

Our Homebirth Story

BY HOLLY PEVZNER

I'm pretty much an on-the-grid type. Sure, I buy organic milk and bring my own bag to the grocery store (sometimes), but that's the beginning and end of my crunchy nature. And I'm not anti-doctor or hospital-phobic. Nevertheless, on May 8, 2009, I gave birth to my baby boy at home in my bathroom, and it was exactly what I wanted.

This wasn't what I had envisioned for myself three years ago when I was pregnant with baby #1. I fully intended to give birth the new-fashioned way. You know, at the hospital, lying down, knees to nose, hours of pain, he-he-he-hooo, the whole shebang. But, my first labor went from "Hey, I wonder if that's a contraction?" to "OMG! I'm about to shit a bowling ball!" in only three hours. There was a 911 call, a public display of nudity, a dramatic *ER*-like entrance to the

hospital, two pushes, and the arrival of a stunning and healthy baby we named Theodore. It was crazy.

Fast-forward two years: I'm pregnant again and very worried. Second babies come even faster. I have visions of being the subject of some TLC show about women who give birth on the subway, in their cubicle, or on a street corner. And so my story begins.



October 1

I had my first doc appointment today for the obligatory confirmation that I am, in fact, with child. When my doctor asked if I had any concerns, I fast-forwarded right to “Can you help me make this birth less insane?” question. I want to avoid being pantsed in public this go-round. She suggested an early induction.

November 17

I’ve been stewing. I don’t want to be induced. I pushed my beautiful baby boy out in three hours. No meds. Just a nervous-as-all-get-out husband who really, really wanted me to get into the car already. No one I know has ever said, “Wow, that Pitocin is some good stuff!” I’ve heard that it makes your contractions more painful. No thanks.

January 13

I got an e-mail today from my pregnant friend/playgroup buddy Tracy. She’s meeting with a midwife next week. She’s thinking about doing a homebirth. Her insurance actually covers it. I’m calling my company first thing tomorrow.

January 14

Holy cow. First, I actually got a real live person from my insurance company to talk to me. Second, he told me they cover homebirth. Whoa. I could do this.

January 16

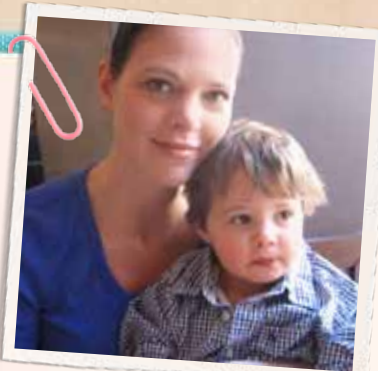
The more I read, the more promising the idea seems. It’s a funny thing—I didn’t even want to have Theo in a birthing center rather than a hospital, but now I’m on the brink of having his sibling in my living room.

January 22

I just e-mailed Tracy’s midwife, Kristen. I’m so nervous that she’ll be busy. Apparently, booking a homebirth midwife is much like securing a great location for your wedding: It’s ill-advised to wait, the way I have, until you’ve only got four months till the big day.

January 25

Kristen has room in her schedule! I really hope she’s not a crazy earth mother. Please, please exude confidence and medical awareness, Kristen. Please don’t mention chakras or chanting or placenta eating or other flaky stuff.



The author with her son Theo

February 2

Sold! Kristen Leonard, Certified Nurse Midwife, is exactly who I want with me when I deliver this baby. She hugged me when we met, and she talked to Theo like he was a regular person, not a small child. My husband, Nathan, and I asked her questions—he focused on the what-to-do-in-case-of-an-

emergency while I asked about post-birth cleanup and if she does baby footprints. (She assured us that it would not be crime-scene messy and said we’d have to order a footprint kit ourselves if we wanted one.) She tells us what she’s capable of handling (she brings an oxygen tank to every birth, is trained in neonatal resuscitation, can stop hemorrhaging, suture vaginal tears, and give IVs) and what she’s not able to do

(C-sections or other surgical procedures, administering pain medication). She tells us when and why she’s had to take patients to the hospital (often a patient has changed her mind and wanted pain meds). And she asks us questions—not just about my pregnancy but about the stress and excitement of adding to the family. She wants to know us. After she leaves, Nathan says, “I love her.” Plus, the tumbleweeds of cat hair rolling through my apartment didn’t seem to faze her one single bit.

