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Birthings

Choices IN HOMEBIRTH

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Homebirth Access
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www.homebirthsydney.org.au

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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).
Spring 2019 issue is themed *Celebration*.
Submission due date: 1st September, 2019
editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

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advertising@homebirthsydney.org.au

VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE

www.homebirthsydney.org.au

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the 138th issue of Birthings magazine! This issue we'll be exploring the theme Choices in Chilbirth which encompasses a whole range of topics including making choices prior to or during pregnancy, birth or postpartum, protecting choices in childbirth for ourselves and other women and articulating what 'choice' in birth really means to you. This issue has the underlying message that all women have the right to make their own choices about birth, regardless of what the medical system, society and well-meaning friends and family think. We have some absolutely delicious birth stories to be read, complete with incredible photos (thank you so much to the families who have spent so much time writing and sharing these – they truly are such a precious gift to the homebirth community!), and we'd love for you to send more our way as you birth your beautiful babies! You'll get the opportunity to 'meet' everyone on our committee, because we've had lots of changes recently, and also have the chance to browse through the media links that have been coming our way over the past few months. We've been blessed with some incredible birth art, and had the opportunity to interview incredible women, and receive fantastic theme articles exploring current issues affecting birth choices in Australia right now!

We at HAS are, and always have been, especially passionate about protecting and maintaining homebirth as an option for Australian women. Despite this, we've seen constant degradation of our birthing rights in Australia over the years, with our birthing options progressively being reduced, midwives being persecuted and forced out of practice, women consequently having access to less birthing options than ever before, and many women leaving birth traumatised for a variety of different reasons.

In 2019 HAS is working in alliance with multiple other consumer groups towards further protecting homebirth as an option for Australian women. More than that though, we are working towards ensuring that homebirth is maintained as a **sustainable** option for women, and for the midwives who are supporting them. We've recently experienced a small win, gaining some traction around Professional Indemnity Insurance whereby the exemption has been extended to December 2021 (it was due to expire on 31st December this year!). You can watch a video that was created for this here, and see the petition that has been part of the change. However, we are still working, and we'd love your help! We hope to see some insurance products becoming available for midwives in the near future, so that they can support us in our choices without risking their own career, livelihood, assets and families! We hope to see these products being supported and subsidised by the government, as they are for Obstetricians. We hope to see new pathways emerge for midwives seeking to work in private practice. We hope to see bundled funding reform, so that all Australian women are provided with an allocation to spend on their CHOICE of care provider, providing them more options for their place of birth. If you can help out, please become a member with HAS, join our committee and start campaigning! If you can't do that, follow us on Facebook, share our posts, sign our petitions and be a voice in support of homebirth Australia-wide.

Though we're not ready to celebrate just yet, our next issue is going to be themed Celebration. Perhaps this is in anticipation of what is to come, but it's also in an effort to remind us all why we need to keep fighting for homebirth. Please write in and tell us about how you celebrated your birth, or how birth is celebrated traditionally in your culture. As always, we love to see lots of beautiful birth stories, and if you're interested in writing a theme article please contact me – I am more than willing to work with you to get something written down! If you have some beautiful birth art to contribute, please do that too.

Until next time!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hello Homebirth Tribe!

Another year has passed and it has been a HUGE one for us at HAS. At our recent AGM in February we discussed some of our highlights from 2018:

- Helping to organise the Mothers for Midwives rally across the country
- Investigating the cause of GP referral refusal to PPMs
- Investigating the reasons behind choosing homebirth in our WHY Homebirth project
- Investigating the economic impact of Homebirth in Australia
- Producing 2 issues of Birthings – one in print!
- Producing our first webinar, "Ask a Homebirth Midwife"
- Putting on our annual picnic during Homebirth Awareness week
- Having 2 of our committee members on the advisory panels for hospital based homebirth programs in Sydney
- Fundraising with our HAS raffle
- Launching our welcome packs for new members
- Exhibiting at the Doula Network Australia conference
- Responding to the many women who email us looking for help accessing homebirth services.

And much more that I am probably missing… we've been busy!

Over the past 2 years our focus at HAS has shifted more towards advocacy. We have been increasingly worried about the future: increasing pressure on Privately Practising Midwives (PPMs) via vexatious reporting, tighter regulations on PPMs, the insurance exemption expiry coming up this year (which has recently been extended until December 2021), and the frequent disregard for women's autonomy and decision making around birth from the medical community. Things are getting serious and we need to be able to stand up for our rights to choose how, where and with whom we give birth. Our rights are at stake and this is an election year – you can expect us to be very noisy.

Please follow us on our social media channels and make sure your membership is up to date – please consider renewing if it isn't. If you want to see how you can help more please get in touch! We need your support now more than ever to step up our activism and meet the challenges ahead.

Dodie

Join Us!

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

Meet the Committee

JODIE POWELL

President

Hello! I'm a mum of two very lively boys, Harry (6) and Caelan (3). I grew up in Canada (eh!) and moved to Australia to be with my Aussie husband in 2001. I became a passionate advocate of Homebirth after the wonderful experience I had birthing my firstborn at home. I started volunteering for HAS after my second was born and I decided not to go back to work in marketing. It's been an extremely rewarding experience to work with a truly passionate bunch of people for the benefit of all women and babies in Sydney and beyond.

KRISTYN BEGNELL

Vice President

I'm mum to two gorgeous little girls, Georgia (3yo) and Bronte (10mo). I found my way to homebirth via a book I picked up at a 2nd hand book sale and I knew this was the path for me once I decided to have kids. Since my teens I've been involved in some kind of advocacy, in the past it was animal welfare and environmental protection. I became involved in maternity consumer advocacy after my first planned homebirth ended in an emergency cesarean. I achieved my long awaited HBAC when my second daughter was born in March last year, and now that I know how amazing it is to give birth at home, I'm more passionate about it than ever. I became involved with HAS because I wanted to do whatever I could to keep homebirth alive in Australia. In my spare time I love adding to my indoor plant collection, reading about low-tox living, crafting (macrame, crochet and scrapbooking) and camping.

AMELIA PARKINSON

Secretary

Solo mum to Sammy (7) I had an incredible publicly funded Homebirth in London and just didn't realise how lucky I was to access this - 8 weeks before my due date although almost 10 weeks before I met my son. I moved back 3 years ago to Oz after 15 years in the Uk. My background is mental health, advocacy, fundraising and events. I'm a hypnobirthing childbirth educator who's training to be a doula. I facilitate supportive new mums groups and have been running the Positive Birth Movement Meetings in inner West of Sydney for 2.5 years. I love swimming and going to the beach.

www.wonderbirthing.com.au

KATHRYN BELL

Co Secretary

Assistant Editor

I'm really happy to have recently joined the HAS committee as co-secretary. Our work is so important and it's awesome to be part of such a passionate team of women. I'm mum to two girls, Isla and Fern. It was Isla's beautiful but challenging birth that opened my eyes to the maternity system, and set me on my path to become a doula in 2012. After years of 'trying', in 2016 our family grew to four with the birth of Fern at home. I love my work supporting couples in the hospital system but I dream of seeing more women realise the beautiful potential of home birth. I'm also a Hypnobirthing Australia™ childbirth educator and Positive Birth Movement facilitator. Nothing makes me happier than a day at the beach or pottering in the garden with my hubby and all 'the girls' (my kids, cat and 7 hens).

www.kathrynbellbirthsupport.com.au

SANTINA AND ARTHUR

Treasurer & Merchandise

My background is Italian. I am currently working part-time doing admin work and have an accounting background. Arthur was born in The Netherlands and is self-employed in the IT industry. Four years ago HAS needed someone to do the merchandising role and Arthur stepped in. Not too long after that I took on the Treasurer role. We sit quietly in the background doing our thing and admiring the advocacy work this wonderful group does. All are so committed and work with such passion. Issue number 68 was the first Birthings magazine we saw. It was given to us by our midwife back in 1999 in the lead up to our first homebirth. We became members and have been ever since. We have three children (Adrian 19, Annelies 16 and Aileen 13) who were all born at home under the wonderful guidance of Marie Heath. We hope that one day homebirth in Australia will be an easily available and widely supported choice that all women have access to.

AIMEE SING

Editor

I'm a researcher, doula, birth activist, wife and mother to two beautiful babies, Willow and Hamish, with another on the way. I was born and raised in the Blue Mountains, West of Sydney, which lucky for me has a beautifully vibrant homebirth community! In my spare time I love reading, being in nature, playing music, swimming, being around friends and absorbing all of the beauty that my family has to offer. I'm in the HAS committee because I'm passionate about working towards homebirth becoming and remaining an accessible birthing option for all Australian women. www.birthaims.com.au

NADINE (NADS) FRAGOSA

Memberships and midwife liaison

I can hardly believe I've been volunteering for HAS since 2012! During that time I have had a couple of different positions and seen many volunteers come and go. We now have a group of passionate, fiery, honest women driving this unique organisation forward. I've been lucky enough to be the consumer on the homebirth steering committee at The Royal Hospital for Women and I'm super proud of the midwives, doctors and administration for listening to what women want at a time when many options are being taken away. Being a doula I support women who birth in the hospital system and also at home and have seen the interest in homebirth grow over the last year which is exciting. I birthed my youngest child at home with the support of the beautiful Sheryl Sidery and hate to think that independent midwives like her, along with their loving, skilled care may be taken away from us all at the end of this year. Homebirth has gifted me many things including a group of what I'd say are my closest friends. www.nadinethedoula.com

JOSI JENTZSCH

Graphic Designer

By day I'm a fashion designer and at any other time I'm running after my son Zeppelin and our dog Ozzy. I also look after the Graphic Design for HAS. In my spare time I dream about having spare time. As long as I can remember I have always wanted a Homebirth. Little did I know what an uphill battle we would have. From crazy ultrasound technicians to referral refusals...I was shocked! My own birth experience, which was my dream come true, inspired me to join HAS. I wish everyone could have a beautiful private practising midwife like us. Janine was our constant for way over 9 months. She was there for all the laughs, tears and leaky boobs. I joined HAS because I want less mums having to fight for a beautiful Homebirth and more mums being able to make informed Choices.

JAIME LEIGH HAWKINS

Marketing

I'm Jaime and I am from Cranebrook, in the nepean area. I'm part of the HAS committee because I believe that every single woman has the right to choose how she births her baby without having to justify or defend that decision. I want to be part of the solution and work towards making sure homebirth is still a viable option for women, including myself.

www.thisiswhatidoula.com

VIRGINIA MADDOCK

Social media coordinator

Assistant Editor

I joined the HAS committee soon after the first of my 2 babies were born at home early in 2009, and have held numerous positions over the last 10 years including Memberships, Birthings editor and Coordinator. I currently put my Facebook addiction to good use by administrating the HAS Facebook page and posting homebirth related content. In my screen-free life, I am wife to a lovely kiwi fella (Dan), Mum to 2 crazy boys Jetsun (10), and Keanu (7), 2 rescue Burmese cats and 3 Silkie chickens. I runs my own business as a doula, herbalist, nutritionist, placenta encapsulator, Mizan therapist and photographer at Natural Beginnings - Holistic Health, Doula and Placenta Services. www.naturalbeginnings.com.au

AZURE RIGNEY

Sticky beak and homebirth advocate

I began volunteering for Homebirth Access Sydney, and got hooked on all things birth and advocacy. On moving to Brisbane in 2018 I got involved with Homebirth Queensland, Friends of the Birth centre QLD, ACM QLD and became president of Maternity Choices Australia. It's safe to say I like information sharing and talking. My husband, Dan, and I have a 3yr old daughter and a 1 year old son. I'm inspired by my favourite midwife Jo and am often quoted saying, "If everyone had a Jo Hunter..."

Birth Advocacy

There are going to be a lot of changes happening in coming months as we petition government for midwifery led continuity of care, bundled funding reform and, most importantly working out a solution to the continued exemption for Privately Practising Midwives to hold Professional Indemnity Insurance (which thankfully was recently extended to December 2021!). Recently, our right to birth at home with a private midwife was under threat, with it being set to become illegal as of 31st December, 2019! Thankfully, your petitioning and efforts have secured an extension to the exemption for Privately Practising Midwives to hold Professional Indemnity Insurance, but only until December 2021. We must not let our right to homebirth be removed, **we need your help**!
So please stay up to date with these organisations (consider becoming a member if you're not already – links below!) and be sure to add your voice to the collective roar coming from the homebirth community at the moment.

Some of the great birth advocacy and consumer

Homebirth Access Sydney
https://homebirthsydney.org.au/
https://www.facebook.com/Homebirth.Access.Sydney/

Homebirth Australia
http://homebirthaustralia.org/
https://www.facebook.com/homebirthaustralia/

Homebirth Consortium Australia
https://www.facebook.com/HomebirthConsortium/?ref=br_rs

Maternity Choices Australia
http://www.maternitychoices.org.au/
Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/Maternity.Choices/

Maternity Consumer Network
https://www.maternityconsumernetwork.org.au/
https://www.facebook.com/maternityconsumernetwork/

Their current campaigns can be found here:

Maternity Choices Australia, Protect birthing choices for Australian women through funding reform

PBB Media, Australian Women for Universal Access to Midwifery-Led Continuity of Care

Maternity Consumer Network, Letter Writing Campaign

Shop, Shop, Shop! https://homebirthsydney.org.au/shop/

HOMEBIRTH IN THE MEDIA

By Aimee Sing

Pregnant mums 'in the dark' over Melbourne midwife's suspension
1st February, 2019
9News

Melbourne midwife quits after surprise twin homebirth controversy
6th Febraury, 2019
9News

Freebirthing health warning for mothers who want to have their child at home
7th February, 2019
ABC News

'We deserve services': Mum launches rural midwife business
7th February, 2019
South Burnett Times

The Sydney public hospital offering pregnant women home births
20th January, 2019
The Sydney Morning Herald

Lights off, candles on, pizza in the fridge: why home birth appeals
13th January, 2019
The Canberra Times

For some rural mothers, there's no place like home (births)
10th January, 2019
Bridge

Mum claims home births are safer than hospital births
17th December, 2018
Kidspot

Mums-to-be miss out on midwife referral
14th December, 2018
The Blue Mountains Gazette

Midwife suspended after surprise twins arrival in planned homebirth
14th November, 2018
Kidspot

RUSH HOUR: Neighbour's 'entitled' note about home birth causes fury
13th November, 2018
News.com.au

Homebirth safe for low-risk women
17th September, 2018
ABC

Greens call for government to ease home birth restrictions
14th March, 2019
The Canberra Times

Why mums are missing out on 'restrictive' home birth program
5th March 2019
The Canberra Times

Hilary Duff Shares a Rare, "Extremely Personal" Video From Her Home Birth
26th March, 2019
Popsugar

Home births: Community midwives trial 'delivery bags'
10th March, 2019
BBC News

Insurance exemption for homebirth extended for three years
March 2019
NMBA

Artwork by Sophie Stok -
www.facebook.com/sacredspace7r
www.sophiestok.com

Sophie Stok is a heartist, storyteller and energetic midwife based out of the Netherlands. Her passion for life in all its forms can be seen in her unique style. Her work centers around mysticism, nature and the magic of the human form.

To Birth Herself

Nothing about Birth is clean.
But oh how we try.
Fresh linens
Bright lights
Antiseptic
And it still comes out
A mess.

Shit, blood, mucus,
Hips writhing
Breasts swollen
Anyone who's witnessed birth
Knows
It's worse than sex.

And we grasp
This thing
With sterile gloves
As if terrified
To touch
Something so honest.

If only birth came
In a sweet smelling onesie
Fresh diaper
And oiled skin.
A tidy package
From the stork.

At least it's
Conceived in a hidden place
Where muffled screams
And furtive glances
Acknowledge
Our shame.

But in birth,
You must,
Spread your legs
Before the world.
Scream
And ruin the sheets.

There is no other way.
Needles,
Knives,
The best we can offer
Is to not
Feel.

It takes a bold woman—
Breasts swollen,
Hips writhing,
Shit, blood, mucus—
To stand exposed.
To birth
Herself
Before the world
Without shame.

Poem by J.M. Wild - www.facebook.com/marieswildpen

Marie Wild is a poet, writer and shaman. She lives outside Yellowstone National Park where she home schools her three children and runs women's retreats. Writing has played a powerful healing role in Marie's life. She shares her work with the hope that it will help others on their journeys.

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 cannot 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. She is also a Maternal Feminist. Catherine is an eternal optimist and occasional poet, who loves The Vicar of Dibley and agrees chocolate is a major food group.

Once a Jolly Woman

(words by Catherine Bell to the tune of Waltzing Matilda)

Once a jolly woman sang aloud her own song,
After eating from the knowledge tree,
And she sang as she mused and waited 'til her baby birthed,
My body, my baby, my choices are free
Informed and Supported, Informed and Supported
My body, my baby, my choices are free
And she sang as she mused and waited 'til her baby birthed,
My body, my baby, my choices are free
Along came a downer to interrupt her glory song,
Up jumped the woman, singing louder with glee,
And she sang as she stopped that downer's attempts to drag,
My body, my baby, my choices are free
Informed and Supported, Informed and Supported
My body, my baby, my choices are free
And she sang as she mused and waited 'til her baby birthed,
My body, my baby, my choices are free
Up rode the doubter, mounted on their pedestal,
Down came the negatives, one, two, three,
And she stood her ground, backed by solid evidence
My body, my baby, my choices are free
Informed and Supported, Informed and Supported
My body, my baby, my choices are free
And she sang as she mused and waited 'til her baby birthed,
My body, my baby, my choices are free
The time came for the woman, to breath instead of sing her song,
And she did so magnificently
And her story may be heard if you sit in circle as a friend,
My body, my baby, my choices are free
Informed and Supported, informed and Supported
My body, my baby, my choices are free
And she sang as she mused and waited 'til her baby birthed,
My body, my baby, my choices are free

NAVIGATING THE MOTHERHOOD

By Catherine Bell www.bellabirth.org

Photo courtesy of Jerusha Sutton Photographer

"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."
Maya Angelou

Is there a piece of advice that you wish your pre-mother-self had received?

