

Conscious Parenting

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When I became pregnant and had my first child, Sean, over 30 years ago, I was a bit of an anomaly, even in the hills of Mullumbimby, where we lived. Those who were not farmer's wives living the rural Aussie life, were in banana sheds tripping out on mushrooms, and having babies at home.

Not seeing a doctor for the first six and a half months was the first thing that possibly was unusual. I knew I was pregnant, and my body was healthy so it would just come to pass that I would birth. I knew I had conceived on day 25 of a regular cycle. It was the only sex that month as we were avoiding parenthood, so we thought.



Sean a week old

When I was two weeks overdue by the date of my last period the hospital staff worried about the placenta shutting down. Being very slender, fit and healthy, I figured that they wouldn't know a healthy woman if they saw her and just ignored the panics they were doing on my behalf.

I went home, matted the garden, and just hung out till the labour started - twelve days after my 'real' due date and four weeks after theirs.

I didn't race off into the hospital when contractions were savage, as I figured leaving it until the last minute might ensure I missed the enema and the shave. I was wrong on all counts! I had the Sean eventually with the full attentions of the doctor (later to be a home birth devotee) but at the time clearly happy with me in stirrups and him hauling Sean out. We had a bunch of beautiful photos taken of the birth. The hospital matron heard about this and thought that it was pornographic.

I was told I was holding Sean too often, for too long; that when I got home I had more important things to do. Apparently I would be spoiling him, and the house work awaited - really?

I figured that if Sean got everything he needed when he was little he would not be so needy when he got older - we would all be winning. Being a mum was not what I ever intended. I signed myself out of hospital on my 22nd birthday, when Sean was seven days old. I was supposed to stay in hospital for longer, however they were feeding me ham steaks and I was a vegan macrobiotic. I needed to eat properly and *they* thought that I needed to be eating properly!

So, home we went. Breastfeeding happened when Sean wanted, as how would I know when he was hungry? I got a sling to wear him. I figured he was used to hearing my heart beat and needed to feel comfort, as I preferred to be close to my man. I found "*The Continuum Concept*" by Jan Leidloff, and it

all made perfect sense to me. I just went on doing whatever Sean seemed to want me to do. How would I know what to do - I had never even held a baby until he arrived?

I started going to college in Brisbane when he was six weeks old, which meant that all day he was there in the room with us all learning acupuncture. I had no one to mind him - my entire family lived in New Zealand and I was a recent 'immigrant' from New Zealand myself. Sean's Dad stayed behind in Mullumbimby, and I hitch-hiked up and down the highway with him when we could not afford the bus fare.

He was carried in a cardboard apple box for a while and was a silent addition to the class. He was content, he had mum. When I needed to go to the loo, he had an abundance of aunties in attendance, and this was as life was supposed to be surely? He grew from an infant being handed about and adored.

Time passed and I found that people thought me really odd - that Sean was always with me, that he went everywhere with us and was always attached to either me or his dad.

What about being in a silent room, in a little bed, alone and getting on with being a slug like baby? Not my son - he was always in the thick of life. That I fed him wherever he needed it and though discreet about it, that was 'out there' for all. I

never saw a child health nurse. I don't even think that I knew that they were supposed to be 'helping' me. I didn't vaccinate - why would I put something foreign into my precious boy's body when his body was too immature to eat anything except what my body had processed for him?

More time passed and he turned a year old. I went out to full time work, as I could, and his dad stayed home and was his dad. Baby Sean decided that he would sleep with me - that was appropriate, he hardly ever saw me as I was a full time worker.

Sometimes I left home before he was up, so it made perfect sense to me too that we should sleep together. That was considered odd for the times, except that it worked and we all thrived.

The beginning of my real altered mothering came about when Sean burst an eardrum. He was supposed to cope with a week in hospital, with no co-sleeping, my absences and an operation. I could not come in except in visiting hours: 'but he sleeps with me at night' ; 'What a dreadful mother, and didn't you know, he was a danger to all the other vaccinated children in the ward, what with your non compliance?'

