

# A Gift of Love

*A journey of courage and  
powerful transformation*



**Anette Schütze Urban**

*For my beloved son Martin  
You truly were a gift of love.*

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*I know that God doesn't  
give me greater challenges  
that I can handle.*

*Sometimes I just wish He  
hadn't such faith in me.*

- MOTHER TERESA



## Introduction

How often do we hear about a story, where we utter the words, “I couldn’t do that.” This is a book about personal pain and spiritual growth. I underwent a life-altering transformation, a metamorphosis, and would like to share it with you.

If we are alive, we cannot escape loss. Loss is a part of life. How we deal with loss and sorrow is personal and individual. It is not how we fall, but how we get back up again that matters.

There were times I felt very alone, but had I looked around, I would have seen I wasn’t.

I wish to thank my family, especially my mother, who time and time again made my favorite foods for me to freeze just to ensure I had sufficient nutrition for the energy I needed. We loved visiting you, both in the summerhouse and in Copenhagen. Martin knew how loved he was.

Martin had a loving father, Jørgen, and even though we did not stay married, we were Martin’s parents; and I am so grateful that we have remained friends.

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Martin was loved by many people, too many to mention. I feel compelled to mention Hanne and Jacob who were his relief family, and they loved him like their own. Martin loved staying with them on their farm, and very often, when I came to pick him up, he didn't want to go back; but then again, neither did I. Thank you so much for your friendship. I feel so blessed to have met you. You gave me the breathing space I needed.

A very special thank you has to go to Jeff, my coach/therapist, who brought me out of the darkness back into light. I could not have done this without you and I truly value our friendship.

Over the years I have met with countless doctors, but no one even came close to you Søren. You were our rock in a very bad storm. I knew I could always count on you to tell me the truth about Martin. Your compassion and knowledge made very tough times a little easier. You had the patience to explain things to me when I didn't understand or just simply couldn't take it all in. You made a big difference in our lives, and for that I am forever grateful.

A special thank you to Brigid, my good friend from San Diego, whom I have spent so many vacations with. I can't thank you enough for letting me stay with you over the years and especially in the weeks after Martin died. You will always have a very special place in my heart.

To my extended family and friends, I will never forget your good deeds and support. You will be forever in my thoughts and prayers.

A special thank you to my loving husband Mike, who, although you were not part of Martin's life, are a part of mine now. I love you dearly.

And finally, I thank God - the Divine force that guides my life.

## The Birth

Each chapter contains an interval in my life from Martin's birth forward. These periods are not necessarily in chronological order, but they were of significant impact in the development of the person I have become.

I hope the reader may connect in some way, not only with the adversity I struggled through, but also the growth that took place as a result of the challenges I faced in my own way and time. May you be strong, and prevail as I have.

- ANETTE SCHÜTZE URBAN



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Birth

“What was it?” I ask dazed.  
“It is a boy,” a strange female voice answered.  
“Okay,” I answered and fell back asleep.

The first thing I remembered when I woke up again was a lamp, shining its light in my face.

“Please turn it off.” I asked so I can sleep some more, and please take off my covers. It is really warm in here”.

“No,” the straitlaced nurse answered promptly.

But I couldn’t see her, because the lamp was blinding me.

“I have to be able to see you all the time,” she stated. “Besides you might experience a draft, if I remove the covers.”

That answer confused me.

“Draft? From where,” I answer slightly annoyed.

The windows were closed, and outside it was a warm summer night. I could feel that my neck was wet from sweat. But the nurse didn’t give in. I looked around the ward. Apart from the nurse, I was alone. No baby, no other newborns with their mothers. No babies crying – only total silence.

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I looked down at my stomach. *Well, it is flatter than yesterday, I thought.* But I was covered with tubes. I had a catheter and an IV drip in my arm. I couldn't move, but I really needed to move and kick off the covers.

I am never still when I'm sleeping, and just the fact that I couldn't move made me feel uncomfortable and claustrophobic.

I was trying to find logical answers to my confusing questions.

*Why am I covered with tubes? Why do I have an IV drip? Why am I not allowed to move?*

Since I couldn't find the answers on my own, I gathered my courage and asked the nurse.

"Where is my child?"

Her face revealed that she would rather not answer that *particular* question, and I detected some sweat on her nose.

"A doctor will come and speak with you tomorrow. It is a doctor who has to inform you about the birth." she responded.

"But where is my son? It was a boy, wasn't it?"

