

Rainy Day Philosophy

Living in Southern California has many advantages. One is the absence of snow days and another is the rarity of rainy days. Life slows down for me on a rainy Sunday morning. No place to run to. Horseback riding cancelled. Cat asleep at my feet. The sound of the wind and rain on the roof all cozy in bed with my book momentarily unhooked from the world. It is wonderful to slow down in today's buzzing world of instantaneous information overload and short attention spans.

Then I open my computer to read the amazing notes of my midwife colleagues at Sanctuary attending 4 separate births in the last 24 hours. Maybe there is something to the super moon thing! They post on the board of the natural progress of labor that comes in so many different forms. With calmness born of wisdom they describe what the families are doing at home. Some resting quietly while others are up walking and talking. Some sit or stand in water while others forage in the kitchen for the perfect nourishment to suit their craving. Fathers and doulas and midwives and apprentices and hypnosis experts and children and pets all are choreographing this dance of life. I was speaking to my great friend and colleague, Heather, in the comfort of The Sanctuary Birth & Family Wellness Center, this past week and the following realization just flowed forth.

I have now attended more than a dozen home births and have noticed many differences from my 28 years of attending hospital births. But none is more striking than how the environment affects the traditions and attitudes of the practitioners. In a hospital based birth the primary care giver is almost always a nurse or possibly a CNM. They are bound by policies and procedures that limit individualization. No matter what the desire of the family dictates there is pressure on the staff to complete forms and data entry. They must document "progress" and even encourage intervention when it does not conform to some standardized norm. To not push the process along can bring the scorn of their supervisor. Nurses are encouraged to monitor all sorts of bodily functions and even the most caring have to deny food and interrupt the primordial place a woman should be for the sake of documentation.

Documenting what and for whom? When and why then? Likely for administrative policy, litigation mitigation for that worst case scenario fear, for the next nurse and doctor coming on in the shift practice model or just one of those long habits of not thinking a thing wrong, thus making it seem right. But that is all the consequence of the dominant

trend to look at pregnancy and labor as illness, not wellness.

In this model there is rarely a doctor present until called by the nurse to come in. From experience I think many nurses fear this for woe be unto them for calling the doctor too soon or too late. From my past experience I vividly recall arriving to the labor room from home or office. Invariably, I would now be expected to do something. Many doctors would feel as if they must do something because they are now there. And so there would be vaginal exams and commands to push when no urge was felt. The nurse would receive orders for pitocin and pressure catheters because labor was not following the curve fast enough. Discomfort is difficult for doctors to observe so the wonders of an epidural would be lauded.

It would almost be inconceivable for the doctor to arrive, sit quietly in the corner observing for a while, whisper a few words of encouragement and then quietly leave the woman and her partner alone. The “I am here now so I must do something” mentality is pervasive. It may be the rescuer in us, the fixer or it could just be an impatience born of long hours, frustration, poor rewards and fear. Whatever the reason it is pervasive and is a startling contrast to the calm, nurturing approach of my experiences with home birth.

When I arrive at a home birth after a gentle knock on the door I quietly enter the space with a whispered greeting to the father or other caregivers. I observe the room, listen to the sounds and look at the faces of those present. There is so much vital information there that no machine can tell me. There is an honoring of the process and the woman in labor is on a pedestal. She is a person not an object. The goal of all those around her is to keep her feeling safe and nurtured and in whatever zone will keep her focused on the primitive, instinctual processes of labor. There is no timetable and no hustle and bustle of disturbances. There are only the sounds of nature and family linking us to all those that came before. We are calmly waiting for another generation to enter the world.

The conversation with Heather clarified what had been just a feeling since joining the home birth community and made it a revelation to me. My midwife colleagues have heard me say that no matter how I am feeling before I enter that sacred space of the nurturing birth world I always leave feeling better than when I came in. That was almost never the case when entering even the parking lot at a hospital. It is a striking difference to enter the world of the laboring woman and not feel like I am obligated or entitled to do something. Trusting birth makes it a better world for everyone involved and returns the

joy to my work.

We have all created a safe and cozy space for ourselves. We call it home. On this windy, rainy Sunday there is no place better to be. I am surrounded by familiar sounds, sights and smells and it feels wonderful. It is a metaphor for life and certainly for birth. Building a secure, nurturing support system is good for your life and better for your birth. There is much to be said for returning to the pleasures of sociability and being intentionally unproductive. I would encourage my fellow practitioners to take a deep breath, look about them, walk more slowly and rethink the model which has become so normal and yet so detrimental to the enjoyment of their lives.

Warm Greetings To You All, Dr.F