

Birththings

Celebrations

IN

HOMEBIRTH

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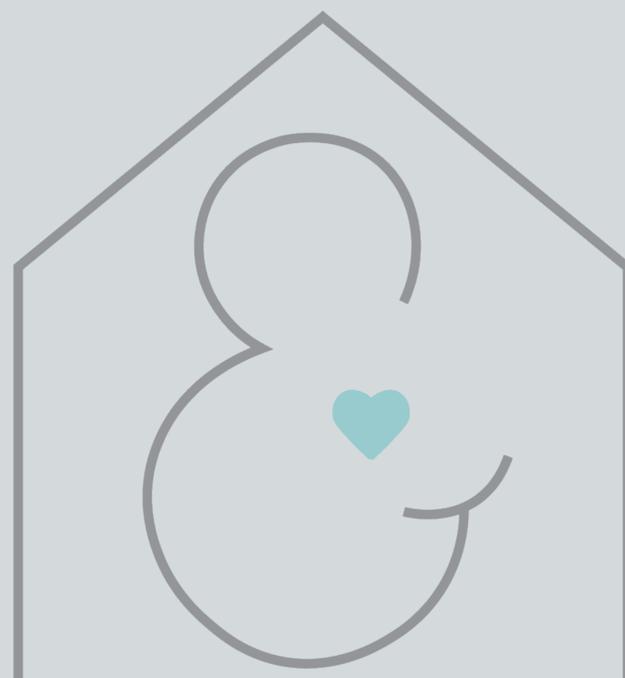
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HOME**BIRTH** NEW SOUTH WALES

www.homebirthNSW.org.au



Contents

Regulars Content

Editorial AIMEE SING 4
President's Report JODIE POWELL 5
Artwork
AMY BELL 19
Birth Announcements 24
Useful Links 52



9

Photo by Jerusha Sutton

Birth Stories

The Birth of Ofelia – BRONTE FISHER 10-14
The Homebirth of Huxley – ELLI MILLER 25-26
The Blissful Birth of Alchemy – SHARMILA AGNIHOTRI 28-29
The Birth of Ivy – YARA EARLE 35-37
The Birth of Evalie – AIMEE SING 40-42
The Birth of Kai – MARIE KOBAYASHI 45
The Birth of Rosa Maria-Lilyanna – JACQUIE HARSH 48-50
The Birth of Juniper – ERIKA WATSON 55-56
Michelle's Birth Story – MICHELLE FERNAND 59



Front Cover The Birth of
Evalie

by [Jerusha Sutton](#)



Final picture from the Birth of Huxley
by [Tara Mahoney](#)

Theme Content

Media Release – JODIE POWELL 6
Celebrations, Rituals, Ceremonies and Traditions around Birth –
JENNY BLYTH 7-8
Pregnancy & Birth as Rites of Passage – ESTHER-MARIE
LINDNER 15-16
It's my Birth and I'll celebrate if I want to – CATHERINE BELL
17-18
Blessingways – NATALIE VENEGAS 20-22
Celebrating our Achievements – BELINDA COSTELLO 27
WOMEN'S CELEBRATIONS
Pregnancy
Celebrating Pregnancy and the Transition to Motherhood –
ERIKA WATSON 30
Celebrating my Pregnancy with Alice by giving back –
JENNIFER LORANCE 31
Blessingway – KIRSTEN LYLE 31
Birth
JESSIE GOETZE 33
CHERYL ANNE MAREE 33
Postpartum
My Postpartum Celebration – LANA MIDDLEBY 34
Blessing, Birth and Birthing Day – LEE REICHENENDER 38-39
Celebrating my Last Baby – ERIN QUINN 43-44
Book Review - KRISTYN BEGNELL 47
CELEBRATION! Rituals & Ceremonies to Honour Pregnancy and
Mothering – JANE HARDWICKE COLLINGS 51-54
Closing of the Bones – CLAIRE HEENAN 57-58
Meet our Intern – HANNAH LYONS-UHL 61
Rituals after Birth – ERIN QUINN 60

Share your story with Birthings

Birth Stories, Birth Announcements, Homebirth Related Articles
Submission Guide: <1400 words with high resolution photos
and/or videos. Don't forget your bio (<100 words).
Winter 2020 issue is themed *Labour of Love*.
Submission due date: 1st February, 2020
editor@homebirthsydney.org.au

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I'm so pleased to bring the Spring 2019 issue of Birthings magazine to you! This issue is themed Celebration, and we've been spoilt with some incredible articles, lots of beautiful birth stories, birth announcements and birth art!

How did you celebrate your pregnancy, birth and postpartum? What did your own journey of celebration involve? In this issue, you'll get some insight into the myriad of different rituals and celebrations that can be undertaken; a deep dive into a few women's experiences of their own, personal celebrations, and reflections of how these celebrations made them feel. I've so enjoyed learning more about the various celebrations that are available to us, about how raw and personal these rituals can be made, to truly be authentic to each woman, baby and family. I wish I had this information before each of my own pregnancy, birth and postpartum experiences!

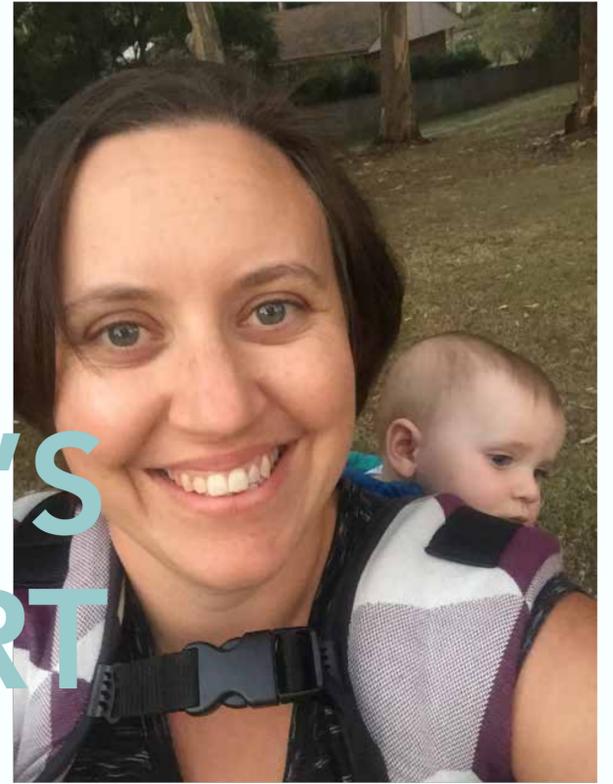
Speaking of which, this issue comes just after my own enormous celebrations have been had, welcoming our third baby to our family. Baby Evalie's birth story is within the following pages, and it gives me such joy to be able to share it with you all. I write this today, 2 days before she turns 3 months old, and feel so privileged to have the chance to reflect on our pregnancy, birth and postpartum experience with so much love and happiness; what an incredibly precious experience each of these things have been. My family's own celebrations around pregnancy, birth and postpartum have adapted over time, starting with a simple baby shower and naming ceremony for our first baby (which never happened, as Willow arrived 3 days beforehand!) and evolving into a raw, honest and empowering Mothers Blessing, an incredible birth in a beautifully blessed birth space, and a Closing The Bones ceremony and placenta ritual to come. I'd love to hear what you think about the articles and experiences shared in this issue – if you're willing to share, send a letter to the editor, or even just let us know on our Facebook or Instagram. If you'd like to share your own birth story or announcement in the next issue, preserving that memory in print, please do send it along!

This issue comes right on the back of some advances in the political side of homebirth too, with an extension to the Professional Indemnity Insurance exemption being provided until December 31st, 2021, and the potential inclusion of intrapartum care in Medicare rebates to come. While these two things are worthy of celebration, there is still lots of work to be done, which leads into our next issues theme, "Labour Of Love". If you are a homebirth specific birth worker please write in to us and tell us all about your work, your decisions to pursue this career and what it has involved. As always, we'd love to see lots of beautiful birth stories and birth announcements too, so keep them coming – we are only publishing biannually now, which means that we have LOTS of birth stories jam packed into each issue from the whole 6 months before. Please send your theme articles, birth art, birth stories and anything else you'd like to share to editor@homebirthsydney.org.au – I look forward to seeing what comes together for next issue!

Many Blessings,

 *Aimee*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



This issue's theme is 'Celebration' and I wanted to take a moment to celebrate Homebirth Access Sydney and its new incarnation as Homebirth New South Wales. Homebirth Access Sydney has a long history of advocacy and support for homebirthing families. For such a small organisation run completely by volunteers it has definitely met a need in the community and it is wonderful to see that it will be spreading out to include all of NSW. A state-wide approach to advocacy is what is needed now to address the limited access to homebirth services in NSW. Another celebratory point to address is that the exemption for Privately Practising Midwives to hold Professional Indemnity Insurance has been extended until 31st December, 2021, meaning that homebirth with private midwifery care still remains an option in Australia.

This year we have taken this wider focus a step further and have partnered with Homebirth Australia to produce a National Register of Homebirth Services. We are currently still developing this register but the information on private midwives and hospital homebirth programs will all be included so that women can search using their postcode and find out what is available in their area. Using this information we, along with all homebirth advocacy organisations Australia-wide, will be able to find areas where there are no services available and focus advocacy support to these regions to facilitate change. We aim to have this available online in Autumn, 2020.

This is an exciting time to join our team of dedicated volunteers; with growth and change brings many opportunities to have a positive impact. Volunteers do not need to be in Sydney! We meet electronically, so no matter where you live you can join us! I have had the awesome experience of volunteering with HAS since my youngest was born and he is now 4 years old. During this time I've been able to work alongside amazing women (and men!) who dedicate their time and skills to help others. If you care about Homebirth and want to ensure that all women in NSW can access homebirth services regardless of their geography or finances, then please get in touch!

I must also add a little personal note: This will be my last report as president. At our upcoming AGM on February 20th 2020 I will not be standing for re-election. Although I love volunteering with HAS, my personal situation is that I am returning to work and can no longer dedicate the amount of time and focus this particular role deserves. I will be hanging around on the committee though to help where I can. So thank you to all HAS members. It has been an absolute pleasure to serve as president in this organisation.

 *Dodie*

Join Us!

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





MEDIA RELEASE

FROM:

JODIE POWELL

PRESIDENT

HOME BIRTH ACCESS SYDNEY INC

INFO@HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.COM.AU

OCTOBER 2019

HOME BIRTH ADVOCACY ORGANISATION CHANGES NAME IN 41ST YEAR

OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS, SINCE 1979, HOME BIRTH ACCESS SYDNEY INC (HAS) HAS BEEN ADVOCATING FOR HOME BIRTHING FAMILIES IN THE SYDNEY REGION. OUR MAIN GOALS THROUGHOUT THIS TIME HAVE BEEN TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO HOME BIRTHING FAMILIES, AND TO PROTECT AND MAINTAIN ACCESS TO HOME BIRTH AS A VALID BIRTHING OPTION FOR SYDNEY FAMILIES. IN SUPPORT OF THIS GOAL, HAS MAINTAINS A WEBSITE FULL OF UP TO DATE HOME BIRTH INFORMATION, DETAILS OF PRIVATELY PRACTISING MIDWIVES OFFERING HOME BIRTH SERVICES AND CONNECTIONS TO HOME BIRTH SUPPORT GROUPS AND BIRTHWORKERS. TO HELP NORMALISE AND PROTECT HOME BIRTH, AND SHARE HOME BIRTHING INFORMATION, HAS PUBLISHES BIRTHINGS MAGAZINE ELECTRONICALLY AND IN PRINT, WHICH IS FULL OF THEME ARTICLES AND BIRTH STORIES AND PROVIDES UPDATES ON CURRENT EVENTS AND THE CLIMATE OF HOME BIRTH IN AUSTRALIA. HAS REGULARLY REPRESENTS THE INTERESTS OF HOME BIRTHING FAMILIES IN THE COMMUNITY AND UP TO GOVERNMENT LEVEL, WITH COMMITTEE MEMBERS INVOLVED IN CONSUMER ADVOCACY IN OUR LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT HOSPITALS, MAINTAINING CONTACTS WITH PARLIAMENTARY MINISTERS AND ACTING AS CONSUMER REPRESENTATIVES WITH HEALTH CONSUMERS NSW. THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS THAT MAKE UP HAS, AND ENSURE ALL OF THIS IS POSSIBLE, ARE VOLUNTEERS; HAS IS A NON-PROFIT, COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATION.

AT OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING IN FEBRUARY 2019, MEMBERS RESOLVED TO WIDEN OUR GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS TO INCLUDE ALL OF NSW. WE BELIEVE THAT A STATE-WIDE HOME BIRTH ADVOCACY ORGANISATION IS NECESSARY TO HELP ADDRESS THE LACK OF HOME BIRTH SERVICES ACROSS NSW, AND THIS CHANGE IS A RESPONSE TO AN INCREASE IN THE REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT AND INFORMATION IN REGIONAL AND RURAL NSW. THE BROADENING OF OUR GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS IS NOW REFLECTED IN THE RESOLUTION TO CHANGE OUR NAME TO **HOME BIRTH NEW SOUTH WALES INC (HBNSW)**.

IN THE COMING MONTHS WE WILL BE TRANSITIONING TO OUR NEW NAME AND FOCUS, AND CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF ADVOCATING FOR HOME BIRTHING FAMILIES IN THE SYDNEY REGION! OUR MEMBERS RECENTLY VOTED ON OUR NEW LOGO TO BE USED GOING FORWARD. OUR WEBSITE AND CONTACT EMAILS WILL REMAIN THE SAME UNTIL OUR NEW WEBSITE IS BUILT UNDER OUR NEW DOMAIN: **HOME BIRTH NSW.ORG.AU**.



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CELEBRATIONS, RITUALS, CEREMONIES AND TRADITIONS AROUND BIRTH

By [Jenny Blyth](#)
Photos by Nicole Hoschke

In the late afternoon light, Stacey took us with her on a journey along the meandering creek bed below her house.

She was radiantly ripe with child, but strong and agile in body and in mind. With her direction and guidance, we became a moving human art installation. We were family and friends – her close community - and we followed her. She led us deeper into the day and the changing landscape and light, constellations of men, women and her children in various arrangements of relationship to her - the mother with child.

The men were initially preoccupied and clustered together in distant and respectful awe. Over time they moved toward the women under the pull and connection to the father Tony, whose attention and position gradually became more mother and baby focussed.

From the beginning the women were aware of Stacey, drawn by the mere fact of her pregnant state and

the knowing and care it instinctively elicited from them. They drew closer quickly, the wise women and the friends, ready to serve and support in any way, at any moment.

Over the journey, as the sun sank low, the men and women began to converge closer to Stacey. We drew together until we were all around her, with her, over her; in homage, protection and sacred service to her glorious being.

Just as it should be.

This beautiful afternoon was the enactment of a pregnant mother's vision of the meaning of her experience, but also her desires and hopes for humanity's engagement with birth.

'...it depicts the sacredness of creation that women are capable of and how our regard for this directly impacts our lives and the world around us. I feel birth practices have the potential to transform aspects of humanity that can be strengthened by our tuning

into the deeper meaning and wonder that is the creation of life. This can be achieved by men and women consciously engaging equally in the process and carrying this awareness through to parenthood....' Stacey

The nature of childbearing is transfixing and transformative, replete with intense love, drama and profound connection to the meaning of our existence. It is a celebration of life unto itself, and a compelling reason to formalise aspects of the experience with ritual and ceremony. Throughout history and across diverse cultures, ceremony and ritual have been used to mark our rites of passage through life. When a baby grows and then makes the transition from womb to the world, the role and identity of the parents and their family dynamics are altered forever. Gathering community together in ceremony is an opportunity to make new commitments, to celebrate and to deepen connections, and to mark the new phase in family life.

and the new baby are celebrated. But, in Western culture we can create



In many cultures, tradition plays a significant part in how pregnancy, birth and the new baby are celebrated. But, in Western culture we can create our rituals according to our specific intentions and inclinations, reinventing rituals based on freedom of choice and spirit. We no longer look only to baby showers, baptisms and christenings as the cultural standard.

Throughout my time of supporting birth, I have participated in a stunning and creative array of pregnancy and birth blessings, celebrations, ceremonies and rituals. The celebration outlined above was unique and such a beautiful example of the creative freedom we are so fortunate to have in our culture. It was an artistic and philosophical quest of the heart and spirit that highlighted the experience of the pregnant mother and baby's connection to her family, the wider circle of support – including both men and women, and to the earth.

Pregnancy celebrations, like blessingways, might include other symbolic and artistic ceremonies such as creating necklaces or affirmation flags for the birth, so that the love and positive intentions they express are with the mother throughout her experience. The mother's body may be admired, decorated and massaged. There may be a walk through a labyrinth or landscape to symbolise the journey she is undertaking into the unknown. There may also be dedications of practical support or meals to ensure the mother rests and recovers well.

Once the baby is born, celebrations and traditions often feature food – the sustenance of life. I remember the traditional feast of Danish pastries spread on a table for the first meal

after the homebirth of a child born to Danish parents. And, the nourishing soup thick with kelp that was prepared by the Korean grandmother to give her daughter strength after giving birth. In Laos, where I spend time each year, a new mother spends a secluded three weeks tending to her tea drinking, taking different strengths throughout the day as she tends to her baby and to her body. She also creates a ritual out of tending to the hot coals that she sits and sleeps over to ensure her body is kept warm. Around her belly she wears a binder to support her womb and her body that has changed so rapidly and will continue to do so. At the end of three weeks she invites the elders of the village to her home where the parents introduce them to the baby and the baby and parents are blessed with offerings and incantations.

The naming ceremonies I have been invited to in Australia have included the naming of godparents or 'birth' parents and also honouring the significant roles and commitments that all those attending will have on their children's upbringing. Almost always there is an offering of protective blessings and wishes from everyone attending, and some kind of ceremonial acknowledgement of connection and belonging to the land and the elements.

Writing or recording the story of the birth itself can be a profound ritual that creates meaning and a sense of connection with life and the wider world. How a baby is born, the experience of the mother, the beliefs of the family and their particular cultural context, become part of the story that shaped them or was shaped by them. There are myriad details about circumstances and conditions surrounding the event,

including how the sun, the moon, the stars, and the weather were. What was happening in the wider world at the time, what had been happening before, what happened after, what was significant? There is always something positive, something auspicious, something to be grateful for, something to remember.

Birth is a reminder of our ordinary yet extraordinary capability, of the wondrous and ever-changing nature of women's bodies, of the robust and regenerative aspects of life, of our ancestry and the continuation of our lineage. For every woman, it's a time when her animal nature meets her spiritual nature and they become inextricably merged. She becomes co-creator, vessel, participant and witness to the instinctive force of birth. And, as she transcends the perceived and conditioned limitations of her body and mind, her dissolution charges the atmosphere around her and captivates all those in her orbit. On top of all that, another being, a baby, emerges from her body. Now that really is something to celebrate!

Jenny Blyth has been working as an independent birth educator, bodyworker and birthworker in Australia for over 35 years. For over 10 years Jenny & Fiona Hallinan have presented Birthwork Workshops called Creating Amazing Space for Babies, exploring many facets of working with birth through touch awareness & bodywork skills. They are now both Spinning Babies® Approved Trainers. Jenny is project co-ordinator of Lao Birthwork, training birthworkers in poor, remote districts in Laos in emergency and hands-on skills for birth. She is also author of Birthwork and The Down to Earth Birth Book; creator of A World of Birthworkers DVD, and co-creator of The Big Stretch and The Big Stretch Sequel DVDs.
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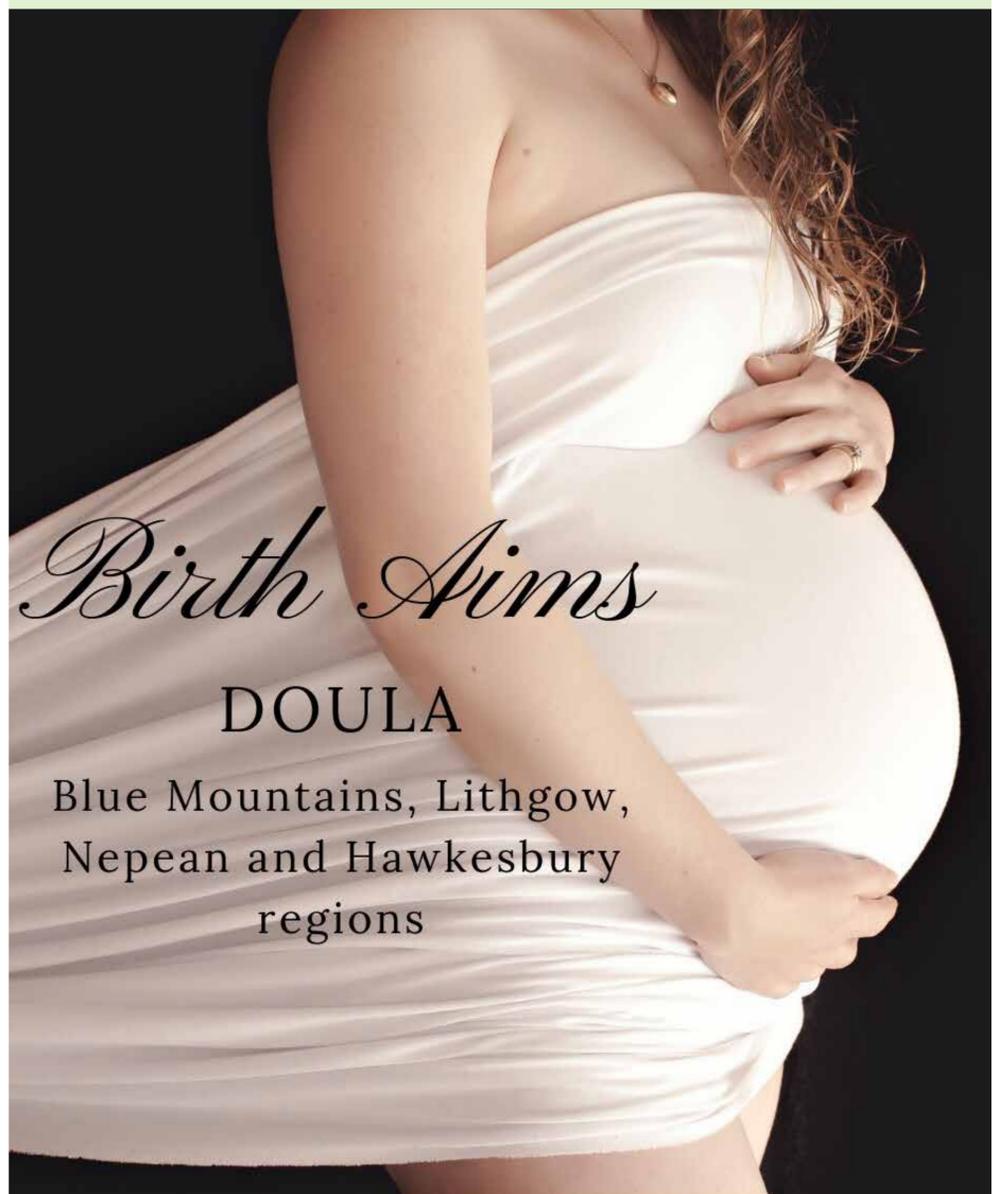
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THE BIRTH OF

Ofelia

Bronté Fisher

Photos courtesy of [Jerusha Sutton](#)

Ofelia is one of the greatest joys of my life. She was born at 10:15pm on Saturday the 29th of June, at 39 weeks exactly.

I had an awful pregnancy, from week 6 until around week 20 I was vomiting about 6 times a day. The vomiting was debilitating and horrible but it was nothing compared to the constant nausea. When I wasn't vomiting I spent almost all of my time in bed, hardly moving or eating. I was so lucky to have a partner who could work and support us, plus my sister and my partner's mum who took turns caring for my son, Llew.

Every morning around 5 am I would wake up, sit bolt upright and vomit violently into a bowl I kept next to the bed (often until I peed myself), and from there it would continue for the rest of the day.

I think I found the nausea more debilitating than the vomiting because it never wavered or gave me a break. The vomiting always came to an end but the nausea felt like it would never leave; I remember often waking up in the mornings and wishing I would just die in the night.

I felt unhappy when it came to sharing the pregnancy with family and friends because I felt like it meant I would then

be choosing to officially be pregnant and face the next two trimesters; it would make it real.

There were times - when I saw her first moving, heard her little heartbeat and felt her kicking - that I was genuinely so excited to have another amazing little person in our family, for Llewyn to become a big brother, for us to guide our children together and grow as parents and partners, but the pregnancy sickness was taking all that joy away and soon I couldn't feel excited anymore.

By 16 weeks I'd lost 10 kilos and when I would occasionally come out of the house and walk down the stairs to the car my legs would tremble with each step, as I hardly left the bed anymore (except for the toilet) and couldn't keep much down.

I cried everyday, feeling isolated and sick. I'd stopped driving after several instances of vomiting so intensely at the wheel I'd almost crashed with Llew in the car.

I didn't feel connected to anyone anymore because I just didn't have the energy to spend time with or talk to friends. I also think it can be difficult for others who haven't experienced severe and debilitating morning sickness to understand.

Very gradually things improved and

by week 20 I could start to eat more than crackers, plain rice and pasta, and I wasn't vomiting from the smell of cooking.

