

# **Baby by Hypnosis**

## **One Woman's Story of Pain Management During Birth**

### **By Kim D.R. Dearth**

*On May 24, the former editor-in-chief of Dane County KIDS, Fox Valley KIDS and N.E.W. KIDS gave birth to her first child with the help of a revolutionary new option in pain management called hypnobirthing. Here is her story.*

**October 12, 1999-** Labor without pain?!? I quickly flipped back to the previous channel. "Dateline" was interviewing a doctor in Florida who teaches expectant mothers self-hypnosis for childbirth. Now that I'm pregnant, I seem to have a special radar for anything to do with children or childbirth, and this really caught my attention. My mom always laughs when she recalls me at 7 saying I was going to have my baby in the tub while I ate a tuna fish sandwich (I think I had seen a TV special on water births in Russia.) This looked even more appealing. These women in Florida were learning to control their minds and their bodies and, consequently, their pain. To prove his point, the doctor stuck a needle through the top layer of skin on one of the women's hands while she had her eyes closed; she didn't even flinch. All I could think was, I wish I lived in Florida.

**November 18, 1999-** I can't believe it; there's a woman in Madison named Melissa Barnes who teaches self-hypnosis for childbirth! My doctor said she had never heard of it, but today one of my coworkers showed me the ad for Melissa Barnes, certified hypnotherapist. I called right away. Melissa explained the theory behind "hypnobirthing" - through deep relaxation and visualization exercises, expectant mothers can learn to break the cycle of fear, which leads to tension, which leads to pain. She sounds very knowledgeable and even over the phone her voice is very soothing. I'm not sure I can do this, but it's worth a try.

**February 3, 2000-** Tonight was our first class. I was a little nervous and babbled while we waited for the other couple to arrive. It's hard to believe this could work. Every birthing image I've ever seen on TV shows women in agony, screaming and cursing their partners. How can a little relaxation overcome such powerful pain? Still, what Melissa is telling us seems to make sense. If you anticipate pain and tense up, the horizontal muscles in your abdomen will tighten and prevent the vertical muscles from pushing the baby down and working with the "surge" (hypnospeak for a contraction) to push the baby out. This prolongs labor and causes pain. Our bodies were designed to give birth. We need to learn to trust in our bodies, relax, and let nature work for us. Many hypnobirthing mothers experience shorter labors because they are not fighting their bodies but working with them. Melissa explains that relaxation and visualization distort time, helping labor seem to go even faster.

We watch a video. The women all seem to be sleeping during their contractions, oops, I mean surges. This seems too good to be true.

We end the class with a relaxation exercise. It's called the Relaxation Rainbow. Melissa puts on a soothing CD, then asks us to close our eyes. She begins to walk us through the rainbow, asking us to picture floating on clouds of mist, one color at a time. I can't believe how relaxing her voice is. By the time we reach blue, I feel like my body is lighter, floating up toward the ceiling. Is this what it feels like to be hypnotized? Instantly, the feeling disappears. Stop thinking - relax! I begin to float again. Suddenly, we've reached the end of the rainbow and Melissa is counting, bringing us back 5-4-3-2-1. I feel like a limp noodle, but refreshed. Melissa asks us how long we were in the rainbow. I say five minutes, someone else says seven. It was 20.

**February 24, 2000-** I don't know if I can do this. I think too much. Tonight, Melissa asked me to relax my body. She talked me through the steps to relaxation, then took my hand and said I wasn't going to feel anything. She's going to pinch me! My eyes flew open and I jerked my hand back. I need to practice more.

**March 2, 2000-** Tonight was our last class. When we were the first to arrive, I made a joke that Amy, another student, must have had her baby already. "She did," Melissa said. Two months early. Now I can't shake my fear that I'll have my baby early, too. If I had to do it today, could I?

**March 13, 2000-** Dave and I have decided to take the hospital birthing class in addition to hypnobirthing. I want to know what to expect from the facility and the nurses, plus, I hate to admit it, I want to know what drugs are available if I need them!

**May 23, 2000, 9 p.m.-** I can't believe I'm only two weeks and two days away from my due date. Life has been a whirlwind. Only a month ago Dave was offered a job in South Dakota, and two days ago he left to start our new life, except I'm still here. His new company is going to let him leave at my first signs of labor, but still, I'm in a panic. It's a seven-hour drive. What if he doesn't get back in time? Things have been so hectic, I've hardly practiced my relaxation. I haven't slept for two nights and I feel dazed and exhausted. I finally started to pack my hospital bag tonight and called Melissa to set up a refresher course on Thursday. My mother-in-law is going to go with me so she can see what it's all about in case she has to pinch-hit as my birth partner. I'm starting to feel a little better now that I've taken some positive steps to prepare. Now all I need is a good night's sleep.

**May 23, 10:05 p.m.-** I've been in bed about 15 minutes when Tux, my fat cat, decides to lay by my stomach. Suddenly, I feel an exceptionally strong kick and Tux jumps straight up in the air, landing across the bed. He slinks back and sniffs at my stomach. What's wrong with him? The baby's kicked him before and he had just continued to lie there. I try to go back to sleep. Suddenly, I feel a slight trickle between my legs. It couldn't be. Then, a gush! I leap out of bed and run to the bathroom. I can't believe this is happening! I'm not ready. I call my mother-in-law and she drives over. I call Dave.

"Honey," I say, "Are you ready to be a daddy?" There's silence, then, "Are you serious? Is Mom there? Let me talk to her," he says.

I hand the phone over. Dottie assures him that yes, I'm serious, and this is really happening. They make plans for Dave to leave South Dakota and turn on his cell phone in about two hours so we can call from the hospital. This way, if I'm not really in labor he can turn around and go back. They can make all the plans they want- this baby is coming tonight.

