

BIRTHINGS

A HOMEBIRTH ACCESS SYDNEY QUARTERLY PUBLICATION



This Issue Is Dedicated To The Memory Of Dr John Stevenson: 1921 – 2010

Safety & Risk

Plus all our regular features, birth notices, letters, your stories and pictures & updates on our community activities.

www.homebirthsydney.org.au

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The views expressed in this magazine are those of the named contributors only and are not necessarily shared by Homebirth Access Sydney, its Committee or the Editors or Editorial Board of Birthings.

CONTRIBUTIONS, PHOTOS, CORRESPONDENCE

Please send to Virginia Maddock at editor@homebirthsydney.org.au
Photos and written submissions must be emailed. Prior notice to the Editors of your intention to submit work is not necessary, but can be helpful in planning content.

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

Winter 2011	No. 110	1 May 2011
Spring 2011	No. 111	1 August 2011
Summer 2011	No. 112	1 November 2011
Autumn 2012	No. 113	1 February 2012

BACK ISSUES Back issues of Birthings are like hen's teeth! But we will try to accommodate requests. Back issues cost \$4.00 – \$7.00 per issue. Postage is \$3.00 per single copy. A price for multiple copies can be arranged. The magazine is very valuable in that it contains many birth stories and information, plus give an insight into the homebirth movement and HAS activities.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS Please notify any change of address to HAS, PO Box 66, Broadway, NSW 2007 or by email to the Memberships Coordinator at: member@homebirthsydney.org.au

CONTRIBUTING TO BIRTHINGS

The strength of Birthings is all the thoughtprovoking, inspiring and challenging writing from members of our community. To ensure that the magazine is balanced, responsive to our audience's interests and needs, and reflects the priorities of HAS, we have developed a set of contribution guidelines. We also work with an editorial board, selected by the HAS executive, to reflect the range of people in our community. The founding board members are Maggie Lecky-Thompson, Adrienne Abulhawa, Jo Hunter, Sarah McLean and the current editor, Virginia Maddock. The role of the editorial board is outlined in the guidelines below.

CONTRIBUTION GUIDELINES

Here are some guidelines for how to write your story, and what happens once you have submitted it for our consideration.

WHAT TO SUBMIT Submissions are sought on the theme of the issue as stated on the back cover of the previous issue. Your response to the theme may be in a range of formats: poetry, opinion, artistic, personal or factual.

We also welcome birth stories from members. Your birth story is a special part of your family's journey and the story of homebirth in Sydney. It is also a great gift to share with other parents, especially those preparing for the birth of their own babies.

Other submissions apart from those outlined above are also very welcome, though we may not always be able to publish them, as we often receive more submissions than we have space to print. We will get back to you as soon as possible with a response and discuss the possibilities. If you have an idea for a submission that you would like to discuss before writing fully, please feel free to send us an email with an outline. We love a good idea!

STYLE Your submission should be written in your own style. You do not need to be a professional writer or have a poetic style to give a moving and interesting account of your own experience.

Your submitted writing should be all your own work – you must not borrow or copy words written by someone else, unless they are attributed quotes of a reasonable length.

LENGTH Please write your story in the amount of words you think you need. As a guideline, most birth stories work best when they are under 1200 words. Submissions on the theme should be under 1700 words.

We may edit for length and style and so may cut your story to ensure it is appropriate for use in BIRTHINGS.

EDITING Your story will be checked by our team of editors. The intention is to retain your voice, while ensuring that grammar, spelling and other style issues are correct and of a high quality. Your story may also be cut for length (see above).

Your story may not defame any person. If the editorial team is concerned that an issue of defamation may exist, we may decline to publish your work or require the defamatory material to be removed prior to publication.

If any major editing is recommended by our editors, we will contact you for permission and return a copy of the edited material for your approval. If our standard editing procedure is applied, we will not send it for your approval.

PICTURES We encourage you to submit some high-resolution digital images with your story, especially with birth stories. We will include as many as we can to illustrate your story.

TERMS OF USE Please note that by submitting your story to Birthings you warrant that the content is not confidential and that you have the right to offer it for publication. You also agree that you grant Birthings the copyright permission for the purposes of publication in this magazine and on the Homebirth Access Sydney website.

EDITORIAL BOARD All stories will be put before the editorial board before publication. The board's duties include:

- Reviewing copy to ensure it reflects the priorities of HAS and the interests and needs of its members and the community,
- Supporting the editors to make editorial decisions,
- Providing a guide for the future direction of the magazine.

PROCEDURES Please provide your story as a Microsoft Word or equivalent document attached to an email and sent to Virginia Maddock at: editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

You will be notified immediately of receipt and contacted before publication. There is often more material than we can publish submitted for each issue of Birthings. If your story cannot be published due to space limitations we will contact you. In some cases we will ask your permission to hold a story over for a future issue.

Thank you so much for considering a contribution to Birthings. Your experiences and insights are what makes the magazine so rich and interesting, and such a valuable resource for the homebirth community.

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BIRTHINGS

Safety & Risk

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Contributors

Carolyn Galbraith lives in the Blue Mountains with her partner Jeremy and newborn daughter 'Sojo'. She runs a service for families of young children with disabilities and enjoys reading and scrapbooking, as well as researching new ideas and best practices, such as birthing at home!

Elizabeth Trevan is an actor, civil celebrant and mother of three, Esther (4 1/2), Harvey and Nash (3) living in Coogee. Elizabeth believes that she's lived an incredibly thrilling life so far, but nothing has yet exceeded the extraordinary experience of home-birthing her twins. She feels very blessed.

Emma Perrott lives in Sydney with her 4 children and husband. For the past 9 years Emma has been a stay at home mum, has home schooled, home birthed and enjoys the odd home brew.

Jane Hardwicke Collings is an independent midwife who has been attending homebirths since 1984. She is herself a homebirth mother of four, a grandmother and a teacher of the Women's Mysteries. She gives workshops, writes books and has founded The School of Shamanic Midwifery. She is author of 'Ten Moons - the Inner Journey of Pregnancy', 'Thirteen Moons- how to chart your cycle', and 'Becoming -a woman, a guide for girls approaching menstruation'. Jane lives in the country of NSW with her husband, some of her children and many animal friends. As Jane says, she's working for the Goddess. www.moonsong.com.au www.schoolofshamanicmidwifery.com www.placentalremedy.com AND check out the Herstory Facebook page.

Jeni Drew lives with her partner Rod and their sons Elijah and Jerome on the Gold Coast, Queensland. Passionate about birth since the homebirths of her boys, Jeni is a member of the HMA (Home Midwifery Association) Gold Coast branch which is a "lifeline" to her in all things birth and parenting related. Jeni is a qualified practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method. As this goes to print, she is newly pregnant with baby number 3.

Julie Priora is married to Dean and they are the proud parents of 3 gorgeous boys; Brendan 4, Cailen 2 and Lucas is 6 months old. They live in the lower Blue Mountains which Julie has called home for 8 years now after moving over from her home state of WA. They are proud homebirthers and one day Julie may put her Steiner Teacher training into full gear and head back to study and the work force.

Justine Caines is a mother of 8 homeborn children, aged 11 years to 9 months. The experience of her children's births has fuelled a life long passion to assist women in making real choices about their bodies and babies. Justine led the maternity reform campaign over the last 10 years, recently standing aside and entering the paid workforce as a political adviser. She was awarded an Order of Australia for her efforts on Australia Day this year, something she shares with her very supportive family members. She now lives in Canberra.

Linda Hutchinson-West is sharing her life with wife Aby and raising their beautiful kids, daughter Cam (7.5), and sons Tali (almost 3.5) and Carter (14/12/10). As a family they are living life to the full as a natural learning homeschool family. Linda is passionate about good healthy foods, natural health care, conscious aware living and parenting, baby wearing, breastfeeding, cosleeping, homebirthing, home cooking and all things Asian Indian. They live in costal surburbia with one dog, 2 cats and 3 chooks and a wild veggie patch.

Marie Burrows is a therapist and childbirth educator in Bondi Junction. She is the mother of two children and the director of Birthing Rites Australia, which commenced in Sydney in 1987. Her work began in birth in the late 1960s with Dr. Graham Farrant in his psychiatric practice in Melbourne, who advocated for intellectual, emotional and spiritual health. This culminated in a strong advocacy for change in birth practices. It was actively supported by many midwives, doctors, and childbirth educators. This profoundly set Marie on the path of changing birth practices for families. Birth is a transformation. www.birthingrites.com.au

Melanie Jackson is a PhD Candidate with the University of Western Sydney and is in her second year of her thesis project 'Birthing outside the system'. Melanie is a naturopath and midwife in private practice with The Ella May Centre and is co-founder of 'Midwives@Sydney and Beyond' midwifery group practice. In her spare time Melanie loves to hike, bush walk, camp, make jewellery, paint and have slow coffees with her husband Dan.

Naomi Pryde holds a degree in International Aid and Development and has a passion for women's and children's empowerment and development. She feels incredibly blessed to be a mother to Elkie and wife to Joshua and is currently just lapping up all the joys of caring for this new little life.

Nicole Bridges is a university lecturer and PhD student. Her research study, titled "Breastfeeding and online social networking" is a netnographic study exploring the experiences of mothers involved in an online breastfeeding support group. Nicole has also published several journal articles regarding breastfeeding and the media, and continues to support and advocate for breastfeeding mothers in her role as a breastfeeding counsellor and trainer with the Australian Breastfeeding Association. She is also mother to Madison, Brynlee, and the latest addition – Quinn Kali.

Ria Hamblett is currently completing her Masters degree in Information Management part time, while being a full time mum to Belle (6 years), Frano (nearly 4) and Iris (6 months) alongside their wonderful dad, Brett Hirst. We live in the beautiful Blue Mountains.

Trisha Gough is a homebirth mother of four beautiful children, doula, childbirth educator and Shamanic Midwife. Becoming a mother 7 1/2 years ago ignited Trisha's passion for all things pregnancy and birth. Her greatest teachers have been her children in their own births, all so different, all amazing. The birth of her fourth baby Willow, made way for Trisha to experience being her own Shamanic Midwife, an empowering experience that fuels her in her birth work and mothering today. Trisha and her husband Cameron own a thriving organic food wholesale business, Pacific Organics, and live on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. www.pacificorganics.com.au/

Virginia Maddock is fiancé to Dan and proud Mum to 2 year old Jetsun and 13 year old Yin Yin, her Burmese cat. She is Birthings editor and HAS Membership Coordinator, and hosts the Sutherland Shire & St George Homebirth Group at her house in Caringbah every Thursday. She is a doula, herbalist and nutritionist for her business 'Natural Beginnings' and runs 'Bear and Bubs' (childbirth education for Dads at the pub) at her local. Virginia and Dan have completed their 4 month preconception health programme and have just become pregnant, first try. Yay! www.naturalbeginnings.com.au



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Editorial

VIRGINIA
MADDOCK

Welcome to the Autumn 2011 issue of Birthings: 'Safety & Risk' – our biggest and best ever (well in my humble opinion anyway, bearing in mind I've only been on the scene for a few years!). We apologise for last edition's printing error which deleted page 2 and messed up the whole layout, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Our printer promised us a good deal on this issue which has meant that we could afford to expand to 60 pages to include every feature article – all 5 of them, and every delicious birth story – all 11 of them (most of which illustrate our theme very nicely!) and a colour cover. We welcome our latest designer Leah White, who has had to replace Danny Crawford who could not continue due to personal family problems – we wish him all the best.

At the time of writing I am 8 weeks pregnant – due early October (well that's what I am telling people anyway to avoid the 'overdue' label and pressure!). I am still getting used to the idea after falling pregnant first try, as I was convinced it would take two attempts like last time. Anyway, before even getting pregnant I was told by my GP that I was high risk, so this issue is a pertinent one for me. After testing positive to 'anticardiolipin antibodies' (which increases the clotting factor of my blood and apparently the risk of miscarriage, intra-uterine growth restriction (IUGR) and pre-eclampsia), I was told that when I did get pregnant, I should be under the care of an obstetrician and prescribed blood thinning medication – which I have heard would guarantee me an induction at thirty eight weeks (as if I would let anyone do that to me!). I had tested positive to this test during my preconception health care before my first child, but due to me religiously taking the right herbs and supplements, I had a relatively incident free pregnancy and birth (to a healthy and robust almost 4kg boy – certainly no IUGR there!), so I see no point in letting the fear mongering medical model stress me into becoming their new subject this time around. I trust that all the healthcare I have done and continue to do will keep my baby healthy.

I think that the majority of people that choose homebirth, do so because they take charge of their own health and want to retain full autonomy over their own bodies, instead of handing over all decisions to a doctor with a God complex who thinks he (or she) knows better! It is this reason that a large percentage of homebirthers fall into the so called "high risk" category, (ie. VBACs at home, going very overdue, twin births and breech births – all of which we have personal stories of in this issue); as we reject the narrow parameters of the medical meaning of risk. And time and time again, we prove that with good education on real risk relativity (ie. evidence based care), with good health practices and with trust in our babies and our bodies, homebirth is usually a very safe (if not safer) choice!

Our next issue will be on the theme "The Fourth Stage" which is the post-partum period of adjustment to the new baby. Some sources claim that this covers the first few hours after the birth and others assume it is up to six weeks. Whichever it is, we invite your submissions. These can include bonding and attachment, breastfeeding, babymoons, sleep, lotus birth, motherhood, or however you interpret it. We would also love your letters (at least one would be nice!), birth stories and poetry. Deadline for the Winter issue is May 1st. Please send your submissions to editor@homebirthsydney.org.au.



Membership

Homebirth Access Sydney is the only group of its kind in Sydney. It fills an extremely important function in providing a centrally organised group of caring people, gathering information and making it available to everyone who is interested in childbirth alternatives and the myriad related issues.

Please support this vital work by subscribing to birthings

- 3 year membership: \$90
- 1 year membership: \$40
- Midwives subscribing clients: \$15 per client

Membership entitles you to receive Birthings four times a year and satisfaction in knowing that your money is being used to keep the group alive in order to make it easier for families to birth at home.

Please deposit correct money into our bank account:
Homebirth Access Sydney, BSB: 062 257, Acc #: 1017 2779
and email your details (as below) with receipt number to member@homebirthsydney.org.au, or send your completed form with cheque or money order to HAS, PO Box 66, Broadway, NSW 2007

*Name

*Address

*Telephone:

*Email:

Occupation:

Can you volunteer help?

(Typing, fundraising, emailing, events, organising etc.)

Please tick: New member Renewal Email receipt required

Please enclose: \$90 for 3-year membership

\$40 for 1-year membership

\$15 for midwife client membership (1-year)

Midwife's name:

*NOTE: REQUIRED ENTRY FOR OUR DATABASE.

For receipt request and enquiries: member@homebirthsydney.org.au

Birth Announcements

Send your birth announcements with a photograph to editor@homebirthsydney.org.au



Cameron and Trisha along with big brothers Taj and Eden and sister Nina, welcome **Willow Violet Moon**, born 08/08/10. At 42 weeks Willow was in no hurry to come out and after a magnificent 3 day labour she arrived into her Mama's loving arms in the pool at home. Willow is a true gift and adored by us all. Thank you to our awesome birthing team Sheryl, Tess, Renee, Elizabeth, Ann, Taj, Eden and Nina. The trust and support I felt during the birthing of Willow is what every woman deserves, a beautiful anchor that sustained me through those three days, and in birthing Willow I have a confidence that supports me in this Mother of four journey! Welcome Willow, our sweet baby girl, we are so blessed to have you.



Geoff and Rebekkah rejoice in the birth of their beautiful gift from the Lord, **Amy Esther Moyle**. She was born calmly in water at home on 15 August 2010 at 9.27am after a 6 1/2 hour labour. Thank you to our midwife Akal Khalsa for journeying with us and to our dear sister, midwife and support, Alyssea, for the treasure you are. All glory and praise to God for His incredible design in creating women to birth so beautifully and for the wonderful privilege of raising Amy in His ways.



Kerai Ru Watanabe arrived on his due date, 30 September 2010 weighing in at 3.3kg. When he smiles he looks just like his Dad and when he's serious he looks like his Mom. We are so thankful to have our midwife, Akal, guide us through the end of the pregnancy, the birth, our first several days with our precious little bub, and also the ins and outs of living in Sydney. We'll never forget our time here and are already looking forward to our return to show Kerai where he was born.



Surprise singleton(!) **Carter Sage** finally made his way into the world on the 14th December 2010 3:14pm. 17 days "late", he was born unassisted at home (in the same pool his big brother was born in 3yrs earlier) after a very fast labour. He was welcomed with much joy by Muma (Linda), Mumum (Aby), big sister Cam, big brother Tali, Nana and our amazing doula, Natalie Dash. A beautiful big boy (4445g and 53cm long), he was lotus born 19th December 2010. Huge thanks for the amazing support Nat, and our love and questions unanswered to 'Rose'.



I am pleased to announce that our gorgeous little baby girl **Treya Griesberg** was born at home on 3rd Jan 2011, weighing a whopping 9lb 4.5oz (4210gms). It was a fairly demanding labour for a small woman but with the help of Sonja Macgregor, my partner Karl, and friend Emily, Treya arrived safe and sound and is thriving!



Our darling **Sienna Francis Marie Granelli** waterbirthed at home on Wednesday 13th October 2010 at 7.14am weighing 3.81kg. Little sister to Luca & Jasper, her wonderful birth completes our family. Many thanks to Sonja MacGregor for her calm yet reassuring support.



Naomi and Joshua welcome **Elkarnah 'Elkie' Halcyon Pryde**, born at 4:57am 26th November 2010, calmly at home with her daddy and our lovely midwives Melanie Jackson and Hannah Dahlen by our sides. She weighed 3.3kg and measured 52cm. Our hearts are bursting with love for our beautiful Elkie and as the days pass we can't believe how much this love just keeps on growing! We are blessed! A massive thanks to our midwives for facilitating a joyful, safe and fear free birth as we trusted your knowledge and skills completely.



Quinn Kali Fazio was born in water at home on Wednesday 1st December, 2010 at 12:47am, at 43 weeks plus 3 days gestation. Measuring in at 4.4kg and 55cm long, he was definitely worth waiting for. Quinn and his mother Nicole were supported by his father Darrin and big sisters Madison and Brynlee during the birth which lasted just over 2 hours. We would like to thank our birth team which included our beautiful midwife Jo Hunter, our amazing doula Natalie Dash, and two other support people (and special friends) Nicole Johnston and Anne Denham. We are eternally grateful for their support, patience and faith that Quinn would enter the world when it was his time. Thank you for sharing this amazing experience with us.



Louise and Corey would like to announce the birth of their beautiful son, **Noah Xavier Silk**, born on the 4th January weighing 3.7kg and measuring 55.5cm. He was born peacefully and happily at home in a wonderful waterbirth! His parents could not be prouder. We would like to thank our birth team, the wonderful, supportive and lovely midwife Jo Hunter for all of her care and love during pregnancy, birth and beyond, and gorgeous midwife Gaye Demanuele, who is also my mother, whose wisdom and support proved invaluable. Thank you both so much you are amazing! We would also like to thank sister Anneke, for everything she did to make me more comfortable during labour. And finally I would like to thank Corey, who was so loving, supportive and a rock to lean on during birth. Welcome to the world Noah!



Carolyn Galbraith and Jeremy Schinko are proud to announce the birth of **Sojourner Angela Galbraith Schinko** on January 9th 2011. Our precious daughter arrived via caesarean after a long labour at home and is absolutely perfect; we can't imagine our lives without her. She arrived 2 minutes past midnight weighing 3.68 kg and was 48cm long, with a head of gorgeous dark curls. We were able to have a "good" caesarean due to our midwife and doula team, Jo Hunter and Natalie Dash, whose support was invaluable both during labour and the post-natal period. We cannot thank you enough.



Robert and Cait are pleased to announce the birth of **Teresa Catherine Griffin**, born on Sunday, January 30th, at 0644hrs through water to her mother's arms, weighing 3.8kg and 56cm long. Thanks to our wonderful midwife Jo Hunter.



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Committee Member Profile:



AURELIE GILES

Joined HAS:

In 2007 when I was pregnant with my first one, my midwife Jan Robinson got me a subscription to Birthing magazine.

Then in 2010 HAS was asking for volunteers to fill some positions and I thought it would be interesting to give it a go. I became 'volunteers' coordinator'.

Family:

Three beautiful boys fill my days: husband Evan, Thomas (3 and half years old) and Paul (16 months).

Life before birthing:

Did I have a life before birthing?

I hadn't been in Australia for long when our first son was born. Before becoming an Aussie mum, I was French and used to live in France.

Why homebirth?

When I attended my first appointment with an obstetrician, I didn't feel comfortable with his patronizing and business like manner. I felt more like a number than a person.

I thought 'surely there is another way...' So I did my research online and soon decided that a homebirth was the best choice for me. Unfortunately, it turned out that Thomas had to be born in a hospital. But his little brother Paul was born at home two years after that, which is ironic because I was booked into a hospital to have him. So my dream of a homebirth came true after all...

Heart to Heart

Because we are too short, too tall,
too thin, too small of foot,
too old, too young, too wide,
and our pelvises are too narrow, too small,
too untried, or unproven,
or the wrong shape,
and our uteruses are too scarred, or pointing the wrong way,
or we are too multiparous,
too fertile, too infertile,
too female,
too small, too big,
too fat,
too emotional, too detached,
too strong, too weak,
too intelligent,
too well designed to birth, not designed well enough,
and our vaginas are too scarred, too unproven,
not stretchy enough, or too stretchy,
and we're too inconvenient, too unpredictable,
too demanding, too informed,
too loud, too messy,
and our bodies labour too long, or not long enough,
and our cervixes don't dilate 1cm an hour on command,
and because when you hire a surgeon you get surgery,
and hospitals are for sick people,
and for so many other reasons,
we are part of the HOMEBIRTH movement.

JANET FRASER
www.joyousbirth.info

Coordinator's Report

We're nearly at the end of a sweltering summer as I write this and things are finally cooling down. Most of our pot plants survived the heat wave and moving house – we're just thanking out lucky stars we weren't visited by fires, floods or cyclones, given what's been happening in recent weeks in the rest of the country! I hope all your families have been similarly lucky.

The changing seasons have been mirrored in our HAS committee – after quite a few collective years on the Committee, a bunch of members are stepping down to concentrate on our families, jobs and other community commitments. Greta Werner is stepping down as Secretary, and Jenny Carleton from her positions overseeing our Website and Birthings Advertising. I'm sure you will all join me in thanking both Greta and Jenny for their efforts in supporting the homebirth community over many years.

After 5 years on the Committee, I have also decided it's time to hand on the baton. My biggest baby starting high school this year, reinforced to me just how much change sneaks up on you. I also think it's important that the women setting the direction for HAS are women really engaged with birthing and linked into our community. I can assure you that I've hung up my birthing boots after number 3, and I am convinced that those of you out there with babies yet to come will be better advocates for the future of homebirth.

So my parting gesture is a plea for you to get involved in HAS. This wonderful organisation is only as strong as its membership and that means YOU! Please put your hand up to get involved in the Committee. They are a lovely group of women who just want to do their bit to help support other homebirth families and our midwives. Every community organisation needs a periodic injection of new energy and new ideas – it's part of what makes them so much fun to be a part of and makes them different from the more formal organisations we have to deal with in other parts of our lives.



JO
TILLY

There are plenty of challenges ahead for homebirth in Australia. How we engage with the changing environment for maternity services is chief among them. As I write this, the release of the Commonwealth Government's final Maternity Services Plan is imminent. What this might hold for the direction that homebirth moves in is yet to be seen. But we must make sure that choice for women and safety for us and our babies remains paramount.

I'd like to thank everyone who has got involved over the years I have been an active part of HAS for all your efforts on our collective behalf. I have met some wonderful and amazing women who it has been an absolute pleasure to get to know. I hope to catch up with many of you at the HAS Annual Picnic at Jubilee Park in Glebe on March 27, and at the Homebirth Australia conference in Newcastle in August this year. It sounds like it will be a ripper!

Namaste

- Jo

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Secretary's Report

GRETA
WERNER

HAS provides a voice for homebirth consumers, by networking, publishing Birthings magazine, making information available to the general public and lobbying.

HAS raises most of its revenue from
merchandise sales
advertising and sponsorship
memberships
donations
events

HAS is, financially speaking, quite a large incorporated association, with an annual turnover of about \$10,000. We tend to spend what we make, which shows that we are quite active.

Over the last 3 months most of us had Christmas to organise, and then holidays, but HAS has still been purring along like a well oiled motor.

HAS has been supporting the Birth Choices committee in the lead up to the next expo which is on Sunday the 3rd April 2011 from 1pm -5pm. Entry is free.

The next AGM and meeting dates are:

1st March – committee meeting
27th March – annual picnic
29th March – AGM

Please see the calendar at the back of this magazine for more info.

HAS will be working more closely with Homebirth Australia (HA). Renee Adair from the Australian Doula College is the coordinator of HA and wants to work more closely with all the state homebirth groups.

The Australian Doula College are currently providing HAS with a venue for our monthly meetings. Hopefully being in such close proximity will help HAS and HA work together more effectively.

Currently HA are busy organising the Australian homebirth conference in Newcastle. The theme is Challenging boundaries – breech, safety and risk, what does safety mean, etc. Check out the new Homebirth Australia website, as it has been updated.

I am standing down from the secretary position at the next AGM on 29th March. Please come along and volunteer. Meetings are a relaxed social occasion. Taking part is also a great way to add your voice to the home birth movement.

