

The Diaries of a Birthkeeper

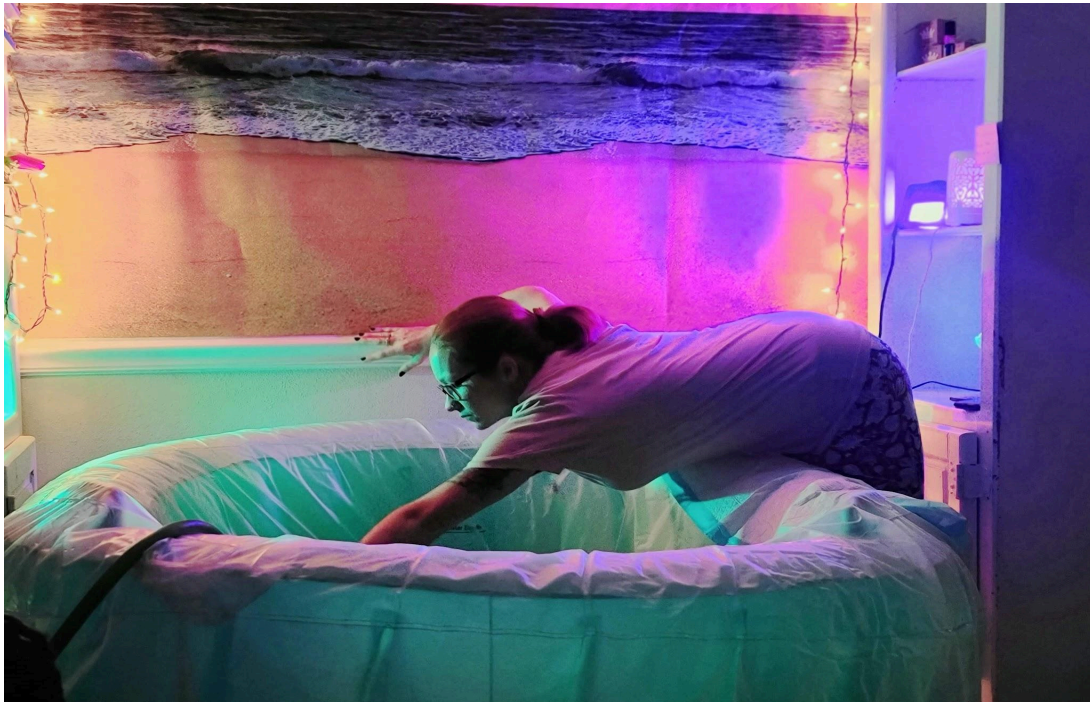
By Raina Brown



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Dear Diary,

In classic Raina fashion, I got myself in some trouble today... gahhh why am I like this? Today was difficult and my emotions are just everywhere at this moment. Beating in my head like a turbulent air flight. One minute I was hopeful and calm the next I felt like I was losing control of myself. The day seemed to unleash challenges at me from every direction, leaving me exhausted and perplexed. Is doula work right for me??? *sigh* I guess I'm gonna try to just sort this out from the beginning...



Kyla started showing some signs of possible labor a couple days ago. Some cramping and some pressure Thursday morning but was able to go about her day. Later that night she texted me to let me know she had a little bit of bloody show but no more cramping and no signs of contractions. Then yesterday early morning she texted *"Today is the day!"*

She had been having pretty noticeable contractions that were making it difficult for her to sleep through and she was shedding more mucus plug with more bloody show. As the morning went on contractions kinda just fluctuated between being close together to sorta tapering off. With some being slightly more intense than others but each one lasting less than a minute long. This went on pretty much all day yesterday. Then about 1:00am-ish this morning my phone rang. Kyla was finally feeling at a point like she was ready for me to join her. I felt so very ready, I was finally expanding my doula work into the physical birth space for the very first time. Something I had been yearning

for since the moment birth work called me in. This brought me so much joy and energy. What an honor it is to serve women and hold such sacred space during the most life changing event of her life!!!

I rushed over to her apartment feeling happy and confident. I spent the drive listening to worship music and talking to God. I prayed for strength and calmness. As I walked up to her apartment building I checked myself at the door. I took a deep breath in “inhale wisdom-servitude-peace, exhale fear-judgement-worry”, I exhaled with steady control then whispered “Thank you Jesus.”

I walked inside to find mama working hard through labor. Present in the labor space was Mama, dad, maternal grandma, friend/photographer and myself. Kyla’s midwife came shortly later. Taking an opportunity between contractions I gently approached her to share a few words. Around 2:00am I started to set up the birth pool. Kyla labored throughout the whole night. She was very restless and unable to get comfortable accompanied by some nausea and occasional vomiting. I thought to myself, “Great, maybe we’re in transition!” ... except come to find out hours later it was anything but... We did some rebozing, acupressure, foot massage, back massage, counter pressure, in the pool, out of the pool, walking, birth ball, you name it we did it. Nothing seemed to really help for very long.



