

BIRTHINGS

A HOMEBIRTH ACCESS SYDNEY QUARTERLY PUBLICATION



Healing Homebirth

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

www.homebirthsydney.org.au

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HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS
Robyn Dempsey
Jo Hunter
Akal Khalsa

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 Jacqueline Cooke at editor@homebirthsydney.org.au
Photos and written submissions must be emailed. Prior notice to the Editor of your intention to submit work is appreciated.

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

Spring 2015	No. 127	August 2015
Summer 2015	No. 128	November 2015
Autumn 2016	No. 129	February 2016
Winter 2015	No. 130	May 2016

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 36 Plumpton NSW 2761 or by email to the Memberships Coordinator at: member@homebirthsydney.org.au

CONTRIBUTING TO BIRTHINGS

The strength of Birthings is all the thought provoking, 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 by the HAS executive, to reflect the range of people in our community. The editorial board members are Maggie Lecky-Thompson, Adrienne Abulhawa, Jo Hunter and 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 1800 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. Please no more than 6-8 photos per story, otherwise they will lose impact due to reduction of size to fit them in.

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 send to Jacqueline Cooke 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.

BIRTHINGS

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Photo by Nick Eager
www.janemccraephoto.com

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Carmelina Bridges' carefully prepared birth space.
Photo by Sweet Memory Photography
www.sweetmemoryphotography.com.au

Editorial



Hello everyone, and welcome to this Winter issue of *Birthings*, packed full of beautiful stories about healing homebirths.

We all know about the power of birth and the importance of having a positive experience. Many of us have, unfortunately, had less than positive birthing experiences with our first, or subsequent births. In these cases, homebirth is often our path back to mental, emotional and physical health.

Birth trauma is often silent. We are told, as mothers, that birth is a necessarily painful and “horrible” experience that must be endured to obtain the prize of a healthy baby. That a healthy baby is all that matters.

We know that this is not the case. A healthy baby is obviously crucial, but so is a healthy and happy mum, and a healthy and happy family. I am no psychologist, but my research and my experience shows me that birth experiences which are not positive are all too often linked with post traumatic stress disorder and / or post-natal depression. I believe we as women (and families) are owed the opportunity to make our own choices about our birthing experiences and to be supported in them, no matter what they are. This includes not judging ourselves or each other according to some “perfect birth” ideal.

Although I wouldn't say that my first birth experience was “traumatic”, it absolutely was not the birth that I wanted. I've written previously about my “semi-elective” caesarean, so I won't rehash that again, but suffice it to say that despite all my preparation for a vaginal birth, in the end my husband and I fell prey to all of the pitfalls of the private hospital system. Thankfully I never felt what I know many women feel; that I or my body had “failed” to birth my baby. I was able to see the positives in the experience, and to think objectively about my next birth experience. I was surrounded by supportive women who held no judgement for me.

However, in hindsight I think I was fortunate. Many women do feel, or are made to feel (unjustifiably) that they or their bodies have failed if they end up with a caesarean, or even with an assisted delivery. I still felt strongly that I wanted to birth my next babe the way I had originally intended.

And so for me, as for so many of us, homebirth was the answer to heal myself and to achieve my goal. After investigating my birthing options in Canberra and doing lots of research, I reached the conclusion that I wanted to meet with an independent midwife. We met with the wonderful Rachele, and I felt immediately that birthing at home with her was my best chance of having the birth that I wanted for me and for our baby.

And we did. It was incredible.

It was empowering, exhilarating, and above all else, healing. I finally knew that what I had suspected was true: that my body wasn't faulty, and that I could birth a baby myself. I don't think I will ever forget the oxytocin rush that I experienced immediately after Adalita's birth, and I was on a high for days (weeks!) afterwards. I don't currently have any tattoos (I've always been more about piercings), but I am thinking very seriously about getting a tattoo of an oxytocin molecule. That's the power of natural, healing birth!

So please enjoy, as I did, re-experiencing that oxytocin rush with every healing birth story in this issue.

We also have a lovely series of recollections of Sheila Kitzinger and the profound impact that her life's work had on so many women and their families. Thank you to Sarah Davies for thinking of such a fantastic way to honour a woman who was loved and revered by so many birthing women.

And now to some news: this will be my last issue as Editor of *Birthings*. I have loved doing this work, and I'm so grateful for having had the opportunity to give back to the community that nurtured and supported me throughout my homebirth journey. However, the pressures of work and motherhood are proving too much. Something has to give, and unfortunately it can't be my family, and it can't be my paying job, otherwise I'd be editing *Birthings* from a friend's couch, and that's not particularly sustainable!

Our new Editor has already been found: Jodi Vial. She will bring a wealth of experience and passion to the role, and I know she's very excited to take on the challenge. I wish her all the best in her role, and I'm looking forward to reading future issues of *Birthings* to continue to relive that oxytocin rush!

Thank you all for your support, especially our wonderful Editorial Board. I wish you all much love and happiness in your lives. For those of you waiting patiently to birth your babes, know that you can do this! For those on their own path to a healing homebirth, I hope this issue provides inspiration, confidence and an understanding of your own special power. For those of you, like me, who have (probably) birthed all the babes that they are going to, I know you'll continue to support our sisters on their journeys.

Jacqueline Cooke

Committee Member Profile

When did you join HAS?

I was introduced to HAS by my doula/friend Virginia and joined in April, 2015 as I took the volunteer position as HAS's new graphic designer.

Who is in your family?

My husband Jose and two girls, Myra (5yo) and Aila (1yo).

What did you do before children?

I was studying nursing and worked as a medical receptionist.

What have you done since children?

I have been a stay at home mother for about 5 years now. During that time I found my new passion of 'being a mother', the nurturer and the facilitator of our precious children from the very beginning of life. I became a massage therapist and childbirth educator (Hypnobirthing Australia™ Paractitioner).

Why Homebirth?

Because I have always believed that birth is much more than just a physiological event but a very sacred event for everyone's life. It belongs to the birthing mother, the baby, the family and the community the family belongs to. It is supposed to be gentle and beautiful and birthing mothers are supposed to be supported and celebrated for the amazing magic happening within her and her family. But for a long time, the meaning of birth and the power and rights over birth has shifted and stripped away from the birthing mothers and the family. It is time to take the power back, rise above and speak up for our rights on how we bring our precious babies into this world. The best way is to embrace our most primal instinct; birth where it's most comfortable and familiar, surrounded by loved ones in a most natural, relaxing atmosphere. AT HOME!"

What is the most amazing thing you have seen, learned about, or learned from Homebirth?

The journey of giving birth at home is not easy. There are definite lack of support and acknowledgement for homebirth mothers and families in this society we live in. It takes a lot of courage, wisdom and patience to take this journey. However as we follow our hearts we start to see the 'Seed of Truth' that leads us to make conscious choices that are best for our WHOLE SELVES. Through this healing experience of trusting our own intuition, ability and choices on birthing our children at home, we gain more well-rounded knowledge and wisdom about birth and being a mother, we build connections and support systems with others who are on the same journey which lead us to this beautiful community of homebirth families and that way we certainly change OUR LIFE! It is truly amazing and I love it! xx



Bitna Castillo
HAS Graphic
Designer

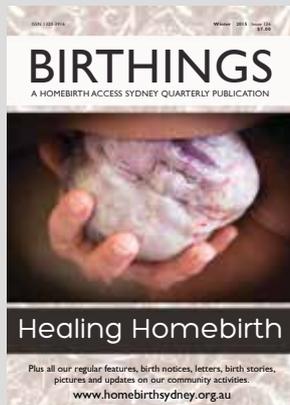
Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor

To encourage readers to write in, we now have a prize each issue for the best letter.

The prize for this issue is:

1 year subscription to the Birthings Magazine!



Please send us a letter for next issue so we can print it here!

Send your letters to: editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

I re-read your Spring 2014 Editorial, and was laughing at your Calmbirth Canberra reference about the homebirthing lady! I was that lady to other people at our CalmBirth weekends!

My daughter loves the homebirthing magazines and flicks through the old magazines I have every day, looking at mummies and babies - and saying she wants another brother. It's really cute :-). I'm not so sure about having a 3rd child (too soon) given our 2 are only 17 months apart! But you're right, Rachele Meredith is indeed a fantastic midwife so we'd definitely want her there for our 3rd homebirth if it came to that.

- Robyn Stephenson

Coordinator's Report

Coordinator's Report – June 2015

Our last committee meeting was the AGM on Wednesday 6th May. Most of our committee members have retained their positions, so for those who are unfamiliar with who does what, here is the list of our current serving committee:

HAS Committee

Coordinator: Virginia Maddock
Assistant Coordinator: VACANT
Secretary: Amantha McGuinness
Treasurer: Veronica Cerbelli
Merchandise: VACANT
Memberships: Nadine Fragosa
Advertising: Serene Johnson
Website: Jennifer Lorance

Birthings team

Birthings Editor: Jacqueline Cooke
Assistant Editor: Virginia Maddock
Designer: Bitna Choi-Castillo
Line editors: Nicola Judd, Lou Williamson
Media Watch: Naomi Homel
Distribution: Rebecca Perrin
Mail Officers: Veronica Cerbelli & Amantha McGuinness
Events & Fundraising: Janine O'Brien

It was noted at the AGM that most of the long serving committee members have been volunteering for a number of years and have finished having babies now. Although we all are very passionate about homebirth and birth choice, we cannot all remain in our positions forever, and it has been some time now since any fresh faces have stepped in to volunteer their help. I remember when I had my 1st baby in 2009, and I couldn't wait to volunteer when the Memberships Coordinator position became available. Where are all you new and keen homebirthers on the scene who want to take part in homebirth promotion and advocacy work? As you can see, there are a couple of positions vacant, and who knows when more may come up, due to volunteers needing to start paid work or move on with other projects?

A very big welcome to our new designer Bitna, an old doula client of mine who has become a good friend and fierce proponent of women's birthing rights, and plans to birth her next baby at home. I can't wait to see what creative flavour she adds to Birthings from hereon in.

May 5 was International Midwives Day. For the last few years we have given a little something back to the homebirth midwives who advertise with us, as a thank you for supporting us and supporting you and your babies. Without them buying your HAS memberships, our humble little magazine, and subsequently our organisation would either cease to exist, or not be nearly as fantastic as it is!

We have given them flowers for a couple of years, then last year we sent them a HAST shirt and the lovely book "Memoirs Of A Midwife" by Joan Brandt who lovingly donated them to us. But this year I had the idea to donate to a charitable organisation which benefits birthing women on behalf of the midwives, as an altruistic gesture which I know our generous of heart midwives would probably appreciate more.

So we decided to donate some money to Heartfelt – a very important organisation which provides a photographer and photographic memories to families who have had stillborn babies. I know there has been a few in the homebirth community who have utilised Heartfelt over the years and I wanted our midwives who have supported these very special families to feel that they have contributed to an organisation which has meant so much to those

families.

So we facilitated the paying it forward for 10 Heartfelt photographic sessions. I know a few midwives (if not all), were deeply touched by this gesture. Jo Hunter had this to say: "Thank you Homebirth Access Sydney, this is such a fabulous idea and such an important cause to support xxx"



Speaking of midwives, last week the Australian College of Midwives awarded our very own Janine O'Brien (midwife and HAS Events/Fundraising Extraordinaire), the coveted award of "Midwife Of The Year". Then a little birdy told us the next day that another Sydney (Blue Mountains) midwife (and my own midwife) Jo Hunter, was awarded as Runner Up. Congratulations to both of you. What a massive achievement that our homebirth midwives take out the top honours – we know that they have an extra special relationship with their women than hospital midwives ever have the time or ability to do, and it's an honour that they are given recognition for all that they do. We are so lucky to have you both, servicing the women of Sydney and surrounds.

On to political news...

On the 20th April some of our midwives received the following correspondence from their insurer, Medisure Indemnity Australia Pty Ltd (summarised version):

Dear Valued Customer,

It is with deep regret that we inform you that as of the 2nd April, 2015 Vero and Medisure will no longer be able to provide a Professional Indemnity Insurance policy to Private Practicing Midwives who are providing any home birthing or home birthing related services.... Any policies that are currently in place that are due to expire after the 30th of June, 2015, will remain in effect until the current expiry date. We are unable to offer you renewal at the expiry of your current policy, however Run Off cover policies will be available subject to eligibility..... Please be aware this decision is only in relation to private practicing Midwives with home birthing patients, or caseloads....

This is a worrying concern for those midwives who are not Medicare eligible, and their birthing women, as it means the midwives will not have the required pre and post-natal insurance to practice. There is currently no solution, although many stakeholders are trying to work with the government to find one. In the meantime, a rally has been organised called the 'Mother Of The Mother Of All Rallies' which will be at Parliament House in Canberra on Thursday 25th June 21. Search for it on Facebook if you want more details. For anyone new to homebirth, The (original) Mother Of All Rallies was held in September 2009 where up to 3,000 people attended in the pouring rain, after the government brought in maternity reforms which required midwives to hold professional indemnity insurance (which was entirely unavailable) to assist women to birth at home, meaning that homebirth with a midwife was about to become illegal! Fortunately the government allowed an exemption for intrapartum insurance which has now been extended 3 (or is it 4?) times until December 31, 2016. We will keep you updated if anything changes.

This weekend is the Homebirth Australia conference which is always a highlight of my year. I hope to see some of you in Melbourne and will bring you that coverage in the Spring issue of Birthings 'HAS In The Community' column.

Virginia Maddock

Treasurer's Annual Report 2014

During 2014 Homebirth Access Sydney has continued to supply Birthings magazine to all of its subscribers and provide access to relevant resources of information for home birthing parents and birth support attendants. In this time we have had an income of \$17,134.87 with an expenditure of \$12,324.47.

Income	Amount	Expenses	Amount
Merchandise	\$ 2,351.41	Merchandise Stock	-\$ 784.03
Birthings Magazine	\$ 365.00	Printing	-\$ 6,325.62
Memberships	\$ 9,713.53	Postage	-\$ 2,033.40
Postage	\$ 384.75	Paypal Fees	-\$ 130.95
Bank Interest	\$ 0.18	Bank Fees	-\$ 2.50
Events	\$ 3,870.00	Events	-\$ 2,391.45
Sponsorships	\$ 450.00	Web Development	-\$ 68.48
Total Income	\$ 17,134.87	Stationary	-\$ 252.72
		eBay Seller Fees	-\$ 50.76
Total Income	\$ 17,134.87	Donations and Gifts	-\$ 284.56
Total Expenses	-\$ 12,324.47		
Total Profit	\$ 4,810.40	Total Expenses	-\$ 12,324.47

Our expenditures are mostly on printing the magazine, merchandise stock, postage and stationery.

The value of the stock purchased carries on for the following year and continues to help HAS produce an income. The committee continues to volunteer their time, homes, experience and love into this organisation, with a dedicated passion to serve our homebirthing community.

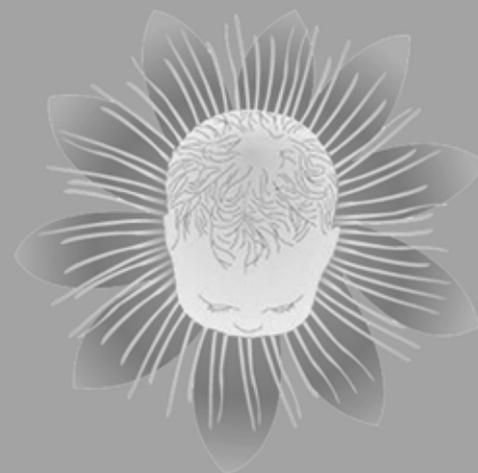
We did have 2 sponsors for the "Homebirth Dads Night Out", Thank you very much to Hills Spinal Health, Sam Saidi and OZ Baby Trends. Although, we still have no long term sponsors for Homebirth Access Sydney, sales and memberships keep the organisation alive and flowing for the public to access the much needed support and information related to Homebirth.

With the development of the new website, we hope to open a new gateway to advertisers and sponsors to support HAS by advertising their products and services with us. The website will be modern and up to date with prenatal and post natal services, articles and access to much more information than ever before. We hope this will help to attract new clientele.

We ask if that you please continue to support Homebirth Access Sydney by purchasing products, memberships, or by sponsoring, advertising and donations, please ask your friends or family, if they would like to advertise or sponsor us, we would greatly appreciate your assistance.

All contacts can be directed to Info@homebirthsydney.org.au and our team will respond to all emails accordingly. Thank you for all of the current advertisers and members that are already helping Homebirth Access Sydney.

Veronica Cerbelli



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Virginia Maddock

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Birth Announcements



Welcome to the world **Zen Drago Houghton**, born after a marathon labour on Wednesday 10 September 2014 at 5.20am. Zen and his mum were supported beautifully, patiently and attentively by midwife Hazel Keedle and doula Nat Dash.



Welcome to the world beautiful **Florence Hannah**, little sister to Ava, Isla, and Aaliyah. Very quickly born into the water on the 20 October 2014, weighing 4.2kg. Huge thank you to my birth team: my sister for her quick thinking and jumping in the pool fully clothed to catch Florie, my husband and big girls for never leaving my side and for putting up the pool and filling it in record time, to my forever friend Elisa thank you for all you support and for getting the milk. And Hazel thank you for making another home birth an amazing, safe, nurturing experience.



Layla May Yarrington was born 22nd Feb 2015 12.27am 3.62kg, 49cm long, a sister to Alexis 6, Rylee 4.5 and Jack 2.5. Born peacefully into the water, into daddy's arms, surrounded by her siblings and goddess mother.



Yasmin Beck Laws born on 27th February 2015 surrounded by my family and supported by midwife Sheryl Sidery and Doula Yolande Hyde.

Was such a magical day, I hope to inspire other woman to birth in nature.



Samuel Eckhart Roberts was born at 4:20am on Monday 2nd March 2015, 3.97kg of gorgeousness and so much more love and light.

Sam is younger brother of Eva (10), Isla (8) and Nate (2) - all four home water-birth babies. So grateful for Samuel, his perfect arrival and lotus birth, the love of his dad, Tim, brother and sisters, and for the support (for the 2nd time round) of lovely midwife Jo Hunter.



Shalom and Helene are pleased to announce the arrival of their daughter **Noa Alexandra Drimer** on the 1st of April 2015 at 4.58pm. She weighed 3.560 kg and was 56 cm long. She is a baby sister for Lior, who is now three. We would like to thank our amazing midwife Sheryl and our wonderful doula and birth photographer Amy Jean Harding.

Photo by Amy Jean Photography
<http://amyjeanphotography.com>

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



Proudly introducing **Amalia Carolyn Howard**, born Saturday 23rd May 2015 at 5.15am, weighing 3.55kgs. Amalia is little sister to Lachlan, 22 months old. We will be forever grateful to Hazel and Jo for their endless support and dedication in assisting us to have a beautiful, healing birth.

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

Aimee Gjeci
Alison Christie
Betty Salouras
Catherine Kane
Clare Marshall
Elle Kolotos
Esther Hughes
Kat Fryzb
Jessica Curran
Jessie Albert
Juliani Cardoso
Karen Gallagher
Sammi Cambray
Natasha Yarrington
Nimity Keon
Rebekah Devcich
Renee Allan
Santina Sannen
Sharon Baldwin
Taylor Winterstein
Wren Edwards

Membership

For new membership or renewals
please go to
www.homebirthsydney.org.au
and click on 'membership'



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Moonsong

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- The influence of the lunar cycle and the earth's seasons
- The spiritual practice of menstruation and the transformative power of our rites of passage
- Understand why you feel the way you do!

It is time, women are awakening..

"MoonSong was inspirational. It really helped me to make sense of my life and where I'm going. It showed me how powerful I really am, and how to live my life to the fullest. I think MoonSong helps women understand the flow of their cycles and how empowering they actually are. It gets us in touch with our essence." Sylvie

Workshop Dates -

Sydney	Feb 22 2015
Melbourne	April 12, 2015
NNSW/SQLD	Sept 6, 2015
Sydney	Nov 6, 2015

Connecting with the Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy

This workshop focuses on the shamanic dimensions of pregnancy, in other words:

What lay beneath...

With prior preparation contemplating our life experiences, we will do some shamanic processes to understand the origins of our beliefs, attitudes and fears around birth, seeing the connection between how we were born, our menarche (first period) and the stories about the women in our family, as well as any experiences of pregnancy and giving birth we have had so far.

Then a *Letting Go of Fear* process and fire ritual and a shamanic drum journey to meet the baby, soul baby or Inner Goddess, to seek guidance, clarity, information etc.

This workshop is for all women. You don't have to be pregnant or planning to be and there is no prior experience necessary.

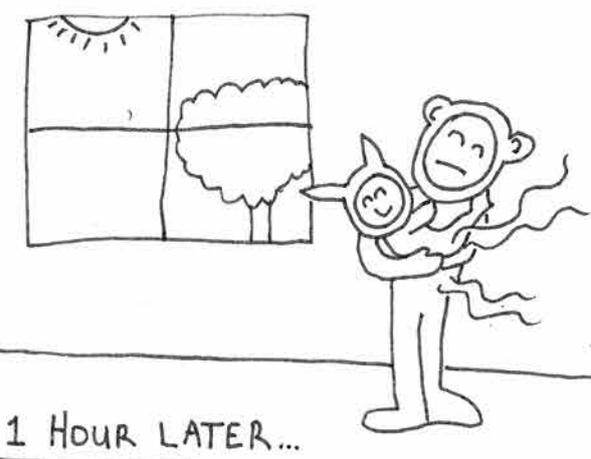
Workshop Dates -

Sydney NSW	Feb 21 2015
Melbourne VIC	April 11 2015
NNSW/SQLD	Sept 5 2015
Sydney NSW	Nov 5th 2015

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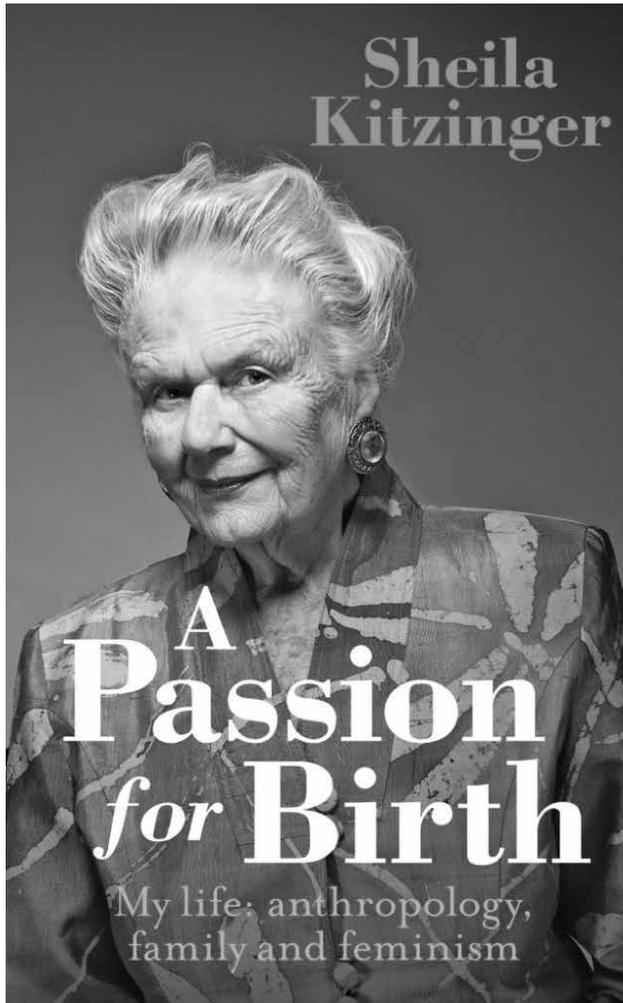


as the minister of mothers I'll remove Ftb and childcare benefits for certian bludg..er... families, we all need to do our bit. did I say "double-dipping"? our wives don't tell us these things, anyway other poor people....

