

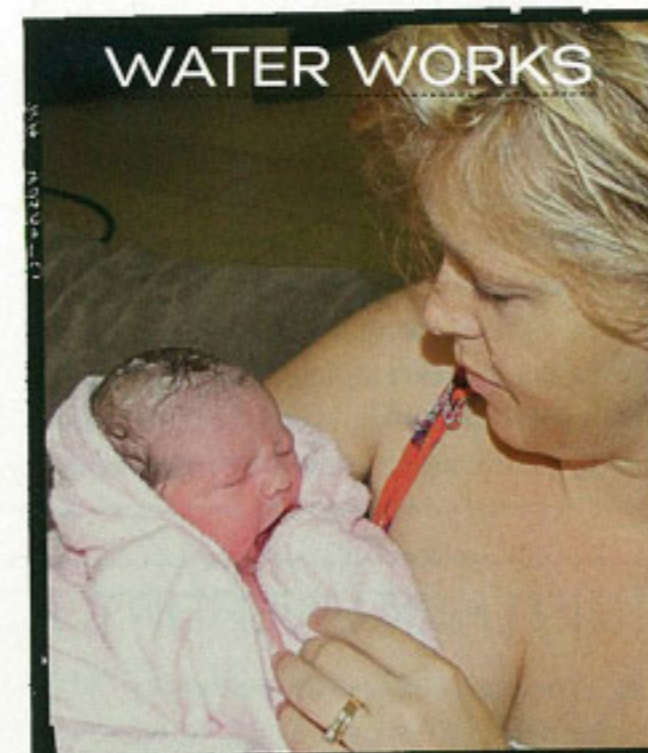
Every birth is different, or so they say. **LINDA BARNIER** spoke to three mums whose birth experiences changed from child to child

POLES APART



If you've got a bubba on the way, you've no doubt heard all the horror stories. Days of labour, failed epidurals, emergency caesareans... there are enough tales of woe out there to put just about anyone off ever having a child!

But births are just like the children they produce – no two are ever exactly the same. Experiences vary greatly from woman to woman, and even having one bad experience doesn't mean you're destined to repeat it. Just check out these mums' stories.



*After one caesarean and a surprise bathtub arrival, **JANE CHESTER** achieved a calm, home water-birth with baby number three.*

"My first birth experience certainly wasn't the drug-free, natural one I had planned. After 24 harrowing hours of labour, I was finally dilated enough to push. But baby Zoe was posterior and stuck, so she ended up having to be born by emergency

caesarean. I was pretty shocked by the experience. I had trusted my body and that I would birth my child naturally, without drugs. In the end I knew I'd done everything possible, but couldn't help feeling disappointed that I didn't achieve the birth I had wanted.

Six months later, I was pregnant again. This time, my husband, Mark, and I took a calmbirth course. It helped me deal with my fears and the lingering feelings I had about Zoe's birth. We also learned some great labour techniques. I hired a doula for some extra support, too. I was keen to have a VBAC (a vaginal birth after a caesarean) and she'd helped lots of mums achieve this.

The plan was to have Isabella in the hospital, but we didn't get there in time. My labour started at home and the contractions got stronger quickly. I asked Mark to run me a bath before we left for the hospital, but once I was in the water, I felt like I needed to push. I reached down and could feel Isabella's head! Mark rang our doula and the ambulance, but Isabella came out before anyone could arrive. She was born into the water and Mark

lifted her out and gave her to me for a cuddle. It was intimate and personal.

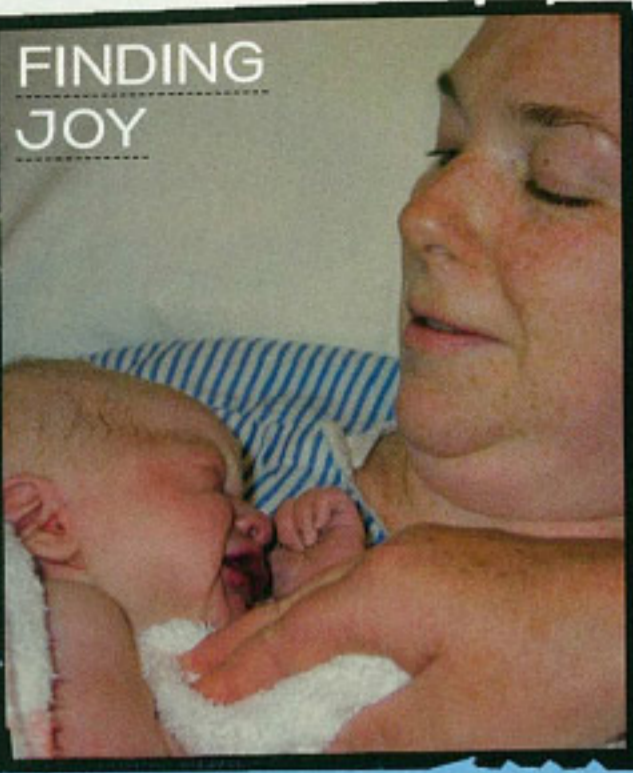
When the ambos arrived, they took us to the hospital and we came home later that afternoon. It was an amazing birth experience, which made me feel everything was the way that it should be.

