Our birth plan with Chase was rigid: Rose knew exactly how it would happen and exactly what she wanted. But life taught her that things do not always go according to plan. Little did we know that this lesson was going to be delivered in spades.

It was October of 2007 when my wife, Rose, started getting baby fever again. Five years had passed since she was last pregnant with our son, Chase. We loved being a family of three, and the idea of adding another was a little scary. I enjoyed the chemistry of our tight little family unit.
In April of the following year, Rose became pregnant. Our decision to birth at home was an easy one: We’d had Chase at home, and we loved our midwife, Lynda. From the beginning, she helped us lay out the plans for our new pregnancy and birth. When we first heard the heartbeat, Rose and I were in tears, and Chase was grinning from ear to ear.

The seasons changed, and so did Rose. As when she was pregnant with Chase, she was all baby. November and the holidays were upon us, and our birth plan was complete. Rose was more open to flexibility this time around. Our birth plan with Chase was rigid: Rose knew exactly how it would happen, and exactly what she wanted. But life taught her that things do not always go according to plan. Little did we know that this lesson was going to be delivered in spades.

One thing Rose was adamant about, however, was having a water birth. She missed the opportunity with Chase, and this time around we had a huge tub in our bathroom. We reviewed the plan with Lynda and agreed to meet again after Thanksgiving. One day, when Rose came to the office for her regular adjustment, I went to release her round ligaments and noticed the baby’s position seemed different. I palpated her tummy and my gut twisted. It felt as though the baby was breech. The extremely strange part was that her adjustments were going great. Her ligaments released perfectly, and yet this baby seemed to be sitting in the pelvis.

I kept my mouth shut. The last thing I needed to do was worry Rose. Lynda was coming over that weekend, and she would let us know.

When Lynda showed up and palpated Rose’s belly, I watched her face go from curious exploration to worry and confusion. My heart sank with the confirmation of our baby’s position. Lynda told us the news, stating she was fairly confident our baby was breech, but only an ultrasound could provide anything conclusive. Rose and I were both shell-shocked. Lynda sat down and talked about our options, then left us to discuss the news. She promised to bring videos next time to show us how a breech baby could be delivered vaginally.

After Lynda’s departure, Rose and I began tossing around ideas of how to get the baby to turn. My ego was bruised; keeping moms and babies in balance is what I do. Why was my baby breech? I began calling and e-mailing my colleagues, pulling textbooks and notes from lectures. I combed through websites like Spinning Babies.com. We tried everything. I took her to the
acupuncturist and the upper cervical chiropractor. We went swimming and administered Chinese herbs; I even bought an inversion table to use at the house. We prayed.

In the meantime, Lynda visited and showed us videos demonstrating techniques for breech delivery. One technique in particular helped my mind relax. It allowed the mother and baby to work together, without pulling and tugging on the baby’s spine. It appeared very gentle.

During our journey, one of the most valuable people we visited was a doctor in the Chicago area who has specialized in home birth for more than forty years. He was trained by Alaskan midwives, and is a rare treasure. We made an appointment with him and discussed our situation. In the kindest manner, he told us he did not see a dilemma at all. He said, “In virtually all circumstances, you are safer at home than in a hospital.” He went on to tell us that breech babies are able to be born vaginally. Our take from what he said was that it really wasn’t such a big deal. As we walked out of his office, I felt like I could breathe deeply for the first time in days.

The next week Rose had acupuncture, and that evening she stayed up walking all night because the baby was unusually active. Meanwhile, I slept like a baby, unaware. In the morning she told me she believed the baby had flipped. We were excited and called Lynda. She arrived and checked Rose. Sure enough, the baby was nearly vertex. We were elated, and Rose started focusing on the water birth again.

One week later, however, our baby decided breech was the way to be. At this point Rose was eight days past her due date; it was the day before Christmas Eve. An ultrasound confirmed the baby was in a complete breech presentation. Based on their analysis, the baby wouldn’t arrive until around January 13th. All we could do was laugh, since Rose’s original due date was December 15th. Rose and I decided to take the rest of the day off and go swimming. That might convince our baby to turn. After all, we had almost another three weeks before she was to be born.

