

The birth according to Candy

Jude White was born on Sunday, June 6. Things did not go exactly to plan and the hypnobirthing course proved invaluable, especially for Stuart, who had not been taking the pregnancy seriously enough. He was pretty clueless.

The sessions fully prepared us and brought us together as a team – he would not have coped or been able to support me during the birth without them. The surges started late on Saturday night and Stuart helped control the discomfort using light-touch massage and



Happy family: Candy, Stuart and Jude

our positive affirmations. He timed the surges so we knew when to go to hospital. Stuart then made sure all the midwives (we had five) were aware of our birth preferences and plan. He helped control the tempo of my breathing once in the birthing pool and I felt reassured by his calm nature. I barely said a word other than to ask for air, a flannel and juice. The midwives all commented on how well we were doing and how calm I remained.

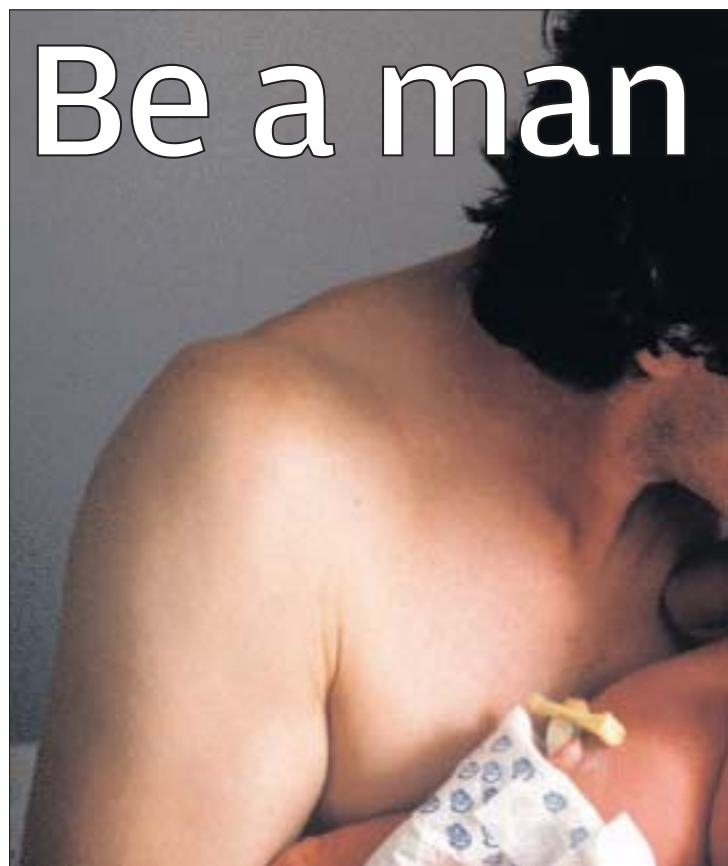
It was not until 8pm that I was ready to start pushing. It was

then we discovered Jude had moved into the posterior position, which was why things had taken longer than expected. I got out of the pool and Stuart talked through the options with the senior midwife, allowing me to focus on my breathing using just gas and air. He knew what I wanted if things took an unexpected turn and decided to go ahead with the ventouse [a cup-shaped suction device applied to the baby's head] and I had an episiotomy to give Jude more space. We then discovered he had his cord around his neck but his heart rate remained constant throughout the delivery. I was so proud of us as a family, and I am loving our new life together.

Body Matters

Edited by James Day bodymatters@ukmetro.co.uk

Be a man



Hypnobirthing: A man taking charge during childbirth? I was a bit skeptical too but there really is a way for men to take some of the strain on the big day **BY STUART WHITE**

I had always believed the maternity ward delivery room was a woman's domain. That the man's role consisted of calling for the ambulance or rushing his partner to hospital, then waiting nervously in the hospital corridor praying for everything to be OK and over as quickly as possible. Or maybe, if my presence was absolutely demanded, stealing a drag on the laughing gas and saying patronising things such as 'keep going, darling'.

So I prepared to be of limited use to my wife Candy: I would hold her trembling hand while absorbing her abuse. Until that is, I reluctantly agreed to miss football and spend two whole Saturdays on a hypnobirthing course.

I had no idea the man could play such a leading role in childbirth. But when, erm, push came to shove, there I was, relaxing my wife, focusing her breathing through the birth plan with the midwives and making informed decisions with confidence. I amazed myself. In my wife's words, after the safe arrival of our baby Jude: 'I was the body, you were the mind.'

Giving birth is the most natural thing a woman can do, yet many female minds are filled with horror stories. Fear leads to tension, which can restrict the body at a time when it needs to let nature take its course. Hypnobirthing offers hypnosis in labour and childbirth to women who

want to be in control of a drug-free, comfortable delivery and get their men pulling their weight.

Now more popular than ever in Britain, hypnobirthing is a complete antenatal education for whatever kind of birth you're planning. We chose a hospital birth pool – alternative, yes, but perfectly normal in the modern age; even old-school midwives are coming round to it.

Signing up to Berkshire HypnoBirthing, we joined three other couples eight weeks before their due date at a Pilates studio in Reading. The comprehensive course was split over two days and our hypnoteacher, Vanessa Turner, made learning each new topic easy, between lessons sending the group into a state of deep relaxation.

'HypnoBirthing techniques and methods are easy to learn and apply,' says Turner (inset left). 'They play a



vital role in making the birthing experience calmer, more peaceful and meaningful for mum, dad and baby.

