

Birththings

Healing

HOMEBIRTH

PART 2

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Homebirth Access
SYDNEY

www.homebirthsydney.org.au



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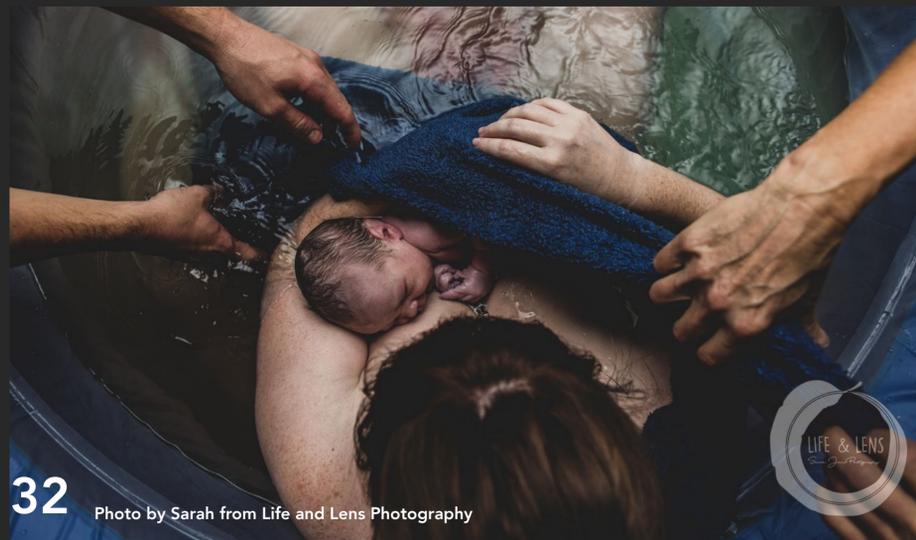
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Share your story with Birthings

Birth Stories, Birth Announcements, Homebirth Related Articles
Submission Guide: <1400 words with high resolution photos and/or videos. Don't forget your bio (<100 words).
Autumn 2019 issue is themed *Choices*
Submission due date: 1st March, 2019
editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

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www.homebirthsydney.org.au



W

elcome to our 137th issue of Birthings magazine, themed Healing Homebirth (part 2). Our first healing homebirth issue was overflowing with incredible content, so we decided to split the issue into two! In this issue we have our regular committee articles, theme articles and birth stories, and lots of gorgeous images to go with them. Clare Marshall, our beautiful designer for recent issues, has sadly moved on to other ventures. However, we have been blessed with a gorgeous new designer, Josi Jentzsch (Hi Josi!), and as I write this editorial I'm excited to see what this issue holds in the way of beautiful, creative new design features.

Our theme Healing Homebirth asks the questions, "How can homebirth heal?" and "What do we need to do to heal homebirth". Homebirth Access Sydney has been involved in recent months with campaigning and rallying AHPRA for changes in restrictions and regulation of our Privately Practising Midwives, and so there are a couple of theme articles and reviews addressing this campaign and giving you more insight into what we believe needs to be done to heal homebirth. We have a wonderful theme article from Professor Hannah Dahlen which talks about why homebirth will survive, despite our current political climate – I hope you all find this article as motivating as we do! As usual, we've got gorgeous birth stories, some fantastic birth art and a couple of really interesting articles, along with our usual podcast and video links (be sure to check out the documentary, "Why Not Home", as this is only available for a limited time!).

So what does 'healing' mean to you? A dictionary definition looks a bit like:

Noun - "The process of making or becoming sound or healthy again."

Adjective – "Tending to heal; therapeutic."

Regardless of any definition, healing can take so many different forms dependent on the person experiencing it, the process, the trauma that led to requiring healing and the mindset of the person at that moment. Sometimes healing occurs without us necessarily doing anything, a passive process whereby we just accept and it happens. Sometimes healing takes time and distance, and it occurs little by little. Other times, healing takes a significant amount of effort; it can be painful or even leave its own residual trauma as we work towards health.

Homebirth can act as a pivotal part of the process towards returning to health and is truly a remarkable birth option. Recently in the media you may have seen the demonisation of natural birth, a brutal attack on women's birth choices, a woman criticised for making a decision that she felt was the safest for her and her baby, and derogatory comments touting that this woman was giving women, and I quote, "Unrealistic expectations for birth." How have we gotten to this point? Where sharing a beautiful, complication free birth is seen as irresponsible, causing unrealistic expectations?

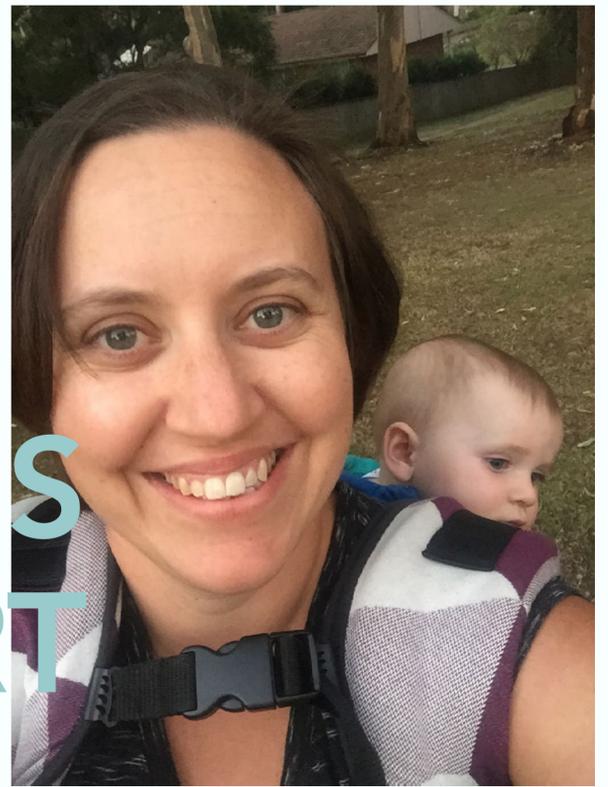
This question leads us to our other topic for this issue: What do we have to do to heal homebirth? Sadly, the actions we need to take to heal homebirth are potentially just as vast, complex and painstaking as any personal healing we seek to undertake. It's not just homebirth that requires healing, but the entire system and society's views on birth! We have a lot of work to do as we work towards healing homebirth in Australia, and so we hope you'll join us in this process by rallying, signing petitions, and making your voices heard when the rights of women are being eroded, particularly when the right to homebirth is progressively being stripped away.

All of this talk about restrictions, removal of options and critiquing of women's decisions around where and with whom they birth leads us on to next issue's theme, Choices. The Choices theme is a broad one and can involve making the choice to birth at home, to transfer, to have siblings at birth, to travel to supportive care providers, or to freebirth. The underlying tone of this issue is that women have the right to make their own choices, regardless of what the medical system, society and well-meaning friends and family think. Women's right to birth choices is a women's and human rights issue!

We'd love to hear your own take on the theme Choices, and as always, if you have a birth story or announcement you'd like to share, please send it our way! The close of submissions for the next issue will be 1st March, 2018 – please send your theme articles and stories my way (editor@homebirthsydney.org.au).



PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Hello Homebirth Enthusiasts!

So much has been happening here at Homebirth Access Sydney it's hard to know where to start!

We are launching our new member welcome packs this month. All new members of HAS will be receiving a welcome pack when they sign up – usually from their midwife or doula. If you are a current member and would like a few welcome packs please get in touch by emailing us at info@homebirthsydney.org.au.

We are also very proud to be putting out our printed issue of Birthings for the year. All members will still be receiving their free colour PDF version in the members section of the website but now one issue per year will also be available for sale in our online shop and from your midwife for cost price.

We have said goodbye to one committee member (Clare Marshall, our designer) and welcomed a few new members, Josi Jentzsch (Graphic Designer) and Kristyn Wednesday Begnell (Fundraising Coordinator). Because of these additions, we will also be running a raffle over the next month, with the plan to draw the raffle at our upcoming Homebirth Awareness Week picnic (this will occur on Wednesday the 24th October in Petersham Park. Please do come along and join in the celebrations!

We have many projects underway on the advocacy front. The Mothers for Midwives march (5th May, 2018) saw us marching outside AHPRA offices in Sydney, alongside homebirth communities and advocates in every state of Australia. We were a pivotal part of organising this march, and have been very involved in engaging politicians and lobbying AHPRA, as well as dedicating resources and time to further push for the objectives of the march. We have also partnered with the PACE program at Macquarie University and have taken on 3 social research interns to work on projects with us. As they are still underway I will just outline them briefly:

- 1. Why Homebirth** – This project is investigating the reasons why some women choose Homebirth. We hope to have this report out in December 2018.
- 2. Referral Refusal** – This project is investigating why some GPs are refusing to refer women to privately practising midwives to have a homebirth. Obviously, this is a big problem and we are determined to get to the bottom of it!
- 3. The Case for Homebirth** – This is a forecasting project. In this project we are looking at what some of the economic and social impacts would likely be if more Australian women chose to birth at home.

We are excited about what we might find in these projects so please keep checking in with us on our website and social media platforms for news!

Until Next time!



Join Us!

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



JOSI JENTZSCH

Designer

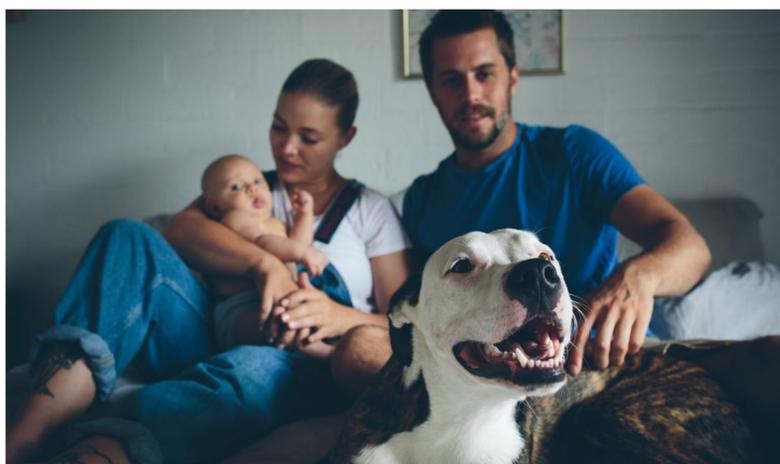


When did you join HAS?

June 2018

Who is in your family?

My partner Sam, my dog Ozzy and my 11 month old son Zeppelin. Zeppelins Oma, my mum, lives super close by. Zep is the apple of her eye and can do no wrong.



What did you do before children?

I travelled a lot. I left home at 16 and spent my time between the UK and Germany...now I call Australia my home. I have always been creative and have worked as a fashion designer for the last 10 years.

What have you done since children?

I am still working as a fashion designer, but much less! My numero uno is Zeppelin and I spend my days running chasing him or our dog Ozzy. I have also become a huge enthusiast for homebirthing and generally a more holistic lifestyle.

Why Homebirth?

I have always known that I didn't want to birth in a hospital. I don't know why I have had an aversion to the hospital from a young age but I had this strong feeling within me that I needed to birth at home. I always saw the hospital as a place for the sick, not necessarily a place to deliver my child. I decided I wanted to homebirth before doing any research, that came after meeting my amazing midwife Janine. She guided all of us through this journey seamlessly.

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

Sam, my partner, and I have known each other since the first day I moved to the UK 16 years ago. He has always been the yin to my yang. Being able to rely on him during my labor made me appreciate our bond even more. I completely let go and simply concentrated on each contraction bringing me closer to my child. Sam was always right there...We were able to stay in our beautiful baby bubble without any intervention or interruption for days. Only Janine popped in to check on us. I don't think I have ever experienced a love quite like it. Not just for my scrumptious baby but for Sam. We created this tiny human and we delivered him so safely, I am still in awe of the entire experience. I am also immensely proud and grateful for my body. WOW! What wonders we can grow, birth and nourish. I would do it all again and again and again...but I need some sleep first!

HAS PICNIC

COME JOIN US !

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN CURIOUS ABOUT HOMEBIRTHING?
 WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET SOME LIKE MINDED FAMILIES?
 ARE YOU KEEN TO NETWORK WITH SOME GREAT BIRTH WORKERS?
 WANT TO SAY HI TO THE AWESOME HAS VOLUNTEERS

.....

FIND OUT IF YOU ARE ONE OF THE LUCKY WINNERS OF OUR AMAZING RAFFLE PRIZES WORTH OVER \$2500

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24TH

.....

10:30AM-1:30PM

.....

PETERSHAM PARK

BRING A DISH

BRING A BLANKET

BRING YOUR FRIENDS

BRING YOUR RAFFLE TICKETS

HAS FRIENDS

REBECCA LAWRENCE PHOTOGRAPHY
 IN MY HOOD KIDS
 JAASE
 BOOBIE BIKKIES
 NATURAL BEGINNINGS
 SOUL BIRTH
 BABY BEE HUMMINGBIRDS
 BIRTH AFLOAT
 THE SMALL FOLK
 STEVIE AND TAY
AND MANY MORE



Homebirth Access Sydney

REBECCA ANNE LAWRENCE
PHOTOGRAPHY

1st prize: Birth photography package with Rebecca Lawrence Photography (value \$1750)

JAASE

2nd prize: Two JAASE dresses (value \$200)

Wonder Birthing
THE WONDER OF BIRTH & MOTHERHOOD, *THE WAY*

3rd prize: Wonder Birthing 90 minute baby massage course (\$197)

Natural Beginnings
Holistic Health, Doula and Placenta Services

4th prize: Natural Beginnings 2 ½ hr Mizan Therapy (Traditional Reproductive Healing) appointment (\$220) and Natural Beginnings 1 ½ hr Herbal Medicine and Nutrition appointment (\$120)

inmyhood

5th prize: In My Hood Kids new baby hamper (\$150)

PINKY'S BOOBIE BIKKIES
NATURAL & ORGANIC
NOURISHING BREASTFEEDING MILK...

6th prize: Boobie Bikkies prize pack (3 boxes Boobie Bikkies, Parenting by Heart and Sleeping Like a Baby books, value \$130)

Soul Birth
Inspiring your birth

7th prize: Soul Birth moon box (\$165)

Stevie and Tay

8th prize: Two Stevie & Tay Wellness out West tickets (\$100)

Baby Bee Hummingbirds

9th prize: Baby Bee Hummingbirds DIY kit (\$60)

Birth Afloat

10th prize: Birth Afloat voucher (\$50 off birth pool hire or 20% off store wide)

Prize bundle:

Kords by Kensa matching cord tie and mums bracelet (\$10)

'Milk Maker' pin from Mother's Milk Collection (\$12)

Smoothie Bombs (\$13)

Shop, Shop, Shop! homebirthsydney.org.au/product-category/raffle-tickets/

Here is what Azure had to say about our last Picnic...

"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. I 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](#)



HOMEBIRTH IN THE MEDIA

By Aimee Sing

[Hope For Homebirths](#)

7-13 July 2018

The Saturday Paper

[Hundreds of mums reject hospitals in local homebirth craze](#)

20th April 2018

Warwick Daily News

[Controversial midwife Lisa Barrett pleads not guilty to manslaughter over homebirth deaths](#)

22nd May 2018

9 News

[James Van Der Beek Keeps It Real With Photo of Daughter's Home Birth](#)

20th June, 2018

Marie Claire

[Corgi wouldn't leave owner's side during home birth and the photos are amazing](#)

3rd August, 2018

Today

[A woman in Germany YouTubed her unassisted home birth from her backyard](#)

24th July, 2018

The Loop

[Erika Christensen Has Unplanned Home Birth](#)

14th August, 2018

Celeb Scoop

[I had no other option: mum defends decision to free birth](#)

16th August, 2018

Essential Baby

[WOMEN SHARE DIVERSE BIRTH STORIES USING #SOPROUD HASHTAG](#)

13th August, 2018

Independent

[More regional women choosing home births and free birthing over hospital deliveries](#)

March 2018

ABC News

['Choosing a home birth was the best thing I ever did'](#)

4th February, 2018

Manchester Evening News

[Australian midwives call for more childbirth options](#)

5th May, 2018

Sky News

[Mums to march against new limits on home birthing](#)

25th April, 2018

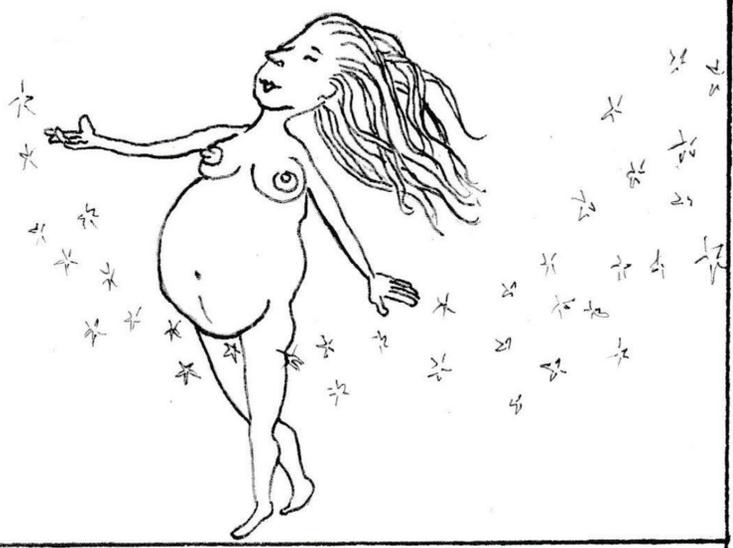
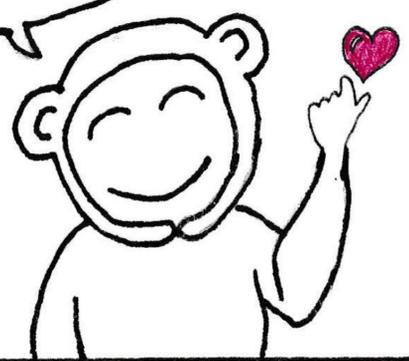
City News

["ARE GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE C-SECTION RATE A GOOD THING?" A MIDWIFE ARGUES 'YES'](#)

18th September 2018

The Feed

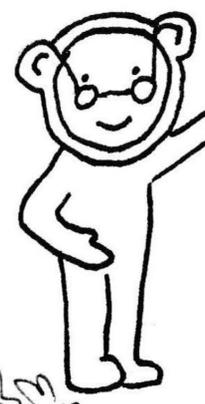
OXYTOCIN IS LOVE. LOVE HEALS



OXYTOCIN

FACTS ABOUT OXYTOCIN (+ BIRTH)

- it helps turn off fear
- it makes your dog like you more.
- promotes attachment (bonding + love)
- eases stress
- crystallises emotion memories.
- essential for birth + breastfeeding
- reduces drug cravings
- improves social skills
- fosters generosity



FACTS ABOUT INTERRUPTED OXYTOCIN DURING BIRTH.

