

MY BIRTH STORY OF WHEN MY BEAUTIFUL HONEY WIFE INTRODUCED OUR MOST AMAZING CREATION: OUR BABY GIRL, QUINN

PROLOGUE:

My wife, Carey, read to me her birth story about the arrival of our girl, Quinn, born on August 1st, 2014. Reflecting on her story, and realizing that I have my own memory of the beautiful event, I was asked to write my side of the story. My name is Gabriel, I'm the new dad, and here's my birth story:

No joke: "The Final Countdown" just came on my iTunes while writing this, which is incredibly ironic because I was humming the theme periodically in those last few days.

STORY:

The original due date was July 30th, and then somewhere during the journey it was pushed to July 31st. We had a running list of guesses by ourselves, our friends, families, and coworkers, as to what the birth date would be. Carey and I allowed each other two guesses. Carey's guesses were in mid-July (because she wanted to give birth as soon as possible while still in a healthy time-frame), and mine were August 1st and August 8th.

On July 31st, Carey was texting me from work that things were happening. She thought she lost some of her mucus plug. Shortly prior to this, she had texted me to congratulate her for making it to her scheduled due date: "Say happy due date baby... say congrats on making it to 40 weeks". I wrote in all capitals: "BABY YOU ARE AMAZING, STRONG, RESILIENT and BEAUTIFUL. HAPPY DUE DATE!" What else can truly be said from the bottom of one's heart via text that the accomplishment by a woman, more importantly your wife, to carry a healthy baby, your baby, full-term, is an amazing and awesome accomplishment. I had to do something else, and was already in the car.

I went to the Publix supermarket to buy a super extreme mixed bouquet... and then I had another idea. I had a feeling in my gut that the baby would be born if not that day, then the next – August 1st: the day I was quote en-quote "pushing" for since the beginning. We have too many July births in my family, I love the name of the month, I love the number 8, and August 1st is 108 backwards which is one of my most favorite numbers (no judgment, please, I like numbers, let's continue)....

The text comes in from Carey as I am with the florist: "She is kicking up a storm. A STORM." I write: "Maybe tonight." She writes: "Who knows." I reply: "I do" with a smiley emoticon. Meanwhile, behind me, I am getting a birthday cake prepared. I knew. I tell the florist what's going on and also tell her that the inexperienced bakery employee told me that the lead baker quit that day... and thus, was unable to use a squeeze thing for lettering. So the florist brought me behind the counter of the bakery and let me write Quinn's name on the center

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Oreo of the Carvel ice cream cake, the same cake we had for the baby shower, a favorite flavor of Carey's.

When Carey came home from work, with the large bouquet welcoming her, she was really aware that something was indeed happening. Yes, she loved the flowers. Exhausted, she lied down in bed, I joined her, and she soon jumped up to the bathroom; when she returned she said her underwear was soaked, and thought her water broke, it was 633pm. We decided to order in our favorite Chinese dinner – shrimp with eggplant and extra vegetables and vegetable Mei fun - and I'd go pick it up with our dog, Figment, who loves car rides. She wanted something spicy – Carey, not Figment – to possibly stimulate the contractions. Another way we stimulated the contractions was just the night prior when we had sex – it was actually important on many levels to do so.

Let me back up for a moment: the ten days to two weeks leading up to this evening were really stressful for me. Whenever I'd be at work, I'd keep my phone ringer on, telling people "Any day now" or "Any moment now". They would reply: "Why are you here?" I would have moments of anxiety. My anxiety would harbor other stressful thoughts and I wouldn't be able to sleep throughout the night. I kept cool, but my body and mind knew that any moment now my entire life situation would be flipped upside down and turned around. Not only that, but both of our panic also resided in if our Plan A: home water birth, was going to go as we wished, and not Plan B: the hospital. We had our Plan B suitcase on the ready. Plus, I was going to catch the baby, and I was a bit nervous about that.

Carey and I had our Chinese food and she was off to bed. I had my fortune cookie, then shared Carey's cookie with Figment. Her fortune: "Good things are coming to you in due course of time." I soon followed Carey to bed. All night she couldn't sleep. I am a deep sleeper – I need two alarms to wake up – but she kept me up. Now, of course, my deep sleep skills have since been thwarted and I pray for 2 solid hours. All night, Carey was in the bathroom, and as soon as she would hit the bed, she was right back in there. That is no exaggeration. As soon as she would hit the bed, she was back in the bathroom. Contraction City.

