

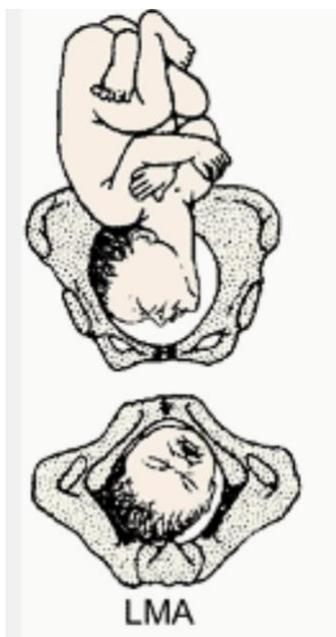
Prodromal contractions began on Thursday, 1/19, making sleep difficult and the days tiring. My mom came down for the weekend to help and I asked her not to leave on Sunday (claiming to her that I knew Sage would be born imminently) but she did anyway. I had an appointment with Barbara on Monday, 1/23. We had lunch, during which I felt many twinges but it was impossible to know if it was prodromal labor (which I knew could last for weeks) or my body actually getting ready to birth a baby. I asked Barbara to do a cervical check even though I told myself how meaningless it could be. She found me to be 2-3 cm dilated but worried that she thought Sage was frank breech like her big sister. She said she could feel her butt and that she was certain she was breech. Ahhh!

Starting on Monday, a Nor'easter pummeled the East Coast with rain, sleet, and snow, providing some labor inducing pressure changes. On Tuesday morning, Chris was up getting ready for work when I asked him not to go in. I had been up since about 5:00am with predictable but not intense contractions. He was going to work from home but then saw how much I was struggling with the contractions and daily tasks so he called out instead. It is hard to manage a toddler, including getting her ready for school, while having contractions every 5-8 minutes. I felt that today was going to be baby day for sure because things were more consistent and getting stronger.

One major task for the day was going for an ultrasound to find out if Barbara was right and we had another butt baby on the way. I called Greenwich Hospital and told them I needed to be squeezed in for an ultrasound. I didn't mention being in early labor! The receptionist put me on the phone with Dr. Adams, who I specifically avoid seeing, and she suggested I go to an ER for an ultrasound and to check out the baby's stats. I "uh huhed" her but then told Chris I could NOT go to an ER. COULD NOT. He agreed and I emailed the head of MFM again, Dr. Stella, to say reception couldn't fit me in and could she please pull some strings.

Chris took Dahlia to school at 9am and when he got back home he had to deal with my high stress level and last minute puttering around the house. Dr. Stella called to say we could be seen at 1pm so Dahlia was picked up early from school (it was pizza day! She was mad!) and off we went. The ultrasound showed the baby was head down and I SOBBED. I knew it was mostly that my hormones were ramping up and my body was preparing for birth but that didn't stop the tears! It was stressful to have to go for the ultrasound and to hold still during contractions pretending they weren't happening. I cried in Dr. Stella's office and she seemed flustered! I then cried in the bathroom for about 20 minutes before collecting myself enough to go to the garage without attracting too much attention. After Sage's birth, we realized she was in a face presentation and it's common for care providers to confuse a fetus' cheeks and mouth for butt cheeks and an anus.

When we got home, Chris put D down for her nap and I went to the basement (aka the birthing suite) to calm myself down and to figure out next steps. I ate a bagel with cream cheese while listening to a book on tape (The Marriage of Opposites). Around 3pm I texted Chris from the basement and asked him to call my parents and tell them to start driving down. My parents had tickets for Kris Kristofferson that night so I had texted them earlier saying today might be the day but I felt bad having them miss the concert if it turned out I was wrong. My dad reassured me they didn't care about the concert!



I simultaneously texted Ilaria, my doula, to update her on my regular contractions. She called and I rejected her call and texted her again to please call Chris instead. She called Chris just after he talked to my parents and he filled her in about the ultrasound and my emotional state. He said we would be in touch when she should head over and at 3:30 when she called again I told her to come over. She arrived at 4pm and Katie, the birth photographer, arrived about 15 minutes later. I told them both that I wasn't sure if I was wasting their time by having them come over but Katie said she had a sitter and wanted to beat traffic and Ilaria said at least she could do some acupressure and assess my progress for herself.

