

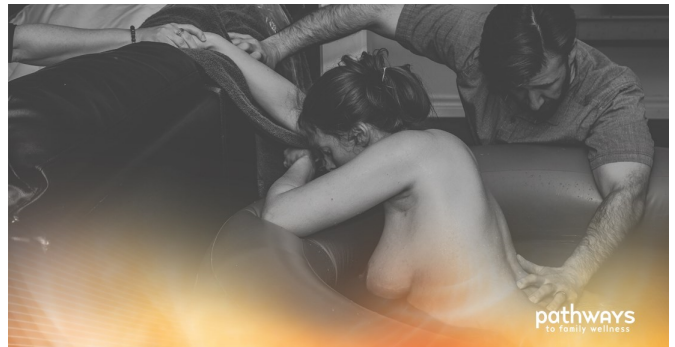


Chiropractic Newsletter Well-Being

The Sacred Dance of Birth

Birth invites us to surrender. It is a rite of passage that changes us in many intangible ways. Birth will ask you to dig deep, be flexible with your plan, and adapt in ways you never thought your body/mind could endure, and this is how we are born anew, every time. Britta Bushnell likens the journey of birth and parenthood to a labyrinth: “designed for contemplation, prayer ritual, and meditation.” I had prodromal labor six times in the three weeks leading up to my daughter’s birth, and I was ready for the labyrinth. After experiencing preeclampsia with my first pregnancy and a traumatic hospital birth, I had planned a home birth this time, and built the physical, emotional, and spiritual birth skills. As the Papua New Guinea Asaro proverb goes, “Knowledge is only rumor until it is in the muscle.”

On February 26, 2018, at 41 weeks and six days, my midwife scheduled an ultrasound to check my amniotic fluid level. Baby was estimated to be 8lbs and lying oblique, with her head jammed in my right pelvis and her shoulder blocking my cervix. We were stuck. The technician calmly wrote a transfer of care requisition to an unknown OBGYN for a C-section while I cried silent tears. I was devastated, and I wasn’t ready to release my dream birth, so I made a plan. I called my colleague from the car, explained the



situation, and requested privacy and an adjustment with Webster Technique. I was adjusted at 12:45 p.m., and as I got up from the table, I felt baby shift into the head-down position. It was an intensely alien sensation; I felt both nauseous and elated.

Theologian William F. May states that parenthood teaches us about “openness to the unbidden.” This experience invited me to practice being uncertain, and that is the inner work of birth. I called my midwife and agreed to meet at her clinic to check the baby’s position. My midwife, Josée, palpated and found that the baby was head down, stating I was in a “risky situation” at 6-7 cm dilated! I was sent home to have my baby!

I contacted my Naturopath and had acupuncture at 6:30 p.m. I went home, had an Epsom salts bath and was asleep by 10 p.m. I was awakened by my first rush at 10:30 p.m., and they were steady. I sensed this would be fast and called my

midwife, birth photographer and sister, who was also my doula. It was a snowstorm, the roads were messy, and we didn't want to take any chances.

French OBGYN Michel Odent states that a woman needs three things at birth, "to feel secure, without feeling observed, and be in a warm enough place." I moved around our dimly lit home as the birth tub filled, riding rushes, emitting low moans, and accepting support. I would rest in the tub, become too hot, feel nauseous, and be helped out. I cooled down, got back in, and the intensity of my rushes increased.

I grabbed my sister's hand while my husband compressed my lower back. I felt impatient—that the pool wasn't right. I was gingerly helped out, and as I moved around the couch dropped into a deep squat through transition.

I looked at Josée and said, "This is SO intense!" Josée looked me in the eye and told me I had this. I believed her. I raised high onto my tiptoes and felt baby fully descend. There were intense rushes as her head crowned. With my fingers, I reached down, felt her head and smiled. My waters broke when her head was almost fully birthed. Three quick pushes over nine minutes, and she was born after three hours of active labor. She cried immediately, was very alert, weighing 9½lbs with ginger hair and a head circumference 4 cm above average.

The midwives were impressed with her weight, her chins, and her neck rolls. She was a cherubic dusky bundle, and we were so grateful to have her earthside, our sweet potato girl. While I birthed my placenta, we tried to nurse. Breastfeeding was clunky, and we struggled to latch.

Addy's dysfunctional latch would take me down a path that would profoundly change my life and the care I offer as a chiropractor. After experiencing a traumatic first birth in hospital with preeclampsia, this was the embodied home birth I had longed for, in a sacred space we created, with a team who offered us autonomy, compassion, presence, dignity, and respect. I remain in awe of the alchemy of birth, which is sacred and safe at home.

By Natalie Bernicky, DC

Pathways to Family

Wellness Magazine Issue #86

