



I was born in 1946

As a teenage girl in the early sixties most girls my age dreamt of meeting the right man and getting married and having a baby. I was no different. Not many girls had lasting careers. I was an apprentice chef at the local hospital. On one of the nights out with my two girl friends I met this very handsome young gentleman and as they say the rest is history.

We became engaged 6 months later and after another 6 months we were married, this was 1966. When it was coming close to the wedding, my boss asked me when I was leaving my job as they had to employ someone to take my place. I had not told him that I would be moving out of the district, women were just not expected to continue working when they got married, nurses, teachers and a few other professions were okay, but the rest were taking men's or single girls jobs.

After the wedding I moved to our house and set about making it into a home. Life was good my dream was coming true. My husband worked shift work. Not long after we were married he came home early one shift and said the company has gone out on strike. The strikes were often, in our early years, and money was very tight. We managed and lived from pay day to pay day. We had no refrigerator or washing machine, I bought meat each day from the butcher in our street, and washed our clothes by hand, I did however have a hand wringer that I used to wind to wring the water out of the clothes.

Four months after we were married I started feeling a little sick, I had missed two periods and thought that I could be pregnant. I made an appointment to see a doctor. Telling the doctor what I thought he proceeded to give me an internal examination, I was shocked not being told that is how you found out (no pregnancy test kits back then). He confirmed my suspicions and when I picked my husband up from work I told him. We were very excited and went off to tell his parents, and the following weekend off to the country to tell mine. Every one was happy for us.

That same week our happiness was shattered with a knock at the door to say that my husband's brother had been killed in a car crash. They were very close he had been best man at our wedding. Apart from the death of my grandmother when I was

18, I had had no connection with death, but knew support was needed and all I could do. This was a hard time because in those days men didn't cry, and did not talk about how they felt.

The pregnancy continued and was all to the book with no major problems, other than morning sickness that lasted all day and most days for the first 4 months. Cooking the meals were no problem it was when they were set before me that I felt sick. I still continued to run the home and managed to make a lot of the baby clothes. Babies were dressed in dresses boys and girls. They had layers of clothes singlet, petticoat, dress and matinee jackets, bootees, and bonnet, and cloth nappies. No all-in-one-suits.

When I was 6 months pregnant my sister took ill, as she had 3 children and expecting her fourth someone had to look after the children. We took her 4year old daughter she stayed with us for 10 weeks, the other children went to my mothers. This time was taxing but we managed.

The time came for our baby to be born, my water broke when I was at my mother-in-laws, and I had to go to hospital by ambulance. The labour was very slow but you weren't allowed out of bed and husbands were not required to be too close as they might get in the way. Not much progressed for 36 hours and the doctors were considering a caesarean, not wanting to be a part of that I got on with the job and delivered a beautiful daughter. The baby was shown to me and very quickly whipped away to the nursery, while the hospital staff attended to me. My husband was allowed to see me briefly, and then told to leave as I needed my rest. The baby was brought to me after it had been bathed and dressed, handed to me and said she is hungry. I was never shown how to breast feed you were expected to know. The baby was then brought to me every 4 hours during the day for feeding; the hospital staff looked after the baby at night, because new mothers need their rest. During visiting hours I, as all new mothers were not allowed out of bed and we sat like royalty dressed up in our frilly nighties. My husband was allowed to view his child through the glass windows of the nursery. He never got to nurse any of his children till they were home. We were told it was to protect the babies from germs from the outside world. This was the same for the birth of our second daughter some 13 months after the birth of our first child. We didn't stop there we had another daughter some 12 months to the day after the birth of our second making 3 girls in 25 months.

My second pregnancy went well, the only problem was a bit of high blood pressure I had a week in hospital resting till it came down then everything progressed as normal. My mother came and looked after my husband and daughter; she stayed till after I had the baby as the doctor would not let me home till I had help. No question of men having time off from work. When I went into labour my husband took me to hospital. The labour was shorter and apart from excessive bleeding all went well. We had a beautiful healthy daughter. My mother stayed for another week after I came home. It was until I got into a routine.

