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## Plum Bites - The Birth Story Issue



Spring is on the way - Mother Nature has babies on her mind too.  
Photo: jpmckenna on flickr

Every season, we bring you an amazing birth story from our practice, and we always have a hard time choosing *just* one. This time we decided to share **five** with you. We were so inspired and excited by the variety of births that these stories represented and by the courage, grace and power in the women who share their passage to motherhood with us.

Every birth is unique. No mother knows how her journey will unfold. These five stories are no exception; they are as different as you can imagine. The tie that binds them all together is the way that each family found great joy and peace in their experience despite radically different circumstances.

We hope that you will enjoy and find inspiration in this wonderful collection of Plum birth stories.

### What's New at Plum?

#### **GROUP PREGNANCY & POSTPARTUM CARE**

In February, we began our first session of our new *Group Pregnancy and Post Partum Care* program and Group 2 is scheduled to start in April. Participants have had a chance to meet other expectant families, ask questions in a group setting, explore relevant topics like nutrition, family support, & goal setting, and receive their regular one-on-one belly checks with our midwives.



## Spring 2012

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### Best of the Web

*Every issue we bring you some of our favourite birthy news bites from around the web.*

#### **Power to Push**

The Power to Push campaign (run by BC Women's Hospital) encourages women in British Columbia to learn as much as they can. The goal of the campaign is to provide up-to-date resources for pregnant women and their families in BC, encouraging them to know their options, advocate for their choices, and push for the safest and best birthing possible. You can test your birthing knowledge, learn about 10 misconceptions, watch videos and more [here](#).

#### **Optimal Birth BC**

Optimal Birth BC is a team of clinical practitioners and researchers who work with health authorities in BC to critically review rates of cesarean birth and associated patient and practice-related factors. [Here](#) you will find BC practice patterns, news, evidence reviews, and resources (like a tool for calculating the likelihood you'll have a VBAC).

#### **Breech Birth**

Find out about your options if your baby is breech [here](#).

#### **VBAC**

[Here](#) you can learn the risks and benefits of VBAC - Vaginal Birth

Participants are saying:

*"It surpassed all my expectations!"*

*"I like the added extras fun and educational:  
I like the techniques, belly dancing, massage etc.  
to help me know my body."*

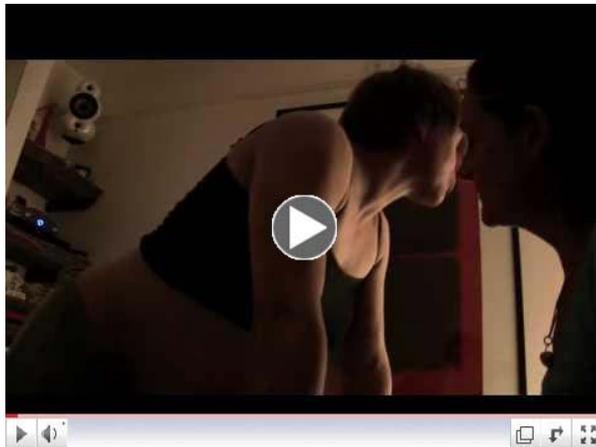
*"I like that we can all share our thoughts and questions, things  
that I haven't thought about and different advice."*

#### **INTERNATIONAL WORLD DOULA WEEK - MARCH 22-28, 2012**

Come celebrate **International World Doula Week** with us! We're hosting a free screening of the film ***Doula! The Ultimate Birth Companion***, followed by a presentation by **Comox Valley Doulas**.

#### **Doula!**

**March 23, 2012 ~ 6:00pm**  
**Strong Start Annex**  
**Cumberland Elementary**



**[Learn more about the film](#)**

#### **PLUM LIBRARY - OVERDUE BOOKS??**

We've noticed we're getting quite a stack of library cards for unreturned books here at the clinic. We know how it is in those early days with your new baby...it isn't always easy to remember to grab that pregnancy book as you juggle the diaper bag and figure out how to use the car seat for those first few post-partum appointments. If you've been discharged and you still have a Plum library book, this would be a great reason to pop in, say hi and show off that baby (who is sprouting like a weed). Courtney's always up for a chat and a spot of baby holding!

