



## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED BEING A HOMEBIRTH MIDWIFE (NOW FORMER MIDWIFE)

*I first wrote this article in the Spring 2013, toward the end of my practice as a homebirth midwife. Since then my midwifery (former) work has been focussed in the more traditional scope of the midwife – from ‘womb to tomb’, the whole of life. And always, I draw on the teachings of my homebirth practice, on the lessons I learned from the mothers and babies I had the honour to serve, about the magic and miracle of birth and being a woman.*

So, what have I learned being a homebirth midwife since 1984? (Now former midwife)

It's the right question. In fact that's one of the things I've learnt, the importance and **the value of the right question**. I've learned I don't have to have all the answers, its better if I have the right questions. It's called the **Maieutic method**, the way of the midwife, teaching by using questions, drawing out the wisdom of the other.

I was 26 when I became a **midwife (now former)**. I did midwifery because I wanted to have a baby and I wanted to learn all about it. And I learned a lot more.

### **Hospital Training**

I learned during my hospital midwifery training at Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney in 1983, how women, mostly without even realising it, were having their power taken away from them under the guise of **fear masquerading as safety**. At the pinnacle of their personal power, as they had access to their wild raw feminine nature, their true essence, women were encouraged to be fearful, to get numb and trust technology rather than themselves.

During my hospital training I attended the 2nd Australian **Homebirth Conference** in the Blue Mountains with my friend and midwife (now former) Shea Caplice and became very clear about what sort of midwife I wanted to be.

### **Homebirth Midwifery**

After I finished my training at RNSH I became Maggie Lecky Thompson's apprentice and did a lot of **un-learning**. I had my first baby, Sam, in 1985 and started my own practice in 1986.

Practicing as a homebirth midwife (now former) and having my own three babies has taught me what's possible in birth and the range of normal.

I've learned from the mothers and babies I've had the honour to serve, from my teachers and my friends.

I've had great teachers, Maggie Lecky Thompson and Jeannine Parvati Baker, to name two.

I met Jeannine in 1991, a year before my third baby Jackson was born, in El Paso, Texas, when Sue Stuart and I went to the MANA conference there to promote the 2nd International Homebirth Conference we were hosting in Sydney.

## Shamanic Midwifery

I attended Jeannine's workshop - Shamanic Midwifery. I was part of a community at that point learning and practicing the **shamanic arts** and doing Jeannine's Shamanic Midwifery workshop was next crucial piece for me of putting it all together. It felt like I joined my **midwifery self** together with my **spiritual self** and became whole.

It changed my perspective on midwifery completely. I realised there was a lot more going on than I had previously thought.

And then in 2005, I spent a week with Jeannine at her deathbed. She told me that the point of life is "to bring beauty to the world". Thank you Jeannine.

Being a homebirth midwife (now former), practicing outside the **dominant paradigm of the patriarchy**, I have learned about the way of process, **the natural way** of things. I've learned about allowing the space for the natural way of what ever is in process to unfold, about getting myself out of the way and simply **holding the space** for others to find the answers to their questions within themselves.

## A Rite of Passage

Many years ago now, when I was trying to understand, why so few women chose homebirths that almost all chose high tech hospital births and went back for more, I learned about the **rite of passage** nature of childbirth, the reason the system perpetuates. One of the effects of a rite of passage is to instruct the individual with the culture's values of the new role, in this case **motherhood**, and to impart the expectations for behaviour in that new role.

In our culture of course, few women even realise that this is happening. They just come away from their experience filled with reasons and proof about why the safest place to give birth is in a hospital surrounded by the technology with the medical experts there to tell you what to do. So they keep going back for more. Or, they figure it out and don't.

I then went onto learn about the other rites of passage in our lives and I learned about the **wisdom of the cycles**, the **blood mysteries**, the connection between the moon and women and this of course led me to the matriarchal cultures and the Goddess.

As birth can. She initiated me into the **women's mysteries**.

## The Spiritual Journey of Pregnancy

I see one of the ways to free women from the patriarchal medical model is for them to **re-member their feminine power**, their divinity, the Goddess, within and without.

This is my current focus in giving pregnancy workshops looking at the inner journey, and in my writing of "*Ten Moons - the spiritual journey of pregnancy, preparation for natural birth*", and in creating "*Birthing With The Goddess*" - a collaborative project with an artist and musicians for the purpose of **reawakening the Goddess energy** around pregnancy and birth.

