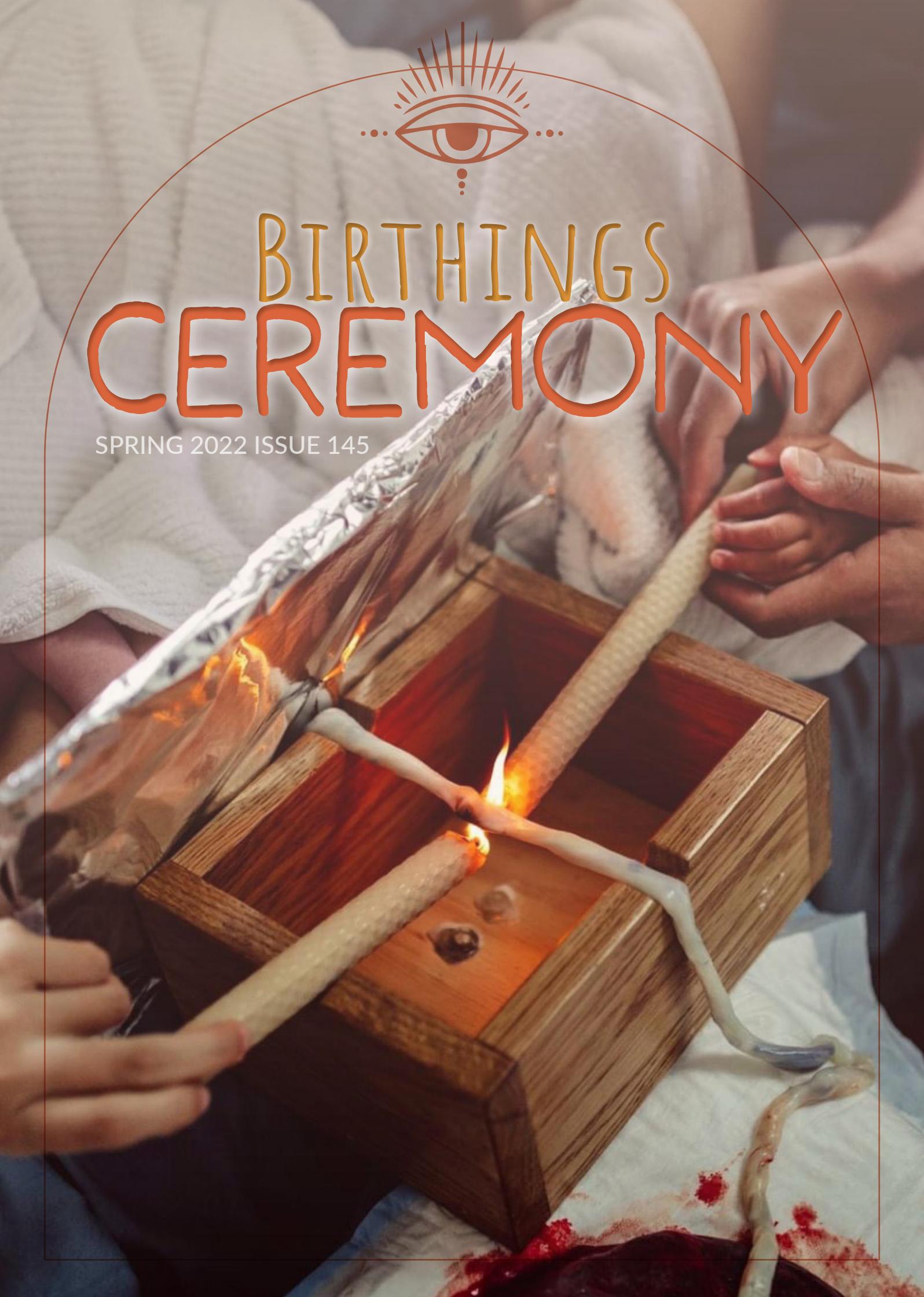




BIRTHINGS CEREMONY

SPRING 2022 ISSUE 145





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Homebirth NSW Committee acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the country on which we share birthings from.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of all the lands on which we all birth.

We recognise the continuing connection to the land and pay our respects to all Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all First Nations people.

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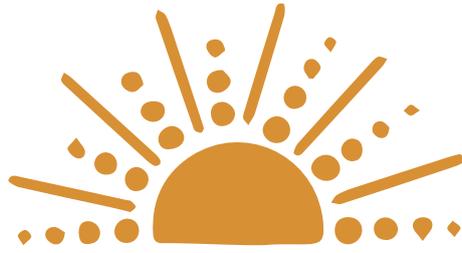
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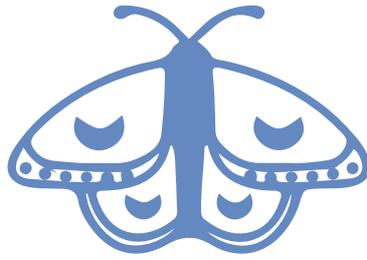
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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the Spring 2022 issue of Birthings, where we explore birth tradition and ceremony.

I'd like to acknowledge the Darug people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which I live and work and pay my respects to Indigenous Elders past, present and emerging. The Birthings team works across many lands and we recognise their continued connection to the land and waters, and acknowledge that they never ceded sovereignty.

Women are reclaiming knowledge of traditional and cultural practices around pregnancy and birth. In this issue, you'll see inside the world of ceremony. We hear from women discovering ceremony and connecting to their lineage. Birth workers also share the ways in which they are supporting women to gather together and celebrate mother's to be. This is also the final time

we'll be hearing from Aimee as president. Thank you from the whole Birthings team! We are sad to see you moving on but we are excited to see you continue your work supporting women.

Join us now as there is much to learn from each other and the women who have walked before us. We look forward to seeing you again in Autumn.

KATIE
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



LATEST NEWS

WOMEN SHOULD HAVE FUNDED HOME BIRTH AS A GENUINE BIRTHING OPTION

[WA Today | 10 Jun 2022](#)

Women deserve to have genuine options for funded planned home birth.

BIG CHANGES ON THE CARDS FOR HOME BIRTHS IN QLD

[Courier Mail | 19 Jun 2022](#)

The Queensland government is considering making home birth services publicly funded in a move to make the option more widely accessible for mothers.

I'M 43 WEEKS PREGNANT AND PLANNING A HOME BIRTH WITH NO INDUCTION

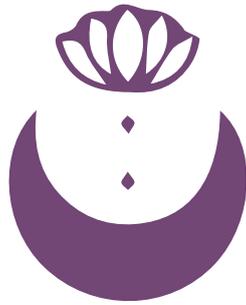
[Kispot | 18 Jul 2022](#)

A mum-of-two has hit back at claims she put her baby's life in danger by opting for a home-birth without any medical intervention.

AUSSIE MUM WHO OPTED FOR A 'WILD PREGNANCY' WELCOMES 'SURPRISE' TWIN BOYS DURING HOME BIRTH

[7News | 25 Apr 2022](#)

Following her desire to 'feel her own way' through pregnancy, Alison had a home birth at 34 weeks that featured a big catch.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hi there! Welcome to another issue of Birthings magazine (this time in colour yippee!).

We are excited to be releasing this full colour magazine to you and hope it finds you and your family well.

Firstly, I want to take a moment to pay tribute to the incredible Justine Caines OAM who passed away on 12 September 2022.

Justine leaves behind a beautiful family, many friends and so many communities who were so much better off for having known her. While I never met Justine in person, her online presence was formidable; I can only imagine how inspiring she was in person. Without Justine's tireless efforts organising The Mother of All Rallies in Canberra in 2015 (amongst many, many, MANY other advocacy events behind the scenes) homebirth with a private midwife in attendance would have been made illegal in Australia.

Justine is a large part of the reason homebirth with midwives in attendance is still an option in Australia and I am so grateful for her dedication, motivation and selfless advocacy for others in the homebirth, maternity and other

healthcare spaces, especially while she did this with young children in tow.

We will have an article written for the next Birthings magazine where hopefully you'll be able to get just a brief glimpse into the amazing work Justine did – her legacy will live on for many lifetimes. Thank you, Justine!

We have had some exciting committee changes recently! Katelyn Commerford (katelynthedoula.com.au), the

amazing woman behind the NBAC Guide ([instagram.com/thenbacguide](https://www.instagram.com/thenbacguide)) a Next Birth After Caesarean program, has joined our committee and will be taking over the President's role going forward.

She is an incredibly capable, connected and motivated mum, doula and NBAC guide, runs the Nepean/Blue Mountains VBAC & HBAC group, the Western Sydney Homebirth group (see page 36) and is just an all-round amazing woman.





I feel so excited about the future directions for Homebirth NSW under her watch. Thank you, Katelyn, for being willing to take over the role and for just being your incredible self!

We have also had the reinvigoration of our blog (homebirthnsw.org.au/blog) with Alex Griffin and Nina Maudslay joining our team! So expect to see lots more content, more birth stories, more theme articles and possibly some guest blogs coming from there too. If you're someone who'd like to offer your story, experience or a piece of writing, please email us at media@homebirthnsw.org.au. Thanks to both Alex and Nina for joining our team – we're so grateful to have you on board!

We have had a beautiful increase in attendance at our local group meetings over the past few months which is so wonderful to see! If you

aren't aware of a group local to you, please check out our website (homebirthnsw.org.au/homebirthsupportgroups) to find one, or if you have an awesome local group we don't know about, please email president@homebirthnsw.org.au!

We are planning our annual Homebirth Awareness Week picnic to take place at the end of October, so stay tuned for that to see where and when it'll be! We'd love to see you there! We also have a brand new, shiny media kit (thanks to Amy Todd!) – if you'd like to advertise with us, please jump on over and take a look at the tab, "Partner with us" for more information.

Finally, this is my final report as President of Homebirth NSW! Whilst I'm a little sad, as I said above, I am so excited to see the new energy coming into Homebirth NSW and what that

will do for the organisation in the coming months and years!

I am so grateful for the opportunities this role has provided, for the amazing people I've met and for the phenomenal committee that has carried this organisation throughout the time I've been a part of it.

I won't be far away, I'm sure I'll be lurking in the background for a while yet! Thank you to all of our members, midwives, doulas and advertisers who support our organisation, without you we wouldn't exist.

If you need to track me down I'll still be working away, supporting women in the best way I can. Just shoot me an email at birthaims@gmail.com. See you on the flip side!

**AIMEE
OUTGOING PRESIDENT
BIRTHAIMS.COM.AU**





THANK YOU AIMEE

A few months ago, I was speaking with Aimee, and she asked me whether I was interested in taking over from her as President for Homebirth NSW. It took a bit of thinking about and mulling over, but I eventually agreed. My lack of immediate enthusiasm was not due to any reservations about the organisation or its values, but much more to do with the fact that this was Aimee's role, and I wasn't sure (and it remains to be seen!) whether I was up to the challenge.

Anyone who knows Aimee knows how perfect she was for this role - committed and hardworking, definitely, but also understanding, gracious, and empathetic. And of course, a fierce advocate for homebirth and women.

I knew of Aimee before our first interactions together, from hearing her birth stories on a couple of podcasts. I loved her stories, and I recognised her journey to homebirth and her births as being similar to mine - narratologically, in part, but mostly philosophically. I felt a kindred spirit there, even before we had ever met or spoken.

It wasn't much later that our paths did cross more purposefully, when she reached out to me following my second early miscarriage and offered a sympathetic ear, having been through similar challenges. And

that's exactly the kind of person Aimee is - she is tremendously empathetic and cares deeply for people and their needs; even those she has never met.

It was an obvious choice to ask Aimee to support me through my second birth when I eventually fell pregnant again. We already had a relationship and clearly shared the same values and philosophies about birth and motherhood. And support me through that birth she truly did, arriving at my door around 11pm on the last night of spring, her steadfast presence and encouragement holding me through hours and hours and hours of hard labour before an eventual transfer. She met us at home practically as we pulled into the drive from the hospital two days later, and had meals, snacks, and feeding pillows in hand - ready and rearing to help wherever and however she could. She held all of my confusing and competing feelings about my birth with me: my disappointment and grief for the birth I thought I would finally get, but also great celebration, pride, and triumph for the incredible labour I'd accomplished and the beautiful baby I had brought into the world.

Her ability to comfort with simply her presence is a rare quality, and her dedication to each individual, organisation, and cause she has committed

her support to over the years, of which there are so many (Australian Breastfeeding Association, Homebirth Access Sydney/Homebirth New South Wales, Homebirth Consortium Australia, local maternity services advocacy, and of course, every beautiful family who has hired her as a doula or lactation consultant) is a testament to her loyalty, integrity, and empathy.

She is a woman who is born for this work of birth and breastfeeding support, and the women of the Blue Mountains and Western Sydney are truly blessed to have her.

Aimee will remain on as Vice President for a while yet and hopes to be able to continue to serve on the committee in some way after that. She has left me with a brilliant team of incredible women, passionate about homebirth and the right to access it, and an organisation that has been doing some amazing things.

Aimee, we can't thank you enough for all that you've done and all we know you will continue to do, both for us here at HBNSW and for women and their babies all over. You're one in a million!

**KATELYN
INCOMING PRESIDENT**



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BIRTH PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE
HAWKESBURY, BLUE MOUNTAINS & SYDNEY



"It was an absolute privilege to have Beth be a part of our daughter's homebirth and her work was truly incredible! I was hesitant to have a photographer witness such an intimate life moment but she came to our home and went about her work seamlessly and unnoticed during the labour and birth. A few hours after our daughter had entered the world and it was time for Beth to go home, she felt a part of our family and it was truly a joy having her there. The photographs that we have from that day really are priceless. She went above and beyond to curate two beautiful albums for us and we'd highly recommend to anyone seeking to entrust a photographer with capturing a once-in-a-lifetime moment."