New and Renewed Members

HAS would like to thank the following new and renewed Members for their support:

Martina Kreznovic
Kim McNamara
Carla Cromie
Charmaine Mirigliani
Simonne Salather
Steffani Gilssen
Samantha Tai
Jacqui Yang
Amelia Evans
Tatiana Schild
Heather Crawford
Donna Edwards
Bronwyn Hall
Heather Crawford
Karen Manning
Kylie De Giorgio
Sarah Arnold
Hedy Shumack
Melanie Greblo
Petra Winkler-Hirter
Cara Joy Cumming
Melissa Keenan
Nicky Maskell
Nicky Court
Rebecca Martin
Michelle King
Lisa Deveney
Rebecca Chapman
Alicia Langlands
Kate Clarke
Lacey Schindler
Trudy Lawton
Beryl Truong
Beck Christensen
Tania McMahon
Chantal Brenton
Bonnie Pearl
Liz Austen
Vanessa Stasinowsky

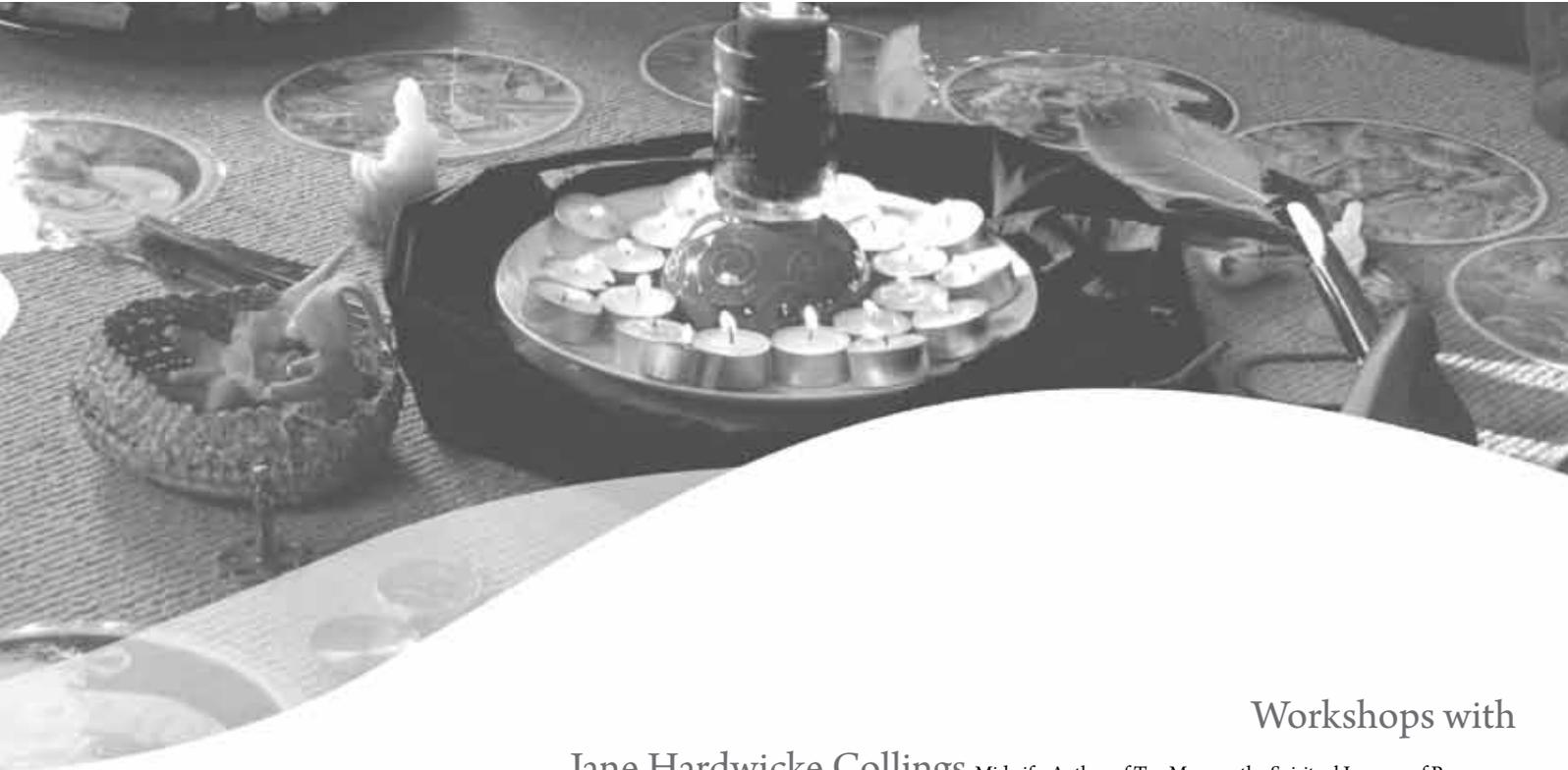
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Workshops with

Jane Hardwicke Collings Midwife, Author of Ten Moons - the Spiritual Journey of Pregnancy

Exploring, Honouring, Celebrating & Healing Our Sacred Feminine Path

Moonsong

is a two day workshop for women from menarche onward, sitting together in a circle, reconnecting with feminine knowledge and remembering the wisdom of the cycles. Using the circle and the ever repeating cycle of menstruation, moon phases, life and Earth seasons, participants reconnect to a wisdom and inner knowing that forms the basis of the experience of being female. Practical information and creative and transformational processes over the weekend reconnect us to our inner wisdom and the magic that is the essence of female-ness - the blood mysteries, the spiritual practice of menstruation, the rites of passage of the menarche, childbirth, and menopause. Each woman receives a copy of Herstory, Thirteen Moons and Spinning Wheels.

Pregnancy – The Inner Journey

is a three day workshop for women - pregnant, planning to be pregnant, midwives and doulas. Using ritual and art to compliment information sharing we delve into understanding our fears and why we think and act the way we do. We explore the inner journey of pregnancy and come to know ourselves more fully through this process, preparing for birth and mothering from our most in-tune and empowered centre. We look deeply at the sexuality and spirituality of pregnancy, birth and mothering, learning meditation, tools for labour and beautiful rituals to perform to honour pregnancy, birth and mothering. We invoke the ancient Birth Goddesses as our foremothers did, for their guidance, nurturance, protection and support. We do what women have been doing together longer than we haven't – sit together in support of each other sharing our innate wisdom focussing on the beauty and strength of Mother. Each woman receives a copy of Ten Moons.

Contact me janecollings@bigpond.com if you would like to receive my seasonal newsletter.
To book for a workshop or for further information email me or phone 0408 035 808.

2011 workshops

Pregnancy - The Inner Journey Workshop

February 26, 27, 11am-7pm
Pregnancy + Parenting Wellbeing Centre
Baulkham Hills, Sydney
Teas catered, non-residential \$350
bookings: Tara Darlington
support@npsydney.com.au

Pregnancy - The Inner Journey Workshop

April 6, 7, 8, 2011
Southern Highlands, NSW
Fully catered, non-residential \$450

Moonsong

April 9, 10, 2011
Southern Highlands, NSW
Fully catered, non-residential \$350 or \$250
per person for two family members

Pregnancy - The Inner Journey Workshop

April 27, 28, 29, 2011
Bellingen, NSW
Fully catered, non-residential \$550

Moonsong

April 30, May 1 2011
Bellingen, NSW
Fully catered, non-residential
\$400 or \$300 per person for two family
members.

Pregnancy - The Inner Journey Workshop

July 5, 6, 7, 2011
Oyster Cove, Hobart, Tasmania
Fully catered, non-residential \$450

Moonsong

July 8, 9, 2011
Oyster Cove, Hobart, Tasmania
Fully catered, non-residential
\$350 or \$250 per person for two family members.

Moonsong

October 1, 2, 2011
Southern Highlands, NSW
Fully catered, non-residential
\$350 or \$250 per person for two family members

Pregnancy - The Inner Journey Workshop

October 5, 6, 7, 2011
Southern Highlands, NSW
Fully catered, non-residential \$450

Pregnancy - The Inner Journey Workshop

November 9, 10, 11, 2011
Queensland TBA
Fully catered, non-residential \$550

Moonsong

November 12, 13, 2011
Queensland TBA
Fully catered, non-residential
\$400 or \$300 per person for two family members





Dr. John Stevenson

A Visionary That Helped to Change the Face of Birth

The climate in the late 60s and 70s around birth was exciting. There was a ground-swell of desire for things to be different and for expecting families to have a voice. Couples started to have their babies at home and on their own. Where I lived at that time, down on the coast in Victoria, this was happening. Things were changing and on the move. There were pockets of people like this springing up all over Australia; Bell's Beach and the Dandenongs in Victoria, Nimbin in New South Wales, and Margaret River in Western Australia.

I met 'Dr John', as we called him, in 1976. I was at Childbirth Education Association in Malvern, which was a very progressive education group driven to changing birthing practices. He came to speak to a group of educators and birth support people. What struck me about John was his humility, modesty, and unshakeable desire to make birth a better experience for the whole family.

Childbirth Education Association was running birth classes and some of our clients were having homebirths. Dr. John invited us to join them at their births, suggesting that he could always use the extra pair of hands. He also did their prenatal care in his old house in South Yarra and we were made very welcome to go and help out when the mothers visited. He taught us how to palpate the uterus, take blood pressures, listen to and find the baby's heartbeat. There were always kids, educators, pregnant mums, and mums and babies running around, and cups of tea being made. Someone had always made a cake for them to eat. It was a regular bustling hive of activity with a lot of laughter and discussion.

One thing that John did, which the mums and the siblings in the family always loved, was to take a texta and draw the position of the baby on the outside of the belly. It made it very real and the mums wouldn't want to wash their baby off until the next visit. The new brothers and sisters-to-be would lift up their Mum's top and say "That is my new baby growing!"

He used to drive around in his old Land Rover over country roads and unmade roads to get to births. There were no mobile phones in those days so we would just wait, the labour would go on and we would do what we could, and then John would arrive - often tired, unshaven and dishevelled from having been up all night at another birth. He was a wonderful humanitarian. The medical profession were puzzled by him in the beginning as he was so matter of fact about it being normal to birth at home. Of course, as homebirth grew and his support and love of birth expanded, they became more threatened by him than merely puzzled.

John was never concerned about the superficialities in life. I remember being at a talk he gave at Geelong hospital. There was a large audience with quite a large number of doctors and midwives. Before he went on to speak he

turned and asked me (as if it was just a last-minute aside to ensure that he was "normal"): "Do I look alright in this outfit?" Well he had thrown on an assortment of clothes as he had just been to a birth. It consisted of a powder blue suit, white shoes, the shirt was coloured from memory, and his famous Hawaiian tie (he wore that for interviews). I shrieked with laughter and said "You look just fine. You have your own style!" He was eccentric and those things didn't really matter to him. It was either that or he was colour blind!

His competency at difficult births was wonderful to watch. Through difficult breeches, long and hard posteriors, and slow labours, he was always calm and even. I learned so much from him. He had a natural grace and dignity. He truly believed that women could birth their babies and they felt this confidence and trust in them. It allowed them to find that within themselves.

I am very grateful to have worked alongside him. He always took the opportunity to teach us things at a birth, talking things through with us and telling us why he was doing this or that. John kept impeccable notes on all the births he attended and his transfer rate was low. When he was taken to the Supreme Court, in the case that finally led to his deregistration, I was pregnant with my second child. While the pain and unfairness of that deregistration never left him, he continued to practice up in the country attending births, just as a friend of the couple. He loved birth and couldn't give it up. It was his life.

I visited John and Audrey last year in Bendigo. His wife, Audrey, is a most loveable woman. They were a lovely couple that had reached a place where there was an easy, kind generosity that flowed between them. He so happily showed me the bag that he used to take to births and all the files he had kept. We looked over them and reminisced about old clients and laughed about the funny things that had happened at births. John wanted his bag and files to be kept and looked after.

Later that day, when I told him about my arterial condition, he said "Oh, you have to make sure you get your folic acid and eat your greens every day." John was always the carer. He walked me to the car that afternoon, opened the door, and said "Make sure you come back and visit me."

John, I think of you so often: when I am teaching, when I listen to birth stories and wonder what you would think. He belonged to a great era of wonderful, inspirational men that had the courage to do what they believed in and gave permission to birthing couples to follow their own visions. He was a visionary and a gentle man; gracious and dignified, humble and very loveable.

- Marie Burrows

Choosing Homebirth

DR SARAH J. BUCKLEY

Adapted with permission from the book 'Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering: A Doctor's Guide to Natural Childbirth and Gentle Early Parenting Choices' by Dr Sarah J Buckley (Celestial Arts, US 2009) available at www.sarahbuckley.com. All references are in the book.

Homebirth has been portrayed as a radical and perhaps even unsafe choice in modern times. However, many studies conducted over many years in many different countries confirm that homebirth is a safe option for modern families. Women choosing homebirth have the lowest chance of needing drugs and intervention and the highest chance of a normal birth of any modern birthing option.

Throughout human history, women have always given birth in a familiar place, with familiar and trusted companions. Globally most babies are still born at home, and even in westernized countries, homebirth was the norm until the last fifty years or so. Many of our grandparents were born at home, and even some of our parents—including my own mother and father.

A Brief History of Hospital Birth

The move from home to hospital began in the eighteenth century, when male midwives—the equivalent of today's obstetricians—needed a captive population to practice their skills in childbirth and began offering free hospital care for poor (and sometimes homeless) women. The first lying-in hospital was established in Dublin in 1745, and lying-in hospitals were subsequently established in other parts of Europe and the United States. Hospital birth under the care of the male midwives was initially exceedingly dangerous. As de Costa records, "... the crowding of patients, frequent vaginal examinations and the use of contaminated instruments, dressings and bed linen spread infection in an era when there was no knowledge of antiseptics.

This new disease—"childbed fever"—killed, for example, 13 percent of women under the care of doctors in the Vienna Lying-In Hospital in 1846, compared with 2 percent of women under the care of midwives. Its contagious nature was identified by Ignaz Semmelweis in Vienna, Thomas Watson in London, and Oliver Wendell Holmes in Boston, but there was strong resistance to the idea that childbed fever could be due to doctors' negligence of hygiene. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the need for attention to basic antiseptics was appreciated and became part of routine care.

Although the mortality for women giving birth in hospital is now equivalent to that of homebirth, there remain increased risks of infection—especially antibiotic-resistant infection—for mothers and babies in the hospital. In addition, there are other major iatrogenic (medically caused) risks in the hospital that can make homebirth a good choice.

Birth Interventions and Homebirth Safety

Perhaps the major risk of hospital birth is the risk of unnecessary intervention.

Medical interventions have been shown to interfere with the delicate hormonal orchestration of birth for mother and baby, with unknown long-term effects. Cesarean surgery, which is much more likely for women who choose a hospital

birth, increases the risk of maternal death, even among healthy mothers, and a traumatic birth can make the transition to motherhood more difficult and painful for mother and baby, with major impact also possible for the partner, family, and friends.

In the United States, Childbirth Connection's (formerly the Maternity Center Association) 2002 and 2006 Listening to Mothers surveys found "virtually no natural childbirth" in either survey, which included over three thousand women in total. In the 2006 survey, around one-half of women were induced; almost three-quarters had an epidural administered; and one-third gave birth by cesarean.

In comparison, women who plan homebirth have, in most reported studies, around a seventy to eighty percent chance of giving birth without intervention.

Cesarean rates for women who plan to give birth at home are generally five to ten percent. Because of the low use of drugs (most homebirth practitioners do not carry pain-relieving drugs), home-born babies are more alert and in better condition than those born in the hospital. Official U.S. figures give the out-of-hospital birthrate (including birth at home and in freestanding birth centers) as one percent.

In terms of outcomes for mothers and babies, most studies of planned homebirth show perinatal mortality figures (the numbers of babies dying around the time of birth) that are at least as good as the hospital figures, with lower rates of complications and interventions. For example, Johnson and Davis's landmark 2005 study of over five thousand U.S. and Canadian women intending to deliver at home under the care of certified professional midwives (CPMs) showed equivalent perinatal mortality, with rates of intervention that were up to ten times lower, compared with low-risk women birthing in the hospital. Rates of induction, intravenous drip (IV), rupture of membranes, fetal monitoring, epidural, augmentation, episiotomy, and forceps were each less than 10 percent, and 3.7 percent of women required a cesarean.

In a review of the safety of homebirth for the authoritative Cochrane Collaboration, Olsen states: There is no strong evidence to favour either home or hospital birth for selected low-risk pregnant women. In countries where it is possible to establish a home birth service backed up by a modern hospital system, all low-risk women should be offered the possibility of considering a planned home birth ...

In the Netherlands, where around one-third of babies are born at home under the care of a midwife, outcomes for first babies have been shown to be equivalent to those of babies born to low-risk women in the hospital, and outcomes for second or subsequent babies have been shown to be better. UK statistician Marjory Tew has analyzed some of the largest data sets of home and hospital birth in the Netherlands and the UK (before the advent of hospitalization). Her conclusion, accepted by UK Government policy

makers, is that birth at home or in small GP (family physician) units is safer than birth in obstetric hospital for mothers and babies in all categories of risk. She also concludes that modern obstetric interventions, applied to the whole birthing population, have made birth more dangerous, not safer. Her book, 'Safer Childbirth? A Critical History of Maternity Care' documents the false information that was used to promote a shift from home to hospital birth in the UK in the 1950s to 1980s.

Why Homebirth?

Homebirth is often an instinctive choice for expectant couples, although this instinct can also be backed up by good-quality information and research. Some prefer homebirth because of a previous negative experience in the hospital or because they have witnessed (or heard stories of) bad experiences. Others come to homebirth because they have heard positive homebirth stories or even, like my partner and I, have had the privilege of supporting friends birthing at home. Others may want to make choices that are very difficult in the hospital—such as vaginal birth after cesarean—and some families want their children, or other family members, to be more involved than is possible in a hospital birth room. Some homebirthers have been born at home themselves.

Women who choose homebirth tend to be older and better educated than the general population and include many health professionals—including midwives and a few doctors, such as my partner and myself.

Homebirthers are generally more trusting of their bodies and of the natural processes of birth, and they tend to be more self-reliant and self-responsible in other aspects of their lives. The experience of giving birth in one's own time, in one's own space, also reinforces these attitudes, giving the new mother a solid confidence in her abilities and those of her baby, and laying a firm foundation for pleasurable mothering.

For the homebirth father, being fully present and involved at the birth of his child can be a life-changing event. The father's experience is usually very different at a hospital birth, where hospital staff may treat him as peripheral or may conscript him to recommend interventions to his wife.

Making an Uncommon Choice

Homebirth is still a minority choice in western countries. Couples who choose homebirth may encounter negative attitudes from friends, family, doctors, and media, many of whom are unaware of the good outcomes associated with homebirth. It may also be difficult to find a caregiver, especially outside metropolitan areas, and in some places, homebirth may be an expensive choice, with all costs borne by the family.

However, the one-on-one midwifery care that most women will receive through homebirth is, as the chief medical officer of health in Brisbane puts it, the "Rolls Royce" of maternity care, shown to give equally good or better outcomes compared with care from a doctor or obstetrician, and higher rates of satisfaction. One study has also shown better outcomes; in particular, thirty three percent lower newborn mortality and thirty one percent less risk of low birth weight, among babies born under midwifery care. The midwife who provides this type of care becomes intimate and knowledgeable about the woman, her partner, and family, building a trusting relationship that will provide real support through labor, birth, and early parenting. This level of support may help reduce stress, and stress hormones, for the pregnant woman, contributing to the better outcomes just mentioned. Many midwives create a birthing community, formally or informally, in which expectant and new mothers and families can meet and socialize. Outside such supportive circles however, homebirthers may find a lack of support for their informed choice. It may be useful to remember that these anxieties are often expressed by people who have a genuine and appropriate concern for the family's welfare, such as prospective grandparents.

Sometimes we may choose to engage in dialogue and education to counter others' worries, and at other times we may save our energy and remain confident internally. Sometimes keeping our plans to ourselves may be the best option, especially around people who are likely to share their horror stories of birth.

A Homebirth Support Group

Attending a homebirth support group, or just getting together with a few experienced homebirth mothers, is one of the best ways to prepare for homebirth. You can share stories of birth, ask questions, and most important, have the experience of being with mothers and babies, which sadly has become uncommon in our culture.

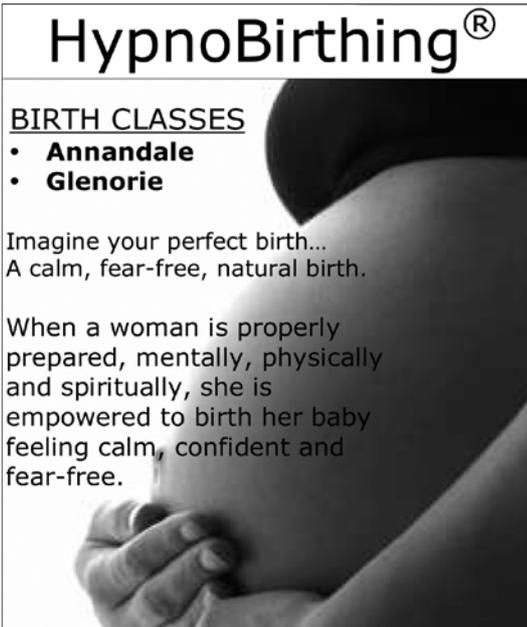
If there is no local group, you could consider starting a homebirth support group yourself. Choose one day per month that suits you, and ask local midwives to get the word out for you. My local (Brisbane) homebirth support group always begins with a short introduction around the circle, then we ask one mother to share her birth story. After this, we have a general discussion, particularly inviting questions from new members, and we finish with a short evaluation from everyone. After the meeting we enjoy a shared lunch, with plenty of time to chat and pass the babies around!

Homebirth and the Sacred Cycle

Birth is not an isolated event in our lives, but rather a part of our feminine sexual cycle. As mothers we move from menstruation to conception, pregnancy, birth, postnatal, and breastfeeding, and then back to menstruation. When this cycle is honored as a life-giving continuum, each of these experiences can be deep and satisfying.

Homebirth ensures that these sacred events stay within our own space, keeping the circle whole and inviolate. Homebirth can bless our homes and our families many times over, creating a luminous atmosphere in the early weeks and months, and giving us memories and experiences that can sustain us—mothers, babies, fathers, and children—for a lifetime.

For more of Sarah's writing and to buy her book, see www.sarahbuckley.com



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Risk is in the

MELANIE
JACKSON

Eye of the Beholder

For this past year I have been researching what motivates and influences mothers to choose a free-birth or 'high-risk' homebirth as part of my PhD thesis 'birthing outside the system'. It has become dramatically obvious that women who make choices that are seemingly against the system have a very different perception of risk than our medically minded counterparts.

The concept of risk is just that, a concept, one that can be perceived and understood differently by everyone based on their previous experiences, research and influences throughout life. Obstetrics argues that their definition or perception of risk is 'right' and authoritative (Murphy-Lawless 1998 p.22) and touts their management and intervention as the best and most sure way of reducing the risk of childbirth. Medicalised management of birth is a hallmark of mainstream birth services; these services perceive their management of birth to be the only 'right', 'best' and 'safe' way to birth, dismissing all other options as 'dangerous', 'irresponsible', 'risky' and 'wrong', but, what if medical management of birth is 'wrong'? What if they unequivocally have it wrong? This is certainly the question asked by the highly intelligent, critical and knowledgeable women who have shared their stories for my research.

For mothers who choose to birth at home, medical interventions and interruptions in the birth process are seen as 'dangerous' and 'risky'. They feel that the risk of something going wrong at their birth proliferates the more they part-take in or make themselves vulnerable to the medical management of birth. One woman explains, 'I look at interference a bit like risk, every time someone new comes across you or does something, that's a risk that something goes wrong, every time you get a medication there is a risk it's the wrong one, every time they do something there's a risk that flows onto something else, so if no-one is doing anything to you or performing any unnecessary tests, then there is no risk there' - (homebirth mother). This is in dramatic conflict with the medical message that interventions are designed and employed in order to reduce risk.

The medical use of risk language alongside birthing generates fear around the process of labour and birth and if birth is marketed as risky, then it will be perceived as scary. By the use of risk language, obstetrics has perpetuated the myth that childbirth is to be feared and thus throughout history convinced mothers to conform to their birth management in order to avoid something going wrong (Murphy-Lawless 1998, p.18). The medicalisation of birth has allowed obstetrics to redefine what is considered 'normal' and 'abnormal'. By developing a conceptual difference between abnormal and normal the medical profession have secured a large and growing market for their services in perpetuity by the creation of false needs and then catering to these newly perceived needs (Ballard & Elston, 2005, p.230). By the social process of medicalising birth, modern obstetrics can justify managing labour and birth by intervening to make each individual labour and birth conform to the obstetric definition of normal. By defining what is constituted as normal birth, obstetricians have monopolised control over events which occur outside the norm under the guise of 'risk management'.

Women who remain unconvinced by the obstetric definition of 'risk' see no reason in accepting medical interventions and therefore see no reason to enter hospitals. The very place they are most at risk of being subjected to interruption and intervention while they are trying to give birth is at hospital. Home birthing women see intervention as risky and thus will not be convinced to accept them as a way of avoiding adverse outcomes; in fact, they believe that the risk of adverse outcomes at birth is increased by

unnecessary intervention. One mother comments, 'I don't see induction now as the safe way out, actually having an induction now is the risk to me, that is tempting fate, not carrying a well baby to full term and comfortably to post-dates, that's not the risk, it's the unnecessary induction' (homebirth mother). Another mother also comments, 'they interfere so that's why things happen, they end up with forceps or vacuum or caesarean because they put up drips (to speed labour) and they just stuff women up' (homebirth mother).

