

SUMMER 2017, ISSUE 135

# Birththings

Homebirth Access Sydney's e-magazine

*Empowerment*

**THROUGH HOMEBIRTH**

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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).

Autumn 2018 issue is themed Healing homebirth

**Submission due date: 1st February, 2018**

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## Kristiane Heidrich

Kristiane Heidrich is a mother of 3 children aged 26, 24 and 21. She is a Physiotherapist & Massage Therapist (30yrs), CranioSacral Therapist including SomaticoEmotional Release (20yrs) and a Visceral Manipulation Therapist (10 yrs). CranioSacral Therapy enabled her to realise that instead of pushing against the body's restrictions causing 'dis-ease', that she could follow the body's own innate patterns and wisdom to facilitate the healing process. She also treats children of all ages in her clinic (0-90).



Kristiane has a special interest in working with mothers in the pre-conception (fertility) phase, during pregnancy, and the postpartum period. She is a Registered Midwife working in midwifery group practice, Doula & Placenta Encapsulator.

Kristiane Heidrich and Caroline Harley (physio and CranioSacral Therapist) run a free CranioSacral Therapy Clinic for children 0-5 every second Wednesday from 9-11.

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# Editorial...



## Welcome to the Summer 2017 edition of Birthings!

I'm excited to introduce you to the Summer 2017 edition of Birthings, themed Empowerment through Homebirth! In this issue, we have our regular committee articles and also theme articles about empowerment through homebirth, how to have an empowered birth and how breastfeeding is influenced by birth. We also have beautiful birth art in the form of a cartoon and some poems on motherhood, some brilliant reviews, new podcast links and tonnes of gorgeous birth stories complete with captivating photos! Empowerment: "The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights." Empowerment holds different meanings to different people, with the above definition being only one of many available. What does empowerment, particularly through Homebirth, mean to you? What does/did it look like? How have these perceptions changed over time? How can we bring this empowerment to other women and their families?

For me, empowerment through homebirth has taken different forms, changing through my own life experiences. Firstly, it appeared as the strength and confidence to make a decision to birth at home, based on tonnes of research and talking to many different doctors, women, doulas and my midwife. Next, it surfaced as the ability to advocate for myself, through having skilled, passionate and understanding care providers who enabled me to make informed, conscious decisions during pregnancy, birth and post-partum; challenging those in powerful roles and advocating for myself and my baby made me feel so empowered!

Later, empowerment through homebirth changed meaning for me. While the strength and ability to take charge of my own decisions was still important, empowerment also meant being witness to the power of my own body; surrendering and acknowledging that my body is powerful, and has the strength and knowledge to not only grow a tiny human, but birth and nourish them too. In all of these instances, empowerment enabled me to 'control' my life and 'claim my rights', even though part of that control involved surrendering to the processes of pregnancy, labour, birth and mothering.

Empowerment can mean different things to different women, and is a word that you likely see used frequently with regard to homebirth. The processes that lead to this empowerment through homebirth (or any birth, really) are what prepare us for our mothering journey; they give us the strength and confidence to mother our babies. What happens when women don't emerge from their births feeling well, safe, strong and confident? You can get your answer by looking at the rates of birth trauma and its correlation with post-partum depression, or the incidence of maternal suicide. Heartbreakingly, suicide is the leading cause of maternal death in Australia.

The recent Homebirth Australia Conference (#HBACON2017) provided an incredible array of speakers and ideas, but one of the stand-outs to me was the talk by a fellow homebirth consumer, Belinda Costello. Belinda spoke about how women are important, and that on the day they birth a baby, they are (and should be) the most important person in that room. She made the statement, "Mothers can have many babies, but a baby can only have one mother." We need mothers who are able to be present in their children's lives, because they made it through pregnancy, birth and

the post-partum period whole and well. We need mothers that are confident in claiming their rights and control of their own lives, so that they can model this to their children. We need strong, confident, empowered mothers raising our next generation! Mothers can achieve these outcomes through birth, by birthing their babies (and themselves) in a safe, supported, empowering way, whatever this looks like for that mother. For me, and likely many of you, one way (and perhaps the only way) this necessity can be realised is by birthing at home.

However, homebirth is progressively being reduced as an option in Australia, by making regulation, criteria and legislation stricter, forcing many of our midwives out of practice, and by making it all the more difficult to walk the tightrope to get referrals and to fit the criteria to be 'allowed' to birth at home. Accordingly, the next issue of Birthings will be about Healing Homebirth; what do we need to do within our homes, communities, state, country and globe to really make homebirth available to every woman, should she want it. What are the steps in advocating for, and creating a movement towards, healing homebirth? Additionally, how has homebirth healed you? How has it torn you apart and remade you? How has it changed your perceptions and experiences, and healed old wounds? Please share your 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!

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed sourcing it. Sending strength and confidence your way!

**Aimee Sing**

HAS is looking to improve our website, and target the information that you most require. Please provide some feedback via this online survey.

TAKE THE SURVEY

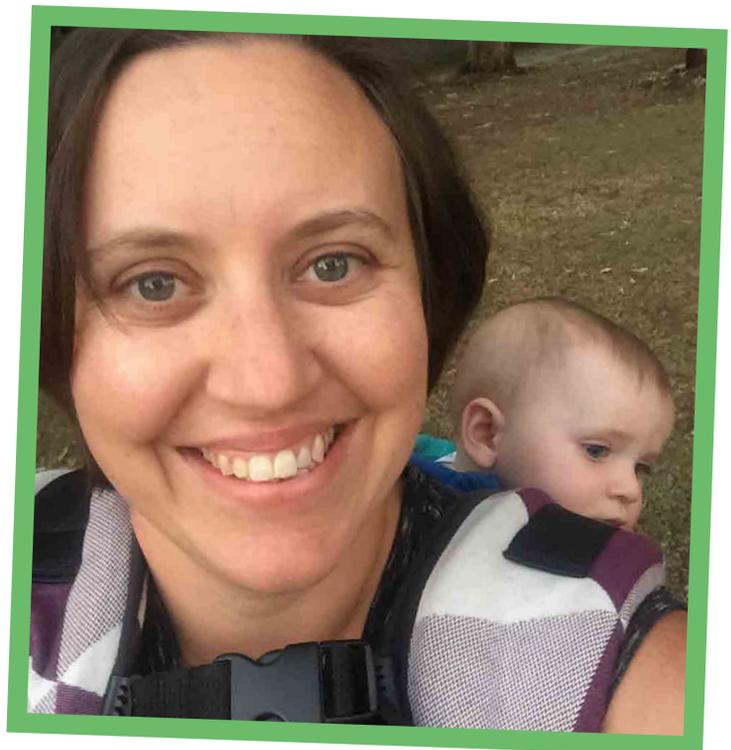
# President's Report

This issue of Birthings E-Magazine invites you to investigate the topic of Empowerment and how this pertains to Homebirth. It is particularly fitting to have this as our topic of interest so soon after attending the Homebirth Australia Conference in Sydney this November.

It seems our current state of maternity care in Australia is not particularly empowering. Talk to pregnant women birthing within the standard system and you will likely hear them talk about how they are 'allowed' or 'not allowed' to have or do certain things in their birth – delayed cord clamping, immediate skin to skin, no vaginal exams or even just having a VBAC. I've heard quite a few friends talk about how their OB is, "Going to let them have a go at a VBAC", and I wonder if they even realise how much they have internalised a lack of power over their own birthing bodies when they talk about being 'allowed'. Clearly women's empowerment is still a vital project in maternity care. I left the conference feeling like we still have so much work to do and not really knowing where to begin. I want to see all Australian women not have their geography or wallet dictate their birth choices. There is so much work to do with bringing this vision to a reality! Having said that, it was energising to meet with so many like-minded women who are focussed on bringing change so that all women are empowered and supported in making their own birth choices.

SO what has HAS been up to in this regard? Largely over the last few months we have been seeking to 'get our house in order' through fixing our website, processes and paperwork so that we can return our focus to our core advocacy work. I can say we are ready to rock and roll on that front. We have many ideas and opportunities for campaigns and actions to put out in 2018; in particular, we are investigating ways to support more midwives to move into private practice, ways to lobby more hospitals to offer homebirth options, and of course pushing for a solution to the midwife insurance crisis. Would you like to help us? Our committee is always open to HAS members who would like to volunteer with us. Please get in touch if you have the fire in your belly and are ready to push for change!

Jodie Powell



## join us!

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



# Aimee Sing

## Editor of Birthings magazine

### **WHEN DID YOU JOIN HAS?**

During my first pregnancy in 2012.

### **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE SINCE CHILDREN?**

Since birthing my daughter in August, 2013 I have completed and graduated from my PhD (specialising in plant physiology), published two research articles, worked as a research assistant, unit coordinator, lecturer, practical demonstrator and tutorial supervisor for Western Sydney University, had two miscarriages, grown and birthed a second baby, studied to become an ABA breastfeeding counsellor and taken on this role as Editor of Birthings magazine.

### **WHY HOMEBIRTH?**

I choose homebirth because I feel it is the safest, most beneficial, calm, supported and natural way to welcome my babies' earth-side. Regardless of mode and location of birth, having an independent

midwife and her continual support and care made my birth experiences positive ones, and I would never birth with anyone else if given the choice! Homebirth provided me with the gold standard in care, even when my daughter was born via caesarean section after placental abruption, and especially when my son was born via an incredible HBAC. Homebirth rocks!

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

The MOST amazing thing I've seen, thanks to homebirth, was a baby exiting my body! The second most amazing thing I've seen would be watching one of my best friends birth her baby girl at home! I'll forever be grateful for her allowing me into her space to witness what I already thought to be true - that birth is normal and natural, doesn't have to be scary or medicalised, and that women are powerful!

The most amazing thing I've learned about homebirth is the incredible hormonal processes and cycles that go into bringing our babies earth-side. I'm constantly amazed that our bodies know how to conceive, grow, birth and breastfeed our babies, and that our body works with our baby to birth them - How awesome is that!?!

The most amazing thing I have learned from homebirth is that regardless of who you are, your history, background, family, friends, intelligence, beliefs, spirituality, confidence, fear...your body knows exactly how to birth your baby, and your baby knows exactly how to be born. I was nervous during my pregnancy with my son that I couldn't 'release all of the fear', and that this would hold me back from birthing my baby! A close friend shared a saying, "Feel the fear and birth anyway", and I did! Our bodies really do know how to get on with it and get the job done when we stay out of the way.

# Community Happenings

## Homebirth Awareness week



### HAS 2017 Homebirth awareness week picnic

Homebirth Access Sydney (HAS) hosted a picnic in Petersham Park on the 25th of October in celebration of Homebirth Awareness Week. It was my first time to this amazing park with green fields, climbing equipment, swings and slides. Next time we return I'd like to try out the Aquatic centre next door. The spring sun put on a good show and, as my toddler shouted "Purple tree!" at the Jacaranda's, I thought to myself 'the inner west is beautiful!'

Another natural beauty is birthing a new life at home. As families, doulas, birth educators and midwives started arriving at the picnic there was a happy buzz; perhaps it was all in my head, but I felt a surge of oxytocin! I guess that is what happens when a collection of loving parents and cute babies gather in one place, complete with a lot of breastfeeding! There were some new friendships made and lots of chatter about recent births and the upcoming homebirth conference.

Amelia Parkinson runs Wonder Birth and invited her usual Inner West 'Positive Birth Movement' friends, so I got to meet some new faces! She also provided a spare set of hands and put my newborn to sleep so I could toddler chase. That's what I love about this community; I finally have a village complete with so much love and support. It was great to join meet ups because I feel Homebirth isn't just about having a baby at home, it's also about women becoming informed and choosing to have a natural birth with continuity of care.

I get the feeling some birth workers are such dedicated professionals they never stop their keen eye and care. Midwife Jo Hunter brought along baby scales, and Jerusha Sutton snapped some beautiful images, and the attached candid photo explains it all!

There were a few cute shirts, onesies, bibs and books for sale at a discount to the website too! Don't worry if you missed out; remember HAS members get 5% off the HAS online shop too.

I can't wait 'til next year!

By Azure Rigney  
Photos courtesy of Jerusha Sutton and Jodie Powell

Jerusha Sutton - <http://www.jerusha.com.au/>





## Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains Homebirth Group met to celebrate Homebirth Awareness Week in two separate group meets. These meets were a beautiful way of providing local mums with the opportunity to get to know one another and share their experiences in a safe, welcoming and inclusive space. An added bonus was that everyone left with an oxytocin high after sharing all of their beautiful birth stories!

Photo courtesy of Jo Hunter

BMHG - [www.facebook.com/groups/bluemountainshomebirthgroup/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/bluemountainshomebirthgroup/)  
Jo Hunter - <http://midwifejo.com.au>



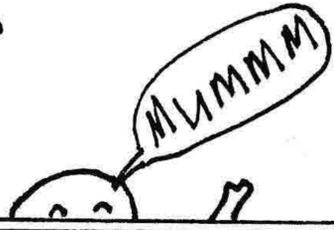
## Eastern suburbs

The Sydney Eastern Suburbs Homebirth Group meets every third Wednesday of the month. They are a lovely bunch of women and babies, and are more than happy for new people to join their group meets! If you're interested, please join the group on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/325498167581640/> or contact Jerusha at [doula@jerusha.com.au](mailto:doula@jerusha.com.au)

Photo courtesy of Jerusha Sutton - <http://www.jerusha.com.au>

**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)

Amy Bell's  
daisychain



mothers are always overlooked, or rather forgotten... or just sold lies

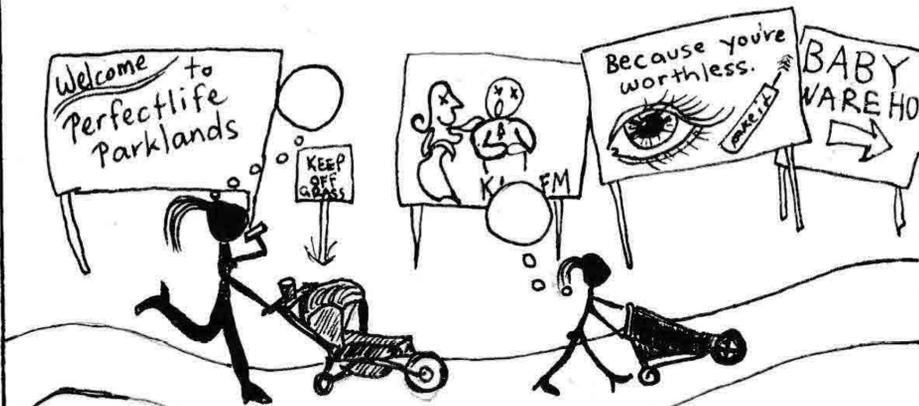
EMPOWERMENT (FOR MOTHERS)



DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL EMPOWERED?



Why aren't you like that?



WE'VE BEEN SOLD "MOTHERHOOD" FOR THE LOW LOW PRICE OF EMPOWERMENT.



BUT WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL WAY TO MOTHER?

DISCLAIMER: NOT SELLING ANYTHING

SO TRUST YOURSELF AND DO IT YOUR WAY!!



EVERY FAMILY IS DIFFERENT. AND YOU ARE THE HEART OF YOURS



i did it My way!

# Birth announcements



## Michaela Athena Mormanis

George and Stephanie Mormanis of Randwick, NSW would like to announce the birth of their second child, Michaela Athena Mormanis. Michaela arrived on Friday the **18th of August, 2017** at 4.45am in the water in her parent's bedroom. This incredible HBAC baby weighed 2.78 kg and measured 50 cm with a head circumference of 34 cm. Big brother Connor (2.5 years old) is besotted with his little sister.

