Valentina Rose Murillo’s Birth Story

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Valentina was due on December 4th, 2010, which was a Saturday. The day came and went and I was very anxious to have her on her due date or very close to it because the midwives all said she was going to be 8 or 8 ½ pounds. I was planning an unmedicated, natural childbirth so a baby that size got my attention.

For the last few weeks of my pregnancy, I walked every day for 30 minutes with a wonderful, supportive group of girlfriends from my prenatal yoga class. They would slow the pace of their walks just so I could be a part of the group and it meant the world to me. My husband also would walk with me as much as I wanted. In addition to walking a lot at the end of the pregnancy I prepared for the birth experience in a few other important ways. Mario and I hired Amanda Moore, a doula, to help support our us in achieving an unmedicated birth. I wrote up a birth plan that basically stated that I did not want any pain medication or other interventions unless it was a life-threatening situation and Mario was not to know my weight under any circumstances. My concerns around the labor and delivery from what I could surmise from watching videos and reading Ina May Gaskin’s book on childbirth was that it didn’t seem like a very lady like experience AT ALL. I hated the idea of making strange noises in front of my husband, and the positions one must be in during the ordeal, the “ring of fire”. Not to mention my concern of having a bowel movement on the table in front of everyone. To counteract some of that I packed my labor and delivery bag with lots of lady-like items. I had two small wedding albums, a beautifully embroidered handkerchief (with the letter “V” – mom helped me pick it out) and a collection of perfumes and cotton balls for aromatherapy (I had Chanel No. 5, Coco Mademoiselle, Coco and Dioresmo by Christian Dior, which I wore on my wedding day) – all designed to balance me from this primitive experience I was going to go through. I also had a bag of snacks. I had 6 Windmill cookies, 3 date maamoul cookies, Zen party mix, red grapes, tangerines, and 2 honey crisp apples, trail mix, popcorn, animal crackers and cinnamon graham crackers. I had two personal goals for myself for the labor and delivery. I wanted the baby to be born into a pleasant environment and I knew that I was going to set the tone in the room. So I did not want to swear at all and I wanted to be polite to everyone that was helping me. The other things I had done to prepare for the birth was to painstakingly plan the baby’s outfit for trip home. My very dear friend Tracy knitted the baby a gorgeous dress and booties and my sister-in-law’s friend crocheted an adorable hat. I had all of this ready in box with a pink satin bow tied around it for the baby with a matching blanket. I also had an outfit for me to wear around while in labor – a blue skirt from Old Navy that was made out of cotton jersey material and a black nursing bra. I needed a new bathrobe to walk the halls of the hospital so Mario took me shopping on my due date and picked out a leopard print robe with matching black slippers and socks. We had a swimsuit for Mario in case he was going to join me in the shower [honestly we just packed it because we were told to – I didn’t see it getting used]. I also had a microwavable hat pad. Last but not least I had my bleach wipes to wipe down the surfaces that I would need to touch and liquid bleach to clean the tub at the hospital. As instructed by Amanda and in the class we took, we also had a small suitcase (lets call this the postnatal bag) with toiletries, pajamas, and slippers for Mario, etc.

The day Valentina was due Mario and I spent most of the day getting last minute errands taken care of. Lucky for me we spent a good chunk of the day shopping at Memorial City Mall. On Sunday we woke up and went for breakfast at Avalon Diner on Westheimer. It was a cold day and the diner was busy so we ate at a very small table close to the door. After breakfast I decided that I wanted some dark chocolate toffee so we went to The Chocolate Bar. I got a few pieces of chocolate and a piece of their dark chocolate cake. The cake was almost $10 a slice! A few days earlier, Maureen, one of the yoga mommies, mentioned that her mother and grand mother both had chocolate cake the day before they went into labor. After the chocolate run, Mario and I went to the arboretum and went for a long walk. I was very emotional and very frightened about the birth of an 8lb baby and rather sensitive to a comment he made about her not wanting to come out because I was feeding her so well. So after the walk I took my hurt feelings to see a comedy to cheer myself up. I saw Morning Glory. That evening I only ate a little bit of the cake (as it was a chiffon cake and I prefer butter cakes). That night I did not rest well and even asked Mario to sleep in another room because of his snoring. I probably only got around 4-6 hours of very fitful sleep.

