

Dear Wendy,

I am so grateful for discovering hypnobirthing when I was pregnant with my second child. Hypnobirthing changed my perspective about pregnancy and birth; its philosophy empowered me to make the best decisions for my body and my baby, resulting in a very powerful birth experience. Please find daughter Lucia's birth story below. I write this in hopes that others will benefit from reading about how essential hypnobirthing practices are for modern birthing.

All the best,  
Aliette

### **Lucia's Birth Story**

My introduction to motherhood followed a steep learning curve: my first pregnancy was unplanned and stressful (due to a move and workplace issues), and by 35 weeks I was funnelled into the medical system due to a breech positioning which, as much as my partner and I tried to fight, resulted in a 'planned' caesarean at 40 weeks.

By the time I became pregnant with my second child, I was determined to have a different experience. After the birth of my first, I engaged in deep reflection, therapy, and yoga to process the reasons why I had an unplanned pregnancy and why the birth had gone the way that it did. But once pregnant, I realised I had unresolved trauma from my first experience that inhibited me from embracing this second pregnancy. When I met Wendy we worked together on trauma release, and she suggested that my partner and I undertake private hypnobirthing sessions with her. We are so grateful that we did.

For one thing, hypnobirthing allowed me to confront my fears particularly revolving around my baby's position in the womb, and the changes in my body. A hypnobirthing approach never asked me to reject or deny my fears: rather it asked me to affirm and validate my fears from another perspective. An affirmation such as, 'My baby is in the best *possible* position for a healthy and natural birth' worked not to deny that the baby might be breech, but to affirm that the baby *knows* how to be in the best possible position for a healthy and safe birth, which might indeed be breech! Or the affirmation 'My body is strong and healthy' helped me not to focus on the extra weight I was gaining, but on my body's strength and intelligence in growing and supporting the baby in my womb.

Most importantly, the hypnobirthing philosophy enabled me to stand in my power and follow my intuition in the face of institutional authority. The first thing it enabled me to do was demand consistency of care from one midwife – even if that meant rescheduling appointments. I was so fortunate that my midwife was extremely supportive of hypnobirthing and women's birth choices. Because I was considered a VBAC candidate (vaginal birth after caesarean), I was also immediately

assigned to consultant care. I used my power to request a consultant who seemed amenable to birth choices. When I began to work with her, I set out my research-based demands (e.g., no continuous monitoring) to organise the birth I *thought* I wanted (birthing pool on the midwife led unit [MLU]). When she was unsuccessful in procuring a place for me on the MLU due to bureaucratic red tape, I used my power and knowledge, supported by hypnobirthing and by my midwife, to demand choices, which is why she informed us that we could birth at home (a universal right for pregnant women in the UK). Although this was the ideal birth scenario for my first pregnancy, I hadn't considered it for my second until it became clear that – despite my low risk – I would otherwise have to give birth on the delivery suite.

When I began the process of trauma release with Wendy, around 20 weeks, I started to question the wisdom of working with a consultant at all. Despite her 'support' for our choices, her attitude was risk averse and her approach was negative (e.g., using metaphors likening birth to 'trying to walk across the motorway' or telling us scare stories about her time as a doctor in Africa where if she hadn't performed caesareans in certain circumstances, babies would have died). Although noting that for my profile the chance of a uterine scar was negligible, she continued pushing for me to birth on the delivery suite with continuous monitoring. Through my own academic research, I discovered that scar thickness predicts the likelihood of uterine rupture and so, to appease the consultant, I agreed to a scan at 28 weeks to measure the myometrial thickness of my scar, something not routinely offered on the NHS. The scan confirmed what I knew intuitively: the baby was healthy, and the myometrial thickness precluded me from elevated risk of a rupture. However, the baby was in a breech position which the consultant noted, and we scheduled another appointment for 36 weeks.

By the time it was 35 weeks my confidence had grown: we were well underway with our hypnobirthing course and practised daily; I was attending my yoga class regularly; and each time my midwife checked the baby's position manually, she was cephalic. I felt empowered to reject any scans at the 36-week consultant appointment knowing the stress they could create given my history. But when the consultant again suspected the baby was breech I caved, and the scan showed the baby's head was on the middle left side of my womb. When the consultant suggested we schedule an external cephalic version (turning the baby manually), waving and saying 'Good luck', I knew that my anxiety over hospital appointments would contribute to another medicalised, traumatic birth, corroborated by hypnobirthing philosophy that posits that stress and anxiety lead to negative outcomes.

That day, I immediately started my maternity leave so I could relax into the pre-birthing rhythm. I cancelled my hospital appointments for the foreseeable. I contacted Wendy who sent me hypnobirthing tapes about positioning, and exercises to move the baby into my pelvis. Along with listening to hypnobirthing tapes daily, I read my affirmations multiple times a day. My husband massaged me nightly. I had an empowering mother's blessing ceremony with close friends. I went on walks daily and did a lot of relaxing. As the baby moved back into my pelvis, birthing at home became a very real possibility.