Photo courtesy of Lauren Storey Photograph and Design  
<http://www.laurenstorey.com.au/photography/>



## Noah Kristopher Bridgeman

Our beautiful baby boy arrived earthside! Introducing Noah Kristopher Bridgeman - Born into his mother's arms, happy and healthy in water at home with the help and guidance of our lovely doula, Gretta, and midwife, Gail Baker. 1:53am, **22nd of September, 2017**. 8 lb (3630 g), 51.5 cm long, 35.7 cm head circumference



## Harvey Patrick Mulhall

Harvey Patrick Mulhall was born quickly in his mama's shower into his mama's hands on the **9th of November, 2017**. Mum, Dad, and his brother Flynn, and two sisters Stella and Juliet, welcome him to our family, and thank their marvellous midwife Marie Heath for her warm support and guidance. A third beautiful homebirth after caesarean has brought healing and joy to his mama's heart.



## Levi John-Josiah Harsh

We welcomed our 6th little home birthed blessing at 8:14pm on Monday the **13th of November, 2017**. Levi John-Josiah Harsh was born into the same bath as his 5 siblings, in a full and noisy house, surrounded by his daddy, siblings, nanna, poppy, and wonderfully skilled and caring birth team, Nat and Jo! We have so much appreciation for the gift that Homebirth is, and for those who make it possible. We are so very thankful to have our little miracle in our arms!



# Conference Reviews

Photographs courtesy of Jerusha Sutton

**B**eing a part of this year's Homebirth Australia Conference (#HBACON2017) has been a life changing experience. I walked into the room and saw the space filled with many beautiful women who share my passion to support the sacred passage of birth through being a midwife, doula, friend or simply sharing in the feminine power; I knew I was in the right place. The journey that I have embarked on, becoming a doula and childbirth educator, is my calling in life. The experience that aligned me to this path and awakened my soul was the birth of my own son, Oli linti. Nothing quite changes us like birth. The conference weekend was all about strength, knowledge, wisdom, passion and anger, and it is the sum of these energies that collectively can redefine our relationship to birth, motherhood and family. This is how we, as birth carers, have the power to bring back the trust in every woman to welcome their babies earth side courageously. The beautiful and strong energy that emanated from every single woman in the room, and the knowledge of every speaker, made it a powerful ceremony. It is only through empowering the woman (and men)

about birth and their choices, about finding and trusting their inner voice and believing in their feminine power, that we will change how we perceive this sacred passage. Each speaker had an important message to share! I personally liked Hannah Dahlen and her compelling speech on how homebirth Will SURIVE; it was magnificent. Bashi Hazard and her powerful voice on human rights was electrifying; the standing ovation speaks for itself. Belinda Costello, I feel you, and Jane Hardwick, you are pure magic. To all the women who stood up there, thank you! WE have a mission. Women need support, the right kind of support; the kind that comes through informed choices that speak truth and with continuity of care and trust in our birth team. We need, as a collective, as a Tribe, to stand tall and reignite the flame that lights the path to achieve what is every woman's right. Birth is a natural and precious time for us and our families. As said by Pam England in Birthing from Within, "The profound mystery and spirituality of birth can never be understood by the mind, they are known through the heart."

**Romina Gardella @soulbirth**

**I** attended this conference with much anticipation. As a midwife, mum and self-professed birth nerd, I was excited to surround myself with three days of learning, knowledge and like-minded women. After many deflated years in the Homebirth community (the changes in laws and many respected, beautiful midwives retiring due to mistreatment from the system), I was really hoping this weekend would be an uplifting experience. I am happy to say all of my hopes were met. I started the weekend off (on the Friday) by attending a pre-conference workshop with Millie Hill, discussing ways in which we can support women and homebirth from the grassroots up. I came away from this morning filled with new found enthusiasm and armed with strategies to take back home to continue working on in the 'wild'. My afternoon was filled with a very informative and passionate workshop by Dr Maggie Banks discussing breech birth. I have always been drawn to breech birth and upset by the injustice of it all. Vaginal breech birth is primarily a variation of normal, and should be an option for women if their baby presents this way. However, due to



tighter protocols and procedures (may I note, not based on evidence) and insurance companies breathing down health professional's necks, breech birth is becoming a dying art form and, in response, the caesarean section rate is now sky rocketing. These consequences are completely inexcusable and unsafe practice for women and their babies. I loved hearing Dr Maggie speak with all her years of experience and knowledge. She is such an asset to have in the birth community. The rest of the weekend was well rounded and inspiring. A mixture of all things delicious and dripping in oxytocin, dappled with enlightening, important information. We were so honoured to watch 'The Birth of Beau', Zoe Naylor's second birth and first homebirth. It was primal, gritty and oh so beautiful. Then Jerusha Sutton's gorgeous 'Birth of Rudi'; I don't think I will ever get over how incredible women and birth are and how completely important it is to have support and care that is continuous, loving and connected. We received some important information, insight and statistics from many wonderful presenters (Heather Sassine, Dr Binda Maier and Bashi Hazard just to name a few!) which

highlighted the absolute importance of choice, support, respect and continuity (of care provider) in maternity care. Hearing from wise women such as Rhea Dempsey and Jane Hardwicke Collings was a highlight for me; they grounded our feet on the earth as they wove their birth magic. This reminded us of the bigger picture; preserving the sacred space of birth not only for ourselves, but for all the women after us. I could go on for hours about this weekend; there were so many educated, insightful and wonderful speakers, all collected in one room to push for change. Change so that all women can come out of birth feeling held, heard and safe with care that would enable them to enter motherhood empowered and nourished. This is something that should be the bottom line expectation for all women. As a birth worker and mama, my cup was filled after this conference. I have come away with so much renewed passion, information and motivation to work towards a better, more connected system of care for women and their families. So much thanks to the organisers for providing this powerful space.  
**Lucy Johnston**





# EMPOWERMENT THROUGH *Home Birth*

© ArtshapedPhotography

By Denise Georges

Photos courtesy of ArtShaped Photography and Birth Services

**E**mpowerment: what does this word mean to you? Why is it a word that's thrown around so much in birth circles the world over? Is its overuse (according to some) leading to its meaning diminishing? Do people glaze over when they read it, or do a little eye-roll and inward cringe? Maybe, but here's why I love the word.

Empowerment for women, particularly when talking birth, is so incredibly important. According to the Oxford Dictionary, empowerment is, "The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights." Read that again, then think about it in the context of birth.

Should we not wish empowerment for all women? Should it not be expected that women come out of birth feeling stronger than they ever knew they could be? That they feel confident as they step into the crazy, tiring, emotional and all-consuming world of motherhood? That regardless of which way their birth went, they were in control of their bodies and the decision-making process? That they felt supported by their care providers and that their rights were respected at

all times?

Sadly, Australia's standard maternity care system very often leaves mothers feeling exactly the opposite of empowered. It often leaves them feeling broken, traumatised, stripped of body autonomy and with a sense of failure (when really, what failed was the system and its support of her).

The intervention-intensive way women are managed during their pregnancy, labour and birth diminishes a woman's sense of control. The scans, the blood tests, the risk assessments and screenings - they all have the ability to take a woman out of her intuitive self, out of listening to her body and her baby and of trusting the creation and growth happening within her.

Once labour begins it becomes very difficult for birth to unfold in a normal, physiological way within a hospital system. It requires extreme diligence on the mother's part, loads of prior preparation and learning, meticulous planning and the curating of an extremely supportive birth team that will advocate for her birth preferences. Without this extreme but oh-so-necessary planning, women

are left in the hands of policies and protocols. A system they expect is there to support them, to give them quality, evidence-based care, to treat them as a whole, thinking, feeling person embarking on the most life-altering experience of her life. However, across the board, Australia-wide, women are experiencing trauma and disempowerment on a daily basis. Caesarean rates are more than double what they should be for good maternal and neonatal outcomes. Interventions such as unnecessary vaginal exams, episiotomies, and third stage management are carried out without a woman's informed consent. Induction rates are at an all-time high and are rising.

Recently, I carried out a small survey on a social media platform asking women to list how a previous hospital birth had made them feel. Words used included;

**Not listened to**  
**Not enough**  
**Shocked**  
**Angry**  
**Unsupported**



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**Traumatised**  
**Overridden**  
**Under surveillance**  
**Not instinctual**  
**Not trusted with my own body**  
**Ripped off**  
**Disrespected**  
**Distressed**  
**Threatened**

This is NOT okay. Childbirth is a pivotal rite of passage for a woman. It is the most transformational life experience she will go through - the most intensely physical and the most deeply emotional and spiritual moment of her life. It is a moment in time that she will remember, in detail, for the rest of her years. It is a moment that will

shape her sense of self as a woman, as a mother, and as a partner. It will form her confidence in her abilities to parent. It has the potential to build her up to the superpower she actually is, or to tear her down into feelings of loss, hopelessness and despair.

Birth is a most wondrous, magical, and achingly beautiful event that should be respected, protected, and admired by those called upon to facilitate it. Optimal care in childbirth is not care that disrupts the normal physiology with unnecessary interventions. It is not care that makes a woman feel unsafe, under surveillance, unsupported emotionally and physically and disrespected. Yet our current birth culture is often not optimal. It is often carried out without the use of best scientific and medical evidence. Women are coming into motherhood

feeling traumatised, and with scars that run deeper than a caesarean incision.

Having a home birth is a way for many women to avoid the potential traumas they know lie in the midst of hospital births. It is also a way for women who have experienced such traumas to finally heal from the psychological suffering that ensued. It can be a way for women to attain the body autonomy they never had the first time around. A home birth plan gives women complete control of her rights; the right to birth where she wants, where she feels safest, surrounded by loving and kind support of her choosing. This is empowerment!

The Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health published a paper in 2010 titled, "Home Birth After Hospital Birth: Women's Choices and Reflections".



One of the main reasons why women chose a homebirth following a hospital birth was because they felt they would be given real choices about their care, which lead to feelings of empowerment. Besides this, women knew interventions and interruptions that do not help the birth process would be avoided. They recognised that they would evade disrespect and dismissal from care providers in the hospital, who focused on the uterus and not the woman as a whole, and that their birth space would be one of peace and calm when choosing homebirth.

Read about Zoe's home births [here](#). This is a woman who overcame great difficulties and worked extraordinarily hard to become informed, confident and totally empowered throughout her two births in the water at home. How many women do you know can say they had an orgasmic birth? I read today approximately 0.3 percent of birthing women will have a spontaneous orgasm during the birth process, whilst others may opt to masturbate. I can fairly confidently say very few of those women are birthing in a hospital setting surrounded by strangers and bright lights!

When birth is allowed to unfold in its own timeframe, in its own way; when women have the ability to move around and change positions during labour according to their instinctual needs; when they have

rock solid, loving and compassionate support; when they are not directed how or when to push; they are then much more likely to have a shorter, intervention-free, complication-free birth experience. These are the principles behind the Lamaze 6 Healthy Birth Practices which I teach in my childbirth education program. These Healthy Birth Practices are so incredibly easy and instinctive for women to follow when they labour and birth in the peace, calm and familiar space of their own home.

Another recent survey I did on an online home birth group asking for women to share how their homebirth made them feel generated this incredible response:

Powerful	Proud	Amazed
Heard	Trusted	Orgasmic
Focused	Strong	Lioness
Capable	Womanly	Magical
Connected	Deep	Whole
Ecstatic	Confident	Invincible
Serene	Awestruck	Honoured
Calm	Fulfilled	Goddess
Primal	Triumphant	Alive
Big	Inward	Joyful
Peaceful	Buzzed	Warrior
birthing goddess		Safe
Free	Strong	Healed
Addicted	Grateful	Private
Liberated	Supported	Cherished
Normal	In control	Instinctive

And yes, EMPOWERED came up a LOT!

What incredibly powerful and emotive words from some super-birthing, warrior women across the nation. Let's hope all women one day walk away from their births with the precious new life at their breast feeling as euphoric, unapologetically badass and EMPOWERED as the women who have birthed so mightily at home. All women deserve that experience, regardless of their place of birth. For now, having that empowered birth is a lot more achievable for the homebirth mummas of Australia.

**Denise Georges is a passionate birth nerd, having come into birth work following the life-affirming and transformative birth of her own son. She is a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator and has trained as a doula with DONA International. She aims to see more and more women come into their full oxytocin-fuelled power during labour and birth, in awe of their bodies' incredible design and strength, and then step into motherhood with ultra-confidence and joy. She believes how women are treated during pregnancy, birth and early postpartum will shape a woman and her family in fundamental ways for years to come. Let it be a time of love, nurture, and compassion, where a woman's rights are respected and she is made to feel empowered every step of the way.**

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Amelia 0498 578 601  
[www.wonderbirthing.com.au](http://www.wonderbirthing.com.au)

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# Our new moon bub, Arlo Thierry

by Amelia Ruifrok

Photos courtesy of Jacqui Wood

**B**aby Arlo Thierry Ruifrok (3.65kg, 55cm) entered the world at 3:30am (about four hours after the first early contraction) on Tuesday the 22nd of August, 2017, in the comfort of our own home.

I had been quite sick at times over this pregnancy, being diagnosed with gallstones at twenty weeks. Unfortunately, my gallstone attacks started getting worse towards bub's due date, and I ended up very sick on my last day of being pregnant. I went to bed that night feeling super exhausted, sore and nauseous. I had a little laugh that it was the night I guessed bub would come (because it was the New Moon at 4:30am), but that I clearly wasn't up to labouring tonight!

An hour later, around 11:30pm, I had my first contraction! At first I felt too tired to deal with even timing contractions or getting up to set everything up, even though my first labour was one hour and 25 minutes. I had planned to waste no time getting myself comfortable and set up this time around. However, realising the contractions were real and that they were continuing to come regularly, I pulled myself out of bed determined that these stupid gallstones weren't going to ruin my beautiful home birth experience.

My husband joked that if I laboured quickly enough I'd beat the garbage trucks. At first I felt really nauseous and wiped out, and felt quite down and worried that being sick was going to make this labour a nightmare. However, my husband and I started lighting candles, making labourade, boiling water to help fill the birthing pool and doing all the things on my list. Very soon my body must

have filled me with beta-endorphins and all my nausea and soreness disappeared! It was incredible! Nature is amazing! I was rushing around, trying to get everything ready, knowing this baby wouldn't take long to arrive. Meanwhile, my husband didn't feel like things were progressing and was totally dawdling! The time absolutely flew and at 1:30am I noticed that my contractions were coming every three minutes and we decided we'd ask my midwife, Jo, to come. However, because I went into a contraction my husband said he'd text her. Fifteen minutes later we were still rushing around and he asked if Jo was on her way. I said, "You said you'd text her!!", and he was like, "What!? I thought you were!!" Then suddenly we couldn't find my phone (haha) but we soon found it, told her to come and started to fill the pool. I put on my birth playlist CD which was only one hour and 20 minutes, and I didn't know if it would go long enough or if I would even want it on; during my first birth any noise just made me want to rip someone's head off! Jo arrived about 15 minutes later. Jo and my husband, Rhys, got the pool to the right temperature, and I sat on the birthing ball during each contraction which I found made me so much more comfortable; my first birth was at hospital and I just felt like I had nowhere/no way to get comfortable during contractions. Soon I hopped into the warm pool and it was just bliss! Jacqui, the second midwife, arrived and it was all happening! The water just held my weight, soothed my contractions and relaxed me so much between waves. Then at one point everyone

ended up out of the room so I just had this totally quiet moment to myself. My music was playing and I just loved it, it was so soothing. Rhys had cut me some fresh jasmine from the garden which was on the bench near me and I could smell it so strong and it just completely blissed me out because I LOOOOVE that smell; it is a real nostalgic scent for me. I just felt really calm and strong and empowered, and the realisation that my beautiful serene birth experience was actually happening just brought me to tears for a moment. Then another contraction came on and it was back to business - haha!