- (eg. elective C-S or epidural / drug)
- impeded breastfeeding
- ↑ blood pressure + cortisol (stress)
- ↑ post-natal depression
- ↓ bonding

* Dr Moberg: "The Hormone of love" (2013)

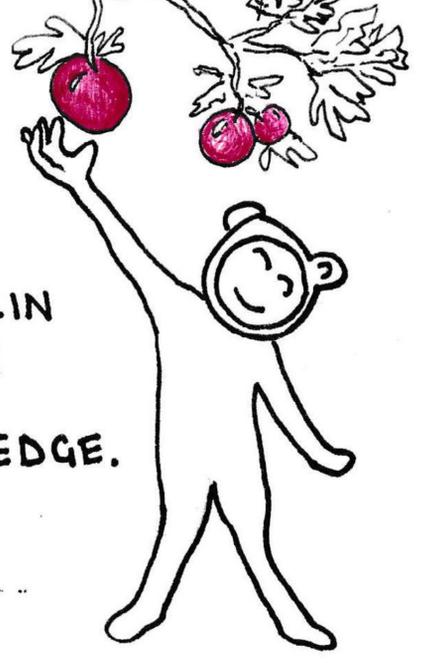


Baby Brain

YEAH!! IT'S RE-WIRING + OPENING NEW PATHWAYS FOR IMPROVED NURTURE FUNCTION



OXYTOCIN IS YOUR INNATE KNOWLEDGE.



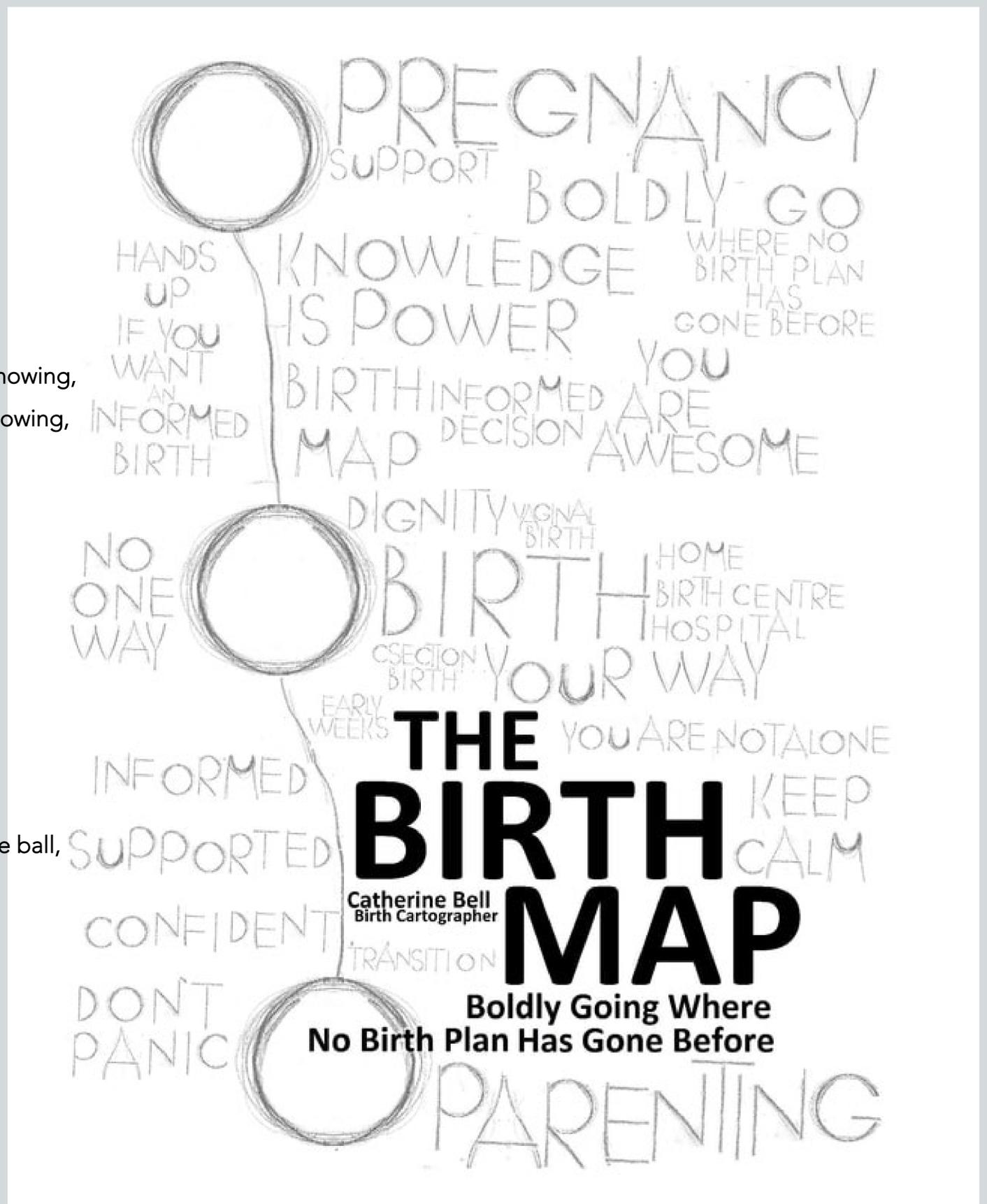
This is Catherine:
The Birth Cartographer



Informed Supported Confident
The Journey Begins with Birth Cartography

Catherine lives on Feral Farm, a bush property near Braidwood, where she is raising four free range children alongside her One True Love. In life BC she was a marine biologist, and to this day can not look out to sea without scanning for whales. She describes herself as a Naturalist, as she has always been fascinated by natural history and anthropology and a Maternal Feminist. An eternal optimist and occasional poet, loves The Vicar of Dibley and agrees chocolate is a major food group.

I'm the custodian of some powerful knowing,
But like seeds, it won't grow without sowing,
Knowledge shared is a gift
For it gives a lift
And gets the power flowing.
The Birth Map evolved in my heart
Four births of my own at its start
It is ready now for sharing
With those who are daring
To take their birth power to an art.
There is no one way, no 'fits all'
And we really shouldn't be passing the ball,
Don't leave it to luck
or your birth might suck
The Birth Map protects from a fall.



EMPOWERING ANTENATAL EDUCATION



Amelia 0498 578 601
www.wonderbirthing.com.au

Positive Birth Movement



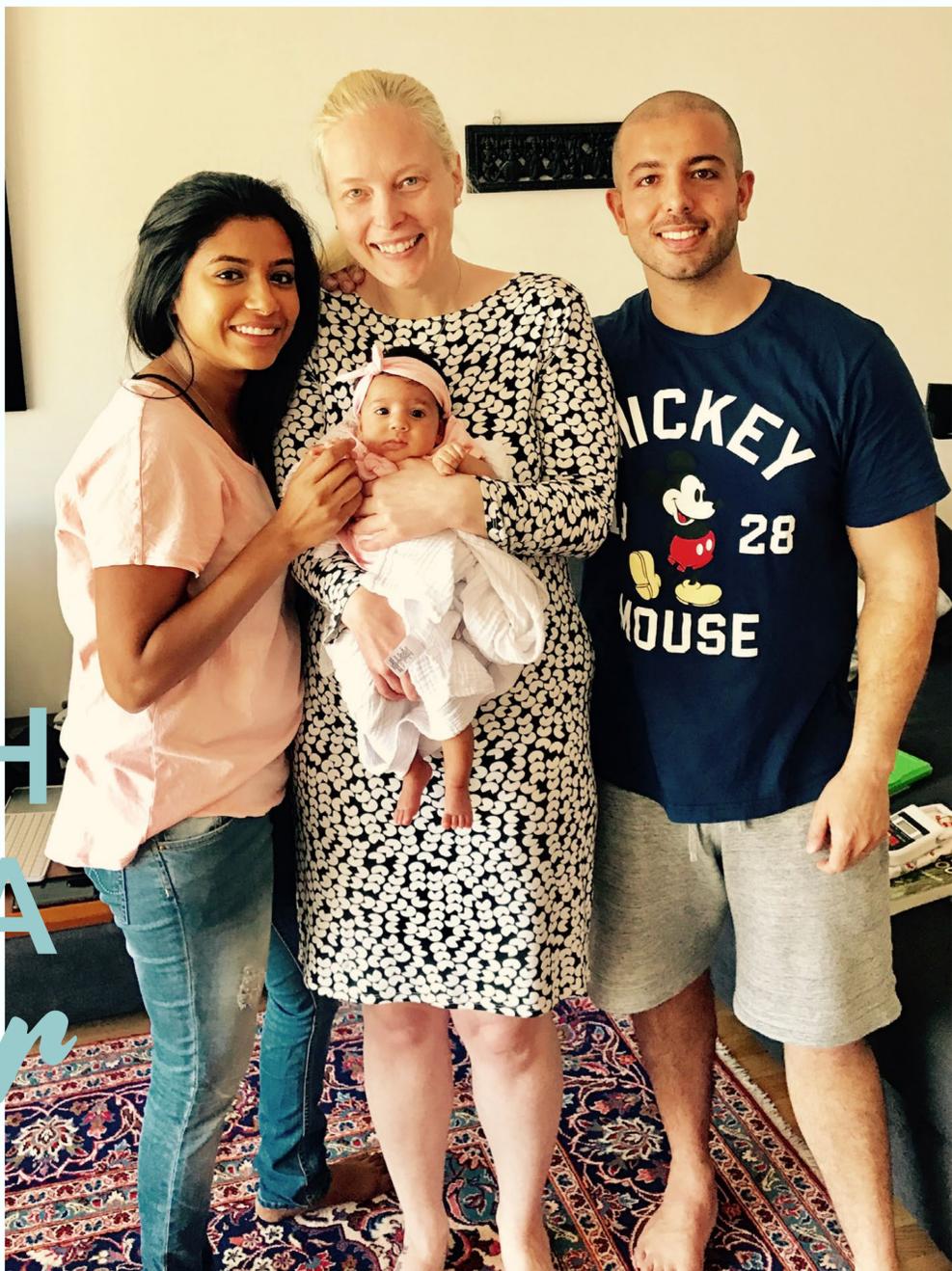
Meet up link up
shake up birth

Meets the last Wednesday of every month
Burwood Park Burwood 10am-12pm

Phone: 0498 578 601

<https://www.facebook.com/positivebirthmovementinnerwestsydney/>

THE BIRTH OF A Mother



By Shalini Suby

Giving birth is a strangely personal yet universal thing – hundreds of millions of women have gone through pregnancy, labour and delivery. I figured if they could do it, so could I. And I could either complain about the aches and pains I experienced as my body stretched and supported this new life, or I could choose to enjoy every moment of it.

On Thursday the 8th of December, while relaxing on the couch with my partner Sabri, I started to feel mild contractions. I assumed they were Braxton Hicks contractions and enjoyed how my stomach would tighten and then release. The contractions were about 10 mins apart and lasted 20 to 30 seconds. We went to bed a couple of hours later while I continued to have them periodically.

I remember waking up around 5am, and Sabri woke up shortly after. We stayed in bed for an hour and then got ready to head to work. I couldn't make up my mind: Should I go to work or stay at home in case I went into labour? I decided to text my midwife Martina. She said it would be fine to work, and I could always come back home if I needed to. This day also happened

to be our work Christmas party, a celebration I did not want to miss.

We arrived at work and began the day (we work together in the business). I was still having contractions every 10 minutes and, although they weren't strong enough to signal active labour, every time I had one I would stand up, bend over my elbows and wait for it to pass. I took this position naturally – it made the contractions feel much better. Every so often, Sabri would come over to my desk and ask me if anything had changed. He stayed very calm but I'm sure he was hiding his excitement just as much as I was, as it was premature.

About halfway through the day, I started timing my contractions and texted Martina. She asked me to turn off my analysing mind and go on with my day as I normally would. She reminded me that labour releases the same hormones that are released during love making.

“Don't analyse it too much,” she said, “just let go and allow your body to do its thing.”

Contractions continued through dinner but that did not stop me from feasting on a six – yes, six! – course Italian meal. Hours passed. Mocktails were consumed, laughs were had, and I took several visits to the toilet during contractions. Around 9pm everyone was heading to a bar and I decided to go home. Sabri felt compelled to join the team but told me he would be home in an instant if anything happened while he was gone.

I got home and showered and got ready for bed. Sabri's mum was visiting us the same night and she arrived shortly after I got home that night. I quickly said hi to her and told her that I was tired and going to bed. I didn't want to worry her about what I felt, as it could have been false contractions.

I was fast asleep when a strong contraction woke me up at 11pm. I went into my bathroom and called Martina. She stayed on the phone and kept talking to me through my next contraction – she wanted to hear if my tone changed. All of a sudden I felt lonely and started to cry. When she heard me cry on the phone, she asked



me to get Sabri to come home and told me she would be at our house in 40 minutes.

My excitement just surged!

Early on in my pregnancy I knew I wanted to have a natural birth like my mother. I come from India where there wasn't a big fuss about giving birth; in fact, my mother had 4 kids with no painkillers. Not once did she ever tell me any horror stories or scare me about the pain, even though she had a bone separation when she gave birth to me and was bedridden for two months after. Three months later, she was pregnant with undiagnosed twins as she didn't have any scans. In contrast, most of the women I had spoken to about their birthing experiences opted for c-sections or epidurals because they felt they could not handle the pain.

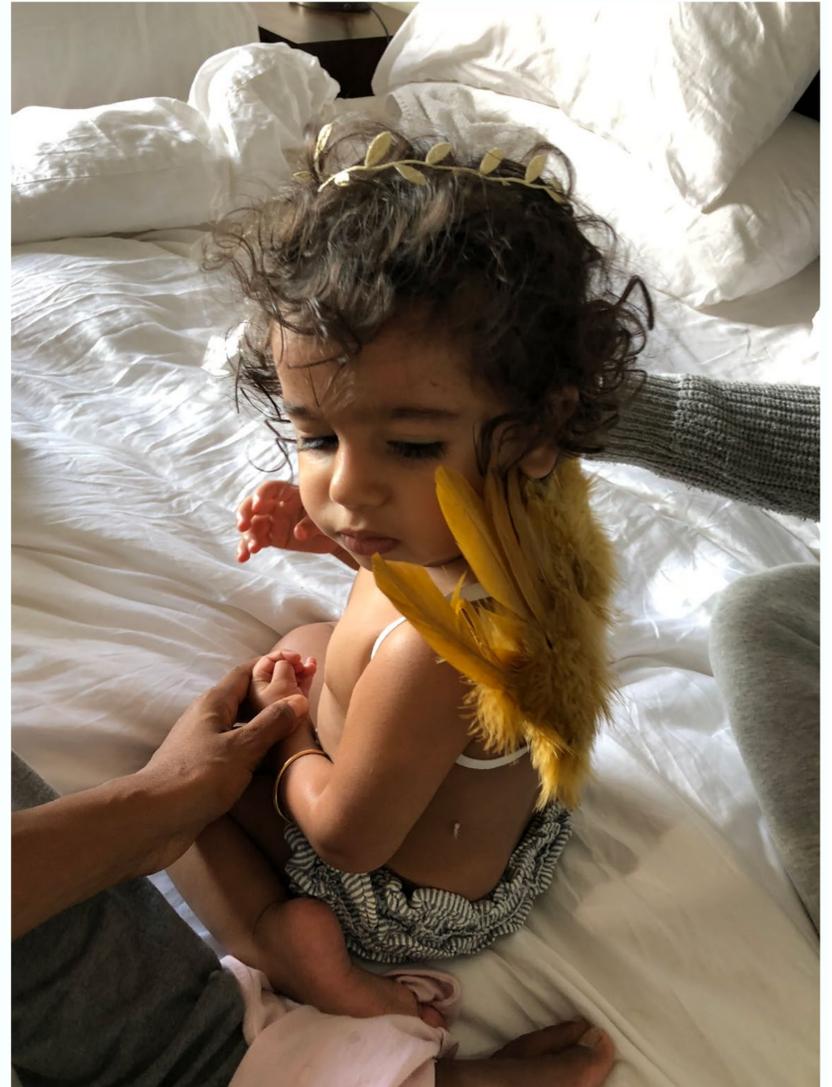
I feel fortunate that I had my mother's experiences to guide me. She taught me that the body is an immensely powerful thing, fully capable of bearing and nurturing children. This is one reason why I chose not to get any scans done during my pregnancy. I didn't want the doctors to scare me telling me about the 101 things that could go



wrong and the multiple other tests I would need to make sure that this was not the case. I didn't want to go down that rabbit hole.

