

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
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BLACKBIRD

Giving birth can either make you or break you. Whether it has gone to plan or not, and no matter what sort of birth it ends up being, if choice and dignity is taken from you, it can leave you with a sense of feeling broken, hopeless, and inadequate. On the other spectrum though, birth can invoke an incredible power within you, giving you strength and an inner-knowing that you never knew you had. That lesson took me three births to understand in its completeness.

When birthing my first child, I wasn't aware of my rights and allowed the medical system to lead the way. Fear and unknowing ruled the pregnancy. Gestational diabetes (including having to inject insulin) and apparent high blood pressure were just some of the hurdles and worries I was faced with. Consequently, during the birth there was a cascade of interventions, from early induction to pain relief of all kinds. My baby was stuck in the canal at one stage for quite a while with a very low heart rate. The birth resulted in many issues, some ongoing, for both myself and my poor baby boy as well. I had a third degree tear from an episiotomy and found it painful and difficult to walk for weeks. My baby had been born covered in bruises, haemorrhages in his eyes, unhappy, and too sore to even breastfeed successfully. He had been taken from me soon after birth and put in the nursery, where he spent his first week. I had what the doctors referred to as a "difficult baby," who cried almost every minute of every day. I took him to the doctors knowing that something wasn't right but was told that I probably needed to do a form of sleep training and learn to better comfort my baby. My frustration with the information I was being fed was brewing and that inner-knowing that had previously been missing was starting to lurk its head a little. I knew deep down that there had to be other options. I knew that there were no issues with how I naturally comforted my baby, as the bond my son and I had, felt stronger than anything I had ever felt before. By chance, I had a fellow mother mention how effective osteopathy had been on her babies. At 7 weeks of age, I took my son to an osteopath instead of the recommended sleep school. There I found out, that due to his forceps birth he was out of alignment in so many places including his skull, spine, chest and jaw. This was giving him grief with feeding, reflux, sleep, and more. As soon as the session ended, he smiled for the first time. From that day on, instead of being known as the "difficult baby," his new nickname became "The Smiley Guy." His sleep improved dramatically as did breastfeeding, happiness, and overall health. What I didn't realise until over a year later, was the effect that birth had on me emotionally and spiritually - what I grew to know as "birth trauma." This birth trauma crushed my strength from within. Confidence and feelings of inner-knowing in most areas of life were taken over by fear, instincts almost absent.

My second birth was quite different. I had the knowledge of what I didn't want to happen and how to avoid the many things that are pushed upon us during pregnancy and birth. I had met a lovely group of women through a Births Group and had the support of an independent midwife named _____ who I had befriended through the group. I had also opted to have a student midwife, throughout my pregnancy to ensure continuity of care. Gestational diabetes had reared its head once again as had pressure for an early induction. I was also told by an obstetrician who reviewed my previous birth that my pelvis must be too small and that a natural birth would almost definitely result in worse tears. Thanks to the support and new knowledge I had gained, I was able to exercise my rights and stick to aiming for a natural birth to avoid interventions. The stars aligned the night that I started to go into labour resulting in me having a beautiful supportive team of midwives with me. I had a natural hospital birth with my baby being birthed onto a mattress on the floor of the hospital while I was in my husband's arms. My baby girl had arrived in the early hours of her "due date" despite the early induction that had been recommended. Her Apgar results were perfect, I had absolutely no tears and was in perfect health as well. While it was satisfying to have been able to

have a natural birth and stand my ground on what I wanted and didn't want, it was still a birth of pain and fear. I hadn't learnt enough about what TO do, instead mostly what not to do. As a result, while it was a natural birth that I had craved, there was still pain, screaming, swearing, and panicking as my little baby girl arrived.

Before my 3rd child was even conceived, I had a dream-like vision of a little girl with dead straight light-coloured hair and huge brown eyes. She looked completely opposite to my little daughter who had very dark brown ringlets. I intuitively knew her name and that there would be something magical and powerful about her arrival.

My last birthing experience was a completely different story to the previous ones. My husband and I completed an online course in "Hypnobirthing", and we were therefore thoroughly armed with what to do, how to feel, how to think, how to breath, what to expect & when, and how to access calm as well as exercise our rights when needed. As a part of the course, I regularly listened to recorded affirmations about the calm birth that I would have. I developed an obsession of daydreaming of giving birth to The Beatles song "Blackbird." I would listen to the song almost every day while my mind went into dreamland imagining my baby making its way out with me pulling her out myself in the bath. Though we weren't sure of the sex of the baby, I knew deep down that the vision I had had of the little girl was the baby growing inside of me. The pregnancy was mostly calm, complete with knowledge and exercising my right of choice when needed. I had a history of gestational diabetes but had read enough to feel confident of my choices that weren't the standard protocols. I also found out I had group b strep, so I experienced a bit of pressure to have anti-biotics during birth but decided that the risk outweighed the benefit for us. I joined the midwifery group program early on in pregnancy and made it clear how important choice was to me. I had luckily been partnered with a lovely midwife named _____ who supported my wishes and helped me gain further information when questions arose.

