

When I close my eyes and I envision a place that is calming for my soul, a place that I feel at peace and complete happiness, I see mountains .. woods .. water .. nature. A place where I can take deep breaths and cleanse my soul. I feel my body relax and all the tension leave me. Our family is happiest when we are outdoors in nature.

Finding out I was pregnant was quite the surprise. We were on the fence about wanting a fourth. I always had said four was the number of kids I wanted, this was pre kids of course! So after our third was born I wasn't sure we'd go through another pregnancy. But as life happens, some things don't always go as planned. I remember finding out I was pregnant and being completely shocked. Knowing that there was a bigger plan but that it wasn't the plan right now. After experiencing quite a bit of bleeding I called my midwife to talk through things with her. I opted for an early ultrasound. The tech informed me that there was a big sub-chorionic hemorrhage. It was too early to see anything other than a gestational sac and we should schedule another ultrasound for two weeks. I left the ultrasound thinking this would likely end in a miscarriage. As I packed my bags that weekend to second shoot a wedding, I packed extra pads, fearing that at any moment I might feel a gush. Days passed, and then weeks. The second ultrasound came and there it was, this flickering heartbeat and bleeding that was almost completely gone. It was the same tech and she told me she was so surprised to see most of the blood gone. I knew that this baby was a fighter, meant to be in our lives, our family.

My pregnancy was easy. While I battled emotionally trying to wrap my head around having a fourth, weaning my almost 2 year old and a feeling of sadness for that, and also trying to process going through another birth .. physically this pregnancy was easy. Early on I had a very vivid dream that I had a baby boy. Him resting on my chest post partum and those glorious newborn smells. By twenty weeks, I had embraced all that was to come. I was excited about this tiny person and was so ready to welcome him/her to our family. I embraced the remainder of my pregnancy. Loving the growing belly, knowing that I would never have this moment again, The movements that came from inside, knowing that at some point they would end and that would be the last time I felt those sacred movements between only mom and baby. Every time he moved I felt grateful that he was letting me know that he was okay, growing just as he should be. Every lab draw, every appointment showed a perfectly healthy baby and a perfectly healthy mama. So we continued on. Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years. I spent countless hours reading birth stories. Mentally preparing myself for this birth and telling my mind that this birth would be beautiful in just the way it was supposed to. I tried to not get inside my head, telling my anxiety to go away and that my midwife would keep us safe. I had a beautiful home birth with my third and had no reason to think otherwise with this one.

At 37 weeks pregnant my kids came down with an awful flu type virus. High fevers, coughs, aches .. the works. Days passed and I soon felt myself getting hit with some form of this virus. I got a nasty cough. One of those coughs where you just can't stop coughing. The cough that makes you gag. I just couldn't seem to shake it. And then, at

38 weeks pregnant I started itching. Thinking nothing of it and just figuring it was end of pregnancy itching, I let it go for a bit. But I was exhausted with the up in the middle of the night coughing/itching so I reached out to my midwife. She said it was likely just end of pregnancy itching but that we needed to draw labs because there is a rare chance that it could be a pregnancy condition called cholestasis. Initial labs came back normal and my midwife told me to have a Happy Valentine's Day!

Tuesday, the 16th, at 39 weeks pregnant, my midwife called. I had pulled a stomach muscle from all the coughing I was doing and had seen the chiropractor that day, so I was assuming she was calling to check on me. I heard the tone in her voice and I knew. I knew my second round of labs weren't right. I knew I would have to be induced. She confirmed it. My bile acid levels were pretty high, showing that I most likely had cholestasis. She had consulted with two other midwives and both agreed, we needed to consult with an OB. So as we devised our plan, I sat there shaking and crying. I had a traumatic hospital birth my first and the last place I wanted to be was a hospital. Pitocin, IV's, interventions, no water birth, my other three kids .. my mind was racing and I could hardly hear the words on the other end of the phone. I remember telling her Denny Hartung was my first choice, call him first. I couldn't even much think of a second choice because I knew Dr. Hartung was the best of the best. He was the one who would give the most freedom to birth naturally with as minimal intervention as needed. I hung up and called my mom, I could hardly breathe through my tears and all I said was "you need to come now. I have to be induced". I called my husband and tried to talk through the tears, giving him as much information as I could muster out and just kept saying "I'm scared .. I never wanted another hospital birth". My midwife called and said Dr. Hartung agrees that the levels are high enough that this is in fact cholestasis and that I need to come in first thing tomorrow morning for an induction. I had the choice between Baldwin and United, and even though Baldwin was an hour from our house it seemed like a better fit. We told our kids that I would need to go in the next morning to have baby and that our plans for a home birth were changed. We tried our hardest to be upbeat about it but I could tell the kids were concerned and didn't fully understand. Family shuffled in and out and amidst the fears, there was genuine excitement about meeting this new baby. The rest of the night was a blur.