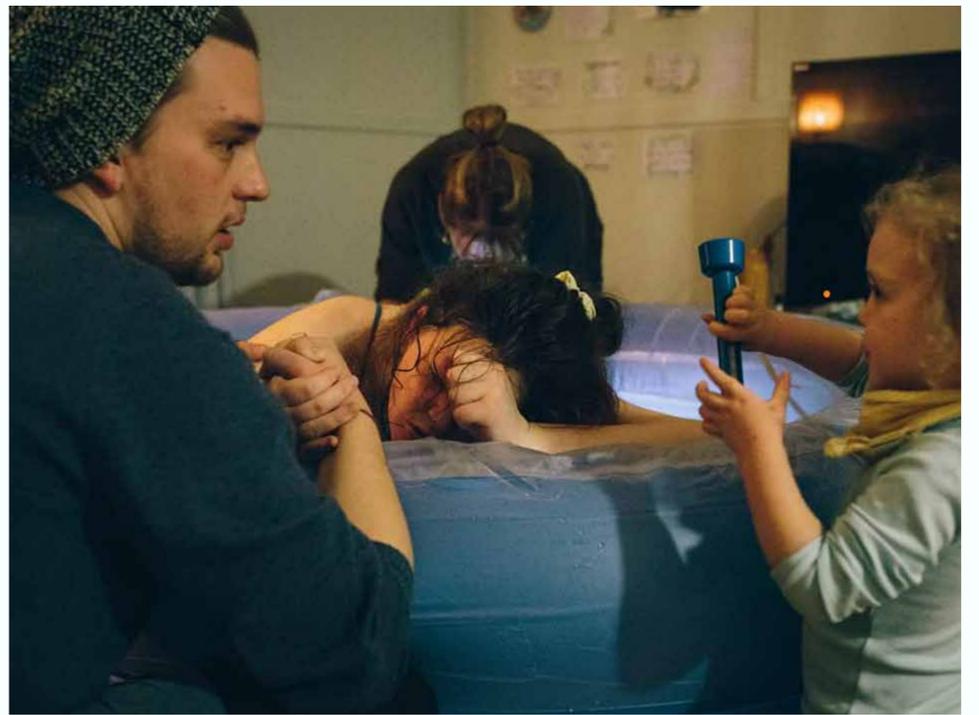
As the vomiting began to ease around halfway, the acid reflux began and gradually got so bad that (coupled with the vomiting) it caused a tear in my oesophagus.

I was put onto Nexium which completely took away the acid reflux and the pain - and thanks to the incredible acupuncture abilities of Anada, I had almost complete relief from nausea for the last month of pregnancy too! :)

By the end (well pretty much from the beginning) I was ready for the pregnancy to be over and to never ever go through one again (haha ok Bronté....we'll see).

So when 37 weeks hit I began doing every single thing I could find on Google and in books to induce labour naturally and safely. At first I thought it was working! I had several nights and a day or two where I had contractions for hours at a time (two minutes apart sometimes), but they always just tapered off.

From 37- 39 weeks I cried and felt angry and frustrated, plus David was getting sick of being used regularly



by me in the different ways I came across as I tried to make labour happen. My midwife, Jo, suggested at 38 weeks that I stop trying to make the baby come out and try instead to relax and just forget about the pregnancy. Jo said that might make me feel better emotionally and (who knows?) even start labour. I ignored this advice for a few days and tried even harder, then finally after another day of no labour and lots of frustration, I went to bed, cried and decided to officially stop trying. The following evening I went into labour.

That night, before labour began, I lay in bed feeling anxious and panicked despite having completed almost everything I'd wanted to get done. I talked to David about how I was feeling as we lay in bed and said I didn't understand why I felt so emotional and worried. We were also pretty tired because Llewyn was on day 5 of hand foot and mouth disease which meant he'd been awake and very upset for several nights in a row. We were hoping for a few nights of proper sleep and a contagion free household before the baby came.

The following morning, Saturday, I did a lot of organising and ran so many errands. Llew and I did a big shop and then went home to make a huge amount of hummus for everyone to snack on if the baby came. Throughout the day I felt an incredible pain and pressure pushing down on my pubic bone and with that I was getting lightning bolt cramps right at the top of my inner thighs. It got to a point in the afternoon where the pressure on my pubic bone hurt so much I wondered if I should call someone. I decided I'd first try having a bath, so after putting Llew down for a very late sleep around 3pm, I ran a hot bath with epsom salts and lavender to try and soothe the pain and relax. I spent about an hour just lying in the water, massaging my sore ribs and enjoying the warmth and peace. Right

before I got out I googled ways to induce labour at home (for the 1,000,000th time), even though by then I already knew them all by heart. I came across a suggestion I'd never seen before which was to 'wear your favourite pair of matching underwear, because the day you do is the day your waters will break on them'. I thought that was pretty funny and decided to try it.

I got out of the bath and into my matching underwear and dressing gown and felt very warm and calm. Within about 20 minutes I started to feel a contraction. Because of all of the false alarms I'd had for the past few weeks, I didn't think much of this and I didn't really expect anything to come of it. Despite that, after just one more very mild contraction, I felt a strong need to message Jo. Jo messaged back to ask how the contractions felt and to let me know she was in Sydney, not the Blue Mountains. She asked if I wanted her to come up and I told her I'd wait 20 minutes to see how things progressed before deciding.

I opened a contraction app on my phone to start timing, and after just a couple more contractions at about two-three minutes apart, Jo messaged me again to say she felt she should come to me and would be leaving for the Blue Mountains right away. As soon as she said that I started to feel worried because I thought once she was on the way, the contractions would of course stop and she would drive all the way for nothing.

I messaged David who was due to get home from work within ten minutes to let him know I was having contractions and that Jo was on her way. He arrived home and started to build a fire while helping me monitor contractions which stayed at around 3 minutes apart for about an hour, until they finally started to get stronger and more intense. David began to rub my lower back through each contraction while I bounced on an exercise ball and Llewyn slept soundly.

Jo arrived and soon after so did our second midwife, Jacqui. By this point the contractions were much more intense and I was finding it difficult to talk or move through them. Still, during the breaks in-between I felt happy, calm, prepared and confident. David and Jo both helped with massaging my lower back through each surge while I leaned against the armchair, the kitchen bench or just stood with David holding me in his arms - which is where I felt the best. I felt really happy at this point because during my first labour with Llewyn, I was so unprepared for the pain and so overwhelmed by the whole experience that I could barely register David's presence, let alone relate to him in any way. This time I felt warm and safe. I felt like David and I were on a journey together and when Llew woke up that feeling only got stronger; I felt more confident.

Jerusha, our photographer, was on her way from Sydney and would be arriving soon, but Jo felt worried that with everyone standing around and watching things might not progress so well. So Jo, Jacqui and Jerusha decided to head up the street for a coffee giving David and I some space for labour to properly establish. Llew got out of bed in a good mood (thankfully) and seemed to understand very quickly what was happening. "Mumma's having the baby, Llew," David told him, "and it's starting to hurt her, but she's ok." Llew listened carefully and then asked me, "OK Mama?" I told him I was fine and gave him a hug and then he ran straight out of the room and we heard him rustling around for a few minutes in the bedroom. He came back with a Gaviscon tablet (which I'd been using for months to try and help with heartburn) and gave it to me. "Here you go Mama!" he said. "One!" he ordered, holding a finger up to me, "Take one!" I thanked him while David and I smiled at each other, so in love with his beautiful little personality.



Around 8pm I told David to call Jo back as labour was not slowing down. Jo, Jacqui and Jerusha came home and worked on getting the pool to the right temperature, which I got straight into when ready. The water provided instant relief and comfort; I felt so much better which I was grateful for because labour was now established and from that point the contractions became much more painful. As I began to breathe heavily I also retreated into myself more, internalising and occasionally vocalising a little to get through a contraction. Jo was giving me sips of water, pressing on my back and reminding me to relax my shoulders and breathe deeply, because I was tensing up like a motherfucker.

I remembered reading about the importance of keeping the body relaxed during active labour and especially to make sure I was not clenching my jaw. It was only once I focused on relaxing it that I realised how much I was doing it and I was then constantly unlocking my jaw. David stayed right next to the pool, letting me grasp his hand and use it as an outlet for the pain. I spent the entire time in the pool facing outward with my arms and head draped over the side.

Llewyn was very busy, sitting in his chair at the table eating crackers with almond butter, doing drawings and occasionally drawing on the crackers and then eating them. Every now and then I'd look up and see him really focused on some task or talking about something and each time I would smile and get a little burst of energy. Having him there was like having a little bit of sunshine wandering around the room, it felt so normal and right. He came over to me a lot, sometimes just to look, or ask me what I was doing or whisper, "I love you." then heading off to do something else.

It was incredibly helpful and supportive to have David next to me holding my hand, encouraging me and wiping my face and neck with a cold towel between contractions, while Jo applied pressure

and rubbed my lower back.

The contractions intensified quickly and I had to put all my energy and focus into being in the moment and staying calm. I soon felt like I was only just making it through each one and the short breaks between them were a relief I can't really describe, but then I began to notice that relief was being replaced by fear.

I was starting to fear the impending contractions that I knew were coming. I tried to counter this, to focus on just making it through each one, each moment; to breathe and be present. Months earlier I had written out positive and encouraging words to focus on during the birth. I forced myself to go back to them and find the ones that would now help me the most. The words that ended up becoming my mantra were the most simple, "This will pass, you can do this." I repeated them over and over in my head, especially as a contraction hit its peak; I'd make those words the only things I allowed into my thoughts.

The other thing that surprisingly helped me through was the music I had chosen to play. From the earliest contractions until I got into the pool I listened to Takk by Sigur Ros, then for the rest of the birth A Moon Shaped Pool by Radiohead played quietly in the background. I look back now and marvel at the power of that music and the impact it had on me. As a song would play (especially ones I love) I felt relief and calm. It was the sensation of hearing something so familiar and second nature to me, music that had moved, comforted, excited and relaxed me so many times before, that now felt so reassuring. It also helped remind me to not let the whole experience overwhelm me. Labour feels so massive and unbelievable that you can forget about everything else and it feels like that's all there is. Listening to music brought me back into the world and then I would remind myself that labour is a normal part of life and I was ok.

Things soon took a turn and I started to feel like I was barely making it through each surge. Jo was telling me to stay with the contraction and breathe but I was starting to doubt myself. Each new contraction had me feeling like I couldn't do it and I began to beg myself in my head to ask out loud if I could go to hospital and get some pain relief. "I can't do this anymore," I kept saying to David, and I'd sob a little bit as I made it through another contraction. "Yes you can!" David, Jo, Jacqui and Jerusha would all say. "You're doing it right now!!" "You can do it," David kept saying quietly into my ear, "I love you and I believe in you." "I love you," I would whisper back, and then I'd keep going.

Jo asked me to see if I could feel anything and I told her I could feel a head, but not hair (which I could feel with Llew); my waters hadn't broken yet. I was getting this recurring feeling that I needed to do a smell? Or maybe a poo. Which really didn't appeal to me to subject everyone to, and capture on film, so I decided to go into the bathroom and sit on the toilet for a bit. I sat down on the toilet, pushed a little, and to my complete surprise heard a pop; finally my waters had broken and it felt good to push. I was both simultaneously terrified and desperate for the next stage of labour to begin; for some sort of progression that would take me out of transition; but now I wasn't sure what to do with this information because sharing it would mean I would have to actually face the next stage of labour. While I was quickly trying to process this through my head Jo called out, "Is everything ok?" and David responded, "Bront's water broke!!" I no longer had to worry about sharing that info.

With Llewyn, labour was much longer and I didn't cope very well. I never felt the urge to push with him, instead it got to a point where I felt so scared, tired and in pain that I had decided I was pushing him out.



Without any need to push or any contractions, it had taken a while and really hurt and I had gotten both a tear and grazing. When he was born and in my arms I'd felt so worried about the pain from the tear, and so exhausted from the labour I had not prepared myself for, I didn't feel like I'd been able to focus as fully on the joy of our first meeting on the outside; I've always felt very sad and disappointed in myself for that. I'd decided long ago that I didn't want to repeat that experience, that with this birth I wanted to wait until my body and baby were ready before pushing. I also hadn't experienced the urge to push before so I wasn't sure what to expect, but now I could feel this was it.

I went back to the pool and then the contractions continued on a whole other level I could hardly believe. Because I now knew the pressure I was feeling (and the sensation of feeling like I needed to do a poo) was because it was time to push, I tried to mentally prepare myself. I suddenly freaked out; I knew that it was time to push the baby out but I also suddenly realised it was TIME TO PUSH THE BABY OUT and I decided I was NOT ready to do that and jumped up and tried to leap back out of the pool and run away. "I think I need to go back into the bathroom!!" I said, thinking maybe I could bide my time away in there. Everyone around me looked very

surprised and Jo told me, "Don't go back to the bathroom love or you'll have your baby on the toilet!" Everyone agreed and gently (but firmly) guided me back to staying in the pool. Begrudgingly I sat down and tried to make peace with the fact that I was staying in the pool.

I'm so, so grateful in retrospect that I had the support and guidance to feel safe enough to stay in the pool, because I really didn't want to give birth into a toilet and I know I probably would have if I had gone back to the bathroom. I knew from last time (when I also leapt out of the pool right before I pushed Llew out), and from preparing myself this time, that my tendency to suddenly

freak out and run away meant I was close. I tried to reason with myself that this was a good thing, that I had prepared for this and it meant I was progressing really well! But in my own experiences, birth takes you to a place where even solid logic doesn't help anymore.

I sat back down, this time with my back against the wall of the pool and my legs straight out in front of me, and realised this was it. When the next contraction started I pushed as hard as I could; I yelled and pushed. I found I had to then just fully throw myself into the process 100% and surrender. I remember seeing and feeling my legs shaking with the sheer effort of pushing and thinking, "Anything you have left, even if it feels like it's nothing, use it now!"

I pushed and it felt like the baby was going to be coming out of my bottom. After another giant effort, the sensation changed from feeling like a baby sized poo was going to come out of my butt, to feeling like I was actually about to birth a baby. I could feel the head and I knew I was close. Everyone was around me and supporting me: David was holding me, Llewyn was standing next to me and I could just hear David saying, "Llew quick!! Move around the pool to where aunt Jo is and you can watch the baby being born!!" Llew, who doesn't like to be told what to do, was shouting back,

"STOP IT DADDU!! SHUT UP DADDU, NO YELL AT ME!!!" and David was trying to explain that he wasn't yelling at him, he just didn't want Llew to miss it!

Despite both of them being right next to my head it was like I was underwater, hearing them talk at half volume; every part of me was focused on birthing my baby and I reminded myself that the baby and I were in this journey together, with the same goal. I felt a surge of excitement to finally meet and hold my baby; it was so close now.

Llew finally moved around to the other side of the pool just in time. I pushed as hard as I possibly could until Jo reminded me to breathe the head out slowly and stop pushing. I breathed and focused and to my amazement the head almost completely came out. I sat for a minute and just touched it, stroked the hair and rested; amazed. This is still my most vivid memory of the whole birth; even now, two weeks later, I will stroke her tiny head while she's feeding and remember that moment in all its detail. Then I pushed a little again and breathed the head fully out. I knew I would need one more big effort and with everything I had left I pushed and birthed my baby into the water, into our home, into love. I was being held by the people I love most in the world and supported by three amazing women. I can't imagine a better way for our baby to come into this world.

I don't remember this next moment exactly, but I know Jo gently untangled the cord from around her neck and placed her in my arms. I held her to my chest, laughing and crying at the same time; relieved, joyful, exhausted and probably a bit delirious. I still couldn't believe she was finally here. I readjusted my position and saw that she was a girl. "Llewyn, this is your sister," I said, with David's hand in mine.

I had pushed her out so quickly that although her heartbeat was fine, she was a bit limp and took some bagged air which she responded to well. I birthed the placenta and once I felt ready, we all worked together to get me and the baby out of the pool onto the waiting lounge. The baby and I lay together in towels and blankets and once the placenta had stopped pulsating and I felt ready, David told the baby he was about to cut her umbilical cord and then tied a rainbow cord around her little stump. Jo had the placenta in a container and was having a look at it and Llewyn came over to see it too. "Mama, what's that?"



he asked, looking at it with a mixture of interest and apprehension. "That's your baby brother Llew," I joked. "See this is your sister and that's your brother" Llew studied it for another minute and said, "Ok, I like this one!" I told him he could name his brother (since we had decided against his baby name recommendations - Red Bird and Oswald). After a lot of consideration he decided on Dragon Pal who is now planted in our garden under an ornamental apricot tree in Ofelia's honour. He seemed a bit worried when we put Dragon Pal into the fridge and he didn't come back out, and when we later plopped him into a hole in the garden, but we told him he was happy there.

I lay on the lounge with the babe against my skin and despite feeling absolutely exhausted, I felt amazing too; completely blissed out and happy. She lay with her chin against my bare chest and quickly started to look around for my nipple; I helped her find it and after a few tries she latched on for about 20 minutes. David made me a cup of tea and the mood became very calm and peaceful, all of us just enjoying the high of a beautiful homebirth and drinking tea as Jacqui began to empty the pool.

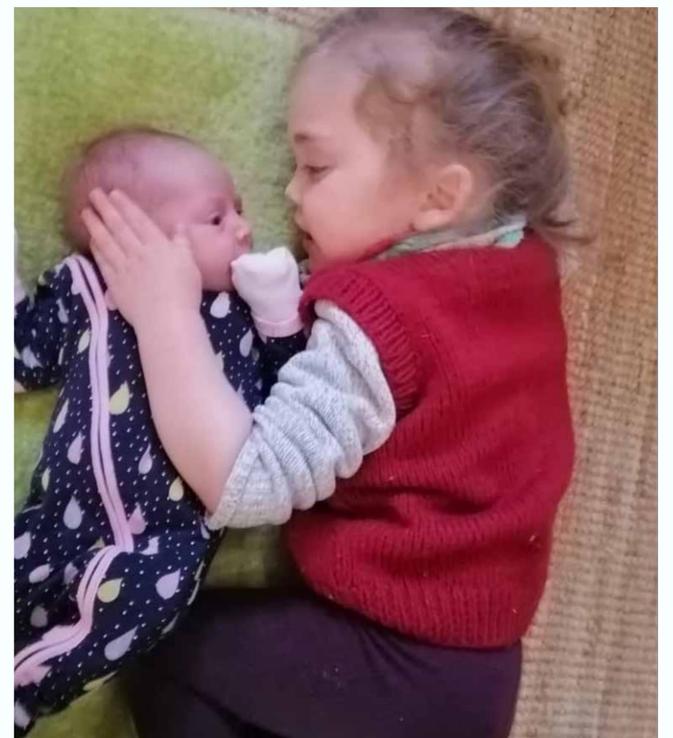
Once the birth was over one of the first things I thought about was how much I INTENSELY disliked the whole experience of giving birth. I think the first thing I actually said out loud to everyone was, "I hated that!!" But in the days to follow I began to read through everything I'd written in the months leading up to labour and reflect on what I'd most wanted from the experience. I realised that while birth was never going to be a super fun experience, this one had 100% been the birth I'd wanted. I had been able to stay focused and calm and positive for (almost) the entire labour, Llew and David were both there and involved and I felt utterly loved and supported by them and by my midwives and photographer. I had laboured really well, I'd stayed in my home and given birth gently into the water with no

intervention or disruption. I feel so lucky when I think about the birth and while I have no idea what the future holds, whether I'll ever have another baby, I know that if I don't, I'm happy with this birth being the last. I couldn't have had a more empowering and beautiful birth and I hold each moment of it in my memory as one of my most precious possessions.

I have always been very self critical and found it difficult to accomplish something without focusing on ways I could have done better or improved. I've been working very hard on changing that for the past decade and while it's still (and may always be) a work in progress, I can see my sense of self love and pride increasing each year. I can truly say (and mean it) that I feel so proud of myself; I really made this birth an experience of love. I have come out of it feeling so in love with my little family, so proud of how I birthed Ofelia and confident in my own strength of mind and body.

It took us almost 2 weeks to pick our daughter's name. We called her Ofelia, which means little helper; to help or assist. Her middle name is Gwynfa, after my incredible and inspiring Welsh Grandma.

If there was ever a moment in my life that I could choose to demonstrate love in its purest form it would be the moment I first held Ofelia, with Llew and David right by my side. We are love.



Bronté is a mama to three year old Llewyn and three month old Ofelia. She's passionate about conscious & compassionate parenting, blueberries, pomegranates, spicy ginger chai, making (and eating) chocolate. In her spare time (haha) she loves doing all sorts of crafts (embroidery, needle felting, crochet, baking), drawing comic strips & making amateur films with her creative partner Steph. She always envisioned she would give birth at home & was lucky enough to have two beautiful homebirths with her amazing midwife Jo. One day when her babies are bigger she hopes to continue inventing and eating her chocolate creations full time.

PREGNANCY AND BIRTH AS RITES OF PASSAGE

By Esther-Maria Lindner

Around the world, different cultural traditions (including ancient European) and the time of human beings, pregnancy and birth has been recognised and celebrated as a crucial one of the many rites of passage a woman goes through in her life journey.

What marks a rite of passage? What is its purpose? Why and how do we celebrate it?

A rite of passage is an event and process that takes place in a person's life marking a time of transition, initiation and change of identity and life on every level – mental, spiritual, emotional and physical - and aligns with the seasons of a human being. Traditionally, some of the major rites of passage for a woman include entrance to life, first menarche, moving from child to having responsibilities, marriage, pregnancy and birth, menopause, major illness / near death / accidents, divorce, and lastly, death. These unavoidable passages in life require preparation and have a major impact on one's reality, consciousness and the way we live life. Traditionally, a rite of passage needs witnesses to be acknowledged and integrated.

The event itself changes one's consciousness and experience of self and life forever. Here, preparation is key, because the experience and its outcome is unforeseen and the event itself is uncontrollable. As these rites of passage touch every aspect of the human's existence – Mind (Air), Spirit (Fire), Emotion (Water), Body (Earth) - in order to experience them as empowered and not traumatised, many cultures around the globe and throughout time have created processes and celebrations to prepare for and offer support and guidance through it. These are generally held with witnesses, masters of ceremony / priest(ess) / shaman / (grand)mother / (grand)father / healer / midwife / witch, you name it.

Most modern world westerners know or use the term Blessingway for the celebration of the transition from pregnant woman to mother through birth. Few are aware that Blessingway [Hózhójí] is a Diné term used as an umbrella term for all of the rites of passage, not just the blessing of a pregnant woman in preparation for birth, and the Diné therefore ask for it not to be utilised by others.

When we look around the world, from aboriginal Australian wisdom, old healers from the German Alps, old Celtic traditions or the Americas, to African or Asian wisdom, we will find a common theme among the preparation, celebration and integration of a rite of passage. This theme is the wheel of life, also called the medicine wheel, representing the four elements, directions, moon phases, daytimes and seasons of nature. It recognises that humans are not separate from nature but are nature herself. One therefore operates on nature's spirit laws, thus requiring the support on all aspects of the wheel of life when transitioning through a rite of passage.

Another common aspect is the need for a certain integration period. While the person is integrating and healing from the rite of passage they receive support and follow specific structures, processes and also taboos.

Pregnancy as rite of passage

Across cultures, pregnancy, birth and the first weeks of motherhood are particularly sacred, and require very specific sets of preparation, celebration and support. Here we also distinguish between processes for the mother and processes and ceremony for the child.

Today we focus on processes and ideation of this for the woman. According to many global belief systems, the energetic power of the process of conception to postnatal has a profound effect on

the earth, the community and society. Whether you sit with an auntie in Australia or a traditional midwife from Ecuador it will completely blow your mind as to how sacred and profound this really is and what impact it has beyond the insular family. Everything about it is important, has an impact and a huge power beyond our western perception.

Over the years I had three most outstanding times with different aunties* from different areas in Australia. Although each of these wisdom keepers had differing teachings, a common consensus seems to be that it is sacred to bring a spirit into this earth body, and it is important that the greater community supports the pregnant and postnatal mother so that she has a peaceful heart at all times to transfer that peace to the child. When a mother is peaceful and loving in pregnancy, birth and postnatal, the children she brings through are peaceful, loving contributors to their community and society. Hence care and ceremony for woman, mother and child is important.

According to Ecuadorian traditional teachings**, a woman is so connected to mother earth that when she is held and supported through her pregnancy, birth and post partum, and if she flourishes, one can observe the whole of mother earth, the harvest of the lands and the community to be peaceful and abundant. Yet when a pregnant woman does not receive this, one can witness the opposite manifest in the area; scarcity and strife can meet the community. Consequently, pregnant women, birthing women and new mothers are very well cared for. Just as in many other cultures, the woman receives massages, wrapping of the abdomen and care through herbal and musical enchantment; song and drumming play strong roles. An interesting ceremony that is part of birthing ritual is that the woman is wrapped in a type of belt or shawl that has 10 knots; whenever the woman has dilated a centimetre a knot is opened and

when the final knot is opened her body lets go and releases the baby.

In Hopi tradition, a woman actually births alone with the maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother outside of her birthing space. After the woman has birthed the child, the maternal grandmother enters the room to tie the cord and to care for her daughter and new grandchild. Once they are washed and comfortable the paternal grandmother will enter the room. She is the mistress of ceremony for all the rituals to come over a 20 day postnatal period in which the mother and child are resting and being cared for in their own space. This period holds strict protocols and taboos, one of which is that on the 19th day the mother will grind corn to flour to be used in ceremony on the 20th day. The 20th day is dedicated to celebrate the new life. The new life that has entered the community, the new life the woman is entering and the first part of the medicine wheel. Hence, ceremony begins early on sunrise. All female relatives enter the resting mother's space to perform purification rituals; washing, steaming, smoking and singing. At the same time that the woman is resting for 20 days, the father is going through his own process in the community's Kiva (an underground sacred spiritual place of ceremony). When the woman and child are introduced to the community and father, the new life is celebrated and this is when the child will receive its name.