As I did more research during my own pregnancy, I became intrigued by the idea of home birthing. We are just like all other mammals and are completely capable of giving birth without any interventions and routine tests and examination. As a matter of fact, like other mammals, we would naturally like to give birth in a calm and familiar surrounding (without being plugged into monitoring machines) with few people around (no students, nurses, unknown doctors and midwives walking in and out).

On the night of December 9th, after talking to my midwife, I called Sabri and he was home before I even knew



it. He got on the phone with Martina and started preparing the room. He turned on the salt lamp, played our birth playlist, got the clary sage essential oil burning in the diffuser, laid the tarp on the carpet and started setting up the birth pool. I was still in the bathroom going through the motions with every contraction. I could feel a distinct change in the type of contractions I was having, they were more pronounced and I had to keep moving my lower hips every time I had one.

The next thing I knew, Martina was there and it was about midnight. After a while, she asked me to get into the birth pool and see how I felt. After a few contractions, I felt a pop like a bubble bursting – it was my water breaking! I told Martina, "I think my water broke." She checked, confirmed that it had, and asked me to lie in the pool.

At this point I started to feel really excited and a little nervous. I was wondering what was going to happen next. I remembered reading other birth stories where mothers mentioned that the most exciting part of the birth was the second stage where they get to urge to push the baby. Thinking about that made me calmer. After a few minutes, I got really hot and got out.

Again I went back into my favourite spot – the bathroom. I felt most comfortable in dark, small spaces and the bathroom was perfect. After a few contractions, I had the urge to push. With every push I felt like something big wanted to come outside of me. I can't recall exactly what happened during this stage because I zoned out and felt like I was in a bubble of my own world. Martina and Sabri let me do my thing and sat, patiently watching.

During this phase, mothers are in an altered state of consciousness to transcend through the stress and pain of labour. In Native American culture, they describe this transcendence as the mother going to the stars and bringing back the soul of the baby before it is born.

I am not sure what time it was but a few minutes later she asked me to get on all fours. So I did. Both Sabri and Martina were behind me. The second midwife had arrived an hour ago, but she was sitting outside the bathroom and watching us in case we needed her assistance.

I touched myself down there and felt a big ball and was wondering how it was going to come out. With the next contraction I felt with my hands as the baby's head started to come out and everyone in the bathroom screamed with excitement. Martina then asked me to push. I could feel the baby's head coming out and once it did, the rest of the body just slipped out without me doing anything. Sabri caught our baby who came out with one arm up, and I could hear him screaming in excitement. I was still in my own zone when suddenly I heard a big scream from our baby and Sabri starting to cry. Slowly, I started coming back to the present moment and soon began to cry too.

Our baby was born at 4:26am on the 10th December, 2016.

I heard Martina say, "Pass him to

Shalini."

"Is it a boy?" Sabri said, then had a look and cried, "It's a baby girl!"

I held her, both of us in tears while our sweet girl was screaming her lungs out. She was completely covered in vernix and was very slippery. Martina covered us with a towel and we moved into our bedroom and lay on our bed so the baby and I could have skin-to-skin contact. Then she helped me breastfeed her for the first time. The feeling was just magical.

The hour after birth is the beginning of the love affair between the mother and baby. The baby and the mother are wide-eyed when they first meet because of the endorphins that were released during the labour. It is essential that during this time, there is a lot of skin to skin contact between the mother and baby and breastfeeding is initiated during this time.

Martina waited about an hour to allow the umbilical cord to drain the blood completely into the baby and then Sabri clamped her cord. About an hour later Martina helped me get up and asked me push to birth the placenta. A few pushes later, the placenta came out and Martina took it away in a bucket for encapsulation.

As we lay in bed, the vernix was quickly getting absorbed into our baby's skin and she started to turn more and more pink.

Around 5:30am, Sabri woke his mum up with the big news. She was fast asleep and didn't hear a thing! She was so shocked and surprised and came into the room to see our baby.

We soaked up every moment, but soon a new adventure was about to begin: my journey into motherhood.

Shalini is a mum to a wild curly haired girl, wife to Sabri and worked in digital marketing. She is now a full time mum and is very passionate about natural birth, breastfeeding, elimination communication and attachment parenting. On her rest days you'll find her digging back into digital marketing & ecommerce.





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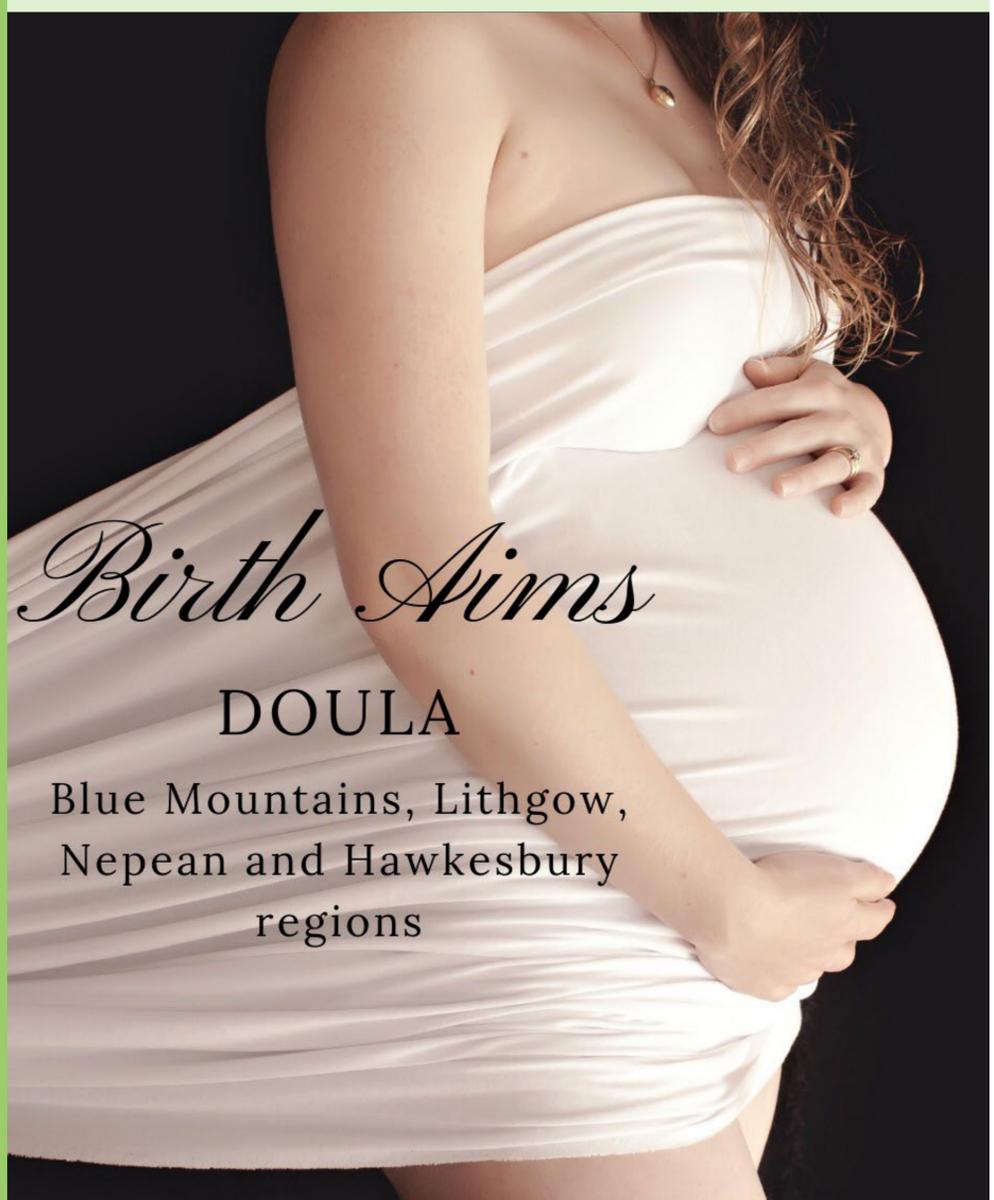
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A REVIEW OF THE MOTHERS FOR MIDWIVES MARCH

How the Government is restricting our access to safe home birth!

Written by [Sarah Widnyana](#) from Life and Lens

Photography

Photography by [Jersuha Sutton](#)

On Saturday I attended the Mother's for Midwives March in the Sydney CBD. This rally was organised by a few key women from the Homebirth Consortium Australia (HCA) to bring attention to and protest the current government policies restricting Privately Practising Midwives (PPMs) from adequately supporting women who choose to birth at home in Australia.

PPMs are midwives who choose not to work for State or Federal Health Departments and instead choose to practice, yep you guessed it, privately. They can support both hospital and home birthing women and are an absolute credit to the birth world.

Some PPMs have chosen to go into private practice after years of working in the medical system and being exposed to its faults, debilitating policies and mistreatment of birthing women and their families.

Midwifery is a Model of Care that predates and overlaps with Medicine. It is the Speciality of supporting

Women in using their own Bodies, Brains and Strength to give birth. Midwifery led care depends less on interventions because it relies more on the capabilities of Women.



Midwives are passionate about birth and have birthing women's emotional, psychological and social best interests at heart but their want to do right by their birthing mummies is sometimes overruled by outdated hospital policy, obstetricians who are a little too "intervention trigger happy" and the medical system as a whole. As Professor Hannah Dahlen, famed

midwife and academic said in the recent Birth Time 'Feminism and Human Rights in Childbirth' event: "Australia is a safe place to have a baby but...about 1 in 10 women are coming out with significant birth trauma, PTSD, and at the root of their PTSD is things that have happened in their past and when they come to give birth... they are not listened to, feel out of control, not given consent..." Did you know that women in Australia are going into hospitals for one of life's most joyous and beautiful events, and coming out instead with Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder? What. The. Actual. Fuck. Australia. 1 in 10. How is that okay?

Women are coming out of births in hospitals having been bullied, degraded and treated with violence by the very people in our medical system who are there to take care of us! Birthing women are using words such

as “rape”, “violated” and “shame” to describe their experiences. Women tell stories of care providers who have whispered threats and insults in their ears as they are being put under for c-sections or right before a care provider gives them an unconsented episiotomy.

No word of a lie, this shit is happening right here in our beloved country, Australia. Obstetric violence is real and rife in our medical system... And it doesn't just stop with the birth experience from the mothers' perspective; a negative birth means mothers are more likely to be depressed and this can then affect their relationship with their baby and thus impact on the baby's development. Not to mention the flow on effects to Post Natal Depression... Birthing women are noticing this trend in the birth world of the medical system too, hence why more and more women are choosing to deviate from the “norm” and birth their babies at home. At home where they feel safest, most supported and most comfortable.

However, the Government is determined to make homebirth access unattainable for a lot of women. In most states in Australia, PPMs are one of the only options for women seeking to birth at home with medical professionals present. There are only a handful of publicly funded home birth programs in Australia and this lack of access to a basic human right to birth where you feel safest and most comfortable is atrocious. I fully understand that to a lot of women out there, homebirth is and may never be a consideration for them – but when you look at the CHOICE for women to birth as a human right, the fact that the Government is restricting this choice for women is just fucking appalling and actually really bloody hard to believe, I thought we were living in 2018, someone might want to let the Government know because clearly they're not aware.

So how are they restricting Australians' access to homebirth?

The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law states that a midwife must not practise midwifery unless the midwife has appropriate professional indemnity insurance however, currently in Australia there is no such professional indemnity insurance product available for PPMs to purchase to cover them for the 'intra-partum' period – they can only get insurance



for pre and post-natal periods for the women they support at homebirths.

In a nutshell; the government made it a requirement that PPMs get a specific insurance product and then made it impossible for them to get said product.

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia also brought in the 'Safety and Quality Guidelines for privately practicing midwives attending home births' which made it a requirement for PPMs to have two midwives attend homebirths – this has made it unaffordable for consumers to access homebirth through PPMs as the rate they pay for their midwives has increased to cater to this requirement. The Government then implemented Section 284 of the National Law which gives PPMs providing homebirth services an exemption from the professional indemnity insurance requirement, however the exemption is currently in place until 31 December 2019 only. Just over 18 months away it will be illegal for PPMs to support women in their choice to homebirth.

A fundamental human right is at risk of being taken away from all Australian women. The choice to birth, their own children, with their own bodies, in their own homes.

Even if home birth is not something you have ever or would ever consider for yourself, I hope that you can see this for the violation of human rights that it plainly is.

It is not okay for the Australian government to try to restrict what its' female citizens can do with their bodies when birthing their babies. Women are seeking homebirth as a way to escape a flawed and dangerous

medical system and soon that will be taken away from them.

Women are being backed into a corner when seeking care at such a vulnerable time in their lives.

The 'Mothers for Midwives' March aimed to provide a platform for Homebirth Consortium Australia to call on the Government to make changes to the current policies and guidelines restricting PPMs from operating their businesses and being able to effectively support women who chose to birth at home with PPMs present. The current policies make home birth a pipe dream for some Australian families with the costs of hiring PPMs ranging from \$4,500 to \$6,000. Furthermore, families in some regional and rural locations aren't able to secure PPMs to facilitate their home births at all due to the “two midwives” rule; there simply just aren't enough PPMs in some locations to make this possible.

Sarah Widnyana is the birth and documentary photographer behind Life & Lens Photography, based in South West Sydney. Sarah was named the 2018 AIPP New South Wales Documentary Professional Photographer of the Year for her birth imagery.

Sarah's journey to birth photography began when she lost her second child, Tommy, at 20 weeks gestation, this devastating experience solidified in her that birth stories deserved to be documented and honoured as the rite of passage that they are.

Sarah now has two beautiful girls earth side and one little boy who she never got to hold. Sarah is passionate about birth rights, birth choices and empowering women to birth out of trust and not fear.



PELVIC FLOOR HEALTH

by [Ali Frendin](#)

Photographs by [Leighsa Cox Photographer](#)

There is a wealth of information given to us by our midwives and available on the internet about our newborn babies. Of course, when baby is not thriving nothing else matters except their health. But what about when baby is thriving? Where is the information about your mama body after giving birth? You can google postpartum weight-loss and you will find about 2,330,000 results. If you had the time, you could sort through and try to find the decent articles that are not promoting unhealthy, high intensity exercise and unrealistic six packs.

But don't bother. They don't exist. At least not on the main pages of Google.

Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with wanting to lose some of the weight you gained during pregnancy. I am simply advocating that you find the best way to do so.

So, the first question on many women's minds after birth is often "When can I start exercising?" The popular thought is 6 weeks. However, most GP's at the postpartum check-up do not check for diastasis recti or screen for pelvic floor function, and Obstetricians are not trained to assess pelvic floor muscles. So, before you consider joining the



local gym, make sure that:

- **Your postpartum bleeding has stopped**
- **You have seen a women's health physiotherapist (and gotten an internal exam)**
- **You are getting plenty of rest, hydration and good nutrition**

And.... If you're exhausted, struggling to find the time to eat and drink or not sleeping at night, then exercise may be the last thing you should be doing just now. You may need to give it more time, let your body heal. Childbirth is one of life's most brutal feats. During a vaginal birth, pelvic floor muscles and tissues stretch so much and can tear as the baby descends through the birth canal. In a recent study, only 25% of low-risk births at term managed a normal vaginal delivery without major trauma. Vaginal births can cause

tears to the vagina and perineum, particularly when instruments are involved. Estimates of the frequency of tears vary, with some estimates (that include episiotomy) indicating this occurs in 85% of births (Kettle 2008). While minor tears may heal quickly without intervention, some are more severe, damaging tissue, muscle and sometimes extending to the anal sphincter. These more severe tears need surgical repair, and depending on the extent, may cause a number of problems in the early postnatal period. Women may experience pain, bleeding, infection, dyspareunia (pain during sexual intercourse), and have a prolonged hospital stay.

A common saying of postnatal women is, "**Why didn't anybody tell me?!**". This sense of disempowerment can be profound and can contribute to postnatal depression and post-

REAL FITNESS *for Mums*



traumatic stress disorders. What I am trying to say is, don't rush back into it - looking after a baby is a 24/7 job and your pelvic floor tissues are very vulnerable during this time. This is what GP's, midwives and OB's need to be highlighting to postpartum women. They also should be referring all women to a women's health physio for a check-up and/or physiotherapy. How can society and the medical profession recognise the need for physiotherapy for a sprained ankle but not for something as traumatic as what happens to the pelvic floor during labour and childbirth?

What exactly is the pelvic floor and its function?

The pelvic floor includes the muscles, connective tissue and nerves inside the pelvic cavity, and it is shaped like the inside of a bowl or hammock. The pelvic floor holds up pelvic organs, aids in sexual function (orgasm and erections), aids continence (the ability to control bladder and bowel emptying) and must relax for childbirth. The pelvic floor connects to the tail bone, pubic bone and sit bones and is intricately connected to the femur (thigh bone, spine and glutes).

What should we all know about our pelvic floor before, during and after pregnancy?

After your baby is born, your abdominal wall and pelvic floor will immediately feel different and probably very weak. This is normal! You have just carried around a few extra Kilos which have been stretching and pressing down on your abdominals and pelvic cavity for months, coupled with pushing those extra kilos out through your vagina. It is normal to feel like your organs are sagging, because they are.