Shortly after Isabella was born, Mark and I knew we wanted one more child and 16 months later, I was pregnant. I wanted another water birth, but the hospitals I approached wanted to treat things as a VBAC, despite my having had a natural birth after my caesarean. So we did lots of research and settled on a home water-birth.

We would never have considered a home birth if it weren't for Isabella's surprise arrival. However, this time around we wanted the reassurance of a trained professional with us, so we hired a private midwife. The birth was incredible. I felt calm and comfortable in our home and Ruby was born calmly and easily.

Having two beautiful births after such a traumatic one has made me realise that wonderful experiences really are achievable, no matter how things start out." >

FINDING JOY



After experiencing a traumatic first birth, CINDY GORE swore up and down that she didn't want to try again. She eventually changed her mind, and the experiences that followed changed her life.

"I had a great first pregnancy and went into labour naturally. Then everything went horribly wrong. The labour was long and difficult and a few hours after Deacon was born, I got up to go to the toilet and collapsed onto the floor. I haemorrhaged badly and lost a lot of blood.

I was traumatised by the experience and adamant that I'd never have another child. But 12 months later, I changed my mind. When I fell pregnant again I became very nervous about the birth, so my obstetrician and I made plans to make sure things went as smoothly as possible.

I was induced and the labour and birth were both very quick and easy. I felt blessed that Isla was healthy and that I'd had such a beautiful experience.

Ten months later, my husband, Tim, and I started trying for our final baby. I fell pregnant straight away and was unwell the whole pregnancy. At 18 weeks, we were told our baby had heart problems. I had tests every week and our doctors said the baby might not survive. The stress of not knowing if our child was going to live or die was enormous. It was a difficult period that affected the whole family.

Tim became so concerned he arranged for me to see a psychiatrist to help me deal with everything.

I had my last round of tests a few days before Connor's birth was scheduled. The results weren't good and we were told that he had to be born immediately. After an emergency caesarean he was rushed away to be stabilised. The staff told us he was doing remarkably well. We got to spend time with him that night, then returned to our hospital room to rest. But in the early hours of the next morning, we got a phone call. Connor couldn't be stabilised. They worked on him all day, but his condition deteriorated. Later that night they turned off his machines and he was in our arms when he died.

The days after, making all the necessary arrangements, remain a blur. I remember wanting another baby straight away. It wasn't that I wanted to replace Connor – I just desperately needed some happiness. Four months later I was pregnant, but then suffered a miscarriage. It was absolutely devastating.

A few months after that, we started IVF and I fell pregnant after the first cycle. I continued to see my psychiatrist.

She had helped me prepare for Connor's birth and then through the grieving process

afterward. She also helped me deal with the anxieties I had about my new pregnancy and baby Reuben's birth. My obstetrician found a private midwife who gave me wonderful

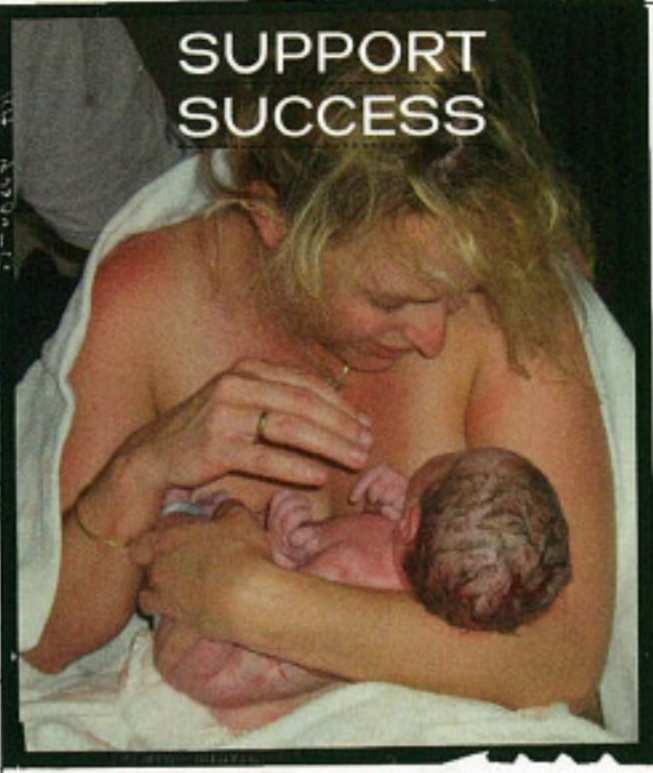
support and I wrote a detailed, four-page birth plan. I felt a huge amount of support, both physically and mentally, and knew that everyone involved was working towards the goal of a positive birth and healthy baby.

