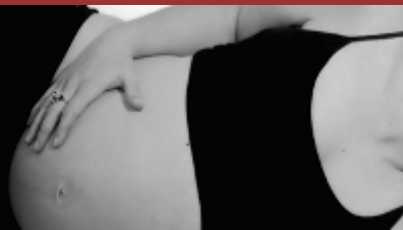


TALK BIRTH

2011

By Molly Remer

Celebrating Women,
Transforming Birth



BlogBooker

From Blog to Book.

'[HTTP://TALKBIRTH.ME/POSTS](http://TALKBIRTH.ME/POSTS)'

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Chapter 1

2011

1.1 January

Happy New Year! (2011-01-01 15:21)

I'm 37 weeks today and it feels exciting to now be in the baby's birth month and birth year at last! I recognize this feeling of "



[1]
37 weeks!

any time now" from other pregnancies—when you hit the official "full-term" mark, it makes you feel like the baby is seconds away, even though I truly expect her to be born right around (if not actually on) her due date three weeks from now. But, the sense of being full-term heightens a sense of awareness and expectation around, "could it be today? Or, today? How about today..." As I said, I do not expect to have her early, my past experiences don't indicate such—my due dates are usually very spot-on. I am having a LOT of contractions lately. During the last three days or so they've picked up in both frequency and intensity. I also have a LOT of cervical twinges (the "baby-biting-my-cervix" feeling). This has been going on since about 31 weeks or so, which is much earlier than I remember from other pregnancies (seems like a 37 week+ feeling). This feeling is very strong at night and almost hurts—like she is twisting her head around/burrowing down.

I weigh 168 pounds now—most ever! I'd kind of like to not pass 170...

No swelling anywhere. Pretty good energy level. BP decent (slightly high at midwife's, normal if I take it at Wal-Mart of my dad takes it). No more leukocytes in urine. Went to chiropractor last week because I have a persistent intuitive feeling of needing to get my pelvis aligned. So, that was good to check off my list. Midwife says baby is lined up in ideal position in utero/pelvis and estimates her to weigh about 5 pounds (which I think is wrong. I always surprise my care providers with the actual size of my babies. I think she's pushing 7lbs right now, probably—6.5 or so).



Feeling nest[2]

y and have been assembling box of birth supplies, sorting through baby clothes, and collecting expendable towels and receiving blankets. Feel like cleaning up and decluttering big time—in with new, out with old time of year! Finished crocheting an afghan for her and want to make a matching hat. Haven't done belly cast yet—want to soon—and feeling the pressure to get it done! I also need to review the neonatal resuscitation stuff I learned at the training last month with my mom and with Mark, so that the only person at the birth who knows how to resuscitate a baby is not also the only person who is birthing the baby....!

I also have collected materials to make a "birth altar" for this birth. It is a shadow box/shelf that I'm going to collage all over inside and out and then be able to set things inside on the little shelves :) Going to have some additional pro pregnancy pictures taken on Tuesday! Haven't really had any birth dreams. I am expecting her to be born at night (well, wee hours of morning) on a weekend within two days on either side of her due date. I'm also expecting her to be born very quickly. If I'm in labor for longer than four hours I don't know that I'll know what to think about that! I keep imagining a sort of "sudden" birth—like one of those 45 minute ones! I started reading [3]Simply Give Birth again to get me in the birthy frame of mind. My mom is reading [4]The Power of Women for the same reason. I am into week 4 with my Hypnobabies home study. Still having "issues" with the persistent and frequent use of the word "anesthesia," but finding that the finger drop technique works amazingly well. I want to do a fear release exercise with myself soon—I'd like to write up my various birth/baby/postpartum fears and work them through on paper, maybe doing a drawing or art exploration, and then do a Hypnobabies fear clearing session.

Looking forward to my blessingway next weekend! If she does for some reason end up being early, that could put a crimp in my party plans! I actually have a lot of plans for next week. I have this urge to "wrap things up," which is making me run kind of high/frantic, rather than rest and relax and rejuvenate in anticipation of a nice, peaceful babymoon. My next online class starts on Jan. 10th and I've got some

remaining prep work to do for it too!

Didn't update with a 36 week picture, so here it is too:



[5]
36 weeks

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0192.jpg
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0191.jpg
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/11/30/simply-give-birth-a-mini-review/>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/book-review-the-power-of-women/>
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0189.jpg

talkbirth (2011-01-06 19:18:03)

Thank you, Kerry! I'm very excited too! I still find it inconsistent with the manner in which Hypnobabies re-frames/rewords everything else—people are very familiar with the terms "contractions" and "pain" also and yet those terms are replaced with other, positive words. To be anesthetized means to shut your senses off and to deaden yourself to what is happening. That isn't how I perceive, or want to perceive, birth! Additionally, I HATE the feeling of being medicated or anesthetized (loopy while having my wisdom teeth removed, for example). It is not a desirable or positive state for me. While I'm enjoying the program and feel I am benefitting from it overall, this is a linguistic incongruity that I can't fully get past regardless of the explanation—my powerful mental association with the word (in a negative way) is apparently different than that of others. I have written in later posts about some great things I've experienced with the Hypnobabies materials—I've enjoying having the home study course overall!

Melissa (2011-01-01 19:42:14)

Wow, Molly - I've been thinking of you :) 37 weeks!!!!!! You look fantastic :) I hope you have a beautiful Blessingway - I am considering having one this time...actually more for my 7yo daughter, as she attended one with me a while ago and absolutely LOVED the whole thing. I didn't want one when I was pg with her, as I felt the need to take myself 'off the stage' and make that experience very private...as my first birth had been so 'public'. But I don't feel that so much with this one, so maybe it's time for my own Blessingway :) I am 32 wks tomorrow, and ENORMOUS...in the best way possible :) That's so wonderful that you are in that 'any time now' zone - YAY!!!! Sending a big hug (that would actually be difficult in real life, as there would be two bellies in the middle!! Melissa

Michelle E. (2011-01-02 22:28:46)

First: Yay!! Second: I really like your idea of working through your fears in some way. I have this idea in my head of doing a burning of my fears...I've even thought about doing it like soon, hoping doing something physical like that will help me work through them sooner than almost birth time.

dancersummer (2011-01-01 16:59:50)

Hard to believe it's so close now! You're looking great as usual.

talkbirth (2011-01-01 19:52:33)

Thanks, Melissa! We could "side hug" around the bumps ;-D My mom has had a blessingway for me for each baby and they have all been really special. I hope you decide to do it. With this pregnancy, I feel the urge for a "big" blessingway—I want everyone who has positive energy to spare for me, to pass it on over! :) I feel very good to be in this zone now—a little disbelieving too!

Mommymichael (2011-01-02 15:30:33)

Hi! I'm a Hypnobabies mom and homebirther as well. Just happened upon your page and wanted to say hi. I like your idea about doing the fear clearing. I did something similar in which I wrote down all my fears about the birth. Then went back to the top and changed them to only positives. So if I was worried about cord issues I would go back and change it to a positive about the cord being exactly where it was supposed to be. Happy birthing!

Kerry (2011-01-06 16:51:55)

Hi Molly, You look so beautiful and I'm very excited for you! I wanted to comment on "the persistent and frequent use of the word "anesthesia," in Hypnobabies". That word is used because of the way the human mind associates words with their meanings in a literal way and in a connotative way. Almost everyone has experienced anesthesia of one kind or another; dental, medical, partial or complete. The upshot is that the effects of "anesthesia" are well-known and experienced, and are associated with the elimination of pain, so hearing the word many times (compounding, in hypnosis terms) is the most effective way for the subconscious and conscious mind to accept what is being produced with Hypnobabies' techniques for comfort in childbirth. Other words, even when used frequently, do not have the same very positive effect, and it is one of the aspects of our program that makes Hypnobabies moms so satisfied with their babies' births. I hope that helps, and I invite you to call and talk to me about this if it still bugs you: 714-952-2229 or 877-554-9766. Big Hugs to you and your family as you prepare for your new little bundle! Kerry Founder/Director of Hypnobabies

Birth & Mystery (2011-01-03 14:05)

"Birth is a great mystery. Yet, we live in a rational, scientific world that doesn't allow for mystery. 'In this day and age, there must be a better way to have a baby,' implies that if you are informed enough, strong enough, you can control it. Any woman who has given birth, who can be honest, will tell you otherwise. There are no guarantees. It is an uncontrollable experience. Taking care of yourself and being informed and empowered are crucial, but so is surrender. Forget about trying to birth perfectly. Forget about trying to please anyone, least of all your doctor or midwife..." –Jennifer Loudon (The Pregnant Woman's Comfort Book)



[1]

At Montana De Oro in 2009 (waves remind me of both mystery and surrender)

I couldn't fit this whole quote into my Facebook status today, so I'm sharing it here. I think it is a good reminder for all of us and especially for me as I get ready to do this again sometime this very month!

Here is a [2]previous post I wrote about surrender, birth, and control and here is one about [3]distraction, concentration, and surrender (which is a concept I love).

Every day I feel more ready to embark on my own new mystery!

Edited to add, in response to a comment about whether it might be possible to have a perfect birth:

I do think it is probably possible to have the "perfect birth" for you, but I have yet to read/see/experience a birth where the mother didn't think of something that would have been nice to have different. Even with the very blissful stories, there's usually some kind of "hiccup" or "wish I would have done..." (even if it as simple as, "wish I would have had the placenta encapsulated). I feel like with each of my own births I "improve" upon whatever it was that was less than perfect last time, but then there is usually a new surprise for me with the new birth—because each birth is its own journey and has its own lessons to impart! But, I feel like I spend a lot of energy prior to subsequent births thinking of ways to "fix" whatever the hiccup was with the preceding birth (with my current pregnancy the needed "fixes" for me are LIVE baby and minimizing postpartum bleeding. I expect there will probably be some kind of new "surprise" for me that will lead to me thinking that IF I had done something different maybe THAT element could have been perfect too!). What sounds perfect to me this time around is a very, very undisturbed (possibly unassisted) birth, but with IMMEDIATE postpartum assistance and bloody-towel washing! ;-D

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/100_1980.jpg

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/07/12/birth-control/>

3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/04/26/distraction-concentration-surrender/>

Birth Altar (2011-01-05 19:55)

Inspired by the birth altars by artist Amy Swagman of [1]The Mandala Journey, I decided I wanted to make a special birth altar for this upcoming birth. My mom bought me a small, unfinished curio cabinet/shadow box from Hobby Lobby to use for this purpose (thanks, Mom!). The first thing I did was to paint it "placenta red" using a blend of red and purple paints to get the shade I wanted. This is my favorite "power" color:



[2] Door open (door is glass, but it doesn't show up in the pictures and looks like an empty frame).

I had a variety of postcards, tags, and inspirational words saved and some of them posted on the wall by my computer. I decided it was time to do something with all these accumulated goodies. I made a reversible, removable card to insert into the front door of the box. For the front panel, I used a card that I bought from [3]Birthing from Within with the "kiva woman" painting that I really love and connect with. I didn't like cutting it up, but it was worth it! Around the edges I picked words from the tag that came with a shirt I purchased from [4]WYSH (though the quotes are intended to be about the parenting journey, they are amazingly apropos for birth—which, of course, is part of the parenting journey too). I also used some of the tear off pages from a little "happy thoughts" sort of page-a-day calendar that I had a couple of years ago from the \$1 Shop (again, totally appropriate for birth, even though it wasn't the original purpose). Finally, my paper-hoarding tendencies have come in handy, because these little words of wisdom were perfect! Part of me felt like I "shouldn't" have so many words as part of my birth altar—birth brain doesn't really "speak" in words, but words are my thing and my "medium," so to speak, so I followed my intuition and I loved how it turned out. It is perfect :)



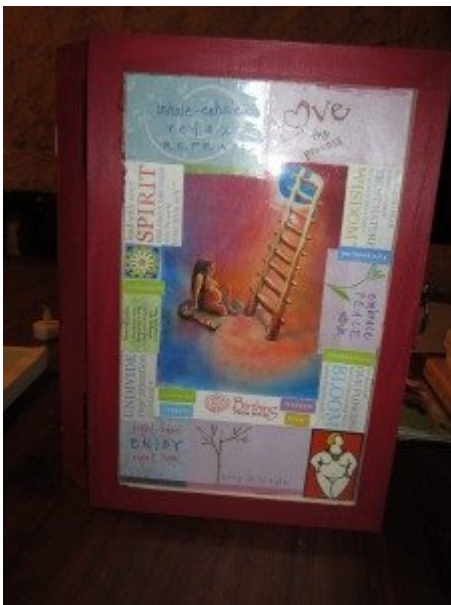
[5] First side of reversible card

I am less happy with the second side—I was going for less wordy on it and maybe I should have worded it up too! The upper left hand corner is a linoleum block print carved by my husband :)



[6]
Second side of reversible card

Front of the altar with card inside:



[7]
Inside of door with card inside:



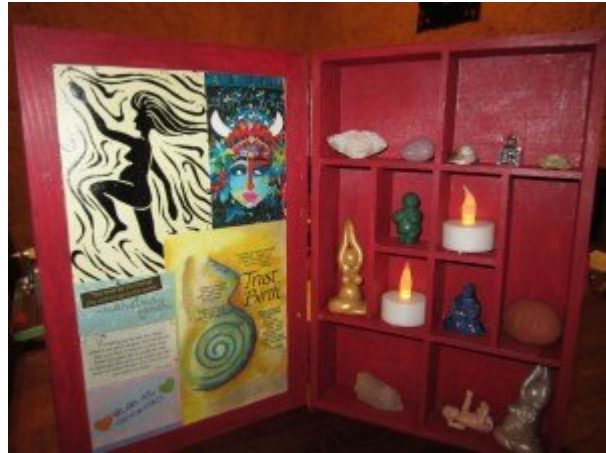
[8] For the back, I had a small collection of items that are round and so I thought they seemed to go together. In the center, I attached the [9]womb labyrinth I made a couple of weeks ago. In the upper right hand corner is one of the black and white drawings that I've been doing that my mom modified and cut into a linoleum block print as well. The lower left hand corner is a postcard version of a womb labyrinth that I drew in 2007.



[10] Then, I filled it up with some things that hold meaning to me that usually are around my house in various places including two of my polymer clay birth goddess sculptures. I included two little LED tea lights, which look really cool in there in real life, but are less cool in the pictures. I also put in a little plastic baby, which might be kind of weird—I can't decide...



[11]

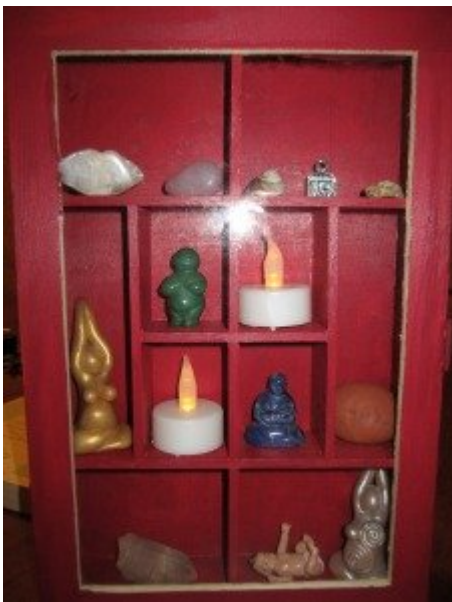


[12]



[13]

Remember the reversible card? Now the front is also the inside panel! :)



[14]

With card removed and door closed.



[15]
Opened all the way with front and back both visible.

This was officially the most fun and rewarding birth project I've worked on :)

1. <http://themandalajourney.com/store/birth-altars/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0209.jpg
3. <http://www.birthingfromwithin.com/>
4. <http://www.wearyourspirit.com/>
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0210.jpg
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8. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0212.jpg
9. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/22/more-birth-art/>
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12. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0216.jpg
13. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0217.jpg
14. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0218.jpg
15. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0214.jpg

Dana (2011-01-05 22:26:24)
You're so creative - it's beautiful!

Karen (2011-01-05 20:52:29)
It's beautiful! LOVE IT!

Finishing Up! « Talk Birth (2011-01-05 20:53:21)
[...] Comments « Birth Altar [...]

Summer (2011-01-05 20:50:06)
I can't wait to see it in person! It looks great!

Mary Alice (2011-01-05 21:59:44)
I love how much thought and energy you put into it, Molly. I believe it will return those thoughts and good energy during your birth experience.

Barbara (2011-01-05 20:31:57)

It turned out so well, and is really wonderful in real life!

amybirthingbody (2011-01-06 17:40:24)

I *LOVE* this!! I'm reposting it on my Facebook page for The Mandala Journey :) <http://www.facebook.com/mandalajourney> #!/mandalajourney Blessings for your upcoming birth! Amy

Adventures in Birth Art... « Talk Birth (2011-01-12 21:26:17)

[...] drawn a number of black and white mandalas (see example to right!), made a specially decorated birth altar, and also made a belly cast. Each one of these projects has been meaningful to me in a special way. [...]

Finishing Up! (2011-01-05 20:53)

I have had a crabby and annoying day for much of the day, which is not the frame of mind I envisioned being in when writing this post! I originally set out to write about what a nice time I've been having the last couple of days, sooooo....going to just write and perhaps I'll recapture some of the peace and sense of harmony that was prompting me to write in the first place!

On Sunday, I had a very delightful time spontaneously working on the [1]birth altar I planned to make. When I say spontaneous, it doesn't mean that I didn't know I was going to do it—I knew I was, someday—just that I suddenly started working on it and basically didn't quit until I was finished and it came together



in a perfect way for me. [2]

I felt so good and content after making it. Inspired by that experience, I then wrote down a list of my fears about the birth (this was also on my to-do-before-actual-birthing-day list) and then did a [3]Hypnobabies "fear release" session after that. And, then I burned them all up in the kitchen sink. More good feelings!

Also on Sunday, while the kids were at my parents' house, I worked in the bedroom getting all of the baby's clothes sorted and into the right boxes as well as assembling my special tub of birth supplies so that everything is easily available in one place and no one has to ask me for anything—I even put a box of raspberry leaf tea in, which could also easily just stay in the cupboard where it usually lives, but it is right there with everything else now. While I was doing this, Mark worked on sorting out his own clothes and decluttering the closet. We also decluttered some of the "hot spots" on our kitchen counters that attract random piles of nothing important. So, more good feelings about that!

The next morning, I woke up before the kids and did the Hypnobabies "visualize your perfect birth" exercise (not a CD, my imagination). It suggested spending about 5 minutes and I spent almost 20 minutes—since

I am having some strange "death" fears about this birth, I went ahead and carried the visualization through to my being 89 and then to the baby being 89 ;-D Maybe this was excessive, but I felt good about it—ending the visualization with just the initial "hi, baby!" moment didn't feel like enough to me! So, then I felt really positive and complete about that :) I also finished my birth altar that morning—I put a glaze over the images, took pictures, etc. I also listened to the pregnancy and birth affirmations from Hypnobabies while I did some of my other work. Later, we went on a nature exploration walk in the woods to enjoy the nice weather and when we came back, I read some of my kids' homebirth books to them—Welcome with Love, Runa's Birth, and We're Having a Homebirth. They are excited and want to be there when the baby is born, but I'm strongly leaning toward only having them present if they happen to wake up. I don't know that I want them woken up if they're not ready (I realized this for sure after Z mentioned how he is going to be "screaming" when the baby is born. Um. No, thanks on that).

Then, on Tuesday, I had some more belly pictures taken. It is fun to be "special" and get my pictures taken :) I love all of the ones I've seen so far from this shoot, but these two are really good!



[4]



[5]

Today, I had my first prenatal appointment with my midwife at our own house. I've spent the entire pregnancy not being able to picture her in our home and so, now, I can—because she's actually been here. I hadn't really realized before that she hasn't really ever met Mark or my mom, other than very short intro-

ductions about 6 years ago! She seems to think I will have the baby early—baby’s head is very low (which I can feel, for sure!) and she said my amniotic fluid has decreased. She also thinks baby is on the small side, but I think I will fool people once again. I only measure 33 weeks, which is kind of funny, because I wonder what I would look like measuring 40 weeks—I guess pretty extreme! I have been having a lot of pre-birthing waves (trying out my Hypnobabies words!). I always do, but they’ve definitely increased in frequency to about every 15-20 minutes throughout the day. I also reminded her that I don’t expect to call her until near the end, because what I want from her is immediate postpartum help—I like being almost alone during my birthing time (more Hypnobabies words. I like this one especially—it isn’t ”labor” it is my ”birthing time.” :))

After the midwife left, my mom stayed and we went through my box of birth supplies so she knows what is where. I also made sure she knows how to use my camera because she is on picture-duty. I also showed Mark and my mom the things I learned about neonatal resuscitation at the training I attended last month and we practiced with my resuscitation bag so that we all know how to do ”positive pressure ventilation” and chest compressions on a newborn now. I know this might seem kind of over the top, but I find it very empowering to know how to do these things now—they always seemed ”mysterious” and specialized before—and it doesn’t make me feel like I’m planning for a ”worst case,” but that I’ve completely resolved any fear I had about things I wouldn’t know how to do for my own baby if I was giving birth alone! We’ve been talking about needing to do this since the end of Dec., so it felt very good to get everything all squared away in this manner.

Really the only things left I’d like to get done now before she is born are the belly cast and my blessingway and to crochet one more hat for her! (Of course, I have non-birth/non-baby things in abundance that I’d also like to get done—double checking the exam questions for my online class, finalizing the FoMM newsletter, submitting two articles, finalizing some the blog posts in my drafts folder, etc., etc., etc. , <sob>), but right now my mind is on the specifically getting-ready-for-baby to-dos and I’ve done ’em! Go, me!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/birth-altar/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0217.jpg
3. <http://www.hypnobabies.com/>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=22615&id=117518641642270>
5. <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=22615&id=117518641642270>

dancersummer (2011-01-06 07:36:47)

Yay! I do hope you get your belly cast supplies today so you can finish that up too and then only have your blessingway left! I’m so glad it was not uncomfortable to have the Midwife there, in your home, and that you were able to clearly state what you want/need from her. That’s really huge. :) Almost there!!!

Barbara (2011-01-06 08:42:28)

Woohoo! I feel relief and a sense of accomplishment also. I’ve been reading loads of birth stories (love those stories in Simply Give Birth and stayed up half the night reading them). Also, I’m feeling honored to be the picture-taker, in light of ill-advised comments of the past (which I own, and were about the quality of my photography rather than the qualities of the subject!). This time, I will capture the power and beauty of your birthing self!!!

Mary Alice (2011-01-06 09:54:49)

My heart literally bumped against my ribs when I read your post, Molly. It’s as if I could see into your heart. I can’t explain it except to say I heard your voice as you ’talked’. I wonder if you plan to have an extra person there to help with the boys? Participating in a birth is a wonderful but overwhelming thing for children. Will Tom be available for duty if the need arises to distract Z? You’ll certainly be too busy to focus on him and so will Mark and Barbara. Okay, enough of my advice. The only thing left to say is this: Molly, your strength, planning and thoughtfulness are

so remarkable. I marvel at you on a regular basis but right now I'm truly in awe of you; I'm proud to know you. You're so much younger than me but you've taught me a lot and I thank you.

Molly (2011-01-06 10:19:44)

You probably were talking about the photo quality after all. Forgiven! Surely my own majestic stunningness was never in question ;)

Molly (2011-01-06 10:21:34)

Thank you very much, Mary Alice. I have a compulsion to write about everything and so it is good to know my "heart" shows in that process :) Mom is actually on kid AND picture duty. If baby is born during the day, Tom will probably be involved with taking them away for entertainment. If it is at night, like I anticipate, Mom is the one.

shauna (2011-01-06 10:30:10)

What a beautiful read. The getting ready and then being ready -things in order- is a wonderful feeling. It makes my stomach turn in a GOOD way. It's butterflies that feel happy. Kids are so different once birth time comes. They know. They just do. They sense the power and are really intune. It's so much magic for a baby to be born in the house he or she was made in. Never leaving...part of the family always. I just love it! I'm so excited! Nothing better than family.

Sheridan (2011-01-06 18:09:27)

It sounds like you are getting really ready. Have fun with the belly mask! I am looking forward to reading your birth story in the next few weeks. :)

smithlaurel (2011-01-06 21:40:36)

Molly, I'm sad that the last few days have been so difficult for you. I'm praying for peace and calm for you and for your family, including the littlest sweetie.

Yarn Goddess « Talk Birth (2012-01-05 14:04:55)

[...] shortly and make available for download for any die-hard "fans" out there), and want to share my post from this exact date last year. Seems so recent in many ways, but also like an eternity in others! I just said to Alaina [...]

Birth Quotes of the Week (2011-01-10 11:21)

"In the midst of a world
...marked by tragedy and beauty
there must be those
who bear witness
against unnecessary destruction
and who, with faith,
stand and lead
in freedom,
with grace and power.

There must be those who
speak honestly
and do not avoid seeing
what must be seen
of sorrow and outrage,

or tenderness,
and wonder.”

–via [1]Unitarian Universalist Association

“One of the most important things I have learned about birthing babies is that the process is more of an unfolding marvel than a routine progression of events.” –Tori Kropp

“We are part of generations of women, one to the next. Teaching, mentoring, supporting, assisting, befriending, and so much more. Let us not lose those connections in our lives, in our births...” –[2]Preparing For Birth

“There is no other organ quite like the uterus. If men had such an organ they would brag about it. So should we” Ina May Gaskin

(this quote got the most “likes” of almost all the quotes I’ve ever posted on the CfM FB page!)

“A woman’s confidence and ability to give birth and to care for her baby are enhanced or diminished by every person who gives her care, and by the environment in which she gives birth...Every women should have the opportunity to give birth as she wishes in an environment in which she feels nurtured and secure, and her emotional well-being, privacy, and personal preferences are respected.” –[3]Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS)

“Birth wisdom...comes most completely not from the outside but from deep within the woman’s physiology.” –Robbie Davis-Floyd (in intro to Gentle Birth Choices)

“Hospital-based childbirth classes usually do not teach women about the wonder and mystery and sweaty, intense power of birth, but rather prepare them for each and every hospital procedure by educating their intellects instead of honoring their bodies.” –Robbie Davis-Floyd (in intro to Gentle Birth Choices book)

(Let it be known before anyone gets their feelings hurt that I do understand that there are very good, complete, helpful, awesome hospital birth classes and hospital birth educators out there! This quote is a generality, but one that seems quite true in a number of cases [but not all, of course]).

“...I have noticed that the subgroup of women who tend to choose [homebirth] often exhibit certain characteristics, such as comfort within their own bodies, a desire to have a birth experience that is more poetic than clinical, as well as a desire to return what we all feel is some seriously missing humanity to the experience of having a baby...” –Cara Muhlhahn

“We can no longer sit back and debate whether maternity care is evidence-based. We have seen that over and over again, in most cases, it is not...” –Connie Livingstone

1. <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=6937463748>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PreparingForBirth>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/CoalitionforImprovingMaternityServices>

Book Review: Gentle Birth Companions (2011-01-11 14:01)

Book Review: Gentle Birth Companions: doulas serving humanity



Gentle Birth Companions
doulas serving humanity

Adela Stockton

By Adela Stockton[1]

McCubbington Press, 2010

ISBN 978-1-907931-00-0

104 pages, paperback, £13.00 (worldwide)

[2]<http://www.adelastockton.co.uk>

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

[3]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

Gentle Birth Companions is the first book “written about the doula movement beyond the US” and as such it was a fascinating read. I hadn’t realized how ethnocentric my own perceptions were about the role and history of doulas and I previously assumed that the “doula movement” was essentially synonymous with the “doula profession in the US.” Not so! Indeed, Stockton discusses the way in which in the US, doula professional organizations strive mainly to be acceptable to the medical community, whereas in the UK the doula operates outside of (or parallel to) the medical system. And, she provides an interesting analysis as to whether doulas should be referred to as “professionals” in the first place (this is also due to a difference in what the word means in the UK compared to the US). She expresses several criticisms of certification or even of specialized training programs, feeling that professionalization builds additional, unnecessary layers of bureaucracy into the maternity care system and that the role of a doula should be the role of a lay woman. She also posits that the role of doula actually represents a return to the role of traditional midwifery—what midwifery was supposed to be and has now become removed from politically, socially, and culturally.

Gentle Birth Companions is divided into three sections. In the first, Grassroots, it explores the origins of the doula, the 21st century doula (including doula preparation and training), the UK “brand” of doula, and the wider doula community (thoughts about a global movement and also about doulas in the developing world as well as the industrialized world). The second section, Guardians of Gentle Birth?, explores the doula’s role both antenatally and postpartum and the return to “traditional midwifery” represented by the role. In the third section, Doula Tales, some UK doulas share birth stories, experiences, and thoughts in their own words. Gentle Birth Companions is an excellent look at the “politics” of the doula movement and the professionalization and motivations of such, as well as at the role and purpose of the doula in women’s lives. – Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://www.adelastockton.co.uk/content/gentle-birth-companions>

2. <http://www.adelastockton.co.uk/>

3. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>

peacefulbeginnings (2011-01-11 14:48:57)
I can't wait to read it!

Birth Lessons from a Chicken (2011-01-11 16:20)

Birth Lessons from a Chicken

by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

Originally published in [1]Midwifery Today, 2009 Spring;(89):49

“Should we just let her sit on them?” my husband asked. He had been struggling to keep a broody hen off her nest for almost two weeks.

“I always vote in favor of the mother,” I told him. So, we stopped trying to oust her. My husband gathered up six random eggs from the coop and put them under her and we let her sit.

We consulted our book on raising chickens. The chicken book had very little encouraging advice about “natural incubation.” After reading it, we learned that she was likely to let the eggs get too cold causing them to die, or perhaps just chill a part of them causing the chicks to have deformed feet. If she did manage to hatch them, they will probably get bacteria in them from the “unsanitary” nest site and get “mushy chick disease.” This is, of course, if the eggs happen to be viable at all, which is improbable. It is recommended not to let her sit and if she persists to either cull her (kill her), or to just let her sit there until she dies of starvation trying to hatch infertile eggs (and therefore culls herself). The book also informed us that if she has feathery feet (she does), she will probably knock the eggs out of the nest by accident and break them. Also, she should definitely be sitting in the spring and not the dead of winter. After studying the book, we are left with a clear sense that incubating eggs artificially is the preferred way to go and that “natural incubation” is fraught with difficulty and dangers.

However, there our chicken sat in the unheated, but well built and insulated chicken coop as the January temperatures outdoors reached -2F. We concluded that she probably had a 5 % chance of actually hatching anything and I felt sad for her.

Then, one morning when my husband went to feed the chickens, he heard a funny noise. He looked at the broody hen and from beneath her, a fuzzy head appeared. Then two. Eventually, four. In this cold, cold weather at the wrong time of year with the wrong



[2]
The mama hen and two of her chicks

kind of feet and the wrong kind of eggs, she did it! We didn't trust her, or believe in her. Our book and the experts didn't either. However, her inherent mothering wisdom won out—it trumped us. At the risk of excessive personification, it truly seemed that she had believed in herself and trusted her instincts (or perhaps, that Nature believed in itself).

Perhaps we could have had the same result with an artificial incubator—a tray that rotates the eggs, instead of “clumsy” feathered feet; a properly temperature controlled unit instead of the heat of her own breast; a sterilized box instead of a wooden coop with an unscientific amount of possibly “germy” feathers plucked from her own body.

My husband ran to get the rest of the family and as we watched that first small fuzzy baby with its eyes bright with life, I was awash with the parallels—the book tells her that her pelvis will be too small, labor will be too painful, her skin won't stretch, she might have GD, there might be any manner of complications, maybe she should elect to have the baby surgically. Why all the fuss about doing it “naturally” anyway?

Then, as we continued to stare in amazement, the mama hen clucked to her baby softly and fluffed her wings around it until it disappeared beneath her with the others. Isn't this the birthright of every new baby of any species? To be snuggled immediately after birth into the warm embrace and near the breast of the female body that has given it life? The body that has cared for and nurtured it so lovingly so that its head may finally peek out into the world?

If our chicken were to write a book about hatching babies—or about giving birth—perhaps her section about natural incubation would read:

Maybe she knows what she's doing.

Maybe you should trust her.

Maybe she can do a better job with her own body and her own babies than you can.

Maybe she can do this all by herself.

—

Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE is a certified birth educator and activist. She is editor of the Friends of Missouri Midwives newsletter, a breastfeeding counselor, and the mother of two young sons and a baby girl on the way. She loves to write and blogs about birth at [3]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>, midwifery at [4]<http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com>, and miscarriage at <http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com>.

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This is a preprint of Birth Lessons from a Chicken, an article published in Midwifery Today, 2009 Spring;(89):49. Copyright © 2009 Midwifery Today. Midwifery Today's website is located at: <http://www.midwiferytoday.com>

1. <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/100_1695.jpg
3. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
4. <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com/>

Kim (2011-01-12 11:39:47)

This is such a wonderful article. I have given birth safely at home unassisted to both of my beautiful children, and I am so blessed to have done so. I had a 7 hour, twenty minute labor with my daughter and a 6 hour labor with my son, both nursed right away with no problems, and both are spectacularly healthy, smart, caring, and wonderful. I also have chickens who have naturally hatched their babies. I had one chicken who had two clutches – the first had a single egg, the second had a single egg also, but I "helped" her by giving another egg from her sister, and both hatched. The other two hens each hid their nests from me out in the yard, and we found that one had six of her eight eggs hatch, and the other had all eight of her eggs hatch! They also have feathered feet, and they are even bantam hens, so they are "too small" to keep all eight eggs sufficiently warm, right? So we went from four chickens to EIGHTEEN, practically overnight! I think you either see birth (of a baby or a chicken) as poorly designed, fraught with danger, in desperate need of intervention and control, or you see it as a beautiful, natural thing that needs hands off until it proves that it needs intervention. (If you break your leg, then you get it set. If you cut your hand badly, then you get stitches or a butterfly bandage or whatever is called for. If you run into trouble giving birth, THEN you get help.) The VAST majority of women and babies, the VAST majority of time would do perfectly well to birth/be born at home. Nutrition, exercise, education, and personal responsibility are the hallmarks of a successful pregnancy. Our society looks at pregnancy as either a time to just sit around and do nothing or a time to eat like a pig or a time to complain. We need to look at it properly as a normal part of our lives, one marked by good food, long walks, healthy relationships, and lots of research. I have been pregnant or nursing since 2004, and, although I did have some doubts early on about my ability to get pregnant, carry a baby to term, nurse, etc., I have proven that I am great at it! If you let the doubts sabotage your success, you will never know that YOU CAN DO IT! Your kids need (and deserve!) to know it, too!

Miranda (2011-01-11 22:33:45)

This is a wonderful post - and so TRUE! Isn't it crazy that these "experts" think they know better about birthing baby chickens than the mother chicken herself! You'd think that chickens in the wild were never able to hatch anything, wouldn't you? Just like human mothers in "the wild" probably couldn't birth their own babies without being hacked open or injected with labour inducing drugs, or having their baby forcibly removed with big BBQ tongs...

Nora Hayes (2011-01-11 17:49:07)

I love this post!!! As a doula and a Childbirth Educator, many, many times I've said to women that even if no one was there to help you give birth, you WILL give birth. Your body knows what to do and it WILL do it. It's best if you can let go of any preconceived ideas of what "should" happen and of whatever "your plan" is. Be in the moment

as much as you can. Live the experience as it is happening and participate in the way your body directs you to. It will tell you what to do if you can tune in and listen. Thank you for a great post!

Anna (2011-01-12 09:33:23)

This is great. Since my first pregnancy, I have often thought of my livestock, and how they always seemed to know what to do. In the nearly 20 years before I left my family's farm, and the many times I came back, I never had to assist one of my cattle, goats, or horses, in birthing. I would always just go out to the pasture and find that one or another had her baby. It was great. They always knew exactly what they were doing. I have never considered myself inferior to my livestock. If they can birth without fear, intervention, or complication, then why wouldn't I be able to do it, too? As nature would have it, and not at all surprisingly, I am just as able as they are. I am not the dumbed down version, in need of intervention and artificial things to "save" my babies from the process hundreds of thousands of years of evolution refined us for. People look at me like I've lost my mind when I tell them how I generally labor alone, and don't find it particularly painful until someone bothers me. It's not crazy. It's biology. Just as the chicken knew what she was doing, and every one of my wonderful animals has brought her babies into the world without a hitch, so have I. Human mothers are just as able as our animal counterparts.

Sandra Marr (2011-01-12 10:46:22)

The doctors around here, all believe that it is better to induce and have a Cesarean procedure. The problem is, the women listen to them. It's okay that I endanger my own body here, because being split wide open is normal and SAFER than having a natural birth. IN fact, I will take the spinal tap too, so I don't get too uncomfortable! Oh my! They just don't realize what dangers they are putting themselves into! Not to mention the fact they opened their bodies and have a huge wound on all levels, to heal! That their muscles and structure has been weakened by the unnecessary opening. I have asked many new and young mothers that live around me: why are you letting them cut you open? Why do you not try giving normal birth? Oh! We can't do that! The Doctor says... ARGH Stupidity runs in the women folk these days, they think like the Blonde jokes you hear! There is always a real emergency situation, that I grant, but these young mothers to be are just accepting a huge invasion of their bodies, because a money greedy and lazy doctor "says so"!

Linda Johnson (2011-01-12 12:02:10)

Having been raised on a farm and with chickens hatching their own eggs, I think you need a new chicken book. Or perhaps, the farm is why I believe in birth. We always left the hens to hatch their own brood and would sometimes slip a few other chicks in that we had purchased from the hatchery. I was always amazed at how many those hens could fit under their wings. Trust mom, trust birth.

Gail (2011-01-12 12:15:16)

This is a wonderful post! As someone who JUST hatched some chicks in an incubator (yes, I know, wrong time of year), I so appreciate your little hen doing everything just right. My husband and I had never hatched any chicks so this was our first attempt. We hatched 9 out of 12 eggs. They started hatching on Jan. 6th and completed on the 9th. I posted the process on my blog. I can't help but wish that the little chicks had a Mommy to teach them things and spread her wings over them. We do our best but it is not the same. Yes, they are healthy and vigorous, but believe me we are going to keep our eye open for a good broody hen. Nature is far superior. Thanks again for your post. It was sweet.

talkbirth (2011-01-12 12:23:27)

I know, Linda! This is a classic book on raising chickens—many copies sold (hmm. Could it be that *What to Expect When Your Expecting?* is its human counterpart?). In fact, the editor of MT recognized which book it must be from the terms I used from it! Since this story was written, we've had quite a few more batches of hatchlings (some from the same hen, some from her two identical sisters). Some as successful as this, some less so. Invariably, it has worked better when we don't try to improve upon it (by moving the mother somewhere "more comfortable," etc.)

julie herr (2011-01-17 22:23:59)

Great analogy! Growing up I was taught that if you had a rooster and a hen that you would somehow get chicks. It always seemed to work whether we wanted it to or not. Good thing our prolific free range bantams never read the book.

tabitha (2011-01-12 21:52:22)

I second the poster who said get rid of the book. I want to point out though that many of the chicken breeds common now were bred in factories, hatched in incubators, not by hens. Hatching is a learned behavior. Also, many have been bred for our use and convenience. The parallels are obvious. We are in a long line of women who have never seen normal birth, women who have never heard of normal birth in many cases. We are also, not in our natural habitat so to speak so we have more difficulty in birth. Having said that I am a mother of 5, all born at home. I believe birth is normal and natural, just not the environment of birth.

talkbirth (2011-01-12 22:13:47)

We have 25 chickens and many of them have never showed an interest in sitting on eggs—a lot of breeds are actually advertised with that as one of their “positive” traits (“rarely broody”). The ones who do—like the one in this article—are often mixed breeds (my theory being that the less “pure” they are, the more they return to their natural chicken instincts/habits). We had three chickens that were identical (to the one pictured—we called them The Three Musketeers) and they all successfully hatched babies, where several of our other hens tried several times and failed each time. Unfortunately, when one of them actually hatched a baby that was her own offspring instead of just whomever’s eggs were in the nest, it ended up getting picked off by a hawk when it was about six weeks old :(Nature doesn’t always have a happy ending! We’ve raised Cornish Cross chickens for meat before—talk about Franken chickens that have no normal/natural left in them :(

Selena (2011-01-13 11:07:35)

Molly, I’ve raised chickens for about 5 years now... You have a horrible book! LOL. Also, you should at least read a few different ones anyway. That way, you can play off one another. Actually, most chickens are now mixed breeds. That’s the reason why many of them get the broodiness bred out of them. It’s for maximum production. While she’s broody, she’s not laying. My best broody hens were a Silky/Brahma mix and a purebred Cochin (with feathered feet). My worst hatches ever? In an incubator. Horrible! That’s when I got malformed chicks and higher death rates. Also, the hen will not starve to death. That’s just idiotic for that book to suggest! If a broody hen always starved to death, and never hatched a normal chick, we wouldn’t have chickens. They’d become extinct! Chickens were not created to give us eggs every day of the year... we’ve bred some to do that. Playing books off one another is exactly what I’m doing with “What to Expect..”, “Spiritual Midwifery”, etc. No book I found so far has as good of a week-by-week progress than WTE, but it’s lousy for the actual main event. SM, “The Bradley Method”, and a few others are great for the main event, but rather sparse for the first 9 months. The only well-rounded book I found was from The Mayo Clinic. So far, that’s been good. However, I’m only 5 months along. Good luck!

Laura Jensen (2011-01-15 19:53:41)

Very interesting. My friend keeps chickens and she has a brooder. I think nature and women can take care of themselves for the most part.

kylar1066 (2011-07-04 00:34:49)

Chickens were never in the wild but bred for 300 years to be what they are. And humans, about 15000 years or 5 centuries since we’ve been “wild”

Belly Cast (2011-01-12 13:21)

I feel like I have about 15,000 blog posts that I want to write before my new baby is born! I'm also trying to add content from articles that I've had published over the years—some of my best stuff is in those articles and I feel like sharing the pre-print versions on my own website at last! Those things can obviously wait, but the posts that I have swirling around that have to do with pregnancy, I want to post NOW, while I'm still pregnant and while the feelings are fresh, not as retrospective posts later. It has been a different experience to blog while pregnant and it has definitely shifted the direction and tone of a lot of the posts I make to this blog—much more personal and less educational. I've also found that family and friends have begun reading my blog during my pregnancy, when they didn't before, so I also like sharing things with them in this way.

Since I only have about 20 minutes right now, I'll go with the shortest subject first, not the one I most want to write about (which is my blessingway last week—however, I think I feel a little too filled with emotion over it to really write about it the way I'd like to do, but I do have plenty of pictures I want to share).

On Sunday afternoon (38w1d), we made my belly cast! I seriously underestimated what a chilly experience it would be to make a



[1]

Trying to look enthusiastic despite the trickling...

belly cast in January! Yikes! My only other casting experience was in May (2006)—very different. For this one, we decided to make it with me standing up (for fullest shape) and so I stood in front of the furnace vent, but it didn't help much. Even though the water was warm, it quickly chilled down as soon as the plaster was applied and ran in slow torturous trickles into my underwear and then

down my legs and into my socks. My heels also started to feel stone bruised from standing on the hard floor without moving (I did stand on a towel, but it didn't help much!). If I shifted

them, Mark would complain that it was messing up his sculpting!

I'm really glad we did it and I'm glad to have an accommodating husband who doesn't think something

like this is silly or weird. I do not plan to actually paint the cast until after she is born. I am thinking of doing a black and white design on it similar to the mandalas I've been drawing during this pregnancy.



[2]
Finished (still unpainted) cast

Aside from "buying car seat" (which is winging its way here right now via site-to-store shipping), making the belly cast was my very last pre-baby "to-do." Of course, I've now added, "finish blessingway and birth art blog posts...and a couple more...and maybe a couple more" to said list!

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0268.jpg
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0269.jpg

Michelle E. (2011-01-12 13:37:47)

Yay! Thanks for sharing the post and the pictures! :) So a July belly cast will be good? ;)

talkbirth (2011-01-12 16:16:10)

I believe that would be perfect!

Adventures in Birth Art... « Talk Birth (2011-01-12 21:26:20)

[...] Comments « Belly Cast [...]

shauna (2011-01-12 22:09:22)

awww love the pictures. looks like a great cst! Can't wait to see it painted. I waited until 38 weeks to do my cast and was glad I waited. We waited until 40 weeks for the car seat... lol. And couldn't leave the house if we had wanted to for over a week. haha. :)

Finished Belly Cast! « Talk Birth (2011-05-09 18:35:53)

[...] Mother's Day I wanted to finish painting the belly cast we made during my pregnancy with Alaina. During my pregnancy I made a series of black and white [...]

Adventures in Birth Art... (2011-01-12 21:25)



[1]
Celebrating pregnancy mandala

This has been my most art-full pregnancy and that has been so much fun! I've made [2]polymer clay birth goddess sculptures galore, some [3]womby finger labyrinths, drawn a number of black and white mandalas (see example to right!), made a specially decorated [4]birth altar, and also made a [5]belly cast. Each one of these projects has been meaningful to me in a special way. At my blessingway/mother blessing ceremony this past weekend, I was touched to be gifted with many birth art projects made for me by my friends. Really wonderful (more on this later, I promise!).

A little while ago, I wanted to incorporate the labyrinth metaphor into one of my sculptures, but was unable to make a tiny enough labyrinth to stick on her belly the way I envisioned, so she ended up with a double-spiral instead:



[6]
Spiral belly figure sitting on spiral birth symbol aromatherapy pillow gifted to me by my friend at my blessingway ceremony.

My current "issue" that I decided to work on through art is with pushing the baby out. I have never found pushing an enjoyable part of labor and the feeling of the baby's head crowning to me is intense

and scary and has—in the past—resulted in injury to my body that takes a long and challenging time to recover from. This is not a part of my birthing time that I am looking forward to. [7]During my birth with Noah, since he was so small (15 weeks) there was no physical harm resulting from pushing him out, but there was the new association formed with having to "let go" of my baby this time in a very emotionally painful way.

So, I've been doing some mental work with myself about pushing, as well as having listened to my [8]Hypnobabies CD about pushing the baby out. This baby is doing a very extreme cervical pressure thing every night and when I experience that, I consciously relax and release rather than hold tension in my pelvic floor. I've also been doing a birth visualization in which I envision the baby gently gliding out :) So, I decided it was time for some Crowning Mother birth art. I made two sculptures, intending one as a doula gift and one for myself. I loved them while they were uncooked, but alas, I tried a new method—I mixed the polymer clay pigment with glaze and then I boiled them. Now, boiling has worked well previously, but I'd never done it with glaze before. They came out looking like they had peeling skin and were all mottled and discolored looking and very ruined to my eyes. I ended up deciding the one with gold pigment was still okay as she was (she has a peeling place on her back, etc. and you can see in the picture how her pigmentation is messed up/uneven):



[9]

First attempt at a Crowning Mama...

The second one was so discolored and bad looking, that I used acrylic paint to paint her pink:



[10]
Pink mama

She looks all right, but I still remember how she was supposed to look! (hmm. Do I sense a message here about how I might feel about my own unrepaired past tears? I remember how I'm supposed to look...)

I know they look like they're sitting on their babies' heads, but that was the best way I could do it to make them be able to be stable and freestanding.

I also made a three generations sculpture that was supposed to be a gift for my mom, but again had with the bad glaze/pigment issue. I ended up painting it green and don't know if I will end up giving it to her or not (she saw it by mistake, because I had it sitting on the counter still when she came over):



[11]
Triple figure

Here all of them all together with my belly cast as backdrop :)



[12]

While I was at the painting, I also painted a mother-baby figure that my friend Summer made for me as a blessingway gift (don't I have nice friends?! This was one of her [13]first attempts at creating birth art and I was touched that she gave it to me! She left it white, saying that I could paint it if I wanted to. So, I painted it sparkly purple :))



[14]

I decided to redeem myself artistically by making a new Crowning Mama figure the following day. This one I applied pigment to in my usual way and decided to bake. Interestingly, I accidentally set the oven for 350 degrees, rather than the normal setting for polymer clay! Yikes! When I got her out, the tips of her hands were smoking! (I'm reaching now, but perhaps some kind of subtle "ring of fire" issue being manifested here...;) And, the pigment turned from purple to blue in some places, which actually isn't a bad effect, but is also not normal! And, I am critical of the shape of her arms—too fat, long, and no graceful taper like some of my others.



[15]

Now, I have to decide whether I'm going for round three or not! (Perhaps there is a lesson to be found here in that birth isn't supposed to be perfect and neither is birth art.) I feel like accomplished my original goal, which was to make a positive crowning/pushing image for myself—I thought all kinds of helpful, "open" thoughts while creating this last one especially and imagined welcoming the feeling of the baby's head, rather than feeling fearful of it! So, she reminds me of that feeling. And, maybe she—and thus, myself—are actually good enough after all.

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0073.jpg
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/08/23/polymer-clay-birth-goddess-sculptures/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/22/more-birth-art/>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/birth-altar/>
5. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/12/belly-cast/>
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0273.jpg
7. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/05/03/noahs-birth-story-warning-miscarriagebaby-loss/>
8. <http://www.hypnobabies.com/>
9. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0278.jpg
10. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0279.jpg
11. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0281.jpg
12. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0282.jpg
13. <http://summerdoula.wordpress.com/2011/01/08/birth-art-for-the-non-artist/>
14. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0277.jpg
15. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0303.jpg

Barbara (2011-01-13 08:25:02)

Ahhh!! I *love* the 3 generations figure, flaws or no! You perhaps don't recognize your amazing and extraordinary birthing power. As a witness to your past birthing abilities, I found you to be an immense source of intuition and body trust, as well as amazingly bodily focused (as opposed to your usual head/intellect focus). I love to see your vast knowledge translated into such a physical realm. Truly, you're a sight to behold!

peacefulbeginnings (2011-01-13 09:04:03)

I'm going to have to with Barbara on this one! While I haven't been present at your births, I've heard enough and seen the pictures. ;) I think it's interesting the parallel between underestimating yourself in birth and underestimating yourself in birth *art*. Hmm.. Personally, I have every confidence that whatever you set your mind to, you will achieve. No matter what. It's just who you are, my friend!

peacefulbeginnings (2011-01-13 09:05:19)

Oh, also...I don't think "underestimate" is quite the right word. Not sure what is, though, so that's why I used it. I know you *know* (even if not right there on the surface) that you are a birth warrior. :)

Nancy (2011-01-13 09:44:09)

Beautiful! Bright! Balanced! maybe one in a side-lying position ? (wink wink) Thinking of you, xo

enjoybirth (2011-01-13 12:28:22)

Wow, I love all the birth art you are doing. I love the insights it is giving you. Even when there are "mistakes"

Amy (2011-02-04 06:03:48)

Your crowning mothers are wonderful and the lesson is of acceptance - We don't get a do over with birth, so we go in as best prepared as we can and have to learn to assimilate whatever path we take without regret or guilt. Sometimes that takes a long time. I hope you will soon see only the beauty in your art and not the flaws.

Birth Art: Final Chapter « Talk Birth (2011-01-31 17:02:08)

[...] I used it as a way to work on—or through—various things. I wrote more about this in this post. So, now that my pregnancy has been completed with the powerful birth of my magical tiny daughter, [...]

The Birth Art Journey Continues « Talk Birth (2011-04-19 16:53:14)

[...] The second figure is a representation of my sense of being in the labyrinth of pregnancy. The third figure was created to help me work with my fear/concern about pushing the baby out. She was my most powerful figure [...]

Mother Blessing Ceremony (2011-01-14 22:12)



[1]

Lots of good friend energy!

I keep wanting to post about my mother blessing/blessingway ceremony last week and I can't quite manage to find the right words. So, I decided to share some pictures mainly and wait to see if more words will come...My mom hosted it at my home and 19 women attended (so, with me, a nice even 20). I don't think there have ever been so many people in my living room! Early in this pregnancy I said I wanted to have the "biggest blessingway ever!" and it was a big one. A lot of my friends tend towards "small and intimate" for their mother blessings and while I definitely see the value to that too, it was really important to me to see and feel and know how many people in my life care about me and my baby and who have hoped with me and waited with me while I cautiously made my way to this time and this place. My mom said something about there being a lot of people here and I said, "yep, and I like them all!" My life has been touched/enriched by every woman in the room and it was very moving to look around the room and see them all here together.

It was a very crying blessingway—they each stated their name and said, "I am here for you, Molly" and I was a wreck! I really felt like it was one of the best days of my life and was just what I needed. I felt so well-cared for and loved and full of emotion. I thank each one of them for being here for me and for loving my baby with me.



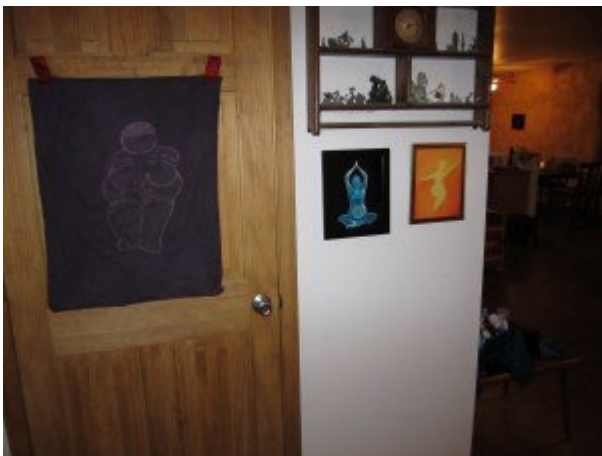
[2]
Birth altar table with many lovely new additions!



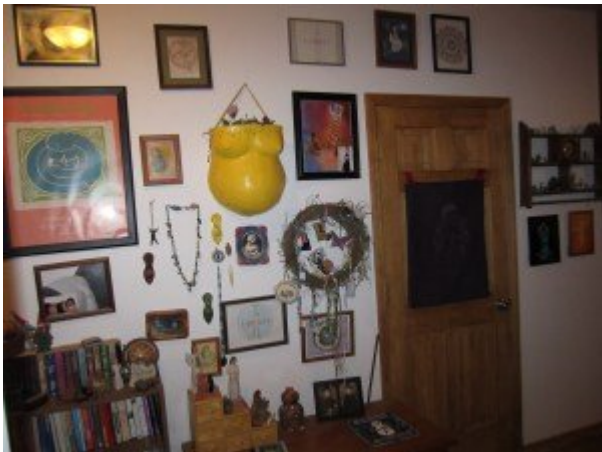
[3]
Birth doll adorned with small items from all the guests.



[4] After the ceremony, I set up a different table close to my "birth nest" spot.



[5] I hung these three lovely birth art pieces on the wall right around the corner from my little table. The Willendorf wallhanging is from my friend Trisha, the super cool photo from my friend Karen, and the fiery pregnant woman painting from my lovely future sister-in-law, Jenny.



[6] My whole birth art wall/gallery.

I wish I would have taken a picture of all the lovely and tasty food that was there for our feast as well! It was a beautiful, special day and felt like an amazing launching point on my upcoming birthing journey :)

1. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Saint-James-MO/Portraits-Paws-Photography/117518641642270>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0260.jpg

3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0261.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0265.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0286.jpg
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0287.jpg

Barbara (2011-01-15 08:42:27)

It was a wonderful experience for your own mama, too, to witness you being honored and cherished by so many.

peacefulbeginnings (2011-01-15 08:58:04)

It was quite possibly the most power-full one I've been to yet! I'm so glad that you feel loved, because you are. :) It was also one of the most emotional ones I've been too because we all wanted this so badly for you and we've all watched/felt your emotions leading up to this point. I got teary eyed just reading the post!

Melissa (2011-01-14 23:42:00)

Wow, Molly - getting so close now :) Your Blessingway looks beautiful, and such an honouring of your journey. Thank you for sharing the pics - I love the one of you surrounded by women who are all 'there for you' - made me cry reading that bit in your post too :) Sending my own vibes across the oceans, acknowledging the beauty of this stage of your pregnancy, and the strength and courage you have :) xx

Elizabeth Allemann (2011-01-19 08:24:10)

Molly, With tears in my eyes, I read that your circle said to you "I am here for you." What a powerful ceremony. Your circle is much wider than you imagine. I join my voice with theirs: "I am here for you." Have fun! Elizabeth

Birth Quotes of the Week! (2011-01-15 11:02)

"One thing you can depend upon is that your birthing with be powerful! Powerful pressure, powerful



[1] Fabulous crocheted goddess from my mom as a blessingway gift :)

stretching, powerful pushing sensations and intense joy. Expect these powerful sensations and emotions, appreciate them for what they are; they bring your baby to you." -[2]Hypnobabies (Official)

"Birth is one of the most profound teaching experiences life offers. It touches us in the depths of our souls, the most private recesses of who we are. It requires that we respond with more creative energy, more conviction, more trust, than almost anything else we do. Birth requires an intensity that is rarely demanded by other experiences...And through it, we can learn more about ourselves, our strengths, our weaknesses, our relationship patterns, and our needs than through almost any other experience we will face in our life." Nancy Wainer Cohen (Via: Peaceful Birth Project)

"We need to take care with every message we deliver to women about birth, and ensure that each message honors the fact that every woman at every moment is making the best decisions she can for herself and her child, with the information she has. And the truth is...that can take a mountain of strength." - Melissa Bruijn and Debby Gould (in [3]Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine via [4]Birth True Childbirth Education)

"...if every midwife was able to work in the way that midwifery was originally intended, the modern doula's role might be very different—with an increased focus on practical and physical measures perhaps, and much less requirement for advocacy and counseling." –Adela Stockton ([5]New - Gentle Birth Companions: doulas serving humanity)

"...I have noticed that the subgroup of women who tend to choose [homebirth] often exhibit certain characteristics, such as comfort within their own bodies, a desire to have a birth experience that is more poetic than clinical, as well as a desire to return what we all feel is some seriously missing humanity to the experience of having a baby..." –Cara Muhlhahn

"It seems as if the birth is a story waiting to be played out, and the midwife is but one character in the play...There are many lessons that we all learn from birth...Not only do the woman and her family learn from the experience, but the midwife learns and understands, with more depth and clarity, the mysteries of life from each birth." –Janice Marsh-Prelesnik (The Roots of Natural Mothering)

"Birth is a mystery, and you never know what's really going to happen - but if you don't reach for the stars and plan to have the very best, you're unlikely to get it. It's important to have a vision for your birth and to work toward that vision." Suzanne Arms (via [6]ICAN of Nashville)

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0231.jpg
2. <http://www.facebook.com/Hypnobabies>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PathwaystoFamilyWellness>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/birthtrue>
5. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/New-Gentle-Birth-Companions-doulas-serving-humanity/132436386815431>
6. <http://www.facebook.com/ICANofNashville>

Planning for Postpartum (2011-01-18 20:59)

I have been meaning to share this article on my blog for a long time. Now that I'm rapidly approaching another "babymoon," it feels like a most excellent time to review my own reminders about planning for postpartum!

Planning for Postpartum



[1]
December, 2007

By Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

Originally published in *The Journal of Attachment Parenting*, 2008.

When my first baby was born in 2003, I had made a classic new mother error—I spent a lot of time preparing for the birth, but not much time truly preparing for life with a new baby.

I had regularly attended La Leche League (LLL) meetings since halfway through my pregnancy and thought I was prepared for “nursing all the time” and having my life focus around my baby’s needs. However, the actual experience of postpartum slapped me in the face and brought me to my knees.

My son’s birth was a joyous, empowering, triumphant experience, but postpartum was one of the most challenging and painful times in my life. I had not given myself permission to rest, heal, and discover. Instead, I felt intense internal pressure to “perform.” I wondered where my old life had gone and I no longer felt like a “real person.” A painful postpartum infection and a difficult healing process with a tear in an unusual location, left me feeling like an invalid—I had imagined caring for my new baby with my normal (high) energy level, not feeling wounded, weak, and depleted. And yet, at five days postpartum I was at the grocery store, at seven days at the post office resuming shipments for my small online business, at two weeks attending meetings and fulfilling responsibilities with an organization (though I still had difficulty walking normally due to pain), at six weeks hostessing at a fundraising ball, and at eight weeks teaching a volunteer training workshop. In retrospect, I have no regrets about how I cared for my baby. He was always with me and I was sensitive to and responsive to his needs. What I regret is how I cared for myself, what I expected from myself, the demands I placed upon myself, and how I treated myself.

I actually slightly delayed having a second child, not for fear of mothering two, but for fear of experiencing the overwhelm of postpartum again.

In 2006, I gave birth to my second son at home. This time I had planned realistically and specifically for a “babymoon.” My husband took four weeks off of work and I stayed at home for the majority of the first month of life with my new baby. Though I again experienced an unfortunate tear and a painful recovery from it (which was still much quicker and less traumatic than the first time) and also some rapidly shifting mood changes along with some tears and anxiety, I look back on this time with my second son with

fondness instead of regret. Instead of rushing to rejoin the world, I allowed myself the time, space, and permission to rest and cocoon, knowing that I would be “real” again soon enough.

Reflecting on my two postpartum experiences leads me to offer the following suggestions for postpartum planning:

- Try to minimize your out of home commitments in advance. Put a hold on projects and “retire” from committees and responsibilities. I joke that with my first baby I thought I needed to get my responsibilities squared away for six weeks and with my second I realized I needed to try to get them squared away for two years.
- Have a good book on hand about postpartum. When my first baby was born, I was well stocked with baby care and breastfeeding books, but none about the transition into motherhood. My favorite postpartum book is *After the Baby’s Birth* by Robin Lim. It offers such gems as, “you’re postpartum for the rest of your life” and “when the tears flow, the milk will flow” (with regard to the third day postpartum). Other good postpartum readings are *The Post Pregnancy Handbook* by Sylvia Brown and *The Year After Childbirth* by Sheila Kitzinger. A classic for support people is *Mothering the New Mother* by Sally Placksin.
- Prepare and freeze a lot of food in advance. Batches of nutritious muffins are a favorite of mine—freeze them and the reheat one as needed for a quick breakfast or snack. These are great for nursing mothers!
- Plans to spend three to seven days just in bed with your baby. Skin-to-skin is even better.
- Everyone is familiar with the “sleep when the baby sleeps” advice, but even if you don’t feel the need to sleep, stay in bed and use the quiet time for reflection or to read or write in your journal. Rest is definitely essential every day, but it doesn’t have to be actual sleep to be restorative.
- If you have other children, arrange for plenty of help caring for them. Do not feel like you “should” be able to handle them all right away. Of course, you could do it if you had to, but you and your new baby will benefit from an extended period of cocooning together. Plan quiet projects that you can do in bed with your older child while the new baby sleeps (a favorite with my older son was making puppets and masks out of felt. I cut them out while still lying down. He actually started calling our bed the “party deck” because we did lots of fun projects there while I was resting with the new baby. I have no idea where he got the phrase!).
- Give yourself permission to rest and be off duty.
- When people ask what they can do to help, give them a specific task (go grocery shopping, pick up pictures, bring me dinner, etc.).
- Ease back into “real life.” Resist the temptation to catch up with email and so forth. Respond to email or phone requests for time or help with a firm, “I just had a baby and I’m not available right now.”
- Become comfortable asking for help (I vastly prefer being the helper to being the helped and this is particularly hard for me).
- Similar to a birth plan, make a written postpartum plan that includes a list of the people in your support network, arrangements for help with household duties (or a plan for what can be left undone), people to call for meals, and so forth. List what each person is willing to do—laundry, grocery shopping, cleaning, childcare, meal preparation (notice that “holding the baby so you can work” isn’t on the list!). An example postpartum plan is available on DONA International’s website: http://www.dona.org/resources/doula_practice_postpartum.php

- If you have relatives coming to help after the baby is born, make sure they know that their job is to take care of you and the house while you take care of the baby. It is not acceptable for you to be fixing meals and sweeping floors while grandma “helpfully” rocks the baby—it needs to be vice versa!
- Prepare your partner and anyone else in your support network that you will be Queen for a Month and let them know what you will need from them (also, get it fixed in your mind that being Queen is okay!).
- Expect to be “nursing all day long.” It is okay and good for you both (10-14 nursings in 24 hours is perfectly normal and acceptable!).
- Encourage your partner to take as much time off as possible—either saved up vacation time or unpaid FMLA time. He can benefit from an extended period of cocooning with his newborn too!
- Explore the idea that postpartum can be a time of postpartum expression rather than postpartum depression—letting all of your emotions flow, expressing your needs clearly and assertively, and being aware of and accepting of your continuum of feelings are ways to be expressive. (This concept comes from the excellent, but little known book Transformation Through Birth by Claudia Panuthos.)
- Plan a few special things for yourself—have a little present for yourself to enjoy during postpartum (a new book, good magazine, postnatal massage, whatever is self-nurturing and brings you pleasure. Personally, I do not encourage TV or movie watching because it can become a passive time filler that distracts you from enjoying your babymoon. Some people may include favorite films as their enjoyable postpartum activities though).
- As postpartum stretches on, if you experience decreased libido, it is okay to honor and accept that.

Planning for a restful, nurturing, “time out” with your new baby is way to honor this new stage in your family’s life cycle and a way to honor yourself as a woman and mother. I hope you will create space in your life for a time in which vulnerability is accepted. Postpartum is a time of openness—heart, body, and mind. I hope your experience is one of tenderness and joy.

Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE is a certified birth educator and activist. She is editor of the Friends of Missouri Midwives newsletter, a breastfeeding counselor, and the mother of two young sons and a baby girl on the way. She loves to write and blogs about birth at [2]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>, midwifery at [3]<http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com>, and miscarriage at <http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com>.

This is a preprint of Planning for the Postpartum Period an article published in The Journal of Attachment Parenting Volume 11, Issue 1, pp 28-29. Copyright © 2008 Attachment Parenting International. API’s website is located at: [4]<http://www.attachmentparenting.org>.

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/smallmollylannandzander.jpg>
2. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
3. <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com/>
4. <http://www.attachmentparenting.org/>

Tweets that mention Planning for Postpartum « Talk Birth – Topsy.com (2011-01-22 11:28:52)
 [...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Crystal Di Domizio, ConfidentMotherdoula. ConfidentMotherdoula said: though this is an american blog there is some lots of common sense tips! <http://fb.me/DLyT3kgD> [...]

My Baby Girl is Here! (2011-01-23 21:37)

“A baby, a baby, she will come to remind us of the sweetness in this world, what ripe, fragile, sturdy beauty exists when you allow yourself the air, the sunshine, the reverence for what nature provides...”

– Sarah Werthan Bутtenwieser (in Literary Mama)



[1]

Three generations!

Alaina Diana was born at 11:15 a.m. on January 19th, 2011! She only weighed 7lbs, 8oz and was 20 inches. (My other babies were 8lbs4oz and 9lbs, 2oz.) I've sent a short-version birth story to a couple of friends over the last couple of days and decided I could work it up into a short blog post as well (of course, a full-length birth story will eventually follow). I actually had a little trouble getting started in writing about her birth—it was pretty uneventful until the end and I felt like the best description would be: walked around the kitchen, sat on the birth ball, walked around a little more, more time on the ball, hummed and ooohhhhhed, seemed as if suddenly things changed and I felt big, big things happening and then baby was born all at once! And, I caught her! Emotionally more than temporally, it felt like a long labor and I felt like I experienced less mind-body integration than with previous labors (the actual moment of birth was much more instinctive and powerful than with the other babies though). In general, lots was unexpected about this labor—it lasted longer than I expected (about 5 hours that were serious, but some warm-up time before that too) and was somewhat erratic and I had quite a bit of back pain. Right before pushing, contractions were still 4-8 minutes apart and it was hard for me to assess where I was/how "active" of labor it was—I was thinking I could either be at the 3cm point OR the transition point! My water didn't break until seconds before she was born and I felt like it REALLY needed to break, but wasn't. My kids weren't here, because her birth was during the day (also unexpected, and a Wednesday, not a weekend!). It was just Mark, my Mom and me.



[2]

I spent a lot of time on the birth ball and Mark would stroke my back in just the right way

After criticizing myself at length for being "too analytical," "thinking too much," and not letting "my monkey do it," I experienced a spontaneous birth reflex and pushed her out in a kneeling position and it only took one contraction—her whole head and body came out all at once, no moment of crowning or head birthed and then body following, just a bloosh of entire baby. I caught her myself. Mom and Mark both missed seeing her come out, because the phone rang at the same time. My mom went to stop it and Mark was moving around to the front of me, and when they looked again, I was holding her (Mark says it was about 12 seconds). So, no birth pix :(

I did tear again, exact same extra-delicate and non-"traditional" place from what I can tell. Feels better than previous births already though—I know how to heal from this (even though I wish I didn't have to).

My plan for immediate postpartum worked out perfectly and just like we planned. The midwife came about 40 minutes after the birth and checked blood loss. My doula was here about 20 minutes after and fed me a bite of placenta—and, I ate it! No gagging or anything!

I have very different post-birth feelings this time around—though I still had the "I did it!" moment, I felt less euphoric and triumphant and more relief and the feeling that, "we survived!" Blog posts about this will eventually follow...

And, did I mention that I caught her myself?! :)



[3]

Shortly post-birth



[4]

My "40 weeks" picture—due date was Jan. 22nd, so took a picture on that day to show how she could (theoretically) still fit! (though she wasn't breech!)

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/3g.jpg>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0316.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0330.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0396.jpg

talkbirth (2011-01-25 21:49:53)

Thanks, Catey! I haven't met many other Alainas :)

talkbirth (2011-01-25 21:47:24)

Thank you, Molly! I'm so happy :)

talkbirth (2011-01-25 21:48:36)

Thanks, Nora! We're doing a large amount of gazing, marveling, and cherishing! (and some pretty good sleeping too :)

talkbirth (2011-01-25 21:46:52)

Thank you, Melissa. It was very powerful! I'm excited for you that your own baby is so close! I have to say that I didn't stop worrying that mine was going to die until I was holding her—in fact, one of the first things I said to her was, "you're alive! You're alive!" I worried less the further in pregnancy I got, but it was still there lurking until the end. Best wishes for a beautiful, healing, powerful birth in the next month or so!

Bibi estlund (2011-01-26 08:55:44)

Sounds amazing. Congratulations!!!!

Birth Art: Final Chapter « Talk Birth (2011-01-31 17:02:06)

[...] about this in this post. So, now that my pregnancy has been completed with the powerful birth of my magical tiny daughter, I felt an intense urge to make two final pieces of birth art (that are directly related to my own [...])

enjoybirth (2011-01-25 19:57:16)

Congratulations! I love that you caught her yourself. That is awesome! Enjoy your sweet baby girl.

Melissa (2011-01-23 23:16:50)

Wow, wow, wow, Molly :) Have been REALLY hoping to hear more about your birth, so thank you for filling things in a bit - sounds like an intense experience. Amazing how it all unfolded with the kids not there, and you being the only one who witnessed the actual birth - pretty powerful stuff, and so special. And you caught her yourself!!!! Thank you so much for sharing...I am 35 wks now, and can feel things getting closer and closer, so REALLY appreciate hearing how Alaina (love her name!) arrived. Sending you many blessings and hugs from across the sea :)

Nora (2011-01-24 01:00:32)

CONGRATULATIONS!!!! She's beautiful! Love the 3 generation picture - your mom looks young enough to be your sister. Try to get some sleep. :)

Catey (2011-01-24 09:26:26)

Congratulations! You look fabulous and she's a cutie! Love the name too, though I have an Alaina as well so I'm a bit biased. :) How exciting that you caught her yourself too! Hope your healing continues nicely!

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-01-24 09:28:18)

Oh, Molly. I am just in love with this having gone well for you. Blessings and love!

Bumbling Introvert (shannon) (2011-01-24 09:35:42)

Congratulations Molly! I have been silently following a long. I saw you on Kerri's FB page. I don't know that you remember me...I was in your MSW classes. I had 3 pregnancy losses and finally with infertility treatment, had twins, then a miracle baby. Anyway...I could so relate to the feelings of trauma, mistrust for your body, anxiety about following pregnancies...I suppose this isn't the place to talk about such things. SO... I just wanted to say how happy I am for you and your family that she arrived safely and happily. Shannon

Amy (2011-01-24 11:30:36)

I got to help catch Zarah, and that was the most amazing thing. I hope I can do the same with other babies!

Barbara (2011-01-24 17:28:42)

Well, Nora made my day! Also, for your readers - Molly's version of transition was being "too analytical" and "thinking too much". Most people start with the self-doubt and the feeling that they don't want to do it anymore (personally, I was heard to say, "What possessed me to get pregnant again?!!"). Molly is an amazing and focused birthing queen!!!

Chase Young (2011-01-23 21:42:56)

Congratulations! I know you have been waiting a long time to finally get to meet her and have your daughter! I am so proud of you and you got to catch her! How special that will always be for you. Now rest and get to know this new little one.

talkbirth (2011-01-26 11:28:15)

It was. Thanks!

talkbirth (2011-01-26 15:44:29)

How nice to hear from you, Shannon! I definitely remember you :) I went to your blog just now-what lovely girls you have!

talkbirth (2011-01-26 15:44:47)

It was a great feeling for sure, Amy!

We did it! | Footprints on My Heart (2011-02-19 15:05:11)

[...] 19 at 11:15 a.m., whole and healthy, pink and precious. I have a short version of her birth story here. As I emailed to a friend who is currently in the middle of her own PAL journey, after the baby was [...]

Alaina's Complete Birth Story « Talk Birth (2011-06-01 16:16:03)

[...] Alaina Diana Remer January 19, 2011 11:15 a.m. 7lbs, 8oz; 20 inches. Short version of her story is here and labor pictures are [...]

Birth Quotes of the Week (2011-01-29 15:59)

"I believe that natural childbirth is a right and a privilege...Our country needs to step up to the plate in educating women about the benefits of natural birth, and we need to help women actually do it – not just hear about it." –Mayim Bialik (via [1]ToLabor Doulas Dallas)

"In the moments of labor and birth, all the forces of the universe are flowing through a woman's body." - Sister MorningStar ([2]The Power of Women)

"These hands are big enough to save the world, and small enough to rock a child to sleep." –Zelda Brown

"Birth is as vast and voluminous, as unfathomable and inevitable as the rising and setting of the sun. And true to the inexorable power and rhythm of their life-giving bodies, women will continue to birth with dignity, grace and courage." –[3]Mandala Mom

"In the sheltered simplicity of the first days after a baby is born, one sees again the magical closed circle, the miraculous sense of two people existing only for each other." –Anne Morrow Lindbergh

"I feel the most important thing the birthing woman does is to listen to her own body and find out what her body is telling her she needs to do. And that neither the partner, nor the midwife, nor the doula, or whomever, should be giving orders, 'Now do this' or 'Now do that' because that interferes with what she is really trying to get from her body..." Marsden Wagner, M.D. (via [4]Birth Without Fear)

"All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence." - Martin Luther King, Jr. (via [5]Literary Mama)

"A baby, a baby, she will come to remind us of the sweetness in this world, what ripe, fragile, sturdy beauty exists when you allow yourself the air, the sunshine, the reverence for what nature provides..." – Sarah Werthan Bittenwieser (in Literary Mama)

1. <http://www.facebook.com/tolabordallas>

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/book-review-the-power-of-women/>

3. <http://mandalamom.blogspot.com/2011/01/of-birds-and-bullies.html>

4. <http://www.facebook.com/birthwithoutfear>

5. <http://www.facebook.com/litmama>

Birth Art: Final Chapter (2011-01-31 17:01)

As I have noted before, this was my most art-making pregnancy. Rather than make birth art just because I like it (I do!), during my most recent pregnancy I used it as a way to work on—or through—various things. I wrote more about this in [1]this post. So, now that my pregnancy has been completed with the powerful birth of my [2]magical tiny daughter, I felt an intense urge to make two final pieces of birth art (that are directly related to my own current experiences, rather than just birth art for birth art's sake!). Since I

pushed her out on my knees and caught her myself and had worked on my pushing fears with birth art previously, I felt like making a new type of crowning mama sculpture. (Yes, her arms are raised and not doing the catching—because it just works better for me to make them with raised arms!) I have also written previously about the labyrinth metaphor for pregnancy and birth and so it seemed fitting to put this mama in the center of the finger labyrinth that my friend made for me as a blessingway gift :) She's taken her journey and she is birthing her baby!



[3] Crowning mama in the center of the fabric labyrinth that my friend Denise made me for a blessingway gift

And, the logical final sculpture in my "series" is a mama WITH her baby!



[4] This mama is happy to finally have her baby to hold and nurse!

I wish I had put the baby in a sling, so it doesn't look so much like it is desperately clinging on with no support! I didn't think of it until today though (I made these last night).



[5]
Side view

I actually made this one while nursing my own baby :)

And finally, here is a picture of my little treasure trying out the Ergo for the second time today. She looks a little skeptical!



[6]
Close enough to kiss!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/12/adventures-in-birth-art/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/23/my-baby-girl-is-here/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0424.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0425.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0426.jpg
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0428.jpg

enjoybirth (2011-01-31 20:19:33)
Love it. She is so cute!

Bumblng Introvert (shannon) (2011-02-01 12:26:22)

Look how tiny she is! Oh my...my heart is melting! Congrats again. :)

Serena26 (2011-02-05 19:59:55)

Congratulations! The baby actually looks a bit like in a sling - the legs bent up and around the moms waist as if supported by sling, and the head is out of the sling to nurse. Your blog has been a great inspiration to me - I love it!

Barbara (2011-01-31 17:40:51)

Perfect!

1.2 February

Birth Quotes Update (2011-02-10 22:28)

"Remember that most of the people who really need your work are not hanging out in the oversaturated twitterverse, but in places where what you do isn't common. Get out of the crowded room and go where there's a dearth of and a thirst for what you do. Don't try to shout over lots of shouting." -Tara Sophia Mohr

(Not specifically birth-related, but an excellent reminder from [1]this post. I've often felt with blogging and writing for birth publications that maybe I'm just clamoring to ...be heard in a cacophony of other voices (that also have good things to say--am I contributing anything unique?!)

"When my kids become wild and unruly, I use a nice, safe playpen. When they're finished, I climb out." Erma Bombeck (via [2]Moby® Wrap)

"The miraculous nature inherent in the unfolding of a flower is the very same that moves through a woman as she gives life to the world. We can neither control nor improve upon it, only trust it." -Robin Sale

"...the stories I see of birth in the media don't reflect the intense emotions, the physical power, or the immense impact of the experience itself. Women screaming, fathers fumbling about, doctors doing most of the heroic work--these images don't do justice to my experience. I felt empowered, strong, heroic in my efforts to bring my daughter into the world yet, I am painfully aware how little others see the heroism in my birth experience." -Amy Hudock ([3]essay in Literary Mama)

"It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself." - Joyce Maynard (via Literary Mama)

"Giving birth, certainly, should rank among the pivotal heroic adventures celebrated in our culture. Certainly it is more heroic than catching a football or acting in front of a camera, and perhaps even more heroic than going off to war. Men return from the battlefield with victory, but women return from the birthing room with life..." -Amy Hudock ([4]in Literary Mama)

"...if you want to know where a woman's true power lies, look to those primal experiences we've been taught to fear...the very same experiences the culture has taught us to distance ourselves from as much as possible, often by medicalizing them so that we are barely conscious of them anymore. Labor and birth rank right up there as experiences that put women in touch with their feminine power..." -[5]Christiane

Northrup

"The intrinsic intelligence of women's bodies can be sabotaged when they're put into clinical settings, surrounded by strangers, and attached to machines that limit their freedom to move. They then risk falling victim to the powerful forces of fear, loneliness, doubt, and distrust, all of which increase pain. Their hopes for a normal birth disappear as quickly as the fluid in an IV bottle." Peggy Vincent

"So many words commonly used to describe childbirth—support, patient, management, delivered by, coached, helped, guided—suggest that a woman does not have the power to give birth without being dependent on somebody else. This isn't the case at all." —Michel Odent

(This reminds me of that Odent quote about not actively supporting a woman in birth that [6] stirred me up a couple of months ago. That one I had some objections to, the one above, I can definitely get behind, even though I think he is actually ...saying the same thing in both quotes!)

"I believe that natural childbirth is a right and a privilege...Our country needs to step up to the plate in educating women about the benefits of natural birth, and we need to help women actually do it — not just hear about it." —Mayim Bialik (via [7]ToLabor Doulas Dallas)

"In the moments of labor and birth, all the forces of the universe are flowing through a woman's body." - Sister MorningStar (The Power of Women)

1. <http://www.productiveflourishing.com/how-to-use-social-media-sanelly/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/MobyWrap>
3. http://www.literarymama.com/columns/motherwriting/archives/2006/when_god_was_a_mother.html
4. http://www.literarymama.com/columns/motherwriting/archives/2006/when_god_was_a_mother.html
5. http://www.drnorthrup.com/womenshealth/healthcenter/topic_details.php?topic_id=136
6. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/12/24/helping-a-woman-give-birth/>
7. <http://www.facebook.com/tolabordallas>

Bonnie B Matheson (2011-02-13 19:35:36)

Birth is the most fabulous, fearless (even if part of you is scared) and fundamental thing a woman can do. The fact that people who say they are helping her consistently interfere with this process every single day in this country, really bothers me. Worse than that, they have so brainwashed women that they are afraid they cannot do it without "professional" help. They have accomplished this with hype in the media and some very popular baby books that are completely "fear based". Women are so frightened of this imaginary danger, that they do not know their own power. My mission is to help women gain back their power by giving them information about birth. Birth is natural. Birth is safe. Interference is risky. Trust Birth, as Carla Hartley says. Go to TrustBirth.com to see more. Or take a look at ChildbirthSolutions.com and especially our Facebook page for Childbirth Solutions. That is where all the newest information is right now.

Fatherbaby (2011-02-15 18:01)

"Nurturing is not a genetically feminine attribute. Tears and laughter are not the province of women only. The last time I looked, men had tear ducts. They had arms for holding babies. They cared about their children. And they cried at births...let the shared experience of childbirth reclaim the human soul." —Ariska Razak (midwife and healer)



[1]
Daddy and his two week old baby girl!

Yesterday, my husband went back to work for the first time since our new baby was born last month. He was off for slightly under 4 weeks. I strongly encourage all of the fathers who take my classes to take off as much time as possible after their babies are born. Many of them seem surprised by the suggestion, a few of them seem disinterested (like, "but isn't that her job?"), but most of them express sadness and regret at their workplaces' unsupportive attitude towards (or flat-out refusal to grant) paternity leave. Many of them are only able (or only feel able) to take the day of the birth off and perhaps one to two more days. I meet many who will only be able to be at home with their new families if the birth straddles a weekend. I could almost cry at the social attitudes this reflects—a complete devaluation of the father's role, his birth as a father, and his baby and family's need for his presence. Fathers as well as mothers absolutely need this time to "cocoon" with their new babies. To absorb the magnitude of the changes in their lives, to have time to consider the meaning of their new roles, and to re-integrate into the "normal" rhythms of home life after having experienced the rite of passage and labyrinth of birth.

When our first baby was born in 2003, my husband took one week off and then followed it with a week of half days. He was crushed to leave us—describing it as feeling like we were his "wolf pack" and he was having to leave his pack when he really belonged with us. When our second son was born in 2006, we'd wised up somewhat and he took off 4 weeks. It still didn't feel like enough for any of us, but it seemed to be viewed by his workplace/co-workers as an unusually long length of time to take off. This time he again took 4 weeks and it hasn't felt like enough for any of us. I'm interested by how his time off seems to be viewed by most as him needing to be home in order to "help" me, not as a time with inherent value to him. While I certainly do need his "help" while postpartum, I view our relationship as a partnership and our family as just that, our family, not as an exclusive maternal domain with occasional visits from the "daddysitter." No thanks. Is spending time with his new baby, taking care of his other children, and taking care of household tasks in the home we share, "helping" me, or is it being a complete part of our real lives?! A part that is completely ignored/denied by the modern workplace culture and social attitudes. Spending time with Alaina is of value and importance to both of them, as people who will have a lifelong relationship with each other. Also, somewhat ironically, I am the one who took no time off this time around. I teach online and I had no leave from doing so—it was my own choice to sign a contract for this session and the online staff doesn't even know I was pregnant or that I had a baby. I took 5 hours off and then posted in my class again. I obviously wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't compatible with having a newborn—it is excellently compatible—and I prepared those around me for weeks before her birth that the only things I planned to be responsible for for the first two months or so, were my baby and my class (and, obviously, taking care of my other kids too—but, not even them in the early days postpartum!).

We have discussed how each of our babies has been a catalyst for big changes in our home situation. Our first baby was the catalyst we needed to move away from our by-the-highway-no-yard townhouse in a city and onto our own land in the country near my parents. Our second baby was the catalyst we needed to finish building our real house and to move out of our temporary house and into our permanent home. So, we are now wondering what kind of catalyst our baby girl will be? We have spent our entire married life (13 years!) saying that we want to live a "home based life." I truly do not think it is (biologically) normal, desirable, or healthy for anyone to spend 40+ hours a week out of their home, regardless of whether or not they have children or who the primary caregiver is. I don't think fathers belong at work that much time, I don't think mothers do either, and I don't think children belong at school every day. The home-based life idea came to us long before we had kids and it came from all the reading and thinking I did about the simple living movement. So, I wonder—and hope—that maybe our new baby will be the catalyst we need to finally face the fear of possible failure (and/or no money!) that accompanies jettisoning his full-time job and building our other "multiple streams of income." Maybe we will, maybe we'll keep talking ourselves out of it, but that is what our baby girl makes us feel like doing!

So, here's to Papatoto! May the fatherbaby unit be recognized as having inherent worth and value.

"When he becomes a father, a man leaves behind his life as a single individual and expands into a more inclusive role. He becomes a link in an unbroken chain. And in doing so, he himself undergoes a birth process—the birth of himself as a father." –John Franklin (FatherBirth)

"The absolute miracle of a birth and the emergence of a new human being into the world catapults both mother and father into the realm of awe and wonder. They are flooded with non-ordinary feelings and energies that support a deep connection not only with the newborn and each other, but also with the mystery and power of life itself." –John & Cher Franklin

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/img_0407.jpg

Allison Dougherty (2011-02-15 20:29:35)

Loved reading this Molly. We should be talking more about the fatherbaby unit!

peacefulbeginnings (2011-02-15 18:18:48)

I absolutely agree! What a wonderful start to a lifelong loving relationship when fathers get to be intimately involved instead of pushed into the background. I have seen a HUGE difference in just a few weeks postpartum off-time versus the few days. While I'm sure multiple other factors come into play as well, having the "cocoon" time is definitely a big plus. :)

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-02-15 19:15:13)

Halleluja, lady. And what a beautiful father-baby pair you have there.

Ahmie (2011-02-15 20:08:36)

been saying for a long time that paid maternity leave will gain more traction when more men start demanding paternity leave (and/or it's made "use it or lose it" like some European countries). The problem I've always had with the kinds of feminism I've been mostly exposed to is that they seem to hold up the male model as an ideal to aspire to, instead of trying to show men how oppressed *they* are in the box they've been crammed into and encouraging men to enjoy the freedoms we women have, while sharing their own freedoms and opportunities more equally.

Barbara (2011-02-15 21:19:46)

I love this post – he has been so devoted to all of you during the babymoon time, and it was so obvious that he'd rather stay with you than return to work. I'm still chuckling over his ability to sooth the baby – he said to me, "See?"

I have skills!?. Wonderful.....

