

COMMENTARY

Mommy-to-be no more: Giving birth

By Kelli Bland

USAG BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The pregnancy journey for this mommy-to-be finally came to an end Jan. 18, and we have a beautiful baby girl to show for it. Now that we're parents, we have a whole new set of funny and disgusting stories to share. Instead of morning sickness and swollen feet, we've graduated to odd sleep cycles and explosive baby poo.

As for the birth experience, For those of you who have experienced it, you simply need to read these words to understand – back labor, no drugs, vacuum extraction, episiotomy and tearing. For those of you who haven't and want the details – here they are.

It was all moving smoothly at the beginning. I started timing the contractions at 3 a.m. when they were averaging 10-15 minutes apart. When my husband got up a few hours later, I told him the day would involve some sort of labor, but it wouldn't be happening at his place of employment.

By 11 a.m., the contractions were 5 minutes apart. At 3 p.m., we arrived at the Klinik Sankt Elisabeth in Heidelberg to bring our baby into the world. I was dilated 4 centimeters with the amniotic sac still intact, and all was looking good – except for the back labor part, which was already pretty painful.

I labored for the next hour and a half in a big bath tub in a room painted like the sea – the dolphins on

the wall didn't make the contractions much better, but the weightlessness felt nice.

It was in the tub that my American modesty went out the door, and I turned Euro-style. I was so worried all along about how the German hospital doesn't provide gowns. I mulled for weeks over the best type of clothing to bring for coverage, easy doctor access, and an opening for breastfeeding when the time came – and I never even put the darn clothes on. I guess since it was the day of my daughter's birth, my birthday suit was fitting.

After the bath, I was almost 7 centimeters dilated, and the midwife was thrilled with my progress, saying we'd have a baby in just a few hours.

I was having severe back labor, and I felt like I was going to break in half. But with my fantastic doula, Angela, massaging my back and applying counter-pressure on my sacrum during contractions, along with my husband holding my hand and encouraging me, I was breathing (and sometimes groaning rather loudly) through the rough spots – thinking it wasn't going to be much longer. So we decided I could continue without pain medication.

At 6 p.m., I was 8 centimeters, and after talking to the doctor, the midwife decided it was time to break my water. She said that would get me the final 2 centimeters, and we would probably have a baby in the next hour to hour and a half. Woo-hoo! Wrong...

Sure enough, I was dilating quickly



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as the contractions got worse. We got to 9 1/2 centimeters easy enough, but the last 1/2 centimeter just wasn't budging. Meanwhile I felt like my back was breaking in two – you'll recall the decision for no drugs. This is the point in time when I was very unhappy about that decision.

Then they brought out the drugs that make contractions worse – yes, worse. My husband says this is when the monster in me came out, but I only bit him once.

When the midwife realized the baby's head was larger than average (she's going to be a smarty pants), the doc came in and brought the vacuum extractor. He vacuumed three rather painful times. Still no baby.

Then out came the scissors. Between a deep cut and the vacuum, he still had a rough time pulling to get her out, but alas, our daughter joined the world (four painful hours after we thought she would).

It was such a relief to hear her cry from the next room – that's when we

knew it was all worth it. We created a living, breathing human being. She was perfect – 8 pounds, 10 ounces of adorable plumpness.

Because of her size and large head (no wonder I was a beach ball), she ended up with a fractured collar bone and a brachial plexus birth injury, but both are healing just fine.

Since this was my first birth experience, I can't compare it to what happens in the States, but I can tell you I was very comfortable with the host nation facilities and care I received.

The midwife encouraged me to get into positions that were the most comfortable for me – whether that was sitting on an exercise ball, getting on all fours, or walking around. After the birth, the staff took very good care of both me and the baby with regular visits and a pretty tasty menu.

All in all, we had a very positive experience – one that gave us the greatest gift in the world.

Editor's Note: This is the final piece in a series about pregnancy and host nation medical care.



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A number of folks have come up to me and asked, "When are you going to write 'Don't Shoot The Messenger?'" after BWnow! published the last blog entry, "Would You Rather..."

I really appreciate all the feedback on that blog, so, here we go: I was amazed by the number of folks who contacted me via email/facebook on this subject. Some relayed their tales of being shot, while one person actually confessed to doing the shooting – describing how horrible they

felt afterwards, even though they felt justified, at the time. Wow. "... even though they felt justified, at the time."

Wow. Folks, to me this entire subject falls under the "Defender 6" (BG Rick Lynch) "Stamp Out Stupid" campaign. I liken shooting the messenger to an angry parent who, when catching their little one hitting another child, raises their hand and spansks the child's bottom repeatedly – all the while saying, "We. Don't. Hit."

In his best selling book, "Greater Than Yourself: The Ultimate Lesson of True Leadership", author Steven Farber tells us that in order to be "capable of a Greater Than Yourself relationship, you need two things: (1) humility, and (2) a firm and evolving sense of who you are and what you are here for....in doing so, it promises to raise every person, situation, and organization to a new level."

-Jacqui Haggerty, BWnow member



Commander, U.S. Army Garrison
Baden-Württemberg:
Col. William C. Butcher
Public Affairs Officer:
Lira Frye
Command Information Chief:
Kelli Bland
Editor:
Lynn Davis
Reporters:
Christine June, Kaiserslautern
Dijon Rolle, Baden-Württemberg

Contact information:

Herald Post
Building 107, Patton Barracks
373-7277/7243 or 06221-17-7277/7243
usaghd.post@eur.army.mil
Baden-Württemberg Public Affairs
373-1400/1600 or 06221-17-1400/1600
usaghd.pao@eur.army.mil
Kaiserslautern Public Affairs
493-4072 or 0631-3406-4062
usak.pa1@eur.army.mil
Mannheim Public Affairs
380-1600/385-3369 or 0621-730-1600/3369
usagmpao@eur.army.mil

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Editorial content is edited, prepared and

provided by the USAG Baden-Württemberg Public Affairs Office.

Printed circulation: 17,000.

The Herald Post offices are in Building 107, Patton Barracks, Heidelberg. Military address: Herald Post, PAO, U.S. Army Garrison Baden-Württemberg, Unit 29237, APO AE 09102. Civilian address: Herald Post, Patton Kaserne, Gebäude 107, Kirchheimerweg 4, 69124 Heidelberg. E-mail address: usaghd.post@eur.army.mil

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