I started to become somewhat impatient. *Why can't she just tell me? What is she hiding? What could happen if she did? It would give me some peace of mind instead of lying here, sweating, left to my imagination, which is starting to run wild.*

"He is at Hvidovre Hospital." That is all I can tell you. But get some sleep. I will move the lamp a little and I will get a sheet for you instead of the thick cover. Goodnight."

There I lay, trying to remember what happened in the last couple of weeks.

There is not a lot to tell about the pregnancy. When my husband Jørgen and I had been married a couple of months, we decided to expand the family. I quickly became pregnant, and my

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pregnancy was normal. I went to regular check ups and my baby was doing very well.

It felt very special to hear the sound of my baby's heart. The midwife placed an instrument on my stomach, which made it possible for me to hear my baby's heartbeat.

It touched me deeply to hear it. It was at that moment I realized that I had a little human being growing inside me and I was to become a mother in a few months time.

*Would I be a good mother? What did I know about motherhood – nothing!*

After the check up I went to the nearest bookstore to buy books on pregnancy and how to care for a newborn. I never read them.

The next couple of months the baby grew inside me and my stomach became bigger. It was a very hot summer and my feet and hands became very swollen. It was quite difficult for me to wear shoes. I remembered that a friend of mine had told me how her fingers were so swollen when she gave birth that she couldn't get her ring off, so the doctors had to have the ring cut off. I couldn't risk that, so I decided to take mine off before it was too late.

But when I tried to take off my ring it was stuck. I tried using dishwasher liquid, but it wouldn't budge. My finger got more and more blue, and I knew if it didn't come off, I would have to go to the ER. Even after pulling very hard and using more liquid, the ring was still stuck.

I got so nervous and was just about to go to the ER, when I tried one more time, and that did it. The ring finally popped off.

My feet were also swollen so I could only wear sandals. I waddled like a goose, but apart from that, I was just fine.

At week 39 it became increasingly difficult for me to breathe. It

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felt like the baby was pressing on my lungs.

My stomach hadn't dropped as it should. My baby had not gone down the birth canal which I pointed out to the midwife at the last check up. She checked me thoroughly both inside and out and agreed with me. She concluded that I should go home and prepare myself for a cesarean section since she didn't think I would be able to deliver him naturally. She estimated he was too large for me to deliver naturally. That was why he hadn't dropped.

The midwife made me feel safe and I trusted her. She looked as if she had delivered thousands of babies. She knew what she was talking about. She had experience.

The thought of a cesarean brought me relief. After what I had seen on film at prenatal classes and what I had heard from others, giving birth was very painful so I thought, *why endure pain, if you don't have to?*

The films had made me nervous about giving birth, but it was something I knew I had to go through. Some women had told me that you are not a real mother if you don't give birth naturally. I didn't feel that way at all.

The midwife wrote her notes in my chart, and the next week when I passed my due date, I was seen by a doctor. The doctor who attended me hardly looked up from his notes and didn't look at me.

"Lie there," he said, and pointed at the table.

His voice was cold and impersonal. He did nothing to make me relax or at least make me feel welcome. I got the feeling that he'd rather be anywhere else than where he was. I laid down and prepared myself for the examination, although it was difficult for me to relax. He got up from his desk and came toward me. I tried to make eye contact, but he didn't look at me. I wanted to ask him about

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what the midwife had written in my chart. What did he think and what would happen now? But I never found the courage to ask him.

"There is nothing wrong with you," he concluded after his hands had briefly touched my stomach. "You don't need a cesarean."

With that information, I was sent on my way. But I was confused.

What was I to believe? *Should I, or could I, give birth naturally?*

The midwife said I couldn't, and the doctor said I could. I was afraid to give birth and chose to believe the midwife. I repressed the doctor's words.

My water broke on August 10, 1990, at 2:00 a.m. I was sleeping on the couch and I woke up because the baby was pressing against my bladder as he had done for many months. I went to the bathroom, and suddenly I felt something wet between my legs. At first I was embarrassed, because I thought I had peed on the floor, until I realized that my water had broken.

Jørgen had attended a Rolling Stones concert with friends and returned home not completely sober, so he was fast asleep. But it was time. Even if my contractions hadn't started, I was afraid of what was about to happen. I walked around in my living room with my hands shaking, trying to get my breathing under control.

"Anette," I said to myself. "Breathe calmly."

