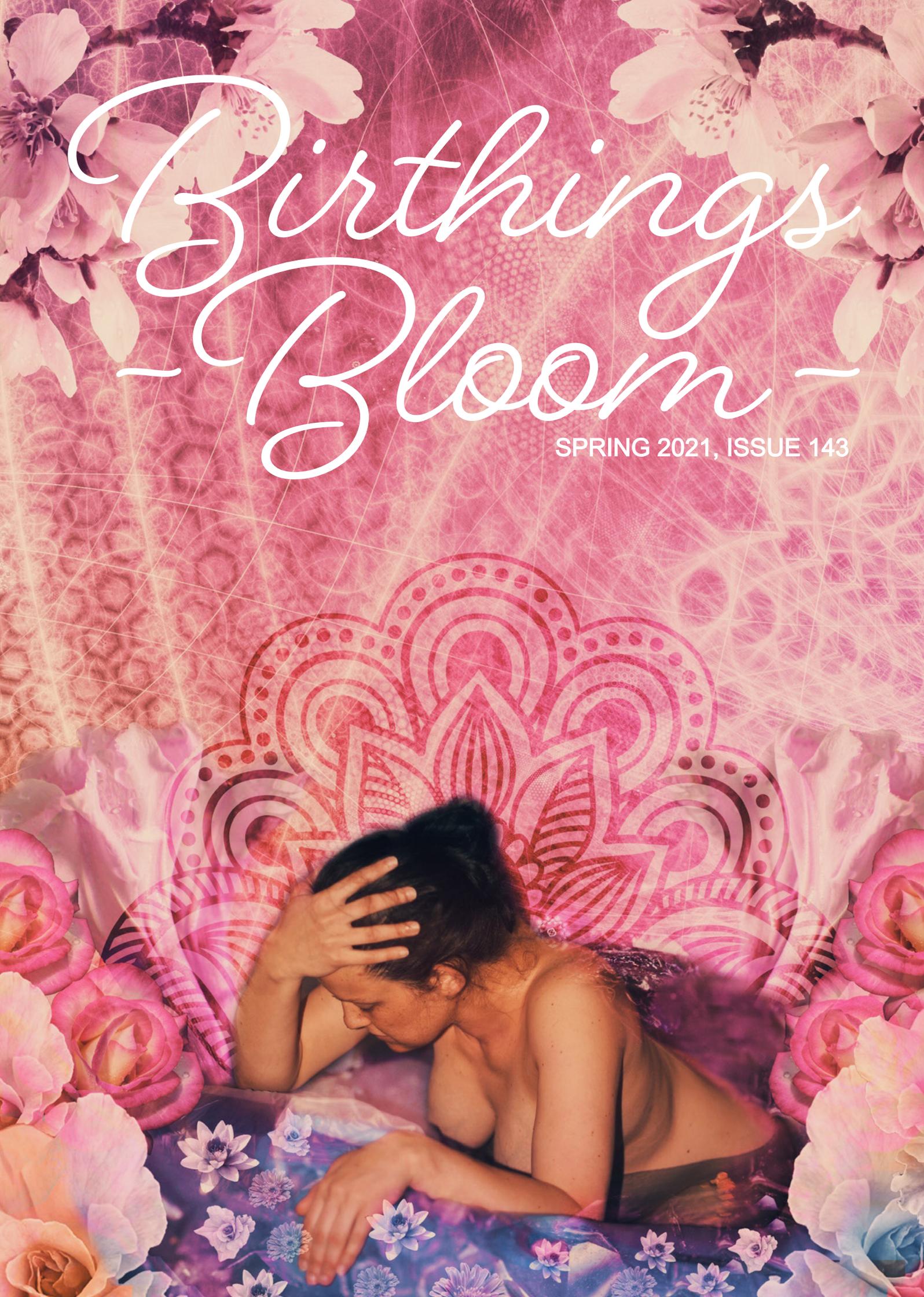


# Birthing - Bloom -

SPRING 2021, ISSUE 143



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HOME BIRTH NEW SOUTH WALES



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# Editor's Letter

## WELCOME TO SPRING

When I flicked back to my previous Editor's letter it was surreal and haunting to see what I had written about mothers birthing in a pandemic, as I was now one of you. Three weeks before COVID hit in 2020, I gave birth to Ruben. Right in the middle of the 2021 lockdown, I gave birth to Aubrey. Except this time, I get to tell my story because thanks to you, incredible readers and contributors, I had the knowledge, education and opportunity to challenge my own beliefs about birth and chose a homebirth! So thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have opened my eyes and allowed me to experience the Homebirth High and completely rewrite my birth narrative and heal my previous trauma. I've written some parts of my birth story, but the majority has been done by my mother.

I couldn't tell my birth story on my own because it isn't just mine. It is all of ours. The experience of having my own mother witness me giving birth in the exact way I dream of for all women, is the greatest gift I could have experienced. Compared to my first birth, this was a non-event. It was calm and so beautiful. Just two hours of active labour & three pushes to meet my son. I dug deep within myself to bring my baby into the world and heal the trauma I carried for both myself and Ruben. I'll never know where that strength came from, but I'll forever be grateful for being a woman and being at the helm of such power and magnificence. I understood the pain was present, but now, I knew its purpose and exactly what it was bringing me. I trusted my body and motherhood had shown me that everything is temporary and this too (each wave) shall pass. With my boys, I am now fully in bloom and not who I used to be, but that is ok. Just as the seasons change, so must we.

Our theme for this issue is Bloom. Nothing forces a woman to Bloom more than motherhood. From the moment your first contraction hits, there is nowhere to hide. The intensity of this new journey is upon you and it requires you to be completely stripped back, renewed and reborn. It is beautiful, overwhelming and incomparable to anything else in life. At times I feel honoured to be consistently in a state of blooming, other times I feel exhausted and want to just close up until the next season. But the magic of women is that we don't. We keep going. We push on each and every day because we know renewal and regeneration is our purpose and we must show up for the incredible little people who brought us to this state and season.

Thank you to all of our wonderful contributors for your generosity in sharing without fear. The strength you have shown is integral to letting all women see another side of birth and confidence in themselves to continue blooming, no matter the season.



Bonnie

[bonniehook.com](http://bonniehook.com)

# President's Report

Dear HBNSW community,

Welcome to this issue of Birthings magazine! At the time of writing this, Homebirth NSW is gearing up for our Homebirth Awareness Week celebrations, and it is set to be the most AMAZING celebration despite the current lockdown situation – we have an array of Zoom meets and topics, a raffle, and some fun social media activities planned! Our committee has been pottering away over the past few months, working in advocacy, welcoming in new members including our new events coordinator, Rebecca Bell, and running multiple new events! One was a breastfeeding webinar, and another was a beautiful women's circle, an extraordinary way to provide connection in these difficult times.

Many of our committee members are also now working with Homebirth Australia who are planning a conference for early next year (2022)! It is set to be absolutely incredible, with amazing speakers and such important topics being discussed. We've also seen a further extension on the exemption provided for Privately Practising Midwives to hold Professional Indemnity Insurance for homebirths – this is something we will have to continue working on in the near future. We are still working on the GP referral refusal issue, and have a fancy new pamphlet that you'll soon be able to print off and take to your GP to help them understand their role in referral to a Privately Practising Midwife, and clear up some of the miscommunication and misinformation out there about this.

We've welcomed lots of new advertisers, sponsors, members and midwives to our organisation and continued with our marketing, advocacy and membership communications (newsletter, blog and Birthings magazine). Last report I mentioned how we'd welcomed three new babies to our committee, and their mums have shared their incredible birth stories in this issue (thank you Bonnie, Claire and Jaime!!).

So, what can you look forward to seeing over the coming months? More of the above! More partnership, more connection, more online events and celebrations. We're connecting in with other state-based homebirth committees to see how our collective voices can make changes in multiple areas, and you can see our focus areas on our campaigns page. I also encourage each and every one of you to get involved in advocacy, whether it be at a local level, state or national. Right now our voices absolutely need to be heard, and if we are to witness an increase in accessibility and affordability of homebirth in NSW (and Australia!) then we are only going to achieve that with lots of people making these small steps together. If you'd like to join us, please email me at [president@homebirthnsw.org.au](mailto:president@homebirthnsw.org.au) – I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Our next issue will be all about empowerment and as always, we'd love to share your theme articles, birth stories and birth announcements! Until then I'm sending you blessings for health, safety, beautiful births and lots of connection and time with those you love most.

*Aimee*



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# Latest News

## “WORLD-FIRST STUDY LINKS BIRTH INTERVENTIONS AND LONG-TERM CHILDHOOD ILLNES”

**UCLan | 1 Dec 2020**

Tasmanian mothers are increasingly deciding to give birth at home after their negative and traumatic experiences of labouring and birthing on hospital maternity wards.

[Read the story here](#)

## I'M AN OBSTETRICIAN. STOP STIGMATIZING HOME BIRTHS.

**Slate | 9 Mar 2021**

We tend to think of them as needlessly risky, but things can go wrong in any setting.

[Read the story here](#)

## QUEEN'S GRANDDAUGHTER ZARA TINDALL GIVES BIRTH TO BABY BOY ON BATHROOM FLOOR

**7News | 25 Mar 2021**

The 38-year-old daughter of Princess Anne safely delivered her son Lucas Philip ... weighing in at 8 pounds, 4 ounces (3.7kg).

[Read the story here](#)

## HILARY DUFF WELCOMES HER THIRD CHILD AND REVEALS THE BABY'S SWEET NICKNAME

**7News | 28 Mar 2021**

She shared a photo of her family welcoming little Mae in what looks like a home birth setup.

[Read the story here](#)

## HOME BIRTH IS AN OPTION

**CoastCommunity | 24 Mar 2021**

Home birth is becoming increasingly popular on the Central Coast, with Georgia Lienemann of Jilliby saying that she chose home birth twice because she wanted to feel empowered and in control.

[Read the story here](#)

## THE UNTOLD BENEFITS OF HOMEBIRTH

**CoastCommunity | 4 May 2021**

As someone who was lucky enough to birth two children at home, this is the information – or at least a small portion of it – that I wish I'd had access to before embarking on my homebirth journey

[Read the story here](#)

## MUM GIVES BIRTH TO WHOPPING 12LB BABY WITH JUST GAS AND AIR IN INCREDIBLE HOME BIRTH

**Mirror | 14 Jun 2021**

A mum-of-four had an “incredible” home birth when she delivered a whopping 12lb baby girl with just gas and air for pain relief.

[Read the story here](#)

## 'STACEY SOLOMON'S POST ABOUT HER HOMEBIRTH MAKES ME GLAD I HAD MY OWN'

**GRAZIA | 8 Oct 2021**

For some mothers, a home birth can help to rewrite the narrative on previous birth trauma

[Read the story here](#)

# Latest Podcasts

## MATRESCENCE PODCAST

Welcome to The Matrescence Podcast. Our goal with these conversations is to share thoughts, ideas, questions and where possible, evidence based research on what Matrescence really is - the mental emotional and spiritual journey of being a woman, not just the physical nature of having a baby! So much of the discussion about Motherhood is physical and rarely deals with the emotional, psychological and frankly spiritual changes that happen during this season. Without language, we can feel alone. So come with us, your hosts Bree and Kelly, on a journey to entertain and share ideas that will empower! This podcast is for the woman who follows all the rules. Who meal preps and time blocks, outsources and up skills, only to find themselves simultaneously overwhelmed, and underwhelmed by what life has to offer. It is a safe space for us to dare to be discontent and to question what is really working for us. From our own experiences, what we have read and researched; and the occasional guest, we will give you the language to connect and understand your own journey.

[Listen here](#)

## PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND BEYOND MEDIA

Pregnancy Birth & Beyond, where stories, science, traditions and new ideas meet. A unique podcast for consumers and clinicians alike working to deliver non-sensationalist useful information to parents, families, healthcare providers and the wider community from a strong source base.

[Listen here](#)

## THE MOTHER SPACE - DIVINE FEMININE AFTER BIRTH

A conversation with Diana Cruz, a Sacred Ceremonies for Women facilitator with a focus on supporting mothers in their Matrescence. We talk all about the deep transformation that takes place when we become mothers. Diana shares the touching story that lead her to doing the work she does today in supporting women through this transition and we dive deep into the concept of matrescence and why so many of us struggle to slow down and listen to our bodies once we become mothers.

[Listen here](#)

## INTO THE DEEP - FOURTH TRIMESTER SERIES

The fourth trimester? What is it? What does that even mean? We've done the hard yards with the pregnancy and the birth, can't we just focus on the baby now?! In this series we share conversations with leading experts that cover every angle of the fourth trimester and why taking care of the mother is so vital during this season of motherhood.

[Listen here](#)

## THE LADY PALACE PODCAST EP #3

Interview with Jane Hardwicke Collings, who is a midwife, teacher, writer and menstrual educator. Jane is an agent of the goddess, helping women remember the importance of being connected to their body and their menstrual cycle, Jane gives workshops in Australia and internationally on mother and daughter.

[Listen here](#)

# Vale Akal Khalsa

It is with great sadness that we advise our members of the passing of Akal Khalsa, a dear and treasured midwife, long time supporter and one of the founding members of our organisation. Akal was an incredible asset to the homebirth community, and she will be dearly missed by our community, her friends and by her daughter, Pritham Khalsa, and grandchildren, Jasmine Sherlock, Kaha and Mārū Packman and Forest Khalsa. Below are some words from those who knew her personally.



I met Akal when I first arrived in Sydney in 2006. She was a long-standing private midwife and word about town was she could ruffle feathers. With this information, I knew we would be friends and we were the best of friends up to the day of her passing. As an elder woman and midwife, she was my friend and mentor and was always there with down to earth advice.

We came from very different generations of Midwifery practice and not all of her advice I would take on. She once looked at me very seriously and said, "Now Jacqui, do you get your ladies to prepare their nipples for breastfeeding?" I told her, I did not; she looked at me sternly and informed me this was something she always did and advised me to consider this in my practice. Suffice to say, this is not something I have taken on.

In her retirement, she moved to New Zealand to be with her Daughter Pritham and 3 grandchildren: Kaha, Mārū and Forest. She had just completed the ski season for 2021, attended Pilates regularly and had taken up beekeeping and was an active member of the beekeeping group. She was very happy and thoroughly doted on her family.

I think of her now reunited with her son, Raj who passed away in 2010. She will be looking down at me telling me to dry my eyes and stop being silly. I loved her dearly and will miss her terribly. Goodbye my love.

- JACQUI WOOD



I am sad to hear the news of Akal's passing. My only real peer in Australia. Starting our practices in 1978 as homebirth midwives in Sydney, from very different backgrounds and varying in our approaches. Akal was such a fierce mother for the women who were her clients. In the tiredest of times when I needed another brain to work through a situation at a birth, I would call her and we would talk it through. She did the same with me.

Akal did me the honour of asking me to be her midwife when she became pregnant with Raj Gopal Singh. It was a lovely birth. Tragically, 11 years ago Raj was killed in a catastrophic road accident. Akal called to tell me the news. I'm glad that we were able to connect and see each other and talked about Raj and the next steps in our lives. Akal believed she would be with her son after her death and this is where I see her now.

- MAGGIE LECKY-THOMPSON



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**Contact: [karenmccloy@calmbirth.com.au](mailto:karenmccloy@calmbirth.com.au)**

# My Home Birth wasn't what I expected

BY SARA DOBSON

The night my son was born was surreal, sublime, the most exhilarating, intense and beautiful heart-opening day of my life. There, in the dark of our living room, two midwives and a doula held space for my husband & I as we birthed our beautiful and very large son (all 4.5kgs).