MEANWHILE IN GOVERNMENT...

Vale Sheila Kitzinger

Compiled by Sarah Davies



A keen advocate of homebirth, she gave birth to all five of her daughters at home. Her (now adult) daughters have written on her website: "Sheila approached death with the same attitude as she did birth - questioning the need for various medical interventions and making

her own choices. Just as she believed in thinking about what you would want while giving birth, she also believed in the value of thinking in advance about dying - and making plans." And so, at the age of 86, she died calmly, in her own home, cared for by family, just as she wished.

"Her nature, her passion, her spirit, changed me forever...She breathed life into my passion for midwifery, and I am a far better midwife for knowing her."

The direct impact that Sheila had on many birthing women, particularly through her books, is profound. While our society almost universally disempowers birthing women, Sheila's words contributed to the antidote: helping women to disregard misinformation, and to know that they usually have everything within them that they need in order to give birth. And so, in the words of birthing women themselves, here are just some of the ways that Sheila helped birthing women to realise their potential to birth under their own power.

"Our daughters are now becoming mothers. I pass to them Sheila's books, and the knowledge and confidence that I gained from them. All of my confusion and pain started to make sense. I wasn't a bad and ungrateful person for being upset and disappointed - I was the victim of an uncaring maternity system. I read her, I wrote her, I understood her, I understood birth on a new level, and I knew I would freebirth, and my heart sighed 'YES!'"

"My midwife recommended Sheila's book *The New Pregnancy and Childbirth* to me when I was five weeks pregnant with my first, and largely clueless. It was liberating to read of birth as a physiologically normal process, as an experience that was mine to enjoy, rather than a medical professional's job to manage. I returned to her work during my second pregnancy, while preparing for our first planned homebirth. All of her information and advice still rang true, and stood as a reminder to listen to my body and follow my instincts during what turned out to be an unassisted birth." - Alex Smith

"I was fifteen years old, and pregnant with my first baby. I needed guidance for my upcoming birth. My mother gifted me the book *The New Pregnancy and Childbirth* by Sheila Kitzinger and I read it from cover to cover, a number of times. I felt that her view on birth aligned with what I instinctively knew I wanted from my upcoming birth. I am now 28, a mother of three children, and a registered midwife, and I believe Sheila's book had a large hand in the woman and mother I am today." - Jaya Dohm

"Women's freedom to give birth at home is a political decision, an assertion of our determination to reclaim the experience of birth. Birth at home is about changing society." - Sheila Kitzinger, *Birth Your Way: Choosing Birth at Home or in a Birth Center*

In April, the world lost one of its fiercest and most joyful childbirth activists. During a career spanning more than fifty years, Sheila Kitzinger worked to change attitudes towards birth - both within the medical system and amongst women themselves - and, to varying degrees, succeeded. Having studied birth in many cultures as a social anthropologist, her mission at home was to fight the medicalisation of birth, and to empower women to realise their own birth power.

She worked with women who had suffered birth trauma, including listing her home phone number on the internet, with an invitation for any woman who needed to chat about a bad birth experience to simply call her. She wrote over thirty books, which had an enormous impact on many women. Her warmth and passion were a delight to watch in the interviews and talks she gave, as well as for those lucky enough to have spoken with her in person.

"She was like an all knowing goddess to a new mother like me, but deep down I knew she was just a wise woman who had seen lots and wasn't afraid to speak out about it."

"After an unpleasant hospital birth experience with our first baby in 1975 I stayed home for the birth of our second child in 1977. Rather than facing a long bumpy ride to the hospital at night, or the certain disapproval from those around me, I stayed home when labour started, and without alerting anyone, birthed our second child alone in the quiet of our spare room. I had, however, Sheila as my virtual doula; the first edition of her *The Experience of Childbirth* in my hand, in which her encouraging voice helped me recognise the stages as labour progressed and she reminded me of the breathing patterns. It was a wonderful quiet birth, and gave me a great sense of achievement, and an instant bond with our baby daughter. After that, I could not possibly go to a hospital for the birth of our subsequent five children.

With the support of my husband, they were all born at home. I am very grateful to Sheila, whose book confirmed for me that giving birth, while not easy, is a natural, joyful and empowering process, not a disease. All our babies were born healthy and full term (although all more than two weeks overdue by the doctor's calculation).

Our last home birth (in 1987) was twins, weighing 3.840kg and 4.325kg at birth, after which I needed hospitalisation for a transfusion. I am eternally grateful to Sheila Kitzinger for communicating the joy of childbirth. Our daughters are now becoming mothers. I pass to them Sheila's books, and the knowledge and confidence that I gained from them. May she rest peacefully while her wonderful legacy lives on." - Erika Lawley

"As a student midwife I shadowed her. Her nature, her passion, her spirit, changed me forever. When she spoke to me about birth trauma it could not be unsaid, the women's voices and their stories showed me why we do this as midwives. She put on a birth trauma day in her own space, and fed me the most gorgeous vegetarian food. Her presence in her own space was overwhelmingly calming, and she took me under her wing, and changed my life. We sat on her large bed in her bedroom, with tapestries and tree of life and sculptures around. She breathed life into my passion for midwifery, and I am a far better midwife for knowing her. Her humble, wicked, passionate beauty will never be forgotten." - Maet Pearson

"I read Sheila's book more than twenty years ago, when it was considered the natural birth 'bible', so to speak. There wasn't much about at the time, but Sheila's book was a thick juicy tome full of assurances that my body was OK, designed to have my baby, and wouldn't fail me. I read it over and over and over. She was like an all knowing goddess to a new mother like me, but deep down I knew she was just a wise woman who had seen lots and wasn't afraid to speak out about it. She was one of few at the time. She inspired my passion, I have since birthed seven children, each one naturally and gently, without fear." - Kaye Bernshaw

"I saw her speak at a breastfeeding conference, circa 2002. I was 24 and babies were nowhere near on my radar. I was the audiovisual technician doing the sound and lighting for the event. I recognised her name, but did not expect to be as completely absorbed by what she had to say as I was, this genteel looking elderly woman. She related some examples of the dehumanising treatment received by women in hospitals, and I remember feeling really worked up about the stories of these women. I believe she planted some of my first conscious ideas about the way birth should be." - Eirinn Ceit

"I am currently reading her book *Birth Crisis*. I feel so relieved that my feelings are 'normal', and feel validated by her words, as close family and friends do not understand the loss I experienced with my first, and so far, my only birthing experience. I would love to have a second child and am exploring homebirth and midwife-centred care, and am grateful for her insight and care." - Bec Tommo

"Sheila's book *Birth Crisis* was the first book I read after my traumatic birth. While I read it, all of my confusion and pain started to make sense. I wasn't a bad and ungrateful person for being upset and disappointed - I was the victim of an uncaring maternity system. This

spiralled me into a completely new world, was the catalyst of my birth work, and also led me to seek a better way (homebirth) for my subsequent birth." - Jen Shipston

"I watched *Face of Birth* when I was planning a homebirth for my second babe, following a traumatic first birthing experience. Hearing Sheila speak about birth trauma, and how she had received telephone calls from women feeling its impact into their sixties and seventies, really resonated with me. It was then I realised how deeply I had been affected by the birth I had. I went on to have a beautiful, blessed homebirth; I am so grateful to have had the chance to heal." - Mary Fok

"I first really saw the big picture of birth when I undertook a university sociology essay, choosing the topic 'The Medicalisation of Birth'. Sheila's books were the most amazing references I found! I read her, I wrote her, I understood her, I understood birth on a new level, and I knew I would freebirth, and my heart sighed 'YES'. I got a high distinction, and the worldly, brilliant, tough educator wrote that she had learned from the essay, and Sheila also :)" - Jo

"I read an op-shop copy of Sheila's birthing book when pregnant with my second child. Her humanity, her research and her passion struck me, and, intangible as it is, her calm earthy sense helped imbue me with a similar mindset. I also have her book of essays on home birth, which although dated, is a thoughtful and again sensible, beautifully articulated and humane resource. She will be missed." - Tine Brok

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Sheila completed her autobiography, entitled *A Passion for Birth: My Life: Anthropology, Family and Feminism*, shortly before her death. It has very recently been published by Pinter and Martin Publishers, and is available to purchase online.

**Sarah Davies** is a birth nerd, trainee childbirth educator, domestic diva (cough), and mother to her two little kids, both born at home.

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# A Healing Homebirth

by Kirilee Heartman



My first two children were born in hospitals. Both births, while emotionally and physically challenging (as birth is), were uncomplicated and smooth, and free from the usual mainstream interventions. Maybe I didn't know it at the time; maybe I have only realised in retrospect how lonely those births were, how exhausting it was to have to advocate for myself, and how much I didn't know about the transition to motherhood (even the second time).

I lost my third baby at nineteen weeks' gestation. Birthing that baby, then saying goodbye to his tiny perfect body, was devastating, and that experience changed me forever. Facing the consequences for future pregnancies – where I was now considered high risk and told I would be subject to constant monitoring and drugs in any future labour, despite there being no medical reason for the death of my third son – was what finally pushed me to homebirth.

I knew I could birth a baby, and I didn't believe there was enough evidence to warrant the interventions that would now be attached to my 'record' in the hospital system. Instead of fighting the system, I would sidestep it, and birth at home for my next child.

I didn't contact an independent midwife until I was twenty weeks pregnant. I had been terrified of losing another baby, and waiting until that nineteen week threshold had passed before I truly acknowledged the pregnancy. Unfortunately, the fact that I was so far along meant that it would be unlikely for me to find a homebirth midwife, or so I was told by the first midwife I rang. I was facing an uncertain scenario for the birth of this baby, but the following day I came home to a message from that midwife, offering me a place under her (and her student's) care.

The healing process began at my first antenatal appointment - I had many fears to work through in this pregnancy around birthing a living baby, and now I had someone with whom I could talk them through – someone who would also be there at the birth and would know the backstory if they were to surface then.

My husband and I spent time every night for the last few months of the pregnancy visualising the birth as a healthy happy event. Every time I thought of my baby or felt a kick I would send a prayer out for a healthy baby.

When the baby was four days overdue, I sat down one evening with some paper. I wrote down every little fear I had around the birth and about meeting this baby.

I still had much lingering fear as I can remember filling several pages. I then went into the back garden, and burnt the paper with my fears. I felt lighter, and the next day I birthed my baby.

The birth of my first daughter completely and instantly healed all that had come before. My midwife and her student arrived when I was almost at transition. It took only a little while for my energy to re-settle with the new arrivals to the space. I had asked the midwife to position herself where she could coach me as the baby crowned, as I was concerned about tearing (I tore badly during the birth of my first baby). I trusted the midwives and felt safe in my home environment, which enabled me to quickly surrender to the intense primal urges I was feeling to push this baby out. This birth was by far the most intense of all I had experienced, and yet I felt a sense of spiritual ecstasy as it progressed.

Again birth pushed me to my absolute limits, and after the baby's body had slithered out into the water, I had to pause, rest, and have just a few seconds to process the intensity of the birth before I could turn to meet her. We were euphoric to discover we had a daughter after three sons.

Both the midwives and myself were amazed when we weighed the baby and she was 4.9kg. Born after a three hour labour, and with no stitches needed. I quickly realised why she was so big – in my mind a healthy baby equated to a big baby – and all my visualisations and prayers had focused on a healthy baby. I now had a baby abundantly healthy, going by my inner beliefs (and one who continues to be so at eight years old!).

In the most quiet of moments of that first night with our new daughter, both my husband and I voiced the feeling that by having a homebirth, we had given our daughter the absolute best start to life we could think of – beginning with a birth that was completely free of stress for her and for her birthing mother. I had grown and birthed a healthy baby after loss, with care that had supported my emotional process and my transition to mother of three.

**Kirilee Heartman** is mother to five children. She runs Steiner based Playgroups and Craft Workshops, as well as a craft workshop for women called *Crafting a SacRed YONI*. She blogs for [www.mothing.com](http://www.mothing.com) and at [www.kirileeheartman.wordpress.com](http://www.kirileeheartman.wordpress.com).

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# Marcel's Birth Story

by Lauren Horton



Four years ago, on September 19th 2010, I experienced a birth that would change my life and career forever. The caesarean birth of my first son, George, took me completely by surprise and then took its toll on me again postpartum. I resisted asking for help because I thought I should be able to do it all myself. This pregnancy, with Marcel, I learned to ask for help, and let my women look after me. It felt so good to be supported and mothered by my midwives, doula, friends, and my incredible partner.

During Marcel's pregnancy, I meditated daily, practised yoga, and visited him in the womb every day through visualisation. Marcel was willing me to be free, to be myself, and to let go. It wasn't easy to be shown my negative habits and force myself to really work through them. It was now or never, though. I had to face these habits and change my mindset. Fear or self love? I chose SELF LOVE.

For childbirth education, or self-discovery, during Marcel's pregnancy, I attended a workshop called "Connecting to the Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy" with Jane Harwicke Collings. I also made a Shamanic Drum with Tallulah Gough. I learned so much about myself just through the creative process. They contributed greatly to my positive mindset and road to trusting the process.

## **So here's Marcel's birth story.**

I had been feeling pre-labour symptoms (period pain, tightenings and Braxtons) since about 36+4 weeks. During the same week, I organised a meeting with the head of VBACs at our local hospital to talk about birthing options, and to have a general rapport with him in case of transfer.

The meeting was a bit of a waste of time, as he wasn't very supportive. He also had no compassion for my previous birth experience even though he played a part in the subsequent surgery (haematoma drainage) that I required after a caesarean from a failed forceps attempt. A waste of time yes, but I found strength in knowing that I had made the right choice to homebirth and had a super supportive team behind me no matter what the outcome.

A waste of time yes, but I found strength in knowing that I had made the right choice to homebirth and had a super supportive team behind me no matter what the outcome. The fact was, I had no control over when my baby was coming, how he would be born, or where he would be born. So I really had to trust that he knew exactly what I needed at every given moment.

Turns out the pre-labour lasted for almost 4 weeks. It was exciting and frustrating at the same time. I got excited most nights when the period cramps started to amp up, and then disappointed when they faded away after an hour. Marcel was always trying to show me patience. This little guy was taking his time and this was perfect. Each time I started to doubt my journey, my midwife Janine and partner Angelo always knew how to get me back on track. They were my guiding lights and I trusted them with my life.

I lost my mucus plug on Saturday, the 3rd of January, and had the chance to rest for most of that day to prepare for birth that night. I drank labour aid all day and resisted the urge to nest. I just had to let go now.

At 3am on Sunday morning, I went upstairs to wake up my partner Angelo. He was sleeping upstairs in the spare room to give me more space. I really had to breathe and focus through the contractions, but I still wasn't convinced

I was in labour. I called my midwife and told her my contractions were lasting about 30 seconds and not to rush. But as soon as I got off the phone with her they grew stronger.

I was in denial through all of it because of the long pre-labour leading up to the birth, so I decided to time one contraction to see if I was in active labour or not. Turns out the contractions were lasting 1.10 minutes, not 30 seconds. Oops. Luckily, the midwives and my doula were on their way.

I stayed in bed and Angelo put pressure on my lower back. He was also trying to blow up the pool, but we found out there were holes in it. He tried to tape them up, but to no avail. A water birth was out of the question, but it was ok. I wasn't attached to any one type of birth. My baby was going to show me where to birth.

My midwives and doulas arrived about 1.5 hours later and by then I was in active labour for sure. It was so intense and the contractions were coming about three minutes apart, and lasting one minute or so. This labour was so different and so much stronger than George's birth. The contractions were low in my pelvis and the intensity in my back and bottom was indescribable. I needed constant pressure on my back. Hot towels were a godsend (thanks to my doula for being intuitive). I was making loud, animalistic grunts and moans.

There was a point where I noticed I was singing or wailing like someone had died. Maybe it was me dying so I could prepare for birth. I know lots of women who say they felt like they were dying during labour. I definitely felt as though I was letting go and becoming something new.

My four year old son emerged from his sleep at about 6am and his first words were, "I'm bored". Typical four year old response after 12 hours of uninterrupted sleep. Hilarious! The midwives read him a couple of books but he just kept saying, "I want to go to Nana's". So Nana made her way over to pick him up for a special morning at her house. I wasn't attached to my son needing to be at the birth, I just wanted him to feel comfortable.

The contractions continued to ramp up. I was changing positions regularly from standing, to squatting, to lunging, to leaning, to going on all fours. My midwives and doula were so intuitive with positions, I didn't need to doula myself.



We made our way to the bathroom and filled up our tub, but realised it wasn't going to be deep enough to birth in. I wasn't very comfortable in there, anyway and the water wasn't as effective as the hot towels on my back.

As I got out of the bath, all of a sudden, in true Hollywood style, my waters broke. It was quite an event. The midwives had never seen such a dramatic explosion of waters. It was quite funny, actually and a big relief. It was game on. Now it was even more intense and all-consuming.

There were so many times I wondered, "I can't do this," or "When is this going to be over," or "Is he really going to descend and come out of my vagina?" Each time, my mind wandered to an eventuality that wasn't true to the present moment. I would then return my focus to my body, and listen to my incredibly clever baby.

I was getting contractions one minute apart now and with each step I took, the contractions came hard and fast, bringing loads of pressure into my bottom. I made my way to the bedroom for a side lying pose with a leg in the air to help to move my baby round the corner. He was descending! I didn't quite believe it. My doula had to take photos to show me his head was coming down. I was overwhelmed each time I saw his head and kept on believing that I could do it even when the intensity of the contractions got so strong that I was saying, "I can't do this". My midwives, doula, and partner Angelo, didn't let me get away with that negative self talk, though.

We moved to an all fours forward leaning pose over the end of our bed. With each contraction I yelled to my partner Angelo, "Pull my arms." I felt like I needed to pull on something so I could really send the energy down into my bottom for pushing. I was going with my body, making grunting sounds, and feeling all the sensations as my vagina stretched and opened.



The experience of the stretching had to be one of the most overwhelming, but rewarding feelings of the birth. I felt it was most definitely the hardest part. I was pushing out a 10.2 pound baby with a 38cm head, remember. I had to do some extra work to get him crowning. I came into a lunge pose for the rest of the birth to help him move down with more ease. I still wouldn't believe everyone when they said the head was almost out. I could feel the opening and ring of fire, but I just didn't believe it was actually happening. Oh how a caesarean birth can take away your confidence.

As my baby crowned and stayed there, I remember wanting to escape. But at the same time, I wanted him there. I wanted to feel it, as I had said during my pregnancy. I wanted to feel it all. Instead of pushing at this point, I panted and took very long breaths. I could feel my babies ears slide out of my vagina as his head was fully born. I still didn't believe his head was out. My doula had to take another photo to convince me.

And then, on the next contraction, his body was born. That part went so fast that I didn't really have time to savour it or prepare for it. I was overwhelmed by the sheer miracle of birth.

Marcel came out screaming and did a huge poo on arrival. My midwife passed him between my legs and up into my arms. Our little man Marcel was gorgeous, huge, and so healthy. I was in love straight away.

My partner Angelo looked at me. We both had tears in our eyes. We did it! Angelo was totally blown away by the whole experience. He said to the midwives after, that it was by far the most incredible experience of his life.

What an amazing team I had looking after me! I was so lucky to have the midwives, doula, and my partner by my side. They not only trusted me to birth, but I trusted them to hold the space for me in a way that allowed me to be ME. With all my demands, moans, grunts, needs, desires, fears, my nudity, I was FREE! It didn't matter what they thought of me, and I didn't care if I was doing it right or not. What I experienced was FREEDOM.

*Lauren is a prenatal yoga teacher, doula and Birthing From Within Mentor. She resides on the Central Coast of NSW with her partner Angelo (yoga teacher and photographer) and her two boys George and Marcel.*

# MANIFESTO OF A 'HIGH RISK' HOMEBIRTHEE

By Eirinn Ceit



**This is an open letter to the powers that be, here in Australia, where the criteria of eligibility for homebirth is getting smaller and smaller.**

Why would anyone want to give birth at home if they are considered high risk? To fully answer that question, I must first share my birth stories.

I was always interested in homebirth, but chose to birth in hospital for two reasons. Firstly, my husband was not comfortable with the idea, saying we should have the first birth in hospital. I know if I had been insistent, he would have supported me, but I wasn't insistent. This brings me to the second reason – hospital birth is free, and I mistakenly believed I could have a natural birth in hospital if I had no health problems, and declined pain relief. I had no idea what that 'free' birth was going to cost me.

My first pregnancy ended at approximately 7 weeks – a missed miscarriage detected at 12 weeks. My second pregnancy was also cut short – my membranes released at 18 weeks, and my first precious daughter died in utero at 20 weeks. No reason was ever found for my membranes releasing, it was a totally random event. I include these pregnancies in the interests of full disclosure, as they have in the past been used by a GP to define me as high risk, when he discovered I was planning my first homebirth. I myself believe that they have no relevancy to my risk standing as a birthing woman.

My first full term pregnancy went smoothly, up until my 38 week appointment at the hospital midwives clinic. My blood pressure was slightly elevated at that appointment, and despite daily monitoring over the next two weeks, no medical issue was found. The only consequence was that I became incredibly stressed. I knew about the cascade of intervention, but I had no idea that it could begin before I was even in labour.

I had a night of intense prodromal labour, two days before my due date. I went to hospital, but was sent home. The next night, my labour truly began. Again, I went to hospital. I thought my membranes had released, but it must have been a hindwater leak. I was admitted, though I wasn't in active labour. Several hours later, one of the hospital doctors recommended I have a caesarean, though neither myself nor my baby were in distress. I don't actually know what the reasoning behind the recommendation was, no one bothered to tell me. All I know was that they told my support team (husband and two friends) that "every contraction was putting the baby's life at risk".

I remember clearly that moment when I gave in. I wanted to argue. I knew that I was fine, and my baby was fine. I knew there was no medical reason for the recommendation. But I looked at the faces of the people around me, and I knew that I had a lot of labour to go (I was 6cm). I knew that if I continued to push for a vaginal birth, I would be doing it in the assigned role of 'the woman who doesn't care about her baby'. And I knew that I couldn't do that, not when I had no one on my side. So I signed the consent form, crying as I did. Despite this apparent emergency, my surgery did not happen for another 5 hours.