I had stopped working the Thursday before Valentina’s due date so on Monday I did not have to get up early. I woke up and decided to do things around the house that made me happy. I sent Mario to the store to get groceries for pumpkin pie, sugar cookies and spinach/meat lasagna. I made the lasagna and the chocolate chip cookie dough and by the afternoon I wasn’t feeling well. I was still planning to bake the chocolate chip cookies and start on my pie and sugar cookies. Mario was working on and off that day. Around 3pm I told Mario he needed to put the ornaments on the Christmas tree and I thought maybe I should lay down. I was feeling like I had cramps. I laid down for a while and thought maybe I should get in a hot shower to alleviate these cramps. So I showered and to feel a little better decided to do my hair. I styled it in a very curly style – my natural style thinking if the baby was coming, I would be better off with curly hair than straight hair since I might sweat a little during labor, which could ruin my hair style if I straightened it. By 4:30 I contacted Amanda Moore, my doula. She was excited for me and asked me what I was feeling. The cramps were in waves so just as she asked Mario and I decided to time them. They weren’t that bad but getting more and more noticeable. I started timing them at 5:12pm. This is the time that Mario says my labor started. I think it started at 3pm. We were using an app on my iPhone called Baby Bump to time the contractions. They were erratic at that point. Lasting 20 seconds to 90 seconds and spaced anywhere from 2 minutes apart to 9 minutes apart. This lasted for about 2 hours. We were in close contact with Amanda during that time by texting, email and phone. We would email her my contraction history. Somewhere around 6 or 7 pm we called the midwives to let them know. Mary Hirschi was on call that night. When I talked to her she didn’t sound confident that I would be seeing her later but I was and I let her know. She indicated that she would call me to check on me again around 9pm but I told her we would probably be there by then. If I remember correctly she seemed gently amused by my certainty. Around 6pm I told Mario enough with the tree and he needed to get prepared for our trip to the hospital. I also gave up my idea of baking or cooking anything else. We ate the lasagna and I can’t remember if we had salad with it or not. I don’t think so. Mario was so super kind and nice. He was calm but purposefully running around the house, up and down the stairs, getting everything ready. At some point, he made my “nest” in the car in case my water broke while on the way to the hospital. I also remember thinking he looked very handsome and youthful and I was feeling very fortunate to have such a supportive and loving husband. Around 7pm I decided a bath downstairs was in order. So Mario helped me get into a hot tub to relieve some of the pain and discomfort. The contractions were not at all what I expected. I thought I would feel the contraction around the entire uterus. Instead they felt like really bad menstrual cramps and were focused in the lower part of the uterus, ostensibly where the cervix is. I remember not wanting to be alone in the bathtub so Mario stayed with me. He sat on the floor of the bathroom and held my hands every time a contraction came. After I got out of the bathtub I decided it was a good idea for Amanda to come. I put on my blue skirt and black bra. When Amanda got here she thought my contractions were close together but not strong enough to be so close and she said that indicated the baby might need to change positions. So she had me get on all fours for the next few contractions. Every time I got into a new position the first few contractions in that position were more painful. The contractions did even out but they were getting intense. Amanda taught me how to breathe through them. I got hungry so Mario gave me some apple slices and tangerine slices. I felt better after eating that. It was sometime around 8:30 or so and the contractions were really getting strong. I could no longer breath through them. So Amanda taught me how to “groan” through them. By this time I was kneeling at the foot of the bed. I sounded like a cow every time I groaned through the contractions. I was quickly coming to terms with the “primitive-ness” of what I was going through and basically just laughed at my noises between contractions. Amanda was great with the app I was using on my iPhone to capture all my contractions perfectly. Looking back I realize now that Amanda was the perfect doula for us because with that gesture I knew she would do everything in her power to honor Mario and my wishes for the birth and that made me feel secure.

