

BIRTHING

AUTUMN 2021, ISSUE 142



EXTRAORDINARY

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

AIMEE SING

PRESIDENT

president@homebirthnsw.org.au

JOSI JENTZSCH

VICE PRESIDENT
ADVERTISING

marketing@homebirthnsw.org.au

KATHRYN BELL

SECRETARY
INTERN SUPERVISOR

secretary@homebirthnsw.org.au

CLAIRE HEENAN

COMMUNICATIONS

media@homebirthnsw.org.au

PHOEBE RETRAC

SOCIAL MEDIA
MARKETING

media@homebirthnsw.org.au

**ARTHUR &
SANTINA SANNEN**

MERCHANDISING &
TREASURER

treasurer@homebirthnsw.org.au

BONNIE HOOK

EDITOR

editor@homebirthnsw.org.au

**MARINA
TAYLOR-CLIFT**

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

editor@homebirthnsw.org.au

KATIE BULLEN

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

editor@homebirthnsw.org.au

**ANA LUISA
NOSSEIS**

WEBSITE

admin@homebirthnsw.org.au

**RACHEL
FOWLER**

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

admin@homebirthnsw.org.au

KRISTYN

BEGNELL

ADVOCACY &
MIDWIFE LIAISON

memberships@homebirthnsw.org.au

AYSHA LATIEF

EVENTS

admin@homebirthnsw.org.au

EMMA BOURKE

MEMBERSHIP

fundraising@homebirthnsw.org.au

MAGGIE

LECKY-THOMPSON

JO HUNTER

JANINE O'BRIEN

CONTENT CHECKS

AMY LOU

JACQUELINE

COOKE

PROOF - READERS



HOME BIRTH NEW SOUTH WALES



Cover Page Image:
[Janine O'Brien - iBirth](#)

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S LETTER	4
PRESIDENT'S REPORT	5
LATEST NEWS	7
LATEST PODCASTS	56
BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS	27, 47, 52

EXTRAORDINARY

EXTRAORDINARY	9-10
THE EMPOWERING BIRTH OF TULLY NGARRA	17-19
OWEN SEQUOIA	23-25
NAMENEST ARTWORK	28
BEST BIRTH CO. BIRTH AFFIRMATION	29
COVID-19: A MIDWIFERY STUDENT PERSPECTIVE	33-34
BIRTH TIME VISITS BYRON BAY	37-38
IGNATIUS	41-42
TOBY	45-46

BIRTH STORIES

THE BIRTH OF AZALEA - APRIL GEROLEMOU	13-14
THE BIRTH OF MILLIE - KATIE BULLEN	21-22
THE BIRTH OF HUDSON - MICHELLE COURT	31-32
THE BIRTH OF SUNNY VAI - DENYA AROHA MAY	35-36
THE BIRTH OF HENRY THEODORE - EMILY MULHALL	43
THE BIRTH OF HUXLEY ERNESTO - RACHEL FOWLER	49-51
THE BIRTH OF DAPHNE - FEYRUSE KHATIB	53-55
THE BIRTH OF RAFFERTY - ANNA JOHNSON	57-59

Photo credit:
Emma Burke Photography



EDITOR'S LETTER



EXTRAORDINARY SEASONS

Autumn is here and we celebrate the change of seasons for so many women this month, as they become mothers.

Regardless as to whether they are now mothers for the first, second or third time, the experience and growth they have begun is as unstoppable as the autumn leaves falling from the trees and the chill of winter starts setting in.

Our theme for the magazine is *Extraordinary* - and doesn't our cover image SCREAM how extraordinary birthing really is?! This was an unanimous decision by our team to celebrate all of the women who have birthed over the past completely unpredictable year and were so generous in sharing their intimate experiences with you, our readers. We chose to focus on their positive experience of birth rather than the ordeal of giving birth during a global pandemic in altered circumstances and a surreal reality to what they had envisaged for themselves and their families. It was not what any would have anticipated, but the strength and "just get on with it" attitudes they took on to bring their babies into the world will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

We were fortunate enough to be given an insight into what COVID looked like at the frontline for a midwifery student, who's honest account shows how homebirth didn't have to adapt to the situation like most industries but was able to keep on keeping on with its centuries old approach to letting women birth how they want, feel and need to birth.

Our own committee member, Josi, who's incredible birth story was among the glorious pages last edition, gives us a review of Birth Time which has initiated so

many ground-breaking (and overdue) conversations about Birth and women being an advocate for themselves and their babies, encouraging them to look more widely than the hospital systems we are indoctrinated into in Western Civilisations.

Thank you and congratulations to all of our extremely wise and wonderful women who have shared their stories with us this edition, it has been particularly joyful to share in your newborn experience and discuss being in the best club there is with you, The Mum Club.

Congratulations to the team on what is another inspiring edition, and we look forward to bringing you another edition brimming with birth next Spring.



Bonnie
boniehook.com

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BIG MOVES

Dear HBNSW community,

Welcome to this issue of Birthings magazine!

Homebirth NSW is as vibrant as ever and our committee has been busily pottering away in the background over the last few months. We've farewelled our old (thank you, Amy Innes!) and welcomed a new events coordinator, hosted multiple screenings of *Birth Time* around NSW, made some great changes to our website, continued discussions with Homebirth Australia (congratulations to their new coordinator, Kristyn Begnell!), welcomed lots of new advertisers, members and midwives to our organisation and continued with our marketing, advocacy and membership communications (newsletter, blog and Birthings magazine). To top that off, we've welcomed 3 new babies to our incredible committee!! Congratulations to Rachel Fowler, Claire Heenan and Jaime Leigh Hawkins who each welcomed their second babies, Huxley, Jeremy and Logan, earthside!

So what can you look forward to seeing over the coming months? We'll continue partnering with some incredible businesses (if you haven't seen the huge number of members benefits you receive by being part of our membership, make sure you login to the website and check them out!) and raising our profile within the birth community.

We hope to hold a few events in the coming months, both online and in person, and will be doing some campaigning online (don't forget it's International Day of the Midwife on 5th May!!).

We're liaising with other Homebirth committees around Australia and will continue reaching out to professional organisations to work alongside them too.

The rest of this year is going to bring some big moves in homebirth as the Professional Indemnity Insurance

exemption is set to expire on 31st December, 2021! So expect to see some serious campaigning around that and, if at all possible, please jump in and take part – we're going to need the strength of all of our voices together to see this through! Many of our committee members are meeting with their local MPs and also local hospital representatives to see whether we can get more access to Publicly Funded Homebirth programs in NSW, and we'll continue to update you as these programs become available – if you'd like to join our cause, please email me at president@homebirthnsw.org.au.

So, all in all, it's business as usual here! If there is anything you need help with, anything you'd like to share or feel we need to be aware of, please contact us. Until then, lots of blessings to you and your families – stay safe and well, and please get active in the birth advocacy space if you have the time!

'See' you again soon!



Aimee



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Calmbirth® is Australia's most highly acclaimed, recommended, TRUSTED and scientifically proven childbirth education program in Australia. Calmbirth® was the first childbirth education program in Australia to recognise the interrelationship between the mind and body connection in birth – the connection and power between a woman's emotional state and the way her body responds in birth. Calmbirth® uses this mind-body connection to assist couples to replace the fear, stress and anxiety about giving birth with the knowledge and skills to birth their baby calmly, fearlessly, safely and confidently.

“A woman will birth best when she feels SAFE, UNDISTURBED and RESPECTED. Calmbirth's goal is to educate and improve the birthing outcomes for all women and their families, not just physically, but emotionally as well,” says Owner and Director, Karen McClay.

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- Calmbirth® empowers you to make informed decisions with your caregivers about birth choices.
- Calmbirth® helps you feel safe, calm and confident to birth your baby irrespective of how you birth.
- Calmbirth® teaches you about the prenatal bonding, the importance of skin to skin and postnatal bonding, self care and ways to nourish the new mother, and awakens you to the concept of conscious parenting.
- Calmbirth® teaches you how to nurture your connection to your unborn child and 'plants the seed' for ways to strengthen that connection in your transition into parenthood.
- Calmbirth® teaches you self empowerment – how to be an active participant in your birth and gives your birth support partners the tools to support you. It teaches you how to access your inner resources and gives you the confidence to use them to assist you in pregnancy, labour and birth – embracing birth as a natural part of life.

The Calmbirth® program is suitable for first time or subsequent births; for couples who've had a challenging birth experience and would like their other birth experience to be different; as well as for couples who know they'll be having a caesarean. Calmbirth® embraces and accepts all pregnant couples regardless of their age, culture, socio-economic or sexual orientation.

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The Calmbirth® organisation has built its reputation over the years by the credibility of its Calmbirth Educators which are ALL trained birth professionals. Calmbirth has been the first to create and consolidate strong partnerships with private and public maternity hospitals in Australia, in successfully incorporating the Calmbirth® program into their antenatal structure. Calmbirth® has close to 100 registered Calmbirth® educators throughout Australia, New Zealand and France.



Contact: karenmcclay@calmbirth.com.au

LATEST NEWS

“TASMANIAN MOTHERS BIRTH AT HOME AFTER TRAUMATIC HOSPITAL BIRTHING EXPERIENCES”

The Examiner | 28 Dec 2020
Tasmanian mothers are increasingly deciding to give birth at home after their negative and traumatic experiences of labouring and birthing on hospital maternity wards.
[Read the story here.](#)

“SOME TURN TO IN-HOME BIRTH DURING PANDEMIC”

News-Press Now | 20 Feb 2021
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of uncertainty, including for families who are expecting a new addition. The topic of having an in-home birth may have crossed the minds of couples more often as concerns about having a hospital birth rose, as some facilities limited visitors or even banned partners from being present.
[Read the story here.](#)

“IS BIRTH TRAUMA THE NEXT FEMINIST FRONTIER?”

AFR | 12 Feb 2021
A new documentary from Australian actress Zoe Naylor explores why women's birth experiences are diminished, rather than celebrated.
[Read the story here.](#)

“WHY GIGI HADID DECIDED TO HAVE A HOME BIRTH”

Refinery29 | 5 Feb 2021
Gigi Hadid's original plan was to deliver her first child in a state-of-the-art New York City hospital, not an inflatable bathtub in the middle of a farm in Pennsylvania. But after the COVID-19 pandemic hit shortly after she learned she was expecting, the 25-year-old model had to reevaluate exactly where she was going to welcome her baby into the world.
[Read the story here.](#)

“AUSSIE DAD’S LETTER ABOUT WIFE’S ‘BEAUTIFUL’ HOME BIRTH EXPERIENCE GOES VIRAL”

7 News | 30 Aug 2020
As Tim Dummett's wife Steph and their newborn baby Inti lay curled up beside him in bed, sleeping just a few hours after the birth, he penned a letter to his wife. And the letter has sparked messages of love and awe from men and women across social media.
[Read the story here.](#)

‘WOMEN FEEL THEY HAVE NO OPTION BUT TO GIVE BIRTH ALONE’: THE RISE OF FREEBIRTHING

The Guardian | Sat 5 Dec 2020
As Covid infections rose, hospital felt like an increasingly dangerous place to have a baby. But is labouring without midwives or doctors the answer?
[Read the story here.](#)



THANK YOU JANE PALMER!

Homebirth NSW would like to acknowledge Jane Palmer as she retires from private practice and begins another exciting chapter in education.

Jane has made a massive contribution to homebirth and continuity of care over the last 25 years. She's changed the lives of many women and babies through her care.

What a treasure! She will be missed.



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EXTRA- ORDINARY

BY JANE HARDWICKE COLLINGS

I saw many extraordinary things happen in 2020.

Everybody experiencing the interconnectedness, our connection with each other and the impact our culture has had on natural habitats of animals that therefore increases the likelihood of the transmission of animal viruses and so the devastating impact we have had on the environment, on the Earth.

A wake-up call; a necessary wake-up call. And at the same time as the pandemic was teaching us the interconnectedness of all things, so too did it highlight to us all, again, and for many for the first time, the dysfunctional aspects of the patriarchy.

Many things came into question in 2020, and many things have changed and disrupted the status quo.

I loved seeing in the news the photographs of the wild animals coming out of the shadows as the humans took up less space and the effect on the atmosphere and the waters through reduced human consumption and rubbish.

I think these things taught us starkly of the negative impacts of our capitalist, growth-oriented,

patriarchal culture. A bit like what happens in week three of the menstrual cycle - everything that's not working in your life shows up so you can learn from it and let it go and find the healed way forward.

I have found myself saying often during 2020 that the clues for how to live an Earth-honoring and sustainable life are hiding in plain view in the menstrual cycle.

For me personally, 2020 was going to be my busiest travel year yet. And then it all stopped, suddenly, and I was home and available 24/7 to my daughter Ellie having her first baby, as it turned out - just before lockdown. So I got to be the mother and grandmother I could be.

Hygieia Health, the NFP wing of the School of Shamanic Womancraft, burst into life at the beginning of the pandemic. Our starting mission was to create freestanding birth centers and to support homebirth, and this became more obviously necessary as the pandemic began to affect women's birthing experience.

We tried to create 'mash-style' birth centers, however, this was blocked at the places it needed approval, so we focussed on supporting mamatotos online by creating the Mamatoto Support for Birth in

Crisis Facebook group. We also created from within the community of women that rose together via this Facebook group, a 24/7 hotline and connected mothers and practitioners who could offer their services for free or discounted to the mothers in need as almost all previous services offered by the system were stopped.

I found it tragic and unsurprising that maternity care was on the bottom of the list of priorities for the government in terms of how to care for the community in this crisis.

We all saw this though the 10 people to a funeral, 5 to a wedding, and 0-1 to a birth, and so many women laboured and or gave birth alone, and many with masks on, with the overarching threat that they may also be separated from their newborn.

We can see the aftermath and the damage from this approach and perspective via women's stories and the statistics around maternal mental health from this dreadful mistake.

The birth of my third grandson Forest, and being with Ellie and Andrew through that experience is a highlight of my life. I give great thanks for having had the

opportunity for the invitation to be there. I saw and felt red thread healing in real-time.

Because my work changed from traveling to giving workshops, to being at home I had the time I'd been wanting and wondering when it would ever happen, to stop and write.