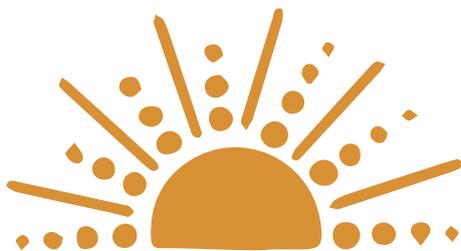
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MAORI CEREMONY

BY ALANAH AKUIRA

I begin with acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land and pay my respects to their elders past present and emerging. Without them we would not be here today.

My father was Maori, of the tribes Ngati Kanhungunu and Ngati Huia. My mother Australian, and I, on my own journey of learning te Tikanga me matauranga (Maori traditions and knowledge).

During my father's time growing up in Aotearoa, his parents were of the generation of Maori that had their language and culture beaten out of them. Almost to the point of the language being lost forever. Naturally following this generation, many customs and Te Reo (Maori language) were struggling to continue.

My father had minimal knowledge of his culture. He relocated to Sydney, on the northern beaches where he met my mother and had our family.

As I grew up, I had only been to Aotearoa twice and knew basic Reo such as, 'hello', 'good morning', 'sleep', 'food' etc. I am of Maori descent but have had limited connections with my people and community and have been very much

integrated into the mainstream (Australian) society.

My eldest son was born in 2019, at that time I knew not of traditional Maori birthing practices and found myself a part of avenues that did not align with my culture or highest self. It was after the birth of my son that I felt called to learn more about my origins of Aotearoa.

The kakano (seed/beginning) of identity had been sewn, I took up Te Reo Maori courses and began to learn more. I then fell pregnant with my second pepi (baby) and this time around I knew I wanted to

incorporate birthing practices that my tupuna (ancestors) had practiced.

I spoke with a cousin of mine who had experience with some traditions through her own birth in Aotearoa. She guided me through what she had done during birth and after. We had korero (conversation) about how I wanted to bring these practices into my own birth. I was faced with my own resistance, thinking things had to be so specific with the tools and instruments used during the ceremony which were very hard to come by here, she assured me that intentions were all that mattered. With my intentions





being to acknowledge my ancestors and their traditions and share this rite of passage and sacred journey of birth with my children and have them experience and witness these traditions with me. There are many rituals and traditions for each stage of pregnancy, preconception, conception, birth and postpartum. I chose to experience a traditional cord cutting ceremony and returning of pepi's whenua (placenta) back to the land.

Traditionally to cut pepi's iho (umbilical cord) you would use something like a muscle shell, pipi shell, pounamu (greenstone) or obsidian from where your tribe belongs. My father passed away in 2012 and his ashes were spread at Freshwater beach, a very sacred place to me and my whanau. A place he loved. It was there where I searched for a shell to sever the cord with however we searched several times and could not find a shell.

During this time, my son had broken a pounamu which

we had bought on our first trip to Aotearoa and gifted to my mother. Pounamu is significant to Maori, often found in riverbeds, it links heaven to earth, the stars and water. Immediately I thought this to be perfect to use as it was sharp where it had broken and was a taonga (treasure) we had kept for over 15 years. I was also gifted a pounamu at my firstborn's baby shower from an aunty. This came from our whenua in Aotearoa and was the stone I chose to sever pepi's iho over.

After 24 hours of labour, my son was born in the warmth of our home. I birthed his whenua shortly after and kept them attached for an hour or so. Not only is the cutting of the cord sacred, the tying of the iho was also a very important stage of this process. Our ancestors would have used various plants which were available in their area. One most widely available in Aotearoa is harakeke (flax).

When a harakeke plant is scraped, leaving the inner fibre exposed it is called muka. After



not yet receiving the muka I had ordered from home, a friend was able to source one in Australia (Mapihi and Co, Brisbane) and after the cord had stopped pulsating I used that muka to tie the iho.

In Maori customs, nature provides with all we need, and this natural method is a great alternative to the plastic clamps we see used in today's world. Muka is easy to use, soft against pepi's skin and doesn't get tangled in nappies or clothing as it will be attached to pepi until the rest of the umbilical cord (pito) naturally detaches from the belly button. Muka is also known to have antibacterial properties and is very absorbent meaning the pito can heal and dry out fast. This is very much true in my son's case, his pito dried out and detached within 3 days.

Tane (men) played an integral part in birth, they would chant karakia (prayer) specific for





birth for the mother and pepi and would also be the ones to cut the iho. For me personally it felt intuitively right for the iho to be cut by myself, with my tane being present through the whole journey. As shown in the photos, I laid the iho across the large pounamu and severed the cord with the smaller sharp piece. These pounamu are now family heirlooms to be passed down, should my tamariki choose to honour their children's birth in this way.

Maori believe the whenua (placenta) should be buried back into the whenua (land). As you can see we have the same



word for both placenta, and land because if not for both of these sacred things, we would not be alive and be here. The ancient practice of burying placenta, whenua ki te whenua, reflects the Maori worldview that placenta, like land, provides physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual nourishment and furnishes all the needs of humanity. It is also believed that the burial offers to preserve the child's Mana (divine right, prestige), Mauri (life principle) and gives us Turangawaewae (a place of our own to stand) as well as preserving the Mauri of Papatuanuku (earth mother). "It reflects the deep reverence and connection that Maori have with the earth, personified as Papatuanuku, a divine mother earth like creature" – Ngahuia Murphy.

Some days later we buried son's whenua in a pot and when his pito came away we also buried it alongside the whenua. It felt deeply nourishing to honour son's whenua, his protector, guardian angel, God, because without this there is no life. It will be kept in this pot until we have our own land to bury it on and carry on our whakapapa

continuing to reignite the mana of our lineage.

The importance of the survival of indigenous knowledge and birthing knowledge has become paramount to me. To honour and respect the wisdom my tipuna held, is to now carry this knowledge through to the next generation. This is the kakano (seed) of identity, essence of who we are as native people and my tamariki, having experienced this rite of passage now have the taonga to carry on tradition and the stories to tell with them.

My name is Alanah Akuira, I am 26 years of age and a proud Māori and Australian woman. I live on the Northern Beaches of Sydney with my partner and two boys. I am a youth worker and have always loved being of service, that's where my heart lies. I love all things birth and have always wanted to be a mama since I was a little girl. What lights me up is learning what I am passionate about which is being a conscious mama, self-development, health and wellness, holistic healing, low tox living and being a mental health advocate! I love being immersed in mother nature and deep meaningful connection that ignites one another. And I am somebody who wants to make a change and encourage people to rekindle their relationship with their intuition. I believe in the deep innate wisdom of our bodies and share this with whoever I can, especially within the realm of birth.

Photographers: Jerusha Sutton & Midwives



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THE BIRTH OF AYLA MAE

BY DEANNAH BRAUER

I had been experiencing braxton hicks consistently every evening from about 7 months. Once I hit 36 weeks, these became more intense and more frequent, but every night I'd go to bed and wake up the next morning still pregnant.

From 37 weeks, I started losing my mucus plug, but nothing eventuated from this. For my entire pregnancy, I had mentally prepared myself to go past my 'due date' but I was still hopeful that I would have my baby before then. My body had had enough - I had an irritable uterus and was also experiencing pelvic girdle pain - so every day closer to my due date, the more miserable I felt. My due date soon came, and just as quickly as it came, it was gone.

At 41 weeks exactly, I woke up around 4:30am to broken waters. I took myself to the bathroom to clean myself up and within 30 minutes, I had my first mild tightening. Around 7am I let my midwife know that my waters had broken, but my tightenings were still very mild and not consistent. For the next few hours, my tightenings didn't eventuate into anything - they were very sporadic and mild, however I was experiencing bad back pain as baby was posterior. I popped the tens machine on my back around 8:30am and used it all day and that seemed to help with the back pain.

Because of baby's position, I also knew I had some work to do, as it was likely a positional issue as to why labour wasn't 'progressing'. Throughout the morning, I did spinning babies techniques and the miles circuit, as well as walks, ball bouncing and rest, but nothing seemed to help. Around 1:30pm, my midwife came over to check up on me and it was thought that baby was still posterior. My midwife left around 3:15pm and within a few minutes, I had my first intense tightening that I

needed to stop and focus on breathing through. From that moment, the tightenings were intense and coming only minutes apart. At that time, my husband arrived home from school pickup, so we set the kids up with some afternoon tea whilst he and I had a lie-down on the bed. For the next hour, I lay on the bed, breathing through the tightenings, but I was still in denial this was the real thing. Come 4:30pm, I got out of bed and told my husband it was probably time to get the pool ready. I called my midwife around 4:45pm, and she knew straight away she needed to come back. Once I got off the phone with her, I let the rest of my support team know it was 'go time'.

As my husband was filling the pool, I laboured in the kitchen, leaning over the kitchen bench with my husband doing hip squeezes during tightenings which was a massive relief for the back pain. My midwife and photographer arrived around 5:30pm and I hopped in the pool about 15 minutes later, which provided instant relief for my back pain.

Not long after being in the pool, I felt our baby move (presuming this move was her finally turning from





posterior to anterior) and at the same time, I felt a big pop - the rest of my waters had broken. Next contraction, I felt the urge to start bearing down, and our little one's head was birthed within minutes. At this point, our little one got 'stuck'. There had been a few contractions and the shoulders still weren't coming out, so my midwife was concerned about shoulder dystocia, so she needed to be more hands on at this point to help get our baby out. With our midwife's assistance, our baby was born at 6:02pm surrounded by her dad, brother, sister and Hammie (grandma).

Our little one took a while to transition to the world, so she needed some extra physical stimulation to start breathing, but after a couple of minutes, she was screaming her little lungs out. We then had our 5 year old announce to us that I had just given birth to a GIRL.

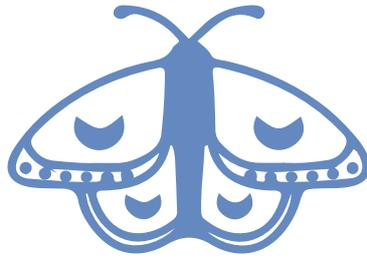
I stayed in the pool for about 25 minutes before hopping out to birth the placenta. Because of the postpartum haemorrhage (PPH), I had with my second birth, it was in my birth plan to have a synto shot to help deliver the placenta and to hopefully

avoid another PPH. Within a couple of minutes of having the synto shot, the placenta was birthed, and unfortunately not long after, I did have another PPH, but it was managed so peacefully that I barely even knew it happened.

As a family, we enjoyed our little oxytocin bubble for a couple of hours. My 5 and 2 year old went off to bed around 8pm, and by 8:30pm, I'd showered and was back snuggling my littlest love on the couch for the next couple of hours before we took ourselves to bed.

I'm Deannah and I'm a mum of 3 kids (5yrs, 2yrs, and 1month old). I have a background as a social worker in the child protection system but nowadays you'll find me behind a camera photographing baby bumps and families, and supporting families as a birth and postpartum doula in the Upper Hunter Valley NSW. I found my passion for birth work after I experienced a beautiful and healing birth with my second child and soon after, completed my doula studies with the Australian Doula College.

Photographer: Earthchild Photography



FAREWELL PLACENTA

BY ALEX GRIFFIN

It is a cold, mid-August evening and I find myself standing in our garden, transfixed by the moon. It is a full moon, and it marks three months since the birth of our daughter, Aya. Earlier today we had gathered in this very spot to honour and farewell her placenta, to mark the end of her birthing journey, and to honour the “lost” placentas of our two older children.

It seemed like the right time. Burying Aya’s placenta felt symbolic of the shedding of the fourth trimester “cocoon”. The meal deliveries from family and friends had stopped, the midwife visits had ended, and we had been venturing outside more and more. Our cocoon was dissolving, and we were finding our feet amongst the pace of the world once again. Both this cocoon and Aya’s placenta had provided nurturing and nourishment to us in some way, and now it was time to let go of both.

I had spent the last three months integrating three very different births and the lessons held within each. I’d come to the realisation fairly early on that whether I like it or not, whether I resist it or embrace it, life will deliver many lessons. Some will be exquisite. They

will ignite something inside of me that will make me skip on air. They will be joyful, even healing. Others will be painful, sometimes excruciatingly so. They will teach me of loss, grief and struggle. The rite of passage into motherhood has gifted me with both types of lessons, beginning with a fairly brutal one in the cost of disconnection with my instincts, my inner knowing and my autonomy. It took me some time to find the lessons within that first birth, and it wasn’t until the birth of my third child, a birth that truly opened my eyes to the magic within myself, and within birth, that I felt the full gravity of what I had lost in those previous births.

Integrating these three birth experiences has been a process. It’s been heart-breaking, empowering and exhausting. So much of this inner work has gone unseen, and I’ve found during this time, as in other significant periods of my life, ceremony and ritual have been powerful in bringing visibility and reverence to this inner work, in outwardly acknowledging and processing the experience.

Our older kids had painted a little wooden box, and my

eldest daughter, Frankie, picked out some 100% cotton fabric. I sewed a little heart onto it and we wrapped Aya’s placenta in it. We lay Aya down next to the box, lit some candles, and I retold her birth story. We each placed our hand on the box and thanked her placenta for all it had done in sustaining her life over the last 10 months. The placenta was formed from her cells and initiated the very first connection between her and I. It felt hard to let go of, but it didn’t belong to me. It belonged to her and returning it to the earth felt powerful, it created a sense of reciprocity; the earth had nourished me (and her), and we returned the product of this nourishment it to for the very same purpose.





