

MELBOURNE MOTHERS TELL KATE NEWMAN OF THEIR BABIES DELIVERED BY THE LEBOYER METHOD OF CALM AND AFFECTION WITH THEIR HUSBANDS ATTENDING

CHILDBIRTH, THE GENTLE WAY

"THE newborn baby is a mirror, reflecting our image. It is for us to make its entrance into the world a joy."

These are the words of Dr. Frederick LeBoyer, whose radical yet simple techniques for easing the birth trauma and helping a newborn baby start life without pain, confusion and fear are revolutionising the way we bring our children into the world.

In his book, *Birth Without Violence* (serialised by New Idea late last year) the French doctor argues against the normal insensitive and traumatic birth experience and advocates a natural and gentle initiation into the world for a newly-born child.

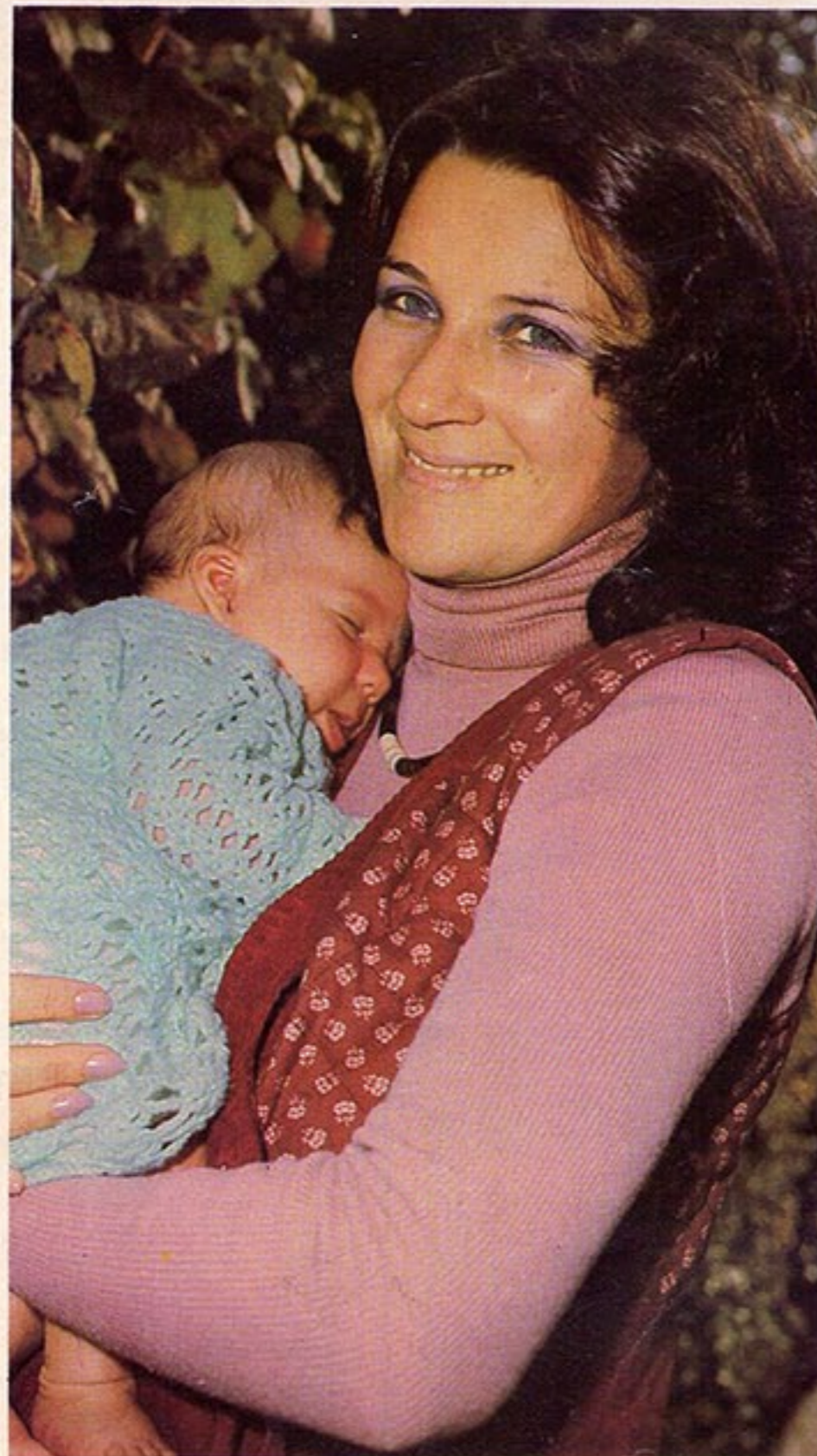
He believes that a quiet and calm atmosphere with dimmed lighting and gentle, unhurried actions are essential for those vitally important first minutes and hours of a child's life.

And in Melbourne there is a growing number of women who are choosing to have their babies brought into the world his way.