How I met my first living child, my rainbow baby: I craned my neck to get a glimpse of her, somewhere behind me and to the right. I was struggling with nausea (caused by the surgery) and gasping for breath (spinal placed too high). I was actually terrified I might die. My husband brought her to me, but I couldn't focus on her, I was too focused on breathing. I wanted to tell him to give her his full attention and not worry about me, but I didn't have enough breath to speak.

I ended up in recovery alone, despite being in an accredited 'baby friendly' hospital. There weren't enough staff in recovery that day to 'allow' me to be with my baby, though my husband and a midwife were present. At the time I didn't mind, as I was still in no state to hold her. It took a long time for the shaking to stop.

I finally got to hold her, two hours after she was born, and my first thought was "This could be anyone's baby. I just have to take the word of the people around me that she's mine".

I spent 5 days in hospital. My baby had lost more than 10% of her birth weight. Despite the fact that my milk was taking longer to come in (a known side effect of caesarean), despite the fact that babies born by caesarean can have artificially high weights due to maternal IV fluids, despite the fact that my baby was otherwise healthy, and despite the fact that I was in a baby-friendly hospital, we were pressured to give formula. We declined, and chose to instead top her up between feeds with expressed colostrum. Finally, she gained a little weight, and we were permitted to leave. Having heard similar stories from other Australian women, I am just grateful that we weren't threatened with having DOCS called when we refused formula.

After this experience, I knew I would never again plan a hospital birth. My husband was in full agreement, having seen how his wife and daughter were treated, placing hospital protocol ahead of all evidence and common sense. Not to mention compassion and respect.

For my next pregnancy, I planned a homebirth. My pregnancy was uneventful. I had four days of early labour. Contractions were intensifying, but never established a regular pattern (I later learned this is a common labour pattern for a posterior baby). On the fourth night, my waters broke with thick meconium. My midwife came over. The baby was in no distress, and I was 6cm. We transferred to hospital, with the intention of birthing vaginally there. Unfortunately, that was not to be. Labour stalled, I dilated no further, and the baby showed signs of tiring (limited variability). A caesarean was recommended, and agreed to, though it broke my heart.

When I became pregnant again, what was I to do? I was now in a risk category where many independent midwives would not accept me as a client, having had two previous caesareans. Yet I knew that the absolute risk of uterine rupture (the big contraindication to VBA2C let alone HBA2C) was around 0.9%. This is a similar rate to the risk of other serious complications in a 'low risk' woman.

I felt every bit as healthy as I did when I was pregnant the first time. If first time mothers are not given prophylactic caesareans to avoid the risk of placental abruption, why should I be given one to avoid the risk of uterine rupture? Because that is essentially what would happen, were I to plan a hospital birth. Why is this one risk blown out of proportion?

I don't plan any other aspect of my life based on a less than 1% chance that something could go wrong. Certainly not when I put my kids into the car, for example. That's not how I wanted to plan my birth, either. I agree that the hospital is the best place to be, should an emergency situation arise, and in an emergency, I would certainly go there. But in the absence of an emergency situation, I felt it was far more risky to treat myself as a sick person, when I was not sick. Far more likely that hospital interventions would create the emergency situation that I wanted to avoid.

That is my personal risk analysis. I know not everyone will agree with me, and of course no one has to. But the material point is that it is MY risk analysis to make. I have a right to do what I deem safest with my own body. My birth choices should not be restricted by someone else's risk analysis. If I want to birth at home with a midwife, and the midwife I engage is comfortable with my risk assessment, why should I not have that option? Why should the midwife be persecuted for supporting me, when that is precisely what I have hired her to do?

If I had cancer, I would have the right to refuse a course of chemotherapy. I would not then be denied care. Why should I be denied care because I don't wish to subject myself to hospital intervention?

Evidently, I chose to have a homebirth after two caesareans (HBA2C) and that is what I had. I had an uneventful pregnancy, and an uneventful 12 hour labour and birth. It was the most wonderful day of my life. I was blessed to have the support of two incredible independent midwives. I want to say publicly just how much I am grateful for that loving support, but I am too afraid to name them in this document.

If I was planning that HBA2C today, I would have real trouble finding support. The midwife I initially hired is no longer practising, and most Sydney midwives will not do homebirth after multiple caesareans. In some states it is getting hard to find a midwife who will support homebirth after a single previous caesarean. Not because they personally believe it is too risky, but if that birthing woman needs to transport for ANY reason, the midwife will be in the line of fire. All it takes is for a hospital to report a midwife, and her career is potentially ended. Whether or not she has done anything wrong.

HBAC has not become inherently more risky. Nor has twin birth, or breech birth, but midwives will not attend these at home any more. I have not become too high risk – but the consequences for the attending midwife, should I require hospital transfer, have become too high risk.

Why did I want so badly to birth at home? Obviously to avoid another caesarean, which would have been almost a given, were I to plan a hospital birth. A vaginal birth after two caesareans is so unheard of, that when I went to have a diaphragm fitted 8 weeks after my daughter was born, the hospital midwife who was on rotation at the Family Planning Clinic was amazed I had been able to, and she wanted to know how I achieved it. This perfectly straightforward birth. But all the reasons to avoid hospital are not what I want to focus on here.

I wanted a homebirth for the same reasons any woman does. For the sheer joy of it. Because I wanted to be treated as a healthy woman, sound of mind and body (because that's what I was). I did not want to spend my pregnancy jumping through hoops, and looking for problems, as per the medical model of antenatal care. I wanted the

assumption to be that I was healthy, until there was a reason to assume otherwise. When I went into labour, I wanted to be surrounded by people who knew about the many ways that labour can unfold, and to be under no arbitrary constraints of time. I wanted to labour unhindered. I wanted the only hands on my baby to be mine and my husband's. Once the baby was born, I wanted to be able to rest, surrounded by my family, not left alone in a hospital room while my husband looked after our other children.

And for anyone who writes off the above reasons as putting my selfish desires above the wellbeing of my baby: The main reason I wanted to birth at home is that I wanted my babies to be born gently. I did not want to be separated from them, even for a minute. I wanted their first moments in the world to be safe and warm against my chest. I truly believe that physiological birth is the best and safest way to bring a baby into the world, and that this can only happen at home.

<http://birthaction.org/risk-as-a-reducer-of-womens-informed-decision-making-and-autonomy-rights/>

<http://tinyurl.com/qbvzgbg>

<http://thederangedhousewifeonline.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/why-do-women-choose-risky-births.html>

<https://birthanarchy.com/wrong/>

<https://humanwithuterus.wordpress.com/2014/02/09/the-right-to-high-risk-homebirth/>

<http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/why-homebirth-1000-times-safer-hospital-birth-low-risk-us-women>

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# Morris James's Healing Homebirth

by Ange Milthorpe



possible (thereby facilitating a fast labour, I hoped). To do this I had to let go of a lot of my own fear - fear of experiencing trauma again; fear of a long labour; and fear of pain mainly. And I also had to find a way for my mum's fears not to negatively influence me. Mum had tried to talk me out of having a home birth the first time and I think she hoped that my experience would have made me want a hospital birth the second time. However I knew that this was a different birth and believed I could achieve it safely and naturally if I were in an environment where I felt safe and cocooned in positive support.

I 'white lied' about my due date by two weeks so that if baby was overdue my mum's fear would not ramp up (and influence my choices), as it had done with Saffy. Mum's increasing anxiety about Saffy being overdue had led me to get an acupuncturist to kickstart my labour (using electrical current). It is my belief that forcing labour to start may have played a part in my long labour and that this in turn contributed to the exhaustion and lack of reserves left to effectively expel the placenta.

This time my intention was to allow the birthing process, rather than resist the pain, and encourage my body to open to speed things up. We did a Calmbirth course and Nick and I planned to use the teachings to increase oxytocin. So I listened to my meditations nightly for months and I read Birthings magazine daily. My favourite story was Edie's Fast Birth and I read this one again and again.

## The birth of Morris James - on Good Friday

Baby's due date was 31st March and Nick and I both hoped he might come around the Easter weekend (as Nick would get a longer break from work to be with us).

At 40 weeks plus two days we were watching a heartwarming show on television and my waters broke. I had never experienced this with Saffy so I was surprised by the amount of fluid I lost throughout the night. I had mild contractions all night and I concentrated on my lower abdomen and breathed through them. I even managed to sleep for a few hours. I let Nick sleep as I knew he would need the energy to help me with the birth.

A strong surge woke me up at 4am and I remember saying to Nick that it hurt and I wanted to call my doula Bec for support. He then woke up and helped me through the surges for the rest of the morning (approximately every 30 minutes I think).



## Background - my first birth

Saffron Joni was born at home on 12th July 2011. This long (17 hours active) but empowering water birth was an amazing experience and I have many beautiful memories of it. One in particular is of the pushing stage: there we are in the dark humid room. Jai Uttal is playing soothing kirtan music on the computer and my birth team are singing along... then meeting her was one of the best moments of my life!

However shortly after the birth things went downhill. Initially I held Saffy and it was joyous: but once I got out of the pool I felt weak and nauseous (and had to hand the baby to Nick). I haemorrhaged and retained the placenta - spent hours feeling awful and eventually transferred to hospital by ambulance to have the placenta removed (where they insisted on an epidural because I had eaten) and gave me two blood transfusions.

This birth contained beautiful lessons nonetheless: I learned to ask for help as I was so weak upon return we had no choice but to openly request support. I also felt much gratitude for the hospital system and the fact I was able to experience the 'best of both worlds': we had achieved a beautiful homebirth for my beloved baby which protected her from drugs (that I know for sure I would have wanted had they been available to me) and allowed her to be born (in the caul) into a dark, nurturing, loving space. And at the same time I was appreciative of the medical support that more than likely saved my life.

## Preparation

After investigating Saffy's birth I decided that for this birth I was going to do things differently. I was going to allow my body to go into labour naturally. And I was going to encourage it to open as quickly as



Saffy woke up at about 7am and she even helped me breathe though one surge too. She was not concerned as we had read lots of home birth books together.

I half expected things to stop during the daytime (once Saffy was awake) but they didn't, instead the surges gradually got stronger and closer together so at 10am I called my mum and told her my waters had

broken and things were "on". She was very excited and said she would make the one hour drive (to collect Saffy) as soon as my stepfather Robert got home from church. I was a bit concerned that things might get a bit intense before she left (I was increasingly wanting Nick's support and attention for myself) but there was nothing I could do about it.

I rang my doula Bec at about 11.30 asking her to come and she said she would ring my midwife Rachele and tell her things had started (but that she need not come yet).

By the time my mum and Robert arrived at 12.45 pm my surges were getting quite strong and I could only get through them by leaning over our single armchair downstairs, swaying my hips and Nick breathing with me through them. There is an amusing moment I remember where I felt a contraction coming and called urgently to Nick for assistance. He ran over to me and breathed me through it while my mum watched and my stepfather looked anywhere else.

Then when it was time for Saffy to leave with her grandparents she did not want to go - Nick carried her outside crying and this made me feel really upset. Then my mum and I shared a beautiful moment because I burst into tears (triggered by Saffy's sadness) and said, "I don't want to do this"; mum hugged me and reassured me and reminded me of the beautiful baby we were soon to meet.

After they left Nick returned and started to fill the pool. Bec arrived shortly after and they took turns doing practical stuff and supporting me through surges. Hip pain began and Bec showed Nick how to lessen it by squeezing my hips together during surges. I found these sensations much harder to deal with and shortly afterwards asked to get in the pool. Bec did not say anything but I could tell from the look on her face that she thought it was too soon and labour would take forever. I didn't care what she thought and got straight in. It was divine. Such a relief. Also, the last contraction before I got in the water



had squeezed fluid all down my legs and I felt dirty so as soon as I got in the water I no longer cared about bodily fluids at all and was able to fully relax into the process.

Around this time Bec sent Rachele a text saying she should come but need not hurry. But my surges became stronger and stronger. The whole time I managed to breathe deeply and make low guttural sounds.

Nick's support through each surge was invaluable. He reminded me to breathe and I consistently had an O getting wider and wider. After about an hour in the pool Bec suggested to feel for a head. I thought she must be joking but felt inside and lo and behold felt a soft skull with downy fuzz on it. I was thrilled as I knew this meant the end was near.

I felt his shoulders turn and then out he came. Rachele called out for me to lift him out of the water but the cord was too short and I could only get him up near the surface, face down in the water. Nick told me later that Rachele pushed him out of the way to assist me and she quickly unwrapped the cord from around his neck and helped me lift him out of the water. Oh the ecstasy. Our beautiful baby boy was here. And boy did he look so much like his older sister. We stayed in the water enjoying the moment, Nick leaning over to cuddle us and Ringo the dog joined us to meet the new addition.

We got out of the pool and sat on the couch. Morris had his first feed (I let him find the nipple himself after laying him on my chest). The placenta came naturally about 60 minutes later. I was then able to drink a cup of tea and eat a hot cross bun, thrilled that we had had the perfect birth. We went to bed that night in our own bed and enjoyed the silence until Saffy came home to meet her now brother the next morning. For days Nick and I could not stop saying how perfect it was.



**Ange, Nick and Saffron** (3 years) live in Bulli with their dog Ringo. Nick (from the UK) and Ange met eight years ago at a yoga retreat in Thailand. Yoga is a shared passion. Nick also meditates daily and his newest devotion is to making/devouring fermented foods such as kefir and sauerkraut. Ange's passions include Indigenous issues (and staying in contact with her 'adopted' Aboriginal families from the Northern Territory, one Yolngu and one Anangu); walking in the rain; singing kirtan; and watching Dr Phil. Saffy loves being a mum to her dollies/babies, scootering and watching Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. Ringo loves to sleep, eat and walk in nature.



# Isabella's Birth Story

by Carmelina Bridges



From 39 weeks I'd been having tightenings, with pressure down low sometimes on my tail bone. Good prelabour and a few times we thought things might kick in. However each time once we reached midnight I knew that nothing was happening that day. I just felt within me that I'd labour through the evening and overnight, with my little girl born in the early hours of the morning, before dawn.

## Tuesday 3rd February 2015

It had been a rough night's sleep. I was waking to tightenings through the night and Lachlan and William decided not only to join us in bed but BOTH boys spent the night sunnigling me, laying on me and rubbing my belly!! Lovely that they wanted to physically be with me, but combined with the tightenings and general discomfort I knew I wasn't in an emotional place to take care of the boys. At one stage I told Cameron that he couldn't go to work today because I needed him at home.

I lay there thinking about what was happening, how this was more prelabour and how I was handling it – or not. I started getting quite upset and restless until I decided I needed to get up and call Belinda, to have her help me get my head back into a good space. This was around 4.30am.

I left the bed and went into the kitchen, started walking around the island bench and called Belinda. I explained to her how I was tired and sore and the tightenings kept coming and the boys had been touching me all night and I didn't think I could do this and... I started crying... and realised I was probably in labour. She agreed. Cameron came in worried as he'd woken up and couldn't find me. I explained to him I hadn't woken him because I didn't need him at that point (I needed Belinda) and it was best for him to get sleep so he was rested for when I did need him. Belinda told us to have some breakfast, take it easy and keep her updated as it was likely to be a long day.

We started to organise breakfast while walking through contractions, which were coming irregularly.

Cameron asked if he could time a few. The 'smart' app he was using said at one point that I wasn't in labour at all, another point that I was in transition! Which I obviously wasn't! I told him that I didn't like the timer as it made me feel like I needed to be 'performing' to a certain level to 'prove myself'. So we decided to stop using the timer and just go with it.

As we got closer to 6am when the boys usually wake up I started to get worried that I wouldn't be able to relax and focus by myself with them awake, so we decided to call Cameron's parents and Belinda.

Belinda arrived around 7am and amazingly the boys were still in our bed sleeping!

Cameron's parents arrived around 8am and the boys woke not long after that. It's like they knew to stay asleep until someone else was here! We also called our birth photographer Tiff to come around as it seemed like things were progressing smoothly. I continued to contract, irregular but strong.

Around 11.30am I was so tired I could hardly open my eyes!

Belinda suggested I lay down and have a nap as this could be my body's way of resting in preparation for labour in the evening. Belinda and Tiff went home and I had a nap. I woke around 1pm with no contractions.

The afternoon was spent pacing the house, talking to Cameron's parents with a few contractions here and there. That evening Belinda suggested we have a glass of bubbly to help relax and celebrate the last night with Isabella in my belly!

Around 10pm contractions started picking up again so we headed to bed so I could try get as much sleep before things became too much.

## Wednesday 4th February 2015

Around 4am I woke to go to the bathroom. Contractions had stopped completely and I was incredibly sad and embarrassed. Cameron woke around 6am and we had a talk. I was feeling quite low and didn't want to see or speak to anyone. He contacted Belinda and asked her to come around.

At 7am Belinda arrived and came in to have a chat. We talked about how I was feeling. I explained that I felt embarrassed that I'd asked Cameron's parents to come down and it was all just a false alarm – that I'd put them out. I explained how I didn't know what to do at this point; tell them to go home? But what if they have to turn around and come back! But what if I ask them to stay – and nothing happens! I didn't want to see them, I felt like a failure.

She asked if she could do a vaginal examination and check Isabella's positioning and my cervix – just to make sure there were no reasons labour was stopping. She checked and told me I was 2cm dilated, and my cervix was fully effaced. Isabella was in a good position, heart rate fine, nothing to worry about.

We talked about my fears. I explained how I was worried my body was broken – that it didn't know how to go into labour naturally, by itself (as my body was pushed with both Lachlan and William's births). I explained how my body not going into labour meant I felt I was getting closer to needing to go into hospital – and I didn't think I could physically walk into hospital. I felt terrified of having to go where I didn't feel safe. Belinda looked at me and told me she wasn't here to drag me to hospital. She wouldn't force me to go and at this stage there was no need for me to go so I needed to relax and push that out of my mind.

She suggested I spend the day in bed. Just relaxing and sleeping, no distractions or stress.

Cameron's parents popped their head in and said they were heading off, that it was a good practice run for how long it would take them to get here and they'd chat to us later! Cameron's mum said if we needed them to turn around at any point that was fine. Belinda told them that she was happy everything was fine with me and baby, that there was nothing to be concerned about, and things would most likely pick up over the next few days.

I posted in two Facebook groups about how I was feeling, and that I was pulling away to focus on rebuilding my positive head space.

I was encouraged and supported by all the girls in the groups. Although I didn't respond, reading their words of love and support really helped.

I stayed in bed all morning, ate breakfast, had some tea, watched Ever After and slept. I didn't think too much about labour, just about my baby girl and how wonderful it would be when she was in my arms.

Around 1.30pm contractions started back up. Cameron took Lachlan to kindy and William to the park. I got up and turned my labour music on and started to walk through the contractions when needed. They were still irregular but starting to get stronger. When Cameron came home with the boys at 4.30pm contractions were starting to get quite painful and Cameron suggested I hop in the shower.

I laboured in the shower while Cameron did the nighttime routine. Contractions were coming irregularly but strong and without much break. The shower was helping, but I started to worry about how I was going to handle this strength with little break for the next 12+hrs.

Around 6.30pm Cameron encouraged me to lay down in bed. Although I was worried this may stall my labour again I decided that I needed to at least slow things down just to get a break. I managed to doze here and there until contractions became too strong. I got up around 8pm and wandered in the kitchen nibbling on some food and neatening up.

Around 10pm we decided to watch a movie to try take my mind off things. I chose About Time (fitting title actually – haha) and we lay down in bed to watch it. As the movie went on the contractions became stronger and stronger. We started to pause the movie during them as the movie was no longer a distraction and I needed to concentrate. I wasn't able to lay down any more so I put the exercise ball up on the bed to lean on.

I was worried Lachlan would come in while I was labouring (he usually joins us in bed around midnight) and didn't want to labour with him right there.

Around 12am I started getting a bit teary as the contractions were becoming quite sharp and achy. I decided I wanted Belinda to come and it was time to call Cameron's parents again.

I tried to watch the remainder of the movie as there was only 20 minutes left but wasn't able to so we stopped the movie and moved into my birth room.

Cameron turned my fairy lights on, birth music on, put lavender and orange oil in my burner and started to put hot water in the pool. I contracted with him moving from standing to kneeling on the bed. Contractions were still coming irregularly but strong.

Belinda arrived around 2am as I was kneeling on the bed. She asked me if I'd had any moments where I hadn't wanted or been able to talk – I told her no, I'd been talking to Cameron the whole time!

Around 2.15am as I was contracting kneeling on the bed I felt a pop and warm fluid and even though I was mid contraction I was overwhelmed with happiness and looked up, yelling, "My waters have broken!" and couldn't help but smile and laugh – even though the loss of focus made that contraction a bit harder! For me, the fact that my waters had broken completely by themselves told me that MY BODY WAS NOT BROKEN!!! I was definitely in labour, labour was not going to stop this time, and my body had done it ALL BY ITSELF!!! Until that point I hadn't realised just how much this had upset me!

Cameron helped me get off the bed so I could go to the bathroom, and on my way contractions started coming even faster and harder than before. I asked if I could go in the pool and said it was time to call the photographer back. The time between going to the

bathroom and getting in the pool was hard!!

Contractions were really intense with little break between them. I started to lose my focus and became a bit upset.

Finally I hopped in the pool and found the warmth quite relieving.

Cameron hopped in with me and continued to talk to me and guide me through contractions. It was some time after I'd hopped in the pool Lachlan woke up and got into our bed. He walked past us and was in our room right next door to where I was birthing yet didn't stir!

I haven't given much detail to this point but need to stop to describe the support Cameron was for me through all this time. He was amazing! Through contractions he was there, holding me, kissing me, walking with me, rocking with me, touching me, whatever I needed he was there. He also helped me keep focused. He'd remind me to relax my shoulders, to open my mouth, to breathe. He'd quote affirmations to me reminding me I could do this, that only one muscle needed to be working, to work with my body not against it. He was amazing and I love him so much for supporting me in exactly the way I needed him to. I can only imagine how hard it must be to see someone you love in pain, and all you want to do is take that pain away, to make it better. And knowing that there are ways in hospital to take that pain away, yet never mention it. To respect me and support me, to love me and help guide me to the birth that he knew I wanted and needed. To me that shows such love for me.

I am forever grateful for him and the part he played! I truly feel this was our birth, the birth of our baby. While I did the hard physical work, mentally and emotionally he was as much a part of this birth as I was.

In the water I continued to contract. I found it was easiest if I lay forward, with my legs froggy and my head resting on the side of the pool. With the rise and fall of the contractions I could feel the pain in my lower part of my uterus the most. I struggled a bit, questioning why it had to hurt so much, telling Cameron I couldn't do this again, we couldn't have any more babies. He said ok, and a part of me knew I was in transition. This was the part of birth I feared the most. After William's induced birth, where I'd lost control during transition and experienced pain and fear that scared me, I was worried about my ability to cope and handle transition again. I was expecting this birth to be longer than with William as it wasn't induced – this to me meant transition would be longer.

