

childbearing

The newsletter of the Lower Mainland Childbearing Society

Ecstatic Birth

Joy during labour? Yes indeed. We have long known that the same hormone behind orgasms also causes uterine contractions in labour: oxytocin. But recent studies of this fascinating hormone reveal that it is responsible for far more than has ever been suspected.

The Karolinska Institute's work suggests that oxytocin may be a major player in infant survival. During labour, oxytocin fills the mother with pleasant, dreamy sensations that shift her into a trance-like state causing her to exist in the moment, unaware of the passing of time. The high levels of oxytocin in the mother's brain allow her to relax and 'space-out' despite labour's extreme pain. They permit her to open her body and surrender to the rhythms of labour. When the baby is born, both mother and infant are overflowing with oxytocin, which has now been shown to foster instinctive interactions between mother and baby.

The oxytocin guides that overwhelming rush of love that passes between new mother and baby: the gazing into each other's eyes, the stroking and smiling, and the proclamations of love. It prompts breastfeeding behaviours in both mother and child; it promotes affection and loyalty; it helps gastrointestinal activity; it helps with sleep; it reduces stress; it helps the cardiovascular system; it harmonizes milk supply; and generally put, it allows infants to thrive. We now know that the more oxytocin mother and baby share, the better for both of them: for their health, their relationship, their confidence, and their sense of trust in each other. It may come as no surprise then, that the higher the oxytocin during birth, the easier the start for mother and baby alike.

So how do we boost oxytocin production during birth? By providing empathic, caring labour support, privacy so the mother feels uninhibited to express herself, comfort measures such as massage, freedom to eat, move, and make noise. By keeping medical interventions to a minimum. And by stepping back and refraining from dampening the potential for joy in labour.

Read on for three inspiring birth stories that radiate joy, a review of a film provocatively entitled *Orgasmic Birth* and three fascinating articles on the nature of joy during birth. This issue explores the unique contradiction of extreme physical challenge and euphoric joy that can co-exist during birth, thanks to the hormone of love: oxytocin.

✉ Stephanie Ondrack, editor



Graduates of the Late Summer 2007 class at their one year reunion

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Childbirth Across the Years

The Childbearing Society is: Aleksandra Henderson, *President*; Jennifer Landels, *co-Treasurer, Newsletter Production Editor*; Stephanie Ondrack, *Registrar, Secretary, Marketing Director, Newsletter co-Editor*; Susan Woodhouse, *Packages*; Molly Eitzen, *co-Treasurer*; Katy Thomson, *Breastfeeding Counselor*; Kara Ko, *Volunteer Coordinator*; Diane Donaldson, *Past President*

Instructors: Molly Eitzen, Aleksandra Henderson, Stephanie Ondrack, Susan Woodhouse.

childbearing news

Meet Katy

**Katy Thomson, CD (Dona),
Breastfeeding Counsellor**

Many of you have already benefited from the wisdom and caring hands of our in-house Breastfeeding Counsellor Katy Thomson at our Breastfeeding Clinics. We're now pleased to have Katy assisting at some of our prenatal classes as well. Katy is a certified Birth and Postpartum Doula, who is always continuing her education by attending workshops and seminars, and gaining hands-on experience. As well, she is currently working towards her lactation consultant certification.



Newsletter Editor: Stephanie Ondrack & Jennifer Landels;
Volunteer Coordinator: Kara Ko.

We bid a fond farewell to **Mary Coll** who is planning a move out of the Vancouver area, and we wish her and her family all the best in their new home. Likewise, we're happy to welcome Katy Thomson and Kara Ko to the Childbearing team.

Bellies to Babies Celebration

Drop by and visit our table, and many more, at the Bellies to Babies Celebration on **May 3rd** from **11am - 4pm** at the **Croatian Cultural Centre**, 3250 Commercial Drive in Vancouver. And when you fill in your survey at the fair, mention that you heard about it through us!



Childbearing AGM

Childbearing's Annual General Meeting was held on March 1st. The result of the elections are as follows:

President: Aleksandra Henderson; **Registrar:** Stephanie Ondrack; **Treasurer:** Jennifer Landels & Molly Eitzen; **Secretary:** Stephanie Ondrack; **Marketing Director:** Stephanie Ondrack; **Web Manager:** Jennifer Landels;

Obituary

Please join us in sending wishes of support and compassion to Sarah Evanetz and Siku Adam for the loss of their son, Sam Evanetz Adam. Sam was born and died on February 22nd. His memory will be cherished.



✧ Letters & Announcements ✧

We love to hear from you! Keep sending your comments on our newsletter, our classes, your birth and parenting experiences, and anything else related to the childbearing year that you'd like to get off your chest to: stephanie@childbearing.org

Hi Aleksandra,

I just wanted to thank you so much for the excellent teaching you gave us. Jon and I both learned so much, and as an educator I so appreciated your teaching style. You are a wise and insightful woman, and the information you presented has really helped us. I was feeling totally uninformed, even with a midwife. I feel much more confident about why I am choosing a natural birth and Jon feels more confident in supporting me.

Thank you!

Kindest Regards,
Kristin Harbut

Hi Stephanie,

I just had my baby boy on May 18th at St. Paul's. His name is Ryan James Wood and was born at 8 lbs. 4 oz. (bigger than anybody expected). Believe it or not, I did it all drug free. Can you believe it? I don't know if you remember from our classes but I was always the one to be scared of natural birth and was counting on epidural. When the time came, my labour progressed faster than I expected and I was already 9½ cm dilated when I got to the hospital. By that time, epidural was pointless. I was in intense active labour for about 7 hours during which I tried a whole bunch of positions that I learned in class. Jasper was doing the hip squeeze and boy, that was extremely helpful during my contractions. Having Erica as my doula

was also amazing. I don't know how I could've have possibly done this without her.