And so I 'birthed' three e-courses during 2020 and worked on my, still to be born, next book, Blood Rites - the spiritual practice of menstruation. And I did the jobs I always convince myself I have no time for, like cleaning out the linen cupboard!

I spoke on lots of podcasts and this not only helped to get the word out there, but it also helped me refine my message. I got to really slow down, more than I ever have

in my life, so much so that I got 'bored' and realised my unconscious process of creating one adrenaline-fuelled experience to the next!

So I think the extraordinary nature of 2020 could be summed up in the teachings within the wisdom of the cycles of the 'winter phase', the void, the death and rebirth part of the cycles, the bleeding part of the menstrual cycle, the place in the cycle that shows up all the things that need to be let go of and the hints of the future. My feeling is we are not yet out of the void, and that in this phase there is still a lot of letting go, and the 'death' of old ways.

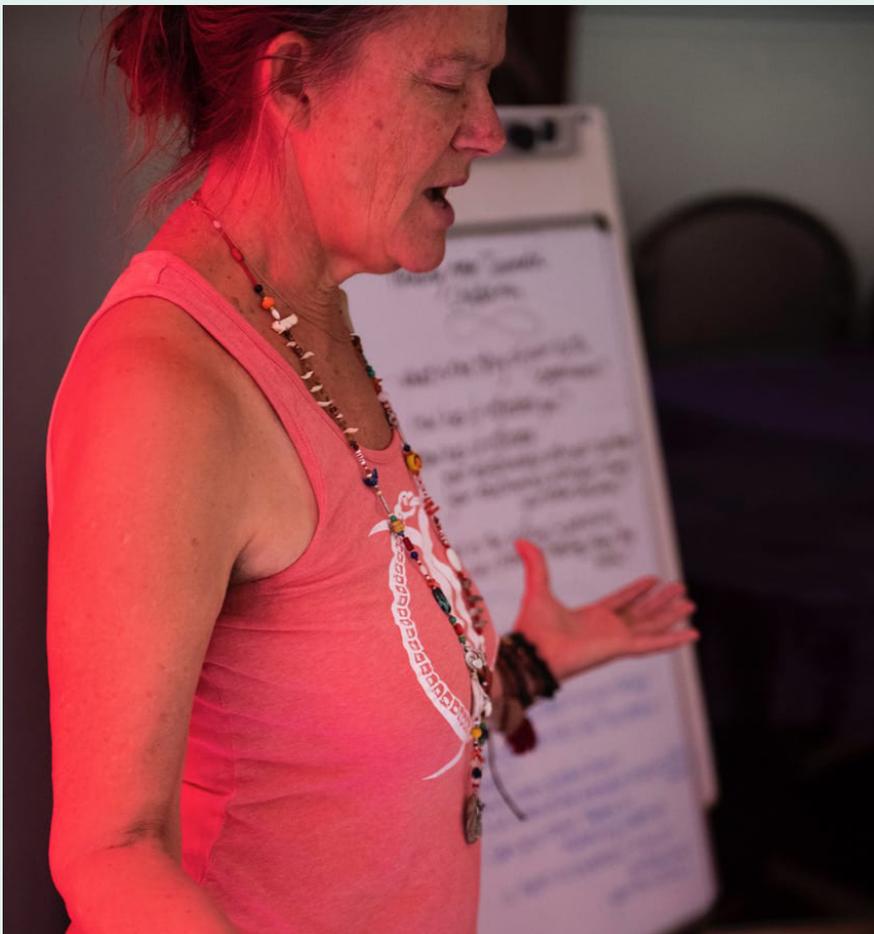
So I hope that all the benefits of the extraordinary nature of 2020 are not lost as we attempt to return to business as usual..... which reminds me of the challenge women face

during perimenopause and post menopausally, as we need to adjust to the truth that it's just not business as usual and won't be ever again, it will be a new story or a lot of pretending...

And now, I feel extremely fired up to advance Hygieia Health's mission of building freestanding birth centers and funding homebirth. We are hoping to have our charity status soon so we can help people who have the resources to help the future.

And so it is.

Bio: I am a postmenopausal grandmother at the sunset of my life. I am mother of a blended family with 4 adult children and 3 grandboys. I am a former Registered Nurse, and worked in that capacity in Paediatric Intensive Care Units and Women's Operating Theatres. I became a midwife at 26 and left the hospital system so as not to be complicit with institutionalised acts of abuse and violence on women and babies masquerading as safety. I travel to give workshops on the wisdom of the cycles and the spiritual practice of menstruation; preparation for menstruation for mothers and daughters; and the sacred and shamanic dimensions of pregnancy, birth, mothering and menopause; and how to reclaim and heal our rites of passage. I also offer teacher training for these. I speak at conferences and festivals and offer my books and e-courses to help heal the wounded feminine and wounded masculine of our patriarchal culture.



janehardwickecollings.com

CALL TO ACTION!



PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE

Right now, women falling pregnant (due January 2021) will not have the opportunity to birth at home with a Privately Practising Midwife. This means that homebirth with a trained medical professional will become illegal.

Why? All healthcare providers are required to hold Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) for their practice. Privately Practising Midwives (PPMs) are able to hold this insurance for antenatal and postnatal care, but for years now there has been no product for intrapartum care. The 'solution' to this has been an exemption for PPMs, so that they don't need to hold PII for intrapartum care... **the deadline for this exemption runs out on 31 December 2021, leaving homebirth with a PPM illegal after this point.**

What can you do? We need to make SO MUCH NOISE! We need a solution, not only for the women who choose to birth at home with a skilled, registered midwife, but also for the midwives who are constantly putting their livelihoods on the line. It is time this situation was resolved! We have been fighting for this for years now...enough is enough. Please join the thousands of voices by signing our petition (note, it's dated 2 years ago and we're STILL fighting for exactly the same things), and stay abreast of updates on our campaigns page. Together, we can secure homebirth not only for us, but for future generations too! Please get active and contact us if you have contacts or ideas that could help!

Visit homebirthnsw.org.au for more information.



KATE RANDALL PHOTOGRAPHY

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as they birth the most powerful parts of themselves

You only need to ask a mother her birth story to realise just how powerful a memory can be. Layers upon layers of emotions, experiences and often expectations imprint themselves on a story we've often got our eyes closed for, sometimes oblivious to the magic unfolding around us. If being witness to other women's births has been healing for my own birth story, I can say undeniably that being witness to your own holds exponential power.

To relive the minutes that made you a family, to piece together the story that you were too present in your body to bear witness to; this is the power of documenting your birth journey. Unrepeatable moments captured as keepsakes that carry you and your story of becoming, once you cradle new life in your arms.



website: www.katerandallphotography.com.au
email: katerandallphotography@hotmail.com
phone: 0418272721
instagram: [kate_randall_photography](https://www.instagram.com/kate_randall_photography)
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THE BIRTH OF AZALEA

BY APRIL GEROLEMOU

Hi I'm April, a woman and mother of two girls living on the east coast of Australia. In some other part of my life I am a nurse, soon-to-be midwife with a strong passion for homebirth and continuity of care midwifery models. Whilst serving in the ADF as a medic, I had my first baby girl. Her unplanned belly birth taught me so very much, mainly that I needed to stop letting things happen to me and start listening to myself. What a gift. This story of HomeBirth After Caesarean (HBAC) is one of triumph through self-discovery, trust and connection with woman.

The days leading up to Azalea's birth were restful. I felt ready and excited for labour to begin, but loved the liminal space of feeling 'in between worlds.' I trusted my body would go into labour when it was ready.

I felt the first signs of labour early in the morning, it was 'our little secret' for those early hours. Once the sun rose, I stayed in my room with the curtains drawn and listened to some music and affirmations. It was a lovely drizzly day, and it felt supportive to rest and feel the surges come and go.

After lunch the surges were needing more of my attention and I no longer felt comfortable in bed. I swayed my hips and spent a lot of time with my chest on the bed and knees on the floor. I felt very instinctual and primal and went with what my body needed for that surge. I breathed and it started to feel good to moan through the sensations.

My midwife GeorGina came just as it was getting dark, she came into the bedroom and lent down beside me saying, 'oh love your body is working so hard,' it felt amazing to have her beside me. We went out to the birth space that Adam had set up with the pool. It was beautiful and womb-like, with candles, curtains and fairy lights.

Getting in the pool was a welcome change, I sat for a long-time letting surge after surge wash over me,

moaning and keeping my jaw loose. I imagined my cervix opening with every sensation. I must have been in the pool for a few hours and I started to feel a bit panicky and some doubts started creeping in. I thought "I can't do this, what if this baby stays high and I am going through this pain for nothing, what if the baby can't fit, and after all this I have to transfer". I was getting cramping and very strong sensations in my hips. I started to feel a bit pushy but didn't want to believe it! Some of the surges were more intense than others. It felt as though baby moved just as the surge was finishing, causing it to start again really quick. I screamed when this



happened which made me feel a bit out of control but GeorGina was good at bringing me back.

I reluctantly got out of the pool. I sat on the toilet for a bit then side-lying on the bed trying to do a hip release. It was intense and I felt again very panicked and that I couldn't do it any longer. I asked GeorGina to see where I was, this was the right thing for me at that time. My midwife exclaimed that she needed to get the second midwife here and that baby would be here soon. I still didn't believe her! Adam helped me back to the pool and he held me up whilst I swayed my hips. Throughout the afternoon the rain was quite heavy, it picked up with my surges, it was lovely to be brought back to the moment with the rain.

Once back in the pool I started pushing, my body just took over. GeorGina encouraged me to see if I could feel the baby's head. I thought I couldn't feel it, but then I felt again and pinched it a bit, feeling hair! "I can feel the head!", I exclaimed. GeorGina said, "there is still a part of you that doesn't believe you can do it, but you're doing it!". It felt so affirming to be able to feel her head! I think I expected it to feel like a smooth skull, not all puckered.

I kept pushing. It was so empowering to be able to feel her head coming down. As she was getting closer to my vaginal opening, I asked Adam if he wanted to feel the baby's head between surges. I was just constantly touching her head feeling her get lower and playing with her hair. Her head would descend with each surge then go back up a bit. Half her head popped out on one push, then the rest on the next push. I was touching her head as it came out, I felt a crunch as my perineum and my labia tore. There was a bit of blood in the pool now. I sat back on one knee and her body came out and I pulled her up. She cried straight away- I was overwhelmed with emotion. I had just pushed this baby out, something I had been dreaming about since my previous caesarean birth. She was purple and wet and gorgeous. She felt waxy, but didn't have much visible vernix on her skin. Her cord was beautiful, plump and filled with her blood. All the doubts subsided; I can do anything!

"IT'S A GIRL!" I EXCLAIMED.

I got out of the pool and my beautiful midwives had made a nest on the couch for us, I lay there for a while and my new baby had her first breastfeed. I felt pretty uncomfortable with the placenta still inside, we tried the birthing stool, but soon moved to the



toilet to release the placenta. It was amazing to see the baby, placenta, cord triad, all joined together as they had been for 9 months. In just over an hour, once the placenta was birthed, we were tucked up in bed with baby feeding. The cord was now white and cold, my midwife tied it off and Adam cut her from her placenta.



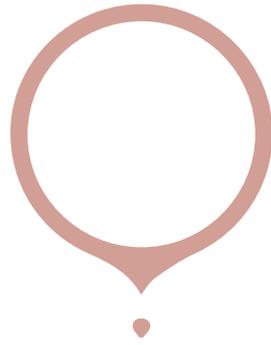
My midwives GeorGina and Maet rubbed beautiful smelling oils into my belly and magnesium cream into my feet. They checked the placenta and it was placed in the fridge where it would be prepared the next day, half in the freezer for burial at a later date and half cut up for smoothies. GeorGina did this so respectfully and asked where I would like this blood from the placenta to be poured, I chose my favourite part of our garden.

Throughout my pregnancy I learnt so much about myself. I feel I reclaimed more of my power as a woman and it has continued my journey of undoing the knots and listening to my body and intuition.

I AM SO PROUD.

Bio: Hi I'm April, a woman and mother of two girls living on the east coast of Australia. In some other part of my life I am a nurse, soon-to-be midwife with a strong passion for homebirth and continuity of care midwifery models. Whilst serving in the ADF as a medic, I had my first baby girl. Her unplanned belly birth taught me so very much, mainly that I needed to stop letting things happen to me and start listening to myself. What a gift. This story of HBAC is one of triumph through self-discovery, trust and connection with woman.

Photo credits: Maet Pearson



S O M A

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What if most of what we thought we knew about a healthy pregnancy was wrong?

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Do you do any of the following?

- Take a prenatal supplement?
- Take a multivitamin?
- Take folic acid or B vitamins?
- Take Iron? Take zinc?
- Get iron infusions?
- Take vitamin C / ascorbic acid?
- Take vitamin D? Take Calcium?
- Take zinc? Eat a low-fat diet?
- Consume vegetable oils?
- Have dealt with stress or trauma

Our bodies and the babies that grow inside them are made of the mineral dust of exploding stars. Minerals are sometimes called the 'sparkplugs of life'. The scientific, peer-reviewed literature from around the world, though not widely known, is explicitly clear - all disease is caused by inflammation, better described as 'oxidative stress' and the root cause of this is an imbalance in three key minerals.

1) Magnesium 2) Copper 3) Iron.

There is nothing more crucial to the health of you and your child than ensuring these minerals are balanced. But did you know that most of the things we are told to do for a healthy pregnancy actually completely mess up this critical balance? This is unfortunately to the detriment of Mother and Baby's long-term health. The good news is that it is completely repairable with the right guidance.



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Many women are told they have iron deficiency. This becomes even more of a focus during pregnancy. But while many may indeed have 'low functional iron' - the iron which isn't being used properly builds in the tissue of the liver, brain, gut and organs causing enormous cellular damage. Rather than increasing our iron intake we need to learn how to properly manage the iron we already have in our system - activating it into a safe functional form.

Invest in your long-term health and you will be a bird set free.



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-Jo Wilbow, Mother of two from Windsor, NSW

**CONTACT BETH TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR BIRTH PACKAGES!
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THE EMPOWERING BIRTH OF TULLY NGARRA

BY GREER ADAMS

Some say you know when the day is here. It was true for me. I woke with the deepest knowing and not just because my partner Cal had been manifesting we would start labour on this exact day, for months.

