New Resources for Childbirth Educators and Parents

Coordinated by Teri Shilling, MS, CD(DONA), IBCLC, LCCE, FACCE

ABSTRACT

In this column, reviewers offer perspectives and comments on a variety of new media resources for childbirth educators and for expectant and new parents. The DVDs and books reviewed in this issue's column address the following topics: cultural views of labor and birth, as portrayed in the U.S. media; natural, safe, and healthy birth practices; memoirs of a midwife; a description of doula care to share with the children of expectant parents; baby behaviors; empowering women to choose the birth experience they want; making informed decisions about cesarean surgery; information and stories of hope for parents dealing with an infant in the neonatal intensive care unit; ways for parents to cope with perinatal or neonatal loss; and fathers' supportive role during the prenatal and postpartum periods.

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Keywords: natural birth, labor, doulas, midwifery, informed decision making, cesareans, neonatal intensive care unit, perinatal loss, neonatal loss, fathers

For more information on a variety of current media titles, visit the Lamaze International Bookstore and Media Center at www.lamaze.org or call toll-free at 877-952-6293.

Laboring Under an Illusion: Mass Media Childbirth vs. The Real Thing

Filmmaker: Vicki Elson, MA, CCE (2009)

Format: DVD (50 minutes)

Cost: \$39.95 (private/small group use); \$99.95 (institutional/public use)

Where to order: www.birthing-media.com

Vicki Elson has produced a masterful documentary, *Laboring Under an Illusion*, by using some of the most popular televised births to detail how culture affects our view of childbirth. The result is entertaining, often hilarious, and absolutely thought-provoking.

Who can forget the infamous birth scene in the sitcom *Murphy Brown*, or the slapstick that ensued on *The Lucy Show* when Ricky, Fred, and Ethel tried

to get Lucy out the door to the hospital? Perhaps you're still traumatized by the Quentin Tarantino-produced childbirth storyline from the television series *ER*? Elson, an anthropologist, contends we don't forget these mesmerizing scenes, and that in fact they become part of our collective psyche around what childbirth is like. Elson then takes on the task of debunking the propaganda produced by popular mass media by contrasting it with real, everyday, garden-variety childbirth—the kind where no Nielsen ratings are involved.

The first part of *Laboring Under an Illusion* starts with a short statement that culture, art, morality, and commercialism shape our opinions and that pregnancy is the perfect time to make that culture transparent so that values and decisions come from

mothers, not media. The next 45 minutes show a variety of images of childbirth from popular media, most with voiceovers helping the viewer dissect what message is conveyed through the image or storyline and why. Elson wisely and fairly examines the cultural messages of popular “natural birth” documentaries and educational DVDs as well as sitcoms, television dramas, and tabloid magazines. At the end of the documentary, Elson concludes that, in the real world, birth is astonishing and dramatic all on its own. No added sizzle for ratings is necessary.

Although it may be difficult to show *Laboring Under an Illusion* in its entire 50-minute format during a conventional childbirth education class, consider showing it before class. Call it “dinner and a movie,” and let your class members bring in their dinner and watch the DVD while you set up your room. Your class members will enjoy laughing and remembering their favorite scenes while you help them think about those subtle, culture-shaping messages.

Laboring Under an Illusion is a terrific addition to any childbirth educator’s lending library and a sure-fire tool for getting conversations started about why you believe what you believe.

Reviewer:

Kim James, CD(DONA), CD(PALS), ICCE.

LCCE

Seattle, WA

Giving Birth

Creators and producers: Suzanne Arms and Susan Berthiaume (2007)

Executive producer: Amy Gilliland

Format: DVD (36 minutes, plus 1-hour bonus material)

Cost: \$40 plus shipping and handling

Where to order: www.suzannearms.com

Suzanne Arms, childbirth author, has released a new birth video in DVD format. With an added hour of bonus material, *Giving Birth* would be a wonderful addition to any childbirth educator’s library.

Giving Birth features music, still photos, rolling slides, running commentary, and the presentation of a powerful birth to show a model of natural birth. Contrasting the obstetrical and midwifery models of birth, *Giving Birth* explains how historical circumstances drove birth into hospitals. Arms describes how a legacy of fear of pain and shame about their bodies has influenced many women to believe that their bodies do not work and that they cannot birth without medical intervention.