All throughout the night, I kept remembering what Carmela from Rosemary Court Birthing Center said, along with all the midwives: was to try to go to sleep. I would gently remind Carey to try to sleep as well as she could. Especially now, since our two first choice midwives, Jessica and Haddie, were now sleeping at their respective homes after two long nights of back-to-back births, and wanted to make sure to plan well to make sure they were up and well for a third one.

At about 4:15am we were reaching "go time". Carey, being admittedly "Type A" and addicted to her iPhone, was using an app to time the contractions. Somewhere in the back of my mind, deep in there somewhere, I was cheering:

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“August 1st!” But seriously, there were no thoughts running through my head blocking my cognition, I was to just be there for her. I had asked Carey if she wanted to contact the midwives and our doula, Ryan, but she didn’t want to, to not bother them. We went back and forth for maybe a minute until I took the floor and said that I was contacting them – Carey was in no place for cognitive thought. I texted Ryan and she got on her way. I texted Jessica and she contacted Haddie. I then asked Jessica if Carey should get in the tub. Her reply was if Carey was comfortable and to not make the water too hot. I had already switched on the faucet, but when I turned to let Carey know Jessica’s reply, Carey was already in the water. I was thanking at this time to all that was holy that as of this point, Carey’s dream was coming true, and I was extremely happy for her.

I filled up two Tervis cups for her: one iced water, and the other with Gatorade, both with straws. After I made sure she was okay in the tub, I left the bathroom to unlock the front door, and make sure Figment the dog and the two cats, Drake and Elsa, were doing okay. I then made coffee; I thought it was needed. We also had food on the ready for them to take whatever and whenever they wanted, but at that time I thought coffee was a necessity.

Figment followed me back to the bathroom and would not leave unless I forced her to do her business in the backyard. In a moment of anxiety, I texted both Jessica and Ryan: “How close?” Ryan’s reply notified me she was only minutes away. I sat on the floor by the side of the tub – the tub that was the big selling point for the house, the tub that Carey said when buying the house: “I’m going to have our baby in this tub”, the tub that we both got into when we knew the house was ours and reclined and took a photo, the tub in the large bathroom where only months prior the two of us and the realtor decided this house was THE house. The tub has always been Carey’s comfort zone, her “happy place”, so where else but there? And I sat there, looking at my the love of my life resting her head on the edge of the tub, not knowing what she was truly going through, but knowing that she had the strength to take on anything that happens.

Figment stood up and exited the bathroom, and walked to the end of the darkened hallway leading into the bathroom where there was a figure standing there in partial moonlight. It was Ryan. As quietly as she entered, she remained during the rest of the experience. She laid some towels under Carey’s head and arms, and asked me to put on some music and light some candles. Carey had made a birthing mix that was on an iPod sitting in a speaker base near the tub. Candles were on the edge of the tub. I actually had asked Carey just shortly before if she wanted her music and candles, but she shook off that idea. While turning on the speakers, I remembered from class that Carmela said not to ask if the mother wants water, food or anything, but to just provide it. I had asked Ryan to take over timing the contractions on the app, but soon enough we both stopped doing so, and Ryan began to use Carey’s iPhone to take photos and videos. Photos were in the back of my mind as not the top priority, especially

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videos, but after I saw Ryan take a close-up shot of Carey's profile, I had hoped she was getting more; she did, and then some.

Throughout the night, Figment would want to lie in front of the tub, but I would then place her next to me, and she would rest her head on Ryan's lap or snuggle her nose under her leg. Since then, Figment the pit bull is now known as the "doggy doula".

The music was a collection of songs that Carey had compiled a few months prior. She had made the same mix made for her Lulabelly, a gift I bought her during her first trimester. The Lulabelly is a belt that the mother wears that has little speakers on the inside, and a pocket for an iPod or similar. There is also a headset for the mother to hear. No matter how loud the music gets, there is a set maximum for the baby. Carey would use the belt a few times a week at an hour a time, and we both would feel the baby move and kick on some songs more than others. Carey is also an amazing singer and pianist, and would sometimes play for the baby: including Sara Bareilles, show tunes, and some Disney songs including the very sad and sweet song "Baby Mine" from "Dumbo".

Still uneasy about asking Ryan to bring me water or take care of the house in any way, which is her job, I was a bit fidgety. At one point, I found myself in the middle of the living room, and I saw shadows through the front window – branches waving in front of the front lamppost – but I went to check in front of the house anyway, and upon opening the door, I saw Jessica on her phone, getting the supplies out of her car. There was another car next to it in the driveway, which was either Ryan's or Haddie's. We had had meetings with Jessica and Ryan at the house, so they knew the layout, they knew the tub, and according to Jessica, the tub "was perfect".

