

Marie Michano: "That sense of being at home"

Narrative 7 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

My name is Marie Michano,* I live in Marathon, Ontario, and I'm a stay-at-home mom. I have 3 boys. I've been here all my life. I was delivered in Marathon, a cesarean when they still did them. My mom tells me quite a bit. She was put to sleep, barely remembers other than how heavy I was when they brought me to her the next morning. Nine pounds, 10 ounces.

Meant to be here

When I was a teenager, I didn't care for it in Marathon. I complained that there was nothing to do, but now that I'm a mother, I love the community for my kids. I love knowing that I can send my son down the road and people know who he is and they're going to let me know where he is. I just don't know anywhere else. I can go to Thunder Bay for a week or The Soo and I just can't handle it. I don't think I'll leave. Not unless Sheldon gets laid off from work or anything ...

We moved a lot back and forth between down south, here, and Pic River. My mom lives in Pic River. I was there from the time I was 14, 'til I was at least 18. I was supposed to graduate that year, had my acceptance papers for college, and then found out I was pregnant about a week later. You get into trouble when there's not so much for you to do. But what can you do? He's here and I wouldn't change it. Once I finally got the courage to tell my mom, Mom actually stuck through it. Mistakes happen, and he was meant to be here for a reason, and he's here. Mom actually had a lot of encouragement for me for that. Him and his dad, we're not together no more. I'm with another person now, the older two's dad.

Nathan was born in Thunder Bay. There was no way—even if I was told I had to deliver here, I'm sure I would have said, "I'll go to Thunder Bay whether you tell me to go or not." I was uneducated and when you're a child

yourself, you hear what you hear and you believe what you hear. It makes you think, but being a small community, everybody knows everybody's business. October 6th, I was 37 weeks; I think I laboured here for most of the day and then they flew me out to deliver in Thunder Bay. I had severe anemia. Barely made it, really. I don't know why it took so long, if they couldn't get the helicopter here or what.

Panicking ... frustrated ... scared

I've been on a plane before. I thought this was going to be nothing. Being in a tiny plane and crowded with all these people and not knowing what's going on. It was bumpy, turbulence. I'm claustrophobic. I panicked. Being strapped on a gurney, tied down and not really able to move, they made my mom sit up in the front, wouldn't let her sit beside me. My water actually broke in the plane when we took off and my contractions must have picked up then. The two paramedics basically sat there beside me with their arms crossed, bored. "It's okay, ma'am. You're going to be fine, ma'am. We're gonna be there. We understand."

I don't know if it had to do with having male people in the emergency; I got angry. I'm hollering and swearing, "You don't understand!" My mom ended up having to kind of set them straight. "Intense" is probably my best word for it.

That time [the flight] actually seemed longer than the whole process of labour that morning. We didn't land at the Thunder Bay hospital, we landed somewhere else, so I had to get into an ambulance to the hospital. It's kind of a blur, but I remember bits and pieces of it, and none of it was very pleasant. I remember swearing, crying for my mom. I remember barely getting into the delivery room because I went from 4 [cm dilated] to 10 from the time I got on the plane to the time I got to Thunder Bay.

By the time I got there, they wouldn't give me anything for pain, probably because I was too far along and not listening when I'm told not to push. Got there at

*The Marathon Maternity Oral History Project includes narratives from Cheryl McWatch,² Marie Michano's mother-in-law, and Connie McWatch,³ Cheryl McWatch's mother.

6:00 and had him by 7:00. A boy, Nathan. It took them more time to stitch me than it did to push him out. I didn't know who the doctors were, who the nurses were. It wasn't fun, being young, uneducated and not really knowing what's going to happen to your body. I was panicking, I was frustrated, I was scared, and it probably made it that much more uncomfortable. As I got older, more educated, became more comfortable with the doctors here, more of my girlfriends were having babies, and I was seeing how it was going, I was totally comfortable. My other two weren't so rough.

That big detour again

When I was 20, I knew what was going to happen. Unexpected again. My parents were more disappointed the second time. I went back to school. When you finally get yourself on that path, you make that big detour again. I was right back where I started. And not being with Dad at the time. My mom didn't live here, my dad didn't live here. I was basically alone in Marathon with one child and another one on the way. I wasn't involved with Dad much, and his family wasn't too happy about

it either. But we ended up working it out and we're still together now.

My doctor was really great, made it actually a more pleasant experience, I'd say. A female doctor. She was close and probably more intimate, and took the time to ask certain questions, on a friend basis, I guess you could say. "How is Mom? How are things with Dad?" She knew I wasn't with the dad, and if I needed somebody to talk to, I guess to unload on that emotional level. I was really disappointed to see when she went on maternity leave, 'cause she had 2 babies of her own. She started and then had a baby around the same time.

I was the deciding factor

The first one I didn't have a choice. I guess I was considered high risk. The second one, it was kind of, "If you want to deliver here, you can deliver here. I'm gonna recommend Thunder Bay; I'm not gonna force you." I was the deciding factor. I said, "Yeah, I'll go to Thunder Bay just in case." I think they found the placenta previa in my first ultrasound, by 19 weeks. At 28 weeks it had moved out of the way on its own. I didn't want to have



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Wilson Memorial Hospital, Marathon

that whole experience of being flown out again—I had already delivered in Thunder Bay—and the risk if they wanted to give me a blood transfusion. You'd feel safer in Thunder Bay: a bigger hospital, a big city, probably more experienced doctors. If anything happens, you can have a C-section right there and not have to be flown out. That's probably why I chose that for my second one.