Everyone also needs to know that it's part of the core and that the core is a system that is driven by the breath. Therefore, the breath needs to be involved to train the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor is just like any other muscle, it needs to be able to go full range (relaxed and contracted), and switch on when it needs to. We don't think

about switching on our biceps to pick up the shopping, do we? We just bend our elbow and the biceps contract to just the right amount to meet the demand of the load we are carrying. So too the pelvic floor needs to be able to respond to what we ask it to do. However, pregnancy and birth cause this automatic pelvic floor function to be missing in action. Therefore, as mums we need to wake up our brain again to reconnect with our PF, and then for a while consciously contract it to the right intensity to meet the demand of our task and to regain strength.

During pregnancy, emphasis on birth preparation for the pelvic floor should be paramount, so that the pelvic floor can relax and the baby can pass through with ease, without the need for assistance. An overactive pelvic floor is one that is unable to relax or let go, and may result in tearing, episiotomy or a distressed baby. Before pregnancy it's important to address any pelvic floor issues that could be exacerbated by pregnancy and birth. Many women experience SUI (stress urinary incontinence), pelvic pain and painful sex long before they ever become pregnant.

It can be overwhelming discovering your body is not functioning as it used to, and having a newborn to care for adds to that load. But help is out there! Everyone needs to know that there are pelvic floor specialists out there, called women's health physiotherapists. These physios are highly specialised to treat, diagnose and assist women in the maternal years with all sorts of pelvic floor concerns. After you have a baby, book in with one in your area. Make it the first thing you do! Even if you have no concerns at present, an internal exam is the only way to accurately assess your PF.

So what are the types of delivery and what do they mean for you? I'm sure you all know birth is a physical marathon that also results in tenderness, soreness, grazes, difficulty pooping, swelling, fatigue, blood loss, and dehydration. The reward is far greater than the risks, holding your sweet baby for the first time and raising your very own - but should that mean we completely ignore our own pelvic health? Some women who deliver vaginally suffer levator avulsion, where the levator ani muscle literally tears away from the bone inside of the front of the pelvis. Some women suffer tearing during delivery to the perineum. These tears can be mild (1st degree) to severe (4th degree).

- 1st degree - tearing of the top layer of skin, sometimes referred to as a graze. No muscles are torn, stitches are sometimes given but are not necessary.

- 2nd degree - tearing of the skin and superficial layer of pelvic muscles. An episiotomy is similar to a 2nd degree tear.

- 3rd & 4th Degree - tearing to the deep pelvic muscles and includes the sphincter muscles.

- Vacuum or Forceps - episiotomy is required for these procedures, and therefore there is considerable pelvic floor damage. Sometimes there may be 3rd or 4th degree tearing as well as an episiotomy.

The higher the degree of tearing, the more trauma there is to the pelvic floor muscles. Pelvic floor and abdominal muscle strength & rehabilitation are of high priority after pregnancy and birth and are the key to re-building a strong body.

- C-section - C-section delivery requires that the superficial layers of skin



be cut, then the tissues are separated until the uterus is cut to deliver the baby. No muscles are cut however, crucial tissues & ligaments are. The uterus is sutured after the delivery of the placenta and so are the superficial layers of skin. Afterwards, the scar may be prone to infection, numbness and it will develop scar tissue. It is normal to find it difficult to 'connect' to the core due to the numbness & severing of these tissues. The phases of wound healing after c-section may take up to 1 ½ half years to be fully restored. A c-section scar may also change your posture, which can result in back pain, thigh muscle pain and neck pain.

The scarring can cause the adjacent muscles to develop trigger points that refer pain to areas in the pelvic region such as the vagina, rectum, clitoris and urethra. There are a lot of nerves around the actual area of the scar and some scars can irritate these nerves,



such as the vagina, rectum, clitoris and urethra. There are a lot of nerves around the actual area of the scar and some scars can irritate these nerves, many describing it as a feeling of severe, constant, period pain cramping. A c-section is major surgery! It is not without long term side effects (just like a natural birth). This also applies to anyone who has had a hysterectomy or abdominal surgery, such as hernia repair or endometriosis surgery. Any abdominal surgery compromises the abdominal wall and strength and thus C-section mums are much weaker in the abdominals than mums who deliver vaginally.

So what can you expect after birth? What's normal and what is not?

Normal

Bleeding up to 6 weeks (similar flow to a period)
Painful pooping, stinging urination (up to 8 weeks)
Tender, itchy, tingling, numb c-section scar, painful lifting baby
Squishy tummy/Diastasis Recti (abdominal separation)
Low energy/tiredness
Feelings of sadness / loneliness / moodiness
Sore breasts, cracked nipples
Pelvic floor feeling weak

Abnormal

Sudden heavy bleeding, clotting, or bleeding longer than 6 weeks
Constipation or leaking wee, poo or gas when you cough, run, sneeze, laugh or any other time
Hot, throbbing, bleeding, pus, or very painful scar, any time after birth
Bulging or doming of your tummy during movement, abdominal hernia, a large diastasis recti (over 4cm), ongoing back pain
Extreme Fatigue
Hallucinations, thoughts about harming your baby, violent anger, depressed feelings that hang around longer than 2

weeks, excessive worry
Hot painful breast, or lumps in breasts
Bulging, pressure, heavy, loose or dragging sensation in your vagina or rectum. Any leaking of urine or poop under any circumstances, feeling or seeing a bulge inside or outside your vagina



So what are the steps to restoring the PF and abdominal wall post birth?

1. Don't do anything vigorous for the first 6 - 8 weeks; just let your body begin its healing process by getting plenty of rest, hydration and nutrition. You can start engaging your pelvic floor and transverse abdominis (TVA).
2. Book in an appointment with a women's health physio for an internal exam.
3. Be alert to the signs of pelvic floor dysfunction (and do not ignore them). These include leaking after 6 weeks postpartum during activity, not being able to hold on (urinary or fecal), ongoing back pain, pelvic pain (feels like period pain constantly), painful sex, a heavy or loose sensation in vagina, not being able to keep tampon in or pain while wearing one, problems going on the toilet and even recurrent urinary tract infections.
4. As well as following the program of PF training from your physio, start paying attention to your posture in sitting, standing and so on. Also start reconnecting with your glute muscles and rebuilding strength in your thighs. Don't introduce weights too soon or if you have a large or soft Diastasis recti (ab separation) or pelvic floor issues. You do need to learn how to pick up your baby and so on while being conscious of your pelvic floor, so I don't have a blanket rule about using weights, except that they should start out light and you should progress slowly. Don't start cross-fit or high intensity exercise for at least 10- 12 months post-partum.
5. It's important to remember that what

may be okay for one person will be not okay for another. It depends on whether the pelvic floor is overactive or there is a prolapse, whether there was a c-section scar, or whether there was an assisted birth. It depends on how you use your breath and how strong you were prior to pregnancy. It doesn't mean you can't do the types of exercise you love, it just means you have to modify and scale things back a bit, to rehabilitate. Training should have more purpose than just getting your body back - You need to train for motherhood; It is a sport!

Can diastasis recti and pelvic floor dysfunction be fixed?

YES! Surgery is not the only answer. Pelvic physiotherapy is 80% successful (unlike surgery, which can also cause more problems). Simple things like breathing can begin to heal PF dysfunction and diastasis recti and can be started the day after you give birth. EVERY woman should know how to use her breath, her core and her pelvic floor!

All of this information and much more is included in the Real Fitness for Mums Postnatal ebooks. The ebooks (stages 1-3) contain 10 week programs to restore function, strength and tone to the core and pelvic floor after birth, and a fully functional fitness guide for those wanting to get back into exercise. Ali is also accepting 1:1 coaching clients in the Sydney areas. Ali has been in the industry for 11 years and has worked with this special population for 7 years. <https://realfitnessformums.net/product/ultimate-core-restore-ebook-stage-1-start-here-for-diastasis-recti-pelvic-floor-new-mamas/>

Ali is a mum of two little girls and lives in Sydney's Northern Beaches. Ali has undertaken an abundance of courses in the women's health area and her current mission is to educate trainers, practitioners and sporting coaches on helping them to bridge the gap between birth and returning to fitness. She created Real Fitness for Mums because she noticed a need and has since endeavoured to make hard to find information on pelvic and core health available to women all over the world via Her ultimate core restore ebooks. She is one of the best in understanding the deep physical and mental challenges associated with pregnancy, birth and motherhood in the fitness industry.

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ISABELLA'S BIRTH

A letter to my Daughter

By Susanna Horn

G On the 20th June I woke up in amazement that I had some mild Braxton hicks. Today was a very busy day, errands had to be run and fun to be had. My best friend Jessie arrived at our house, I didn't tell her I was having Braxton hicks, it was my secret for the day. We dropped Daddy's car off at the mechanic, dropped Eva at day care and Jess and I made it to the plaza. I was so excited and secretly enjoying all the braxton hicks! Jess and I bought our final Big Mac meal and sat in the cinema watching Pitch perfect 2, laughing so hard we cried! Jessie sure knows how to help a mumma relax and get the oxytocin flowing! I soon found myself perched on the edge of the seat breathing through these Braxton hicks and went to the toilet a few to many times which made Jess very suspicious and excited that I was in labour.

We walked slowly back to the car, I was denying to Jess that I may be in early labour, much to Jessie's disbelief as she asked if I was ok to drive - of course I am! We excitedly and quickly picked Eva up from day care and drove to the mechanic to get daddy's car and drop it back to him so he could get home. It was at this point I found myself pushing the accelerator and break a bit hard.

When Jessie got in the car, I got out and told Jess she needs to drive! Jess was so excited and nervous with the biggest smile on her face, thinking I was going to birth then and there as she hadn't seen a woman labour before.

When we got home we went for a walk to help you into a good position and hopefully crack things along. Jess was adamant to find a 4 leaf clover and she did just that! Another encouraging sign that you Isabella were going to come very soon! Jess headed off home as she had to work the next day and Daddy arrived home not long after. It was early evening and Eva was in bed as I sat in the lounge having strong braxton hicks. Jenny my midwife was rostered the day off tomorrow, so I sent her a message to give her the heads up you were going to come. Just as I told Daddy we better have a good sleep as I will wake up in labour at 4am, Eva woke up crying and had a fever of 40 degrees. Of course, this would happen right now, another thing to test my strength! But I knew deep down if anyone could handle this, it was me. I said to Daddy, "Great, I am definitely going to have a baby tomorrow". We called Dr to the door which I found a hilarious visit. The poor young doctor couldn't wait to leave, he looked

worried I may have a baby during his visit! There I was in my bra and undies contracting and breastfeeding Eva, 2 years and 4months old. He wrote the script for antibiotics and promptly left as I apologised for my loud and long breaths, reassuring him it's all good! We settled Eva and went off to bed.

Now 40+2, as predicted, I woke up at 4am with contractions. I didn't wake Daddy and spent the next 2 hours lying in bed, breastfeeding Eva. Soon we were all awake and Eva was very upset with an ear infection and wanting to continuously breastfeed. I found this very hard and got quite irritated. Jenny my midwife had texted me early that morning and asked what I was doing. I lied and told her not much, as I was ready for another 4 day labour. Jenny told me she was going to go to her gym class. "Ok, yep, she can do that, it's her day off," I thought.

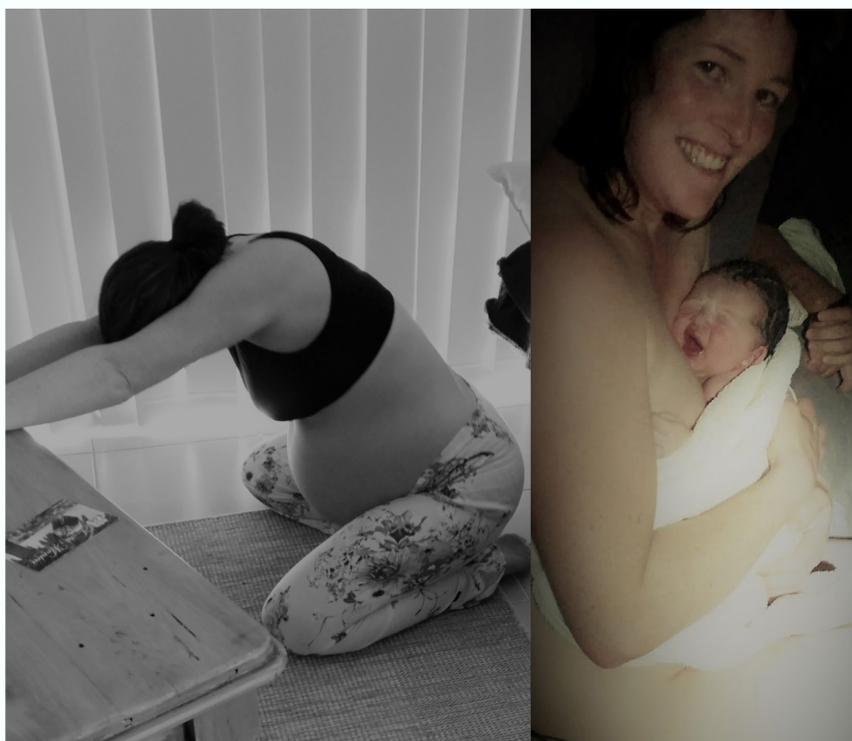
I asked Daddy to take Eva to the park and get some lemonade and snakes for me (what a stupid idea). At first I was so relieved to be on my own and put Ed Sheeran on whilst hiding in our spare room, but then these contractions picked up and I felt scared being home alone. So, I texted my other dear friend, Jess, who was also a midwife to come over and keep me company so

so Dan could look after Eva, as I couldn't bear the thought of her spending her first night away when she was feeling sick and miserable. I really needed to birth you at home, today! Jess arrived with her beautiful 12 week old baby Josie and I felt so relieved and relaxed again.

Jenny messaged me back after her gym class asking what I was doing, I again told her not much as I knew she had a nice lunch to go to and I wanted her to enjoy that. Meanwhile I was having 3 contractions every 10 minutes. I thought to myself, "Oh well, Jess is here, she's caught plenty of babies." Jess was excited and encouraged me you were coming today! I laughed at her in disbelief. Jenny messaged me again, in true Jenny style writing, "I am about to order lunch, what are you doing?" I lied again and said not much.

It was now early afternoon and I stopped contracting. I thought there is no way I'm doing this for 4 days again, so Jess and I walked up and down hills. But nope, I had 1 measly contraction as I waved at a lady putting her bin out on the street. I sent Jess home, totally bummed that we weren't going to meet you today. Jenny rang me this time and she told me she was coming over to see what I was doing. When she arrived, I was lying in bed breastfeeding Eva (which worked wonders) and was having good contractions again. I didn't believe these were good enough as I was enjoying the pressure and breathing through them, feeling in control. Jenny told me these were the sort of contractions I would have a baby with and listened to your happy heartbeat. Jenny said she was going home to shower and eat dinner, and we would ring her at 7pm to come back. I loved her optimism and laughed, telling her we'd ring her tomorrow.

7pm came, I was in the birth pool contracting 3 times every 10 minutes. It was very hot water, too hot for Eva to get in, which really annoyed me. Eva wasn't settling so I stormed out of the pool and texted Jess and Lauren to come look after Eva so Daddy could be with me. Jess arrived, Jenny arrived, and I relaxed. I asked Jenny why she was setting up the birthing packs and scales, still in disbelief you were coming today. Jenny said told me I'd been having 4 contractions every 10 minutes and she wasn't taking the packs home. I thought she was ridiculous and felt embarrassed that I was about to let everyone down and never birth you. Lauren's daughter Carla then arrived with coffees and babycinos. I was a little bit thrown with the amount of people in the house at this point as I hadn't anticipated it, even though I had sent messages in labour. Jenny intuitively picked up on this and locked me in our bedroom as my contractions had slowed again. Jenny



laid on my bed with me as I cried and tried to figure out what to do with Eva and everyone in the house. Jenny told me I wasn't going to have a baby with the circus going on out there. I thought, oh no, what have I created? I knew she was right. But everyone sorted it out and beautiful Jess ended up breast feeding Eva to sleep for me.

Jenny told me to walk around, I thought this was weird and felt embarrassed but also amused at her antics. I ended up hiding in my wardrobe and then walking out in a huff and throwing myself on the floor as the contractions had picked up again. Jenny, in a very matter of fact tone, told me to get in the shower because I was getting stressed. She was right, I was, I felt so much pressure to do this, to birth you and birth you at home. I realised at this point it was solely up to me and closed my eyes and repeated, "It's just me and my baby." At first it was a mind battle and I was arguing with myself, but eventually we found our rhythm and I went into a peaceful trance, enjoyed the waves of labour and envisioned you moving down. I felt so focused and connected with you.

I soon hopped back into the birth pool where I spent the next few hours, vomited and asked for vegemite toast, until I became too tired, impatient and fed up. I was transitional but clueless. I just kept saying, "I want to go home." Jenny asked me if I wanted to go and lie down on my bed and rest. Clever Jenny, and silly me, thought this is a wonderful idea! Yes, I'm going to have a sleep now. Jenny and Jane tucked me into bed, the doona was so cosy, I was just about to doze off and then out of nowhere these powerful surges woke me up. I felt so frustrated and kicked the doona off. Everything became quite intense and overwhelming; I felt like I was passing out with every contraction and feared I would be transferred to hospital. My waters had broken but your sac was so strong and wouldn't budge, so Jenny helped us out.

She told me if I wanted a water birth I needed to move to the pool - the pool felt 100km away.

