



We're Together At Last

As told by a surrogate and
parent through surrogacy

Every surrogate and intended parent or parents have their own unique journey. Hearing other people's stories helps us to understand each other—to celebrate our similarities and to learn from our differences.

In this book, one very generous intended parent, Lauren, along with the surrogate she worked with, Sarah, share the birth story of baby Charlie.

We are grateful they shared their story enthusiastically. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed doing our part to unite these individuals in order to make this miracle possible.

- Circle Surrogacy

Lauren

I'm scared I won't be there on time. With all of the stress, expectation, joy and pain of three years of planning, I may miss the birth. The plan was to leave on Wednesday, April 8 but I couldn't sit still so now we're leaving April 4.

Sarah, our surrogate, and I have dreamed of this moment. I write to assure her that if I arrive after the birth, I'll see her first and then we will have the baby brought to her room so she is by my side the first time I meet him.

When we arrive in New York all connections have been cancelled and we're not even guaranteed to be on a flight the next day. We have too much luggage so lockers aren't an option. I can't sit still.

We pack up the car and start driving overnight across the Appalachian Mountains in the snow on our way to Akron. We stop to sleep for a bit before we make it there.

Charlie is not here yet. Phew! The gynecologist confirms the birth is imminent. And yet, one week later, baby Charlie still isn't in my arms.

Sarah

We had an OB appointment at 39 weeks and five days. I'd been dilated 3 cm and 50 percent effaced three weeks prior, and 3.5 cm for the past two weeks. This week, I was 4 cm and 80 percent effaced.

The running joke was, "How are you not in labor yet?"

Dr. Johnson gave me a second membrane sweep. We did the first one the week before and nothing happened.

We were offered an induction for the next day. Dr. Johnson was convinced breaking my water would get things going. We jumped at the chance.

"We've been waiting for this baby for so long. We're ready to meet him," I said.

After the appointment, we all had lunch together. I didn't have a single contraction all afternoon.

Lauren

Sarah and I are relieved the gynecologist thinks we should induce. The baby will be in our arms shortly. We are full of hope and dreams for the next day. We're here at last!

We have lunch together, and we go our separate ways to get ready for the next day.

Sarah

That night Steve and I took our girls to a hibachi place for dinner as sort of a last hurrah before my delivery and recovery.

At home, we bathed the kids and put them to bed. I packed my hospital bag, did some laundry, picked up the house and worked for a few hours. I did have a few contractions throughout the evening, but they weren't painful or regular so I went to bed.



Lauren

At night we over pack the baby's suitcase. What pajamas should we pick? What size will he be? How much will he weigh?

Dinner is light and our thoughts are elsewhere. We jokingly say, "I hope that the baby doesn't wake us during the night. It's the last one without a 4 a.m. bottle!"

Our joke is somewhat of a ruse. I can't sleep. I'm way too excited. I check my phone every five minutes. I set my phone so that only my parents or Sarah can call me.

Sarah

A contraction woke me up at 3:30 a.m. on the nose. Lying there, trying tried to fall back asleep I felt a pop, then a tiny trickle. I didn't move right away, wondering if I was spotting from the sweep that morning or if that pop was just a strong kick.

A few seconds later I felt another tiny trickle. I ninja jumped out of bed, just in case, and a huge gush of water went all over the floor. I was pretty pleased with myself for not getting any water on the bed.

I woke up Steve and my mom. Steve joked, "Are you sure you didn't just pee your pants?" My mom brought me a few towels. I waddled to the bathroom while Steve tried to inform Michael and Lauren that we would be a few hours early.

At first he couldn't get through on their cell phone so he looked up the hotel. The front desk person thought he was crazy trying to disturb their guests in the middle of the night, but he managed to convince them to put the call through.

At first there was no answer. He asked the front desk to keep trying them because they were having a baby, dang it! It worked because Lauren texted me.

Lauren [3:57 a.m.] - Did you try to contact us?

Me [3:58 a.m.] – Yes! Charlie is coming, ready or not! My water broke, we're headed to the hospital!

