

We originally planned to have Tessa in the hospital at Langley AFB, the same place Isaiah was born. I thought I was comfortable with this decision but as we got closer and closer to the birth date I began to regret deciding against a homebirth. I thought that it was too late to change my mind but through a unique series of circumstances we ended up switching to a homebirth just 1 day before my due date (July 15th)! I was ecstatic! The midwife Jeni and her assistant/apprentice Cathi were so great. They rushed to help me get everything I needed and even came by very frequently to get in the 4 pre-natal appointments they needed before the birth. I will be forever grateful to them for making my dream birth possible. Because we switched so late we chose not to tell very many people until after the birth. We didn't want anyone to worry unnecessarily and didn't want to have to answer too many questions when we were already preoccupied with getting everything ready. Of course we didn't really expect to have 2 weeks to get ready.

I had a couple false starts during the week of my due date and we were sure she was going to come that weekend, but the weekend and following week came and went with no action. We were both feeling very impatient to meet our daughter, but at the same time I knew that a due date is not an expiration date, going to 42 weeks (and sometimes further) can be perfectly normal, and that every "extra" day she was in there was one she and my body needed. I wanted to go into labor without any interventions, but we knew that if we got to 42 weeks with no baby we would have to go to the hospital for a non-stress test. I really wanted to avoid that because I knew they would pressure us to induce.

On Monday the 27th (at 41 weeks, 5 days gestation) we decided to have Cathi strip my membranes. She sure was shocked to find that I was already dilated to 6-7 cm and that Tessa's head was very low (only a few inches in)! Not long after contractions started up and David and I were hopeful for a birth that night or the next morning. The contractions stayed about 30 seconds long and 7 minutes apart for around 5 hours before petering out. I started feeling really queasy and had a headache so I went to bed and just hoped they would start up again in the night. We woke Tuesday morning disappointed with no contractions at all. Jeni called me to let me know another of her clients was in labor, so I figured it was actually good that things had stopped. We went about our day waiting to see if the contraction would start again, and at around 3 pm they did! They started out slow and short, I hardly even noticed them. By around 5ish they were getting more frequent, longer and a bit more painful, so I started to think they might be the beginning of the real deal. I got dinner cooked and some dishes done, then at 6 we decided to start timing them so we could let Jeni and Cathi know what was going on. They were already pretty painful while I was cooking; I stopped what I was doing and sat down for each one. They were about 4 minutes apart and 30 seconds long. We called Jeni to let her know they were close together but still short, and she said to tell her the second they got to a minute long or when we thought she should come and she could rush right over (the birth she was at was across the water, but progressing slowly enough that she would be able to leave) and send a couple of other assistants/apprentices who were on our side of the water but that I hadn't met. David got the boys to bed around 7:30 and I got in the birth tub, which we had set up in the living room. It felt really nice, like a spa, but it was also really hot and I was sweating like crazy.

I wasn't in the tub for very long, just a few contractions. They were getting really intense and hard to relax through. I thought that I had just remembered Isaiah's labor wrong or something, because they

were still only 30 seconds long and about 4 minutes apart but were really hard to deal with. They reminded me of the contractions I had in the last hour before Isaiah's birth, when it started to actually get hard. Jeni called to check on me, and I just told her they were still short. Then I decided that even though the contractions were short they just felt too much like the right-before-birth contractions and I should call her back. I'm not sure exactly what time I called her...it couldn't have been much after 8, maybe 8:15ish? She said she would be right over and she called one other apprentice, Neely and another friend of hers, Tiffany. I got out of the birth tub pretty much right after calling Jeni – I was just too hot and felt really out of control during the contractions. I tried sitting on the couch, because I remembered preferring the sitting position for Isaiah's labor, but after 2 contractions that way I knew it wouldn't work. I needed to have full mobility. Those last 2 contractions on the couch were really intense, and that was when I started to think Tessa might come too fast. I briefly had the idea in my head of maybe getting back in the tub, since I had read that water can slow the contractions down a bit, but when I stood up to walk to the tub I felt something between my legs! I said to David, "what's that?" He said, "What's what?" and I lifted my leg and asked him if he could see her head. He could! We called Jeni again and told her that he could see the head. (Note here – we realized later that what he actually saw was the bulging bag of water) At this point I had had no pushing urge and the contractions were still short, but they started coming on really fast. I went back to the couch but this time I kneeled on the floor in front of the couch with my head and arms resting on the couch. The series of events here starts to get a little fuzzy... Jeni called me back and passed the phone to Cathi. Cathi told me to try to just hum through the contractions and that if Tessa was born before they got here the only thing we needed to do was keep her warm. We already had a couple towels out and ready. I had done some reading about "breathing the baby out" and hadn't planned on actively pushing anyways, so Cathi's advice to hum made sense to me. I stayed on the phone with her in between contractions but dropped it on the couch every time a new one started. Cell phone reception in our house really sucks so my phone kept dropping the call, which I found hilarious in between the contractions. David had opened the front door and was watching for their cars in between contractions. It was so funny to see him running back and forth. I was very focused during each contraction but in between I was kind of in a happy/excited/silly mood. Cathi said it sounded like I could be baking cookies in between because I was so calm. At one point I could hear Jeni in the background yelling at the cars on the interstate, which I also found really funny. I'm pretty sure I told her to slow down and not get in an accident in between contractions too. The contractions were really hard, I tried to hum through them but sometimes I just made an open mouthed uuuuuungh kind of sound. I could feel Tessa move down with each contraction but then she went back up at the end of each one. Every time we were sure she would be born but there were actually quite a few like that. Each contraction she seemed to go just a teeny bit further; they got progressively more painful and I got louder with each one. I was just sure the boys would wake up but amazingly they didn't! Finally her head came out (still with no pushing on my part, although I could feel my body heaving and pushing...I had read it described as kind of like throwing up before and while that's a gross comparison it really was like that – the way my body just expelled her), breaking my water as it did. Here's another part where I couldn't help laughing because David said how strange it looked to have a head just hanging there out of my...um, backside. On the next contraction (or did it take two? I can't remember...I just remember it seeming like a long time to have a head just sitting there) her body followed right into David's arms, and then she started crying. Just as we had worked out how to get her

under my leg and into my arms Tiffany walked in the door! She was only seconds after the birth. A funny note here but I was surprised to find that this was a Tiffany I actually knew – we're in the same Attachment Parenting playgroup together! Within a few minutes everyone else showed up. Someone (either Tiffany or Neely) thought to grab our camera that was sitting there and start taking pictures. I am so thankful she did! Cathi had noted the birth time on the phone, 8:53 pm. She weighed 8 pounds, 10 ounces and was 22.5 inches long! David woke Trevor and Isaiah so they could meet Tessa but they were so out of it that he just took them back to bed. Once the essentials were done Jeni and Cathi headed back to the other birth, leaving Tiffany and Neely to tend to me. They helped me get upstairs and settled in bed with Tessa and were gone by 11-ish. David and I were hopped up on endorphins and talked quietly in bed for quite a while before finally going to sleep snuggled up with our new baby girl, Tessa Marie.