

## Birth Quotes

Written by Mary Young  
Tuesday, 07 December 2010 13:55

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**“Letting a woman discover her own power is a delicate art...You’ve helped her go to a place where she feels safe...and she will grow there when she is ready. We cannot take away her strength by controlling. We need to shelter and encourage her strength.”**  
–Midwife Carol Gautschi on First Stage (in [Midwifery Today](#) interview by Kelly Moyer)

(I have a pet peeve about any use of the word “let” in relationship to birthing women, but I still like the ideas in this quote.)

**“When you change the way you view birth, the way you birth will change.” ~Marie Mongan, Hypnobirthing (via [Birth Without Fear](#) )**

I like this and teach this mind set change in my classes.

**“Every single human being was drummed into this world by a woman, having listened to the heart rhythms of their mother.” -Connie Sauer**

**“We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee.” –Marian Wright Edelman**

□ **“I believe the act of giving birth to be the single most miraculous thing a human being can do and it is surely the moment when a lot of women finally understand the depth of their power. You think it can’t possibly be done, you think you can’t possibly take the pain, and then you do —and afterward you look at yourself... in a whole new way. If you can do that, you can do anything.” – Ani DiFranco (via [Spirited Doula Services](#) )**

**“I see the beautiful curve of a pregnant belly shaped by the soul within.” –Hafiz (quoted in The Art of Pregnancy){slide=Read more...}**

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**“In acknowledging woman-to-woman help it is important to recognize that power, within the family and elsewhere, can be used vindictively, and that it is not only powerful men who abuse women; women with power may also abuse other women.” –Sheila Kitzinger**

**□ “Anyone who has felt the pain of bearing a child, or pushed past physical limits in some athletic event, or struggled to learn difficult but powerful truths understands that suffering can be an integral part of the most profound joy. In fact, once suffering has ended, having experienced it seems to magnify the capacity... to feel pleasure and delight.” –Martha Beck**

My note: As I've noted several times previously, I always emphasize in my own birth classes that pain does not equal suffering—there is a profound difference between pain and suffering (and much suffering that women experience in birth is NOT actually physical) and that no one wants birthing women to \*suffer\* (i.e. “natural birth advocates think women should just suffer” is not true!). However, I still liked the essence of this quote, which did not come from a book that has anything to do with birth, but from Beck's book *Finding Your Own North Star*.

**“Of course, if 40% of women need oxytocin to progress normally, then something is wrong with the definition of normal.” ~ Henci Goer (via [An Everyday Miracle](#) )**

(“Synthetic oxytocin” would be better in the quote, because all women DO need oxytocin to progress, but what they need is their OWN oxytocin, which is what the quote above is actually referring to.)

**“When we talk about changing birth in our culture, everybody's small & grand efforts matter. Birth touches everybody. So everybody must speak up: mothers, fathers, grandmothers, doctors, midwives, doulas, nurses, writers, & artists. We cannot wait for the powers that be to change birth for us. When millions of us change our attitude & expectations, & we speak up, we become the change we are waiting for.” -Pam England**

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□ **“Woman-to-woman help through the rites of passage that are important in every birth has significance not only for the individuals directly involved, but for the whole community. The task in which the women are engaged is \*political\*. It forms the warp and weft of society.” –Sheila Kitzinger (Rediscovering Birth)**

**“Women die in childbirth as a result of systemic failures including: barriers to accessing care, inadequate, neglectful or discriminatory care, and overuse of risky interventions like inducing labour and delivering via caesarean section.” — Amnesty International (via Huffington Post article)**

**Obstetric Violence = “[T]he appropriation of the body & reproductive processes of women by health personnel, which is expressed as dehumanized treatment, an abuse of medication, & to convert the natural processes into pathological ones, bringing with it loss of autonomy & the ability to decide freely about their bodies & sexuality, negatively impacting the quality of life of women.” –International Journal of Gynaecology & Obstetrics**

This quote is re: the term as used in Venezuela, which carries a fine for violation.

