Leading up to my first birth, I had obstetric care until I was 34 weeks. My obstetrician told me I would be induced two weeks early, for no reason other than he felt it was best, so I transferred care to a group of midwives. Overnight, it seemed, I woke to a new birth paradigm. In this new landscape I was part of a team of women who took notice of my diet and my mindset, and opened my awareness of informed consent. The weeks passed, and I felt carried by these women as I waited for the birth.

I must have had some romantic ideas about what labor would feel like. All of the sound suggestions—to sleep between contractions, to take the labor pains one at a time, to breathe and let my mouth relax so my cervix would open—could not reach me where labor took me. I wanted to be touched and held and soothed, but there was no balm for this labor. In water and out of water, it felt long and shockingly hard with every new wave my uterus brought. While I did
not push for long compared to some births, this last portion of labor felt like an imperative impossibility: My hormones rushed over me and brought gargantuan pushing contractions, but my daughter moved slowly, slowly down, it seemed. I felt panicked and consumed with how difficult the last 32 hours had been.

When I held my girl for the first time, life came into focus again. I noticed how slippery, firm, and heavy she was. This was no ambiguous bump any longer; she had form and feeling. Newborn cries filled my Hollywood apartment and we spent a long while comforting her. My midwife noted that my daughter breathed about 100 breaths per minute—fast, much too fast. Many years later we would wonder if, had we known about chiropractic, would we have been able to save this little newborn girl from the ensuing tests that came her way as she was referred to pediatric care and then hospital care for tachypnea, or rapid breathing. We stayed only 24 hours in the hospital. After two rounds of IV antibiotics—“just in case,” they said—and several tests, we decided to leave when they insisted she needed a spinal tap, even though the tachypnea had resolved.

Three years later, my husband was a student of chiropractic—and I was pregnant again. From the very beginning I worried about how hard labor would be. I read about alignment of both the soft and bony tissues, and hoped that I would be able to have a different birth experience. Somewhere in my mind I feared that I was “pain sensitive,” and that I didn’t mentally have what birth took. My husband and I, with Dr. Kent Vanderslice, worked to create health through chiropractic. I had weekly adjustments, and in the final few weeks we added some massage. My body felt well enough, but my memory of my first labor still loomed.

Labor with my son began gently, much as my daughter’s had. I went to the bathroom and decided that the toilet, with a Squatty Potty for my feet, seemed like a reasonable way to begin the journey. Waves came and went, and my mood was a constant, contented hum. Contractions were work for my uterus only, instead of the mind-and-body consuming vortex they had been in my first birth. I drank coconut water, I wished our toilet had a head rest, and prepared myself for a whole night of labor.

My body shook and gave me a huge adrenaline rush. I looked at my midwife and asked, “Could I be transitioning?” It had not been all night—it had been some blur of contractions and conversation. Transition meant pushing, and that the baby was almost here. How was that even possible? I was too happy, too here. The all-over urge to push came as it had the first time, but instead of feeling lost and possessed, I felt like my body was really busy and I should just relax and watch the show. All 9 pounds 4 ounces of my son came without a tear. When I held his body and marveled like I had with my daughter, I did so with a second awareness. Labor and
birth had been the biggest high of my life. I could have done it again the next day had we another case of that pink coconut water.

My son was checked and adjusted by my husband after he was 15 minutes old. That had been enough time for me to cut the cord, don a robe, and sit on the couch with everyone. Our son had no tachypnea or any other sign of physical stress. He nursed and slept through being passed to the different hands in the room. Dr. Vanderslice came to my home the following day with his table, and adjusted me as well. By day four postpartum, I had almost no bleeding, a sharp contrast to the 5 weeks of postpartum bleeding in my first pregnancy.

Chiropractic had transformed what I knew as labor and birth. It left me and my children better than they found us, restoring function and joy in our bodies. I wonder if what we consider the range of normal in labor and birth are actually common dysfunctions that we share when we have subluxations and other alignment issues. What if birth was supposed to be this easy? What if our children were made to be healthy? After witnessing many births and newborns, this student midwife and mother would say: Health is our heritage.