Everybody came back out and I just wanted to keep talking and telling them what was going on with my labour. I looked at the clock and thought, 'Oh man! This is taking longer than with Bailey (my first)' and just suddenly felt impatient and over it! I had this idea that I was still too 'with it' to be anywhere close to transition, and that I must still have ages to go. Funnily enough I was probably going through transition already and didn't recognise my impatient, 'ready to give up'-type feelings as just that! Then I had a contraction where my body started pushing and it really, really took me by surprise, because I thought I still had such a long way to go. During my hospital birth the midwives went nuts when my body started its involuntary pushing reflex, yelling at me not to push yet because they didn't think I could possibly be at that stage yet; then they checked and his head was already on the way out and my cervix was completely out of the way! So, even though I was determined to go



with my body this time, I must have been a bit traumatised and I freaked out feeling that I couldn't be ready; I could see them in my head telling me that I was going to inflame my cervix and end up in trouble. I looked over to Jo and Jacqui and those beautiful angels both calmly told me to listen to my body and that I'm doing exactly the right thing. It just reminded me of my promise to myself to trust my body, so I went with it.

I had another contraction and my waters broke. I felt so much more in control than with my hospital birth, and this time thought to just feel my vagina to see if I could feel his head; I could, and I realised that once again my body was pushing at the right time and I could do this. The pushing was more intense than with my first (I had pushed him out slowly over 40 minutes with little naps between waves), but I just felt this time like I would be fine to push him out quicker. I decided to give a long, gentle push between contractions, trying to breathe through it to keep oxygen flowing to bub, and I could feel him moving down slowly.

Jo told Rhys he had better go and wake little Bailey (3.5 years old) up. Rhys didn't seem to understand how close bub was and looked at the clock and said, "Oh, he normally wakes up around now anyway so I might just wait for him to wake up himself," and Jo was like, "Ahh no...Rhys, you better go get him.....quick!" Then she had to call out to him again to hurry back! I ended up having a bit of a wait for the next contraction, but I felt him so close to being out so I kept pushing a little after the wave and felt his head slide out, then in another push his body slid out and I caught him and pulled him up.

The cord was tight around the back of his neck, so Jo got it off and then I was able to give him those first precious cuddles. I was amazed at how much vernix he was covered in! My birth CD was playing the final, uplifting song ('Blood' by The Middle East, which is actually a song about tragedy and death, but for me is always a beautiful and moving reminder of the preciousness of life). I had planned for the CD to be up

to that song when the baby was born, but assumed it couldn't possibly actually line up that perfectly – but it did!

We moved out of the pool over to a mattress on the floor and the placenta slipped out naturally and easily 12 minutes later. Baby Arlo latched straight onto my breast perfectly and fed happily for two hours. We had a laugh about the fact that he was born only an hour before my estimated time of the 4:30am New moon. Jo and Jacqui cleaned up amazingly quickly, and got all the waste in the bins just in time before the garbage trucks arrived - we beat them! Haha! I found it amusing to think that the drivers wouldn't have been at all aware that they were picking up drop sheets, just soiled with the fresh blood from the birth of a brand new, tiny human life entering the world just moments before!

It was amazing to just go back to our own comfy bed, use my own bathroom in the morning and pop out quickly for a snack, looking around at my birth space flooded with morning light, in awe of what had just taken place there! It was so quiet except for birds chirping and felt so restful.

We had a beautiful five days at home. The breastfeeding and healing was so much easier than with my first son. Despite still having issues being able to nap during the day, I was able to sleep between feeds at night. At my hospital birth I ended up staying awake for 86 hours in a row during and after Bailey's birth, because I couldn't switch off to the fluorescent lights, noise and constant obstetrician checks. That had felt like literal torture, and I still didn't feel like I'd recovered from it all these years later. So, this was a much different experience.

Unfortunately, I had a gallstone attack on day five postpartum and it set off very bad pancreatitis. I ended up in hospital, where they kept us up all night in a waiting room, then said they could only fit me into a ward where my baby wasn't allowed to stay with me other than during visiting hours with the supervision of another adult! It was all pretty traumatic and devastating, but luckily things took a turn for the better and they found space for me in the postnatal ward.

They got me off for surgery to remove my gallbladder within a couple of days and I was able to head home the following day. It was all very full-on, but I'm so happy to be back home and just trying to enjoy my little baby bubble again despite the pain of recovery. I'm so, so grateful that I got my perfect, serene home birth in among all this craziness, and will be eternally thankful for the care and support I got from my brilliant midwife Jo – what an absolutely exceptional, amazing, compassionate, wise, down-to-earth, genuine, kick-ass woman!! I watched a bit of the video we took afterwards. I laughed until I cried seeing the part where my husband brought Bailey in. I was doing some big groans, looked up to see Bailey and obviously just decided to carry on my motherly duties, feeling the need to explain to him, "Mumma's having a baby" in the middle of that contraction. I then immediately carried on with my big groan - I just thought it was so funny! I also had the very sweet surprise of seeing little Bailey clapping his hands in excitement during the birth! So adorable! It was also really nice while watching it to see myself smiling around at everyone between waves! I can see just how comfortable and thoroughly happy I was to give birth in my own, safe home surrounded only by supportive, caring people who have my full trust and admiration. So many special memories!

**Amelia has just spent her fourth year as a stay-at-home-mum after telling her employer she'd be back to teaching music the term starting just two weeks after giving birth to her first baby! Since having children she has discovered an intense desire to channel her inner Domestic Goddess – sewing baby clothes and Christmas stockings, turning the backyard into an edible jungle, inventing dessert recipes, and trying to move to a more natural and self-sufficient way of life. She lives surrounded by the beauty of the Blue Mountains and has aspirations of bulldozing her neighbour's home in order to grow a large tulip field.**



# Two daughters born at home; *Betty and Monica*

by Veronica Brandt

Photos courtesy of Jacquie Harsh

**A**t my last hospital birth, my fourth baby boy, I was fortunate to have a midwife who later went on to become a private homebirth midwife. I also came up against the shortfalls of our local hospital when a transfer to another hospital was threatened as they had no anaesthetist past 6am - not that I needed anaesthetic, it was a matter of hospital policy. Fortunately with a massive effort I got walking around the birth suite and labour picked up and I delivered a beautiful little boy with the help of a bean bag - my first birth off the silly hospital beds - how good that felt!

The ridiculousness of that situation sealed my decision to homebirth. I met many mums who had birthed their babies at home and even attended the Blue Mountains Homebirth Group a few times. I knew homebirth had worked for many different families and here I was, an old hand at normal vaginal births, no complications, no stitches, why would I go to hospital?

There were still moments of doubt. I remember one time, walking by myself, when I realised my worries were always going to be my responsibility as a parent and it would be remiss of me

to feel absolved of responsibility by unquestioningly trusting an institution. I am the chief worrier over my kids and nothing can or should take that away.

It was another six years before I was looking at birth options again. I went with a private midwife and it all went beautifully - though not all according to plan.

My sister came to stay with us to lend an extra hand. She is ten years my junior and has no kids of her own, but is a wonderful person and I had taken advantage of her cheerful generosity and willingness to do crazy stuff on a few occasions already.

As with previous pregnancies, I had a week of fairly regular waves, then one night they were getting more intense. I would dance them out singing, "Twist and Shout - c'mon baby! c'mon and work it all out..." The boys were keen to inflate the birth pool, though I maintained it was too early, but hey, if they want to stay up working on the foot pump, that's fine. I went to bed.

After a brief sleep I got up while all the house was quiet and had a shower. I realised the waves were not slowing down and phoned the midwife - remembering as I did so, that logically I should wake up my local support first, but they had only just got

to sleep. Anyway, the contractions were still fairly far apart, my sister turned out to be awake, texting her boyfriend, so I got her to time things as she had her phone handy. She suggested filling the pool. I demurred, until another contraction came, then I agreed.

The water was lovely and warm and the summer night was just right. I thought things slowed, but the timer said otherwise. When I felt my waters break I got my sister to phone the midwife, who warned that things could speed up, and she was right. Little Elizabeth was born about an hour later. It was intense and I was holding my sister's hand which made it difficult for her to do anything else except stay there with me. My husband woke up - he was sleeping with earplugs as he had a 2.30am start for his job at the dairy, but the noise I was making got through, though just a little too late. The midwife arrived a little later and helped make sense of everything.

So for my next homebirth I assumed it would be similar; middle of the night, kids all in bed and nice and quick. Yes, I bet you can see where this is going.

A fantastic friend, Jacquie Harsh, had offered to be my doula for both births. Both



times I had demurred and there was no time with Elizabeth. With Monica however, things were a little different. My sister had moved on and it was towards the end of winter. Getting in the pool this time slowed things down. The waves were fairly consistently 10-15 minutes apart but too strong to take lying down. I was getting shakes. I called Jacquie for reassurance and amazingly she responded with a few ideas I had not tried before. She came in the middle of the night with heat packs, fruit juice, sports drinks, newborn clothes plus her own baby in a sling and a book to read. She also brought a camera. I never really thought I'd be looking back at these beautiful birth photos. I loved seeing accounts of birth but wasn't sure if I could share these private moments myself. Also, when I'm feeling down I tend to look back on all the niggly disappointments and things in hindsight I could have done better. Looking at these photos though, I see the joy and the reality with everyone doing their bit. It did work out alright and I did well. Monica took her time. The sun rose and I wondered if labour would slow as the practice contractions tended to slow in the morning. They kept going and the

children were all up and active. My friend turned out to have supplies for just such an eventuality with some crafty stuff for my preschooler. The older boys introduced her to the pets and showed off their rollerblades, trampolines, bows and arrows, all captured in photos while I was somewhat preoccupied. I remember the roller blades - kids rollerblading through the house is not really what I wanted at that stage. The midwife arrived with more help. The pool needed to be warmed, so we had all boys at work taking out buckets of tepid water while the hose brought more hot water. This time I was holding my husband's hands. Monica came a little quickly with the cord wrapped around, which the midwife fielded well, sliding the cord down over her shoulders as she came out. She needed suctioning to clear the mucous from her face, and then she was in my arms. I had read about hypnobirthing and quiet births during the pregnancy. I was a bit concerned that my kids would be put off by my noise at the actual birth, but from the behind the scenes photos, they look happy, even with their fingers in their ears. Another thing from my amazing doula friend, she found while attending with her own baby in

a carrier that the mother's yells during birth didn't upset a baby. Maybe some instinct for normal birth sounds continues. The theme for this issue is empowerment. Having a baby is a massive achievement however it goes. Being able to recognise that is so important. A mother tends to be really vulnerable to criticism, from other people or even herself. Having that reassurance from trusted people helps restore a mum's confidence at a time when she really needs that deep rooted calm, so that she can be the strong nurturing mother her baby needs.

**Veronica Brandt is a homeschooling mother of six, living in the Blue Mountains. She tries to find time for knitting, learning, singing and volunteering with the Australian Breastfeeding Association. Her first four births were in hospitals with public midwife-led care, the last two at home with private midwives.**

# TONGUE-TIES: FAD OR FICTION

## My Personal Experience

By Azure Rigney

### WHO, WHAT, WHERE AND WHEN?

Why do some babies have ties? There is research to suggest that a link exists between methylene-tetrahydrofolate reductase (MTHFR) gene mutation, tongue-ties and other midline defects. This could be caused by the mother's inability to detox. Essentially, MTHFR is an enzyme involved in the methylation and metabolism of folate. There are various genetic mutations affecting this methylation process, some of which are collectively referred to as 'MTHFR gene mutation', but there are many variations within this gene mutation that affect the MTHFR enzyme and accordingly the methylation process. MTHFR genetic mutations affect ~53% of Australians in varying degrees. Not all carrier's genes are switched on at all times, but it can be activated when the carrier is over loaded with toxins or stress (MTHFR Support Australia).

### MY STORY

There are a few MTHFR groups for basic information; we saw a specialist naturopath and integrative GP for tailored advice for our family, which helped us naturally conceive our second baby. My mutation is considered the most severe in terms of lack of ability to process folic acid (folate is required for cell development) and detox chemicals and heavy metals. In my experience, the overwhelming body of health professionals have either been unfamiliar with MTHFR or ties, or know they exist but believe they have no role to play in fertility and/or breastfeeding problems. I believe this is why some health professionals believe it's a fad, as they are hearing

about it more and being put off by Facebook support groups being up to date with information. However, I see posts daily from women who are becoming more empowered to trust their instincts, educate themselves and push for their breastfeeding relationship.

I joined the Facebook tongue-tie pages prior to conceiving my first child as I'd heard it could affect breastfeeding success. Like everything, I was determined to educate myself while trying to conceive, particularly as my nephew was born tongue-tied. Yet still, after my daughter's hospital birth in 2015, I was constantly let down by hospital lactation consultants and midwives, child health nurses and their international board certified lactation consultants (IBCLC's), private and public paediatricians and countless GP's. Phrases like 'slight tongue-tie', 'stretchy', 'can poke tongue out' and 'doesn't affect feeding' were used patronisingly in attempts to reassure me, as a young first time mum, that there were no reasons for concern.

We were recommended three providers in hospital during the blur of fighting to breastfeed my daughter, who was taken to special care nursery for no medical reason and was weighed incorrectly. We took her to a provider who wasn't on the Facebook tongue-tie groups preferred provider list. Not only were they unable to diagnose her upper lip

**Archie Rigney**

**DOB 04/08/2017**

**Age: 6 days old**

**Seen: 10/08/2017**

Appointment made due to anterior tongue tie. Our in house lactation consultant assessed a 7/10T and a 5½/9L on the Dobrich Decision Tool for Breastfeeding Dyads (attached). Oral Restrictions: Mandibular: Tongue Tie Class II – Submucosal

Maxillary: Class III

### Photos

1) Anterior Tongue Tie Class II      2) Lip Tie Class III



### Procedure Details:

**AMD Picasso Laser, 2.2kv 810nm. Diamond shape observed post-op. Treated: Tongue tie and Lip Tie**

**Notes:** Post op exercises shown, in house lactation consultant checked feed immediately, immediate improvement noted.

Patient to return to lactation consultant immediately to retrain feeding. Review in 2 weeks as deep fibrous tissue.

Thank you for your referral, F

tie but, when I brought up stretches, they said, "No, we don't recommend them, it's very American to do them." I then found out that after bub has the sucrose, which acts as an anaesthetic, they can't have their latch assessed with the new range of movement due to the tongue feeling numb. Later on, I found out that the nurse wasn't even an IBCLC! So, we continued with a terribly narrow latch and pain, ending up in the top-up trap with nipple shield dependence for six more weeks. I spent the next seven months breastfeeding hourly, day and night, to over compensate for her weak jaw muscles and to provide pain relief as she was very gassy from her poor latch. She saw four chiropractors and one physio for regular Cranial Sacral Therapy. Finally, we drove to Melbourne to see a brilliant laser dentist and after treatment, the gas issues reduced instantly. However, by then she was behaviourally used to waking and feeding hourly or more, as by this age her mouth breathing had caused sleep apnoea. It took another six months to get diagnosed and to



undertake an adenotonsillectomy and have grommets placed; this provided instant improvement. By 18 months she was able to sleep two hour stretches.

