

BY CAMILLA RANKIN

# VBA2C...

...what's that? A vaginal birth after two caesars – Lynne Hosking wanted to and she did...



Sand fight: firstborn, Noah, with his dad, Guy



Lynne with her second born, Sammy

**D**ESPITE MORE AND more women, once again, opting for natural birth, choosing that route after one caesarean birth is still frowned upon in the private sector of SA and after two caesars it is considered a big no-no! But Lynne wanted to try – she backed herself up with a lot of research, a very supportive midwife and husband, a willing gynae and let nature take its course... and successfully gave birth to a big (4.1kgs), beautiful baby boy, Jesse, via natural, vaginal birth.

## NOAH FIRST CAESAR

“I would have liked a natural birth with my first child as I am an advocate of natural birth. Where there is genuine concern for the baby or mother’s health and wellbeing, then yes, a caesar is definitely preferable, but I am saddened that births have become a medical procedure needing medical intervention, rather than something natural that women have been doing since the beginning of time. With Noah, I hired a private midwife, Susan Lees from Birth Options. A lot of people have this idea that only doctors can properly look after a pregnant woman. I always left my midwife feeling inspired, nurtured and well looked after. I felt really cared for. They felt the baby manually to check its position, they counselled my fears and worries and gave me emotional strength and encouragement. I looked so forward to their visits. They were always a phone call away if I had any fears or concerns.

With Noah we planned a home birth. I had hired a birthing pool and we were all on track, except that he was breech and just didn’t seem to want to turn. I tried everything, I went to acupuncture,

did all sorts of special exercises, tried homeopathic remedies but he didn’t budge. The gynae agreed to try to turn him manually, but because of his position and because he had one leg straight, turning him was not an option. So a caesar was scheduled for 38-and-a-half weeks.” Although relieved that Noah (3.5kgs) was healthy and safe, Lynne did not enjoy the caesar.

“I remember lying on the operating table with the team tugging at him to get his head out while the gynae and assistant chatted casually about golf. It just felt wrong – I was having my first baby and yet they treated it like a routine knee op. It was very cold and clinical. Maybe I didn’t have my head wrapped around it properly, I suppose I was disappointed that my birthing plan had gone wrong.”

## SAMMY SECOND CAESAR

“When I fell pregnant 18 months later, I knew I wanted to try for a VBAC. Research shows that less than one percent of caesar scars rupture and there is a particularly low risk that this will happen with horizontal scars – like mine – with a high success rate when the reason for the first caesar was due to a breech baby. There would also be a 27-month gap between births, so there was never any worry that my previous scar had not healed properly. I went to the same midwife and her new partner for my prenatal care and found a gynae who backed up VBAC at the Life Vincent Palotti Hospital.

The pregnancy ran smoothly, I went into labour naturally the day after a stretch and sweep at about 4pm, and went into hospital later that night. The labour also ran smoothly, it was just long. I was given Pethidine to help me try and sleep and then later had an epidural. I



Lynne gave birth, naturally, to Jesse after two c-sections

reacted badly to the drugs and was really out of it. I ended up pushing for well over three-and-a-half hours and was truly exhausted! Sammy had turned during labour into a posterior position, which can happen with an epidural, a position known for long and painful labours. An epidural also often slows down labour, often means you can't feel where or how to push and also once it wears off; you are suddenly in full blown, very painful, labour – all of these things often lead to more medical intervention and my labour was a good example of that.

So, when Sammy repeatedly crowned and then slipped back again, and because of my caesar history, the gynae and midwife became quite concerned. They offered me a ventouse – a vacuum device used to help 'suck' the baby out – but because of the risk of swelling on the baby's head we decided to pull the plug. In retrospect I regret it, but at the time I was in so much pain, was thoroughly exhausted and felt so vulnerable, so another caesar seemed the right choice

and Sammy, our second son was born at 3.3kgs, full term."

