

# The Rattle Autumn 06

Dear all,

Its August, we are huddled in jumpers and hoping for an Indian Summer, again. Lots of us are now doing our first ever uniform buying round so some more articles then on Going to School.

I have now completed a year as Editor. Initially my concerns were that I'd never be able to produce something of merit. I am now concerned about our Branch. Our Committee is dwindling and most of us now have school age kids; the NCT is all about pregnancy and early parenthood and we often feel very far removed from that stage. We all volunteered because we had gained so much from the NCT when it mattered (in my case, my sanity!) so I am asking you to think about volunteering. Its not scary, not hard and its not forever. The other option is for people like you to not have an NCT to go to.

I hope this finds you bathed in sunshine!

Liz

## Contents

Birth Story	2
NCT Conference	5
Starting School	8
Preparing your Child for School	10
Whos Who in the Branch	13-4
Information Co-ordinators	15
Committee Meeting Dates	15
Pets	16
50th Anniversary Story	19
Writing for Children	21
Top 5 Names	22
Birth Announcements	23-4
AGM Notice	25

**THANKS ONCE AGAIN  
TO DM KEITH LTD FOR  
DISTRIBUTING THIS  
NEWSLETTER.**

## The Birth of Findlay Patrick Joseph 01.04.06

On the Wednesday (6 days after due date) I had a surge of energy and cleaned through the house and when Tim came home from work I suggested we go out for dinner as it could be the last chance we get for a while (and I wanted to try and tempt fate a bit!). So we were in Pizza Express that evening when I had a long sharp period pain. Tim paid quickly (you should have seen the look on the waiter's face when he said his wife was going into labour!). I had a few more of these in the car on the way home and then had to make a dash for the loo when we got home! I didn't sleep well that night because I thought "I've had the energy spurt, the clear out (!) and some contractions so this is it!". No such luck as the niggling pains continued till Friday evening on and off with no real signs of anything major happening. I was feeling a bit fed up by this point as my sister who was due 8 days after me had given birth the day after my due date, and our baby was due 2<sup>nd</sup> out of the NCT class and 4 babies had already arrived!

I went to bed on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March at 9pm and then woke at 11pm with a much more painful period pain. Contractions started every 20 minutes or so throughout the night, steadily getting longer and stronger so I got no sleep whatsoever, but I had the TENS machine on and that was really good pain relief and distraction. I tried to rest and read a book and surfed the net in between contractions (baby chat rooms were good for this as I found other people up in early labour trying to distract themselves and pass the time!).

I was desperately hoping that the baby wasn't playing an April Fool's joke, when at 5am I had a show and lost the plug. At 8am I woke Tim up and got him to start timing contractions and getting things ready to take to hospital. By 9am contractions were 5 mins apart and at least a minute long and I had a real pressure bearing down, so we phoned delivery suite and they advised us to come in. On the way there contractions virtually stopped (typical!!) and when we got there they hooked me up on a monitor (because of being on the monitor the week before when the baby's heartbeat was picked up as slow by the community mw). His heartbeat was a bit slow after contractions (which

had gone back to 15 mins apart!) so they kept me on it for an hour until they were satisfied things were ok.

When they examined me at about 11.30am I was 4-5cm dilated (I was dreading them telling me I was only 1cm at that point so was sooo relieved!!) and they showed us down to one of the home from home rooms and showed me how to use the gas and air (great stuff once I'd got the hang of using it!). They let me wander around until 1pm to try and get things moving, and then wanted me back on the monitor so that they could make a decision about whether I could have a water-birth or not (I'd actually decided by this point that I didn't want one as there was no way anyone was taking that TENS machine off me!!). I was kept on the monitor until 4pm, but allowed to sit either on the bed or on a beanbag so wasn't too uncomfy (sucking on the gas and air and still using the TENS).

At 4pm the midwife came back and I was allowed off the monitor. When they checked on us again at 6pm I wasn't progressing much so they wanted me off all fours and on my side. I can remember saying over and over that I was too tired to go on and just felt like getting up and going home (if I could've been bothered to get off the bed!). Contractions started coming quite hard and fast once I was on my side – the TENS was still on but I wasn't allowed any gas and air as it was making me too sleepy.