My son was born at home 10 weeks ago and my third thought after meeting him was 'Wow, this anterior tongue-tie is so obvious! Here we go again.' Prior to conceiving him we had met a newer laser dentist, who had trained with the Melbourne provider, to discuss the release for once the next baby was born. I felt quite comfortable with his knowledge and IBCLC staff so we had his ties done at six days. It's hard, because again he struggled to breastfeed for a few days. However, this time he was finger fed with a nasogastric tube to avoid bottle preference. While my son is gassy after breastfeeding, he doesn't use lactation aids or scream and he sleeps all night, so I'm pretty happy with the outcome. I'm fortunate to have my well connected midwife and homebirth communities support during all of this.

### Facebook Groups

The two Facebook groups I have found informative for this situation ('Tongue and Lip Tie Support Australia' and 'The Gentle Breast Feeder') have preferred provider lists for tongue-tie assessment, lactation support and body work pre and post tongue-tie release. These recommendations

are influenced by the feedback from the community based on personal experiences and recent research. The costs of these providers can range from free, for a doctor with full Medicare rebate, to over \$1000 for a laser dentist. Research suggests that the use of a laser can be beneficial in sealing the wound, however, most agree it's the skill of the provider rather than the tool they use that makes the release successful. The surgery is minor and although stitches are uncommon there is a risk of bleeding and oral aversions, particularly in older babies who may be more aware of the procedure. Each individual provider has their own set of after-care instructions in relation to pain relief and stretching the wound to retain mobility. Personally, we didn't use any pain relief for our second child and after a few days he was very relaxed when we did 3-6 hourly stretches during each breast or finger feed.

**Azure Rigney is tandem breastfeeding 2yr old Mia and 1mo 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 7 years, almost as long as she's been with her hubby, Dan!**

### HELPFUL NAMES AND LINKS

DR JACK NEWMAN, paediatrician and director of the Newman Breastfeeding clinic in Toronto, discusses supply lines for finger feeding - <http://ibconline.ca/not-latching/>

DR BOBBI GHAHERI provides a thorough explanation of how lip ties

negatively affect breastfeeding - <http://www.drghaheri.com/blog/2014/3/6/how-does-an-upper-lip-tie-affect-breastfeeding>

PINKY MCKAY (IBCLC) talks about the links of tongue-ties with reflux and sleep-evader babies - <http://www.beautifulbreastfeeding.com/crying-baby-sleepless-nights-could-your-baby-have-reflux/>

MEG NAGLE (IBCLC, the milk meg) has a good video showing the mechanics of breastfeeding - <https://themilkmeg.com/video-babys-tongue-moves-breastfeeding/>

NORMA RITTER (IBCLC, RLC) gives a great overview including links to increased cavities and other long term implications - <https://breastfeedingusa.org/content/article/tell-me-about-tongue-ties>



# The birth of Paige Evelyn

by Karina Morrow

Photos courtesy of Emma White

**M**y third pregnancy was both my easiest and hardest. The first four months were tough with morning sickness and all that comes with those first months of pregnancy. I worked almost full time this pregnancy unlike my previous two which were seven and eight and a half years previous; I was that much older too. In turn however, I was healthier and fitter, which was a blessing. I exercised often and really listened to my body, resting when needed.

In the last weeks of my pregnancy I really accepted and prepared mentally and emotionally for our baby to arrive when they were ready, whether it be prior to our guess date or closer or beyond forty two weeks. I embraced all the practice surges and really let go of the societal pressures of being 'overdue'.

On the morning of the 24th of March, 2016 (I was 40+5 weeks according to dates), it was a beautiful, sunny Thursday and I was completely oblivious that it was the day we would meet our sweet baby. My partner went off to work, I got my two big boys off to school and met a friend for pancakes and quince green tea. It was during breakfast that I had some quite strong Braxton Hicks but brushed them off when my friend asked if I was okay; I was perfectly fine and completely unaware. I followed breakfast with a big food shop in preparation for the Easter long weekend and for the possible arrival of our baby sometime in the next week or so; I didn't want to be caught short with no food in the house for either event!

I spent the rest of the afternoon resting until

I picked my boys up from school, prepared dinner and then lay down to rest some more. I was still having frequent practice surges and I was feeling particularly tired. Around 5:30pm I got up to finish preparing dinner and noticed a change in my surges. They began coming more frequently and with a slight edge that felt different. I knew my partner was on his way home from work, and that traffic was relentless due to the long weekend starting the following day, so I didn't bother him. However, I sent a few messages back and forth with my best friend who was also my student midwife.

I was breathing and swaying through the surges and enjoying the breaks in between while finishing cooking dinner and highly doubting it was labour. My partner arrived home from work about 6:30pm



and I informed him that I thought maybe something was happening. In true first dad fashion his eyes were the size of dinner plates and a cider was skulled from the fridge all while he rushed to finish pumping up and begin filling the pool! Once I had calmed him, and said there was no rush and we would see how it played out, we ate dinner with the boys. He couldn't believe I was eating dinner – mate, there was no way I was missing out on slow cooked corned beef and veggies with white sauce, I was starving! I sat at the table, bouncing gently on my yoga ball.

After dinner I called my mum to fill her in as she was to be the boys' support person. I also called the midwifery group practice. My midwife was unable to come for the birth as she had injured herself and didn't want to take the risk, but I had two lovely midwives arrive at about 8pm and 8:30pm, as well as my other best friend to take photos. My mum arrived somewhere in there too.

Surges were still the same frequency but slightly increasing in intensity, though I was STILL doubting labour as I was getting a break in between and able to chat, smile

and laugh. This labour felt so different to my two previous labours which were fast and furious from the get-go. I got in the birth pool at about 9pm which felt amazing. I used water (and had a water birth) for my first babe so it felt comfortable and right. My partner was an amazing support and having my two very best friends there was amazing and calming!

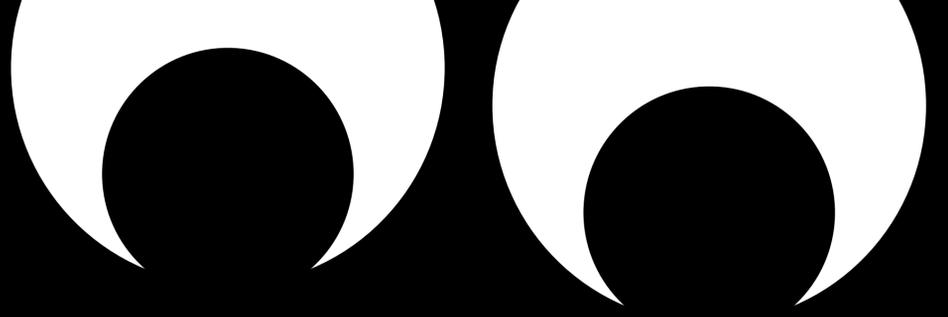
I still doubted whether I was in labour. After she checked baby's heart rate, one of the midwives suggested a little nipple stimulation, which I hadn't considered or had just forgotten about. I opted to try a few drops of Clary sage on a washer to inhale first. After this, the surges continued at the same frequency but were increasing in intensity. I felt my waters go at about 10:20pm; it was intense, crazy and out of this world after that! I felt every inch of her coming down as my body started involuntarily pushing. I held my hand over my clitoris to apply some counter pressure and relief (this felt amazing) while breathing and guiding babe's head into my hand. Her anterior shoulder was a little sticky, which the midwife helped to remove (I roared through as this was so intense and painful),

and I then pushed a little more and brought her up onto my chest. It was the most amazing, incredible experience ever. She was covered in the most beautiful, snowy vernix ever. As I met my baby for the first time Bob Carlisle's 'Butterfly Kisses' began playing on my playlist, and we discovered we had a daughter and our boys a sister.

This was by far my most empowering birth. It was nothing short of perfect and amazing. I am still in awe of my body's strength and ability.

We welcomed Paige Evelyn into our hearts and our home on the 24th of March, 2016 at 10:53pm weighing 9lb 9oz (4360g).

**Karina (30)** is a mother of three and a registered nurse. She is mother to two sons and a daughter: Izaak (11) and Kyan (10), who were both full term pregnancies birthed in a hospital birth centre, and Paige (20 months), born at home. Karina is a homebirth advocate and is passionate about breastfeeding and birth in general.



# HOMEBIRTH IN THE *Media*

WESTMEAD  
WELCOMES  
PRIVATE  
MIDWIVES  
The Pulse

HOMEBIRTH  
THE POWER  
OF ONE  
Midwifery  
Today

STERLING K.  
BROWN'S HOME  
BIRTH EXPERIENCE  
INSPIRED THAT  
EMOTIONAL  
'THIS IS US' SCENE  
Huffington Post

WILL JOY-  
ANNA DUGGAR  
GIVE BIRTH ON  
'COUNTING ON'?  
HERE'S WHY SHE  
MIGHT  
Romper

MUMS ON  
HOME BIRTHS:  
'THERE WERE  
FIVE MIDWIVES  
IN OUR TINY  
LIVING ROOM'  
Marie Claire

WANT A HOME  
BIRTH LIKE KATE?  
THESE ARE THE  
ADVANTAGES  
AND  
DISADVANTAGES  
Xpose

MOVE  
TO MORE  
MIDWIFE-  
LED  
MATERNITY  
SERVICES  
BBC Scotland

ACT HOME  
BIRTH TRIAL  
SEES BELOW-  
EXPECTATION  
BIRTHS AS ONLY  
SIX BABIES  
BORN  
Canberra Times

MIDWIVES  
DEBATE BILL THAT  
COULD REGULATE  
HOME BIRTHS  
AROUND THE  
STATE  
Boston Globe

WHY HAVE  
THE NUMBER  
OF HOME  
BIRTHS  
DROPPED?  
Huffington  
Post

SPEAKING THE  
UNSPEAKABLE:  
WHY I'M NOT  
CELEBRATING  
HOMEBIRTH  
Katherine  
Eden

# My Belly, My Guru

by Erica Nettle-Chik

No I'm not pregnant  
 This is the home of my babies.  
 The cauldron in which they grew  
 The round curve that speaks of my visits  
 between the realms to grow and collect my  
 children.  
 Some of them made it earthside. Some did not.  
 This belly that moves when I walk speaks of  
 ecstasy and pain.  
 It is my guru. Teaching me to love beyond my  
 culturalisation.  
 Asking me to look beyond the praise I was  
 raised with.  
 The idolisation of the 'perfect body.' I mean,  
 what even is that??  
 It speaks of motherhood.  
 The stage in which our culture would prefer I  
 not have visual signs of.  
 A culture that would congratulate me feverishly  
 if I lost my belly quickly after giving birth so that  
 I went back to how I was.  
 That I looked more like the maiden I was.  
 And I've done this.  
 A few times.  
 And this time I didn't.  
 I sat with her.  
 This soft jelly-like, glorious tummy.  
 I sat with the hate I felt.  
 I listened to the horrific words that went  
 through my thoughts. I really listened. Wow!  
 They were mean. Really mean.  
 Confusing at times because I can never recall  
 thinking these cruel thoughts about other  
 women.  
 I sat with them noticing that they actually were  
 not my thoughts but what I was taught to think  
 by culture.  
 And slowly. very slowly, they got quieter.  
 As I reminded myself of the powerful, beautiful  
 being I am. That I am a creator. That life has  
 formed within me. That this roundness was the

place where the feminine resides.  
 That being a mother was an absolute gift.  
 Suddenly those words, thoughts and feels lost  
 their sting.  
 I saw them for what they were. Brainwashing by  
 a culture that makes billions of dollars off me  
 wanting to be a maiden my whole life. Period!  
 Why should I want to hide my place of glory?  
 Why would the man I love not revere the womb  
 in which his child came from?  
 Unless he were under that same delusion. It's  
 been a journey of me being really honest with  
 myself. An experiment of sorts. It's been about  
 embracing the calling of the 'mother' for me.  
 About embracing change and difference. That  
 throughout my journey in life I will look different  
 a million times. The seasons and cycles of life  
 flow through me. I am them and they are me.  
 Sometimes those mean thoughts come back  
 and I feel that sting. I love them away.  
 Motherhood is a sacred journey and she should  
 never be asked to hide herself.  
 May she express herself how she will through  
 me and may I remember to give her the  
 reverence she deserves.

*Erica is a mother of four and the founder of Luminous Youth ([www.luminousyouth.com](http://www.luminousyouth.com)), a youth and parenting experiential learning space operating online and locally in the Byron Shire. She is a doula, a writer, a children's-rights activist, a truth seeker and an advocate for conscious parenting and parenting as a spiritual journey. She home-schools her children and is passionate about natural and immersive learning experiences. Deeply interested in human development, play, learning and plant consciousness, she is dedicated to highlighting the powerful role parents play in the future of ecological sustainability.*

# The birth of Savannah Nayeli

by Amy Basha

Photos courtesy of Janine O'Brien

I always knew I wanted a natural birth, with as little intervention as possible, and preferably at home. My sister was born at home, in a birthing pool, with friends playing guitar and singing alongside low lit candles. This was in 1986, at the height of the New Age movement in California. I was born nine years earlier in a clinical hospital birth, with forceps and drugs included, and immediately put onto formula. This was not the birth experience I wanted for my own, future baby.

Growing up in California, I saw several friends have home births and I found the thought of giving birth at home empowering and liberating. It made so much sense to me to have low lights, soft voices and love for this sacred experience of bringing my baby earthside. When I finally became pregnant I began immediately searching for a homebirth midwife with a twist. I decided on a private midwife that could attend a hospital birth. Due to fibroid tumours and my age (39) it was recommended that I have a hospital birth. My dream of home birth was disappearing. However, because of my choice to have a private midwife, I knew I could labour at home in the birthing pool like I'd seen so many of my friends do and

could go to the hospital at the last minute to give birth to the baby. Janine O'Brien, my midwife, offered great flexibility in that she could do home visits throughout the pregnancy and come with me to the hospital to give birth. It was very reassuring to have Janine show up with her bright, friendly smile, guide me throughout the birth experience in the comfortable space of my home and be my advocate for natural birth in a hospital setting. I researched tirelessly to find a hospital that was woman- and baby-friendly. Being from the States, I had heard so many horror stories of mothers being mistreated by hospital staff. I'm not sure my Australian husband, Charles, understood my insistence at finding the right place to give birth but he went along with me. I decided on Randwick Royal Hospital for Women, which has a high ranking for being pro natural birth and breastfeeding with midwife-centred care. My vision and my plan were to labour at home calmly and in the birthing tub and go to the hospital as late as possible to give birth. As we know, sometimes the things we plan the most don't turn out the way we envisioned. As my due date approached and then passed, I was no closer to giving birth. I knew this was normal for a first time birth

and began drinking raspberry leaf tea, walking, dancing and working to stimulate the baby to come on out. My little darling, Savannah Nayeli, must have felt very safe and comfortable on the inside because as I passed 41 weeks we were no closer to her coming out. At this point, all the talk was about inducing which I desperately wanted to avoid. I knew that if I had an intervention like that it could lead to a cascade of other interventions, potentially leading to a c-section which would have devastated me. The most important thing was for my daughter to go through the birth canal as nature intended and pick up all those wonderful microbes to seed her gut bacteria.

At 41 weeks and three days my water partially broke and I had light contractions. At this point they wanted to book me into the hospital for an immediate induction because once my water broke and I didn't go into full labour I was at risk for infection. Janine was my advocate at this time because I did not want to be induced and really wanted to go for natural labour. I insisted on waiting for 48 hours, praying to go into natural labour so I could avoid the induction.