I actually started having contractions at 36 weeks. [My doctor] wanted to fly me, but I insisted I could drive. The dad and I actually made it, and by the time we got there my contractions had stopped. It wasn't fun stuck in Thunder Bay for 2 weeks waiting, my little one at home with Mom. Two weeks in Thunder Bay at the hotel and back and forth to the hospital, checking to see if I was dilating any more. Then when it did happen, it happened really fast. November 2nd he was born. I got up at 8:00, and Aidan was here at noon. Thunder Bay was an unfamiliar environment; I didn't know the doctor, didn't know the nurses. It just happened so fast that I didn't really get the time, I guess, to enjoy the experience of birth.

When I became pregnant with my third one—we had actually planned him—we discussed whether or not Marathon or Thunder Bay. Sheldon was all for Thunder Bay. Probably because he was comfortable when Aidan was born in Thunder Bay. He thought it was safer, in case an emergency had happened. I'm pretty sure his cousin, the same thing happened; she started to push and the baby got stuck and meconium got in his lungs, and her baby spent, I'm going to say, 2 months in London. I practically had to talk him [Sheldon] through it the whole 9 months. We went to the hospital and took a tour. He mellowed into it.

Other than that, Mom, Dad, and everyone else were okay. My grandmother—you'd think with her being older that she'd be more traditional about staying in your community and not needing that medical hype and stuff—she was the one that actually gave me that hard time about not going, that it was unsafe. Women used to do it a long time ago with no help. It's amazing to think what they did. Geez, I've been hearing since I was a little girl, [people] going to the hospital here and complaining about the doctors, if they're in it for your best interest, if they're doing what they're supposed to do. They still do it now. I have a friend that's due to deliver within a month or two, she's gonna go to Thunder Bay because she just feels that doctors are not equipped here emergency-wise. Most of my girlfriends that I talk to that are not in Marathon, they go for the pain medication. I didn't use any pain meds for all 3. I think the big reason I wanted to go to Thunder Bay was the whole hype for the epidural—which I didn't have for all 3 anyway. The fact is it's your decision, your body. That's what I stressed to them. It was my decision.

Trusting the professionals and trusting yourself

[My doctor] was really encouraging, "Look, if at any point you feel uncomfortable, you give me the word and we'll go to Thunder Bay. I'll have that plane here and you'll go to Thunder Bay." I was at the hospital off and on through that entire day and I encouraged myself and told myself that I was going to do it this time, that everything was going to be okay. Sheldon was the same. Really comfortable with [the doctor], being that he's got 2 boys that are the same age as our boys, and we see him at the soccer field and wherever else. I feel safe and more comfortable. I knew the nurses, I knew the doctor. [He] did everything that I asked him, and I was able to enjoy what was going on. He made it that much easier for me.


Noah and his labour I would say was probably the worst. I don't know, probably being that I carried to full term and he was so much bigger and heavier. When my water broke, 6 AM, I probably dripped all day 'til about 6 PM. All of a sudden, the contractions just started fast and strong. I was given the opportunity to take my time and do what I wanted. I wasn't told what to do. When I went to Thunder Bay—I don't know if they're older doctors where they strap me up with stirrups and wouldn't let me move around—it was just painful and uncomfortable. In Marathon they let me move around if I wanted to do this, do that. I ended up trying all kinds of different birthing positions because he was 9 pounds—big difference for me from 7 pounds to 9 pounds. He was big. I was probably losing my mind, but [my doctor] was patient. He called in extra nurses and they were great coaches. I got to the point where I had been pushing for 2 hours and I actually did say, "I wonder if he's stuck. I can't do this."

[My doctor] says, "No, I know you can do this. You've done it twice before. The more you make yourself worried, the more you're not going to be able to do it." Once I got over my crying and he got me focused again, I think it maybe took 10 minutes. Worry is always in your mind. It's just a matter of trusting the professionals and trusting yourself.

I had him at ten to 11:00 ... I actually delivered in the washroom because I couldn't get him past my tailbone, so he had me squat on the toilet and push that way. I don't know if it was because he was so big or because I started pushing before I was supposed to, I ended hemorrhaging and I actually had to have, I think, 2½ pints for a blood transfusion. Being in Marathon, losing all this blood made me nervous, but I didn't feel afraid. By 2 AM, [my doctor] was still in the room with me trying to control my bleeding. You feel comfortable with that person and you know that they're not going to want anything different for you than they would for anyone else. I wasn't worried that he was going to ship me out. I wasn't panicking. I trusted him.

My family was here and they all took care of everything. Mom was in the delivery room and the whole whack was out in the waiting room. The idea of having everyone there; being nosy, poking, looking, it just made me tense. But they all came. My family, we choose to tie ourselves together and it's really important to my family to be there. I want them to be close. Afterwards, when he was born, being able to experience that joy with them, that was amazing.

I remember my iron was not even half of what it should be. I had to stay in the hospital for 4 days, just because he wanted to get blood back in me. When I talk to girlfriends about it, they can't get over it that I wasn't afraid. "You had blood, oh my God!"

Labour is a big ordeal. You wait so long for this baby to get here. I don't think I'll be having any more babies, but I'm for having babies here. It gives that sense of not having to travel far, of being at home. It's safe. 

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Competing interests

None declared

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