

Revisiting Home Birth

by Mandy Lacy



The fourth of April 2007 dawned with a brilliant sunrise followed by a sunny clear morning and by 11.20am a beautiful being had entered our world. His name is Luka, and he is the son of Hannah and Andre. In addition to his parents, his two grandmothers and two midwives were present for the wondrous event of his birth.

Hannah worked hard throughout her labour. She was woken at 3.30 that morning by strong contractions. She was thrilled, scared and anxious all at once, because the event she had been waiting for and, in the past few weeks, was impatient for, was here. By 6 o'clock the contractions were stronger and lasting a minute, and the midwife was phoned. Andre filled the birth-pool with the help of one of the grandfathers, and Hannah's brother, his girlfriend and the grandmothers were working out the best ways to provide support and comfort.

By 9.30 am, the house had emptied to just Hannah, Andre, the grandmothers and midwives. The energy was calm, patient and gentle, and Hannah laboured freely, announcing what was most comfortable, expressing the contractions as they happened. All were quietly busy, or waiting, watching and being attentive to the needs of Hannah.

Hannah moved around also, she spent some time in the pool, used hot water bottles, had lower and full back massages, words of comfort and encouragement were given and being present was the main focus.

The midwives, Bet and Phoebe, expertly and non-invasively went about keeping regular accurate records and monitoring procedures of both mother and baby throughout the whole labour, birth and post-birth.

At around 10.30 am, Hannah wanted to be on her bed, she was beginning to have urges to push and tried several ways for a while, until she was comfortable half-sitting. She had good breaks in between pushes which allowed her to rest and be ready.

Luka entered the world into gentle hands, a quiet, warm and loving environment and was put gently on his mother. This moment was miraculous and seemed to be held in time as everyone present was in awe of the amazing energy a new life brings. Luka had introduced us to his beautiful loud voice and when he finished telling us how hard it had all been, he settled onto his mother's breast for over an hour.

Something that could be considered extraordinary about this story is that Hannah is 16 years old. She too was born at home and even though she had loved her own birth story being told to her as a child, at the beginning of her pregnancy, the thought of herself giving birth was too big and all she wanted was to be put to sleep and woken up afterwards. Hannah's mother, formerly a childbirth educator for over 10 years, was tempted to impart all her worldly wisdom and information (of course she had noticed that over the two to three years before Hannah was pregnant, imparting her wisdom and opinion about anything had never really worked), but instead she suggested attending home birth antenatal classes

as a way of learning about options and becoming more informed. This was most successful and the nurturing of friendships with others was beneficial. Hannah herself then became convinced that planning a home birth was going to be important and worthwhile.

Sharing this birth experience is about 'revisiting home birth' and the power that support and belief in someone will have. This is about the expectation of normal and natural in the first instance, being sensible, engaging professionals (midwives), having open and transparent relationships with them in an equal way, planning well, becoming informed and knowing that secondary services have a vital place.

A Baby Whisperer once said, "Mothers weren't supposed to look after babies on their own." And they didn't in years gone by as they usually lived in villages and communities where family and neighbours you knew were close by. The impact of supportive people can never be underestimated, they are willing to let it be about the other person and believe in the person's ability to succeed. Sometimes it is about letting others help and give of themselves, it is about healthy interdependency.

One of Andre's family visited a day or so after Luka was born and said during the conversation, "... So you had the baby at home, eh? Wow that must have been hard." "No, it was awesome,"

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Wow, that must have been hard.”

“No, it was awesome,” responded Andre

responded Andre, “It’s all in what you believe you can do in your head.”

Of course breast-feeding brought its own set of challenges and through Hannah’s determination, her mother’s promotion, the practical support she received and the advice given, breast-feeding has been established – it was much harder than she ever thought it would be.

The message from Hannah’s story is that we should be revisiting our need for support in raising our families, and that being part of the support group is fulfilling and part of the energy matrix of raising the next generation. Hannah and Andre live with one of the grandparents and along with other siblings. The household has certainly changed, and the elders (who aren’t so old) are endeavouring to be there and not take over, they feel confident that this baby is being looked after very well and they enjoy adding to the parenting and are relishing this baby.

We celebrate these successes and know that home birth is special. The health system is to be congratulated on the services it provides through competent midwives and services such as Plunket home services, parents as first teachers and general practitioners. Then there are the excellent alternative and complementary health practitioners and therapists who are to be congratulated too – they were a fundamental aspect of Hannah’s health care during pregnancy, birth and post birth through the use of homeopathy, Bowen therapy and supplements.

One more thing that could be considered extraordinary about this birth is that Luka was 11lb 2oz (5080g) and his mother received no injuries and had no resultant health conditions.

There have been many big babies in Hannah’s family history, so perhaps this has been an influence.

Hannah was very proud of herself and her achievement in giving birth, her mental, physical and spiritual health has been illuminated by her own power and by those who supported and believed in her. She feels she can achieve anything. Her continued involvement in the teenage parent’s school will be testimony to this, and the beginning of a new life. In the beginning her parents and others lamented the loss of teenagehood and its opportunities, but now they celebrate the courage, determination and honesty of a young woman who wants to be connected and responsible. Andre, only two years older, has taken a quantum leap too in his view and actions in the world. No-one is saying it will be easy and no-one is predetermining the future path.

There will be challenges ahead, every reader will know this. Who knows what is around the corner for this family group? However, what they all know is that Luka has had the most healthy and loving start to his life and there will be many people as his support group while he is growing up. They have all experienced the wonderment and privilege of being present and connected through this birth, and feel special to be part of this child. ✍



Model: Julie Dovaston. Pic: Sonya Williams