In Mexico, pregnant, birthing and postnatal women are cared for utilising spirit baths, steams, massage, song, prayer, herbs and rebozo techniques. For me, their most inspiring practice is the postnatal care and the closing of bones ceremony^{***}. This ceremony is performed when the woman stops bleeding, approximately 4-6 weeks after giving birth. In the time between birth and the ceremony she is cared for by her family / community to spend time nursing, healing, and adjusting to life as a mother. When she returns to community, and her postnatal rest and integration period comes to an end, her midwife comes to perform the ceremony. While the female relatives look after the baby and any other children, the midwife first washes and bathes the woman. She tenderly cares for her, massages her and gives

her nourishing, loving care, as a mother does for her child. The ceremony itself utilises the rebozos that were used in her pregnancy and birth care and brings her spirit back into her physical self, closing the bones and body after the big opening of pregnancy and birth; an integration piece of all the levels (Mind, Emotion, Spirit, Body).

Looking at the postnatal period according to Indian / Hindu^{****} tradition, it is again recognised that the woman and the child need an integration, healing and bonding period. For a period of 4-6 weeks, the mother will spend time on a daybed being nourished and supported through the women of her family who will come to cook for her. She receives very specific meals that have species for digestion and milk flow. The new mother will sit with the women of her family / community, receiving massages and being taught how to massage her child with fragrant oils. The local priest will also come and draw the Ohm symbol on the tongue of the child using honey and speak and chant Sanskrit prayers to bless mother and child.

Integrating rite of passage thinking into the western care model

So how can we tap into this? How can we make sure our pregnancy, birth and postpartum is held, supported and allows women to flourish?

Across the above cited cultures and also traditional practices of ceremony across the world there seems to be a few common aspects:

- Pregnancy, birth and postnatal care on body, mind, emotion and spirit
- Use of purification rituals using either water, smoke or brushing
- Blessing Ceremony in preparation of birth
- Use of wrapping, herbs / spices and massages
- Postnatal resting period that is in line with the time the uterus requires to return to its 'normal' state (roughly 3-6 weeks)
- Ceremony to mark the end of the postnatal period
- Throughout the whole time, community support on daily tasks and activities to foster a peaceful heart and existence within the mother and child

Final Words

All in all, it is our role as guardians of pregnancy, birth and postnatal time to support the mother in the transition from woman to mother and continue to do this also for mums who go through new transitions with each birth. We must acknowledge that women's role, identity and consciousness continues to change.

When a mother is fully supported and cared for on each of these levels she will experience an empowered transition. No matter the direction the birth took, she has the tools to claim the experience as her initiation into an empowered and supported mother and guardian of an incarnating spirit, and can take her seat among the mothers of the world shaping the next generation.

*Minmia NSW in 2009 and 2010, 10 different aunties at an extensive elder gathering on sacred land in Outback SA in 2014, Milliwanga from NT in 2018

**In 2016 I had the opportunity to meet Ramiro Ramero Partera, traditional shamanic midwife from Ecuador
***As taught by Angelina Martinez Miranda in 2016

**** As shared by my friend Priya, her mother and her grandmother in 2012

When she is not teaching about Conscious Conception, Esther-Maria practices as a doula, bodyworker and Reiki Jin Kei Do Master. She has been apprenticed to a variety of Medicine Peoples and Shamans from various traditions and is deeply committed to the teachings and practices she received from them. Her conscious conception and birthwork is shaped by and unites all these foundations to reconnect her clients and students to the sacredness of conception, pregnancy and birth. Esther's work recognises the power of these rites of passage to heal the Earth - one conception, one birth and one generation at the time.
www.aparaba.com



It's My birth! I'll Celebrate If I want to!

We have a strange society, don't you think?

Women who celebrate – or enjoy – birth are vilified.

Women who look forward to and prepare for birth are mocked.

'Birth Brat', 'Birthzilla', braggart, lucky, offensive ... all have been applied to women who talk positively about their birth experience. And, very sadly, these cruel descriptions have come from other women.

Why do the positive, rejoicing, celebrating ways of another cause offence?

Why is it 'bragging'?

And, who gets to decide what someone can and can't celebrate?

Positive stories are ESSENTIAL. A positive birth is not down to luck.

Women who have positive births talk about feeling respected, involved, central to the experience ... no matter what the 'type' of birth.

"If a woman doesn't look like a goddess during labour, someone isn't treating her right." (Ina May Gaskin)

So, why is it that celebrating birth is only happening on the fringe?

Why isn't our society celebrating birth?

I think the problem lies with our cultural training - many women don't know they CAN question the doctor, let alone seek another opinion or change care providers.

Part of this is the power play that occurs when visiting the doctor (for any reason):

- The act of waiting - makes you unimportant
- The act of being called - makes you submissive / obedient
- Entering the doctor's room - you become a visitor
- The way the doctor launches into the procedures, types little notes or avoids eye contact - dehumanises you
- The way you are ushered out before you can ask your questions - devalues you.

Before you know it, you have paid your fee and leave wondering what happened. Some people are satisfied as long as they have a script or a test to do (something to show for the consultation). Others leave feeling powerless and confused.

The term 'patient' means wait. Wait to be called. Wait to be 'informed'. Wait for instructions.

During pregnancy, you can be the most confident woman; educated in, and well prepared for natural birth. Supported by a partner who is equally prepared and confident in natural birth. but as soon as you enter the doctor's room or the maternity ward *something strange happens to you both - your confidence evaporates*. You can't think straight. Is it the lighting? The questions? The suggestions for interventions? The feeling of being rushed? The sense of authority?

The Authority Phenomenon, known as 'Milgrims' Agency Theory' (Milgrim, 1974) is a very real state of being referred to as 'agentic'. Milgram suggested that two conditions must be in place for a person to enter the agentic state:

1. The person giving the orders is perceived as being qualified to direct another's behaviour. That is, they are seen as legitimate.
2. The person being directed believes that the authority will accept responsibility for what happens.

The first condition occurs in pregnancy because of this perception of authority, especially when in a medical setting where the hierarchy is very apparent. The second condition occurs when fear and lack of understanding prevent autonomy, and it's easier to hand over the responsibility. Rhea Dempsey (author of Birth with Confidence) refers to this as the Trance of Acquiescence.

Perhaps for those who acquiesce, the power of the care provider is so overwhelming, that they do not even realise that they have any power. They accept their role as patient, are seemingly happy with it, and just 'go with the flow'. Perhaps the outcome is accepted (without trauma or question) with a sense of thanks or gratitude towards the 'heroic' authority. And, whilst this may seem fine on the surface, it begs the question; why/how has our society reached the point where the majority of women do not struggle with this unbalanced power.

Catherine Bell is The Birth Cartographer, Australian Doula Representative of the Year and Mother of four. Two of Catherine's births were at home. Her birth stories are told on the Circle of Birth podcast. To Catherine, birth is a celebration. This does not mean it is easy, it means it is an important life event; worthy of honour and worthy of taking time to prepare.

Find out more about creating a Birth Map via Catherine's [YouTube](#) channel.

There are Five Stages of Being. When speaking of childbirth, they are an insightful way to see where we are as a society, and why it is so rare to hear of birth as a celebration.



FEAR: In this Stage of Being, we experience a physical reaction (rapid heart rate, for example), feel anxious and wary, possibly even angry. In order to avoid the experience, we will choose 'avoidance' options in an attempt to numb or 'void' this response. It is also easier to hand the responsibility of this over to an authority. This usually means a high intervention birth, with a belief of being saved.

TOLERANCE: In this stage there is a level of knowing that birth is a part of life, but still preferring to avoid fully experiencing it ... there is a holding back and a reluctance to compromise. There is still a feeling of avoidance, which tends to lead to a 'managed' experience. Birth is processed, but not experienced.

ACCEPTANCE: This is the stage where women start to feel more open to the experience, and will seek to compromise - to make some decisions more actively and look at the options more openly. Less likely to avoid the experience, more likely to have a 'plan' that states, "I will have a natural birth, unless medically warranted."

UNDERSTANDING: This is a stage where the power shifts back to the individual. This is where agreed differences, without judgement, can exist in harmony. This is where open communication and enjoyment come into play. The individual becomes assertive, and able to explain their needs, whilst understanding the full context. They may seek support, and do not wish to avoid the experience. They are more likely to have a map (rather than a plan).

CELEBRATION: This is a Stage of Being where the individual takes full responsibility and immerses themselves in the experience. They acknowledge the importance of this life event, and seek to engage in the experience completely. They bring joy and confidence, choosing care providers and supporters that fully embrace the celebration.

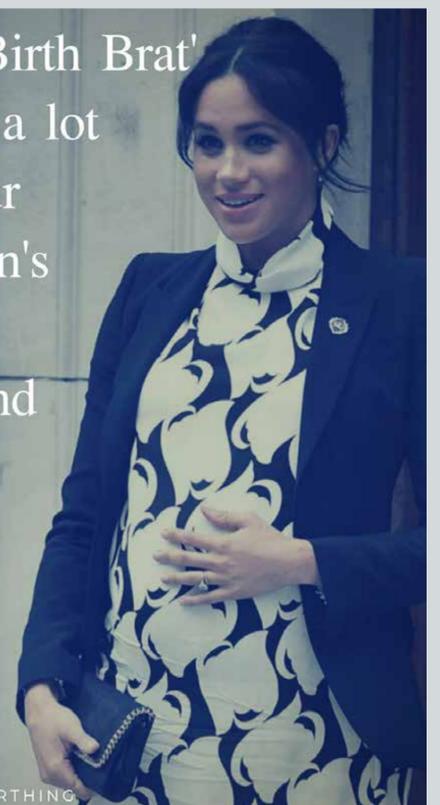
Unfortunately, our society is currently stuck in Stage One and Two. The small number of women who dare to question this authority may be labelled as trouble-makers (or atopic), or have to enter in a power struggle to retain control. If they are fortunate, they will have several genuine options for their care, and will be able to choose the one that supports them.

Autonomy starts with genuine options. Autonomy continues with the freedom and support to make informed decisions.

As a society we fear and, at best, tolerate birth. Rarely do we celebrate it. As a society we do not value the importance of this life event or understand the reality of matrescence. Together we Celebrate Birth. We experience it fully and know that with each birth celebrated, society heals a little more. The rise of the doula is evidence of this healing. More and more women are taking this path, with the aim of guiding more and more women toward Celebration. With every new doula, knowledge is reclaimed. With every woman and her partner who celebrate birth, a strong family emerges. With every child who hears their birth story told as a celebration, another being grows more beautiful, more whole, more open and with more joy. A doula helps navigate and prepare, encouraging people to claim their autonomy. The doula also provides opportunity to debrief a previous experience and give it context. A doula is the key to shifting towards understanding and celebration.

"The phrase 'Birth Brat' says a hell of a lot more about our society, women's rights and the narrative around birth than it does about The Duchess of Sussex!"

MEGAN ROSSITER
FOUNDER OF POSITIVELY BIRTHING

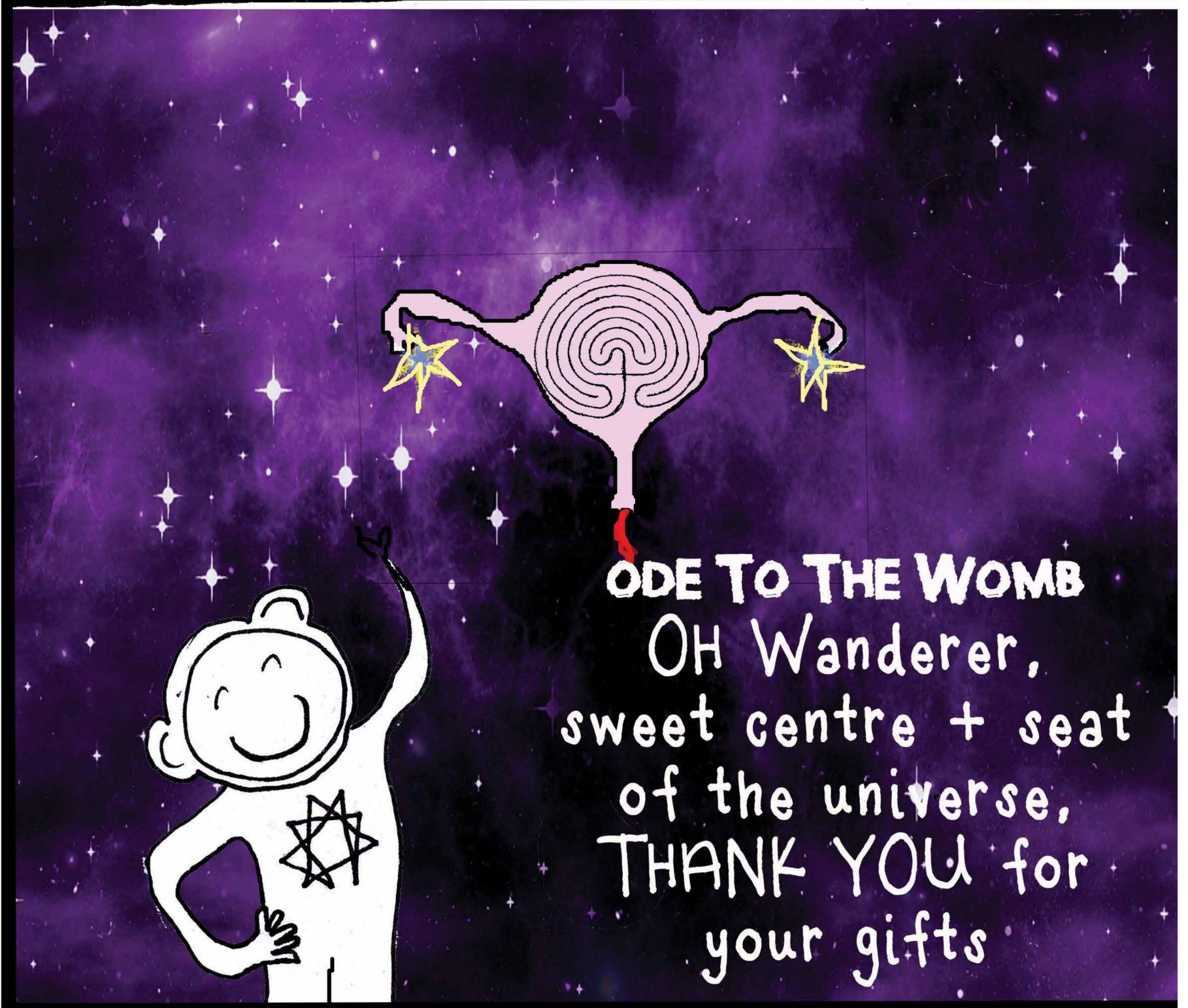




THE STARS
ARE OUR ANCESTORS
AND OUR UNBORN
CHILDREN. WE
all come from
the stars, and to
them, shall
RETURN

let go of fear, become
informed and assert your
knowledge. It has been
within us since the beginning

CELEBRATION



ODE TO THE WOMB
OH Wanderer,
sweet centre + seat
of the universe,
THANK YOU for
your gifts



BLESSINGWAYS

By Natalie Venegas

Photography by Dianna Martinez and Katie Barnett

The gift of motherhood came to me after a five-year, life changing journey. While I would describe much of the journey as gut-wrenchingly painful (filled with struggles of infertility and the devastation of many losses), I also view this time as the most liberating, soul enlightening and self-empowering transformation of my life. The changes that grew in me prepared me to be a better mother and set me on a new path of life purpose.

I found my path to healing in natural therapies which led me to emotional and spiritual healing that was life restoring for me. Through a focus on my desires rather than my losses, I fell pregnant again and just knew I was going to grow, birth, hold and raise the precious little human forming in my belly.

I had a lot of time to invest into my knowledge of pregnancy and birth (it had become quite the obsession) and along the way I discovered water birthing and then home birthing and I knew this was for me. Once hubby was on board, that was it - a home birth was what we planned.

My struggle with infertility had gifted me a new understanding of the richness of life and of its extreme, raw

beauty. I'd found new confidence in me, in my body and in my truth. Being pregnant and planning a home birth felt amazing. It was incredibly healing and I felt the most beautiful and empowered I'd ever felt in my life. My body was doing what it was designed to do and I trusted it completely (well, most of the time - healing of old beliefs and habits takes time).

When it came time to plan a baby shower, I hit an abrupt, knowing truth - 'No... that's NOT for me!'. This was not the way I wanted to celebrate my miraculous, life changing, soul defining experience. The idea of not celebrating my journey saddened me, but I knew of no alternative.

Then my midwife lent me a few birthing books and in reading them I discovered the Celebration of The Blessingway or Mother Blessing. The very idea captured me and I knew this was the way I wanted to celebrate my journey of feminine healing, my coming into wholeness. I had never experienced a Blessingway and knew none of my friends had either. I found myself researching and planning what I believed would be a celebration not only of my story, but of the new glimpse of feminine truth and purpose each woman would experience.

calling
we





I felt so strongly in the power of the feminine, in the miracle our bodies are capable of, in the motherly instinct or calling we embody (whether we're mothers or not) and in the healing powers women hold to bless the world. I wanted to celebrate the beauty of this feminine life with other women. With a grateful heart, I planned my own Blessingway and asked others to be involved where they could. The planning taught me about my inner circle (a group of women, beyond my friend list, who I knew would get and honour the significance of the Blessingway and be inspired to live their feminine truth) and it taught me to trust life (the women who would come were the ones meant to be there).

My Blessingway was such a lovely experience. We shared, laughed and cried as each woman selflessly gave of their hearts to empower me for the final act of becoming a mother. They gave me candles for my birthspace, gifted me with beautiful words of affirmation and gave me meaningful beads which were strung together on a rainbow catcher (a very personal symbol for me). One washed my feet to free me of fear and another drew henna on my belly while the others drew meaningful symbols of feminine empowerment on each other. In return, I gave each of them a pair of beaded foot sandals I'd made and wrote them a note sharing with them the feminine strengths I admired in each of them. They also took a wrist bell home to wear while I was in labour to remind them to hold space for me. We then belly danced to end our celebration.

When most of the women had left, two of my closest friends and my mum prayed blessings and cried with joy over my birth space, my life and the life inside my belly. It was the perfect way to honour my miracle and my heart felt incredibly prepared to birth my baby, which I did, in my parents' home six weeks later. It

was a beautiful, intervention free, peaceful, empowering birth and my little girl was the perfect gift of feminine healing for my heart.

When we joyfully found out we would be blessed with another rainbow baby, I contemplated whether or not to have another Blessingway - I am so glad I did. While I had healed so much through the pregnancy and birth of my daughter I felt, coming into this birth, an irrational fear that I'd got lucky with my first home birth and that it might not happen again. I knew I needed to release this fear and also celebrate my new miracle child.

Beautifully, as life divinely knows one's needs, one of my close friends who had attended my first Blessingway offered to facilitate this one. We planned a gorgeous ceremony together. I discovered again that my inner circle had transformed and new women that motherhood had brought into my life replaced some of the friends who had attended previously. I intentionally wanted the ceremony to be comforting and healing to each of the precious women in my circle.

As they arrived I placed a symbolically coloured braid around their wrist. During the ceremony they spoke birth blessings over me, gave me beads they felt represent me and 4th trimester gifts of nurture as well as symbolic ribbons of blessing and intentions over my baby's life. I gave each woman a feather hair-piece that was the same colour as the braid on their wrist and spoke to the beautiful qualities each colour symbolised in them that I desired more of as a mother. As I spoke to this they took off their braid and tied it around a candle in the centre of the circle



as a symbol of them gifting me those qualities.

A dear friend washed my feet to release my fear and another friend then performed a peace ceremony for the circle. Each woman spoke with beautiful vulnerability to a fear they wanted release from, then they lit a candle to symbolise the giving over of their fear to a higher power and allowing peace to fill their heart. This moment became incredibly healing, deeply spiritual and, in many ways, life changing for us all.



We cried many cleansing tears and for many, peace now came to them in the perfect way. I know it will come to the rest in life's perfect time.

It was at the end of this time shared that we all realised how rare it is to share the burdens of the heart in a safe place of understanding and many expressed to me a desire to do more feminine connecting.

To conclude our celebration they each made a birth flag for me while we enjoyed a delicious meal, lovingly made by a friend. My heart was again ready to give birth and I did once again in my parents' home. My little boy was birthed quickly, safely and intervention free just as we had hoped and planned. I am eternally blessed and grateful to have followed my heart and had two perfect, empowering homebirths.

While my personal Blessingway story is one of celebration in learning to trust my femininity, it is also one in being transformed and finding my life purpose. Through experiencing my Blessingways,

friends have spoken into my life their belief in the importance of healing feminine circles and encouraged me to follow the passion and heart I have for this sacred space. I've had the honour of facilitating a few Blessingways for their own pregnancies too. Each Blessingway has been a beautiful celebration of the mother's journey and a healing conclusion to their stories too. It has introduced more women to the heart connection and healing that occurs when we come together to honour and celebrate our femininity.

I look back now at my journey with such gratefulness as it has serendipitously led me to study Women's Circle and Blessingway Facilitation with Imogen Bailey from Honouring Heart, and I am now holding a monthly circle for my gorgeous friends and birthing and breathing life into my own circle business – 'She en Circle'. I call it my sacred women's business! It's incredible what life gifts you when you learn its lessons and trust there is a purpose. I can't think of a more beautiful and honouring way to

embrace the feminine journey of freedom than in circle with other heart filled, spiritually in-tune, authentic women of the sisterhood. Here's to living from our truth.

Natalie Venegas is a mother of two precious rainbow babies and currently a proud stay at home mum and wife to her supportive husband Edgar, who has taken this journey of self-discovery and truth with her. She is an advocate for natural and knowledge empowered birth and dreams of championing women who wish to live joyfully and authentically from their truth. She is the founder and facilitator of She en Circle - a Women's Circle and Blessingway business located in Brisbane. To follow her journey or contact her head to [She en Circle](#), or call her on 0402 771 565.

Every woman deserves continuity of support. Every woman deserves a doula.

If you'd like to inquire about doula support, Closing the Bones, Women's Circles or Mother Blessings, get in touch! I'd love to know how I can support you.

0413 416 210 / @claireheenandoula / www.claireheenandoula.com.au



Claire Heenan Doula

Birth Announcements

Teddy



Teddy Podolski – **7th February, 2019**

After staying warm and snug in my belly for nearly 43 weeks our baby boy decided to slowly enter our earth. The excitement and anticipation was out of control. We laboured together night and day over and over. When labour finally started I was beyond excited. Freedom to move and be in the shower are beautiful memories that I will forever cherish. Adam and Jo by my side throughout the night. Our Teddy was born through my tummy, assisted into the world by my hands and up to my chest. He was born surrounded by love and the best most incredible support that I could ever have imagined. My body made, carried and birthed our perfect 4.5kg baby boy. Teddy chose his birthday, he felt the oxytocin surges of labour and he was preparing to be born. I am grateful I felt my liquor running down my legs in my own home. I am so happy that I could experience the surge of contractions in my space. None of Teddy's birth story would have been possible without Jo as our midwife, advocate and friend. Jo, I will never have the words to thank you for your support, trust, empathy, love and strength. You are truly one in a bizillion. Thank you xxxxx

Abigail



Abigail Mateo Tjønndal made her way into the world on a cool, crisp Monday morning on **March 25** at 8:17am, weighing 3.18 kilos. Big brother Bailey and pappa Arne proudly stood close by witnessing her first breath as she lay in the warm embrace of her mamma, Jeremay. Private midwife Jacqui Wood and doula Kylie Roughsedge lovingly supported each member of our family throughout our pregnancy and birth journey. Both amazing women created a safe space for us to fulfil our dream of a VBAC in our family home. A thousand times thank you! Salamat! Tusen takk!

Satsuki



Born: **17/05/2019** Weight: 3.45kg

Thanks to all the incredible men and women who supported us along the way. Special thanks to my amazing midwife Belinda Henkel and doula Bree Downes for supporting and believing in us when few others would.

Rosanna



Baby Rosanna (Rosie) was born at home in **May 2019**. Miss Rosie weighed 3kg and we were so excited to meet her. My support team, including my husband Stephen, midwife and a midwifery student, were amazing and I would describe the whole experience as incredibly intense but calm.

Evalie



Evalie Maia Sing joined our family on the **3rd July, 2019** at 5:29pm. She was born into her mum's hands at 3.75 kg, 55 cm long with a 36.5 cm head circumference. Evalie is perfection in a little baby and we are all so grateful she's here!

Luana



Luana DiPascal Dargren, born in the water on the **20th August 2019**, weighing 3.12kg.

My deepest gratitude goes out to my partner and number one human, Hampus, who always has my back; my brother Callum, whose encouragement and strength supported my mind and body through birth; and my wonderful midwife Geesje, who nourished me throughout pregnancy and opened my eyes to birth. The interplay of each of you created the most special space for Luana to meet the world.

