

SPRING 2017, ISSUE 134

# *Birththings*

Homebirth Access Sydney's e-magazine

*Change of plans*

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## Share your story with Birthings

Birth Stories, Birth Announcements, Homebirth Related Articles

Submission Guide: <1400 words with high resolution photos and/or videos.  
Don't forget your bio (<100 words).

Summer 2017 issue is themed Empowerment through homebirth

**Submission due date: 7th November 2017**

## Grow your business with Birthings

Advertise with us!

Contact our Advertising Coordinator, JODIE POWELL

[advertising@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:advertising@homebirthsydney.org.au)

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SPRING 2017, ISSUE 134

# Contents

## Regulars

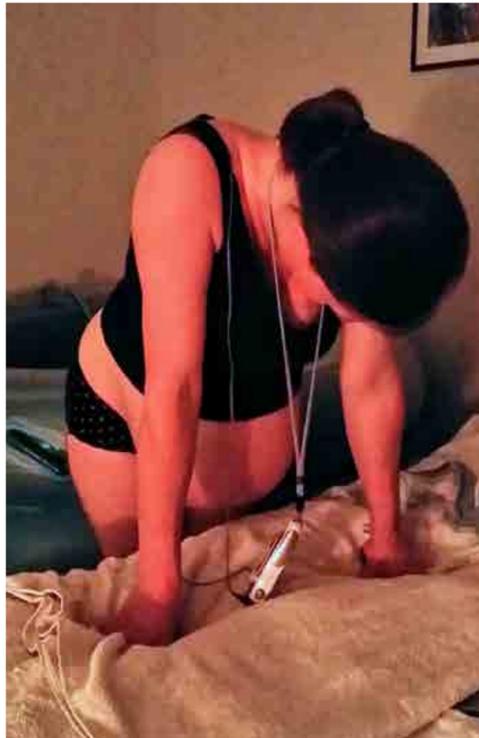
- 3 Editorial AIMEE SING
- 4 President's Report JODIE POWELL
- 5 Committee Member Profile CLARE MARSHALL
- 6 Community News
- 15 Homebirth in the Media
- 18,29 Poems on parenthood SARAH HARVEY and RASHA RUSHDY
- 30 Cartoon AMY BELL

## Features

- 8 Birth Announcements
- 9,13,37,51 Change in plan stories (mothers and midwives)
- 16 Change in plan interview (midwife)
- 21,33 Book Reviews
- 23 Essay on sacred feminine AMY BELL
- 25 Podcasts (Circle of Birth and The Birth Hour)
- 39 Homebirth transfer article MARY-ESTHER MALLOY
- 49 Everywhere is home article and song

## Birth Stories

- 19 The Birth of Archie AZURE RIGNEY
- 27 The Birth of Hamish AIMEE SING
- 31 The Birth of Manning SARAH ALLISON
- 35 The Birth of Julia ALY KRANZ
- 41 The Birth of Hugo ELLI MILLER
- 43 The Birth of Georgia AMY GARROW
- 47 The Birth of Saya CAT BUNTING



FRONT COVER Photo by Lucretia McCarthy

BACK COVER 'The Birth Of Archie' Photo by Jo Hunter



[www.homebirthsydney.org.au](http://www.homebirthsydney.org.au)



# 32nd Homebirth Australia Conference



## Homebirth Matters: Choices, Changes & Challenges

Mercure Broadway, Sydney

3rd - 5th November 2017

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

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HOME BIRTH  
AUSTRALIA



# Editorial...



## Welcome to the Spring 2017 edition of Birthings!

This is our 134th issue of Birthings magazine to date, and second e-magazine - amazing! Due to a reshuffling of committee members, the transition to including a new editor and designer and some difficulties associated with receiving content, we regrettably did not publish the Winter edition of Birthings. However, with lots of hard work and contributions from our committee members, our HAS members and our brilliant homebirth community, we are back on track! Accordingly, I'm excited to introduce you to the Spring 2017 edition of Birthings, themed Change of Plans! In this issue, we have an introduction to one of our newest committee members (our designer, Clare), lots of analyses of what a change of plans means to different mothers, midwives and doulas, articles, art and books that explore changes in plans and lots of beautiful birth announcements and birth stories!

A change of plans can involve so many different aspects of pregnancy, birth and parenting - a change of care provider, place of birth and choices around birthing our babies to name just a few. Changes

in plans can occur during conception, pregnancy, labour or postpartum and encompass a variety of possibilities. Exploring the endless list of possibilities from which changes can occur in pregnancy and birth is not within the scope of this issue. Rather, this issue aims to provide support to those of us who do or will change plans, and to provide stories and evidence of these situations when, despite changes of plans, things worked out positively for those involved. Even more importantly, this issue aims to promote honesty and clarity around how changes in plans can affect us, and how differently this can present in each mother-baby dyad.

While collecting content for this issue, I've been shocked by the lack of supportive information available for birthing mothers who may experience a change of plans. It is incredible the number of mothers who have to deal with a change of plans during their pregnancy, labour, birth or postpartum period (indeed, I was/am one of them)! Despite this, information on how to cope with, process and transition into parenting our babies after such events is hard to come by, and often mothers are encouraged (nay, expected) to 'get over' or 'move on' from such changes. This issue of Birthings provides a place for sharing of this

important information, giving strategies to mothers who may need assistance processing their births, or who may be currently dealing with a change of their plans. I hope it provides a safe space for all mothers to consider and accept their feelings and emotions as valid and worth processing - You matter, your birth matters, and however you feel is acceptable and worth recognising!

Despite, or sometimes due to, a change of plans, some mothers will emerge feeling empowered and in awe of themselves, their babies and the process involved. With this in mind, our next issue of Birthings is themed Empowerment Through Homebirth, and again relates to all aspects of pregnancy, birth and parenting! Please share your empowering articles, birth stories and birth art with us by sending your submissions to [editor@homebirth.org.au](mailto:editor@homebirth.org.au), the submission guidelines for which are on the 2nd page of this e-magazine! If you lack confidence in writing please send anyway, I'd be honoured to help you get your story in a format that is able to be shared.

Much love and light to you all! There'll be more of an introduction to me in the committee members profile in the next issue, so stay tuned

**Aimee Sing**

# President's Report

Hello fellow homebirth enthusiasts - Welcome to our second edition of our Birthings E-Magazine!

First off, we have some committee member changes to announce: Our editor / graphic designer Bitna Castillo is stepping back from those roles. Bitna has been a core part of the HAS team and instrumental in the production of Birthings. Replacing Bitna as editor is a new member of the team, Aimee Sing – and replacing her in the designer role is another new member, Clare Marshall. Welcome to the team ladies! New people bring new ideas and ways of doing things, so watch this space. There are exciting things to come with Birthings in the near future!

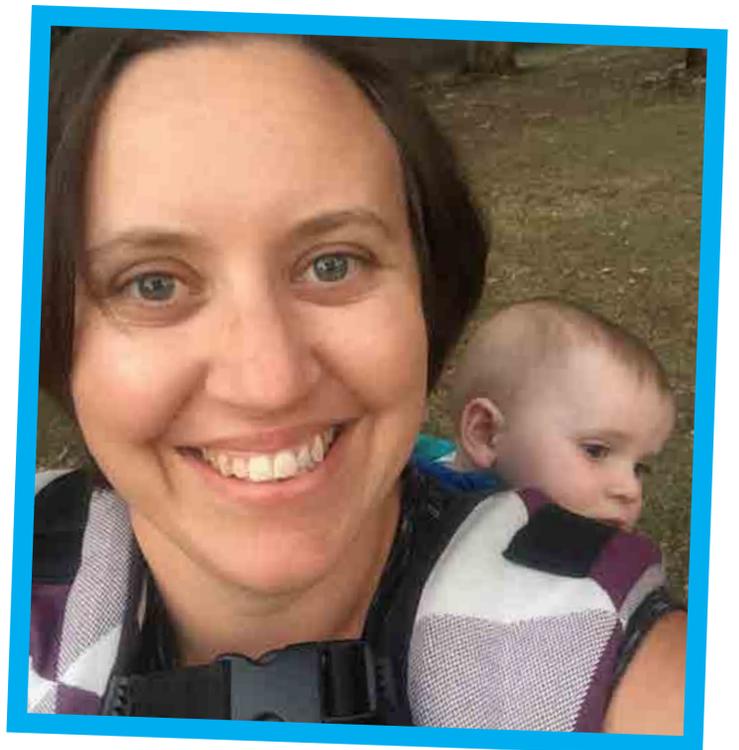
We are getting very close to the upcoming Homebirth Australia Conference – Choices, Changes & Challenges, which is being held in our very own Sydney from Nov 3rd to 5th (Tickets here). If you haven't already gotten tickets then please get on board and come along. You will find us manning a booth in the exhibition area, please come and say hello. Our HAS committee members will also be attending the 'Grassroots Campaigning & Online Advocacy workshop' with Milli Hill. We are always striving to improve our advocacy skills so that we can do better at supporting homebirthing families like your own.

It's my sincere hope that one day soon every woman in Australia who wants to birth at home can be supported to do it. I hope for more private midwives, more hospital run homebirth programs and more CHOICES for women! Right now, we aren't even close to achieving this in Australia, and we need to keep pushing so that women aren't forced into birthing in a place not of their choosing.

Are you on board? Do you want to help? How about donating some of your skills and time and joining our team? Or consider supporting us financially by making a purchase in our online shop or buying a membership.

All the best,

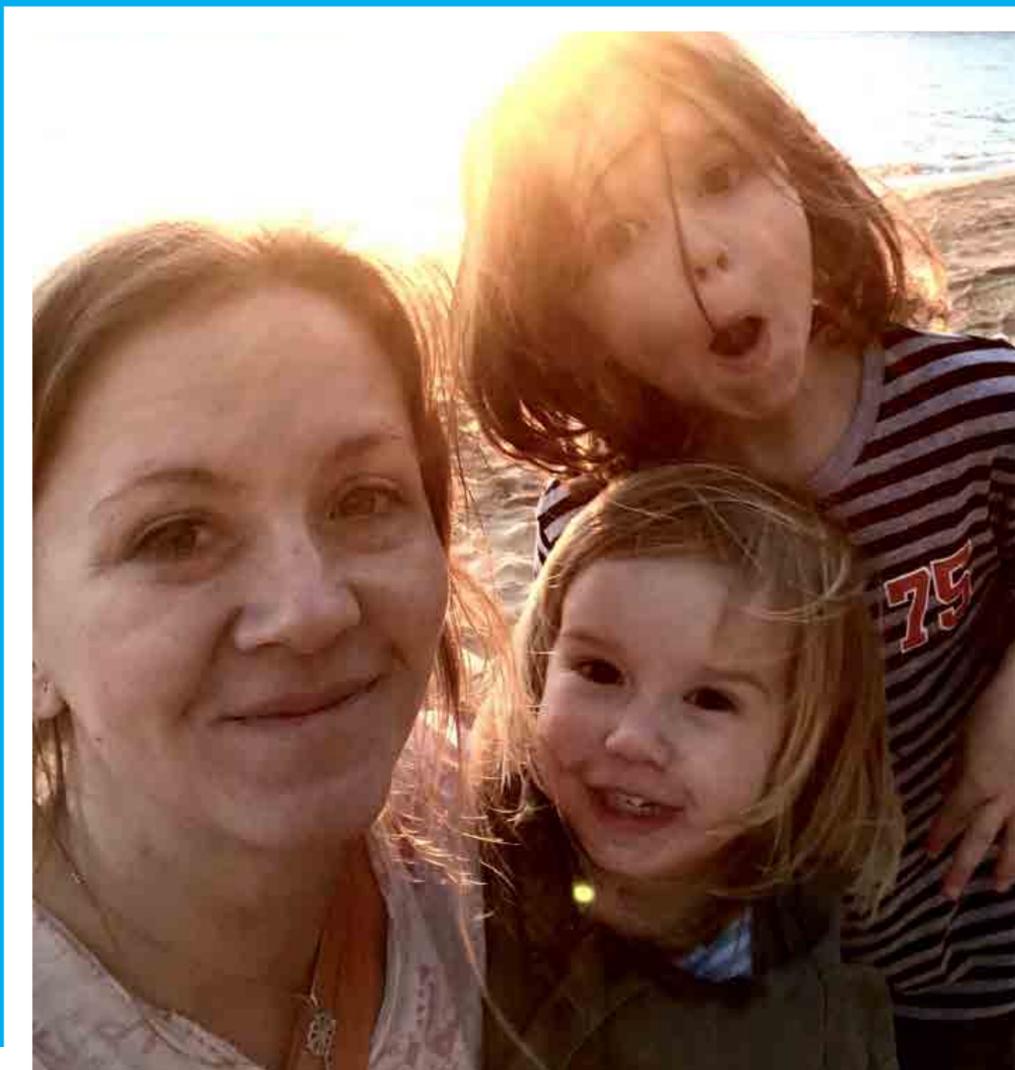
**JODIE POWELL**  
Homebirth mum and HAS President



## join us!

For new membership or renewals go to  
[www.homebirthsydney.org.au](http://www.homebirthsydney.org.au) and click on *membership*

# Clare Marshall designer



## WHEN DID YOU JOIN HAS?

I think it was just before the birth of my second child in 2015 when my amazing midwife, Janine O'Brien, signed me up.

## WHO IS IN YOUR FAMILY?

My family consists of myself, my 6 year old son Finn and my 2 year old daughter Eve.

## WHAT DID YOU DO BEFORE CHILDREN?

I've worked in design since I finished my studies in 1999. When pregnant with my son, I had been freelancing for the Guardian in London, where I lived for over 6 years. I've worked in magazines and book publishing since my career started.

## WHAT HAVE YOU DONE SINCE CHILDREN?

I continued my freelance career at Penguin books in London. I still miss the cold a lot. After relocating here in 2015, and having a mat leave break, I've been working at

Penguin Random House in the Children's Marketing and Publicity department.

## WHY HOMEBIRTH?

Having my first child in London, the climate and options of 'where to birth' was so very different. Homebirth is completely supported by GPs and hospitals, so making that choice, which felt intuitive, was easy. Ultimately, I believed in myself and didn't see the need to have a 'things could go wrong, so best to be in hospital' mentality. Having support from the 'establishment' really does make you feel you can have a child at home as 'easily' as in a hospital. I was always confident in my body, and after a 27 hour labour with my son, he was born happy and healthy at home. He was delivered by a trainee midwife I might add!

My daughter followed in 2015 here in Sydney, which was a trickier thing to organise. However, after 4 hours she arrived safely as well. I've been very lucky.

## WHAT IS THE MOST AMAZING THING YOU HAVE SEEN, LEARNED ABOUT, OR LEARNED FROM HOMEBIRTH?

I think the most amazing thing I've learnt about is that the 'fear' of hospital can actually stop your labour. The mind and body are a powerful duo when it comes to things like having babies. Both my babies started their labours shortly after I'd had to attend hospital, which I felt meant they wanted to be at home just as much as I did. Creating your safe space, your nest, is really the best place to be for the whole process and I believe homebirth gives that in spades. It gives you the environment and space to follow and trust in your instincts, rather than 'ticking boxes' before you're allowed to continue your labour.

I will always feel pride that both my babies came into the world in the calmness and love of their homes. They were unhurried and supported, as was I. I think there's no more empowering thing for a woman than to effectively be in the element of her body's greatness and ability at home.

# Community Happenings

## Hunter

The Hunter Positive Birth Support group in Newcastle is holding an expo where all funds raised will be donated to local breastfeeding and birth support groups! The Baby Planning Expo will run from 5-9pm at 'The Place Charlestown Community Centre' on Frederick street, Charlestown. It will include expert speakers, the premiere of the film In Utero, lots of food, interesting information and Q & A sessions. Head over to <https://www.facebook.com/BabyPlanningExpo/> or contact Natalie at [hunterpositivebirth@gmail.com](mailto:hunterpositivebirth@gmail.com) to find out more and keep up to date with the event.



## Illawarra

Better Births Illawarra group and the Doula Heart Network screened the documentary The Face of Birth on 24th September. The event was used to fundraise and included a Q&A panel with Illawarra birth providers and workers. If you'd like to stay in touch with Better Births Illawarra, please head on over to <https://www.facebook.com/betterbirthsillawarra/> or <https://www.betterbirthsillawarra.com/>



## Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains Homebirth Group has been meeting monthly to provide support, share resources and information and brainstorm ideas for improving maternity choices in the Blue Mountains. They meet every 3rd Wednesday of the month and would love to welcome some new faces into their group! The BMHG is an inclusive, welcoming group of mothers and babies, and provide beautiful support for their members including providing meals for families in the postpartum period. For details on group events and upcoming meets, please head on over to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bluemountainhomebirthgroup/>



Chrissie and Sasha cooking for Amy after her birth.

## Inner West

The Inner West Homebirth Group continues to meet monthly and provide support to their local homebirth community. The group provides excellent support to their members, including providing meals for families after the birth of any new babies, and welcomes new members openly! For more details, please head on over to the Sydney Inner West Facebook group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/InnerWestHomebirth/>

# Positive birth movement

The positive birth movement group in Sydney's inner west meet monthly in Burwood Park to chat about all things Positive Birth. The group connects women together to share stories, expertise and positivity about childbirth to challenge the epidemic of negativity and fear that surrounds modern birth, and help change birth for the better. If you would like to connect with them please go to <https://www.facebook.com/positivebirthmovementinnerwestsydney/>, <http://www.positivebirthmovement.org> or <https://www.instagram.com/positivebirthmovement/>



## The Homebirth Australia Facebook Group

The Homebirth Australia Group on Facebook is home to a diverse range of beautiful mums and babies. There are separate, seasonal 'due in' groups that branch off from the main Homebirth Australia Group, where members are from all over Australia and provide support throughout the pregnancy, birth and postpartum period to other members in their group. Members from the Spring 2016 group 'local' to Sydney met recently to celebrate their babies turning 1! These groups provide a huge source of support, encouragement and information to anyone who joins. If you'd like to join the Homebirth Australia Group, you can find them here - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/212985225383780/>

**COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS:** We know that there are several homebirth communities around Sydney. We'd love to hear about and celebrate events, fundraisers, meetings, campaigning and any other interesting news you have! Please send your news to [editor@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:editor@homebirthsydney.org.au)



# **DADS!**

**COME CELEBRATE  
HOMEBIRTH AWARENESS WEEK  
AT: THE 'HOMEBIRTH  
DADS NIGHT OUT!' #5!**

**SUNDAY 29TH OCTOBER 6:30PM**

**PJ'S IRISH PUB: 74 CHURCH ST  
(CNR OF PARKS ST), PARRAMATTA**

**TICKETS \$10 AT THE DOOR**

**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.**



## Archie Fynn

Archie Fynn was born in a quick water birth at home on the **4th of August 2017**. Archie was born in the presence of Midwives Jo and Jacqui to Azure and Dan's open arms. Shortly after, big sister Mia came home and asked for cuddles.



## Brienne Adeline Shae McGuinness

We are delighted to welcome our daughter Brienne Adeline Shae McGuinness to the world. Our second homebirth after caesarean, she was born in the water into her Daddy's hands on **Fathers Day 2017** and she really is the most precious gift. We were so blessed to be surrounded by an incredible group of women; our midwives Jo and Jacqui, doulas Lucretia and Nadine and photographer Jerusha. Words can't express our gratitude for your support, you are all so amazing! Love Cyril, Amantha, Ayden and Eli.



## Manning Gray

Sarah, Jake, Cooper & Hadley were thrilled to welcome Manning Gray into the family! Birthed into this world on **August 14 2017** at 12:57am, at exactly 40 weeks, he weighed 3870 grams and was 58 cm long. Manning was welcomed joyfully at home in the warmth of the water, after two caesarean births. One of three boys, Manning has brought closure, healing & empowerment to so many in his family.



## Hugo William Miller

Elli, John and big sister Annie are beyond excited to announce the birth of Hugo William Miller. Hugo was born beautifully into water via a HBAC on the **18th March, 2017** at 6am. We are so thankful to have had such a beautiful, empowering experience. Special thanks to our awesome midwife, Jo Hunter, Doula, Lucretia McCarthy and birth photographer, Tara Mahoney. Thank you for holding such a beautiful space for us. Thank you, Hugo, for choosing us to be your parents - you have given us so much love and we couldn't imagine life without you! Xx



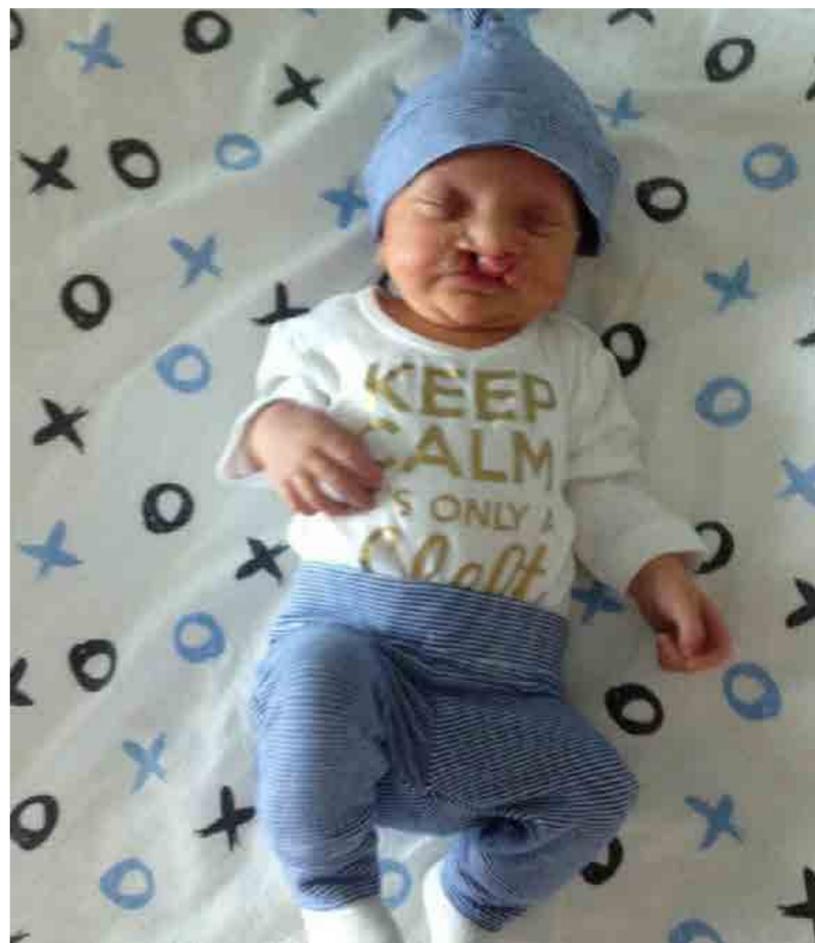
## Hamish John

On the **13th November 2016**, one day after his mum's birthday, Hamish John was welcomed into water via a blissful HBAC. Hamish swam earthside in the presence of his elated parents (Aimee and Justin), ecstatic big sister (Willow), beautiful midwife (Jo) and doulas (Jacquie and Annalise). We are forever grateful for the support that made Hamish's entry earthside so gentle, supported, calm and loving and for the healing he brought with him.



## Arlo Thierry Ruifrok

Amelia and Rhys Ruifrok and big brother Bailey joyfully welcomed baby Arlo Thierry Ruifrok (3.65kg, 55cm) into the world at 3:30am on **Tuesday the 22nd of August 2017**. A serene home birth into his mother's hands surrounded by warm water.



# A CHANGE OF PLANS DUE TO *Cleft Diagnosis*

by Karlee Flynn

Photo courtesy of 'Beyond the Spectrum Photography'

January 2016, we found out to our surprise that we were expecting our third baby. It wasn't like most surprise pregnancies I had heard stories of. I knew I was pregnant before I got a positive test. My pregnancy was simple; I knew I was carrying a boy from the beginning. I had told one of my friends I was pretty sure his name would be Oliver. From that day on we both called him Oliver in conversation.

I had been researching home births since I was pregnant with my second baby, and was pretty sure we would go in that direction. I did book in with our local birth centre, it can be hard to get a spot, and I wasn't sure how I would manage antenatal and postnatal care of a homebirth. I wanted to keep my options open. I interviewed the only homebirth midwife in my town but we didn't click, I knew she wasn't the right choice for me. I met with my midwife from the birth centre and we clicked. She was amazing; I knew we were in great hands. I was still planning and researching to have my baby at home using the birth centre for my pre and post-natal care.

At 20 weeks we were booked in for a morphology scan and I was happy to have this as part of my care. I wanted to check positioning of the placenta and check baby's health. My family had gastro on the day the hospital booked me in so I called to reschedule and was booked for 7 weeks

time. I asked my neighbour and friend Cat to come with me to the morphology scan. My partner, Sam, was away, as he had been during the majority of my pregnancy. The older two kids, Elijah 4 and Georgia 3, wanted to come along and I needed my friend's support.

The scan went like any other. At the beginning the sonographer asked me if I wanted any specific pictures. I said I would love a face profile as I had my other two kids face profiles from their morphology scans framed. Toward the end, Cat had to take the kids to the toilet and the sonographer started printing a picture and handed it to me. It was of my baby's foot. I was so confused; I asked her why she didn't have an image of the face. I saw it come up on the screen so I knew baby wasn't hiding. I was so far along that his features were very clear. She told me, "I can't show you a picture of your baby's face, there is something wrong with it. I have to go and get my boss". I don't remember when Cat came back in; I don't really remember much of the rest of that session. I do remember repeating to myself "this is the reason we have this scan, to find out if there is anything wrong". The head sonographer informed us that the baby had what looked like a severe unilateral cleft lip with what they assumed would also be palate involvement. We went to the birth

centre to see my midwife. I knew from here everything would change. I knew I wouldn't be able to birth my baby at home, or the birth centre. I knew I likely wouldn't breastfeed, I most likely wouldn't take my baby home with me and my baby might have a NICU or SCN stay after birth. My midwife and I worked so hard to keep my options open and, in the end, we were able to fight for a hands-off hospital birth.