My waters broke at about 6.15pm and I went from 8-10 cm dilated pretty fast and the urge to push started. I was utterly exhausted at this point (I'd had no sleep since Thursday night and only 2 pieces of toast all day) so the pushing stage took a long time. The baby's head got stuck in one place for about ½ an hour because I couldn't summon up the strength to push any harder. But when they said they'd have to get the doctors in (ie forceps, ventouse etc) I suddenly found the energy and things started to move again! The TENS had come off by now with all the perspiration and I was still without Gas and Air, so squeezing Tim's hand (and apparently nearly biting the end of his finger off when things got really bad!) was the only pain relief I had for the last 1½ hour of pushing. I felt an incredibly hot, stinging pain and the head finally emerged (with a slight tear but no stitches required), and with one more push the rest of the warm slippery little seal came out (the weirdest but most fabulous feeling!) and our little April Fool,

Findlay Patrick Joseph was born at 7.59pm.

It is without doubt, the hardest but MOST amazing thing I have ever done and I could never have got through it without Tim who was fabulous throughout, remembering all the things we were told at NCT classes. I know it's a cliché, but I found the pain of labour instantly forgettable. We are still in awe of our little man and can't believe how much love we feel for him, even when he screams for hours and we can't sleep! Finn is no longer the baby wriggling inside me, but a person in his own right and being a mummy is just the best thing ever!

Helen

***WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE YOUR BIRTH STORY WITH OTHER READERS? WRITE IN TO [rattle@nctleeds.org](mailto:rattle@nctleeds.org)***

## **Celebs, Football & Radical Women Annual NCT Conference July 2006**

In December 2005 I qualified as an antenatal teacher after four years of studying. During my 'student' days, I had little time to focus on anything other than essays, so now, with a little bit of breathing space, I was keen to get to know a little bit more about the organisation I was working for. The annual conference seemed to be the perfect opportunity, and it being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference seemed an added bonus. Of course the fact I was going to have a weekend in Brighton on my own (first in 13 years!) was just the icing on the cake.

I took my knitting and a good book for the long journey South, trying to adjust to my new not-so-young, free and single role, but feeling like I had mislaid something the whole way. Decided to walk from the station to my hotel to take in the atmosphere of Brighton. Stopped to look at my map and was approached by a lovely young man with shaved head and pink t-shirt who advised me to take the seafront route as it was much prettier. I knew I was going to love this place.

After an early night (too much sea air) I strolled along the seafront to the conference centre the next morning. With my delegate badge pinned proudly to my chest, but still feeling like a fake (could they tell I was just a mummy?) I did the tour of stalls, buying too many books for my class library and then realising I was going to have to carry them home again.

Finally we were called to the main hall for an address by the NCT president, Gail Werkmeister. Her presentation on 'fifty years of the NCT' was inspiring. She had a copy of the original Times Newspaper where a woman placed an advert seeking likeminded people to start a 'Natural Childbirth Association' based on the methods of Grantly Dick-Read (a pioneer obstetrician). During the weekend, we were to meet the original members of the organisation. It was clear we have come a long way in 50 years and some of the aims have changed, but it was always about strong women challenging the system, putting the woman at the centre of the birth experience and striving for mums and babies to have the best possible start to family life.

The rest of Saturday was an overview of the NCT, various people's roles,

our aims and vision for the future – all very interesting, but overshadowed by my sneaking out half an hour early, furtively meeting other AWOLs in the lobby and nipping round the corner to the pub. We proceeded to watch the England world cup match, drink copious amounts of beer and generally behave in a very disreputable manner. By this point I had completely forgotten I was somebody's mother. After a fish and chip supper on the seafront, and a walk on the pier, we moved on to a gay bar and danced till 4.30 when we returned to the B+B for a nightcap.