Bumbling Introvert (shannon) (2011-02-16 15:36:56)

Molly, what a thought provoking entry. And validating, too. I had to push my husband to take 2 MEASLEY weeks off from his job when we had our twins in 06 via c-section. I think he wanted to, but he had zero support and a lot of push back from the partners at the firm he worked at. With no family to help, lifting restrictions, 2 brand new babies, deconditioning from 5 mos of bedrest, and ultimately the development of a major postpartum depression/anxiety episode – I have to say that my first days as a new mom were some of the darkest days of my life...and that makes me cry when I think of it. I often feel that I was a failure as a mom, and carry much guilt at not having enjoyed my babies...and after reading your article, I feel a bit empowered to replace those feelings and indulge in a bit of anger at the lack of support in my life as a new mom. – the support that may have made a difference in how I experienced new motherhood. To your strong stand on dad's having a presence in the home versus at work in the days post partum, I say Cheers, cheers, cheers. S

Time Round (2011-02-18 22:30)

I connect to the circle now

and see my life and death

in the child before me–

the glorious whole that spins so fast

it seems not to move

as the sun stands still in the heavens

until we glance again at dusk.

Where did it go and when

did we forget to look?

No matter, just turn.

The circle: our map

The heart: our book.

–Karen Engelmann

I copied this poem onto the first page of my journal when my second son was a newborn. I'm not totally sure what the meaning is intended to be, but I take it as a reminder to slow down and remember to

look :) My new baby is already one month old (tomorrow). How is that possible? I still look at her with surprise and amazement almost daily—sort of a, "where did you come from?!" feeling. There is something magic about her.

I have surprised myself by not having much urge to write in the last couple of weeks—usually I am consumed with blog post and article ideas. Something switched this week and the topics are flooding in again, as well as the sense of frustration of not having "enough time" to write them all. It may be because of Mark going back to work and now I feel like I am no longer "off" either and have to get caught back up with real life again. So, I remembered that poem and got it back out again. I also want to remember that my conditions of enoughness for the foreseeable future are:

1. take care of my baby.
2. take care of the boys—including doing some school every day.
3. eat enough food.
3. teach my online class.

That's it. Write scintillating blog posts is not on the list. Nor is write books, which has suddenly popped back into my consciousness as a "want to do RIGHT NOW!" Nor is laundry really, though it has been haunting me this week. Even birth activism efforts are not really on my list, though there is a lot going on right now that I could/should contribute to. I've had a familiar sort of pressure this week to get back to "normal" and to prove to myself that I can handle everything I need to handle (without help).

But look...



[1]

This is where my heart is right now.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/#!/PortraitsAndPaws>

enjoybirth (2011-02-21 11:25:29)

Glad your priorities are on enjoying your baby! :) She is beautiful.

Amy (2011-02-19 04:44:51)

I love your phrase "conditions of enoughness". With a priority list, I can still put laundry or whatever on there, even if it is far down the list, and then feel guilty if it does not get done. But with your phrase, things like that are nowhere to be seen. Also, your baby is adorable. I did not realise until my son was born how amazing baby hands are. Your picture captures your little one's perfectly!

Barbara (2011-02-19 07:32:26)

Obviously, her doting grandmother should be doing more laundry! She has all of us locked in and focused on her.

Dana (2011-02-19 16:30:30)

I love this. And if it makes you feel any better, my LO is 3 months old and I'm still in that place - not ready to pick up the pace again just yet!

shauna (2011-03-05 16:07:21)

Everett is 5 months old and I'm just now picking up the pace. Just like many people tend to push children to move forward and grow too quickly we will do the same with ourselves if not careful. Stop to smell the roses... and babies are the most beautiful roses in the world!!! :)

OBs and Normal (2011-02-20 12:06)

I've been looking through posts on my old book blog, because I shared lots of birth-related thoughts/quotes there that are now lost in the shuffle and would be more relevant transferred over to this blog. From the book *The Mother Knot* by Jane Lazarre, written in the 70's she shares an anecdote about her OB that I think carries a huge ring of truth still today:

My obstetrician had whispered a secret to me on a sunny afternoon. I had come to the office prepared with my written list of questions. Why was I feeling nauseated, I asked, and what was all this pain in my thighs? And he had answered wearily, 'If you want answers to questions, have a miscarriage, or toxemia, or let something else go wrong with your pregnancy. We don't know anything about normal births.' So much for technological know-how. [emphasis mine]

This is a perfect example of the differences in approach to caring for women present in the midwives model of care and the modern obstetrics model of care. Another good example of some differences is in the [1]Snow Baby story I put on the CfM blog on Friday.

1. <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com/2011/02/snow-baby.html>

Pushed Thoughts (2011-02-23 17:55)

If you are looking to get fired up about about birth activism, I recommend reading the book [1]Pushed by [2]Jennifer Block. This book is seriously GOOD! Lots of weighty, meaty information, scathing critiques, astute observations, and clever commentary. She has plenty of scientific backup for her claims and the book is written in an engaging, fast paced style that skillfully weaves facts into descriptive commentary and personal, illuminating interviews. I originally checked this book out of the library, but after seeing all of the data contained within—she pulls together vast quantities of data about effectiveness of "routine" practices, etc. and makes it accessible to the average reader—I quickly ended up acquiring two copies (one hardback and one soft cover, both autographed from when Jennifer was our featured speaker at [3]FoMM's annual Cookie Day event!).



[4]

Yes, I was a geeky fangirl in the Capitol rotunda in 2009 when Jennifer Block spoke at the annual Friends of Missouri Midwives Cookie Day event.

Pushed is a thorough critique of obstetrics as an industry and how women and babies are being HURT by the systems ostensibly in place to "protect" them. Especially thought provoking is Block's descriptive exploration of the cesarean epidemic. She points out on one occasion when discussing the whole uterine rupture straw man used to deny women VBACs, that people must prefer "controlled uterine rupture" (i.e. cesarean) than the small chance of natural uterine rupture. Later, in a separate section regarding blood loss during birth, she mentions that average loss is 300-500 mil and over 500 is considered a hemorrhage. She then notes that during a cesarean the average loss is 1000 mil. Reading that, I thought so essentially with a cesarean you have a 100 % chance of a uterine rupture AND a 100 % chance of a hemorrhage. ::sob:: :-)

The information about blood loss wasn't new to me, but I did learn something I hadn't known at the time—300-500 mil of blood is approximately 8-9 menstrual periods worth. Isn't the female body thoroughly awesome?!

—
Some assorted random thoughts and quotes from Pushed:

Re: EFM (external fetal monitoring): "For the natural childbirth movement, the emergence of the monitor was unfortunate timing. Just as activists were urging women to get up and birth, hospitals reined them back down in bed and strapped them, both physically & psychologically, to a machine that falsely promised a safe birth."

—
While my feelings about unassisted birth have been "refined" and tempered somewhat since first reading Pushed in 2008, I did find the sections about UC to be frustrating and annoying. Quoting a midwife re: unassisted birth: "'That's not why you're hiring a midwife. You're hiring a midwife because you want her there for complications.' Some of Linda's clients are such believers in birth that they toy with the idea of going unassisted. To this, Linda is fond of telling the story of a birth she attended where the baby had its umbilical cord wrapped around its neck three times and need resuscitation. 'You never know when you're going to have a problem,' she says. 'It's like playing Russian roulette.'"

This makes me frustrated because those kinds of scare-tactic comments and implied "you must not

really love your baby” subtext is EXACTLY the same as the conventional medical system’s attitude toward homebirth. The midwife quoted seemed totally oblivious that her remarks are virtually identical to the things OBs say about homebirth and, regardless of any other personal opinions, I think they are just as demeaning and restrictive to women as the anti-homebirth sentiments are.

Okay, brief rant aside for another quote, this one while the author was observing a home water birth:

”It is at this point that I begin to fathom what supporting normal birth really entails. Linda is on her knees, sleeves pushed up, gloved hand in a soiled kiddie pool up to her bare elbow, gleaning diarrhea wisps with a spaghetti strainer by flashlight. I try to imagine a doctor doing this work and have great difficulty. This is not medicine. This is birth. It is messy, backbreaking, humble work.” [emphasis mine]

—

During the conclusion of the book after a discussion about the [5]NAPW and whether childbirth is a reproductive right or not:

To her [a doctor who thinks it is not], it is a medical issue, one that may need reform, but one that belongs under the purview of physicians. ’To my mind, I’m all for people having a pleasant and safe birth experience,’ she says. ’But my highest priority would be for them to have a safe birth experience.’ But what’s considered safe is political. What’s safe changes. Thirty years ago obstetricians said VBAC was dangerous. Then they said it was safe. Now they’ve gone back to saying it’s dangerous. ACOG says out-of-hospital birth isn’t safe, but the research has consistently suggested that for women with normal, uncomplicated pregnancies it is not just safe, but safer, because those women are far more likely to have a normal, spontaneous vaginal birth and far less likely to experience harmful, unnecessary interventions....”

”...The goal is to have a healthy baby. ’This phrase is used over and over and over to shut down women’s requests,’ she [Erica Lyon] says. ’The context needs to be that the goal is a healthy mom. Because mothers never make decisions without thinking about that healthy baby. And to suggest otherwise is insulting and degrading and disrespectful’...What’s best for women is best for babies. and what’s best for women and babies is minimally invasive births that are physically, emotionally, and socially supported. This is not the kind of experience that most women have. In the age of evidence based medicine, women need to know that standard American maternity care is not primarily driven by their health and well-being or by the health and well-being of their babies. Care is constrained and determined by liability and financial considerations, by a provider’s licensing regulations and malpractice insurer. The evidence often has nothing to do with it.

This the TRUTH and I hope women hear it.

The only critique I have of this book is one I echo from several other reviews. The book fires you up and has a lot of passion and energy, but provides no outlet or ideas for where to channel that energy. There is no ”resources” section, no suggestion to join [6]Citizens for Midwifery or your state midwifery advocates, no list of birth-positive organizations who are working diligently for birth change in our culture, etc.

For some ideas that address the above, read my [7]small-stone birth activism article :)

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0738210730/103-6893043-7177433?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0738210730>
 2. <http://pushedbirth.com/>
 3. <http://friendsofmomidwives.org/>
 4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/jenniferblock.jpg>
 5. <http://www.advocatesforpregnantwomen.org/>
 6. <http://cfmidwifery.org/>
 7. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/10/09/small-stone-birth-activism/>
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Transformation Through Birth (2011-02-25 17:47)

One of my favorite birth books is Transformation Through Birth. Written in 1984 by Claudia Panuthos, who also wrote the excellent book Ended Beginnings (about miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death, and healing all sorts of childbearing losses), it is one of the books I recommend as "going beyond" typical pregnancy/birth book material. I enjoy books that are designed to help women with the emotional work of pregnancy instead of just the physical work, with a quick dabble into the psyche. I find they are few and far between.

Some quotes and ideas from this book that I particular like:

"In some sense, childbirth is much like a marathon. Once given some general guidelines, marathon runners know how to breathe, to run, and to complete their race according to their own body signals. Similarly, women know how to breathe, to birth, and to complete the delivery according to their own body signals. Marathon runners who are true champions are free to stop the fast pace, and even quit the race without loss of integrity."

She then makes the point that birth is really more like a "Zen marathon" in that "the focus is to become centered and one with the body, to remain on purpose and directed toward a single goal and to act from the witness or higher mind within" and goes on to say, "Because we view marathon running as an expression of ultimate physical health, a similar attitude toward childbearing may greatly aid in the altering of present attitudes that respond to childbearing as an abnormal condition requiring medical treatment."

I use the marathon example in my birth classes usually—particularly when talking about "pain" and what birth feels like. I use the marathon analogy to illustrate how the sensations of birth are not like the sensations of accident, illness, or injury, which send us pain signals indicating something is wrong. There is nothing wrong with birth! (well, usually) The sensations of birthing are more similar to the feeling of healthy muscles working hard and working for a long time, but doing something of which they are fully capable.

I've posted about this before, but the marathon talk reminds me of something one of the doctors in the Business of Being Born film said that made me really outraged. He said something to the effect of: "in three months you're just going to be pushing a baby in a stroller, so what difference does it make how you gave birth?" What difference does it make?! Would anyone even THINK to say something like that to a marathon runner or Olympian—"in three months, you'll just be pushing a baby in a stroller, who cares that you won a gold medal?" (analogy side note, feeling good that you won a gold medal [gave birth in a triumphant and empowering way] does not invalidate or cause guilt in those who did not run the marathon, or had to quit early, or needed help finishing. There is no shame in not running, but there is also rightful PRIDE and "glory" in finishing the "race" you set out on.

Okay, back to the actual book! Another good quote, but one I have a mixed reaction to:

”Women who birth joyfully do so because of who they are, what they believe, and how they live.”

While I like the sentiment, there is an unintended subtext of—if you did NOT birth joyfully, it must be because you have a sucky life in general and does not take into consideration the millions of factors that go into any one birth (it isn’t JUST about what the individual believes and how she lives, it is also about what those around her believe and how they live, and also what our culture believes about birth).

That said, the book is very compassionate with regard to cesarean birth experiences, stating:

”For the woman who delivered surgically, her task is to see that she was attempting to save her baby’s life through an act of personal courage.”

I love this re-framing—it isn’t a failure to have a cesarean birth, it is often an act of personal courage.

The final element I love from Transformation Through Birth is the author’s concept of encouraging and preparing for postpartum EXPRESSION instead of postpartum depression (the theory being that stuffed down, unexpressed feelings, moods, conflicts, emotions contribute to depression by repression of expression. That’s my own bit of alliteration there—I’m so catchy! ;-)

The Waters are Breaking... (2011-02-28 17:53)

I recently bought a very discounted copy of Penny Simkin’s Comfort Measures for Childbirth video. In the explanatory booklet that comes with it, she mentions the following: ”You may also notice the woman’s bag of waters break during a bearing-down effort. This is normal, though quite rare, as the bag of waters is usually broken before this time...” She doesn’t specify whether it is quite rare because the bag of waters is artificially broken before that time for many women, or whether it is just quite rare, period. Regardless, I found it an interesting comment because my personal experiences have all been of this same ”rare” type—my water breaks right as I’m pushing out my babies. With my first son, I arrived at the birth center ten centimeters dilated and was told I could push whenever I felt the urge. After about 30 minutes or so, I began pushing sort of experimentally. My water exploded across the room after a few of these mini-pushes. He was then born about an hour after that. With my second son, I was on my hands and knees on the floor feeling the first intense pushes and on the second push, my water broke with a soft, warm gush and ran down my leg. He was born about 5 minutes after that. After these two experiences, my conclusion was that it was kind of a nice benefit to have my water intact until pushing—it created sort of cushion for the baby’s head and (I felt) perhaps lessened the intensity of contractions (I have yet to experience a ”freaking out,” identifiable transition stage in any of my births).



[1]

Waves breaking at Montana De Oro on CA trip, July 2009.

When my daughter was born last month, it was a slightly different story. As usual, the water stayed intact, but as I began to feel the pressure of her approaching head, I felt like my water really needed to break and wasn't. It felt distinctly in the way and it was really bothering me. I felt like I could feel it in my "birth path" and it felt like an obstruction rather than a cushion and I was completely annoyed by it. I got on hands and knees on the futon and could feel her head moving down and almost crowning, when the water finally broke and a small trickle of it came out before she did (approximately 12 seconds before!). As I've written before, I moved up into a kneeling position then and my entire baby was born all at once along with...a big sploosh of water. Most of it came out after the baby—she was particularly nice and clean after birth too. My sons were very bloody. My daughter had a couple of tiny spots of blood on her head, but the rest of her was pink and vernixy.

I titled my post as I did because during this last pregnancy, I often listened to a CD of chants. One of the songs on the CD has sort of a wailing refrain of, "the waters are breaaaaaaking...all over the world...the waters are breaking!" and I could NOT listen to that song while pregnant (even though it has nothing to do with pregnancy—I'm not sure exactly what it is supposed to mean, but I surmise it is about change in the world). I always ran to skip over it, feeling like to listen to it would be to send some kind of message to my body/baby that I wanted my water to break, when really, I definitely didn't want it to break early! I wish I would have thought to turn the song on during labor though ;)

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/100_1975.jpg

peacefulbeginnings (2011-02-28 18:04:15)

That IS interesting. I've had one AROM, one rupture right at pushing and one that started labor. I was surprised when pushing my son out at the intensity with which my water broke. I heard a distinct POP and then felt lots of fluid on my legs. It almost scared me! In contrast, my next son (and most recent birth) involved lots of stopping and starting until one night I was lying on the couch reading and my water broke. I first thought I had peed myself, but quickly realized that was not the case. Unfortunately, I also remembered reading that many people who experience labor starting with the water breaking have described them as more intense. It was a strange feeling to have the famous "water breaks" moment (as popularized by movies and tv shows) without the immediate overwhelming contractions. False advertising, anyone? My son was born about 12 hours later, and I wouldn't characterize it as overly painful.FYI. :)

Kimberly (2011-02-28 20:00:10)

It was interesting when my second daughter was born. With my first daughter, I had an epidural and my midwife broke my water with the giant crochet needle. I didn't feel a thing and I barely heard the popping. But with my

second, I had been having contractions for about 11 hours (gradually getting stronger). I was laying on my left side when a contraction hit...and...okay, this is the best way I can describe it...its like you have to pass gas, and it feels like you just pass a small balloon (or air pocket). And then the next thing I know my thighs are wet and there is a huge spot of water on my triage bed. I told my husband "I'm pretty sure my water just broke" and he lifted up the sheet I was under and said "gross" and put it back down (which made me laugh, which I desperately needed). Almost as soon as my water broke, I felt the urge to push, and she was born about 10 minutes later.

Return to the Mother « Talk Birth (2011-03-04 12:58:17)

[...] Comments « The Waters are Breaking... [...]

Susannah (2011-03-02 05:47:55)

Hi! I'm Susannah, a doula in Connecticut. I love your blog so much! I've been reading for a couple months now, and I was so happy for you when you delivered your daughter. <3 In my limited experience, none of my clients have had their waters break spontaneously in early labor. Of course, some have had their waters broken by their providers.. It was so amazing to me with my first client, whose water didn't break until she was pushing, that her bag was bulging and that I could smell it. It was unlike any scent I ever experienced. Not a bad smell, just an incredibly earthy one. I have to say, I'm curious about the chant and I want to hear it. Could you tell us the name?

talkbirth (2011-03-02 17:15:32)

I'm glad you enjoy my blog! Thanks so much for commenting! The chant is called Return to the Mother and is on the CD "Chants" by Reclaiming. I'm going to make a new post with the words to it, I think, because it actually feels like a neat birth song after all (like I said, I wish I would have remembered it in labor!): All over the world, The waters are breaking. Everywhere, everywhere The waters are breaking. And so return, Return, return, Return to the Mother...

kaba zama (2011-06-02 04:04:30)

my water never broke but was broken

1.3 March

I'm a Birth Warrior! (2011-03-04 11:20)

Earlier this week, I was surprised and pleased to get a small package in the mail from my Birthing from Within mentor friend. In it was a sweet little "My Mama is a Birth Warrior" t-shirt. The words surround a labyrinth image, which of course, I love.



[1]
Modeling new t-shirt :)

In the enclosed card was the following:

Imagine a tribe in which a woman is prepared for childbirth in the same way warriors are prepared for battle. Imagine a Ceremony for this woman before she gives birth, a grand send-off with holy songs and fire. Imagine a feast, prepared just for her.

Her tribe tells her, they say to her "Go to your journey, you have prepared. We have prepared you. If you fall from your horse once or a hundred times, it does not matter. All that matters is that you come back to us, that you come home.

Throughout your journey—your labyrinth of Great Love, Great Determination, Great Faith and Great Doubt—you rode on!

The Great Tribe of Mothers welcomes you back from your birth journey with honor.

Imagine, indeed. I have a partially prepared blog post about my own labyrinth of pregnancy and birth. I hope to eventually publish it, but for now, just know that I do feel I embarked on a mighty journey during this last pregnancy, I did pass through those Gates, and I did ride on. I AM a birth warrior! :)



[2]
Standing up so big!

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/img_0525.jpg

2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0531.jpg

Return to the Mother (2011-03-04 12:57)

In my recent blog post about [1]waters breaking, I mentioned a chant/song with a refrain of "the waters are breaaaaking! All over the world..." A doula commented on that post and was curious to know the rest of the words to the song. The chant is called "Return to the Mother" and is on the CD Chants by Reclaiming. As I read over the words it actually feels kind of like a neat birth song (and like I said in the other post, I wish I would have remembered it in labor!):

Return to the Mother

(song)

All over the world,
The waters are breaking.
Everywhere, everywhere
The waters are breaking.

(chant)

And so return,
Return, return,
Return to the Mother...

Perhaps if it was a birth song, the word "return" could be changed to something else—representing "come out and meet your mother!" :)

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/the-waters-are-breaking/>

International Women's Day, Birth Activism, and Feminism (2011-03-07 17:40)

"The minute my child was born, I was reborn as a feminist. It's so incredible what women can do...Birthing naturally, as most women do around the globe, is a superhuman act. You leave behind the comforts of being human and plunge back into being an animal. My friend's partner said, 'Birth is like going for a swim in the ocean. Will there be a riptide? A big storm? Or will it just be a beautiful, sunny little dip?' Its indeterminate length, the mystery of its process, is so much a part of the nature of birth. The regimentation of a hospital birth that wants to make it happen and use their gizmos to maximum effect is counter to birth in general." –Ani DiFranco interviewed in [1]Mothering magazine, May/June 2008

"We were all held, touched, interrelated, in an invisible net of incarnation. I would scarcely think of it ordinarily; yet for each creature I saw, someone, a mother, had given birth....Motherhood was the gate. It was something that had always been invisible to me before, or so unvalued as to be beneath noticing: the motheredness of the world." –Naomi Wolf, *Misconceptions*

Since tomorrow is [2]International Women's Day, I felt moved to share the above quotes. I also wanted to touch briefly on birth as a feminist issue, spurred by this [3]thought-provoking post by my friend Summer(I

have TONS more ideas about this topic, but limited time in which to share them!). Personally, I've identified as a feminist since I was a child—long before I became a birth activist. Identifying in this way was my first taste of the activist spirit that has fueled me for the rest of my life. For me, my birth activism is intimately and inextricably entwined with my larger interest in women's rights. I have always been somewhat confused to hear any woman say she is not a feminist, it grieves me because when you dig a little deeper, it is usually because they are defining feminism according to a very skewed, simplified, inaccurate, media misportrayal of feminism (i.e. a man-hating caricature). I also like the term "womanist." To me, being a feminist most simply means believing and acting as if women have value. All too often, those who mischaracterize feminism in the above ways believe EXACTLY the opposite.

In one of my many books about women's issues, I found these awesome explanations of what feminism is—the source being of some surprise to me, the Roman Catholic Order of Sisters of Loretto:

Feminism: a world-wide social change movement which critically but lovingly rejects relationships and structures based on stereotyped roles of dominance (male) and submission (female).

Feminism: a life-affirming movement reorganizing institutions and relationships, so that women will have equal access to society's goods, services, status, and power.

Feminism: the bonding of women discovering the joy of woman-identity.

Feminism: a process freeing women to work toward liberation for themselves and other oppressed persons.

And here is another definition: "Feminism is a conscious and continuous effort to improve the lives of all women, an effort which requires changing the system that defines success as making a lot of money."—Jane O'Reilly

To me it also means defining all women's work, paid or unpaid, as having real value (this includes the "invisible" work of mothering reflected in the second quote I chose to open this post).

I think all of these definitions can be well applied to our work with birth!

I also think some women who do not self-identify as feminist do not because they feel like "feminists want women to be like men." So, here is a feminist quote about that too :) "A woman should not be a mirror image of man's universe. A woman should not try to emulate men, thus taking on masculine traits, she should develop herself, realize herself, gain direct vision into her own being." —Anais Nin

I love the final point especially—gain direct vision into her own being. I think empowered birth often triggers this for women.



[4]
Net of love in action!

And, then finally, bringing us back to International Women's Day I have a final quote:

"I believe that these circles of women around us weave invisible nets of love that carry us when we're weak and sing with us when we're strong." –SARK, Succulent Wild Woman
As I noted in my [5]post for CfM this week, in honor of International Women's Day—and every day—let us celebrate our bodies, honor our mothers, and trust in the nets of love woven around us by a multitude of remarkable, powerful, everyday women.

1. <http://www.mothering.com/>
2. <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/>
3. <http://summerdoula.wordpress.com/2011/02/26/birth-as-a-feminist-issue/>
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/135656_137106326350168_117518641642270_210194_8124920_o.jpg
5. <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com/2011/03/international-womens-day.html>

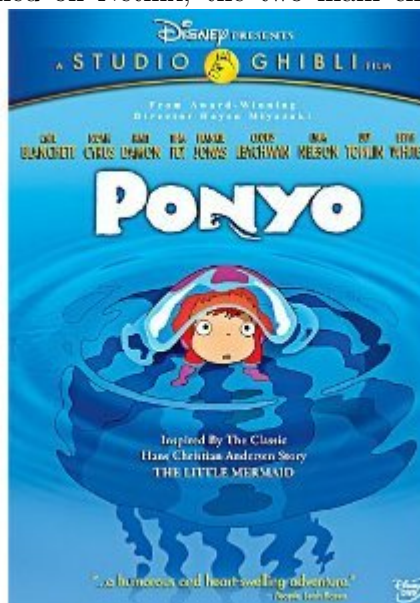
Ahmie (2011-03-12 14:51:02)

the problem I run into is that a lot of feminists of my mother's era (baby boom generation) take all those "liberation" ideas and interpret them as "don't be a martyr, have the epidural!" (actually said to me by one of my aunts at the baby shower for my first pregnancy) and "what do you do? oh, you're home with your baby - well, what will you be going back to after maternity leave?" as if mothering children isn't enough (and these have happened at church!). I have been subjected to disapproval from older women because I CHOSE to let my husband's career be more important than my own (his is a steadier income than I could hope to have without an advanced degree, being a public school science teacher - which he became the August after we finished our bachelors degrees, and so since our household finances couldn't support us both going to grad school and he needed extra classes for his license, I CHOSE to put off my advanced degrees until after we started a family, I'm currently hoping to finish my Master's then have one more baby, then on to PhD and MAYBE one more baby while I'm working on that degree, so they'll all be born before I'm trying to deal with being a professor and such. I said I wanted 5 when my first was less than two hours old and I still feel like there are two family members missing as I hold my sleeping 3rd baby in my lap to type this). I have been told, outright ot my face, that I am squandering my potential and talents by devoting these years to motherhood (and having "so many" children - these are people who don't know I still wish to have 2 more as that is not something I bring up much). The academic research I want to do involves pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, and other parenting issues (basically children and their parents from conception through early adulthood, and how differences early on may shape outcomes in the young adult years). My children are my pilot subjects ;) Piaget did it too.

Birth & Breastfeeding in Unexpected Places (2011-03-09 14:53)

No, I'm not talking about giving birth in the car, or breastfeeding in the rotunda at the Capitol, I'm talking about birth and breastfeeding showing up in unexpectedly positive ways in books and movies. I had two such occasions last week.

In the animated children's movie Ponyo, which we watched on Netflix, the two main character children



encounter a father, mother, and baby floating in [1] a small boat in the flooded town. Ponyo attempts to give the baby a drink from her thermos and the mother says, "no, he gets his milk from me. I can drink it and make milk for the baby and he can get it that way." The little boy then says, "when I was little my mom made milk for me too." Ponyo then tries to give the mother big stacks of sandwiches saying, "for milk! For milk! Here, you can have this for milk!" It was really cute :)

Then, I finished reading a novel called Medicus on my Kindle. It was a "novel of the Roman Empire" about a military doctor in Britannia during the Roman occupation. It was a mystery book, but definitely not a traditional sort of mystery. The doctor ends up buying an enslaved girl to stop her from being abused and investigates the suspicious deaths of several prostitutes/slaves. It is noted several times that the girl has "some skill in midwifery" and that she used to attend births with her mother. Towards the very end of the book, the doctor is called to attend a complicated birth in which the baby is transverse and everyone is pretty sure both mother and baby will die. She has been pushing for a long time and is all worn out. The doctor enters the room and has no idea what to do. He says, "I'm only a medic. A surgeon. Where's a midwife?" And, with a few dramatic twists, the slave girl with some midwifery knowledge is convinced to come help, turns the transverse baby, and saves the lives of both mother and baby who are later described as nursing happily (the mother "pale, but alive"). Birth often makes a dramatic appearance in books and films, but the drama usually involves the baby, mother, or both then dying. So, this was a refreshing change as well as a nice plug for midwifery :)

1. http://www.amazon.com/Ponyo-Noah-Lindsey-Cyrus/dp/B002ZTQVQQ/ref=sr_1_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1299699174&sr=1-1

peacefulbeginnings (2011-03-09 15:08:44)
Cool!

shauna (2011-03-09 16:46:03)

Wow those are two really, really, really cool examples! You don't come across it that much anyway and there were two great ones! Thanks for sharing!

thegnomesmom (2011-03-09 17:15:53)

Very cool. Makes me want to see Ponyo that much more! <http://thegnomesmom.com/>

Lindsay (2011-03-09 20:51:04)

My husband and I just watched the movie, "Due Date." Thought it was pretty funny, but disappointed at the get go when you find out the woman is having a scheduled c-section (of which there is no explanation, of course...it's just passed off as completely normal...go figure) Well, not to be a spoiler if you haven't seen it (it really doesn't spoil the movie), but the woman ends up going into labor on her own and has a vaginal birth with a healthy baby. It was refreshing to see things go so smoothly on a movie. So, yeah Hollywood on getting it right once in a while!

Lori Doty (2011-03-10 15:21:02)

Other studio Ghibli movies show breast feeding too. One for sure is Pom Poko. I'll have to check the others.

Blessingway Readings & Chants (2011-03-14 12:39)

I'm looking through my files to choose a reading for a mother blessing this weekend as well as choosing readings for a women's retreat this weekend. Anyway, I felt like sharing some of them here for people who might be googling around looking for something to share at a blessingway:

From the book *Joyful Birth: A Spiritual Path to Motherhood* by Susan Piver

The path of motherhood has a beginning, but no end. It's constantly changing and constantly challenging. Along the way, we encounter our personal limits over and over. We fall in love over and over. We ride the sharp edge of hope and fear. On this path of discovery, as on any spiritual path, our pretensions are shattered, our minds are blown, and our hearts are opened. We cry, we laugh, we bumble around and make countless mistakes. Through it all, we are gently—or abruptly—poked into greater honesty, lovingkindness, and understanding. It is a truly joyful path.

The memory of [my son's] birth has become a talisman that I hold in my heart as I journey deeper and deeper into motherhood. For these moments come again in every mother's life—the times when we are asked to walk straight into our pain and fear, and in doing so, open up to a love that is greater than anything we ever could have imagined: all life's beauty and wonder, as well as all the ways that things can break and go wrong...Again and again, motherhood demands that we break through our limitations, that we split our hearts open to make room for something that may be more than we thought we could bear. In that sense, the labor with which we give birth is simply a rehearsal for something we mothers must do over and over: turn ourselves inside out, and then let go.

This is the reading we often use for symbolically summoning the four directions. It is from the book *Mother Rising: The Blessingway Journey into Motherhood*:

Blessed be this gathering with the gifts of the East: communication of the heart, mind, and body; fresh beginnings with each rising of the sun; the knowledge of the growth found in sharing silences.

Blessed be this gathering with the gifts of the South: warmth of hearth and home; the heat of the heart's passion; the light to illuminate the darkest of times.

Blessed be this gathering with the gifts of the West: the lake's deep commitments; the river's swift excitement; the sea's breadth of knowing.

Blessed be this gathering with the gifts of the North: firm foundation on which to build; fertile fields to enrich our lives; a stable home to which we may always return.

From previous posts here is:



[1] After my blessingway with baby girl, January 2011

[2] A birth blessing

[3] Full moon poem

[4] Courage reading

[5] Fear release for birth

[6] Birth warrior affirmation

[7] Two birth poems

[8] Birthing poem

And, finally, here is a [9] handout of the chants we often use. It is formatted with the chants in two columns so it can be cut in half to distribute.

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0254.jpg
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/10/23/birth-blessing/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/09/28/like-one-full-moon/>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/05/20/courage-reading-for-mother-blessing/>

5. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/08/15/fear-release-for-birth/>
6. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/05/06/birth-warrior-affirmation/>
7. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/04/06/two-birth-poems/>
8. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/07/19/birthing-poem/>
9. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/bwchants.pdf>

enjoybirth (2010-10-25 13:26:23)

This is a GREAT quote! :) It is so very true too.

Bethany (2011-05-20 20:09:13)

Thanks for posting this. I am planning a blessingway for my friend and this has been really helpful!

Responsive Readings for Women's Rituals (2011-03-14 15:26)

As I noted in my previous post, I'm choosing some readings for an upcoming women's retreat. Our theme for the spring is "personal power" and so these responsive readings from the book *Readings for Women's Programs* by Meg Bowman and Connie Springer seemed perfect to me. The capitalized (or italicized) sections are read in unison by the group and the non-capitalized/italicized sections are read by the facilitator. I think they could work for any type of women's ceremony (blessingways, etc.):

Self-Love



[1] At my blessingway for my second son, May 2006

Self-love is respecting my own uniqueness,
my creativity and my talents.

LEARNING NEW SKILLS,

BEING ASSERTIVE

HAVING CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITIES

Self-love is acknowledging my good qualities

and following my own guidelines.

SURROUNDING MYSELF WITH PEOPLE

WHO NOURISH ME AND ENHANCE MY SELF-ESTEEM.

Self-love is taking time to enjoy each day.

SURROUNDING MYSELF WITH COLORS AND BEAUTY,

GIVING PLEASURE WITHOUT GUILT

KNOWING THAT I DESERVE THE BEST

Self-love is loving and respecting my body.

REALLY TAKING CARE OF MYSELF

PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY,

GENTLY AND LOVINGLY

Self-love is seeing myself equal to others,

accepting myself and letting myself win.

NEVER PUNISHING MYSELF

OR HARMING OTHERS

TURNING MY NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

INTO POSITIVE ONES.

The more I love myself,

the more I can love others

and the more others will return my love.

SELF-LOVE

IS BEING MYSELF

AND ENJOYING MY LIFE.

Blessed be.

—

To Be

BE healthy enough

To live each day to the fullest

BE strong enough

To know that I cannot do everything alone.

BE wise enough

To realize I don't know everything

BE courageous enough

To speak my mind and to change my mind

BE understanding enough

To listen to those with differing views

BE secure enough

To reveal my own unique personality

BE generous enough

To assist those who need my help

BE frugal enough

To take care of my own needs

BE realistic enough

To let go of the past and live in the present

And above all, BE loving enough

To BE loved

To BE happy

To BE whole

To BE myself.

Blessed Be.

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/000_0020.jpg

Threshold Moments (2011-03-16 10:49)

In cleaning off my desk this weekend, I found the following note from a webinar by Rose St. John that I attended some time ago:

”Labor is all about finding your threshold and learning your can go beyond it.” –Rose St. John



[1]
Threshold Stone, Newgrange, Ireland

I think one of the powerful lessons of birth is about one’s own immense capacity—each of my births has had a ”threshold” moment and, indeed, I have some notes taken for a possible future article about ”At the Threshold: Pivotal Moments in Birth.” With my first son it was during pushing when I realized I had to just do it, I had to push him out even though it was scaring me to do it. With my second son, it was when I realized that I was actually in labor—I had a distinct sense of literally crossing a threshold. A sense of, ”there is no turning back now. I’m going back into the house and I’m having a baby.” With my third son, it was when I got up in the night feeling contractions and went into the kitchen. There, I talked to the baby, telling him it was time to let go of each other—”Lets do this. Lets get it done by 3:00” (and we did). With my last baby, it was when I was talking to myself prior to pushing—fretting that I was too ”in my head” and not letting go enough. After this moment, I did let go and she was born very rapidly after that.

So, looks like I had two ”pushing” thresholds and two ”bring it on—labor is beginning” thresholds. The pushing thresholds occurred during my longer labors and the bring it on moments during my short labors.

1. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/ireland/newgrange>

Kiva Woman with Womb Labyrinth « Talk Birth (2011-04-14 17:14:25)

[...] approaching her “threshold moment” and getting ready to enter the “laborinth” of birth. Her baby is waiting for her [...]

DVD Review: The HUG: Understanding the Secret Language of the Newborn (2011-03-16 16:10)

DVD Review: The HUG: Understanding the Secret Language of the Newborn
Created by Jan Tedder, 2010

21 minutes, \$25

[1]<http://www.hugyourbaby.org/>

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE

[2]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>



[3]

Developed by a nurse-practitioner to help educate new parents, HUG stands for “help, understanding, guidance for young families.” In this short, informative DVD, parents learn about the baby’s ability to use distinct body language to communicate its needs and emotional states. Short sections showing real newborns with their parents address calming a crying baby, helping baby eat and sleep well, and playing with baby. It is helpful to see footage of real babies that illustrate a baby’s “Zones” and SOS cues (“Sign of Overstimulation”). The families shown are ethnically diverse.

The information provided on The HUG is very simple and basic. It is nurturing, empowering, and clearly presented. Mentions of breastfeeding communicate that it is the normal and expected way to feed babies. The HUG is a good resource for people who have little previous experiences with newborns or for birth/postpartum professionals looking for ideas about communicating newborn behavior to new parents.

Most new parents are eager to learn about more than just the “baby basics” newborn care such as diapering and bathing. The HUG takes parents into more meaningful territory and helps them learn about their baby’s special communication abilities.

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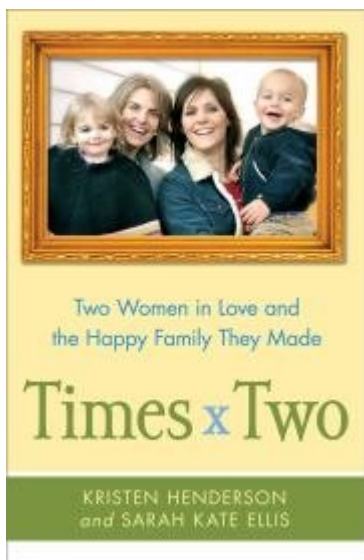
Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this DVD for review purposes.

1. <http://www.hugyourbaby.org/>

2. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>

3. <http://www.hugyourbaby.org/>

Book Review: Times Two (2011-03-18 16:09)



[1]

Book Review: Times Two: Two Women In Love & the Happy Family They Made

By Kristen Henderson & Sarah Kate Ellis

Free Press, 2011

ISBN 978-1439176405

224 pages, hard cover, \$14.81

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

[2]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

Written in a she said/she said format, Times Two is an engaging memoir of two women's journey into parenthood. I was immediately entranced by their story and devoured the whole book in less than 24 hours. A professional couple living in New York, Kristen and Sarah embark on various fertility treatments and experience a devastating miscarriage before both becoming pregnant—with the same donor and with due dates only three days apart. The rest of the book chronicles their progress through their dual pregnancies, the births of their nearly-twins, and a brief discussion of the postpartum adjustment period. It was interesting—and sad—to read about the hurdles faced by same-sex couples in achieving legal parenting rights.

I was especially interested in their birth choices. While beginning with very different goals, the mothers-to-be hire a doula and find the private birth classes she offers to be a transformative influence. Sarah successfully turns her transverse baby with moxibustion shortly before her due date and avoids a scheduled cesarean and both women give birth with doula support (and eventually epidurals) during the same month.

The book is fast-paced and reads like a novel. A nice, extra touch is a series of color photos in the middle of the book—ultrasound pictures, double-belly pictures, and photos of the babies and family. The tone of Times Two is fairly lightweight and casual and the dialogue felt somewhat stilted or artificial, but this unusual double narrative kept me captivated.

—

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://www.amazon.com/Times-Two-Women-Happy-Family/dp/143917640X/>

Unity (2011-03-18 19:07)

I keep wanting to write an update post about Alaina and never finding enough moments in one day in which to do it—I joked the other day about, "instead of taking care of your sweet little self, I want to write a blog post about taking care of your sweet little self!" ;-D Overall, I'm surprised by how easy she is to take care of. I love having a baby again—I'm surprised I ever found it hard to take care of a baby! Her needs are very simple and easy to meet and it just isn't very complicated to figure her out. Older kids are a different story altogether! Though, taking care of her while taking care of my other kids adds a different level of challenge and isn't itself actually easy. But, caring for her when considered on its own is very easy and natural and good. I was concerned about "starting over" and taking care of a baby all over again and I'm pleased to discover anew how much I love having a baby.

She does have an interesting habit of being awake until about 1:00 a.m. every night. Not sure what is up with that and keep puzzling over changing the pattern. With my first baby, I remember remarking that at night I felt in "perfect harmony" with him, but during the day I found him somewhat confusing (and also kind of fussy/unsettled). With Alaina, I feel in perfect daytime harmony with her, but the night is the confusing time. It is also hard to write about her without comparing her to my other babies—I'd like to consider each child on their own, rather than using the others as a yardstick, but I also think it is a natural thing to do. I feel like she is my happiest baby yet. I'd worried she would be an anxious or difficult baby, because of all the fear I "marinated" her in during pregnancy, but she is a happy little soul. She is also incredibly quiet. It is weird, actually, sometimes I look down at her and she's just riding along quietly and I get kind of a start, like, "oh, you're still here!" She does not really ever cry—just occasionally commentary type "wahs" of protest or alert or notice. I remember the boys becoming unsettled more easily and also being harder to calm down. For example, yesterday she was asleep when we got home from the park. I hurried to bring in my stuff and when I got back out to the car she was awake and crying pretty hard—I was horrified and ran to scoop her up. The second I picked her up, she made not another peep. I know for a fact that my other babies would have kept on crying for a couple of moments just for emphasis, as well as just taken a little more conscious effort for me to calm them back down. She smiles a lot and enjoys watching her big brothers play.

While the feeling isn't as intense as it was when she was first born (she is two months old tomorrow!), I continue to marvel at her every day—"HOW did you get here, you amazing little thing?" I feel almost startled that she is here with us, happy and whole and engaging with the world around her. I don't remember having quite the same sense of miracle about the boys. Sense of magic, yes, but the sense of surprise and/or disbelief about their existence, no.



[1]
Aren't they cuties?

I think she looks remarkably like my oldest in this picture, but in baby pictures at the same age and to my eyes in person, she doesn't look so much like him.

I am enjoying experiencing the symbiosis of the nursing relationship again. I sat nursing her a couple of days ago and remembered a quote from the book *The Blue Jay's Dance* by Louise Erdrich in which she is talking about male writers from the nineteenth century and their longing for an experience of oneness and seeking the mystery of an epiphany. She says:

"Perhaps we owe some of our most moving literature to men who didn't understand that they wanted to be women nursing babies."

I am currently reading three different books about spirituality and one of them has this focus on "oneness"—I was reading it while nursing her and that quote popped into mind.

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0581.jpg

Rapturous Acts « Talk Birth (2011-03-21 16:45:29)
[...] Comments « Unity [...]

Rapturous Acts (2011-03-21 16:45)

I had included this quote in my [1]recent update post, but decided it edit that one for length and give this its own post. From the book, *The Blue Jay's Dance: Growing, bearing, mothering, or fathering, supporting, and at last letting go...are powerful and mundane creative acts that rapturously suck up whole chunks of life.* —Louise Erdrich

I went to a retreat yesterday and one of my friends said of her own baby that, "I am his everything." That is an excellent description of that mother-baby unity that I touched on in my last post. With Alaina right now, I am everything she needs. I am her habitat. I am her gauge for the world around her and also for her own self—I've pointed out to the boys before how if she gets startled and her arms go out, she immediately searches for my eyes, looking for my signal (calmness) that everything is fine and the startle is unnecessary. She uses me and my responses to her to understand the world (and herself). If she gets fussy when someone else is holding her, as soon as I take her back, she rides along happily peeking over my shoulder—balance of her world restored. Her eyes follow me when I am walking around. I feel like I have savored all of my

babies, but I feel more intensely aware this time around how short this time period is—this time of complete symbiosis and dependence. I also remember feeling more confused by my first baby and I remember worrying and worrying about, "what if he cries?" I think I thought he might cry and I'd never be able to calm him back down or something? I'm not really sure what that was about, but I remember feeling like crying = bad mother. With Alaina, I am 100 % confident that she will not keep crying (duh). I mentioned before that she doesn't cry much, but last night she had a fussy spell after our second day in a row being away from home all day, and I had no doubt at all that her trust in me to care for her would calm the fussy (and it did). Oh, and, she also laughed at me for the first time last night! It is amazing to be someone's whole world and it just feels extra special this time around. This morning when I was playing with her and she was smiling with her whole body (love that), I felt like our connection is so pure and basic that it feels almost holy. I have to confess that she makes me feel like having another baby—how can I not do this again?! I'm still pretty certain we won't have any more children, but I surprise myself by frequent thoughts about maybe ONE more...

My boys still think I'm pretty awesome and prefer being with me to pretty much anything else (they do adore their grandpa and he is their most fun person to hang out with), but they really like me a whole bunch and I still have the power to make their worlds "right" as well. I enjoy their company and their wild, funny, enthusiastic, creative, complicated personalities and I feel like they are the treasures of my heart. I also feel like my love for them is deeper in a way (or more developed, maybe?) than it was when they were babies, because we are so invested in each other. I know them so well and we've had so much life together, I can't imagine not having them. I can still remember not having Alaina and I can remember how I thought I may never get to have another baby ever again and I'm really enjoying this very uncomplicated, unconditional, sweet, sacred love of and for a little baby again.

I am currently reading and very much enjoying a book called *She Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World* and the author critiques the foundations of modern philosophy as being based on independence from others as the goal/highest state as well as critiquing spiritual traditions that see attachment as a flaw and a state to be transcended (the book is based on process philosophy instead). She describes an anecdote how a fellow student wrote a paper making a case for "the existence of other minds" and no one else in her class other than her seemed to find it bizarre. She discusses Descartes and his "I think, therefore I am" conclusion as inherently flawed saying that before Descartes could articulate this thought, "he reached out his hand for his mother." It is relationship, not thought that forms our basis for life and our experience of reality.



[2]
In her habitat ("the maternal nest")

I'm getting ready to start teaching in-seat again at the end of this week. I'm getting nervous about it, because we're not really ready for separation yet, even for short times. The class is 5 hours and since I'm the teacher, I can give breaks when I need to. My husband is going to stay in town with all the kids—I know this sounds slightly crazy, but I have to know she can get to me if she needs me AND we also always have a Wal-Mart list, so he's going to do that each week (the boys love to go to WM with him, because he has a tendency to say yes to new toys, candy, and weird food for dinner). The class only lasts 8 weeks and one week is a midterm and one a final, which usually means dismissal a bit early those nights. I guess it is a little strange to be worried about it, because many mothers go back to work when their babies are 6 weeks old and for 40 hours at a time. I'm getting all concerned about only working 5 hours once a week! (with a baby lurking in the parking lot with my husband!) But, still, it is on my mind...a LOT.

I'm going to remain on leave from teaching birth classes and I'm also strongly considering not resuming breastfeeding support group meetings—just stick with phone/email help and no in-person group for a while. I do have another project brewing, but I'm not going to write about it until I know if it is going to work out or not!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/03/18/unity/>

2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/199248_1787088349341_1003507904_32055362_5369420_n.jpg

enjoybirth (2011-03-22 21:54:36)

I so love that newborn - early baby stage, where i am the everything. I was the same with my 3rd, much calmer and TREASURED the days. I still do and he is 5. Just knowing he was probably my last made it so much easier and more special. Good luck going back to work!

shauna (2011-03-23 05:59:04)

Love this! I just wish all mother's, no ALL humans, would understand this. It's not a crib, car seat, swing or even a house that is our babies habitats (love your phrase maternal nest with the gorgeous picture) but it is us that they crave, need and search. I love watching Everett search for me. They do the eye search at such a young age too, don't they!? Ricky points it out and observes it all the time. I was pained yesterday on the way home when he cried for the last 10 min of the ride. I reached back and he gripped my finger in sorrow and I kept feeling sooo bad and like he was searching for me! It seems like going some place is easy, going home is not for him. Driving home from the retreat I had to stop twice to nurse/clam him. Just one more baby ...is a slippery slope LOL ;) Just look at me. Seriously though my dad says lots of people wish they would have had one more child, no one wishes they wouldn't have. :D I love that he said that! Funny because just hours before I read this post of yours I was laying in bed thinking about your kids' age differences. I wondered if you had such temptation to have just one more. Another baby aligned more with Alana's age would be very similar to how your parents spaced their kids. 2 and 2 right? :)

talkbirth (2011-03-23 09:50:22)

So far, I really enjoy the age difference because I feel like Z being almost 5 really allows me to fully enjoy A as a baby, without feeling torn between needs the way I felt when L was little and Z was born. So, if I do have another one, I think I'd want another semi-big space for that reason, BUT then I also want a smaller space for the playing together reason—which is SO incredibly irreplaceable and fun (for them, and for me to watch). I don't know! The car seat thing is so hard—I always think about how we are so quick to meet their needs at all other times and then in the car seat they are "abandoned" for no reason that they can discern. :(I feel pretty lucky so far with our car trip experiences—we haven't gone anywhere very far away.



[1]
Trying to decide whether or not this is it!

Then, my mom took this one of me after I got out of the shower. I was going to try to go to bed, because the birth center staff seemed pretty sure I wasn't really in labor and should just get some rest. This picture was taken about 5-6 hours before he was born:



[2]
With my second son, my mom took a great series of birth pictures as he was emerging. They're really good and step by step as he comes out—however, the angle is a very direct "rear view" that I don't feel comfortable putting on the internet! With that birth, there is only one picture from the actual labor (and, it is a nice active labor picture that isn't too graphic and it has actually been printed in several publications):



[3]
About 30 minutes before giving birth to second baby

I like how you can see all of my older son's playdoh creations in the foreground. That's homebirth for you!

With my daughter, my mom took a series of labor pictures and while I'm sad not to have birth pictures too, I like the story that these pictures tell:



[4] Taken during the morning of birthing day–wanted one last "belly picture" of pregnancy.



[5] Spent a lot of time on the ball with Mark at my side



[6]



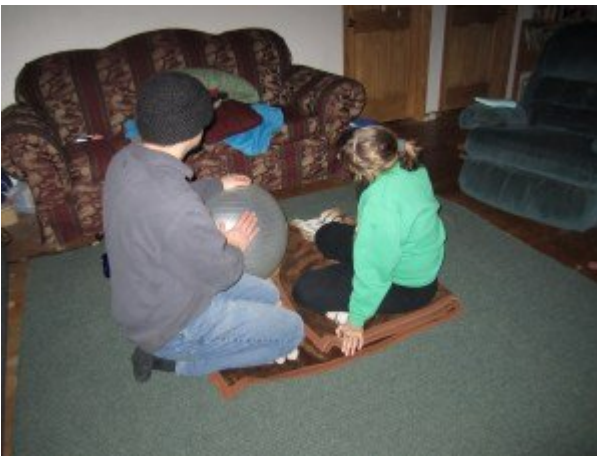
[7] My birth nest is all ready! (on floor outside bathroom) Notice that my birth altar is set up nearby.



[8]
More time on the ball...



[9]
Proving I can still smile one hour before she is born! (+ advertising my alma mater)



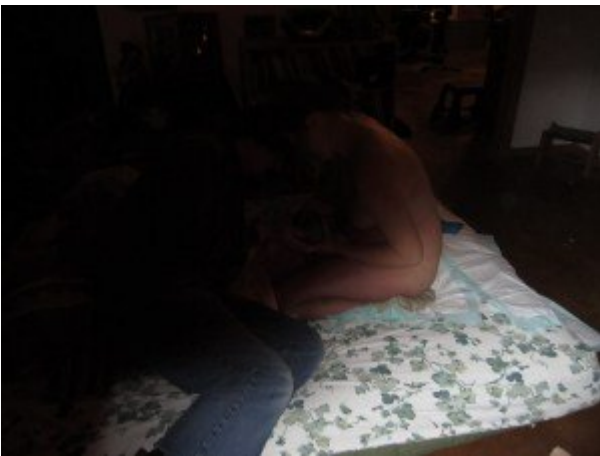
[10]
Accidentally got trapped on floor in horrible and painful position.



[11]
The closer I get to having a baby, the nearer to the floor I get (hands and knees is right for me)



[12]
Switched into ridiculous too-small PJ shirt right before pushing.



[13]
She's here! Closest thing to a birth picture that we got.



[14]

First nursing

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/inlabor1.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/inlabor2.jpg>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/000_0006.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0315.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0316.jpg
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0317.jpg
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0318.jpg
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11. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0323.jpg
12. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0325.jpg
13. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0326.jpg
14. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/img_0330.jpg

talkbirth (2011-03-28 19:32:58)

LOL! :) I ended up in that exact same position twice during the labor—it was a "sitting on the floor between contractions, getting up to lean on ball during them" mid-point, where I would get "trapped" before making it all the way up to the ball. It was shockingly immobilizing.

talkbirth (2011-03-28 19:34:54)

Thanks, Steph! I felt happy looking back through them to make this post. My mom also got some good post-birth pictures from this birth. I hope you get just what you want photo-wise this time! There is a certain *feel* one can get from pictures, rather than just a written account.

Steph (2011-03-28 19:09:18)

You have some wonderful pictures. After realizing I had no pictures of labor or birth of my first baby (I had a couple after she was born but that was about it) I enlisted two sisters to take pictures of everything for my second. I love having so many pictures to look over and help preserve different moments from the event. For my third I had even less pictures than with my first which has always made me a little sad. I love the words of birth stories and write mini novels about each one but love the pictures too and miss them when I don't have them. I've been known to wish I could take pictures of my labors and deliveries because then I might get the moments I want saved on film. I'm working on writing a list of shots that I feel to be important (the way my husband and I work together, the tools or techniques I use, the concentration/work I put into the event are a few items on that list so far). I feel that my personal birth team needs my husband, my doula (so far filled by my mother), my photographer and my care provider

(though that one doesn't feel as vital some days ;)). Sorry to ramble you obviously hit on a special subject for me ;) thanks for sharing!

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-03-28 19:04:24)

"Accidentally got trapped on floor in horrible and painful position" cracked me up. I'm sure it wasn't funny at the time, but ... I don't know. There's something lovely and hilarious and true about how *ordinary* labor and birth are, when they're also so surreal and sacred. Like, here's a miracle, and crap—I've somehow gotten myself stuck in a weird position!

Happy Birth Dance « Talk Birth (2011-04-04 15:24:02)

[...] My ongoing thought process actually didn't have much to do with the quote, though my recent labor pictures post illustrates the idea of freedom of movement throughout labor according to my own body's [...]

Alaina's Complete Birth Story « Talk Birth (2011-06-01 16:16:21)

[...] The Birth of Alaina Diana Remer January 19, 2011 11:15 a.m. 7lbs, 8oz; 20 inches. Short version of her story is here and labor pictures are here. [...]

♥♂►The Perfect Birth◀♀♥ (2011-06-30 22:56:11)

Does a birth ball help very much? With all my labors, it seemed like almost everything was shockingly immobilizing. :/ It gets to the point sometimes where I am scared to even change my position between contractions, for fear of getting "stuck" in something worse.

talkbirth (2011-07-01 11:02:52)

Birth ball helps a LOT! I really recommend them. I used one a lot during my first labor and my last labor. Really good tool! I received your book and have begun reading it—I have several others going at the same time, so it may take me a while to finish. Your journey is an interesting one! :)

♥♂►The Perfect Birth◀♀♥ (2011-07-01 15:10:37)

Awww. Thanks so much! Take your time! Maybe I should consider the birth ball next time. I seem to have such a low tolerance for dealing with almost anything that stimulates while in labor, so I do wonder how I would react, but I'm trying to keep an open mind and figure things out. :)

1.4 April

Birth Strength (2011-04-01 13:02)

"Women are strong, strong, terribly strong. We don't know how strong until we are pushing out our babies. We are too often treated like babies having babies when we should be in training, like acolytes, novices to high priestesshood, like serious applicants for the space program." —Louise Erdrich, *The Blue Jay's Dance*
This is one of my favorite quotes to share at blessingways. *The Blue Jay's Dance* is a memoir of the writer's first year with her third baby (sixth child). She isn't particularly a birth advocate, the book is a general mothering memoir, but at one point she says the above and I love it. Though, I should note that I think there are all kinds of strengths to be found in birth—not just in pushing out a baby. One can experience "terrible strength" in coping with an unexpected cesarean also. And, of course, womanpower can also be found in other non-birth experiences. When I shared the quote on Facebook, some people commented that they hated it or that it was offensive. I have been surprised by how very personally some of the birth quotes I post on Facebook are taken. There have been several occasions where I've felt so upset about it that I

thought maybe I should never post quotes ever again! (now who's taking something too personally? ;)). Then, I realized a strong personal reaction is normal, because birth is such a strong and personal issue, so now I try to be extra mindful of the subtexts that might be perceived in a quote (regardless of original intent) and clarify that below the quote. I truly think the intent in this one is of the potential to discover our own hidden strength via birth, not to say that birth is the only powerful experience available to women. I know that I draw on my "birth strength" in other important moments in my life. I also realized after the miscarriage-birth of my third son that the strength found in birth is present in women, period. It is woman strength and it rises up during birth, but it is always there.

During a recent women's retreat we reflected on sources of personal power and how we feel when we are standing in our personal power (this question comes from a fabulous book, [1]A Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal). When I first considered this question, I was somewhat sad to discover that the only instances of personal power I could come up with from giving birth—it would be nice to have piles of personal power experiences! More reflection revealed that I also feel like I'm standing in my personal power when I teach. Not a sense of "power over," but in power with. More freshly, I've realized that I find personal power in Goddess spirituality/images and ideas of the Divine Feminine. And, I also experience personal power when I am alone. I feel most whole and authentic when I am just by myself. I like quiet space in my own head in which to think and I also enjoy my own company :)

"A woman meets herself in childbirth" –Cynthia Caillagh

Each time I gave birth I realized I was a pretty amazing person with inherent worth and value. The woman that I met in birth was very strong and very capable and very focused. And, she is me.

I hope my baby girl grows up standing in her own personal power and having a profound sense of her own worth.



[2]

Baby's First Bindi—taken at a recent blessingway for my good friend

1. <http://www.reneetrudeau.com/>

2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/188205_1942797854820_1388678911_2235835_5841221_n2.jpg

peacefulbeginnings (2011-04-01 13:10:10)

Unfortunately, we can not know ahead of time how our girls will grow up, but the scale is definitely tipped in her favor. ;) Having a strong mom as a role model really helps! As for the personal power, I feel very lucky that I even though I have some pretty icky, non-powerful moments, I also have some amazingly powerful moments where I saw my own power. It is life changing, for sure.

Happy Birth Dance (2011-04-04 15:23)

“Birth is a creative process, not a surgical procedure. I picture dancers on a stage. Once, doing a pirouette, a woman sustained a cervical fracture as result of a fall; she is not paralyzed. We try to make the stage safer, to have the dancers better prepared. But can a dancer wear a collar around her neck, just in case she falls? The presence of the collar will inhibit her free motion. We cannot say to her, ‘this will be entirely natural except for the brace on your neck, just in case.’ It cannot be ‘as if’ it is not there because we know that creative movement and creative expression cannot exist with those constraints. The dancer cannot dance with the brace on. In the same way the birthing woman cannot ‘dance’ with a brace on. The straps around her abdomen, the wires coming from her vagina, change her birth.” –Dr. Michelle Harrison



[1]
Present from my husband after my daughter's birth

I woke up this morning thinking about this quote. I've shared it on my blog before, but that was in 2008 and so it has been lost in the shuffle of other posts (and many, many quotes!) since then. My ongoing thought process actually didn't have much to do with the quote, though my recent [2]labor pictures post illustrates the idea of freedom of movement throughout labor according to my own body's messages, rather than assisted with anything else. However, thinking of dancing and birth made me think of the pendant my husband gave me following the birth of our daughter. He actually gave it to me for Christmas first, but since he gave me four other pendants for presents, I gave this one back to him and told him to save it for a post-baby present! Given how I then felt after birthing her, it felt like a perfect present. I love how this exuberant goddess is dancing for joy. And, how her upswept arms form a heart-like shape. I was so happy to have MY BABY. When I wear this pendant, I remember that feeling of relief and happiness after giving birth to her. Every night when I look down and see her there in my arms I feel lucky and also this continued sense of surprise, almost, to have her here with me. It all seems so magic.

I was talking to my husband about this last night (well, quietly croaking, since I've had laryngitis for several days) while on our nightly walk. We'd noticed that Noah's tulip tree actually bloomed! I told him I hadn't been sure it would actually survive (clear parallels here), but look, now here we are and look at this baby who is here with us while the flowers bloom. We looked quietly for a minute and then I said, "remember how we almost decided not to try again?" I feel like it was brave to try again. I was brave.



[3]
Noah's tree bloomed!

1. <http://www.sagewoman.com/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/03/28/labor-pictures/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0636.jpg

Barbara (2011-04-04 15:42:41)

You **are** brave, warrior queen daughter!

Summer (2011-04-04 18:34:42)

What a lovely post, on so many levels! I totally relate to the dancer image. You were and are brave, which is a quality I think Alaina will have in full force! I am so happy that Noah's tree is blooming. :)

Kelli (2011-04-05 05:45:36)

You are brave mama and this post shows it. Birth is a dance between us and a partner that is so much a part of us first from within and then grows into something new (another go) without. Thanks for this post.

Birth is a Creative Process – Not a Surgical Procedure | Birth True Blog (2011-04-05 06:53:23)

[...] Visit <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/04/04/happy-birth-dance> to read an entire blog post about this quote from childbirth educator, Molly Remer. [...]

Handouts for Birth Booths (2011-04-11 16:10)

A frequent topic on email lists for birth professionals is good handouts/resources for booths at maternity or baby fairs. Rather than making copies of materials or creating my own handouts (reinventing the wheel in a less-professional looking way!), I am a fan of using glossy, professionally printed, but still very low cost stuff for tables and also a fan of materials that address good maternity care in general. My top faves for having on a booth or as handouts are:

- The Rights of Childbearing Women: [1]free + shipping from Childbirth Connection or available as a



[2]free pdf if you want to print your own)[3]

- The Guide to a Healthy Birth from Choices in Childbirth: [4]free to download as a pdf, or available [5]free + shipping only as an awesome booklet. Seriously, these are AMAZING!
- ICAN's [6]ICAN Birth pamphlet is a very reasonable 11 cents per copy and is such a nice, positive, informative brochure—packs a lot of essential birth preparation information into a small space (it is coming up as "unavailable" for me on the site right now, so I'm not sure what is going on. Love it, though!).
- I have [7]some links to other handouts you can print too. I created some myself and others are favorite online resources.
- For homebirth or midwifery specific booths, Citizens for Midwifery has several useful free [8]fact sheets/handouts as well as reasonably priced [9]Midwives Model of Care brochures.

1. <http://www.childbirthconnection.org/article.asp?ck=10084>

2. http://www.childbirthconnection.org/pdfs/rights_childbearing_women.pdf

3. <https://app.etapestry.com/cart/ChoicesInChildbirth/default/category.php?ref=1199.0.99948585>

4. http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/resources/CIC_2011_NATIONAL_BirthGuide_WebMech_01_hires.pdf

5. <https://app.etapestry.com/cart/ChoicesInChildbirth/default/category.php?ref=1199.0.99948603>
6. http://www.ican-online.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=1&products_id=189&zenid=90cdaff68d9c74ff0e87fca31a18daa3
7. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/childbirth-education-classes/handouts/>
8. <http://cfmidwifery.org/resources/>
9. <http://cfmidwifery.org/Web/c-2-brochures-and-fliers.aspx>

ICAN Conference Thoughts (2011-04-13 22:59)



[1] This past weekend, I attended the [2]ICAN conference in St. Louis. I was really excited that the conference was in my own back yard (well, two hours from my back yard). I enjoyed seeing lots of people that I know from [3]Friends of Missouri Midwives as well as other friends and contacts from other organizations. And, I got to meet some people in real life (like Jill from [4]the Unnecesarean), who I previously only "knew" online. I also bought myself a pretty awesome new ring from the [5]MANA booth (and a t-shirt and a bumper sticker!).

In addition to these things, highlights of the conference for me were:

- Hearing Pam England speak and getting to meet her after so many years of being a fan of [6]Birthing from Within. I will write another post soon about her "9 Birth Story Gates" presentation. It was very good.
- Taking Amy Swagman's birth art workshop (Amy is the [7]Mandala Journey artist and was someone else that I enjoyed meeting in person after only "knowing" online). I will write about this soon as well.
- Seeing the amazing breech birth videos shared by Gail Tully of [8]Spinning Babies in her presentation about breech birth.
- Connecting with another mother during the sand tray art therapy workshop presented by [9]Maria Carella. Though our birth experiences were different, our "processing" of them during the workshop was amazingly similar. More about this later too.

The main reason I wanted to post tonight though was to share my experience in visiting the "Our Voices" room at the conference. This room is a safe, quiet place—a place of silence—in which women can go to contribute their feelings about their cesareans to the wall displays. They can take their contributions home with them when they leave, or leave them up to be re-installed in the next Our Voices room at the next conference. Every wall in the room, plus the doors and several tables, was covered with women's words and feelings about their cesarean experiences, subsequent births, VBAC, etc. It is difficult to put into words how potent of an experience visiting this room was. I was not expecting to be moved to tears by it, but I was. It was extraordinary. And, painful. There were other women in the room crying and crying as they composed their additions to the wall, as well as other women walking quietly through and looking and reading. I originally intended to add to the wall—I was told that it was not necessary to have had a cesarean myself in order to add something—but after seeing the room and the women in it, I did not feel "worthy" (so to speak!) of adding to it. It wasn't my space. It was something I was privileged to witness, but I did not feel it was appropriate to add my own words to these women's pain and expressive space. I felt like anything I could say would be trite somehow, almost insulting, to the depth of feeling expressed on the walls. Sometimes you really do have to have "been there" in order to fully recognize the experience of another. And, while I can certainly empathize and feel deep compassion, cesarean birth has not been my own personal journey and it just felt like it would be rude almost, to claim enough understanding of it to write on this wall.

This experience also taught me that I am not meant to start an ICAN chapter. I really think our area could use one and I love the work that ICAN does and I had signed up to start a chapter (before coming to my senses and realizing that I am overcommitted to too many projects/organizations right now as it is), but after visiting the Our Voices room, I realized that I am not the appropriate person to lead one. I just can't really get it even though I can "see" other women and honor their experiences.

I've noted before that I feel like my experiences with pregnancy loss opened my heart more fully to the full range of birth loss (which includes many women's feelings about their cesareans) and birth/pregnancy trauma. Before loss, I only saw the "pretty" side of birth. Well, not pretty, exactly, but the empowering and triumphant and exciting side. After my birth-miscarriage, my world was opened to the wider world of birth experiences and feelings. I feel like there are—somewhat surprising—parallels between pregnancy loss and the loss of a vaginal birth women experience with cesarean, but it is also different and the Our Voices room at the conference was a sacred space for those with cesarean experiences. It was both humbling and moving to hear their voices in this way.

There are pictures of the room and the contributions at the [10]ICAN Conference Facebook page.

1. <http://ican-online.org/>
2. <http://ican-online.org/>
3. <http://friendsofmomidwives.org/>
4. <http://www.theunnecesarean.com/>
5. <http://mana.org/>
6. <http://www.birthingfromwithin.com/>
7. <http://themandalajourney.com/>
8. <http://www.spinningbabies.com/>
9. <http://www.mariacarella.com/>
10. <http://www.facebook.com/#!/icanconference>

peacefulbeginnings (2011-04-14 05:36:12)

Thanks for sharing! I was deeply disappointed not to be able to attend (only 1 1/2 hours from my backyard!), and appreciate being able to read about other's experiences there. I HATE that there has to be room/safe space for women who have been so hurt and traumatized by their births. Thank you, ICAN, for giving these women that opportunity

and working to lessen the pain they have. I also understand where you are coming from about not really "getting it". It feels important that those of us who have not had that experience "get" that we "don't get it". We can empathize, love and see them (as you said), but we can never fully understand. :)

Kiva Woman with Womb Labyrinth (2011-04-14 17:13)

Today, a friend told me that she searched google images for "womb labyrinth" and [1]mine were some of the first images to come up. I thought that was kind of fun and decided to post another labyrinth drawing I did a couple of years ago. She was posted on my now defunct birth art blog (need to move some of that content over here!) and I think she deserves a post here as well. Inspired by [2]Birthing from Within, of course, this "kiva woman" (based on the BfW cover image) is contemplating her upcoming birth journey:



[3]
Kiva Woman & Womb Labyrinth

She's approaching her "[4]threshold moment" and getting ready to enter the "laborinth" of birth. Her baby is waiting for her in the center. I have several friends who are preparing to enter their own "laborinths" and I hope their birth paths are filled with beauty, peace, and power...

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/22/more-birth-art/>
2. <http://www.birthingfromwithin.com/>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/kivalabyrinth.jpg>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/threshold-moments/>

Giveaway: Aloe Cadabra (2011-04-19 15:59)

This giveaway is now closed. Kelly D. was the winner!

As a breastfeeding counselor and a childbirth educator, I get occasional questions from new mothers about what to use as an "all natural" personal lubricant. So, my attention was caught when I received an email



from the company, [1]Aloe Cadabra. They note the following:[2]

New moms have a lot of things to juggle – care for a newborn, altered sleep patterns, returning to work, etc. As women navigate their new routines and new “normal” life, many struggle with one piece of this pie – resuming sexual intimacy with their partners. With pregnancy and childbirth affecting the hormonal balance of a woman’s body, many new moms face challenges in their postnatal sexual health. A pilot study carried out by St George’s Hospital Medical School in London reports that 3 months after delivery, 39 % of women experience vaginal dryness.

As a result, many women turn to mainstream personal lubricant products found at a local drug-store to help bring the spark back to the post-baby bedroom. If these personal products are on the shelves, then they must be safe to use, right? Wrong – these readily available products contain the same ingredients found in antifreeze, food preservatives and cleaning solutions – obviously bad for both your body and the environment.

[3]Aloe Cadabra has developed an all-natural, certified organic product made from 95 % organic aloe and enriched with Vitamin E. This first and only plant-based intimate moisturizer is pH balanced for a women’s body, anti-bacterial, anti-microbial and anti-fungal. Aloe Cadabra is fully absorbed into the skin as it is used, so there is no goeey, sticky mess, and it’s compatible with condoms.

Parents are wisely cautious and educate themselves on products that come in contact with their baby’s body...Doesn’t a mom deserve the same caution?

One reader can win a bottle of [4]Aloe Cadabra simply by leaving a comment on this giveaway! I will close the giveaway next Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.

1. <http://aloecadabra.com/>
2. http://aloecadabra.com/_catalog_94509/Aloe_Cadabra
3. <http://aloecadabra.com/>
4. <http://aloecadabra.com/>

Mary Tighe (2011-04-23 02:33:44)

Wow I can't believe the other stuff has the same ingredients as found in anti-freeze and cleaning solutions. I use organic and natural cleaning products in our house and yet I was using the chemical stuff that I try to avoid in my toilet as a personal lubricant yuck!!! Will be throwing that out asap - so would love to win this

Chris G (2011-04-25 20:49:48)

WOuld love to try it and share it with my clients too!

Lynda M O (2011-04-21 22:11:49)

Like Barbara above, I am menopausal and would love a natural alternative to the commercial products available in the local stores.

LeAnn van den Bosch (2011-04-19 16:09:49)

sounds great! I'd love to try it.

Holly Wilson (2011-04-19 16:16:58)

I would like to try this. I am unhappy with traditional products and would love to try an all-natural alternative.

Sheridan (2011-04-19 16:22:42)

I would love to try this!

Katie Tonarely (2011-04-19 16:42:29)

This looks great. I hope I win. :)

Barbara (2011-04-19 17:58:55)

Might be helpful for those of us who are post-menopausal!

Kelly Downum (2011-04-19 18:09:50)

Would LOVE to try it out! :)

Jessica (2011-04-19 20:46:24)

Oh! Seeing as I just gave birth 3 weeks ago, and the time to resume, er, activities is quickly approaching... We could really use this...

Lori Doty (2011-04-24 20:49:08)

I want some, or at least want to win some to give it a try.

Terina Shrout-Knarr (2011-04-25 20:51:31)

Would like to have this on hand for one of my clients....

Julie (2011-04-26 07:48:08)

I've tried another natural product, but would love to give this one a try as well.

Cole D (2011-04-26 09:26:51)

I would love to try this! I almost didn't enter, cuz truth be told, I NEVER win anything, but it only takes a second to type a comment, eh? What's to lose? :)

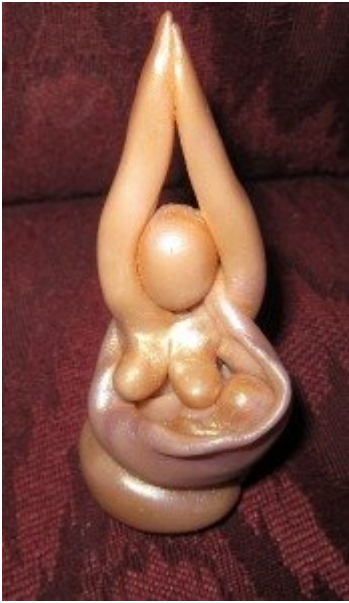
talkbirth (2011-04-27 09:24:46)

I drew numbers and you are the winner, Kelly! Please email me with your address so I can mail it to you!

The Birth Art Journey Continues (2011-04-19 16:52)

This weekend I made two more additions to my series of birth art sculptures that I began during my last pregnancy.

Since A spends a lot of time in a pouch, I added this slingin' mama to my collection:



[1]

And, just as I initially made a [2]polymer clay birth goddess figure to incorporate the "pregnant woman" identity into my life, I wanted to make a non-pregnant figure (who isn't holding a baby) to represent my return to the nonpregnant identity:



[3]

I also made some new pregnant figures for two upcoming mother blessings for friends. In a way, these too are a continuation of my series, since the cycle of life continues in other women after my own "return." Here are my four new figures all together:



[4]

And now, here is my full birth art series from my pregnancy with Alaina, all lined up together representing my journey:



[5]

The first figure represents my incorporation of the pregnant identity. The second figure is a representation of my sense of being in the labyrinth of pregnancy. The [6]third figure was created to help me work with my fear/concern about pushing the baby out. She was my most powerful figure and served as a source of strength to me. The fourth figure is an image of my actual experience pushing my baby out (I was kneeling, which is why she is kneeling). The fifth figure is the transition to nursing mama and then the final two figures are those I describe above.

And, finally, here is my series of figures plus my pregnant friends :)



[7]

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0648.jpg
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/08/23/polymer-clay-birth-goddess-sculptures/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0651.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0653.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_06551.jpg
6. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/12/adventures-in-birth-art/>
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0658.jpg

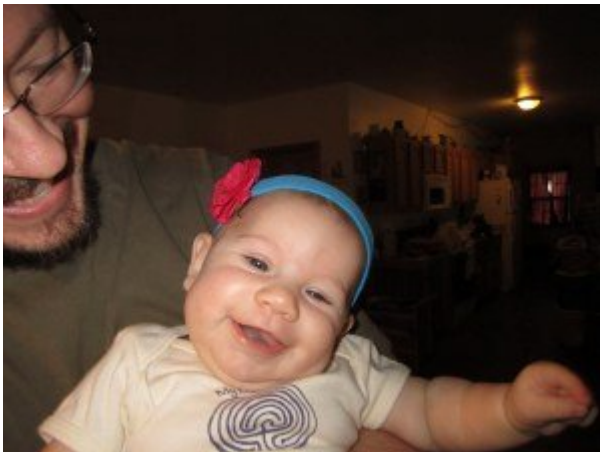
Lynda M O (2011-04-21 22:19:05)

Beautiful figures. I love the arms overhead pose and you bring the images to life with your curves.

Haumea: The Divine Midwife « Talk Birth (2011-07-05 17:47:42)

[...] about Haumea and thinking about my own births, I felt inspired to make yet another figure in my birth art series. I'm experimenting with new types of figures lately and made this catching-your-own [...]

Three Month a-Baby! (2011-04-20 08:54)



[1]

Saw lots of baby girls with handbands at the ICAN conference and decided to cobble together a test one :)

I can hardly believe my baby girl is three months old now! It is amazing. Though, on the other hand, I also can hardly remember life without her. We also just crossed into her "life spark-aversary" as the anniversary of my LMP was April 17th (TMI!). This time last year, I was still full of confusion and anxiety about whether we would be able to have another baby and gathering up my courage to try again, "one more time." She continues to be the most delightful, wonderful baby in the history of the world :) Seriously though, she is

just a really great baby. She is tons of fun, she smiles all the time, she laughs sometimes (mostly only at her Baba [my mom]), she chews on her hands in a contemplative manner, she drools a little. She goos and coos and gives little squeals of communication. She is shockingly accommodating, patient, good natured, pleasant, and adaptable (Z threw-dropped a pile of clothes on her head out of nowhere last night and when we snatched them back off, she was just blinking and then she smiled and kicked her legs—the boys would have SCREAMED from being surprised unpleasantly like that). I've never had such a calm and cooperative baby. She also sleeps like magic. Of course, she does also sleep in my actual arms all night long, so maybe that is why! I think she is actually one of those babies that I could probably put down in another bed, but I haven't tried it. I sleep better with her close by and I don't want to miss out on any opportunities to snuggle and enjoy her. I guess it is because we've said she is the last baby, but every day I think that I've got to have another one. She is so adorable that this can't be the last time I get to have a baby! (I still think it is going to be last time though, for a variety of reasons.)

Despite being so used to her and feeling like she's been with us for ages, I continue to have that sense of marvel over her—every day I feel it. I tell her things like, "guess what? You're my BABY!" This is an unfamiliar feeling for me and it may be related to the same "last baby" thing, or, just because of my fear that I wouldn't have another baby, or because of my relief to be on this side of the PAL journey. Whatever it is, I just feel amazed and grateful and delighted by her presence in our lives.



[2]

Having tummy time and showing off her cute little ears!

We're doing elimination communication (EC) with her just like we did with Z. It is working out great. EC is amazing and I will write a separate post about that experience. But, I think it is just so COOL that a 3 month old baby will sleep all night and have a dry diaper in the morning (and then pee in her little potty).

The boys totally love her, which can have its challenges. They both like to get really close to her face and also kind of lean on her head to snuggle her. Her eyes start to blink rapidly when she sees them getting close to her! :(But, she also gives them some of the biggest grins and loves to watch them play. They are her favorite show and she will sit on my lap and just watch them for the longest time. She also likes to ride facing outward on my hip and kick and pump her legs and wave her arms. Lann is big enough at 7.5 that he can carry her around and you can tell she trusts him to take care of her. She has even fallen asleep on him before! (He was holding her and kind of dancing around while we cooked dinner one night and then laid down on the couch with her laying on top of him and she conked out.) She weighs about 15 pounds now and is getting heavy enough that he can't hold her for very long without complaining about the weight though, LOL. She has fabulously chubby legs and dimpled hands.



[3]

Daddy and his kids!

We've just had a family-wide cold and she got it too (she escaped the one that caused laryngitis for me two weeks ago, but this one she got before me, which meant my antibodies weren't able to save her from this one). My grandma is coming to visit from CA this week and I hope she will be suitably enraptured with her first little great-granddaughter!

This blog has taken on a more personal tone during my pregnancy experience and continues to do so. Eventually, I will get back to writing more educational or advocacy-oriented posts. Right now, I just feel more like writing about my own personal experiences.

There has been a "baby boom" of April babies amongst my friends recently and as I read their birth stories, I realize that I've yet to share the full version of Alaina's birth story. I have it hand written in my journal and think I will transcribe it "sometime soon." Attending Pam England's presentation about the gates of birth story sharing also heightened my desire to write it up in full. Of course, every day I have at least 10 things I'd like to do that I don't make it to that day. I was just talking about this to my husband, saying that really, I actually like this about myself. While I feel some kind of pressure somewhere to be "more Zen" and to "chill out"/relax, I like my own intensity. I run fast and high and bright. It's okay. That's how I am. As I've noted before, if chilling out means cooling my enthusiasm or putting out my fire, then, no thanks! I don't want it after all. I'd rather have the slightly manic edge :)

I like waking up in the morning with my head boiling with possibilities and being full of exciting ideas. Of course, perhaps I could be calm and relaxed and full of ideas, but if it is a trade, I'll take the ideas! To be totally honest, sometimes I feel like people who suggest relaxing are secretly trying to "dim my shine." So there! ;-P



[4]
Cutie pie!

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0642.jpg
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0646.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0644.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/215849_1859660563601_1003507904_32132813_7078716_n.jpg

Rachel (2011-04-20 16:21:20)

What a wonderful post. It's so great to hear how much you are enjoying your daughter! I can tell you are reveling in the delight of nurturing a child-something that is sadly too often rushed through and not treasured as it should be! You know what? Your pace seems to suit you just fine! You seem to have a good balance and intuitively know what works best for YOU, and your own unique personality and strengths. I couldn't keep up with your activity level and brimming ideas (!), but that's just me. I say; if you aren't stressing yourself and your babies out, and you have a zest for life and feel refreshed-then yay for you! Keep doing what you love. :)

shauna (2011-04-22 03:09:59)

"I've never had such a calm and cooperative baby." Isn't it SO MUCH FUN! I've had so many types of babies but the happiness of a calm baby is really refreshing. It's not just easier, but it's really fun! You know the 3 month mark really is a special time of reflection. It's a milestone. I so wish I would do EC. It's something that bugs me -that I don't do it. I think it is amazing and babies ARE SO SMART. We do teach them to go in diapers. I'm glad you have a great, happy and well sleeping baby for your last one. Not that Z and L weren't great. The ease and good natured aspect really is fun though. The sleeping babies are a god-send! She's SO SWEET Molly!

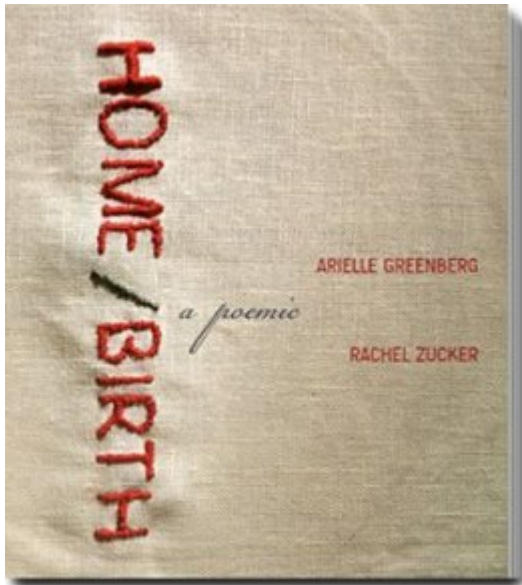
shauna (2011-04-22 03:10:52)

reflection

talkbirth (2011-04-23 09:56:04)

L & Z were definitely great too and I had plenty of enjoyment with them as babies, but I also felt like they were hard work to take care of. There has only been one day in 3 months when I've felt like Alaina was hard to take care of and that was the non-napping post-ICAN conference day I wrote about on Facebook. You're right, it is both easy and fun! Speaking of hard work though, EC IS quite a lot of work and I understand why people don't do it. I feel almost like I have no choice in the matter-once started, there's kind of no turning back! And, it is very cool and I'm amazed by it, but it also very time-consuming and takes quite a lot of energy and I often think, "what was I thinking?!" Anyway, I swear she is the most awesome baby on the planet :)

Book Review: Home/Birth: a poetic (2011-04-22 10:17)



[1] Book Review: Home/Birth: a poetic
By Arielle Greenberg and Rachel Zucker
1913 Press, 2011
ISBN 978-0-9779351-7-8
208 pages, softcover, \$11

Book Review: Home/Birth: a poetic

[2]<http://www.1913press.org>

[3]<http://www.facebook.com/pages/HomeBirth-A-Poemic/>

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

[4]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

Co-authored by a pair of long-time friends, the “poetic” book Home/Birth reads as if you are eavesdropping on a lengthy, juicy, engaging, thought-provoking conversation about homebirth, birth in America, maternity care, and feminism. The book has a lyric, narrative, stream of consciousness format linked together with segments of poetry.

The text does not differentiate between the two speakers/writers, though through the “call and response,” back-and-forth exchange between the two authors, you quickly begin to recognize two distinct voices (as well as other fragments from birth books, bumper stickers, midwives, etc.).

The book was written during Arielle’s second pregnancy, which ends in the stillbirth of her baby boy. Arielle had one prior homebirth and one subsequent homebirth. Rachel had two hospital births and a homebirth prior to the writing of the book.

While the style in which it is written takes some time to get used to, once you tune in to its rhythm, Home/Birth is a unique and fascinating journey. Because it is so distinctive, I find it difficult to describe in writing—you need to make sure to read it for yourself!

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0977935175?ie=UTF8&tag=rachzuck-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0977935175
2. <http://www.1913press.org/>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/HomeBirth-A-Poemic/>
4. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>

dancersummer (2011-04-22 10:20:07)
Can't wait to read it!

erinmidwife (2011-04-22 14:41:19)
Juicy! Looking forward to checking it out!

Mother's Day Giveaway: Moody Mamas Gift Certificate! (2011-04-23 10:00)

This giveaway is now closed. Rebecca was the winner!

Last year, I hosted a giveaway for a beautiful dress from [1]Moody Mamas. This year, in honor of Mother's Day, we have a \$35 gift certificate good towards anything on [2]www.moodymamas.com! Items from the



new spring collection make perfect Mother's Day gifts[3] or would make any pregnant woman feel special at any time.

The giveaway will run for 2 weeks, closing on Saturday, May 7th. To enter just leave a comment on this post about which piece from the Moody Mamas spring collection you like the most, Earn bonus entries by doing any of the following (and posting a comment to let me know which you did):

- 1) Fan Moody Mamas on Facebook [4]here
- 2) Follow their blog, [5]here
- 3) Follow Moody Mamas on Twitter [6]here

4) Fan [7]Talk Birth on Facebook

5) Subscribe to Talk Birth (email subscription link is to the right ->)

If you have been lucky enough to win a Moody Mamas giveaway within the last six months, please do not enter and give another mama a chance to be a winner!

1. <http://www.moodymamas.com/>
2. <http://www.moodymamas.com/>
3. <http://www.moodymamas.com/dresses/>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Moody-Mamas/154812621198930>
5. <http://themoodymamasblog.blogspot.com/>
6. <http://twitter.com/moodymamas>
7. <http://www.facebook.com/talkbirth>

talkbirth (2011-05-07 13:42:38)

I drew numbers and you're the winner, Rebecca!

Rixa (2011-04-23 13:14:27)

I like the rosette t-shirt in pink.

Julie (2011-04-23 13:30:05)

I like the Tori dress in blue!