I returned to the bathroom and let Ryan know the midwives were here, and before I knew it, I had looked up and saw them in the bedroom setting up their supplies, including oxygen tanks, and laying down chuck pads on the bed. Carey and I had also layered the bed with cheap sheets and shower curtains. Around this time, I had asked Ryan or Jessica, or maybe both, to make sure the front door stayed closed because Drake the cat likes to run away, and even then I checked it as well.

I felt a bit more settled now that the entire "dream team" was here. Carey was finding a position that worked for her best, which was by now on her back going the long way of the tub, her head on a bathtub pillow. I remained by the tub for the rest of the stay, unless to make sure Figment did her business outside, or I did mine in the other bathroom.

Jessica and Haddie, quiet and calm as they were, would take non-invasive temperature readings of the water and of Carey, and blood pressure readings of Carey, and pulse of the baby. And it was, especially with Haddie, after those

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readings, with her sweet smile and nod, or a returned “thumbs up” that made me feel that much more at ease. It was all happening magically before my eyes.

Carey then switched position to face outwards into the bathroom; I was instructed to fold a towel and place it under Carey’s lower back. I believe it was at this time that Carey would begin to lift her butt more often to release the pressure off her tailbone; and would lift it for longer periods during the more intense contractions. Every once in a while and until the end, when Carey’s breath got too heavy, fast, or high-pitched, I would bring her down with low hums and gentle exhales, and say the words: “easy breathing”.

It was just around this time that I noticed a big piece of body tissue slowly evict from Carey. I made a reference to what that thing was, pointing to it, and I was told the mucus plug, and I just nodded and smiled. Even then I was being in a moment of not being grossed out, or shocked, or worried about anything. It was my wife in there, and I love every bit of her; I’ve loved her since Day One, I loved her then and I love her now as the mother of my daughter. What a wild experience to have the opportunity to witness the real and beautiful everything of birth, especially by the love of my life. I sat there and never looked away.

For the next so many hours, it was Carey in the tub, music, candles, and the team in the bathroom. I had a towel over the faucet because it would get really hot from refilling the water throughout the night to the best temperature not only requested by Carey but also allowed by the midwives (98.6 to 100 degrees).

Jessica and Haddie would check all the numbers and heart rates and be hands-off but completely there and reassuring, supportive, informational yet silently strong: two amazing women who we can never thank enough. The midwives would take turns napping on the couch (not making it to the extra bedroom), or sipping tea in the bathroom, occasionally typing in their reports on a iPad after a digital reading. Ryan, the star doula, and a great guidance throughout and since, was awake the entire time. Ryan would offer a cold compress for Carey’s head, refill Carey’s or my drink, or just be there. Those two Tervis cups were a constant necessity throughout the entire birthing process; because of the angle, every so often, the water or Gatorade would spill out of the top and onto Carey’s chest, no big deal. All three women are birthing gurus. Figgy, the “doggy doula”, would sit there patiently and quietly.

Carey would occasionally moan or make guttural sounds, we would work together on breathing, and sometimes she would ask how she was doing: she was, as we all kept telling her then and after, a “rock star”. When Carey would get loud, not that there was anything wrong with any sounds she would make, but out of humorous curiosity, I would peak through the window blinds over Carey’s head to see if neighbors were gathering at this early hour. I would sometimes try to offer bits of motivation, referring to Carey’s three completed half marathons, stuff we talked about days leading up to this, stuff we learned in our

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birthing classes and prenatal yoga, but Carey was in her own element. I once said “Everyone is waiting for you at the finish line”, but Carey took it as “they want you to get to the finish line” or something completely different. Needless to say, just me being there was enough for her.

I had gone to the bathroom, or had gotten water, or maybe let Figgy out at some point, I don’t remember, but I had returned to the bathroom and I was told the new plan was for Carey to sit on the toilet to move things along. I knew that wasn’t her plan, but I was flexible for anything that was necessary. When I stepped to the tub, Carey was struggling to move from her position, and had gotten up on her hands and knees. This was as far as she was going to go. Throughout the night, she would say that her legs or tailbone were hurting, but didn’t want to move. She made it into a deep squat, and after a few contractions, the baby began to move, so Carey returned to her favored position on her back alongside the far side of the tub. Carey was offered to pee in the water, to empty her bladder to relieve pressure, but she couldn’t.