My beautiful midwife Janine O'Brien (iBirth) had arranged a circle that morning for the birth team (my partner Cal and doula, Lizzy Criner) so we could let the baby know we were ready. We weaved red thread around our ankles and wrists and wrote down our fears so we could burn them.

It was at that moment I realised I didn't have any fears. It's not to say that I wasn't fearful of birth at times throughout pregnancy, I was. But that my preparation had fully landed me in deepest trust of my body, baby and the birth force.

As if Janine could read minds she uttered the same thing, "Greer I can't think of anything to write, I don't have any fears with you, you're ready, you've done the work."

Having that kind of belief backing me was huge and just one of the many reasons I encourage women to curate their birth team. This was the energy of my whole birth. An unwavering sense that this homebirth was already written by me, my support team and the invisible forces.

After heading to acupuncture to be energetically 'induced' the surges escalated on the table. I noticed my red thread had come off in the bathroom, another nod from my ancestors, it was on.

I spent the early afternoon in gentle preparation. Meditations, birth script, listening to my birth playlist, connecting with my birth intentions and calling in my ancestors, guides and all the invisible forces for support.

By early evening the waves had started to build. Water visualisations were a big part of my birth prep. I draw a lot of wisdom and power from the ocean and so Cal drove me down with the TENS machine on my back to waddle over the Clovelly ocean cliffs invoking mother nature's strength and power.

We came home, lit all the candles, turned up the birth playlist, danced in between surges in the lounge room and even managed a roast chicken dinner.

The next 5 hours straight Cal worked acupressure through every wave. Lizzy, my doula arrived by early morning and we continued for another 7 hours of consistent surges before Janine arrived.

This entire period was marked by a devotion to pure presence. I didn't get ahead of where I was at. Focusing only on each surge as it arrived, allowing myself to be taken over by the intensity time and time again, moving toward, rather than away from the birth force.

As strange as this may sound to some, while there was a serious



intensity to each surge I did not consider myself to be in pain. That's not to say my body and baby weren't working hard or the surges weren't strong. I don't say it to sound tough but to share what was possible for me when I focused more on the waves as powerful sensations and related to 'pain' as a normal helpful physiological intensity that was a really good sign my hormones and body was doing everything it needed.

I declined the offer of an internal check from my midwife because I knew that if I wasn't dilated as far as I thought, it could mentally set me back. I also knew that the number didn't mean much to me at that point, I wasn't on a clock and my body would guide the way.

While I wanted to get into the pool I was worried that it might slow the labour rather than speed it up... Which is exactly what happened. I felt a little defeated because I thought I was close.

While I will never know, I look back on this moment as my baby needing a moment of pause, probably to adjust his position. I believe wholeheartedly in the intelligence of body and baby and I trust they slowed for a very intelligent reason.

Out of the pool I had a little internal chat with my baby and reminded them it was safe to come. I also began really using my voice, exhaling loud primal sounds, acutely aware that the opening of my throat chakra is directly connected to the opening of my cervix.

Not long after I got out of the pool my waters broke - the body had listened. I got back in the pool for a second time and now, the surges got stronger and I felt the need to push.

After some time of pushing I intuitively knew there was something blocking him. My midwife checked and I had developed a cervical lip - when the cervix becomes inflamed and creates a lip blocking the baby's head from coming through.

This is one of the many moments that I have to bow down to my midwives Janine and Chantel.

What could have in some cases warranted a transfer to hospital was met with the 'no fear' confidence and expertise of my birth team.

This was without doubt the most challenging part for me personally. I had to get out of the pool to lie left lateral on my bed while having full blown surges. I had read that this sort of case could most likely end in a C section in a hospital.

YET, I HAD FAITH.

Before I knew it, with permission, Janine was administering accu needles in my feet and back while my second midwife rubbed essential oils to treat cervical lip (Myrrr and Copaiba) with castor oil in my lower back.

By fate I had only researched cervical lip late in the pregnancy and decided to purchase Myrrr essential oil specifically for this 2 weeks before! A reminder to always follow your intuition.

Within an hour my magical midwives had it resolved. Their confidence and trust never wavered. I was ready to give birth.

I asked for the primal music to be turned up - a mixture of shamanic drumming and didgeridoo. I got tall, scanned the visuals on the birth wall, mentally recited my power affirmations, called in the support of my ancestors and then got really loud.

My midwife suggested I reach down and touch his head which was helpful because it helped me gauge how much I had to open.

In the flow of a contraction I was pushing against Cal in the pool with all my Amazonian strength and his voice of reassurance anchored me in knowing I was close.

With one large push my sun's head emerged. I waited for the next surge to ensure I wasn't pushing against



the flow of my body and then with one last push, his little body came earth side.

Janine carefully removed the cord tied around his neck and body and then I turned around and reached out for my baby.

Tully arrived in my arms and began his big, beautiful emotional release. This moment felt so significant to me. One of the most important intentions for me as a parent is to rewrite the blueprint that was handed to me around stifling and hiding emotions. He cried in my arms and we didn't try to quiet or shoosh him. We wanted him to let rip so he could immediately know it was safe to express his emotions and it always will be.

My final stage of labour, birthing the placenta took place naturally

with ease and before we knew it we were tucked up in bed and I nursed my little boy.

A couple of days later, my partner and I did a little ceremony to honour the placenta and also welcome the baby 'to country'. I am a Cabrogal descendant from the Darug Nation and so we wanted to incorporate some rituals according to what was, and often is traditionally practiced within Indigenous Australia.

Prior to birth I arranged to collect some soil from our Cabrogal land for the ceremony. Firstly, we pressed his little feet into the soil as a way of welcoming him to his traditional land. We also buried the majority of the placenta in the same soil. It can be thought that if the placenta isn't buried the soul (miwi) can wander ungrounded. We also created a miwi print which can be

said to visually capture the baby's soul map, his path and purpose in this life. Finally we encapsulated a small portion of the placenta too.

The emotions I experienced following birth are hard to express. It was the greatest high of my life staring into my new son's eyes, especially as I let the birth wash over me and feel into without doubt the most powerful version of myself that I have ever witnessed.

Bio: Greer lives in Clovelly, Sydney with her little boy Tully, partner Callum and dog, Zeta.

Photo credits:

[Bec Lawrence photography](#) & [Janine O'Brien - iBirth](#)





"My hypnobirth was so beautiful that 5 minutes after our hypnobub was born, I said to my husband 'I want to do that AGAIN!'"

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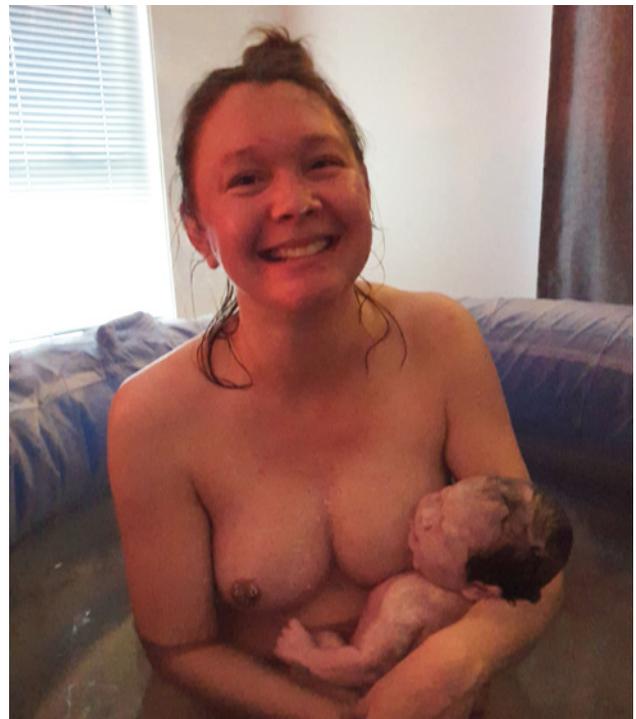
THE BIRTH OF MILLIE

BY KATIE BULLEN

In the weeks leading up to Millie's birth I practiced regular meditation, yoga and breathing exercises to learn how to put myself into a state of deep relaxation in preparation for managing the sensations of labour. For both of my pregnancies, I've had an 'irritable uterus' which means I've had regular contractions from 20 weeks gestation coming between 5-20min apart. It isn't a concerning condition, however it is uncomfortable and means I don't know when my labours truly begin.

In the 24 hours before Millie was born I had stop/start labour. I walked the path along the bushland across the road from our house and spent the day cleaning the floors. As these activities didn't bring on strong labour, we decided it would be good for me to rest that afternoon and go to bed early. I was woken at 12:30am on a Sunday morning unable to sleep through the contractions. The contractions were intense but they weren't very regular (between 3-5min apart) so I was unsure if I was in active labour or if my uterus was just particularly irritable that night. I laboured moving between sitting on the toilet and an office chair as they were the only places I felt comfortable. After about four hours, I was no longer able to float above the contractions and instead they were starting to consume me. I was becoming 'over it' and wanted our midwife Cara to come and either make labour happen or stop. If only she had those powers! We called at 5am asking her to come and see what was happening and said we weren't sure if I was in active labour. In hindsight, I was very close to the birth and was starting to bear down at the end of each wave. I was labouring in the shower after we called Cara while Andrew set up our birth space. Thankfully Cara had the intuition to call the second midwife to come and they both arrived at 6am. This is when I hopped in the birth pool and that warm water felt amazing! While I was in the pool I asked Cara if labour would fizzle out again like the previous day. I was still not 100% sure if I was in labour or if this was my irritable uterus. Millie was crowning as I

asked this and Cara could see the hair on Millie's head. Cara reassured me our baby was definitely coming and I definitely was in labour. Millie's head was out within a few minutes of this conversation at 7am. After literally months of contractions, my uterus was done and contractions all but stopped! My placenta took 2 hours to birth. Cara eventually suggested I sit on the toilet which worked really well. Poor Cara had to reach quite far into our toilet to pull my placenta out of the S-bend as it fell in with such force. Weighing Millie was quite a shock as for many weeks in the pregnancy she was measuring small so we weren't expecting a 4.110kg baby! The midwives were all packed up by 10am and we were left to admire our new not-so-little squish.

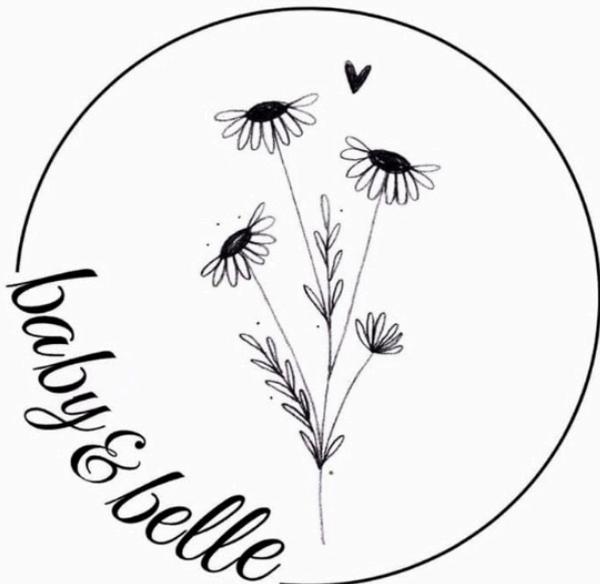


Our story doesn't end here though. For months we had been planning and living with the uncertainty of if my family would be able to meet our baby after the birth. Within days of Millie being born the borders were closed between Queensland and New South Wales due to Covid-19 restrictions. While I

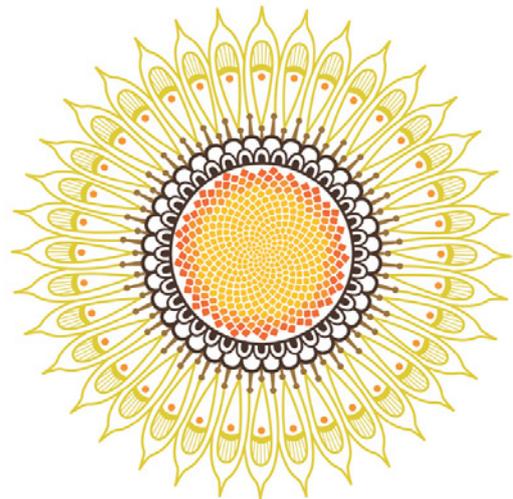
didn't want to have any family present at our birth, we usually welcome family members into our home to spend time with us the week afterwards. Millie finally met her Nanny and Poppy at six months old after months of border closures. The anticipation was huge. We cried, laughed and all held each other tight. My parents played for hours and my Mum took every opportunity to sooth Millie to sleep. I still don't know when we will see my family next, but it now feels like her birth has finally been complete and she has been welcomed into this world by all the most important people around her.

Photo credits: Andrew Bullen

Bio: Katie is a birth nerd, Mum and early intervention therapist living in the western suburbs of Sydney with her husband Andrew and her two daughters Amara (three years old) and Millie (seven months old). She is a Queenslander who somehow found herself south of the border where she works with children with disabilities. Since her homebirth Katie has been transformed into a feminist and even more unexpectedly has developed a green thumb.



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OWEN SEQUOIA

BY RUBY-ROSE WATKINS

LABOUR PART ONE

7 Sep | 38 weeks pregnant

I had been experiencing braxton hicks waves fairly consistently from 36 weeks, however this time they were not stopping - but getting longer, stronger and closer together. My birth team was called to come and support in the early hours of the morning.

My beautiful husband Matt was already in my 'zone'... reminding me of my calm breath, massaging my arms and head, keeping me hydrated, and making my space feel safe and secure. At one point I leaned forward onto all fours and sat up like a gorilla. I was calm, I was in control, I felt ABLE to birth.

Janine and Matt blew up the birth pool while my mum was quietly supporting me through each wave... But as the hours passed it was seeming that my waves were starting to space out and lose their intensity. Janine offered to do an internal exam - to help guide our next steps. I agreed, and was overjoyed to know my body had brought my cervix to 4cm dilated. I was in established labour. I was so close to meeting my baby now! I spent a moment with Matt to be excited, and took Janine's advice to rest while waves were spaced out. I thought to myself, 'I will need this rest, because soon there will be no stopping this labour'...