My pregnancy and birth journey started 6yrs before I successfully fell pregnant when I stumbled upon a birth documentary called 'The Face of Birth'.

Have you heard of it? You should seek it out if not. It is the original Birth Time movie and it completely blew my mind. My views of birth changed for good (I watched it every month for a year!) as I learnt that:

- women have an internal and innate power to birth without the need for intervention;
- homebirths - the safety & privacy the space of a home can provide can facilitate the natural 'openings and of unfolding' of birth;
- how 'freedom of choice' plays such an important role in the where and how of birth.

That powerful movie (and the many more I found all those years ago), planted a clear and determined idea for how I wanted to birth. I held onto it for 6years, through our infertility struggles, IVF harvesting,



body aches and pains, drugging and pregnancy losses, until the day we fell pregnant, finally in a position to make my own birthing decisions.

There is so much to love about homebirth, from the feelings of safety you get knowing that you are in a familiar space; the positive & encouraging energy it ensures (it is so quiet and serene). But, what I was most impressed with was how it facilitates the Maiden to Mother transition 'uninterrupted'. Don't get me wrong, no matter how you birth that transition will occur, I was eager to be that woman, in her own space. And it was..I honestly can't find the right words to express the wonder of that night. It was so beautiful! Janine, Karen & Brooke were freaking phenomenal!!! Like rock-star amazing!! I have so

much respect for Birth Workers and what they do!!

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I wish every woman could experience what I experienced that night. There is a wonderful card in our [Positive Birth Affirmation Card Deck](#), an African proverb I love that says:

*“Being pregnant and giving birth is like crossing a narrow bridge. People can accompany you to the bridge, they can even greet you on the other side, but you walk that bridge alone.”*

No one can prepare you for birth! You can read the books, do the classes, eat the right foods, exercise, can be mentally ready, know the stages of birth, you can prepare your mind with meditation,



affirmations and you can book the best birth workers but the blunt fact is you won't know how your birth will unfold until you are in it! You and you alone are the only person who can birth your baby. You have to find the strength to dive deep within, to find your powerful, brave self because she will carry you across the threshold.

### HOW DO I KNOW THIS?

Because I found that brave, powerful woman inside of myself, and so can you! Women for millennia have been finding their brave selves and birthing their babies!

### THE UNEXPECTED

My homebirth was not what I expected! I mean, it was incredible, but it was also hard, fast, calm, serene, challenging, shocking, nauseating and painful! I had a quick labour - 6hrs establish and 2hrs active. My mental focus & strength was astounding, but I put that down to my Birth Affirmation cards and my dedication to visualise, meditate and prepare in the days and months leading up to that day. Mental preparation plays a powerful and important role in birth. It really does!

So what caught me off guard? What

was it about my Homebirth that didn't go as planned? Was it the cold, intense adrenaline-fueled shake I got once the contractions started? Or the awful pain my hips created because of that adrenaline shake? Or was it the moment my son got stuck in my pelvis and had to be pulled out? (All thanks to a combination of tight ligaments, old dance injuries, my son's wide shoulders and my positioning in the pool - I have since learnt about Spinning Babies and Optimal Maternal Position and would love to explore these techniques next time).

### SO WHAT WAS IT?

Sure I tore, I lost a lot of blood, and at one point, during the transition, I cursed myself for wanting a homebirth, away from the lure of that blasted epidural (hello crisis of confidence) but I wasn't surprised by any of these things either.

That night, I came face to face with a woman I had never met! She was strong, stronger than I have ever been in my entire life. She was self-assured, loud, in control for the most part as she smiled, sang and drew comfort from her [Affirmation Cards](#), internally controlled her pain with her breath.

### SHE WAS SO SURE, SO CONFIDENT OF THE PROCESS.

I think it was because she drew strength from the knowledge she and her baby were safe and in the sanctuary of their own home. There was no one to fight, no negotiating to do, no bright lights, no medical machines making annoying beeping sounds, no privacy curtains being swung open and closed by a busy team, “just checking on your progress”.

Instead, there was a team that

trusted in her ability. They sat there in the darkness with her, quietly, encouragingly, and emphatically holding space for her while her body & baby did what they needed to do.

That woman, the one I brought forth that day from the depths of my soul, was the woman who held my hand and walked me through those final stages of labour. She was the 'unexpected' element in my homebirth and I am so pleased she was there.

**SHE CONTINUES TO WALK ME THROUGH MY MATRESCENCE JOURNEY.**



Sara Dobson is the creator and designer of Best Birth Co and their hugely popular Positive Birth Affirmation Card Deck. Sara is passionate about helping women birth their babies calmly, confidently and without fear. Her range of Birth Tools are designed to help you feel empowered come their birthing day. She lives with her husband and son on the Northern Beaches of Sydney.

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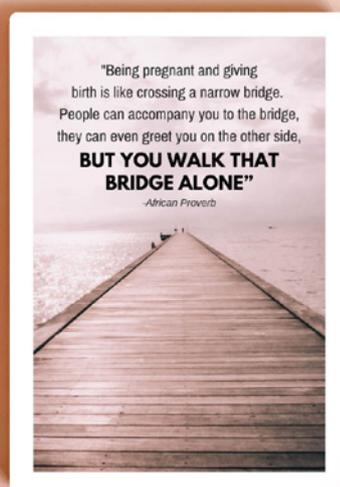
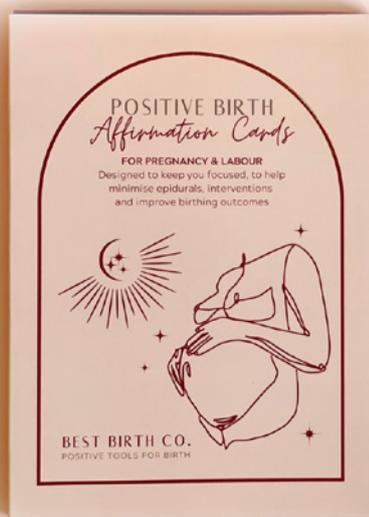
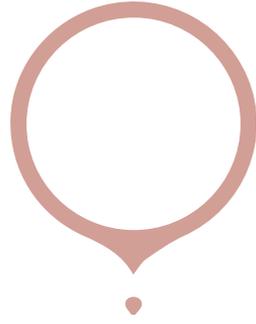


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# The Birth of Elly

BY AZURE RIGNEY

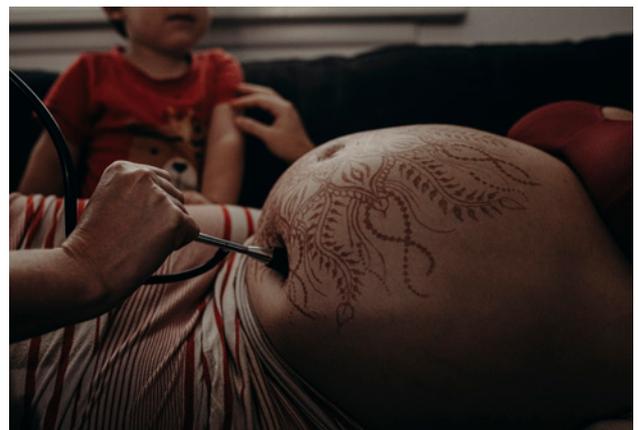
## PART 1- ADVOCACY

A story of activism and a little baby girl born at home on International Women's Day, in a country that barely respects women in public policy, and almost has disdain for mothers. Even our feminists avoid recognising birth as the forgotten feminist issue or buy into the patriarchy's messaging of, 'a healthy baby is all that matters'. While the civilian maternity system is bad, the military's maternity offerings are even more restrictive. In a 2017 copy of Birthings, I wrote about my middle child's birth.

This third pregnancy, I shared the news with my midwives, husband and the Federal Health Minister (in that order, lol). I wrote about human rights and my request to access funded private homebirth choice and received unsatisfactory responses. I engaged a lawyer who advised me to change tactics and write about safety. This application was also denied. My final request focused on savings to the taxpayer and included a thinly veiled threat of freebirth and reporting my GP to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, (AHPRA) if he didn't write the referral to my private midwife. I included a letter from the Federal Health Minister dated the year prior to Maternity Consumer Network, Maternity Choices Australia and Homebirth Australia (MCN, MCA and HBA) around the Federal Government supporting homebirth with an intrapartum exemption and misinformation around state hospitals running publicly funded homebirth programs, as obviously Queensland is the only state to have never offered this. I had a chat with the President of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), who sent me an email linking the second part of the position statement stating, 'women choosing homebirth to have 'maximal support'. I was given a letter from the CEO of the Australian College of Midwives (ACM) advising homebirth as safe for low risk women. I consulted a woman centred OB-GYN on the Sunshine Coast who supplied me with a letter reiterating my low risk status. No questions about OB-GYN's insurance are raised by funders, but

on legal advice, my midwife was forced to divulge her insurance certificate in order to support the payment of my homebirth.

In the meantime, I had calls and appointments with the local Birth Centre (BC) and told them my parallel state-based advocacy plans to take the largest health service in the country to the Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHRC). These midwives are highly constrained but egged me on so that soon they might offer publicly funded homebirth as an extension of the birth centre (virtual beds) and practice in their full scope. They arranged email correspondence from the BC consultant who offered me an induction in order to mitigate risk of a roadside birth during my speedy labours. I advised that I was unwilling to accept the risk of induction from increased Postpartum Haemorrhage (PPH), tearing/episiotomy, c-section, breastfeeding/bonding and other hospital acquired complications/infections that impact most service users including research to back all this up. I was formally declined access to a publicly funded homebirth, due to 'No QLD Health Guidelines'. I used this evidence to lodge a complaint with the QHRC who arranged a free 1-hour appointment with Legal Aid. The Human Rights lawyer was one that I had been following for a while and I explained I wanted to be a test case. She said it was very helpful. I'm very low risk, have a history of precipitous births, have had 1 negative



hospital and 1 positive homebirth and live locally to a hospital. However, as a test case I would have needed to keep going to appointments and pretend I intended on birthing there and ideally being low income would help the cause. The role of QHRC would be to facilitate conciliation where you can ask for economic and non-economic outcomes such as Queensland Health (QH) to implement PFHB and cost of the Private Practice Midwife (PPM) reimbursed. So alas we are still looking for a woman willing to go through these processes.

Luckily by now I had approval from the Commonwealth to have my PPM's bill paid, however it came at great personal cost with GP relationship breakdown and additional scrutiny. So, you could say it was a stressful pregnancy, I was on crutches for a back injury with some pretty extreme pain too.

## PART 2 - TURNING IN AND THE BIRTH

Unlike last time, I hired a Brisbane birth photographer Emma who I had been stalking since living in Sydney, turns out she is one of the coolest people I've ever met so it was a really unexpected bond and support. During my 36-week pregnancy appointment with the 2xPPM, Emma and my family, my midwife Maet asked, 'What is the most important thing to you?' I replied looking at Emma - the photos! Her colleague Meg suggested I could focus my attention on the baby, but I explained I didn't need to as the baby would be born regardless of what I did. I love that I have videos and photos of the kids learning to use the doppler, pinard and fetoscope at various appointments. Due to my history of quick labours I planned to call everyone ASAP and didn't mind if they didn't arrive in time but would prefer they were there, especially Emma, who also happens to be a midwife and has had homebirths.

The night before I went into labour my toddler was vomiting; we didn't know if it was gastro or ice cream induced. I finally fell asleep at 1am listening to Mount Isa Birth stories interviewing one of my faves, Rachel Reed. After a few Braxton Hicks around 4am I suspected I was about to start labour at 38.5 weeks. I tried to sleep for a little more and then potted around to put on makeup and find a cute bra as I was in early labour. My midwife had arrived as the sun started to rise and cocked an eyebrow but said nothing when she noticed Emma had already arrived but lived further away. A labouring woman is particularly aware of her surroundings, and I was so content, everything was just as I had imagined.

After clearing the kitchen to boil some rarely used instruments, Maet asked me if she could use the doppler. Archie, aged 2.5 at the time, piped up and said, 'No this is how you do it!' and took it off her, LOL! By the time Meg arrived my labour had definitely slowed, I was so excited they made it and I felt like it was a party. Maet suggested being alone in a warm dark room, she's really quite intuitive. Of course, within minutes my labour picked up again. I didn't need to use the toilet much this time, so I popped into the birth pool about 40 mins prior to her birth. I got a bad stitch in my back which my beautiful midwife massaged out and waters didn't break until about 6 minutes before the birth. Unlike my hospital birth where I screamed in frustration, 'why are these people so incompetent, how long does it take to get a walking epidural?' or my first homebirth, thinking 'I can imagine how good an epidural is right now but f\*\*k riding in the car in labour,' to this time 'my back pain has reduced due to oxytocin but gosh contractions are painful, I wonder if it's this bad due to all the gluten I've eaten this pregnancy'. And then back to focusing on birthing in my primal brain. Hubby had given the 2.5



and 4yr old snacks and screens but every 30mins they would wander in and cuddle or ask questions. Having them there wasn't a distraction and when hubby needed to go support them, Emma or my midwife would support me, exactly how I needed. As usual I needed ice to chew on while pushing. The kids could hear my deep moaning ramp up, so they came out and hubby encouraged them to stay as baby was about to be born. I love [re-watching the film](#) seeing what cheeky things they got up to in the background as I was busy birthing

And just like that she was born. I was a little offended she was only given an apgar of 8. I just knew she was perfect (albeit squished). Ahh, but breastfeeding was painful, and those afterbirth pains are really something. Thank god I was in my own home to be comfortable, imagine being coerced into a postnatal hospital transfer for paperwork/registration purposes or in order to access a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) number for planned hospital birth. I'd had no vaginal exams in pregnancy, birth or postnatally as there was no blood from tearing and I felt ok to wee and poo that day. The next day we cut her cord and I sent the placenta home with Maet to do a print and we went to get her tongue and lip ties lasered. Have I said despite tandem breastfeeding last pregnancy this time I hadn't so establishing breastfeeding was challenging with cracked nipples?



Thank god I could just text Maet a cracked nipple selfie - no need to be in an infection ridden hospital navigating parking etc.

6 days after giving birth I was called onto a QLD Health COVID-19 maternity response group. I was pained reading the human rights violating draft documents around washing breasts and removal of waterbirth access. I follow the best academics in the country and the world wide so feel confident that my evidence is up to date and appropriate compared to the medical lobby's response (usually opposite of biologically normal and the most expensive option available even if limited evidence or inappropriate sources). It was confronting to be in this position and advocate for women to have access to all choices. Later, I put the call on mute and cried. I don't usually get emotional around systemic advocacy, usually I feel frustration and try to distance myself from individual women's stories to protect myself from vicarious trauma. But this time I thought what the hell, I've had the best care and the easiest birth in the world.

Would I have changed anything? That's a hard question. Please contact MCA if you'd like to be part of system advocacy, some positions with hospitals/depts etc are paid or if you're in QLD and would like to be a test case for this new human rights legislation.



Azure is a 31yr old mum of 3 under 6 and wife to Dan. She spends many hours focusing on maternity reform, beginning with HAS now HBNSW and moving on to Maternity Choices Australia (MCA) for more political and systemic engagement in Qld. She will 'retire' from volunteering when reasonable levels of access to continuity and homebirth are achieved to avoid a moral injury. She has produced an inservice on the Qld Human Right Act 2019 and hopes to find an excellent test case using this complaints template.

Please see the advocacy page on [MCA's website](#) for MP briefs and ask both state and federal MP's for a meeting to discuss maternity reform. Inbox MCA on facebook if you need help.