Lauren [3:59 a.m.] We are coming!!!! We are trying to be there in 15 minutes max!!

Me [4:01 a.m.] We haven't left just yet, so you might beat us. :)

Lauren

I must have fallen asleep since I can hear Michael's alarm ringing and all I can feel is that I'm very tired. So very tired!

The alarm stops. I'm thinking that Michael turned it off and that I'll let him wake me when he's finished in the bathroom. But the alarm comes on again and again. Michael shakes me. It's not the alarm, and it's not 6.30 a.m. It's THE PHONE!!!

The front desk is calling to let us know that the baby is on his way. It's 3.55 a.m.!! I confirm with Sarah and the tiredness flies away at once.

I feel an incredible rush of adrenaline. I take five minutes in the bathroom and a minute to call my father to ask if he can babysit our eldest, and off we go. We grab the bags without even taking time to close them.

Sarah

While Steve was calling Michael and Lauren, I called my OB and put myself together.

By 4:10 a.m., we were walking out the door to the car. I had to stop once and brace myself against the side of the house during a contraction. Steve put a trash bag and a towel on the passenger seat for me. We kissed good-bye and he wished us luck. He had to stay home with our sleeping girls so my mom was driving me to the hospital. At this point, I still figured we were in for a long day.

As soon as we pulled out of the driveway, I was trying to give my mom directions in between contractions. Of course, the GPS chose that night to have trouble acquiring a signal. As soon as I pulled up directions on my phone, the GPS decided to work. Finally!

Contractions were coming pretty fast, but with the GPS issues I still wasn't timing them. I truly thought we had plenty of time.

Lauren

Once at the hospital, we go straight to triage but no one is aware that Sarah is on her way. They expect her later in the morning for the induction.

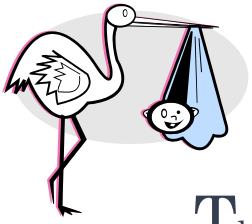
We explain who we are and that Sarah is currently on her way to the hospital. They ask us to wait outside the ward. We're anxious. We worry about being left out of the entire delivery process even though we were repeatedly told the previous weeks we'd be included.

The next 5 minutes feel like 50. I can't take it anymore. I go to see if Sarah has arrived. I text her but there's no signal. I go straight to the reception desk. I remain there for a few minutes, which feels like an eternity. No Sarah in sight.

Suddenly I realize there may be another entrance. I go back to Michael. He doesn't have any news either but he tells me to have patience. I go back out. On the way, I hear a man say, "I've got a woman in labor out here!" I can hear a chuckle that sounds like Sarah. I reach the door and I can see their car, but there's nobody in it.

I go back to the waiting room quickly. There's a man there with a cap getting out of the triage area. I'm expecting someone to call us into the other room but no! Nothing! Again I'm afraid we will be left out.

I stare at the door, not moving. I hear my heart beating, and nothing else. Suddenly the door opens. A nurse calls us, "Hurry, maybe you'll be on time for the birth!" WHAT??? At that time, I was thinking that I could be missing the birth by a few minutes!! Noooooooo!!!



SARAH

The hospital is a good 25 minute drive from my house.

I don't know exactly what time we got to the hospital, but I did get a text from Lauren at 4:27 a.m. saying, "Here we are!!" Later we learned that they only beat us to the hospital by about five minutes. And it was only about the last five minutes or so of the drive that I started to feel a bit of urgency. The streets were clear so I didn't hesitate to ask (demand) that my mom run a few red lights at the end.

We pulled up to the hospital at the wrong door. Well, it would've been the right door if it hadn't been the middle of the night, but we missed the ER entrance completely. My mom jumped out and ran around to open my door. She didn't realize I'd been bracing the door handle during a contraction. When she opened the door I immediately yelled at her, "I need that!" and yanked it back.

My poor mom. I'm sure I yelled at her quite a few times. As the contraction waned, I yelled at her again, "Get a wheelchair or something!" As she headed for the door, the Man (I still don't know who he was so I dubbed him the Man) came running around the building out of nowhere and called out, "I'll grab a wheelchair!"