**“The protocols in the world of animal husbandry to protect an offspring at the time of birth—no strangers, dimmed lights, freedom of movement, familiar environment, unlimited nourishment, respectful quiet, no disruptions—are done without hesitation because to do otherwise invites ‘unexplained distress’ or sudden demise of the offspring.” ~ Beth Barbeau (via [Midwifery Today](#) , from article “Safer Birth in a Barn?”)**

**“In most societies birth has been an experience in which...women draw together to help each other and reinforce bonds in the community. Now that eradication of pain with effective anaesthesia is often the only issue in any discussion of birth...the sacramental and social elements which used to be central to women’s experience of birth...seem, for an increasing proportion of women, to be completely irrelevant.” –Sheila Kitzinger**

**“Having a good birth is great. It helps you feel empowered. It’s the most powerful time in your life; it’s creation...But the self-empowerment that comes with knowledge and being able to make choices that are good for you, and good for your baby, and good for**

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**your family, helps put women on that path of being able to use that for the rest of their lives...” –Jennifer Welch (Turtle Women’s Project Founder)**

**“When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision—then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” –Audre Lorde**

**□ “No one can sufficiently capture in words the euphoria, the gratitude, and the total delight which can follow a natural birth. The high of these moments is spiritual to the utmost, while remaining utterly physical.” -Qahira Qalbi**

**“If mothers experience birth as a spiritual event that brings them closer to their communities instead of as a violent incident that takes place among strangers, then they can pass that attitude along to their children.” –Elizabeth O’Sullivan (in “The Turtle Women,” Mothering Magazine, 2004)**

**□ “But, to me, the battle will not be won until midwives can be positioned not as some new fringe ‘hippie-mother’ movement but as a longstanding and natural part of the human experience, as part of rather than threat to the modern health care industry.” –Sam Ford (in article about the Midwife “Brand”)**

**“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, even its uncertainty and sadness.” – Sarah Werthan Bittenwieser ( [Literary Mama](#) )**

**“Fear is completely intertwined with what we experience as labor pain...And it is the fear in our physicians and nurses as much as the fear within ourselves.” –Suzanne Arms (Immaculate Deception II)**

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My note: I think sometimes women underestimate the power the attitudes of other people in the birthplace hold over outcome (the placebo effect, possibly)—while being prepared, confident, fearless, etc. a birthing woman is excellent and she \*can\* sometimes manage to triumph over the fear of the others around her, I more often see the fear of others overriding the preparation and confidence a mother has tried to develop in herself .

**“We have disrespected the mother-baby bond and their birthrights so badly that we have changed the course of history. It is time to take birth back. It belongs to mother-baby (with dad and midwife there to love, support and protect the mother-baby). This does not mean any particular birth will always go easy and you must have skill, knowledge, techniques and intuition with a lot of love.” –Jan Tritten ( [Midwifery Today](#) )**

□ **”When intervening becomes routine, meaning there is no reason for it, only risks remain.” ~Henci Goer (via [Fans of birth activist Henci Goer](#) )**

□ **”...we can’t define our birth story ahead of time. We can’t go into it assuming it will be healing or empowering or a message or a political statement. When we do that, we risk that we will not see our birth for what it is – a beautiful, amazing process that helps define us as women and mothers in ways we may not expect. It may not be pretty. It may not live up to our standards of perfection. Sometimes birth just...is.” –Angela Quinn in the article [Baggage Check via The Unnecesarean](#): <http://www.theunnecesarean.com/blog/2010/10/20/baggage-check.html>**

□ **”The desire to help is so great, even from well-meaning, beautiful midwives, that they use intervention. We want to help. But what’s missing in our culture is that there is pain with a purpose, and that helping is sometimes interfering.” –Augustine Colebrook, CPM (quoted in “Do-it-Yourself Birth” article in *Mothering* mag)**

I’ve written a lot about birth having inherent value in its own right. Process AND “product” (i.e. healthy mom, healthy baby) are both important. A de-emphasis on the process only serves to disempower, silence, invalidate, and violate women.

That said, I do also value the work of organizations like the HypnoBirthing Institute that questions the very notion of pain as being an inherent part of birth.