Photo credit: [Emma Jean Photography](#)



*"My hypnobirth was so beautiful that 5 minutes after our hypnobub was born, I said to my husband 'I want to do that AGAIN!'"*

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# Earthed to Birth

BY ONI BLECHER

The sun is still low in the sky, and the world is waking up in that way that the birds, the bees, the petals, and the leaves know too well through their rippling of life and reaching for the sunlight. Every Thursday morning from 7:30am - 9:30am, as the sun casts light on the landscape of our lives; the plants, the grass, the flowers, and eyelids, the soils and the sands slowly warm, and a group of pregnant women meet at an alternating location for the Earthed to Birth pregnancy gardening group.

Two years ago, friends Dani Wolff and Oni Blecher were hanging out. At the time, Dani had started and was running a 200-acre community based around food growing and regenerative agriculture in the Northern Rivers. She was pregnant with her first baby and with her rich background of facilitating community and earth building, she was excited about the prospect of earth-based community in her motherhood journey. Oni was deeply steeped in birth work,

supporting mothers and families in their transition into parenthood through birth and postpartum assistance, craniosacral therapy and as a host of the PBB Media's, Pregnancy, Birth, and Beyond podcast. They vaguely planted an excited seed of one day running a pregnancy support group based around gardening. They imagined a group of pregnant women gathering in the gardens, the greens, the fields, chatting between them, cross pollinating pregnancy and motherhood advice, and learning how to garden and maintain land as they went. They saw women embodied, squatting in their capable and strong bodies. They saw women sitting in circle in the shade, dewy skinned and needing to rest, be soft, or cry in the safety of known faces and hearts. They saw women confident in their gardening skills in the early and sometimes house-bound stages of motherhood, reading their soil, planting their cover crops, and harvesting their meals. They saw new communities; networks

of families with mutual values around nourishing, regenerating, and considering the land. They saw these communities not just taking care of the land and their gardens but taking care of each other. An implicit and omniscient feeling of, "knowing your neighbours"; local mums and families that could swap seeds or trade worm castings with an abundance or whatever is growing at the time.

Fast forward a year and a bit to January 2021, Dani and Oni start Earthed to Birth. Pregnant mothers at various stages of their gestation have been continually joining the pregnancy group since its inception. Dani and Oni facilitate the group between Hungry Earth Agroecology, an acre of organic market gardens located at The Farm in Byron Bay and the children's gardens at Mullumbimby Community Gardens. Every week, Dani and Oni organise guest facilitators to educate on various topics around gardening, sustainable earth practices, body awareness and birth



preparation. Sessions include seed raising, cuttings, soil preparation, compost, bee keeping, birthing on country, postpartum planning, movement in birth, herbalism, and birth education from SheBirths instructor, Nadine. Key gardening and growing educators Venetia and Lydia from hungry earth share the values of motherhood being a pillar of healthy communities and take so much care and pleasure getting to know the mothers and sharing their own green-thumbed wisdom. The Mullumbimby Community gardens have bestowed the children gardens to the group so that we can improve the gardens and reclaim collective custodianship of care, planting and designing the gardens and planning how they could be effectively optimised for mothers and children.

Now, around 9 months on and going strong, mothers from the group have birthed nearly 30 babies collectively. Dani and Oni created a new 'Birthed to Earth' group text stream for the ladies who have birthed. In this chat, they share the joys and vulnerabilities of their journeys. They show photos of their new productive food gardens, ask each other advice about everything from nappies to sex after birth, and organise regular babes in arms meet ups.

There are so many overlapping elements within this group that



create a magic organic matter. Much like how compost feeds the soil and worms, the mash up of a diverse experience of pregnancy and colourful perceptions of birth create a matter that nourishes our group, their birth preparation, and therefore our local communities. Oni and Dani are keen enthusiasts when it comes to healthy families being a microcosm for healthy communities, like the integrity of seed and soil being a microcosm for how the eventuality of that plant can be bioavailable for a human body. This regenerative dynamic can be replicated, optimised, and appropriated through simple frameworks and organisational structures such as Earthed to Birth. The beauty is in the simplicity! They utilise local facilitators, charge a humble \$15 participation fee (while advertising free accessibility for all socio economic groups), pay these

facilitators, and set up a supportive integrative communication forum for the participants after they birth so there are ways of asking for and receiving help.

However, it doesn't end there. Oni and Dani have further visions on how to implement more supportive earth-based pregnancy groups elsewhere so that tending our own soil and growing our own food can become accessible for more families. The metaphor of regenerative gardening within pregnancy and motherhood is not lost on these two women. From both their experiential and intellectual skills base, they are well aware of the intergenerational capacity of groups like 'Earthed to Birth', or any positive and nourishing education during the tender and fertile times of preconception, conception, pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. Mothers, parents, and families that feel supported and cared for will automatically pass positive and long-lasting lessons on to their children and down the family line. If these lessons include how to take care of our environments with planet friendly messaging, the effects of this are immeasurable. Some of the more dire projections of our planet cannot be approached by educating person by person, they must be approached by educating culture by culture so that we have



supportive frameworks that help build and remind us of new ways of being and thinking.

Oni and Dani are in the process of creating a package that they're able to use to train and support other facilitators to start their own Earthed to Birth gardening groups locally and all over the world. In regard to accessibility, Dani and Oni look forward to evolving and making their offering more widely available to more demographics. One of their dreams is to link up with low socio economic, Indigenous, and refugee communities of mothers and birth workers in their local rural areas through appropriate channels in order to create relationships and offerings of grassroots pregnancy and postpartum support. Most universal themes are the foundational meaning of our unified human experience. Child rearing and gardening are two of these. They are humble themes that are often degraded by a consumerist, fast paced, and adolescent masculinised society. They are forgotten deities; the tender and monotonous times of parenting and the slow and consistent art of growing your own edible garden. How can we reclaim these foundations for a warmer, more cohesive, mutually responsible, and respectful society?

On Bundjalung Country, in the Northern Rivers of NSW, Australia,

where Earthed to Birth is held, they are lucky enough to have many local Indigenous custodians; Indigenous culture keepers with direct lineage of the land, knowledge, wisdom, connection, and understanding of what it means to birth on country. Earthed to Birth sessions generally run in 6-month cycles. To start each cycle, Oni and Dani ask Ella Noah Bancroft, local Bundjalung women to come and welcome the mothers to country. She talks to the women about the history of this land. This welcome session goes beyond words and their meaning. Ella's life work is to bring people to return to the essence of belonging, to respect the land they're on, the origins of the land and who has cared for it. The area being rich in water and river systems, Ella reminds the women of their own feminine waters, the waters of pregnancy, and how they're conduits for magic. She urges them to connect to country; of the absolute honour it is to birth on traditional birthing grounds, and how to deepen connection, respect, and listening. In the 6-month cycle, Oni and Dani are lucky enough to receive facilitation from at least three indigenous women. Being continually in the process of respecting and acknowledging the country they are on; Dani and Oni also want to remind themselves to listen more deeply and respectfully to the land and its origins.

The birth preparation side of Earthed to Birth is rich and warm. At the start of every session before the facilitator begins, Oni and Dani do a check-in, where everyone sits in a circle to chat about how they have been in their personal life and pregnancy journey. At the beginning of the cycle, as a group, they agree on some basic respectful communication guidelines. These guidelines allow the women to feel safe and secure sharing in confidence. They may talk about updates with their maternity care providers, their relationship with their birth partner, their excitement or concerns about birthing, their current physiological realities including changes in sleep and how they feel in their body. With a large variation of models of care being chosen for birth represented in the group, its heart-warming to see acceptance and openness for all choices. Earthed to Birth has remained a non-judgemental group, where we can cheer on a mother planning for a home birth VBAC, private obstetric care, private midwife, or a birth centre birth. As the blossoming and collective overlapping blooms, our group walks into motherhood together. We hold and catch each other in all stages, as does the happening of the cycle of healthy soil, gentle conscious seed planting and eventual harvesting. The humble foundations of our community sing together in these weekly groups and this singing will continue into motherhood like the hum of a beehive at dawn.



Oni is a Northern River's local with a unique understanding of human nature and the human body through the creative arts and physiological fields.

Photos: Supplied.

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# The Birth of Logan

BY JAIME LEIGH HAWKINS

On the 13th March in the late afternoon, I started to have consistent surges, between 5 and 10 minutes apart for a number of hours. I called my team. We all expected things to move quite quickly as my labour with my first baby, Maverick, was only 5 hours.

My midwife, Jacqui, doula, Aimee and photographer, Sarah arrived at around 8pm. I was going between bouncing on the ball and leaning over the lounge. The birth pool was filled, and I got in. The relief was instant. I had my birth playlist playing, reading my affirmations on the wall and having my husband pour water over my back and my sweet Maverick rubbing my shoulder. Aimee was keeping me well hydrated. My pain was significantly less when I felt Matt's hands on me, it made my skin tingle.

At about midnight, Jacqui told me she thought that baby's position was causing my consistent contractions, but I was still in early labour and that I should head to bed and try and get some rest and that she would drop by in the morning to check on me.

I jumped into bed with Maverick and had lots of cuddles. My contractions eased and I had a great night's sleep.

On the 17th of March surges started strong and consistently at about 7pm, just after dinner. These sensations were much stronger than before. I went to bed with Maverick, with the mindset that my baby was never going to come. I was 40+3 at this stage having had days of prodromal labour. I was already exhausted.

I was awoken at 11pm with intense surges only a few minutes apart. I stayed in bed for a few hours, breathing and cuddling Maverick. I got up at around 2am and woke Matt. I stood in the shower and the surges were intense, toe curling. I moaned. I roared.

Matt called my birth team again and they arrived at around 4am. They filled the birth pool again and I got in. Once again, the water provided such a huge

relief. I swayed and moaned, vocalisation helping immensely. Maverick got in the pool with me and rubbed my belly.

At around 8am, everything slowed again. I asked Jacqui for a vaginal examination because I was so defeated and needed to know what my cervix was doing. I was 2cm dilated. We decided to send Mav to preschool, Matt to work and I was going to go back to bed to try and get some rest. I slept for about 2 hours and was awoken at 11am with intense surges 2-3 minutes apart. I tried to rest between surges and listened to my Hypnobirthing tracks, but I could not concentrate.

My mother in law came around midday and brought lunch. I couldn't eat. My surges consistently stayed 2-3 minutes apart unless I was lying down. I stayed lying down in bed to get a break and attempted to get rest, but it wasn't happening.

At around 1:30pm the sensations changed. I knew immediately that baby had moved into a full posterior position.



At around 2:30pm I messaged Jacqui and told her, "I don't know how much longer I can do this". She called soon after and helped me to relax, telling me that my body was doing exactly what I had to do to bring my baby down.

When Matt got home at around 5pm he was doing hip squeezes during surges and putting counter pressure on my back. Mav was happily playing in his toy room, coming in every so often to tell me I was being too loud!

From this point, things got quite blurry. I lost control a bit... no, actually, I lost control a lot!

I had a bloody show at around 6pm. This was SO exciting. It was something different, progression! Jac said she would make her way over. I think she got to our house around 7pm.

When she walked in, I told her I wanted to die. I told her I was in fact dying, "No sis, you're not dying. Let's hop up and get into the shower".

So, I got in the shower around 7:30ish. I tried to stand but couldn't at this point. I was then on all fours and I threw up. Jacqui was sitting on the floor in the doorway telling me that I was doing great.

Aimee arrived at about 9pm and I believe this is when Sarah was called. I was back on my bed, really out of control. It was a relief to see her.

Matt never faulted. He was exactly where I needed to be at every turn. He never freaked out, not once did he ever question me or my ability.



I walked out to the dining room, my contractions taking my breath away. Matt held me and Jac told me to breathe. I couldn't, it felt like I couldn't take a breath in. I was on my toes, the pain in my back was intense. I was trying so hard to breathe, but at this point I just felt high. I felt out of control and like the room was spinning. Everyone's voices were distant and echo-y. Jac suggested going to sit on the toilet.

I went and sat on the toilet with Aimee, while Matt tried to get Mav to sleep. We definitely didn't expect things to move this quickly. I had actually accepted that my baby was NEVER going to come. It sounds crazy, but I literally accepted that I was no longer going to be alive. I felt really calm at this point internally, not too sure about externally. I surrendered.

I had one contraction on the toilet which was very strong. Then another and I felt my baby's head drop. I started to get the urge to push. I couldn't speak or think. It felt like the world was spinning and everything was in slow motion.

Aimee called, Jac helped me to the pool. I called out for Matt who was still trying to get Mav to sleep. Matt grabbed Abby and Mav and brought them to the pool. The pain eased immediately as I got in the pool and knowing that my family was around me made me feel safe and excited.

The next contraction, I felt like I was doing the biggest poo of my life. It had to be poo because as I said, I had accepted that my baby was never coming.

I felt the familiar stretching of my perineum, it's not something you forget. My baby's head was born at 10:08pm. I reached down and felt my baby's head, with lots of hair! I felt so much relief. I knew that I would meet my baby in the next few minutes, and I was so excited and ready for my back pain to stop.

Feeling his head was surreal. I longed for that in Mav's birth, but it was railroaded. Even now when I touch Logan's head, I'm taken back to that moment. It makes me so emotional!

The next contraction, I pushed the rest of my baby out, receiving him into my own arms. It was the most surreal, amazing moment. Overwhelming relief was what I felt. The pain was gone. I finally had my baby even though I was convinced he would never ever come. And I was alive.

## I CRIED. AND CRIED. AND CRIED.

Maverick got in the pool with me, Matt stroked my shoulder and Abby watched on. It was absolutely amazing. Looking at my beautiful baby, he was not what I expected. I will never forget the look on Mavs face as he met his baby brother. Maverick said, "you are beautiful mum" which just melted my heart! For weeks afterwards he would randomly say "mum is so strong and beautiful".



It was at this point I felt myself coming back into my body. I realised that I was in the spot where I had sat in my mother blessing a few weeks prior. How powerful to have all the candles from my tribe in eyesight, all my affirmations. Just the feeling of being held, even from afar. I still have my birth altar set up today and don't see me taking things down any time soon.

My birth was not what I had planned for or what I had expected. I feel that I was in my own head quite a bit, over analysing. The support of the people around me though, grounded me, even momentarily. I do not have any regrets about the choices I made because I know that they were the best choices for me in that moment. I never felt pressured into anything!

Our little (2.5kg) Logan showed me that I have strength and courage that I never thought I had. He showed me patience and love that knows no limits. It was empowering and painful and transcending and staggering. It obliterated every part of me and then just as quickly made me whole again, expanding my heart in the process.

## IT WAS BIRTH.



My name is Jaime Leigh Hawkins, I've just turned 30 and I am a wife, mama and step mama. I am a doula ([This Is What I Doula](#)) and I also teach the Hypnobirthing Australia program.

I had my first son, Maverick, in hospital 4 years ago and had a less than fabulous experience. I decided at the last minute to have my placenta encapsulated and I connected with a local doula. After birth, I researched more about this term, "doula" and it was like a lightbulb went on. When joining the doula world, I learnt so much about homebirth and knew that for my next baby, I would birth at home.

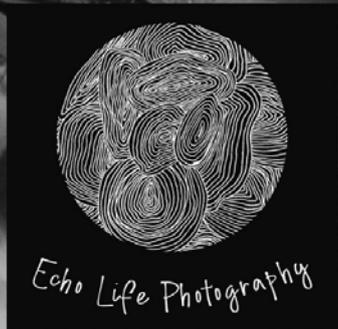
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# Why a Mother Blessing helps a woman's transition to Motherhood

BY DIANA CRUZ

We live in a society that traditionally celebrates the birth of a new baby with baby showers, presents, cute newborn photos and so on. The new beautiful baby is the focus.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MOTHER?