The Christmas holidays were filled with family and fun. Chase was enjoying Christmas, and we were accepting that God was handling the arrival of our baby.

On the morning of Dec 26th, I began getting ready to go into the office. Rose was caring for
Chase, and I noticed she was stopping in mid-sentence when she spoke. When I asked why, she said, “No big deal, I’m just having contractions.” When I asked how often, Rose told me to stop worrying and go take my shower.

After getting ready for the day, I checked in with Rose. She was still having contractions. I pulled out a watch and started timing. They were 3–4 minutes apart. I called Lynda, who advised Rose to take a bath and see if the contractions would slow or stop. They didn’t. I called Lynda again. There had been severe ice storms overnight and roads were being closed. Rose and I had been so wrapped up in the potential beginning of labor that we were clueless about the weather. Lynda promised she would be on the road shortly, but she had no idea how long it would take to make the 35-minute trip over the icy roads. At this point I decided to assess our situation and resources: I had my laboring wife, our 5-year-old son, and two Weimaraners. Who was going to watch Chase? Would it be just the three of us for the birth of this baby? Would we need to travel to the hospital, and would it even be safe to drive?

In the meantime we had asked my sister-in-law to watch Chase, but she was iced in at home. Rose continued to have contractions, and they were becoming intense. An hour passed, when all of a sudden my back door opened and Rose’s parents and sister came in, panting. They had made the dangerous trek from the city through the icy mess. I was so relieved. Now, at least, I would have someone to watch Chase, regardless of what happened.

Another hour passed before Lynda arrived. She checked Rose, and everything was perfect. She phoned her birth assistants, who said they would not be able to come until the roads opened.

Seven hours passed, and the birth assistants still hadn’t arrived. Rose was cared for by her sister, mother and me, with Chase checking in occasionally as well. Rose was progressing, and our baby was descending in the birth canal. Heart tones were strong. Lynda instructed Rose not
to push until she gave her the okay; the baby’s bottom needed to be completely past the cervix before she could begin pushing.

Lynda was downstairs for a moment when Rose’s water broke. It was like a dam breaking. This was completely different from Chase’s birth. I yelled for Lynda to come up. There was meconium everywhere. In the stress of the moment I had forgotten that this was to be expected with a breech baby. Lynda, veteran of over a thousand births, was unaffected and confirmed this was normal.

Ten minutes later our birth assistants came running up the stairs. Lynda was getting Rose ready to push. She moved her to the edge of the bed and marshaled everyone into position. My mother-in-law was stationed on the left leg, my sister-in-law on the right, and I was under Rose, holding her up. There was only one missing party.

The door to our bedroom had been closed to keep the room warm. At the exact moment of a rest between contractions, we heard a little knock on the door. My son came in and sat next to me. Just then a contraction began. Lynda instructed Rose to begin pushing. Rose was grateful to give in to the urge.

With each push, the baby descended. Within moments, it seemed, our little girl was born. She was completely normal and healthy, and turned pink immediately. Her Apgar scores were 9 and 9—extremely high for a breech baby. She was perfect.
All According to Plan: A Breech Homebirth Story

Written by C. Bryan Strother, D.C.
Tuesday, 01 March 2011 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 04 October 2013 08:53

It did go according to plan after all—God’s plan! The cord was very short, and remained loose around her neck the whole time. If she had been head-down, the cord would have been pulled to tension and Rose would have either needed a cesarean or the baby could have been strangled. Our baby knew which position was safest.

I learned two lessons through this experience. The first is that we need more midwives and doctors trained in breech vaginal births, and trusting enough to do them. Second, and most important, is that our bodies really do have an innate wisdom deserving of our trust. Being in balance allows our bodies to work exactly how they are intended to, even though the reasons for their actions are not always clear. My little girl’s journey into this world was made easier by having people who trusted in the innate wisdom of the body.

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