

# Mum's the Word

*Secret Diary of a New Mother*

A guide for every parent-to-be or excited relative

E K Wills

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



# 1. INTRODUCTION

*"Think of the world you carry within you." (Rainer Maria Rilke)*

Being pregnant gave us the opportunity to imagine the concept of baby, prepare for her, and to be creative with the pregnancy as a couple.

We took a series of photos at monthly intervals to see my belly grow then framed them after Candy's birth with the final photo of us together.

We made a belly cast when I was over eight months' pregnant as a keepsake to show Candy when she was older.

Importantly, I kept a journal with doodles, images and thoughts of how I was feeling on a daily basis to help me process what I was experiencing.

All that was BC (before child).

Now Candy is here, it's a new phase with less downtime. There's so much to learn and adapt to and it seems there is so little time to myself to work out which way to turn.

I read that the three stages of pregnancy are cheery, teary, and weary. Prenatal classes help you through that but they never mentioned what it would be like AFTER baby was born.

I turned to parenting books and they seemed so sure of themselves.

I would have loved to have a shoulder to cry on, a word of advice, a hint that I wasn't the only one going through this phase and that it was okay to have these feelings of helplessness.

This account is an attempt to give solace and company through that initial craziness, so you know that there is light at the end of the tunnel and that it is well worth the tough journey you are undertaking.



Photo by Hedonics

**FIRST MONTH**

## 2. THE BIRTH

*“Other things I could run away from, but not, apparently, your birthday.” (Ten Ch’in U)*

Simon and I met on Mars. Not actually Mars but the movie, *Red Planet*, that we both worked on based here in Sydney. It was the spark of our relationship that two years later led to the decision to have a baby. We were both busy in the art department of films, lucky enough to live close to the beach and have a creative lifestyle.

Although my baby’s birth was textbook perfect, it is still imprinted on my brain with complete clarity, assisted by the retelling in mothers’ group and to interested family members. It was such a life-changing experience that it needs mentioning. It was the rite of passage to this new life and I still can’t believe I survived!

I spent pre-labour having a massage at the osteopath where he informed me I was in labour and not just experiencing period-like pains. So, I went home and had a lie down (to “not give it too much energy”, as the prenatal classes instructed).

At 11 minutes apart, I texted my husband Simon to let him know how I was going and said not to worry about coming home, yet.

Soon after, he turned up with a dozen long-stemmed scarlet roses and a goofy smile on his face so we could “be calm” together.

So we went to lunch.

Nothing like sipping champagne between contractions, while watching the waves from the lofty heights of a restaurant balcony in Bondi.

About 4pm, the contractions were getting stronger so we walked home in time for my sister, Loo, to turn up. By 5:30pm, I was pulling my hair to detract from the pain and beating my fists on the bed. But even though the contractions were close together, they were still erratic in length.

Simon called the birth centre:

“Shall we come in now?” he queried.

“How is she? Can she talk?” responded the midwife.

He passed me the phone after that contraction subsided and I was surprisingly lucid. This meant, of course, I was advised to stay put!

Loo suggested that we go anyway, or it would be too difficult in the car. It is a 20 minute drive to the hospital on Sydney roads. Lucky we did...

When Loo got in behind the passenger seat to brace my arms, I knew I was in for a treat—it was peak hour.

Each wave of contraction had my body arched in the seat so I didn't feel the bumps. I accepted Loo's support, gratefully.

By 6pm, we were at the front door of the hospital and I fell out of the car into a contraction.

Where was my wheelchair? And the buzzing numbers of people to come to my rescue? As I came out of the grip of my contraction, I realised I was still on the ground and no-one was coming to rescue me.

We went inside and were graciously allowed to go up to the birth centre.

Another clenching contraction in the elevator.

Got into the room and, bang, another one. The midwife assured me we'd still be going for hours. Loo came in asking what to do.

"Run the bath!" I yelled, urgently.

My examination was conducted on the toilet (childbirth leaves no room for modesty) and I was informed I was already eight cm dilated.

"Is that ALL?!" I screamed. I was thrashing around, unable to get a grip on anything to stabilise myself.

I got into the queen-sized bath and flailed even more.

Poor Simon got in at my feet and became my stomping board as I attempted to beat my way out of there.

"How can anyone go through this excruciating splitting of pelvic bones and survive?" I thought as I raised my eyes to the sterile ceiling. This didn't help Simon, who was staring at me, wide-eyed and fearful.

I couldn't look at him.

Mum arrived soon after us, then my friend, Jo, came to capture the joyous occasion in happy snaps. The room was full of people but I couldn't see anything past the task at hand.

Moments of panic about tearing or pooing ensued, interspersed with me yelling the house down to let out the bursting feeling.

"Don't push!" advised the midwife.

What?

“How can I not?” It felt like trying to hold back something as natural, as involuntary, as vomiting. There was no way...

One minute I was being split, feeling the head slide between my bones, the next there was a real baby in front of my very eyes.