I'm not sure I even listened. I couldn't calm down. I was nervous and needed someone to calm me. *Was I ready? Would I be a good mother? How do I change a diaper? Should I leave for the hospital now or wait? Would I have a cesarean or would I have to give birth naturally?*

Once again I believed, that I would get a cesarean.

I called the maternity ward, as instructed if I had questions. It was difficult for me to dial the number, because my fingers were still shaking.



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It took a while before they answered. It felt like an eternity. When I finally got through and told them that my water had broken, I could feel my jaw tighten. I was clearly anxious and afraid.

“Have your contractions started?” The midwife asked calmly.

“No,” I answered. My voice was trembling and so were my hands.

“Okay, that is fine. How does the amniotic fluid look?”

“Umm. I don’t know”, I answered, feeling a bit stupid.

The midwife was very patient and explained what it could look like: gritty, clear, or green.

“I don’t know, but I think it is clear,” I answered shakily.

The midwife suggested that I come in if I was too nervous to remain at home.

“Uh, it is stated in my chart, that I am supposed to have a cesarean”, I uttered.

She sounded surprised.

“I don’t know anything about that,” she answered, “but you are welcome to come in here if you want to.”

I thanked her and felt calmer.

But my new-found calmness didn’t last long. Nervously I walked around my living room.

*Should I go to the hospital or should I stay at home?* I knew if I stayed at home, it would be difficult for me to remain calm. I thought of waking Jørgen up, but decided against it when I realized how heavily he was sleeping. I felt he would be too drunk to comfort me, so I let him sleep a little longer.

Back in the living room, I walked around impatiently trying to find some peace, to no avail.

*Oh God, how am I going to get through this?* My palms were

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sweaty. I put my hands in my pocket, just to take them back out a moment later.

It was as if my hands had a life of their own and I was not a part of it. I couldn’t make them stop shaking.

*I really need to talk with someone. But whom could I call? Nobody.* It was 3:00 a.m.

I stopped walking around and tried instead to focus on one of the pictures on the wall. My mind needed a distraction from the imminent delivery. But my eyes couldn’t focus. I tried to look at a pattern on the couch, but that didn’t work either. *Anette, do you realize, when you return home in a few days, you will be a mother? Can you really handle that?*

“No,” I answered to myself. I can’t stay here any longer. I’m driving myself mad. I only have myself to talk to and I am not much help. I have to wake up Jørgen and we have to go to the hospital.”

I tried for a long time to wake him up. Finally I succeeded. He sat up in the bed, looking very confused and not very pleased about being awoken.

“It is time to go to the hospital.”

“What? Why? Is it now?”

He sounded very confused. The two hours of sleep he had did not sober him up and he took a shower.

Now we had to figure out how to get to the hospital. Jørgen was in no shape to drive and for some reason I got the idea that I should be driving. But I felt too nervous to drive responsibly. I didn’t want to take a taxi, since I was afraid I would give birth while on route.

The only option left was to call an ambulance. However, I felt stupid for calling because there was really nothing wrong with me, and it didn’t seem to be an emergency. I was convinced that I would

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waste their time, but I did call, and the ambulance drivers were very sweet and understanding.

They quickly discovered how nervous I was and did their best to calm me down.

“Do you want me to carry you down the stairs?” one of the drivers asked.

At first I respectfully declined.

“You already paid for the service, through your taxes, so why not take advantage of it,” he said it with a smile that relaxed me.

“Okay, you can carry me, but don’t drop me.”

“I won’t. I promise,” he answered calmly and carried me down to the waiting ambulance. Normally I don’t like to be lifted or carried, but there was something about him that just made me relax and trust him.

I had to go to Frederiksberg Hospital, which was only 10 minutes away. As we started driving, I began hoping for a detour or just getting lost. *Even better, a drive out of the country. Anywhere but where we were going.*

Jørgen was struggling to keep awake. I realized that I might have to go through this alone. Jørgen would be too tired to be supportive and that thought made my heart beat faster. I kept thinking *relax. Everything you are feeling, the baby feels too.*

I closed my eyes and tried to breathe deeply. “*Relax, breathe calmly. In and out,*” I told myself. I made an effort to be calm, but my heart was beating so fast. I looked over at Jørgen to find comfort – he was sleeping.

The paramedic who had carried me down the stairs, started to talk to me.

“I need your full name and date of birth,” he said.

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The sound of his voice reassured me. By giving the information he had asked for, my mind could focus on something else. It helped, but only for a moment.

