Description

Homebirth Feels “Right”

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Summary

Homebirth is miraculous. It enables the woman to journey through her pregnancy, labour, birth, and postpartum period physiologically, unobstructed by institutionalised hospital policies and procedures. It enables the midwife to practice to their full scope and provide true woman-centred evidence-based care. I was fortunate enough to have my first practical exposure to midwifery in the homebirth world, and, as a soon to be registered midwife, I believe it changed the course of my practice. It taught me to trust women’s bodies and have faith in their innate design, while being a skilled practitioner able to identify and treat any complications should they arise.



Hana Maxwell (left)

My first ever clinical placement within the Bachelor of Midwifery course at the University of Technology Sydney was with the incredible Privately Practicing Endorsed Midwife, Gail Colquhoun, a woman I now consider to be one of my “Fairy Birth Mothers,” as she had a profound impact on my student experience and midwifery practice. The placement opportunity was offered through the university and was immediately something I knew I wanted to experience. Growing up, my first exposure to birth was through watching “Call the Midwife” with my sisters, mother, and grandmother, and the majority of the depicted births are at home in the earlier seasons. When I was a little older, I watched movies and tv

shows with more medicalised births in hospital settings like “One Born Every Minute.” Although my fascination with pregnancy and birth remained, watching these depictions of birth in hospital did not feel “right.”



Hana Maxwell (right)

I was allocated two weeks on placement with Gail. Additionally, I had the privilege of three families inviting me to follow them through their pregnancy, birth, and postnatal journeys, so I spent a total of 8 months in the homebirth world. Attending private midwifery antenatal and postnatal appointments with Gail showed me how to truly provide woman-centred care, giving all the time and space they needed. This involved having appointments later in the evening so partners could attend, including the women’s other children in the appointments, teaching them how to use equipment including dopplers and blood pressure cuffs, and spending over 2 hours in some appointments if more time was needed to discuss education topics or emotional wellbeing. Gail was an extraordinary mentor, teaching me theory, clinical skills, and her beautiful way with women. I spent my first International Day of the Midwife with her and some of her wonderful women and families – a memory I will always cherish as a landmark in my career.



Hana Maxwell (left)

Waiting for my three follow-through women to birth was my first experience of being “on call,” and I was so excited. The first woman had a very quick labour, birthing a mere 30 minutes after calling Gail about the onset of contractions, so sadly I missed her birth, but arrived in time to watch her birth her placenta. Entering her birth space was magical. She had soft music playing, fairy lights gently illuminating the room, two of her friends and her partner by her side, and was having skin-to-skin with her newborn daughter while resting on her lounge. It felt completely “right.”

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The second woman was having her third baby. I arrived to witness her labour in the birth pool that was set up in her lounge room. She was completely relaxed and undisturbed. Her partner, two older children, a friend, Gail, a second midwife, and I quietly moved around her space. She moved and positioned herself intuitively and birthed her baby in water. I feel incredibly lucky to say that this is the first birth I witnessed. It was entirely physiological and peaceful, and she allowed her body to instinctively engage in the beautiful process of labour and birth. This showed me what birth can be when women are supported to follow their instincts in labour and birth. Another thing that struck me about this birth was the way birth was integrated as such a normal aspect of life. Within an hour the woman was showered and in her pyjamas, sitting with her birth team chatting while she breastfed. Again, it felt “right.”

The third woman was having her first baby. I, along with Gail, another midwife, her partner, and a friend, supported her through 12 hours of active labour and birth at home. We said affirmations, did hip squeezes and massage, offered her food and water, held her hand, brushed her hair back, did her observations, listened to the fetal heart rate using a doppler, encouraged her to use the TENs machine, shower and the birth pool. At one stage she asked me to climb into the birth pool with her to do some hip squeezes during contractions while her partner had a break. I felt immensely honoured, and immediately rolled up my pants and hopped in. We supported her to birth her first daughter in water at home. This woman went on to have a postpartum haemorrhage, and I observed how the midwives calmly treated this at home by administering synthetic oxytocin medication. There was no one rushing into the room disturbing her space, she was able to be treated in her home, and within an hour was feeling well and learning to breastfeed for the first time. I had been with her for 12 hours at this stage and our work was done, but I didn’t want to leave the magic of her birth space, it felt so “right.”



Hana Maxwell (left)

It wasn’t until I entered the hospital on my second clinical placement that I truly understood how special homebirth and home antenatal and postnatal care is. The extended time women have for appointments, the lack of an institutionalised setting driving decision-making, the focus on what is important to the woman, the continuity of care, and the way the woman’s physiology is optimized all give me a sense of internal harmony that feels “right.”. Through my experience I learned how to truly be “with women,” and the power of not intervening, while consolidating my knowledge of normal

physiology. I feel that all birth workers should have the opportunity to witness homebirth because I believe it would transform the way they practice with all women.

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I am looking forward to another homebirth placement in a few months time to continue to experience this miraculous side of midwifery. I hope to move my work into the homebirth space as my career progresses, so that I can continue to be a part of the magic of midwifery, offering women an excellent standard of care in their own space.

Read more about a student’s experience of homebirth here

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1. Student Midwife Blog

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1. homebirth

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