The result could not have been more wonderful. Reuben was born by caesarean and during the surgery the staff were very reassuring about the process and Reuben's health.

I feel like we have been through so much, but have come through it supported and stronger – so much so, I might convince Tim to have another baby!"

"I felt a huge amount of support... and knew that everyone involved was working towards the goal of a positive birth"

SUPPORT SUCCESS



After two difficult caesarean births, EMMY LEE knew she was ready to try for a vaginal birth.

"Before I fell pregnant, I assumed I'd have a natural birth. But after finding out we were having twins, my obstetrician booked a caesarean. I felt a pang of disappointment, but didn't question it. He was the expert and knew more about having babies than I did.

After William and Olivia were born, I haemorrhaged badly. After a few hours of blood loss, the doctor announced that if I didn't stop bleeding, I'd have to have a hysterectomy. It was terrifying. Luckily, the bleeding eventually stopped and I didn't need further surgery.

The experience stayed with me, but I recovered quickly and bonded easily with my babies. Two years later I was pregnant again. I desperately wanted a better birth,

which I thought I'd get if I had a VBAC. At 39 weeks, though, I was told my baby was breech and so another caesarean was scheduled. I was distraught. Matilda was to be our last child and I hadn't experienced natural labour or birth, let alone a positive birthing experience where I felt safe and supported. I was frightened about haemorrhaging again and cried all through the surgery.

It's hard to explain the emotions I felt afterwards. I had three healthy babies and wasn't overly traumatised or depressed, but things just didn't feel right. My sister told me about a wonderful education and support service called Birthtalk. I went to one of the information nights and knew I had found something special. As I listened to mums tell their stories, I realised it was perfectly normal to feel disappointment about birth experiences. It was a huge revelation that many women had similar feelings to mine and that what happens during birth really matters.

I went to a few of Birthtalk's 'Healing from Birth' meetings and my husband, Richard, and I took their VBAC course. Through Birthtalk I started to become educated and empowered about birth. I found myself wanting another child, but didn't know if I wanted another baby for the chance at a positive, natural birth or if I actually wanted another family member.

Four years later, after lots of soul-searching, I knew that I wanted another baby for all the right reasons. I went to more Birthtalk sessions and started putting plans into place to make the birth a good experience.

When I became pregnant, I asked one of Birthtalk's founders, Deb, to be my doula and found an obstetrician and hospital that supported my desire to have a VBA2C (a vaginal birth after two caesareans). I was relaxed and confident about the impending birth and trusted my body. Amelia was born after an intense and long labour. I'm proud to say she was born naturally and the experience was amazing. Finding Birthtalk was a huge part of my healing and education. They supported me through a long journey and I thank them from the bottom of my heart."★

"I realised it was perfectly normal to feel disappointed about birth experiences"

BIRTH TALK'S TIPS FOR A BETTER BIRTH

- ★ **Process your previous birth.** Debriefing and gaining clarity about what happened the last time can be important steps when it comes to understanding what your needs will be this time around.
- ★ **Know how your body works best.** Read up on women's bodies and learn about the hormones involved in birth and how you can help them do their job.
- ★ **Choose a carer carefully.** The philosophy of your chosen health professional can profoundly affect your

birth experience. Would your needs be better met by midwifery, obstetric or shared care?
 ★ **Define your needs.** Once you know what your body needs – and what your hospital and caregivers are likely to expect – you can begin to shape a plan that meets your needs.
 ★ **Communicate.** Your support people are relying on you to let them know what you will need, so speak up!

SOME ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP...
 Caesarean Awareness Network Australia (www.canaustralia.net) – info about caesareans and VBACs, support groups and more.
 Birthtalk (www.birthtalk.org) – for healing from birth, with birth education in QLD.
 Birthrites (www.birthrites.org) – support for birthing after a caesarean, with meetings in WA.
 Maternity Coalition (www.maternitycoalition.org.au) – information and links to support groups.
 Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond (www.pregnancy.com.au) – information about birth options and directories for a variety of services.
 Find A Doula (www.findadoula.com.au) – a national database of doulas.



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