The question must be asked, how can it be that modern medicine believes they can make birth safer by interfering, to avoid complications and minimise risk when a home birth mother believes interventions make her birth more dangerous, will cause complications and increase her risk? Is it possible that both are right? If not, who is wrong? The answer lies in what women have described to me as 'medically indicated intervention' and 'necessary intervention'. The women who have contributed to my study saw the absolute necessary place of obstetrics in emergency care for birth complications; we can all agree that when a caesarean is legitimately needed we want a skilled obstetrician (not a midwife) to perform the surgery, but where the bone of contention exists is, who defines necessary? Just like modern obstetrics and home birthing women have different perceptions of 'risk' they also have different definitions of necessary. Women who birth their babies at home see 'necessary intervention' as one that is 'medically indicated' and a response to a real threat to the mother and baby, one that is truly required because the mother and baby are at risk of death or damage. One mother was asked during her interview if she thought there was a right place for intervention. She replied "Yeah, if there is a problem, if there is a risk, there's something possible that's going to affect the mother or the baby and that's their only way of getting out a healthy baby then yeah, that's the advantage of living in today's society" (home birth mother).

You might ask, why else would an intervention be performed if not for the safety of the mother and baby? The answer not only lies in the findings from my study but also my personal experience working in the hospital system. Deviating from the medically defined norm of time in pregnancy will find you shafted into an induction, not because you and your baby are at risk, but because the hospital policy says so. Not dilating at the medically defined speed will see you augmented with medication, which will see you strapped to the medically defined 'best' way of monitoring your baby, which will see you in much greater pain than if you had free movement, which would increase the 'risk' of you needing pain medication, which would increase the 'risk' that your baby will need to be pulled out with forceps and need intervention to breathe, which will increase the 'risk' of breastfeeding being unsuccessful. Digressing from medical definitions of normal and hospital policy will see you managed with intervention, not to decrease your risk, but to increase your conformity to the medically defined boundaries of normal - which may or may not be right.

Risk is in the eye of the beholder. Every day we make decisions about the risks we are willing to take. You take a risk getting in your car, buying sushi, having sex, taking a Panadol, going for a jog, drinking hot coffee and gardening on a hot day. I took the risk today of aggravating my repetitive strain injury while typing, but it was a risk I was willing to take. The medical system and home birthing women perceive risk differently and are willing to take different risks based on different motives, but while each one's perception is different, it is not less or wrong, just different. What is 'right' and 'best' can only be determined by each individual and where the conflict lies is in who defines what is 'best' and which risks are 'right' to take.

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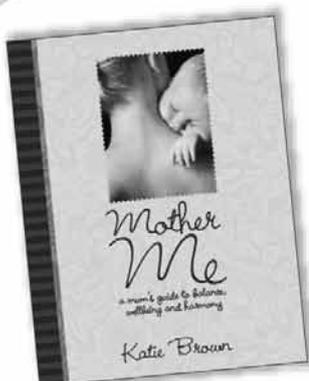
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MOTHER ME

*Katie's book outlining the
seven steps to balance, wellbeing
and harmony for every mum*



BY KATIE BROWN

Mum-of-three, Katie Brown is one of Australia's most respected pre & post-natal yoga teachers. She is a certified infant massage instructor, baby yoga teacher, massage therapist, doula & author. She holds yoga classes and workshops in Sydney.



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“High Risk Birth”

Defined by Whom?

JUSTINE CAINES



After 4 very normal pregnancies with stunning, intervention-free homebirths I was greeted with the news that I was having twins. In a split second I plummeted into the category of ‘high-risk’ - but did I really, and who defined it anyway?

Breech birth, vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC) and twins birth can carry additional risk. The risk must be measured rationally however. The risk of uterine rupture for example after a primary c/s is not quite 1%. The vast majority of obstetricians do not support women to achieve a VBAC. Many paint a picture of fear and death citing uterine rupture as a compelling reason to elect for a repeat caesarean. The risk of spontaneous abortion after amniocentesis is 1-2%. This test is routinely offered to women over 35 without any of the trappings of death and injury.

Before I was aware I was carrying twins I had planned another homebirth. I very much look forward to it. My first thought was “My homebirth is out the window”. Although I resist becoming a prisoner to the language of obstetrics that sees women as deficient beings in need of rescuing, I think some of it had rubbed off. In our advocacy we spend much of it demonstrating that midwifery care should be a mainstream option, but also accept the obstetric line that breech and twins and VBAC belong within a high-risk category. Now with a label threatening to choke me I sat back and thought, “Where is the individual rights of the woman and her body here?”

Very few women would knowingly put their baby or themselves at risk. Why then are women with ‘special needs’ granted less insight or knowledge of their body’s capacity or their baby’s wellbeing? Again we know the answer. It is because current obstetric practice in Australia is not about women, or even babies. It is about fear and control, the necessary ingredients in keeping maternity services dominated by the medical profession, and keeping the birthing of babies as big business.

After the huge shock, I researched obstetric management of twins. It seemed at best if I fought hard I could give birth to my babies vaginally, but I would be very likely to be pressured to have an epidural (for the fast removal of twin 2, via c/s or forceps), I would also be pressured to have constant foetal monitoring. In the event of twin two presenting breech I would be likely to have a very managed birth (via forceps). In the event that I had

not given birth by 38 weeks, induction would be strongly recommended. Of course the far more acceptable option would be an elective caesarean section again at 38 weeks. Despite many twins being born by caesarean section, like many obstetric practices, it is not supported by evidence.

“Virtually no data from controlled trials are available to help determine the choice between vaginal birth and caesarean section for women with multiple pregnancy. A single trial has assessed the effect of caesarean section for delivery when the second twin was in a non-vertex presentation. As would be expected, maternal febrile morbidity and need for general anaesthesia was increased with caesarean section. No offsetting advantages in terms of decreased fetal or neonatal morbidity or mortality were found.” [Enkin et al 3rd Ed ‘Guide to effective care in pregnancy and childbirth’ p.146]

At thirty eight weeks my babies would be smaller and more likely to need additional care. In the event of a caesarean section I would need to recover from major surgery and at the same time attempt to breastfeed two babies and care for another four children. This was considered a safe option? I was very fortunate to be sent the now out of print book, “Having Twins” by Elizabeth Noble (copies can be found on Amazon.com etc). This text reaffirmed my gut feeling that although a multiple pregnancy required some special care through nutrition and rest there is no reason that twins should be treated as high risk. The misconception that all twins arrive early was a consistent theme. Why does one neglect the power of a woman’s mind in determining when and how she gives birth? Currently there are very few practitioners who affirm a woman’s ability to carry twins to term. In my case I gave birth to two, three-kilogram babies at forty weeks weeks and one day. With the exception of my midwives, everyone I spoke to would say “You won’t go full term” “You’ll have these babies early” “Noone carries twins to term”. Interestingly the women I spoke to who had birthed twins at home or at least been cared for by an independent midwife, all went very close to term. Those who birthed in hospital had to fight off the routine thirty eight week induction but with supportive care they all achieved term babies at thirty nine to forty weeks.

This was very welcome news. I told my babies daily that they would grow to term. I did not give a thought to the fact that I would birth premature babies. Living in rural NSW this would have been disastrous for our family and myself. I would have been hours away from home and our children. I was fortunate enough to read a fascinating book called Pre-natal Parenting by US Neonatologist, Frederick Wirth. After thirty five years seeing the often tragic consequences of premature birth, Dr Wirth researched how the mind affected the body. He makes a compelling case for women to focus on positive and loving thoughts throughout their pregnancy; guiding families to address relationship problems and potential fears to enable not only a healthy pregnancy and birth, but also an affirming start to bonding and parenting a new human.

I was buoyed by what I read. I progressed full steam with confidence that the only place to have my babies was at home full term. Instinctively I knew that home was the safest place to give birth (in the absence of medical complications or conditions). Importantly I had also proven clinically that it was also much safer for me to be cared for by midwives at home.

“ “ Our baby’s entrance into the world was sacred and safe. ” ”

How could my babies be safer with a routine induction at thirty eight weeks, when they were more likely to need resuscitation and medical care? How would constant foetal monitoring assist when studies have shown its routine use has seen no improvement in outcomes, only an increase in caesarean section? How would my babies or I be safer with an epidural that would prevent me being upright, the proven best physiological position for normal birth? How would I be safer being denied deep water for pain relief? (Do you know of a hospital that will enable a woman birthing twins to use a birth pool for pain relief in labour and to give birth if she wishes?).

As my pregnancy progressed, I remained healthy and happy. I had decided to have three ultrasounds - one at twenty weeks (soon after I realised I was carrying twins), one at twenty eight weeks and another at thirty four weeks. All these scans revealed healthy babies of a good size. I was carrying fraternal twins (in all likelihood), I had a single placenta that had probably fused. One baby was head down, the other breech. This is the only interaction I had with obstetrics. I used technology in a limited way to keep my home birth plans alive.

Like many women, in a way I would of liked to have given birth at around thirty eight weeks, I felt pretty heavy. Although at thirty nine weeks I felt excellent (even had a spring in my stride). My midwives said I looked ‘too good’ to be close to birth!

At forty weeks I decided it was really time to meet my babies and they must have agreed. My midwives and doula were with me. On the last day we enjoyed time together with the kids, had a nice meal together and all went to bed. At 1.30am my waters broke with a huge gush. By 2am I had strong contractions. I then woke my midwives and doula, as I was conscious the pool needed to be filled. My labour progressed furiously. I could feel twin one moving down. I entered the pool with the water level a little low. The pain relief was instant and considerable. Our digital camera revealed I was only in the pool for seven minutes before our first baby was born. The water was just deep enough! Amazingly I put my hand on her head and felt her shoulders rotate as she was born. I also caught her and drew her close to me revealing her gender. It was an awesome feeling to catch my own child (something I had been previously unable to manoeuvre).

My husband entered the pool at this stage. Contractions started again, six minutes after our first baby was born. I was very uneasy holding our first baby with a contraction winding up. Paul held her as I got on with birthing our second baby. The cord had stopped pulsing with baby one and I asked that it be cut. Although this would not have been my preference, the cord was not overly long and I felt very uneasy still being connected and contracting. The midwives later said they were happy to hear me quite anxious about all of this, as it was a clear sign that baby two was very near.

My midwife announced there was ‘a foot’ and I very clearly thought “OK, here’s our little breech babe, just remember her head will be last, brace yourself!” I had no fear about her being breech. Her birth was easy. I do concede however, that she was a twin with a smaller head than most (33cm) and I had just birthed a baby. My midwives were remarkable. One simply gave baby two a gentle push back towards me (as the weight of her head prompted her to move up towards my back rather than the front). Both Paul and I then welcomed our two girls in the warm pool. Both babies were

born with APGARs of 9 and 9. I had a slight graze. I had a physiological third stage, birthing a very large and healthy placenta forty five minutes later. I had minimal blood loss and recovered beautifully.

Our baby’s entrance into the world was sacred and safe. In comparison they could have been cut or pulled from me before they were ready, most likely with worse results. The irony is that the latter choice is seen to be ‘safer’. It is time to re-think risk. I have explored twin birth through my own experience. VBAC and single vaginal breech birth are other ‘risk’ categories that need to be examined. The fear that surrounds VBAC is totally unwarranted. I believe the majority of women attempting VBAC are set up to fail, vaginal breech is so rare in the hospital system that I believe it is unsafe. Not unsafe itself, but unsafe due to totally inexperienced practitioners. Other than independent midwives, I know of one obstetrician experienced in breech birth with a gentle ‘hands-off’ approach.

In relaying this story I do not believe that all twins, some VBAC’s or breech babies can or should be born at home. What I have learnt via research and through practical experience is that ‘risk’ is a conjecture from practitioners who have little if any understanding or faith in normal birth. Unfortunately birth in Australia is dominated by medical practitioners. These practitioners create labels of ‘risk’ often with little regard for research evidence. On the whole these practitioners only believe in the safety of birth after the event. To me this is most telling and explains our huge rates of intervention, and resultant morbidity.

If the pilot responsible for flying the plane you travelled on was only convinced air travel was safe after he had safely landed the plane, what would you think? Would you doubt his competence as a pilot? Think perhaps he should get another job? Would you doubt the safety of the actual aircraft? Sadly most women do the latter, they allow medical practitioners to convince them that their body is faulty. Why not question the practitioner? After all, most obstetricians are male with no real way of truly understanding pregnancy and birth.

Thank you to Betty Vella, Robyn Gasparotto and Margie Perkins for your courage and commitment.



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So Called High Risk Birthing

Vaginal Birth After Caesarean (VBAC), Breech, Twins

JANE HARDWICKE
COLLINGS

Adapted with permission from the book 'TEN MOONS – The Inner Journey of Pregnancy, Preparation for Natural Birth' By Jane Hardwicke Collings (Available for \$25 from HAS)

The important thing to remember about the so-called high risk birthing situations (and there are actually many more situations usually included in the list than the three here) is the role of fear. Fear clouds the mind; fear has us revert to basic survival instincts – fight or flight. Fear stops labour. Risk evokes fear; society has given us the belief that if something is risky then it's not safe. But we need to put that attitude into perspective. Everything has its risks. Everything.

If you are in a so-called high risk birthing group it doesn't mean that you have to give away your decision making power regarding your birth plan to someone else. Rather, you need to be sure that you are making informed choices about everything: what tests you will or won't have, what kind of birth you plan for, who your primary care giver is, etc.

Once you have ALL the information you need, and you are clear that you are not handing away your decision making to someone who says words to the affect of:

"Don't worry about all that, trust me, I'll look after what's best for you and your baby;"

when you've confronted all your own fears about your birthing situation;
when you weigh up the actual data about your risks;
when you take responsibility for your own decision-making;
AND when you listen to your intuition;

THEN you can be sure you are making an informed choice regarding all aspects of your birth and labour. Not objective choices - informed and subjective decisions.

VBAC, twins and breech births require the level of trust that is possible, that you are capable of:

trust that everything will be perfect, that you will make the perfect choice for you and your baby. You are not separate. What's good for the mother is good for the baby.

Let go of your fears and expectations and trust in your and your baby's life journeys.

Maybe you would like to ask yourself these questions:

How does this unique birth situation serve me?

What is this unique situation teaching me/showing me about myself?

Why is this happening?

How does the fact that this situation is occurring make sense in my life?

What beliefs and patterns of mine does this situation reveal?

What does this situation bring up for me? What fears?

What am I feeling?

Is this situation or feeling familiar?

What memories come up?

Is there healing required from past experiences to enable me to move forward from here and to stop repeating counterproductive life patterns?

Journal the answers to these questions and any others that arise for you in the process of becoming informed about your risks and birth plan decisions.

There are no right or wrong answers; this is simply a process for you to come to know yourself more fully and understand your life journey. When I thought about why my first birth had ended up a caesarean I could see how it reflected my inner belief that I was not safe and that under no circumstance should I surrender. I didn't realise I felt this way until I went hunting within, a good while after I 'surfaced' from being immersed in Sam's newborn time. Further in-depth introspection took me to my experience as a four year old when I was in hospital with pneumonia and 'nearly died'. My soul searching revealed that in my decision to live, back then when I was four, I decided I wouldn't give in to anything, especially if it was bigger than me. This decision gave me strength to 'live' through adverse or threatening situations, but when it came to surrendering to the 'birth force', I couldn't or wouldn't – and I didn't consciously even realise that I was fearful of this surrender. Bringing this self awareness to my next pregnancy and birth enabled me to tend to my terrified four year old self and make new choices that suited my current situation. I learned that surrender is safe and preferable in certain situations, especially in making love and giving birth.

Know that if a doctor performs a caesarean section, from a medico-legal perspective, it will be deemed that (s)he has done all (s)he could to medically serve the mother and the baby. From a medico-legal perspective performing a caesarean is the biggest safe guard in the practice of obstetrics.

There has been a case in Australia where a mother refused the obstetrician's recommendation for a caesarean section following her two previous caesareans. When she didn't turn up to her next antenatal appointment, the doctor reported her to the law enforcing arm of the government responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children. The officials arrived at the woman's home to question her and she was in labour! The Mother had found another hospital supportive of her desire to give birth vaginally and was on her way there. She had a vaginal birth after two previous caesareans.

You won't make a friend of your obstetrician if you go against his or her recommendations.

Would you rather be told that you're a good girl or know that you are a powerful woman?

The experiences women encounter during birth are extremely varied. This fact points to the need for you to get all the information available about your risks and birth plan options in order to make informed choices about the care you will have and the birth for which you will plan.

*An Australian woman who refused to have a caesarean section was reported to child welfare authorities by her hospital. Mandelaine Dagan (who already had two children by caesarean) decided to have her latest child vaginally and at home. Hospital officials said that Dagan's decision was risky because of the previous caesareans. <http://feministing.com/archives/002671.html>
<http://www.abc.net.au/pml/content/2005/s1295480.htm>
<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1296234.htm>*



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Once upon a time, but not so very long ago, what we call Shamanic Midwifery was just a way of life....

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At our time of Menarche we were honoured and initiated as women and welcomed to join the Motherline, ready to receive into our own hearts, the ancient ancestral women's wisdom of all those who had walked before us. As we lived our lives through Mother, Maga and Crone, the voices of our Ancestors called to us often, whispering wisdoms of Knowing, Truth, Intuition, Psychic ability, Healing prowess and the Midwifery that comes from being a Shamaness who walks between the worlds.

Whilst the time we live in now is different, the women's hearts and bodies we bring to this life are still the same perfect, precious instruments finely tuned to hear and receive the wisdom of our Ancestry as it calls.

*The opportunity to find our way back to the Motherline is always there.
We are the sacred vessels we have always been.*

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Mama Is...

A HISTORY OF THE ^{BIRTHING} DISAPPEARING WOMAN



MAMAISCOMIC.COM
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Heather Cushman-Dowdee, long time creator of the comic "Hathor the Cowgoddess", is now creating all new comics over at www.mama@is.com. Heather is married to Kevin and is a homebirther, attachment parenter to 3 unschooled girls and a baby boy, and breastfeeding activist which inspires her cartoon creations.



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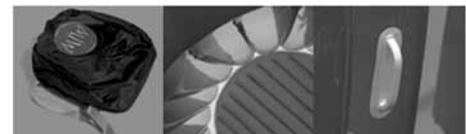
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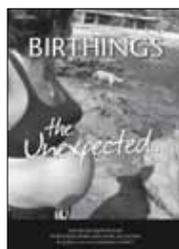
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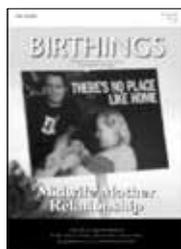
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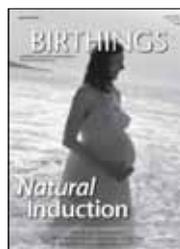
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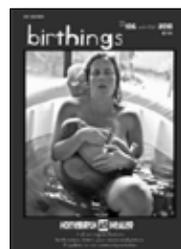
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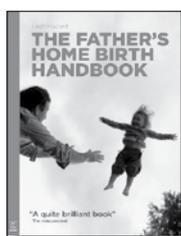


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BOOKS AND DVDS



BREASTFEEDING MAMA
Fine art print by Chrissy Butler
From the homebirth children's book, 'My Brother Jimi Jazz', comes this 8x10 inch fine art print from Chrissy Butler.
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THE FATHER'S HOME BIRTH HANDBOOK
Leah Hazard
As hospital-based maternity services become increasingly medicalised, more and more parents are deciding that birth belongs in the home. For many women, this choice may be an easy one, but for their partners, home birth raises some serious questions. For the first time, The Father's Home Birth Handbook provides a resource aimed specifically at exploring men's hopes and fears around home birth.
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HAVING A GREAT BIRTH IN AUSTRALIA
David Vernon
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012BK \$24.95



WE'RE HAVING A HOMEBIRTH
Kelly Mochel
Children will love this colorful, contemporary book about their family's special upcoming homebirth event. A great tool for discussion about what to expect when the baby arrives, this affordable book covers important issues such as the role of a midwife, being good labour support, noises to expect mom to make, cord cutting, placenta delivery and breastfeeding. Combined with healthy conversation about pregnancy and homebirth, this book will help teach children that birth is a natural occurrence, not a medical emergency.
SKU: KMBK \$12.00



New Reprint

TEN MOONS BOOK
Jane Hardwicke Collings
A unique guide to pregnancy and birth. This book offers practical tools and suggestions to help women reconnect with the spiritual side of birth. The spiritual journey of pregnancy and natural childbirth are acknowledged in relationship to the earth's natural rhythms. Subjects covered include, letting go of fear, connection with the baby inside you, yoga and meditation.
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MY BROTHER JIMI JAZZ
Chrissy Butler
A beautifully illustrated children's book, written from the perspective of a young girl about the homebirth of her brother Jimi Jazz. This book embraces natural active homebirth, breastfeeding, co-sleeping, cloth nappies and siblings at birth.
Aust 2006.
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Maggie Lecky Thompson
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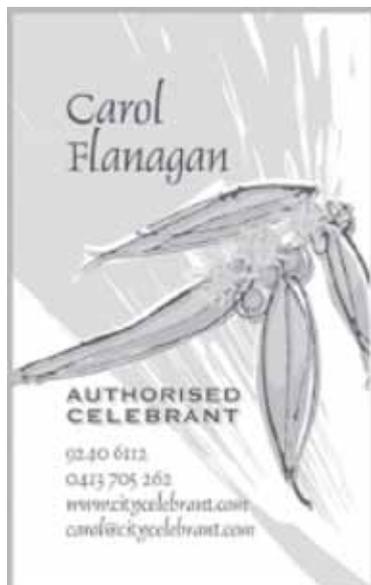


THE WONDERFUL PLACE BOOK
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The Unassisted Birth of



LINDA
HUTCHINSON-WEST



I have three beautiful children. My first birth was a homebirth / hospital transfer in the UK. I carried many regrets from that pregnancy and birth with me (scans, blood tests, pressure of induction at 10 days, or lose the 'right' to birth at home as I was in a hospital run homebirth programme). I was a trained midwife, I knew exactly what I didn't want, I had also 'educated' my wife Aby on what I didn't want, yet somehow we got sucked into the system, and my daughter was born with the usual cascade of intervention.

Four years later in Australia I plan an unassisted homebirth. That time I wanted to feel that I was completely in control, I didn't want anyone's rules or baggage to interfere, I also didn't want anyone being an 'expert' at my birth. I knew I could birth, I didn't feel I needed a medically trained person to help with that. Being involved with my local homebirth community, I met several doulas, and to me, these women were the sort of person I wanted by my side as I laboured! However I carried regrets from that pregnancy too (one scan at twenty weeks, and having to lie to my GP about my birth plans, as well as avoiding the hospital!), and found his birth very hard going, a 3hr transition, and felt for a long time that I only birthed him at home unassisted because my doula Natalie Dash and wife Aby held the space for me. I swore after his birth I was done!

Then he turned two... baby fever hit hard! I wanted another child, actually I wanted another two, but Aby felt she'd be too old to support me through another 2 pregnancies and the subsequent sleepless nights (not to mention that after my last labour, she was concerned at how the next birth would be from her perspective). So I settled for one more child. Then the dreams began. We both separately dreamed of a little girl at different ages with straight, dark brown hair (my daughter has curly light brown hair and son straight blonde hair). I dreamt her name, Rose, and heard her calling to come to join our family.

I contacted our donor and began the arduous journey of trying to conceive, which when you have PCOS is hard and not fun. Rose came to me and said it would be on our third try that she'd join us. Try one... nothing... try two... a positive line! Then a week later, a bleed... But after I bled, I still had full pregnancy symptoms. I even did another test a week later as I still felt pregnant! It was negative, so I saw my homeopath who diagnosed hormonal imbalance and prescribed homeopathics.

Then came try number three. It was successful! I was pregnant again! This time there was no bleed a week later and the tests I did were all dark! Then the symptoms came. Strong for so early on, but I loved them. My Rose was here within me! Then I noticed that I looked big for six weeks, but assumed it was third baby bulge. By eight weeks I could feel my uterus above my pelvis... and then came the movements, loads and so early!

There was no hiding the news of this pregnancy, I was big! There was talk of two; I'd also gone there in my head. Two, wow, that would be cool! I had planned this pregnancy to be one of no regrets. I had planned it to be an unassisted pregnancy (care only as I chose) with no scans except if medically indicated, no doctors or midwives visits unless I wanted to, followed by an unassisted birth with just my doula Nat present. The thought of two babies growing inside me didn't change this at all. I saw it as a continuation of

Carter Sage (and Rose)

normal, and trusted my body to let me know if care was needed. I made sure I ate well, rested and was well hydrated. My mum checked my blood pressure a few times and I checked for protein or other abnormalities in my wee. I also kept a check on my fundal height.

I continued to grow, and grow and grow. I measured consistently four to six weeks ahead of my dates, and it was like an octopus was growing inside me. So many movements, all the time and all over! I had dreams of two, then one night I was sent the name Sage. My son's in utero name. So now there was Rose and Sage. A little later he sent through his birth name. I spent all night saying it

in my dreams, and by morning was OK with it. It took Aby a lot longer, but she too liked it. Rose's birth name was never sent to me, but was a combination of names of a respected elder who has passed and a good friend of Aby's.