When the contractions got so intense that groaning wasn’t working, I got on the bed and Amanda suggested a “running position” – where I laid on my side with the “upper leg” bent. It was around 9pm at this time. [Incidentally I had nicknamed this position the Gorgeous Position in yoga and loved being in this position at the end of every yoga class for the last few weeks of my pregnancy.] At about 10pm the contractions were really getting strong and I was starting to feel scared. I suggested we go to the hospital but Mario was reluctant. Mario’s game plan was to stay home as long as possible as he felt the earlier we got to the hospital the less likely I would be able to resist pain medication. After one more contraction and I said out load that I was scared and wanted to go to the hospital, Amanda said that is time and we need to go to the hospital.

After all of that careful preparation of outfits, robes and dresses, I had nothing prepared to wear to the hospital and frankly had outgrown much of my maternity wardrobe and my feet were so swollen I also had only one pair of shoes to wear – my hot pink Mary Jane Crocs. It was very cold that night. So I put on a warm teal tracksuit, black socks, my hot pink Crocs and wore the leopard print robe as a coat! I looked ridiculous – part pimp, part clown and I was yelling through all contractions at that point. We drove right through the heart of downtown to the hospital, as there was no traffic. We arrived in valet at St. Luke’s hospital after 4 contractions – about 15-20 minutes. There were lots of people around but no one to assist us. Mario was a little nervous – he got a wheelchair for me but it didn’t have feet and I could not hold my feet up to be wheeled to the maternity floor. While I was sitting in the “bad” wheel chair he ran to get a new one with feet. I got a contraction and yelled right through it. I can’t imagine what people were thinking when the saw me in my outfit yelling through contractions but I was still saying please and thank you to Mario. In fact he would say I was very pleasant throughout the entire ordeal. I think there was only two times I didn’t say please or thank you and one time was during transition and the other was when I was pushing. So Mario comes back with an extra large wheelchair and I make the transition to the new chair. The plan was for Mario to just get the labor and delivery bag and the snack bag come back later for the small suitcase I had packed. But sometime in the evening Mario also decided to pack a backpack with his laptop. In his panic he got all the bags and was maneuvering me with his left arm and wheeling the suitcase with his right one, had the backpack on and somehow was also carrying the labor and delivery bag and the snack bag – both of which could not be closed so if they were dropped they would spill everything. I kept my purse on my lap but he wouldn’t give me anything else. No doubt he looked like a Hispanic Sherpa to a leopard-clad pimp-clown! I didn’t have the heart to tell him we only needed one bag – although at this point I was NOT hungry and hadn’t gotten into any of my lady like “pretties”. We actually didn’t need any bags at all but we didn’t know that at the time. The path to the elevator is not well marked so we were moving quickly down the halls to the area where we thought we needed to go. Security stopped us (by yelling from the desk about 30 feet away) that we needed to sign in and I kind of yelled back that I was in labor so they let us go. An employee down the hall pointed us to the right corridor for the elevator and we got there just in time to have a central supply clerk and his cart cut in front of us onto the elevator and take off without us. I said to the employee that was standing there – “Seriously? The central supply stuff is more important than a woman in labor?” So she stayed there until the next elevator came and we got on. There was an older man in the elevator – he looked like a supervisor for housekeeping. Just as we got into the elevator I got another contraction so he got to enjoy one with us. We checked in and they asked if I could walk – which I did to the scale and then to the room after they recorded my super secret weight. They put me in a corner room with a bathtub. It was about 10:30pm and very quiet in the maternity ward. I got another contraction walking to the room and stopped at the doorway at the room next to mine and yelled it out. There was a lot of activity getting me checked in and situated in the room. Mario was anxious to know how dilated I was and I was too. That number and the weight of the baby were important numbers to me. Although I was obviously past the point of having the admissions clerk come in, they still wanted 20 minutes on the baby monitor and needed to take blood. I took off all of my clothes – which I didn’t think I would do. I asked for a lozenge since my throat was super