How could they all be so damn stupid? With *my* child? It was not as if I could go off and get a replacement if they really stuffed him up. Both of us may be stuck with their bad-day-at-work's consequences. We fortunately had to wait for a week until the active infection had subsided with antibiotics before the booked procedure to have Sean's tonsils and adenoids *scraped out* could be executed.

So, he was healed at home by me. I constructed an orgone accumulator - and that was the beginning. The hospital never saw him again. I went to the other

major hospital for a check-up a week later and they looked at his ears, and could see that it had all healed. He was totally recovered. So, the healing journey in training to be a therapist (for Sean) was worth it all - he still had his body intact.

As Sean grew I fed him no dairy, or sugar. I rationed gluten. He was exclusively breastfed until he was 8 months old - he was perfectly happy with Mum. This was very out of step back then. His father had been a drastically allergic baby, with dreadful eczema and asthma. This is what had stirred me into action into doing the alternate therapies courses. Surely prevention, and growing him straight, not bent like a sapling in a prevailing wind was the way to do it? My mother particularly could not feed him up on all the treats that she saved for our infrequent trans Tasman visits, chocolate, ice creams, lollies and the like, that she deemed were expressions of her love and caring.

As Sean became old enough to be read to, I discovered that all the books had heroes (bunnies/kittens or the likes), who were brave and intrepid - and male. The ones needing rescuing were the girl characters. I set about evening this up as he needed to know that boys can feel insignificant and in need also of a cuddle.

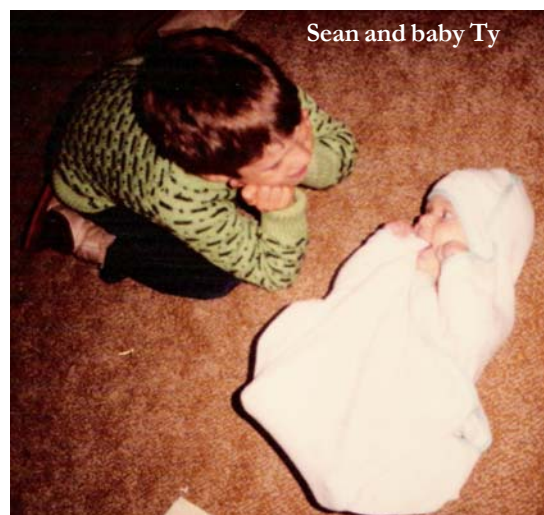
Then along came child care, such as it was back then, and a new set of influences. Why was I feeding him all of these pulses, nori and no fruit or dairy? Surely he would be unwell with all these exclusions? He was very well, and did not even catch measles from where he was staying in the daytime

when they had it. He spat sugar out the first time he tasted it at a birthday party as it was 'too hot'.

Sean started to be exposed to others and their TV socialisation. I refused to have one even in the house - all those 'cartoons' of killing/maiming and violence, and the innocent sucking it all in. When I took Sean to "The Muppet Movie" he was the only one to 'lose it' when Kermit had to sit in a dentist like chair, to get his brain adjusted/sucked out. We left the cinema whilst my very bright, sensitive kid got over his hysterics. What is wrong with the rest of them? Who said that this was entertaining - let alone appropriate for a little one?

This had followed a ban on all violent toys - one that continued through my three sons' decades of being raised. A gun has only one intention, and killing was not something I was patterning my kids for. The biggest assistance was a father who felt as I did; that we were the ones entrusted to raise this being.

Parenthood was stewardship, our child retained his sovereignty. We did not own him, or his foreskin, his purity or his naïve spirit. We did not enforce upon him anything that would stifle his creativity/innocent joy or being.



Sometime later, another son, Ty, arrived. A different Dad meant a set of struggles that are very difficult to resolve when the other is sure that they are the 'masters' not the 'servants' of the growing being. It was still my version of parenting based on respect for him as tender individual.

Vaccination had to happen (fear based medicine has a hold on 'good parents' and there was no access to such jewels as the Australian Vaccination Network www.avn.org.au). It was on my terms though, later than 'they' wanted, and definitely not during teething or any form of unwellness.