As the sun began to rise this morning I could start to feel the energy in the room shift. It almost felt to me as if the midwife was getting a bit impatient, and grandma-to-be was just accumulating anxiety like a storm cloud. I could see the fear etched deep on her face. I understood the importance of maintaining a sense of calm in the room. Yet, I found myself struggling to keep the emotions of everyone at bay.

I could really tell that mama-to-be was getting pretty overwhelmed and frustrated with the energy her mother was emitting. I ended up asking Kyla how she felt and she confirmed what I was observing was correct. There had been a few times I had to pull grandma-to-be aside and gently point out to her that the stress, fear and anxiety she was having was being felt in the room. I reminded her of how important it is for Kyla to feel calm and supported during this time, ESPECIALLY so, because of her MCAS. I wanted her to know that it's okay to feel all these overwhelming emotions but that finding a way to channel them into a more positive state of mind could really benefit her daughter.

By mid morning mama was getting visibly exhausted, despite her unwavering determination, the hours of labor were beginning to take a toll on her. The rhythmic surges had begun to plateau, so she retreated to her bedroom and sought solace in the thought that perhaps a bit of rest would recharge her energy. But even in these moments of quiet, the reality of her situation loomed—A little while later, Cathy went in to do a vaginal exam and said she was still not fully dilated. A shadow hovered over the room, generating doubt as the words “failure to progress” left Cathy’s lips.

Throughout all of labor FHT’s continued to remain normal every time Cathy listened. But ultimately by late morning the stress and pain and exhaustion from labor had in fact triggered a mast cell attack. After some discussion between mama, Cathy and myself, and lots of begging and persuasion from grandma, Kyla had decided to go ahead and let Cathy stick her with the epi pen with the understanding that it is an automatic transfer to the hospital via ambulance. Kyla’s mom was frantic, She was clearly scared and overwhelmed, talking over everyone with a voice that trembled. It broke my heart to see her like this.

Once the EMT’s arrived their presence felt like a double-edged sword; we needed their help, but their entry only amplified the noise and disorder. 5 new people without a single clue of what the hell is even going on all walk into this tiny apartment and everyone is trying to communicate at the same time. The room got crowded, bright and loud very quickly. I could feel myself getting very overstimulated. The chaos of the moment washed over me like a sudden wave, crashing into every one of my senses. It took everything in me not to yell for everyone to just SHUT UP!

Kyla was stable, a little out of it but coherent. She begged me to make the EMT's take her to a different, slightly further away hospital from the one they would have taken her to by default given it was closer to her apartment. I had to put up a huge fight with the EMT and argued with him for several minutes, only adding to my irritation. Kyla was perfectly stable enough to get to the hospital that she so desperately desired to be at. Reluctantly the EMT relented but not without a patronizing reminder that if I am to follow I had to abide by traffic laws and can not try to keep up with the bus or run red lights. I stifled the urge to roll my eyes or snap back at him. I really just wanted to flick him in the forehead and say "no duh!" His tone was so condescending, which only heightened my annoyance. Yet, I kept myself calm for Kyla's sake. She needed someone in her corner, fighting for her comfort and peace of mind. So instead I smiled, said ok and thanked him.

Quite frankly, we could have just driven her ourselves and would have already been there long before they even got out of the parking lot of the apartment complex. Labor had essentially all but stopped by this point. A whole lotta time, energy and anxiety could have been spared. But I digress... I grabbed my shoes and my keys and jumped in my car. Dad did the same in their car. Grandma stayed back to try and clean up the house and Cathy just packed up and poof was nowhere to be seen again. Did she leave? Was she in the ambulance? I honestly don't even know where she went. It was a bit of a shock to me to learn that many midwives simply just do not transfer with their clients. That was bothersome to me. And maybe she did, I just have no clue.

Around 11:30 this morning dad and I arrived at the hospital and wanted to get back to mama's side as quickly as possible. Of

course the hospital didn't make that an easy or quick process. As daddy-to-be and I waited for them to finish triaging Kyla, I could feel the weight of anxiety pressing against my chest. A nurse, with her cold demeanor and up tight posture, approached me like she was guarding a fortress... *"I need to see your doula certification,"* she stated firmly, her tone leaving hardly any room for negotiation. I took this as a clear indication that she felt I did not belong there.

I explained to her that, that is not something I just carry around with me in my back pocket and was unable to provide her with anything at the moment. This nurse continued to lecture me about the new covid visitor policies, reducing my role from an essential part of Kyla's birth team to just a visitor. She then went on to tell me that because Dad was also there I was unlikely to be able to go back to L&D at all since I was not a hospital certified doula.