Julie (2011-04-23 13:30:50)

I "liked" Moody Mamas on facebook

Julie (2011-04-23 13:31:23)

I'm already a fan of Talk Birth on facebook

Rebecca Kenwick (2011-04-26 20:43:24)

I fan you on facebook :)

Rebecca Kenwick (2011-04-26 20:45:05)

I like the runched top dress in grey! I fan moody mommas on FB

Four Generations! (2011-04-27 10:13)

Yesterday, my grandma went back to her home in CA after being here to meet Alaina and visit the family. While she was here, we made sure to get a four generations picture:



[1]

I have to laugh at our nearly identical smiles. I wonder if A will also have the same smile? Can't tell now with all the gums rather than big square teeth like my mom, grandma, and I all seem to have. (Related side note: quite some time ago on the last day of my internship at a battered women's shelter, one of the women, who had fairly severe psychological issues, told me, "goodbye, Molly! We'll sure miss Molly with her big, big smile and her square, white teeth!") Something else that is neat about this picture is that we are all "first daughters"—so, this is a picture of the first daughter of a first daughter of a first daughter of a first daughter. Though, in my family A is the youngest child and the rest of us first daughters are also the oldest child.

I was happy to see my grandma and have her meet my baby girl. Alaina is at a perfect age for company. She is sociable and sweet and will laugh and smile at people even if she is unfamiliar with them. She played with my grandma and slept on her chest (transferred there after having fallen asleep at my breast—I was going to put her down, but my grandma said kind of casually, "or...I could hold her while she sleeps.") I have noticed that she is getting a tiny bit stranger-anxious if she can't see me at the same time though. I've had two experiences over the last week in which I let friends hold her while I went to the bathroom and both times when I came back, she was upset.

I'm getting ready for a big event, so this is the only post I can come up with for today! Oh, do I have about 50,000 other ideas for things I'd like to post though!

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/223439_1868245778226_1003507904_32145297_8209036_n.jpg

francoise freedman (2011-04-28 16:13:54)

Just to say thank you for your beautiful four generations picture, it is great to see such warmth flowing through the (indeed similar) smiles. At Birthlight we give importance to the mother-daughter relationship in pregnancy in preparation for birth and also for healing past relationships. It's not so common that grandmas are around but when they are, it's a delight to access this female lineage through them. Thank you for sharing your lineage Francoise.

The "Almost Died..." Remark (2011-04-29 06:58)



[1]
?

Anyone who has planned a homebirth has probably heard the, "If I'd had my baby at home, I would have died" remark more times than they can count. It seems to be almost a default response to mentions of homebirth. I used to have a pet peeve about this, because I was almost certain that most of time the people saying it had been nowhere close to death! It seemed like an overly dramatic, overreaction to a normal life process, etc., etc. And, also that we've been so brainwashed by the media into thinking birth is this life or death emergency that that filter then artificially colors our perceptions of events and dramatically affects our social lexicon of birth. (However, I also have the companion thought that in many countries, birth does remain a life or death experience for women and babies. Maternal and infant mortality are significant issues and are not subjects to be taken lightly. And, mothers and babies in the U.S. do, in fact, die sometimes. It isn't just a third-world country thing!) Another statement that used to confuse me was when birth writers say things about giving birth bringing you to the, "edge between life and death." This didn't match my own to-that-date birth experiences, which had not ever involved feeling like dying.

So, these things said, it has been very, very difficult for me to write about my own feelings of being close to death following the miscarriage-birth of my third son in November 2009. I really, truly felt like I might be going to die after he was born. I have never felt that close before, but I reached that "edge" after him, and I had the visceral experience of the veil between life and death being very, very thin. And, the feeling did not occur in a scary way, but in a resigned, "oh, so this is how it is going to end, too bad I still had so much I want to do with my life!" kind of way. I felt okay with it actually. A type of acceptance that my time was over. Since everything turned out okay in the end, I haven't had much reason to process that feeling, but it was very, very intense. And, actually it was also life-changing in several areas of my life, including in terms

of my spirituality (I semi-joke that my miscarriage-birth was a "religious experience" for me, but truly, in a way it was). However, I can hardly manage to write about it. And, looking back, I remain amazed that it was humanly possible to bleed as much as I did, especially because at that point early in a second trimester pregnancy I didn't have the whole 50 % increase in blood volume that you have by full-term!

I think I don't talk much about my own "almost died" experience because obviously, in hindsight, I wasn't almost dying (since I didn't), I just felt like I was going to. But, this is the key...the fact that I wasn't truly dying doesn't mean that I didn't truly feel as if I was—and, genuinely so, not in just an irrational fear-planted-by-the-media way. This has given me new insight into the "almost died" remark that seems dished out so casually. I used to think it was primarily a risk-based/skewed/brainwashed attitude, rather than an emotional thing, but I have an understanding now that it more often probably represents how she felt (or perceived the situation) and that her feeling really matters. It was real. And, I now hear and honor that feeling (rather than secretly thinking "yeah, right!"), because the feeling was real. And, that means, to her, she really did "almost die."

I've also come to realize that despite the many amazing and wonderful, profound and magical things about birth, the experience of giving birth is very likely to take some kind of toll on a woman—whether her body, mind, or emotions. There is usually some type of "price" to be paid for each and every birth and sometimes the price is very high. This is, I guess, what qualifies, birth as such an intense, initiatory rite for women. It is most definitely a transformative event and transformation does not usually come without some degree of challenge. Sometimes to be triumphed over or overcome, but something that also leaves permanent marks. Sometimes those marks are literal and sometimes they are emotional and sometimes they are truly beautiful, but we all earn some of them, somewhere along the line. And, I also think that by glossing over the marks, the figurative or literal scars birth can leave on us, and talking about only the "sunny side" we can deny or hide the full impact of our journeys.

During Pam England's presentation about birth stories at the ICAN conference, she said that the place "where you were the most wounded—the place where the meat was chewed off your bones, becomes the seat of your most powerful medicine and the place where you can reach someone where no one else can."

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/chinese-crisis-2.jpg>

Rachel (2011-04-29 07:23:47)

Thanks for sharing this, very thoughtful. I'm sorry about the loss of your son.

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-05-03 19:01:05)

I love this post. I shared it via Twitter and then realized you aren't psychic and don't know that, so—I figured I'd actually tell you—it's beautiful and great.

talkbirth (2011-05-03 21:09:53)

I really appreciate you letting me know! Since I'm indeed not psychic, I didn't know ;-D I actually just sent my first tweet today (just a post link). I've been staying away from Twitter though, since Facebook is already so absorbing/distracting.

Rainy Wedding « Talk Birth (2011-07-25 11:26:28)

[...] thought or experience that is too awful to share with him. He has seen the places where the "meat has been chewed off my bones" and he still says I'm the greatest person in the world. So, while it is fully possibly [...]

Rebirth: What We Don't Say « Talk Birth (2011-10-02 19:25:12)

[...] a previous post, I wrote the following about the idea that giving birth and mothering leaves permanent [...]

The Spot (2011-04-30 08:25)

“Can I ask you a personal question?” asks the woman on the phone. She is calling to inquire about my birth classes and the subject of homebirth has come up.

“Sure!”

“What about the mess?”

At first I give the standard answer. That birth isn't so terribly messy, that you can put down towels and chux pads, that the midwife often does the cleanup. I pause a moment. This prospective client and I have an instant connection and excellent rapport. I add, “Actually, I left a huge blood spot on our living room carpet.” I add that the spot came out almost completely with peroxide, but can't stop myself from also remarking, “I actually feel kind of proud of it—it felt like a symbol to me.” I find myself laughing a little and there is an unmistakable note of triumph in my voice.

“Of what?”

“That I did it. Gave birth in my own home, in my own living room, on my own terms, under my own power, in my own way. In the way that felt best and right and safest to me. On my own. Me. I did it.”

What I did not add—what would have been pushing it just a little too far—is that when we moved the peroxide-cleaned carpet square into our new home a large, round, rusty-red stain was revealed on the concrete floor beneath. And, that I take secret delight in its presence. I am proud that I left my mark on the floor that bore witness to my labor. I delight and actually revel in the reminder of my power that the stain represents. Is this total weirdness? Or freakishness? A type of maternal masochism or even a perversion? No, I decide. It is really not so different from keeping a football trophy from high school or an award for volunteerism in human services from college. Maybe there is a medal for natural childbirth after all—arriving in different surprising guises, one kind a blotchy reddish stain on a concrete floor.

Despite our easy camaraderie, I never hear from that prospective client again.

Those who critique the zealousness of birth activists sometimes accuse us of supporting an insidious “Cult of Natural Childbirth” and assert that we undermine women and their unique and often traumatic experiences by “insisting” that birth be an empowering and triumphant event for women.

Maybe there actually is a Cult of Natural Childbirth and I am an acolyte of Birth cackling with wild glee as I caper around my bloodstained floor....



[1]
Nursing my brand new baby boy! (2006)

In the original article, I included a post-birth picture from my second son's birth that showed one completely exposed breast. I must have still been hopped up on the post-birth euphoria when I sent it, because after it was actually published I felt slightly horrified to have my boob in print and didn't feel like I could show the article to my dad (or, really, to many other people!) If you look closely at the picture I substituted in this blog post, you can see there is blood streaked all over my chest, arms, and hands. It was a very bloody birth!

This is a preprint of The Spot, an essay by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, published in Midwifery Today, Issue 86, Summer 2008. Copyright © 2008 Midwifery Today. Midwifery Today's website is located at: [2]<http://www.midwiferytoday.com/>

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/zandernursing.jpg>

2. <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/>

Lori Doty (2011-05-03 19:36:54)

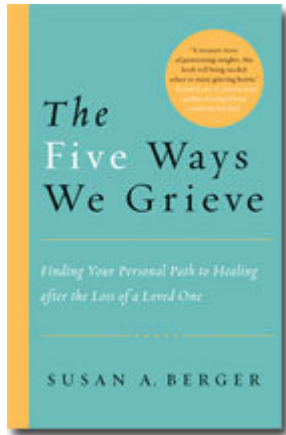
I have left a dried clump of blood on the floor in our bedroom post #2's birth just for the reason that it causes me to pause and remember just how fast the birth went and how much inked after. No stains at the actual birth site 3-4 feet away, but I think I'll keep my bedroom reminder for quite some time.

The Spot « Talk Birth | Diaper Earth (2012-01-04 05:45:40)

[...] my brand new baby boy! (2006). ———. In the original article, ... See original here: The Spot « Talk Birth
Tags: active-birth, activism, birth, birth-classes, birth-education, facebook, family, midwifery, [...]

1.5 May

The Five Ways We Grieve (2011-05-03 07:00)



[1]

”...most people are unaware that our losses affect us forever, since they cause us to see the world and ourselves differently. The task of discovering ‘Who am I now?’ and finding our own path to healing represents one of the greatest challenges of the grieving process.” –Susan Berger

I recently received a request to review a new book, *The Five Ways we Grieve*, by Susan Berger. I was instantly intrigued by the book and felt like while it is not specifically about pregnancy loss, it might still have helpful information to contribute to mothers who are coping with pregnancy loss. And, it does not disappoint! The book describes the five “identities” survivors of loss assume and the ways in which these identities transform or paralyze. While the experience of pregnancy loss is often minimized or marginalized culturally as less significant than other types of loss, the reality is that many women experience profound and genuine grief that is just as “real” as any other sort of grief and loss. When I found out that my tiny son had died after 14 weeks of pregnancy, I experienced a depth of sadness never before experienced in my life. I felt a sorrow so profound and full of anguish that I feel certain it was the same type of grief I would experience at the death of any of my dearly loved children. While some might find this surprising (or even impossible), because the baby wasn’t born yet, I believe that the pit of despair one enters after losing a child is the same regardless of the age of the child and whether born or not—perhaps the duration of grief might be shorter for some, but the initial shock, impact, and sense of intense loss and sadness is the same. And, while my own first loss may be defined by some as, “just a miscarriage,” the reality is that I gave birth to a third tiny son in the privacy of my own home—a real, little baby with fingers and toes and whose little fluttery kicks I had just been beginning to feel.

So, regardless of the size of person who died, I very readily recognized myself in the descriptions of the five identities explored in *The Five Ways We Grieve*. Most people are familiar with the classic “5 Stages of Grief” model developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance), however, these stages most readily apply to people who are dying, not to the survivors. While survivors still speak of moving through these stages, they are not really adequate to describe the experience of grieving a

loved one. The five identities explored in Susan Berger's book are:

- Nomads: Those who have not yet resolved their grief in a way that allows them to move on with their life and form a satisfying new identity.
- Memorialists: Their main goal is to honor their loved one by creating physical objects or rituals that honor the deceased.
- Normalizers: They work to recreate the kind of life they lost or wished they'd had.
- Activists: They focus on helping other people who are dealing with the same disease or issues that caused their loved one's death.
- Seekers: They experience loss as a catalyst for philosophical exploration into the meaning of life.

In my own experience, I believe the Activist and Memorialist roles are intimately intertwined—nearly immediately post-loss, I wanted to reach out to others and to try to help them as they experienced their own loss journeys. Creating my website/blog/journal, [2]Footprints on My Heart, was a means of helping myself through exploration of my feelings and thoughts, but also a means of helping others. And, it is also a means of being a memorialist. I wanted to assure that Noah's brief life would be remembered and would have value. On significant dates, I felt/feel an urge to acknowledge the date with some type of memorialization. In keeping with this, I'm posting this on his due date (which is also my birthday). Earlier in the year, following the birth of my sweet new baby girl, I felt like perhaps these date milestones would have lost their significance. In March, I considered that I had hardly given my former due date any thought at all and was really only thinking of it as my birthday and not really as anything else. However, as we got closer, old feelings were stirred and I remember how very painful this time of year was to me last year. And, no matter how distant the lived experience becomes, my birthday will actually never be the same, because I will never forget. And, I don't want to. His death/birth and my experiences with those things are part of me in a permanent way. However, the experiences now come through the lens of memory and commemoration/memorialization, rather than as a "fresh" or current, in-process experience. I write about it to ensure that he is not forgotten, nor is what he meant to me. And, I am presently in the process of turning my Footprints blog into a book, again with a dual intention of activism and memorialization.

Finally, I also see myself in the Seeker role. While I have spent a lot of years already exploring the meaning and purpose of life, giving birth to Noah was a catalyst for spiritual exploration for me. His birth prompted me to take a deep and long-lasting inner journey and to much more fully explore and elaborate on my spiritual perspective and my experiences with the Sacred Feminine, rather than to "dabble" with various ideas.

The Five Ways We Grieve: Finding Your Personal Path to Healing After the Loss of a Loved One
By Susan A. Berger, LICSW, EdD

Psychology/Grief | US \$17.95 CAN \$20.50 | Paperback | ISBN: 978-1-59030-899-8 | Trumpeter, an imprint of Shambhala Publications, Inc.

[3]<http://www.amazon.com/Five-Ways-We-Grieve-Personal/dp/159030697X>

[4]<http://www.shambhala.com/html/catalog/items/isbn/978-1-59030-697-0.cfm>

1. <http://www.shambhala.com/html/catalog/items/isbn/978-1-59030-697-0.cfm>

2. <http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com/>

3. <http://www.amazon.com/Five-Ways-We-Grieve-Personal/dp/159030697X>
4. <http://www.shambhala.com/html/catalog/items/isbn/978-1-59030-697-0.cfm>

lyndamo (2011-05-04 07:56:59)

Still I battle grief every day and my precious sister will be gone three years the end of July.

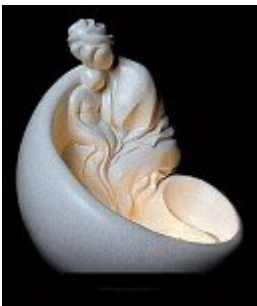
talkbirth (2011-05-04 11:11:57)

I'm sorry about your sister. Definitely permanent changes.

Honoring Mothers (2011-05-06 11:31)

[1]Science and Sensibility is having a Mother's Day event inviting birth professionals to submit stories of how they especially honor mothers in their practices, leading up to Mother's Day. The invitation is part of a contest: a randomly-selected reader who submits a story will be chosen to receive a beautifully hand-made [2]"Beads of Strength" bracelet from Amnesty International.

While I'm not sure will actually work with the vision of the contest, when I think about honoring mothers in my own work, I think about honoring their right to define their own experience and therefore, I submitted this previously written post: [3]Musings on Story, Experience, and Choice.



[4] Mother-honoring birthday gift from my mother this year.

1. <http://www.scienceandsensibility.org/?p=2669>
2. <http://shop.amnestyusa.org/Multicolor-Beads-of-Strength-Bracelet/M/B002WUUTKM.htm>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/02/24/musings-on-story-experience-choice/>
4. <http://www.goddessgift.net/candle-lamps-maya-hill.html>

Family Adventures in Polymer Clay (2011-05-07 15:17)

Last time I made [1]new polymer clay sculptures, my boys wanted to join in. They have always liked sculpting things and got into it, making a whole little series of figures each. My older son (7.5) made these little cuties:



[2]



[3]
Close up of the mom with her baby

My younger son (5), made a whole series of little ball creatures:



[4]

Two of them looked like they had another ball stuck on to them and so I said, "oh! Are these holding babies?" He looked a little sheepish and said, "no, it is eating that other one." LOL! This is classic, classic Z ;-D



[5]

[6]



said he'd changed his mind and this one above, "actually IS holding a baby."

This was my own little series I made at the same time:



[7]

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/the-birth-art-journey-continues/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0665.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0671.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0679.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0675.jpg
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0677.jpg
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/img_0653.jpg

Happy Mother's Day! (2011-05-07 23:00)



[1]
Birthday present from my mom (mother candle-lamp)

In thinking about Mother's Day this year, I keep thinking of Dr. Bradley's use of the word "motherlike" in his classic book, *Husband-Coached Childbirth*. While I'm not a huge fan of the book, I am a fan of this word. To use it in a sentence...giving birth may not be "ladylike," but it IS motherlike.

This time last year, I was on pins and needles waiting to find out if I was pregnant again (I was!). I attended a friend's blessingway ceremony on that Mother's Day and while I was there another friend announced her new pregnancy. And, I'd found out that same week about another friend's pregnancy as well. These were bittersweet announcements for me as I was happy for my friends, but also felt a pang that it wasn't me and that I "should" have been full-term myself at that point. Another friend made a very casual, offhand joke about miscarriage shortly after these announcements and I almost lost it completely, feeling at the edge of tears throughout the rest of the event. I was pretty sure that I, too, was also pregnant, but I felt almost paralyzed with fear of being "left behind" again. I imagined all of my friends going on into January and having their babies without me. As it was, the dear friend who had announced her pregnancy that day ended up losing her own sweet baby at a gestation very similar to my own loss of Noah (side note: the 18 month anniversary of his birth is today). My heart ached deeply for her, knowing that now she would have to be the one watching me go on without her and I felt acutely aware of that each time I shared a new pregnancy picture throughout my pregnancy with Alaina—my own sense of "arrested pregnancy" was one of the many difficult post-miscarriage feelings for me (it simply felt wrong to not be pregnant—like pregnancy was my "rightful state" and had been prematurely interrupted).

Anyway, that isn't really what I planned to write about today, it just came to mind as I began to type. I really planned to just share a couple of new photos! So, here's one...



[2]

All the reasons I'm a mother!

At playgroup this week, I asked my friend to take a new profile picture for me and so she took this one:



[3]

I love it! She is the same friend who took all of the wonderful pregnancy photos of me :)

Alaina keeps getting bigger and bigger! She weighs about 15 1/2 pounds now. She rolled over for the first time a couple of nights ago, but has yet to repeat the feat. However, she has started to act kind of like she wants to sit up. So, we have been experimenting with that and she has surprisingly good sitting up skills for a 3.5 month old!



[4]
What's this?!

I think her big cloth diapers serve as a stabilizing influence and I would imagine that if we tried to sit her up without one on, she would fall right over!

Last year, my husband gave me a beautiful ring for Mother's Day. I received it with some trepidation also, knowing that if my tiny, tentative new pregnancy was to also end, I would associate the ring with that forever (it also has two garnets in it—January's birth stone). The goddess of Willendorf image has held special meaning for me for some time and I love this ring. I am grateful that rather than being a loss trigger, it instead serves as a reminder of the potency and power of the Feminine. Of being motherlike.



[5]

Mother's Day present from last year

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/candlelamp-mh502-first-awareness_t.jpg
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0792.jpg
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0819.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0709.jpg

My Mother (2011-05-09 13:48)

I wrote a brief entry about my mother for a Mother's Day contest on [1]Giving Birth With Confidence answering the question, "How does your mother inspire and encourage you on your journey to (or through) motherhood?" My entry wasn't one of the finalists, but I thought since I'd taken the time to write it, I might as well share it here! My mother is such an integral part of my life that I actually find it difficult to write

about her. I have noticed the same thing in writing about my husband. Our lives are so entwined with each other that it is hard to imagine life without them, and consequently, hard to properly credit their roles in my life (a taking-for-granted thing perhaps in part, but also I think the intensity/depth/length of relationship makes it difficult to choose adequate words). Anyway, this is what I wrote and the photo I submitted with my entry:



[2]
Three generations!

My mother inspired me through her example--she was a homebirthing, homeschooling, cloth diapering, co-sleeping, attachment-parenting, baby-wearing mama when this type of mothering path was virtually unknown. She was always respectful of my personality--I was shy/reserved and she wasn't, but she was very mindful of not pushing me outside of my own personal boundaries until I was ready to "blossom" on my own. Even while parenting my much younger siblings, she made daily space for me a young teenager to come sit on her bed every night and talk and talk and talk to her (about "nothing" probably!). She was always present. And, while she didn't particularly like to play (that's what my sister was for!), she made us SO many different little handmade toys :) She also was/is a fabulous craftswoman and taught me a large

number of handwork skills—always nurturing of that creative spark!

She continues to encourage me by being available to me to babysit my boys (we live one mile apart), by being a listening ear and source of advice, and by never failing to think that I'm amazing, even when I don't see it in myself.

I also entered a [3]previous written blog post into the [4]Honoring Mothers contest at Science and Sensibility, where it was the first runner-up :)

1. <http://givingbirthwithconfidence.org/>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/3g.jpg>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/02/24/musings-on-story-experience-choice/>
4. <http://www.scienceandsensibility.org/?p=2831>

Lynda M O (2011-05-09 14:10:40)

A lovely tribute to your mom; you and she have a great relationship and it shines forth in the writing about her.

Barbara (2011-05-09 14:55:02)

Aw, shucks.....Personally, you began my mothering journey and have been an amazing source of education and inspiration to me since you entered our lives. You are not only my first born, but my very close and dear friend. I can't imagine my life without your immediate proximity, physically and emotionally!

Finished Belly Cast! (2011-05-09 18:35)

On Mother's Day I wanted to finish painting the [1]belly cast we made during my pregnancy with Alaina. During my pregnancy I made a series of black and white mandala-type drawings and I knew right away that I wanted to continue this theme on my belly cast. It felt somewhat odd to paint the cast black—like it was weird of me to do so, but it was the only "vision" I had for the cast!



[2]

I feel a little critical of it—it was very difficult to paint smoothly with the white on the uneven/porous surface—but, overall I feel very pleased with how it turned out.

Here is a different angle:



[3] I did not do a belly cast with my first pregnancy. With my second, I did, and I painted it very simply:



[4]

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/12/belly-cast/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0821.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0822.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/100_0588.jpg

Lynda M O (2011-05-09 18:48:08)
Both casts are beautiful. Wow...

Karen (2011-05-09 20:20:54)
LOVE the black! It looks amazing.

Michelle E. (2011-05-09 20:30:20)
Awesome! I haven't done a belly cast before, and I am SO excited to do one this time!

Sheridan (2011-05-10 17:20:42)

I think they are both beautiful. I really want to paint mine, but I am not artistic and maybe need to give it to someone else to paint for me. Where do you put yours? Mine is in my closet.

talkbirth (2011-05-10 18:30:57)

My yellow one hangs on my birth art wall (I should post a picture of it too!). This new one is going to hang on the opposite wall in our hallway. The wall is painted red and I think the b & w will look nice against it.

electra (2011-05-11 06:24:51)

Love the black! So elegant.

Birth Art Wall (2011-05-10 18:52)

On my recent belly cast post, a commenter asked me where I hang my belly casts. My first one hangs on the birth art wall in my hallway and I am planning to hang the new one on the opposite wall (which is painted red—I think the black and white of the new cast will look nice on the red wall). Anyway, the question prompted me to share a photo of my birth art wall:



[1]

Is it weird to have a birth art wall? The possibility never crossed my mind until just now when I went to post the picture! :) Someone did once refer to it as, "your fertility shrine," which is not how I think of it at all. I think of it as a visual celebration of the role of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood in my life.

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0287.jpg

electra (2011-05-11 08:05:56)

I think its weird we don't ALL have birth art walls. :)

Hillary (2011-05-11 11:24:28)

I'm with electra ;-)

talkbirth (2011-05-12 11:02:47)

Excellent point!

enjoybirth (2011-05-13 17:30:30)

I think it is a lovely idea. I don't think my DH would agree. If we had a basement, I would totally do this. All our walls are taken up.

Mother's Day (2011-05-13 13:58)

My other grandmother is town visiting this month (also from CA), so on Mother's Day, we were able to get another four generations pictures—this time with my dad and his mother.



[1]

And, then my mom took a new family picture for us:



[2]



Mother's Day present from Mark:[3]

I keep only finding time to post short, picture-type blog posts lately! I'm getting ready to be on break from teaching though and have grand plans for all of the posts I'm going to write with all of my "free" time ;-D

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/fourgenerationsagain.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/familypicture.jpg>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/goddess-child-egg-mini-so-msgce_t.jpg

Michelle E. (2011-05-13 16:14:10)

Great pictures! I love your Mother's Day present from Mark! Do you direct him on these gifts or does he find them on his own? Either way, score! :)

talkbirth (2011-05-14 14:27:36)

He knows my favorite website! (www.goddessgift.net) But, he finds the things to get me on his own. I've directed him on some things (like my ring from last year), but he's always been good at selecting things on his own too.

Updating My Birth Quotes! (2011-05-13 19:26)



[1] Baby Alaina, 3.5 months, taken at the park by my friend Karen :)

"Blessed be all the mothers of mothers.
Blessed be all the daughters of daughters.
Blessed be all the daughters of mothers.
Blessed be all the mothers of daughters.
Now and forever, wherever we are." –Diann L. Neu

"I have almost given up on the government and the country but I have not given up on birth. I believe rabidly. It is not enough to hold the space for one woman at a time. Peace on earth begins with birth." –Arielle Greenberg/Rachel Zucker (in [2]Home/Birth: A Poemic)

"In giving birth my attention was pulled inside forcibly by something naturally wild, hot, raw and primitive—something so powerful that my only choice was to surrender." –Kristin Luce

"Now I see the secret of making the best person: it is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth." Walt Whitman

"A new baby is like the beginning of all things—wonder, hope, a dream of possibilities." Eda J. Le Shan

"Birth isn't something we suffer, but something we actively do and exult in." –Sheila Kitzinger (from promo for new One World Birth film)

"Many women have described their experiences of childbirth as being associated with a spiritual uplifting, the power of which they have never previously been aware ... To such a woman childbirth is a monument of joy within her memory. She turns to it in thought to seek again an ecstasy which passed too soon." Grantly Dick-Read (Childbirth Without Fear)

"Childbirth isn't something that is done to you, or for you; it is something you do yourself. Women give birth. Doctors, hospitals and nurses don't." Lester Dessez Hazell

"Whether she chooses to birth at home, a hospital or a birth center, it is the right—in fact, the responsibility—of every woman to plan her own baby's birth with the information, honor and freedom to which she is entitled." –Cynthia Overgard (in [3]Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine)

Life, love, and laughter - what priceless gifts to give our children. – Phylis Campbell Dryden

"A mother's joy begins when new life is stirring inside... when a tiny heartbeat is heard for the very first time, and a playful kick reminds her that she is never alone." Author Unknown

"Growing, bearing, mothering, or fathering, supporting, and at last letting go...are powerful and mundane creative acts that rapturously suck up whole chunks of life." –Louise Erdrich

"Perhaps we owe some of our most moving literature to men who didn't understand that they wanted to be women nursing babies." –Louise Erdrich

"Labor is about finding your threshold and learning you can go beyond it." –Rose St. John

"...the labor with which we give birth is simply a rehearsal for something we mothers must do over and over: turn ourselves inside out, and then let go." –Susan Piver (Joyful Birth)

"The minute my child was born, I was reborn as a feminist. It's so incredible what women can do...Birthing naturally, as most women do around the globe, is a superhuman act. You leave behind the comforts of being human and plunge back into being an animal..." –Ani DiFranco

"The health of mothers, infants, and children is of critical importance, both as a reflection of the

current health status of a large segment of the U.S. population and as a predictor of the health of the next generation.” –Healthy People, 2010

”The miraculous nature inherent in the unfolding of a flower is the very same that moves through a woman as she gives life to the world. We can neither control nor improve upon it, only trust it.” -Robin Sale

”Loving, knowing, and respecting our bodies is a powerful and invincible act of rebellion in this society.” –Inga Muscio

”A new baby’s fresh milk smell causes the mother’s heart to spill over.” -Melanie Lofland Gendron

”...childbirth is much like a marathon...marathon runners know how to breathe, to run, and to complete their race according to their own body signals. Similarly, women know how to breathe, to birth, and to complete the [birth] according to their own body signals. Marathon runners who are true champions are free to stop the fast pace, and even quit the race without loss of integrity.” –Claudia Panuthos

”Birth, like love, is an energy and a process, happening within a relationship. Both unfold with their own timing, with a uniqueness that can never be anticipated, with a power that can never be controlled, but with an exquisite mystery to be appreciated.” –Elizabeth Noble

”...all those tasks and interactions of motherhood, a day full of which might make you feel you’ve ‘gotten nothing done’ because you’ve been in the cycle of care, are the heart and soul of the best brain building possible.” –Lauren Lindsey Porter (Attachment Theory in Everyday Life, in Mothering magazine, 2009)

”The lure of the distant and the difficult is deceptive. The great opportunity is where you are. Do not despise your own place and hour. Every place is under the stars, every place is the center of the world.” –John Burroughs

”Motherhood has a very humanizing effect. Everything gets reduced to essentials.” Meryl Streep (via [4]Midwifery Today)

”It is not ‘ladylike’ to give birth. The strength and power of labor is not demure.” –Rhonda (midwife quoted in Gayle Peterson’s [5]An Easier Childbirth Book)

”What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.” –Helen Keller

”The greatest teachers we have are the women we serve.” –Jan Tritten

”...undisturbed (not neglected or abandoned) birth is a powerful initiation into motherhood, not only in a physical and physiological sense, but also in an emotional and spiritual sense.” –Christina Hurst-Prager (in [6](ICEA) International Childbirth Education Association’s journal)

”Never hire a midwife who is afraid your birth will go wrong.” –Arielle Greenberg/Rachel Zucker, [7]Home/Birth: A Poemic

”It is dangerous to be right on a subject on which the established authorities are wrong.” –Bumper sticker quoted in the book [8]Home/Birth: A Poemic

"Women today not only possess genetic memory of birth from a thousand generations of women, but they are also assailed from every direction by information and misinformation about birth." Valerie El Halta

"I see generations of women bearing a flame. It has been hidden, buried deep within, yet they hand it down from generation to generation still burning. It is a gift of fire, transported from a remote and distant world, yet never extinguished." –Kim Chernin

"Birth is as vast and voluminous, as unfathomable and inevitable as the rising and setting of the sun. And true to the inexorable power and rhythm of their life-giving bodies, women will continue to birth with dignity, grace and courage." –Mandala Mom

"I pity the folks at ACOG who think they can make protocols, rules and guidelines that will cover all births in all situations. A better goal would be to have clinicians who can think for themselves, distinguish complications from normal birth, relax when things are taking a while, and marvel over the consistently fascinating process of human birth" -Gloria Lemay in [9]Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine

"A pair of substantial mammary glands have the advantage over the two hemispheres of the most learned professor's brain in the art of compounding a nutritive fluid for infants." Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894)

"The energy that can rise in real connection is the stuff of revolution." –Carol Lee Flinders

"A woman meets herself in childbirth" –Cynthia Caillagh

"I believe that these circles of women around us weave invisible nets of love that carry us when we're weak and sing with us when we're strong." –SARK, Succulent Wild Woman

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." –Howard Thurman

"If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely and simply for the benefit of humanity it will be a power such as the world has never known." –Matthew Arnold

"Authority without wisdom is like a heavy ax without an edge: fitter to bruise than polish." Anne Bradstreet (Feeling frustrated with anti-midwifery legislators in Missouri and then this quote came along from Midwifery Today's e-news and I thought it was quite fitting)

"The midwife teacher's first concern is to preserve the students fragile unborn thoughts, to see that they are born with their truths intact, that these truths do not turn into acceptable lies" – from the book Women's Ways of Knowing (shared by a participant in the [10]Birth Workers and Beyond group)

"...we do not have humanized birth in many places today...Why? Because fish can't see the water they swim in. Birth attendants, be they doctors, midwives or nurses, who have experienced only hospital based...medicalised birth cannot see the profound effect their interventions are having on the birth. [They] have no idea what a birth looks like without all the interventions, a birth which is not dehumanized." –Marsden Wagner

"Childbirth is a rite of passage so intense physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, that most other events in a woman's life pale next to it. In our modern lives, there are few remaining rituals of

initiation, few events that challenge a person's mettle down to the very core. Childbirth remains a primary initiatory rite for a woman." –from the book *MotherMysteries*

"The holistic model holds that birth is a normal, woman-centered process in which mind and body are one and that, in the vast majority of cases, nature is sufficient to create a healthy pregnancy and birth. The midwife is seen as a nurturer." –Penfield Chester (midwife)

"Birth, like love, is an energy and a process, happening within a relationship. Both unfold with their own timing, with a uniqueness that can never be anticipated, with a power that can never be controlled, but with an exquisite mystery to be appreciated." –Elizabeth Noble

"If there is ever a part of human anatomy that resembles the image of God it is the uterus." –Reverend Darren Cushman-Wood

(I hesitated to share this quote because I thought it could be viewed as disrespectful [or even sacrilegious!] by some. But, it caught my eye in an article called *Pharaohs and Kentuckians* in a 1997 issue of *Mothering* magazine. Written by a pastor of a Methodist church about homebirth and spirituality :)

"Modern culture often teaches us to be 'tight'...trim, taut, & terrific...We understand the need to stay 'fit'...but we would also like to encourage you to soften yourself, in preparation for mothering & nurturing your baby. Soften your viewpoint, soften your body, surrender to this awe-inspiring event...in this way, you will be preparing yourself not only for labour, but for the days & years afterward..." -The Pink Kit Method For Birthing Better®

"Love is such a powerful force. It's there for everyone to embrace—that kind of unconditional love for all of humankind. That is the kind of love that impels people to go into the community and try to change conditions for others, to take risks for what they believe in." —Coretta Scott King

"Nurturing is not a genetically feminine attribute. Tears and laughter are not the province of women only. The last time I looked, men had tear ducts. They had arms for holding babies. They cared about their children. And they cried at births...let the shared experience of childbirth reclaim the human soul." –Ariska Razak (midwife and healer)

"When my kids become wild and unruly, I use a nice, safe playpen. When they're finished, I climb out." Erma Bombeck (via [11]Moby® Wrap)

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/222712_1668620442276_1440273478_31357544_4596972_n.jpg
2. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/HomeBirth-A-Poem/188657481155742>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PathwaystoFamilyWellness>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/MidwiferyToday>
5. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/An-Easier-Childbirth-Book/186074385236>
6. <http://www.facebook.com/ICEApage>
7. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/HomeBirth-A-Poem/188657481155742>
8. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/HomeBirth-A-Poem/188657481155742>
9. <http://www.facebook.com/PathwaystoFamilyWellness>
10. http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_164318150271388
11. <http://www.facebook.com/MobyWrap>

Six Healthy Birth Practices Handout (2011-05-17 10:41)

Lamaze's [1]Six Healthy Birth Practices are one of my favorites resources when discussing birth plans in my classes. I find that some materials about birth planning on the internet are unnecessarily cumbersome (while simultaneously being very "cookie cutter"). As I tell my clients, the Six Healthy Birth Practices provide an absolutely phenomenal "basic" birth plan and concisely cover each element of a healthy birth. I suggest using them as a foundation for any birth plan the client plans to write. For use in my own classes, I created a one page handout briefly summarizing the practices: [2]Six Healthy Birth Practices. At the bottom of the handout, I also include my own even simpler summary of the information. I just love them and think they should be the core of any class that serves women planning hospital births. Seriously, what women deserve in a birth environment can be summed up in six, clear sentences! How practical.

I also absolutely LOVE the video based on the practices that is [3]available from Injoy. It is extremely affordable (I actually own three copies of it!). It is very concise and clear (just like the practices themselves)



and I love [4] how it shows women in a hospital environment, getting their needs met and having satisfying births. While I personally choose homebirth for myself and am a big advocate of homebirth, at least 90 % of my clients are planning hospital births and deserve information and resources that support healthy, satisfying births in the environment they have chosen. I have a variety of great videos in my library, but many of them focus on homebirth and I think the message this sends to clients is—"good birth = homebirth." While that feels personally true for me, it isn't actually the message I want to share with my clients—I want to share my enthusiasm for birth, period, and to help them discover resources and plans for having a beautiful birth in any setting. I want to communicate to them that they deserve access to these healthy birth practices in the hospital and I hope we can create a birthing world in which all women can expect to have access to these practices in any setting. So, I like how this video shows women getting their needs met within in a hospital setting.

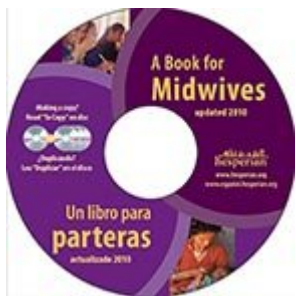
Additionally, the videos are available for free, practice by practice, on the [5]Mother's Advocate site, which also includes a variety of accompanying handouts to print.

And, again, here is my own handout for use during birth classes: [6]Six Healthy Birth Practices.

I know I sound like a "commercial" for Lamaze's Birth Practices and though I am a Lamaze member, I am actually certified with other organizations (ICEA and CAPP). I think it is important that childbirth educators not limit themselves only to the materials and information provided by their own certifying organization and instead seek out excellent materials from a variety of the wonderful organizations that exist to support birthing women!

1. <http://www.lamaze.org/ExpectantParents/HealthyBirthPractices/tabid/251/Default.aspx>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/six-healthy-birth-practices.pdf>
3. http://www.injoyvideos.com/product.php?proid=109&page=Healthy_Birth_Your_Way
4. http://www.injoyvideos.com/product.php?proid=109&page=Healthy_Birth_Your_Way
5. <http://www.injoyvideos.com/mothersadvocate/>
6. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/six-healthy-birth-practices.pdf>

Review: A Book for Midwives (2011-05-18 10:11)



[1] Review: A Book for Midwives

Hesperian Foundation

CD-Rom, 2011

544 page pdf book in English and Spanish

by Susan Klein, Suellen Miller, and Fiona Thomson

ISBN13: 978-0942364-24-8, \$16.00

[2]www.hesperian.org

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE

[3]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

As a child, I was fascinated by my father's copy of the book, *Where There is No Doctor*. Fast forward twenty or so years and imagine my glee when as a birth activist adult, I then discovered *A Book for Midwives*, also published by the [4]Hesperian Foundation. Hesperian's goal "is to promote health and self-determination in poor communities throughout the world by making health information accessible. [They] work toward that goal by producing books and other educational resources for community-based health." In keeping with this goal, *A Book for Midwives* is available for FREE download on the [5]Hesperian site. (Personally, I appreciate the professionally printed version of the book I purchased, because I think it would cost more same in ink to print it myself, but without the nice cover!).

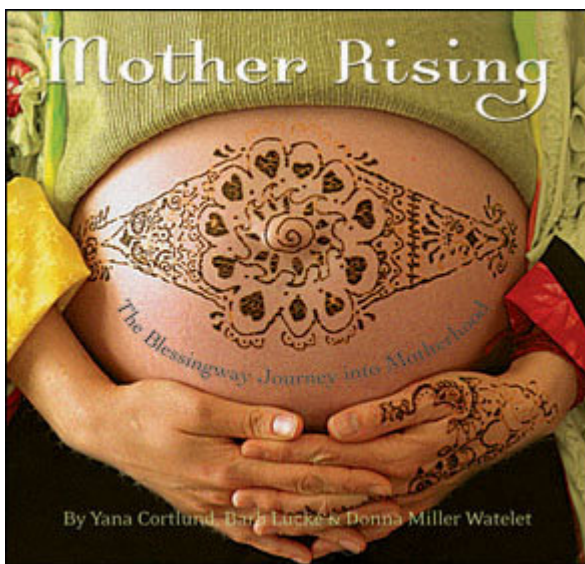
A Book for Midwives is excellent; a true community resource. It is also a very sobering look at the reality of women's health and health care in other countries. It contains reminders such as "do not hit or slap a woman in labor," and other things that can make you cringe. *A Book for Midwives* is basically a textbook for midwives, health care workers, or educators working in developing countries and/or with very limited resources. I appreciate how it makes information available that is sometimes "hidden" in other books—i.e. explicitly technical content and "how to's" that are normally reserved only for "professional" people. It is simply written and extremely blunt. There is no fluff and nothing romanticized about pregnancy, labor, and birth. In a way, it was hard to read a book that makes it so very clear how very, very difficult things are for midwives and women in impoverished areas (living in the US, I am used to the "normal, healthy pregnant women" approach to midwifery care). The book covers a wide range of information from preventing infection, treating obstetrical emergencies, doing pelvic exams, and breastfeeding to HIV/AIDS, testing for STDs and cervical cancer, and IUD insertion. There is also a section in the back of the book about medications, medication administration, giving injections, and other topics. It is an extremely comprehensive resource. (Just a side note, in the section on contraceptives, the book is heavily in favor of hormonal methods such as pills as well as very positive about IUDs and sterilization.)

Recently, Hesperian made *A Book for Midwives* available for [6]purchase on CD. The CD includes the 544 page book as a pdf file in both English and Spanish. Both high resolution and low resolution versions of the book (in both languages) are included on the disk. This format makes it easy for the book to travel with you via laptop for trainings or presentations. I was particularly excited to convert it for my Kindle, making it readily available for travel and reference.

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Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of the CD for review purposes.

1. http://www.hesperian.org/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=HB&Product_Code=CD080&Category_Code=CLTH
 2. <http://www.hesperian.org/>
 3. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
 4. <http://www.hesperian.org/>
 5. http://www.hesperian.org/publications_download.php#midwives
 6. http://www.hesperian.org/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=HB&Product_Code=CD080&Category_Code=CLTH
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Celebrating 100,000 Hits! Mother Rising Book Giveaway (2011-05-19 09:09)



[1]

Giveaway is now closed. Shawna was the winner!

Talk Birth has reached 100,000 hits and I'm having a giveaway to celebrate this milestone! When I initially began this website in 2007, it was exclusively for the purpose of providing information about my birth classes to the local community. I never intended for anyone other than local, potential clients to read the information here, I was just using Wordpress as a platform to host what I assumed would be a fairly static site—possibly just being updated with new class information and dates. Then, I decided I'd like to add a couple of posts/articles for my prospective clients to read. Before I knew it, the few posts I had made were receiving hits from locations other than my local area and so I started writing posts with a wider/more general audience in mind. Eventually, the class information portion of my site became very secondary to the birth-blog portion of my site. And, I find it somewhat amusing, that now I primarily reach women through my writing rather than through my classes. I have a new class beginning in June, but otherwise, I have been on leave from teaching any classes since my new baby was born and due to my other commitments, I have only had limited availability for classes for the past year or so.

When I first began my journey as a childbirth educator, some part of me envisioned reaching hundreds of couples through my classes. I quickly realized that I wasn't going to be able to fill group classes in my small hometown and felt like I had an excess of birth-change energy that was being blocked/frustrated by only working with one couple every so often. I used to complain to my husband, "I just want to transform

the birth culture in the U.S. Is that too much to ask?" I felt like my drive to change the birth world was just hitting up against a wall and I felt frustrated by living in an area that could not support that packed-to-the-brim, life-transforming classes I'd envisioned offering. Writing blog posts became my way of "discharging" this energy as well as being a birth educator to a wider audience—i.e., whomever stumbled across my blog! This has been a fulfilling way for me to use some of that activist energy and to feel like I have the ability to make some type of change within a large circle. As my classes became more well known, I did build enough of a practice to be working with new clients each and every month of the year and I felt personally satisfied with that—I need direct contact as well as virtual contact to feel like I am making a difference. I love that this website/blog helps me with each of those avenues for change.

In honor of 100,000 hits, I am giving away a copy of the book *Mother Rising: The Blessingway Journey into Motherhood*. Since my tagline is, "Celebrating Women, Transforming Birth," I wanted to give away a book that exemplifies the idea. *Mother Rising* is perfect, because it is literally about celebrating women through blessingways. My friends and I have a long-standing tradition of hosting mother blessing ceremonies for each other during our pregnancies and *Mother Rising* is a helpful resource for planning them. It even includes recipes for snacks!

To enter the giveaway, just leave a comment letting me know your favorite way to celebrate women.

You can earn bonus entries by doing any of the following and letting me know via another comment that you've done so:

- Tell me what post/idea you've read here on Talk Birth is your favorite!
- Become a fan of [2]Talk Birth on Facebook
- Subscribe to this blog via email (link this way —>)
- Share the giveaway link on your own Facebook page or blog

Giveaway ends next Thursday at noon!

1. <http://www.blessingwaybook.com/>
2. <http://facebook.com/talkbirth>

BERNADETTE P. (2011-05-22 12:12:29)

This is my FAVE line from my favorite poem here: Later, as I postpone weeding the garden I will make two hands That may tend a hundred gardens. From: <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/04/06/two-birth-poems/> Yes, bc I WAS postponing weeding while pregnant! I also LOVE the Birth Warrior's Affirmation. I read your post about the concept of birth as "war" and for ME it was not taken that way, exactly. I did feel "challenged" bc I wanted control in a hospital setting (sortof an oxy-moron) BUT I achieved it! This Affirmation was inspirational and, well, self affirming.

BERNADETTE P. (2011-05-22 11:45:28)

I celebrate women by loving and supporting the ones in my life. I am very outspoken on woman and family issues that I value highly, birthing freedom being one of them.

Shawna (2011-05-19 10:05:28)

Maybe this is too simple, but I love totake the time to write little notes to women I care about and tell them exactly what I think of them and how much they mean to me and what a difference they are making in the world. I usually try to do it when they will least expect it.

Shawna (2011-05-19 10:07:20)
Liked you on facebook!

Shawna (2011-05-19 10:08:21)
Shared you on facebook!

Vanessa (2011-05-19 17:39:27)
My favorite way to celebrate women, is to help support them in finding the birth path that feels best for them. I also particularly feel drawn help with young girls who are becoming young women something like a blessing way but for the transition from girl into womanhood :) I feel really passionate about it, but am still unsure how this will unfold :) I think this book is a wonderful opportunity to expand on that :) Thank u for the great giveaway and congratulations on reaching 100,000 visits!!

Vanessa (2011-05-19 17:40:11)
I'm already a fan on facebook! :)

Vanessa (2011-05-19 17:40:48)
I already am subscribed to your blog - love it!

Vanessa (2011-05-19 17:42:32)
My favorite posts are your birth quotes! :)

Cole D (2011-05-21 17:25:47)
I <3 this post: <https://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/04/fathers-fear-and-birth/> It is a great one that I send dads to a lot. :)

Cole D (2011-05-21 17:26:41)
I am already a FB fan, are you mine? (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sage-Beginnings-Doula-Services/142407972488535>)

Cole D (2011-05-21 17:27:45)
Shared on FB too! :)

BERNADETTE P. (2011-05-22 12:14:30)
LOVE Talkbirth on FB.

BERNADETTE P. (2011-05-22 12:17:09)
Subscribe via email.

BERNADETTE P. (2011-05-22 12:18:05)
FB share? Check!

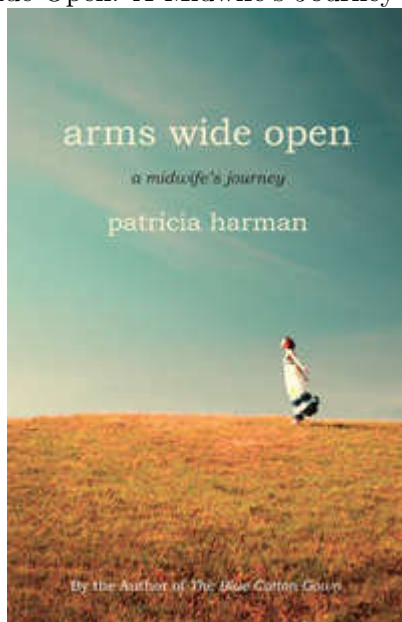
talkbirth (2011-06-14 16:24:02)
I re-drew numbers today due to non-response from the first winner and you won, Shawna!

enjoybirth (2011-05-24 11:05:46)
Congrats! I love that you can help moms all over the world with your blog. :)

talkbirth (2011-05-26 11:18:22)
I just drew numbers and you are the winner, Cole!

Book Review: Arms Wide Open: A Midwife's Journey (2011-05-22 17:48)

Book Review: Arms Wide Open: A Midwife's Journey



By Patricia Harman^[1]

Beacon Press, 2011

ISBN: 978-0807001387

324 pages, paperback, \$16.47 (Amazon)

^[2]<http://www.beacon.org>

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

^[3]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

I very much enjoyed Patricia Harman's first book, ^[4]The Blue Cotton Gown, and was delighted to learn about her new memoir, Arms Wide Open which is, in a sense, both a prequel and sequel to her first memoir. The first half of Arms Wide Open chronicles Patsy's experiences with homesteading and communal living as a young hippie mother in the 1970's. It also explores her thoughts and experiences with peace activism and her passion for an eco-friendly life. During this time, she attends her first birth and dives into her midwifery journey and eventually becomes a CNM practicing with her hippie-farmer-turned-OB/GYN husband in West Virginia. Her experiences with their years in a joint women's health practice are described in The Blue Cotton Gown. Readers who, like me, wondered what happened where The Blue Cotton Gown left off, can find out in the second half of Arms Wide Open, which is a narrative of Patsy's ongoing work with women through 2009 and includes her emotional painful moments in her marriage, as her husband struggles with fears of another lawsuit as well as with chronic pelvic pain patients who abuse his trust (chronic pelvic pain is a specialty of their practice).

I did feel as if there was a large chunk of story missing as the book somewhat abruptly skips from 1978 to 2008. We miss learning about any of Patsy's experiences in nurse-midwifery school, nor do we learn much about her practice when she was a CNM attending births. The book transitions from her years as a self-taught midwife considering going to school to become a CNM, straight to her present-day years as a CNM in a private women's health practice.

Harman's writing style is lyrical and engaging as well as candid. The book is based on personal journals and reading it feels like eavesdropping on someone's very private thoughts and feelings. The book is much more of a look at a woman's feelings about her life, than it is a "manifesto" about birth or about the practice of midwifery. In this manner, I feel like you receive a much more complete picture of a midwife's life and journey, rather than reading a sequence of birth stories. Patsy has a lot of life in addition to birth. While definitely not a "feel good" book, Arms Wide Open is a deeply touching and very honest exploration of one woman's personal journey in life, love, motherhood, and midwifery.

—

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. http://www.patriciaharman.com/arms_wide_open__a_midwife_s_journey_106806.htm
2. <http://www.beacon.org/>
3. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
4. <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com/2009/02/book-review-blue-cotton-gown.html>

Lynda M O (2011-05-23 13:23:21)

Molly, thanks for the comprehensive review of this book about a midwife. Altho not a birth professional, I am a care provider and love little ones the best.

Giveaway: Arms Wide Open: A Midwife's Journey « Talk Birth (2011-12-11 08:57:11)
[...] via Book Review: Arms Wide Open: A Midwife's Journey « Talk Birth. [...]

Happy Birthday to Me! (2011-05-23 11:34)

When I get money as a birthday gift, I usually just put it in with the household money and it gets spent on groceries or miscellaneous cash expenditures. This year, I decided to get myself a present! I saw these unassisted birth pendants by [1]Meghan Rice on Laura Shanley's site before I gave birth in January and loved them, but talked myself out of buying one for various reasons (too expensive, what if something happens to the baby, etc.). Since I did end up birthing my daughter on my own AND in a kneeling position exactly like the pendant and since she was born in January (birthstone is garnet), I decided to go ahead and splurge on one of the pendants with a garnet belly :) She arrived just before Alaina's four month birthday on May 19th (also my mom's birthday!) and it felt like just the right occasion. I really love this pendant!



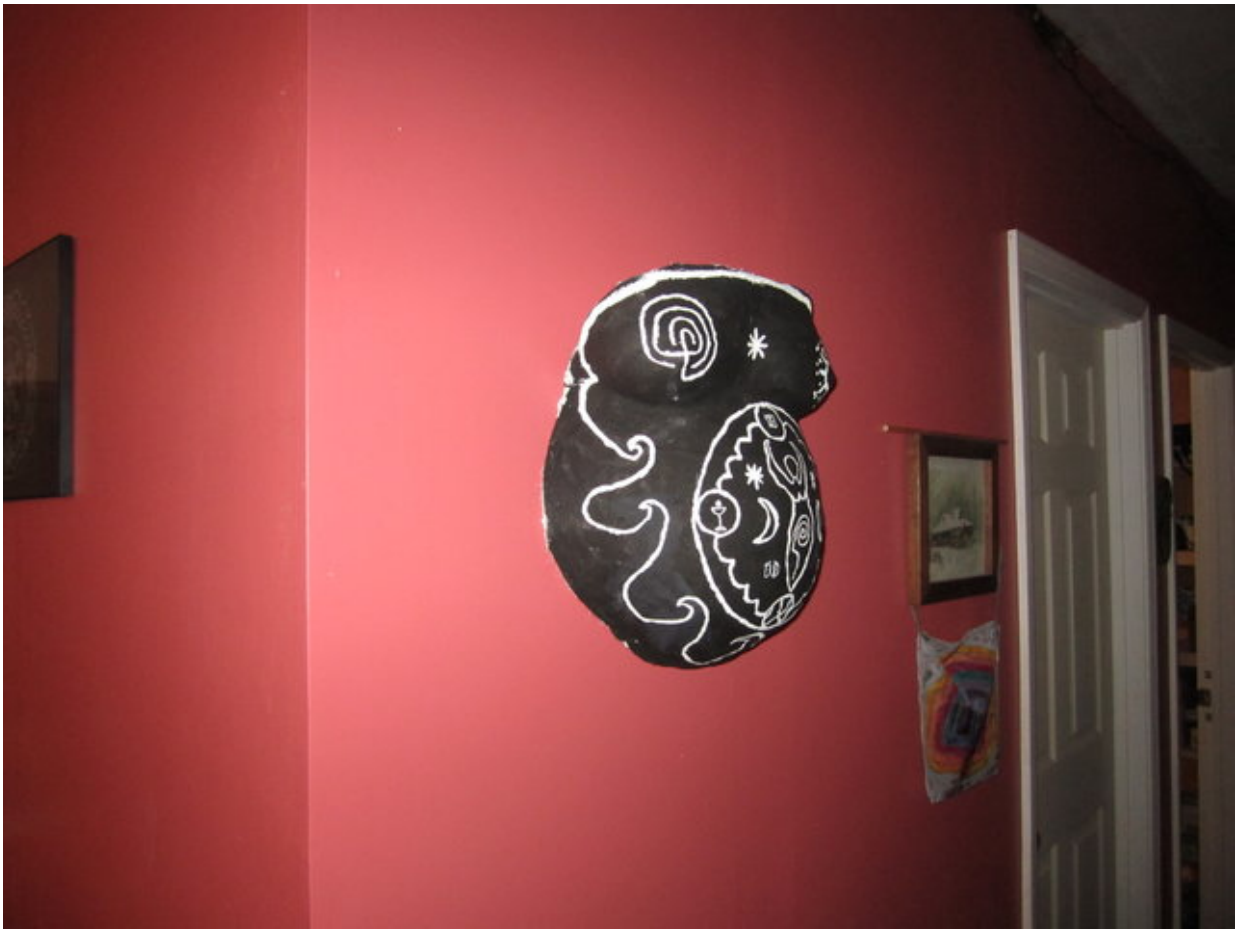
[2]

I have to say that I have the greatest collection of pendants in the world. Too bad I only have one neck, because I would like to wear many of them all of the time! ;)

We also hung up my belly cast. I like how it looks on the red wall!



[3]
far away



[4]
close up

1. <http://www.unassistedchildbirth.com/ucpendants.html>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0886.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0842.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/img_0844.jpg

Lynda M O (2011-05-23 11:39:48)

Wonderful mementoes of your last year, precious, pretty and so very evocative. Thanks for sharing yourself with us.

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-05-25 19:52:53)

Happy birthday—belatedly but enthusiastically!

Help Choices in Childbirth Win a Grant! (2011-05-23 14:46)

I've [1]posted several times before about one of my top favorite handouts for birth classes and birth education booths—[2]Choices in Childbirth's booklet, [3]Guide to a Healthy Birth. Now, Choices in Childbirth is trying to win a \$5000 grant through FAM (the Foundation for the Advancement of Midwifery) and would really appreciate your vote. Here is the information:

Help Choices in Childbirth win \$5k! [4]Vote Today! Tell your friends!

[5]Vote for CIC to win the \$5,000 Floradix Fan Favorite Award from FAM, and you can help to expand our

educational programs that have a direct, and positive impact on women’s pregnancy and birth experiences.

In her words...

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your work and the ongoing work of Choices in Childbirth. Your Guide has singularly been the best and most comprehensive resource I have been given to date. Two months ago I decided to switch my care over to ”Mother-Friendly” facilities and practitioners. Finding alternatives to traditional practices proved to be one of the most difficult and stressful projects in my pregnancy. I was give your Guide last week and within 2 days I had set up meetings with a pre-natal chiropractor, birth center, pediatrician, and midwife!

- Joey Anna Young

.....

The Details:

As one of the finalists for a grant proposal we submitted to FAM (the Foundation for the Advancement of Midwifery), CIC is eligible to compete for an additional \$5,000 Fan Favorite Award furnished by Floradix. Your vote will help us to win crucial dollars that support our educational resources for women: the online [6]Mother-Friendly Provider Network and the printed Guide to a Healthy Birth!

Here’s how you can help:

1. VOTE for us! Use [7]this link ([8]www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote) to complete the survey and choose CHOICES IN CHILDBIRTH when you get to the selection page! (you have to click through a few pages first with a few words from the generous sponsors of this award, but hang in there - we appreciate your vote!)
2. SHARE your status! Copy this text, and set it as your status on Facebook, G-chat and Instant Messenger:

Please vote for an organization I support, Choices in Childbirth, to help them win a \$5k award to fund their work to educate and support women in their maternity care options: [9]www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote

3. FORWARD this email!
4. TELL US YOUR STORY! We would love to hear your story of what CIC means to you.

Please tell us more! We’d love to be able to show what our work means to our supporters.

Email [10]info@choicesinchildbirth.org with your story!

.....

Our Proposal

CIC is eligible for this fan favorite award because the project we submitted to the Foundation for

the Advancement of Midwifery has made it to the final round of the 2011 grant cycle! Below is a synopsis of our proposal:

Choices in Childbirth's education and outreach programs are creating a national movement to change the way women and families think about birth. We are not satisfied with speaking to the choir – we want everyone to know their rights and options in birth! CIC has created two educational programs, the Guide to a Healthy Birth and the online Mother-Friendly Provider Network, that will significantly impact maternity care in this country by bringing the conversation about birth into mainstream dialogue in an accessible, evidence based way. The Sponsor a Midwife campaign is a creative marketing and outreach plan that will showcase midwifery within these programs by providing 100 free memberships to Mother-Friendly midwives in the Provider Network and distributing at least 5,000 copies of the Guide in each of 5 pilot cities. Together, these educational programs and the outreach campaign will provide more families with information about their options in maternity care, promote access to midwifery care, provide valuable advertising opportunities for midwives, and help us to create a sustainable model for providing these resources in additional communities across the country.

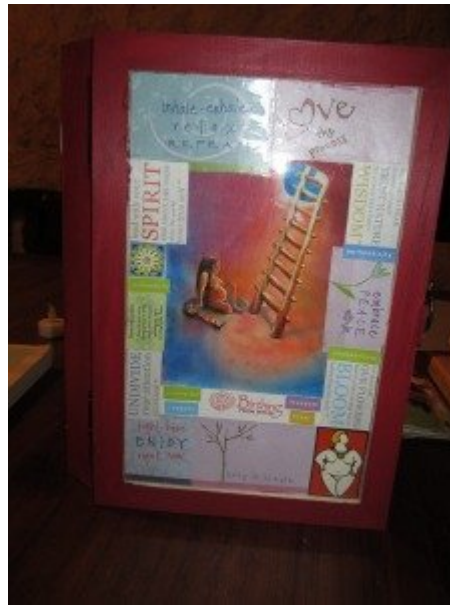
1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/handouts-for-birth-booths/>
2. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/>
3. <https://app.etapestry.com/cart/ChoicesInChildbirth/default/category.php?ref=1199.0.99948603>
4. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote>
5. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote>
6. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/network>
7. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote>
8. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote>
9. <http://www.choicesinchildbirth.org/vote>
10. <mailto:info@choicesinchildbirth.org>

Malorie (2011-05-25 08:18:04)

Thank you so much for supporting the work of this great organization!

Birth Altar Wisdom (2011-05-25 12:34)

I am preparing to paint a birth altar cabinet for a friend's upcoming blessingway ceremony. I have felt the urge for some time to share a post about the words that I included on the [1]birth altar that I created for



myself before my last birth. [2] Some elements included were from pages of a cheap page-a-day calendar from the \$1 Shop and some were parts of a t-shirt tag from the tag on a shirt I purchased from [3]WYSH at an LLL conference in 2009 (why keep a t-shirt tag from 2009, you might ask? Because it had lots of cool things written on it! And, behold, it became a source of birth altar wisdom for me. Wisdom lurks in unexpected places!)

I am struck by how these words from unconventional locations apply so perfectly to giving birth. Here's what the little cards and snippets I included say:

From the calendar:

Inhale * Exhale * Relax * Repeat

LOVE the process.

Embrace peace within.

Keep it simple.

Right here

ENJOY

Right now

From the t-shirt tag:

Befriend fear, embrace struggle, trust nature, the process, and a baby's wisdom (I swear, this shirt had NOTHING to do with giving birth!)

We don't tell our flowers how to grow, to stay low or bloom before they're ready.

Undivide your attention. All clear.

Lead with your spirit, rise above the noise, show the world your true self.

Also from the tag were individual words that I included: freedom. trust. inspiration. respect. authenticity. empowerment.

And, then I cut the following from a tag on a pendant from my husband:

May the Love we're

sharing spread its Wings

and fly across the Earth

and bring new Joy to

every Soul on the Planet.

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/birth-altar/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/img_0213.jpg
3. <http://www.wearyourspirit.com/>

Lynda M O (2011-05-25 13:29:33)

Thank you for these words of wisdom; they will become part of my life too now.

1.6 June

Alaina's Complete Birth Story (2011-06-01 16:15)

It has taken me a long time to finish typing up Alaina's birth story. I wrote it in my journal at 3 days postpartum and the following is almost verbatim. I've gone back and forth about what to include and decided to just include everything, as originally written. I feel critical of the story somehow, like it is "choppy." I used interestingly short, jumpy sentences and while part of me want to smooth it out, another part of me feels like it is more authentic in this format. I also feel like I "should" be posting it on a more significant date—i.e. her six month birthday, or something. But, it is finished now, so I feel like sharing now! Additionally, I thought about taking the self-analysis section about the use of a hypnosis for birth program out of the story, but, indeed, this was the FIRST thing I wrote in my journal, so it seems like it "deserves" to be included as well. It obviously was one of the most important details for me to write about. However, for the purposes of clarity, I moved it to the end of the story in this version. Likewise, I thought about making the section about my newborn- love into a separate post, but because those feelings are so intimately entwined with her birth and because, in my journal, that is exactly the chronology I used—first hypnosis criticism, second birth chronology, third baby love—it feels like it all belongs together in one story. It is funny how that first story has such value to me and that it feels almost wrong to edit, change, or add anything to it. It feels most honest this way.

The Birth of Alaina Diana Remer

January 19, 2011

11:15 a.m.

7lbs, 8oz; 20 inches.

Short version of her story is [1]here and labor pictures are [2]here.

I had a restless, up and down night, getting up at 3:00 a.m. and even checked in with my online class. Mark got up with me and we talked and speculated. Waves were four minutes apart and then kind of dissipated unenthusiastically away. He went back to bed at 4:00 and I listened to Hypnobabies. At 6:00, I was feeling trapped lying down and got up. Mark got up then too and worked in the kitchen on the dishes and things like that, while I walked around and leaned on the half wall during contractions (a lot. It was the perfect height). Sitting down in a chair caused horribleness, leaning forward on the ½ wall was good. Called Mom and told her to be on standby and to notify my blessingway crew. Also, called Summer (doula/friend) to be on alert. Felt serious, but not totally. Also was having back involvement which each wave. I felt like I would have a real contraction and then a closely following, but milder, back-only contraction (no tightness in uterus really during these, but definitely a wave-like progression and then ease of sensation).

I was very quiet during most waves until the end. I think because I was doing the Hypnobabies and was concentrating on that. Then, I would talk and analyze and be very normal in between. This pattern seemed to lead to a decreased perception of seriousness from others of my need for attention—Mark washed dishes, went outside to take care of chickens, work on fire, feed cats and so forth. The boys woke up at 7:00 a.m. and as soon as they came out and started talking to me (Mark was outside), I knew they needed to go elsewhere. We called my mom at 7:30ish and she came to get them. I did not want to feel watched or observed at all, so asked her to wait to come back.

I kept waiting for the “action” to increase and feeling distressed that it was taking such a “long” time. I suggested to the baby that she come out by 10:00. I continued to stand in the kitchen and lean on the ½ wall, sometimes the table or the bathroom counter. Dismayed to see no blood/mucous, nothing indicating any “progress.” Significant feelings of pressure and pain in lower back continued and at the time felt normal to me, but looking back seems like an extra dose of back involvement. In another intensity-increasing experience, the baby moved during contractions for the entire labor until the contraction before I pushed her out. She moved, wiggled and pushed out with her bottom and body during each contraction, which really added a new layer of intensity that was difficult. I was, however, glad she was moving because then I knew she was okay, without doing any heart checks.

I went into the living room, very tired from bad sleep during the night. We set up the birth ball in the living room so I could sit on it and drape over pillows piled onto the couch. I spent a long time like this. Mark sat close and would lightly and perfectly stroke my back. Continued to use Hypnobabies—finger-drop, peace and release, with most waves.

Mark fixed me chlorophyll to drink and I barfed it up immediately and horribly. Called Mom to come back and 9:00 or so, at which point I finally had a little blood in my underwear. Kept up my ball by the couch routine and moved into humming with each wave. Also did some contractions on the floor leaning over the ball. Also good.

On the ball, I began to feel some rectal pressure with each wave. However, I felt like the waves were erratic still, with some very long and intense and then smaller ones. Hums began to become oooohs and aaaaahs and I began to feel like there was a bit of an umph at the end of the oooooh. Went back to the bathroom and there was quite a bit more blood (plus mucous string) and I started to fret about placental abruptions and so forth. Left the bathroom analyzing how much blood is too much blood and began to critique myself for being too “in my head” and analytical and not letting my “monkey do it.” Said I still

didn't feel like I was in "birth brain" and wondered if that meant I still had a long time to go. Started to feel concerned that I was still early on. This is a common feature of all of my births and is how the self-doubt signpost manifests for me. Rather than thinking I can't do it, I start thinking I'm two centimeters dilated.

I almost immediately returned to the bathroom feeling like I needed to poop. Serious contractions on toilet produced more pressure with associated umphs at the end. At some point in the bathroom, I said, "I think this is pushing." I was feeling desperate for my water to break. It felt like it was in the way and holding things up. I reached my hand down and thought I felt squooshy sac-ish feeling, but Mom and Mark looked and could not see anything. And, it still didn't break. Mom mentioned that I should probably go to my birth nest in order to avoid having the baby on the toilet. My birth nest was a futon stack near the bathroom door. I got down on hands and knees after feeling like I might not make it all the way to the futons. Felt like I wanted to kneel on hard floor before reaching the nest.

Suddenly became obsessed with checking her heartbeat. I knew you're supposed to do so during pushing and I had stopped feeling her moving painfully with each contraction. I couldn't find her heartbeat and started to feel a little panicky about that as well as really uncomfortable and then threw the Doppler to the side saying, "forget it!" because big pushing was coming. I was down on hands and knees and then moved partially up on one hand in order to put my other hand down to feel what was happening. Could feel squishiness and water finally broke (not much, just a small trickle before her head). I could feel her head with my fingers and began to feel familiar sensation of front-burning. I said, "stretchy, stretchy, stretchy, stretchy," the phone rang, her head pushed and pushed itself down as I continued to support myself with my hand and I moved up onto my knees, with them spread apart so I was almost sitting on my heels and her whole body and a whole bunch of fluid blooshed out into my hands. She was pink and warm and slippery and crying instantly—quite a lot of crying, actually. I said, "you're alive, you're alive! I did it! There's nothing wrong with me!" and I kissed her and cried and laughed and was amazed. I felt an intense feeling of relief. Of survival. I didn't realize until some moments later than both Mark and Mom missed the actual moment of her birth. Mark because he was coming around from behind me to the front of me when I moved up to kneeling. My mom because she went to stop the phone from ringing. I had felt like the pushing went on for a "long" time, but Mark said that from hands and knees to kneeling with baby in my hands was about 12 seconds. I don't know. Inner experience is different than outer observation. What I do know is that the moment of catching my own daughter in my hands and bringing her warm, fresh body up into my arms was the most powerful and potent moment of my life.

I was covered in blood again. Caked in my fingernails and toenails and on the bottoms of my feet again. And, I did tear again, same places.

I feel the moment of her birth was an authentic "fetal ejection reflex" including the forward movement of my hips. The immediate postpartum went exactly as I had planned. Summer arrived approximately 20 minutes after Alaina was born. She brought me snacks, wiped blood off of me, and served me a tiny bit of placenta (which I swallowed with no problem!). My midwife arrived approximately 40 minutes post-birth and assessed blood loss and helped with placenta. She said I lost about 3 cups of blood, but I think all of the fluid that came out with the baby, plus the blood from the tears, may have bumped the estimate up too high. I did not feel weak or tired like I'd lost too much blood, I felt energetic and really good, actually. I didn't get faint in the bathroom either and my color stayed good throughout. "Don't look down" (while using the bathroom) is an excellent plan for me!

My post-birth feelings were different this time. I feel more baby-centered in my feelings about it rather than self-empowerment centered. I also feel more critical in my own self assessment this time—like I didn't "perform" well or handle myself well. I hypothesize that this may be related to using a hypnosis for birth program, because I didn't feel "calm and comfortable" on the inside. On the outside I think I looked

it, but my internal experience involved more “should” than I like. The hypnosis philosophy wasn’t really a match with my own lived experience of birth. Birth isn’t calm, quiet, and comfortable and I don’t actually think it should be or that I want it to be. However, I was trying to make it so and thus not using some of my own internal resources. I felt more mind/body disconnect than I have before also, perhaps because I was trying to use a mind (“control”) based method on such an embodied process. Anyway, it was good for relaxing during pregnancy, personally not so good for behaving instinctually in labor. I did use it though and technically I guess it “worked” because Mom and Mark couldn’t read where I was in birthing and though I was very calm. It didn’t feel calm inside though, it felt HARD. I also was very stuck—almost in a competitive-feeling way—on thinking it was going to be fast and feeling stressed/concerned that it wasn’t.

I also want to include this segment from my journal, written when she was three days old:

She is so wonderful and amazing and beautiful and perfect and I just want to etch these days into my mind forever and never forget a single, precious, beautiful, irreplaceable moment. I want to write everything down to try to preserve each second of these first few days with baby Alaina—my treasure, my BABY! The one I hoped for and feared for and worked SO HARD to bring to this world (in pregnancy more so than in birth). I can’t really though—I am here, now. Living this, feeling this, knowing this. The newborn haze is my reality in these moments, but it will pass away and the best thing to do is to fully live it. To feel it and to be here—without struggling to preserve it all. It is here in my heart and soul and preserved in the eddies and ripples of time. The unfolding, continuous ribbon of life and experiences. I have a weird, petrified feeling of forgetting—i.e. when I’m 89 will I still remember how this FELT?!

What do I want to remember?



[3]
Alaina newborn photo (c) Sincerely Yours Photography

- The scrunchy feel of a newborn’s body.
- The little mewling squeaks and sighs
- How she is comforted by my voice and turns to me with a smacky, nursie face...
- The soft, soft skin
- The soft, soft hair
- The fuzzy ears and arms

- The little legs that pull up into reflexive, fetal position.
- The utter, utter, MARVEL that I grew her and that she's here. That she came from me. That sense of magic and wonder and disbelief when I look over and see her lying next to me—how did YOU get here?!
- The miraculous transition from belly to baby. From pregnant woman to motherbaby unit? How does it happen? It is indescribably awesome.
- The sleeping profile
- The scrunchy face
- The “wheeling” half coordinated movements of arms and legs—sort of “swimming” in air.
- The peace of snuggling her against my chest and neck.
- The tiny, skinny feet.
- Putting my hand on her back and feeling her breathe, just like in utero



I was still scared she was going to die until the moment I held her. [4]
Molly & Alaina newborn photo (c) Sincerely Yours Photography

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/01/23/my-baby-girl-is-here/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/03/28/labor-pictures/>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/417.jpg>
4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/567.jpg>

talkbirth (2011-06-07 15:50:15)
Thank you so much, Shannon!

peacefulbeginnings (2011-06-01 16:38:39)
I can't even come up with a really coherent comment, it's *that* beautiful. :)

Jamie (2011-06-01 16:40:24)

beautiful!! I remember the smell.. Newborns have such a sweet smell that they only keep for a while. I used to just set a breath him in

enjoybirth (2011-06-03 13:05:00)

I am so excited to finally read the whole story. It is very beautiful and I am so happy that you did it and she is here and so wonderful! I also enjoyed your insights into your experience using hypnosis.

Bumbling Introvert (shannon) (2011-06-03 21:23:38)

This is such a powerful piece of writing and beautifully done...the moment was beautiful...the writing is beautiful. Thank you. I feel honored to have read it. Beautiful...I just can't say it enough.

Softening for Birth... (2011-06-07 16:03)

I've mentioned a couple of time before how much I enjoy [1]The Pink Kit as a resource for birthing couples. This resource has been available for a number of years, but I only bought a copy two years ago. It rapidly became one of my favorite resources! I continue to find new and useful information within the Kit and I really recommend it. It covers very basic, "common knowledge" information and brings it all together in a useful way. There is a heavy emphasis on knowing your body and how it moves and works and on pelvic bodywork. The Pink Kit consists of a DVD, a book, and three more pdf companion books.

An example from the book: "Modern culture often teaches us to be 'tight'...trim, taut, and terrific! But there is a difference between being fit and well-exercised and having a 'tight' body. We understand the need to stay 'fit' at this time, but we would also like to encourage you to soften yourself, in preparation for mothering and nurturing your baby. Soften your viewpoint, soften your body, surrender to this awe-inspiring event. We can assure you that in this way, you will be preparing yourself not only for labour, but for the days and years afterward..."



[2]

Nursing my baby!

I love this idea of becoming softer in preparation for baby! I also think breastfeeding keeps you "soft"—I know that as I spend time being on many tasks during the day, when I sit down to nurse Alaina I can physically feel my muscles (and mind) loosening and becoming softer. This is one of the gifts that breastfeeding brings.

1. <http://www.birthingbetter.com/>

2. <http://www.facebook.com/#%21/pages/Sincerely-Yours-Photography/163051267048017>

Birthing the Mother-Writer (or: Playing My Music, or: Postpartum Feelings, Part 1) **(2011-06-10 14:38)**

A friend and colleague of mine [1]recently wrote some very touching and honest posts about her recent postpartum experiences. It is amazing how powerful the written word can be at clarifying and explaining one's feelings.

I wrote the following article about my own postpartum feelings several years ago and have submitted to various publications, but it has always been rejected. So, I decided to finally "publish" it here. I plan to then do a follow-up post about my postpartum experiences with my other children.

Birthing the Mother-Writer* (or: Playing My Music)

By Molly Remer

After my first son was born in 2003 I felt silenced. Stifled. Shut down. Squelched. Denied. Invisible. Dissolved. Muted. I felt suffocated, chewed up and my bones spit out, erased, deconstructed, worthless, and useless. (In hindsight, I see the PPD-ish glint behind these feelings, though some of these feelings also featured in my pre-motherhood neuroses.) Postpartum was the most vivid and painful transition point of my life.

I felt slapped in the face by postpartum. I was triumphant and empowered in birth, but diminished, insecure, and wounded postpartum. I had a difficult physical recovery due to unusual labial tearing that was not repaired. I hypothesize that perhaps this contributed to my difficult adjustment to early motherhood. I've long tried to analyze the difficulty, concluding that it is not uncommon in the least, but wondering why/how others survive without mentioning this pain. How is anyone doing this? I would wonder, concluding that I must not be "cut out for this" and that I was the only one feeling alone, stifled, shut down, and unheard. As a consistently overachieving type, it was humbling as well as psychologically painful to not "get an A" on this new "assignment," my baby. Each time he cried, I felt it was evidence of failure, failure, failure. I would see women and couples without children and think, "it isn't too late for you" and, "if only you knew." When I would see women who were pregnant I would feel a sense of grief for them, "Just wait. You have NO idea what is coming."

I felt a duality in motherhood for which I was completely unprepared. How is it possible to feel simultaneously so captivated and yet also so captive, I would wonder. Bonded and also bound.

Maybe these feelings mean I'm egocentric, selfish, or immature (I certainly lectured and berated myself about that!), but they were my reality at the time. The experience was so scarring to me that for about 18 months after my first baby was born I considered not having any more children; not because I couldn't handle pregnancy, birth, or even the mothering of a baby and toddler, but because I could not stand the idea of experiencing postpartum again. I came to realize that my only regret about these days of early motherhood was not in how I related to my baby, or in how I took care of him, or loved him, or appreciated him, or marveled at him. My regret is that I was so very mean to myself the whole time I did those things—in reality, I was actually fairly skillfully learning how to mother. I was responsive, nurturing, kind, and loving and I took delight in my baby, but I was cruel to myself almost the entire time and failed to appreciate or

notice any worth I had as a person or to accept and have patience for my birth as a mother.

When my first son was almost one, I wrote in my journal:

I feel like I have no one to talk to. I feel like no one understands me. I feel like I cannot express what I really feel inside. I feel like no one believes me. I do not feel accepted. I feel like my needs are not being met. I feel burned out. I feel drained. I feel angry. I feel sad. I feel desperately unhappy. I feel guilty. I feel wrong. I feel alone. I feel unworthy. I feel like I am not good. I feel invisible. I feel ignored. I feel small. I feel bad. I feel like I cannot say what I mean and actually be heard. I feel like I can't explain my "bad" feelings. I feel trapped. I feel suffocated. I feel stressed. I feel overloaded. I feel like snapping. I feel mean. I feel unfair. I feel selfish. I feel disconnected.

I miss Mark. I miss our relationship. I miss feeling right in our marriage. I miss being alone together.

I feel like I am not enjoying motherhood the way I am "supposed" to. I feel confused. I feel conflicted. I feel torn. I feel low. I feel resentful. I feel worried about the future. I feel anxious about being good enough. I feel stretched. I feel taut. I feel like changing.

What helped me a great deal during this time were the voices of other women. Not women face-to-face, though I had begun building a network of wonderful female friends, it seemed too painful or dark to broach the question with them—"Do you hate this sometimes too?" And I couldn't really bear to voice my feelings to my own mother, also a tremendous source of support for me, because to risk hearing her say, "Yes, sometimes I did feel tortured by YOU" was not really what I needed. She also has a well-meaning, but frustrating tendency to meet genuine expressions of despair with comments that imply I should put on a happy face. Instead, it was the voices of women reaching off the printed page that met my hunger for contact. For truth. For rawness and a look at the "ugly." I gobbled up books about motherhood and women's experiences of mothering and have a permanent place in my heart for the "momoir."

A quote that serves a recurrent guidepost (or almost obsession) in my life is, "Don't die with your music still in you." During my abovementioned painful transition to motherhood I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't letting my "music" out. Then, following the birth of my second son in 2006, sort of accidentally, I began writing again and in earnest this time (articles, essays, blog posts, journals) and later realized that I no longer have any fear about dying with my music still in me. And, I also don't feel depressed, invisible, worthless, or muted anymore. During my original fretting over this phrase, I felt like it was another type of "music" that I needed to let out (mainly that of the social service work that I had been groomed for in graduate school), not words necessarily. However, I've finally realized that maybe it was literally my words dying in me that gave me that feeling and that fretfulness. They needed to get out. I've spent a lifetime writing various essays in my head, nearly every day, but those words always "died" in me before they ever got out onto paper. After spending a full three years letting other women's voices reach me through books and essays, and then six more years birthing the mother-writer within, I continue to feel an almost physical sense of relief and release whenever I sit down to write and to let my own voice be heard.

Molly Remer, MSW, CCCE is a certified birth educator, activist, and writer who lives in a straw bale house in central Missouri with her husband, two young sons, and infant daughter. She blogs about birth at [2]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>.

title inspired by^[3] Literary Mama.

1. <http://summerdoula.wordpress.com/>
2. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
3. <http://www.literarymama.com/>

talkbirth (2011-06-11 13:12:29)

I'm glad it spoke to you, Emilia! (funny, too, since that is exactly what the post is about!) I'd like to suggest that maybe there is another option between "not accomplishing" and "ditching my kids"—I feel like after a LOT of work and trying, I've found a balance in my own life between "personing" and "mothering." It is possible to mother well AND also do some other things that feed your soul. It doesn't have to be an either/or arrangement. And, we don't do our kids any favors by not pursuing some of our own passions when they can watch and observe us being vibrant, active, complex, complete human beings (not saying that it isn't "complete" to be a SAHM, but that if you want to pursue some other projects, kids learn good things from watching that happen! I used to feel like I was going to die—metaphorically speaking...like my soul was getting squashed. I don't feel that way anymore (and I still spend 90 % of every week with my kids!).

Lucy@dreamingaloud.net (2011-06-13 03:51:55)

Wow a friend just forwarded this to me by email - I love your voice, love your honesty. I was there too. With each of my three. I can totally relate. Especially as I am a writer mama too... Well done you! Do stop by and visit me at Dreaming Aloud for honest mama reflections, including my latest v popular post - The White heat of mama anger <http://dreamingaloudnet.blogspot.com/2011/06/white-heat-of-mama-anger.html>

Sheridan (2011-06-13 19:46:59)

I love this. It helps me see why I love to blog. It is a way to let my music get out too. What a wonderful analogy.

Emilia (2011-06-10 15:41:11)

I think I actually gasped out loud when I read this. It spoke to me in a deep way I think I've been needing for a while, perhaps since Lyra's birth. I felt good, really good, for quite a while after Mason's birth. In the past couple of months, that "music dying" feeling has crept back in and increased. I've been having a hard time defining it, and an equally hard time determining how to fix it. I grieve for the time I lost by having Lyra so young (not to mention the guilt I have for giving her a "bad" young mom). I worry I'm not accomplishing what I'm capable of doing, but I know that ditching my kids and simply pursuing my "own thing" would not be fulfilling. Just this morning (before reading this post) I decided I HAVE to start a blog or two I've been considering for a while. I have to find some way to "play my music", even if I'm not entirely sure what it sounds like yet. I wound up writing a lot more than I meant to here. I guess all I really need to say is thank you for sharing this!

Postpartum Feelings, Part 3 « Talk Birth (2011-06-24 10:35:29)

[...] I published my article about my postpartum feelings with my first son, I envisioned it as the first part of a series of [...]

I just want to grind my corn! « Talk Birth (2011-07-29 08:34:38)

[...] to write a blog post about this idea for quite some time and when I posted my essay about "playing my music," I received a comment from a friend saying, "I worry I'm not accomplishing what [...]"

Rebirth: What We Don't Say « Talk Birth (2011-10-02 19:25:09)

[...] As I've shared before, one of my favorite quotes about postpartum comes from Naomi Wolf, A mother is not born when a baby is born; a mother is forged, made. The quote I shared above from this "Rebirth" article touches that

place in me—that motherhood results in a total life overhaul and a new, enriched identity. (This article also made me think of first postpartum journey which I wrote about here.) [...]

Regarding Balance « Talk Birth (2011-08-18 07:36:10)

[...] hard to identify—that I get out of it (I think it is both about telling about it and playing my music), in the scope of my life right now, it really needs to slip to the bottom and possibly off of my [...]

Surrender? « Talk Birth (2011-08-24 16:17:40)

[...] not “allowed” the space in my day I feel like I need to write (see my post about “my music“). So, I’ve spent quite a bit of time moaning and groaning about how I just need to [...]

Happy Father’s Day! (2011-06-17 12:45)



[1]
My man and his kids!

”No one can describe to a man what having his own child will mean to him. Words simply cannot do justice; each man needs to discover it for himself.”

”Fatherhood challenges us, but it also enlarges us and reshapes our perception of what is important in the world around us. As we take stock of this new world, we find that doing our job as a dad is inherently honorable and respectful, and brings to us the dignity that goes with the territory. Far from being emasculating, being a dad makes us men in the finest sense of the term.” –[2]Dads Adventure

Both of the above quotes come from a wonderful article from [3]Dads Adventure about [4]The Dignity of Being a Dad. Make sure to check out the associated [5]Father’s Day Flashmob in Denver and keep watching until the 3.5 minute point—loved this part especially and it made me cry! I really appreciate this new ”brotherhood of dads” movement and hope it becomes widely known! I have used materials from [6]Dads Adventure in my birth classes for quite some time. More often than not, the wife comments to me privately about how her husband appreciated receiving materials that were specifically for him.

Here are some links to past posts I’ve made about fatherhood:

- [7]Fatherbaby
- [8]Fathers, Fear, and Birth

- [9]Book Review: The Father’s Home Birth Handbook
- [10]Book Review: Breastfeeding Facts for Fathers
- [11]Resources for Fathers to Be
- [12]The Daddy Brain
- [13]Birth Affirmations for Fathers
- [14]No Right Way + Fathers at Birth
- [15]Fathers at Birth Book
- [16]A Father’s Role
- [17]Ideas for supporting your partner in labor

And, from [18]Mother’s Advocate, here is a great article with some specifics for new(ish) fathers:

[19]Sex After Baby: A How-To Guide for Partners (an associated post called [20]Sex, Lies, & the Post-partum Year is also very good)

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/img_0790.jpg
2. <http://www.facebook.com/DadsAdventure>
3. <http://dadsadventure.com/>
4. <http://www.dadsadventure.com/jikinam/the-dignity-of-being-a-dad/>
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=vHhRqAJ1yCk
6. <http://dadsadventure.com/>
7. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/02/15/fatherbaby/>
8. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/04/fathers-fear-and-birth/>
9. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/02/book-review-the-fathers-home-birth-handbook/>
10. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/06/19/book-review-breastfeeding-facts-for-fathers/>
11. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/08/17/resources-for-fathers-to-be/>
12. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/06/10/the-daddy-brain/>
13. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/04/28/birth-affirmations-for-fathers/>
14. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/01/10/no-right-way-fathers-at-birth/>
15. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2008/12/11/fathers-at-birth-book/>
16. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2008/10/11/a-fathers-role/>
17. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2008/04/16/ideas-for-supporting-your-partner-in-labor/>
18. <http://mothersadvocate.wordpress.com/>
19. <http://mothersadvocate.wordpress.com/2011/06/06/sex-after-baby-a-how-to-guide-for-partners/>
20. <http://mothersadvocate.wordpress.com/2011/05/31/the-dry-spell/>

peacefulbeginnings (2011-06-17 15:21:13)

I, too, enjoyed the Dad’s Adventure video! I love that more and more fathers are stepping up and REALLY doing it.