It was not to be; I continued to have light contractions but did not go into full labour.





So, at 41 weeks and 5 days, I was booked in for my induction so that I could meet my daughter Savannah Nayeli earthside. It was a difficult day for me; I had wanted to be calm, present and grounded. Instead, I felt like a bundle of nerves, full of anxiety and dreading the induction. I googled positive induction stories and really tried to have a positive outlook, but was not exactly feeling that way.

I had a large birthing room with a medicine ball, and they had even set up a birthing pool for me, which I was hopeful to try out. I put my positive birthing visualisations and Calm Birth quotes up, and had my Himalayan salt lamp there. I was trying to create a relaxed home environment as much as possible.

The midwives at the Randwick were wonderful and treated me with kindness and respect. Janine was a wonderful advocate and was there from the moment I was induced through to the birth. I really felt her and Charles' support and strength by my side and was so happy I had a private midwife to support me through the hospital birth experience. At the hospital you are left alone quite often and having Janine there to explain and guide Charles and I was a godsend.

Once I was induced the rushes were pretty intense. For about seven hours I endured what I considered to be very painful rushes. The only way I felt any relief was on all fours. I decided to try the birthing pool and at this point the heat from the water just intensified the pain and I began vomiting. I looked at Charles and said, "I think I need an epidural". The pain from the induced labour was more than I could take at this point.

I had the feeling that I could not endure more of these intense contractions and be able to push her out. My biggest fear was ending up in a c-section, so I decided to have an epidural because I was not dilating.

I had a mobile epidural so it was good that I could change positions.

Within an hour of having the epidural I dilated from 2 centimetres to 9 centimetres. As Janine said, sometimes the body needs to be able to relax and then the birth can start happening. Unfortunately, while I was receiving the epidural the anesthesiologist nicked my spine and I received a postdural puncture which left me with a blinding headache after the birth. During the birth I did not feel the blinding headache, but the epidural did not fully work. So at times I had relief from the pain and at other times I fully felt the contractions.

At one point I had uncontrollable shaking from the drugs from the epidural. It was a very distressing feeling. I remembered I had set up a playlist for the labour and we decided to play the music. James Taylor's soulful crooning pulled me out of the shaking and, as long as I was singing, the shaking subsided. Janine, Charles and Jane Palmer, the second midwife who came to assist Janine, all sang along with me to James Taylor and Janis Joplin's "Me and Bobby McGee." Singing was such a powerful way to ground myself in my body and be present for Savannah and the birthing that was soon to come.

I had been in labour for about 11 hours and of course Savannah was being closely monitored for fetal distress. The doctors came in and I heard through a haze if I did not give birth within the next hour I would be wheeled in for a c-section. At this point all the energy work and visualisations I'd done in the past came into play. I visualised my daughter coming out of the birth canal with ease and effortlessness. I kept this image strongly in my mind and felt I was communicating with her.

Even though I had had the epidural, at this point it was not working and I felt the ring of fire around my perineum. It was an intense, powerful feeling; I just kept

focusing on pushing her out, that my body knew what to do and she would come out with ease and effortlessness. And she did! Savannah Nayeli greeted the world at 9:04 pm weighing 4.3 kilos on December 6th, 2016. She was put on top of me for immediate skin to skin bonding and she latched right away. She was so alert and so aware and I was so happy she was with Charles and I and I was able to birth her myself. I was also amazed that the hospital let me birth and labour for so long. If I'd been at a private hospital I was almost sure they would have insisted on a c-section, which was why I chose Randwick.

I struggled with my birth story and sharing it here on the Homebirth forum because I did not have the perfect homebirth that I had wanted for so many years. I also believe there is power and strength in sharing our birth stories and our truth here, in whatever form they come to be. It isn't the perfect homebirth story, but it is a true, raw story of how my beautiful daughter, Savannah Nayeli, came to be with me. I have enjoyed every moment with my daughter since she was born. It has been an incredible blessing to have her with us every step of the way. We are so in love with Savannah Nayeli and the magical journey we've been on since her birth.

**Amy is originally from the States and has been in Sydney for the last eight years with her Australian husband, Charles. Amy is a writer, dancer and world traveller who is a passionate believer in natural childbirth, organic foods, breastfeeding to term and spending time with her beloved Savannah Nayeli.**

Follow her writing here: <https://www.weekendnotes.com/profile/152327/>  
Go here to see Amy dancing samba to bring on labour at 41 weeks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22Zk0sQjw9U&t=146s>

# The birth of Michaela Athena Mormanis

by Stephanie Mormanis

Photos courtesy of Jo Hunter, Nadine Fragosa, and Jacqui Wood

I cannot write this birth story without mentioning my son's birth, as that is the reason many of our decisions were made. My son's birth was an emergency caesarean almost two and a half years ago, although a natural hospital birth was what I was aiming for and had no reason to believe I would not achieve. I was certain that this birth would be a completely different experience for me, baby and George (hubby). For this reason, I knew I didn't want to go through a hospital setting. I had read countless stories of women being supported in having a VBAC up until a certain point in the pregnancy, where midwives and obstetricians would begin suggesting, scaring and pushing women into another caesarean; this was not going to be me. I was part of some VBAC groups on Facebook and, after reading about a HBAC, knew that this was something I wanted. I also knew that my son's birth was the anomaly, and birthing naturally was something I could definitely do and was made to do; this, I never questioned. After finding an incredible midwife (Jo Hunter) and doula (Nadine Fragosa), we were on the right path to achieving a completely natural and beautiful homebirth. As my son was born 11 days past his due date I was certain that this next baby would also be 'late'. How wrong was I?! Just over a week before baby was due, at about 1:30am, I began having mild and irregular contractions. These went on for a couple of hours, not allowing me to sleep, so I decided to message Jo at 3:30am. She said that I should try to get some rest as my body was preparing for the birth of my baby. And yes, she messaged me back immediately at 3:30am. I was excited but

tired. As Jo suggested, I knew rest was what I needed, so I did my best to get as much sleep as possible. I was fortunate that I had an appointment with both Jo and Nadine the following morning, making me feel very comfortable that I would get a chance to speak with them both so they could gauge where I was at. I didn't know if I should be active, to try and initiate labour, or to rest; rest prevailed. George stayed home from work and we played with our two and a half year old son. In the afternoon, Mr two and a half went to his grandparents' house as he usually does on a Thursday afternoon, and it was at this point that my surges became stronger and more frequent.

As with my son's birth, I was feeling back pain. My first labour was on my back as bub was posterior and, although this baby was in a good position, I still had the back pain. At about 5pm, I hopped into our bath to get some relief. Between surges George and I watched *An Idiot Abroad* on the laptop. Watching *An Idiot Abroad* and laughing was great, but I needed to focus during each surge and the laughter caused some discomfort, so George would rush in, switch it off and massage my back. Between surges, George continued to prepare our birth space as we were not anticipating an early arrival. After speaking with Jo, she recommended not staying in the bath for longer than a couple of hours; at 7pm I hopped out. At this point, my surges immediately went from every 10ish minutes to every 3ish minutes. George called Jo after about 40 minutes of this and it was decided that she should call the second midwife (Jacqui Wood) and Nadine so they could all be on their way. Since getting out of the bath, I was using a heat pack on my

front and occasionally lower back, a tens machine and breathing deeply through each surge.

By 9pm, everyone had arrived and all was progressing well. However, by about 10pm my surges were slowing down. Jo suggested George and I get some rest, but the pain in my lower back made it difficult for me to lie down. I felt as though I was constipated and really needed to use the bathroom. Although I tried numerous times, there was nothing. By midnight, the surges all but completely stopped and I agreed to having a VE to see where I was at. Initially I couldn't lay on the bed due to the pain, and jumped up immediately. Everyone was so patient as I took quite a while to work up the courage to lay down for a second time. During this time, I recall someone saying something about the back pain being psychological from my son's birth. I knew I couldn't let this get the better of me; mentally, I just knew I had to get through it. Once I finally worked up the courage to lie back down there was no pain at all; absolutely none. Jo was being as gentle and quick as she could as she thought I may still have the pain, but I recall thinking, 'I could probably nap now...there's no discomfort at all.' It was incredible! Most definitely mind over matter. Jo then told me I was 6cm dilated; this was huge! With my son's birth, I only reached 5cm before a caesarean was called.

Jo then suggested George and I walk, so we did! We walked for two hours around the neighbourhood, in the freezing cold, in the middle of the night. We looked like hobos; we were both in our Ugg boots, me in my pyjamas and him in his tracksuit pants and jumper, with beanies and a blanket over



the top of it all. We walked up hills through surges, very slowly, hand in hand; most of the time with both of our eyes closed. I really enjoyed this time (I can't say the same for an exhausted George) as we chatted about baby names, the future, the progress of the labour and how lucky we were to have the support team we did. Every now and again one of us would veer off the path and knock into something (a wall or a tree) after which the other would pull them back on the path. A few times I stepped off the path and into the grass area which was slightly lower than the path. It was almost as if this drop in my footing helped nudge bub a little lower each time.

After one big lap of our neighbourhood we popped back home, Nadine warmed up the heat pack which she managed to tuck absolutely perfectly into my 'labour' undies, and filled up the water bottle. Much to George's dislike, we headed back out. I was certain I was going to follow Jo's advice which was, "Come back once you're ready to push or your waters have broken" (a joke, but I was determined it was going to happen). I knew, just knew that my waters would break during the final surge on the way home; they did. After a second hour of walking, and on the corner of our street, I felt a big rush of water running down my legs. I was so excited! I sent George running into the house to let everyone know.

My birth team helped me up the stairs and continued to fill the birth pool. I was kneeling, leaning on the side of the bed, and I could hear a comedy act happening behind me: "This pool is huge; It's going to take a while to fill up", "What's the temperature?", "It's only 35 degrees." A body part goes in the water: "Ouch. This is hot!", "Give me that duck! It's not 35 degrees, it's 45 degrees." I said, "I don't care if it's hot, can I get in?" Someone responded, "You're not getting into 45 degree water." I thought, 'Surely 45 degrees isn't that hot.' (Though now I'm glad I didn't get in at 45 degrees!). Finally, the temperature was perfect and in I went. Initially, I was slightly uncomfortable in the water and thought to myself, 'Wow...I always thought I'd love the water, but I may not give birth in the water.' However, a surge later, I was thoroughly enjoying the water and knew that this was where I would birth my baby.

I've always loved the water: the beach, a pool, scuba diving, snorkelling, springboard diving, wake boarding and anything that involved water, I had done it all. It relaxed me so much. In the case of birthing a baby, it relaxed me a little too much! My surges slowed right down, so Jo suggested hopping out of the pool and sitting on the loo as it was a good position to be in. Before I got out Jo suggested feeling to see if I could touch bub's head; I could. It was as deep as the second knuckle on my finger! This was an incredible feeling; so soft and squishy and I could feel so much hair. Wow! So with a great deal of help from George and Nadine I hopped out of the pool for a couple of surges, at which point the surges sped up again, and then I hopped back in. Again, the surges slowed down, but this time, bub's head was only about one cm or so from coming out. Again, this was an

incredible sensation! Jo suggested I stand up in the pool for a couple of surges and she had a look at where bub was. Soon enough, she told me to get back in and, when I was ready, to begin to push. I loved that I had complete trust in everything both Jo and Jacqui were advising. Not once did I feel uncertain or hesitant to take on their words as we had developed such a good relationship and I knew their knowledge and experience was just what I needed. Nadine was incredible through all of this; between each surge she held a glass of water with a straw to my mouth for a drink and wiped my head down with a cool, damp cloth. As ridiculous as this sounds, the straw was the perfect distance and angle from my face that I didn't need to move my neck. As soon as I began to have a surge, everything came off so I could focus. This refreshing break between surges gave me the energy I needed to continue.

For the next two hours the burning sensation I was feeling through each surge was unlike anything I had felt before. Thankfully, I knew that this meant bub was close which kept me focussed. During each surge Jo and Jacqui kept asking if I had more in me, but I just didn't, or didn't think I did. At one point, I thought I heard a very slight sigh from Jo. I thought to myself, 'She's disappointed. Baby must be close. If she thinks I can do this, I can do this. I'm going to do this!' With that thought the next surge was close to my last. This time, when she asked if I had another push in me, I did, again, and again, until bub's head came out. It was the most incredible sensation in the world! And so incredible that the burning completely dissipated after each surge. Once the head was out, I looked down to try and see baby, but my pregnant belly was in the way. It was so strange to think that I was lying there, with a head in the water, and the body still inside of me. That still baffles me; just wow! With one more surge I felt bub turn to get into position (again, another amazing sensation) and out popped the rest of her body at 4.45am. My baby had arrived!

I looked down and saw Jo's hand dive down to get baby. The umbilical cord was quite short and wrapped around bub's neck, so Jo quickly gave her a few spins in the water before moving her up to my chest. I looked down and thought, 'We have another boy!' but something wasn't quite right. It took me a while before I figured out that I had been looking at the umbilical cord, and we actually had a little baby girl! I was so shocked yet thrilled as I was so certain we would be having a second son. Due to the short cord, I decided to get out of the pool as I didn't want the cord cut yet. With everyone's help bub and I got out of the pool and lay on our bed. I held bub, fed her and had a good opportunity to bond with her before George cut the cord a good 1.5 hours after she was born.

Jo then asked if she could massage my legs. I thought, 'Oh, how lovely of her' and of course agreed. Little did I know she was doing acupuncture to bring the placenta out. During this time, she was monitoring my blood loss, of which there was little; I believe 100ml overall. She then suggested I sit on the toilet as this position can often bring out the placenta and, sure enough,

it did. While looking at photos of the birth with her she popped out of the bathroom for a moment and out it popped, just like bub's body, it was such a similar sensation. It was so lovely to spend a few hours lying in bed with George, Jo and Nadine there, chatting, eating soup which Nadine prepared for us (I now feel so guilty not suggesting they make themselves breakfast! It was now about 7am) and just enjoying these moments.

This is a life experience I will never forget and am so grateful to have experienced. I had the most incredible support team: George, Jo, Nadine and Jacqui were absolutely perfect and I couldn't have wished for anything more.