It was the most painful and the hardest thing I've ever done in my life and I wanted to give up so many times during labour, but I got through it! The whole 7 hours was a blur to me, but Jasper mentioned how he was so shocked at how strong I was. When I was doing the squats leaning on him, he couldn't believe the strength that I had. I don't even remember, but I guess I had one thing on my mind: to get the baby out.

Stephanie, I just wanted to thank you for the classes. Jasper and I learned more than we could've have possibly imagined and as much as we thought we were clueless about going through labour and parenting, we are doing it and we are learning as days go by. Taking your classes and having a doula were the two best things I've done to prepare for the big day and I can't thank you enough!

Take care!
Grace Wood

Ryan at 9 months



Welcome to the Pleasure Dome

by Susan Woodhouse

Joyful birth, ecstatic birth, and erotic, orgasmic birth: these are some terms you may come across as you prepare for the arrival of your baby. Orgasmic birth? What? When I mentioned to a couple of my friends that I was writing this piece, they responded with curiosity and disbelief. Birth is painful not pleasurable, they said. Isn't it? Most of us have been imprinted with images of birth as a medical emergency, and with notions that birth can only be a painful, exhausting, dreadful ordeal. So the idea that a woman may find labour pleasurable, and that she may even find it so sexually powerful as to experience an orgasm, is ... well, almost unbelievable! It turns out, though, that this may be what some are calling one of the best kept secrets of womanhood.

Truth is each and every woman is a birthing woman, flooded with hormones that are the body's natural birthing enhancers. Hormones are the movers and shakers of all human development. During sex, during pregnancy, during labour and birth, during breastfeeding, we get extra shares to help us accomplish the jobs we need to do. We've become accustomed, through images from the media, to thinking of birth as an impending disaster. However, those fictionalized versions, where labour goes from zero to sixty in just one mighty contraction, are just that: fiction! The effects of cultural views of birth and of media imprinting with over-dramatized birth depictions are profound, and have led to a cultural inferiority complex and widespread disbelief in and detachment from the innate abilities of our bodies to create, sustain and birth a new life. Think about it: if we were not meant to be reproducing creatures, we would not have the ability to conceive in the first place and we certainly couldn't grow a baby, a complex organism, if our bodies didn't already know how to do so. Imagine if you had to be conscious of the progress of foetal development. What would happen if you were responsible for designing your baby's digestive or nervous system? What if you were really busy at work on the day you were supposed to grow hair, or develop fingers and toes? Luckily, we don't need to think about managing all the complexities of human development. And thanks to the era we live in, we have lots of information available to us about how to support our bodies in this process, for example through good nutrition, exercise.

We're lucky indeed that we don't have to direct

labour and birth either. Labour (most of the time) starts when it's supposed to, when your body and your baby are ready, and the intricate dance of birth is choreographed for you. All you need to do to figure out the steps is let the music overtake you. Just as we know how to support a baby's development through good prenatal care, we know lots about how to enhance the circumstances for your body to birth that baby. Sheila Kitzinger, childbirth educator, talks of making conditions in which a woman gives birth as close to possible to the ideal conditions for lovemaking: how the baby got in is how the baby will get out! So, in other words, a safe and secure environment where a woman feels no tension or fear; a private setting where intimacy allows for freedom of expression and movement and the freedom to follow instincts; a place where the birthing mother can, as much as is possible, labour unobserved and undisturbed. This environment allows full use of the natural resources Mother Nature has given us: our hormones. Dr. Sarah J. Buckley, a family physician, mother of four and birth activist, refers to these hormones as the "blueprint of life". In an internet article titled "Ecstatic Birth — Nature's Hormonal Blueprint for Labour," she clearly and simply outlines the effects of hormones on a woman's body during pregnancy and birth. (www.sarahjbuckley.com/articles/ecstatic-birth.htm) She also describes how disruptions and interferences have the effect of disturbing the birth process and reducing the body's ability to utilize the blueprint. Here is a brief description of the hormones you've got working for you during labour:

1. **Catecholamines**, the "fight-or-flight" hormones: during the first stage of labour, if a woman is feeling anxious or afraid, these hormones can slow labour. They are nature's mechanism for preventing birth from occurring if danger is present. At the end of undisturbed labour, however, they provide the labouring mother with a burst of energy and alertness, and cause several very powerful contractions to birth the baby.
2. **Beta-endorphins**, nature's opiates, contribute to a feeling of pleasure and euphoria. Also stress hormones, they appear in higher quantities in our body when we encounter situations of physical duress and pain, and acts as natural painkillers. During undisturbed labour, beta-endorphins contribute to a shift in consciousness similar to the "runner's high" we know about. Beta-endorphins also help the production of prolactin.



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3. **Prolactin**, also called the "mothering hormone", is the main hormone of breast milk production. It helps us feel nurturing toward our baby.
4. **Oxytocin**, last on this list but by no means least, this stuff is the true "Big O", the hormone of love. Oxytocin is present during lovemaking, orgasm, during labour, and breastfeeding - it's even appears in higher quantities in our bodies when we

Film Review

"Orgasmic Birth: The Best Kept Secret"

Orgasmic Birth is certainly a title that grabs attention and it intrigued many as it made the rounds of screenings and film festivals throughout 2008. It is now available to purchase on DVD and with luck it will no longer be "Childbirth's best kept secret" as it is referred to in the film by midwife Elizabeth Davis.