The Rhythm of Our Lives (2011-06-18 10:58)

This article was originally published in New Beginnings magazine (publication of [1]La Leche League International) in 2007. As I’ve noted, I’m making an effort to “centralize” my written pieces into one location—bringing things here that I’ve written for other blogs or for other publications.



[2]
Nursing & Reading, 2007

by Molly Remer

2007

When I became a mother, many things in my life changed. I was startled and dismayed by the magnitude in which my free time diminished and one by one many of my leisure pursuits and hobbies were discarded. The time for one of my favorite hobbies increased exponentially, however, and this was a very pleasant surprise. That hobby is reading. As a child I was a voracious reader—my mother had to set a limit for me of “only two books a day.” In college and graduate school, reading for fun fell away and I spent six years reading primarily textbooks and journal articles. In the years following, I began to read for pleasure again and when my first baby was born in 2003, I once again became a truly avid reader. Why? Because of breastfeeding. As I nursed my little son, I read and read and read. I devoured mostly nonfiction with occasional fiction as “dessert.”

At first I scoured *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* and the Sears’ *The Baby Book* to try to make sense of my new life and then began to gobble up books about motherhood and women’s experiences of mothering. Reading did actually help me adjust to motherhood. Subtitled “[3]Breastfeeding as a Spiritual Practice,” an article published in the fall 2003 issue of *Mothering* magazine was immensely meaningful to me. My baby was about two weeks old when the magazine arrived—the first issue I had received after his birth. This article was in it and it was exactly what I needed to read. Breastfeeding can be a meditative and spiritual act—it is actually a “practice” a “discipline” of sorts. The author, Leslie Davis, explains it better:

I realized I’d never before devoted myself to something so entirely. Of course I’ve devoted myself to my husband, to my family, to friends, to my writing, to mothering, and even to God and other spiritual endeavors at various points in my life...I’d completely given myself to this act of nursing in a way that I never had before. Nothing was more important than nursing my son. Nothing was put before it. There was no procrastination as with exercise, no excuses as with trying to stop eating sugar, no laziness as with housecleaning and other chores. Nursing had to be done, and I did it, over and over again, multiple times a day, for more than 800 days in a row. It was the closest thing to a spiritual practice that I’d ever experienced.

Viewing the act of breastfeeding through a spiritual lens like this was a lifeline to me as a vulnerable, sensitive, and bruised postpartum woman trying desperately to adjust my pace as an overachieving "successful" independent person to one spending hours in my nursing chair attached to a tiny mouth. I marvel at the uncountable number of times I spent nursing Lann and that I now spend nursing my second son, Zander. I calculate that I've probably nursed Zander about 3,000 times just lying down to go to sleep (nap or bedtime, plus waking up times too). That is just the lying down times, not the sitting in the chair or standing in the Ergo baby carrier times. This is the key to my reading success—I've had over 3,000 opportunities during the last year to pick up a book or other reading materials!

In 2007, I read approximately 150 books. I lie in my "nest" with my baby nursing and my older son resting near my back. The baby is nourished by me and in this pause in the busyness of life I am in turn nourished by the access he allows me to the printed word. As he grows bigger with my milk, I also "grow" intellectually and in the opportunity for spiritual and emotional renewal. As the baby drifts off I read to myself and when he is asleep I read stories to my four year old. This is the rhythm of our lives—suck, swallow, read, and consider.

With my current baby, my reading "landscape" has changed again, since I now have a Kindle! :)

1. <http://www.111i.org/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/100_0710.jpg
3. <http://mothering.com/breastfeeding/breathing-i-am-nursing-my-baby-breastfeeding-spiritual-practice>

Lynda M O (2011-06-18 13:01:31)

Your life and its four stages sounds perfect to this Care Provider; you are doing the most important work in our world.

enjoybirth (2011-06-24 22:03:28)

I loved reading and nursing too. I couldn't imagine ever bottle feeding, how could I hold a book?

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-09-16 11:33:42)

Have you read Anne Cushman's "Mothering as Meditation Practice"? I think you'd enjoy it.
http://annecushman.com/pages/z_pdf/tricycle_mothering.pdf

Abusive or Honest? (2011-06-20 08:13)

I recently finished reading the book, *Breakthrough: How the 10 Greatest Discoveries in Medicine Saved*



Millions and Saved the World, [1]

which I got for free on my Kindle. The section about germ theory talked about Ignaz Semmelweis, of course, and his conviction that it was an "invisible particle" carried by physician to woman that was causing "childbed fever" to be a rampant problem in hospitals. (I appreciated that the book noted that mortality rates for women attended by midwives or giving birth in their own homes were very low compared to hospital-based physicians.) During the latter part of his life, Semmelweis became very agitated by the failure of his colleagues to recognize the validity of his theory of the cause of childbed fever and began sending them, "vicious letters." An example included in the book was the following:

Your teaching, Herr Hofrath, is based on the dead bodies of women slaughtered through ignorance...If, sir, you continue to teach your students and midwives that puerperal fever is an ordinary disease, I proclaim you before God and the world to be an assassin...

The author goes on to explain that Semmelweis later died in a mental institution and that, "Ironically, some contend that Semmelweis' final vitriolic attacks against his colleagues constituted a third key milestone: His abusive letters may have helped raise awareness years later, as other evidence for germ theory began to accumulate."

I find it fascinating that his frustration and anger towards his colleagues is described as "abusive" and "vitriolic," when Semmelweis wrote a book, presented papers, and spoke with other professionals at length about the issue and was dismissed and even mocked for his ideas. When his (correct!) theory continued to be ignored and women continued to die, isn't he a little entitled to be angry and express that?! I think he was being honest in his letters, not abusive. It made me think of how women are dismissed as being "drama queens" for being upset about unnecessary cesareans and that the terms "birthrape" or "birth trauma" are viewed by some as too "extreme" and how the medical profession all too often continues to NOT practice evidence based maternity care with regard to a variety of issues from restrictions on freedom of movement, to continuous fetal monitoring without indication, to risky induction of labor procedures, to cesareans for "failure to progress." In the future, these experiences and women's and birth advocates' "vitriolic" reactions to them may be viewed through the same lens in which I view Semmelweis' attempts to share his findings—they were trying to tell people something really important after all.

In another section of the book, the author says, "Scientific medicine has never been shy to dismiss if not denigrate any perceived threat to its values or power." We continue to regularly see this in maternity care today!

1. <http://www.plusultratech.com/2011/02/hypothesis-and-evidence.html>

peacefulbeginnings (2011-06-20 08:45:46)
Exactly!

Poem: Sons (2011-06-22 12:48)

Every so often I wake up in the morning with a fully-formed poem in my mind. In 2006, five days after composing the poem below, I gave birth to my second son, Zander (just as seven dreams told me prenatally). Fantastic two-hour homebirth of a 9lbs 2oz baby!

Sons

I sense a future for myself as a mother of sons.

Curious, vibrant, full of life energy.

Will I be able to nurture them into

Good men?

Warm hearts, strong hands.

Compassionate, responsive, confident.

Happy and balanced in their lives.

For now, one son.

Not yet three.

Bright eyes, big smile

Wonderful way with words.

Generous with hugs and kisses and

“I so love you mommy!”

Loves slides at parks

And painting

And dictating sculptures.

Bursting with life and

Shining with possibility.

Full of ideas, words, and vigor.

The prospect of another waits

Close beneath my skin.

Thirty-nine weeks of mystery.

My sense of the future unfolding.

Molly Remer

5/24/06



[1]
My sons: St. Pat's 2011

1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/img_0586.jpg

Postpartum Feelings, Part 3 (2011-06-24 10:35)

When I published [1]my article about my postpartum feelings with my first son, I envisioned it as the first part of a series of three posts comparing/contrasting my postpartum feelings and experiences following each child. Here's what happened—I wrote part two in which I shared some of the recurrent thoughts I had in the year following my second son's birth and decided that I just don't feel like publishing it. Reading it back over makes me feel like I probably could have been considered mentally ill and I don't really feel like sharing that right now. I started to analyze why I feel like sharing any kinds of feelings via blog anyway—really, what is this about? Why "expose" myself? In part, because that is what helped, and still helps, me the most; knowing that I'm not alone in my feelings and that other women have "been there." So, I feel I have a responsibility of sorts to share my own "been theres." When I began this website/blog, it was primarily about gathering and sharing information with others, not about telling my own story or sharing my personal experiences. I didn't start it intending to have any element of a, "personal journal published online" feeling. After the birth-miscarriage of my third son and then my pregnancy-after-loss journey, it took on more of the personal journal flavor. And, I've liked that. I've enjoyed sharing my feelings and experiences and learning from the comments other people leave that I've "spoken" to something in them, and/or helped someone to understand their own experiences (or me) better. That said, I don't have to share everything I write just because I've bothered typing it and I just don't feel like sharing my second post about weirdo, "crazy" postpartum thoughts right now. So there! Maybe someday I'll hit "publish" on it.

Of course I know (and firmly believe!), that you're "postpartum for the rest of your life" (Robin Lim), but I feel like this current postpartum experience is different than my others in some qualitatively different ways. I first credited it to having taken placenta pills this time around. My doula encapsulated my placenta for me and I took all 95 capsules during the first 6 weeks postpartum. It was amazing! I have become a total "convert" to the benefits of placenta encapsulation. I felt GREAT and I had tons and tons of energy, instead of being wiped out and weak and exhausted feeling. I've only taken about two naps in Alaina's life (this may come back to bite me with regard to lactational amenorrhea , we'll see...) and that ISN'T because I'm crazy and was pushing myself too hard, it is because I haven't felt like I needed to take any naps. I highly recommend placenta encapsulation. Amazingly powerful!

Another thing that is different about this experience is that I don't feel "restricted" after having her—I don't feel like I've had to sacrifice or let anything go, I feel like she has integrated smoothly into our lives. I had a phone counseling session with an intuitive healer the afternoon before Alaina was born and one of the new "neural pathways" I set was, "the new baby seamlessly integrates into our lives." I think it worked! :) What is interesting, is that I have put quite a lot on hold lately, but it doesn't feel like she MADE me, it feels like what I want to do (or not do, as the case may be). When my first son was born, I had to let go of most of my old life and work and it was very painful. With my second son. I felt like I had a lot of energy to give to the "world" that was being blocked/couldn't find expression. This time, there is more balance. I'm continuing to teach college classes in-seat and online and that feels really good to me. I'm homeschooling the boys and doing well with that (we actually "do school" almost every day!). I read all of the time (55 books so far this year!). I've started a doctoral program. And, I make time for a variety of other smallish projects like facilitating quarterly women's retreats, editing the FoMM newsletter, and answering breastfeeding help calls/emails. Oh, and making birth art sculptures (new pictures to follow soon!) And, here's what I'm not doing: writing new articles, working on my books (I have three in progress), doing much birth work, staying caught up on articles/news/research, teaching prenatal yoga or prenatal fitness classes or leading birth art sessions (all of which I trained to do last year), creating (or teaching) any new craft classes for our annual craft camp, writing the dozens of blog posts that come to mind (or even pulling old material into this blog the way I'd like to do), staying caught up with book reviews, keeping up with the garden, etc., etc. More about balancing mothering and personing will follow someday. I promise!

With previous babies, I've felt very haunted by the "list" of all I'm not doing. While I still feel this way sometimes, I more often have a less familiar feeling—that of amazement at my own capacity for adaptation and change. I regularly feel kind of proud of myself—like, look how I can expand and enfold and how I can create a life that works and is satisfying as it continually evolves and changes.

This time with my baby has been the sweetest and most delicious time in my life. Yes, I'm still busy and overextended and hard on myself about a lot of things, but there is a different clarity to the experience. I feel like every moment with her is so vivid, clear, and memorable and like each one is being etched into me. It is just so real this life we have together now and it is weird for me to realize how quickly things change and how pretty soon, this life that I'm living in this moment, will just be our past. I do feel like I savored my boys' infancies as well, but I don't remember this sharpness of feeling and observation. I feel like I will never forget what it is like to be this mother of my baby girl. However, I also know that the reality is that the growing baby and then toddler, and then child replaces the one who came before (even though it is the same person—those other versions of them are replaced by the vivid reality of the now). So, while I retain distinct mental snapshots of my life with the boys as babies, their current, vibrant, and ever-growing selves are much more intense and real (obviously), and I know it will be the same with her. And, it makes my eyes well up to know that this sharp sweetness will float away on the rivers of time and that before I know it, I will be the mother of two men and a woman. It is hard to explain what I mean in writing—what I want to say is, "but this is SO REAL now." Well, duh. It IS real now. And, later will be real as well. That is just the flow of life, Molly dear ;-P However, one of the main reasons I wanted to get her pictures taken yesterday is to try to capture what it is like to be her mother NOW:



[2]

Then, last night while I was nursing her to sleep in my arms as I have done every night for five months, I took this picture myself to capture how well we fit together. I wanted to get how her little feet are nestled into my legs so perfectly and how her hands rests on me and how her head cradles in my arm:



[3]

I know this one isn't a pro picture, but this is what it is like to be her mama :)

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/birthing-the-mother-writer-or-playing-my-music-or-postpartum-feelings-part-1/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/img_1003.jpg

enjoybirth (2011-06-24 20:20:14)

I love how you capture these feelings so beautifully in words. That is how I mostly felt after I had my 3rd. Just treasuring every moment. I still do and he is 5. Maybe the third times a charm. :)

Poem: Woman & Nature (2011-06-26 17:22)

Woman and Nature



By Susan Griffin[1]

The earth is my sister;

I love her daily grace,

her silent daring,
and how loved I am
how we admire this strength in each other,
all that we have lost
all that we have lived
all that we know:
we are stunned by this beauty,
and I do not forget;
what she is to me,
what I am to her.

My friends and I had our quarterly women's retreat today and I used the above poem as our closing reading (I did alter it slightly from the original in the middle). To read it, have each participant read one line and the rest of the group repeat it after her. The italicized section is then read by the group in unison.

I also used the following as our opening reading:

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings
but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,
to this community and to each other.

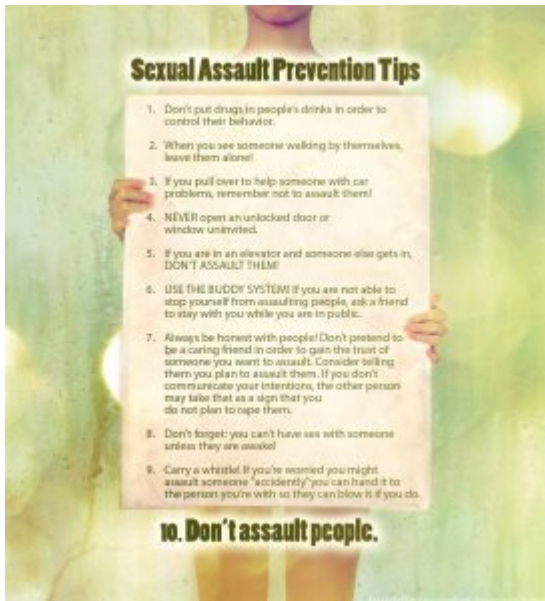
-Anonymous (Reading #434 in Singing The Living Tradition)

I like to share these things I've collected here as well in case other women are googling for readings for women's programs, retreats, or mother blessing ceremonies :)

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/gaia.jpg>

Terina (2011-06-26 21:39:08)
Awesome...just what I needed!!!

Asking the right questions... (2011-06-27 09:28)



[1] A couple of weeks ago a list of sexual assault prevention tips made the rounds on Facebook. Containing reminders such as, "When you see someone walking by themselves, leave them alone" and "Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone 'on accident' you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can blow it if you do," these tips are absolutely perfect and so very appropriate. I spent several years working in domestic violence shelters answering the hotline. The number one question/comment I used to get from people about this work was, "why doesn't she just leave?" And, we always used to reply that that is the wrong question, "the question isn't, 'why does she stay?' but 'Why does HE do it!'" And, why, as a society, do we accept it? The same [2]website that created the SA Prevention Tips poster, also noted this:

When we talk about rape as something that happens to 1 in 6 women, it is something that happens to women. Oh no, women! You have a problem! A women's problem! That has to do with women! What are women going to do to solve this problem? Perhaps if we rephrased that as 'one in...however many...men will commit rape in his lifetime,' the problem might start to look a little different to certain people.

The wrong questions

Quite a while before this, an article made the rounds about women in another country ironing their pubescent daughters' breasts flat to try to make them less appealing as rape targets. Many comments on the article were to the effect of, "ugh! What horrible mothers." Again, entirely the wrong lens with which to be looking. Why is it okay to rape little girls?! Ditto for the news reports of a reporter being sexually harassed by the football team when she went to interview them—people responded with things like, "she should try dressing professionally." Um, excuse me? How about the football players—adult, capable men—try acting like professionals? Wrong questions, wrong lens, wrong direction to point the fingers. And, it is because I respect men as people that I give them more credit than this—I believe men are rational and fully capable people

who are responsible for their own behavior, not out of control pigs who women are responsible for "taming" and/or not "provoking" (sexually or otherwise). Men are smart, let's treat them like it by remembering to ask the right questions and to give the right sets of tips.

Of cannibalism & implied social acceptance

These topics remind me of an example I use in the college classes I teach and the questions I encourage my students to ask about all kinds of social services: If we respond to the presence of disturbing social conditions by working primarily to soften the pain they cause, does this imply tolerance for their existence? Our actions do help, but we need to be sensitive to the fact that our limited actions indicate endorsement of, or at least acquiescence to, these conditions that call for all our hurry and scramble. Under the guise of caring we may have reached a point of acceptance of conditions that produce the pain we try to ease...Why are we accepting that children go hungry, that people are homeless, and that women are beaten and raped? Are these conditions that you find acceptable? Are these things just part of the "normal" course of life? I then ask my students to consider cannibalism—what would it be like if rape was as unheard of in our culture as cannibalism? We don't have "cannibalism survivors support groups" and cannibal hotlines and shelters, because as a whole, our culture does NOT accept cannibalism as a remotely acceptable activity. All of our "services" for sexual assault and domestic violence tell a different story—while these things are "too bad" and "shouldn't happen," we've accepted that they do and in a way tolerate their existence. I believe we can and should create a world where DV and SA are as unheard of as cannibalism! Usually this example gives students pause. We need to ask bigger social questions that go beyond the individual cases right in front of us.

But what about pregnancy and birth, anyway?

Okay, what does any of this have to do with pregnancy or birth?! Well, in the most recent issue of [3]Brain, Child magazine, I was reading an essay called "Play Parallels" by Dorothy Fortenberry, exploring parallels between her play, Good Egg, and reading What to Expect during her own pregnancy. In it, she makes this fabulous observation:

"I also left my obstetrician. The more I saw him, the less I wanted to talk to him—and if you don't like chatting with someone, I've usually found you also don't want to have his face in your crotch."

And how! She then comments on reading an article about how the environment in the womb sets the stage for the baby's entire life and that mothers are responsible for making this environment as pure as possible—it is in your hands! She also is thinking about the dangers of eating coldcuts during pregnancy, frequently warned about in popular pregnancy books and media: "Hold on, I thought, deep breath. Stop hating yourself and start asking questions. Like: Where was an article about why cities have air pollution in the first place? What about an article about what to do if you want to leave your ob/gyn? Or the headline I would have written: 'Pregnant Women Routinely Denied Health Insurance, Perhaps a Bigger Deal for Babies Than Tuna'?...I'd be damned if I paid someone else to make me feel bad about myself. The next time I started to panic, I vowed to put my time and money to helping women with real challenges in pregnancy, and more worrisome things on their plate than sliced turkey." [emphases mine]

Finally, she describes the book as, "a long, depressing catalogue of all the ways I had already failed my baby" and then concludes, "I saw it as one more way our society puts all of the blame and credit on individual mothers, casually omitting any larger forces like politics, or fate."

Motherblame

I truly think this is a chronic social issue—motherblame. We MUST look at the larger system when we ask our questions. The fact that we even have to teach birth classes and to help women learn how to navigate the hospital system and to assert their rights to evidence-based care, indicates serious issues that go way beyond the individual. When we say things about women making informed choices or make statements like, "well, it's her birth" or "it's not my birth, it's not my birth," or wonder why she went to "that doctor" or "that hospital," we are becoming blind to the sociocultural context in which those birth "choices" are embedded. When we teach women to ask their doctors about maintaining freedom of movement in labor or when we tell them to stay home as long as possible, we are, in a very real sense, endorsing, or at least acquiescing to these conditions in the first place. This isn't changing the world for women, it is only softening the impact of a broken and oftentimes abusive system.

1. <http://tumblinfeminist.tumblr.com/>

2. <http://tumblinfeminist.tumblr.com/>

3. <http://www.brainchildmag.com/>

Dana (2011-07-09 21:46:34)

Excellent post! We live in a band-aid culture and I agree with Meghan that it applies to many other aspects of our society too. For instance, in my field of ecological work, the prevailing mindset is to "restore" ecosystems that we've already broken and which will never, ever be restored to their original state, rather than just stopping the ongoing destruction of the few pristine places remaining. You have my mind spinning. It's certainly not cheaper to put band-aids on these issues than to change the paradigm, so why ISN'T it the norm to actually work from the bottom up? Maybe it's because we can't change people, they have to ultimately change themselves and we can't do it for them? But it CAN happen! Thanks for this post. Oh and I wish I could take one of your classes after reading this!

Meghan (2011-06-27 18:38:19)

Wonderful. The thought process is applicable to so many topics, sexism, racism, fat shaming. That society routinely holds the disadvantaged responsible for solving their own problems, while refusing to change itself, has disgusted me.

Lynda M O (2011-06-28 02:39:32)

@Meghan You took the words right off my fingertips. The idea that fault lies with the deprived infuriates me on so many levels...

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-06-28 06:38:45)

"Pregnant Women Routinely Denied Health Insurance, Perhaps a Bigger Deal for Babies Than Tuna" is full of awesome.

talkbirth (2011-06-28 20:21:30)

Isn't it? I LOVED it!

The Illusion of Choice « Talk Birth (2011-12-30 09:40:14)

[...] When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth Birth & Culture & Pregnant Feelings Asking the right questions... Active Birth in the Hospital Why do I [...]

Remember those pink shoes? (2011-06-28 16:11)

When I found out that Alaina was probably a girl, I went to the store and bought a pair of shiny pink shoes. (I wrote about this [1]here.) When I got my first set of maternity pictures taken, we included those shoes in a couple of the pictures:



[2]

Last week, I took Alaina for a photo shoot with my same photographer friend and look at the shoes now!



[3]

One of my good friends is nearing the end of her own pregnancy after loss journey and she just had a maternity photo shoot with the fabulous Karen as well. She had a similar belly picture taken with a little pair of pink socks. When I looked at her photo, I remembered so vividly my own feelings while getting the one taken of me—that almost panicky combination of hope and fear and just trying to trust that I would NOT have to look back at that picture and be filled with grief that I had no one to fill the shoes after all. And, once again, I felt grateful and relieved to be on this other side of the PAL journey. It is a very, very good place to be. I look forward to my friend welcoming her own "rainbow baby" next month and getting to feel that sense of pure relief at putting those pink socks on her happy, beautiful, healthy new daughter!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/09/12/maybe-girl-baby/>

2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/261981_176679969059470_117518641642270_442266_1867258_n.jpg

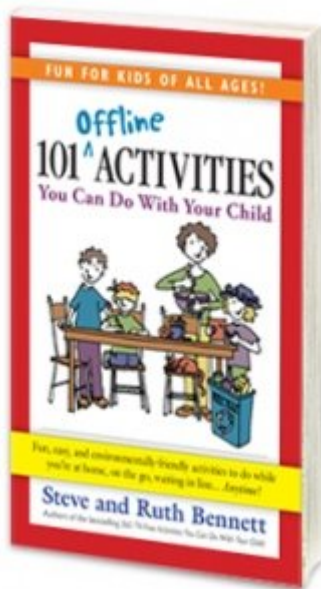
Jacarandamum (2011-06-28 17:51:27)

It IS such a very good place to be :) So glad you got to fill those gorgeous pink shoes, Molly :) And as I sit here typing, my fat baby is spilling out over the sides of the Ergo, and I am thanking my lucky stars that I, too, got my own rainbow baby (love that term - perfect description). Big hugs from Australia xxx

talkbirth (2011-06-29 14:00:53)
So glad you're here too! :)

1.7 July

Book Review: 101 Offline Activities You Can Do With Your Child (2011-07-02 14:43)



[1] 101 Offline Activities You Can Do With Your Child
Steve Bennett, Ruth Bennett
Paperback: 134 pages
Publisher: BPT Press (June 14, 2011)
ISBN-13: 978-0984228522

Reviewed by Molly Remer

Just in time for summer amusement comes the new book 101 Offline Activities You Can Do With Your Child. Written by the authors of the classic 365 TV-Free Activities You Can Do With Your Child (a book I've used a resource for about 6 years), this concise little book offers a wide variety of fun activities. Coded at the bottom of the page with a sketch, the activities are either designed to be used at home, on the road, in the kitchen, or anytime, anyplace. A nice feature is the picture index for kids who are not yet reading to choose their own activities.

Single page explanations/descriptions mean all of the activities are fairly simple to implement and enjoy—offering a brief time-out for anytime fun. Many of the craft ideas seem most appropriate for children under age 10 and plenty of the other games and other activities are enjoyable for any age group.

My kids have come up with quite a few of the suggested ideas using their own imaginations and some of the ideas are classic car games (or variations thereof), but there is enough fresh, unique content to make this book a worthwhile resource for our family.

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://offlineactivities.com/>

Inseparable (2011-07-02 15:57)



[1]
Notice how she is holding my finger?

The cutting of the umbilical cord tends to herald the arrival of a new and unique life. Though this tiny being began its existence many months before, growing nestled and protected within the womb, the just-born infant is seen as an individual apart from his or her mother. There is, however, a significant error in this thinking, for baby and mother are one, so to speak, and severing this unit denies an empirical truth. Birth should not be a celebration of separation, but rather a reuniting of mother and baby, who joins her for an external connection. —Barbara Lattner, in the book *New Lives* [emphasis mine]

I felt like this was a completely relevant quote for our Independence Day weekend. A baby has no concept of the notion of independence. Even though we live in a culture that pushes for independence at young ages, all babies are born hard-wired for connection. For dependence. It is completely biologically appropriate and is the baby's first and most potent instinct. I remind mothers that after birth your chest literally becomes your new baby's habitat. Mother's body is baby's home—the maternal nest. If the baby cries when you put her down, that means you have a smart baby! Not a "dependent" or "manipulative" one. People are fond of making comments about babies being "spoiled" if they are held often. It is impossible to spoil a baby by responding to her needs (why do people have such an issue with other people holding babies anyway?). I am 100 % certain that it is impossible to "spoil" any baby under the age of one by answering her when she cries and giving her what she needs (which at this point is food, warmth, safety, love, and physical closeness). One of LLL's pearls of wisdom is, "a baby's wants are a baby's needs"—there is no difference between them at this age. A baby is not "manipulating" you by crying for you to come to her and then stopping when you pick her up—that is a perfect example of skillful mother-baby communication (if someone says, "she is only crying to get you to pick her up" the answer is "yes! She is! Isn't she smart!") .

New Lives is a compilation of essays by NICU nurses and it is no surprise to me that the essay from which the above quote comes was written by a former LLL Leader :)

Speaking of LLL, at the last international conference in 2007 I was fortunate enough to hear Dr. Nils Bergman speak about skin-to-skin contact, breastfeeding, and perinatal neuroscience. In super short summary: babies NEED to be with their mothers following birth in order to develop proper neural connections and ensure healthy brain development and proper brain "organization"; Mother's chest is baby's natural post-birth "habitat" and is of vital developmental and survival significance; Breastfeeding = Brain wiring.

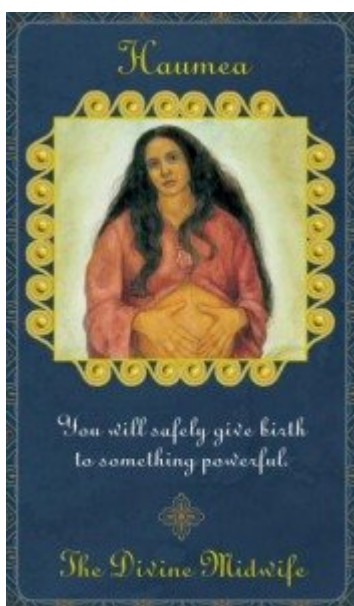
And, as long as I'm reminiscing about the conference and Dr. Bergman, in fact I actually ended up "performing" on stage with him in a mimed play put on immediately prior to his presentation! He is a dynamic and engaging speaker (with a great accent!) and has so much of value to share. I will never forget hearing his duet with an LLL Leader of the song, "Anything Tech Can Do, Mum Can Do Better."

Yes she can, yes she can, yes she CAAAANNNNNN!!

Today, let's celebrate being in dependence with our babies :)

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Haumea: The Divine Midwife (2011-07-05 17:47)



[1]

"Haumea, a Polynesian Goddess, was credited with teaching women how to give birth by pushing their babies out from between their legs. Before this, folklore claims that children were cut from their wombs, extracted by knife like a pit from ripe fruit. Thanks to Haumea, women were able to forgo this dangerous passage."
-Kris Waldherr, Goddess Inspiration Cards

Reading this, I felt like women need to "meet" Haumea again. Perhaps modern midwives, doulas, and birth educators are Haumeas on earth, reminding women that they have the inherent power and capacity to push their own babies out from between their legs, rather than having major surgery.

After reading about Haumea and thinking about my own births, I felt inspired to make yet another figure in my [2]birth art series. I'm experimenting with new types of figures lately and made this catching-your-own image:



[3]

You will safely give birth to something powerful.

1. <http://kriswaldherr.com/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/the-birth-art-journey-continues/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/img_1070.jpg

talkbirth (2011-07-12 20:22:57)
Good point, Bonnie!

Bonnie B Matheson (2011-07-05 18:14:10)
Suppose this was an ancient memory, from a time before any we know of. Perhaps what is happening now, has happened before...But the civilization was completely obliterated...If we are not careful women will forget that they can birth their own babies....

Listening to my baby...even when we disagreed! (2011-07-06 10:13)

I have a lot of breastfeeding-related posts I'd like to share soon. Here's hoping I have time to make that come true! The following is an essay I wrote about my experiences nursing my first baby. It was originally published in [1]LLL's [2]New Beginnings in 2006.

Listening to my baby...



[3]
Taking a break from nursing to peek at the camera!

By Molly Remer

Before my son Lann was born, I felt prepared for frequent nursing, comfort nursing, and for experiences nursing in public. I started attending LLL meetings when I was 26 weeks pregnant and was also involved with the local Breastfeeding Coalition. I fondly imagined cuddling my baby as he nursed away. I also imagined proudly nursing in public wherever necessary—doing my part to increasing public perception of nursing being a normal part of everyday life, not secret or shameful.

After newborn Lann’s first growth spurt had passed, I was surprised to learn that he had other ideas about what our breastfeeding relationship would be like. Lann did not like to comfort nurse—he nursed when hungry and stopped when full. He would become upset and cry loudly if the breast was offered and after the first few sucks he would get milk that he wasn’t looking for. He also vastly preferred nursing lying down in our own bed. In public, he would refuse to nurse at all or would nurse a bit, choke on a mouthful, and become upset and not continue. He would often choke while nursing in any setting (though less frequently while lying down at home) and become very distraught and turn away from the breast—sometimes even pushing at me with his hands. These experiences were very difficult for me. I felt embarrassed to go to LLL meetings with a baby who cried and fought the breast, despite clearly appearing hungry, but then would nurse happily in the car! I did not have the cozy, peaceful nursling I imagined (though I was comforted by the fact that at home, lying down, when he was hungry, he certainly loved to nurse!).

These challenges continued for three and a half months, before I finally accepted that listening to my baby’s needs applied to these situations as well! Even though Lann didn’t breastfeed the way I had imagined or in the way I thought he needed to breastfeed, I still needed to listen to what he was telling me. Things became much less stressful when I finally realized this. If we were in a public place, I went to the car to nurse him and generally averted the crying, gagging/choking on milk episodes. At friends’ houses, I would ask to go lie down in another room. I made sure to “tank him up” before we left our house and planned to be home again within approximately three hours so we could nurse in our comfortable surroundings. I stopped being embarrassed that my baby wouldn’t nurse the “right” way and accepted that his style was different than what I had anticipated. After Lann went through a very challenging nursing strike at 5 months old due to a cold, I also learned that it often worked to nurse him standing up and moving around and I successfully employed this strategy in other settings after the nursing strike had passed. I also learned that if I let him unlatch to look around frequently while nursing in public (something I had never expected to “allow” before he was born), we could usually manage to complete a nursing session without struggling.

Interestingly, Lann’s disinterest in comfort nursing and his preference for private nursing both faded away when he was about 10 months old. He began to enjoy nursing “just because” or for comfort when distressed.

He started to nurse around other people and in public places with ease and continued to nurse happily and frequently until he was two and half and weaned during my pregnancy with his brother, Zander.

I loved the feeling of being able to meet multiple needs in one interaction with Lann. Even during our early “conflict” over where and how to nurse, I loved the experience of feeling both of our bodies suffused with peace as we lay down together to nurse. I also deeply cherished the times we eventually spent comfort nursing. I felt so sad to be missing out on those times when he was younger, that every time toddler Lann asked to comfort nurse, I felt like it was a true gift.

(Hindsight lets me know that I was struggling with oversupply/overactive letdown with Lann, an issue that has re-arisen with each baby, but one that I’ve managed much better each time!)

1. <http://www.l11i.org/>
2. <http://www.l11i.org/nb/nbnovdec06p253.html>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/smileysleepy.jpg>

Lynda M O (2011-07-07 01:46:56)

Thank you for sharing these stories; my relationships with my two nursing babies were learning experiences for the whole family each time.

Guest Post: Overcoming Stigma: A Film Story of Stillbirth, Miscarriage (2011-07-08 07:35)

This post is republished from the blog of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation:

[1]Overcoming Stigma: A Film Story of Stillbirth, Miscarriage

by Jhene Erwin

In 2007, with one two and half-year-old child, my husband and I decided it was time to have another baby. My first miscarriage occurred at six weeks. My second was at almost eleven weeks. The grief was alarming but I did what many women do - my best to quietly “carry on.”

Simple tasks became challenging. I’d stand in the cereal aisle frozen by the choice between honey-nut and plain. The question, “Paper or plastic?” should not make a person cry. Maintaining this external “everything-is-ok” façade was agonizing.

It was the tension - between façade and grief - which inspired my [2]short film about miscarriage, stillbirth and early infant loss. “The House I Keep” is a story of transformation during one woman’s struggle to come to terms with the loss of her child.

[youtube=[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVS9kUp60j0 &w=560 &h=349](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVS9kUp60j0&w=560&h=349)]

My hope is that this film frees people to talk more openly about what remains stubbornly taboo. When people hear about my film total strangers let loose regardless of location: be it the gym or in a grocery store. Their stories are always deeply moving and I am honored by their candor.

What do they say?

They tell me there is no appropriate place to mourn this loss. While family and community are powerful sources of comfort, the silence on this subject prevents women from accessing that healing power. Consequently, the mental health of not only mothers but also their children suffers.

Consider this stigma magnified around the globe. In some developing countries, superstitious beliefs lead women to be blamed for a stillbirth or miscarriage. Some communities feel more people will die if the bereaved mother is in contact with other women and children. Subsequently, access to the healing power of family and community becomes greatly restricted. As we move forward with the important work of improving global maternal and newborn health, the long term effects of stigma on the mental health of women and their surviving children cannot be over looked or marginalized.

Talking heals. Women want to feel reassured that their child's too-short life had a place in the world and that the world is different because of that child's absence. You can help mark that life by just being willing to talk and listen. The landmark [3]Lancet Stillbirth Series released in April is already impacting the worldwide perception of stillbirth.

In my own community of Seattle, Washington, in the United States, nonprofits that counsel women postpartum will be using my film as a starting place for open discussions. The ripple effect of community efforts, combined with the work of organizations including PATH, UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, will undoubtedly lessen the stigma of a tragedy for which no woman should ever be held accountable.

By letting women talk openly, and by listening, our communities around the world can help women – including me - begin to heal.

More to Explore

- [4]Our Work in Maternal, Newborn, & Child Health
- [5]Our Stillbirth series on the Foundation blog
- More Posts on:[6] Maternal, Newborn, & Child Health
- [7]Lancet Stillbirth Series

Jhene Erwin is an actor and filmmaker. She lives in Seattle, Washington with her husband and six year old daughter.

[8]The Bill & Melinda Gates [9]Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. Safeguarding the health of mothers and young children is one of the world's most urgent priorities and a core focus of the foundation's work; especially in the developing world.

1. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/foundationnotes/Pages/jhene-erwin-overcoming-stigma.aspx>
2. <http://www.thehouseikeep.com/>
3. <http://www.thelancet.com/series/stillbirth>
4. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/maternalnewbornandchildhealth/Pages/default.aspx>
5. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/foundationnotes/Pages/default.aspx?filter=Lancet+Stillbirth+>

Series&filtertype=Campaign&pager=0

6. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/foundationnotes/Pages/default.aspx?filter=Maternal%2c+Newborn%2c+%26+Child+Health&filtertype=Topic&pager=0>

7. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/foundationnotes/Pages/default.aspx?filter=Lancet+Stillbirth+Series&filtertype=Campaign&pager=0>

8. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/foundationnotes/>

9. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/foundationnotes/>

Our Bodies, Ourselves: New Edition Cover (2011-07-08 22:33)

In April, I responded to a call for readers' photos for the cover of the newest edition of the women's health classic, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. I sent in a profile picture that my friend Karen took of me at a river a couple of summers ago (same Karen who took my pregnancy pictures and then recently, Alaina's pictures). I was completely shocked to find out this month that my picture was selected to be one of the 52 women on the cover. I could hardly believe it! OBOS is such a classic women's health book and so devoted to women's empowerment that I'm just as pleased as pleased can be to be a tiny little part of that herstory now :) (And, a very tiny piece it is, as I appear in the lower left corner and part of my head is cut off ;) I don't care though, I still think it is cool to be on it!)

THE BESTSELLING CLASSIC,
INFORMING AND INSPIRING WOMEN ACROSS GENERATIONS



OUR BODIES, OURSELVES

"Within these pages, you will find the voice of a women's health movement that is based on shared experience. Listen to it—and add your own." —GLORIA STEINEM



[1]

My original little story and picture is [2]here:



[3]

"When I think of OBOS, I think, Empowerment! OBOS means knowing your body, your personal power, and taking control of your health care and your reproductive rights. OBOS is an essential voice for women."

1. <http://www.ourbodiesourblog.org/blog/2011/07/the-new-our-bodies-ourselves-cover-is-here>
2. <http://www.ourbodiesourblog.org/blog/2011/06/13689>
3. <http://www.ourbodiesourblog.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/molly.jpg>

"You'll Miss This..." (2011-07-14 10:12)

We've all seen or heard it happen. A mother voices a complaint about something she is not enjoying about the mothering experience and someone else returns with a comment that disguises itself as "words of wisdom," but is perhaps actually a thinly veiled criticism of the other mother: "well, you know, they grow so fast and you'll miss them when they're older!" I am curious if anyone actually finds this a helpful remark or thinks it is an original sentiment. While probably originally born from good intent, "you'll miss this" based comments have become trite and cliché. While perhaps voiced in a good-intentioned way and theoretically used to bring perspective, to bring a proper sense of gratitude, and as an honest reminder to count your blessings (which are many and true), I think the shadow side and darker purpose of this "bringing perspective" is to silence, to muffle, to dismiss, to deny, and to shame. How often do we use this phrase against ourselves in exactly this manner? Perhaps we are nursing the baby and longing for it to fall into a deep enough sleep so that we can sneak away and "get things done." And then, pop! there it is, "You shouldn't be trying to get up, you'll miss this when they're older."

Well, guess what, there are plenty of things I'm confident I won't miss when they're older. I know that I will miss breastfeeding. It is one of the deepest and richest joys of my life. The breastfeeding relationship is an intimate, interdependent, and profound connection that is irreplaceable. However, I also know in my heart that I will never miss having a toddler twiddle, pinch, stretch, and pick at the other nipple while nursing (and, frankly, I seriously doubt that any woman on earth has spent her twilight years wishing someone was stretching her nipple out to superhuman lengths). I'll miss the sounds of little boys as they spin elaborate imaginary scenarios out in their play. I will not miss having to shout to be heard over this play while trying to carry on a reasonable, adult conversation with my husband. I'll miss having warm little bodies snuggling with me. I won't miss having someone sit on my back and chew on my hair while I try to type an article

(yes, this has happened more than once!). I could go on, but you get the drift. There are pieces of parenting that are profoundly disagreeable and it is okay to name them, rather than shame yourself or others in the name of imaginary future regret. Additionally, the subtext that women with grown children spend their days pining for earlier years rankles with me. Personally, I really hope my own mother doesn't waste a lot of her time wishing I was still a baby. I like to think she enjoys my company now!

Children grow and change. It is what they do. And, we want them to, really, and we want to continue to grow and develop ourselves as well, not to remain stagnated in memories of an earlier day or paralyzed by concerns about future regrets. A good friend once said something that has had a profound impact on me: "I parent the child in front of me." Not the future adult, or, the memory of the baby or the toddler.

Here are some scenarios carrying a genuinely meaningful message: My older son is then three. He takes off his shirt at an event and a playgroup friend with adult children stops and her breath catches a little. She says, "Oh, Molly, make sure you take a picture of that little boy belly." That night, I make sure to take one. Watching my sons playing in a wading pool one year, my mom says, "just look at the back of his neck and his powerful [tiny, narrow] shoulders." I take another picture, not just with my camera, but with my heart. I visit my friend with a newborn baby. Even though I have my own treasure of a 5 month old with me, I ask my friend if I can touch the back of her newborn's head. When I touch him, tears fill my eyes. All of these are genuine expressions of the original heart of the "you'll miss this" message—pay attention and remember to look. We don't need a trite platitude that summarily dismisses the potent intensity of mothering small children day to day, we need to see other mothers in the act of remembering. Those moments with our babies and our children that bring a sweet, deep ache to our hearts in the moment, those are our clues that we are savoring and cherishing their lives as they unfold. The tears that may spring unbidden to our eyes in the future when another mother's child makes us remember this potency of early childhood, the very fact that we look back with such a pang, means that we did a very, very good job with the savoring—if we hadn't savored, we wouldn't know how to feel so deeply later.



[1]
Here's what I'm savoring :)

"It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it myself."

—Joyce Maynard

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Jamie (2011-07-14 10:46:34)

I really like this. I try to tell my self this all the time and it just makes me feel bad that I am tired of being up all night every night with a sick baby or feel guilty that i just want them to behave or those time that I feel like a horrible mother for wishing the baby would hurry and grow out of the stage of taking his diaper off nonstop and peeing on EVERYTHING

lovenotesmama (2011-07-14 12:05:06)

What a great post. It's totally OK to love some moments and really dislike other moments of parenting! What we know is that the love for our kids is unconditional - it never wavers! People have a habit of saying that "you'll miss this" or some form thereof to me a lot. And I think that just saying that means you're actually *missing* the moment right now, because you are already regretting its transience. But everything changes - living constantly with that regret is wasted time! I like "This too shall pass." I try to remember this when we're in the midst of the challenging moments (LOL @ your monkeys all over you) and I also remember this in the midst of the powerful, beautiful moments. Which makes me even more grateful for those moments of powerful shoulders or little bellies or edible thighs (my favorite).

Julie McMinn (2011-07-14 10:22:29)

Very good thoughts! I am with you on the nipple-stretching and also potty-training—not my favorites. And you and I understand more than some about wanting our children to grow. When you have a "forever" baby—one that will never have the chance to grow and change, but remains concreted in history and our hearts as "the baby we lost", you appreciate the milestones of accomplishment in the other children even more. So thanks for the reminder to glean the truth from the cliché, and move on!

Another Rachel (2011-07-14 10:32:38)

YES! Agree and so beautifully said! Thank you.

enjoybirth (2011-07-14 22:24:23)

This is a good point. I may say this to moms, without even thinking. Hmm, maybe if I say, "I miss that." or I miss parts of having a newborn. I try to think to myself, "embrace this moment" when I am capturing something like that little boy belly.

Lucy@dreamingaloud.net (2011-07-15 02:28:52)

Perfect, perfect, you speak my thoughts precisely. I really resent that "you'll miss it" comment. I love my children dearly. And I love my own life. And there are things I will not miss. Well said, I'll be sharing this one on my Dreaming Aloud FB page.

Sunday Surf | lovenotesmama (2011-07-18 05:21:22)

[...] post at Talk Birth on that trite "You'll miss this" statement made me want to cheer, and then cry, [...]

Hope (2011-07-14 17:24:46)

Well said! I completely agree that it is so dismissive of the problems a mom is facing when people say this. I also dislike when it is implied that the problems parents face with older kids are somehow worse. An older lady I worked with used to say, "When they're little they step on your toes but when their older they step on your heart." I used to get so mad when she said that in such a dismissive way, as if my physical exhaustion didn't measure up to her worrying about her teen's choices. Not better or worse, just different! All that being said I have to admit that a few times lately I've caught myself wanting to say, "You'll miss this," to another mom. I stopped myself and then wondered, where did THAT come from? Now I realize I was talking to myself. Hopefully I'll remember that the next time I'm tempted to say it!

Karen (2011-07-15 04:48:07)

I'll admit it, I've said it! *hangs head in shame* but I realize now as I question why I've said it, that it was for ME I was saying it. I DO miss it. I adore my kids at the age they are, we have a blast together and they have grown into amazing people. Sometimes though, when I'm surrounded by babies I miss them at that age. I think what I really wanted to say, the times I have said it, was I MISS THAT, not YOU'll miss it! Of course we won't miss the struggles, the sleepless nights or the tantrums, but looking back, somehow most of those things don't seem so bad anymore, especially when you miss the sound of a giggle, the look of wonder on their faces, or the dimples on your babies chubby arms. I think it's so important to be there with your kids at whatever age they are, it would be so sad to only enjoy them when they are little, there are so many wonderful experiences throughout watching your child grow up. Only sometimes does that pang of missing little ones make me open my mouth and say things like "you'll miss this" After thinking about it , from now on, I've vowed to say "I MISS THAT!" instead! :)

talkbirth (2011-07-15 09:53:32)

I wasn't thinking of people like you at all, Karen! I guess I didn't explain it well, but when I wrote this I was thinking specifically of when mothers *currently in the same stage of mothering* use it against each other (or themselves) in a shaming sense—so, a mother on a FB group or on a message board or at a playgroup says something about wishing she got more sleep or wishing Little Johnny would grow out of some stage, and another mother smugly responds with, "well, I know that *I'll* miss the sleepless nights and sticky fingers when they're older!" (subtext: you're a sucky mother and me, *I've* got it ALL figured out!)

MaryAlice Spurgeon (2011-07-15 10:21:33)

I do miss 'that'. I'll remember to say what I mean in the future. My young friends continue to teach me.

Karen (2011-07-15 10:32:44)

Oh ok! Well, I still feel like I got a lot from what you wrote and do think that sometimes mothers with older children tend to think they have "one up" on younger mothers b/c they have "been through it". Maybe they do have some experience, but each family/child is unique, so what might have been the perfect experience for one mother might not work for someone else. I try to be careful not to come off as a know-it-all who has BTDT! :)

talkbirth (2011-07-15 10:36:34)

Well, it is also true that mothers with older children will use it in a dismissive way too and I guess I was also talking about that too (I just re-read my post!—but, they weren't on my mind as much as the mother-to-mother, "I get it, you don't" sort.)

talkbirth (2011-07-15 10:39:02)

Mary Alice—you might not remember the moment, but you are the friend I reference who made the "boy belly" comment that I used as an example of the RIGHT way to make these sorts of remarks :)

MaryAlice Spurgeon (2011-07-15 22:08:38)

Thanks, Molly. Watching you and other friends/family members with your little ones makes me 'flash back' to when my children were small. There's a lovely amnesia that allows me to remember the very best times. I have to dig around for a memory of anything unpleasant now. And, little boy bellies are especially adorable.

Motherhood and Anarchy (2011-07-16 13:53:04)

thank you all for this writing, it has helped me. I am at a stage of nostalgia when I am missing my babies...

jessica (2011-10-04 15:53:19)

Being the parent to littles and big simultaneously I have to say that for *me* it is much, much harder to parent the bigs (assuming generally average lives for everyone involved). It is just that you have so much less control (over the

environment) and the risks are so much higher. I was never tied up in knots over how to handle toddler tantrums or bedtime challenges, but the amount of life energy I've spent wondering, worrying over dating dilemmas, drugs/alcohol, driving perils, even just the child's ability to function successfully as an adult (will they pay their bills? be able to get past their anxiety and reach for their dreams? etc) is just so much... I don't know... *more* than the toddler in front of me yelling "I wan't cookies!" repeatedly. I do understand that some people have a harder time with infants and young children - they struggle with the neediness, the lack of reason, etc. I guess don't assume that when someone says that that it is coming from a place of dismissal - I can't imagine that when you wanted to say that to another mom that it you had any intent of dismissing her at all? Maybe it is from an honest place of love and support and empathy for the entire parenting journey.

Allison (2011-10-03 06:30:30)

Great article Molly! I've been getting the tears in my eyes when I see a newborn. There are a lot of things I will miss dearly and a lot that I won't miss at all. Screeching in the car will definitely not be missed.

Lori Adams (2011-10-03 18:13:00)

I fear I may have been doing pretty close to what you are talking about! But my friends are graciously indulging me, as my one and only child moved away from home a scant two weeks ago. It is still fresh, and I guess I am desperate for them to enjoy theirs while they are small, because, trite as it sounds, the time does indeed go thisfast. I am so glad I came across this article—it is a gentle reminder that will serve me well before I get too obnoxious!

jessica (2011-10-04 15:56:35)

Oh yikes! I've never heard anything like that before (I'm pretty dense so it's quite possible it was said to me and went over my head). I am sad that it would be used like that. I agree with others that I will focus on the "I miss that" instead - because regardless of the intent it is absolutely true that I can't say what anyone else will miss. Thank you!

Shauna (2011-11-15 09:34:38)

I've been thinking about this post since July (lol!) because I don't see that comment in the way that you describe at all. I see it really totally different. I have been thinking about this for months and have wanted to write my own thoughts on the subject but never did. Here is a post that mimics my feelings towards what I think and feel, even though it does not directly relate to what you are saying. <http://magicalchildhood.wordpress.com/2009/07/10/savor-it-anyway/>

The Blessingway Connection (2011-07-15 08:15)

Last weekend, I attended a mother blessing/blessingway* ceremony for a dear friend. I have mentioned her here before, because she is on a pregnancy-after-loss (PAL) journey after having given birth to a tiny boy after 16 weeks of pregnancy last July (my own Noah was born at 15 weeks in Nov., 2009). My friend's baby had been due in January, the same time my own "rainbow baby" was born. So, I've spent the last year being a couple of months "ahead" of her on the very complicated and emotional path of pregnancy after loss. And, now she is preparing to give birth to her own new baby girl any day now. It felt very, very good to come together with friends to celebrate this strong mama, her journey, and her babies. I so clearly remember the feelings of "feeling the fear and doing it anyway" when it came to things like doing a belly cast, having pregnancy pictures taken, and, yes, having a blessingway—each of these commemorative events was tinged with a fear of possibly being a sad memory instead of a happy one. I remember worrying, "what if I look back at my blessingway and have to think, 'but I was so happy.'" These thoughts aren't necessarily rational or logical, but they featured prominently in my PAL experience. And, while I truly loved being pregnant and I was happy much of the time, I was so glad for it to be over and for PAL to be behind me. This is the feeling I had for my friend during her ceremony as well—pretty soon PAL will be over and you will be so

glad to leave it behind and snuggle your new baby girl (I'm also very familiar with the companion fear of, "but what if my PAL journey ends with another loss? I'm not holding my new baby yet...")

For many mother blessings, I pick out a quote or a poem or a reading to give to the mother. Considering how much writing I do in my life, it is kind of surprising to me that I usually choose to give women other people's words rather than creating something new for them (I do say original things aloud to them during the gifting time, in which we each take turns kneeling before the mother and telling her what she means to us). After some looking for perfect quotes, I knew that for this friend, I needed to write something to her from my heart and not from someone else. So, on one of my womb labyrinth postcards, I wrote the following:

Nine months ago you entered into the long, challenging labyrinth of pregnancy after loss. You have walked with courage, strength, and grace. You have been SO BRAVE. And now you prepare to take the final step on the path—to greet the power and intensity of your birthing time. All of your love and hope and fear will become concentrated on the task of opening your body to welcome your precious new daughter into your arms and your life. She is coming. She is okay. And, sweet mama, so are you. This is a time of openness and surrender—in body, mind, heart, and soul. May you give birth with confidence, strength, bravery, vulnerability, and wild sweet joy and relief.



[1]
(c) Sincerely Yours Photography

One of the special things about blessingways is the sense of connection with other women. The ritual space creates an opportunity to speak and share with each other with a depth that is often not reached during day to day interactions (and definitely not usually at baby showers!). This winter, my friends and I started having quarterly women's retreats. One of my reasons for wanting to do so was to bring some of that sense of celebration and power from our Mother Blessing ceremonies more fully into our lives and

to celebrate the fullness and completeness of women-in-themselves, not just of value while pregnant. For these same reasons, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in women’s spirituality—while birth work is still important to me, I feel very ”called” to celebrate, work with, acknowledge, and respect the full cycle of a woman’s life.

”We are mothers, sisters, family wrapped in different cloth,
standing under the same wide sky
and we’ve come to the very end of our silence
together we’ve found our voice
and it is loud
and it is beautiful
and it sings a love song for our children”
–[2]Mothers Acting Up



[3]
(c) Sincerely Yours Photography

For a general description and explanation of mother blessings as well as musings on ”connection,” see my friend Hope’s [4]post.

Out of respect for Native traditions, I continue to try to refer to these ceremonies as "mother blessings." However, my local circle of women has been holding these ceremonies for each other for about 30 years and they have "historically" been referred to as "blessingways." Blessingway remains the term that feels most right to me—most genuine, authentic, and, truly, is part of my own life's "traditions," so a lot of the time, I feel like it is okay for me to continue using the word, rather than trying to force myself to use mother blessing instead.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sincerely-Yours-Photography/163051267048017>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mothers-Acting-Up/17777750755>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sincerely-Yours-Photography/163051267048017>
4. <http://tryitfor30days.wordpress.com/2011/07/09/connected/>

Mother Blessing Quotes « Talk Birth (2011-07-15 15:16:15)
[...] Comments « The Blessingway Connection [...]

Mother Blessing Quotes (2011-07-15 15:16)

For the mother blessing ceremony [1]I wrote about recently, I also went through my [2]birth quotes collection (which is becoming quite extensive!) and picked out some special quotes that reminded me of things I wanted to share with the birthing mama-to-be.

"For each of us as women, there is a deep place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises...Within these deep places, each one holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us...it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep."
—Audre Lorde

While some people have said they don't like the use of the word "dark" in this quote, I think it is perfect. In the darkness is where wonderful seeds take root and grow.

"It is so easy to close down to risk, to protect ourselves against change and growth. But no baby bird emerges without first destroying the perfect egg sheltering it. We must risk being raw and fresh and awkward. For without such openness, life will not penetrate us anew. Unless we are open, we will not be filled." —Patricia Monaghan

Since, as I mentioned, this recent ceremony was for a PAL-mama, I included the above quote. While I don't really like the image of the egg being destroyed (if I relate the quote to birth), I feel like this is a good quote to describe the bravery involved with consciously undertaking the pregnancy after loss journey.

I also included my top two favorite quotes about birth and pain. The first:

"When I say painless, please understand, I don't mean you will not feel anything. What you will feel is a lot of pressure; you will feel the might of creation move through you. Pain, however, is associated with something gone wrong. Childbirth is a lot of hard work, and the sensations that accompany it are very strong, but there is nothing wrong with labor." —Giuditta Tornetta

I love the part about the might of creation. How is that for a bold summation of the potency and power of birth. While some people object to the inclusion of the word "painless" in it, to me the takeaway message of the quote is that birth is too big for the word "pain" to adequately contain or describe it. We need more

and better language for it! And, that brings me to the second quote:

“So the question remains. Is childbirth painful? Yes. It can be, along with a thousand amazing sensations for which we have yet to find adequate language. Every Birth is different, and every woman’s experience and telling of her story will be unique.” –Marcie Macari

From the same author, two more quotes, this time describing the transformative power of birth:

“Birth is an opportunity to transcend. To rise above what we are accustomed to, reach deeper inside ourselves than we are familiar with, and to see not only what we are truly made of, but the strength we can access in and through Birth.” –Marcie Macari

“A woman in Birth is at once her most powerful, and most vulnerable. But any woman who has birthed unhindered understands that we are stronger than we know.” –Marcie Macari

And, then, a helpful reminder, that birth is our gateway to conscious, active, full-on parenting for the rest of our lives!

“The natural process of birth sets the stage for parenting. Birth and parenting mirror each other. While it takes courage and strength to cope with labor and birth, it also takes courage and strength to parent a child.” –Marcy White

And, finally, I shared the quote that to me was a touchstone describing my feelings about Alaina’s entrance into my world. She did this for me.

“A baby, a baby, she will come to remind us of the sweetness in this world, what ripe, fragile, sturdy beauty exists when you allow yourself the air, the sunshine, the reverence for what nature provides...” – Sarah Werthan Buttenwieser (in *Literary Mama*)

Speaking of that sweet baby of mine, here she is at my friend’s mother blessing ceremony. I’m so glad she’s here! And, my heart is full for my friend as she is so close to her own fresh baby girl. I’m glad my daughter is going to grow up within a circle of strong, empowered, healthy women and girls and I love taking her to blessingways with me, knowing that I am socializing her into a model of womanhood and life that values the feminine :) (and, yes, that is a bindi on her forehead).



[3]

(c) Sincerely Yours Photography

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/15/the-blessingway-connection/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/category/quotes/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/268936_239414599411683_163051267048017_922237_6749432_n.jpg

Women and Knowing (2011-07-16 14:15)

I read an interesting article by anthropologist and birth activist, Robbie Davis-Floyd, in the summer issue of [1]Pathways Magazine. It was an excerpt from a longer article that appeared in Anthropology News, titled "Anthropology and Birth Activism: What Do We Know?" In the conclusion, Davis-Floyd states the following:

"Doctors 'know' they are giving women 'the best care,' and 'what they really want.' Birth activists...know that this 'best care' is too often a travesty of what birth can be. And yet on that existential brink, I tremble at the birth activist's coding of women as 'not knowing.' So, here's to women educating themselves on healthy, safe birth practices—to women knowing what is best for themselves and their babies, and to women rising above everything else." –Robbie Davis-Floyd

I believe that every woman who has given birth knows something about birth that other people don't know. I also believe that women know what is right for their bodies and that mothers know what is right for their babies. I'm also pretty certain that these "knowings" are often crowded out or obliterated or rendered useless by the large sociocultural context in which women live their lives, birth their babies, and mother their young. So, how do we celebrate and honor the knowings and help women tease out and identify what they know compared to what they may believe or accept to be true while still respecting their autonomy and not denigrating them by characterizing them as "not knowing" or as needing to "be educated"?

Additionally, with regard to education as a strategy for change, I'm brought back to a point I raise in my community organizing class: People often suggest "education" as a change strategy with the assumption that education is all that is needed. But, truly, do we want people to know more or do we want them to act differently? There is a LOT of education available to women about birth choices and healthy birth options. What we really want is not actually more education, we want them to act, or to choose, differently. Education in and of itself is not sufficient, it must be complemented by other methods that motivate people to act. As the textbook I use in class states, "a simple lack of information is rarely the the major stumbling block." You have to show them why it matters and the steps they can take to get there...



[2]

She knows

1. <http://pathwaystofamilywellness.org/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

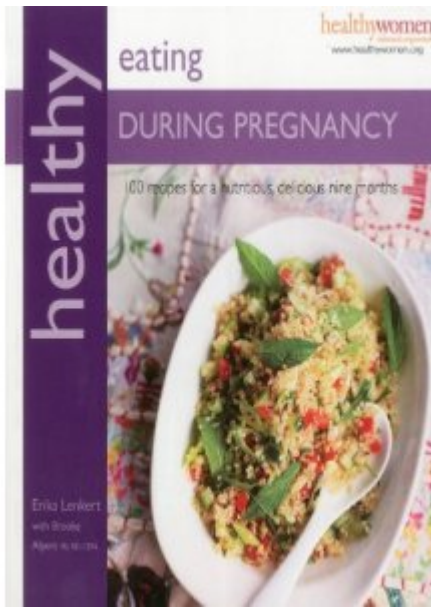
♥♂►The Perfect Birth◀♀♥ (2011-07-17 11:41:37)

You're right. We say "education", but like so many things in life, that's not enough– and not what we really mean. I think we merely hope that education will propel people (ready people?) into the next logical step that would involve acting differently... which would, from the point of view of the person shouting "educate!", be BETTER for the people involved. How many times though in life, in various subjects, have we "educated" like we were beating a dead horse, only to have people nod in one second and say and act contrary in the next? It's puzzling. So, how do we motivate people to act, beyond the education?

Birth and the Women's Health Agenda « Talk Birth (2011-11-14 15:59:39)

[...] to their practices) and changing those sometimes feel like an insurmountable task. As I've written before, much of the time it isn't that we actually want women to know more, we want them to act [...]

Book Review: Healthy Eating During Pregnancy (2011-07-18 12:09)



[1]
Review: Healthy Eating During Pregnancy
By Erika Lenkert with Brooke Alpert
ISBN: 978-1-906868-41-3
Softcover, 144 pages, \$16.95
[2]<http://www.healthywomen.org>

Reviewed by Molly Remer

Co-written by a cookbook author/food writer and a nutritionist (both of whom are mothers), Healthy Eating During Pregnancy offers 100 recipes with the nutritional needs of pregnant women in mind. The first part of the book contains specific nutrition information for pregnant women, including a short section on coping with morning sickness, as well as good information about the micronutrients and macronutrients that are essential for growing a healthy baby. The remaining two thirds of the book is a collection of tasty recipes, organized into categories beginning with breakfast and concluding with desserts. The book is very colorful and contains many appetizing photos.

Though marketed specifically for pregnant women, the recipes have appeal to anyone. My family enjoyed the zucchini and parmesan frittata and the "totally tasty breakfast muffins" and we look forward to trying more of the recipes in the future.

This book would be well-placed in the lending libraries of midwives, doulas, or childbirth educators. Anyone in need of healthy recipe ideas during pregnancy will enjoy exploring the new book Healthy Eating During Pregnancy!

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://www.amazon.com/Healthy-Eating-During-Pregnancy-Nutritious/dp/1906868417/>

2. <http://www.healthywomen.org/>

Telling About It... (2011-07-19 23:02)

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

-Mary Oliver

I saw this quote on [1]another mother's blog yesterday and loved it. To me, it sums up the reason why I continue to write this blog. I have so many things going on in my life and I often wonder why I bother to continue writing blog posts. Does it matter at all? Aren't I just adding to the general cacophony of voices and wild, information overloaded chaos of the internet (and even of the birth activist sphere in general). I feel almost compelled to do so though. And, really, the reason why is to tell about it. There is a lot to be astonished by in one's everyday life. While I can get distracted and frantic and lose my present moment orientation, I do pay attention a lot. To a lot of things. A friend told me at my blessingway that I live my life with more intention than most people she knows. I considered that to be a great compliment—and, I also think I live my life with a lot of attention. Sometimes that attention may seem like excessive navel-gazing and very often it is excessively self-critical (and, isn't that being self-centered, she says critically and self-evaluatively?), but I feel like I am a generally observant person, paying attention to my place in the world and the manner in which I walk through my day. And, the paying attention is intimately involved with then wanting to tell about it—here, on my blog :)

Here's what feels astonishing about my life today. Six months ago today I gave birth to a little treasure. I feel like every day for the past six months I've experienced astonishment that she's here—where did you come from, I ask her. She's magic. I can hardly believe it has been six months already and yet, it also feels like she's been here forever. And, guess what? My friend who has been waiting for her rainbow baby to be born, gave birth to her own precious daughter this morning. So, now our journeys share one more point of connection.

I really, really wanted to write an effusive blog post about my baby today in honor of her sixmonthabirthday. However, the end of the summer session is wrapping up and I had many papers to grade instead. I spent naptime working on them with the plan to reward myself with a blog post after finishing my grades (though, since I planned to grade 22 papers and 11 exams, you can see that something was awry in my calculations!). She woke up of course, after my only having graded 11 papers, and needed me to hold her rather than to write about her and so now I am here at almost midnight, needing to go to bed rather than to gush. Anyway, my happy, BIG, smiley, adorable, friendly, charming, unflappable, cooperative, sitting-up-and-working-on-craw ling-and-pulling-up girl is six months old today. Her head smells like apricots and flowers. She loves watching her big brothers. She loves watching chickens and cats. She loves watching me. While I've written a lot about what an easy baby she is, she also likes to be held and toted along pretty much everywhere I go—maybe some people would define that as "high need" (i.e. "I can never put her down!"). I, however, think that is biologically appropriate baby genius. She is very grabby and reachy lately. My mom described holding her like "holding a bag of snakes," because she is constantly on the lookout for something to snag. She

has begun pushing up on surfaces so that her legs are standing (but her hands are still on the surface—so, not pulling up exactly, but pre-pulling up). She LOVES to find and eat paper and tear up catalogs. She laughs like crazy if I make monster noises on her belly. We tried to give her some solid food, but she gags and spits it out, even though she appears captivated by other people eating food. We still do EC (elimination communication) and she sleeps all night with a dry diaper. She always wakes up with a smile. She thinks Zander is hilarious, but isn't very comfortable with him holding her. When Lann holds her, she snuggles down on him with total trust (even though he staggers under her weight—she weighs almost 18 pounds now and he weighs under 50). I love having a baby while also have a 7.5 year old. He carries her to the car for me. He watches her while I take a shower. He can hold her while I cut up vegetables or do something food-prep related that needs two hands. It is awesome.

Despite grabbiness, she strokes and pats faces very gently. It is very sweet. She likes to ride in a pouch on my hip checking out the action. She likes to nurse best while lying down in bed—she tucks her feet up on my legs and puts her hands on either side of my chest. She has beautiful skin and beautiful eyelashes and her eyes sparkle with the delight of life. She is chubby and not petite. She is my most relaxed, settled baby—she rarely gets scared, hurt, or upset by things. She's tough! When something makes a loud noise, she jumps, but then looks at me (to gauge possible severity) and then gives a big grin (the boys would both cry). If she tips and bumps her head or gets bonked or scratched by something, she usually doesn't cry about it—my older son would have screamed and my younger son would have had a fit of rage. Her temperament is very steady and even. She has started to get more displeased if you take something away from her that she wants though—sometimes that provokes a protest. She also growls to herself while she plays with toys lately—she loves to empty a basket of toys and will sit on the floor working on this task for about 30 minutes. We think the growling sound is from listening to the boys play. I cannot believe how fast she is growing and changing. I try to take mental snapshots every day—her soft hair, her round cheeks, her little neck when her head is bent looking at something, her dark watchful pools of eyes, her careful and still clumsy hand movements and swiping grabs, her big gumbly smiles, her eyes fluttering closed at the breast. I pay attention. I am astonished. And, I tell about it.



[2]

Telling you all about it...

1. <http://lovenotesmama.wordpress.com/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Lynda M O (2011-07-21 09:37:46)

Your thoughtful writing provides your children with a tangible memory of this special time of their lives. I thank you for sharing it with me as well here on your blog.

talkbirth (2011-07-22 16:34:09)

Thanks, Lynda! :)

Barbara (2011-07-20 06:17:16)

This is a magical testimony to a mother's love for her daughter! And I also am completely amazed every day by the

”presence” of this baby girl (and I feel like I’ve known a lot of babies in my day). She’s everything described here and more – her spirit shines through with clarity and a radiant energy that brings delight to us all.

talkbirth (2011-07-20 12:30:06)

I know—I kept thinking of other things to add after I posted! She’s a treasure :)

Cathy Glueck (2011-07-20 13:22:35)

I’ve not ready very many blogs but this one was beautiful. My daughter’s wedding reception is this weekend and this has brought back so many of the same feelings I had about her when she was this age and weight (although she was 18 lbs at 4 months). It’s hard to believe that she is a married lady now but I’m grateful for every picture I took and every ”mental snapshot” so I can remember her sweet baby days. Those memories really come in handy the most in their trying teenage years, ha! Keep writing and sharing your life with the rest of us and ”telling about it”!!!

Regarding Balance « Talk Birth (2011-08-18 07:36:07)

[...] something important—but hard to identify—that I get out of it (I think it is both about telling about it and playing my music), in the scope of my life right now, it really needs to slip to the bottom and [...]

Eightmonthababy! « Talk Birth (2011-09-26 13:12:13)

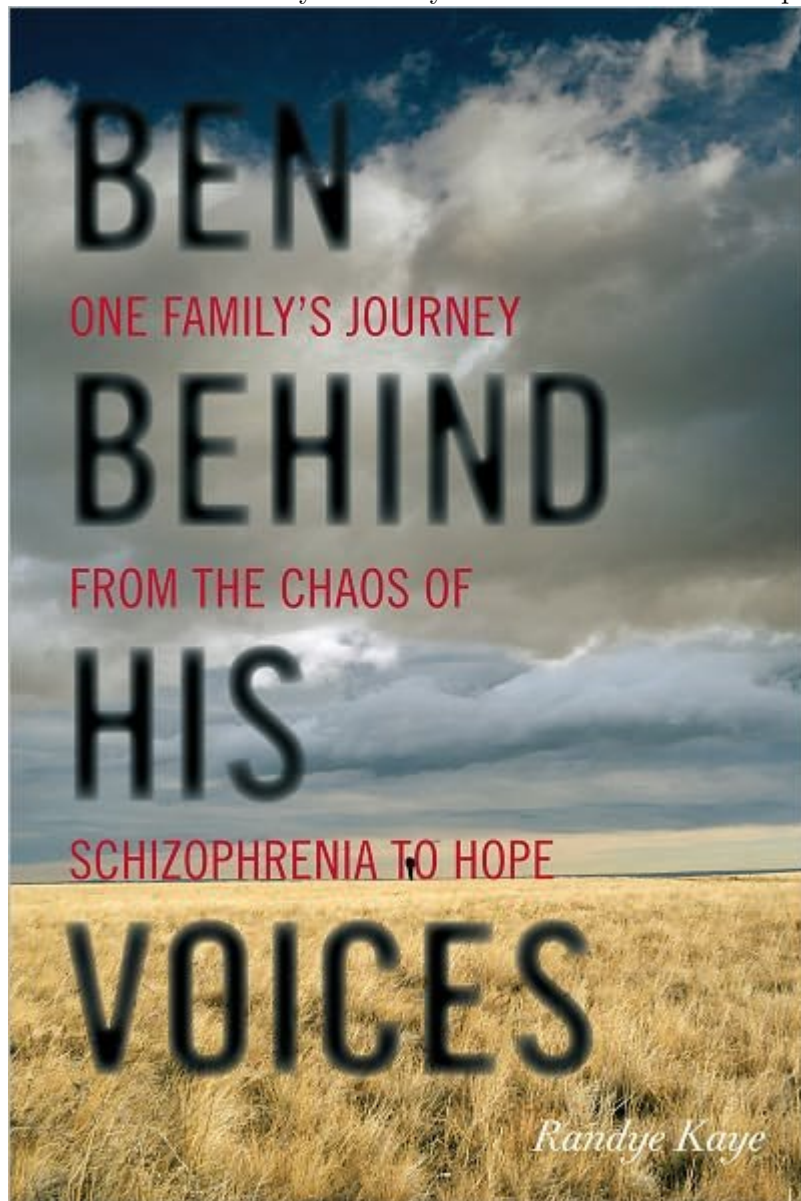
[...] has experienced lots of changes since my 6 month update post. She has four teeth now! (Brushes them herself before naps and at bedtime.) She crawls all over the [...]

Midwife’s Invocation « Talk Birth (2011-12-05 15:04:39)

[...] as previously noted, this is exactly why I write and blog—to tell about it. GA _googleAddAttr(”AdOpt”, ”1”); GA _googleAddAttr(”Origin”, ”other”); [...]

Book Review: Ben Behind His Voices (2011-07-22 16:21)

Review: Ben Behind His Voices: One Family's Journey From the Chaos of Schizophrenia to Hope



By Randye Kaye[1]
ISBN: 978-1442210899

[2]Rowman and Littlefield Publishers

Hardcover, 320 pages, \$26.95; Kindle, \$9.99

[3]<http://benbehindhisvoices.com/>

Reviewed by Molly Remer

Ben Behind His Voices is a mother's poignant memoir of her young adult son's struggle with paranoid schizophrenia. It was instantly engaging and kept my attention throughout. The author, Randye Kaye, is a radio personality and voice actress and the mother of two children. When her oldest child, Ben, is 17 he begins exhibiting increasingly strange, confusing, and disturbing symptoms. After being shuttled through a

variety of diagnoses and treatment providers while steadily becoming worse, he is diagnosed at age 21 with schizophrenia. Randye is obviously a devoted parent to Ben and a committed advocate for her son and the book chronicles a roller coaster of experiences with psychiatric hospitalizations, medication challenges, bright spots of hope, relapses, group home placements, and readjustments of expectations. Perhaps most touching are her struggles to accept the "new normal" of her family's life and to let go of her old expectations and hopes for her son, while still celebrating the caring and worthwhile person he is, albeit one who is coping with a formidable disability.

A particularly nice feature of this book are the textboxes inset throughout containing facts and information for family members of those with mental illnesses. Much of this information is based on Family-to-Family peer support materials from the [4]National Alliance on Mental Illness (Randye becomes a trainer for this program).

Though written about very emotional events, there is a dispassionate quality to the writing that kept me from feeling fully connected to the narrator.

A fascinating character study as well as an exploration of family adaptation and coping skills, *Ben Behind His Voices* would be a particularly interesting read for students in psychology, social work, or human services as well as anyone who has a family member with a mental illness. As a mother of young sons, *Ben Behind His Voices* was a difficult book to read—Randye's thoughts and reflections about her own son as a young boy, made me look at my own little guys with a pang of "what if."

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://benbehindhisvoices.com/>
2. [http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com/Catalog/SingleBook.shtml?command=Search&db=%5EDEB/CATALOG.db&eqSKUdata=1442210893&thepassedurl=\[thepassedurl\]](http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com/Catalog/SingleBook.shtml?command=Search&db=%5EDEB/CATALOG.db&eqSKUdata=1442210893&thepassedurl=[thepassedurl])
3. <http://benbehindhisvoices.com/>
4. <http://www.nami.org/>

Rainy Wedding (2011-07-25 11:26)



[1]

Wedding Day, 1998. Cake is a homemade cheesecake also made by Lynn :)

Today is our thirteenth wedding anniversary. We planned a lovely outdoor ceremony at Meramec Spring Park and this time thirteen years ago, it was pouring down rain. While we still got married outside (in the dirty old pavilion rather than by the Iron Works as we had imagined), our wedding site was actually evacuated later in the afternoon!

When we returned from our honeymoon in August, there was a copy of a newspaper article in our mailbox. Our family friend, Lynn, had a newspaper column at the time and she'd written this beautiful poem about our wedding day:

Rainy Wedding

by Lynn Saults

We cannot know what will bring perfection.
They had supposed that it would be a day
of exalted blue heights,
a tree-columned cathedral day
in the loftiest, most elegant
sapphire domed summer.

Sun blessing stone,
birds blessing sky
and in the gentle benevolence of that day
the bride and her ribboned maidens
would drift, pale and clear as flowers
toward the welcoming arms of her groom.

To wed in the blue and white
softness of a summer morning
would be perfection.

But the day hung like an iron bell
tolling rain, rain, rain
all down the metalled sky.
The stones stood dark and forbidding
as thunder upon the earth,
and all our tinsel plans
for a bright and delicate day
were washed away in gray cascades
above and below us.

Yet, there was another kind of beauty there:
Small boys slid like silver minnows
in that heavy green light between the trees.
Garlanded little girls yearned
toward the coming of the bride,
tugged at their mothers' hands,
pulled at their mothers' hearts
with the brevity of their innocence.
Family and friends gathered
and sheltering, made a chapel
of their bodies and faces and wishes.

There, in the unplanned darkness,
was unlooked for wonder,
joy beyond ornament,
song beyond instruments.

At last the bride came and like a white flame
blazed among her maidens,

in brilliance more stern and starlike
and vastly more magnificent
than the ribbons and confections
we had planned for that day.

She blessed us as she passed,
toward her waiting bridegroom
in the unadorned steadfastness of her love,
and in the wake of that radiance
we turned to one another,
a silent hymn of faces
now wet with more than rain,
having glimpsed in that lambent bride
the flaming sun heart of human love.
Small, fallible, mortal,
we could not have dreamt or designed such a day.

It was Perfection.

I read this poem every year on our anniversary and it makes me cry every time! Before we got married, people would say things in semi-ominous tones like, "just wait. After you get married, everything changes." We still laugh about this—nothing changed except for that it felt really fun to be married instead of just dating :)

I occasionally read articles that say things like, "marriage is lots of hard work" or, "parenting and marriage are both very, very tough." I've truly never felt like our marriage was hard work. And, while I daily feel that parenting is tough and emotionally very complicated, I would never describe my relationship with my husband as "tough" or difficult in any way. I actually feel like he is my oasis of calm, peace, and love in what sometimes feels like lots of chaos. He is steady and even and I always feel as if I can be completely and totally real with him—there is no feeling or thought or experience that is too awful to share with him. He has seen the places where the "[2]meat has been chewed off my bones" and he still says I'm the greatest person in the world. So, while it is fully possibly that being married to ME is tough—I'm pretty intense—being married to him is not. It is gentle and sweet and whole.



[3] After the ceremony and before the rain re-started, we were able to get some pictures in front of the Iron Works after all.



[4]
Self-portrait taken on his birthday this year.

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/mmwedding.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/04/29/the-almost-died-remark/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/268635_2229302302071_1533263426_32416143_3969272_n.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/267482_2171386214205_1533263426_32335345_2604576_n.jpg

Lynda M O (2011-07-25 12:18:52)

Well, that made me cry as well, for all the world's love and its possibilities.

Cathy Glueck (2011-07-25 12:50:13)

Wow, what a great and beautiful thing your wedding day must have been and what a moving and beautiful thing that poem is. I have always said that the wedding day is just a day, it's the rest of the marriage that is more important and it seems like that is the case for you and Mark!

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-07-27 18:25:29)

Aw. Hope you had a good anniversary!

Barbara (2011-07-25 11:44:01)

That poem still makes me cry, as well – and I also cried when I saw that cake! I'm grateful to Lynn for all of those tears.....

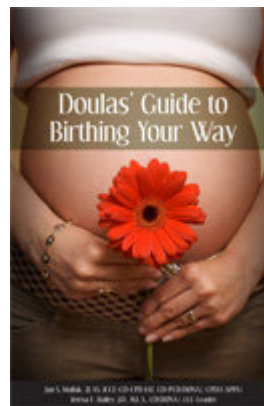
MaryAlice Spurgeon (2011-07-25 11:40:37)

Molly, I'm delighted to learn you intended to marry at the place that brought my family to this area. One of my ancestors worked at that very spot and is why I exist here and know you. Your wedding story and photos made me smile. Lynn's poem brought happy tears to my eyes. May you and Mark spend every day of your lives together being as happy as you looked then and as you look in your recent photo. <3

Louis Chilton (2011-07-25 22:18:42)

I remember Mark catching us "decorating" his car and he chased after us, but we made a clean get away in our buddies waiting vehicle.

Book Review: Doulas' Guide to Birthing Your Way (2011-07-27 07:54)



Book Review: Doulas' Guide to Birthing Your Way[1]

Authors: Jan Mallak & Teresa Bailey, 2010.

ISBN: 978-0-9823379-7-4

\$15.37 - \$21.95, 188 pages, softcover

Hale Publishing: [2]<http://www.ibreastfeeding.com/>

Reviewed by Molly Remer

Geared towards pregnant women, Doulas' Guide to Birthing Your Way is written in a simplistic manner using short, direct sentences. While in some ways this approach makes the information readily accessible, it can also feel unsophisticated in places. However, while the writing style is basic, the content is not. The Doulas' Guide is a book that really "goes beyond" the information traditionally offered in birth preparation books, covering topics many parents typically may not have considered prenatally such as natural birth vs. birthing naturally, physical comfort preference styles, visualization, being a savvy consumer, blessingways,

and taking pictures of the placenta. The information is refreshingly practical and hands-on. Chapters cover the critical importance of the human environment, "five arms of doula support," birth preparation, one chapter for each stage of labor including separate chapter for immediate postpartum, a section about cesarean birth and VBAC, and a breastfeeding chapter. There is an excellent section on postpartum care including a PPD symptoms chart. I was a little taken aback by a blithe comment, "Just think of it as an alternate birth route!" regarding cesareans.

Doulas' Guide contains good, helpful snapshots throughout the text. Dads will like the plethora of labor support skills and ideas and the accompanying photographs. The book advocates preparation of a "birth vision" and includes examples at the end of the book (including cesarean birth options).

The variety of checklists, key questions, tables with reference information, bullet points, and pictures keep the pace of Doulas' Guide to Birthing Your Way snappy and digestible. This book covers lots of ground and packs a lot of information into under 200 pages!

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. http://www.ibreastfeeding.com/catalog/p235/Doulas&%2339-Guide-to-Birthing-Your-Way/product_info.html
2. <http://www.ibreastfeeding.com/>

Separation Anxiety? (2011-07-27 15:40)



[1]
Who is that looking at me?

I'm starting to notice some signs of what is traditionally called "separation anxiety" with Alaina—she starts to call/complain if she can't see me, turns away from other people if she doesn't want someone else to hold her, flops around at night until her hand is touching me, that kind of thing. Anyway, it made me think of the following quote that I had saved to post about it. From an article by the same name by Naomi Aldort in the May/June 2011 issue of Natural Life:

”By nature, there is no such thing as ‘separation anxiety.’ Instead, there is a healthy need of a child to be with her mother. Only a deprivation of a need creates anxiety. If we honor the need for as long as their child needs it, no anxiety develops. The concept ‘separation anxiety’ is the invention of a society that denies a baby and child’s need for uninterrupted connection. In this vein, we can deprive a child of food and describe her reaction as ‘hunger anxiety,’ or we can let her be cold and call her cries ‘temperature anxiety.’”

I loved this. What a strange society we have that defines a baby’s normal and wholly biologically appropriate need to be with its mother, as ”anxiety.” I always call a baby that wants to be with its mother a smart baby, not a baby that has ”separation anxiety.” :)

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

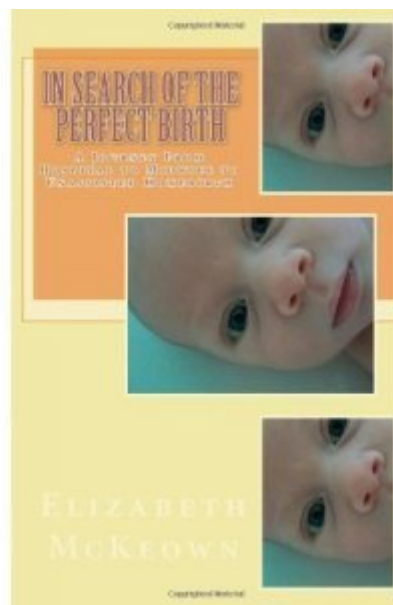
Amy (2011-07-28 06:28:54)
Great quote! Thanks for sharing :)

talkbirth (2011-07-31 18:51:07)
No, I wouldn’t really call that normal. It sounds like there is something going on that needs to be addressed. I’m not sure how–blaming or shaming will probably just make it worse. Perhaps a counselor would be able to help.

Hubert (2011-07-31 18:10:29)
Very nice quote, and right. I always felt that way when I wasn’t a parent. My son was well loved and never left with anyone who he was a baby. He had normal fits when he didn’t get what he wanted. Now he is twelve and things have not progressed ”normally”. He still sleeps with us, when we try to break him of this and tell him he has to sleep in his own room, he will stand by the door quietly. I will wake up a couple of hours after I believe he is asleep in his bed and find him standing inside our bedroom. With very dark circles under his eyes, shivering like he is freezing (we have no air conditioner). Now, right off hand I would not call that healthy need of a child to be with her mother. your article says that only a deprivation of a need creates anxiety. If we honor the need for as long as their child needs it, no anxiety develops. Ma’am we have honored that need to be with his mother for twelve years, now, normally an honor roll student, he refuses to go to school. If his mother needs to go to the market he screams and throws a terrible fit and will not allow her to leave. When she gives in he is very rude and mean to her, causing very embarrassing scenes. This boy has a lot of anxiety. would you call that normal?

afriendindeed (2011-08-19 11:37:43)
I am very saddened by your son’s situation. I am praying for peace for him. The depth of his anxiety really pains me. I hope you are not offended by my offer to pray for him. Sometimes it’s the only answer. May God bless you richly.
A Friend Indeed

Book Review: In Search of the Perfect Birth (2011-07-28 07:23)



Book Review: In Search of the Perfect Birth[1]

By Elizabeth McKeown, 2011

186 pages, paperback.

ISBN-13: 978-0615481708

[2]<http://www.theperfectbirth.com/>

Reviewed by Molly Remer

Written by a mother of three, *In Search of the Perfect Birth* is an unassisted childbirth manifesto. It chronicles the author's journey through the births of her children—the first born in the hospital, the second a planned homebirth ending in hospital transport, and the third an unassisted birth. Elizabeth is strongly convicted that unassisted birth is the right choice for most women, though I feel she is also fairly respectful that other women's experiences may or may not lead them to the same conclusion. This book is not a do-it-yourself guide to UC, but is an exploration of one woman's experiences in healing from birth trauma and taking full responsibility for the birth of her next child. I was fascinated by her conclusions that her own birth trauma wasn't healed through unassisted birth itself, but through the decision to take charge of her own birth care.

The book is pretty rough around the edges and could use some more editing and polishing. There is a stream-of-consciousness feel to the writing style that can be a little confusing and disjointed.

The author makes some excellent points with regard to the restrictions that can be placed on women's birth freedoms by midwives also, noting wryly that if you choose the "middle ground" you may well end up with all the downsides of being told what to do with your own body, but "without the opiates that make it bearable!" Elizabeth's homebirth turned hospital transport experience was pretty horrific and it was difficult to read about. She also writes with candor about the degree and intensity of pain she experienced during all of her births (including the UC).

In Search of the Perfect Birth will be of particular interest to women who already support unassisted birth and to women who have experienced birth trauma and are seeking resolution in future natural childbirths. It is an honest and heartfelt story.