Were there things you bought or were given that you never used?

I remember how fixated I was on baby 'necessities'. It helped make things real.

We were given a cot, which we sanded back and painstakingly spent hours with. That cot signified a making of space, a preparing for a new person into our well-established coupledom. One of the few new things we bought was a pram. This one was reversible. I would touch it, admire it, imagine myself pushing my baby proudly down the street. I chose it so I could still see my baby as I walked.

We set up a change table. I laid out the little clothes. I packed my hospital bag, carefully choosing baby's first outfit. I had little booties, long in my waiting-for-motherhood possession. I would gaze at these items, imagining my baby.

I would cut articles and ideas out of magazines (this was pre-Pinterest, when scissors and glue were required). I was going to be a Great Mum. The Best Mum. EVER!

I planned to breastfeed for about a year, as I had been breastfeed for 14 months (alongside my twin), and it did not occur to me to do otherwise. I took this for granted.

I attended my hospital provided antenatal classes and all my antenatal appointments, dutifully checking off each test and requirement as they arose. Not always understanding why, or feeling I had enough time to consider things, but trusting the process.

My 'last hurrah' was to head off to The Kimberley for a month or so to help my friend with her PhD field work, followed closely by a couple of weeks on a UNESCO student exchange to Japan.

I wrote a birth plan which basically said, "I want a natural birth". At the last minute I added 'physiological third stage', because I happened to learn the default was an injection of synthetic oxytocin.

It was a blissful and beautiful pregnancy. A very special time.

I am now nearing my 12th Anniversary of Motherhood. I have four children now.

The cot was mostly used to store the unfolded washing. For a time it was side-cared to our bed, and saw a little use. By the time number three was born, we no longer had the cot. I hope whoever has it now finds it useful!

The pram was wonderful, and hangs in the shed now…a little worse for wear, but it has seen some happy trails. I came to prefer my carrier.

I recently found my folder of cut out articles. I never did revisit them. I was too busy being a mum. But I was surprised at the sheer volume of formula adverts littering the pages. I don't remember 'seeing' them as I collected them…I was going to breastfeed, so they did not grab my attention, I guess.

And as for breastfeeding: After a few hurdles at the start, we powered onto that year mark…and then beyond and through a second pregnancy, to tandem feeding. My first baby had her last feed when she was a bit over 4. Thanks to the Australian Breastfeeding Association, I learned so much. About me, About babies. About Breastfeeding.

The antenatal classes were…adequate… better than nothing…but I know now that independent classes are much more informative.

I am glad I took the time to have my last hurrah. I sensed Motherhood would change me. And those trips were a letting go.

I have changed. I have grown. I feel I have found myself. I am coming into my Full Moon Phase of life, a guiding light for my children, a beacon and focal point. Always they will be able to look to me and feel comfort. At last, that is my hope.

A real turning point came as my first baby approached 12 months old. I had been doing all the 'right' things, and it wasn't really working. Most of it just didn't make sense and seemed to go against my instinct. It was about this time that I stumbled upon Night-time Parenting by Dr. Sears. I found an old copy in the tip shop. How could someone part with this gem? In the pages of this book I found the information that confirmed that my instinct was intact! The book gave

permission, as it were, to follow my instinct. It explained why my baby woke, wanted to breastfeed beyond one and why co-sleeping was the path for us. If there was one thing I wish I had known it was about co-sleeping!
Two very awesome resources (in addition to Night-time Parenting): McKenna's Breastfeeding and co-sleeping and the Kathy Dettwyler article on the natural age of weaning. These two resources appealed to my scientific brain.They just made sense.
I also discovered Michel Odent. In The Face of Birth, he spoke about Scientific versus Technological Birth. Oh how this spoke to me! YES! Science: biology, normal biology, natural, evolution, primal. Technology: interventions, interferences, interruptions, interactions, interrogations!
I also realised the severe inadequacy of Birth Plans, and that relying on your care provider alone to inform you was at best folly and at worst a recipe for trauma. My second birth had a more detailed plan, but still very much relied on luck rather than good management. By the time I had my third, the power of hindsight, experience, education and networking saw a thorough and awesome birth plan, based on an Informed Birth Preparation guide I had created for my doula clients. With my forth birth, Informed Birth Preparation evolved into a new species. No longer a plan, it had become a map. This evolution revealed the landscape, the possible detours and pathways, and was a game changer! With my fourth pregnancy, I started using the term Birth Map, and found that conversations were enriched. Rather than being shut down or dismissed, this simple change from 'plan' to 'map' opened up new possibilities. The key was in the questions. My guide became The Book and it was apparent that birth maps were great for women, their partners and the care providers. It was facilitating communication and allowing for truly informed decisions. Looking back, with the power of hindsight, on the journey into motherhood, the change, the transition, I feel a desire to support others through their transition. I want to make sure they never say, "I wish someone had told me!" Knowing all your options is important. Understanding normal biology (scientific birthing) is important. And being able to own your journey.

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Looking back, with the power of hindsight, on the journey into motherhood, the change, the transition, I feel a desire to support others through their transition. I want to make sure they never say, "I wish someone had told me!" Knowing all your options is important. Understanding normal biology (scientific birthing) is important. And being able to own your journey.

Informed birth preparation is the key to do this.

Staying at home is the obvious choice for full autonomy, and transfer plans are an important aspect of a well prepared homebirth. Even a planned caesarean benefits from Informed Birth Preparation. Informed Decisions are documented, for various scenarios. It is the equivalent of an Advance Care Directive.

As more midwives witness 'Informed Birth', they will be better able to support unprepared women toward an informed and empowering birth.

As more and more women use Informed Birth Preparation to create Birth Maps, and encourage others to do so, we will see a shift. The power will be returned to the women. The System may still be Insurance-driven, but the women will no longer take it lying down.

Catherine Bell is The Birth Cartographer. The second edition of her book THE BIRTH MAP: boldly going where no birth plan has gone before was released in September 2018. 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 cannot 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. She is also a Maternal Feminist. Catherine is an eternal optimist and occasional poet, who loves The Vicar of Dibley and agrees chocolate is a major food group.

Samantha is a mum of two, doula and antenatal educator from Shropshire, England. She is fascinated and excited by all things birth and passionate about informed choice – "I really do believe that knowledge is power, especially when it comes to how we birth and raise our children. I love working alongside women during pregnancy and beyond, as they discover and rediscover their own strength.

Dignity in birth is important. I feel very strongly about this. Birth can be powerfully transformative when it's given the respect it deserves. "

Samantha said that the "Instructions for attending a normal birth" started out as her trying to write her own birth plan.

Photography by Gwenyth Gittins

Watch me.

Watch me lean over and groan.

Watch me sway or rock or dance.

Watch me find my rhythm.

Watch me breathe through a contraction.

As it ends, watch me have a drink of water.

Then watch me relax myself, resting, waiting for the next wave.

Then watch me breathe again.

As you sit there, just outside the vortex, know that my world has shrunk to a bubble.

Be careful. Don't burst it.

A careless word, a bright light… they would be unwelcome right now.

Watch in awe as I play out the age-old miracle.

The world turns for me, the edges go fuzzy, time turns inside out.

There's a big slithery feeling

And then there's a BABY!

Warm and slippery and fresh from my own body.

Worth every push, grunt, drop of sweat.

Worth every tightening, every stretch mark.

Wait! I'm still in my bubble. It is not finished yet.

Keep your hats and your clamps and your scissors and needles.

Keep your telephones, your scales, your exclamations

Keep us warm and keep the room quiet and still.

Watch me meet me baby.

Watch his eyes find mine.

Watch his hands and then his mouth find my nipple.

Watch me discover in wonder each finger, each hair, each wrinkle

Don't disturb the awe of this first meeting.

Please. Just watch.

She is not here

She is not here to make you smile.

She does not exist for the sole purpose of making your life easier or making your pain feel less painful.

She does not wake each day to make you gasp or groan with pleasure.

And she sure as hell is not destined to hold your broken pieces politely together.

She is here to inhale her pain and exhale

Fire.

She is not a pretty plaything

Or a sweet little pet

She is a living, breathing, booming woman

With curiosity flowing through her veins like hot pink lightning,

With thorns on her skin

And colliding particles of electric, mystical mystery in her eyes.

She might look cute, she might look delicate and sweet

But she's got a fierce beast inside her—

Her wild heart.

But that's no secret.

Because she knows what she's not—-

And she is not here to people please until she dies.

She is not here to say pretty, glittery things that make people happy, but have no truth, no meaty substance.

She is not here to hold the crushing weight of the world on her shoulders.

She is not here to hide the flames of her anger behind sweet, sugary, fake little smiles.

She is not the one who will save you.

She knows that she can't save anyone, for she nearly lost herself while trying to mend the rips of a thousand broken hearts.

Now, she knows—

She is here to love herself, first.

She is here to inhale pain

And exhale

Fire.

She is not a pretty plaything

Or a sweet little pet.

She is a living, breathing, booming woman

Sent here with a mission, a purpose, a spark

That blooms inside her

When she stops trying to be perfect

When she stops trying to say all the right things

When she stops trying to please everyone else—

When she stops, lets out a delicious roarin' scream and asks herself aloud—

What do I need?

A bright purple lily blooms in her chest,

It unfurls with decadence and sparkles proudly in the sun, it covers her skin with a silky coat of electric goosebumps.

And in that moment, all is revealed—a scroll of tattered truths that make her heart beat a little faster—

She is here to dive deep and she knows it.

She is here to be so honest that it hurts.

She is here to stand alone, completely alone, and taste dripping raspberry glazed sunsets and kiss dark stormy skies with her head tilted back in pure, ecstatic pleasure.

She is here to create works of raw, wild blooming beauty from the gaping cracks and smashed shards in her heart.

She is here to unearth grains of gritty truth from the stinging scabs on her soul.

She is here to love fiercely and unabashedly—without timidity, without fear, without pretending, without second-guessing.

She is here to rise above her piles of sh*t and learn to fly.

She is here.

This moment is hers—hers to catch like a tangerine speckled butterfly in the palm of her hands—

This moment is hers

Hers to kiss, to touch, to embrace, to devour, to make passionate love to.

And in this moment,

She is so vividly alive.

She is here to inhale pain

And exhale

Fire.

Written by Sarah Harvey, February 18th 2016

Find more of Sarah's work at http://www.sarahlouisaharvey.com/ or on Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/sarahlouisaharvey/?fref=ts

Artwork by Neha Gupte - https://www.etsy.com/au/shop/TheBlckPen

Neha is a watercolour Artist based in Sydney. Through her art she wants to express her love for all nature around us, to depict the peace and calm it brings to us and emphazise that we cherish its beauty. HAS member Josi asked Neha to create a piece that combines both of their passions, nature and birthing at home.

CHOICES IN BIRTH

remember the long history that BIRTH HAPPENS... for over 150 years the men of medicine have taken the innate knowledge that sleeps within every woman. LEARN the ancient wisdom of birth and the modern interventions EMPOWERMENT comes with KNOWLEDGE. you will know what is right for YOU.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MARCH

Story and Photography by Kristyn Begnell

On Sunday the 20th of January I caught the train into Sydney CBD with my 10 month old daughter to attend the Women's March.

I felt excited and a bit nervous walking to Hyde Park with my sign. This is the first Women's March I've attended and I didn't know anyone else who was going.
As I arrived, the size of the crowd surprised me. People stood crowded around the stage and wrapped around the pond (it was later reported that there were 5000 people in attendance). Amongst the crowd of women I saw groups of teenage girls, families with small children, elderly men and women and even a few dogs.
The atmosphere was positive; people were smiling at each other and greeting friends as they arrived. There was a lot of hugging, smiling and a real sense of banding together for a common cause. A woman approached me and asked if she could take a photo of my sign to put on her Facebook page (she explained that she is a midwife). We stood together and spoke for a while before she moved closer to the stage.
As I looked around I observed that the majority of signs in the crowd bore slogans calling for an end to violence against women, in theme with the Women's March mission statement: "To harness the power of everyone present to change the culture of violence against women for the next generation."

The Women's March website goes on to say:

"Australia's culture of violence against women is a crisis. It is rooted in a widespread cultural acceptance that the values, roles and rights of women are lesser than those of men. It is time to change this culture so that the next generation of women can live their lives to their fullest potential; free from intimidation, harassment and violence. Women have the right to be safe, claim their space, be respected and have their voices heard."

When I read this, my mind floods with the many stories of obstetric violence and abuse that I've heard from other women and read about online. There is no doubt that birth trauma is a real issue here in Australia and a lot of women feel violated after their birth experiences, particularly those in hospital. A few days before the march I read a letter written by a woman to the hospital she gave birth in (a copy was shared with and by the Maternity Consumer Network), which detailed the horrendous treatment that she, her husband and her doula endured from hospital staff during her birth. I was in tears and shaking with rage by the time

I'd finished reading, and I harnessed those feelings as I marched.

One young woman came up to me and asked what my sign was about (it read 'STOP OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE #metooinbirth'). She was genuinely curious, so I explained a little and she went on to tell me a little about a friend of hers who had a traumatic birth recently. I looked around the crowd at all the mothers and grandmothers and wondered how many of them were also left feeling traumatized by their birth experiences... according to ABTA it would be roughly a third of the mothers present!
We marched through the streets of the CBD until we arrived at a park outside Central Station. There was a stage set up for speakers, dancers and musicians to perform as well as tables set up with information on organisations such as Safe State and Amnesty International. They had a few food trucks towards the back and people were sitting or standing in groups, talking and dancing. I stayed for a while to feed my baby and watch the last few speakers. As I was walking away towards the train station I was approached by a woman who asked to take a picture of my sign. I recognized her face - it was none other than Bashi Hazard (human rights lawyer and Board Director of Human Rights in Childbirth for those who are unfamiliar with her work). I was so excited to meet her and we ended up chatting for a while about the ups and downs of birth advocacy. We spoke about organising a group for the next march under the HRiC banner, to help draw more attention to the cause of human rights in childbirth.
Prior to the march I was feeling disheartened about the future of homebirth in Australia. With the PII exemption deadline looming and no real organised campaign for consumers to join, I was beginning to wonder how I could really make a difference. However, I am more hopeful after taking part in the march and speaking to Bashi. I feel more determined than ever to do whatever I can to help keep homebirth alive in this country. I owe it to my girls, so they too can one day experience the joy of giving birth in the safety and comfort of their own environment.

To learn more about our passionate Vice President, Kristyn, please check out her Bio on our Comittee Page (6-7)

THE BIRTH OF *Adrian*

By Bitna Choi Castillo

Profile photo by Paula Brennan

It was about time for a new chapter in our lives. We were in the middle of wrapping up our busy Sydney life to start a peaceful and slow Sunshine Coast life. My husband Jose and I always wanted to have three kids so we were going to plan our last baby when we moved, but good news came a few months early. In December, around the time our offer for our new home got accepted, we found out that I was pregnant.

I love being pregnant and had worked with pregnant women and their partners helping them to be prepared for a positive and empowering birth experience. I had experienced two beautiful, relaxing births with each of our girls, even though the plans didn't always go the way I preferred.

Nearly 10 years ago, I planned to have my eldest daughter, Myra, at home, but half way through the pregnancy I was diagnosed with gestational diabetes. I agreed with my independent midwife that I'd go under the system and birth at the Royal Hospital for Women (RHW) in Randwick. It was frightening to dump all the plans and let go of the fear of going to the hospital. Fortunately, it turned out to be a very good mother and baby centred hospital. I had one midwife looking after me for the entire pregnancy and birth and also had a doula who was there to support me. She reassured and cheered me on silently during the birth of my first baby. After 26 hours of chilled labour, I gave birth to Myra and became a mama!

Having that experience kind of eased my feelings about hospital birth, though I had to constantly fend off question after question with, "No, I'm fine" or "No, I don't want to" whenever they recommended a routine procedure. Because she was my first child I didn't fully understand what it meant to have ultimate choice over my pregnancy and birth. There were many things I regretfully followed blindly, especially with newborn routines.

Five years ago, we were expecting our second child. We didn't have the funds to hire a private midwife at that time but were confident that we could have a wonderful birth at a hospital again. We decided to have our baby at a local hospital in Sutherland. I thought I could do it again. Dealing with the unnecessary tests, routines and threat, "If you don't do this....you're at risk of xyz happening." I thought that I knew better and would not take anything personally, but with the second time having gestational diabetes, I was again tagged with a 'high risk pregnancy' label and was probably also labelled a 'difficult patient' too. To make things even worse, this hospital didn't have the same system as RHW, so I never saw the same midwife twice. I'm so glad that Jose pushed me to find a doula and I found Virginia. She knows how to support a woman - she's a wealth of knowledge in natural health and her heart is filled with love and passion to support birthing mothers.

After suffering many hours of anxiety, frustration and tears at the hospital visits, I finally stopped going for the weekly prenatal check-ups after 34 weeks. After 16 hours of a relaxing and gentle labour at home at 41 weeks, I called up the hospital to let them know that I was coming in. Aila was born 2 hours after we got to the hospital. It was an incredible water birth, despite the fact that I had never met the midwife, that she completely ignored our birth plan and called security when Jose wanted to catch the baby.