At 32 weeks we had another ultrasound - I didn't really want this, however I wasn't sure of their diagnosis of unilateral cleft lip and palate because in the pictures we could clearly see 2 lines in the lip. I wanted clarification on this point, so we went. The obstetrician was there and he confirmed the diagnosis we had assumed of complete bilateral cleft lip and palate. He urged me to consider a high risk birth. I declined, I asked for them to wait near the birth centre when I was in labour. He declined this. So my birth centre midwife agreed to accompany me in birth suite at the hospital. We fought for intermittent monitoring, no IVs and no other medical personnel in the room. It was difficult and there was a lot of back and forth.

In August, my partner researched and purchased the spectra S1 breast pump for me. We ordered cleft teats and squeeze bottles and I ordered an SNS (supplemental nursing system). I immersed myself in the

## THEME ARTICLE

cleft community, reading, watching videos and talking to cleft mums. I contacted a number of Internationally Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC's) and joined groups of mums dedicated to exclusively expressing. I really held hope that maybe Oliver would latch, one day.

On September 9th, I woke up feeling tight. I was only 35+5 and I tried to ignore it. Cat came over for the morning with her daughter. She told me my baby was on its way. I knew it, but I said no. Lunch time rolled around and I was exhausted. I took Cat's daughter and had a nap while she took care of my kids at her house. My last pregnant photo is of my favourite little neighbour baby sleeping wrapped around my big belly.

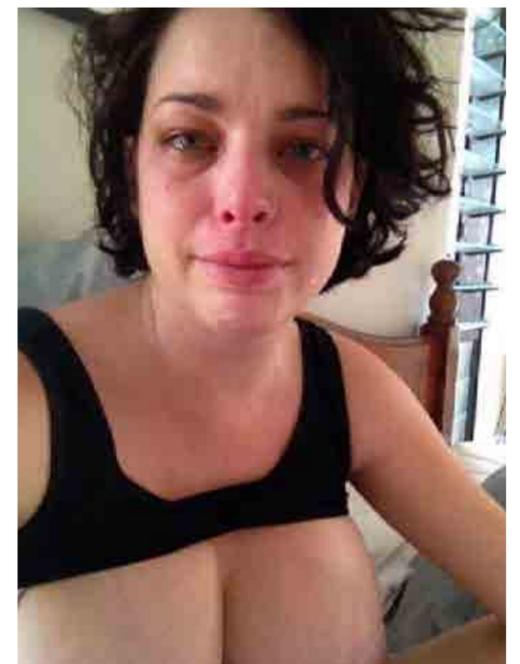
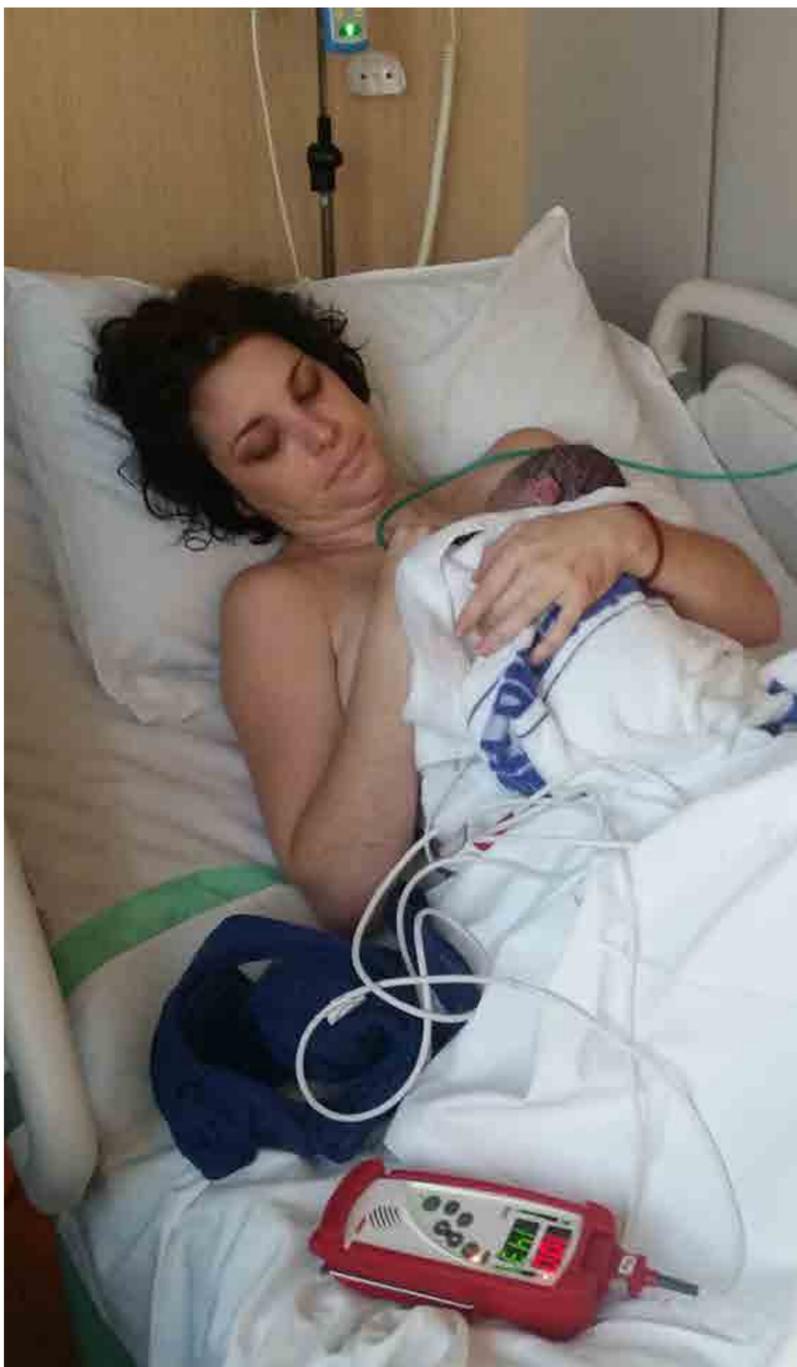
That night we had family over for dinner and I told them I was labouring and was pretty sure baby would be here in the near future, but I welcomed the distraction. Distraction indeed, we were told that night that Sam's Dad had malignant melanoma and they were unsure on prognosis at that point. I slept heavily, but Sam didn't. When I woke up at 4 the house was quiet and I was in active labour. I went for a walk in the street, trying to pass some time. I came home and sat in the searingly hot shower with candles and affirmations. I really didn't want to wake Sam, knowing he didn't sleep well because of the news we had received.

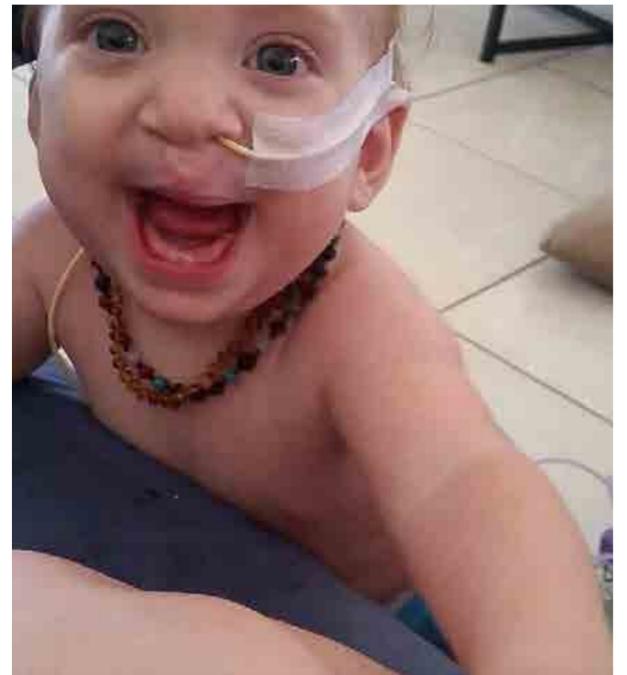
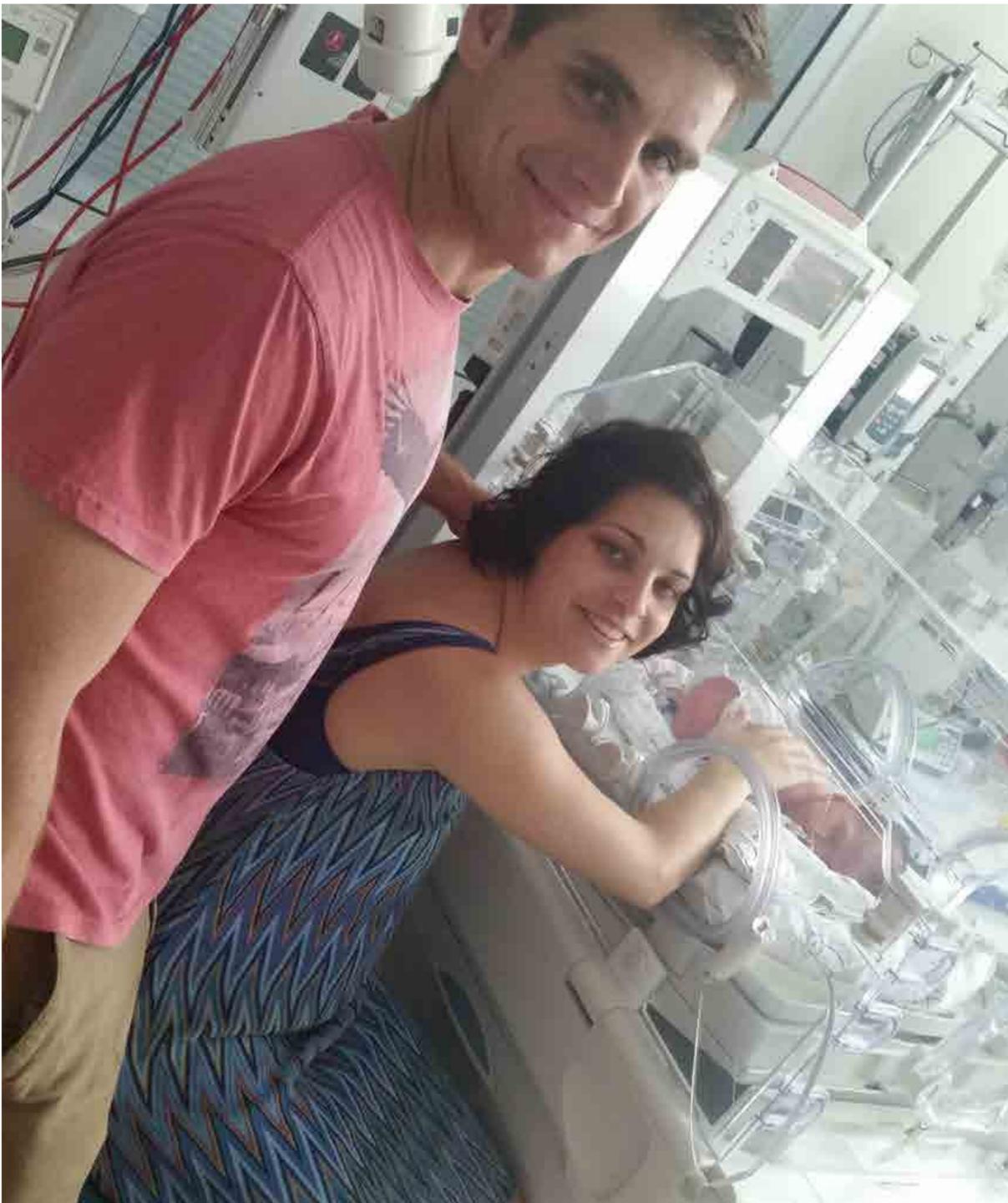
I got out of the shower and climbed back in bed. As soon as I got in my nursing felt me and immediately needed to nurse - woaaaaah, that amped up my labour. I held onto the headboard through each wave, loving my last nursing session in the breaks I received.

When she was done, I got up and woke up Sam. I got the birthing ball and sat in the lounge. I was still quite content, it was still pretty easy. He laid out a big blanket and some pillows and I moved between the ball and the floor on all fours. He brought me an affirmation from our bedroom wall which said "I can do anything for one minute". He called the midwife to tell her how things were going. It was actually her partner midwife on roster that day, who we know personally - I felt very comfortable with this. As soon as Sam hung up the phone I felt like I hit transition. He called Cat and his mum and called the midwife back. At this stage I knew I could have easily birthed my baby at home very soon, but that for my baby I had to go to the hospital. Georgia went with Cat, Sam's mum took Elijah and we met them at the birth centre. We walked up to the birth suite with our midwife. As we walked into the room and turned on the taps to the birthing tub, she looked at me and turned them off again. She went to get some towels while Elijah and Granny went to fill their water bottle. I felt his head, I

told Sam to push the buzzer. It was all very quick and next thing I knew I had a baby! My midwife had read my birth plan - she laid Oliver on my lap and attempted to resuscitate him while allowing him to have 3 minutes with his cord attached to the placenta.

During this time, Elijah and Granny came back in shocked that they had missed the birth. After 3 minutes, she told me she would have to cut the cord and call the doctors in as he was still not breathing. My baby was taken away to be cared for. I remember the neonatologist - she was a gentle lady, watching over her colleagues - looked over to me and said she thought it was time to give me back my baby. We had some time skin to skin and unfortunately Oliver wasn't able to hold his stats well enough to stay with me. He was also extremely bruised - he must have hit his face on his way into the world. Sam went to NICU with Oliver and I had time to debrief with my midwife. She told me I had had a precipitous labour. I don't have a lot of memories of the rest of the day though I have photos. It's quite a blur in my mind. That evening I went to my room, without my baby. My mum came to visit us; she helped me work out my pump. From that first pump I pumped for 11 months and 1 week. I hated every session - pumping was awful, a reminder of something my baby and I





couldn't do. Time I couldn't spend with my baby and more dishes I had to wash. I didn't feel I had a choice, but I am glad I did it.

Oliver spent 13 days in hospital - he had severe jaundice, most likely from the bruising to his face. He had a nasogastric (NG) tube for feeds as he slowly learned to take the bottle. One of the most difficult things I've had to do was to be discharged and leave the hospital without my baby. I spent two weeks going back and forth, spending as much time with him as I could. Once we were home, things were somewhat smooth, although around week 5 he started drinking only very small amounts and then dozing off. I mentioned this to the nurses and they weren't too concerned as he was growing quite well.

Oliver had his first surgery at 8 weeks old, he had his lip repaired. This was so difficult for us seeing such a tiny baby in so much pain. I was still so hopeful that he might breastfeed at some point. I booked in with the local LC who told me, "You seem to know more than I do" and left it at that. After surgery, Oliver was restless and he continued to having trouble drinking. By 3.5 months I had requested to see a paediatrician. On my birthday Oliver was 2 days shy of 4 months and was extremely

unwell. We took him to ED where he was immediately given an NG tube and fluids. He was admitted with bronchiolitis and failure to thrive.

During this stay I fought tooth and nail for my baby's right to breastmilk! I was told that if I would 'just' fortify my breastmilk with formula I could take my baby home when he was better. I refused, so we stayed longer. I had countless meetings where I told everyone who would listen that I had been trained in how to insert and use a NG tube in NICU. That I could handle a NG and that I would rather a tube than to fortify my milk. My baby's issues were not with nutrient absorption or with volume tolerance, but with the mode of delivery. We were finally discharged with a NG tube. We continued to use bottles throughout the day and used the tube overnight to up his daily intake. Every feed was hard, for him and for us. Over time we slowly stopped offering the bottle and moved to tube feeding full time. It was not a decision we made lightly, but one that really helped our family thrive. It was not the easy way out, it was not in our plans, it was heartbreaking but it was worth it. At 11 months Oliver had his second surgery. He got his lip revised as there was a lot of excess tissue inside and

he also had a gastrostomy tube placed. The recovery was hard; I questioned my decision over and over again. We are now 6 weeks out and I am finally confident that it was the right choice; life without the NG is amazing!

My plans changed, my baby wasn't born at home. My baby wasn't able to feed from the breast, or even from a bottle. He didn't want to co-sleep and he didn't really like being worn. The way I had parented, soothed and nurtured my other two children wasn't really applicable to Oliver. I had to grow, I had to adjust to meet my baby's needs.

Oliver is a light in our lives; he shines so brightly it's hard to see much else.

**Karlee is mother to 3 beautiful children and lives with her military family in far North Queensland. She is an occupational therapist, a baby wearer, a breastfeeder and birth lover, and has done a consultancy course in babywearing. She is starting her own business in birth services, studying placentology, and aspires to one day become a doula.**

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*Yes! No?  
Maybe...  
Argh!*



'Yes! No? Maybe... Argh!' These were my thoughts and emotions for 26 weeks of this pregnancy. Twenty-six weeks of pro and con lists, asking other people for their opinions and intense premature nesting urges to distract myself from making a decision. When I finally made a decision it happened within the space of 24 hours. But let me reverse a little to give you the backstory.

Almost three years ago I gave birth to my daughter. It was a natural, unmedicated, physiological childbirth. I am lucky enough to have a great group of friends and family members who are advocates of natural childbirth. I educated myself about pregnancy, labour and birth. I stayed fit to give my body the best possible chance of being physically up for the challenge. I picked my birth team carefully to ensure they were going to help me rise rather than crumble in a moment of crisis. I prepared myself mentally as best as I could. I picked a caregiver I believed in - one of Melbourne's largest, public, inner-city hospitals. I attended two birth education courses, the standard hospital course at a major inner city hospital and an independent course run by a passionate birth attendant and educator. I was a willing woman.

Giving birth was an amazing experience. Don't get me wrong - it was the hardest thing I've ever done and it hurt like hell, but at the same time it was indescribable and so empowering. The thought of pain relief didn't even cross my mind because I felt safe and fully supported by my wonderful partner and our doula. In fact, I felt like a superhero for weeks! This powerful start to motherhood made me realise I was strong enough to do absolutely anything!

However, when I started to meet more new mums the reality of our current birth culture hit me hard. So many of the mothers I talked to had traumatic experiences and still believe that there was no possible other way their birth story could have turned out. I wanted to help women through the emotional struggles of pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period! Long story short: I trained as a doula and childbirth educator, became a huge birth nerd and founded My Kind of Birth.

Over the next three years I attended many labours of strong birthing mummies, read loads of books and articles and immersed myself in the world of birth and babies.

So when I fell pregnant again everyone

around me assumed I wouldn't have to prepare for this birth because I had done it before and I had seen so many births now. But exactly that became one of my problems: I had seen so many births now. So many hospital births, to be precise, where something didn't go according to 'plan', where something was said or done to the labouring woman that would never have happened had she been in a different, more supportive environment at that time. So many births that would have unfolded faster, easier and with less intervention if the mum-to-be had been supported by a team of professionals who knew what physiological birth looks like and how to hold space for her.

In the early weeks of this current pregnancy I had some appointments with private midwives but didn't feel like I 'clicked' with them on a personal level. I knew that if I was going to have a home birth I had to find midwives I really connected with. So I went to my first few appointments at the hospital, still unsure about what I was going to do. This is when the next 'problem' came up. After my daughter's birth I lost 750ml of blood - more than usual but not that much on the scale of postpartum haemorrhages.

Without getting into a long story about it, most midwives and obstetricians I have talked to about the events of that day agree that the PPH was caused by a mismanaged physiological third stage; Mismanaged by the hospital staff attending to me that day. It's really not that surprising if you look at the statistics for third stage delivery in Australia. Active management, meaning with the help of a syntocinon injection, is the routine procedure for placenta delivery in Australia. Physiological third stage mainly happens in birth centres and at home births.

This became the second 'problem' for my current pregnancy. Every midwife and obstetrician at the hospital had a different opinion on what was going to happen to me after this baby was born. Some weren't too fussed and asked me what I would like to do regarding the third stage, others told me that there was only one way it was going to go down: I haemorrhaged once so I am going to haemorrhage again. Therefore, I was going to get a cannula upon arrival, I was going to have this, this and this drug, I was going to do it their way or the highway. At this point I should tell you that I am a control freak; I am educated and strong willed and I don't do well with people telling me what I can and can't do. So, guess what? I didn't like this message of "Your body failed you, you won't be able to do this, and we will handle it for you". Uhm... thanks, but no thanks. So I went into every appointment, ready to defend my position, never knowing who I was going to see and what their opinion was. This wasn't the state of mind I wanted to be in when labouring and giving birth.

Then there were a few minor issues that swirled around my head. Last time we made it to the hospital as I started to feel the first little urge to push. Perfect. But was I going to make it there in time for this baby? I

have seen heaps of home birth videos with toddlers at the birth. My daughter enjoys watching birth videos and is super excited about the baby coming. If she is interested on the day I would love to have her around me and present for the birth of her sibling. That would obviously be much easier at home than at the hospital.

Writing all this makes me realise that I had my mind made up a long time ago. So why was this so hard? I knew the stats. I knew that homebirth was safe. I knew about the importance of your birth team and birth place. Heck, I talk about it with my clients, on my blog and on social media all the time. I adore Penny Simkin and her wisdom on finding a nurturing care provider and creating positive memories. Why was it so hard when it came to making the decision for myself? I'm not sure what I was waiting for; A special sign? Some writing in the sky saying "Change provider now"? I've got no clue. Maybe it was just a bloody hard decision to make and, as always, I needed to wait until it felt right... or until it all came to a big, fat blow up.

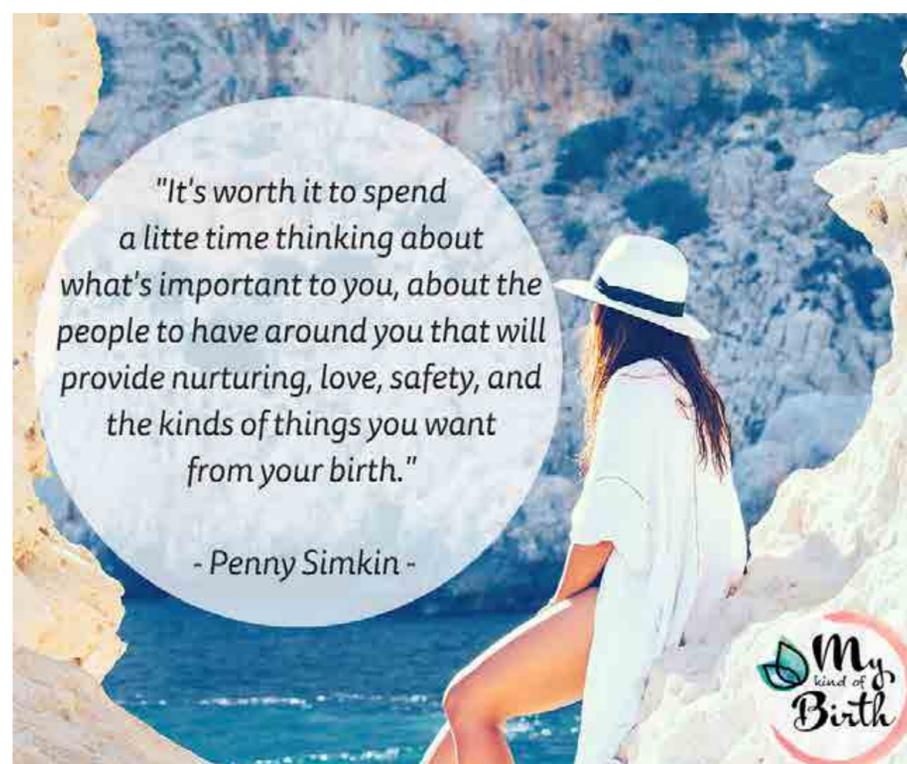
Well, that's pretty much what happened. One day, around 26 weeks gestation, I was booked in for an appointment at the hospital. I left the house on time with a toddler in tow (lunch box and games packed for a long waiting period at the hospital), drove through morning peak hour traffic, found a car park four blocks away, rushed to the day-care clinic because now I was almost running late, only to be told that my appointment had been cancelled and it seemed like no one had notified me. No shit. Combine that with some hormones and you've got a raging pregnant woman. Someone else might have just rescheduled and not batted an eyelid but as mentioned before, my mind was (subconsciously) made up. I knew I wanted to feel safe, respected, supported, heard and understood. All I

needed was a little shove.

So, when I stopped fuming about the unapologetic receptionist, I started to compile a list of private midwives, called them, talked about my previous birth and this pregnancy, listened to what they had to say, how they responded to my stories and my insecurities and carefully noticed how they made me feel. It wasn't hard. It wasn't scary. After a few phone calls I knew who I wanted to be by my side when I gave birth. All of a sudden it was crystal clear and the easiest thing in the world.

I have had a few appointments with my homebirth midwives now and I could not be happier. They are bloody good at what they do and are so, so, so caring! The appointments are so much longer and more personal than at the hospital. It is a lot less stressful to get there and my daughter loves seeing the midwives - in fact, she palpates my belly at home and listens to the heartbeat of her sibling with anything that looks remotely like a Doppler. I feel calm and ready to birth this baby. This was the right decision and it came at the right time.

Sabrina is the owner of My kind of Birth, where she supports women in her role as a doula and childbirth educator. After an amazing birth experience with her daughter in 2014, Sabrina became passionate about supporting women on their journey to motherhood. She trained with Rhea Dempsey to become a doula and followed on by becoming a childbirth educator and running the Melbourne meet-ups of The Positive Birth Movement. My kind of Birth offers childbirth education classes in Melbourne that combine the knowledge of multiple facilitators who are all experts in their respective fields. Educational videos on the website and empowering posts on the Facebook page give women the opportunity to prepare for birth from the comfort of their home.