#### **A Family Affair**

After Cesarean.

#### **Plum Babies**



Visit our [website](#) for photos

#### **December 2011**

Finley, 9 Lb  
Linnea, 6 Lb 12.5 oz  
Neena, 7 Lb 13 oz  
Zoe, 9 Lb 8 oz  
Maria Rose, 6 Lb 10 oz  
Myles, 6 Lb 15 oz  
Lacie Grace, 7 Lb 6 oz  
Molly, 8 Lb 2 oz  
Finnius, 8 Lb  
Kora, 8 Lb 8 oz

#### **January 2012**

Joseph, 6 Lb 10 oz  
Parker, 9 Lb 5 oz  
Olive, 6 Lb 6 oz  
Mackenzie, 5 Lb 4 oz  
Dorian, 7 Lb 12.5 oz  
James, 6 Lb 11 oz  
Freya, 7 Lb

#### **February 2012**

Roman, 9 Lb  
Penelope, 7 Lb 2 oz  
Carla, 7 Lb 5 oz

**We want to feature your  
beautiful babe!**

Click [here](#) to email us a photo  
of your little one!

#### **"Like" Plum?**

We invite you to come on over and check out our Facebook page. You will find Plum news, interesting articles and news stories. **We would be thrilled if you would drop us a line, share your baby photos, post questions and help us make it a vibrant space for everyone who "likes" us.**

[Like us on Facebook](#) 



On Tuesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, just three days before our due date, my husband Norm and I welcomed into our lives our beautiful (hence the middle name) daughter Harper Bella. She arrived at 5:08 pm at St Joseph's Hospital, born into the hands of our amazing midwife Emma Gledhill. Also in attendance at her birth were her fourteen year old big sister Marina - who had attended her sister Madeline's birth almost four years earlier - and my own mother - who had been there for the birth of both of my daughters. Being that Harper was to be my third delivery - having had one c-section with Marina, and one successful VBAC (vaginal birth after caesarean) with Madeline - also delivered by Emma - I truly believed (or maybe it was just a whole lot of wishful thinking) that third time around would be a charm - or at the very least just a *little* quicker of a labour and delivery. Boy did I have another thing coming...

In the wee hours of the morning on Sunday, October 1, I felt my first contractions. With my husband away working in Victoria, I wondered if I should call him and have him make his way home or just wait it out a while and see what transpired. I opted to wait it out before waking him, since he was due home later that day anyways. It was a good thing I did, because although I was contracting off and on all night, things really weren't progressing and it was somewhat comforting for me to know that at least one of us was going to be well rested for the journey that lay ahead. I called him when I got up later that morning and told him not to dawdle and then with that being said, things for me pretty much came to a halt.

It wasn't until later that evening that things started up again. That night my husband slept but I did not! Although still irregular, I contracted ALL night. We called our trusty midwife Emma in the morning on Monday and she came to give me what would be the first of three at-home exams. To my dismay she found me to be only one centimeter dilated. That day I continued with my "pre-labor," with my contractions gradually getting stronger and closer together. Monday evening, with many contractions five minutes apart or less, we once again called Emma. She came to the house and gave me my second at-home exam. To my complete disbelief, I was still only one centimeter dilated. She told me I was still far too "happy" to be in true labour and suggested I spend as much time as possible laying

on my left side (which was opposite to how I had spent the night before) as she felt the baby was a bit tilted and that gravity may help her get into position, therefore allowing my labour to progress.

That night neither my husband nor I slept! My contractions were really long and incredibly intense but still too far apart throughout the night. As morning approached, they finally began coming closer together and we decided to give Emma yet another phone call. She arrived at our place around nine o'clock Tuesday morning. She examined me to find that I had finally dilated to four centimeters. What had begun to feel like the impossible had finally happened - I was now officially in active labour.

Around eleven o'clock Tuesday morning my husband and I decided to head to the hospital. My labour progressed steadily for the next few hours and somewhere around four o'clock that afternoon I entered the transition phase of my labour - contractions were long, hard and furious - with very little time between them for any sort of recovery on my part. My water still hadn't broken and when Emma suggested we give it until about six o'clock, I remember thinking "I would rather die than keep going for another two hours"! I think she may have "sensed" the immediate fear she instilled in me because the next thing I knew she was preparing to break my waters. And only minutes later - with only the slightest of an urge but plenty of encouragement - I began pushing.