First-time filmmaker Debra Pascali-Bonaro challenges our cultural myths by inviting viewers to witness the glorious emotional, spiritual, and physical heights attainable through the miracle of birth. This intimate documentary, capturing stunning moments of women in the ecstatic release of childbirth, reveals that childbirth is something a woman can enjoy rather than endure.

The pregnancies, labours, and births of eleven couples are chronicled in the film, demonstrating how blissful birth can be when the mother is surrounded by a supportive family, a patient caregiver (midwife, doctor, or nurse) and an environment that allows her body to do whatever is needed to ensure a safe serene birth. In comparing and contrasting settings from hospital to home Debra does a great job of depicting the diversity of an empowering experience. Interlaced within the film is commentary from numerous renowned experts who speak out on such topics as the medical system, epidurals, caesarean sections, and natural childbirth. The experts come from a wide array of fields, including family doctors, gynaecologists, obstetricians, midwives, paediatricians, nurses and perinatal researchers.

The couples' stories are beautiful, captivating, sensual, natural and even humorous at times; depicting birth as spiritually orgasmic, emotionally orgasmic, or even physically orgasmic. What a crucial message for the young women of our society! For generations we've been raised believing that childbirth is the most painful thing a woman will ever endure. How much healthier and more hopeful is it to instead believe that birth is something to be treasured and enjoyed.

Orgasmic childbirth is not a new idea but this film is the first truly intimate exploration of the feat. It is not very often that a book or a movie comes out with the potential to change peoples lives, but *Orgasmic Birth* is such a film.

☞ **Katy Thomson** is a doula, assistant instructor, and Breastfeeding Counsellor with the **Childbearing Society**.

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share a meal with good company. It contributes to mood elevation and alleviates depression. During the final stages of labour, as the baby's head puts pressure on stretch receptors in the vagina, oxytocin levels peak. It helps the uterus contract to push the baby out, and then to separate and birth the placenta. Both mother and baby have higher levels of oxytocin in the period immediately following birth, helping them bond.

Nature has provided us with this impressive arsenal of substances to assist us in the birth of our babies, without us even having to think about it. What if you augmented them with some lovemaking, too? Ina May Gaskin, a midwife with over 40 years and 1,000 births in her experience, talks about how the vagina is enlarged during sexual activity and foreplay, and also during birth. She says lovemaking activities during labour can enhance a woman's feelings of pleasure, enhance her body's natural hormone production, and facilitate her entering a state of primal awareness. These are the same hormones swirling around during sex, remember, so you can imagine how they would be enhanced during labour with some kissing, cuddling, stroking, making love (semen is high in prostaglandins, a substance which helps soften the cervix), and nipple or clitoral stimulation.

There's no recipe for the ideal labour, nor is there a foolproof plan for achieving an orgasm during labour! The idea of joyful birth, or ecstatic, erotic, orgasmic birth as some will call it, is that we are graced with the natural means of accomplishing the task of birth, and we can complement our bodies' natural abilities by allowing ourselves to consider a shift in our perspective and attitude toward birth; not necessarily pain free, but with the perception of pain changed. Women will talk about the power they feel, of the pleasure they feel through and in spite of the pain; and there are some women who don't describe their contractions as painful at all. They are experiencing an altered state, brought on by the bath of nature's helpful hormones, in which their bodies are alive to the power of birth. Words of wisdom from Dr. Buckley: "Perhaps the best we can do is trust our instincts and vote with our birthing bodies, choosing models of care that increase our chances of undisturbed — and ecstatic — birthing."



☞ **Susan Woodhouse** facilitates our postpartum circles. She is the mother of two (ages 23 and 11), one born at home and one in hospital. Although well into her third decade of mothering, Susan still delights in unravelling its mysteries.

Wow! I Did That!

by Renee Taylor

When I was 9 months pregnant a dear friend of mine held a celebration to bless my journey to motherhood. As each woman present offered their blessings, one of the women said "I hear that childbirth can be orgasmic and so I wish that for you." I thought she was crazy. I did not have an "orgasmic birth" although I hear it certainly is possible. For me, childbirth was the most extra-ordinary event in my life and I am looking forward to doing it again.

In this new era where childbirth is being brought back to women, I am very grateful to see the birthing trend moving away from the industrialization of this natural process and back to grass roots. We have choices. Today, unlike the birth stories of our mothers and grandmothers who suffered greatly, women can choose to have a midwife, we can choose to labour in water or on all fours. We can choose to have the presence of friends, family, a doula, even an alternative medicine practitioner to support us and our partner on our journeys. We have the opportunity to labour in a loving environment where we are safe to make the decisions that are right for us. We are encouraged to listen to and trust our bodies' innate knowledge and ability to birth our babies.

Childbirth is possibly the most extraordinary event in our lives. To give birth is miraculous, powerful and transformative for the woman, for the family and for the community. Women's bodies are perfectly crafted for the experience. Women radiate during pregnancy, we love to be mothers, to nurse and nurture our precious babies. Meeting our babies for the first time is overwhelmingly joyous beyond compare. Furthermore, there is a sacred communal happiness in the celebration of a new baby. For parents there is deeper connection to the community in which we live. Passers-by stop to say hello and marvel at the newest member of the community. Grandparents, aunts and uncles don't know how to contain their excitement; new life in the family brings everyone closer again. I have not met a woman who, after becoming a mother, did not feel a new respect and awe of other women, a connection to all women past and present, a new belonging to her community.