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://www.theperfectbirth.com/Aboutthebook.html>

2. <http://www.theperfectbirth.com/>

♥♂▶The Perfect Birth◀♀♥ (2011-07-28 14:09:03)

This was an extremely fair review, Molly, and I really enjoyed it. Thank you so much for your input– and I humbled by it. :) I honestly can't disagree with anything you said.

I just want to grind my corn! (2011-07-29 08:33)



[1] *Hopi women grinding corn* If you know me in real life (or if you are my husband), you've probably heard me use the phrase, "I just want to grind my corn." I've been meaning to write a blog post about this idea for quite some time and when I posted my essay about "[2]playing my music," I received a comment from a friend saying, "I worry I'm not accomplishing what I'm capable of doing, but I know that ditching my kids and simply pursuing my 'own thing' would not be fulfilling." When I read that, I knew that the time for my corn grinding post had come. When I use the phrase, I'm envisioning some kind of ancient tribe in which the mothers are working together grinding corn, while their babies are tied to their backs, and the older children play nearby. While I do not literally want to live in primitive times (those corn grinding mothers also probably had a lifespan of 35 years!), I feel as if mothering is "meant" to be a communal activity rather than a solitary one and I feel like babies and children are meant to coexist alongside their mothers as they go about their daily work. Rather than intensive, child-focused, total-reality mothering, I think babies are happy watching their mothers work and participating in the daily rhythms of the home and world with no need for the mother to be "rolling around on the floor in the glitter in her sweatpants" (see the book *Perfect Madness*) while serving as a one woman entertainment committee. This age of individual mothers caring for individual children in isolation from the larger "tribe," is a social and cultural anomaly when we look at the wide scope of human history. Likewise, meeting for playdates isn't what I mean either—I mean more task-oriented, corn grinding work, than that.

In the book *Perfect Madness*, the author articulates what I mean when I say I want to grind my corn—the need for something in between staying at home and working full time (basically, that working and mothering simultaneously is the most natural and fulfilling approach, but our society does not make that combination often feasible or comfortable):

Which means that 'natural' motherhood today should know no conflict between providing for our children (i.e. 'working') and nurturing them (i.e. 'being a mom'). Both are part of our evolutionary heritage; both are equally 'child-centered' imperatives. What's 'unnatural' about motherhood today, if you follow Hrdy's line of thinking, is not that mothers work but rather that their 'striving for status' and their 'maternal emotions' have been compartmentalized. By putting the two in conflict—by insisting on the incompatibility of work and motherhood—our culture does violence to mothers, splitting them, unnaturally, within themselves...For they show that the so-called 'choices' most of us face in America—between more-than-full-time work or 24/7 on-duty motherhood—are, quite simply, unnatural. They amount to a kind of psychological castration: excessive work severs a mother from her need to be physically present in caring for her child, and excessive 'full-time' motherhood of the total-reality variety severs a mother not only from her ability to financially provide for her family but also from her adult sense of agency...

This is what I'm talking about. There needs to be a third, realistic option (and not just for women. For men too. For families!). I have often expressed the desire to find a balance between mothering and "personing." I'm seeking a seamless integration of work and family life for both Mark and myself. An integration that makes true co-parenting possible, while still meeting the potent biological need of a baby for her mother and a mother's biological compulsion to be present with her baby. Why is the work world designed to ignore the existence of families?

So, returning to my friend's remark, I truly feel as if there is another option between "not accomplishing" and "ditching my kids." And, I feel like after a LOT of work and trying, I've found somewhat of a balance in my own life between "personing" and "mothering." It is possible to mother well AND also do some other things that feed your soul. It doesn't have to be an either/or arrangement. And, we don't do our kids any favors by not pursuing some of our own passions when they can watch and observe us being vibrant, active, complex, complete human beings (not saying that it isn't "complete" to be a SAHM, but that if you DO want to pursue some other non-kid projects, kids learn good things from watching that happen!) I used to feel like I was going to die—metaphorically speaking...like my soul was getting squashed—if I wasn't able to pursue some of my personal goals. I don't feel that way anymore (and I still spend roughly 90 % of every week with my kids and 99 % of my waking and sleeping hours with my baby!).

At one point when my first son was a baby, I was trying to explain my "trapped" or bound feelings to my mother and she said something like, "well what would you rather be doing instead?" And, that was exactly it. I DIDN'T want to be doing something instead, I wanted to be doing something AND. I wanted to grind my corn with my baby. Before he was born I had work that I loved very much and that, to me, felt deeply important to the world. Motherhood required a radically re-defining of my sense of my self, my purpose on earth, and my reason for being. While I had been told I could bring my baby with me while continuing to teach volunteer trainings, I quickly found that it was incompatible for me—I felt like I was doing neither job well while bringing my baby with me and I had to "vote" for my baby and quit my work. While I felt like this was the right choice for my family, it felt like a tremendous personal sacrifice and I felt very restricted and "denied" in having to make it. With my first baby, I had to give up just about everything of my "old life" and it was a difficult and painful transition. When my second baby was born, it was much easier because I was already in "kid mode." I'd already re-defined my identity to include motherhood and while I still chafed sometimes at the bounds of being bonded, they were now familiar to me.

I become fully certified as a childbirth educator in that year after my second son's birth (provisionally certified in 2005 and he was born in 2006) and another feeling I struggled with was the sensation that I had all of this change-the-world birth energy that was being stagnated or blocked somehow. I felt like I had become a birth educator in order to change the birth world, to transform the birth culture in the US, and in

my own small corner of the world I could not make the kind of impact I envisioned making. That is when I started writing and found satisfaction in reaching out to the wider world in that manner (I explored how that benefited me in the [3]music post already).

Now, with Alaina, while I do feel overloaded or overbooked at times, in general I feel like I have found a better balance than with any of my other children. I continue to teach college classes in person and online and while it is tricky at times, so far it is working pretty well and we're all happy (thanks in no small part to my mom who has been willing to come to class with me to take care of her in between my breaks, so that we experience only small amounts of separation once a week). As she gets bigger and more energetic (read: sleeps less), I'm definitely finding that I will probably have to let something else in my life go in order to continue to be available to her, to my boys, and to my own need for "down time" in the manner in which I wish to be without hurting myself (by staying up too late, not eating well, having stressed out "freak out" moments, etc.). Sadly, I think it is going to be my birth classes that I put on hold and possibly this blog as well (more about this later) .

Speaking of the difference between parenting and personing—I also do not view being a mother as my job. Mothering is a relationship to me and not a job that I perform. Just as it is unhealthy for me to be defined by work responsibilities, it is also unhealthy for me to be defined by relationships. I would never describe my job as being "Mark's wife" or "Barbara's daughter," that gives them too much responsibility for my identity. We are in relationship to each other, but that is not a duty I perform. And, just being in relation to them is not enough for the full expression of my personhood, I need other aspects and elements to my identity. Why am I surprised that I feel the same way about parenting? I want to be with my children, but I wish to be engaged in my own pursuits at the same time. When our lives feel happiest and most harmonious is when exactly this is occurring—when we are all together, but each working on our own projects and "doing our own thing." I envision a life of seamless integration, where there need not even be a notion of "life/work" balance, because it is all just life and living. A life in which children are welcome in workplaces and in which work can be accomplished while in childspaces. A life in which I can grind my corn with my children nearby and not feel I need apologize for doing so or explain myself to anyone.

Continuing my birth art and life theme, I made two new sculptures a couple of weeks ago to express my corn grinding spirit. The first one is a corn goddess sculpture:



[4]

The second is a mama literally grinding her corn and holding her baby :)



[5]

They both make me happy when I look at them and I added them to my living room side table altar/sacred space.

Footnote: I started this post on June 17 and am now finishing it over a month later. Simultaneous corn-grinding and mothering can be very sloooooow.....;)

1. http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall_2004/kadish.htm
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/birthing-the-mother-writer-or-playing-my-music-or-postpartum-feelings-part-1/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/birthing-the-mother-writer-or-playing-my-music-or-postpartum-feelings-part-1/>
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/img_0991.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/img_1009.jpg

The Ragged Self « Talk Birth (2011-08-25 09:34:55)

[...] it all.” They’re my “tribe”—the village that comes to help me grind my corn. I rely on having this time and so when I don’t get it for some reason, I become very ragged [...]

talkbirth (2011-07-30 15:46:05)

The last line about having been working on it since June 17th?

♥♂▶The Perfect Birth◀♀♥ (2011-07-31 10:54:59)

I think that if our society had more of a group spirit, all working toward the greater good together, we would have this kind of parenting environment you speak of. It sounds like something that wouldn’t be in our future, but I think maybe it is. I think we live in isolation because everything has become very self-based. This has a few pluses but some obvious minuses, as you’ve noted. You know, I don’t like much when people think that being a mother is my job. Or when I’m patronized that I do “work” full time, because “that’s hard work too! maybe the hardest ‘job’ of all!” I understand that they are trying to give me credit, but I don’t consider being a mom a “job”, and even though it can be “hard work” sometimes, I don’t “work full time” by being a mother to my children and staying at home with them. I don’t know. I guess I felt that terminology demeans the kids (in addition to sounding patronizing or condescending to me). I don’t need the labels of “work” to feel worthy in what I do with them. Our love and growth is fulfilling in a way that shouldn’t require we sanction or validate it by categorizing it as something reduced to an extended chore or obligation. I think it could and should just be what it is without everyone’s approval, but maybe this is just my little rant? What is interesting is when you do have something you consider your “work” (something like you were mentioning as it relates to your *person*), refer to it when the topic arises, and people think you are talking about

your children. Nope. I am actually referring to other things outside the domestic capacity... :/ :)

Dana (2011-07-29 10:18:49)

I needed to read this today. Thanks so very much for sharing these sentiments. And the last line is so true, haha!

Veronica Messegee (2011-07-29 11:03:50)

This is so healthy. When we become self actualized as women, that is what we model for our children. When we take our focus on being there for the children 24/7 and put it back into perspective where it belongs, we allow the children the room to self actualize, to learn to be responsible for themselves. This type of mothering is empowering and self esteem building. If we spend all our time focused on others, that's what we teach our children they must do to be valuable....which stunts the growing self. Your post was so refreshing to read! Thanks!

Anon (2011-07-29 13:30:44)

Thanks for taking your time and giving this post the thoughtfulness it deserves; what a great topic. I too felt the constraints and hated it and so would do it differently given the chance. I incorporate it into my babysitting/nannying professional life and results show positivity in my relationships.

Shannon Snyder (2011-08-01 21:08:14)

wow, you can't even know how timely your post is for me Molly. I have been trying to start a private practice as a parent coach (www.sosparentcoaching.com), have a personal blog, and stay home with my twins and 2 yr old while husband is gone long hours. I have been bitterly stewing after reading "The War on Mothers." It was the first time that I realized it was a systemic problem – not a "me" problem – that a I can't figure out how to balance it all. And lately, we are needing more income, so I've been looking at going back to work, but my heart -literally, it feels like my heart – doesn't want me to send the girls into long hours at a daycare...and it infuriate me to go back to corporate world as an MSW and "work for the man" so to speak. After dinner tonight I "vomited" up my frustrations to my husband that I can't figure out how to have balance...and that is leading to me to resent him...resent our kids...and while there is no reason for me to be miserable with my life...that's where I'm at...miserable. I just can't figure it out...and I DO believe that by me filling fulfilled by my passions...that that is a gift to my girls...but I,just.can't.figure.it.out.

Integrated Mama « Talk Birth (2011-10-22 09:26:21)

[...] is socially and biologically meant to be at this point—mother goes about her business (grinding corn, perhaps), with baby very close and watching. Unfortunately, this doesn't include typing [...]

Emily (2011-08-24 20:11:11)

Thank you for posting this! I wish I had something brilliant to add but really I feel like what you've written perfectly captures what I've been feeling! I love that I have the opportunity to stay home with my daughter but I've also found it very isolating at times. Community is so important me and my daughter...we both go a little crazy without it. I also know that I'm a better mother and wife when I take time to take care of myself. I feel like the idea that you're only a good mother if you're sacrificing everything plays into all this. It's definitely plays into the balance I've been trying to find!

talkbirth (2011-08-12 15:46:19)

Thanks for commenting, Shannon. Definitely a systemic problem! I think many mothers struggle with similar issues of "balance" and don't really realize that part of the struggle is because we are embedded in an institution/social structure that doesn't value family life, but pays a fairly extensive amount of lip service to the "mothering is the most important job ever!" message

links for thought, July 2011 (2 of 2) (2011-08-30 12:02:01)

[...] Molly Remer at Talk Birth, "I Just Want to Grind My Corn!" There needs to be a third, realistic option (and not just for women. For men too. [...])

Surrender? « Talk Birth (2011-08-24 16:17:46)

[...] when to hold and when to fold. Just as I continue to return to my image of grinding corn, I continue to return to this inner vision of joyfully releasing our butterflies [...]

Homeschooling Today (Part 2 of 2) « Talk Birth (2011-09-30 14:48:52)

[...] to spend time each day on "work" that is not parenting, whether it be grinding corn, or something [...]

working/parenting interview: Molly Remer (2011-10-18 12:01:07)

[...] Molly's relationship with working/parenting, please click through to her lovely post "I just want to grind my corn!" and her follow-up [...]

Jennifer (2011-12-23 08:30:46)

As a sixty-year old mother of 10, lawyer-consultant, corporate marketing communications director, married twice, I will share this bit of hard-won wisdom: you young women have many opportunities for work-family integration due to technology that equal corn-grinding, so be thankful and seize them with imagination. However, subscribe to my theory of the 'horizontally integrated life' and enjoy each moment with good humor and humility. Yes, you will have perfect, well-adjusted children who love you, a devoted husband and passionate marriage, a well-organized and clean home, and a fulfilling career. You just will NEVER have all those things at the same moment in time. When you look back from old age, you will be satisfied, but not really before then. Blessings to you all.

Viktor Kapinus (Induvit) (2011-12-12 10:25:51)

Thank you !

Stacey (2011-12-08 17:18:44)

Through reading this blog I felt deeply connected as I am 26 yes old and a mother of four and a wife of 6 years I have always felt the need to continue on my path and defintly explore more of myself out side of the roll of wife and motherhood and such an emptiness inside feeling like I'm not being myself and achieving much in my life as me I had the feeling of who am I I've lost myself . I suffered slot of irratic moods when my fourth child came along and not having the support of my husband was a major impact on my life my idea of a happy contented family was some what becoming more of a part in my fantasy mind . My youngest is now 3 and I have qualified as a age care worker and next yr studying diploma of aromatherapy I am trying to grind my corn with my children on my back and I strongly feel that it is a necessity to do so for your children and yourself I thoroughly enjoyed your blog and I give many thanks for knowledge blessing to you and may you find the pleasure in grinding your corn always .

Benny (2011-12-08 06:11:35)

I post constantly about needing a commune.. feeling so very torn between my gorgeous son and full-time attachment parenting and following the ever-pulling presence of "the other". The other encompasses (I'll apologize now for being on a computer without spell-check.. that I've totally become reliant upon) everything from taking a shower by myself, to working on the bazillion projects I have on the go, to working hours at the amazing pottery shop that hands me a paycheque. My dear partner and I work completely opposite schedules in order to always have one of us with our son (childcare options in our sparsely populated corner of the world just don't sit well with us at this point) and so we rarely see each other. Living in a communal environment where there would be worksharing, shared toddler-minding.. and, nearest to my heart.. a community of people working together in a way that banishes that intense loneliness of almost-single parenting. Freeing everyone up just enough to be able to pursue the other things that nurture the soul in a different way.. a personal way. You word it so well up there *gazing at your post* that I won't try to paraphrase.

I thank you wholeheartedly for your amazing words. I'll be printing them out to read at those times where I'm pulling out my last hair and rolling in the glitter in my sweatpants.

Kristine Mannion (2011-12-08 07:11:20)

Yes! Yes! Yes!! I have felt just this way for a long time - it's just hard to find a way to create this! How do we mother in a community way when we're all so isolated?? I totally agree that play dates don't cut it - I want more!! I don't want to be a mother alone! And I want to see something that I accomplished at the end of the day - and not have to try to hard to find all my satisfaction in the fact that my children are happy at the end of the day

Jennette (2011-12-08 08:31:38)

This was exactly what I needed to read today! Thank you.

Debbie Penley (2011-12-08 09:37:58)

LOVE this!! My life is sort of divided into "before marriage" and "after kids". I moved to a new state after graduation college, and all my childhood friends and family aren't close by anymore. So all the people and friends I know now know me only with kids. I became "The coach's wife" and "Amber's mom." I wasn't ME, anymore. No one know what I like to do, what I might be good at. I've even heard "You look different today - oh! You don't have the kids with you!" (I have four now, and they are rather attached ;) Anyway, I felt a PHYSICAL need to create, to do SOMETHING that didn't disappear minutes later - laundry always came back, dishes never stayed clean, and toys seem to breed like crazy around here. But when I started playing with clay - polymer first and then ceramic - I could look at the thing I made - an expression from inside of me, and it would stay there, the next day, the next week....forever. (if it didn't get broke!) I could walk past and smile because THAT was something I accomplished. Now I am trying to make a small income with my hobby, and at the same time I'm finding the benefit of touching other people's lives with my art. I don't get time to make a lot - I'm not sure I'll even be in the "green" this year, but I'm supporting my need to do something from deep within my soul. And I'm very thankful to have a husband that has never once complained of the funds I've spent to pursue this passion. I wish we could meet in person - I bet we'd have a ton to chat about while our kids played :)

Kelli Stapleton (2011-12-07 15:47:22)

I sooo get this Molly!

1.8 August

Maternal-Fetal Conflict? (2011-08-01 09:35)

"You will have ideas, options and paths to ponder, but you will also have a sense of possible directions to take as you consider midwifery, childbirth education, or being a doula or an activist. Your path may be circular or straight, but meanwhile you can serve motherbaby while on the path, with a destination clearly in mind." She also says, "I use the word midwife to refer to all birth practitioners. Whether you are a mother, doula, educator, or understanding doctor or nurse you are doing midwifery when you care for motherbaby."
-[1]Midwifery Today editorial by Jan Tritten

Mamatoto is a Swahili word meaning "motherbaby"—reflecting the concept that mother and infant are not two separate people, but an interrelated dyad. What impacts one impacts the other and what is good for one is good for the other. The midwifery and birth communities have used this concept for quite some time and more recently some maternal health researchers have also referenced the idea of the "maternal nest"—that even following birth, the mother is the baby's "habitat."

Critiques of homebirth sometimes rest on a (flawed) assumption of maternal-fetal conflict (which is also

invoked to describe situations with substance abuse or other risky behavior). In the Fall 2007 issue of CfM News, Willa Powell wrote about maternal-fetal conflict in response to an ABC segment on unassisted birth. She wrote:

[quoting the expert physician interviewed for the segment] "The few hours of labor are the most dangerous time during the entire lifetime of that soon to be born child. Because of this, I would argue, all soon to be born children have a right to access to immediate cesarean delivery, and women who insist on denying this right are irresponsible."

This was the only professional opinion in the program on unassisted birth, and he set up a typical expression of an obstetric community belief: the "maternal-fetal conflict." The notion is that there are two "patients", where the mother's desires are sometimes in conflict with the well-being of the baby, and that the obstetrician has a moral/professional obligation to abandon the mother in favor of the baby.

I have to remind myself that Dr. Chervenak is setting up a false choice. In fact, this scenario is a "doctor-patient conflict". The mother wants what's best for herself and her child, but she disagrees with her doctor about what is, in fact, best. Women are making choices they believe are best for themselves and best for their babies, but those choices are often at odds with what doctors consider best for both, and certainly at odds with what is best for the obstetrician!

In the book *Birth Tides*, the author discusses maternal-fetal conflict:

According to obstetricians, the infant's need to be born in what they have defined as a safe environment, i.e. an obstetric unit, takes precedence over the mother's desire to give birth in what doctors have described as the comfort of her own home. It is a perspective that pits the baby's needs against those of the mother, setting 'overriding' physical needs against 'mere' psychological ones. It is rooted in the perception that the baby is a passenger in the carriage of its mother's body—the 'hard and soft passages,' as they are called. It is also rooted in the notion of the mind-body split, in the idea that the two are separate and function, somehow, independently of each other, just like the passenger and the passages. While women may speak about 'carrying' babies, they do not see themselves as 'carriers,' any more than they regard their babies as 'parasites' in the 'maternal environment.' If you see your baby as a part of you, there can be no conflicts on interests between you.

I previously [2]linked to a book review that explores this concept of the more aptly described "obstetric conflict" in even more depth.

I think it is fitting to remember that mother and baby dyads are NOT independent of each other. With a mamatoto—or, motherbaby—mother and baby are a single psychobiological organism whose needs are in harmony (what's good for one is good for the other).

As Willa concluded in her CfM News article, "...we must reject the language that portrays a mother as hostile to her baby, just because she disagrees with her doctor."



[3]
An example of a mamatoto :)

1. <http://www.midwiferytoday.org/>
2. <http://rixarixa.blogspot.com/2009/04/policing-pregnancy-book-review.html>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Listening Well Enough (2011-08-02 19:18)

In honor of World Breastfeeding Week this week, I am planning a series of breastfeeding posts. The following is a modified version of an article that previously appeared in a journal for support group leaders:

Listening Well Enough

by Molly Remer

When I was training to become a breastfeeding counselor, I practiced four helping situations as telephone



role-plays. I was very anxious about receiving [1] the first practice call. In fact, I confess to being so anxious that when one of the women I was working with called for the first time to practice and I missed her call, I actually cried.

After that missed call, I had a dream. In the dream, the woman called to practice. I said “hello,” and received no response. I said hello again. No response. “I’m not able to hear you,” I explained, “you have reached a breastfeeding counselor. Do you have a breastfeeding question?” Silence. I tried again, “Let me tell you a little bit about our services...our services are free, do you want to ask me a question?” Still there was silence, though I was positive that the woman was still on the other end of the line. Finally, I said, “I am not able to hear you, so I’m going to hang up now. Please feel free to call me back if you need to talk.” Finally, the woman spoke. She told me that I had not handled the call well. I asked her how I was supposed to know what to say if the mother wasn’t saying anything. The woman responded, “that mother told you everything you needed to know, you just weren’t listening well enough.”

Obviously, this dream reflected the anxiety I was feeling about being able to “perform” during helping calls. It also showed the fears I had about being judged by the other women as not being warm enough or informative enough (though I was assured by my trainers that the practice calls were to help me feel comfortable, not to judge and test me!). Aside from this analysis of the practical reasons behind my dream, I feel it reminded me of several relevant points:

- A breastfeeding counselor is not a mind reader. While we can ask skillful questions, read subtle cues, and encourage explanation, we cannot intuit everything!
- A helping call is a partnership—no matter how well we listen, the mother must still give some information in order to receive information.
- Breastfeeding counselors do not have to have all of the answers—we listen to what the specific mother tells us, ask for more information if we need it, explore further if we sense it is necessary, and share information with her.
- Breastfeeding counselors need to listen well and respond sensitively to the individual mother, not take a “cookbook” approach and think we have the answer right away.
- Breastfeeding counselors need to listen for the questions not-asked, because they are often the most important. It may take some “detective” work to get to the real question behind her request for help. The first question a mother asks is rarely her real question.
- For in-person interactions, nonverbal communication can tell you so much—“listening” to her body language and other cues is as important as the words she speaks, or doesn’t speak.

Before becoming a mother, I worked in domestic violence shelters answering the crisis line and providing short-term crisis intervention services to women who had experienced domestic violence. Interestingly enough, I find that those types of helping calls were in some ways “easier” to work through than breastfeeding help calls, since there were fewer variations in women’s stories and experiences. With breastfeeding questions, there are an infinite number of variables and an infinite array of mothers, babies, families, and mother-baby dyads. Just as there is no one way to be a good mother, there is no perfect way to help mothers. Breastfeeding is not a by the book procedure—it is an intimate relationship with different dynamics from one nursing couple to the next. Individual mothers and babies respond differently to the same things.

Our main message to each mother is how important she is to her baby and how breastfeeding can be a wonderful part of this. We want to help mothers feel good about being a mother, about meeting their babies’ needs in the way that feels best for them, and to trust their own instincts. We wish to leave mothers with a feeling of self-confidence, acceptance, and encouragement.

Nursing Johnny Depp (2011-08-03 11:15)

While planning posts for World Breastfeeding Week, I realized that I've never posted the essay for which I am most "famous" on my own blog! "Nursing Johnny Depp" originally appeared in [1]Literary Mama in 2009 and an excerpt was used in the 2010 edition of *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* in the section about nursing toddlers.

Nursing Johnny Depp

by Molly Remer

As I put his head to my breast, I feel a distinct thrill of the forbidden."Na-na, Jack Sparrow, Mama," my two-year-old son said, and I put the action figure to my chest without much thought.

As I look down at that tangled mop of dark hair and braided beard, and touch the slightly sneering lips to my nipple, I suddenly feel a bit dirty. Illicit. Inappropriate. As if perhaps I shouldn't tell my husband what I've been doing in my spare time. In nursing that plastic Johnny Depp, I've crossed a line that maybe a good girl wouldn't cross. Or, at least, I've surely violated some social norm or standard of propriety.

Previously an equal opportunity nurser, from that point on I begin to place more limits on what I am willing to nurse. Yes, to the tree frog. No, to the pink rubber rat. Yes, to the hungry-looking little piglet. No, to the Shrek Pez dispenser. I'm teaching my son about limits, I think: Body boundaries, personal space, self-respect, common decency. These are good concepts to master. Or, as I reject nursing a large red monster with a mouthful of sharp-looking teeth, am I teaching him to discriminate on the basis of personal appearance? To withhold love and to be stingy with affection? Or, perhaps more simply, that grimy, but appealing men are more worthy of attention than large blue stag beetles?

Sitting on the living room floor, my little son rocks back and forth with two small toys singing, "Rock, baby. Rock, baby..." I look closer and see that Obi-Wan Kenobi is tenderly cradling Yoda in his arms.

At dinner, eating grapes, my boy picks out a large grape and a very small grape. He is delighted with the small grape, "baby grape! Baby grape!" He holds up the large one and announces, "Mama grape." He sets them on the table and carefully pushes the small grape towards the large one until they are touching. "Dat baby grape have na-nas!" he reports with obvious satisfaction. Later, he eats them both.

Skin contact is a requirement of nursing the inanimate. I used to try to get away with putting the toys to my breast on the outside of my shirt, but that was unacceptably less-than-genuine.

"Dat frog crying, Mama!" he implores. Later, he asks, "Where my frog go?" and I realize it is still

snuggly tucked inside my bra, its purple rubber face nestled comfortably against my nipple.

I've seen a number of snapshots of other people's little girls and boys "nursing" their own dolls, stuffed animals, or dump trucks, but neither of my own sons have been interested in nursing their own toys.

I have suggested it and was met with utter contempt—"Mom, we're BOYS! We don't have na-nas." I am well aware that I look somewhat less than adorable at the park with a plastic alligator latched on.

Playing on the floor with my dad, my son picks up one of my husband's childhood He-Man action figures. Evilyn has bright yellow skin and a revealing metallic bikini.

"Hey!" Zander exclaims, "Dat lady got na-nas!"

He fingers them approvingly and my dad comments blandly, "Well, yes, she does."

Several months prior, at my older son's insistent request, I lovingly fashioned a cloth baby carrier for Evilyn to wear on her back. Her baby of choice is a tiny crocheted "button buddy" monster with googly eyes.

"Look, Mom! She can hold her baby!" The five year old announces. Evilyn's yellow hand is tucked completely through the button hole in the middle of her baby's chest.

I begin to consider that perhaps I am the chief toy nurser because my sons lack enough appropriately endowed female toys. Indeed, my little one is greatly distressed by trying to get one of our Playmobil women to hold her baby. Her stiff plastic arms hold the baby by the wrist at arm's length and this simply will not do.

He holds the baby to her plastic bump of a chest (she has a "uni-breast") crying and fretting, "Hold baby! Na-na baby!"

Eventually I solve the problem by taping the baby sideways across her chest like a bandolier, its head now appropriately positioned at breast level. (Lest it appear my son is only concerned about proper nursing access, earlier this same month I also carefully taped a tiny plastic knife into "Baby Froggie's" beanie baby paw. "Look, Daddy! Baby. Froggie. Got. Sword!")

So, yes, I am still nursing and not only do I nurse my toddler, I sometimes nurse a big orange robot, assorted earth-moving vehicles, Ewoks, squirrel puppets, the occasional pretzel or grape, and more. I turn down an offer of nursing Luke Skywalker (would I have turned down Han Solo, I wonder?) and also of some guy with a half-metal face. "Sorry, honey," I say, "I don't nurse that kind of guy."

Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE is a certified birth educator, writer, and activist. She is a professor of human services, an LLL Leader, and editor of the Friends of Missouri Midwives newsletter. She has two living sons and an infant daughter and blogs about birth at [2]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

Postscript: In the Literary Mama version, the editor decided to take out my last line, which was originally this: "Next time we watch Pirates of the Caribbean and that roguish face fills the screen, I can't help but feel as if Johnny and I share a little secret. And, hey, if my son brings me Orlando Bloom to nurse next

time, I definitely won't say no... ”

I couldn't decide whether to leave it in this version or not and ended up deciding to take it out here too (but then not, since I'm including it in this little postscript!). As a special bonus, this version includes pictures of the actual toys! (I took these last night and amazingly, three years post-events-described-in essay, Evilyn is still wearing her baby carrier and the Playmobil baby is still taped in place!)



[3]



[4]

1. <http://www.literarymama.com/creativenonfiction/archives/2009/07/nursing-johnny.html>
2. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/img_1162.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/img_1163.jpg

Cathy Glueck (2011-08-03 17:48:31)

Wow, Molly, I had forgotten how funny and touching that article was! I looked for it in the new Womanly Art of Breastfeeding but couldn't find it! I love the pictures too, I can't believe how real the Jack Sparrow doll looks. I'm with you, I don't think I'd turn down Orlando Bloom either!!! Great writing!

Breastfeeding Toward Enlightenment (2011-08-04 15:59)

I have a book called [1]The Tao of Motherhood. It is literally the Tao Te Ching for mothers—a translation of the ancient Tao Te Ching by Lao-Tzu, but reworked slightly so that every "chapter" is about mothering and mothering well. It has 81 one to two page "chapters" just like the classic book. A quote from the end of the chapter on selflessness:

"You can sit and meditate while

your baby cries himself to sleep.

Or you can go to him and share

his tears, and find your Self."

I've been thinking lately about writing an article about breastfeeding as a spiritual practice and have been using the same technique lately when nursing Alaina as described in this [2]Mothering article by the same name: "breathing in, I am nursing my baby. Breathing out, I am at peace," etc. (It also reminds

me of my own [3]How to Meditate with a Baby poem.)

On Monday, I was lying in bed nursing her and thinking about the intensity and totality of the breastfeeding relationship—it requires a more complete physical/body investment with someone than you will ever have with anyone else in your life, including sexual relationships. While I don't like to lump the breastfeeding relationship in the same category with sex, because it feels like I'm saying breastfeeding is sexual, when it isn't...though, I since lactation is definitely part of a woman's reproductive functions, I guess maybe it is...but basically my line of thought was that if you nurse a couple of kids through toddlerhood, odds are high that you will have nursed them many more times than you will end up having sex with your husband in your entire lifetime. (This question of function reminds me of a quote I saw today: "Breasts are a scandal because they shatter the border between motherhood and sexuality." Iris Marion Young)

I calculated that so far in my life I've put a baby to my breast more than 12,000 times. Even if I only experienced a single moment of mindful awareness or contemplation or transcendence or sacredness during each of those occasions, that is one heck of a potent, dedicated, and holy practice :)

In the book *Tying Rocks to Clouds*, the author interviews Stephen Levine who has three children and he says:

"Talk about a fierce teaching. It is easier to sit for three years in a cave than to raise a child from the time he is born to three years old." This was in response to a question about whether serious spiritual development is possible when having relationships with others (spouse, children, etc.) I do believe that without having children, I would be less "developed" than I am now—I've said before that having kids can be hard on the self (ego), but great for the soul.



[4]

"Perhaps we owe some of our most moving literature to men who didn't understand that they wanted to be women nursing babies."

—Louise Erdrich, *The Blue Jay's Dance*

1. http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1577310144?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&link_code=wql&camp=212361&creative=380601

2. <http://mothering.com/breastfeeding/breathing-i-am-nursing-my-baby-breastfeeding-spiritual-practice>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/02/23/how-to-meditate-with-a-baby/>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Lynda M O (2011-08-04 17:57:16)

Well-written, honest and thoughtful... thanks for sharing this post.

Jenny (2011-08-06 20:36:04)

I like the part about fierce teaching... and breasts being a scandal. :) Breastfeeding is definitely an intimate endeavor.

peacefulbeginnings (2011-08-10 09:11:36)

Great post, as always!

Motherhood as Meditation « Talk Birth (2011-10-30 12:03:22)

[...] Surrender? Book Review: Mindful Motherhood Book Review: 10 Steps to Joy and Inner Peace for Mothers Breastfeeding Toward Enlightenment How to meditate with a [...]

Health Care or Medical Care? (2011-08-05 08:36)

For quite some time, breastfeeding advocates have been working to [1]change the language of infant feeding to reflect that breastfeeding is the biological norm (and formula feeding is the replacement/substitute). This includes sharing about the "risks of formula feeding" rather than the "benefits of breastfeeding" as well as encouraging research that no longer uses formula-fed babies as the control group or considers formula to be a benign variable (i.e. the babies in the breastfed group of many research projects also received some formula, but since our culture views formula as the "norm," this was not seen as a conflict). I love [2]Diane Wiessinger's example—would we ever see a research project titled "Clear air and the incidence of lung cancer." No! Problem behavior is linked to problem outcomes in other areas of research, so it would be "Smoking and the incidence of lung cancer." However, we routinely see research titles like "Breastfeeding and the rate of diabetes" rather than linking problem to outcome—"Infant formula and the rate of diabetes."

Similarly, "intactivists" (people who oppose circumcision) have pointed out that there should be no need to refer to some boys as "uncircumcised"—being uncircumcised is the biological norm, it is "circumcised" boys that should received the special word/label. (On a related side note, I have written about "pleonasm"—words that contain unnecessary repetition—and birth and breastfeeding in a [3]previous post.)

So, this brings me to another need for a change in the common language—correctly identifying whether we are really talking about "Health Care" or "Medical Care." This was originally brought to my attention by Jody McLaughlin the publisher of [4]Compleat Mother magazine. We have a tendency to refer to "health care" and to "health care reform" and "health insurance" and and "health care providers" and "health care centers," when it reality what we are truly referring to is "medical care"—medical care reform, medical insurance, medical care providers, and medical care centers. As [5]Jody says (paraphrasing), "we do not have a HEALTH care system in this country, we have a MEDICAL care system." She also makes an interesting point about a trend to re-name medical care systems with names that use the word "health" instead:

This is what I have observed: Our local facility was called Trinity HOSPITAL, later re-named Trinity MEDICAL CENTER, and now it is Trinity HEALTH.

In the late 70's and early 80's the discussions centered around the MEDICAL crisis, MEDICAL reform, MEDICAL insurance and MEDICAL care cost containment.

MEDICAL insurance morphed into HEALTH CARE insurance. MEDICAL reform morphed into HEALTHCARE reform.

This is a difference with a distinction.

Health care includes clean air and safe water, enough good food to eat, exercise, rest, shelter and a safe environment as well as healing arts and the availability of and appropriate utilization of medical care services.

Medical care is surgery, pharmaceuticals, invasive tests and procedures. Malpractice tort reform is on the agenda too but no one is talking about reducing the incidence of malpractice, or alleviating the malpractice crisis by improving outcomes.

Why does this discussion belong here? First, I wanted to address it because I have a special interest in our use of language surrounding birth and how that language can impact our birth experiences. Secondly, if we emphasize that birth is a normal bodily process, a normal life function, and not an illness, we need to make sure that we are focused on health care services for birth, rather than medical care services. Personally, I think [6]the midwives model of care can truly be described as health care, whereas standard maternity care in the U.S. can much more aptly be described as medical care.

1. <http://www.bobrow.net/kimberly/birth/BFLanguage.html>
2. <http://normalfed.com/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/03/10/birth-apples/>
4. <http://www.compleatmother.com/>
5. <http://www.compleatmother.com/obama.htm>
6. <http://cfmidwifery.org/mmoc/>

Hope (2011-08-13 16:04:31)

I love this and completely 'get' what you're saying about the language we choose. I feel this way about the word unschooling- the best, most recognizable word we have has the word schooling in it?? That would be like calling nursing 'unformulaing'. A bit of a tangent I know but I wanted you to know that understand and agree. Language is important!

talkbirth (2011-08-13 16:15:48)

Thanks for commenting! Yes—the other thing that is "wrong" with the unschooling word is defining something in terms of what it is not. I like "life learning" best, probably, but it isn't as usually depending on context.

Omega 3 Fatty Acid Supplementation During Pregnancy (2011-08-06 16:01)

This week, I was contacted about some new research being presented at the [1]The Era of Hope conference



in Orlando, FL about omega 3 [2] supplementation during pregnancy reducing the risk of breast cancer for the baby girl in the future. Era of Hope is a scientific meeting funded by the Department of Defense Breast Cancer Research Program (BCRP). I was offered the opportunity to do a short interview with the researcher, Dr. Georgel:

Q. What are some easy tips for pregnant mothers to increase their consumption of omega 3 fatty acids?

A. Select the right type of oil when you go shopping:

- Avoid corn oil and chose canola oil instead. Price is similar and canola proper ratio of omega 3 to omega 6 fatty acids (i.e., 1-2).
- Wild caught salmon is a viable option; avoid farm-raised
- Walnuts and broccoli are also good foods to incorporate into your diet.

Q. Are supplements (i.e. fish oil or flaxseed oil in capsule form) as effective as other foods?

A. Yes, if you select them properly. Read the label; for fish oil, you have to make sure that the amount of omega 3 fatty acid (combined EPA plus DHA) is around 1600 mg/day. If the label says, “essential fatty acids,” it usually contains a high level of omega 6 and low omega 3 (which is not optimal) so you want to avoid those.

Q. Is the effect dose dependent? (i.e. how much do women need?)

A. Yes, 1600mg of combined (EPA plus DHA) omega 3 fatty acids per day.

Q. Since it is World Breastfeeding Week this week, I’d love to tie this research in to research we already know about the role of breastfeeding in reducing a woman chance of breast cancer. Any thoughts on that?

A. Our research indicates that the maternal diet (in utero and during breast feeding) containing omega

3 fatty acids has the potential to reduce the female off-spring's incidence of breast cancer.

I also asked about the following: finally, there is some evidence that supplementation with EFAs postpartum has an effect on reducing the incidence of postpartum mood disorders. Any thoughts on how prenatal supplementation might have a similar impact? But, since Dr. Georgel's research does not explore mood disorders, he was unable to comment on this question. Here are two great handouts from Kathleen Kendall-Tackett about EFA supplementation postpartum:

[3]Can fats make you happy? Omega-3s and your mental health pregnancy, postpartum and beyond

[4]Why Breastfeeding and Omega-3s Help Prevent Depression in Pregnant and Postpartum Women

1. <http://eraohopemediapage.org/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
3. http://www.uppitysciencechick.com/can_fats_make_you_happy.pdf
4. http://www.uppitysciencechick.com/why_bfand_omega_3s.pdf

Diplomats and Breastfeeding (2011-08-09 10:13)

Today I came across an old note about a dream I had a couple of years ago:

I was in a sort of waiting room area with quite a few people in it including a friend and also a Diplomat (distinguished older gentleman with gray hair). Z wanted to nurse and so I picked him up and then turned slightly away from the diplomat in order to start nursing him. My friend said something like, "I see you're trying to hide from everyone. I can't believe you're STILL breastfeeding him." The diplomat then said, "at the Embassy we have an old saying: we work together as smoothly and comfortably as a good latch."

I wonder how world politics would look if breastfeeding mothers were the role models :)



[1]

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

lyndamo (2011-08-09 13:17:56)

Dang, Molly, it's so neat to hear that sentiment come from someone so august. What a huge compliment to your relationship with the nursling. and your friend can hush if there's nothing nice to say...

Wordless Wednesday: Big Latch On (2011-08-10 11:45)



[1]
10:30 on Saturday in honor of the worldwide Big Latch On in conjunction with World Breastfeeding Week



[2]
1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/biglatchon1.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/biglatchon2.jpg>

lyndamo (2011-08-10 22:02:55)

Excellent—I am so proud of each and every one of you. Thank you for standing (sitting) for the rights of baby mothers everywhere. i bow to your resolve.

Hope (2011-08-10 16:12:18)

Hurray! You got pictures even though I was quite bummy and bailed on you, lol.

A Fresh Look at Discipline (2011-08-11 08:49)

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

- Frederick Douglass

I'm cleaning up my "office" area and keep coming across small scraps of things I've saved to read later. One was a notecard sized piece headed, "A Fresh Look at Discipline." I'm not even sure what book it came from. I'm making it into a blog post rather than continue to hang onto the scrap, because then it is stored/saved this way, rather than my needing to keep track of many little papers (this makes sense and seems efficient, right?! I will do this with more scraps as I discover them!)

A Fresh Look at Discipline

(from Playful Parenting...maybe?)

- Cool off
- Make a connection
- Choose a "Meeting on the Couch" over a "Time-out"
- Play!
- Instill good judgement
- Look underneath the surface, at the child's feelings and needs
- Prevent instead of punish
- Know your child
- Set clear limits

I'm also trying to remember to use [1]Naomi Aldort's SALVE formula, which connects with the looking under the surface at the child's feelings and needs. And, today, I started trying something I read about in the book Momfulness which involves a three breath hug—take three deep breaths together while hugging. My second son, Z, gets so upset and mad about things that I tried this with him this morning when he was really mad and having trouble calming down and it helped. I also try to remember (and I did get this from Playful Parenting) that children are seeking connection—sometimes not always in "positive" ways, but the ultimate goal is connection—and you can either promote and encourage that in your interactions, or shut it down. And that, reminds me of a quote [2]Lu Hanessian uses in her talks about parenting: "Ernest Hemingway said it was the world that does break everyone, not life itself, but that most of us get stronger at the broken places." She reminds us that when you do have a "breakdown" with your children, that what matters most is how you repair the cracks.

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF1Pe14SuAY>

2. <http://www.letthebabydrive.com/letthebabydrive/WELCOME.html>

Homeschooling & Feminism (2011-08-12 13:07)

Though I spent my entire childhood as a homeschooler and my own children are also homeschooled, I find I rarely have the urge to write about it. Homeschooling for my own children felt like a "given" to me—I didn't feel like doing any reading or soul-searching about making the decision, as it had been made in my mind before ever even becoming pregnant with our first child. Indeed, the decision was made when I was a child myself. When I had been married for about two years, I remember telling a friend that maybe I wanted to wait a little longer than many people do to have children after getting married, because once I had them, I knew I was in it for the "long haul." There was no, "well, after they're five, then I'll have six hours a day to myself." I knew without a doubt that once I had kids it was going to be a 24/7, 365 gig. She said, "well, you don't have to homeschool you know. You always have a choice." I said, "you know. I really don't have a choice." And, while I do know that in truth one always has choices, homeschooling was a completely foregone conclusion for me. (Breastfeeding was the same way—I didn't "choose" between feeding methods, I was born to be a breastfeeding mother. There wasn't a choice about it for me in my mind—much like if someone had asked me whether I was going to go with "artificial blood" or regular blood in my own body! Hmm, thanks, I'll take what my body makes of its own accord!) Another Molly at the blog [1]first the egg asked a couple of weeks ago for input about homeschooling and feminism—i.e. where are the homeschooling feminist mothers. I raised my virtual hand, but said I don't really write about it and she essentially said, "get started." I'm surprised by how many good "nuggets" exist at my old blog, just languishing and waiting to be mined into new blog posts here and I discovered that I had, in fact, done a little writing about homeschooling there. So, with minor modification, here are some thoughts about homeschooling and feminism...as primarily separate topics though, not intertwined...

[2]Natural Life magazine often has good articles about homeschooling. A couple of years ago, I enjoyed one called "Education is Not Something That's Done to You" and it addresses the (false) assumption that learning "can and should be produced in people." It addresses the assumption that children won't learn on their own, but must be made to learn by being kept in confinement with others their own age day in and day out. She notes that even homeschoolers often fall into the trap of thinking education must be "done to" children. I marked the conclusion to share: "What we should not do is create new schools—be they charter schools, private schools, or home schools—which perpetuate old assumptions of how children learn or who controls children's learning." I have to remind myself of this sometimes—if I start to feel like my own children "should" be doing something specific, or think "most 5 year olds can XYZ..." or if someone asks my boys if they're getting ready to go back to school or remarks on how "is your mommy or your daddy your teacher," that I reject that system—why would I try to use its values to define our experiences?

The other article I enjoyed in the same issue is [3] The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Rocks the Boat: Life learning as the ultimate feminist act. In it, the author quotes social commentator Susan Maushart as asserting that "motherhood needs to be at the center of human society, from which all social and economic life should spin. Society needs to 'acknowledge that bearing and raising children is not some pesky, peripheral activity we engage in, but the whole point,'...Warehousing kids in daycare or school so mothers can get on with what they see as their real lives is not part of that vision, but we need to find ways to ensure economic security for women of all classes, and extend the vision to include fathers as well."

While thinking about feminism and homeschooling, I had an epiphany while facilitating a series of women's spirituality classes. The theme of one week's session was "womanpower." A point was emphasized several times during this class that in feminism the view of power is different. A patriarchal view of power is that of "power over" or control over—you have power, someone else doesn't. You can use your power to control others, or to take their power away, etc. A feminist view of power is of cooperation—"power with" as well as inner power. When you have inner power, you do not need power over someone else. A hierarchical version of power falls away and is unnecessary. I reflected on the times I have heard women say,

"I'm not a feminist, but..." and how I've always *boggled* at that. How can you NOT be a feminist, I'd wonder. Now, I think it is because of a misinterpretation of values—an interpretation that views feminism as wanting to "take over" or to "dominate" men or to prove that "women are better than men." This is a flaw in understanding—using a worldview rooted in "power over" concepts, instead of a totally different worldview or a reinvention of how society operates/what its values are. My epiphany is that this is just like homeschooling—you can't use the "lens" of public school to understand homeschooling and you can't use the "lens" of patriarchy to understand feminism. These different lenses are why you feel like you are banging your head against something when you speak to someone who is coming from a fundamental misinterpretation of the values at work. Feminism and homeschooling both involve alternate value systems to that of mainstream society and a revisioning of social structures into new kinds of systems (healthier ones).

Another issue of *Natural Life* had an interesting article about free schools called [4]U of Free. Some points I liked: "most come with the free school philosophy of solely pursuing an interest, rather than for a degree or other recognition of knowledge. They resist the consumer-driven mentality sweeping traditional schools, where students vie for exam hints and quick solutions to get to the next step, with their ultimate goal being an exit out – their graduation. At Anarchist U, the students are all about learning itself. Without the pressure of exams and marks, students can relax and savor their learning moments."

And on the same topic: "In his classes at U of T, he encounters a chorus of students whose sing-song refrain 'is this on the exam?' puts his pedagogical ideals out of tune. The classroom conductor laments that these U of T students are looking for a quick study guide 'because they need the credit from my class to get the piece of paper.' Instead of enjoying the educational experience, his students are disengaged, shrewdly seeking the quickest route out of the system."

I struggle to cope with this in teaching college classes—I want to work with people who are excited to learn, not people who are trying to just get the grade and get out. I see this as the whole point of homeschooling/unschooling—to create a way of life that involves learning for intrinsic reasons, not extrinsic ones. This was very much true for me as a homeschooler and I carried it over into college—I didn't understand why people were there for other reasons than to learn. It didn't make any sense to me to hear someone recommend a class because it was an "easy A" (but had a teacher who was so boring and so pointless as to make you wish to be unconscious under a rock rather than listen to him any longer). What is the point of an easy A?! Hello! It also didn't make sense to me to have to take classes that I wasn't interested in (and I did have to do this), but I made the best of them by studying the stuff and trying to get it/like it. Someone at our craft camp one year expressed surprise that I was "self-taught" at the classes I was teaching—"so, you just learned this by teaching yourself?" Yes, I did! Why? Because I like to learn stuff—no one has to make me do it or show me how! I study and learn things all of the time, because I like it. I'm a very self-motivated, self-disciplined, self-directed person and credit that to my homeschooled/unschooled background (thanks, Mom!). I long while ago heard a friend say about herself that if, "no one is making me do it, I won't do it/learn it." I thought that was incredibly sad as well as incredibly telling about the drawbacks of our current social methods of education as something that is "done to" people, rather than a self-directed process.

Pulling my two seemingly disparate subjects back together, I return to [5]Wendy Priesnitz' article in which she says this: "In short, schools – and society in general – treat children the way women don't want to be treated. They don't trust children to control their own lives, to keep themselves safe, and to make their own decisions. In this way, feminism and life learning are one and the same because they trust people to take the paths that suit them best. " (emphasis mine)

Isn't that just delicious?

Two pictures from our lives this morning:



[6]
Artists at work!



[7]
Pensively patting

1. <http://www.firsttheegg.com/>
2. <http://www.naturallifemagazine.com/>
3. http://www.naturallifemagazine.com/0906/unschooling_as_the_ultimate_feminist_act.htm
4. http://www.naturallifemagazine.com/0904/U_of_Free.htm
5. http://www.naturallifemagazine.com/0906/unschooling_as_the_ultimate_feminist_act.htm
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/184194_2272609424722_1533263426_32471919_7433658_n.jpg
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/198786_2272723827582_1533263426_32472000_4302308_n.jpg

Hillary (2011-08-14 20:50:39)

Hey Molly, I really appreciate this. I just sent in my letter of intent to homeschool my oldest and I have to tell you that getting to this age of "officialness" has thrown me for a bigger loop than I expected. For years I've been calmly knowing we are homeschoolers—just like you explained (it's so much like breastfeeding in that way), but lately I'm a little unnerved. Between my son (6.5) going through a really restless age and my very active work life I'm a little nervous. On a philosophical level we're life learners all the way, but I'm feeling a little lost at the moment. I want to keep trusting that he's learning all the time (b/c he is!) but I also want to provide him with really great resources. Are you using specific curriculum or how do you frame your days?

talkbirth (2011-08-17 08:20:09)

I hope to do a follow-up post along these lines (eventually!), Hillary! You're not the only person who has asked about it. In the meantime, I like this post from my unschooling friend about "what we do": <http://hopefulinsights.blogspot.com/2010/06/but-what-do-you-do.html>

Lori Doty (2011-08-12 14:28:56)

I've been reading your blog a lot lately and rarely say anything but I'm so glad I read this today. Thank you for putting that last quote there. I often have felt the resulting effects of just that environment and it does indeed feel like I'm slamming my head against a brick wall. I hope to see more posts on these subjects from you. Thank you.

talkbirth (2011-08-12 15:42:07)

Thanks for commenting, Lori! I've been thinking about giving up blogging and then to read your comment today made my day—it is good to know that the things I share do, actually, mean something to people.

Lana (2011-09-28 08:30:56)

Beautiful! I am considering homeschooling myself now that my child is 4. Thank you so much for the encouragement!

talkbirth (2011-09-28 11:07:23)

You're welcome! Thanks for commenting. I plan to write more about homeschooling soon.

talkbirth (2011-09-30 07:58:35)

You're welcome!

Getting a C-Minus (2011-08-17 09:24)

Several years ago, I read a collection of essays called [1]Sons & Mothers that I picked up at the book sale. I



marked this quote from it to [2]

share:

"I also believe that C-minus is the top mark for motherhood. Each generation strives to build faster, cleaner planes, trains, and automobiles and to be better parents than their own. Without this margin for error, there can be no growth, no development" [as a species].

This is hard for me to swallow as a quintessential 4.0 overachiever student type. I like A's dangit! ;-)

On a related note, check out [3]this wonderful post from my homeschooling friend that draws parallels between evolving technology and the not-evolving nature of education. It is just full of awesome.

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1860493556?ie=UTF8&tag=vertfieldfarm-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=1860493556>
2. http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/16700/16767/c_16767.htm
3. <http://hopefulinsights.wordpress.com/2011/08/17/it-was-good-enough-for-me/>

Hope (2011-08-17 14:22:33)

Thanks for linking to me! That quote is great- but I like A's too! ;)

Regarding Balance (2011-08-18 07:33)

My friends and I often reference the word "balance" in our conversations, with a popular refrain being, "it all comes back to balance!" I have several books about life balance—my favorite being [1]A Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal and I feel like I continually engage in a dance with balance in my life, coming into various sensations of balance or imbalance throughout my days. I think I make a mistake in thinking that balance is something I will one day "achieve," rather than dipping in and out of it. I also think that the cry for "balance" can sometimes be a secret code in my brain for, "I will eventually figure everything out and life will be perfect!" So, I appreciate this quote from the book [2]The Mommy Wars, with regard to balance, that eternal question:

”Let me save you some money: In a life with children, balance does not exist. Once you’re a parent, you can figure you’ll be out of whack for the rest of your life...Children are not born to provide balance. children are made to stir us up, to teach us how angry we can get, how scared we can be, how utterly happy, happier than we’d ever imagined was possible, how deeply we can love. Children turn us upside down and inside out; they send us to the depths and heights of ourselves; but they do not balance us. We can’t balance them either, and that’s a good thing, too. They’re finding out how to live in the world, and the most we can do is make them as safe as possible and have a good time with them.”

I have just started teaching (college) again after having a three week break and I’m teaching more classes than I ever have before, not to mention continuing to homeschool my kids and finding scraps of time to work on my own doctoral program. And, Alaina is on the move now—a seven month old baby is quite a lot more work than a younger baby! (Chiefly that she sleeps less and gets into more!) So, I’m in that time of trying to find my footing, my balance, with this new schedule and making sure I...once again...have my priorities in the right order. I have a blog post about ”surrender” that I wrote several weeks ago that I keep waiting to post for some reason, as well as some other musings about keeping my blog posts going or not. I think I will keep writing, but I’m going to just post once per week—on Wednesdays probably (though, I may prep extra posts on that day to go out on different days). I also have plans for keeping them short, less navel-gazing, using material I’ve already written, and that sort of thing. While I really enjoy writing blog posts and there is something important—but hard to identify—that I get out of it (I think it is both about [3]telling about it and [4]playing my music), in the scope of my life right now, it really needs to slip to the bottom and possibly off of my radar entirely for a time.

This conviction that something I’m doing needs to change in order to be ”balanced” (or perfect, as the case may be!) makes me think the root issue is really about control—control of life’s energy and flow—and reminds me of something else I read recently in Thomas Moore’s book, *Original Self*:

As a therapist, I often followed a simple rule...I would listen to a man or woman passionately explain what was going on in their lives and what they needed to do. This strong expression of self-understanding and intention told me a great deal about their suffering. I could see where and how they were defending themselves against life...it always seemed fruitful to explore the direction closed off by insistent plans for improving life.

To free our souls, we may have to be loosened by our suffering and our problems. Rather than look for ways to be further in control, we may have to surrender to the vitality that is trying to get some representation. Rather than understand our dreams, we might be understood by them—reimagine our lives through their challenging images. Rather than get life together, we might allow life to have its way with us and get us together in a form that is a surprise. (emphasis mine)

True personal strength is not to be found in an iron will or in superior intelligence. Real strength of character shows itself in a willingness to let life sweep over us and burrow its way into us. Courage appears as we open ourselves to the natural alchemy of personal transformation, not when we close ourselves by making the changes we think are best. (emphasis mine)

In the following section he also says that, ”when people say they want to change, I hear a subtle rejection of the person they are...even then, a conscious plan for change usually comes from the same imagination that got us into trouble in the first place. A new project of self-transformation may land us back in the uncomfortable wallowing hole we just left.”

Hmm. Not sure what my conclusion is after all this now...to blog or not to blog. I don't think that is really the question.

1. <http://www.reneetrudeau.com/>
2. http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1400064155?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&link_code=wql&camp=212361&creative=380601
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/telling-about-it/>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/birthing-the-mother-writer-or-playing-my-music-or-postpartum-feelings-part-1/>

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-08-19 13:35:25)

I keep hearing you waver on the to-blog-or-not-to-blog question, and I totally get it—it takes way longer to write a post than it seems like it 'should' (at least for me). It's a big investment without a clear payoff (no paycheck, for instance, and no 'credit' in other ways). But I am selfish and get a lot out of feeling connected with you and a handful of other bloggers I care about but have never met, especially given how isolated we feel locally right now. So ... at least stick around on Twitter, please? I jest, sort of: I'd hate for you to fall off my radar entirely, though.

talkbirth (2011-08-20 13:22:12)

Good to know you'd miss me! :) I'm really only talking about taking a break, not quitting entirely. You're right about how long it takes and I often wonder, "why" about doing it—this only started out as a website for my CBE business, it wasn't meant to be a blogging space for me. And, during my last pregnancy it took on much more of an online journal feel for me, rather than serving as an information resource for women. I don't know how I feel about its larger purpose or value. I do know that a LOT of article seeds begin here. I think the solution (at least for the next two months) is quickie, once a week posts. No more philosophizing about my own life/feelings—or, is that personal voice what I have to offer right now? Blah, blah, blah.

Shari (2011-08-22 05:17:52)

What a fitting post...I struggle with the balance of life and know that it will never be the way I want it. I need to go with the flow a bit more and this post's timing is impeccable. Today is my son's first day of school (Kinder, and I really want to home school) and next week I begin a nursing program...talk about being unbalanced! I know I cannot have it all. The life I do have needs to be enjoyed and we need to have fun with it! Thanks!

Hope (2011-08-18 08:00:14)

You knew I'd like this post didn't you? ;) I totally agree that balance isn't something we 'achieve' it's something we strive for. And one of the reasons I'm drawn to the yin-yang symbol of balance is that the shapes represent movement because life never sits still. Incidentally, when I think about balance I don't just think about life overall, I think about in regard to individual situations as well. (ie: the balance between caring for yourself and caring for others) And I also don't think balance means 'equal' the way it does when we think about balancing scales. A tree pose doesn't have our weight equally distributed but is still about finding balance. It can be tough but I hope you find your balance with your new challenges (and selfishly that you keep blogging!)

talkbirth (2011-08-18 08:11:22)

I did know! ;) I think it is an inner sense, more than anything objective/observable/quantifiable!

Surrender? « Talk Birth (2011-08-24 16:17:44)

[...] and say that I just need to find, "balance" (which is why I already wrote about that here). I know myself well enough to know that isn't how I work though—I am very black and [...]

Take Pictures (2011-08-23 18:50)

I've been thinking of one of my favorite poems today. Published some time ago in Mothering Magazine, it is called "[1]Take Pictures" and is a poignant look at how fast it all goes. The end gets me in my heart every time I read it:

"Holding tight to my neck, my son
trusts - he knows no other way - my touch lightly
dries his tears. I am his queen, his goddess, handily
his slave. Blink, it's a photo again, a trick of the eye,

a frozen captive of time, paper, light and silver: my son
is a grown man: he drinks from his own hand.

Reader, I urge you,

spin slowly, take pictures, remember to laugh." (emphasis mine).



[2]

1. <http://www.mothering.com/poems/take-pictures>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Surrender? (2011-08-24 16:17)



[1]
Giving kisses

Instructions for the New Mother

by Andrea Potos

Mothering magazine, January/February 1998 issue

Give up your calendar and clock,
start flowing with milk time.

Hunt for the frayed scraps

242

and threads of your fears.
Wrap your child's cries around
the skein of your days.

Stop racing to meet your familiar ways—
know change
will always beat you.

Lower that small fist of resistance
still struggling to rise within you—start now—
unclench your life.

I feel like I have spent my whole mothering journey trying to unclench my life and to surrender fully to the rhythm of life with small children. I "should" myself a lot about this actually, telling myself about various things at various points during various days, "you need to just give up. You need to surrender. You need to figure out when to quit." To be clear, this can be about things as simple as fixing myself breakfast or as complicated as wondering if I should give up blogging. As I've referenced, I've been going through a period of internal debate about my blog and my writing and wondering if I should just stop writing for a while. I feel like I am constantly awash with blog ideas and can spend the better part of a day waiting for the opportunity to finally have a few minutes to write one. While I really love it and find it fulfilling to do, I don't like the tickling feeling that I'm spending so much time waiting to write about my life, that I'm not actually fully living my life. And, I do not like the frustrated, blocked, squelched, and denied feeling I get when I'm not "allowed" the space in my day I feel like I need to write (see my post about "[2]my music"). So, I've spent quite a bit of time moaning and groaning about how I just need to know when to quit. I also somewhat coincidentally stumbled on a blog post by [3]Progressive Pioneer about quitting blogging, in which she makes a lot of interesting points about the "darker side" of blogging.

And, duh, I know some people reading might think, "it's simple. Just write when you have time and don't write when life is too hectic. It's just a blog, dummy." And, I know that maybe someone will comment and say that I just need to find, "balance" (which is why I already wrote about that [4]here). I know myself well enough to know that isn't how I work though—I am very black and white about my responsibilities. Either I can make room in my life for something or I can't. I cannot STAND having things lurking in the back of my brain that I want to do, or should be doing, or thought I was going to be able to do. I either have to do them, or cut off the possibility all together, otherwise they haunt me. I am almost pathologically responsible and it is impossible for me to "just relax" when I have a to-do or ought-to or thought-I-was-going-to-get-to hanging over my head—even if they are completely self-imposed. Despite parenting for almost 8 years, I continue to have trouble realizing when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em, often struggling to keep working on something or doing something, even when it would make more sense to just quit—or, perhaps more rationally, take a break and come back later.

But, a couple of months ago as I struggled to complete something and simultaneously berated myself about not knowing when to quit, I also had a companion thought—is this what I want to teach my children? That when something feels difficult or is hard work or feels like a struggle, you just quit?! Do I want to raise children who give up when something isn't going perfectly smoothly? Do I want them to learn to just throw up their hands, throw in the towel, and never raise a small fist of resistance? If I'd "known when to quit" trying to have another baby, I wouldn't have Alaina right now. She is here expressly because I didn't give up. I kept going even though it was hard and I felt like quitting and I even felt like maybe I was ignoring signs that told me I should quit. Maybe I'm actually glad I haven't yet learned when to fold. So, I hold companion thoughts, that there is grace and ease in surrender; it makes sense, is harmonious, is zen. And, it is brave to try again. To not give up. There is beauty and strength in persistence and in refusing to

quit. I do want my kids to know when to quit, but I also want them to value getting back up. I don't want them to capitulate to the "plodding dullness of spirit" that can occur when you lower that small fist.

I was also reminded of an essay that I wrote several years ago, but no one has yet published, in which I considered the notion of "surrender" in relationship to mothering:

Is it more sensible, more true, more rational to surrender? Or is surrender another word for hiding behind? For failing to reach potential, to scale to new heights, to realize dreams. "I can't because of the kids"—does that represent a truth and a surrendered, graceful acceptance of the season of my life, or does it actually mask fear and a hiding from potential? Isn't it possible to hide behind my children and their need of me and in so doing deny all of us opportunities for growth and to stretch our personal boundaries?

Isn't there value in the seeking? Is it better not to ponder and wonder, but instead to coast and flow? Which is more beautiful? Taking the fabric of life as it is and embracing it, or actively trying to sew something rich and new? Is acceptance or struggle more illuminating? Is flowing or paddling? Is it more graceful to surrender to the current or to flap my wings and soar above the trees?

What I know is that I wish to live passionately. With aliveness. Connected to the arteries and pulse of life. To know deepness, not hollowness. Sustenance and hope. Peace, but with the ability to peer into dark places and to ask difficult questions in order to more completely scale the cliffs of life. Vibrancy and truth in word, action, life, and rhythm.

I originally wrote the above in 2008 when my second son was two. After writing it, I paused in my chair and a spontaneous vision came to me—I was walking to the top of a hill. At the top, I opened my hands and beautiful butterflies spread their wings and flew away from me. Then, a matching vision—instead of opening my hands, I folded their wings up and put them into a box.

So, which is it? Open my hands and let my unique butterflies fly into the world. Or, fold their wings and shut them into a box in my heart to get out later when the time is right? Do I have to quit or just know when to stop and when to go? When to pause and when to resume?

What are the ways in which my children can climb the hill with me? To be a part of my growth and development at the same time that I am a part of theirs? How do we blend the rhythms of our lives and days into a seamless whole? How do we live harmoniously and meet the needs of all family members? To all learn and grow and reach and change together? Can we all walk up the hill together, joyfully hold up our open hands with our butterflies and greet the sun as it rises and the rain as it falls? Arm in arm?

I guess rather than balance per se, it comes back to mindfulness, attention, and discernment—knowing when to hold and when to fold. Just as I continue to return to my image of [5]grinding corn, I continue to return to this inner vision of joyfully releasing our butterflies together...

Like many posts, I originally wrote most of this over a month ago, with, as noted, some quotes from a piece I wrote three years ago, but I continue to return to the same issues in my life. The to blog or not to blog question actually surfaced for me in this post, but I then published several other pieces before it that were also musing on the same topic—so, if this seems like a rehash of some recent posts, consider that this

one came first! This morning, as I considered that the time had come to finally publish this post, I sat at my living room sacred space/altar and these words came to my mind: surrendering to the moment is not the same as a permanent surrender.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/birthing-the-mother-writer-or-playing-my-music-or-postpartum-feelings-part-1/>

3. <http://www.progressivepioneer.com/progressive-pioneer/2011/06/why-im-not-blogging-.html>

4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/08/18/regarding-balance/>

5. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/i-just-want-to-grind-my-corn/>

The Ragged Self « Talk Birth (2011-08-25 09:34:58)

[...] Comments « Surrender? [...]

talkbirth (2011-09-02 11:04:20)

Thanks! I do like to think of seasons also.

talkbirth (2011-08-26 07:36:04)

Yes—I think there is a reason why I didn’t publish this post when I first wrote it last month (other than just the vulnerability of these types of posts). It wasn’t finished yet—was waiting for that conclusion of the last line! I am uncomfortable with the “submission” suggestion that accompanies surrender in some religious traditions. I’m also uncomfortable with the “giving up” connotation that is sometimes its companion in a Zen Buddhism outlook.

Hope (2011-08-26 06:53:45)

“...surrendering to the moment is not the same as a permanent surrender.” There is lots of food for thought in this post but the last line summed it up perfectly! I have some issues with the word surrender because (for me) it has a lot of religious connotations that make me uncomfortable. I like the idea of reframing it and thus giving the word new meaning and new life. Thanks. :)

Sheridan (2011-08-31 21:46:12)

I love your insights. I like to think of it as seasons. Some seasons I may choose to do less or not blog. Some seasons I may blog daily. It is so hard to find a balance and I don’t know that I have, but I hope I will! Your words inspire me.

Motherhood as Meditation « Talk Birth (2011-10-30 12:03:12)

[...] posts: Surrender? Book Review: Mindful Motherhood Book Review: 10 Steps to Joy and Inner Peace for Mothers [...]

working/parenting interview: Molly Remer (2011-10-18 15:03:50)

[...] For more on Molly’s relationship with working/parenting, please click through to her lovely post “I just want to grind my corn!” and her follow-up “Surrender?” [...]

The Ragged Self (2011-08-25 09:34)

Several years ago I read a book called [1]Trees Make the Best Mobiles. Primarily geared towards first time parents of infants, it didn’t cover a lot of new ground for me, but there were a couple of good reminders in it about present, mindful parenting. I originally wrote about this on an old blog and this week the notion of the “ragged self” came back up for me again. In the book regarding time with our children, the authors write: “They offer us a chance, not only to quell past demons, but to leave behind the pressures of the day.

With them, we can be our best selves: alert, vibrant, and generous—and fully alive in the present tense.” And then, with regard to children learning your behaviors: ”Make sure that what your child is absorbing isn’t your ragged, frustrated, or furious self, but your best self. And when it’s not, let him know that you know, and that you’ll try harder next time.”

Unfortunately, I think I often do show my ”ragged” self to my family and am NOT necessarily my best, alert and vibrant self. It isn’t a ”furious” self usually, but sort of a worn out and taut self. My husband ”gets” to see this side a lot—I start out the day much more vibrantly and as it passes, I become more ragged so when he gets home, all that is left for him is ”scraps.” I hate that. I also feel like my mom sees my ragged self more often than I’d like—aren’t these the people that matter most? Why do ”other people” get the vibrant parts?! I try to tell them sometimes that that raggedness isn’t how I am or how I feel for a lot of the day, it is just that which is only ”allowed” to reveal herself in front of them.

I’ve noticed the ragged self emerges when:

- I’m hungry
- I’m tired
- I have a headache (sometimes related to the above two)
- I haven’t had my two hours

What’s this about two hours?

Well, picture that newspaper kid from the movie *Better Off Dead* and you’ll have how I feel about it ;) Almost every day, my wonderful parents pick up my boys and take them to their house to visit for approximately two hours. If I play my cards right, this is also when Alaina takes her afternoon nap, which gives me two hours on my own to ”get things done.” I NEED this time in order to survive—in order to keep up with the other elements of my life besides mothering. I know other mothers swoon with jealousy at the idea of having a regular two hours—they should, my parents are awesome and they are a key factor in how I’m able to ”do it all.” They’re my ”tribe”—the village that comes to help me [2]grind my corn. I rely on having this time and so when I don’t get it for some reason, I become very ragged and feel like I must quit everything else ([3]surrender). So, sometimes when I start feeling ragged and can’t put my finger on exactly why, it comes to me: ”I WANT MY TWO HOURS!”

[youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z9Cg46Nktw>]

Yes, that kid’s face is exactly how my own looks when I say it!

Another minute?

From the same book quoted above, the authors write ”Each time you say, ’I need another minute to finish this...,’ you squander a moment with your child, never to be reclaimed.”

I confess, though this is another good reminder, it also annoys me. There is a little too much ”romanticizing” of parenting implicit within it. I thought of all the times when I’ve said ”I just need another minute to...” Hmmm. Go to the BATHROOM! Finish fixing breakfast, put the baby to sleep, help someone else go to the bathroom, talk to my husband—the love of my life... I guess each could be seen as ”squandering” and I have an inner monitor in my head that lets me know that! But, get real, sometimes

you really DO need another minute to "finish this" and there is no reason to get all blamey about it! (I also confess that my defensiveness here is also about the times I do say "just a minute" when it really ISN'T that important and I could drop what I'm doing to meet their needs—but is it always actual needs, or sometimes just a nonstop desire for parental entertainment?)

The entertainment committee?

In thinking about entertainment, another quote:

"Keep in mind, too, that life isn't all entertainment—even when you're only three...Allowing them to become bored means letting them draw on their own resources. It means trusting them to make their own fun. A child who can reach inside herself for amusement or consolation is a child who is truly plugged in."

And a final reminder:

"What we all crave is to be seen, really seen, and through that seeing, know ourselves. We spend much of our life—in work, love, friendship, and sometimes even in therapy—trying to achieve this."

Self-improvement

I've been having a ragged couple of days and have been lamenting my tendency to turn myself into one, long, relentless, failure-filled, self-improvement project. I get annoyed with myself for always wanting to be "productive" and conclude that becoming more awesomely zen-like is required aaaand! There's another self-improvement project... ;) Or, that I need to focus on just BE-ing (which as soon as it becomes a "pursuit" the very point is lost! That is just the kind of mental conundrum that makes me spin ruts in my brain). Anyway, yesterday morning I saw the tiny edge of a new top tooth in Alaina's mouth and suddenly it all became clear to me why she hadn't been napping as expected (thus not getting me my TWO HOURS!). I would have thought I'd be wise to this pattern by now—unexplained non-napping baby precipitates spiral of despair in mama involving large doses of self-criticism and conclusion that giving up all personal goals is required and then tiny tooth is revealed. Since I've done this exact thing with two other kids as well as with Alaina herself just last month, you'd think I'd finally get a clue!



[4] I was trying to come up with a picture to share of a ragged self—you know, sticking up hair and crazy eyes—and instead I felt like sharing a picture of Xena instead.

And, sharing these two quotes:

"Be wild; that is how to clear the river." (Clarissa Pinkola Estes)

"We're volcanoes. When we women offer our experience as our truth, as human truth, all the maps change. New mountains form" - Ursula Le Guin

But, returning to the notion of "being seen," I've decided that rather than take a complete break from blogging, I've instead got to let go of making long, self-analyzing, personal journal type posts. I don't know that anyone even actually wants to read them AND they take a long time to write (and make me seem neurotic and needy. Inside my head is an intense place!). This blog didn't start out in that vein, but as I've noted, it took on more of a personal journal feel when I was pregnant with Alaina and in the months following her birth. I think it is time to bring it back from that personal ramble place and just share shorter and more simple posts. I have trouble with short—this is why I don't enjoy Twitter very much—but I also know that long posts are very unlikely to be fully read. So, this is my last navel-gazing post for some time to come (unless something is already in my drafts folder—I do have 78 drafts in there!).

I got a necklace at the ICAN conference with the image of a standing woman holding her arms up to the moon. Inscribed on the back it says, "the call of the wild is not a difficult song."

Clear the river!

1. http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0312303254?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&link_code=wq1&camp=212361&creative=380601
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/i-just-want-to-grind-my-corn/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/08/24/surrender/>
4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/xena.jpg>

Barbara (2011-08-25 10:14:17)

Those of us who are allowed to witness your ragged self feel honored to be within the inner circle of your tribe.....just so you know!

Dashaina (2011-12-15 16:11:33)

I LOVE that you wrote this... it makes me feel as if I am NOT the only one. :) Inspiring stuff, truly.

stiffianie (2011-12-16 08:06:13)

Feeling a bit ragged myself lately which is especially frustrating as I vowed that this year I would fully enjoy the entire month of December and make sure we did lots of fun family centered things instead of cramming to get presents made and sent like last year. *Sigh* Bit off more than I could chew and have had to deal with a couple life changes that have really affected how everything in our household works. Now the kids have a hard time falling asleep unless I am in bed as well - if I lie down for ten minutes they will usually be asleep but if I stay up for a couple of hours they will continue to pop out of bed to pee or get a drink of water or see what I'm doing. Unfortunately ten minutes is about what it takes for me to fall asleep as well...then I lose my night hours which are the precious hours that I need to get things done (house related or not). I'm sure that we will figure out a good routine for our family it's just a bad time to be adjusting. Your comments on 'another minute' were very timely for me. I said the exact same thing to my daughter last night to which she replied 'You said that a minute ago.' She was right so I rephrased my statement to 'when I'm finished with this' which I think was a more honest answer. I think I say 'in a minute' because that is my intent but I fail to calculate the time involved in some projects/endeavors so when I use more accurate (and easier

to gauge) reference points they are able to better track when I will be ready to focus on them. Sorry this is so long. Obviously short is not so easy for me either. :)

Benefits of Prenatal Massage (2011-08-29 11:45)

In the U.S. there are more the six million pregnancies each year, and a growing number of women are opting to use massage to deal with the aches, pains and stress that come along with pregnancy. Studies have shown that prenatal massage can reduce anxiety, joint pain and swelling caused by poor circulation, according to the American Pregnancy Association. Massage therapists who are trained in prenatal massage must take extra precautions when giving an expectant mother a massage, including avoiding specific pressure points and ensuring the client is in a position that will not cause added stress to their body.

I recently had the opportunity to interview Colleen Bryan of [1]Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa. about the benefits of prenatal massage:



[2]

Q: How can the benefits of massage transfer into the delivery/birthing room?

A: Regular massage can assist the labor process by enabling each woman to begin labor with less tension in the back, pelvis and legs. It also provides flexibility, prepares muscles and reduces stress levels which can improve the outcome of labor. It has been noted that labor is shorter with fewer complications for women who receive regular massage.

Q: Are there any special tricks and tips that can be used through massage to help a birthing woman?

A: It takes a lot of hard physical work to get a baby into the world but steps can be taken to make that process easier. Regular massage throughout the second and third trimester will allow the muscles to be more relaxed and flexible through the delivery process. Not only does massage help throughout pregnancy and delivery but once baby and Mom are home that's when disrupted sleep patterns need rejuvenation. A one hour massage is equivalent to three hours of deep sleep....often needed not only for Moms but Dads as well.

Q: When are the best times to receive a massage for pregnant women?

A: Pregnancy is a wonderful experience, but it often comes with physical challenges from a changing body. The second trimester is the safest time to start receiving regular massage, once or twice a month. Weight

gain in the front of the body can change the center of gravity placing more stress on joints, the spine and muscles. Massage can offer relief from muscle pain and joint stiffness on into the third trimester as the baby grows and changes the body even more. At this time it would be beneficial to receive a massage every week. Receiving massage during pregnancy is an excellent way to care for both Mom & baby. It should be part of every pregnant woman's self-care plan.

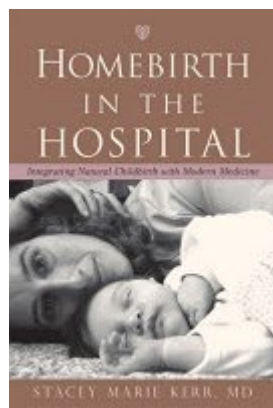
Q: What are some of the cautions about receiving massage during pregnancy?

A: Prenatal massage is effective and safe for women with uncomplicated, low risk pregnancies. High risk pregnancies with certain medical conditions should get consent from their doctor before receiving massage. Massage should be avoided during the first trimester and there are regions of the body and specific therapeutic techniques that are contraindicated for prenatal massage. A professional massage therapist trained in prenatal massage will know what precautions need to be taken.

1. <http://www.handandstone.com/>

2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Book Review: Homebirth in the Hospital (2011-08-31 08:43)



Homebirth in the Hospital [1]

by Stacey Marie Kerr, MD

Sentient Publications, 2008

Softcover, 212 pages

ISBN: 978-1-59181-077-3

[2]www.homebirthinthehospital.com

Reviewed by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, [3]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>

I would venture to say that most midwifery activists and birth professionals have said at some point, “what she wants is a homebirth in the hospital...” This comment is accompanied with a knowing look, a bit of head shaking, and an unspoken continuation of the thought, “...and we all know that's not going to happen.”

Well, what if it is possible? A new book by Dr. Stacey Kerr, *Homebirth in the Hospital*, asserts that it is. She was originally trained at The Farm in TN (home of legendary midwife Ina May Gaskin) and after going to medical school realized that she, “...needed to balance my new knowledge with my old priorities. I missed the feeling of normal birth, the trust that the birthing process would occur without technology, and the time-tested techniques that help women birth naturally. And so it was that I went back to midwives to find the balance.”

If you are a dedicated homebirth advocate, I recommend reading *Homebirth in the Hospital* with an open

mind—clear out any cobwebs and assumptions about doctors, hospitals, and birth and read the book for what it is: an attempt to create a new model of hospital birth. What Dr. Kerr proposes in her book is a model of “integrative childbirth”—the emotional care and support of home, while nestled into the technology of a hospital.

The opening chapter explores the concept of integrative childbirth and “the 5 C’s” of a successful integrative birth: choices, communication, continuity of care, confidence, and control of protocols (“protocols are the most disempowering aspect of modern maternity care...”).

This section is followed by fifteen different birth stories, beginning with the author’s own (at a Missouri birthing center—my own first baby was born in a birth center in Missouri, so I felt a kinship there).

The births are not all happy and “perfect,” not all intervention-free, and most are quite a bit more “managed” and interfered with than a lot of homebirthers prefer (one is a cesarean, several involve epidurals or medications). I, personally, would never freely choose a “homebirth in a hospital” (I also confess to retaining a deep-seated opinion that this phrase is an oxymoron!). However, that is not the point. Over 90 % of women do give birth in a hospital attended by a physician and I appreciate the exploration of a new model within the constraints and philosophy of the hospital.

The book closes with a chapter called “how to be an integrative childbirth provider.” The book has no resources section and no index.

I certainly hope that doctors read this book. I am also glad it is available for women who feel like homebirth is not an option or not available and would like to explore an integrative approach. Even though my opinion is that none of the births are really “homebirths in the hospital” as most bear little resemblance to the homebirths I know and love, unlike the content of the standard hospital birth story, they are deeply respectful births in the hospital and that’s the issue truly at the heart of this book.

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Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://www.homebirthinthehospital.com/>
2. <http://www.homebirthinthehospital.com/>
3. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>

Active Birth in the Hospital (2011-08-31 09:41)



[1] One of the inspiring images in ICAN of Atlanta's "Laboring on the Monitors" slideshow.

The vast majority of my birth class clients are women desiring a natural birth in a hospital setting. My classes are based on active birth and include a lot of resources for using your body during labor and working with gravity to help birth your baby. Sometimes I feel like active birth and hospital birth are incompatible—i.e. the woman's need for activity runs smack dab into the hospital's need for passivity (i.e. "lie still and be monitored"). So, I was delighted to discover [2]this awesome series of photos from ICAN of Atlanta of VBAC mothers laboring on the monitors. It IS possible to remain active and upright, even while experiencing continuous fetal monitoring.

In my own classes, we talk about how to use a hospital bed without lying down—the idea that a hospital bed can become a tool you can use while actively birthing your baby. Here is a pdf handout on the subject:[3]How to Use a Hospital Bed without Lying Down. In this handout, I offer these tips for using the bed as an active assistant, rather than a place to be "tied down":

While being monitored and/or receiving IV fluids that limit mobility, try:

- Sitting on a birth ball and leaning on bed
- Sitting on bed
- Sitting on bed and lean over ball (also on bed)
- Kneeling on bed
- Hands and knees on bed
- Standing up and leaning on bed
- Leaning back of bed up and resting against it on your knees
- Bringing a beanbag chair, putting it on the bed and draping over it (can also make "nest" with pillows)
- Partner sitting on bed and woman leaning on him/supported squats with him
- Partner sitting behind woman on bed (with back leaned up as far as it will go)

While giving birth, try:

- Hands and knees on bed
- Kneeling with one leg up (on bed like a platform or "stage")
- Holding onto raised back of bed and squatting or kneeling
- Squatting using squat bar

While most of the above tips can be used during monitoring, additional ideas for coping with a simultaneous need for monitoring AND activity include:

- Kneel on bed and rotate hips
- Sit on edge of bed and rock or rotate hips
- Sit on ball or chair right next to bed (partner can hold monitor in place if need be)

If something truly requires being motionless, it can be helpful to have some breath awareness techniques available in your "bag of tricks." One of my favorites is: [4]Centering for Birth

Some time ago, a blog reader posed the question, [5]can I really expect to have a great birth in a hospital setting? I definitely think it is possible! I also think there is a lot you can do in preparation for that great hospital birth! When planning a natural birth in the hospital, it is important to consider [6]becoming an informed birth consumer. I always tell my clients that an excellent foundation for a simple, effective, evidence-based birth plan is to base it on [7]Lamaze's Six Healthy Birth Practices. My own pdf handout summarizing the practices is also available: [8]Six Healthy Birth Practices. Don't forget there is also [9]a great video series of the birth practices in action! You might also want to get a copy of the book [10]Home-birth in the Hospital. And, check out this post from Giving Birth with Confidence: [11]Six Tips for Gentle but Effective Hospital Negotiations.

Before you go in to the hospital to birth your baby, make sure you have some ideas about this very popular question, [12]how do I know if I'm really in labor?

And, finally, be prepared for the hospital routines you may encounter by reading my post: [13]What to Expect When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth.

For some other general ideas about active birth, read my post about [14]Moving During Labor (written for a blog carnival in 2009).

Best wishes for a beautiful, healthy, active hospital birth! You can do it!

1. http://www.icanofatlanta.com/?page_id=159

2. http://www.icanofatlanta.com/?page_id=159

3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/usingabedwithoutlyingdown.pdf>

4. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2010/10/28/centering-for-birth/>

5. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/06/03/can-i-really-expect-to-have-a-great-birth/>

6. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2010/03/26/becoming-an-informed-birth-consumer/>

7.

<http://www.lamaze.org/ChildbirthProfessionals/ResourcesforProfessionals/CarePracticePapers/tabid/90/Default.aspx>

8. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/six-healthy-birth-practices.pdf>

http:

9. <http://www.lamaze.org/OnlineCommunity/LamazeVideoLibrary/LamazeVideoPlayer/TabId/808/VideoId/11/-Healthy-Birth-Your-Way-Introduction.aspx>
10. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/08/31/book-review-homebirth-in-the-hospital/>
11. http://givingbirthwithconfidence.org/2011/08/six-tips-for-gentle-but-effective-hospital-negotiations/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+GivingBirthWithConfidence+%28Real+women+sharing+stories%2C+finding+answers+and+supporting+each+other.+Powered+by+Lamaze%29
12. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/09/28/how-do-i-know-im-really-in-labor/>
13. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/09/09/what-to-expect-when-you-go-to-the-hospital-for-a-natural-childbirth/>
14. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/10/28/moving-during-labor/>

talkbirth (2011-08-31 12:16:48)
It is great!

christine (2011-08-31 12:10:40)
Glad you like our laboring on the monitors page! :) Thanks for spreading the word! Christine - webmaster, ICAN of Atlanta

links for thought, September 2011 (2011-10-14 12:03:26)
[...] Molly Remer at Talk Birth, “Active Birth in the Hospital” [lots of useful resources [...]]

The Illusion of Choice « Talk Birth (2011-12-30 09:40:17)
[...] for a Natural Childbirth Birth & Culture & Pregnant Feelings Asking the right questions... Active Birth in the Hospital Why do I [...]]

talkbirth (2011-12-15 09:44:27)
Yes, I would like to exchange posts! I need to edit this one to add your book to the post itself as another resource.

thebirthmuse (2011-12-15 07:23:17)
Yes! Thank you for mentioning “Natural Hospital Birth: The Best of Both Worlds” on Facebook and linking back to this post. You are right! I think all of us in the birth world are on the same page, trying to use these tools to help women. Most of these tools are not rocket science (be upright, move, use water, etc.), but the hospital setting makes us forget our natural instincts. Instead, we often act like a patient (we lie down, we wait for the doctor or nurse’s permission to do anything). But prepared women have natural hospital births every day, so it IS possible. Would you like to exchange guest posts about this topic on our blogs?

1.9 September

Guest Post: 5 Easy Ways to Stay Happy and Relaxed (2011-09-03 12:53)

[1]Chicago Healers Practitioner Dr. Helen Lee provides five easy ways to stay calm, relaxed and connected to the self throughout even the busiest days.

- Breathe – It may feel silly to remind oneself to breathe, but it is so important. There are two types of breathing: shallow and deep. Taking shallow chest breaths causes the body to operate in “fight or flight” mode, which is highly stressful. Less oxygen goes to the brain and the body continues to operate on high

alert. It is important to take deep abdominal breaths, which stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system. This optimizes digestion, relaxation and detoxification while keeping hormones balanced.

- Gratitude – Remembering things to be grateful for throughout the day really does wonders for personal state of mind and for the body. Positive thinking releases chemicals that help with digestion, euphoria, relaxation and overall well-being.
- Laughter – Laughter is the best medicine as the saying goes, and this is often the case. Laughing for 10 minutes a day will do amazing things. It changes the physiology of the entire body—increases circulation, releases different “happy” chemicals in the body, reduces stress, keeps everyone in a lighter frame of mind, helps the heart and can even burn calories! It’s contagious, too!
- Sit in Silence – Taking 10-30 minutes to quiet the mind and clear thoughts can be so beneficial. If meditating is not preferable, spend the time visualizing goals for the day. This will put focus on personal needs, which will be relaxing later when the day starts to get stressful.
- Take a 15-20 Minute Walk Outside – Sometimes all that’s needed is fresh air and sunlight. Taking a step away from the computer, the phone, the office, etc. can really help clear thoughts and be very calming.

