

thespin

BRITISH COLUMBIA PARAPLEGIC ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN 2011

See the World by Sea

Cruising offers an incredibly
accessible travel opportunity





Go-Go Mom

Many BCPA peers embark on the journey that is motherhood. Teri Thorson shares her story 18 months in.

Excerpt from The Spin Magazine Autumn 2011
Find this issue online at sci-bc.ca/stories/spin-magazine/

Teri Thorson has worn many hats in her lifetime—some before the October 1996 car crash that left her with a C6/7 complete SCI, and many more after. She's been a model, Olympic athlete, go-go dancer, fashion designer, inspirational speaker, and a wife. But she says her greatest satisfaction has come from playing the role of mother since the birth of her son Lucian 18 months ago.

The decision to have a child didn't come easy. "I can't say I always wanted to have a family for sure—I was always on the fence about it," says Thorson.

Thorson's SCI wasn't the only factor in the decision. Brad, her able-bodied husband, suffers from Crohn's disease and was fearful that he would pass the disease on to their child.

A year after they were married, the couple overcame their concerns, and their desire to have a child won out.

Preparing for pregnancy, birth and motherhood took time and effort. But Thorson insists that it's the same for any mother. "Most everything I experienced through pregnancy, birth and post partum were things that every mother goes through, injury or not," she says. "It was all very normal."

In the time leading up to pregnancy, Thorson's focus was achieving optimal health. "In preparation for pregnancy, I read lots of books, blogs and websites," she says. "I made sure I was in good shape, I ate well and took the required vitamins. I also established communication with a physiatrist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, nutritionist and sex therapist, all of whom provided me information on what to look forward to in my pregnancy and delivery."

The list of specialists grew once Thorson became pregnant. "I was seeing an obstetrician, an anesthesiologist, a hematologist, a dietitian, a lactation consultant and the coordinator at the hospital I was planning on delivering at. We did a pre-natal class and I connected with my community health nurse to get some help in my home as I got bigger and less independent."

Thorson was impressed by the professionalism of her support network. "I would say that the attitude and willingness from my physicians was very positive, but of course there were a few that wanted to err on the side of caution," she explains.

In particular, her physicians were concerned with her request to labour at home. Like others with quadriplegia, Thorson is susceptible to autonomic dysreflexia—a dangerous elevation of blood pressure in response to pain that can't be felt because of paralysis. "Because of that risk, some doctors wanted to admit me before my due date and induce labour. However, since we are only 10 minutes away from the hospital, they relented and allowed me to reach my due date at home."

Thorson also had a specific request when it came to the epidural. "I agreed to have an epidural, but I wanted it administered after I went into labour, which they agreed to but wanted to site it first. Unfortunately, when the needle was going in for the epidural, I went dysreflexic. So I agreed to start the epi-

dural right away on a very small dose and on a pump so I could increase the dosage as I felt I needed it when labour came on."

After a successful vaginal delivery, the new parents pulled together a fabulous support team for their return home, where Thorson began her long recovery. "After I had the baby we had a doula (a person who provides non-medical support to women and their families during labour and childbirth), a nurse, a care worker, and a lactation consultant, all helping me and the baby. And my husband, friends and family provided me with invaluable support and advice and continue to do so today—without such great support, I don't know if I could do it."

Interestingly, Thorson didn't make any home modifications, or make or purchase any special equipment to assist her with daily "mom" chores. "I made the choice not to, as I had—and still have—a nanny to help me when my husband is at work and when I run into any issues," she says.

However, Thorson is the first to admit that being a mom with a SCI has had its challenges. "When Lucian first arrived home, I couldn't get him in and out of his bassinet and I gave up trying to change his diaper as my hand function was just not good enough. I could get him undressed but not dressed, I could get him out of his high chair but not into it. I couldn't lift him up onto my lap from the floor and I had to play with him on our bed as I couldn't get down on the floor. I couldn't take him out in his stroller or in and out of his car seat either, although at least he sat well on my lap so I could wheel around with him."

As Lucian gets older, however, some of these difficulties have all but disappeared. For example, she can now easily get Lucian out of his crib and off the floor as long as he helps.

Thorson admits that the hardest part of motherhood right now is not being able to keep up with her very active son. "He still sits well on my lap," she says. "But when he wants down, he's off and running—usually to places I can't get to. I have a power chair now too, but even with that I can't get everywhere he goes. I can't take him out on my own, so when we're alone it doesn't take long before he's bored and is into everything. Luckily I've learned a few tricks with trial and error along the way to coerce something from him. It's all about communication."

Along the journey of motherhood, she's had to learn to live with strangers assuming the Lucian isn't her son because she uses a wheelchair. And it's still sometimes difficult watching others do activities with him that she can't because of her injury.

But she wouldn't change a thing.

"Every stage Lucian goes through brings new challenges—but also so many great successes. The hugs, kisses, love and happiness he shows us makes it all worth it and assures me that we're doing the right thing."

Would Thorson recommend motherhood to other women with SCI? "I think it's totally up to the individual, disability or not. I don't think having an SCI should stop you from having a family if you really want one. Yes, there may be a bit more risk involved, but we have just as much to offer as any other mother." ■