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I always explain to my classes that the sensations of labour are more similar to the exertion of intense physical work/effort more than the pain associated with accident, illness, or injury. We need a bigger and broader vocabulary for completely describing the breadth, range, intensity, and beauty of birth experiences!

**“Today, shake things up. Look at everything differently: Love a tantrum. Don’t dry tears. Embrace your flaws. Trash your guilt. Get stronger at the broken places. Parent where you are. Forget the crystal ball. Trust the process. Develop an insatiable curiosity. Tell another parent they rock. Give your child the benefit of \*no\* doubt. Go!” – [Parent2](#)  
[ParentU](#)**

**□ “How is one woman to claim her own experience of an ‘easy’ birth when she knows other women labor for days in pain... Or if you had a ‘bad’ experience giving birth, how are you to name that when women around you are happily anticipating a successful culmination to their [birth] classes? Women’s naming of much in their own birthing experiences is silenced by their sensitivity to other women’s feelings.” –Elizabeth Dodson Gray**

My note: I think sometimes those of us who do have it “easier,” forget that even sometimes when someone has done all the “right” things, birth is ultimately an unpredictable and surprising journey with its own power, path, and purpose.

**“Childbirth can be changed, one woman at a time. Each woman can share with another what she has learned, and as women stand up to their providers with information and intelligence, I believe we will gradually see a desperately needed change in the state of modern obstetric care in America.” ~The Midwife Next Door (via [Delightful Pregnancy & Birth](#))**

**“Nothing in medical literature today communicates the idea that women’s bodies are well-designed for birth. Ignorance of the capacities of women’s bodies can flourish and quickly spread into the popular culture when the medical profession is unable to distinguish between ancient wisdom and superstitious belief.” –Ina May Gaskin (in an article in [Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine](#))**

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**“The knowledge of how to give birth without outside interventions lies deep within each woman. Successful childbirth depends on the acceptance of the process.” – Suzanne Arms**

(I would add, “and birthing in an environment that shares that acceptance...”)

**“When there is no home birth in a society, or when home birth is driven completely underground, essential knowledge of women’s capacities in birth is lost to the people of that society—to professional caregivers, as well as to women of childbearing age themselves.” –Ina May Gaskin (in an article in [Pathways to Family Wellness Magazine](#) )**

**“Woman is as common as a loaf of bread, and like a loaf of bread, will rise.” –Judy Grahn**

□ **“...Like other involuntary processes, we cannot consciously control pregnancy and birth unless we physically intervene. Did you need to learn how to make your heart beat? How to breathe? How to digest your food? How to produce hormones?...You don’t have to do anything to make these processes work. You can support them, or you can intervene, but they will happen all on their own. You can trust them.” - [Lamaze International](#)**

□ **“Worry gives a small thing a big shadow.” – Old Swedish proverb (via Lamaze e-news)**

**“Who invented First Stage? Did it come about when we started putting our hands inside women? This act...killed many women because doctors were doing it before they learned to wash their hands...mother-leading is best. We are in partnership with women, but she is going by her thoughts, knowledge and culture. You have time to change and educate during the prenatal period, but at birth follow her lead!” –Jan Tritten**

**“Labour is for bringing the baby down and out. If we are going in and up, we are reversing the natural order. Let us try to find the most optimal ways of working with the**

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**natural process of birth. It cannot be improved upon in 90–95% of cases. Discerning the 5–10% is the hard part. With good prenatal care and careful attention to our reactions, we can probably come close.” –Jan Tritten (Midwifery Today e-news. Continued from above)**

**“Pregnant and birthing mothers are elemental forces, in the same sense that gravity, thunderstorms, earthquakes, and hurricanes are elemental forces. In order to understand the laws of their energy flow, you have to love and respect them for their magnificence at the same time that you study them with the accuracy of a true scientist.” – Ina May Gaskin (via [Birth True Childbirth Education](#) )**

**“Don’t forget to bring your sense of humour to your labour.” ~ Ina May Gaskin (via [Midwifery Today e-news](#) )**

**“When you have a baby, your own creative training begins. Because of your child, you are now finding new powers and performing amazing feats.” –Elaine Martin**

