



## 9 Months 9 Hours

Jethro James Morcombe was born on January 14 2010 at St John of God Hospital Murdoch at 6.19pm. This date is also my father's birthday.

When I fell pregnant my husband Adam and I asked our obstetrician if it was possible to be induced early as Adam works on the mines and was due to fly back to work on Jethro's due date which was January 19. She said that this was not a problem as a baby is fully matured at 37 weeks.

What a wonderful pregnancy I had! I never had morning sickness nor did I feel like I needed to rest all the time. I was the absolute opposite. I felt like an energizer bunny that couldn't stop. I would of course start to feel it in the last few weeks of pregnancy and my feet looked like duck's feet. But that was the worst of it. Other than that nothing was slowing me down and I was ready to be a mum.

On Monday January 4 we had an appointment with the obstetrician. She had told us to come back on Tuesday January 12 and we would do an internal examination to check if my cervix was ok to give birth. If it was shaped like a carrot, then this may not be possible and we may have to wait.

On the January 12, I had my internal and our obstetrician said that we could be admitted to hospital the next day to be induced. We were so excited and on Wednesday at 3.30pm we arrived at the hospital and the induction of Jethro's birth began. I was connected to these monitors that were checking the heartbeat and movement of Jethro. All the wonders started to come over me - what's he going to look like and who is he going to look like? We were about to be parents, what more could a couple hope for.

Wednesday night at 8.05pm I had my first contraction. It was really weird because I didn't really know if it was one or not. I just started to get cramps that wouldn't go away. When they finally did, the same thing happened again nearly an hour later and then it clicked, the labour process had started.

At 10pm I was taken to the birthing suite to be monitored for contractions and heartbeat again. The pain by this time started to get quite intense and the poor midwife was unable to get hold of an anaesthetist to give me an epidural. So I had to suck on gas for a while until the midwife gave me Morphine as the chance of getting an epidural that evening was slim. Throughout the night the midwives were like angels at my side. I felt well looked after and couldn't believe how lucky I was to have these wonderful women looking after me whilst I was in pain.

Time ticked on to the early hours of the morning. I slept on and off knowing that my baby could come any time. At 7.30am the anaesthetist arrived and inserted the epidural. At 8am the obstetrician arrived to do an internal and told me I was 1-2cm dilated apart. She came back at 12pm and I was 3-4 cm. At 4pm I was 8-9cm and she was to come back at 5pm and then we could probably start pushing. It was the longest day, but 5pm came and it was time. I had my wonderful husband at my side who was just so amazing. We attempted to push about 4 to 5 times and this wasn't working. We then had to have the vacuum and we attempted this 4 times and this wasn't working either. My obstetrician said to me that we would try the forceps and if this didn't work we would have to go for a caesarean. She tried the forceps and that is when Jethro's heartbeat started to slow down and a look of panic came over the obstetricians face. I was then rushed to



have an emergency caesarean. By this time I was in so much pain and was begging for some pain relief. I was well looked after and cared for and they were doing the best they could to make me comfortable.

I was now in theatre and it all happened so quickly. I was finally comfortable and ready to see my baby. Jethro was brought into this world at 6.19pm. He came out and they showed him to me and I remember thinking how beautiful he was. Then I thought, why hasn't he made a sound? I had someone come over to me and lean over and say that he wasn't breathing and I squeezed Adam's hand and just looked into his eyes and didn't look away for some time. We were both so scared and I think I knew that this wasn't good at all. The process took ages and we were being updated as they worked on him. These wonderful doctors and paediatricians worked so hard and I turned my head to see them all huddled around Jethro and realized he couldn't have been in better hands. We were told that he had a very strong heartbeat and great colour but he had no movement and was not breathing on his own. Our hearts sank and we knew that this was not good news.

We were told that Jethro was very ill, he hadn't made any movement and that indicated that there was no brain activity. He was now to go to Princess Margaret Hospital where he was to be taken care of. A few hours later they prepared to transfer Jethro, but just before they did they brought this bundle of joy into my room. He was attached to all of these tubes and cords. It was devastating. The first time of actually touching my child and he was in this condition, all I can say is that I was living a nightmare. I had said that I didn't want to see Jethro as I didn't want to see him that way, but thanks to my loving sister and the nurses, they made me see him which is the best thing I ever did. I remember my sister saying to me that he needs his mother, she was right and it turned out I needed him just as much to know that I was there.