Stress is almost unavoidable these days but there are many ways to keep it at bay. Practicing these five methods is a great start.

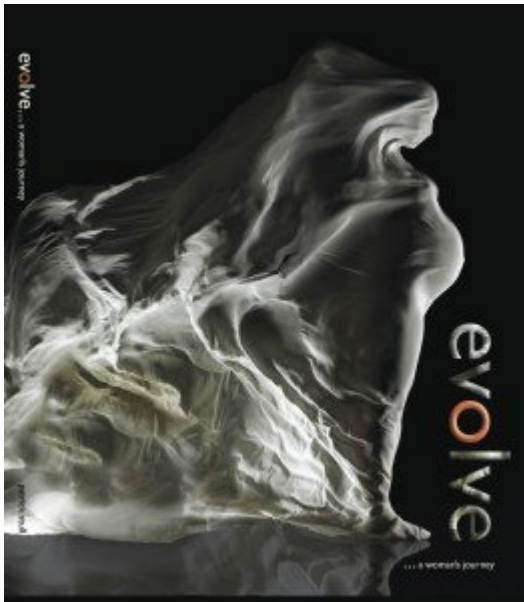
Chicago Healers ([2]www.ChicagoHealers.com) is the nation’s pioneer prescreened integrative health care network, offering a comprehensive understanding of each practitioner’s services, approach, and philosophy. Our holistic health experts teach and advocate natural and empowered health and life choices through their practices, the media, educational events, and our website. With close to 200 practitioners and over 300 treatment services, Chicago Healers has provided nearly 400 free educational events for Chicagoans and has been featured in 300+ TV news programs and print publications. For more information, visit [3]www.ChicagoHealers.com.

1. <http://www.chicagohealers.com/>
2. <http://www.chicagohealers.com/>
3. <http://www.chicagohealers.com/>

Jenny (2011-09-03 14:21:47)

It’s always the simple things in life that make a difference... :) I can totally relate to #5– a walk will put a totally different spin on my day.

Book Review: Evolve...a woman's journey (2011-09-05 15:31)



[1] Book Review: Evolve...a woman's journey

by Patrick Stull

Stull Visual Arts, 2011

Hardcover, 164 pages, \$44.95

Also available as an [2]iPad app and as an[3] iBook in Itunes for \$9.99.

[4]<http://www.patrickstull.com/books/>

Reviewed by Molly Remer

A combination of stirring photography celebrating the creative journey of pregnancy and lyrical ode to women, *Evolve* is a unique book presented by artist Patrick Stull. The author-photographer's love, respect, and honor for women shines through on every page. The photographs are arresting and dramatic and the prose is poetic and beautiful. The book is part of a [5]multimedia exhibit taking place in 2012. I would love to see the full exhibit, which involves full body casts as well as images and voice recordings.

Why would a man prepare a project such as this? According to his introduction, due to "this insatiable desire to be part of something that excludes me...I have found something within me that one might call love, though I think it is more a sense of attachment to something that makes me whole. I have fallen in love with this creature and she has left her imprint on my being, casting me out to share the love—the humanity I have found." Later he also shares that: "I have discovered nothing more stunning, nothing more emotionally stirring, nothing more intriguing than a woman as she creates life." He also has an activist purpose behind his work, asserting that one mission of the *Evolve* project is to help people recognize the strength and value that all women possess. Stull states, "I also want people to consider the daily injustices to women and children all over the world, and how often they suffer the greatest costs of conflict. Why are women treated so cruelly?"

The early photographs shared are the faces of the women we follow throughout the rest of the book. A short snippet of information about the woman's life accompanies each portrait. One woman is a midwife and several mothers had homebirths and/or hired doulas or midwives for their births. *Evolve* is a high quality hardback book that would be a great addition to a birth center waiting room or midwife's office. If the price for the hardback book is out of your budget, luckily there is [6]an affordable iBook version available.

The overwhelming message received through *Evolve* is of pregnancy as an active process. The pictures

are very active and dynamic in feel, celebrating form and motion. Evolve is not a book of "belly pictures," it is a book about women and their lives in the act of creation.

Disclosure: I received a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

1. <http://www.patrickstull.com/>
2. <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/evolve/id452856295?ls=1&mt=8>
3. <http://itunes.apple.com/us/book/evolve...-enhanced-version/id453868817?mt=11>
4. <http://www.patrickstull.com/books/>
5. <http://www.patrickstull.com/exhibitions/evolve/>
6. <http://itunes.apple.com/us/book/evolve...-enhanced-version/id453868817?mt=11>

Milk, Money, & Madness (2011-09-07 14:31)

In early August, I received a press email from Evenflo about their "in-law feeding frenzy" video. While I recognized they were attempting to be playful and funny, I chose not to share the video with my readers because I found several elements of it problematic. Rather than recognize the opportunity to create an internet stir over the video, I just wrote back to the company and told them, "I try not to encourage the notion of other people having a chance to feed the baby, so I do not plan to use the video myself—I would have been more pleased with it if somehow mom stood her ground and helped in-laws see that there are other ways to be involved with the baby other than by feeding it expressed milk. I don't promote the idea that mothers need to pump, 'just because.'" Considering what a controversy has now boiled up this week over [1]Evenflo's "funny" breastfeeding video, I confess I sort of feel like I missed my opportunity for a major wave of blog traffic by exposing the ad and expositing on the problems therein when I received it in August! ;-) However, when considering the controversy, I thought of some wonderful quotes I'd saved to share from the book *Milk, Money, & Madness* and so I'm sharing them instead.

Dia Michels is one of the co-authors of *Milk, Money, and Madness* and I've actually heard her speak twice—once in 2003 when I was pregnant with L and then in 2007 at the LLL of MO conference. I'm surprised at how thoroughly riveting a book about the "culture and politics of breastfeeding" can be and I highly recommend it to breastfeeding and women's health activists.

In perfect response to the Evenflo video, we have this quote:

"Babies need holding, stroking, dressing, bathing, comforting, burping, and, within a short time, feeding solids. Dad can do every one of these. The desire to participate should not be confused with the need to give the baby the best of what each partner has to offer."

I hear from people SO often that they want Daddy to be able to participate in baby care by giving the baby a bottle. There are LOTS of things that fathers can do for their babies, other than feeding—bathing, snuggling skin-to-skin, diaper changes, playing, babywearing, and just plain walking around holding the baby while mom takes care of her own needs.

And, here is an excellent quote with regard to public breastfeeding/breasts as sexual objects:

"When the attitude is taken that a woman's breasts belong to her and no job is more important than caring for one's young, the confusion between breastfeeding and obscenity goes away."

And, then considering the argument that bottle feeding "liberates" women from the tyranny/restrictiveness of breastfeeding:

The liberation women need is to breastfeed free of social, medical, and employer constraints. Instead, they have been presented with the notion that liberation comes with being able to abandon breastfeeding without guilt. This 'liberation,' though, is an illusion representing a distorted view of what breastfeeding is, what breastfeeding does, and what both mothers and babies need after birth. [emphasis mine]

I've noted before that I am a systems thinker and I think this way about breastfeeding as well as many other experiences—breastfeeding occurs in a context, a context that involves a variety of "circles of support" or lack thereof. Women don't "fail" at breastfeeding because of personal flaws, society fails breastfeeding women and their babies every day through things like minimal maternity leave, no pumping rooms in workplaces, formula advertising and "gifts" in hospitals, formula company sponsorship of research and materials for doctors, the sexualization of breasts and objectification of women's bodies, and so on and so forth. According to the book, "...infant formula sales comprise up to 50 % of the total profits of Abbott Labs, an enormous pharmaceutical concern." And the U.S. government is the largest buyer of formula, providing it for something like 37 % of babies. (I should have written that quote down too!)

I have a special interest in how women are treated postpartum and Milk, Money, and Madness has some gems to share about postpartum care as well:

An entirely different situation exists in societies where technology is emphasized. The birth process is seen from a clinical viewpoint, with obstetricians emphasizing technology. A battery of defensive practices are employed, some of which are totally irrelevant to the health of either mother or infant. Skilled technicians spend their time and the family's money on identifying the baby's gender and performing various stress tests. All the focus is geared toward the actual birth. After the birth, mother and baby become medically separated. The infant is relegated to the care of the pediatrician, the uterus to the obstetrician, the breast abscess to the surgeon. While the various anatomical parts are given the required care, the person who is the new mother is often left to fend for herself...All the tender loving care goes flows to the infant; the mother becomes an unpaid nursemaid. [emphasis mine]

When I do breastfeeding help with mothers, I always make sure I address the whole woman and do not focus only on the mechanics of breastfeeding. Recently a mother told me, "I don't know if it was your breastfeeding advice or just the encouragement that helped most, probably both." Women need both—"technical assistance" and emotional support. Sometimes, all they need is the emotional support and they can figure out the rest with some undisturbed time with their babies. The pendulum in breastfeeding support is shifting from active, "education" based strategies, to the recognition that often the best we can do for mothers is give them time to get to know their babies. Rather than offering positioning "advice" and "breastfeeding management suggestions," we need to give her space, stand aside, and offer encouragement as she discovers her baby and the biological dance they are hardwired to engage in. The Milk quote continues with:

This may appear to be a harsh evaluation, but it is realistic. In western society, the baby gets attention while the mother is given lectures. Pregnancy is considered an illness; once the 'illness' is over, interest in her wanes. Mothers in 'civilized' countries often have no or very little help

with a new baby. Women tend to be home alone to fend for themselves and the children. They are typically isolated socially and expected to complete their usual chores, including keeping the house clean and doing the cooking and shopping, while being the sole person to care for the infant... (emphasis mine)

According to the U.S. rules and regulations governing the federal worker, the pregnancy and postdelivery period is referred to as 'the period of incapacitation.' This reflects the reality of the a situation that should be called 'the period of joy.' Historically, mothering was a group process shared by the available adults. This provided not only needed relief but also readily available advice and experience. Of the 'traditional' and 'modern' child-rearing situations, it is the modern isolated western mom who is much more likely to find herself experiencing lactation failure.

I think these quotes are important because I think there is a tendency for women to look inward and blame themselves for "failing" at breastfeeding. There is also an unfortunate tendency for other mothers to also blame the mother for "failing"—she was "too lazy" or "just made an excuse," etc. We live in a bottle feeding culture; the cards are stacked against breastfeeding from many angles—economically, socially, medically. When I hear women discussing why they couldn't breastfeed, I don't hear "excuses," I hear "broken systems of support" (whether it be the epidural in the hospital that caused fluid retention and the accompanying flat nipples, the employer who won't provide a pumping location, the husband who doesn't want to share "his breasts," the mother-in-law who thinks breastfeeding is perverted, or the video that promotes expressing milk so other people can feed the baby). Of course, there can actually be true "excuses" and "bad reasons" and women theoretically always have the power to choose for themselves rather than be swayed by those around them, but there is a whole lot that goes into not-breastfeeding, besides the quickest answer or what is initially apparent on the surface. As I said above, breastfeeding occurs in a context and that context is often one that DOES NOT reinforce a breastfeeding relationship. In my six years in breastfeeding support, with well over 600 helping contacts, I've more often thought it is a miracle that a mother manages to breastfeed, than I have wondered why she doesn't.

For more about the relationship between birth and breastfeeding, check out my previous post: [2]The Birth-Breastfeeding Continuum.



[3]

Check out those exclusively breastfed thighs!

1. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/technology/digital-culture/trending-tech/evenflo-breastfeeding-ad-irks-mommy-bloggers/article2154736/>

2. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2010/05/28/the-birth-breastfeeding-continuum/>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

BigLittleDays (2011-09-07 16:30:53)

Beautifully said. I just blogged today about supporting women in their birth decisions, and what a gift it is to me. I respect your decision to avoid being the center of the debate over pumping for dad/MIL. I'll be sharing this post on my page :)

Simple Pleasures (2011-09-10 15:00)

Saved quote from 2007 (in book Simple Pleasures):

"When we lack proper time for the simple pleasures of life, for the enjoyment of eating, drinking, playing, creating, visiting friends, and watching children at play, then we have missed the purpose of life. Not on bread alone do we live, but on all these human and heart-hungry luxuries." –Ed Hayes

I need to stick this to my forehead!

And, a favorite quote that I used to have on my FB page:

"A simplified home feels friendlier. A simplified life seems easier. And remarkable joy comes from simple things—like having work to do that matters, and having people to love who matter a lot." –Victoria Moran (Shelter for the Spirit)

New Quotes About Birth, Motherhood, Activism, and Women (2011-09-10 18:00)

I have a LOT of new quotes to add to my collection! I've got to start updating more frequently. As I've mentioned before that while these quotes are obviously not my own words, I do appreciate a linkback to my site if you re-post them because I have a significant amount of legwork invested in finding and typing the quotes. Most are not recycled from other pages (I give credit if they are), but are typed up when they catch my eye in the books/magazines/journals I'm reading.

"Women experience pain differently; some feel strong overwhelming pain, some may feel a deep discomfort during birth, and still others may feel no pain at all. The experience of pain during childbirth facilitates an unfolding of inner power and resources we never imagined we possessed, similar to enduring the pain of completing a marathon at the finish line." –Barbara Nicholson and Lysa Parker, API founders

(I do wish the analogy was flipped culturally—ie running a marathon is like giving birth, rather than vice versa. We'll get there!)

"For months I just looked at you. I wondered about all the mothers before me—if they looked at their babies the way I looked at you. In an instant I knew what moved humankind from continent to continent, Against all odds." –Michelle Singer (in We'Moon 2011 datebook)

"I use the word midwife to refer to all birth practitioners. Whether you are a mother, doula, educator, or understanding doctor or nurse you are doing midwifery when you care for motherbaby." –Midwifery

Today editorial by Jan Tritten

"Change, when it comes, cracks everything open." Dorothy Allison

"I invite people to examine their lives, knowing that it's scary, but that not doing it is even scarier."
- Barbara De Angelis

"There isn't a lot you actually *need* to do to birth, but there is a lot you can do to get in the *way* of birth..." -Elizabeth McKeown

"Mother love is the fuel that enables a normal human being to do the impossible." -Marion C. Garretty

"In western society, the baby gets attention while the mother is given lectures. Pregnancy is considered an illness; once the 'illness' is over, interest in her wanes. Mothers in 'civilized' countries often have no or very little help with a new baby. Women tend to be home alone to fend for themselves and the children. They are typically isolated socially & expected to complete their usual chores...while being the sole person to care for the infant..." -Milk, Money, & Madness

"I have discovered nothing more stunning, nothing more emotionally stirring, nothing more intriguing than a woman as she creates life." -Patrick Stull

"My first delivery was a traumatic experience, physically and psychologically almost destroying me. My second, with a midwife, allowed me to regain my womanhood and experience my biological imperative. And yet, I would do them both over again to have what I created." -mother quoted in the book *Evolve*, by Patrick Stull

"Too often in modern busy obstetric practice, we doctors forget this meaningfulness of childbirth. In our anxiety and impatience, or in our sincere, but misguided efforts to relieve suffering (and childbirth is not without it), we relieve a woman not only of this suffering, but also of her 'birth right.'" John Miller, MD, *Childbirth* via [1]Citizens for Midwifery

"Too often in modern busy obstetric practice, we doctors forget this meaningfulness of childbirth. In our anxiety and impatience, or in our sincere, but misguided efforts to relieve suffering (and childbirth is not without it), we relieve a woman not only of this suffering, but also of her 'birth right.'" John Miller, MD, *Childbirth*

"A woman's confidence and ability to give birth and to care for her baby are enhanced or diminished by every person who gives her care, and by the environment in which she gives birth...Every women should have the opportunity to give birth as she wishes in an environment in which she feels nurtured and secure, and her emotional well-being, privacy, and personal preferences are respected." -Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS)

"Aside from new babies, new mothers must be the most beautiful creatures on earth." Terri Guillemets

"It's a good day not to judge anything - not myself, not others, not the world. Let us just be."
Sonia Choquette

"We're volcanoes. When we women offer our experience as our truth, as human truth, all the maps change. New mountains form" - Ursula Le Guin

"Be wild; that is how to clear the river." –Clarissa Pinkola Estes

"I believe global transformation hangs on the empowerment of women." –Vajra Ma

"Grace reveals to you a great mothering love that you can step into, that's been here before you and will be here after you. Grace will be with you as you open your arms, as you release your children and send them out into the world. If you listen carefully, you can hear grace whispering its thanks to you for being a mother to these souls." –Denise Roy (Momfulness)

"No one has yet realized the wealth of sympathy, the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure." - Emma Goldman

"A person who believes too earnestly in [her] own convictions can be dangerous to others, for absence of humor signals a failure in basic humanity." –Thomas Moore (Original Self)

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are messengers of overwhelming grief...and unspeakable love." –Washington Irving

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." - Frederick Douglass

"No mammal on this planet separates the newborn from its mother at birth except the human animal. No mammal on this planet denies the breast of the newborn except the human." –James Prescott (neuropsychologist quoted in *The Art of Conscious Parenting*)

"Every society practices the birthing ceremonies that best mirror its values, norms, and philosophy." –Gregory Bateson (quoted in *The Art of Conscious Parenting*)

"The world can only value mothering to the extent that women everywhere stand and declare that it must be so." –Oprah

"Motherhood focused my early political consciousness. It helped me understand how the choices I make in my personal life are linked to those I make on a larger scale." –Wendy Priesnitz

"There is a wild tiger in every woman's heart. Its hot and holy breath quietly, relentlessly feeding her." - Chameli Ardagh

"The state of the world today demands that women become less modest and dream/plan/act/risk on a larger scale." - Charlotte Bunch

"Prenatal care of the future will be guided by a [this rule]: "Eat sardines, be happy...and sing!" – Michel Odent

"If you are going to generalize about women, you'll find yourself up to here in exceptions." - Dolores Hitchens

"If we can mobilize the mothering instinct in all of us, we could save the planet. It is inappropriate to be dispassionate right now." –Helen Caldicott (1981) in *Momfulness*

"There's something contagious about demanding freedom." - Robin Morgan

"Remember our heritage is our power; we can know ourselves and our capacities by seeing that other women have been strong." - Judy Chicago

"For months I just looked at you. I wondered about all the mothers before me—if they looked at their babies the way I looked at you. In an instant I knew what moved humankind from continent to continent, Against all odds." –Michelle Singer (in We’Moon 2011 datebook)

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"Mother love is the fuel that enables a normal human being to do the impossible." –Marion C. Garretty

"As a woman, you are powerful. Birth is of course only one of many amazing pieces of being female, but it is unique in some very key ways...it is a time in a woman’s life that requires physical, spiritual, and emotional strength. It tests the foundation of who we believe we are as women, and challenges our beliefs about our own power." –Marcie Macari (She Births)

"And I say the sacred hoop of my people was one of the many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father." - Black Elk (via [2]Literary Mama)

"We must act to keep the knowledge and the powers of women alive." - Lynn Andrews

"Doctors 'know' they are giving women 'the best care'...Birth activists...know that this 'best care' is too often a travesty of what birth can be. And yet on that existential brink, I tremble at the birth activist’s coding of women as 'not knowing.' So, here’s to women...to women knowing what is best for themselves and their babies, and to women rising above everything else." -Robbie Davis-Floyd

"The natural process of birth sets the stage for parenting. Birth and parenting mirror each other. While it takes courage and strength to cope with labor and birth, it also takes courage and strength to parent a child." –Marcy White

"For each of us as women, there is a deep place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises...Within these deep places, each one holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman’s place of power within each of us...it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep." –Audre Lorde

"Time stands still best in moments that look suspiciously like ordinary life." –Brian Andreas (quoted in Momfulness)

"Your children love you. Be the trampoline for their rocketing and the cupped palms for their re-

turning.” –Shae Savoy (in We’Moon 2011 datebook)

”Birth should not be a celebration of separation, but rather a reuniting of mother and baby, who joins her for an external connection.” –Barbara Latterner, in *New Lives*

”When you bring consciousness to anything, things begin to shift.” –Eve Ensler

”Birth is a time we need to believe in – and need those around us to trust and encourage – our bodies, our power.” –Choices in Childbirth blog

”Scientific medicine has never been shy to dismiss if not denigrate any perceived threat to its values or power.” –from the book *Breakthrough: How the 10 Greatest Discoveries in Medicine Saved Millions and Saved the World*

”Fatherhood challenges us, but it also enlarges us and reshapes our perception of what is important in the world around us. As we take stock of this new world, we find that doing our job as a dad is inherently honorable and respectful, and brings to us the dignity that goes with the territory. Far from being emasculating, being a dad makes us men in the finest sense of the term.” –Dads Adventure

”Where you give birth is not nearly as important as who is there. The *human environment*–the people who surround you and your relationships with them–is what sets the tone for the birth, directly affecting its safety and success, as well as your own satisfaction.” –Jan Mallak/Teresa Bailey, [3]*Doula’s Guide to Birthing Your Way*

”Drugs, machinery, and medical personnel are not match for a woman’s own intellect and intuition. Birth is sexual and spiritual, magical and miraculous–but not when it is managed, controlled, and manipulated by the medical establishment, or hindered by the mother’s own mind.” –Laura Shanley quoted in book [4]*Home/Birth: A Poem*

I am compelled by some deep hunger of the soul, driven by a desire that will not leave me alone, to live life to the fullest. And I know this does not mean working endlessly, accomplishing the most, or consuming the greatest amount & variety of things and experiences. It means tasting each mouthful, feeling each breath, listening to each song, being awake & aware of each moment as it unfolds. Oriah Mountain Dreamer

”The expectant mother is an image of strength, power, and creativity. She is able to carry twenty to thirty or more extra pounds and still continue her daily activities. And more wonderful, she is able to bring forth a new life.” – Carl Jones

”Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.” –Golda Meir

”Every birth is holy. I think a midwife must be religious because the energy she’s dealing with is holy. She needs to know that other people’s energy is sacred...By religious, I mean that compassion must be a way of life for her. Her religion has to come forth in her practice...it cannot be just theory. Truly caring for people cannot be a part-time job.” Ina May Gaskin, from *The Spiritual Midwife, Mothering #8, 1978*

”We have barely tapped the power that is ours. We are more than we know.” –Charlene Spretnak

”Birth always alters you. It’s a learning experience...no matter how many classes you go to, how

much you practice relaxation, how many books you read, or how many prayers you put out into the universe, childbirth is beyond your control, a force of nature, like a tornado, a blizzard, or an earthquake.” –Patrician Harman ([5]Arms Wide Open: A Midwife’s Memoir)

“Becoming a mother makes you the mother of all children. From now on each wounded, abandoned, frightened child is yours. You live in the suffering mothers of every race and creed and weep with them. You long to comfort all who are desolate.” — Charlotte Gray (via Giving Birth with Confidence)

“It is not female biology that has betrayed the female...it is the stories and myths we have come to believe about ourselves.” –Glenys Livingstone

“In western society, the baby gets attention while the mother is given lectures. Pregnancy is considered an illness; once the ‘illness’ is over, interest in her wanes. Mothers in ‘civilized’ countries often have no or very little help with a new baby. Women tend to be home alone to fend for themselves and the children. They are typically isolated socially & expected to complete their usual chores...while being the sole person to care for the infant...” –Milk, Money, & Madness

“Women experience pain differently; some feel strong overwhelming pain, some may feel a deep discomfort during birth, and still others may feel no pain at all. The experience of pain during childbirth facilitates an unfolding of inner power and resources we never imagined we possessed, similar to enduring the pain of completing a marathon at the finish line.” –Barbara Nicholson and Lysa Parker, API founders

“Nourish beginnings, let us nourish beginnings. Not all things are blest, but the seeds of all things are blest. The blessing is in the seed.” –Muriel Rukeyser

“One of the most important things I have learned about birthing babies is that the process is more of an unfolding marvel than a routine progression of events.” –Tori Kropp

“There is no telling how many miles you will have to run while chasing a dream.” Author Unknown

“Aside from new babies, new mothers must be the most beautiful creatures on earth.” Terri Guillemets (via [6]Brio Birth)

“There’s nothing that can help you understand your beliefs more than trying to explain them to an inquisitive child.” - Frank A. Clark

“Grace reveals to you a great mothering love that you can step into, that’s been here before you and will be here after you. Grace will be with you as you open your arms, as you release your children and send them out into the world. If you listen carefully, you can hear grace whispering its thanks to you for being a mother to these souls.” –Denise Roy (Momfulness)

“I believe global transformation hangs on the empowerment of women.” –Vajra Ma

“Learning too soon our limitations, we never learn our powers. We will learn them now.” - Mignon McLaughlin

“No one has yet realized the wealth of sympathy, the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure.” - Emma Goldman

“A person who believes too earnestly in [her] own convictions can be dangerous to others, for ab-

sence of humor signals a failure in basic humanity.” –Thomas Moore (Original Self)

”No mammal on this planet separates the newborn from its mother at birth except the human animal. No mammal on this planet denies the breast of the newborn except the human.” –James Prescott (neuropsychologist quoted in *The Art of Conscious Parenting*)

(While I like this quote, the snarky part of me wants to say, no other mammal wears clothes, sleeps in a bed, drives a car, etc., etc.)

”If we can mobilize the mothering instinct in all of us, we could save the planet. It is inappropriate to be dispassionate right now.” –Helen Caldicott (1981) in *Momfulness*

”Parenting is a mirror in which we get to see the best of ourselves, and the worst; the richest moments of living, and the most frightening.” –Myla & Jon Kabat-Zinn quoted in *Momfulness*

”Remember our heritage is our power; we can know ourselves and our capacities by seeing that other women have been strong.” - Judy Chicago

”I hear the singing of the lives of women. The clear mystery, the offering, and the pride.” - Muriel Rukeyser

”She’s turning her life into something sacred: Each breath a new birth. Each moment, a new chance. She bows her head, gathers her dreams from a pure, deep stream and stretches her arms toward the sky.” –from the journal offered for giveaway on [7]Mamahhh

”Birthing is the most profound initiation to Spirituality a woman can have.” –Robin Lim (in *She Births*)

”As a woman, you are powerful. Birth is of course only one of many amazing pieces of being female, but it is unique in some very key ways...it is a time in a woman’s life that requires physical, spiritual, and emotional strength. It tests the foundation of who we believe we are as women, and challenges our beliefs about our own power.” –Marcie Macari (*She Births*)

”There is something wonderfully bold and liberating about saying yes to our entire imperfect and messy life.” –Tara Brach (in *Momfulness*)

”We cannot withhold facts for fear of offending because the importance of the information outweighs people’s right to not be challenged in their beliefs.” Maddy Reid

”Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” –Winston Churchill

”A ’no’ uttered from the deepest conviction is better and greater than a ’yes’ merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble.” Mahatma Gandhi

”Let’s declare a permanent truce with our bodies for the sake of our daughters. Imagine with me being at home, at ease, and at peace with our bodies.” –Patricia Lynn Reilly

”I believe that natural childbirth is a right and a privilege...Our country needs to step up to the plate in educating women about the benefits of natural birth, and we need to help women actually do it –

not just hear about it.” –Mayim Bialik

”I dream of giving birth to a child who will ask, ’Mother, what was war?’” - Eve Merriam

”...undisturbed (not neglected or abandoned) birth is a powerful initiation into motherhood, not only in a physical and physiological sense, but also in an emotional and spiritual sense.” –Christina Hurst-Prager (in (ICEA) International Childbirth Education Association’s journal)

1. <http://www.facebook.com/citizensformidwifery>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/litmama>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Doulas-Guide-to-Birthing-Your-Way/103879092977398>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/HomeBirth-A-Poemic/188657481155742>
5. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Arms-Wide-Open-A-Midwives-Memoir/206215119418514>
6. <http://www.facebook.com/briobirth>
7. <http://www.facebook.com/mamahhhjenni>

Being Succulent (2011-09-12 10:17)

From the [1]The Bodacious Book of Succulence by SARK:

”We are succulent with our shredded fantasies, our unread books, our misguided perfectionism, our hiding in bed eating rows of cookies, or neurotically running to and away from things. We are succulent just like this. Just the way we are NOW!....”

I like the way this book emphasizes that you are succulent right NOW—you don’t have to do anything special to be it (of course, I still get the ”do something and you’ll finally be wonderful” message anyway!).

I had a rough weekend in which I felt overwhelmed by to-dos and ”shoulds” and was crabby and snappy at my family and then extremely hard on myself about being crabby and snappy and so on and so forth in an endless spiral of ick. I have known for a long time that I honestly think that if I just read the right book and did the RIGHT thing, I would finally be PERFECT!!!! And, it just sucks when I remember...again!...that I’m not and that it isn’t possible and that the pursuit of doing it all ”right,” really ends up making me less than in many respects in the end. I also feel like all the reading I do can mute my own intuition—how can I know what I truly feel and believe, if the words of 5 dozen self-help authors are chasing around inside my brain and each making the ”most sense”? (I feel similarly about parenting books—I try so hard to parent the ”right” way and wonder if I’ve lost touch with my own sense of what the right way is, by always reading and trying to incorporate other people’s right ways...?) Seriously, there was so much messy should in my brain this weekend I honestly could not distinguish what I really wanted to do from the shoulds—right down to, ”I should be having more fun and being a more delightful person.”

P.S. The spellcheck attempted to change, ”neurotically” in the quote above to ”erotically.” ;-D

Tried to get a family picture of all our succulence—and, fittingly, it turned out kind of blurry ;-D



[2]

1. [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0684833778/102-2126667-6774520?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0684833778/102-2126667-6774520?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0684833778)
[xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0684833778](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0684833778/102-2126667-6774520?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0684833778)
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1311.jpg

Lynda M O (2011-09-12 11:02:37)

Lovely photo of your smiling faces; may the week perk up and give you some moments of graciousness and fulfillment.

Review & Recipe: The Artisanal Kitchen Balsamic Vinegar & Olive Oil (2011-09-13 16:29)



[1] I am a long-time fan of balsamic vinegar and so I was excited to try a sample size bottle of the "Full Bodied Authentic Modena Aged Balsamic" offered by [2]The Artisanal Kitchen. It arrived in a super cute little bottle (I've also been a sucker for mini-sized versions of things!) along with its companion product, "Extra Virgin Three Olives Olive Oil," another indispensable part of my kitchen supplies. I decided to make my favorite salad dressing using both samples. I do not follow a specific recipe for the dressing, just make it to taste using:

Ample quantities of balsamic vinegar

Roughly equal portion of olive oil

Splash of lemon juice

Dashes of garlic powder, onion powder, salt & pepper

I then serve myself a generous portion over organic baby mixed greens, home grown sprouts (thanks, Mom!), and some french fried onions (bad!). Sometimes I add some pieces of steak to make it a full meal :)

Not all vinegars are created equal, so I was pleased to discover The Artisanal Kitchen Balsamic vinegar was light and fruity in taste. While still possessing the sharp tang that makes a balsamic vinegar SO tasty, the flavor of this one was lighter and sweeter in taste than many others and was delicious. The Three Olives olive oil was also high quality and light in flavor and feel. I heartily enjoyed my salad and will be making more dressing using these products soon.

I also received the following chicken recipe to share:

BBQ chicken topped with caramelized red onions made with The Artisanal Kitchen Aceto Balsamico di Modena



[3]

Ingredients:

- 4 medium-size chicken breasts
- 4 tablespoons [4]Aceto Balsamico di Modena (purple label) by The Artisanal Kitchen
- 2 red onions, sliced thin
- 2 tablespoons of [5]Three Olives Olive Oil by The Artisanal Kitchen
- Pinch French Fleur de Sel.
- Garnish: parsley

Instructions:

1. Put the olive oil and salt in a medium-size frying pan and heat on low. When oil is heated, add sliced red onion to the pan and cook over a low flame for about 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, until onions are caramelized. Next, add The Artisanal Kitchen Balsamico di Modena to the onions and continue to cook on a very low flame, stirring frequently, until the onions have turned a dark brown color. Scrape the balsamic residue off the bottom of the pan, mix with the onions and cook for a few more minutes to allow the remaining balsamic to be absorbed into the onion mixture.
2. Cook chicken breast on the barbeque and, once done, lightly salt and drizzle with olive oil and balsamic vinegar over the top. Place a few tablespoons of onion mixture on each chicken breast, garnish with a parsley leaf and serve.

Disclosure: I received complimentary samples of these products for review purposes.

1. <http://theartisanalkitchen.com/>
2. <http://theartisanalkitchen.com/>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/tak_recipe_32.jpg
4. <http://test.theartisanalkitchen.com/index.php/shop/aceto-balsamico-di-modena-purple-label/>
5. <http://test.theartisanalkitchen.com/index.php/shop/three-olives-olive-oil/>

talkbirth (2011-09-13 21:20:13)

It doesn't actually use the oven, so I guess that was a typo of sorts!

Lori Doty (2011-09-13 20:18:25)

I'm probably missing something here but I don't see where you cook it in the oven just that you should preheat it to 350.

Success, Parenting, and Having Each Other's Backs (2011-09-14 15:40)

Sometimes my day is made by receiving an email thanking me for putting into words what the reader has felt, but has not been able to express. These emails/comments make my writing worth it to me—to know that I've made a connection across the distance and touched someone else's life. Likewise, sometimes I can best express what I've felt or thought by using the words of another's writing, that's why I'm a quotaholic. After a long conversation with good friends on a local homeschool list about peaceful parenting, which sort of evolved into a general discussion of parenting and parenting books and whether there is a right way and whether we really have that much influence over how our kids eventually turn out, I feel drawn to share some quotes from the book [1]Inconsolable by Marrit Ingman. I previously wrote a [2]short post about this book and made a (funny) quiz to go with it: [3]What Kind of Mother Are You Quiz

Inconsolable is a memoir of postpartum depression consisting mostly of semi-humorous vignettes excerpted from the author's life with her young son (a colicky baby who has severe eczema and food allergies), mixed in with own wry observations about life. In the context of the conversation referenced above, I feel like sharing some quotes from her about parenthood/parenting styles in general and her comments about judging other people for making different parenting choices. As I've noted several times before, I struggle with an ongoing sense that I can somehow figure this out once and for all and be PERFECT at last. While I'm improving (! ;) , I think my parenting still tends to operate from the assumption that it is possible to be perfect and do everything right.

Here's a quote I really identified with (minus the Guinness):

There's a certain type of parent I see often—sometimes see it in myself—who is a success-oriented person from a middle-class background, well-taught (traditionally or through self-education) and accustomed to high praise. We're used to getting a report card or a performance review every six weeks, we're current with Big Ideas and prone to Big Discussions over pints of Guinness, and we throw ourselves into parenting with the same right-minded stamina with which we might compare graduate programs and scholarships. We educate ourselves about various theoretical orientations on the topic, read the works of champion scholars...memorize acronyms and slogans, and align ourselves with a 'good match.' We study rigorously, and our parenting is like a practicum. We analyze situations and apply theories; we fasten Snappis and gently redirect toddlers with great self-satisfaction, as if we are strutting for a review committee. We meet over coffee with study groups.

This is not necessarily lamentable. It's good to be well read, to be prepared, to invest oneself in the new role of parent. It's just not really about the kids is it? It's about more than just wanting to be good at what you do; it's about wanting to be the best. We're parenting careerists. We want to be superstars. We want other people to praise us. We want props for holding off on the antibiotics for that ear infection, delaying solids just a little longer, for buying the organic

crib sheets and the shampoo that's made with kukui nuts harvested by the indigenous people of Brazil and imported by a woman-owned business. We go that one extra mile. We exceed expectations...Is this wrong? Again, not necessarily. It's not wrong to have ambitions, to dream of home-sewn Halloween costumes (or ones we just "whipped up" because we're so crafty) and slow food and perfect portraits and cooperative preschool.

But we have to remember that our standards of success, of happiness, of demonstrating our love for our children are inflated. We'll never meet them. Our reach will always exceed our grasp.

An essay I wrote pondering some similar topics was published in the [4]summer issue of Natural Life magazine. I've had a lot of articles published in a lot of different places and this is only the second time that I've received several emails from strangers thanking me for the article. I've received five emails like this during September, which has really touched my heart! I look forward to taking a look at the issue myself.

Back to Inconsolable regarding her unexpected cesarean:

So that was it. I'd failed. Well, close the book on this one. Nurse Rachet was probably stuffing a Nuk into the kid's mouth or giving him a Happy Meal. Hooking him up to an IV of Kool-Aid. He'd have to grow up in an iron lung. Maybe the other kids would use him as third base. He'd call me 'Mother,' and I'd sign his college tuition checks while he snuggled with a rhesus monkey made of sheepskin.

I literally laughed out loud while reading that one :)

And then, finally:

Mothers of the world, we've got to have each other's backs. Without working together, we literally cannot survive. Because we are divided—into 'working' and 'stay-at-home' parents, into 'natural' or 'attachment parents' and 'mainstream' parents—we remain marginalized as a group. We just haven't noticed, because we're too busy shooting each other down, trying to glean little nuggets of self-satisfaction from an enterprise that is still considered less significant than paid work...

Much as I strive to be accepting of everyone and to honor the dignity and worth of each human being (like a good human services pro!) I do see this tendency toward division sometimes sneaking out in myself—either in thought, or conversation, even though my heart truly lies in helping other women. In helping other mothers. This can't be done through judgement or secret convictions of superiority!

At the end of my own Mindful Mama essay in Natural Life, I write:

Perhaps parenting authentically, from the heart, can't be learned in a book or through application of a theory, but only through being there and being aware – of both the beauty and the messiness. Perhaps it means a loosening of attachment to attachment parenting as a prescribed set of practices and beliefs. Perhaps it means being a more loving friend to my own imperfect self.

Sometimes I have more "figured out" than I give myself credit for...

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1580051405/102-2126667-6774520?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=1580051405>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/what-kind-of-mother-are-you/>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/what-kind-of-mother-are-you-quiz.pdf>
4. http://www.naturallifemagazine.com/1108/Natural_Life_July_August_2011_index.htm

Sara (2011-09-20 22:54:37)

What a great article! Even outside parenting we women tend to have a habit of finding flaws in other women. I think you are right though starting to love ourselves (successes and flaws) is the key.

lis (2011-09-16 19:42:07)

just found my way here after reading your article in Natural Life. it really spoke to me, as does this post. my goal is to be Perfect Mama. i hold myself to that and i sometimes even judge others for not having that as their goal. the quotes from Inconsolable hit the spot for me. thank you so much for sharing this, and for the article in Natural Life. i am new to the world of mothering, and blogging about mothering. it is so easy to get lost in my goals and feel as though others can "do it all" and dont get frustrated with their child or stress about money or just need to go to sleep at the end of the day. thanks for keeping it real. reminding to me to as well. its a fine line between focusing on the good in life, setting high goals, and being realistic and unattached. we mamas dance on that line. and, we should all be taking our own advice! giving ourselves credit for who we are, what we know. noone else is sending home a report card on our parenting. i gotta get my hands on Inconsolable now. sounds wonderful. thanks again for sharing. ill be back around your blog

stayingalivemoma (2011-09-14 15:53:51)

lol, I also have sever eczema and allergies! It gets worse when you're pregnant!

Writing and Nursing (2011-09-18 18:54)

Today, I came across an old quote I had saved from the book [1]The Writer's Life. Essentially a collection of quotes from the diaries of famous writers like John Steinbeck, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Mark Twain, etc., the compilers of the book went through authors' diaries and put together a new book—it is organized in to chronological sections starting with excerpts written in youth and then thoughts about the writing process, fame, ambition, and so forth, and then concludes with thoughts about death, life's work, and immortality.

From Rosellen Brown, this quote felt particularly relevant to me:

"I know that for me, writing has something in common with nursing the baby. I can't do it if I don't do it all the time. Put it aside to build up strength, the flow will dwindle and finally disappear. When the baby was at my breast ten times a day, I had a rare secret feeling that we were violating a law of nature, defying a form of entropy...One cannot hoard some things. The more I gave the baby, the more I had to give her, and had I tried to conserve myself, I would have found that I conserved nothing."

I once read somewhere else that after you have been writing a blog for some time, you will discover that you have generated a significant body of work. I love that. I can think about blogging as "wasting time" or as something to do only when I have a few extra minutes, or, I can look at it as an opportunity to contribute to my body of work in the world. This is my 469th blog post here! Anyway, this is why I decided not to

completely quit blogging, but instead to set aside some dedicated time on Wednesdays to write a post (even if it is a short one). I do find that I need the "proper" time to write, or the flow just isn't there and can't be forced. That isn't true of nursing—I can do that anywhere, anytime! (Well, though it, too, can't be forced!).

I've had emails from several readers wanting to read more about homeschooling and how I "structure my day." I told my husband that and he asked, "did you say, 'I'd like to know that too?'" ;-D I've also had a request to write about elimination communication. I plan to write about both these topics soon. My nursling will be 8 months tomorrow and my biggest boy will turn eight years old on the 21st, so I'd like to write about both of those occasions before tackling homeschooling and ECing.

This SO isn't an exciting or earth-shaking post, but here it is anyway...!

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0679769579/103-6893043-7177433?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0679769579>

Hillary (2011-09-27 19:17:32)

Molly I have a feeling we could sit down and have a long talk. If the homeschooling/ecing/blogging and many things on our plates didn't get in the way of course. I've scaled back my personal blogging a lot. Thought about stopping but it's my baby—my very own labor of love. I'm happy I can get one post a week. We're about to celebrate my oldest's 7th birthday next week!

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-09-19 08:31:58)

Eight years! Wow. That's BIG. I remember when Noah was a baby and the three-year-olds all looked monstrous, impossible, somehow unlovable to me. Now he's five. It's so clichéd, but still. Also: what a great quotation. I'm trying to figure out how my life in the next few years can include more writing (I have a couple/few book projects I'd like to do, but I'm finally accepting that I cannot work full time and parent and gestate and blog and write a book and be a happy healthy person: it's too much pressure, just unrealistic for me)—I like the breastfeeding / writing habit analogy.

Jenny (2011-09-18 21:42:51)

Thank you!

talkbirth (2011-09-28 11:08:45)

Not to mention birth, birth, birth! ;) Maybe we'll have a chance for a real life chat sometime in the future! Any chance you're coming to the 2012 CAPPa conference? I'm coming to a place where I can feel okay with a once per week post. I want to post every day though—I have ideas for posts every day.

Perfection (2011-09-20 15:14)

Some quotes about perfection and perfectionism from the (extremely) short book [1]Being Perfect by Anna Quindlen:

"Perhaps someday we will be able to read something over which a real person has not sweated and sworn; perhaps we will find out precisely what the thing lacks that only effort can confer. Is it soul? Passion? Vivid reality? If I had to guess, I would say it would be all three."

About young people thinking about parenthood (reminds me of my [2]Getting a C-Minus quote):

"You will convince yourself that you will be a better parent than your parents and their parents have been. But being a good parent is not generational, it is deeply personal, and it comes down to this: If you can bring to your children the self that you truly are as opposed to some amalgam...you will be able to teach them by example not to be terrorized by the narrow and parsimonious expectations of the world, a world that often likes to color within the lines when a spray of paint, a scribble of crayon, would be much more satisfying."

And finally, after something bad has happened or some failure:

"Sitting there, you will fall into the center of yourself. you will look for some core to sustain you. And if you have been perfect all your life and managed to meet all the expectations of your family, your friends, your community, your society, chances are excellent that there will be a black hole where that core ought to be."

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0375505490/002-0508358-2447242?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=sm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0375505490>
2. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2011/08/17/getting-a-c-minus/>

Eight is Great! (2011-09-21 16:33)

Eight years ago today, I became a mother for the first time [1]when I gave birth to a magical baby boy. Born at sunrise on a Saturday morning, he surprised us all by weighing over 8 pounds and by crying when only his head was born! He had lots of dark hair and a tan complexion and he took to "nursies" like he was born to breastfeed. He was my highest need baby and in some ways remains the most complicated one to parent—perhaps because he is the first and so always more of an "experiment." Now, at 8, he is getting tall and is super skinny. He is still tan, but his hair is light brown now—and out of control wild if it gets more than an inch long (and even then it is crazy—he has a double crown and a super weird, uneven hairline in front! No matter how his hair is cut, it looks like we went crazy and hacked it all off). He is losing teeth like crazy and finally has learned how to read—and, more importantly, to have a thrill of discovery about it, rather than acting like it is a chore. He has been cautious and careful since birth—at 10 months old, he would babysign the word "nervous" when scared about something and he is still likely to hang back in new situations.

Pre-pregnancy, I always envisioned myself having girls, but my Lannbaby quickly showed me that being a boymom is a great thing to be and I felt content to remain exclusively a boymom if that was my destiny.

He is amazingly creative and is constantly bubbling with ideas and projects. He draws all the time and does things like make books titled, "Impossible Things to Do in Your Own Back Yard." He is highly verbal—always has been—and is maturing in his outlook/grasp on the world. For example, just last night Mark was telling me about wanting to buy some new exercise equipment (as I told him, there are some things in life I don't believe in, and buying exercise equipment is one of them!). I said to Mark, "sure, fine. Go ahead and buy it. It's totally okay with me for you to spend all our money on something that will just sit in the corner. I'm fine with it, really!" Lann was lying on the bed watching us and he said, "Gee, Mom, you are really bad at guilt tripping, aren't you?" It cracked us up!

I'm amazed at how awesome it is to have an 8 year old and a baby at the same time. He is so much help and is a great big brother to both of his siblings. It is excellent to have someone who can stand by the cart while I use the bathroom at the store, or who can play with the baby while I take a shower,

or who can carry the baby out to the carseat for me so I don't have to make two trips. I find myself feeling completely weirded out by the fact that as his baby teeth are steadily falling out, hers are coming in. Where does the time go? It spins so fast and life just keeps rolling along, each stage so vibrant, real, all-encompassing, and normal, and yet *blink* there I am with my newborn son in my arms, feeling my heart crack wide open and my boundaries becoming stretched beyond all imagining. Feeling my way along as we are birthed into our new roles together, triumphant and tender all at the same time. Challenged beyond belief in the adjustments required to my sense of self, awed by my own ability to give and to adapt, shocked by the magnitude of the changes wrought in my life by one tiny soul. I've said it before and I've said it again, in the words of Naomi Wolf, A mother is not born when a baby is born; a mother is forged, made. Lann was the first babysmith of my life and the forging of my new self in the flames of motherhood was, and is, a potent, powerful, intense, transformative, and irreplaceable rite of passage—body, mind, heart, and soul. Thanks, baby!

Here we are, tender and new:



[2]



[3]

Listening to a harmonica being played



[4]



[5]

Family hug

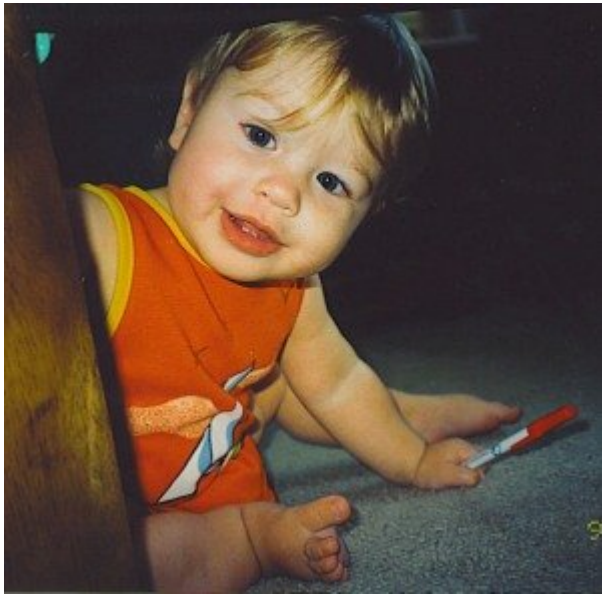


[6]

Crawling



[7]
Mohawk boy...



[8]
Peeking out!

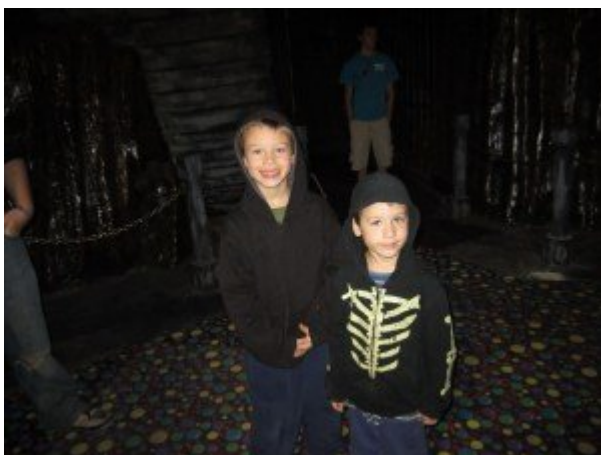


[9]
First birthday cake!

****Blink!****



[10]
Missing teeth!



[11]
Getting ready to play laser tag for family birthday party fun!



[12]
Birthday cash this morning!



[13]
With brother and sister (here, she's trying to escape)

And, yes, I cried while I was doing this...

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/my-first-birth/>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/lanmmama.jpg>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/harmonicalistening.jpg>
4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/smilingtogether.jpg>
5. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/remerfam.jpg>
6. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/lanntongue.jpg>
7. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/mohawk.jpg>
8. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/prettydarncute.jpg>
9. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/cakeboy.jpg>
10. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1322.jpg
11. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1332.jpg
12. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1361.jpg
13. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1371.jpg

dancersummer (2011-09-21 16:55:34)
I cried while reading it! :)

Jessica (2011-09-21 22:06:00)

I am always so excited to watch life unfold for you and your boys. It is like I am taking a peek into the future of what is in store for me. Life is going so fast and it is crazy to see Lann as an 8yr old now! I will always have memories of him the size of my Logan at the LLL meetings in the basement at Sherrick's. :) Congrats on number 8!!!!

Barbara (2011-09-21 20:32:35)

I forgot how round his little face was! Funny how the current child completely eclipses the baby he was.....he changed things for many of us. Made us into grandparents and the other kids into aunts and uncles. Ah, Lann.....sniff....

Affordable Fetal Model (2011-09-22 12:55)

Two things to know about me:

1. I love dolls.

2. I love bargains.

For quite a while, I've wanted a realistic baby model to use in my birth classes. My ideal model could be used both for demonstrations of [1]fetal positioning in the pelvis and also for demo'ing newborn care and possibly breastfeeding. Most fetal models sold by CBE supply companies range from \$60-150. I usually use a Bitty Baby doll to demo newborn care and breastfeeding (a third thing to know about me is that my love of bargains makes an exception when it comes to American Girl dolls. I have an embarrassing number of AG dolls and vast quantities of accessories. I've had this Bitty Baby for over 10 years, I didn't buy her to use in class). In my knitted uterus, resides a cute little baby doll I bought at Target for \$5. Neither of these dolls works at all for fetal positioning or with my demonstration pelvis.



[2]
Look at this cute baby!

So, imagine my delight when I found a nearly perfect model newborn at Kmart yesterday while my son was picking out his birthday presents. I named her Sasha AND, get this, she was \$20. In a bonus twist, unlike 99.9 % of the dolls in the store, she did not come with a bottle! (There is a bottle pictured with a different doll on the back of the box.) She did come with a little cloth diaper, a onesie, a band to cover her cord stump (yes, she seems to have one, but it could just be a dramatic "outie"!), a little outfit, a hat, and socks. Called La Newborn (nursery doll), she is made by Berenguer.



[3]
Legs and arms straightened out a little

The only drawback is she is not very flexible and so would be hard to use comfortably for things like practicing putting on diapers. Her fairly flexed permanent body position does make her absolutely ideal

for use for fetal positioning and even for swaddling or babywearing practice. I originally planned to take her arms and legs off to fill with plastic pellets to add weight, but I'd don't think I'm going to bother. While nothing near the weight of a real baby, she is made from good quality vinyl.

After looking these dolls up various places online, I'm now thinking I should have bought the remaining one or two that they had at K-Mart. They don't seem to be widely available for the \$20 price.

This morning, my older son helped me take all kinds of pictures of my new toy—I mean, teaching aid!—today (yet another of the many benefits of having an 8 year old in the house!). So, this is a photo-heavy post!



[4]

See what I mean about well flexed for fetal positioning information?!



[5]

And now my Christmas pelvis gets in on the demo...



[6]

If the demo pelvis had a coccyx joint, the baby would fit perfect through. As it is, her head does get stuck on it (good teaching moment about the importance of active positions for birthing!)



[7]

Bitty Baby Noelle and Target Baby are less than impressed with this interloper...



[8]

Alaina helps take care of baby Sasha...



[9]



[10]

For sizing purposes—while I think she appears to be the perfect, realistic size when held up to my belly as a fetal model for positioning, when held in arms, she is more the size of a preemie baby (maybe a 31 weeker or so). She is about 15 inches.



[11]

Lann wanted me to take this one—”make them guess who’s the real baby!!!”—conveniently, Alaina closed her eyes for this picture, making identification of the real baby even trickier...

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2008/09/17/which-pelvis-model-to-buy/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1418.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_14251.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1403.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1413.jpg

6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1414.jpg
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1420.jpg
8. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1399.jpg
9. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1428.jpg
10. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1431.jpg
11. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1422.jpg

talkbirth (2011-09-27 07:26:55)

Thanks for the clarification! I didn't have my tape measure handy when I was writing about it (I also forgot to think in terms of crown to rump length vs. total length).

Barbara (2011-09-22 17:10:03)

If you leave early enough tomorrow, you can make it to Kmart in time to stock up on more babies!!

Emily White (2011-09-22 18:08:04)

Super cute! I'm going tomorrow to see if my kmart has them. My sister in law is 34 weeks tomorrow I bet she'd be thrilled to see what size her baby is approx. Its so hard to imagine whats in there when you can't see it. I've had 4 and every time shocked that HUGE baby was inside my belly. No matter how big I thought my belly was!

clearroadbirth (2011-09-22 18:11:33)

I have some great breastfeeding and babywearing models that had cloth bodies with inflatable inner liners (to feed them so they can pee??). I cut them open and filled them with rice so that they have a more realistic weight. Mine weigh 7 lbs now and it is so much easier to teach mummies to manipulate them into new positions for feeding and wearing. Thank you for sharing this! -Mandy

Kristen O (@BirthingKristen) (2011-09-25 20:35:47)

Just wanted to say that the interloper picture is hysterical. (Also? Bravo on finding such an affordable doll! I'm often struck by severe sticker shock whenever I check out childbirth ed products. Not that they're not EVER worth the money. But still...)

Midwife@heart (2011-09-26 14:53:10)

I wanted to say that I found out by gogging that the doll is the size of about a 30 to 31 week baby. I just bought it and it is about 11 in. crown to rump. I agree with you, it has the perfect curvature for showing baby positioning. I have this one which I use for baby care and breastfeeding <http://www.1cascade.com/ProductInfo.aspx?productid=60409>

talkbirth (2011-09-28 11:12:53)

I swear I didn't set the picture up like that! I only noticed the skeptical glances after moving the pic to my computer!

Eightmonthababy! (2011-09-26 13:12)

I don't know if it simply because we've said she is the last baby, or, because she is such an awesome baby, or what, but Alaina makes me want to never not have a baby. Maybe I have a different perspective this time around because my oldest is now 8, so I can see right in front of me every day how quickly it goes by—or, maybe I am literally able to enjoy her more completely than I was with the older two. The adjustment to motherhood with the first was emotionally complicated. The adjustment to having two was easier, but the juggling of the needs of an infant and an almost-three year old, made some of the days very difficult to cope with. Life isn't perfect now and I do get maxed out feeling (talk to me on a day when she doesn't nap as

I've come to expect!), but I just really, really, really like life with this baby in it! I was trying to explain it to Mark this week, saying that this is the last time anyone is ever going to love me like this. I know that might sound weird and that we think of parents as the ones having unconditional love for their babies, not vice versa, but the depth of the mother-baby attachment is extremely profound and incomparable. It is also simple and uncomplicated. I had the same depth of attachment with my other children, but I also felt more "oppressed" at times by the level of dependence and attachment. Now, I feel more aware of how short-lasting this period of intensity is and I just love how much she loves me. While we'll always love each other deeply, right now we are a motherbaby—a single psychobiological organism and there just isn't anything else like it.

Alaina has experienced lots of changes since my [1]6 month update post. She has four teeth now! (Brushes them herself before naps and at bedtime.) She crawls all over the place, mainly as a means to get to the next place where she can pull to stand. She pulls to stand on just about anything, sometimes letting go and just holding on with one hand. She can transfer between two surfaces, but does not yet "cruise." We experiment with solid foods—she's interested in everything, but doesn't like many of the things she tries. I forgot what it was like to be in this stage of motherhood where I perpetually have weird substances stuck to my clothes and can never stay "clean" (or, keep her clean). Just this month she seems to have figured out how to move food around in her mouth and swallow it, vs. just tasting it and then letting it ooze back out. She like broccoli (defrosted florets, not mashed up) and those little, too-expensive Gerber baby puffs. Still weighs about 20 pounds and fits most comfortably into size 18m clothes. She is just starting to wave and will—sometimes—say "hi" or "bye" accompanying the wave. She says "mama," seemingly purposely and has also seemed to say, "brother" and "Baba" purposely as well. She will give high fives. She is working on clapping and on raising her arms in response to, "how big is Alaina?!"

She still does an adorable face-stroking gesture and has also added back/chest patting into her repertoire. When I pick her up or take her from someone, she gives an extra launch kick with her legs that is really cute. She will then pat me on the chest (like I pat her back). Really cute!

I really think she is my most mouthy baby. Everything goes into the mouth. She is always after my computer mouse and my phone, trying to eat them all up. I also feel like she is my quietest baby, spending more time looking and watching than talking about it. She loves to ride along checking out the world from my hip, sometimes with a solemn and contemplative expression, sometimes with leg-kicking enthusiasm. She is still a really happy and content baby—I frequently get comments about her being the, "happiest baby I've ever seen," or, "she just seems to have a really pleasant temperament." She does get bumped/bonked more often than she used to, primarily by crawling around and getting stuck under tables and things like that, and so she will cry about that. I always find myself a little startled when she cries and not so sure what to do about it (nursing usually works). She remains a night owl—preferring to stay up until around 11:30 and then waking up for the morning at around 11:00. Her hair is looking a little less thin and occasionally I think I catch a hint of curl in it, but that might just be my imagination! It still looks red outside, but then sandy inside (just like the boys). Recently she has started to "dance" when music comes on and sometimes will actually tap her foot in time with music. I think the origin of the tendency to say, "mmm" about tasty food as a lifelong habit that originates in nursing babyhood, as she usually says, "Mmmm! Mmmm! Mmmm!" when she starts nursing :)

She is very mama-centric recently, wanting to spend most waking time with me or held by me. I've been teaching three college classes this session (two in-seat) and I was offered the opportunity to do so again next session. I opted to turn down the second in-seat class and just teach one. While part of me feels like I'm turning down something that would be good for our future, after a lot of thinking and back-and-forthing, I decided it is too much to expect of Alaina, of my mom (who comes with me to watch Alaina so that she doesn't have to be separated from me on teaching nights), and of myself. I'm handling it this session, but it has been a challenge and I've had several freak out moments about the demands (mainly

during grading times—another of which is rapidly approaching). She is becoming more hesitant about the separation—reaching after me, that sort of thing, and above all else, I want to honor her need for me. Regarding the overall workload, I explained to my husband that most of the time everything is going great, but that the balance and my personal emotional equilibrium is very fragile. I rely on everything unfolding “perfectly” in order for me to fit everything into a day that needs to happen. If something disrupts my anticipated schedule (like early naptime wake up, or nap refusal), I go into a tailspin and feel like my life is in a terrible state, etc., etc. I’m looking forward to a break and then to only teaching one in-seat class in the fall. While I feel like I’ve been doing a great job taking care of Alaina and also doing a pretty good job as a professor, I feel like I’m not doing as good of a job as I could be with my boys or with my husband or with my friends.

Now, for a whole row of update pictures! (I do posts like this primarily for my own “memoirs,” rather than to be particularly exciting for anyone else to read!)



[2]
She spends a LOT of time in this pouch!



[3]
On the go!



[4]
Pulling up on mama!



[5]
Standing baby!



[6]
Showing toofs! (that is my hair behind her, not hers!)



[7]
Pensive pondering



[8]
My baby companion!



[9]
Look at those eyes!



[10]

Uh oh! Located a remainder of mama's protein bar and is sucking off the chocolate part...



[11]

Showing her findings!



[12]

Mama is funny!



[13]
Matching hats!



[14]
On Lann's birthday, ready for fall!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/telling-about-it/>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1439.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1239.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1256.jpg
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1227.jpg
6. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1279.jpg
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1275.jpg
8. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1270.jpg
9. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1234.jpg
10. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1329.jpg
11. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1328.jpg
12. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1306.jpg
13. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1309.jpg
14. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1370.jpg

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-09-27 16:18:18)

"I rely on everything unfolding "perfectly" in order for me to fit everything into a day that needs to happen."—know the feeling. I think it's wonderful that you're making mindful decisions like this.

talkbirth (2011-09-28 11:11:13)

Thanks! We'll see what the next session brings!

smithlaurel (2011-10-01 18:55:57)

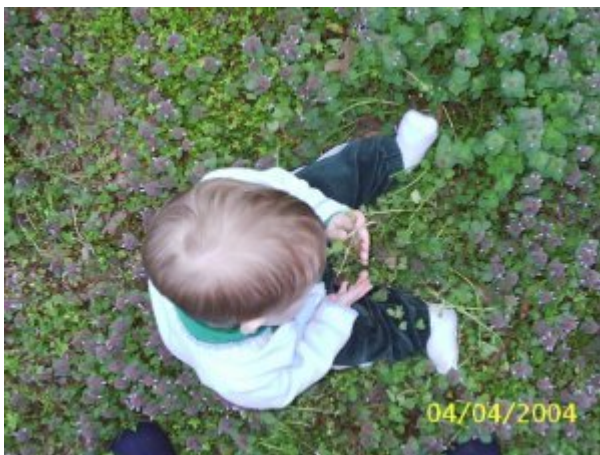
Love the update on your sweetie. And I appreciate the line of thought that led to you realizing you should just do one in-seat class next session. If everything must unfold "perfectly" in order to fit everything into a day, then I likely need to cut something. I'd honestly never thought about it quite that way. Thanks!

enjoybirth (2011-10-06 16:31:32)

Continue to enjoy her! My "baby" is almost 6 and I treasured every day with him (still do) There is something so magical when you are raising your "last"

Picking Stuff (2011-09-28 12:47)

This is purely a personal post to share pictures of my babies picking stuff :) We have a tradition of taking a picture of each sitting in the grass picking grass, leaves, and flowers. When writing about Lann's birthday and choosing pictures to use, I came across his "picking stuff" pictures and I wanted to share the series!



[1]
Lann picking stuff



[2]
Zander picking stuff



[3]
Alaina picking stuff

Can you tell they're related? I think they all have nice-shaped little heads. Different hair configurations, but same color. I love how Alaina's hands were capturing in enthusiastic picking motion :) Putting these pictures together gives me a weird, nostalgic sense of collapsed time.

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/morepicking9.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/zanpick7.jpg>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/alainapicking.jpg>

talkbirth (2011-09-30 07:58:03)
Yes, thanks!

Barbara (2011-09-28 14:47:43)
Love these – and will take credit for taking the pix!

My Homeschooling Life Story (Part 1 of 2) (2011-09-28 19:31)



[1]

I remind my students that in order to effectively help others, it is important to "know your story" and that felt relevant for this post about my homeschooling story

As I mentioned several posts ago, I've received some requests to write more about homeschooling. I realized I'm a little stumped on the direction to take, realizing that I used a lot of my "homeschool philosophy" type of energy up writing papers on the subject in college and that I also don't feel like I have any "how to" advice to give about homeschooling either. Nor can I really figure out how to write a "how we structure our day" type post either, because our days frequently look very different and change based on the needs of the day and the people. These things said, I also don't mean to suggest in any way that I've got it all figured out, I just don't spend a lot of time thinking about homeschooling. I mentioned it to my mom and she suggested that people might just be interested in my own experiences, both from my childhood and then currently, with my own kids. So, that's what I've decided to offer in this series of two posts. No philosophy, theories, or advice, just my own narrative about being a homeschooled kid who grew up to homeschool her own kids.

My own homeschooling story/saga is such an integrated part of my past, or my life story, that it has barely occurred to me that people might be interested to hear it. Maybe they will be, maybe they won't be. This is LONG post and who knows if anyone will even make it until the end! I do think I am in a fairly unique position as an adult former homeschooler. I know almost no one else who was homeschooled throughout the childhood and teenage years, never setting foot in a formal school until entering college. Did I mention its long? Be warned!

Childhood

I have three younger siblings and my mom homeschooled all of us. At the time, we considered ourselves "unschoolers" but I feel like that label has evolved to encompass a more developed philosophy and set of beliefs than it did when I was a kid. To my mom it meant that we homeschooled without curriculum and that learning in the house was primarily child-led/child-directed, with Mom's primary purpose to make quality resources available to us and to answer questions. My mom has a degree in early childhood education, which always gave her a little additional credibility in the eyes of casual questioners or people wondering if you were "allowed" to homeschool. As a kid, I truly felt like my mom homeschooled because

she enjoyed our company so much that she couldn't stand to have us away from her all day at school. It wasn't until adulthood that I fully realized that she probably could have used the "break" school would have provided, but she homeschooled us because of her own convictions that it was in our best interest and that the public school system was a "broken" one to which she was philosophically opposed. As a teenager, I did catch on to some of these convictions and would passionately advocate for homeschooling when encountering those who would express skepticism or doubt (this is what I mean about having "used up" this energy already).

My dominant memories of my childhood years consist mainly of playing with my sister, reading, and having my mom make things for us. My youngest siblings are 9 and 11 years younger than I am and do not feature prominently in my childhood memories. My other sister is 22 months younger than I am and our lives together are so inextricably linked that I rarely speak about my childhood without using the pronoun "we." We spent so much time playing. It was the bulk of our day really, just playing with each other. We were each other's best friend. We played outside, we played with toys, we made toys, and played some more. We had neighbors (loosely speaking—within five miles from us) who were also homeschoolers and we saw and played with them frequently as well (and, grew up to be bridesmaids in each other's weddings). With our friends, we often played house, restaurant and yes, school. We made all kinds of worksheets for our dolls and I was always the teacher. At home, we sometimes did worksheets with mom. Almost every year she bought "Super Workbooks" for us (i.e. "My Third Grade Super Workbook") and we'd start off with a bang with her saying that this was the year when we were really going to buckle down and do school every day. This usually lasted a couple of weeks and we'd be back to our freeform, playing days with occasional bursts of workbooks as we expressed interest in them. We had old-fashioned readers like Dick & Jane that were always fun to read, as well as lots of other schoolbooks in addition to the Super Workbooks. These were always available to us on the bookshelf if we wanted them. I learned to read when I was three and have been a voracious reader ever since. We would go to the library once a week and I would check out every new book they had.

Because of my tendency to read until my eyes glazed over, my mom eventually limited me to reading two books a day (full-length "chapter books" such as Trixie Belden—favorites of mine when I was about 6). I literally read every single book in the children and youth sections at both local libraries. A lot of my learning truly came from fiction. I still feel like my most long-lasting lessons about history came from American Girl books! We also used to get all kinds of educational magazines. Mom also read to us every night until we were in our early teens, usually book series like Narnia. We were in 4-H for many years and did all kinds of projects through 4-H, went to summer camp, and eventually participated in their many leadership-opportunity programs. I've never forgotten the mock trial of the ethically and morally complicated case of Nancy Cruzan we participated in at the state Capitol building through the 4-H civic leadership program I took part in. We belonged to the local homeschool support group and regularly went to homeschool bowling, skating, and other events. My mom also did a "craft club" for girls and we would get together and make craft projects every week. We also had lots of sleepovers.

Unlike many other homeschoolers of the time, we did not homeschool for religious reasons and in fact were not religious at all. I felt a barrier throughout my childhood in relating authentically to other people because I was not religious—it felt like something I needed to play close to the chest and keep "secret." Many of my friends were fundamentalist Christians, which was not compatible with my own burgeoning sense of social justice and women's rights. My own self-identification as a feminist was my first taste of activism and my first involvement with a "cause" (other than homeschooling). I had many experiences with my homeschooled peers that left a very bad taste in my mouth towards religion, primarily religious attitudes toward women, to the extent that I maintained a knee-jerk almost anti-religious response to any discussion of religious or spiritual issues until I was close to 30. As a child and teenager, I came to feel like being religious and being feminist were fundamentally incompatible and I chose feminism. I truly did not

know that someone could be religious or Christian without being frighteningly fundamentalist about it. It wasn't until much, much later that I discovered that there are a lot of "normal Christians" in the world (including "normal homeschooling Christians").

I grew up in an off-the-grid log cabin in the woods. We did not have a TV until I was 12 when we got a TV/VCR combo unit—it did not get any TV channels, but after that point we watched one movie per night.

High School

When I approached age 14, my parents gave me the choice of continuing to be homeschooled or to start high school. Several of my homeschooling friends started high school at this point and homeschooled boys in particular were hard to come by, many having been lured to public high school from desire to play organized sports. Those of us who remained actually organized our own homeschool basketball "team," playing basketball together in local parks at least once a week. I opted to begin a homeschool correspondence program, American School, a (supposedly) college-prep high school program that offered an accredited diploma at the end. Any naysayers were quickly silenced to learn that the same accrediting body that accredited the local high school, also accredited the correspondence high school I attended.

During my early teenage years, I also remained very involved with 4-H, serving as president of my club, etc. I also joined an Explorers post, the co-ed, young adult version of Boy Scouts and this is where I ended up meeting the boy who would eventually become my husband. Through dating his public-schooled self, I ended up participating in all of those things that people express concern about homeschoolers "missing out on," such as the prom. I cannot count the number of times people have asked, "but what about prom?!" when they hear that someone is homeschooled. After going to prom myself, I felt deeply sad that this experience was what some people apparently considered the pinnacle of their lives! My homeschooled-til-high-school friends were in band and another friend's brother played football, so I went to many high school football and basketball games to watch them play, thus again not missing out on a classic high school experience. (I'm glad I didn't need to spend 12 years in public school in order to earn these fabulous honors!)

I quickly discovered that I could complete my high school classes very quickly, sometimes completing an entire high school course during one weekend (of intensive work). My only challenging area was math and sometimes my mom and I both ended up crying over it as I struggled through algebra and geometry at the kitchen table. I started to toy with the notion of possibly completing high school in three years. As classes passed, I realized I could finish even more quickly than that, and in 1994, I received my high school diploma at age 15—14 months after having started the correspondence classes. Yes, I completed 4 years worth of high school work in slightly over a year! This really solidified for me that high school was likely a "waste of time" for everyone. After starting college, I was interviewed by the local paper and was asked if I felt like I had "missed anything" by not going to school like everyone else, I responded that I had missed out on "having been institutionalized." I was dating my future husband at this time and his friends were extremely annoyed at my "snotty" attitude in this quote stating that I couldn't know what high school was like, having never been there. They also said, "it isn't an institution! It has windows and the lockers are painted different colors." I rested my case.

While my parents and I debated about whether it made sense or not for me to start college so young, I really felt like I might as well be spending my time in college as in high school—if I could do it, why not start. So, at 15 1/2 I enrolled in a branch college to "get my feet wet." My primary motivation for starting at this school rather than at the local university, was because the branch college did not require an ACT score to be admitted and I really, really did not want to take the ACT. I eventually took the GRE to

get into graduate school and that remains the only standardized test I've ever taken.

College

I spent almost two years taking classes at the branch college until I had enough credit hours to transfer to the local university without an ACT score. I took College Algebra with trepidation, never having felt fully competent in math. I did successfully get an A in the class, but it involved literally hours of self-imposed practice problem solving at home sitting by the wood stove. I was a very enthusiastic and hard-working student, theorizing that I had so much energy for college because I hadn't previously been "burned out" by high school. I earned all A's at the branch school and continued to earn all A's at the university to which I transferred, eventually graduating summa cum laude with a 4.0 GPA. I was also the youngest graduate in the university's history, finishing my bachelor's degree at age 19 years and 13 days. I kept my age very private throughout college, only revealing my true age to a tiny handful of other students and then to a couple of my favorite professors in the two weeks before graduation. One classic moment was when a friend asked me to go to a bar after class to continue working on our group project. I said I couldn't and he said, "why not? You're 21, aren't you?" I just said no, and he said, "22?" which I continue to find very amusing ;) For all of those who worry about the "socialization" of homeschoolers, no one ever seemed to be able to identify me as a homeschooler or as overly young.

After it became clear that driving into town every day for classes and work no longer made a lot of sense, I lived in the dorm for one semester in my junior year and then moved into a small efficiency apartment when I was almost 18. I worked at the branch college I originally attended, which was a perfect job for me, allowing me to do all my homework and paper writing while at work. (I am now a professor at this same college!)

I was extremely obsessive about my grades, becoming almost panic-stricken at the thought of not getting an A in a class. Astronomy was my most horrible subject and I remember crying—wailing almost—certain that it was going to be the undoing of my 4.0. As it was, I calculated the exact score I needed to get on the final to manage a 90 % in the class and I still remember the tension in my chest in going to look at the final grades on the professor's door and seeing that, yes, I had received exactly that score on the final, not a single point over! I continued to date my only boyfriend throughout college and in July after I graduated we got married (we've been married for 13 years now). Immediately following college, I went on to graduate school and finished my master's degree there at age 21, also with a perfect 4.0 GPA (though I'd been told by many people, including professors, that I'd have to lower my expectations of myself once I went to graduate school and that it would be a "bigger pond," that didn't end up being true). Again, I only revealed my age to a handful of people. At one point after being pushed into saying how old I was, my friend said, "wow! I would never have guessed. If someone had asked me, 'is Molly 19 or 30,' I would have said, 'well, she looks young for 30.'" Even at the time, this struck me as mildly sad, like I had been "fast forwarded" through my adolescence.

Adult Reflections

My experienced as a homeschooled, now-adult taught me many things about education and about homeschooling. Primarily, I know from experience that it is not necessary to sit in desk all day. I also know that it is not necessary homeschool with a "school at home" mentality. Basically, children do pick up everything they need to know to be functional, socialized adults with access and opportunities. I always say I learned about the "real world" by living in it, rather than being closed up all day in an artificially age-segregated environment expressly modeled to serve the purposes of the Industrial Revolution, not human needs.

I do retain some sense of having been "fast forwarded," in my life, but that isn't really a bad thing (for example, now a 32, I have over 15 years of experience in my chosen field, rather than still "just starting out" as it seems to me like many thirty-something year olds are!). If I was starting all over again, I wouldn't necessarily recommend going to college that young, but nor would I recommend trying to prolong something that could be completed in less than four years.

My brother and sisters all did the same high school correspondence program, but paced themselves intentionally to finish later. They also all went to college and finished their bachelor's degrees. I share this personal story for those of you who have wondering if homeschooling "works" and whether your kids will, indeed, grow into functional adult humans :)

I find it somewhat amusing that I've ended up in education as a career. I feel like my outlook was profoundly shaped by my homeschooled childhood and my students frequently express that I expect them to think in ways they've never thought before and that my assignments are not like anything they've experienced before, "I mean, you actually expect us to think." (direct quote)

I have joked before, but am half-serious, that being unschooled "ruined" me for full-time employment. It did in the sense that I don't think it is healthy for anyone—male, female, child, adult—to spend all day, every day doing the same thing at the same place. That is not how life is meant to be lived! I also feel like my childhood spent essentially doing what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it, did have an impact on my experience of motherhood now, which not infrequently does not allow me to do what I want to do when I want to do it, and I chafe a little at those restrictions on my autonomy and all of my billions of ideas.

I also find it somewhat amusing that my life has taken a religious turn now, in that I am currently working on my doctoral degree (D.Min) in women's spirituality. I also am the vice president of my very small UU church. I find myself very passionate about and absorbed in study of the divine feminine, the sacred feminine, women's spirituality, feminist spirituality, and the Goddess. It took me a long time and some childhood religious "scars" to realize that there is a vast world out there beyond the dominant, patriarchal, Judeo-Christian lens and to discover that I connect to the women's spirituality movement on a very deep and meaningful level.

Homeschooling My Own Kids

As I previously noted, homeschooling my own kids was a foregone conclusion for me. I literally cannot fathom the idea of sending them to public school. Please see [2]Part 2 of this homeschooling post for more about what homeschooling looks like for us right now!

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/mollyatpark.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/09/30/homeschooling-today-part-2-of-2/>

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-09-28 19:44:00)

The prom thing cracks me up. I was in institutional education from preschool on, but I also started college early (at 14, graduated at 18, mostly because I felt high school would be a boring waste of time spent with the same people who tormented me in junior high, and my home life wasn't awesome either), and people's biggest terror at that was consistently "But you won't get to go to prom! What about prom?" I did go to a friend's prom, actually, and it totally sucked. (You knew I'd right the whole post!)

talkbirth (2011-09-30 07:56:49)

I'm glad, Laurel! I don't meet a lot of grown up homeschoolers so I hoped it might be helpful to hear from one.

smithlaurel (2011-09-29 20:01:04)

I loved reading this, Molly! What wonderful insight into the formation of you. And what tremendous encouragement to this home educating mama. Thanks!

talkbirth (2011-09-30 07:53:33)

That is what I saw in a lot of my college classmates too.

talkbirth (2011-09-30 07:55:17)

I didn't know that was your college experience too, Molly! Interesting. Did you tell people your age "secret"?

talkbirth (2011-09-30 07:52:21)

Yes, you're right and we've talked about that before. My own always public parents are always "productive" and full of ideas too. It is probably inherited! I guess when I think about this, what I really mean that I've met a lot of formerly public-schooled people who seem very "passive"—like they don't know what to do with themselves unless someone is telling them what to do. I'm not like that. At. All.

JMT (2011-09-28 22:23:12)

That was really fascinating! Thanks for taking the time to write it all out. I had what I generally consider to be a positive public school experience from grades 6 through 12, but the farther I get from it the more ambivalence I feel. I think one of the worst outcomes for me is a really-hard-to-shake mental association between "I'm learning a lot" and "I'm impressing the teacher" so that I only believe/feel the former if the latter obtains. Not a good thing! Coming back to do my MPH after a few years and a lot of personal changes has been good - I am much more self-motivated and engaged with my own learning processes. It just makes me wish that it had always been that way - I feel I missed a lot of opportunities to truly LEARN in college due to the mindset I carried over from high school.

Barbara (2011-09-29 07:58:32)

Very validating from the standpoint of this homeschooling parent!

Hope (2011-09-29 17:02:46)

Very encouraging for a currently unschooling mama. I have to say that this... "...impact on my experience of motherhood now, which not infrequently does not allow me to do what I want to do when I want to do it, and I chafe a little at those restrictions on my autonomy and all of my billions of ideas." is also true for this always public schooled mama. When I'm in the moment of mothering I'm okay with it but when I'm doing my own thing and feel interrupted I definitely get agitated or resentful about it. We have discussed that we have some other similar personality traits and I'm not sure this is at all about being unschooled and think it is just about being you.

Homeschooling Today (Part 2 of 2) « Talk Birth (2011-09-30 14:48:48)

[...] Comments « My Homeschooling Life Story (Part 1 of 2) [...]

Chrissy Grainger (2011-10-01 00:25:34)

Thank you for sharing Molly, what a wonderful testament for homeschooling, can't wait to finish part 2. I have a friend on facebook that was homeschooled and is also homeschooling or unschooling her children, you should look her up, Guggie Daly

Sierra (2011-10-03 10:19:54)

Very interesting. Thanks for sharing and yes, I did read the entire post. The more and more and more I read about

homeschooling, the more I would like to do it with my own kids when the time comes (no kids for this couple yet...we're both still in school).

Addressing some legitimate questions concerning unschooling « Hopeful Insights (2011-10-17 11:50:18)

[...] For a more in depth look at how a grown unschooler views her childhood and how it prepared her for adulthood read my friend Molly's post about her experience. [...]

Homeschooling Today (Part 2 of 2) (2011-09-30 14:48)

So, after my extremely long [1]"ghosts of homeschooling past" post, it is time for my follow-up post about what homeschooling looks like for me today. My boys are only 8 and 5 and if there is one thing that I know for sure, it is that how our daily lives look will change many times. I truly believe that children's play is children's "work" and the best thing we can do for them is allow them ample space and opportunity for play. I believe in life learning and playful learning and that we are learning all the time, not just when "doing school." I also believe that most people are "meant" to live home-based lives, spending a good deal of time in the company of their personal "tribe" and in their own homes (or those of people close to them), rather than in institutional settings (whether that setting be a schoolplace or workplace—as a companion to this thought though, I also feel like adults are also "meant" to spend time each day on "work" that is not parenting, whether it be [2]grinding corn, or something else).

So right now, our daily "structure" looks like this:

- 8:00, wake up—day feels bright and full of promise!
- Boys play Minecraft on computer or play with toys in living room or draw. A favorite is these amazingly awesome complex map-type drawings using newsprint paper on a roll (see pictures below). They also draw comic books and write stories.
- I do yoga
- I fix breakfast and we all eat
- Boys continue playing whether on Minecraft or outside or with toys, or draw or play sort of acted-out-video-game-adventure-type-stories
- I work on my online class or grades papers/homework or prepares materials for the week's classes—sometimes with "bonus time" (if Alaina keeps sleeping), writes blog post or works on lessons from own doctoral program.
- Around 11:00ish, Alaina wakes up. Boys run to play with her. She is wiggly and smiling and "look, world! I'm BAAACK!"
- Do things like listen to radio and dance together (today, it was Madonna, which the boys said was "laser tag music!" so we then danced/listened and played laser tag. Alaina was in pouch and I held the target and ran around with it to add an extra level of challenge while boys battled it out and attempted to also shoot the target).
- Do some household chores with Alaina in pouch.
- Go outside to let out chickens, play, swing on swings. When weather is nice in fall, go into the woods by big rocks to play and explore.

- Make lunch and eat. (Boys draw or play while I fix it. Alaina rides in pouch and supervises or plays on floor with boys.) Today I also made four loaves of pumpkin bread for our work co-op this weekend with Zander stirring/measuring and Alaina supervising, while Lann drew plans for "jet shoes" he would like to invent.
- Do school with boys. This consists of a combination of options from:
 1. [3]Reading Eggs
 2. [4]Starfall (we pay for the "more" version)
 3. [5]Jumpstart
 4. Leapster K and First Grade
 5. [6]ClicknRead Phonics
 6. [7]Videos from Harry Kindergarten
 7. In the past, we have also used [8]Dreambox & [9]Time4Learning
 8. I also have approximately 499 educational bookmarks on my computer that we do an assortment of things with.
 9. I get the[10] Clickschooling daily email which often has something good to check out.

Recently, we've been doing reading and math worksheets from their [11]Comprehensive Curriculum of Basic Skills workbooks every day. We stop as soon as they say they are bored and don't want to do anymore, because I don't believe in setting up an atmosphere where "learning" equals bad. Every day, they also each read me one new [12]Bob Book for reading practice. Z reads the early reading ones and L is into the first grade series. I am crossing my fingers hopefully that Z will learn to read more quickly than L has learned. Just this year, reading has finally clicked for L, but he still isn't exactly proficient or fluent in reading skill. Since I, personally, learned to read so early, this is really hard for me to deal with.

- Sometimes we don't make it to school before Alaina goes down for nap at about 1:30. So, sometimes we do that after I get back up from lying down with her. Sometimes they watch an episode of something they are interested in on Netflix while I'm putting her down for nap.
- At about 2:30, boys go to visit my parents at their house. While there, they—surprise!—play some more.
- If the stars are well aligned, Alaina naps while boys I gone and I frantically work on all tasks I imagined doing in the morning, while also feeling guilty about trying to finish my blog post rather than visit with my mom when she comes to get the boys.
- Once a week we go to homeschool playgroup and we do other homeschool events as they arise like bowling, skating, plays/shows at the university, occasional field trips, pumpkin patch, etc.
- Alaina wakes from nap and we snuggle and nurse and play and I marvel at her fundamental awesomeness.
- Boys return and I start trying to work on dinner (usually with Alaina in pouch). Sometimes while visiting with my mom (who plays with Alaina while I cook).

- Mark gets home from work at close to 6:00.
- I lament briefly about all the tasks I thought I would complete that I didn't get finished.
- Berate self for complaining and for whining at Mark when he has just gotten home, rather than be delightful company.
- Finish dinner and eat. While eating, we usually do "high-low" of the day—each take turn saying our "low point" and "high point" from the day.
- Clean up dinner and go outside for our evening walk. Boys ride bikes and are extremely loud and Mark and I try to talk over them.
- Boys shower, brush teeth and I read to them from our current book and then snuggle them until they go to sleep (Mark gets Alaina in her PJs, pottied, and teeth brushed, and sometimes a bath).
- Lament a little more about what I still haven't gotten done.
- Watch Netflix with Mark in bed while nursing Alaina to sleep.
- Feel dismayed at pile of laundry still needing to be put away.
- Imagine hopping up and whirling through the house in a blaze of productivity, but decide going to sleep makes more sense.
- Review things I expected myself to get done—such as working on books, completing massive projects, writing dozens of blog posts, doing dozens of school assignments, etc. Feel vague sense of failure about the day—never having "caught up" or gotten "finished." Feel guilty about times I snapped or said, "just a MINUTE!" or didn't stop what I was doing to look.
- Wonder why I forget to include, "sustaining life of small, wonderful person" on my list of "accomplishments" for the day.
- Berate self for not being nicer to self. Berate self for berating self for not being nicer to self.
- Vow that tomorrow will be a "better day." Vow to be more patient, more responsive, more mindful, more spiritual, more attentive, more cheerful, more delightful, more zen-like, more inner-peace-full, more better. Berate self for always making same vow. Briefly berate self for self-beratement.
- Feel bad for not spending more rose-smelling time or time snuggling with my husband or visiting with my mom. Remind self to be generous with self. Retain secret sense of certainty that it is possible to get everything done tomorrow.
- Read my current book (or books) until I'm almost falling asleep (around midnight).
- Nurse baby much of night.
- Wake up [13]full of awesome and ready to do it again!

Things I envision our daily life including, but that rarely manifest:

- Drumming and musical instrument fun
- Handwork
- Family games

- Making small animals out of moldable beeswax
- Meditation and other peaceful, contemplative spiritually-oriented practices in perfect harmony with all children participating
- Wool and wood toycrafting
- Nifty Waldorfish or paganish seasonal cycles of learning coolness of all kinds
- Relaxing on back deck porch swing with cup of tea

My friend, Hope, has a great [14]blog post about what homeschoolers "do" every day, which seems to be the number one question of mothers who are thinking about homeschooling their own children.

Here are some pictures of what our lives look like during the day:



[15]
Drawing!



[16]
Toys set up for adventure...



[17]
Tricky moves



[18]
Playgroup at park!



[19]
Baby with laundry backdrop...



[20]
Harry Potter Quidditch Match "trick" photography...



