

We prayed all the time that somehow God would work things out so that he would be there for your birth. When I returned from the states, poppa and I only had a couple of short months together before he had to leave. It was a hard time for us. Such a mix of emotions being so excited for you to arrive and so sad that he might not be with us. All we could do was to trust God and pray. Once poppa got to California we were able to confirm exactly when he would get to come back to Okinawa, which was when I would be 41 weeks pregnant with you. I asked you every day to please wait to be born until 41 weeks and 3 days...just to be on the safe side and give your poppa some time to get back and rest before labor began. This would put your birthday on September 3rd. I focused and prayed on this date, hoping things would all work out. I spent many days while he was gone lying around and doing as little as possible just short of standing on my head to try to encourage you to stay warm and cozy in my womb.

Well, you and God must have heard our prayers. Finally the day had come for him to return. I had been having Braxton Hicks contractions sporadically since I was about 20 weeks pregnant. But as soon as your poppa walked through the door that Sunday night {41 weeks exactly} and gave me a hug and a kiss my uterus responded with a nice big squeeze. I think you heard his voice and knew he was finally home. The next morning my BH contractions were coming on much more regularly and earlier in the day than they usually had before. Poppa and I decided to go run some errands and went for sushi for lunch. It was there in the "Sushi-go-round" that things really started to happen. I started having waves that were more intense now and would wrap around me instead of just my belly tightening up like before. Your poppa noticed the difference in me, so we finished our meal and started to head home. Once we were back home I called our doula, Amanda, to let her know that things were changing and I thought labor was starting up. I told her to hold tight and that I was going to time my pressure waves and try to nap and we agreed that I would let her know how I was doing in about an hour. We were really excited but overall things were pretty calm. Your poppa was cleaning up around the house and starting to prep for dinner. We were going to have one of our favorite meals that night, chicken slovakia. After an hour or so of not really napping and having waves that were about 4 to 6 minutes apart, I let Amanda know it was time and she headed over to the house around 6 pm. Meanwhile my waves were getting stronger so I decided to get into the shower and let the water run across my lower back to see if that helped. It felt AMAZING!! I swayed under the water for a long time while relaxing through the waves as they came. Once Amanda arrived, we all discussed how things were going and continued to work through my waves together. Poppa ate dinner, which sadly I did not have the appetite for by then, while I spent time laboring with you all over the house...in the bed, on the yoga ball, on the toilet and in a nice deep bath. Your poppa and Amanda were both so calm and helpful...even Shiner and Elvis {our dogs} were watching with excitement...while you and I began to go deeper into our labor...

It was getting later, probably around 10pm, and things had gotten more intense. Initially I had planned to stay at home for the majority of our labor and then to transfer to Yui, our birth center, just in time for you to be born. However, once things really got going at home, I changed my mind and decided I was ready to go ahead and get to Yui. I think a lot of this decision was based on the unknowns...like what it would feel like riding in the car during waves and not knowing how fast things were going to move along. I realized these uncertainties came with being a first time momma, but decided to head out

nonetheless {not to mention I had thrown up which made me think I might be further along into things}. I rode in the backseat of the car with a sleep mask over my eyes so I could stay focused in “labor land” while your poppa drove and Amanda followed us in her car. I believe I had 2-3 good waves in the car on the way to the birth center. Your poppa who normally drives like a wild man, was being extra gentle in his accelerating and braking the whole time, bless him, and the car ride turned out to be not so bad after all.

Once at the birth center, Miwa, one of the wonderful midwives, greeted us. I felt so relieved to finally be settling in to where you would be born. Miwa checked my cervix and said that we were a good 3 cm dilated...which I thought was pretty great because I figured I was only maybe a 1. Once we settled in, I immediately wanted to be in the bathtub. It was funny because upon previous visits to Yui, I had commented on how tiny and “claustrophobic feeling” the bathroom in the labor room seemed. But now...that bathroom had become the birthing cave that I never wanted to leave! Though counter-pressure brought me a lot of relief in the beginning of our labor, I was starting to only find comfort through water and light touch massage. That night while I was submerged in the tub I felt a “pop” sensation and told everyone that I was pretty sure my water had just broken. The midwives at Yui were not accustomed to water births so they asked that we please drain the water from the tub and suggested that we use the shower head to spray my back, instead of being submerged.

This was the part in or labor when I began losing track of time, where it was just you and me, working together, bringing you down and closer to birth, little by little. It was starting to get really warm and steamy in the bathroom so your poppa opened up the window above the tub to let some of the cool air blow inside {it was storming hard outside that night and unusually cool for what it had been in Okinawa around that time of year}. You and I spent the rest of the night laboring in the tub while someone sprayed water across my back the entire time. At any given moment I would look back and it would either be your poppa, Amanda or Kyoko {our interpreter} spraying me. I remember once it was your poppa’s shift and he was so tired and jet lagged from his trip home, that he had fallen asleep while still holding the sprayer directed at my back. Poor guy. It was so hot in the bathroom and we were working really hard. I remember taking momentary reprieve by resting my face on the windowsill and breathing in the cool storm air.

