

**the birth of gus abraham**  
**march 10, 2013**

pre-labor

on the 3rd, while tim was quite sick with an intestinal bug and hazel just barely recovered from the same, i felt "off" in a general sense. i thought maybe i was about to get the same bug. but i was also having loads of contractions that i could feel in my fundus and lower abdomen, as well as a bit in my back. the next day, more of the same, but also i felt gus engage in my pelvis, resulting in loose stool, pressure on my pelvic floor, and hip and back aches. when i shared this with sara (midwife), she said babies often are born 1 or 2 days after they engage like that. i thought this would be the worst moment to begin labor, while my husband is down for the count and i feel sick, too. ugh. at the same time, i had been so eager to meet gus, i figured we'd get through it one way or another. so i just rested, and decided not to do anything to encourage along labor, since it wasn't an ideal time.

labor did not start and the next day, monday, i felt normal again. on tuesday, gus disengaged. in fact, he floated right back up to the top of my uterus and started squirming and wiggling and readjusting all day long. suddenly labor felt very far away indeed. i started to get really discouraged. one day i just wanted to cry and i felt like my life sucks and i can't handle being a mom of two, etc. another day i was super on edge, like i wanted to just jump out of my skin.

a couple of friends distracted me. friday i had a cake and coffee date with jenn at marie catrib's, enjoying wonderful kids-free conversation. on saturday night, alicia suggested that we sneak out without our kids to go get a drink! so after eating lots of homemade pizza with tim and hazel, i went upstairs to get ready to leave. i noticed pink, watery discharge in my panties! and instantly felt excited. i had been asking the Lord in my heart for that particular sign to encourage me that things ARE moving in the right direction. i told tim that i had bloody show, and that it could mean i'd be in labor that night, or not for a couple more days. i proceeded with my pans with alicia. we went to grayden's crossing and had pomme frites with garlic aioli, and i drank a mint mojito. wasn't exactly stocking up on nourishing foods for labor that night. hehe. i had more contractions and some stabbing sensations in my cervix throughout our evening, but enjoyed the adult conversation with my dear postpartum friend, with whom i hardly ever get to visit in the absence of our little ones.

when alicia took me home, i had had quite a bit more bloody show, and i was starting to feel excited. i asked tim for a foot rub before tucking myself into bed with a book (Pushed: the unfortunate truth about childbirth and managed health care in america) to read until i was too tired to stay awake. i think i fell asleep around midnight or one a.m.

early labor

at about 4 a.m. i woke up slowly and was aware of contraction feelings that felt a little more like premenstrual cramps than anything else. i half-heartedly attended to them, noticing how they felt, but continued to lay in bed and try to sleep through them. somewhere between 4:30 and 5:00 i got up to use the bathroom and walk around a bit. the contractions intensified. so i started to count seconds in my head (not super accurate) and tried to notice if there was any pattern to them -- build, crest, descent like a wave? i was counting 30-45 seconds in length and they definitely had a wave-like pattern. they felt so different than the ones i had had with hazel -- all in my lowe abdomen, not at all in my back, more pelvic floor pressure -- that i wasnt sure this was really "it." still, i continued relaxing through them, which wasn't terribly hard. but when i got up on my feet, they felt much more difficult. at 6 a.m. i decided to go wake tim.

### active labor

i hobbled downstairs (he's been sleeping in our guest room downstairs for the last several weeks because i'm an obnoxious bed hog during the end of pregnancy, using 5 pillows and placing myself smack in the middle of the mattress). i said, "i'm pretty sure it's baby day today" and explained the contractions. he put a contraction timer app on his iPod and left it with me while he went to the kitchen to do all the dishes from the previous night (he knew a sink full of dishes could be a mental block for me). i tried my best to use the timer, but was a little frustrated by it and some of the contractions seemed weirdly short or false and it all felt erratic, though very uncomfortable and/or painful. but the timer told me that they were averaging 60 seconds in duration and were spaced about 2.5 minutes apart. i was on my hands and knees for most of them, and beginning to vocalize (moan). i was also having lots of loose stools which forced me to keep running to the bathroom, and every time it was so intense just to be standing up or sitting on the toilet, due to increased pelvic pressure.

i texted sarah jayne (emotional support person and photographer) to come over in about 30 minutes and then also sent sara (midwife) and update on the contractions, but told her (via tim) not to come yet. i was nervous that my labor would stall out when she arrived, because it had done so in hazel's birth. sara told tim that she'd give us a bit more time, but that based on the contractions she would prefer to be closer. tim and i consulted briefly and i said ok, she should just come on over. i stayed in the guest room on my hands and knees or kneeling, laboring mostly alone.

at about 8 a.m., sara and sarah jayne arrived. and at 8:20 jodi (midwife apprentice) arrived. they settled in in the living room. i decided i needed to go upstairs to put a new pad in my panties and take off my pajama pants and put on a dress or something instead, in order to facilitate easier bathroom trips. however, once i got upstairs, the contractions were so strong and close together, i realized i wasn't going back down.