So there I was, in another world. It was just after midnight, 40+3, surrounded by amazing, strong, calm women, smiling, knowing I was ok and I had this. Your dad was beaming in excitement, eagerly watching as I was birthing you, in my room, on my bed, growling loudly as these powerful, frightening and intense reflexes kicked in. I gathered my thoughts and told myself I just had to go with it, I felt like a powerful birthing vessel

bringing you into my arms.

You looked exactly the way I imagined and dreamed: dark hair, dark eyes, a beautiful baby girl. As I birthed you Jenny's daughter Katie had phoned her to let her know her waters had broken. I laughed and said, "Well you better get out of here." I knew Katie and I were going to birth on the same day! While you and Daddy enjoyed your first snuggles, I sat on the toilet and birthed your placenta. Jane kept me company, I said, "Here it comes, plopp," and Jane smiled and said, "Doesn't that feel great?" We climbed into bed and enjoyed our snuggles and a breastfeed. Eva woke up and Daddy brought her over to meet you. It was like you were always here and meant to be! Eva snuggled into me holding your hand and you both had a breastfeed. So there we were, a new family of four, and I did it - circus and all!

Susanna is the mother of two beautiful, cheeky and totally loveable girls, Eva 3.5 and Isabella 15 months. She is also partner of Daniel, a midwife and registered nurse. She had always envisioned herself as a mother and yearned for that day to come, little did she know what a crazy adventure that would be, drawing from the roots of who she is and who she would become. It also brought to life the passion she has for women's health and rights, helping her discover her inner feminist and the realisation of how powerful and strong women are. Susanna felt so fortunate to have a publicly funded homebirth through Belmont midwifery Group, and hopes more women can be made aware of these wonderful services.



THE HEALING JOURNEY FROM *Midwife to Doula*

By Jacki Barker (Love Cherub - <https://www.lovecherub.com/>)
Photos courtesy of Erika Elliott - <https://www.beachesdoula.com/erikaelliott>

My journey through midwifery to become a doula is pretty unusual. I am very passionate about what I do and couldn't be happier working as a doula. This passion for what I do has led me to create a company alongside another midwife, Jennifer Hazi. We Birth is the name of our company and we educate and provide a support network for doulas and birthworkers, but more on this later.

I believe I am doing now, as a doula, what I thought I would do when I became a midwife. I really love that I can build a strong relationship with couples through their perinatal journey. They need this continuity of care which the hospital system is so often unable to provide. As a midwife, I was staring at clocks, CTGs, policies and computers instead of being with women. Being a team-leader meant I spent even less time assisting women through birth. Most of the time, I had never met the women who walked into the birth unit in labour.

I seriously considered becoming an eligible independent midwife for a

period. I thought how wonderful it would be to build a relationship and provide the type of support couples deserve. So I left my hospital admin role and planned to work as a doula until I could become an eligible midwife. The admin role made me realise I needed to be back in the birth room again. I had sustained a neck injury while in a birth unit and it was decided a desk role would prevent further injury to my neck. Being a doula was a way, I decided, that I could return to the birth room. I would not be in the position of being a workers compensation concern to government health as I would be working for myself and I would ensure all heavy work would be performed by partners and other staff members.

As I ventured into the world of doulas, I was thrilled to have independent midwife Sheryl Sidery as a friend and a mentor. We met through a love of music and we sing in a choir together. We discussed how I might begin my journey to independent midwifery. Whilst I was thoroughly enjoying my work as a doula, I also loved working with Sheryl as a second

midwife attending homebirths all around Sydney. I learned, or perhaps unlearned, so much during this time. Homebirths helped me stamp out so many health policy blockages I had hardwired into my brain over so many years as a hospital midwife.

The homebirths I attended led me to become a passionate birth activist and a much better doula than I might have been had I not been in this role. I remember the first HBAC I attended. The couple were looking lovingly into each other's eyes as the woman leaned forward in her steamy birthing pool. In my mind, I thought back to the hospital VBAC policy of no waterbirth, cannula on admission, continuous monitoring, bright lights etc. This opened my mind! I watched and listened as Sheryl assisted this amazing woman have an undisturbed, beautiful, physiological birth. It was such a powerful and healing experience not only for the woman but also for me. I let go of all the boundaries that had been placed in my mind and really saw the power of this woman birthing with the best kind of support in the safest place for her.



I fell in love with homebirth just like that! I was full of a sudden urge to assist women to learn to believe in their own true essence of self-power in pregnancy and birth.

All my policy driven fear became a thing of the past. My mind was exercised with research and statistics around all the hospital policies I had once believed to be law. I gulped down all the facts and figures and found myself repeating them to couples. I researched articles and read books and I started to view the maternity system that I was once so much a part of (albeit, a reluctant part) with a very fresh set of eyes. I could see I had always supported HypnoBirthing and waterbirth from my student midwifery days. Those were the rooms I loved to be in the most. Because I trained in the UK, I was lucky to have attended homebirths as a student.

Reflecting back to my time as a midwife in the UK, I remember feeling proud of myself learning to become proficient in suturing, cannulation and scrub nurse skills soon after I graduated. Midwifery appeared to be about how quickly and efficiently you could suture and cannulate. However, I always felt something was wrong with the system I was working in. I just thought there seemed to be far too few natural, easy births; Intervention was rife.

Many of the other midwives I spoke with didn't appear to understand what I was trying to question. Often midwives, through no fault of their own, appeared to be focused on their individual skill sets and their positions in the highly political arena of the midwifery led unit. I remember discussing how I loved assisting low risk women who enjoyed their waterbirths and the answer was invariably the same, that I was similar to an 'old school' midwife

just wanting to attend natural births. They would always follow it up with the fact that I would soon become deskilled if I wanted to focus my attention on natural birth. What a pity it would be to lose all the skills I had learned with epidural use, inductions, HDU and theatres etc!

When one of the midwives I had trained with decided to become an independent midwife, she was given very little support and instead many started sharing stories of dangerous and incompetent independent midwives they had heard about. I began to feel a real fear around homebirth because of the stories those delivery suite midwives shared.

Sheryl and Jane Hardwicke Collings helped me examine the reality of our patriarchal, dysfunctional maternity system in its true colours. Jacki the feminist, birth activist doula was on a mission! I love that I can assist couples working outside of the system. Our maternity system has made it so difficult to become an independent midwife. I decided not to become independent as a result of these difficulties. However, I feel I can help make a difference one birth at a time working as a doula alongside educating doulas.

I firmly believe my company, We Birth, can create a change in the birth world. Doulas need to be educated. We need to put the power back into the hands of birthing women. We Birth provides advanced online education and a support network for doulas. We raise community awareness of doulas. Our ongoing dialogue is with Obstetricians, midwives, GPs and consumers. The better a doula is informed, the more power they can provide for women and their partners as they navigate our broken maternity system. Knowledge is power, as they say, and it is time doulas gave that power back to the women who need it the most. Women-centred-care needs to be exactly that. We need to ensure women are the centre of the care and doulas are in a great place to help make this happen.

Doulas in Australia are not governed or regulated as they are in the UK. Each individual doula self regulates here. We Birth is providing a high level of education, using evidence based research, to doulas and birthworkers who are keen to be well informed. We have a Mentorship Program as well as courses on obstetric emergencies, breastfeeding and ideological examination of our maternity system. Eventually, doulas will be regulated everywhere just as homebirth midwives have had to jump through hoops over time. Before they are regulated here, they are in such a great position to educate and help women comprehend our

system and use it to their advantage.

Doulas are a necessary part of a team in the maternity world today because midwives are required to do more and more obstetric led activities. I want to share the important role of a doula. In an ideal world, we could ask our sisters, mothers and women who are part of our tribe, to be our doula equivalent. Our homebirth midwives would also provide so much nurturing and continuity of care. This is what we need to create again. This is how we can heal birth. Hiring doulas to be present at birth can help us along the road to repairing our maternity system. They can empower women to make well informed birth choices. This, I believe, will lead us back to homebirth being the preferred choice.

Jacki is an experienced and respected birth professional with a passion for natural births. She has almost 20 years' experience as a midwife in a variety of settings including hospitals and home births. She now operates her own successful doula business, www.lovecherub.com.

- Mother of 2 adult children.
- Studied Arts and Psychology in the UK at Open University and Birkbeck College, University of London.
- Studied Midwifery at EIHMS, University of Surrey, Guildford UK.
- Worked as a midwife at East Surrey Hospital, Guildford Hospital, Mona Vale Hospital and Manly Hospital.
- Trained in waterbirth Crowborough Birth Centre East Sussex UK.
- Trained in reflexology for midwives.
- Trained HypnoBirthing Practitioner Marie Mongan's Method.
- Team Leader Midwife at Manly Hospital.
- On the Steering Committee for the NSW state directive 'Towards Normal Birth' while at Manly.
- Worked with Independent Midwife Sheryl Sidery as a second midwife for home births in Sydney.
- Successful full-time doula and business owner for over 3 years attending between 40 to 50 births per year.
- Co-Director and Founder of We Birth: Advanced Education and Training for Doulas and Birth Workers.

Birth Announcements

Noa



Our son Noa was born on the **15th April 2018**. Surrounded by love, trust and beautiful women holding space for us. I couldn't have imagined a better way to welcome our baby earthside. Yumi xx

John David Low



This is John David Low, born at home on **10/01/18** in a quick, calm and beautiful birth. He is our first baby born at home and is adored by his two older sisters (Penny and Josie). He weighed in at 5.4kg and was 60cm long. He is a delightfully calm soul, in the midst of his two passionate and spirited sisters. We deeply value our three beautiful gifts from God.

Hendrix Winterstein



I want to break the stigma and encourage more women to look into home birthing without a cloud of fear or pre-conceived ideas. I want to be a loud voice for all women who want to take back control of their births, who long for an empowering birth experience, who want to make truly informed choices and decisions when it comes to how you plan to bring your baby into this world...because it matters. A woman's transformation into motherhood matters. How she is being treated throughout the entire process matters.

At 4.01am on the **28th of April, 2018**, my birthing dreams' came true. I DID IT. I had an all-natural, VBAC, water birth at home. Our beautiful boy Hendrix Winterstein landed safely earth-side and has dropped the biggest love bomb on all our hearts.

Vera Mae Wilkins



We welcomed Vera Mae earthside on **Sunday the 5th of August** at 12:28 am. We had a very quick yet amazing labour (3 hours all up) and she surprised us with her little foot appearing and coming out breech. With the amazing support of our Doula, Jerusha holding the fort while our midwife was en route, there was only calm and love in our space. Nonetheless, she birthed easily without a worry, and Jo the midwife arrived with two minutes to spare, hands at the ready and waiting for bub. Healthy Mum, ecstatic Dad and a healthy baby girl with bodies, minds and souls whole and very full hearts.

Max Oliver Napper



Max Oliver Napper arrived at 4:40am on **12th April 2018** in the most peaceful and perfect birth at home in the Blue Mountains surrounded by his dad and siblings Charlotte, Samuel and Zachary. He is the last baby for Jared and Erin and we are now at Max capacity! Many thanks to Jo Hunter and her friend Nicky for their support. Jo's warm and loving expertise held space for us as we welcomed Max earth side, and we couldn't be more grateful for her presence in our lives, not just as a midwife but as a friend. Thank you for sharing this journey with us!

Maxwell Leigh McMahon



First time parents Kate and Sam welcomed Maxwell Leigh McMahon earthside on the **6th August 2018**. Birthed at home he arrived gently into the water at 10:26pm. Weighing 3.55kg, 57cm long, 35cm circumference.

River Echo



We welcomed precious River Echo onto this land on the **13th July, 2018**. Birthed at home by the light of a warm roaring fire, into water and in the presence of our daughter, Jasmine, and my darling husband, Matt. Barney our son trotted in just after River emerged, teddy in hand to show his new sibling, and was excitedly part of the placental birth. With the loving guidance of our midwife Jo we are now complete. The most transformative moment of my life.

Bronte Jean Begnell



Bronte Jean Begnell was born at home on Monday the **5th of March 2018** at 12:55am. She was born in the dining room next to the birth pool and welcomed by her mum Kristyn, dad James and big sister Georgia. An enormous amount of love and gratitude goes to our midwives Jane and Geesje, for guiding us through the pregnancy and helping to make this healing HBAC possible.

Euan Bon Offerton Kelshaw



Elise and Jeremy welcomed little Euan Bon into their family on **8th December 2017**. He was our third homebirth and, just like his two sisters, arrived swiftly and calmly just before dawn. 3.92kg, 57cm long. Our wonderful midwife Jo Hunter supported us once again exactly the way we needed her to and we are so grateful for her love towards us and deep wisdom as a birthkeeper. Euan brings endless joy and laughter into our family and we all adore him to bits.

THE BIRTH OF Mahfi

By Jessie Goetze

Photos by [Port Douglas Wedding Photography](#) and [Shelley the doula](#)



Firstly I'd like to say that although I spent more hours than I could tell you researching and preparing for a homebirth 'just in case' (I'm sure you are all aware of the unacceptable amount of maternity wards that have been closed), we only freebirthed because we have zero access to homebirthing midwives (private or government funded) in our region.

I had felt great about pregnancy and our upcoming birth. I was healthy, energised and stayed very active (I photographed a wedding the day before our due date). We went on a babymoon to Hawaii and upon our return began the antenatal classes at the private hospital where I was registered. I remember the first question I was asked when I arrived was if I was booked into a C-section. I was shocked and replied, "Not that I am aware of".

I had already begun my Hypnobabies home program (at Week 32) and at that stage had every intention of having a physiological birth with no interventions. Thanks to my strong mum who had always encouraged me to always trust in myself, I 100% believed my body was made for birth.

During the antenatal classes I was told

when I would be induced and what drugs would be used to augment labour and their benefits in doing so. I was reassured of free movement, told I could bring my own music and oils, that they'd welcome my doula and if there were no complications could do delayed clamping and skin to skin bonding.

They insisted on having me sign a document agreeing to regular monitoring and a cannula. Being low risk, I asked about not being monitored, not having a cannula, how long they allowed for the placenta to be birthed and if there was any way around not being able to birth in the bath. I asked their policy on the 'rest and be thankful' stage and, in the end, I wasn't confident that my birth preferences would be followed. My midwives had worked in Europe & New Zealand and had so much experience in home births but I just felt like they were bound by hospital policies. I was told by my obstetrician to get the gestational diabetes test, the group B streptococcus test and was told what shots I and my baby would receive immediately after birth. When I questioned (refused) them I wasn't met with encouragement. I was told that delayed clamping had no proven benefit and that the shots were

part of their protocol.

I by no means intend any disrespect to the doctors and midwives as we are certainly blessed to have the medical system that we have in Australia! The bottom line is that I didn't feel supported in my informed choices, I actually felt I was being a nuisance.

With the encouragement of my incredible birth doula Shelly I began to research. I read Ina May, Sarah Buckley, I watched home birthing videos & documentaries, I joined the Facebook page BirthTUBE (and was excited to livestream our birth). I kept reading about the increasing rate of 'emergency' C-sections and found reasoning as to why so many are occurring. I read recent studies that supported that place of birth for low risk pregnancies had statistically no impact on infant mortality. The more research I did the more I discovered our bodies are not being left to do what they do most naturally. I found so many myths surrounding childbirth, it made me angry. It is assumed that we NEED HELP TO BIRTH, that we DO NOT HAVE THE ABILITY to birth without medical help. Babies are being taken from the womb well before their estimated



due dates as precautions, and mums believe they are doing the right thing because they are being told so by the doctors.

So, I started preparing for the homebirth. I took it as a huge responsibility and learned as much as I could about any complications that might happen - I learned newborn resuscitation, what to do if I haemorrhaged among many other potential situations. I made two manuals for my husband on how he could support me during labour and his part to play in our emergency back-up plan.

Then I prepared my birth space. I put up affirmations and crystals to heighten female energy, I had items that made me happy and encouraged the amazing birth hormones, I decorated with pretty flowers and fairy lanterns.

I woke at about 2:30am with a feeling that I needed to walk that I could not ignore. I paced around the house and eventually settled into our upstairs room, being followed by my beautiful cat who kept me company, and feeling happy with her loud purrs vibrating against my belly. At the time I thought I was experiencing pre-labour and was surprised with how 'pushy' I was feeling. I remember thinking, "Wow, I wonder what the 'real' throws of labour will feel like."

Looking back now I realise I was in 'real' labour. I didn't feel any cramping in my abdomen, I felt pressure in my lower back during the waves.

I told Brett when he woke not to call Shelly yet as I didn't feel as though Mahli was going to be born any time soon. He must have felt differently because he called Shelly who had instinctively already started her journey to us. Shelly arrived at about 8:30am, she was unobtrusive and used her incredible intuition to know when to apply pressure to my lower back.

During one particularly strong pressure I remember exclaiming, "Whoa," in awe as

I watched and felt my waters break with such force. This coincided with transition. I heard Shelly gently remind Brett to start running that bath. She asked where I visualised having our baby and I slowly made my way upstairs. I climbed in and felt really good in a wide kneel position. Shelly had noticed where my hand was and asked what I could feel. I had smiled at the softness and slipperiness of her hair and replied, "My baby." 23 minutes after my waters broke, just as Brett responded to my calling out and leapt into the bath, our little Mahli was born at 10:23am. She took her first breath just a short time after being in our arms, and coloured very quickly.

We spent some time in the bath and let her crawl to my breast. My love for these two is a love that has reached into corners of my heart that I didn't know existed. We moved to the bed and soon birthed the placenta in its entirety. It was amazing being able to feel the uterus contracting down into a tight ball. I lost very little blood and was sipping on red grape juice and Blissful Herbs No Bleed Tea while bonding with our little one.

