

Aoife

By Geraldine Conway

27th April, 1983, a day that will stay with me forever.

“Oh God, where is he?”

Sitting uncomfortably behind the driver’s seat, I scanned the area around the bus-stop but there was no sign of my brother. He promised to travel into the city centre with me as I had to get the telephone and electricity bills paid before the baby came.

“What will I do - stay or go?”

Before I could decide, the bus pulled away from the stop making the decision for me.

“Where are the pains coming from and will they ever stop?” I asked myself.

On arriving in town, I made my way to the ESB office and then the AIB bank. I was now in great pain and feeling confused. I went into the phone-box at the top of O’Connell Street and dialled the number of my sister’s office and began to cry. One of the girls answered the phone and remarked on how long it had been since I had called to them there. As she chatted away, all I could think of was how soon she would put me through to Helen.

“Is everything alright? Is it the baby?” she asked as her voice, full of concern, came on the line. “Are you getting pains? How far apart are they?”

On hearing her voice, I began to sob, “What do you mean about how far apart, they just won’t stop.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m in town, O’Connell Street, near The Ambassador cinema,” I replied.

“Stay right there and I will get to you as quickly as possible.”

I moved from the phone-box and stood in front of the Royal Dublin hotel to wait.

“Look at the size of her,” a voice from a gang of youths coming up the street towards me called. “It should be easy to grab her bag.”

I turned and fled into the hotel lobby and stayed there for some time. The pains were growing stronger all the time. When I ventured back outside, I stood nervously waiting until my sister came and put her arm on mine, telling me she had called me a number of times as she had approached.

“Come with me, the hospital is just around the corner and I need to get you there quickly. But, don’t worry, everything will be fine.”

Within minutes, we had arrived at the Rotunda Maternity Hospital, a place I had come to know well over the previous 9 months while attending pre-natal classes and check-up visits. The nurse took my name and other details and located my chart. She asked me if I had had a show and how long it had

been since my waters had broken. When I told her that neither had occurred, she suggested it may be a false alarm.

“What do you mean? What’s happening? Why are you not doing anything?” I asked.

Finally, they brought me to a side ward, put me in a hospital gown and up onto a trolley. A nurse then placed a cone-like instrument on my stomach and got, and then lost, the baby’s heartbeat a number of times. She then covered me with gel and ran an ultrasound across my bump, laughing when the machine tuned into a local pirate radio station.

A doctor was finally called in who, on examining me, was shocked to discover that I was 5cm dilated. She broke my waters and put me on a drip telling me it was to speed the labour up. They put me onto my side, as was normal practice, but the pains were coming hard and fast and it was unbearable.

I turned onto my back telling them that I had attended all my classes and the choice was mine and I was staying in this position. A foetal heart-monitor was then brought in and a nurse placed the sensors inside onto my baby’s head.

“Please do something,” I wept. “ A section, anything, something is very wrong. Please!” I screamed as another contraction came.

After some time, the doctor turned to face me, gently saying, “There is no point in putting you through all that for no reason.”

Stepping back, she removed the sensors from my baby’s head.

One of the nurses quietly wheeled the ultrasound machine away from my trolley.

THE SILENCE THAT FILLED THE ROOM SAID
EVERYTHING...