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Autumn 2017 Issue 133

Birththings

Homebirth Sydney Access E-Magazine



Contact Us

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Birth Stories
Birth Announcements
Homebirth Related Articles

Submission Guide: Less than <1800 words
with high resolution photos and videos (if you have one),
Don't forget your bio (<100 words).

Next submission due date: 26th June 2017

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Birththings

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by
Angela Hardy
Photography



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by
Virginia Maddock
Natural Beginnings



Homebirth Access Sydney
www.homebirthsydney.org.au

Editorial

Welcome to our Autumn issue of Birthings 2017.

First of all, I apologise for your long wait. There have been major delays due to all the changes we are going through regarding the structure of Birthings Magazine. I apologise again for the delay and would like to thank you all for your patience.

Now, I'm so excited to announce our first paperless edition of Birthings. You can now enjoy the modern, interactive and full colour version of Birthings in your preferred devices. I know some of you might feel sad for the discontinuation of Birthings in print but since the discontinuation of our printing sponsor a few years ago, it is no longer financially possible to continue the printed version (If you would like to sponsor us for printing or know someone who would then please get in contact!). And as time passes we have to evolve to be able to serve our purpose in the best way possible. I hope you will enjoy this new version of Birthings as much as the printed version. Don't forget to click on the ads to send some business their way in thanks for supporting us!

Thanks to all the hard work of our Homebirth Access Australia (HAS) committee members and caring members of HAS, we have been able to continue to support homebirth families and communities and advocate homebirth options as an available choice of birth. Not only have we made these changes to Birthings, we have launched a beautiful new website, with special thanks to Jodie Powell and Veronica Cerbelli. It's perfectly designed for our members to navigate through to access so much information about homebirth and homebirth services and communities in Sydney and surrounding areas.

This issue has inspiring birth stories, warm welcomes to the new home-birthed babies, a review of the Homebirth Dads' Night Out, empowering birth affirmations and much more. Hope you enjoy this edition as much as I did.

Our next issue will have the theme: "Change of Plan". Did you initially plan a hospital birth but saw the light and changed to planning a homebirth during your pregnancy? Or did you plan for a homebirth but transferred to hospital for whatever reason? Perhaps you had to move house and birthed in a different location than you first envisioned? Tell us your experience of Change of Plan in regards to your homebirth (or lack thereof). Deadline is 26th June so send us your articles, birth announcements and stories to editor@homebirthsydney.org.au.



I've been blissed with my editor/graphic designer role for Birthings for nearly 2 years now, I would like to thank everyone who supported me to complete each issue with confidence and joy. This was not only a great opportunity for me to share and expend my skills, but for me to join this wonderful community, and also to grow as a person to contribute to an important cause I strongly believe in.

However, I've made a very hard decision which is to step down from both Editor and Graphic Designer position. As some of you might know, we've been home educating our eldest daughter Myra (7) for about a year now. It has been a challenging yet exciting and rewarding journey for all of us as a family. So we've decided to step forward from that already awesome experience, and are planning our world adventure next year. Regardless of all my love and passion toward Birthings and HAS, I know my time is tied to all the current and future commitments for my family and work. It won't be wise to hold on to the position if I can't give 100% to Team HAS and our members because you all deserve the best. I'm going to stay with these positions until we find suitable people to take over.

So if you are interested in taking over the editor or graphic designer role for Birthings, see page 25 for brief job descriptions for each role and send me an email to express your interest : editor@homebirthsydney.org.au.

- BITNA CASTILLO

President's Report

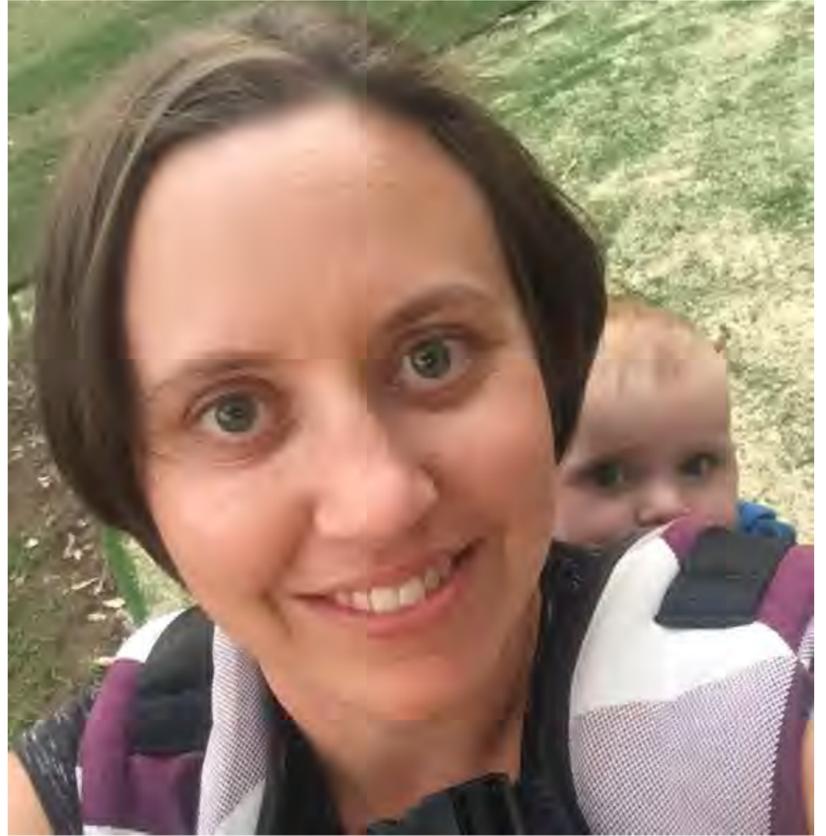
Hello Fellow Homebirth Enthusiasts! I must begin by bidding farewell to 2 important members of our committee who are moving on: Our Secretary Natalie Rees and Our Treasurer/Web Admin Veronica Cerbelli. I want to say a big thank you to both ladies who have put so much time and effort into their roles at HAS and will be dearly missed. Virginia Maddock will be taking over as Secretary and Santina Sannen has stepped up to help us out as our new Treasurer. Bitna Choi will be taking over as the new web admin. As always - if you feel called to devote some of your time to help promote and protect the right of women to choose homebirth - please get in contact with us and see which volunteer position would suit you. Volunteering with us is also a great way to keep your skills fresh while taking time off to raise a family.

This issue of Birthings marks a new era for HAS, being our first E-magazine. We apologize for the extra time it took us to produce this issue - we are still working out kinks with doing things a different way and this has taken more time than we had anticipated.

Nevertheless, please enjoy this issue and send us your feedback so we can keep improving.

Our focus in the coming weeks will be to update and expand our online resources for women interested in Birthing at Home. We are collecting and collating information about homebirth options for women in Sydney in wider NSW. We have appointed a new volunteer, Azure Rigney who will be helping us with this project. Watch this space.

We are also going to be actively promoting the upcoming Homebirth Australia Conference - Choices,



Changes & Challenges, which is being held in our very own Sydney Nov 3rd to 5th. ([Tickets here](#)) This event is going to be a powerful one - and if you care deeply about homebirth, this is a great event to support. I am particularly excited about the pre conference workshop in online advocacy. We hope to see you all there!