I was getting little to no break in between contractions. There were moments of still where I'd rest. Sometimes I'd doze, though a small part of my brain always remained aware of what was going on. Sometimes I'd gaze at my affirmation wall letting my eyes fall on ones that I needed in that moment.





In that moment, when I opened my eyes, its like a cloud was lifted.

It was like I'd been climbing a mountain, which had slowly become covered in fog. I kept climbing as it became steeper and steeper and was slowly giving up believing I was only half way, that I still had hours ahead of me. In that moment I opened my eyes, the fog disappeared and I realised I was at the top of the mountain, and had probably been there for some time.

A split second was all it took, I knew it was time to work with my baby, I knew it was time for her to be born. Apparently by my midwife notes this was around 4.15am; only two hours after my waters broke! I instinctively moved into a squatting position, left ankle under my bum, right foot on the ground. My right hand cupped her little head and I could feel her there and my perineum.

As each contraction came I pushed gently with it, feeling and in my mind seeing my baby come closer to being born, stretching the skin, but knew it was not yet time to push her out. I moved and worked with my body seeing her in my mind's eye move down and up, in and out, stretching and preparing to be born.

I had no idea of the time that was passing, I was so deep inside my body, connected with my baby that it didn't matter. I came up out of my depths for a moment to ask that Lachlan and William be woken and come in to see their sister be born, then went back down inside. At another point I took Cameron's hand and guided him to touch Isabella's head; asked if he'd felt and then pretty much pushed his hand away so I could sink back inside.

This time, for me, was amazing. There was still pain, but it was more power. I felt so good. With one contraction I felt it was time to birth my baby's head so I pushed and felt her be born, and it was a good feeling. The outside aware part of my mind had been reminding me the ring of fire might be coming, to bear with it, but honestly I don't remember it at all! I know the sensation of birthing her head was intense but I don't recall any overwhelming unbearable pain.

After her head was birthed I felt it was time to relax a little. I leant my body back to show everyone her head was here and lay against the wall of the pool for a bit. During this time I glanced up and saw Cameron's parents holding Lachlan and William in the door way. They were there, they were seeing their sister be born. I closed my eyes again and just felt her in me. She was not still!! She was wriggling and turning!

It was an odd sensation, uncomfortable, but obviously what she needed to be doing! It felt like at some points she was stretching her legs out, pushing her feet up under my ribs!!

I didn't feel any contractions during this time, no urge to push so just rested. Cameron told me after it looked like I'd gone to sleep!

Belinda said it was time to push, it was time to birth her body. This part was hard for me, I had to try to focus on pushing without contractions. It was a bit difficult to work my body but after what I think was two pushes she was born and I lifted her to my chest! 4.48am!!

It was amazing!! I did it!!! She was here! She didn't cry much, but Belinda said she was perfectly fine! Lachlan was practically jumping to hop in the pool (we'd told him he could after she was born) so Cameron's parents stripped him down and put him in. He was amazed. The look on his face, the emotion coming from his little body, the way he gently touched her head and kissed her! He was so happy. As he walked towards Cameron he slipped and went for a dip! No one but me noticed! I caught him with my leg, lifted him up as I said, "Lachlan's gone under the water;" which everyone then noticed, but he came up grinning and gave Cameron a big hug!

In between one set of contractions my eyes fell on an affirmation I'd happened to put at perfect eye level while in the pool. It read, "My body is made to give birth, nice and easy." I glowered at it and said, "That one's a lie." Everyone was like, "What? Which one?" I pointed and said, "That one! This is not easy!" which made everyone laugh! I think I needed that, it helped lighten the mood a bit!

Belinda at one stage suggested I have a feel and see if I could feel Isabella's head, I had a tentative feel and could just feel 'squishy' but no head. Contractions were still coming hard and fast and I started to lose my control. I started to scream through the contractions instead of keeping my voice low, I could feel I was building tension in the upper half of my body instead of focusing lower, but I couldn't help it, I thought this was going to be going on for hours and I was doubting myself. The pain was becoming too much and I was crying out to make it stop.

Belinda started talking to me. She said if I wanted we could take the pain away. I could get out of the pool, hop in the car, we could drive to hospital, go into emergency, wait in the waiting room, go in and be assessed and request an epidural... but did I really want to do that?! I was shaking my head, no that was the last thing I wanted, I felt like asking for an epi just because sometimes it helps to verbalise but that part of me that stays aware and observes me in all things knew that I really didn't want an epi.

I was exhausted and saying, "I can't do this, I can't do this," when Belinda leaned on the side of the pool, pointed her finger at me and said in a low serious voice, "Yes you can!"

For the first time in a while I opened my eyes and looked straight back at her. In a millisecond I considered whether I was going to be defiant and growl back at her "No I CAN'T!!" or if I wanted to admit to her I knew I could but it just hurt so much... But I never got to reply.

In that moment, when I opened my eyes, its like a cloud was lifted.

It was like I'd been climbing a mountain, which had slowly become covered in fog. I kept climbing as it became steeper and steeper and was slowly giving up believing I was only half way, that I still had hours ahead of me. In that moment I opened my eyes, the fog disappeared and I realised I was at the top of the mountain, and had probably been there for some time.

For the first time in a while I opened my eyes and looked straight back at her. In a millisecond I considered whether I was going to be defiant and growl back at her "No I CAN'T!!" or if I wanted to admit to her I knew I could but it just hurt so much... But I never got to reply.

Around this time Cameron asked Belinda about my blood loss as I had a bit of a gush. Lachlan was taken out so we could observe as that first gush was the separation bleed. It didn't seem to slow so Belinda asked me to hop out and onto the bed so she could monitor the blood better.

I started to feel quite dizzy and Belinda told me she wasn't happy with the amount of blood I was losing so although it wasn't my preference she felt strongly I should have the syntocinon to assist with birthing the placenta and clamping down my uterus. I agreed and she got to work. It was painful but needed to be done. This was around 5.20am.

After everything had settled down Belinda asked if Cameron would like to cut the cord. He said he wasn't feeling too good after the lack of sleep and the sight of the blood so he didn't want to. Belinda asked if we'd like to get Lachlan to! So Cameron went and asked him and he came in beaming. He cut the cord and then hopped on the bed and had some snuggles with us!

At 4.48am on the 5th February 2015 surrounded by love and support, I worked with my body to birth my baby in the way nature intended! I proved to myself my body is not broken, and I am a strong and capable woman!

This birth for me has not only healed damage done to my heart and mind from my first two births, it has also undone damage done to my heart and mind from my childhood!

I am so grateful I chose this path for me. I am so grateful my husband agreed, supported me through his own fears and in the lead up to the birth encouraged me in my moments of doubt, telling me I NEEDED to birth at home! I am so grateful for our midwife, for her teaching and encouraging Cameron and I in the lead up to birth. Helping us believe and trust in our baby and my body. Creating a safe space for us to birth in. I feel she was the protector of our space, allowing us to do what we needed to do, guiding and supporting when we asked for it!



**Carmelina** is stay at home mum to three children: Lachlan (4yrs); William (2.5yrs); and Isabella (3 months) She and her husband Cameron are over the moon with how their homebirth experience went and have decided if they have any more children, they will all be born at home!

# Birth of Amber Love

by Melanie Fogarty



Forty one weeks were approaching and emotions were high. Ten years prior while planning my first baby's birth I had fantasised about my perfect birth for me and my baby. It was to birth in pure love, to be in a place I felt so calm and safe, somewhere I could let go and surrender to birth. Unfortunately my first two babies' births were quite traumatic, affecting both them and me. I spent a lot of time working on myself and what I would do for my future births before falling pregnant with my third. In fact it was exactly 10 years since the day I conceived my first baby that I birthed Amber.

## Pre-labour Begins

I woke a day shy of 41 weeks with familiar pains, pre labour. I had actually never gone into labour before, so although some women get frustrated with pre labour (for very good reason) I welcomed it. I welcomed every wave of pain. As the day went on we treated it like any other day. In fact after a few really emotionally tough days for me it was the best I had felt in two weeks. The night before I cried so hard that I could not cry any more, I was empty and it was nice. It was as though I had truly let go. I surrendered to whatever was to come and went in to a place of true being. I just WAS.

We locked up the house and I rocked on the birth ball most of the morning while watching comedies with my love Chris. Waves were coming around every 20-30 minutes, which isn't out of the norm for pre labour. So I just went with it with no thought. We got dressed up and headed in to town for some Asian food. We sat and ate together, laughing, getting that oxytocin flowing. Of course joking that maybe I was in very early labour. Who cared, we were just loving the moments together.

Around 7 pm that night my little family headed to the supermarket where we got some supplies to make fish and chips. I had an intense craving for crispy battered fish! We had a lovely time in the kitchen making a mess with flour and eggs, listening to music and talking with my older children over our dinner about the coming birth of Amber.

They were very well prepared to be a part of her birth and looked forward to meeting their little sister. Across from our kitchen sat the birth pool, in a beautiful little spot in which I had spent the past few weeks envisioning her birth in. The pool remained empty, anticipating the moment in which it would be filled to welcome new life in to. The same pool a friend birthed in a year prior, and the same pool my goddaughter was born into three months later.

At 9 pm I decided to go for a nice warm bath and relax. At 10pm it felt as though my waters were leaking into the bath so I hopped out. As I went to the toilet and wiped I discovered I was having a bloody show. I'd never had one before, so the excitement was welcome as I witnessed my body working. At this point I texted my two Doulas and Birth photographer and just let them know to have a sleep in case this turned in to anything. At one point I actually called one of my Doulas while having some unpleasant period pain that felt like wind pains. I was laughing nervously and asking her what I had done to myself. I think I was in denial that something I wholeheartedly wanted was actually happening!

At 11pm I was walking out of my bedroom and I felt my waters give way. I texted my photographer as she was eagerly awaiting news and let her know my waters had just gone. She told me she was on her way!! Labour hadn't established yet and I worried she would be coming too early and would burn herself out, however I did have a spare room set up for my birth team to rest as I believed I was in for a long labour being my first actual labour. It turns out she came in perfect timing.

At around 12am my photographer arrived. I didn't call on my Doulas as I let them sleep. It was a cool winter night with slight rain outside. It was the perfect weather to be either sleeping, or birthing a baby. I walked, swayed, joked and skyped my mum. The kids shortly woke to see what the commotion was about, then off they went in to the spare room to watch a movie. It wasn't until my sister in law was timing my contractions with me that I realised that I may really be in labour. I was still able to talk and joke between but decided maybe it was time to call upon my Midwife to let her know I was in early stages of labour. With just over an hour's drive for my Doulas I gave them a call at 1:30 am to let them know to maybe think about getting dressed and heading up at some point.

## Active Labour Begins

At some point around 1:45am I told everyone to 'stop', they needed to be quiet and let me gather myself inside. On later reflection this is when I was moving in to active labour. It was as if a light was switched on in my inner core, telling me to become one with my baby and ask for those around me to simply protect my space and calm any excitement. I moved on to the ball after attempting to use heat packs on my lower back and just getting cranky that Chris couldn't get them in a decent spot. At 2am between contractions I peeked up between my lashes and saw my midwife walk in ever so quietly. I thought to myself, 'I can let go now'. She walked over and spoke with me about how I was feeling. I felt so at peace and so relaxed. I had American Indian music playing and was so taken away deeply by this. The pain was there, yet not intense.

I spent most of my time on the ball, it was bliss! There were times I was going to the toilet and sitting alone thinking to myself how amazed I was that I was actually doing this! I felt I was rocking this birth so easily!

Somewhere around 3am while on the ball I briefly opened my eyes to see my two Doulas walk in. My support was complete! I was touched on the belly, stroked on the head and whispered words of encouragement throughout, it was truly bliss!

*"My birth was the most incredibly healing and empowering experience of my life. From having 2 absolutely unnecessary & traumatic caesareans, to my Daughter's birth where I felt so powerful and supported. I healed that day, as a woman and most importantly, as a mother."*



At one point I was being sick and worried more about everyone seeing my dinner on its return! One of my Doula's tied my hair up during these moments and when my returning dinner was over I went off to the bathroom to fix my hair! I tied it up all nicely again and checked my appearance in the mirror. I laugh now because I did think I was in early labour still, yet showing signs of being around seven centimetres (I had no VEs) and caring what I looked like should have been the last thing on my mind!

The pool was filled by my birth support as I rocked on the ball. I truly took only one contraction at a time and just enjoyed the time between blissfully zoning to my music. Somewhere between 3.30am and 4am I got in to the pool – oh the bliss!! I was having some really bad hip pain by this point and had my husband on one side and my Doula on the other giving me double hip squeezes, singly! Those squeezes took all of my pain away. There was a time in my labour I was leaning on the side of the pool in my zone then next minute a feeling of absolute euphoria took over my whole body. It was a pure rush of oxytocin that was flowing through me. I had a massive smile on my face as my whole body was overcome with this amazing feeling. There was no pain; it was joy that radiated my whole being. This was just before transition hit and I began shaking violently.

At transition I shook so hard and thought to myself, 'This must be transition coming'. Yes, of course I had my own Doula hat on! Through my whole labour it was as if I was observing my own behaviour and identifying what could be taking place. I hear this can be common with women who work as a birth worker.

As I hit transition I thought to myself, 'Shit just got real'. I actually believed that despite my body showing all of the signs for transition that it was only now that active labour had begun. I counted out time and guessed at 11am I would be giving birth as I had another 6hrs to go. This was the moment I was thinking I should go to hospital as anyone who had ever given birth without drugs was crazy! It was too much to get out of the pool and dressed to go get any kind of drugs anyway, not that I actually would have. I let out a 'I cannot do this', knowing full well I could and that I was, but I needed to voice this so I could move on. One minute after 'shit got real' it passed.

I heard myself getting grunty and feelings of pushing overcame me. Small pushes as I roared deep from within. It felt amazing!! There was no pain any more, it was purely surges that pulsed through my body. There was a point I had a feel inside and felt my babies head. I exclaimed to everyone 'I can feel her head!' I was in denial. I think I was in denial through my whole labour that I was actually doing this and that I would birth my baby this day.

After a little bit of cervix was moved the real pushes took over. There is no greater power within the body than a woman who is pushing her baby out. The force was uncontrollable. So raw and powerful! Soon I was feeling the 'ring of fire'. Yes it burned, but only about five centimetres of the area did. I held on as I gave it my all. I pushed my baby into the pool with such force that she shot out with an arm fist pumping the water in great victory that we did it! She was here!

### Meeting my Baby

At 5.45 am I pulled my baby to my chest from the water. She was so alert and calm as we lay there taking each other in. There was not a sound. Outside the morning sun was coming up over the mountains after a night of beautiful gentle rain. The candles burned down until they were almost non-existent any more, and my music had hushed not long before Amber's birth. My two older children watched on in amazement as they took everything in. The morning air was crisp outside, yet the warmth inside my house radiated with the love that poured through my heart.

We soon got out of the pool and onto a mattress where I began feeding Amber, surrounded by my husband, children and wonderful women. I sat next to my midwife and told her I did it! I actually did it! Tears of joy were shared between us; it was one of the most heart filling moments between myself and her.

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from <http://beyonidthewillow.com/2014/03/30/birth-of-amber-love/>

**Melanie** is a mother of 3 who live in Far North Queensland with her husband Chris. Melanie is the founder and creator of Beyond The Willow Tree, creating precious memories of pregnancy, birth and Motherhood into keepsake jewellery. Which was inspired by her HBA2C.



# My Journey of Faith After Our Precious Prem

by Jane Eager



“Birth takes a woman’s deepest fears about herself and shows her that she is stronger than them”

The story of the birth of our precious fourth babe starts with the birth of our precious third babe, Amelia some three years earlier.

We had planned another beautiful homebirth and I spent 30 weeks daydreaming of this beautiful event of welcoming her into our lives. At 30 weeks however my whole world fell apart when out of the blue my waters broke. My hopes and dreams for another empowering birth in our lounge room was suddenly replaced with a transfer to a tertiary centre in Sydney. It was the most challenging and lonely time of my life being so far away from my family and my home. I was scared for my baby. I went from being a holistically cared for woman to all of a sudden just a vessel. The medical staff would come and go. Nobody would speak to me, but rather speak at me while looking at the CTG.

Her birth was actually quite beautiful. The Midwife had left the room and while she was gone I birthed Amelia straight into my own hands supported by those of my husband (Nick). It was just the three of us, a flicker of beauty amongst the heartache. But then a moment or two later she was gone, taken from me so swiftly to the NICU.

A mother should never have to see her newborn like that, tubes and cords coming from her moments old babe. I asked Nick to go to the NICU to be with Amelia. I sat in that delivery suite all by myself for what seemed like an eternity. The Midwife didn’t return to provide

care to me. I looked out the window blankly, all alone. I didn’t feel like a Mum. I grieved for my pregnancy and home birth. It was a year filled with anxiety and worry. She was perfectly healthy but I was a mess. Whenever I spoke about my experience to anyone I would choke up. My eyes would well with tears. I felt like someone was strangling me and I couldn’t share what was really on my heart. I swore that I would NEVER have another baby.

Three years later and a little surprise package was growing in my belly. Nick was excited right from the word go. He has been my rock, never faltering in his faith that this was going to be a healing experience for me. After lots of tears when we found out I knew it was time to heal from Amelia’s birth, to face my fears and step out in faith for a beautiful full term healthy babe to be born in our lounge room... this is the story of my transformation.

At six, eight and 10 weeks I had episodes of really heavy bleeding. We went for a scan to see where all the bleeding was coming from. In that very moment, of seeing a six week old heart beating I fell completely and utterly head over heels in love. This was a precious little gift and I knew God’s blessings were upon me.

I told one of my dear friends about the bleeding and my uncertainty with the pregnancy and being frightened about having another prem. She spoke so many words of encouragement into me. She said that she believed this was going to be an incredibly healing journey. A few weeks later Nick and I went to see another dear friend to ask her if she would be our home birth Midwife. She too said that she believed that this would be an incredibly healing journey for me.

Nick posed the question: If this is going to be a healing experience, how can we make it just that? What things can we control and choose to do differently? That question had me soul searching. What was it about Amelia’s birth that broke my heart? What can I do differently this time around? How can I accept things that I don’t have control over?

Christmas day was upon us and I was 12 weeks pregnant. We decided to share our exciting news with the kids and our family, a beautiful Christmas gift. Everyone was excited. I said to Mum and Nan that if this babe turns out to be a girl her name is to be Faith, as this was a journey of stepping out in faith into the unknown, frightened and scared but standing steadfast in my belief that God was holding me. My sister in law handed me a beautifully wrapped Christmas gift. It was a gorgeous pregnant figurine. She had no idea that we were pregnant, but thought that I would like it. The words written on the figurine rang true with me and I read them regularly throughout my pregnancy.

## *New Life*

*While she held so much hope and so many dreams  
for the miracle of life that was on its way,  
her heart was expanding in ways she never knew possible.  
She could hardly wait to meet their sweet spirit.*

After soul searching the reasons why I struggled with our prem journey were numerous. I felt cheated out of my experience. My waters broke completely out of the blue, 30 weeks just wasn’t long enough to enjoy those beautiful little kicks, I didn’t have any photographs taken and I wasn’t prepared for a hospital birth let alone a transfer to a tertiary hospital. I didn’t have a chance to ‘nest’, there was no celebration or time to be encircled by my birthing friends. I was never given a reason for my waters breaking early so that played on my mind too.

By far the biggest thing was having Amelia taken from me moments after she was born, I felt empty and so alone after her birth with no baby in my arms. I struggled to bond and to feel like a Mum. I felt guilty, was it something that I had done to cause her to come early?

My heart said that this is where I needed to start my healing. Accepting that the baby has a role to play in his/her pregnancy and birth journey and that it wasn't my fault. I have no idea why my waters broke but there was obviously a reason. Perhaps she was in danger and my body did exactly what it needed to, to birth a healthy baby.

I wanted to do a fear release ceremony. I envisaged a beautiful rock platform overlooking one of my favourite beaches so Nick and I went off in search and found the perfect spot. While I was on top of the platform enjoying the beautiful view my hubby yelled out to me. He was down below the rock and said 'Come down here babe and make sure you bring your camera'. So onto my hands and knees I went and bush bashed my way down. He was standing in this incredibly beautiful sandstone cave. It was truly stunning. It was later to become an analogy for me that there is so much beauty underneath the surface, if you are to take the time to go in search of it.

We headed back up to the top and I wrote down all of my fears in chalk on the platform. Nick and I discussed each fear and then he did EFT (emotional freedom technique) on each point. When I came to a place of peace we would move onto the next one. He was the perfect person to journey with me through this. He was the only person who saw the heartache I went through and he knew exactly what I needed to overcome this sadness that I had been holding onto for so long. In a powerful gesture I poured water and washed away each of my fears before moving onto my affirmations.

One by one I wrote my affirmations down, how I wanted this to be a completely different journey. Nick then got me to yell out at the top of my voice each affirmation. I am usually a quiet person however yelling these words out was so freeing and powerful. I got to the one about our home birth, "Our baby will be born in our lounge room". I struggled with this one. From past experience I know that crappy things happen. I couldn't be sure that this was going to occur but I so wanted it too. I said to Nick, 'this one is all about faith' so digging deep I yelled it out with all the passion and certainty I could muster.

That day was so incredibly healing. It was an emotionally intimate day to spend with my precious husband. I was finally feeling free!!

That night I had an intense dream. I was standing in the beautiful sandstone cave and this massive snake slithered past me and curled up next to me. I'm not scared of snakes but I felt unsettled by it being there. The next morning Nick asked me how I was feeling. I said to him I was feeling incredible. I was finally walking around with a sense of freedom and excitement however we are NEVER going back to that cave. I shared with him my dream and he said to me that snakes are a powerful symbol of healing and transformation, all of a sudden my dream made sense. God was showering me with all sorts of signs

that this journey was going to be so very different.

It was around this time that I met a gorgeous friend for brunch. She handed me a little gift. I unwrapped it carefully and inside was a bracelet. I automatically welled with tears when I read the word..... 'Faith.'

Along with my fear release ceremony there were some other things that I wanted to do during my pregnancy to mark this as a completely different journey. I spent time with God, listening to His quiet whispers gaining strength from His word. I journalled my journey, and used writing as a way of healing. I shared with strong women friends my fears and didn't hesitate to share my need for encouragement. Being a photographer I used my camera as a way of documenting my journey. I did a lot of self portraits and when that wasn't possible I got Nick or the kids to photograph me. Nick is a Naturopath so I followed his advice along with another dear friend who also has a background in naturopathy. I made sure I ate well, took my supplements and really nurtured myself.

