



Super dad Rob smiling over his baby boy Cameron

BECOMING A MOTHER

Gina prepared academically, emotionally and psychologically for the birth of her first child

BY CAMILLA RANKIN

As an academic person, environmental scientist and firm believer in western medicine Gina Ziervogel prepared for her first birth by reading, doing research and standard antenatal classes, but she also opened herself up to the idea that birth is a normal, natural process. Here is her all-natural birth story.

GOING NATURAL

"I started out with a fantastic Obstetrician/Gynaecologist, but after my 12 week scan I started to really think about the actual

birth. I started to do a lot of reading about natural labour and birth and realised that I really wanted to try natural labour if at all possible – I was not averse to an epidural but wanted to try doing it without. From my reading I started to see that birth does not have to be scary but is an amazing, natural process that the body goes through to get a child into this world.

I do strongly support western medicine and felt that if there were any complications for me, or the baby was in any way compromised I would be happy with a caesarean birth. One friend

suggested I use a midwife rather than my gynae as my gynae was apparently quick to caesar – I found this hard as I wanted to believe that a gynae would support my birthing choice but as I did more research, I decided that a midwife was the better option for me. I am so glad I did: I found a wonderful midwife who was supportive during the pregnancy and very grounded and present at the birth.

SOUL SEARCHING

I did Pilates until I was seven months pregnant and a preggie yoga class, which I loved. The yoga instructor was also a doula, so not only was it great to do stretching and breathing that focused on my baby, but a big part of each class was listening to many birth stories that the instructor attended. These stories went a long way in making me feel more familiar with a range of births.

I also read a lot of books with birth stories and listened to a few birth meditation CDs. Going to formal antenatal classes was also helpful in preparing for the academic side of birth and motherhood

– most importantly they were something my husband, Rob, and I did together to prepare for the birth. Apart from all the practical preparation I also went on a soul searching journey through a course called Vision Quest. It is a course I wanted to do for a while and although it is not specifically geared towards pregnancy and birth, they encourage you take part in the course at a time in your life when you are contemplating a life change or have a particular issue to resolve: and I thought, what a better time than preparing to become a mother?

It is an intense process, where you spend the first five days preparing with facilitators and the next four completely alone under a rock out in the wilderness. I was heavily pregnant at the time, so normally you fast for four days, but I chose a rock near the base station and was delivered a pack of food every day. It was incredible: I spent a lot of time thinking and writing about motherhood and being a mother; what my hopes are for my child and what special qualities and principles I can bring to motherhood.

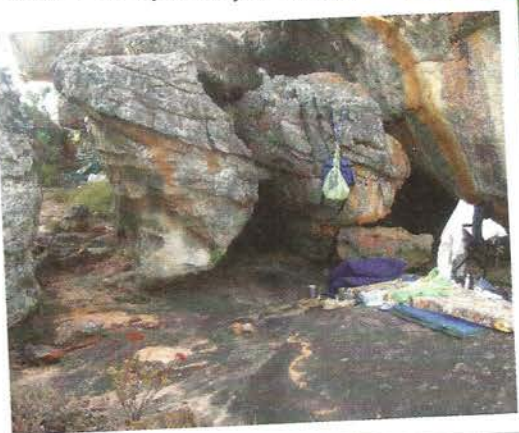
It was also a celebratory time for me: I made a little sculpture, painted my belly and wrote a lot. What I loved most about the process was that it gave me a chance to look beyond pregnancy and actual birth – it is so easy to focus on getting the baby out and lose sight of what happens afterwards – and to really think about being a mother and what having a baby meant to me.

KICK STARTING LABOUR

Ten days past my due date, we decided to induce labour using a prostaglandins gel to the cervix – the least invasive of the medical inductions. We had given the baby enough time to come out by himself – although I was still convinced ‘he’ was going to be a ‘she’! I was a bit worried about being induced as so many people say that an induction makes the birth more intense, but my doctor explained that the gel just kick starts contractions, only lasts a few hours and then wears off, so there is no reason for the birth to be any different to a non-induced labour.