'The man's role is crucial. He provides practical, emotional and physical support – much better than sitting in the corner wondering what he can do to help.'

Turner explained ten ways to achieve a gentle birth, the rationale for hypnosis in birth and how to block out birth nightmares. We were told to not even consider them and to leave out negative energy. The mind can only hold one

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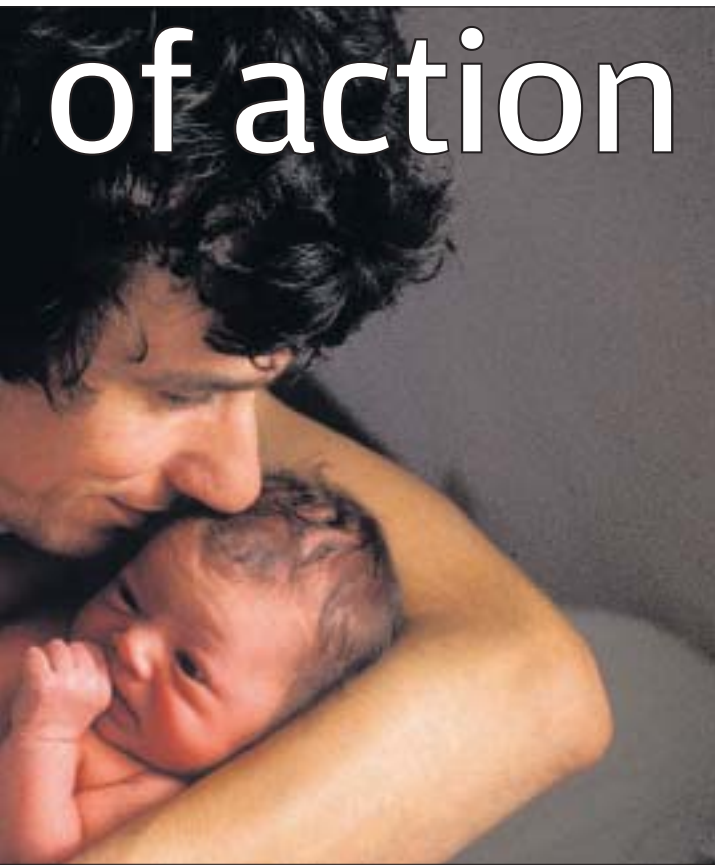
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➤ **Hypnobirthing has been around for millennia. The current Mongan method has been used in Britain since 1980**

of action



Picture: Alamy



The waiting game: Forget pacing the hospital corridors, men can take some of the strain during childbirth

thought at a time and the course places great importance on desire, belief, relaxation and visualisation.

Turner explained how thought precedes reality and how every emotion triggers a physical response. A section was devoted to big babies, a common fear, and the women were made to trust their inner knowledge or instinct, to trust that their body knows exactly what to do.

The group was then shown images illustrating the various stages of birth and a selection of calming hypnobirths on DVD. The men were in charge of relaxation-deepening exercises, helping dump negative energy and thoughts.

'I teach a wide variety of techniques and encourage men to become fully involved,' says Turner. 'It builds their confidence, helps them trust themselves and means they can learn what a woman needs at different stages of labour and birth.'

During the breathing exercises I spoke in a slow, calming voice to enhance a trance-like sensation, the idea being to maintain focus and reduce discomfort. Hypnobirthing bans words such as 'pain' and 'contractions' as these are considered negative – 'discomfort' and 'surges' are preferred.

'The benefits to mum are such that a woman can feel safer, can trust and let go during the process of giving birth more instinctively when she knows her partner is taking care of everything on the outside,' adds Turner.

'This means birthing can be a calmer and more comfortable experience where both mum and dad feel confident and in control to make whatever choices are necessary for a healthy delivery of their baby.'

The main goal of the course is to arm prospective parents with the tools to stay in control. It doesn't end in the classroom, either. We were told to practise the techniques for at least five minutes every day and encouraged to have conversations with the unborn baby and play him music.

I saw my job as learning the birth plan by heart before the contractions – sorry, surges – took hold, to avoid unnecessary medical intervention on the big day.

I was pumped up and ready, and not at all nervous. Two days after her due date and it was action stations – but only my wife can tell you how it went...

For more on hypnobirthing visit www.hypnobirthing.co.uk

Road test: Swimming goggles

I must have been through 15 pairs of goggles in the past decade. The pattern is always the same: try them on, decide they feel fine, get in the pool, realise they leak, persevere for a few lengths, develop a headache, fling them off in disgust. But just when I'd resigned myself to a life of gentle breaststroke, along come these 'lady' goggles. The manufacturers claim they



are specially designed to fit the 'narrower features of the female face' – and there was me thinking I had a funny-shaped head. They look normal enough – no pink glittery bits, thank goodness – and the first signs are good. I'm able to tighten them without feeling like my eyes are being sucked from their sockets. They're easy to adjust, too, even while in the water. I try a couple of lengths of rather vigorous butterfly to put them through their paces.

The first thing I notice – apart from the fact that, hallelujah, they don't leak – is the wide field of vision the goggles give me, which is apparently due to some rather nifty curved lenses. They don't fog up, either. Once I've got the fit right, and after half an hour in the pool, they leave only the faintest of red marks. I give them to a friend to try but she tells me they feel like a child's goggles. I believe if you have a narrow nose, then these really are worth the investment.

Felicity Cloake

Aqua Sphere Kayenne Lady Swimming Goggles, £17.99. Tel: 01254 692200. www.aquasphereswim.co.uk

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