He ran inside. I climbed out of the car and moved as quickly as I could towards the wall of the hospital, knowing in just a second I'd need it to brace myself through another contraction without having to get down on the ground. Before I could get there, the Man came running back outside with a wheelchair and helped me sit down. He somehow also realized the urgency of the situation (or else he was horrified by all the noise I was making) and pushed that wheelchair with a quickness. Sitting was uncomfortable, as I had to keep my knees really far apart. The Man kept reassuring me, "We're going to get you there. Don't worry. I've got you." It's amazing the trust I put in this complete stranger, not knowing whether or not he was an employee, or even who he was at all. I still have no idea.



SARAH

We got to the door of Labor and Delivery and the Man rang the bell.

"Can I help you?" a woman called out sweetly over the intercom. The Man replied, still with urgency, "I've got a woman in labor out here!" She buzzed us in as he mumbled something like, "idiot" and "Why else would we be here?" He wheeled me to the triage area, and after that disappeared.

The woman behind the counter looked at me expectantly. I was between contractions and smiled at her, "My water broke." She motioned toward a stack of papers, "Can you fill one of those out for me?" I leaned forward to reach for the paper just as another contraction hit and said, "Nope, I sure can't! Mom?"

She grabbed the paper as a nurse came around the corner and asked my name. I don't know if I told her or my mom did, but she grabbed the wheelchair right away and said, "Oh, you're our morning induction. I'll just take you back now, we've already got your room ready." As she wheeled me down the hall a few feet, she asked me, "Do you want an epidural?" I replied with gusto, "Abso-freaking-lutely!"

The nurse later told me we got to our room at 4:42 a.m. As soon as I stood up and leaned against the bed, another contraction hit, and I felt even more pressure. I moaned through it. "We need to get you up on the bed," a nurse said, as she gently tried to push me up by my hips.

I was on my knees gripping the back of the bed. The contractions kept coming. I yelled out, "I can't!" Once the contraction came down off its peak, I was able to climb onto the bed.

SARAH

At this point, things started happening really fast. I don't remember everything exactly. I remember yelling out at one point, "I need to push!" and a nurse called out, "She's bearing down!" A few more nurses were grabbing my pants trying to pull them down. I also yelled out, "Where are his parents? I'm a surrogate, and they're here. Someone find them!"

They managed to get my pants down enough to check me. I remember someone saying, "You're going to feel my touch." I remember thinking, "That's the least of my worries right now!"

She immediately called out, "She's complete!" That's when things got even crazier. At some point, someone found his parents and Lauren made her way into the room and stood to my left with my mom. The two of them held on to each other for dear life. Michael waited out in the hall. I am sure my yelling terrified everyone.

"O.K., Sarah, we really need to get these pants off." I remember saying, "I can't" a lot. Like, a LOT. The contractions were crazy intense. I did a lot of screaming and yelling, saying things like, "Holy shit it hurts!" A few nurses managed to help me out of my pants.

Someone told me, "You've got this, you're doing this all on your own and you've got this!" My body took over and I felt so much pressure while on my knees.

I remember thinking and saying, "I can't do this!" Someone reassured me, "You can do this. You are doing this!" Thank goodness for those calm voices.

Two nurses grabbed my feet and knees. A contraction peaked and I pushed with all my might as my body felt like it was being ripped in half. I truly thought I might die from the pain. And just like that, out he came into the arms of the resident (who was fantastic). Dr. White didn't have time to run in. It was instant relief. He came out kicking and screaming. Lauren was able to cut the cord before they moved him over to the warmer to check him out and clean him up. He was 8 lbs 13 oz, 20.5 in long, and absolutely perfect.

Lauren

I'm running down the hallway. I can hear Sarah's voice. I can hear her screaming. I'm sure I'm in the right place. I give a look to Michael who tells me, "Go ahead!" I drop all the bags and enter Sarah's room.

I can see she's panicked. The medical team is helping her get in position. Her mom has lost all color. I don't dare touch Sarah. I don't want to hurt her. I'm wondering what I can do for her. I approach her mother and hug her. In fact, I cling to her for my own safety. Every time there's a contraction, I can feel her stiffen and suffer in Sarah's place. She tries to reassure me by saying, "It's okay. It's just that it's hard to see her in pain."