February 7

Date night. Steak. Holy heaven, it was so good. And Nathan and I finally got to really talk about this baby. Between work and toddler wrangling, we haven’t had a moment to bask in this pregnancy at all. We talk about Kristen and how comfortable it seems. We talk about how this pregnancy is what we’d imagine it’s like to run the Boston Marathon for the second time but with weights strapped to your ankles. The fanfare is gone, and the race feels longer and harder. A homebirth



Kristen Leonard
is exactly who I want
with me when I
deliver this baby.

would be a nice reward at the end of it all. And it'll give my little #2 fanfare of his own. He deserves it. Why should Theo be the only one with a great birth story?

February 9

There's no turning back: I called my OB and dumped her. Said I picked a hospital closer to home. Bad, but I didn't want a lecture. I'm not dumb. I know what people think of homebirth. I may as well braid my armpit hair and breastfeed the whole neighborhood.



March 6

Today was my first official prenatal visit with Kristen, in my apartment. I had no idea what to expect. I made my bed in case there was any lying-down-and-peering-in-the-vagina. (There wasn't.) She took my blood pressure, measured my belly, and listened to the baby's heartbeat. No worries over the fact that I don't have a scale. This is heaven. I don't have to leave the house or feel anxious about getting fat. Awesome!

March 16

Ricki Lake's homebirth documentary, *The Business of Being Born*, has been sitting in our apartment unwatched for, oh, two years now. Tonight we finally saw it. And it made me rethink the idea of having Theo present for the birth. At first, I didn't want him distracting Nathan. More important, I didn't want to scare—or scar—my Theo. I mean, that's a lot to look at. But maybe being at home with us would actually be less traumatic. After all, if you went out for a playdate and came back to find a new brother, you might never want to leave the house again.

March 27

Kristen gave me a checkup and then asked Theo if he wanted to hear the baby's heartbeat. He quickly scooted up on the couch and nestled up next to me. Thump-thump-thump. "Baby!" he said. Tears!

March 31

The birthing kit arrived today! It's filled with gauze, a syringe, straws (!), a baby hat (!), measuring tape, and more. So exciting! Next step: Unearth old sheets and towels from the basement; buy a shower-curtain liner for the bed and zipper bags to put the placenta in. Apparently, for sanitary reasons, it needs

to be secured before you throw it out. I've heard some people actually bury it in the backyard, but I'm a renter—I don't think my landlord would be too thrilled with that idea.

April 30

My belly is huge. I'm tired. My knees hurt. And my apartment is a mess. I have pretty much given up picking up toys. It's driving me crazy. This is why people give birth in hospitals.

May 1

Kristen asked me how we've prepared Theo for the birth. We've read a few "I'm a big brother" books, talked about the baby in my belly and all that, but I've never really given him the whole baby-exiting-my-body lowdown. Kristen tells me to just let him know that Mommy will be making some noises that might be scary and then make some of those sounds for him so he knows what to expect.

May 7

Chili for dinner. I'm too fat and tired to do dishes. Toys are all over the floor. There's a pile of clothes at the foot of the bed. I asked Nathan if he'd take tomorrow off from work. I don't think I can manage chasing after Theo myself. I've lost my energy. Just 12 more days.

Birth Day! May 8

I accomplished a whole hell of a lot before 7:00 A.M.

Like, having a baby, taking a shower, and enjoying an egg-and-cheese sandwich.

5:00 A.M. I woke up suddenly having to pee. I go and return to bed. Hmm, I have to pee again. That's weird. Back to the bathroom. No pee. Pace. Is this labor? Ponder. Sit on sofa. Lie on sofa. Pace. Pee. Wander aimlessly back into bedroom.

5:10 A.M. Pace. Sit. Stand. Pause. Grimace. Repeat. Nathan: "That's a contraction! Have you had more?"

Me: "Yes. I think I have."

Nathan: "I'm calling Kristen."