I've heard women say that the pushing stage of labour was the easiest part and/or that their bodies just "took over" in this phase. Unfortunately my experience was not so and all I could think was "the harder and faster you push Leah, the quicker this unbearable pain will be over" - there was NOTHING easy nor instinctive to this final leg of the journey we so rightly call LABOUR. In those last difficult moments there was not even a trace of thought in my mind of the beautiful baby that was so close to being in my arms. My thoughts were only on my own survival. So I mustered up all of the strength that I possibly could and I pushed Harper out in a remarkable thirteen minutes - hands down the most grueling thirteen minutes of my life!



And then just like that it was all over. Lying in my arms was this

perfect baby girl, wide eyed and alert and ready to face the world. I wondered how these last few days had worn on her. And while utterly inconceivable while I was in the throws of labour - looking into her eyes I knew that if ever need be, I would do it all again for her - one hundred times over. And with each newborn cry or coo or smile, fades the pain I once - only six weeks ago - thought so impossible to forget.

I am forever thankful for the loving support and care I received during my pregnancy and post-baby from all of the midwives at Plum. And I am especially grateful to my amazing support team during this birth - my husband, my daughter, my mom and Emma.



To wrap up my story, I thought I would ask Norm, Marina and my mom for just a few of their thoughts on Harper's birth and here is what they had to say:

**Norm:** "One of the greatest moments of the birth was holding my lady's hands and looking into her eyes as she was getting ready to push - while at the same time staying strong for her and reassuring her that she could do this. It took *all* of my physical strength to push against her as she gave everything that she had to bring us our baby girl. I used to laugh when I'd see dads on TV or in the movies getting their hand crushed by their labouring partner, but now I know that it is no joking matter - it is very real - ouch! And then after what must have seemed like forever for Leah - out came our daughter and there she was - just beautiful. There is nothing in life like the bonding you have with someone as you experience and share bringing a precious life into this world."

**Marina:** "This was my second time watching a delivery - the first was to my other sister Madeline. I remember that the first time I was scared and it was hard for me to understand what exactly was going on since I was only ten years old. This time around seemed different - I knew what to expect and that made it easier for me. I felt kind of useless being there though - just sitting in the big brown chair in the birthing room until it was actually time for Harper to come. I felt bad that I couldn't do anything to help my mom with

her pain. But when she was just about to be born I realized that I was actually going to be a big sister again and that I could help her after with that. The experience of watching a baby being born is amazing - all my friends found it odd that I wanted to be there - but for me it was one of the best experiences ever. I got to put on her first diaper and I got to hold her - I just wish she could stay small forever."

**Mom:** "It's somewhat difficult for me to find the right words to describe the intense love and emotions that surrounded me on the afternoon of October 4th, as my daughter went through the final stages of a very long and difficult labour. But seeing my tiny granddaughter make her entry into the world and taking her first breath and hearing her healthy newborn cry, was absolutely one of my most special moments - one I will forever cherish. To my daughter, I am eternally grateful for the three very special little girls that call me 'Amma.'"

*Leah, Norm, Marina, Madeline & Harper*

## Home Sweet Home

When my water broke on December 1<sup>st</sup>, I was in disbelief that it was already happening! It was 9:45 a.m. and I was going about my regular Thursday morning routine with our 2 year old son Kai -we were at Kindermusik. I didn't have any other signs that labour was imminent and my due date was still 2 weeks away so it was hard to believe that our little one might be arriving sooner than later!

After a very difficult (and very medicalized) first birth experience with Kai, we were really hoping to experience a normal and comfortable birth at home this time. We were nervous about opting for this other extreme in case Finley would need medical support too (though we had no reason to believe that he would). I talked a lot with our midwives about our concerns and they took so much time to answer our questions. Despite our history, they still never seemed nervous about us birthing at home and this gave us a lot of confidence.