8.30am, feeling quite good, stroll breezily along the seafront to the conference centre. By 10.30am I am sipping water and eating tiny pieces of cake to stave off the nausea. Thankfully the hangover didn't detract from the absolutely brilliant day. First there was Davina McCall; I quite liked her in Streetmate but her chat show was truly awful, so basically I wasn't sure if I was going to like her. However, as I walked out for the coffee break afterwards I heard someone say 'don't you wish she was your best friend' and I thought, yes, you're right. She was absolutely charming. Six months pregnant, she had presented Big Brother the night before, been up half the night with her two little girls and then driven down to Brighton to do the conference – for free – and they couldn't get her off the stage. She kept saying "how long have I got? I want to talk forever!" She described her euphoric home births and was in tears throughout. We were crying and laughing with her at the same time as she described pushing her baby out while her dogs licked her face. She even revealed she was going to train as a doula "because you can do that and present television programmes apparently!" What a fantastic ambassador for the NCT she is going to be. Her midwife, the famous Caroline Flint came on to talk after her, and, set off by Davina, she blubbed the whole way through her bit too – get a bunch of women in a room together...!

Next was the inspirational Michel Odent, the French obstetrician who pioneered water births. Five minutes in and I had penetrated his accent and could actually make out what he was saying. "Labour is a physical process, not a mental one. For a woman to labour well, she must detach the neocortex – 'thinking part' of her brain. Nothing must stimulate the neocortex. Words are the labouring woman's enemy. We must rediscover silence in the delivery room". Wow.

Professor James Walker from Jimmy's (one of ours!) talked about the risks of Caesareans on future pregnancies and births. We gawped as we heard

a respected professor at the forefront of caesarean research saying that a caesarean birth significantly increases the risk of infertility, stillbirth, and placenta praevia amongst others in a subsequent pregnancy, and that we should avoid that first caesarean birth unless it is absolutely vital. He even believes that if a first baby is breech, it is safer to deliver it vaginally than have a section and transfer a bigger risk to the next baby. Wow again.

By the end of the day my brain was aching (and it wasn't just the hang-over). I had heard revolutionary speakers, met childbirth royalty like Sheila Kitzinger and networked with radical midwives. I sat on the train on the way home uplifted, focused and with a sense of belonging to an organisation I was proud of. I know that through my antenatal teaching I make a difference to individuals, but on a national level, I work for an organisation who are passionate and radical and always there in the eyeline of the establishment to speak up for women, babies and families.

Sam Conway

## Starting School—Open Days & How to Choose!

So you have received the Common Preference Form, it all looks quite simple but now you have to choose 3 schools to put on the form! If like most of us the last time you set foot inside a school was for your own exam results it can all seem a bit overwhelming, especially as there are only 6 weeks to do it in! So a few points below, culled from various sources, which may make the process a little more bearable.

Firstly, locate your nearest schools (or those which you know you are interested in) via the Education Leeds website:

**www.educationleeds.co.uk**. This will show you the catchment area on maps for these schools. If you are clueless about which is nearest, call Education Leeds and they will tell you your 3 closest over the phone; **0113 247 5729**

Secondly, call each school and ask them when their Open Day is. Some have appointment systems and will book you in, some just have days you come along to. Whichever, you will need to know early as it will be a day off work. People differ as to whether to take their children or not—it can be more distracting to have them there but sometimes they can offer some opinion too, it is usually up to you. Be aware that Open Days often clash so book into your most favoured first; you can always make appointments to see others if you miss their scheduled event.

Pre-reading: before you visit, get genned up. It is useful to ask the same questions in each and compare the results;

- visit the school's website, get their prospectus.
- Access the Ofsted report (be aware that these can be years out of date however) [www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/). The key here is to look first for the two boxes on the front page headed "What the school does well" and "What could be improved". The section on Standards, Teaching and Learning can be interesting as well as how well it caters for different types of pupils. Look at the last section to find out what other parents think of the school. Finally, refer to the section "How the school has improved since its last inspection" to help you decide whether important improvements

have been made and whether the school is getting better.

- Key stage 1 and 2 results available from the Education Leeds site. Results can be useful to compare schools but be mindful that in small schools results are easily skewed by a few students at either end of the spectrum.