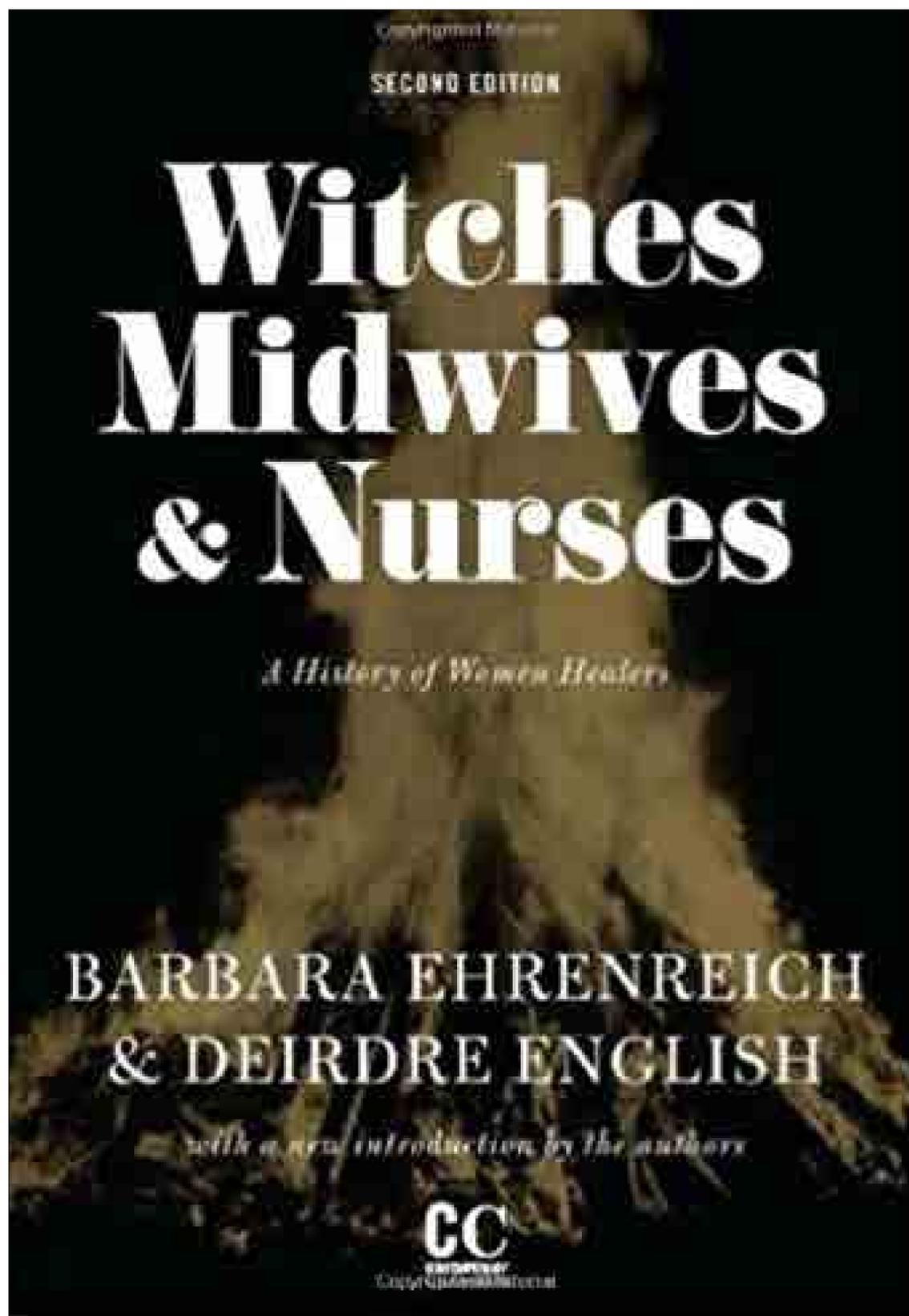
**Stephanie is wife to George and mum to two children, Connor (2.5) and Michaela (11 weeks) and lives in Sydney's East. She is currently taking a break from high school music teaching while she cares for her children and does some casual piano teaching from home. Since experiencing two completely different births (emergency caesarean and homebirth), she has become very passionate about homebirth and wants to shout her birth experience from the rooftops.**



# Book Review

Witches, Midwives, and Nurses

by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English



A BOOK REVIEW BY JENNA RICHARDS  
CLEC, CBS(LER)

Witches, Midwives, and Nurses (WMN) is a feminist critique of the fall and abuse of women in natural and holistic caregiver roles. This degradation occurred at the hands of the male driven patriarchal system which has now become known as our current healthcare system. The process by which our healthcare system was developed speaks volumes about why our current system, under the guise of policy, is violent and dismissive towards families and the women it serves today. The original work was written in the 1970s and has since been translated into multiple languages. The book is referred to as an 'underground best-seller' and, while the second edition includes some corrections, the existing text is still the powerhouse of a call to action it was back then.

This is a book that is focused on the corruption of the medical establishment and its historic roots in the demonising of women healers. It goes into detail about how the killing of women by the church and state during the witch trials was done with the collaboration of male medical professionals, to control and exterminate women in leading healing roles. This was done with aggressively, with the number murdered falling in the range of 50,000 to 100,000. This is just a fraction of those accused (and likely abused) to suppress those women who were seen as competition to the developing, male-dominated healthcare system.

While women healers were using their years of training, handed down from one traditional healer to the next, the male 'doctors' were using families and women as

experiments, often with damaging and horrific outcomes. As a way to forever tarnish the work our grandmothers did attending births and saving lives, the College of Physicians started a campaign of propaganda that slandered the healers and midwives. In the late 1500s, the College of Physicians claimed the right to regulate medical practice in London to stop 'lay practitioners' from practicing. Wise women were known in communities to practice safely compared to their male counterparts and they were often the only resource for the poor communities. They were eventually restricted to working in only 'womanly' businesses; before long, that was taken away as well. There is no happy ending to this book. In fact, all you need to do is read today's newspaper or search online to read countless stories from families about the abuse that they have experienced at the hands of our hospital dominated childbirth system. Furthermore, our midwives are still living through a witch hunt today. Do not read this amazing text if you want to sit on your butt and enjoy a nice cup of tea. Read this book before you join the next protest to save our midwives or read a chapter before you go to your weekly knitting circle and spread some chaos. Absolutely buy this book for every woman working in birth work as a May Day gift; this book isn't in our required text for school, but it should be. Now go find your local midwife or doula, give them a hug and help them plan their next rally or act of rebellion; I will see you there.

**Jenna Richards is a radical birth worker and breastfeeding support with a focus on education, nutrition and community building. She teaches childbirth education to homebirthing families and works to support her community midwives and new families from all communities. She is originally from Ontario, Canada and is now living in Perth while she finishes her degree in Lactation Consulting and raises her two girls. She spends her spare time swimming in the ocean and working in the kitchen to make healing food and elixirs for her birthing and breastfeeding families.**

## BOOK EXCERPT

".... If anyone, then, deserved a legal monopoly on obstetrical care, it was the midwives, not the MD's. But the doctors had power, the midwives didn't. Under intense pressure from the medical profession, state after state passed laws outlawing midwifery and restricting the practice of obstetrics to doctors. For poor and working-class women, this actually meant worse – or no – obstetrical care. (For instance, a study of infant mortality rates in Washington showed an increase in infant mortality in the years immediately following the passage of the law forbidding midwifery.) For the new, male medical profession, the ban on midwives meant one less source of competition. Women had been routed from their last foothold as independent practitioners." [Page 87, *Witches, Nurses, and Midwives*]



# The birth of *Revvin*

by Eryn Barlow

Photos courtesy of Taylor Russell

**W**e had decided on a home birth for lots of personal reasons. We weren't exactly sure what to expect, but we were hoping for a more positive experience than what we'd had previously. Through this decision, I learned so much about the entire process of birth and also what options are available to families and birthing mothers. I'd had two children in hospital already and, I'm ashamed to say, I still knew nothing about birth or the difference between natural and hospital birth; I didn't even know what Syntocinon was. I learned more than I could ever have imagined and it all started right there with the choice to birth away from hospital. It was an extremely empowering experience from beginning to end and my midwife was incredible. When we finally went into labour we were at 42 weeks and one day gestation! I was so tired and had been doing everything short of castor oil to try and bring on labour. When it came down to it though, we just had to be patient. We had done as much preparation as possible: I had been practicing breathing and hypnobirthing techniques, working on visualisations, and I had my space all prepared. I had made myself birthing flags with affirmations on them, we had blessed candles, we had incense, we had Clary sage oil, we had postpartum herbal soaks made, we had baskets full of towels and we had our birth ball. We were all ready to go, but our baby was determined to make a late entrance. It felt like he was never going to be born and I had to keep reminding myself that this baby was coming out one way or another! On 18th September, 2017, he did! After having surges between 10 and 30 minutes apart all of the previous day, we

knew things were finally starting when by 5am I couldn't sleep through the surges anymore. I had no idea how long labour was going to take to build, so I started making a pancake breakfast for my family, figuring it was best to keep busy with normal tasks. By the time my eldest was up at 9am my surges were 4.5 minutes apart and lasting up to a minute each, so we called our midwife. She listened to my breathing and timed my surges and after a few minutes she asked us how we would feel if she didn't make it! At that point I thought maybe we should have called her earlier! I just hadn't felt that the surges were strong enough! Compared to my previous births these surges were only very mild; I was able to do all my normal activities through them with no issues. I called our birth support, Taylor, and let her know that she could come over whenever she was ready; she came straight away. While we were waiting for everyone to arrive, I cooked my eldest child pancakes in between surges which were starting to get stronger. Occasionally I would look at my birth flags and think about my affirmations, reminding myself to do my deep, yogic breaths. I thought about Ina May Gaskin's words about thinking of the surges as a really interesting sensation that required all of my attention (this really helped). Most of all, I kept thinking the affirmation, 'I surrender my will to my body and my baby,' and it helped me observe my labour more and to really let it start to build. We had our music and our yoga ball and we all sat together in our birth space and laboured pretty quietly. The music, mostly "Fever Ray", "Clannad" and "Deep Forest", created a loving and calm atmosphere. It was very chilled with some

beautiful moments of connection with my partner and I, and also with Taylor. It was so wonderful having her with us; she put everyone at ease and was so helpful to everyone, joking and laughing and keeping the mood light. Once my surges were three minutes apart my eldest, who had previously wanted to be at the birth, felt that she didn't want to be there anymore and went to my parents' house. I was surprised, as things hadn't gotten that intense yet, but I respected her decision and am glad she decided to follow her instincts and didn't force herself to stay when she wasn't comfortable. I went to have a shower when my surges were two minutes apart. Our midwife Gail arrived just as I was getting in and, by the time I was finished, my surges were a minute apart. I have no idea how long I was in the shower for but I knew things were now moving pretty quickly so I did my hair in between surges and put on my dress. When I came out to our birth space everything was ready and waiting; Gail had set up a birth mat and a placenta bowl and our couch covers were on, being all bright and cheerful. I had completely lost track of time by this point but Gail our midwife had arrived around 11:30am I think. I sat back on my yoga ball and rocked and breathed my way through the surges. As they were building they became so intense I couldn't help but vocalise, despite my decision to internalise and focus my energies into my surges. Gail encouraged me to vocalise if it was helping me through and by the time my surges were on top of each other Gail and I were "ohmm"ing together loudly and in synchronised vibration. The vibrations were



coursing through me with each surge and their power was so overwhelming that it felt like that was all there was in the world - just Gail and I and the building power of my labour.

Eventually I felt I needed to change positions, so I had my partner Tarragon sit in an armchair and I knelt in front of him with my head in his lap. I instantly felt my labour take on a new quality; deeper and stronger. After three or four more powerful surges my waters burst. About five minutes later I felt our baby begin to descend, and fast! I looked to Tarragon and simply said, "He is coming. I can feel him." Taylor took his place in the armchair and Tarragon took his position to deliver.

As the power of transition took over the entire world, all of my preparation flew out the window and suddenly I had a front row seat at this immensely powerful, vibrant display. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply and as I exhaled the sound that came out of me was so loud and like song; high in pitch and melodious singing, resonating through every fibre of my being. I was completely out of control of myself. I breathed in again and the same happened. Gail's voice came floating through the air to my ears and she asked me to pull my

energy in. So, I gathered everything I could and focused it down into my uterus. Our baby quickly came down and my body began to push involuntarily: once, twice, three times. I could feel my baby's head as he moved down the birth canal and I could feel him start to crown.

At this point I was so engrossed in the experience I hardly remember Gail's words. She wanted me to slow the process down to give his shoulders time to turn and gently breathe him out. I began to try and control my breathing but my body was pushing him out despite me. I puffed gently to slow his descent but a final surge from my body simply pushed him out in one last wave and he came flying and crying into the world at exactly 2:30pm. He was 4.51 kg and 53 cm. His name is Ronin.

We delayed tying and cutting his cord for as long as we could but his cord was so short I could barely get him to my chest and there was too much traction. So as soon as it stopped pulsing we cut the cord, despite me originally wanting to birth the placenta first. I felt pretty disappointed that it happened that way because delayed clamping until after the birth of the placenta was one of the central parts of my birth plan, along with extended skin to skin,

doppler only monitoring and no cervical checks. All of our other birth wishes were made reality though and it was no one's fault that the cord was so short. Gail then made us some beautiful tree of life placenta prints and my son and I got to have hours of skin to skin contact. Our home birth was a deeply spiritual and empowering experience for our whole family. Being able to have that presence and control, and the privacy of our own home, all contributed to what was one of the best experiences of my life.

**My name is Eryn and I am a 30 year old mother of three. I live in Armidale in Northern NSW. I'm a pastry chef and Barista by trade and have more hobbies than are probably healthy for someone with so much to do! I'm training to be a doula at the moment and plan to go into midwifery in the future. I really value connection and family and have recently started a sister circle here in my town. Midwife Gail Baker's business is 'Bun in the Oven Homebirth Service' and her website is <https://au.linkedin.com/in/gail-baker-3a836a40>**



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# 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  
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# YOUR BIRTH, YOUR WAY

## *No Matter What*



Catherine Bell

**B**everley's birth was a positive homebirth caesarean. It was positive because it was her story; it was her story because she planned it that way.

Beverley's primary pathway was a water birth at home. She had a wonderful, dedicated midwife and was aware of her risk factors. These risk factors would make it very difficult, potentially impossible, to have a private midwife and would certainly exclude her from a public homebirth program (if one were even available!). Beverley was a VBAC and 'geriatric'.

Her choice to homebirth was simple: she knew it was safe; she knew she was well supported. Her midwife was experienced and respectful, she knew the risks and the benefits and she knew where she was most comfortable. Her previous labour had been traumatic, ending in an emergency caesarean, and she did not want to repeat that experience. Accordingly, this experience very much factored into her decision making process. She knew about the cascade of intervention and she knew the potential long term risks to her baby.

She also knew enough to make a contingency pathway.

Her contingency pathway was equally as informed and very much on her terms. If she were to transfer to hospital, it would be for an after labour, non-emergency caesarean. Michel Odent describes this as the caesarean that takes place before things get urgent; the baby is fine and the mother is fine, but labour is progressing very slowly or not at all. There is time to prepare, time to 'walk the baby out', time for skin to skin and possibly even a maternal assisted caesarean; the decision is made by the mother. The 'test' leading up to this decision, according to Odent, is to spend two uninterrupted, unhindered hours in a warm pool. The room should be warm and dimly lit or dark, the mother should feel safe, unobserved and free to move, sleep, rest and moan...to go inward, into 'The Zone'.

If after two hours no change has happened, the statistics tell us that the mother is likely to end up with an urgent caesarean or difficult assisted vaginal birth, probably

preceded by an assisted labour (syntocinin and epidural). So this is the point where the mother has the power to choose: she can minimise her baby's exposure to labour drugs by calmly preparing for a caesarean, or she can augment the labour and hope for a quick birth. Odent is quite clear that he feels the obvious choice is the 'after labour, non-emergency caesarean'. Beverley agreed; she knew she wanted to avoid an augmented labour and she knew she would not labour well in those circumstances, so there was no point in dragging out the inevitable. The choice belongs to the mother and you may not agree, but knowing the options means you can make an informed decision for yourself; there's no one way.

So it was that after laboring beautifully at home for many hours, Beverley asked her midwife to support her in a transfer for an 'after-labour, non-emergency caesarean'. She knew instinctively that it was the right thing for her, she had reached her limit. Her midwife had admitting rights to the hospital and the transfer was smooth and

respectful. The hospital was ready and waiting for Beverley and she was met with calm and professional staff. The caesarean was uncomplicated and Beverley recovered quickly and was able to focus on her baby and her breastfeeding without the physical and emotional complications of her previous caesarean. It was her birth, her way, on all her pathways.