I hadn't intended to go anywhere for after care/checks, however the hospital actually called the ambulance after Brett answered the phone to them and they discovered I'd already had Mahli. The ambulance arrived without our permission. The intrusion was unnecessary and an invasion of our peaceful space. They rushed in and were racing to prepare the Syntocinon. I wasn't sure what they were doing but before they could jab me Shelly told them to stop. She reminded them I had already birthed the placenta and was not bleeding. I was feeding Mahli and was just chilling out on my oxytocin high. They then tried to cut the cord which Shelly again



prevented and Brett did this instead. The three paramedics (all men) later told me that when they are called for in these situations they expect an emergency. They still wanted to take me to hospital however I declined. They left giving their congratulations and saying I looked like I was about to go on a holiday somewhere. We did go later that night to our private hospital where my OB and midwife met me. No, they were not too happy about the homebirth...but I didn't care, I was still on that oxytocin high and nothing could bring me down. It was the most empowering, humbling, incredible



moment of our lives.

We came home and I had a beautiful Blissful Herbs tonic bath with gorgeous flower petals, sipping my red grape juice from a wine glass. It truly was the most incredible day, one that I will relive over and over and can't wait to tell Mahli about.

I put our smooth, peaceful, beautiful birth down to feeling loved, safe and supported with no disturbances or interruptions. My endorphins and hormones were able to run wild! I

was able to listen clearly to my body, visualising opening up and breathing baby down, moving how my body wanted to move, enjoying the pressure instead of fighting it. I was free from fear, stress and the pressure of time limits which cause adrenaline that delays the birthing process in so many women.

Women intuitively seek out the safest place for them to birth - for some this is hospital. I told anyone who would listen to me about all the benefits I had found of waterbirths and undisturbed birth. I never doubted myself for a second! There was never a time during labour that I didn't think I could do it. Despite being criticised later for creating unrealistic expectations of birth, I believe that doing so much research contributed to the birth we had which was an empowering, unmedicated birth. It was everything we expected and more. We had done everything we could to prepare physically, mentally, emotionally, practically and in the case of any complications. It wasn't just birth goals we had - we had a focussed plan of action that we followed to give my body the best chance of the birth experience we had.

I hope that women out there feel strong enough to voice their wishes - whatever they may be. It is your legal right and you should be supported in your informed

choices. I also urge expecting mums to do their own evidence based research, trust your mama instincts. No one knows your body like you do.

Every woman remembers the way she was made to feel during birth. If she was respected and in control or ignored, listened to or made to feel like she was being demanding or 'hysterical'. It doesn't just affect her in the days and weeks following birth, but is something that will affect her for the rest of her life. The end result of birth isn't 'just' about a healthy baby - the mental and physical health of the mother should be equally as important.

Happy birthing mamas.

Jessie Goetze is a Port Douglas photographer. She was born in Byron bay and raised on a certified organic farm. Her freebirth recently gained international attention. "Our birth was obviously special to us, but I didn't realise something so natural could spark so much controversy. It's raised so many important questions like WHY we were forced to freebirth, WHY couldn't my hospital accommodate my birth wishes? WHY is it assumed births must be managed? WHY is birth feared? WHY aren't women aware it's their legal right to have choice and autonomy over their body and baby during pregnancy, labour and birth?"

Help us!

Homebirth Access Sydney is working hard on birth advocacy behind the scenes in various ways. One of the ways we are doing this is to compile information about GP referral refusal around Australia, and also to obtain information about women's reasons for choosing homebirth, experiences of homebirth and the barriers they have encountered when planning to birth at home. We'd love for you to help us get this information! You can provide info via these two surveys:

***GP referral refusal survey**, investigating the number of women affected by referral refusal, and the spread of these instances around Australia.

***Homebirth in Australia survey**, investigating why women choose to plan a homebirth and the barriers they encounter to this choice.

Furthermore, if you have some spare hours each week to dedicate to birth advocacy, please consider contacting us! We're always open to welcoming new members to our committee.

editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

Movie Reviews

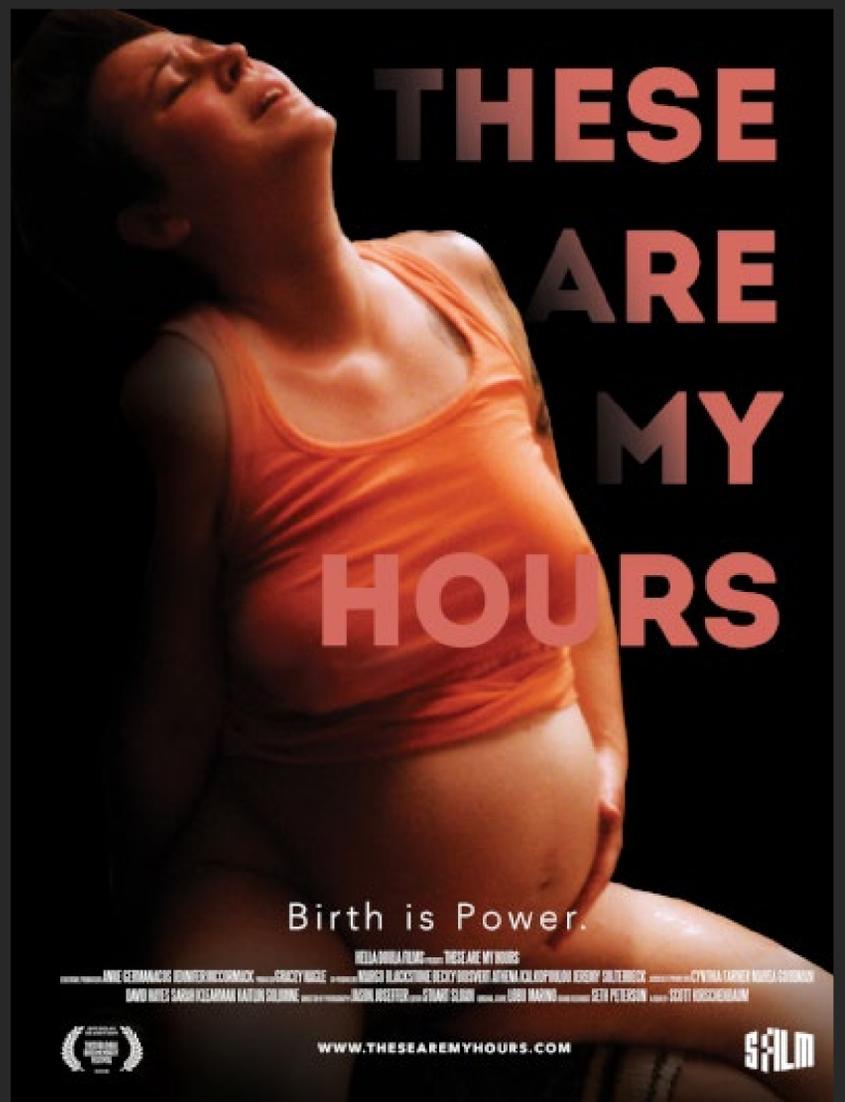


www.whynothome.com

"'Why not home' has the potential to influence people and policy in a way previously unseen. With the normalising of hospital birth, the notion of home birth carries a certain stigma and evokes fear and judgment from many. 'Why not Home?' reveals not only the evidence about safety and interventions in birth, but also the beauty and value of this rite of passage. The women in this film are doctors, nurses, and hospital based midwives, when they were pregnant themselves, they chose to give birth at home." ~ Kate Elliott, Independent RM, #bcmidwives

"I watched this movie and really enjoyed it! I have plans to contact the midwives involved and see if I can visit them when I visit the USA next. The movie made me feel sad and hopeful for homebirth in the USA. There is such a division between different sorts of midwives, and the amount of fear around childbirth is staggering. I can see our system headed the same way. I recommend this movie." ~ Robyn Dempsey, Privately Practising Midwife, Midwives @ Sydney and Beyond

Documentary available free for a limited time
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC1o7_POkcM



www.thesearemyhours.com

"I watched the film when I was around 24 weeks pregnant with my first baby. It is a beautiful homebirth which really captures some of the raw moments in Emily's labour. There is very little talking during the film. I was lucky enough to listen to the podcast by Circle of Birth, where Emily is interviewed. The podcast discusses the film and Emily's labour which I found very helpful for giving context to the film. I do question the presence of the film crew during the birth and wonder what impact this had on Emily. I can't avoid thinking that although she talks about having an uninterrupted labour and birth, her actions must have been altered in some way by their presence. During my pregnancy I had deep trust in my body and my baby's ability to birth naturally. This trust was built from being surrounded with strong women who had birthed naturally themselves and also from having access to many privately shared homebirth videos. I love that this film will be able to help others understand the true power of a birthing woman. I hope that the film is able to provide for other women the same empowerment and trust that I felt during my pregnancy." ~ Kate Carbines



THE HEALING POWER OF *Birth Photography*

Photos and article by [Sarah Widnyana](#) from Life and Lens Photography

When I trace my thoughts back, I think my journey to birth photography started when my sister fell pregnant with her first child in 2014. She told me she was planning a homebirth and I thought she was crazy. A few years prior, in 2012, I fell pregnant with my first child, Wren. I fumbled my way down the path of aiming for a 'natural birth' but not really knowing anything about birth at the same time.

My birth was a standard hospital birth. I arrived, they wouldn't let me birth in the pool, they wanted continuous monitoring which I tolerated for an hour before taking them off and walking around, I laboured entirely in the shower with hot water beating down on my back. I pushed on my hands and knees on the bed for 2 hours before a nurse waltzed into the room, snapped on some gloves and said 'I'm going to have to cut you if we don't push this baby out' to which I yelled "no you're not" and within 2 pushes my little girl was out.

Even as barely educated on birth as I was back then, I knew that being 'cut' was not written in the stars for me – I would sooner have torn than be cut at the hands of some strange nurse. Nevertheless, I left mostly unscathed compared to the masses of women leaving hospital births with significant trauma. I was lucky.

After my experience, when I thought of my sister birthing at home I was worried

– I hadn't ever heard of the term home birthing and at the time, I wasn't even aware that you could choose not to birth in hospital.

As it turns out, my sister never got her planned homebirth with her first. She had an emergency c-section and appendectomy at 37 weeks supported by her private midwife team.

Alas, the seed for homebirth and alternate thinking had been planted in my mind. When Wren was 2 we decided it was time to try and extend our family and add another tiny person to our ranks. However, as the universe would have it, this story didn't lead us to our expected destination of a happy family of 4.

I fell pregnant quite quickly but that joy was short-lived as at 7 weeks I experienced heavy bleeding.

My fears were soon downplayed by every medical professional I saw. I was seeking advice, answers, good news or hell, even bad news. I just wanted something definitive.

Between 15 and 17 weeks I had been in and out of emergency and Early Pregnancy Assessment Units at two separate hospitals. I ended up in Liverpool hospital on bed rest and at 19 weeks my waters broke and the reality of the possible loss of my baby started to sink in.

I was alone at an ultrasound, with no one to hold my hand, when the sonographer





put his hand on my arm and simply said "I'm sorry...", I thought, sorry for what? He said it as though there was only one possible outcome. It was the most definitive answer I had been given my entire pregnancy, it just wasn't the answer I was searching for. I swallowed the desire to scream and calmly asked what he meant; he explained that a baby needs amniotic fluid for lung development and that a baby's lungs don't start developing until after 20 weeks. Despite this, babies can survive in utero with no amniotic fluid but more often than not the mother will go into spontaneous labour soon after her membranes have ruptured. Babies who survive have countless months of neonatal care ahead of them and the possibility of needing oxygen support for the remainder of their lives, not to mention the risk of cerebral palsy and countless other issues... Thus, a choice was handed to us. Wait and try to make it to 24 weeks to see if bub could survive, or choose to induce labour and end our baby's life. Black and white, those were our choices. I wished that this choice could be made for me. For us. I hoped it would be taken out of our hands so we didn't have to make the decision to end our child's life. I spent hours at night researching the risks for continuing with the pregnancy and trying to imagine what our life might look like afterwards if bub did survive. Would I be burdening our family if bub survived and had chronic health issues leading into the future? Could I mentally cope with that? Did I WANT to cope with that? I say 'want' because this is something that is very important to me. To have the ability to choose. I wanted complete autonomy over my body. Some women do not get that choice and I will be forever grateful

that I was able to choose for myself, for my husband and for our family. As much as it hurt to think it, I did not want to put our family through the trials and tribulations I could see lying ahead for us if we decided to continue with the pregnancy. So we made our choice, as a family. Making that choice destroyed me. As much as I reasoned with myself and knew within myself that we were making the right choice for our family it tore me apart. No mother should have to make that choice. Though, to have the choice was a blessing and a curse.

When being induced, the doctor advised that I was already 1cm dilated and it looked like I would have been going into spontaneous labour in the coming days. A small consolation for my now broken soul.

I laboured and delivered a little boy, he looked just like his Dad. Our little Tommy. The hospital advised that even if we didn't want to take them with us, that they would photograph Tommy and keep the photos on file so that if ever we wanted to see him, we could come back and ask for them.



Herein lies my realisation for the immense healing power of a photograph. At the time it seemed like nothing, but thinking back now, bless those bloody midwives. I took those photos and I treasure them dearly. They are held close to my heart and have healed me beyond measure. I have nothing else from that pregnancy. These photos were the be all and end all for me. The only tangible memory I have of our boy and ultimately the spark to ignite my passion for and my journey towards providing birth photography to other women.



We buried our little man under a special tree in my Mum's backyard then we headed home to pick up the pieces of our now shattered lives.

The silence surrounding our grief was stifling. I was thrown into a world I was unfamiliar with but I refused to hide behind the stigma and spoke my soul to anyone who would listen. People would know about our loss. People would know our boy's name and the universe would know that he had lived.

With an amazing support network we rebuilt and started to talk about trying for baby number 3.

We fell pregnant quickly and this time I felt a strong urge to protect the pregnancy and my birthing choices. I realised that all throughout my mothering life I had bought into the ideal that when you birth in hospital you are guaranteed to leave with a live and healthy baby...that any other choice you make could jeopardise that positive outcome for you.

But now, that story had been shattered. I was living proof that not even a hospital birth can guarantee you a live baby. A fog was lifted from my eyes, and I could see the benefits of homebirth in the distance. So we went on to plan our first home birth.

My homebirth experience was amazing, empowering, healing and restorative. It returned to me the faith I once had in my body, it healed wounds I had left from losing our little Tommy and it restored my relationship with my husband.

Our family felt whole again and I have

the photographs of the moment my body felt mine again. The moment our second daughter, Clover, took her first breaths and brought white light and healing energy into our lives.

Soon after my birth with Clover, my sister fell pregnant again and of course, she was planning her homebirth – her homebirth after caesarean. I much less asked her if I could photograph her birth, and more so told her that I would be there regardless. She agreed, somewhat reluctantly at first but she acknowledged the significance of the moment and knew that it deserved to be captured.

She had suffered great trauma from the loss of her homebirth with her first and I knew that having photographs of the moment she brought her second child into the world, in the way she had planned with her first, would bring her immense healing. And therein began my career as a birth photographer – a twisted and convoluted course of events had led me to my current destination and whilst some sad and devastating I can see that these events are what led me to be where I am now, and I am certainly living in my power and am vindicated in that I know, to my bones and with every breath I take and every birth I photograph, that I am right where I am meant to be.

Now, I use my platform and voice as a birth photographer to advocate for birth rights and educate on birth choices. I use my birth images to challenge the status quo on birth and birth censorship. When we censor birth and stop society from seeing real images of women giving birth we create a situation in that the images of birth that are publicly available are what become the norm. When birth is removed from day to day conversation it creates the status that birth is bad, painful and something to be feared. Women and families need birth photography. Birth imagery challenges

these societal norms. It helps to break down the fear of childbirth and replace it with beauty and power. It gives women a benchmark, it shows people what is possible and the more they see it, the weaker the stigma of birth becomes.

When we are presented with birth imagery and birth stories day in day out we start to reverse the damage caused by birth censorship. Birth is normalised, fear is eliminated and confidence in our bodies is regained.

After all, why can't you birth like that woman you saw on Instagram last week, roaring her baby out like a boss? You can.



THE BIRTH OF *Oliver*



By Jane McDermott

I went to bed with the feeling that we were going to meet our baby soon. I was 40+5 weeks and something felt different as I climbed into bed.

It was 11:30pm when I felt my first contraction. It woke me. I took a walk around the house and soaked up the moment, everything was in its place. My affirmation bunting was hung just above where we planned to place the birthing pool, our midwife's birthing beads were hung to the right, and our salt lamp dimly lit the living room with a magical orange glow. I was feeling relaxed. Placing the birthing beads from my blessing way around my neck I felt the support of my tribe. I went back to bed and curled up next to Drew. It was at this point that I consciously chose to turn off my thinking brain. With every contraction I visualised my body opening, softening and preparing for our baby's arrival, sleeping between each one to conserve my energy.

At 1:30am I realised it was time to get out of bed. I woke Drew saying, "Babe, we are going to meet our baby soon, are you ready?" Drew was delighted and of course he was ready. I had a list of things to share with him before I could completely get in the zone, and after downloading a bunch of instructions I happily let go of my thoughts and sunk back into my body.

Drew was amazing. He hopped out of bed and started preparing the environment; he woke my Dad and had him jump into bed with our two year old, Harper, as we knew there was a chance she could wake during the

night and we wanted her to be easily comforted. Drew then inflated the birthing pool, boiled large pots on the stove to ensure we had enough hot water, and placed towels, sheets and plastic covers around the living room. Moving slowly, Drew remained mindful of keeping the energy in the house peaceful for me and yet somehow he set everything up quickly.