With all the experience I had, I made up my mind that we would have our third baby at home even before I got pregnant. It seemed the only logical

choice was that we'll homebirth this last baby, nice and sweet, then end our baby making for good.

We had our first appointment with an independent midwife at 12 weeks. She made it clear to me that she would not support me for a homebirth as the doctors at the hospital wouldn't approve because of my history of GD. I had GD again for the third time and this time my blood pressure (BP) was also through the roof. I can only assume that it was stress related because it all settled down after a couple of weeks. After talking to the midwife many times I was (nearly) convinced to birth at Sunshine Coast University Hospital with a private midwife, if I could make it.

I had my BSL and BP under control with diet till mid-way through the pregnancy. I needed insulin to keep my BSLs under control and towards the end of pregnancy my BP became too high. My midwife and all the doctors at the hospital wanted to admit me to take BP medication, I said 'no'. It was a careful and informed decision, but it put me in an awkward spot which every pregnant woman would want to avoid. After making that decision and seeing everyone freak out I started to resent the choice I'd made. I should've looked at more options, not rushed and hired a midwife who wasn't confident to support me and the choices I make. I'd also had enough with the hospital and the doctors who made me feel stupid for listening to my own instinct over their fear driven advice. I knew they weren't a good fit to support my birth; it was bitter but true.

The whole situation made me so lonely, angry, sad and defeated. I shared my miserable feelings on homebirth Australia group. I felt understood and gained support from the group without realising that what I had written was offensive to my midwife. She flipped and nearly cried in front of me telling me how hurtful it was to read. It was hurtful for me to write but I apologised for causing her pain. There was no apology from my midwife for her lack of support, whether or not it was intended. Instead, she decided to stop providing care at 38 weeks. I had no one else. I had no plan. I was totally lost, but totally free.

I ran around asking for support. I sent inquiries to doulas and other independent midwives in the area to get support for homebirth, but being 38 weeks pregnant was too tight. Now that I did not have to worry about anyone else's fear, I could fully embrace my own choice, my own instinct. I listened to my body and my baby more closely. I started to visualise the birth I wanted to have without any limitation. I felt so empowered and free. As my mind was settling on the idea of having a free birth, Jose was still a bit worried. He anxiously said he wouldn't know what to do when the baby was born and suggested we go to the hospital, that I didn't need to worry about anything because he would be my shield. As much as it was sweet and heart-warming to hear, I refused to moderate my choices and calling to accommodate anyone else's fear. I told him, "You'll be fine. You'll know what to do when it happens."
As if our baby knew we were having a hard time 'deciding', he decided to arrive at 39 weeks. We had just had a shopping day, buying some baby stuff and a blow-up pool just in case, and that night I had cramps and knew our baby was coming. I slept on and off that night through the contractions. I let Jose know that I was in labour in the morning; he knew we'd be having a baby at home but started to write a birth plan just in case we needed to go into the hospital. We set up our birth corner in our guest room, decorating with lights, candles and crystals. We tried to blow up the pool and set it up in the room but had no idea how to connect it to the tap. It didn't matter to our baby. I was told that a third baby would come a lot faster and easier. My little one was on the way, fast and intense. By about 9am I knew we'd have our baby before dinner time.
It felt so right. I felt empowered and centred. I was in the zone with myself and my baby. Breathing and rocking. Breathing and rocking. I could hear our girls giggling, watching a movie while waiting for their baby sibling to arrive. No one was freaking out. No one was bothering me. Jose knew exactly how to support me through the labour by just being there for me, trusting me and letting me do what I am meant to do.

At about 2.30pm I started to feel strong urges to push. I asked Jose to forget about the pool and fill up our bath. As I got into the bath, I felt an instant relief. Soon the urge started to get stronger and stronger; it was time. I started to breathe down baby number three. I felt the 'pop' and knew my waters had broken. I could feel a little bit of head with soft hair. Then there was a knock on the door, it was Esther. She's a doula and the only person available to come over to support us at such short notice. She came at the right time; five minutes after she arrived there was a little head poking out to see what's up. Jose yelled out, excited, "B, you are doing great! I can see baby's head!"

I felt my body on fire. It was doing exactly what needed to be done, so naturally. I felt the mother goddess roaring within me. I felt powerful!

At 3.15pm, Jose caught a tiny little baby fresh to this world. "It's a little boy!" He said emotionally and put him on my chest. He was here. He looked around, cried out loud. The girls came into our bathroom to meet their baby brother. I birthed the placenta not long after Adrian was born. We moved to our room to take turns cuddling our little one. We didn't have a name for him for a couple of days, so we just called him 'little one' or 'our baby'. He was precious; tiny, but strong and loud.

Our little Adrian is now 5 months old. Cute, cheeky and chubby. Smiling away and melting everyone's hearts. We are so grateful that he chose us. Jose knows now too that we had all things within us to make it happen.

One of the greatest things about moving to the Sunshine Coast was the people. We connected with amazing like-minded families right away, one of them was Ellie. She supported us so much and in so many ways. She was there to support me

throughout the pregnancy, came over on the day of Adrian's birth to prepare the room and went around to find a better hose for us to set up the pool. She also brought us dinner that night. She's a busy mum of three kids. I can't speak more highly of her because she truly has a golden heart. Esther spared her time to come and support us. We clicked right away, learning that we had so many things in common. She stayed for a while to help and made sure we were fine. I could just see through her soul how pure and full of love she is. In this journey it was painful to be rejected, dumped and left vulnerable, but through that I saw what is real and what's not. How true support should feel and be. Special thanks to these two incredible women.

At last, I have a love letter for all other expecting mums who were told, "You can't".

Hey Mamas,

Never under estimate the power of mother instinct!

You are an empowered, strong, intelligent and inspiring woman.
Your instinct has been there for generations to not only keep us alive but for us to thrive!

Beginning of the miracle is trust.
Trust in yourself.
Trust in the universe.
Trust in the unseen.

Magic of motherhood begins with trusting your own built-in navigation that tells you the right way for you to walk, talk, learn, experience and honour.

Follow your heart.
Listen to your soul.
Honour your instinct.
Trust in yourself.

Rock your inner goddess!

Bitna Castillo is a former Birthings Editor, a wife, a mum of three, a home educator and a Holistic Success Coach based in beautiful Sunshine Coast. She spends most days doing something creative with her two girls while cuddling her baby boy. Outside of mummy hours, she's on a passionate mission to help other freedom seeking mummas to find balance, abundance and fulfilment in their life through her online and private life and business coaching programs.
www.bitnacastillo.com

KEY CHOICES THAT AFFECT BIRTH OUTCOMES

by Helena Mooney

Photos by Emma Hill and Helena Mooney

The current rhetoric is highly supportive of women having the right to choose their birth provider and for "informed consent" for procedures, but what choice do women really have? And, crucially, what information is readily available to them to base their decisions upon? The reality is, when women are in the birthing room, their ability to actively choose outcomes is limited. The time to make important decisions occurs before they ever step in there. The most important decisions of all are **where** a woman chooses to birth and **with whom**. So let's look at the key choices women can make and the impact it has on their birth, and then let's start to ask another question.

Choice 1: Where to give birth

This decision has THE most significant impact on the type of birth a woman will have and the outcome for her baby.

Despite this, there is little information readily available to help a woman choose her place of birth other than the experiences of those around her and cultural perceptions of the benefits of private, public or at home birth. Local GPs are a key source of information and they will often ask if a woman has private health insurance (which, due to tax incentives, most do) and therefore provide a list of private obstetricians on the assumption that they will therefore go through a private hospital (well, you might as well after paying for all that insurance). There's the overarching perception that, if you pay for it, you'll receive better care and therefore have a better outcome for you and your baby. Following this thought process, private hospitals must be better, yet the statistics show a different story.

There is very clear research which shows that a first-time, low risk woman has a 20% less chance of having a physiological vaginal birth in a private hospital than a public one . That is a hugely important piece of information women should have easy access to when making such an important choice. Why isn't this more widely known?

It's not widely known because:
- Obstetricians are trained surgeons and have a different approach to birth
- Maternity is one of the most lucrative areas for private hospitals.

Accordingly, much is done to promote the benefits of having your own room, access to your private obstetrician, hotel-like facilities. Therefore, if a

woman goes down the private hospital route wanting a vaginal birth, who is going to tell them that they've just reduced their chances of having the birth they'd like by 20%? They've just made a huge decision, possibly without access to evidence that may be important to them.

Then, of course, there is the option of Homebirth - an option that rarely, if ever, enters into the initial information provided by the GP. Despite ample evidence showing the better outcomes for women and their babies, the ability for women to choose their home as the place for their birth is continually being eroded. Lack of available private midwives (because the system makes it difficult for them to practice), limited public funding and lack of government-assisted insurance to enable private midwives to practice (despite the government assisting private obstetricians) all contribute to this option being less available

for most women to choose.
Even if a woman had done her research and wanted a homebirth, there is the strong possibility that her GP will simply refuse to sign the required form to 'allow' her to make such a choice.

So much for the rhetoric that choice is available.

Choice 2: If you've chosen a public hospital, a handful of fortunate women can make an additional choice - to join the Midwife Group Practice (MGP) or not

MGP is when a woman is cared for by a known midwife, within the hospital system, throughout pregnancy, birth and postpartum. Statistically, mothers have a greater chance of having a physiological vaginal birth with fewer complications or need for intervention when they are cared for by a known midwife . Babies are less likely to be born pre-term, less likely to need resuscitation and less likely to die when their mothers receive such care. So why do more women not 'choose' this option? After all, who wouldn't want this level of care? Because 'the system' is not adequately set up to give such care to all:

- It's limited to a small percentage of women (only about 8% nationally , well short of the NSW Health target of 35%) and is often quickly booked out by those who do happen to know about it
- It's limited to women who are judged to be 'low risk' (despite the evidence showing benefit to women of all risk)
- Many women don't know it exists, or are aware of the evidence of its benefits so don't know to ask for it
- It's often described in an unappealing way (namely, that you have to go home 6 hours after giving birth which, to a first time mum, can initially seem really scary)

As you can see, there often isn't any choice available at all. And, again, women are inadequately informed of the facts, which results in most, by default, going through the fragmented general clinic where they see different midwives each appointment, at birth and postnatally. Which brings me to my key point surrounding choice & birth:
WHY are most women not given access to best-practice, evidence-based care?

Why are women not given access to a known midwife throughout their pregnancy, birth and postpartum when it clearly leads to better outcomes for them and their babies? Why are important statistics not more widely known? There are many reasons such as maternity system structure, the design of MGP, staffing, education, etc. But I believe at the heart of it is politics and money. There is the turf war between obstetricians and midwives - with obstetricians having the upper hand politically and financially.

A key example is the recent National Strategic Approach to Maternity Services (NSAMS). After extensive consultation with birth professionals, workers and consumers, the recommendations were based on continuity of care with a known midwife; cue outcry from the AMA about the "disturbing national trend where obstetricians and GP-obstetricians are being pushed out of primary roles in the provision of maternity care."

According to Tony Bartone, AMA President, "It is alarming that obstetricians and GP-obstetricians are being relegated to secondary positions within the maternity care team or wholly excluded in favour of midwife-led care." The politicians listened, the AMA prevailed, and, at time of writing, the recommendations were changed to simply "continuity of care," i.e. no effective change to the current system. The outcomes from the consultations were ignored on this fundamental point and women's access to true choice was denied.

So, why the outcry from the AMA? The main reason is because if all women were offered continuity of care with a known midwife, i.e. if they were offered a true choice, fewer may choose to engage a private obstetrician. Since the early 1990's, women in New Zealand can choose their Lead Maternity Carer (LMC) from midwives, GPs or obstetricians. Most choose a midwife as their LMC . Likewise, closer to home, the Royal Hospital for Women in Randwick have recently significantly increased their MGP programs, and demand is still outstripping supply with many women choosing to be cared for in a midwife continuity of care model.
Where true choice is available, many women choose midwife continuity of care - this would be bad for business for obstetricians….
The fact that choice to midwife continuity of care models are limited within hospitals has a major impact on access to homebirth. If our maternity system was truly based on providing women with access to evidence-based care, then homebirth would become a more appealing & accessible choice for many women.

So how can we counter this? How can we ensure women can make true choices? We can do this by:

- **Educating girls in High School of the evidence around birth and the politics involved so they are better prepared when they eventually become pregnant**
- **Ensuring GPs fully explain the options and consequences to newly pregnant women and support them in whatever their decision**
- **Educating the population at large without AMA retribution (such as recently happened in Adelaide after an ACM advertising campaign)**
- **Changing the maternity funding model at a federal and state level**
- **Women demanding access to MGP & homebirth programs at their local hospital**
- **Women continuing to actively lobby their local MPs demanding change**

Ultimately, every woman should have access to evidence-based, best practice care, which has been proven to be continuity of care with a known midwife (with, obviously, additional support from other professionals, including obstetricians, as needed). If she then wants to choose a different form of care such a private obstetrician or GP-shared care, then of course she should be able to do so. First, let's ensure all women have a genuine choice and are treated as the capable decision-making adults that they are.

Helena Mooney is a homebirth mum, parenting coach, doula and maternity services advocate on the Northern Beaches. She runs Birth and Parenting, about which you can read more here - www.birthandparenting.com.au

THE BIRTH OF *Vera*

By Ash-lea Gazzola

Photos courtesy of Jerusha Sutton Photography

My partner Zac and I had just started trying to fall pregnant and we were very fortunate to receive a positive test after our first month of tracking my ovulation period.

I was expecting to rock up to Christmas dinner and announce we were starting to try, but instead we announced we were 8 weeks pregnant.

We had decided to wait until birth to find out what we were having, and surprisingly it was super easy to just let it be. I always thought I would HAVE to find out, but it was just lovely to focus on growing a healthy baby and not getting caught up on buying boy or girl garb.

Personally I pictured my antenatal care to just be magical, and full of competent, supportive women. I think I got this picture in my head after living in Mexico for a few years and learning about how the ancient culture of the Zapotecans birthed, with shamans, wise women and sacred ceremonies in their Temazcals. Temazcals are ancient dome shaped saunas used for birth and to detox from heavy situations like war and battle. The women entered the Temazcals and birthed their babies in the warmth of the dome in herb filled baths or squatting all in ceremony with their support team.

I would have loved to birth exactly like that if we still were living over there. But, back in Australia I had the challenge of finding the closest experience to that. I had yet to find the home birth world at this stage and started looking at birth centres. I wanted a shaman, but in Aus we don't have these ancient healers, but we do have incredible doulas!

I specifically wanted only women to be my care providers throughout my entire pregnancy. I know there are amazing men in these fields but I just felt very strongly that if you do not have the same anatomy as me, then how could you know more about my body than me? Or share experiences and stories of support? I was craving that community that only women can provide to other women.

I was in the middle of moving to Sydney from the Gold Coast at this stage, so everything I was researching was Sydney based. I had googled doulas in the Sydney area and Jerusha Sutton popped up - I sent her an email and later that week we spoke on the phone. After about 2 minutes of chatting I knew I had found the right person and we organised to meet when I arrived in Sydney a few weeks later. She briefly mentioned home birthing and midwifery led care after I told her about how I wanted to birth in water. With that conversation, my research into the world of home birth began. By now I had been to the birth centre for my first booking appointment and to see the facilities. To be honest I had left there just not feeling great, nothing bad had happened necessarily but I didn't visualise myself birthing there.

Later on, when myself and Zac had a coffee with Jerusha at our first meeting, she mentioned private midwifery care again. By this stage Zac and I had discussed the option and were very into it, but stuck on the financial aspect of it. We realised quickly that to have the experience we wanted, we have to be knowledgeable and informed - this meant surrounding ourselves with the right people to make that happen. So we locked in a meeting with our midwife, Jo Hunter, who was recommended to us. We had now secured our birth team and only positive things were to come.

I really loved being pregnant, every bit of it was magical to me.

The fact that I was growing a human, my belly and body were changing and even all the aches and pains… I loved it all. The care we received at each prenatal appointment with Jo and at each catch up with Jerusha just validated the decision we had made with this model of care. It was all exactly how I pictured it to be - just full of love, care and excitement.

During a prenatal visit, I think sometime between week 29-32 weeks, bub was head up. We weren't stressed, as we had plenty of time - But of course started using techniques to help make the move to head down. I swam, was already doing yoga throughout my pregnancy and had some acupuncture done.

By the next appointment and from then on until 37 and a bit weeks bub was head down and on track. Everything was plotting along nicely, bub remained head down and was 3/5th's engaged at what turned out to be my last prenatal appointment with Jo. I was indulging in all the self-care I could during the last part of pregnancy. I had a fair amount of pressure on my hips and wanted to give them a break, so I visited the flotation tanks. I was floating away on my back, but was not getting the relief I needed as the weight of the baby was still pressing down on my hips (she was moving like crazy during the float, which was out of character as she was a slow mover the whole pregnancy). So, I decided to float belly down in the water and use the foam floaty to hold my chin up, this let me relax my hips and fully take the weight of my belly off my body. This is where we think she had the room to do some serious acrobatics.

I had never felt so womanly and beautiful in my life than I did during my last weeks of pregnancy, I was not quite ready yet to let it all go. When baby Vera decided to evict me at 38+5 I was excited to meet her, but also sad to say goodbye to my pregnant self.