I slept not much that night. Trying to not allow myself to go to the "what ifs". Somehow I woke up feeling mostly okay about what lie ahead. We ate, snuggled the kids, I cried as I said goodbye and then we headed out with our cups of coffee in hand, knowing that today we would meet our newest love. As Zach and I drove our long hour drive, we talked about our fears, our excitement, our trust in both Kate, our midwife, and Dr. Hartung, rubbing my belly and feeling him move .. reassuring me that he was fine in there. We watched a beautiful sunrise and I knew that it would be okay. We pulled in and I took a deep breath. I saw Rachel, our midwife's midwife in training, and was happy she would be a part of this. We walked in and I saw my dear friend Jamie, my photographer. She had a bright smile and we joked about taking pictures of the amazing sunrise. Kate walked in shortly after and gave me a giant hug. Wrapping her arms around me, knowing that this was the last place I wanted to be, but bringing me so

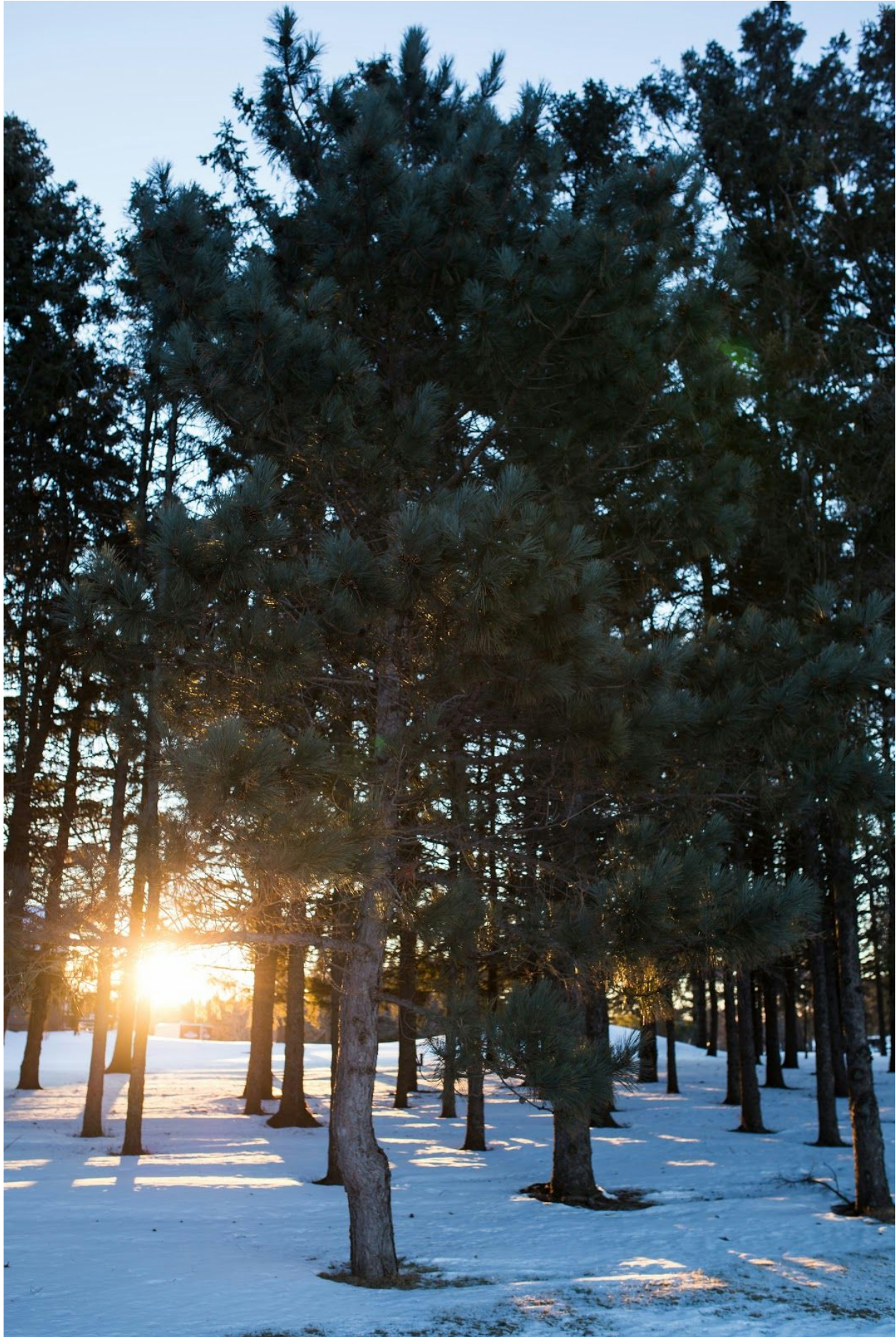
much comfort in the present. As we all trucked upstairs to labor and delivery with our load of bags, a birth tub that we were hoping to use, and food to feed the floor .. I felt like I had my army with me and we were ready to do this. Greeted by two of the sweetest nurses who assured me that we were going to make this birth as close to a home birth as we could, we were brought to our birthing room where beautiful natural sunlight flooded the room. It didn't feel "hospitally" to me. It felt bright and cheery. Soon after in walks Dr. Hartung, with the kindest smile and the calmest energy to him. I talked about my fears, couldn't stop shaking and all those feelings were acknowledged. Then we broke my water. Nice clear fluid, no meconium which can be a concern with cholestasis, phew! We walked and walked and speed walked on a treadmill and we walked outside and did stairs and lunges and pumped .. all to no avail of stimulating contractions. Three hours after my water broke, a hot shower and a big flood of tears between me and baby, I walked out ready to take the next step, even though I didn't want to. The nurses were yet again great. We joked about the IV and who drew the short straw on getting to poke me. First try and it was in. Off I went with my wireless fetal monitor and my pole of pitocin. We started it on the lowest dose and upped it slowly as needed. By about 230, contractions started coming. They came every three minutes. Within the hour they were every minute/minute and a half and soo intense! I just kept saying "hear comes another one .. no another one". It seemed as though they would never end! But I just kept walking .. leaning against any countertop type surface I could find to breathe through them. Soon enough the room became busy with people setting up. It was getting close but I didn't really want to believe it, especially after a check and hearing I was only 6-7 cm, gah! After hearing I could get in the tub, the super stubborn side of didn't want to believe it. The thing I hate the most is getting in and out of the birth tub. I just wanted to stay IN! But then a few more contractions and hit and in the water I went. Breathing in peppermint oil, being fanned by my amazing posse, and telling myself "it doesn't hurt it doesn't hurt" .. trying to get out of my head and trust my body. And with each contraction, I felt him moving down. Getting closer. Pushing is my ultimate fear of childbirth, irrational I know, but it is. Once I let go of it and embraced that there was one way through this, I pushed with all I could to get my baby in my arms. My shortest pushing of only twenty minutes and my love lifted him up in to my arms. Tears streamed down my face as I stared at my fresh new baby who was nothing short of perfect. Oxytocin flooded through and the pain was gone. He was here. In my arms and all felt right in this world.

