



# The beauty of birth at home

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**M**ANLY businessman Doug Lees surprised himself when his second child, Summer, came into the world four weeks ago.

The founder of one of the world's oldest surfing magazines and a large Manly surf retail business had expected to be anxious. In fact, he said he was totally calm as his partner, Pam Manning, gave birth in their own home.

"I thought I would be there going, 'Dammit, I wish I had rung the hospital' but during the whole labour I was 100 per cent relaxed," he said.

Now, in National Homebirth Awareness Week, he can't help drawing comparisons between that experience with Pam, family and two independent midwives there for support, and his son's hospital birth six years before.

"That experience was disappointing, which is a bit sad to say about a birth. A whole bunch of things didn't go right," Lees said.

Despite that unhappy experience and a much more frightening one where he said Pam nearly died after being left to bleed in hospital for 10 hours following a miscarriage, the couple came to the idea of a home birth gradually.

It followed their meeting with independent midwives Shea Caplice and Sheryl Sidery, who had been recommended by good friends.

"It really started with us trying to get our own midwife because you can choose

your hospital and choose your doctor but you can't pick your midwives," he said.

"We wanted our own midwife so it organically grew to a homebirth from there. They left the option open that we could proceed with a homebirth or go to a hospital where they would assist but we just became more comfortable with them and the personal rapport we had built."

But Lees admits he had plenty of reservations when the idea first started to take shape. "I did feel a need to have everything ready in case there were problems but I know birth is as much about the emotional as the physical and I thought Pam needed a lot of emotional support because of the bad experiences she had had." With her own scientific background Pam, a vet, said she was definitely not anti-hospital or anti-doctor but "with a normal birth it works better if you are emotionally comfortable". She described Summer's birth as a "terribly beautiful experience". Her partner's assessment was that it was perfect.

"The first time was really clinical," Lees said. "This time we got the baby straight away and then, being in your own bed, in your own home, was just incredibly rewarding. Everything about it had extra power."

He said homebirth had a lot to recommend it for those who felt it was right for them. "As a father it is particularly rewarding because all you have to do is focus on the birth and the mother. It's a great way for the baby to enter the world."