

# And baby makes

# FIVE

EVEN WHEN YOU'RE A DAB HAND AT GIVING BIRTH, **GILLIAN HARVEY** DISCOVERED THAT LABOUR CAN STILL SPRING A SURPRISE OR TWO



Well, I'm officially a mother of five! Robert Peter Harvey (or Robbie) was born in the early hours of a Tuesday morning, meaning four out of my five kids are 'full of grace', if we're to believe the nursery rhyme.

As someone who's had three previous labours, you'd think I'd be confident at recognising the signs of impending birth – but you'd be wrong. Perhaps because my labour with Evie was an induction, while the twins' arrival was signalled by a dramatic membrane rupture all over the living room floor, I was looking for something more definite than the dull aches I started to feel that Monday evening.

Was I in labour? Or was it just the discomfort of being 38 weeks pregnant?

Problem was, we live 45 minutes from the hospital. Add to that the need to arrange cover for the other kids, and the fact that my deliveries are pretty quick, and you can appreciate my dilemma. Do I go in and risk being sent home? Or do I wait it out and chance giving birth on the side of the road?

I'd have preferred a couple of weeks' notice, preferably in writing and countersigned by

a judge. But after giving things another half an hour, I decided I'd rather go in too early than wait until I was sure and force my husband Ray to play midwife in the back of our crumb-filled Peugeot.

At hospital, the contractions suddenly seemed non-existent, and I was convinced I'd got it wrong. So, when the midwife said I was four centimetres dilated, I could've kissed her! 'I do know my body!' I thought.

As my contractions resumed, I watched the monitor, seeing the numbers build up as each squeeze occurred. It wasn't painful, so I thought I was in for an easy ride. (Note

to self: do not tempt fate... )

I'd booked an epidural, having been converted during my labour with Lily (I'll just say episiotomy and leave it there), but had to 'woman up' for the first hour until I reached five centimetres, breathing through the pain.

At last, the anaesthetist was called for. "She'll only be 10 minutes," the midwife said with a smile. 'Only?' I thought. Ten minutes in pain is very different from a normal 10 minutes!

Suddenly, my labour went into overdrive. Back-to-back contractions, and more pain

than I've ever experienced before.

I'm usually a quiet, unassuming person (at least in public) – but by the time the anaesthetist arrived, I was fulfilling every stereotype I'd hoped to avoid. Not only could I not stay still enough for them to get the needle in my back, I was also guilty of: Crushing the lovely midwife's hand; Screaming (stock phrases like: "Oh, my God", "Help me!" and "Don't TOUCH me!"); Swearing; Saying the M word: "Mummy!"

In my defence, the baby was bearing down, and once they'd given up trying to get the anaesthetic in, I was ready to push.

I'd progressed from five to ten centimetres in about half an hour and, with the first squeeze of my overworked pelvic muscles, my waters shot across the room, soaking the four midwives at the business end.

I clutched Ray's hand and prepared to deliver. Two minutes later, 7lb 1oz Robbie was thrust into my arms. I felt a rush of love that made up for every moment of pain.

I won't lie – labour can be agony. But the mind is a wonderful thing. Within seconds of holding my tiny baby, it was all forgotten.

Labours last hours; babies a lifetime. So a little embarrassment and some short-lived pain are a small price to pay. That said, I'm not sure the poor midwife with the bruised hand would agree...

“Holding my baby, I felt a rush of love that made up for every second of pain”