# HOMEBIRTH IN THE *Media*

## THE RISE OF FREEBIRTHING

29th August, 2017

JOSIE TAYLOR

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2017/s4726100.htm>

## DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE WANTS A HOME BIRTH

10th September, 2017

LIFESTYLE

[http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=6&objectid=11920589](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=11920589)

## HOMEBIRTHS: HEALTH MINISTERS 'WORKING' TO SAVE PRACTICE AHEAD OF INSURANCE EXEMPTION DEADLINE

30th August, 2017

JOSIE TAYLOR AND REBECCA ARMITAGE

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-30/health-ministers-working-to-save-private-homebirths/8842348?pfmredir=sm>

## POWER AND PLEASURE. 6 LESSONS FROM ZOE'S HOME BIRTHS

2017

EMPOWERING BIRTHS AUSTRALIA

<https://www.empoweringbirthsaustralia.com/single-post/2017/10/10/Power-and-Pleasure---6-lessons-from-Zoes-home-births>

## UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT BIRTH AND STORY

2017

SARA WICKHAM

<http://www.sarawickham.com/research-updates/understanding-more-about-birth-and-story/>

## THE RISE OF FREEBIRTHING: 'IF THERE WAS A DEATH OF MY BABY ... I WAS CAPABLE OF GRIEVING'

30th August, 2017

JOSIE TAYLOR AND REBECCA ARMITAGE

<http://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-29/freebirthing-if-there-was-baby-death-i-was-capable-of-grieving/8827582?pfmredir=sm>

## WHY ARE MORE WOMEN NOT HAVING HOME BIRTHS?

2017

CANBERRA TIMES

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/act-home-birth-trial-sees-belowexpectation-births-as-only-six-babies-born-20171005-gyv1nj.html>

## THE RISE OF FREEBIRTHING

11th September, 2017

PARTICLE

<https://particle.scitech.org.au/people/the-rise-of-freebirthing/>



# A Privately Practicing Midwife Discusses *Change Of Plans*

Jo Hunter

Photo courtesy of Jerusha Sutton Photography

## AS A MOTHER, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CHANGES IN PLANS DURING PREGNANCY AND BIRTH?

My first baby was a planned Birth Centre Birth (KGV) in 1996. The actual labour and birth went to plan, however 3rd stage did not. After a straight forward 10 hour labour my daughter was born peacefully into water in the BC. I had wanted a physiological 3rd stage. Sadly, the midwife didn't have a lot of experience with this and whilst she didn't administer syntocinon as with active management of 3rd stage, she did do fundal massage and cord traction a short 20 mins after my baby was born. The cord traction resulted in the midwife pulling the cord off the placenta, as well as causing a partial separation of the placenta. I lost 1500 mls of blood and went to theatre for a manual removal of the placenta. I was separated from my baby, I received 2 blood

transfusions and ended up on the high dependency ward. I had an allergic reaction to the second bag of blood which resulted in my entire body breaking out in large red welts. I promptly signed myself out against medical advice and vowed not to birth in a hospital again. My next 3 babies were born at home, smoothly, peacefully, powerfully and without the need to change any plans.

## HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR EXPERIENCES HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR PRACTICE AND CARE OF WOMEN IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL ROLE AS A MIDWIFE?

I think my experience in the BC has resulted in me really listening to women and their desires and to never ever do anything without their informed consent (unless in an absolute emergency situation of course).

The care I received from my midwife and

the birth experiences I had at home left me with the desire to become a homebirth midwife myself. My birth experiences left me feeling like I could do anything if I put my mind to it and had the right support. My midwife was my biggest midwifery teacher and through being under her care, I really 'got' the importance of one to one continuity of midwifery care.

## AS A MIDWIFE, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CHANGES IN PLANS DURING PREGNANCY AND BIRTH?

Gosh, I won't name every situation, but I will say that I have experienced women transferring to hospital for all sorts of reasons: sometimes in an emergency situation, sometimes at maternal request for pain relief, sometimes for long drawn labours, sometimes during pregnancy for high BP, breech presentation and/or the woman developing conditions that require

closer monitoring of her baby etc.

I have experienced a woman choosing a different midwife for her next pregnancy and birth support; for whatever reason, I was not the right match for her.

I have experienced women hiring me as their midwife after having birthed with a different midwife for their last birth; for whatever reason, that midwife was not the right match for her.

I have experienced women transferring care during their current pregnancy from another midwife to me due to a breakdown of their relationship or the midwife no longer feeling comfortable supporting that woman's choice.

I have declined care to a woman due to the fact that she did not pay me for her previous care.

I have experienced women transferring care from a planned hospital birth, both public and private with a private OB, to me for a planned homebirth.

I think it's important to acknowledge that a large part of our job as midwives is to support women's choices and if that means that we are not the right fit for each other, then it is important to recognise this. It is also important for the midwife to be reflective and perhaps consider ways that she may have been able to serve that woman differently to meet her needs. I feel it is vitally important for a midwife and woman to feel very safe and comfortable with each other and feel they can trust each other; without this, then homebirth is not safe for either party.

#### **REGARDING CLIENTS THAT HAVE GONE FROM PLANNING TO BIRTH AT HOSPITAL TO SEEKING YOUR CARE, WHAT WERE YOUR EXPERIENCES (POLITICALLY, EMOTIONALLY AND LEGALLY)**

This is becoming much more difficult for women now because we (PPMs) are getting booked out so quickly that women who want to change over from a planned hospital birth to a PPM are often finding that it's too late to do so. Saying this, I have supported many women who have chosen to do this. Again, it's all about women's choice and sometimes it takes several months for women to realise that homebirth is even a 'thing'.

#### **I HAVE EXPERIENCED WOMEN SWAPPING TO HOMEBIRTH BECAUSE**

- they've educated themselves and realised that homebirth is more in alignment with what they want
- they desperately want a water birth and it is not offered at the hospital they are booked in to
- they want continuity of carer
- they want to avoid routine interventions
- they are planning a VBAC and want to avoid continuous monitoring and cannulation and the inability to birth in water



Photo by Natural Beginnings Photography

- their OB changed his/her mind on what was earlier agreed to in the woman's birth plan
- they were kicked off a publicly funded homebirth program due to being GBS positive, having a higher BMI at the end of pregnancy than the policy says is ok, etc
- they feel disappointed and/or disillusioned about the care they have been receiving.

#### **REGARDING CLIENTS THAT HAVE HAD TO TRANSFER FROM BIRTHING AT HOME TO BIRTHING IN HOSPITAL, EITHER DURING PREGNANCY OR LABOUR, WHAT SORTS OF EMOTIONS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED?**

It is always tough when things deviate from normal at home and a hospital transfer is required. It is tough for the woman and her family, and it can also be tough for the midwife. How the woman and her team feel about the transfer is so dependent on how they are treated once in the hospital setting.

I have experienced transfers that have been fantastic, where the staff have been really respectful of the woman and her wishes and have been open to working in collaboration with me to create the best outcome for the woman and her baby.

I have also experienced transfers where the woman and myself have been treated so badly that it impacted hugely on the woman's experience, how she felt about the birth and influenced her postnatal period.

I remember one woman, who was planning

a VBAC and needed to transfer to hospital for meconium in the liquor, and ended up having a repeat caesarean section for fetal distress. The midwife who filled in her baby's blue book had written under "reason for caesarean" ..... "failed homebirth". I promptly ripped the page out and replaced it with a new page and wrote "mec liquor and fetal distress". This comment alone spoke volumes about that particular midwife's unwanted opinion on this woman's birth choices. When a woman transfers from a planned Birth Centre birth to a labour ward, no one calls it a "failed Birth Centre birth", it is considered an appropriate transfer to the next level of care.

In my experience, my local hospitals are now mostly very good on transfer, probably because they have gotten to know me and I have worked hard to build up relationships with staff. However, I find this is not always the case when I am out of my own area and need to transfer to a hospital that I haven't been to before.

Jo Hunter is a privately practising midwife who lives in the Blue Mountains and serves women and their families throughout the Blue Mountains and Sydney. She has 4 gorgeous children, all of whom were born in water, 3 of which took place at home with the beautiful Maggie Lecky-Thompson as midwife. Jo is co-creating a documentary called Birth Time and is currently completing Honours by research on PPMs in Australia.

# The Trusting

by Sarah Harvey

Because even in trying, even when it seems like absolutely nothing is happening, it's happening. Close your eyes & feel the slow edging of truth, of change, of who you really are. Feel it all wash over you. The old scabs & demons, feel them, too. Sit still... As so much flies and swirls all around you. Let the past be gutted out of your bones; let it crumple & be but a whisper of a distant, echoing memory. So that only truth Only here Only now May fill & crash like the infinite ocean of beauty that is waking up inside you. Let it spill into every crack and crevice and reservoir of your existence. That's how big you really are. That's how beautiful. Feel comfort. For change, it's not always pretty, like they say it will be. Let it be messy. Wild, too. And know it's okay--- Even as white hot tears and fear and sweat and pain and confusion comes to the surface to make itself known. Even when it seems too hard. Because you are doing it. You're changing. Sometimes, it may not seem like much, but it's everything. Bend and sway with these wild currents of energy, of emotion, of release, that run up & down your spine like uncoiling snakes--and trust it. You're changing. The old fear that kept you so small, it snaps and rips and peels, leaving your skin and heart raw enough for your soul to peak through. The breeze, a hug, a breath---never felt so magnificent. Because as you change, you won't ever feel less.

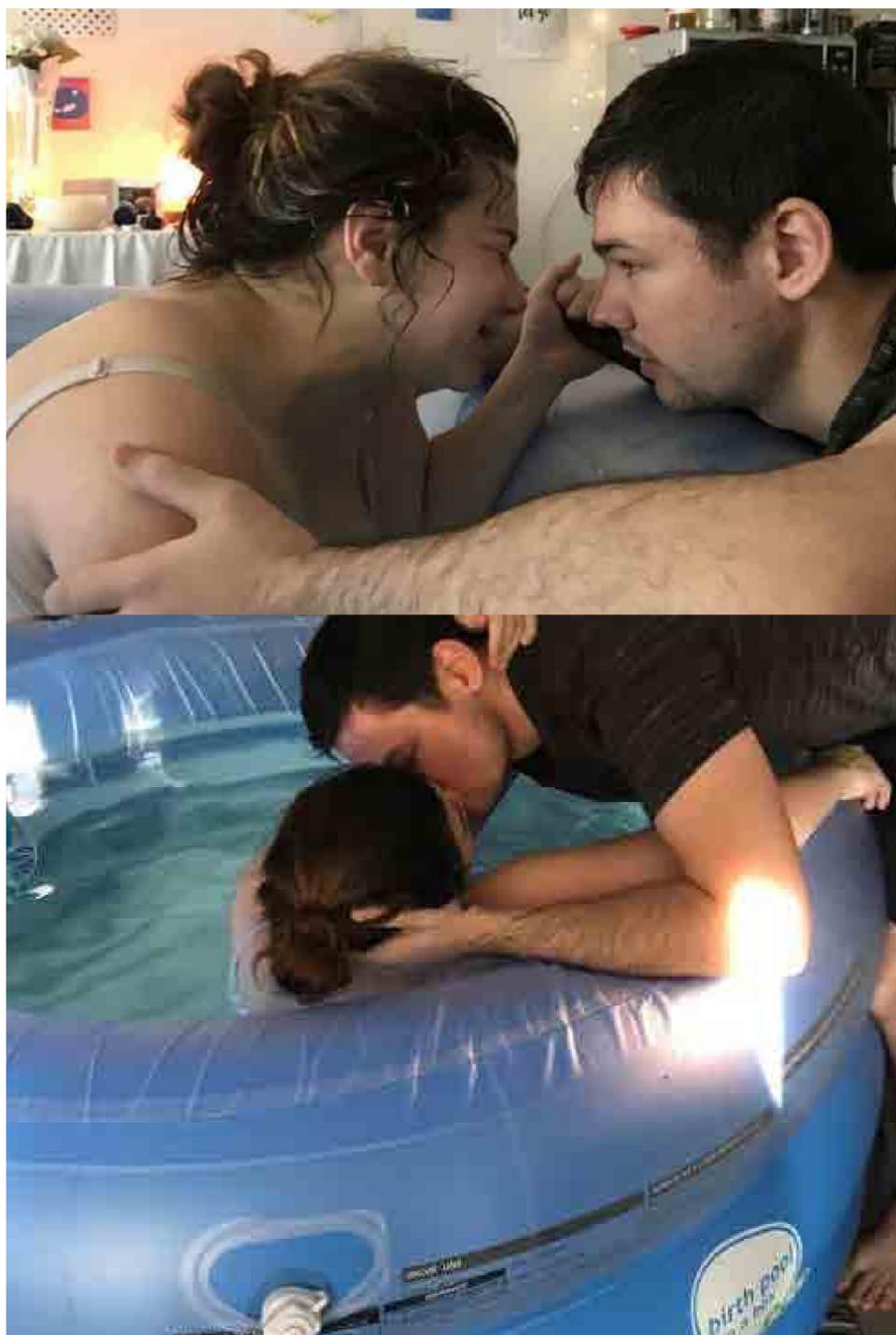
You will only feel more. The strong softness embedded in the fierce humanness you are. Cherish it. Cry. Howl. Touch. Dance. Surrender to softness. Feel everything. Come home to yourself. It's time. For change is the invitation to embody ourselves in an entirely new way. Don't care about external pressure, about circumstances, about how it will look, or what people will think This time, you have to do it for you. Be that bold. Be that hungry to radiate from your soul. Be that unrelenting in your thirst to be truth. To be the love and stars and pain and hope, and all that you are. You're changing. Trust it. And this time, It's different than ever before. Do it Just. For. You.

Sarah L. Harvey; August 19th, 2017

Find more of Sarah's work at <http://www.sarahlouisaharvey.com/>

or on

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/sarahlouisaharvey/?fref=ts>



# Archie, Born Swimmingly

by Azure Rigney

Photos by Jo Hunter

On 4th August 2017 I woke up at 2:30am having Braxton Hicks. As I had experienced this all pregnancy I didn't think much of it. I'd had a couple by 3am and started thinking to myself I wonder if today is the day. By 3:30am I started pottering around and knew it was the day. My husband Dan came out of my toddler Mia's room and asked what I was doing. I told him we would have a baby today! He said "Should we fill the pool?" I said no, and that he should go back to sleep for now. I turned the lights on in that space and listened to my Spotify playlist which included 'I'm not afraid' and 'I feel it coming'.

I waited until a decent hour of the morning, 4:30am, to text my midwife Jo Hunter saying it reminded me of 10 hours before my daughter Mia was born. I had been scared and in denial of becoming a mother

of two under two all pregnancy! I only accepted that this was actually happening at around 3am!

My next job was to set up the GoPro. I had read about having a labour project, and that it was important – well, it sure did take my mind off the surges. It was possibly the most frustrating hour of my life and I was using Wi-Fi so I had to swap over into my downloaded The Hypnobirthing Mum tracks from our private Hypnobirthing course. I became quite passive aggressive with the affirmations like 'I am calm' because I wasn't feeling so calm dealing with technology.

Mia, my 23 month old toddler, had been waking upwards of 10 times a night for most of her life, yet this night she didn't wake up at all until 6am in the morning calling out for a breastfeed. I lay with her hoping to get another hour out of her. Due to vasospasm and aversions I usually breastfeed with

gritted teeth and curled toes, however the surge of oxytocin amped things up so her painful latch was the least of my worries.

I texted Jo letting her know that I was starting to struggle during the contractions. I didn't want her driving all this way in case it faded out. I was conscious of peak hour traffic and had prepared in the pregnancy in case she didn't arrive prior to the birth. We got up and Mia and I played between surges, during which I'd run to the loo, my position of choice. I texted Jo again asking her to come now, mostly for moral support as my waters hadn't broken, something they did when I was 3cm 41mins prior to Mia's birth.

My waters broke at 6:30am. Now, in addition to pressure in my back and belly, it felt like someone was trying to fit a triangle shape through a circle. It was becoming harder to play in between surges and Dan



was torn on who to look after so I asked him to text my mum, who moved from Brisbane to three levels above us, to come take Mia. I was a little bit disappointed that she would miss the actual birth, but I think she knew what was happening which was important to me. I guess this is why people have doulas, to tag team baby sitting and birthing woman support with hubby!

At 7:30am I was then able to relax a bit more knowing little Mia would be happy with her grandma and Dan could focus 100 per cent on me. It was clearly transition as I started to get demanding, barking instructions for ice each surge like in Yoni Yoga Birth Couples yoga preparation for childbirth class.

'How did he not know what I needed?' I thought.

"I need to push," I told him, thinking to myself 'Oh my God, Jo isn't here yet!' But I knew I could do this if she didn't make it! And of course a few surges later Jo arrived and I had a wave of calm, something I felt every time I met with her, even if I had had a rough time with Mia's sleep or work dramas.

But then I really started to lose control, Jekyll and Hyde style. Why did I choose home birth? I then rationally thought it would be the same pain if not worse in hospital with less oxytocin. Then I had a bit

of a reprieve and asked if I had the purple line up my bum, she said, "Yes you do love."

I wanted so badly to ask for a quantitative answer to correlate with dilation but knew to trust the process. I was flipping around the birth pool like a maniac trying to get comfortable in vain, and then thought maybe the baby was descending? I should try to feel his head! An inch or so away gave me great hope! But he moved back up after each push which was cruel. It was something I hadn't experienced previously, but had heard of. Jacqui arrived at 8:15am (I never expected her to make it as my daughter's labour was 41mins) and I again felt so much love and support and simple encouragement from everyone. Once his head was out I felt like I wanted to pull his body out with my hands but just gently guided him. It was much slower than my daughter's three pushes, which makes sense now we know how comparatively big he was. And then he was here! I did it! We had another baby! Oh look, it's an anterior tongue tie.

One of my favourite things about this birth experience was not being rushed. It was really important for me to birth the placenta naturally using gravity, as my wish was denied last time for no medical reason, and it was the most painful part of her labour

and delivery.

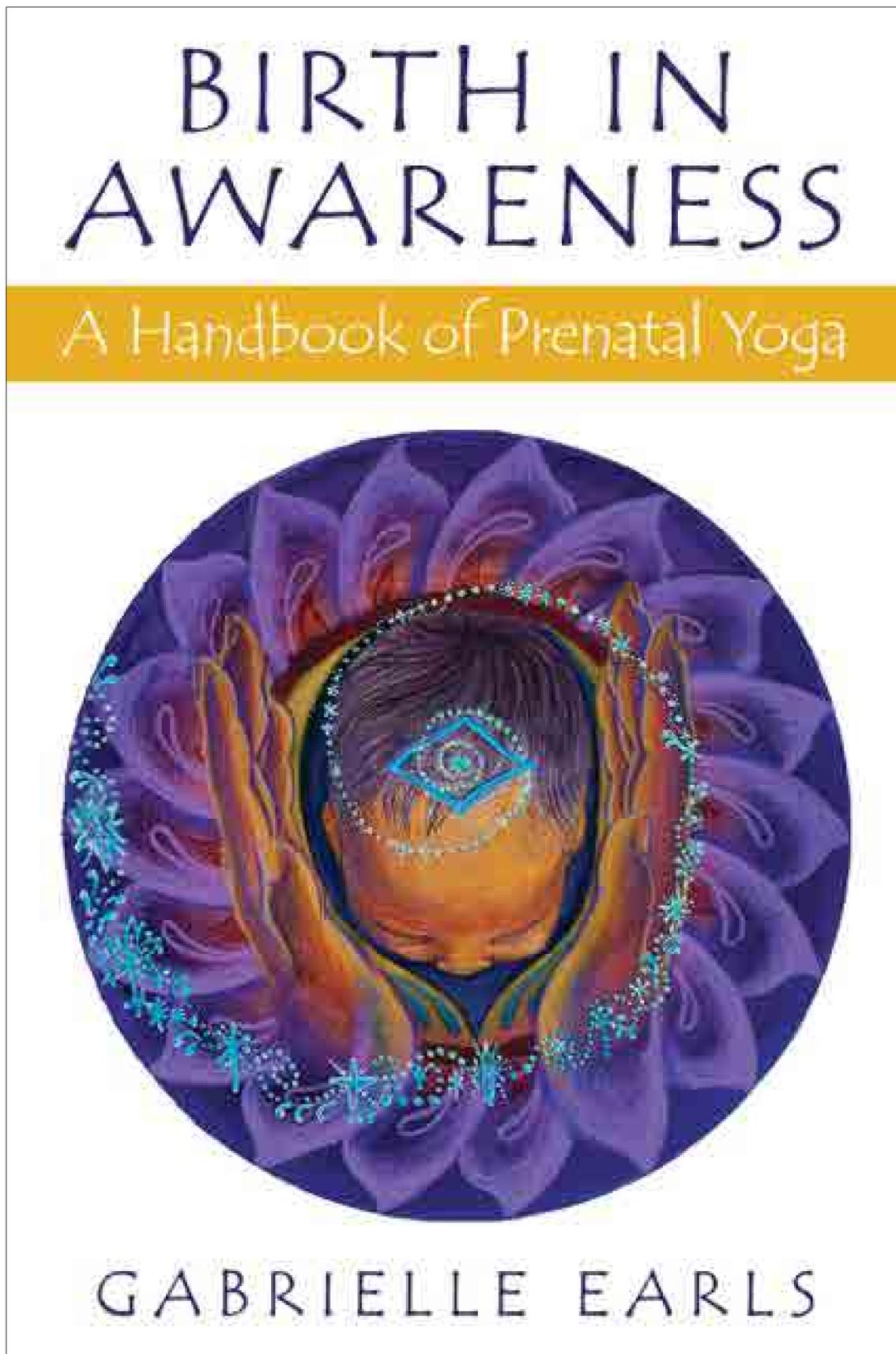
My husband Dan said seeing my strength through the birth was such a powerful experience. He asked, "How could we not do this again?" I thanked him for unlearning society's conditioning on the safest way to bring babies into the world over nine months and for becoming so informed. He watched many videos, read articles and talked to other Dads at Homebirth Access Sydney's Dad's Night Out!

One of Jo's other clients said it best: "Thank you for your unwavering support, your compassion, your calmness, your involvement, your empathy...just, thank you."

**Azure Rigney is tandem breastfeeding 2 year old Mia and 1 month old Archie. She had fertility treatment to fall pregnant with Mia and after finding out about MTHFR midline defects such as ties, diet and life style changes...surprise Archie! Azure is currently on maternity leave from the Army who she's worked with for seven years, almost as long as she's been with her hubby, Dan!**

# Book Review

Birth In Awareness  
Gabrielle Earls



"Gabrielle Earls has blessed us with her book, Birth in Awareness. It is so very useful, practical and well done that it makes my heart sing! Folded in these pages is a perfect blend of the essential nature of yoga for mothers, the science/anatomy of benefits, plus balancing of spirit. Gabrielle brings her Doula skills to light by making the 'How to' so clear that mothers and teachers of yoga feel guided and supported in their practice. The illustrations are simply wonderful. I am astonished."

Robin Lim ~  
Midwife, Doula,  
Grandmother  
March 2017, dawn,  
Bali, Indonesia

Excerpt from Birth in awareness,  
A handbook of prenatal yoga.  
Gabrielle Earls (2017) Chapter 3:  
Letting Go, Letting Go Through



## BOOK EXCERPT

Labour, Pages 20-22.

Through labour, it may be about letting go of the breath and not holding the breath to try to hold off the painful sensations. It may involve letting go of any tension through the jaw. There is a smooth muscle connection from the jaw down to the perineum. I have heard people comment that "a tight jaw makes a tight vagina." Ina May Gaskin, creator of The Farm midwifery centre has spoken of this idea. Loosening through the jaw releases through the body.

Physical, mental and emotional releases can all open up a woman in pregnancy and through birth. We shift the focus from trying into allowing; from resisting into softening.

A practice to let go.  
Benefits Deeply connective

meditation. Can be practised through pregnancy, labour and post birth. How to Sit back-to-back with your partner and close your eyes. Feel the shared space between you. With neither partner controlling the breath or the rhythm, feel each others' breath as you connect back to back. Let your breaths flow together and as you relax into the shared space, notice how your breaths work and flow in sync together. With that awareness of breath, become the shared breath. Place concentration on each breath. As you sit together be aware of the breaths you are also sharing with your fetus inside. Vocalising to let go Sometimes there is the need to make sounds and express through vocalising. It can be releasing and supportive at times during labour to sync the sounds with a partner, just ensure to let go of any control while doing

this.

On each inhale, take in a fresh breath and energy, expanding through the lungs and diaphragm.

AAAAAHHHHHH  
OOOOOOHHHHHHHHH  
AAAAAHHHHHH  
OOOOOOHHHHHHHHH  
AAAAAHHHHHH  
OOOOOOHHHHHHHHH  
AAAAAHHHHHH  
OOOOOOHHHHHHHHH

Keep repeating this cycle with your in and out breath, in sync with your partner. Do 10 cycles of breath or as many as you like.

# THE MEDICALISATION OF BIRTH IS AN INSTRUMENT OF CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY ERASING *Sacred Feminine*

An essay by Amy Bell (Daisychain)

The innate power of the sacred feminine is fixed to biological rhythms of the female body, primed for giving life and providing nourishment, and capable of selflessly holding their family, or tribe, together with secure attachment. Self-efficacy in pregnancy, birth and mothering is crucial to a woman achieving her sacred femininity. In this essay, sacred feminine is used to encompass the reproductive biology and rituals associated with menstruation, pregnancy, birth, motherhood, menopause and the community of caring for each other's offspring.

I will argue that historically, the value of the sacred feminine has been progressively undervalued by feminist discourse since the 1960s. This follows on from the late 1800s paternalistic medicalisation of birth and gynecology, separating women from their innate power and knowledge, coercing the interpellation of the cultural hegemony of capitalism. Cultural hegemony in film, television and advertising reinforce the capitalist patriarchy that keep women disempowered from their innate knowledge and strength from community, whether as an isolated housewife or a childless career woman or working mother. The liberation from motherhood is feminist discourse, of course, and that choice is a good thing, but it has come at the cost of "othering" motherhood.

## WHY IT MATTERS - MY EXPERIENCE

My interest in the sacred feminine and the role natural birth plays in transitioning a woman into motherhood began with my own journey into motherhood. I learned that less than one per cent of women had drug-free births or home births. I was shocked by these statistics, despite having worked as a nurse on a busy (high-intervention) post-natal ward. Inspired to study, I qualified as a Doula, Breastfeeding Counsellor and Parent Mentor. I strongly positioned myself as believing these roles support a new mother to transition into embracing motherhood as their sacred purpose, in an environment which was hostile toward women choosing the path of the sacred feminine. Women choosing any

combination of homebirth, breastfeeding, homeschooling, nonvaccine, ecoparenting - or any deviation from the hegemony - experience what is akin to the modernday version of the witch trials; to disempower women by crushing the sacred feminine knowledge.

In 2010, leading up to the federal election, homebirth midwives were fighting against increasingly restrictive legalisation and insurance requirements, interpreted as an attempt to discredit and erase the minority of women practicing sacred femininity. As the local convener of the Maternity Coalition and presenter on Birth Hour, I was nominated to run as an independent candidate for the 2010 federal election. I aimed to promote that homebirth would become technically illegal because the population of homebirth midwives was too small to access appropriate insurance.