Sometimes I'd question the twoness growing inside me, then came the doubter's voices..."How can you know there is two without a scan?" "You're big, but not big enough for two really"... a crisis point.... what do I do? Do I scan and find out, exposing myself to the hospital system, or do I sit and wait for the eventual unveiling of my uterus's contents? I chose the latter. Did it really matter if I was growing one baby or two? I wouldn't change my plans on where or how I birthed (I just made sure I had some styptic herbs on hand from a herbalist, and had a plan for bleeding post birth if that happened), so why invade my unborn's privacy just to satisfy that curiosity? I read up on types of twins and the chance of having the ones with the most problems, and felt it was unlikely I had a chance of that. Even today, I am so so glad that was my decision.

Then my pregnancy drew to its close. Term approached and went by... Hmmm, twins come early don't they? I'd spend so much time poking my tummy, a head waaaaay down in my pelvis, and a body way back on my back/right where I'd get movements... and a prominent body with a mobile bump up high under my ribs on the left, in front. I'd still feel movements absolutely all over my bump, no pattern, no way to map, nothing consistent.

Forty one weeks came... and went... Hmmm, anyone know of twins getting to forty one weeks? People around me getting twitchy, but I felt fine and strong, no shortage of movements. I'd have days where the one on my right would move very little, and the one on the left would party all day. Then the next day, both sides of my belly would be full of movements! My fundal height measured 59cm..... It wasn't fluid, I could easily feel foetal parts.

Forty two weeks came and slowly ticked over into forty two plus....Anxieties crept in for me... One of the biggest regrets of my other two pregnancies was inducing my babies. I induced my daughter using castor oil at 'T+10' because I was in a U.K 'hospital at home' homebirth programme, and they wouldn't let me birth at home after that date..... Hmmm, like that worked! My son I selfinduced with homeopathics at 'T+16' because I didn't feel comfortable going much further than that. This pregnancy I swore I wouldn't intervene..... yet here I was forty two weeks and no sign of anything! Around this time I had another dream of my babies. They were born, a girl and a boy

(as they always were in my dreams). They were dressed and laying snuggled up together, the girl with her arm around the boy. They were good sized babies and looked just like my son but with slightly different hair. I had 2 cords coming out of my vagina. I felt very reassured by that dream. I was torn between honouring my own wish and the need to allow my body to begin spontaneous labour, and the stronger and stronger likelihood (I felt) of something untoward happening to my babies if I just let things go. So at 42+1 I chatted to Nat of my thoughts and my plans. She was very supportive, and suggested meditation with my babies, telling them what I was planning. 42+2 Aby took the kids shopping, and I sat on the lounge and talked to my unborn babies, felt the amazing tingling energy my uterus was giving off....then this surreal thing happened. I'd feel a rush of energy tingle in my spine, go buzzing up the back of my neck and into my head and sort of shoot out the top! I'd then get a tightening. It was like being under the influence of an illegal substance, all floaty and so relaxed. The spine/head/tightenings kept up, as did the altered state for twenty minutes, then gradually receded. Then Aby and kids came home and there were kids yelling and fighting and lunch being made and I actually thought for a minute "It is my family that is stopping me going into labour!!!!"

I went to bed that night thinking maybe I'd be in labour overnight, or at least my days of pregnancy were numbered, as something I had planned in the next few days would get stuff happening.... surely! I woke at 3am, weed as usual, then back to bed, and I couldn't sleep. I kept running through my self-induction plans, and started crying. It felt like such a bleak place to be. I could actually see myself on Saturday at forty three weeks fronting up to the local hospital ('cause everything else had failed), submitting to an IOL there and ending up with a c/s.

A little later on the morning of 42+3, I woke Aby up and we had a bit of a snuggle and a chat. I then got up and sat on the lounge as the sun started to rise. I was getting a few of the customary tightenings that I'd been having on and off the last few weeks and I thought 'squat down', and I did, thinking that maybe the first head would hit my cervix and do something. It did, my waters broke, onto the carpet! I grabbed the closest thing, a plastic container the kids kept their marble/magnet game in and emptied that to catch the drips.... milky/clear fluid with.... splodges of vernix! I waddled back to bed and told Aby that my waters had gone and went and put a cloth nappy in my pants. Aby got up and said "Oh my god, what do we do now?" I laughed and said it could be another thirty six hours!

At 7.30am I phoned Nat, (who lives 2hrs away from me 'cause we moved while I was pregnant!), who said she'd come up and do some shopping and wait to see what the day brought. I rang my mum who just giggled a lot! I then realised how hungry I was and scoffed down some watermelon, toast, McCrappy hotcakes, a chocolate paddle pop, and a banana.

Over that time I was starting to get the occasional mild tightening that I had to stand up for and my fluid was still clear. I was liking this! I had always wanted the sort of labour where one could potter around in the early stages but both my other labours started with a BANG. I had also wanted to experience a labour where my waters broke first.... Looks like I was getting my wishes. I decided at midday to write down my contractions 'cause I'd

never done that in a labour before. They were still irregular, seven to twelve minutes apart, easy to breathe and rock through. My bump by this point had totally deflated on one side! Looked very odd indeed!

At 1pm I had a strong tightening that I needed to walk and vocalise through! I heard my seven year old daughter say to her three year old brother "Don't worry Tal, those are just the noises Mumma makes when she is having babies, they are good noises!" LOVE it! I sat down between contractions, then when one came I would stand up, hold the back of the chair and step from foot to foot, moving my hips and thinking "Open!" in my mind. I decided to ring Nat to tell her that the contractions were now seven minutes apart, I was vocalising, I'd had a show and the fluid coming out was pink. I said "Don't worry about coming just yet", I was fine and was still coping well. Aby started to get the pool ready and I let Mum know where we were at.

Then things ramped up. I got Aby to ring Nat back about fifteen minutes after I'd talked to her. The contractions were now five minutes apart and taking a lot of my concentration. Aby also rang Mum who arrived with flowers followed by Nat not long after. Aby and Mum were merrily filling the pool and chatting. Nat walked in, heard me and saw how I was doing and suddenly it was all hands to fill the pool! It was also kind of surreal, kids playing and chatting, my mum sat on the lounge, our Labrador was inside under the table asleep and I was in labour! I took myself away into the bathroom area, wanting to feel the cool tiles under my feet and find a quiet darker space. Then my space was invaded by a frantic Aby and Nat filling pots and pans to help top the pool up as the hose was too slow! I was just in some kind of zone. Eyes closed, vocalising through each contraction, willing my cervix open in my mind each time, leaning a little forward and still stepping from foot to foot. I was aware of my noises getting more and more loud and out there sounding, of shaking throughout each tightening, of feeling like the wave I was riding was going to dump me and throw me under at any point. This was HARD! As she'd pass me with a pot to be filled, Nat would offer a kind touch or word, Aby would apologise again for having to walk round me. I could feel my pelvis starting to open as the baby's head moved down, that all too familiar pain at the edges of my

hips that I had for hours with my son, an ache beginning in my back. Oh no! Then they said the pool was ready! The contractions now felt like they were almost without a break, eyes closed, I could feel tears just there, this was so BIG!

I walked round and stripped off. Noticed that the last cloth nappy I had on had a blob of blood on it... Cool! Progress! Into the pool, and oh my god no relief, it was worse. The pain so intense, my back killing me. Nat suggested Aby pour water over my back. Relief! Then an involuntary push from me during a contraction... Shit! I felt inside, nope no head, nothing... "Geeez" I said once, "I can't do this!" And the contractions kept on coming, with almost no break. I continued to push and grunt, so different from my son's birth

where my pushes were silent and controlled. This felt so raw and animalistic, just pushing, grunting, vocalising, and one swear word (in front of my mum!). Eyes closed and within my body, I have no idea what positions I was in, just moved as I needed. So different from my son's birth where I was so externally aware!

Then I could feel the head moving down. I felt inside, squishy, hairy, a head! It was all just so fast. That sensation in my bum, like that was where the head was coming out, then the bulge on my perineum.... I held my vulva, pushing, feeling the head moving down more and more, then the burning stretch, and a tiny pop as my skin tore, but still no head. Everyone was encouraging me to breathe the head out and all I heard was Nat's voice. I found this time it was something I was doing almost automatically, and it was a slow process, even with pushing, this head wasn't in a rush! Slowly it came almost out, then another push and a "Come on baby" and the head was out. I sat back, relieved and so chilled out.

Then another push and out came a baby, into the pool. I reached down and grabbed the baby and brought it up to my chest, 3.14pm. A look between his legs...a boy! Carter Sage! In my dreams he was always born first, then his sister. The party atmosphere returned, happiness, smiles, laughter. Cam (my daughter) and Tali (my son) amazed and happy and excited; Aby in awe, my mother so happy! WOW! What an awesome experience, active labour just over an hour long! My son sat on my chest COVERED in the thickest layer of vernix, chunks of vernix floating in the pool! He was a little grumpy and mucousy. Nat advised a gentle blow on his face and that helped his colour and his breathing.

Then Tali said "Is the 'nother baby coming yet?" Oh yes, that's right, the 'nother baby'. Well, there were no contractions, so I just sat in the pool. Tali stripped off and came in, checking out his brother, then catching blobs of vernix and painting the side of the pool with it! Then Cam got in and they played together and chatted to Carter and I. Then Tali decided to taste and eat all the vernix blobs off the side of the pool. Said it tasted like butter! Ewww.

Carter had a feed at 5.02pm and more contractions began. I asked Cam and Tali to get out of the pool and Aby got in with Carter and I. In both of my other births the placentas took 4hrs (and a manual removal of placenta) and three and a half hours respectively. I was getting back ache and a mild urge to push. I felt inside my vagina and felt membranes and nothing much else. As the urge to push got a little stronger, I went with it... then saw the tell-tale sign of placental separation, a puff of blood in the pool and pushed the placenta out. Caught it in a bowl and said "Well there was only one in there then!"

Eventually we got out of the pool and sat about while Carter was weighed and measured. He looked massive and weighed 4445g! I cuddled him again,



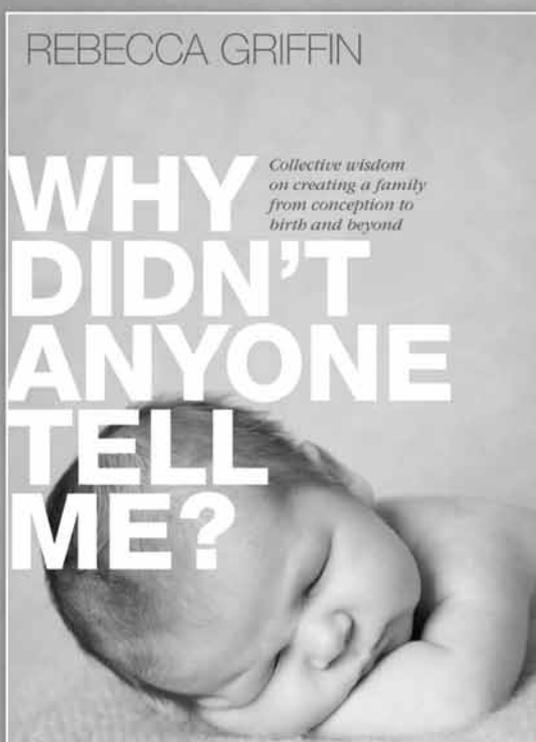
and for the 1st time felt that I had an empty space in my arms, that someone was missing.

Later we washed and dried his placenta as we were lotus birthing. Such a long cord! We wrapped the placenta in a cloth nappy and put it in the same bag I used for Tali's lotus birth. We then all headed off to bed.

The next morning was glorious. We were all home, together, a family! Aby and the older two kids got up and started doing breakfast stuff and the usual morning routines and I just sat there and drank in my newest son. He was gorgeous! I sat there gazing at him and smiling down to my soul when I was aware of that 'altered feeling' I'd had a few days ago - the tingles in my spine, the lightness and floatiness in my body. I waited for the energy rush to go up my spine, but it didn't, it went down in a wave, followed by this sensation of opening down through my body, down into my pelvis and out between my legs. I was suddenly aware of tears, uncontrollable tears. It felt like I was birthing 'energy'. Cam came in and asked if I was ok, then went and told Aby I was crying. We talked a bit about the gap we felt in our family, that it felt like there should have been another soul here with us. I told her of what I had felt just before and the tears that just came from nowhere. Later that day I got my mum to do a Bowen treatment for me, and she did a move that would help close the base chakra / stop the birthing energy.

Later that night I was feeding Carter and suffering with horrendous after pains. Aby said she heard me moaning softly and felt sorry for me, then went to sleep. She dreamt I was birthing another baby, a small misshapen daughter who we wrapped in a red towel and didn't know what to do with. Would I have done anything different in hind sight? No. I still wouldn't have scanned to see how many babies I was carrying. Would I have invested so much energy in pondering the 'twoness'? Yes, I believe whatever / whoever Rose was, she was an energy within me. Maybe she was a baby conceived and lost so early in pregnancy. Maybe she was a guardian angel of sorts, watching over Carter. Maybe she was someone who had known both Carter and I in another life time, and wanted to join us again, but it wasn't the right time, or the time was right, but she only came through briefly this time. I don't really know. Maybe I don't really want to know. I just know that I felt her, on so many levels and am actually grateful for the experience. It allowed me to really trust my body and the journey to birth, it allowed me to choose from a

position of strength and wisdom exactly what I wanted to do in each step of my pregnancy. I chose to have a haemoglobin check done by an IM (Sonja) at thirty four weeks (my only antenatal test!) based on thinking there was two babies, but to still follow my plans to monitor my pregnancy myself, and to go on to birth unassisted at home. That never changed. Knowing for definite may have saved us a few hundred dollars in the cost of a new car seat, but I'm not sure I would want to swap my now VERY impressive sling stash! :) Having had two unassisted births, this is the only way I would choose to birth at home. We initially asked Nat to support us for Tali's birth to take photos and look after Cam (she did much much more than that, including keeping the pool warm and suggesting things to get me through the intense labour and offering amazing emotional support). We asked her to attend Carter and Rose's birth because for me, birthing with someone who trusts birth innately is very important. It is also important to me that that trust also comes without medical 'responsibility'. Not because I fulfill that role for myself, because as any birthing woman knows, when you birth you birth; it doesn't matter what job you did or do pre-baby, but more because for me homebirth is safe, my body births beautifully and I don't feel the need for a midwife to be there for the process.



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My "Safer"



My journey to homebirth starts with two previous births in hospital that ended in Caesarean.

My daughter Belle was born in 2005. She turned breech at 36 weeks and despite my best efforts, trying every remedy I'd heard of, when my waters broke at thirty eight weeks she was still breech and the hospital requested I come in for an "emergency caesarean".

First time round I hadn't thought too much about alternative birthing options. I had booked into the lovely birth centre at our local hospital, had gotten to know all the midwives, and was hoping to have a natural birth there, but was pretty compliant in terms of going along with what the hospital told me, rather than doing external research.

I was elated with my beautiful baby, but knew that when I had my second child I really wanted a chance to push it out.

My son Frano was born in 2007. I had done a lot more preparation for this birth. We attended a hypno-birthing course and I practiced the techniques a lot, and spent a lot of time thinking about and preparing for the birth. But it too ended in a caesarean, ultimately for no other reason than I went into hospital too early and once admitted, the labour progressed slowly. I had been in the birth centre for about twenty two hours and was 8cm dilated when a staff change-over occurred. The new person in charge of the labour ward and birth centre took one look at my file and said "Get her ready for theatre now!" Never mind that I wanted to keep going, that the midwives were happy for me to keep going... They were answerable to this one woman and I was pretty tired and in no state to argue in between contractions, so I was taken to theatre.

I was very disappointed but I think I never actually realised I could flat out refuse a caesarean. This seems strange looking back, but I guess I just assumed they knew more about it than I did.

Again, I got my beloved baby safe and well, and for this I remain totally grateful. My disappointment about his birth dissipated over time... after all I wanted "a baby, not a birth".

But when pregnant again in December 2009, I was very keen to not have the same experience. I am not anti-caesarean. I would have had a third one in a heartbeat if there was a strong reason to. The goal is obviously a safe birthing process for both parties whatever the scenario may be, but I felt that my previous two were ultimately both unnecessary.

We had moved to a different area and the hospital I am eligible to attend has a 30% C section rate. I have a meeting with a local (hospital based) midwife and she basically says that if I don't want another caesarean then I'm going to have to avoid hospitals altogether and have a homebirth! This freaks me out somewhat. I admired stories of women who homebirthed but never

considered I would be one of them. My husband, Brett, was considerably more freaked out by the idea. But after we researched it and found a midwife and doula who we felt really good about, we decide that it's a great idea, love that the children can be present and get really excited about it!

The children were well prepped for what was to happen. They were present at my prenatal visits with midwife Jo, had seen lots of videos, knew all about what noises I might make etc. and were very excited. But mainly Frano just wanted to know "When are we getting the pool?" – Yes, he thought the idea of a (birthing) pool in the living room was brilliant!

My labour starts at thirty eight weeks & three days. I have my weekly visit with Jo at 10am, the baby is in a perfect position and engaged. Straight afterwards I go to my acupuncture session with Anthony who I have been seeing weekly from thirty four weeks. He activates some points to facilitate movement but nothing too full on, and for the rest of the day I feel mild crampings every now and then.

That night I wake up at 11.30pm needing to pee. I hear something plonk into the toilet bowl and decide that it must be my mucous plug, so I ring Jo. She says that sounds right and tells me to "Go back to bed, get some more sleep and ring me if you need to." But I spend the next hour going up and down to the toilet, completely emptying my bowels, and the contractions start. I ring Jo again at 12.30am. She says to call her back when contractions are lasting for a minute and are two minutes apart.

Brett sets up the birth pool and starts filling it while I concentrate on my contractions which are getting more and more intense. They don't quite get to two minutes apart, some of them get close, then further apart, then much closer... but by about 2am I'm screaming at Brett to call Jo and Natalie (our doula)!

Natalie is the first to arrive. I am in the pool which feels really good. She walks in and says "Hi" just as I lean over the side of the pool and absolutely spew my guts out. What a welcome! She says something like "That's right, let it all out..." (she's so amazing, calm and unflappable!) then rolls up her sleeves, cleans it up, and gets on with filling up the pool some more. Jo arrives soon after, and Belle hears me, wakes up and comes to help. I was in my own zone completely concentrating on contractions and all I remember about this time is being in the pool, Jo constantly telling me that I was doing great; Natalie and Brett bringing pots of hot water to top up the pool; and Belle bringing me glasses of water with bendy straws and putting the straw in my mouth to help me drink, little sweetheart.

The contractions were getting quite painful and Jo was telling me to let them wash over me, imagine they are a big hug. Whenever I reacted against them

at Home" Birth!

RIA HAMBLETT



or cried out it would feel worse, so I tried to go inside myself, to ride with them, to internalise them. There was a moment when I thought it was all too much and apparently I yelled out "I'm going to die!" Jo said "No you're not, you're doing great, this is exactly what's supposed to happen...." I think you could say this was my transition!

Then I suddenly felt too hot and got out of the pool. Everyone else was worried the water wasn't hot enough and the room was cold, but it was really good to climb out and feel cool. I was standing up, moving around a little bit, leaning on Brett, swaying in between contractions. He said there was a point where I almost pulled him over because he'd just about fallen asleep between contractions.

Then the pushing sensation started. I found this quite bizarre, completely uncontrollable. Contractions with intense pushing and vocalizing! I absolutely couldn't stop it if I tried (not that I did try). The pushing went on for quite some time. After a while I got back in the pool and eventually I could just feel a hard little head if I reached inside with my fingers...A MA Z I N G! I was wishing and wishing it would hurry up and come down, I was getting tired of the contractions, but it took forever to move. Then I could feel a proper little head with hair on it, just like peach skin, although I could feel the scalp move and could grasp tufts of hair with my fingers. Just amazing! But then the head would slip back up and I would feel discouraged and thought it was going to take forever. I was talking to her, asking her to come out, telling her I really needed her to come out now. Funny thing is I just felt it was a girl. I wanted to say "Come on baby girl!" but I was holding myself back from saying the word.

I was on my knees, leaning on the side of the pool. It was about 5am and Brett had woken Frano up so everyone was there watching and waiting. Jo leaned over to pull up my sit bones and finally the little head came out. Then the most amazing sensation of all...When the head was out but the rest of the body was still inside, I felt the baby's body twist and wriggle inside me to get to the right position to be born.

And suddenly it was out. I rolled over on to my back and Jo was beside me saying "Catch your baby, catch your baby" and I scooped her up out of the water. Wow. And then she's there on my chest. 5.49am. Frano burst into tears when we established she was a girl – he'd wanted a boy. He ran off to the kitchen and had a cry but a couple of minutes later he came out and announced "I love baby girls now!" He's been smitten ever since.

The placenta came out about thirty minutes later. I think someone forgot to tell me that the contractions keep coming even after the baby is out. (By the way, they

don't stop after the placenta is out either!) Actually my after-birth pains kept up for about a week but let's not dwell on that!

The kids named her Rainbow straight away, and she was known as "Baby Rainbow" for a couple of weeks. In the end we decided to go with the rainbow theme and chose Iris – the Rainbow Messenger from Greek Mythology who "rides the rainbow to deliver messages between the gods and humanity". She is the sweetest thing in the world and I am lapping her up, knowing that she is my last and that babies vanish so quickly! (into toddlers, then children...)

Jo is the most wonderful, attentive, strong, informed, supportive, creative midwife you could hope for and we felt so safe in her care, and even more so with Natalie by her side. I knew that my birthing team was completely there for me and I was absolutely confident in their ability and experience. They both helped me to believe a homebirth was possible in my situation, and with their support we did it! It was an incredible experience and I'm so grateful to both of them. Of course now I think everyone should be encouraged to birth at home, and you'd have to be terribly brave (?) to chance the hospital system without good reason!



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The Twin Story of Harvee

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I figured I was pregnant one morning when hit with a sudden nausea and instant craving for food. I had to eat something IMMEDIATELY and as we were driving I reached for Esther's snack bag and ate everything in it. A trip to the GP confirmed the home pregnancy test but the symptoms weren't quite right so she sent me for a date scan. Lying back on the table for the scan I got the shock of my life when each movement of the scanner picked a little body. There were somehow two in there and I was already 10 weeks pregnant!!

Excited about being able to repeat my positive experience of the Birth Centre with my first born Esther, I called to make an appointment. I was shocked and amazed to be rejected on account that in carrying twins, I was suddenly regarded "high risk". I couldn't believe it! Someone as healthy as me, who had a good track record was a risk??? All tests were showing completely normal and I'd never felt less risky in my life!

So reluctantly I was booked into the hospital clinic and a journey of disappointment, rejection and frustration followed. I was informed that shared care with my GP was not acceptable and a normal vaginal birth (NVB) without intervention was not an option in the hospital system. In my striving to have a NVB without intervention obstetricians in several clinics told me of all the many things that can go wrong, endless horror stories and a barrage of tragic statistics. One obstetrician recommended a caesarean at thirty four weeks, others thirty six to thirty eight weeks or induction at thirty eight weeks. Epidurals, foetal monitoring, the list went on and the treatment was negative. Not once was there any encouragement for an expectant mother of twins – just a constant resistance to letting a woman's body give it a go naturally.



I started to look outside the hospital to search for more positive approach. Although I was keen to have a home-birth to avoid all the intervention and reap the benefits, my partner Damien understandably was a bit apprehensive given the lack of insurance, so we decided to go the hospital path, but on our terms. Talking with independent midwives, a midwife consultant and home-birthing mothers, hearing inspirational stories gave me hope. There were also many frustrated tears and constant consultation with my beautiful doula Jerusha. Our information gathering continued. I spoke with one mother who had home-birthing her twins at full-term in the water at home. Another who had run the gauntlet by labouring at home to the very last minute with her Doula present and getting to the hospital fully dilated, so they had no time for interventions. This seemed like a very good strategy, but for additional support we decided to also include a midwife in the team. Damien and Jerusha would act as "security" for the babies and my body and our midwife



would be there for a nod and a wink when we needed it. We would all be across the birth plan and anticipate any interventions and try to avoid them. Operating against us as well was the due date, New Years Eve. So many obstetricians and independent midwives were away on holidays or not taking any bookings at that time. After many calls we were blessed with finding an incredible independent midwife Akal, who immediately put us at ease and became a sensible sounding board and a champion of our cause. From week twelve to week twenty nine with my support team I battled against the hospital system and obstetricians at every monthly check-up.

Birth and Nash

ELIZABETH TREVAN

All my results were completely normal but their horror stories persisted. Eventually after being moved through several clinics all refused to handle my case. Then finally I received a call from a wonderful Clinical Midwife Consultant (CMC) who had found my file on her desk and recognised and supported what I was trying to achieve - a natural birth. She then referred me to the clinic of a female obstetrician who was happy to support a NVB - this was ironically in the High Risk Department of the hospital. I had several monthly checks with her and all was progressing normally. Unfortunately, however she left for holidays overseas just three weeks before my due date. At thirty eight weeks I had my weekly check in the clinic. The babies were in good positions and all was progressing normally. The CMC later called to say that she felt bad that we had been left without an obstetrician we could put a face to so she organised a meeting for that afternoon.

A terrible meeting ensued with a very senior obstetrician. All available monitoring had continued to show the pregnancy to be uncomplicated at this stage and from my position all I wanted was to be allowed to have a NVB with the support of a skilled medical team available IN CASE something went wrong.