I've got teary eyes and my heart aches at the sight of Sarah in so much pain saying, "I can't, I can't."

I tell myself I did this to her. I'm so sorry I can't be in her place. I'm sorry I asked her again to be there for me. The staff says, "He's here. I can see his head!" Sarah's mom indicates that I can go and see, but I can't. My sense of respect and decency makes me want to wait until the baby is completely out. I won't be able to rejoice until Sarah has stopped enduring all that pain.

I do not wish to see my baby before Sarah. I want the two of us to see him at the same time. Then finally, he's here!!!



Lauren

I cut the cord. Sarah signals that I should. I had not given it any thought. It makes me feel weird but moved.

I'm cutting the cord while watching my baby for the first time. My eyes go from Charlie to Sarah, back and forth. I'm trying to realize that these few minutes are finally behind us. I keep telling myself, "I was there, I didn't miss the delivery, and Sarah and the baby are fine."

Those seven minutes were so intense. We are finally here at the expected outcome. After three emotionally intense years, the pressure is finally released.

Charlie is brought onto the warmer. Michael joins him. From where I stand, I can see my baby and I can see his dad. It was the same when my daughter was born.

Sarah

Baby Charlie was born at 4:47 a.m., just five minutes after I was wheeled into our room, approximately 10 to 15 minutes after we first pulled up to the hospital, and exactly an hour and seventeen minutes after I woke up to my water breaking. It was such a surreal experience.

Once they move Charlie to the warmer, Lauren holds my hand asking if I was O.K. She thanks me over and over. It is so incredibly sweet of her. I'll never forget her concern for me. I assure her I am perfectly fine and tell her, "Go see him!"

I see Michael leaning over his new son, and my heart just swells. It's so beautiful, that first mother/father/son meeting! It's these moments that I'd looked forward to the most, and they are even better than I could have imagined.

Lauren

Just before the birth, I read a book about surrogacy where the surrogate mother experienced one tiny regret. The few minutes following the birth, she felt like she had no existence any more. While she felt special during the expectancy, all the attention shifted to the baby and she felt invisible.

I promised myself I would do everything in my power to make Sarah feel acknowledged. I wanted Sarah to know she meant the world to us and that she would always be important and special.

Charlie is with his father in good hands. Now it's Sarah who matters and I want to stay by her side a bit longer, holding her hand warmly, sharing my gratitude with her. Together we look at Michael. Sarah says, "Go see him." I go around the bed and approach the tiny little being we expected for three years. My feelings are oscillating from 'it feels so natural' to 'this is completely surreal.'

Sarah

After the birth, we joke about doing everything backwards. I had to sign paperwork and a consent form saying they had my permission to deliver me. There had been no time for an epidural, an IV, or monitoring of any kind. I barely had time to get my pants off, and I wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of some awesome nurses.

Once Charlie and I were both cleaned up and both no longer screaming (ha!), I was able to enjoy watching Michael and Lauren take in their new baby. It was absolutely magical.

They let me hold and snuggle him too, and we took a few pictures. 6:00 a.m. rolled around and the alarm went off. I joked, "It's time to wake up and have a baby!"

We spent five hours together before our recovery rooms were ready, and I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. I still couldn't believe I'd just given birth. I was so overwhelmed with complete joy for Michael and Lauren.

Everything we'd gone through to get to this point ran through my head. I couldn't believe we'd finally gotten the happy ending we all so desperately wanted. That little baby boy is a truly a precious gift.

Lauren

When Sarah felt well enough, I put Charlie in her arms for a moment of magic.

I will always remember that very moment when our arms entwined to hold that wonderful baby, a symbol of love and victory combined.

After Michael and I took turns holding Charlie. I gave him his first bottle and whispered in his ear, **“We’re together at last.”**



*That incredible woman is
a truly precious gift...
- Lauren*

*That little baby boy is a
truly precious gift...
- Sarah*



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