

The Sustenance of Life

I am a Cancer, born mid July. I consider myself to be a very upbeat sort of person. The fact a crustacean personifies my astrological sign sometimes makes me crabby.

I was even pleasant in labor, when many women take full advantage of the license to levy serious attitude, not to mention death threats.

Having endured an entire night of what doctors deemed “false labor” about ten days previously, I was sure the pain gripping my gut like a cracker squeezing the nut from its shell a September evening, 1995, was nothing more than Braxton Hicks contractions. My husband thought otherwise.

He stared intently at me as I munched a Bonzai burger, pausing only to grimace when the pain took hold.

“You’re in labor,” he said.

“Nope.” I shook my head. “That’s what I thought last week, honey, remember? Six hours of pacing, contractions three minutes apart and look at me now! I’m still pregnant. I won’t be fooled again.” I put my dinner down to double over.

“I’m saying this as a doctor, not your husband, and I’m telling you, we should go. That baby is coming tonight.”

“Let’s hope so,” said my mother. With her first grandchild on the way, she had arrived well ahead of my due date and agreed: we should forego the food and head home—where my two concerned labor coaches proceeded to crash on the couch while I sat upright, counting contractions and wondering if this might finally be it.

Then it happened.

The bang rang out like a shotgun blast, so loud, it awoke my mom and my husband, both of whom sat up, startled, demanding, “What was that?”

There was an urgent rush of warm water. Like a balloon filled taught to the breaking point, my membranes—stretched to overdue—had burst in a dramatic blow of sound and wetness, announcing without doubt, I was in labor.

Nicolas was born 45 minutes after we got to the hospital. My GP still loves me for it and I still love to share the story. It’s a rite of passage for mothers: where were you when the pain set in, how long did it take, what profanity did you hurl at the father?

For me it all started with water...a great big, beautiful gush of life-giving water. Water that had soothed my son for more than nine months, cradled him close, kept him safe and warm, and sang him to sleep—announced his arrival with a ka-boom.

When my daughter, Tayanna, was born, the doctor had to break my water himself. She arrived much more calmly, though she’s made up for her subtle entrance since. Born a couple of weeks before my birthday, she’s a water sign, like me.