I have had the pleasure to experience childbirth myself and have had the honour to witness and share with women and couples in their birthing experience. Simply being present for this miracle is mesmerizing each and every time. Labour is a potent time where we can manifest joy, healing, empowerment, and learn a great deal about ourselves and the power within our bodies. Labour is natural, normal and wonderful. Furthermore, the intimacy with our partner deepens in this process where we take the first step towards a new relationship as parents.

Childbirth is something deep and wild as the ocean, we cannot control it, we can simply ride the wave and surrender to the journey of birthing our children. The key is in our support network. If we are well supported we can cope one contraction at a time. If we feel safe and

assured, we can let go of the fear and preconceptions about labour. If we can dispel all the untruths told about childbirth and forget the horror stories told by women before, we all have potential to have an "orgasmic birth", or at least an unforgettable adventure.

No one can deny the intensity and pain of childbirth. Penny Simkin once said that pain is not the same as suffering. We have all endured physical and emotional challenges. Labour is just another challenge. As with climbing any tall mountain, it may hurt and you may sweat but once you have reached the top, the accomplishment of the feat followed by the most wonderful reward makes it all worth it. It is not something to be afraid of as your body has great capabilities and knows exactly what to do. Don't we all feel most alive and joyful when we are pushed to the edge of our comfort zone and come through the challenge with grace? Facing the physical discomforts of labour and coming out the other side is a factor that makes birth so joyful. It is empowering because at the end of the day you can pat yourself on the back and say, "Wow, I did that!"

✶ Renee Taylor is a Registered Acupuncturist and Doula. She treats people in all stages of life with a special focus on pregnancy and labour. She can be reached at contact@reneetayloracupuncture.com or at 604-873-3717.



Transformed by Birth

by Wendy Frasca

I never thought birth would have such a profound impact on my life. I have two children: my first daughter I gave birth to in a hospital, after a rather unpleasant labour that was induced with oxytocin. My second daughter I gave birth to at home, without any interventions. While I'll never say giving birth was 'fun', it was absolutely full of joy: joy that I still feel over two months later. It was the most amazing experience of my life. Birth has changed me.

Birth has made me a better mother. The bonding that followed immediately after Ainsley's birth was so powerful. The closest thing I can liken it to is the feeling of falling in love. I find it spilling over to my older daughter Lucy, strengthening our relationship in new and wonderful ways. I am a more joyful mother. I am softer, with an abundance of cuddles and kisses. I'm not sure how all this has happened – maybe it was due to the cocktail of hormones that is released after a natural childbirth. If so then wow, those really are some powerful hormones!

Birth has deepened my faith. When I gave myself up entirely to the process of labour and birth, there was no denying that God was in control. Giving birth was a very spiritual experience for me: in every way I had to let go and trust in my body, the process of childbirth and ultimately, God. I can't think of many experiences in life where I'd get a chance to experience God in such a physical way.

Birth has helped me embrace myself as a strong woman. I trust my instincts more. My interest in home birth began as a desire to understand why other women chose it – it certainly was not for me! The more I read about home birth and birth stories, the more I felt that I wanted to give birth at home. I stepped outside of my more mainstream surroundings and listened to what my heart and my head were telling me. I am so much stronger for it. And I feel such confidence in my body. Giving birth was hard work but I rose to the challenge and I did it.

Birth has made me a better wife. I have a deeper love for my husband who supported my decision to give birth at home and provided amazing support

throughout the labour. I find myself being more loving and supportive. The strength I've found in myself has allowed me to be more tender. I would not have thought that strength & tenderness go hand in hand, but somehow for me, they do.

Choosing to give birth at home was a journey that I was meant to go on. From the first moment it crossed my mind to the first time I held my daughter on our living room floor, I have grown as a woman and mother, and increased my capacity to love.

✦ Wendy Frasca has two lovely daughters, aged 2 ½ years and 3 months, and is currently on maternity leave. She studied psychology at university and is hoping to train and work in the childbirth and post-partum field.



Birth Stories

Jordan's Birth

by Elizabeth McQuade

We had a birth plan all written up with what we wanted to occur during the birth of our daughter. It was a half-hearted attempt on our part to control the unknown.

Up to the time of the birth our baby had been alternating from breech to regular and transverse positions since about week 28, and I felt pressure to do everything I could to ensure the baby was head down. All the following things were done to encourage my little Taurus baby to turn in hopes of avoiding a C-section:

- I made sure I did not slouch in my chair
- I would lie on my back, head down at a 45-degree angle with headsets playing music where I hoped the baby's head would migrate to.
- I went to the local pool to do hand stands (you get a lot of looks in a 2 piece in your third trimester).
- I went to acupuncture and heated up my pinky toes with moxibustion.

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As a last effort we went to the hospital to have an obstetrician try to manually turn the baby. As the nurse was leaving the room she told me she was a breech baby herself. During the procedure I kept my eyes closed the whole time and kept repeating, "I can do this, I can do this". My husband said it was hard to watch while two doctors "reefed on my stomach, while one of them was straddling me". Even though everyone tried their darnedest, she would not turn. After the second attempt the obstetrician turned to me and said "Do you want an April baby or a May baby?" meaning when did I want to book my Gsection. I told him I wanted to talk to my midwife.