However as the sun began to rise, my waves completely stopped. I fell asleep leaning over the couch, with my mum gently massaging my back. When I woke up Janine reassured me that this was normal. We agreed that it was likely my oxytocin levels would increase with the sun going down again in the afternoon. So my birth team went away, although stayed on 'standby' ready for the call to say labour had started again.

That day felt as though it lasted an eternity. Despite all my efforts, my waves stayed small and far apart. I was back to the familiar braxton hicks waves. My baby wasn't ready to come earth-side just yet.

LABOUR PART TWO

17 Sep | 39+3 weeks pregnant

Fast forward to 10 days later, and still no sign of a return to established labour. I had been consistently having the same braxton hicks waves, but now they felt SO LOW and SO STRONG. There were 3 nights where waves had increased so much that I was back in my labour zone - rocking around with my TENs machine, getting lost in my peaceful labour music, but like the first time, they always fizzled out. I was exhausted from my body's constant work to get my baby lower and lower still. Janine came for a home visit on the Thursday morning. Since I had

been in this long early labour, she suggested an internal exam might give us an idea of what was going on. We found that I was 5-6cm dilated, with baby's head well applied, and very low. "Love, this baby has to be coming soon", I tried holding onto Janine's words, but my feeling of absolute defeat pretty well brushed it off. Nevertheless, Janine did some accu needling on points that encouraged labour, massaged my tired body, and left.

I called Matt who was on his second last day of work, "when you get home we're doing everything to get this baby coming", were the words that spilled over the phone through my frustration and exhaustion. With nightfall and a bit of romance - things started to change. The waves picked up again and I was back in my gorilla pose with the TENs machine on. It was about 10:00pm. Things were moving very fast. I snuck away to our walk-in-wardrobe. I had pulled all the pillows from the bed and made a sort of nest. I knelt on all fours while Matt stroked my forehead and tried to gently assure me that this was it - that I was going into labour again. He encouraged me and held my space so, so well. And although I didn't quite believe him yet - that's where the long awaited change happened. Tucked away in the quiet of our wardrobe I believe I began to transition from dilating, to fully dilated.

It was about 10:30pm. I very quickly became uncomfortable, and looking back I had such intense pressure from baby's head descending. My body went from the long first stage of labour to intense transition in what felt like only minutes! Matt had asked a few times if I could feel pressure in my bottom, to help guide him as to when to call Janine. I kept saying "I don't know!", which soon changed to, "whose idea was it to homebirth?" and, "get me to the hospital I NEED an epidural" and "I need something for these waves!", as well as several, "I can't do this" and "ARGHHHH!". It's safe to say I was a noisy "transitioner", and in fact what my body and my baby now needed, was to birth.

BEAUTIFUL BIRTH

18 Sep | 39+4 weeks pregnant

The clock ticked over to Friday. Janine arrived at 12:15am. I remember looking up from the floor of the shower and telling her that I couldn't do it. Just moments later, my body started to push. I stood up and said, "WHAT WAS THAT!?", I was now truly in the second stage - after 11 days!



After a couple of pushes on all fours, while leaning over the mattress, we moved into the living room. Janine explained my waters were still intact and that baby was coming en caul. I longed for the pool. I stepped in and immediately felt a weight lift off me and a sense of calm settle all over me. Janine encouraged me to reach down between my legs and feel the bulging waters surrounding my baby. It was at this point that I FINALLY believed I was about to birth.

My waves spaced just enough for me to catch my breath and take a moment's rest. Pushing felt amazing. Finally something to do with all the intensity inside of me. I felt powerful. I felt like, "I can SO do this", once again. I finally found my zone after the wildness of transition that had previously taken over. I found Matt's gaze and gathered my strength to keep birthing my gorgeous baby.

Very soon my baby's head was born, and my waters broke. I could feel his nose and his ears. Lost in the oxytocic "labour land," I talked to Matthew and Janine about what I could feel with a smile across my face. And then - after all the waiting - I birthed my baby boy. I had so longed for this moment and here we were. I was holding my firstborn in my hands....

However - it would be a hot second before I could take it all in...

Our baby came forward all tangled up in his cord. We now knew why he needed a long and slow early labour: to gently come down into the world. It was hard to bring him to my chest and I accidentally dunked him a couple times in an attempt. With Janine coaching me,



I stood up, and with what is called the “somersault maneuver”, we untangled my little sweetheart from the long cord that had sustained him all his life. Mid untangling I looked down to see that we had a boy!

Within 30 seconds he was untangled, crying, breathing well, and up on my chest. I slowly sunk back down into the pool - precious baby boy in arms. Matt embraced us and our special moment was really, finally happening.

Owen Sequoia was born at 12:52am. Although it was a VERY long first stage of labour, it was

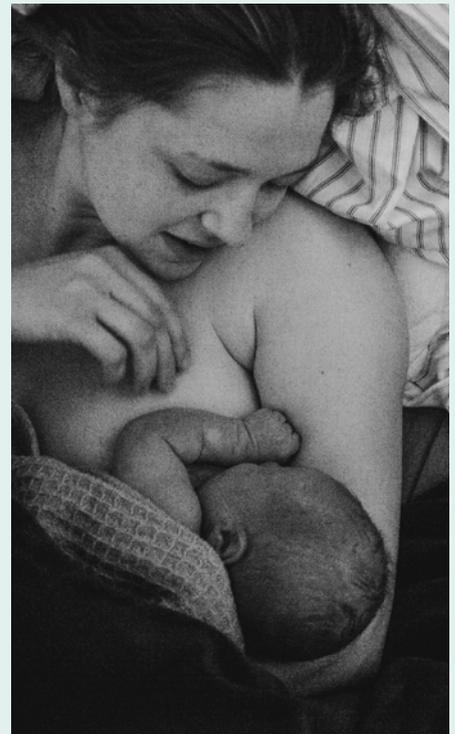
a fast second stage and a fast birth. But the rest then followed peacefully and slowly.

I birthed my placenta leaning over little Owen, and after receiving some uterine massage and labial suturing, I breastfed him for the first time. It all felt so surreal. As a student and professional midwife, I had always admired breastfeeding women and jealously watched brand new mums connect with their

newborn babes with the breast. Now it was my baby, my breasts. Unreal.

Before long Janine had tucked the three of us back into bed. Matt snuggled up beside me, and Owen cuddled up to my chest. We stayed like that - in our new family cocoon - right through the day and until the next. Our family had just been born. What followed for Matthew and I was the beginning of our adventure into parenthood together. We embarked on our fourth trimester, with our beautiful, beautiful boy.

Photo credits: Hannah Wong & [Janine O'Brien - iBirth](#)



Bio: I am Ruby-Rose, a young mum, and midwife. I live with my wonderful husband Matthew, and my gorgeous son Owen (now 6 months old). I finished my midwifery training in 2019 and went on to gain VERY practical experience through my own child bearing experience in 2020. My home birth taught me about patience in the waiting, and trust in the birthing process. My story challenged me in ways I didn't know possible! It's an honour to share.

I'm SO thankful that my own experiences can now enrich what I give back to women in my work. I'm enthusiastic about empowering women to experience safe and fulfilling births. Now that I have been breastfeeding for 6 months, I'm also passionate about supporting women through their feeding journeys. I never fully understood the enormity of the transition into motherhood. What a gift to empathise deeper with the women I will care for in future!



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BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS

ISABELLE GRACE VALERIE TELFORD - 12 FEBRUARY 2021 -

Desiree, Brad and doting big sister Auriella welcoming Isabelle Grace Valerie Telford. Born at 41 weeks, 12/2/21 at 7.28pm Midwife was Celia from caseload at Westmead. Desiree birthed at home as part of the new Westmead Hospital Publicly Funded Homebirth program. She was also supported by doula and photographer Virginia Maddock. *Photo credit:* [Natural Beginnings Photography](#)



TÉO BATTERHAM - 21 FEBRUARY 2021 -

I have always said our little man will be born on my late grandmother's birthday which is 21/02, and sure enough, he did at 39+4 weeks. My waters broke at 3 am and the surges started straight away - 3-4min apart. I woke my husband up around 4 am then my 2 wonderful midwives, Tracy Pyle and Heidi Williams, and my photographer Kate Kennedy arrived around 4.45 am. I decided to jump in the pool shortly after and it was an amazing feeling! By 7.25 am I screamed that he was coming and by 7.31 am he was born peacefully in my husband's arms weighing 4.2kg and measuring 55cm. He was born with 2 knots in his cord which was quite mind-blowing! It was the most empowering and incredible experience I have ever had. I am so proud of my body for achieving my perfect home birth & I would have not have been able to do it without my two wonderful midwives and husband! *Photo credit:* [Kate Kennedy Birth Photography](#)



HUXLEY ERNESTO FOWLER - 23 NOVEMBER 2020 -

Our 'almost homebirthed' second baby boy, Huxley, arrived earthside via a healing VBAC after a spontaneous straightforward labour with a slightly unexpected 2am ambulance ride for a little help at hospital. We were lovingly supported throughout the long journey to that moment and beyond by our dear friend and private midwife, Janine O'Brien. Huxley is a much-anticipated little brother for Lewis and has made himself right at home with his beautiful eyes and cheeky smile.





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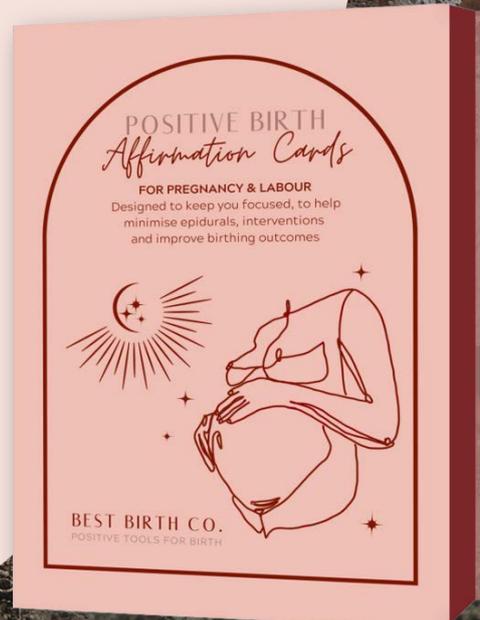
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THE BIRTH OF HUDSON

BY MICHELLE COURT

It was just 2 weeks before my due date and I was out for the day getting the very last pieces of equipment I needed ready for our homebirth. "Okay!" I announced when my partner got home that evening, "We are now ready to give birth!" An hour later, at 7:20 pm, my waters broke.

I was feeling really well. Still energetic and relatively comfortable. I was convinced that my babe wasn't coming anytime soon. Nope ... I was sure I was going to be going over my due date.

So when my little voice came from the toilet where I was investigating if my bladder had given up on me or not, my partner didn't believe me. "Ummmm, babe. I think my waters just broke." "What? No. You still have ages to go!"

After some rushed texts back and forth with my midwife, Jacqui, the plan was to settle in for the night, and she would come and visit in the morning to see how I was going. I settled down on the lounge to watch television and be as 'normal' as possible. At this stage my contractions were 6 minutes apart.

By 9:30 pm my contractions were 3 minutes apart and I was no longer able to ignore them. I remember thinking, "If it is this painful already, how on earth am I going to withstand this for a couple of days?"

By midnight I could no longer take it. I needed my Mum. Every contraction was gritted teeth, all consuming, trying desperately to breathe through the pain. I was bound to my rocking chair – the only place I was relatively comfortable. White knuckling the arm rests, so desperately trying to relax my muscles that were all coiled in with overwhelming tension. Occasionally the contractions were so fierce across my back they would send me flying out of the rocking chair in an attempt to try and dull the pain. But so soon I would return to my chair. At this stage I had become good friends with my bucket, emptying my stomach over and over again, and I had visited the toilet more often than I could count.

When Mum arrived she asked, "How far apart are your contractions?" I flung my phone at her with the contraction app open and ticking, as another wave of a contraction rolled over me.

"Okay, an hour and a half apart," she noted. "No!" I snapped. "That's not an hour and a half. That's a minute and a half!" "Okay, so ordinarily you would be at the hospital by now. I think it's time to call Jacqui."

Jacqui arrived at about 1:30am. She stayed with me for a little while and she asked if I'd like an internal examination. After originally not wanting one, I had now changed my mind – I desperately needed to know what time frame we were looking at.

Two centimetres. I was absolutely gutted. I was so sure my baby boy was near appearing. "It's time to strap yourself in, love. I think we have a while to go yet" Jacqui said with her arm around me.

It was decided that Jacqui would go home and get a few hours sleep so she could support me fully for the seemingly long day ahead. I shed a tear as she walked out the door at 3:00 am.

The next little while was a consistent blur of my clockwork contractions: 1 minute 30 each with a 30 second rest, more relationship building with my three new best friends: bucket, toilet, rocking chair, and me saying countless times, over and over again, "I don't think I can do this".

4:45 am crawled around and I was annoyed that I needed to go to the toilet AGAIN. Whist I sat there, all of a sudden this deep desire to push came over me and I realised no, I didn't have to go to the toilet again. I needed to start pushing!

"I need to push!" I yelled out from the bathroom. And with those four little words, it was all systems go. My partner was running around filling up the pool. Mum was back on the phone to Jacqui.

I got in the shower looking for some kind of comfort and relief. On the phone Jacqui asked me to check and see if I could feel the head. As I reached inside, a jolt of excitement pulsed through me. I could feel my baby boy's head! He was so close to being earth side. I was so close to having him in my arms. This was when we all realised that Jacqui wasn't going to make it. She called Jo, who was closer, to get to us as soon as possible.

Now, I was completely focused. Any doubt that I had previously left me. In its place was a deep primal focus. My body knew exactly what it had to do and everything around me had dissolved to nothing. Just me, my baby and the flow of active labour.

I eventually submerged myself into the pool where I found some comfort leaning forward, draping myself over the sides of the pool. My mum was directly in front of me and I vividly remember the most beautiful moment when we looked straight at each other, grasping hands tightly, and I said, "I can do this" with such conviction. I knew my mum believed in me beyond anything I could imagine.



It was all happening so quick, we were still waiting for Jo and Jacqui but this babe was coming fast. My partner asked at one point, "Could you please wait until at least one midwife gets here?" But this baby and my body was not going to wait for no one!