- JODIE POWELL

Membership

For new membership or renewals
please go to

www.homebirthsydney.org.au
and click on '[membership](#)'

Committee Member Profile



AZURE RIGNEY - HAS Secretary

When did you join HAS?

I saw the HAS stand at the Raising Happy Kids Expo run by some friends from the Inner West Home birth Facebook group. Fortunately my midwife Jo Hunter signed me up so we could look at birth stories and review local service providers.

Who is in your family?

My husband Dan, my 21 month old Mia and I'm 7 months pregnant with a baby boy!

What did you do before children?

I have studied Business and Human Resources at Queensland University of Technology and worked in insurance. I've been in the Army for 7 years doing Payroll, but yes I still wear combat boots and do the training. The maternity camouflage uniform is called a tent hehe.

What have you done since children?

After Maternity leave I returned to work part time.

Why Homebirth?

I made jokes about accidentally homebirthing during my pregnancy with Mia after firing 3 Ob's who weren't

supportive of Delayed Cord Clamping, avoiding an epidural and my one fear; birthing on my back. I was even more scared of giving birth in a private hospital, as policy states no waterbirths. I was in active labour for 41 minutes with Mia however a long list of hospital errors including weighing her incorrectly as 2kg and sent to SCN for no medical reasons. We lived 7mins away from hospital and the car trip was the most painful part along with hubby 'not being allowed to go home to get frozen colostrum' so was fed formula against my wishes. My daughter was born in the smoothest easiest labour I could imagine, and I was very informed, but I'm traumatised by what happened to us. I've since read my work's maternity policy in more detail and found I'm entitled to a private practicing midwife as long as they collaborate with a private OB.

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

I've recently learned about how beautiful 'Siblings at birth' is and my toddler loves watching birth youtube videos. Last time I had Fetal ejection reflex from fear over how hubby and I were treated by staff, however now have everything in place to experience it from feeling private, safe and unobserved by being home with a wonderful care provider.

Community News

Review of 'Homebirth Dads Night Out' OLIVER WENN

The recent Home birth dad's night out, was for me a fantastic event. In truth I was apprehensive at first however quickly realised there was a kinship between the Dads that was very comforting. I think as men you can sometimes feel that you don't have the right to care as much as perhaps the women, or at least the women would be more passionate about homebirth and childcare. However I discovered the opposite was true, the dads that came were eloquent, informed and just as passionate.

All in all it was a very affirming experience. I highly recommend all dads go along.

OLIVER WENN
Homebirth Dad, Actor,
Producer & Company
Director of The Hub Studio



**HELD
IN PUBS
ALL OVER
AUSTRALIA**

beer + bubs

childbirth education for men at the pub

Beer + Bubs is a one-night session at the pub where expectant dads learn the practical skills they need to support a woman through labour for an easier, faster birth.

Use any free QR code app to scan this code and go to the mobile-ready site for dates and bookings

For dates and bookings visit beerandbubs.com.au

The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a man's face in profile, looking down at a baby he is holding. The text is overlaid on the image. A circular badge in the upper right corner contains the text 'HELD IN PUBS ALL OVER AUSTRALIA'. The main title 'beer + bubs' is in a large, white, cursive font. Below it, the subtitle 'childbirth education for men at the pub' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. A paragraph of text describes the event. At the bottom, there is a QR code and a website URL.

Look out for
our next
Homebirth Dads
Night Out
during Homebirth
Awareness Week!

29/Oct/2017!

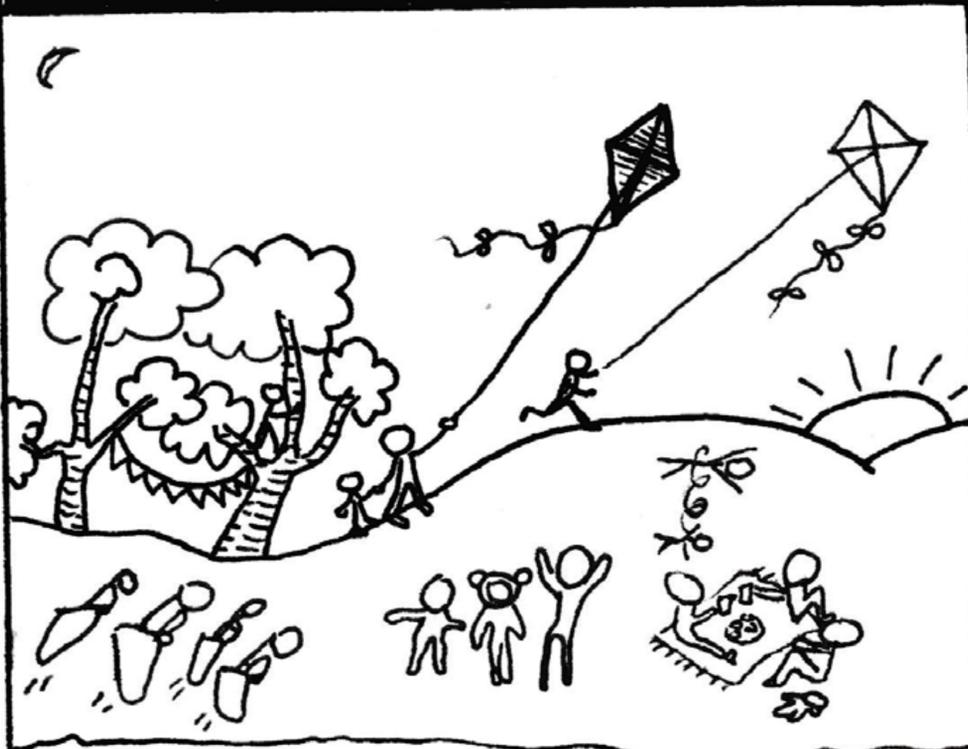
The advertisement features a photograph of a group of men sitting at a long table in a pub, drinking beer and eating. The text is overlaid on the image. The main text is in a white, sans-serif font. The date '29/Oct/2017!' is at the bottom.