It was a boy. A health beautiful boy. My mommy heart knew it was a boy. He was what I prayed for and although the early journey was tough and things didn't go the way they were supposed in the end, it was the way things were supposed to go. A hospital birth with my first son that left me broken to the birth process and a restorative, healing birth with one of the best Ob's around. I regained my trust in the beauty that a hospital birth can be. To the staff at Baldwin, thank you. Thank you for honoring our space during this process, for trying to make this as much like a home birth in a hospital setting as possible. Thank you for allowing us to snuggle our baby boy the night after his birth and for letting our girls stay with us. We appreciate it more than we can say. Kate, I know how hard that phone call was. Just know that even though it went in a direction we

never expected, you advocated for me, stood by and supported me through the thick of it .. I wouldn't have chosen anyone else! I heart you. Both moms .. thank you for watching this final addition to our family be born. Birth is always so emotionally charged and you've been there for me through all of them. Zach, you are pretty much a male doula. Your quiet demeanor and mellow personality brings a calm to me when I'm in the throws of it, you pretty much rock! Jamie .. my dear photographer. You have taught me so much over the years and for this one day, I got to reap all of the benefits of J Stoia Portrait Design .. thank you for capturing every moment of this day with me, you are a true treasure in my life. And I'll let everyone see just how beautiful your work is in the pictures below ..

My Jasper ... you were so perfectly chosen to be ours. Whether or not I knew it at the time, but you were meant to be in my arms. Giving me strength and courage and reminding me just how simple this world is. We chose Jasper as your name because, well, have you ever seen pictures of Jasper National Park? It's utterly amazing. A place we would choose to go to calm our souls and the noise this busy world brings at times. But the icing on the cake .. those glorious Jasper stones. They are known to be a nurturing and protective stone. In it's physical properties it's considered highly restorative for internal organs (such as the liver .. cholestasis being a pregnancy related disease of the liver). As soon as I read about the Jasper stones, I knew if you were a boy this was your name. You can read more about this lovely stone (<http://www.crystalvaults.com/crystal-encyclopedia/jasper>).

Two months later and I'm done writing your birth story. Your smile is infectious with your small little dimple on your cheek. Your almond shaped eyes draw me in every time you coo at me. You seem to be your dad both physically and your disposition. You are calm, mellow and have such an ease about you. I love every day that I get to wake up next to you and hold you in arms.















































And the gal behind this lens, she was just as important and I'm so sad she wasn't in this frame!

Photos courtesy of J. Stoia Portrait Design.

If you're still reading this and need a good cry, watch this. Jamie is incredibly talented and has a way to bring your emotions to the surface.

<http://video214.com/play/54ZL8TfYce6ZuZuDRSZUeA/s/dark>