The next few hours on December 1<sup>st</sup> progressed uneventfully, which gave me time to get a few things in order in anticipation of our little one's arrival. Our midwife, Katie, came over to confirm that my water had broken and started my first dose of IV antibiotics (for GBS). My husband (Chris) had been working in Campbell River and came home right away. We called my parents so that they would be ready to come for Kai when things started to progress. I was too excited to rest, so I got some cleaning done around the house, did some laundry, baked some Christmas cookies, prepared some of the things that I thought we might need for my labour, and called a bunch of girlfriends. A friend of mine had planned to have a Birthing Ceremony for me that night at her house so once all of the women from that group knew it was canceled because I was in labour, I felt like I had a huge circle of support around me, cheering

me on.

Around 3:00 pm, I wondered if I might be starting to feel some tightness in my lower back. Chris had gone out for groceries as we realized that we didn't have any food in the house! At 4:20 pm when Katie came back to give my second dose of antibiotics and set up her birth supplies, I was feeling mild contractions but they were irregular. My first labour had progressed quickly so Chris stayed close and checked in with me regularly. By 5:15 pm my contractions were stronger but I was still able to walk around and write in my journal so I assured Katie that I was fine and that she had time to slip out for some dinner. My parents had just come to get Kai and my mom brought me the bead that she had planned to give me that evening at the birthing ceremony. I held onto this bead during the rest of my labour. By 5:45 pm, Chris felt we needed Katie back quickly (she never did get dinner). My contractions were strong but I was still walking around and in disbelief that things were progressing so quickly. It's a good thing Chris knew better! By 6:00 pm when Katie arrived, I was kneeled beside our bed and unable to look up when I heard her voice. I stayed inward, focused on the intensity of my contractions and my journey with Finley. I heard Katie phone the second midwife, Cat, to come right away. Despite the intense surges going through my body, everything around me felt comfortable. I kept telling myself to "let it happen" so that I wouldn't tense up against the pain and prevent the natural flow of things. I felt the need to push within a couple of minutes. When I could recover my breath, I also found it helpful to push in between contractions when I could move Finley along a little more gently. The lights were dim, Chris was close, and Katie was so calm in the midst of everything happening so quickly. There was no question that home was the right place for us this time.



Finley was born at 6:24 pm. Katie helped me bring him right up against my skin. Kai had been taken from us right away--something that I've always felt sad about--so with Chris close, we held Finley against me, taking in every moment before anything else.



Eventually, Chris started making phone calls to announce Finley's arrival. We called my parents to bring Kai back instead of having him spend the night with them, as it didn't feel quite right not to have him with us on such an important occasion for our family. Once I'd been laying down for a couple of hours and had a shower, I got up and we sat by the fire with Katie and my parents to celebrate over a few sips of wine.



It was an incredible day. I wish I could do it all over again. I am thankful for Finley's safe arrival, for the privilege of going through pregnancy and birth, to feel the closeness that I have with Chris, and to have been able to birth at home. This was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. Thank you Plum, and especially to

Katie, for your confidence in us and for your support through this beautiful journey.

## Melissa, Chris, Kai & Finley

### Choices & Miracles



As I lay in bed late into the night, thinking about writing my birth story, I look at my beautiful family in bed with me. I am, and forever will be, in awe of the miracle of birth and how bringing a human being into this world truly can complete and satisfy your life in so many wonderful ways.

This was my second pregnancy. Our first daughter Elenah, after 30 odd hours of trying, came to us via c-section. With this pregnancy, I was bound and determined to have the baby naturally. Our little Zoe came into this world at 10:13am, December 11, 2011.

I was eight days past my due date and a number of emotions were stirring. We live in Port Hardy, so our waiting took place in Courtney. Away from our home, our supports, our pets, our life. We just wanted our baby to come so we could take him or her home and start our little cozy life together. After a couple of stretch and sweeps, two acupuncture sessions, and a couple of tablespoons of castor oil, things were shaping up.