Eventually I was getting very tired and I decided to check myself to see if I could feel your head yet. I reached inside and could feel what seemed like a squishy bulge, but I wasn’t sure if it was your head or if maybe my water had not broken after all, so the midwife asked if she could please check me to find out. I told her yes, but I asked to not be told how far dilated I was, so I would not get distracted by the number {I knew it would be no indication to me as to how fast or slow things would go from there and I did not want knowing a number to mess with my focus....I found out later that I was at about 7cm}. The midwife checked me and said that my water bag had broken, but the squishy bulge I felt was my cervix starting to swell from being upright all night laboring hard in the tub. At this point she and Amanda suggested that we come out of the bathroom and try to take some needed rest on the futon. I agreed and made my way out to sit in front of your poppa, resting back on him. We were both so exhausted! I remember seeing the sun come up as we sat there trying to slow things down and rest. One of our midwives, Haruka, offered to do some Healing Touch Massage where she glides her hands over me

without actually touching me. It is energy work and it really helped me to slow down my labor and breathing and get some rest. All morning long we did this. The waves would come, I would focus on just staying calm and breathing through them, and then I would put my head back on your poppa's shoulder and fall asleep. At one point during all of this I remember Dr. Fumi coming into the room and telling me that she was a bit concerned since it had been over 12 hours since my water had broken, so she wanted to give me IV antibiotics as a preventative measure for infection. This was something I did not want for myself and definitely did not want for you. I asked Dr. Fumi if I was showing any signs of infection such as a fever in order to warrant the use of the antibiotics and she said no; so I declined them and we decided it was something we would discuss again later if needed {In my previous research I learned how administering antibiotics during labor could cause later problems for you by upsetting your perfect gut flora and I am a strong proponent of the sparing use of antibiotics in general anyways. We never talked about it again, by the way}. I really appreciated how Dr. Fumi respected my decision and did not try to force anything on me.

Around mid-day I was feeling a lot more rested and moved into the next phase of our labor. Amanda tried to work with me to get into some different positions on the yoga ball to see if I could get my labor to pick back up again {my waves had slowed down to about 5-10 minutes apart while I rested}. I'm sad to admit {as a doula} that I was not a very easy "doula client" to work with. Everything she would suggest...I would start to try, and when it made my waves too intense, I would tell her "no" I could not do it. I just knew my limits. The best way I can think to describe this part of the labor was like I was walking along the side of a cliff and at any moment I could fall over the edge and completely lose myself to the intensity. I told my birth team that I needed to go to the toilet to pee. I was laboring on the toilet for a long time, so long that my legs started to go numb and my feet were turning blue...but I could not get off that toilet! Your head was very low and I was feeling a ton of pressure. At this point, things really picked up. I started to feel like I was no longer directing things like before. I was having really strong "cluster contractions" and my body was starting to push with them all on its own. They would come in sets of four and were very intense. So I just surrendered to it. I took each wave as it came and did my best to hang on and breathe through them, to not fight what was happening. It was the strongest most intense energy moving through me that I have ever experienced in my life. Like I was in the eye of a storm and everything else was moving around me. Your poppa was sitting on one side of me and Haruka was on the other. They were both rubbing my feet and legs, trying to help move the circulation that was being cut off by the hard toilet seat, back into them. At this moment, Haruka became the only calm in my storm. I was starting to panic somewhat in my mind, to doubt myself because of how overwhelming the waves felt. But each time I would open my eyes and there she would be with her calm reassuring smile and nod letting me know everything was going fine. Funny thing is, she was the only one in the room who did not speak English. However, her lack of words, amid everyone else's encouraging "you are doing great, Stacey"..."good job"..."slow your breathing down", was exactly what I needed and calmed me the most in my storm of energy.

Eventually Haruka looked at all of us and said, "head"...meaning she could start to feel the top of your head. I was so relieved and also feeling such intense pressure all at the same time. It was then they asked that I please try to make my way out to the futon again because you would be coming out soon