Dahlia woke up from her nap right around when Ilaria and Katie arrived. Chris put on Tayo (worst tv show ever) for her but she wanted to see what I was doing. I told Chris it was okay for her to come to the basement. It was a good distraction for me. Ilaria did some

acupressure and then I walked on the treadmill and did lunges on the stairs. I had consistent contractions throughout these activities, lasting about one minute and about 3 minutes apart. It was still early labor because although the contractions hurt, I could talk through them. Katie and Ilaria were surprised I was having contractions because they said they couldn't tell at all. They seemed concerned that we were in for a long night but I told them I wasn't going to make them pull an all nighter. How true that ended up being!



The major theme of my early labor was PEEING. I kept having to pee! This had been true for days and was really frustrating because barely anything would come out but then when I got up from the toilet I would feel the need to immediately sit back down. I peed nearly every 10 minutes and accidentally soaked a few pairs of underwear. It's hard to hold it in when you're 9 months pregnant and in labor!

I checked in with Barbara at 4:30 and she also spoke to Ilaria and asked to be called to come over at a point in labor knowing that it would take her about 2 hours to get to me (she had to pick up the assistants and make the hour drive). This is the point where Barbara's notes say that "active labor" began.

We ordered pizza around 6pm and Chris went to pick it up. I hadn't felt nauseous up to that point but I was skeptical about my ability to keep down pizza once labor really got started. Katie and Ilaria thought it was a good idea for me to eat dinner so we all sat down around the dining table at 7pm for dinner. The pizza was delicious and I never ended up getting sick!

My contractions were getting stronger while we ate dinner, a point I didn't realize until Katie asked me if they were and said she could tell because I was closing my eyes periodically. Chris did Dahlia's bedtime routine at 7:30 and she didn't protest going to sleep at all. Usually she tries to get put down in "Mama's room" at the very least but she just went into her crib without any fussing. I wonder if she could just tell that that night was different and required more cooperation. Everyone sat down in the living room after dinner but that wasn't my "zone" so I asked to go back to the basement.

I asked Chris to join us in the basement because I was ready to get to work and wanted him there. He had stayed out of the way up until that point because girl time really was what I had been needing. Ilaria did more acupressure and I commented that contractions were getting stronger without any sort of real intervention. With Dahlia I took castor oil, had acupuncture done, and still contractions took a long time to ramp up. I was feeling gradually stronger contractions this time just as time went on.

Ilaria asked my thoughts on when I might need Barbara considering her lead time and I said we should probably tell her to come (7:50pm) because I imagined by 10pm I would be more than ready for her to be there. I texted her and Chris followed up with a phone call.

I asked for Hypnobabies to be put on and I got out my essential oil mixture for back pain. It felt amazing for Ilaria to rub it into my lower back during contractions. I felt the contractions really low in the front and the contraction would wrap around to my back. I didn't feel any pressure but just a heavy ache as my body did the work necessary to open for this baby to be born. My preferred position was on the exercise ball with Chris sitting in a chair in front of me and Ilaria rubbing my back sitting in a chair behind me. When a contraction would start I would motion for Chris to lean forward and I would press my forehead into him while gripping his hands.



My parents arrived at 9:30 and I was so relieved to see my mom that I cried. I didn't realize that the rainstorm by us was hail and sleet up by them so their journey down had been harrowing and took 4.5 hours instead of the usual 3. We had decided to fill the birth pool before my parents arrived and Katie was busy boiling water on the stove because the hot water had ran out. My mom asked her "Is my daughter really in labor?" and Katie said "Oh yeah she is!" before my mom came down to the basement to see me herself.



