

Circle of life

Birth is terrifying whether as an observer or participant. The overriding emotion during the hours of toil and sweat is one of fear. How can the human body with all its frailties and design faults possible cope with moving a human life form from the squashed but safe confines of a womb? There's a reason nature prevents us remembering our own births.

Pregnant and scared in the labour ward, I can clearly remember wanting to go home. I said as much to the midwife who patted my arm with the patronising air of one who has heard it all. As I was rigged up to drips, monitors, gas and air and lying like a beached whale, the practicalities of actually moving were insurmountable. But driven by primal fear I swung my legs across the bed and sat up.

"I'm going home. I've had enough. I don't want to do this anymore" I announced authoritatively. I was used to being in control. Then another wave of pain hit. Being British I didn't want to scream out loud. I had spent the past 6 hours hearing screams from other rooms. I gritted my teeth and took another gasp of gas and air. The mask was my friend and my saviour. I threw a mutinous glance at the midwife who smiled, patted my arm and went to check on the next victim.

The pain faded until the next time, a pattern repeated over several hours. I wasn't alone. My husband armed with the paper, sandwiches and numerous cups of tea kept me company although staying away from 'the business end'. He came into his own as the finale approached. It all got a bit stressful and exciting, when he forgets to squeeze the natural sponge he was using to wet my dry lips. Slapping a full sponge of water into my face and causing me to choke instead of push caused much merriment in the room. Thank goodness nobody thought to video births back in my day.

There were numerous times I didn't think I could do it. I was scared and cried, convinced I was going to die. I had researched every aspect of childbirth in the hope that knowledge was power. It isn't. You are on your own, now understanding why they call it labour. I clung to my husbands' hand like a drowning woman.

Detailed memories of this 18-hour period in my life have faded over time. But I can still remember with absolute clarity, feeling unbridled joy and overwhelming love as they placed this tiny human in my arms. I gazed in absolute amazement at this baby girl who was batting her eyelashes and observing me with the same intensity and puzzlement as I was looking at her.

And now, 32 years later I am on the brink of becoming a Nana. That wonderful baby has grown up and will give me my first grandchild. I am both joyous and terrified in equal measure.

500 Words