

The 7 Secrets of Being a Home Birth Dad

By Ven Batista

Ven Batista wrote this article after his wife, Bel, had her second daughter at home in London.

All Dads-to-be are nervous, or at least skeptical, when their wife/partner first mentions the idea of having a home birth. This is nothing to be ashamed of – us guys are conditioned by a lifetimes constant bombardment that Doctors know best and that it is our patriarch's duty to always make the safest choices. That's why when my wife Bel first brought up the idea for the birth of our second daughter, my first train of thought was about risk. Images of John Hurt's chest cracking open and a tiny, evil alien being screeching its bloody arrival to the universe ran through my mind. I looked up at the walls of our apartment and wondered whether an arterial spray of blood could ever be washed out of that particular shade of off-white.

Ten minutes' googling dissolved my misconception that home birth is reckless (with Bel peering over my shoulder and directing me to websites she'd already read). In a nutshell, there are studies for and against, but if you listen to your own common sense you will probably agree it's just as safe, if not safer. You can find all that stuff for yourself, what I want to really want to talk about is the second train of thought that ran through my head – why?

Why have a home birth? My wife had her reasons and she laid them out for me. Bel had a horrible experience in hospital with our first daughter and that was a big part of it. As Bel explained it to me I nodded and said 'umm' a lot and was happy to go along with it because I knew it was what she wanted. But I never had reasons of my own – from my selfish perspective as a Dad – until after I had experienced it for myself. These reasons are the 7 secrets I want to share with you Dads now so that you can appreciate your home birth the first time round.

1. In a home birth you are no longer relegated to the bench.

Before the birth itself there is more to think about in a planning and logistics sort of way, ranging from buying equipment to manly jobs like making sure the birth pool hose actually attaches to your taps. On game day you are not just a big hairy thing whose only use is to be squeezed viciously or swore at. You are in charge of the birth pool, maybe even catching the baby (I'm doing that next time). And, aside from the mother, who will be a little preoccupied, you are the only person in the building who knows where all the towels are. If you have ever read 'The Hitchhikers Guide', you'll know how vital that is.

2. You'll lose less hair and gain less wrinkles.

Having a baby is always frightening on some level, if you're not scared out your wits you must be medicated or dead inside. With a home birth though there are less things that stress you out and feed the ugly fear monster within. Think of it: No traffic. No worry of getting lost. No worry of the car not starting. No worry that you've forgotten something. No worry about what's happening. No corridors to pace. No smug doctors. You'll still be worried, but it won't consume you. Besides – in a home birth, you have too many jobs to do to have time to let your fear monster run free.

3. Home is where the heart is – not to mention cds, dvds, the playstation...

All your comforts. Your music, your TV, your favourite mug, your fridge, your magazines, your books even your beer I guess. You'll be more relaxed, the mum will be more relaxed and the baby will be more relaxed too when he/she pops out. I'll be honest, despite the stimulus of worry and excitement, births are pretty boring. Maybe I have a short attention span, but it's not, you know, entertainment. And we all know they can go on a bit. With a home birth you will be a thousand times less bored as you can take a break and read a magazine or flip on the idiot box for a bit. Hell, it's probably less boring for the midwives.

4. Say goodbye to the little things that kill

Me? I hate hospitals for a million and one small and big reasons. Looking back now I can't believe I didn't jump for joy when Bel mentioned having a home birth simply because I wouldn't have to go to one. My main problem with hospitals is this - the idea of being surrounded by sick people sounds like a bad strategy if you want to stay healthy. Plus the small things: it smells bad, the foods nasty, it's demeaning to find your way by following coloured lines on the floor and specific to delivery rooms - when your newborn arrives he/she won't be woken up by someone else's screaming child. Hospitals suck, home rules!

5. You don't have to live the delivery room cliché of the hapless and scorned father

You know the one - where the woman in labor hates her husband and screams blue murder into his face, punches him etc. Either that or she is so medicated and spaced out she doesn't even know what a father 'is' let alone who you are. With a home birth her labor is undisturbed. She does not have to be picked up halfway through and rushed to the hospital. I cannot state enough how much a difference this makes.

6. You are He-man of the home, you have the power!

That's right. It's not the power of grayskull, it's the power of being the master of your environment. It's a subtle difference, but one you will notice. Your home is your place. You pay for it. The midwives and guests are the fish out of water. If they want something, tea, coffee, whatever, they ask you. There's a funny thing about evolution, it has created the subconscious trait that whoever gives out the food and drink is the dominant player in any situation. That's why in a home birth you will find it feels a lot more natural to ask more questions about what's going on, to make sure that the birth plan is stuck to and to generally be more involved and have more say over the whole thing.

7. You won't have your surprised, fragile heart ripped out.

If you only remember one of these secrets, make sure it's this one. At the end of a home birth, (the midwives leave. Not you.) This is the way it should be. In a hospital, you will be torn away from your newborn child and your exhausted wife at the very peak of your emotional

vulnerability. Let me paint the picture of my experience of this real quick: two weeks before my eldest daughter was born my Dad had died, we were not financially safe and I didn't have a job. In short, it was tough. But being an alpha male, I wasn't showing it and being the rock solid guy I like to think I am. But the instant I saw my new daughters face I discovered a vein of happiness and a depth of feeling that washed away my ego and my fears and even helped me come to terms with my Dad's recent death and made me, a mainly scientific sort of thinker, almost see a thread of symmetry within life. If that's all a bit too Lion King for you I apologize, my main point is this – at that moment the most unnatural thing in the world for me to do was leave my daughter, drive home and lay on my couch for eight hours and wait for the sun to rise. To make me do that was probably the cruelest thing that has ever been done to me. In retrospect I wish I had stayed and made them try and have me arrested for refusing to go. I have forever lost that first night with my first born.

These are my reasons why home birth was better for me. I've called them secrets, because the Dad's viewpoint is not talked about that much, even within the world of home birth programs and message groups etc. It's not all good you know – you will have to clean up afterwards. That's not anyone's idea of fun. But hey, that's a small price to pay in my opinion.

After experiencing both hospital and home birth my wife and I wouldn't even consider going to a hospital again unless there was a very compelling medical reason why we should do so. That's compelling, by 'our standards' of reason and common sense. Not what any medical professional says. It's a no-brainer for us. As a Dad there is really no comparison to be made. You are a key part of a home birth. The mother needs you and is relying on you. In a way it's a shame when it's all over because you revert back to being a useless man again before the midwives' leftover tea goes cold.

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