A mother is the one who must prepare her body, mind, and spirit for an unprecedented transformation.

A mother is the one who, once she travels through that rite of passage, will never be the same.

A mother is the one who must ensure that this miraculous new soul, her child, survives and thrives.

## WHO HOLDS THE MOTHER? WHO SUPPORTS HER?

A "Mother Blessing" is a simple, symbolic, yet powerful ceremony that celebrates life, love, pregnancy, and motherhood in a sacred space. Its purpose is to nourish, nurture and support the mother as she moves towards this rite of passage. Its intention is to strengthen her, to provide clarity in Mind, Body and Soul for herself, for the labour, the birthing and for her baby.

This ceremony is a Navajo - Native American tradition called a "Blessingway" and it has been

adapted to the western world by many spiritual teachers and mothers that see the need of putting the mother in the centre of the celebration.

During this sacred ceremony, special women in the mother-to-be's life are invited to attend and to create significant items which will support her during birth, in their absence. These special souls' gifts will bring meaningful purpose to her as she travels through the birthing process and beyond. These items represent the souls of these women. They serve as reminders that they are supporting her with the strength of their own shared experiences.

These are some examples:

- Birthing necklaces uniquely created by each woman's choice of beads
- Affirmation cards or any symbolic meaningful and appropriate gifts which contain all the women's wishes and feminine wisdom and strength to remind the MOTHER during labour of her own inner and outer strength and of the sisterhood who support her through their calm focus.

(Some mothers even create a special temple to gather all the gifts, to keep them close during labour, so as to draw strength from her sisterhood.)





As the ceremony advances, women may read poems, heartfelt letters, or words of wisdom to the mother.

The group of women may also offer shoulder and foot massages to the mother. They may share space by creating bracelets with yarn which will be worn by each woman until the moment the mother goes into labour. At this point in time, they will all cut the yarn, light a candle, and offer a prayer or wish for the mother to be. The yarn represents a deep connection for the group who are linked by a singular purpose to support the mother-to-be. The ceremony may also include shared moments of dancing, meditating, journaling, painting, chanting, the sky is the limit!

All these elements symbolize the circle of women and the circle of life, the power of women sitting in circle is felt by all the attendees as their hearts expand and the divine feminine rises. It's truly magical.

Motherhood is a sacred stage in women's lives, and it deserves to be celebrated, acknowledged, and supported.

## WHEN A WOMAN BECOMES A MOTHER, SHE IS BORN ANEW.

Whether society acknowledges it or not (we still have a long way to go), she is now a new woman who needs to be supported and nourished, as was the tradition in ancient times.

## IT'S TIME TO BRING THE VILLAGE BACK....

In this way, blessing ceremonies for women can re-establish supportive, caring women in their communities.

*We are not meant to do this alone.  
We are meant to be part of a community of women.*

*We are meant to be held, supported and heard.*

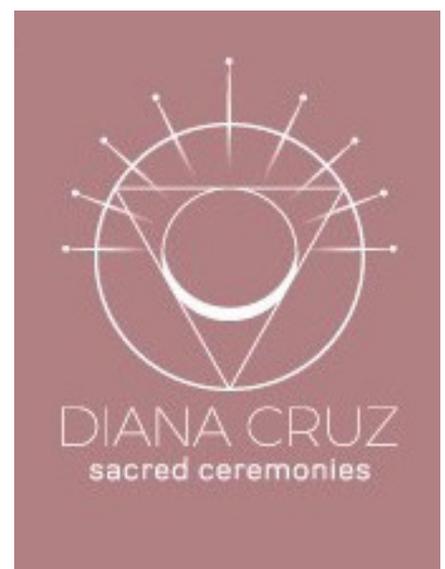
*We are meant to share our experiences and to learn from each other.*

*We are meant to show up just as we are, with our emotions.*

*When women gather... magic happens  
When women gather around a mother, their message is:*

***We care for you, acknowledge you, honour you, and celebrate YOU MAMA!***

I honour all my teachers and mentors for holding the space for my connection with the Divine Feminine and the opportunity to share it with other women and contribute to the collective consciousness awakening. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I work. I pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, both past and present, and celebrate their cultural contribution to society.



Diana Cruz is a Sacred Ceremonies Facilitator, passionate about supporting women in their transformational journeys and rites of passage through sacred rituals. Her individualised ceremonies are created to allow women to connect with their pure and divine feminine essence. You can follow her at [@dianacruz.sacredceremonies](https://www.instagram.com/dianacruz.sacredceremonies)

# The Birth of Aubrey

BY BONNIE HOOK

My first birth was planned down to the minute. When I say that I also mean, I was totally open to whatever happened and had a plan to have no plan. Of course. Except if it didn't go to plan I'd be distraught. Naturally. We had the most wonderful doula, [Christa Buckland](#), who was a core component to our team and we were all on the same page that she and Ryan were there to be my voice and advocates for the birth I wanted and knew was possible. 29 hours later, we also had stirrups, glaring lights, the presence of 5 midwives and an obstetrician, and our son Ruben arrived via an episiotomy & forceps. But he was here safely and that was all that mattered. Right? Arriving in a global pandemic we sheltered from the world in our newborn bubble, cut off from family and friends and I had no time to process the birth and what I had been through - instead I had to focus on being a mother. Healing physically, emotionally and spiritually took a backseat.

When I fell pregnant 8 months later, we were fortunate enough to get into the Midwifery Group Practice at Randwick. Immediately home birth was put on the table as an option and we jumped at the chance to rewrite my birth narrative. We had complete trust in the system and the universe that this was for us.

And how fortunate that we did! By July 2021, Sydney was back in lockdown and it was a scary time to be birthing in a hospital. 8 months pregnant with a toddler to tend to and a chest infection that wouldn't leave me alone, my mum flew up from Melbourne to lend a helping hand before the birth. A-ha! Now she was "stuck" here. Open-ish to homebirth, the plan was that she would take Ruben when labour started and stay in a hotel while we welcomed our new baby. However, one meeting with Sheryl Sidery and Anna Haworth and my cautionary mother was the new homebirth advocate & point of knowledge in our house. She would be going nowhere during the birth and had eagerly taken on the role of photographer and doula.

This is our birth story. Told by my Mum. It is one of healing generational birth trauma. Two mothers witnessing each other's power and trust in one another. It is an experience which changed all of our lives and relationships with one another forever. It is the story of Aubrey bringing us all together and creating an unbreakable bond.

*"When Bonnie first told me she and Ryan were planning a home birth I was horrified. Sceptical. My own birthing experiences were not fantastic. First a 36 hour labour, epidural, forceps and copious amounts of pethadine, resulting in nausea and vomiting throughout. Next was a stillbirth at 39 weeks and finally an emergency Caesar.*

*Despite my concerns I continued to support Bonnies' plans and when I was deployed to Coogee I was included in a meeting with the midwives to discuss final plans and requirements to aid in a comfortable and efficient delivery. After 60 minutes of sitting in the background watching this positive and competent team of Sheryl, Anna, Bonnie and Ryan prepare and enthuse, my negative thoughts had been dispelled. I was as excited as they were and completely onboard!*

*During the next two weeks we redecorated the lounge in readiness for the birthing bath. Strung up fairy lights, repositioned plants and crystals, borrowed pots for boiling water, towels for the floor, bought snacks for the waiting and informed the neighbours of the impending birth. We were ready.*

*At 41 weeks exactly waves started early in the morning and steadily built throughout the day. We kept busy, Bonnie hesitant not to get all of our hopes up and reserve her energy for the birth.*

*At 4pm Ruben and I went for a walk to get final supplies and some flowers for mum. Bonnie had a shower, we blow dried her hair, Ruben enjoyed a hearty and calm dinner and was in bed by 6pm. Ryan was efficiently timing each wave and the bath was blown up, this was it! Bonnie was in labour, and the baby was on the way.*



We took time to sit and reflect on the last few weeks. We ate twisties and we marvelled at how lovely our "birthing suite" looked and felt. Music was playing softly, candles were burning, Bonnie and Ryan had stuck her affirmations to the wall nearest the bath along with some favourite photos and memories. It was 7pm and time to call the midwives. Ryan started filling the bath as I began boiling huge pots of water, it was obvious the small hot water service would not provide enough water and boiling more was a great diversion for me.

Sheryl and Anna arrived at 8pm. Their presence was wonderful, reassuring and peaceful. Sheryl took me aside to assure me everything was going well and to remind me she was there for me if I had any concerns. Bonnie was in transition, the babies heart was beating strongly. Everything was progressing well.

Finally the bath was deep and warm enough for Bonnie, a relief from the couch where she had been lying. She kneeled, then squatted then found her most comfortable position lying back in the pool. Here she proceeded to breathe her way through more severe waves, asked Sheryl and Anna a few questions, almost broke her mothers wrist as she squeezed through the rapidly increasing waves, and looked to Ryan for her encouragement.

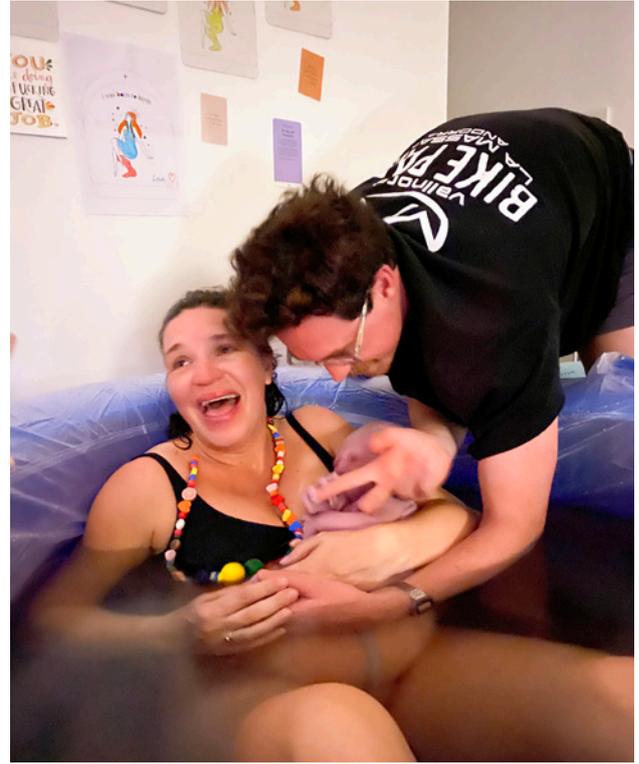
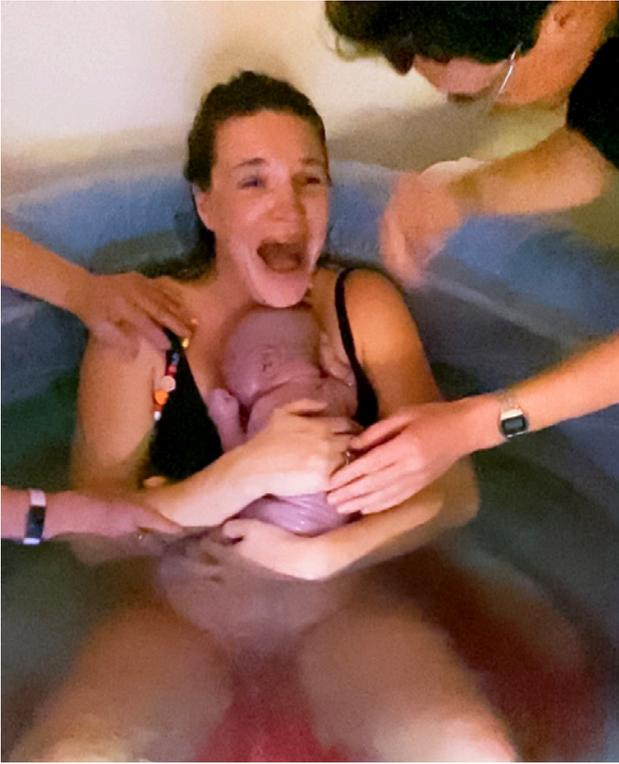
Her waters hadn't broken and things began to slow down a bit so it was suggested she try puncturing them with her finger. This didn't work so Sheryl assisted

and within minutes the baby had started to show. Initially all we could see was a very creamy puckered object and I heard the midwives questioning whether it was breech! No time to panic, the baby was going to be born. With her next push the head came out a bit more, (not breech). My baby was having her baby. I was holding onto her, coaching and coaxing, breathing her through each wave. Ryan on the other side calming her, holding her and caressing her. We were a team bringing someone into the world. Anna and Sheryl prompting and encouraging her, guiding her through the crowning.

Time to stop whilst the baby turned in readiness for its final struggle. A little face turning and then one final push as Bon reached down to guide her baby up onto her chest. A beautiful slippery pink little thing. It opened its eyes, cried a tiny cry then reached up to touch its mothers face.

We'd done it! We'd had a baby! Bonnie was magnificent! All her dreams of having her baby in an environment of choice had come to fruition. The room was charged with emotion, with pure love. Bonnie and Ryan cocooned their tiny bundle whilst we three hugged and exclaimed our joy and admiration of Bonnies' stellar effort. They caressed the product of their love and eventually checked the sex - another boy!

**A FEW MINUTES LATER RYAN CUT THE CORD AND WE SANG HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THIS LITTLE PERSON.**



*Quietly and without fuss the placenta was delivered and Bonnie gently washed and dressed so she, Ryan and their baby could relax on the couch.*

*The bath was drained, the room cleaned up, cups of tea made & cake eaten. Time to weigh and measure bub then not long after say our thank yous and farewells to Anna and Sheryl. It was 2 am and although I wasn't tired, I went off to bed.*

*Five and half hours later Ruben was quietly, calmly and lovingly introduced to his baby brother. Three had become four as they huddled over their new arrival. Oooing aaahhhhing and loving him.*

*No-one had left the house, no-one had been woken during the night, no-one had the indignity of stirrups or invasive lighting. No risk of infection from COVID, no*

*death defying drive home from hospital with a brand new person. We all slept in our own beds and none of the neighbours heard a thing.*

*Throughout the birth my emotions had levelled into a state of complete faith in Bonnie birthing her baby successfully. I envisioned myself crying, nauseous with anxiety and a wee bit over the top. Bonnie had instilled such a feeling of peacefulness over us all that none of my concerns eventuated.*

*My bond and love for Ruben, my first grandchild, will always be very, very special. It will change as I watch him change and grow, I will always love him first. My bond and love for Aubrey has come from somewhere else, from deep within my soul as I watched him come into my world".*

**Hailing from Melbourne I revel in the beauty of Sydney's beaches and can always be found near the ocean with a coffee in hand and weet-bix smeared in my hair. My husband, Ryan and I live a relaxed life with our two sons, Ruben and Aubrey. I have been the editor of Birthings for 12 months now, starting when Ruben was practicing tummy time, just like I now watch Aubrey doing. I have a copywriting side hustle, work in Community Development, am passionate about giving excellent recommendations, everything about women and fostering connection. Becoming a mother has been the hardest & most relentless experience of my life, but watching them wrap their entire hand around my index finger while they sleep (YAY!) makes it worth every second.**

Photo credit: Robyn Hook and Sheryl Sidery



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I am a doula based in the Blue Mountains and servicing surrounding areas of Nepean, Hawkesbury, Western Sydney and Inner West Sydney.

