

Natural birth: a magnificent success story

Cozette de Jager

In April 2014 we received the news that my brother, Waldo, and his wife, Juané, were expecting. To the De Jager family this was incredible – the first small De Jager in our family was due and an unexplored chapter was waiting. We shared the excitement about the progress after every doctor's visit and we watched as Juané's tummy quietly grew bigger and bigger, Baby Kailah was becoming a perfectly healthy little human being.

Only last month I wrote an article titled *The Role of Pain, Oxytocin, Birth and Mothering* and it was fascinating to see these things take shape right in front of my eyes. My sister-in-law is an organised lady, she's quick and she's effective, but as the pregnancy progressed she slowed her pace, she reduced her work hours and, my oh my, did her body and brain do their part to slow her down too ... The tiredness grew and so did the lack of details, arrangements and even words. She repeated the same questions over and over, she forgot everyday names like McDonald's and Steers, and she even on occasion forgot her friends' names – that made for a good giggle. Her body was making it easy to work from her Emotional Brain and no longer her Thinking Brain: the perfect place to start your journey as a mommy.

Before the pregnancy I could imagine that a totally new experience like pregnancy and birth could be a scary one for Juané, but I was pleasantly surprised by her calmness and the ease with which she accepted the lack of certainty and control. Throughout the pregnancy her husband, Waldo, was extremely supportive, caring and protective – a wonderful environment for a vulnerable mommy to relax into. It was like these words were written for them:

“To be a good mom, you need to feel a lot (and think a little) to stay in contact with your Mommy Brain. Your hormones are your willing assistants that keep you relaxed and functioning from your Mommy brain, more than functioning from your thinking Brain. That is why new moms often feel slow and a little out of control. It is exactly how you should feel to be able to get to know your baby ...”

I have read Melodie's books, I have heard her speak passionately about birth countless times, I have even trained quite a number of student Instructors in BabyGym, but somehow experiencing something personally just makes it so much more real, doesn't it?



Dad ...

“Your baby needs you because you feel, smell and sound different to mom – and these differences trigger the development of your baby's brain. Dad, it is through contact with you that a bridge is built between mom as baby's place of safety and the real world. It takes quite a while to complete this bridge and before your baby can confidently travel across that bridge to learn about the world and the people, animals and things around him. You are just as important to your baby as mom. You are also very important to mom, because she needs your strength and clarity of thought while she is feeling, rather than thinking ...”

(De Jager, 2011: 10)

On the last doctor's visit their doctor, Dr Verwoerd from Pretoria East Hospital, discussed the finer birth arrangements and mentioned that if Juané did not spontaneously go into labour by Week 40, they would induce her as the space in utero limits growth once the baby has reached full term. So on Thursday evening 30 October Waldo and Juané arrived at the hospital with a prescription.

True to Dr Verwoerd's words, on Friday 31 October (40/40 weeks) Juané and Kailah started their birthing dance. By 14:00 the contractions were intense and dilation followed very smoothly.