**May 24, 2 a.m.-** We finally got to my room a few minutes ago. There are nine laboring mothers here tonight, and the nurses are scurrying about. I just want to rest. Contractions are really starting now, although they aren't too bad. I try to lie down for a while, but I'm too excited. Dottie and I get up and wander the halls. We stop at the patient kitchen for a Sprite and some Jello - I know this might be the last chance to eat for a while. As we walk down the hallway, I have to stop for the contractions, but more for concentration than pain. Not pain, pressure, I remind myself.

Finally, it gets too exhausting and we go back to the room. I lie down and try to breathe. With each contraction - rather, surge - I visualize the horizontal muscles in my abdomen as bright balloons, floating upward into a blue sky letting the vertical muscles push my baby down. It's working! I begin to recognize the peak of each surge and look forward to it, knowing it's downhill from there. I've never concentrated so hard in my life. (I later found out the nurses thought I was sleeping during this state. If they only knew!)

**May 24, 5 a.m.-** After asking for two hours, I finally get my cervix measured. The nurse kept putting me off, since I was a first-time mom and had only been experiencing "true" labor for about three hours. I'm 3 to 4 centimeters dilated. The nurse assures me that I have a long way to go and should deliver sometime late afternoon. I'm not so sure. I decide to call Melissa in for support just in case.

**May 24, 6 a.m.-** Thank God Melissa is here. This is getting tough. I don't feel like I can just rely on myself anymore, and her soothing voice is just what I need. With each surge I grab her hand and she talks me through, helping me relax. I can keep it together until near the peak of the surge, then I tense up and my body begins to shake. I think I need to get in the tub to take off some of the pressure.

**May 24, 6:45 a.m.-** Right before I get in the water, I go to the bathroom and have a strong desire to push. There's no way I could be ready yet, is there? I feel lightheaded, and I can't even make the simplest decision. Should I leave my gown on or take it off to get in the tub? I get in, clothes and all, and lay my head back on a bath pillow. The water helps some, but these surges are coming hard and fast. Although they take my breath away, they are strange- a wave of intense pressure stronger than I could ever imagine, but not pain. Melissa calls the nurse to measure me again. She seems skeptical, but does it. Even in my stupor, I see her eyes widen in surprise.

"Get out of the tub," she commands. "It's time to push." I've completely dilated in two hours.

**May 24, 7 a.m.-** Suddenly, the room is alive with activity. Dave's not here yet, and

neither is my doctor. The resident asks if I want to slow things down until they get here. Are they kidding? I want this baby out!

**May 24, 7:05 a.m.-** Dave just walked in. He looks exhausted, but excited. I'm happy to see him, but still grab Melissa at the next surge. If I change my procedure now, I'll lose it.

The resident asks what position I want to try. I can't even think. Dave reminds me that I wanted to use the birthing bar. They attach the bar to the end of my bed and I drape myself over it with Melissa on one side and Dave on the other. I don't think I have the strength to squat, but the nurse says I can kneel and use gravity to my advantage.

At each surge I lean back onto my heels and try to breathe the baby down. Suddenly, my doctor arrives. After a few more surges, she assures me that it really is time, and I need to push, hard. I push with all my might, surge after surge. Between surges, I drape myself across the bar. (Later, my mother-in-law would say I looked like a prisoner at a guillotine.) I don't know how much longer I can do this.

**May 24, 8:05 a.m.-** I hear the doctor and the resident marveling at how well everything is going, and how quickly, but right now it feels like an eternity. I'm vaguely aware that the first stage of labor went quickly, but I feel as if I've been pushing forever. I haven't looked at the clock since 5 a.m. I ask what time it is, expecting to hear that it's at least noon. After all, the nurse said my baby would be born in the afternoon. It's a little after 8, Dave says. In the morning? The excitement of proving the nurse wrong gives me a rush of adrenaline. Still, I don't think I can hold this position much longer. Dave and Melissa help me ease back on the bed and put my legs up on the bar. The nurse ties a sheet to the center of the bar and tells me to pull up on it with each contraction.

A few more surges, and I'm spent. I don't know if I can do this. Still, my doctor seems really happy and says she's never seen anyone relax so completely. I think that it's not relaxation, it's exhaustion!

Finally, the head is crowning. They ask if I want to feel my baby. I reach down and feel the tip of his head. I start to cry. Someone finally finds a mirror and I get my first glimpse of Dylan. The image spurs me on. I push and see more head, then I relax and some slips back in. And so it goes.

I feel like he'll never be out, but after each of these cycles a little more of my son is brought into the world.

**May 24, 8:34 a.m.-** Finally, Dylan's head is three-quarters out. Even though I know he's still getting oxygen from the umbilical cord, I panic. He's not moving, and breathing, just stuck there. I bear down with everything I've got. The head slips out, then, with a little push, the shoulders.

"Reach down and grab your baby," says the resident. What?! I reach down and take this

little body, this little piece of me and pull him onto my chest.

"Oh my God, oh my God!" I can't say anything else; I just let the tears flow.

I did it. We did it. I'm overcome with the emotion of meeting this little man for the first time, of seeing the beautiful face I glimpsed in my ultrasound, of patting the tiny rear that I watched shift in my pregnant belly. It is a miracle- there is no other explanation.

I thank Melissa, I thank the doctors, I even thank the nurse who was so skeptical. I feel overwhelming love for everyone, for life, and especially for my perfect little boy. Above all, I feel gratitude that I was able to fully experience, drug-free, every second of this wonderful passage into motherhood.

For more information on hypnobirthing, contact Melissa Barnes at 1-866-THE-LADY (1-866-843-5239).