

## Homebirth - American Style

by Anitra Carr

I always planned on having my children at home, there was never any doubt about that, although I never once thought that I would end up having my first child in America. I became pregnant (planned) whilst my husband and I were living and working in Oregon. There was only one midwife in the small university town where we lived and luckily for us she was very nice,



competent and well respected. She had not had any formal midwifery education, instead she had become a midwife through being an apprentice and having five children herself, all home births, including her twins, which gave her the added advantage of first hand experience. We attended our prenatal visits in a little cottage which stood beside her house. She had a wonderful student midwife who we became good friends with and who also took us for our antenatal classes.

A few weeks before the due date we had a baby shower, a wonderful American tradition. American's are very generous with gifts, it is their way of showing love, thus we were basically set for the next year with respect to clothes, toys and books. A week or so later, we had a woman's only "blessing way" ceremony with the midwife, student midwife, my mother, and a good friend. We took turns giving readings, some of which were quite moving, and we each took turns weaving part of a "God's eye" for my child. I also had my feet rubbed with cornmeal by each woman and the midwife did a private blessing to the goddess. Many stories were told, which was reminiscent of the oral traditions of childbirth and midwifery (meaning "with women") whereby the women who have had children are able to pass on some of their personal experiences and insights to those who have not.



My mother had come over to stay with us about two weeks before the baby was due (I was born two weeks early so we weren't taking any chances), although my daughter actually ended up being ten days late. The day I went into labour my mother and I had been for a long walk in the morning and I had felt a bit "funny" afterwards. By about four o'clock that afternoon I knew that something was definitely up as I was experiencing mild "period pain" type symptoms. In the early hours of the next morning my waters broke so we called the midwife soon afterwards. Unfortunately, she was

already at another birth so she sent the student midwife over to monitor my progress and the baby's heart beat etc. I love water so I spent as much time as possible in the birthing pool that we had rented. However, since nothing much had happened by nightfall we decided to head off to bed with the student midwife checking me with the doppler periodically throughout the night.

I must have transitioned during the night (which could explain why I had felt such painful contractions during the intermittent periods of sleep) because when the midwife arrived the next day and carried out an internal examination she found that I was fully dilated. This made her very happy as she had been mentally prepared for me to be only a few centimeters dilated, and was confirmed by me shortly proceeding to vomit, another symptom of transition. However, by this stage (one and a half days of labour) I was pretty exhausted and had no urge to push. Therefore, the midwife encouraged me to get out of the birthing pool, even though she had been prepared for me to give birth in there, because it appeared to be slowing down my labour. The apprentice midwife then taught me how to bear down using the toilet as a comfortable place to sit; we had tried various other positions earlier.



By this stage, however, there was some fetal distress evident and I began to bleed (we later decided that the short cord may have resulted in the placenta parting early) so some quick decisions had to be made; push the baby out now or go to the local hospital with the risk of the baby being born on the way. Maybe the thought of going to hospital gave me the extra incentive I needed because at 5:05 pm, two days after going into labour, my daughter literally burst into the world, all nine pounds of her! (the student midwife later confided that it was the closest she had ever seen the midwife to doing an episiotomy). There had been some debate as to whether the baby would be a boy or a girl as I had had no ultrasound scans, however, I had always wanted a little girl with blue eyes and blond hair, and I was thrilled to be blessed with my wish. We already had a name for her, Anna Christina Carson, which one of my colleagues had assured me meant that we would be having a girl as my husband and I had not been able to agree on a boy's name. My daughter was born in the room and on the bed that she had been conceived in and we later buried the placenta under a small maple tree standing just outside our bedroom window.

I feel very fortunate to have had such a great birthing team (see photo). My husband was there throughout the labour, even though during the pregnancy he had been adamant that he wouldn't be able to be there as he doesn't like the sight of blood, and my mother stayed on for an extra few months to help out which was wonderful. I also feel fortunate that I gave birth in an era in which



we have many more choices than in our mother's or grandmother's times; my mother gave birth to me in the early 70's whereby she had absolutely no control over what was done to her in the hospital, including epidural anaesthesia and forceps delivery. Furthermore, I am glad that we were living in Oregon at the time as there were midwives available and our medical insurance covered a portion of the midwife's fees; there are some states where it is still illegal for midwives to practice and others where even though it is legal for midwives to practice, their fees are not covered by the medical insurance companies, such is the extent of the medicalisation of childbirth in America. We returned to New Zealand about eight months ago in order to be closer to family and my daughter is

now two years old. As such, I am now looking forward to having a baby in New Zealand sometime in the future - at home of course!