We could hear Jo's car crunching on the gravel of the driveway just as I announced, "This is it. This is my last push!" I have no idea how I knew my labour was coming to an end, but for some reason I just did, without a doubt.

With one final, guttural push at 5:25 am, Hudson graced us with his presence. I pulled him out of the water and enveloped him in my arms right against my bursting heart. With tears in my eyes, meeting



my babe for the first time, I quietly whispered to him "We did it".

Jo walked in just as I cradled him in my arms. At that exact moment everything switched from my body being in control and knowing what to do on a primal level, to my mind now totally freaking out. I had a tiny human! I was truly blessed in that moment to have Jo who so kindly celebrated my success, as well as reassure me of any concerns I may have had.

Jacqui arrived soon after and the morning passed in a delicious homebirth bubble – snuggled up with my precious baby in the comfort of my lounge-turn-bed, courtesy of my wonderful midwives. I was elated and extremely proud.

WE DID IT. JUST ME, MY BOY, AND MY CHEER SQUAD.

Bio: I was a first time mum, who decided to homebirth after feeling as though the universe was screaming at me not to birth at our local hospital. I am now mum to Hudson who is one, step-mum to Riley who is ten, and partner to Mitch. We live in the glorious Lawson in the Blue Mountains where we soak up as much of our beautiful surrounds as possible. Our local homebirth community has welcomed me so warmly and I have learnt so much from these inspiring, strong, amazing women. I feel incredibly blessed that I was able to start my parenting journey with a homebirth.

Photo credits: Debbie Court & Mitch Cooper

COVID-19: A MIDWIFERY STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

BY ERIN QUINN

I began my midwifery degree a few weeks before NSW went into lockdown at the end of March 2020. In our practical unit, we had learned proper handwashing technique and how to use personal protective equipment. Just before we were going to learn how to take vital signs, the university campus closed to students.

Our classes went online. Classes in the time of COVID-19 were easier to manage logistically, in terms of not having to travel, and not having to juggle other commitments such as school drop off. The downside was that online classes were far less engaging by their very nature, through no fault of the lecturers. No matter how interesting the subject matter, it was hard to keep focused while sitting at a computer for up to four hours at a time. I had lots of time at home to complete assignments, but my whole family was home too, and my house is not big. I couldn't even escape to the library!

One of the things I was looking forward to in pursuing my midwifery dream was the women I would meet sharing the journey, the

bonding with my peers. Another consequence of being off campus is that I haven't gotten to know my fellow students the way I would like to.

The lockdown made the practical component of the degree fairly redundant. Our initial placements were cancelled. Instead of learning to take vital signs in class, and consolidating the skills gradually through regular practice in a clinic, the university allowed us to come onto campus for an intensive two days in June. Our skills were assessed the following week, and the week after that we were finally sent out on our first placements, like little fawns on wobbly legs.

I found this placement was more stressful due to the sense of not being as competent as I should be; though I suspect this was all in my head. All the midwives I worked with were very kind, and nowhere near as hard on me as I was on myself.

I had never worked in the hospital prior to the pandemic, so I guess I don't have a frame of reference, but I don't think the day to day duties of a hospital midwife have

changed much – at least not in a hospital where there have been no cases of COVID-19 in the maternity departments. We have a room put aside for COVID-19 positive women, but it hasn't been needed so far. We are still caring for women throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. Antenatal appointments changing to telehealth during the tightest lockdowns was probably the single biggest change.

And then there's the mask wearing. A small change, which technically doesn't alter the performance of our tasks, and yet I feel it could potentially have a bigger impact. Hiding our faces from the women we serve feels so wrong. A midwife meeting a woman for the first time needs to build rapport fast, and our ability to do this is curtailed by the mask. Perhaps as a student with limited clinical skills I feel this more, as I am rarely the one doing the talking, and sometimes the only support I can give to women is a non-verbal expression of empathy.

It lies in stark contrast to my own experiences of care from my homebirth midwives. As a

home birthing woman, used to antenatal appointments that could go for hours in my own home, I would never be able to accept this perfunctory mode of care for myself, and I don't want to accept it for other women. Some women spend more time in the waiting area than in their actual appointment. I am already imagining ways to make appointments more individualized, even if I can't control the length of them.

If I feel less connected to women on the other side of a mask, all the time I am acutely aware of how it feels for them. Most of the women are receiving fragmented

care in the system as it is. It may not change midwifery practice much, but the women's experience of care must be vastly different. Instead of woman centred care, they are bound by Covid restrictions at such an important time. They can't bring children to antenatal appointments, or even postnatally to meet their new sibling. Likewise, the tradition in some cultures of having extended family visits for a new baby is forbidden. Some women have even been denied support from loved ones while attending ultrasounds, and must receive the results of these scans (whether happy or sad) alone.

As a home birthing woman and a midwifery student, the importance of placing pregnant women within a paradigm of wellness has been emphasised. In the hospital we hide all the medical equipment behind curtains where possible. But now there's a great big visual reminder of illness that we wear on our faces. We know women need to feel safe in order to give birth safely. How does this affect their feelings of safety? How does it affect their trust and connection with us?

I am also a trained doula. It's been an adjustment to go from attending births of women that I have formed a relationship with (women that are educated and relatively privileged in knowing what a doula is and being able to pay for one), to attending births of strangers. It's hard to not be able to 'doula' them the way I instinctively want to. I want to be holding their hands, not palpating their fundus through ten minutes of contractions. I want to be looking at the woman, not learning how to interpret the CTG reading. I often have the urge to call my own homebirth midwife, who didn't do these things to me in my birth, and jokingly ask what kind of midwifery skills does she have, if she doesn't do these things? I guess I am fortunate to know that there is more than one way to be a midwife, and I know which kind of midwife I want to be.



Bio: Erin Quinn is a doula, student midwife and home birthing mother of three living in Western Sydney. She values both evidence based practice and the inherent expertise of women regarding their own bodies and babies, and hopes that her midwifery practice will one day reflect this.

THE BIRTH OF SUNNY VAI

BY DENYA AROHA MAY

The first signs of my contractions were at around 11:30pm on Monday 19 October 2020. I woke up feeling nauseous and with period-like pain. I remember my midwife, Jo Hunter, telling me to try and ignore the contractions until I couldn't ignore them anymore. So I tried to go back to sleep. The pain was getting a bit more intense so I woke up and set myself up on the couch with a movie. I thought I'd just ride it out gently on my own for a while, but the surges were becoming stronger and started to come quite frequently. I woke my partner, Drew, to time the contractions for me and to get in contact with Jo.

The sun had been up for a little while, we then let our birth team know and slowly people made their way over. I know it's not everyone's preference but when I say 'birth team', we really did have a whole team! It was super important to me that Drew felt just as supported in the labouring/birthing space as me, so we had my parents, John and Mesepa, my godmother Seneuefa, her husband Herbert, Drew's parents, Mark and Diane, Drew's sister Zoe, the two midwives, Jo Hunter and Athena Hammond, and our videographer/photographer Jerusha Sutton.

The whole time baby was posterior, so I tried all the recommended positions and tricks to help promote her swinging around into a more ideal position. Nothing seemed to be working and the pain in my back was very intense. I had to remain inward and allow my breath to be my anchor.



Night time came and I had already laboured in and out of the birthing pool, and although it was great for the pain relief it was slowing things down too much.

I laboured on my bed and on the floor, but the toilet seemed to be the most comfortable place for me. My waters hadn't broken so my Midwife, Jo, suggested I go outside and stomp on the driveway to see if they would break.

I feel like this is when the real magic began.

Drew came outside with me and followed my rhythm by holding my waist and stomping in time. It felt primal, rich and raw. I felt connected to the earth and to the many women who had come before me in this initiation.

One by one we had family members come out and join in with the stomping. A big bass drum and the Patè (Samoan wooden drum) came out, hands were clapping, people were singing, humming and dancing all around me. I was being treated like a goddess. My waters still hadn't broken. I needed a break from stomping so I bounced on the ball on our front deck. My dad started playing the guitar and my mum, joined by my godmother, started singing some Samoan and Māori songs. The dancing continued and I remember hearing beautiful, joyful bursts of laughter. I managed to sing along to a couple of songs, and smile at the joy that was being created, but had to quickly return inward and follow my breath again. It was overwhelming yet so beautiful and powerful. It was a perfect display of how everyone was in it with me - in it with us; supporting us, loving us, and allowing the process to unfold naturally.

As time went by and it was getting very late into the night, people found places all over the house to sleep. My contractions were getting stronger and stronger as I laboured on the toilet. I could feel baby moving around with each surge trying to get into that

ideal position. It was during this time that something changed. Instead of just intensifying my breath, I started to vocalise by making a quivering drone-like sound. My mum and godmother supported me in the bathroom as this sound seemed to be coming out involuntarily. My mum kept encouraging me by joining in with a karanga ~ traditionally a Maori exchange of calls as part of a welcoming ceremony. It felt like my ancestors were there, assuring my baby she was welcome and safe to enter this world.

My waters still hadn't broken so I had tried pushing against them myself and even that didn't work. I then agreed to having them be broken by my midwife, which really moved things along. Before I knew it, my midwife Jo said, "ok let's go to the pool. You're about to have your baby."

This was it ~ the big moment. It felt great to finally be able to do something with the surges other than endure them. Baby's head was well and truly coming down. I pushed again and remember thinking, "this is what they refer to as the ring of fire!" By this stage everyone had gathered in the birthing room and was surrounding the pool, waiting eagerly. I could hear my mum saying, "sau, sau, sau." Which means, "come, come, come" in Samoan. Another push and her head was out. Swiftly the rest of her body shot out into the pool! Jo then beautifully said, "Denya, pick your baby up." My hands reached down and there she was. I lifted her steadily out of the water and into the air for her very first time. The room was electric! There was a chorus of gasps and sobs, the sounds of pure love, joy and relief. I didn't cry but I stared at her in absolute awe. I birthed such a beautiful, healthy baby. I leant over and kissed Drew, acknowledging that in that moment, we too were born as parents.

After a good long while of sitting in the pool holding her, Drew's dad asked, "what do we have?"



I was almost shocked when he asked me because it hadn't even crossed my mind to check yet. I lifted my arm and quickly said with a big smile on my face, "it's a girl!" Majority of the predictions people had were boy, so when all was revealed, the room erupted in joyous celebratory laughter.



My placenta ended up needing a little encouragement to come out. I was so tired of pushing that it felt like I forgot how to. Out came our placenta! We then ritualised this moment with a tradition from my Samoan side of the family where the placenta gets placed on the chest of the baby and their arms wrapped around it, giving what was their source of life a final embrace. As we did this we sang a Samoan song of acknowledgement, gratitude and hope. She amazingly stopped her cry, listened and began to massage the placenta with her hands. Drew then cut the cord in this sacred moment.

Sunny Vai was then measured and promptly given back so that Drew could have that very precious skin to skin moment with his daughter. After a whole 27 hours, our little girl was here in our arms. We snuggled up in bed for the first time as a family of three. We were exhausted, excited and vulnerable after such an incredible experience. We did it!

Bio: My name is Denya Aroha May and I was born and brought up in the Blue Mountains, NSW. I am of Polynesian and European descent. I had a beautifully alternative, musical, adventurous upbringing, and I grew up being around and part of transpersonal development workshops for people from all over the globe. My early childhood Steiner education supported my already creative outlook on life, and I continue my creative practices now in visual arts, music and dance.

Photo credits: [Jerusha Sutton](#)

“BIRTH TIME” VISITS BYRON BAY

BY JOSI JENTZSCH

I was beyond excited to strap my baby, Baer, into his carrier and grab my bestie to head to the screening of *Birth Time*, in Byron Bay. It was a long awaited documentary, and oh my goodness it was so worth the wait!

Firstly, I think we all need to take a moment to appreciate the glorious outfits that Jerusha draped her bump in, at every single screening. Sequins have never looked so fabulous!

Birth Time has been in the making for 4.5 years. The incredible women behind this masterpiece are Jo Hunter (Mother and Privately Practising Midwife), Zoe Naylor (mother, birth advocate and actress), Jerusha Sutton (mother, doula, photographer and sequin queen) and Selena Scoble (mother, Olympian and marketing guru). After Zoe birthed her third child at home with the support of Jo and Jerusha they realised yet again what a travesty it was that not more women had the opportunity to birth in their power.

“With new born babies and toddler in tow we took charge, pressed record and dove head first into asking women, their partners, experts and birth workers what they knew, what they had experienced and what was happening in our

maternity system here and around the globe, and that is how the *Birth Time* Movement began.”

This documentary covers all aspects of the demise of our current maternity system. It gives you a heartfelt, tear jerking and gut wrenching look into the life or mothers and fathers that have suffered.

“Each time I went into the hospital environment; I think my body just shut down.”
- Melanie Podolski

We hear the accounts of seasoned birth workers and doctors, explaining how the “modern” maternity system has been over medicalised with an eye on the bottom line at all times, “I’ve come to talk about how the epidurals are like the Trojan Horse in the birth space.” - Rhea Dempsey

We get to meet Cherisse Buzzacott and Melanie Briggs, two Aboriginal midwives and senior members of the *Birthing on Country Project*, a project designed to change the face of birthing services for Indigenous women across Australia. Cherisse in particular, shares in intimate detail the horrific events she experienced at the hands of medical staff. Their fight continues to enable Aboriginal women to birth on country.

It is my opinion that this documentary is an absolute must-see for men, women, mothers and fathers, birth workers and medical staff. Each and every one of us should watch and learn. We have to work on dismantling a broken system. The current maternity system is no longer serving us but we can be a part of the change. As Zoe so aptly describes it, “we can all be cicadas making noise. Maybe one cicada is hard to hear but you cannot ignore the noise of thousands of cicadas”.

I am fortunate to have birthed both of my sons at home. After my mother, unbeknownst to her, passed on her birth trauma to me I decided to break the cycle. I was able to watch this documentary and feel a renewed fire burning in my belly - we must continue advocating for our birthrights.

Birth Time will make you laugh, cry, rage and hopefully head to their website to find out more about how YOU can be part of the change.

Mamas, who may have experienced birth trauma, please be gentle on yourself.