Amy Bell's
daisychain

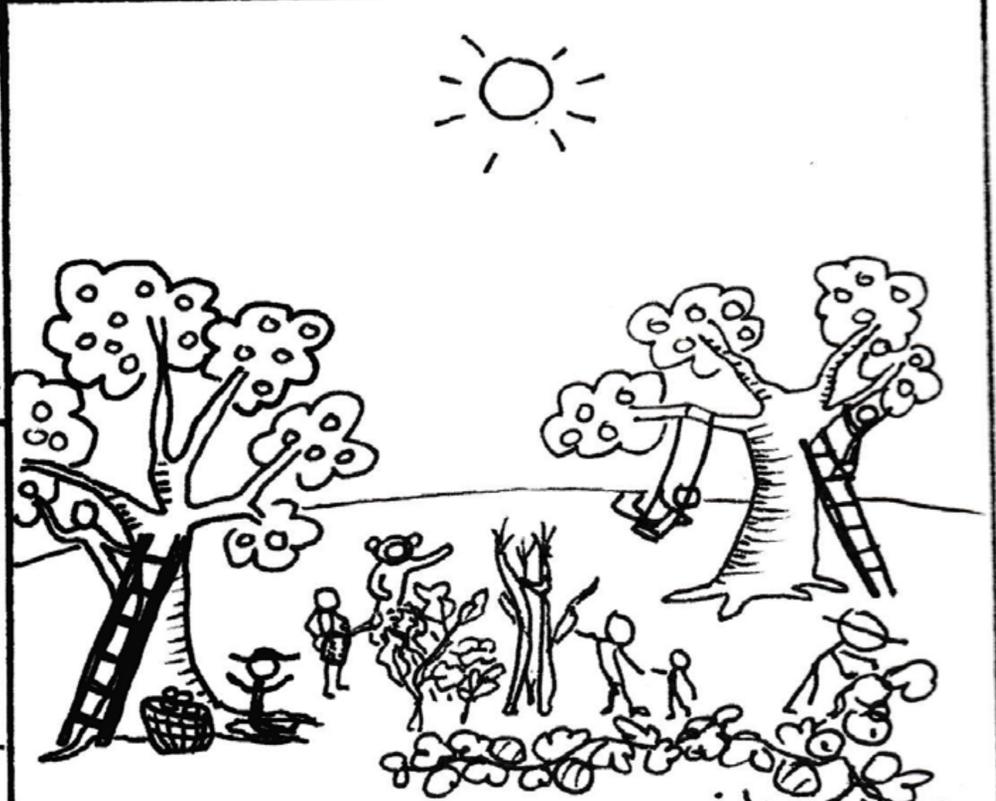
* a family is whatever
a group of people
decide.

Daisy's guide to creating
a village to promote love
and belonging in a world
that has forgotten about
the value of families*

"IT TAKES A VILLAGE"



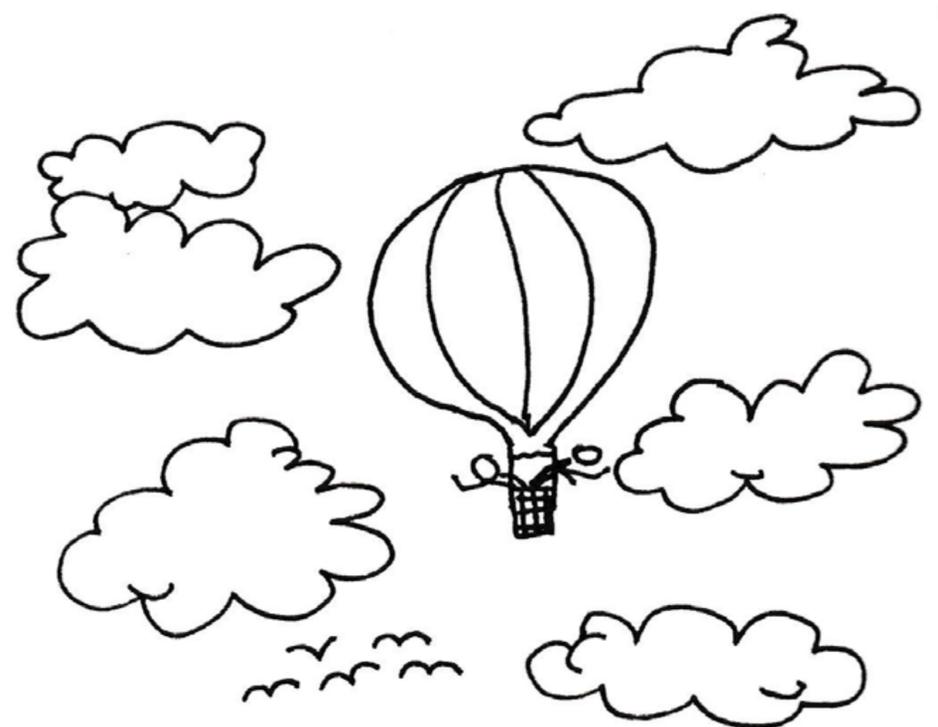
Organise regular gatherings
to play with all the kids



meet at the community
gardens or have working bees



take turns babysitting...



... so parents can go on
dates



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Birth Announcements

Maddy, Brendan, and Nicky are please to announce the arrival of **Ellen Elizabeth** into our lives on the **4th of September 2016**. She was born at 42 weeks into water aided by Dad and Midwife Jo Hunter.