In *Giving Birth*, Arms uses interviews with doctors, a doula, and a midwife to discuss the belief that women and their babies *can* birth naturally. Without criticizing obstetricians and hospitals or offering any negative commentary, the birth professionals featured in the video also discuss scientific evidence about birth and how many interventions actually hinder birth.

The rolling text slides throughout the film present factual information and alternatives to medical intervention, listing ways to help a woman in labor. The text also explores how standard contemporary medical practices are *not* based on scientific facts.

Giving Birth features a wonderful discussion about labor support and doulas as well as comments from a practicing doula. The presentation addresses the fact that most women can birth safely at home or in birth centers with the help of a midwife and supportive partner or support system. It also explores how to help a woman trust her body’s wisdom and ability to birth, how to support and trust the natural birth process, how to protect the mother-baby partnership, and how to address women’s real concerns and doubts. The DVD goes on to discuss the many common misconceptions about labor and birth pain, epidural anesthesia, hospital routines, and routine interventions.

The birth component of *Giving Birth* is an excellent “first birth video” to use in childbirth classes. There is no full-frontal nudity and no close-up vaginal footage. The mother gives birth at home in a calm, supportive atmosphere, dressed in a kimono, seated on a birthing stool, and attended by a midwife. The father actively supports the mom during the birth and stays with her after the birth. An older sibling joins the parents and new baby after the birth.

The added hour of bonus material features reflections from the birthing couple’s midwife and documents the first hour after the couple’s birth. The midwife discusses not only the couple’s labor and birth but also home birth and midwifery in general. *Giving Birth* is one of the only videos I have seen that explores a couple’s feelings about their birth experience right after the birth. I think the bonus material is a valuable addition to the DVD.

Giving Birth is divided into sections that can be shown alone or in different segments of a childbirth class. I particularly like that the message of natural birth is presented without the all-too-often doctor and hospital bashing that is sometimes done.

The message of what it is to birth normally and naturally is positive, compelling, and worth viewing. Midwife Roxanne Cummings sums up her beliefs about birth when she says, “[When] given the right amount of support and privacy, a woman can do it, and it is a major achievement of her own strength and capacity that no one can ever take away from her for the rest of her life.”

Reviewer:

Kathy Chiocca, CD, LCCE, FACCE
Lake Oswego, OR

The Blue Cotton Gown: A Midwife's Memoir

Author: Patricia Harman

Publisher: Beacon Press (2008)

Hardcover: 290 pages

Cost: \$24.95 (also available in softcover at \$16)

Where to order: Online at www.beacon.org or at most major bookstores and online booksellers

If you are a birth junkie, if you love working with women, if you believe in the power of the human spirit, then *The Blue Cotton Gown: A Midwife's Memoir* is for you! I really had trouble putting this book down. Patricia Harman writes in a way that is like talking with your best friend—a very easy and pleasant read.

As both a birth and health-care professional, I found Harman's memories enlightening, intriguing, and at all times “reminding”—reminding us all how vulnerable the women and families in our care are, and how a kind word, sympathetic ear, or a gentle hug can truly be the *best* medicine.

Harman's title, *The Blue Cotton Gown*, is quite symbolic, and as a nurse, I have often seen this “opening of the soul” take place when the patient/client takes on the gown. I think all of us who work with pregnant and parenting families need to remind ourselves often that we are privileged to share, hear, and experience things that others will never understand. Families entrust us with these pieces of their lives, and we are *changed*.

The Blue Cotton Gown is a book for caregivers of many capacities and disciplines, but I feel those involved in birth will be especially delighted by it. From this book, we can learn how to *be* more human, and that we are *only* human. To share more would spoil the read!

The Blue Cotton Gown is not a direct tool to be used in class, nor will it educate the reader about any of the nuts or bolts of childbirth education. What it will do is make you laugh, make you cry, make you

think! This is the kind of book that helps fill your cup back up so that, in turn, you have a little more to give the families you serve.

