

The Art of Birth

The Art of Birth

Empower Yourself

For Conception, Pregnancy and Birth

Alexandra Florschutz

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The Art of Birth – Empower Yourself
For Conception, Pregnancy and Birth
Alexandra Florschutz

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**To my son Jude, my greatest teacher,
inspiration, joy and love.
This book would not exist without you.**

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Disclaimer:

Every care has been taken to offer information that is correct, to the best of my knowledge, at the time of writing this book. All art exercises are tried and tested and although these can enable deeper personal insight, they do not guarantee a specific birth outcome. This book is intended for self development and to invite you to see birth as a defining event in your life. It is important to remember that whatever birth intervention you may have already experienced or might be necessary in the future, a healthy baby and mother is paramount. If at any point while reading this book or following the exercises and doing the inner work you feel the need for more support with emotions or issues that may arise, then please consult your doctor; find a suitable therapist/counsellor/art therapist; or you can contact me at alex@theartofbirth.co.uk and I can offer Skype™ sessions or email support.

I use the word 'her' and 'she' throughout the book when I talk about your baby. I find it preferable to using 'it', 'his/her' or 's/he and it includes the masculine.

Affirmations

The Archetypal Affirmations that run through this book have been created by Binnie A. Dansby, the founder of SOURCE Process and Breathwork Therapy, a unique approach to mind, body, spirit development. 'Thoughts to Remember' are also courtesy of Binnie.

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The Truth about Birth

Introduction



✚ Birth can be an ecstatic experience for a woman – a rite of passage

Every Human Being starts Life inside a Woman's body and yet Birth is feared by most Women – and Men. This is not surprising as over 50% of Births in the UK require medical intervention and this statistic is rising. Many of these Births can be traumatic for the Mother, not to mention the Baby. Birth is our entrance into this world and it has an impact that stays with us throughout life. If we can heal the fears, emotional barriers and life diminishing thought patterns that hinder the natural, pleasurable flow of Birth, then we can birth our babies – the future generations of this planet – more peacefully. We can do this by exploring our inner world using Expressive Art to gain deeper clarity and help us create the pregnancy and birth we desire. I have discovered that art and birth are compatible because they are both creative processes that harness our vital life energy. Art is physical, spiritual, intuitive and tangible and offers a valuable way back to our authentic Selves. Through carefully designed art exercises, affirmations, relaxation meditations and pleasure, you will have the tools to navigate your internal landscape and connect to your inherent wisdom. Let us reclaim birth as a rite of passage for Women (and Men) as powerful givers of life. Let us, once again, take Birth into our own hands. My personal story, the catalyst for my positive birth experience and general life change, underpins the book. I also include my art work which charts my creative journey, a parallel journey from conception to motherhood. This exciting and unique book, promises to be not only informative but very much 'transformative' for anyone who is interested in being a conscious person. We are all connected and so we all share the responsibility for supporting a positive outcome for new life and thus creating an overall paradigm shift for birth. If we approach birth in a conscious, positive, loving and gentle way, then we have the opportunity to manifest this shift.

✚ Well begun is half done (Maharishi)

Women have all the physical and most of the emotional responsibility for birth, an enormous life-changing task, and yet they receive very little support or validation for this role. We are collectively accountable for ensuring pregnancy and birth is a positive experience for mother and baby and, of course, for the father. It is assumed nowadays that women just 'give birth' and yet most births could be much more pleasurable. In the west, birth is seen as painful, potentially traumatic or even dangerous and, at times, these assumptions become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The Art of Birth invites you to consider the possibility that pregnancy, birth and parenting CAN happen in gentle and conscious ways that can change the world for future generations. Birth is potentially the most sacred, positive and wonderful experience in the world, even though it involves our full participation, energy and focus.

Through my research and my story I describe how it may be possible to move cultural consciousness about birth, from a fear-based paradigm to one of empowerment linked with a mother's inner world. *The Art of Birth* aims to inspire, educate and support pregnant women, midwives, doulas, childbirth practitioners, fathers, women/couples considering conception, mature women and grandmothers and anyone who is passionate about conscious conception, pregnancy, birth and parenting. It will enhance your emotional wellbeing and move you towards a deeper understanding of your internal world. It provides empowering tools, fun and playful exercises and plenty of information.

