



“UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF BIRTH”

This Story is dedicated to the beautiful mothers of Goroka-PNG

In 2003 I a midwife with 6 years experience educated in Victoria-Australia found myself volunteering my skills and knowledge in Goroka, a central highlands town of Papua New Guinea. This was to become a life changing and inspiring event in my midwifery career as I experienced the art of natural birth in a community which lacked western technology, resources and expertise. Accompanying me on this adventure was a student midwife Nicole who was just as keen to add to her learning experience, birthing practices of another culture.

Nicole and I were always on the lookout of experiences on the labour ward which would allow us to care and assist women in labour and Birth. Nicole had a mission to assist in 9 births to make up her student tally and I was ready to take my place as a midwife despite the language and cultural differences. We empowered ourselves with key pidgin words that were frequently used in labour and birth. For instance, we learnt to say “Breath”- “Opens maus pulim win”. Then there was “Push”-“pusim long” or “pusim strong”. Finally there was “Water”- “Warer”.

We usually worked Monday to Friday and had weekends off. However, we had the freedom to come and go from the hospital as we pleased. This particular weekend we were out and about touring around Goroka visiting some remote villagers and viewing the local sites. We came back into town about 4pm and decided to stop into the hospital and check out the action on labour ward. Nicole and I found ourselves amidst an obstetric emergency as a woman had just given birth vaginally to twin girls. The babies were fine, whereas their mother Florence was having a post partum haemorrhage and the doctors and nurses were working hard to stabilise her. Nicole and I instinctively began to care for Florence as well, helping administer blood transfusions, check vital signs. Florence’s agitated behaviour indicated she was hypoxic, so we helped to calm her so that we could administer Oxygen and allow necessary care to be given. Eventually, after a blood transfusion of 6 units and all possible medical and nursing care, Florence stopped bleeding and her vital signs stabilised. She then waited to go to theatre for an evacuation and cleansing of the uterus to prevent complications of retained products of conception. Nicole and I then held the babies and kept them warm, who were oblivious to their mother’s near death experience. Once Florence and the babies were doing well, Nicole and I left around 9pm.

The following day was Monday and we were back at work. I made it my first priority to check on Florence and the babies on the post natal ward. She was sitting up with a big smile on her face with her two beautiful babies lying beside her. Due to Florence’s mental state at the time of her obstetric emergency, I knew she couldn’t possibly have known that Nicole and I had been there. I went onto explain to her in my broken Pidgin English that she had become very sick after the birth of her babies and that Nicole and I helped care for her during that time and that we were very glad that she and the babies were doing so well. I asked her what she had named her babies and she told me that she would take them back to her village and have a naming feast and then name them there. I wished her luck and left. She smiled acknowledging she had understood all that I had said. Yet I doubted it. It wasn’t until our last day at Goroka hospital, that we truly understood what an impact we had had on Florence. We were saying our final goodbyes at a luncheon organised for us when the Director of nursing had a message for us. She said she had received a message from Florence to say that at the naming feast back at her village she had named her twin girls after us Nicole and Marie. Tears filled our eyes as we were filled with overwhelming emotion brought on by this special honour. We were truly blessed to have been part of Florence’s birth experience, even with its complications. One of the greatest rewards a midwife can receive is to have the babies under their care named after them. Nicole and I will never forget Florence and the twins and neither will we forget the joy of assisting in the births of several Papuan women who welcomed us into their birthing experience with complete trust and gratefulness. Thank you Goroka.

Marie Treloar