Reviewer:

Lisa Gartin, RN, CD(DONA), LCCE
Fresno, CA

Being Born: The Doula's Role

Author: Jewel Hernandez, with illustrations by R. Michael Mithuna

Publisher: Hohm Press (2008)

Softcover: 32 pages, with 16 full-color illustrations

Cost: \$9.95

Where to order: Online at Hohm Press (www.hohmpress.com) or at Amazon.com

Written for children, *Being Born: The Doula's Role* is a lovely book that contains a complete explanation of the care doulas provide to birthing women. It is filled with gorgeous images that pull the reader in from the initial cover, depicting scenes of doulas and families with a diversity that spans the globe.

The author, Jewel Hernandez, is a certified DONA International doula. In *Being Born*, she gives many examples of who can act as doula, from sister or mother to professional, volunteer or paid. Images reaffirming this variety are included throughout the book.

Being Born aligns with Lamaze International's mission and specifically upholds two of the six Lamaze Healthy Birth practices (“Walk, Move Around, and Change Positions Throughout Labor” and “Bring a Loved One, Friend, or Doula for Continuous Support”). Also shown in the delightful illustrations are babies being born in a wide variety of settings, including water, at home, in hospital, and there's even mention of babies being born in “grass huts.”

Within a childbirth class, *Being Born* could serve as a nonthreatening way of sharing information about doulas, as well as being an essential aid for a sibling-type class.

Reviewer:

Stacie Bingham, CD(DONA), LCCE
Chico, CA

Why Babies Do That: Baffling Baby Behavior Explained

Author: Jennifer Margulis

Publisher: Willow Creek Press (2005)

Hardcover: 95 pages

Cost: \$15.95

To view each of the six Lamaze Healthy Birth Practices (formerly known as the “Six Care Practices That Support Normal Birth”) and to read about the evidence-based research that supports these practices, visit the Lamaze Web site (www.lamaze.org).

To view the Lamaze approaches to pregnancy, birth, and parenting, go to the Lamaze Web site (www.lamaze.org), click on “Who We Are,” and click on “About Lamaze.”

Where to order: Available at local bookstores and through online booksellers

Why Babies Do That is a collection of 40 essays that focus on common yet seldom explored “baffling baby behaviors” that may crop up during baby’s first year of life. Each behavior is introduced with an adorable representative photo and followed by 1–2 pages of informative text. The author, Jennifer Margulis, strikes a good balance, making this book an easy read by infusing it with a bit of humor.

Even though it is a small book, *Why Babies Do That* covers a wide range of subjects. Some topics serve to warm your heart, such as “Why Do Babies Learn to Smile so Quickly and Like to Smile so Much?” or “Why Do Babies Form Attachments to Blankets or Special Stuffs?” Other topics may inspire parents to interact with their child. For instance, in “Why Do Babies Look so Keenly at Human Faces?” Margulis states, “By looking at a face, a baby is setting groundwork to learn language, emotional expression, emotional security, and responsiveness. The strong gaze that is shared by a baby and a mother is also a powerful bonding force.” After reading this section, what parent wouldn’t be tempted to put aside the mobile in favor of a loving gaze?

Finally, other topics in *Why Babies Do That* serve to reassure. In “Why Do Some Babies Bang Their Heads Against the Crib?” a parent will learn that up to 20% of “otherwise normal children will bang their heads for some time,” which is theorized to be a way for baby to self-soothe. Likewise, in “Why Do Babies Like to Play With Their Own Poop?” parents will come to accept this as a natural extension of their baby’s innate curiosity and not an indicator of future behavioral issues.

The hardcover format, beautiful photographs and relatable content make *Why Do Babies Do That* an ideal gift for a new parent.

Reviewer:

Jessica Koester, CD(DONA), LCCE
Parlin, NJ

Your Best Birth: Know All Your Options, Discover the Natural Choices, and Take Back the Birth Experience

Authors: Ricki Lake and Abby Epstein

Publisher: Wellness Central (2009)

Hardcover: 238 pages

Cost: \$22.99

Where to order: Available at local bookstores or online at Amazon.com; overview available at www.thebusinessofbeingborn.com

Your Best Birth is a book about knowing you have choices and then doing the research to make those choices wisely. This is no small matter. First of all, when did *you* actually realize that you had choices in your own life? Was it when you entered into a relationship? Sought higher education? Could it have been when you became pregnant for the first time, or, when raising your children, you learned to give them choices? Authors Ricki Lake and Abby Epstein each made what they thought were the best choices for their first births. In many ways, they did make the best decisions. But for Lake’s second birth, she did more homework, found more choices, and had the kind of birth she truly wanted.