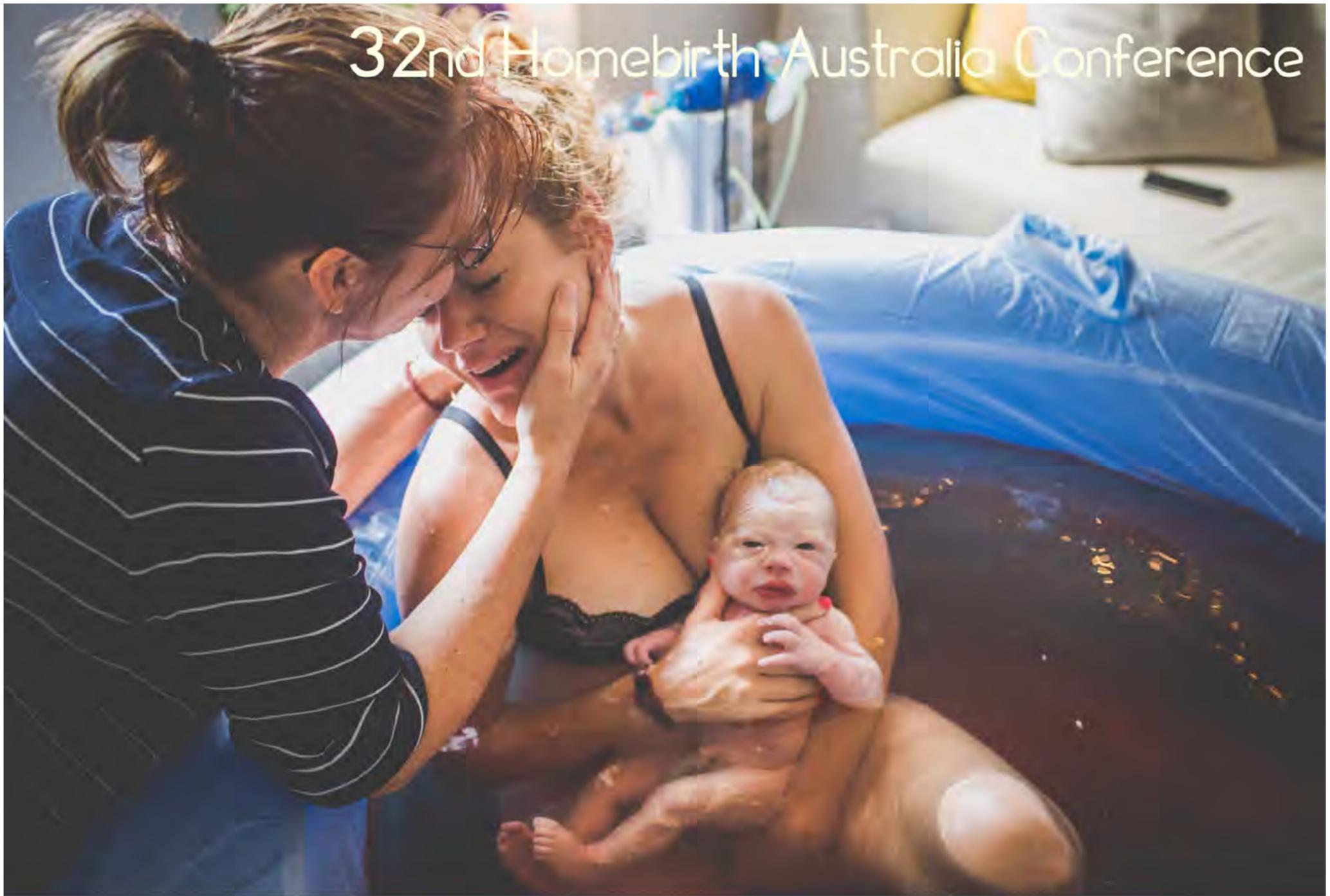


Stevie Jade Riggs
Born at home after a much planned healing anticipation from my previous planned homebirth but ended up in hospital Stevie born into the world earthside in the presence of her daddy Jason Riggs, our independent homebirth midwife Daniel Evans, our photographer Angela Hardy & my sweet friend & greatest supporter GEM Stevie is our 2nd rainbow baby, a sister for Stella, Weighed-3.950kgs Birthed @ home peacefully in the comfort safety & security of our own environment

Send your birth announcements with a photograph to

editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

32nd Homebirth Australia Conference



Homebirth Matters: Choices, Changes & Challenges

Mercure Broadway, Sydney

3rd - 5th November 2017

Keynote Speakers: Maggie Banks & Mimi Hill with Zoe Naylor as MC



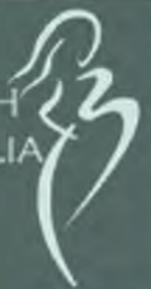
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www.homebirthaustralia.org

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HOME BIRTH
AUSTRALIA





The Birth of Arliese

LINDY KLEIN

When my husband Gerwood and I discovered I was pregnant, we were so excited. This was my second pregnancy (my daughter Isabella is 12), and Gerwood's first.

With Bella, I was naive, and followed along with the system in a rural town in NSW. The best part of giving birth to Bella was being in the bath before we went to hospital (where I had an epidural as I went into transition, and didn't get to hold her for several hours after she was born). So for my second pregnancy, I wanted a water birth. And I had learned with Bella that just because a hospital has a birthing pool, doesn't mean you'll be able to use it!

So I ventured tentatively into a discussion with Gerwood, anxious about proposing an "abnormal", non-hospital birth. His early reaction was to tell me "Well, just prove to me its safe" to which I responded "No! I don't have to prove anything to you - you have to prove what you want me to do is safe. This is my body, my pregnancy, and I'm the one giving birth!"

I am proud of myself for reframing the discussion, and grateful for having a supportive husband. We both did more research, concluding that home birth was actually the safest option available to us in our circumstances.

I was even more gratified when I could say to well-meaning friends and relatives that we were having a homebirth, and were also booked in at a hospital where our midwives have an arrangement with an obstetrician. If things had become complicated, both my midwives had privileges at the hospital, and I had seen the obstetrician and had confidence in him.

At 8.30pm on Monday 19th September, I felt a pop and a gush of liquid between my legs. My waters had broken! After letting my husband and daughter know, I texted Jane our primary midwife (as Janine was in hospital for surgery).

The flow was quite heavy, and I changed pads frequently for the next hour or so. Mum arrived at about 9.30pm, and with no contractions, I encouraged everyone to go to bed and sleep while we could!

I woke several times to change my undies and the towel I was sleeping on. I got up at about 7.30am on Tuesday 20th September, to find Mum making breakfast, and Bella very excited. Gerwood called work and advised he wasn't coming in. I noticed occasional contractions, but it didn't occur to me until 8.30am to start timing them - and they were 6 mins apart!! Gerwood called Jane, and Mum left to get Dad. As she left, Gerwood and Bella got the birth pool ready.

Jane arrived at approximately 9.30am, and by the time she arrived, the birth pool was nearly ready. After 20 minutes or so of riding through the contractions by holding onto the back of a kitchen chair and swaying, I was ready for the pool!

I remember Jane asking at around that point if she should give midwife Emma a call, and feeling quite incredulous responding "Jane! Call Emma now!!" (knowing if she was coming from home, she was at least 40 minutes away!). I don't remember when Amy (a lovely student midwife who we invited to observe her first home birth), Emma, and Mum and Dad each arrived - I was generally too focused on riding through each contraction. I stayed in the pool for about half an hour, but the water was a little too warm.

and the contractions were starting to get stronger and longer - I clambered out and went to the toilet. I distinctly remember Jane sitting in the toilet room with me, perched on the edge of the bath, talking calmly and encouragingly through breathing and being strong. She was amazing, I am so grateful she was there!

I'm guessing it would have been close to two hours, maybe two and a half, when I asked Gerwood to get the single bed spare mattress with the waterproof cover and lie it on the floor by the pool. I felt dizzy and tired, and increasingly anxious, though I wasn't sure about what. As I lay on my side on the mattress, someone (I later discovered it was Emma) gave me a wonderful strong back massage. I shifted to laying over the gym ball, and Emma and Jane moved to massaging down my back and thighs, helping relieve the energy of the contractions wonderfully. After one particularly strong contraction, Jane asked me if I was afraid - and I realized I was scared, but still couldn't explain what I was fearful of.

Bella was a marvel, offering sips of water and encouragement. Jane suggested getting back into the pool, as I realized I was tiring, and frightened of baby getting stuck (Bella got stuck as she was coming out, leaving a bruise across the bridge of her nose for just over a week). So into the pool we went!

Gerwood was holding my arms and shoulders, quietly encouraging me and telling me how amazing I was doing. The next contraction I felt baby coming down, and

groaned through it - Jane encouraged me to go into it, and Emma let me know the head wasn't visible yet, but it was clear there was progress. I lay limp over the side of the pool between contractions, aware of the chatter in the room, grateful for the care and support of those there. The next contraction I screamed as I felt baby crowning, too fast, too fast - nooo, I don't want to tear!! I slowed my breathing, adjusting my crouch to try and slow baby a little before the next wave. As the next contraction came, I heaved myself up with my knees wide and roared through the contraction, feeling her head come through and hearing Jane go "Nearly there, two more should do it!", the last wave followed straight away and I screamed as baby was born into the water. Emma pointed down with smiling eyes, and next I knew my babe was in my hands! I wanted to scoop bubby straight out of the water, but I tried to be slow, tried to remember to let them adjust to life Earthside before that first breath! I lifted my baby gently out of the water and up to my chest. Delighting in how small and slippery she was, the silkiness of her vernix, and her beautiful newborn wrinkly skin, I didn't worry that she hadn't cried. Fortunately, Emma was on the spot "Just blow in her face Mama, that's it, come on bubba, cry for me!" - and while it took a few puffs in her face first, she let out a cry (and everyone else breathed a sigh of relief!).