sore. Mary, the midwife, came in and checked to see how dilated I was and I was between 6 and 7 centimeters! Yeah! This was good news. Both Mario and Amanda were practically cheering! I got on a birthing ball while they tried really hard to get the baby’s heart rate on the monitor. For some reason they couldn’t get her heart rate but I wasn’t worried I was just very uncomfortable. At some point I was on a rocking chair too. I got very nauseous from the lozenge and announced that I was going to vomit. At that moment I got very hot and instead of me putting my hair up in my pretty clips from my bag, Amanda kindly took her scrunche off and tied my hair up. She did such a good job getting all my hair in the scrunche on top of my head that I looked like a sumo wrestler. Let the games begin! Now I am naked (and huge), making strange noises, look like a sumo wrestler and I am vomiting. That was unpleasant but I had Scope in my bag so Mario gave me that and I was still saying please and thank you. Amanda started wiping down the surfaces with the bleach clothes and I said I wanted to get in the bathtub – “natures epidural”. It was around 11pm or shortly thereafter by this time. I asked the staff what the cleaning procedure was for the tub but they were not sure of the particulars so I indicated to Mario and Amanda they needed to bleach the tub. I saw Amanda approach the bathroom with the wipes for the tub and thankfully in between contractions I could explain that I had liquid bleach for the tub and the jets. Mario and Amanda just stood at the tub with their backs to me, and the bleach in hand, hiding the fact that they were laughing. After I knew the tub was filled I asked them if they had added the bleach yet and they said no – so I said forget the bleach – I needed the tub now! Well these two obviously did not know proper procedure for bleaching a tub because they had filled it with cold water instead of hot. So we had to wait for hot water to fill the tub. But I got in without it being properly sanitized. As I was moving toward the tub I asked if I could change my birth plan and get some medication. Mary, the midwife, commented that it was nice that I was still able to make jokes and Amanda said Mario and I had been making jokes all night. To which I replied I was not joking. I was starting to think about getting some drugs. I got in the tub but it didn’t relieve the pain at all and I was getting claustrophobic in there. I was starting to get really scared. I got out of the tub and onto the birthing ball. Remember every time I changed positions it made the contractions much worse and I was no longer breathing, groaning or yelling through the contractions – I was screaming through them. At this point, everyone cleared the room except Mario and Amanda to let me labor. I got the impression they all thought I had hours to go but I knew I didn’t. It was probably close to 11:45 or midnight. I started negotiating with Amanda about the pain medication. She would tell me to get through the next one. She indicated it was too late for the epidural so I started asking about all of my alternatives at that point. The pain was intense and I was just sure no one had ever had as painful of a labor as I was having. Ever in the history of birth. At one point I indicated to Mario not to touch me and that was the first time I didn’t say please or thank you. I was deteriorating quickly because I had not been properly rested before it started and my ability to cope with the contractions was diminishing with every one of them. I wanted Amanda to tell me how much longer I would be in labor – of course it was impossible for her to tell but I was trying to determine how to disperse my energy because on some level I knew I was deteriorating and I knew I still had to push her out. I was worried because I had heard that some women get to the pushing part and don’t have any energy and have to have a c-section. I was on the birthing ball hanging on the side of the bed at the foot of the bed. Amanda was behind me groaning out the contractions as I screamed them out. Amanda kept reminding me that if I kept my noises low (groaning vs. screaming) it would be more effective. She was right but I couldn’t always do that. Sometimes I would start with a scream and then in the middle make my voice low. Mario was in front of me across the foot of the bed holding my hands as I was negotiating with Amanda about the meds. I knew a non-medicated birth was going to be a mental game and I thought I could do it because I can be very stubborn and strong willed. What I was not prepared for was the fear that goes along with this experience. I was really afraid and felt very alone. It became clear that I was the ONLY one going to be able to get that baby out and this experience over. That was a scary thought and felt lonely because there was no help it was just me and I was scared that I couldn’t do it