Choosing a school is largely a subjective experience. 2 sets of parents can visit the same school and come away with very different views, though they may have done exactly the same pre-reading;

- Visit the Open Day and meet the Head. The Headteacher will heavily influence the ethos of a school and the overall atmosphere (check he/she is not about to retire!) Could you imagine speaking to the Head about sensitive issues? Look at how staff interact with children (not just teachers—classroom assistants, dinner and admin staff too). Talk to some of the children, ask them what they think of the school. Focus on some of the older classes rather than just reception. If you feel the Open Day was too busy, make an appointment to visit again.
- What is the fabric of the school like? Age doesn't necessarily matter but cleanliness and care over wall displays does.
- How close is the school? Can you walk there? Are there "Walking Buses"? Will your child have children nearby from school to play with/walk with? If it is in your community you may get more involved than if it is miles away.
- Does the school have Before and After care? Ask to look at that if it is something you need.
- Will your child be happy there? Is there enough focus on the things that they enjoy? Will it suit their personality? Are there any friends attending (this may not matter if your child is gregarious but may be vital to them settling in if they are timid) - be aware that new friends are made before the first week is out!

Often people talk about their visits to schools much like viewing a house—you just know when it's the right one. Good luck, see you at the school gates!

## Starting School—Preparing your Child

When you apply for your child's school place, it seems too soon, you look at your 'baby' and can't quite believe that they will be going to school in a year. By the time they start they will be ready for the next challenge and will crave the extra stimulation that school brings but there are a few things that you can do now and over the coming 12 months to help them in their transition.

Particularly if it's your first child you will probably underestimate just how capable your child can be. Over the year try to encourage their independence, in terms of dressing, feeding and getting things and putting them away. Your child will benefit greatly if he or she can dress and undress him/herself and keep clothes vaguely together. PE is a cliché but nevertheless is a part of the National Curriculum. Reception teachers are used to helping children change but classes are often scheduled next to playtimes. If your child is capable of doing the whole job alone they'll feel more grown up and get more playtime, whilst peers are still queuing up for help.

Dressing and undressing can start off with just getting coats on and off and progress to the whole caboodle over time. Try to encourage them to have a go and as always give lots of praise for trying even if clothes are in dubious positions or places! Start allowing children to hang up their own coats and get them for themselves before trips out – you'll be there to assist at the start and end of the school day, but what about playtimes and lunchtimes?

If your child is having a school lunch then they should be used to using a knife and fork by the time they start school. There will be help with cutting things up but fingers and clothes will be very messy if sauces are on the menu and your child can't use a fork!

Tidying up is also very important. Children will be asked to find their own pencils, books and other equipment and also to help put them away. It is a really good idea to introduce the idea of tidying up as a game and help out initially. Children do get better at it, but I don't

think anyone finds it fun!

Develop the enjoyment your child has in books. Encourage them to 'read' brand labels on the milk, cereal, biscuits etc. This is a really important reading skill and contributes a lot to early reading strategies. I am not suggesting that you teach your child to read this year – in fact I am positively against pre-empting school and taking the fun away from books and mark making, but if you encourage early skills then they'll pick up these things quickly once in a school environment. Allow your child to help you read predictable books at bedtime and to fill in rhymes in rhyming texts. Pick an unknown book and ask your child to tell the story just using the pictures – this is a fantastic skill and gives them an immense sense of achievement – who cares if it's right or not!

Let them help out with shopping lists, letters, cards and anything else that allows them to 'write'. Most of it will look like a few wavy lines in the middle of the page and some of it may include letters from their name but again it gives them a sense of achievement and independence. Copying actual words can be detrimental to the fun aspect and takes away independence. Save it for occasional words and allow children to tell you what their own marks 'say'.

Many children can write their name by the time they start school –but it depends on how long it is. Recognition is more important and writing it will come with practice. Encourage them to sign their name in cards or on letters as this has a real purpose, sitting and practising for no reason just leads to boredom and being switched off from writing.