**I believe all women deserve continuity of support throughout the transformations and rites of passage we go through.**

Within my doula work I offer:

- Pre-conception, pregnancy, birth and postpartum doula support as individualised packages or one-off tailored sessions
- Mother Blessing Ceremonies
- Women's Circles and Motherhood Circles from the MoonCourt Temple at my home in Springwood
- Closing the Bones and Sacred Belly Binding
- Goddess Girls Circles for young girls and teens

If you would like to get in touch, please feel free to reach out via any of my details below!

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**Social Media: @claireheenandoula**

Photo credit: Laura Coleman Photography

# The Birth of Jeremy

BY CLAIRE HEENAN

When I found out I was pregnant with our second baby it was our wedding anniversary, which my husband and I had both forgotten! We had a good chuckle when we realised. Later that morning I burst into the lounge room, exclaiming I had gotten my husband an anniversary gift - I was pregnant! We told our then 2 year old daughter and had a moment to celebrate together before I hurriedly rang the midwife I was hoping to book. I had to laugh when she asked how far along I was and I explained I'd known for about an hour!

I'd been dreaming of that moment. I knew who my midwife was going to be, I knew who my doula would be, I knew I was going to have a chubby baby boy. I just knew.

42 weeks came and went, and my baby had about 3 possible different star signs by now. I didn't find out the sex, but I knew in my every cell that he was a boy. I had been experiencing early labour signs for a couple of weeks and I had decided I was going to be pregnant forever and give birth to a teenager.

Finally, at 42 weeks and 3 days, labour began. I was SO relieved! That last week was a hard one emotionally, I was questioning my body and having to ground myself and tune into my baby more than ever so I could block out the conditioning that pregnancy has some kind of expiry date.

Labour was beautiful, hard, powerful and brought up lots of emotions. Having lost my Dad in my third trimester, he came to me a lot and I found that my labour provided a big release and deeper connection to my grief.

I had been having surges about 5-10 minutes apart on Monday 22nd March from around 7.30am. I assumed it was a false start, again! After a few hours I realised this was it. With my daughter at day care, my husband and I spent some time together cuddling in bed, watching episodes of Grace and Frankie and going for a walk. After chatting with my midwife,

she said she was cancelling her appointments for the day and would be there when I needed her. Something about that text message comforted me and reminded me how beautifully supportive my birth team was. The weather was aligned with the force of birth - waterfalls of rain drenching everything below.

In the afternoon my contractions ramped up. My daughter was home now and very at ease with the sounds and movements I was using. I rang my doula asking her to come, and 5 minutes after she arrived my waters released as I was on all fours labouring with the fit ball. For some reason, probably relief or hormones, I thought this was hilarious and spent a good few minutes giggling away with my doula. I remember saying, "there's SO much liquid it just keeps coming!".



She then rang my midwife and my photographer. I remember saying when they arrived, "I don't think it's the real thing yet, I called too early!", but my midwife assured me she wasn't going anywhere. She suggested filling up the pool. I loved being in the water for a few hours, I felt so primal as if I was a lioness, it was amazing! I remember my birth team humming and singing along to parts of my playlist, and I loved hearing their voices around me. A circle of familiar voices surrounding me like a protective, sonic ring.



My beautiful photographer was unobtrusive, I was aware of her presence, however she blended into the environment perfectly so as not to draw attention to the camera.

My husband was holding me between surges and quietly, unwaveringly supporting me. My midwives were just beautiful, hands on when I needed it and hands off otherwise. I felt so connected to each of them, 100% safe and able to be myself. I remember getting the giggles (those birth hormones, huh?) after a contraction about something in the Grace and Frankie episode we'd been watching that day. My midwife said, "ha, the episode about the dildo?" which set me off laughing more. It was fun to have fun in labour!

The water wasn't working for me anymore, so I hopped out and had some surges on the toilet, they felt so strong that I started resisting them as I wasn't ready to bring on those sensations. I was vocalising louder, simultaneously fearing and embracing the loss of control. I remember shaking my arms and hands and Athena saying, "yes, shake it all out" and shaking her hands along with me.

Something within me shifted, I began questioning myself and feeling exhausted. Despite labour being only a few hours this time around, I'd been experiencing early labour for more than a week which had drained some of my energy. I asked my midwife to do a vaginal examination and I was fully dilated. I had a few surges on all fours leaning over the fit ball. I have never felt so primal in my life, pure animal. The sensation of my baby's head moving downwards was painful in the most incredibly empowering way. I had fully transcended to another realm now, leaving to collect my baby boy.

My midwife then had some concerns about baby's heart rate not recovering between contractions, so

she suggested I move on to my back and I could tell she was a bit worried, yet calm. I had been upright the whole time and the position change was helpful in making room for my baby to move down. My doula-mind reared her head...birthing on your back is 'bad'! However, knowing my baby needed to be born soon for his own safety and feeling surrounded by total love and trust, I went with it and it felt good for me being in this position.

There was some talk of possible transfer as Jo asked my husband if I had a bag ready. I could hear it myself when she used the doppler, his heart rate was very slow between surges. The energy in the room shifted ever so slightly, but I felt safe, I trusted that my baby was safe.

I remember feeling I was pure power and a primal force was pulsating through me. This was the moment I came into my power as a woman and a mother. My plans of an undisturbed, water birth had to be let go of and reborn as this wild, deliberate effort to birth my baby and keep him safe from any more distress he was in.

Birthing my baby's head took every ounce of physical and mental strength I had. Then, my baby boy was born and placed on my chest after receiving just a few seconds of oxygen and a bit of a rub (he'd done a HUGE meconium poo on the way out). I didn't cry straight away as it took me a few minutes to come back into my body, I was still with the stars. My daughter was in the next room - she had been coming in and out the whole time which I loved - so she ran in and then I came back to myself and had a big cry at finally meeting my baby boy. His body was warm and SO chubby! He was quiet, peaceful... and big!



I birthed the placenta about an hour later on the toilet. I looked up at my midwife - "I did it!", she gave me one of her unmistakable midwife hugs, I knew she believed in me all along. We won't know for sure why he went into distress, but he did have a super long cord so it's possible it was cord compression. I like to think he had something to teach me about us, about our unity and resilience through my grief. How I wish my Dad had lived a little longer to meet this little person who I now saw had some of his features.

I felt great despite afterpains and the adrenaline shakes, and I loved being tucked up on my own couch in our oxytocin love bubble. My daughter didn't leave my side, continuously asking to hold him and saying over again how cute our new baby was. I was on a high, in love, and fucking proud of myself.

Eventually my midwife did the baby checks, and wow, my baby was 4.8kgs! Everyone laughed when

she announced that! I only had a 1st degree tear, to which my midwife then said, "Claire, you've got a magic stretchy vagina" which was one of my favourite quotes of that day... of ever really!

There he was, Jeremy. All thigh rolls, cheeks, chubby fingers and wise eyes. The joy of him, the smell of him, the absolute miracle of him.

I am so proud of myself for reclaiming birth as mine.

I will forever remember and be thankful to our amazing birth team: Jo Hunter, Athena Hammond, Erin Quinn and Beth Lindsay of Natural Focus Photography. Those women are the salt of the earth. They knew the gravity of their presence in my space and upheld me as the birthing warrior woman I am.

## JEREMY IS A DELIGHT... AND I AM ADDICTED TO HOMEBIRTH



Claire lives in the Blue Mountains with her husband, 4yo daughter and 5 month old son. She is a doula working with women and families during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. Claire also facilitates women's circles, menarche circles, mother blessings and postpartum rituals and ceremonies. She is a member of our Homebirth NSW team in the Communications role. Claire has a Masters of Teaching and has a background as a music teacher and she continues to tutor instruments privately. Her work as a doula and a music tutor fulfil her professional life whilst her active involvement in the birth community and time spent with family and friends fulfils her personal world. Claire's favourite thing to do is be in nature with her husband and her babies. [claireheenandoula.com.au](http://claireheenandoula.com.au) [@claireheenandoula](https://www.instagram.com/claireheenandoula)

Photo credit: [Natural Focus Birth Photography](http://NaturalFocusBirthPhotography)



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# Earth Altaring

BY PRUDENCE RUSTEAN

My Earth Altaring practice has helped me heal in so many different ways. It has given me a chance to really check in with my overall well-being while feeling fully supported from our Mother Earth. I feel like she has literally been holding me like a baby while dealing with the complexities of life's ups and downs like illness, heart break, grief, unexpected change, letting go and surrendering to some major life changes. The feeling I get from connecting in with the heartbeat of the Earth is something I can rely on every day no matter where in the world I find myself and this really helps me reset when I am feeling anxious or unsettled which I think everyone, no matter what your personal story is, can benefit from.

The process of creating an Earth Altar helps to process and move through emotions, into more positive feelings like love, connection, gratitude, creativity, excitement, inspiration, confidence, pleasure and joy.



## YOU CAN USE YOUR EARTH ALTAR TO

- Connect to the Earth's energy
- Honour the elements (Fire, Water, Wind & Earth) and connect to them within your physical body
- Balance your mental, spiritual, physical and emotional health
- Deepen your relationship with yourself
- Develop your intuition
- Express and process emotions
- Develop confidence, focus and concentration
- Feel more grounded
- Quieten your mind
- Become present
- Breathe mindfully into your belly
- Oscillate your heartbeat to the rhythm of the planet
- Rediscover your passions and purpose
- Access and express your creativity
- Embrace change and experience more flow

## A GUIDE TO CREATING AND USING YOUR OWN EARTH ALTAR AT HOME

### FORAGING:

Start to be on the lookout for gifts and treasure from Mother Nature. Collect things that are significant/meaningful to you. Silently ask before you take your treasure - If there is any hesitation or you don't feel a full YES in your body then leave them be and move on.

Some examples of things you can use to build your Altar are:

- Sticks
- Stones
- Rocks
- Crystals
- Soil
- Beach sand
- Shells
- Wood
- Charcoal
- Leaves
- Flowers
- Seedling

Remember you can use whatever you like to create your Altar. You could use paints to paint an Earth Altar artwork, you could do it digitally on a computer program if that's your jam or you could even use the power of visualisation and sing or dance it into being.

### FINDING THE SPOT:

Once you have collected your materials you will need to find a quiet special spot for yourself to create. A place that is peaceful where you will be uninterrupted and feel comfortable to sit in silence, pray and express your emotions each day.

This practice is more potent if you are directly working with a patch of Earth (grass, soil, rock, mud, beach sand etc.) but it is not totally necessary. You can still receive powerful benefits if you are indoors and unable to set up outside.

The importance is to find somewhere that feels good for you. Find a place that you will feel comfortable to sit in simplicity, to pray and to give thanks.

If you are able to set up your Earth Altar for a permanent amount of time you might like to slowly start to fill in the spaces by adding something new everyday to help you regularly connect with and build on your Earth Altar. It can be a really beautiful and expansive experience watching your Altar evolve as the fresh flowers start to wilt and become dried (sometimes they look even more beautiful over time).

### HONOURING THE DIRECTIONS:

Once you have found your spot on the Earth to honour the four directions, the elements and



yourself - you will need to work out what direction is North, East, South and West. You can use your compass on your phone to double check you have the directions correct if you are unsure.

You may like to start by marking out each direction with crystals, stones, flowers etc. as a starting point to building your Altar.

### HONOURING THE ELEMENTS:

Bring your attention to the four elements corresponding with each direction - air, fire, earth and water. Take some time to ponder each element and think about how you can connect with each one.



Take a deep breath in while facing the direction of the North and bring your attention to the fresh air you are able to breathe deep into your belly. Close your eyes and feel the gentle breeze brush past your skin and through your hair. Allow the wind to move through you and disperse any stuck energy in your body.

While facing the direction of the East take a moment to think about the Sun that rises everyday without fail. Be grateful for the light, heat and warmth that this fiery ball of energy provides for us. Light a candle and stare into the flame to connect to your spirit. Remind yourself about what sparks the fire in your belly. What are you passionate about? What drives you in this life?

When you face the direction of the South, put your bare feet on the Earth, visualise the roots coming up through the ground below your feet and bring the Mother Earth energy up through your soles and into your heart. Feel gratitude for your physical body and notice how grounded you feel.

Face the direction of the West, take a drink of water from the source - a waterfall, a stream, a freshwater spring. How do you really feel right now? Remind yourself to let your emotions flow like water and be

mindful not to let feelings get stuck in the body, stagnate and grow putrid. Flush your body with water. This is incredibly healing.

You might like to collect some things that you can use in your Altar to represent each element and use the objects to mark out the four directions on your Altar:

Here are some examples:

- North / Air: A feather or incense
- East / Fire: A candle or sage stick
- South / Earth: A stone, rock, plant or soil
- West / Water: A glass of rain water, spring water or salt water from the ocean

Be creative and use your imagination!

## CREATING YOUR EARTH ALTAR:

Before building your Altar, it is important to ground. Grounding means connecting and oscillating your personal energy to that of the Earth. If you are nervous or excited, you may be running too much energy through your body and the Earth can absorb the excess for you. If you are lethargic or dizzy, you may be suffering from a lack of energy, and the Earth has plenty to share with you. Slip off your shoes, stand with your bare feet

on the ground and take three deep breaths. With every inhale breathe the colour green, the colour of Earth energy, up through the soles of your feet; feel this Earth energy filling your cells and nourishing every inch of you.

To start, think about why you want to create this Altar. Is it to connect with the Earth? With yourself? To contact ancestors or guides? As a ritual to invite abundance? As a blessing for good fortune and prosperity? Is there something you would like to manifest into reality? You can be as vague or specific as you want. These intentions will help subconsciously inform you about what objects to use, symbols to create, and mindset to have while creating your Earth Altar.

Remember, while creating your Altar there is no right or wrong way. This is your time to tune into what it is you need in the present moment. You do not have to perform a ceremony. You do not have to speak words out loud if you don't feel like it, but rather pray and create from your own heart. While you create your Earth Art offer your own deepest and most sincere prayers and you will be doing it perfectly. It is much more important to take what resonates with you from this information and to tune in and listen more to your own intuition/gut feelings about what it is you want to create/

connect to/heal/work with. All that matters is what's true for you, which is why getting really good at listening to your intuition, your heart, and following your happiness is critical during the process.

## EARTH ALTARING WITH THE KIDS:

Creating an Earth Altar is a great activity to do with children. It is a fun and active way to get the kids off the screens and outside into nature. They will be focused for hours at a time and find so much joy in collecting materials in nature to create their own temporary art work, ignite their imagination and stimulate their creativity.



Earth Altaring is a project Prue has been passionately working on since her health was drastically compromised in 2020. Prue was diagnosed with class IV Lupus Nephritis and a low grade B Cell Lymphoma which resulted in some abrupt and unexpected life changes which triggered a range of intense and painful emotions which at times felt consuming, overwhelming and impossible to escape.

The practice of Earth Altaring has been a vital part of Prue's healing process and learning some very simple and practical tools that can help to balance our mental, spiritual, physical and emotional health while strengthening our relationship with Mother Earth, nature and the elements has become something she feels very passionate about sharing. Through this work she hopes to help others deepen their relationship with themselves, feel more connected to planet Earth's powerful energy, promote healing, embrace change, inspire creativity, help you to feel more confident to speak and live your personal truth, experience more freedom, joy, pleasure, self-expression, connection, truth, integrity, authenticity, passion, purpose, playfulness and pleasure. Photo credit: [Lynden Foss](#)

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# The Birth of Emie

BY ELIZABETH TAVERNER

Here's the story of how our first child came into the world in April. It helped me so much to read others' birth stories and see their photos, so I wanted to share mine too. I also want women to be prepared for the reality that while their birth may be far from blissful, it can still be beautiful.

