

## Chapter 1

### Birthing Is the Easy Part

“Stop pushing!” the nurse cried, and she shoved her hand between my legs to push the baby’s head back in. Then she barked an order to her colleague to go get the doctor, turning back to me in time to repeat, “Don’t push!”

Her command meant nothing to me, and I pushed with all the strength I could. Which wasn’t much, considering I had been totally deadened in preparation for a caesarean section.

I had just spent thirteen hours in labor. Because my physician believed the cord was around the baby’s neck, I was kept hooked to a monitor the entire eight hours I was at the hospital. The nurses insisted I lie in a certain position to help the baby get oxygen, but when I had trouble handling the contractions in that position, they threatened me with shots of Demerol. The oxygen mask strapped to my face left me disoriented, which made me cry, which made them threaten other medication. The following series of events - epidural; slower, weaker contractions; short respite from pain; return of pain; tears - led to the physician’s order that I be prepared for a C-section.

My husband protested strongly that I had not been given a chance to birth this baby. As smugly as only a doctor can be when he has mere mortals in his complete control, my doctor declared, “I’ll let her try pushing for a little while, but she’s completely deadened and really won’t be able to. This isn’t going to work, and I can’t give her very much time.” Then he left. Even though dazed, I determined to push my baby out in order to prove him wrong to everyone present.

When the nurse said, “OK, now you can push,” I concentrated every bit of my strength into pushing - the epidural notwithstanding.

At that moment she gave the aforementioned order to stop. I had worked thirteen torturous hours toward this precise moment, and she wanted me to stop? I pushed even harder against her restraining hand.

In moments the doctor was back, a look of shock crossing his face when he saw what I had accomplished in just those few minutes. I quickly filed that look of shock away, intending to do some gloating of my own when I reminisced on this day.

I saw my son emerge and crinkle his face in dismay. Little Peter Edward was finally here. Now we had the perfect family: two girls,

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aged six and four, and two boys, the other aged two. After cleaning him, weighing him, and getting his Apgar scores, a nurse brought him over to me.

“Here’s your son, Mrs. Schap,” the nurse said, beaming.

As I stared at that beautiful little creature, only one thought crossed my mind: get him away from me. “Give him to my husband,” I said weakly.

She handed him to Daddy, who cooed enough for the two of us. I was tired, nauseated, and shaky, and I had absolutely no desire to hold him. I was sure they all thought I was some kind of monster, but even that couldn’t move me. I asked for a basin to throw up in and sent Daddy and baby off to the nursery. I just wanted to be left alone.

If I had only known, I would have treasured more dearly my two days in the hospital. How could I know what bringing home baby number four was going to mean for my life? Indeed, being “left alone” was going to become such a rare situation that the desire for it would at times become an obsession.

When David and I were dating and it became obvious that our relationship was getting serious, I decided it was time to tell him my feelings on having children. I had no intention of having any - just in case that might affect our relationship.

I had given this careful thought for several years, and felt I had come up with three good reasons for my decision. (1) There was diabetes in my family, and I felt it would be unfair to pass that on to some poor little baby. (2) As a Christian, I couldn’t stand the thought of subjecting an innocent child to the evil that was all around me. (3) I did not have a maternal bone in my body. While I thoroughly enjoyed being someone’s beloved aunt, I had to know that I could hand the baby back to someone when the going got rough.

Any one of these reasons alone might not be sufficient, but I felt that the three of them combined compelled me to make the decision I had.

David heard me out and said he understood my feelings. He didn’t dispute my reasoning or demand I change my mind. Neither did he tell me his dream of having a houseful of babies.

In truth, I never did change my mind. I just progressed, from a single woman who naturally had no place in her life for dependents, to a married woman who knew that our union would be immeasurably enriched by the addition of children.

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As we saw it, we had the choice of becoming yuppies and filling our lives with possessions, or becoming parents and focusing our priorities on the family. I realize that being yuppies and parents at the same time is not mutually exclusive, but since we weren't yet either, we saw it as a clear choice between two lifestyles.

We chose family. We made a decision right at the beginning that we would never spend a lot of money on something unless it was for the family. Rather than Hawaiian getaways for David and me, we would get a camper that slept six. Rather than a ritzy house in the suburbs, we would find one that was stout and sturdy, with a good play yard instead of fine landscaping.

We made lots of other decisions, of course, pertaining to the raising of our little ones. We agreed on forms of discipline, on the importance of their spiritual and educational upbringing, on finances. In short, with all the confidence found only in the not-yet-parent, we felt that all we needed now was the baby - and we would be all set.

Our firstborn gave us no reason to feel we had been mistaken. Not only did we handle the practicalities of parenting well, we also seemed to be on a spiritual high. God seemed closer than ever with this little miracle of life in our midst. Even now, whenever I see a woman who has just had her first child, I feel a little twinge of envy. My first year with my first baby was a time of total joy.

I was a typical new mother. I was nervous on the one hand, sure if I didn't do things just right, I would ruin the rest of her life. On the other hand, I bragged about each new pound or smile as if they somehow reflected the great job I was doing.

When Elizabeth started to walk at nine months, I made the natural connection that someday she would be a brilliant neurosurgeon. More experienced mothers looked at me in pity as they saw my tiny girl rushing here and there, but I couldn't imagine anything I would rather do than chase her around. She brought out the best in me, and I liked who I was.

I couldn't wait to have another baby, to double our joy. Even though I'd had terrible morning sickness with Elizabeth and had had to spend two months in bed, I was willing to go through it again to make our family complete.

Just in case you're wondering why I relate average, common events and emotions, I have a purpose. I want you to see that I was a normal, average woman. I loved my babies and the whole process of birthing

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them. I was as ecstatic as any woman has ever been over the little creatures I had helped to create.

Another important aspect needs to be mentioned. I asked the Lord into my life when I was twelve years old. Our relationship had a slow and shaky start, but in my midtwenties it had become strong and solid. From that time on, I experienced the normal ups and downs of the Christian walk, but my commitment to faith and growth didn't significantly waver.

When I talk about some of the negative feelings I experienced later on, you should keep two things in mind: (1) I had a good life, with enough to eat, a decent home, and wonderful family and friends; I was not a person with mental or emotional problems; and I had a close relationship with God. (2) If I could experience these feelings, they could be found in anyone.

In rapid succession I presented the world with three more babies. None of the birthing experiences were smooth or easy. Like all new mothers, however, I enjoyed relating my birthing experiences to anyone who would listen. I thought of them fondly as my "war stories." "It's worth every minute of it when you hold that baby in your arms," we say dreamily.

We have been through hell and back. The pain is excruciating, we suffer one indignity after another as we are exposed to every intern and resident that happens through, and we totally lose control of our bodies. Birthing is one of the most stressful things a woman ever does in her life.

Ironically, mothers don't realize that birthing is the easy part. The hard stuff comes later.