Shortly after, we arrived at the hospital. The ambulance stopped right outside the maternity ward and I said goodbye and thank you to the paramedics who had been so kind to me.

There was a drawing on the door to the ward, which said, “Here we give birth.” Then I heard loud screaming. I could not tell if the scream came from one woman or several. One thing was certain. It made me afraid and I did not want to go inside. However, I had no choice.

The midwife who received us was very kind. I had seen her before. I had taken some prenatal classes with her. That calmed me a bit. She welcomed us and led us to a room with four beds. The first thing I noticed was how old and worn out everything looked. It was a very old hospital. The maternity ward was a small building separate from the main building. They wanted the maternity ward to feel homier than a hospital. Many people preferred that, but not me. I wanted a modern efficient hospital. There was something about this place that just made me feel more anxious. It had that old hospital smell that I hate. Yes, I wanted a modern hospital. It felt safer.

The midwife, who had received us, gave me the bed by the door.

“We are rather busy at the moment. I will give you time to unpack,” she said.

“Ok, but I am having a cesarean!” I reminded her.

“I will be back later,” she answered, and turned her back and walked out.

*Well, I thought, I am here. This is it. I wonder how long it will*

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*be before I have a baby in my arms. Will it be a boy or a girl? Will the baby have his or her birthday today? I am about to become a mother!*

The thought felt overwhelming. *In a couple of hours my life will change completely. Am I ready? It will happen, no matter how I feel about it.*

I tried to think of something else. I looked around the room. All the beds were taken. One of the women was in a lot of pain and she yelled to her husband to get some pain relief. The scene reminded me of the movie *Terms of Endearment*, where Shirley MacLaine shouts at the nurse, “give my daughter her shot!” It made me smile, but not for long.

In another bed, a woman was lying with a sort of belt, which monitored her baby’s heartbeat. I had seen one at the prenatal class. I hoped I didn’t get any closer to it.

I was beginning to wonder why my contractions hadn’t started, so I decided to take matters into my own hands.

I had heard that walking would speed up the process. So I did. I asked Jørgen to unpack, while I went for a walk, up and down the hall wearing my very worn but beloved pink bathrobe. I wanted to walk as long as I could. I knew I was in for a long wait. It never occurred to me that I could just go home and come back when it was time. However, nobody had told me that it was a possibility.

My contractions were coming little by little. I continued my walking and a wave of contraction came washing over me. I found a table to lean on. It eased the pain somewhat, and I continued my walk as soon as the contraction was over.

I wondered when somebody would come and prepare me for the c-section and couldn’t figure out why nobody came for me.

*Maybe they don’t perform, c-sections at night? Yes of course. That’s*

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*it. It is because the surgeon is not here yet.*

That thought made me relax, but only for a moment as a new contraction came over me.

“Oh shit, this hurts,” I yelled. I was beginning to understand why I had heard screaming women upon arrival. I was becoming one of them. A midwife approached me.

“How is it going?” She gently massaged my lower back while I was leaning over the table. Her gentle touch felt really good, but even so, I answered in a harsh tone,

“It hurts like hell.”

“I know,” she answered with warmth and patience. “I will stay with you, while you are having this contraction and after that I will give you an enema.”

I was trying to focus on my breathing, but it was a bit difficult. I wanted to know why I needed an enema. *They can’t be serious. Do they really want me to go to the bathroom here, where everybody can hear me? No way. That is just too embarrassing.* So when the contraction had passed I told her about my concerns.

“I promise it will help you,” the midwife answered with a smile.

“OK, then give me the enema,” I said, as if I was doing *her* a favor.

While the enema was working, I was in the bathroom with no reading material and listened to all the sounds coming from the other rooms. I was scared and didn’t want to be there. All I wanted to do was run away and stay pregnant forever. Clearly it was very painful to give birth.

Afterward, I went for my walk, up and down the hall. I looked into the room and saw Jørgen sleeping in my bed. Some of the beds were occupied with new women.

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The contractions came more frequently now and they had become increasingly painful, but I tried not to utter too many cries or say too much. I didn't want to scare the new arrivals. I was in pain and I needed to lie down.

"Jørgen," I said while shaking his arm. "Wake up, so I can lie down."

He got out of bed. I felt a little better lying down, but only when I didn't have contractions.

I was bored so I got up and continued waddling up and down the hall in the hope of speeding up the process. I was still in a lot of pain and wanted something for it, so I tried to get the attention of the midwife.