I was feeling really happy and well. All of a sudden it was the 14th of February, the eve of Amelia's birthday. I went to bed feeling quite heavy hearted. In the wee hours of the 15th of February deep in sleep I woke myself sobbing and sobbing and sobbing as I recalled the shock of my waters breaking early. Nick rolled over and embraced me and said, "It's ok, things are going to be different this time." I looked at my watch and it was 2.45am, the exact time to the minute three years earlier that the Doctor came into my hospital room and said I needed to be induced ASAP.

All of a sudden a sense of peace came over me and I started to drift off back to sleep. I was weightless, drifting on a rug up in the air. Up and down I gently flew, over the crests and valleys. Off in the distance was a candle and a group of people surrounding it. A sacred event was taking place. It felt warm and tender. So much joy and love was enveloping it. The words 'Faith, Hope, Trust and Journey' came to my mind.

I woke up the next morning feeling so drained. The deep seated intense sobbing wore me out. I decided to journal my dream. As I wrote about it an interpretation came to me. The peacefulness that I felt was God who was with me along my journey of highs and lows throughout my pregnancy. The light was the flame of Christ, the Holy Spirit providing warmth and encouragement through works such as dreams and visions. The sacred event in the distance was my upcoming birth and welcoming our precious babe in our lounge room. I drew the dream and held that peace and joy close to my heart for the rest of my pregnancy.

The 29/30 week mark came during the school holidays. I was all of a sudden frozen with fear as Amelia's gestation came. I purposefully acknowledged and validated those feelings. I think it is perfectly normal for a prem Mum to experience those feelings at the same gestation her prem babe arrived. I found myself needing solitude





during that period. I sought refuge in the peace and quiet and sat in God's presence in the lounge room where I envisaged our birth to take place. It was during this time that Nick brought me a beautiful card. It said 'Faith' on the front and the words

*'God is with you, for you, behind you, ahead of you.  
And even if you lose your way for a bit,  
Even if you grow weary,  
even if you don't know which direction to go at times,  
His purpose will prevail.  
So move forward in faith woman of courage  
And know that love goes with you all the way.'*

I loved the bit about losing my way and growing weary. At this time I was weary but that was ok. God was carrying me through the emotional hurdle.

Thirty three weeks and my soul was dancing and my spirit singing. I felt so incredibly joy filled at the thought of what was ahead of us. Throughout my pregnancy I felt a strong sense to be encircled by like minded women so I planned a mother blessing and invited a few of my dear friends along. I purposefully invited strong, inspirational women to this this evening, many of whom I had photographed their births and have become friends with.

I am not usually one to be the centre of attention however I loved every minute of the evening. I found it to be such an important part of my pregnancy to be surrounded by so many encouraging words coming from women who inspire me. They hennaed my belly with the vision from my dream- the light of Christ guiding my journey, the Holy Spirit revealing God to me through dreams and visions on this healing journey. We went up to the waterfall the following day and took some photos of my belly. As we crossed a little bridge a snake slithered through the water straight in front of us... another snake, another sign of healing and transformation. I asked the women at my Mother blessing to bring along a decorated square of calico expressing their personal words of encouragement and blessing for the remainder of my journey. Two of my gorgeous friends sewed this all together as a birth quilt and it hung in my birth space.

The following day I was sitting on the lounge enjoying a concert. Our girls love to dance with their Daddy and while I was watching them I had a strong vision of there being a third little girl named 'Faith' who was dancing too. I wept as I daydreamed. I felt that we were having a little boy but it was a lovely vision to enjoy.

I continued to feel fantastic, well, healthy and excited. Every day was a bonus and every kick or uncomfortable nights sleep I embraced with open arms. I was 34+4 weeks pregnant and like any other night we headed off to bed. In the early hours of the morning I was woken by a warm gush of fluid that soaked the bed, I yelled out with fear and sadness, "NO, my waters have broken again."

In that moment all hope of a homebirth left me. I was anxious and worried, I felt hopeless. I thought I knew what this meant. A medicalised hospital birth and my baby taken from me and sent to special care. It was 4am and I rang Mum and Dad to come and be with the kids. I didn't even have to speak, Dad answered and said, "We are on our way sweetheart."

My bloods, swabs and CTG were completely normal. The medical team said I needed to stay for 72 hours and if I didn't go into labour they would let me go home and induce me at 36 weeks. I was so emotional the first day of my admission. My head needed time to catch up with what my body had done. Mum and Dad came up to the hospital to visit. They had been praying for me daily and Mum said, "Just don't give up hope of your homebirth." I laughed it off thinking she was crazy. I was 34+5 weeks pregnant, there was no way I'd be having a homebirth.

Tuesday came and went and Wednesday arrived. I felt so at peace. I was still pregnant, the liquor was clear, bub was moving, the CTG was fine, I was well. Later that evening my parents came to visit again.

Mum began to tear up as she spoke to me. She said that she believed with all her heart that God would answer my prayers for a beautiful homebirth. "Just don't give up hope," she said. "Sometimes our faith is tested, stand firm in your belief." Mum spoke directly to my soul and I knew that the words that came out of her mouth were from God. I started to entertain the idea, perhaps this still is possible. I was discharged home on Thursday.

The next week was the longest of my life. I was discharged from hospital having to return for regular CTGs, and bloods. I spent my days at home in the peace and quiet while Nick took over all of the domestic chores. When I felt anxious I'd ask myself, "Is the liquor clear? Is the baby moving? Is my temp fine? Do I feel well?" If I could answer yes to all of those questions I knew everything was fine. It was just a waiting game.

My Midwife was in Prague at the ICM conference. She was due back on Wednesday morning the day that I was 36 weeks. Prior to her leaving the country she had jokingly told the baby that he/she could be born that Wednesday morning once she was home. That gave me something to aim for; I desperately wanted her to be with us after she had so beautifully encouraged me from the word go.

One evening during this period Nick and I were watching TV together. I was reflecting on the scripture Mum had given me several months earlier: I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her heart.

The wilderness was alive and well, I was in the midst of it and those words that Mum spoke to me in hospital were directly from God, speaking tenderly to my heart. I knew in that very moment that I was going to be birthing at home just as I had envisaged.

I was 35+6 and needed to go back to the hospital for further bloods etcetera. My Midwife that I had had for Amelia's home birth showed up out of the blue. It was SO fantastic to see her. I asked her opinion on having a 36 weeker at home. She confirmed my own thoughts and said that in hospital you'd be continuously monitored in labour and then the baby would be regularly checked for any signs of infection. She said if I went ahead with my homebirth to make sure I feed the baby regularly and check her temp/resps 4/24 to pick up on any infection from the prolonged ruptured membranes. I instinctively knew that my baby was well and I was more than happy to stay at home. My bloods, swab and CTG were all perfect.

I was now 36 weeks and in the early hours of Wednesday the 11th of June I woke to some niggles. They were intense but only coming every half hour or so. My Midwife's plane had been delayed by 12 hours;

originally she was due to arrive home Wednesday morning but now it wasn't until Wednesday evening. I told my body to stop however I am also a big believer that the baby knows exactly when he/she needed to be born and to go with it. I contacted another dear friend who is a very experienced homebirth Midwife and asked her what she was doing in the morning. Lucky for us she was free and said it would be an honour to attend our birth. I will always feel a great sense of gratitude to her for saying yes to us.

We got the kids off to school at 8am and by 9am the tightenings were becoming more intense so we asked Mum and Dad to come and get Amelia. They arrived and we chatted at the door. I felt like my body was holding back until Nick and I were alone and sure enough after they left I was in labour. The tightenings were coming hard and fast; it was intense. I floated off into labour land while Nick was ringing our Midwife to come. I felt safe with just Nick there. It was like de ja vu from Amelia's birth but this time I was exactly where I wanted to be. Everything was perfect.

I was leaning over our lounge the exact same place that our second child was born six years earlier. I kept saying to myself, 'God has got this, I've done it before I can do it again.'

Before I knew it a little head was born into my hands. I could hear Nick taking some photos while next to me.

The next tightening was starting to build and I said 'Get ready to catch' and sure enough both of us caught our precious babe together.

A few moments later our Midwife arrived and then the kids with Mum and Dad. We looked down to see what we had and to my great surprise we had another beautiful daughter. It went without saying, her name was to be Faith, Faith Margaret Grace our precious little gift from God.

Birth DOES matter. The way we are cared for and the way we are spoken to while we birth our babies lays a foundation for strong relationships. Women hold their birthing day close to their hearts forever, the way they are treated is never forgotten. Three years ago, I gave Amelia my whole self, I could not have done a better job of nurturing her and adoring her. It was an incredibly difficult journey being a mum to a preemie babe but we made it through together. A deep sense of gratitude has come upon me as I have bathed in the delight of my most beautiful, healing journey of Faith. I opened my self up for the possibilities. God revealed himself to me in ways I never dreamed of.

I have been blessed beyond measure and am incredibly grateful to my four amazing children who have all taught me the strength I have within me and the abounding love I have around me :-)

*Jane lives on the Central Coast of NSW with her incredible husband Nick and 4 precious munchkins. She is living her dream as the principle photographer behind 'Jane McCrae Photography'. A passionate, internationally award winning birth and motherhood photographer.*



# Merchandise

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round neck, short sleeves  
003BT Price: \$16.50

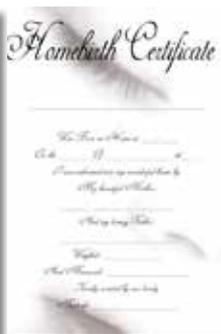


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BABY T-SHIRT**  
Purple with white print  
Sizes 00, 0 and 2  
100% cotton t-shirt,  
round neck, short sleeves  
001BT Price: \$16.50

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**MANDUCA BABY  
CARRIER**  
Made from organic cotton  
and hemp. Available in 8  
different colours.  
Great features include inbuilt  
newborn insert and extra  
long hip strap.  
Price: \$159



**HOMEBIRTH CERTIFICATE**  
A personalised Homebirth Certificate is a  
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baby face as a background. Matte photo finish.  
Space for baby's name, birth date, weight, height,  
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Fine art print by  
Chrissy Butler  
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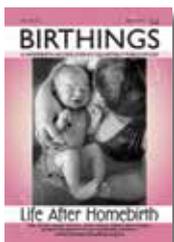


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Cards and envelopes use  
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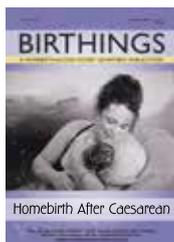


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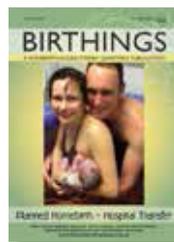
## BACK ISSUES OF BIRTHINGS



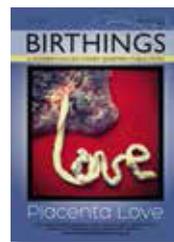
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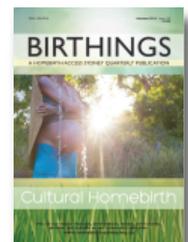
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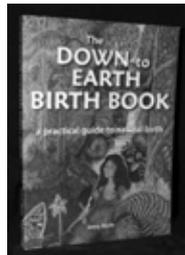


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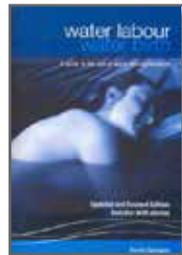
# BOOKS, CDS AND DVDS



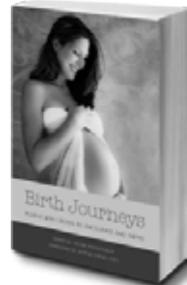
**BIRTHWORK BOOK**  
A COMPASSIONATE GUIDE TO BEING WITH BIRTH  
Jenny Blyth  
Intended as a guide for anyone working with, or caring for pregnant, birthing, and new mothers. 15% discount for midwives and doulas.  
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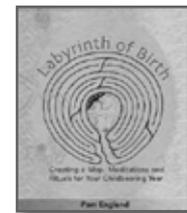
**THE DOWN TO EARTH BIRTH BOOK**  
Jenny Blyth  
A practical guide to natural birth in any setting, promoting self-nurturing, responsibility and awareness.  
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Fourteen meditations and ceremonies designed to transform the experience of the childbirth year. Instructions for drawing/making labyrinths included.  
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Book and CD set.  
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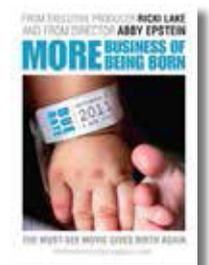
**THE BIG STRETCH DVD**  
Alieta Belle & Jenny Blyth  
Women reflect on how the experience 'stretched' them – physically, emotionally and spiritually, with a bonus extra on baby massage. Includes booklet with birthwork topics such as pain, breathwork, and challenges. Made in Australia, approx. 60 mins.  
Price: \$42.00.



**THE BIG STRETCH DVD SEQUEL**  
Alieta Belle & Jenny Blyth  
DVD sequel explores different kinds of birth including many 'variations of normal'. A celebration of natural birth. Made in Australia, approx. 2hrs.  
Price: \$42.00.

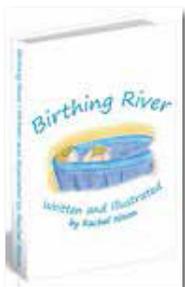


**THE BUSINESS OF BEING BORN DVD.**  
"A Must- See for every parent to be."  
From Executive producer Ricki Lake and Director Abby Epstein.  
Price: \$19.99.

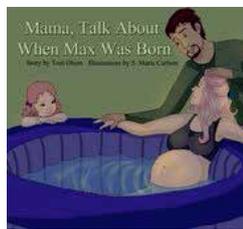


**MORE BUSINESS OF BEING BORN DVD Set.**  
"The rare documentary that's truly changing the world. It deserves to be called Revolutionary."  
The complete set of all Four Films. Over 5 hours of footage. From Executive producer Ricki Lake and Director Abby Epstein.  
Price: \$29.99.

# CHILDREN'S BOOKS



**BIRTHING RIVER**  
Rachel Nixon  
Written in simple rhyming verse, with soft watercolour pictures that speak to the very young. Includes the stages of birth and lotus birth. Price: \$20.



**MAMA, TALK ABOUT WHEN MAX WAS BORN**  
Toni Olson  
Children's book depicting a pregnancy journey and homebirth.  
Price: \$25.00



**WE'RE HAVING A HOME-BIRTH**  
Kelly Mochel  
Colorful, contemporary book about homebirth, Covers the role of midwife, noises during birth, and breastfeeding. SKU: KMBK.  
Price: \$12.00



**MY BROTHER JIMI JAZZ**  
Chrissy Butler  
Beautifully illustrated children's book about a homebirth, written from the perspective of a young girl.  
Aust. 2006.  
Price: \$20.00.



**THE WONDERFUL PLACE BOOK**  
Chrissy Butler  
Unique picture book that affirms the sustainability of breastfeeding. Printed on 100% post consumer recycled paper.  
Price: \$20.00.

# Remembering Bodhi Grech

Can you knit or crochet?  
Or do you know someone who can?  
We would love your help!

As August the 12th fast approaches  
and with it Bodhi's 3rd birthday  
With your help, we would like to make  
300 knitted/crocheted beanies  
to donate to the NICU ward units  
by the 12 of August 2015.  
Please send your beanies to  
20 Millard Cres Plumpton NSW 2761

This is going to be a huge task  
but I believe together we can accomplish it!



ONCE UPON A TIME, BUT NOT SO VERY LONG AGO, WHAT WE CALL SHAMANIC MIDWIFERY  
WAS JUST A WAY OF LIFE... *A way of life that all women knew inherently from their own birth.*

As babies and children we watched our mothers and the women of our tribe facilitate transformation daily within community life – holding space for each other in Moonlodge, birthing their babies with instinct and knowing, honouring their Elders, attending to their rich spiritual practice and walking a way of wisdom, sovereignty and beauty in their expression of being a Woman.

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.*

## FOUR SEASONS JOURNEY

SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Spring (Nov) 2015 - Spring (Nov) 2016

NORTHERN HEMISPHERE - SUBJECT TO INTEREST

Spring (Feb) 2016 - Spring (Feb) 2017

A year long earth based spiritual experience creating and maintaining a deep connection with the Earth and the Divine Feminine. 4SJ is for all women and focuses on the shamanic perspective of cycles of the Earth, life, the moon, and menstruation, preparing women to be shamanic midwives, practitioners and teachers of the Women's Mysteries, for their community and beyond.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND REGISTRATIONS GO TO  
[WWW.SCHOOLOFSHAMANICMIDWIFERY.COM](http://WWW.SCHOOLOFSHAMANICMIDWIFERY.COM)

# Gentle Unassisted Home Birth of Layla May

by Natasha Yarrington



She was excited that wombat was on the way and was an amazing help, getting me a drink and holding my hand through a contraction. I remember feeling very overwhelmed with the contractions and that I couldn't stay on top of my breathing. I told Rod, during a break, that I needed him to tell me to slow my breathing down. At the next contraction he was amazing and having his voice to concentrate on helped me.

Sammi arrived mid next contraction and I remember her saying, "Oh well, you're in labour" and I thought, 'Oh good, this is happening, baby is finally coming!' I was so relieved to see her; her presence in the room instantly calmed me. I had one more 'breathing' contraction before they changed.

The next contraction felt different. I instinctively widened my legs and started to push and was very vocal, grunting more than breathing. Sammi asked if I was pushing, to which I answered, "I think so!"

Rod was saying, "Slow breaths, slow breaths," and after that contraction, I said, "Honey I can't breathe, I'm pushing." I don't think he believed me; I still didn't believe the baby was coming yet!

With the next contraction, I felt her move down very low and was feeling very pushy. Her head was born with the next contraction. I told Rod to look, that it was out, something was out! I don't think he believed me until he looked and said, "Yep, I can see a head."

After a couple more contractions, she was out! Rod caught her and brought her up out of the water, while I turned over and he passed her to me. Lexi and Jack were both in the room when she was born. Lexi woke Rylee (four and half years old) straight away, and we all enjoyed the moment.

Layla May Yarrington, born at 12:27am, 22 February. The placenta was birthed within 20 minutes and Layla had her first breastfeed. I still can't believe it happened so fast! Mum had missed Layla's birth and arrived at 12:45am. We all had some fruit salad and tucked back up into bed with our newest addition!

*Natasha and her husband run a dairy farm business on the mid north coast of NSW with the help of their children Alexis, Rylee, Jack and Layla. Born peacefully into the water, into daddy's arms, surrounded by her siblings and goddess mother.*



On Saturday 21 February, being eight days overdue with my fourth bub, I was thrilled when I started getting gentle waves from about 2pm. They were only coming every 40 minutes to an hour. By 7pm they were coming every 10-20 minutes, lasting 40-50 seconds and taking a bit of my concentration. I texted my doula, Sammi Zajko at 8.20pm, saying they were ramping up a bit and I thought that this may be it.

By 10.20pm, they seemed to have slowed. I'd had two 40 minutes apart. I texted Sammi again to tell her I was going to try and get some rest. I went to bed but didn't stay long before I was up, restless and feeling lots of pressure. I rang Sammi at 11pm, telling her that it was on and I needed her here. The waves had intensified and now needed a fair bit of concentration.

I woke my husband, Rod, up and told him I wanted him to fill the pool. Jack (two and half years old) woke up and came out and asked if the baby was coming. He said he wanted to watch Anna and Elsa, so I put Frozen on for him to watch. He wanted a peeled apple and his tractor blanket and was settled. Rod started filling the pool while I paced the house and verandah in between contractions. I wasn't timing them, but they were probably about 7-10 minutes apart and lasting 30-40 seconds.

I got into the pool at about 11.30pm and the relief was instant. I remembered from Jack's labour how amazing it was. Rod was still running around getting things ready and looking after Jack. I had a few strong contractions and felt my waters break in the water. After about 15 minutes in the pool, I got out, and went to the toilet to do a poo. I remember feeling relieved that I'd done a poo!

Jack was getting restless, so we decided to ring mum and ask if she could come over to be with him. We rang at about 11.50pm. I got back into the pool and had a couple of really strong contractions. I remember wondering where Sammi was and called her asking where she was. She was about 10 minutes away. The next few contractions were incredibly intense and I was wondering how I was going to get through. I remember telling Rod I couldn't do it and that I needed a container in case I vomited.

The thought entered my mind that I might be in transition, but having had such long labours before, I didn't think it could be. Alexis (six years old) woke around this time as I was becoming quite vocal.

# Charlie's Birth Story

by Tania Mitchell



Our planned home birth was a journey of three years of research, preparation, self analysis and healing. After a traumatic hospital birth with our first son, which led to post traumatic stress, anxiety and PND, we discovered the world of homebirthing, independent midwives and a community of knowledge. Who knew we would go from mainstream homebirth sceptics trying to follow the 'textbook' on how birth should happen to loving every minute of an accidental freebirth and becoming absolute homebirth advocates!? We've met many new wonderful people along the way and created an entirely new support network for our little family.

After initially assuming the that our three year old, Eli, would not be present but watching how much he enjoyed learning and being involved in our preparation, his acceptance of how his new brother or sister would be welcomed to the world changed our plans to include him in the preparation and birth process which infinitely enriched our birth preparation as birth videos and stories became part of his normal storytime and life. A huge thank you to our wonderful midwives and the homebirth community who helped us debrief on our previous experience and discover that a positive birth is possible when caregivers support your choices and decisions.

Three days of prelabour was challenging in itself as I didn't experience a discernible prelabour last time. After a very mobile pregnancy, spending most of the time in anterior left or right, bubs spun posterior in week 39 when I caught a respiratory virus. I finally managed to spin him back anterior on the Wednesday night just before bed and said to Marcus, "Ok we're ready now."

I woke at 3am to pee, hopped back into bed and thought I should put a towel in the bed just in case. I rolled over to go back to sleep and had a Braxton Hicks at 3.15am thinking, 'Hmmm I don't usually get BH at this time,' then got another BH at 3.30am accompanied by a massive gush of fluid and poked Marcus saying, "Honey, can you get another towel, the bed is going to get wet, we're having a baby." He leapt out of bed and grabbed another towel. I took a deep breath and said, "Right, we can do this." Marcus replied, "Yep, you can, you are speed zm zm zm." (from the Cars movie that Eli is obsessed with at moment... I later blamed this comment for the fast labour!).

We got up and started filling the birth pool, lighting candles, getting food and drinks ready, going to the toilet and putting on the TENS. I was kind of trying to time contractions on my watch and they seemed to be about every five minutes-ish. Marcus said, "Should we call Juliana (our midwife)?" And I said, "Nah I'm fine, let's time some properly first to know what to tell her."

So we timed them and they were 3.5-5.5 minutes apart so Marcus rang Juliana, by now it was about 4.30am. The pool was full but still heating as we were using our camping instant hot water heater. Contractions were getting more intense then halfway through a contraction the TENS stopped working because I dropped it - wow what massive difference when you're used to the TENS on! Marcus changed the batteries and the leads and it came back on but wasn't sending any electrical current. So, no TENS, pool wasn't hot enough, and no hot water for a bath or shower as it was all in the pool. It was just us.