Gerwood and I cuddled over the side of the pool, with Bella crouching nearby, and discovered our baby was a little girl! After checking with me, Gerwood fetched Mum and Dad into the birthing room, where they stood and admired our newest family member.

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(WORTH \$300)

Our midwives were incredibly supportive and respectful, and I'm glad they gave us these moments. With the water turning dark though, it was time to get us out of the pool. I wasn't ready to let go of bubby, so cuddled her to me as I stepped out of the pool, and got comfy on the mattress. Towels and blankets were found, and bubby had her first feed (such glorious skin-to-skin!). About 20 minutes after she was born, I birthed the placenta easily in one smooth contraction. We had discussed lotus birth, so did not cut the cord. I was prepared with a plastic kitchen sieve and metal bowl. But I had forgotten to mention to anyone else that there was also a fish net for poo catching, and as no one had seen the net, the sieve had been put into service. I heard Emma say "Oops!", as she did a quick dash to clean up for the placenta. I recommend new mamas make sure they communicate with their team, but this is still one of the funny moments from the birth. The next was discovering Gerwood, Mum and Dad had made a spit roast and vegies for everyone for lunch!

After checking over the placenta, bubby and I were tucked up on the mattress, with her having a feed, as Jane brought me a lovely plate of roast and vegies, cut up ready to eat. Had someone told me I'd be eating lunch less than an hour after giving birth, I would have laughed at the idea.

Having eaten, Jane gave me a quick check to ensure all was well internally and with the perineum. I had torn (there was a reason for screaming through that first contraction of baby crowning!), and chose not to have stitches, as it was only a little (and from Bella's birth, I remembered the stitches hurting almost as much as the tearing itself!). I am so glad I got to choose, and own my experience! Jane did all the newborn checks with baby on my chest, so quickly that there was barely any disturbance to our cuddling. Bella got to have bubby cuddles, as Jane and I did the final checks to make sure I was ok. I was helped up to our bedroom, and stayed there for all but

pee breaks for the next two days.

We kept the placenta in the metal bowl covered with a terry-toweling nappy, moving it from side to side as baby changed breasts for feeding. While this wasn't too bad at first, as evening came it got harder, with the cord becoming cold and clammy to touch - baby seemed unhappy when the cord was against her skin, and cried when the bowl was moved. By 10pm I was frustrated and about ready to find a pair of scissors!! Still, we persisted, and by the time Jane arrived the next morning, the cord was mostly dried and hard. Jane cut it, and clamped it just to be safe. By the end of the following day, it had fallen off on its own, leaving a beautifully clean navel.

By day 6 we finally had a name for our beautiful girl - Arliese Woodlin Stewart. As I write this she is now nearly 8 weeks old, and I can't believe how the time has flown. Our little newborn has morphed into a wonderful infant, sharing our delight in her with coos and gurgles. I still cannot get over how settled and calm she is, and I attribute much of this to the gentle birth experience we both had.

Welcome to the world Arliese - we are so joyful you're here!

Lindy hopes in sharing this story, feminism can be seen in the context of everyday decisions and conversations between friends and family. Feminism is as much how we frame these conversations as it is having access to models of care that provide compassionate, informed support for women's birth choices. By challenging notions of "normal" birth, Lindy and Gerwood had an incredible experience across the pregnancy and birth of Arliese - providing a rich learning experience for Bella too!

Lindy, Gerwood, Bella and baby Arliese are grateful to the fantastic team at Midwives at Sydney and Beyond, especially Jane, Emma and Janine!



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The Birth of Gregory

DORA VASILI MAHER



Photos by Virginia Maddock
© Natural Beginnings Photography

It was early November. The Jacarandas were in full bloom as was my ripened belly. At 37 weeks and 2 days, on a warm Sunday at dawn, my bladder woke me as usual. I visited the bathroom and my waters broke; I remember standing there in shock. I tried to ignore it and went back to bed for a few minutes until I felt a mild cramp. I had things to do, decluttering to finish, my birth space to set up. I moved around the house in a daze, not knowing what was to come next. I had been frantically decluttering the house that week and had almost prepared my nest!

Throughout most of our pregnancy we had been seeing an Obstetrician and had registered into the local private hospital for the birth of our first baby. We were only aware of the private versus public system. In the meantime, I had been reading two books recommended by my Naturopath – Dr Sarah Buckley’s “Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering” and Rhea Dempsey’s “Birth with Confidence”. I anxiously looked for Doulas in my area after reading these two eye opening books. I wanted to experience birth in its entirety and I knew I needed a Doula to help me make it happen. I learnt of the shocking statistics of the private hospital I was booked into of mostly unnecessary interventions and hoped to avoid them. Why couldn’t I give birth as my grandmother did, in her own home, drug-free and no fuss, assisted by the town Midwife? After a life-changing chat with a Doula, Virginia Maddock from Natural Beginnings, I knew I had choices. It wasn’t too late to make it happen at 28 weeks.

We then made the switch to a planned homebirth with an absolutely wonderful, professional and experienced Independent Midwife, Yvonne Medina from Midwife Services and Virginia, my Doula. I wondered - was I strong

enough to birth without drugs, physically, emotionally and mentally? I spoke to Virginia of all my fears and she was the listening ear, the voice of reason and the voice of birth wisdom. I had been blessed with a smooth pregnancy, would the birth be as kind to me? Both Yvonne and Virginia opened my eyes to an amazing world where birth was completely natural and empowering. I felt prepared.

And so on this warm Sunday morning, just as the sun was rising, I felt the first strong contraction. Oh my - so this is what it feels like! I woke my husband Luke. He sprang out of bed and began working through the list I had prepared for him. Just after my first contraction, a little bird flew to the glass doors of the birth room with a large moth-like insect in its mouth, hovered for a few seconds right in front of me as if to tell me something and took off! My mother later told me that around the same time a little bird also flew to her bedroom window while she was sleeping and sang beautifully to her as if it was in the room next to her! Neither of us had ever experienced this before. She woke with the feeling that I was in labour. Her prayers sent me strength and I felt blessed from above.

I hastily wrote my affirmations on the whiteboard between contractions. I arranged my birth altar with icons of Saints who I admired and most importantly for me, an icon of the Holy Mother of Jesus smiling and holding her baby, hinting at me with her knowing smile that she is with me and I can do this. I ate some soup between contractions. They were happening far too frequently - around 2 minutes apart - and I wondered how people can even go for a walk in early labour! Was this even early labour? Luke contacted Yvonne and Virginia who promptly began to make their way to our home.



his hand. With the head out, now I had a chance to rest for a moment. I regathered my strength knowing I only needed one last push. With that, he was out! I was elated. It was over with only minor tearing and minimal bleeding.

Luke caught the baby as he came out and promptly handed him to me. I held him against my chest and was euphoric from the joy of finally holding the little person that had been growing inside me. All those feelings - tenderness, elation, joy, love, feeling blessed and so much more - were wrapped up in that moment of holding my baby for the first

I squatted; I swayed; I knelt by the bed; I lay on my side while I held either Virginia's or Luke's hands during contractions. They placed cold face washers on my forehead and hot packs on my belly. Meanwhile, Luke blew up the birth pool and began to fill it. Luke and Virginia brought me drinks and snacks.

