

Jillian McPeake: "Look at that face!"

Narrative 4 of the Marathon Maternity Oral History Project

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In 2008, we interviewed women about their experiences of childbirth and maternity care in Marathon, a rural community in north-western Ontario. This narrative is one of a series of stories that resulted from the Marathon Maternity Oral History Project. All of the narratives in this series were edited from the interview transcripts, then reviewed and approved for publication by the women involved. We invite readers to see the accompanying research paper for more on the Marathon Maternity Oral History Project.¹

I'm Jillian McPeake, age 19, from Marathon, Ontario. This is Asa Terrance Frauts, born August 6, 2008.

Dirk's my boyfriend. We've been dating, like, 3½ years now. It was pretty awesome. Best friends, too, in grade 9. We were four-wheeling in the bush, and he stopped the four-wheeler and, like, turned around and was like, "We should date." "Okay," and we kept going.

And he goes, "As if I just did that. I just slowed the four-wheeler down and was like, 'We should date.' I didn't take you to the beach, I didn't do anything like ask you romantically or anything."

And I was like, "Do you really consider me a romantic person?" He knows me.

I had a feeling I was pregnant. Oh my God. I didn't even drink or anything on Christmas because I'm 11 days late on my period. "Dirk ... Can you go to the store and get me a pregnancy test?" He goes to the store. I peed on it. Two seconds later: positive. I was like, "Oh my God! Go get another one!" I called my cousin and made her buy two just so she could pee on one, just in case they're all flukes in the store. We kept them all just to say that's what I made her do.

I kind of hyperventilated. It wasn't supposed to happen this soon. I was on the birth control pill, and it still happened, so he was meant to be. "What am I gonna tell my dad?" I told my parents right away because I never, ever keep anything from them.

My mom was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to be a grandma!"

My dad at first was like, "Oh, you should've went to school." He had big dreams for me, right?

And I was like, "Yeah, I know." I want to go back to high school again, and then go to university for dentistry. I love that. I'm always concerned about people's teeth. Ever since I was a kid. But there's always time for that later. Then we called Dirk's parents and they were really excited. Called Dirk's sister who lives in Sudbury. She screamed on the phone, dropped the phone and everything. It was pretty awesome to have that much excitement.

"Jillian," not "Number 23" or "Room Number 5"

The doctor who looked after me and my belly, I knew her before I was even, like, a patient. I babysat her kids, so I even know what the inside of their house looks like. It was like a friendship plus you get to deliver my baby and I get to be your patient sort of thing, so that was nice. It's really personal here. "Jillian," not "Number 23" or "Room Number 5." Like, you know everybody by first name; you see them on the street and it's like, "Hi, how are you? How's it going? I'll see you in 2 weeks," or whatever. This is the person who's going to be delivering your baby. This is the person who gets to look at your vagina. That's a little personal! You have to have someone you can trust and know, and who kind of knows you and what they can say to help you. That's someone delivering your baby, your love. That's the person that's taking care of you and taking care of the itty-bitty life inside of you and you need trust to put the little life that you guys made into someone else's hands. They get to touch him before you get to hold him, you know?

I basically assumed: I'm pregnant; I'm gonna deliver here. That's the line; that's the story. It's just comforting to be home in Marathon. Home, because I was born and raised here, never been anywhere else. You get comfortable with the place I guess. The doctor said there's always that chance that you might have to get flown out. If they needed to do a C-section then go ahead and fly me out. At least we tried it here. One of my friends got pregnant; she had a baby girl and she started to deliver here. Her labour stopped, and she kept pushing, but the baby's head got stuck in the birth canal. So they had to fly her out. That was one thing I was a little iffy about too. What if something goes wrong like that? How much pain will I be in? Will he be okay? Will that mean, like, he has a lesser chance of living? I was worried, but I just knew everything will be okay. I thought for sure I was gonna go into labour, gonna wait 'til the contractions were, like, 2½ minutes apart, and then I was gonna get in the car, drive to the

hospital, go to the nurse's station. Everything in order. I wanted to know I'd be in good hands. I wanted my whole family present for sure. That's what I wanted.