On expressing my desire to the obstetrician to have no intervention immediately upon hospital arrival, I was told that "if I was his wife, he would make me have an epidural", followed by "I've been delivering babies for 20 years and you haven't". (Interestingly our independent midwife who was offering emotional support had been delivering babies, including many sets of twins, for over thirty years both here and overseas.)

At thirty eight weeks + three days I was being attacked with total disdain because my babies were still in utero ten days before my due date. From the beginning, having done my research and with everything progressing normally, reaching my due date had been my goal as it would maximise the benefits pre and post birth for my babies. The obstetrician then told me that I was being "incredibly selfish and putting my babies' lives at risk".

My confidence was knocked, I knew now that regardless of the normality of the pregnancy and my knowledge and acceptance of the small risk, my preference for a NVB without intervention was totally abhorred by the system and the clinicians operating within it. I felt rejected, dejected and very depressed. How would I recover from this in time for a positive birthing experience?

In order to make it happen I visualised the safest place to birth. It was on my tibetan rug in the lounge room. The carpet had been made by the hands of women in a rug factory I had found by chance in Shigatse, Tibet and I had carried it on my shoulders whilst trekking down the treacherous border crossing between Tibet and Nepal. Jerusha and I joked that I should roll it up and take it into the hospital delivery suite. We laughed as we imagined the looks on the faces of the staff and what would be going through their minds as we rolled it out to give birth.

On the day before the due date I walked to the next suburb for a few errands and some reflexology. I bought a beautiful scented candle, for the

client meetings I have at home and some incense. I felt strongly the need to spiritually cleanse the apartment in preparation for these new spirits who would enter our home. I wanted them to feel welcome and loved.

I lit the incense and walked around the apartment clockwise. My doula had told me babies often turn clockwise and I wanted the second baby to feel the strength to turn and make the best movements to come out freely. I asked all the darkness and negativity to leave and welcomed in white and golden light. In reality I knew nothing of what I was doing, I was making it up, but it felt right and gave me strength that there would be other forces taking care of me in my special moment. As it turned out I was intuitively performing a "smudging ceremony", something I perform regularly these days. Damien cooked a beautiful meal for Jerusha and I. I went to bed and about midnight started to get a few pains. By 12.30a.m. I thought I should share this with Damien, who was at the computer. I told him not to get too excited it was probably just pre-labour and I went back to bed. Given that my pre-labour had been so long with Esther there was no need to panic, but it was exciting to know that something was finally happening and the twins would be with us soon. Damien came in about half an hour later and could see I was having another contraction, so I asked him to start to time them and we decided to call Jerusha, our doula. As soon as she arrived I had one giant contraction following moments later by another. She immediately told us to call our midwife as we would need her here soon and we certainly wanted her reassurance and presence before heading off into the hostile environment of the hospital delivery suite.

At 1.30am we phoned our midwife to come and also my friend Angela to babysit seventeen month old Esther. The contractions were coming quite

strongly and I had already thrown-up Damien's beautiful dinner which caused a few chuckles about the quality of the meal. We then thought it might be a little more soothing to get under the water in the shower, but as soon as I got in I felt the incredible pressure and desire to push. The midwife hadn't had time to reach our home and we didn't want to make a move without her approval so I went to my Tibetan rug on the lounge room floor and with head down I stuck my bum in the air.





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At about 2.30am our midwife walked in to this picture and obviously wondered how it had gotten to this. The labour had progressed so fast and we were all caught by surprise. She examined me and said "Either call an ambulance or you're having them here!" I knew immediately what I wanted and with Damien's confirmation it was action stations. There was the odd joke about tearing up the sheets, but I was only laughing on the inside as the contractions had me bellowing deep and long. Jerusha and Angela ran to our midwife's car to grab her gear, Esther's plastic play mat was placed over the rug and the girls efficiently gathered whatever else we needed.



I give great thanks to our midwife who with her ease and reassurance allowed all the team to be calm in the face of this unexpected turn. Our babysitter Angela was stoically boiling instruments on the stove in her moo-cow pyjamas, still in shock at what was happening. Our doula was there with her joyous spirit and encouraging words and Damien patiently knelt beside me, still massaging me in the contractions and ready to catch the babies "in the slips" in cricketing terms.



Whilst on all fours and the pressure of the contractions allowing me to push, the membranes of the first baby swelled and burst. I felt an incredible release at this moment and knew that it wasn't far to go. The baby was teasing us as the head moved in and out but finally and beautifully unassisted, at 3.12am, Harvey Francis arrived weighing 3.96kgs. Both his hands were up around his face, probably why he had been taking a while. He was moved into my arms and nursed until the contractions came again and I then passed him into the lap of his father.



I started to push the next baby but he seemed to be taking his time. In between contractions I would look at Damien and Harvey in his lap, cord still connected. Our midwife wondered what the hold-up was with the second baby and on inspection discovered his arm beside his head. With the next two contractions she instructed me to push while the arm was held so the head could move past. This done, I moved into my favoured squatting position and with the assistance of gravity and supported in the arms of my doula, at 3.41am, Nash William arrived weighing 3.74 kgs. Once he was safely in my arms Damien returned Harvey to me. What a feeling of triumph. Both my babies in my arms. Hooray!! And a home birth – a dream come true!!! Joyfully, because we were home there was no abrasive fluorescent lighting; no cast of thousands; no removal of the babies from our arms; no immediate clamping and cutting of the cords - the two cords were not touched until the single shared placenta delivered and ceased pulsating. Three little words that mean so much. Three little words that change everything.

Born at home.

Later, when the early morning light was pouring into the lounge room, I took a look around to assess how everything could look the same as the day before, but everything had changed. Under the circumstances I'd expected the place to be in total disarray. I was amazed that despite the size of the babies there had been no real blood loss..... and so quickly everything in the room was back in place. Jerusha and Angela had efficiently collected and washed everything that had been used and it was already neatly hanging on the line. Then I noticed that my new scented candle was burning and remembered during the birth looking up at its golden light and thinking one of the girls must have lit it. I mentioned it was still burning and Damien said that he had been the one to light it when I'd come out to him at 12.30 a.m. and he'd lit it thinking there would be a long night of labour ahead. I smiled and loved the fact it had been Damien.

So in the end, surrounded by a wonderful team, I unexpectedly had the gentle birth at home that I was endeavouring to have in hospital - without the battle or the emotional distress. Whilst understanding and accepting that there was a small risk, I was one of the over 95% of the Monochorionic Diamniotic pregnancies (twins that share one placenta with two amniotic sacs) that remained uncomplicated through to a natural and normal vaginal birth demonstrating (contrary to most medical recommendations) that successful outcomes are possible and probable.

As a result my children and I continue to reap the considerable benefits.





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JENI
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At thirty seven weeks pregnant, we learned that our baby was sitting in a breech position. Lianne, my midwife, relayed two dreams she'd had of the baby being born breech – easily, but breech. "That just means the baby will come out the other way around, doesn't it?" I said to Lianne. It didn't seem a big issue to me. I still intended to have a homebirth if Lianne was still prepared to support me. (A caesarean section was all but guaranteed if I went to any hospital in South East Queensland.)

Rod, my husband, however, was worried. He searched on the internet for information about breech birth. What he read only scared him more. He tells me that it was largely due to my confidence around this time that he started to again relax about the baby's birth. (I did make attempts, via natural means, to see if the baby would turn. However I also wanted to respect the choice that this little one was making for his/her own reasons.)

My 'due date' came and went. I wasn't concerned. I knew the baby would come when he or she was ready. I had done what I could do to prepare. I had read. I had visualized. I had watched birth videos. I had listened to birth stories. I had said affirmations. (My favourite: "I have an easy, safe and beautiful birth".) I had meditated. I had listened to Lianne's reassurance that I really could do this (I needed to hear that often). I had had acupuncture and Feldenkrais sessions regularly. I had massaged my perineum. I had attended pregnancy yoga classes, ante-natal classes, and a 'preparation for birth' workshop. Using my Feldenkrais training (body and movement awareness) I was regularly rehearsing for labour, focusing on breathing into and relaxing my pelvic floor, and softening my mouth and jaw. Whew, what a busy schedule!

I knew something still had to happen before the baby came, however. I knew that the intimate, loving energy between Rod and I that was present for this baby's conception would need to be here again for the baby's arrival. So on the last Sunday evening before the baby arrived (Saturday had been my 'due date'), Rod and I devoted time to each other, and created a space for some much longed-for sexual intimacy. The next morning this lovely energy was still with us.

When Lianne arrived for an ante-natal visit that morning she said that something was different – some tightening around my uterus (or something like that). I was convinced it was because of my recent pelvic activity, but was too embarrassed to say so! Lianne departed confident that everything

was 'just perfect'. I headed out for my acupuncture treatment. I enjoyed the continued focus on my pelvis with acupuncture needles around my sacrum. It seemed timely and helpful, allowing me to bring my attention low in my body, ready for birthing. I was aware that my genital tissue had been softening also, particularly in the last few days.

I was resting in the bed when Rod came home at around 6 pm. He was keen to tell me about his day, but I could only partly focus on what he was saying. "I'm quite uncomfortable", I explained to him. I had some sharp abdominal pains, different to the

Braxton Hicks contractions I'd been experiencing throughout my pregnancy. Neither of us thought much about it, and Rod went to start making some dinner.

I moved from the bed to the couch and continued to complain about this discomfort in my belly. Maybe it was the acupuncture treatment, I thought. I watched some 'junky' TV which offered a welcome distraction from my cramps. At times I squatted down to the floor to try to relieve the pain. "I haven't felt this before", I said to Rod. He asked, "Do you think the baby is coming?"

I picked at a bit of dinner. When I turned off the TV at 10 pm or so, I didn't

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really want to move but thought I would head to the bedroom. When I stood up from the couch water gushed out of me. I was shocked. Seems maybe the baby was coming. I went to the toilet and gushed more meconium-stained water (Lianne had told us to expect this with a breech baby), and started emptying my bowels. Rod called Lianne. She said she would come.

I moved to the bed (where I would remain for the next six or so hours). The crampy feelings were now coming in waves that required focused breathing for me to manage. I could feel myself leaking fluids almost constantly. The menstrual pad I'd placed in my pants could only cope with so much, but I really wasn't thinking about that. Rod made a hot water bottle for me and I sat on it. After that I didn't want him to leave me. As I sat on the edge of the bed on my hot water bottle, I squeezed Rod's hand and buried my forehead into his shoulder each time the wave of sensations intensified. I exhaled strongly – blowing away the contraction, blowing out for as long as I could. When I was blowing out I felt in control. I didn't enjoy breathing in. My ability to endure each contraction lay with the longest, slowest exhale I could manage.

Lianne arrived, checked on us and saw that all was OK. She relieved Rod for a while and offered her hands and shoulder in place of Rod's. Then she disappeared to the lounge room leaving Rod and I to do what we needed to do. I really appreciated this space.

When Lianne re-appeared we learned that the back-up midwife's car was at the mechanic's workshop. Claire would come as a support person instead. I was delighted. Claire and Lianne had spent an evening with us showing us a video of a breech birth and answering any questions we had. Rod and I were really pleased that both women would now be present at the birth of our baby. (When Claire first put her hands on me when I was about thirty seven weeks pregnant, she said "Wow, after all this time coming along to homebirth meetings, you are going to treat us to a breech birth!") As scared as I was to imagine giving birth, I felt so encouraged by Claire's enthusiasm. I continued to become more confident in the ability of my baby and me to 'birth' together as those final weeks went by.)

I decided to lie down. I lay on my left side in our bed and Rod lay next to me. For what seemed like many more hours (though I really had no awareness of time – just of breath, and of how well I'd gotten through the previous contraction), I just blew out the pains. I felt relieved during the rest periods, even dozing off at times. I continued to clutch Rod's

hands as the sensations intensified. "Here comes another one", I'd think to myself. I kept blowing. Using my breath in a controlled way to endure the contractions was not easy for me; however the alternative seemed far worse. If I 'lost control' and became overwrought, I feared that it would be a long, hard road back to composure. So with each contraction, when I almost broke into sobs, I renewed my commitment to stay on top of it. "Just until the end of this contraction", I told myself. I then found more air... and blew out even harder and longer. With each contraction Rod offered words of encouragement. "You're doing really well", he'd say. I found great support in his presence and his words.

Sometime around 4.30am Lianne came into the bedroom. There had been a distinct change for me from simply 'enduring' and blowing out the pains to now moaning and pushing. I wanted Rod to ask Lianne or Claire where I should be pushing. My pushes felt so unclear and generalized, as though I was trying to push the baby out of my bottom. This felt really uncomfortable. I didn't have the energy to ask Rod to call them so I was very relieved to see Lianne. It was an effort to roll onto my back so that Lianne could do an internal check on me. She encouraged me to feel the baby with my hand. I touched the baby's bottom and right heel just inside my vagina. Wow! WOW! Lianne said that it was time to decide if I was ready to have this baby. Claire added gently "Your baby wants to come now." Lianne suggested that I get up from the bed, but warned me that the contractions may get stronger. I didn't like the sound of that at all! I wanted to stay where I was, even though my bottom was hurting. With some encouragement I did get up and I moved to the end of the bed, squatting during contractions but not comfortable. I moved onto the birth stool and finally removed my nice, warm woolly jumper which had been like a security blanket up until now.

As I began to push in this new position I became aware of how strange and unfamiliar the opening sensations of my vagina felt to me. To experience my baby opening me from the inside out was totally new. I was intrigued but also scared. On seeing me hold back, Claire and Lianne encouraged me to 'go for it'.

A moment of great clarity came when Claire had her hands on my sacrum and Lianne a finger on my perineum telling me to "push here". Receiving such precise tactile information, I felt immediately empowered. I knew what to do in that moment, and it was truly blissful. This is one of my fondest labour memories. I asked Lianne to keep pointing to the spot. It really helped. I continued to push. Eventually a tiny little toe (the fifth toe of my baby's right foot) emerged, or rather remained at the end of the contraction. Lianne says she delights in remembering this part of my labour – all that work for one little toe!

I decided to stand, leaning over the end of the bed. I pushed some more. Rod who had desperately needed to go to the toilet for some time, thought he'd better go now, since at this rate 'it might be another few hours before a whole leg appears'. However by the time he came back, both of the baby's legs and trunk had been born. I called to Rod, "Look!

Look!" I was totally amazed to peer between my legs and see this little person's body hanging out of me – a real, living little person! Everyone present was careful not to say "he" or "it's a boy" even though they could see. The baby did his first wee as he hung there!

The most curious sensation during that pause, as my baby hung between my legs, was to feel him make his own way out. He wriggled bringing first one then the other shoulder down. This felt so weird, in a pleasurable sort of way. He was birthing himself. I was a little frightened to again feel the extreme stretching and opening of my vagina as his shoulders and arms came through. However I was also in awe.

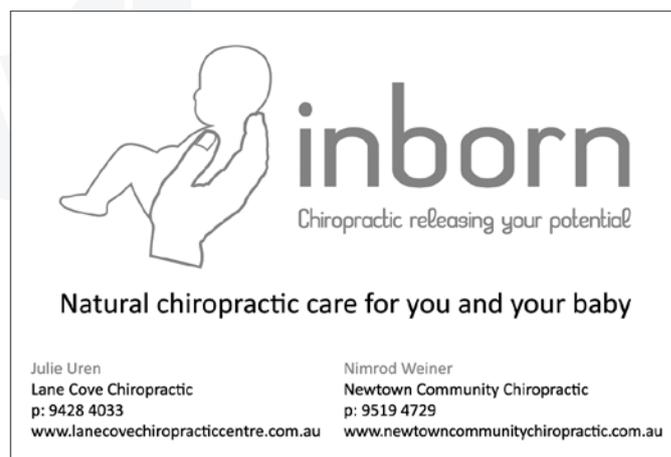
I didn't watch his arms swing out. I had again closed my eyes. I remember thinking that his arms must be out since I was told to push to bring his head out. This all seemed to happen quickly. I pushed. Then suddenly he was out. Rod was saying, "You did it! You did it!" Somehow the placenta plopped straight out in the same push – almost like a beret on the baby's head. It was 5.47am, Tuesday 16th August, 2005.

I was amazed. I had done it. Wow, who would've thought? Our baby boy (now I saw for the first time that he was a boy) was here! I felt very proud of myself and my baby for this amazing birth. Claire said, "Look at the cord!" It appeared to be very long and was wrapped around Elijah's neck four or five times. Lianne was carefully unlooping it and suctioning Elijah's nose and mouth with a little plastic suction bottle. Elijah cried.

I sat and held my baby for the first time. Every little part of him was perfection.

The sun was rising and starting to come into our bedroom. Someone drew the curtains to let some more light in. What a way to start the day – to give birth to a baby!

I had imagined that I'd like to labour through the stillness of night whilst



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others slept. This is what had happened. The feeling of that night was quite surreal. My labour (just under twelve hours in total from the first crampy feeling until he was born), was spent in a wonderful altered state of reality – thanks to the mysterious blend of sleep deprivation and birthing hormones. When we noticed Elijah's sucking reflex a little while later, I was assisted in bringing him to the breast. It took quite some attempts to latch him on – not as easy and comfortable as I'd hoped. He was very keen and enthusiastic to learn however. He drank a bit and then went to sleep.

I was thrilled to learn that despite all that pushing and vaginal stretching, I had not torn. This was the icing on the cake. There was a tiny graze, Lianne said. Not enough to be concerned about. Claire had told me that breech babies were easier to birth because their soft bits come first! I had hung onto that vision.

We did not cut the cord. Rod and I had decided that, all being well, we would give our baby a Lotus birth. So the placenta stayed attached until Elijah released it on his third day here. It was then that we decided definitely on his name... Elijah Jonas.

And so our baby was here. If I were to tell Elijah something special for me about his entrance into the world, I would tell him how happy I was that he wanted to come feet first. His position in my womb kept everyone guessing. However once we knew, I developed a clearer focus about the birth and renewed my commitment to doing it at home. I am so grateful to Elijah because his birth allowed me to say "I did it!"



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Waiting waiting waiting.....

Eden's

The birth experience of my fourth child is difficult to tell. It's not because it troubles me to do so, but because the birth itself is such a small part of the story of his journey earthside. So I must start in the weeks before labour began. I want to start around forty weeks. That's the time you really hope to meet your baby any time soon.

We were fairly well prepared by this stage, we had the birth pool ready, and a big kit of things that we might need during labour and birth. We had finally made it through forty weeks of a pregnancy that was through the hot summer and to this point, a very emotional ride. My husband, Quinn had met with both my midwife Jo Hunter and doula Lucretia McCarthy, and my other three children were both familiar and comfortable with both. We were ready. As the days and nights passed, I couldn't help but look for signs that my baby would soon be born. Everything was on track, baby engaged, in perfect launch position - ready to kick off. But the days kept passing. During this time my midwife was incredible. She was so there for me. I felt like even though she was an hour's drive away, she was right there too. This was exactly why I needed a homebirth midwife.

By forty two weeks I was completely over the whole thing. Every morning I woke up with a distinct feeling of disappointment that I hadn't been awoken by labour. By forty three weeks I was really feeling the pressure. With my Facebook status set to "Still no baby" one day and "NO" the next - I think most people got the message. But you know, I am truly blessed to have the kind of friends who do not pressure me at the point but encourage me, remind me that my body is not broken and soon my baby will be born. Family know better than to second guess me, but I could feel their concern and they had their reasons to worry, and I could respect that and not take it personally.

Jo was incredible with Quinn when he had doubts and concerns. I can't illustrate enough how much the constant contact between myself and my midwife truly helped me through the last weeks. There were some pretty interesting and sometimes graphic and funny texts flying between us. I knew that if at any time I needed her, she was ready to drop anything and be there for me, and at times I called upon her to do just that. My doula was checking in on me daily and I felt that when the time came we were all very ready and excited to meet the little person within.

At 43+5 I had had enough. I was tired of looking at the pool that just sat there unused. I was tired of having swollen feet. I was sick of waking up each morning pain free and babyless. So I deflated the pool and did some washing. I was completely fed up. My husband suggested that we go out for a bit and do something so I would be distracted. It was a good idea, so we left immediately. I decided that while we were out, I would pick up some castor oil and bring it home to drink it. We did a little shopping and I bought myself a violet plant (Violet was our choice for a girl's name and I suddenly felt certain that we were having a boy). We called in and got some castor oil on the way home. When we were home I potted my violet and sat the castor oil on the bench. I looked at it some. YIK! It was so unappealing. I decided that I would do something else for a while and maybe drink some later on if I could make myself do it - maybe lay down and read for a bit.

I lay down on my bed next to Quinn who was reading a magazine. I texted a friend a complaint about the absence of baby. She made a clever retort that caused me to laugh out loud and consequently start to wet my pants! I leapt off the bed as "wee" trickled down my leg. As I sat on the toilet a searing pain ripped through me. Not a contraction, but something that just took over me for a moment. When I was cleaned up I began to think it perhaps wasn't wee. I don't usually wet my

pants, even a tiny bit, and even when pregnant. I texted Jo: "Not sure if I maybe wet myself a bit or if it's a small bit of something else but it's followed up with pain but continual. Watch this space?"

Immediately Jo called me and asked if I wanted her to come. I said no, then I said yes, but be cautioned that I may send her away if she arrived and I wasn't up to anything. I am pretty sure that in hindsight she must have known by my vagueness that I was about to have a baby. If she didn't, she did once she got the next text: "Pain Jo Pain!!!"

And that was a close to the end of my ability to talk to anyone. The pain was continual, there was no "contractions", it just felt like one contraction started before the last one finished and the end result was one big contraction that I couldn't quite recover from. I gripped the wall as I made my way to the bedroom to tell my husband that the baby was coming and I needed him to blow up and fill the birth pool. The conversation went something like: me "POOL NOW!"; him "You want me to fill the pool up right now?" He looked at me and got onto the job. I don't know what was going on by then, I kept thinking I just need a break from the pain so I can take a breath - just a couple of seconds...

No such break came. I gripped onto anything and everything as I made my way to wait for the pool to fill. My children were buzzing about, wondering if finally the baby was going to come out and meet us.

Jo texted me to say she was on her way and gave some useful advice about keeping drinking and asked if I could time contractions - of course I never got the message, but my husband replied to her: "Ema is in the pool and there doesn't seem to be much time between contractions." The reply from Jo to my husband was offering advice for the possibility that the baby might get here before she did.

Despite the pain and the fact that I was now in the pool, I really wanted Jo and Lu there with me. My children kept popping in and out wondering how soon the baby would be born, they could tell it was going to be soon. Quinn finally gave the green light that Jo and Lucretia had arrived. By this stage I could feel my babe's head moving down. I could reach in with my fingers and stroke the softness of my child's head. It was such relief that soon my little one would be in my arms.

As the women entered the room I could feel myself calm a little. I was already pushing my baby out. It was such a powerful force that overtook me then. I had wanted to breathe my baby out - but this baby was not going to be having that sort of birth, and though I had enjoyed breathing out my

Journey Earthside

EMA PERROTT

previous baby, I realised at that point that every birth shows you something new, and like each of my children, each birth would be individual. I tried as hard as I could to remain centred, though I was quietly begging my baby or my body to let up just for a moment. I concentrated on that little soft head that was now so near.

I didn't notice but Jo had left my side and it wasn't until I heard Lucretia telling Jo that the baby's head was now visible that I realised that she had ducked out for a moment. And then she was there, magically offering me what I needed - a cool face washer to mop the sweat and a calm voice while my head was swimming with all that overwhelms you in birth.

I didn't know at the time but Jo had noticed that the baby was not coming down as fast as he perhaps should have and I think she realised then that baby was a little bigger than we were expecting. Once I got his head out, his shoulders were a little stuck in my pelvis, and with no concern or worry from my end, she helped me as my baby was born into my hands.

I love that feeling once the toes slip out and baby is in my hands. It's a rush of love and relief and excitement and probably a lot of other emotions as well. So of course I lifted my baby to my chest... but wait - his cord was wrapped around his neck. It was such a surprise. I love that these things happened and not once did Jo give me reason for worry while I was in labour. In actual fact this was probably the most eventful of my four births, as well as the one with the least concern from my perspective. The cord was unwrapped and my little baby was in my arms. A boy. Eden.

It was so delightful to see the wonder and pleasure that my older children had while meeting their fresh born brother for the first time.

I usually birth the placenta pretty soon after the baby is born, so after a short time I could feel it coming out. Quinn held our baby, still in the water, while I birthed the placenta. My daughter and husband cut the cord together when we were ready. Jo showed the children the placenta as it was inspected. Some were more fascinated than others. Before I knew it I was showered, in fresh PJs and on the sofa with my baby and family.

I am so appreciative of both my midwife and my doula, who made the experience very worry free for me. Lucretia took care of the kids and the photos, and by the time I was moving again, the washing was done and the dishes were sorted. I have never felt so supported in my other births.

And the baby - he is bliss. Born smiling and hasn't stopped. He was 4.32kg and 57cm long with a very blue face due to such a quick birth which faded over the first week or so. I think we were done in around an hour and a half, with Jo walking in with just fourteen minutes to spare.

Many thanks to all the people who were listening to me complain in those last waiting weeks and to those who were the best support team a woman could wish for!



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Overdue:

NICOLE BRIDGES

About four weeks before my due date as I sat on the side of the bath watching my husband pumping up the birth pool, I asked him if he ever thought he would be inflating a device in his own home so that his wife could give birth in it. That question was met with an almighty “No way!”

If you had asked me twelve years ago when I was pregnant with my first baby, I would never in a million years imagine I would be writing up my homebirth story. There was no way I would have contemplated the idea of birthing in an environment that was far away from the skill and knowledge of obstetricians and all of the high-tech support that hospitals can provide - little did I know!