Barbara and her assistants arrived at 10pm and my contractions were hard but not rolling through me yet. That's how I view transition. You have to let the contractions roll through you instead of get on top of you but there isn't much more that can be done to get through them. I went to the bathroom with Chris and we talked about how close we were to meeting our new baby girl.

The birth team opened up the sofa bed and put down the plastic cover and white sheet on it before I got out of the bathroom. They spread out the chux pads and had me lie down so Barbara could do a cervical check. The cervical check showed that I was 4cm dilated but completely thinned and at -1 station and as she finished her check pop! my water broke. I didn't have another contraction right away and in my head I knew that NOW things were going to get intense. I had read enough birth stories to know that when your water breaks, the cushion is removed, and contractions get as real as they are going to get. I was disappointed that since my cervical check the afternoon before I had dilated only 1-2cm but Barbara assured me that I had called her to come at exactly the right time.

Since Dahlia was breech, I didn't know what to expect, and I still don't know what is "normal" but needless to say that the pain of this baby's tiny head pushing against my cervix was a lot. Also, the contractions were double peaking so it felt like the contractions were never ending and non-stop. Perhaps it felt that way because in fact, they were. Barbara's notes show that the contractions were every 2 minutes, lasting 70 seconds. I again had Chris position himself in a chair in front of me so I could continue with my forehead pressing/hand gripping. I would loudly moan (okay, more like low tone yell)

through the contraction and that made it bearable. By the end of each contraction my arms were shaking from how hard I gripped Chris, the poor guy! Oh wait, I don't feel bad.



The initial cervical check was done at 10:10 and at 11:00pm, I was reminded of my desire to get in the birth pool. Barbara said if I wanted that to happen, it had to happen now. I wasn't sure how I could lie down again for Barbara to check me or how I could get up from where I was (sitting on the side of the pull out sofa) to get into the birth pool, but somehow both of these things were accomplished. The check showed I was at 7cm and 0 station (3 cm in 50 minutes, not shabby!) and with monumental effort and support from Chris, I made my way the few feet to the birth pool.

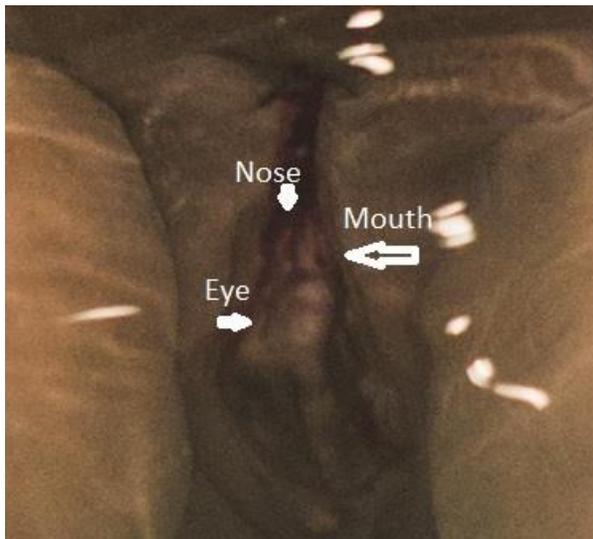
Ah, relief. The water felt so great. With Dahlia, I didn't have the pain of the baby's head pushing against my cervix so also I didn't find relief in the water. With this labor, I felt a lightening of the pressure and found comfort in the warm water. I had a break in contractions long enough for me to get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Then, the contractions started again with full force. I continued to squeeze Chris' hand with all my might while lying draped over the side of the birth pool. My mom poured water on my back but I told her to stop because it was messing with my concentration/attempt to stay relaxed. I was very aware of the feeling of the baby's head getting lower and lower. I wondered to myself what it would feel like to be fully dilated with this immense pressure and just as I realized how terrified I was of pushing that gigantic head out of my vagina, the contractions entirely changed and I knew that I was at the point of having to make it through that fear and pain to meet my daughter.