Burying her placenta was also sharing who she was with the earth, in the alchemy of her cells, in her life map etched within those vessels, and in the blood of her ancestors inside of them.

I'd written a letter, which I read aloud to her as we placed the box containing her placenta into a pot we had painted a few days earlier. Our beautiful midwife, Robyn, had made a homeopathic tincture using some of Aya's placenta, which Frankie held over the pot as we read the letter, infusing it too with our love and hopes for her. My son, Sage, and my husband, Marty, added some Clivia flowers and succulents from our garden into the pot. On the night of Aya's birth we had drained the birth pool into our front garden where these plants had received that water. They had soaked up her

essence and it felt right to bury some of them with her placenta. At the time of Aya's birth, my older children had a lot of questions about their own births and their own placentas, many of which I'd found difficult to answer. There were many things I wish I had done differently and explaining to them that we hadn't honoured their placentas and births in the same way was hard. But, now seemed like the time to rectify this. Both kids painted a small wood round symbolising their placenta. Frankie spoke about what her placenta painting represented, and I told a brief version of her birth story through tears. She had also written a letter to her placenta and read this aloud, before placing both the wood round and letter into the pot with some other drawings and paintings she had made. Sage was next, he told us about the



painting he had done on his wood round, and he held it as I recounted his birth story. He placed his wood round into the pot with one of his drawings. We thanked both 'placentas' for all that they had done during our children's time in my womb and took turns adding soil to the pot. Earlier, Frankie had been concerned that if we buried Aya's placenta we would have trouble remembering what it looked like. So, to ensure we would always remember it, I'd made an embroidery of it which she kept with her throughout the ceremony.

We decided to plant our little cinnamon myrtle shrub on top. We had bought this during my pregnancy and had used the leaves in our cooking from time to time. That tree had helped to nourish Aya and her placenta, and now, her placenta would return the favour. We hope it will grow with her and continue to nourish her and us over the years. As we patted down the





experiences. The act burying these surrogate 'placentas' also felt as though we were putting some of the energy from those births to rest. Those experiences will never be gone, but more and more, it seems as though I am able to carry healing and deep empathy with me, alongside the pain.

Below is an excerpt from the letter I read to Aya during the ceremony:

soil, I felt a sense of peace that was hard to put words to. I was honouring and recognising the births of our older children in a way that I hadn't before. I was connecting these experiences to healing, rather than to trauma. In a way, it felt as though we had restored some of the sacredness of birth to those

Our time on this earth is finite. Tread lightly, but live wildly. Get to know yourself, really, truly, know yourself. Know your nature, your soul. Know that your greatest points of difference are a gift, celebrate them. Know that your greatest points of resistance are your teachers, embrace them. Know that growth will come from light, but also from darkness. Just as your tree grows branches, so too does it grow roots. Do not fear the growth that comes from darkness, for this is the most transformative growth there is. Both are necessary, embrace this polarity. And in your growth, venture far but remember to come home, not to me, but to yourself, for your most potent source of love and joy in this world will always be found within.



Tonight, three embroideries sit on the wall of our home. Alongside the embroidery of Aya's placenta sits one of Frankie's and one of Sage's, the vessels modelled off their palm lines. They are a reminder of what has been lost but a celebration of what is; reclamation and healing.



I am a mother of three, a physiotherapist and marine biologist. I work in research, investigating the regenerative potential of the brain, and I am forever in awe of the intricacies of our bodies and our connections to the natural world. Talk to me about menstrual rhythms and rituals, placentas, stem cells, pain physiology or axolotls, and you will no doubt sense this awe. I am an eternal student and my love for qualitative research runs deep, as I believe the most meaningful learning comes through sharing our stories. I am happiest under the waves or on a mountain. I enjoy sleeping in, snuggling babies, warm cups of tea, my husband's jokes and smelling my children's heads.

Photography: Self and Marty Lochmann



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THE BIRTH OF BODHI ATLAS SMITH

BY JESSICA GIBBONS

Hello! I'm Jess.
Welcome to my story.
Grab a cuppa and make yourself comfy.

I'm a 30-year-old RN from Sydney, and now a mother (yay!). I'm interested in spirituality, human behaviour and nature. I also hold my ancestral lineage very close to my heart and soul, Finland and the Cook Islands.

Through my exposure in hospital, I became acutely aware of the degree of disconnect we have with ourselves, with others, and with the world. We give so much of our power away - and the hospital is no exception. I believe this mentality was my homebirth journey in the making. I also held the empowering understanding that, "if my ancestors can birth at home, then so can I".

My partner, Micheal, and I were both intuitively guided toward a strong energetic ley-line called 'Wilpena Pound' in South Australia. It so happened to also be during the Super Blood Full Moon of May 2021. This is how our child was conceived.

Pregnancy was a wild ride for me. Old traumas and triggers were re-surfacing, traumas like the fear of death, loss of control, body image issues, self-criticism, mother wounds. But from my experience in self-exploration, I was able to realise that I cannot control what happens during pregnancy, labour, and beyond. I am experiencing a lesson in complete surrender.

Due to experiencing a blood clot in my lungs years before falling pregnant, antenatal doctors would say, "you must go on this medication, you must be induced, you cannot spontaneously labour, it is dangerous!". They did plant seeds of doubt and fear in my mind, I mean I am human, but it also

activated my stubborn nature - that I don't like being told what to do. This being coupled with the unwavering support from my doula, Claire Heenan, and my midwife, Cara McDonald, to take radical responsibility for my decisions.

At the time of my pregnancy Micheal and I were renting and I made the decision to give birth at my dad's house which is my childhood home. I wanted the sentimental memory of being able to return to where I gifted the world a life. So, I prepared the space with beautiful candles, salt lamps, pregnancy trinkets, labour affirmations, flowers, essential oils, made a dedicated "Pain Station", had photos of my foremothers to guide and protect my journey, and made the bed ready. I even smudged the room and placed my own energy and intentions in there while picturing myself holding my child on this very bed. It was beautiful.





So.
I'm pregnant. Check.
I have my support team sorted. Check.
I'm feeling empowered in my decisions. Check.
The birth space is set up. Check.
All that is left now is for the baby to arrive.

February 10 - I got my first burst of nesting energy
February 11 - I had an appointment with Cara (our midwife)
February 12 - We had an unplanned and private Post-Partum workshop with Claire (our doula)
February 12 - I go into labour

I had called Claire about 5 hours after just seeing her to show her a picture of my mucus plug, explain to her my cramp patterns, and let her know that we were on the way to dad's house, "just incase". Cara was made aware too and said to us, "yes it does sound like you're in the early stages of labour. Get as much rest and sleep as you can as it might be a long time before you progress as this is your first baby. Call me when it's getting more intense". I said "OK".

I laid down in my birth space thinking, "how the fuck can anyone sleep through this?!". I was incredibly uncomfortable and I kept having the urge to go to the toilet. So that's where I stayed for a long time, vomiting a lot (yay for buckets!). Anytime I left the toilet a surge would arrive and my legs would turn to jelly. I started quickly going inward and quiet and thought to myself, "how can labour become more intense than this?!"



And then came the roaring.

Micheal ended up calling Claire and Cara again (only about an hour after initially hanging up) and both said to Micheal, "I can hear Jess in the background, I'm on my way!". Cara then called the second midwife, Natasha, whom I was yet to meet.

So eventually Claire arrives and I'm still on the toilet; the porcelain throne. The birth pool is set up and I try my hardest to walk despite my legs wanting to collapse everywhere like a game of Jenga - but golly gosh that birth pool was next level in pain relief. Wow. 5 Stars. Highly recommend. 10/10.

Cara then arrives.

Labour was the most BIZARRE experience of my life. Being absolutely conscious of everything around me but having no capacity to communicate. My doula dog, Jasper, was also there being himself and laying down in exactly the direct path of our foot traffic while we were in near darkness and his fur colour matched the floor.

Good times.

Great classic hits.

WSFM.

#NotSponsored.

Am I really using my word count for this?

Apparently so.

Anyway!

After being in the pool for a while Natasha arrived and since I was so aware of my surroundings, I



realised she was there but I also felt rude for not acknowledging her. So, between surges I said to her in all my nakedness, “hello, I’m Jess”. First impressions are important, ya know?

I had seen Jo Wholohan (physio) for my pelvic floor and SPD issues during pregnancy, and she said my muscles felt “like concrete”. Due to this, baby was taking a while to come down at this point. And we tried so many positions. One honourable mention would be with Micheal sitting behind me on the bed holding my knees, Natasha and Claire were holding my legs from the front, and Cara had the front row view. A surge came and I was flailing so wildly! So much so that Claire, in particular, was holding on for dear life as my legs thrashed about. I shook her world. Hehe!

Eventually we found a good position to bring baby down - on my knees and my arms leaning over the bedhead, with the important detail that I was mooning everyone. Baby was now starting to make their entrance. At one point after pushing, for what felt like forever during a surge, I felt my vulva start to bloom open and I was sure their head had popped out (because man that hurt). Natasha said to me, “this is how much of their head I can see!” but gestured about a 50c coin with her fingers. “WHAT! IS THAT ALL?!” I burst out loud. Complete disbelief that there was more stretching to be had. My poor vulva. R.I.P.

But alas, “surrender” blah blah blah.

Jessica lives with her partner, Micheal, and her dog, Jasper, in Western Sydney and is a mother to baby Bodhi Atlas Smith. She has a degree in Bachelor of Nursing but is currently a Stay-at-Home Mother. She is interested in all things spiritual, human behaviour, holistic living, nature, animals and music. She plans to remain in her Post-Partum chrysalis until she is guided toward her next journey of giving to society. She is the black sheep in her family and home-birthing definitely triggered a few people, but she got her dream ... “a birth without trauma”. She will continue to push against social norms and aims to experience Conscious Conception for her future children. She is super approachable, so reach out if you feel called to it.

Photographers: Claire Heenan / Danielle Lalchere



And then came the Ring of Fire.
Need I say more?
Let’s move on.

Their head did in fact pop out this time and then their body essentially spewed out of me. I stayed still for a moment. “Did I just give birth? Umm, what?”, I say to myself. Micheal inspected the baby and informed me that we have A SON! I fumble around to sit down to hold my son for the very first time in all his warm and slippery glory. And you know when you hear those stories of women joyfully crying when their baby is born or proclaiming aloud, “I did it!” ... well ... apparently, I say, “fuck, fuck, fuck!” over and over - to which I then proceed to profusely apologise to my newborn son for swearing.

After about an 8-hour labour inclusive of 3 hours pushing...

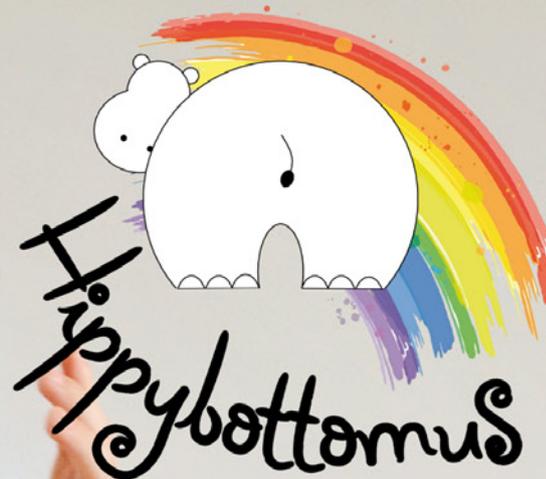
Born February 13 2022 at 0605.
Weight 3.16kg
Length 48cm
Head circumference 35cm

My beautiful child, Bodhi Atlas Smith, has arrived.

I’d like to thank my partner Micheal for his unconditional love, protection, gentleness, and his ability to hold space for me. I love you, so deeply.

Oh! And did I mention that I experienced all of this fuelled only by ONE jelly bean?

Thank you for reading and goodbye!
queue credits

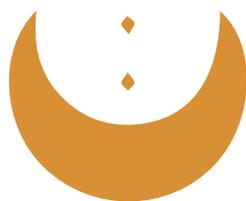


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MOTHER BLESSINGS

BY KATHERINE EDEN

Blessings are a beautiful way to honour a pregnancy journey, or any transitional journey/rite of passage. They are a wonderful way to support women to honour the many emotions arising from this path - including fears or worries or blocks, without it being specifically therapeutic.

You may have seen beautiful photos of women and people adorning flower crowns, sitting in a circle, surrounding a mother/parent-to-be. This is an example of a Blessing, but there are many variations to suit every individual. The main aim and intention of a Blessing is to support a woman to move through everything that might

be arising for them in a safe and nourishing space where they feel loved and supported for any life transition.

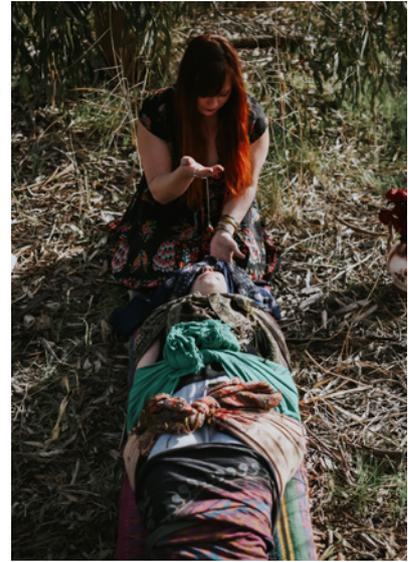
Throughout history, humans have always honoured specific rites of passage. It is only in more recent and modern times that rites of passage and the rituals and ceremonies surrounding them have moved from blood rites and physiological based rites (menarche, pregnancy, menopause, boys becoming men), to cultural rites (birthday parties, weddings, baptisms etc).