I see the experience a woman has of pregnancy, birth and motherhood as a reflection of her individual and unique inner journey.

Her story is full of clues about her personal beliefs and attitudes, their origin and their power and the influence that her culture has over her.

I've learned that first and foremost it is the contents of our consciousness that determines how we experience our life.

I've learned through observation and personal experience that pregnancy presents us with opportunities, should we care to notice them, to **redefine ourselves, rewire ourselves**. During our pregnancies we encounter all manner of situations that provide us with the opportunity to notice and check on our inner beliefs and our attitudes. It's as if everything you've learned about yourself and the way of things so far in your life is up for review, reassessment. It is as if an impetus from the baby inside, the baby's gift to their mamma, part of your deal, or soul contract.

*We grow not only our babies inside; we grow ourselves into the mother this baby has come for.*

I've learned that we have our potential birth experiences, not potential as in the very best, but potential as in the birth that your current beliefs enable. Our experience of birth then serves as an indicator of our beliefs and attitudes and provides us with the opportunity to notice **what needs healing in us**, the next piece in our life journey so to speak.

I've learned about the importance and value of **meditation** and **yoga** for pregnancy, birth, mothering and midwifery. Meditation provides us with a way into our quiet inner space that is free from thoughts. This is the best place to take our awareness in labour to enable the altered state of consciousness that is associated with **ecstatic birth**, which is, I believe, our **biological blueprint**.

I've learned about the **power of visualisation** and **intention** to both bring to our attention any limiting ideas we may have and to draw to us that which we desire.

### **The sexual nature of Pregnancy**

I've learned about the sexual nature of pregnancy and birth and how much we can learn about ourselves through what comes up for us around our sexual patterns and habits. I've learned how healing birth can be for us in our **intimate relationships** and with our body image and self-esteem.

I've learned about the opportunity of **practicing surrender** and letting go in our sexual relationships as preparation for birth. I encourage women to notice in their lovemaking whether they are holding back and if so to abandon themselves to what their body would do instead of thinking about it. Great practice for labour and giving birth.

I've learned that the sometimes-unpredictable nature of birth and life presents us with the opportunity to trust in life at the real core level of a **soul's journey**. Birth and life and death can teach us that if we are open to it.

### **Inner Guidance System**

I've learned that during pregnancy, birth and mothering the **symptoms and emotions** we experience are messages about **what needs healing and balancing**.

I've learned about intuition, that the voices I hear in my head are not a sign of madness; they are my **inner guidance system working**.

*I've learned to trust the process and to trust in the perfection of every thing and every moment, and how much easier life is if you do trust.*

Midwifery is a great model for so many parts of life, especially parenting. It has taught me about **facilitation**, helping people to come to their own conclusions, to learn their own lessons in their own time.

## Ecstatic Birth

I have learned heaps from my own 3 births, not just about myself, but also about what's possible. My first birth was a caesarean after trying to push Sam out for 4 hours with no progress. My second birth was Ellie a VBAC at home and my third birth, Jackson, completely changed the way I practiced midwifery (now former). I had, what we've come to call an ecstatic birth, and through my process of understanding what happened, I have been able to help other women have the same. I learned to focus on the pain of labour not try to get away from it, rather get right into it, and surrender to it, then it becomes a **gateway to an altered state of consciousness and ecstatic birth.**

After Jackson's birth and moving to live in the country everything changed for me. Living in the bush, with solar electricity, getting water from the creek, living in harmony with nature, in a way that is difficult in the city, I learned about the **interconnectedness of everything.** Putting together what I learned from Jackson's birth, shamanic practices and what I was learning living in nature, the way I practiced midwifery (now former) changed to.

I felt a deeper connection with the women I served as a midwife (now former), I had visions of their births receiving valuable information.

Jeannine would say I was practicing **shamanic womancraft.**

I've learned about the value of community especially after birth, the importance of regularly gathering with likeminded folk, especially women. I facilitated a weekly **women's circle** in my area that was made up of homebirth mums and their friends. And we gathered with our families to mark the **seasons and cycles** of the Earth and our lives.

I've learned that as a midwife (now former), I am a guardian at the gateway of birth and I know I've done my work well if the mother and father say - we could have done that without her!

*Blessed Be!*