**“Uterine contractions are felt by many women to sweep towards them, rise in crescendo and then fade away like waves of the sea, so that wave imagery is very useful when describing the sensations they produce. This wave imagery is closely associated with the idea of rhythm, which is all important in harmonious psychosomatic adaptation to labour.” –Sheila Kitzinger (Education and Counselling for Childbirth)**

**□ “The childbearing year—the time of pregnancy and early parenting—is the temporal and physical passage from being one woman to being a mother-baby dyad. The symbiotic relationship the two share during this time is critical to the long-term wellness of both.” –Julia Seng (intro to Survivor Moms)**

**□ ”Nature in all her wisdom has designed the experience of birth so that it teaches a woman about her inner resources and how to access them.” ~ Christine Northrup, MD (via [An Everyday Miracle](#) )**

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**“The contemporary woman is the victim of her culture. It has beautifully conditioned her to a view of childbirth that cannot serve her well when she enters labor. Western culture generally, and American culture specifically, considers childbirth synonymous with suffering.” –Dr. Irwin Chabon (Awake and Aware, 1969. Quoted in [Lamaze International](#)**

**‘s  
Summer 2010 journal)**

I always talk in my classes about the difference between pain and suffering and often see a “lightbulb” go on...

**□ “Through the act of controlling birth, we disassociate ourselves with its raw power. Disassociation makes it easier to identify with our ‘civilized’ nature, deny our ‘savage’ roots and connection with indigenous cultures. Birth simultaneously encompasses the three events that civilized societies fear—birth, death, and sexuality.” –Holly Richards (In Cultural Messages of Childbirth: The Perpetration of Fear,” ICEA Journal, 1993. Via this blog:  
<http://humanizebirth.blogspot.com/>  
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**“Childbirth education has changed because what we know about birth has changed...Childbirth education must evolve from the technological curriculum to a physiologic study of how well women’s bodies are created, not for being delivered, but for giving birth.” –Barbara Hoteling (in Lamaze International’s Journal of Perinatal Education, Fall 2009)**

**“Mothers who have fears also hand down fearful attitudes about birth to daughters—and to every other woman who will listen. But each woman who gains the confidence to birth as unhindered or freely as her biological circumstances will allow—she will go on to encourage her sisters and daughters with birth words and images which resound with all the potential strength and beauty of birth.” –Jan Tritten**

**□ “Choices—no matter how \*educated\* or \*informed\* the consent—are not real choices when they are made within the context of fear...” –Jan Tritten (in Life of a Midwife)**

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I get frustrated with comments about how women need to “be educated” or “as long as they make an informed decision...” It is a LOT more complicated and “bigger” than that. I heard a presentation where informed consent was referred to as “the ritual of informed consent.” (i.e. not informed at all!) Informed refusal is the logical companion of informed consent and yet it is almost never a real “choice” at all—so, how “informed” can the decision be? ARGH! This is so frustrating for me! (and it is frustrating because I hear childbirth educators say these kinds of things—but, if the only choice that is allowed is to say “yes” then the whole thing is a sham!) Having no options to choose differently makes a choice not represent a real choice, regardless. Women need energy to fight their way through labour. I also know that even with all their information and resources, they don’t have the strength to overpower the hospital “birth machine” while also birthing a baby!

**□ “Remember this, for it is as true and true gets: Your body is not a lemon. You are not a machine. The Creator is not a careless mechanic. Human female bodies have the same potential to give birth well as aardvarks, lions, rhinocerus, elephants, moose, and water buffalo. Even if it has not been your habit throughout your life so far, I recommend that you learn to think positively about your body.” ~ Ina May Gaskin**

**“One of the central spiritual lessons of birth is accepting that life is unpredictable and we are not in control. Another is it cannot be done perfectly. Accepting that can be a deeply enriching act of self-love.” –Jennifer Loudon (The Pregnant Woman’s Comfort Book)**

**“You can’t mass produce good birth experiences. Midwifery is a place where you can use all the love you have.” –Jan Tritten (founder of [Midwifery Today](#) in their book Life of a Midwife)**