Any kinds of lotto, matching pairs and counting games are a good idea. Feeling confident with numbers, recognising their age and recognising colours and shapes give a head start. Setting the table so that everyone has a knife, fork and spoon is a good mathematical activity as is looking for patterns, whether on wrapping paper or number sequences. Use mathematical language such as more and less, bigger and smaller and encourage helping with measuring activities such as

baking. Writing numbers is not a big deal, if they are ready for writing and can recognise a few they'll quickly pick it up.

Don't forget to talk to your child about what school is and why they will be going. Tell them just how much fun it can be. School, particularly reception, is less formal than it used to be so try to learn a little yourself about the types of thing they will be doing. Go to open mornings with your child, so that they can see school aged children having fun and doing what they will be doing; most schools have them around September and October before you send in the form. Also make sure you attend all the open days once your child is allocated a place – this will help them to get to know where they will be going, so that they can visualise themselves there and really get to grips with the idea.

Remember that this year is about preparation and not pre-empting. The key is to give your child confidence and independence so that learning is easy once in school. Ability to perform tasks such as writing and reading at 5 is not an indicator of SATs achievement at Key Stage 1 (age 7), verbal ability and a thirst for knowledge are much more important.

Reception teachers are special people – they are well prepared to help out and ease children in, but the adult child ratios in school are nowhere near as small as in nurseries, at childminders and of course in your own home. If your child is confident and prepared for school you are less likely to have tears and tantrums (and there'll be fewer from your child as well!).

Whatever you do – enjoy it this year and make the most of it. Before you know it next September will be here and your pre-schooler will be no more.

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## POSTNATAL GROUPS

If there isn't a group near you, call **Karen Timms** on **0870 421 4548**.

Please advise Karen of any changes to group leaders.

Area	Contact	Name	Day
<b>Cookridge</b>	261 4789	Karen	Mon pm
<b>Crossgates/ Swarcliffe</b>	260 4187	Kathryn Holme	Wed pm
<b>Chapel Allerton</b>	268 6261	Rachel Greer	Wed am
<b>Roundhay &amp; Gled- how</b>	266 9154	Jo Dundon	Mon am, Wed am, Fri pm
<b>Oakwood</b>	266 7022	Sharon Ness	Thurs pm
<b>Guisley</b>	01943 876091	Allie Britchford	Thurs am
<b>Pudsey</b>	229 8227	Patrice Morris	Fri am
<b>Weetwood &amp; Far</b>	217 7356	Cal Hancock	Fri am

**Interested in setting up an NCT postnatal group in your area? Contact [postnatal@nctleeds.org](mailto:postnatal@nctleeds.org) for our New Group Support Pack which will help you to get a group up and running.**

## **WE NEED YOU!**

### **Information co-ordinators**

Do you have a couple of hours a week to spare? Then read on - you might be interested in this role ....

We need a couple of people to distribute posters and leaflets to advertise Leeds NCT. General posters need to go to GP surgeries and hospitals. We will give you a list of places. Some of the information can be posted out and some will need to be taken.

Can you help? If you feel that you've gained something from the NCT, then perhaps you feel that you could give something back - a little of your time.

Please contact anyone listed on the committee (previous page) if you can help.

### **NCT LEEDS BRANCH Committee Meetings:**

Wed 6th September 23 Kingswood Crescent

**TUES** 10th October 30 Kingswood Crescent

Wed 1st November 7 Shaftesbury Road

**ALL WELCOME**

## **Pets—not just any old Cat or Rabbit will do!**

With the rise of allergies in children, many families steer clear of the traditional cat dog or rabbit but would still like to have the experience of having a pet. So what else is there? Here are 3 less common examples, all kept in suburban areas and suitable for children without costing a fortune. If anyone has other unusual pets please write in to [rattle@nctleeds.org](mailto:rattle@nctleeds.org)!

### **Chooks**

When thinking of pets for children, chickens may not be the first thing that pops to mind. But in our experience it's a great choice.

Last spring Dolores and Margot, our first two hens, moved into the modern dwelling of every stylish urban hen-about-town, the Eglu. It's a brightly coloured moulded plastic hen house that looks like an overgrown Apple Mac and comes complete with "fox-proof run." I should add that it's only fox-proof if you remember to shut the door at night. One night we forgot, which is why we had to get back to the farm and collect new hens.