"I will be right there," I heard her say.

"Yes" she asked?

"I'm in a lot of pain. It's 9:00 a.m. and I have been here for many hours. Can I get something for the pain, please?"

"Of course. I will get something for you."

She returned in just a few minutes.

"Any news about my cesarean?" I asked the midwife, while she injected me with morphine.

"I haven't heard anything about you having a cesarean. Who told you that?"

"The midwife who discovered that I'm unable to give birth myself."

"Let me check and get back to you."

I wasn't too sure that she actually would, but I let the thought go, while I continued my walk.

While walking, another question kept surfacing.

*Dear God, why couldn't you have forgiven Eve, so childbirth didn't*

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*have to be so bloody painful?*

While I was waiting for an answer, I saw that Jørgen had gone back to bed and was sound asleep again.

Gradually, not having any progress with the delivery became a psychological burden. Women who arrived after me were wheeled into the delivery room or passed me in the hall with a flat belly and a baby in their arms.

It was hard for me to watch. I kept thinking, *when would it be my turn? Why is nothing happening? Why don't they come for me, when I am having a cesarean?*

About 1:00 p.m. a midwife came to me and before she could say anything, I asked, "Any news about my cesarean?"

"Excuse me," the midwife answered while looking confused, "but I'm not sure what you are talking about. Besides, a doctor has to decide that."

It occurred to me that I hadn't seen any doctor at the ward while I had been here, so I knew I had to fight harder.

*Maybe they have forgotten me. No, they can't have. Why should they? It is written in my charts. I have to make them listen.*

"Read my chart, it is in there."

The midwife ignored my comments and said: "Why don't you go out and have a bath? It will help you."

That confused me a bit, as I had just had a bath.

"I am sure it will ease your pain, and besides it might help you dilate."

It's 1:00 p.m. and we need this to progress."

When hearing that, I relaxed. I had heard of women who had dilated up to 8 centimeters after taking a bath. While nothing much had happened with me, I felt that maybe something would.

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*Maybe I would dilate 8 cm.*

“Well, give me that bath then,” I answered cheekily.

In the bathroom, I could really see how run down the hospital was. The room was dark and some of the tiles were missing. Others were loose.

“It is ready now,” the midwife said while pointing at a door. I was hoping to find a big tub in there. But no, there were only showers.

In one of them, I found a white plastic chair to sit on. I took off my bathrobe, sat down and looked around. Even the shower cubicle had loose and missing tiles and I could see green blotches on the wall down by the floor. It had a moldy and stuffy smell. I didn't like being there. *What if someone should come in? They would see me naked.* I didn't like the thought of anyone seeing me naked. I let the water flow over me as if it could rinse away my thoughts.

Another contraction came. I put the shower head on my lower back and let the water gently massage me. It helped, but the pain was still there. I was starting to wonder if something was wrong. *Why is no doctor or surgeon coming for me? Why is it that nobody knows anything about my cesarean? Why is nobody talking to me?*

I felt very alone.

In the meantime Jørgen had woken up. He came to the bathroom while I was still sitting on the plastic chair with the water washing over me.

“Does it hurt?”

“Yes, it does. How are you? You look tired and hung over.”

“I am.”

We were interrupted by a powerful contraction.

“Oh shit,” I groaned and tried to breathe like I had been

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taught at prenatal classes.

“Is it very bad?” Jørgen asked timidly.

“Yes for fuck sake!”

“Is there something I can do?”

I wanted to be alone, but all I said was “No, I am OK.”

Finally the contraction wound down.

“I'm bored,” I said. “I am just sitting here and nothing happens. I'm going to bed so I can relax and maybe get something for the pain.”

In my threadbare pink bathrobe, I walked back to the room and got in to my bed and waited for a midwife to check how much I had dilated.

It took a while because they were very busy at the ward. I was lying in bed and Jørgen was sitting in the chair next to me. We didn't know what to say to each other, so we read some magazines. Finally, the midwife came in.

*Please be 7-8 centimeters. I really want this to be over soon.*

The midwife was just about to put her hand inside me, when an excruciating pain ran through me.

“Get that hand off me,” I growled.

So she waited.

“Ok. It passed. You can start now.”

Once again I *prayed* for 7-8 centimeters. *Only 4. Bummer!*

“I think I'll call the doctor,” the midwife said. “This is not going well.”