I had a little prickly massage ball that I'd been holding the whole time and the texture in my hand became my point of focus along with my breathing during each contraction. Marcus stayed with me for each contraction, reminding me to breathe and keeping me focussed, I couldn't have done it without his support and encouragement. Everything was getting very intense, which I thought was because I didn't have the TENS (in retrospect, it was transition!).

I suddenly felt like I needed to poo so went to the bathroom, started to push and thought, 'Oh, that's too much pressure for poo,' so dropped onto my hands and knees in the bathroom. I was becoming more vocal so Marcus went to call my sister to come (she was to be Eli's support person) just in case Eli woke. While he was in the kitchen, I had another contraction with an unbelievable urge to push and thought, 'Oh no, it's too soon to push' so sucked bub back up.

Next contraction was too overwhelming and I couldn't not push, I felt his head descending and reached down to touch it. As soon as I was pushing, the intensity of contractions suddenly disappeared and I was purely focussed on the feeling of his head descending. I tried calling Marcus but he didn't hear me. The next contraction I tried to slow down as his head popped out into my hand. I called Marcus again and he came running in to see the head and exclaimed, "Oh my god, there's a head!" to which I just replied, "Get the camera!" I wasn't missing out on birth photos this time!

He took a few shots then said, "What do I do?" I said, "Put some towels under my bum because he'll be out with the next contraction." Then I said, "Ok, he's coming," and pushed, feeling his shoulders stretch through and he bobbed out. I turned around as Marcus said, "How do I hold him, he's all slippery and floppy." He was holding bub sitting on the towel behind me. He had a purple head but pink body and looked fine relative to all the birth videos we had watched. So we wiped his face and gave him a quick rub then he let out a cry.

Marcus posted him under my legs so I could hold him on my chest and he rooted straight onto the breast and started sucking. Marcus wrapped us in towels to stay warm and we sat there laughing and astounded at what just happened - we had a baby!

A few minutes later my sister arrived so Marcus woke Eli to come meet the baby and tell us if it was a boy or girl (that was his pre-designated special job). He was very excited to announce that he had a little brother! About 10 minutes later, Juliana and Helen, our midwives, arrived. Marcus answered the door with, "Show's over, it's all done."

Juliana thought he was joking until she walked around the corner and saw us all sitting on the floor of the bathroom. They made up the couch with towels and I lay on the couch snuggling bubs until my placenta detached approximately 45 minutes later and they coached me to push it out.

My first comment was that we'll have to have another baby because I still haven't had my water birth. When the cord was empty, they clamped and Eli cut the cord. The birth pool was now warm enough, so Eli, Charlie and I had a nice bath in it together.

Juliana and Helen cleaned up and made us breakfast and tea before doing their paperwork then monitored us for a couple of hours before heading home. We spent the rest of the day on the couch as a family and my sister stayed to help entertain Eli, it was wonderful! A better birth experience than we could have possibly asked for and an incredible bonding experience for us as a couple!

I hope our amazing accidental freebirth can inspire anyone who is yet to meet your bubs earthside that you can absolutely do it! Trust your body, do what it's telling you, adopt the positions that you are most comfortable in and above all else, know that your body is designed to do this! The biggest preparation you can do is optimal foetal positioning and have a few options for distraction/pain relief to get you through contractions as you may change your mind for what works at the time.

Our biggest learning experience from Eli's to Charlie's birth was: Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself against a health care provider if something doesn't feel right, and you can say no if you want to. If bub and you are ok and healthy you can ask for time and a second opinion. Don't let them bully you. Please consider a home birth if you have a complication-free pregnancy, the difference is indescribable! Your body, your baby, your birth!! xx

**Tania Mitchell** is a part time Veterinarian, mum to two gorgeous boys (Eli 3y3m and Charlie 4w) and married to Marcus, an IT consultant and proud dad. Initially sceptical of homebirth, it has become our whole new world of community, knowledge, and an empowering and healing birthing experience that bonded us closer as a couple and a family. We're looking forward to doing it again.



# Birthing Bohemia

by Veronika Laws



Finally I gave in to IVF.

My first cycle I produced six eggs that were fertilised successfully. One resulted in a heartbreaking miscarriage at 13 weeks. The second egg worked and my beautiful spirited boy Jakob was born 5 ½ years ago.

Given my bohemian ways I felt desperate to counteract the IVF treatment with a natural drug free birth. I looked into options and homebirthing was top of my list. Being our first child, and potentially our only one, Josh, my husband, just couldn't bring himself to agree. So I opted for a natural birth at a midwife-run birth centre.

RPA had a wonderful birth centre and I was lucky enough to get a room on the evening I was giving birth to Jakob. I had a really supportive doula who encouraged me to labour at home until the final hours. It was during that intense experience that I learnt to trust my body and move through the pain using a form of ecstatic dance I practiced called Chakradance. The feeling during early labour was divine. I was a goddess surrounded by light, dancing, swaying and moving with each contraction.

After Jakob was born I felt grateful and complete and didn't feel I needed another, but really I was masking the fear and heartache of IVF again. But despite this I kept the left over embryos chilled like a French Champagne on Ice. And I'm glad, as I approached my mid thirties I realized the importance of family and giving Jakob a sibling.

Fast-forward five years and another embryo was inserted.

This little egg was conceived in the same batch as Jakob. Does that make them twins? It's a very strange feeling to have both our children conceived at the same time but born almost six years apart, one frozen in time like Austin Powers...must be one 'groovy baby'.

All jokes aside it was an amazing feeling. When we found out it was a girl, our hearts melted. At last I was able to look forward to playing fairies and ponies instead of mythological tales of knights and dragons. Although Jakob was open to anything, being a Steiner school kid.

We had just moved to Avalon in Sydney's Northern Beaches, which in itself has a very bohemian vibe, and bought a classic old weatherboard house on large block with a feeling similar to that of Byron Bay's hinterland. Dotted with palm trees and leafy tropical plants and a picturesque view across the valley, I knew that this was where I wanted to birth my baby.

I was so excited about this birthing experience. Now my creative juices started to flow, I was like a phoenix rising out of a fire.

Ever since I was a teenager I had a thing for tipis. It had nothing to do with American Indian culture; it was about design and energy. To me a tipi is a warm sacred space to gather, share and connect, almost womb-like. In my early 20's I was an event producer and I used tipis as venues for high profile clients including the late Rene Rivkin. We erected a tipi in the backyard of his Eastern Suburbs mansion for his twin sons' birthdays. We covered the whole property in snow, complete with reindeer and fur-clad girls serving chilled vodka. It was 5am and all the party goers had left. I have this everlasting memory of Rene, the great creative thinker, a style icon, sitting in a big old chair smoking a cigar immersed in the majestic space.

The term "Bohemian" is often tossed about freely, but how many people can honestly claim they are truly Bohemian? After I tell you my birth story, I think you will agree that I can.

It's important to first establish where I come from. Then from there, it's easier to understand how I came to choose the journey to motherhood through homebirthing and push the boundaries of an unconventional birth even further by laboring in a tipi, yes that's right, a tipi, and birthing my baby in nature under the shade of an old tree.

Both my parents are Czech, which makes me Bohemian. Here's how. The Kingdom of Bohemia was once a region in Central Europe now called the Czech Republic. Some of our gypsy ancestors made their way to France. These groups of creative vagabonds, artists, poets and free thinkers revolted against mainstream. The stylish Parisians began to follow their lead and Bohemianism became the timeless fashionable romantic movement that many still follow today.

Creativity flows through my whole family. Dad studied at the Prague film school where director of 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' Milos Forman attended. There he produced many student documentaries during a rebellious underground bohemian art movement in the late 60s. My mum and sister are both artists. And I, well I'm a creative producer and I married an illustrator.

Mum and dad escaped from Prague in 1968 during the 'Prague Spring'. They arrived in Australia in the mid 70s and I was born here. Both eccentric and fashion forward, together they would stop traffic! My father tells a story of how in the late 70s he visited New York. One night he went out and happened to pass by the famous Studio 54, there was a long queue of people trying to get in but the doorman signaled him straight into the club. Dad thinks he was mistaken for someone well known. Andy Warhol just happened to be at the bar that night!

I guess it made sense then, given the world I grew up with and the influences of my culture and ancestry that I was naturally attracted and open minded to an unconventional birth journey. It was not an easy one! I was the first in my group of friends to get married. Most of them followed soon after. We started trying for a family with no success. Year after year we watched as everyone around us fell pregnant with their first, second, sometimes even third child!

Being a hippy at heart I tried every natural treatment and alternative therapy known to mankind. Six years passed and nothing worked. Our infertility was unexplained.



The attraction continued into my 30s when Josh and I built a tipi on our rainforest block in Bellingen. We decked it out with antique furniture and spent many years glamping on the land and swimming naked in the crystal clear pools of the river. It was only fitting that when my second birth was coming around my next tipi needed to rise from the earth. I called my old friend Ray the tipi master from Rainbow tipis and my partner in tipi crime. We designed a Nordic style or 'Kata' that would feel intimate and naturally fit in the tropical surrounds.

Now I had the setting, all I had to do was convince everyone around me that a home birth was the best idea I had ever had, and believe me, I've been known for many!

I attended a workshop run by Jane Hardwicke Collings of Moonsong. It was called 'The Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy' and boy did this resonate with me. A group of like-minded women who were all going through different stages of birthing, whether birthing a baby or the goddess within; it was an awe-inspiring experience. In this sister circle I learnt how to enter my womb and meet my baby. I learnt how to let go of fear and control. I learnt about ancient women's wisdom and the divine feminine. I met many women on the same journey. I built a relationship with my body and felt empowered, energized and unique and confident that this was going to be a rite of passage that would validate me as a woman.

First and foremost was finding the right birthing team.

My son was attending the Steiner school where homebirthing is the norm. A few of the mamas suggested a local midwife called Sheryl Sidery. I contacted her and luckily got the last spot available in February. Without even asking Josh, I jumped at it.

Yolande, my doula came much later. I had given up hope of finding anyone in the area and two months before I was due I found Yolande who was within a stone's throw of my house. It was like finding a pot of gold!

My pregnancy was not without difficulties. We discovered that I had some kind of rare antibody protecting me against Josh's antigens. Apparently it had started its fight when I gave birth to Jakub and some of his blood mixed with mine? I'm still confused as to how it all happened but suddenly I was labeled 'high risk' and my homebirth was hanging by a thread. Sheryl encouraged me to make peace with whatever the outcome might be, but I was determined not to have a hospital birth. There was no Plan B. Together we continued to be positive and during this time formed a great friendship.

I had produced and styled my whole birth space, just like I would a photoshoot or event and was using every last dollar we had...I didn't care. The romantic ideal of Bohemianism was in full force. I was like a starving artist sacrificing everything I had for my art, my baby.

It wasn't like the tipi. It went up with a drama! It arrived and the colour was wrong. The pure white 'boho chic' fabric of the skin was a sandy yellow. Then, the night before a massive storm dropped a giant tree across our yard right across the tipi space. It was finally erected a week before she was due. My friends came over to check it out. One of them said she felt it resembled a giant vagina. I had erected a vagina for my birth space. What could be more perfect? A glowing golden space; warm and inviting like the womb of Gaia.

Forty weeks came and went and an induction was looming. I couldn't believe it. I had put in all this effort and everything I had dreamed of was now at risk. At 14 days overdue it looked like I would have to go to hospital after all.

I was booked in for a scan at 10am on day 15 to check my fluids and make sure baby was ok. If the fluids were low, I was going straight in for the induction. I was hysterical! I woke up at 4am with twinges and by 8am I'd called Sheryl and we cancelled my appointment. The contractions were really close together but I was ok. At 10am I spoke with Yolande and she reassured me she was a minute away should I need her.

I moved up to the tipi, took up my space, and danced.



I'd never believed in 'god'. I've always searched for something else, something within me, a connection to the earth, my inner goddess. I began my Chakradance, a free-form ecstatic dance done with your eyes closed. A voice lead music journey to balance out each chakra. From deep tribal drumbeats of the base chakra to the operatic ethereal sounds of the crown chakra, it was like a spiritual dance party. This was my tool for pain management. In the final weeks leading up to the birth I practiced on the beach at dawn. Women on their daily walks often stopped to cheer me on with words like... 'Go mama' or tell me how beautiful I looked. I just like to clear up that I'm by no means a dancer, apart from my early years on the nightclub scene. This euphoric dance made me love my pregnant body, I loved how it moved, I loved how it looked.

Josh, who has ants in his pants, whipped out the lawn mower to prepare the garden. When in doubt, what else is a man to do but grab a cold beer and mow the lawn?! Typical! I was cool with this, as we had already discussed the idea of having a supportive circle of woman only in the tipi during labour. It would be like a Red Tent, a sacred space where women celebrated the divine feminine with other women.

I kept track of my contractions, texted Yolande and Sheryl updates and Yolande popped by to check on me. Xavier Rudd was playing and Yolande and I chatted in the tipi and told stories. I was moving my body so easily through each contraction it felt good so I told Yolande to leave and I would call when I needed her. At this point I was happy to be on my own. As she walked away I made an almighty tribal growling roar. She looked back and decided to stay! The feeling was so intense, like the baby had dropped down, even my belly shape had changed. Now Sheryl was on her way!

I started to go deeper into myself, to really listen to the music and move and sway. I planted my feet on the ground and connected with the earth and my ancestors, my mother, my mother's mother and the red line of Bohemian woman that birthed before me. I moved in the warm glow of the tipi and followed as the voice lead music asked me to 'surrender my hips to the dance and the natural serpentine moves of my body', 'embrace my sacred sexuality' and be 'sensual, sultry like a wild gypsy'.

When Sheryl arrived we were so excited that all the elements of nature had aligned for me to birth outside. I felt the sun shining; it warmed my belly. Josh and Sheryl prepared the pool as Yolande gently guided and nourished me through each contraction both physically and emotionally.

I was now ready to enter the healing waters of the birth pool. Sheryl and Josh had chosen a shady spot under our big old jacaranda tree. I hopped in the pool and the powerful waves began. The ladies were having a good old chat between each one, making me laugh so much it hurt! With each contraction Yolande ran her fingers through my hair and stroked my forehead, a nurturing feeling I will never forget. The sun was on my naked body and a family of kookaburras I regularly feed had perched themselves in prime position on a branch above me, laughing vigorously.

My mum and sister arrived with Jakub. He wanted to be part of the birth and we had practiced the deep guttural roaring sounds of a lion I would make giving birth to his sister.

He helped Yolande for a while by washing my forehead with a cloth, but being a five-year-old boy he decided that splashing would be more fun, so we sent him inside with my sister.



Sheryl and Yolande were giggling about how they've never worn their sunglasses at a birth. Josh was running back and forth, tasked with bringing boiling water to top up the birth pool, which at that point was leaking. I suddenly felt like pushing; fear consumed me and my waters hadn't broken yet. I couldn't stop myself. I thought standing up might help them so I got out and held onto the trunk of the tree. I call this my tree-hugging moment.

It only made it worse so I got back in the pool. Finally the time came that Sheryl allowed me to go for it. I could feel the baby crowning and suddenly the fear kicked in. I was so prepared and so deep into my body and now I had lost control. Sheryl locked eyes with me and guided me with a smile, reminding me that I would meet my baby soon. With each push I could feel baby's head pop out, then as I relaxed it would go back in. Finally her little white body slipped from mine and I heard Sheryl softly say "grab your baby mama". And so I did, a divine being in my arms. I think I was in shock at first, I didn't cry like I thought I would, it didn't help that the placenta was sitting at the base of my vagina. It felt like another baby was coming. With another push the discomfort was over.



I believed in myself and found strength and courage to do what I felt was instinctively right and lived up to the dictionary definition of Bohemian as "a person with artistic or intellectual tendencies, who lives and acts with no regard for conventional rules of behaviour." We moved to our bedroom, which was styled and kept clean ready for me and baby to spend the next couple of weeks deep in each other's embrace.

We all sat around my bed and laughed and chatted as Sheryl checked the baby.

I had heard a wonderful story in the Moonsong workshop how in Aboriginal wisdom, the placenta is always buried – given back to the Earth to let her know that a baby has been born and, by its blood, who this baby is. We decided that would be fitting under the tree.

When everyone left we chose her name. Jakub had picked Yasmin, which we loved. In Czech it's Yasminka and we decided Minky would be a cute nickname. In the following weeks I decided it was important she had a name that embraced her mother line. And so she came to be Yasmin Bohemia Beck (my maiden name) Laws.

*What, then, is it that makes this mystical empire of Bohemia unique, and what is the charm of its mental fairyland? It is this: there are no roads in all Bohemia! One must choose and find one's own path, be one's own self, live one's own life. (Aylo, 1902[14])*

'My children are my world. One day I will take them to Bohemia, but in the meantime I hope to inspire them with myths, songs and fairytales from their homeland'.



**Veronika** is a creative producer at The Photo Commune, which is her own business. She collaborates with photographers to shoot lifestyle imagery for photolibraries. Veronika is married to Josh, who's a Storyboard artist. She loves being visually inspired; she is an ideas woman. She surrounds herself with raw beauty, handmade, homemade objects.

*She is all for teaching her children where things come from or how to make or grow them, including babies!*

# There and Back Again - The Journey of Max

by Dr Robyn Stephenson



For my first birth, it was a consciously chosen homebirth: long, yet wonderful. My pregnancy was awesome too: my skin was great, I was physically active for most of it doing Swing Dancing and Pilates until I was six months pregnant, adjusting patients well into my third trimester (I'm a chiropractor) and the worst I got was occasional leg cramps first thing in the morning in later pregnancy. And one skin tag. I didn't even get to the 'bloated' stage as Lexie was naturally three weeks early (just like her daddy), so I felt great.

I had brilliant support from my husband, Mark, and my midwife, Rachele Meredith, through both pregnancy and labour. Although the labour was 40 hours in total, I was cool, calm and collected and everything was A-OK. The whole pregnancy and labour contained no ultrasounds, no internals, no needles, no medical doctors; no intervention at all. It was fantastic! I did suffer from PND a few months after having Lexie, but seeing a psychologist helped there. Going back to work too early (Lexie was only three months old) at my own business was part of the problem.

After such a wonderful first birth, I was not at all worried about an impending birth heading into my second pregnancy. Admittedly, the pregnancy was kind of accidental but in all reality we weren't too worried (I laughed when I found out I was pregnant!). There would be 17 months between our children but that was manageable we were sure. We asked Rachele to be our midwife and she agreed.

Admittedly, this pregnancy was soon after a shake-up of my work with my locum leaving, and I'd only just managed to find another temporary P/T replacement, but I now had to seriously consider selling the practice in the very near future as I was pregnant again. It was all a bit stressful. We also had a family month-long holiday planned to the USA when I was 8-12 weeks pregnant (hence the 'unplanned' pregnancy part!) so we guessed I would just be tired for a lot of that holiday (which I was). But we realised that things started to go truly pear-shaped when I had a bleed at 10 weeks in the States.

I let Rachele know what was going on via email and she stayed in the loop. I found myself a private gynaecologist and off I went that same day (thank goodness we had travel insurance!). I was miserable but I was thinking that an ultrasound would determine the cause of the bleed and all the other questions I had such as, "Could I go back to physical work?" or "Was this going to end in another miscarriage?"

The gynaecologist's staff wanted me to undress, lie back in stirrups and wait for an internal. This wasn't what I wanted at all! So I stuck to my guns and told them that I thought an ultrasound would be the best way to determine what was actually happening in my uterus, not an internal examination. The staff gave me weird looks, made me feel uncomfortable, spoke with the doctor and then he and I had a sit-down and chat. He was very nice and understood exactly where I was coming from and agreed to the ultrasound. The ultrasound showed that the baby was fine and there was nothing to worry about (it was a post-chorionic sac bleed but the foetus was just fine). Phew! We were also told it was a low-lying placenta but that it should move up as the baby grew. All things considered, things were certainly looking up.

Fast forward a week and Rachele gave us some bad news - due to a family crisis, she couldn't take us on after all. We were gutted but we understood. "That's okay, there are lots of midwives out there," we thought. We'd find another one when we got back to Oz and we'd still get a homebirth. But oh, how wrong we were. I tried about 20 midwives, I tried the internet, calling random people, chasing up leads of someone who knew someone who might be able to help. It was useless. I even considered an 'under the radar' midwife, but decided I didn't feel comfortable with that.

No one wanted to come to Canberra for our homebirth, no one was available within three hours in any direction let alone two hours most of the time. We had no one. So I reluctantly put my name down for the Canberra Birthing Centre (which has great reviews, it's just that I wanted to birth at home, not in a birthing centre in a hospital - I hate hospitals).

In between all this, the sale of my practice had fallen through and I was in the midst of trying to find another associate - not an easy task when you run a country practice! But I did find someone eventually and put many hours into training him up as well.

Amazingly, I got accepted into the Canberra Birthing Centre at about 20 weeks (usually you have to put your name down as soon as you know you're pregnant) and had my first appointment with my primary midwife 22 weeks into my pregnancy. She was a lovely person but totally the wrong midwife for me. Not that you get a choice - it's the midwife you're assigned or no Birthing Centre placement. So I continued on through my appointments (including one with another midwife in the team whom I found much more 'me' but knowing I'd only get her if my midwife couldn't make it for one reason or another). So I was up in the air for most of the pregnancy.



Physically, this pregnancy was also difficult. I'd given up Pilates a while back because the placenta was so low that every time I tried actively engaging my pelvic floor muscles, I was in pain. Swing Dancing was no longer, sex was uncomfortable and exercise consisted of a bit of walking - and adjusting patients (with me being extra careful about my own body position as the wrong motion could cause me abdominal pain!). It all felt pathetic. On top of this, Lexie was still not sleeping regularly through the night and had horrible teething troubles (which we only realised many months later) and had this awful scream that she would do because of the pain she was in, which caused us many headaches and an awful lot of stress. Still, we had to carry on. Life stops for no one, right?

I discussed the possibility of a homebirth with the Birthing Centre midwives and although they were supportive, it wasn't how the 'system' worked. So I decided to call Rachele on a whim and find out if she could possibly be my midwife after all. She was still non-committal, but there was a strong possibility that she might be able to turn up for the birth. That was all I needed to know that this would work out okay in the end.

As the pregnancy progressed, the placenta moved up and I felt more a lot more comfortable. Even eating and breathing was easier. Driving the car was far more comfortable and I even worked a week later than originally intended. I felt good, finally! Was this because I thought I had trained up my Associate well enough and the business was going to be okay without me for a while? Was it because Rachele was pretty sure she could now attend the birth after all? Was it because my body was finally managing in the third trimester? Was it because Lexie was sleeping through the night now? Or was it because I didn't have to be at work any more and could finally STOP for a few weeks? Regardless, I was feeling pretty good.