Eight days after my "due date" (which let's face it, really should be referred to as a "guess date") I was still very much pregnant and waiting. People around me were getting impatient and some felt worried. I stayed away from the hospital knowing that the talks of induction were pending. That night in bed my waters broke. It was the first time I had experienced it that way, which funnily enough, was another event that I had been manifesting to experience. We lived in bushland an hour from the hospital so had to take the long trip into consideration. I didn't worry and instead focused on sleeping until the surges grew strong and regular. My Mum was staying with us at the time so that when the time came, we would easily be able to leave our other two children with her. In the morning I calmly told her that we would be going to the hospital soon and that my waters had broken the night before. The look of sheer terror on her face was priceless! She couldn't believe that I'd waited so long, and calmly.

Contractions were getting strong and fast as we approached the hospital. To my dismay, when we arrived, I found out that my midwife had gone to Sydney, a five hour drive away. Because my pregnancy was considered "late" the midwives who were rostered on kept telling me how the Obstetricians wanted to have a chat. I had no desire to talk to them. As they kept asking, my contractions grew further and further apart until they came to a stop. I knew I had to get endorphins and oxytocin moving. I put some music on as well as an oil diffuser. I also had fake candles lit and the lights dimmed. Medical equipment was covered with sheets. The plan was to make it feel as much like a homebirth as possible. I got my husband to slow dance with me to a song on my playlist which had over 30 songs on shuffle play. Things were still moving slowly and every now and then I'd get reminders from the midwives that the risk of infection was growing. I rang the beautiful midwife who helped me birth my last child and discussed the risk. She simply asked if my baby was wearing a

watch?! Then she told me to go and eat some chocolate! So I did just that! After a caramel slice at the hospital shop my husband and I decided to get some fresh air and go for a walk next to the hospital among the trees. As we walked along, we heard a “plop” right behind us. We turned to see that a golf ball had missed us by only inches and that we were actually on the edge of a golf course. While my husband seemed mortified that we were in danger, that near-miss with a golf ball sent me into hysterical laughter! We quickly started to make our way back to the hospital, but I was laughing so much that I could barely walk! The laughter had definitely made the endorphins start moving! Surges had very quickly become hard and fast! My husband started to get worried that I was going to birth on the golf grounds which made my laughter, and therefore my surges, even stronger!

We finally made it back into the hospital room where I spent the next few hours in the shower as that’s where I found the surges most relaxing. I had decided that the bath was uncomfortable so was slightly disappointed that my manifestation of a water birth wouldn’t be so. We focused on breathing and going *with* the surges, not against them. My husband knew when to pass me water and how to gently pour water down my back for comfort and support. He reminded me of ways to relax my muscles and breath. The midwives were barely present. I was quiet. They therefore were waiting for the noise and fuss to arrive before they would stay.

At one stage I suddenly thought “I can’t do this” and told my husband that I think I need the gas. The surges were strong and fast and I felt too tired to continue. I had been at the hospital all day and I had barely slept the night before. He straight away reminded me that this very thought of wanting the gas was because I was now in transition, to recognise it, and do what we had learnt. He reminded me of my strength...and that our baby would soon arrive! That encouragement was just what I needed resulting in me getting straight back into focus and the flow of it all.

My playlist was still on shuffle play in the bathroom. Random favourite songs played as I quietly moved my hips through each surge in the shower. Completely silent something overcame me and I decided to hop into the bath which had been previously filled. After a short while I heard the guitar introduction to the song “Blackbird,” and without any pushing or control whatsoever my daughter’s head emerged out. I lay there silent. In my mind I was beyond amazed at the magic that had just happened. It was as if time had stopped, and I was the only one who knew the miracle that had just occurred. I also realised that I had been so quiet that not even my husband, who was sitting beside the bathtub, knew that the head of our baby had already been birthed. After a minute or so I saw his head look down in astonishment and he quickly pressed the emergency button to alert the midwives. The midwives ran in to see for themselves exclaiming “oh my god there’s a baby! You’re so quiet!?” Within a few more minutes, the rest of my daughter’s body emerged and I was encouraged to grab her out myself. I brought her to my chest with tears in my eyes. We were finally together. We had achieved our beautiful, calm, water birth. The midwives impatiently asked “What is it? A boy or a girl?” I remember answering softly “It’s a baby.” I didn’t need to know straight away in that moment. Time had stopped, and I was pausing with it. I knew who she was before she was even conceived and needed no proof. I soon checked and the sex was confirmed, tears pouring down my face.

I was adamant to have delayed cord clamping and made sure there was not a single pulse before my husband cut the cord. Both my husband and I had skin to skin contact for many hours. Little had a full head of dead straight hair, which to this day is dead straight, and light coloured. Her big brown eyes are the same shape I had envisioned too. She is without a doubt that same girl who had visited me in a vision.

The birth of awakened me. It created a strength in me that I had partly forgotten, but also didn’t know the extent to which I had. It awakened the power of intuition within me. It made me

proud to be a woman and have a new respect for what our bodies and minds can do. It reminded me of the magical and almost unexplainable connection we have with our children, on a soul level.