



THIS MOST SACRED PROCESS *Of birth*

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The tide swirls around my ankles. I look out at the vast expanse of blue and feel nervous, excited, scared, and overwhelmed all at once. The current pushes and pulls the blue-green sea in all directions. My body sways to and fro, forcing me to anchor my feet firmly into the sand.

I LOOK TO MY LEFT and see a long line of women past and present. I see the warmth in my mother's face, the grin and knowledge of my Nana. I see the kind eyes of aunts and cousins. They do not seem nervous, scared or overwhelmed as they look out into the blue expanse in front of them. In fact, they smile and welcome it. They look at me expectantly, with an innate wisdom that only mothers and birthing women hold.

I skim my toes against the cool froth of the water, gingerly testing the waters. What if I don't know how to do this? My

Nana takes my hand and together we dive into the mass before me. As the waves envelop me, I let go; and trust this most sacred process of birth.

I am surprised at how my body moves in the water. It glides and rolls in circles – turning somersaults, my skin luminescent in the waves. "Ha!" I shout. "I remember!" I am triumphant in my power.

This is the story of my third labour and birth. Often a fast labour is thought of as 'easy' and it seems preferable. Of all three of my births, this labour was the most

intense, and took me on an incredulous journey within. To be able to tap into the divine wisdom that every woman and mother holds is such an honour.

My labour started in the wee hours of the morning, with a light trickle of waters.

My first reaction was "But it's not my due date and I'm not ready!" It took me a few hours to completely let go of my expectations, my plans and embrace a newfound trust. A trust that my body and my baby know exactly what to do.

As dawn broke, rain and mist emerged. It was such a perfect day to have a baby.

My son is running between the laundry and the kitchen, where my daughter and sister are, telling them what is going on. "There is a baby! A BABY!" he squeals.

I had no contractions and didn't feel the need to wait around for labour to kick off. So we – my husband and our two children – decided to do some last minute Christmas shopping. We spent the morning enjoying being a family of four for the last time. I looked at both of my children and worried about how they would react to a new baby and a homebirth. We went to a café, indulged in Christmas treats, went gift shopping and by the early afternoon headed home.

I spent the rest of the afternoon resting, snacking, taking flower essences and reading Christmas stories to my children. Surrendering into the moment allowed me to enjoy my children just as they were, to enjoy this time with them. My husband was rushing through our house cleaning, at one stage he was in the roof reinforcing hooks for the baby hammock we had yet to put up.

My labour started with some dull period-like pains, and amped up really quickly. I lay on my bed and listened to the sounds around me, the kids singing and playing, Nick vacuuming, the rain sprinkling the windowpanes.

As my contractions intensified, I started focusing inward, breathing and visualizing myself moving effortlessly through a sparkling expanse of ocean. My Nana bobbing on top of the waves smiling at me, encouraging me forward. With every breath I became more and more insular, no longer fully aware of the noises around me. I could feel my baby moving further and further down the birth canal. I breathed in sharply, and exhaled to the feeling of my son's feather light fingers tracing along my eyes and temples, soothing any concerns or burdens I carried. "It's okay, Mama," he whispered, somehow aware of my need for quiet. "Our baby will be here soon, I'll go find Daddy". His nimble five-year-old

feet skipped off down the hall. My husband arrived and all I could manage was a few words. He called our midwife who would be shocked to hear from us – as I was only 37 weeks – and my sister, who has been at all of my births.

As our midwife arrives I begin to feel pushy as the surges in my belly and pelvis intensify. I hear disjointed conversations around me; Nick is softly talking to me – his focus completely on me now. I can hear the children singing and laughing in childlike wonder, fully aware that their Mama is giving birth in the next room. They are loved and supported by their Aunty and Daddy.

I bring my focus inward again and hear that familiar inner voice telling me to 'trust'. I know my baby is doing a lot of work. Labour has never been this intense for me. My midwife wants to get me to the toilet and I want to stand up. I can't talk anymore and am breathing, keeping an image of my body gleaming in the water as it circles and dives effortlessly in the waves.

Each surge that comes is strong, I breathe and look for my husband to lean on. As I walk through our house I feel my baby move down further, my pelvis opening as if it were a vortex for this little soul to emerge. By the time we reach the laundry, a mere six metres away my body bears down with such force that the baby's head emerges. Someone (me?) calls for Lynn, our midwife. I can't keep up with what is happening. Nick has his hands on the baby's head; he looks up and smiles at me. With a final breath my entire body convulses and baby Harper slips out. I don't even need to push. My sister tells me later that our midwife bolted through our house when I called her. I'm glad she did, as she reached us just in time to catch our baby as he slipped out into her arms.

I can't hold myself up anymore, my legs are shaking and I am leaning on Nick, our baby on my chest. My mind has to fight to keep up with my body. Did that just happen? I hear him cry and as I gaze down at my baby, we stare at each other for the first time. Reality hits me. I just gave birth to my son in my own home surrounded by support, my family and my amazing midwife.

My son is running between the laundry and the kitchen, where my daughter and sister are, telling them what is going on. "There is a baby! A BABY!" he squeals. I walk slowly supported by Nick and Lynn to my bed and am met by my two older children and my sister. My daughter is quiet, she is the watcher, and I catch the sparkle in her eyes that is triumphant.

We spend hours gazing; and welcoming this long awaited third child into our lives; awestruck at this perfect being that chose us. There are elated tears, songs, laughter and a swim by two excited children in the birth pool that never got used. The cord is left; our baby suckles and listens wide eyed to the sounds of his family. This is how birth should be. I birth the placenta, whilst baby Harper feeds, letting it go and silently thanking it for nourishing my baby. It will soon be returned to Papatuanuku.

My midwife envelops me in a cocoon of warmth, support and kindness. She pre-empts my every need, making me comfortable. She is ever respectful of my birth plan and my need to involve my older children in this process. With the birth of each of my children I am in awe of the relationship that is formed between mother and midwife. A close bond was formed, not only with myself but my children and husband also.

I am so happy that my children, my daughter especially, was able to witness birth in all its normality. A regular everyday occurrence with nothing to fear. I was especially in awe of my son who, on the day his brother was born, exhibited so much compassion, love and support to his birthing Mama. He too was born at home.

Harper Sol was born on December 24, 2012, at 6:00 pm weighing 7lb 10oz. Welcome earthside little one. 