One of these, Mrs. Marie Burrows, was the subject of a recent special edition of ABC-TV's *This Day Tonight*. Entitled *You're Only Born Once*, the program was a filmed record of the birth of Mrs. Burrows' daughter, Bianca, by the LeBoyer method.

Mrs. Burrows was one of the first Melbourne mothers to have a "LeBoyer baby" and with Mrs. Christine Hall and Mrs. Helen Shorter, who had their babies some weeks later, was nursed in post natal stages by New Idea's baby clinic expert, Sister Lee Pattinson.

Marie Burrows and her husband, Bob, first heard of the LeBoyer birth method through a family friend, a psychiatrist who had met Dr. LeBoyer in the United States.



ABOVE: Mrs. Marie Burrows and her daughter Bianca, whose birth was recorded in a special edition of ABC-TV's *This Day Tonight*.

"We both agreed that I would have the baby by natural childbirth methods and when we read Dr. LeBoyer's book we decided that that was the way we wanted our child to come into the world," Marie said.

"Like all prospective

parents we wanted the best possible thing for our child and Dr. LeBoyer's ideas seemed so natural to us that we found it hard to understand why it should be regarded by so many as 'new and different'.

"We wanted our child to

have a good birth, which in our minds meant that she was to be handled gently without being rushed, so that she could arrive in her own time.

"We wanted to try to eradicate any possible stress or trauma for her."

Marie attended natural childbirth classes throughout her pregnancy, exercised regularly and read every bit of literature about childbirth that she could get hold of.

"I had no fears about the birth," she said. "I felt I was so well-prepared I understood so much of what was happening and when and how it would happen that all the fear was removed."

She was in labor for about 20 hours and throughout this time her husband, Bob, and her brother, who is very close to her, were in the delivery room at Melbourne's Queen Victoria Hospital.

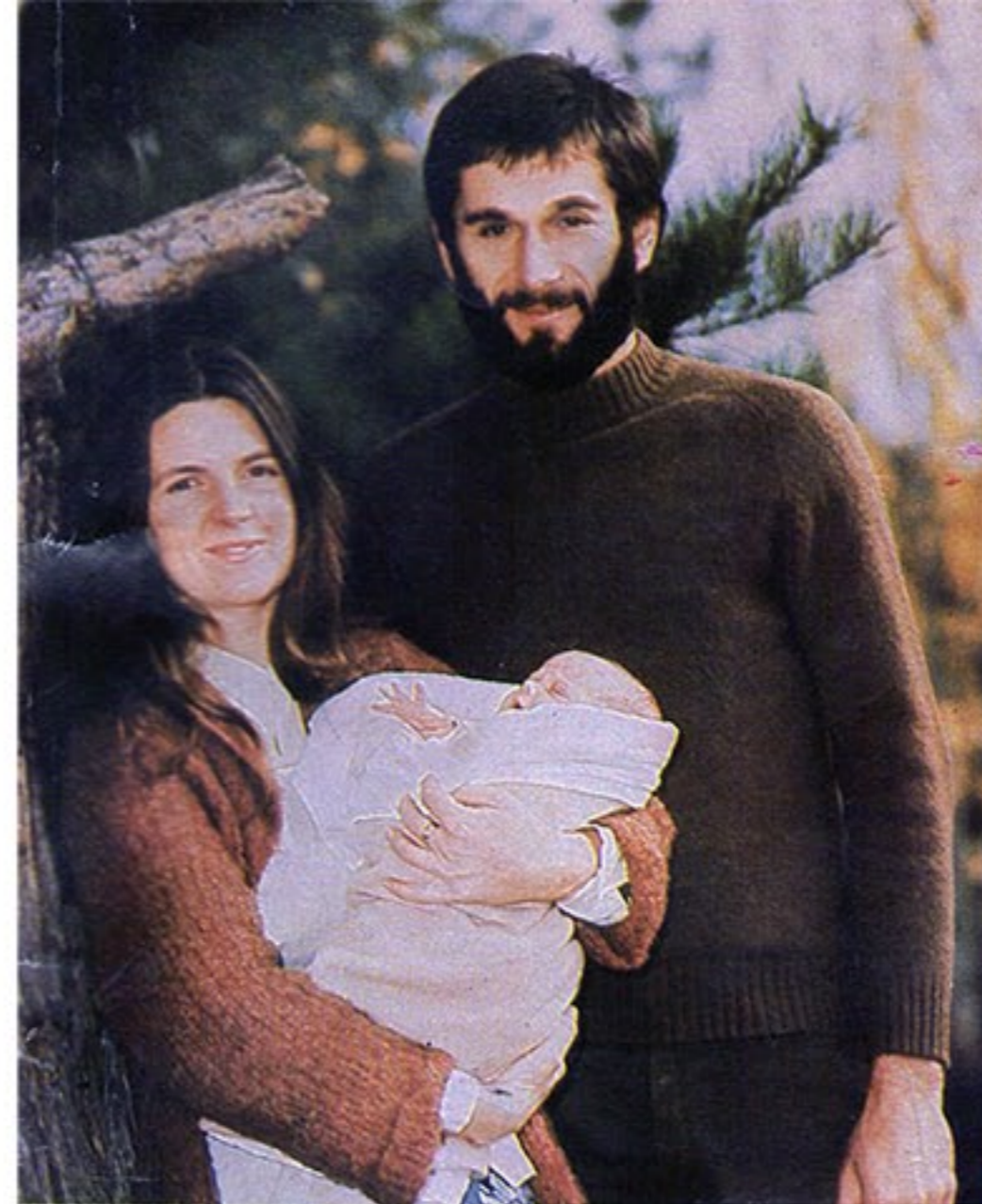
"The feeling . . . the emotion in that room as Bianca was born was so great and beautiful," Marie said. "She was lifted on to my stomach and we actually stroked her in the first seconds of her life. I don't think any of us could put what we felt into words."