I felt my contractions coming stronger and faster now and just as things in my body were really heating up I heard Harper wake. She knew something was happening. "Why was grandpa in her room?" I heard her crying and felt sad that I was unable to comfort her; I could feel myself becoming distracted with thoughts of mothering. I knew that she was safe and that right now my body was preparing to bring new life into this world - To do this I needed to remove myself from the distraction, so I moved outside.

Outside the sky was well lit with the moonlight, the grass was wet and cold as despite it being the middle of summer we were experiencing a cold spell. With bare feet and a blanket wrapped around me I walked around the yard. Each contraction stopped me and I would find something to lean on, swaying and moaning as my body opened more. It was a different experience to my labour with Harper, I felt myself completely surrender to the work my body was doing. I felt no fear; while the sensations were intense I was enjoying the ride. I was totally in the moment.

During my time outside things had progressed quickly. I was ready to call our midwife. I waited for Drew to finish settling Harper and then asked him to call Sheryl. It was about 2:00am. Sheryl and her daughter Abby (also a midwife) were on their way. I heard Drew check in with them and was grateful that they were only around the corner and would soon be here. I was feeling the heaviness of our baby's head now and knew that pushing was going to happen soon.

Sheryl and Abby arrived at about 2:45am. I could feel my body surrender even more as Drew greeted them at the door. Everyone I needed was now in my space.

My contractions became even more intense now and with each one I would call for Drew to come close. He massaged a figure 8 in my back and whispered positive affirmations in my ear, he was constantly reminding me that I was strong and doing an amazing job. Each contraction was weighing heavily on my knees as I felt the urge to get closer to the ground. Up until this moment, all of my laboring had been done standing or leaning. As each contraction passed I rested and vaguely noticed Drew, Sheryl and Abby preparing the space. The energy in the room was beautiful and I felt completely supported.

It wasn't long before I was in the pool. It was blissful. The water was beautiful and warm, taking away some of the intensity in my body. I remember using the moment to soak in my surrounds;

my heart was full of gratitude and love.

In the pool, Abby placed a cold washcloth over my head and it felt amazing. Drew passed me an endless supply of coconut water and I couldn't get enough. Sheryl whispered words of encouragement and just when I thought I couldn't take any more she looked me in the eye and said, "You're going to meet your baby soon, remember as soon as he is born it will all be over." I repeated those words as positive affirmations in my mind and they gave me the strength to continue.

I felt my waters break in the pool; the sensation was like a little pop. It was time to push.

Different to my experience with Harper, I actually wasn't pushing. I surrendered and let go and was amazed to feel my body was doing the pushing on its own, all I had to do was breathe. Observing this was mind blowing, the human body is amazing. About 3 or 4 contractions

later I felt the final sting and stretch as our little boy's head was born, just moments later the rest of his body glided out into the water. It was instant physical relief. Looking down I could see our little man as Sheryl gently guided him into my arms where I pulled him from the water and onto my chest.

I fell in love instantly.

My little Boy, Oliver, was earth side gifting me the most magical experience of my life and bringing with him the most peaceful energy.



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WHY HOMEBIRTH WILL

ALWAYS SURVIVE

By Hannah Dahlen

Professor of Midwifery and Higher Degree Director, Western Sydney University
Privately Practising Midwife, [Midwives@Sydney and Beyond](mailto:Midwives@SydneyandBeyond)

My years of being a midwife, of watching the amazing power of women and transitions into motherhood, and sharing the laughter and tears, has been rewarding beyond belief. To discuss why I believe homebirth will always survive I need to begin with my own life journey, so I hope you bear with me?

My midwifery career began long before I trained to be a midwife. My early memories of childhood were not typical. I was born and raised in the Middle Eastern country of Yemen. My mother was an English midwife and my father, who was Australian, taught Arabic, set up clinics, cleaned and bandaged camel bites, pulled teeth and even assisted in sewing up the odd shark attack victim despite being neither doctor, nurse or dentist. It was however my experience of watching the way women were treated and their lack of worth in that society that made me determined to fight for the rights of women alongside their health needs. As I have grown older I have realised these rights are integral to well-being. Human rights in childbirth have become my burning passion. For me, homebirth is the first and final frontier of these human rights - but I digress.

Midwife in training

When I was 12, a girl on the brink of womanhood, in a world on the brink of a major paradigm shift (1970's), in a country where women had no voice (Yemen), I was part of a birth that changed my destiny forever. My best friend Amal lived next door to me and we were inseparable. Fatima, Amal's sister-in-law, was married to Amal's oldest brother and was pregnant. She agreed to let me come and be with her for the birth. At 16 years of age Fatima was pregnant with her third child in three years. She had two daughters, both born a year apart, and

there was great hope this baby would be a boy.

When Fatima went into labour Amal woke me up, and in the top room of their house, alongside the local midwife, we caught a beautiful little girl. Fatima took one look at the child and turned her head. "Take it away," she said, "It's another girl". Her value as woman and wife was tied to the ability to produce sons, not daughters. I remember holding that perfect newborn baby as the dawn began to pierce the black of night and the first thin warble of the minarets began to break up the quiet of the coming day and I knew this was my calling. They named her Hannah after me. I understood so clearly then as a young girl, on the brink of womanhood, that midwifery was a way to change the world and women's rights was the key. For me, homebirth was what I knew and it embedded itself under my skin. However, it took me a while to really get there in my career - and so the story continues.

Becoming a midwife

It is no great surprise then that I ended up as a midwife. My mum was a midwife in the East End of London in the 1950's and worked with Jennifer Worth in the real Nonnatus House (St Frideswides Mission House). Jennifer Worth (Jennifer Lee back then) is the author of the now famous Call the Midwife book (which became a TV series) - but that is also another story.

After doing nursing training in Australia (I had no option to do the Bachelor of Midwifery back then), I packed my bags and headed to the UK to undertake my midwifery training and follow in my mother's footsteps. When I returned to Australia in 1991 I embarked on a twenty-year career in busy public hospitals and found that while I loved my job I did not love the way women were often treated

and the way they often became victims of a fragmented and highly medicalised system. While I became one of those 'expert midwives' I found that slowly little pieces of my soul felt like they were withering and dying. Finally, I found the fear had crept in and I began to think of everything that could go wrong before I thought about what could go right. I found often unwittingly I was an instrument of the system rather than working in partnership with women. Having said this, I have worked with some incredible midwives during my career who managed to carve a path of love and trust through a system that is often an enemy to these fundamental requirements for birth. Thank goodness for these amazing midwives.

The long road home

In the last 10 years I moved from a clinical role into an academic role and I am now Professor of Midwifery at Western Sydney University. The questioning nature I developed during my childhood appropriately channeled me into research. Again that is also another story for another time.

I was so honoured to be a part of that moment in history on November 1st 2010 when midwives gained access to Medicare in Australia (though not for homebirth). However, amidst the excitement and full life I lead I had missed women and babies and realised that I had to be a part of this historical time midwives had entered into. Jane Palmer, Robyn Dempsey, Melanie Jackson (three wonderful midwives) and I formed a group practice together called Midwives@Sydney and Beyond. During the past eight years we have been joined by others who came and went, as well as several midwifery students who have also spent time with us. The group now consists of those named above and the

and the wonderful Emma Fitzpatrick and Geesje McGuire. Most of the births we attend are homebirths.

A day in my life is never the same as the next, or the previous day, and that is how I like it. I feel finally that I have come home. Love and trust once again fill my working life and bring reality into my research, teaching and political life. I watch the amazing power of women when they know their midwives and believe in themselves. I see how birth can be and I am simply addicted! The greatest role of a midwife I now know is to keep fear at bay and listen to and respect women. Have that in place and women give birth just fine.

Going to my first birth at home again in 2010 in Sydney after many years was amazing. As I drove through the dark empty streets I wound down the window and began to chant my mantra, "Trust in birth and respect it also". In the early hours of the morning a beautiful little girl was born into water and her Middle Eastern parent's arms. I was reminded of the first home birth I was at nearly four decades ago when still a young girl. There was peace, love and power there. I thought later at how safe it all felt. I realised with wicked joy that I had violated several hospital protocols and policies, but at no time was the care unsafe. In the early hours of the morning, as the dawn began to pierce the black of night and the garbage trucks rumbled past the empty streets, the baby's father surfed the internet to find out the exact time dawn would break and putting his prayer rug on the floor he faced west and prayed. There was of course no call to prayer from the minarets like there had been at the first home birth I attended at 12 years of age, but I knew that while it had taken almost four decades, and was a long and at times convoluted journey, I had finally come home.

So why do I know homebirth will always survive?

After many years of researching and writing about homebirth I have realised that it will not be the evidence alone that finally sways the debate on homebirth as we have piles of it now. This is because the debate about homebirth is about more than place of birth or the associated perinatal mortality; it raises deeper and more complex issues. The debate is about:

- The right of women to have control over their bodies during childbirth,
- The rejection of the prevailing medical model that holds an essentially pathological paradigm of pregnancy and childbirth,
- Society's belief that they have an

investment in the product of childbirth and therefore should determine what is considered safe,

- The culture of childbirth in a country, and the position and status of women within a society,
- Starkly different philosophical frameworks held by midwifery (essentially a social model of care) and medicine (essentially a medical model of care)

"Hence the debate over this issue is ideological, contested, longstanding, and circumscribed by relationships of power. Sadly, it is rarely about women, and women's voices are often dismissed or denied in the debate"(1).

While it is about more than place of birth, birthplace is important as:

- Women act differently in different environments.
- Midwives act differently in different environments.
- Relationship based care changes everything, but women hold the upper hand in their own house.
- Environments buffer women and babies from the gauntlet of medicalised birth.
- Homebirth moves us forward as a society and changes the way we engage with family and community and how we see both.

As a professor of midwifery and a midwife who attends women at home for birth I often see the unspoken questions in peoples' eyes - "Why would a professor of midwifery attend homebirths?" The answer is simple. Firstly, the evidence supports it being as safe for the baby and safer for the mother for low risk women (2). For women with risk factors it can be less safe for the baby but still amazingly (or not) it remains safer for the mother (3). Secondly, I support the fundamental human right for a woman to make a choice about what happens to her body during labour and birth (and at any other time). Thirdly, the long-term consequences of intervening without strong indication in this ancient process are not only costly in terms of physical (4) and psychological health (5), but are costly in terms of economic burden (6).

So here are my top 10 reasons why homebirth will always survive:

- 1) Homebirth has existed in every country on earth and at every time in human history – simple fact of history.
- 2) Women and their partners will and do continue to demand homebirth and fight for it.
- 3) The law is largely on the side of self determination for women and, where it is not, we must fight for it to be.
- 4) The scientific evidence is mounting around some consistent facts and

these facts have made their way into government policy.

- 5) The long term impact of how we are born and give birth is mounting.
- 6) Homebirth moves us all forwards and reconnects us to community.
- 7) The oldest profession on earth (midwifery) is only this old because it knows how to fight.
- 8) Oppression hones our spirit and makes us resilient. Bring on the resistance!
- 9) Our children need a better world to give birth in and parent in in the future and homebirth is THE most sustainable birth option.
- 10) Women and midwives working together will make sure homebirth survives.

It is only the mother that is constant in all their childbirth experiences and there is no safe childhood without safe motherhood. No one other than the women whose bodies are making new humans for our earth should have the right to decide what gets done to them and what does not, and where and with whom that happens – NO ONE. The hand that rocks the cradle does rule the world - If that hand is powerful then the children that step from that cradle are centered and certain and much harder to manipulate with fear, which is after all the main tool of neoliberalism and #1 strategy of men in power. Strengthen the hand and you strengthen the cradle. Strengthen the cradle and you change the world. Sister Morning Star wrote recently that, "The most powerful, informed, persistent act of civil disobedience and conscious resistance in our modern times is homebirth." While it might seem tough, and it is, imagine the world today if people only joined causes that seem easy to win?

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THE BIRTH OF

Violet Moon

Pregnancy photos by [Holly Priddis](#)
Postpartum photos by [Elle Wickens](#)



It was 1am and I was officially one day past 40 weeks pregnant with my third babe. I got up to go to the toilet and felt some painful braxton hicks... but this was nothing abnormal (as I had had weeks of prodromal labour like symptoms), plus I had a full bladder, so I thought nothing of it. Another wave hit ever so gently a few minutes later and they continued to come and go but with no real pattern and no real bite. I lay awake for a while then drifted back to sleep. When I woke I realised it all must just be more of the same I had been experiencing for weeks now as if it had been true labour I wouldn't have slept. My daughter came into bed with me and we had a cuddle for a while before she wanted to get up for the day at 5am. Her brother was already up with my partner as he had woken at 4.30am!

We all hung out as I made the small ones breakfast and my partner coffee, and I noticed a few more waves coming. Every now and then one would actually hurt! I decided to time them just to get an idea of what was happening as my brain had no real concept of time anymore. I mentioned to my partner, "I may be having some contractions... but I'm not sure yet so don't get excited!". My surges were coming 24 minutes apart but then I'd have a random big break of 1520 minutes. So I thought maybe this was just nothing and it

would peter out as soon as the sun came up. Maybe this baby would come the following night. It surely wouldn't come in the chaos of this morning. Oh the denial. My partner wanted to start setting up the birth space but I was adamant that nothing was really happening and the kids would just jump in the birth pool and mess everything up, just wait.

We planned to head to the market and see how the morning unfolded. I wasn't sure if I should bother my midwife but thought I'd better give her the heads up so I texted her, "Niggling", at about 6am.

I then casually texted back and forth with my doula for a while, assuring her that it was still early days and I wasn't even sure yet what this was. I potted around having breakfast and realised that they were coming pretty close together now but not really hurting. The kids had trashed the lounge room (where I'd be birthing) so I instructed my partner to take the kids to get croissants while I got a few things organised and cleaned up 'just in case!'. It was then that I realised I could barely get from one task to the next without stopping to have a surge and now they were beginning to feel sharp. I could also feel her head pushing down, low!

I managed to pull all the birth gear out

of the laundry and mostly clean up the epic toddler mess. I began attempting to light my mama blessing candles but only got to light two before I was MOANING. Luckily the kids and my partner hadn't left yet and Lee came to check on me as he'd heard me making a lot of noise from the car! "Don't go anywhere!" I yelled. "Set the pool up!". Shit, it had escalated quickly. I called Jo not really knowing what I wanted from her at this stage. She said she'd get ready and then be on standby. As soon as I hung up the phone I could no longer speak with contractions and had to squat to get any relief. My poor partner scrambled to get the birth pool and all the plastic to cover the floor and couch while the kids excitedly jumped all over him wanting to help. I now was beginning to panic as I could feel her head pushing down and could literally feel my cervix opening with every surge (a very cool feeling, but not when there was no birth pool to jump into [there was no way I was birthing on land!] and my birth team were not yet here).

I managed to text Jo and Romina "Please come!" before another wave hit. I was literally not getting any break now as my uterus remained contracted the entire time but would just peak every couple of minutes. I was standing with my legs crossed starting to feel out of control as I then realised it was



almost 8am and we had some guys coming to pick up bricks Lee had sold on Gumtree!!!! BLOODY HELL. "Noooo, they cannot be here while I'm giving BIRTH!" I screamed to my partner. "Call them and tell them to come back another day!!" But it was too late, as they were literally at our house. Jo got there and I felt slightly at ease but still completely mortified that these random men were about to hear me birth this baby.

Jo, the second midwife, my partner and the kids were now THROWING buckets of water into the pool as I no longer knew what to do with myself. THIS WAS NOT my serene, peaceful, in-the-middle-of-the-night birth I had envisioned. Noah (my eldest) was so beautiful and excited wanting to help with everything. My darling daughter watched wide eyed for a while before getting into the excitement of it all and helping hold the hose to fill the pool. I had had this delusional idea that I would be really quiet and calm for this birth as the kids would be there so I didn't want them to worry. But MAN, there was no way I could do that. I was vocalising a lot at this point while I tried to keep myself centred amongst the craziness that was the morning. Finally I was able to get into the pool. YES. BLISS. I recentred myself and felt immediately more in control. I was able to open my eyes now and connect in with everyone and what was going on. My doula had arrived, everyone was here. At this point I had to laugh at hearing 'clink, clink, clink' outside the lounge room window as the men loaded bricks onto the trailer. "WELL, I'm giving them an education I guess!" Lee had warned them I was in labour if they heard any 'strange noises' - ha ha.

My son was hanging off the end of the birth pool playing with his shark and whale in the water, my daughter was pottering around eating corn ships. It was the most normal, random morning and here I was having a BABY in the middle of it all. The pressure started to build and I felt inside my vagina, her head was right there! Shit. This was happening. It helped for me to keep my hand there and feel her descend. I've naturally done this with all of my births, I think it's the positive feedback thing, it

helps so much to know what is happening and transforms the pain. I was able to blow through most of the surges now feeling her move lower and lower and lower. Soon I was just pushing. I was worried it was too soon but my midwife reassured me beautifully to "Just go with it."