It was time to enter the pool and the relief I felt was wonderful. Yvonne arrived and greeted me with a "Hello Gorgeous!". Her cheerfulness brought me much consolation. It was fantastic having her there ensuring all was going smoothly. Contractions kept coming strong, and I would reach out for anyone's hands to hold. I would think of all the mothers I know and immediately had such a new admiration for them. I surprised myself by not wishing for any drugs to reduce the pain; I simply accepted it in the package of this new birth experience. However, if the temptation of the epidural was nearby, would I have asked for it, I wonder.

My increasing temperature and heart rate were slowly becoming a concern. The baby's heart rate remained stable and he was engaged in the anterior position. At around 2pm, Yvonne made a phone call and reported back that we may need to transfer to hospital due to my elevated temperature and heart rate. I then began to think to myself how in the world would I survive a trip to the hospital in this state? She indicated a vaginal examination would help us determine our course of action and I gladly agreed. Yvonne laughed as I was fully dilated and the baby's head was right there! We all breathed a massive sigh of relief. It was time to push!

Virginia helped me establish a breathing and pushing pattern. The baby's head was stuck behind the pelvic bone and needed a good strong push to move it through. I sent loving thoughts to my baby and asked him to do his bit. I was losing any scrap of energy I had left and it felt like it was taking forever! His head would peek out and then revert back inside to my frustration - come on, baby, hurry up, I want to meet you! Luke entered the pool with me and just a few minutes later, at around 4pm after 2 hours of pushing, the baby's head came through with his left hand cradling his jaw! Yvonne reached in and dislodged

time. I felt rejuvenated - ten or so hours of labouring and I had so much energy! What a great feeling!

Luke, my husband and proud new father announced my son to the world with the name Gregory William Maher.

As I held my baby in the pool, the relief of birthing him was clouded by the thought that I still had to birth the placenta. The water had cooled and was not warm enough for the baby so my team helped me get out of the pool and onto the spare bed which Yvonne had prepared for me. The baby was still attached to the placenta as I had requested. It was a strange sensation having the cord hanging around below. I lay on the bed with the baby on my chest and we attempted the first breastfeed. He didn't seem too interested and I couldn't quite get the angle right but eventually he latched on.

I wanted a natural third stage and hoped the placenta would come out in good time. After an hour or so, more contractions began. I didn't know they would be so strong, I thought that part was over! At one hour and ten minutes after the baby, the placenta came out. The baby's cord was clamped and Luke, with a big grin on his face, cut the cord. Gregory had definitely received all his blood with the heavily delayed cord clamping. I held him on me while Yvonne inspected the placenta - it was all intact thankfully.

After Yvonne extracted some blood out of the cord and placenta for blood group testing, Luke placed it in a plastic bag and into the freezer for burying in the backyard. Gregory was weighed at 3.15kg and measured at 51cm in length. Yvonne helped me into the bathroom to get sorted and have a shower - but there was no hot water left as we'd used it all for filling the pool!

Before leaving the bathroom and heading to bed with my newborn, I looked in the mirror and saw a different woman. She glowed glorious, victorious, beautiful and strong. A life-changing day of labour indeed!

I'm not sure if I truly understood during the pregnancy just how much having a baby would change my life!

Initially, the pain from labour, my carpal tunnel and the other bits and pieces that come part and parcel with birthing and breastfeeding were somewhat intense and unexpected. The afterglow of having a homebirth helped to keep my spirits high in the early days as well as the mental, physical and emotional support from my husband and family and the regular visits from our Midwife for the first 6 weeks. It's quite amazing that in so many cultures the first 40 days / 6 weeks the mother is well looked after - and truly that amount of time was a turning point in the recovery process! In my culture and faith, mother and baby are read special blessings and prayers at church after the 40 days. That was a wonderful conclusion to this challenging period. Life goes on. A new journey begins.

I am very grateful for my husband's support and belief in what my body, like any woman's, is capable of - from the time we made the decision to plan for a homebirth until long after the birth. Our Midwife and Doula were our angels and we will be eternally thankful to them. We still glow in the happiness that our baby's life began in the comfort and love of our own home, and feel so grateful and blessed that the pregnancy and birth were smooth and free of complications.

Dora Vasili Maher is a first time mum at 34 years old to baby Gregory who was born in a planned home water-birth. She married her secret workplace romance, Luke, and both are still employed at the same office working in treasury software. Dora is the daughter of Greek-Cypriot migrants who brought with them, and handed down, their love of family, faith, nature, good food (and growing it) and cooking. Luke and Dora spend their free time growing fruit and vegetables in their Sydney backyard and looking after their 2 chickens - Dove and Parrot - and their dog, a Border Collie called Panda.



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The Birth of Stevie

SKYE WELSH

Photos by Angela Hardy @ Angela Hardy Photography

Stella our first daughter was a planned homebirth.

Purely & simply because my biggest fears in life are needles, hospitals, anything clinical & not being heard.

So I employed my own independent midwife & birth photographer 2 days before due date had symptoms of late onset preeclampsia.

I was told by midwife needed to go for testings at Nepean & following days due to results ended up being induced.

For ME this was just gut wrenching.

FOR ME it meant EVERYTHING against nature was going to happen & this is what a DIDNT want to happen.

Going into a hospital terrified by fear, paralysed by it.

We went out for dinner that night, the tears flow like a tap knowing this but this was our last dinner together as a couple.

The waitress must have thought what the hell this bloke did to this heavily pregnant woman.

We went home & Jason held me all night while I just sobbed & sobbed uncontrollably.

We were ostracised from the moment we walked into the hospital, as our notes had HOMEBIRTH inscribed heavily

across the top of the page & we bought our own outsider (the midwife) into the hospital system.

Our midwife Jo Hunter will & still is our hero in life, how supported us from the moment we took her on to the end of our post care.

So fast forward to Stevie Jade, our 2nd daughter, she was going to be my healing process from Stella's experience.

I must say, if anything medical was to arise again of course we weren't going to be silly about it & attend hospital if it was required.

But we moved 4 hrs away for Jason's work & was gutted we couldn't have Jo again.

So I employed our own again to do everything in our power to stay at home again & out if a hospital setting We did this on the 12th January 2017 here at home in Karuah mid nth coast with the attendance of our midwife Daniel Evans, my partner in life Jason Riggs, our birth Photographer Angela Hardy & my dear friend who made it by 20 mins travelling from Springwood 3 hrs away, GEM, what a Wonder Woman to have support Jason & I.

It was the empowerment I needed & deserved & I did it No hospital, no needles, no drugs, no interventions.

Just quite, peace, the security & comfort & safety of our own HOME ENVIRONMENT.

THIS IS OUR HEALING STORY

Skye grew up in south west Sydney & has recently moved to the port Stephen NSW area. Before becoming a full time mum she used to work in mining & NSW ambulance. she is a true advocate for all things home birth, baby wearing, breastfeeding & cooking/meal prepping ahead of time, anything to make mum life 100 times easier.

She now is devoted to her 2 rainbow baby daughters (Stella 22 months & Stevie 5 months old) after losing 4 pregnancies.