It was music to my ears. *Finally a doctor would come to see me. Now I was getting the cesarean I had been talking about for hours. Finally they were going to listen to me!*

While I was waiting for the doctor, my mood changed for

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the better. I became more optimistic, and my thoughts felt lighter. Now I was getting my cesarean and soon I would be the one with a flat belly and a baby in my arms. I started to think about the procedure itself. *Should I be awake or should they knock me out and then see my baby later? Doesn't really matter now. The most important thing is that there is a light at the end of tunnel.*

When the doctor arrived, I could see he was very stressed. He hardly looked at me and only spoke through the midwife.

“Is she the one who needs the medication to stimulate the contractions?”

The doctor only looked at the midwife. *She? Is he talking about me?*

At last he spoke to me. “Well, it is not going as well as we had expected after so many hours, so I will give you some medication to stimulate the contractions and make them work better.”

I didn't understand what he meant. *I had contractions, didn't I?* It sure felt like it, but I didn't say anything.

“What about my cesarean,” I asked, hoping Jørgen would have been the one asking.

“Which cesarean? Why should you have a cesarean?”

“Read my chart!” I pleaded.

The doctor ignored my emphatic tone of voice. He just uttered to the midwife that he would be back.

Once again my hope collapsed. I looked at Jørgen and wondered why he hadn't spoken up, but I didn't say anything. I didn't know how to say it. I looked up in the ceiling. I was tired of not having people listen to me. Tired of waiting. Waiting for support, kindness and understanding. I was tired of waiting for my baby to be born. Even if Jørgen was sitting next to me, I felt utterly alone. I was just waiting for something to happen while other women were ready

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to deliver long before me. The only thing I could do was count the drops of medication, which were going into my arm...and wait.

I was bored and needed something to do. A big clock with a second arm was hanging on the wall. Paralyzed, I looked at it and could see that time did pass, even though it felt as if time had stopped. A midwife came in to increase the medication, because nothing was happening. Every time I saw a midwife, doctor or nurse, I asked about my cesarean. Not always with a calm voice. But they had stopped answering me.

I tried to read a bit. Jørgen was bored too and often went outside to smoke. When he was with me, we didn't speak, we didn't hold hands. We were like two strangers. Jørgen was tired and wanted to go home to get some sleep. But I was afraid to be alone, so he called my mother and sister, before he went home and they arrived shortly after.

I was still afraid, and even if we didn't speak, it helped that they were there. I didn't feel completely alone, and yet.....

My sister was timing the contractions and shaking her head. It was not going well. My contractions were very irregular. The nurses, midwives and doctors were all tired of listening to me talk about the cesarean and my frustration over the lack of progress.

It was very busy in the maternity ward. Nobody had time to be there for me. Other women had to be taken care of first. One after another, women were rolled out of the room and down the hall to the delivery room. I had some painkiller medication injected in my thigh a few times, with no particular effect.

At 4:45 p.m. I called the nurse.

“I am in pain. Can I get something, please?”

“Yes, but I have to talk with the doctor first,” she responded.

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They offered me an epidural. Under the influence of a lot of pain and lack of progress and anxiety, I accepted.

Shortly after, the anesthetists arrived. They were very nice and explained what an epidural was.

“An epidural is medication we put in your spinal cord. It will paralyze you from your belly on down. The good thing is that you will be completely pain free. Lie on your side and bend as much as you can. It is very important that you lie very still, because I have to put a needle in your spinal cord to administer the medication.”

I was still afraid, but the sound of his warm and comforting voice calmed and reassured me.

The anesthesia began to take effect very quickly and I was paralyzed from my belly on down. That meant I had to stay in bed, but that was OK.

The midwife put a belt around my big stomach. It was to monitor my baby’s heart rate. I could see from my stomach when I had contractions. It became very tense and hard. I could see on the monitor that my baby’s heart rate fell, but the midwife assured me that it was quite normal. It would go up as soon as the contraction was over.

I liked the effect of the epidural. The pain subsided. It was supposed to eliminate the pain, but it didn’t. Something was wrong. I could feel my baby hit against my pelvis. It made me anxious, so I called for the midwife, who came with the doctor. I explained how it felt in my body. But the doctor didn’t examine me even after I explained to him and the other staff that the pain was not completely gone as it was supposed to be.

He obviously didn’t believe me, because all he said was: “You are a first timer. What do you know? Stop being so hysterical.”

I was so shocked by that remark that I just uttered, “You are a

## The Birth

man, how do you know, what I feel in my abdomen?” The doctor turned his back to me and talked to the midwife who was passively standing by.

