Once a cesarean, always a cesarean? Not quite! Have you had a cesarean section (c-section) and is your doctor or hospital trying to force you to undergo another c-section, just because you've had one previously? Are they spewing statistics about the potential consequences of Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC), but not telling you how dangerous another c-section can be?

DON'T CUT ME AGAIN! True Stories About Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC)

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Consumer Reports has named the cesarean section number three on its list of "12 Surgeries You May Be Better Off Without."

According to the *International Cesarean Awareness Network* (ICAN-online.org), the VBAC (Vaginal Birth After Cesarean) rate in the U.S. has plummeted 67% since 1996. According to *Newsweek*, c-sections hit an all-time high of 27.6% in 2003. According to womenshealth.org, the rate rose to 29.1% in 2004. As of this writing, the rate of cesarean births is estimated to be higher than 30%, and still rising.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states that half of the cesareans performed today are unnecessary.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthy People 2010 Report* stated unnecessary c-sections take a heavy toll on pregnant women and health care resources.

Read more about these stories at the ICAN website below.

DON'T BECOME A STATISTIC!

If you feel you're being forced into a cesarean against your will, immediately contact the International Cesarean Awareness Network, Inc.:

Toll Free: (800) 686-ICAN

Website: http://www.ican-online.org

Email: info@ican-online.org

DON'T CUT ME AGAIN!

True Stories About
Vaginal Birth After Cesarean
(VBAC)

Edited by Angela Hoy

VBAC.AngelaHoy.com

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This book details the contributors' personal experiences with and opinions about Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC). The contributors, editor and publisher are not healthcare providers.

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This book provides content related to pregnancy and childbirth. As such, use of this book implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

Dedication

To Renata Moise, CNM, Maine Coast Women Care

http://www.mcmhospital.org/ds/services/woman-care.htm
Your firm yet gentle words and touch helped me get through the worst minutes of labor, Renata. And, Mason loves your beautiful painting!

To J. Scott Flubacher, D.O.

Sadly, Dr. Flubacher passed away a few months after Mason was born. He was the only physician in our area that we could find who would accept a new VBAC-hopeful patient, 20 weeks into the pregnancy. His confidence and expertise, and his willingness to let me choose, are what made my VBAC possible. I want his family to know that he was not only a great doctor, but he was also one of the few doctors we've met who always puts his patients first. I wish there were more doctors like him!

To Andrea Mietkiewicz RN, Midwife

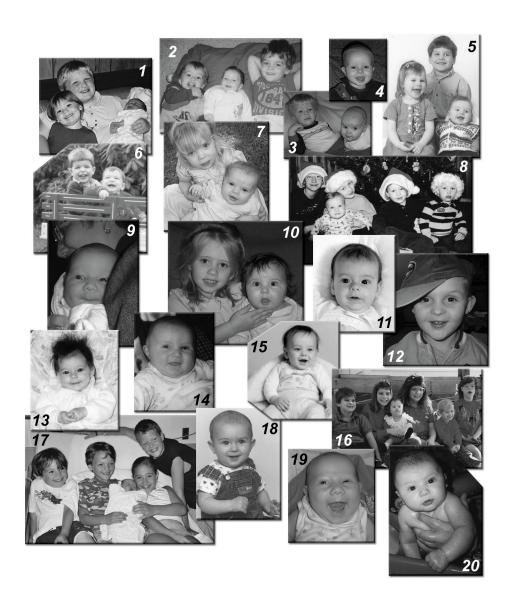
http://www.clearlightholisticmidwifery.com/ You gave me the courage to go for it, Andrea!

To the labor and delivery nurses and the administrators at Maine Coast Memorial Hospital

Thank you for taking care of me and Mason, and thank you for continuing your commitment to allow women to choose how they birth their babies!

And to my husband, Richard

Thank you for putting up with my moods, for constantly holding my hand, both literally and figuratively, and for bringing me any kind of food I wanted, for loving me, hugging me, and kissing me, even when I felt HUGE, and for being my rock. I love you, honey! We did it!!!