The battle, referred to as The Witch Hunt, was given a 'solution' requiring homebirth midwives to be auspiced under a willing (patriarchal medicine) obstetrician; those same obstetricians who were instrumental since the inquisition (as barber surgeons) to remove women healers and midwives from their powerful position in communities. This had resulted initially in burning midwives and healers as witches, and aligning obstetricians with the ruling class. Eventually it established Obstetrics (around 1850) which, along with universities, excluded women, discredited midwifery and created elitism. Thus began the medicalisation of birth and the final chapter in erasing the sacred.

## THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN DISTRACTING WOMEN FROM THE SACRED FEMININE

Cultivation Theory is a research approach examining the impact media has in influencing societal norms and consumerism. From pregnancy to death, television and mass media have become the instruments which inform worldviews. Debord's radical concept of "The Spectacle" (1967) also states that the illusions of reality, as portrayed by mass media, commodify and influence people's consumer choices and lifestyles. The

Spectacle expects the image or signifiers to become more real than lived experience, and to become the 'truth' despite contradictions. Cultivation Theory and Debord's Spectacle illustrate that "reality", as depicted in media, shapes and informs the views and beliefs of people. Common depictions of women and birth in media can therefore be seen to contribute to the erasure of the sacred feminine.

One of the films Birth Hour screened was the documentary Laboring under an Illusion by childbirth Educator and Filmmaker Vicki Elson. This film used Cultivation Theory to research how the portrayal of birth on screen fuels fear and unreal birth expectations. In an interview, Elson described the film as "100 birth scenes — TV and movie comedies, dramas, real births — plus narration. Birth films tend to be very romantic or absolutely terrifying. I wanted to juxtapose real and fake births and let people make up their own minds". Prior to modern mass media, during the middleages and the original witch trials, pain in childbirth was reframed by the paternal church as punishment for Eve's sin. This created a cultural hegemony that enabled men to take over healing and enter a previously women-only space - the birthing room. Midwifery and pregnant women have suffered as obstetrics took over the birth domain, further eroding women's autonomy and knowledge of their own bodies.

In terms of science, the sacred feminine is the production of oxytocin which triggers maternal-infant bonding. Endogenous oxytocin is the hormone which changes molecular pathways and transitions a woman into motherhood, physically changing her body for lactation and for the mental workload and selflessness needed to care for an infant and growing child. The biological changes, or new pathways, associated with the transition to motherhood are dependent on the natural birth process, including experiencing the 'pain'. If this process is difficult and has many medical interventions, there is a correlation with insensitive mothering and infant attachment. Women influenced by

the cultural hegemony and media have identified a need to be 'ideal', with mothers who had natural births having the least anxiety about achieving the prescribed ideal, which much second wave feminist discourse rejected as oppressive.

### **FEMINIST RESPONSE: BIRTH CONTROL AND INDIVIDUALISM OR HOW TO MARKET MOTHERHOOD AND CREATE A COMMERCIAL INDUSTRY**

De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) conceptualises that woman is imprisoned in her biology and reproductive function, by which she is oppressed. The birth of the second wave challenged this notion with the contraception/abortion rights movement. Giving women autonomy of their bodies and motherhood, a choice made possible by birth control, was to free women from being oppressed. The consumer industry soon saw opportunities to use the feminist ideology to market formula feeding and promote other, now essential baby products. The image of the ideal mother has been created by a consumer model. The problematic way media sells motherhood has created new anxiety for mothers, fearful of being bad mothers; failing to be wonder women with the added pressure to be personally fulfilled, have a successful career, be sexy and always cope while undertaking child-rearing and domestic duties. Formula was promoted as the choice for liberated career women, and television and magazines reflected this shift in product promotion. Women were then seen as independent from their husbands, and thus began to see the deterioration of sacred feminism and a rise in divorce rates.

### **HOW CAPITALISM DESTROYED THE SACRED FEMININE OR THE SHIFT FROM MOTHER TO DIVA**

At least four generations have been born into a progressively more medicalised birth industry and commercialised motherhood and baby industry. These have been influenced by media, which over the last ten years has become a constant presence. The film *The Business of Being Born* critiques the birth industry, while internet Blogger Mia Freedman embraces the medicalisation of birth, breastfeeding and parenting due to its alignment with her third wave feminism. Her blog, [Mamamia.com.au](http://Mamamia.com.au), is one example of the current feminism trend promoting individual choice and personal empowerment as a rejection of traditional roles; traditional roles like motherhood and natural birth, which are given caricatures of

old-fashioned, oppressed, and (ironically) selfish. *Freedom Fallacy* (2015) is a series of radical feminist essays critiquing Third Wave or liberal feminism as the commodification of femininity. External signifiers situated in capitalist-patriarchal consumerism replaced baby dolls with Bratz™, saw popstars become like porn stars and saw binary gender roles sexualised and removed from the family setting.

The second wave of feminism, formed in the 70s (radical feminism), has eroded the importance of biological functions of womanhood (birth, breastfeeding and motherhood), promoted lesbianism and the pursuit of careers, and rejected porn, marriage and motherhood as tools of patriarchal oppression. The rise in elective C-section, and bottle feeding to fit in with career, equated empowerment for those women giving birth. The third wave in the 90s (liberal feminism) focused on individual choice as empowerment, including sex work and pornography, promoting a Beyoncé-style sexual empowerment and eternal youth philosophy. Capitalism succeeded in convincing women, via mass media, to adopt a new and improved feminism which is capitalist patriarchy in disguise. Birth and motherhood are no longer featured in feminist discourse, being viewed as clinging to an old paradigm; when it was it focused on being liberated FROM motherhood. However, The Purple Stockings Movement is a new feminist discourse seeking to reclaim motherhood in feminist discourse. It is the response to capitalism, which is needed to counter the forgetting of the sacred feminine. It is a movement that respects men and women, the earth and community; a feminism that I could authentically embrace.

In conclusion, the importance of the biological role of sacred feminine to building community and sustaining healthy emotional development of future adults is overlooked by governments and by feminist discourse in general. It is time for a maternal revolution!

**Amy Bell is a doula and single mother of three daughters. While studying Art Therapy she researched the history of feminism in the context of birth. Amy is the cartoonist behind *Daisychain*, an artist and a punk violinist.**

### **BEYOND LABOR: THE ROLE OF NATURAL AND SYNTHETIC OXYTOCIN IN THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD**

Aleeca F. Bell (CNM; PhD), Elise N. Erickson (CNM) and C. Sue Carter (PhD).

Emerging research raises questions that synthetic oxytocin during childbirth may alter the endogenous oxytocin system and influence maternal stress, mood, and behavior. Endogenous oxytocin is a key component in the transition to motherhood, affecting molecular pathways that buffer stress reactivity, support positive mood, and regulate healthy mothering behaviors (including lactation). Synthetic oxytocin is widely used throughout labor and postpartum care in modern birth. Yet research on the implications beyond labor of maternal exposure to perinatal synthetic oxytocin is rare. In this article, we review oxytocin-related biologic pathways and behaviors associated with the transition to motherhood and evidence supporting the need for further research on potential effects of intrapartum oxytocin beyond labor. We include a primer on oxytocin at the molecular level.

'Bell AF, Erickson EN and Carter CS. (2014) Beyond labor: the role of natural and synthetic oxytocin in the transition to motherhood. *J Midwifery Womens Health*. Vol 59(1):35-42.'



# Podcasts

Given our new e-magazine format we are able to share electronic content which means we can now provide you with links to various articles, websites and podcasts! Accordingly, here are a few birth story podcasts within the theme 'Change in Plans' for which the births have occurred both in Australia and abroad. While listening, please keep in mind that different countries have different protocols and procedures around hospital transfer and the treatment of midwives, doulas, women and babies within the hospital system. The majority of these birth stories are shared from The Circle of Birth podcast series, created by Aly Kranz, and you can

find more of these at <http://circleofbirth.com/> or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/thecirclebirth/>. Before listening to these podcasts, please follow the links and read the associated information, look at the photos and videos and read the birth stories available on The Circle of Birth website. An additional one of the birth stories shared is featured on The Birth Hour podcast series, and you can find more of these at <http://thebirthhour.com/>.

I hope you love listening to these as much as I did! ~  
**Aimee**

## THE CIRCLE OF BIRTH PODCASTS:

### E17

Shamanic Craftswoman Jane Hardwicke Collings Shares Her Transformative Births. Podcast link <http://circleofbirth.com/e17-shamanic-craftswoman-jane-hardwicke-collings-shares-transformative-births/>

### E30

Mother & Midwife Professor Hannah Dahlen Shares Stories of Midwifery, Birth & Loss. Podcast link <http://circleofbirth.com/e30-mother-midwife-professor-hannah-dahlen-shares-stories-midwifery-birth-loss/>

### E39

Making Sacred-Transversing Through the Dance of Birth-4 Birth Stories-Hospital Home & NICU. Podcast link <http://circleofbirth.com/e39-making-sacred-transversing-through-the-dance-of-birth-4-birth-stories-hospital-home-nicu/>

## THE BIRTH HOUR PODCAST

The Homebirth to Hospital Transfer Birth Story of a Midwife (American based)

For a first person perspective on the process of a personal homebirth to hospital transfer for a licensed midwife, consider listening to this podcast interview with Ami Burnham.

<http://thebirthhour.com/homebirth-hospital-transfer-positive-birth-story/>

Ami Burnham is a Licensed Midwife, Registered Nurse, and International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) as well as a mother and partner. She has dedicated the last 17 years to supporting families throughout the childbearing years both in the US and abroad. Ami met the love of her life in December 2010, and was blessed to give birth to their son, Axel, in January 2015 and their Daughter, Ophelia, in August of 2017. They all live together in San Francisco where Ami is continuing to practice as a lactation consultant, parenting educator, and occasional midwife.

You can find her at [www.ammassource.com](http://www.ammassource.com).

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Photo by Rebecca Rewolinski photography

# Birthing Hamish

by Aimee Sing

Photos courtesy of Jacquie Harsh

**H**amish's birth story starts with his sister's birth. After planning a homebirth we miscarried our first baby, but fell pregnant again soon after. Despite an asymptomatic pregnancy, with some hiccups, I ended up having a placental abruption at 36+4 weeks. My beautiful daughter was born via emergency caesarean. While Willow's birth was not traumatic for me, it really instilled a craving to experience labour; just one contraction! It also introduced fear - I was scared of losing my baby, my husband was scared of losing me. Despite this, we tried for another baby 18 months later.

After 12 months of trying, weaning Willow and seeing a naturopath, kinesiologist, chiropractor, herbalist, Maya therapist and acupuncturist, I fell pregnant but sadly experienced two more miscarriages. Devastated, I decided we would stop trying and just see where life took us. Along came Hamish, determined to do things to HIS plan!

My pregnancy was simple and easy once past the anxiety-inducing first trimester. Everything with bub and I measured and looked perfect. Thirty seven weeks rolled around and I was shocked and grateful to still be pregnant! I had a gorgeous mother's blessing, organised by a fellow HBAC mum, and experienced having henna decorating my belly! My chiropractor did a couple of adjustments on my pelvis and soon after that our baby engaged. Over the following weeks I finished work and baby moved further down, but I still felt totally comfortable. I had a few fears surrounding birth, mainly regarding haemorrhage and my waters breaking before labour, and had discussed those and what we would do with my midwife.

On the 13th of November, our baby's due date (and the day after my and before my MIL's birthday), I woke up and commented to my hubby, "I'm still too happy and comfortable being pregnant for this pregnancy to almost be over, this baby is in for the long haul." About two hours later my waters broke! Lucky I'd released those fears with my midwife.

I was delighted to notice that the waters were crystal clear with little flecks of vernix! I was so elated, hugged my hubby in excitement and rang my midwife and texted my doula. We took Willow to the local growers market and saw lots of familiar faces, including a fellow homebirth mum, which had me rushing away for fear of blurting, "I'M GOING TO BE HOLDING MY BABY SOON!!!"

While walking, I kept feeling gushes of fluid and was filling pads pretty quickly. I also noticed I was starting to have little, niggly Braxton Hicks, so after stocking up on some food we headed back home. I had planned to set up my birth space and bake a birthday cake (chocolate, at my daughter's request) while in labour, but once I got home I realised things were potentially picking up! I tried to rest but realised that laying down made the Braxton Hicks worse. We set Willow up with a few toys, I packed the food from the markets away and Juz helped me set up my birth space.

By the time we'd finished setting up I was swaying and stopping during surges, the most comfortable position being on all fours with a heat pack on my lower belly. My mum called during a surge and I managed to talk to her saying, "I'm just having some niggles, nothing serious" (was this the real deal?).



Soon after, the only way I could cope was to rock forwards and backwards over a fit-ball, vocalising with heat packs on my lower belly and back. Contractions! I'd felt one, at last! At 2:15pm I asked Juz to call our midwife. She wanted to know whether I needed her and I replied, "I don't know" (I STILL wasn't sure whether this would peter out!). After speaking with her I decided to text my doula. Four surges later, no text sent, I asked Juz to "please just get her here!"

At 2:45pm I asked for Jo! Once I had the go-ahead I started running the bath and got in! I must have looked ridiculous in 1cm of water, rocking away in the bath. Just having SOME water around me was helping. Then I lost all concept of time...I remember Jacqui, our doula, arriving and supporting me. I remember Willow coming and going. I remember Jo arriving, seeing her calm smile and all of a sudden feeling



a flood of relief - my birth team was here, I was going to give birth soon!

Jo checked on bub and kept saying, "that's one happy baby," which made me feel wonderfully reassured and calm. At one point I got frustrated and decided I was getting out of the bath because it was taking too long. I walked to the bedroom and used the fit-ball again, but after a while I decided I needed the bath, hopped back in and it was blissful!

I kept going as I had before, then all of a sudden sitting wasn't working, I needed to stand! So I'd float between contractions, sometimes falling asleep which had me thinking, 'maybe I'm close to transition,' and then doubting myself, 'no, I have forever to go, this isn't hard enough yet!' As a surge came I'd stand and hold a heat pack on my front, and Juz would support me and hold a heat pack on my back.

This continued until I started needing to put one leg on the edge of the bath! As I was having a surge I felt something drip out of my vagina and looked down, it was a bit of mucousy blood! A few more surges and more blood kept coming. Jo kept checking bub's heart rate and all looked perfect, but she commented that it'd be helpful to know how far dilated I was. I agreed to a vaginal exam and was 8cm (what?! No way!). Being on my back not able to move during the surges was unbearable, I've no idea how women manage that!

Afterwards, I got back in the bath and Jo said she'd keep a close watch on bub, but to keep doing whatever I felt. I kept on, but these surges were intense. Juz asked Jo what the time was and I yelled "NO!", and then said, "hey, it's dark, when did that happen?!"

I looked at the affirmations and focussed on one: surrender to the power of your body. I remember pleading with Jo, telling my birth team I wanted to go home, I needed an epidural and asking, "How many more?" My birth team had an answer for everything! Jo said, "Just focus on this one," and so I kept repeating, "Just this one," with each surge.

I said, "I can't do this anymore," and Jo asked, "What's the alternative?" Then all of a sudden I remember thinking, 'hey, there's pressure in my bum.'

I went with the pressure for a few surges

and noticed I was getting pushy, but I was convinced this was a baby-position thing and that it'd go away. Slowly, the pushing urge took over and I commented, "I'm pushing" (Jo knew, of course!).

This was the most incredible feeling; totally overwhelming and surreal! I kept visualising an image of a baby crowning and I got really excited - maybe we'd be holding our baby soon!

The pushing surges kept coming and going, coming and going, and I wanted to know when it'd be over. I remember saying, "come ON baby, please just come out!" I asked Jo how much longer and she said, "I don't know love, maybe see if you can feel anything."

I reached up as far into my vagina as I could and felt... nothing. "It's going to be FOREVER," I wailed, but Juz squeezed my hand and said, "It won't be; you're doing it, just focus on the next one." So the next one, and the next one, and then I checked again - 'I CAN FEEL THE HEAD'.

With each surge I'd check and show Jo on my finger, usually with a big grin on my face. At one knuckle away I remember sighing and grinning, and Jo said, "Wow, you're so lucid!" - I felt incredible and womanly, and despite being totally out of control, somehow I felt entirely powerful and capable.

Then came a BIG surge, and bub's head started to crown - I felt lots of stretchiness! Jo and I said 'Hah, hah, hah' as bub's head moved further down and then as he crowned out came a gush of blood. It felt like the next surge didn't come for 10 minutes...come on body, I want to meet my baby!!

I gave a big (involuntary) push with the next surge and felt a rubbery feeling as the head moved through and down, and then I stared at my baby's head - here's my baby, between two worlds! I rubbed the head full of hair and said, "hi baby, hi" and waited for what felt like an eternity for the next surge.

Jo couldn't get his heart rate but I told her not to worry, "the baby is pulsing" The next surge brought bub into the water and lo and behold, bub's cord was around his neck - THAT'S what that pulsing was! Willow squealed 'JO, IT'S A BABY!!!' As we scooped Hamish up I realised there was

something foreign - a penis and testicles! We had a baby boy! It didn't matter enough to acknowledge just yet because Hamish was still coming into his body - he wasn't breathing so Jo asked that I rub him and he ended up needing some suction. Then came his first cry and I was just awestruck by how perfect, squishy and beautiful this little human was!

I lost some blood so got onto my bed to feed bub and the placenta came out 45 minutes later. We used cord burning to separate Hamish from his placenta but needed to tie it too. Hamish remained so calm, Willow fell asleep, we weighed and measured Hamish and then snuggled up in bed together, in awe of the little miracle that just occurred!

We had the most blissful, empowering, transformative experience bringing Hamish earthside! I am eternally grateful for my legend of a midwife and beautiful doula, for journeying alongside us through five pregnancies, a homebirth caesarean and a HBAC, always believing in my ability to birth my babies, even when I had my own doubts, and always being present to provide wisdom and love. We've been blessed with a gorgeous, albeit cheeky, baby boy who is absolutely divine, the perfect fit for our family! I love watching my babies love each other and I'm in awe of what my husband and I have achieved; what we created, how we birthed and how we're parenting two little beings - what an awesome team!

Hamish's birth video is available at <https://vimeo.com/213662052> with the password 'HJSing'.

**Aimee is a mother, wife, university lecturer, eternal student and lover of all things birth, babies and breastfeeding! She lives with her husband and two beautiful children in the glorious Blue Mountains. While Aimee has completed a doctorate in plant physiology, since having babies she discovered her passion lies with birth, breastfeeding and parenting. Accordingly, she has begun training to become an ABA counsellor, has recently become the editor for Birthings magazine and often toys with the idea of becoming a doula - We'll just see what life has in store!**

# Mama, You Told Me

by Rasha Rushdy

Mama, you told me  
That motherhood would be wonderful.  
But Mama, you never told me  
What it would do to me.  
How it would take the woman that I was;  
The woman who thought she knew everything  
And could control everything  
And break her down and  
Teach her that  
She had so much to learn.  
Mama, you told me  
There would be sleepless nights.  
But Mama, you never told me  
Just how tired I would be;  
How sleep would become a luxury, and not something  
To which I am entitled;  
But that there was nothing sweeter  
Than hearing the sound  
Of their steady breath while they slept;  
And that even when all I wanted  
Was to close my eyes  
For five more minutes,  
Small, soft, chubby arms  
Around my neck,  
Singing me songs,  
Telling me stories,  
Giggling and squealing,  
Would make me forget how badly I needed to sleep.  
Mama, you told me  
That I would figure it out one day at a time.  
But Mama, you never told me  
That motherhood would take the perfectionist in me,  
And whittle her down to someone that  
Has no choice but to accept  
That sometimes,  
"Good enough"  
Is enough.  
Mama, you told me  
That motherhood would change the way I think.  
But Mama, you never told me  
How my sharp memory would be torn into shreds,  
And that I would forget,  
Misplace,  
And confuse things;  
But that I would remember nothing more clearly  
Than the way the weight of their  
Small, warm bodies felt  
In my longing arms,  
The first time I held them.  
Mama, you told me  
That motherhood would teach me selflessness.  
But Mama, you never told me  
How sometimes I would feel like my independence,  
My freedom,  
My time,  
My sense of self,  
Had all been taken away  
And that I would feel guilty sometimes wishing I could have it all back;

But that in fact, it is a privilege to be needed by someone  
So deeply  
And that motherhood would gift me  
With so many exhilaratingly precious moments  
That take my breath away.  
Mama, you told me  
That motherhood would change my priorities.  
But Mama, you never told me  
About the worrying;  
How much I would worry.  
Are they happy? Are they healthy?  
Are they okay?  
Am I enough?  
I didn't know that someone else's needs could  
So wholly and completely  
Consume my every thought  
And that everything else would become  
Unimportant,  
Secondary,  
As long as my children were happy.  
Mama, you told me  
That it would be a joy to watch them grow up.  
But Mama, you never told me  
How quickly the time would pass;  
How the hours, the days, the weeks and the months  
Would slip through  
My fingers  
So fast  
That I would suddenly find myself looking at a child instead of a baby;  
A baby instead of a newborn;  
And beg time to be a little bit kinder and wait for me to catch up.  
Mama, you told me  
That motherhood would teach me things.  
But Mama, you never told me  
How becoming a mother would test me  
And push me  
And make me doubt myself  
And lead me to think that I was doing everything wrong;  
But that with each test, each push, each trying moment  
It would teach me  
How to be better  
How to be stronger  
And just how much I was capable of.  
Mama, you told me  
You loved me.  
But Mama, you never told me  
How that love would run so fiercely through my veins;  
How every other kind of love  
I have ever felt  
Would be nothing like this.  
How it would be a love that teaches me  
To give more than I ever thought I could give,  
To somehow want to give even more when I think I have nothing left,  
And to be grateful for the simplest of joys.

Rasha Rushdy of The Tuna Chronicles © 2016  
[www.thetunachronicles.com](http://www.thetunachronicles.com)



In the beginning...



Amy Bells DAISYCHAIN

# Middle Ages

Barber-surgeons attempt to monopolise birth services.



## HISTORY of BIRTH

ERA of "WITCH" TRIALS

Away in a manger:  
1522



Dr Werth of Hamburg dressed in women's clothing to gain entry to a labour room...

1600-1700



THE RULE of BISHOPS and the RISE of the MALE DOCTOR

- no fee\*
- no abortifacents
- no practice magic
- don't conceal information about birth events from Civil or religious authority
- attend the poor

I DECLARE EPISCOPAL LICENCE FOR MIDWIVES

\* fees from wealthy for doctor services.

EVE'S SIN IS FOUND TO BE CAUSE OF PAIN DURING CHILDBIRTH.

He was burned at the stake.

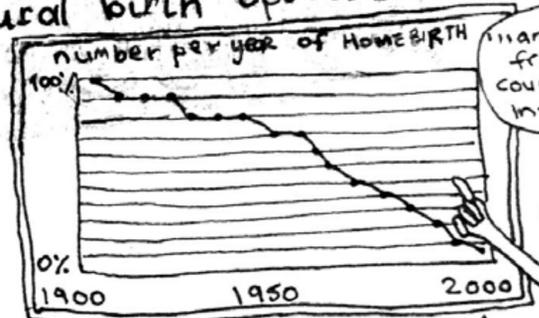
1850 MODERN MEDICINE IS FIRMLY ATTACHED TO THE UPPER CLASS



CHILD BED FEVER (PUERPERAL) EPIDEMIC OBSTETRICS BEGINS.

1900 - NOW

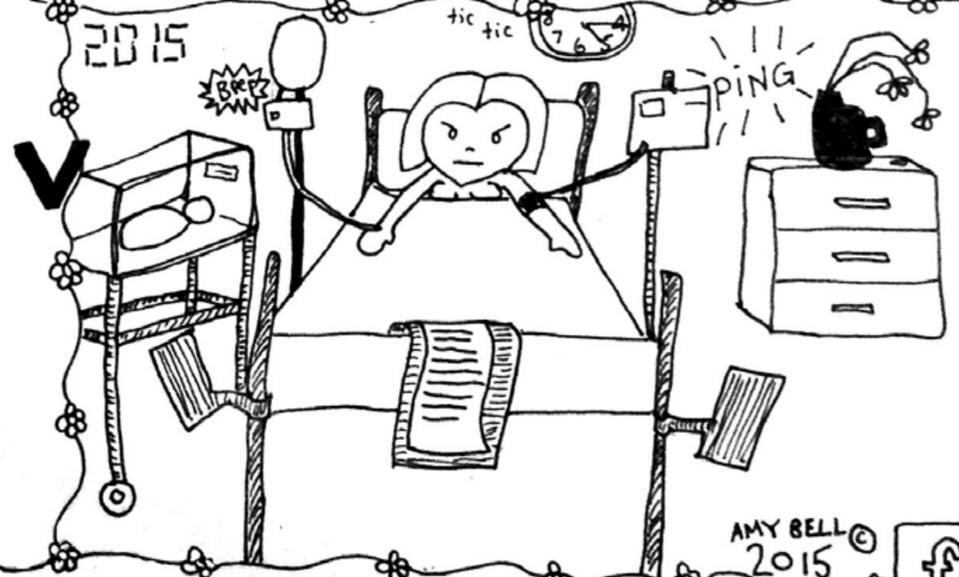
doctors form a society to protect members, and take the monopoly on birth services. Rogue midwives continue to offer natural birth options



and America has gone from 17th ranked country to 45th for infant mortality..

ERA of A.M.A

2015 homebirth



AMY BELL © 2015



# Birth Of Manning

## A HOMEBIRTH AFTER TWO CAESAREAN BIRTHS

by Sarah Allison

Photos courtesy of Annaliese Bakes

**M**y first birth was in March 2013, where I carried until 40+13 with no complications. The hospital then induced me for being 'post-dates' and being a first time mum I didn't think I had the option of declining the induction, despite knowing full well what it could lead to. The induction was attempted three times and all failed. I was then told it was a caesarean or transfer to Nepean and try to fight them for another induction attempt. Cooper was born at 42 weeks and within days of his birth I was dreaming of my next birth where I could experience labour and a vaginal delivery.

Our next pregnancy we sadly lost at 10 weeks gestation. This ended up being quite emotional on top of the loss of our child, because I miscarried our baby naturally. I felt that this was my first experience of birth, without intervention.