This lasted all of a month. Then my body's relaxin hormones kicked in big time and I felt like a walking, wobbly machine, unable to even change my daughter's nappy without pain and misery. My sleep was wrecked as well. I got past Lexie's 37 week mark and kept wondering when I was to birth this second baby. I also spent two weeks in late pregnancy doing admin because my main admin person had quit without telling anyone!

At 38 weeks, I finally just left work on the backburner and refused to check my email. I needed to 'nest'. I also ended up at the Canberra Hospital one day before labour began, as it turned out, with a very 'quiet' baby. They monitored me, and I quickly realised that intervention was something I didn't want. Luckily, Max woke up, squirmed all over the place and they sent me home.



Max's labour was nothing like Lexie's. Where hers was controlled and reasonable, his was erratic and horrible. Where hers was at 37 weeks, his was at 40 weeks. Where hers occurred over two days, his lingered over three days. Where I was reasonably well rested for hers, I was sleep-deprived for his. The labours did have things in common though: they were both over 30 hours long, both babies had short umbilical cords, both placentas partially detached before the baby was birthed, both times Mark and Rachele were there and both times I got the homebirth I wanted. The endpoint was similar, I suppose, but the journey was vastly different.

During Max's labour and birth, I had great support from my husband Mark, my friend Katie and my midwife Rachele. I ended up with the water birth at home that I wanted. I ended up really 'feeling the music' this time around, which was also what I wanted, believe it or not! We ended up with a boy, so we now have a pigeon pair. And although Max was 50 per cent bigger than his sister Lexie, actually birthing him, even at 4kg, was somewhat easy (I was so happy to be at the birthing stage after all that crazy labour!). The cord was tightly around his neck but Rachele didn't miss a beat and was there to support us and she did an amazing job so that we both got through it just fine.

I did get PND again but I saw a psychologist again, had time to 'digest' things and now the PND has physically lifted and I finally feel like 'me' again. My business did go under in the end but I'm okay with that now. Working closer to home as an Associate is so much less stressful! Max and Lexie are both thriving children who love each other; it's beautiful to see. Mark and I are more in love than we've ever been and all things considered, our family is in a far better place now than it was a year ago. It's been a journey all right. Sometimes the unexpected is exactly what we need!

**Robyn** is a chiropractor and Mark is a librarian. They live in Canberra with their two beautiful blue-eyed children Max and Lexie and their cat Lucinda. They both love their jobs, their children, the cat, each other and learning about everything! Sometimes Lucinda thinks she's unloved because she gets her tail pulled far too regularly by the children...



# The Birth of Willow Rain

by Emma Raycraft



On January 22nd 2015 at 40+6 weeks gestation, I woke up at 8.30am, jumped out of bed and ran to the toilet. It had been a while since I had moved so quickly. My immediate thought was that the membrane had ruptured, but it was just some watery discharge. I put on a liner and tried to go back to bed.

My back was aching and I couldn't get comfortable, so I got up and called Janine to let her know what was happening. She sounded very excited but I didn't think much of it, I figured it could be going on for days still, so I didn't tell anyone.

The day carried on much the same way, the aching in my back would come and go in no particular rhythm. A couple of times I got into the bath and the hot water was so soothing.

Adam was checking on me often and was really keen to get things going. I still didn't think this was the real deal but he decided it was a good idea to get the birth space set up. Of course he was right about that. In the evening the waves began to feel a bit stronger. We had kept in contact with Janine and had also given our doula, Emily, a heads up. I still hadn't talked to any family or friends because I didn't want to get people excited yet.

I was resting between waves when all of a sudden I jumped up and felt a big gush of water and I burst out laughing. What a bizarre sensation! I figured then that this wasn't a false start and that I would be meeting my baby that night.

I asked Adam to put some hot water in the pool, just enough to cover my lower back and I got in straight away. He had asked a few times if he should call Emily and I just kept saying, "I don't know," but then he decided. It was probably around 2am when he made the call and she came over.

At this point I was too focused to think and make decisions; the waves were becoming more intense but I was feeling confident and calm. When the waves were coming about every two minutes Em said to Adam, "Tell the midwife to get her butt down here!"

Everything was progressing really well and seemed to be going fairly quickly. I was in the pool when Janine arrived and it was still dark when Emma showed up. I was excited to see her and thought we didn't have much longer to go.

I had turned inward and was not paying much attention to what everyone else was doing, but I was aware of the sun starting to rise. The birth room had big windows that let in a lot of light so Janine got Adam to cover them to try and keep the room a bit dark.

It was now Friday the 23rd, sometime during the day. I was still labouring in the pool. I looked up and saw everyone and no one was looking at me. It seemed like they had all lost interest and I realised how long it had been and I hadn't felt anything change. It had been going so well and moving so quickly and now I felt a bit disappointed and confused.

I looked at Janine a while and then said, "I feel like things aren't progressing any more." I felt stuck. She offered to check and I agreed. She said I was about 8cm but there were two lips of the cervix still in the way. She helped me try to move them while the waves came and managed to get one bit out of the way. I carried on for a while and when she checked again she could feel baby's eyebrows!

There was still a bit of cervix in the way and Willow was trying to come out face first! I remembered reading about posterior births causing more discomfort in the back but since my pregnancy had been so good and baby had been in the perfect position, I figured her birth would go without a hitch. Janine told me that bub couldn't come out this way and would need to turn.

At some point Janine and Emma had left the room, which I was unaware of then, but they went to discuss a transfer to hospital.

Janine came to me and said that she was going to leave me with Adam for a while and asked if I could try not to push with the surges but instead just breathe through them. I could either be on my side or on my hands and knees; these two positions would hopefully help get Willow into the right position to be born. She said if this didn't work then we would discuss our options.

I had a feeling our options would be to go to hospital and have a Caesarean and there was a tiny quiet voice in the back of my mind saying, "That would be great, we could just get this over with," but I didn't pay much attention to that voice. I knew the way I wanted my child to enter the world, the way I thought would be best for her. I still didn't feel afraid; I thought whatever was going to happen would be okay even if we did need a Caesarean, but I really didn't think that was going to happen.

Being on my hands and knees felt right but not pushing was the most difficult thing to do. Some of the waves were so strong and felt almost overwhelming and I was so lucky that Emily was there and just reminded me to breathe! I was so exhausted and decided to lie on my side for a bit with Adam cuddling me which was really comforting. Janine came back in and checked our progress. Willow had turned! We were all thrilled and I think Janine even seemed a bit surprised but excited.

The cervical lip had also thinned out and she was able to help me move it. I got back in the pool and some really strong surges started to come. It seemed to me like they were further apart now and it felt so good to surrender and just ride the waves instead of trying to resist them. It was also a huge relief to not have the intense aching in my lower back. I was feeling good; I felt that I suddenly had some stamina back and was roaring like a lioness with the massive surges of energy.

I could feel the head and I knew we didn't have long to go when her heart rate suddenly spiked after being perfect up to that point. Janine suggested then that I get out of the pool and I didn't hesitate. I was comfortable and enjoying being in the water. I had looked forward to having a water birth for so many reasons and loved being in the water my whole pregnancy, but I had full trust in Janine and when she said she thought it would be good for me to get out of the pool I knew it was the right thing to do.

I assumed a supported squat position with Adam sitting on a lounge behind me, and they got some cold compresses to try to cool me down. The next time we listened to the heartbeat it had gone back to normal.

From then on things moved really quickly. I had a mirror underneath me so I could see what was happening. I found that to be very helpful and also pretty cool; seeing what my body was doing and actually watching my baby be born! The sensations felt familiar in a way, there was a knowing like I had done this before and I already knew what to expect. As I was seeing more and more of the head I thought of the Ina May mantra "I will get wide enough!"

As the head was crowning I started breathing quickly so I wouldn't tear, and I didn't! I could see my baby's head exiting my body and I looked down and smiled. Before the last push to get the shoulders out I looked up and laughed. Seconds later Willow was Earth-side. Janine held her up and said, "Look," showing me that she had a vagina and my jaw dropped. Adam and I had been pretty sure we were expecting a boy. We had even named 'him' Koa. Now I look at her and can't imagine it being any other way.

I thought that holding my baby for the first time would be surreal. I had imagined what I might be feeling in that moment: joy, shock, excitement. It was surprisingly normal though, it all felt so natural. I held her on my body for a long time while I tried to birth the placenta. I had some trouble with that because I couldn't feel anything and didn't really want to do any more work.

Willow had found her way to my breast and was feeding in no time and once I had pushed out the placenta, Emily cut the cord. Janine got Willow on the scale and measured her; she was 4440 grams and 56cm!

Adam had some skin to skin while I had a shower. It was so beautiful to see him holding her. He had been the most amazing birth partner, looking at me lovingly and telling me that I am an amazing Goddess. I loved him being with me in my most vulnerable moment and being so proud, it was very empowering.

I feel transformed after this amazing and unique experience. I was so inside of myself and stayed strong even through uncertainty. I birthed my baby at home, naturally and calmly with love all around us.

Willow was what some might call a 'big' baby, but I had released all fears and doubts and trusted in my body's ability to birth her. Having Janine there to look me in the eyes and gently brush the hair from my face was so comforting. It was invaluable to feel that connection to another woman on the biggest day of my life and feel truly cared for when I needed it most. My own inner child that had thoughts of, 'I'm not good enough', now realised that she was indeed worth a whole lot. Feeling safe and nurtured through this experience has healed that part of me that felt unlovable. I AM a powerful Goddess.

*Emma is 23 years old from Canada. Adam is 29 from Australia. They met in Canada and are currently living on the central coast with their beautiful daughter Willow. After experiencing an ecstatic homebirth, Emma feels drawn to help empower other women in their birth choices and hopes to become a doula.*



# Zen's Birth Story

by Bronwyn Hall



At 8pm on Monday 8 September 2014, I was 40+5 and received news that my closest friend (who was also pregnant and due at the same time as me) had just birthed a beautiful girl. It triggered some sort of birth relay marathon and I felt the first twinges of labour.

I had about four bitey pains come and go within the next hour and kept saying, "After the next one I'll contact my doula and midwife..." but the next one would come and go and I'd say it again. My previous labour (although an induction) progressed very quickly, labouring from first twinge to birth for a total of six hours and my midwife had a three hour drive to reach me, so I was very aware of notifying everyone with plenty of time. I texted my birth support and settled back waiting to see what would come of it all.

At about 11.30pm I rang my midwife to tell her I was having contractions coming every five to six minutes. She said she would get going and hopefully arrive around 2.30am. I called my doula (who is much closer) and thought I would try and get some rest and sleep. But I felt restless and excited! So I got up and thought I'd get everything in its place for the labour, even though everything was pretty much already in its place. I told my partner to blow up the pool and we moved some things around.

I stopped every five minutes or so to rock through a contraction. Surprisingly, they felt quite strong. And they were coming fairly consistently. From memory, and perhaps expectation, I thought that labour would build gradually and contractions would go from being mild and uncomfortable to unbearable. It seemed to reach a certain point, where contractions came every 5-6 minutes and had the same intensity.

Labour continued at this pace and nothing much changed. I noticed a small show and my bowels started to empty. Hazel arrived and I continued labouring on an even keel. I felt pretty tired, having been awake all previous day and now all night. I was starting to feel pain in between contractions, therefore feeling constant pain the entire time with no relief. I couldn't tell if labour was increasing in intensity or not, or if contractions were getting closer together. I hopped in the pool for some relief from the constant pain.

The pool felt amazing and instantly I felt less pain. At about 7am (on Tuesday 9 September), Odin woke up and saw me in the pool and was very excited that I was floating about in a pool in the lounge room. After some negotiation, he was taken to day care. With the morning came the decision to call off the builders for the day so I could labour. However I felt each contraction fizzle further out and reluctantly admitted to everyone that perhaps it wasn't the right time for the pool. So I hopped out.

We all chatted about what we should do at this point, as we were all very tired with no sleep the night before, and clearly this labour was not going to be like my last one! The plan was for everyone to rest as they could and hopefully labour will pick up again. I rested on the mattress in the lounge room, still feeling contractions every 5-6 minutes as I had the past 12 hours and still feeling constant pain. It was hard to articulate where this constant pain was located, it felt like a constant ache in my pelvis and pubic bone. I felt the pain increase whenever I sat on the toilet, and of course this is where my birth support wanted me for the majority of my contractions!

After an hour or so of laying down, I felt like I needed to move and Hazel and Nat suggested we go for a walk up and down my street. Contractions were coming consistently and I had to stop and lean on someone as I rocked through them. Walking was difficult; I had to hold onto both Nat and Hazel as we kept moving in an effort to get labour going more than it was. At one point, swaying through a surge at the end of my street, Nat whispered that a young pregnant woman was walking towards us and thank goodness she had headphones in so she didn't hear me moaning in pain!

Labour continued, but I'm not sure if it progressed. I had hoped that it had progressed! As the morning turned into afternoon, contractions continued at the same pace of every 5-6 minutes but increased in intensity and the dull ache I was feeling was getting stronger and stronger. We decided to go for a walk up the other end of my street, which meant walking up a steep hill. It felt like it took forever. The dull ache was beginning to feel unbearable and then to feel a contraction on top of that I felt like I was being pulled apart. The pain froze my body. I couldn't walk, or stand, or move. I focused on breathing and tried to breathe through the pain without tensing my body. Every contraction I had, Nat would tell me to relax my bottom and relax my shoulders (she even said it in her sleep!). When we reached my driveway, I was at the point where I felt like I was going to die. The pain was overwhelming and it was all I felt. There was no relaxing in between, I didn't feel the effects of any of those wonderful hormones that come from the hard work of labour.

As soon as we were inside, I was into the pool. The warm water relieved some of that pain and I was able to relax. But no sooner had I jumped into the lovely warm water but the intensity weakened and I felt contractions ease off. I felt really exasperated. I felt lost. While in the pool I ate some blueberries and lolly snakes. I guzzled some water and Berocca. My support ordered and ate some dinner. Shortly after, I was on the toilet, vomiting everything I had eaten back up. Not only vomiting but pooing at the same time. And crying. I just wanted it to be over. I asked Hazel for something, anything, to help with the pain. I asked for drugs and even an epidural.

It was around 7.30pm on Tuesday 9 September. I had been experiencing contractions for nearly 24 hours. In my head, I felt like I was deep into labour, more than half way at least. I asked Hazel to give me an internal examination to gauge where I was at, as I felt it would help my mindset. This examination showed I was 3cm dilated and my cervix was very thin. I felt disappointed and frustrated. I had been feeling so much pain, for what felt like a really long time.



I had been involuntarily vocalising through contractions for the last 12 hours. I should be closer! I stayed in my bed and rested. I cried. I moaned through contractions. Odin was dropped home by the grandparents and put into bed. My support all rested: Gareth went to bed for a little, Nat went home and showered then returned. Hazel had a lay down on the lounge. I had to shift my mindset. I had to keep facing the pain. I thought rationally that this baby is probably not in the best position to birth, hence feeling constant pain. So I asked for some rebozoing. Instead of tensing into pain I relaxed into pain, consciously surrendering to it (and still feeling it).

I moved back into the lounge room and used the fitball to lean on through contractions. I started to lose fluid at every contraction, and I did anything to avoid going to the toilet, as squatting down was so painful and contracting in that position even more so. I made my way around the lounge room with a towel between my legs. The night wore on and I lost more fluid and plug. I was in and out of the pool a few more times. My waters had not broken at this point, I believe baby was positioned on my bladder and squeezed it at every contraction. At this point, I asked for a Caesarean. I said I was done, that this was a stupid idea and that I couldn't do it. Hazel said she didn't have the equipment for a Caesarean, so I had better just push on through.

I was determined to not get into the pool until the last minute. As time wore on, I became acutely aware of everyone around me. I felt like I had overstretched my birth support, that I had called them to me too soon, that my partner (who hadn't planned to be as involved as he was) was exhausted and his patience was wearing thin.

I turned more inward. I was silent in between contractions and I moaned when I needed to. I leaned on Gareth for a few contractions, moving into different positions to get baby into a better position. At this point, contractions sped up and I felt them occurring almost on top of each other. One would finish and the next would start without much of a rest in between. I leaned into Gareth, I roared into his shoulder. I stretched myself until I could no longer bear it, and then at around 4am on Wednesday 10 September, I moved into the pool.

Once in the pool, I felt I had to focus more on my body. I was afraid the contractions would ease off again. They certainly still happened, but I felt their intensity less. I could hear that rain had started to fall heavily and the noise on our tin roof drowned my low loud roars as I felt my baby move further down into my birth canal.

I changed positions a few times, from laying on my side, to being supported by Gareth leaning on one side of the pool and almost laying back. But I found I could stretch my legs out as far as I could, leaning forward on all fours and this is where I stayed. Although my focus was staying within, I could feel everyone around me getting prepared. Hazel had everything laid out that she might need. Nat had her camera. Gareth was no longer sitting on a chair, but up against the side of the pool. Now, we all waited. Again.

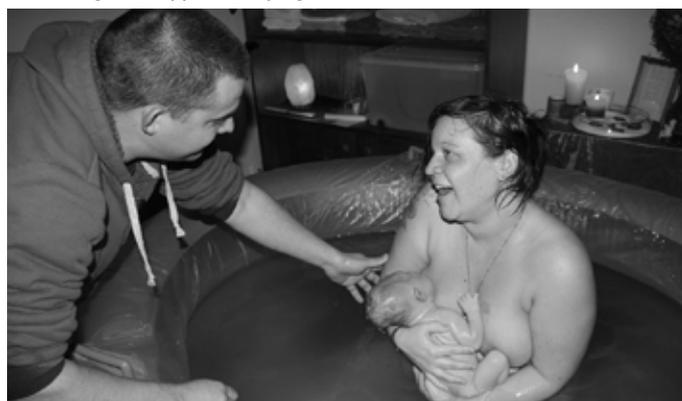
Time stood still as I worked with my body to bring this baby earthside. I had completely forgotten that that was what I was doing, that the whole point of all this pain was to birth a baby. I felt everything stretch and open with every contraction and felt the baby's head move down further. I remember Nat suggesting I feel inside for the baby's head, as they were able to see it with each contraction (and I remember saying that I couldn't reach because I have tiny fingers – what a weird thing to say!). I remember saying that I must have the world's longest vagina, because it seemed to take an eternity for this baby to finally be born. With every contraction I felt like my left leg was going to pop out of the hip socket. It. Hurt.

Finally I felt the pop of my waters, I exclaimed they had finally broken, and the baby moved down without going back up again. I stayed on all fours as I birthed his head, trying so hard to pant through the stinging pain and to try not to tear like last time (but I did. In the same spot). With a few contractions, his head was born. Contractions came again for me to birth his body and Hazel asked Gareth if he'd like to catch the baby. Gareth reached into the water to pull out the baby before I'd had a chance to birth his body and Hazel cried out, "Wait until he's all the way out!" Gareth lifted the baby up to me as Nat captured a photo of the baby breaking through the water with his eyes wide open.

"I did it! It's finally over!" I called out. It was 5.20am on Wednesday 10 September 2014. After double checking we had a boy (thanks Nat, good suggestion!) Zen Drago Houghton was finally here. His head had moulded spectacularly during the final moments of the second stage, he had a beautiful conehead covered in ginger fuzz. To my relief, he latched moments after he was born. His placenta followed about an hour or so after he was born and Gareth cut the cord. Odin woke and met his brother (he was a bit afraid of him to start! Especially when Zen cried or made a noise).

Zen weighed 3.94kg, was 50cm long with a head circumference of 35cm.

**Bronwyn Hall** is a part time working mum to Odin (4 years) and Zen (7 months), juggling motherhood with helping women in the community access counselling and support escaping domestic violence.



# The 'Homebirth Dads Night Out' #2 is coming!



**During Homebirth Awareness Week:**

**Late October 2015**

**6:30pm**

**VENUE TBA**

**\$10 on the door**

**(Details to be announced soon so look out for it on our Facebook page and the next issue of Birthings magazine!)**

This fun male-friendly and dad-focused night will be for expectant dads planning for homebirth and wanting to learn more, and for new/seasoned homebirth dads who wish to meet and network with each other, to share their stories and wisdom with and for the benefit of the expecting dads.

**6:30pm:** doors open

**7pm:** Introduction from **Homebirth Access Sydney** Coordinator Virginia Maddock and co-host Gary Caganoff

**7:20pm:** Homebirth stories by dads

8pm: Dinner

**8:30pm:** Midwife panel with homebirth midwives Janine O'Brien and Jo Hunter. (An opportunity for the expectant dads to learn about the practicalities of dads' role during birth at home, and to have any questions answered by the birth experts.)

There will also be:

~Basic Homebirth Dads resource packs will be provided to each expecting dad with brochures / flyers on key topics on homebirth and making the transition to fatherhood.

~Homebirth merchandise for dads will also be available for sale on the night.

Generously Sponsored by:

**Oz Baby Trends, Hills Spinal Health, and Sam Saidi.**



24/1/15: Central Western Daily

**YOUR SAY: Homebirth all about choice, according to midwife**

<http://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/2835912/your-say-home-births-all-about-choice-according-to-midwife/>

It has been found that women who choose to birth at home are making this decision for a variety of reasons. The most common reason is to actively avoid unnecessary medical interventions that are more likely to occur when birthing in hospital ...

These interventions include a higher rate of episiotomy, medications, forceps or vacuum births and caesareans, with the latest Australian statistics showing a caesarean rate of 32.4 per cent compared to recent large international birthplace studies that showed intervention-free vaginal births at home to be over 80 per cent.

11/3/15: Huffington Post

**Maybe we should agree to disagree: A perspective on homebirth**

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/whitney-you/maybe-we-should-agree-to-disagree-a-perspective-on-home-birth\\_b\\_6823736.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/whitney-you/maybe-we-should-agree-to-disagree-a-perspective-on-home-birth_b_6823736.html)

In the United States, approximately 25,000 (0.6 percent) births occur outside of the hospital each year, the majority of which are planned. Women may choose to deliver at home because they want to avoid what they see as unnecessary medical interventions, to be in a more comfortable environment, or because of negative experiences in a hospital. As an obstetrician and a maternal fetal medicine specialist, I have witnessed an escalation in home births in my five years of practice

19/3/15: The Age

**Midwives fail to access mother's full medical history before homebirth death**

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/midwives-failed-to-access-mothers-full-medical-history-before-homebirth-death-20150319-1m3azm.html>

The midwives who assisted a Melbourne mother who died after a home birth should have better sought medical history which showed she suffered a haemorrhage during her first pregnancy, an inquest has heard. But the inquest into the death of Caroline Lovell also heard that midwives often faced difficulties within the health sector in accessing the medical records of their clients.

19/3/15: Sydney Morning Herald

**Home Births could be offered by public hospitals**

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/home-births-could-be-offered-by-public-hospitals-20150319-1m39yj.html>

More public hospitals in Victoria could soon choose to offer publicly-funded home birth to women with organised back up if medical care is required from a doctor. The Victorian government is finalising a guide for public hospitals that may be interested in giving women the option of a midwife-led home birth overseen by their local public hospital.

