FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Health & Fitness

Birthing from Within: An Extra-Ordinary Guide to Childbirth Preparation

Pam England
Rob Horowitz
Partera Press
978-0-9659873-0-1
(June 30, 1998)

At the agrarian onset of the century, childbirth occurred almost exclusively at home, with mothers assisted by female relatives or midwives. But by the middle, techno-urban part of the century, most babies were born in a sterilized hospital environment that preferred mothers anaesthetized and fathers excluded. During the 1970s, the pendulum starting swinging back again, as mothers chose breathing exercises over drugs and fathers became labor coaches. In Birthing From Within, childbirth educator and midwife Pam England, with husband-writer-psychologist Rob Horowitz, furthers this trend as she encourages mothers to treat birth as a rite of passage and not a medical event.

Instead of focusing almost exclusively on the baby, as most hospitals and birth centers do, England attempts to reconnect women with cultural traditions that also view a baby's arrival as the birth of a mother. She asks the expectant mother to create art to probe her feelings and fears about labor and birth, and to explore customs that celebrate the mother. And if the mother is healthy and the pregnancy uncomplicated, the best site for childbirth may well be the mother's home, she says.

England frees the father from the chore of timing contractions and encourages him "to just be there, to soak up the miracle of his child's birth." A doula, or trained labor assistant, is a better choice to guide the couple through labor, delivery and postpartum adjustments. Mixing cross-cultural stories and a hint of Zen, plus ancient tradition and modern medical understanding, Birthing From Within ultimately empowers women to take charge of their birth experiences by trusting their inherent ability to do what mothers have done from the dawn of time: bring new life into the world.

Sharon Flesher