Lincoln



Welcome to the world Lincoln John Davis. **23/8/19** 5500gms

Thank you to my beautiful birth team, Midwife Sheryl Sidery, 2nd midwife Jacqui Wood, doula Jacki Barker, Photographer Yasmina Nadine and my amazing partner Ryan for helping me achieve a wonderful water birth at home.



THE HOMEBIRTH OF *Huxley*

By Elli Miller

Photos courtesy of [Tara Mahoney](#)

On the 6th of March 2019 we welcomed our second son and third child earthside, with another beautiful home birth. Huxley was born right on his due date! My whole pregnancy, I was really hoping he would be born in February. I even did body pump and body balance right up until his birth, hoping this would help, but nope, he had other plans!

My husband had taken the week off that Huxley was due, but had agreed to do a short job on the Wednesday (Huxley's due date). He got up early and went to work. I had a great sleep that night (which doesn't happen when I'm pregnant). At 6am, I was woken to a strong contraction. I laid there for a while and a few minutes later I got another one. I remember thinking, "What great timing!" I knew then and there, I was going to birth a baby today. With my second birth, I had three days of intense pre-labour so I was surprised I never had that with Huxley's birth. I messaged hubby to let him know and he was super calm (because he knew I didn't have to go anywhere, we had Aimee as our doula and he thought this was going to be an all-day thing). In this time I messaged my midwife, Jo, to let her know what was going on. I got up and got the kids ready for the day. I was able to quickly do things before my next contraction. Both Annie and Hugo were meant to go to preschool that day, but when I asked Annie what she wanted to do, she was very excited and said she wanted to stay

home (funnily Hugo wasn't feeling very well, so he spent most of the day just resting and being still).

Throughout the morning I kept myself busy, only stopping when I had a contraction. I remember Annie laughing and saying it was funny when I would have one. At some point throughout the morning I messaged Aimee and let her know what was going on. Both Jo and Aimee asked me if I wanted them to come yet, especially because I was home alone with the kids, but I wanted to wait for John to come home first, and I didn't want them to come and have my labour stop.

John ended up getting home somewhere around 10:30am and by that time I had started to blow up the birth pool and get everything ready. Not long after he was home, I went and had a bath to try and help with the pain, but this just made my contractions increase and intensify! Aimee had messaged me saying she would be down this way and would come over and see us; she arrived when I was still in the bath, around 12pm. Initially I didn't want her to come yet, in case it all slowed down, but I am so grateful she did! Aimee spoke to John and the kids to see how everyone was going, and once I came down stairs she suggested I use my essential oils (clary sage) and oh boy did that work! Almost instantly!

I laboured leaning over my sink and sitting on my exercise ball. In that time, I remember I started to feel hot and a little bit sick, so Aimee asked if I wanted to go for a walk. So off we went! I wasn't able to get far without

having to stop for a contraction while holding John's hand. We came back after a short walk and I continued to labour standing and sitting until I decided to go for another walk. It was now around 2pm when Aimee suggested we call Jo and let her know to come, then Aimee and John started to fill the pool up (I remember seeing them thinking they were maybe getting worried Jo wouldn't make it in time).

Jo arrived at 2:40pm and I remember feeling relieved and that I could fully let go now (I think that I was holding back). I continued labouring and around 3:15pm, I asked Jo if she could check me (I had asked her previously, but she'd said something to try and stall me. I remember thinking, "I know what you are doing!"). My waters hadn't broken yet, but I just had this feeling I was going to need to start pushing soon, so I think that's why I wanted Jo to check me. She said I was around 8cms and had a big bag of waters in front of the baby's head. At some point after that Tara my birth photographer arrived (last time she only just made it!), and by 3:30pm my second midwife Jacqui had arrived and we were now a full house!

I hopped into the birth pool and I felt instant relief. I remember holding on tight to John's hand, but it was uncomfortable for him the way he was kneeling. He tried to leave to get a chair, but I wouldn't let go. Soon after I felt like I needed to push. I really tried to focus hard on breathing baby out instead of pushing (I found this bit the hardest!!). In this time, Aimee was with the kids and would take them out



of the room when she felt like I was holding back. They would leave and I would let out this scream. At 4:10pm I had slowly birthed Huxley's head (I remember Jacqui, I think, saying to me I could reach down and feel baby's head, but I remember thinking, "No, I don't want to touch it").

My next contraction Huxley did not retribute, so Jo had to reach inside to feel and that's when they felt his shoulder was transverse. It was at this point I remember Jo telling me I needed to turn over quickly (I was kneeling over the side of the pool). This part is a bit of a blur to me, it all happened so quick! John ended up holding Jo's torch while Jo hooked her finger under Huxley's shoulder, and at 4:16pm out he came! While I held him in the pool, Huxley was given a couple of puffs of air and some firm rubbing as his breathing was a little bit slow. I remember thinking, "What a relief," it was over! I never wanted to give up this time like I felt with Hugo, I remember just thinking I just wanted it to be over already. We didn't know the sex of baby this time (our first time not knowing) so that was very exciting! The whole time Annie had said baby was a girl, and to be honest we were all kind of hoping for a girl, but towards the last couple of weeks of my pregnancy I had a feeling baby was going to be a boy. When Jo and I scooped Huxley up when he was born I remember seeing what looked like a pair of balls, so before we officially checked I knew. I looked down and said, "It's a boy," to which Annie replied, "I don't like boys, remember!"

We all couldn't get over how big he was! I was all baby! It was such a surprise to have had a baby this big (I don't think I'll ever get over that!). It must have been all of those weights at the gym.

Huxley's cord pulsed for what seemed like forever! I had to get Jo to double check a few times because I couldn't believe it was still going. At 5:10pm I got out of the pool (this was a little bit tricky as Huxley had a small cord, just like his big brother, Hugo) and my placenta



was still attached. I fed Huxley on the lounge and at 5:50pm, with some gentle help from Jo, I birthed my placenta. Jo checked me and I was sure I would have torn, but I only had a slight graze (I had a tear with Hugo)! Again, I couldn't believe it! I remember Jo checking my placenta on the floor with all the kids around, explaining it to us while Aimee hung out our washing. Jo then completed the newborn check on Huxley and we all took guesses on how much he weighed. 4.16kg!! Where did this baby come from? John reckons he had the biggest head and biggest set of balls on him so he started calling him Mack (head like a Mack truck and big balls). Around 7pm Jo helped me have a shower and get dressed while John dressed Huxley. We then came downstairs and ate spaghetti bolognese for dinner. Jo, Jacqui, Tara and Aimee left and we went to bed as a family of five.

As we always knew he would, Huxley has fit in perfectly to our family. Both Annie and Hugo adore him so much and, touch wood, he has been our easiest baby yet (we are very blessed to have had babies that sleep through the night at a young age). He is such a chilled out, happy, chubby baby and we all love him so much. We are so grateful and lucky to have had the best birth team yet!!

To our midwife Jo: you are so much more than just a midwife to us and to everyone else who has been lucky enough to have your care. You have changed our lives forever, and we all love you so much!

To our doula Aimee, we are so lucky to not only have you as our friend, but also our doula. We could not have imagined how the day would have gone without you! It was all the little things you did that we appreciated so much. The kids adore you so much. (If you ever thought about getting a doula, do it!! You honestly will not regret it!!!).

Huxley's birth and recovery were my easiest yet, I had minimal blood loss with him (hardly any!) and I recovered so much quicker and easier this time around. I never would have thought I would have laboured and given birth during the day! I am so beyond grateful we were able to welcome Huxley into the world this way, with his big sister and brother watching on. It was just so normal! I could never have imagined it any other way.

Elli is a wife to John and mum to Annie, Hugo and Huxley. She loves baby wearing, breastfeeding and has become a real homebirth advocate. Elli hopes in sharing her story she gives other VBAC and Preeclampsia Mums inspiration and courage that you can do this!





CELEBRATING *our Achievements*

By Belinda Costello
Photo by Georgia from [Gregarious Peach](#)

Today, I'm taking a moment to celebrate a milestone. Some people run marathons to wild applause and some study amazing things and receive the adulation of their peers and a nice certificate saying they are an expert in x, y and z.

Well I am no marathon runner and I have not done any postgraduate study. I haven't climbed Mount Everest or any other mountain to be honest. However, today marks the day I fell pregnant 11 years ago.

Since that day, there has not been a single day that I have not been pregnant or breastfeeding a baby.

I have sat at tables watching fit people talk about their amazing feats and spoke to driven people talking about their achievements. I have felt a sense of guilt that my fitness is not theirs and that I do not have the education that others have striven for.

However, today I reflect on what an amazing achievement it has been to mother my children in this way.

I have always been pregnant with my next child before my current nursling has weaned and then continued on in pregnancy, breastfeeding till I was pregnant with the next. I have given my heart, body and sleep; everything it took to give my children this start to life. But, perhaps more importantly to me, a chance for us to forge precious and valuable bonds that can never be broken. This is what I have wanted desperately for my family; to be a close-knit unit.

With mummy wars being what they are, and knowing how hard it is for women to celebrate their achievements, I hesitate to celebrate this. But it is actually important.

We all achieve in different and no less valuable ways. This was my way, this was my sacrifice, this was my gift to my children, and to myself. This was me, giving everything I had, to push what was possible for me to achieve and give my children

everything I could. I'm quite hoping that as my youngest approaches her third birthday in October, she will want to wean and not be quite so in love with breastfeeding. She tells me "you boobies are bewdiful mummy". I hope I can feed until one or both of us are done.

Today I'm acknowledging myself, so that I will never forget that I have climbed my own mountain. It might be a mountain that is quiet and mostly unseen, but it is heroic in its own way. It has asked so very much of me, but I wouldn't have it any other way and I am proud of what I have achieved for my family.

Belinda is a mum to four children, an ED nurse and a birth and women's rights activist.

THE BLISSFUL BIRTH OF

Alchemy

By Sharmila Agnihotri
Photos Courtesy of Lucretia McCarthy



Once my Hyperemesis settled down, being pregnant with my third baby was such a wonderful experience. It was a pleasure to go through my whole pregnancy with the midwife of my dreams, as I had only experienced her care at the end of my last pregnancy. After an emergency caesarean with my first baby and a beautiful VBAC with my second, I had no doubt this pregnancy that I was able to birth a baby out of my vagina. This time I wanted nothing more than to have a homebirth, like I had planned to each other time. I needed to not develop Cholestasis like I did with my second baby so, amongst other things, I accessed the support of a wonderful naturopath who is particularly knowledgeable about conditions of the liver. My inner work seemed so different compared to my other births. There was a real lightness of being this time, even during those times of vulnerable and sometimes painful self-exploration which inevitably came bubbling up at times.

I comfortably reached 39 weeks without experiencing any symptoms of Cholestasis. It was a warm and relaxed Sunday in March when my midwife Jo checked in with me to see if anything was happening. Jo lives two minutes'

drive from me but that particular night she and my second midwife, Jacqui, would be spending the night more like one hour twenty minutes' drive away. I reported that there were no changes I was aware of. I had been having so much uterine activity for weeks by then and Baby had been so low in my pelvis for weeks too - I often felt like I was dilating! But nothing felt particularly different that day. Jo reminded me to let her know ASAP if I thought I might need her due to the distance.

I hosted a play date, carried on with cleaning and organising my home, and thought to myself as the day was ending, I really must clean out my laundry first thing tomorrow if we're attaching the hose for the birth pool in there. I was glad to climb into bed for an early night and fell quickly into a deep sleep.

I was aware of when Matt came to bed that night. It was 1:10am and when I went to roll over, I felt a 'pop' and the warmth of my waters breaking all over me and throughout my side of the bed. I lay there for a few moments, surprised, joyful, excited and just taking in the magnitude of that moment and what it meant. Matt and I talked a bit, both feeling the electrical

anticipation of those moments, and I got up to put a pad in, call Jo and hopefully get a bit more rest before contractions started.

Just as I was about to lay back down I had a contraction during which I needed to move my body and I noticed I needed to vocalise through too. Oh yikes, I thought, there mightn't be more rest after all. I quickly called Jo again and she got straight into her car to come back to the mountains.

My surges started coming thick and fast, requiring all of my attention and focus. Matt was filling up the birth pool at my request and I could feel myself starting to feel irritable that it was taking so long. I nearly lost it when I thought he was being far too perfectionist about lining up the pool liner with the pool and I realised I was needing my women around me to hold that space for me and help me feel more grounded. I called Lu, my beautiful doula, and felt so happy to see her when she showed up a few minutes later. Her presence was just what I needed. She watched, listened, encouraged, lit all the beautiful candles on my birth altar and I look back on that special time with her with such a lot of fondness and gratitude.



The pool was filled and ready not a moment too soon. I could feel myself slipping more and more into the zone - that portal between worlds where birthing mothers retreat to to expand, surrender, flow and collect the soul of their dear baby. I was really enjoying the music, music which Baby had helped me select, and I was enjoying the communion with him or her in my belly for this last duration of time.

The water was absolute heaven. I was working hard with each contraction, feeling my baby move down more with each one and enjoying how much sensation I was having. Lu asked when she and Matt should wake my other children, as we had discussed. 'When I'm pushing?' I put out there. Lu seemed to think that that might be too late given how quickly things seemed to be moving. Just then I had a contraction which felt really pushy and I asked if Lu and Matt could wake Remy and Billie now please!

Remy and Billie woke up to me in the pool feeling more and more pushy with contractions, making low, guttural noises. I was able to interact with them a little between surges, and there was a part of me that wanted to stay 'on' and present for Billie, who still seemed so little to me. I could see that she looked cosy and snug in the carrier with Matt, thankfully, and I was able to let go a bit and trust. I felt so connected to Matt, my kids and Lu in those moments, feeling grateful that they were all there with Baby and me. I was in awe of my body working so powerfully and efficiently to birth my baby. Feeling the power of my uterus reminded me of the force of a rocket launcher! Lu was giving me updates about how far away Jo was and I was looking forward to her being there too. The cold cloths Lu was putting on my face and neck were such a welcome relief and felt so refreshing as I worked hard.

Just as the involuntary urge to push took over, Jo arrived and Jacqui wasn't far behind her. I remember the joy of them arriving, knowing we were all here now to welcome Baby. The contractions and pushing were intense and it felt good

to me to be on all fours in the water, visualising myself as a gate opening to let baby through. Jo told me she'd guide Baby through my legs so I could lift him or her out of the water. 'Are we that close?' I asked, thinking about how pushing took ages during my last labour. 'There's head on view, Love', Jo encouraged. I found it hard to believe even though I could feel the crowning starting to happen myself!

The next contraction brought Baby's head out, as far as her or his lips. My perineum felt so stretched out waiting for the next contraction! It's the one time I panicked. Jacqui gently coached me back into my body and into my breath and after one more contraction, I was guiding my beautiful baby up out of the water at 3:03am! Oh my goodness, seeing my baby's dreamy eyes, luscious hair and soft, squishy body was pure magic! I held Baby close and looked straight at Remy and Billie to see their reactions to their new sibling. Remy wanted to know if Baby was a girl or boy and when I took a look, I could see that we had a delicious baby boy! I was shocked because I'd spent months feeling like baby was a girl! But what I also felt in that moment was the recognition of this dear, amazing soul who had already given me so much insight into who he was in the months leading up to then. I was awash with love for him, and it just felt so right having him earthside with us. I looked at Jo and said, 'That was so easy! That was the easiest hard thing I've ever done!'

I stretched out in the pool, drinking my delicious baby in and watching him latch on for the first time to feed. After some time I wanted to get out of the pool. Like the Queen of Sheba, I was supported and held by Jo, Lu and Jacqui to exit the pool and get comfortable on a little bed we'd made up in the lounge room. Continuing to breastfeed, I visualised my placenta coming away and coming out. As we neared one hour after Baby's birth, Lu put pressure on some points on my shoulders and I took a couple of whiffs of clary sage oil. That did it! I birthed my placenta at 4:07am and had a tiny first degree tear which we left unsutured. Matt

acknowledged how amazing it was that I'd just had a baby at home! And it was certainly so good not to have to travel anywhere, to shower in my own shower and then to be tucked up in my own bed with my whole family next to me. We had a lotus birth this time. It was moving to witness our baby experiencing such a gentle transition into life outside of the womb over the coming days.

Birthing on my own terms and with my choice of carers enabled the most powerful rite of passage I've ever experienced. Having an undisturbed birth at home with Jo, Jacqui and Lu holding space for me and my family so unwaveringly was the most empowered start my baby and I could have had. I will always be so, so grateful for their care.

We named our baby boy Alchemy in honour of the transformation and magic he has brought to our lives. We have had a beautiful few months being guided into a new family rhythm as a family of five.

Sharmila is a midwife from New Zealand and currently a full time mum. She lives in the beautiful Blue Mountains NSW with her husband, Matt and their children: Remy, 7, Billie, 3, and Alchemy, 6 months.

WOMEN'S CELEBRATIONS



Pregnancy

Celebrating pregnancy and the transition to motherhood

By Erika Watson

Before the birth of my first child, I was so fortunate to have a special day organised for me by beautiful friends and mothers; to cherish the momentous and humbling change of becoming a mother.

I really didn't want a baby shower. I had been given many hand-me-downs from family and found everything else we needed second hand. We also live in a tiny studio cabin, so I didn't want lots more baby clothes, toys and 'stuff' to have to find a nook or corner for.

Instead, the day was about motherhood. It was a warm and heartfelt day. A beautiful table of food was laid out amongst the autumn trees in the garden. Each woman brought a bead to make a necklace and bracelet, and a poem, prayer or phrase to fill me with love and strength as I prepared to go through the portal that is childbirth.

Sitting in a circle around a fire, they took turns to share why they'd chosen their bead and words about how we'd met, thoughts of birth, parenthood or encouragement, light and love.

A thread was run around everyone's wrist and tied; a symbol of connection and unity, to be cut when the baby was born.

It was a safe circle of honesty and love and many tears of open hearted vulnerability. It

was an overwhelmingly beautiful day.

I wore the necklace and bracelet in the weeks leading up to the birth, which gave me a sense of comfort and warmth. I didn't end up wearing them during the birth (I didn't want anything on me!), but they laid in the heart of the home which I had also decorated with stones and the cards or letters the women in my life had given me.

This heart of the home, or pillar, was an anchor in my home and for my heart, covered in affirmations, candles, a vase of four-leaf clovers found on the farm, feathers I'd collected over the years. All items I'd placed luck, strength or love onto to guide and carry me. I could read the messages daily, pick things up and turn them in my hand. My body is wise, my spirit is strong.

I ended up going post dates, either 42+1 or 41+3 depending on the dates chosen. I believe my baby could have come just before her due date when I was having contractions in the early mornings and felt close. But, then it stopped completely. Over the next 10 days my body went quiet (still lots of baby wriggles and hiccups). My partner and I stopped working on our farm and spent the days walking, talking, dancing, having baths outside together. We listened to music and spent nights filled with candles and laughter, good food and love. We hadn't connected like that in a long time, if ever, and I will cherish



that time with my partner forever. I think my baby gave us that time, to fill up our home and our hearts and prepare us to work together for her arrival, birth and parenthood. She came into our world healthy and whole-heartedly full of love.



Celebrating my pregnancy with Alice by giving back

By Jennifer Lorance

Photos by [Birthing Kit Foundation Australia](http://www.bkfa.org.au)

Alice was my fourth baby girl. Before my pregnancy with her, we had two miscarriages. After my first miscarriage, I read about the work of Birthing Kit Foundation Australia (BKFA) (<https://www.bkfa.org.au>). The foundation works with health service providers that work in low-resource and emergency settings to improve maternal and newborn health outcomes. They donate birthing kits to approved organisations for distribution to pregnant women and maternal

healthcare providers to help enable a safe and clean birthing environment. I decided that if I was fortunate enough to have a healthy pregnancy again, I would host a birthing kit packing day, instead of a mother blessing or baby shower.

I felt so much gratitude to be preparing for Alice's home birth that I wanted to give back to mothers and babies who were not able to access the same level of care that I was so fortunate to have with my private midwife. It took some organisation, but

I held the kit packing day when I was 37 weeks pregnant. On the day, about 30 of my friends and family and some women who had contacted BKFA looking for a packing day came together. It was so enjoyable! Afterwards, we shared afternoon tea. I hope the women who received the packages felt the love that went into carefully putting together the 200 kits we sent back.

I would love to do it again - pregnant or not!

Blessingway

By Kirsten Lyle



To celebrate my final pregnancy a beautiful doula friend, Aurelia from Perth Hills Doula, organised a mother's blessing for me. The day started with a beautiful poem and henna belly

art. We enjoyed food together and I was pampered with hand massages. All the ladies brought a bead to add to a necklace, so I would have their energy with me in labour. They all brought me a meal for the

freezer too, which was a wonderful support in early postpartum and fed our family for weeks.

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Birth

By Jessie Goetze
Photos by Brett Goetze and Shelly

Our pregnancy and birth was our celebration. We planned for Mahli's birth in the same way we planned every meticulous detail of our wedding.

To begin with, we experienced conscious conception. After numerous losses, we were aware of the exact moment Mahli started life in the beautiful comfort of her womb.

I spent 41 weeks preparing myself mentally with information on birth and learning how to let my own endorphins work in harmony with my body to reduce pain, create euphoria and augment labour. I practised hypnobabies, learnt beneficial positions and stumbled across the power of an undisturbed waterbirth. I also prepared and nourished my body and baby with clean food, herbs and tinctures from Blissful Herbs.

In the same way a bride might have a vision for a wedding, I chose the space where I felt safest to birth and the people I felt safest with. I selected cord ties, fabrics and music that spoke to me. I decorated my sacred birth space with crystals that promote protection and female power and fairy lights to illuminate baby's way to us. I hung 50 of my favourite birth affirmations around the spa. There were also flowers and photos of things in my life and words that made me feel loved and happy. Even my childhood bear was there.

For the birth, I was surrounded by love and support from my doula, Shelly Langford, husband Brett and fur babies Lulu, Skipper and Eddie. After an amazing pregnancy and lovely labour Mahli came into this world at 10:23am into the loving embrace of her dad and the first face she saw was mine,

just as we had wished for.

We went straight into the 'golden hour', which lasted well into the night. Being in our own space meant we were able to honour the placenta, and only separated Mahli from her life giving source well after she had received all of the essential stem cells. We feel incredibly blessed to have had the time and environment to do the 'breast crawl', delayed clamping, first feed and skin-to-skin contact. Late that night I had a relaxing flower bath in the same bath I had birthed in, in the company of Shelly, Brett and Mahli. We drank grape juice from wine glasses and spoke about our experience. It was a life changing event and one we thankfully were able to record. We try to make time to watch and celebrate it together every month - much more often than even our precious wedding film!

By Cheryl Anne Maree



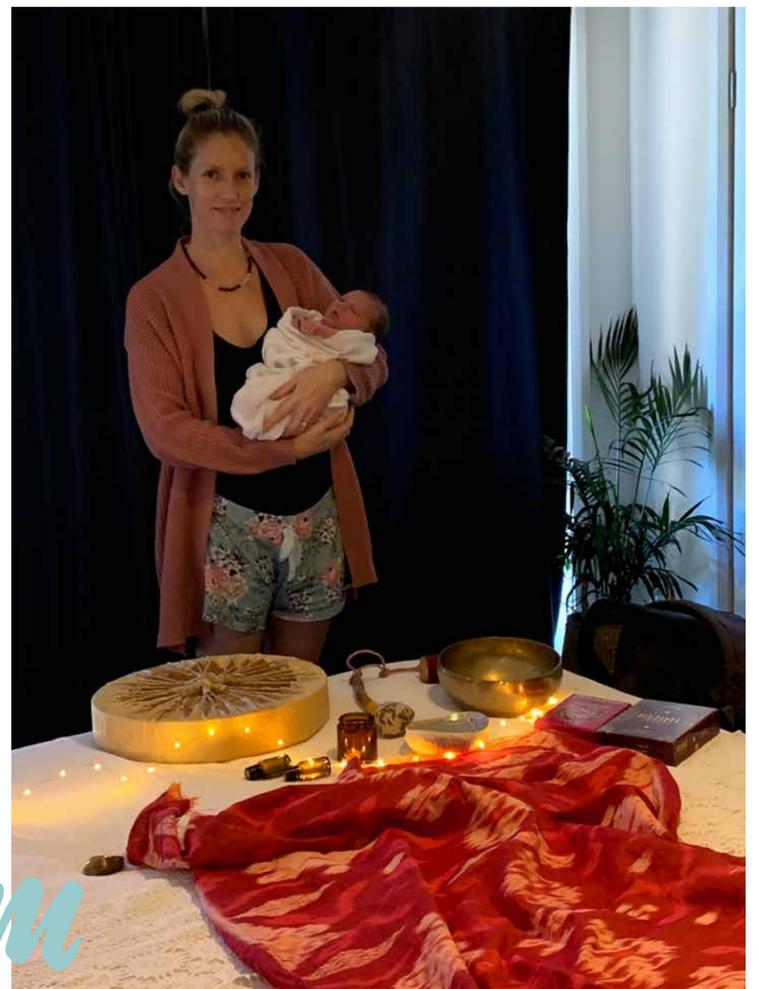
I set my hubby a challenge, asking him to make a black forest cake using a professional Masterchef recipe! Black forest cake is a complex, multi-layered mix of tantalising flavours that stimulate the senses, adding sweetness to life.

Well, much like the cake, my labour was a long, complex and multi-layered mix of extreme stimulation and intensity. We had a cacophony of sounds, including but not limited to, boiling, mixing, stirring, bubbling, grinding, moaning, deep breathing and splashing.