Beverley was a 'bellabirther', so the multipath birth plan she created was a birth map using the informed birth preparation guide. Creating this birth map involved communicating her pathways with all her care providers and her birth team in advance. This meant that on the day it was a very clear 'if this, then that' reference. There was no second guessing and all were confident that informed decisions had already been made and simply needed to be actioned where appropriate.

Most importantly, this approach to birth benefits the mother and her baby. It also benefits her partner, giving them guidance and confidence, and their care providers.



Having clients consider and pre-make informed decisions for various circumstances means greater confidence in care.

Bashi Hazard and Hannah Dahlen wrote an excellent piece addressing the ethics and legalities of (informed) birth plans (Dahlen & Hazard, 2016). These are the plans that contain informed decisions (i.e. consent or refusal) for various options. These plans involve care provider discussion during pregnancy, and it was this sort of plan that Beverley prepared.

The decisions belonged to Beverley: she was supported informationally, emotionally and, when it was necessary, clinically. Even within the clinical settling she had autonomy. The key factor in this positive outcome was that because the decisions were made in advance when there was time to fully consider the options, there was no need for discussion during the vulnerable labour period. This meant Beverley could remain calm and inward-focused, feeling safe and supported.

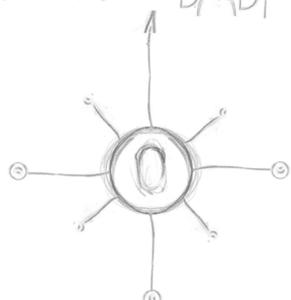
This feeling carried over into her fourth trimester, a time period that was also included in her birth map. During this time she had considered the potential for recovery from surgery as well. Her freezer had been stocked before the birth by her circle of support and the care arrangements for her older children were considered.

Beverley welcomed her precious daughter into the world feeling powerful, respected and autonomous. It was her birth.

Catherine is The Birth Cartographer. She runs [www.bellabirth.org](http://www.bellabirth.org) which provides information, support and mentoring to those wanting to be informed, prepared and confident. Her book *The Birth Map* provides the questions you need to ask to make informed decisions. You can follow her on twitter (@cath\_bellabirth) and you can listen to her speak on *The Circle of Birth* in three separate podcasts:

- 1) <http://circleofbirth.com/e3-part-1-birth-cartographer-shares-her-1st-birth-hospital-to-nicu/>
- 2) <http://circleofbirth.com/e5-part-2-birth-cartographer-baby-come-bum/>
- 3) <http://circleofbirth.com/e12-part-3-birth-cartographer-two-fast-relaxed-births-home/>

SEVEN WAYS TO HELP US  
NAVIGATE WITH OUR  
NEW BABY



Your birth map is NOT a list of  
'wishes' or 'preferences'.  
It is a series of statements  
containing your  
**INFORMED DECISIONS.**

The power of the document  
is in the statements it contains:  
Your Informed Decisions.  
You can present it anyway  
you like.  
Remember to

**Keep It Simple, Sister!**

You do not need to go into detail,  
be confident in your preparation.  
The purpose of this document is to  
simply state your Informed Decisions.



UNWELL? DON'T VISIT

PHONE AHEAD  
ASK IF WE NEED ANYTHING

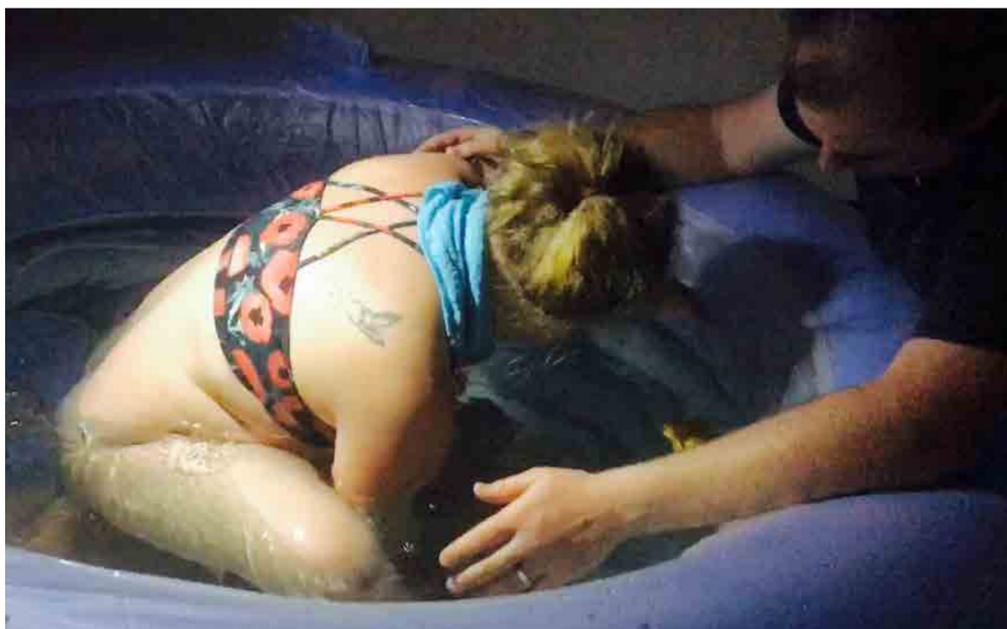
BRING FOOD!  
TO SHARE AND TO FREEZE

DON'T EXPECT A HOLD

ASK HOW WE FEEL

PLAY WITH OUR  
OLDER CHILD

PICK A CHORE ANY  
CHORE



# The birth of Noah

by Courtney Bridgemann

Photos courtesy of Gretta

Noah is our little rainbow miracle baby. We spent 1,035 days waiting, thousands of dollars on IVF and many sleepless nights, tears and triumphs to get to this moment. I knew from the moment I was pregnant with my first child that I wanted a home birth, but at the time it wasn't possible for many reasons. Part of me also knew what I wanted and knew about how to advocate for myself and avoid unnecessary interventions in hospital, but I still ended up with an experience that was far from ideal, though I won many battles which I am still proud of.

I met Gail (our midwife) 4 years ago as I was right into the local homebirth group. Throughout our infertility journey she helped us; for years she put up with my

complaining, phone calls, crying, meeting up for talks and she even would visit us at home to show us how to do our IVF injections. Gail supported us through one of the hardest times of our lives when we lost our IVF baby in October 2016 (miscarriage), and then celebrated with us again when we got pregnant with Noah. She is amazing! And that's an understatement! We even moved back to Armidale so we could have our homebirth with her.

At about 30 weeks pregnant I started having preterm contractions and Gail instructed me to stay home and rest. It seemed to work and my contractions didn't get any worse, but they didn't go away either. I thankfully made it to the 37 week mark and

my contractions ramped up again. The pre-labour was exhausting; I was practicing all of what we had learned in the SheBirths course including yoga, acupressure and massage, and we even made the eggplant parmigiana under the loving guidance of our doula Gretta. I can't speak highly enough of having a doula for those hard times, not just in labour!

Finally on the 21st of September I started early labour in the morning. I woke up that day in such a lovey haze. We dropped our son off at his nannas house and let Gail know I was having contractions 10 minutes apart but I was very convinced 'proper' labour wouldn't start for ages yet; I was in such denial. My husband (Ryan) and I



decided to get a picnic and go to the falls and relax in nature; it was beautiful, we spent a few hours out there slowly walking around in quiet contemplation realising very calmly that this would be the last day being pregnant. This was such a surreal experience since I'd spent years wanting to be pregnant and now it was coming to an end.

We later arrived back home. I had a bath and I was still convinced I wasn't in real labour yet; I kept saying, "They aren't painful enough!" Night fell and we had a lovely candlelit dinner, just the two of us, then we meditated with a nice cup of tea in front of the fire. I rocked my hips in a cross legged position for a few hours, just breathing.

Ryan checked my purple line and it was about 7 cm and I couldn't believe him (I even made him take a photo!) haha! I stood up to text Gail and then I felt a small gush that I thought must be my waters. I went straight to the toilet and then panic set in; it was blood, and a decent sized clot. I really focused on my breath at that point and Ryan helped ground me with some shoulder presses. We told Gail about the development and thankfully she was only in Uralla, so she came straight over. In the 25 minutes it took her to get to our house the contractions really picked up and at that point I was finally convinced I was in real labour.

When Gail got to our house she was a little concerned about the bleeding and asked me if we could do a pelvic check to see where the bleeding was coming from. We discovered I was 8.5 cm and we couldn't find the source of the bleed. Considering I was already in transition at that point and the bleeding was slowing we decided we could just closely monitor Noah's heart beat intermittently, keeping a close eye on the bleeding and staying at home.

We called Gretta over and by the time she got over I was in the pool. The pool was such sweet relief; Noah was in a posterior position (spine to spine) so the pain in my back was actually more intense than the contractions. Gretta had some nice cold

washers for my face and neck and I had Ryan apply counter pressure on my lower back which was great. I asked him to push harder and he said he couldn't push any harder! By this time the bleeding had subsided and I'd well and truly got back in my zone. I went to the toilet, then into the shower and my waters finally broke. I felt the need to push coming on so I got back into the pool. Ryan was encouraging me and massaging my head which felt lovely. It all seemed to happen so fast; I could feel Noah's head move down lower in big jumps with each surge and then he was crowning. I had been concerned about tearing because of a previous episiotomy that also tore, so I stayed on my hands and knees and tried to breathe slowly to just ease his head out. I found this really hard to do because my body had completely taken over, but Gail was helping by breathing with me so I could follow her and then my husband whispered in my ear, "You can do this."

Then he was born. His little body flowed beautifully through the water with his hands outstretched waiting to feel the warmth of my skin. I just held him there for probably a second although it felt like I was looking at him for some time.

I grabbed Noah out of the water and on to my chest. It was such a beautiful moment; he started breathing with a little rub on his back and I just felt a huge surge of relief. This! This was the moment I had waited and wanted for so long. I finally had my baby healthy and alive in my arms, and he was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen; I cried almost instantly.

Noah arrived on his 'due' date at 1:53am on the 22nd of September 2017. He weighed 3630 g (8lb) and was 51.5 cm long.

I took back the power and was in charge of my birth and my body! I was the first to touch my baby, the baby I grew and birthed! Empowering is an understatement! Noah's birth was such a healing experience and a lot of my own personal growth came from this pregnancy and birth. I feel strong, happy and completely confident in mothering my two little boys.

It took roughly 3.5 hours from when we called Gail over to Noah being born, although I find it amazing that I managed to get to 8 cm totally 'pain' free! Before that it was just like period cramping. I was so sceptical about some of the methods I had researched on reframing pain, but I was shocked at how it totally worked for me and even during transition I kept calm and it just flowed; I wouldn't even call that painful either, it was just intense and strong.

So the bleeding: upon close inspection of our placenta it was decided that probably around the 30 week mark (when I started having preterm contractions) part of our placenta detached slightly from the uterus, but the placenta concealed it so my only symptom was the cramping, no bleeding. Despite having an ultrasound at 33 weeks it wasn't discovered. That part of the placenta seemed to have stopped growing and Noah didn't receive all the nutrients, he came out looking like a really overdue baby, not a single bit of vernix on him, and his cracked dry skin was even bleeding in places. Our placenta was purple and calcifying with a strange patch that looked very thin. We are very thankful and blessed everything turned out fine in the end; my body and baby knew what to do. Noah had an APGAR score of 9 and started breathing right away, and his heart didn't skip a beat during labour.

I am so thankful for everyone who helped, encouraged, loved and supported us on this massive journey. I am so relieved and ecstatic to finally have our beautiful baby in our arms and for him to have arrived in such a peaceful, loving way. All my dreams have come true.

**Courtney is a 23 year old mother to two amazing little boys, a wife and early childhood educator. She loves gardening and photography. She lives in Armidale, New South Wales, in the beautiful New England table lands. She has been active in the local homebirth support group and has supported a number of local birthing women in a doula role. Her future plans are to stay home and soak up every minute of being a mama to her boys.**

# 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, 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.

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

## THE CIRCLE OF BIRTH PODCASTS:

### E4

A Hypnobirthing Practitioners Birth Stories.

<http://circleofbirth.com/e4-hypnobirthing-practitioners-birth-stories/>

### E16

Birth Keeper Shares Her Empowerment  
Hospital Home / Free Births.

<http://circleofbirth.com/e16-birth-keeper-shares-empowerment-hospital-home-free-births/>

### E24

Midwife Birth Stories – Four Births Hospital & Home  
– Conscious Conception & SoulBirth.

<http://circleofbirth.com/e24-midwife-birth-stories-four-births-hospital-home-conscious-conception-soulbirth/>

### E42

Jerusha Sutton #birthtime 12 Yrs of Doula / Birth Photographer Life  
– First Baby Homebirth Story.

<http://circleofbirth.com/e42-jerusha-sutton-birthtime-12-yrs-doula-birth-photographer-life-first-baby-homebirth-story/>

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# Useful FAAS links

Information about homebirth, including why to choose a homebirth, preparation ideas, information on the safety of homebirth, links to homebirth and homebirth in the media - <https://www.homebirthsydney.org.au/homebirth/>

HOMEBIRTH AND  
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SUPPORT GROUPS



Photo courtesy of Amy K. Zuercher

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therapies, natural toys and clothing,  
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pregnancy and birth art, seminars,  
workshops and courses and wellbeing  
and food products.

# A MILKY CASCADE: HOW BIRTH AND BREASTFEEDING *Work Together*

By Alex Smith

Photography courtesy of Leanda Cochran of Studio 22

When I was pregnant with my second child, having trained as a breastfeeding counsellor after my first baby was born, I knew that breastfeeding would again be an important part of my parenting journey. I also knew that an undisturbed birth at home, in an environment that allowed normal physiology and hormones to do their work, would give me and my baby the best possible chance to establish breastfeeding. The following article discusses the ways in which birth and breastfeeding work together, and how undisturbed labour and birth can positively impact the establishment of a breastfeeding relationship. Birth and breastfeeding go together like...birth and breastfeeding. The intricate hormonal and physiological interactions that occur during pregnancy, labour and birth are also implicated in the establishment and continuation of breastfeeding, and the choice to homebirth and the choice to breastfeed share some critical similarities:

- Informed, empowered, woman-centred choice should be at the heart of the experience.
- Understanding and trusting normal physiology and hormonal processes is key.
- Recognising the potential impact of interventions can be empowering, and so too can knowledge of ways to mitigate the impact of interventions.



- Compassionate, informed support and opportunities to express and work through concerns, fears and challenges are crucial.

## **EMPOWERED, INFORMED AND WOMAN-CENTRED**

Genuinely woman-centred care, and having your choices known, heard, and respected in that context, is critical to both the experience of birth and the experience of breastfeeding. Expressing the desire to breastfeed can also be like expressing the desire to birth at home; you may encounter resistance, roadblocks, and attempts to undermine your choices and interfere with your body's and your baby's normal physiology. Women who choose to birth at home have **consistently higher rates of breastfeeding** initiation and higher rates of continuation and exclusivity of **breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks and 6 months post-partum**. While more work is needed to establish which factors might be of most causal importance, it's unlikely to be pure coincidence. Rather, women who are able to make an informed choice to birth where, how, and with whom they choose, and who feel empowered in that process through being heard, respected and supported, **will likely**

**feel greater** empowerment and self-efficacy in relation to infant feeding decisions and other aspects of pregnancy and the post-natal period. Empowerment and genuine respect for women's bodily autonomy in pregnancy, labour and birth has real consequences for empowerment and choice around breastfeeding and parenting.