He did not ride in a child's car seat until he could walk. What was the world coming to? How was the neck and entire back structure of a baby, with a monster-sized head and tiny neck protected in an upright car seat? Especially when one considers that once in the car babies go straight to sleep. So, it was on his stomach in a bassinette with netting over the top until he could walk – whether it was legal or not.

After a few months, he was less than the perfect baby he had been and a friend suggested going to the chiropractor. I did and it was magic. From that point on if ever any thing was untoward 'nice man fix back up' was the first stop. Next, if the problem persisted we saw the naturopath. She would pendulum over his nappy and diagnose whatever was happening as a deficiency in my body and give me something to rectify his woes through my milk.

We never saw doctors. Why would a naturally reared baby need one?

On we travel, time passes and there is another baby, Kathryn. This one nearly dies.

Attachment parenting and breastfeeding lasted vastly longer with Kathryn. In the intensive care ward we were all supposed as mothers to go home whilst 'they' sorted the dying bubs out. I did not follow this script.

Where was the lactation assistance, in isolation, in the babies' intensive care ward? Where was the breast pump to stop the milk from departing as baby lay dying? What if she didn't die and we needed it again?



Baby Kathryn

"Why do you not go home and let us mind your (dying) baby?" Well, that would have ended Kathryn's story easily. I stayed and stopped the dying many times. I also learnt that no one looks after your child as you would.

On time goes and here is baby number four, Ryan.

If you sleep this baby on his stomach he will die. Really? Have I not done this with all the others and

they are fine. Did my mother and hers, going all the way back, not do this? Human babies are all too neurologically immature and startle awake on their backs. They fret and keep an exhausted mum awake this way. This to me was a bad mothering option. Sleep is surely the first ingredient in abundant breast milk supply, let alone the mental state of a mum who gets to repeat yesterday, today, and for all foreseeable today's and on into the sunset.

I had no idea that we as a culture would allow toxic chemicals such as fire retardants, into such intimately used items as mattresses. Then to heap chemicals (fabric softeners and the sort) into the washing of sheets that go over the mattresses, to combine in a toxic out-gassing that kill off our babies as they sleep.

As babies in a different era, we were safe with Lux flakes, and no modern conveniences. We were simply and purely reared; children of this new generation are not. Why are we having red nose days, and threats of death around sleeping, when the answers are already known? See www.cotlife2000.com Think of all the content bubs, milky mums and sleeping couples if we all woke up to this one!

Again, I chose no vaccination and was consequently regaled with tales of services that would be withheld. This was all fear-based campaigns and water off this duck's back. Why should I place heavy metals, toxic poisons and other perceived assistance that is to 'help' him, into his system, when he is getting all nature ever intended from me? By being with his mum, and my body providing in its wisdom, whatever assistance against whatever I am exposed to him, is he not therefore covered? This is all at tender ages when he is still too young to cope

with food or foreign proteins apart from breast milk.

He is still untouched at twelve years old. He doesn't get sick. His immune system works as it is supposed to. He was demand fed and slept with me, (so he was in my mother's disparaging words 'full of himself') and was not injected with toxic products under the guise of helping him.

I noticed he was the only one in his child care facility when little, who was well. Everyone else's kids were getting snotty noses, tummy bugs, colds, flus, chest infections and rashes.

These are but a few of the many examples of me as a mother not following what was expected and always being the odd one out. Why was I so out of step, to be standing up for myself and my kids in a sea of complacency and habit? This seemed to be my signature – if this 'x' is the policy then I will find 'y'



to be better. What is so hard about leaving well alone, and letting nature do what nature does best? Why have we deviated from this script of following what baby and life seems to want?

Heather Bruce is an acupuncturist, naturopath and Chinese herbalist, author and mother

of four. Her passion is to assist people to help themselves, through the acupuncture/common sense mode. More articles on a variety of topics can be found at Heather's website www.easybabies.com.au. She is the author of "What Dads Can Do – a manual for partners of pregnant women" and has been a regular contributor to Down to Birth since 2005.