Besides all of that, there was no way I was going to be pushing a baby out of my body without all of the drugs I could safely get into my system. Drug-free childbirth was for strong women, not weaklings like me who couldn't handle pain. Why would I go through all of that pain if I didn't have to? That would just be insane, right? Again, little did I know!

At the tender age of twenty five, I gave birth to my first daughter. I did not know many women my age who had given birth, and the birth stories from the media and people around me were predominantly scary and negative. This shaped the birth choices I made and hence my first birth experience started with an induction and epidural at forty one weeks and ended ten hours later with an episiotomy and forceps. Needless to say I was determined that the next birth would be very different.

And different it was. I surrounded myself with women who normalised birth and demonstrated positive experiences (including a doula). I read and researched and talked to the “right” people, all of which helped me to believe in myself and trust in the birthing process. My second birth experience started with some mild contractions at forty weeks plus three days and ended in a rushed ambulance ride to the hospital, as I had stayed at home too long (I was waiting for the pain to get as “bad” as I had imagined), and ended up in transition in my own bedroom. Fortunately there was a happy ending and I birthed my second daughter (drug free), only twenty minutes after arriving at the hospital.

The logical progression was for my third birth to be a homebirth. I knew I felt safe and comfortable in my own home and I wanted to avoid that ghastly ambulance ride. Besides, I wanted to be part of the sorority of homebirthers – they all seemed like such a brave and inspirational bunch of women. So a homebirth it was for number three. I contacted my friend Natalie Dash and asked her to be my doula - I was convinced she could recommend as a midwife. Jo Hunter's name came up and I had heard of her in homebirth circles and once we met, I knew she was destined to be MY midwife. The pregnancy progressed without any problems. I remember at one stage Jo told me that I was her only “low risk” client (according to the ultra-

conservative guidelines). She wondered out loud why I was meant to have a homebirth and what lessons my birth was going to teach her. Little did she know! By mid-way through the pregnancy I was having regular Braxton Hicks contractions and by thirty six weeks, I was having them all the time and the baby was so strong and active - I was convinced he was going to be born early (or at least on time). My due date came and went, at which point time seemed to stand still. The phone calls, SMS messages, emails and Facebook

messages were coming thick and fast – everyone wanted to know when this baby was going to arrive.

From this point forward, every day was like ‘Groundhog Day’. I would wake up every morning with a sinking feeling and a tinge of disappointment. Every day seemed the same. Lots of contractions that would start to come regularly at night time, then as soon as I went to bed they would stop (apparently this is called prodromal labour). I hit forty one weeks and people of course started asking me “So when are you being induced?” My response was “Hopefully never.” I was determined to wait it out and knew that my baby would arrive at exactly the right time – for him.

At forty two weeks, Jo congratulated me on finally becoming a “high risk” client as I was now “outside the guidelines”. I was really starting to lose faith. Physically I felt fine, but I thought my uterus had forgotten what to do, and that this baby was going to celebrate his eighteenth birthday in my body. I could tell that Jo was starting to get a little concerned also. We went for an ultrasound at forty two weeks plus one day and this indicated that all was well. The amniotic fluid levels were great and the placenta was still functioning perfectly. The estimated weight was 4.2kgs, which is about what I expected at forty two weeks. During this week we tried some natural induction methods such as homeopathy, reflexology, a stretch and sweep (which revealed I was already 4cm dilated) and acupuncture. Most of these methods did bring on some pre-labour symptoms, but nothing turned it into established labour.

By forty three weeks, Jo was checking on me daily and I could tell her concern was increasing. One morning we tried a series of stretch and sweeps followed by vigorous walking. Again, there were some hopeful pre-labour signs, but everything settled down again within a couple of hours. The following day she referred me to another midwife for a second opinion, just to reassure everyone. She concurred with Jo that the baby and I were perfectly healthy and we should just wait it out (if that is what I wanted to do). She also gave me a referral for another ultrasound which I had booked for forty three weeks plus three days.

Finally at forty three weeks plus two days, I started to get some contractions about seven minutes apart at around 7pm. This was nothing unusual. However, this time there was also a bloody show, so I called Jo and let her know that this time it might be real. I also called the rest of my birth team and told them to all be on standby. Jo arrived at around 8:30pm, and Nat followed soon after. The contractions were constant and now at around five minutes apart. I managed to keep pottering around and doing some housework, and once the contractions increased in intensity I started bouncing on the exercise ball. My friend Anne also turned up. She was there to take video and also help look after our two daughters if they needed some emotional support. She was also there to cut the cord (which she didn't know about, but my husband and I had agreed to ask her to do the honours!)

According to Jo, labour was officially established at around 10:30pm. By this stage the contractions were about three to four minutes apart and I was now unable to talk through them. I stayed on the ball for a while and then moved onto my knees, leaning over the lounge. At around 11:45pm I moved into the birth pool and pretty soon things really started moving. At this stage,

Quinn's Birth

the final member of my birth team, Nicole arrived. The contractions were still about three minutes apart and lasting around ninety seconds. Before long, I felt the urge to push. This part felt like hours, but was really only about forty five minutes. I was really starting to panic as my last baby was out in twenty minutes. Also, my membranes hadn't ruptured yet which made me think I still had a long way to go, as they ruptured as I began to push with my last baby. I didn't realise until this point, but I had very real concerns about the size of the baby and how on earth he was going to fit through my pelvis. It felt like each contraction was the same and that no progress was being made (even though everyone else was telling me otherwise).

Then all of a sudden the baby was on view and everyone was yelling at me to stop pushing and use the "Ha" breaths that I had learnt at yoga. We all must have sounded so funny – five of us all chanting "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha" through each contraction. The pitch and volume would increase as each contraction progressed. Then I felt the burn as the head came through. Everyone was marvelling at the fact that my membranes were still intact and through the membranes, they could see the baby's hand was up against his face as he crowned. Then with the next contraction I gave an almighty push and the rest of my baby came with it.

Quinn Kali Fazio was born at 12:47am on the 1st December, 2010 at forty three weeks plus three days. He weighed in at 4.405kg, 55cm long with a 38cm head. He was surrounded by a fabulous and very patient support team – my husband Darrin, our daughters Madison and Brynlee, my midwife Jo and doula Nat, and dear friends Nicole and Anne. Now I know why I was meant to have a homebirth this time. If I'd have had a hospital birth I would have been induced, which of course could possibly have led to a caesarean. According to most obstetricians in this country, I would have been risking the life of my baby carrying him beyond forty two weeks. Little do they know!



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My Journey



Lying in bed at 2am it begins, I'm thirty nine weeks pregnant and movement is awkward. Shifting slightly, fluid trickles out. This seems so familiar. Am I awake or is this a dream? I shift again and more warm liquid flows. Deep breath Karen - it's happening. My husband Mark lies asleep beside me unaware of what's to come. A trip to the bathroom and it's confirmed - pink tinged amniotic fluid. Relief. He's woken up and through bleary eyes he asks if I need anything, if we need to call Sonja. I feel fine and tell him to go back to sleep - we can deal with this in the morning. Sleep comes easily, I'm exhausted.

We've done this all before but last time was very different. Rewind 2 years and 10 months and the scene is chaos. Awoken by a trickle, I move and splat I'm gushing. "My waters have broken." Mark jumps out of bed and throws towels at me from the linen press, but I stand there frozen and terrified, continuing to leak onto the carpet. Panic! We've got to get to the hospital. We rush there with bags packed and I am told that if I don't go into labour spontaneously in forty eight hours I will be induced. A failed induction and a 'failure to progress' diagnosis later, my son Darcy enters the world by caesarean section. The phrases 'too big; small pelvis; no dilation; posterior; obstructed labour; healthy baby' keep me content. I'm okay with my life saving surgery.

Eleven months later fate intervenes. I find out about the 'cascade of intervention' and my whole cushy world falls apart. My eyes blur as I read dozens of birth stories just like mine and for the first time I weep about that birth. I feel betrayed. There is righteous, passionate anger bubbling up inside of me, but at the same time I feel naive for being so blindly trusting and ignorant. All this time I believed Darcy's birth as unusual and necessary. I wouldn't let that happen to my baby and I again.

The research began before a second child had even been thought of. For a 4ft. 11in. woman with a scar, getting a vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC) in a hospital was going to be difficult. 'Hire a doula'; 'find a supportive ob.'; 'don't turn up till you're crowning'; 'just say NO'. It just sounded so hard; I shouldn't have to fight to get the birth I want. I was appalled that two reportedly local pro -VBAC hospitals had VBAC success rates of only 18% and 23% respectively. I knew then that my only option was to birth at home. At first I didn't embrace the homebirth idea, I just embraced the fact it was the only way I was going to avoid surgery again. I feel cornered and bitter. How dare they make me feel so unsafe.

And then I was pregnant. I meet my midwife Sonja and we chat sitting on milk crates under the Jacaranda tree in our backyard. I felt sick, garden

variety morning sickness mingled with nervousness crept in. That first meeting everything started to become real.

Different baby, different labour but the universe was giving me *dejà vu* and it was all beginning to look like a 'Sliding Doors' moment. My in laws come over to spend time with Darcy whilst I sleep. Between the hours of 12-5am I labour. In the soft light of lamps and candles I pace the floors, rock on my birth ball and breathe. The constant slow leaking of fluid reminds me that it's not a dress rehearsal. My body is working beautifully.

11pm (ninety three hours since my membranes rupture), a change is in the air - contractions are starting to come regularly and with a bite. This is it! Unwisely we don't bother trying to get some sleep. The excitement is palpable; Mark gets the camera set up and birth pool is rolled into the bedroom. Blessingway candles dotted throughout the house are lit and the scent of essential oils in the burner fills each room. I'll have the baby before my son wakes up in the morning and embrace each wave.

The excitement soon wears off, fatigue and boredom take over. I've changed my mind - I think I'd rather go to sleep thanks. I can't get comfortable, my back aches with a posterior babe who changes position then swings back. Sulk. Sonja arrives before the sun comes up and disappointment sets in. Darcy wakes up and has a complete melt down and Mark rushes to be with him. Contractions slow down further until all I feel are mild tightenings. I don't feel respite though, I'm just worried about Darcy. His bag is packed and his gran collects him. It wasn't meant to be like this, I should be holding my newborn by now. Sonja leaves telling me to try and rest, and call her if I need her or labour establishes. It doesn't take long for everything to resume once they leave.

Hours later, crying in the bathtub I wail at Mark to do something, he calls my friend Janet and she offers to come over. I gratefully accept. All my fears pour out. I sob that it's not working, my labour hasn't changed for hours. Everything is exactly the same; I'm going to end up with a C-section again for sure. I'm devastated as I begin to think that everything the hospital had told me before was actually right.

It feels better getting it out. I don't need to like this; I've just got to get through. I sleep froggy legged on the couch between contractions, watch a movie, chat and eat. It's just like a normal day... but not! On the toilet three intense contractions back to back floor me. Feeling drugged and woozy, I need to squat. My mucous plug comes out and Janet rubs my back and presses my hips. Clunk. The move is dramatic. Like tumblers in a lock, my

to Homebirth

KAREN
MANNING



baby drops and turns suddenly. I can feel his back pressed hard against my belly. It's the right time. The pool calls to me and I flop in as it's being filled. 'Tell Sonja to get her arse here NOW!' This is happening fast. I'm ranting, I can't do it, I want sleep, I need sedatives. Transition. Sonja arrives; I hear the tinkle of bracelets like a cat's bell. My waters burst then pressure. My body retches. Out of my periphery there's movement and Sonja says 'Go with the feelings, push into your bum' She thinks I'm pushing, she's read my signals wrong. I don't feel like pushing. My body retches again. Denial!

Adrenalin has a powerful effect. Zen birthing mama I am not, I swear, scream, beg, growl and cry through contractions. 'Take me away, please take me away'. I circle the pool like a killer whale in captivity. 'The baby's stuck; I need a vacuum; my legs are broken; I need to go to hospital; I'm freaking out'. Why won't you believe me? Mark speaks, "You're doing it, you're getting your homebirth, you're getting your VBAC!" Furious I spit "Damn straight I'm getting a VBAC, I'm getting a Vacuum Birth After Caesarean." I hate them for not taking me seriously. I CAN'T DO IT! Will the baby still come out if I do nothing? 'Yes' But, I have no choice, my body makes the decision - it does everything for me. The heaving cannot be stopped.

The smell and the sound of the rain outside are tantalising and I crave a shower. "Turn on the shower." I don't like waiting. I can't get out so I lean out, touching the floor with one hand. The shower is turned off. "Turn it on NOW." But it's too late, a sliver of head and hair is now floating in the water like some strange anemone. This can't be it, this can't be working. 'Ooooh it stings'. I hear the excitement in Sonja's voice - she thinks I'm crowning. 'No, no, it doesn't' I blurt out - she's getting the wrong idea. Another contraction and the head corkscrews out. It doesn't hurt, far from it. A nanosecond of ecstatic bliss before the announcement "The head's out." I don't get the chance to even steel myself for the next contraction when a flurry of kicking legs slides past my thighs. "Mark, pick up the baby." Over my shoulder I see him rummaging in the water; an intense look of concentration on his face. The room is quiet, nobody exists except us.

At that moment I notice how dark the room is, many candles have burnt out leaving puddles of warm wax in their place. All pain is gone. The surface of the pool, dark and clear, ripples from our movement and then I see him, white and ethereal - beneath the water he's between worlds. His eyes wide open, arms outstretched as time slows down. Held in Daddy's hands, he emerges and lets out a couple of squeaks. He's fine, he's perfect. Warm, sticky, slimy and covered in thick vernix, he's plopped onto my chest - it feels right. Hi my baby, it was you in there all along! We've been waiting for you. My heart explodes with love.

Camera flashes go off lighting the room and the enormity of what's just happened slaps me in the face. "Holy shit I did it, I can't believe it, it's unbelievable!" My first words are trembly and ecstatic. Sonja and Janet come back into view. There are smiles and laughter and joy is pouring off us. We check what we have, another boy, our Calvin. He crawls to the breast making adorable mewling noises, latches on and drinks deeply before promptly falling asleep. Everything is wonderful.

Over two hours later though the placenta hasn't birthed yet so I request to cut the cord. Sonja asks Calvin if it's okay to cut and ties it with a beautiful handmade beaded cord tie. Sitting is making me feel uncomfortable. I need to wee so am helped out of the pool to go to the toilet. Sweet relief! Experimentally I give a little push to see if the placenta will come out, but it just hurts. I never want to push again in my entire life. With wobbly legs, I have a blissful shower as Calvin is having skin to skin with Mark.

Takeaway pizza arrives and I eat in the bathtub - I have never tasted anything so good. Nurturing, support and patience sees me through to birthing the placenta five hours after the birth. It's finally over, and time for bed. Sinking under the doona with my newborn on my chest, my eyes feel heavy. I did it.

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Elkarnah Halcyon's Birth



NAOMI
PRYDE

The day I found out I was pregnant was one of the most amazing days of my life. After three long years of actively trying to conceive and many tears, we felt a new season of hope and joy was beginning. I was NOT barren as I had once thought, I was full of life! God had opened my womb! I knew instantly that I wanted the best possible start for my daughter and after longing and praying for her for so many years, I wanted to do everything in my power to bring her earthside in the safest possible way. After much research I knew homebirth was for us.

At 5am on the 25th of November 2010 I awoke with strange stomach pains that seemed to move from my front to my back. Was this it? Was this labour? As the pain came and went in regular intervals I was sure that our little miracle was on her way. I continued about my day, stopping every contraction to lean against a wall or kneel over the bed. My beautiful husband meanwhile was busy blowing up the birth pool, laying ground sheets and continuously microwaving wheat bags to press against my back and tummy.

By 8pm something changed and I felt my contractions becoming more and more intense. With great excitement I asked my husband to call our amazing midwife Melanie Jackson from the Ella May Centre. An hour later Mel arrived and gently and compassionately talked me through my contractions. She uninvassively checked on me and Elkie as I continued to labour.

By 10pm I hopped into the birth pool and wheat bags were replaced by hot towels! AMAZING! Each 'wave' brought with it a mixture of feelings; excitement, power, pain, energy and exhaustion, all at the same time! With the second midwife, the lovely Hannah, arriving, my breathing and rocking became more intense and Mel asked if I felt like I wanted to push. I did have a desire, but was also reluctant due to my eternal fear of poeing in my watery birth pool heaven! Slowly I let go of my hilarious fear and began to push. I have never felt anything like it before. I felt everything, but I truly felt that something much bigger than me took over. My body was birthing this baby and God was giving me the strength and determination to do so. I'd never felt so empowered as a woman, so blessed, so strong.

After what felt like an eternity pushing in the pool, Mel gently suggested that we try something to help the baby come out. We stood in the pool and 'marched' for a while – when that seemed fruitless we went to the bathroom and laboured on the toilet. I was starting to doubt that my baby was ever going to come out when we decided to go back to the birthpool. As we got to the doorway of our bedroom, a massive contraction hit me and I knew Elkie was coming right then and there!

Hanging from my husband's strong neck I pushed with all my might. I could hear the encouraging words of Mel assuring me that she was "right there!" and ready to meet her mum. With a mighty push I felt my waters break (finally!) and Elkie's head was out. With the next contraction at 4:57am on the 26th November 2010, Elkarnah Halcyon was born. I dropped to the

floor and picked up my perfect, precious and beautiful little girl. With shock, amazement and an overflow of love and exhaustion I looked at my little girl for the first time; my husband all the while lovingly holding onto me and her. The birth, whilst long and exhausting, I can truly say was beautiful. With Melanie, my midwife whom I trusted completely, gently and compassionately guiding and monitoring my labor, I never once felt scared or fearful. I felt incredibly empowered as a birthing woman, a mother! The mistrust I had in my body's ability to "work" after 3 years of infertility instantly melted away. After birthing the placenta of which Melanie would then humbly encapsulate for me, our new family hopped into bed for some bonding time. Our daughter never left our arms from the moment of her birth, and as we held her skin to skin I realized that having a child was not my right as I had once thought it was, but is truly an incredible gift, a blessing from God.

Elkarnah means "God as created or God has purchased" and is our variation on the Hebrew name Elkanah. Halcyon means "Calm and tranquil".

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Our Homebirth Joys

JULIE PRIORA

I had my first child at age 34 and last one at 38 all 3 were wonderful, healthy, happy pregnancies. My Mum and sister had up to 12 hour labours with some of their children so I was prepared for that length as well for my children. But my three boys had other plans.

I had booked Katoomba Hospital for my first birth, then every other nearby hospital as well ready for the second and then the third I thought, we obviously aren't going to make it anywhere so we booked a planned homebirth that time.



Brendan Lewis Priora—
Our eldest son Born:
Sunday 30th July 2006 at
4pm Weighing 7lb 10oz

Three days before my due date I started having a few little contractions every now and then, so I continued on with my day with my Mum and Dad here with us. At 2.50pm I handed my watch over to my husband, Dean to time my contractions telling him he would still have time to read his book in between them. But no sooner had I handed over my watch, when BANG! The contractions hit me full-on! They were heavy, hard and no break in between. Dean was saying "Slow down Julie, I can't keep up!" I told Mum to call our Doula – Natalie Dash and she arrived at 3.20pm and said it would be a while yet as I wasn't having any cramping or pains anywhere else. But when I said I needed to go to the toilet and never came out, Nat came in to find me pushing with all my might on the toilet, I managed to get out of my clothes (a very hard feat when waves of surging energy are rippling over your whole body) and crawl into the shower. The amniotic sac was protruding and I could feel the baby's head. Nat was racing around trying to find all the towels and blankets she could find as Mum and Dad were gardening thinking it would be hours away yet. A few more pushes and panting as bub's head was birthed then another push as he was born into the sac (only then did my waters break) and Dean received our beautiful baby boy! Nat ran out to find my Mum and Dad and when she told them the baby was here after a 1 hour and 10 minute labour. They couldn't believe it and came running upstairs to find us sitting in our ensuite with our new addition. I'm sure the ambulance officer had seen it all when he came in to find my husband sitting on the toilet holding our new son with the cord still attached and the placenta in a saucepan on the floor between his feet! It was an amazing experience that I wouldn't change for the world!



Cailen James Priora— Our
middle son Born: Sunday
16th November 2008 at
1am Weighing 8lb

A week after my due date and I was starting to get a bit restless as Mum and Dad had been here (from Perth) for 3 weeks and nothing had happened. So we went to bed with me starting to think maybe they are going to induce me now. Woke up about 11.30pm and felt a stomach cramp thinking, oh no, that fish I ate was no good – had to go to the toilet twice and then tried to get back to sleep. I phoned our Doula, Nat just to tell her what was happening and even though it didn't feel like labour, because of my previous quick labour

I told her to come anyway – just in case. Well, she had only been in the car about 20 minutes when my Mum phoned her to say "Julie needs to push already" Holy Cow – here we go again.

This time I told Dean to get our bed ready and I made it from the shower to our bed and shortly after Nat arrived I relaxed more then and I birthed my second son after a 1 hour labour. Again he was born in the sac which ruptured as his body was birthed. Another amazing birth!

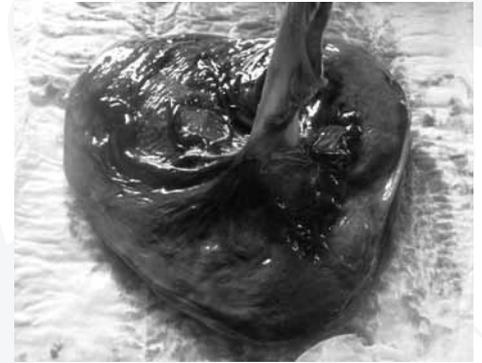


Lucas Samuel Priora— our
youngest son Born: Friday
30th July 2010 at 4am
Weighing 7lb 9oz

I was hoping to go well overdue with my third born as I was due 3 days before Brendan's birthday. But at 3 days past my due date I went to bed feeling a bit 'ordinary' and I knew I had pushed myself too hard that day and things were going to happen tonight as a result. Late that night I had a few twinges in my right side – they felt more like a stitch so I didn't think it was labour. But again, phoned Nat, our Doula just in case. She came and we sat and chatted and I felt bad as I said nothing much is really happening yet. In the mean time she had another call from a woman who was in labour and needed her. So I told her to go as nothing was happening here. So she left at 3.15am and just as I saw her car disappear into the distance the contractions hit me! I phoned her to say – guess what, I'm in labour. Well she didn't know what to do. I told her to go to the other Mother-to-be as she would need her more than me and I phoned the midwife, Jo Hunter that we had organised this time. She lived just up the road and so she raced here and just as she was running down our hallway I was pushing and 2 minutes later I birthed our third son into my husband's arms. But this time I had the wonderful experience of feeling my waters break with a gush about 10 minutes before his birth. What a wonderful feeling! This also made it feel like Lucas catapulted out of me like a missile. So at 4am after a 43 minute labour I birthed our son Lucas on his brother's birthday (Brendan was born at 4pm 4 years ago. So for 12 hours I had 3 under 4 years) Brendan also helped Daddy cut the cord, what a wonderful birthday present for Brendan. Brendan adores his little baby brother and they will always have a special bond. I would never change anything from our son's births. I have loved every experience we had.



Home At Last:



There's nothing like returning home after time spent away. You wander from room to room remembering, feeling more relaxed by the moment. You wonder why so much has changed and yet everything is just the same. I'd wanted to birth at home ever since I remembered. Spending labour walking through the garden, then pushing a baby out in a warm bath and ending up in your own bed sounded blissful. I spent a lot of time researching once I fell pregnant ended up with a fabulous midwife and doula team, Jo Hunter and Natalie Dash.

That first pregnancy ended in miscarriage. My sadness at the loss of the baby was tempered with the sense of empowerment I felt at being at home; at exactly the right time my body completed the miscarriage without the need for medication, surgery, hospital visits. I felt strongly that this would be the case for any future births at home; my body would take over and I would be amazed by it.

My second pregnancy was uneventful, although I found it hard to believe we would really end up with a healthy baby. The support I received throughout the pregnancy was great, all decisions I made were respected and I really enjoyed discussing the ideas around birth and pregnancy with my midwife. I told the baby to wait until after Christmas and New Year before arriving; and then the pregnancy continued, till I got my first inklings at fortyone weeks, a show and some mild contractions.

This pre-labour built up especially during the nights until fairly painful contractions came regularly at three minutes apart on the Thursday night. I called our doula, Natalie, who came over and helped us with filling the birth pool, lying hot nappies on my back (bliss!) and moving through the contractions. In the early hours on Friday morning our midwife Jo arrived and all seemed well. Coping with labour in spite of not having had sleep in days was fine, because we were all doing it. My partner Jeremy talked me through my fears and spent ages massaging my sore back. I actually didn't have the perception that I was the only one experiencing pain; as far as I was concerned all four of us were in labour.

Unfortunately the contractions became irregular and my back pain increased, a sign of a posterior labour. Over the next day they built up, petered out, and the pain in my back continued whether a contraction occurred or not; in fact, I was convinced I'd pulled a muscle in my back. Despite the pain and frustration, it was a wonderful day of labouring as a team; we walked together in the garden and beside the bushland, listened to music and talked about what was to come. That night we spent hours trying to reposition the baby. I spent contractions lying upside down holding

my legs and bum up against the wall, or bent over a series of pillows. My main instinct was to run to the toilet and groan. By the next morning I was exhausted and the baby was still posterior. Contractions had slowed again to six to fifteen minutes apart. My partner and I decided to go to the hospital for augmentation; I naively believed a bit of synto and the labour would be over in a matter of hours.