I said, *"ma'am, do you realize the disservice you are doing this mama by denying me entry to see and support her? This family paid their hard earned money to have my support and you want to take that away from them over some loose set of covid rules? Would you like to take my temperature?"*

I mean for FFS I've only been with her for the last 12 hours already...

I then demanded to see their policies and procedures regarding doula support. The nurse walked away and a few minutes later another nurse greeted me kindly and brought me back to mama's room. I never did get those policies and procedures. *eye roll*

As the adrenaline from the epipen began to wear off Kyla started to feel incredibly nauseous again. Possibly approaching another MCAS attack. She brought this to her nurses attention but had to

wait for approval from the OB. When the OB made his first debut, he began to rattle off a list of procedures and medications almost mechanically, his voice steady but distant.

He instantly ordered an anti-nausea medication without so much as a pause to seek her consent.

When he turned to speak to the nurse I asked Kyla if she was feeling ok with the OB's suggestions and she seemed to be a bit confused on what was really going on.

While she understood the urgency of her condition, she couldn't help but wish for a moment of clarity, a simple inquiry about how she was feeling. Instead, he instantly ordered an anti-nausea medication without so much as to answer her questions and concerns.

When Kyla spoke up and told the OB about her mast cell and that she was not familiar with the medication he ordered, his response was "this is the safest nausea medication for pregnancy and it's what I give every mom in labor." He didn't seem to be too worried about the fact that she is allergic to many medications and was taking other medications for her unique conditions.

She then proceeded to ask if he knew how it would interact with her mast cell and was concerned with the potential risks for her baby, as it was not something she could recall ever having before. Again, he responded with "it will help your nausea which is being caused by the MCAS flare." I reminded mom that it was ultimately her call and encouraged her to ask him once again for more information so that she could feel confident to take this medication. It was blatantly apparent this dialogue between me and kyla irritated him. Some under his breath comments were made and that just set me off. I stood up straight next to the bed, pulled my shoulders back and I bellowed out *"EXCUSE ME????!!!"*

I'm sorry, she is simply just asking you for some information so she can make a fully informed choice for the wellbeing of her baby and self!"

He then proceeded to argue with me from the other side of the bed about how I was trying to hinder him from doing his job and that Kyla is HIS patient and I have no standing in his delivery room. He told me that it is not my place to make these decisions for her and if I didn't keep my mouth shut security was waiting in the hall to escort me out.

I made the point to him that while yes she is his patient she is ALSO my client who hired me specifically to be her doula and I was not making decisions for her, I was only advocating for her wishes, which were discussed with me in detail prenatally and that we were all a part of the same team here.

I did not appreciate this hostile exchange happening with both of us on either side of Kyla's bed and her in between us talking about her as if she wasn't right there. I quickly became very uncomfortable and I retreated from dialogue with the OB and redirected my attention to Kyla. I reiterated that she is deserving of informed consent and that no matter what she does, I am here to support and uphold her wishes.

He made it seem as though I was trying to prevent Kyla from taking a medication that could potentially help her to feel better. My issue was not with the fact that he was trying to give her medication, my issue was with his lack of informed consent when she was explicitly asking for it. Not once did he offer any information other than it was routine and given to all the laboring moms with nausea as if that was supposed to make her feel safe. Afterall, she had 2 different conditions that made her very different from most mamas.

I wanted mama to get relief from the nausea while also being presented with individualized care. It started to feel like the “superior” in the room was trying to have a turf war with me, meanwhile I'm not fighting for turf, I just wanted Kyla to feel empowered and safe. The whole exchange was totally inappropriate in its entirety. Both myself and the OB behaved very poorly in the birth space. Hostility has no place in the birth space and I let my emotions get the better of me.

After the OB left the room, a nurse approached me and apologized to me for the way the Dr had treated me. I explained to her that I felt partly responsible for the encounter and started to defend myself with reason. Which in hindsight I really shouldn't have even done because this whole process isn't even about ME! It's about Kyla and her baby. She was the one who deserved the apology, not me.

I got out my phone and googled information on the medication for Kyla to read. From what we learned, it was an appropriate medication to give her and she agreed to it. All of the nonsense could've been completely avoided had the freaking Dr just given proper informed consent and not acted all high and mighty. When the room finally cleared out I sat with Kyla and apologized to her for having acted so aggressively. I explained to her that I did in fact understand that I was not there to make choices for her and that I got a little over protective. She seemed to be understanding and shared my frustration with the OB. A short time later the OB came back, his bedside manner had shifted and he came in all nice and communicative acting like nothing happened. He discussed a potential care plan to keep the mast cell attacks at bay after he had some time to review her chart. Before he left the room I followed him to the door and asked him

politely if I could just have a quick word. I apologized for our dispute and thanked him for coming back in with a different approach. He seemed to be receptive, but not at all apologetic for his part, but I took the high road and let it go. Oh yea, turns out, security was never “waiting” in the hall for me, he was just simply being an ass because he didn’t like me being there.