My surges began exactly two weeks before the birth, irregular and weak, but a sure sign of things to come. My friend arrived on week 39 to support us with the birth and with our son. My total acceptance of her support certainly resulted from my hypnobirthing practice. We did our final session with Wendy on week 39 and I had a very relaxing reflexology session. Then, six days before the 'due date', I found myself very ill for two days with norovirus, with a day of respite before having another bout of illness that my friend noted may be a clearing out before birth. Indeed, my surges were growing stronger and I was slowly losing my mucous plug. Overnight, at 1AM that Friday morning, I awoke with a start: my first birth surge.

Upon finding out about my birth choice as a VBAC with a homebirth team based at a different hospital from my consultant, the homebirth team midwives were in a panic. They were aghast with institutional worry, particularly because I was basing my understanding of the baby's position on the hands of my midwife and my intuition, rather than a scan. They urged me to come in for a scan: I felt so contented and relaxed, so empowered to say no! I agreed that when I entered the early stages of labour I would call so they could do a home visit and scan me with the portable scanner. This scan revealed that the baby was in the ideal birth position. I cried with delight and relief because I knew I was about to have my ideal birth experience. I knew that all the hard work of hypnobirthing would lead me to the exact outcome I needed: a beautiful and healthy homebirth. The midwife, again, urged us to attend hospital where we could have the baby on the MLU. It was a firm and empowered no from me, even as she warned of staffing shortages for homebirths.

My surges became stronger and more regular and by the evening. I lay on my left side on the bed with my partner: his presence and soft touch grounded me to breathe with the intensity as we had practised. I took a bath, but the water did not sooth me as expected. I preferred the peace I found in my bed on my left side. The TENS machine helped distract me from the intense pain, giving me something else to focus on. My strong breath practice supported me to move into the breath during the surges, and hypnobirthing practices of soft touch caresses and key words helped keep me calm and in my body, rather than allowing my fears and pain body to take over. Instead, I remained in a magical state of being detached yet deeply present in my body.

Exactly 24 hours after the first birth surge, the surges began to accelerate and we called the hospital, not at 3 surges in 10 minutes, but when I *instinctively* felt a hastening. I needed birthing wisdom to guide me through the next phase of labour fast approaching. It took us 15 minutes to get through to the hospital and when we did, we were told to immediately come to the hospital due to staff shortage. By this point I knew that if I changed my environment, I would have slowed labour and/or a birth with interventions. I could not leave my bedroom, let alone my bed. It took a stressful 1.5 hours of ringing back and forth to convince them to send homebirth midwives. I was overjoyed when they agreed, particularly as I felt my breath naturally shift from deep rhythmic breathing (up breathing) to slow panting (down breathing), and a strong instinct to bear down. I had a single moment of fear and doubt that perhaps we should go into to hospital just before they finally agreed to send midwives to us because I knew I needed safe hands to help me in the final stage of labour.

Once the midwives arrive, the key midwife quickly examined me including another scan and my first and only vaginal examination. I was 8 cm dilated and she was very encouraged. I asked if I could push and whether I should change positions from lying on my left side. She responded: “Trust your body. You have gotten this far, just trust your body”. This was exactly what I needed to hear: affirmation that I could trust in *myself* and my birthing body. And I did. The midwife never told me when to push or what to do: she was just there as a grounding presence and guide. I pushed down with my breath, and this got stronger until I really began to push and the head was in the birth canal, moving up and down just like we learned in our hypnobirthing course. As she crowned, I reached to feel my daughter’s head, dome-like, squishy, and wet. I felt a burning sensation with every move down. In that moment I was so scared to push her through. I said to my partner, “I don’t think I can do it”. But both he and the midwife said I could, so confidently. So I pushed and her head came out. And the next contraction, out came her body at 6:14AM, on her due date, May 28, 2022, with the morning sun. She lay on my chest and the midwife rubbed her back with a towel. She began to cry and cough out mucous and bloody show and all the rest of it. Once she calmed, she began to suckle, 44 minutes after the birth. It was so beautiful.

I can honestly say that hypnobirthing enabled the most powerful, spiritual experience of my life. Since the birth I have a newfound confidence. Many of my old fears – even those unrelated to birthing – have dissipated. After my first birth experience, I can’t quite believe that I am the one writing this positive, powerful birth story. Now I truly understand of what my firstborn and I – and so many other mothers and their babies – had been robbed by overmedicalisation, scare tactics, and lack of integrative support that is so necessary birthing. I can also see how my birth experience was shaped by having midwives present who understand the need to empower women’s choices, whatever they may be, when it comes to birth and well versed in hypnobirthing. This was shaped by Wendy who educated us about the body and birth, as well as encouraging us to be committed to working hard to get the birth outcome that we wanted (e.g., affirmations, daily hypnosis, relaxation, embodiment practices, therapy and so forth).

We are so very grateful to the hypnobirthing philosophy, and to Wendy for her unwavering support.