

The Jungle Journey

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Amazon, Peru

There are plenty of ministry stories to share, but as I wrote about the birth of Joy and surrounding stories, it seemed appropriate to focus entirely on this story, so here goes:

When I found out I was expecting, I knew without a doubt I wanted a home birth. Several factors had to line up for that to happen, such as Nelton's support, medical staff availability, position of baby and umbilical cord, my health, and legal documentation of a live birth, to name a few. In the early weeks of praying over this desire, I had a vision of a sacred birth that included ministering to the hearts, hurts, and visions of the birth team.

Nelton was on board with a home birth and was more confident than I was about having it at home, in the jungle, and not in town like our last birth. The fact that we are located an hour and a half from the clinic was a little concerning, but home home is what I had envisioned.

Nicole, a dear missionary friend, came to mind for delivery, even though she has no medical training. I was at both of her home births and was always impressed with how much she studied for them. Her confidence was the major reason I had accepted her invitation to deliver her daughter. When both of the medical professionals were unavailable, it felt like confirmation for her to take the lead. She accepted the invitation and, in Nicole style, threw herself into midwifery study.

The team also included Katie Tofte, a recently registered nurse who would bring the medical knowledge. My two close friends, Heather and Courtney, had the roles of

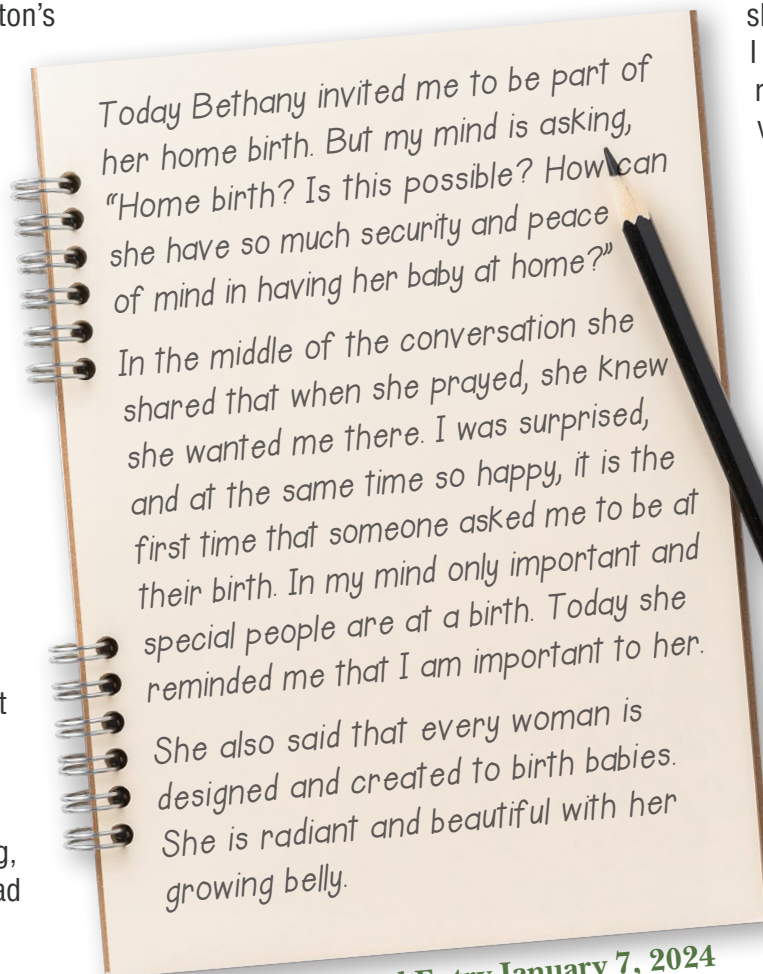
immediate baby care, photography, prayer, and moral support. Vero, a physical therapist, would help with pressure relief during contractions. And Stefani was the one I absolutely believed had to be there.

The first time I met her five years ago, she was just finishing high school. I was drawn to her, but her quiet, reserved nature made it hard to get very far in conversation. That is, until I found out she wanted to be an OB-GYN. I had just had Jayden and went into detail about how wonderful birth can be, which was not the case with my clinical deliveries or other Peruvian birth stories I've heard. I shared a desire to see a home birth center open, one that equips, empowers, and ministers to women through the experience of giving life, but that's another story.

The pregnancy went well and everything was on target for our birth plan, including a medical doctor who did all prenatal care, supported the home birth, and would attend to me in the case of an emergency. But

at week 36, things seemed to fall apart. It was unclear how we could get a live birth certificate. Our doctor was confident it wouldn't be a problem and offered solutions, but each one turned out to be a dead-end. Stress over documentation, especially concerning US citizenship, loomed over me. It ended up not being a problem, but was a hurdle that felt impossible.