We were expecting our next baby in November of 2015 and I set out to have my VBAC (vaginal birth after caesarean) from the get go. I had antenatal care through our local hospital caseload with the same midwife I had for Cooper's pregnancy. I felt we were in a great position as she was also going to be present at the birth at the bigger hospital, where we had to birth due to being VBAC. Sadly, the hospital dropped caseload when I was 38 weeks pregnant and I lost my midwife and birth support, except for our student midwife.

My waters spontaneously ruptured after weeks of pre-labour pains and, as I was also GBS positive, we headed in once this happened as per the instructions of the hospital. Again, this was a choice I wouldn't have made if I wasn't fearful of what they would say should I decline their protocols for VBAC and GBS positive women.

My labour did not start during my time at the hospital, not surprisingly, and I had one particular midwife play the 'dead baby card' on me when I refused induction then and there. After spending an emotional night on the postnatal ward, they took me down to the labour ward and started me on the drip to induce labour. After eight hours on my feet, scared to sit or rest should I not progress fast enough for the OB, the contractions were too much for me to bear and after resisting for so long I consented

to an epidural. This led to our baby's heart rate dropping with each contraction and, after a while, we could see he wasn't recovering in between.

The midwife told me his head was deflexed with a brow presentation and I felt that this was the nail in my VBAC coffin that I couldn't overcome. We asked everyone to leave the room and, after crying with Jake for a few moments, I was wheeled into theatre for my second caesarean birth. Hadley was born at 41 weeks and before we were discharged I told myself and Jake that I could never go back to the hospital to birth my children.

From there on I dreamed of a homebirth - I asked friends whom had birthed at home and I investigated my options for local independent midwives. I put out feelers with Jo not long before we conceived our next baby, asking if she would be willing to support a HBA2C (home birth after two caesareans) and from there we chatted a bit about the logistics and realities of home birth and VBAC.

The pregnancy was breezy. I didn't opt to do any testing that I felt unnecessary and I received all of my care in my own home, with my family around me. We came to love our midwife Jo and I was able to continue working through the trauma of my previous birth experiences. One of my only fears was the fear of what I couldn't predict or control. I never expected my waters to break before labour started with Hadley, but they did, and I was worried this might happen again. What about his position? If it wasn't optimal for birth, how was I going to manage that? I never doubted that I could birth this baby at home however and I never doubted our safety either.

I finished up work at 38 weeks and was content to wait for our baby, fully expecting that he would likely arrive some time past 40 weeks. Jake and I planned a date day for his first day of leave, my 'due date', and we joked a lot that we weren't having the baby



until after this as we wanted one last movie/lunch date by ourselves.

Sunday August 13 - 2:30am - 39+6 weeks

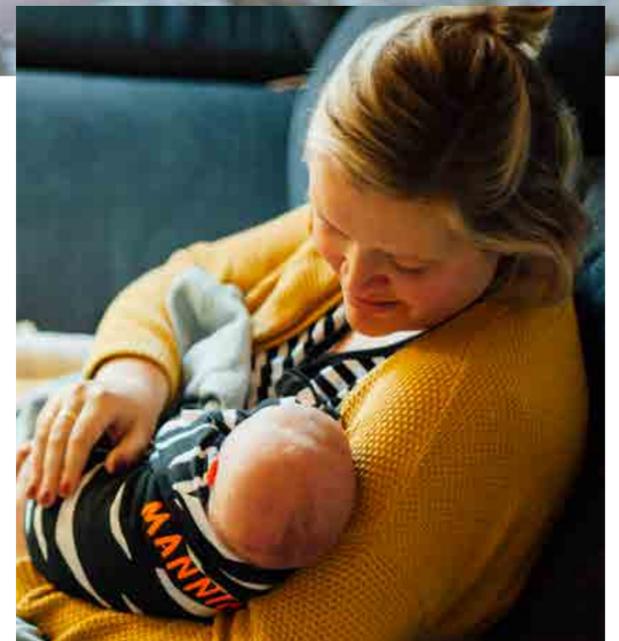
During sleep I felt a few painful tightenings that felt more powerful than typical and I also had a small gush of fluid. I didn't think much of this as I was still mostly asleep and I'd had weeks of experiencing watery discharge. I ended up going to the toilet around 3-3:30am and as soon as I got up I felt my waters had ruptured. I'd also had my show.

I had more tightenings and checked in with my midwife to let her know about my waters and that I was going to try and sleep. I didn't end up getting any real sleep as the contractions were too painful to sleep through, though I did stay in bed.

By 7am I was eating breakfast and watching a movie in bed. I expected the contractions would ease off during the day and establish once the sun was down. To my surprise, the contractions continued throughout the day, with 4-5 contractions each hour lasting a minute. I alternated between resting in bed and doing a bit of last minute nesting, aka cleaning ridiculous things! I was tired but unable to sleep.

4:30pm

I told Jake I wanted some pasta for dinner and went about ordering some. By 5pm the contractions were building in intensity and I thought it was getting close to time for Hadley to be picked up. Jake's parents came to get him just before 6pm and I asked Jake to pump up the birth pool. Contractions were coming every 3-6 minutes and were hard for me to breathe through. I continued labouring in my bedroom and asked my midwife to head up



once she'd had some dinner.

Jo arrived at 8pm and quietly set up on my bedroom floor, checked my pulse and the baby's heartbeat with the Doppler - all good and contractions were intense by this point. I had been having continuous pain in my back for hours that didn't come in waves like the contractions. Jo used pressure during some of the contractions to help ease the pain and Jake sat behind me with a hot water bottle. All I wanted to do at this point was sleep, but I couldn't find any position that was comfortable and there was no real break in contractions so I had to push on.

Jake began filling up the birth pool but ran into several problems, one of which was that the kitchen tap literally popped off from the pressure with the hose attached, which took some time to figure out. I continued to labour up in my room during this time and around 9pm Jo called Jacqui, our second midwife, to come over as I started feeling pressure. At this point we also ran out of hot water and the birth pool was nowhere near full. Jacqui arrived at 9:30pm and started boiling pots of water and the kettle, on repeat. I really needed Jake at this point, I didn't know what I wanted but being held was really reassuring.

I kept labouring in different positions up in my bedroom and begging for the pool. It was likely a real blessing it was taking so long to fill as it meant I got maximum benefit for the pain relief! However, Jo told me after the birth that she was worried I'd be birthing on the bedroom floor given the way my contractions were building at this stage!

At 11:30pm I finally got to get in the water. I literally threw off my undies and nightie in the hall and hobbled down to the lounge room. We had our fairy lights on and getting into that hot water and having all the weight taken from me was an amazing relief!! I even surrendered to having tiny power naps between contractions which I found so bizarre but lovely! When contractions came I was on my knees, leaning over the side of the pool, and at

12:05am my body began pushing. At this point Manning had had a perfect read on the Doppler and a steady heartbeat the entire labour with no decelerations.

The pushing stage was incredibly intense and I was shocked how I didn't actually need to do anything except let it happen and breathe. After 30 minutes or so, when I was struggling to focus through the contractions, Jo told me to feel for the baby's head. I was completely shocked to find that I could feel Manning's head just half a finger away from crowning - he was right there!! Manning's head was going in and out which Jo continued to encourage me was good as he was slowly stretching me rather than shooting out. Jo did two more fetal heart checks and Manning was becoming tachycardic. Without scaring me, Jo and Jacqui told me it was time to get him out. Jacqui helped me put one leg up to adjust my pelvis and I then pushed with everything I had. Jo told me to feel his head and push it into my hands! It took several more painful pushes but I got his head out and literally within seconds the rest of his body followed! We were all a bit shocked he just shot out like that and I had to scoop him up.

Manning was covered in thick vernix and I couldn't believe I'd done it! He was born at 12:57am, spot on 40 weeks, a perfect 3.87kg and 58cm long. Cooper, who had been sleeping in his bedroom with the door open, just above the lounge room, woke when his baby brother cried. He came down and met Manning for the first time. I hopped out of the pool shortly after that and laid on the lounge with Manning on my chest. We then waited for the placenta, all while Manning was still attached to his cord. An hour later the placenta was birthed. We were all home and able to jump in our bed and try to get some rest. Hadley came home that afternoon to meet his brother as well and gave some beautiful cuddles!

It was the most intense and beautiful experience of my life to date and healed so many scars. Some of those moments I dreamed of that became a reality during this experience included:

Being able to stand up after giving birth - when I just got up out of that pool I was so proud!

Spontaneous labour - my body just did everything it needed to, I didn't need to "get things moving" or worry about a timeline.

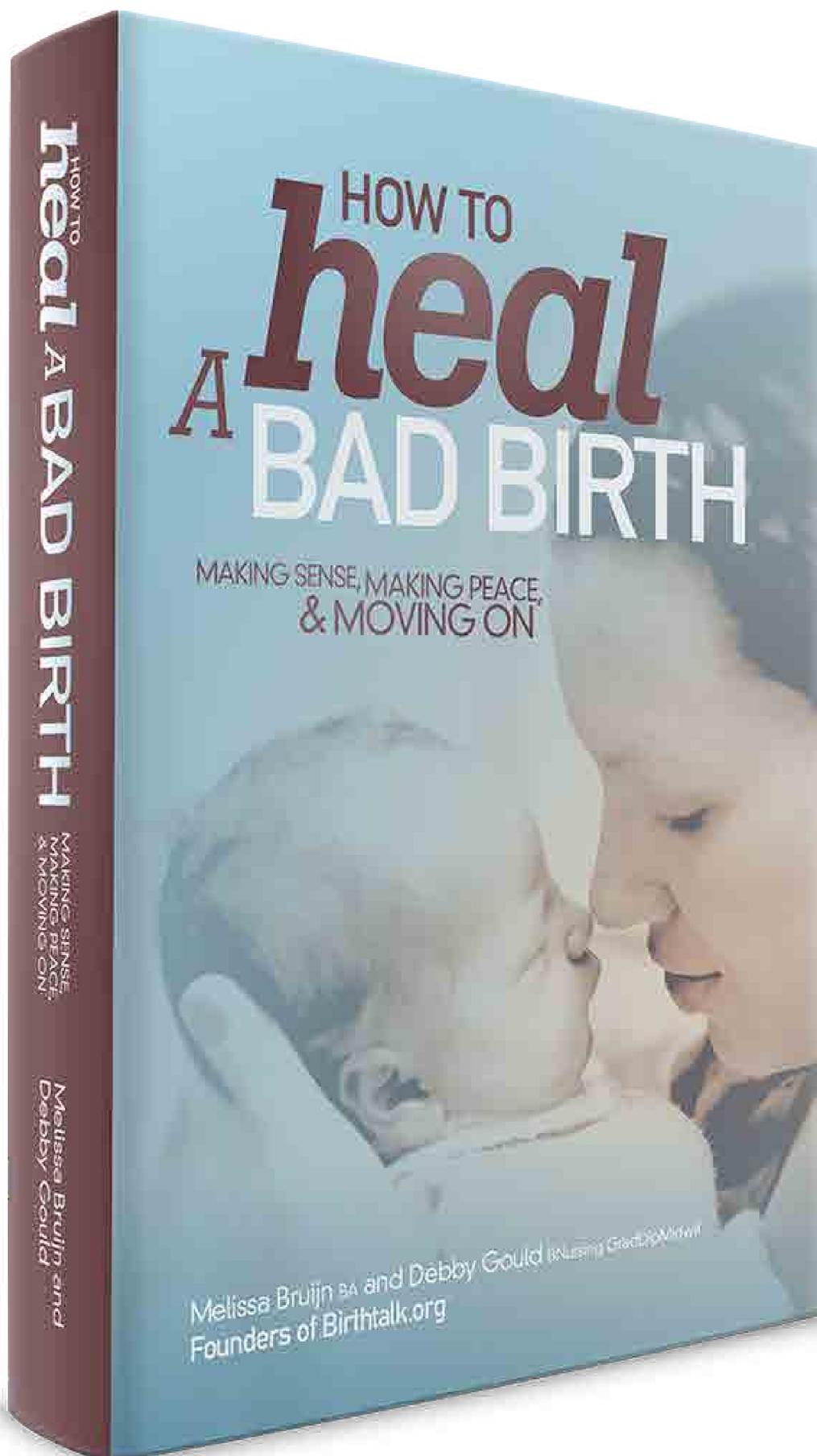
Catching my baby - no one touched or held Manning before I did, I felt him before he was born and he stayed with me from there!

Making educated choices means different things for different people, but our choice to birth at home was one I never second guessed and I'll probably never be prouder of having broken a cycle of high intervention births by having a beautiful, completely natural, physiological birth.

**Sarah spends her days surrounded by all her little men and her high school sweetheart, Jake. She was born and raised in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, and is now raising her three boys in the same suburb. When she's not chasing her cherubs she works as a learning support teacher and is passionate about community and living as part of a united tribe to make life easier. She has a particular interest in advocating for families who are living with disability, as does her husband. After her homebirth she continues to have a love affair with all things birth related and empowering families to make decisions they feel confident and safe with.**

# Book Review

How to heal a bad birth: making sense, making peace and moving on



How to Heal a Bad Birth is a gentle guide for women who have experienced a difficult, disappointing or traumatic birth, and want to make sense, make peace and move on. Written by the founders of Birthtalk.org™, this book works double-time as an indispensable resource for partners, family and health professionals, enabling them to offer meaningful support for a woman in this situation. This ground-breaking self-help book takes the reader on a 'choose your own adventure' style of healing journey... because every woman's path to healing will be different. The pages are filled with heartfelt quotes from women, facts and insights about birth trauma, and ideas for dealing with common emotions that arise such as sadness, guilt, feelings of failure, anger and partner issues. There is a chapter titled 'I had a homebirth transfer' to support women who have experienced this situation as well. There are step-by-step tools for healing, and immense support and compassion contained within these pages. Say the authors: "For the past 15 years we've been working with women after a traumatic birth in our 'Healing From Birth™' support sessions. Because we've seen the impact birth can have, we are gentle with women's hearts as they step forward and acknowledge that they are ready to take the journey to healing. And we are with you all the way."

Please go to [www.howtohealabadbirth.com](http://www.howtohealabadbirth.com) to learn more!

## REVIEW 1

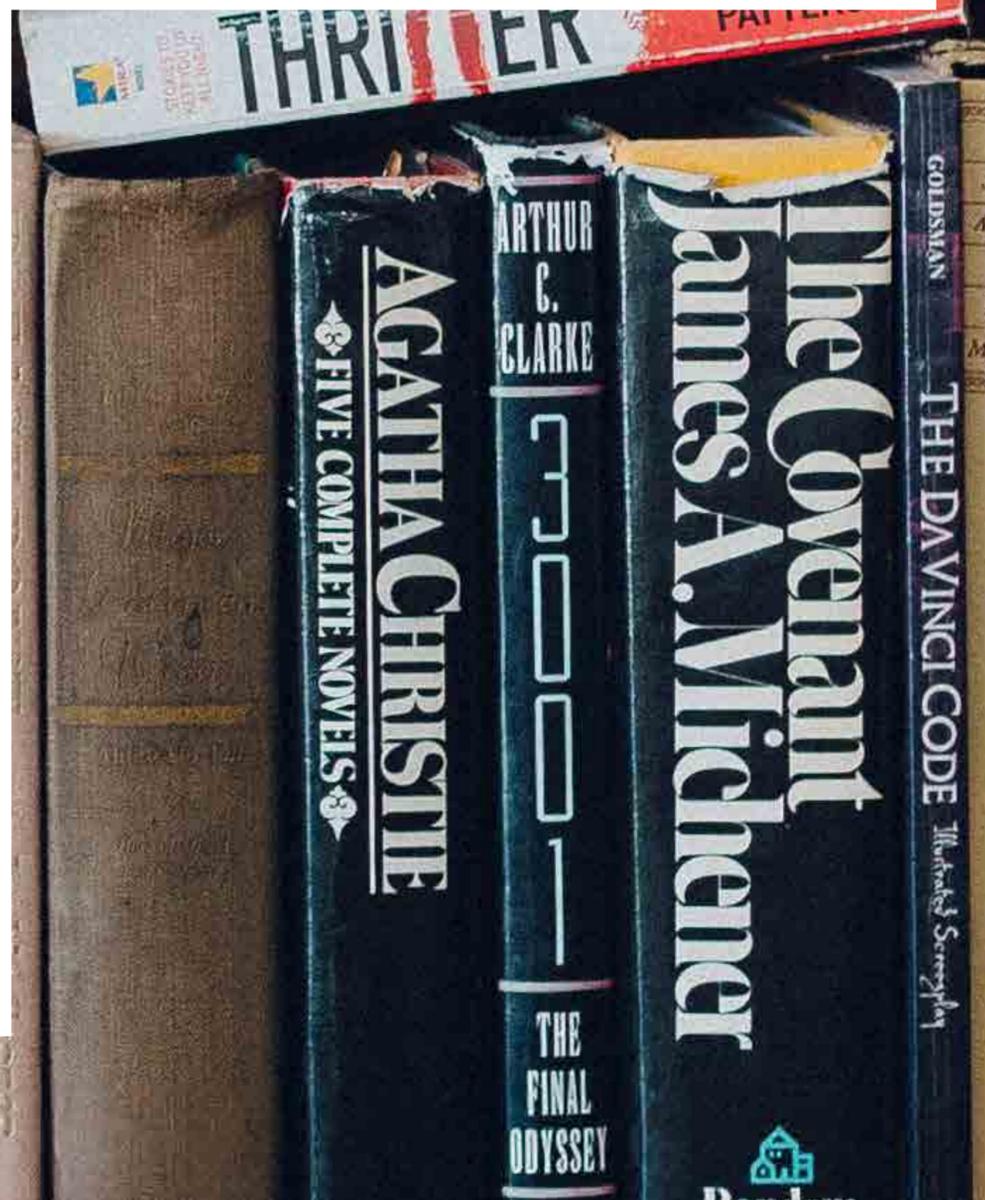
FROM A MIDWIFE AND  
HOMEBIRTH TRANSFER MOTHER,  
CAITLIN

"For any mothers who are hesitant to purchase 'How to Heal a Bad Birth' - you're not alone. It's taken me five months to buy this book. Five months of questioning whether it is for people like me; five months of battling with my inner voice. Who am I to complain? My birth really wasn't that 'bad', but boy did it bring out a hell of a lot of emotional turmoil. I spent weeks crying over the what-ifs and angry at the mighty fight that I had to conjure up (in hospital) whilst birthing my son. Utterly disappointed that I had let what could have gone so right, go so wrong. Grief for the birth I had worked so hard to achieve, and got so close to achieving, yet - didn't. I knew I was struggling, but I wouldn't describe it as trauma, nor what I considered a 'bad birth'. I would sit in my Midwife's waiting room prior to our postnatal appointments, and stare at the book for sale on the shelf. If I bought it, would my husband think I hated our birth? Would my (amazing) Private Midwife think I was disappointed with her care? I wouldn't dare. Finally at a professional conference, five months after my homebirth transfer, I found the courage to buy 'How to Heal a Bad Birth' because, you know, I'm a Midwife, this will help me help mothers I care for. I'd pushed aside the disappointment, grief, and anger surrounding my son's birth, but still held on to the 'I should have', and 'if only I had'. Well, I went home, breastfed my son, and picked up the book. This book is phenomenal. As I read on, it was as if the authors and contributing mothers had taken all of the jumbled thoughts in my head, written them out clearly so I could make sense of them, and then provided practical strategies to begin to heal. 'How to Heal a Bad Birth' is very easy to read and set out clearly, so that you can access the information you need, when you need it. I cannot speak highly enough of this resource for mothers, families and birth workers. It is a credit to the years of experience the authors have with supporting families through the post birth fallout, and I believe it should be utilised as a part of training for all Student Midwives. I love it." [Caitlin]

## REVIEW 2

FROM A REFLEXOLOGIST

"Such is the power of Instagram, I stumbled across 'How to Heal a Bad Birth' and bought the book. I am interested in working in birth trauma in some way, perhaps as a peer volunteer, so thought it would be a good read. Wow; I can't stress how important this book is, how much it resonates both in terms of understanding women suffering with trauma and PTSD but also how enlightening and potentially game-changing it is for family, friends, therapists and health professionals who live or work with women who are suffering right now. If you have ever said or thought, "At least he/she is alive", "At least you are alive," "Birth is like that," "You should be grateful to have a baby," "You'll soon forget about it," "You/they need to let it go"... buy this book. We owe it to the women we live, socialise and work with not to increase their pain or drive it underground. This book clearly signposts the road out. How I wish I had read it 8 years ago. It is just such a fantastic resource and I am genuinely excited to know that I have a tool that can actually start to help as soon as it is in a woman's hands; from the validation before you have even got to the exercises." [Lull Reflexology]



# Birth Of Duljia Ayla

by Aly Kranz

**W**ith the fairly intense and triggering birth of my now seven year old son Mallee, our intentions with this pregnancy and birth were to make it as safe and respected as possible for all involved. We decided to go with a home birth and connected with our midwives on a deeper level. Due to this, I was able to extract many aspects of my physical and emotional self that arose during pregnancy in a safe and supported space without judgment or intimidation. Prior to this birth we had a miscarriage that was diagnosed as a partial molar pregnancy, so we really put our focus on nutrition and environment, particularly stress and emotional balance to get our bodies ready for another pregnancy. This miscarriage was again supported by my midwife and I was able to birth mostly at home with her support. So no doubt there were some underlying fears about pregnancy and birth that we needed to address and having the same person, who knew our journey so well, was a blessing on so many levels. Our midwives were always there through all of this.

Five days prior to our birth, at nearly 41 weeks, I began to feel that familiar sensation of tightening and movement. Nick (my partner) and I were both excited that night. We finished dinner and I suggested that Nick get some sleep as we were sure that baby would be arriving soon as the moon was full and it was a perfect scenario for a birth! Alas, nothing came from it.

The contractions were continual and regular yet not getting stronger. I found myself outside at 3am walking up our driveway with our dog, Tyler, gazing at the moon! This

carried over the next night and I decided that sleep and relaxation was a much better choice than anxiety and excitement! Breathing techniques really helped with the anticipation and little anxious moments. I felt a calm, serene feeling that something **WAS** actually happening and this was all a connection of my baby and I working together.

The feelings and emotions were absolutely surreal, as if the whole world had stopped around us! The whole family was lifted by how I was; I had some luscious baths, used my meditation exercises and it was fantastic just being in this blissful limbo. As a side note, I realised in this birth what prodromal labour was! With my first son's birth I had the exact same thing happen, but had no idea what it was, so I got no sleep for three days and was told that I was incompetent. A much different type of experience and support!

The days went on and, as if by magic, 6pm – bang, there were contractions! During my last check-up with the midwife we found baby was posterior. Then of course I got some resurfacing emotions from my last birth as he was in the same position. On the day before her birth I phoned my midwife and asked her for some advice as I felt like I was holding back and that some anxiety had started to develop.

She was wonderful and talked about my previous birth with me, explained that this is not that experience and I need to let go of those sensations and work on visualising and focusing on what will lie ahead, not what happened in the past. She was so calm and wonderful. Even though I was heading into 42-week territory there was no pressure

on me to get the baby out as I felt good and healthy. She suggested acupuncture for the anxiety only. The acupuncture was amazing - I got a full understanding of my situation and as soon as the needles were in place and the acupuncturist left the room she began to turn!

I had this wonderful time feeling her move around with all her might, and feeling how connected we both were, which would ensure the best birth for us both! I fell in complete and utter love with her at that moment - what a clever girl, and clever me for being in tune with my anxiety! The session was great; I felt relaxed, connected, less anxious and ready to go! We ate dinner and I put our son Mallee to bed. As soon as he was asleep the contractions came on a bit stronger and I suggested to Nick that he go and catch up on a bit of sleep, so he went off to bed.

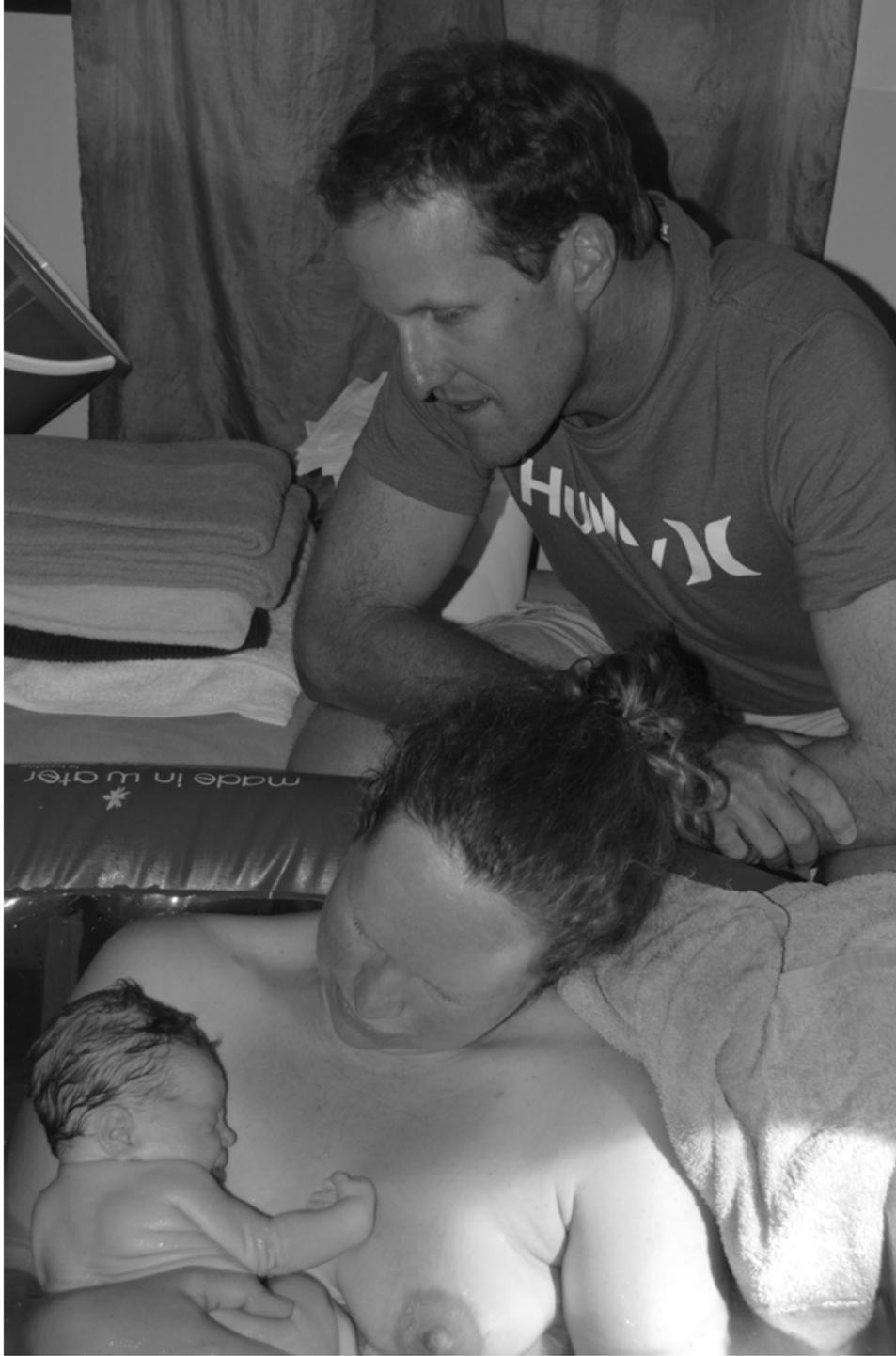
Calm breathing back on, I continued with some nice, rhythmic contractions. As the midwife was about two hours away I felt like it was time to call her as they were certainly doing something! I asked her to come over for a cup of tea and a baby and she said that she would be delighted to!