Thank you to the forces behind this movie. An eye opener, even for those of us that are already part of the homebirth world.

Birth Time

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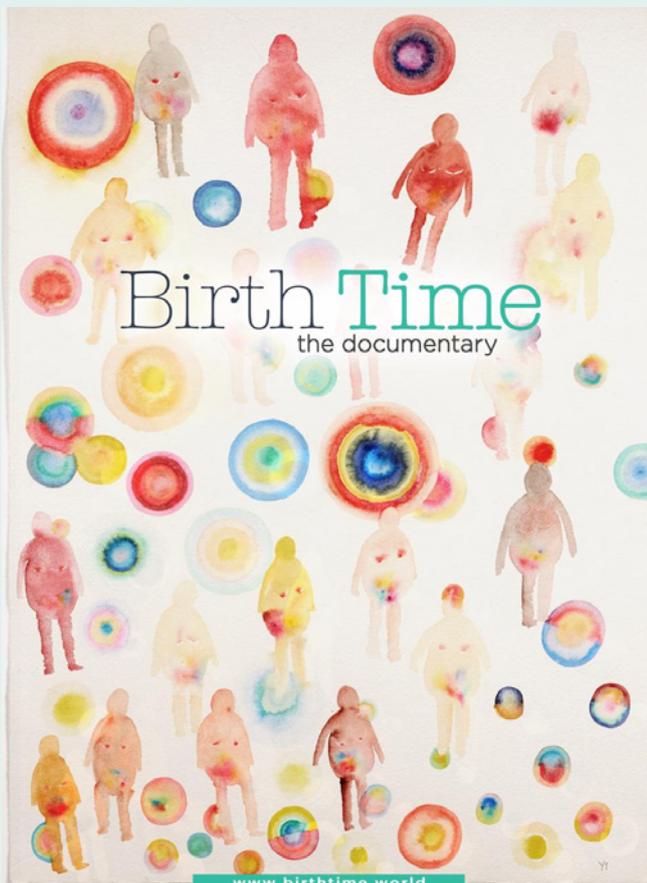


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IGNATIUS

BY ANASTASIA TODD

Experiencing, even witnessing, a birth like this connects you to great power. You become engulfed in a sacredness, a wisdom, a gateway to a different plane and faith. That deep and humble understanding never leaves you. I am so blessed to have had my devoted husband, Michael, my beautiful midwife, Chantel Letertre, and my shining friend (doula/birth photographer), Emma Burke, by my side. Ignatius was born at 4:12am on 6 November 2020, at 41 weeks weighing 4.295kg, 55cm in length, and sporting a 36cm head circumference.

With my worst experience of HG yet, we were positively convinced that we were having a girl (ha!). I'd already had two water births at hospital birth centers so I felt very confident in my body's ability to birth a baby, and after a few uncomfortable experiences in hospital previously plus having friends who had also birthed their babes at home, I was inspired to try home birthing. Ignatius had been positioned perfectly throughout my whole pregnancy right up until I'd had a chiropractic appointment to induce labour. He clearly was not ready to join us at 40 weeks, as DURING the session, he turned posterior. I definitely had to dig deep with prayer and hypnobirthing sessions to calm myself at this point.

On the night of November 5th, I'd started having more Braxton Hicks but they fizzled out. I'd even texted Chantel that everything was normal and boring! By some miracle, we'd inflated the birth pool that night to be prepared for the next week. I slept on the couch just after midnight because I felt like labour

was imminent. Woken at 2am by a serious contraction, I got excited... but only 1 or 2 more came that were irregular in timing. I stayed awake and waited with my contraction timer. Michael stumbled out of bed and crept out to the living room, asking if I was okay. I told him I might be in labour but wasn't sure, and that he should go back to bed (he didn't).

At 3am, my surges became regular at 2.5-3.5 minutes apart. I called Chantel and calmly explained the situation through a surge...I sounded so relaxed, though, that Chantel advised I message her when I couldn't talk through them anymore! 10 minutes later, I messaged her, "Michael reckons you should come now". By this time, I had also called Emma who had reacted similarly to Chantel!

Moments later, I had the urge to eliminate with the surges, and this happened in a HUGE way, three times! I lost my mucus plug with the first elimination, and with the second elimination, my waters gushed out all over the toilet and floor, considerably lessening the pressured feeling. I was texting Emma while on the toilet and she replied that she was brushing her teeth and about to leave (she ended up not brushing her teeth!). I texted Chantel as well to which she replied, "fill up the pool!".

It was so surreal, as I had gone from not knowing whether or not I'd contacted her too early to knowing with full assuredness that things were in full swing in such a short space of time.

I walked around the apartment, wondering why I felt like I was in transition and starting to panic from the intensity when labour had only just started. I tried humming, singing, praying, and hypnobirthing, but in the end, the most relief was provided when Michael firmly pressed into my lower back so I could lean back into him during a surge.

Emma arrived at 4am and started setting up her camera and taking shots. I still remember her face upon entering the room and seeing me completely naked holding onto the pool - she went from cheery face to "ok this is serious". Michael was frantically filling the birth pool with buckets of water in addition to the hose whilst intermittently pressing into my back, which Emma thankfully took over. Just before I started to push, Emma murmured, "your body was made for this", which was incredibly soothing and empowering. I was feeling a little confused because not much earlier, Michael had said he couldn't see the baby's head, yet I really felt like our baby was almost here. Emma asked if she could remove her hands, and I spat out immediately, "the surge is still going!" She hadn't realised because I'd gone quiet to let my body do its thing.

I felt SUCH immense pain relief when the sensation went from surge to push. I told Michael and Emma that baby was coming. Michael checked and realised that I was right. Emma raced to get her camera, and both she and Michael urged me to get into the pool, which was finally ready. By that point, however, I was standing outside

the pool, holding onto the handles with my legs shaking, and I knew that my body was not going to be coerced to go anywhere - baby was coming RIGHT NOW!*

*NB: I still get aches in my left hip flexor... if you want to birth standing up, don't favour one particular leg!

Michael cried out to Emma, "how do I catch it?" She replied, "you just do!" Priceless.

Michael's biggest fear was coming true. I gave out a low moan and Ignatius' head emerged, followed 10 seconds later by the rest of his body rocketing into Michael's steady hands. It happened so fast that we couldn't get a picture of him emerging and no one can remember whether or not he was posterior! I immediately looked down and exclaimed, "is it a boy?!" I was helped into the pool, holding Ignatius, and embraced the sweet sense of



release to let go of my baby's weight those long, tiring months. Looking into his perfect face gazing up at me was sheer bliss and gratitude. I did have a 2nd-degree tear, but it was the least I'd torn during a birth and I only lost 100ml of blood.

My eldest, Silouan, banged on his

bedroom door at this point and climbed into the pool naked to look at Ignatius. He said, "there's a little bit of blood but I will make you feel better". I asked him how and he replied, "with a bandaid."

Chantel rang the doorbell 25-30 minutes after I'd given birth (we hadn't realised she'd been outside texting us!) and Michael astonished her, saying, "the baby's here!"

We all laughed together about the whirlwind birth before Michael bundled Silouan back to bed.

Soon after, I was assisted to the couch and Chantel guided me to push out my placenta, which had become slightly stuck behind my pubis bone. This was such a healing experience, as with both my previous births, the midwives/obstetrician had forcefully pushed down onto my stomach, causing immense pain. Chantel sutured the tear with my permission after I shed some fearful tears. I can handle labour but not needles! Having experienced suturing three times now, Chantel has the BEST touch - there was minimal pain, she checked in with me every step of the way, and recovery was by far the quickest.

We are all still so in love with our little family, and I feel so blessed to have experienced an accidental free birth with all the perks of private midwifery care.

Photo credits:

[Emma Burke Photography](#)



Bio: Anastasia Todd is the wife of Michael and mother to 4-year-old Silouan, 2.5-year-old Seraphim, and 4-month-old Ignatius. She composes contemporary classical music for orchestras, choirs, smaller ensembles, and film on a commission basis, and is currently enjoying a short hiatus from her conducting work. Anastasia plans on homeschooling her tribe of vibrant little gentlemen and fills her cup with her Eastern Orthodox faith, family, her like-minded friends, books, tea, nature immersion, gourmet cooking, soulful conversations, singing, and generally just keeping an eye open for magic and adventure.

THE BIRTH OF HENRY THEODORE

BY EMILY MULHALL

A fast and intense labour of just over an hour. We had a sudden location change from home to hospital, but his birth was everything it needed to be. I felt empowered and informed the whole way and that is what made all the difference.

This birth took me to an ethereal and otherworldly place in the stars I have never been before, where I was calmly and quietly flanked on either side by Peter John Horner and my midwife Cara McDonald Midwifery and spiritually flanked by Jaime Leigh Hawkins, who had nothing but complete belief and faith in me and my ability to bring this boy into the world.

As I roared him into the world, I was momentarily struck by how calm and quiet the entire bathroom was in contrast. Due to being in the water, none could see if or when he was emerging so it was with quiet prompting from my midwife to listen to my body as he descended, to surrender to the massive waves that smashed into me minute after minute. That I could do this despite my protesting. To feel for his head, to whisper to her that his head was out and then his body. As I scooped him up and onto my chest, the immediate relief my body felt was incredible. A feeling I recognised well and acknowledged as I did his brother and sisters that came before him.

At just 27 minutes of active labour, his actual moment of birth is brief, intense and with little fuss. His



story however from conception to pregnancy to birth has been etched in the stars since the dawn of time. When I was chosen as his mother. A gift and the greatest privilege that has been bestowed upon me for a fourth and final time. An honour for which I feel unworthy, just as I do to his brother and sisters, but with which I will devote my life to as I have done before. And as I choose to do every day henceforth.

For Pete, who once again had unwavering faith and commitment when I said to him early this year in tears 'there is one more little boy to join this family' you have once again demonstrated why you are the man I love and married.

Born 24.10.20 in the water, into my waiting arms Henry you are so loved.

Bio: Emily is wife to Pete and mother to four children, James 10, Molly 8, Charlotte 4 and Henry 4.5 months. Residing in the lower blue mountains she is enjoying living a slow and authentic life with her family, nostalgic for a simpler time. She spends what little free time she has enjoying trail runs with her dog George, op shopping for antiques and reading into the small hours of the night. She is passionate about sustainability and her and her husband are planning to soon build a cob house made from reclaimed materials in Darug country.

Photo credits: This is what I Doula Photography



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TOBY

BY JANELLE HINZE

My labour really began at 11:30pm on a Friday night after a happy day with mild cramps every half hour. I didn't get to sleep at all because that's when everything ramped up. Each surge came hard and fast with no gradual build up. They just hit me. Ben called the birth team when surges were 3-4 every 10mins.

Midwife Meg felt my belly before getting in the pool. She noticed bub was posterior, I'm glad she didn't tell me since I had asked for positive reassurance and not too much detail.

Time flew in the pool. I was hot and roared through contractions. I coped, but it was intense.

My Birth team gave me cold drinks and icy chux cloths. My eyes were mostly shut and I was hyper aware of anyone talking, although I said some funny things which made the others laugh.

I was aware when I reached transition. Soon after that things changed. It felt stingy, as though bub's head was coming into the birth canal. Meg preempted my urge to push. She encouraged me to hold off on pushing while I could. I couldn't wait much longer, so I growled and pushed.

Meg suggested holding my vocal energy in and to push into my bottom. It wasn't natural for me, but I tried. It was hard work but so powerful and it achieved more. My body took over. I held my breath in and went along for the ride. I couldn't resist. Meg asked to check,



and it was encouraging to hear that bub's head was about 1.5 to 2 inches down. I'd been in the pool for a long time so we moved to the toilet. I was hot and we needed to get things moving.

The surges on the loo were more painful, but I could feel progress now every push. My legs were aching so I had to get off the loo after a while. I went to the floor next to the birth pool. I leant over the birth ball and pushed for a while there, but then moved back to the loo. I was just so uncomfortable and the pain didn't subside that much between the surges now. The pain was so strong in my sacrum. Meg checked for bub's head again and got me to check too. 1 inch inside now. I felt really pleased, it was good to feel the head so close.

Bub's heart rate increased for a while and then returned to normal, they considered whether to transfer me

to hospital or not. But both I and bub were coping so we proceeded.

I was distracted with the extra doppler checks at that point. It's so good I didn't know the facts because I was thinking, "yeah this is really hard but it's no harder than I expected".

I was humbled by the pain, I almost felt defeated but we kept going.



I felt bub kicking wildly and I had read that babies are active participants in labour. I had no idea what was happening but contented that bub was doing something to help possibly. We moved from the toilet to the floor again.

Once again leaning over the ball on the floor, I gave some of my best pushes, like I was literally pushing my guts out my bum. The pain was serious yet the surges were relieving as the pushing helped the pain. It felt good to hold my breath and push while squeezing the birth ball with my torso and arms. It was relieving.



My waters finally burst on the floor. The waters were clear so that was a good sign things were well with bub.

Each surge was hard but I was impatient and I longed for the next one between them, everything was in slo-mo. Meg gently tried to slow me, I thought it was too slow, lol.

The head came out pretty fast with about 3 pushes in one surge. Bubs' head emerged with normal presentation. That kicking I had

felt was bub turning themselves around. It was pretty wild and now I know what was happening. What a strong bub to turn 180 degrees!

The ring of fire was a fizzer because of the pain from my sacrum. I felt the sting but it was a distraction compared to the other pain.

I felt a twang in my bum as the head emerged as I tore. A little sting and, "oh I think I tore"! Meconium dribbled out around the head which was ok because it hadn't been long since the waters had broken clear.

With the head out and bub waiting, the pain was the most of any I'd felt. I had pressure between my bottom and sacrum like nothing else. I felt helpless at that point. I just had to breathe through it. I was exhausted.

As the head was born the room was quietly joyful as they could see beautiful kissy lips that were moving and there was hair etc. I thought that was lovely but I had no ability to be present in that moment. I felt sad about it and disappointed in myself but at the same time I had been to the depths. It took an effort for me to come back.

Finally about 2 minutes and bub turned and slid out into Ben's arms. A slimy green meconium bub. I felt sad and distant as bub was fully born and I had to have a few moments just to catch my breath.