The next appointment revealed that Joy was suddenly transverse. My heart dropped. If she remained in that position, it meant an obligatory c-section. It was a long week as I tried different exercises to get her back into



Stefani's Journal Entry January 7, 2024

position and prayed over her, but there was no major identifiable movement.

The volume of doubt turned up when people started voicing my own thoughts: "What if this is God's way of protecting you or the baby?" My dream and desire for a home birth started to dissolve as I heard "that happened to us" stories. Obviously, God could do what He wanted, and I'd just wait to see what that was. In the meantime, I thought it'd be smart to pack hospital bags (I never did get around to that).

Two days before the 37 week check-up, Jayden approached me at the close of a church service, flipped his hat backwards, put his hands and forehead on my belly and started praying. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but the minutes he stood there stirred my heart and brought tears to my eyes.

Did my six-year-old have more faith than me? Did I really have a vision all those months ago or was I just crazy? Would I coast on autopilot and "wait to see what happens" or would I pray in faith and believe God could move this baby? Of course, He could and would do what was best, but faith can move mountains (and babies), can't it?

Theology is a beautiful thing and I know enough of it to have days of inward debate. But the bottom-line is, divine paradoxes coupled with real-life experiences can paralyze faith. The fresh load of examples where God didn't work the way people hoped he would affirm that. Still, I had a choice. After all, divine paradoxes coupled with real-life experiences have the power to resurrect faith and see miracles. I decided to activate the latter and believe that God would move her, conscientiously making a bold proclamation of faith.

The next ultrasound confirmed that she had moved into the best position possible, with no umbilical cord issues. We would move ahead with the plans for a home birth!

A week later, on April 23, I woke up at 4:30AM with cramping that felt like the start of labor. After thirty minutes of tracking on the contraction app, it seemed a better option to try to get as much rest as possible. I woke up a couple hours later, had breakfast and devotions, then went to set up the final details of the birth room. The activity made



She's here!



8 pounds, 22 inches. Just an hour after birth.

contractions came on faster and by lunch intensity picked up significantly.

It's hard to explain what happened in the next few hours. It was not a typical labor. The presence of the Holy Spirit was so intense it was hard to keep from crying. It felt like he was coaching me through movements and positions of labor, giving me

long rests between contractions. Those pauses made me think I had a long way to go, but they were gifts that led to Joy faster than I could have imagined. At 3:42PM Joy entered the world, leaving me praising and thanking Jesus for such a beautiful, and sacred, birth.

Her first name is Selah, a Hebrew word in the Psalms believed to mean "reflection pause," or an indication for an ascent of instruments for worship. She is our unexpected "pause" in life to reflect on the Joy of the Lord, which is available in any and every season.

Stefani

(Reader's discretion advised. Trigger: infant death)

I'm not sure what draws people into the medical field, but for Stefani, it was undoubtedly her compassion and heart to see suffering alleviated. I doubt her

classes included a course on the severe suffering mixed with corruption that haunts the halls of the public health system in Iquitos. She probably wasn't warned about the injustices that threaten to harden the kindest of souls, like needless deaths in the ER simply because someone can't produce sufficient money for treatment. Clinical practice provides the lessons that are neglected in schooling.

Stefani was working in labor and delivery on March 13 when a seventeen-year-old girl came into the ER five months pregnant. She had lost a lot of fluid and could no longer carry the baby. After inducing for delivery, the doctor blandly declared that the baby had to be born dead. At 10:34PM a baby boy was born, alive, and handed to Stefani, whose job was to care for and dress newborns. Only this time it was drastically different, as she was instructed to hold him until he died, then dispose of him in the trash can. With that, the doctor left her and one other nurse alone to grapple with the lethal instructions.

His feeble cries, tiny frame, and gentle imperfections will be forever etched into Stefani's memory as she held him for the three hours he resisted, crying with him. Unable to ethically carry the orders to completion, she found the grandmother and suggested she smuggle the lifeless body from the one place that should have given him a fighting chance. He deserved a proper burial.

These and other traumatic memories were plaguing Stefani as she drove to camp for Joy's birth. No wonder anxiety accompanied her as she quietly walked into the room that was advancing towards new life. If medical facilities couldn't adequately save lives, what would happen in this rustic little room nestled in the jungle?

Her fears began to melt away as prayer, worship, peace, and joy engulfed the atmosphere. She never dreamed that birth could be so redemptive. Driving home that evening, she began processing an array of thoughts in light of opposing experiences and could only whisper in wonder, "That is how it's supposed to be."

No one could have guessed what she would go through between being invited to the birth and delivery day. I'm not sure if we will open a home birth clinic or what God has in store, but I do know that He healed something that was broken in Stefani's tender heart. And for her sake, I'm grateful that He put all the pieces for the home birth together to restore joy for her calling.