Regardless of our culture, as humans, our rites of passage hold great meaning and are

transformative both physically and emotionally. We carry the experiences of these transitions with us throughout our life and share them as stories to future generations about what it means to be a woman/man/elder/mother within that specific culture and community. And we pass these messages about what it means to belong and have purpose within that community both consciously and unconsciously. It is in the unconscious passing down, without specific intention and reverence given to the importance of this message about what it means to be part of a community that creates disconnection.

How we experience these rites, become the rite and play out as the themes for the next phase - whether positive or negative. If a rite of passage was honoured and supported, this may cushion the challenges that may arise within that phase, and in the next. Also modelling to the children and next generation vital regulation techniques and ways to connect in healthy ways. When a rite of passage is ignored or met with a lack of support, lack of connection and/or shame, these themes embed themselves within the identity of the person about





what society expects of them or what will be present for them in the next phase and the phases thereafter, continuing to be passed down as beliefs and patterns to their next generation.

Mother blessings are a remembering and reclaiming of the rite of passage from maiden into motherhood. They focus on the mother (as opposed to the baby) and her physiological, psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as a whole. Mother Blessings are not the same as a 'Blessingway'. The use of the word Blessingway has created great unease, sadness, offence and debate. The specific term Blessingway is an incredibly sacred term that directly translates to a sacred ceremony belonging to the Dine Navajo people. This sacred ceremony, rooted in the Dine culture is much more elaborate than just the honouring of a woman's transition into motherhood. The Dine people have specifically asked that the word "Blessingway" (which is a direct translation of their

ceremony) not be used to describe ceremonies outside of their own culture. As such, it is important that we cease the use of the term Blessingway. It is not ours to use (unless you are of Dine Navajo ancestry).

Here in the West we are not facilitating a traditional Blessingway, we are facilitating a westernised Mother Blessing which is a non-cultural specific ceremony to honour Matrescence. Similarly, if you are not South American (or have not been granted specific permission from a South American ritual practitioner), you do not facilitate a "Closing The Bones ceremony", you would be offering your own intuitive and westernised ceremony (based on your culture and ancestry) to honour the postpartum/menopause rite of passage or a significant rebirthing. Notice the difference?

So what are mother blessings? Mother Blessing ceremonies are uniquely tailored, very loosely prescribed ceremonies

to support a woman or pregnant person through their "Matrescence". I teach and facilitate all blessings with a focus on "Matrescence" - a term coined by Dana Raphael to describe the 'liminal space' that occurs as we transition from Maiden to Mother. Matrescence is a pivotal time which begins around late pregnancy but can last many years after birth. It is a 'liminal space' where one is reclaiming their identity and relearning their place and purpose in the world as a newborn mother. Transitions and liminal spaces occur at each rite of passage but Matrescence is uniquely defined to describe the crossing of the motherhood threshold, a powerful double gateway of birth (for child), death (of the Maiden/pre-mother) and rebirth (of Mother/parent).

Everything changes for a woman when she moves through the birth portal; emotionally, physically, spiritually, psychologically, personally and also from a community/relationship perspective. She is



"If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive."
- Brene Brown

This is why circles are the medicine. Circles are a portal for transformation. They are in and of themselves a threshold. Circles weave together science/modern ideologies with the sacred mysteries as a necessary part of the medicine. They meet our physiological needs for safety, belonging, purpose, co-regulation, ritual and reverence. This anchors us back to our spirit, embodied in physical earthly form; the true human nature.

not the same person she once was and she never will be again. This transition needs to allow for both grief as well as joy. Both grief and gratitude co-exist in this space as they initiate us into the next phase. Grief is not often honoured in our culture, but it is through the alchemy of grief (grief of the maiden, of a life before) that we truly witness the rebirth of oneself.

Each Rite of Passage offers a gateway through a liminal space into a new phase as they come into maturity and become the integrated and embodied

version of themselves in the new phase. In order to get to this embodied and alchemised place, we are again reminded of the core and vital needs of being a human. As mentioned above, these needs centre around having a sense of belonging and purpose. We are wired to be interdependent creatures who co-regulate with others. We need connection! But we need to feel connected on a deep level. We require safe and brave spaces for connection to our whole selves where shame cannot survive.

When we connect with other women our stress hormones decrease and our happy hormones increase. We are therefore able to feel pure potent pleasure which is the foundation of our existence. Our pleasure (physical and emotional) and our desires make up our internal gps and when we are off route from pleasure, we encounter issues. When women gather we are able to experience this pleasure. It is biological and cellular. We are also able to reduce the mental and physiological stress in the body to be able to think more clearly, make clearer decisions, and for the body to function more optimally as a whole.

As children, most of us were taught that our automatic stress response is that of "fight, flight or freeze". Right? But, studies have shown that for women our automatic stress response is actually to; "tend





and befriend". As women, when we feel stressed or scared, our automatic response is to connect with other women thereby reducing the feeling of stress and fear, and are able to move through the threat with more ease. This is exactly the need for pregnant women to move through pregnancy, birth and parenting feeling supported and able to cope with whatever they are faced with. The rates of postpartum depression, antenatal anxiety and birth trauma are rising at rapid rates. What if the key to reducing those rates was rooted in our physiological needs to connect and co-regulate in safe spaces where we can be honest

about our truest emotions? Fear, hyper independence and stress hormones interrupt the body's physiological birthing process and the hormones needed to birth and care for a baby. What we need more of is oxytocin and endorphins, which is exactly what circles and connection elicit.

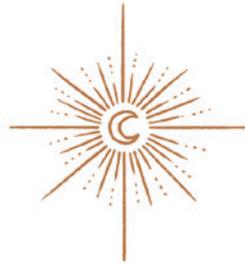
We know times of transition often pose a wide spectrum of emotions. Being heard and witnessed for all that we are experiencing and feeling without bias or judgement, by people who love us, not only allows a feeling of connection and unity, but also offers space for others to share

their experiences and the lessons they learned. Humans are wired to learn best via storytelling. Stories are our greatest medicine. It is within these spaces of storytelling, just as our ancestors did that meets our need for belonging and connection. This is the magic and medicine of ritual and ceremony. They bring us home to ourselves via our connection to and with others, as well as the Earth. They remind us of what it truly means to be human, our strength and power, and that both grief and gratitude co-exist as they initiate us into transformation.

Katherine is a Birthkeeper and Social Worker turned Threshold Walker, Rewilding Mentor, Cycles & Circles Teacher, Kinesiological and Sacred Business Guide, and Mum to two wildlings.

With a foundation of honouring the cycles and reclaiming our rites of passage, Katherine guides Birthkeepers, Healers and Wellness Practitioners that walk the sacred thresholds of life to go deeper in their work, reclaim their power, heal witch wounds, embody their magic, master the art of holding space, live and create with authenticity and freedom, and step into the conscious leadership to grow (and thrive in) their sacred business.

Photographer: Kirsten Klemasz



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THE BIRTH OF CONNIE

BY SARA ADAM-SMITH

40 weeks came on Friday 18 March and I wasn't expecting anything as my previous induction was past 40 weeks. We had a midwife appointment on Monday at 40+3 and we chatted about booking an ultrasound for 41+ weeks just to check on bub and see if we were happy to leave them in there and continue waiting for labour to happen on its own. The morning of that appointment though I had woken up to a little more than normal mucous loss and continued to lose small chunks throughout the day, I also had started having slight period pains which I hadn't had at all previously.

I mentioned what was going on to my midwife and she said it sounds like things could be starting to happen and, in my head, I was thinking I would

have baby by the end of the week. Jokingly I said as she left our house, "go and have a nap, I'll see you tonight". We both laughed it off, but little did I know that she knew I would go into labour that night.

As the day went on the period type pains hung around but they were nothing more than that so I got a little excited but not too much. We actually set up the birth pool that morning as well because Brodern was home for the day and I organised the rest of my home birth supplies, which I had been putting off. We took our daughter and the dogs for a walk that afternoon and the pains started to have more of a rise and fall feeling to them but were still super mild and not consistent.

I cooked dinner that night and put Riley to bed. I remember thinking to myself that this would be the last time I put her to bed before the baby came. I don't know what made me think that because I was still convinced that I had 2 or 3 days to go, it must have been intuition.

I sat on my exercise ball and bounced while Brodern and I watched some TV before I decided I needed to go to bed. Well, the pains started to come every 10 ish minutes while I was trying to sleep and they were enough that they were bothering me but I managed to have maybe an hour rest. I got up to go to the toilet at about 10-10:30 pm and lost some fluid, so I thought I should probably let my midwife know what was happening since I hadn't updated her again after the appointment that morning. Di said that it sounded like my body was getting ready so I should get some rest and she would hear from us in the morning. Brodern decided to come to bed then thinking I would probably have some pains throughout the night but nothing major would happen until maybe the morning or the next night.





I kept having what I didn't realise were contractions every 10 or so minutes whilst trying to sleep and they started to get strong enough that I had to breathe through them, although I still didn't think I was in labour yet.

It got to about 12am and I got up to go to the toilet where I lost some more fluid and decided I wasn't going to be able to lay down any longer. This is when I started really having to concentrate to get through the contractions and once I was out of bed I managed to have about three all in a row really quick, they came on hard and fast. I started feeling sick so went and vomited in the toilet and I knew that was a sign for me that things were getting real. I told Brodern to message Di to let her know that my pains were more frequent and intense and that I had vomited.

While he was typing the message the contractions just kept coming one after the other and I needed him to help me through them, so I said maybe we need to just ring since it had been 15 minutes since we first tried to send the message. Di heard one of my contractions and let us know that she was going to get ready to leave.

She lives about 40 minutes away so we thought we still had plenty of time. This phone call was at 12:38 am. The intensity was ramping up and I

thought I still had forever to go so I tried the TENS machine, which of course neither of us could figure out how to use in the moment. Brodern had the instructions, I had the remote and we were both trying to work through the contractions so I just kept turning it up which didn't help. Heads up if you plan on using a TENS to test it out a few times beforehand!

I got frustrated with the TENS as it wasn't providing any relief anyway - turns out I was already transitioning - so I said to Brodern "fuck it get me in the shower." The daunting thought of feeling like this for hours on end had started to get to me and I needed some relief.

At this point I had no concept of time and felt like I had so much longer left to labour even though things were happening so quickly.

I jumped in the shower and the water provided some relief but the contractions were starting to roll into each other and the pain was so intense that I started thinking I couldn't do it. I thought how on earth am I supposed to keep going like this all night, this is only the start of labour. True transition style I started to cry and doubt my capability, but Brodern was incredible and reassured me that I was doing amazing and that I was strong enough to get through it. I got on all fours then in the shower

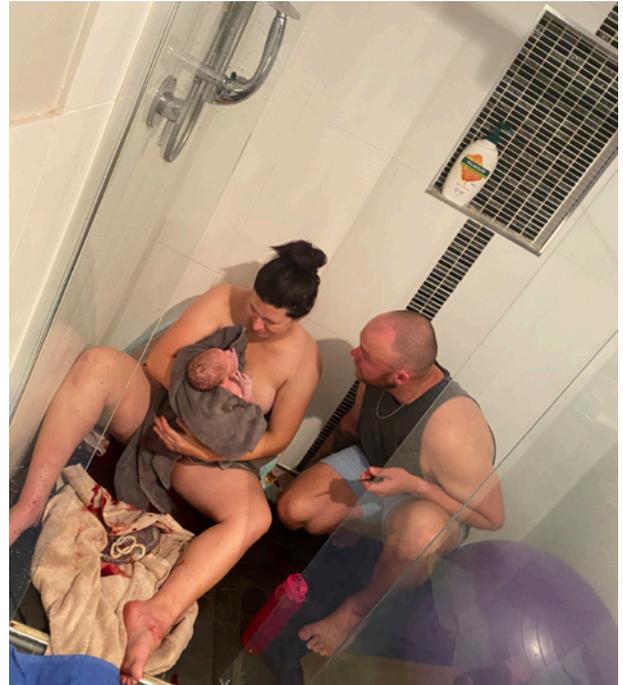




and started vocalising out of nowhere, it just came naturally and helped me get through each surge.

At this stage it was 1am and Brodern had called Di again to see how far away she was because he could see I was struggling. Di said she was still half an hour away and when she heard me in the background told Brodern that he needed to hang up and call an ambulance because the baby was going to be there before she was. I think this moment was a shock to him because it was only the two of us with Riley asleep in her room and no one else was going to make it in time.

The 000 operator was so helpful, she stayed on the line the whole time and coached him through what to do whilst I started to push. I didn't experience the fetal ejection reflex but I had an intense urge to push which I knew I needed to follow. Baby's head came down and nearly out and then all the way back in 2 or 3 times, the operator told Brodern that I had to get baby's head out on the next push or I would have to try a different position, this gave both of us the motivation we needed and I used all of my strength to push on the next contraction. Connie's head came out and within the next breath her body just slid straight out. The pressure and feeling of her head coming out was so strange and definitely not what I had planned. She came out all at once in one massive push and I definitely did



not breathe my baby out like I had been practising for weeks.