Where is the disconnect for expectant women? Why are so many women blindly choosing the standard protocol when, many times, research does not recommend a particular test or intervention? In *Your Best Birth*, Lake and Epstein ask that question and begin the book with a section titled “Know Your Options.” In fact, the entire book is about knowing your options. Lake and Epstein repeatedly encourage readers to consider their own comfort level with technological birth, examine their fears, ask the hard questions, and then dig even deeper for an understanding of what they are choosing.

Your Best Birth is different from the many books on birth choices in two main ways. First, Lake and Epstein have already prepared their intended audience with their documentary film, *The Business of Being Born*. Those who have attended the screenings around the country already know of the harsh realities of technological birth without supporting medical indication. They are already aware of many of their options. Yet, in *Your Best Birth*, those options are each examined with historical background, stories from Birth Goddesses (women’s experiences of birth from birthing or assisting with birth), the experiences of care providers and educators and doulas, and with the current evidence. The distinctions between medically indicated interventions and routine interventions are made, honoring those times when the lives of mothers and babies are saved by technology. Reading *Your Best Birth*, “you feel empowered because you know all your options and are confident in the decisions you have made about the birth” (p. xxvii). Lake and Epstein wrote the book in response to women they talked with at

the screenings of their film and who “wanted a book that would demystify the natural options that their doctors didn’t present as viable” (p. xxx).

Secondly, celebrities wrote *Your Best Birth*. It is hoped that readers will flock to this information because it is written by celebrities, just as they have mirrored the births of other celebrities who have not made birth choices so intelligently. In the birth activist community, we cherish celebrity births that reflect an understanding of the evidence and a desire for optimal physical and psychological outcomes. We’ve noticed the surge of cesareans based upon urologists in the media claiming better bladder control later in life after cesarean surgery. Lake and Epstein include their birth stories and those of other celebrities, such as Cindy Crawford, Kellie Martin, Melissa Joan Hart, and Laila Ali, who all had natural births.

Your Best Birth is certainly not a book about what to expect when you’re expecting the worst birth. Lake and Epstein are to be commended for doing this impressive work of educating and empowering women to face their fears with questioning, reading, and exploring how truly ecstatic birth can be for them.

Reviewer:

Barbara A. Hotelling, WHNP-BC,
CD(DONA), LCCE
Carrboro, NC

Understanding the Dangers of Cesarean Birth: Making Informed Decisions (The Praeger Series on Contemporary Health and Living)

Author: Nicette Jukelevics, with foreword by Charles Mahan, MD

Publisher: Praeger (2008)

Hardcover: 262 pages, with illustrations and glossary

Cost: \$49.95

Where to order: Available at most major bookstores and online booksellers

Understanding the Dangers of Cesarean Birth puts it right out there in the title, in terms of the ultimate message the author, Nicette Jukelevics, wants to leave you with. This book feels like a combination of other recent books with commentary on the state of maternity care today: for example, *Born in the USA* by Marsden Wagner, and *Pushed* by Jennifer Block. However, Jukelevics’s book provides a much narrower focus on the topic of cesarean birth. Included among the “political” commentary are useful resources for women hoping to avoid a cesarean or to have a vaginal birth after cesarean.

Understanding the Dangers of Cesarean Birth is conveniently divided into five parts: “Background,” “Cesarean Delivery and Its Impact on Mother and Baby,” “Common Reasons for Cesarean,” “Reducing the Risks for Cesarean,” and “Changing the Status Quo.” A glossary, lists of abbreviations, notes, and citations are useful and included, if more information is desired.