So…to the birthday. The morning of Saturday the 4th August I was wandering over to the local library with Zac to print off my birth sheet with all the info he would need during labour. I remember saying to him, "The baby is really sitting on my cervix today," and stopping to do a squat or two on the way. I had planned to spend the day tying up a couple of loose ends in preparation for labour in the coming weeks. I was pretty organised and had everything just about ready for my home birth.
The last things I wanted to do were write a letter to my body thanking it for all the awesome work it had done during pregnancy, and will do during/ after birth, write to my baby, letting bub know we were ready to go and how much we loved her/him, and write out my birth manifestation of how I had been visualising my birth for the last 9 months.

I finished these up, sealed the envelopes and placed them on my birth mantle. Soon after Zac came home and started cooking us a yummy lunch, I popped into the loo before we sat down together and quickly called him in. I had finished weeing, but I could still hear a trickling sound - so I asked him to look down there for me, as I could no longer see my toes let alone my downstairs region. He said I was leaking and we both just looked at each other very wide eyed. Holy crap - birth was imminent. We were going to meet our baby.

I let our ladies know that my waters were slowly breaking and we all got a bit excited. They let us know to go about our business, as I had no other symptoms of labour. Zac headed into work to tie up any loose ends and to bring some groceries home. I chilled out at home and finished off decorating my birth mantle, put the final touches on my play list, meditated with bub and spent some last moments with my belly.

A couple of hours later Zac came home, I was feeling a little crampy by this stage (around 4pm) but nothing big at all was happening. We decided to go for a walk, ground our feet on the grass and watch the sunset together as a duo for the last time. I remember we both couldn't stop smiling at each other and we had to remind ourselves to relax and not get so excited, it could be days before our baby arrived earthside.

Zac, being the chef of the house, made us a tasty dahl for dinner and we started setting up the rest of the birth space in case it all kicked off in the middle of the night/early morning. Everything was good to go, all that was missing was the water in the birth pool. We picked out a movie to watch and jumped into bed - by this time it was around 9pm; still no big symptoms, just a few cramps.

At around 9:30pm I had my first real surge. It was pretty intense and I remember thinking, "Sh*t, this is full on." I was over trying to watch the movie and decided to take a bath. My surges were lasting a minute and coming every 10 minutes... But I wasn't keeping track too much either as I thought I was only in the early stages. I messaged Zac from the tub after having a big surge telling him to come sit with me. He was messaging Jo and Jerusha to keep them updated.

We were all certain that I was at the start of labour and we had a fair haul ahead of us. I was concentrating on conserving energy and breathing. I know Jo had told me that when I couldn't ignore the surges any longer that is when she would come. But, from the first surge I had I was not able to ignore it, I kind of put this down to being my first experience, not that I was already in active labour. I had planned to do so much during my labour: I wanted to wear my birth necklace, meditate, burn sage, wander around my house just being a goddess, lighting candles. Luckily everything was set up, but I did not have the slow ramp up of surges to facilitate the hippy picture in my head.

I was going through the motions and reminding myself just to let go and to go within. I had gotten out of the bath and was labouring on the birth ball for a short period before getting back into the bath. Zac had begun filling the pool and I was more than ready to be in deeper water.

Once I was back in the bath tub a surge came and with it my body pushed. I was a bit shocked as we were only 2 hours into what I thought was the start of labour. Zac called Jo and I know I spoke to her, but that conversation is a bit fuzzy. Nonetheless, she was on her way with haste and had called Jerusha to tell her that we were on.

While I was waiting for the birth pool to be filled enough for me to jump in, I had begun lunging in the bathroom during the surges. I felt the need to stretch my legs and hips. Looking back, obviously I was working my baby down. I reinstated to Zac that I needed that pool to be filled faster (like he wasn't already doing it as fast as possible) and he let me know that it was full enough to get in.

He helped me into the warm water and I immediately felt like I could live in the pool forever. My body was pushing with every second or third surge by this point and I was very deep in my breath. Zac left me for a second to answer the door and in floated Jerusha, just like an angel. We were doing great when she wasn't there but her presence just brought us all together even more. I remember her holding onto both of my hands over the birth pool during a surge and when I opened my eyes she was just smiling at me and said I was doing great... I hope I smiled back but I was pretty deep by this point. But damn, her holding my hands at that point was just really what I needed and solidified my confidence.

She passed my hands into Zac's and this is how we stayed up until the end nearly. I felt like I was rolling and rocking with the motions really well
and I heard Zac using our Hypnobirth breathing techniques for me to follow and click back into if I lost my rhythm between surges.

My body was really kicking up a gear, surges on surges, and I didn't feel a break between. Jerusha said to me to have a feel and see if bub was near. I said no at first, I didn't want to be disheartened if I wasn't able to feel anything, but I did and I felt something but I didn't know what it was. In my head I was thinking it could just be my cervix or possibly the head, I had no idea and told this to Jerusha. She told me it's ok and that I was doing amazingly, just to go with it. And that was my first vaginal exam of my entire pregnancy and birth.

I was moving my hips to open them up and through a few surges I had felt something coming. I said to Jerusha, "There is something in my vagina," and she looked down and said she couldn't see anything just yet and asked if she could place her hand just under me, but there was nothing there.

At this point talking for me was pretty tough and I remember wanting to say to wait for the next one, but as quick as I thought it, a surge came and I knew something was out. I thought some 'birth stuff' must be coming down before the head. Jerusha looked down and though I thought she immediately told me the news, she actually first took a photo (of course), called Jo and then came back into the room. She said, "Ash, there is a foot."

I don't know if I laughed out loud or just in my head but I thought that was a pretty funny thing to say. Then I guess I realised that meant bub was breech. I didn't have any fear or worry, I just knew this baby was coming and my body was doing some pretty powerful things to help out.

When Jerusha told Jo the news, who was still on the way at full speed, Jo answered the call expecting to be told that the baby was born, so she could stop speeding. Instead she was informed about the tiny toes that had appeared, so I think the pedal was fully to the metal.

Jo asked Jerusha to call an ambulance in case she didn't make it in time so they could provide resuscitation if the baby needed it. This was all explained to me and Zac by Jerusha and not once did the calm, warm and love filled atmosphere change. I do remember hearing Jo saying on the phone, "Don't let them touch the baby if I don't make it," due to the baby being breech the rule is 'hands off'.

Zac held me like a rock through my continuous surges and Jerusha spoke with the ambulance call centre. The lady on the other end had told us that I needed to stand up out of the water and come out of the pool.

Might I just add the lady on the phone was a cool, calm, collected and

unexpected addition to my birth team. I wish I could get in contact with her to say thanks for not bringing any bad energy into the space.

I didn't want to leave the pool. I thought it was going to be impossible and now a little leg had descended. I was not into the whole idea, I was so happy in the water. Jerusha told me in her serious voice that Jo and or the ambulance will need to see exactly whats going on. She and Zac both lifted me out onto the other side and I continued doing my thing.

The ambulance had made it by this stage but not before super midwife Jo. I could see the lights or maybe I could just imagine them but they stayed put in their car whilst our midwife arrived and they did not enter the house.

Jo arrived just in time to have her hands out and ready for baby to come. She was out to her hips by now and my surges had stopped all of a sudden. Probably from the quick position change and a bit of adrenaline no doubt. Jo instructed me to try to push, as bub couldn't hang there for long. I found it nearly impossible to do so. It felt so wrong from what my body had been doing itself this entire time, but I did and then my body quickly came back online and finished pushing our baby out smoothly into the waiting hands of lovely Jo. The time lapse between her tiny foot appearing to her being caught by Jo was 10 minutes according to the time dated images taken by Jerusha. It was also just 3 minutes from Jo's arrival that she was earthside!

The feeling of release was insane. The feeling of our baby joining us in the room was even better.

I could hear Zac crying and I couldn't stop saying, "What do you mean?!" I am guessing that was me trying to say, "What do you mean I just gave birth?" which I still laugh about when I think of it.

After bub had a quick check over by Jo and given the all clear, she was in my arms. Zac and I took a look to find out the sex and after first thinking it was a boy, were corrected and on closer inspection, through all the vernix, we saw she was a girl. This, I still find hilarious too.

I stepped back in the pool with her to deliver the placenta and have a cuddle. The cord was really short and I couldn't bring her to my chest yet so we waited for the placenta to well finish pumping and Zac cut the cord.

I hadn't birthed the placenta yet and it was really hurting my back. I was having a tough time just relaxing and pushing it out. No matter how encouraging Jo was, it really was hard for me just to wrap my mind around the fact that if I just relaxed and gave a push it would come out. I had just given birth and felt like I was just done. Eventually I got the memo and the final stage was complete. That was a feeling of pure relief.

Our baby girl was then put against my chest for her first feed. We all sat back and debriefed about what the heck just happened. The speed of labour, the way she decided to come out, the moments leading up to labour, Jo's fast and furious race to catch her, Jerusha's thoughts upon spying her right foot... all of it was dissected in our lounge room with her feeding away.

A few cups of tea, lots of cuddles, kisses, tears, laughs and hours later she was weighed, measured and named Vera Mae Wilkins.

She stepped into the world at 12:28am on Sunday 5th August 2018 weighing 3.2kgs, with a start to finish labour time of 3 1/2 hours.

We feel like she will be giving us a run for our money for the rest of our lives.

My name is Ash-lea Gazzola, I am originally from Melbourne but have called Sydney home since I was 17. I own my own business and freelance occasionally. I specialise in social media strategies and public relations. I have a beautiful partner, Zac, and now our gorgeous daughter, Vera Mae. My love affair with birth started with this pregnancy once I found the private midwifery model of care and begun learning SO much about women, our bodies and how very powerful we are.

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Birth Announcements

Aria

Aria Rebekah Jean Glass was born on **26 November 2018** at 7:59pm at Royal Prince Alfred hospital via C-section after transferring from home. Daughter to Melodie and Nik, and sister to Isabelle (10), Stella (8) and Max (5) (all born at home). Quickly getting over their initial disappoint not to "see the baby come out", Aria's siblings are completely besotted with their little sister! A huge thanks to Jo Hunter and Jacqui Wood for providing unwavering care and support.

Arnold

Arnold Charles Clews

Born 11:36am **Sunday 3rd February, 2019** at 41+6. 4.1kg, 51cm.

The most incredible home birth experience for our 2VBAC. Thank you to our little man & amazing midwives Annie, Nina & student Kathryn for making our dream birth come true.

Stella

We are excited to announce the birth of Stella Louise Wenn on **December 2nd 2018**. She was a healthy 3.85kg and 58cm long. It was an amazing, powerful freebirth at home. Mum - Natalie, Dad - Oliver and brother -Charlie are so happy to welcome her to the family. She is a peaceful happy soul.

Huxley

Elli, John, Annie and Hugo are very excited to announce the birth of Huxley John Miller. Huxley was born via 2HBAC on the **6th of March, 2019** at 4:17pm into water at home, surrounded by the love of his parents, big sister and brother, and birth team. Their biggest baby yet, Huxley weighed 4.16 kg and measured 56 cm long! They truly had the most amazing birth team with Jo, Jacqui, Aimee and Tara and are so grateful they were able to welcome Huxley into the world this way.

Violet Quinn

23/01/2019

She arrived calmly & swiftly at 3:28pm; welcomed by her mum Tahlia, dad Adam, brother Jasper and Grandma Joanna. We are all so full of joy and love for this little darling. The homebirth has left us all so healed, empowered and, above all, proud. Our thanks go out to our beautiful, wise midwife Janine, who has been there for every step of our HBAC journey. We are so grateful!

THE HOMEBIRTH OF *Alice*

By Jennifer Lorance

The choice to have a home birth for my pregnancy with Alice was easy. After a caesarean with my eldest daughter Lucy in 2006, I had two wonderful home births with my next two daughters, Hannah and Charlotte. Charlotte's birth in 2014 had given us additional reason to choose home birth, because she arrived so quickly neither our midwives nor my doula made it.

We fell pregnant unexpectedly in 2016 for the fourth time and I excitedly booked in with Hannah, who was also closest geographically. Sadly, that pregnancy ended at 12 weeks, after discovering no heartbeat at an ultrasound. It was a long natural miscarriage, without complications. The loss of that pregnancy had intensified my desire for another child and I felt like we had room for one more. It took us three months to fall pregnant; I was 40. I don't think my body had fully recovered from my miscarriage six months earlier. This new pregnancy was almost exactly a year later. My due date was only two days different. I was so nervous going to my 12 week ultrasound, and my fears were realised with a tiny still figure on the screen.

I could hardly believe I was having another miscarriage and went into labour exactly one year after the first awful ultrasound. The loss felt like more than just bad luck. The labour to pass the baby was harder than my live births and I lost a lot of blood. I went to Royal North Shore's Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit for a check afterwards, as I didn't want another long drawn out process. The care providers we saw were respectful and sensitive. We opted to have tests done, for my own peace of mind. I felt a lot of relief when we learned our baby girl had Trisomy 15, both because it was rare so was unlikely to have been the cause of the first loss and also because it was probably random bad luck. My father in law also passed away a few weeks after losing the baby; we were thoroughly grief stricken.

I desperately hoped for one last chance. I never thought I would have a baby after I was 40, so to find myself trying at 41 was a surprise. I researched ways to improve my reproductive health and took supplements that may improve egg quality. I felt different in my body after this loss, and my cycle returned right on time. I was praying for a miracle. I fell pregnant less than two months later. I kept it to myself, hoping to spare everyone else the anxiety. I booked in with my midwife Hannah and told her I didn't want to meet up until I was about 15 weeks. I was 12 weeks on Christmas Day, so I decided to skip that ultrasound. I felt this baby would be fine, but I couldn't handle the anxiety of that scan. We told our girls and immediate family for Christmas, which was so special, but because of the holiday break, we didn't need to share it with anyone else.

I had my first appointment with Hannah at 16 weeks, where I got to hear that beautiful heartbeat. I had been feeling the baby move for several weeks, and I knew in my heart everything was fine, but the relief at hearing that was immense. I chose to have the 18 week ultrasound as planning a home birth VBAC I was keen to know the placental position. Again, that feeling of relief when the first thing I saw on the screen was a lovely clear head with a perfect brain.

The remainder of my pregnancy was uneventful. I was healthy and baby was growing. I do wonder how I might have been treated as a 41 year old mother having her fourth baby and a VBAC in the hospital system. Having not been in the hospital maternity system for 11 years, I can only guess from the stories of my friends. I chose not to have the Glucose Challenge Test. My midwife did recommend an extra blood test to check on my iron stores. My fundal height, like my previous full term pregnancy, started to measure a little smaller in the third trimester. My babies tend to be small, but healthy. I am not very big, so this would make sense!

Since both of my previous pregnancies came at 40 weeks, give or take a few days, I presumed this one would be the same which put me right at the start of the winter school holidays. The weekend before 39 weeks I finally finished preparations for the baby. We had a late night.

I woke just before 7am to a contraction. My first thought was, "No – I have work to do this week!" I had another contraction about five minutes later so went down and told my 12 year old she could stay home from school today, the baby was coming. I phoned my midwife but told her she would be fine to come after peak hour and avoid the traffic. After the freebirth of my last daughter where my labour never really intensified and I had about 20 minutes warning before she was born, neither of my midwives took any chances. When

I called around 9:30am to ask them to head over, they were there within a few minutes as they'd been waiting nearby.

The girls were excited to know their sister was going to be born today. They hung sun catchers we'd made in the bedroom window and my six and four year olds put on their prettiest dresses for the baby's birthday. They played downstairs, colouring and watching a movie. I read my birth affirmations.

Contractions were not intense, every five minutes or so, but I wanted the support of my team. They had tea and I hung out the washing. I felt nauseous. We set up foam padding and waterproof towels on the bedroom floor where I was going to give birth. Around 11 am I asked for a hot pack. When I went into the kitchen I dropped to the floor and knew it was time to get into my birthing space. 11:22am. I told my midwife it wouldn't be long now.

My contractions were about three minutes apart by 11:45am but more intense. The heat pack was helping with an unusual pain sensation I was getting across my pubic bone. It felt like ligament pain, not labour. I had a dull ache there for some time after the birth and when I started exercising, so I think I guessed correctly. My midwives watched as I laboured. My dog Charlie sat by me. This was his third stint at birth support! I undressed, vocalising with each contraction, partly due to the ligament pain and because it was getting close. My midwife told me I had a purple line about half an hour later.

I felt the waters break and she was coming. I told my partner to go and get the girls, it was time. He came back a minute later – they'd told him it was a good bit and they wanted to finish the movie. I made him go back and get them NOW, I wasn't doing this again!

This was the first of my births where I felt stretching and burning as her head crowned, so I breathed her out gently. She came out quickly and easily, without any real pushing. I could hear the girls saying, "Baby!" excitedly when they saw her head. My midwife said she had a nuchal cord and she unlooped it. I caught my baby and lifted her to my chest. I did it! She was born just before 12:30pm.

We climbed into bed and everyone met our newest family member. My second midwife Robyn gently helped the placenta out after about 20 minutes (much quicker than my previous births). She breastfed and peed all over me! Our beautiful baby was 2.85 kg, almost exactly the same size as my previous baby at 2.86 kg. We named her Alice Georgia a few days later.

She has been a blessing to us and her arrival was so healing after the grief of the previous two years. I had the best of care during that time from my wonderful midwives. They walked alongside me as I navigated the anxiety of pregnancy after loss and saw me through her birth. Each

birth has taught me something, and this one was to listen to my intuition and trust myself. I learnt to surrender, that I was not in control, but I was okay, from my previous birth. My first VBAC taught me I was strong and empowered.

