

Introduction

Each child and each birth has been a blessing and a gift to my husband and me and to our growing family. When I was in my early twenties, I experienced two major back surgeries and was told I would probably never dance again nor be able to carry and deliver any children. This prognosis was devastating to me. Both my dreams of being a dancer and even more important, a mother, seemed dashed.

I was determined to come back and prove them wrong. Did I mention I am quite stubborn? I searched for new directions for my life. I needed to find a way to combine my years of training as a dancer, my love for movement and the human body, and my education in body science and kinesiology.

During graduate school, I was introduced to the work of Joseph H. Pilates. I was humbled and inspired by the work. I was mentored by master teachers (and their protégés) who had worked with Joe and had carried on his work respectfully. I began to train with Alan Herdman and studied under Eve Gentry, Ron Fletcher and Michele Larsson. I was a sponge that absorbed everything that could be taught. With my background and education, I came to understand the work and appreciate its completeness. The work of Joseph H. Pilates continues and evolves with me as I work with clients and other teachers in training to combine all the knowledge that has been brought forth in the field of movement and rehabilitation.

At 28, I became pregnant with our first child. I met with a well established obstetrician (OB) and listened while he spoke in terms of episiotomies, saddle blocks... pulling babies out... I panicked. That was not what I wanted. I left the office confused and scared, wondering if having a child would be survivable.

Fortunately for me, in 1986 I had a client who introduced me to the midwifery program at Herman Hospital in Houston, Texas. Ruth Ann Price, a Certified Nurse Midwife, explained to me how I could give birth naturally and how I could cope with the pain. She taught me self-reliance as she guided me through the hospital protocol and taught me how to make a birth plan (see Sample Birth Plan, page 128). Birth plans were not standard protocol in the medical establishment mainly because they were something new and misunderstood. For me, my birth plan was my creative visualization guide to a healthy, easy, and natural childbirth. Ruth Ann encouraged me to nurse right away and to keep the baby by my side. I also used Ruth Ann for my second birth during which I went into pre-term labor. I knew immediately that something was wrong and quickly went to the hospital. I attribute this body awareness to the Pilates mind-body work I had done. Because I had researched birthing, I knew how to respond. My actions saved Lucas's life. With the permission of my OB, I designed a conservative program to keep my body in tone while I was confined to bed rest for 4 weeks.

Both births were in a hospital with this great midwife and birthing mentor, my loving husband, a birthing plan and my close friend, Debi Russell who was there as support. Those births were peaceful and beautiful. I would encourage all expectant mothers to find a supportive female friend to be present at the birth of their child.

Dr. Nellie Gross and Ruth Ann encouraged me to have my third birth at home with Pat Jones, CNM. For safety, I had a backup OB on call (thank you, Bob) and urge you to do the same if you are having a home birth. Lily was born in an hour and a half in the comfort and peace of my bedroom with my two children and husband. It was so beautiful. Sam read a poem, said a prayer, and cut the cord. I felt no underlying threat or fear of procedures. I found a new power within me that I have to this day. Pat infused me with confidence to do something that was inherently possible.

Eight years later and thousands of miles away from Houston, I found myself 43 and pregnant with the desire to once again have a home birth. It was difficult in Spokane, Washington, to find a CNM for a home birth. I found a midwife, but developed complications which turned out to be an incarcerated uterus. I was sent to meet with an OB from Northwest OB-GYN of Spokane. I prayed the whole way there that I might find a female OB-GYN, but God sent me Dr. Glen Hiss, a great man with the gentle heart of a midwife. Because of the complications, I was reconsidering a hospital delivery. My fears of a hospital birth resurfaced. I was comforted by the words of my father who is a deeply religious man. He always told me I needed to take control of my mind. He meant that I must channel my thoughts, change the negative to the positive and let go of my fears.

During this time, I had a great deal of emotional support from my midwife, Pat Jones, in Houston. I missed having a midwife during the first and second trimesters and she really helped me work through many of my fears surrounding the hospital and my disappointment over my decision of not delivering at home.

Living in the country, I realized that one of the things I had not planned for was the fact that all of my deliveries were progressively faster and more furious. Now I would be making a long drive to the hospital? I prayed for a solution.

One evening while I was watching a news program, a segment was featured about HypnoBirthing™. HypnoBirthing™ is a childbirth education program promoting natural birthing through teaching mothers self-hypnosis techniques for easier, more comfortable births. Marie F. Mongan, founded HypnoBirthing™. I was intrigued and followed up by calling Mickey McReynolds, a local HypnoBirthing™ practitioner. We spent 30 minutes on the phone, discussing the process and I was encouraged that HypnoBirthing™ might help me channel my fears and pain into something positive. She was very supportive and suggested I read the HypnoBirthing™ book, listen to the tapes, and then we could decide as a team what would best fit my situation. Dr Hiss was very supportive of doing hypnosis.