“I will be back at 8:30 p.m. Turn the volume up and let us wait and see.”

*Let’s wait and see!* I was so frustrated. *I have done nothing but let time pass for Christ sake!* I felt I couldn’t get through to the staff. It was beginning to dawn on me that I had to go up against the doctor and the nurses and midwives by myself.

Jørgen had returned, but decided to be silent when the doctor or any of the staff spoke.

The second hand on the clock was moving slower and slower. Outside in the corridor, I could see women being rolled by, ready to give birth. Again, I tried to read, but I felt the noise of the second hand ticking very loudly and it disturbed me.

Jørgen was sitting next to me on the chair, but I didn’t know what to say. I was nervous, afraid, anxious, confused, but I kept the feelings to myself. I didn’t share with him, and he didn’t question me. From the office down the hall, I could hear the nurses’ laughter mixed in with the screams from the women giving birth.

All my senses were working overtime, so I felt as if I had gotten a super sense of hearing. My frustrating string of thoughts just kept going on and on. *Why didn’t they listen?* I could feel something was wrong. However, both the doctor and the midwife ignored it. *How could they feel, what was going on inside my body?*

At that point my language was bad too. I was cursing a lot. I couldn’t get through to them and make them understand that something was wrong. *Why aren’t they listening, or just take some time to talk with me to calm me down and reassure me?*

## A Gift of Love

It was a very busy ward and noticeably understaffed. So I was left to my own devices. Jørgen was sitting next to me and when he wasn't outside smoking, we just did our own thing. I was lying paralyzed in the bed, reading a magazine and couldn't feel the contractions and yet, I did feel something. I didn't know what it was, I just knew it didn't feel right. But the doctor didn't believe I would feel anything in my body. I was still not convinced that everything was ok, even if the staff had tried their utmost to convince me. *Maybe the epidural has stopped working?* I thought, in an attempt to calm myself.

I kept telling the midwives, that I could feel something, but every time they did the same thing. They looked at the monitor and said: "Your baby is fine." And they left the room.

I didn't know what to think. All I knew was that I felt something in my abdomen I wasn't supposed to feel. But the staff denied it. *Was I wrong?* I started doubting my own judgment. *Maybe I can't trust my instincts anymore?* With that doubt in my heart, I was quiet for a few hours.

I spent time observing the nurses and midwives running around taking care of all the women. I could see how stressed out they were and how much they gave of themselves to these women, and it made me feel guilty that I needed them too. That thought kept me from calling for them as much as I actually needed. Finally I gathered all my courage and called. A midwife came to me 10 minutes later.

"I can feel my contractions again!"

She checked my IV drip and she could see that it was empty.

"It is 7:30 p.m. I'll call the doctor and have him give you some more."

The doctor came 30 minutes later, but it felt like an eternity.

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I got the medication and the amount of medication was increased. I was glad to get rid of the pain so I could relax. But a part of me was convinced that I got the medication to make me stop calling for them, because they just didn't have the time to take care of me.

The ward was still very busy and even though more women had come in, they still had the same number of staff. Women were rolled past me to give birth. It was really hard for me to watch. *When will it be my turn?*

Once again they increased my medication. It was now 180 ml an hour, which was the maximum dose.

At 9:30 p.m. the epidural stopped working and finally the contractions came regularly, four minutes apart. It was excruciatingly painful. I called again to get something. The midwife examined me and suddenly I felt an urge to push. I had waited 18 hours for that feeling.

"You are dilated enough. You are ready" said the doctor.

Finally it was my turn to be wheeled out of the room. Soon it would be me passing by here with a flat belly and a baby in my arms. But the fear of the unknown at the end of the hall mingled with the pain and my mixed and confused emotions. A part of me didn't want to go down there. That's where all the screams I had been listening to all day came from. But a part of me just wanted this nightmare to be over. I was in so much pain that I really didn't care anymore what happened to me.

*It couldn't get any worse.* I was wrong.

In the room, I was lying with my legs spread and my heels in the stirrups. The midwives were cheering me on. "Push Anette, push!"

I pushed and I pushed, but nothing happened.

"Do you want a mirror?" somebody asked me.



## A Gift of Love

“For what?” I answered harshly.

“To see your baby being born,” she answered, trying to keep a calm tone of voice.

“Here you are, take this,” said another midwife while handing me an oxygen mask.

“Move that thing away from my face!” I screamed while pushing the mask away from my face.

