



Roberto Simpatico photo

Gia is a granddaughter for Alison McNeill, niece for Emma and daughter for Jenner and Sep.

Emma's now Auntie Em

Some of us who were kids years ago will relate to Auntie Em as a character out of the Wizard of the Oz film. She was Dorothy's aunt and her anchor. When Dorothy was afraid of something in the story, she wanted her Auntie Em. On Feb. 10, our Emma became an Auntie Em.

What an amazing adventure being able to play a small role in helping baby Gia greet the world. I had the honour of supporting Emma's older sister and her husband in the birth of our first grandchild.

During the 20-hour ordeal, we kept in touch with the rest of the family through texts, giving updates on how Jenner was doing, how many centimetres dilated she was, while her siblings bet on when she would give birth.

During labour, Emma kept texting me asking when her niece or nephew would be born. She wondered how big would it be and would it be smiling?

There are so many amazing things when a child is born let alone conceived. The whole ordeal is simply incredible. After having myself a long labour with my first, then an emergency C section and then another three automatic sections, I think humankind should vote to have babes come forth as lovely (and smaller) eggs, which we can share sitting on — mum, papa, grandparents, uncles and good friends, and aunts. Could be fun for the whole family.

Thirty years ago when I was pregnant with our first, Jenner, I thought my husband had an equal share in the pregnancy and birth and I guess he really did for that time.

When I watched Jenner and Sep go through the first to last weeks of pregnancy, somehow they seemed incredibly joined together in the goal of having their first babe.

They took on the tasks together, whether going to the midwife appointment or deciding what to eat and drink, and shopping for it. They researched all aspects of their babe and we talked about whether they should be tested for any abnormalities.

As it turned out, they decided not to be tested even though there are some challenges in both sides of their families. Right from the start of deciding to have a baby, they were in the task together and were not afraid of what is in front of them.

When we were pregnant with Emma and I was 29, we were never given the option of having any testing done, not that we would have anyway. As it turned out, Emma was born with Down syndrome and changed all of our lives in many ways, most of them positive.

Jenner was the same age as I was when I had Emma during this pregnancy, so although I was supportive of them not getting testing, I prayed that all would be all right with the pregnancy, the birth and the baby.

After you have gone through a few pregnancies, you realize all that could go wrong for whatever reason. It is actually brilliant that with all that could happen, it does not seem to happen often.

Leading up to Emma's sister having "our" baby, we also had the honour to have them stay with us for several weeks leading up to the birth.

They were responsible their home and



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Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?

with paint and floors being sanded, nasty smells and dust, it made sense to have them stay at home. It also gave our baby's Auntie Em, 23, and Uncle Noel, 18, and me an amazing opportunity to help them by opening up our family home to them and to experience the last few weeks of pregnancy.

We have a pretty active home already. Having an extra few people for several weeks could have been a challenge. However, it ended up being an honour.

The weeks leading up to the birth, were quite honestly an incredible and intimate experience.

To be able to help them with simple things such as having dinner ready when they came home from work, having a fire on, being able to rub Jenner's feet and talk about how she was feeling was so precious.

They appreciated having us to come home to and we anticipated their arrival every day with joy. For the most part, life at our home did not change much, yet were enhanced with the gift of giving and the honour of being needed.

The fact that we were able to have her sister and husband live with us for six weeks leading up to the birth prepared all of us for the next generation.

Who knows if Auntie Emma, who is an amazing lady, will ever have a boyfriend, let alone a husband and marriage? She is not in any hurry and got to experience first hand through many evenings after dinner snuggling next to Jenner and being able to feel baby kicking while settling her hand on her sister's tummy.

Just before the babe was born, their home was ready to move in to — really a few days before labour. As we moved them out, we were happy and sad.

When we were pregnant with our second baby, we also were renovating and my in-laws had done the same for us by having us live with them for a month leading up to the finishing of the renovation and last month of pregnancy. It is a really personal experience.

We had spoken a few times leading up to the birth of Gia, about maybe my coming into the delivery room, yet I had said, "Well after you were born after 53 hours of labour an emergency C section and all your siblings following C section's hence, I am not sure how much help I can be."

When they called from the hospital to say it was time for me to come, just like it seems in all labours, it was the middle of the night.

We have a puppy that sleeps in my room so I had to ask one of the kids to come up and "be in charge" for the night.

When I go to the gym in the early morning, Emma comes up and does just that and

she came up to be in charge of dogs, cat, breakfast, getting off to school and securing the house.

This morning, I explained the baby was on its way. As I woke up Emma and said, "I need you to come upstairs to be in my bedroom to look after things, your sister is in labour and we are about to have a baby," Emma rubbed her eyes, said, "I love you Mum."

I woke up her younger brother who said "I will do whatever you need us to do." They were both so responsible before their father died a few years ago, and are especially so now.

As I left to go to the hospital to be part of our next generation's birth, I knew things were in good hands with Emma and her younger brother.

What an incredible feeling that you can leave your home to assist one child and the others are so able to look after the entire on goings in the home for as it turned out at a few days.

Having communications devices made life a bit easier and as we went through the labour, that was handy. Emma was at the forefront of so many texts over the next 20 hours.

What a life-altering experience to have been at the birth of my first grandchild. Having the communications devices we do and having one son in Calgary, one in Vancouver and three children here, being able to get updates, made it feel like the family was all with us during the labour.

Finally, weighing in at nine pounds, four ounces, Gia was born. The birthing room went from a quiet concentration on helping Jenner work to the great sound of a new babe crying, nurses running around in enthusiasm.

As Sep cut the cord, we finally asked what sex the baby was as we counted her toes and fingers.

After being again honoured to hold Gia and getting to hold her up so her parents could admire her, I handed my grandchild to her mum to feed and phoned the rest of my children to celebrate her birth.

Finding out that her name was Gia and James after her grandfather, Jack, who never got to meet her, was lovely. Even though he is not here in body he was there that day in spirit for sure.

Emma and Noel immediately came through to the hospital to join the celebrations and meet their new niece.

Seeing them hold baby Gia was such a happy moment, seeing the joy in their faces meeting their new niece was incredible.

Upcoming events:

— Kelowna self-advocates monthly meeting April 10 from 11:30-1 at Parkinson Recreation Centre. All welcome and bring a bag lunch

— Cool Arts are exhibiting some Cool Art at the Streaming Cafe 596 Leon Ave. Kelowna, to April 30. The work is based on Shelley DeCoste's concept of Diversability. Opening night is April 11 from 5-8 p.m.

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