Our first-born pipped Dad at the post and arrived with a splash before he had the chance to assemble the cake completely. Singing happy birthday in the warmth of our room with our supportive birth team was sheer bliss! The combination of hot tea with the mouth-watering flavours of the decadent cake matched the richness and swelling of my heart. As my son nestled close beside me in bed, sweetness of a new kind entered my life as never felt before ... I was re-birthed.

I wanted to mark the occasion of my baby's birth by having a cake, so we could sing happy birthday together with bubs after the birth.

Post Partum



My Postpartum Celebration

Lana Middleby

For my second birth, I had a lot of mental preparation to do to overcome my difficult and traumatic first birth. I also wanted to ensure I was going to be nurtured and cared for after the birth; a fleeting time that you can never get back. I told myself I deserved it, and I did. I organised to have my placenta encapsulated by the The Oxytocin Collective, as I did with my first baby, and purchased the book, "The First Forty Days," making meals to nourish myself after birth.

I organised a postpartum doula, Clancy Allen, to come and mother me while I mothered my newborn and toddler. It was the most special gift. Something I will always look back on and recommend to every single woman!

Clancy prepared a goodie basket with chocolate, a belly wrap, a blend of herbs, flowers and salts for a sitz bath, a herbal-floral blend for vaginal steaming, a hormone balancing tincture, an aromatherapy massage oil and a smudging stick.

She visited me about four times over a couple of weeks and each time brought with her prepared meals, snacks and treats,

did the dishes and anything else that was needed. She did my baby's astrology chart, sent over a massage therapist for a special postnatal massage and my favourite part of all, she gave me her own specially created Closing Ceremony.

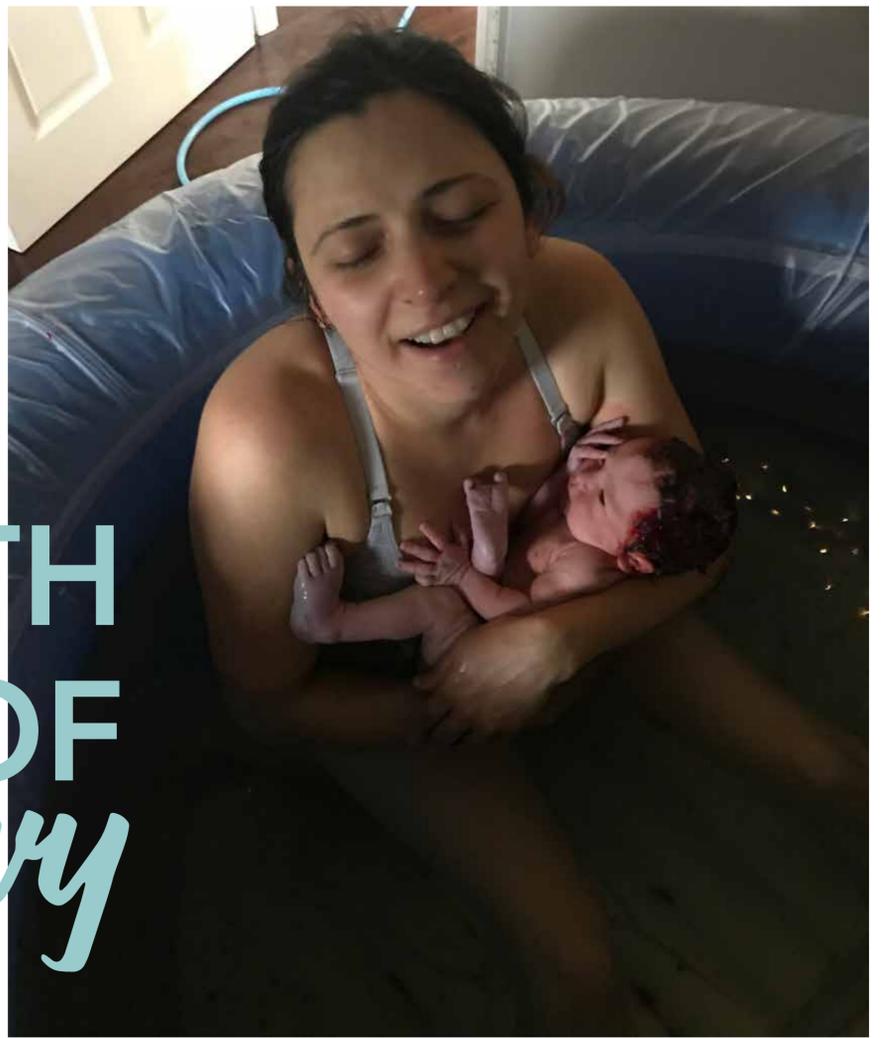
She set up my bedroom with fairy lights, placed blankets and pillows on my bed and used essential oils. My hips were bound and I was guided through a meditation honouring what I'd just achieved. She used a singing bowl, a shamanic drum, and placed crystals on and around me. She also used touch, on pressure points with essential oils. It was the most incredible, soul-filling, relaxing experience. Hubby was with baby outside the room. She must have picked up the vibes because as soon as it had ended she made a sound, he brought her into me, and we lay on the bed, enjoying the bliss.

On top of all that, Clancy was someone who specifically asked how I was, and genuinely cared, allowing me to offload emotionally.

I would definitely do it again next time, and recommend it to anyone.



THE BIRTH OF Ivy



By Yara Earle

Photos courtesy of Jo Hunter, Jacqui Wood and Chris Earle

My first birth was a c-section in a private hospital with a private obstetrician, due to Ollie being breech.

With Ivy, my contractions started on a Thursday night. They were very irregular and only lasted a couple of hours. I remember swaying on my fitness ball around midnight while the rest of the family slept. The house was dark and quiet with nothing but the sound of rain outside. Doing my deep breathing, feeling so relaxed and ready, I was thinking of how blessed I was to be experiencing this. I had absolutely no anxiety or fear of what was to come. It was such a lovely way to begin my birth journey with my little girl. It was perfect. Very different from my first birth when I was filled with anxiety as I knew I was facing major surgery and everything that a c-section was going to deprive me from.

I experienced very similar contractions on Friday night. They lasted longer and felt like they may quickly progress, but then also fizzled out to nothing. Saturday morning the contractions started coming on very regularly. Chris, Ollie and I went out for brekkie and I had to stop to breathe through the contractions. This was our last brekkie out as a family of 3.

I messaged Jo to let her know and just continued to work through the contractions; by lunchtime I had to start getting on all fours to get through them. We stupidly decided to head

out to buy a heater for the room I was going to birth in, as we hadn't had the chance to do that and I started to panic that it was going to be too cold. I don't know why I thought I'd be ok! Chris ran out quickly to grab the heater while I waited in the car with Ollie sleeping, and I called him saying, "Quick, come back, I can't stand this any longer!!!" It was absolutely excruciating. I went from managing my contractions just fine to no longer coping. I remember thinking how silly it was for women to have to get into a car and drive somewhere else to give birth, especially while they were in an even later stage than I was! It was so silly of me to willingly get out of my comfort zone, but clearly none of us were thinking straight!

As soon as we got home Jo messaged with the okay to jump in the bath and relax now that things felt like they were really ramping up and it wouldn't be long. The contractions were probably around 10 mins apart at this stage. We set up the birth pool without filling it and Ollie jumped around in it while I was stopping to breathe and vocalise through my contractions. It was so lovely to be in my own space with my family. Everything felt as it should be.

Having Jo on the other end of the phone was so comforting; she always replied within minutes and gave us a real sense of ease and security.

We eased our way into the evening. Chris sorted dinner, bath and bed for Ollie while I remained in the birth room.

By now everything started to become very blurry and I was really retreating into my head and barely noticing anything around me. My contractions were becoming very intense and I was becoming quite loud. The pain was mostly in my thighs and I couldn't stand up. The pain would come from my abdomen through to my thighs and the only thing that worked was rubbing stress balls up and down my thighs while squeezing them with my hands, or Chris massaging my thighs. There was no pain in my back.

Chris was keeping Jo up to date on the progress and by around 3am (I think!) they started to finally reach 3-5 mins apart. Jo asked us if we wanted her there and we said yes. By this stage I started to really struggle. The pain was becoming unbearable and I was getting very tired and sleepy. I just wanted to lie down and sleep, but every time I tried I'd wake up feeling like I couldn't breathe from the pain. I still tried and slept a little, but couldn't manage much.

Jo arrived and started to quietly set herself up and I remember breathing a sigh of relief. She had such a lovely sense of calm and comfort about her. She quietly came in to check on me and so lovingly measured me and comforted me. She suggested I try to sleep and get some rest. Chris went to get some rest and sleep in bed with Ollie while Jo relaxed on the rocking chair. I tried to lie down on the couch. I had the same thing happen where I would wake up screaming, but now my contractions

went to 15 mins apart. I had no idea why! I was getting so disheartened. The pain was getting too much and I was so tired I just wanted to sleep.

Jo asked if it was okay to check me as it was weird that my contractions had slowed down so much. I remember her saying it may take another day and thinking there was no way this was going on for another day! I agreed to get checked and gosh was Jo just amazing with how she carried out the whole examination. She was so comforting and gentle; it wasn't even the slightest bit painful. Jo noted that I was 7cm dilated with bulging waters; she decided to get Jacqui, our second midwife, to come over.

Half an hour later Jac arrived. Every time I'd have a contraction both Jo and Jac were amazing. I remember at one stage Jo put her hand on my forehead and held my hand through a contraction while Jac spoke so lovingly and gently; I felt so held, loved and safe. The level of empathy they clearly felt and showed flowed right through me!

Jac looked at me and so confidently said with such ease and comfort, "You can do this, you'll be fine." Those words were everything. They were exactly what I needed to hear at that point. I felt a huge sense of relief and confidence wash over me. I felt like she told me what I already felt and knew. She just confirmed it to me. Maybe hearing it from an expert was a relief. I don't know, but in that instant I felt my body just take over.

My contractions ramped up to 2 minutes apart; I couldn't sit on the couch any longer. I felt the heaviness in my vagina and butt area, and like I needed to do a poo! I couldn't believe that only a few minutes ago my contractions were so much further apart. I said I wanted to get in the pool, so Jo and Jac topped up the pool to bring it back to a nice temperature while Chris helped me through the contractions. Ollie was now awake and also trying to comfort me and make sense of what was going on.

Getting in the pool was AMAZING!!!! I absolutely love hot water. I have baths that Chris deems to be hot enough to cause 3rd degree burns! Very shortly after I jumped in, my body started to push. I had zero control. I remember trying very consciously to just relax my lower body, based on everything I had learnt about this phase, even though I felt like I was getting very overwhelmed by the pain; it was consuming me. I was

screaming so loudly at this stage but I remember feeling like I needed to get MORE noise out; how could I possibly scream louder?!

I felt my bum do all sorts of things and then heard Jac joke about scooping a poo out, and Chris chuckling. I don't know whether I laughed aloud or not but I remember thinking it was hilarious. Ollie still says that the sieve is used to scoop poop out - Eeeek!

Ollie was a sweetheart at this stage; he was giving me cuddles, but I needed him to be kept away because I was so scared I was going to cause him hearing damage. Chris took him to the living room and turned the TV on. Originally I had wanted him to be there for the whole thing, but I just couldn't think straight and I needed him away from my screaming; to me it felt like it was deafening (Jo later told me that it wasn't even that loud!). Jo reminded me to roar deeply from my cervix, instead of screaming, and that felt so much better.

Everything was happening so quickly I couldn't keep up. I felt like I was really losing control, but at the same time felt like I was in control; it was a weird feeling.

Jo saw a foot poke out. When on Earth did she turn!?! She told me that she had to call the ambulance and I screamed, "I'M NOT GOING TO THE HOSPITAL." She said, "You're not going to the hospital, I just have to call them and have them on standby. They will stay outside and wait." I agreed.

My least favourite part was being asked to get out of the pool, as they couldn't see what was happening and needed to be able to help if needed. I was pulled out of the pool by Chris and Jac, and got on my hands and knees.

Half of her came out, but she wasn't coming out quickly enough, so Chris and Jac pulled me up to stand with one leg up. We needed her out quick now as her head was only partly inside. Jo later told me that her chin and mouth were out as well, so she wasn't really in any danger, but of course we couldn't take any chances. She told me her body was moving and doing some amazing things to pretty much birth herself; I wish I had it all on video.

As soon as I put one leg up and did a couple of big pushes with my contractions she was out, screaming and pink and beautiful. The oxytocin and adrenaline flowing in the room was intoxicating; everyone was on a high. I



remember turning around to see my little munchkin cuddled up in Jo's arms, and Jo bursting with excitement saying, "Oh my God look at her, she's here!! She's here. Look how beautiful she is!" And things like, "You did it! You're fucking amazing, you did it!!"

It was so incredibly exciting and relieving. It was finally over. The whole phase from when we were on the couch debating what to do to her coming out lasted about 20 mins! Amazing how it felt like it was so quick, but so long at the same time. I hopped back in the pool to relax and enjoy some cuddles and the placenta came out within 5 minutes. I remember looking at her in disbelief; it was so overwhelming.

Unfortunately, I didn't feel very good at that moment; I may have been too caught up in the pain of it all, but I remember just feeling so uncomfortable and in pain still. This really bothered me as I felt like I couldn't really enjoy bonding with my new baby; I just wanted to not be in pain. I didn't know this at the time, but it was because I had some tearing.

The paramedics popped into the room to check on me. Jac set up a lovely and inviting 'bed' for me on the couch and moved me there with Chris. I got comfortable and started feeding my little girl; she instantly latched on and got so relaxed and fell asleep! It was so beautiful and I remember saying, "This is how it should be." I was robbed of this experience with Ollie.

I had my legs wide open and God-knows-what was happening down there. I looked at Ollie sitting in front of my open legs, glancing down shrugging, and turning back to the TV.

I'm pretty sure he was snacking on something too! How unphased kids are with birth.

While all of this was happening Jo and Jac were working together, almost unnoticed like the incredible duo they are, cleaning up the birth space, writing notes, cracking jokes and just being awesome! When we later went back into that room, you couldn't even tell that anything had happened in there and we had even gotten blood on the rug! The room was spotless.

After that delightful first feed (apart from the crappy after pains) Jo had to wash Ivy's head at the basin as she was born with so much hair it was caked with blood and gunk; the little angel fell asleep!

I then sat on the toilet so they could inspect what had happened. Part of my labia had torn off along with some internal 2nd degree tearing; ouch! They helped me have a brief shower and set up a little 'operating theatre' on my bed and worked away. This was a really awesome moment in my birth; Jo and Jac were just beautiful! They were so gentle and empathetic during the whole

thing, helped me breathe through the pain of the needle and cracked jokes, which was so nice as it helped take my mind off the pain. It was also so nice to be in my own space and comfortable. I spoke to my friend later on about this. She had a very different experience being stitched up in a hospital by an obstetrician with a room full of students and nurses staring at her; something out of nightmares!

I just felt so blessed and thankful for my experience with these two amazing women. They made sure we were all comfortable and relaxed before they left for their post-birth brekkie.

The postpartum support I had from Jo during the following weeks was absolutely the most vital and profound aspect of my birth and healing. She was there with me through all of my ups and downs. She was in contact with me almost every day, checking in on me and helping where she could. Her daily visits in the first week were something we all looked forward to and welcomed. She made us all feel a lot more relaxed and able to really enjoy soaking up our little love bubble.

Jo helped me make sense of all of my emotions and thoughts; she made me feel so normal. Not once did she make me feel like I was complaining or being dramatic. By the 6 week mark I felt completely healed, physically and emotionally. It was the biggest rollercoaster of emotions I had ever experienced. I came out of it feeling so much stronger and knowing myself like I never have before. If I didn't have Jo's support during those extremely vulnerable weeks, things would have turned out very differently.

Midwifery care is now something so sacred to me. Imagine if every woman was able to birth and heal this way. The world would be a different place. Jo and Jac, I cannot thank you enough for what you have given me and my family. I feel no words can really do it justice. You women are angels. The world is a better place because of you, and midwives like you. Thank you.

Yara is a mum of two kids aged 4 and 1. She is passionate about all things breastfeeding, positive parenting, midwifery - led care and kids nutrition.



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BLESSING, BIRTH AND BIRTHING DAY

By [Lee Reicheneder](#)

Photos by Lee Reichender, Anna Ward, Kellie Hermes and Steven Reichender

The journey towards the birth of our fourth baby was a special one for us as this was our rainbow baby, VBAC and first homebirth. The odds were stacked against us in terms of achieving this homebirth, unless we had an unassisted birth (which I was comfortable in doing); however, I really wanted the support from a Midwife. At 35 weeks I found the most amazing, truly with-woman midwife; I was so blessed to have her as my midwife. Just 2 weeks later, I celebrated my journey with my first ever blessingway experience which was attended by my midwife Rachele, my best friend of over 10 years, my Doula, other friends and of course my amazing soul sister (student postnatal Doula, now business partner) Anna.

The blessingway experience was amazing for me. Never having experienced a blessingway before (despite this being my 4th baby) I thought to myself, 'why on earth didn't I do something like this with my others?' It certainly put 'me', as the pregnant and soon to be birthing woman, at the centre of the journey rather than simply focusing on the baby within me, and it was incredible.

Everyone brought a plate of food and I didn't need to go rushing around trying to cater for guests as I had to do with my baby shower and baby sprinkle. The simple act of gifting a bead for Anna to turn into a necklace for the birth was incredibly meaningful; my lovely hormones had me bursting into tears when my successful HBAC, rainbow baby pulled it off my neck, breaking it at some point during that

babymoon period. I was even lucky enough to have Anna bring her shamanic drum to use to honour all the corners of the earth and its elements before everyone blessed me with their positive words as we sat in a circle being joined together by red wool. This was conducted in a white gazebo outside, which I had purchased specifically for my blessingway. We then all went inside to create blessing flags, eat, chat and my doula decorated my belly with henna.

At 39 weeks I woke at 11pm to a contraction, went to the toilet and found a bit of pink when I wiped. Wandering back to bed I sat down, had another contraction and decided to put a pad on. My husband was still awake playing the computer, so I let him know to call the midwife to give her the heads up as she was about 3 hours' drive away. I decided to wait another hour after calling then call her back as I felt this was fairly early stages and I didn't feel I needed anyone just yet. After another hour of contractions which went from 15 minutes apart to 10 minutes my amazing midwife said she would head to my place just in case.

By the time my midwife arrived at 3am my contractions were every 7-10 minutes, still early on but getting somewhere, and this then progressed to 5-7 minutes apart. However, by 6am they just fizzled out. Rachele checked my baby's heart rate, it was all good – she suggested I get some rest and go on with my day as usual, that she thought it would pick back up and she would likely see me that night. Rachele said she would go visit a friend of hers in

Canberra (where we live) and we were to keep her updated. We got on with our usual routine, my husband took two of our three (now 4) kids to dance classes and I got stuck into cleaning our filthy bathroom.

At 12pm we decided to walk to the park across the road so that our 5-year-old could express his energy in a safer manner (the last thing I wanted was him trying to dive off something while I was birthing a baby when the time came). When we arrived I sat under a tree with earphones in listening to Cher's 'I Believe', singing at the top of my lungs while watching the kids and my husband play. The first contraction after hours of nothing hit about 30 minutes later while I was singing to my apparently bad taste in music (according to my husband). Five minutes later another contraction hit and this continued for about an hour while we were at the park. The contractions then amped up to 2-3 minutes apart, so we left the park. The 'just across the road' walk home turned into a 15+ minute walk as I had to stop so often.

I decided to sit down when I got home to see if it would die down a bit or keep going; it did die down a bit, dropping to 7 minutes at first, but then it immediately went to 5 minutes, then 3 minutes and back to 2-3 with each lasting 1 minute and 20 seconds. I contacted my friend, Anna, to give her the heads up that it may happen that night. I did not once think that my HBAC rainbow baby would be in the world just after 4pm. My husband had phoned the midwife not long after we got home.

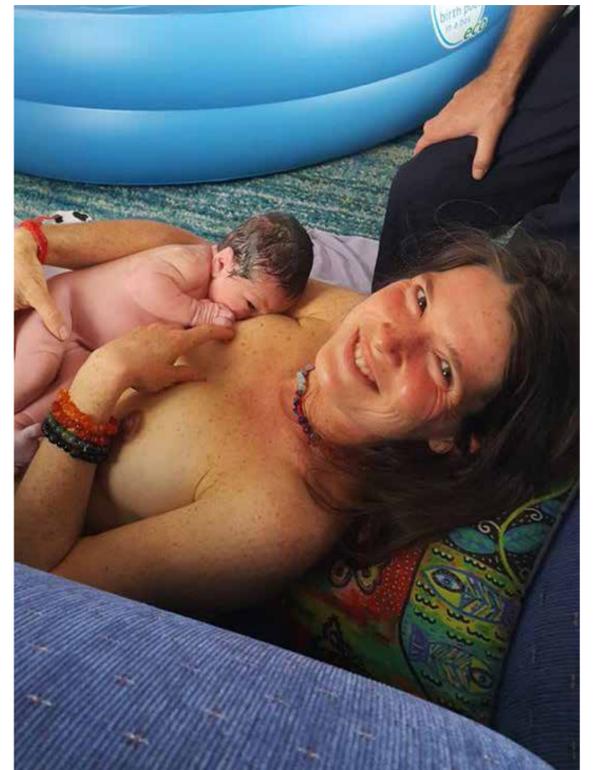


Due to a miscommunication, he also called our friend Nyx, telling them to head over. I thought I had plenty of time and just wanted to give them the heads up, but I am glad there was a miscommunication because otherwise they would have been entering the door at the same time as Anna, who arrived as our baby entered the world. Poor Anna felt so bad, but I couldn't have given a hoot – I just had my dream birth, heck yeah! It was totally hands off and I felt completely safe, surrounded by people who loved me and who I loved, in my own home. My birth went exactly how I wanted it to go! Well, minus birthing in water; I had wanted to birth in water and even though my amazing midwife Rachele had brought and set-up a birth pool, it just all happened so quickly. To be honest though, I wasn't fazed about it, not even in the slightest; I was so happy and in awe.



given me, along with his cord keepsake and the blessing flags we had all made at my blessingway. It was an amazing way to finalise such an amazing pregnancy and birth journey, one which I will never forget.

Lee is a travelling Doula, Student Childbirth Educator and Trauma Informed Professional; she is also the mother of 4 children (her fourth child born at home). Lee works at Birthing Individuals Australia alongside Anna (a close friend who attended the birth of Lee's fourth child) who is a Reiki Practitioner, Student Neuro-Linguistic Kinesiologist and Student Postnatal Doula.



I was so lucky to have been surrounded by so much love and I will never forget those amazing feelings and the total rush I had with this birth. Anna and Nyx took pictures, the kids played in the pool that I didn't manage to birth in (they had a blast), we ate chips and chatted afterwards. Anna made me a beautiful placenta print and prepared my placenta capsules for me. A red wool bracelet which had connected us all at my blessingway was removed from each of us at some point over the course of the baby moon. My kids regard bub's birth as. "The best day ever," except for my daughter who still almost 2 years later enjoys giving everyone graphic details. I even have an awesome picture she drew of the birth on our wall - Can't get better than that.

A year on at my HBAC baby's first birthday and my birthing day I celebrated with those who had also attended the blessingway. We chatted and reminisced over the journey as a beautiful framed keepsake was made. Within this keepsake were pictures of my pregnancy, blessingway and birth along with the placenta print which I had coloured in. It also contained my HBAC rainbow baby's 'born at home' outfit my midwife had



THE BIRTH OF

Evafie Maia

By Aimee Sing

Photos courtesy of Jerusha Sutton

At 40+3, at 3am on the 3rd of July, the night/morning of the new moon, I woke to contractions 10 minutes apart. I spoke to my baby, letting her know that I was excited to meet her soon and asking that she go gently, that we work together to ensure she was born beautifully and gently, at home.

I went to the bathroom, took my last ever belly-selfie and listened to my hypnobirthing soundtrack. I went back to bed, shifting through the discomfort and building a pillow fort to allow me to lean forward. I was calm, but unable to rest. I got up to drink and wee several times and every time I walked by the clock it showed repeated numbers – 3:33, 4:44, 5:55 – just as I’d seen throughout this pregnancy. I decided to get up and sat in my birth space, rocking back and forth with my forehead on the cold window. The space was beautifully prepared, both physically and spiritually - I could feel my tribe of women holding me in this space.

I messaged my midwife (Jo), photographer (Jerusha - Ru), and childhood friend/doula (Jacquie), to let them know I was in labour. By 8am I was moaning through 5 minutely contractions but easily able to chat between them. In order to ‘get on with the day’, like I so often suggest

to the women I support, I went to the chiropractic appointment I had booked for 9:15am. The car trip was hellish - how women labour in cars beats me! After adjustment the contractions were suddenly closer together; two to three minutely, lasting 45 seconds. We went for a brief walk then travelled home with lots of stopping and me rocking and moaning on the side of the road. Juz was shaking his head asking, “Wasn’t the point of a homebirth being at home? Why are we here!?!”

By 10am I felt nauseous; I was working during contractions, but still fine in between! Juz was telling me to stop doula-ing myself! I asked him to set up the pool, maybe that would help me zone in? Jo rang and we chatted through a couple of contractions; we decided she should come and check on us, and we messaged Jacquie and Ru too. Jo and Tash (student midwife) arrived at 11:11am and Jo confirmed that bub was engaged and happy. Jacquie and

Jacqui arrived soon after, both bailed up by our dog, Obi. Then Ru arrived. Everyone was here! But I was sure it was too early!