Denying women the support and resources needed to successfully breastfeed can also result in physical and mental health costs, as well as social costs. Not breastfeeding, similarly to many interventions in labour and birth, increases a range of health risks for both mothers and babies, and results in demonstrably higher health costs in countries like the **US** and **Australia**. There is also an emerging recognition of the **emotional and psychological impacts** for women who face breastfeeding challenges, themselves often linked to lack of support, poor information, or the impact of birth interventions. Without doubt, both birth and breastfeeding are significant, interrelated, sociocultural and health issues of our time.

*"I just kept thinking, 'I can't not push myself, I can't not do this. I am her mum, I'm supposed to be able to breast feed her; this is how I am*





*supposed to be a mum.' It was just so important to me, it was such an important mum attribute." - Steph*

## UNDERSTANDING AND TRUSTING NORMAL PHYSIOLOGICAL AND HORMONAL PROCESSES

Breastfeeding physiology is intertwined with the physiology of pregnancy and birth, and understanding how milk production and breastfeeding works is similar to understanding how birth works; it gives you critical knowledge that reinforces optimal physiological processes, acting as a powerful complement to great support networks, and helping you find ways to restore balance if you experience less than optimal processes.

The complex hormonal cascade that commences in pregnancy and continues through birth and beyond is critical in the establishment of breastfeeding. This involves the release and interaction of oxytocin, the shy 'love hormone' that is so central to the physiology of birth, and prolactin, the milk-production hormone. When a woman labours and births her baby in an environment where she feels safe, and in which interventions and interference are minimised, the **hormonal physiology of labour and birth** has the very best chance of falling into place; this sets the optimal scene for breastfeeding.

While your body already produces colostrum during pregnancy, lactation ramps up in response to the separation of the placenta after birth. While the post-birth 'lactogenesis II' stage is hormone-driven, as you move into 'lactogenesis III' you and your baby quickly become the primary players in regulating milk production through frequent and effective removal of milk.

Some aspects of the immediate post-partum period are particularly important in the successful establishment of breastfeeding.

These are also often features of an undisturbed birth and post-partum period at home, and include:

- **Skin-to-skin** between mother and baby immediately post-birth, for as long as mother and baby are comfortable. This helps to nurture breastfeeding in the early hours and beyond. During this time, your baby's instincts will likely kick in, and he or she may do a breast crawl to root for the breast and attach for a feed of the nutrient-dense colostrum.
- **Early, frequent and effective breastfeeding** is key to establishing milk production longer term, and this **'fourth trimester'** also gives you and your baby plenty of opportunities to get to know one another. Newborn babies feed frequently, with the **range of normal** extending from eight feeds in 24 hours, up to around 20 feeds per day. If your baby has at least 6 heavy wet nappies, has 2-3 dirty nappies daily up to around four weeks old, and is growing and hitting milestones then you can be **reassured that they are getting sufficient milk**.
- **Good attachment and positioning** also help to set the scene for establishing and continuing breastfeeding. Reports of persistent breastfeeding complications such as ongoing nipple pain appear **significantly lower amongst women who birth at home**, however challenges can still arise! If you are feeling discomfort or pain, sustain damage to the nipple or areola,

suspect an infection, are experiencing recurrent blocked ducts, or your baby seems to tire easily and/or not be transferring milk well, positioning and attachment could be the underlying issues. Strategies to try include:

- **Baby-led attachment (BLA)** – possible both immediately post-birth and beyond, BLA involves optimising attachment through supporting your baby's instincts and primal reflexes.
- **Different styles of positioning** and attachment will suit different mother-baby dyads, so if BLA doesn't feel right, other options might work better for you and your baby to achieve optimal attachment.
- Learning and responding to your baby's early **feeding cues**, and offering unrestricted access to the breast rather than scheduling feeds, helps to ensure attachment isn't compromised due to your baby being distressed and unable to coordinate their suck effectively.
- Knowing what's normal and seeking support early if problems arise – You might chat with an experienced, like-minded friend, a knowledgeable midwife or birth attendant, an **International Board Certified Lactation Consultant**, or a breastfeeding counsellor via a **local ABA group** or the **National Breastfeeding Helpline**.

## BUT MY BIRTH DIDN'T HAPPEN LIKE THAT! RECOGNISING (AND MITIGATING) THE IMPACT OF INTERVENTIONS

Interventions during labour and birth can disrupt the perinatal mother-baby dance, and this **disruption of the hormonal cascade** can also affect women's and babies' experiences of breastfeeding. Various interventions and complications can disrupt the hormonal physiology of birth and breastfeeding, from unsolicited, unhelpful comments and suggestions during pregnancy and labour, and

uninvited or unanticipated attendees at the birth, through **medications** and imposition of birthing positions, to instrumental and surgical procedures, post-partum haemorrhage, health professionals' **distrust of instinctive behaviours** and more. Physical pain and discomfort, and emotional trauma suffered during birth, can also have lasting impacts on breastfeeding. Despite this, there is good news for women whose experience of labour and birth involves interventions of any kind, whether that's a home-to-hospital transfer for an otherwise straightforward vaginal birth, an emergency caesarean section involving separation of mother and baby after the birth or a medically-indicated caesarean section in which there is no onset of labour.

There are a number of practices that can support restoration of the hormonal and physiological balance and keep your breastfeeding relationship on track. In particular, **skin-to-skin contact** and **baby-led attachment** are wonderful ways to connect with your baby. These can help stimulate primal reflexes and attachment that may have been affected by **analgesics** used in labour, by a **difficult birth** or by **early supplementation with milk substitutes**. These practices also work on milk-production and milk-releasing hormones in the mother, stimulating prolactin receptors and oxytocin release, and contributing to a more effective **let-down reflex**. These approaches are not just for the first few days! Skin-to-skin contact and BLA can work to calm both baby and mum, stimulate hormones and support ongoing breastfeeding weeks and even months post-birth.

*"Breastmilk wasn't just about nourishment, it was about comfort and bonding, and I gave him a lot of comfort." - Sarah*

#### **FIND YOUR VILLAGE: COMPASSIONATE, INFORMED SUPPORT FOR BIRTH AND BREASTFEEDING**

For many of us who have chosen to birth at home, we have done so with

an awareness of the kind of support network we want and need. While everyone's 'village' will look different, women commonly cite a desire for compassionate, informed, woman-centred support, and this is true of breastfeeding as well. If you are pregnant and planning a homebirth, your network of support probably already incorporates some or all of these elements, however it's worth considering what kinds of support are important to you and how you might access them now and in the future:

- What does your ideal village look like? Do you already have those people around you? Your network might include your partner, family, friends, birth attendants, other mothers, local chapters of peer support organisations like the **Australian Breastfeeding Association**, health professionals, allied health workers, complementary medicine practitioners... the list is long!
- Do the people in your support network understand and respect your desire to breastfeed? For example, a **recent Australian study shows** that women whose partners prefer bottle feeding, or who are indifferent about feeding method, were between 73% and 86% more likely to cease breastfeeding within the first two months.
- If you face challenges, fears or concerns, now or down the track, will you have people in your support network to turn to, with whom to debrief and process?

*"It's so hard to find the support [for breastfeeding through challenges], because people just want you to stop, and to feel better, and they don't understand that you're not going to feel better by stopping." - Krista*

In both birth and breastfeeding contexts, there is an extraordinary network of women out there who have experienced many of the same things you're facing, and who are able to offer

that knowledge, skill and experience one-to-one or in small group settings, in online forums, or over the phone.

The **ABA's National Breastfeeding Helpline** (1800 mum 2 mum – 1800 686 268) is staffed by qualified breastfeeding counsellors 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Email counselling and LiveChat are available to members via the **website**, along with publicly-accessible articles and links to information. **Local ABA groups** can be found Australia-wide and meet regularly, providing mother-to-mother support.

Seeking out informed, compassionate support, and knowing a little about the mechanisms of breastfeeding, can reinforce your empowerment as a birthing and breastfeeding woman. In breastfeeding, as in birth, empowerment and woman-centred care and choice should be at the heart of the experience.

Alex qualified as a breastfeeding counsellor with the ABA in 2013, and recently completed her PhD in anthropology at the University of Queensland. Her areas of research interest include women's experience of breastfeeding, milk insufficiency and milk sharing; and anthropological perspectives on pregnancy, birth, infant feeding and parenting. She has a particular interest in the use of at-breast supplementers to support breastfeeding, and used a supply line and donated breast milk to supplement both her children.





# Nursling

by Amy Basha

Photo courtesy of Ernita S.

I love your baby instincts  
The way you nurse and nuzzle  
Your mouth helplessly opening  
Searching for the warmth and comfort of my breast  
I love calling you my nursling  
Before you came I had no idea if I would breastfeed  
What that would be like  
To be honest I felt repelled by the thought of it  
I was born in 1977  
And no breastmilk ever touched my lips  
Formula feeding was the fashion  
My mother was told it was  
'superior' to her mother's milk  
I rage at the stupidity of humanity  
That a man-made creation  
Could compete with what our  
Mother's bodies create specifically for  
Nurturing and growing our children

Now I mourn that loss  
I never had of connecting with my mother through  
breastfeeding  
I am able to mother you in a way I never was  
And my heart is blown open  
Such love and connection  
It has not been easy  
I've had mastitis and pain  
Even bites from you!  
But I've always endured for you  
Knowing how beneficial it is for you  
The love bond we share while breastfeeding  
Is beyond words  
It's just another way our soul connection is clear  
I am here for you and will do anything for you  
My darling daughter

Amy is originally from the States and has been in Sydney for the last 8 years with her Australian husband, Charles.  
Amy is a writer, dancer and world traveller who is a passionate believer in natural childbirth, organic foods,  
breastfeeding to term and spending time with her beloved Savannah Nayeli.  
Follow her writing here: <https://www.weekendnotes.com/profile/152327/>



# Kords by Kensa

By Kensa Lloyd (9 years)

<http://kordsbykensa.com.au>

**N**ot wanting a little brother is one of the biggest mistakes of my life. Since my mum told me that she was having another baby, my life has changed.

Even though I knew quite a lot about birth because of my mum's job, I was still worried about what was going to happen. As the baby started to grow inside my mum I was always asking and looking at how big it was getting. I also felt where the baby was and every night I read a story to the baby. Because my mum was going to have the baby at home, it meant I was there for some of the midwifery appointments. The midwife let me help by holding the machine that lets us hear the baby's heart; it was very exciting. I also went with my mum, dad and sister to the ultrasound and was amazed to see the baby inside my mum, even though it was very hard to work out what I was looking at.

When my mum was about 30 weeks pregnant she was talking about different ways to tie the umbilical cord and the advantages of having a soft cord tie rather than those nasty plastic clips like people use on bags of frozen peas. My mum wanted to have a cotton cord tie because they don't interfere with the baby laying skin-to-skin and having cuddles.

We had a look on the internet and I found one that I liked and that my family agreed on, so we did some research about how to make them and create them in our own style. We went shopping to pick out colours of cotton, and we chose colours that were my mum's favourite. Before

we made the final ones we made a lot of tests to see what length and thickness was right. After we got them perfect I made a cord tie for the new baby and then made some matching bracelets for my family. I wanted us all to have something that matched.

The day finally came when we thought the baby was about to be born. Meanwhile, I was at school; it seemed like the day went slower than usual. I was anxiously waiting to see if everything was ok. Later on that day everyone was gathered around the birth pool at home. The midwife had arrived and we were waiting and waiting until there was a doubt that it was going to happen today, so the midwife left and me and my sister went to bed. At 2.20am a beautiful little boy was born; everyone was so happy, but not as much as me! The baby came so quickly that the midwife hadn't had time to come back, so that meant that me, my sister, my dad and my nan were with my mum throughout the whole thing, and we got to see the baby come out. Witnessing a real live birth was one of the most interesting things I have ever seen. My sister said, "It's a boy!". But did it matter it was a boy? No! Saying it a year later, I almost regret wanting a little sister; having a baby brother is wonderful.

After celebrating the birth the midwife finally arrived and my sister cut the umbilical cord and tied the cord tie that I had made on his tummy.

Day after day everyone wore their

bracelets and it really showed the connection between the birth and our family.

I wanted to be able to share this experience with other people. I enjoyed making the cord ties, so my mum and I started to plan and build a website of my own where I make my very own cord ties and bracelets for other people to enjoy. It's called "Kords by Kensa"; we created it because I loved seeing the connection between my family and the baby, and I'd love to see it between your baby and family too.

**Kensa is 9 years old and lives with her mum, dad, older sister Eleanor and baby brother Leon. She loves helping her mum care for Leon and, now that he is walking, she loves taking him outside to play with his ball or blow bubbles. Kensa enjoys making cord ties and matching bracelets after school and on the weekends. She is a home birth baby too and was born in the same pool as her brother, just on the other side of the world in England.**





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# Birthings Directory

Summer 2017

## THEME CONTENT (PODCASTS)

**Aly Kranz** - <http://circleofbirth.com/>

**Avalon** - <https://blossomingwoman.com.au>

**Faye Read** - <http://www.soulbirth.com>

**Jerusha Sutton photography** - <http://www.jerusha.com.au/>

**Sarah Purvey** - <http://www.sarahpurveypsychology.com>

## THEME CONTENT (ARTICLES)

**Alex Smith** - [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

**Azure Rigney** - [Azure@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:Azure@homebirthsydney.org.au)

**Catherine Bell** - <http://www.bellabirth.org/>

**Deirdre English** - co-author of 'Witches, Midwives, and Nurses' - <https://www.feministpress.org/books-n-z/witches-midwives-nurses-second-edition>

**Denise Georges** - <https://www.empoweringbirthsaustralia.com/>

**Kensa Lloyd** - <http://kordsbykensa.com.au>

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**Romina Gardella** - <https://www.facebook.com/soulbirthbluemountains/?fref=ts>

**Amy Bell** - <https://www.weekendnotes.com/profile/152327/>

## BIRTH ART

**Amy Basha** <https://www.weekendnotes.com/profile/152327/>

**Amy Bell** - <https://www.etsy.com/au/shop/AmyBellCartoons>

**Erica Nettle-Chik** - [www.luminouslyouth.com](http://www.luminouslyouth.com)

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**Gretta** - <https://www.facebook.com/womenoftheearth.com.au/>

**Janine O'Brien** - <http://www.ibirth.com.au/>

**Jerusha Sutton photography** - <http://www.jerusha.com.au/>

**Jo Hunter** - <http://midwifejo.com.au/>

**Lauren Storey Photography and Design** - <http://www.laurenstorey.com.au/photography/>

**Nadine Fragosa** - <http://www.nadinethedoula.com/>

**Studio twenty two photography, Leanda Cochran** - <http://studio22photography.com.au/blog/>

## CORRECTION FROM SPRING 2017

Apologies to Tara Mahoney from Motherhood in Focus for providing her personal rather than professional Facebook page in the last issue. If you'd like to see more of Tara's work please head over to [www.motherhoodinfocus.com.au](http://www.motherhoodinfocus.com.au) or <https://www.facebook.com/motherhoodinfocus/?fref=ts>



## THE TOPIC FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF BIRTHINGS IS

# **HEALING HOMEBIRTH**

For this issue, we ask what it is that needs to occur to 'heal' homebirth; to bring homebirth back to being an option for all women, regardless of their location and/or financial situation. Additionally, we ask how homebirth has healed you; how it has healed old wounds and changed your perspectives and experiences.

Birthings is the Sydney homebirth communities magazine and we'd love your contributions! Please send us your theme articles, birth announcements and stories with some high resolution photos. Submissions are due by 1st February, 2018 to [editor@homebirthsydney.org.au](mailto:editor@homebirthsydney.org.au) and should be <1400 words with a <100 word bio and some high resolution photos.

**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)**

