

IT'S the ultimate privilege: to be trusted to help a woman safely deliver her baby into this world. It's a time of pure joy for most, of hesitation and fear for some, another pressure to add to a burdensome load for others, and — in the rarer cases — a time of deep sadness. Sometimes it's all of these things.

Years ago I looked after a couple having their fourth child — a girl to complete their family. It was a calm and beautiful birth and a healthy girl was born. Less than 24 hours later the mother was dead.

Maternal deaths do happen, still. Even in the developed world, in state-of-the-art facilities, women die as a result of childbirth. This is unbelievable to many. It was unbelievable to me, and the experience changed me. It changed the type of midwife I was.

I had so many questions: what would happen to this little girl? What would happen to her family? What about my colleagues who cared for her? The ripple effect was enormous.

Then there's the other sad, hidden side of the job: babies die, too.

Since that experience, there have been many

this (midwife) life

Narisha Pental

new memories and experiences. A baby born at 11.50pm, whose father wanted to name her Ten-To. Mothers from Sudan, who have experienced some of the most horrific traumas imaginable before arriving in Australia, who quietly give birth to their children without fuss. Tears of frustration at 3am from mothers who haven't slept for two days.

These days, I work mainly in research. I still witness the extremes of emotion babies bring. In this case, it's preterm birth. The work keeps me at arm's length from the pure joy and occasional terrible sadness.

I still think about that mother and her family. I met her husband many years later. They have coped and adjusted. No doubt their lives con-

tinued on but I often think of that little girl. Midwifery is still a privilege. It's certainly not a profession for the faint-hearted.

But it has provided me with a way of seeing the complexities of life in a way I would never otherwise have been able to observe. Here I am at 40, with a family of my own.

It was a childhood fantasy to be a nurse and a midwife but my children are the true inspiration for my vocation.

There are many women in the developing world who don't have access to a trained midwife during their pregnancy or births. It is something we take for granted.

Most women in Australia will rely on a midwife at some point during their pregnancy, birth or post-partum period. Let's hope it remains that way. That's what midwife means — “with woman”. And we are.

Review welcomes submissions to *This Life*. To be considered for publication, the work must be original and between 420 and 450 words. Submissions may be edited for clarity. Send emails to thislife@theaustralian.com.au

Blue agave is the base ingredient of which popular distilled beverage?

Who preceded David Johnston as Australian minister for defence?

Malcolm Kelley and Tony Oller make up which musical duo?

4. World of Warcraft takes place within what world, starting with A?

5. Which comedian wrote the poem *On the Ning Nang Nong*?

6. Gustation is related to which one of the five senses?
7. Herbert Henry Asquith led Britain into which war?

8. What were the two demonstration sports at the 1956 Summer Olympics?

9. Gustave Flaubert is best known for which 1857 novel?

10. Marrakesh is one of the major cities of which country?