On the evening of December 10th, I quickly arose to sudden contractions. No lead up, whatsoever. I got out of bed, walked to the shower and told my husband to call the pager. Talk about intense! They were five minutes apart and super strong. I remember looking up and saying "okay God...this is it. Help me through this." It wasn't too long when Emma arrived, checked me out and noted that I was 3 cm dilated. At that point, I decided to get on to St. Joseph's because I feared that if we waited any longer, getting into the truck would be impossible.

The next nine hours seem to be a blur. I just remember my amazing

husband by my side supporting me the whole way and Emma consistently monitoring me. The pain was out of this world. They were ten times more intense than with Elenah. I consider myself to be a strong, workhorse woman...but man, was I a wimp!!! I remember telling my husband over and over that I didn't think I could do it. He just kept on reassuring me. Emma kept on saying, "you are doing it Jen!" At around 5 or 6 in the morning I got to 6 cm! Progress! Yes! I only got to 4 cm with my first daughter. I was beginning to feel like all this work was doing something. The next three hours were unbearable. The ventalin was not giving me any satisfaction...my once so confident husband was beginning to get very tired. I remember looking at him and seeing tears stream down his face. This baby needed to come now!!

I remember feeling pressure, and telling Emma that I needed to go to the bathroom. She told me the pressure I was feeling was my baby's head ready to come out. We got into position to push. It was 9:30am. Emma checked to see how far I was. I will never forget the look on Emma's face. She said..."Jen, I'm so sorry...but you're still only 6 cm!" That is when I completely lost it. Tears of discouragement and utter disappointment.

I could not go any further. I knew that there was no possible way that I could. I looked at my husband, grasped his hand so tight and told him that I was done. He nodded and commended me on how hard I tried, but he could not see me go any further. He was done too.

Dr. Hartman came in and gave us two choices. Choice one--Have an epidural and continue to have contractions in hopes of progression. Choice two--Cesarean. I wanted so badly to have the natural birth experience, to hold my baby as he or she came into this world. To have that moment with my husband. I had dreamed of it so many times. But...at that moment the possibility of it happening was pretty slim. I just wanted to see my baby. If it meant a c-section, than c-section it was.

I was scooted down to the surgery room and was given an epidural (relief at last). Less than thirty minutes later our baby girl was born.

Was I disappointed that I had a c-section? Did I feel jipped that I didn't get to experience what the female body was capable of doing? Did I miss out on the skin-to-skin contact? No.....my baby is with us and that is all that mattered.



I wasn't in recovery for very long, when Joanne brought Zoe to me. Right away, she latched and started feeding. Dr. Hartman said that we made the right decision. Zoe's head was lodged and stuck in my pelvis. He literally had to pop her out. Her poor little head was shaped like a cone from trying so hard. I felt so blessed and grateful that Zoe was safe and in my arms. A few days stay in the hospital than we made the drive home and had a unforgettable and cozy Christmas with our new little girl. Thank you to the awesome team at Plum. Your support and dedication is and forever will be appreciated!

*Jen, Dean, Elena & Zoe*

### **The Joys & Challenges of the Unexpected**



Our son, Parker James MacGibbon, was born on Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup>. I woke up that morning not at all expecting what was to happen that day. I was just three days past my due date and feeling a little anxious to meet our baby, but all around pretty good. At 8:00 in the morning I received a call from the hospital asking me to come in for a routine ultrasound at 11:20. The scan was intended to check my

fluid levels and to make sure that baby was healthy.

We arrived at the hospital and had the scan, but the technician told us she had to check a few things with the doctor. After waiting for a little while, the technician came back and let us know that the doctor needed to talk to the midwife on call, Emma. I started to feel a little worried at this point, but I didn't think there would be anything serious.

Emma arrived at the hospital and after talking with the doctor, let us know what was going on. The radiologist thought our baby was swollen, which indicated an infection and meant that our little guy would have to come out right away by cesarean. When we heard this, Patrick and I were so shocked! My pregnancy had gone very smoothly and I didn't expect anything like this to happen. Even though we knew to keep an open mind about our birth plan and we knew that a c-section could always happen, we didn't actually think it would. However, in the moment, we were just thinking about our baby and hoping that everything would be okay.