Our chooks, Biffer, Ronnie and Flo, keep the place clear of slugs, make very funny soft clucking noises, will do the high jump and the 50 yard dash when grapes are involved, lay delicious fresh eggs and also make a great deal of high grade compost enricher. Ok, they poo a lot. Their care takes 2 minutes a day plus half an hour a fortnight to blast the Eglu with the power hose, their feed is a big sack costing £10 and lasting 3 months at least, and they are really good fun. The kids love feeding them and fetching the eggs and all their friends are dead keen to come and have a go.



Hens are usually bought at "point of lay" when they are around 18 to 22 weeks old, and the eggs come soon after. They are remarkably cheap - a hybrid is around £4 to £8. If you handle them a great deal in the first weeks they become extremely tame and will hop on your

knee for a bit of fuss. You can also buy ex-battery hens for literally pence. These are just one year old, very bedraggled to start with but soon become healthy happy animals.

To answer the main things things everyone asks: You do not need a cockerel for eggs, they happen anyway, and hens lay for up to around 5 years. They can peck but as their beaks are very blunt it feels more like a poke and doesn't hurt at all. They are not much work. It's easy to leave them when you go away for the weekend - as long as you (or a neighbour) tops up the food and water every couple of days your hens are happy as can be. We have loosely fenced off a scrubby section of the garden for them to run about in when we are at home, but their proper "foxproof run" is ample for their needs. We just like watching them scratch around. And the only significant cost is the hen-house.



Did you know that the yellow colour of yolk comes from the plants they eat? The more greenery they can eat, the yellower the eggs. Commercial egg production often uses feed with a dye in it to give the yolks colour - otherwise they would be extremely pale because the chooks have no access to fresh plants. You've never had an egg like a freshly laid, still warm egg from the hens in the bottom of the garden. And it's nice to know the name of the hen who laid it. Thanks, Biffer.

## **Tropical Fish**

The boys have a small tropical fish tank in their bedroom and it's been great. The fish are small and brightly coloured, there are plenty for each child to name and, once they finally got the hang of how little food is required, the tanks stays pretty clean. I siphon off some of the mucky water and top it up with fresh from time to time - it's certainly a lot less bother than the hamster was!

Fish need plenty of places to hide to feel secure. Without them, the fish feel exposed to predators, stressed and tend not to last long. This works

out well with kids because alongside the plants (real are great but in my experience very short-lived, so I'd recommend plastic) and rocks, your kids can have a great time picking any kitsch tank decorations they fancy. It's their tank, so they can go as gaudy or ridiculous as they like. The fish won't care.

The bit about the memory is not true, by the way. Fish will shoot to the top of the tank the minute the lid is opened, because that's how their food always arrives. They couldn't learn that with the much-touted 20 second memory. They also appreciate a good deal of space to move around in, so it's important not to overcrowd them. We found a small shoal of little fish more fun than just 3 or 4 larger fish.



## Ferrets

Excellent fun, low maintenance pets! Cheap to purchase initially and feed and easy to care for. They use litter trays like cats and are clean animals. Girl ferrets have to be spayed as they are in permanent oestrus otherwise but if you get them from a ferret rescue place (there are lots about) they should be spayed already. They are a bit pongy for indoors but happy outside in hutches with runs much like rabbits or in a palatial shed which means that offspring can sit with very entertaining ferret to hearts content without losing one or the other. They do not nip as a rule but are wriggly tickly and fun. Alert when woken and curious; they like to be bathed in the sink and dried with towels which they play hide and seek in, they like toys, tunnels and climbing but if ignored will sleep. Rescue centres will often "kennel" them for you during holidays and give their nails a clip while they are there. They live for about 7 years and will happily live in single sex groups but better to start off with multiples if you want more than one.



Thanks to Jay Williams and Anne Errington for this information.

## **NCT 50th Anniversary— Joan's Story**

To coincide with the NCT 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mo McGeorge visited Joan McDermot who had her children in the 1950s.