I sat on the fit ball, Jo holding a heat pack on my back, Juz holding my hands/heat pack on the front. I felt so supported and loved! But I felt that this wasn’t doing anything! I sat and cried; big fat tears dripping onto my bare belly. “I just want to meet my baby!” Obi licked me, sitting by my side. I asked Jo why it wasn’t progressing; she suggested I get out of my head. I asked her with bitterness, “And how exactly do you propose I do that?” I don’t remember her response, the question



was rhetorical.

I got in the pool and everything intensified further. I gripped Justin's hands, Jo's, Jerusha's, whoever was there. Jacquie and my kids were so beautifully present, the kids wonderfully unphased – it was just another day. I could feel myself becoming transitional and decided I would doula myself through it. After what felt like an hour of this I started voicing my doubts. Frustratingly, my birth team had answers for everything, but they weren't what I wanted!

"How much longer?" "As long as it takes."
"I'm done!" "One at a time."
"I need an epidural." "No, you don't."
Each contraction felt worse than the one before! I needed a time limit, answers, SOMETHING! It was relentless. Willow (5.5yo), Hamish (2.5yo) and Juz were providing me water and massages. I was screaming, "Owwww, nooooo, noooo!" until Ru held my hand, massaged me and helped turn it into a "Yesssss-aaaa-owwwww!"

I was getting grumpy at the end of contractions – 'Good, we're getting somewhere!', but the grumpy urges never got longer or stronger. "Jo, can I just start pushing? I need this baby out!" Jo suggested I see if I could feel baby's head. I reached into my vagina and couldn't feel anything noteworthy; just a squishy mess. "Where is this bloody baby!?!!" I cried. I was so tired. Jo and Ru guided me to totally relax between contractions and I started 'falling asleep' over the pool side. Ru fed me a bliss ball and some honey and lemon tea, but I still had no energy. Jo got some Clary Sage on a tissue which I asked her to take away. A few contractions later I smelt it again, "Get it out of here!" I yelled. 'I know what you're trying to do, Jo!!' Willow showed me a card she'd made for baby - it was so sweet, but I couldn't acknowledge her.

I was done; I asked Jo what we should do. I'd been in transition for what felt like days! Jo mentioned she could check where we were at. "Yes, let's check!" As I stood, some bloody show came out – 'Excellent! That happened when fully dilated with Hamish, this'll be the same!' I waddled into the bedroom believing I'd be 9-10 cm. I was 7 cm (Jo added I was stretching to 9 cm, apparently I blocked that out!). I despaired - this was too much! Jo reassured me it could go quickly from here, "Let's just keep going."

I got back in the pool, hating the world, angry at my body, screaming I'd done this before and could do it again! "Come ON baby, go gently!!!" I kept glaring

at everyone through weak, cruddy contractions. My mum rang but couldn't get through, so dropped by. I'd debated whether to have her there, now I was being given the chance to decide. I knew this was too intense for her, it felt too intense for me! I let her be sent home.

I needed to wee but couldn't. Jo suggested I try visualising my waters breaking on the toilet. I sat backwards on the toilet, bashing my head on the tiles, visualising an explosion of waters...nothing. A pop?...nothing. A trickle? Come on!! I did a tiny wee; STILL no waters. I sat in the shower on the fit ball until the water felt cold, still no waters. I got back into the pool, deflated. I'd told myself, "I'll be holding my baby tonight," but it suddenly got dark (the rain settled in) and I questioned this!

I was convinced my full bladder was holding everything up and asked for a catheter; Jo agreed. I HATE catheters, but luckily my midwives are super-human and I couldn't feel it once in! It did nothing. After a few contractions, feeling like I was dying without the pool, I asked Jo to break my waters; something needed to shift bloody soon! I screamed through brutal contractions on my back as Jo broke them; immediately everything shifted gear. I was FINALLY dropping into my body now, though I had an anterior cervical lip. I got on my knees with my bum in the air while Hamish sat next to me eating peanuts! "Geez mum!! You sore?" he asked. Willow announced, "There's blood EVERYWHERE out there!!"

I was asked to try 20-30 minutes of contractions without pushing; cue horse-lips, screaming, tantruming and kicking and punching the lounge! I calculated (still in my head, then) that 20 minutes would be around 5 contractions; I did 4. Constant words of encouragement were everywhere now! I asked for the catheter to be removed. "Jo, can you check again?" Surely this





was almost over!

The lip was still there. "I can't DO this anymore!" I wanted the pool! More screaming, horse-lips, bum-in-the-air contractions and I started involuntarily grunting at the end. The next contraction, despite doing horse-lips, my body pushed! "I NEED THE POOL!!" I hopped in, collapsing to my knees. Relief! Then the next contraction came and so did babe's head - whoa!! I heard Jo ask, "Is that bub's head?" "Yep." "Ru, get in here!"

I tore birthing Hamish, so had asked around about how I could avoid it. As a friend suggested, I felt bub's head descend while rubbing my perineum - That squishy scalp felt incredible! In just one contraction I breathed my baby out. "Ha-ha-ha," down, down, down...pop! Bub did some acrobatics and with a tiny tightening she wriggled and slid into my hands (a tiny tear!). I turned over and slowly brought our baby into the air - Just as I'd hoped. The kids were looking on excitedly. Suddenly, everyone that needed to be here was.

Jo and I untangled bub from her cord, and then she did the 'Sing-baby-thing' and went floppy. It took some rubbing, suctioning and bagged air, but she let out a cry. I felt the cord pulse - our connection, it was amazing!! Willow asked Juz, "Is it a girl!?" "Yes!" She was SO excited! As soon as bub was breathing she pooped and latched on for a feed!

I wanted to birth the placenta in the pool, but had to get out for the bleeding. I waddled to the lounge. Hamish watched closely ("Whoa, mum!") as I birthed the placenta with some gentle help from Jo. I

ate toast and honey tea as I soaked in the beautiful bub I'd just birthed, surrounded by the love and support of my incredible birth team.

Jo measured Evalie and tied the cord, Willow cut the cord, Hamish cut our mother's blessing bands and then we ate birth-day cake that Jacquie made with the kids while I laboured. We dressed Evalie and I showered (no pain!) and got into bed. Everyone said their goodbyes while Jacquie brought dinner. The kids were so overtired and excited! We chatted through how I felt and I couldn't stop beaming - I was so proud, happy, and in awe of our perfectly complete family!

I'm so grateful I had the opportunity to birth a little girl with such power into such love. I've never felt so held, loved and supported! I am so grateful to have been surrounded by such a delicious group of people; the J-team (Jo, Jacqui, Jacquie, Jerusha and Juz), Tash and my kids. Thank you to all of you! Thanks especially to Jo and Jacquie, who have supported us through all of our family's 6 pregnancies and 3 births, who introduced me to homebirth, creating what I'm sure will remain a lifelong passion, and who have both sacrificed countless hours with their own families to support us. We are eternally grateful.



Aimee is mum to 3 beautiful, homebirth babies, wife to Juz, a doula, birth activist and editor of Birthings magazine. When she's not dragging her family along to birth related meets, you'll typically find her supporting mums in person, over the phone or online, campaigning for change in the birth world, loving (and being exhausted by) her kids and living life as best she can, typically with as many outdoor activities and family-hugs thrown in as possible.



CELEBRATING MY LAST BABY

By [Erin Quinn](#)

|| *A first child is your own best foot forward, and how you do cheer those little feet as they strike out.*

You examine every turn of flesh for precocity, and crow it to the world.

But the last one: the baby who trails her scent like a flag of surrender through your life when there will be no more coming after--oh, that's love by a different name.

She is the babe you hold in your arms for an hour after she's gone to sleep. If you put her down in the crib, she might wake up changed and fly away.

So instead you rock by the window, drinking the light from her skin, breathing her exhaled dreams.

Your heart bays to the double crescent moons of closed lashes on her cheeks. She's the one you can't put down."

~Barbara Kingsolver

I've had five pregnancies, and I have three living children. That's my number. That's all the children I will ever have. Yet I don't feel done. I don't think I will ever feel done, ever feel ready to leave those devastating and glorious years of pregnancy, birth, infancy and early childhood behind.

When I had my first baby, I quit my job and without hesitation became a stay-at-home mum. Without really knowing the term "attachment parenting", I felt very strongly that I did not want to leave my babies with anyone else, not even their father (not that he offered). My career until that point, doing AV for events, was not a very family-friendly one and I was not sorry to leave it behind. I completely embraced my new role as a mother. I deconstructed my former self. It was relentless, exhausting and wonderful. It broke me open and broke me apart over and over. Literally and figuratively consumed in this mothering fire. My purpose was my children, and it was them that my days were built around. This has been especially true in mothering my last baby.

I loved being pregnant, each and every time. I was fortunate enough that pregnancy was pretty easy on me. I've never felt more special, embodying the magic of creation simply by existing. Especially after having losses, I delighted in the growth of my body, and in every kick.

I looked forward each time to birthing, something I have dreamed of since childhood. I didn't long for children when I was younger, but still looked forward to this rite of passage, knowing somehow that there would never be any experience

quite so powerful.

I had three kids under four for a month, and then three kids under five. I was glad to have my babies close together, but it was hard. Under the weight of sleep deprivation and relentlessness, I was not the kind and patient mother I wanted to be. I cried many nights after all the babies were in bed, feeling I had failed them that day. My heart wanted to have more babies, but my heart was already breaking trying to be 'enough' for my existing children. That was a big factor in deciding to have no more.

And it wasn't really another child that I longed for. I never had that sense that some women described, of another soul waiting to join their family. I don't feel our family is missing anyone. I don't feel clucky when I hold other women's babies. I just feel sad that my kids aren't babies anymore. I grieve that that time in my life is over. I will never again know the wonder of being pregnant. I will never again know the tumultuousness of giving birth. I loved that time so much, and I will always miss it.

I guess I knew all along that my last baby would, in fact, be my last. My husband did not want more than three, and if I am honest, neither did I. My last baby was a surprise – a happy surprise, but still unplanned. I was self-aware enough

to treasure all the moments, all the last 'firsts' of every milestone that she hit. I kept her in newborn nappies for a few weeks too long – until she was practically wearing them like a g-string and started flooding them! Perhaps paradoxically, although I was struggling with three kids under five, I also enjoyed her more. I fed and cuddled her to sleep. I wore her in a baby carrier for most daytime naps in her first year. I did these things with my other babies too, but with them, I worried about creating a rod for my own back and that it would never end. Now I didn't want it to end.

Every milestone was so poignant. My first baby was a late walker, and I laugh now to think how I was so anxious about it, and how I tried so many things to encourage her to walk. With my last baby, I never wanted her to walk. I would have pushed her back down when she stood if I thought it would do any good. She gets endless permission to be little.

I kept baby things for a lot longer than I needed to – and there are still some things I can't bear to part with. I never made a move to wean her, and she was still having the occasional breastfeed until the beginning of this year, though the milk long ago disappeared. I don't ever correct her mispronounced or misused words, and exhort others not to either.

It has helped to realise that no matter how many children I have, this grief is something I will have to go through sooner or later,

and more children will only delay it. I know some women describe a feeling of being definitely 'done', but I can't imagine feeling that way, and I can't go on having children to try to find a feeling that may never come to me. My own mother had six kids and never felt done. This feeling defies logic. Though I know that stopping at three is the right decision, my heart still yearns to do it all again. I really do feel it as a biological imperative, but I also believe we don't have to be slaves to our biology.

Not that I want to get my tubes tied, or my husband to have a vasectomy either. I may not want another child, but I still want to be able to fantasise about it! Funnily enough, when I was still in the trenches of the baby stage, it was easier to contemplate having another one, because I didn't really have anything to lose. I was already sleep-deprived and touched out. The yearning peaked when my last baby was two, when I should have been having another one. Once I left the baby years behind, it was harder to consider going back. Now that I am out of those trenches, it would be all too easy to regret not having another baby, one who would now be four (and a two year old?). But I am confident that I made the best choice for myself and my family at the time, and that's all I could have done.

I have heard that as women approach and traverse menopause, the feeling lessens, and I hope this is true for me.

This year, my last baby turned six and

has started school. By age seven she will officially be out of early childhood. Mothering is no longer quite so relentless. Life isn't punctuated by the baby's feeds and naps. There is room for me to breathe, and conceive of other ways to spend my days, and while it is refreshing, it is also daunting. Where was I for the past ten years, if not in the fabric of society, and who am I now, if not the perpetual mother? Being a stay at home mum was, if not valued by the wider community, at least recognised and valued by myself, and other women who understood the significance of the work I was doing. What value and validity do I hold now? What do I do with this new freedom?

As I contemplate what the next part of my journey will look like, I can report that I am feeling less sadness and more acceptance. Instead of crying that I will never again feel the sweetness of a baby's kicks from the inside, I can look at pregnant women and smile in recognition of a shared experience, and enjoy the memories of when it was my turn. I too knew that joy. And I will never forget it, and it will colour my life forever.

Erin Quinn is a doula and aspiring midwife who serves families in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. To connect with her, go to <https://www.facebook.com/birchtreebirth/>

birthwork



2020 March 6-9 (4 days)

Melbourne: Birthwork – Creating Amazing Space for Babies
with Jenny Blyth & Fiona Hallinan

Venue: Centre for Mindfulness, 16 Trinity Place, East Melbourne, Victoria

Discounted if attending Melbourne Spinning Babies

for Doulas, Midwives, Birthworkers, Birth Educators & Bodyworkers working with pregnant women & birth, including osteopaths, chiropractors & physiotherapists

Join these 2 intuitive and skilled bodyworkers and educators to develop a deeper understanding of women's bodies and how to help them with their pelvic health and wellbeing. This workshop is an extraordinary blend of body knowledge, body awareness, bodywork, tender touch and light palpation skills - and their relevance to all phases of childbearing.

For the full programme and registration use this link: <http://birthwork.livingevents.info/melbourne.html>

THE BIRTH OF *Kai*



By Marie Kobayashi

Photos courtesy of [Jerusha Sutton Photography](#)

My son, Kai, was born on 1st April 2019, with my wonderful midwives' Jacqui and Jo's support.

Although my birth was tough, we had an amazing experience welcoming our beautiful boy at home.

My pre-labour went on for almost 3 days; it was the hardest time in my life, especially the second night. My husband and I stayed up all night to work through the contraction pain. I was screaming and thought I would not be able to go through the night.

The next day, Jacqui gave me some drugs (painkillers and sleeping pills) to help me relax and sleep. After I'd woken up from a nap, my water broke and soon after, I started to push.

I was in the birth pool when Jacqui and Jo arrived. Approximately 15 minutes after their arrival, my son was born.

My primary midwife was Jacqui and we are so grateful to her. She answered all of our questions nicely and was gentle to our choices throughout the pregnancy.

Home birth is rare in Japan, where I am

from. My parents were worried about the birth as they had no idea about homebirth. On the other hand, I had no worries at all about my birth under Jacqui's care. Building trust in the relationship with Jacqui gave me and my husband the confidence for birth and parenting.

We are planning to have a second baby, hopefully next year, and we're looking forward to having Jacqui again!

Marie is a mum who is passionate about natural parenting methods and environmental awareness.



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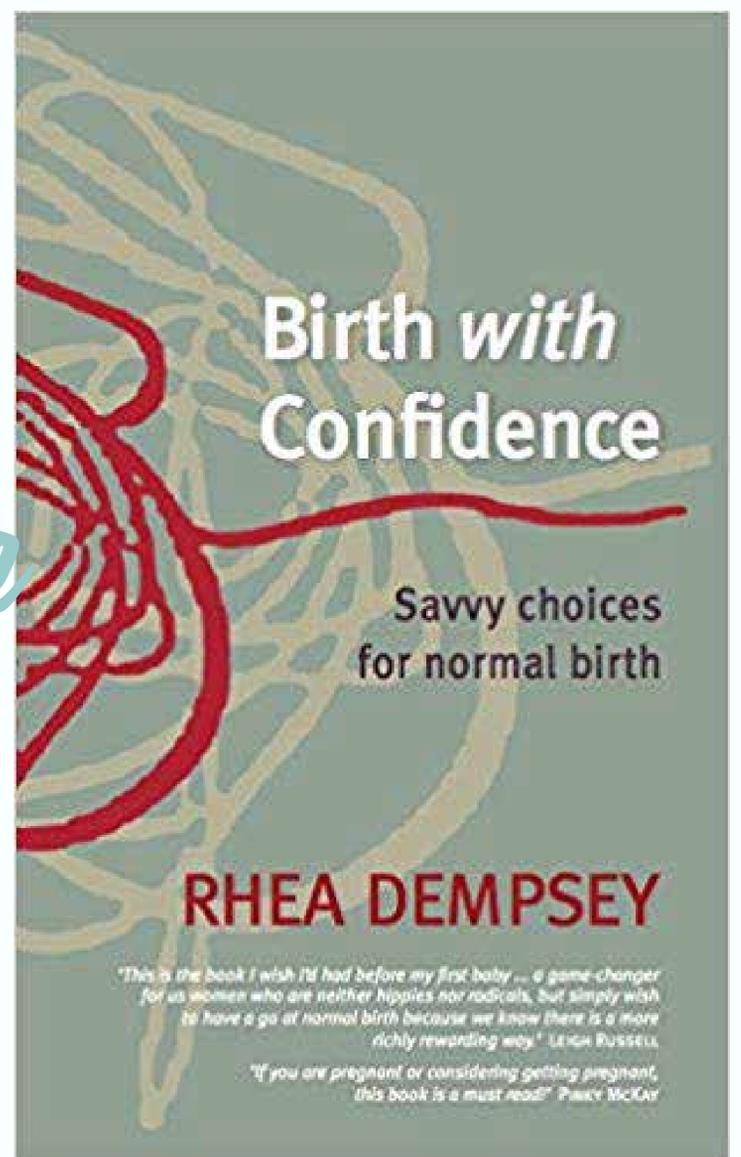
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BOOK REVIEW

Birth with Confidence Rhea Dempsey

By Kristyn Begnell



Part way through the introduction of *Birth with Confidence* I found myself nodding in agreement and knew that I was onto something good. Rhea details her experience birthing her first child in hospital and the challenges she and her partner faced dealing with hospital staff and procedures. Reading about her subsequent healing homebirths struck a chord with me - at the time of reading this book I was pregnant with my second and planning a HBAC, desperately hoping that the trauma from my first hospital birth could be healed also. Rhea urges women to be clear about the birth that they want and what their motivations are. She prompts the reader to consider their choices around place of birth, caregivers and their own health literacy. I found her honesty about the state of Australia's maternity system validating, having experienced some of the poorer aspects first hand with my first birth.

Rhea calls normal physiological birthing 'an endangered activity' and educates the

reader on how social pressures and the maternity system's culture of risk contribute to Australia's appallingly high intervention rates. This chapter goes deeper on the topic of intervention and the 'cascade' of implications on bonding, breastfeeding and the emotional well-being of mother and baby.

My biggest takeaway from this book was 'reframing pain in labour'. I found myself feeling nervous about going through the process of labour, as I didn't experience it (or even Braxton hicks) with my first. I desperately wanted to experience this rite of passage and reading this book helped me to think of pain in labour as functional. Whenever I found myself feeling nervous I reminded myself of previous physical challenges, like the half-marathon I ran a few years earlier. I imagined my uterus contracting, pushing my baby down. I imagined my ligaments stretching and making room for my baby. Understanding the process of normal physiological birth,

the perfect cocktail of hormones and the effect they have on labour and later on with bonding and breastfeeding, was immensely helpful for me. My HBAC was an amazing, empowering experience and I attribute my self-confidence to having informed myself during pregnancy. Whenever I speak to a pregnant woman who is a bit anxious about birth, whether it is their first pregnancy or they have experienced birth trauma previously, I always recommend this book. It is honestly the best birth related book I have read.

Head over to <https://homebirthsydney.org.au/product/birth-with-confidence-savvy-choices-for-normal-birth-by-rhea-dempsey/> to grab your copy!

THE BIRTH OF *Rosa Maria- Zilyanna*

Our 7th Homebirth baby 'An emotional pregnancy & healing birth'



By Jacquie Harsh
Photos courtesy of Natalie Dash

We found out we were expecting our seventh baby on the last day of 2018. With each new pregnancy our children have delighted in picking a 'Womb name' for the baby, and this time was no different. They've picked names like Baby Gumboots, Wooly, Pola-chinta (Hungarian for pancake). This time around they all agreed on Sesame, as that is how big bub was when we told them on the way home from a Zoo trip! Our kids love babies and are always so excited when we announce another pregnancy. That excitement never dulls; it is so beautiful to witness.

My pregnancy was a comfortable and straightforward one. Physically I felt really good (apart from the 'all day' nausea feeling and cooking aversions from about 10-16 weeks!) Yet, emotionally I was struggling. My dad was very sick, again, in and out of ICU a few times before he passed away in April. I was very close to my dad and travelling to be close to him in hospital with the kids in tow was a necessity. As much as I dislike hospitals, I had to do it for him. My husband took weeks off work to be with us, driving long distances. Wrangling the medical system and being there for dad was a blessing, yet such an emotionally draining time.

I didn't really have much time to think

about this pregnancy until after dad passed away. I finally booked into my morphology scan at 23 weeks. I agreed to it for the main reason to find out the placental positioning after a suspected low lying placenta with our last homebirth. I was anxious about the ultrasound and booked and cancelled many times at different places, wondering which was the best ultrasound place! I finally settled for Katoomba and the lady, Marie, was so lovely. She agreed to do the shortest possible ultrasound. So, with all 6 kids with us we piled into the ultrasound room and got the reassuring news - baby was healthy, the placenta was not low lying and our baby was a GIRL! YIPPEE! We were all so very thankful. Our 3 year old, only daughter was excitedly looking forward to a little sister to dress and play mummy with! I never really feel the need to have earlier appointments in pregnancy, so after our ultrasound we finally met with Jo for our first prenatal appointment; something we always look forward to!

Our pregnancy was a healthy and easy one, apart from a turn at 40 weeks when I had an odd night of nausea, blurred vision in one eye and numbness down one side of my body. The next day, I was fine and so was my blood pressure.

My sister-in-law was also pregnant with her first baby and also planning

a homebirth with Jo. It was so special to share all the different feelings and preparations together, as we looked forward to our home births. She was due 5 days before us and as our 40 and 41 week marks approached we kept joking that these little cousins might get us a two for one deal if they come on the same day.

She got a surprise though when at over 41 weeks she found out her baby was breech! After an ECV didn't work in coaxing baby to turn, her homebirth plans turned to a natural birth at Westmead with Jo. I'd never witnessed a natural breech birth as a doula, and I was uncertain about it all. But, if anyone could do it, I knew she could, especially with the support of Jo and the team at Westmead. It was an incredible thing to witness my little niece being born. As I drove home that night I looked forward to our baby's arrival sometime soon.

As the days passed, I wondered when this little one would be born. We went to visit our little niece later in the week, and our baby was still in utero, snuggled up nice and low. Incredibly low! I don't think I've ever felt a pregnancy waddle before, but this time I did.

Each night, whilst feeding our nearly 2 year old to sleep I got contractions, and then they'd shy off and I'd wake in

the morning somewhat disheartened to not have bub in my arms. The longest I'd gone in pregnancy before was 40+3 days, which led us to September 13th and son's 8th birthday. But, still no baby to be born. I'd dismissed my last pregnancy going to 42+3 as just stress and wrong dates.

At around 41+3 weeks, I kept leaking fluid and mucous, to the point that I had to wear a pad for a few days. I thought that was going to lead to labour?! But no, it stopped!

So, at 41+6 I decided it was time for a gentle eviction notice. I booked into acupuncture that day, I bought some flowers to decorate our birthing space next to the corner spa bath and I took the kids to the same café that we went to when my sister-in-law was in labour. Waiting all afternoon for something to pick up. But, nothing more ...

That night whilst preparing dinner I was feeling over it. I started crying, feeling anxious, and worried. Did my body not know what to do anymore? Was our baby going to be okay? The big baby worry never crossed my mind, as the seed was planted that she was 'little' like her 7 pound sister at our earlier ultrasound.

I gave it all to God. There was nothing more I could (or wanted) to do. I messaged friends who had also gone post-term for support and read articles Jo sent me, and spent a copious amount of time in prayer. My fear turned to acceptance and trust; and so on with the waiting. I accepted this baby just wasn't ready yet.

Tuesday morning arrived, and I was 42 weeks. And, of all things it was snowing! 'Great!' I thought. 'She can't come today, the roads will be closed!'

Jo came later that afternoon when the snow turned to rain and checked baby. She was strong and healthy, and so so low. I tried to shut out other people's anxieties and just enjoyed our family as we made play dough and cooked yummy food. The plan was to do more acupuncture the next day, and a foetal well being scan on Thursday morning if she hadn't yet arrived.

When I awoke on Wednesday morning I felt very indignant as to why I was still pregnant. I was cranky and I read my past birth journals to see if any other baby stayed in this long. Low and behold, as much as I was in denial, according to my 6th pregnancy journal he went 17 days 'over'. Right, I thought, 'I am giving this baby until 17 days over also'. I cancelled my acupuncture appointment for the day and moved the scan until Friday afternoon. Then I announced to my husband, I was going to bed to sleep and hibernate like a bear until the baby came



out. After a little cry, I tucked myself into bed and had a wonderful, relaxing nap for 2 hours.