Each of my home births, with my midwives, put me in control of my own choices and I felt respected; truly woman-centred care.

Jennifer Lorance is a mum of four girls aged 7 months to (almost) 13 years, with three home birthed babies after a caesarean. In professional life, she is a sustainability consultant for large multinational corporations. Over the years, she assists the home birth community by volunteering in home birth group and maternity consumer groups, as well as at her local church, parenting and school groups. She has a passion for human rights and making the planet a better place for all.

AN INTERVIEW WITH *MP Trish Doyle*

By Aimee Sing
Photography by Camille Walsh, profile picture by Mell Mallin

It was such a privilege to have the opportunity to sit and chat with Trish about homebirth, women's choices and politics in childbirth. Trish is an open-hearted, honest and gracious woman, and accordingly we spent a great deal of time talking, so while I'd love to share the entire interview with you it would unfortunately take up too much space! However, here are some excerpts of our chat that I felt held the most relevant and inspiring wisdom shared. Aimee

1) Why did you choose to birth at home?

I'd decided that I felt incredibly fit and healthy, and to me the hospital system was for people who were unwell. I went with some of my family members to a local hospital maternity ward and it just left me with the feeling, 'I don't need to be in hospital, there isn't anything wrong with me, there's everything right with me and I can do this'. I was living in Queensland and the closest hospital with a maternity ward was an hour away. **The most sensible thing to do, especially with a partner who didn't drive, was to have someone who came to me.** I was walking, swimming and gardening, and upon reflection it was a time in my life that I felt the healthiest, able, capable and strong and knew that I had to express what it was that I wanted in terms of my birth. I met with the support group who were an incredible bunch of men and women and endorsed what I was saying, answering some really practical questions. In that support group there were maybe 5 different midwives, so **I had a choice, and I knew that if I turned up to the hospital I wouldn't have a choice about who cared for me. I wanted someone to know me and know what I wanted.** I knew from the outset that my decision was the right decision, and it was supported by my partner who reiterated from a male perspective, "This is how women have done it for time immemorial. They've trusted themselves and they've trusted their bodies".

2) What was birth like for you?

Patrick was born just over 9 pounds, he was a big baby, and I laboured all through the night – it was a long labour. He was born with his fists either side of his head, and I tore extensively. I remember looking at my darling midwife as dawn was approaching and I said to her, "I can't do this anymore; I don't want to do this anymore". She got down on her hands and knees on my bedroom floor, and it's just that raw, gritty, intimate connection that you have when you know you're about to have one of the most amazing experiences of your life, that I think a homebirth midwife gives to you. She had tears in her eyes; she was exhausted and wanted me to birth this baby as much as I wanted to birth this baby. Though I tore extensively I just remember looking up and out, we lived in a Permaculture village, and I looked out over the balcony and saw the sun sitting up in the sky. The stars aligned, I had a healthy baby, I was healthy though torn, and she said to me that at some point she was going to have to take me in her car to get me stitched up, and I trusted in that decision. I didn't want to leave home with my baby, and I remember it was painful in the seat with my baby, and we were travelling up the mountain to this little hospital to get stitched up. I remember the conversation happening over in the corner between the midwife and the Dr who was stitching me up. She was quite able to give it straight back to the medical fraternity, which made me feel safe in that – she was there, she had my back, she would argue for me and my baby. That one element to the birth was a bit unfortunate, but on so many other levels I was amazed with myself. I was amazed that at different times through my labour that we laughed about some of the books I'd read, like those by Ina May Gaskin, about visualising the opening of my body like the petals on a flower, and how at some point I said, "It's nothing like that!". Even through the process and afterwards, there was that raw, intimate, natural beauty, and the starkness that I think women are prevented from feeling and seeing, and I felt it. **How I felt beforehand, the decisions I made, the pregnancy, the state of my health, the labouring and the** birth was incredibly empowering, because I felt powerful. I knew that from the outset, from the moment I discovered that I was pregnant – I am a powerful woman, I can do this.

3) What did you think about your midwife?

I enlisted the services of a private homebirth midwife, and she was great – she was really down to Earth and had also worked in the hospital system.

Her choice was to work in the homebirth sector, which was a healthy sector in Queensland, but during quiet times she also worked in the hospital as well. I knew that if I had to transfer she knew what the system was like. We had a great rapport with each other. **I chose her, there was choice – there were 5 or 6 different midwives to choose from.** She was a fantastic human, and she was a little different. She had a little bit of the country in her too, which is where I came from.

4) How can we protect our birth rights and options, advocate for ourselves and support choice in this system when there are a lot of organisations (e.g. the AMA) opposing us?

I believe with issues around women's choice, and with reproductive rights generally, that you have communities, society and governments that move in circles or cycles. Recognising the AMA is a very conservative body that will support a particular model that supports their members, and recognising their lack of progressive thought, is really important. It would be very difficult to push up against an entity like that when there actually are more like-minded souls – we build the strength in the voice, in the numbers of those like-minded souls. At different stages, that voice is strengthened; is louder and makes more sense than the medicalised world of intervention. You make an assessment that the people who work in that system, the judgement they make around what is good and safe and what is not, is linked to their hip pocket, and linked (surprisingly) to an ignorant world view. If you step back into her-story and look at the way that there was a healthier respect of women and choice than there is today, it is really startling. So, (you can protect your birth rights by) recognising what you're dealing with and finding those like-minded souls. Given my position of privilege I can use this to talk about how there is safety and there is research in the fact that women should have choice, and we need to support the various options instead of fight each other on those options; work together on the best outcome given a woman's choice.

Trish noted that you may connect with people on every other level, but when it comes to birth choices they choose very differently to you. She noted that it is important in these instances to open up discussion about the risks and problems associated with unnecessary interventions – "It is these conversations with our friends that are really important. From a political point of view I was told I didn't dress, look or sound like a politician and so I should step to the side – I thought, 'I'm going to prove you wrong'. Someone said to me that the way you do that is conversation by conversation. I think the same can be applied to important issues like this; you have the conversation about empowering women, listening to women, giving women choices and also pointing out that birthing at home, and women choosing how they do that, actually is supported as a safe practice by the research."

5) How can we combat Privately Practising Midwife referral refusal by General Practitioners?

It seems there is a disconnect around that term 'collaboration', so I would start by working towards making sure that from a community perspective there can be steps taken to set up that collaboration. If the purpose of a collaborative arrangement is to make homebirth safe and to enable transfer of a woman from a homebirth to hospital if needed, but the overall premise is choice, then that's where we can move towards a collaborative arrangement. The attitude, framework and headspace of those GPs, the first port of call for giving referral pathways, is really important here. **It might be useful to come back to the initial question and problem, find those like-minded souls and get together, and find out where you can connect up best with community health through these support groups, linking you to all of the general practices and then through to obstetricians and hospitals.** Oftentimes it is through community health organisations like women's health centres. Sit with the women in those organisations and ask how we can work with them to set up a collaborative arrangement. It's not about designating that 'this is good' and 'this is bad', but about protecting choice – women should have options.

6) How do we combat the Professional Indemnity Insurance exemption expiry, with a looming date of 31st December 2019?

You need to ask the question of your MPs around the issue of Professional Indemnity Insurance expiring, and situation where women who choose to homebirth will be doing so illegally – **"What are you doing to stop this from happening?"** Do this with a preamble above it regarding women having choice in their lives, reproductive health and births. **This needs to be sent from every one you know who is a like-minded soul to their local member, especially in an election year for both state and federal governments.** Imagine the pressure that's put on people seeking election or re-election if they go into meetings with their colleagues into their party rooms where they say, "I've got 1600 emails from women asking what we will be doing around the Professional Indemnity Insurance issue" - it becomes an issue that has to be discussed and people have to put their hands up and stand up or walk away. **A positive action that could come out of what appears to be an awful situation looming (PII exemption expiry) might be that you get everyone you know to reach out to their local MPs and band together, asking these questions.**

7) We wonder whether bundled funding reform, where women are allocated the money for their antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care and can spend as they choose, would assist these choices to be supported in Australia. Could this realistically be obtained in Australia?

I can't see why not. At the moment there are a huge amount of comparisons between New Zealand and how progressive they are, with Australia and how we're going backwards into the 1950s, so now is a great time – **the timing is right, absolutely. Why not ask for that; ask in an election year.**

Trish Doyle grew up in country NSW, trained as a school teacher, then worked in schools throughout Sydney's west.

Always an activist, Trish moved onto working in women's services and advocated strongly for changes to domestic violence and sexual assault laws. She was the founding Co-ordinator of the NSW Women's Information & Referral Service.

She travelled and taught overseas in Ireland, then had two children; sons Patrick and Tom.

In 1999 she joined the staff of Tanya Plibersek, Federal Member for Sydney.

Trish moved to the Blue Mountains as a sole parent of her two boys in 2004.

She taught locally until 2007 when she joined the staff of local State Member Phil Koperberg, where she continued her community advocacy role on issues such as social equity, affordable housing & homelessness, environment protection, and education.

Between 2011 and 2015, Trish worked as a casual teacher and community advocate across a range of issues. She is a Member of the NSW Teachers Federation and the Australian Services Union.

She believes in maintaining close connections with the community sector, encourages union membership & activism, and speaks up for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society.

Trish has been involved in many local community organisations such as the Blue Mountains Conservation Society, the Blue Mountains Unions Council and the Winmalee High P&C.

Since her election in 2015, Trish has campaigned for improved public transport services, the protection of our World Heritage listed local environment, and better public health and education services and infrastructure.

Trish believes that public services belong in public hands and stands against the privatisation agenda of the NSW Liberal Government

THE BIRTH OF *Willow Autumn Aurora*

By Kimberley Deeney
Photos by Janine Obrien

Years before I was even pregnant I was always very drawn to home births, and strongly felt with if I was to have a child one day, this is how I would like to bring them into the world. I loved the idea of being able to birth in your own home, where you feel most comfortable, where you are able to create a sacred space for this momentous event, and where you can be undisturbed to bond with your baby afterwards. Of course, it is entirely possible to have a beautiful birth in a hospital or birth centre too, but this was always my personal preference.

When I did eventually become pregnant, my partner Tim and I sought out a privately practising midwife as soon as we knew. I felt very certain this was the right path for us to take, and as a result I was blessed with a pregnancy where I had continuity of care with a known caregiver. This made me feel safe and confident, and I knew I would be 100% comfortable having her in my birthing space. I was very much hoping my baby would be born at home, but we also prepared for a hospital transfer just in case.

On September 18, 2017, I was 40 weeks and 4 days pregnant. I woke up with what felt like period cramps. I fell back to sleep an hour later, and when I woke again at 6:30am, they were still there. They started to feel like a faint squeezing, tightening sensation in my lower back. I told Tim I thought our birth might be happening today, but it could be hours and hours so he should still go to work and I would call him if anything changed. At 9am I walked down to the local shops to have acupuncture (which apparently helps labour progress). While on the table for 45 minutes, the tightening surges got a little stronger. I finished up there, did some grocery shopping, met my mum at her work with a coffee, then walked back home. All the while the surges were slowly getting more intense. When I got home, I had a strong urge to tidy the entire house and make the space clean, clear and calming. By the time I was finished it was 3pm and the surges were strong enough that I needed to stop what I was doing and be on my hands and knees during them. I rested on the bed in between, spoke to my mum on the phone and looked at birth affirmations and inspiring images to visualise.

At 4pm the surges were intense enough and close enough together that I messaged Tim and asked him to come home. I was alone for the next hour, and by the time he got back at almost 5, things were getting more full on. I was still able to have a normal conversation in between surges but they were getting constantly stronger and closer together. Tim managed to run a warm bath for me and get me into it, and also began filling the birth pool in between holding me during each surge and rubbing my back. He called our midwife, who said things were definitely progressing, and asked did we want her to come now. We decided not right then, because I felt the baby could still be quite a while away. At this point I started to get a little bit scared, and worried that I might not be strong enough for what was ahead, but Tim was reassuring me that I could do it and that I was doing well. I decided to get into the birth pool while it was filling up, so Tim helped me in and brought me an ice block, then was very quick with a bucket as I had a bit of a vomit over the side due to how intense things were getting. I was also vocalising louder during surges now so Tim called our midwife and asked her to come. I felt like I needed to go to the toilet so asked him to get me out of the pool and help me to it. After sitting on the toilet a very short time, it became clear that the baby WAS actually coming, very imminently.

I wanted to get back into the pool, but with her head starting to bulge between my legs, I couldn't walk. Then our beautiful midwife arrived and came quietly into the bathroom, crouching unobtrusively on the floor and telling me I was doing wonderfully and the baby was very close. She pointed out that the toilet wasn't really the nicest place for a baby to be born and asked did I want to move. With a big effort I stood up and grabbed onto the bathroom counter, but that was as far as I could go. I reached down and I could feel my baby's head, so I refocused my efforts, and with my midwife telling me I looked like a goddess (she was just outrageously kind and encouraging and supportive!), pushed her out standing up in front of the bathroom mirror. Tim stood next to me with his arms around me supporting me to stand, and our midwife caught the baby as she emerged. She cried the second she was born (after expecting a

calming water birth, maybe emerging into cool air and quite a drop wasn't the best feeling for her!). She was so loud, and as I looked down I could not believe that this little person had actually, really come out of me. I was a bit too dazed to hold her straight away, so Tim did while our midwife helped me to gently sit on the floor in a big nest of towels where she was put into my arms. She was so tiny, soft and warm, slippery and covered in blood and her own poo, and also the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. We named her Willow.

About 3 hours of active labour and there she was at 8:01pm, much quicker than anticipated. Our second midwife arrived now; our baby had come too quickly for her to get there for the birth.

We waited for the placenta in the towel nest in the bathroom, then it was decided that I would need some stitches where I had torn during the birth. I couldn't feel anything at this point, the tears didn't hurt. I was gently moved out to the couch (which had been thoughtfully covered with a drop-sheet) and the stitches were done gently in the semi-dark of candles and fairy lights we had set up near the birth pool, obviously using a good torch also! The room was kept dark and calm with peaceful music playing and I was able to hold my baby while the stitches were being put in, so our bonding was not disturbed. I was incredibly respected, safe and cared for, which made the somewhat unpleasant experience of having stitches nowhere near as awful as it could have been.

Tim cut the umbilical cord after about 40 minutes and the placenta was wrapped up in the freezer to be buried under a special tree later. Our second midwife was able to go home now, while our main midwife gave me tea and a sponge bath. Finally, after she also made the bed up with old sheets and a drop-sheet, she tucked all three of us in together and went home about 12:30am. I was so happy falling asleep with my new little baby in my arms snuggled up to me, and honestly, although extremely intense, it had been such a beautiful, magical night. I was so empowered by the whole experience, and I cannot emphasise enough the quality of care I received, how respected and treated with dignity these women made me feel the entire time.

A home birth was definitely the right choice for our family, and I am so filled with gratitude that it went like it did. Far from this birth being a traumatic experience, it is a precious memory I will cherish forever.

Kimberley is an early childhood teacher and mostly stay at home mum from Sydney's Northern Beaches, who really likes painting, birth videos and vegan food.

YOUR OWN PRIVATE MIDWIFERY PRACTICE *Getting it right!*

By Azure Rigney
Photos by Life and Lens Photography

I recently attended a seminar run by Jane Palmer, a well-known Privately Practising Midwife (PPM) based in Sydney. Jane has been travelling the country delivering a seminar aimed at midwives interested in setting up their own private practice, and for midwives currently in private practice.

Jane began practicing as a midwife in 1997 and the majority of her midwifery experience has been outside of the hospital supporting women birthing at home. With her extensive experience as a PPM and business owner (Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond and Birth International), Jane is the perfect role model for the midwives sitting around me.

This jam packed, information rich seminar covered a lot of business based content such as goal setting, business and marketing plans, market research, accounting systems, how to register a business, guidelines for good customer service, online marketing and social media, as well as appointment management. I learned more during the seminar about companies, trusts and sole traders than I did during my business degree!

Like most events I go to with midwives, there was a lot of oxytocin, giggles, chatting and bonding over passion for woman centred care. It was very raw to discuss the hardships midwives face and I reminded the midwives to reach out to consumer organisations for support; the only way forward is together.

We covered more topics specific to midwifery including nursing and midwifery board requirements, professional indemnity requirements, Medicare eligibility, mentoring, professional support, fee structures, purchasing midwifery supplies, structuring client visits, complaints management/procedures and ways to build collaborative relationships with General Practitioners and Obstetricians.

The midwives asked me about my experience as a woman who has had the opportunity to experience private midwifery care. I was so blessed to share my experience and a few women cried as I explained the high level of relationship based care I received.

Jane spoke to us about how to navigate some of the hurdles that PPMs often face, such as AHPRA marketing guidelines, time management, contingency planning and ways to avoid burn out. I was sitting there thinking about every PPM I know and starting to comprehend the hoops they jump through to ensure women have choices and a gold standard of maternity care.

Jane offers workshop attendees six months access to Birth International's Moodle education platform. Through Moodle, workshop attendees have access to all handouts for the course and lots of information on private midwifery practice. Jane has also developed a Facebook group for ongoing support for midwives contemplating going into, or currently in, private midwifery practice.

As a consumer advocate, I now understand so much more about the barriers midwives face in private practice and have a greater appreciation for the work that they do on a daily basis. appreciation for the work that they do on a daily basis. Even in the face of all of the red tape and reporting which takes them away from their real work, they remain focused on the objective – to be 'with woman'.
Hopefully in the next year we can work together for funding and regulation reform to help fix some of the problems that midwives and consumers face.
Jane will be delivering this seminar around the country in 2019, head to the Birth International Facebook page for dates.

