

Post Natal Depression

by Kath Graham

When I was pregnant with Paige in 1999 I had terrible morning sickness and depression. I don't know if the two things were linked but the vomiting made the depression worse and the depression made the vomiting seem worse. It was a sad and lonely time, and a time when everyone wants you to be happy about the miracle of life, which I wasn't. Eventually the pregnancy got better and Paige was born at home, if not much went well that year at least the birth was great, five or six hours of labour, nothing went wrong and I found it easy (ish). Lets just say it never reached the fever pitch that some women talk of and at no point did I think I couldn't do it. We lived in Palmerston North and had a great midwife Gretchen Adam. She made me feel secure and was easy to talk to.

After Paige was born I never experienced the love or bonding with anyone, not my baby or partner, I was pretty numb. I could see people looking at me as though I had drunk from the holy grail, but inside I was empty and just went through the motions. I really felt like something inside was broken, and I was robbed of my baby raising happiness. When I look back at that I think it wasn't right that I had that experience and I feel a bit sad for Paige even though somehow she and I have a strong bond. Gradually it got worse and by the six week check I told Getchen my feelings and she felt I had PND. I then received help and was able to talk to other women about it. It was a long hard year as the PND affected the whole family and took a long time to repair. Even when Paige turned two I still felt it pulling at me.

When Paige was nearly three I found myself expecting again and was again very sick, not as bad as the first time but it lasted for most of my pregnancy. I was very concerned about getting PND again as I am studying and wanted to continue after the baby was born. My partner and I had many talks about how to prepare for the PND should it happen again and we actually spent much more time preparing for that than we did the baby. I did feel that it wasn't going to happen as I didn't feel the same, in fact I felt more in control of my life than I ever had. I wonder now if the second pregnancy fixed whatever it was that was broken the first time. The end of the pregnancy was really hard and exhausting I felt huge, was

really hot all the time and couldn't sleep, which is about par for the end of most pregnancies I guess.

Claude was born at home on a Thursday and funnily enough the labour was almost identical to Paige's. She was ten pounds, yes, that is five kilos and ouchy. Her placenta was one kilo so it's no wonder she was so bonny. Around seven weeks after the birth I felt a bit of a pull into PND. At first I was confused as I was sure I would recognise the signs, but I see now that PND is a sneaky thing. I found myself crying about things that I knew shouldn't be bothering me, and innocent comments from my partner really cut me. Once I said it out loud I knew what was happening, that it was real. We had already set up some rescue things, like we had a house keeper, just a friend who came in and did some laundry and dishes. Also I took extra care with my diet and ate lots of fresh food. Along with having a bit of timeout myself to get some exercise, sometimes it meant getting up at six thirty am but it was worth it. Instead of going straight for the pharmaceutical drugs for depression I got St John's Wart and I found that it protected me from the PND and it didn't really become an issue.

I have had a tough year but as far as my Baby and I go it's been great. I know it looks like a real middle class problem-solution scenario but it is real. Women get PND all the time and are too embarrassed to talk about it. I think it affects the whole family, it takes years to heal, suburbia makes it worse, and so does secrecy. I think being with your baby helps and that removing the baby to give the mother timeout is the wrong solution. We need help with all the other things that get in the way of our relationship with our child like cleaning, laundry, bed making and cooking.

Now it's eleven thirty at night and I should have been in bed ages ago but I promised Jo I'd do this six months ago and I want to finish it before Claude turns one. As far as birthing goes I'd like to say I loved it, it was so exhilarating, like a drug I want again. I found having a five kilo baby more painful than a four and a half kilo baby. I guess I'm lucky in that I have had two five to six hour labours. Midwives on Barrington were there for me and I found them to be great. Lyn Chapple was everything I needed and I'd recommend her to anyone, and that's about it. Claude will be one in two weeks and we have survived a long first year with our two girls. I passed all my midwifery papers. I still can't manage to get the house cleaned and tidied at the same time but, hey, in five years time I'll be getting close. Are there more Home Births for us, well if birthing is addictive, then I'm hooked and I think it's safe to say "yes".