Front Cover

- 1. Amelia, Daniel and Abby Meritt Chapter 18
- 2. Nathan, Logan and Gavin Jarmin Chapters 21 and 25
- 3. J.P.'s children Chapter 22
- 4. Noah Duggan Chapter 3
- 5. Karen Putz's children Chapter 13
- 6. Dominic and Mikolas Ruggiero Chapter 12
- 7. Bridget Kathleen and Ivy Ruedell Chapter 20
- 8. Brad, Ian, Chandler, Carter and Brandon Steinweg Chapter 7
- 9. Sarah Kneale Chapter 8
- Mykaylah Anne Bean and Lydia Brooke Cooper Chapter 19
- 11. Hannah Grace Duncan Chapter 9
- 12. Zachary K. Chapter 24
- 13. Jenna Brianne Ruggiero Chapter 12
- 14. Isaac MacArthur Chapter 5
- 15. Kai Duncan Chapter 9
- Bart, Christina, Amanda, April, Emily and Sarah Craver Chapter 10
- 17. Tate, Evan, Madeleine, Lexey and Jake Atherton Chapter 14
- 18. Dominic K. Chapter 24
- 19. Amy Kneale Chapter 8
- 20. David MacArthur Chapter 5

Back Cover

Zach, Mason, Max, Ali and Frank Hoy – Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2

Table of Contents

Introduction by Angela Hoy	xiii
Don't Cut Me Again! by Angela Hoy	1
A Heart Defector a Water Birth Complication? by Angela Hoy	49
We Are Fully and Most Awesomely Female by Chaleen Duggan	57
4. Birth and Re-birth by Brigid Cumming	76
5. A Tale of Two Sons by Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur	92
6. Three Births, Two VBACs by Lea Date	97
7. Three VBACs! by Carrie Steinweg	99
8. A Belly Dancer's VBAC by Heidi Wessman Kneale	104
9. Trading Fear for Love by Julia Duncan	110
10. A Natural Delivery is Best for Baby by Diane Craver	114
11. Delivery by Pony Express by Jodi W	119
12. Two Successful VBACs by Brenda Ruggiero	124
13. Induced At Home— A Midwife Uses Cytotec by Karen Putz	127
14. VBA2C: VBAC After Two Cesareans! by Deana Atherton	131
15. I Fired My OB at 35 Weeks by L.S	136
16. A Birth I Can Dream About Now by Robyn Morton	143
17. Position and the Right Support Mean Everything by Wendy Bat-Sarah	150

18. I Will Definitely Do It Again! by Franny Meritt	.160
19. Our Bodies Will Do Anything to Protect Our Babies by Lauren Cooper	.167
20. Stuck at 4 cm by Kathleen F	.173
21. Hoping for a Better VBAC Next Time by Emilie	.179
22. The Happiest Mom with a Sore Bottom in Town by J.P.	.185
23. Don't Fix What Ain't Broken! by Lauren Cooper	.192
24. I Didn't Know I Had That Kind of Strength by Kathleen K	.196
25. To My Sweet Baby Logan Bob by Emilie Jarman	.206
Index	.213

Introduction by Angela Hoy

If only...

I've said those words to myself so many times over the past four years. If only I'd stayed home when I was in labor with Max instead of going to the doctor's office so they could "check" me. If only I'd then come right home again, instead of walking next door to the hospital and getting admitted. If only I'd been more brave and not asked for an epidural. If only I'd asked questions instead of voicelessly letting medical personnel intervene in my labor, over and over again. If only I'd demanded they continue the epidural instead of giving me a narcotic. If only I could remember the next several hours of my life after the narcotic rendered me senseless. And, finally, if ONLY I'd known, when I finally begged for a c-section, how long the recovery would take, and how it would affect my next pregnancy...

But, I must start at the beginning.