I started losing my mucus plug on the Saturday afternoon and was so excited but didn't go into labour until a long four days later, on the Wednesday, which actually happened to be my due date. By that point I was getting pretty fed up, impatient and uncomfortable - I'd had Pelvic Girdle Pain to the point of not being able to walk (read: shuffle) much more than just around the house for at least a couple of months - but had resigned myself to the fact I could still be a week away from the birth.

That night, at around 10.30pm, my husband, Jorge, and I were making the move to go to bed when I had a contraction that straight away took me down to my knees. So much for 'pre-labour'! We tried all the lovely music and fit ball and yoga moves and pressure points that we'd been taught in She Births to start with, in the beautiful space I'd set up in the lounge room, but I wasn't having any of it. I was already throwing up from the pain, which was all in my lower back.

Seeking comfort and quiet, I headed to the bed, took off all my clothes, hooked up to the TENS machine and rocked back and forth on all fours. Jorge was timing my contractions with an app and being such a great support. We weren't sure when to call Jo, our midwife, as we knew we'd be waking her up, but eventually we did, and she told us to call back if things progressed (they did!).

I was not prepared for the level of pain I was in! I moved to the shower but couldn't stand up through the contractions and found kneeling on the hard tiles, feeling cramped, wasn't great so went back to my default position on the bed. I kept on throwing up and groaning loudly with each surge. Our sweet

cat, Boris, came to check on me and stayed close by the entire labour.

When Jo arrived around 2.30am she was very calm and sat on the floor quietly writing notes. She suggested Jorge put a wet flannel on my back which felt great. Until it didn't. My back was so painful and bulging that a flannel felt like a huge, painful weight. Then came the inevitable line of "I can't do it" and Jo reminded me that I was, in fact, doing it!

She suggested I sit on the toilet for a couple of surges and warned me it would be even more intense but would help bring the baby down and. Oh. My. God. At this point I was literally fantasising about being in a hospital and having an epidural. What the hell was I thinking in having a home birth?! Was I delusional?! As I felt the next contraction coming on strong, I screamed out, "No NO NOOOOO". It felt like I was being tortured and I blanked out and saw white. I didn't know it was possible for someone to tolerate this amount of pain. I saw myself as William Wallace at the end of Braveheart, being quartered, which probably wasn't the most helpful visualisation in retrospect. Gripping onto Jorge for dear life, it really felt like I was dying (now I realise I was transitioning, of course). Jorge was my rock throughout it all.

After a few more surges I knew I needed to get in that pool, but it wasn't ready as the water was too hot! I was determined and somehow made my way over to the lounge room before the next contraction, when I was standing on tiptoes and pushing into Jorge's hands, then finally got in. It helped but the water level wasn't quite high enough to cover the pressure in my back and it was boiling hot, so Jorge put ice in there and turned on the ceiling fan. Not ideal but it was an improvement and I was nearly there! I'd had my eyes closed for practically the entire labour but at that point caught a glimpse of an affirmation I'd hung by the pool that said, "This too shall pass". That really helped and I repeated it to myself in my head.



and I hugged and gazed at our little miracle and eventually I remembered to check the sex - it was Emie, our girl - I knew it!

## WOW. I'D REALLY DONE IT.

After about 20 minutes in a blissful, dreamlike blur I felt the urge to push again and Jo suggested I gently tug on the umbilical cord and as I did, out came the placenta. Jorge then had skin-to-skin with Emie, as Jo and Athena (the wonderful second midwife, who'd arrived not long before) helped me out of the pool and onto the sofa. I was shaking uncontrollably for quite a while with the shock - I think both my mind and body couldn't quite believe what I'd just survived.

Jorge got me a banana and some coconut water and put a blanket around my shoulders and Emie came back to me and breastfed. It felt so natural to be holding her. Jorge cut her cord and dressed her, then Jo checked me and I just had small tear and a graze that would heal naturally.

The three of us were quietly elated, resting in our dimly lit, sacred cocoon as a new family, as Jo and Athena packed everything up. After they left, around 7.30am, we made our way to bed and I had tea and toast and a chocolate bunny. I hadn't eaten any chocolate over Easter as I'd quit sugar and gluten in the last trimester (and eaten SO MANY dates!) to help reduce inflammation and speed up the labour. Needless to say, when I got my hands on that bunny, it was the best chocolate I'd ever tasted!

For the last few surges, I was on my knees holding onto Jorge's arms. He was reminding me to keep my sounds low (instead of high pitched) and I was ROARING! It was taking all I had, and between surges I was so exhausted that a couple of times I didn't even breathe, and he had to remind me to!

Then Jo told me I could reach down and touch the baby's head, which was amazing, but I really couldn't appreciate it at that moment, I just wanted it to be over. The pressure was incredible through the last surges and I pushed down with all my might - I didn't care if I tore - with Jo reminding me to do 'ha ha ha' breaths. And suddenly, there she was! I'd done it! It was over! Thank f\*%#!

Jo untangled the cord, which was twice around our baby's neck, and then I lifted her out of the water. Looking at her for the first time, I felt a deep sense of recognition as I took her into my arms. That's got to be the best feeling in the world. The worst and the best within moments; what a ride. She was calm and curled up with thick vernix on her back and looked like she had a little smile on her face. After a while she let out a little cry. Jorge





The whole thing has taken me a while to process as it kind of hit me like a tonne of bricks. I now realise I was also feeling a lot of shame around not having a 'calm' or 'blissful' birth, as I'd heard and seen so much about. I'd created this ridiculous expectation of myself that I should be able to 'breathe through the pain' and with the power of my positive visualisations (\*cough\* William Wallace) maintain some sort of Buddha-like serenity throughout, surrounded by chimes and essential oils. Ha! It was not like that. At all. And I've come to accept that that's okay. Every woman is different and the fact I was crying out in excruciating pain does not mean I'm a hopeless meditator/birther/human being. In fact, I love to think about the animalistic rawness of it all now and what I overcame and accomplished that night; I can see it all from a higher perspective. And wow, how incredible are women? And how sacred is birth? It really is a transformational portal - I died, went to

the stars and came crashing back down to Earth, grounded and reborn a mother.

I'm very grateful I was able to birth my own baby, my own way, on my own like this and that I wasn't controlled or coerced or offered drugs (because God knows I would've taken them!). After it all, we were left bonding in a natural bliss bubble and it felt so right. And now I'm absolutely passionate about homebirth and would do it all over again. I'm so proud of each and every woman who chooses this sadly now less-trodden path (whether they end up needing medical support or not), stepping away from the current mainstream to instead follow her wisdom, intelligence and ancient intuition.

**AS MY HUSBAND NAMED ME IN ADMIRATION AFTER THIS EPIC BIRTH, I NAME US ALL: BADASS GODDESSES!**

I'm a Child & Parent Counsellor turned Stay-at-Home-Mum living in the Blue Mountains with my husband, daughter and two cats. Originally from the UK, I moved to Australia eight years ago and to the Mountains just a year and a half ago, with plans to start a family. I feel very lucky to already feel part of the beautiful homebirth community of incredible, supportive women up here.

I'd dreamed of being a mum since I was a child myself and feel transformed by the experiences of both homebirth and motherhood. At 36, I've worked with kids for many years in all sorts of roles and I'm also passionate about supporting parents and healing the inner child, but of course nothing could really prepare me for having my own kids! Now I've decided to extend my maternity leave indefinitely as I immerse myself into this new stage of life, open to the possibilities of where it may take me.

Photo credit: [Jo Hunter](#)

# KATE RANDALL PHOTOGRAPHY

Multi International Award Winning Blue Mountains/Sydney Birth Photographer

Holding space for mothers to feel safe in their sacred stories,  
as they birth the most powerful parts of themselves

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You only need to ask a mother her birth story to realise just how powerful a memory can be. Layers upon layers of emotions, experiences and often expectations imprint themselves on a story we've often got our eyes closed for, sometimes oblivious to the magic unfolding around us.

If being witness to other women's births has been healing for my own birth story, I can say undeniably that being witness to your own holds exponential power.

To relive the minutes that made you a family, to piece together the story that you were too present in your body to bear witness to; this is the power of documenting your birth journey. Unrepeatable moments captured as keepsakes that carry you and your story of becoming, once you cradle new life in your arms.



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Servicing Blue Mountains, Sydney Australia

# Shine Postnatal

BY ELISE APPS AND TIFFANY HUDSON

As registered midwives who founded Shine Postnatal Services, we are passionate about the postnatal period and providing new families with the support they need to thrive in motherhood. We really resonate with this month's theme "Bloom". We believe that in order to truly bloom in motherhood, you need to be prepared and well supported through this life changing transition. With one in five mothers in Australia being diagnosed with postnatal depression, we commenced a venture to provide women with additional postnatal support, which we observed to be lacking in current maternity systems. After conducting market research, we ascertained that meals and cleaning were two top areas of day-to-day life that mothers were struggling with, and as a starting point we commenced providing these services to women in our community. As mothers ourselves we were able to recognise the relentless and unrealistic expectations in today's society to do it all. Women are expected to



raise children, maintain households, careers, relationships, social lives, their physical appearance, and somehow also maintain their emotional wellbeing. In this day and age our support systems have reduced, and our society is individualised, self-focused and success in motherhood is categorised by the ability to be independent and self-sufficient. We observed that the transition to motherhood is not being honoured in the way it is in other cultures around the world, and as a result mental health outcomes of mothers in Australia are suffering.

Because of our passion for supporting women and families, our midwifery knowledge and ability to implement evidence-based education into our content, as well as our personal insight into this sacred transition as mothers ourselves, our venture to provide a modern approach to postnatal support has bloomed into a holistic approach to supporting

women in pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. Although our focus remains on life after the baby has arrived, we recognise that a birth experience is the gateway to motherhood, and research shows that birth experiences directly impact mental health outcomes postnatally. For this reason, we have created online educational content, to provide Australia wide access for evidence-based education created and presented by us as registered midwives. Throughout all our courses we balance our content with ways to prepare for the postnatal period. We truly believe that being prepared for the changes that having a baby for the first, second, third or any subsequent time is vital, and this unique experience should be honoured so that entire families and communities can thrive once they bring home a new baby.

Some key suggestions we outline to prepare for the postnatal period include seeking education



around normal newborn sleep and feeding patterns, having realistic expectations around this and preparing strategies to implement that will help you cope with the changed sleep pattern that a new baby brings. We also focus on changes in the dynamics of your relationship with your partner and how you can best support each other after bringing a new baby home. Other more practical supports can also be vital in ensuring the postnatal experience is positive, such as re-delegating household tasks such as meals and chores, or outsourcing help in these areas. We also recognise that asking for help can be extremely difficult for mothers for various reasons and therefore we provide an affordable way to provide women with the support they need, without feeling like a burden on busy loved ones. COVID-19 times have also further isolated women from their support networks, and we are so proud to be able to bring in-home support to women during these times.

We are aware that some of our services come with a financial cost for women, so we are devoted to providing an abundance of free information-sharing, support, and services to women in our community too. Our Instagram account @Shine\_Postnatal provides free education and content almost



daily, we encourage mums to reach out to us via private messaging if they are feeling overwhelmed and need someone understanding to chat to, and we also offer a few monthly drop-in clinic where local Sunny Coast women can have access to a psychologist, a lactation consultant and ourselves as registered midwives. We also have some free resources such as e-books available on our website.

Working in the postnatal space, we have observed over the last two years that the culture around postnatal support is starting to shift. We are so excited to be a part of this change, that seeks to honour the transition to motherhood through holistic support, education and planning, so that mothers, babies, families and entire communities can flourish in the way they deserve.

Elise and Tiffany are two Registered Midwives on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland who started a business as student midwives, offering practical support for new families on the Sunshine Coast and surrounding areas. After noticing a gap in the support families receive, they set up Shine Postnatal to offer families meal delivery services and cleaning. Two years later their business has supported over 150 families in the postpartum period with new services including midwife support, online education courses, in-home massage, lactation services and free midwife drop-in clinics alongside a perinatal psychologist and lactation consultant. Elise and Tiffany are really passionate about the postpartum time and focus on helping parents to feel supported by offering these services, as well as providing education online to provide realistic expectations and informed planning and decision making for all stages of the perinatal period. Follow us for educational posts and content on our social media.

[shinepostnataleservices.com](https://shinepostnataleservices.com)

Instagram [@shine\\_postnatal](https://www.instagram.com/shine_postnatal)

Photo credit:

[Maeleo Photography](https://www.maeleo.com.au)



# The Birth of Tara

BY KARENNA REIDY

The pregnancy and birth of Tara is nothing short of a bloomin' miracle that opened me in ways I never imagined possible. At 45 years young and after a few early pregnancy losses along the way, I'd made peace with the 'fact' our beautiful nine year old daughter Maya (born at home), would be an only child.

So, in spring 2020 when I discovered I was pregnant it was nothing short of a miracle-surprise! My husband Viv and I were cautiously excited and decided to keep the pregnancy between the two of us and our midwife Janine O'Brien ([iBirth](#)) for as long as we could.

Throughout the pregnancy I worked on my mental game- reading, researching, visualising, attending workshops with leaders like Rhea Dempsey, Min Mia and Jane Hardwicke-Collings plus curating our birth support team. I worked on my physical game by teaching and practicing Japanese yoga combined with regular chiropractic and acupuncture sessions. Feeling fantastic, I was so grateful my body could receive and grow a baby 'at my age'.

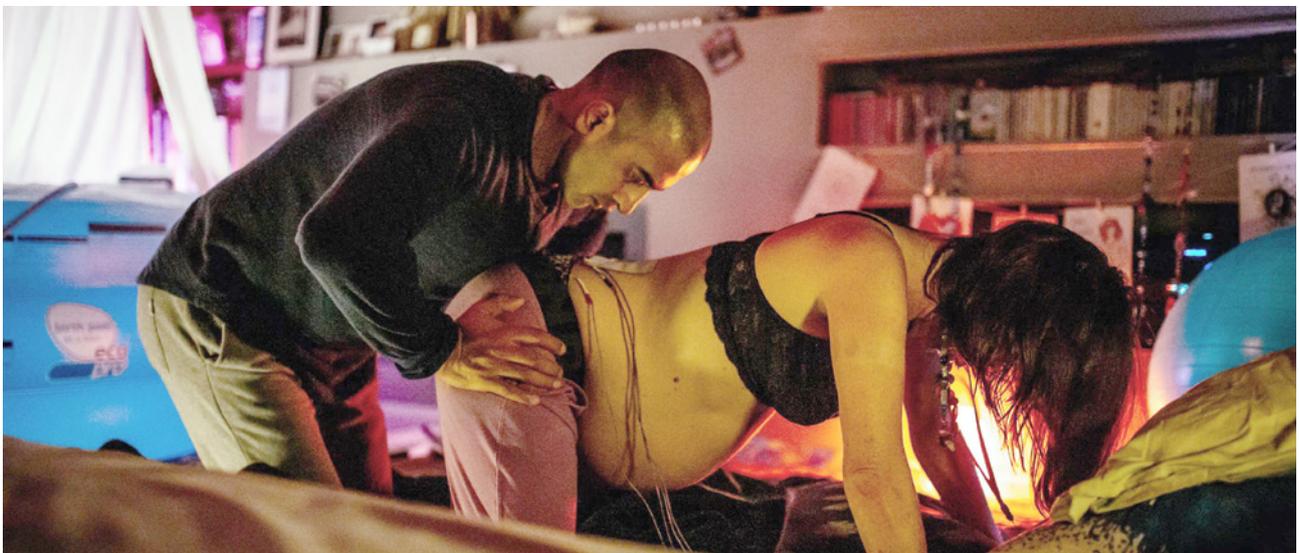
Ever since I'd learnt at Jane Hardwick-Collings' The Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy workshop that babies are often born on full moons, new moons and

in storms, I'd penned into the calendar the Super blood moon of May 26th as 'Bubba's birthday'. I had a strong sense she/he would arrive on this date.