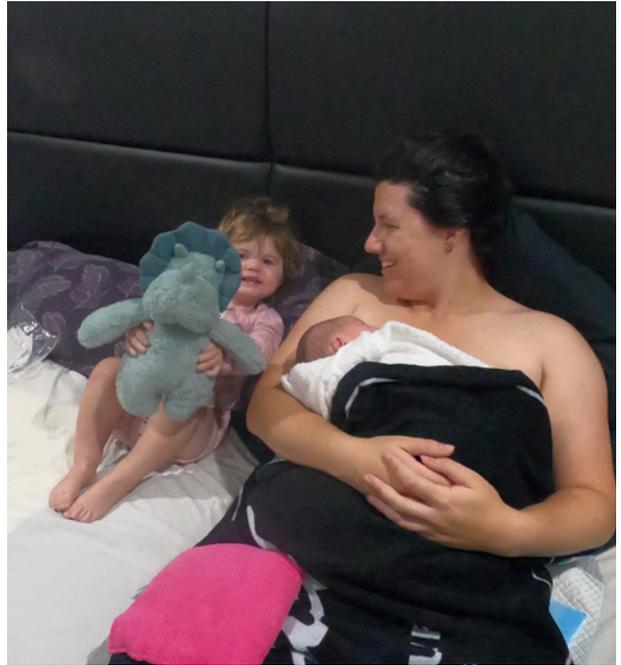
Brodern caught our baby, whose gender we didn't know and shouted "it's a girl!" Amongst the chaos I realised that we hadn't taken a single photo of the labour or birth like I had wanted to so I shouted at Brodern to take a photo. The operator told us that it was 1:18 am and congratulated us on the birth, letting us know that the ambulance was still about 15 minutes away. I held her up to my chest and just sat there in awe at what we had endured.

She had a tiny cry but then just tried to sleep while we waited for the placenta to come out. Brodern called both of our parents to come over because all I was worried about whilst pushing was that we needed to have someone here in case our Riley woke up and needed us.

Time felt like it stood still as the three of us sat there soaking in what had just happened, this magical moment between Brodern and I as we welcomed our second daughter into the world, this beautiful human that had been growing inside me for so long, she was perfect.

Everyone sort of arrived at the same time around 1:30am; Di, both sets of our parents and the paramedics. Everyone popped their heads into





the bathroom to see us and say hello and then left us alone to cut the cord and move Connie and I out of the shower and into the bed.

Riley finally woke up once she heard all of the commotion of people in our house and was more excited that she had all of her grandparents to play with than the fact that she had a little sister.

I had a 2nd degree tear and some slight grazes from the quick delivery so I got stitched up while everyone played and talked to Brodem about what had just happened. After a few hours, we got Riley

back to sleep and settled ourselves into bed for a nap and everyone else went home.

I honestly can't believe how quickly things went from nothing to baby being here. Brodem was so amazing and kept me in check when I thought it was all going to come crashing down. He stayed strong and ended up being the only person I needed with me to birth my baby. I think we were both in a little bit of shock at how things turned out as it most definitely was not the calm endurance event that we had prepared for, but we did it and we did it together and I'm so proud.

I'm Sara and live in the small town of Muswellbrook in the Upper Hunter, NSW. My husband, Brodem and I have 2 beautiful daughters now. Riley who is 2 and Connie who is currently 5 months.

We had a high intervention birth with our first daughter, Riley in 2020 which was partly due to some blood pressure issues, but majorly due to our misguided trust in the system and lack of education. After our local hospital turned the maternity ward into COVID isolation just 3 months before I was due to give birth to Connie this year we desperately searched for alternative options. I wanted to avoid induction unless medically necessary and this meant that I would need to travel possibly 1.5 hours in labour to the hospital.

We were lucky enough to find a private midwife in our area who had only just branched away from the public system. The beautiful Di @valleybirths agreed to take us on at 32 weeks pregnant and facilitate a home birth for us.

Photographer: Brodem (Husband)



CEREMONIOUS CIRCLE

BY CLAIRE HEENAN

I acknowledge the custodians of the land on which I write this story. The Blue Mountains is in the Ngurra (Country) of the Gundungurra and Dharug Traditional Owners who have a continuous and deep relationship with Ngurra since the time of creation. I acknowledge that I sit and write this story on unceded land.

I wait in my lounge room for the women, as I have done many times. I mentally check things off; cushions, altar, tea, snacks, candles, oils diffusing. As much as I indulge in the ritual of them, I remind myself these material things hardly matter. I check myself, my energy. It's important that my demeanor sets the tone for the women who have already done the hard part by committing to arriving here. One hand on my heart, one on my womb and three deep cathartic breaths set the inner tone in my mind and body. I'm ready for these women now.

The women begin arriving and I descend into the familiar feelings of privilege which surrounds them trusting me to hold space for whatever it is they bring. Open arms embrace each woman warmly, my heart to her heart. One woman is a

friend, one is a doula client, one saw a flyer at her prenatal yoga class, one heard about pregnancy circles from her midwife, one follows me on social media and others from all different avenues. However, they heard about this gathering brought each woman to this moment in time. Whoever needs to be in circle will be here. Their pregnant bellies are all beautifully different yet universal in that the women's wombs hold sacred little lives within. I have a sudden moment of huge emotion considering the flow-on effect of this

circle on these little lives. How incredible for these souls to feel the comfort of circle before they've taken their first breath of air?!

We wrap ourselves warmly with hot tea, shawls, comfy cushions and nourishing treats. I envision the energies of the women interwoven here - nervousness, excitement, calmness, vulnerability, ferocity, power and everything else in between. I almost hear this mixing of energies as an overwhelming symphony of the intuitive knowing that is unique





to pregnancy. The symphony roars beautifully through my ears, reminding me of the primal song of birthing.

“Welcome”, I say. And we begin. The ceremony of circle is very difficult to put into mere words, and this is why I am story sharing in the first person. This is my voice in circle with you, my wise reader, opening my heart about the ceremony of pregnancy circle as I have experienced it as a facilitator. Just as in circle, my words written here are not overly edited or intellectualised as I write, but rather I let my fingers type out a non-linear waterfall of a story that feels important and relevant to this concept of ceremony.

The ceremonial aspect of circle is simply within the way we hear one another. Sure, it might also be in the form of a mother candle, oracle cards and burning sage, but the way the women listen to one another in circle is where the magic happens. Pregnant women are audiences for plenty of stories,

aren't they? The appearance of a bump conjuring unwelcome projections of the world in the form of confronting birth stories of friends of friends, tangents of advice or intrusive questions. No. This pregnancy circle I have cultivated, like all the others, is for these women to be HEARD. They don't need nor want advice, they don't need nor want to be given suggestions beyond their own instincts. When the sharing begins, they will know what they need to say and if they don't consciously know, then what they need to hear will be said anyway.

I notice the collective exhale and the dropping of shoulders as I tenderly set the parameters of the circle by first stating that everything here is optional and that everything said here is confidential and safe. Judgement of others and critical judgement of the self should kindly remain outside of our circle thank you very much! Not that toxic positivity is welcome either, but that we shall go gently on ourselves

and practice self-compassion at all times.

The first sharing circle brings common ground - discomforts, nausea, peeing ALL the time and the other fun stuff pregnancy brings. I invite the women to call in creativity now and engage in a birth art process. This is a way of practicing intuitive self-trust which they must call on for labour and birth when the time comes. Trusting the birth art to reflect what needs to be known. Trusting the process rather than critiquing or controlling it. Letting the clay or colours on paper invoke messages of the subconscious in the way that only creative tasks can. And we share again...

This time the wisdom is rich. Women speak without being rescued from their emotions in the way of words or touch. They say, “I don't know if that makes sense or not but...”. They say, “I'm sorry for crying...”. They say, “Wow, I can relate so deeply to what the others have said”. These are phrases I hear at every single circle I facilitate and attend myself. And I remind them that their stories don't need to make linear sense, they will always make sense here. I remind them that their tears do not deem an apology necessary, we are comfortable with their emotions. I remind them that yes, we are all one so the words of each woman may feel familiar somehow. And I know I don't actually NEED to remind them because they KNOW all of this deep within their bones. I reflect on how significant it may be for women to practice owning their stories





and emotions in the lead up to labour and birth, being ok with what flows.

We sigh it out. We shake it out. We laugh a lot as the circle organically becomes a comfortable cohort of unity in diversity. Pregnancy circles remind women they are not alone and the connection in these circles propels power from the women to the world as they own and reclaim the rite of passage that is pregnancy and birth. Stories shared are stories reclaimed. It's so easy to let our walls melt away when we feel safe, heard and protected in confidentiality amongst sisters in circle. I wonder how the women feel now?

“Grateful”

“Relieved and calm”

“Powerful, excited to give birth!”

“Soft and strong”

“Connected and less isolated as I prepare to birth”

“Confident in my body”

This is ceremony. A deep reverence of an experience witnessed by others. A celebration of rite of passage and admiration for the growth it required. Women hearing one another fully. Our pregnancy circle has a tangible energy to it of fire. The experience of the circle ignited or re-ignited



the necessary work in these women of claiming their stories and therefore claiming their power. Claiming their power and therefore uncovering a feminine force to be reckoned with as she crosses the threshold into motherhood.

Having tuned in to the women here in circle, I decided to close the circle with a guided meditation for them to meet their baby in their womb. The potency of the women doing this collectively reverberates around the circle and will continue to do so as the women leave the space. For some of the women life is busy and this is the first time during their pregnancy they've had the chance to stop and fully connect

with their baby. I suggest we check in with the babies here in circle with curiosity. The women quietly smile as they mentally ask their baby how he or she is going today. I notice the way the collective feeling has shifted from the beginning of the circle as we finish up and say our heartfelt goodbyes. It's grounded now, strong yet flowing. The ceremony of circle has taken root and reminds each woman how interconnected she is with the earth beneath her and the sky above her. And mostly, the women surrounding her as she prepares her descent into labour and birth. All of this, and more, flows from the cup of embodied and true listening.

Claire lives in the Blue Mountains with her husband, 5yo daughter and 1yo son. She is a doula working with women and families during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. Claire also facilitates women's circles, menarche circles, mother blessings and postpartum rituals and ceremonies. She is a member of our Homebirth NSW team in the Communications role. Claire has a Masters of Teaching and has a background as a music teacher and she continues to tutor instruments privately. Her work as a doula and a music tutor fulfils her professional life whilst her active involvement in the birth community and time spent with family and friends fulfils her personal world. Claire's favourite thing to do is be in nature with her husband and her babies.

Photography: claireheenandoula.com.au | @claireheenandoula



HOMEBIRTH MEET-UPS

DID YOU KNOW ABOUT OUR HOMEBIRTH MEETUPS?
FOR MORE DETAILS, JOIN THE HOMEBIRTH GROUP
ON FACEBOOK FOR YOUR AREA.

WESTERN SYDNEY PENRITH

Hosted by Katelyn [@thenbacguide](#) (0431369352)
Every 3rd week of the month

INNER WEST SYDNEY

Hosted by Abigail [@chinasis31](#)
1st Tuesday of every month

BLUE MOUNTAINS LOWER

Hosted by [@claireheenandoula](#) (0413416210)
Last Monday of each month.

WESTERN SYDNEY GREYSTANES

Hosted by Donna [@beauty_in_birth](#) (0404020393)
1st Tuesday of every month

BLUE MOUNTAINS UPPER

Hosted by [@birth_aims](#) (0438862178)
2nd Friday of each month

NORTHERN BEACHES

Hosted by Kelly [@kponsford](#)
& Meredith [@mama_gaia_birth](#)
Monthly. Join the Facebook group for more info.

EAST SYDNEY

Hosted by Nadine (0468382580)
3rd Wednesday of each month.

WOLLONGONG

Hosted by Jessica - please find further details on
the Wollongong Homebirth Facebook group

SOUTH SYDNEY

Hosted by Virginia [@natural_beginnings](#)
(0415683074)
2nd or 3rd Monday of each month.

MACARTHUR

Hosted by [@nurtured_by_karley](#) (0452192905)
4th Friday of each month

HAWKESBURY

Hosted by Beth [@naturalfocus_birthphotography](#)
(0410368860)
3rd Thursday of the month.

ANYONE WHO HAS HAD, IS PLANNING, OR
IS INTERESTED IN HOMEBIRTH IS WELCOME!
INCLUDING THOSE WHO HAVE PLANNED
A HOMEBIRTH BUT TRANSFERRED FOR
WHATEVER REASON!



THE BIRTH OF ISABEL ROSE

BY ELISE LASSIG

My waters started leaking on Sunday 3rd of October and continued until the following Sunday. I trusted my baby and body knew what it was doing and declined the castor oil option offered to me by my midwife, Chantel. On Saturday 9 October I went for acupuncture to try to induce labour. I woke up to surges which felt like stronger Braxton Hicks at 4:55am on Sunday the 10th of October. I was excited and I knew that this was the start, it felt different. I so badly wanted to wake up my husband Tim but knew it was best to let him sleep.

It was pretty amazing in the earlier stages of the labour, when Tim and I hugged and kissed it literally felt like we were on a love drug! This feeling lasted until the intensity of my surges started to pick up. My surges were manageable and not too intense up until about lunch. Around 2pm my surges became stronger and closer. I was having to focus more of my attention on breathing deep into my belly and then also began using toning during the surges. Tim was very supportive with this and would breathe and use his voice with me. He also played the lower chakra crystal bowl at this time. I put the tens machine on my back in the early morning

and had it on for about 8 hours! The surges were becoming very intense and close together lasting for sometimes up to 2 minutes with only a couple of minutes break in between so Tim called Chantel.