The contractions were coming on well now. I did not look at the times of them and let my body do what it needed to without the worry of the clock. I was mostly using a position on all fours (head down, bum up) with a hot water bottle on my back during a contraction (this I feel was I instinctively realigning positioning after the acupuncture). A beautiful friend of mine gave me a birthstone to use that she used for her births. I rubbed it during the contractions which helped during the process. Nick was amazing - I wrote him a list of the things that I would like to have set up and he was walking around the house setting up the pool, candles, oils for myself and herbal preparations for us during the birth, and during each contraction he would be right there for me.

The midwives arrived and things were really getting stronger - I noticed that I was going from having a good break in between to chat and joke, to full concentration and an inward journey in my body. I lost a lot of what was happening outside and looked totally inward and focused myself wholly. The breathing I practiced really helped during this transition.

The pool was getting filled and nearly ready for me to hop in and by that point I was ready! The feeling of that water was wonderful. As soon as I hopped in I was completely immersed into the warmth and I felt like a goddess! Contractions were much stronger and closer together with little or no break in between. I knew she





was coming along fast and well and she was ready. I took on a primal deep groaning and was making some wonderful sounds! I felt completely free to express noise and used the breathing to bring it back if needed, but I was warrior woman and I was strong and accepting of my body and what was happening, and yes, I was enjoying it! Nick was right there again - in between making tea for the midwives, patting my head with a cool cloth of water and peppermint oil and administering the Beth Root we decided to use during labour, I could just feel his calm and supportive presence. I recall once when it started to get very powerful and intense that I looked at Nick's arm and felt the need to bite down hard! Luckily there was some rational process in my mind that stopped this from happening!

The midwives were wonderful; they completely respected me and my choices and they gave me an absolutely calm and serene presence. They could tell when I was nearly ready to birth by my movements and noises and I noticed that minutes before she was born they were filling the pool with more warm water. I was boiling hot at that point and was not too pleased about shutting the window and putting more warm water in the pool even though it was about 2 degrees outside!

Again, using my breathing techniques, I began to spiral my body and feel all the force within of Julia coming down the birth canal. Being able to feel her head with my hands was great. In my head I repeated over and over 'let the rivers flow'. I fully

felt like she was gliding down a wide open river bank into my arms, having Nick and the midwives there with their comments 'breathe', 'open' in a quiet voice really helped bring things back if I started to get too 'caught up'.

Being utterly in tune and aware of the processes that were happening to my body was wonderful! Julia spiralled out in six minutes. I did not push at all; she absolutely just let herself out! Foetal ejection reflex at its best. My favourite part was listening to my midwife say 'oh, she has popped out' in her calm and pleasant voice. I turned around and we had to shine the torch in the pool to find her! Once I had her we all gazed at her under the pool for a moment as she had her eyes open just staring with absolute calmness. This was possibly one of the most amazing experiences that I have ever felt. She came out of the water into my arms and we all cooed her gently into taking a breath. When she was ready after a while she took a beautiful breath with an 'ooo' noise and went into her lovely pink state. There was no panic, just pure trust in what was happening. She began to seek the breast nearly immediately after and had a great suckle.

The placenta was born within half an hour while Nick held onto Julia. The cord was cut and we then all enjoyed a cup of tea and cake! The midwives left at 5.30am with our placenta to encapsulate and we were left with an absolute state of joy and elation! We toasted with some champagne and Mallee, my son, slept through the whole

birth. After waiting until 7.30am we went and woke him up by placing Julia in his bed - he was joyful and said that he woke up only once and heard what he thought was animal noises and just went back to sleep!

Our labour was in total five hours - the pushing (or lack of, according to the midwives) was six minutes. I absolutely enjoyed the whole experience, I felt strong and I felt primal yet inwardly calm and connected. I was on some other mental plane that can probably only be reached by putting in the effort and practice to engage in what was as true, pure, supported and normal a birth experience as it gets. It was definitely, as you could say, psychedelic!

**Aly brings her love of seeking and learning traditional midwifery practices in contemporary Australia, and her joy of supporting women and families in their journeys, into her business and everyday life. Aly is a student midwife and a Doula, serving in birth and death. While riding the ecstatic birth experience written about above, Aly created an informative birth story podcast called The Circle of Birth, opening the pathway for ALL people to come together and feel connected through the wisdom and power of story. She is mother (and still learning!) to Mallee (7) and Julia (2), and partner to Nicholas. When not obsessed with birth-work she is an Environmental Scientist and food grower. Aly and her family reside on the beautiful Far South Coast, NSW. She dreams about soon calling in some more babies and a beautiful palomino horse!**



# CHANGE OF *Place* OF BIRTH

by Joanna Lloyd

For me, a homebirth meant birthing in our home. I had a homebirth with my second daughter in the UK and it was sad to leave our home, her birthplace, when we moved to Australia. I'm not sure why my own home rather than a rental was so important to me, but it was. I had a traumatic birth with my eldest daughter and didn't want to set foot in a hospital for my next birth, but it was more than that. Home is like the heart of the family and birthing there brings an energy to the house that I find hard to describe.

My daughter was born in our home in a room that had the most calming and positive energy. I specialise in pregnancy-related complementary therapies and had been treating mothers and their babies for five years in that room before she was born. Their energy was there and the power and wisdom of all the mothers I had supported, supported me in return.

When we moved to Australia I wanted another baby. However, our circumstances were such that we weren't able to have our own home until a couple of years ago, when we bought a plot of land and started building. We got to a point in the build and decided to start trying for a baby, as the house would be finished in time for a homebirth.

We fell pregnant in the second month and I was so excited! After waiting eight years, everything was falling into place. Then we got the call, the call that changed everything.

I was six weeks pregnant the day before I took the call telling me our builder had gone into liquidation. I was devastated; not just because it was going to have a massive impact on us financially, but because after

waiting so long for the perfect moment to have another baby and another homebirth, I had it in my sight and it was gone.

Where would I birth now? We had a tiny rental with one open plan area downstairs. Where would I put my pool? How was I going to create a space that felt right? My mum and grandad were flying over from the UK for his birth. Where would they go, not just to stay, but during the birth? We designed the house we were building to include a room for me to see clients and this was where I was going to birth. The plan was to move in a few months before he was born and then bring life into the house with his birth and to the room for my clients, creating a beautiful positive energy.

I shed many tears during the stressful months that followed, fighting insurance and legal battles because our builder went under. Knowing how important birthing in our home was, we took a huge risk with the insurance company and found our own builder to pick up the project and finish the house. They gave me hope; it was a tiny glimmer, but it was hope. Even if we hadn't finished the house to move in, maybe we could have my room ready and still be able to birth there. Gradually that hope diminished as the new builder found more and more problems that needed rectifying before we could start building again. I was back to birthing in our rental and I had to come to terms with it - kind of. I wasn't going to get my homebirth in my own home, so how could I make this work?

By this time I had become great friends with a beautiful group of women from my 'homebirth due in group' and they were very supportive, offering suggestions and ideas, and we created a plan. We had a

little study nook and it was just big enough for my birth pool. It would be cramped having everyone in the space when I gave birth, but it allowed me an area to go, everyone else didn't need to be there all the time and I could have a little privacy when needed.

Greenery was important to me, so we bought a huge plant and added a few of my birthing demo dolls and my belly cast to the study nook. We had been exchanging beads in our 'homebirth due in group', and these gave me the birthing power and wisdom of women to create an energy in the area.

Our little boy was born surrounded by my hubby, my daughters and my mum, just as we planned. It was a perfect birth, but something didn't feel quite right. The postnatal period and breastfeeding didn't go to plan, but that's a whole other story. We moved into our new home three months after he was born. It's a lovely house, although it holds many stressful memories and doesn't have the life and positive energy I was hoping for.

After my mum and grandad returned to the UK I set up my room for my clients but it just felt cold and I was still sad I wasn't able to birth him there. When he was nine months old we decided to do a birth reclaiming ceremony. This was a way of celebrating nine months in, nine months out. I had no idea if it would help as it wasn't about healing a traumatic birth experience as such, but I figured it was worth a try. We set up the room exactly as I would have if our house had been ready when I was due. My husband and I got in the pool the night before, as we had the night before he was born, and we talked about the pregnancy,

## THEME ARTICLE

the stress we had gone through but also found the positives to focus on. We also talked about the birth and the difficult times, and after shedding many tears, it was helpful.

The following day was going to be different; unlike many birth reclaiming ceremonies where the babies are still very tiny, I had a nine month old who loves the water. However, I approached it with the most open mind I could.

As I suspected, he loved the pool; He thought it was great getting to splash around. We hadn't emptied the pool and so after lunch I asked hubby if I could get back in, something was drawing me back. I got in and my son had a little play but this time it was different; he was ready for a nap, so I fed him in the pool and this is where the magic happened. Feeding him in the pool was special because he didn't feed in the pool after he was born. He fell asleep and I held him close to me, surrounded by the warm water. The tiny movements of his breath in and out and the odd twitch of his body as he slept felt just like he was in my tummy. The tears flowed, I closed my

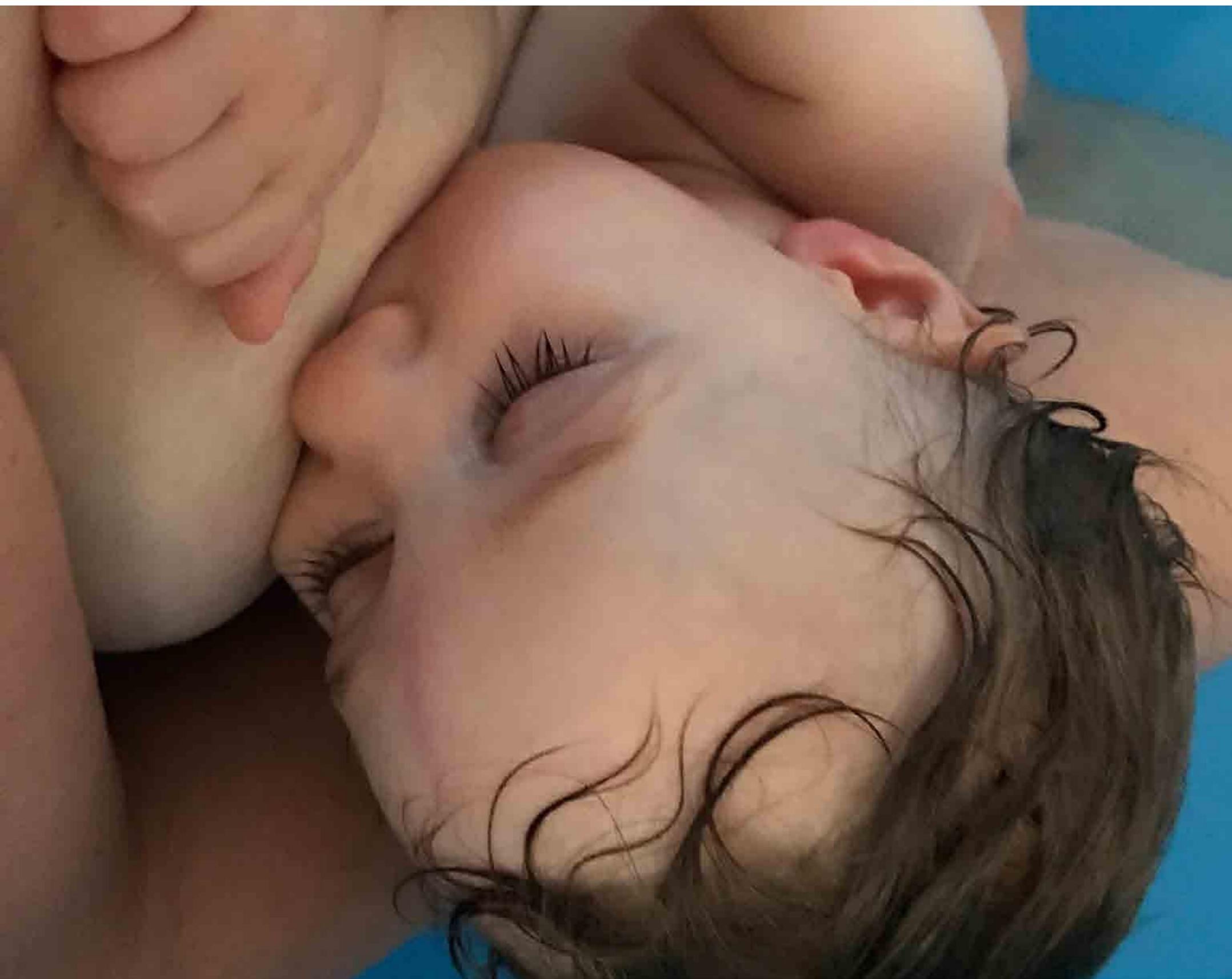
eyes and I took myself back nine months to being in the pool the day he was born, and I talked to him about how things hadn't gone to plan. It was an extremely emotional moment and a very powerful one. When we got out of the pool, I said goodbye to the birthing room and to that chapter of my life, as he will be our last baby. I closed the door behind me and hubby packed everything away so that when I went back in it was all set up as my consult room for my clients. It took a while for me to go back in, but I was surprised how different the room felt; there was more life and energy.

My little boy turned one at the beginning of September. Due to his love of balloons we planned to have a balloon net, which he could pull and watch the balloons fall around him. The best space to rig this up was my consult room! So hubby and my youngest daughter set it all up the night before as a surprise for us. I hadn't thought about the significance of being in the room until that morning. I remembered something I had previously read about having the baby crawl through a tunnel rather than carrying him in as it is meant to

be symbolic of passing through the vaginal canal to be born. We put a play tunnel in the doorway so he had to crawl through it to get to the room. He loved the balloons and we all had such fun batting them around to get some good photos! It was really nice to hear the joy and laughter in the room and a great way to celebrate his birthday, and my last birthing day.

It doesn't matter what you plan. Even if you wait eight years for the right moment, things change. It will never be the same as if I had birthed him here in our home, but I did the next best thing and it has made a difference. I'm no longer looking back to his birth with sadness.

**Joanna lives in the beachside suburb of Shell Cove in the Illawarra with her husband, daughters Elleanor (14), Kensa (9) and little boy Leon (1). Joanna is an Internationally Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC), Childbirth Educator and specialises in a blend of complementary therapies for conception, pregnancy, birth, postnatal and baby health and wellbeing.**



# Thoughts On Home Birth Transfer

Mary-Esther Malloy

[Editor's note: This article first appeared in *Midwifery Today*, Issue 109, Spring 2014 (<https://www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/homebirthtransfer.asp>) and has since been revised by Mary-Esther in September, 2017. Please note that Mary-Esther is based in the US, and accordingly the information contained herein, the stories of the hospital system used and the examples provided are not necessarily reflective of the current birthing climate, policies and procedures in Australia.]

I've put together the following notes on homebirth transfers for parents, midwives and doulas in the hopes that some of the strategies and perspectives suggested might be of help if a transfer needs to happen.

I'll begin with a perspective offered by a British woman I worked with a few years ago who was planning a homebirth. She said, "I hope I give birth at home, but I understand that there is a continuum of where I might give birth—home or hospital. What matters to me is that I will have my midwife with me. I think of it more as hiring a person I trust than planning a birth in my home." Her attitude struck me as a very open place from which to enter birth. She was passionate about what she wanted (a high level of individualized care from a birth professional she trusted), and yet she had an ease about the birth itself and where it might take place.

Her words have stayed with me because in the US where I live, all too often homebirth and hospital birth get set up as antagonistic opposites, and this has been a source of stress for many of my clients. By contrast, my clients from countries that have a close and functional relationship between homebirth midwives and hospitals have generally held a more relaxed attitude about the possibility of transfer, like my British client above. Since 'relaxed' is a lovely state for birth, I suggest that anyone preparing for a homebirth – no matter where they live - take some time to imagine coping well with plan B. Doing so can help parents establish a healthy relationship to fears they may have about the possibility of



a transfer.

Before I get to my notes, I will also remind us that birth really does work most of the time. And when something bumps a woman from normal, run-of-the-mill status, it is worth remembering that the vast majority of transfers are not emergencies. Usually, there is time enough for deliberation and a range of strategies to avoid an emergency situation and to keep the birth as low-intervention as possible. Additionally, it must be said that there are a few rare emergency situations that homebirth midwives are not equipped to deal with. Be sure to discuss aspects of risk with your midwife to get a sense of how and when she transfers. Make sure her approach feels right to you.

## **If the best and safest course for you and your baby is to give birth in the hospital...**

Practice Acceptance. Birth is sacred. Period. There are no second-class births. A person is being born. A family is being born. This is of the highest order of sacred. Hold to this perspective and draw on the strength, love, support and expertise of your team (partner, midwife, doula, hospital staff). Keep them in close.

Expect that you will feel many emotions as you continue to work to birth your baby in the hospital—feelings of upset, concern and grief may co-exist alongside your excitement to meet this baby. Even with these mixed feelings, commit to being truly present at your child's birth.

Your baby needs you now and wants nothing more than to be welcomed fully.

Every birth has its challenges, its darkest hour and its lessons. These lessons always seem to circle around to some version of surrender. Do your best to practice acceptance. Very wise teachers have told us that this is how suffering ends.

Work with fear. Breathe, meditate, pray, find a helpful word to repeat over and over, stay physically close to your partner, midwife or doula and get the reassurances you need to quiet unwarranted fears.

## **2 - MAKE THE EXPERIENCE GO AS WELL AS POSSIBLE (PARTNERS, TAKE NOTE).**

With a transfer, advocate and line up the supportive nurse, resident or attending physician. Make friends with hospital staff; learn names, thank staff for their care and be respectful even if you are in disagreement over some aspect of care.

Be an active participant in all decisions. Ask your questions and consider your options (remember that in the case of a true emergency, you can ask your questions afterwards). One way to remember helpful questions when a treatment or procedure is proposed is to memorize this simple mnemonic,

**BRAND: B–Benefits: What are the benefits? R–Risks: What are the risks? A–Alternatives: Are there alternatives we can try? N–Now: Is it medically necessary that we do this now or can we wait an hour/day/week? D–Decision: Can we have a few minutes alone to make a decision?**

Consider what matters most to you and do your best to make these things happen. For some, this might mean advocating to keep your baby with you in an uninterrupted way in the hours following the birth. For others, it might mean insisting on sleeping with your baby on your body during the hospital recovery stay. Doing whatever it takes to get breastfeeding off to a good start gives some women an empowering sense of agency following a transfer.

A doula friend of mine told me about a transfer she recently attended. The mother ended up using the tools of Pitocin and an epidural and gave birth to a beautiful boy. As the time of birth neared, she and

her partner convinced the hospital staff to do something they had never done: lower the foot of the hospital bed and place the baby there as he was born. Others then helped the mother to sit up so that she could see, touch and be the first to pick up her son. Before the birth, the mother had really loved the idea of her midwife guiding her baby down at the moment of birth. The mother said afterwards that making that moment happen in the hospital was particularly powerful and healing, given the transfer.

**3- KNOW YOUR RIGHTS IN THE HOSPITAL.** Find out if your area has a 'Hospital Patients Bill of Rights.' Frequently, states protect patients' rights to informed consent, as well as the right to decline care from any hospital staff and the right to refuse a proposed procedure or treatment. These rights are as applicable to homebirth transfers as they are to individuals planning hospital births.

**4-PREPARE.** Be sure to talk with your midwife during your pregnancy about transfer plans and ask all your questions. I have found that some homebirthers feel more confident if they create a simple transfer plan that identifies certain things they would like to see in the event of a transfer (uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact with the baby after the birth, continuous support from the birth team, etc.).

Some homebirthers will prepare hospital bags in advance, others won't. Some will visit a potential back-up OB and hospital, others won't. I, myself, did not feel it necessary to do either of these things. However, when I drove to my back-up hospital and drew up simple maps for my husband and midwife, I could feel myself relax at a deeper level about my upcoming homebirth. Do whatever helps you feel safe, and this may include doing nothing other than trusting your midwife to manage a transfer should the need arise.

**5-WORK THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE AFTERWARDS.** Allow for the mixed feelings both during and after the birth. Many well-meaning individuals, including hospital staff and family, will tell you, "How can you be upset now? You have this beautiful baby in your arms!" However, it is possible to simultaneously cherish your baby and mourn aspects of your birth. Grief and gratitude can exist side-by-side, and this will likely be the emotional tacking that defines your recovery. It is fully normal. Expect it. Work with it. Do not fear the difficult or dark emotions that may come up. Cry and move through them. You will heal. Get support by going to a mothers' talk group or therapist. We heal by telling our stories; we heal through our laughter and tears.

A woman from my moms talk group who had transferred from a planned homebirth described a recent night with her 6-week-old son. Her son had been crying and crying that evening and she simply reached a breaking point and burst into tears herself. She described how she and her son clung to each other and cried together for what seemed like ages. She said she felt like they were both working through the challenging birth they had shared six weeks earlier. After their good cry, she described feeling much

lighter and reported that her son's crying was no longer so persistent. She felt they had really connected and shifted something through that memorable cry.

Finally, keep in mind that your baby and birth deserve to be celebrated and announced just as any other birth would be. Celebrate your baby and this birth with photos, announcements and stories that include the heroic shifting to plan B required of this baby's parents. In other words, don't hide your story. Tell it with pride, even if you are still struggling with how you feel about the birth. Honor your efforts and your baby's birth.

**6-HELP YOUR BABY.** If the birth or the period following the birth was challenging for your baby, you might consider trying a few things to help your child integrate what may have been difficult.

If you and your newborn missed the first 'golden hour' for any reason, you can create this special hour at any point hours, days or even weeks following the birth. Repair is always possible. Simply set aside an hour or so to focus your full attention on your child. Let this be a special time where you observe, listen to, welcome and reassure your child. Allow everything to be slow. It might be nice to place your baby skin-to-skin on your chest or take a bath together for this re-claimed golden hour. If your child cries, this is fine. Just listen. If your child sleeps or nurses, lovingly pay attention and talk to your child.

If you feel there was a degree of trauma involved before, during or after your child's birth, try talking to your child as she sleeps. (We now know that babies—and bigger people, too—listen in their sleep.) This can be an effective strategy to help your child process what might have been a challenging experience. Check out the wonderful booklet by Marcy Axness on this practice ([marcyaxness.com](http://marcyaxness.com)). You might also want to get to know the impressive work of Patty Wipfler, found at [handinhandparenting.org](http://handinhandparenting.org).

#### COMMON REASONS FOR TRANSFER

I include this list of common reasons for transfer simply because I am frequently asked this question by parents planning a homebirth. In no way do I include this list to give expectant parents additional reasons to worry. Some of you will not want to read through this list of complications. You will say to yourselves, "I trust my midwife to let me know if there is a risk factor at play that means the hospital will be the best and safest place to birth my baby. I know worrying now will not be helpful." This is a fine and excellent decision. Pregnant women are vulnerable and are smart to be cautious about the information they take in. A woman entering birth wants to be in the head space of a birthing woman, not in the head space of a medical professional.

If reading through this list will help you be less fearful, please keep in mind that homebirth midwives are skilled medical professionals and have a host of tools to deal with the list of challenging situations below. Do what you can do to stay low-risk: Eat well, exercise and prepare in positive ways for the birth of your child. Address fears as they come up now. Stay hydrated,

eat and rest or sleep when you can in your labor.

Prior to labor, common reasons for transfer include:

- Persistent malposition of baby (e.g., breech)
- Maternal health issue (e.g., hypertension)
- Baby health issue (e.g., intrauterine growth restriction)
- Postdate with complicating factor (e.g., very low fluid, non-reassuring fetal heart rate)

During labor, common reasons for transfer include:

- Signs of stress on baby (e.g., non-reassuring heart rate)
- Very long or abnormally progressing labor
- Long pushing phase, usually with some sign that baby is not tolerating it well
- Sign of infection (e.g., maternal fever, rising fetal heart rate)

Postpartum, common reasons for transfer include:

- Excessive bleeding post-birth
- Issues with baby

#### CONCLUSION

I'll close by sharing a brief story. Recently I was sitting with a woman who had given birth unexpectedly by cesarean the previous week. Parenting was going well, she was clearly in love with her baby, and she was openly weeping as we spoke about her birth. As we sat together on her couch with her mother, she shared an experience she had had as the surgery started. She told us that when she was lying on the table in the operating room, she had a clear image of herself at a lake in Canada with her baby in her arms. Years ago, she explained, she had visited this lake and had felt the loving presence of her late father. As her baby's cesarean birth began, she had a flash of the lake and again felt her father's presence. She heard the words, "You and your baby are safe." She experienced a deep sense of peace as she went on to birth her baby with the help of technology. Now, in her living room a week later, she turned to me with tears running down her face and said, "This is what I had wanted from my birth. I wanted it to be spiritual and it was."

Her mother moved closer to her daughter on the couch. This woman had birthed both her daughters naturally in India and had recently attended her other daughter's natural births. She laughed and said, "If you had birthed your baby the other way, I doubt you would have had this same spiritual experience!"

