

This month we get a chance to celebrate Home Birth Week running from the 26th Oct to 1st Nov. I hope you enjoy the selection of articles in this newsletter and that they inspire and engage your thoughts on this topic.



Bronwyn van Hooijdonk
Company Director

What Really Matters

A philosophy professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, rocks about 2 inches in diameter. He then asked the students if the jar was full? They agreed that it was.

So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the student again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The students laughed.

The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

"Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognise that this is your life. The rocks are the important things - your family, your partner, your health, your children - anything that is so important to you that if it were lost, you would be nearly destroyed. The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else. The small stuff."

"If you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your energy and time on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness.

Play, sing to and talk to your children with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and mow the lawn."

"Take care of the rocks first - the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."



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During birth

1. Use low light.
2. Do not disturb the mother with unnecessary interruptions. Limit talking.
3. Have the mother choose the positions that are best for her.
4. Make the mother central. Follow her lead and do what she needs or wants. Pay attention to her sounds, body language and expression to determine her needs.
5. Make sure the room is warm. If mum is comfortable she will birth more easily.
6. Comfort measures for the mums also help the baby. They are a unit.

Jan Tritten and Jill Cohen
Excerpted from "Tricks of the Trade,"
Midwifery Today, Issue 81

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Think about It

What is the soul of homebirth? How do you describe the action of choosing homebirth? For me, that action was a "Kriya," something one does on purpose, a purposeful action.

Another way is to liken the soul of birth to a holy feeling, a "Darshan," or spiritual audience.

And how can one explain childbirth?

Birth is truly that which cannot be explained, or "Wakan," the "great mystery."

The difficulty and work of labour leading to the pleasure of birth and nursing is "Evam," the joining of negative and positive energies.

With the birth of my first child I realised that the event of birth needed to be in the familiarity of home. With the birth of each of my other three babies, this notion was only strengthened. During this time, my life as a homebirth midwife was born and grew. Now my babies are nearly grown and on their own, and that notion still holds true.

Birth needs to be in the familiarity of the home if at all possible, and in the event of being elsewhere, the soul of birth can be maintained by those present. I guess that is what we midwives are doing when we assist someone with her birth, no matter where we are.

Editor's Note: According to the author, Kriya and Darshan are Sanskrit words, Wakan is Native American and is used for the Great Spirit, and Evam is most likely Tibetan.

Vi Sadhana

"The Soul of Homebirth,"
Midwifery Today, Issue 50

Not Among Strangers

How important is the impact of the birth environment upon achieving an optimal outcome of the birth process?

The environment in which birth takes place has an enormous impact upon birth outcome. Labour progress, pain tolerance, necessity for medical intervention, fetal well-being and satisfaction with the birth experience may all be directly related to the mother's sense of "safe place" in which she brings forth her baby.

"Safe place" has little to do with physical surroundings alone. Yet for many a woman, the home in which she resides, feels loved and secure, has prepared for her baby and "nested" most clearly defines that place. "Safe place" also has to do with the people with whom the woman feels most secure and comfortable.

The interaction of the several personalities which may be involved during labour and birth may either positively or adversely affect the labouring woman's sense of "safe place." As we come to understand the importance of how these personalities impact the birth environment, we, as caregivers, become more sensitive to the needs of the mother as she approaches the time of labour and birth.

Traditionally, birth has been a very private affair in which only the most intimate of a woman's relations would attend the labouring woman. Grandmothers, aunts and wise women of the village whom the woman most trusted were the ones to be called. In today's society, women have been taught to place their trust in the medical model of childbirth and in medical professionals rather than in persons with whom they are most familiar. They are taught to accept the place of birth that the medical professional chooses (because it is the medical professional's "safe place"?).

For many women this is a difficult and sometimes impossible transition, one which so impacts the sense of the familiar that patterns of labour are changed and the sensation of birth pain intensified. Outcome is made less predictable, and birth comes to be regarded as a difficult and painful ordeal, fraught with danger.

Moreover, if the woman is confronted with an unfamiliar and therefore "not safe place," a survival mechanism will kick in. She will protect her baby by preventing baby from being born by ceasing to contract, keeping her cervix closed and in general "failing to progress".

Valerie El Halta

Excerpted from "Not Among Strangers,"
Midwifery Today, Issue 50

"Our body is a machine for living. It is organised for that, it is its nature. Let life go on in it unhindered and let it defend itself, it will do more than if you paralyze it by encumbering it with remedies."

Leo Tolstoy

All over the world there exists in every society a small group of women who feel themselves strongly attracted to giving care to other women during pregnancy and childbirth. Failure to make use of this group of highly motivated people is regrettable and short sighted.

Dr. Kloosterman Dutch Obstetrician/Gynecologist