Fast and furious, baby was out: within the hour, in the water, with everyone present.

Labour was surreal, a totally new experience for my body that was very intense.

I couldn't grasp that the purely conceptual idea of baby was now a reality. I almost wasn't ready because it had all gone so quickly. I'd prepared for months for labour and it was already over.

Because the cord was so short, I couldn't reach to hold her. Simon gathered her up, and I felt immense relief – I was still stinging from so-called “minor” graze and a single tear, plus the placenta still needed to be delivered (almost the size of a baby!).

Afterwards, I got the wobbles as I emerged from the bath.

Then I needed to be stitched so it was little wonder baby didn't take to the breast. She probably sensed I wasn't ready yet.

While stitching occurred, the full room of support people vanished. Since the birth was all over, they went off to secure cups of tea, deal with the car, paperwork and, apparently, have a chat (!).

Meanwhile, I'm wincing and baby is wailing.

Note to self: if I do this again, I will put it in my birth plan I'm to be supported after the birth, too!

On the way up to the ward, I needed to suck ice blocks to soothe my throat, which I now realised was hoarse after trying to vocalise my body's surprise.

### 3. VENTING THERAPY

*"In one decision life can change forever." (Caia Hagel)*

Straight out of hospital into the waiting arms of family.

Both sets of parents had to fly here and are staying in nearby accommodation, which means they naturally spend most of their time in our tiny flat. Mum came from the north coast and the alternative lifestyle of ex pats from Sydney. Simon's parents, Ethel and George, are from the more European enclave of the south.

With everyone in town, I have started to get jumpy instead of feeling a sense of security I desperately need.

When Candy slipped in the bath, Mum got such a fright that her yelp made us all jump. Then Ethel, Simon's mum, worried that Candy couldn't breathe in the sling. I think it's put me on edge, worrying that I'm doing things the right way.

I've started to fuss, too...

Is it too loud in this cafe for her ears? (Yes, we live in a cafe-culture city.) What about people smoking around her? Is this fussing and worrying a contagious condition or does it come on when you become a parent?

\* Three days of after pains

\* One day of tears

\* Two days with a headache

\* And one good day with "just" sore nipples then another with tears...

Yes, it's all been "natural". No drugs! But there were plenty of occasions when I really struggled because I had made the decision to do it naturally, avoiding even painkillers.

I'm tired of well-meaning input. I'm irritable with Simon; and I'm short fused with Candy at night. That's what comes from lack of sleep, I guess.

I try to focus on getting things around me in order, like housework, but can't seem to get Simon motivated to do these tasks for me.

"Honi, can you just clean up after lunch while I give Candy a feed?" Our sun-filled, one bedroom unit should be easy to keep in order but the extra baby items add another dimension to the mess.

"I will, I just want to have a coffee first."

What I really want is to jump up and do it myself but I'm tied to the sofa for what seems like hours, breastfeeding.

I'm trying to 'demand feed' as the midwives suggest which is supposed to mean baby will eat when baby is hungry. It started well with three to four hour intervals. So why has it become erratic after only a couple of weeks and now there's only one and a half hour intervals between feeds?

My nipples are incredibly sensitive so when she starts to suck, the let down really hurts. For those who have never had the pleasure, it's when baby sucks enough to get the milk flowing out.

I've started to wonder if I'm doing it right... and the breastfeeding appointment with the lactation consultant isn't for another six days which seems like an eternity with eight pinches a day at each feed!

A day of tears due to Simon and Mum bickering:

Mum suggests, "How about we try taking Candy for a walk?"

Simon grunts, doesn't even bother looking at her.

Mum squirms and her irritation shows.

I'm exasperated they aren't communicating but have enough to deal with trying to make head or tail of whether Candy needs a sleep, a drink or maybe some stimulation.

I now don't feel I can talk openly to vent my feelings. Simon takes it on and it manifests in his behaviour towards Mum. She told me she gets insecure and thinks he doesn't like her.

When conversations don't flow well, I feel I need to fix it: the quintessential piggy-in-the-middle. I feel responsible for family relations and whether everyone can work together. Is that the role of the mother now?

But what about my mother? Why do I feel responsible for her when I'm new at this and want to be shown the ropes?

But then, do I really? I'm used to doing things my way. I've been working independently for a long time now, so it's no wonder Mum doesn't know what I need. But I can't communicate what I need because I don't know!

I'm desperate to chat to my little sister, Loo, privately. But she's caught up with trying to start a new life having moved to the north coast as a single mum. She lives an hour's flight away but that's excruciatingly far when I want to debrief about Mum and Simon. With only 15 months between us, we've always been close, and it seems we can pick up where we left off each time, and instantly understand each other. It helps that she became a mother recently so the experience is new and raw for her, too. I want the reassurance and benefit of

her experience. I've tried calling but she's hopeless at answering... it's her free spiritedness,  
says Mum.

This morning I've opted for the therapy of writing since it's my most accessible outlet:  
instantly available.