I was barely 19 years old when I got pregnant with my first child. I was unmarried...but not for long! You can barely see the curve of my tummy in the wedding pictures. I went into labor at 5:00 a.m. on September 16th. My baby, Zach, was born on September 17, 1986, after 28 hours of natural, completely un-medicated labor. I was determined to be an "Amazon Woman" and I did it! Had I been better informed, I'd have been able to have him much faster and easier than I did. Instead, I starved myself for 28 hours, didn't drink any fluids (until they gave me an IV at the hospital), let them strap me down flat on my back while pushing (this actually hinders the process) and let them give me a mile-long episiotomy, no questions asked.

Zach was 9 lbs. even, alert and beautiful, and I was the happiest young woman alive.

Four years later, I was pregnant again, but this one was planned. We didn't want to find out the sex, but when they performed the first sonogram, I knew it was a girl, but didn't tell many people. She was due right after Christmas and I was scheduled to be induced on December 28th. Again, I was completely ignorant and did just what the doctor told me to do. The only instructions I refused were to meet with the anesthesiologist for a consultation because I wanted a natural birth again. But, nobody bothered to tell me how bad labor hurts when they use drugs to induce!

I woke up early on the big day, ready to go to the hospital. My husband had a hangover and didn't want to get out of bed. (Yes, we've since divorced and he gave up his parental rights in 2003.) My friend drove me, and my son, Zach (age 4), to the hospital. They strapped me to a bed, inserted the IV, and started administering the labor-inducing drug. Labor started immediately and I was in agony. This pain was many times more intense than the last time! I distinctly remember being hit by wave after wave of excruciating, unbearable pain. I screamed for help. The nurse tsk tsk'd me, telling me I'd signed a form refusing pain medication.

I couldn't take it anymore and was looking for any medical instrument that I could use to cut my wrists and end my misery. Yes, I was in so much pain, and the doctors and nurses were so indifferent to my pain that I was blindly seeking suicide to end the suffering.

I guess I screamed enough because they finally brought in the anesthesiologist and he gave me the epidural. The pain only went away on my right side. The left side still hurt horribly, but it was infinitely better than what I'd been going through. Shortly thereafter, it was time to push.

Zach pushed a stool over from the corner, put it right next to the doctor's, and intently watched his sister being born. After she came out, he said, "It's not a girl! It has boy hair!!"

Ali was born after only three hours of labor. She was 8½ lbs and posterior, meaning she came out face-up, which is a very difficult and painful way to birth a babe. The doctor didn't know she was posterior until her face emerged. She came out blue and limp. They quickly carried her to a warmer and the nurses started suctioning her and pounding on her chest and back with a funny, small, paddle-looking thing. They then whisked her away to the nursery because she was unresponsive. Our 4-year-old son, Zach, saw the whole thing and I had to pretend everything was just fine so he wouldn't be as scarred from the experience as I was.

I didn't get to hold her for two hours and I was terrified. They put her back in a warmer, and left her in my room, saying she had to lie with her head lower than her feet so the excess fluid would drain out of her lungs. So, I lay in my bed, looking longingly at my baby on the other side of the room, yet not able to hold her.

Later, an alarm went off. Her bed was getting too hot. Her temperature monitor had fallen off and Ali was being cooked in the bed. No nurses told me to keep an eye on that. I jumped out of bed and grabbed her when I realized something was wrong. She was fine and I finally got to hold her! We got to go home the next day. I had another mile-long episiotomy, which hurt like hell whenever I had to go to the bathroom (not to mention the first few times I had sex after the birth), but my recovery was quick and easy.

Thinking back, I now know that, had I let nature do its job and let Ali be born when she was ready, and not when the doctor or calendar said she was ready, these problems could have been avoided.

A few short months later, I was shocked when I discovered I was pregnant again. When Ali was only 21 months old, Frank began to make his debut.