Spending Saturday at the local hospital was an eye-opener. Of course I'd read about people's experiences with the "system", but it was different to experience it for myself. The obstetrician told me I couldn't eat anything during labour, that I had to have continuous monitoring, that if I made other choices he would "turn off the synto". I was almost amused to begin with, it was so much like a stereotype! Of course once the contractions were ramped up and I wasn't "allowed" hot water any longer after refusing a vaginal examination (VE) it wasn't particularly funny any longer. Fortunately my wonderful partner advocated firmly for me, requesting a copy of the protocol which allowed the obstetrician to make these decisions; of course there was no such protocol. In the end we negotiated that the hospital midwife would do a VE at a later time. While she had to follow hospital procedure, she tried her best to be flexible – and didn't cause nearly so much pain doing a VE, either.

When she broke the news that I'd scarcely progressed and that the head had developed a caput I became really discouraged. I'd spent several hours counting or reciting the alphabet at the top of my voice, focusing on each moment, focusing on one source of relief at a time, whether that was a hot shower or hot bath (although the water in the hospital was simply not hot enough!!). The hospital midwife encouraged me to walk through the ward and focus on the cute newborns that I saw, but what I was experiencing didn't seem to have anything to do with my baby. I was exhausted and really wanted pain relief – fortunately my partner reminded me again and again that it wasn't what I wanted. The hospital midwife provided gas, but a breath or two of that made no difference, and instead I ended up back on the toilet, groaning.

Suddenly my body began to push involuntarily, the strangest feeling – just like, as someone has described it, I was "vomiting backwards". My insides folded in on themselves and I roared and growled through it, or breathed when it seemed that there was a cervical lip. Even though the pain was there, it felt finally as if something was happening.

But sadly another VE showed that the babe's head was not descending and was in fact stuck in an odd position; swelling of my pubic area and tailbone confirmed obstructed labour. I had no idea that this would mean a caesarean

Sojourner's Birth



CAROLYN
GALBRAITH

and when the obstetrician announced this I was utterly devastated and burst into tears. I felt horribly guilty and terrified my baby would die.

When I'd first arrived at the hospital, Jo and Natalie had helped Jeremy and I write a birth plan and now they helped us negotiate a "good" caesarean. I can't thank them enough for this as it was the last thing on my mind! At this point the hospital staff suddenly became very accommodating – for which we were very grateful. The obstetrician actually argued with the anaesthetist in charge of theatre so that both my partner and my midwife could remain with me during the operation. Photos were allowed to be taken, the placenta was kept for us to be taken home, and the baby was allowed to remain with me in recovery for skin to skin. They also allowed Jeremy to stay overnight in a single room with me afterwards and the whole of the next day, even though partners were generally only allowed in the hospital rooms for very strict hours.

I think I was in shock going into theatre; I was in pain, and distressed, and frightened. Natalie showed me how to use the gas properly which got me through that last hour as they put the catheter in and laid me down on the bed ready for transfer. The nurses in theatre held my hands and supported me through contractions, helping me stay still as the needle went into my spine. I began to shake almost immediately from the effects of the spinal anaesthesia, and I remember the nurses laughing as I described my body as feeling "fizzy". Jeremy and Jo joined me once everything was about to begin. All the sadness I felt at the circumstances disappeared in the moment I saw my baby. The theatre staff knew we didn't know the sex and let Jeremy announce it. My beautiful daughter Sojourner Angela arrived at two minutes past midnight on Sunday January ninth, perfectly healthy, weighing 3.6 kilograms, with a funny shaped head from being stuck in my pelvis – and with gorgeous dark curls and big blue eyes. Her apgars were fine and she seemed totally cool and calm when placed next to me, cooing as they sewed me up. I cried, feeling overwhelming love and happiness. Just as the sadness of my miscarriage had been augmented by the power of the experience at home, so this sadness of the experience in hospital was lessened by the joy of meeting my daughter.

My midwife Jo helped the babe attach to me in recovery, but I really have no memory of that night after this; I was so exhausted. Although I was able to sleep that night, I grew more and more exhausted in the hospital and more and more discouraged. While the staff were lovely, they were very busy and hospital policy couldn't allow for individual circumstances. I felt lonely each day as my partner was only allowed to visit on very restricted hours, and feeding was a real challenge with different advice given by whomever

happened to be on that shift. I knew I needed to get home.

It wasn't so easy. My milk hadn't come in as yet, my daughter had lost a little more than ten percent of her birth weight. Because of this, she was threatened with special care and supplementary feeds. I knew that this would mean the end of my breastfeeding relationship. Jeremy and I signed our daughter out against medical advice, even after being told that we might be "prevented" from taking her home. Fortunately this threat was not followed up on. I knew that rest was necessary for both my daughter and myself; sure enough, my milk came in the very afternoon I got home.

Home at last, home with my daughter, home as a family. The mixture of circumstance which had led to those days away in the hospital, the operation, perhaps we'll never know quite why they occurred; but we were home at last, where we had begun. I feel sad my dream homebirth never happened, but full of joy that my daughter is at home with us right now, loved and adored. To my wonderful team, Jeremy, Jo, Natalie; I can never thank you enough.

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Willow's Birth

TRISHA GOUGH



On Thursday the 5th of August 2010, at nearly forty two weeks, I thought my baby fourth was never going to come out. I cried most of the day; tears of worry, tears of responsibility, tears of feeling pressured. I had a very big conversation with my Mum because she kept trying to be around when the baby was born without ever clearly asking me if I was OK with that. So I said I didn't want her there because I felt she was fearful of homebirth and wanted to be there in case anything went wrong. This she said in part was true, but also she wanted to be a part of another one of my beautiful homebirths! She was at Eden's, my second baby's which was beautiful, but we had a traumatic transfer afterwards, and she had never said anything to me about the birth. I felt at the time a big 'I told you so' from my Mum and Dad, but perhaps I made that up, feeling guilty about what Eden had been through. We kept our third baby's homebirth a secret until she was born so we didn't have to deal with other people's fears.

So I decided she could come down and if she was there when I went into labour, I would see how I felt, and she had a place to go if it wasn't right. It was such a relief to feel supported in our choice to homebirth by my parents. The next day Mum arrived and took a weight off my shoulders by doing the school run so I wouldn't have to face the "Haven't you had that baby yet?" bamboozlement, and playing with Nina all day. That afternoon I felt my first contraction and thought "Baby is coming!"



Now this was a labour of first time experiences in so many ways. Previously, I have had my first contraction, and then a few hours later I have my baby. A few hours later I had had about ten contractions and a show (another first). I spoke to my midwife, Sheryl, and we thought "Tonight's the night!" The kids went off to bed with the thought that they might meet their baby soon. Contractions heated up around 10pm... then they went away.

So we went to bed and I continued to contract quite strongly once an hour through the night. I woke the next morning slightly annoyed I was still pregnant, but also happy that without a doubt, baby was coming very soon. Cam took the kids out and I nested, baked, swayed, and talked to my baby, contracting about once or twice an hour all day. More tears in the evening as things died down again. I was tired, so I went to bed hoping to get some sleep so I would have some energy when baby came. Again I contracted every hour through the night - the contractions were stronger and something about them was sharper. I woke with each one and they lasted about 90 seconds. Throughout all this, my beautiful baby felt totally fine and let me know it was doing well, just doing things in a very different way to how I do them!



Going into this labour, I had wished for a little more lead up to giving birth, as with my third baby, Nina's birth, it was all over start to finish in two hours. I was beginning to regret that wish on the third morning of pre-labour! Again Cam took the kids out, then my parents picked them up for an all day adventure. I was feeling very supported in my journey, clearing the way, checking in and breathing a space for baby. The day went on the same as the two before, and I asked my amazing acupuncturist Naomi from the Red Tent to come around and do a session. Naomi travelled forty minutes to come and see me. What followed was a very loving but very intense acupuncture session, with Naomi also treating Cam for a cold he had coming on! By the time Naomi was leaving, contractions were ten minutes apart, and as the door shut behind her they came every four to five minutes. Soon after, Cam felt to call our midwife Sheryl and doula Renee, although I didn't feel I needed

anything. We all thought it could be very fast once it happened with all the pre-labour.

Sometime soon after, around 5:30pm, I wanted to get in the pool, aware that it could be too early, but the contractions felt sharp, like I wanted to jump out of my skin and I was finding it harder to relax. Before long I was in the pool, aaahhh! Bless water, bless baths, bless you all! Things slowed for a little while but

before long I was back into five minutely contractions. During all these contractions I was visualizing a disc of light in my pelvis, of endlessly opening flower petals, like pinky white camellia petals. I had music and chanting playing the whole time, the house felt beautiful, calm, quiet. I was really with it between contractions and having a chat. The candle in the photo was given to me by my sister Shamanic Midwives - it was in front of my pool and at one stage I was staring at it and the flame was huge. I could feel them all with me, holding me through this awesome time. My dear friend Elizabeth arrived then to help Mum with the kids.

At the end of each contraction I felt like throwing up now, they were so strong, I felt the baby flutter inside and asked Sheryl to check baby's heart which was slightly fast and so was mine, but I felt ok, so I knew the baby did too. Soon after I said "Wow, these breaks are so long. How long Sheryl?" She said "Still 5 minutes." I decided to have a feel of what was going on inside "Hmmm, that feels like my baby's head with a cervix just about fully dilated." Straight away I had about four or five contractions and changed positions to dilate that last little bit. It was full on, big, big opening up. I felt myself backing away and then just breathed into the feeling. It was a much bigger feeling than I have ever felt before in my previous three labours.

And then came that overwhelming feeling of the baby wanting to come out. To me this stage felt very long, the feeling of pushing was very different again. I usually love pushing, but this was stingy in a whole new way - every push was a major exercise of the mind. (It was actually about 10 minutes!!). I was leaning forward on my knees over the edge of the pool when the baby's head started to come out. I knew it was going to hit the bottom so I kneeled back sitting up and out came my sweet baby's head, looking at me! Ah, so that's a posterior labour! Still in the caul, I saw the little eyes and pushed baby out into my hands and up to my chest. Amazing relief to have done it, amazing relief my baby was fine. Cam was next to me so proud, so happy, so much love radiating from his eyes. This was at 7:40pm.

Baby's cord was short and I had to crouch down to hold it. The cord was tightly between the legs, but I had a little feel, and felt sure i was holding

my little mermaid. I waited until Cam asked and we had a look, a beautiful baby girl, our Willow Violet Moon, crying loudly and clearly - every breath so easy and strong. The kids and Mum came in just as she was born - a beautiful celebration of smiles and wonder. Our baby was finally here! Willow vigorously fed for about fifteen minutes and we decided it was time for third stage.

Biggest brother Taj held Willow while I birthed the placenta. I had expected it to drop out as I got out of the pool. Wrong! The placenta still hadn't come after an hour. I felt fine, but the midwives were worried, so I had Syntocinon - another first. Still nothing. I was focusing on letting go, saying thank you, but nothing. Tess, our backup midwife arrived just as Willow was born and is a placenta expert! She stepped in and massaged and a huge clot came out (I thought it was the placenta)! And then soon after the placenta, followed by another enormous clot and a bit of blood followed. I felt fine, although there was a bit of worry that after such a long labour that I might haemorrhage. I didn't. I went to bed with my precious girl, brothers and sisters all tucked in their beds, Daddy and Granma so happy and proud, and I stared at her, fed her, smelled her and fell in love with her all night.

This pregnancy was such a gift. Willow was breech for part of the pregnancy, as was her sister Nina. Through Willow being breech, I came to know that more than anything I knew, I could birth my baby whichever way she wanted to come at home, and that I was capable of being a mother of four! My midwives' Sheryl and Tess were so wonderful, and they believed in me too. So when I thought I was going to have a breech birth at home, although they could no longer support me at home, they were happy for me to look for someone who would.

So I also want to thank Jo Hunter and Sonja MacGregor who offered to support me at home if baby didn't turn. This was so amazing and important for me to feel completely supported. But it turned out that Willow did a flip and wanted to come out head first, just back to front!

Thank you to our birth team Sheryl, wise owl perched quietly behind me while I birthed Willow; Tess, joyous, calm and focused; Renee, divine doula and dear friend holding my family; Elizabeth, sister of my heart; Mum, who stayed for a month so I could have a proper baby moon; and our amazing children, Taj, Eden and Nina for being the most awesome big brothers and sisters to Willow. Thank you to my beautiful husband Cam for believing in me and trusting birth as I do. The love, support and wisdom I received from my Shamanic Sisters and teacher Jane Collings through this pregnancy and birth was a blessed gift that shone a light for me to follow in meeting my Willow Violet Moon xxxxxx Sweet Willow you have brought so much joy to our world, we love you with all our hearts. xxxxx



SARAH
MCLEAN

16 November “Hames raps doctors over homebirths”

- Cathy O'Leary Medical Editor, *The West Australian*

WA Health Minister Kim Hames sided with the homebirth lobby and accused some doctors of being anti-midwives and protecting their own turf. He said that like the previous Labor government, his Government strongly supported the right of women with low-risk pregnancies to give birth at home. Dr Hames said he would not consider cutting Government funding for the community midwifery program, which has operated since the mid-1990s. Dr Hames rejected claims homebirth was riskier than a hospital birth, saying a review of homebirths from 2005 to 2007 by the Health Department-appointed perinatal and infant mortality committee was still not finished. He said changes had been made to the program since 2007 which would have improved its safety.

"<http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/8334231/hames-raps-doctors-over-homebirths/>" <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/8334231/hames-raps-doctors-over-homebirths/>

12 November “Women are the losers in maternity care reform”

by Justine Caines - "<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au>" *The Daily Telegraph*

Justine's article discusses how women can now - for the first time - access a Medicare rebate if they seek care from certain (eligible) self-employed midwives.

However the woman appears to feature little in the implementation of these government maternity reforms. She discusses how over the last 18 months the turf war has raged violently, particularly between private obstetricians - squealing about the global financial crisis combined with the capping of the Medicare safety net - and midwives providing homebirth care who only appear to come to political life when they have the threat of illegality hanging over them.

Women have been put to the side in a debate that has seen the Government struggle to get the first area of health reform sorted - not a minor area but that which has the greatest number of bed days attributed to it.

"<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/women-are-the-losers-in-maternity-care-reform/story-e6frezz0-1225952246450>" <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/women-are-the-losers-in-maternity-care-reform/story-e6frezz0-1225952246450>

29 January Midwives give birth to baby revolution

- Kathleen Donaghey - *The Courier Mail*

This article introduces the My Midwives centre which is the first midwifery clinic in Toowoomba following the introduction of Medicare funding for midwives by the federal government.

The My Midwives centre is loosely described a super clinic for mums and bubs where women are attended by their own midwife through pregnancy, hospital or home birth and post-birth. Midwives for the first time can organise and interpret all scans, swabs and tests - doctors are consulted when necessary. And all visits six weeks post birth are also Medicare refundable.

The centre became possible after federal health minister Nicola Roxon allowed access to the Medicare Benefits Schedule and government-subsidised professional indemnity insurance. My Midwives midwifery manager Liz Wilkes was the first midwife to receive a Medicare Provider Number in Australia.

"<http://www.couriermail.com.au/ipad/baby-revolution-born/story-fn6ck45n-1225996593338>" <http://www.couriermail.com.au/ipad/baby-revolution-born/story-fn6ck45n-1225996593338>

7 November “More risks in homebirths, doctors say”

- Cathy O'Leary Medical Editor, *The West Australian*

This article discusses how doctors have hit back at a leading child health researcher's defence of homebirths, saying research from Australia and overseas showed the practice is significantly more risky for the baby. Telethon Institute of Child Health Research director Fiona Stanley said last week she strongly supported the use of midwives. She said she did not believe there was evidence that homebirth was riskier than a hospital delivery, provided that it was a low-risk pregnancy.

Professor Stanley said there were anecdotal claims that homebirth was dangerous but she had not seen the evidence. The AMA quote studies which claim homebirth is not as safe as hospital birth. Professor Stanley stood by her comments.

"<http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/8276647/more-risks-in-homebirths-doctors-say/>" <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/8276647/more-risks-in-homebirths-doctors-say/>

HAS in the Community

In this edition of 'HAS In The Community', we take a snapshot of our various homebirth groups and document how they celebrated Christmas with the kids. We have four homebirth support groups in the greater Sydney region, with our newest group being the Inner West Homebirth Group which started in the second half of last year. We would love to get an Eastern Suburbs Homebirth Group started as we believe there are a number of homebirth families in the area, so please contact info@homebirthsydney.org.au if you are interested in meeting like-minded mamas in the Bondi area. Please check out the calendar for details of a group near you.



The Inner West Homebirth Group had our first Christmas party on the 1st December. A big thank you goes to Karen Manning who invited us to her place for the occasion. There were loads of food, music and a big basket of toys. An empty cupboard was the most popular toy on the day. It was the busiest meeting we have had, as we were joined by some members of the Joyous Birth forum. There were 8 adults and 12 children!

Greta Werner



The Sutherland Shire & St George Homebirth Group has had a lovely year. It was decided earlier in the year to move our venue from Gunnammatta Park in Cronulla to my house and backyard at Caringbah so that wet weather would not affect us and our growing toddlers could run rampant without us mums having to continually get up and rein them in from going too close to the water or having to chase them around in the playground. It has given us a chance to better get to know each other and be able to use the facilities and enjoy a hot cuppa during cold weather, while the kids play with the toys inside or in the backyard. We had our Christmas party on the 16th December with a 'Kris Kringle' gift giving around the Christmas tree for the kids, which they loved. We have about 8 regular mums, most of whom have been with us from when the babies have been young, so it is lovely that the toddlers are growing up together. Congratulations to Charmaine (mum to Archie and Oscar) who will be expecting another baby to add to our clan in May, and I am also expecting a new baby sometime in early October. We hope that some new mums and younger babies will also join us next year.

Virginia Maddock



The Pregnancy and Parenting Network has been running at my house since 2007. Finding understanding, compassion and respect for alternative birth and parenting choices was very difficult in the local area at that time. There were no regular local groups in 2007 that women could attend to share stories, information and support. Travelling distances when pregnant or with young babies was not something many women were prepared to do. So I decided to start a group that was open to everyone, not just my own midwifery clients. The Pregnancy and Parenting Network began with just a few and now has grown to a wonderful, diverse and sometimes large gathering of women, partners, babies, midwives and others interested in natural birth, homebirth and gentle parenting. For the final gathering in 2010 we discussed a whole range of topics including childhood development, play, preschool, school options and Christmas celebrations. It was a wonderful end to the year with interesting discussion and sharing of food in a supportive environment.

2011 should be a great year. Robyn Dempsey, Melanie Jackson, Hannah Dahlen and I have joined forces in the midwifery group practice "Midwives @ Sydney and Beyond". Together we will be facilitating the Pregnancy and Parenting Network.

Jane Palmer



The Blue Mountains Homebirth Group held their final meeting of the year at Gloria Park in Hazelbrook. It was a beautiful sunny day and provided the women with an opportunity to catch up and for the children to play before breaking for the holiday period. The group meets alternate Thursdays at members homes and provides a nurturing supportive environment. The meetings begin again on the 10th Feb, we would love to see you there.

Sara Heritage

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City & Eastern Suburbs

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61 Queen St, Woollahra, www.RedTent.com.au

Naomi 0413 690 861, naomi@redtent.com.au

Rebecca 0404 457 911, rebecca@redtent.com.au

REBECCA GOULDHURST

Doula, Naturopath, Counsellor, Pregnancy Masseur & Hypnobirthing

I am a passionate doula practicing from a naturopathic and counselling background. I have been in practice for 14 years. Being a doula allows me to support parents-to-be with my wisdom and experience of the birth process and the know how to create the birth that you want. Birth is a magical time that I am honoured to be part of. I have experience both at home and in hospitals and have different packages to suit all. All enquiries welcome.

Rebecca Gouldhurst, 93864243, 0415304369
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www.rebeccagouldhurst.net.au

Inner West

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Preparation * Education * Support

North Shore / Northern Beaches

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Louise Luscri / 0408 231 759
info@allaboutbirth.com.au
www.allaboutbirth.com.au

HEATHER CRAWFORD

Acupuncturist, Doula, calmbirth®
Please see my listing on the next page under 'Birth Support Services: Doulas'
Heather: 9777 7888 or 0423 171 191
heather@heathercrawford.com.au
www.heathercrawford.com.au

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Virginia Maddock

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Southern Highlands

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Jane Hardwicke Collings
48882002, 0408035808
janecollings@bigpond.com
www.moonsong.com.au
www.placentalremedy.com

HOME BIRTH SUPPORT GROUPS

SYDNEY & SURROUNDS

Inner West Homebirth Support Group
Day: First Wednesday of Every Month
Time: from 10am
Contact: Magda 0410 139 907
magda.jansen@gmail.com

Sutherland Shire and St George Homebirth Group
10.30am weekly on Thursdays.
Contact Virginia 0415683074 or maddvirg@yahoo.com.au

Illawarra Homebirth Support
Karen Sanders (02) 4225 3727

Mothers & Midwives of the South (Southern Highlands)
We meet every month in the Illawarra area. For more details contact Jane Collings on 4888 2002, 0408035808 or Jaia on 0431709978, jaia_shanti@yahoo.com.au
Everyone welcome!

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support
Gatherings fortnightly on a Thursday at 10am.
Alicia 47592336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com

NEW SOUTH WALES

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Cindy (02) 64940131
www.birthcentral.org.au

ARMIDALE AND DISTRICT

Homebirth Support Network
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Mobile: 0402 910 211
Email: hbsarmidale@gmail.com

Clarence Valley Birth Support
Laena Jongen-Morter
(02) 6649 4271

Far North Coast NSW
Jillian Delailie (02) 6689 1641

Mid North Coast Homebirth Support Resource & Referral
Berry Engel-Jones
(W) 6652 8111 (H) 6655 0707

INTERSTATE & NATIONAL

Homebirth Australia
Jo Hunter (02) 4751 9840
homebirth.australia@bigpond.com

Queensland
(07) 3839 5883 | email
info@homebirth.org.au

Darwin Homebirth Group
(09) 8985 5871
darwin.homebirth@octa4.net.au

Homebirth in the Hills – Dandenong Ranges
Melinda Whyman
(03) 9754 1347
mwhyman@bigpond.net.au

Homebirth on the Mornington Peninsula
Kim (03) 5987 0657
Alice Springs Homebirth Group
Anna Yffer 0402 424 780
wildisha@gmail.com

BIRTH SUPPORT SERVICES: DOULAS

NORTHERN & NORTH-WESTERN SUBURBS

Jacqui James
I am passionate about supporting & encouraging families during pregnancy, labour, birth and in the early "daze". I work with both parents and assist in creating a nurturing environment for the baby to be born. The birth of a baby is a sacred experience and I feel honoured to be a part of it. I also facilitate mother/family blessing ceremonies.
I trained in 2003 at Birth Central, completing post natal doula in 2005. References available.
Mob: 0418 445 653
jacquij@people.net.au

Heather Crawford
Acupuncturist,
Doula, calmbirth®
I practice from a lovely clinic overlooking Manly beach and provide acupuncture services for the whole family through pre-conception, pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. I offer birth support and have been a doula for 4 years, I also hold calmbirth® classes once a month in Frenchs Forest. I love tea and birthing chats or you can see my website for more info.

Phone: 9977 7888 or 0423 171 191
15 South Steyne, Manly
heather@heathercrawford.com.au
www.heathercrawford.com.au

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www.australiandoulacollege.com.au

MotherBirth - Conscious Birth

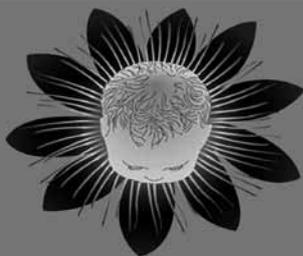
H2 Erika Elliott
Please see my listing on the previous page under 'PreNatal Services' 0425 217 788
erikabirth@gmail.com

SOUTHERN SUBURBS

Natural Beginnings
Holistic health and Doula service
As a homebirth mum, I have the experience and trust in natural birth to be your ideal birth support, whether you choose to birth at home, in hospital or birth centre.
As a natural therapist, I have the resources to assist you with reiki massage, herbs and flower essences in case the journey of labour becomes difficult.
As an ex-nanny, I can help look after older siblings so that Mum can focus on birthing, Dad can focus on Mum, and older sister or brother can still feel important and included in the process, without fear.
My birth package includes 2 prenatal visits, birth support incl. herbs/flower essences and reiki massage, follow up visit to debrief, and a beautifully presented photo book of your birth for you to keep.
Natural Pregnancy, Birth and Post-Natal Kits also available which make great gifts for the expectant or new Mum.
Virginia Maddock
Herbalist, Nutritionist & Doula
9501 0863
5 Balfour Ave Caringbah 2229
www.naturalbeginnings.com.au

BLUE MOUNTAINS & WESTERN SUBURBS

Simply Birthing Doula Service
In my three years as a doula I have been witness to many natural births. I believe strongly in the women's ability to birth her own baby and in her own wisdom and instinct as a mother. I've also been teaching Prenatal Yoga for past 11 years and am a Childbirth and Early Parenting Educator. My focus as a doula is to ensure that you and your partner are feeling confident, reassured and informed in preparation for your birth. I am also available as a calm support to your family and other children.
Jenny Schellhorn: Doula. Childbirth & Early Parenting Educator. Pre Natal Yoga Teacher
9625 7317, 0403 957 879
jenny@simplybirthingdoulas.com.au
www.simplybirthingdoulas.com.au



natural beginnings
"Holistic health and doula service"

- Herbal Medicine
- Nutrition
- Iridology
- Reiki
- Birth Support

*Specialising in Natural Fertility,
Pregnancy, Birth and Children's health*

Fridays & Saturdays by appointment

Virginia Maddock
ADWHM, DN, ACI, RC3, DC

9501 0863

0415 683 074

5 Balfour Ave Caringbah NSW 2229

virginia@naturalbeginnings.com.au

www.naturalbeginnings.com.au

BIRTHING SERVICES: MIDWIVES

Homebirth Access Sydney provides a list of midwives currently offering homebirth services in the Sydney area and a list of questions to ask when interviewing them on our website. Midwives are listed when they agree to sign up their clients for a year's membership of HAS. Listing does not imply endorsement by HAS.