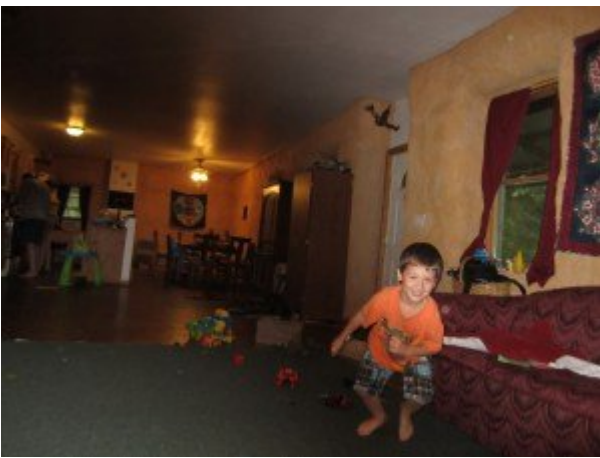
[21]
More "trick" photography (note large drawings in progress on floor)



[22]
Big drawing/map...



[23]
This is the kind of energy that flows through our house every day!



[24]
Lann took this picture—notice Mark, A, and I in background at stove



[25]
Worn out and time for bed!



[26]

My awesome is a little tarnished by this time of night, but I'm still here!

I'm really, really, really grateful that I have two boys who are such good friends for each other!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/09/28/my-homeschooling-life-story-part-1-of-2/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/i-just-want-to-grind-my-corn/>
3. <http://readingeggs.com/>
4. <http://www.starfall.com/>
5. <http://www.jumpstart.com/>
6. <http://www.clicknkids.com/>
7. <http://www.youtube.com/user/HarryKindergarten>
8. <https://play.dreambox.com/>
9. <http://www.time4learning.com/>
10. <http://clickschooling.com/>
11. http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_2_7?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=comprehensive+curriculum+of+basic+skills&sprefix=compreh
12. http://www.amazon.com/gp/search/ref=sr_nr_scat_69800_ln?rh=n%3A69800%2Ck%3Abob+books&keywords=bob+books&ie=UTF8&qid=1317410551&scn=69800&h=73740c31a01934a47ce2f8eb8e02f5e5d26c91d0
13. <http://blog.pigtails.com/2011/08/waking-up-full-of-awesome/>
14. <http://hopefulinsights.blogspot.com/2010/06/but-what-do-you-do.html>
15. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1326.jpg
16. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1114.jpg
17. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1369.jpg
18. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1222.jpg
19. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1378.jpg
20. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1040.jpg
21. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1140.jpg
22. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1153.jpg
23. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1044.jpg
24. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1173.jpg
25. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1207.jpg
26. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/img_1383.jpg

My Homeschooling Life Story (Part 1 of 2) « Talk Birth (2011-09-30 14:49:52)
[...] « Picking Stuff Homeschooling Today (Part 2 of 2) [...]

Barbara (2011-09-30 15:29:45)

At least we can visit via the occasional text message.....and, personally, I like never getting "done", because then I'm never bored!

Lynda M O (2011-09-30 18:22:50)

Yes, indeed it is great that they play so well together and seem to truly enjoy each others' company. Your life is full of all kinds of Awesome and the molded clay will come in a few years. Sounds like you are doing fine. A LOT and fine, too.

Hope (2011-09-30 22:13:38)

You are getting A LOT done in a day! I can't believe you're second guessing that you should be doing more- I'm tired just from reading it. And thanks for linking to me. :)

1.10 October

Rebirth: What We Don't Say (2011-10-02 19:24)

A new self did emerge. This is what women do not tell each other. I want to say it here: You will die when you become a mother and it will hurt and it will be confusing and you will be someone you never imagined and then, you will be reborn. Truthfully, I have never wanted to be the woman I was before I had children. I loved that woman and I loved that life but I don't want it again. My daughters have made me more daring, more human, more compassionate. Their births have brought me closer to the earth and they have helped me pare my life down to its essentials. Writing, quick prayers, good food, a few close friends, many deep breaths, love, plants, dancing, music, teaching-these are the ingredients of my/this new self. I waited for this new self in the dark, in the bittersweet water of letting go, in the heavy heartbeat of learning to be a mother, against the isolation, I grew and emerged laughing and crying and here I am, sisters and brothers. [1]Rebirth: What We Don't Say | The Sage Mama.

One of my favorite songs to listen to after my miscarriage experiences had a refrain of, "it is dark, dark, dark inside." While previously not connecting to "darkness" as a place of growth or healing, during these experiences I learned that it is in the darkness that new things take root and grow.

As I've shared before, one of my favorite quotes about postpartum comes from Naomi Wolf, A mother is not born when a baby is born; a mother is forged, made. The quote I shared above from this "Rebirth" article touches that place in me—that motherhood results in a total life overhaul and a new, enriched identity. (This article also made me think of first postpartum journey which I wrote about [2]here.)

In a [3]previous post, I wrote the following about the idea that giving birth and mothering leaves permanent marks:

I've also come to realize that despite the many amazing and wonderful, profound and magical things about birth, the experience of giving birth is very likely to take some kind of toll on a woman—whether her body, mind, or emotions. There is usually some type of "price" to be paid for each and every birth and sometimes the price is very high. This is, I guess, what qualifies, birth as such an intense, initiatory rite for women. It is most definitely a transformative event and transformation does not usually come without some degree of challenge. Sometimes to be triumphed over or overcome, but something that also leaves permanent marks. Sometimes those marks are literal and sometimes they are emotional and sometimes they are truly beautiful,

but we all earn some of them, somewhere along the line. And, I also think that by glossing over the marks, the figurative or literal scars birth can leave on us, and talking about only the “sunny side” we can deny or hide the full impact of our journeys.

During Pam England’s presentation about birth stories at the ICAN conference, she said that the place “where you were the most wounded—the place where the meat was chewed off your bones, becomes the seat of your most powerful medicine and the place where you can reach someone where no one else can.”

(I’m experimenting with PressThis for this short post)

1. <http://thesagemama.wordpress.com/2011/09/22/rebirth-what-we-don%e2%80%99t-say/>

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/06/10/birthing-the-mother-writer-or-playing-my-music-or-postpartum-feelings-part-1/>

3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/04/29/the-almost-died-remark/>

Sand Tray Therapy « Talk Birth (2011-11-07 08:38:39)

[...] a treasure she is to me. The bone on the side of the candle represents the places where the “meat was chewed off my bones” by all my births, including Noah’s (I had just attended Pam England’s birth story [...])

Lucy @ dreamingaloudnet (2011-10-03 15:31:45)

I have been thinking on this topic too, especially rebirth, but from a slightly different angle <http://dreamingaloudnet.blogspot.com/2011/10/how-we-are-born.html> LOVE that Pam England quote - I trained with her, she is an INCREDIBLE woman.

Natural Learners (2011-10-05 15:55)

As long as I have homeschooling on the brain lately, I want to quickly share some things I had saved in my drafts folder. This will most likely be my last homeschooling post for a while and I’ll return to my usual topics!

Quite some time ago (pre-children), I wrote the following in response to a 2001 Time magazine article about homeschooling that bemoaned both that homeschooled children were “not allowed to have a childhood” (forced to be miniature adults and grow up too soon) and that they somehow also “miss out on learning ‘real world’ skills” (in school) such as conflict resolution that will benefit them in adulthood. In the article, a strong statement was made that I’ve never forgotten that riding the school bus is a valuable and important part of growing up and imparts irreplaceable life lessons summarily denied to poor, deprived homeschoolers. (Luckily for my social and personal development as a complete human being, I did get to ride a school bus to our local Vacation Bible School each year for a number of years.)

Truly, is there anything inherently valuable about things like riding the school bus? I lived my childhood and it was rich and full in a way that is impossible to create when you spend 8-9 hours per day institutionalized. Why is sitting at a desk, artificially grouped with children all your own age, being spoonfed information, and restricted from developing your own personality and preferences (i.e. everyone must learn algebra), what childhood “should” be? Why do so many adults go through crises as adults that involve having to “find themselves” and develop their “true selves”? I would hypothesize that is because they never got to explore themselves and their identities in childhood, which is actually the ideal time for such growth and development.

Government schooling is somehow seen as the better way for children to spend childhood instead of letting children develop, grow, and learn in the actual world in which they will live as adults.

I also had saved a quote about natural learners from the book, [1]Providence, by Daniel Quinn. Quinn is the author best known for his philosophical novel [2]Ishmael, which I read as a young teenager. I remember considering it to be a life changing and fascinating read, but it has been a LONG time since I read it—my primary memory of it is how he challenges the very human conception that we are the "end" result of evolution. That's it, evolution has finished, we're here now. Anyway, [3]Providence was less illuminating/interesting. It was primarily an autobiography with an emphasis on how the author developed [4]Ishmael (which went through more than 6 versions over a period of like 13 years) as well as an exploration of his religious development (which includes some time spent in a monastery and ends with animism).

While he was writing his book, he worked in educational publishing and I appreciated his remarks about education:

One of the great, persistent myths of education in our culture is that children become reluctant learners as they grow older. In fact, what they become reluctant about it going to school, where they're bullied, regimented, bored silly, and very effectively prevented from learning...We know what works for children up to the age where we ship them off to school: Let them be around you, pay attention to them, talk to them, give them access to as much as you can, let them try things, and that's it. They take care of the rest. You don't have to strap small children down and teach them to speak, all you have to do is talk to them. You don't have to give them crawling lessons or walking lessons or running lessons. You don't have to spend an hour a day showing them how to bang two pots together; they'll figure that out all by themselves—if you give them access to the pots. Nothing magical happens at the age of five to render this process obsolete or invalid.

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0553100181?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0553100181>
2. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0553375407?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0553375407>
3. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0553100181?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0553100181>
4. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0553375407?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0553375407>

Have you met Pachamama? (2011-10-07 20:52)

I have a friend who was taking a mythology class in college this session. She sent me an email titled, "have you met Pachamama?" and included this great little picture:

I just love her! Love her serene little face and the yin-yang type of background.



"Pachamama is a goddess revered by the indigenous people of the Andes. Pachamama is usually translated as Mother Earth, but a more literal translation would be "Mother world" (in Aymara and Quechua mama = mother / pacha = world or land; and later widened in a modern meaning as the cosmos or the universe).[1] Pachamama and Inti are the most benevolent deities; they are worshiped in parts of the Andean mountain ranges, also known as Tawantinsuyu (the former Inca Empire) (stretching from present day Ecuador to Chile and northern Argentina being present day Peru the center of the empire with its capital city in Cuzco)."

[1]<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachamama>

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachamama>

peacefulbeginnings (2011-10-08 07:15:46)
Love it!

Hillary (2011-10-09 08:43:58)
I love pachamama!

American Girl & Nursing (2011-10-08 19:56)

I've long loved American Girl dolls. While I've decided to finally decree "enough" on the full-size dolls, I continue to want to add to my collection of the mini dolls. This year in honor of the 25th anniversary, the company has special edition mini dolls in their holiday dresses. I went back and forth about whether or not I should buy them and finally decided to order a couple as my "reward" for juggling so much this session and making it through to the end! I opened up mini Josefina when my Monday night class ended and when my online class ends tonight, mini Kit will join her :)

To relate this post to my overall themes of this blog, I thought I'd mention an experience in the past when reading an American Girl book. In their "history mystery," [1]Riddle of the Prairie Bride, widowed father of 12 year old Ida Kate sends for a mail order bride. She arrives with her one year old baby and it soon becomes clear that something is amiss. She does not meet her description from her letters, gives inconsistent answers and so forth. Ida Kate investigates, mystery is solved, and true love reigns on the prairie. What's

the connection you may ask? Because, I always keep an eye out for "breastfeeding as normal" content in kids books and I loved that in this mystery the first clue that the prairie bride is not who she says she is is that she didn't nurse her baby! (And, a one-year-old baby at that! Wow!) The book states, "She feeds him milk from a cup rather than nursing him as mothers do..." (Ida Kate notices the baby patting on the front of the mystery woman's dress and instead of nursing him, she gets a cup of milk for him). I also liked the use of the word "nurse" instead of "breastfeed." Cozy, familiar, desirable, and NORMAL. (With the emphasis on the process and not the product as [2]Diane Wiessinger would say.) Of the top of my head, I also remember that in one of the AG short stories—Josefina's Reward I think—her older sister has to hurry back from what she is doing to "nurse the baby" (who is also over one year old and walks and talks in the book).

(These breastfeeding bits don't really make up for the bottles sold for Bitty Baby, but anyway.)



[3]
Mini Josefina in holiday finery



[4]
Holiday mini Kit is still in her box waiting to reward—luckily I have two regular mini Kits (plus one big Kit) to keep me company ;)

1. <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1584853085?ie=UTF8&tag=stonehaven-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=1584853085>

2. <http://normalfed.com/>

3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1456.jpg
 4. <http://store.americangirl.com/agshop/html/item/id/177460/ctc/XSYMAL>
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Glass Half Full (2011-10-11 12:37)

Written by Katy Read, the article "Glass Half Full" in the fall issue of [1]Brain, Child magazine, explores the questions: "Have mothers complained too much, already ... or not enough?" In it, she references a book I hadn't yet heard of by Bryan Caplan, *Selfish Reasons to Have More Kids: Why Being a Great Parent Is Less Work and More Fun Than You'd Think*

...Caplan argues that parents make their own job unnecessarily difficult. If they'd cut themselves some slack, he insists, raising kids would be more enjoyable—so much so that couples should consider having more children than they'd planned.

At the same time, however, other observers contend that it's still rare and socially risky for mothers to admit any discontent...

So which are we: A culture in which mothers hesitate to voice misgivings for fear of social reprisal? Or one so inundated with maternal kvetching that onlookers are understandably tired of it?...

[2]Glass Half Full in Brain, Child magazine.

She later returns to Caplan's ideas about nature vs. nurture (i.e. that nurture carries less weight than we often assume):

Why do moms "self-flagellate"? Because they've been taught that kids pay a long-term price for their parents' ordinary mistakes. They don't. Because they think they're to blame for their children's flaws. They aren't.

But guess what. Admitting you can't control phenomena that nevertheless significantly color your emotional well-being and day-to-day life is not necessarily a ticket to relaxation. Even armed with twins studies and mortality stats, I have not experienced parenting as the carefree romp that Caplan promises.

Sure, much of it has been wonderful. However, not to get all whiny mother on you, raising children remains an often complicated, frustrating, and stress-inducing enterprise, involving many kinds of challenges.

The best part of this article in my opinion, however, was the author's postscript:

If I were the conspiracy-theory type, I might imagine a sinister plot behind efforts to keep mothers from complaining. After all, mothers perform the lion's share of unpaid housework and child care—and pay a steep economic price for doing so, on average making less money than fathers or childless people and suffering from a higher rate of poverty. What better way to keep

mothers from rebelling against those circumstances than to discourage them from voicing any objections? It's ingenious: convince women through cultural conditioning that mothers are blissfully content—or ought to be, anyway—and penalize those who contradict that image by lashing back with criticism dripping with contempt.

Luckily, I'm not a conspiracy nut. So of course I don't seriously think that the writers and publications I quoted in this piece, whom I respect, are in cahoots with opponents of reforms that would make mothers' lives more manageable (universal health insurance that would make part-time work more feasible, for example). Still, it's worth asking why the reaction is so swift and harsh—why the outrage? where's the threat? what deep, dark fears are being tapped?—when a mother dares to mention the empty half of the glass. [3]Glass Half Full in Brain, Child magazine.

As a side note, the same issue contains another interesting article called [4]Inappropriate. This article includes a nude photo of a woman with a double mastectomy and notes that no print publication has ever published the photos, taken by photographer/artist David Jay in a project called SCAR (“Surviving Cancer. Absolute Reality.”). So, it was cool to extrapolate from that that Brain, Child was the first publication to have the guts to publish his work in a print magazine!

1. <http://brainchildmag.com/>
2. http://brainchildmag.com/essays/fall2011_read.asp
3. http://brainchildmag.com/essays/fall2011_read.asp
4. http://brainchildmag.com/essays/fall2011_lynch.asp

The Value of Sharing Story (2011-10-12 22:49)



“..no matter what her experience in birth was, every mother knows something other people don't know.”—Pam England

“Stories are medicine...They have such power; they do not require that we do, be, act anything—we need only listen. The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories.” –Clarissa

Every woman who has given birth knows something about birth that other people don't know. She has something unique and powerful to offer.

As birth professionals, we are often cautioned against sharing our personal stories. We must remember that it is her birth and her story, not ours. In doula and childbirth educator trainings, trainees are taught to keep their own stories to themselves and to present evidence-based information so that women can make their own informed choices. As a breastfeeding counselor too, I must remind myself to keep my own personal experiences out of the helping relationship. My formal education is in clinical social work and in that field as well we are indoctrinated to guard against inappropriate self-disclosure in a client-helper setting. In each environment, we are taught how to be good listeners without clouding the exchange with our own “baggage.” The messages are powerful—keep your own stories out of it. Recently, I have been wondering how this caution might impact our real-life connections with women?

Nine months after I experienced [1]a powerful miscarriage at home at 15 weeks, a good friend found out at 13 weeks that her baby died. As I had, she decided to let nature take its course and to let her body let go of the pregnancy on its own timetable, rather than a medical timetable. When she emailed me for support, it was extremely difficult to separate our experiences. I kept sharing bits and pieces of my own loss experiences and then apologizing and feeling guilty for having violated the “no stories” rule. I kept telling her, “I know this isn't about me, but I felt this way...” I told her about choosing to take pictures of the baby and to have a ceremony for him at home. That I wished I had gotten his footprints and handprints. The kinds of personal sharing that may have been frowned upon in my varied collection of professional trainings. After several apologies of this sort, I began to reflect and remembered that what I hungered for most in the aftermath of my own miscarriage was other women's voices and stories. Real stories. The nitty gritty, how-much-blood-is-normal and did-you-feel-like-you-were-going-to-die, type of stories. Just as many women enjoy and benefit from reading other women's birth stories, I craved real, deep, miscarriage-birth stories. These stories told me the most about what I needed to know and more than organization websites or “coping with loss” books ever could.

I had a similar realization the following month when considering the effectiveness of childbirth classes and trying to pin down what truly had reached me as a first time mother. The question I was trying to answer as I considered my own childbirth education practice was [2]how do women really learn about birth? What did I, personally, retain and carry with me into my own birth journey? The answer, for me, was again, story.

On this blog, I have a narrative about my [3]experiences during my first pregnancy with being able to feel my baby practicing breathing while in-utero. More than any other post on the site, this post receives more comments on an ongoing basis from women saying, “thank you for sharing”—that the story has validated their own current experience. In this example, rather than getting what they need from books, experts, or classes, women have found what they needed from story and, indeed, most of them reference that it was the only place they were able to find the information they were seeking.

And finally, as breastfeeding counselor, during monthly support meetings, I cannot count the number of times I've seen mothers' faces fill with relief when another mother validates her story with a similar one.

So, what is special about story as a medium and what can it offer to women that traditional forms of education cannot? Stories are validating. They can communicate that you are not alone, not crazy, and not weird. Stories are instructive without being directive or prescriptive. It is very easy to take what works from stories and leave the rest because stories communicate personal experiences and lessons learned, rather

than expert direction, recommendations, or advice. Stories can also provide a point of identification and clarification as a way of sharing information that is open to possibility, rather than advice-giving.

Cautions in sharing stories while also listening to another's experience include:

- Are you so busy in your own story that you can't see the person in front of you?
- Does the story contain bad, inaccurate, or misleading information?
- Is the story so long and involved that it is distracting from the other person's point?
- Does the story communicate that you are the only right person and that everyone else should do things exactly like you?
- Is the story really advice or a "to do" disguised as a story?
- Does the story redirect attention to you and away from the person in need of help/listening?
- Does the story keep the focus in the past and not in the here and now present moment?
- Is there a subtext of, "you should...?"

Several of these self-awareness questions are much bigger concerns during a person-to-person direct dialogue rather than in written form such as blog. In reading stories, the reader has the power to engage or disengage with the story, while in person there is a possibility of becoming stuck in an unwelcome story. Some things to keep in mind while sharing stories in person are:

- Sensitivity to whether your story is welcome, helpful, or contributing to the other person's process.
- Being mindful of personal motives—are you telling a story to bolster your own self-image, as a means of pointing out others' flaws and failings, or to secretly give advice?
- Asking yourself whether the story is one that will move us forward (returning to the here and now question above).

While my training and professional background might suggest otherwise, my personal lived experience is that stories have had more power in my own childbearing life than most other single influences. The sharing of story in an appropriate way is, indeed, intimately intertwined with good listening and warm connection. As the authors of the book, *Sacred Circles*, remind us "...in listening you become an opening for that other person...Indeed, nothing comes close to an evening spent spellbound by the stories of women's inner lives."

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This is a preprint of *The Value of Sharing Story*, an article by Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, published in [5]*Midwifery Today*[6], Issue 99, Autumn 2011. Copyright © 2011 Midwifery Today. Midwifery Today's website is located at: [7]<http://www.midwiferytoday.com/>

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/05/03/noahs-birth-story-warning-miscarriagebaby-loss/>

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/06/16/how-do-women-really-learn-about-birth/>

3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/05/15/in-utero-practice-breathing/>
 4. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
 5. <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/magazine/issue99.asp>
 6. <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/magazine/issue99.asp>
 7. <http://www.midwiferytoday.com/>
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Integrated Mama (2011-10-22 09:26)

Alaina turned nine months old this week and I again found myself wishing to make a new polymer clay goddess sculpture to capture this new phase in our life cycle. I'm interested by how I began [1]this series during my pregnancy with her and how I continue to feel "moved" to add to it as she grows and changes. While she is on the move a lot, she also spends a great deal of time riding on my hip in a pouch carrier. So, it felt àpropos to make another slingin' mama figure, this time with the baby on her hip. While, as always, it isn't perfect, I do like how my new sculpture turned out:



[2]
Slingin' mama goddess!



[3]
Healthy Baby Fair Booth—just popped out of baby carrier for photo op

I've written several times before about my desire to live an integrated life and I honestly think that baby-wearing makes it (semi) possible. She most wants to be with me, but often she doesn't want direct play, she wants to ride along and see what interesting things I'm going to do. I think this is part of baby's biology and part of how the motherbaby relationship is socially and biologically meant to be at this point—mother goes about her business ([4]grinding corn, perhaps), with baby very close and watching. Unfortunately, this doesn't include typing things on the computer, which is what much of my work actually entails. So, I save household work to do while she's awake and riding along and I do computer-based work while she sleeps. That way, we (usually) both get our biologically appropriate needs met within our cultural context. Recently, I had a LLL table at the local Healthy Baby fair and several people came up to my friend and me to comment on how we were wearing our babies and how they were just riding along so content to look at what was going on. I tried to explain to one booth visitor who was expressing concern about the changes babies bring to life how I believe that babies can go along with mothers as they go about their tasks/days—it is possible to integrate the baby into the rest of your responsibilities.



[5]

Looking at the wavy lake from safe harbor of mama's body (in Ergo)

I was thinking about this again over the last couple of days that I spent with my family on a mini-vacation to [6]Silver Dollar City (theme park in Branson, Missouri). As long as Alaina was riding with me in the pouch or Ergo she was totally happy. We spent hours outside on Wednesday in pretty bitter cold and she rode and looked and nursed and snoozed. On Thursday we took a lunch "cruise" on a Showboat (didn't actually cruise due to wind) and again, she rode and checked out the world. Then, on Friday, we were back in the park where she got to go on her first rides ever like a big girl—the carousel (out of pouch) and on the Flooded Mine ride (where the whole family rode in a boat—she rode in the Ergo in the boat with me).



[7]
Big girl going for a ride!

Several years ago at an LLL conference, a sleep "expert" spoke during the lunch session. She was of the opinion (which is not shared by LLL as a whole), that nursing a baby to sleep is a "habit" that you don't want to get into and advocates detaching them when they get sleepy so that they learn how to fall asleep without relying on nursing to get them there. She gave examples of babies and sleep associations and then said, "but if a baby is used to being nursed to sleep, they could fall asleep in the middle of Times Square while the ball was dropping on New Year's Eve as long as mama was there too and nursing them." And, I thought, EXACTLY! The problem with that is....?! That is one of the very best things about breastfeeding to me—home is where the mama is. So, this week as Alaina snoozed peacefully when she was sleepy while roller coasters sped around and bluegrass played and fiddlers fiddled and cold winds blew and people swarmed all over, I was thankful that I've never tried to get my baby to develop a different sleep association! Breastfeeding is magic like this to me, not an inconvenience or a habit to be restructured.



[8]
She is nursing in this picture

Of course, integration of parenting with work can also be a pretty significant challenge, as I touch on in my [9]recent interview in the [10]working/parenting series at Molly Westerman's [11]blog First the Egg. (I typed my responses to her interview questions on my phone while lying on my side in bed nursing Alaina to sleep.)



[12]

My whole series of sculptures

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/?s=sculptures>
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1514.jpg
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/298649_10150831822025442_119044235441_20853492_1436570940_n.jpg
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/i-just-want-to-grind-my-corn/>
5. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1546.jpg
6. <http://www.bransonsilverdollarcity.com/>
7. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1581.jpg
8. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1523.jpg
9. <http://www.firsttheegg.com/workingparenting-molly-remer/>
10. <http://www.firsttheegg.com/workingparenting-an-introduction/>
11. <http://www.firsttheegg.com/>
12. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1516.jpg

Lynda M O (2011-10-22 10:20:30)

Your work with polymer fascinates me with its subtlety and indigenous look. I support and encourage baby-wearing and breastfeeding to all the women with whom I come in contact as I go thru my days taking care of little ones. I enjoy your blog for its honesty and forthrightness. Thanks for sharing your life.

talkbirth (2011-10-25 14:41:54)

Thank you, Lynda!

Placenta Encapsulation—Three Days Postpartum Comparison... (2011-10-24 08:22)

I've been wanting to write a quick post about placenta encapsulation for ages. I had it done after Alaina was born and I'm a total convert. A month or so ago, the topic came up on a breastfeeding email list I belong to, with concern raised by several IBCLCs about the possibility of hormonal disruption of milk supply with placenta ingestion. Several women stated that they would not be comfortable doing it until there is some real evidence to support it. All I had to offer to the conversation was my own personal experience (and, I'm well aware that the plural of anecdote is NOT "data") and also the observation that it is common practice for mammals to ingest the placenta. Of course, mammals eat it all at once and don't powder it

up into little capsules first, but then again, mammals also don't wear socks or read stories to their kids or drive cars or sleep in beds in warm comfy houses either. I only found minimal evidence online via these two articles (which I think cite the same sources): [1]Research Studies supporting Placenta Encapsulation and [2]Scientific Research (from Placenta Benefits which certifies placenta encapsulators).

Anyway, this is what I shared with the list about my own experience:

I had it done with my last baby (born in January) and I'm a total convert. I have never felt better during postpartum. I joked that I was "placenta powered." I felt and looked great—good color in my face, etc. Tons of energy. Total opposite of my other postpartum experiences in which I felt completely depleted and run over by a truck. I didn't even ever feel like taking naps during the early weeks—you know how new mothers are often all strung out and exhausted. I was vibrant, cheerful, and alert. (I also swallowed a small piece of it raw, immediately pp.) I do not think there is any real research on milk supply and I had/have the same questions as you—if it is putting those "discarded" hormones back into the body, couldn't it have a milk supply reducing effect? My guess is that the amount you take is so small (one placenta makes around 100 capsules), that it does not have a significant impact on supply one way or the other. I only have anecdotal evidence to offer in favor of it. In addition to various long-distance friends, three in-person friends have also done it during the last six months. Three of the four of us have had oversupply—one of which had not had oversupply with her other three children (my other friend and I had oversupply with previous children who we did not do placenta encapsulation with), though she is tandem nursing, so I suspect that as the cause more than placenta (she also has had mastitis with the current nursling).

I had less trouble with oversupply this time around than with previous children—my first baby and I struggled with it for 10 months, my second baby and I did 12 hour block feedings to get it under control. With my new baby, I started block feeding her from birth (I know this isn't an officially recommended strategy, but I truly think it made a very positive difference for us). While we still had some issues with it, including several days of 12 hour blocks and one day with 24 hours on one side only (her choice, not mine!), it was much less stressful than my previous experiences. (And, BTW, I did have a couple of plugged duct incidents that quickly resolved with ginger tea compresses.)

Anyway, IMHO, placenta encapsulation= awesome. I really support it!

Oh, and one side effect I did experience was bad headaches when I started "weaning" off the placenta pills. I've always been sensitive to hormone changes provoking headaches (get one with ovulation and then again with menstruation, etc.).

As I was typing and thinking about my experiences, some pictures came to mind and so in this post I want to do a photographic comparison of how I looked at 3 days postpartum with each baby. (I left out Noah's post birth pictures, because how I look in those is complicated by grief as well as blood loss.)



[3] First baby—pretty happy and pretty tired. Note the eyes, pale skin, and the semi-exhausted tilt of head.



[4] Second baby. Could NOT find another 3 days pp that was any better than this. Again, note pale skin and kind of distant, tired eyes.



[5] Second baby again, but now one week postpartum. I've perked up! Still see tired eyes and pale-ish skin.



Last baby—note pink cheeks and happy, sparkling, semi-manic, placenta-powered eyes!

Of course, when this picture was taken I had actually hardly ingested any of the placenta, but for me, it visually sums up the vastly different physical recovery experience of this most recent postpartum time. I also think part of the difference is also in my emotional relief at her live birth!

1. <http://www.hypnobirthingutah.com/research-studies-supporting-placenta-encapsulation/>
2. <http://placentabenefits.info/research.asp>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/lanmama.jpg>
4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/zanderpp.jpg>
5. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/zanderpp2.jpg>

Kristen O (@BirthingKristen) (2011-10-26 18:48:06)

I too will be encapsulating my placenta for the first time after this (my third) pregnancy. While I agree that the research on the topic is sparse, I have found anecdotal stories (some of which are downright GLOWING reviews) compelling enough to give it a try. As a side note, one of my doula clients asked her OB about his thoughts on encapsulation, and his response was as such: "There isn't enough research out there for me to give a *medical* opinion, but I did grow up on a farm and always wondered why many of the animals ate their placentas. There must be a reason! And you're a mammal too, so why not?!" :-)

Julie (2011-10-24 09:02:22)

That's great that it worked for you! My experience wasn't so noteworthy. I tried placenta encapsulation with my second baby, and I don't think it made any difference. I was a lot more tired and had a slower recovery. I don't think the placenta made it worse, just didn't help. And I had the same kind of oversupply issues I did the first time around. If I have another baby, I think I'll save my money.

talkbirth (2011-10-24 09:59:27)

My doula/friend did the encapsulation for me. Like I mentioned, I'm not sure how much my own relief at her birth (I had two previous losses) played into my different feelings. I also think that other life cycle issues probably had 'an impact—with my first baby, there was that intense adjustment to new parenthood and with my second, I had to juggle the needs of my newborn with the needs of a not-quite-three-year old. With her, my sons were 7.5 and almost 5—MUCH easier to juggle their care with a newborn and to integrate a new baby into the house. And, she is also an "easy baby," a label which did not describe either of my other kids. Definitely a lot of factors!

Jodi Selander (2011-10-24 13:44:35)

Thanks for sharing your story! I also had better outcomes with the two placentas I encapsulated; so much more energy and vitality after the birth. Most of my clients report an increase in energy, and most of them have dubbed them their "happy pills". Loved the pictures - you definitely look chipper in the last photo! One happy mama. <3 Blessings, Jodi Selander Founder, Placenta Benefits

Andrea (2011-10-24 18:04:06)

Great post! There is this one study on placentophagia and breastmilk production. Dated, but interesting. Placenta as Lactagon. Soykova-Pachnerova, E., et. al. Gynaecologia 138(6):617-627, 1954

talkbirth (2011-10-25 14:41:19)

Thank you for the information!

talkbirth (2011-10-25 14:41:35)

Thanks for commenting, Jodi! I'm a fan for sure!

talkbirth (2011-10-27 18:24:08)

I look forward to hearing about your experience! I'm a total fan.

Moon Salutation Yoga Series for Blessingway or Women's Gathering (2011-10-25 13:19)

At my blessingway with my second son, my mom led us through a moon salutation together outside and then we all entered the blessingway space via a "birth arch" made with the women's arms (think London Bridge only all in a row making a channel of arms to pass through). This weekend, we had a women's retreat with the theme of the sacred body and I found this moon salutation from the book *She Who Changes* for us to do together—seemed fitting that with a theme of the body, we should actually use our bodies! (In addition to the moon salutation below, I also have a [1]handout with a birthing room yoga series available.)

Moon Salutation

I stand tall, heart open to the world, body full and present in all of its beauty.



[2]

(c) Karen Orozco, Portraits & Paws (Molly at 37 weeks)

(standing with arms in prayer position)

I open my arms wide to bring all of life into my being.

(opening arms and tracing the circle of the moon)

My arms form a temple above me, sheltering and protecting me.

I know that I am on holy ground.

(arms completing the circle extended with palms touching above the head)

Yielding now, softening, my body takes the shape of the crescent moon.

I see visions of women, young and old, helping and loving each other.

(bending to the side with arms still above the head and palms touching)

Rising up and bending to the other side, I know that my softness is my strength. I am tested, but not broken.

(bending to the other side)

Up again, I feel the sweet stillness, always present within me.

(arms above head, palms still touching)

I step wide now into a squat. Mother Earth's ferocious powers rise up through my strong legs, hips and back. As woman, I give birth to all that is, caring for and protecting life.

(arms bent in priestess pose, legs bent and open in birth pose)

Straightening arms and legs, I am a star. I am the universe. Planets and galaxies whirl within me. I radiate in all directions.

(legs straight and spread widely apart, arms straight out to the sides)

Supple and yielding, I stretch to the side. I open my arms and look up, opening to love and compassion.

I reach, yearning and striving, and yet rest, accepting fully.

(triangle pose)

Turning to pyramid pose, I become quiet. Head to knee, I sense the inner workings of my own being.

(typical runners' stretch)

Lunging, I stretch long and feel the glorious length of my body.

As I look up, the moon shines on my path.

(lunge pose)

Turning now, I touch the earth, hands on the blessed Mother, strong and steady.

Gratefully and tenderly, I bow my head.

(turning and bending to touch the earth)

Coming into a squat, I am connected with all animal and plant life. My body open and close to the earth, I know my body's ability to give birth, to love, to work, to pray. I resolve to hold all of these activities as sacred.

(full squat)

The Moon Salutation continues with the poses repeated in reverse order to form a complete circle and cycle of the moon with the whole body. The combination of words and yoga movement creates connections between the body and the mind, enabling the meaning of the words to come into the body. The full meaning of the Moon Salutation can be appreciated only in the doing. It celebrates the female body and the earth body, affirming that the female body is sacred, an image of the body of Goddess. It names the connection between women and the moon, positively affirming cycles of change, in contrast to classical theological traditions. In the Moon Salutation, women's changing bodies and the process of giving birth become images of the divine creativity of the Goddess. The Moon Salutation celebrates strength as supple and yielding, yet ferocious in the protection of life. These are images of strength as power with, not power over. In the Moon Salutation, the female body is not perceived negatively as it is in traditions associating femininity with the "weaker" light of the moon. Still, it might be asked: Does the Moon Salutation limit women to the body or the traditional roles associated with it? I do not find this to be so. In the Moon Salutation the female body is an image of all the creative powers in the universe. It can expand to include planets and galaxies. The female body is celebrated not only for its capacity to give birth, but also for its ability to love, to work, and to pray.

From: Carol P. Christ. *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World*, Kindle Edition.

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/03/10/birthing-room-yoga-handout/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Deena, Shining Light Prenatal Education (2011-10-25 19:09:31)

I teach these every full moon in my prenatal yoga classes! Although, there are variations to it ;-)

talkbirth (2011-10-26 12:11:14)

That is such neat idea! I am trained to teach prenatal yoga, but don't currently. I do incorporate a short series of poses into my regular birth classes though. I've done several variations of the moon salutation before—I like this one because of the words that go with each movement.

More Readings for Women's Programs (2011-10-26 10:11)

I absolutely love collecting these kinds of things (almost as much as I love collecting quotes) and I figure that as long as I've bothered retyping or saving them, I might as well share them via my blog—that way more people can possibly benefit from or enjoy them!

Invocation:

Mother of the Medicine Wheel (from [1]Sage Woman issue 81)

By Sharon Blessum

In the womb of the East Lodge

She gives birth in the morning.

She mothers us with smiles and songs.

In the strong sun of the South

She offers food from Her garden,

Enchantment for the mid-day of life.

In the benediction of the West

She colors evening with sunset

Wraps us in reflections of day.

In the old age of the North Lodge,

She will hold us in sweetness

Cross with us into the Land of the Ancestors.

—

Opening Words/Chalice Lightings

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,

and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings

but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,

to this community and to each other.

-Anonymous (Reading #434 in Singing The Living Tradition)

—

Or (not sure of the source for this one, I had it jotted on a little piece of paper):

With the kindling of this flame,

We honor the mysteries and riddles that prompt us to ask questions;

We give thanks for community, in which we can seek their answers;

And we open our hearts and minds to our great and many freedoms.

—

Introductory Reading/Welcome

The Gaze of Love: A Body-Loving Invitation to all Women, by [2]Patricia Lynn Reilly

Today, and everyday, let's turn toward other women's bodies, and our own, with mercy and unconditional acceptance, letting go of the competition and scrutiny-based sizing up of each other, letting go of the subtle put-downs and diminishments when we're threatened by each other, allowing healing attention to flow one to another until the gaze of love heals us.

A gaze of love, calling wise women with their beautiful silver hair and life-lines out of hiding; inviting our smart, gifted daughters to reject the tyranny of thinness and to cease from harming themselves; welcoming the full, rounded bodies of our friends, bodies that refuse to be battered into shape by diets and admonishments.

A gaze of love so powerful, so encompassing, embracing the whole community of women, all sizes, shapes, colors, ages, and languages, with the widest welcome, the deepest affirmation, the highest calling, the loudest YES.

A gaze of love, inspiring us to bite into LIFE and the fullness of its possibility, to express LIFE through us in color and shape, sound and movement, to honor LIFE by turning our body-loving energy toward projects of justice, relationships of comfort, strategies of wellness, and words of affirmation.

Knowing we're all in this together.
One breath. One body. One life. And so it is.

1. http://www.bbimedia.com/store/index.php?main_page=advanced_search_result&keyword=sw081&categories_id=&inc_subcat=1
2. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/p9zxmtk2/www.imagineawoman.com/home/blog>

Happy Halloween! (2011-10-27 19:12)

This time last year I was entering the third trimester of my pregnancy. It feels almost surprising to me to look back at [1]my pictures and posts from that time. I love having it be my past experience now—it feels great. And, in some ways it seems so far away that it is hard to believe that it was just last year. I've reposted several links from old posts to my [2]Talk Birth Facebook page recently because of that feelings—I'm like, remember just LAST YEAR you were PREGNANT??!!

Today was our playgroup Halloween party again and here we are (Lann took the picture so isn't in this one):



[3]
Yes, I have three troll pins on :)

When my first son was three, my friend sent him a skeleton sweatshirt that glows in the dark. He wore it for about three years! Now, it has passed on to my younger son and he has been wearing it for a year. So, imagine the delight when we found these cool sweatshirts at KMart this week. I got one for each of them (these glow in the dark too) and I couldn't resist getting a smaller skeleton sweatshirt for Alaina as well. (Hers doesn't have the cool hood-mask though.)



[4]

Three little skeletons!

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/10/30/happy-halloween/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/talkbirth>
3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1593.jpg
4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1588.jpg

Lori Doty (2011-10-29 19:56:05)
Those sweatshirts are awesome.

Happy Halloween! « Talk Birth | Happy Halloween (2012-01-05 03:54:50)
[...] Happy Halloween! « Talk Birth Be Sociable, [...]

Spirit Doll (2011-10-29 16:04)



[1]
Traditional Akuaba figures

In the summer we started working on spirit dolls at our women's retreat. I have always wanted to make one in the style of an Akuaba—an African fertility goddess-type figure—however, I felt like it would be quicker to make a different style and so that was the one I began working on in the summer. After letting her languish for months without finishing her, I realized after our fall retreat that I really wanted to make one according to my original vision. So, in two days, I worked feverishly and made this little beauty:



[2]

I love her! She's just what I wanted to make. My boys say she looks like a gingerbread voodoo doll and she kind of does. That's okay. I know what she really is!

1. http://www.randtribal.com/Asante_akuaba_figures_group.html
2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/img_1594.jpg

Lynda M O (2011-10-29 21:07:04)
Very cool; I love her.

kateshrewsday (2011-10-29 16:06:08)
I love her too :-). What lovely little things! I have never heard of them before...

Motherhood as Meditation (2011-10-30 11:50)

I sometimes use my blog as a way to "store" things that I've read and want to remember later—or, come back to and re-discover later. I'm slowly making my way through a book called Meditation Secrets for Women and this morning I read the following:

...a mother is naturally drawn into simplicity meditations when she has small children. A hundred times a day you are forced to surrender, to slow down and pay attention...A mother must continually let go, not only of rigid scheduling but in the deepest movement of her heart. The maternal bond is a powerful primordial instinct...Each day is a little death and a challenge to live in trust. When a mother learns to accept this process and allows herself to be changed by it, her heart is softened and stretched. This demonstrates again how women's awareness of the preciousness of life leads us into a natural spirituality that does not have to be manufactured or enforced.

I was just thinking on Friday about just how many things I let go of every day. It is still painful to do—I'm not softened and stretched enough yet, I guess—but I also feel impressed with my own ability to accommodate and enfold. Knowing how many letting gos are required daily also doesn't stop me from starting out the next day with just as many plans as the day before though.

I'm experimenting with making this post using my phone...did it work?!

Related posts:

- [1]Surrender?
- [2]Book Review: Mindful Motherhood
- [3]Book Review: 10 Steps to Joy and Inner Peace for Mothers
- [4]Breastfeeding Toward Enlightenment
- [5]How to meditate with a baby



[6]
My baby zen master :)

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/08/24/surrender/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/book-review-mindful-motherhood-practical-tools-for-staying-sane-during-pregnancy-and-your-child%e2%80%99s-first-year/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/05/07/book-review-25-ways-to-joy-inner-peace-for-mothers/>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/08/04/breastfeeding-toward-enlightenment/>
5. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/02/23/how-to-meditate-with-a-baby/>
6. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/20111030-124905.jpg>

1.11 November

Birth Fear (2011-11-01 15:39)

“...if you want to know where a woman’s true power lies, look to those primal experiences we’ve been taught to fear...the very same experiences the culture has taught us to distance ourselves from as much as possible, often by medicalizing them so that we are barely conscious of them anymore. Labor and birth rank right up there as experiences that put women in touch with their feminine power...” -Christiane Northrup



[1] Since it was just Halloween, I wanted to re-post some things about fear and birth that I shared on another blog a couple of years ago. I encounter a lot of women who are very scared of birth, particularly of the pain of birth. Grantly Dick-Read’s Fear-Tension-Pain cycle has influenced the teachings of most natural birth educators and most people readily connect to the idea that fear leads to elevated tension in body which leads to increased pain (more about fear-tension-pain in a linked post below).

One of my favorite birth books, *Birthing from Within*, has several sections about coping with fear. The author’s idea is that by naming fears and looking them in the eye rather than denying they exist, you shift your thinking from frozen, fear-based, thoughts to more fluid, adaptable coping-mechanisms. There is a [2]useful handout based on her ideas available at the Transition to Parenthood site.

I also think of this quote from Jennifer Block:

Why is it that the very things that cause birth related morbidity rates to rise are seen as the ‘safe’ way to go? Why aren’t women and their doctors terrified of the chemicals that are dripped into their spines and veins—the same substances that have been shown to lead to more c-sections? Why aren’t they worried about the harm these drugs might be doing to the future health of their children, as some studies are indicating might be the case? Why aren’t they afraid of picking up drug-resistant staphylococcus infections in the hospital? And why, of all things, aren’t women terrified of being cut open?

I actually was afraid of these things, which is part of why I didn’t go to a hospital to have my babies!

I hope some day all women will be able to greet birth with confidence and joy, instead of fear and anxiety. This does NOT mean denying the possibility of interventions or that cesareans can save lives. And, it

also doesn't mean [3]just encouraging women to "trust birth." Indeed, I read a relevant quote in the textbook *Childbirth Education: Research, Practice, & Theory*: "...if women trust their ability to give birth, cesarean birth is not viewed as a failure but as a sophisticated intervention in response to their bodies' protection of the baby."

Here are some more good quotes from *Childbirth without Fear*:

A well-prepared woman, not ignorant of the processes of birth, is still subject to all the common interventions of the hospital environment, much of which places her under unnecessary stress and disrupts the neuromuscular harmony of her labor.

—

It is for this reason that thousands of women across the country are staying home to give birth...Women are choosing midwives as attendants, and choosing birth centers and birthing rooms, in order to regain the peaceful freedom to 'flow with' their own labors without the stress of disruption and intervention. Pictures on the wall and drapes on the window do not mask the fact that a woman is less free to be completely herself in the hospital environment, even in a birthing room. The possibility of her being disturbed is still there.

—

The women in labor must have NO STRESS placed upon her. She must be free to move about, walk, rock, go to the bathroom by herself, lie on her side or back, squat or kneel, or anything she finds comfortable, without fear of being scolded or embarrassed. Nor is there any need for her to be either 'quiet' or 'good.' What is a 'good' patient? One who does whatever she is told—who masks all the stresses she is feeling? Why can she not cry, or laugh, or complain?

—

When a woman in labor knows that she will not be disturbed, that her questions will be answered honestly and every consideration given her, then she will be better able to relax and give birth with her body's neuromuscular perfection intact. The presence of her loving husband and/or a supportive attendant will add to her feelings of security and peace, so she can center upon the task at hand.

Childbirth without Fear was originally written in the 1940's. The quotes above are just as relevant and true today.

Related posts:

[4]Fear & Birth

[5]Fears about birth and losing control

[6]Fathers, Fear, and Birth

[7]Fear-Tension-Pain or Excitement-Power-Progress?

[8]Cesarean Birth in a Culture of Fear Handout

[9]Worry is the Work of Pregnancy

1. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/p9zxmtk2/www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

2. <http://www.transitiontoparenthood.com/ttp/foreducators/handouts/Tigers.pdf>

3. <http://birthpeeps.blogspot.com/2011/09/27-from-innocence-to-genuine-trust.html>
 4. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/06/08/fear-birth/>
 5. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/03/04/fears-about-birth-and-losing-control/>
 6. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2010/11/04/fathers-fear-and-birth/>
 7. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2009/02/14/fear-tension-pain-or-excitement-power-progress/>
 8. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2007/12/18/cesarean-birth-in-a-culture-of-fear-handout/>
 9. <file:///localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/2007/12/03/worry-is-the-work-of-pregnancy/>
-

What Really Scares Me: Social Attitudes Towards Women (2011-11-02 08:05)

The following items all came across my desk (top) last week and it seemed fitting to put them into one post.

The first is with regard to the Boxing Federation wishing to make the female boxers box wearing skirts:

That's right, skirts. The AIBA has introduced a trial alternate uniform, asking female boxers to wear skirts because it will make the women easier to distinguish from the men, as if the completely different bodies wasn't enough. Poland adopted the uniform, calling the uniforms more "elegant" and "womanly."

via [1]Boxing federation wants female boxers to wear skirts - Fourth-Place Medal - Olympics Blog - Yahoo! Sports.

As you might imagine, the comments on this article with alternately hilarious and maddening (seriously, reading comments on a news article is the quickest way to both cause my blood to boil and to simultaneously despair at the future of humankind). I liked this one though:

"So I guess the AIBA thinks Americans are so stupid that when they see 'Women's boxing,' sports bras, longer hair, and oh yeah, women, we can't figure out what gender it is until we see skirts.

'What sport is this?' 'Boxing...but those don't look like men...what the hell are they?'"

But, why stop at skirts?! Why not lingerie! That's what the Lingerie Football League is in favor of:

The LFL claims its emergence in 2009 "formally shattered ... the ceiling on women playing tackle football." Thankfully, the visionaries at the LFL have devised a way to offer such athletic empowerment to our younger generation with their decision to start a youth league:

"With the growing popularity around the LFL, younger and younger girls are starting to dream of playing LFL football," its website reads. "In recent months and years, parents of young ladies routinely contact LFL league offices inquiring about everything ranging from what size football do you use to what form of training should I place my daughter into now to prepare her for LFL Football. [sic]"

...Look, I know we can't shield our little girls with a protective glass box and expect them

to never be exposed to the harsh reality that at some point in their lives, probably sooner rather than later, they will be viewed as sexual objects. But do we need them to feel it before they know how to multiply double digits? I can appreciate that the LFL youth league will be fully clothed, but just the mere association with the word "lingerie" will instill in the girls that one day, if they want to play with the big boys, they'll be forced to strip down to do so.

via [2]Talking Smack – Are you ready for some T &A? - espnW.

What an excellent concluding point. This article reminded me of the [3]sexyfication of Halloween costumes for girls in recent years. And, also of conversations recently amongst my friends about "appropriate dress" and how restricting girls' clothing choices is damaging too, just like clothing that objectifies girls/women is damaging. We usually conclude that dressing in a way that makes YOU feel good is what matters (and being able to make your own choices about what that is). When think about things like the LFL though, I just wonder if it is even possible to tease it apart anymore—are girls learning that there is any other way to feel good about themselves other than how they look while playing football in a bra?! Likewise, we've also had conversations about how little girls are often complimented on their clothes and how "cute" and "pretty" they are and much less often about how brave and smart and strong they are. But, likewise, sometimes it is also nice to be told you look cute or pretty—when I feel cute or pretty it feels nice to have that acknowledged rather than to be ignored PCishly. I think it is hard to tell where it comes from.

So, this brings me to my third disturbing experience. I frequently receive press releases about a variety of products related to pregnancy, birth, parenting, and women's health. Some of them I write about, some of them I don't. I usually refrain from posting about the ones I find ridiculous or insulting, because I don't want to have this be a place in which I mock things and I also don't want to insult or point fingers at the press people who contact me with these "news" items. However, in the context of the above, I cannot help but mention that I received a release about a new procedure for those of us who are seeking, "completely new buttocks" with just two quick, nearly painless doctor's visits! According to the release:

Dallas, Texas, October 28, 2011 - A stitch in time can re-align. At least, that's the concept behind a new minimally-invasive cosmetic procedure to lift and shape the buttocks called the Brazilian Thread-Lift.

"I've never seen anything this quick and this dramatic," says [4]Dr. Bill Johnson at Innovations Medical in Dallas. "After two simple, 45-minute procedures using only local anesthetic, a patient can completely re-shape her backside."

During the first visit, while under local anesthesia, the patient has several specifically-designed sutures or plastic threads strung under the skin and across each buttock. The entire procedure takes less than an hour. The threads have a series of thin knots covered by tiny cones which can be placed easily and with minimal discomfort. The cones create small fibrotic areas that function like little ligaments. After three months, the patient returns for an equally-brief follow-up visit, during which the physician gently tightens each thread, providing a smooth, even lift... (emphasis mine)

While they term it "small fibrotic areas," I read purposeful internal scarring in the name of "beauty" or sexiness and I find it deeply disturbing. What does it say about our cultural attitudes towards women that anyone would desire OR promote purposely creating scar tissue in your butt so that you look more "youthful"? Because, after all, nothing says youthful and sexy like fibrotic areas that help pull your butt fat into place.

And, this reminded me that on a recent trip out of town we passed a "women's health office" of an OBGYN. In largest print on the clinic's sign was, "laser hair removal." Ah, yes, because the most pressing mission of a women's health surgeon should be to rid the world of excess body hair. That really inspires confidence. And, it also makes me wonder what is happening socioculturally, that anyone would consider it appropriate to see a physician for hair removal. How could we possibly be having a national health care crisis when such fabulous services are available on every street corner?! Considering that being pregnant and giving birth are medical conditions requiring "delivery" via the medical model of care, I guess it is not such a leap to think that those pesky stray hairs could also warrant medical attention. Perhaps we will reach a point in the future where anything having to do with women and their messy, excess hairy, birthy, butt fatty bodies will be dealt with by professionals. Wearing skirts.

[5]

1. http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/blog/fourth_place_medal/post/Boxing-federation-wants-female-boxers-to-wear-sk?urn=oly-wp850
2. <http://espn.go.com/espnw/commentary/7155327/talking-smack-ready-some-ta>
3. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/p9zxmtk2/blog.pigtailpals.com/2011/10/from-candy-corny-to-downright-porny/>
4. <http://www.innovationsmedical.com/>
5. <http://www.ascotmedianews.com/em12all/lt.php?c=2532&m=287&nl=275&s=8f9c5a8efe2129fc03eb9a765ef0d424&lid=11800&l=-http--www.innovationsmedical.com>

links for thought, November 2011 (2011-12-06 13:06:26)

[...] Molly Remer at Talk Birth, "What Really Scares Me: Social Attitudes Towards Women" Perhaps we will reach a point in the future where anything having to do with women and [...]

enjoybirth (2011-11-10 14:07:53)

It is maddening. It makes me glad I don't have girls to raise in this crazy society. But also makes me so aware that I need to teach my boys to value women as PEOPLE!

Sand Tray Therapy (2011-11-07 08:36)

I hoped to finish Noah's book before his birthday today, but I didn't quite make it. I'm still editing the last half, adding resources to the appendix, and waiting for my husband to design the cover for me. Hopefully I will publish it by the end of the year! Instead, I wanted to share some pictures and thoughts from a sand tray therapy exercise that I did during a session at the ICAN conference in St. Louis in April. I've been meaning to post about it since then and haven't found the opportunity, so in honor of his birthday seems very fitting and appropriate. The session was intentionally kept small for personal sharing and when we walked in the therapist, [1]Maria Carella, asked if we were there to celebrate a birth or to grieve one. I said I was there for both (I had Alaina with me and she slept in the Ergo during the session). Each of us had a tray of sand and there were long tables at the front of the room full of objects and materials (like shells, feathers, and so forth). We were paired up and after arranging our items on our sand, we were asked to share our tray with the person next to us as well as the message, lesson, reflection, or insight we received from the process of making the tray. While some people used the sand in various creative ways—mounding it up, etc.—I just smoothed mine out and put stuff on top of it. The experience of sharing with my tablemate was very moving and profound. We had a lot of surprising similarities in our feelings about our births, though

our stories were very different. And, our closing thoughts or insights about our trays were almost identical.



[2] While it might be hard to see everything, I chose the bridge to symbolize my feeling of having crossed the bridge to the "other side"—meaning first the fact that after Noah and my second miscarriage, I felt separated from women who had not experienced loss by a bridge and as if I'd crossed over into new territory and left my old, happy, naive pregnant self behind (along with the other non-loss mamas. A little more about this bridge [3]here). AND, that I also felt like with Alaina's birth that I crossed a bridge into the unknown and to the end of the pregnancy-after-loss journey. Her birth represented the "other side" of PAL. So, at the end of the bridge I drew a question mark in the sand, representing all the questions I had to get past and over in order to get to my new baby. The little baby on the side of the bridge represents how I still had Noah with me. He didn't get "left behind" on the other side of the bridge, but was next to me on my journey. The spiral on the other side represents the continuous, unfolding spiral of life. Sitting by the question mark is a sort of Kachina-type figure holding many babies. To me she represents all of the babyloss mamas and also reminds me of the [4]jizos who protect lost babies. There is also a coffin on the other side of the question mark, summing up how the fear of the death was everpresent for me and I had to pass over that fear as well to get to my new baby—my light, the candle on the other side of death. The little sparkling gems also represent my joy at her birth and what a treasure she is to me. The bone on the side of the candle represents the places where the "[5]meat was chewed off my bones" by all my births, including Noah's (I had just attended Pam England's birth story sharing session prior to this sand tray session). I placed the Goddess of Willendorf figure, that I had immediately snatched off the table as soon as I spotted her, at the top to represent how my sense of spirituality had surrounded and enfolded both my experiences—She is "holding" it all. And, I explained to my tablemate how the roundness of the tray to me also represented the full circle—how Alaina's story and Noah's are entwined and how her birth was the "end" (of sorts) of his story, but that they are part of one whole.



[6]
View from the top

Happy birthday, tiny third son. We remember you. Thank you for opening my heart and my life for your sister to enter.

1. <http://www.mariacarella.com/>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/photo04091550.jpg>
3. <http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com/2010/05/15/miscarriage-art/>
4. <http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com/2010/11/09/one-year-anniversary/>
5. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/10/02/rebirth-what-we-don%e2%80%99t-say/>
6. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/photo04091553.jpg>

Michelle Evans (2011-11-15 21:33:20)

Great post, thanks for sharing! My favorite part is the very last three sentences...sums it up so well, and describes my feelings also. They were only with us for as long as they were suppose to be, and we'll remember them forever. <3

peacefulbeginnings (2011-11-07 08:59:07)

tears* What a beautiful and profound way to celebrate a tiny being who touched us all in so many ways.

Amanda (2011-11-07 22:07:27)

So very beautiful. Thank you for sharing this with me.

Giveaway! More Business of Being Born! (2011-11-08 08:03)



[1]

This giveaway is now closed: Kelli, Stephanie Lee, Luta, and Jessica (jessiegirl) were the four winners!

Today the long-awaited sequel to the Business of Being Born is released! I should have a review of the film to share with you soon and I'm so excited about this film. But, even better than a review, I am hosting a giveaway in honor of the film's release today! More Business of Being Born consists of four approximately one hour films centering on different themes (see summaries below). We will have four lucky winners of this giveaway—one per film. Each winner will receive a code to watch one of the films for free. To enter, simply leave a comment below letting me know which of the four you'd most like to see! I will draw the winners via random.org next Monday.

Here is a little bit more about [2]More Business of Being Born:



[3]

Ricki & Alanis

This release follows their landmark documentary, The Business of Being Born, with a four part DVD series that continues their provocative and entertaining exploration of the modern

maternity care system. More Business of Being Born, available November 8th, offers a practical look at birthing options as well as poignant celebrity birth stories from stars including Alanis Morissette, Gisele Bundchen, Christy Turlington-Burns, Cindy Crawford, Molly Ringwald, Laila Ali, Kimberly Williams-Paisley and Melissa Joan Hart.

And, you can check out the trailer here too:

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJTN88Zv0_M &w=480 &h=360]

Film summaries:

DVD #1

Down on The Farm: Conversations with Legendary Midwife Ina May Gaskin

Follow Executive Producer Ricki Lake and Director Abby Epstein to The Farm Community in Summertown, Tennessee, where pioneer midwife Ina May Gaskin talks candidly about the latest birth trends and the art of midwifery. Gaskin, who was featured in the original *The Business of Being Born*, sparked Lake's initial interest in natural birth and has continued to inspire the filmmaking duo's advocacy efforts. Also on the journey is pregnant actress Kimberly Williams-Paisley, who has enlisted a midwife to attend the birth of her second child and joins the filmmakers in meeting The Farm's famous midwives and touring the picturesque birth cabins in the woods. In the poignant final sequence, Gaskin exhibits her Safe Motherhood Quilt and calls for a deeper examination into the rising maternal mortality rate in the US. (Running Time: 55 min)

DVD #2

Special Deliveries: Celebrity Mothers Talk Straight on Birth

Featuring celebrity moms Laila Ali, Gisele Bundchen, Cindy Crawford, Alyson Hannigan, Melissa Joan Hart, Kellie Martin, Alanis Morissette, Christy Turlington-Burns and Kimberly Williams-Paisley, *Special Deliveries* is a collection of intimate birth stories from a diverse group of mothers. Whether they chose to deliver at a hospital, home or birthing center, these heartfelt and humorous testimonies speak to the lasting power of the birth experience. True inspiration for any mother-to-be, this group of women trusted their bodies and intuitions, taking responsibility for their birth decisions even when things didn't go according to plan. None of these courageous women has ever spoken on the record in such compelling detail, and, on this DVD, the filmmakers weave together their passionate narratives as a celebration of the journey to motherhood that will leave viewers with a renewed sense of amazement about the power of women. (Running Time: 74 min)

DVD # 3

Explore Your Options: Doulas, Birth Centers & C-Sections

The most comprehensive and educational DVD in the series, *Explore Your Options* offers birth-planning guidance around key topics such as the role of doulas (labor support specialists,) the advantages of birth centers and the alarming escalation of cesarean sections in the United States and Brazil. Epstein and Lake talk to doulas about why their profession is currently booming and uncover why having a good doula can make-or-break the entire birth experience. They look at the ever-growing rates of inductions and c-sections, which have reached 50 % in many US hospitals and more than 99 % in some private hospitals in

Brazil. How “safe” are these cesarean surgeries, and what are the health implications for the mothers and babies? Explore Your Options examines the pros and cons of birth centers, described as a perfect middle ground between home and hospital. Special features include Alanis Morissette and Alyson Hannigan on the advantages of doulas, Christy Turlington Burns on her unexpected complications at a birth center, Molly Ringwald on how she avoided a cesarean birth with her twins and Gisele Bundchen and Michelle Alves on the cesarean epidemic in their native Brazil. (Running Time: 102 min)

DVD #4

The VBAC Dilemma: What Your Options Really Are

The VBAC (Vaginal Birth After Cesarean) has become a hot-button issue in the modern maternity care system, as one in three new mothers will give birth via cesarean section. Are all of these mothers then forced to undergo a repeat cesarean the next time around? Epstein and Lake posed that question to dozens of experts, determining the surprising truth about VBACs. They also follow several women’s stories – both those who succeed and fail at attempting a VBAC – including that of filmmaker Abby Epstein, whose first c-section delivery was depicted in the dramatic, final moments of *The Business of Being Born*. (Running Time: 51 min)

1. http://www.thebusinessofbeingborn.com/?utm_source=Press%2BRelease&utm_medium=Press%2BRelease&utm_campaign=Jamie%2B10%2F24%2B-%2Bgeneral
2. http://www.thebusinessofbeingborn.com/?utm_source=Press%2BRelease&utm_medium=Press%2BRelease&utm_campaign=Jamie%2B10%2F24%2B-%2Bgeneral
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/ricki-alanis-photo.jpg>

Kathy (2011-11-08 21:39:06)

I would love to see "Down on the Farm"! Neato!

Joyce (2011-11-08 20:34:50)

I would love any of them, but I'm most interested in Explore Your Options. Second choice would be The VBAC Dilemma.

Gina Hilton (2011-11-08 19:16:36)

I would love to see them all, but if I had to pick just one it would be #3. I am having my second child, first homebirth sometime in the next few weeks. When baby is good and ready to enter the world, on their own time!

Kristy (2011-11-08 18:55:49)

It all looks so amazing!!! I think I'd have to say dvd one though if I won. I love Ina! Saying a prayer I win :)

Stefanie bates (2011-11-08 18:57:45)

I would love to see film 1! I want to visit the farm!!!!

roxy c (2011-11-08 19:01:55)

Down on the farm for me please!

Alyssa Martin (2011-11-13 07:25:50)

It is hard to choose...It is between #1 and #4. I suppose I would first like to see #1. Thanks! -Alyssa

Niki (2011-11-12 20:18:02)

I would love to see all of them! I would have to pick 1 or 4, ok I have to decide #4.

Erin Leigh (2011-11-12 20:37:29)

i would LOVE to watch #1 - Ina May is such an inspiration!

Julia (2011-11-12 20:38:40)

number one, please

LeAnn van den Bosch (2011-11-08 11:07:12)

I would most like to watch "Down on the Farm" oh, how I hope I win!

Catey (2011-11-08 11:40:24)

Can't wait to see this! though it would be even better to win it. :) I would LOVE to hear the interview with Ina May, how awesome will that be?! It will be fun to see the celebrity moms part too, while usually that whole endorsement by celebrity thing bugs me, it is nice to see that more well-known people are helping spread the word about a more natural approach to birth.

Kelli (2011-11-08 11:53:32)

I can't wait to see all these films and am so looking forward to them as a resource. I'm most interested in the VBAC film.

Rixa Freeze (2011-11-08 12:19:03)

I'm interested in DVD #2!

Hollie Moyer (2011-11-08 13:16:49)

Oh I can't wait for all of them... I'm most interested in hearing from Ina May Gaskin since I'm preparing to become a midwife myself!

Mary (2011-11-08 13:48:15)

These all look brilliant. The original documentary was brilliant so expect the same of all of these. Hard to pick just one to settle on, but think I'd have to go for Number 3 since I aspire to work as a doula when my children are older

peacefulbeginnings (2011-11-08 14:16:40)

I'm interested in #3!! The first one was GREAT!

Autumn (2011-11-08 16:12:12)

The VBAC Dilemma: What Your Options Really Are

Selene (2011-11-08 16:13:03)

I would love to win any of the DVDs and am completely excited about the release! If I had to choose just one, it would be Down on the Farm. I am in school now getting prerequisites done to go to nursing school, then moving on to certification in Midwifery and am saving money to take a trip to The Farm (hopefully next Summer).

Missy Bailey (2011-11-08 16:13:30)

#3 please!!!!

Luta (2011-11-08 16:14:33)

I'd like to see DVD 1 - conversations with Ina May

Janice Phillips (2011-11-08 16:15:33)

All of them, but if I had to choose, I suppose #4! Very cool giveaway!

Heather (2011-11-08 16:18:50)

I am interested in DVD #1 !!

abundantbearth (2011-11-08 16:35:21)

I'd love to see Down on the Farm because I have always wanted to visit the Farm and take workshops there!

angie (2011-11-08 16:35:48)

#3PLEASE! :)!!!!

shaina (2011-11-08 16:44:21)

wow its so hard to choose just one but for now i'm going to choose DVD # 1 and hope to see all of them at a later time

Amanda (2011-11-08 16:48:32)

This is so exciting!!! I can't wait to see all of them but I think I am most interested in #3

Mary Martinek (2011-11-08 16:49:15)

I want to see all if them but if I had to choose I'd say #4

Launa (2011-11-08 16:49:31)

I would love to watch/win DVD number 2. So many people in our society idolize celebrities. i am curious of their take on birth. Glad these films are being released and grateful for the conversations they will spark. Nothing changes if we don't talk about it!!

Jessica (2011-11-08 17:09:18)

I would really like to see DVD #3. I gve been doing quite a bit of research regarding this topic and it is intriguing to me! I have given birth at home twice and at a hospital once. I have watched The Business of being Born numerous times and recommend it to everyone! My midwife now hands out copies to sceptical mothers as well!

Tonia Starr (2011-11-08 17:53:45)

DOWN ON THE FARM!!! I adore Ina May Gaskin and devoured her books throughout all 5 of my pregnancies. <3)

Elizabeth (2011-11-08 23:15:22)

I would also love to see the interviews with Ina May Gaskin in film #1. We need to do more to catch up to the developed world in correctly recording and reporting our maternal mortality!

Jessica (2011-11-09 02:32:21)

I can't wait to see them all, but I would most like to see the VBAC Dilemma.

jackie (2011-11-09 09:16:05)

Down on the Farm for sure! I would love to visit the Farm.

Guest Post: More Business of Being Born Mini-Review « Talk Birth (2011-11-09 12:41:03)

[...] Comments « Giveaway! More Business of Being Born! [...]

Bernadette Paige (2011-11-09 16:05:55)

I am sooooo excited to see these!!! I really can NOT miss Down on the Farm OR Special Deliveries. GREAT giveaway. Thank you!

Rachel (2011-11-09 16:40:30)

Ah, Having a hard time picking which one I'd like to see the most! Probably the Down on the Farm dvd. But Explore your options and VBAC sound so awesome too! Thanks for the great giveaway!

DawnStar Sarahs-Borchelt (2011-11-10 18:15:45)

I'd most like to see the VBAC segment. Or any of the others, but that's the most interesting to me :-)

Alicia Hurd (2011-11-12 12:34:26)

I would most want to watch the VBAC segment. That is where i will be in a year hopefully * fingers crossed*

cc (2011-11-12 12:36:24)

Awesome! If I had to choose, #4, please :)

Karli (2011-11-12 12:46:33)

ooooh! I would love any of them! But I'm most interested in #3 - I'm a doula! This would just perfect! <3 Karli

Stephanie Lee (2011-11-12 12:50:14)

#3 please!!!

Chase Young (2011-11-12 13:09:55)

I would most like to see Down on the Farm, as my second child was born with a midwife who was one of those homebirths on the farm 30+ years ago. I would be really excited to see any of them!

Sarah Dodds! (2011-11-12 13:20:35)

Wow I love the first one and can't wait to see this one! I am torn between seeing Ina May and the Celebrities one! I think I will go with Ina May! Thank you for showing the clips!

Molly (First the Egg) (2011-11-12 13:47:10)

I'm torn between 1 & 2 but ... if pressed ... would probably go for "Special Deliveries."

Sarah Dream (2011-11-12 14:21:36)

#3 please!

Rebecca Haak (2011-11-12 14:51:16)

I would definitely be happy to win any of the dvd's but the one i am most itching about is Down on the Farm! xoxo

Mary (2011-11-12 15:15:35)

I'd love to see them all, but I'm particularly interested in #3!

Sarah Desrochers (2011-11-12 15:40:05)

I would love to see DVD #1 Down on the Farm. I am an aspiring midwife and I loved all of Ina May Gaskin's books. Can't wait to see this sequel!

Leslie (2011-11-12 15:47:52)

I'd love to see the VBAC DVD as that is what I'd love to attempt.

Vernita Salinas (2011-11-12 16:21:51)

All the DVD's sound wonderful. I would most like to watch #1!

Guest Post: More Business of Being Born Mini-Review (2011-11-09 12:40)

In conjunction with the More Business of Being Born [1]giveaway I'm currently hosting, I'm also pleased to share this mini-review of the first installment (Down on the Farm) guest posted by my friend and colleague,



doula Summer:[2]

More Business of Being Born

Down on the Farm: Conversations with Legendary Midwife Ina May

Reviewed by Summer Thorp-Lancaster

[3]<http://peacefulbeginnings.wordpress.com>

[4]<http://summerdoula.wordpress.com>

The first installation of More Business of Being Born, Down on the Farm: Conversations with Legendary Midwife Ina May, is infused with loving scenes of midwifery care, loads of vital information and even a few jokes (such as a gift referencing Ina May's infamous "sphincter law"). We are given an up close view of the well-known Farm in Tennessee, whose Midwives boast an exemplary track record of Midwife attended, out-of-hospital births. This record includes a less than 2 % cesarean section rate in over 2500 births. Throughout the interviews, Ina May's (and the other Midwives featured) reverence and respect for the Midwifery Model of Care is ever-present. Her passion for the safety and overall well-being of the motherbaby is palpable and stirring.

It would be impossible to cover the many aspects of birth, or even just Midwife attended out-of-hospital birth, in a full length film, let alone an episode, but this piece successfully touches on many topics and will (hopefully) lead to further discussion amongst viewers. As an activist, I found myself left with a renewed sense of action or purpose, a desire to do more and help more so that all mamas and babies have the opportunity to experience birth as the positive, loving and intimate experience it was meant to be as well as a

deeper understanding of the crisis surrounding our medical model of birth. I would recommend this film to everyone, as the state of maternity care affects us all.

1. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/11/08/giveaway-more-business-of-being-born/>
2. <http://www.thebusinessofbeingborn.com/>
3. <http://peacefulbeginnings.wordpress.com/>
4. <http://summerdoula.wordpress.com/>

More Business of Being Born | Friends of Missouri Midwives (2011-11-12 20:04:49)

[...] provided a review for my friend and FoMM Newsletter Editor, Molly Remer, over at her site, Talk Birth. If you'd like to win one of the installments, be sure to check out her giveaway...but [...]

New Pictures! (2011-11-11 07:23)

I took Alaina for a 9 month photo shoot with my friend Karen (of [1]Portraits and Paws Photography) who also took my pregnancy photos. I really have fun getting high quality pictures that capture what our lives are like. She is able to catch expression, details, and feeling in a way that I can't usually do with snapshots. So, even though we were thoroughly exhausted from having just returned from my sister-in-law's wedding near Chicago), I'm really glad we did another photo shoot!

Here are a couple of my favorites from the day, including one of each of my boys (lest you think I only get pictures taken of the baby!):



[2]

This one might be my favorite—I see this little face all the time, but have never really preserved it in a picture (she always looks away, it is blurry, whatever).



[3]
Became very obsessed with this candy cane



[4]
What a cutie! (note, still has some candy cane)



[5]
My biggest boy!



[6]
My little Z! (He's got some pretty amazing eyelashes/eyes too!)



[7]

We're going to try to get some better family shots another day. This was at the end of the shoot and all were tired. I like it anyway though. I also think it somehow looks like a lot of kids and only one mom!



[8]

I thought this one was a cute one of me–A looks done with pictures though (and, still has some candy cane)

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
4. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
5. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
6. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
7. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
8. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

peacefulbeginnings (2011-11-11 07:32:15)

I don't know how it was for you, but I was shocked Karen (a.k.a. photographer extraordinaire) was able to get *any* pictures of Milo. They're so FAST! They look great. :)

The Beauty of a Nursing Mother (2011-11-13 08:05)



[1] "The beauty of a nursing mother can never be explained by a little oxytocin around the milk glands."

-The Wisdom of the Body

(in a section discussing the biology and physiology of milk production and delivery)

I've mentioned before how very much I enjoy the [2]Diane Wiessinger's conference presentations. In 2007, I attended her amazing session called "Watch Your Language" that was about how we talk about breastfeeding. An example of a problem word when it comes to breastfeeding—using the word "special" to describe breastfeeding: a "special bond" a "special nursing corner" etc. and also using the word "perfect" (which communicates something that isn't reasonable or that "real" people can't do or live up to). She encouraged us not to "glorify breastfeeding" like this. Breastfeeding ISN'T special, it is NORMAL. A breastfed baby has a "normal bond" with its mother! Human milk isn't the perfect food for babies, it is the NORMAL food for babies.

A long time ago I also marked the following quote to share from K.C. Compton in an article in Utne about baby boomers:

"We discovered firsthand the radical nature of simple acts: Sit in the front of the bus, ask that your husband be present during his son's birth, decide to feed your infant with your own breasts, refuse the nuclear power plant being built just up the road. We also learned how much more effective those acts can be when compounded by the hundreds and thousands, their feet on the street..."

And, then this reminds me of a powerful [3]editorial by Peggy O'Mara, urging women to see their mothering as a political act:

See your mothering as a political act. The way you talk to your child becomes his or her inner voice. The way you model acceptance of your own body becomes the way your daughter

learns to accept hers. The way you model the distribution of chores in the household provides a blueprint for your children's marriages. Bringing consciousness and awareness to the small acts of your life with your family can change the world. Your mothering is enough.

...As mothers, we think that our concerns are the concerns of the many. We have to make sure that they are. As mothers, we hope that our children are protected by society. We have to act when they are not. As mothers, we have authoritative knowledge about our own experience, an experience we have in common with millions of women. We can build a more just society on the ground of this common experience.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
2. <http://www.normalfed.com/>
3. <http://www.mothering.com/a-lantern-for-lorri>

A Writer's Prayer (2011-11-13 12:40)

I often use my blog as a means of saving thoughts and ideas for "later" or for storing the ideas of other people for future reference or reflection. Sometimes I feel like it is silly to do this—why write a blog post that primarily consists of quotes that I want to remember or use in the future? Why not just trust that I can eventually go back to that book or article and re-find the good stuff then? I've often chided myself about it—don't use your blog to "store" stuff, use it for original ideas. Quit writing short little posts and work on your books instead. And, more cruelly, don't bother, no one cares. However, I've also realized that I don't have the space in my life right now for the sustained concentration it would require for me to write my books. I have ideas for four of them. My miscarriage memoir is almost finished and I do plan to publish it this year, but the others are not and I've accepted that they won't be likely to get any of my attention until my kids are older. I can barely find the time to write any articles lately, let alone books. But, then I realized that in a way, when I collect words and thoughts in my blog—whether just transcribed words from something that caught my attention, or fresh words of my own—I am working on my books. I'm preserving, collecting, storing, and refining ideas, words, memories, and thoughts, so that I will have a rich collection to mine when I'm ready to fully develop it. I might dismiss it as "just blogging" and some posts might just be short quotes from other writers, but I think there is good value to me in this collecting process after all.

From the anthology *Sisters Singing*, here is a quote from a longer poem called, *A Writer's Prayer*, by Sarah Jones:

...The body of a writer
is a political action
with each swing of a letter
each truth written
the world is broken open,
a vein of truth exposed.
A writer's prayer is for herself.
That she will hold to slowness
that she will hold to the beauty of a candle
that with the dirt and the grit of living under her nails,
she will write her body into language.

I write to remember. I write to share. I write to preserve. I write to collect. I write to store. I write for myself. I write for my children. I write for others. I write for perspective. I write to play my life's music. I write because I just can't help it.

Quentin, Jenna (@JennaQuentin) (2011-11-15 03:49:34)

Thank you for this encouragement! I am pushing forward to finish writing my middle grade novel, but it looks like the birth of my second child in February will come first! If I can turn this round bellied, tired body into language of any kind I will be content. I appreciate the idea that none of my blogging is wasted - bless you!

What Am I Thankful For? « Talk Birth (2011-11-24 09:44:05)

[...] into one place. I thought that was a great idea and so I'm following suit! I've written recently about how blogging counts as valuable writing and I also think that the seeds of many a good blog [...]

Hope (2011-11-13 14:31:41)

Love this! I am easy to dismiss blogging (and go for long stretches ignoring it completely) but I do find value in it and find that when I go back to look at old posts I both enjoy it and find "gems" that I'm glad I have stored away somewhere. I also find that when I take the time to blog on a regular basis writing becomes more natural and easier to fit into my day because it isn't such a struggle. I'm not wasting time trying to find my 'inner writer'- she's already right there at the surface!

Birth and the Women's Health Agenda (2011-11-13 16:10)



[1]

Ready to be on the agenda, dangit!

Note: This is the post I was working on yesterday from my phone when my thumb accidentally brushed the "update" button and published it as a textless post!

In the Fall issue of *The Journal of Perinatal Education* (Lamaze), there was a guest editorial by perinatologist Michael Klein called "Many Women and Providers are Unprepared for an Evidence-Based Conversation About Birth." In it he notes:

Childbirth is not on the women's health agenda in most Western countries...It never has been. Osteoporosis is. Breast health is; violence against women is. Why not childbirth? Because women, understandably, do not want to be judged only by their reproductive capacities. Women are multipotential people. Among many potentialities, they can rise to the top of the academic

and corporate world. Giving birth is just one of many things women can do. But now is the time to add childbirth to the women's health agenda; it is because of the lack of informed decision making that birth should be added to that agenda, lack of information, misinformation, and even disinformation. The time is now.

...What really matters is attitudes and beliefs, which are much more difficult to change than putting away the scissors and hanging some plants. These are systemic issues. (emphasis mine) It is all about anxiety and fear. The doctors are afraid...The women are afraid...Society is afraid and averse to risk.

So how can you make a revolution when so few individuals are unhappy with current maternity care practices? The most unhappy and well-informed women select midwives, if available. The most fearful women select obstetricians. Providers are not going to initiate the revolution to make childbirth a normal rather than high-risk, industrialized activity...Women are going to have to take the lead...

The problem is not that obstetricians are surgeons. They are. The problem is that society has invested surgeons with control over normal childbirth.

I keep wanting to write an article called, "is evidence-based care enough?" because we see this phrase used so often in birth advocacy work. It is kind of the companion phrase to the, "women just need to educate themselves" line of thought, that, quite frankly, is also just not enough. And, I think the reason it isn't enough—all of our education, all of our books, and all of our evidence—is because it isn't information itself that really needs to change, it is women's feelings and beliefs about birth (and the medical system's feelings and beliefs about it too, in addition to their practices) and changing those sometimes feel like an insurmountable task. As I've [2]written before, much of the time it isn't that we actually want women to know more, we want them to act differently. And, a choice made in a context of fear is not an informed choice at all.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/16/women-and-knowing/>

Full Moon Calendar Mandala (2011-11-15 16:23)

I drew this full moon calendar mandala as part of an assignment for one of the classes I'm taking (we are working on our "wheel of the year" and holidays, etc.). While it was not specifically part of the assignment to do so, I found that drawing this mandala image helped me to explore and express my ideas. It contains the dates of all the full moons in 2012, as well as representations of the waxing and waning moons for the entire year. I initially set this to post as private, so it wouldn't be visible to my blog readers and would only be available to my class, but then I reconsidered and thought other people might be interested in seeing it as well:



[1]
Full Moon Calendar Mandala

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/fullmoonwheel-copy1.jpg>

Lynda M O (2011-11-15 17:37:48)

Gorgeous mandala; thanks for sharing with the rest of us not in your class.

Top 10 Kid Gadgets for Holiday Road Trips (2011-11-18 17:27)

We recently returned from a train trip to the Chicago area. While it took a long time to travel by train (mostly due to having to get to the station early, etc.), I really appreciated this mode of travel with a baby! Check out some pictures:



[1]
Alaina watching the world go by!



[2]
Watching a movie on Daddy's laptop on the way—Amtrak has two outlets for each set of seats, which is

awesome!



[3]

The boys on the commuter train on the way home—they both got a little bit of a fever/cold and ended up sleeping on much of the return journey. It was actually kind of "convenient"!



[4]

Conked out on the commuter train back into Chicago (see how she holds my necklace :)

One of the greatest benefits of train travel to me is the ability to hold and nurse the baby while traveling. I've said so many times how I wish I could invent a baby carrier that you could legally wear in a car. Traveling on the train allowed me to experience that imagining. It was great! She rode, she nursed,

she snoozed, she checked things out.



[5]
Now THIS is how I like to travel with a baby!

When I got home, I coincidentally received the following guest post about keeping kids entertained on holiday road trips. For our own train trip, the most useful thing we had was the laptop. (I also had mine with me and actually managed to edit 81 pages of my miscarriage book on the trip home!) While we were at my in-laws, I also bought some fun little "blind bag" Playmobil and Lego figures and gave them to the kids to play with on the way home.

Guest Post: Top 10 Kid Gadgets for Holiday Road Trips

by Ashley Grimaldo

Talking on a cell phone while driving is dangerous. But a mid-transit chat pales in comparison to the distraction of driving with one (or two!) children wailing in the backseat. Nothing increases adrenaline and quick recall of four-letter words quite like crying kids.

As parents, we can mentally cope with crying kids to and from the grocery store. But long-distance trips need more finesse. Careful preparation and a few necessities can prevent a few glitches and keep your travel going smoothly. As you prepare for holiday travels, make the most of your trip with these handy gadgets.

1. Snack Container

A signature trademark of a kid-friendly car is a Hansel and Gretel-worthy crumb collection on every surface. If you can overlook this completely annoying parenthood perk, I applaud you; otherwise invest in some creative cups. [6]Munchkin offers an ingenious design with handles and no spill rubber top—two for under \$7. Sporting a similar design but with an attachable rope (and additional solid top) is the Spill-Proof Snack Buddy Cup from [7]One Step Ahead.

2. Window Shade

Getting on the road is tough enough; stopping to shade a sunset shouldn't be on your list of priorities. Grab a light-cutting window shade to curb the brightness. Measure your windows and buy the widest shade possible, making sure you have enough visibility in your back and rear passenger windows. Check out your options at [8]Great Baby Products for window shade reviews.

3. Lacing Toys

Kids above age 3 (who don't suffer from motion sickness) will work on lacing boards for hours. [9]Growing Tree Toys has a fantastic range of simple lacing activities, like necklaces and ABCs, to complex connect-a-dot boards. Bring a bucket to set in your child's lap so that she can contain the blocks without dropping them on the floor.

4. Finger Puppets

For the dramatic types in your crew, a set of finger puppets can be a space-saving lifesaver. My favorite are high-quality puppets that tell a familiar story, like Thumbelina or the Frog Prince from puppet master [10]Folkmanis, but folks on a budget can definitely afford IKEA's popular set of circus characters or animals for just \$4.99.

5. Favorite Music

Not your favorite music, mind you. Junior may not appreciate the vocal stylings of Rihanna for hours on end (and, honestly, you shouldn't either). Enjoy some traditional Disney favorites and throw in some award-winning movement songs from Hap Palmer and Joe Scruggs to keep the mood kid-friendly. Bring on talk radio when it's time for a snooze.

6. Bubbles

So what if you have to clean up the residue later! Bubbles are total fun for all ages, especially when the road seems never-ending. Unless you have an older child, mom or dad needs to commandeer the liquid and blow them toward the back. The best bubbles on the market, hands down, come from [11]Gymboree. These bubbles float forever and the solution never dries out.

7. Barf Bag

Close to 30 % of people are susceptible to motion sickness, and kids are no exception. The barfies can strike at any time—there's no guarantee that your child will or won't get sick on a road trip. Prepare for the worst by investing in a few leak-proof [12]barf bags with fun pictures printed on the outside and show your child how to "cough" into it if his tummy starts to hurt. And bring an extra couple of towels just in case.

8. Neck Pillow

This is a tricky one. Your younger child may or may not like the feeling of something so close to her neck. Try it on short stroller trips ahead of time to practice. If your kiddo will wear it, she'll be far more comfortable during naps. Pillow companions like the [13]Dora neck pillow attach to the straps of your car seat or stroller, making it a bit more accessible.

9. Small Baking Sheets

This ingenious idea from [14]Family Fun keeps the ever-present I-dropped-it-on-the-floor wail at bay. Use a

conventional (but smaller) lipped baking sheet as a drawing, magnetic and keep-it-all-in-one place surface. Glue one or two layers of foam shelf paper on the bottom to make it less likely to fall and affix white contact paper to the top for the drawing surface. Turn it into multiple activities by attaching magnets to buttons for checkers or bingo games. Older travelers might prefer a more sophisticated travel kit like [15]this one from Martha Stewart.

10. iPad

No, I'm not a fan of hours of screen time for little eyes, but during a road trip this godsend is a total catchall. From apps for all ages to music and movies, the iPad is the perfect device for tiny travelers. [16]Purchasing gift cards at a discount from sites like GiftCardGranny can help you pay for the pricey device at such retailers as Target and Walmart, who are currently offering deals on iPad 2 bundles. Then, let your kiddos learn letters with [17]Starfall or everything nursery-rhyme cooky from [18]Duck Duck Moose. When all else fails, strap it to the seat and watch a movie.

#

Ashley Grimaldo comes from a long line of penny pinchers and enjoys blogging on money-saving tips and advice for frugal-minded parents. She lives with her husband and three children in Bryan, Texas. Ashley has been featured among such media outlets as Redbook, The Chicago Tribune, Time.com, and CBS News-Houston.

For all media inquiries, please contact Ashley Grimaldo at [19]ashley@kinoliinc.com.