By harnessing the creative process, it is possible to release buried thoughts and feelings that may hinder the natural flow of pregnancy and birth, and allow them to gently come to the surface and be expressed in a safe non-judgemental way. May the contents of this book encourage personal change so we can begin to create a new birth model by raising the consciousness that birth is the most fundamental experience of our lives.

Birth matters and what you think also matters

My journey to Bali, Indonesia, in 1998 was the catalyst for this book. Since then I have explored many aspects of birth, read extensively on Pre and Perinatal psychology from leading experts in the field, learned from my practical experience with clients and groups, healed my own personal birth story and share my experience of the birth of my son. My research is underpinned by the marriage of two cultures, East and West and has enabled me to gain a deeper understanding about being a woman in today's world where conception, pregnancy, birth and motherhood have become a controversy. My work with women has allowed me to witness how, through the use of expressive art and personal exploration, they achieve deeper personal insight that has in turn made their pregnancy and birth more fulfilling.

Here are some of the areas we will cover:

-  We will explore ways to have a more pleasurable conception, pregnancy and birth
-  The Art of Birth – tools for empowerment to clear the way
-  Fun creative exercises, visualisations, journal work, poetry
-  The importance of fathers, partners and supportive relationships
-  Positive Birth Stories and their power to heal and inspire
-  Healing our own birth
-  Reclaiming our true female power through birth

- ✚ Affirmations for birth – what you think matters
- ✚ History of birth psychology
- ✚ The Goddess within
- ✚ Feminine Sexuality (in its broadest sense)
- ✚ Spiritual pregnancy, birth and beyond using our intuition as guidance
- ✚ What to do if something goes wrong – looking at the bigger picture for support
- ✚ Find an independent midwife/doula/support who has a positive outlook of birth

The birth experience profoundly impacts both mother and baby. Although we may not be consciously aware of how our own birth shapes us, we are certainly influenced by it at cellular and unconscious levels. Birth creates a blueprint for our development. We take in an enormous amount of information during the first days and weeks of life, which in turn has a major effect on the ways in which we experience and respond to circumstances and people in our life.

✚ **My body is safe, even though I may be feeling afraid
(Binnie A. Dansby)**

We have a large amount of technical/medical support for pregnancy and birth, yet offer very little emotional support for an expectant mother – and father. Pregnancy is a time of change in all respects, yet it is rarely acknowledged as being anything but a medical procedure. Research by leading experts such as Grantly Dick-Read and Sue Gerhardt, indicates that anxiety and fear during pregnancy not only affects the neurodevelopment of the foetus but also diminishes the mother's wellbeing and ability to give birth easily. What causes fear? It is usually fear of the mysterious power that surrounds birth, the potential pain and the many unfortunate stories about birth in our culture. We have, mostly, lost the ability to 'trust' our body/self and our intuition. I believe a woman will know exactly what to do if allowed to deeply trust the process.

✚ **Whether you think you can or you can't, you are right**

When we relax and trust our body, expansion is more likely and relaxation reduces pain. This sounds very simple in theory but if the general consensus is that birth is an ordeal, why would one 'relax'? Other contributing factors that may generate fear are previously unresolved traumatic births that become activated in subsequent pregnancies. Our own birth into this world will also be potentially activated in various forms; after all, it was our first birth experience. Most births are not given the reverence they deserve. Difficult life experiences may surface at this time and manifest as emotional obstacles, and yet there is no immediate support or outlet for these experiences.

Healing our life stories can have a hugely positive impact on our current birth. I know I would not be writing this book if it wasn't for all the support I received during my pregnancy, for all the art I made and how I processed my story. It was my most prolific time

creatively and I produced extraordinary paintings which explored many of my unresolved issues... as I later discovered! I found making art was a spontaneous process and a great comfort that definitely supported my amazing birth outcome. Finding creative outlets to express any thought or feeling, however big or small, can really help free the way. If we take time to engage with our pregnancy and listen to our thoughts, we can work towards changing these thoughts from self-limiting to life-enhancing.