AKAL KHALSA

Akal Khalsa has been offering her individualised midwifery care to women in Sydney since 1979. She will provide experienced, comprehensive and personalised care throughout your pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. With Akal as your midwife you will be assured of professional care and full and accurate information throughout this vital time. She is available by phone, 24 hours, 7 days a week. Akal has over 30 years experience as a midwife and childbirth educator and will help you and your partner prepare emotionally, mentally and physically so you can approach the birth of your baby with joy and confidence. She has many years experience with water births, lotus births and vaginal after caesarean births.

Akal Khalsa (Sydney) 9660 2127 | 0411 267 016
akal@ourmidwife.com.au www.ourmidwife.com.au

BIRTH WITH GENTLE CHOICES

Offering continuity of midwifery care during pregnancy, birth and postnatally. Birth is a natural, and empowering experience that is part of a normal life journey rather than a medical event.

Providing support for women and their families and encouragement to believe in herself and her ability to birth instinctively.

Betty Vella (GyMEA) 9540 4992 bpvella@optushome.com.au

THE ELLA MAY CENTRE

The Ella May Centre provides an alternative to the medical management of fertility, pregnancy, birth and beyond by providing Midwifery and Naturopathic care to prospective and expecting families. Your midwife will provide you with individualised care throughout the pre-conception, pregnancy, birth and postnatal periods and is on call 24 hours a day.

The Ella May Centre supports you to birth in the way and place of your choosing. For full details of services please visit our website or book a free information appointment.

Melanie Jackson (Western Suburbs & Blue Mountains)
0425 280 682 www.ellamaycentre.com

HAZEL KEEDLE

I have attended homebirths as a midwife and have been a practising midwife for over 3 years. I have attended the homebirth midwives retreat in 2008 and also an active birth workshop. I have qualifications in massage, aromatherapy and infant massage. I have recently obtained Cert IV Breastfeeding Education (Counselling) with the Australian Breastfeeding Association and Childbirth Education training. I am passionate about keeping birth natural and providing continued care from pregnancy through to birth and during the newborn time. I have

a keen interest in women achieving vaginal births after a caesarean (VBAC) in part due to my own personal experience of VBAC. I am a local mountains mum with a family including five children.

Hazel Keedle (Blue Mountains and surrounding areas)
4787 8430 0408 661 503 hazelkeedle@gmail.com

INDEPENDENT MIDWIFE: JACQUI WOOD

Pregnancy and birth is a normal, healthy life experience. As natural as it is to conceive your baby in a loving, safe and intimate environment, labouring and birthing at home, in your own relaxed setting, gives you the freedom to follow your body's instinctive knowledge of birthing naturally, without restrictions. As a Midwife, I have immense passion for my career and gain great professional and personal satisfaction from it. I offer a holistic approach to midwifery care, providing care throughout your pregnancy, labour and birth (a birthing pool is available for water birth) and postnatal care up to 4 weeks after the birth of your baby. All care is provided in your home.

Jacqui Wood (Blue Mountains, Western Sydney and South West suburbs)
0430 109 400
www.independentmidwife.com.au jacqui@independentmidwife.com.au

JO HUNTER: HOMEBIRTH MIDWIFE

I believe that women should be placed at the centre of their own experience, supported to empower themselves with knowledge and skills, given time and encouragement from their midwife, as well as being surrounded by those they love and people who believe and trust in their ability to birth. It is the midwives role to have patience and trust in the innate ability of women and babies and to be comfortable and confident to support this process in any setting the woman chooses. Pregnancy, birth and postnatal care up to 6 weeks is provided in your home. I live in The Blue Mountains and service local families, inner west and western Sydney.

Blue Mountains, Inner west and Western Sydney (02) 475 19840
midwifejo@bigpond.com

NEW BEGINNINGS MIDWIFERY PRACTICE

New Beginnings Midwifery Practice offers a personalised approach to pregnancy, birth and beyond. Receive comprehensive prenatal care with your own midwife. New Beginnings can assist you with homebirth, hospital birth or birth centre birth. Extensive postnatal visits. Access to information, resources and a large lending library. Care and support available 24 hours a day.

Robyn Dempsey (North Ryde) 9888 7829
midwiferobyn@optusnet.com.au www.homebirthmidwives.com.au

PREGNANCY, BIRTH & BEYOND

Looking for special care during your pregnancy, birth and as new parents? Receive personalised, professional care by an experienced midwife. Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond supports women and their families birthing at home, birth centre or hospital. Midwifery care helps you avoid unnecessary interventions and to be recognised as the most important member of the birth team. Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond aims to assist families achieve an empowering birth experience. For full details of services please visit our website.

Jane Palmer (Dundas Valley) 9873 1750
jane@pregnancy.com.au www.pregnancy.com.au

SONJA MACGREGOR

A holistic midwife who empowers and trusts a woman to birth her own baby in the comfort of her own home, surrounded by love. I provide a full antenatal, labour, birth and postnatal service in collaboration with the woman. Appointments are attended in the woman's home, with the inclusion of family and support people if the woman desires. I service Sydney, Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands, Illawarra, Central Coast & Newcastle.

Sonja MacGregor 0419 149 019
sonjamac@bigpond.com www.birthathome.com.au

ST GEORGE HOSPITAL HOMEBIRTH SERVICE

This public health service is available to women in the St George and Sutherland Shire area. Continuity of care is provided by two midwives throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period.

For further information, call the Birth Centre on 9113 3103.

WOLLONGONG HOSPITAL HOMEBIRTH SERVICE

This public health service is available to women in the Helensburgh to Kiama region. Continuity of care is provided by two midwives throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. Contact the Antenatal Clinic on 42534256 and ask to book in with the Midwifery Group Practice (MGP). Your details will be taken down and MGP will return your call.

GUIDE TO CHOOSING A MIDWIFE

For a downloadable list of these questions to ask your midwife, please go to the 'Find A Midwife' page on our website.

Different midwives have different personalities and practices, and different midwives are right for different women. Finding the right midwife for you is your responsibility. When selecting your midwife, we recommend you:

- Interview as many midwives as you can
- Talk to as many of their clients as you can

Here are some questions you might consider asking midwives you are considering for your care:

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Are you registered?
- How long have you been practising?
- Where did you train and when?
- Do you do regular continuing education? What about refresher courses and extra skills courses?
- Have you had any long periods away from practice? If so, what did you do to update your skills and knowledge?
- Do you have regular peer review of your midwifery practice?
- Did you work in a hospital setting and then become a homebirth midwife? When?
- Do you combine hospital shift work and a homebirth practice?
- How many births have you attended as primary caregiver?
- How many of these were at hospital? In a birth centre? At home?
- How many births per year and per month do you attend?
- Do you have a specialty area of practice?
- What is your rate of transfer to hospital? Rate of caesarean section? Rate of assisted delivery?
- Have you ever had to resuscitate a baby?
- Has a baby ever died under your care? What were the circumstances?
- Are you certified in neonatal resuscitation? Do you carry oxygen to the birth?

ELIGIBILITY

- Are you registered as an eligible midwife?
- Can I claim Medicare for pre and post natal services?
- How much will I get back from Medicare per visit?
- Can you prescribe antibiotics, vitamin K etc?
- Do you have a collaborative relationship with a GP or obstetrician?
- Do you have midwife visiting rights to my local hospital?

PHILOSOPHY AND ATTITUDE

- Why did you become a midwife?
- What do you perceive your role to be - during my pregnancy, during my labour, after the baby is born? How does your practice vary for different women?
- Do you see yourself as actively involved in a woman's labour? How? (Some midwives prefer to sit back and let you do it with your birth support people, others will become actively involved if you want that and talk to you, massage, hold heat packs)
- What is your attitude to complementary therapies such as homeopathics, acupuncture, etc
- What is your attitude to circumcision? Immunisation?
- What do you expect regarding self-care during pregnancy?
- What is your view on nutrition and weight gain during pregnancy?

COLLABORATION/TEAM

- Will you provide all my midwifery care or will others be involved?
- What are your back-up arrangements if you are not available to provide my care?
Do you work with a regular second midwife?
- If you work alone, what happens if two women go into labour at the same time? What is your backup system? If you work with other midwives, when can I meet them?
- Are there any collaboration requirements with doctors, obstetricians or others? Do you have any collaboration agreements? If so, with whom? Please explain how these will work, how the team collaborates and how much each element will cost. How does collaboration affect my care and specifically continuity of care? When will I meet these people?
- Who will you bring with you to the birth?
- What is your experience of working with doulas? Do you prefer

a woman to have a doula at birth? Do you have any doulas with whom you regularly work?

- What will happen if I need to see a specialist during my pregnancy or labour?
- What will happen if my baby needs to see a specialist?
- In what circumstances would you recommend my baby see a pediatrician or doctor?

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Legal, contractual, financial

- What do you charge for your services and what does that cover? Is it a lump sum or segmented for different phases of care? Will there be a written contract?
- When do you expect payment? Is there flexibility?
- What rebates are available?
- What happens if we discontinue our relationship during my pregnancy? For example, if I don't want you to be my midwife anymore, if there is a medical situation that recommends against my having a homebirth, or if you are unwilling or unable to continue my care? Will you refer me? How will the finances work?
- Please explain the current situation regarding professional indemnity insurance and how it affects my care or our relationship.

TIMING

- What happens if two clients are in labor at the same time? How many clients do you have due around the same time as me? Will you take on more?
- Do you combine hospital shift work and a homebirth practice? What if you're working when I am in labour?
- Are you likely to be away when my baby is due?

SPECIFIC ISSUES...

...DURING PREGNANCY

- Where will the prenatal appointments be? What do they include? How long will they take? How many antenatal visits do you recommend, and why?
- How and when can I contact you if I need help or advice during the come up between visits?
- In what circumstances would you transfer me to obstetrical care for during pregnancy? What is your rate of prenatal transfer?
- What is your attitude to 'due dates' and how would you feel about my pregnancy going over 40 weeks? What would your advice be?
- How do you feel about natural induction methods? Can you offer any of these services?
- What would you do in the case that I was having twins? Had a breech baby?
- What prenatal tests do you require? What do you recommend? Do you have an obstetrician to whom you refer?
- Do you provide education as I prepare for the birth? Do you have a lending library of books/DVDs?

...DURING LABOUR AND BIRTH

- In what circumstances do you recommend transfer to hospital? How often do your clients transfer and for what reasons? Do you stay with your clients who transfer? In what capacity?
- Do I need a backup booking with the hospital? Which one? What is involved in this? If it's a private hospital, do I need private health insurance?
- What equipment do you provide (eg birth pool)? What must I provide?
- How and how regularly will you monitor the baby during labour?
- Do you support me labouring in water? Birthing in water?
- What do you do in the event of a long labor? A "stalled" labor? Do you stay? Go away and come back? In what circumstances?
- When will you come to me after I begin labor? Have you ever missed a birth?
- How often do you perform an episiotomy?
- What is your attitude towards premature rupture of membranes (PROM)?
- How long do you wait to cut the cord after the baby is born?
- Do you support lotus birth?
- What do you do if there is a post partum hemorrhage?
- What procedures do you perform immediately on the newborn? What can wait? Will you wait if I request it?
- How long will you stay after I give birth?

...DURING THE POSTNATAL PERIOD

- What is the schedule of post-natal visits? Where will they be? What do they include? How long will they take?
- Will you help me with breastfeeding? If so for how many weeks?
- How do I get my baby's birth certificate?

Where to go with concerns about your MIDWIFE

FOR MONEY MATTERS

NSW Department of Fair Trading
Lodge a Complaint
13 32 20

FOR MATTERS OF CONDUCT

Health Care Complaints Commission
How To Make a Complaint
1800 043 159

Midwives & Nurses Board NSW
mail@nmb.nsw.gov.au
(02) 9219 0222

WHICHEVER PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION THEY ARE A MEMBER OF:

Australian College of Midwives
(NSW Branch)
admin@nswmidwives.com.au
02 9281 9522

Australian Private Midwives Association
info@privatemidwives.net.au

Australian Society of Independent Midwives
midwife@ozemail.com.au
(02) 9888 7829



CHALLENGING THE BOUNDARIES

19-21 AUGUST 2011
NEWCASTLE CITY HALL

27th Homebirth Australia Conference

www.homebirthaustralia.org

Speakers include Robbie Davis-Floyd
Put it in your diary now! More details coming soon



HOME BIRTH ACCESS SYDNEY (INC)

- 1) To create an awareness in the community of planned attended homebirth as an accessible and attainable alternative and to be actively involved in maintaining homebirth as a choice and improvement of conditions for homebirthers. In the interest of furthering the cause of homebirth, our public relations policy will be one of assertive, non-aggressive approach.
- 2) To provide an information and referral service by way of newsletters, pamphlets, telephone contacts, a permanent mailbox, a reference library and regular public meetings.
- 3) To provide support to HAS members by holding regular public meetings and maintaining and publicising a list of contact phone numbers and addresses.
- 4) To represent HAS members on or to any regulatory or advisory body, Local, State or Federal, which is formulating policy or implementing decisions which affect homebirth.
- 5) To work with other homebirth groups and other groups concerned with birthing to further the aims of HAS.
- 6) To be involved in public gatherings that are relevant to and consistent with HAS' aim regarding homebirth.

YOU ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND Homebirth Access Sydney (HAS) Committee Meetings

10.00am–12.00 noon
last Tuesday of every month

AUSTRALIAN DOULA COLLEGE
422 Marrickville Rd Marrickville
Bring a plate or something to nibble.
Children welcome.

Please call to confirm
Virginia Maddock 0415 683 074

NEXT MEETINGS:
March 29 (AGM), 26th April and 4th May.

HAS POLICY STATEMENT

This policy statement was written because of the need to promote unity and understanding among our homebirth members and the wider community.

- 1) Homebirth Access Sydney is an organization which was established in 1973 to provide information and support to those interested in homebirth our members include parents, birth attendants, educators and midwives.
- 2) HAS recognises that Australian families have the right to have their baby in any setting – be it their home, a clinic, a birth centre or a hospital.
- 3) The members of HAS believe that home is a safe place to give birth and that there will always be an element of risk in birth whatever the choice of birth place.
- 4) Families who choose homebirth are taking a shared responsibility in the births of their babies. They are opting for a birth outside of an institution and its model of mass health care which is restrictive and frequently denies individuals requirements.
- 5) The midwives who attend homebirths are specialists, educated to provide total care throughout pregnancy, labour and the post-natal period. They consult with other health practitioners when appropriate.
- 6) Midwives are accountable to their clients and their peers (through quality assurance and standards review) as well as the Dept. of Health, the Nurses Registration Board, the Australian College of Midwives and the various courts.
- 7) With the widespread misconceptions about the safety of homebirth, a homebirth midwife's professional status is in jeopardy whenever anything goes wrong. However skilled she may be, deregistration and loss of career is a constant insecurity in the face of social hostility to her chosen profession.
- 8) Birth is an intense, emotional, life changing experience. In the event of conflict or unresolved issues, HAS encourages mediation and conciliation between all parties whatever the birth place and whoever the birth attendants.

MAGAZINE ADVERTISING RATES

	Single (1 Issue)	Annual (4 issues)
Service Pages		
Doula Listing	n/a	\$25
Services Listing	n/a	\$35
Advertisements		
Business Card Display	\$20	\$70
Quarter Page Display	\$30	\$110
Half Page Display	\$40	\$150
Full Page Display	\$65	\$250

For print and online advertising please email Jenny
advertising@homebirthsydney.org.au

HAS ABN 75 947 458 113

HAS MISSION STATEMENT

Homebirth Access Sydney is a viable and visible organisation working with integrity to support mothers and families' rights to informed and empowered home birth.

Calendar

MARCH

Wednesday 2nd

Inner West Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am – 12pm, first Wednesday of every month.

Location: We meet at toddler and baby friendly locations around Sydney's Inner West, such as fenced parks and playgrounds or a baby proof home.

Contact: Please email or call Magda for this month's meeting place (magda.jansen@gmail.com, 0410 139 907) or join our Facebook page 'Sydney Inner West Homebirth Group' to find out details.

Please feel welcome if you're pregnant, have children or are just curious about home birthing. Partners welcome too!

Every Thursday

Sutherland Shire / St George Homebirth Support Group

Time: From 10.30am - 12.30ish pm

Location: Virginia's house at 5 Balfour Ave Caringbah (North)

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 maddvirg@yahoo.com.au

Whether you're pregnant or have babies or kids in tow, come on over, let the kids run amok and enjoy a cuppa and some fresh baked delights with some like-minded mamas.

Tuesday 8th

HAS Committee meeting

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Australian Doula College, 163 Livingstone Road, Marrickville

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 info@homebirth-sydney.org.au

All welcome including kids.

Thursday 10th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contacts: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Monday 21st

Illawarra Birth Choices Group

Time: 10.30am to 12.30pm

Topic: Topic and guest speaker to be confirmed.

Location: Russell Vale Community Hall - corner of Keerong Ave and Channon Street Russell Vale.

Contact: Please call Sonia on 0424 051 246 or find out more at <http://www.illawarra.birthchoices.info/index.html>

Thursday 24th

Pregnancy & Parenting Network meeting

Theme: Waterbirth

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Jane Palmer's house, 27 Hart St, Dundas Valley

Contact: Please let Jane know you're coming so she can let you know if she has to cancel to go to a birth: 9873 1750 or jane@pregnancy.com.au. Please bring a plate of food to share. All welcome.

Thursday 24th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contact: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Sunday 27th

HAS Annual Picnic

Time: 11am – 2pm

Location: Jubilee Park Cnr Eglinton & Northcote Rds, Glebe, near the playground (Jubilee Park light rail stop).

Contact: Virginia 0415683074

Look for the HAS banner! All welcome – bring partners and kids. It's a great opportunity for all homebirth families to come together.

Tuesday 29th

HAS Committee meeting & AGM

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Australian Doula College, 163 Livingstone Road, Marrickville

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 info@homebirth-sydney.org.au

All welcome including kids.

APRIL

Sunday 3rd

Birth Choices Expo

Time: 1 – 5 pm

Location: Petersham Town Hall, Crystal Street

Free Entry - Great Lucky Door Prizes - Food - Entertainment - Talkfest

A unique opportunity for women & families to meet a range of highly experienced birth professionals to obtain information about natural pregnancy, birth & parenting, so that everyone can make informed choices.

Wednesday 6th

Inner West Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am – 12pm, first Wednesday of every month.

Location: We meet at toddler and baby friendly locations around Sydney's Inner West, such as fenced parks and playgrounds or a baby proof home.

Contact: Please email or call Magda for this month's meeting place (magda.jansen@gmail.com, 0410 139 907) or join our Facebook page 'Sydney Inner West Homebirth Group' to find out details.

Please feel welcome if you're pregnant, have children or are just curious about home birthing. Partners welcome too!

Every Thursday

Sutherland Shire / St George Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10.30am - 12.30ish pm

Location: Virginia's house at 5 Balfour Ave Caringbah (North)

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 maddvirg@yahoo.com.au

Whether you're pregnant or have babies or kids in tow, come on over, let the kids run amok and enjoy a cuppa and some fresh baked delights with some like-minded mamas.

Thursday 7th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contact: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Monday 18th

Illawarra Birth Choices Group

Time: 10.30am to 12.30pm

Topic: Topic and guest speaker to be confirmed.

Location: Russell Vale Community Hall - corner of Keerong Ave and Channon Street Russell Vale.

Contact: Please call Sonia on 0424 051 246 or find out more at <http://www.illawarra.birthchoices.info/index.html>

Tuesday 26th

HAS Committee meeting

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Australian Doula College, 163 Livingstone Road, Marrickville

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 info@homebirth-sydney.org.au

All welcome including kids.

Thursday 28th

Pregnancy & Parenting Network meeting

Theme: Introducing solids

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Jane Palmer's house, 27 Hart St, Dundas Valley

Contact: Please let Jane know you're coming so she can let you know if she has to cancel to go to a birth: 9873 1750 or jane@pregnancy.com.au.

Please bring a plate of food to share. All welcome.

MAY

Sunday 1st

Winter submissions due: Topic "The Fourth Stage".

Wednesday 4th

Inner West Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am – 12pm, first Wednesday of every month.

Location: We meet at toddler and baby friendly locations around Sydney's Inner West, such as fenced parks and playgrounds or a baby proof home.

Contact: Please email or call Magda for this month's meeting place (magda.jansen@gmail.com, 0410 139 907) or join our Facebook page 'Sydney Inner West Homebirth Group' to find out details.

Please feel welcome if you're pregnant, have children or are just curious about home birthing. Partners welcome too!

Every Thursday

Sutherland Shire / St George Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10.30am - 12.30ish pm

Location: Virginia's house at 5 Balfour Ave Caringbah (North)

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 maddvirg@yahoo.com.au

Whether you're pregnant or have babies or kids in tow, come on over, let the kids run amok and enjoy a cuppa and some fresh baked delights with some like-minded mamas.

Thursday 5th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm.

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contacts: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Monday 16th

Illawarra Birth Choices Group

Time: 10.30am to 12.30pm

Topic: Topic and guest speaker to be confirmed.

Location: Russell Vale Community Hall - corner of Keerong Ave and Channon Street Russell Vale.

Contact: Please call Sonia on 0424 051 246 or find out more at <http://www.illawarra.birthchoices.info/index.html>

Tuesday 24th

HAS Committee meeting

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Australian Doula College, 163 Livingstone Road, Marrickville

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 info@homebirth-sydney.org.au

All welcome including kids.

Thursday 19th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm.

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contacts: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Thursday 26th

Pregnancy & Parenting Network meeting

Theme: Natural induction methods.

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Jane Palmer's house, 27 Hart St, Dundas Valley.

Contact: Please let Jane know you're coming so she can let you know if she has to cancel to go to a birth: 9873 1750 or jane@pregnancy.com.au.

Please bring a plate of food to share. All welcome.

JUNE

Wednesday 1st

Inner West Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am – 12pm, first Wednesday of every month.

Location: We meet at toddler and baby friendly locations around Sydney's Inner West, such as fenced parks and playgrounds or a baby proof home.

Contact: Please email or call Magda for this month's meeting place (magda.jansen@gmail.com, 0410 139 907) or join our Facebook page 'Sydney Inner West Homebirth Group' to find out details.

Please feel welcome if you're pregnant, have children or are just curious about home birthing. Partners welcome too!

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Location: Virginia's house at 5 Balfour Ave Caringbah (North)

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 maddvirg@yahoo.com.au

Whether you're pregnant or have babies or kids in tow, come on over, let the kids run amok and enjoy a cuppa and some fresh baked delights with some like-minded mamas.

Thursday 2nd

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm.

Location: We are now meeting in alternating

homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contacts: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Thursday 16th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm.

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contacts: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

Monday 20th

Illawarra Birth Choices Group

Time: 10.30am to 12.30pm

Topic: Topic and guest speaker to be confirmed.

Location: Russell Vale Community Hall - corner of Keerong Ave and Channon Street Russell Vale.

Contact: Please call Sonia on 0424 051 246 or find out more at <http://www.illawarra.birthchoices.info/index.html>

Thursday 23rd

Pregnancy & Parenting Network meeting

Theme: Baby wearing and slings.

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Jane Palmer's house, 27 Hart St, Dundas Valley.

Contact: Please let Jane know you're coming so she can let you know if she has to cancel to go to a birth: 9873 1750 or jane@pregnancy.com.au.

Please bring a plate of food to share. All welcome.

Tuesday 28th

HAS Committee meeting

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Australian Doula College, 163 Livingstone Road, Marrickville

Contact: Virginia 0415 683 074 info@homebirth-sydney.org.au

All welcome including kids.

Thursday 30th

Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Time: 10am-12pm.

Location: We are now meeting in alternating homes & local parks in the Blue Mountains.

Cost: A donation of \$2-5 is appreciated to help with group running costs.

Contacts: Alicia 4759 2336 or Sara dave-sara@bigpond.com To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings/topics please e-mail Sara.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway. No meetings in school holidays.

The topic for the next issue is:

'The Fourth Stage'



Birthings is your magazine. Please contribute!

Submissions are welcome on anything to do with the postpartum period. This can include: bonding and attachment, breastfeeding, lotus birth, babymoos, sleep, motherhood, or however you interpret this topic.

As always, we also welcome your birth announcements, birth stories, letters (please!), art and poetry.

Submissions are due by February 1st 2011.

Email the editor at: editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

Reminder: Please ensure we have your current email address so you can receive your membership expiry reminder, as well as all the important homebirth updates in our e-newsletter. And if you've recently moved, send us your new address so you don't miss out on the next issue of Birthings!

Email: member@homebirthsydney.org.au