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UNEXPECTED CHOICES

Aria's Birth

By Melodie Glass
Photos by Jerusha Sutton

I had my first homebirth 10 years ago. Isabelle was born into water in the lounge room of our London apartment. Back home in Australia in 2010, Stella was born on our family lounge whilst living in Armidale. Then in 2013 Max joined our family, born into water in the same family room in Armidale.

Since making the choice to have my first homebirth in 2008 I have been a solid advocate for birth choice. Committed to seeing families feel empowered in their birth choices, I became a Calmbirth® practitioner and taught classes in the New England from 2011-2013. I have been lucky enough to have birth choices - a NHS homebirth, a NSW Hunter/New England Health homebirth and a homebirth with Independent Midwife, Gail Baker. So, when I became pregnant with our fourth child, the choice was simple: another homebirth. I had read about Jo Hunter in Birthings and through the community, and finally living back in Sydney, I was quick to engage Jo as our midwife. I had a wonderful pregnancy, feeling well and full of energy. I actively chose to have regular chiropractic care and acupuncture, and managed to fit yoga in most weeks, all of which kept me feeling great.

As a Calmbirth practitioner I had a good understanding of the subconscious mind, and deep within I could sense that maybe this birth was going to be different, but of course I didn't know how. I prepared for birth in much the same way as the others, practicing meditation whenever I could find the time. I felt confident, calm and excited about meeting my baby. However, every now and then I would feel a little anxious and Jo and I would talk through 'what if' scenarios. I never really gave them much thought, because I had had three home births, so logic and experience concluded I would have another homebirth and the baby would just slide out…right?

I went into labour gently, 9 days past my due date (which was new for me) on our 12th wedding anniversary. We sent the kids off to school without telling them, as we didn't know how long it would take, and we also really wanted to steal some time together on our special day. My husband Nik and I went out for breakfast (he ate, I breathed) and then went for a walk around our local park; it was blissful. We came home and made dinner for the kids as we knew we'd be busy later, and then when the app kept telling us to go to the hospital, we called in our support crew. Jo Hunter came with Jacqui Wood, Jerusha Sutton arrived shortly after, ready to take photos, and my mum and sister arrived just ahead of the children who had been collected from school early. Labour felt easy, but it also felt different. I couldn't pinpoint how, but it just didn't feel quite the same. Still, I calmed my mind and stayed focused; after all, it had been 5 years since my last birth! I told myself that maybe I had forgotten and every birth is different. I got into the pool (usually a highlight in labour) and didn't feel comfortable, so I got out.

By the time I had been labouring strongly for a few hours, I started to feel really over it. I was swinging from my stairwell railing longing for my waters to break. I begged Jo to do a vaginal examination as I just didn't feel right. She told me I was about 9cm and I urged her to break my waters as I felt this is what needed to happen. She tried, but Jo could barely get to them, as only a little of the forewaters could be felt in front of baby's head. I could feel the baby was in a posterior position (my second was posterior), but as I continued to labour into the second stage I just couldn't feel the baby coming down.

We laboured in the second stage for about 1.5 hours, using what felt like every position available to us. As I continued to push I sensed I was making no progress, and my concern for the baby was growing stronger. I asked my midwives to make a choice - what are we going to do? We need to make a call. We promptly decided that we should transfer to hospital. Immediately this felt like the right choice. Living so close, we arrived at hospital via Ambulance very quickly. As Jo had booked me in, I was immediately taken into the maternity ward and had a room full of people attending to me within minutes. Having never been to hospital to give birth this was all very new, but it felt okay. I felt like I was where I needed to be. In the few moments the medical team left the room, my team and I

actively tried one more time to push the baby out, but she wasn't budging. A quick review of baby indicated that she was in distress, it also appeared that there was meconium in her waters. We couldn't see this at home, as later we would learn that her head was blocking the majority of the waters.

I was given a choice.

The medical team would use intervention to attempt to birth her vaginally, and if that didn't work I would need an emergency c-section. As soon as this was presented to me I knew, instinctively, the choice I needed to make. Much to my midwives' surprise and concern I chose to have the c-section. I would need to go under a general anaesthetic as I was in second stage, but this didn't deter my resolve. I fell to sleep, confident my baby would be okay, and deep down knowing this was the way it had to be.

What I didn't know then, that I know now, is the work that my sub conscious mind had been doing in preparing me for this experience. 5 days before I went into labour, while deep in a Calmbirth meditation, I had been abruptly awoken back into conscious thought because I had the vision of a single word: 'caesarean'. At the time I was shocked, and I told myself that it was simply a fear I was working through. In hindsight, I now believe that this was in some way a preparation for what I was now experiencing. Even though what I was going through was very dramatic, and some would say it was traumatic, I was calm and I had an inner sense of ease.

While I didn't get to meet my gorgeous daughter for many hours, my husband is what Rhea Dempsey would call 'an initiated man'. Having been my rock through our homebirths, he knew exactly what our baby needed in the NICU. The skin to skin they had together will form a lifelong bond, and he stood firm that she was to receive no formula – I would soon be with her, as he made it his mission to push hospital protocol to get her to me and me to her.

When we did meet, it was very quickly evident that I had made the right choice. Our darling little girl looked like she had been in a boxing match with my pelvis. We learnt that she was not only posterior, but brow presentation, and her head was transverse. We don't know how long she had been in that position, but it took over a week for her little squished nose to straighten out. In the week following, Jo used her baby doll and pelvis model to show us the position she had got herself into – there was simply no way our baby would have been safely born at home. We had all made the right choice.

In the months since I have retraced my choices that day, much like a pilot rethinks a flight plan after an unexpected event, and no matter what the scenario it always ends in the deep sense that we made the right choices. Reflecting on my choice to have the c-section, I actually feel very proud of what I did for my baby. Because of the general anaesthetic, and her quick birth once at hospital, she didn't have exposure to drugs during the birth (I did, she didn't) and she wasn't sent into any further distress. She arrived in good health and was calm and alert. Had I of attempted to deliver her vaginally with intervention I truly believe both of us would have been very traumatised from her birth. I have been proud to deliver three of my babies at home, but I am equally proud of the choices I made in delivering our fourth baby.

Aria Rebekah Jean Glass was born at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital on 26 November 2018. As I explained to my children, I think their little sister just wanted a really, really different birth story!

Melodie Glass lives in Sydney's Inner West and is mother to Isabelle (10), Stella (8), Max (5) and Aria (3 months) and wife to Nik. As well as raising her wild tribe of red headed children, Melodie is an Early Childhood Teacher who works as a Business Development Manager for a large not-for-profit children's services provider. She loves singing, immersing herself in music, yoga (when she can find the time) and pottering about the house and garden (she thinks she found 'the joy' before Marie Kondo!).

CHOICES, CHOICES, WE WANT CHOICES!

By Kathryn Bell and Helena Mooney of Friends of Northern Beaches Maternity Services

Choices, Choices, We Want Choices! This was our rallying cry at a protest action timed to coincide with the opening of the new Northern Beaches Hospital that replaced Manly and Mona Vale hospitals, which both closed in October 2018. The NSW Liberal-National Government opted to hand the construction and operation of the new hospital over to private company, Healthscope.

Healthscope is one of Australia's largest operators of private hospitals, including the Prince of Wales in Randwick. Like most private hospitals, Prince of Wales has a track record of high intervention births. In fact, it's one of the worst performers according to the most recent NSW Mothers & Babies 2017 report, with: just 26.9% of 20-34 year old, first time mothers of full-term, single babies in the head-down position, starting labour spontaneously, compared to 45.6% next door at the Royal Hospital for Women (RHW), and 49.8% of the same cohort of women giving birth via caesarean, versus 25.1% at the RHW (see table below for further statistics).

With this move we've seen a serious reduction in the standard of care and options for the women and families of the Northern Beaches in pregnancy, birth and postnatally. We now have limited access to:

- **safe, effective pain relief in water, with only three birth pools (out of 10 birth suites)**
- **midwife-led continuity of care through Midwife Group Practice / caseload midwifery, with just 240 low-risk women having access to this model of care per annum**
- **adequate postnatal support, with no cross referrals for postnatal home visits to women who have birthed at other hospitals**
- **midwives in general, with only three midwife antenatal clinic rooms and planned midwife clinics at new facilities in Mona Vale and Brookvale having been axed.**

Friends of Northern Beaches Maternity Services (FNBMS) fear this will inevitably lead to a rise in the rate of childbirth interventions, birth trauma, and all the related concerns for the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies.

During the hospital's planning and construction, FNBMS sought to engage in a meaningful and constructive way with Healthscope, the Northern Sydney Local Health District and the Health Minister to see that the models of care and birth suite design were delivered in an evidence-based and women-centred way. FNBMS representatives, including local mums, doulas, independent midwives and midwifery academics, have met with key NSW Health and Healthscope staff numerous times over the years. The one positive outcome achieved has been the inclusion of a birth pool in three of the ten birth suites. Initially, there were not going to be any, given Healthscope does not permit water birth in its hospitals. "Water birth over my dead body," was the response from former Healthscope CEO, Deborah Latta. If the available evidence had been followed, there would have been a birth pool in all ten birth suites. Unfortunately, women birthing in our brand-new hospital will only have the choice to labour and birth in water if they're allocated one of the three rooms with a big enough bath. Additionally, it's a shame that women choosing private care will not have this option at all because the three pools are on the 'public' side and Healthscope does not have insurance for private women to birth in the water.

Sadly, the deficiencies extend into services and staffing, right across the board. There is now a significantly reduced midwife antenatal clinic with far too few rooms built to accommodate this service. Healthscope have also decided not to use the new, purpose-built facilities at Mona Vale and Brookvale as a cost saving measure. Women are now being encouraged to use GP shared care, leading to greater fragmentation of their overall care. Additionally, postnatal home visits are no longer provided for Northern Beaches women who have given birth at another public hospital (as was previously the case under cross-referral arrangements).

Perhaps most concerning is Healthscope's refusal to expand the Midwife Group Practice (MGP) program. This is despite the much larger catchment area of the new hospital, all the evidence and NSW Health's 'Towards Normal Birth' policy supporting midwife-led continuity of care as the best and safest model of care for women of all risk levels.We are currently down from the six MGP midwives that were working at Manly to just 2.8 full-time equivalent (FTE).

We're encouraged to see recent recruitment advertisements to bring the number back up to 6 FTE, but we need to see MGP expanded significantly and opened up to all risk levels, including VBAC women. With 6 FTE MGP midwives working, just 240 women will get into MGP. That's only around 12% of women birthing at the new hospital, and well short of the NSW 'Towards Normal Birth' policy target of 35%. We are continuing to lobby on this front, and will be meeting with NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard in February.

As Sheryl Sidery, Clinical Midwifery Educator and Mentor at the RHW, UTS lecturer, member of FNBMS said, "It's postcode healthcare":

"Postcode healthcare in Sydney is unjust. The women of the Eastern Suburbs, 97% of whom have private health insurance, choose to go public as they actively choose MGP. This cohort of women can be compared to their Northern Beaches sisters. 32% of the women who attend RHW have their babies with MGP. There are another few hundred who miss out and who desperately want this option. Women can only access MGP if they call and book at 6 weeks gestation. This is how popular it is. The numbers speak for themselves. Low intervention rates, high satisfaction rates, less morbidity and mortality and high job satisfaction for the midwives who work in this way as they are able to form meaningful relationships with women – as opposed to working in the fragmented way of other hospitals who don't or won't offer MGP."

In a NSW state election year, we hope to be able to put pressure on the Government to influence what's happening at the Northern Beaches Hospital. The public didn't ask for our new public hospital to be handed over to a private business that puts profit and its shareholders ahead of evidence-based care.
Hannah Dahlen, private practising midwife and Professor of Midwifery at Western Sydney University warned in her address to the crowd who gathered for our rally on 4th November 2018 that we face a, "David and Goliath battle." We can't stop, because Healthscope sees its shareholders and doctors as their key customers, not patients:

"The idea that the profit motive ensures private managers are more effective than their public counterparts is not supported by a large body of evidence, but sadly once again we are unwilling to learn lessons from past mistakes. The Port Macquarie Base Hospital showed clearly the ramifications of a profit driven health service with commitment to the shareholder and not the patients - most certainly not public patients.
Maternity care under these private run services are especially problematic as the medical model means high intervention in birth and little to no regard for midwifery models of care that lead to the best outcomes for women and babies. We have shown through research that women in NSW who are low risk have 20% less normal birth in private hospitals compared to similar women giving birth in the public sector. This is not without consequence for women and their babies."
What we need now is for the public, for consumers, for WOMEN, to raise their voices. Unfortunately, choices on the Northern Beaches have always been limited and we're battling a lack of awareness and education. We need to show them what they're missing out on. As a homebirth community we value women's right to have choices about where they give birth and with whom. We care about the choices available for women who may not feel safe birthing at home, or who can't afford a private midwife. They should be offered the best, evidence-based care, and that means continuity of care with a known midwife in pregnancy, birth and beyond.

The issues at the Northern Beaches Hospital directly impact homebirth women too. Homebirth families and midwives need a supportive, well-managed hospital to transfer to if need be. So far, our local Privately Practising Midwives have had less than positive engagement with hospital management.

We'll never see Privately Practising Midwives given visiting rights or a public-funded homebirth program at Northern Beaches Hospital while it remains in private hands.

We need to continue agitating for more MGP, and ultimately for NSW Health to take back full control of our public maternity services.

How you can help?

- **Like and follow our Facebook page @FriendsNBmaternity, and share our**

content

- **Sign our change.org petition (more-midwife-group-practice-for-northern-beaches-women)**
- **Spread the word about Midwife Group Practice – education equals empowerment and consumer demand can create change**
- **Vote this Government out!**

Friends of Northern Beaches Maternity Services (FNBMS) is a small group of local mums, doulas, midwives and childbirth educators who came together over 4 years ago to advocate for the best maternity services for women and babies on the Northern Beaches of Sydney.

Local midwife, Sheryl Sidery, started the group when it was announced that our two public hospitals at Mona Vale and Manly would be closed, and that the new Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest would be built and operated under a public-private partnership model.

We've been working ever since to positively influence the choices available to local women birthing through the public maternity system. Engaging with academics, politicians, public servants, midwives and clinicians as part of our advocacy and lobbying efforts. We've also worked hard to raise public awareness of the change and what it means through social media and protest actions.

	Spontaneous labour (not induced / augmented)	Normal vaginal birth	Caesarean
Prince of Wales Private	20.5%	33.5%	55%
Royal Hospital for Women	37.8%	50.5%	32%
Manly	34%	52%	29.8%
Mona Vale	41.6%	56.8%	29%

Mothers & Babies NSW 2017 birth statistics - comparing Healthscope's Prince of Wales to the RHW, Manly and Mona Vale Friends of Northern Beaches Maternity Services

THE BIRTH OF *Alyssa Violet*

By Tamara Warry
Photos courtesy of Virginia Maddock from Natural Beginnings

Just after midday on Tuesday 24th July 2018, I gave birth to my beautiful daughter, Alyssa Violet here in my lounge room with her daddy and big brother by our side.

Labour started slowly the night before. I was having very mild tightenings all afternoon and they would generally come in waves around 10-20 minutes apart, but I convinced myself they weren't the real deal, and I could get these for the next week! By that night, I said to my husband Anthony, "I could be very wrong, but I think our baby is going to be here within the next couple of days." By that stage I had to stop as a surge washed over me, but could still easily breathe through them. Midnight approached and I couldn't stay in bed lying down any longer. I texted my doula Virginia Maddock, and my midwife Rachele Meredith, to give them a heads up. I got up, lit some candles and put my fairy lights on. The contractions continued to intensify and I found it hard to rest but I thought I'd let Anthony sleep for the time being. Who knows how long I'm going to be here for? And let's be honest, men are hopeless without sleep….

5:30am came and I woke Anthony. He sprung out of bed and was gentle and loving. Tye, my 3 year old son, woke not long after and came out in the dim lighting and comforted me, then played with daddy and had breakfast. I hadn't put any of my hypnobirthing (Hypnobirthing Australia™) tracks on yet as I'd been trying to cope on my own. I was getting emotional, not knowing how long it was going to stay like this without progressing further. Contractions were still only 10 minutes apart but were going into my back. My previous birth was a long 22 hour posterior labour.

We spoke to Rachele just after 6am and she said to just try and rest. Virginia called around 7am and suspected (as I had, too) that bub may be posterior. She said she'd head over soon to try some Spinning Babies® techniques to try and encourage bub into a better position. For another hour and a half contractions were still only 10 minutes apart, but the pain in my back and bum had intensified and I was really glad to see Virginia when she arrived! Anthony had my music playing in the background. Food and TV was keeping my toddler happy.

We spent the next 2 hours rotating through the Spinning Babies® techniques. Each time I felt a surge coming on I was helped into a particular position and we did this over and over. It certainly wasn't comfortable at the time, and I was losing hope. I was frightened I'd end up having another long, posterior labour, and possible hospital transfer. Virginia kept gently directing and encouraging me, and I knew I had to just follow her lead. She was so warm and loving, it felt so good to have a woman by my side who knew exactly what I was going through, but

how to help me, too. Anthony was also there by my side, giving me his hand to squeeze tightly, and gently tickled my shoulders as each surge hit. His soft words of encouragement and reminder to breathe brought me so much comfort. I remember my contractions feeling so intense, like I just couldn't get a rhythm with my breathing. Each time I breathed out, the sharp pain went from my back and deep pelvis right down into my bum. …. I remember thinking, "I just can't surrender." My whole body would tense up, but at the same time I knew there was no escape, no going back… I just had to ride this wave and find my strength! I remember Virginia gently reminding me to surrender and to find it in me to let go. She told me to say, "F*CK YOU!" to the pain and I remember getting strength from that; It was actually so helpful!