In learning HypnoBirthing™, and using it in Joseph's birth, I found a new source of inner-strength and peace. It was a discovery of a part of me that had been missing; the ability to totally release my fears and focus deeper than I ever thought possible. Applying this to Joseph's birth was some of the hardest work I had ever done.

Everyday I listened to the tapes, practiced my breathing, and talked to my baby. The HypnoBirthing™ breath work is slightly different from my exercise breath work in that for exercise the inhale is used to draw the energy up and the exhale is used to engage the abdominals. The breath work in HypnoBirthing™ is one of relaxing and releasing all tension in the body and mind. I felt calm and more relaxed than I had in a very long time. I have always had a strong connection with each of my unborn children; however, this time the connection was different. I began to realize and accept that this birth was not just a dance of the self, but a dance of two souls joining. This birth wasn't just about me pushing out this child. It was about our relationship and working together. Breathing down into my womb and to my baby; I wanted to allow him to complete his journey in a peaceful and calm manner. We communicated. He not only communicated to me, but to his siblings and father as well. This was a profound experience for our family to share.

Of course, in the true sense of preparedness, Sam and I reviewed the Bradley method for the third or fourth time!

It took me little effort to go under hypnosis. The baby loved this time and when hearing Mickey's voice, would roll and move very gently. Mickey and I worked on specific techniques to totally relax and allow the body to use its own anesthesia to numb any part of my body. We talked of feeling "surges" rather than contractions and

pressure rather than pain. I learned to breathe down to the baby to aid in opening and softening my cervix and relaxing my uterus. When the time came I had a detailed understanding of how my cervix worked. The more I learned and experienced the techniques, the more confident and less fearful I became. My goal was not only to get that baby out, but also to enjoy the journey we would have together. With the other three births, due to the pain, I just wanted get it over with as quickly as possible!!

My doctor was totally supportive when I asked to see the midwife from Northwest OB-GYN and have her present if he could not attend. They both agreed. I met with Sharron Bradley, CNM (another Godsend). I had great confidence in her and I liked her, but more importantly so did Joseph. I rested easier about our hospital delivery. I had a great team, which also included my family and my HypnoBirthing™ coach.

I continued to work weekly on my hypnosis, meditations, and affirmations with Mickey. I exercised using Pilates-based work on all of the equipment (The Reformer, Wunda Chair, Trapeze Table, Ped-a-Pul and Magic Circle). I felt great for being in my last trimester with my fourth child at age 44. Age has not had a significant meaning to me and both my doctor and midwife didn't seem concerned. I also taught three intermediate/advanced Pilates-based conditioning classes a week for ballet dancers during my last 6 weeks. I remember telling Dr. Hiss I wanted two weeks off before Joseph was born and I was gifted those 2 weeks. I was ready.

On the day Joseph would be born, I was practicing my HypnoBirthing™ and meditating and was totally relaxed and felt the need to communicate with him about his birth and the timing. I came out of my hypnosis and my water broke. Sam called our midwife who met us at the hospital. We all anticipated a very fast birth, and we wanted to at least make it to the hospital. I was still having very gentle surges and I was expecting forceful contractions. I knew right away that this labor and birth would be very different and peaceful.

I felt it was important for me to begin listening to my hypnosis tape on the way to the hospital so that I could stay ahead of the pain and remain calm and relaxed. For me, hypnosis made everything feel so surreal. Childbirth wasn't something to get through, but to be cherished. I was excited with the anticipation of holding my child in my arms.

As the evening progressed, my surges were not, and I was beginning to feel discouraged. On one hand, Joseph's heart rate was not affected by the surges, a benefit of hypnosis; on the other hand, I was only dilated two centimeters and very soft. A concern with hypnosis is that you can become so relaxed that the labor actually slows down. Everyone was respectful of our birth plan and wishes. Sharron encouraged me to walk the halls to get my labor started again. She was helping me avoid pitocin, a drug that starts uterine contractions. The important note is that she did not rush me but trusted my process. A kind nurse offered this encouragement, "You will have this baby tonight!" Those words gave me hope and courage.

Mickey arrived at the hospital and joined me on my labor-inducing stroll through the hallways. We reviewed my fears of hospital interventions and once again acknowledged that at least 25% of hospital births end in c-sections. My third fear really surprised me because it was fear of pain or perhaps fear of failure. I apparently equated failure with the lack of my ability to use hypnosis to control my pain. I trusted my doctor and my midwife; however, because of my fear, it was not as comfortable birthing at a hospital as it would have been at home.