Many tears were shed during these weeks as I felt I was not in control (because I wasn't) and I went through alternating periods of peaceful surrender and frantic panic. I wanted to have a natural birth dammit! Deep down I knew I could. I felt I had been given these wide hips for that very reason. After talking about my concerns with my midwife she informed me that I could have a safe natural breech birth. She explained that the hospital I was going to was very conservative and a few requirements would need to be met if I was going to be able to have my wish. The baby's chin had to be down towards it's chest and the baby could not be too big. Also there had to be a doctor when I went in that was willing to perform a natural breech birth. She told me that there are not very many doctors who will do this procedure anymore. I asked if all those requirements were met would it be safe for the baby. The answer was yes! Unfortunately I had no control over any of those three requirements so I just had to hope and wait.

One thing I kept hearing from other women's birth stories was that it did not turn out anything like they expected. Our experience was no exception.

The day after going to my acupuncturist for a last ditch effort to turn the baby I felt achy all over, somewhat like the flu but without the fever. I felt like this for 2 days. I slept and slept. Then I started to feel better. As I was lying down I felt something wet and wondered if I had peed myself. I stood up and there it was, my water had broken. It was 2 weeks early and I was not expecting this! I called my husband who had just left for work, then the midwife, then the doula.

Once my husband and I arrived at the hospital my contractions started. I was 3 cm dilated. My midwife

began organizing an ultrasound for us to check the position of the baby's chin (it had to be down) and to make sure the baby was not too big (I was 2 weeks early so that was not a problem). The person doing my ultrasound seemed peeved that I was having contractions while she wanted to do the ultrasound. I found this amusing.

My doula helped remind me to breathe, held the foetal heart monitor in place and encouraged me to chant "open" in a deep voice. My labour progressed quickly. At one point in the washroom I told my husband I did not think I could handle it any more and that I thought I needed some drugs (I was later told this is the transition phase). Shortly after that I felt the need to push and told my midwife about this. Her face dropped and she checked how things were progressing. I was 9 cm. I had gone from 3 cm to 9 cm in 5 hours.

I was in heavy labour now and luckily my midwife managed to find a doctor who would do a breech delivery! The doctor informed me that I would need to be prepped for an epidural and that they may need to use forceps or do a caesarean and needed to be ready for that. I listened to her but was in the zone so I had her repeat the requirements. I repeated them back to her and agreed. The baby was coming out: I knew we needed to get going so I had to make some compromises.

Before the labour I was terrified of having an epidural but if this was the compromise that was needed for me to have a natural birth I was up for it. It wasn't that bad and I made sure not to move an inch while they inserted the needle.

Then it was off to the races. The room was filled with at least 15 people. I was in the zone and did not even recognize one of the other midwives who arrived to see the birth. A mirror was set up so I could see how things were progressing. When I was told to push everyone in the room chanted "Push, push, you can do it!" I felt like I could do no wrong with all these women chanting for me. Now I know the elation and support that professional sports athletes must feel when the whole stadium is rooting for them. I pushed, knowing that the baby's head was the last thing to come out and I wanted to get it out as soon as possible. After about 5 minutes of pushing our baby girl arrived! They took her to the table quickly to



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check her with my husband watching and verbally letting me know what was happening. Then they placed our baby girl on my chest. It all felt so surreal. It is impossible to explain the feelings you have when you look into your baby's eyes for the first time.

Then I felt the resident doing something and I asked her what she was doing?" My midwife informed me that my umbilical cord snapped during the birth so they had to manually remove the placenta. I wondered why they were doing this. Wouldn't my body delivery it naturally? If I could have everything my way I would not have had an epidural and would have delivered my placenta naturally. The prenatal classes were very helpful as they had us visualize the possible scenarios, which prepared us mentally and emotionally for whatever came our way. In the end it really did not matter how she arrived but that she arrived safely.

We later found out that there were cheers at the midwife clinic after they heard that we had a successful natural breech birth. Breech births are not common but they are natural. Since the birth progressed so well on it's own it was good that we were allowed to birth with minimal medical intervention.

Jordan is now a healthy, happy three month old who has captured the hearts of our family and friends and has become daddy's little girl and the apple of her mother's eye!

✶ **Elizabeth McQuade** is a graduate of The Childbearing Society's prenatal classes and mother to now one-year-old Jordan.



Newborn Jordan

Oliver's Birth

by Anne Marie Laplante

On April 21st 2008, I had the honour of having been blessed with a lovely home VBAC of my baby boy, Oliver.

Oli's 4-year-old brother Sam was born in May 2005 at St Paul's Hospital, after an uneventful pregnancy yet a complicated, stressful and long labour, ending in a caesarean following failed forceps in the operating room. I often joke (somewhat) that I experienced pretty much every complication in labour, a classic cascade of interventions: induction at 42+2 days past due, epidural, oxytocin, fever, heart rate decelerations, exhaustion, and a baby boy who was born angry at the world, having had endured such a stressful welcome. Sam spent a bit of time in the nursery, while I recovered from surgery. It was hours before I saw him, and I'd always felt cheated somewhat at not having been there to hold him, during his early hours.

In a weird and fateful twist of events, during my year of maternity leave, I was offered a position as the Office Manager at Pomegranate Community Midwives and soon learned that such birth experiences, while not all bad, are unfortunately more common than I had thought, in hospital settings.

When I became pregnant with Oli, I hoped this time it would be different. Luckily for us, our midwives were also friends and so it was easy for me to convince my husband that it would be best for us to birth at home. I spent the months pregnant telling everyone that we were hoping

for a home birth, but knowing full well that sometimes things are beyond your control; mamas get tired, labour takes too long, babies just don't want to be born at home and you make the sometimes difficult decision to transfer into the hospital to birth your baby. Since I also had the risks of a VBAC birth to consider, I knew that the stars needed to be aligned for Oli's birth to go according to our 'plan'. I knew the risks and the rewards of both birth locations and yet, deep down I very much wanted this baby to be born at home.