I then stayed and spent the remainder of the afternoon with Kyla. She started to feel better from the nausea and 5:00pm was approaching. Mama really wanted to get some rest so we talked about taking that opportunity for me to run out, pick up my kids and take them home and I would return back to the hospital once the kids dad got home. Just as I had left and was only about 10 minutes from the hospital, Kyla texted me and said they were going to go ahead and break her waters to get labor going again and had a solid plan in place in case of another MCAS attack. She asked them if they could wait until at least 6:30 because she really wanted to rest. Kyla really wanted her mom present for the birth but due to covid policies the hospital was only allowing her to have dad-to-be and one visitor at a time and she really just needed her mama. She relieved me from coming back to the hospital and asked me to go back to her apartment to clean up the pool. I was happy to go wherever she needed me, but by the time I had made it back over to her apartment, grandma-to-be had already left and locked up.

So here I am, at home stewing in my frustration, worried to death about Kyla and how she's being treated and whether or not she feels supported. Is she upset with me, too? Like I am with myself? I’m feeling pretty ashamed of myself for not being stronger, I’m feeling angry with the medical model, I’m feeling sad for Kyla, I feel like I failed her, I feel disappointed I will not be present for the birth of this baby that I watched this sweet mama grow all

these months. I feel like I did not channel the energy of those around her to the best of my ability, I feel weighed down with guilt that clings to my spirit like wet clothes. I stand as an outsider feeling a little disconnected, from mama, from the process, from the birth plan she envisioned, and I feel let down by my own expectations, which I never should've had in the first place.

As I continue to reflect, I find my heart heavy and troubled with concerns about how my actions may have affected her. What is she feeling and thinking right now? Does she share these feelings of disappointment or is she feeling at peace? How is she coping with the changes that had to be made to her labor and delivery. Did I inadvertently create an atmosphere that felt unsafe or chaotic? I truly hope not. Everything I did was rooted in love and a desire to ensure her safety and advocate for her birth plan. Still, I recognize that when faced with unwanted challenges, it would be completely normal and understanding for her to feel upset or scared. I want her to know that her feelings are valid and she doesn't have to walk this journey alone. It pains me to think of the possibility she might be feeling isolated right now. I did reach out and offer her affirmation and reassured her that I was still here to listen and support her without judgement. I haven't received an update since she told me the plan about PROM, so I really just don't know what is going on right now. Which is perfectly ok as I'm sure she has plenty of other things on her mind right now, but even with knowing that I just feel so in the dark. Have they done it yet? Have they not? Did she get rest? Are they respecting her? GAHHHH I just wanna knowww! I hope she still feels safe enough to lean on me, to express whatever she needs to express even if it's disappointment in me. I want so much for her to be ok

and to find comfort in the fact that this experience, despite its unexpected changes, can still lead to beautiful outcomes. She deserves all the support and understanding in the time of transformation.

So, That's all I guess. *sigh* It's now almost midnight and I am going on 40 hours of essentially no sleep. Hoping to wake up to an update in the morning.

Goodnight diary.

XO, Raina

Don't worry friends, there's more to the story coming! Remember these are true but anecdotal stories from my perspective, taken directly from my personal birth journal and nothing is to be taken as medical advice and may not always tell the full story. Names may be changed in order to preserve the family's identity.

The diary of a Birthkeeper offers a unique glimpse into the world of autonomous pregnancy and birth. These diaries will reveal the deep bond and connection that forms between the attendant (me) and the families I serve during one of life's most significant moments. Each entry captures the emotions, challenges, and joys experienced within the physiological birthing process through personal stories and insights. It highlights the importance of support, love, understanding and connection during this sacred and transformative journey. It is my hope that by embracing these stories, it will enhance how we view birth and the impact it has on our community. I want to thank the women who have taught me, supported me, mentored me and encouraged me. I truly wouldn't have made it this far without y'all. I want to

thank my birth bestie for always giving me a safe landing, every time I feel like I'm going to crash and burn. I want to thank the families who have allowed me to walk alongside them during their pregnancies and births. Most of all, I want to thank God for bestowing my path with purpose and meaning.

Thank you for being a part of this very vulnerable journey with me.

Let's create a Revolution together. God Bless.

XOXO ~ With love, Raina

The Revolutionary Birthkeeper