Mickey offered support. As we walked, I remained in my hypnotic state, and Mickey assured me I was in control of my body and had the ability to have this baby without procedures. Did I want a C-section? Emphatically, no! Mickey began having me visualize my natural oxytocin (for surges) coming in from my control center

technique for controlling pain and to jump-start my surges. It began to work. We continued to walk and process those fears.

I have long used visualizations and affirmations to help me achieve my goals. I realized I needed to gracefully combine my desire for control and pushing through the pain with the need to let go and flow with gentleness to complete this journey and give birth to my child. I felt my surges move forward as I came to accept this concept. Mickey and I talked about this and how important both parts were for this birth and my life in general. We walked and I surged. We got my labor “going.” Now I needed my “flow and let go” to help breathe my baby down, open my cervix, relax my body; I needed my “control” to help me focus.

Another concern was my ability to control pain through HypnoBirthing™. Could I really give birth without pain or even discomfort? I had worked with Mickey using this technique for several months. Now, could I truly do this? Mickey and I continued to walk while I was in my trance state, and I began to see my control center sending down endorphins, my natural epidural. Pain meds or a pharmaceutical epidural was not an answer for me. I know what pain meds can do to the mother and baby. After two major back surgeries, the thought of a needle in my back and the inability to feel my body was not an option.

I utilized the time-distortion technique, which I had read about and gave myself the suggestion that every five minutes seemed like one minute. I have no idea how long we walked or how long I labored. After working through my issues, I settled into my room and continued the work of dilating my cervix and bringing Joseph down and when Sharron checked me, I had dilated to five centimeters.

Sharron told the nurse, “We will have a baby soon. Bring in the isolette.” I remember thinking, “Really?” It was like I was in a dream and everything seemed so far away. I labored on all fours and concentrated harder than ever before. My time-distortion was working. At times, I came out of my hypnosis and Mickey was there to guide me. At times, I listened to a tape Mickey had made for me and other times, I listened to the birthing music “Peace of Mind” that my husband, Sam had composed. I had birthed all of my children to this music. I kept breathing down to my baby and seeing my cervix open. I used the two parts, focus and flow, to help me through this part of labor.

My nurses and midwife asked Mickey at separate times if she thought I was progressing. I had not moved for about an hour. Mickey assumed I was making progress, but she didn’t know for sure. Sharron returned and wanted to check me. I knew I was in transition because I felt irritable and didn’t want anyone to touch me or talk to me; not even Sharron.

I knew my baby was about to enter the world ,and I wanted to feel his passage from my body into my arms. I came out of hypnosis and clearly remember turning off 80% of my natural epidural. I calmly announced that I could feel the baby’s head. Out of hypnosis, my back labor became intense. Sharron pressed on my sacrum and that immensely helped reduce the pressure. She directed me to a position of comfort. In HypnoBirthing™, the goal is to breathe the baby down. I decided to allow my physicality to take over and push him down. On all fours, I gave birth after only 5-7 pushes. Joseph was born at 11:11 pm on August 11. He was very quiet and lifted his head and looked around without crying, although my family and I were. I felt rejuvenated, joyful, and very calm.

Joseph was immediately placed upon my chest with warm blankets over him. He was so calm. Once the cord stopped pulsing, Sam said a beautiful prayer and then cut the cord. Joseph nursed within 30 minutes and his APGAR was 9.5 out of 10.

My children were so beautiful as they cooed to their new little brother. After Sharron checked him out, Sam gave Joseph to his younger big sister Lily, then Lucas, my second child and finally into the arms of his older sister and second mother, Marie. Marie was 15 at the time and such a wonderful support for us. She truly made my labor easier. His siblings love Joseph and are so gentle with him.

Lily refused to leave my side, and the wonderful nursing staff at Sacred Heart Hospital brought in an extra cot for Lily and Marie, a reclining chair for Lucas, and a floor mat for Sam. My entire family was there with me throughout the night. Marie kept me company while the rest of the family slept. I was so high and so amazed with my new son and felt intensely loved and so very blessed to have such a wonderfully supportive family, Mickey, nursing staff and Sharron.

By birthing in a hospital, I discovered new strengths I would not have by birthing at home. Would I do a home birth again? Yes. Would I do a hospital birth? Yes. I qualify that yes with a must for a supportive team. This includes an open-minded OB, a midwife, nursing staff and of course my HypnoBirthing™ Coach. What a powerful experience! This pregnancy helped me to accept help, to slow down, and to find the patience to take one day at a time.

Pregnancy and birthing weaves through a maze of emotional and spiritual dilemmas to clearly emerge on the other side of our hopes and fears. I believe it is our responsibility, as the receptacle for new souls, to become as enlightened as we possibly can so that our children will have healthier ways to face their own challenges.

As a woman, mother, and wife, pregnancy is a time for intense reflection in all areas of our lives. How we see the world, our lives, and our family will change with each pregnancy and birth.

May this book help you to find your own path.