

'Underwater' baby blissfully unaware he's made history in a bathtub

Northern Advocate
March 18 1982

New Zealand's first baby born under water was this morning sleeping peacefully, oblivious to the blaze of international publicity caused by his bathtub arrival.

Zhann, the son of an Australian woman, was delivered in a bath full of warm water at Tutukaka early yesterday morning.

The healthy 3.6-kilo baby is the first to be delivered under water in the Southern Hemisphere, although the Russians have been delivering babies under water for more than 20 years.

EXPERIMENTS

Zhann's mother Suzanne, who has asked not to be identified because she "is nothing special", is already the mother of three other children aged 9, 7 and 5.

She read an article in the New Zealand Women's Weekly nearly two years ago describing the underwater birth experiments being carried out by Dr Igor Charkovsky.

"I knew then that if I had another birth it would be delivered under water," she said.

Then late last year, when she was carrying Zhann, she read another article in the magazine describing the Tutukaka dolphin research and birth centre being opened by Mrs Estelle Myers.

She didn't contact Estelle or plan the underwater birth.

"I knew that the Lord would direct me — I just took one day at a time," said Suzanne.

CAMPED OUTSIDE

About a month ago she and her three children drove the bus they were living in to Tutukaka.

When she arrived she found Estelle was in Australia so she camped outside her place to wait for her.

"I started to get worried as the birth got closer but I was determined to have it under water, even if I did it myself," she said.

Estelle arrived home last Thursday and that night Suzanne started getting labour pains. The bathroom was prepared but the pains turned out to be a false alarm.

Then early yesterday morning Suzanne went into labour again. Zhann was born in Estelle's bathtub after what Suzanne described as an easy 2½-hour delivery.

Present at the birth were seven of Estelle's friends, including a midwife and nurse.

Suzanne said Zhann had appeared to be a normal birth even during a check by a Whangarei doctor the day before.

TURNED AROUND

"But he must have turned around during the night because he came out back to back," she said.

She said her last baby had been born in this position and it had been a very painful birth. "But this was nowhere near as painful."

Suzanne said she attributed this to the support from the water and the "feeling" she got from the seven women and three children who were in the bathroom giving her support.

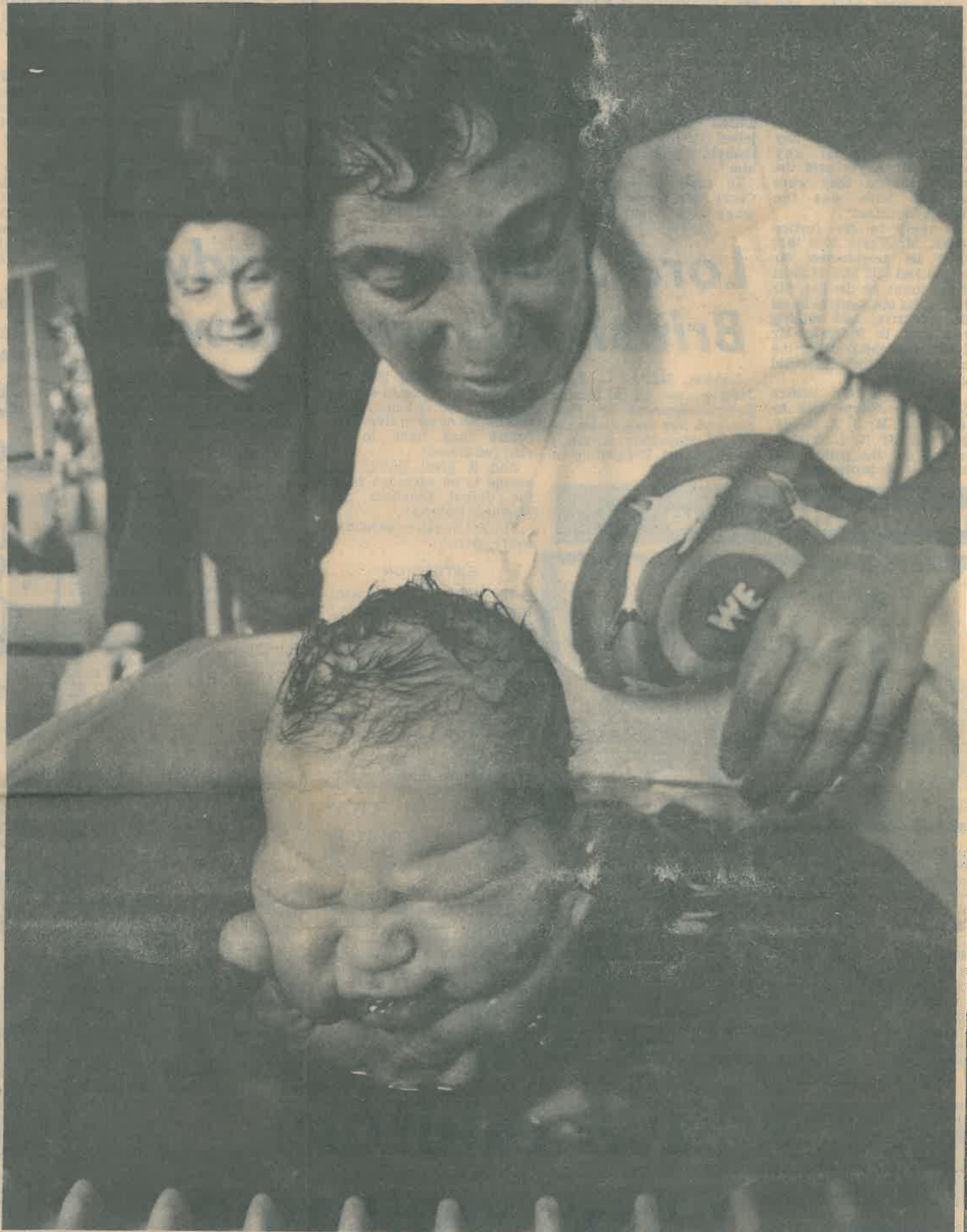
She said the midwife Isabelle Smith kept Zhann under the water for several minutes.

"We held on to the cord and as soon as it stopped pulsating we brought him to the surface."

She said Zhann took a mouthful of water but immediately spat it out and started breathing without difficulty. She said the water appeared to have cleaned out the passages.

MORE DETERMINED

Suzanne said she was the first woman to have a baby under water in the country because she was probably more determined. "But I am no different to any other woman."



It looks as if even babies born under water screw their eyes up when they are bathed. But in fact Zhann, New Zealand's first baby born under water, is much happier than he appears in the photograph. Holding him is Mrs Estelle Myers, who runs the Rainbow Dolphin Centre at Tutukaka where Zhann was born yesterday morning.

RIGHT: With the bath over, Zhann is nearly ready for another sleep.

If she had another baby she would have it under water but would try to keep the baby under water for a longer period. However, this would depend on how long the placenta stayed attached to the umbilical cord, she said.

WOMEN QUEUE

Estelle predicted there would be more underwater births both at Tutukaka and elsewhere.

"But we don't know when — these things happen; you don't plan them," she said.

She already had more women than she could cope with who wanted to have their babies under water.

Estelle said the next birth could take place in a spa pool which had been offered by a Whangarei pool retailer.