In “Part I. Background” Jukelevics accurately paints a picture of where the United States is today in terms of current cesarean rates, the root causes, the truth behind “maternal request” cesareans, and what it means to be an informed consumer of maternity care. Every chapter in the book ends with a section entitled “Especially for Mothers.” I found these sections most useful, full of good questions to ask health-care providers, items to consider when making choices, and suggestions for alternatives and options. I could see maternity consumers using these questions as a guide for making decisions about their pregnancy, labor, and birth.

“Part II. Cesarean Delivery and Its Impact on Mother and Baby” starts with a detailed chapter on the actual surgery, with informative drawings illustrating the various steps of the surgery. I enjoyed the detail of these illustrations. The risks to both mother and baby are well documented, and especially helpful is the section on traumatic birth, post-traumatic stress, and the emotions women may experience post-cesarean, issues often glossed over as insignificant by most of the population today.

In “Part III. Common Reasons for Cesarean,” some of Jukelevics’s personal views seem to sneak in the most. Chapters with titles such as “I’m Laboring as Fast as I Can. . .” identify the situations where women “run into trouble” with the current “one size fits all” maternity system in place at many hospitals across the country. The “Laboring for a VBAC. . .” chapter can be very helpful for mothers who need to respond to fear-based statements from health-care providers pushing for a repeat cesarean or for mothers who are trying to make a decision on their subsequent births.

“Part IV. Reducing the Risks for Cesarean” includes adequate chapters on labor support and coping with pain, but weighs in heavily with longer segments on the midwifery model of care and out-of-hospital birth, areas where the birthing, low-risk mother can really avoid many of the “traps” that lead to surgery. If an expectant woman were already committed to a hospital and obstetrician for her birth, she would benefit from a more

in-depth discussion of how she can achieve a vaginal birth under those circumstances—an area in which I think this book falls short.

“Part. V. Changing the Status Quo” is the briefest section in *Understanding the Dangers of Cesarean Birth*. The *Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative* from the Coalition for Improving Maternity Services is printed in its entirety, along with descriptions, philosophies, and approaches of national organizations (including Lamaze International) that are currently leading the way in support of natural birth.

The cost of *Understanding the Dangers of Cesarean Birth* may make the book an unlikely choice for mainstream maternity consumers who could purchase other less expensive books and receive information that would be just as useful (e.g., *The Official Lamaze Guide: Giving Birth with Confidence* by Judith Lothian and Charlotte DeVries; *Ina May's Guide to Childbirth* by Ina May Gaskin; and *Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Newborn: The Complete Guide* by Penny Simkin, Janet Whalley, and Ann Keppler). In *Understanding the Dangers of Cesarean Birth*, Jukelevics does a good job of putting all the current information and resources about cesarean and vaginal birth after cesarean in one handy place. However, although the book may be useful for the birth professional, the cost might be prohibitive for many.

Reviewer:

Sharon Muza, BS, CD, CDT(DONA), LCCE
Seattle, WA

Your Premature Baby

Producer: InJoy Birth and Parenting Videos (2008)

Format: Three-volume set in DVD and VHS (English and Spanish; closed caption available in English only; Volume 1 – 25 minutes; Volume 2 – 26 minutes; Volume 3 – 27 minutes)

Cost: Three-volume set, \$499.85; each single volume, \$199.95

Where to order: Online at InJoy Videos (www.injoyvideos.com) or call 1-800-326-2082

InJoy productions recently released a three-volume video series, *Your Premature Baby*, designed to educate and support the parent of a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The videos are filmed in a NICU at the University of Colorado Hospital. Each video addresses issues and concerns the parent may have during the different stages of their baby's hospital stay. The videos highlight four diverse, young families with an emphasis on the importance of parental involvement.

Your Premature Baby Volume 1 includes topics such as defining prematurity, preemie appearance, NICU equipment, and common medical problems. *Volume 2* focuses on how to interact with your preemie to include kangaroo care, feeding, and coping with the emotional aspect. *Volume 3* discusses topics related to going home, including segments on preparing for discharge, early developmental issues, and longterm complications.