As bub lay crying on the floor below me, I could see it was a boy, we chose not to find out until birth. He was beautiful. I was overwhelmed and I just shivered. I had nothing left for tears. Despite drinking 5 litres, I'd pushed for more than 3 hours in total.

At our hospital that wouldn't be allowed, neither posterior

presentation. We would have had an instrumental delivery or c section.

Toby was born at 7:34am on Saturday 14/11/20 - his due date and our 16th wedding anniversary - the best anniversary gift ever.

Just hours after his birth I was at peace with everything. I learned of the posterior position and that next time we should call Meg sooner because it was a quick first time birth despite being posterior. She says my next bubs will walk out so I must call her earlier!

The placenta came an hour after. There was no more bleeding than from the 2nd degree tear but Meg was able to repair it. She did a good job too.

Meg and Sharnie are an amazing duo. They helped me so much postpartum and I needed them so much. That's another story.

Bio: Janelle 35, lives with husband Ben 37, of 16 years and 3 month old son Toby, on the Mid North Coast. They jointly operate an Avocado and Beef cattle farm with Janelle's family. They married young, both from large families themselves. They welcomed Toby earthside on their 16th wedding anniversary 14/11/20 on his due date in their home. Midwife Meg, Doula Sharnie and Janelle's mum completed the birth team. Janelle and Ben plan for more homebirths.

Photo credits: Sharnie Murphy

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS

MAHALIA GRACE - 10 OCTOBER 2020 -

She's finally here! Our beautiful Mahalia Grace. Just when I thought I'd be pregnant forever, at exactly 41 weeks, our little girl entered the world on the 10.10.2020. And what a wonderful entry she made here at our home, supported by her Dad, Kuya (big brother) and Nanay (grandma); and guided by the wisest, gentlest midwives Emma Fitzpatrick and Robyn Dempsey. It was a well paced 5hr labour from the first cramps at 8.30 in the morning to the final grunt at 1.25pm that glorious Saturday afternoon.



ADELINE CHRISTINE RAWLING - 12 FEBRUARY 2021 -

Adeline Christine Rawling born 12/02/21 at 2:33pm at home with the support of Marie from Midwyf Services. Adored by her 5 big brothers and Mummy and Daddy are in love!





Claire Heenan Doula



I am a doula based in the Blue Mountains and servicing surrounding areas of Nepean, Hawkesbury, Western Sydney and Inner West Sydney.

I believe all women deserve continuity of support throughout the transformations and rites of passage we go through.

Within my doula work I offer:

- Pre-conception, pregnancy, birth and postpartum doula support as individualised packages or one-off tailored sessions
 - Mother Blessing Ceremonies
- Women's Circles and Motherhood Circles from the MoonCourt Temple at my home in Springwood
 - Closing the Bones and Sacred Belly Binding
 - Goddess Girls Circles for young girls and teens

If you would like to get in touch, please feel free to reach out via any of my details below!

Phone: 0413 416 210

Email: claireheenandoula@outlook.com.au

Website: claireheenandoula.com.au

Social Media: [@claireheenandoula](https://www.instagram.com/claireheenandoula)

Photo credit: Laura Coleman Photography

Emma Burke

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birth@emmaburke.com.au

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THE BIRTH OF HUXLEY ERNESTO

BY RACHEL FOWLER

Trigger Warning: mention of previous c-section, general anesthetic, hospital transfer, instrumental birth.

I knew after the birth of my first son, Lewis, that I wanted a different experience for our second baby and I knew I wanted to avoid “the system” that had failed me and lead me down the path of a failed induction and emergency caesarean under general.

So in November 2020, I was 41 weeks pregnant with our second. We had engaged Janine O’Brien (iBirth) and obstetrician Marisa Martin at Westmead for our VBAC journey and had everything in place for a beautiful homebirth. My mum had come to stay with us to be with Lewis and to be there for the birth.

With wonderful support and guidance from Janine, we found ourselves at 41+1 still waiting for any sign of labour. We had an appointment with Marisa where we declined a sweep and agreed to wait until 42 weeks for anything further. That night my waters broke! We had a comedic moment of panic, rearranged the birth room as planned, and then all went to bed to see what the night would bring.

41+2 and unfortunately labour didn’t start overnight. Janine came to see us, and we agreed to a GBS swab. We discussed the recommendations for induction for prolonged ruptured membranes, and Todd and I agreed we would wait as long as possible for labour to start. Later that day we received a positive GBS result! Well that was unexpected and totally threw me off my game. We discussed the recommendation for antibiotics but agreed we would wait until the next morning and would hopefully have a baby overnight. I had a few moderate surges around 10pm which fizzled, and I got a relatively good night’s sleep. However, I woke the next day still pregnant.....

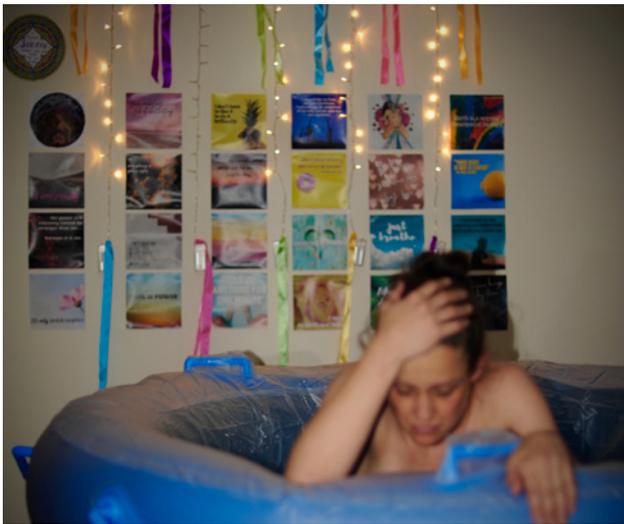
41+3, I felt fairly discouraged at this point. Janine came and we had a bit of a reset discussion. I was

having intermittent tightenings but it just felt like Braxton hicks still. We agreed that we didn’t want to wait any longer than another 48hours due to the GBS risk, so we decided to try castor oil. I had the first dose at about 11am. I went to lay down upstairs. It was hot and I felt quite lethargic. Gradually I felt myself slip into a strange consciousness, I dozed, I sat upright, I tossed and turned. I felt the oil start to work, my tummy churned. I lost track of time. Eventually Todd told me to go downstairs into “our birth space”. He reminded me that’s where I needed to be. I still wasn’t sure if anything was happening, but I moved down there anyway. I opened my bowels and vomited a few times and knew the oil was working. I could feel baby wriggling and twisting, almost corkscrewing into my pelvis. At this point I felt something shift. The surges became more intense, along with the nausea. I got in the shower but couldn’t stand up so was on all fours. When I dried off there was blood. I had another moment of fear. What if the intensity of the vomiting had caused a rupture or abruption? I messaged Janine, she reassured me that it would be my bloody show. I returned to the bed, not even realising that this meant progress! It was about 10.30pm by this stage.

41+4, at some point Todd came in and wanted to know what was going on. Hours had passed, and I don’t think I spoke a word the whole time! I was completely in another world. Todd insisted on timing the surges and made the decision around 1.00am to get Janine on her way. Todd and Mum started to set up the birth pool. By this stage I was on all fours on the bathroom floor. The surges were coming thick and fast, and I was having to vocalise and sway my hips. Next thing I knew Janine was next to me. She checked baby’s heart rate and I remember hearing her say “perfect”. I’m not sure how long we sat there but I felt Janine check baby’s heart rate again and she mentioned that baby probably didn’t like that position. Janine asked if she could examine me to see where we were at. I agreed. 9cm with an anterior lip. No wonder things were intense! Janine

listened again and his heart rate was recovering ok, but still having big drops. I remember asking if I could get in the pool, Todd helped me in, and I sunk into the warm, comforting water. That was a moment I had imagined for a long time.

I kept my eyes closed and focused. Janine asked if I could feel anything in my vagina, yes, I could feel his head! Amazing! It was soft and squishy and right there. I realised I was pushing; I couldn't help it. Janine listened again another extreme deceleration, and I heard Janine say the words that, during all the preparations, I had desperately not wanted to hear "I think we need to go".



Surprisingly, I wasn't alarmed, I wasn't panicked, I wasn't even really upset. I knew in Janine's voice that something wasn't right, and I trusted her 100%. I heard her say it again to Todd. I sensed his panic, and I sensed Mum's concern. I remained focused and trusted that they were all holding my space, and getting things organised. Why didn't I pack that damn hospital bag, haha!

Next thing I heard Janine on the phone to emergency services, I remember she was having trouble due to the lack of phone reception. I remember hearing the slightest bit of stress creep into her voice. I sensed that the ambulance had arrived. Without really thinking I got up out of the pool, we were going. It may have been gut instinct, or my trust in Janine that this was the best option.

I grabbed a towel and after a quick hug with Mum I was out the door. In the ambulance I continued to push and focus through the surges. It was possibly at that moment that I realised my much longed-for homebirth had slipped through my fingers, but I couldn't let those thoughts hang for too long. We

needed our baby earthside safely and this was our story. I felt Janine right next to me, one ambo in front of me, and another sitting behind me. And away we went...

I felt the corners, I felt the bumps, I kept my head down and focused, pushing and swaying with each surge. I felt Janine's hands and the ambo's hands holding me up as we went around corners. I still felt incredibly calm, I felt safe. I knew baby wasn't coming, but I pushed anyway.

We made it to the hospital and the next thing I remember clearly is Janine saying, "oh my goodness you're at the wrong hospital". I was pulled for a moment out of labour-land to realise that Janine was on the phone to Todd. I was laying on my back on a bed in the birthing suite, Chantel, our second midwife, was there, but Todd wasn't actually by my side! I realised in a flash that Todd had gone to the private hospital and we were in the public hospital. Janine gave him directions and I was overcome by the next surge. I had no desire to think about the possibility that he could have missed the birth. Or that he still could! I felt deep down somewhere the guilt for not having explained properly during one of the antenatal appointments, I felt his panic. But within what felt like the next breath he was there beside me, and so was Marisa. The full team. I felt safe and knew everything was going to be ok.

Chantel and Janine got my legs up in the stirrups and I had the overwhelming realisation that I was facing an instrumental birth with no pain relief. No time to think as the next surge came through. I felt the pressure in my hips as I tried to relax and open. I felt Janine's touch, everyone's support and encouragement. I felt the stretching, the touching, the pressure. I heard Janine say gently "Come on Rach, we need to get baby out".

The thought of my long awaited VBAC was far from my mind. This was not how I imagined it. And yet this was it. This baby was about to come out my vagina! I pushed with everything I had. I was so thirsty. I couldn't open my eyes. Suddenly I felt the head burst through and the instant relief. I remember Janine saying "look down and bring your baby up". I opened my eyes, I could see a little head and upper body. I reached down and tried to bring our baby up, "I can't, it's so slippery". I felt the rest of the body leave mine, and there HE was on my chest. Warm and wet. I'd done it. Holy shit! His little hand grasping my finger. We'd done it!



Janine turned him over to face Todd and he let out big cry. I looked at Todd, a boy! We both laughed. (Two weeks later we named him Huxley).

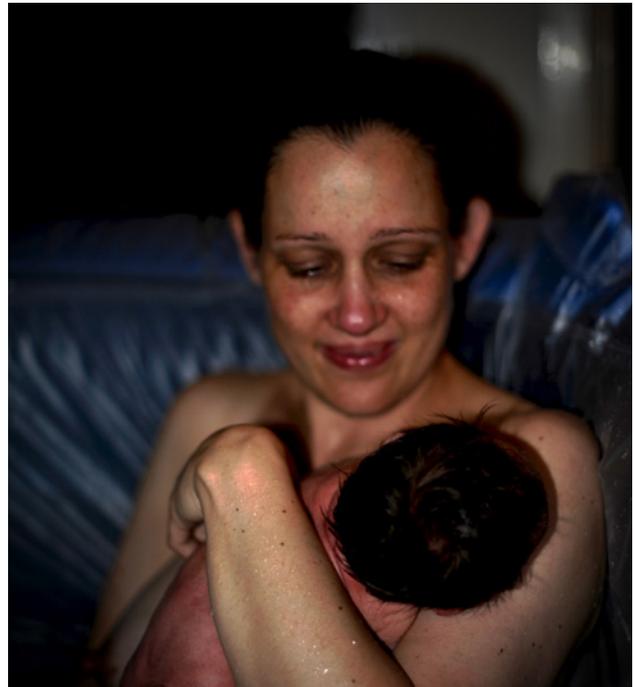
I felt like I was as high as a kite. Everything became a blur from that point. I was talking but I don't really remember. I think I may have asked for a physiological third stage, or perhaps Janine told Marisa that this was my preference. I remember a comment about the cord being long (70cm when I measured it later). I remember feeling the placenta coming out and seeing it in the bowl, still attached to Huxley. I remember him latching for his first breastfeed. What an amazing feeling! I was in an absolute oxytocin bliss bubble! We'd done it!

We stayed overnight for monitoring and discharged ourselves the next day as I was desperate to get home to Lewis. It was a strange feeling coming back in the front door. Everything was still in the same place except the pool had been drained slightly.

At Janine's beautiful suggestion, we refilled it that night and Huxley and I and Lewis re-created the moment we missed out on. We sat in the pool together and I explained to Huxley that this was meant to be "the spot". I was a blubbering mess, but it was extremely healing. We got photos and I was able to sit and soak it all in.

The whole experience has been incredibly healing. I am taking some time to grieve the loss of the homebirth and to celebrate achieving a VBAC. I have watched the videos back 100 times. It was certainly not how we planned but I sit here now, and am so thankful. For all Todd's support, for my Mum's support, and to Janine, Chantel and Marisa for empowering us to make the choices that we did, which ultimately made it all possible.

I am proud to be a VBAC Mumma. Maybe we'll get our homebirth next time!



Bio: I am a member of the HBNSW Committee, a student midwife and mother to Lewis and Huxley. I live with my husband, Todd, and our boys in Thornleigh NSW. Both my birthing experiences have taken unexpected turns, however it was the model of care that made all the difference the second time round. I hope one day every woman will have access to a known midwife, through a continuity of care model, and access to funded homebirth!