ANGELA HAR



ANGELA HARDY PHOTOGRAPHY

BIRTH & FAMILY LIFESTYLE PHOTOGRAPHER

I am a storyteller. A wife. A mother. A lover of all things ordinary. Documenting "Life" from the very first breath.

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The Birth of Nara

HOLLY ZWALF

My birth didn't go as planned. I was supposed to have a homebirth. It was supposed to be drug free. I was supposed to be in a familiar space surrounded by my family, with my birth beads hanging above the birthing pool and my mum's famous quiche warming in the oven. I had spent the whole pregnancy planning the big event, but in the end none of it happened according to plan. In fact, none of it even happened at all. I am no longer pregnant. There is a baby. It is healthy. But how it got here is a complicated and, at times sad, story.

To start with, I was running late. Day by day went past until there I was, two weeks overdue, in the middle of a stinking hot summer. Already in this story, if I had been birthing in hospital I would have been pretty much bullied into having an induction. An insanely high rate of first babies come at around 9/10 days overdue. Way more than come on their due date. Why then are pregnant people pushed to induce at between 7-10 days? This deadline is an arbitrary line in the sand which changes from hospital to hospital. In The Netherlands they don't even discuss induction until you are two weeks over. Yes, there is a small increase in the risk of stillbirth in overdue pregnancies. But not taken into account in these stats is the birthing person's age, weight, and other health factors. Just because a baby is overdue does not automatically mean they are at risk. My homebirth midwife was satisfied that I was healthy and the baby was doing fine. So I was happy to wait.

At two weeks overdue my waters broke, but 24 hours later I still hadn't gone into labour. (Once again, in a hospital I would by now have been pressured into having an induction.) This meant there was now a risk of infection to the baby. A very small risk, mind you. Possibly smaller than the risk of the baby's heart rate dropping if exposed to the induction drugs. I went to the hospital to get the baby monitored, and everything seemed to be just hunky dory. I also felt fine. Over it, but fine. Every day my homebirth midwife informed me of the risks associated with my various options, and each day I weighed them up and then called the shots, choosing to wait a little longer. No one told me what to do with my body, and no one used fear to get me to adhere to hospital policies. My body, my choice. Sound familiar? That's the feminist mantra when we talk about abortion rights or body autonomy, and yet when it comes to birth so many of my fellow feminists hand their bodies over to the doctors, who are governed by hospital policy, which is driven by insurance policies. I believe this is partly because of a lack of knowledge and access to unbiased information, and partly because we are taught to be so scared of birth that we have lost the confidence in ourselves and our bodies. We trust blindly, and that blindness makes us vulnerable.

The whole pro-choice debate regarding abortion is structured around the mother having the right to choose what's best for her. But in birth it becomes "what's best for the baby". As a friend said, "A healthy baby matters, but so

do our bodies, our consent, and our informed choices". The key issue is all about choice. Yes, sometimes this choice might lead to unforeseen lifelong outcomes, and while medical institutions and midwives can do everything within their power to prevent against this, sadly sometimes babies do get harmed in the birthing process. But my point is that that can happen either way. Babies can die in hospitals, babies can die from induction drugs and during caesarians. They can also die in home births. No one wants this to happen, regardless of how they have chosen to birth. My point isn't that one choice is better than another. It's that we need to have real choice in these things and not just be ordered around by the hospital, who has a mixed agenda.

I copped plenty of negativity when I told people I was homebirthing. Even from the stalwart feminists. There were the usual paternalistic comments: "but what if something goes wrong?"; "are you sure that's safe? You'd be so much safer in a hospital". Do a bit of googling and you'll discover that's not exactly true. I don't have time to tell you the stats, coz I've got a baby wriggling round impatiently in my lap. Suffice to say, hospital births have a way higher induction, intervention, and caesarian transfer rate than homebirths, and contrary to popular belief inductions, interventions, and caesarians aren't exactly "safe". There's plenty that can go wrong, not to mention the increase in allergies we're seeing as a result of Caesar babies missing out on all the healthy bacteria they'd have absorbed if they'd been squeezed out of a vagina. I would never judge a person's choice to birth in a hospital or to have pain relief or a caesarean. But I am critical of the patriarchal over-medicalisation of pregnant bodies, and the subsequent disempowerment this creates. So many people I know say they felt pressured into agreeing to birth interventions, to the point that they forgot they had any choice in the matter. Unfortunately hospitals operate on a risk assessment basis where they will default to medical intervention in order to avoid the potential (and possibly less quantifiable) risk of a birth with no interference. But what they fail to mention when scaring you into agreeing to an induction/intervention/caesarean is the subsequent risk involved.

Pregnant people need to be given more impartial information so that they can make informed, independent choices. Sure they can't force you to do anything. But they make a damn good attempt at making you feel as though you have no choice. Whenever I tell people my birth story I start with, "so I was 2.5 weeks overdue...", and invariably people respond with, "but I thought they didn't let you go past 11 days over?" Why is the word "let" a part of this dialogue? From the moment you get pregnant it begins: "get this scan this blood test this glucose resistance test this other scan". No one tells you why, no one tells you the implications, no one says, "you don't have to if you don't want to, these are the risks if you do/don't". Sometimes when I or other people have asked why, we've been met with "it's just routine". When one friend of mine pressed as

to why they wanted to do an internal examination (she wasn't even in labour yet), the staff eventually said, "yeah ok, I guess we don't need to". You lose all agency unless you educate yourself and are strong enough to stand up against these "standard" procedures.

I recently attended a focus group regarding the revision of the nurses and midwives code of practice. They agreed that calling someone up to disapprovingly ask them why they haven't had a certain test or scan during the pregnancy constitutes as harassment. And responding to someone's decision to refuse a scan with irritation or annoyance, as happened to me, constitutes bullying. It's amazing how quickly, with all this disapproval being directed your way, and you can forget that it's your body, pregnancy, and birth we're talking about— not theirs. So many of my friends who have recently birthed have had similar experiences:

"I declined one scan and the doctor rang me at home on a Saturday night insisting I return to hospital! I made a complaint to the safety and quality area citing harassment as I had already made an informed decision to decline which had been clearly communicated to staff."

"36 hours after my waters broke I was bumped from my hospital because my labour was too slow (20 hours in, which is short for my family! I was fine). After an hour strapped in an ambulance on bumpy roads I'd un-dilated 3cm and baby was in shock-no choice but surgery. I dearly wish I'd had a home birth or an independent midwife to help me navigate my choices in that situation. It's very hard to make clear decisions when you're being told you are risking your child's life."

It seems that as soon as you get pregnant you get put on this conveyor belt that carries you through the system and spits you out the other side with a baby in your arms. Anyone who chooses to take a different path at any step along the way is regarded as at best naughty, and at worst a bad, irresponsible mother. "This is best for the baby" sometimes actually means "this is just what we want you to do for insurance purposes / because my shift is about to finish".

Don't get me wrong. There is absolutely a time and a place for modern medicine in births. I am living proof. Living being the operative word. I suspect that, had I been birthing a century or two ago, I would most likely have been one of the 15% who would not have survived the process. However it is precisely because of this that I so firmly believe in homebirth. The continuity of care is invaluable, and the reason homebirths are a perfectly safe option is because if something isn't right, THEN you go to hospital. Which is exactly what I did.