The thing with babies: nothing is organized

That's the thing with babies: nothing is organized, nothing's on schedule. Every appointment my blood pressure, it was up and down, up and down. It would be, like, 143 over 97 or whatever, and then the next minute it would be 124 over 82. They didn't really know what to do. In the end it was apparently just getting too high. I was so sick and stuff, probably. August 5th, my prenatal appointment, my doctor said, "We might have to send you to Thunder Bay to get you induced."

It felt overwhelming. I thought I'd be here in Marathon. I was more concerned for Dirk because his face went white. Dirk just kind of went, "Oh my God." This was it.

She kept on talking, and Dirk's like, "Are you allowed to come with us?"

"No, unfortunately I'm not."

And he's like, "Why?" really puppy-eyed, "Why?"

And then she said, "I just can't go with you." That's not the rule, I guess.

And he goes, "Well, don't be surprised if you hear someone break into your house and you wake up in a potato bag." She just started laughing.

I guess he really wanted our doctor here. He trusted her. I think he really liked her as a doctor. She was his doctor too, like, before any of this pregnancy stuff. Like, he doesn't want me dying on the table. He reads too much stories and watches too many movies where women give birth and suddenly she's dead on the table. I knew that wasn't going to happen because we were going there for a reason. Everything was going to be hunky-dory. That's just the sucky part about having to go to Thunder Bay. You lose that personal relationship. She's been there with you for the whole entire 9 months, and seeing you in town all the time, and you get to go to Thunder Bay and find somebody new that you can't even call her by her first name and doesn't really remember you.

I'm only 19 years old with a 21-year-old boy who didn't work. He's laid off. He only gets a certain amount of money from unemployment and that goes towards rent, that goes towards hydro, that goes towards baby fund and towards food for us, but when you have to go to Thunder Bay there goes your rent money. You need gas money to drive out there, you've got to stay