Pushing felt AMAZING. I have always heard this from other women but I have actually never felt this way until this birth. It made the pain completely go away and I loved feeling her come down until she hit 'the bend' and then to get her around was a bit epic. I didn't want to do it but then found she was coming quite easily so just pushed through it to get it over and done with! The kids were there with Lee watching the whole thing as I pushed her head out. I could hear Noah being in awe as he saw the baby for the first time. I so wanted to catch this baby! The last two times I'd had trouble birthing their shoulders. I changed position into a more open squat. I was still in utter shock that there was a baby's head just sitting there! She began to wiggle quite a lot as she tried to turn and help herself be born but I didn't have a contraction so this felt really crazy. I tried to remain calm and patient. I pushed and she was coming, but not coming easily. I began to lose my nerve and asked Jo to help. "You can do it Lucy!" she cheered, but I was now beginning to want her out. "You do it, Jo!" I cried, so together we got her shoulders out and I pulled my baby to the surface of the water.

I stared in absolute disbelief down at this tiny little creature in my arms. How on EARTH are you here little one? My one year old began crying, "BABY! I want to hold the baby!!!" She was beside herself that I didn't immediately hand over the baby to her - ha ha. Noah couldn't believe his eyes. I later asked him what he thought of seeing Violet come out of my vagina, he said, "It was good, but it was a bit owey!" You know it kid. I felt shaky and out of my body, the whole thing had been an utter whirlwind. 1 hour and 40 minutes of active labour. It took me a while to come back into my body. When I did, I discovered we had another daughter! I hopped out of the birth pool and birthed the placenta. Once this was done I felt a million times better

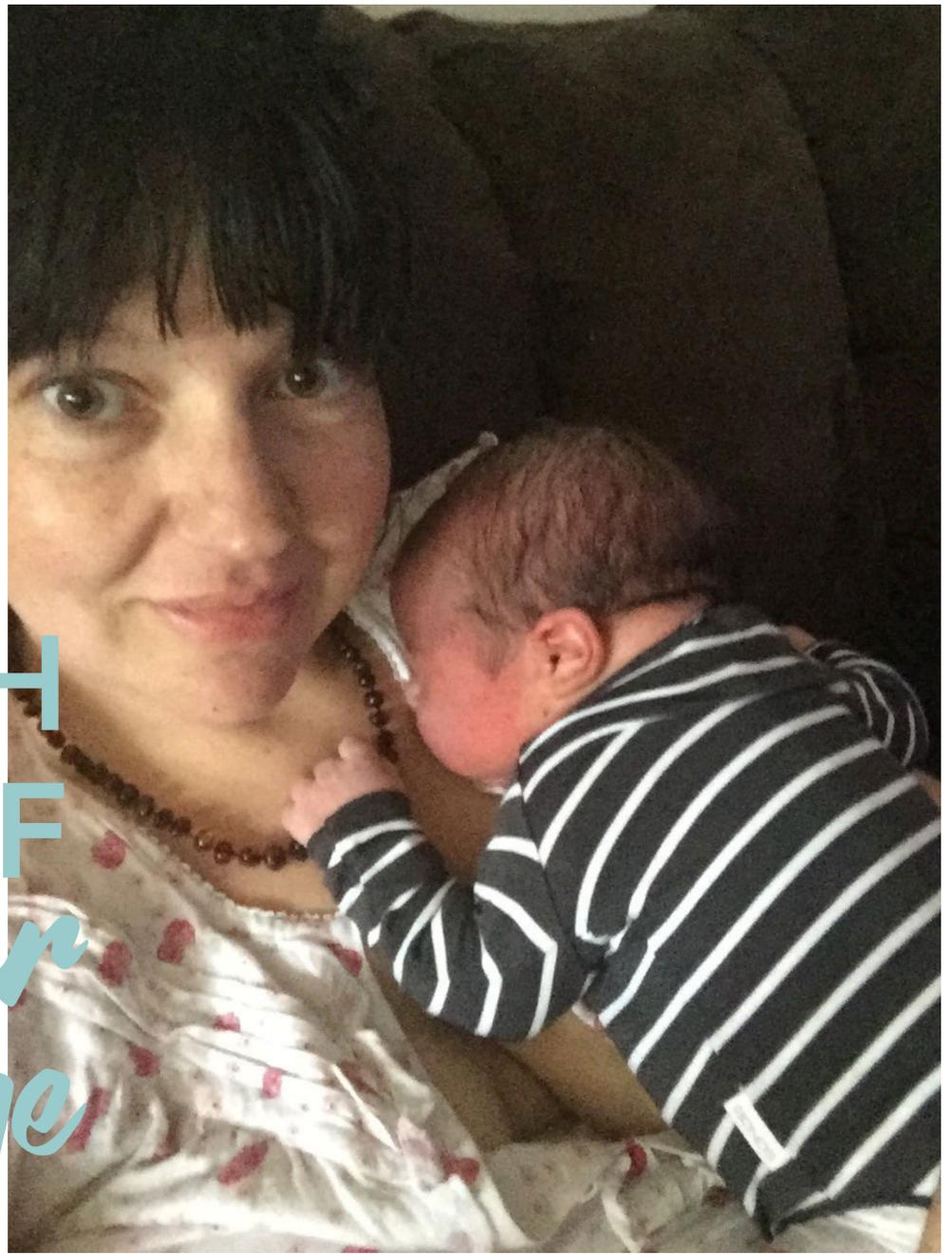
and felt really present. WOW, she was here. I just birthed my third baby at home! WOW.

Meanwhile, the guys were still loading the bricks and 100 percent heard the entire thing! My partner casually went outside to announce we'd had the baby! They were pretty surprised. We had skin to skin and Violet had the biggest, most perfect breastfeed. About an hour after birth we did cord burning to separate her from her placenta. I wanted to wait a bit longer but the kids were crowding us and threatening to tip over the placenta bowl! During the cord burning Violet was so quiet and so still. It was such a beautiful way to slowly and reverently separate her from what had been her life source. The kids, my doula and Jo looked over my placenta and did placenta prints while I soaked it all in. My birth team cleaned up, made me tea and fed me brownies and fruit. And then we all just sat around laughing and chatting (how good is homebirth!). Then everyone left and it was just us. Our little family that was now 5! The kids had dinner and then we tucked them up into bed. Lee, Violet and I snuggled on the couch and ate pizza watching Netflix.

And that was that. What an EXTRAORDINARY ordinary birth day of Violet Moon. I wasn't prepared for this little babe. She came on her own accord and surprised me in every way. She taught me so many humbling, big lessons and made me go deeper into myself as a woman, mother, partner and friend.

Lucy is a doula, a midwife and a mum to two beautiful children with a third to be born in the next month! Originally from Melbourne, Lucy migrated up to the Blue Mountains to follow her wonderful man. She has been in love with birth since the age of 3 when she attended the birth of her sister, and from then on, as they say, is history. Lucy says, "Birth inspires me, it moves me and I am in awe of women and their capabilities. It's such an honor to be a birth worker and be welcomed into a woman's birth space."

THE BIRTH OF *Alexander George*



By Alicia Dixon

40w came and went with baby number 6 but I didn't think much of it. I was cranky, sore and huge, but only one of my previous babes had come on 40w, the rest were closer to 41, so I knew I still had at least a week of being cranky. I went and had some relaxation acupuncture which definitely helped me be a bit more calm and easy to live with for my family!

My 41w appointment with midwife rolled around on the Wednesday and bub was happy, partly engaged and in LOA, a good position for birth. We discussed what would happen in the next week or so if bub still hadn't arrived and discussed making space for baby to come in, maybe getting someone to watch my kids for me for a night or 2.

I went home feeling happy that bub was engaged as most of my bubs only did this in labour, and I made an appointment for chiropractic care the next day as my neck and upper back were a bit sore.

On Thursday I had chiro in the afternoon and went home feeling good. Thursday evening, after cooking dinner, surges started that were a little more uncomfortable than the nightly braxton hicks I'd been having. I busied myself cleaning my room while

hubby put the kids to bed. I timed a few at 8 minutes apart and lasting 30 seconds, so I knew they may fizzle out or progress to active labour but either way they were doing something. I tried a shower and sleep but they were uncomfortable enough that I tossed and turned. At about 1am my daughter woke and came into my bed and everything stopped. I managed to get about 4 hours of sleep but woke for the day feeling cranky and defeated.

I decided on Friday to send my big girls to school, and my 3 youngest to my mum's house for a sleep over, and tried to make the day a day for me and my baby.

I went for walks in the fresh winter air, ordered Indian take away and moved a mattress onto the lounge room floor so I could snuggle and watch a movie. Hubby and I also used the time to reconnect and after some "cuddles" I decided to try and sleep around 8pm.

I remember tossing and turning for about 2 hours until I gave up and got up for the toilet. I had the runs and when I got up had a mild contraction that lasted about 30 seconds.

I decided to go relax in the bath

for a while and listened to music in the dark, floating in the warm water. I noticed every 3 songs I'd have a contraction that would last about 30 seconds. They were painful enough to stop me but easy to breathe through. After about an hour I decided to get out and try and sleep a bit more because the contractions were too short to be real labour and I was really exhausted.

Mick warmed my heat packs and rubbed my back until I fell asleep. Every 20 minutes or so I was woken by painful contractions, I breathed through them and went back to sleep. After about 3 hours of this I got up for the toilet again. I had a contraction almost as soon as I stood and had to vocalise through it. Hubby looked at me and said, "Time to call the midwife." I laughed at him and went to toilet, had another contraction as soon as I stood up again and moaned through it.

"Call the midwife," hubby said. I refused again and told him the contractions were still 5 minutes apart and only lasting 30 seconds. He argued that the noise I was making suggested it was labour so I gave him my phone and told him he could time some if he wanted but I wouldn't call

the midwife until there was a pattern.

I went to my room and diffused some oils (may chang and frankincense) and set up the area with some towels, a bin, some blueys and other things I might need after birth. Hubby kept timing contractions and at about 3.30am told me he really wanted me to call the midwife. I reluctantly called Martina and told her I thought it was too early but Mick wanted her there, so she told me she'd be there around 4am.

I went back into my room and put on some music and set up my bed with old blankets and a drop sheet, still expecting everything to slow down once the midwife arrived. I kept going back and forth to the toilet as I noticed with each contraction the pressure was so great, and I kept weeing a little bit. Turns out this was likely my waters but they didn't really go in a big gush, so I wasn't sure.

Martina arrived, checked baby's heart rate and went to sit in the lounge room. We had discussed earlier that I laboured better on my own, so she stayed away unless I called her. She set up her supplies and I went and had a shower to manage my back pain. At some stage the second midwife arrived and moved into the lounge room too but I was unaware she was here.

I experimented with ways to feel more comfortable as my legs were tired of standing, but in the end I found standing, leaning over a chair with a heat pack on my lower back the best way for me to manage the pain.

Some time over the next hour or so I began to feel a little pushy. I told Martina who said to just go with what my body wanted to do. So I pushed a little with each contraction while standing but felt baby wasn't going anywhere. Hubby came in and I cried and told him I couldn't do it and nothing was happening. In my mind the contractions had really slowed down and it felt like I'd been not really labouring for a while. I felt nauseous and exhausted, so I asked hubby to bring me a banana which I ate between contractions. Not long after I called Martina in and asked her to break my waters. She laughed and said, "No, I can't do that at home." She asked me what the problem was and I explained I felt like I wanted to push but it was unproductive. She asked if I wanted to push or if my body had to push. I said I didn't know and went on to my bed to



sulk, leaning over the fit ball on all fours.

Martina sat quietly in the room. I breathed through the next few contractions while Mick applied counter pressure to my lower back. Suddenly that feeling of no holding back hit and my body began to silently push. It was really slow and painful but I could feel slow progress and Martina assured me that soon I'd be able to feel my baby. As his head got closer to crowning I went into runners pose which definitely opened up my pelvis like I needed.

Soon I could feel that familiar wrinkly velvet head which gave me the energy to push harder than I ever had before. Baby's head crowned and Martina told me to breathe as she could see I was starting to tear. As I pushed she announced the parts of his face as he was being born. Once his head was born I was having trouble moving the rest of him down when Martina announced his hand was coming out under his chin. Martina touched his hand and he extended his arm out which allowed me to birth his shoulders, then the rest of his body. He slithered out between my legs and I grabbed him and tried to pick him up. He was slippery and yet to cry so Martina rubbed him a little with a towel and I lifted him to my chest as he let out an almighty cry. I was so relieved. The time was 6.38am.

I snuggled my perfect baby while I waited to deliver the placenta. We marvelled at the length and thickness of baby's cord. We also joked about baby's weight as I have a history of big babies and made guesses. Martina was 4.7kg, mine 4.9kg.

The placenta came away and after some toast and some water daddy snuggled bub while I had a shower. Once I was out we weighed and measured bub.
40cm head circumference
55cm length, and wait for it
5.06kg (11lb2oz)
Martina congratulated me on cracking the 5kg and birthing the biggest baby she had attended.

I got snuggled up on the couch with bub to feed and Mick went to get me something yummy for breakfast.

Over all it was one of the most challenging yet empowering experiences of my life!!

Susanna is the mother of two beautiful, cheeky and totally loveable girls, Eva 3.5 and Isabella 15 months. She is also partner of Daniel, a midwife and registered nurse. She had always envisioned herself as a mother and yearned for that day to come, little did she know what a crazy adventure that would be, drawing from the roots of who she is and who she would become. It also brought to life the passion she has for women's health and rights, helping her discover her inner feminist and the realisation of how powerful and strong women are. Susanna felt so fortunate to have a publicly funded homebirth through Belmont midwifery Group, and hopes more women can be made aware of these wonderful services.

Alicia is a stay-at-home mum of six gorgeous kids, Shelby-lee 12, charlotte 7, Emily 5, Mj 4, poppy 2.5 and Alexander 9 months. Alicia is passionate about undisturbed birth, natural term breastfeeding, and all things that come with natural parenting. She also runs a small handmade business named COCO BUBS from her home in rural Victoria, hand-making skincare products for mums and bubs. She has been very fortunate to experience three no intervention hospital births and three glorious homebirths between her six children, which she attributes to be some of the greatest experiences in her life.

Podcasts and Videos

PODCASTS

THE CIRCLE OF BIRTH PODCASTS:

Here are a few birth story podcasts within the theme 'Empowerment through homebirth'. 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 podcasts as much as I did! ~ Aimee

E49 - #MOTHERSFORMIDWIVES -HOMEBIRTH CONSORTIUM AUSTRALIA -CONTINUITY & MOTHERS SUPPORTING MIDWIVES – A HYPNOBIRTHING PRACTITIONERS BIRTH STORIES
www.circleofbirth.com/e49-mothersformidwives-homebirth-consortium-australia-continuity-mothers-supporting-midwives/

E50 – THESE ARE MY HOURS – FIRST DOCUMENTARY FILMED ENTIRELY DURING LABOUR – EMILY'S STORY
www.circleofbirth.com/e50-these-are-my-hours-first-documentary-filmed-entirely-during-labour-emilys-story/

E51 –WHY I'M NOT CELEBRATING HOMEBIRTH – KATHERINE EDEN'S STORY
www.circleofbirth.com/e51-why-im-not-celebrating-homebirth-katherine-edens-story/

E52 – ELECTIVE CAESAREAN TO HOME BIRTH, JESSIE'S STORY OF FINDING HER AUTONOMY AND SAFETY
www.circleofbirth.com/e52-elective-caesarean-to-home-birth-jessies-story-of-finding-her-autonomy-and-safety/

HEALING HOMEBIRTH VIDEOS

The following birth videos have been shared with permission, and were chosen as they represent births that were healing for the mother and/or family, or are working towards healing homebirth in the eyes of our community/society.

NEW DOCUMENTARY, WHY NOT HOME

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC1o7_POkcM

THE BEAUTIFUL HOME BIRTH OF MAHLI HARPER JESSIE GOETZE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsFlwJMwkm0&feature=youtu.be>

OUR RIGHT OF RESPONSE #DOGINTHEBATH AND A GLIMPSE INTO OUR FULL BIRTH VIDEO JESSIE GOETZE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01vg1F0CfGg&feature=youtu.be>

Birththings Directory

Theme Content (Podcasts & Videos)

Aimee Sing
Aly Kranz
Emily
Grace Sweeney
Jessie Goetze
Katherine Eden
Virginia Maddock

Birth announcements

Ash-lea Gazzola
Elise Kelshaw
Erin Napper
Jane Aspinwall
Kate Carbines
Kristyn Begnell
Taylor Winterstein
Yumi Takahashi

Theme content (Articles)

Ali Frendin
Hannah Dahlen
Jacki Barker
Sarah Widnyana

Reviews

Azure Rigney
Kate Carbines
Kate Elliot
Robyn Dempsey
Sarah Widnyana

Birth Art

Amy Bell
Catherine Bell
Jess Low

Committee members

Aimee Sing
Azure Rigney
Jodie Powell
Josi Jentzsch

Birth Stories

Alicia Dixon
Jane McDermott
Jessie Goetze
Lucinda Johnston
Shalini Suby
Susanna Horn

Photographers, doulas and support people behind the camera

Elle Wickens
Erika Elliott
Holly Priddis
Jerusha Sutton Photography
Jessica Robinson
Leighsa Cox Photography
Life and lens photography
Port Douglas Wedding Photography
Shelley the doula



Photo by Rebecca Anne Lawrence Photography

THE THEME FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF BIRTHINGS WILL BE

CHOICES

The Choices theme is a broad one and can involve making the choice to birth at home, to transfer, to have siblings at birth, to travel to supportive care providers, or to freebirth. The underlying tone of this issue is that women have the right to make their own choices, regardless of what the medical system, society and well-meaning friends and family think.

Women's right to birth choices is a women's and human rights issue!

We'd love to hear your own take on the theme Choices, and as always, if you have a birth story or announcement you'd like to share, please send it our way! The close of submissions for the next issue will be 1st March, 2018 – please send your theme articles and stories to Aimee.

editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

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