Emma took us up to the maternity ward and I was hooked up to the fetal monitor and preparations were made for the c-section. We were very nervous this whole time since no one really knew what Parker's condition would be when he was born. We were so grateful to have Emma with us! She was so supportive and helped us understand the whole situation.

From here, everything happened very quickly and after the pediatrician arrived and we met with the anesthesiologist, I was taken down to the operating room. Once there, Patrick had to wait upstairs while I was given a spinal, but he came back down for the delivery. The cesarean only took about 5 minutes and by 3:04 pm our Parker was born. As soon as he made his entrance into the world he was pink and screaming and seemed perfectly healthy!

I could hear his amazing cries and as they carried him over to be checked I could see his little hands and feet and I was in love. It was immediately clear that he wasn't sick at all and right away Emma and the nurses assured me that he was fine! I was so relieved and just wanted to hold him.

Once he was swaddled Emma brought him over to me for a little snuggle and then he and Patrick went upstairs to have some skin on skin cuddles while I was in recovery. After spending just over an hour in recovery, I was taken back upstairs to the maternity ward and finally got to hold my Parker and breastfeed him right away. Parker was born with a full head of hair and weighed 9 lbs. 5 oz.! I was totally surprised that he was such a big boy and it turned out that what the radiologist had thought was swelling was just his chub. In the end the cesarean wasn't necessary, but we were so relieved to know that he had no infection and was so healthy.

Parker's birth was very unexpected and didn't look anything like the birth we were planning. Even though we were so overjoyed to have finally met our son and to have such a healthy, beautiful boy, I still found it hard to process his birth. It was a very scary day and I had really wanted to experience labour and delivery. The first week was the hardest, but sharing our story helps and we have had such

amazing support from everyone at Plum! We are so grateful to have had their care and help in bringing our precious son into this world! We are loving being a family of three and going through the joys and challenges of parenthood. I can't imagine our lives without Parker and I can't wait to learn more about our baby boy!

## *Jaimie, Patrick & Parker*

### Turn of Events



Our first child was a Plum homebirth, and it was a beautiful experience. We planned to do a homebirth for our second baby. This time it was different.

After water broke and contractions begun, we discovered that our baby had turned into the breech position, and that we needed to go to the hospital. We were stunned, and luckily had our midwife at home to prepare us for what the next few hours lay in store. She told us that the obstetrician would insist on doing a c section, and that it was our right to accept or refuse any procedure.

This was a difficult, heartwrenching decision which needed to be made quickly. We knew that if we wanted to go for a vaginal birth, our minds needed to be made up firmly, before we went to the hospital. Being the internet age, we googled stats on the risk factors, and looked over the guidelines and studies on breech birth and obstetric practice for Canada. We flip flopped on our decision several times and we just couldn't decide. Avoiding major abdominal surgery and have a natural birth against avoiding the unthinkable worst case scenario of a slightly more risky birth.

Finally we let our hearts make the decision... we felt that it would be OK. Vaginal birth it would be, so we got ready to go to the hospital. All of this would have been total confusion if we didn't have our midwife with us.

Our midwife told mama to focus on resuming labour, which had

kinda stalled during all the heavy concentration. So on the way to the hospital, mama did just that, and papa was trying to stay cool while stopped at a construction zone!

We parked at emergency and left grandmother and first born there in the mini van, and waddled up to maternity. As expected, the doctor and nurse were displeased with our decision, and it turned into a stressful drama. They felt disrespected, and we needed their services.

Finally the heavy wave washed over, and opened the way for birthing. The OB, nurse, and midwives all did great jobs. A relatively quick and easy vaginal birth followed.



But I also need to say that I would not encourage someone to follow what we did. Every case is different, and as difficult as it is, every case needs its own decision\*.

*Miyako, Stephen, Clemente & Neena*

*\*Note from Plum: For more info on the risks, benefits, and evidence-based practices of vaginal breech birth, please refer to:*

**[SOGC Breech Birth Guidelines](#)**

**[Mothers of Change - Breech Birth in Canada](#)**

**[Coalition for Breech Birth](#)**

**Thank you to our clients. You are why we love what we do--even at 3:00 in the morning.**

Sincerely,

Joanne, Emma, Katie & Cat.

**Plum Midwifery**

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