Now, let me tell you, Frank was every woman's dream labor. I woke up in labor about 5:00 a.m. I was well rested and ready. Not only that...I was now a rebel. After Ali's birth, I was going to do things my way and nobody was going to tell me differently.

My husband (yeah, still the same guy) got up and went to work. I was left alone to labor with Zach (age 6) and Ali (21 months). My contractions were all over the place – 45 minutes apart, 5 minutes apart, 2 minutes apart, 30 minutes apart – there was no rhyme or reason to them at all, but I knew it was real labor.

Zach helped with Ali and I spent the day alternating between cleaning house and squatting in a warm bathtub. When I was in the tub, I'd turn on my Walkman® and turn the volume up really high, concentrating on the music whenever I had a contraction. When the contraction would end, I'd get up, dry off, put my nightgown back on, and do some more housework. I even stopped to wolf down two huge chilidogs for lunch. Labor starvation be damned!

Sometime in the afternoon, while squatting in the tub, I timidly checked myself and discovered I could feel the baby's head! I estimate I was dilated to 5 or 6 centimeters. That was a very empowering moment!

Around 5:00 p.m., I felt like I had to go to the bathroom (#2 as the children would say) but, when I sat down, nothing was

happening. I finally called the doctor and said, "My contractions are all over the place, completely irregular, the baby is very active between contractions, and I keep feeling like I need to go to the bathroom, but nothing's happening down there..."

He firmly said, "Get to labor and delivery NOW!"

Uh, okay. My husband was home from work by then but wanted to wait to leave until he'd showered. Honestly, I was feeling so great and so energetic, and the pains were so manageable, that I said no problem. We left for the hospital at 6:00 p.m. I was just fine!

When we arrived at the hospital, I opened the car door and got out and was pretty surprised to discover I couldn't walk. It didn't hurt...it just didn't work right. My pelvis wouldn't move the way I wanted it to.

Somebody got me a wheelchair and off we went to Labor and Delivery. In the room, the nurse asked for a urine sample. I can't remember how I did it, but I managed to pee in a paper cup and put on the hospital nightie. I even managed somehow to get to the bed.

That's when I remembered how badly labor had hurt last time. I figured the pains were going to get really bad pretty soon so I said, "Drugs! Gimme drugs!"

The nurse was checking me right then and said, "Too late. You're a 9. I'll get the doctor."

What?! Nine centimeters?! Where was transition? Where was the pain? Wow!!! Now THIS was the way to give birth!!!

I looked over at our two other children, Zach and Ali, who were seated by the window. Ali was sucking a lollipop the nurse had

given her. We were supposed to have another adult there to watch the children, but there was no time for anyone else to arrive. I quickly grabbed the phone and called my mother-in-law, saying, "I'm at 9. You'll never make it." She didn't believe me.

Only seconds later, the doctor was propped between my legs and I was pushing. The only real pain I felt was when Frank's head crowned. At that moment, I said, "Get it out of me!" The doctor cut me (yes, yet another huge episiotomy) and Frank slid out with ease. He never cried and was breathing just fine, and he started smiling! Yes, I have the videotape to prove it! Like Ali had been, he was 8 ½ lbs.

While they sewed me up, the nurses who'd come in to help with Zach and Ali brought them close so they could see their new little brother. I remember looking over and seeing my cup of urine, still sitting on the counter, untouched. The birth had happened that fast!

When Frank was five, my husband and I separated and then divorced. I remarried in 1999 and, a little over a year later, Richard, my new hubby, and I decided to add to our clan.

It took three months to get pregnant, which seemed odd to me. I was 35 years old at the time. Turns out I was ovulating early each month. The tryin' sure was fun, though! The pregnancy was pretty easy, but I weighed more this time around. I hit 200 lbs. for the first time in my life just before Max was born. (I've gained 65 lbs. with every pregnancy.) I also had some heartbeat irregularities that I'd had during previous pregnancies but these seemed worse this time around. Richard was a typical nervous father and waited on me hand and foot. That was nice as I'd never had a husband pamper me before!

