

## BabyGym<sup>®</sup> and Our Birth Stories

Diamari Schoeman

I was extremely blessed to do my BabyGym Instructor training with Dr Melodie de Jager while being pregnant with our first daughter Annebel. It was later that same year at a BabyGym conference that I learnt that there was a big difference between birthing your baby naturally, and birthing your baby normally. This intrigued me and opened up my curiosity to what it means to truly birth your baby naturally.

So in a nutshell what I had learned is that a normal birth refers to birthing your baby vaginally but that there are sometimes procedures included in this process like an induction, epidural, episiotomy, use of forceps, etc. A natural birth refers to the natural onset of labour and birthing your baby vaginally without any procedures, medication or interferences.

After numerous antenatal classes, studying my BabyGym manual and books, and reading up on the topic I felt more than ready to give birth to Annebel.

### Birthing Annebel

Wow the process was quite a bit different to what I had expected. I don't think any couple can truly be prepared for labour, no matter the route you choose, but knowing my body and my baby was benefitting throughout the entire process kept me going. I knew my baby's APGAR scores would be higher, her response rate quicker, I learned that the contractions were hugely important and helped the natural endorphins and hormones to secrete, enabling myself and Annebel to bond. Being born naturally also means your baby's sucking reflex is stimulated on her way out and so Annebel latched immediately after birth and suckled well. How privileged I was to know all of this before birthing my first baby. I was on top of the world!

### Birthing Rebekah

We had a very different journey with our second miracle. We discovered quite late that we were pregnant. What we thought was our first appointment at 12 weeks turned out to be our 16-week appointment. We were shocked but simultaneously very excited to become parents for the second time. I felt good and the pregnancy went well but when we received our blood results back we were startled to learn there was a very high chance of our baby being born with Down syndrome. This was very difficult news to receive and being faced with the question whether you want to proceed with the pregnancy or terminate was soul wrenching to say the least.

After days of thinking and praying, and praying some more, we decided to continue with the pregnancy. We felt that the choice over life and death was not ours to make. We continued with the appointments with the Gynaecologist and I could tell that a lot of attention was paid to studying Rebekah's hands, feet and face. I was fascinated by this and learned that Gynaecologists usually look for signs of Down syndrome in these parts of the body. There were typically "evasions" in the curve of the small finger, and the big toe was often further away from the other toes leaving a noticeable gap. I had also started to notice that I only felt my baby moving on the one side of my belly.

Although we had made up our minds about continuing with the pregnancy there were still a lot of troubling thoughts. "What is it like to raise a baby with special needs?", "Will I be able to handle it?", and "How will I explain Rebekah's differences to her sister Annebel?" Keeping this myriad of thoughts and emotions under control wasn't easy.

It was however easy to decide on a birth option. We would birth this baby like the first, naturally. The scans up to this point showed a very healthy “normal” pregnancy, and when it came to completing our documents for the hospital the Gynaecologist’s comment read “healthy pregnancy, normal birth...”

With our 36 week scan the doctor said that the baby has not turned yet, and that we can wait up until 37 weeks before trying to move the baby into the correct position. This procedure is called an External Cephalic Version (ECV). It is done by applying pressure to the abdomen and manually manipulating the baby into a head-down position. Very few experts would proceed with this due to some risks involved, and most of the time the baby rotates back into the breech position after being successfully turned.

At 37 weeks the doctor said that our baby was positioned bum first and that a normal birth was not advisable. That explained why I only felt movement on the one side of my womb! At that point I refused to except that my baby would be born with a caesarean section, I wanted the benefits for Rebekah offered by a natural birth.



At 38 weeks Rebekah had still not turned and we had to make peace with the idea of a caesarean birth.

I went into spontaneous labour 9 days before her estimated due date. My waters broke as we rushed into hospital and I hastily explained to the medical staff that my baby was in the breech position and that an emergency C-section was necessary. It was a Sunday night and no operations were scheduled... there was a skeleton staff on duty. I was already fully dilated and I could feel my baby being born with every contraction.

While waiting for medical staff to arrive, I explained to my husband what would happen next and what we needed to do after the caesarean section. I explained to him that once the medical procedures had been done he should take her, hold her skin on skin so she could smell and taste him, and talk to her to calm her and orientate her and to tell her that her mommy will hold her soon. I explained to him that her responses might be slower due to medications administered and that he could massage the crown of her head to stimulate the sucking reflex, he could also massage her hands to further strengthen the sucking reflex.

Praise God for my husband! He kept a clear head while I was feeling more than thinking. He took our baby, helped her, cared for her and because he was well equipped with all the BabyGym ‘tools’ she never had to go to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). When they brought her to me she latched immediately and had a strong sucking reflex. Her first APGAR score was 9/10 and again 9/10 5 minutes later.

The first few days in hospital were not at all like our first birth experience. In some ways I think I rejected my own body for not being able to help my baby to turn. Rebekah’s lower body was bruised and she was born with her feet all the way up to her face, (due to the time spent in this position in utero and the strong contractions that had already positioned her in the birth canal), but after a few hours her muscles started to relax and little by little her legs flexed back into a normal position. Due to the bruising of her lower body nappy changes were painful and unpleasant.

We did a lot of BabyGym massaging, outlining her body, and we continuously told her we loved her - assuring her that she was accepted and treasured. All of these important and effective BabyGym exercises helped all of us to survive. I can't imagine this journey without the information and tools from BabyGym.

The greatest pleasure of all was to see our beautiful baby's face for the first time. A perfectly healthy baby without any sign of Down syndrome.

Today she is 7 months old and adores her older sister Annebel.