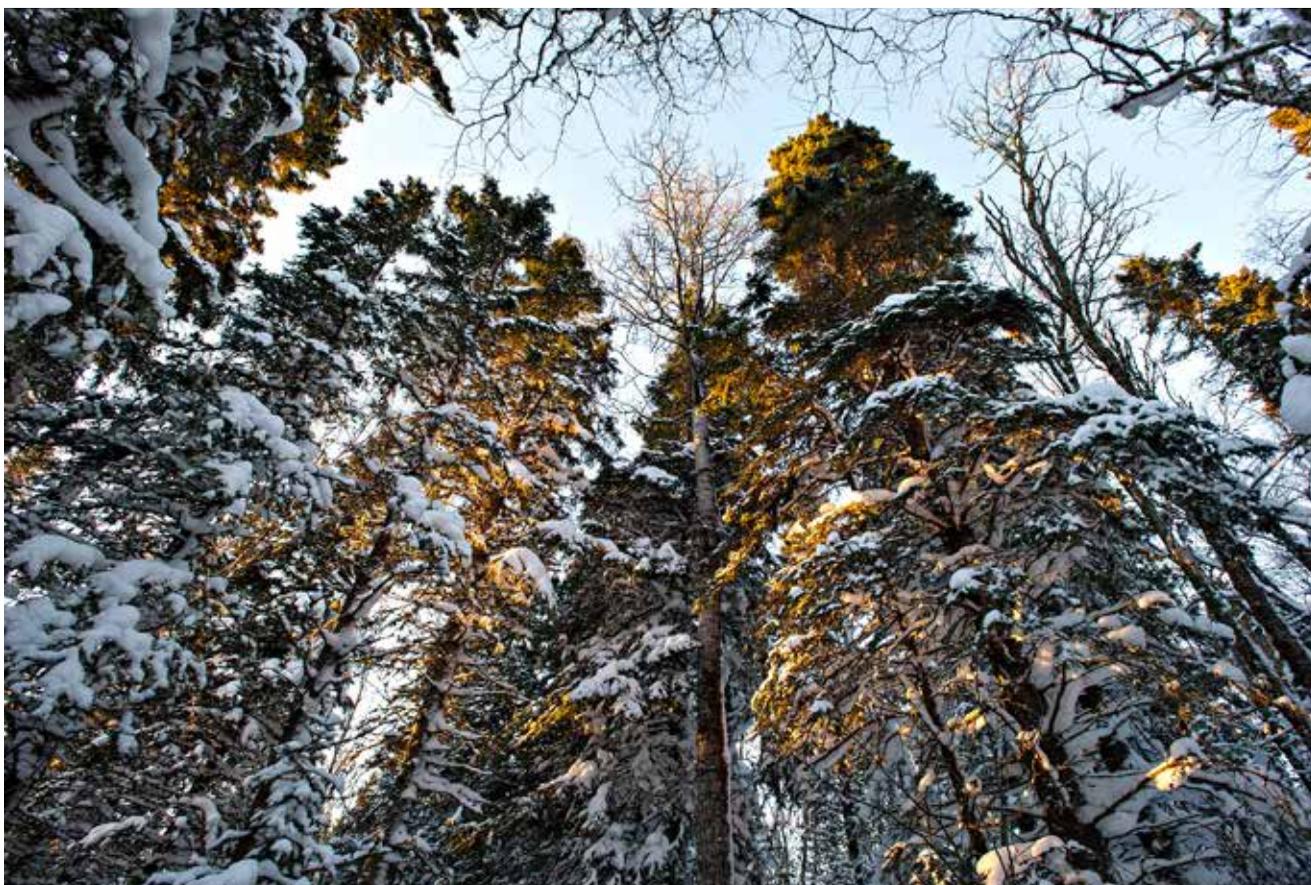


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in a hotel the first night, plus I had to stay in the hospital and there's no room for everyone in the hospital so they had to get a hotel for the next 2 days. That's a lot of money gone.

What if I didn't have a car? What if my parents didn't live in town? Luckily we did have help. We weren't just left on our own. "If you guys need something, don't hesitate to ask," that's what both our families said. We kinda lucked out that way, but it was hard having to spend money that was supposed to go towards rent—a roof over our heads, you know? We could get evicted for that. We couldn't get a hold of our landlords to tell them, "Uh, we can't pay rent right now. Another 2 weeks." It was difficult.

We end up going to Thunder Bay and there's only 2 people allowed in the delivery room. It was all germ control, is what they said. But my mom and Dirk were allowed in the room. They were allowed to leave and go anywhere in the hospital and come back. How is this supposed to be germ control when you're allowed to wander all over the place and then come back? It was hard. My dad and Dirk's mom stood outside the window of my room and kind of looked in when I was contracting and everything. You could see them, wave to them and stuff, so it was nice that way.

How to breastfeed 50 different ways

My little baby ... Having a baby is definitely not what I expected. I just read so much books and stuff. They tell you when your water breaks, it's a gush of fluid. They don't tell you that it doesn't stop until you deliver. So you're sitting in a hospital room with doctors you don't know, nurses you don't know, people coming in and out of your room, poking and prodding you everywhere. You're sitting in a pad the size of freakin' Marathon itself. It's huge! Fluid leaking out everywhere and you're like, "God, when is this gonna be over?"

I read *A Girlfriend's Guide to Pregnancy: Or Everything Your Doctor Won't Tell You*. It tells me basically everything the doctors told me. "When you're in labour, expect to have pain." No, you're kidding! "Expect it to be like your stomach feeling like you're gonna have a poop." Okay, it wouldn't be that bad, I guess. And then we get into that position and it's gonna be a friggin' monster crap if that's what they think. Bowel movement my freakin' ass! Liars. Some women are like, "Oh, it didn't hurt that bad." What did you have, a 2-pound baby? I have a 5-pound baby and it hurt. But it was totally worth it. He's so healthy. I did something right in my pregnancy.