In the meantime, I educated myself to the best of my abilities. I devoured pregnancy books; listened to empowering birth stories. I watched movies and searched the internet for homebirth and VBAC support. I contacted my wonderful doula Aleksandra to be by our side, offering support and wisdom. She sent me powerful emails that gave me shivers and made me want to shout out 'I can do it!' She helped me prepare physically, and mentally as well, suggesting I imagine myself birthing my baby. I saw myself in the birth pool, pushing my baby out, imagined the pride I would feel when it was all done and we were safe at home.

Starting at about 37 weeks, I did a lot of labour prep, in hopes of not going late again. I began weekly, then twice weekly acupuncture sessions, drank a lot of

birthing tea, took evening primrose oil caplets, and pretty much everything else my midwives and doula suggested.

At about 39 weeks, I started experiencing very mild contractions on and off for the weekend. I continued on with my days, shopping, going out for lunch, hanging out with family. The contractions were coming every 20 minutes or so. I was able to walk through them, breathing and distracting myself. On Friday and Saturday night, at the suggestion of my midwives, I took a warm bath, some Tylenol and Graval and had a good night's sleep. However, by Sunday morning I was tired of 'niggling' and wanted to get things going. I went to an acupuncture session I had already booked and hoped I would meet my baby soon.

That night, while my husband was getting Sam ready for bed, my contractions suddenly picked up in strength and intensity - my husband came down to the living room at 8:30pm and found me on my hands and knees on the sofa, in tears. Initially, I was scared. I had been dealing so well all weekend and though I had wanted this so bad, I was afraid of the intensity of the pain all of a sudden. Could I really do this? Neil ran me a warm bath and the water felt wonderful but the contractions continued. Every time one started, I would curl over on my side, closing my eyes and moaning. Neil grew nervous, asking if I needed Aleksandra to come, if we needed to page the midwives. It's funny, even in the midst of labour, I worried about what I was supposed to 'sound like' - what were those guttural sounds I was supposed to be doing? Was I breathing right? Was I labouring 'correctly?' I think the intensity increased at this point and my husband called Aleksandra, who arrived at 9pm. Contractions were coming every 2 - 3 minutes, lasting 60 seconds. The three of us laboured together for 1½ - 2 hours: in the bath then walking around our house while Aleksandra offered encouragement and sips of water, and Neil held my hand through contractions.

I read in a blog once, regarding labour expectations "I will grunt and sweat and pant and push and poop and moan and rock and I will probably even barf. This is what it will take to get my baby out, and this is okay. I don't have to like it. I just have to do it". This particular passage resonated with me and it's a lot how I saw my experience. I vocalized a lot during labour, yelled, moaned, cried and just let myself be in the moment, be scared yet strong, in

childbearing

the comforts of my home, surrounded by people who loved me.

Sensing that I was coming along quickly, Aleksandra paged our midwife at 11pm and she arrived a few minutes later. By this time, I was walking around our house, working on getting the baby in the best position possible, doing lunges, squats and leaning into Neil whenever a contraction would hit. Immediately upon arriving, Janice listened to the baby's heartbeat and everything sounded great! At 11:50pm, while sitting on the toilet labouring, my water broke with a pop and a gush! This is one of my most vivid moments in my labour and coincides with when I hit transition. I remember losing control, and looking into the toilet to see if the fluid was meconium-stained (which might have necessitated a transfer to the hospital). Everything was clear, which was great. I also remember Janice saying to me 'you're in transition' and I thought 'of course I am! This makes much more sense, and totally explains why I'm having a hard time coping!' There was a bit of a flurry to get me to the couch, since Janice hadn't even had a chance to check me to see how far dilated I was: 9 ½ cms! I was in shock and remember laughing when she told me that. I knew then that I could do it!

While I continued to labour with Neil at my side, Aleksandra filled the birth pool and Janice called for back-up. Once my urges to push got stronger, I started pushing in the tub, alternating between floating on my back and squatting, holding on to Neil's arms for support. I pushed like this for an hour but couldn't quite get enough of a grip for the pushes to be effective enough. At 1:40am, I got out of the tub and sat on the birthing stool and that's where I really felt myself pushing. Pushing was by far the strangest and most powerful sensation of my entire labour. It felt out of my control, my whole body pushing, every fibre, every muscle working to get this baby out.

Not long after I sat on the birth stool, our 'little' 9lb Oli was born and was immediately placed in my arms, wailing his lungs out. I had done it! Drug free, complication free, the way I had imagined it could be and the way I had dreamed it would be. We cuddled and bonded, nursed and snacked while admiring our new baby boy in the quiet and comfort of our living room.

Carolynne Abrams, Osteopathic Practitioner

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Janice helped me shower, get dressed and tucked us into bed shortly after; I was suddenly exhausted! Oli met his big brother Sam (who had slept through the entire thing!) that morning and life continued on as it should. In the end, it was a lot easier than I had anticipated, yet much more intense than anything I'd ever experienced and I will be forever grateful for the experience.