and they could not help to catch you if I was still on the toilet. I really did not want to move {again being a difficult doula client...haha}, but I remember looking down over my bulging belly and only seeing a tiny bit of space into the toilet bowl and thinking, "they were right...how would they catch you in there?" {haha} So that convinced me to comply, get up and go to the futon. Your poppa sat in the middle of the futon and I got down on all fours in front of him. This was when I "took the reins back" and did the hardest work of my entire labor. I roared and pushed with each wave and sometimes even without them trying to make your slowly crowning head come out. I remember having lots of doubts, thinking that you were stuck and that they were going to have to pull you out with forceps. I told everyone that "you weren't helping me" birth you because it felt like no matter how hard I pushed...you weren't moving. I think this was my "mountain moment". The moment in my labor where I felt like I was looking up at a mountain that I was not sure how I would ever reach the top of. I labored in every way I knew how; on hands and knees, on my right side, on my left side. For three hours {including some of the toilet time} I pushed. This was the hardest I had ever worked in my entire life. Kyoko held up a mirror so I could see your head coming out with the pushes. We were making progress slowly but surely. The whole time, Haruka gently used almond oil to help me stretch open and gently scratched your head to keep you stimulated during the waves. Wakako was the other midwife in the room and she used the Doppler to check your heart rate during my waves to make sure you were handling everything ok. You were doing great! Finally Amanda said to me, "Stacey, how about you try turning over and leaning up against Ross to see if that position will work to get his head out". I just remember thinking, "NO...that's on my back and that's the one position I did not want to have you in!" {being flat on your back decreases the opening of the pelvis and makes it more difficult to birth}. But I guess Amanda was reading my mind {or maybe I said it out loud...I don't remember} because she said, "its not flat on your back, don't worry" and so I flipped over into a seated position in front of your poppa. With each new wave I curled myself around you and pushed with all I had. Even your poppa was curling around me and pushing too as I remember at one point he tried to do an extra crunch and I had to tell him "no, the wave is over!" {haha}. Finally, the energy in the room shifted to excitement as your head fully emerged. Everyone was ecstatic! Your cord was draped once around your neck, but loosely, more like a scarf would be. There was a moment where I was somewhat in shock as I first laid eyes on your beautiful face and then suddenly I noticed the midwives both trying to pry your cord over your head so I reached down and started pulling at it too. Once we got it over your head the rest of your warm, wet, poop-from-head-to-toe-covered body slid right out and I pulled you straight up onto my chest.

::It was 4:07 pm on Tuesday, September 3, 2013...just as I had prayed::

This next part is a little crazy. When you came out you were choking a bit on all of the birth fluids. My primal instincts must have kicked in because my immediate reaction was to bring your face up to my mouth and suck out the fluid that was obstructing your airway. I think I did this 2 or 3 times, sucking and spitting out the fluids. Amanda later told me that everyone was a little shocked at this and this made the Dr.'s jaw drop as I guess she had not seen a momma react this way to her choking baby before, {Haha}. I remember hearing the midwives say, "Stacey-san...it's ok...we have sucker," but I didn't care...I didn't think...I just reacted. {I've since learned that this is actually common practice amongst some cultures in the world...so not so strange after all!} Most people will be very grossed out by that part of your story,

but to me it just speaks to the raw, instinctive, uninhibited nature of your birth. I love and feel so blessed to have had a birth experience like this.

It was over an hour and a half later that we finally had your poppa cut the cord. He had some skin to skin time with you while I attempted to go sit on the toilet to drain my bladder which at this point was holding back my placenta from coming out. Though I tried, I guess with all the people watching and waiting, I couldn't go {funny to have stage fright after all that}! I finally agreed to let the midwives do their one and only intervention and insert a catheter to help me out. I proceeded to fill a pitcher half way up...it was a lot of pee. Shortly after, I delivered your placenta. This was about two hours after you were born. Our sweet friend Amy was there and she took your placenta with her to encapsulate for us so I could consume its' nutrients to replenish and heal my body during our postpartum time. It was after all of this that we finally weighed and measured you. You were 7 pounds 11 ounces and 20.5 inches long. You were perfect.

That night you, your poppa and I settled into our postpartum room which would be our resting place for the next few days, and enjoyed a yummy Japanese meal prepared lovingly by the Yui staff {even though it was very late in the evening by then}. The entire staff took such good care of us for our entire stay at Yui. They helped me learn how to feed you and gave me breast massages and taught me how to massage and soften my nipples so it would be easier for you to latch on. They made me cold lavender cloths to ease my "under carriage" discomfort, which brought me such great relief. We stayed at the birth center for 3 more days and couldn't have asked for better care and compassion than what the Yui staff had given us. They treated us like family and the midwives all loved you as much as we did.

Throughout our labor journey, I did what we as doulas always tell mommas to do {but I don't think I ever really fully understood until then}...and that was to LISTEN TO MY BODY. During my labor I knew exactly what I needed. I knew what I could handle and what I could not. What would send me over the edge of that cliff and what would keep me just in the balance. I knew when to rest and when to push and you were working with me the entire time. We were a team. We were perfectly created and designed by God to do what we were doing and thanks to the wonderful birth center and our wonderful birth team...we were able to bring you into the world without any intervention and into a room full of love. How blessed. I could not have asked for a more empowering and awesome birth experience!!! It was hard and intense. It pushed me to use strengths inside myself I did not know I had in me. To trust God more than I had ever before in my life...to trust His perfect design. Having you as our son has been an absolute dream come true. I've dreamt of the day I would meet you, almost my entire life and the reality far out does the dream. You are such a sweet little person and we love you with all of our hearts. Thank you being our son. We are honored to be your momma and poppa. There is this saying that goes, "seeing a baby being born is like seeing God in person." How true! It was the most amazing and spiritual moment of my life! I have never felt so alive and so much love. I had finally reached that mountaintop...and it was pure bliss!