all by myself. Right around that time it became evident to me that I was just going to have charge forward – there were no drugs to be had and no one was going to help me and I had to move forward. I almost visualized a tunnel and it was dark and lonely but I ignored all of that and kept putting one foot in front of the other. As I write this I realize that Mario taught me that – when going through something unpleasant you just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other and sooner or later things will change. It was that lesson from Mario that guided me through. At about 12:10am or so, I was still on the birthing ball and I felt something change inside. We were still all alone in the room and I looked at Amanda and informed her the baby was coming. She said get on the bed and start pushing if I need to. She pressed the button and told them to send someone in there NOW! The nurses came in and informed us that Mary was at the other birth at that moment – it was a c-section and she was scrubbed in. I had starting to push but didn’t really know what I was doing so I was still yelling through the contractions. A resident showed up around that time and was about to put on gloves but then she stopped after witnessing one of my contractions. She stood about 10 feet away near the door and asked where the midwife was. She wouldn’t touch me! It was getting a little tense in the room with the nurses at the foot of the bed, the resident standing 10 feet away near the door and the baby nurse preparing the baby warmer and no one attending to me except Amanda and Mario. Mario announced that he was “going to loose it”. That got everyone’s attention but especially mine as I knew he was getting mad but they weren’t sure if he was going to faint, vomit, get angry or what. I wanted the entertainment and distraction. But Mary arrived a few moments later. Mario told her that she better get another midwife in here but she calmed him down and said she was staying. She checked and my cervix was dilated 10cm and totally effaced – it was “officially” time but I already knew that. My water had not broken yet so Mary broke my water. I started pushing purposely now. I was very quiet and focused. Mario was on left side and Amanda was on the right holding my legs. They told me when I was pushing to hold onto my thighs. I was in an upright position in the bed. They got the mirror to show me what was going on but I couldn’t really see anything interesting – just my body contorting in ways I do not wish to recount and nor should anyone have to think about. I was just certain my worse fears were coming true – the part about the bowel movement but I will never know as I wasn’t looking, I haven’t asked and thankfully no one has told me. The head nurse came in and put the bed down but I didn’t like that as I wanted gravity on my side. She explained the baby needed a little more room and it was better for my torso to be stretched. I asked Mary how many pushes to get her out. She didn’t know but again I was trying to manage my energy output. Mario decided it was a good idea to bring up the ring of fire and ask how it felt. I sternly banished him from using those words at that time – that was my second and last time not to say please or thank you. Since the mirror was not inspiring I just got deep inside myself and pushed very hard every contraction. Before I knew it they told me to look and I saw the baby’s head and arms – I pushed for about 20 minutes total. Amanda and Mary told me to reach down and I did and pulled her up on me. I kept my eyes open at that point. Two nurses were stimulating Valentina with blankets to get her to cry. My sense of time was not very good by this time so it seemed like a long time to get her to cry but Mario says it was really fast. She laid on me for a while and I marveled at her. Mario was right there as well. He had tears in his eyes. She was born at 12:48am. Her first Apgar was 8 and her second one was 9. After Mario cut the cord, they took her to the baby warmer and Mario stood there while they did all the stuff they were supposed to do. She weighed 7lbs and 12.5ozs, which the hospital rounded up to 7lbs and 13 ozs. I knew she wasn’t 8lbs and I had said so but no one believed me.

**Epilogue**

I was so shocked that I had a baby that I didn’t think about the birth for a few hours then for days after the birth I just couldn’t believe I had done it. Amanda said that women that have fast labors tend to have intense experiences and sometimes can have emotional reactions to them. Both Amanda and Mary said that virtually everyone that plans an unmedicated birth asks for medication at some point during labor but they may have told me that because I kind of felt wimpy that I asked. I really wanted to “conquer” the contractions but Mario kindly explained to me that surviving them was conquering them.

Thanks for reading Valentina’s birth story.