My Story of Pleasure and Grief

Claire Wyborn

ABSTRACT

This is the story of the home birth of Claire's twins. It is a story of incredible pleasure and devastating loss. It is also a story of love, compassion, validation, and of deep respect in honoring the experience of birth and loss. Claire hopes that every mother who has experienced the loss of a baby will be encouraged to speak out and tell her story. She shares her belief that women need to feel that there is someone out there who can hold them gently and listen.

The Journal of Perinatal Education, 29(1), 6–8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/1058-1243.29.1.6>

Keywords: ecstatic birth; stillbirth; loss and grief

Childbirth is one of life's biggest mysteries. Sure, we can have a good understanding of what happens physiologically, and we do have expectations that there is a live baby at the end of all the incredible physical and emotional work that we do. *But*, that doesn't always happen for everyone who gives birth. We can ask all the BIG questions and sometimes we may find the answers. But then there is that gap in our understanding when we cannot seem to find the answers that we think we need to process the emotions of loss, grief, and deep unending sadness.

This is my story of pleasure and grief. I married very young, and became a mother at 19, with the beautiful home birth of my daughter. Four years later I gave birth to twins at home with the help of two incredible, experienced midwives. My pregnancy was perfect, I carried the babies to term, and chose another home birth as the local hospital would not allow me to birth vaginally.

Labor began in the early hours of the morning, and my midwives arrived about an hour or so before the first twin was born. I was fortunate to have relatively easy labors. I knew what my body was doing.

I knew that I could birth my babies. I just needed to let my body do its job. During my labor I remember the moment when you know birth is close, and I completely surrendered to the power in my body and allowed the dance of birth to fully play out. As my son, my first-born twin, began emerging through my body, in that moment of full surrender I experienced an overpowering orgasm that reached to my fingertips. My body felt so aroused and electrified. It was a defining moment for me, a rush of energy, a rhythm of pleasure. It took my breath away. I wanted to soak for ages in that bubble of sensuality and ecstasy, in that raw moment of humanity of giving birth. To feel so amazing and full of pure pleasure was just mind-blowing.

It wasn't too long, 10 or so minutes before I felt the waves of contractions coming again. I needed to birth my next baby. My second twin, my daughter, was stillborn. I was in no-mans-land. How do you process this? How do you hold a baby that is not alive? What do you say? What do you do? So, so many questions! I felt like I was on auto pilot, watching what was happening, not really there.

This cannot be real. This doesn't happen. How do I do this? My daughter was taken by ambulance too quickly. I wanted to hold her one more time. So, after getting cleaned up and dressed, we made our way to the hospital. I wanted photos of her, I wanted to remember her, so one day I could work this out. Yet all this time, I still had a baby to love and feed and care for and hold. The amazing birth of my son was overshadowed by the loss of my daughter. His birth was undeniably incredibly amazing, but how could I feel pleasure and then feel deep loss and grief with the birth of my daughter, all at the same time?

I have contemplated many times about telling my story, how can I tell someone that I experienced an orgasm while giving birth, like, who does that? And, who wants to hear about a stillborn baby? But, I cannot tell one story without the other. For too long, I had suppressed sharing this birth experience with anyone. Who can I trust with this enormous story, and still feel honored and respected in its telling?

For many years, I yearned to tell my story to someone who would totally understand and "get it" and finally I knew that person was Debra Pascali-Bonaro; I had seen her DVD "Orgasmic Birth" in 2012 and knew I needed to meet her. Debra's work and the

truth of the fact that birth is intended to be pleasurable really resounded with me. It took me 5 years to get to meet Debra in Bali, in 2017. When I asked to share my story with Debra, on the steps at Eat Pray Doula Retreat Bali, I was quite nervous. I felt very vulnerable, but when telling Debra my story, I had never felt so validated and heard. It was such a beautiful moment to share together and will remain very special to me forever. Debra affirmed my experience, with celebration, gentleness, and so much love and understanding. It was such a pleasure to feel that I could honor the truth of what happened in those raw, pleasurable, heartbreaking, and desperately sad moments in my life. She held me in my grief and it was just what I needed but had never received, all those years ago.

Debra celebrated my pleasure and held my pain, and I felt complete in my truth.

If you are reading my story, if you have experienced the loss of your baby, I would love to reach out to you and hold you too. Don't be afraid to feel it, it is real. Find someone you trust to hold you gently and to listen to your story. It doesn't have to be pushed away and hidden. There is healing in honoring your experience.

My daughter Hannah, who would now be 30, has been one of my greatest teachers. The lessons I have learned are invaluable to me in honoring the human experience, whether it be pleasure, disappointment, grief, or sadness.

The biggest lesson is that we need to talk. We need to tell our birth stories. We need to share our pleasure, our grief, our pain and loss. We are vessels of incredible wisdom, comfort, and understanding—storytelling also helps other women, and gives them silent permission to tell their story. To tell the story of the rawness and vulnerability in the beauty of birth, as well as the loss and grief that sometimes happens. Talking about it is validating and healing, all wrapped up together.

In loving honor of my son Aaron and in tender memory of my daughter, Hannah Fenwick born July 25, 1989.

DISCLOSURE

The author has no relevant financial interest or affiliations with any commercial interests related to the subjects discussed within this article.

FUNDING

The author(s) received no specific grant or financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

CLAIRE WYBORN, Brunswick East, Victoria, Australia.