When I woke up, after 3 days of rain our 6 kids were slightly wild, running and jumping, wrestling and spraying plates with perfume?! They kept talking about the baby and guessing when she would come. I told them that I didn't want to hear about the baby's birth date anymore as she was never coming out, and if they were going to act like monkeys and stress me out, I would leave them asleep when she is finally born and wake them up afterwards! Poor kids. Thankfully, they're very resilient and get the cranky mum hormonal thing.

That night we read stories together, said night prayers and everyone fell asleep quickly, including my husband who does super early morning starts.

As I lay in bed breastfeeding, those contractions started again like they had for the last 2 weeks. But, this time I felt a pop sensation in my lower belly.. Ohh that's odd, and fluid! Once Levi was asleep, I rolled out of bed and waddled to the bathroom. More thick mucous, and the contractions kept coming! Yippee I thought!

At 9:30 they had gotten a little stronger so I texted Jo. I felt it was too early, but she said she would head up and just wait out the front in her car. I loved the quiet time of labouring alone, I was so excited it had begun. I was scared to have lots of people around in case I became self-conscious and my labour died off. I didn't want it to stop! Jo reassured me this was her job, and it wasn't an inconvenience to head up.

I got baby clothes ready, got my washer and lavender oil ready, and woke up my husband. We made a cup of tea and just enjoyed the quiet time for a few minutes. Soon after, our littlest boy (nearly 2) woke up and was staring like a possum at me in daddy's arms. Knowing something was happening, he wanted cuddles, but the contractions soon became too strong to rock and hold him as well. He finally



became content in Micah's arms as I laboured.

My mum who lives in a granny flat heard me filling the bath and decided to come in and check up on us. I told her to go back to bed as there was nothing to do, but instead she got out the chocolate cake and coffee, ready for the 'guests' (midwives and doula). Because we all know they just sit around eating cake and drinking coffee right, hehe. Contractions got stronger, I got in and out of the bath, sat on the toilet, rocked leaning over the ball. I don't think I've changed positions so much in labour before (usually I go for a big walk in early labour, feel nauseous, vomit, jump in the bath and give birth). I then lay down on the floor in a corner of our house. I asked for a pillow to 'rest', knowing things were getting more intense and that it wasn't stopping. It must have been a funny sight as I caught a glimpse of Jo and Micah smirking at each other. Jacqui sat so quietly at the dining room table, I hardly noticed she was there. It was a lovely, quiet and peaceful atmosphere.

Finally, I felt like it was time to get into the bath around 10:30pm. I started to vocalise with contractions and feel a lot of pressure.

Jo asked should she call Nat and wake the kids up. I replied 'yes, if you think it will be soon, but I don't know'. In my mind it wasn't going to be too soon as I still hadn't vomited (usually my sign of transition) and my waters hadn't broken (this usually happened just before babies head crowned in my past births and I didn't put it together my waters were already leaking). Suddenly I felt that familiar wave of intense nausea, she kicked inside me as I vomited; it was a very strange feeling!

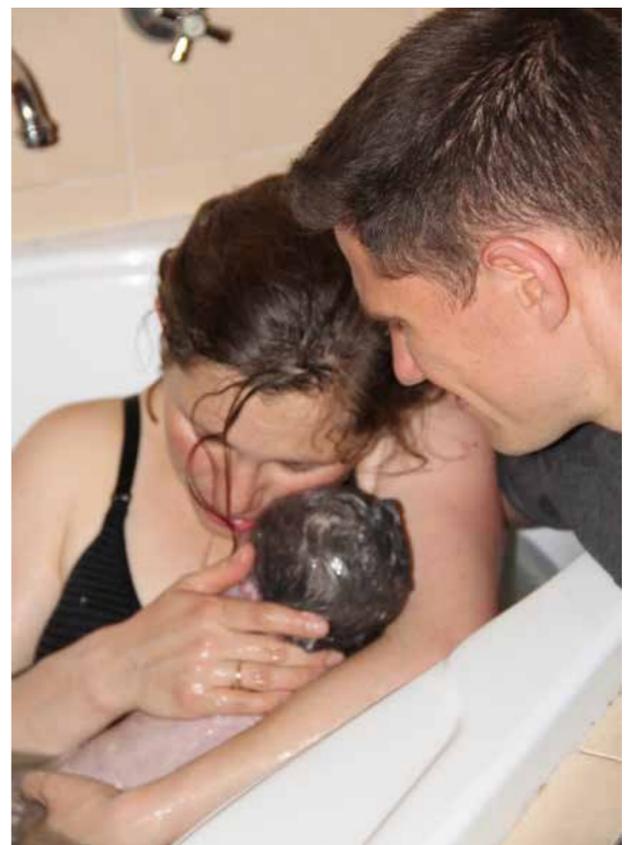
With that transition vomit I accepted that it was all really happening.

Our eldest woke up when he heard those familiar birth sounds and promptly woke up the others. They all ran downstairs, peeking their heads into the bathroom door, with little smiles on their faces. Contractions were strong. I prayed through them and tried to get comfortable. My hips were aching as the baby moved down. Jo reassured me that I was safe and so was my baby. All of the kids gathered around the bath. Micah sat by my side with Levi in his arms; he was so quiet and still. As she slowly moved down, I could feel that baby's head wasn't tiny like her sisters; this second stage seemed like really hard work. Finally, her head popped out. I yelled. It hurt! Then a relief came over me as I felt her wiggle around ready to slip out. Her shoulders were tight, so Jo helped her release a shoulder and finally she was out!

After 3 hours of labour, on 19 September 2019 at 12:56am, I reached down and lifted her out of the water. She cried straight away and I couldn't stop hugging her tightly and saying 'thank you!' It was the one thing I hoped for all my pregnancy; to have a healthy baby cry as soon as they were born. I've never appreciated a babies cry so much!

I was so thankful she was here, safe in my arms, that birth was over, and that she was breathing and crying. She was so chubby, with a full head of thick black hair. Her cord was feeling very short and I couldn't lift her high onto my chest. As the placenta detached I lost a lot of blood at once, so with everyone's help, I moved out of the bath onto a mattress. My husband cut the cord once it stopped pulsating and we waited for the placenta to be birthed. My uterus was a bit 'boggy', and I felt faint laying down, so the kids kept feeding me lollies as I lay there feeding baby. Jo and Jacqui massaged my uterus to help it contract and finally after 40 minutes and a bit of help the placenta came out, big and kind of ripping in half! This time around it was me needing attention and watching, rather than the baby. I was so very thankful for a healthy baby!

Micah carried me up into bed. It felt amazing to lay in bed snuggling with this baby girl whom we'd waited to meet for what seemed to be a very long two weeks. After a feed, bub was weighed and



measured. She was the biggest of all of our children weighing in at 4.06kg, 54cm long, and with a head circumference of 36cm. She had amazing little chubby cheeks that were lower than her chin, long legs and a head of hair so thick and black, ready for her big sister to put a headband on.

Our amazing birth team left around 3:30am. I felt so blessed to have them by my side. My mum made me scrambled eggs, and the kids finally toddled off back to bed at 4am after some convincing and negotiating that they could have their movie and bath the next day (activities they'd planned to do during the birth).

My recovery was wonderful. Apart from feeling a little weak from the blood loss, I felt amazing. We received meals, snuggled in bed, enjoyed the sunshine and relished in this healthy little baby girl that we had been given.

She fed amazingly from the beginning, and one week on she is still the most chilled out little baby. She's so adored by her siblings and always in someone's arms being cuddled. What a little blessing.

Jacque is a mum living in the Blue Mountains with her husband Micah and their 7 little Homebirth blessings. Her time is taken up homeschooling, dealing with all of the little surprises that parenting brings and being a Doula when time permits!

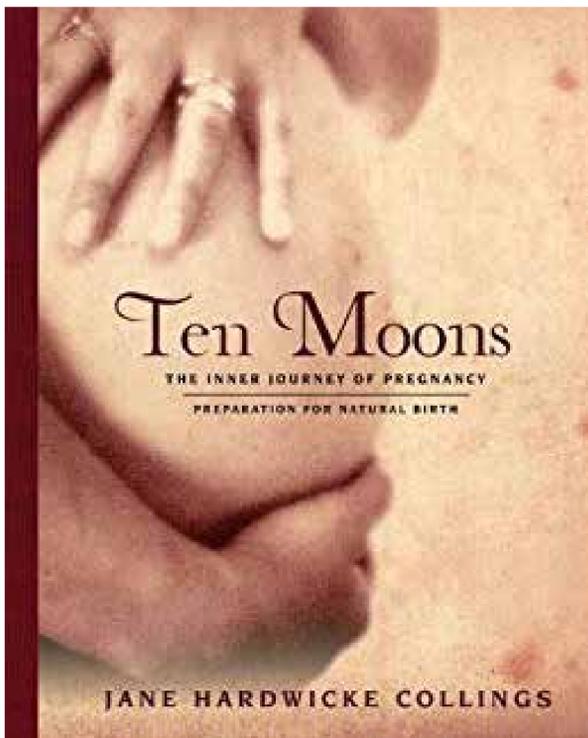
CELEBRATION!

RITUALS AND CEREMONIES TO HONOUR PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND MOTHERING

by Jane Hardwicke Collings

// TEN MOONS – THE INNER JOURNEY OF PREGNANCY, PREPARATION FOR NATURAL BIRTH

Available from www.janehardwickecollings.com



Using ritual and ceremony gives deeper meaning to a situation. During ritual and ceremony we bring respect and reverence to whatever it is we are acknowledging, designating it as sacred. These processes involve gratitude, honouring and celebrating.

Ritual and ceremony bring the spiritual aspects of pregnancy, birth and mothering alive.

Rituals are repeated processes you engage in, that become part of your routine. The attention and reverence you bring to the ritual process returns to you through the effects and benefits it creates.

Ceremonies are one off events that combine rituals, other special processes and observances to honour, celebrate and 'wish well' the person and their situation that is being honoured.

During Pregnancy

Journaling

Write to yourself, "I think..., my view about this is..." etc and uncover the beliefs you hold. Do this if you find outmoded beliefs or fears are running your life, then you can let them go and re-program yourself with new, more appropriate beliefs.

For example, finish these sentences:

My body is.....

About birth I believe...

As a mother I will...

Realise your beliefs and then uncover the fear that may be underneath it.

My fear about birth is...

Then write a positive affirmation to replace the negative belief or fear and remind yourself of that anytime you think the opposite.

Birth is...

Some women choose a fresh new book, unlined so you can draw and doodle as well as write. This journal will become a reference point for you and a keepsake for you and your child.

"I had tried to journal during my first pregnancy but felt I was judging my own writing and felt too uncomfortable to continue. During my second and third pregnancies, Jane encouraged me to journal again, with the knowing that no one would look at my journal, that it was my private space. I felt nervous but committed and tried again. I chose to write in coloured pencils in the journals which helped me

over the hurdle of them seeming too formal. I drew, wrote with my left hand (I'm right handed), wrote letters and told the newest baby how the outside world was preparing for them. In both these journals I knew our babies name (regardless of the sex) and addressed the baby so. My journals reveal when middle names appeared, when anxieties appeared, how they were handled and subsided. The journals also reveal personality traits of each child which have carried through. I wrote to Merlyn, "I cannot decide if you are a galloping horse or a gentle sweet one." Turns out she was Gemini and both a galloping joyous horse and the sweetest and gentlest one in the family. I am grateful for the reflections and early connections that I developed with my daughters through the ritual of journaling." ~ April

Letting Go of Fear Ritual

"By acknowledging my fears, I recognized them as they popped up and I knew I really had to face them full on. In doing that I felt a moment of anxiety, terror even. I pushed myself on a bit further and allowed them to come out and allowed myself to feel them - to feel the discomfort instead of pushing it down. Each time this happened the intensity of the fear and the feeling decreased, and then they were gone!" ~ Melissa

Create an Altar

On a mantelpiece or shelf, place items from nature that bring you good feelings about yourself, your pregnancy, mothering, your baby etc. You may have items from your own

babyhood or other children's special things. Photos of relatives, special trinkets, power objects, crystals, things you've made, cards; you'll know what to put there. Creating an altar and attending to it is a ritual that will bring you connection with your inner journey through pregnancy. You will be able to see and feel 'where you're at' with relevant issues and situations because what you bring to your altar each day will be a reflection of that. Think metaphorically and observe your subconscious 'speaking' to you.

Consider yourself an altar and see where that takes you.

Journey to Meet the Baby

Do this as often as you like. The baby's father can do this too. In fact, it's a lovely thing to do together. If you can get someone to drum for you all the better, otherwise choose some ambient music and decide when on the track is the signal to return to normal consciousness. If on your journeys you ever encounter anything or anyone that you are not sure about, simply ask them, "Are you for my highest good?" If they are not, they will disappear, if they are then ask them a question. Ask lots of questions, say please and thank you and pay attention. Talk about your experience when you come back; write about it and draw it. If you think you can't remember it all don't worry, you will.

"In the drum journey I got into a deep meditative state, I was able to see within myself, like I was floating through my unconscious mind. I connected with my baby girl, I felt safe and I knew I could trust the birth process which was ahead of me." Kath

Make a 'Goddess Eye' Protective Talisman

The Goddess Eye, originally called the Ojo de Dios or God's Eye, is a protective amulet or talisman from the Huichol Indians in Mexico. The Grandfathers used to make these as a prayer for their newborn grandchildren and each year they would add a hair from the child to the weaving as a way of asking for continued life. In the workshops we make these using Birch wood or Apple wood, various colours of wool and crystals. The magical quality of Birch is protection. In the 'old days' they made cradles out of Birch to protect the babies, and Apple is the tree of love. Each colour has a magical quality too, usually the women intuitively choose the colours and are delighted to see the significance later. Finally, the crystals are sewn to the finished piece to

bring in the desired energy.

The Opening Circle

Once you have decided who you will invite to the birth of your baby, bring deeper meaning to it by having an Opening Circle. At about 38 – 40 weeks, you'll know the perfect time, invite your support people to come to your home and have a cup of tea or meal. Be as elaborate or as simple as you want to be. You could include those who you have asked for help before and after the birth, who you may not have asked to the actual birth, or just have those who will be at the birth. Before your tea or meal, sit in a circle and address each person, welcoming them to your birth circle. Tell them why you have asked them to the birth (or for help around the birth) and tell them what you want them to do. This can be done either just from you the pregnant Mother or together with your partner, or you may wish to do both. Ask each person to speak in response, from their heart, of their wishes for you and your baby. Warn them beforehand so they can give some thought to this important process. Ask everyone to name any fears they have and address them there together; you don't want anyone with unresolved fears attending you at your birth. If you can't resolve the fears together then you may want to change your plans.

After everyone has spoken and all is said, using a ball of wool or thick embroidery thread, wrap a couple of loops of the yarn around each person's wrist around the circle, making real and visual your circle. Contemplate the significance of this, talk about what it means to you to have these people prepared to help you unconditionally with your pending birth. Then each person breaks the yarn off and ties three knots to make their bracelet. Tell each person to make a wish with each knot. Have your tea or feast and enjoy the deeper connection. Everyone will have a constant link with you and each other now, waiting to be called by you, so they can serve you in whatever way you have asked.

After the birth, when you are ready, perhaps on day 7 or so, you can have a **Closing Circle** where you give thanks to everyone, cut off the yarn bracelets, tell and retell the stories, look at the photos and celebrate.

A Blessingway

The special ceremony to honour the Mother-to-Be is the Blessingway. This is your wider circle of friends, your community, gathering together to bestow

you with their wishes and to honour you for the important role you are playing for the community, bringing in a new person. The point of this ceremony is that your friends, family and community thank you and honour you for that. You may choose to do a 'belly cast' at this party. You could also do a henna tattoo on your pregnant belly, an ancient protection 'spell' from India. The Blessingway is also a wonderful event to include your other children in. This ceremony can be a women only or a family event. It can be organised by you or for you and be conducted at around 36 weeks of pregnancy, or within the last month.

Ask the guests to bring a bead, these are to be strung during the ceremony as each person speaks their blessing, and they are given to you to keep. You may hold, contemplate, or wear the beads during your birth to remind you of all the love and support that you have around you. Ask each guest to prepare to speak their blessing, or read aloud written words, as they string their bead. These words may perhaps be:

- words of wisdom and encouragement to help the mother-to-be during her birth.
- their prayer or wish for the woman in her mothering.

Ask them to write their blessings down so that you can keep them in your journal. Ask the guests, if necessary, to focus on the positive. Have a tea party, with you, the mother-to-be, as the guest of honour.

"It was awesome having a Blessingway, it was like the start of the magic to create the perfect birth. I felt so blessed that these women had so many beautiful wishes for me. Everyone put their thought and wish into their bead, and we created the connection literally with the bracelets. With the power of all those spoken words, within days I gave birth to Eden. And in the days after his birth, I felt the support again of all those women, completing the circle." Monica

"Having a Blessingway was beautiful. During my birth, I felt surrounded by the women who had wished me well. It was as if we became one and I had extra strength and wasn't alone." Melissa

"For my first daughter Iris, my sister asked if she could arrange a baby shower. I was a little nervous at the potential lack of heart of such an event, so I agreed on the condition that I could help. My requests were:

1. That each woman coming brought a bulb, plant or seeds I could plant for my baby (instead of gifts).

2. That each woman came with a piece of writing or poetry, by her or borrowed, for my baby.

3. That each woman would bestow a trait upon my baby, which they wrote on a wooden bead to be strung together with all the others. So now 6 years later, we still have our garden, the writings are in a special envelope for Iris and the beads hang in the playroom. I am grateful that we did this welcoming event for me and my beautiful Iris. With my 3rd daughter Cedar, I felt it too much to have an event at home and was deeply aware that the majority of the women I wanted to connect with were not within traveling distance. So I arranged a welcoming spell that I could send to women far and wide. The spell consisted of a piece of beautiful fabric to create the spell upon, paper to write upon, a candle, and instructions with a date and time that one could attempt to perform the ritual on with the intention that we created the welcoming in unison. It arrived tied in ribbon. The extraordinary things that were returned on that paper made me cry with joy, over and over. Some wrote poems, others did a painting and some wrote a letter of love to the baby Cedar. One even had a big lipstick kiss. The fabric was to be returned to be constructed into something at a later date. I had expected no change to the fabric apart from being filled with the magic of ritual. Instead some were carefully embroidered with words and images of love for Cedar. I am so grateful that I had the inspiration to create this ritual. I did mine at home with Cedars 2 older sisters who were 2 and 3. They each did a picture for Cedar and had their own fabric to perform the ritual on." April

Birth

Invoking the Ancient Birth Goddesses Birthing With The Goddess

Pregnancy and childbirth are often a time, often the first time, women and men truly encounter the Divine Feminine. The pregnant woman IS the Goddess, the Divine feminine in her human (wo)-manifestation performing a miracle. The Divine Feminine has her outward manifestations, everywhere. Every culture across time has had it's Goddesses to call on for protection, guidance, nurturance and support through pregnancy and childbirth. You can call these ancient Birth Goddesses during pregnancy meditations and during labour. Call Brigid, Artemis, Ixchel, Freya, Yemaya, Changing Woman, Pukkeenegak, Sri Lakshmi, Kwan Yin, Tauret, Hathor, Gaia, Nungeenatya. Light a candle for each of them as you say their

name and give thanks for them being with you.

Remember your birth is a rite of passage

It is important to ensure that your transition time to mother (each time as well as the first time) is as you would like it to be. For example, bring the same amount of attention to detail for the birth as you would to your Wedding. Who do you want to be there to assist you, to tend to you, to take photographs? What things do you want around you? What music, what food, what essential oils will you burn? The process of figuring this all out (journal your conversation with yourself about this) will reveal to you all sorts of things, for example any issues within primary relationships that may need addressing, fears about who is in control, etc.

"A strong message for me, as I contemplate my pregnancy, is that in creating life and giving birth I am experiencing a unique and precious rite of passage for myself. It deserves reverence and love as much as any other special occasion in my life, and the more I attend to this, the richer and closer connection I have with myself and my baby." Cassarne

Siblings at the birth

Birth is a rite of passage for the baby's siblings too, into big brother or big sisterhood! Give special care to your thoughts about older brothers and sisters involvement in the birth. I suggest that they are present for the birth, with the freedom to come and go as they feel and need to. They need their own support person, maybe even each depending on their age, and she or he will be responsible for knowing at the time, with lots of discussions with you ahead of time, what's right for the sibling. I believe that part of the healing our culture needs around birth will happen as the children who are present at their baby sibling's birth grow up knowing that birth is part of life - Mummy just concentrates and gets really strong and pushes out the baby and there it is. Obviously the easiest place to do this is in your own home, however, the inconveniences to the siblings that a hospital creates can be worked around. Afterwards, have the children draw the birth and if they're old enough, write the story or have someone be their scribe. You will love to look back on these.

"I was six when Jackson was born and I remember it more vividly than any other memory from that age. As an adult now, looking back, I know that

what I experienced taught me that birth is a community celebration, and this is very different to what most of my peers think." Sam

Candles

Get a special candle, your birth candle, to light at the beginning of labour. Make a wish, set your intentions and give great thanks for a safe, easy birth. This could be the special candle that you light for your baby on special occasions or each time you want to remember the magic of their birth and your powerful journey together. Don't blow the candle out! Pinch it out or use a snuffer; it keeps the 'wish' contained.

After the Birth

Placenta rituals

Lotus Birth

Rather than cutting the baby's cord at birth, Lotus Birth involves leaving the cord and placenta connected to the baby until it comes off by itself. This takes anywhere from about 3 to 12 days. During this time the placenta needs to be drained of blood and salted to prevent it smelling. This process creates a very subdued and still atmosphere in the home, which is very appropriate for a newborn and is said to create a more gentle transition for the baby to the outside world.

Making a Homeopathic Remedy from the Placenta

You can easily do this yourself or with the help of a Homeopath. The theory is that having a remedy at hand for your baby that is made from her/his placenta is like having a bit of a magic potion for the baby. A remedy to use at times of illness, shock, transition or change and when you intuitively feel to. It can be used for others as well. For more information see www.placentalremedy.com

Placenta as a Tonic

Humans are the only mammals that don't eat their placenta; even vegetarian cows do. The reason the animals eat it is for the unsurpassable nutrition it supplies. If you want to get the almighty boost that your placenta can be for you but you don't want to eat it, you can dry it and take it in capsule form. To dry a placenta you would simply dehydrate it in the oven, then using a mortar and pestle grind it up. Put the powder in empty capsules that you can buy and take it over whatever period

of time your intuition tells you.

Burying the Placenta

Do this as a ceremony, returning it to the Earth and giving great thanks for the role the placenta played in 'feeding' your baby. Many traditional cultures honour the placenta in all sorts of ways. Nowadays, after most births, the placenta is thrown in the rubbish bin. Burying the placenta, perhaps with a special tree to grow from it, is a beautiful way we can reconnect with honouring this vital organ, and in so doing express our gratitude for the whole process. For those who give birth in hospital, taking your placenta home is a definite step forward in claiming the birth experience as your own.

Baby Moon

Remember Honey Moon, think Baby Moon. Ideally a whole moon cycle of 28 days, but perhaps more realistically 1-2 weeks, at home. No chores, no work, answering machine on, phones off, lots of help from friends and family with the

cooking and washing, older children happily enjoying coming and going to friends or family and you with your partner in bed or on the couch relaxing, recovering and being 100% focussed on the baby. You all deserve this, and it will set you up well for the time ahead.

The Naming Ceremony

When you are ready, introduce your baby to your community with the Naming Ceremony. The act of naming your child is hugely symbolic, in fact it's probably something you put a lot of thought into. You may choose to use this ceremony to designate 'God' parents. Perhaps this could be the occasion you plant a tree in honour of your baby and bury the placenta with it.