8/4/15: 9 News

**Gold Coast mums slams coroner report after home birth death**

<http://www.9news.com.au/national/2015/04/08/07/39/gold-coast-mum-slams-coroner-report-after-home-birth-gone-wrong>

A Gold Coast mother who lost her baby in a home birth gone wrong has refused to blame her midwife despite a coroner's report finding she fudged details surrounding the death and had no formal baby CPR skills. Alanna Goetzinger lost her baby daughter Rana after giving birth by candlelight at her Canungra home in 2012, The Gold Coast Bulletin reports. The level of care shown by the midwife of 19 years, who has not been named, during the water birth was found to have "fallen significantly short" of the standard expected from someone of her experience, the Australian Health Practitioner's Regulatory Authority found.

17/4/15: The Independent

**Sheila Kitzinger: Natural childbirth advocate who challenged the medical establishment and aimed to give more choice to mothers**

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/sheila-kitzinger-natural-childbirth-advocate-who-challenged-the-medical-establishment-and-aimed-to-give-more-choice-to-mothers-10182999.html>

Sheila Kitzinger was a powerful advocate for natural childbirth and home births who dedicated her career to the revolutionary idea that giving birth should be an exhilarating and rewarding experience, taken out of the hands of obstetricians and medical staff and given back to women....

With her relentless campaigning she almost single-handedly changed traditional attitudes to childbirth, challenging a medical fraternity which expected women to do what they were told and let the experts handle things

15/5/15: Free Malaysia Today

**Argentine midwives bare breasts for home birth**

<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/world/2015/05/15/argentine-midwives-bare-breasts-for-home-birth/>

BUENOS AIRES: Argentine midwives and activists staged an unusual protest Thursday, picketing topless in front of the health ministry to demand the right to give birth at home. Around 20 protesters bared their brightly painted breasts along a busy Buenos Aires street and held up signs urging Health Minister Daniel Gollan to protect the "right to choose where and how to give birth." Argentina's midwives say they have been excluded from policymakers' discussions on new regulations for their profession, which they fear will limit their activities and ban home births.

28/5/15: The Age

**Home birth midwife Gaye Demanuele involved in three deaths in two years**

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/home-birth-midwife-gaye-demanuele-involved-in-three-deaths-in-two-years-20150527-ghau3x.html>

The Melbourne midwife involved in a home birth where a mother died was present at two other home births that resulted in the deaths of two babies. The three deaths occurred within an 18-month period between July 2011 and October 2012. Home birth advocate Gaye Demanuele was the senior of two registered midwives at Caroline Lovell's fatal home birth in January 2012 that is the subject of a current coronial inquiry.

# PRE-NATAL SERVICES

## MASSAGE FOR WOMEN AND BABIES

Mobile Massage Service for All Areas in Sydney.

Supporting women before, during and after birth, offering:

- Pregnancy Massage
- Postnatal Massage
- Labour Trigger Massage
- Baby Massage Class
- Reflexology
- Remedial Massage
- Massage and Acupressure Lecture for Partner
- Doula Service
- Placenta Encapsulation
- Child Care/Housework Support

Private health fund rebates are available.

Noriko Amies

Health Funds Registered Remedial Massage Therapist and Doula

[www.norikoamies.com](http://www.norikoamies.com)

0410547980

## InnerWest

### BIRTH SENSE WITH JACKI MCFARLANE

Birth Art Group, Prenatal Counselling, Hypnosis and Creative Preparation for Pregnancy Wellbeing and Positive Birthing.

For group details and individual sessions please phone Jacki:

90433079 or 0419286619

[ackichip@internode.on.net](mailto:ackichip@internode.on.net)

### KRISTIANE HEIDRICH

In Adults CranioSacral Therapy Treats a wide range of conditions such as:

- Sensory Integration Disorders/ Learning Disabilities
- Dizziness
- Tinnitus
- Emotional Difficulties: Depression, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, Anxiety
- Digestive Issues including Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Sleep Disorders
- Unexplained (Tooth) pains
- Migraines and Headaches
- Chronic Neck and Back Pain
- Motor-Coordination Impairments
- Stress and Tension-Related Problems
- Traumatic Brain and Spinal Cord Injuries
- Chronic Fatigue/ Exhaustion
- Scoliosis
- Central Nervous System Disorders
- Temporo-mandibular Joint Syndrome (TMJ)

Kristiane Heidrich is a mother of 3 children aged 21, 19 and 17.

She is a Physiotherapist, Massage Therapist, CranioSacral Therapist, SomaticoEmotional Release Therapist, Visceral Manipulation Therapist and a teacher of these therapies. CranioSacral Therapy

enabled her to realise that instead of pushing against the body's restrictions causing 'dis-ease', that she could follow the body's own innate patterns and wisdom to facilitate the healing process. Kristiane has a special interest in working with mothers in the pre-conception (fertility) phase, during pregnancy, postpartum and also treats children of all ages in her clinic (0-90). She is a Doula, a Placenta Encapsulator and a midwifery student at UTS.

For fees/conditions and further information contact 0405 501 012 or visit the website [www.ashfieldphysio.com.au](http://www.ashfieldphysio.com.au)

## Southern Highlands

### PREGNANCY WORKSHOPS

Midwife Jane Hardwicke Collings gives regular workshops – "Pregnancy The Inner Journey" – in the Southern Highlands and in other places by arrangement. As well as "The School of Shamanic Midwifery" – a women's mysteries school for doulas and midwives

Jane Hardwicke Collings

0248882002, 0408035808

[janecollings@bigpond.com](mailto:janecollings@bigpond.com)

[www.moonsong.com.au](http://www.moonsong.com.au)

[www.placentalremedy.com](http://www.placentalremedy.com)

## Sutherland / St George

### ACTIVE CALMBIRTH® COURSES SYLVANIA

The calmbirth® course imparts the knowledge of birth preparation techniques such as deep relaxation, visualisation, breathing, positive imagery, attitudes/expectancy to achieve a rewarding, easier, more comfortable stress-free birthing experience. Julie Clarke is an experienced homebirther. Many women who have done the calmbirth® course during their pregnancy are far more likely to have positive feelings about their birthing experience. Their partners and midwives are quite often very impressed with how beautifully they've worked with their body during the labour.

For enquiries of dates and available times and bookings phone 95446441 - available weekends, weekdays, evenings. Visit: [www.julieclarke.com.au](http://www.julieclarke.com.au) see website for dates and discount.

Special note: Julie's calmbirth® course is very reasonably priced.

Mobile: 0401265530 / 9544 6441.

9 Withybrook pl. Sylvania (20mins south of airport).

### NATURAL BEGINNINGS

Herbal Medicine, Nutrition & Birth Support

I have a very personal interest in treating preconception, pregnancy and children's health, naturally. With some help from herbs and nutrition, my partner and I prepared our bodies' health naturally for conscious conception, and I enjoyed 2 trouble free pregnancies, and gave birth at home to my 2 healthy, full term baby boys and they continue to enjoy perfect health. You too can benefit from my experience in natural health care.

I can assist you with:

- ~ preconception health and natural fertility
  - ~ preparing for a healthier baby
  - ~ overcoming health conditions, (including during pregnancy)
  - ~ preparing your body and mind for a better birth
  - ~ birth support for mum & dad, and/or siblings
  - ~ treating your children's health naturally
  - ~ chemical-free home-made herbal skin products
- Natural Pregnancy, Birth and Post-Natal Kits also available which make great gifts for the expectant or new Mum!

Virginia Maddock

Herbalist, Nutritionist & Doula

0415683074. 5 Balfour Ave Caringbah 2229

[www.naturalbeginnings.com.au](http://www.naturalbeginnings.com.au)

### TRANSITION INTO PARENTHOOD

Active Birth and Newborn Care Courses

The most comprehensive and best value birth and parenting courses in Sydney. Facilitator is Julie Clarke who is respected as a specialist in natural active birth including waterbirth. Importantly she also presents information beyond the birth to encompass the newborn period, specially on the practicalities and reducing stress, helping you to enjoy the first weeks as a family. Pregnant couples receive professionally presented, well organised course notes.

Very suitable for homebirth, birth centre and delivery suite.

See Julie's website for more details, birth stories and pictures, and information. [www.julieclarke.com.au](http://www.julieclarke.com.au)

Julie has a great sense of humour and a very gentle approach, she is regarded as one of the most inspirational educators in Sydney.

Good variety of courses to choose from: 8 wk evening course 1 night per week, or 2 full Saturdays condensed or 1 full Sunday super condensed.

Julie is a unique birth educator who also provides post natal in home baby care support service exclusively to the couples who have attended her courses.

Julie Clarke / [julie@julieclarke.com.au](mailto:julie@julieclarke.com.au) / Mobile: 0401265530

Landline: (02)9544 6441

### HYPNOBIRTHING AUSTRALIA™ COURSE

Hypnobirthing Australia™ program is a unique, modern and comprehensive antenatal education to suit Australian needs.

Be Prepared for an easier, safer, gentle and empowering birth experience through discovering and optimizing the power of our mindset, deep relaxation, visualisation, self-hypnosis, specific breathing techniques and other practical information covered in our classes.

#Special price offer for HAS members.

w: [www.birthingbreeze.com.au](http://www.birthingbreeze.com.au)

f: [www.facebook.com/birthingbreeze](https://www.facebook.com/birthingbreeze)

e: [bitna@birthingbreeze.com.au](mailto:bitna@birthingbreeze.com.au)

m: 0433 952 104

# DOULA SERVICES

## **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 3 prenatal visits, birth support incl. herbs/flower essences and reiki massage, birth photography, follow up visit, and all your edited digital photos 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  
041 5683074  
5 Balfour Ave Caringbah 2229  
[www.naturalbeginnings.com.au](http://www.naturalbeginnings.com.au)

## **ELS VAN LUEEWAN**

Qualified Doula, Childbirth Educator and Child Care Worker, providing personal care and practical support in honour of your authentic and empowered path through birth and early parenting. Please get in touch to arrange an obligation free meeting.  
0403233719  
[els76@hotmail.com](mailto:els76@hotmail.com)

# PLACENTA SERVICES

## **KRISTIANE HEIDRICH - Placenta Encapsulation Specialist Offering**

~Raw Encapsulation  
~Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Encapsulation  
~Placenta Tincture (optional as homoeopathic remedy)  
~Placenta Smoothie  
For fees/conditions and further information contact 0405 501 012 or visit the website [www.ashfieldphysio.com.au](http://www.ashfieldphysio.com.au)

## **LOTUS BORN - Lotus Birth Supplies**

Lotus Birth Kits, Placenta Bags, Placenta Wrapping Cloths and Drying Herbs.  
All Lotus Born products come with full Lotus Birth instructions. We welcome custom orders.  
[www.etsy.com/shop/lotusborn](http://www.etsy.com/shop/lotusborn)  
[lotusborn@y7mail.com](mailto:lotusborn@y7mail.com)

## **NATURAL BEGINNINGS**

Doula, herbalist and nutritionist Virginia Maddock is now offering placenta encapsulation give back what your body has lost after birth. The placenta can be ingested in a palatable way once it is dried and encapsulated, to nourish your body and replace nutrients and hormones that will help with post natal bleeding, mood regulation, breast milk production and energy boosting.

I can also make your placenta into a tincture to be taken by you or your baby for years to come, create a beautiful tree of life artwork, have the cord dried into a heart or spiral shape keepsake (or dream catcher), and make a placenta balm infused with herbs and essential oils for many skin conditions.

Please see my website for more information and prices.  
Virginia Maddock 0415683074 [Virginia@naturalbeginnings.com.au](mailto:Virginia@naturalbeginnings.com.au)  
[www.naturalbeginnings.com.au](http://www.naturalbeginnings.com.au)

## **THE NURTURED BEBE**

For ten moons your placenta nourished, supported and grew your precious bebe. Once you have welcomed your bebe earthside, your placenta can still continue to nourish both of you. The most common benefits of placentophagy include;

~ Reduced risk of postpartum depression  
~ Increasing breastmilk supply  
~ Replenish iron stores  
~ Assisting recovery post-partum  
~ Reducing the length of postpartum bleeding  
~ Increasing general wellbeing in both mother and bebe  
I offer a variety of services including encapsulation, tinctures and salves as well as mementos such as artwork and dried cord keepsakes.  
Alicia Langlands 0400684464  
[www.thenurturedbebe.com.au](http://www.thenurturedbebe.com.au)  
[info@thenurturedbebe.com.au](mailto:info@thenurturedbebe.com.au)

# HOSPITAL HOMEBIRTH PROGRAMS

## **BELMONT MIDWIFERY GROUP PRACTICE HOMEBIRTH PROGRAM**

Our service provides individualised women centred continuity of care throughout pregnancy, birth and for two weeks postnatally.

Healthy women have the choice to birth at home if they are within 30 mins to our supporting hospital, John Hunter Hospital (New Lambton Heights in the Hunter/New England area).

For further information contact Jane Crosbie, Phone: 0428 112 192, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Belmont-Birthing>

## **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 029113 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 0242534256 and ask to book in with the Midwifery Group Practice (MGP). Your details will be taken down and MGP will return your call.

# 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.

## ACORN MIDWIFERY : KATIE SULLIVAN

I am a midwife in private practice on the NSW Central Coast and have been a midwife for 10 years, having worked in continuity of care models for all of my clinical experience. I can tailor your care to your needs. Antenatal or postnatal care individually or as part of the suite of services including labour and birth at home. I am a placenta specialist certified to provide placenta encapsulation, placenta tinctures and placenta salves. I will travel to Newcastle/Hunter Valley/Port Stephens and Upper North Shore/Northern Beaches area to work with women and their families.  
Katie Sullivan: 0408614029  
katie@acornmidwifery.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

[Midwives @ Sydney And Beyond]  
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 preconception, 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

## EMMA FITZPATRICK: MIDWIFE IN PRIVATE PRACTICE

[Midwives @ Sydney And Beyond]  
With over 11 years experience in Midwifery, I am passionate about supporting women and their families throughout the journey of pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. As well as being a passionate Midwife I am mum to 3 children, my littlest recently being birthed at home in the water. I am located in the Hawkesbury, and happy to provide support and service to women in Western Sydney, The Hawkesbury and The Blue Mountains areas.  
Emma Fitzpatrick (The Hawkesbury)  
0432724103  
emma\_gu77@yahoo.com.au

## HAZEL KEEDLE

Private midwife, antenatal, home birthing and postnatal care and placenta encapsulation covering the Central West, based near Orange, NSW  
0408661503  
hazelkeedle@gmail.com  
www.midwifehazel.com

## IBIRTH - INTIMATE BIRTH & BEGINNINGS

[Midwives @ Sydney & Beyond]  
My name is Janine O'Brien and I have been a midwife for over 10 years, committed in women centred care and providing a continuum of care to women and their families. I am the mother of two beautiful young women and have been practicing with Midwives@Sydney & Beyond since June 2013.  
Servicing Northern Beaches, Sydney & surrounding suburbs.  
Janine O'Brien 0422 969 961  
janine@ibirth.com.au  
www.ibirth.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.  
Jo Hunter (Blue Mountains, Inner west and Western Sydney)  
(02) 47519840  
midwifejo@bigpond.com  
www.midwifejo.com.au

## NEW BEGINNINGS MIDWIFERY PRACTICE

[Midwives @ Sydney and Beyond]  
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  
midwiferyrobyn@optusnet.com.au  
www.homebirthmidwives.com.au

## PREGNANCY , BIRTH & BEYOND

[Midwives @ Sydney and 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

## SHERYL SIDERY

Hi my name is Sheryl, I live on the northern beaches and have been in private practice for over 23 years. I believe that pregnancy and birth is a transformative process that is essential for mothering. I cover the northern beaches, eastern suburbs and the inner west.  
Having Medicare eligibility provides women with a rebate for some of their pre and postnatal care.  
Sheryl Sidery 0409760548  
secretwomensbiz@bigpond.com  
www.sherylsidery.com

## TANYA MUNTEN

Having trust in the normal process of birth is Tanya's foundation for her midwifery practice along with the understanding that every pregnancy, birth and pathway into parenthood is a unique and profound life experience.  
As an eligible Independent midwife from Sydney's Northern Beaches Tanya is able to provide a Medicare rebate for your antenatal and postnatal care for up to 6 wks after the birth of you baby.  
All visits take place in your home at a time that suits. Area's covered are Sydney's Northern beaches, Nth Shore & Eastern Suburbs.  
Tanya Munten 0412 210 222  
tanyamunten@hotmail.com  
www.tanyamunten.com.au

## WITH WOMAN MIDWIFERY CARE

I am an independent midwife based in Shellharbour. I provide continuity of midwifery care throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period to women planning to birth at home. All visits take place in the woman's home at a time that suits the family. Areas covered include the Illawarra, Southern Highlands, Southern Sydney, Shoalhaven and Canberra.  
Rachele Meredith 0421 721 497  
rachele@withwoman.com.au  
www.withwoman.com.au

# 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 from different practices
- 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 paediatrician 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?

# HOME BIRTH SUPPORT GROUPS

## Sydney & NSW

### Eastern Suburbs Homebirth Support Group

3rd Wednesday of every month

Time: 10.00-12.00

Location: Bondi Beach

Contact: Nadine Fragosa 0468 382 580 or nads@jonads.com

Next Meeting: 18th Sep, 16th Oct, 20th Nov

Please feel welcome to join us if you're pregnant, have children or are just curious about home birthing.

### Inner West Homebirth Support Group

First Wednesday of Every Month

Time: 10am - 12pm

Location: changes every month, so please email your details to Magda or call to find out where we are meeting.

Contact: magda.jansen@gmail.com 0410 139 907

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

### Sutherland Shire Homebirth Group

Every Thursday

Time: 10.30am weekly

Location: 5 Balfour Ave Caringbah.

Contact: Virginia 0415683074 or maddvirg@yahoo.com.au

If 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.

### Pregnancy & Parenting Network meeting - Dundas Valley

4th Thursday of the month

Time: 10am-12pm

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

Contact: Jane Palmer 1300 MIDWYF (1300 643 993)

jane@pregnancy.com.au

Dates and Topics:

3rd October - Baby wearing

7th November - Unexpected outcomes

5th December - Parenting a new baby: Settling techniques, co-sleeping and elimination communication and Christmas Party

Info: <http://www.pregnancy.com.au/resources/support-groups/index.shtml>

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

### Pregnancy & Parenting Network meeting - Hawkesbury

2nd Tuesday of the month

Time: 10am - 12 noon

Location: Emma Fitzpatrick's home: 5 Rowland Ave Kurmond

Contact: Melanie: 0425 280 682 mkjackson@live.com.au

Dates / Topics:

17th September - Baby moon - postnatal support and mental health

15th October - Baby wearing

19th November - Unexpected outcomes

17th December - Parenting a new baby: Settling techniques, co-sleeping and elimination communication and Christmas Party

Info: <http://www.ellamaycentre.com/Events.html>

Please bring a plate of food to share (anything you can manage).

As always, mums, dads, friends and kids are all welcome!

See you there!

### Illawarra Birth Choices Group

3rd Monday of each month

Time: 10.30am to 12.30pm

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

Next Meetings:

September 16- Models of Care, presented by Sarah, place: Figtree

Dragon Park, back up: Samantha Rudd, Mount Keira

October 21 - Homebirth, host: Samantha Contri, Dapto

Nov 18 - Antenatal Testing, place: Austinmere park

Dec 16 - Coping with Labour and end of year picnic, place: Figtree

Dragon Park - Antenatal Testing, place: Austinmere park

Contact: info@birthchoices.info

### Mothers & Midwives of the South (Southern Highlands)

Every month

For more details contact Kylie Woods: 486801691 / 0416204424 or candlebark@hotmail.com.

Everyone welcome!

### Blue Mountains Homebirth Support Group

Every 2nd Thursday

Time: 10am-12pm

Location: Lawson Family Day Care room, unless otherwise specified!

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

Contacts: email Krystal: bmhomebirth@gmail.com or visit our website

<http://www.bluemountainshomebirth.com.au/>

To join our mailing list of upcoming meetings / topics please email Krystal.

Bring a healthy snack to share if you get a chance, if not come anyway.

\*No meetings in school holidays\*

### Central Coast Homebirth Group

1st Wednesday of each month

Time: 10.30-12.30

Location: Various venues in group members' homes

Contact: Lisa Richards bellabirthing@live.com.au

Come along if you are pregnant, trying to conceive, mums, dads, kids, doulas, midwives, and anyone interested in homebirth (including homebirth & hospital transfers).

### Hunter Home and Natural Birth Support (HHNBS)

2nd Wed of every month, 10am-12noon

Location: various indoor and outdoor locations in Newcastle

Contact: Anne 0434 941 892 or email hhnbgroup@gmail.com with

enquiries or to join our mailing list

You can also find us on Facebook - Hunter Home and Natural Birth Support Group

### Armidale and District Homebirth Support Network

1st Sunday of every month

Contact: Rebecca Pezzutti hbsarmidale@gmail.com

## Interstate & National

### Homebirth Australia

Contact: Chris Wrightson 0414 812 144 homebirthaustralia@gmail.com  
[www.homebirthaustralia.org](http://www.homebirthaustralia.org)

### Homebirth Queensland Inc.

Contact: 07) 3839 5883 info@homebirth.org.au  
[www.homebirth.org.au](http://www.homebirth.org.au)

### Alice Springs Homebirth Group

Contact: Anne Yffer 0402 424 780 wildisha@gmail.com

### Darwin Homebirth Group

Contact: Justine Wickham 0438 888 755 dhbginfo@gmail.com  
[www.darwinhomebirthgroup.org.au](http://www.darwinhomebirthgroup.org.au)

### Homebirth Network of SA

PO Box 275, Seaford, SA 5169

Contact: Claire at admin@homebirthsa.org.au  
[www.homebirthsa.org.au](http://www.homebirthsa.org.au)

## HOMEBIRTH 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

Meetings are generally held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at venues TBA, but dates are subject to late changes according to availability of attendees.

Please contact Virginia on 0415683074 or email [info@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:info@homebirthsydney.org.au) for submissions and agenda confirmation.

All welcome, including children!

## 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         |                  |                   |
| 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 Serene Johnson [advertising@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto: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.

The topic for the next issue is:

# Nesting Instincts



Birthings is your magazine, so please contribute!

The Spring 2015 issue is on the theme 'Nesting Instincts'. This issue will be about all the many and varied things that we do to get ourselves ready for homebirth. This could include physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual preparation for ourselves, or setting up our birth spaces and preparing those in our lives for the incredible journey we're about to embark on.

As always, we also welcome your birth announcements, stories, letters and creative expressions around home birth.

Submissions are due by 1 August 2015.

Please check our submission guidelines on page 2 and don't forget a bio!

Email the Editor at [editor@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:editor@homebirthsydney.org.au)

**REMINDER:** please ensure we have your current email address so you can receive membership expiry reminders, as well as our newsletter. If you have recently moved, please send us your new address: [member@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:member@homebirthsydney.org.au)