Virginia asked Anthony to get a timer app up on his phone so we could properly time the contractions. I remember looking down at the phone after each one and noticing that they were getting longer and stronger and only about 3 minutes apart now. YAY, I was finally in active labour and things were moving along.

At about 11:15, when I was laying over the bed and during a surge, started to feel this uncontrollable urge to bear down and I groaned so loud. I remember being conscious of my neighbours but having no control! I felt a huge pressure really low, then it retracted back up. I knew things were moving along! Virginia called Rachele to give her the heads up and she said she'd head over. This whole time, Tye sat and watched TV, asked for the occasional snack and just busied himself. At one stage we were going to have him picked up by his nana. He was such a good little boy during this time and I was so grateful to have him there.

Virginia suggested that Anthony start filling up the pool (Yes, that's right - it still had no water in it and had only JUST been blown up!). I remember hearing him walking around, and the pants he was wearing were so noisy. I thought to myself, "He sounds like a walking tarpaulin!" In less than half an hour the urge to push became so strong and I knew instantly that I was transitioning, I remember hopping off the end of the bed during a surge and saying, "I need to push, can you take my pants off? Get some towels." I'm sure I heard them both say, "Oh shit." Virginia called Rachele on loudspeaker and asked her, "Where are you? She needs to push!" I heard Rachele curse and say she was 4 minutes away.

Virginia asked me if I still wanted her to take photos of the birth or if I preferred her to keep supporting me. I knew at that stage that the next bit was solely up to me; it was ME that was going to birth this baby! So I knew I'd be ok and of course did not want to miss capturing the moment that was about to be! She also asked if I wanted to move from the bedroom floor and I didn't, but when she said photos would be better in the lounge room, I agreed. I quickly chugged back some Ginseng that she had prepared for some extra energy, and off I crawled into the lounge room. I remember feeling a bit of relief and a 'rest' for a moment, as I made my way out of the bedroom. I asked them to move the birth pool out of the way (a centimeter of water isn't going to cut it for a water birth!) and I just got on my hands and knees.

In my first labour, I never got to feel that uncontrollable urge that I'd heard women talk about. I so desperately wanted to experience that, and here it was! My body was just going with it, I wasn't scared, I was just like "Yep, it's happening!" I knew everything was going to be ok. I felt so relieved and excited. This is it. My baby is almost here!

I heard my Midwife walk in and at that point I felt baby crowning! I waited for the next contraction and just breathed my babe down. I remember feeling the pop, and I knew the head was out and OH! What a relief, I knew the next part would be easy! Rachele was behind me. She got Anthony to come over. I remember hearing the girls call Tye over too and got him involved and reassured him that Mummy was ok. They were pointing out the baby's head, eyes, arms etc. I was so pleased to have him there by our side. I didn't know at this stage but the caul was still over bubs head; Wow, amazing!! I tried to reach down to feel the head. Anthony held the slippery body as it started to emerge, however it just stayed there, half in-half out to the hips. Caught between worlds for over 2 minutes! A slow transition earth side! I could hear crying but we still couldn't see if we had a little girl or boy! Whoever it was down there was sneezing though! I waited a little while and then Rachele asked if I could give a little push, I did and out she flopped into her daddy's arms with her big brother happily standing by.

I heard Anthony say, "It's a girl!" and, "You were right." I was not surprised, I knew it was HER all along. A mother's instinct (and this case, brother's too!) isn't often wrong. I remember putting my face in my hands and sobbing; the relief, exhilaration and the complete joy that my baby was here. I grabbed her from Anthony and she was so slippery! I went to pop her up onto me but felt the cord was quite short. I cuddled her and looked at Anthony with tears in his eyes, I think we both cried and hugged. It's a bit of a blur now but I remember he told me he loved me, that I was his hero - again! I told him not to ever forget what I just did, ha-ha! I also remember saying out loud, "I DID IT!!" I just couldn't believe it I'd had my dream home birth. I asked him without really saying much if she was the name we had discussed, and he said yep…. so I announced and welcomed "Alyssa Violet" to the world, and then the 3 of us sung Happy Birthday to her. Pure magic!

I sat there on the floor with her in my arms and waited for the placenta to come. I started feeling labour pains again quite soon after and handed Alyssa back to her dad. I birthed the placenta easily as Geesje, our 2nd midwife, arrived. Rachele collected the placenta and we Face Timed my mum and dad in Perth with a fresh baby in my arms! The midwives took great care of both Alyssa and I, checking us both over, and then cleaned up around us as we bonded and established breastfeeding.
It was a pretty amazing experience! I had the most wonderful team and getting to know them and having their support during my pregnancy really helped me feel calm and excited for the big day. I would do it all again in a heartbeat!

My name is Tamara and I am a Mum of two living in Caringbah, Sydney. I grew up in Perth and moved here to be with my husband 10 years ago. I am a regional flight attendant and Hypnobirthing Australia™ Practitioner, but currently having a break from both as I focus on my young family. I am into health & fitness and love to travel! I travelled through Europe & the UK for 2 years in my 20's. As I spent my time in the sky, I also studied Clinical Hypnotherapy which led me to hypnobirthing. I became a bit of a birth junky as I taught the Hypnobirthing Australia™ program to many expecting couples. I then used it for both of my births!

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Maternity Choices Australia

New committee and a renewed commitment ' to supporting Australian women's maternity choices

By Azure Rigney, President of MCA

2019 is a big year for Australian women choosing to birth at home with registered midwives, of which there are about 100. Why are there so few you may ask? Is it that most midwives think homebirth is unsafe? Do midwives have any exposure to homebirth while studying at university? Is it a viable career path for midwives looking for adequate work-life balance? Or is it all the damn regulation and control of midwives and women?

I have personally experienced all models of care, minus public MGP which I am a huge fan of. As a passionate homebirth advocate and an emerging consumer representative within the system promoting choice, I have been shocked to learn that most midwifery students are inducted into a system where insurance doesn't cover homebirth, there is no information provided to midwives on how to step into private practice and there are no supported pathways! I was further outraged when listening to student midwives on the Australian College of Midwives committee call discussing the graduate hiring process, explaining the bottle neck of limited positions available to them, even rurally, and the even more limited number of roles that would provide continuity of care to women. The few midwives who do make it through the gruelling 3 years of full time hospital experience, who go on to become endorsed midwives in private practice, are then subjected to absurd requirements of regular audits, the necessity to work alongside a second midwife, one way collaboration with GP/OBs, not to mention the number of vexatious reports they endure.

When I moved to Brisbane a few months ago I got to networking, thinking and talking about systemic reform. I recognised that birth choices are oftentimes controlled by the stereotypical middle aged, white, wealthy male – this is madness, right? I know too much, how can I sit back and watch as midwives and women are undermined? I learned about the role of large mainstream consumer groups such as the Maternity Consumer Network (MCN) and Maternity Choices Australia (MCA), and their ability to have a real impact on the services provided to Australian women through committee representation, lobbying and relationships with politicians.

I looked into MCA which had a rich history under its previously known name, Maternity Coalition, yet I found it difficult to know what they were currently working on and what policies they were supporting on behalf of their members and all Australian women. I knew this lack of information was common with volunteer led not for profits, however upon further digging I learned MCA had a seat at the table and voted in support of the 'Perineal bundle', an experimental trial aimed at reducing third and fourth degree tears. This trial has no end date and is now being undertaken at 26 unnamed Australian hospitals where clinicians are given financial incentives for performing hands on care, encouraging the use of rectal exams for all women and the use of episiotomy in all instrumental births, despite there being no evidence to support such management. It wasn't necessarily the content of the bundle that I was concerned about, but the lack of consumer consultation leading to its implementation and the blatant disrespect for informed choice of women. I thought, "If I was president of a consumer organisation, I'd make it my mission to let families know that this trial was happening."

I was aware a Homebirth Access Sydney (HAS) committee member had already been trying to get in contact with MCA about what they were working on and whether they would collaborate with us, ensuring consumer consultation was at the forefront of their mission, yet we had received no response. With this in mind, and my recognition of the issues I felt were being supported by MCA without consumer consultation, I wondered whether I could get involved somehow and help make some improvements to the direction the organisation was taking. I saw that the Annual General Meeting (AGM) was coming up and thought this would be a great opportunity to figure out what projects we could collaborate on, particularly given I was now in touch with Friends of the Birth Centre QLD, had committed to working with Homebirth Queensland, the Australian College of Midwives (ACM) and a local university.

A small group of passionate women attended the AGM and were voted in as the **newest committee members** of MCA. As your president, I want to assure our members and all Australian women that the MCA committee is committed to representing the voices of Australian women on the various boards and panels we sit on, even if consumer views don't always reflect our own. We will remain open and transparent to ensure women are made aware of upcoming consumer consultations, and the discussions and the outcomes of meetings we attend. Please feel confident to share your wishes for maternity care with us as we are aware that not every woman wants the same things from their pregnancy, birth and postnatal experience, but we are committed to doing our very best to represent Australian women's voices in maternity care. If you're not already a member, please come on over and **join us** – your membership helps our organisation to keep representing Australian women the best way we can! Please also consider liking our Facebook Page to keep up to date with current events and changes.

To learn more about our supermum and powerhouse birth advocate, Azure, please check out her Bio on our Committee Page (6-7)

THE BIRTH OF *Stella*

Freebirth as a choice

By Natalie Rees

My first birth was a homebirth transfer with a private midwife. Although not severely traumatic, there was an ambulance with sirens and an episiotomy involved, which was not the birth I wished for. In my opinion, there were so many factors of why it went that way, but it happened, and it influenced my choice to freebirth with Stella greatly. Not long after I would say to people that the only way you can have the birth that you want is to do it yourself.

When Charlie was 18 months old we decided to move to Perth from Sydney for a freer, carefree and natural life. Even though I had talked about freebirth for my next birth the first thing I did when I got to Perth was seek out a potential midwife for when I would fall pregnant next. There was one in particular that I really clicked with. She had no children of her own, but she mentioned that if she fell pregnant she would freebirth too. As soon as I became pregnant I went into default mode and contacted this friend and asked her to be my midwife. I told her I didn't want any bloods, no Doppler, no ultrasound, no intervention. She listened to me and then told me that I would have to have bloods because that it is the regulation.

I started feeling really uneasy about the whole thing. I knew that she didn't necessarily believe in doing bloods herself BUT that she was obliged to if she was to stay a registered midwife. I understood her position, but I wasn't happy about it. Regardless, my husband and I met with her and what happened next was super interesting. She said that every time she sees a client she pulls tarot cards and the cards that she had pulled for us said that something wasn't in alignment and we weren't a great match for her. At first this made me feel even more uneasy, did she not like me after all? But, it soon came pouring out of me that what I really wanted was a freebirth. I hadn't really discussed it with my husband, but had briefly mentioned it a while back. Anyway, she left us with that thought of free birth and said that maybe we weren't the right fit, but to come back to her. Over the next few weeks my husband and I talked about it a lot and decided freebirth was the right decision for us. There was some fear, but ultimately he trusted me explicitly. I'm really blessed to have him and I love him so much for supporting me.

The pregnancy was fairly uneventful. I'd decided during this pregnancy that I wouldn't have morning sickness, and I didn't. I think this had a lot to do with the fact that since having Charlie my life was a lot slower and I'm more with the rhythm of nature. The second trimester and third trimester were also pretty easy. Throughout the pregnancy I had no bloods, no scans, no Doppler, no fetoscope and saw no doctors or midwives. I lied to most people about my birth saying I was having a home birth with a midwife. I even lied to my closest homebirth friends as I just didn't know how they would react and didn't want or need anyone's fear. I told a few select friends, who I knew wouldn't care and would be supportive, that I was having a freebirth. It was nice to have people to talk about it to. I also joined online Facebook free birth groups which were a great source of support. I additionally sought out real life people that I knew had freebirthed and spoke to them extensively. I found out from my grandfather that my mum was technically freebirthed because the midwife didn't make it in time.

During the last trimester I did a lot of Law of Attraction work, plus I was doing yoga and vocal toning quite a lot which helped in the labour. Stella was conceived on the full moon and was due on the full moon. It would be perfect! HAHA!

The full moon came and went.
I was so annoyed - why wasn't she here?! She was supposed to be born on the full moon! It wasn't that I was sick of pregnancy or uncomfortable but I just wanted her here.

I got to 10 days over. I had a busy day setting up my brother's apartment for Airbnb, visited friends in their new house and then a big family barbeque dinner.

I got home and we got our 3 year old to sleep. I then kind of drifted to sleep, but shortly after I woke up to my waters breaking. I got up and went to the toilet and they continued to leak. I woke up my husband and told him that my waters had broken. He got up as I was walking around with my waters leaking all over the floor. I couldn't stop laughing at them leaking; this hadn't happened with my first. We set up the house. I lit all the candles and used my smudge stick to cleanse the house. He took the clock down as last time I couldn't help but look at it.

An hour after my waters broke, my labour started to pick up. I stood leaning on my husband, swaying, as we looked into each other's eyes. We kissed. It was pretty magic. As things progressed I would walk around. I would sway and circle my hips. I'd get on all fours. I'd get up again, walk out into the garden. Walk out the front of my house. I went to look for the moon outside but it was nowhere to be found. As much as I searched - all I could see were stars. Right then I said that maybe she had chosen her name – Stella, meaning Star. Even though I didn't know for sure she was a girl I had a feeling she was.

As labour ramped up I started vocal toning, then Charlie woke up in pain with aching legs and collar bone which he'd hurt earlier that day. "Oh no," I thought, "This is where everything derails. I must stay focused. Keep calm." Charlie was crying for me and wanted me to have a hot bath with him to ease the aching legs. I had sworn not to get into the water as I felt it slowed my labour last time, making me feel passive and lazy. But…Charlie just wanted mummy in the water with him, so I got in the bath knowing that it would be good pain relief. My husband asked if I wanted him to call my mum to help with Charlie, I nodded a strong yes. Living on the same street she was up within 10 minutes. By then, Oliver had gotten Charlie out of the bath and was reading him a book in bed.

My mum arrived and came in to me. She asked if I wanted a massage and I said, "No, just hold my hand," which she did. My mum is pretty awesome and although slightly unsure about the freebirth at first, she was 100 per cent supportive. Then Oliver came back and she went to look after Charlie while I laboured. Oliver gently suggested I should get out of the bath. I didn't want to but I had told him to make me get out if I did happen to get in the bath. I got out as I knew it was best for me. It was definitely a good suggestion because as soon as I got up and walked around again things picked up. It was intensifying and I started vocal toning and then singing, "I love you my baby, you're coming my baby." It definitely helped. Basically I was nearly at transition and I felt inside for my baby's head. It was still quite high up but I decided I was ready to meet her, so I set my mind and let my body do its thing. I knew I was nearly there when I vomited. My previous birth I had vomited with every contraction for about an hour, but this time it was only twice.

Oliver came out and saw that I was nearly there. He got my Mum and Charlie from the room and they watched as Stella emerged over the next few pushes. I was in a squatting/standing position and first her head came out. She then came out in the next push and I caught her into my own hands. It was absolutely wonderful and joyous. I was so proud and ecstatic. During this time Charlie was cuddling my mum. Afterwards it was all very simple; I jumped on the couch and rugged up. Immediately after I got really cold and shivery, exactly the same as when I had birthed Charlie. I had minimal bleeding and delivered the placenta 10-15 minutes after. It was super easy.

We left the cord attached for about 1.5 hours and then Oliver tied it with a crocheted cord tie and cut it. My Dad came up straight after and we then all sat on the couch snuggling and eating cream cheese bagels. I just kept thinking how proud and ecstatic I was. I felt so satisfied. I had exactly the birth I wanted. I did it! All women deserve this. Stella was born at 2.08am. Active labour started just after 11, so it was about a 3 hour labour. It was hard work, but very simple and straightforward. All the visualising I had done came true. All my mental preparation, faith and hard work had paid off.

The next few days I was on a big high; so blissful and happy. Everything seemed so perfect. I had torn down my episiotomy line and while sore and swollen it wasn't as bad or as torn as the cut with Charlie. I let it heal naturally and though it hasn't returned to what it previously looked like, it healed easily and without infection.

Natalie Rees is a mother to Charlie, 3.5 years and Stella, 8 weeks. She has a double degree in Japanese and Journalism that she has never used. She owns and runs The Hub Studio – The Actors Gym with her husband Oliver Wenn in Chippendale, Sydney and Fremantle, Perth. Originally from Perth, she has lived abroad in Japan, in Sydney for 7 years and returned back to Perth when Charlie was 18 months old. She is an actor and created her own verbatim theatre show about motherhood before leaving Sydney. She was a HAS committee member while living in Sydney. She is very passionate about women's freedom of choice, an obsessive researcher about all things birth and loves to live as naturally as possible.

MY HOMEBIRTH JOURNEY

Part 1

By Kristyn Wednesday-Begnell

Photos courtesy of Life Lense Photography

I feel so fortunate to have fallen into the world of homebirth the way that I did. My journey started years before my husband and I even considered having kids. After reading a book on the US maternity system I began researching homebirth and found the details for a local midwifery group practice. I met with one of the midwives there to ask questions. Little did I know that we would meet again a few years later and she would accompany me on my own pregnancy journey.