I was concerned with a few aspects of *Your Premature Baby*. Although these aspects would not deter me from purchasing the videos, they warrant mentioning. In one scene, a mother walks away from her preemie, leaving the crib side rail down. In a second scene, she puts the rail up correctly. The hand-washing technique depicted in the video is inadequate—the video missed an opportunity to demonstrate correct technique, an area that is so important in the NICU. Another scene shows a mother with long, artificial, painted fingernails. The narrator makes a comment on the importance of short nails, but this is not visually demonstrated.

Your Premature Baby does a wonderful job promoting breastfeeding for parents with an infant in the NICU. The information is accurate and up to date. The segment lacks education on the use of pacifiers and their impact on breastfeeding. They are shown extensively both during the hospital stay and after discharge. Using pacifiers during the NICU stay is appropriate, even for the breastfeeding baby, but should be used less frequently after discharge because feedings at the breast are being re-established.

The three-volume series of *Your Premature Baby* provides a comprehensive view on all aspects of a NICU experience. It includes simple explanations and several interviews with a neonatologist who is encouraging and gentle when meeting with a new father. The videos serve to provide a much-needed visual educational tool for parents in the NICU. I would not recommend the videos for a childbirth class. Instead, they would be more applicable when working with individual families.

Reviewer:

Veronica Schaedler RN, IBCLC, LCCE
Dallas, TX

Almost Home: Stories of Hope and the Human Spirit in the Neonatal ICU

Author: Christine Gleason, MD

Publisher: Kaplan Publishing (2009)

Hardcover: 256 pages

Cost: \$26.95

Where to order: Available at most major bookstores and online booksellers

In her debut book, *Almost Home*, Christine Gleason compiles stories from her many years as a doctor of neonatology in several of the best hospitals in the United States, including Johns Hopkins. *Almost Home* is largely a memoir, but reads more like a novel as the author eloquently describes her experiences from her time as a pediatric intern through her successful career as a neonatologist. Rather than using chapters, Gleason separates breaks in the book with individual babies and the stories behind their often-miraculous entrance into life and sometimes their tragic exit as well.

As I began reading *Almost Home*, I found myself wondering how I could possibly identify with the high-tech medical atmosphere in the NICU. Those feelings were quickly dispelled as I continued through the first stories that drew me in with excitement to read more. Gleason, a masterful writer, portrays not only her personal experiences in the NICU, but also her observations of parents' experiences with babies so small and so fragile. Over and over again, I was impressed by Gleason's ability to explain complicated medical jargon with ease and in a way that even a reader with no previous medical knowledge can understand. I was surprised by the vulnerability of Gleason, who shares not only her life as a neonatologist, but also insight into the triumphs and failures of her personal life.

Thinking about the Lamaze International approach to birth, I reminded myself while reading *Almost Home* that the book does not focus on the births that are natural but rather on the very early preterm births that are far from natural birth. I found one disturbing remark about home birth on page 188, as Gleason describes her first month in the NICU at Johns Hopkins. She notes that she had a higher number of admissions to the NICU that month, 75 rather than 50 (the average). When describing some of these admissions, she states, "They had a wide variety of problems—prematurity, birth defects, infections, home births that went badly." This was the only reference to natural birth in the book, and I was disheartened that it was presented with a negative connotation.

In keeping with the Lamaze approach to parenting, Gleason shows true compassion in her dealings with parents. She shares stories of her willingness to fight for the relationship between parent and child,

even when the odds are stacked against her. She describes many critically ill babies, always taking into account the parents' wishes and wants and allowing them to make informed decisions for their babies.

I would cautiously recommend *Almost Home* to expectant parents or as a resource for childbirth classes because it may instill additional fears to those in a vulnerable state of learning. However, Gleason's book proves to be an exceptional read, and I recommend it for anyone in professions surrounding childbirth.

Reviewer:

Melissa Harley, LCCE
Tallahassee, FL

Empty Arms: Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Death

Author: Sherokee Ilse
and

Couple Communication After a Baby Dies: Differing Perspectives

Authors: Sherokee Ilse and Tim Nelson

Publisher: Wintergreen Press, Inc. (2008) – for both publications

Softcover: Just under 100 pages for each publication

Cost: \$9.95 for each publication

Where to order: Online at Wintergreen Press (www.wintergreenpress.com)

In *Empty Arms: Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Death* and *Couple Communication After a Baby Dies: Differing Perspectives*, the focus is the family who has experienced perinatal or neonatal loss by miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death. The books are written from the perspective of families who have experienced perinatal loss; therefore, each book brings an authentic view on this topic.