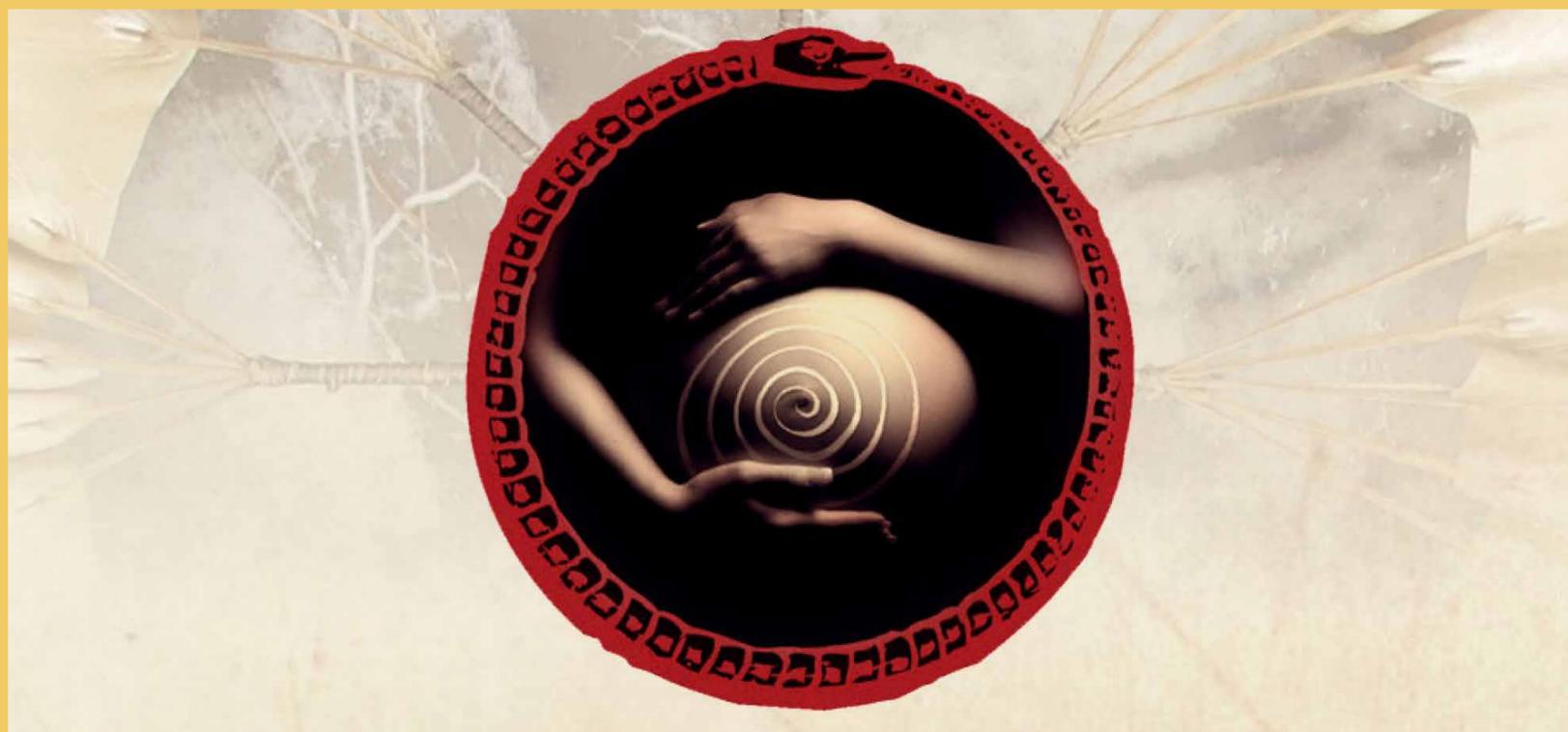
Jane Hardwicke Collings is an independent midwife from Australia, who has been attending homebirths since 1984. A homebirth mother of four, a grandmother and a teacher of the Women's Mysteries, she gives workshops, writes books and has founded Moonsong and The School of Shamanic Womancraft.



Jane's next 2019 Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy workshops can be seen here:
<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/o/workshops-with-jane-hardwicke-collings-6352044223>

The School of Shamanic Womancraft Four Seasons Journeys start in Mullumbimby in November and Victoria (Otways) in December 2019, and in Glastonbury UK, Adelaide, and Blue Mountains in February, Tasmania in March and MNC in August 2020.

2020 workshops:
Glastonbury UK February 4
Sydney (near) 5 day Shamanic Womancraft Retreat
Sydney May 23
Melb August 22
Mullum November 7





THE BIRTH OF

Duniiper Margot

By Erika Watson

Photos courtesy of Hayden Druce and Jo Hunter

I started early labour on the 25th June and was feeling relaxed and happy. We registered the new car in Lithgow; I knew at that point labour was happening and accidentally wrote the day's date as the 25/6/2000. In the afternoon, I saw my show and contacted Jacqui to let her know, then I had a warm bath outside under the trees.

My mum came up that evening and by then I thought I was still in early labour and was going to rest for the night; very civilized. But the contractions were very close and by 9:00pm, I couldn't lay down. We called Jacqui again and she had already messaged to say she was on her way, arriving at about 11:00pm. I dilated from 1 to 7 cm on her examination and was able to get in the pool. It progressed in intensity and I laboured in the pool and on the toilet, sometimes screaming with frustration. Jo arrived in the early hours of the morning; it was raining. I felt like I wanted to push. The forewaters were heavy and bulging and I couldn't feel the baby's head, I tried to break them with my finger but couldn't and I decided Jac could as the pressure was too great. I laboured longer and had the urge to push, but I still had a cervical lip. Both Jo and Jac tried to hold the lip out of the way during a contraction

but it was no good! I had to put my bum in the air, slow my breathing and STOP PUSHING to release the cervix. It felt like forever, it was so fucking hard to do. That was the most connected I have ever felt with my partner, Hayden, who was holding me while I didn't push but breathed through the strong contractions. I watched the spots of blood fall from my cervix; I felt proud with every drop that I was doing it. Hayden was my rock and I could feel his love and support.

Jac checked and the cervix was fully dilated. I then climbed back into the pool. As my baby moved into the narrow bend, my contractions were strong and I pushed with every one. Jac checked the baby's heart rate between every contraction. I focused on going soft, like jelly, floating and swaying in the water, breathing low and deep. I talked to my beautiful baby, "I Love you, we can do this little one," "I love you my baby," "You are so safe," "This breath is for you." The most incredible thing happened through this time, my baby's heart rate would dip down and then as I talked to my baby, my eyes closed the whole time, with my gentle energy and focused breath on my beautiful baby, it would pick up, strong and regular,



EVERY TIME, for every contraction. We did it together. I felt like my baby and I knew each other, were strong for each other; brave and full of heart, utterly connected.

I eventually had to get back out of the pool as things weren't progressing. I was worn out, stuck wanting to push for hours before the cervix had fully dilated. Jac and Hayden braced my legs so I could push and I had my baby on the floor on my back in front of the fire at 10:13am. Hayden caught my beautiful healthy baby and placed them on my tummy, the umbilical cord was short. I looked and learnt my baby was a beautiful girl. Hayden cut the cord after it stopped pulsing and then held her while I birthed the placenta.



After examination from Jac and Jo, it was learned that I had a third degree tear and would need to transfer to the hospital. Juniper was born 4.2kg, 37.5 cm head and 53 cm long, none of the clothes we had chosen fit. We left after a couple of hours (in our registered car!), after washing off in the bath and having the first feed. I had local anesthetic instead of the general and it was done under good light in the theatre. To keep calm and still I breathed and talked to the staff about sandwiches - hahaha. I was back home again in the evening where mum had made the bed and a pumpkin soup. It felt so wonderful to all be home in

bed together.

Birth is hard, harder than anything else I will ever do. But if I learnt one thing (I learnt many) it is that hard does not mean traumatic. I feel empowered, strong, a warrior. I love my body. I am transformed.

Note from editor: During the second stage of labour (i.e. pushing) it is normal for the fetal heart rate to dip at the height of contractions due to head compression.

Erika is a new mum, a horticultural scientist, and organic farmer running her own business growing vegetables with her partner. She manages 50Ha regeneratively with a focus on ecosystem processes to enhance biodiversity. She is passionate about the environment and art, combining the two in collaborative projects with art groups. She is excited to raise Juniper on the farm and share the treasures of the natural world with her.



SPINNING BABIES®

For workshops listed below register here:
<https://spinningbabies.com/australia-workshops/>

2019 November 18-19
Darwin: Spinning Babies® Workshop 2 days
with Jenny Blyth & Fiona Hallinan
Venue: NARU seminar room 23 Ellengowan Dr, Brinkin

2020 March 11-12
Melbourne: Spinning Babies® Workshop 2 days
with Jenny Blyth & Fiona Hallinan
Venue: Centre for Mindfulness, 16 Trinity Place, East Melbourne, Victoria

2020 May 4-5
Wagga Wagga: Spinning Babies® Workshop 2 days

with Jenny Blyth & Fiona Hallinan
Venue: to be announced

2020 May 8-9
Sydney: Spinning Babies® Workshop 2 days
with Jenny Blyth & Fiona Hallinan
Venue: Loft & Earth, 170 Bronte Rd, Bondi Junction, Sydney NSW

2020 May 11-12
Newcastle – Spinning Babies® Workshop 2 days
with Jenny Blyth & Fiona Hallinan
Venue: to be announced

CLOSING OF THE BONES

MOTHERING THE MOTHER.
NURTURING THE NURTURER.
HOLDING THE WOMAN
WHO HOLDS ALL CREATION.

By [Claire Heenan](#)

The Closing the Bones Ceremony is a rite of passage. An honouring of transformation, a healing embrace of vulnerability and openness, and an expression of gratitude and recognition for the life-giving force of the womb. Birthing a baby, no matter how they choose to be born, is a physical and energetic opening, a surrender to extreme change. I like to refer to the process of engaging in this ceremony as 'floating' in a Closing the Bones Ceremony. Why? It's a perfect analogy for the flow of rocking, swaying and soothing weightlessness that is felt when having your bones closed.

I would like to be clear that when motherhood is mentioned in this article, this is inclusive of all mothers; those who hold their babies in their arms, their hearts, or both. Closing the Bones is for all women, and is celebratory of all forms of motherhood and all variations of birth journeys. This ceremony brings the pregnancy and birthing experience full circle.

I would like to pay respect to the culture from which this ceremony originates, and traditionally belongs to. Closing the Bones is an ancient and sacred ritual that originates from Mexican postpartum tradition. It is also commonplace elsewhere, particularly in South American countries. This ritual uses traditional rebozo cloths to wrap the body. A rebozo is a long piece of woven cotton/woollen cloth that resembles a shawl or wide

scarf. However, it is different in that it is specifically made for women by Mexican artisans who have generational and ancestral lineage behind their knowledge and skills in weaving. Ideally, practitioners of Closing the Bones may choose to use ethically purchased, fair trade rebozo cloths so as to supportively respect the original healers and their traditions. Still, many women who offer Closing the Bones are very well-intentioned and use their own shawls, which can still have the same wonderful effect.

Closing the Bones is intended to 'close' a mother's body and welcome her into herself as a newly born woman following her experience of giving birth and becoming a mother. There is an old saying about how women leave their bodies and journey to another world, to the stars, to collect their babies before returning. Closing the Bones is a way of welcoming a mother back into herself, renewed and ready for her mothering journey. The ceremony is a deeply nourishing experience that is unique to each woman who experiences it. Some women explain a sense of rebirth, a feeling of closure surrounding anything they might be holding on to from their birth. Others have described it as an opportunity for deep, meditative stillness.

My own experience of this powerful ritual was what called me into this work. I remember experiencing such a real, palpable feeling of peace within me,

and a deep sense of relief in accepting myself and who I am as a mother. I felt so comfortable with my vulnerability, and cried tears of release afterwards for finally embracing myself with love for my work in growing, birthing and caring for my baby.

Up until that point I had felt like there was a big identity gap between my pregnant self and my mothering self. After crossing the transformational threshold of birthing my baby, it felt expected by society that life go on as normal, but just with 'mum' as part of my title. Closing the Bones bridged that gap for me, and allowed me the space to honour and appreciate all the hard work my body and mind had





then slowly immersed in the comfort of rebozo wrapping at her feet, legs, hips, chest and head. Only the top of the head and eyes are covered, leaving room to breathe of course! It's common for women to worry about feeling claustrophobic, however, the style of wrapping and relaxation aspects of the ceremony ensure this is very unlikely. A woman's comfort during Closing the Bones is paramount for her to feel nourished and re-energised. As she is wrapped up tightly and comfortably, she is given the space and time to show herself love for all she has done in birthing her baby. This provides women the sacred rite of passage that they often crave as they transcend into themselves as newborn Mums.

Following the sacred stillness within the rebozo accompanied by sound, guided meditation and/or silence, the woman is very slowly unwrapped beginning from the head and eventually unravelling the rebozo at her feet. She is then given the time and space she needs to welcome any stories, emotions or sensations that have surfaced. As a practitioner I believe this can be a moment of important discovery, therefore I feel it is vital for my role at the end of the ceremony particularly to be a space holder and a calm presence, listening. Simply, listening. The power of being held, and heard, in loving emotional safety, is transformative.

Facilitators of this ritual will vary in their approach and in what they offer. The ceremony can include a postnatal bath, gentle womb and hip massage, a debrief at the beginning and end, rituals for letting go and more. As a facilitator of this ceremony, I tailor each ritual to the woman and her unique circumstances, needs and preferences. Being a musician, I love to include the option of sound as an anchor for grounding and as a powerful pathway to emotional discovery. Practitioners will differ in the setup also; some suggest one-on-one sessions; others recommend a women's circle style of ceremony. I offer both, as I believe both styles of ceremony have benefits. Some women choose to have a women's circle involving their tribe as part of their Closing the Bones ritual, followed by a one-on-one ceremony at a later date. The ceremony is always flexible and malleable to meet the needs of all women who feel called to it.

When I facilitate this, I like to include rituals that seem to speak to that individual woman. This might be one or a

combination of these; warming postnatal tea, oracle card guidance, burning old beliefs, smudging with sage, breath-work, music meditation, a creative task or something else that a woman's energy calls for.

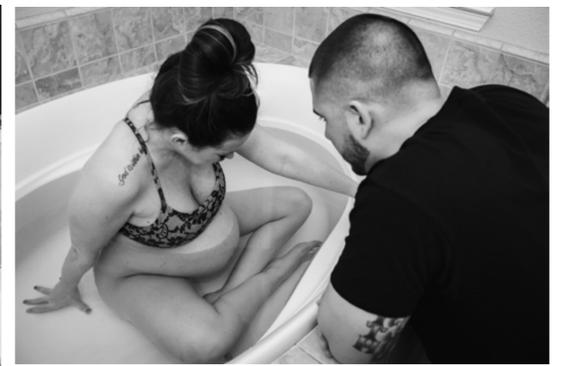
In Western culture, honouring our most soul-changing experiences as rites of passage is fairly uncommon. I believe there are incredible discoveries to be made when we have the opportunity to be immersed in reflecting on and embracing all the colours of our transitional experiences such as birth, motherhood, breastfeeding and menopause. Floating yourself in a Closing the Bones ceremony is a gateway to engaging your very real and accessible inner power.

Claire Heenan is a birth and postpartum doula in the Blue Mountains. Her soul work is to power with women in one of the most transformative times, holding space as women meet their babies. She trusts that women are the experts of their own bodies, babies and birth experiences. Claire believes that all women deserve continuity of supporter; that all women deserve a doula. Claire is a facilitator of Women's Circles, Mother Blessings, and Closing the Bones Ceremony. The MoonCourt temple at her home has seen many women joining in circle and finding their collective power. Claire offers Closing the Bones to all women.

done. The ritual guided me in loving my postpartum body and finding a replenished sense of joy in the wisdom of my womb. I then felt such a strong calling, a calling I couldn't ignore, to dive into this beautiful work and provide this ritual for women.

A Closing the Bones Ceremony is used to realign the body energetically, as well as to physically support the pelvis to realign following changes the pelvis and hips go through in pregnancy and birth. Traditionally it is facilitated multiple times during postpartum to assist with postnatal recovery. I suggest women repeat the ceremony as their baby reaches nine months old, marking the beautiful milestone of '9 months in, 9 months out'. Having a Closing the Bones ceremony to honour the end of a woman's breastfeeding journey is also a wonderful way to thank the body for all the nutritional and emotional nourishment provided. However, it can be done at any time and for any woman. I believe this ceremony can benefit all women, whether they are mothers of babies, businesses, fur babies, gardens or other!

The ritual involves the use of rebozo to gently sway and rock the woman using the cloth positioned at her hips, followed by wrapping using a specific technique to allow her to be held tightly, but very comfortably. Just as a woman is rocking and wrapping her new baby lovingly to help them adjust to life beyond the womb, she requires that same mothering and ceremonious recognition of her adjustment to life with her baby. She is



MICHELLE'S BIRTH STORY

By Michelle Fernand
Photography by [Little Wonders Photography](#)

All seven were hospital births; some were elective inductions and others spontaneous labours. I knew this 'late' was normal. It had been eight years since my own twins were born and I was more conscious this time about soaking it all in.

I lost my mucus plug at 1pm after walking all day. I sent pictures to our private midwife who casually inquired about contraction duration; they were inconsistent at best. It was amazing to be able to text and send pictures, and receive prompt and inquisitive responses, from my care provider. I'd never had that with my OB's and hospital deliveries.

My last delivery (a surrogate baby born to a local doctor's family) was less than 3 hours, barely making it to the hospital in time to push. We knew this delivery would be swift. We made sure our birth photographer was on board with being available last minute, and of course our midwives' were aware of my history of precipitous labours. Contractions came and went, and by 1:00am I was feeling frustrated with myself for 'calling wolf'.

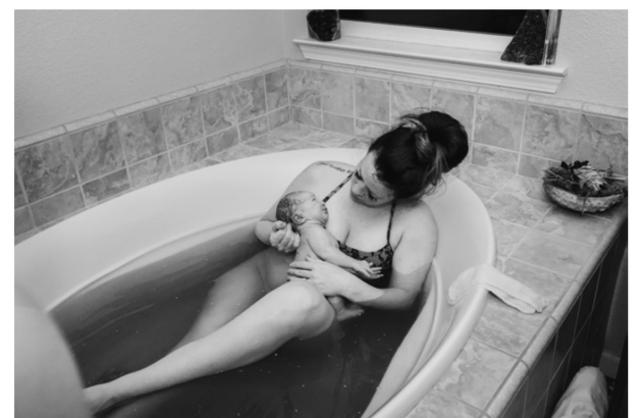
I closed my eyes while I lay in bed and had one good contraction with significant pressure. I knew this was it. Hubby made the calls and I started doubting myself. Was this really it? I mean we are home, kids are asleep

and it's 1am, so no traffic on the road for the midwives or photographer. It couldn't be this easy!

Our tribe arrived, with a calm and gentle presence, like wind blowing in the fields. I carried on making conversation right up until pushing. We had no manual checks. I didn't want anyone to tell me what my body was doing; I knew I had to just listen to my body.

At 4:47am our 8.12lbs of pure chunk joined us earthside. The weight of my belly felt enormously heavy standing up to exit the tub, covered in all things birth that I had been oblivious to in the hours prior. My birth team assisted daddy with baby, and then me out of the tub. Drying me. Holding me. Walking with me. To the bed we made this very baby in. They cooked for us while we marvelled at his weight and length, measured by our team. They all stayed until the sun rose and just as it did, we found ourselves in a brand new day, with a brand new baby.

This was my first home birth and I deeply mourn this experience for the rest of my children. I almost feel robbed to have such a blessed and pure experience for only one; bittersweet.



Michelle lives in a small suburb in Northern California and is a stay-at-home mother of five. Her children are aged 17, 11 and 8 (boy/girl twins). She has been a surrogate to J (14), C (3) and W (1) and a Boxer puppy (2). Her kids keep her very busy, between football for her boys and softball for the girls, it's nearly impossible to find time for anything else. She's found herself falling in love with all things surrounding medical advocacy, freedom and choice. "Fighting like a Mother". Like most other mummas she runs on coffee and no sleep!



NATURAL PREGNANCY
&
PARENTING DAY 2020

Homebirth NSW are excited to announce our very first Natural Pregnancy and Parenting Day. The event will be held **Sunday 9th February 2020 at Brush Farm House, Eastwood.**

Come and enjoy a day celebrating all things Natural Pregnancy & Parenting. We will be offering an array of market stalls, different speakers, workshops, live music and many more activities for kids and adults.

You can practise your babywearing skills and get to meet some amazing birth workers. Or take the opportunity to sample some new natural therapies.

It will be a great day out for the whole family. And its **FREE!** So please come along, bring your family and friends and enjoy an afternoon of likemindedness.

For stall holder information contact Kristyn at admin@homebirthsydney.org.au

Meet our Intern



My name is Hannah and I live in Dundas Valley with my brother Conor and our dog Esky. I am currently in my third year at Macquarie University studying a Bachelor of Social Science and as part of my degree we undertake PACE (Professional and Community Engagement). This means that for one semester we all intern with a private organisation, non-profit group or government institution.

As part of my PACE experience I have been working with Homebirth Access Sydney (HAS) and additionally Homebirth Australia. My project involves creating a national register of homebirth service providers. A huge part of the project is to work with midwife groups and homebirth communities on Facebook.

We have been lucky enough to work with several Interns. The help they provide is invaluable to our organisation.

The project being on a national scale meant that there were some issues with getting the right information about where midwives specifically worked and what kind of criteria hospitals had in place. However, most people were more than helpful and invested in the success of the project.

See this [link](#) to our two latest reports we have been able to release with the help of two wonderful interns.

There are only a handful of hospitals who offer home birth options across Australia, and the information on their services and the criteria for entry was not always sufficient which resulted in lots of emails with hospital staff who were more than happy to provide assistance.

It has been an eye-opening experience the whole way through since all of the research and work I am doing is completely new to me. It has been a privilege to be part of multiple Facebook groups who have an active and vibrant community of midwives and women who were willing to share not only their contact details but also their experiences.

RITUALS AFTER BIRTH

I yearn for ritual and sacred traditions in my life and I wanted the welcoming of my babes into the world to be sacred beyond the moment of birth; well into the fourth trimester. In the absence of any of my own cultural traditions passed directly down to me (save for Christian ritual, which does not resonate), I searched out what I could find from British folklore – chiefly from the Carmina Gadelica, and a book called 'By Sundown Shores' by Fiona MacLeod.

Whilst I didn't have a village to mother me and had to leave the home from necessity, I tried to honour the 40 days postpartum, which is common to many cultures around the world including mine on both sides. I rested as much as possible, even if I felt more than fine. I did not have sex during this time either. It wasn't that I didn't want to or wasn't ready for these things, but I wanted to acknowledge the huge transition I had been through, in a world that only places value on 'bouncing back'.

For my babes - on their first full day at home I performed the 'old mothering' ritual by simply placing the brow of my baby against the earth - the mother to us all.

On the first evening at home, I placed a silver sixpence in the baby's hand. I took water that I'd previously blessed by placing it under a full moon, and put three drops on their forehead.

"The little drop of the Sky

On thy little forehead, beloved one.

The little drop of the Land

On thy little forehead, beloved one.

The little drop of the Sea

On thy little forehead beloved one.

To aid thee from the fays,

To guard thee from the host;

To aid thee from the gnome,

To shield thee from the spectre;

To keep thee for the Three,

To shield thee, to surround thee;

To save thee for the Three,

To fill thee with the graces;

The little drop of the Three

To lave thee with the graces."



Later I would use the same 'consecrated' water and coin for the first bath, saying the following blessing while bathing the baby:

"A wavelet for thy form,

A wavelet for thy voice,

A wavelet for thy sweet speech ;

A wavelet for thy luck,

A wavelet for thy good,

A wavelet for thy health ;

A wavelet for thy throat,

A wavelet for thy pluck,

A wavelet for thy graciousness ;

Nine waves for thy graciousness."

Lastly, on their first birthday my husband and I held an intimate naming ceremony with the chosen godparent - in Gaelic they are called 'anam cara' (soul friend). We did readings and blessings and we had a special candle lit around which the baby was circled three times and passed over three times. The fire blesses and purifies.

Erin Quinn is a doula and aspiring midwife who serves families in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. To connect with her, go to <https://www.facebook.com/birchtreebirth/>

Useful links

INFORMATION ABOUT HOMEBIRTH, INCLUDING WHY TO CHOOSE A HOMEBIRTH, PREPARATION IDEAS, INFORMATION ON THE SAFETY OF HOMEBIRTH, LINKS TO HOMEBIRTH AND HOMEBIRTH IN THE MEDIA -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/HOMEBIRTH/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/homebirth/)

FIND A MIDWIFE -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/FIND-A-MIDWIFE/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/find-a-midwife/)

CHOOSING A MIDWIFE -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/FIND-A-MIDWIFE/CHOOSING-A-MIDWIFE/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/find-a-midwife/choosing-a-midwife/)

GUIDE TO CHOOSING A MIDWIFE -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/FIND-A-MIDWIFE/GUIDE-CHOOSING-MIDWIFE/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/find-a-midwife/guide-choosing-midwife/)

HOMEBIRTH AND NATURAL PARENTING SUPPORT GROUPS -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/SERVICES/SUPPORT-GROUPS/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/services/support-groups/)

SERVICES PAGE -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/HOMEBIRTH/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/homebirth/)

WITHIN WHICH ARE LINKS TO CHILDBIRTH EDUCATORS, DOULAS, FITNESS AND EXERCISE, HOMEBIRTH SUPPLIES, LACTATION SERVICES, NATURAL THERAPIES, NATURAL TOYS AND CLOTHING, PHOTOGRAPHERS, PLACENTA SERVICES, PREGNANCY AND BIRTH ART, SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES AND WELLBEING AND FOOD PRODUCTS.

HAS ONLINE SHOP -

[HTTPS://HOMEBIRTHSYDNEY.ORG.AU/SHOP/](https://homebirthsydney.org.au/shop/) CONTAINING BOOKS, CLOTHES AND PAST ISSUES OF BIRTHINGS MAGAZINE



Photo by Tara Mahoney

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

The next issue is themed 'Labour of Love'. This issue is all about what birthworkers do, how they came to this line of work, what hurdles they need to overcome and how they manage to continue to do this, so that they can best serve women. If you're a private midwife, a doula, a birth photographer or work in the birth scene in any other way (holistic therapies, placenta encapsulation, women's circle holder, ceremony/ritual provider) we'd love to hear from you!

Birthings is the NSW homebirth communities magazine and we'd love your contributions! Please send us your theme articles, birth announcements and stories with some high resolution photos. Submissions are due by 1st February, 2020 to editor@homebirthsydney.org.au and should be <1400 words with a <100 word bio and some high resolution photos.

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



HOME BIRTH NEW SOUTH WALES