Stefani's Own Words

When contractions came more frequently, the room was full of adoration to God. Without a doubt I could feel His presence in that place. At every pause, Bethany prayed and drank her water. When the moment arrived that everyone was waiting and preparing months for, we saw a beautiful, strong, and healthy baby.



Vero, Stefani, and Selah Joy (5 weeks)

When I saw Bethany hold her baby in her arms, saying, "Thank You, Jesus!" again and again, my eyes filled with tears of joy and my heart was being ministered to. Minutes later, she looked at me and told me that this is how God wants births to be (that we worship him and give glory to him at all times).

I had a wrong, fearful concept about childbirth. I said I never wanted to get pregnant and didn't want to have babies because of many stories that are truly sad, unfair, traumatic. I thank you, Bethany, for inviting me to be part of this experience that marked a "before and after" in my life.

Vero's Testimony

Throughout my many years, I have never had such a tangible experience. It led me to learn and also think about how my country and culture see childbirth as something to fear, not as an opportunity to enjoy. It also changed a belief I had that childbirth is the worst thing a woman goes through. I experienced that childbirth is something so beautiful and natural that God created. My mentality changed. I was challenged about how I can help women in their pregnancy and birth process.

Joy came to mark a before and after in my life. She taught me true unconditional love, a pure love that comes from a womb. Also in the middle of the birth, I experienced how angels arrived to take possession of the place. We felt the presence of God with unbreakable peace! This is what Joy's birth meant in my life.

Personal prayer request: *If I had the opportunity to train in the area of obstetrics (midwifery), I would do so with a vision of helping women give birth. Please pray for me about this.*

All glory to God,

*Nelton, Bethany J., Kyliana,
Briel, Jayden, and Selah Joy*

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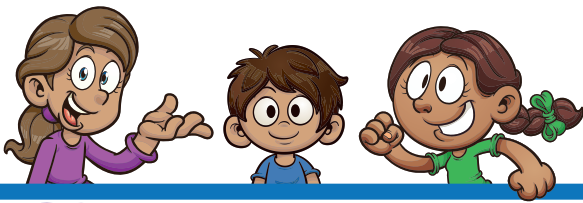
* All gifts are tax deductible and may be made payable to:
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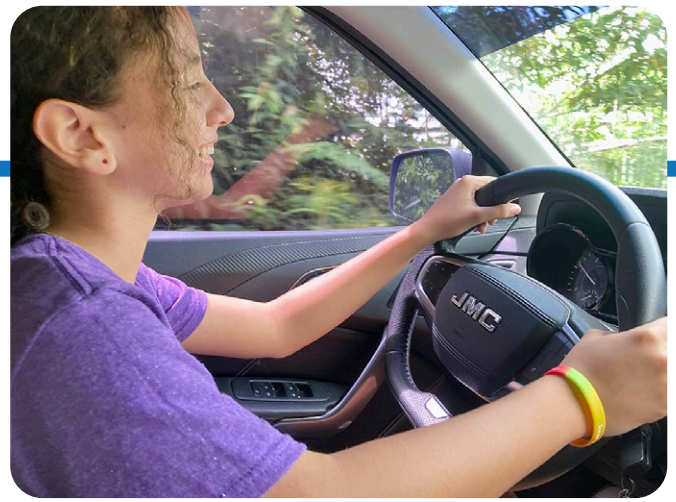
INTERNATIONAL
MESSENGERS



KYLIANAS'

ORNER

As a precaution for an emergency where no one else was at home, it seemed ideal to teach Kyliana to drive our manual truck. There was plenty of conking out, but she's picked it up well. She loves driving down camp road, and it's handy to get a feeding in under a time crunch (no car seat laws here).



Driving stick shift through the jungle.

BRIEL'S BREEZE



All star sister (Joy 6 weeks)

Briel has the lowest pain tolerance of my kids. At five years old, we went to get her ears pierced at Walmart. After the first side, she hid under the shopping cart and screamed so loud I thought passing customers would call CPS. She refused to pierce the other side. Taking any sort of oral medicine makes her throw up. Shots throw her into consuming panic. That's why I was surprised (and delighted) after Joy's birth when she said, "I'll be having home births!"

Jayden loves being a big brother. He's not viciously jealous, but has had a process relenting his position as the youngest child. The first few days, he wanted to "remember the good old days" and try a pacifier. I let him, but after seeing it in his mouth more than once, I retracted the decision.

Next, he wanted to try her milk, so after pumping, I let him try it. He was not impressed and declared that it "tastes like rotten fish."

Then, he insisted on trying out her 0-3 month floor toy and laid there unenthusiastically for 5 minutes as his toes poked at the little keyboard.

Finally, he had to try a warm bath. We only have cold water, so I heat a little pot of water for Joy every evening. It wasn't hard to comply with his request when he asked, "Mom, can you cook me some water too?"

JUST JAYDEN