This is when the contractions got really intense, which was about 8am, and Carey would make sounds like I’ve never heard before, her face would tense into the most extremely graphic and bright red like a beautiful devil is the only way I can put it. She was pushing as hard as she could. I would again breathe low tones to bring her down to a calmer level, but I would also just let her go or let the midwives guide her.

Jessica saw the head first, and she had to do a brief check with her gloved finger, which was extremely painful to Carey, but necessary. I sat there, my eyes on my strong wife the entire time. When I first saw the tip of the head, a few inches inside Carey, full of dark hair, was when the concept of a small body inside Carey began to really hit me. The “real” of this was becoming more “real”, that the baby was not just in ultrasound photos or funny kicks and movements in Carey’s belly, not a concept, but she was there. Hair. Dark hair. A little head. My daughter was moments away of being here.

The head would appear, then go back inside, a little more out, then back in, a bit more crowning, then back in. As the baby’s head was going through “the ring of fire”, Carey said something like “I can’t do this”, but we all knew she could. Finally, after long extremely intense pushes, the head began to emerge, and all I can say was stuff changed the color of the water. Carey’s blood formed around the opening and around the baby’s head, and it was either Ryan or Haddie who told me all was fine and normal.

With both of us on the edge of the tub, Jessica and I discussed in few words with supporting hand movements how I was to catch the baby: To have my hands underneath her body, supporting the head, and to gently lift her up first, and then rotate her and place her on Carey’s chest. I blew out the candles;

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looking back, I am not sure exactly why, but maybe it was out of precautionary measures that they would indeed be put out.

The head emerged, with the baby facing downward, as it's supposed to be. The mantra from prenatal yoga in my head: "Head down, chin tucked, back to belly, arms down." The baby hung there for a moment, her body still inside her momma, and Carey said she could feel her moving. Jessica said she is trying to get out. Jessica calmly told me that the cord was around the baby's neck and she was going to use a gentle scoop of her finger to release it, and we both worked together, as I, with my left foot in the tub, lifted her out of the water, Jessica unwrapped the cord, and we placed Quinn onto Carey's chest. This was the image I was waiting for. I also finally got to see the baby's face, and when baby Quinn let out her first cries, with her small body still a shade of purple, it was the happiest moment ever in my life.

The umbilical cord was still attached, the placenta still inside. Carey was there for about a half hour in the tub with the baby, as we waited for the cord to naturally empty and for the placenta to be birthed. With a gentle tug by Jessica's hands, the placenta was free. Jessica took her time to show us the entire placenta, where it was attached to Carey, and then she opened the sack to show the tight space Quinn lived in for about 10 months. It was an amazing site. We also got to touch it. Something else I was excited to do was to cut the cord. I was told by many people that it was like cutting chicken, but it was actually quite easy; it was the idea of it that held a lot of meaning to me: being a part of the separation of the literal tie allowing our baby to be her own person.

The music was still playing, but it was a distant echo of sorts. However, while Quinn was on momma's chest, just before or after the placenta released and I cut the cord, I realized I'd recognized the notes of a song, a familiar tune, and as far as my recollection serves, it was "Baby Mine" from "Dumbo".

It was time for Carey to get out of the tub. I was given the baby, a small delicate body, calm and content, and I lied down with her on the bed, she on my chest. Carey soon made it over, holding cold packs on her bottom area. Jessica checked Carey for any tears, something she feared for, and nope: just labial tears called "skid mark tears", natural abrasions due to the birth. Haddie let me weigh the baby using a sheet hooked to a weight, and I put on the baby's first diaper (my first experience putting on a diaper as well).

Then, it was our time to rest and be with the baby. The "dream team" cleaned the bathroom, shut the door, and helped them selves to breakfast. The untouched coffee was poured out and Ryan made me a fresh cup, and we given a delicious breakfast as well.

Just about two hours later, baby Quinn latched on to Carey's nipple. It was the cue for the "dream team" to pack up: their incredible job was over. Once

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they had left, I turned to Carey and said: "I bought a birthday cake." She said, "no, you didn't, you did?" "Yup, guess what kind." We have saved the "Happy Birthday" plastic sign for many cakes to come.

EPILOGUE:

Figment has been amazing with the baby, gentle and aware, always making sure that when the baby is crying we are there, and very cautious of strangers.

My wife was a rock star, my baby the best gift my wife has ever given me besides letting me marry her, my best birthday gift was when she surprised me that she was pregnant, and her choice my wife made to go this route for us was the most beautiful experience I ever witnessed.

.... Oh... one more thing: Carey was also excited to learn that she didn't poo in the water.