

this time I knew for sure that this was hormonal as labour was just around the corner. Afterwards, Sharon said that while I was working the left foot she started to have strong regular contractions!

She was very relaxed and decided to stay on the bed for the rest of the afternoon. We arranged an appointment for two days time, if we had not met before!

### **Labour and childbirth**

36 hours later I got the phone call from Sharon, "my waters have gone and I'm having very strong contractions". It was 2am and the only commitment I had that day was to see Sharon; this baby had timed it just right!

As I drove along deserted streets to the hospital I was feeling very excited, but realised, that I was not just there for these parents, but I was representing Reflexologists everywhere! I need not have worried, as the welcome I received from all the staff, midwives, doctors and ancillary people was tremendous. Everyone was fascinated, and extremely encouraging.

At 2.30am I entered a labour room to find a happy looking Sharon and a rather tense looking husband Peter! She was being admitted by a student midwife, Nicky and her midwife mentor, Louise. We were the team! The midwives went out of their way to ensure that Sharon and Peter felt comfortable and informed and that they and me had copious tea, water etc.

Sharon and I decided that I would give her a full treatment on the bed, while she was admitted and monitored.

### **Aim of treatment during labour**

- Relax Sharon
- Give her encouragement
- Support the whole endocrine system and reproductive system
- Support the body to give birth
- Pain relief by stimulating natural endorphin release
- Help encourage natural energy release

I managed to do the full treatment, pausing when Sharon had a contraction, and just working the solar plexus points. She said that this was extremely helpful, as it gave her a point to focus on, and I think it helped her stay grounded.

The next couple of hours were spent with me working Sharon's feet during contractions and Peter doing sterling work with the flannel, tea, and sweets and sorting out the music! My aim was very much to top up all the work I had done initially and to encourage the uterus to work efficiently and push out the baby, as nature intended. As Sharon had experienced a previous

caesarean section there was a risk that the uterus may not contract easily as there was a scar on its wall. The midwives kept regularly checking things to make sure all was working well, and that there was no danger of the uterus rupturing.

Sharon kept very mobile during this part of the labour; this was very good as gravity naturally helped the descent of the baby. I found I could still work her feet by sitting down on the floor and working the feet from the dorsal angle and the sides. I must say I wished I had attended Lyn Booth's vertical reflexology course, something for the New Year perhaps! (I have since done this workshop and I highly recommend it) The midwives had thoughtfully provided us with mats and beanbags, so I was quite happy to crawl about on the floor!! Also I am quite flexible due to my own yoga practice, therapists must remember to look after themselves as well!

### **Mid labour**

At 5.30am it was time for Sharon to be examined by the midwife, so this was a good time for me to have a banana! They told her that she was just about halfway dilated. It was at this point that Sharon got very despondent and could have lost control, however, she seemed to really calm down and find some more reserves of energy after I gave her some more treatment. I really concentrated on working the relaxing reflexes and the coping point that is between the 2nd and 3rd toe dorsal side of the foot - see Susanne Enzer book. Also I worked the diaphragm to help control breathing and emotions.

The midwives suggested that Sharon get in a bath to help soothe the painful contractions and backache. They had found that the baby was in a posterior position, which means that the baby's back is lying towards the mother's spine. This makes labour slow and very sore in the back. We found that it was helpful for me to sit by the bath and stick my hands in the water to give the feet some extra aid during contractions, I just held the solar plexus points as best I could!

### **End of first stage of labour**

It was at this point that Sharon decided to have some pethidine, as she was getting very tired with the thundering contractions. The midwives administered this at 7.15am. Sharon liked to know how we all were, and I found this so touching that she still had time to consider her team, despite it all!

### **Second stage of labour**

At 7.30am Sharon started to have a very strong desire to push, and the midwives felt that the signs were positive for her to do this. Unfortunately this corresponded with a staff shift change. I felt that my role now

was very much one of being there for Sharon and also to help Peter. The student midwife stayed on to see the birth. During the pushing stage I was mostly holding Sharon's left leg and foot, so I worked the uterus and nervous system as best I could.

It was a very emotional time for everyone in that room, we all played a part in encouraging Sharon to find the stamina to work the hardest she had ever worked in her life! She later said to me "no wonder it's called labour"!

### **Delivery**

In between the contractions I tried to relax Sharon by working her hands and getting her to let them go. We were all revived by the spirit and energy of the new midwife Mary, her Irish warmth and vitality really seemed to help everybody.

At 8.45am the midwife and doctors discussed with Sharon and Peter that the baby was now showing some signs of distress and that it would be advisable to help the baby out with a vacuum extraction. It was put to Sharon that she had pushed the baby almost all the way out, but it just needed a hand to be lifted the last part of the way. Things got a bit medical and technical, but the Doctor was very encouraging to all of the team, and most of all to Sharon and Peter.

At 09.13am the baby slithered out and was placed on Sharon's abdomen, a beautiful girl, welcome Saffron! The joy and relief of everyone in the room was palpable, I felt so lucky and privileged to have been there. Peter looked so relieved and overjoyed! After they had both had lots of cuddles, they gave me Saffron to hold; I stroked her foot and felt that everything was all right in the world! Her little eyes peeped out at me and they seemed to have so much wisdom in them. She arrived the day before Thanksgiving!

The rest of the delivery went fine for Sharon, and she later told me the baby breast fed like an absolute dream. I went home to bed feeling that I had worked hard but it was so rewarding.

### **Post natal**

Sharon told me that she could not have done it without the reflexology, she felt that she stayed in control and as relaxed as possible. Her stitches all healed up really well and breast feeding was very successful, the baby gained 3oz in her first week!

### **Summary**

I would recommend having or giving reflexology in pregnancy and labour, be flexible in mind body and soul! It will be a fantastic experience for you.