☞ **Anne Marie Laplante** and her husband both grew up in Kingston, Ontario but moved to Vancouver in 2000 after living the mountain lifestyle in Lake Louise for a few years. She spent 10 years working in the Tourism Industry but has found a home within the midwifery community and considers herself immensely lucky to have been part of Pomegranate Midwives since its beginnings in 2006.



right: **Sam, Oli & Anne Marie**

Charlie's Story

by Alexa Devine

The funny thing is, I have to refer to a time line written out on paper for me to recall this. It was honestly a long, hard blur of events that culminated in a miracle. It was the most difficult thing I will ever do in this life. And apparently, many times over the course of labour I reminded everyone "I will NEVER do this again!!!!" Give me some time to forget and we'll see... I've heard that these are famous last words of many mothers of several children.

He woke us up with contractions 22 hours earlier (after we had been asleep for only two hrs!) and I went into active labour shortly after. Fifteen hours into labour he decided to face the wrong way (when I was 8cm and wanting to push), so we had to hold back from pushing and do one of two things. Go to hospital OR do some hard work. Wanting our child to arrive in the comfort and peace of our home more than anything, I opted for the work.

Work: during contractions I had to do some insane one legged squats with my left leg up on the sofa; walk stairs two at a time and lunge on the stairs during contractions; do hands 'n' knees in the pool and be shaken by two midwives on a Rebozo rug (a Mexican shawl that lay perpendicular under me while I lay down and my midriff was lifted and shaken from side to side). I did all this for a total of 3 ½ hours. This was by far the most difficult part. My body wanting to push but not being allowed to. I was so exhausted and there were times when I wanted to quit and take the easy way out. But something kept me going. It was insane!

I need to pause here and give gratitude to Sean who never left my side, who gave me *everything* I needed and *immediately* stopped doing the things that weren't working. He was an angel and there is no other way to describe it. I simply couldn't have had the birth I wanted without him there. That said, Carli, our doula needs some credit here. I have been told that without her Sean would not have been able to cope. Our doula was a Godsend. I mean that. She was there for both of us in

ways I don't quite know how to describe. It was her expertise, compassion and instinct that got us through each transition and on our way to managing the pain as it increased. (Insert plug: if you are going to have a baby, talk to a **doula!**)

I was also given tons of homeopathic stuff throughout the labour by my midwives. They would put tiny pills under my tongue for all kinds of things, and also at one point stuck some acupuncture stickers on my baby toes! All the while I was sipping on energy concoctions too. Their bag of tricks seemed endless.

Okay, so after those "turning" exercises, I was checked and told I was 10cm and that I had succeeded in turning the baby! There were cheers and tears and then lots of roars and growls. It took me 45 minutes to get a hang of how to push effectively and then I got really good at it for the next three hours of pushing in all kinds of positions. It hurt like crazy but felt really good and productive.

Sean was sitting on the sofa and I was squatting on a birthing stool between his legs. Sean held a mirror to watch so I could guide the baby's head out with my hand. Up and out he came and was put on my chest right away. Sean then got some quality skin on skin time with his son.

The midwives were shocked at his size (9 lbs 4 oz) and that someone my size was carrying him; but more shockingly that someone my size was able to *turn* him! That made me so happy! WE DID IT! I was also told that had we been in a hospital with a doctor that I would

have had an emergency caesarean hours earlier either due to "Failure to Progress" or "Failure to Turn".

The midwives made our bed for us, brought us breakfast and left two hours later.

They came back less than twelve hours later, and then again the next day and again the next and the next, making sure that we were all doing well. And indeed we are. They have been taking care of everything, from how much Charlie is pooping and peeing to how my breastfeeding latch is doing. I don't know what I would do without their daily visits. They are amazing! We had such an incredible group of supportive women with us through it all. It's difficult to have them know just how much they shaped this experience and the beginning of Charlie's life with us.

There was so much love in our home that day/night. A strange, magical and holy coming together of lives to help bring another one into this world. We are indeed blessed!

☞ **Alexa and Sean Devine** are both actors who lived in NYC for a while before settling out West to make Vancouver their home. They were married on the gorgeous Sunshine Coast in August of 2006 and gave birth to their first child Charlie Alexander Devine on November, 17th 2008. They share their beautiful home with Tuica the cat and Clea the bird. All living in harmony!



Business Directory

Baby, Child & Maternity Gear

Little Earth

778-737-7004
www.littleearthvancouver.com

New & Green Baby Company

604-323-4145
www.newandgreen.com

Room For Two Baby & Maternity

1409 Commercial Drive, Vancouver
 604-255-0508

Wee Ones Reruns

604-708-0956
weeonesreruns@shaw.ca

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778-991-2084
www.drpeltz.com

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Yoga West of Vancouver

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604-908-1214
www.emergingfamilies.com

Soma Studio Massage

213 / 303, 1529 W 6th Ave, Vancouver
 604-738-1502

Yaletown Chiropractic

604-688-5437
www.bonnychiropractic.com

Parenting

Mamaspeak
 604.266.8124
meralon@mamaspeak.com

Community Resources

Information and Counselling

BCW Breastfeeding Clinic 604-875-2424
 BCW Lactation Consultants 604-875-2282
 Breast Milk Bank 604-875-2345 Ext 7607
 Dial-a-Dietician 604-732-9191
 Family Place (Westside) 604-738-2819
 Family Place (Eastside) 604-255-9841
www.eastsidefamilyplace.org

Family Services of Vancouver
 1616 West 7th Ave 604-731-4951
 202-1193 Kingsway 604-874-2938

Infant and Child Seat Information
 BCAA Consumer Service 604-298-2122
 604-298-2755