Photo credits: Todd Fowler,
[Janine O'Brien - iBirth,](#)
[Chantel Letertre - Midwife to Mother](#)

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS

HARLOW JADE BRIGHT **- 20 OCTOBER 2020 -**

Harlow Jade Bright was welcomed peacefully into the world surrounded by her two older sisters Charlie (10yrs) and Maddison (8yrs) her Daddy and two of her aunts in a beautiful home water birth. I was supported by my amazing private midwife Louise David and back up midwife Emma Gedge and student midwife Jen. It was an amazing second homebirth for myself and incredible that her big sisters got to witness their baby sister being born.



ÉLISE BIDABÉ **- 6 MARCH 2021 -**

Welcoming our Sweet Little Girl into the world. Élise Bidabé joined our family 6 March 2021 at 11:46pm, weighing 3450g and measuring 51.50cm. Her waterbirth was gentle and calm and she was surrounded by so much love. We couldn't have asked for a better birth experience. We'd like to thank our incredible birth team - Midwife Janine O'Brien, doula Ana Nosseis, second midwife Chantal Letertre and birth photographer Alisia Mason. Thanks for all your support and for respecting our birth choices. A dream has come true! Proud parents Naissa and Florian and big sister Eloá.



THE BIRTH OF DAPHNE

BY FEYRUSE KHATIB

I had a tiring pregnancy, dealing with Hyperemesis Gravidarum for the third time from early on and then Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction, alternating weekly chiro and physio appointments and struggling to walk around the house by the end, so when I hit 40 weeks I was so very ready for my baby to come.

After an hour or two of sleep, I woke up at midnight at 40+3 with what felt like slightly painful Braxton Hicks in my front lower belly. It took an hour to realise they were real contractions, once I was having to breathe a little through the tightness, so I told my partner to get some sleep.

I lay in bed scrolling through Facebook, seeing that my doula, Aimee, had just made a post after getting home from a screening of Birth Time, and making a mental note not to call her too soon so she would get a couple of hours of sleep! I was becoming restless, and after braiding my hair so it would be out of my way for the labour, I went downstairs and called my photographer, Kendyl, as she lives 2 hours away, and then started making school and preschool lunches for our four children so that we wouldn't have to worry about that in the morning.

I called my mum while making sandwiches so she could get ready and head up to be there when the kids woke up to get them ready and take them to school. I was really having to stop and breathe through the surges while leaning over the kitchen counter, and since I was timing them with an app, I noticed they were only 5 minutes apart, so I called my midwife, Mel to let her know, and soon after I called Aimee. My partner then came downstairs and started filling the birth pool in our lounge room.

Soon my doula, midwife, and photographer were all there and I was cheerfully eating a bowl of weetbix between surges. My parents arrived a little while later, getting a couple of quick hours of sleep, and before long the children were awake and getting ready for school. Knowing that the kids were up, my labour stalled, so my midwife went home for a



little while to have some breakfast with her own babies and recharge for the day ahead.

By about 10am, once Mel was back and the children had all gone off to school and preschool and my parents went into town for the day, my surges came back in earnest. I started to get tired, so I spent a while sitting on the lounge room floor with Jerome and Aimee, surging over the birth ball. I wanted badly to get into the birth pool, but I knew it could slow things down and I wanted to make sure my body progressed as effectively as possible for as long as I could handle it, so I asked for the TENS machine and Aimee attached it to my back and showed me how to use it. I needed to use the bathroom a lot at this point, as I was making a very conscious effort to stay really hydrated by drinking lots of coconut water, and my body was starting to empty itself in preparation for the birth. It was agony as every



time I went to the bathroom I would have a really powerful surge, so Jerome came with me each time so I could wrap my arms around his waist, holding tight as I breathed through.

The TENS machine wasn't doing much for me as my pain was so strong in the front, with none at all in the back, so after a while I took it off and Aimee got out the rebozo to try some spinning babies techniques, as it was getting harder and harder to manage the pain in my hips and thighs. I got on all fours and Aimee used the rebozo to wrap it under my belly and take the weight of my belly from my ligaments, which gave me great relief. My surges were becoming strong enough that I couldn't get through them with the rebozo on me. I had to stop everything and really work through them.

I was finally at the point where I really needed the relief of warm water. Thankfully my wonderful birth team had been heating pots of water on the stove, topping up the pool to keep it warm throughout, so it was ready for me to get in when I needed to. I didn't feel the immense relief when getting in the water that I remembered from my last two labours as this pain was so different, but it did feel nice just to be in the water – I had been having almost daily baths to relieve my sore back toward the end of the pregnancy, so it felt safe and familiar.

I spent some time labouring leaning over the wall of the pool with Jerome kneeling beside the pool so I could hold onto his arms with each surge. It was becoming harder and harder to hold onto him the way I needed to get through the pain, so I asked him to come in the pool with me. Jerome sat in the water with his back against the wall of the pool and I knelt between his legs holding tight to his thighs and his ribcage with each surge while Aimee applied counterpressure to my hips. I started to drop into a bit of a trance and was able to sleep on Jerome's chest in between surges.

I noticed the sounds I was making became much longer and lower, something I recognised from watching a million wonderful birth videos, and realised we must be getting close. I felt baby very low in my pelvis. My birth team suggested that I reach in and see if I could feel baby's head at all. I couldn't, and felt discouraged, but was determined to start pushing to get to that point. Despite all my previous intentions to not pushing consciously





(as I had a wonderful fetal ejection reflex and involuntarily birthed my last baby) this was just different. My body was telling me I had to work for this and push to get baby's body down.

I pushed hard and managed to break my waters, which I was so thrilled at, as I had my waters artificially broken with my last two babies. The pain amped up significantly, and I started to panic a little as I couldn't find a comfortable position where it felt right to be pushing, but eventually I got onto my hands and knees facing Jerome and soon baby was crowning. I reached down and felt a hairy little head and knew we were almost at the finish line. I reclined back against the pool wall and the top half of baby's head made its way out, stopping there briefly, which absolutely burned, but I panted and then slow-breathed through it. After a few big pushes our baby was born, with Jerome catching her and making sure he handed

her to me underwater so I could decide when to bring her above the surface. We hadn't found out the gender during pregnancy, and I was stunned to find that we had a girl – I was so sure we would have a boy – but she was here, our Daphne.

Her umbilical cord was a little short, so Jerome held her close to me as I worked to birth her placenta. It took a bit of work, and a few blood clots, but finally, once I stood up, the placenta was delivered – another thing I was adamant to do myself after two actively managed third stages in the hospital. We spent a few hours on the couch feeding and being checked and relaxing. Per my wishes, Daphne wasn't weighed or measured until a few hours later when she had fed. Soon after we went upstairs, I took a shower, and we went to bed, where we stayed for days, totally blissed out. My first homebirth was an absolutely magical experience, and I am so grateful for the amazing team I had supporting me.

Photo credits: Kendyl Christian



Bio: My partner, Jerome and I live in the picturesque NSW Blue Mountains with our five children – we have two each and Daphne is our first together. I gave birth to my first two children at hospital, and they were wildly different experiences. Charles' birth, when I was 19, involved a 27 hour labour with Pitocin augmentation, artificial membrane rupture, epidural, episiotomy and a 3b tear. Olivia's birth involved an 8 hour drug-free labour ending in water birth. That second experience healed me enough from the first to trust my body to be able to birth safely at home.

PODCASTS

THE MIDWIVES' CAULDRON

Join us as we huddle, bubble, toil, and trouble our way through aspects of midwifery, birth, lactation, and womanhood. We tackle and discuss a variety of topics within the sphere of womanhood, birth, and lactation and what this entails in today's society. We want to be able to share in the strengths of women gathering together and being more informed, for their birth, their feeding experience, and the transition into knowing ourselves better. This is the podcast to connect us as a greater circle of women united.

midwifethinking.com

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Hosted by Alecia Staines, mother-of-five, maternity reform advocate and teacher, this podcast shares research and reflections from fellow lobbyists, birthing women, researchers and health professionals. The intention of this podcast is to change the culture around birth and maternal healthcare, and stir change among women and feminists alike to improve birth for women. Women share their birth stories, researchers share the evidence, feminists share their insight into how birth was forgotten in the continued liberation of women.

aleciastaines.com.au

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Are you wanting to learn more about vaginal homebirth after cesarean section and find your confidence to birth the way you feel is the best and safest for you and your baby?

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THE BIRTH OF RAFFERTY

BY ANNA JOHNSON

I had the wonderful privilege and joy of birthing my third baby through the Westmead Homebirth Service. As a Midwife, I have a great appreciation for birth and the importance of birthing in a place where one feels safe and valued. I have had two previous normal vaginal births through the Ryde Midwifery Group Practice stand-alone birth centre, where my care was exceptional and each birth left me in awe of both the woman's body and the wonder of the beautiful little babe that had been formed within me.

When pregnant with my third baby, I returned to enlist the care of my birth centre midwife, however, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the centre was temporarily closed and births were moved to a local hospital. Getting to and from appointments was made more difficult by having to organise care for my other children each time. As the pregnancy progressed, I started to develop anxiety around travelling a long way in labour to birth and coordinating care for my children.

My Midwife discussed the various options available to me and I contacted Westmead Home Birth service early in my third trimester, fortunately they had availability. My husband and I had some questions about the service so we met with Lynelle, one of the Midwives, to discuss both my suitability and decide if a homebirth might be an option. Upon meeting Lynelle, I felt immediately at ease. She brought a calm reassurance, complimented with a confident clinical capability. After a long visit with her, I was once again VERY excited about birth. I no longer had the anxieties about travel, privacy and childcare and instead was left with confidence and anticipation of what was to come.

Lynelle came to our home for midwifery appointments. My children loved being involved with the care, listening to their little brother's heart beat and talking about baby's growth and position and so, for the first time in the pregnancy (due to COVID-19) the pregnancy became a family event.





I went seven days post-dates and attended Westmead for a full check-up with Lynelle and an Obstetric Registrar. Everything was normal and so I chose to continue to wait. I had a couple of days of pre-labour on and off and Lynelle maintained contact over these days, continuing to visit and check up on baby and me.

On the Friday morning, I was eleven days post-dates and still niggling, I knew baby wasn't well positioned and so I spent the morning going through a string of different positions from the Spinning Babies website. Lynelle performed a sweep at my request and I went for a walk with the kids. Contractions started to increase throughout the day.

The kids and Chris had such a fun time preparing the birthing space by inflating the birth pool provided by the hospital, lighting candles and warming heat packs. We played music and I helped bath the kids between contractions – these were things that I thought I would prefer not to do in labour – but it helped pass time and seeing their bubbly little faces was a positive reminder of what I was doing. We gave our children the option to be part of the birth, we had talked about what would happen and they had watched their own birth videos – but as the afternoon progressed they both decided they would prefer to wake up to baby in the morning – I think they realised they weren't quite up for the intensity of the birth experience.

We had been in contact with Lynelle throughout the day and as contractions increased in regularity, she travelled over to our home. The relief at not having to coordinate child care and car travel to the hospital was significant. Tucked away in the privacy of my own home, I felt at peace and safe. I could feel my little one kicking away throughout the labour, nudging into position. My son and daughter would sometimes dash into the room to check progress and, in the nicest way, it made the whole labour pass in a very normal, Friday afternoon activity kind of way!

With the kids tucked into bed, the sun setting and Lynelle arriving, my little one didn't take long in coming! Only half an hour after the kids were asleep our beautiful little Rafferty Jude was gently birthed into water and I lifted him out of the warm water for his first gasp of air. We were elated! I felt incredibly safe and cocooned in this space that we had created for birth. Rafferty had a good cry and then a long feed as we sat in the pool. I had no blood loss and so was able to sit and feed him in the pool for a long time before moving to the shower to birth the placenta. My third stage was physiological – and my postnatal recovery was quicker this time around, with much less blood loss – I drank copious cups of a postnatal herbal tea which noticeably aided my recovery immediately post birth and in the weeks following.

Following the birth, I dug into a big meal with the enthusiasm of someone who has achieved greatness and then lay wide awake on my own soft bed reliving the highs of the day – I didn't sleep a wink that night, high on birth! Lynelle left after 4hrs of close observation and returned the next day and continued to visit and maintain close contact in the two weeks following.

The next morning the kids, sensing the presence of a new, tiny being, crept in to meet their little brother early. It was so very special to enjoy these quiet moments of wonder with them in our own home. We live in a small two bedroom flat and so each time I sit down at our dinner table, where the birth pool was, I am filled with joy for the little life that was birthed in that spot! Our home has been imprinted with a life-changing experience.

My husband reflected that he felt much more included in this birth – I found this interesting, given that during the previous births he had very much been part of the action! He said that having



to practically set up the pool, help with the kids, fetch things for me and the midwives gave him a fuller sense of being a part of what was happening rather than an extra.

I had two previously wonderful birth experiences. But having this third little one at home was so special for us as a family. I appreciated the way that it normalised birthing for my children, made my husband feel included and very necessary to the birthing process and the intimacy and privacy that I experienced at home really added to my sense of achievement at doing something remarkable! More than this though – I found birthing at home incredibly empowering, this was my space and I was in a natural birth environment. Having a baby at home was, in the loveliest way, just another day!

I believe women should birth where they feel safe and with skilled caregivers. For me, I was safe in my home. I am so very grateful for all the hard work that has gone into providing skilled midwives to care for women in their homes through Westmead Hospital, it was quite extraordinary birthing at home whilst having seamless access to a tertiary referral setting.



Photo credits: Chris & the Kids

Bio: I am a wife, Mum of three adventurous children – Huckleberry, Abigail and Rafferty. I am a Midwife and Nurse and before having my own sweet babes I had the privilege of working in Group Practice – during this time I worked with some incredible Midwives who helped shape my birthing ethos, taught me to listen to women, respect their fears, how to be a quiet and an engaged presence in the birth room. Whilst my heart and mind are on the home front, one day I would really love to utilise my Midwifery skills to assist those that don't have access to skilled practitioners. I love God and am constantly being wowed by both His amazing creation and the grace offered to me in Jesus.

BIRTHINGS IS THE HOMEBIRTH NSW COMMUNITY MAGAZINE.

THE THEME FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF BIRTHINGS
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HOME BIRTH NEW SOUTH WALES

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