### JESSE NATURAL BIRTH

"Then I fell pregnant with Jesse. Again, I was tempted to try for a natural birth. I did a lot of research on VBA2C. They were being done successfully in the UK and the US, and the statistics seemed to show that the risk of uterine rupture did not increase after two caesars," explains Lynne. "I figured that my first scar had survived the long labour and hard pushing with Sammy and that it would survive again. The midwife team of Susan and Ciska were incredible as usual, and supported me 100 percent as long as I could find a gynae to back up the birth. That part was trickier. I went armed with research to try and convince Dr Douglas Dumbrell to give me a chance. He had over 10 years of vast experience and is very supportive of natural birth. He believed that it was completely possible, but was concerned that it wasn't common practice. But as he reasoned, 15 years ago, >

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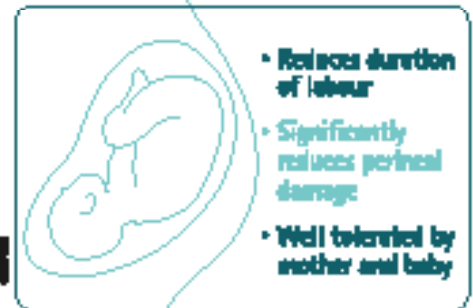
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 1. Dianatal<sup>®</sup> (Gel) Assists the Second Stage of Labour and Promotes Perineal Health in Postpartum Women: a controlled, randomised trial by Schaub, Dumbrell, Smith, A.C. International Journal of Obstetric Gynaecology 34 (2005) 128-132



## real life

people would never have considered doing vaginal births after one caesar and now it is being achieved. He agreed to let me try, especially once he found out that Groote Schuur Hospital supported a vaginal birth after two caesars, and were also doing them successfully. He gave me a reasonable deadline of about a week after my due date, after which I agreed I would have a caesar.

I did a lot of mental preparation. The book: *Womens' Bodies, Womens' Wisdom* by Dr Christiane Northrup became my pregnancy Bible. I did meditation, visualisation and walked a lot. When I went into labour, I welcomed it – I was in a very positive frame of mind; confident that it would all be successful. I was able to handle the pain so much better this time and didn't take any drugs. Dr Dumbrill set a reasonable timeline to have the baby before he would insist on a caesar. I also wasn't going to be irresponsible about it, if there was any sign that things weren't progressing well, I would opt for a caesar, I wasn't prepared to put my baby at risk. My head was in the right space, as well as having amazing support from my midwife, and husband, Guy. My waters were broken to speed things up and our third son, Jesse was born naturally just before midnight.

It wasn't easy, I had some tearing and stitches, but for me, it was far better than a caesar. I was driving in a couple of days and I was able to carry my other two boys without any problem. I was happy that I had achieved it, that Jesse came when he was ready to come, with minimal medical intervention. I am very grateful to Dr Dumbrill for supporting my choice, and I'd never have succeeded without Ciska's presence, amazing energy and support."



The three boys: Noah (5), Sammy (3) and baby Jesse (1)

### A WOMAN'S CHOICE

"In the end I managed to give birth naturally to a 4.1kg baby, despite being a very small-framed person and despite it being a VBA2C. It was important that I had the choice. Some women may choose an elective caesar and that is their right. Research is at our fingertips and it is up to us to do our own homework, and up to our caregivers to allow us to make an informed decision on the type of birth we want and believe we can achieve. This quote really sums up how I feel... "When enough women realise that birth is a time of great opportunity to get in touch with their

true power, and when they are willing to assume responsibility for this, we will reclaim the power of birth and help move technology where it belongs – in the service of women giving birth, not as their master. For many women, having a baby is their first experience of being connected with other women and with their vast creativity. It has the potential to transform the ways in which we think about ourselves. As one patient said to me 'I felt at one with every woman who ever gave birth. I felt powerful and in touch with something in me that I never knew was there. I took my place among the lineage of women as mothers.' YP

win

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