The third pregnancy was a breeze, well all the way through till the birth. I spent four days in hospital in full blown labour in a ward with other woman who had already had their babies. I had all the labour pains in my back and therefore they weren't felt as contractions. One of the sisters wanted to send me home as she said I was faking it. My doctor called in a specialist who gave me an internal examination and said "this baby will be born within the hour get this woman to the labour ward". My third beautiful daughter was born 45 minutes later, the doctor had trouble stopping the bleeding they gave me two pints of blood. I was very weak for a few days and not allowed out of bed. Mind you I had a lot of attention after and the sister apologised I think she learnt that not all labour is the same. I spent 10 days in hospital after the birth recovering. Our daughter had mucus on the chest as they were too busy looking after me to clear her chest properly; this was a problem for almost 12 months as she used to projectile vomit.

The doctor said that I should not have any more children, if I wanted to stay healthy. This we adhered to for the next 4 years, we desperately wanted to try again to see if we could have a son. This didn't take long and I was pregnant again.

All went well till the 5th month one night I awoke to a wet feeling and I had haemorrhaged. Lucky my mother was visiting at the time and she looked after the girls while we went to the hospital. I was informed that if the baby was to arrive safely I was to stay in bed in hospital till the birth. My mother stayed a little while but then my mother-in-law took over caring for my brood. She did a great job as two were at school she would get them ready every school day and one of our friends would pick them up and take them to school. The third girl was 4 years old, no pre-schools then, so activities at home were the go. My husband was well looked after as well, and all survived.

Our son was born six weeks premature, the birth was breech (feet first) and again was taken away to the nursery this time to intensive care, where he stayed for a few days. I was able to visit the nursery and could hold him up to the window for my husband to view him. I had the same problems with this birth; this makes you very weak, but with a couple pints of new blood, and a new little son and knowing I had 3 little girls and a husband at home, that I missed dearly I soon recovered. I took our son home to 3 adoring sisters and a besotted father. Our son had four mothers, the girls wanted to do everything for him. I breast feed him as I had the others only this time because he was premature he was slow to feed I had to feed him every two hours. This was extremely hard to do with 3 other children demanding attention as well. He took nearly an hour to feed as he kept falling asleep. All I seemed to be doing was feeding him. Against the advice of the clinic sister I put him on the bottle and he thrived. There was no outside help except for baby health centres, which were run by middle aged women who expected every child to be the same.

We had decided not to have anymore children as it was too risky for me. In late February 1980 I began to have a lot of pain down my right side every time I put my right foot to the ground a pain would shoot from groin upwards. I visited the doctor who set me to a

specialist who said I had an enlarged womb and need a curette. This I had and the pain went away. In late March the pain returned only this time worse till one day I felt that a bomb had exploded inside me. I was taken to hospital and needed emergency surgery I had had an entopic pregnancy and my right fallopian tube had burst. Again it was hard to stop the bleeding and I required 4 pints of blood. My husband was able to look after the children this time as they were now capable of making a meal for themselves (even if some of it got burnt) and were all at school. There was no follow up treatment or counselling. Emotions were a thing you kept to yourself, and you had to get on with life.

When I was asked to write about my experience in having my children and the differences between then and now, I had not realised how much things have changed. My daughters and daughter-in-law had good support when having their babies and were well informed. Their husbands and my son played major roles all the way through the pregnancies and were expected to be in the birthing suite and to participate in the birth even cutting the cord. The other changes are also in the household, my son and sons-in-law are very capable and can do everything that is required in looking after children as well as cooking and cleaning.

In summing up it is my opinion that although some things have changed. Apart from wanting my husband to be more involved with the birth of our children. I would not change anything, it was part of the era I lived in.