That night Adam went to PMH to sit with him. He was comforted by his mum dad and two brothers. A few hours later Adam came back to the hospital as he wanted to be with me. He told me that his family was going to sit with Jethro all night and we could go back there tomorrow.

Friday morning around 10.30am we made our way to see Jethro at PMH. I was so nervous because I didn't know what to expect. As I was wheeled into the neonatal ward, I just burst into tears as I saw my little boy naked and spread out like a starfish connected to all this machinery that was keeping him alive. I was heartbroken and just couldn't believe my eyes. I felt punished and ruined. My husband and I just held each other and watched our little boy fight for his life. I then sat and just watched him, stroking his little body and begging him to pull through. I talked as much as I could to him and told him mummy and daddy loved him very much. A few hours later I went back to the hospital St Johns. That night Adam sat next to me and I said to him, "I don't know what I'd do if I had to make a decision to take him off life support." He looked at me and said "Well, we actually do need to make a decision. He is brain dead, and there is no chance that he will recover." My heart died right then and there. Even though it was a terrible decision, it was also easy as I was not going to have my son live like this. He would never speak. He may never see. He was never going to move. What kind of mother would I be if that was the life I choose to give my child?

The answer was clear. I knew what we had to do.



Adam and I are not religious people even though I was brought up Catholic as a kid. But something inside me wanted him to be christened and I asked Adam what he thought. He said it was a great idea and that would be a nice thing to do.

The next day we went to PMH knowing that a decision would have to be given. We were able to hold Jethro even though he was still connected to all this machinery. He lay on a pillow and I sat in a chair and held my baby for the first time. It was amazing and I just cried. Adam had his turn as well and cried in disbelief. In the meantime we had arranged for the baptism to happen in the afternoon. Just before the ceremony we were taken into the office of the neonatal surgeon and his team who explained to us the extent of Jethro's illness. They told us that somewhere along the line, something went wrong at the birth and they couldn't tell us why. His brain was not responding and there was still no movement. He didn't receive enough oxygen to his brain. If they kept Jethro on the machines then he may actually survive but would basically be brain dead and there was nothing that they could do. Even though we knew that this was the case, we still burst into tears. Those words "nothing we can do" will haunt me forever. We told the doctors that we would like Jethro to be taken off life support. The hardest words any parent has to say. But there was no way we were going to let him live that way, no way!

We then went out and confirmed this with our families, which of course was a very emotional ride. We then went back into the ward and had the baptism with all of our family. It was really lovely and we are so glad we chose to do this.

After the baptism Adam and I went into one of the rooms provided for overnight stay and waited there until they brought Jethro to us. When they came into the room and handed him to us, I just couldn't believe my eyes. He was the most perfect little thing I had ever seen and so good looking. To see him without all those tubes on his face was such a relief. It was now time to watch our son drift away and die. We really did think that this was only going to be a matter of an hour, two at the most. However it took Jethro nine hours to pass on, but this just showed his incredible strength and courage to try and survive. I joked with Adam that he was just doing as he was told as when I was talking to him the day before I told him he had to be strong and pull through this.

We had to listen to him gurgling and gasping for air. It was seriously hard listening to him, but our positive to this was that at least we got to hear him. After a little while I noticed he was bleeding from the nose and I panicked. The doctor told me it was just from the tubes that were removed. Later he started bleeding from the mouth, again I panicked. Same thing. Still it looked wrong, this whole situation of watching our son die was all wrong, it wasn't meant to be this way.

He did look so peaceful though. Just sleeping and dreaming was exactly how he looked.

Those nine hours were the hardest, saddest but most incredible time of our lives. We could not believe that a child who was so sick, could breathe on his own for such a long time. His last breath we will never forget.

We believe that Jethro was brought to us for a reason and taken for a reason. Even though we feel robbed and angry, we do believe that this wasn't our time, nor Jethro's.

Our mission is now to live the best life we can in celebration of the life of Jethro James Morcombe.

**Dominique Morcombe**