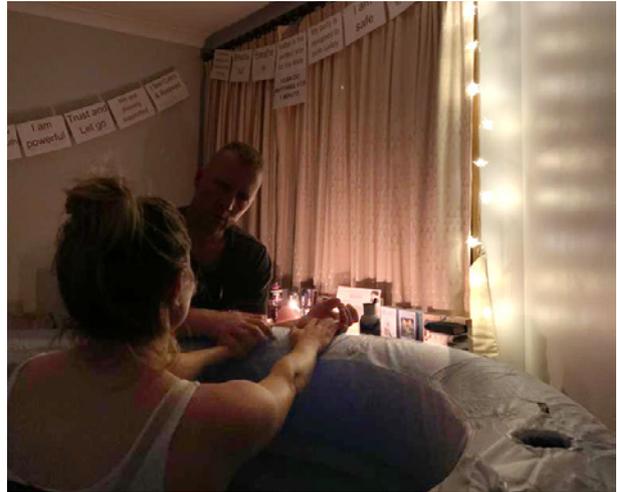
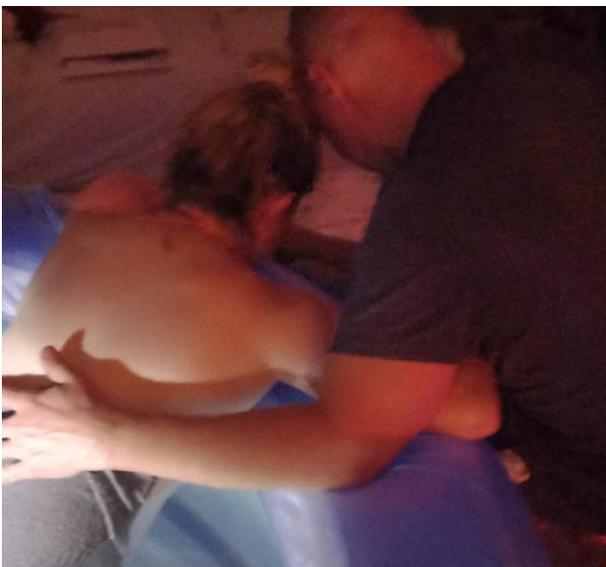
I can't remember the order of events, but I was surging trying to stand up, on the toilet and then I moved into the pool. Chantel suggested I lay on my side on the bed for 1-2 hours allowing my body and pelvis to relax and to continue to reach full dilation. I felt myself trying to cry through the intensity, but I couldn't cry because every time a new surge came, I knew that I had to focus my energy on that and not waste it on crying, that that was not going to help. I remember self-doubt came up a few times through the intense periods, but I only briefly spoke it once. I didn't feel like it was worth giving energy to, but I definitely thought to myself at times, can I really do this? Am I progressing? Am I going to be able to do this? The last time I sat on the toilet I said to Tim, trying not to cry, "this is really hard". I could tell that he was tired too. I had no idea what time it was, but I knew it was getting late as it was now pitch-black outside. I think I said something like I don't know if I can





do this or if I'm going to be able to do this and he said something like, "you know the other option, which is not really an option", meaning to go to the hospital which I knew 100% I did not want to do and it was a good reminder that the only way out of this was through it!

Tim left to go to the bathroom, and I noticed when he left, I instantly felt that the labour was harder when he wasn't there. His energy really grounded me, and Chantel told us after the birth that whenever Tim left the room, which was very rare, that I would look around for him and that I noticed when he had left, even though my eyes were closed. The 2nd time in the pool Chantel could tell that my surges were strong and long with only short breaks in between but that baby wasn't moving down further. She suggested that I get out of the pool and sit with my back up against the couch in a



deep squat position to bring baby's head down. I then put my legs up, one on Chantel and one on Mel through each surge. Chantel was telling me to push low like I was doing a poo and I felt like I didn't know how to push, which I didn't expect! It was really challenging.

Chantel said once baby's head was down that I could birth her in the pool & that this was going to help because baby's head was stuck, and it couldn't get under my pelvis. Incredibly, each time Chantel checked baby's heartbeat, she was totally fine, no stress for her at all. It worked and Chantel told me to reach down and to touch my baby's head and that was the most surreal feeling to know that I was so close to holding my baby girl. It was an interesting experience getting into the pool with baby's head right at the entrance of my vagina ready to be birthed into this world. I got in the pool and hung over the side and with every surge I breathed, and I pushed.

Chantel then told me that my baby's head was out, and I couldn't believe it! I remember thinking the hardest part is over and I'm so close to actually holding her and this being over! It took a couple of pushes and I listened as Chantel said to breathe and not to try to push out too fast or too hard to avoid tearing, which I was so afraid of doing. I now knew what the ring of fire felt like. Surprisingly it wasn't as intense as I expected, the labouring beforehand was so much harder for me. I'm not sure if it was at this point or when I was trying to push out her body, but I squeezed my eyes shut and it was like I saw stars against the black background of my eyes! I had read birth stories of women saying they shot



out to the stars during labour and how magical it was! That was not my experience of 'seeing stars', but I do believe I went somewhere else as this was the most intense feeling I have ever felt.

The next two pushes were my baby's body which Chantel had to help pull out because she wasn't coming and no matter how hard I actually did push she was not coming out. Even though this was not how I visioned birthing my baby, I was grateful that Chantel did what she did because I was ready for it to be over. Chantel then said to me, "turn around and hold your baby". I held my baby Isabel Rose in my arms and kept saying, "oh my God oh my God oh my God". It was the most surreal experience! I got out of the pool after being in there for a little bit and I moved to the bed in the birthing space, and they propped me up with pillows. About 30 minutes or so later I felt the surges come back and then I birthed the placenta whilst on the bed. Tim cut Isabel's cord after it went cold. I was also amazed when Chantel checked for tearing that I'd had no tears to my perineum. I only had a small tear on my labia and one just inside from Isabel's shoulders coming out, but neither required sutures! I was amazed and very grateful I breathed and pushed her out listening to my body and Chantel's instructions.

The 3 of us went to bed around 3:00 a.m. The next day Isabel and I spent all day skin to skin lying on the bed and by that night she had begun feeding. I was so glad we spent the whole day skin to skin as I honestly did not connect with Isabel straight away when she was born, and that was something that really shocked me! I had read about this happening to other mothers, but in my head, I thought, "I want her so much, I'll connect instantly!". Many lessons were learnt through the pregnancy and birth of



Isabel, and this was one of them for the ego.

I am so grateful to have had a homebirth and to have known about this option. I couldn't even begin to imagine having that same experience in a hospital, it wouldn't be the same, not for me, Tim or Isabel!



My name is Elise, my husband's name is Tim and we met in January 2019, at the Cosmic Consciousness Conference in Uluru! From there many synchronous events led us to leaving our old businesses and setting up Source 88, our spiritual, sound & vibrational healing company! We followed the signs from the universe that had us move house a few times, and finally be led to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, where I gave birth to our beautiful daughter Isabel Rose on the 11th of October 2021, at 31 years of age. Isabel's spirit had connected with me long before Tim & I even met. Once we met, she came through even stronger, sharing with us her name & personality, and also things she needed us to work on before she came Earth side. In miraculous ways, after just over a year of 'trying' to conceive, we found out I was pregnant, and what an amazing journey it was!

Photographers: Chantel Letertre

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RITE OF PASSAGE

BY KARLEY HUMPHRIES

Being a deep lover of the big moments in life, I have always viewed birth as a rite of passage that needs to be honoured. The transition that a woman makes as she walks the path of labour and birth is truly transformational. Such a momentous time in a woman's life, I feel; needs to be honoured with the deep reverence that it deserves.

How could one possibly honour such a journey?
With ceremony of course!
But...
"What even is a ceremony?"

I view ceremony as a series of intentional rituals that have the desire and purpose to honour a particular event in a woman's life. To me; ceremony is something that is deeply ingrained within all of us. It is what we are yearning for. It is something that is missing from our daily lives and something that is welcomed with a warm familiar embrace.

In the context of my 'work', ceremony started with meeting women at the birth altar and witnessing their experience. Now, ceremony looks like;

creating personalised Mother Blessing Ceremonies (as well as Closing and Rebirth Ceremonies and Placenta Burials). Since finding my deep love for ceremony and holding hands with it on a daily basis my life feels completely aligned, in ways that I often find hard to describe. I feel like I was born for this and my heart is so happy to be able to share ceremony with the women that I get to work with.

Now, back to Mother Blessings. Each and every ceremony that I have been given the honour





to create has been different. No two Mother Blessing Ceremonies have ever been the same. We are all different women, who are having different experiences in this life, therefore we are all in need of different rituals. Some Mother Blessing Ceremonies have included fear release rituals, flower crown making, word sharing and candle lighting.

Some ceremonies I've held have been designed around calling in a women's support network

as well as acknowledging and connecting with feminine energy. There is always joy, tears, laughter and feasting. The coming together and union of souls. Ceremony is for everyone. I have held ceremonies that have been women only, some have included small children, others with both sets of grandparents and all the men in the family.

The beautiful thing with ceremony is that there is no right or wrong way. It

is whatever feels right and whatever feels good. Ceremony can be alone or with gatherings both small and large. There is not a 'type' of person that a Mother Blessing Ceremony is for. Ceremony is for absolutely any woman who wishes to bring intention into their life and path the way to labour and birth with meaningful rituals.

If you are interested in creating a personalised Mother Blessing Ceremony please get in touch at nurturedbykarley.com



I am a space holder, women's circle facilitator and creator of personalised Mother blessings and closing ceremonies. I hold workshops for women wanting to connect with their menstrual cycle as well as nourishing birth retreats.

Being deeply invested in bringing ritual and ceremony back into our lives, I lovingly spend my days dreaming up circles and ceremonies. I value that each and every woman is a unique individual with their own experience in this beautiful and wild life is deserving of being honoured. Every aspect of my big hearted work is intentional and meaningful. My deepest desires are to contribute to the well being of women, establish a nurturing community and gently plant the seeds for women to start connecting with their inner cycles.

I am a Mother of two beautiful wildflowers, homebirth lover and enjoyer of juicy white peaches.

Photographer: Laura from Marve Photography



THE BIRTH OF KAI

BY ELLI MILLER

Kai's pregnancy came as a big surprise. My fourth little babe and 3rd HBAC. Throughout my pregnancy I told everyone that if I went over 40 weeks I would be pretty grumpy, well you guessed it! I went over 40 weeks, 40+5 to be exact. For months I experienced braxton hicks and losing my mucus plug. This baby was sitting so low in my pelvis and had been since 20 weeks, this made me even more convinced he would come early. How wrong I was, he was my longest pregnancy yet.

At 40+4 my partner and I didn't go to bed till around 11/midnight after we had some fun (multiple orgasms later) and we were both ready for sleep. Around 2:30 the next morning I woke up to the feeling of a contraction, I stayed in bed to see if they continued, and they did. After about 15 contractions later (they were coming frequently and were painful) I decided to wake my partner up and tell him we are having a baby today. We were both really tired from going to bed so late

but also still recovering from being sick (we had a runny nose we couldn't shake). We got up and decided to get things ready (that included me sitting on my exercise ball braiding my hair in-between contractions!).

I asked my partner to message my doula and let her know. We started timing my contractions and they were frequent, so we asked her to come over. From there they were all over the place, not really consistent. I started smelling clary sage to see if that would help. By this time my children had woken up and were starting the day.

My doula suggested we go for a walk to see if that would progress labour, we walked halfway up my giant hill and then came home. It was all such a blur, I honestly felt so out of it the entire time. I just remember feeling so tired. I spent some more time lying down trying to breathe through the contractions. At this point I'm not sure if we thought



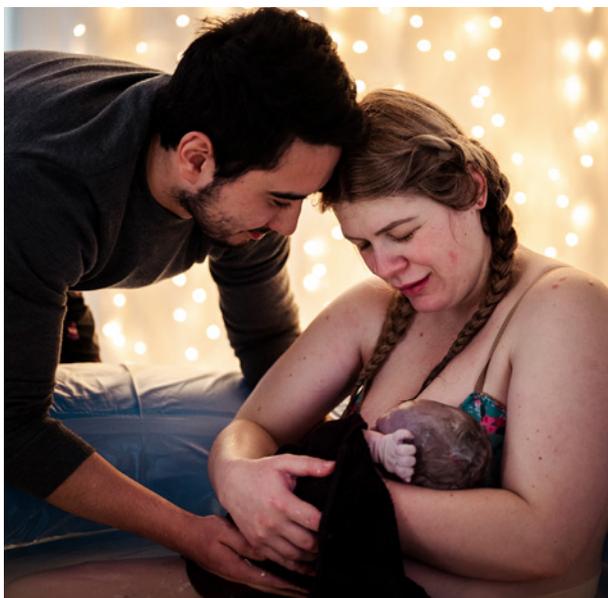


I was progressing much. My doula suggested I try having a bath which I did, I felt like the contractions did ramp up a little but were still not that consistent. I remember asking for my midwife to come. She was worried if she did and the contractions were still inconsistent that she would have to go home, I remember feeling a little disheartened. I continued labouring and a little time went by when I asked again if my midwife could come. My doula contacted her, and she was on her way.