I was in so much pain, mixed in a cocktail of fear of what would happen next, almost panic stricken with the thought of having my mouth and nose covered, exhausted and in despair that I only had curse words and negativity left.

Jørgen was watching passively and didn't try to do anything. Every time I felt the need to push, I prayed it would be the last one.

I kept looking at the clock on the wall thinking, *in 10 minutes this will be over!* But it wasn't.

More and more people in white coats came in to my room. They were standing at the end of the bed and I felt exposed and humiliated. Nobody told me who these people were and why they were in my room.

Again I felt something was wrong, but I had learned my lesson, not to ask the staff. So I didn't. But I noticed that they were looking worried. They were whispering, as if they didn't want me to hear what they were saying.

I had enough to do, pushing my baby out, so I couldn't focus on trying to read their lips as well. But I wanted to know what they were talking about, knowing it about me.

Half an hour before midnight, I felt as if I had been pushing forever and I was exhausted. When there was still no sign of my baby coming out, the doctor chose to try to deliver him with help

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from a suction disc. He didn't succeed. Just as predicted by the midwife a couple of weeks earlier, my child was hopelessly stuck.

The attending pediatrician from another hospital had arrived. Frederiksberg Hospital doesn't have a children's ward, so they cooperate with other hospitals. The doctor, who had been with me all night, tried to put the suction disc on my baby's head several times and every time it fell off without my baby coming out.

The amniotic fluid became more and more green and the heart rate was alarmingly low so at 10 minutes to midnight, they decided give me an emergency cesarean. They pushed the baby back in and rolled me very fast down the hall to the operating room.

For me it all happened in slow motion. I didn't know anything, because I hadn't been told or informed. Doctor's terms in Latin were flying over my head. I was trying to find a friendly face, a pair of soothing eyes, somebody who would tell me what was going on and where they were taking me. But all I saw was the panic coming from their eyes.

I was shaking with fear and I no longer cared what happened to me. I couldn't take any more. I looked up at the big cold scary lamp over me on the operating table. I was terrified – convinced I was going to die. I saw more people in white coats, and some in green. Two nurses were by my head. I tried to recognize any of them, someone my eyes could hold on to, but facial features were covered with masks.

I could only see eyes and none of them look gentle, only cold, professionally efficient. I felt like a spectator. All I felt now was fear and pain. Physically and mentally. The staff's moves were hectic.

I became even more frightened when one of them covered my nose and mouth with a mask. I felt like I was being strangled and I

## A Gift of Love

panicked when I realized I couldn't move my arms. Somebody was holding me down. The nurse didn't have time to be kind or gentle and she said in a hard voice: "You need to have this mask. It is oxygen. You will feel better."

I felt the panic coming back. I got my arm twisted free and I pushed away the mask.

"No," I shouted.

She let me off the hook. It felt like a victory, even if it only lasted for a few seconds.

I felt a slight prick in my arm and a few seconds later I was asleep. I woke up and thought I was in the middle of the operation and asked if it was a boy or girl.

"It is a boy, someone answered

"Ok," I mumbled and went back to sleep.



*The delivery was a very traumatic experience for me, but at this time I didn't understand it completely.*

*I had held on to what I knew and thought about myself, and what happened in my body. Especially, the doctor didn't listen to me. He didn't take me seriously and it broke me mentally. Anger was brewing inside me, but at that time I wasn't aware of it. Another consequence was that, for many years, I lost trust and faith in others and – more importantly – I started doubting my judgment and myself... a doubt that would stay with me for many years.*



## CHAPTER TWO

# Hvidovre Hospital

When I awoke from my cesarean, my parents were already there. During the night Jørgen had told them that I had given birth, but it hadn't gone as planned. It was difficult for them to tackle the situation. Who could blame them.

"It will be all right," they said, trying to cheer me up. *What else could they say?* None of us had gone through anything like this before.

Martin was born 10 minutes after midnight. When he finally came out, he showed clear signs of oxygen deficiency. He was very blue and listless. Large volumes of green amniotic fluid were suctioned from his mouth and nose. Not being able to breathe on his own, he was intubated.

Frederiksberg Hospital does not have a children's ward, so immediately after his birth he was transferred to the neonatal ward – the intensive care unit for children at Hvidovre Hospital.

In the ambulance on the way to Hvidovre the tube fell out, so they had to go back to the operating room to re-intubate him. I knew nothing about this at the time. I was sound asleep.