Joan and Tony had their 2 children, a boy and a girl, at home in Wakefield. It was her choice to have a home birth and the Health Service was grateful as there weren't many maternity beds! Having a hospital birth was becoming more popular but Joan was positive and relaxed about childbirth as long as she received good antenatal care.

In those days, pregnancy tests didn't exist so when a woman suspected she was pregnant, a visit to the Doctor would confirm or deny this: he would feel the uterus and if it was 'standing up', the pregnancy was confirmed, this was usually about 2 months in.

Whilst pregnant, Joan would visit the Clinic Doctor regularly where he would check the growth of the baby and the heartbeat by feeling the abdomen. The midwife was present at the clinic but didn't carry out any of the checks as they do now.

The local midwife visited Joan at home and inspected the room where she planned to have the baby and make sure she had every thing she needed. The same midwife would deliver her baby. Joan needed stitches after one birth and the Doctor had to be called out, midwives didn't carry out such duties then. Dads weren't generally present at the birth but in Joan's case, she held on so tightly to his hand he couldn't escape! After the birth, the midwife would return to assist with feeding and bathing training!

Joan breastfed her children for nearly a year but bottle feeding was on the increase; big fat babies were considered healthy and you could add supplementary food to bottles like rusks and Farex. Also, Joan suggested that women could be a little bit inhibited about breastfeeding and bottles were a handy alternative.

Similar to the deluge of information we have now, Joan said there

were plenty of leaflets and pamphlets about various aspects of pregnancy and babies.

At the time it was fashionable to wean your baby onto protein so pureed chicken was the norm. Babies were generally weaned about 9-12 months but remember they did receive all those liquidised rusks and arrowroot biscuits in their bottles! There wasn't a lot of emphasis on fruit and vegetables as there is now; women were just advised to give their babies a "good varied diet".

Joan bought her first washing machine after the arrival of her first child, and it was solely because of the amount of washing required to keep up her supply of terry towelling nappies! When Joan wanted to return to work (as a health visitor) after the birth of her babies on a part time basis she had a battle to do so...but won! And in these seemingly enlightened times that situation is commonly mirrored today!

Vaccinations were administered but not until after the child was 1 year and all diseases were given separately so there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between home and the Doctors between ages 1 and 2!

Joan said a big difference between then and now was the cleanliness of babies (in Leeds). In those days, babies tended to be quite grubby and this was exacerbated by the coal smoke and industry around. And particularly in the Woodhouse area, it was popular not to bathe babies very often at all. However, it may have strengthened their immunity to disease so there was some method behind the madness!

Joan had very positive experiences of labour and birth and obviously passed that message on to her daughter who also had her children at home.

Thanks to Joan for speaking to us.

Mo McGeorge

## Writing For Children

When I started writing for children, I didn't have any and wasn't planning to. I wrote for children because, all my life, I loved children's books. Eventually my first book was published. Having first gone part-time, I decided to try writing full-time. Two more books followed. It was then I became a parent myself.

Having your own child changes everything. For me, the first effect was a massive slow down in output! Naively, I thought I would take six weeks off, and get plenty done while she napped. But despite all the people who say, "how wonderful to be a writer – perfect when you have children", as every parent working at home knows, it is not easy. The other thing people say is: "she will give you lots of ideas". This is certainly true. Once the small baby stage is over children provide lots of material. This is a comfort when they throw your car keys down the toilet, or wreck the display at Tesco's.

So perhaps it is not surprising that many parents tell me they have an idea for a children's book – if only they had time, and a few pointers. From Alice in Wonderland to Horrid Henry, many classics have been inspired by or written for a real child. Maybe this gives them their originality. I'd encourage anybody to write. If you love reading to your children, or have the glimmerings of a good idea, then you are half way there. But, like anything, it is a craft that must be learned. That's why I have started teaching writing – as much for fun of meeting new writers, as anything else.

Writing rarely brings fame and fortune. But there are other rewards. For me these include the chance to meet readers at schools and festivals, and surprise financial windfalls – foreign rights, radio fees. Most important is the creative satisfaction. And, as a parent, the anticipation of seeing whether my daughter likes my books – or wants to put them through the shredder!