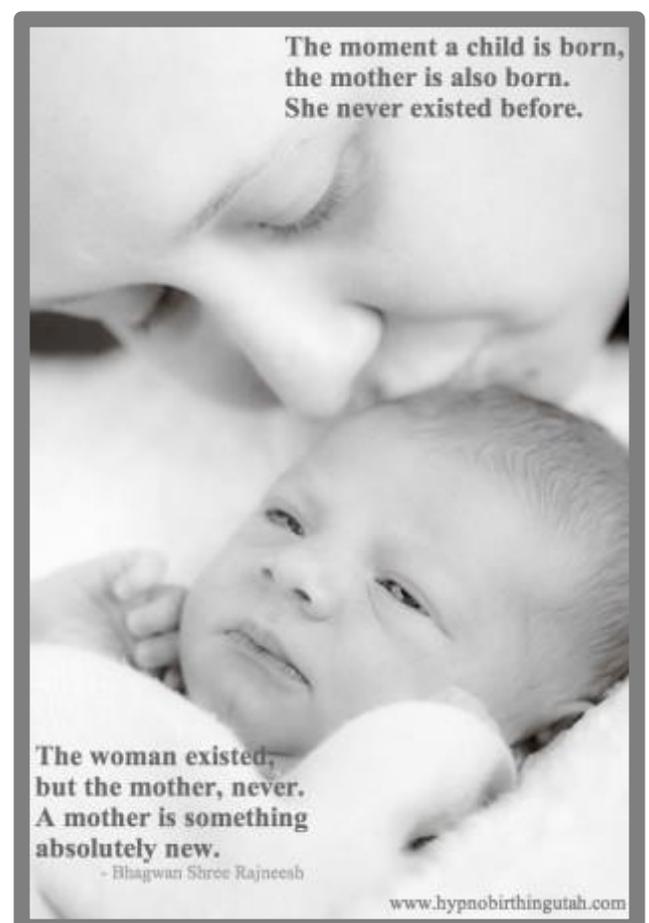
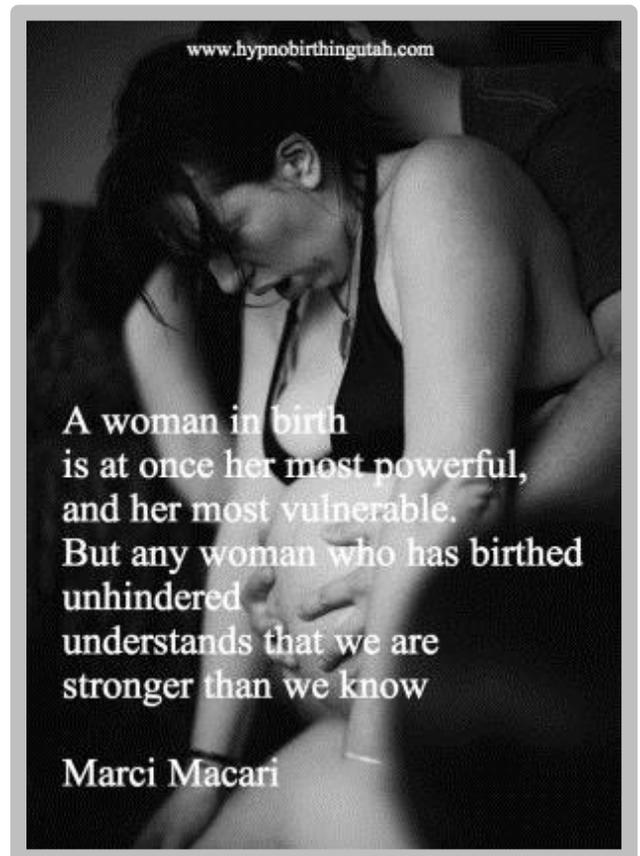
By 15:35 I was on my way to the hospital, literally coming around the corner when Juané gave the last push and Kailah's cry followed.

I stepped into the hospital and was greeted by the grandmothers, teary-eyed and so thankful that their daughter and granddaughter had made it. Few words were spoken; the moment was just too big.

They hadn't seen Waldo, Juané or Kailah yet, but they had heard and understood the process, it had been tough and Juané had given it everything she had. The grandmothers wanted to hold their daughter, protect her and help her, she was so vulnerable. Yet there was a change – a baby had been born, but also a mother. The grandmothers were so proud!

Waldo walked down the aisle with his greatest achievement and gift in his arms – no doubt Kailah had already won her dad's heart. We met a perfect little baby, big and strong, 10/10 APGAR score, and breastfeeding like a champion.

The birth process was tough on Juané: her body hurt, breastfeeding hurt and the adjustment after birth was huge. But I wish Kailah could talk and thank her mommy and daddy for who they are and what they have meant to her thus far. I can only imagine what she would say ...



Thank you, Mommy

Thank you that you have endured the toughest pain and longest two hours of your life so that I could be born in a way that was good for me. Thank you that you chose to have me naturally and followed through with the birth, because I am adjusting so well to life outside the womb. Finding your nipple and feeding well is really easy for me. Thank you, Mommy, for providing me with milk that sustains me and allows me to sleep well, because I know that while I am so young, feeding, digesting and sleeping well is the best brain development for me. Thank you for holding me, talking to me, loving me and caring for me – I feel so welcome in your life.

Thank you, Daddy

Thank you that you kept Mommy calm during the birth. Thank you that you guided her through breathing, words of affirmation and motivation – you made the birthing process so much easier. Thank you that you change my nappies, even when they look really gross, and that you bath and wash me with so much care. Thank you that you hold me with so much love and adoration. I know I am a very lucky girl to have you as my daddy.

Thank you that you chose to keep my birth as natural as possible. I am so relaxed and really enjoy exploring my body. I am well aware that I have way more space now than I did in Mommy's tummy and stretching out is such a great feeling.

My paediatrician says I am healthy and very strong. I will continue to remind you how strong I am by lifting my head, turning my head from side to side and even making eye contact. Yes, I know I am very young for that – but I can!

Thank you, Mommy and Daddy, you have given me the best start possible and I am grateful to you!