### transition

when i got to the bathroom to change my pad, i never even got my panties back on. i just started feeling so overwhelmed by the pain and pressure and my legs were shaking

and i felt like i couldn't get a break from the intensity. i was on my hands and knees on the bathroom floor, resting my head and hands on the toilet or the edge of the tub, just completely unable to relax through them anymore. and i felt a little pushy. emotionally i felt like crying, and felt discouraged and wanted it to stop. after one hard contraction, my water popped. after that, i felt -- and said -- "i just don't know what to do with myself. i don't know what to do." when sara told me contractions would get more intense now that my water had broken, i looked at her pitifully and said, "that makes me want to cry." Ha! and those were my "emotional sign posts" of transition.

around that same time, hazel woke up! tim went in and i could hear him talking to her about what she was about to see/hear, reminding her of the videos we'd watched of babies being born and the mamas making lots of noise. he stood with her in the hall right before a HUGE contraction through which i was moaning and growling and gripping the toilet seat for dear life. she didn't seem worried or scared, though. she even stood there alone for a minute while tim helped me through the next contraction.

### pushing

i asked sarah jayne to call casey to come hang out with hazel downstairs, since my mom had not been able to arrive yet. jodi checked baby' heart tones, which were fine, and sara coaxed me off the floor and onto the bed in my room, saying, "do you want to have your baby on the bathroom floor or on your bed?" i somehow manage to climb up on the bed, staying in all fours, with a stack of pillows by my head to lean my head on. it was maybe the second contraction after getting onto the bed when i had a pushing contraction and sara said just to go with it, do whatever my body wanted to do. so i pushed and made all kinds of noise and it was a LONG push and i could feel his head coming down. it felt like it must be so close to crowning and sure enough someone said, "we can see his head!" with one mighty push, i pushed right through the ring of fire and his entire head emerged with that single push! unbelievable. the feeling of his body still in the birth canal was uncomfortable and i just wanted him out. i could hear tim say with emotion in his voice, "he's coming out, honey!" i asked, "do i have to wait [until the next contraction to keep pushing]?" and was told no. so, burying my head in a stack of pillows and yelling (including yelling shit at one point), i pushed again and his shoulders emerged, straight on (no time to rotate). then he got a little "stuck" at his mid-section so it took another push to release him from there. then the rush of completely being emptied. ah! that is the best feeling! sara lowered him to the bed and then i got to turn around and gather him up into my arms.

my first moments holding him, all slimy and purple and sputtering mucus, were on my own bed, seated next to my husband, totally feeling strong and capable while sara and jodi stood by smiling. sarah jayne came running up, having left hazel strapped into her high chair and so sad to have missed the actual moment of birth, to find us there beaming at our boy. i was in such shock and disbelief that it had all happened that quickly! someone brought hazel upstairs to meet gus, which she did great with.

when someone looked at the clock to see that it was 9 a.m, we realized that sara's dream about my birth, in which my labor was 5 hours long, was exactly spot on!!! she told me her dreams usually are accurate, but i had been slow to believe it; i couldn't imagine having a 48-hour labor the first time, followed by a 5-hour one!

he stayed in my arms for at least 30 minutes and we initiated breastfeeding at about that mark, too, i think. we waited while the cord pulses until it was entirely white and then i cut it with jodi's help.

at the hour mark or so, he left me long enough to get measured, weighed, and checked over. 9 lbs, 10 oz, 20.5" long, 14.5" head. a big boy! and barrel-chested. his eyes were puffy and red from enduring so much pressure, and his head wasn't really molded at all.

the placenta took its sweet time, however. it took 2 hours and some prayer before it finally decided to detach. then it felt like we were finally really done. jodi and sara cleaned me up a bit and tucked me into bed with gus.

recovery has been amazing compared to last time. i can walk and sit almost any way without discomfort other than a bit in my tail bone. no swelling, no tearing, no blood loss to make me woozy. no weird nerve/disc damage effecting my leg. i have only taken 400 mg of ibuprofen. and i feel elated and empowered and energized.

gus is nursing voraciously and we're fine-tuning his latch. :)