You can imagine my excitement when, on May 25 at 10.30am, my waters broke. Viv came home around lunchtime and later on drove me to my pre-scheduled acupuncture appointment (with [Sue Booth](#)). Sue took my pulse and said my body was primed for birthing action. Almost as soon as the first needle went in, I felt a light wave and could sense my baby was getting close. It was a nurturing, nourishing session and when it ended Sue wished me the best with a knowing smile.

I felt regular, light waves on the drive home – enough to feel excited but not enough to need to drop everything and focus. Once home I lay down for a nap and when I woke it was just getting dark. The waves were still regular but not too intense- I put on the TENS machine so I could get used to the different sensations.

Viv, Maya and I ate dinner together, lighting a candle to welcome in our new family member. I put Maya to bed around 8.30pm, letting her know our doula, [Kath Belle](#) would wake her up for the birth (we'd talked about it lots and Maya had said if it was a



night labour she wanted to be left to sleep for the labour but woken for the birth).

The waves started to pick up around 9pm, where I needed to pause, move and breathe through them. I was feeling a bit tired and considered trying to sleep- but I could tell by the waves I'd need to get up and move through each one so instead Viv and I listened to a hypnobirthing track. After that we went outside and basked in the full moon light, taking a moment to pause and savour the moment- the moon was big, bright and close!

By now it was about 10.30pm and we decided we'd like our doula to come. We called her and she asked to speak with me- I knew it was to gauge how far into my primal brain I had gone. We had a pretty standard conversation, so she suggested she hold off coming over for about an hour to give the labour a chance to get established. We said we'd stay in touch as I settled into the waves.

I found it helpful being on my knees with Viv squeezing my hips through each surge. I must have gone into the birthing zone around this time because

what happened after that is a bit of a hazy blur in terms of time. I remember noticing our doula arrive and hearing her say she'd called Janine our midwife and Anna our birth photographer and they were on their way. Meanwhile I stayed mostly on all fours, burying my face into a nest of pillows with each wave as Viv squeezed my hips.

## I FELT FULLY PRESENT, SAFE AND TRUSTING IN MY BODY AND BABY.

At one point during a big surge my other cat Zen gently rubbed against me - I felt so held and supported - not only by my cat but especially by Viv and all my ancestors.

Soon after I moved into a phase where I felt very irritated. Irritated at the discomfort in my body and the 'slowness' of the endorphins to kick in; irritated about the rustlings around me (my support team filling the pool); irritated and feeling abandoned when Viv wasn't with me for one or two waves (I learned afterwards there was a 'complication' with the hose for the birth pool and he was desperately trying to help get it filled!); irritated my doula couldn't read my

# Emma Burke

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*Deepen your birth & mothering experience with intuitive guidance and gentle, loving reassurance.*

mind and offer me my labouraid drink and specific essential oils at the precise moment I wanted them ;- ) (she was also helping with the pool debacle...).

Although I didn't realise it at the time, I must have been getting close to transition because soon after that Janine gently suggested I get in the birthing pool. 'Already?' I thought to myself - remembering our birthing plan was that I'd 'save up' getting into the pool until the end and the birth was close. I felt a combination of surprise we were at pool time, relief everything was still feeling 'bearable' and denial my baby would be coming soon.

I had no idea was time it was - I learned later it was just after 2am. I reluctantly removed the TENS machine - my new best friend - and slipped into the bath. The warm water felt so soothing and warm.

From there it felt like a switch was flicked and things intensified very quickly. I felt an uncontrollable pushing sensation and the waves started coming on thick and fast. My breath become shorter and I started vocalising involuntarily. I longed for the 'rest and be grateful' phase I'd read can happen between transition and second phase. The pushing feeling intensified and felt overwhelming to the point where I cried out 'help!!'.



While I clung to Viv for dear life, Janine reassured me I'd be meeting my baby soon and Kath suggested sending my breath down to the baby. Despite the intensity I felt safe, present and connected to my baby. I asked how she/he would like to be born and sensed it was the position I was in - on my knees, arms around Viv and legs apart. An extra strong pushing surge rippled through my body - and with a few more breathes the head emerged, soon followed by the body ejecting. It was 2.54am.

In a split-second, Janine whooshed baby and cord out from between my legs and I was holding my baby in my arms. Words can never do justice to the feeling of holding your baby for the first time, but I'll try; a mixture of extreme joy, pride, relief, thankfulness and pure ecstasy washed over me all at once. I held her up and Maya proudly announced she was a girl. After cuddle time in the bath I was helped to the couch where she latched on to my nipple like a seasoned pro and soon after I birthed the placenta. Maya immediately jumped into her big sister role and was keen to announce the name.

## WELCOME TO THE WORLD TARA!

We all celebrated with homemade fruit slice and bliss balls. Soon afterwards the birth team tucked us up in bed and we were ready for our moon cycle birth bubble and gentle start as a family of four.



Karena Reidy is wife to Viv and mother to Maya (10 years) and Tara (2 months), living on Gamaragal Country in Sydney. She is a high school teacher and Japanese yoga CEO/instructor where she runs her own outdoor boutique yoga studio and offers online courses. She is currently enjoying a short hiatus from high school teaching and gently returning to her Japanese yoga business. Karena's a fan of Aware Parenting and the Montessori approach. She is passionate about family, Eastern culture and philosophies of health, essential oils, piano, nature immersion, books, seasonal living and soulful conversations.

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Photo credit: [Anna Todd Photography](#)

# Birth Announcements

## CHARLOTTE - 5 OCTOBER 2020 -

Hi, I'm Amy. Just shy of 42 years old #advancedmaternalagemyass. First baby 41+3 weeks gestation Homebirth. Rocked a 5 hour labour. I had to do A LOT of mental preparation and re-education around the normality of labour and birth after many years of being an institutionalised, hospital based midwife. (I would have told you you were crazy a few years ago if you had suggested I'd have a home birth!) I was too scared to have my baby in a hospital so I researched a home birth. During pregnancy I found great inspiration and strength from [@badassmotherbirther](#) and my labour and delivery couldn't have been more magical thanks to my hilariously supportive partner, Pete, and the most incredible midwife on this planet, [Jo Hunter](#). Photo credit: [Jerusha Sutton](#)



## MARIA ANGELICA EL-ALI - 4 AUGUST 2021 -

At 4pm on 4 August I was sitting on the toilet and I got my first contraction, the pain was something else, but I was overcome with excitement as I knew I would be meeting my little love soon. The contractions got stronger quickly and soon enough I was labouring in the bath with my amazing hubby supporting me. Calmbirth techniques came flooding in and my awesome birth team promptly arrived along with my sisters to get the party started. Fast forward a few hours (14 to be exact) and I was holding the most perfect little girl with the best set of hair and longest lashes I'd ever seen. My home birth was everything I'd expected it would be plus so much more. It's left me so excited that I can't wait for baby and birth number two. Photo credit: [Bec Lawrence Photography](#)



## ADELINE CHRISTINE RAWLING - 28 FEBRUARY 2021 -

Our daughter Zola's birth was undisturbed, unassisted and uncaptured by our photographer, who we forgot to call and our Midwife [Janine](#), who we FaceTimed when I realised it was Zola's head and not a world record sized poop forcing me to the bathroom around 6:30pm on 28 February. 3.54kgs, 52cm long, 34cm head circumference, thankfully, as I don't think my perineum could have handled much more baby at the speed at which Zola was born. Her 5 year old brother Bodhi (who was also beautifully born at home) managed to grab 2 towels just in time, and her Dad looked after us all, keeping us calm and safe, until the rest of our birth team arrived.

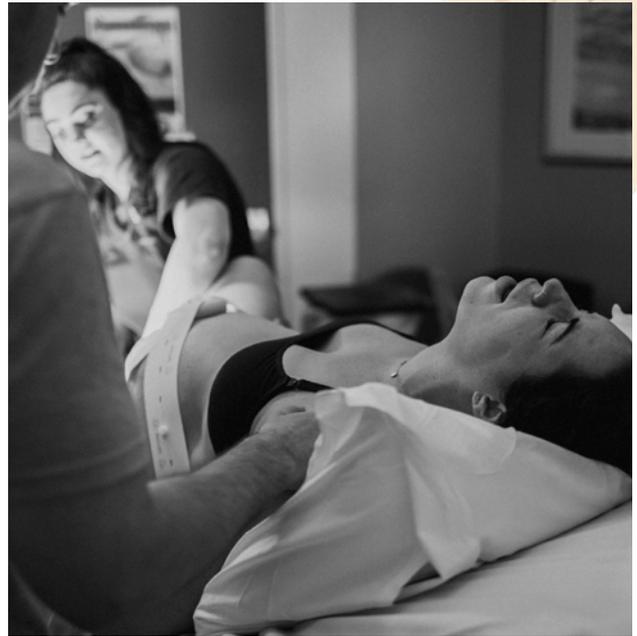


# The Birth of Blair

BY RACHEL MCDARRA

## THE BIRTH OF NASH (BABY NO. 1)

I was the typical new age pregnant woman - I read all the books, I felt so prepared, I was going to have a glorious natural birth. And then life smacked me down with brute force. Why? Because I didn't trust my instincts. I was all surface, no embodiment. So, when my labour didn't go to plan, I choked. I still had a natural birth, but it was scarring, traumatic, and soul destroying. I felt I'd let myself down. What happened next only reinforced my in capabilities - a few days after his birth, sitting in hospital for jaundice treatment, my brand new first baby stopped breathing in my arms. Luckily, I was in hospital at the time because the swift action of the nurses saved his life. But I know if I had trusted and followed my instincts, we wouldn't have been at the hospital at all, and he would never have stopped breathing in the first place (it's a story for another day). So, my first birth taught me I was absolutely immensely resilient. I can do hard things. And I never give up. I remember standing over the humidicrib in the NICU, looking at my first born covered in tubes

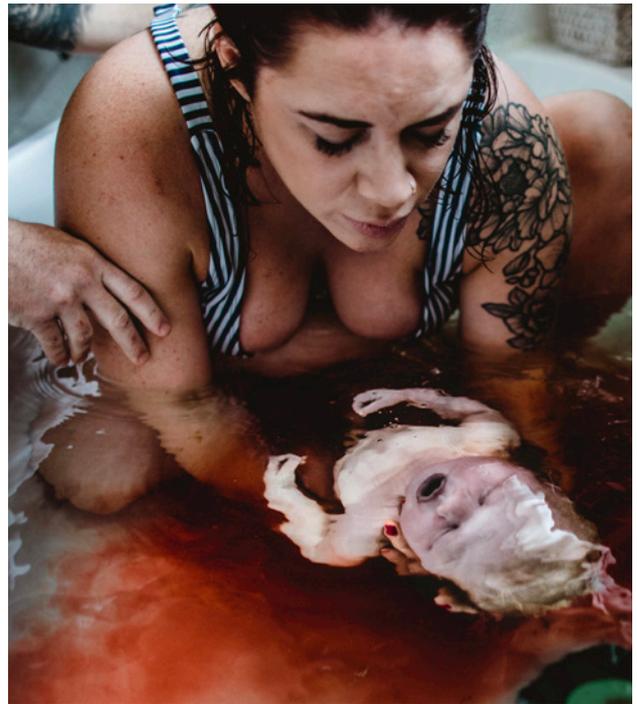


in a medically induced coma. My husband was an absolute wreck - he thought the worst. Looking up at him I said "I know it's hard. But if you can't push your own sh\*t aside while you are in his presence, so that you can be fully here for him and show him you believe in him, then you need to leave". Harsh? Maybe. I was feeling all the feels too, I was an empty shell. My heart was laying in that humidicrib. But there was no escaping the fierce mama lioness that was instilled in me the moment I found out I was pregnant, and even more so after the earth-shattering experience of bringing him earthside. And I would be damned if anyone was going to bring negativity into my babies healing space. He needed our determination to match his. And so that's what I brought. Here we are, on the other side, with a strong and healthy 3-year-old, and a knowing that I CAN do hard things. My first dip into motherhood taught me I am resilient and powerful beyond measure. He cracked me wide open and reminded me that I should trust my instincts. After all, mama knows best.

Photo credit: [The First Hello](#)

## THE BIRTH OF KOBE (BABY NO. 2)

I was much better prepared this time around. I'd had the hard birth, and there was no way I was going to repeat it. I wasn't going to be pushed around by hospital staff or feel alone and scared like my first time in the arena. I was reclaiming my birthing experience. And I was excited. I hired a doula for extra support, and we planned for another hospital birth. I'd have loved a midwife-led homebirth, but we couldn't afford it. So, although I was super anxious about birthing in a hospital again, I figured when the time came, I would heed advice and hop into the car like a good sport. But on the day of Kobe's arrival, there was no having it. He was coming in hot and fast, and by the time I knew what stage I was at, there was no leaving (my first was posterior, so the feeling was completely different). He was going to be birthed at home. And I wasn't worried one bit. My husband, on the other hand, was beside himself! "We have to get her in the car!", I remember him saying. My response? "Someone tell him to SHUT UP!". Haha. My baby and I were in control, and we knew everything was happening perfectly just the way it was. I roared Kobe into water in my own bathtub. My two year old was holding my hands and bringing me tissues for my 'ouchy', my



parents were keeping him occupied the rest of the time, my husband was silently freaking out by my side, and my Doula and photographer were epically holding space. I have my second baby to thank for teaching me to be bold (like he is in every sense of the word!). He showed me how to trust my body and my instincts, to be IN the moment, and to live in the fast lane.

Photo credit: [Life and Lens Photography](#)

## THE BIRTH OF BLAIR (BABY NO. 3)

My third and final baby brought me full circle. He taught me to trust others again. To allow myself to be held. To ebb and flow and embody fluidity. After much deliberation, at 34 weeks I finally decided how I would birth my third and final baby. I knew I wanted it to be special. And while a home-birth would have been equally amazing, I felt like nothing could compare to the epic power brought about by Kobe's free-birth, and plus, I wanted to enter the hospital space again, to deeply heal my first birthing wound. So, I set about finding my support network. My previous doula and photographer were unavailable, so after not 'feeling it' with a few options, I went with my gut and reached out one last time to two beautiful women who were surprisingly available, and that's when I knew we were on track for an epic birth. This was around the time of the pandemic, so after much back and forth with the hospital, I was granted permission to have both my Doula and photographer in the birthing suite with me. Everything was aligning. I

could feel this baby was different. The energy was different. And when I leant into it, it felt calming. He was reminding me to trust my instincts and the only time I felt stressed, was when I didn't. On the day of his arrival we were able to stroll the gardens in the hospital and reminisce on my previous two births. At go time I instinctively knew what my baby and my body needed. I chose the stairs instead of the lift, even though I was leaking amniotic fluid everywhere. A lady stopped me as I was sidestepping my way up the stairs. "Are you ok?" She asked. "Yeah! I'm just in labour" I replied effortlessly, a grin on my face. "Oh my god, do you need help?!" She said, frantically looking for a nurse to grab. "No! I'm fine, thanks." I replied, a little abhorred by her distrust in my body's abilities. But I knew, I was right where I needed to be. I was calm. We get back to my room, and I realised I have meconium waters - the same issue that sparked an attempted cascade of forceful intervention at my first birth - "don't tell anyone!" I told the room. When the midwives finally arrived, I was almost ready to push, and they were none the wiser. Babies heartbeat was checked and strong. Any further intervention was unnecessary. After a few self-imposed position changes to help him move into the right position, out I roared baby Blair, into water, in hospital, feeling safe and supported and



powerfully attuned. I had come full circle. I did it. I listened to my body and my mind and I created the perfect birth. He was born on my late Aunt's birthday - I like to think she had something to do with it too.