I was induced at midnight and was told that Rob had to go home. At first I was quite upset as I wanted the support, but in retrospect I was glad as not much

happened at first and Rob was able to get some sleep while I lay on the bed reading magazines. Labour kicked in an hour and a half or so later, with mild contractions. I called Rob at about 2.30am and he arrived at 3am when things really started to ‘hot’ up. Rob rubbed my back at every contraction until the baby was born. I tried all sorts of things to deal with them: I had my bouncy Pilates ball



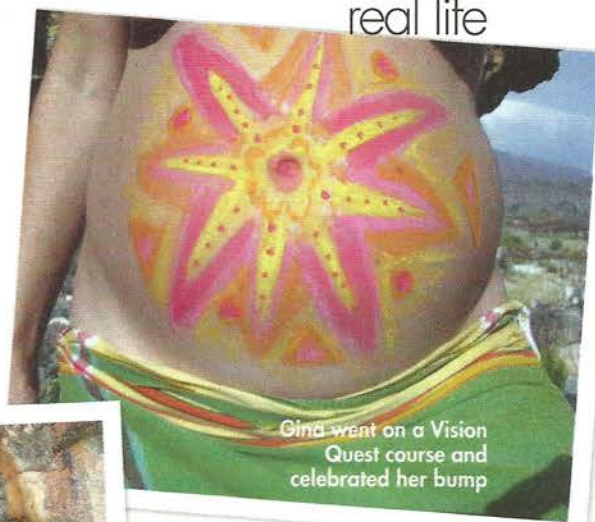
Gina went on a Vision Quest course and celebrated her bump

but that didn't work for me; I kneeled and leant against the bed and walls and I had one of those big beanbags that you heat in the microwave that I held on my tummy when a contraction came. As the contractions got hectic I asked Rob to rub my lower back through each one. At one stage he suggested I get into the shower. It was a brilliant suggestion and one I could not have thought of myself at that point. He pointed to his non-waterproof watch – a birthday present from me, but from the look in my eyes he quickly took it off even if it was not soon enough for me.

I think though that it was my breathing and meditation practice that paid off the most. The contractions were so intense and the breathing really helped me to stay in the moment and breathe with the contractions rather than fight them. I didn't land up using any of the other techniques from the books I had read such as visualising a rainbow or counting – just breathing!

A BABY IS BORN

At 4am my waters broke, the midwife arrived at 5am – I was 5cm dilated. She saw that things were going quickly and were very intense so she suggested I get into a bath: the relief was incredible. I had been open to a water birth but it wasn't



Gina went on a Vision Quest course and celebrated her bump

something I wanted particularly strongly. It was just that after I got in the water, there was no way I was getting out again. It did make rubbing my back for Rob pretty tricky but I am not sure how I would have coped without the bath. At 6am I was 8cm dilated and by 6.53am our (surprise!) son, Cameron

was born into the water and lifted onto my chest.

When the cord stopped pulsing Rob cut it. The last hour was incredibly tough and I had to work very hard to focus on my breathing and to figure out how to push him out by working with the pain rather than against it. Rob was a champion – so supportive in action, word and spirit, as was my midwife: so grounded and good at guiding me through the process.

SO WORTH IT

I moved to the bed soon after and Cameron was put on my chest, while my midwife helped him to latch: he started feeding immediately. He weighed 3.33kg, was 52cm long and had a 37cm head which is apparently rather big for his weight. And unfortunately his head size and my pushing caused me to tear. So the midwife stitched me up but saw that I had torn worse than she thought and I had to go for surgery.

After getting through labour without pain relief, I was given a saddle block in theatre and was on painkiller drips afterwards. But it was all worth it to get Cameron into the world. Lying there afterwards with him on my chest was the most amazing experience. YP