In 2013 my sister gave birth to her first child and my husband and I decided not long after to start trying for a baby of our own. It took 7 months for us to fall pregnant. I'd already decided that I wanted a private midwife and the option to birth at home. I made an appointment with Jane Palmer at Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond. We were lucky to book her and Melanie as our midwives.

My pregnancy went smoothly and I really enjoyed it, despite some morning sickness which lasted about 14 weeks. After some more discussions with Jane, I decided that I did want to birth at home, but we told people that we planned on giving birth at the local public hospital because I just didn't want to deal with the negativity I expected we would receive. We went to a Calm Birth class towards the end of the pregnancy and it was great to learn about the stages of labour and see some interviews with people who had positive birth experiences. In hindsight, I wish I had followed the facilitator's advice about being a bit more open to the possibility of things not going to plan.

4 days into my maternity leave I woke up not feeling very well. I started to feel a pain down low on the right side of my abdomen. Jane advised me to rest and keep her updated. The pain got worse as the day wore on, and by 9pm I was laying on my bed unable to move. My husband called my mum who is an ED nurse, and she said it could be my appendix and that we should go to the hospital. I jumped up and started frantically throwing things into a bag, I felt so unprepared. On the way to the hospital I kept saying, "I'm not ready yet!" I was forced to prepare for the fact that our baby might be arriving that night. Jane met us at the maternity unit soon after we arrived. We were taken into one of the rooms and they began monitoring the baby's heart rate. When the surgeons finally came to see me they seemed very reluctant to say that the pain had anything to do with my appendix. Jane had already determined that I was not in labour, so it just seemed like they were avoiding a diagnosis because I was pregnant. Our obstetrician was updated on the situation and we waited for the surgeon to do a review.

Hours passed. I was displaying all the signs of having appendicitis yet the surgeons kept stalling because I didn't have a fever yet! The hospital midwives kept offering me pain relief but I declined. I held out until about 2 or 3am when the pain became unbearable (I think this is when my appendix finally ruptured). I couldn't sit still on the bed so when Jane suggested some morphine I nodded my head. Not long after it took effect, the surgeons walked in. I was so out of it that I couldn't even speak, so my husband had to answer their questions for me. After they left, we all managed to get some rest. We waited about 5 more hours before my obstetrician arrived, and then all of a sudden things started moving very quickly. He said I needed to go into surgery right away. As I was being wheeled into theatre past my mum and husband I could see on their faces how scared they were. I thought for a moment that I might not see them again and I was terrified.The operating room was full of strange faces, there must have been 10 people standing there. As they were putting me under a general anaesthetic my husband wasn't allowed in the room; I felt myself starting to panic. Jane and my OB were the only people I knew and they held my hands as they put the mask over my face and I tried to slow my breathing. I woke up alone in the recovery room what felt like a second later. My face was unbearably itchy and my vision was blurry.

A nurse saw me removing my mask and came over to me so I asked her, "Where am I, where is my baby?" Eventually they wheeled my bed into the NICU where my daughter, Georgia, had been taken. Apparently my abdomen was 'full of pus' so they wanted to keep her in NICU on IV antibiotics as a precaution. When the nurse brought her over to my bed my vision was still so blurry, I couldn't make out the details of her face. She was asleep and I asked to hold her but they said no because I was still groggy from the anaesthetic. I wish they had just put her on my belly or on the bed next to me and held her there. I just wanted to feel her next to me.

They wheeled me to the maternity ward and I must have fallen asleep for a while. When I woke up someone showed me a photo of Georgia. She was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen, but I was heartbroken that the first time I saw my daughter's face was in a photo someone else had taken. My husband took me to NICU in a wheelchair a few hours later so I could see Georgia. She looked so peaceful laying there all swaddled up. The nurses told me she had to stay there for 2 days and I was really upset to hear that they'd already started feeding her formula without my consent. I wanted to breastfeed, so the next day the midwives showed me how to hand express; I tried so hard to get enough colostrum to put into a syringe for my baby but I felt a lot of pressure from them to get 'enough' milk and everyone was telling me that I was 'doing it wrong'. The treatment I received from the NICU nurses was terrible. One of them in particular told me I couldn't hold Georgia for longer than 15 minutes at a time, her reasoning was that we needed to regulate her body temperature! I was sitting in a wheelchair with this intimidating woman towering over me telling me, "I'M the nurse and I'M responsible for her care." Though in my mind I was shouting, "I'm her f**king mother and I know what's best for her!" I couldn't get the words out.

I was relieved when Georgia was released from the NICU. I thought I would have some control back but I continued to be pressured by the nurses to feed her formula. After feeding and managing to express about 15ml I ended up conceding and giving her formula. I remember the smell of the Milton on the bottle; it felt wrong in every way. Every day I would count down the hours until my husband could come in to visit me. When we were discharged after 4 or 5 days it was such a relief to be home. It was a strange feeling though, walking into a house that wasn't quite ready for a baby. The birth pool was still in the box, unopened, inside the front door. It made me sad to look at it.

Georgia was slow to put on weight in those first few weeks, so I was breastfeeding every 3 hours and pumping immediately afterwards to give her top-ups in a bottle. I was determined to make breastfeeding work, after the rough start we'd had, it was the only thing I felt I had any control over. For weeks I cried. They were tears of happiness that she was ok, mixed with grief for the natural birth that I wanted so badly. I was so sad that she didn't get the best start in life that I wanted for her. I was angry at the hospital staff who took so long to operate on me, but also so grateful to be alive. I thought maybe if they'd operated sooner Georgia wouldn't need to be in NICU and therefore on antibiotics and formula. I was angry at the NICU nurses for not allowing me to have more skin to skin contact and bullying me into giving her formula feeds. I was angry at the nurse who wouldn't let me hold her when I first saw her. People kept telling me, "Well at least she's healthy, that's the main thing," which really hurt. Yes, of course I was glad that my daughter was healthy, but my feelings matter too!

Once I left the hospital I had no further contact with them regarding my recovery. There was no discussion about follow-up appointments for the caesarean or the appendectomy – nothing. I didn't know whether my scar was healing properly or not, or how long I could expect the pain to last. It really felt like they had wiped their hands of me. We started planning to have another baby when Georgia was about 10 months old; I started to feel really nervous. Even though the circumstances that led to my caesarean were so random and I knew that it couldn't happen again (you only have one appendix!), I was scared that something else would go wrong. I had also heard that it was a possibility I wouldn't be able to have a homebirth because the exemption for Professional Indemnity Insurance for Privately Practising Midwives was due to expire, and the thought of going back to hospital terrified me. I spoke about my experience and how I was feeling at the monthly catch ups with Jane's midwifery group practice. Jane recommended I see a psychologist who specialises in birth trauma. I found those sessions immensely helpful and I started to feel ready – physically and emotionally – to have another baby.

Part 2

A few months into the New Year my sister announced that she was pregnant with her second child. She experienced complications with bleeding and was admitted to hospital at around 17 weeks. She was diagnosed with PPROM and induced at 19 weeks. Her son, Tommy, was stillborn; we were all heartbroken. My husband and I had planned a family holiday with Georgia to Tasmania for the month after Tommy was born. A few days before the trip I took a pregnancy test and it was positive. I froze and just stared at it. I showed my husband and there was no excitement, just dread. All I could think was, "How am I going to tell my sister?" It felt too soon after her loss for me to share our good news. I had been experiencing bleeding for about a week but I didn't worry too much about it and we left the next day.

My sister decided her family needed a little break too so they joined us on the trip. We saw them every day, all the while not mentioning the fact that I was pregnant. My bleeding was increasing so I snuck away one day to call Jane and tell her what was happening. She suggested I get an ultrasound to see what was going on. At our appointment we stared at a blank screen while the technician explained that there was no baby, but a 'mass' near my right ovary, and suggested we go to ED straight away. I couldn't believe it. The OB at the hospital explained it was likely an ectopic pregnancy and was very quick to mention the word 'surgery' to remove a fallopian tube and possibly an ovary! All my fears came rushing back when I was sitting in emergency. I finally sent my sister a text… she immediately packed up their things and left their accommodation a few hours away to come back to Hobart. When I told the doctor about my previous caesarean/appendectomy they were less keen to perform surgery. One of them said to me, "I imagine it's quite a mess in there." They kept me for overnight for monitoring in case the ectopic burst and I did need emergency surgery. James took Georgia back to the hotel room - she was 16 months old at the time and we'd never spent a night apart since she'd left the NICU as a newborn.

In the morning I had another internal ultrasound which confirmed their suspicions. They suggested a methotrexate injection rather than surgery and explained that I wouldn't be able to breastfeed Georgia for at least 4 days, which was devastating for me. I was allowed to go back to the hotel with my family and was told to return for blood tests in 2 days. They explained that I wouldn't be allowed to fly home until the risk of the ectopic rupturing was ruled out. My sister came with me to the methotrexate appointment. I'm so grateful for her doing that - it must have been extremely hard for her to be in an early pregnancy centre so soon after losing her son. I was told to return for blood tests again in 2 days to see how the hormone levels were dropping. I asked an obstetrician what caused this to happen and he said likely my burst appendix caused inflammation in my abdomen and somehow damaged my fallopian tube. Because I didn't have my tube removed my risk of repeated ectopic is 15%.

I was so angry as we left that appointment, I couldn't even speak. I was absolutely fuming at the surgeons in the hospital back home who refused to make a decision to operate on my appendix. I wished they could know how their decision has affected our lives. I blamed them for the loss of my second baby, for the disruption to breastfeeding Georgia and for not being able to go home. We were stranded until they decided that rupture was no longer a risk. We ended up spending an extra 10 days in Hobart before being able to return home. I wanted to fall pregnant again but I was told to wait at least 3 months after the ectopic to allow time for the methotrexate to leave my body. I started seeing my psychologist again to help process everything that had happened. I used that time to prepare my body for pregnancy

again and get into the right head space.

Almost a year to the day after I found out about our ectopic pregnancy, I had another positive pregnancy test. I told Jane and my OB right away, who told me I could come to his office for a quick scan to check that it wasn't another ectopic. Things were looking good, but we kept quiet until we had a scan at 5 or 6 weeks and had the confirmation that there was indeed a baby in my uterus. I was anxious about something going wrong with this pregnancy. I was told that the chances of having appendicitis while pregnant were about 1 in 1000, so I was worried my bad luck would continue. My midwives and OB were confident that I could achieve the VBAC at home that I so badly wanted. I made a lot of changes to my birth plan to cover all the scenarios I thought were most likely to happen. I didn't want to think about the possibility of another caesarean, but after the massive disappointment following my first birth I wanted to be more prepared. I started to worry about uterine rupture but my midwives reassured me that the chances of rupture were very low. VBAC was the best course of action for me. It felt like preparing for my first birth all over again. I had no idea what labour felt like, so I was a little worried about how I would deal with the pain. I found a few books recommended to me extremely helpful for beginning to think about the pain in labour as functional pain, rather than 'something is wrong' pain. I read as much as I could about the physiological process of birth.

At 40+3 I started to feel some contractions so I told Jane and she said I should get some rest. I was convinced the baby was coming soon as contractions started becoming more frequent and stronger. Still, Jane told me to get some sleep and that nothing was going to happen tonight. Mum stayed over and I called my sister, who was our birth photographer, to come over. I should have listened, because as soon as the sun came up the contractions slowed right down. It was my husband's 40th birthday that day and we had been putting off making plans for it. My contractions picked up again as the afternoon wore on, but I managed to have a nap or two. By 9pm they were 5 minutes apart, so we added more hot water to the pool (which was still pretty warm from us filling it prematurely the night before!) and I got in. It was such a relief. Jane arrived at about 10pm and not long afterwards my contractions really amped up. I had asked not to be told how dilated I was, so when she asked if she could check and I said yes, she just gave me a pat on the back and said, "You're further along than you think you are." She called the second midwife and by this stage I was feeling the urge to push. It was the strangest sensation! My body was just taking me along for the ride.

I spent about an hour pushing in the pool and I could feel the head descending, then I felt it go back up when the contractions died off. It was so disheartening and the pain in my tailbone and lower back was intense. She was having trouble coming around my pubic bone so Jane recommended I get out of the pool and into a supported squat. We spent an hour like this, with me pushing with all my might but making not much progress. I remember Jane telling me as a contraction started to build, "Ok, this time I want you to push really hard, as hard as you can." I sobbed between breaths, "I'm trying so hard!" I was exhausted. They knew how important this VBAC was to me and I could see the concern on their faces. Jane told me that the baby was doing really well, but she wasn't sure going on like this for much longer would be a good idea. When she offered to do an episiotomy I was actually relieved, especially when she said she could do one right here, because I was thinking to myself, "How the f*** am I going to get out the front door and into an ambulance?" As they were preparing I had another contraction and thought, "This is it, let's go bubba,", but no matter how hard I pushed, her head wouldn't move. I didn't even feel the cut after having the burning ring of fire for the past hour! Within seconds my baby was out and in my arms. I remember how slippery she felt and how instantly all the pain just went away and my body relaxed. She let out a cry but settled so quickly in my arms. I'll never forget that moment, sitting there on the dining room floor. Jane was concerned about my blood loss so suggested Syntocinon to help deliver the placenta. We moved to the lounge and my husband cut the cord. .

We named our little girl Bronte Jean.

After all my anxiety about uterine rupture during my pregnancy I honestly didn't worry about it once through the entire labour. I'm convinced that having a better understanding of the process of birth really helped me to get through each contraction and make the pain bearable. Bronte's birth wasn't exactly as I'd imagined it would be: I didn't birth her in the water and I wasn't expecting to need an episiotomy. It was intense, hard and so rewarding. I will be eternally grateful to my fabulous midwives and my husband for supporting me so well, and to my sister who took the most amazing photos and doubled as an un-official doula, holding space and giving me words of encouragement right when I needed them. We joke that Bronte held on so that she could have a different birth day to her daddy.

People have asked me whether Bronte's birth has helped heal my previous traumatic birth experience. I feel that it has, and the more time that passes the more healed I become. Going through the rite of passage giving birth was something I felt completely robbed of with my first; I literally woke up and was no longer pregnant. I was detached from the whole experience; it was something that happened TO me. I struggled for a long time to say that Georgia was 'born' or that I 'gave birth', because I didn't feel like I had. Now I know that I can do it, I have DONE it. It was the most amazing experience of my life and I feel so grateful to have given birth at home.

Kristyn is a mum to two gorgeous little girls, Georgia (3yo) and Bronte (10mo). She found her way to homebirth via a book she picked up at a 2nd hand book sale and knew this was the path for her once she decided to have kids. Since her teens she's been involved in some kind of advocacy, in the past it was animal welfare and environmental protection. Kristyn became involved in maternity consumer advocacy after her first planned homebirth ended in an emergency caesarean. She achieved her long awaited HBAC when her second daughter was born in March last year, and now that she knows how amazing it is to give birth at home, she's more passionate about it than ever. In her spare time she loves adding to her indoor plant collection, reading about low-tox living, crafting (macrame, crochet and scrapbooking) and camping.

Podcasts and Videos

PODCASTS

Here are a few birth story podcasts and videos within the theme 'Choices' in birth. I hope you love listening to these podcasts and watching these videos as much as I did! ~ Aimee

BIRTHFUL - THE PURPOSE OF CHILDBIRTH PAIN, WITH RHEA DEMPSEY.

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CIRCLE OF BIRTH, E53 - BIRTH WITH JOY – MIDWIFE AND BIRTH IN A BUS

INDIE BIRTH – WHEN HOMEBIRTH DOESN'T HAPPEN AND TRANSPORT BECOMES THE BEST CHOICE.

INDIE BIRTH – UNCOVERING YOUR HIDDEN TALENT FOR MAKING PERFECT BIRTH CHOICES (FOR YOU).

INDIE BIRTH – RESTORING WOMEN'S CHOICE FOR VAGINAL BREECH BIRTH: MY CHAT WITH RESEARCHER DR. RIXA FREEZE

THE BIRTH HOUR – UNEXPECTED BIRTH OUTCOMES AND WHY CHOICE IS SO IMPORTANT.

PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND BEYOND – PRIVATELY PRACTISING MIDWIFERY IN AUSTRALIA WITH ASTRA.

HOMEBIRTH VIDEOS

ROMPER'S DOULA DIARIES - CHOOSING A HOME BIRTH

MATERNITY CHOICES AUSTRALIA – SAVE OUR MATERNITY SERVICES.

10 NEWS FIRST – SYDNEY HOSPITAL OFFERING HOME BIRTHS.

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Sophie Stoke

Photographers, doulas and support people behind the camera

Camille Walsh
Emma Hill
Gwenyth Gittins
Janine O'Brien
Jerusha Sutton Photography
Life and Lens Phinhotography
Mell Mallin
Natural Beginnings
Paula Brennan
Tara Mahoney

Photo by Virgina Maddox of Natural Beginnings

THE THEME FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF BIRTHINGS WILL BE

CELEBRATIONS

Our upcoming issue is themed **Celebration**! We are looking to celebrate everything that is homebirth, explore what homebirth means to you, and hear how you have chosen to celebrate your birth and homebirth in general. Do you have specific traditional/cultural ways of celebrating birth? We'd love to hear about them! If you're interested in writing a theme article, sharing your birth story or announcement, or allowing us to share some of your birth art (poems, images, photos – anything really), please send it through to editor@homebirthsydney.org.au by the **1st September, 2019**. Our submission criteria is <1400 words with a <100 word bio and some high resolution photos.

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

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