In *Empty Arms*, Sherokee Ilse takes care to address individuals with many types of loss and to carefully express her own experiences. She offers suggestions for the immediate period of grief and for longterm grieving. Ilse speaks openly and candidly about her experiences with stillbirth and miscarriage.

Couple Communication After a Baby Dies speaks to the perspective of both parents after perinatal loss. It provides sections written by Sherokee Ilse and by Tim Nelson, thus providing a female and male perspective on perinatal death and grieving. One of the best features of this book is the worksheets at the end, with questions for couples to use as a starting point for conversations to deal with their loss.

The childbirth educator can utilize *Empty Arms* and *Couple Communication After a Baby Dies* in two different ways. One is to have these books on-hand to provide copies for class participants who are experiencing perinatal loss. Another is for self-improvement. By reading these books, the childbirth educator can gain a new perspective on teaching classes to those who have previously had a perinatal loss. The books give many suggestions for childbirth educators to acknowledge and discuss prior perinatal loss with class participants.

Over all, *Empty Arms* and *Couple Communication After a Baby Dies* are excellent sources of information on the topic of perinatal loss, and both provide up-to-date, comprehensive resources. The only negative comment that can be made is that there are a significant number of punctuation errors related to apostrophes in *Empty Arms*. *Couple Communication After a Baby Dies* has fewer such errors, but they are still distracting. However, overall, these errors do not change the context or content of the writing.

Reviewer:

Renece Waller-Wise, MSN, CNS, LCCE
Dothan, AL

Fathers At Birth

Author: Rose St. John

Publisher: Ringing Bell Press (2009)

Softcover: 249 pages

Cost: \$19.95

Where to order: Online at Ringing Bell Press (www.ringingbellpress.com) or at Amazon.com

The target audience of Rose St. John's *Fathers At Birth* is fathers who are preparing to support their partner during the prenatal through early postpartum period. Doula and childbirth educators may also find the lists located in the appendix of this book helpful.

The greatest value of *Fathers At Birth* comes from personal stories told by experienced fathers who share firsthand accounts of their insights, emotions, and concerns about pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, and the early postpartum period. Inexperienced fathers may relate to the use of masculine terms such as "mountain," "warrior," and "protector," which are used throughout the book.

Some readers may find the book's illustrations helpful. However, others may be offended by the nakedness or lack of cultural diversity depicted in the illustrations.

Fathers At Birth seems to lack organization in certain chapters as well as an easy flow of ideas and information from one chapter to the next. The descriptions of the emotional components for mothers and fathers during stages of labor are factually correct, but the book lacks specific information for fathers to use to empower mothers to be "mother directed" or to find their "own way." Furthermore, the lengthy discussions of specific breathing techniques for laboring women have been found to be ineffective in recent research.

Providing information to encourage an expectant couple to navigate the birth they want is not addressed in *Fathers At Birth*. Also, the issues of informed consent, questions for the couple to ask the health-care provider and labor and delivery staff, and specific times to "buy time" are not addressed. Providing updated resources and Internet sites would have been helpful.

Resources that fathers could use as they help their partner make an informed decision as to how they will feed their baby would have been very useful in *Fathers At Birth*. While trying to be realistic, the benefits of breastfeeding are presented in an unenthusiastic way.

In light of the fact that there are not a lot of informational books for expectant fathers on the market, *Fathers At Birth* may meet some of those educational needs.

Reviewer:

Marilyn Hildreth, RN, IBCLC, ICCE, CD, LCCE
Brookings, SD

NOTE TO READERS

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TERI SHILLING is the program director for Passion for Birth, a Lamaze-accredited childbirth education program. She is also the creator of The Idea Box for the Creative and Interactive Childbirth Educator.

Interested in writing brief reviews of books or DVDs hot off the presses? Have a new resource you think deserves to be reviewed? Send an e-mail to Teri Shilling (teri@passionforbirth.com).