"I was tired, very tired. We both were. At one stage Bob had fallen asleep on my pillow. But as Bianca was born the tiredness left us and we just seemed to come alive. We were so excited!"

Dr. LeBoyer advocates that the baby immediately after it is born should be placed on the mother's skin and massaged softly and gently as it makes its first exploratory moves in the world.

The umbilical cord remains attached until it ceases pulsating — thus giving the baby the security of still being attached bodily to its mother, and the additional benefit of a secondary oxygen and blood supply during those vital first minutes of life.

The baby's head is not



ABOVE: Mrs. Christine Hall and her daughter, Jessica, whose birth gave "supreme happiness" LEFT: Mr and Mrs. Shorter with their daughter Beth. They gave her "a gentle start to life" with Dr. LeBoyer's radical yet simple techniques for easing the birth trauma.

touched as it has borne all the stresses and strains of birth only seconds before and is extremely sensitive.

As the cord is cut, the child begins its own individual life and starts to relax, stretch and accept the world outside.

As Bianca lay on Marie's stomach, Marie, her husband, Bob, and her brother massaged her tiny body in gently moving waves.

"This, as Bianca experienced it, was very similar to the sensations she felt during my labor," said Marie.

"Her first sounds, her first cries were not to our ears those of terror or fear, but more like small words of appreciation or understanding."

Following the initial massage stage, Bianca was lifted and taken to a bath close to Marie's bed. Here she was placed in a water bath.

"The water is heated to body temperature," Marie said. "So there was little or no shock to Bianca's system when she felt it. As she was let down into the water, her feeling of security was still constant. The motion of the water lapping her skin was so like the environment she knew in the womb before her birth."

Following her bath, Bianca was again placed on Marie's stomach and fed before being wrapped in a soft covering.

"It seems only natural to wrap new-born babies in something soft," Marie explained. "Their skin is still so sensitive that anything harsh or rough could frighten and disturb them."

For Marie and Bob Burrows, the shared experience of their daughter's birth has brought them closer together. During the labor their thoughts were so much with each other and their coming child that they barely noticed the TV crew or cameras.

'We both cried, I think, as we touched her for the first time'

"All I thought was what we were experiencing and what we were gaining together from the experience," Marie said. "I was so thrilled to know that we had shared Bianca's birth together."

"Men are so often excluded from or frightened by the birth. I feel that this is often because of the lack of knowledge on a man's part — this is what makes him afraid of the birth process."

"A lot of men think it's all blood and pain and noise."

During the days after Bianca's birth Marie kept her daughter with her all the time in hospital.

Bianca is breast-fed and fed on demand. Marie also spends a lot of time just holding her daughter.

"Some might say that it's all too much bother," she said. "But just because your child has had a gentle birth doesn't mean that the special care and attention stops there."

"You must keep this environment at home for at least the first three months of the child's life. The child must have continual contact — by touch — with the family."

"Six weeks after her birth Bianca had become accustomed to sleeping on her own. But her security is kept constant during sleep by the gentle rocking motion of her crib — just like the rocking she first received in the womb and then in our arms."

Marie has made a carrying shawl in which Bianca is held close to her mother, yet Marie's arms are left free to do her normal house work.

"At first I left everything to Bob and my family," she said. "I just enjoyed holding and nursing my baby. I wouldn't have been able to do this without their help. Now that she is older and happier in her new environment, I can get some work done."

For Christine Hall and her husband, Richard, the birth of their daughter, Jessica, was a moment of "supreme happiness"

When given information about Dr. LeBoyer's delivery method at natural childbirth classes, Christine and Richard decided to read his book.

"We liked his thoughts and theories," Christine said. "Anyone with a heart or a soul at all must see that it's such an obviously natural way for a child to enter the world," said Richard, "providing, of course, that both mother and child are healthy"

Christine had decided, as did Marie, on a natural birth for her baby and was very conscious of the fact that although much had been done over the years to make it a pleasant experience for the mother little thought had been given to what the child might experience.

Christine was in labor for 13 hours and Richard was by her side all this time.

"Of course, this joint experience has brought us closer

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