As with Zach and Frank, I woke up around 5:00 a.m. on the morning of September 7th in labor. The children left for school and I naively assumed this time would be just like the last time, another long day of lounging in the tub and eating chilidogs. I sat on a rocking stool next to our bed and pulled out my laptop, intending to get some work done before the baby arrived. The contractions were irregular, but running around 5-12 minutes apart. At one point, I laid down on my right side on the bed and flicked on the T.V. I had two very strong contractions within 10 minutes when I did that. I told Richard, "It's time to pick up the kids from school."

He grabbed the suitcase, but I said, "No, I don't want to go to the hospital yet. I just want to pick up the kids." We left to pick up Zach (age 14), Ali (age 10) and Frank (age 8). We both got in the car and went to their three different schools. Richard ran in to get each child while I waited in the car. I had no contractions at all while we did this carpooling chore. However, I knew it was real labor and I wasn't concerned.

When we got back home, the contractions started right back up again and I knew my body was doing what it needed to do.

MISTAKE #1 - Letting the doctor's office "check" me

I called the doctor's office just to alert them that I was in labor. They said, "Why don't you come in so we can check you?"

Okay, I thought, what could be the harm? Richard, Ali and I drove to the doctor's office. They laid me flat on my back on a hard bed and hooked me up to a monitor. I had no contractions at all for 45 minutes. The nurse came in and said, "We think you have an infection. You're not in labor. We're just going to give you some antibiotics and..."

I interrupted her, "This is my fourth child and I AM in labor."

She didn't believe me.

Just then, the doctor's midwife came in and said, "Why don't we just check you..."

I was 5 cm and my waters were bulging.

Uh huh... I knew it.

MISTAKE #2 – Going to the hospital before I wanted to

They told me to go right on over to labor and delivery, which is next door to the doctor's office. I should have insisted we return home and stay there until things were further along (we live two minutes from the hospital), but I obeyed the medical personnel.

MISTAKE #3 - Getting an Epidural

We got to the hospital and my contractions started again the moment I sat down on the bed. I remembered how badly Ali's birth had gone and I asked for an epidural.

The nurse said, "But you're doing so well!"

I replied, "I want to enjoy this."

I should have listened to the nurse!!!

The boys and our neighbor, Jan, arrived soon thereafter.

Things progressed amazingly fast and I was at 10 cm before we knew it. I remember when they told me to start pushing. I remember Richard looking between my legs. And then I remember nothing happening. The baby wasn't moving down and he certainly wasn't coming out. He never crowned at all—never even came close.

MISTAKE #4 - Letting them artificially rupture my membranes

While we'll never know exactly what prevented Max from traveling down the birth canal, we do know that he was not born with a cone head, nor did he have any bruising. When they artificially ruptured my membranes, his head may have gotten wedged against my pelvis in an odd angle instead of floating into it.

Rupturing the membranes may cause the head to settle into the pelvis at an unnatural angle, preventing the baby from traveling into the birth canal.

Unfortunately, at that time, I didn't know you could refuse to have your membranes artificially ruptured. Again, I just stupidly went along with everything they told me they were doing!

MISTAKE #5 - Narcotics

The epidural quickly wore off and I was begging for relief. The contractions were strong and I was pushing with each one, but the baby wasn't moving and the pain was extremely intense and unbearable. They decided that giving me a narcotic was a good idea. I had no idea what it would do to me!

The narcotic rendered me senseless. I can remember thinking, "I can feel the pain...but I don't care." I couldn't hold my head up. It kept swaying back and forth and that scared our children. And, the drug made my face itch so bad that I clawed at it for hours. (For days afterward, my face peeled because I'd scratched it so much.)

I lost the next several hours of my life to that drug. I vaguely remember them sitting me on a birthing ball. That's about it.