The nurses and doctors were great in Thunder Bay. I'm not going to say they're not, because they were. Without them, he wouldn't be here. When he came out I was panicking a lot because he wasn't breathing. Then they cut the cord and you're going, "Breathe! Come on, breathe!" They made him breathe, so they're definitely

appreciated. But the doctors there: no conversation, no "How are you feeling?" Nothing.

The nurses came in and explain how to breastfeed 50 different ways. The nurses would show you one way or they'd show you how to get the colostrum out yourself one way, and another nurse would come in, "No, that's the wrong way."

"Okay, get one story here, and stick to it!"

He didn't like my milk anyway, so formula fed. I was always just concerned about his health. If he can't have the milk, he can't have the milk. If formula's what's best for him, so be it. He's gaining weight, he's healthy. I'm happy with the formula and it's not hard to make. Everyone's like, "Oh, it's so much easier breastfeeding," but when you're sitting there at 2 o'clock in the morning trying to get him to latch on for 20 minutes and then he falls asleep on you, he doesn't get anything. It's easier just to get a couple ounces of formula, mix it with water, heat it up, and you're ready to go. Stick it in his mouth, he drinks, burp him, and then back to bed. Everything is done.

He probably needs his diaper changed ... Pff! Smells like it anyway ...

Everyone cares about everybody

It was so awesome when I brought him home. Everyone was waiting. We got phone calls coming out the yingyang and people coming over. It's a big family. Everyone cares about everybody. Almost everything is on a personal level because you, like, know them. That's why it's great living here and it's great raising a baby here and you already know the people. I have 2 girlfriends who had kids in Marathon. They talked about how, like, the doctors here kept them after for, like, 3 days and they taught her how to breastfeed and they taught her all the proper ways to clean things and do things. How do you take care of an uncircumcised penis? In Thunder Bay they hand you a book of pamphlets. "Here you go. Read." One of my friends, she had a baby boy, and they taught her all that. She didn't have to read any pamphlets and it was one-on-one and you could find out the proper way instead of trying to guess what they mean in the text, right? So that's probably one thing I missed out on too. But I do like to figure things out, and I babysat lots of boys, so I wasn't too surprised how to take care of things.

Dirk is such a great guy and he's a freakin' awesome dad! At first he was like, "I'm not gonna be able to hold him or anything." When he was delivered, as soon as his head came out, Dirk started to cry and then I started to cry 'cause I saw him cry. I was supposed to hold the tears back! Oh, Dirk wanted me to tell everyone and recommend that if the father is in the delivery room, watch the birth. He wanted me to say that. Definitely watch the birth. It's the most amazing thing

he said he'd ever seen in his entire life and the most amazing thing he's ever seen me do. So he wanted every guy to know that.

Dirk works at 8 o'clock in the morning, and, like, last night I was starting to get frustrated because I couldn't fall asleep. Five o'clock in the morning rolls around and I'm still not sleeping and he ended up like, "You know what, baby? Try going to sleep. I'll stay up, and if he cries, don't worry about it. You need your rest. You're gonna be up all day with him tomorrow." He's great like that. Diaper changes or something, he's like, "I've got it!" Except for one time when he, like, pooped on Dirk's hand. Projectile poop. Dirk was like, "Bleechhh! Jill! Jill!" It was hilarious.

He's here and he's safe and healthy and beautiful. If you're gonna be pregnant in Marathon, try and plan to have your baby in Marathon because the doctors are great, and that's it. Even though I had to go to Thunder Bay, something still magical happened. It went more

than okay in Thunder Bay. Now Dirk is like, "You have to give him a little baby brother or sister." Keep wishing. It's not happening now. Eventually. I'm sure it'll be fine here too, and maybe next time I'll find out. But Thunder Bay was perfect. Everything's hunky-dory.

Oh, he's sleeping ... Look at that face. They say, "Oh, that's a face only a mother could love," but *that's* a face everybody could love. Look at that face! 

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None declared

Reference

1. Orkin A, Newbery S. The Marathon Maternity Oral History Project. Exploring rural birthing through narrative methods. *Can Fam Physician* 2014;60:58-64. Available from: www.cfp.ca/content/60/1/58.full.

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