Emma Barnes

*Emma is teaching an adult evening class this autumn at the Swarthmore Centre (tel: 243 2210 ) and a children's workshop at the Ilkley*

## Top 5 Names

The NCT is 50 years old in 2006. Here is a list of the top 5 names from each decade that the NCT has been around. It would be interesting to know what the top 5 in 1904 would have been—I wonder if Emily would have been there?

### 1954

SUSAN	DAVID
LINDA	JOHN
CHRISTINE	STEPHEN
MARGARET	MICHAEL
JANET	PETER

### 1964

SUSAN	DAVID
JULIE	PAUL
KAREN	ANDREW
JACQUELINE	MARK
DEBORAH	JOHN

### 1974

SARAH	PAUL
CLAIRE	MARK
NICOLA	DAVID
EMMA	ANDREW
LISA	RICHARD

### 1984

SARAH	CHRISTOPHER
LAURA	JAMES
GEMMA	DAVID
EMMA	DANIEL
REBECCA	MICHAEL

### 1994

REBECCA	THOMAS
LAUREN	JAMES
JESSICA	JACK
CHARLOTTE	DANIEL
HANNAH	MATTHEW

### 2004

EMILY	JACK
ELLIE	JOSHUA
JESSICA	THOMAS
SOPHIE	JAMES
CHLOE	DANIEL

## **CONGRATULATIONS TO:**

### **Rose McCarthy's Groups**

Keith & Ruth	Alexander Sweetland
Ian & Sally	Abigail Rebekoh
Richard & Alex	William Wright
Steve & Jo	Annie Cecilia
Tim & Helen	Findley Patrick Joseph
Paul & Christie	Alice Juliet

Emma & Robin	Kate
Heather & Daniel	Matthew Thomas
Joanna & James	Ethan
Kerry-Anne & James	Sophia Anna Kubisa
Karen & Ian	Ben
Helen & Robin	Emily
Rachel & Michael	Meryl
Antonia & Rob	Francis
Sobi & Kevin	Eshan
Helen & David	Oliver
Mike & Jenny	Emma Jessica
Barbara & Rob	Erin

Karen & Dom	Frances Elizabeth
Steven & Sarah	Harry Joseph
James & Karen	Annika May
Elaine & Sam	Leo Fred
Donna & Andrew	James



### **Sarah Lewis' Group:**

Kate & Richard	Jacob
Kate & Gordon	Freya
Karen & Anthony	Joey
Gaynor & Steve	Finlay
Gwen & David	Abigail

## **CONGRATULATIONS TO:**

### **Sam Conway's Groups**

Andrea and James	William
Angela and Paul	Lewis
Jenika and Carl	Mia
Farha and Simon	Nur
Grace and Doug	Tali
Becky and Pete	Eva
Claire and Richard	Genevieve
Sarah and Mike	Lauren and Charlotte
Kirstie and Joseph	Martha



### **Are you pregnant? Recently given birth?**

The NCT have launched a new '**Pregnancy and Birth Line**'. Its aim is to provide a counselling and information service to deal with pregnancy, birth and early parenthood issues.

The line is staffed by trained antenatal teachers who can provide:

- A listening ear for fears and anxieties
- Information on your options for birth
- Practical information about hiring equipment, employment rights and benefits
- Answers to questions you may feel silly/embarrassed asking your midwife
- Information on pregnancy health topics
- Contact details for other organisations who can help with your specific query

**0870 444 8709**

## TODDLER GROUPS

We will be running a regular listing on toddler/mums and tots groups in Leeds from the next issue.

Please get in touch to let us know about your local Group, where and when they meet, who they could get in touch with if they were interested.

It will be so useful for all those new mums out there who may not be able to attend our post natal coffee mornings.

**Email [rattle@nctleeds.org](mailto:rattle@nctleeds.org) or**

**Call Liz on 0870 421 4552**

## NCT LEEDS BRANCH Annual General Meeting

Wed 29th November 2006 8pm

*The Roundhay Fox, Street Lane, Roundhay*

This is your chance to influence the future of your NCT Branch; you do not have to be a committee member, all are welcome!

*Call Liz on 0113 2253198 for more details.*