I don't know how it looked to others but in my head it replays as that my eyes suddenly flew open and I flipped myself over onto my back while announcing she was coming. I felt her head RIGHT there and since Dahlia was breech, this was entirely new to me and I asked everyone what to do at that moment. The birth team instantly surrounded the pool and told me to gently open my legs and to take deep breaths and push when I felt the urge. I said that I needed another hand to grip and Jama, the guest Birth Assistant, and then Ilaria, appeared at my side and took my right hand. I yelled for Hypnobabies to be turned off because it was for sure no longer the "Easy First Stage" as the track described. It seemed way too complex and unnecessary to explain to them how to turn on the relevant track. I asked for a cold washcloth for my head because the heat had been turned up in the room in anticipation of the

birth so I was overheating. With Dahlia, the pushing stage felt out of control. I could not for the life of me stop pushing during a contraction. So I was surprised that in that moment I felt in control of pushing. I gave tiny pushes until it felt overwhelming and then I eased up and let the baby's head do some of the work.



This labor was entirely different from Dahlia's, mainly in intensity and speed! The initial cervical check at 10:10pm showed I was 4 cm dilated, at 11pm I was 7cm dilated, and Sage was born at 11:34 pm! It felt like at least 20 minutes of small pushes and waiting for the head to make its way out but in reality it was only 4 minutes and 3 contractions before our beautiful baby girl entered the world face first!





As with Dahlia's birth, my initial reaction was to look at Chris before even looking at our daughter! Barbara had guided the baby into the birth pool and she told me to grab her and lift her onto me. I did exactly that and then looked around at everyone and smiled. I asked my mom to go get my dad, who had respected my wishes and stayed upstairs (although he had what I imagine was a terrible labor soundtrack). When he got downstairs he asked the baby's name and I announced Sage Genevieve. Once the cord was limp and white, Chris cut it. I held Sage while pushing out the placenta, a feeling that I remembered from Dahlia's birth as sweet relief and it didn't disappoint.



Once the birth pool was bloody, I was ready to get out. I handed Sage to her daddy while my mom helped me out of the pool and onto the pull out couch so Barbara could check me. Even though both

Sage's head and body were born in one push (face first no less), I had absolutely no tearing and honestly I felt amazing. With Dahlia, I pushed for so long that my body felt so worn out and sore. This time I didn't feel any pain and although there was a lot of blood (nothing abnormal), I showered with ease and positioned myself on the sofa to observe the newborn exam without any difficulty.

Sage Genevieve weighed 7 lbs 2 oz and measured 20.5" at birth. Her initial APGAR was an 8 and at 5 minutes it was a 9. What a perfect tiny new human being and how lucky we are for her to be ours. Her head wasn't even coned since she was born face first and not with the top of her head first!



The birth team sat around eating cookies and muffins and Katie took a group photo of us that shows a crowd of elated birth workers, parents, and grandparents. I had told Katie that Pelham doesn't allow street parking between 2am-6am but that I doubted it would be relevant for the birth team. Turns out, I knew what I was talking about since everyone left for their own homes by 1:45am. My mom helped me to slowly make my way upstairs, and settled me, Chris, and Sage into bed for the night. Thus began our story as a family of four (although Dahlia wouldn't know she was a big sister until late the next morning)!



Notes on face presentation: It wasn't until I was looking through photos of Sage's birth that I saw her face being born first. I immediately texted Katie to remark on how cool it was that she captured that but it wasn't until Sage was 6 months old that I realized how rare and potentially dangerous face presentation is. I texted Barbara about it and when we spoke on the phone she said she didn't even suspect that what she felt was Sage's face rather than her butt because she had only encountered it once before in her career. The ultrasound tech didn't realize it either, although I am less clear on why that was the case. Barbara said that if Sage had rotated the other way, posterior instead of anterior, we would have had to transfer for a c-section. There is no way to vaginally give birth to a posterior face presenting baby (forgive me for my lack of medical knowledge/terms). Barbara said she is glad she didn't realize it because she would have been quite worried. As it turned out, Sage's birth went smoothly. She does continue to see a chiropractor for ongoing neck tightness, a fact that now makes more sense given this realization about her position.