Mistake #6 – Asking for a c-section instead of asking what was going on

Around 11:00 p.m., Jan, my neighbor, says I sat up in my bed, clapped my hands over my head, and said, "I want a c-section."

I don't remember that at all, but I believe her. It was at that time that the narcotic started to wear off and I came out of the fog. At no time at all did a nurse ever tell me or my husband what might be going wrong, what was preventing Max from coming out.

Our daughter, Ali (age 10), had been with me to every prenatal visit and I was very sad that she might not be able to see her brother being born. When the anesthesiologist came in, we told him our predicament and he graciously agreed to let Ali watch the c-section!

In a whirlwind, I found myself in the operating room with Ali by my head and Richard taking pictures by my belly. Ali gave me a play-by-play of the operation while she watched. She said, "Okay, they're cutting you open now. Oh, Mom! There's the baby's head!"

The doctor interrupted, "Uh, no, that's your mom's bladder..."

We all had a laugh, even me.

Then, the doctor said, "Oh my God."

I said, "What?!"

He replied, "This is the biggest baby I've ever seen!"

They pulled Max out and he was, indeed, a huge, fat baby. He weighed in at 10 lbs. 4 oz. They took him away to the nursery

and I didn't get to see him for three hours. I was taken to recovery alone where a very nice nurse told me I was "all bruised down there" from so much pushing. (I looked the next day and I didn't see any bruising at all.)

My mom flew into town and, since I hate hospitals, I was able to convince them to release me after only 24 hours. I came home and began the long recovery from major abdominal surgery.

On thinking back, I think the narcotic is what did it. If I couldn't even hold my head up, how could I push a baby out? And, it was later explained to me that a baby and a mom work together during the birth. If Max was drugged, too, how could he turn this way and that in response to the pressure from my womb's contractions? He was probably just as doped up as I was.

Some may think he was just too big for my pelvis. However, he was only a bit more than a lb. heavier than my first baby, and there were no marks, swelling or bruises on his head which would indicate he was being pressed against the pelvis or stuck in the birth canal.

Now, four and a half years later, I am pregnant once again. This one was also planned and he (yes, another boy!) was conceived at Yogi Bear's Jellystone Campground in Racine, Wisconsin. While names like Yogi and Boo Boo do sound tempting, he'll be called Mason.

1. Don't Cut Me Again! by Angela Hoy

When we went for our second prenatal visit at the Ob/Gyn's office (the same doctor as the last time), we were shocked speechless when the nurse who was looking at my chart casually said, "...and we'll schedule your c-section at 40 weeks."

WHAT?!?!

I knew I was healthy and that there was no medical reason for me to have a c-section, other than for the doctor's and hospital's convenience. Heck, I even knew about the Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC) controversy 19 years ago when I was pregnant with Zach! Haven't things changed in those 19 years? And, when I questioned her and she said the doctor would never allow a VBAC, I knew we were in for a fight...and I knew we were going to WIN. **Nobody** was going to force me to have major surgery. This was going to be **my** decision!

Richard and I returned home from the doctor's office and immediately started researching VBACs on the Internet. And, I decided to solicit help from other VBACing moms in the process. Coincidentally, as we started to research VBACs and our local hospital (which has been labeled a "VBAC Hostile Facility" by one website), our local newspaper published a letter written by the sister of a woman who'd also been denied a VBAC at our local hospital. She then birthed her baby at home.

Interestingly enough, at my next doctor's visit, the doc said I could attempt a VBAC. But, on more intense questioning, I got the impression he was just saying what I wanted to hear and

had no intention of letting me go through with it. More on that later.

Below are excerpts from my blog entries that detail our investigation and our fight to avoid an unnecessary c-section, along with the days leading up to Mason's birth...

Once a cesarean, always a cesarean? Not quite! Have you had a cesarean section (c-section) and is your doctor or hospital trying to force you to undergo another c-section, just because you've had one previously? Are they spewing statistics about the potential consequences of Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC), but not telling you how dangerous another c-section can be?

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