Safe Start Programme 604-875-3458
 ICAN Vancouver 604-734-4226
 Post Caesarean Birth Support 604-433-5827
 La Leche League 604-736-3244
 Newborn Hotline 604-737-3737
 Pacific Postpartum Support 604-255-7999
 Parents in Crisis Line 604-669-1616

Support for Grieving Parents
 Rob & Jill Mullen 604-986-5012
 BC Children's Social Work 604-875-2345
 Ext 7358
 BC Women's Social Work 604-875-2424
 Ext 6161

Twins and More Club
www.vancouvertwins.com
 Volunteer Grandparents Assn. 604-736-8271
 Westcoast Family Resource 604-255-9568

Prenatal Classes
 Lower Mainland Childbearing 604-878-1031
Doula Referrals
 Doula Services Association 604-515-5588

Vancouver Coastal Health
 Vancouver Health Department 604-875-6381
 Evergreen Health Centre 604-872-2511
 North Community Health Office 604-253-3575
 Pacific Spirit Health Centre 604-261-6366
 Raven Song Health Centre 604-709-6400
 South Health Office 604-321-6151
 Three Bridges Health Centre 604-736-9844
Note: Your Community Health Nurse has further information on local resource

Prenatal Class Schedule (updated April 2009)

<p>Healthy Pregnancy Classes Content: <i>Mums only class.</i> Covers nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle choices for pregnancy; screening & diagnostic tests; foetal development; pregnancy discomforts & remedies</p>	<p>2 sessions 2 hours each Cost: \$75* <i>*Included free of charge with weekly series or weekend workshops.</i> Time: 7:00pm – 9:00pm</p>	<p>Location: <i>Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House</i> 800 East Broadway April Th 23 & 30 Apr June W 3 & 10 Jun July T 21 & 28 Jul</p>
<p>Weekly Series Content: Normal labour & birth; relaxation, positions & coping skills for labour; medical pain relief, interventions & procedures; postpartum; breastfeeding; early parenthood; newborn care. Includes handbook and CD.</p>	<p>14 sessions: 7 Evening classes (2hrs ea) 2 Healthy Pregnancy sessions 1 Postpartum Reunion 4 Postpartum Classes <i>(option: 8 additional postpartum classes for \$60 more)</i> Cost: \$240 <i>(\$300 includes full PP series)</i></p>	<p>Time: 7:00pm – 9:00pm Location: <i>Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House</i> 800 East Broadway Late Spring Th 7 May – 18 Jun Early Summer T 26 May – 7 Jul Summer W 17 Jun – 5 Aug Mid Summer Th 16 Jul—27 Aug Late Summer T 11 Aug—22 Sep Early Autumn W 2 Sep—14 Oct</p>
<p>Weekend Workshops Content: Same as for weekly series; slightly condensed format: breastfeeding not covered, but cost includes Friday or Monday night breastfeeding class. Handbook & CD included.</p>	<p>10 sessions: 2 Weekend days (5hrs ea) 1 Breastfeeding Night 2 Healthy Pregnancy sessions 1 Postpartum Reunion 4 Postpartum Classes <i>(option: 8 additional postpartum classes for \$60 more)</i> Cost: \$240 <i>(\$300 includes full PP series)</i></p>	<p>Time: Sat & Sun 9am - 2pm OR 3-8pm Monday 7-9pm Location: <i>3285 Victoria (at 16th)</i> Late May 30-31 May June 27- 29 Jun July 25-27 Jul August 29-31 Aug October 3-5 Oct December 5-7 Dec</p>
<p>Breastfeeding only Content: Covers breastfeeding basics; troubleshooting; breast pumps & returning to work; special needs; colic</p>	<p>1 session: Friday Night 2 hours Cost: \$40* <i>*Included free of charge with weekend workshop</i></p>	<p>Time: Monday 7-9pm Location: <i>Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House</i> As above, Monday nights only</p>
<p>Another Birth: refresher class Content: finding ways to honour this pregnancy and celebrate its distinctness; what worked last time... and what didn't; recalling old birthing techniques and learning new ones; how to prepare your first baby for sibling-hood; connecting with your new baby while maintaining the bond with your 1st.</p>	<p>1 session: Saturday Afternoon 4 hours Cost: \$75* \$65 for <i>Childbearing Grads</i> Time: noon – 4pm</p>	<p>Location: <i>3285 Victoria (at 16th)</i> June 6 Jun August 8 Aug</p>
<p>Breastfeeding Clinics: Content: one-on-one help for those who are experiencing breastfeeding difficulties any time in the first few months after birth.</p>	<p>1 session: Saturday or Sunday 2 hours Cost: 1 session included free with registration. Additional sessions \$40.</p>	<p>Time: 3-5pm Location: <i>3285 Victoria (at 16th)</i> 9 May 13 Jun 18 Jul 15 Aug 19 Sep 17 Oct</p>
<p>Postpartum Classes Content: <i>For parents with babies who are not yet walking.</i> Covers infant feeding, sleep, safety, colic & crying, attachment, and infant development, and many other topics.</p>	<p>12 sessions: 1 ½ hours each Cost: \$150* <i>*Free for expectant parents enrolled in prenatal classes; 4 sessions included free with prenatal class series.</i> Time: 12:30 - 2 pm</p>	<p>Location: <i>Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House</i> 800 East Broadway May W 6-27 May June W 3-24 Jun July W 8-29 Jul August W 5-26 Aug Sep W 9-30 Sep</p>
<p>Private Classes Cost: \$20 + \$50/hour Minimum 2 hours. Does not include materials (optional: \$25)</p>	<p>To register, or for more information: (604) 878-1031 www.childbearing.org Low income rates available.</p>	