**Mary-Esther Malloy, MA, is a New York City-based doula, birth counselor and Bradley childbirth educator who has the pleasure of parenting three children ages 6, 13 and 15. For more articles by Mary-Esther, please visit [www.mindfulbirthny.com](http://www.mindfulbirthny.com), [www.thebirthpause.com](http://www.thebirthpause.com) and [www.themindfulcesarean.com](http://www.themindfulcesarean.com).**

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<https://www.midwiferytoday.com/articles/homebirthtransfer.asp>



# The HBAC of Hugo

by Elli Miller

Photos courtesy of Tara Mahoney

**A**fter all the preparation and all the research I got my VBAC!!

On the 18th of March at 6:00am we welcomed Hugo William Miller earth side with a beautiful home birth. I pushed this 3.29kg baby out of my VAGINA! And despite the pain (OH THE PAIN) I am so unbelievably proud of myself to have had this empowering experience.

My first birth resulted in me getting pre-eclampsia at 39 weeks. This led to a constant back and forth to the hospital. After multiple attempts of trying to get the baby to come naturally (I just knew she wasn't ready and neither was I!) I was admitted to hospital for an induction. I still remember crying on the way to hospital because I didn't want to go. My cervix wasn't favourable so this led to having a foley catheter put in, my waters broken and being induced. After labouring for around seven hours the baby's heart rate was not coping and this led to an emergency caesarean. This was a very traumatic experience for both hubby and I and was one of the main reasons we wanted to do a home birth for our next baby.

I knew I didn't want to have to fight for my rights to have my baby the way I wanted to, let alone step back into that hospital! So homebirth it was. I was always planning on having a drug free labour, so having a homebirth made so much sense. And so I found myself the best midwife and support team and this was the start of our HBAC

journey!

Everything in this pregnancy was going great, I had the best midwife and support team I could ask for and no sign at all of pre-eclampsia! Too good to be true, right?! At 38 weeks I managed to break my finger! After having a half cast and multiple x-rays my surgeon decided the best option would be to have day surgery. So here I was, at 39 weeks pregnant, having day surgery. They put two pieces of wire in my hand which looked like fishing hooks sticking out. After a few days I was able to get my cast off and have my hand in a splint, though I still had the wire in for a few more weeks. I was devastated. I wasn't able to dress myself let alone look after my toddler or a new baby. I was really hoping this baby was going to come really over-due but I always felt like it was going to come early or right on time. And I was right.

Baby Hugo was born at 40+1 weeks. It was a seven hour active labour all up, although it honestly felt so much longer.

On Wednesday I started to get some Braxton hicks (coincidentally when I was getting my cast off and my splint put on!) and with nothing else happening I dismissed them as much as I could. These continued into Thursday, where I started to lose some of my mucous plug. They started to become more regular and painful and again, I just tried to dismiss them as much as I could. Friday morning arrived and this was now the THIRD day. Yep, that's

right! The third day of hardly any sleep and constant discomfort and I was over it! I either wanted to go into labor or for them to stop!

To help take my mind off it all my midwife had a pregnancy and postnatal get together at her house (how cool is that!) to which I decided to go, and of course the entire time I was there my Braxton hicks completely died down. As soon as I left her house they ramped right up again (literally as soon as I walked out her door!). With our toddler at daycare, hubby and I decided to go watch a movie, however nothing was on we wanted to see so home it was. With a last desperate effort we decided to have sex.

Fast forward to around 6:00pm and the Braxton hicks had started to come every five minutes and were quite painful. I spent this time on my exercise ball squeezing hubby's hand. By 9:30pm they had started to come even closer together and more painful, so I told hubby to call my midwife and doula and let them I know I wanted them to come. Come 10:30pm my midwife and doula had arrived and of course the next hour after that my contractions had seemed to slow down slightly. To try to get some pain relief I attempted to have a shower sitting on my exercise ball as it was painful to stand up. After not being able to get much relief I got out and continued to labour on my ball.

It was now 1:20am and my midwife asked if I would like to be checked to see how I



was going to which I very much accepted! I needed to know I was getting somewhere. After a quick check my midwife informed me I was 5cm, which was so disappointing. 'Only 5cm' I thought, 'how can I keep going?'

At this point I kept saying "I can't do this, I can't do this," to which my midwife and doula said, "Yes you can Elli, you are doing this. You need to stop saying that." It was at that point with every contraction I had I just kept saying the word 'baby' in my head over and over.

By 3:00am my midwife suggested we all try and lie down to get some rest. I found lying down extremely painful. I tried to rest but found it nearly impossible and after some time (it was now around 4:30am) I attempted to sit up and wake my husband, telling him, "I can't do this," to which he replied, "No, you are doing this!"

At this point I even thought about calling an ambulance to take me to the hospital for some pain relief, I was in transition but didn't know it!

It wasn't long after this I felt the urge to push when I was having a contraction. My midwife got up to come and see how I was going and I asked her if I could be checked again. After a quick check she informed me my waters were right there and I was 9cm dilated. With another contraction coming I gave a push and my waters broke. I was now 10cm. 'Oh, thank god,' I thought! Almost straight after this happening I felt the urge to really push and just wanted to get into the birth pool. My doula finished filling it up and at 5:30am in I went with every contraction I started pushing. I felt like I lost all control over my voice and started to become quite vocal as

I progressed (I was really quiet my whole labour up until this point). We quickly called my birth photographer to let her know that she needed to come now! After half an hour of being in the pool, pushing and his head almost crowning, she just arrived! My doula had started taking some pictures because we didn't think the photographer would make it in time. After some more pushes (by far the hardest thing I have ever done) my midwife and husband caught Hugo and straight away he was put on my chest. And oh boy, it was instant love! I remember thinking, 'look how much hair you have!' We waited for the cord to stop pulsing and hubby cut it. I hopped out of the pool and onto the lounge and 50 minutes later I birthed my placenta.

As I lay on the lounge with Hugo the sun started to rise and a beautiful day had begun. I remember thinking; just like that it was morning. What a night! At 7:30am our daughter woke up (can you believe she slept through it all!) and suddenly we were a family of four!

Once hubby had brought Annie down Jo did her checks with Hugo. We all had a guess to see how much he would weigh. We couldn't believe he was over 3kg!! I still can't believe I had a 3.29kg baby!! If someone had told me that I was going to give birth to a 3kg baby with the biggest blue eyes, lots of hair (to anyone else it wouldn't be lots but to me it was!) and the cutest little dimples I never would have believed them!

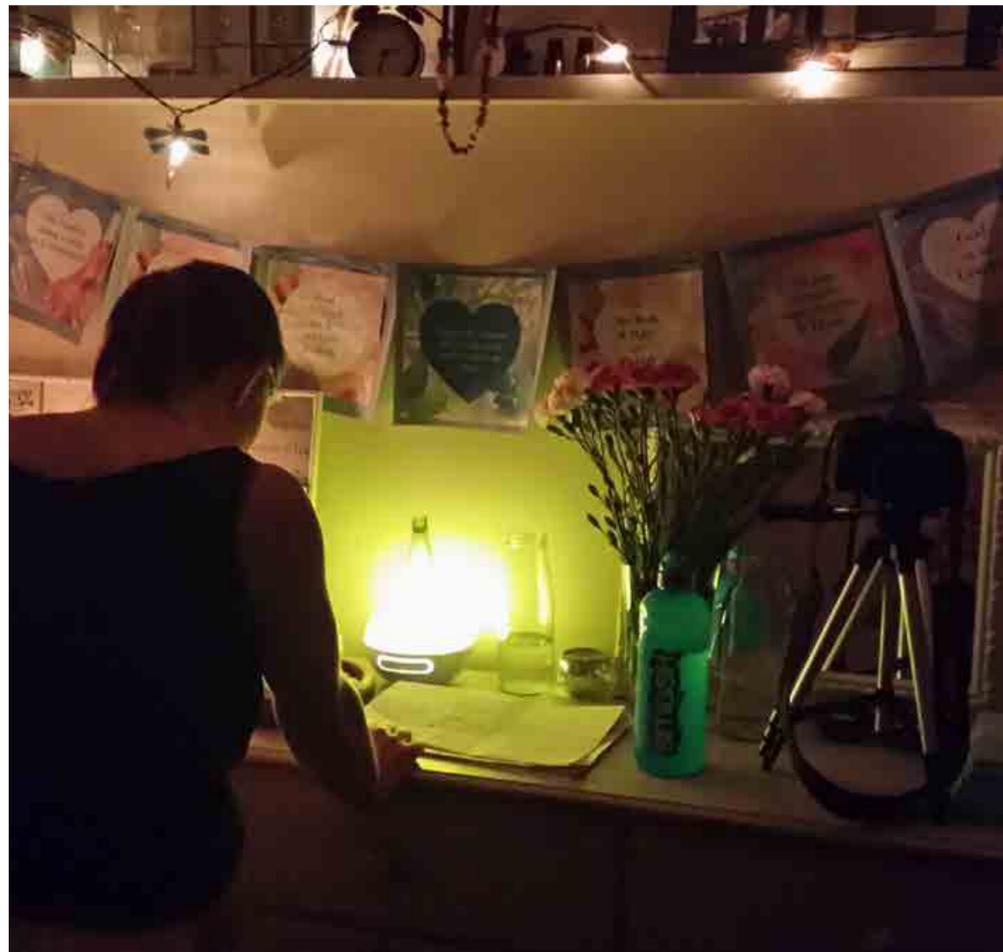
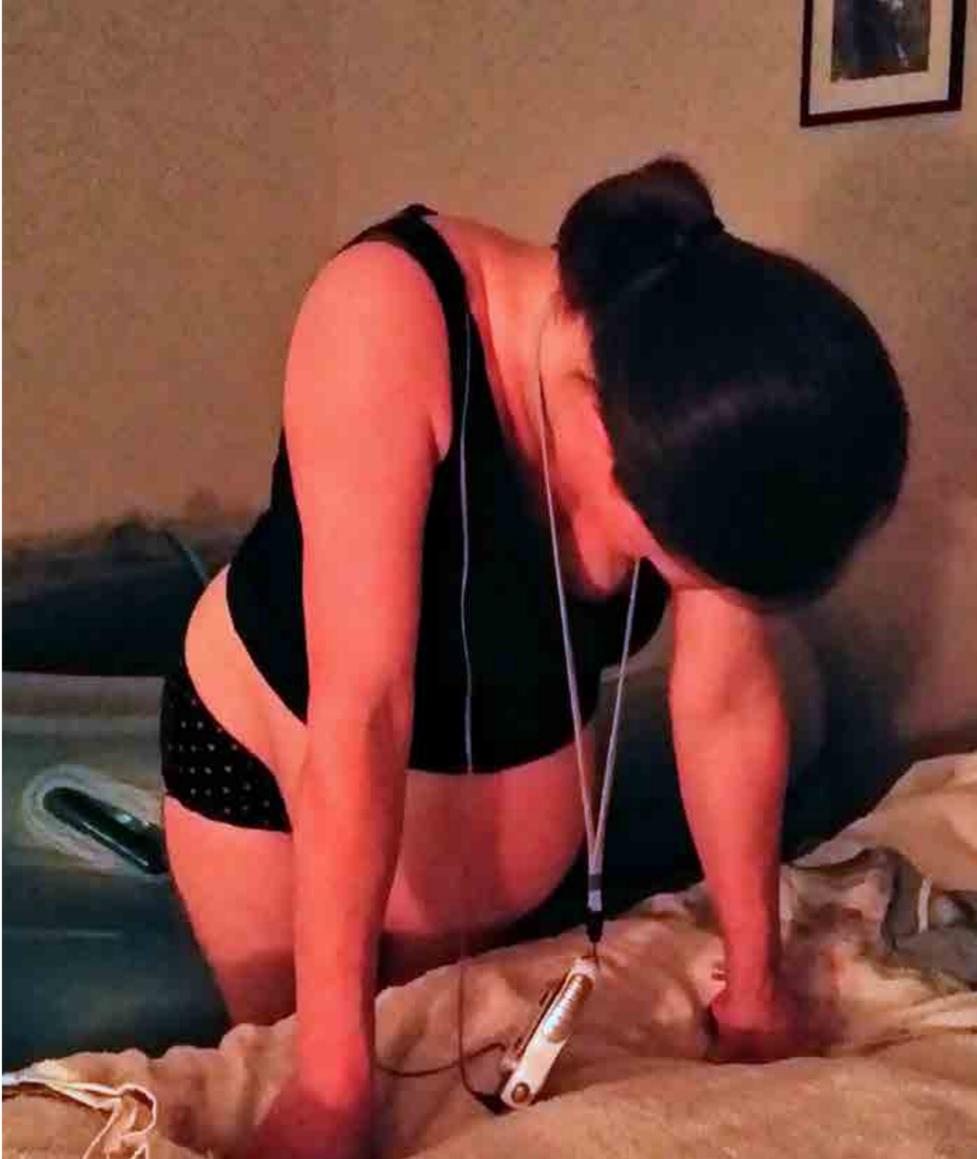
Hugo is now six months old and is the happiest, most chilled out baby (I always tell everyone it's because of the way he was born!). His big sister adores him so much and we simply couldn't imagine life without him!

I have been able to look back and reflect on his birth. At the start I felt like I cheated myself for constantly wanting to give up. I almost felt I let myself down for this, which I now know is far from the truth. I did it! I refocused myself and I birthed my baby! And from the words of my midwife and doula, I am a birthing goddess! I honestly believe I could not have done this without my husband John, Midwife Jo and Doula Lu. I was so lucky and grateful to have them all and I will always cherish the journey we got to experience together.

Giving birth at home is the most natural thing to do, there's just something so raw and beautiful about it; something just so right. I am so incredibly lucky I got to experience this and will treasure these memories every day. As if I wasn't proud enough, I did all this with a fractured finger (thanks Lu for making sure my hand never got wet!).

Lastly, I just want to give a huge shout out to my midwife, Jo. I honestly can't thank you enough! Not once did you ever doubt my ability to birth my baby. I trusted you 100 per cent and you made me feel that way. The love and support you gave me is something I will never forget. Thank you so much! You rock!

**Elli is a wife to John and stay at home mum to Annie (2 years old) and Hugo (6 months old). She loves baby wearing, breastfeeding and has become a real homebirth advocate. Elli hopes in sharing her story she gives other VBAC and pre-eclampsia mums inspiration and courage that 'you can do this'!**



# A 'Super Moon' Baby: Georgia

by Amy Garrow

Photos courtesy of Kylie Purtell Photography

It was the full moon, the 'super moon' in fact! I was 39 weeks and five days with my third baby - the longest I had ever been pregnant. I adjusted my position on the couch and felt a small gush of fluid. Was this my waters? They had not broken before labour with bubs one and two so I wasn't sure. I soon realised that yes, my waters were slowly leaking and it was 10.30pm.

I texted my midwife Emma and she informed me that she was at another birth and anticipated being there all night! Oh no - this was not in the plan! Oh well, I was to contact my back up midwife, Mel (with whom I already had a great relationship, and I now feel privileged to call a friend). Mel asked me what I thought I wanted and we decided I was to try and get some rest as labour may be hours away. I tried to go to bed after getting the birth pool semi ready to go but I was too excited! Hubby got an hour's sleep before I felt the first few surges.

By 12.30am I had had about five surges. My second baby was born in the car on the way to the hospital after only a three hour labour (22 hours for my first baby!) so I was anticipating a quick labour. I asked my midwife to come since she lived a little further away than my main midwife in case labour heated up fast. Hubby and I got the Elle Tens machine on (which got me

through my second birth after needing an epidural for my first) and I felt the sweet relief from that little boost button each surge.

We started filling the pool in our bedroom. I lit my candles, turned on my diffuser with Lavender and Wild Orange and got my calm music playlist on. However, I quickly realised I was going to need something much more upbeat to get me through as surges were heating up and I tend towards active birth. So dance music it was – haha! I was stamping my feet and pounding my stress balls together to the beat of the music. I remember telling someone I needed a huge drum to beat.

During this time my midwife had arrived and, after a few subtle checks, she was in the lounge room with my mum who had arrived in case my five or three year olds woke up. The second midwife arrived. Hannah, whom I had not yet met but who was amazing, lovely and very helpful when labour later felt like it was stalling.

It was about 3 or 4am and my stamping and stomping and bashing stress balls was starting to not be so helpful. I found myself instinctively vocalising through each contraction. I also felt like I was starting to lose control during each one. My midwives suggested I could be nearing transition and



maybe it was time to get in the pool. I was dreading taking the Tens machine off and we did it as quickly as possible so I could get in the pool before the next surge.

The pool was lovely! However, I felt that all the coping mechanisms I was using couldn't be used in the pool. I found myself hitting the sides of the pool with my hands and then I requested a stool next to the pool. I knelt against the side with my arms over the edge and hit my hands in a rhythm onto the stool during each surge.

I felt myself fighting against each surge and being scared of the next one coming. Hannah noticed this and reminded me to submit and open up with each surge. This was helpful, however after an hour or so in the pool it was decided I should try something else. I reluctantly got out and dried off as quickly as possible and got that Tens back on. I was trying to open and loosen during each surge and a supported squat was suggested to me. I felt these were the first 'productive' surges of the night.

I heard the birds begin chirping and I was not happy that it was now morning! Where was my quick, easy, third baby born in the water at home after one not great hospital birth and one car birth? I pleaded, "how much longer do you think?" to my midwives.

I was getting really very tired and physically exhausted from all the stamping and hand banging. They informed me that they could see the shape of my tummy change so bubs must have been in a bit of a funny position before (she had been posterior on and off for the last few weeks).

I needed to go to the toilet, and despite the midwives laughing and telling me that they love poo because it means the baby is close, I just could not poo squatting on my bedroom floor - Even with all the drop sheets in the world! So I went into my ensuite with my hubby (much to his protests!).

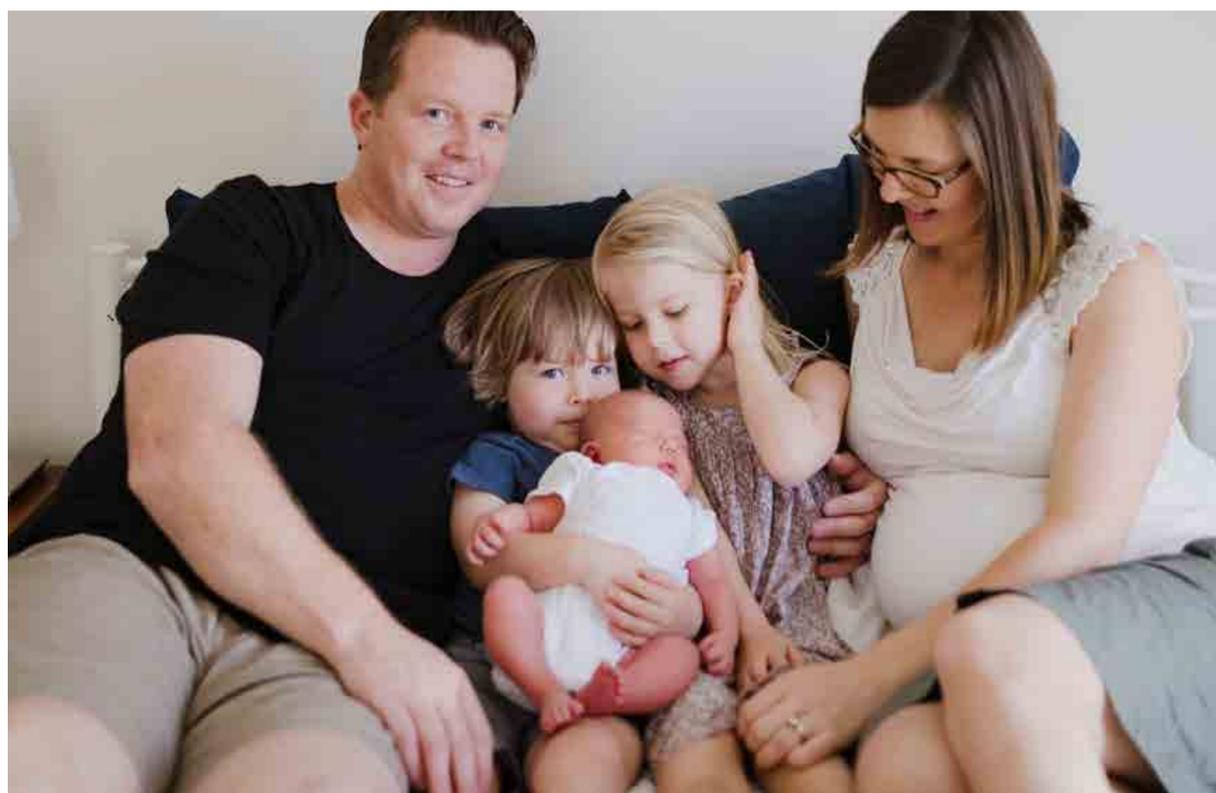
Around this time, my five year old daughter had woken so was with my mum in our room. She pleaded with my mum to wake her three year old brother so he wouldn't miss it!

So, after I had been to the toilet, I felt a lot better but could not seem to move from

where I was as my body had begun pushing. It was the most intense 'work' I feel my body has ever done. More than I remember at least from bub one or two. I will never forget the involuntary grunting sounds my body was producing, but my body was doing all the pushing by itself. There was no pushing coming from me; my body knew what it was doing. All I could manage to do was stand up, lean against the wall in front of my loo and call out "HEAD!" My midwives rushed in and bubby was born after only about three contractions.

Georgia Mary. 13th November, 2016, 6.10am. 3.8kg, 56cm, 36cm head

**Amy is a wife to Matt and mother to Lola 6, Hugh 4 and Georgia 10 months. She lives with her family in the bountiful Hawkesbury region with their cat Polly, 7 chickens and a caravan in the backyard which her parents stay in on the weekends. She is passionate about healthy living, organic food and products and runs a bulk food co-op. She homeschools their eldest daughter in kindy while juggling the demands of a 4 year old and a baby. Amy is a Christian, an environmentalist, a minimalist, an over-thinker and a coffee lover. She strives to live slowly and purposefully, taking in the small things and not leaving the big things to chance.**





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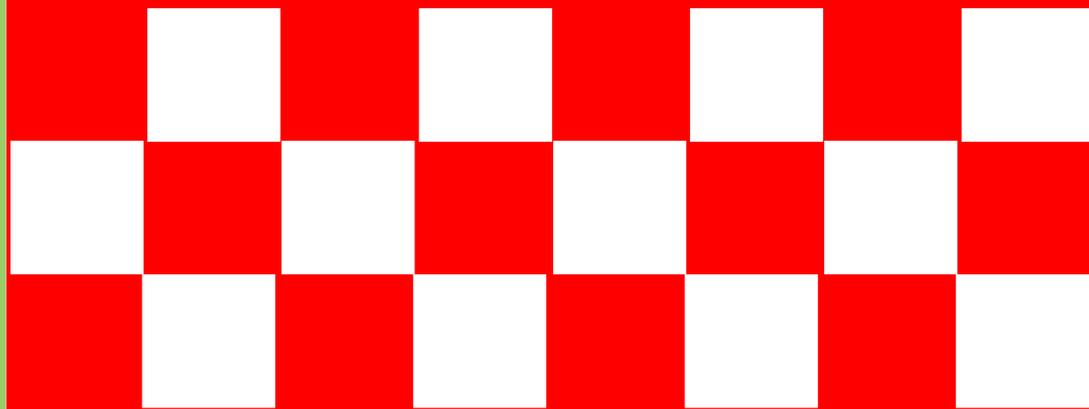
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# HOMEBIRTH AWARENESS WEEK PICNIC

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PETERSHAM

# LETTERS TO EDITOR:

We've been without a *letters to editor* section for a while now, but we'd love to hear your thoughts, concerns and ideas!

Please send your letters to [editor@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:editor@homebirthsydney.org.au)



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# Birthing Saya

by Cat E More

Photos courtesy of Shannon Everest Photography

**A**fter birthing my first born (almost two years ago now) I listened to the midwives tell me, "be careful next time, sneeze and the baby will be out!" I thought that was an interesting way of thinking about it. I also thought, 'I couldn't be that lucky twice, could I?' I mean, I had made the hospital the first time round by just 12 minutes and had an estimated established labour time of three hours, which was pretty good for a first baby by all accounts.

For my second birth, I had hired an independent midwife and had a few different plans. I was either going to birth at home or at a lovely birth house near the hospital (we were a 35 minute drive away). If necessary, I also had a fantastic obstetrician lined up too. I had all bases covered. In my house, I had set up a lovely corner full of pictures, affirmations, crystals, candles, a lovely big birth pool, twinkle lights, the lot (not that I'd ever come to use it). I had disinfected the house and I was ready to go at 38 weeks!

## PRE-LABOUR

It all started on Mother's Day (what a fabulous first gift). Around 4pm, I had some cramping and Braxton Hicks were increasing. I remember thinking, 'game on!' I went to rest and prepare myself for a birth marathon, wondering if I could actually have my baby tonight. I thought she may be 'early' as my son had been. I was excited! In reality, there wasn't much action and by 10pm there was nothing at all. I fell asleep and woke in the morning to....nothing! I

wasn't deflated as I thought, 'not long now.'

## BUT THEN...

This process repeated itself for the next 10 nights! It became very deflating and quite frustrating, cramps starting and stopping each night. With my last baby, there had been a lead up (as my waters broke early) but the wait was only 72 hours (and even that seemed like an eternity at the time). This time I started to wonder, 'is she coming at all?!' I was trying to have faith in the process but it was tough.

## DRAGGING ON

I tried everything during this period to get things moving. I went for acupuncture, reflexology, and massages galore. My husband, Bart, was on the case and gave me lots of acupressure, massage and reassurance. I also tried extra meditation, spicy foods, bouncing on the gym ball like a demon and burning clary sage 24/7 (of course).

## BUT NO, NOTHING WORKED, THIS ONE WASN'T BUDGING!

So I gave up trying to 'induce' and focused on trying to relax and trust the process. It would happen; this baby would be born at some point soon, somehow! In her own perfect time, of course. The midwife told me of potential advantages as to my drawn out predicament: the longer my pre labour went on, the shorter my established labour would probably be. I still couldn't have anticipated exactly what this would come to mean (and nor could she).