Five days after my waters breaking, there was still no movement at the station. I was starting to suspect that I needed some help, so I chose to be induced. I was now 2.5 weeks overdue. Ten hours later, when we realised the contractions were not making me dilate, I made the decision to have a caesarian. My baby was eventually "born" in a sterile white room, delivered by a surgeon wearing blue gloves and a hipster headscarf. The baby was

perfectly fine, though I was more than a little worse for wear. I didn't get the birth I wanted. But even though I was too weak to hold my own baby, I felt strong. I felt sad, I felt depressed, but I felt strong. I felt empowered and supported and in control every step of the way, because thanks to my homebirth midwife I was kept informed without any bias. It was my body, my rights, my decisions. And that is what a feminist birth looks like.

So there you go. I am the perfect example of why birthing at home, with a trained and insured midwife, is not an irresponsible choice to make. However the freedom to birth safely wherever you choose is now under threat. At the end of this year in Australia midwives will be facing the possibility of no longer being able to access professional indemnity insurance. Furthermore, recent changes to the laws in Australia have now made it illegal for a homebirth midwife to attend a birth without another midwife present. This makes practicing homebirth economically unviable, and many midwives are now choosing to leave the profession. These midwives have decades of experience behind them. They are medically trained to a very high level, and many have worked extensively in hospitals as well as at home. The changes to the laws are unfounded, paternalistic, and will only serve to push homebirthing underground, limiting our birthing choices to either using lay midwives or freebirthing. Any public health worker will tell you that making something illegal doesn't stop it happening—it just means it stops it from being able to happen safely. When abortions were illegal women died in backyard clinics. Where drugs are illegal drug abuse is high, and drug related incarceration even higher. In countries where sex work is illegal, workers are at a greater risk of violence and have higher rates of STIs. People have the right to homebirth and they have the right to do it safely, with the support of trained and insured professionals.

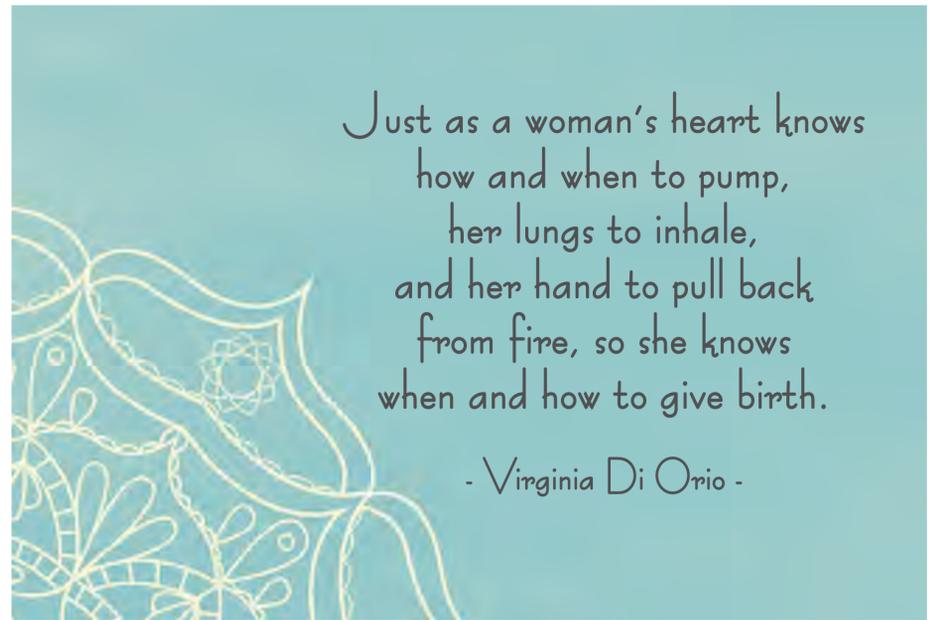
Holly Zwalf is a queer solo parent by choice. She conceived using her gay friend as a donor, and it's the best decision she's ever made! She just spent six months driving round Australia with her little baby in a red and white polkdot teardrop caravan. All the photos from the trip are on instagram: [@thecabbagepatchfib](https://www.instagram.com/thecabbagepatchfib), and she blogs about queer solo parenting at thecabbagepatchfib.wordpress.com.



Birth Affirmations

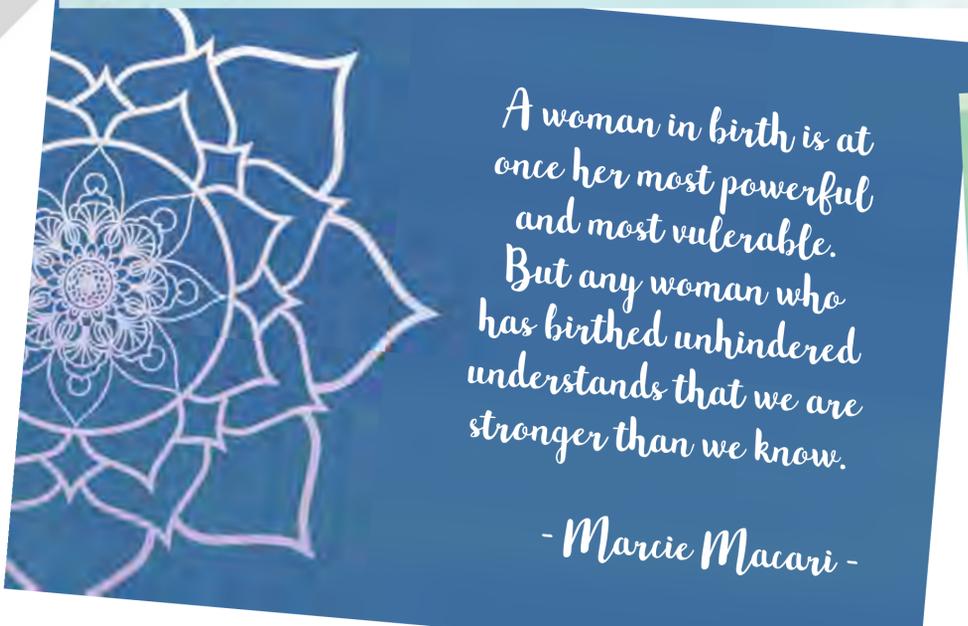


Ride the WAVE
You got this!



Just as a woman's heart knows
how and when to pump,
her lungs to inhale,
and her hand to pull back
from fire, so she knows
when and how to give birth.

- Virginia Di Orio -



A woman in birth is at
once her most powerful
and most vulnerable.
But any woman who
has birthed unhindered
understands that we are
stronger than we know.

- Marcie Macari -



Birth
is
Joyous



My baby
is
healthy
&
happy



My baby
is
the perfect size
for my body



Keep
Breathing

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The topic for the next issue of Birthings is:
'Change of Plan'

Birthings is your magazine.

We would love you to contribute.

The theme for the next issue is "Change of Plan".

Pregnancy and birth are unpredictable with unexpected changes and challenges which can make our best laid plans go awry, for the better or worst. We would love to hear your story!

Send us your theme articles, birth announcements and stories with some high resolution photos.

Submissions are due by
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guidelines on page 2

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