I decided to get out of the bath and labour sitting on my bed at this point. Sometime around this my birth photographer arrived as well. 30 minutes later my two midwives arrived and checked the baby. I

remember feeling the baby move so much in labour, something I had never felt before which made it more painful. At this point I asked my midwife if she could check my progress. I was only 3-4 cm. I remember thinking how tired I was and was really hoping I would be more. She asked if I would like a stretch and sweep to progress things. I said yes. I remember wanting to get off my back as soon as I could, I found lying on my back so painful with contractions.

My midwife encouraged me to get up and move my body by swaying and allowing my hips to loosen. I remember thinking I don't want to, but I tried hoping on all fours on the bed, but that next contraction





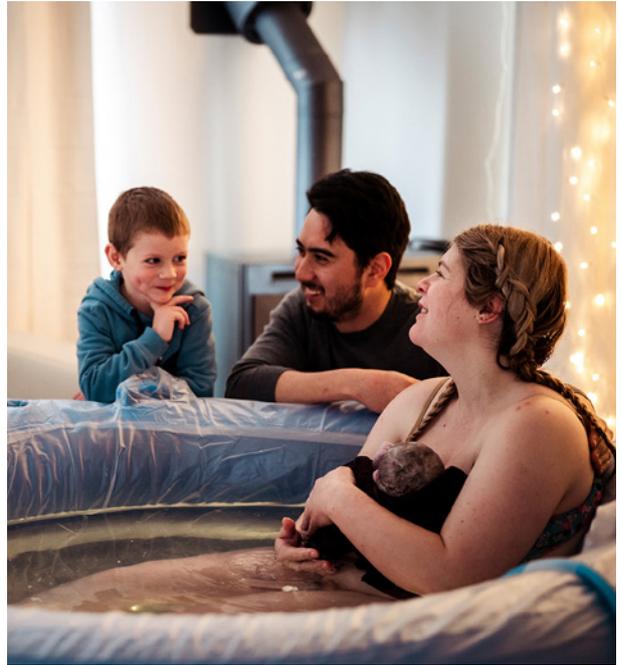
was so painful I had to move. I remember I had to sneeze and when I did it was the most painful contraction I had ever experienced. I sat on the bed hugging my partner and telling him and my doula I just want to cry, I remember trying to cry so hard, but no tears would come out. My midwife and doula tried some acupressure points and some light massage to see if that would help. I just remember feeling so tired and didn't want to keep going. It was at that point my midwife asked if I wanted to try her tens machine to which I said yes to.

I can't remember if it was before or after, but I remember thinking I just wanted that feeling for the urge to push and I felt something shift like I

was almost ready to. I remember asking if she could check me again. I was around 8cm at this point, and I started to have the urge to push.

I wanted to go downstairs to my birth pool. My partner and team helped me, the urge started to get stronger, and they were worried I would have him on the stairs. I quickly went downstairs and hopped in the pool. I finally felt I could release everything I was feeling and have him. I immediately started to push. I didn't want to push this time and although I did, I felt in control. I really tried to focus on my breathing. I remember hearing my children in the background making noise and asking for them to get away as I just couldn't concentrate. I continued





to labour and the urge to push just kept on getting stronger, I remember someone in my team asking me if I wanted the kids to be there for when the baby arrives and my answer was, "I don't know". I felt so out of it. With my next contraction I felt a pop, and his head was out. The next contraction I remember giving it my all, but he was a little stuck (my last birth my baby had shoulder dystocia, so my midwife knew to look out for that). She could see he needed some help and with that contraction she told me to put my leg up and out he came!

It took me a few minutes for me to just catch my breath before I held him. I remember looking around feeling so exhausted and relieved I had done it. I hardly lost any blood at all. We sat in the pool for soaking in the baby cuddles. He was covered in vernix, and we were all so surprised.

After some time, we hopped out to deliver my placenta on the lounge (it usually takes a little while to come out for me). After a little feed we weighed

and measured him while I had a shower. We then all snuggled into our bed and rested some more.

Looking back, I found his birth really exhausting and hard. I wonder if we were not sick how much better I would have felt. The whole time I just wanted to rest but he just wasn't letting me. I was surprised later on to find out that I went from 1st to 2nd stage in only 15 minutes! I knew it was quick, but not that quick. Everything was such a blur, the most out of it and high on oxytocin I have ever felt in all my births.

This was my partner's first baby and homebirth, and he was able to support me so well. We worked as a team with so much love together to bring him earthside. I'm so grateful my children were able to see their brother be born this way, they were and still are, so excited he's here and can't get enough of him.

Elli is a mama to her four little babes. When she's not working, starting her business or studying she's reading books, going for hikes, baking, decorating & so much more!

Elli loves spreading awareness of Homebirth, particularly Homebirth after caesarean. She has had three Homebirths now, with all of her babies being present to see their sibling being born. She is forever grateful she was able to experience this with her babies & hopes to continue to normalise Homebirth.

Photographer: Natural Focus Photography



THE BIRTH OF LACHLAN LITTLE

BY RANI LITTLE

My first birth I really wanted a physiological intervention free birth. I thought I was prepared. I thought I had done my research. But birthing in hospital, even with a Midwifery Group Practice, was not the right place for me. I trusted that they would support my wishes, but policies got in the way.

My second pregnancy I knew I couldn't birth in hospital. I hated the idea of moving once in labour. We had plans to move to Bathurst NSW, and I researched if a homebirth there was possible. I found Ashlee at The Birthing Tree. I messaged her as soon as I fell pregnant. I was finishing my new graduate year for nursing and would end up moving at about 26 weeks pregnant, which meant some of my antenatal care would be via zoom. Ash thankfully supported this.

After devouring all the birth books, podcasts and information I could, I also decided to have a doula. To support my support people mostly. Enter Aimee from Birth Aims. What a magical birth team! Initially I was thinking of having my husband, Robbie, my mum and cousin as well as my daughter. Towards the end of my pregnancy and especially once prodromal labour started, we worked out fewer people were better for my progress and mental health. After finally getting to Bathurst and meeting both Ashlee and Aimee I settled into waiting for our baby boy to arrive.

Pregnancy is uncomfortable for me. I had awful reflux, insomnia, and just so uncomfortable.

At 38 +3 (a Wednesday) my Braxton hicks turned into regular contractions. I was hopeful. I called the team and let them know something might be happening. Labouring all night for it to slow down at 6am was super disheartening. Especially because the night ended with the whole team here

and me in the birth pool. The following night they ramped up again only to stop at 2am again. I was so disheartened. I had been having a pain in the top of my belly. Aimee said it wasn't something she would expect. Ashlee thought it was due to the prodromal labour.

On Friday morning after very little sleep, and what felt like very little progress and the prospect of this going on for many nights I had a little tantrum and asked my husband for a caesarean. He told me he supported me with whatever, but knew I'd never forgive myself.



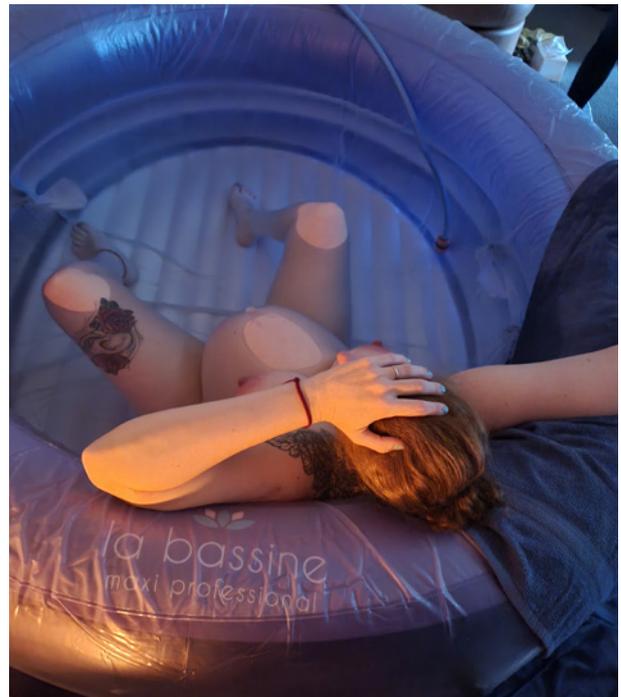


Ashlee suggested some acupuncture to help with the discomfort to hopefully get some rest. I managed to get an appointment which worked wonders. I had the best sleep that I'd had in months. I woke up at 3 am (Saturday 23 April) to my waters breaking. I let the team know. They had another woman in labour so keep them updated.

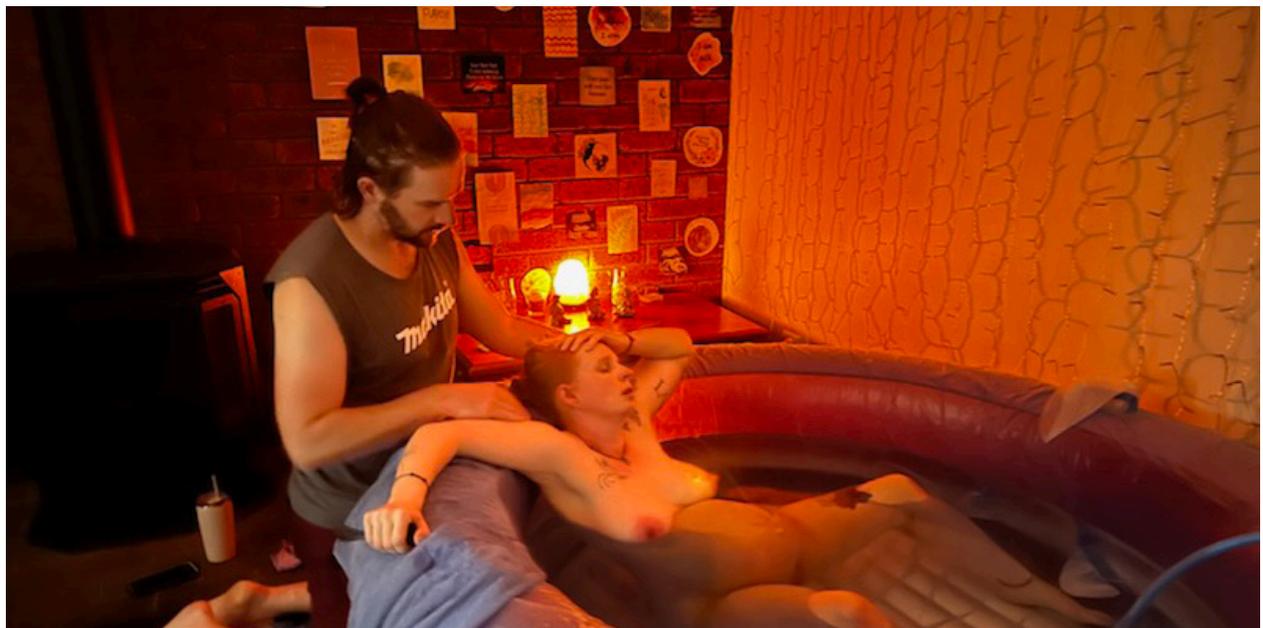
My early labour was so lovely. I laid on the couch listening to relaxing music with a TENS device on while my husband and 5-year-old daughter did the morning routine around me. I kept worrying that I should get up and do things to keep labour going, I didn't want it to stall. But then I remembered I just needed to listen to my body. I kept telling my body it was amazing and doing such a wonderful job. My body told me to rest while I could.

At around 10am I noticed meconium in my waters. This happened with my first which was where all the procedures occurred. I tried really hard not to stress this time. Ashlee was happy to continue to monitor because baby was moving heaps and it was light. Around midday the TENS started to annoy me, so I moved into our normal bath. I kept thinking I wasn't in 'established' labour because I was eating (pizza), and I wasn't in 'labour land'. So, I started a mantra to try and get out of my thinking brain. To embrace the birth.

"I open. I relax. I surrender. I welcome. I trust".



We messaged Ashlee that things were building as she had a 2-hr drive. I felt like I was still in early labour though. I don't remember making the decision, I think Robbie did. Ashlee arrived just after I got out of the bath at 2pm. This is where things really ramped up. I asked when I could get into the pool. Ash explained that it's contraindicated with meconium to have a water birth, she was happy to do it but would ask me to get out if there was an extended pushing phase. The choice was mine. I laboured leaning over the birth ball a lot. Ashlee suggested a lunge





could see the head. Pushing felt heaps better than transition. And I said all the usual things, like “it bums”. The second midwife walked into me roaring his head out then after just 14 mins of pushing I roared Lachlan out. Ash and I caught him together. The cord was wrapped around his neck twice and Ash said the labour made sense now. I immediately told Robbie to get a vasectomy because I am not doing that again. To be honest though, I would birth again in a heartbeat. I just never want to be pregnant again!

I'm so beyond proud of myself, Lachlan and my husband Robbie, who was such an amazing support. He was the best tether, rock, and supporter! He was there through every step of this journey. Words can't describe what an amazing support he was, except that I've never loved him more.

position to help bring baby down. I repositioned to leaning on the back of the couch with my foot on the arm. Ash told me I was making noises that told her bub was moving down.

But I still felt like I wasn't in 'labour land' I was still thinking a lot. I didn't really want to talk though. I just kept up the mantra in my mind. Most waves came as I got to 'I welcome'. I was shaking my head not to resist the waves but to keep myself loose. Again, I asked when I could get into the pool. Ash said 3 more. I counted down the contractions and basically dove into the water.