## MOVEMENT FINALLY?

On Wednesday 24th May, we went through the same nightly ritual but this time the cramps were slightly stronger, more often (around 20 minutes apart still) and feeling more like proper contractions. This went on until 4am when they slowed right down again. Argghh! Though I was used to this now! They did continue every 30 minutes or so throughout the day on Thursday 25th May.

My midwife came out that morning and said she thought the birth was close, possibly by the weekend. At this point it felt never-ending but at the same time I also felt the end was in sight. I was pleased we had progress and I knew baby was ok as her heartbeat told us so. Nothing really changed throughout the day and I was starting to gear up for another tricky night of sleep with the mild contractions still coming, albeit irregularly. I certainly didn't think the baby would arrive today as they were still 20-30 minutes apart and had been all day. It was such a far cry from our first birth which ramped up over hours! This felt alien to me and I had no idea what to expect next.

At 4pm our neighbour came round and we drank tea and had a great game of chess, with no real changes in contractions strength or timing. I remember looking at my watch as our neighbour left and it being around 5.20pm. Little did I know my baby would be born just an hour later. Literally as he walked out of our front door I felt my



waters starting to gently break (not like the gush last time from my son). While going to the toilet, I had a bloody show, too. I started to wonder if tonight could actually be the night. Although I didn't want to get too excited after the rollercoaster we had ridden over the past 12 days!

#### **RAMPED UP AND THEN IT STARTED....BOOM!**

I remember having an intense contraction out of the blue, to the point of being doubled over. I experienced a strong pain in my hips and I had Bart apply counter pressure. I remembered this pain from last time but felt it was yet to get a lot stronger. 'We have a while to go yet,' I thought, but I knew we were heading towards established labour.

I asked Bart to call the midwife and get her to come over. It was an instinctive call, not based on any real evidence. I felt a bit foolish really because I felt I still had hours to go and was making the call too early. I couldn't see the baby coming before tomorrow. The midwife asked Bart to time the contractions and call her back. As he hung up I had around 5 back to back intense contractions, in around 10 minutes. I was in excruciating pain in my hips; it had ramped up in the space of minutes! Part of me, remembering the pain last time, thought I was being soft and it was going to get worse yet! Bart called the midwife back and told her what had just happened and asked her to head straight over. She had an hour's drive ahead of her. We weren't fazed by this as I still didn't feel I was having this baby just yet. But looking back, I was showing signs of transition as I kept saying to Bart, "I can't do this," and started to doubt my ability to 'get through,' as is typical in this stage. Bart was great, offering me plenty of reassurance, kisses and cuddles.

I started to find it hard to even move without pain at this point. I remember thinking it was because I hadn't spent enough time getting fit this time and my body was packing in already! But I still

had a marathon to go. Anyway, I managed to make it over to the fire and get on my hands and knees, thinking I'll do some yoga to help get me more comfortable. At this point I was constantly screaming at Bart to "get on my hips" as the pain was intense (but still not as bad as last time) and coming thick and fast.

Bart was trying to get the fire going and also fill the bath, as well as support me. My mother was looking after my toddler, who kept popping over to me with gestures, such as cars. It was actually really helpful having my toddler around. It helped me to stay calm, trying to reassure him, which took me by surprise! We called our neighbour back who came and helped with the bath and the fire, as at this point I needed Bart with me the whole time. Bart helped me into bed onto my side and everything stopped for a good few minutes. Oh no, not again, surely not?! We even debated on whether we should call the midwife back and tell her, 'false alarm!'

#### **AND THEN...**

I had a very big contraction. I threw myself off the bed and was stood leaning over onto the bed. It was at this moment I could feel the baby coming. I said to Bart, "the baby is coming." He said to me, "you what?!" I think he could tell from my voice I was serious.

I said, "The head is nearly here." I remember at this point feeling really nervous as we had no medical support, but at the same time I was powerless to stop the process too. Then suddenly I felt a real sense of calm wash over me. This was happening and it would be ok. I simply let go and put all my trust into the universe. I dropped onto the floor onto hands and knees in a bid to 'slow it down'. I started to pant, again to try and slow things down, but it was fruitless. My body had taken over and was convulsing, as I'd experienced last time.

#### **HERE SHE IS...**

I thought, 'shit, she's here,' and instinctively

reached down to catch my baby. Next news the head is in my hands. I shouted to Bart, who was behind me, "the head's out." Bart quickly took over and held the head in his hands. I focused on breathing through the next contraction and out she came, right into Bart's arms. He passed her straight to me, through my legs. I sat on the bedroom floor where she'd been born. She didn't breathe immediately. In fact, it probably took just 10 seconds or so. This was the longest 10 seconds of our life. I screamed for Bart to ring 000 (and also in the same breath check the time of birth). I held her and blew on her (like my doula taught me last time) to help her 'awaken' to the world. And she breathed, thank God!!!

Bart helped me onto the bed and we put lots of blankets over her whilst she was on my stomach having skin on skin. We then had to wait another 40 minutes until paramedics and the midwife arrived (pretty much together). I was so relieved! And so surprised my baby was here already!! The midwife couldn't believe it! She worked out I had an established labour of just 45 minutes. I was in shock at the speed and the way it suddenly ramped up. This time I had no tearing, nothing. It was just incredible!

Bart and I would never have chosen an unassisted birth but we are very pleased it happened that way. It was such a special way for our beautiful daughter, Saya, to enter this world. We wouldn't change a thing. All's well that ends well. The Gods were shining down on us!

Oh one last thing... Bart is currently considering a career change into midwifery! Clearly, he's a natural!

Much love, Cat x

**Cat is certifiably crazy; a mother, a blogger, a counsellor and an intuitive reader. With a BSc in Psychology and a MA in Social work, helping others has always been a strong focus for Cat. Becoming a Mum and having an intense fling with postnatal depression led Cat to her latest obsession: blogging about motherhood and wellness. She shares her own healing journey and holistic research, wanting to inspire struggling Mums. When she's not running after her rug rats, she loves writing, with a good cuppa tea. Cat and her husband have recently bought a farm. You will mainly find her hiding in the toilet and running away from spiders, while 'training to be a farmer!'**



# EVERYWHERE IS *Home* PREPARATION FOR BIRTH OUTSIDE OUR COMFORT ZONE

Amelia Ruifrok

**D**uring my first pregnancy, I did a Calmbirth course which taught the importance of feeling comfortable and safe during birth in order to enable birth to progress smoothly.

I had planned a hospital birth, but I knew I needed to feel comfortable and safe, and I knew that I felt this 'at home'. In order to get myself into the right headspace, to enable myself to be flexible and comfortable in the hospital setting, I created a birth affirmation, a sign saying 'Home is everywhere'.

I chose this saying because when I was a little girl, I remember a friend of our family talking about a buddhist monk (possibly Thich Nhat Hanh) who she heard talking about his travels. He spoke about how when he travels he doesn't get home sick because he's taken on this philosophy that everywhere is his home - where ever he is, as long as he is present with that moment... that is home. This idea resonated with me in terms of mentally preparing myself to feel safe and comfortable to birth in the hospital, and so I made preparations to bring this idea into my birth space. I felt that if I could bring things that made me feel comfortable, have a wonderful support person and have the courage to speak up about what I wanted during my birth, I could achieve the birth I desired.

I allowed myself to make myself at home, let go my expectations and was present with the moment, however things went, to help me to achieve my calm and

empowered birth. I also added some songs from an Australian artist, Paul Greene, which were based around this theme of everywhere being home. One of these songs, called 'Might Have Arrived', speaks a lot about this idea of 'home is everywhere', even repeating this 14 times at the end of the song. This song in particular I listened to lots in the lead up to my birth, in preparation of the unknown.

Then when it came to my homebirth I knew that there was the possibility of a hospital transfer, so once again I listened to the song and put up my 'Home is everywhere' sign to try and remind myself to just let go and be present with the journey, where ever it took me. I didn't end up needing the hospital transfer and had a serene home birth exactly to plan!

However, I did end up in hospital for a cholecystectomy five days into my 'babymoon'. This was a really difficult and disappointing thing to have to go through because the healing focused postpartum period was such a major part of my homebirth plan this time round. However, the song and the philosophy allowed me to let go and just enjoy and focus all my attention on my precious new baby, which really helped me get through such a difficult and unpleasant time. I share my story, photos of my birth affirmation and the lyrics and a link to the song here, so that women can feel prepared, empowered and able to birth at home, wherever their birth takes them.

## SONG LYRICS

MIGHT HAVE ARRIVED – PAUL GREENE:

Not sure where we're going,  
Haven't for quite a while  
Maybe you should take the wheel this time  
Coz I need to close my eyes

The wheels roll on, the engines hum  
My mind wonders to and from  
But I think I'm too tired to dream  
Who needs dreams when you're a dreamer like me

And I thought we were looking for something to hold on to  
But I just want to let go now and drift way  
Coz maybe where we were going wasn't the right place  
but we were better off getting lost anyway

Might have arrived, Might have already arrived

This one's for the travellers, sleeping under stars tonight  
This one's for the lovers, feasting on loves delight  
This one's for the mothers, still waiting for their babies to come home  
This one's for the old man, drinking alone

Might have already arrived

The Eastern sky is glowing,  
Soon it'll be tomorrow  
Another whole night, gone, gone, gone  
New day just begun

And I thought we were looking for something to hold on to  
But I just want to let go now and drift way  
Coz maybe where we were going, it wasn't the right place  
and we were better off getting lost anyway

Yeah we might have arrived, Might have already arrived  
Yeah we might have arrived, Might have already arrived

Coz home is everywhere  
Home is everywhere x14  
Link to 'Might Have Arrived', Paul Greene - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoCoB\\_7zufA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoCoB_7zufA)



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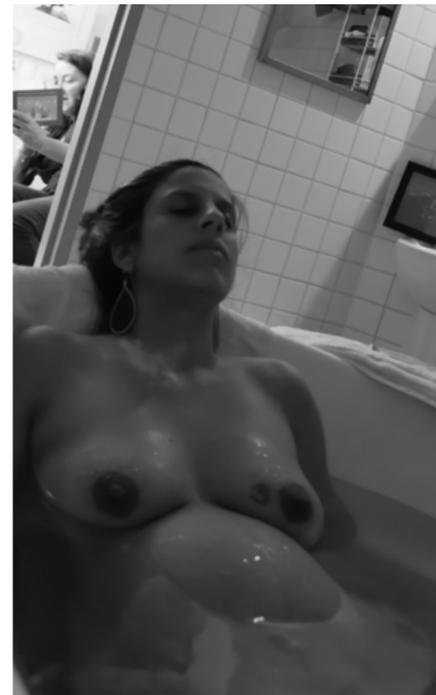
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# The Gentle VBAC Of Billie

by Sharmila Agnihotri

Photos courtesy of Lucretia McCarthy, Jo Hunter and Matt Ho

I have wanted to birth my babies at home, undisturbed, for as long as I can remember. My pregnancy was an invitation to trust again but it felt like there was a lot for me to overcome, with the lingering disappointment of birthing my first baby via emergency caesarean and the grief still fresh from losing a baby at 12 weeks of pregnancy a few months earlier. I began to draw on my great trust in the process of birth and my unwavering appreciation of women as walking, breathing miracles for how they birth their babies.

I embarked on my own emotional work; I walked, danced and learned to breathe to be in my body more and in my head less. I paid great attention to what I ate, how I moved and what I visualised. I saw an osteopath regularly and had acupuncture frequently. I had no doubt that I wanted to birth at home, that I wanted midwifery care and that I also wanted the support of a doula. I felt so healthy and well and before I knew it I was in full bloom with a baby who was head down and engaged in my pelvis.

One night when I was 38 weeks, I noticed that the palms of my hands and soles of my feet were itching. My blood results came back mildly out of range and when my midwife and I consulted with the obstetric team at the base hospital, I was diagnosed with Obstetric Cholestasis, a condition of the liver. With such minimally deranged bloods the obstetric team admitted that I might not in fact have Cholestasis but they were recommending an imminent induction of labour anyway. I still very much wanted to birth my baby at home. However, I would

consent to my labour being induced if my clinical profile worsened.

My peaceful hub of quietly getting ready for baby gave way to a busier way of being. I was having regular blood monitoring, daily CTGs at the hospital and scans. I was having regular contact with my midwife and even though she was asking me to consider birthing in hospital, she would still support me to birth at home if that was my choice. I was regularly tuning into baby and knew that she was ok.

The base hospital was a horrible place and I could feel my body clench up every time I set foot through those doors. I couldn't visualise birthing my baby there and I hoped, prayed and spoke to my dear little babe about avoiding the place. I was pressured daily to commit to a date for my labour to be induced and asked to sign waivers stating that I was taking full responsibility if my baby died and I had declined an induction. But I needed to weigh up the risks of induction following my previous caesarean too. My dear doula, Lu, was my sturdy rock during this difficult time. I will never forget her strong support, clear vision and deep trust in me.

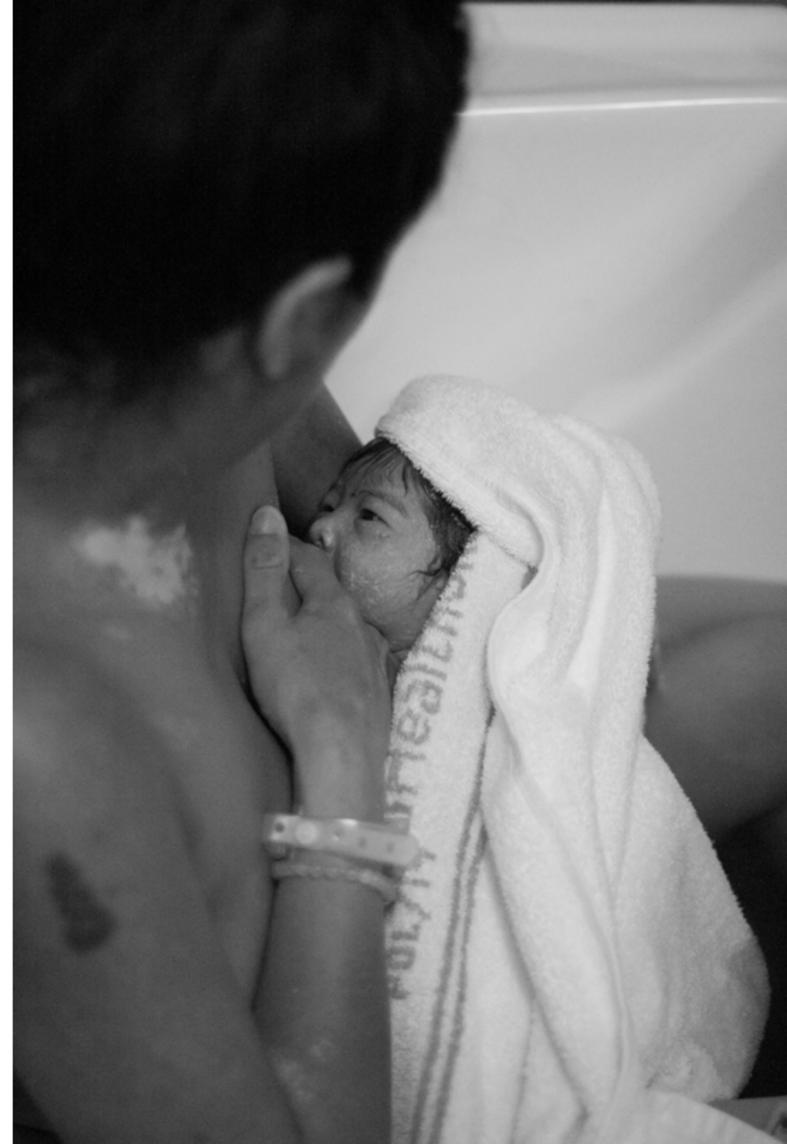
Perhaps the hardest change of plans for me was when my midwifery care disintegrated. I was forty weeks when my midwives withdrew their support for me to birth at home. Sadly, neither would they arrange an imminent consultation for me at the base hospital of my choice. They would continue to provide care for me to birth at the base hospital I hated so much; I was stunned. Only my midwives could each tell

you their side of the story, and that is an important point to remember. But from my perspective, whatever partnership there was had turned into a one way flow of self-preservation and group preservation for my midwives. Their stark absence in holding space for me was truly one of the most painful things I have experienced; I was devastated.

What I didn't see coming was that the darkest night of my story was about to fade into the most deliciously bright dawn. I was so, so fortunate to be able to find another midwife at such a late hour. She honoured me and my baby so holistically and with so much integrity and trust, and she was able to provide me with all the options that I was seeking. In whatever time I had left of my pregnancy, I had found the perfect team to care for me and help fill me back up with all the hope, trust, self-belief and empowerment that I needed for my baby's birth.

As it turned out, I consented to an induction of labour when my bloods started to become significantly out of range. It was a decision I was peaceful about by this point, especially as I would be going to an entirely different base hospital from the one I had found so oppressive. I knew baby was low down and I was having lots of end-of-pregnancy tightenings and small surges, so I just trusted that baby and I were as prepared as we could be.

The next morning, at 40 weeks and four days, I woke up early and enjoyed snuggling in bed with Matt and Remy knowing that when we would next do this,



us three would be four. When I arrived in hospital I was about 5cm dilated and all I needed was an ARM. With the very first surge not long after, I needed to be standing and swaying my hips. With the surge after that, I needed to also be vocalising.

The hospital midwives were so respectful of my wishes and of my space. My beautiful prayer flags and birth artwork was hung up for me and everyone was respectful enough to let me set the tone of this labour, even though I was far from home. The surges amped up quickly and not long after Jo arrived, I got into the pool. It had only been a short while, but it was blissful to be in the pool! That's when I really got into the zone. I didn't want any touch, but really appreciated everyone's quiet, present support. Whenever I had a surge, it felt best to squat in the pool and then I'd stretch out in the water and relax until the next one.

When Remy turned up with Lu, I heard Matt saying to him that I was roaring like a lion because it was helping to get the baby out. My surges were taking all my attention and even though they were so intense, I felt such a deep joy to be in labour. It was all happening and my body was working beautifully. I started to feel pushy at the peak of some of the surges now and when I inserted a finger I could feel baby's head not very far in! I kept squatting with the surges and working hard through each one. Now I was really nodding off between them and could feel the hugeness of all that I was taking part in. There must have been a point where my surges started to space out a bit. Jo gently talked to me about being in my head and to come back into my body. I was in a bit of denial, but when Jo suggested that I get out of the pool for a bit, I knew she was right. Out of the pool I felt a bit less able to cope. Jo kept reminding me that the pain wasn't bigger than me because it was me until I could

believe it myself.

Time passed with me pacing through the surges, and then me leaning over the raised bed head on my knees for some surges too. I was overjoyed to be able to get back into the pool again at some point and before long I was feeling very pushy again. I tried to be in my body and to visualise baby coming down with each surge. I was heartened to feel baby's head right there again and it gave me the motivation to push more than to vocalise. Even though I was in my own big/little world, I was aware of some pressure from the hospital staff about how I was progressing given that I was fully dilated. I felt very protected by Jo, Lu, Matt and Remy. After pushing, squatting in the pool for a little while, I got out. I favoured squatting and did the same on land and soon there was a peep of baby's head with my pushes. I found looking into a mirror on the ground so helpful. At this point the doctor came in to talk about giving me some help if I didn't push this baby out soon. After, 'yeah right!' I thought to myself, 'everything is opening and stretching beautifully.' No one was coming anywhere near me with any kinds of tools! 'I've got this,' I thought, and could feel Jo's strong support from right next to me. I pushed more and felt what must be the ring of fire, but it felt really scratchy almost. I yelled out that I needed a hot compress by which point Jo reminded me that I wanted to be in the water to birth. With a head between my legs, I did a funny hobble back into the pool and a couple of big pushes later, baby's head was born! One more surge and baby came flying out, did what looked like a kung fu flip under the water and I brought her up into my arms. 'She's here! I did it! She actually came out of my vagina!' I thought. I just drank in all her perfection and felt the immense love and support of my family and my birth team in the room. She fed straight away after a big

cry. I was so happy that she was safely here and that my amazing body had grown her and birthed her so powerfully.

I looked outside and couldn't believe it was 6pm! I had been in such a timeless zone. There's a quote that says "...women in labour leave their bodies, travel to the stars, collect the souls of their babies and return to this world together" and that's exactly what it felt like I'd been doing. Birthing Billie was such a transformative, transcendental experience where I felt pushed to my limits. I emerged better connected within myself, fearing death a little bit less and embracing much more the ancient sisterhood of which I am part.

Nearly two hours later, my placenta still hadn't arrived despite many changes of position, breastfeeding, acupressure, visualisation or emptying my bladder. I consented to an ecbolic because I just wanted to be home and I still had a second degree tear that I agreed needed some suturing. It was a bummer having to have a car journey with little Billie so soon, to be home. But once we were home, I knew I wasn't going anywhere for at least the next month. And so began our luscious babymoon.

I am so glad I dared to trust. I am so grateful that my little family was so beautifully looked after in the face of some unexpected changes. The love, trust, wisdom and belief of my midwife and doula were invaluable to me and my family. The repercussions of Billie's beautiful birth have already been far-reaching for us and I know they will continue to ripple out in more ways than we can imagine.

**Sharmila Agnihotri is a midwife and currently a full time parent for Remy, age 5 and Billie, age 1. She lives with her husband, Matt, in the beautiful Blue Mountains.**

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Spring 2017

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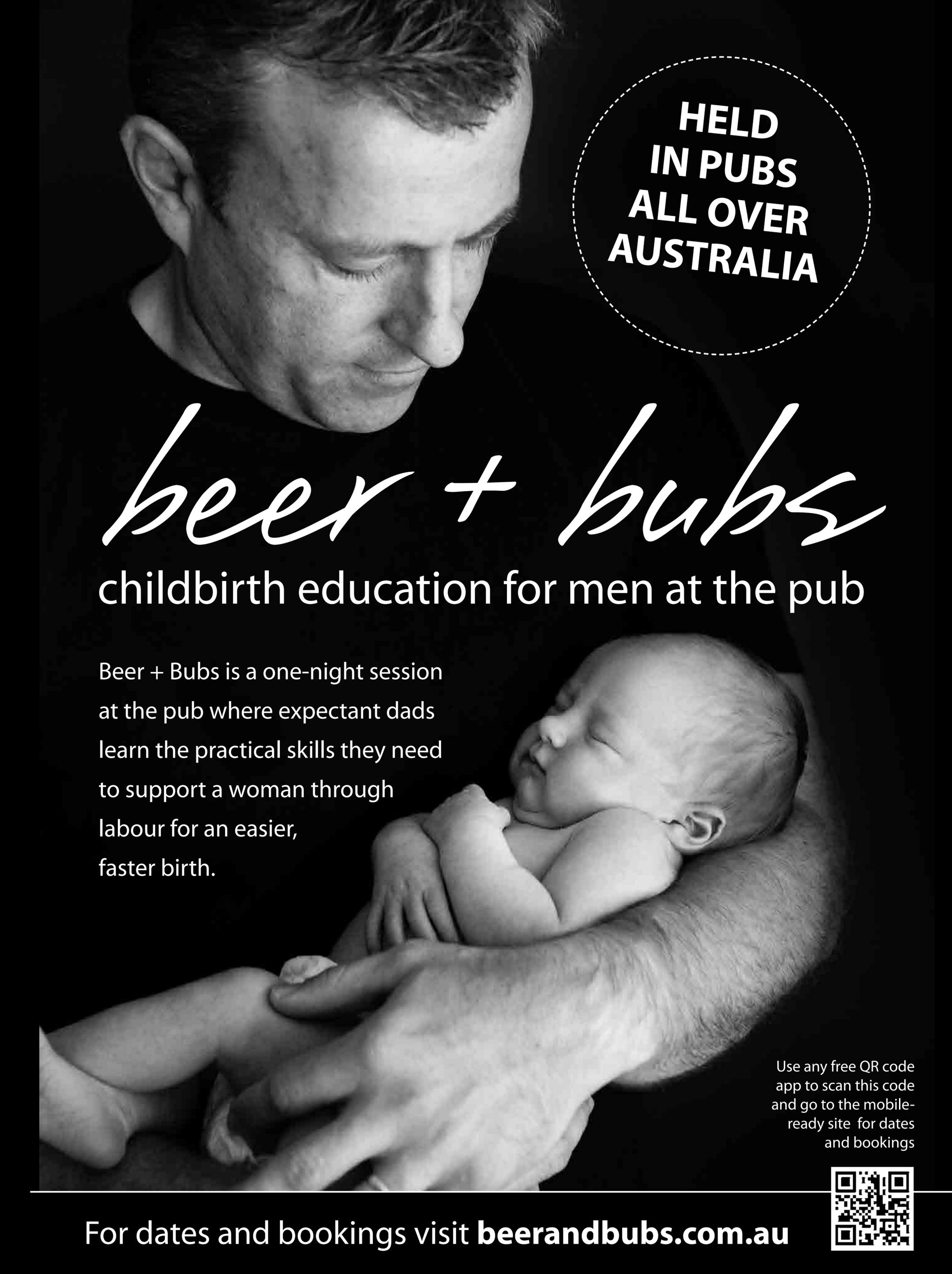
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# THE TOPIC FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF BIRTHINGS IS ***EMPOWERMENT THROUGH HOMEBIRTH***

Birthings is the homebirth communities magazine and accordingly we'd love your contributions!

The theme for the next issue is Empowerment through Homebirth!

Women choose homebirth for a variety of reasons and yet, despite their reasoning, we increasingly often hear words such as empowered, powerful and strong associated with homebirth. We would love to hear about how homebirth has empowered you, and how this empowerment filters through to your everyday life and parenting!

Please send us your theme articles, birth announcements and stories with some high resolution photos. Submissions are due by 7th November, 2017 to [editor@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:editor@homebirthsydney.org.au) and should be <1400 words, <100 word bio and some high resolution photos or videos.

**ADDITIONALLY, PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOUR CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS IS REGISTERED WITH HAS SO YOU CAN RECEIVE MEMBERSHIP EXPIRY REMINDERS, E-NEWSLETTERS AND BIRTHINGS E-MAGAZINE. IF YOU'VE RECENTLY CHANGED, PLEASE SEND YOUR NEW EMAIL ADDRESS TO [MEMBER@HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU](mailto:MEMBER@HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU)**