5:25 A.M. Nathan calls Kristen and tells her that labor has begun. She is just returning from another birth. She tells Nathan she's going to lie down for a bit and to call as soon as labor progresses and she'll be right over. Meanwhile, I'm kicking toys into the closet and picking up crayons between contractions. Why is this house such a mess?! In the

*Call OB—maybe go with 'It's not you, it's me'??

*Possibly, if there's time, clean apartment.

*Talk to Theo about what's going to happen when the baby comes.

*At least pick up some toys off the floor!

Only one month left to go!





Theo checks in to see what his brand-new baby brother is doing.



Eli Cooper Powell in all his just-born adorable perfection



It dawns on Theo that he and Eli share a daddy.

bathroom, out of the bathroom. On the toilet. Off the toilet.

5:30 A.M. Theo is up, and Nathan springs him from his crib.

"Your baby brother is coming!"

Theo pads into the living room and sees me: "Hungry, Mama!" He sits down, watches me pace, and waits for breakfast. Two big, fat contractions hit.

5:42 A.M. Nathan calls Kristen. "You need to come now."

5:45 A.M. We need to get Theo some food, ASAP.

The two guys go to the corner store in their pj's. Kristen is here before they leave the house. She smiles and heads right for the kitchen. She somehow finds a clean pot and starts boiling water. Wait. Boiling water? That's so *Little House on the Prairie*.

6:00 A.M. Boys are back. Kristen and Nathan exchange smiles. "We're having a baby now!" Kristen says excitedly. Nathan gives Theo a bagel to eat on the sofa. I make a run for the toilet and yell: "Put on the Curious George DVD." Kristen and Nathan join me in the bathroom. Even though the bedroom's all set, I just feel like I want to have the baby in the bathroom. I don't want to be lying down. Nathan asks how far apart the contractions are. I have no clue. Kristen says it doesn't matter. This baby is coming.

6:15 A.M. Kristen kneels in front of me and strokes my left thigh. Contraction. She hands me water.

6:20 A.M. Theo wants more breakfast. Nathan gives him cantaloupe. "Mama make noise," he says. "The baby's coming. Mama's helping the baby come." Theo makes his way into the bathroom to check this out himself, but stands close to the door next to Nathan. I'm on the toilet. I'm sweating and swearing and holding onto the wall.

"Hi, Mama!"

"Hi, sweet pea." Then he heads back to Monkey George.



6:32 A.M. I get loud. Real loud. Kristen leans over me and says, "Let me just shut the window." I should have told the neighbors. I shuffle over to the sink where Nathan is standing. I hate this bathroom. It's so small. Theo is back. When did he get here? I bury my head in Nathan's chest and yell, "Get this baby out!" Theo lets out a sharp, scared cry. Nathan scoops him in his arms. He quiets, continues to eat his melon, and watches.

"Do you want to feel the head?" Kristen asks me.

I reach but only get a handful of blood.

More yelling and swearing. The blood on my hands leaves a print on the wall. I keep standing.

6:41 A.M. My baby emerges. The head, then that quick slide of the shoulders. In an instant I am handed a big, fat, slippery boy. Tears. Laughter. My legs are shaking. Get the camera! Theo says, "Mama! Baby!"

I slowly walk to the bedroom, cord dangling, baby in arms, husband and midwife on either side. Theo goes back to Monkey George. Nathan cuts the cord. I deliver the placenta and nurse my beautiful baby in my own bed. He's wrapped in a beach towel we got on our honeymoon. It's all so surreal. Theo finally joins us. He stares at his new brother resting in Nathan's arms. Kristen picks him up for a better look.

"Say hi to your baby brother, Eli."

Eli Cooper Powell is weighed and measured. His fingers and toes are counted. He gets the official midwife thumbs-up. Kristen stays for a while and talks and cleans up.

An hour later, Nathan, Theo, and I are eating egg-and-cheese sandwiches around our kitchen table with our newest member sleeping in my arms.

Then we all move outside to the backyard. Theo plays with his new sandbox—a gift from Eli. And I sit on my new double glider—a gift from Nathan—with my baby in my arms. I cannot get over how ordinary yet utterly amazing this all feels. □

Kristen measures Eli.