Transition was challenging. Transition felt like pure panic. I told Ash I needed a poo; she told me it was bubs head. I was adamant it was a poo. I hopped out and sitting on the loo was awful. I got back in the pool and Ash told me if I needed to poo to just do it in the pool. So, I pushed and then Ash



My name is Rani. I was born and grew up in Broken Hill. I met my husband while studying theatre in Armidale. We met at age 18 have been together for 13 years. I decided to study enrolled nursing in 2014. We had our daughter in 2017. I then returned to university to complete my registered nursing. I fell pregnant during my graduate year. I worked in the operating theatres and loved my work with anaesthetics. It was very challenging to be doing all this birth work surrounded by unnecessary surgical interventions in birth.

Photographers: Aimee Sing, Robbie (husband), Ashlee Anslow



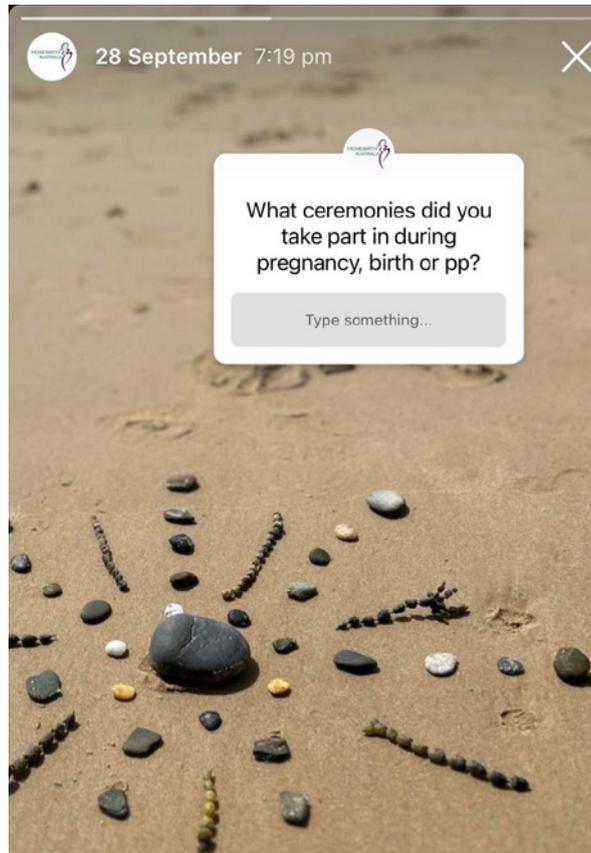
ASK INSTA

WE ASKED YOU ABOUT THE KINDS OF CEREMONIES YOU TOOK PART IN DURING PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND POSTPARTUM...

 jaydewagner_
Fear releasing 🔥
Reply >

 dustforthedancers
Matoni ceremony (7 months pregnancy ceremony) in East Java, Indonesia and 40 day pp ceremony
Reply >

 shreya.diary
Closing of the bones 😊
Reply >



 the_bec_cameron
Circles mother blessing
Reply >

 tilly_e_s
Mothers blessing, setting a birth alter, cord burning and closing of the bones
Reply >

 mama_gaia_birth
Mother blessing
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THE BIRTH OF MAEVE

BY EMMA DAVIES

Dear Maeve,

At 2.45am, on your Monday estimated due date, I had to scramble out of bed to head to the bathroom. Your waters had just broken and woke me up from a dream. I felt mild contractions start up and found it impossible falling back asleep because of the excitement about finally meeting you soon. Your dad took the day off work and texted the midwife, Kira at 7.20am to let her know about labour starting. It felt great putting my phone away and having him be in charge of all the correspondence with her. All Monday I laboured on the deck and the living room. It was a really clear winter day, the sun on my back was comforting. I didn't feel hungry, but your dad made me some fruit and snacks for energy. He also inflated the birth pool in the living room, so it was ready when the time was right. As the day went on the intensity of each contraction was mostly felt around my lower back. Using the tens machine that we had hired really helped to distract me from fully feeling the contractions. I was surprised to notice with the stronger contractions the waters still coming out.

Kira visited around 4pm. For that half an hour labour seemed to have eased up. She checked your heart rate with the doppler and said we had a happy bub. She said I was in early labour and told us to get her back over when my contractions were consistently 2 mins apart, lasting an hour. That night I tried to get some rest with your dad between contractions, but it felt too uncomfortable to be lying down. I remember starting to feel completely out of my depth and fatigued from the intensity. The only thing grounding me was listening to a guided meditation of birth affirmations, in the lounge room, leaning over the exercise ball, eyes closed, breathing through the contractions. The audio was 60 mins and somehow that time passing felt so fast. I had the tens machine ramped up to the highest setting by now, only taking off the pads to spend some time in the shower. The running hot water was a massive relief on my back.

Around 3am Tuesday had me vomiting with the more powerful contractions. Your amazing dad was cleaning up after me and offering me coconut water ice cubes for hydration. Between spending





some time in the shower, on the toilet and once in our bathtub, I started running out of places and positions to labour. I kept looking at the empty birthing pool in the living room, yearning to fill it up with water and get in, but not sure when the right time to do so would be.

Around 4.30am your dad went ahead and filled the birthing pool halfway. Getting in that hot water was like magic. Finally, some blissful steamy rest. I could move freely and have what felt like mini naps in-between contractions. I had been up for over 24 hours, and felt totally drained.

Your dad messaged Kira to let her know that I had moved to the pool, but our contractions were not yet 2 minutes apart. Kira was happy with the progression and said to let her know if I started feeling lots of pressure in my bum. At 6am Ciaran messaged Kira back, I was feeling the intense pressure in my bum.



At 6:20am Kira arrived, and I was stoked to see her walk in the door. Up until then it felt like I was hesitating about what was to come. With her in the house I surrendered into the craziness. She used the doppler to check your heart rate and said even after a massive day and night you were still a happy baby. She said the pool was too shallow, so we had the go ahead to fill it up further. I was sent to the shower for a few contractions. Kira told me to lift and hold my belly up during the contractions. That small movement felt extremely uncomfortable. I remember I came out early from the shower, just pretending I stayed in for the amount she asked. Bailing from that extra painful activity early so I could get back in the pool was all I wanted to do.

Around 8am I told Kira that it felt like I really had to poo. She said that would probably be the feeling of your head getting closer. I was sceptical, so I got out of the pool to head to the bathroom. She suggested beforehand that I should feel if you were close. Down on all fours next to the pool, I touched your head for the first time. I instantly started happy-crying. You were so close now! Kira used a sarong from the lounge for some rebozzo sifting. Looking around the living room I could see the birth affirmations on the wall. In those crazy moments somehow, everything felt safe and just right.

Around 9am I was back in the pool and loudly moaning through a contraction when the second midwife walked down the hallway. She picked up your dad's phone and started taking photos. During the last couple of contractions when your head was crowning all I could do was focus on my breath. Kira was reminding me, in through the nose and out through the mouth. The time in-between the surges I felt relaxed, mostly eyes closed, being able to chat, giggle and move freely, before the next all-encompassing surge took over and it was back to breathing through it. Kira then suggested I place my hand on your head. That was a game changer, it gave me some clarity to the wild stretching that was happening. Kira said I was doing well breathing you out but if I wanted, and if it felt ok, I could push with the next contraction. So, I leant over the side of the pool, held onto your dad and pushed when the contraction came. Your dad got his face squashed into the side of the pool for the whole time of the contraction. Two contractions



like that and your head was out in the water. The strangest feeling! Your body followed soon after with the next close contraction without pushing. I had to turn around to find you. You looked like a little fish in the water. Born at 9.38am. You were glowing with the sunlight beaming through the windows. Your skin was so smooth and clear of vernix. I was surprised to see you had a dark head of hair, I thought you would be bald or ginger. It was surreal after forty weeks waiting to meet you. I had never held a baby before that moment. Your big dark eyes looked all around the room while you cried a little. I held you off my chest, moved your umbilical cord to the side and we discovered we had a daughter!

The first feed in the pool I looked down and you missed my nipple and started giving me a hickey next to it instead. Great start to breastfeeding! An hour and twenty minutes later I birthed your placenta over a container resting in the toilet.

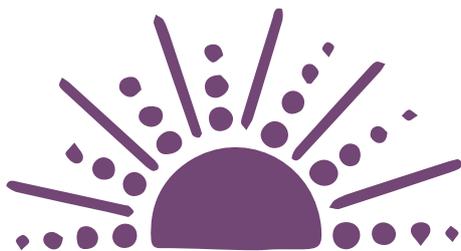
We live near Wollongong NSW. We grew up in the area. I was 26 when Maeve was born last year. She is our first child and our first pregnancy. From knowing absolutely nothing to learning loads after following some doulas on Instagram, watching the Birthtime documentary and reading up some books from the library, we changed from birthing at the local hospital to hiring a local private midwife at 24 weeks along in the pregnancy. My paid job is a surveyor, but I have taken a year off that job to be Maeve's mum full time. I love surfing when I have the spare time.

Photographers: Nada Fred



You were still in my arms, both of us covered by the green dinosaur blankie. Your dad got to cut your umbilical cord. I got to have a shower. Kira checked me and I didn't tear during your birth. You weighed 3.72kg. The midwives cleaned up in the living room and left us as a new family of three. I was on the biggest natural high and didn't go to sleep until 10.30pm that night. Too busy smiling at you, totally in awe.





“IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE, ASK A BUSY PERSON!” A LIVING EULOGY IN GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR AIMEE SING

When I first came across Aimee in the Spring of 2017, I was Vice President for Homebirth Access Sydney (HBNSW's former title), and my friend Bitna was the editor for Birthings magazine. Bitna was ready to hand over the editor role due to being too busy with homeschooling, and Aimee applied.

I was very familiar with the workload and knew the passion and high commitment needed for the role, having previously been editor for 9 issues myself, often working till up to 1am while pregnant or with a newborn on the breast. So, when I read Aimee's application email asking about the time needed and admitting she was a bit time poor due to having 2 kids and studying and working on her PhD, I had my doubts if she was up for the challenge. How wrong I was! Fortunately, she convinced me on a phone call that she was the best person for the job.

They say that if you want something done, ask a busy person, and Aimee is one of those busy people who puts 110% effort and commitment into everything she does. She

always did a stellar effort with Birthings magazine, and then later the President role which she later took over from Jodie Powell. Aimee also helped me re-establish Homebirth Consortium Australia to organise nation-wide 'Mothers For Midwives' rallies outside the offices of AHPRA on International Midwives Day 2018 to demand maternity reform for homebirth midwives (pictured). [See her beautiful speech: "Just a midwife" here.](#)

On a personal level, I have always felt such an alignment with Aimee. Not only do we both have a background in plant-based careers – hers in Botany and mine in horticulture, we both then went on to become doulas, birth our babies at home with the same midwife (Jo Hunter), and volunteer for this organisation, as editors and then Coordinator/President.

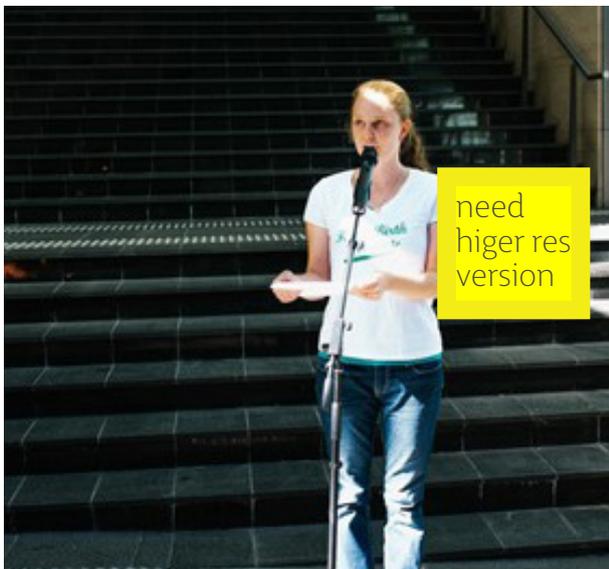
I have enjoyed long phone calls with Aimee over the years, debriefing difficult births and challenging personal situations, as I feel we share the same philosophies around birth, as well as a similar sensitive nature in our personal relationships.

She has stuck by me in sticky situations when others haven't and given me the empathy needed that I know she would need for herself.

The sign of a great leader is committing to doing whatever is needed for the highest good of an organisation over the personal ego, knowing when to step down and let others take over who will put in the commitment needed. In this regard, Aimee has shown what an amazing and selfless leader she is, on top of being a wonderful mother, caring friend, and amazing doula and lactation consultant.

I wish her all the very best in whatever she does next, and whoever she works for will soon know what an asset she is to their organisation, or their pregnancy/birth/breastfeeding journey!

**MUCH LOVE,
VIRGINIA MADDOCK**



Photographers: Jerusha Sutton Photography, Aimee Sing

BIRTHINGS IS THE HOMEBIRTH NSW COMMUNITY MAGAZINE.

**THE THEME FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF BIRTHINGS
WILL BE**

ADAPTATION

WE WOULD LOVE YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!

BIRTH IS WILD, IT TEACHES US TO SURRENDER AND ADAPT. IT PAVES THE WAY FOR FLEXIBILITY IN THIS NEXT PHASE OF LIFE. SHARE WITH US YOUR ADAPTATION STORIES. NEEDED TO CHANGE PLANS OR LOCATIONS? HOW DID YOU ADAPT TO LIFE AS A MOTHER? WHAT WAS YOUR PARTNER'S EXPERIENCE OF BIRTH AND TRANSITIONING TO PARENTHOOD? WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

PLEASE SEND US YOUR THEME ARTICLES, BIRTH STORIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS
WITH HIGH RESOLUTION PHOTOS.

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