**THE POWER OF BIRTH. THE POWER OF SURRENDER. THE POWER OF WOMEN. THE POWER OF ME.**



I am a 35 years young stay at home mum of three amazing boys, aged 3 and under. I always wanted kids close in age - people say it's hard in the beginning but gets easier because being so close in age means they'll have so much in common. Well we're definitely not at the easier stage just yet! My boys are Nash 3.5 years, Kobe 1.5 years, and Blair 4 months. They were all 4.2 - 4.5kg (9.25 - 10 pounds). My body is wrecked, and my mind feels about the same most days! I'm tired, but I love it. Mothering is hard, but wow I've never felt my heart so warm. When I'm not making snacks or cleaning grubby faces, I love yoga, Pilates, reading, baking, and my hair when it's behaving. Oh, and quiet time!

Photo credit: [Justine Curran](#)

# Birth Announcements

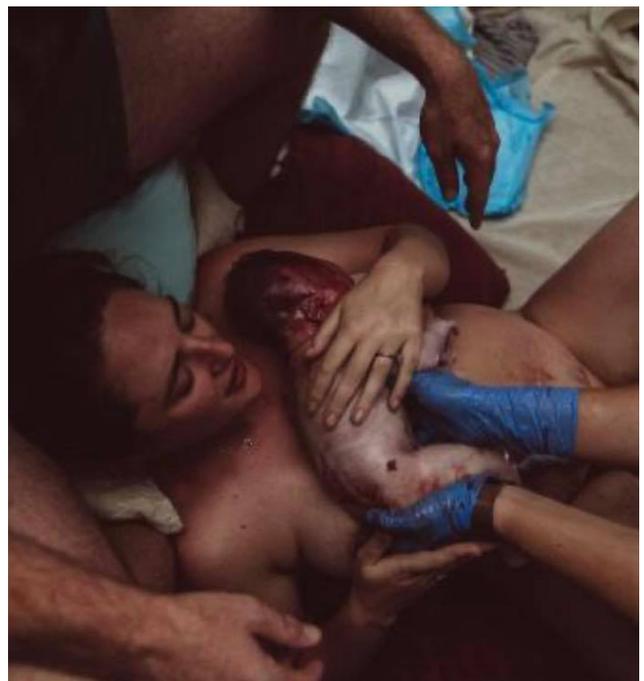
## ZURIKO ANDANI ZEUS - 1 JUNE 2021 -

Zach and Rebecca are happy to announce the arrival of Zuriko Andani Zeus, born at home at 1:02am on 1 June, measuring 3.6kg (7lbs 15oz) and 53.5cm (21in). Her brother Zaden and sisters Zia and Zirsha welcomed her and are thoroughly in love with her. Her 9 year old sister Zia was present and supportive throughout the labour and witnessed her birth. The labour was very intense - less than 4 hrs start to finish - but we did manage to get a little bit of our much anticipated early labour dance party on! Our journey was supported and enhanced by our incredible midwife [Janine O'Brien](#), who brought deep compassion and trust, and provided emotional, spiritual and physical support throughout and beyond; and our doula [Sarah Newling](#), whose questioning and reflections uncovered new insights into my previous births that helped me in this one.



## ASHER GOSLING-BUXTON - 27 MARCH 2021 -

Asher Gosling-Buxton was born on 27 March this year at home in south Sydney. I'm told my labour was more fast and intense than some first time mums but with nothing to compare it to I'd say it was just right. I started early labour around 2am and was warned by my midwife they would probably ease off in the daylight, but by midday my beautiful doula, [Emma](#), had arrived and shortly after confirmed we were into active labour. By 4:30pm, [Chantel](#), my wonderful midwife was there and I heard the word 'transition' whispered between women. Bub didn't want a water birth and everything slowed in the water, so after some more time in the bathroom, spinning babies, lunges along the corridor, and a whole lot of pushing.... Chantel performed a quick episiotomy and my beautiful boy was on my chest in one push, followed by the placenta 3 minutes later. To me it was perfect and I couldn't be more grateful to my gorgeous team and my partner who never left my side. Photo credit: [Emma Burke Doula](#)



# What Does It Feel Like Being Born?

BY JODIE MILLER

Before reviewing the book, I want to offer my insights on beautiful author Jodie. She's over 50 but looks 30 due to a life of organic eating and selling her produce via Fresh Local Provisions and pre-mothering yoga instructor roles. She is diplomatic, but a fierce advocate for women to have public access to continuity of midwifery care and out of hospital birthing. I've had the pleasure of sitting in a meeting with Qld's Senior Maternity Advisor where Jodie explained, 'Giving birth is just like doing a poo, it's a physiological process'. While I agree it can be and most women want this, it's virtually impossible in a hospital setting with around 1% achieving an unhindered vaginal birth. Her first draft of the book included some incredible, enlightening and inspiring accounts of events of the last 20 years of maternity activism, predominantly in Brisbane with many familiar names, now that I live here.

Her published book has been toned down into a memoir intended to appeal to a wider audience. This gives insight into the 'otherlife' of maternity consumer representatives. She touched on personal sacrifice, with the out-of-pocket cost of childcare while representing consumers in hospital meetings, being ridiculed by the medical lobby and media at times,

and the phrase we constantly hear 'it's a marathon not a sprint' which feels even more tokenistic than health consumer representation is.

I'm a big fan of comparing and contrasting, and after reading the 2005 Hirst Re-birthing report into Queensland's birthing services, which MC (now known as MCA) lobbied the health minister to achieve, not a lot has changed and recommendations have still not been implemented, and certainly no independent evaluation of any of the recommended National maternity plans or strategies have been reviewed again since that time.

Jodie recounts many key events that led to the Re-birthing Report that would be valuable for all women to read about but particularly vital

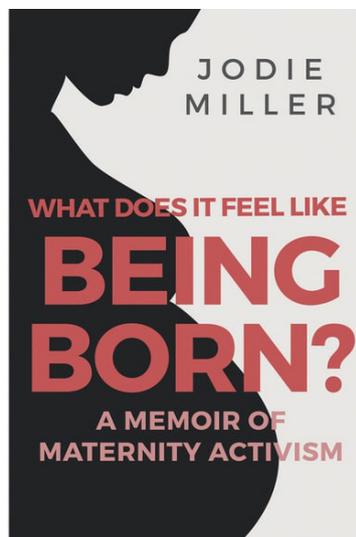
historical context for maternity advocates to immerse themselves in. Her stories will make you so angry as you read the comments from those opposing women owning their births, in order to retain control of the market. You'll feel excited as she explains in detail how she felt conception and labour begin.

Controversially, she discusses sex and mothering needs and she is inspiring with her work life balance and running a household while suffering PND with her first two colic babies. It truly is a good read, but you won't want to put it down! Paperback and eBook are sold online everywhere, and an audiobook is in the pipeline for November 2021 to make it more accessible, particularly for busy mums!

Order your copy from [shawlinepublishing.com.au/what-does-it-feel-like-being-born](http://shawlinepublishing.com.au/what-does-it-feel-like-being-born).

Watch the vodcast at [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Review written by  
Azure Rigney





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# The Birth of Mia

BY SUZANNA LA ROSA

I had been waiting for labour for what seemed like a while. 38 weeks had come and gone, and both my boys (5 and 2) were born at 38+2 and 38+5. I was trying not to expect it at the same time again but couldn't help the waiting and analysing of every twinge. All week I had been having pre-labour, but nothing ever came of it. Once I reached 39 weeks, I had just accepted that it would be longer this time around.

On Monday I had a busy day and went around running quite a few errands. Even though I had ticked off my to do list a while ago little things kept popping up, so I went out to buy some extras for dinner, chicken food and picked up a bundle of towels for the birth in case we needed more. School run, playground, homework, dinner - it was busy, but the day went well. All day I had noticed more of the early labour cramping and contractions than I'd had the last few days. They were uncomfortable, but not painful. So, I was able to go about my day as normal but was secretly wondering if things were truly ramping up this time. My husband wasn't home until very late in the evening as his father had a stroke late Saturday night and he'd been staying at the hospital with him all Sunday and Monday after work. When he got back, we were all tired and went to bed very early.

Around 1am I woke with defined contractions, but they were gentle enough to breathe through while laying down in bed. Salv noticed and we started chatting if it was happening this time. I was able to doze off a little between contractions. Leon, my two-year-old, woke at one stage but thankfully I could settle him back to sleep quite quickly, unlike during the previous last few weeks of pregnancy.

Between dozing and resting I went downstairs a couple of times to warm up my heat pack, then back to labour in bed mostly trying to conserve energy and rest before the day began.

Around 4.30/5am the waves had gotten considerably stronger and I couldn't lie down during them

anymore. I messaged my best friend Izzy who was going to support my freebirth, telling her what was happening. Salv and I cuddled in bed and I'd get up on all fours to sway and breathe through each contraction. We decided he would stay home from work today, even though my previous labours had all been very long.

The kids woke and we decided to keep Louis, our 5-year-old, home from school also. He was keen to go at first but finally agreed to stay home as long as he could wear his uniform.

I went to the toilet many times during labour and finally chunks of my mucus plug were coming away. I had been waiting for this, with my other two births I'd always lost the plug the day before labour started so now, I finally let myself believe this was really it.

Salv took the kids down for breakfast and they excitedly told my sister Ninna and her partner James that we were having the baby today! James got ready to clear out for a day or two and left not long after while my sister and Salv looked after the kids and occasionally came upstairs to check on me.

Labour was progressing quickly, and I soon had to start vocalizing through the waves. I tried to stay relaxed and not tense during them, reminding myself to let each one come and go, come and go while I would sway through them. They were very strong and around 8am I remember thinking I'll struggle to make it through a 20-hour labour of these. In anticipation of another very long labour, like previously, I had bought the birth boost tincture this time. But when offered to me I was actually too scared to take it as the waves were strong and I didn't want to ramp things up even more.

I had a shower which helped for a bit and then continued to labour mostly alone in the darkened bedroom upstairs. In the shower, I had a feel for baby and could feel the opening still higher up but definitely there which encouraged me.

Ninna and Salv were beginning to fill the pool. We were all unsure what to expect as labour seemed in full swing with very strong contractions but with my last birth things also started early in the morning, but my son wasn't born until almost midnight that day.

I was getting quite loud through the waves, a particular affirmation in my mind... to keep my tone low, but as loud as I needed. Vocalising definitely helped with the sensations.

## EVERY NOW AND AGAIN MY KIDS CAME IN FOR A QUICK VISIT TO SEE ME WHICH WAS LOVELY.

In the end I was glad the pool was ready when it was. I thought I could just get in and out a few times if it was going to be many, many hours still. I got in the pool about 10.15am maybe. The water was wonderful. So, soothing on my belly and tired back. Salv told me that Izzy, my friend, would be there within the hour. I mostly laboured on all fours or hanging over the edge of the pool. For a little while I switched to resting on my back as I was becoming exhausted and just needed a change in

position during the waves. The pool was so hot, but I also didn't want to cool the water or get out. Instead I had a cool cloth on my forehead.

I kept waiting for Izzy, thinking her coming might give me another boost of energy to make it through as I was struggling. The contractions were coming in hard and fast; I was moaning very loudly through each one and Salv closed the doors. I asked him to put pressure on my back for the last few, getting a little frustrated at his lack of support. Reaching inside I felt for baby once more and the head was there, just a few cm up. I thought I should go to the toilet to pee and release there. Ninna and Salv helped me out, as soon as I sat on the toilet, I got the strongest contractions back to back and my body just began pushing. It hurt and I felt scared of the pain yelling, "I can't do this", but at the same time couldn't help anything as Fetal Ejection Reflex (FER) had kicked in. The ring of fire, my waters burst and out came the head and body in one mighty wave. I caught the baby myself, Salv saw the cord was wrapped and I asked him to help me unwrap it as bub was so slippery, twice around the neck and once the upper body. Then I brought her up



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to my chest and she pinked up and let out a little cry right away.

The floor was so slippery from my waters and Salv helped me walk over to a chair that Ninna had gotten ready. I sat down and we all just marvelled that it was over, and baby was here. The kids came over to meet their little sibling, we checked and found we had a little girl! I ended up checking again a little later just to be sure as I couldn't quite believe it.

Izzy arrived a few minutes later. They made me the afterbirth tea which was lovely, and our little Mia had her first feed. When she was done, I tried to see if the placenta would come but it didn't yet, then we moved upstairs to sit more comfortably on the bed. This was so lovely; I had some tea and snacks and Mia had another feed.

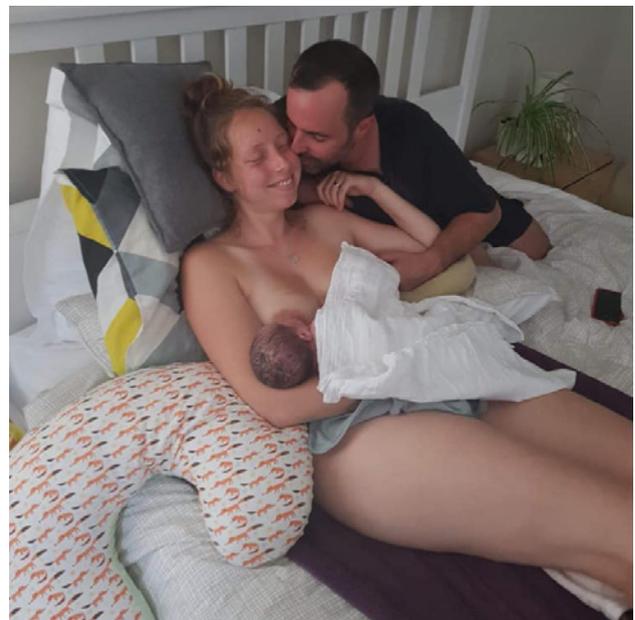


it out then. Finally, though it came away and we went back to bed.

Later it was time to cut the cord and Louis wanted to help but then felt unsure. Ninna tied the cord tie and then Salv cut it with Louis holding his arm. We snuggled some more, Salv had some skin to skin with Mia while I had a short shower and got half dressed. Eventually we dressed her too and both her and I had a beautiful nap while everyone else helped finish up cleaning.



The after pains were quite strong but I still didn't feel the placenta wanting to come. Eventually, after about two hours I decided I really wanted to get it out and went to the bathroom first and then squatted over a bowl there. It was awkward and actually took quite some effort to push out as I didn't have any urge or contractions to help push



Susanna is a mum of three and lives with her loving husband and their beautiful children at the foot of the Blue Mountains. Her first son was born in the car and her two younger children were free birthed at home. She has a passion for birth, breastfeeding and everything creative. Being a stay at home mum keeps her busy but when she finds a spare minute, you'll find her sewing or crocheting.

Photo credit: Eliza Peacock

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# Lactation Cookie Recipe

BY MEALS 4 MUMMAS

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup rolled oats  
 1 cup gluten free flour  
 1 cup almond meal  
 150g of jaggery or coconut sugar  
 150g butter or coconut oil for vegan option  
 1 tsp cardamom  
 1 tsp ground fennel

## METHOD

Melt butter on stove top, add sugar and spices.  
 In a large mixing bowl add all dry ingredients and once.  
 Butter has melted add to the dry mix. Stir in well.  
 Heat oven 180degrees, pour mixture into baking dish and cook for 12-15mins.

You can add chocolate chips to mixture if you fancy a chocolate hit!  
 Just add after you have stirred in the butter otherwise they will melt.



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