**“Giving birth naturally is not just a nice option or the opportunity to have a transforming experience; giving birth naturally is the safest way to give birth for mothers and babies.” –Judith Lothian (in an article in [Lamaze International](#) ‘s Journal of Perinatal Education, Fall 2009)**

**“...drugging or cutting a pregnant woman with no medical indication is an act of violence, even when performed by a medical professional in a hospital...In what other**

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**area of life in the United States is it apparently acceptable or legal for a professional to perform major abdominal surgery to reduce vulnerability to a lawsuit? Is this not even more violent than a black eye? And more insidious?” –Susan Hodges (CFM’s founder, in an article in Lamaze International’s Journal of Perinatal Education)**

**“Truth has a power all its own. Truth is stronger than lies. We need to tell the truth about birth. Trust will follow.” – Carla Hartley (via**

**[Lamaze International](#)**

**pregnancy e-newsletter)**

**“A mother is a school. Empower her and you empower a great nation.” – Hafez Ibrahim (Egyptian poet 1872-1932, via [Literary Mama](#) )**

**“The gift of creating new life needs to be, once again, welcomed and honoured as one of the most mysterious of human powers. And women need to be confirmed in their decisions to use this power however and whenever they see fit.” –Patricia Monaghan**

**“Birth has not only reached the absurdity of having to be relearned, it also has the absurdity of becoming a criminal offense if we are to go ahead with our ideals & do things the way we desire...midwifery as practiced in [Birth Book] is against the law. It has become political. We didn’t make it that way. For us it is... a beautiful, personal, spiritual, sexual experience...for us to have that, we become criminals.” –Raven Lang, Birth Book, 1972**

**“Be sure to share your story. There is no shortage of fear-mongering and simply unhelpful advice when it comes to birth. As fathers, we need to make birth a part of the masculine dialogue.” –A father quoted in The Father’s Home Birth Handbook by Leah Hazard**

**“Pregnancy offers us the excuse to be gentle with ourselves. That excuse can become a habit. That habit can slowly become a lovingly held belief: ‘I AM worthy of self-care, not just when I am carrying a child but every day.’” –Jennifer Loudon (Pregnant Woman’s**

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### Comfort Book)

**“Pregnancy can make you fat, or it can allow you to appreciate the wonder of your body. Pregnancy can make you a raving lunatic, or it can give you clues from your raw emotions where you need to ‘cut to the chase’...Pregnancy can make you extraordinarily exhausted, or it can give you clues to slow down and listen to your body, feed it what the baby and you need to thrive...” –Jennifer Louden**

**“Birth goes best if it is not intruded upon by strange people and strange events. It goes best when a woman feels safe enough and free enough to abandon herself to the process.” –Penny Armstrong & Sheryl Feldman (A Midwife’s Story, quoted in Having a Baby, Naturally)**

**[re: &quot;surrender&quot; during labour] “...She may refer to this as the feeling of surrender; but this kind of surrender is a gift, not something she herself did with her mind. At this point the body truly takes over and the thinking mind recedes into the background. This may be how women historically and presently, are able to labour without mental suffering and without pain medication.” –Pam England (Labyrinth of Birth)**

**“...in not disturbing the labouring woman you’re not handing over all control to her...it’s not a question of handing control to the labouring woman, it’s a question of \*not controlling\* her...while she’s in labour and giving birth physiologically, she’s going to seem well and truly out of control–totally wild!–so the issue of control seems a pretty irrelevant one really.” –Sylvie Donna (Optimal Birth)**

**“...if you know that you are pregnant and if you know when you conceived your baby and you think that everything’s okay, doctors can probably do nothing for you. Women need to realize that the role of medicine in pregnancy is very limited... –Michel Odent (in Optimal Birth)**

Re: “advice” for someone who is pregnant. Quote continues with: “What’s important is for a mom-to-be to be happy, to eat well, to adapt her lifestyle to her pregnancy, to do whatever she likes to do...I think that’s what we have to explain to women. They have to realize that doctors

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have very limited power. The woman has the power within her, she needs to claim it back!{/slide}