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111115-082336.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111115-082550.jpg>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111115-082401.jpg>
4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111115-082502.jpg>
5. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111115-082531.jpg>
6. <http://www.amazon.com/Munchkin-Snack-Catchers-Colors-Vary/dp/B000GBONZK>
7. <http://www.onestepahead.com/catalog/product.jsp?productId=536154>
8. <http://www.greatbabyproducts.com/Car-Window-Sun-Shades-s/1068.htm>
9. <http://www.growingtreetoys.com/category/lacing-toys?gclid=CKzGg-LQmKwCFY5Y7AodmElaIQ>
10. http://www.folkmanis.com/characterpup_detail.php
11. http://www.gymboree.com/shop/dept_item.jsp?FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=2534374306236928&PRODUCT%3C%3Eprd_id=845524443130845&Port=DataFeed&ad=SLI
12. <http://www.barfboutique.com/little-traveler-kids-barf-bags.html>
13. <http://www.amazon.com/Dora-Explorer-Travel-Combo-Pillow/dp/B0033505ZK>
14. <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/backseat-travel-tray-665360/>
15. <http://www.marthastewart.com/270460/kids-travel-kit>
16. <http://www.giftcardgranny.com/buy-gift-cards/>
17. <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/starfall-abcs/id395623983?mt=8>
18. <http://duckduckmoosedesign.com/>
19. <mailto:ashley@kinoliinc.com>

Ten Months Old! (2011-11-19 20:37)

Today marks ten months of baby girlness in our home! I'm so glad she's here! Quickie update in developments this month: she has seven teeth now! She cruises around furniture with impunity. She pinches your arms and then scream-squeals to demonstrate her empathy for your pain. She ate a gemstone, but it was

recovered when we washed diapers. We successfully traveled to Chicago and back. She pinches and scratches while nursing and is a wild, twisting nurser. Naps have been bad lately, which can lead to commensurate maternal despair. She still sleeps on my arm all night long. She still smells like apricots. Has the bestest baby yogurt breath. She has the best eyes and eyelashes ever. While still even-tempered and brave when faced with new things, she has now thrown a big-time fit over dum-dum deprivation (also, has located and consumed entire blue dum-dum from the boys Halloween haul). Eats lots of things (some edible, some not) and likes broccoli the best. Is on a potty strike and stiffens back to make pottying impossible. Has been standing alone for brief moments. Has started going to visit like a big a girl with Baba and Tom (my parents) when the boys go over in the afternoon.

I still look at her with surprise and amazement multiple times a week—how did we get you? Are you really here? Oh my goodness, MY BABY! Feeling a weird sense of clock ticking as she approaches one year—is this really the last two months that I will ever spend with a baby of my own in my house? I’m trying to remember that...only two months of baby left...every single day so that I appreciate and marvel and cherish her every, single day. (Which, of course, all babies deserve, but which can be hard to remember—non-napping “schedule” also makes me “fail” in this arena some days as well.) I’m becoming more certain that she really is our last baby, though I still think maybe quite a lot. She needs a lot of me lately—lots of in arms, in baby carrier time. I’m sure in another *blink* she will be walking and won’t need me like that. I’m her favorite place right now still though. She says da da and mama and hi and bye. I’m only teaching one in-seat class this session and it is a lot easier on us all. I have signed on for three in January again though—it is three sections of the same class, so that is bound to be easier than the early fall session was, right?! I’m still plugging away on my own classes too—I’m taking six classes, but they are mercifully all self-paced (I’m over halfway done with several of them). I love them all—really amazing content. I love “stretching” my brain with them and thinking and pondering over and writing about complex ideas and issues.



[1]

We also had a family photo shoot this week:



[2]

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Lynda M O (2011-11-20 02:13:15)

A beautiful family and a great photo. I miss all the infants I have babysat over the years. My first family day care's toddlers are now Sophomores in high school. Unbelievable how time just keep marching on and they keep outgrowing the baby stage. It's bittersweet.

Polymer clay birth goddess pendant (2011-11-21 21:17)

"We all start out knowing magic. We are born with whirlwinds, forest fires, and comets inside us. We are born able to sing to birds and read the clouds and see our destiny in grains of sand. But then we get the magic educated right out of our souls." -Robert R. McGammon

My husband is very into gems and I'm into birth goddess sculpting, so I recently put the two together and experimented with making one of my sculptures in a small version to use as a pendant and I incorporated two gems into my "design." Alaina wanted to grab and chew on her of course and so I let her, thinking it was good product "testing"—after approximately zero minutes the pink gem was gone and was not located again until I found it in the bottom of the washing machine after doing a load of diapers...

(don't worry, I'd already replaced it with a new stone and glued this one in)



[1]

Today, I had a "vision" of a new series I'd like to make using gems representing the four elements. Then, I thought of another necklace and then remembered I want to make one of my original style sculptures for a blessingway this week. All told, I somehow imagined making FIFTEEN new sculptures today! I didn't end up making any (I had grading to do and other work in my online class as well as laundry by the truckload and Christmas shopping to do online), but I did pick out the gems and I know what I want to make! Hopefully, more photos will follow of those...

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111121-211631.jpg>

Carol Lovekin (2011-12-02 09:59:13)
Beautiful! You are an artist.

Top Ten Things I Love About Having a Baby (2011-11-23 09:25)

The winter holiday season remains linked with pregnancy loss for me. This time last year, I was entering the final stretch of my pregnancy-after-loss journey and feeling so hopeful that I would have a happy ending to my loss story. This time two years ago, I was reeling from Noah's birth and it was so very difficult to experience the holidays without being pregnant after all. I feel like this whole first year with Alaina has represented another "circuit" in the labyrinth of pregnancy loss, pregnancy-after-loss, and then new baby. I feel like I have to make another complete "round" of the year, passing through all of those significant dates and milestones that I experienced first as a post-loss mama and as a PAL mama, but getting to take another

lap, this time holding my new baby. Each time I pass another date, I feel almost like waving—here we go...together!

So, in this time of thanksgiving, I want to share the

Top Ten Things I Love About Having a Baby



[1] Should have had Karen take a picture of the back of A's neck for me—as it is, this is the best I could do!

1. Morning lounge-nursing
2. The bent back of her neck as she seriously examines something.
3. The way she rides on my hip and snuggles her head in on my shoulder.
4. Being a little person's one and only—the most loved and most desired companion. (To be fair, this is one of the hard parts too. It can be exhausting to be needed most of the day and night.)
5. How curious she is and how quickly she notices something new—and how closely and seriously she studies and examines and explores it.
6. Babywearing.
7. Her fuzzy hair. Smelling her head.
8. How she meets my eyes across the room, or while nursing, or in any instance when she is surprised or startled, or even just noticing something—she checks it out with her home base. It is an honor to be so trusted.
9. Experiencing the thrill of discovery through her eyes.
10. Having a baby! Being one of the babymmas. Being a mamatoto. It just feels really right to have a baby on my hip and at my breast.



[2]
Trusting gaze



[3]
Big girl! (but checking in to see if all is well—she’s looking at me in this picture).

Happy Thanksgiving!

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111122-164224.jpg>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

What Am I Thankful For? (2011-11-24 09:43)

Many people have been participating in the Facebook tradition of posting something they’re thankful for as their status throughout November. A friend of mine collected all of hers into a Thanksgiving [1]blog post, noting that they seem more powerful when all collected into one place. I thought that was a great idea and so I’m following suit! I’ve [2]written recently about how blogging counts as valuable writing and I also think that the seeds of many a good blog post can be found in Facebook statuses and comments. While usually written in a different, very casual manner, I often save things I’ve posted to Facebook to use as “kernels”

from which to germinate new blog posts.

So, during November, I have been thankful for:

- Bedtime. On a day, "where my kids were manic, wild little beasts and I was a frazzle-haired crabatron."
- a class full of (mostly) interested and engaged students who seem to really be *clicking* with the material. I really got a great group at FLW this session. I'm having lots of fun with them!
- safe travels and for Kindle
- when I got rear-ended this afternoon, it was just a little bump and nothing more serious!
- well water—I always feel confused when people say they "don't like water" or that they have to force themselves to drink water. Water is my favorite drink! But, then I go somewhere with city water and suddenly I understand!
- On the second anniversary of the miscarriage-birth of my tiny son Noah. I've been thankful today for Alaina who fills our lives with such joy and I'm thankful that I got to spend his birthday on the "other side" of the pregnancy after loss journey with her, and I'm thankful for Noah and the gifts he brought to our lives—I feel like he made it possible for us to have her and I'm so thankful for that. We remembered him tonight with a candle by his tree and moonlit labyrinth walk while we listened to a special song.
- smooth, safe travels and home sweet home.
- that I had a flat tire at the geology museum parking lot today rather than at FLW last night! And, I'm thankful for my wonderful husband who dropped everything to come to the rescue (not only did he put on the spare, he traded cars with me so I took the kids home in his car, while he kept mine in town and is going to take it to get a new tire).
- the military service of Mark's late dad, LaRoy, who was disabled in Vietnam. He made many personal sacrifices in his service, but one of the gifts of that service was that Mark's college education was paid for—meaning our family continues to benefit today by having no student loans. I often feel thankful for LaRoy for that!
- an active, engaged online class this session.
- quiet time alone to write!(and for a normal nap from baby girl today—I'm also thankful that she remains a precious, good-spirited treasure even on days when she doesn't nap very well)
- my mom, who keeps trekking to the Fort with me each week so that Alaina doesn't have to be separated. I really appreciate it! (and her only reward, aside from spending time with the greatness that is A and me, is a salad from Panera)
- pictures from our family photo shoot today! Feeling thankful for Karen today (see photo below).
- my husband, who takes care of so many things each morning that I often overlook or take for granted (maybe because I'm busy still snoozing and snuggling in bed with the baby when he's getting ready for work!) He takes care of the animals, makes me tea, does the dishes, etc. (Today got all of the towering mounds of recycling packed up to take to the recycling center.)
- the past TEN months of baby girlness in our house!

- my Kindle. I love being able to carry 600 or so books around with me wherever I go! It is like magic.
- that I get to say things in my home like, "Lann! Those birth goddesses aren't baked! Did you hear me? The goddesses aren't baked!!" ♥ my boys and my life!
- that the busyness of the day involves finally getting to meet an out-of-town friend's new baby, celebrating a beautiful mama at a blessingway, and teaching a class tonight that I enjoy!
- a great class tonight—I have some really fun students!
- courageous birthing women, for midwives of all varieties, for magnificent babies, for loving fathers, for dedicated doulas, for committed birth activists, for inspirational childbirth educators, and for the everyday, transformative miracle of birth.

And, heck, I should add that I'm thankful for Facebook, because of how it allows me to maintain connections with friends who have moved away as well as for daily check ins with local friends and with family near and far. Also, for the idea-sharing, thought-provoking discussions, points of connection and inspiration, and being able to reach out to the broad birth activism world and to pregnant mamas through my business pages. That thankfulness makes me remember that I am thankful for this blog as well, which gives me the opportunity and avenue to reach out to touch the lives of many women and people around the world, rather than simply in my own little corner.

Some are mundane and some are more profound and there is some repetition, but all make up the texture of daily life.

Happy Thanksgiving!



[3]

A lot of my thankfulness reasons all in one place!

1. <http://hopefulinsights.wordpress.com/2011/11/24/so-much-to-be-thankful-for/>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/11/13/a-writers-prayer/>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Birth Quotes of the Month (2011-11-26 15:36)

As always, while these quotes are obviously not my own words, I do appreciate a link back to my site if you re-post them because I have a significant amount of legwork invested in finding and typing the quotes. Most are not recycled from other pages (I give credit if they are), but are typed up when they catch my eye in the books/magazines/journals I'm reading.

"The first few months after a baby comes can be a lot like floating in a jar of honey—very sweet and golden, but very sticky too." –American College of Nurse-Midwives

"Your children love you. Be the trampoline for their rocketing and the cupped palms for their returning." –Shae Savoy (in *We'Moon* 2011 datebook)

"There is nobody, out the other side of that sort of strong birth, who is not better prepared to meet the absolutely remarkable challenges of parenthood. When the power and trust is transferred to the mother,

when she delivers her child, rather than 'is delivered' when she chooses, rather than 'is allowed', no matter what sort of technical birth she has, she is stronger, fiercer, and better. After a trip like that, you would kill for that child, and you know you can." –[1]The Yarn Harlot

Why do birth work? "I do it, because nothing else... nothing else, compares to watching a woman move mountains with her own self, to watching her rise to a challenge and meet the moment with all she has, and that experience is only enhanced when she is supported by those who care for her, respect her, and want her to be empowered by the journey." –The Yarn Harlot

"We must act to keep the knowledge and the powers of women alive." – Lynn Andrews [2]



"Birth Freedom is inevitable. The natural progression is for people to move from tyranny to liberty. The agents of the status quo, however, rarely yield power without a fight." –Senator John Loudon (ret.) in Midwifery Today e-news

"If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive." - Audre Lorde

"We have barely tapped the power that is ours. We are more than we know." –Charlene Spret-nak

"Woman is a glorious possibility; the future of the world is hers." - Matilda Gage

"In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit." Albert Schweitzer

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are messengers of overwhelming grief...and unspeakable love." –Washington Irving

"Don't you dare, for one more second, surround yourself with people who are not aware of the greatness that you are." (Roots of She by Amanda Oaks, via @ROAR! Empowering Women to Give Voice to Their Truth)

"We all start out knowing magic. We are born with whirlwinds, forest fires, and comets inside us. We are born able to sing to birds and read the clouds and see our destiny in grains of sand. But then we

get the magic educated right out of our souls.” -Robert R. McGammon

“It’s hard to describe if you’ve never been there, but to watch a woman access her full power as a woman to give birth is awe-inspiring, and I never get tired of being witness to it. It’s an honor to watch that transformation take place.” Julie Bates, CNM

”The emerging woman..will be strong-minded, strong-hearted, strong-souled, and strong-bodied...strength and beauty must go together.” Louisa May Alcott

”The women in labor must have NO STRESS placed upon her. She must be free to move about, walk, rock, go to the bathroom by herself, lie on her side or back, squat or kneel, or anything she finds comfortable, without fear of being scolded or embarrassed. Nor is there any need for her to be either ‘quiet’ or ‘good.’ What is a ‘good’ patient? One who does whatever she is told—who masks all the stresses she is feeling? Why can she not cry, or laugh, or complain?” –Grantly Dick Read, *Childbirth without Fear*

“We must relearn to trust the feminine, to trust women and their bodies as authoritative regarding the children they carry and the way they must birth them.”
–Elizabeth Davis, CPM

”The purpose of life is not to maintain personal comfort; it’s to grow the soul.” –Christina Baldwin

”Humanizing birth means understanding that the woman giving birth is a human being, not a machine and not just a container for making babies. Showing women—half of all people—that they are inferior and inadequate by taking away their power to give birth is a tragedy for all society.” –Marsden Wagner

”Everyone who interacts with a pregnant woman is, in some way, her ‘teacher.’ Telling birth stories, sharing resources, imparting obstetrical information, giving advice or warnings—these are all direct or indirect ways of teaching about birth and parenting. Whether you currently identify yourself as a ‘childbirth teacher,’ or you are a midwife, doctor, doula, yoga teacher, nurse, therapist, breastfeeding counselor, or you are simply a woman or man who cares about the power of the childbearing year, you already hold the power of mentoring within you.” –Pam England

”The purpose of our lives is to give birth to the best which is within us.” –Marianne Williamson

”There is no single formula for motherhood and writing that suits us all. Instead, there are many paths on this literary journey, all leading to the same destination, each equally valuable.” - Elif Shafak

”Remember our heritage is our power; we can know ourselves and our capacities by seeing that other women have been strong.” – Judy Chicago

”Scientific medicine has never been shy to dismiss if not denigrate any perceived threat to its values or power.” –from the book *Breakthrough: How the 10 Greatest Discoveries in Medicine Saved Millions and Saved the World*

”Midwives often forget that our beliefs in [mom’s] abilities can alter her accomplishments. It is important to check our hearts and push through any lack of belief that may inhibit her strengths. This may sound silly or ethereal, but I guarantee it can make a difference for a laboring mom and family.” Carol Gautschi (*Midwifery Today*)

"Hormones have a kind of crazy rhythm that you can trust. Behind them is internal intelligence; try listening instead of controlling. When hormones are 'raging,' they exaggerate what's already going on internally as a signal for us to pay attention and learn from it." –Camille Maurine (Meditation Secrets for Women)

"Since the release of adrenaline is highly contagious, the main preoccupation of an authentic midwife, after the paradigm shift, will be to maintain her own level of adrenaline as low as possible when she is close to a labouring woman. Midwives of the future will also need to train themselves to remain silent, since language is the most powerful stimulant of the neocortex. The silent knitting session will be a necessary step towards an understanding of what authentic midwifery is. We present it as the symbol of a vital new phase in the history of childbirth and midwifery." –Michel Odent (in *Midwifery Today*)

"Sons branch out, but one woman leads to another." –Margaret Atwood (quoted in *Sacred Circles*)

"We can no longer sit back and debate whether maternity care is evidence-based. We have seen that over and over again, in most cases, it is not..." –Connie Livingston

"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, together women ought to be able to turn it rightside up again." –Sojourner Truth

"The intrinsic intelligence of women's bodies can be sabotaged when they're put into clinical settings, surrounded by strangers, and attached to machines that limit their freedom to move. They then risk falling victim to the powerful forces of fear, loneliness, doubt, and distrust, all of which increase pain. Their hopes for a normal birth disappear as quickly as the fluid in an IV bottle." Peggy Vincent

"The problem is not that obstetricians are surgeons. They are. The problem is that society has invested surgeons with control over normal childbirth." –Michael Klein, MD (in *The Journal of Perinatal Education*)

"Perhaps the greatest gift that women can give their daughters is to take precious care of their own lives—to develop their natural talents and to honor the opportunities that come their way. By so doing, they become vital models for their children as well as full women in their own right." Evelyn Bassoff

"When one woman puts her experiences into words, another woman who has kept silent, afraid of what others will think, can find validation. And when the second woman says aloud, 'yes, that was my experience too,' the first woman loses some of her fear." –Carol Christ

"Befriend fear, embrace struggle, trust nature, the process, and a baby's wisdom." –WYSH (Wear Your Spirit for Humanity see also <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/05/25/birth-altar-wisdom/>)

"Thousands of women today have had their babies born under modern humanitarian conditions—they are the first to disclaim any knowledge of the beauties of childbirth..." –Grantly Dick Read, *Childbirth without Fear*

"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." –Audre Lorde

"Not only do I trust my body, I am in awe of all it can do. I don't know if I will ever be able to accomplish anything as marvelous as birthing and nursing two babies. That is more amazing to me than running a marathon or climbing a mountain. I have created and nurtured life; nothing tops that." Corbin

Lewars (via Midwifery Today)

"Humanizing birth means understanding that the woman giving birth is a human being, not a machine and not just a container for making babies. Showing women—half of all people—that they are inferior and inadequate by taking away their power to give birth is a tragedy for all society." –Marsden Wagner

"I am sure that if the mothers of various nations could meet, there would be no more wars." - E. M. Forster

"The strength that is displayed in labor and birth is something that no one can EVER take from you in your life. Elixir of courage." –Desirre Andrews

1. <http://www.yarnharlot.ca/blog/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Blessingway Poem: A Prayer for One Who Comes to Choose This Life (2011-11-26 16:06)

A Prayer for One Who Comes to Choose This Life

By Danelia Wild

May she know the welcome

of open arms and hearts

May she know she is loved

by many and by one

May she know the circle of friendship that gives

and receives love in all its forms

May she know and be known

in the heart of another

May she know the heart

that is this earth

reach for the stars and

call it home

And in the end

may she find everything

in her heart

and her heart

in everything

Last week I attended a blessingway for a friend who moved away last year. We didn't know each other very well when she lived here, but thanks to Facebook, we've kept in touch and have bonded this year due to some personal experiences and commonalities. The poem above from the book *Sisters Singing* felt perfect to me to share with her. She has waited with such hope and love to meet her new daughter.

I also made her one of my polymer clay birth goddess sculptures. I purposely overbaked it to make the pigment more deeply colored. This goddess is holding a heart-shaped gem for love. [1]



1. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/img_1776.jpg

Kelley Maresca (2011-11-28 21:06:15)

How beautiful! Do you sell the birth goddesses you create?

Mindful Mama: Presence and Perfectionism in Parenting (2011-11-29 16:18)



Being a mindful mama can be painful.[1]

I am acutely aware of how often I fail, mess up, and let myself down in this work of conscious mothering. When I decide to go through a drive-through after a long day in town, I am very aware of each preservative laden, saturated fat heavy, factory-farmed, non-fair trade bite that crosses our lips. When I'm tired and have low energy for responsive parenting and I say "yes" my boys can watch a DVD, I know I am using it as a "babysitter" and as a "plug-in drug." I cringe to hear myself say at times, "you guys are driving me crazy!" It is painful to know better and to watch myself do it anyway.

Listening to my Inner Critic

Instead of an inner guide, I too often listen to my inner critic. My judge. The perfect mama that sits on my shoulder and lets me know how often I screw it all up. I laugh sometimes as I reference the invisible panel of "good parents" that sits in my head judging me and finding me lacking.

For me, being a mindful mama is bound up in complicated ways with being a perfect mama; a "good mother." In this way, it is NOT true mindfulness—I respond to my children based on how I think I should respond, how a "good mindful mama" would respond, not necessarily based on what is actually happening. Too often, I respond as I believe Dr. Sears, Jon Kabat-Zinn, or Marie Winn (The Plug in Drug) thinks I should respond, not based on reality or how we feel in the moment. This is the antithesis of true mindfulness. Mindfulness means an awareness of what is, it does not mean a constant monitoring of how I have failed. If I cannot be flexible and compassionate with myself, how do I expect to be a flexible and compassionate mother?

I am harsh and relentless in my own assessment of myself. Listening to the inner clamor of how to "be good" and "do it right," prevents me from tuning in to what my children are really doing and really need in the moment. It is difficult to hear my own authentic voice, the still, small voice within, amidst the shouting in my head produced by all my reading and ideas.

This realization also forces me to acknowledge how often my mothering is about ME and not about my children. Too often my mothering springs from a preoccupation with being a "good mother"—i.e. making this all about me, me, ME—rather than about my children in the moment.

Meet Perfect Mama

I'm sure many of you know Perfect Mama—she gives birth with joy and ease, preferably at home and possibly unassisted. She breastfeeds responsively and for as long as her child needs—even through subsequent pregnancies and babies. She uses cloth diapers, or even better, no diapers at all because she practices elimination communication. She eats only organic foods and is perhaps vegetarian or vegan. She is always happy and creative and ready to play. She homeschools. She stays home, or, she effortlessly balances fulfilling work with a baby on her hip. She babywears and co-sleeps and grows her own food. She is “green” in her life and buying habits. She does not circumcise and she never forgets to boycott Nestle. Her family does not watch TV. She uses gentle, patient, loving discipline—no snapping or snarling. She never yells or gets angry and she never, never feels resentful or irritable.

I see in myself, in my friends, and in online communities, a ready tendency to judge or evaluate other mothers based on this inner checklist of good, “natural mothering” behaviors/practices, rather than seeing her as who and how she really is. There is also the tendency to hide the “ugly” parts ourselves or the parts that don't conform to the checklist.

I actually meet many of the criteria on this checklist and in many ways (at least on paper!) I am “Perfect Mama.” Except, I do not always do it all with a smile on my face. That is my major failure. I am painfully aware—mindful—that, though I always love my children, I do not love every single moment I spend with them. It hurts to recognize and confess that I do not always cherish and adore being a mother. When I look past all the “right answers” on the checklist, guess what is left? Just me. For better or for worse.

I'm afraid that many of us trade the rigidity and prescribed values and ideals of the dominant culture, for a new set of natural family living values that we cling to with just as much rigidity and dogma.

If I look at being a mindful mama as an entity, a goal, an ideal to achieve, an assignment on which to get an A, then I've missed much of the point. Being a mindful mama isn't about a rigid constellation of proper behaviors and ideas. It isn't about struggling to conform to a mold. It is about being there, showing up, being present for life as it unfolds, and offering myself to my children fully, imperfectly, and whole. Cultivating self-acceptance alongside the “witness.” And, picking up the pieces when I fall, and trying again.

Finding My Authentic Mothering Wisdom

I continue to discover how I might clear our mental space to find my own authentic mothering wisdom. I am learning that being a mindful mama isn't truly about a specific collection of beliefs and behaviors—the checklist—but is about responsiveness and presence.

I open my heart and vow to be here now. To tune in—to really look and breathe and smell and hear. Perhaps if I throw out the checklist, it is enough to look daily upon my life and my children with gratitude and love. To pause in the moment and drink it in. To really see my little ones before me. To stretch my arms wide to embrace them and to embrace the flow of life. To hold myself in the inner light of love and compassion. To try to do better—but in moving forward, rather than looking back with harshness and self-criticism. Perhaps I can love and accept right here, right now, even if that nowness sometimes involves a Happy Meal, or a raised voice, or red food coloring, or an Elmo movie.

Perhaps parenting authentically, from the heart, can't be learned in a book or through application of a theory, but only through being there and being aware—of both the beauty and the messiness. Perhaps it means a loosening of attachment to attachment parenting as a prescribed set of practices and beliefs. Perhaps it means being a more loving friend to my own imperfect self.

Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE is a certified birth educator, writer, and activist. She is a breastfeeding counselor, editor of the Friends of Missouri Midwives newsletter, and a professor of Human Services. She has two wonderful sons, Lann and Zander, and one delightful infant daughter, Alaina and lives in central Missouri. She blogs about birth at [2]<http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>, midwifery at [3]<http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com>, and miscarriage at [4]<http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com>.

Mindful Mama: Presence & Perfectionism in Parenting by Molly Remer, was published in [5]Natural Life, July/August, 2011,



[6]

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
2. <file://localhost/mnt/ext/blogbooker/tmp/>
3. <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com/>
4. <http://tinyfootprintsonmyheart.wordpress.com/>
5. <http://www.naturallifemagazine.com/>
6. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

Nora (2011-12-01 22:26:53)

I love this post - thank you. I'm an extremely critical (of myself) single mom. I ALWAYS feel that I'm lacking and like you, I don't always love being with my 5 year old daughter, which makes me feel horrible. It's good to know that there are other people out there with the same feelings and struggles. I guess the bottom line is that we do our best and the greatest thing we have to offer (to anyone, really) is love. Thanks again...

Dashaina (2011-12-15 16:23:05)

Ditto Nora...truly inspiring. :) Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

stiffianie (2011-12-16 08:28:20)

Thank you for this article/post. It is a much needed and very much appreciated reminder for me.

talkbirth (2011-11-29 22:58:08)

I almost put a disclaimer/notice at the top to that effect, but then I thought it kind of spoiled it to have that be first (if people haven't already read it) and might make people stop reading.

Hope (2011-11-29 22:29:51)

As I was reading I kept thinking, "I've read this before!" It took me about three paragraphs to realize it was the Natural Life article, lol! Still a good read, even the second or third time though. :)

1.12 December

Midwife's Invocation (2011-12-05 15:04)



[1]
Seated mountain pose

I'm currently taking a class based on Karen Armstrong's book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. One assignment was to find a reading articulating a spiritual perspective/teaching on compassion. I turned to one of my new books, *Sisters Singing*, in which I had immediately marked a prayer called *A Midwife's Invocation*. As a birth educator and activist, I have been devoted to birthwork as a cause for many years, something that for me is [2]rooted in social justice as well as women's empowerment.

Midwife's Invocation, by Cathy Moore

I call on Artemis, huntress, protector of animals and birthing.
Help me to trust birth.
I call upon Diana, keeper of the moon, and the cycles of women's lives.
Help me to listen to women.
I call on Hecate, wise crone who stands at the crossroads.
Make me a guardian of the passage.

Great goddesses, fill this vessel with your wisdom.
Guide my hands. May they be gentle and strong.
Guide my heart. May I be open to giving and receiving love.
Guide my words. May they be kind and true.
Guide my thoughts. May they be compassionate and free of judgment.
Guide my spirit. May I be connected with the higher beings.

I put my roots deep into Mother Earth.

I draw her energy into my belly for gestation and creation.
I draw her energy into my solar plexus to fire my will.
I draw her energy into my heart for opening to love.
I draw her energy into my throat to awaken my authentic voice.
I draw her energy into my third eye to enliven my inner knowing.
I draw her energy into my crown for connection with spirit

I call on all the women ancestors who have given birth before us.
Come gather round. Support this woman.
Guide her to access her power, confront her fear, and find strength.

I call upon my sister and brother midwives from past, present and future.
Encircle and embrace me with your loving intentions
For the sacred work we do.

As we ready ourselves to accept new life into our hands,
Let us be reminded of our place in the dance of creation.
Let us be protectors of courage.
Let us be observers of beauty.
Let us be guardians of the passage.
Let us be witnesses to the unfolding.

While originally written by a midwife for birthworkers, I really find this prayer to be inspirational for daily living regardless of my tasks. I wish to have a head, heart, and hands that are open in the spirit of compassion as I move through my daily round. And, I strive to cultivate the "witness," both in relation to myself and my own life, but also to those around me—most people want to be seen, they want to be heard, to be witnessed. I've quoted the following poem snippet about that before:

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.

-Mary Oliver

And, as previously noted, this is exactly [3]why I write and blog-[4]to tell about it.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>
2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/11/09/why-indeed/>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/telling-about-it/>
4. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/telling-about-it/>

The Ongoing Crisis of Abundance (2011-12-07 08:11)

In March, I lamented to my husband, "you can't imagine the amount of things I think of doing each day and then have to let go of." What is weird—and that I also told him then—is that many of those ideas only occur to me on that day and are not really that important. Very often, these are not life priorities—they are just things that pop up and catch my attention and I think, "I could do that!" So, things like blog carnivals at interesting and popular blogs (I could write an entry—I have tons of ideas regarding that theme!), legislative

alerts from worthy causes (I should write a letter and help with this!), interesting articles and posts (I could read that, it would only take a minute!), contests to enter (I'd like to win that, I should enter!), volunteer roles (wow! Sounds so interesting, I'd love to do it!), trainings or conferences to attend (I should register!), neat homeschooling projects (hey, maybe next time the baby sleeps, I can start this with the kids!), a new book that catches my eye (I should order that!), great recipes (I could make that for dinner!) good quotes to share on Facebook, I could write an article about this!, or about that!, someone has a question I could answer, here's a neat article (I want to share this with others!), ooh! More free books to put onto my Kindle, art ideas, journal entries, etc., etc. It never stops! And, these are usually in addition to my ongoing projects, ideas, commitments, responsibilities, laundry, meal preparation, things other people want from me and so forth. Oh, and did anyone comment on my Facebook status? ;-D

Too much?

Sometimes I think I just like and care about TOO MANY things. All of these things splinter my attention in a million ways however, and also leave me with a persistent sensation of, "well, I didn't get everything done today." I continue to try to make sure to unsubscribe from email lists and blog subscriptions to cut down on this immediacy sensation that a constant influx of new information and ideas promotes. As I told my husband, "if I didn't get that newsletter, or click on that article, or open that email, I would never have known about all those things I could have gotten done today." Plus, there is always a new batch tomorrow! And, then I get a little depressed thinking why the rush to get things done and to finish? So I can die with a clear to-do list?! Come on!

Though actually, this is different than having "too many things to do"—because many of the things are new each day—it is part of managing the information flow into my life, I think. Some time ago I read this [1]free book from Zen Habits and it was very helpful in its recommendations of how to sort through all of the clamor and focusing, but I think I've let go of those zen habits again in the last couple of months and need to try to re-read the book (but, OOPS, I've just turned that into another to-do!). I worked very hard before Alaina was born to trim away the extraneous so that I could focus intensively on her, but new and interesting things, ideas, and opportunities continue to emerge to take the place of what I trimmed away.

I want to remember my conditions of enoughness and to also make a new priorities/goals sheet so that when the baby naps, I know what's at the top, rather than getting distracted. When each day ends, I continue to find I feel as if I have somehow failed. And, that I have let someone, some thing, or myself down.

When I was originally planning to share these thoughts so many months ago, I also remembered a poem I wrote when my first son was a toddler. I don't have a toddler now...two kids and a baby instead...but the feeling of ideas building, cresting, and falling away is still familiar and my closing thought still a good reminder!

Vision

I cannot shake the feeling
That my life does not look
The way I want it to.
Each day, new big ideas build in me
And crest in a wave of vision
That finally breaks upon the shore
Of daily life with a toddler.

Reality.
Bound by the demands of everyday
Instead of grand and bold.

You'll See It When You Believe It
Do I believe it?
Is this my journey?
Humbling
To watch the death of ego.

Be here now.
Am I?
Is it possible that where I am
And what I'm doing
Is exactly where I'm supposed to be?

—

And, then I remembered this quote from *The Life Organizer* by Jennifer Louden:

"Would a weight lift off my shoulders if I realized that it's normal to feel pulled between choices, that it's normal to want to do more than I have time or energy for, and that it's normal to have to choose between two equally wonderful things, that it's actually a sign I'm a fascinating, amazing person?"

That's right. I'm a fascinating and amazing person. And, so are these three:



[2]

Choose wisely, Molly dear. Choose wisely!

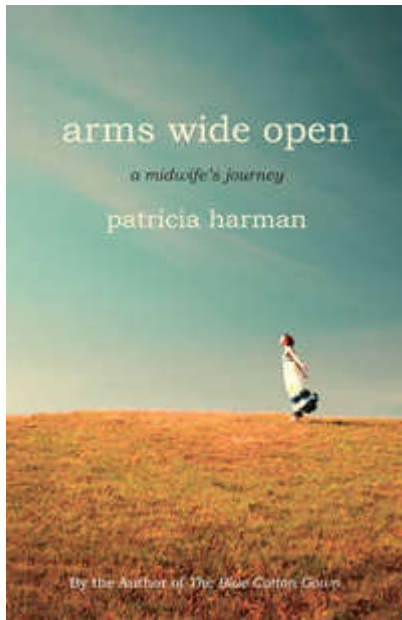
I always say that I want to live well and wisely my one wild and precious life and to me that means making conscious decisions every day to pull my actions into alignment with my values. It is an ongoing process. I live in a rich and fascinating world. I can do it!

1. <http://zenhabits.net/focus-book/>
2. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

enjoybirth (2011-12-26 15:36:00)

I too feel torn like that. I have been somewhat media free in December and it has been lovely! So freeing. :)

Giveaway: Arms Wide Open: A Midwife's Journey (2011-12-11 08:57)



[1]

Giveaway is now closed! Jen Chendea is the winner!

I'm happy to host a holiday giveaway of Patsy Harman's book, *Arms Wide Open*. To enter, just leave a comment sharing what giving birth taught you about yourself! I will draw the winner randomly on January 1.

An excerpt from my review of the book:

Harman's writing style is lyrical and engaging as well as candid. The book is based on personal journals and reading it feels like eavesdropping on someone's very private thoughts and feelings. The book is much more of a look at a woman's feelings about her life, than it is a "manifesto" about birth or about the practice of midwifery. In this manner, I feel like you receive a much more complete picture of a midwife's life and journey, rather than reading a sequence of birth stories. Patsy has a lot of life in addition to birth. While definitely not a "feel good" book, *Arms Wide Open* is a deeply touching and very honest exploration of one woman's personal journey in life, love, motherhood, and midwifery.

via [2]Book Review: *Arms Wide Open: A Midwife's Journey* « Talk Birth.

1. http://www.patriciaharman.com/arms_wide_open__a_midwife_s_journey_106806.htm

2. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2011/05/22/book-review-arms-wide-open-a-midwife%e2%80%99s-journey/>

Dawn Star Sarahs-Borchelt (2011-12-12 15:41:18)

My last birth taught me a lesson about it being okay not to know. I didn't know my baby would come almost a month early - and it was okay. I didn't know my midwife would be out of town and her back up would come instead - and it was okay. I didn't know if my baby was a boy or a girl - and it was okay (actually, I didn't know that with my other two, either, but . . .). I didn't know my labor would be so short (4 hours) - and it was okay. I didn't know what to do at one point and my birth assistant made a suggestion that worked - and it was okay.

Toni Hill (2011-12-12 08:04:08)

My third birth taught me that above all LOVE is the most awesome medication for everything!

Leanne (2011-12-12 08:14:19)

My birth taught me that me that my gut is usually right, that I have a knowing inside me that I need to listen to.

DoulaSummer (2011-12-12 08:21:00)

Ooh! I've had four births, but the first and the last were the most pivotal for me. The first one set me firmly on the path of birth work/advocacy. It taught me that listening to myself/my body was paramount and that I could love my baby more than I had ever loved anyone but dislike the way she entered the world. The last one taught me that my body can do AMAZING things! :)

Marcia Barritt (2011-12-12 13:01:05)

The beauty and empowerment of a peaceful birth in the home with midwives is a profound experience of which to be a part! And I feel very blessed to be on the path to becoming a midwife.

thebirthmuse (2011-12-13 22:10:43)

Birth taught me that I can survive anything, that being alive is full of FEELINGS, that I love being with people all the time, that I can really fully let go and be safe.

Terina Shrout-Knarr (2011-12-23 19:38:40)

Each time I gave birth I realized I was stronger than the time before, but it was a different kind of strength. And each time I watch someone else capture their strength during their birth, I think I secretly build more strength as a woman and a midwife.

Rachel (2011-12-24 01:41:56)

It taught me everything. That I'm strong. That I want to help give birth back to women. That there is so much work to do, and joy to experience.

Asheena Kiser Kuhn (2011-12-15 14:16:53)

My first birth taught me how powerful & deep the love between mother and child is. My second birth taught me that sometimes the unexpected happens and that I truly know my body and never to give up on that knowing. My third birth taught me that my power was within me and that it is ok to let go.

Jen Chendea (2011-12-16 07:38:43)

Holy cow, birth taught me how to be... how to let go, how to be vulnerable, how to know that I am amazing. Also, my second birth taught me what it feels like to be high on drugs (I think?) because those first two days of her life I was so high, just floating around in bliss.

Lynn (2011-12-27 12:39:56)

My births taught me to trust myself—that I really will make the best possible decisions for my family and my children.

Becca Renaud (2011-12-12 18:42:19)

My births taught me that I am in charge of my own body... but it is my job to research what I want, know what I want, and do it (and/or demand it). And my births taught me that when I know what I want, I CAN demand it.

Bri (2011-12-12 20:02:02)

I would love to win this book! When I birthed my son, I learned of a capacity to love that was absolutely life changing.

Mary (2011-12-11 13:39:45)

Birth taught me that I am a goddess and stronger than I had ever imagined.

Annie Choate (2011-12-11 14:04:14)

My second and third births taught me that each child brings with them enough love of their own to fuel the warmth of family life.

GeorGina Kelly (2011-12-11 15:53:03)

My births have taught me how to say the Great Yes to life..... how to allow myself to really feel with an open wide heart.

Kimberly Oberklaus (2011-12-12 18:17:27)

Both of my births (a medicated birth and a drug-free birth) taught me different things. My first (medicated) birth taught me that it's okay to be scared sometimes. And my second birth taught me that it's okay to let go. I've taken away so much from both of my births and I am so thankful for the experiences I've had. They both have made me a better person, woman and mother.

enjoybirth (2011-12-20 16:02:25)

Giving birth taught me to be flexible and open to whatever comes my way.

talkbirth (2012-01-02 13:04:29)

Drew numbers and you're the winner!

Polymer Clay Goddess Pendants (2011-12-14 22:20)

So many blog topics and ideas and yet so many papers to grade! (Expect a flurry of extremely awesome posts from me during my break that starts Sunday.)

Just a picture post then to show my two most recent experiments in polymer clay birth goddess pendant making.

This little one is my tiniest effort. She doesn't have a belly stone, just the jewel in her hands:



[1]

The larger one is my favorite so far. She has a moonstone belly and is holding a heart shaped crystal.



[2]

Tried to get a picture of me wearing them, but it didn't really turn out (and, my, what an attractive shirt I wearing in which to model them. Love the flattering neckline with the pendants).



[3]

I really love making these sculptures and have plans for more on that aforementioned break as well!

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/20111128-144746.jpg>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111205-143346.jpg>
3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111205-143408.jpg>

Last Minute Gift Idea: Rescue Gifts (2011-12-15 16:30)

I received a press release recently with a neat last-minute gift idea that has relevance to birth activism—a symbolic gift of a safe birth kit for a mother in the developing world (I investigated a little and the organization is a legitimate humanitarian organization.) Here is the information:

[1]Rescue Gifts help refugees and others who have been impacted by war and natural disaster.



ter. Holiday shoppers can choose a gift that [2] inspires them and dedicate it in honor of a special person in their lives. The International Rescue Committee will send gift recipients a beautiful acknowledgement card with the gift giver's personalized message.

There's a perfect gift for everyone:

- For a mom: A [3]Safe Delivery (\$24) can ensure critical supplies for the safe birth of a child in a crisis zone.
- For a spouse: [4]Emergency Food (\$68) can deliver a month's supply of vitamin-rich therapeutic food for at least 50 malnourished children in places wracked by food shortages or famine.
- For the foodie or friend with a green thumb: A [5]Community Garden (\$60) can provide tools and seeds to refugees who have been resettled in the United States, so that they can grow their own fresh, healthy food in an IRC community garden.
- For a teacher: A [6]Year of School (\$52) can supply the tuition, books and other materials for one year of a child's schooling in a country recovering from war.

Shoppers who spend \$75 or more will receive a fashionable organic cotton "Rescue" T-shirt designed and donated by Threads for Thought, or they can opt to have it sent as a gift.

Rashida Jones, IRC Voice and star of NBC's "Parks and Recreation," is promoting the [7]Clean Water Rescue Gift and giving it to her friends this year. She says, "At an IRC refugee camp in Thailand, I saw that the ready availability of water transforms lives. I am buying this gift for my friends this holiday season."

Parks & Recreation is one of my favorites TV shows, so it is fun to have that connection too. Of course, I inquired as to what exactly a "safe delivery kit" entails, because I do not want to inadvertently be promoting non-evidence based Western medical care practices in countries relying heavily on traditional midwives. I was told that, "as such, the Safe Delivery Rescue Gift represents the typical amount of money needed for the IRC to provide supplies and assistance necessary for a safe delivery. However, Safe Delivery Rescue Gift donations will be used where and when most needed in our wide-ranging humanitarian work in more than 40 countries and 22 U.S. cities. The IRC does provide and support pre and post natal care for new and expectant mothers and their babies. This includes training and equipping midwives like the ones in [8]Tham Hin refugee camp in Thailand, although midwifery is not the only childbirth model that the IRC supports."

If you're looking for a last-minute stocking stuffer for a humanitarian minded friend or family member, or for a birth activist buddy, you might find the right gift at [9]Rescue Gifts!

1. http://gifts.rescue.org/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzz_rf_11zzzz

2. http://gifts.rescue.org/product/health/safe-delivery?utm_source=rescue.org&utm_medium=interstitial&utm_

content=Rescue%2BGifts&utm_campaign=EOY&ms=ws_home_hjk_zzzz_zz_111118

3. http://gifts.rescue.org/product/health/27/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzzz_rf_11zzzz
4. http://gifts.rescue.org/product/emergency-relief/77/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzzz_rf_11zzzz
5. http://gifts.rescue.org/product/rebuilding/72/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzzz_rf_11zzzz
6. http://gifts.rescue.org/product/education/34/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzzz_rf_11zzzz
7. http://gifts.rescue.org/product/emergency-relief/42/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzzz_rf_11zzzz
8. <http://www.rescue.org/news/photo-essays/thailand-life-saving-midwives-tham->
9. http://gifts.rescue.org/?ms=bl_zzzz_zzz_zzzz_rf_11zzzz

Lynda M O (2011-12-19 02:44:10)
Many thanks for posting these links.

Elevenmonthababy! (2011-12-19 09:52)

I can hardly believe I've spent 11 months now with this baby girl in my arms! She's got nine teeth now and seems to say (to the very carefully observing and possibly imaginative ear): kitty, dolly, cookie, book, egg, up, na na, mama, daddy, brother, Baba, baby, boo, and something that indicates "I see people I know in that picture" as well as a "go that way" directive sound and maybe says, "get" or "got." Does baby signs for nurse, eat, and all done. Is into EVERYTHING, stays up til midnight, only goes down for nap in the Ergo, eats toilet paper, loves dolls, and is unbelievably adorable!

My little heart is all aflutter because of her obsession with dollies. If she's going to be a fan, she's definitely in the right house!

She practices standing up often, but no steps yet.

Here is a standing video (she'd been practicing over and over when we took this at 11:30 one evening—she had been clapping and cheering for herself every time, but that cuteness disappeared when the video was on!)

[youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkOzVGpNvqw?rel=0 &w=420 &h=315>]

And, here is an adorable one of "walking" using a push toy:

[youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfr6lFbpBQY?rel=0 &w=420 &h=315>]

I mentioned the staying up til midnight—this is what I see...



[1]

I mentioned the toilet paper eating (also at midnight):



[2]

And, there's mouse-eating that happens too. She hopped out of bed of her own accord and stood on my laptop looking like this:



[3]

That is another skill this month—can climb out of bed by backing off edge semi-carefully.

She's fabulous, truly!

The potty strike seems to be waning—has been sleeping dry all night and pottying in morning. Also pottying successfully for all recent poops. She is on the move all of the time and is quite a bit harder to take care of than she used to be! Has destroyed the Christmas tree twice this month—luckily, she wasn't hurt either time, but there was a shower of broken glass and the second time the tree itself was broken beyond repair. So, my husband cut the top of it off and made a stand for it and now we have a pretty-sad looking tiny, tabletop tree.

I'm on break from teaching and looking forward to three weeks of time off and holiday fun! I'm scheduled for three classes next session (luckily, all the same class, which should make prep time significantly easier). So far, one is very low on registrations though so I may not end up teaching that one and that's more than okay. I'm nervous about driving in January-February weather and I also really only feel comfortable trying to leave her home for one night per week (that's right, the time with my mom coming with me is drawing to a close—I don't feel like I can have a walking [presumably] baby hanging out in the building and my mom, while still gamely trekking out with us, is pretty tired of having to come with me. It isn't really about proximity for nursing, it is about not being separated from my baby for long, and I've very grateful that she's been willing to keep coming with me for so many months so that we could be together.)

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-095218.jpg>
 2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-095331.jpg>
 3. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-095347.jpg>
-

Busy is Boring! (2011-12-19 15:19)

Another tidbit for my personal "remember this" files...

Stop Describing Yourself as Busy

When you're swamped, it's easy to tell anyone who will listen that you are very, very busy. As I describe in *Hidden Feelings of Motherhood*, your thoughts are powerful. Viewing a situation as negative releases the stress hormone cortisol. This is not good for you! Mentally rehearsing your busyness accomplishes nothing positive and is most likely harmful. So stop describing yourself that way.

This is something you can do for yourself now. Besides, everyone is busy these days. It's actually kind of boring to hear about the busyness of others. And telling others about our busyness fuels the peer pressure you might feel when talking with other mothers—a rather bizarre competition to see who is the busiest of all.

—Kathleen Kendall-Tackett: [1]Practical Steps Toward Achieving More Balance in Your Life

I read this several years ago and it comes to mind whenever I'm tempted to describe myself as "busy." She's right. It is boring to hear about how busy other people are and to essentially compare lists of busyness. I'd rather talk about the things we're doing that fuel us and excite us, rather than review a litany of to-dos.

1. <http://www.apipeoria.org/newsletters/apipeoriadec2007.pdf>
-

Polymer Clay Birth Power Pendants (2011-12-20 09:35)



[1] Inspired by a [2]tutorial pinned by a friend on Pinterest, I made a bunch of polymer clay birth power pendants this weekend. Short version instructions are to roll out polymer clay in a pasta maker. Stamp something cool on them using a rubber stamp and cut it out using a clay/cookie cutter and then either carve or write a meaningful word on it. I used individual pieces of type from my dad's antique printing press to make the letters on mine. I was psyched to make these because I already have my [3]birth logo as a rubber stamp (I drew it and it is fun to be able to get so much mileage out of just one drawing once upon a time!) I also have a rubber stamp of the LLL



logo. More awesomeness.[4]

I used metallic powdered pigments (Pearlex brand) to color them—I did some by brushing the pigment onto the unbaked clay after already having stamped it and others by brushed pigment over a whole section of rolled out clay and then stamping and cutting it.

My husband drilled small holes in the tops and made copper rings for them, so they can be strung as a pendant or used as an ornament.

I had a delightful time having the litespace to be crafty and then my husband accidentally cooked my art at 350 degrees and burned the living daylights out of all of them.



[5]

So, after a few tears from me about my wasted effort, we started over from the beginning and made a new batch. We put ribbons on the least burned ones and used them as birth power ornaments for the Christmas tree!

They do have a certain similarity to Necco wafers or poker chips, but I'm pretty pleased with them.



[6]

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-192036.jpg>
2. <http://thenshemade.blogspot.com/2011/08/word-pendant-tutorial.html>
3. <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com/2010/12/11/seated-mountain-pose/>
4. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-192106.jpg>
5. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-192154.jpg>
6. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/20111219-192120.jpg>

Barbara (2011-12-20 13:00:12)
Beautiful!

Hope (2011-12-21 16:18:16)

These turned out great! I also wanted to let you know that I nominated you for the Versatile Blogger Award. All of the info is on my blog. :)

Guest Post: 8 Toddler Pitfalls to Avoid on Christmas Morning (2011-12-23 13:58)

Regardless of your nostalgic, Christmas-morning-frenzy memories, you'll quickly learn that a no-holds-barred



approach doesn't go [1] over well with your toddler – especially on the most anticipated morning of the year. Don't wing it Christmas morning. Get a game plan together now so that your entire family can enjoy the holidays without going into meltdown mode.

1. Decide on a number of sweet treats allowed.

With the font of sucrose flowing throughout the holidays, be a sugar-monitor fiend and make sure other house visitors know your rules. If you have a struggle with, ahem, I-want-to-be-the-favorite grandmothers, get it out in the open first rather than commencing a power struggle on Christmas. According to the [2]American Heart Association, children should limit their intake to about 4 teaspoons of added sugar each day.

2. Get to bed early the night before.

While establishing family traditions for Christmas takes precedence over toddler routine, make your plans reasonable for the younger crowd. Try to wrap up Christmas Eve activities early and give plenty of down time before going to sleep. Junior needs good rest to enjoy the following morning. He won't get it if he stays up until 10:00 with out-of-town visitors.

3. Limit gift opening to a small number.

Three is good. This will be the hardest part of your holiday experience. Regardless of your convictions, the gift-giving fever kicks in at Toys 'R Us and you go crazy buying, wrapping—and still more buying—several days ahead of Christmas. Even this late in the season you can nab holiday coupons from sites like [3]CouponSherpa.com for one or two special gifts – open them earlier in the week rather than all at once on Christmas morning.

4. Wrap up the morning with quiet time and a nap.

After opening a few presents and enjoying time with visiting family, give your toddler plenty of time to decompress alone in a quiet space. Review the fun times of the morning with her and read a special book to help calm her down. Be on the lookout for overstimulation – nasty meltdowns, hyperactivity, and avoiding eye contact should be a red flag to flee the scene and recover.

5. Plan a Christmas morning activity.

In the throngs of gift-wrap thrashing, laughing and emotion, kids with a typically predictable routine can become stressed out by the absence of normal. If your toddler is particularly sensitive to big events, make sure you have a small, soothing activity planned – like watercolor Christmas trees or lacing boards of holiday

characters – to keep your little one anchored.

6. Space out opening gifts throughout the morning.

You'll probably feel enormous pressure for your kid to open every gift, respond with enthusiasm and then give a huge, grateful "thank you" to the recipient. It just won't happen if you rush through the gift opening. Some moms, like Mae at [4]What To Expect, prefer to open one gift every other day for the week leading up to Christmas—a godsend when winter storms hit and the family is stuck indoors. Bare in mind that your preschooler will enjoy his offerings much more if he has time in between opening to play with the goodies.

7. Construct all disassembled toys the night before.

Most parents learn this the hard way after their first Christmas with kids. Kids don't want to open up a box, especially the preschool crowd. They will either get frustrated while you sweat over a screwdriver and instructions written in Mandarin or lose complete interest. Skip the \$5.99 for wrapping paper and tie a simple bow on your ready-to-play toys. Start putting them together now so you aren't up past midnight, bleary eyed with a wrench, on Christmas Eve.

8. Don't barrage your kids with posed pictures.

Get candid with these fantastic tips from [5]Photography Blog! A surefire way to send your toddler into defiance is demanding he smile in a picture with his hand-knitted sweater. Even though Aunt Jean may get a little ticked off that she can't see Junior with her woven creation Christmas morning, it's not worth the struggle. Opt instead for unposed, spontaneous smiles.

Photo by [6]Karen Orozco

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Ashley Grimaldo comes from a long line of penny pinchers and enjoys blogging on money-saving tips and advice for frugal-minded parents. She lives with her husband and three children in Bryan, Texas. Ashley has been featured among such media outlets as Redbook, The Chicago Tribune, Time.com, and CBS News-Houston.

For all media inquiries, please contact Ashley Grimaldo at [7]ashley@kinoliinc.com.

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/alaina9mo-079.jpg>

2. <http://life.familyeducation.com/nutritional-information/obesity/64270.html>

3. <http://www.couponsherpa.com/holiday/holiday/>

4.

<http://www.whattoexpect.com/blogs/motherhoodinthemountains/gifts-for-toddlers-opening-early-christmas-gifts>

5. http://www.photographyblog.com/articles/how_to_take_natural_photos_of_children/

6. <http://www.facebook.com/PortraitsAndPaws>

7. <mailto:ashley@kinoliinc.com>

Lynda M O (2011-12-23 22:07:04)

Great suggestions and all make sense to me, thanks for helping out.

Sheila (2011-12-27 12:45:35)

My family used to unwrap the presents slowly, throughout the day. Each kid would open one present, play with it for an hour or two, then come back to the tree for another one. Took all day to get those presents unwrapped, but the kids were much less overstimulated.

Guest Post: Alcohol and Breastmilk (2011-12-23 15:43)

Just in time for the holiday season, a note to clarify the issue of nursing moms drinking alcohol. [1]



Your milk alcohol level will be exactly the same as your blood alcohol level. So if you've had a couple of drinks and hit the legal limit, your milk has about the same alcohol content as fresh fruit juice or a non-alcoholic beer—.08 %ish. Alcohol does not concentrate in the milk, and as your liver clears it from your blood, the milk alcohol level will also drop. There is no need to pump and dump for a healthy baby! If you are concerned about even very minimal amounts of alcohol in the baby's system, nurse before you go out, and time your drinking so that you give your liver time to metabolize it before the baby would want to nurse again.

The takeaway message: Long before you have enough alcohol in your milk for your baby to even notice, you would be so hammered that you would hardly remember you even had a baby. The concern for occasional drinkers is not really alcohol being passed to the baby, but mom and dad remaining sober enough to care for the baby—and that's a really big deal where co-sleeping is concerned! Safely sleeping with a baby means being stone cold sober. Period.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and a great New Year to everyone!

Please note that I'm really only talking about moms who have a drink now and then, not habitual heavy drinkers. We just don't know what effect continuous long-term exposure to alcohol might have on a baby.

Lynn Carter is an IBCLC in Kirksville, Missouri.

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/alaina9mo-045.jpg>

Jespen (2011-12-23 20:20:52)

Good post, short and sweet, it always annoys me when my friends (or family) respond to me having *a* glass of wine with 'well someone's going to sleep well tonight' (referring to my nursing). Um...no, one drink won't even be noticed by my babe. There was a study this past year released in the U.K. (that mimics studies done in other countries where healthy social drinking, as opposed to the 'get drunk' social drinking more common in the U.S., is common) showed that to even register as affecting an infant (affect, not even dangerously affect) a mom's blood alcohol level had to be

almost .2! More than double the legal limit in most U.S. states.

Sheila (2011-12-27 12:41:16)

Basically, you should just be aware of how long alcohol takes to exit your system. If you had one drink, it will take about an hour to clear. But if you don't want to wait an hour, the amount of alcohol the baby will get is still miniscule. I tend to stick to the one-drink-per-hour rule at parties anyway – never enough to get drunk (though I find my tolerance is lower while nursing, probably because I'm a bit dehydrated – it's important to drink water alongside) or do any harm to my baby. I wouldn't cosleep, though, unless it had been a few good hours since the last drink and I felt completely clearheaded.

Magic of Mothering (2011-12-28 00:09)



[1]
Nursing baby A at two weeks old

(The first part of this post is an excerpt from an assignment in one of the classes I'm taking)

“Remember, when Keplet postulated that the moon effected the tides on earth, Galileo dismissed the hypothesis as ‘occult fancy.’ It involved action at a distance, and, therefore, violated the ‘solid laws of nature’ of that time. Now these laws of nature (as they were understood by classical physics only a century ago) have already been transcended; this progression should gently hint to us that many of the solid laws of our day are beliefs that obscure the otherwise obvious” (Passmore, 168).

I have long been wary of the phrase, “we used to think, but now we know...” usually stated with great conviction and little room for debate.

Body Wisdom

As Passmore goes on to note, “It is important to make a distinction between ‘progress in science’ and its explanatory power. This power for explanation depends upon the kind of question being asked. History shows that the questions change with changing beliefs/values in both time and space, periods and cultures.” It is exciting to me to consider how much we just don't know and yet, the world keeps on spinning along, with or without our “knowing” all the facts. I think about this with regard to birth and breastfeeding. How many generations of women have pushed out their babies and fed them at the breast

without knowing the exact mechanics of reproduction even, let alone milk production. There are all kinds of historical myths and “rules” about breastmilk and breastfeeding and even ten years ago we used to think the inner structure of the breast was completely different than what we think it is like now. Guess what? Our breasts still made milk and we still fed our babies, whether or not we knew exactly how the milk was being produced and delivered. Body knowledge, in this case, definitely still trumped scientific knowledge. I love that feeling when I snuggle down to nurse my own baby—my body is producing milk for her regardless of my conscious knowledge of the patterns or processes. And, guess what, humans cannot improve upon it. The body continues to do what the human mind and hand cannot replicate in a lab. And, has done so for millennia. I couldn’t make this milk myself using my brain and hands and yet day in and day out I do make it for her, using the literal blood and breath of my body, approximately 32 ounces of milk every single day for the last eleven months. That is beautiful.

The protective impact of a mama

And, on a somewhat related note, several years ago when I read [2]Birth Book, I marked a section about “imprinting” in it (I think it has been fairly well established that there isn’t really human “imprinting” after birth, but when this book was written it was still one of the ideas). Anyway, there was a section about research done with baby goats done to look at the ability of a mother to protect her offspring from environmental stress. They separated twin goats and put some in rooms alone and the others in rooms with their mothers. The only difference in the room was the presence of the mother. An artificial stress environment was created involving turning off the lights every two minutes and shocking the baby goats on the legs. After the babies were conditioned like this, they were tested again two years later. This time all the babies (now adult goats) were in rooms alone and were again “treated” to the lights off and shock routine. The goats who had been with their mothers during the early experience showed no evidence of abnormal behavior in the stressful environment. The ones who had not been with their mothers did show “definite neurotic behavior.” Somehow, the presence of the mother alone served to protect the baby goats from the traumatic influences and keep them from being “psychologically” disturbed in adulthood.

Except for feeling sorry for the baby goats, I thought this information was SO COOL. How magic are mothers that just by being there we can help our babies—even if there is still something stressful going on, our simple presence helps our babies not be stressed by it and continue to feel safe. Magic!

Birth stress?

The goat research was included in the book because of the idea that birth may be a stressful environment for a baby and if the continuity of motherbaby is maintained after birth (immediate skin-to-skin contact and opportunity for breastfeeding), the baby does not become stressed or “neurotic.” But...if the continuity for mother and baby is broken by separation (baby whisked away for weighing or whatever), both mother and baby are stressed by this and it may have an impact on their future relationship and behavior. The book also talks about how the sound of the baby’s first cry has a sort of “imprinting” effect on the mother in that her uterus immediately begins to contract and involute after hearing her baby’s first cry, whereas mothers who are immediately separated from their babies and do not make contact with them have a higher likelihood of postpartum hemorrhage (I have no idea if this has been debunked or not since the book was written in 1972, but it was an interesting idea to read about).

Mothering is magic. Seriously.

1. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sincerely-Yours-Photography/163051267048017>
2. http://mollyreads.blogspot.com/2008/01/birth-book_25.html

Imaginary Future Children (2011-12-29 08:25)

My brother graduated from college earlier this year and recently got his ultimate dream job in a nearby state. This is the realization of a plan and vision he's held for himself since he was a very small child. It is pretty exciting for the whole family! Anyway, a couple of weeks ago I was talking to my husband about it and we were reminiscing about when we were young and launching our lives. Thinking about him, I was feeling a little wistful and a little tied down, thinking about how we're never planning to move anywhere else and so forth and musing about whether we've made a mistake by settling so permanently in one home and location, are we missing out on "adventure," etc. I also said, "remember what it was like to make decisions without having to think about our kids?" After a pause, we realized that we did not remember and that was because, while our children at one point didn't physically exist, making decisions about our lives as adults has still always included them. And, then I was struck with a wave of memories of how the choices we made as a very young couple were based on the then-hypothetical nature of our future children and what we wanted for them. When I was finishing my BA in psychology, one of the top issues on my mind was where to go to graduate school. I felt a pull towards PhD programs in psychology and I felt like that is what many people were expecting of me, but I also knew in my heart that there was no way I could manage a practice as a psychologist while also having children. I didn't want to spend that much time in school and then feel torn being pursuing my career and taking care of my children. So, I decided to work on my MSW, theorizing that the more flexible nature of the work and the less expensive nature of the degree would be more compatible with family life. (I was 18 while making this decision.)

Then, when I was getting ready to graduate from graduate school and Mark was finishing his bachelor's degree we had a conversation about how it was "now or never" in terms of what we were going to do—I told him that now was the time when we had the MOST freedom and flexibility with our choices and if we felt like we wanted to live in a different part of the country, etc., NOW was the time to do it, before we had a family to uproot. We talked at length and looked for jobs and apartments in a variety of different states. Finally, we concluded that we wanted our children to be raised near their grandparents and not in a different state where they would see them once or twice a year. (I was now 21 and would not actually have any children for three more years.)



[1]
No way could I keep these people apart!

We realized that many towns and places are much the same as any other and why not settle where we were certain the grandparents would remain. I also knew that I wanted to be close to my own mom so she could help me with my babies! So, we bought land one mile from where my parents live before I even got pregnant with our first baby. Post-graduate school I was offered a full-time job at an organization that I adored the year before I planned to get pregnant and I turned it down, knowing that I wouldn't want to be

working full-time while having a baby.
Any more future babies out there?

Yesterday, I was sitting in the living room playing with Alaina and waxing eloquent about her fundamental awesomeness. The boys were playing in the living room too and I said, "I think I HAVE to have one more baby so Alaina has someone to play with! She's going to really want me to have a friend for her." Lann said, "But mom, what if you have a..." and I said, "it won't matter if the baby is a boy. Boys and girls can play together just fine! It is great to have two boys and it would be fun to have two girls, but the other baby doesn't have to be a girl. Alaina will be happy to have a boy to play with too." He started to say something again and I went on and on about why do people think children have to be segregated by gender, blah, blah and then he said, "MOM! I'm not talking about what if the baby is a BOY, I was trying to say, what if it is a MISCARRIAGE!" And, I was quiet for a moment before saying, "I know. I worry about that too." It was a sobering moment. I've talked and thought at length about how I'd like to end my childbearing years on this high, happy note, rather than possibly begin a new loss journey. (I do recognize that it is bizarre to make decisions about our family's future based on fear, rather than love.) Just as when I was a teenager and twenty-something, today I continue to make decisions based on my present-day children and my hypothetical future children, including the possibility of experiencing further pregnancy losses.

Today as I was snuggling Alaina in the morning—she was popping up and staring at me and then flopping on top of me and snuggling her head into my shoulder over and over—and I was smelling her and feeling her strong, wiggly, vibrant little form and I thought, "you healed me." If I hadn't had her, I know I would have carried a permanent wound and a permanent place of sadness in my soul surrounding my childbearing years. She fixed it.

Thankful for place

Returning to my notion of being "permanent, this is an excerpt from one of my essays for my Ecology and the Sacred course.

I was interested by the explanation [in our class text] about how we typically, "tell the story of our cultural lives and our interactions with other people..." While I definitely share this tendency, I do also feel deeply rooted to my natural place—the land on which I live and on which I grew up. My parents homesteaded their property in the 1970's and I was born at home and spent my entire childhood on the same piece of land on which I was born, playing in the woods. They are very connected to their land and literally their blood, sweat, and tears have gone into their "place" in the natural world.

Eight years ago, my husband and I bought a parcel of my parents' property and built our own home there. We live on a different road than my parents, but are still only one mile from where I was born, and our property is bordered by theirs on two sides. My husband and I have now invested a lot of time and energy into this piece of land, now our blood, and sweat, and tears are part of this piece of land and we feel permanent in this location. We do not—indeed, cannot—envision ever moving and living anywhere else. Sometimes my husband and I talk about whether this sense of permanence is binding or restrictive—i.e. what about the sense of possibility, about being able to "start over" anywhere—but we've concluded that rootedness has a great deal of personal value to us and we wouldn't want to trade our roots for "wings." While this isn't quite the same as a natural history of place, I do feel that my own identity and social story includes an interwoven, personally important element of natural place. This part of the country is where I belong and I am invested in it...

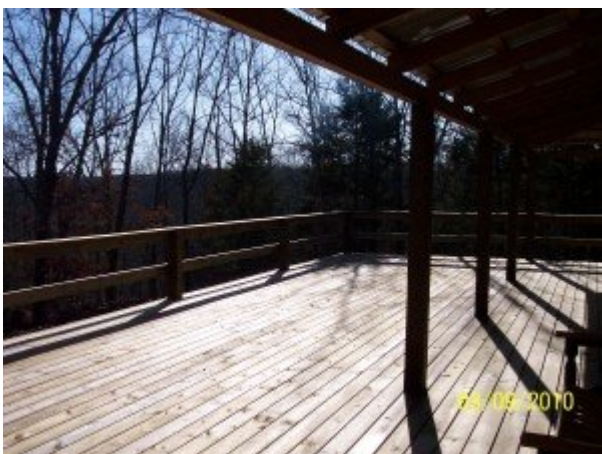
While some people lament the "foolishness" of their youth, looking back at my own young adult years, I'm surprised at my own youthful perceptiveness and foresight about what choices would best suit the needs of my then-imaginary children and family. I'm curious to know what life choices did you make as an inexperienced young adult that have continued to serve you well?



[2] The boys playing in our place last year—not hypothetical children anymore!



[3] Front of house



[4] Back deck. See why I love it here?

1. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/remerfamily-027-copy.jpg>

2. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/100_2457.jpg

3. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/100_2479.jpg

4. http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/100_2473.jpg

The Illusion of Choice (2011-12-30 09:39)

A choice is not a choice if it is made in the context of fear.

Informed choice is a popular phrase with birth professionals and healthy birth activists. I've read impassioned blog posts from doulas and birth activists claiming that if we support women's right to home-birth, we must also support her "choice" to have an elective cesarean. But, I believe we have constructed a collaborative mythos within the birth activist community that an informed choice is possible for most women. The statistics tell us a different story. I do not believe that women with full ability to exercise their choices would choose many of the things that are typically on the "menu" for birth in mainstream culture.

What's on the menu?

Women give their blanket "informed consent" to all manner of hospital procedures without the corollary of informed refusal—is a choice a choice when you don't have the option of saying no?

In many hospitals, women are *STILL* not allowed to eat during labor despite ample evidence that this practice is harmful—is a choice a real choice if made in the context of hospital "policies" that are not evidence-based?

Women are told that their babies are "too big" and then "choose" a cesarean. Is a choice a choice when it is made in the context of coercion and deception?

Women choose hospitals and obstetricians that are covered by their insurance companies. Is a choice a real choice when it is made by your HMO?

Women choose hospital birth because they cannot find a local midwife. Is a choice a real choice when it is made in the context of restrictive laws and hostile political climates?

Women often state they are seeking "balanced" birth classes that aren't "biased" towards natural birth (or towards hospital birth), but is a choice a choice when it is made in the context of misrepresented information? Because, as Kim Wildner notes, balance means "to make two parts equal"—what if the two parts aren't equal? What is the value of information that appears balanced, but is not factually accurate? Pointing out inequalities and giving evidence-based information does not make an educator "biased" or judgmental—it makes her honest! (though honesty can be "heard" as judgment when it does not reflect one's own opinions or experiences).

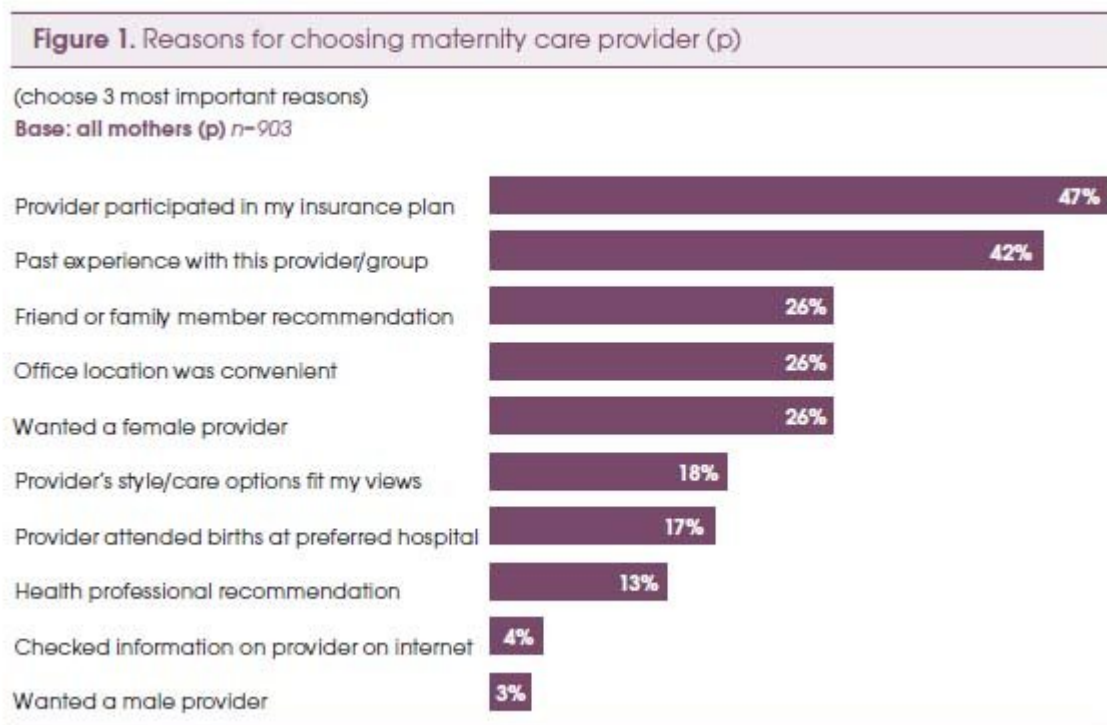
On a somewhat related note, recently, the subject of "quiverfull" families came up amongst my friends and comments were made about feminists needing to support those women's "choice" to have so many children. However, I worry about women who are making reproductive "choices" in the context of what can be a very repressive religious tradition. Women's choices about their lives are not always made with free agency. And, that is where some feminist critiques of other women's choices come from—a critique of the larger context (patriarchy) rather than the woman herself. Is a choice a choice when it is made in the context of oppression?

Where do women get information to make their choices?

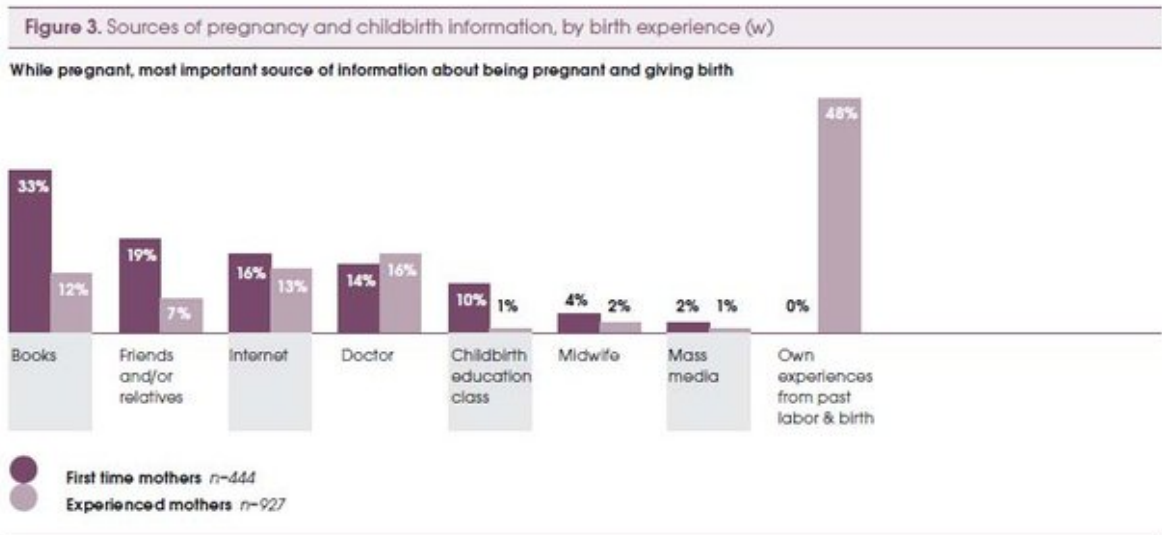
In his 2010 presentation, *Birth Ethics: What You Should Know About the Ethics of Childbirth*, Raymond DeVries uses data from the *Listening to Mother's* studies to help us understand where women are getting their information about birth—this is the context in which their “informed choices” are being made and this is the context we need to consider.

Our choices in birth and life are profoundly influenced by the systems in which we participate...

Some choices shaped by the system



[1]
Women learn from books and experiences of others (and self):



[2]

The number one book women learn from is *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, which has been number four on NY Times Bestsellers list for over 500 weeks and counting.

According to De Vries, via the *Listening to Mothers* data, this is what women tell us about how they learn, what they learn, and upon what their choices are based:

Television explains birth
 Pain is not your friend
 But technology is
 Mothers are listening to doctors (and nurses)
 Medicalized birth allows mothers to feel capable and confident
 Interfering with birth is mostly okay
 Our health system works (mostly)
 We like choice
 We want to be “informed”

He also explains polarization: “We seek information to confirm our opinion. Contrary information does not convince, it polarizes.” How do we share information so that women can make truly informed choices without polarizing?

As advocates, I think we sometimes fall back on the phrase “informed choice” as an excuse not to be outraged, not to despair, and not to give up, because it promises that change is possible if only women change and most of us have access to change at that level.

Birth room ethics

In another presentation, *U.S. Maternity Care: Understanding the Exception That Proves the Rule*, De Vries explores the ethical issues surrounding choices in birth, noting that “choice is central at all levels – but can choice do all the moral work?” We wish to respect parental choice, but [3]information does not equal knowledge and we often err on the side of treating them as one and the same. In maternity care, often there

is no choice. Tests become routine or practices become policy, and “information [is] given with no effort to understand parental values (the ritual of informed consent).”

Is choice possible while in active labor?

De Vries also raises a really critical question with no clear answers—is choice really possible during active labor? He also asks, “should a healthy pregnant woman be allowed to choose a surgical birth? But is it safe? The problem with data...Interestingly, those who think it should be allowed find it safe, and those who oppose it, find it to be unsafe.” When considering where this “choice” of surgical birth comes from, he identifies the following factors:

- The desires of women
 - Preserve sexual function
 - Preserve ideal body
 - The need to fit birth into employment
 - Options offered by health care system

- The desires of physicians
 - Manage an unpredictable process
 - The limits of obstetric education

Why should we care, anyway?

Another popular phrase is, “it’s not my birth.” I agree with the opinion of Desirre Andrews on this one:

“I do not believe in the saying ‘Not my birth.’ Women are connected together through the fabric of daily life including birth. What occurs in birth influences local culture, reshapes beliefs, weaves into how we see ourselves as wives, mothers, sisters, & women in our community. Your birth is my birth. My birth is your birth. This is why no matter my age or the age of my children it matters to me.”

Victims of circumstance?

While it may sound as if I am saying women are powerlessly buffeted about by circumstance and environment, I’m not. Theoretically, we always have the power to choose for ourselves, but by ignoring, denying, or minimizing the multiplicity of contexts in which women make “informed choices” about their births and their lives, we oversimplify the issue and turn it into a hollow catchphrase rather than a meaningful concept.

Women’s lives and their choices are deeply embedded in a complex, multifaceted, practically infinite web of social, political, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, historical, and environmental relationships.

And, I maintain that a choice is not a choice if it is made in a context of fear.

But, what do we know?

I read an interesting article by anthropologist and birth activist, Robbie Davis-Floyd, in the summer issue of [4]Pathways Magazine. It was an excerpt from a longer article that appeared in Anthropology News, titled “Anthropology and Birth Activism: What Do We Know?” In the conclusion, Davis-Floyd states the following:

“Doctors ‘know’ they are giving women ‘the best care,’ and ‘what they really want.’ Birth activists...know that this ‘best care’ is too often a travesty of what birth can be. And yet on that existential brink, I tremble at the birth activist’s coding of women as ‘not knowing.’ So, here’s to women educating themselves on healthy, safe birth practices—to women knowing what is best for themselves and their babies, and to women rising above everything else.”

I believe that every woman who has given birth knows something about birth that other people don’t know. I also believe that women know what is right for their bodies and that mothers know what is right for their babies. I’m also pretty certain that these “knowings” are often crowded out or obliterated or rendered useless by the large sociocultural context in which women live their lives, birth their babies, and mother their young. So, how do we celebrate and honor the knowings and help women tease out and identify what they know compared to what they may believe or accept to be true while still respecting their autonomy and not denigrating them by characterizing them as “not knowing” or as needing to “be educated”? As [5]I’ve written previously, with regard to education as a strategy for change: People often suggest “education” as a change strategy with the assumption that education is all that is needed. But, truly, do we want people to know more or do we want them to act differently? There is a LOT of information available to women about birth choices and healthy birth options. What we really want is not actually more education, we want them to act, or to choose, differently. Education in and of itself is not sufficient, it must be complemented by other methods that motivate people to act. As the textbook I use in class states, “a simple lack of information is rarely the major stumbling block.” You have to show them why it matters and the steps they can take to get there...

And, as the wise Pam England points out: “A knowledgeable childbirth teacher can inform mothers about birth, physiology, hospital policies and technology. But that kind of information doesn’t touch what a mother actually experiences IN labor, or what she needs to know as a mother (not a patient) in this rite of passage.”

The systemic context...

We MUST look at the larger system when [6]we ask our questions and when we consider women’s choices. The fact that we even have to teach birth classes and to help women learn how to navigate the hospital system and to assert their rights to evidence-based care, indicates serious issues that go way beyond the individual. When we talk about women making informed choices or make statements like, “well, it’s her birth” or “it’s not my birth, it’s not my birth,” or wonder why she went to “that doctor” or “that hospital,” we are becoming blind to the sociocultural context in which those birth “choices” are embedded. When we teach women to ask their doctors about maintaining freedom of movement in labor or when we tell them to stay home as long as possible, we are, in a very real sense, endorsing, or at least acquiescing to these conditions in the first place. This isn’t changing the world for women, it is only softening the impact of a broken and oftentimes abusive system.

And, then I read an amazing story like this [7]grandmother’s story of supporting her non-breastfeeding daughter-in-law and I don’t know WHAT to do in the end. Can we just trust that women will find their own right ways, [8]define their own experiences, and access their own knowings in the context of all the impediments to free choice that I’ve already explored? What if she says, “why didn’t you TELL me?” But, if we share our information we risk polarization. If we keep silent and just offer neutral “support,” regardless of the choice made, then doesn’t it eventually become that the only voice available for her as she strives to make her own best choices is the voice of What to Expect and of hospital policy?

”Our lives are lived in story. When the stories offered us are limited, our lives are limited as well.

Few have the courage, drive and imagination to invent life-narratives drastically different from those they've been told are possible. And unfortunately, some self-invented narratives are really just reversals of the limiting stereotype..." –Patrician Monaghan (New Book of Goddesses and Heroines, p. xii)

Related posts:

- [9]What to Expect When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth
- [10]Birth & Culture & Pregnant Feelings
- [11]Asking the right questions...
- [12]Active Birth in the Hospital
- [13]Why do I care?

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Kristen O (@BirthingKristen) (2011-12-31 00:10:50)

Fascinating, insightful, and altogether brilliant post. I guess my hang-up on these matters stems from a problem that goes all the way back to my initial work in academic philosophy (i.e. my "pre-birthing" job ;)). Within theories of autonomy, there is a debate over whether to endorse a procedural view of autonomy (i.e. one in which a person must meet a set of general and decision-content-independent conditions in order to be considered autonomous) or a substantive view of autonomy (i.e. one in which someone cannot be considered autonomous based on the content of their decisions EVEN IF they all meet the conditions for a procedural view of autonomy). Okay, I've done a bad job of explaining this, but here's the gist: the debate comes up often in regard to feminine socialization. Can a woman *autonomously* choose to enter, for instance, a "quiverfull" family, even if doing so might ultimately compromise some of her autonomy-making capabilities? Can a woman *autonomously* choose to submit to a patriarchal maternity care system, even if doing so might ultimately compromise some of her autonomy-making capabilities? Some who endorse a procedural view would say yes, but those who endorse a substantive view would say no. And long story short? I don't know exactly where I fall on this matter.

Chapter 2

2012

2.1 January

Embodied Prayer (2012-01-01 19:47)

Sister, before you get all busy and serious about your new year resolutions, take a moment to tune into that force which beats your heart, which grows the leaves on the trees, which creates and tears down, everything.

Tune into the captivating rhythm of evolution, and dance your way into your holy calling. The whole universe is dancing with you.

[1]—Awakening Women Institute



[2]
This was Alaina and me in January 2011!

This year, I'd like to let go of shoulding myself. If I don't truly have to do something, I'm only going to do it if I want to do it. If the word "should" enters the picture about anything, I'm going to use that as my cue to NOT do whatever it is I'm letting should me. Sound like a plan?

I enjoyed reading [3]this post from Dreaming Aloud recently and the writer observes that she is only going to be able to be her for the new year: "I might even let myself mother to my own standards too! Wouldn't that be nice, rather than failing every day because I don't do everything the way the books say." She also included this interesting idea about 3/4 baked: "Another influential book in my life...Zugunruhe... talks about the 3/4 baked philosophy, where the author urges us to do our work the best we can, but rather than spending all our energy in refining it ad infinitum, put it out to the world 3/4 baked and let the feedback and the inspiration it creates, and your own distance, do the final honing, because really there is no such thing as perfect."

Embodied Prayer

My next intention for 2012 is a very personal one that I feel hesitant to write about. As soon as I read the gorgeous quote above, I knew I wanted to share something about it though. When I applied to graduate school in thealogy (not spelled wrong!) last year, I wrote in my application that I wanted my life to be a living prayer for social justice and women's empowerment. Recently, based on my work in my graduate classes, I have been asked to write several articles for academic journals focused on women and religion. I have always felt very cautious and wary of sharing any of my ideas about spirituality or religion publicly and so this makes me nervous for a variety of reasons. However, if I'm actually going to be writing these articles, it is probably time to shed discomfort and speak my truth! I think my primary concept of living prayer is really about mindfulness. Being here and being aware. In September, the Awakening Women Institute offered via Twitter to give people "temple names"—you were asked to respond to the question about "your edge right now in your life. What is calling you, what is challenging, what is opening?" I was instantly intrigued and responded to the offer with the following: "I have multiple edges—I feel at the edge of being able to truly live my faith, having my life be a living prayer. I also constantly teeter on the edge between meeting my children's needs and meeting my own needs—and trying to find the harmony in that; trying to find the place in which our family works in harmony to meet each member's needs (not requiring 'sacrifice,' because we have a seamless integration!)." The temple name I received was: Embodied Prayer. At first I felt slightly disappointed, like, yeah, I said that already. But, as I "rested" with the name and stated it aloud—i.e. "I am Embodied Prayer"—it has become a very powerful daily practice for me. I have long sought strategies to integrate a sense of the sacred in daily life and have also known that at the root, what I'm really wanting is daily mindfulness. My "temple name" is serving as that mindfulness touchstone for me—as I go about my life, I ask myself what kind of "prayer" I'm offering in this moment. And, is this the kind of prayer I want to embody right now? (i.e. the other day I was stressed out and driving too fast and feeling annoyed with my kids and I stepped back slightly and looked at my "prayer" and realized that I wanted to embody a much different sort of offering to the divine, to the web of life, than a stressed out cranky prayer. This step back and self-reminder, immediately calmed my mood and allowed me to breathe more deeply and kindly.) That said, I also have a pretty deep-seated tendency to be extremely harsh with myself (see first New Year's intention!) and I must also be mindful of not using this name in a self-flagellating way—i.e. what kind of prayer is THAT, you loser!—or to become angry at myself when I forget to use it, forget to be mindful.

To what/why is this prayer offered anyway?

Something that made me feel as if I belonged to our tiny little Unitarian Universalist church and like there was indeed a spiritual niche I fit into, was a hymn we sang during one of my first visits with a line of, "some call it evolution, and others call it God." That notion that there is something widely felt by many, but called by different names and within vastly different systems of belief and understanding, is why I continue to identify as a UU. This force, this connecting "glue" that holds the universe together might be named by others "God" or "the Universe" or "Nature" or "Life Force" or "the Sacred" or "Divinity" or "the Tao"—I feel most satisfied when I personalize it as Goddess. I do also feel Her presence directly in my life—call it an energy, call it the sacred feminine, call it the divine, call it source, call it soul, call it spirit, call it the great

Molly (First the Egg) (2012-01-03 10:32:45)

Thanks for the BlogBooker-to-Wordle tip—I'd been trying to figure out a workaround for that!

Barbara (2012-01-03 08:47:28)

How fun!

anniechoate (2012-01-03 05:57:57)

I have always loved the shapes of words. I studied as a vocal musician in college and spent many hours teasing over how each consonant shaped it's nearby vowel and blended into a phrase that had shape and direction. I am inspired to see what shape wordle and BlogBooker will make of my words. Words as art, art as words.

Yarn Goddess (2012-01-05 13:57)

I made sweeping promises about all of the fabulous posts I was going to write over my break and apparently I only had [1]ONE in me. I find a good blog post really takes a minimum of three hours to write and that is after having the idea, taking notes, collecting links, etc. Someday I envision cleaning out my intense drafts folder, but that day has not yet come. So, for now, I want to share a picture of the delightful Goddess of Willendorf my talented mother crocheted for me for Christmas this year:



[2]

Isn't she a beaut? Who is the real Yarn Goddess here? My mom! I am also enjoying some lovely new handknit socks in solid black at my request (so that I can wear them to teach in).

Speaking of teaching, the new session is about to begin! One of my classes got cancelled, which is really a great thing, because I only have one separation per week from Alaina now. I was really nervous about how all of us were going to manage two and I'm glad I don't have to find out. I did get a second section of my online class, which I have been hoping for for about a year. So, I'm super excited about that! Let's hope it scrapes up enough students at the last minute to actually run.

Also, went back via my BlogBooker (which I think I'm going to re-do shortly and make available for download for any die-hard "fans" out there), and want to [3]share my post from this exact date last year. Seems so recent in many ways, but also like an eternity in others! I just said to Alaina today, "remember I used to be pregnant?!"

This is my first post constructed entirely on my new iPad—photo and all. :)

1. <http://talkbirth.me/posts/2011/12/30/the-illusion-of-choice/>
2. <http://talkbirth.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/20120105-134822.jpg>
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Michelle (2012-01-05 14:20:23)

I love her!! How awesome! Your Mimi's definitely a true yarn goddess! :)

BlogBook v0.4,
L^AT_EX 2_ε & GNU/Linux.
<http://www.blogbooker.com>

Edited: January 5, 2012