

Birth

Category: Being in the Minority

written by Pamela Adelstein | May 4, 2021

Saturday night in my living room, I was surrounded by the parents of the children in my daughter's kindergarten class. I had boldly offered to host a parent social. We were playing Two Truths and a Lie, one of my favorite icebreakers. My turn had come, and I shared three statements. One of my truths was that my daughters were intentionally born at home. Immediately everyone declared this as the lie, joking that I asked for an epidural as soon as I arrived at the hospital. I understood that no one knew me, yet I was thrown by this gross misunderstanding of who I am and the deliberate choices that I make.

When I was pregnant for the first time, I could not conceive of walking out of my house as two people and then returning home as three. As a family physician who practiced obstetrics, I was well-acquainted with the ups and downs of hospital births. I had seen intervention beget further intervention. I resented the television mindlessly blaring while a woman was laboring. I cringed at hospital staff who would chitchat as if the birthing woman was invisible. Once I learned about the improved outcomes for low-risk home births relative to hospital births, I decided home was best for me.

It was difficult to reveal my plans to family and colleagues. Somehow it felt incongruent to them that a doctor would make this choice. My grandmother proclaimed in her Brooklyn accent, "Pammy, don't you know there's technology?" Even after I shared precautions taken by the midwives to get ahead of possible complications, people seemed unconvinced and remained firmly attached to their opinions. Stories of difficult labors with successful births were projected onto my decision, somehow validating the storyteller's choice to have a hospital birth. People questioned me about how the midwives would handle different complications, as my choice became about them.

Fortunately I had a great team supporting me, and I was stubborn enough to endure a three-day labor with my first child. After that, my twelve-hour labor with my second child feel like a breeze. One of my joys as a mother is telling my daughters various iterations of their birth stories on their birthdays. My home births were amazing and defining events in my life. They taught me a great deal about myself, and for this I feel profoundly grateful.

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