‘Do the work you need to do on yourself. Our fears around birth can take over when we are in the altered state of consciousness that labour brings. It is essential to really get to the root of and clear these limiting thoughts, not just suppress them. When women are truly approaching birth from the right space, they tend to make choices that will support them.’
(Roma Norris)

I have found that creative expression is the easiest and most pleasurable way to connect to our deeper selves and promote personal growth. We could say Art is a useful bridge between our internal and external worlds, with a concrete object as evidence. Art Making can be a fun way to explore our pregnancy while indirectly uncovering our inner world. It also offers us a constructive self-soothing ‘time out’ where we can tune into our baby and our body and receive its wisdom.

 **Fear is created in the mind and can be resolved by the mind**
(B. A. Dansby)

In the West today, many midwives have had to become obstetric nurses who follow doctor’s orders. Andrea Robertson, consultant in childbirth education and pioneer says, ‘birth is a normal bodily function for a woman that requires a conducive environment and an experienced companion to watch for problems that may occasionally develop’ (Robertson, A. 2002, Vol 5, No 7). Women possess ancient wisdom as birth keepers. Why are we not given more support and reverence as life givers? We all started life inside a woman and were born – even men! Many of us have lost our connection to the great earth mother who stands before us as an invisible but nonetheless powerful archetypal beacon. Carl Jung speaks of archetypes as being ‘inborn forms of “intuition” which are the necessary determinants of all psychic processes’. They deal with the ‘universal, inherited contents beyond the personal and the individual and they correlate with each other’ (Hyde, M & McGuinness, M 1992).

How can we – women – believe once again in our own creativity and not fear our power to bring new life into this world? If we do not reclaim our body and our personal power we cannot blame the medical profession for taking over. According to Robertson, it is possible for most women (85-90%) to have a normal birth because nature has designed our bodies to do the job effectively. Nature sometimes has her own agenda which we cannot always change but by removing psychological barriers, we may prevent unnecessary complications. She believes ‘birth is so safe and easy that almost always, any woman anywhere in the world, with no special education, training or experience, is capable of producing the next generation’ (Robertson, A. 2002, Vol 5, No 7). She advocates that pregnancy and birth happen by themselves and so can birth, and that midwives are there to support the woman who inherently knows what to do. She argues that the natural pain of labour is essential and empowering, and promotes the home as the most natural place to give birth. Shiela Kitzinger says that ‘the right place to give birth is the right place to make love’ (Pre & Perinatal Psychology Conference, Toronto 1983). Home births are cheaper and there is

plenty of research that shows how safe these are when compared to hospital births, with less intervention, less pain relief, virtually no separation between mother and infant post partum and lower mortality rate (British Medical Journal 2000, March 18; 320(7237): 798).

Additionally, the overuse of labour drugs, particularly in hospital, is greatly reduced with home births. Even though there is no evidence that any drugs are safe during pregnancy or labour, the first advice from hospital wards at the onset of labour is to have a Paracetamol and relax! (Haire, D. 1994 – cited in Robertson, A). I am not suggesting everyone must have a home birth in order to have a 'good birth' because it takes preparation and not everyone feels confident enough. If possible, you should give birth wherever you feel most comfortable and supported.

It is safe for me to feel all my feelings (B. A. Dansby)

We now have extensive evidence of prenatal memory and that the aural capacity of the foetus develops around sixteen weeks gestational age, which means that the foetus is able to learn from the senses (including taste and olfaction) as well as the emotional state of the mother and her environment (Chamberlain, D. B. 1998). The way in which we are born leaves an imprint in our body on a cellular level and on our unconscious. Dr Leboyer pioneered the idea of 'birth without violence' in the 1970's which compliments Chamberlain's theory of 'traumas arising in the womb and at birth' (<http://birthpsychology.com/person/david-b-chamberlain>). Natural childbirth is less traumatic for baby and mother and leads to a more harmonious interaction. 'We must keep in mind that it is the child's first experience of life' (Dr Leboyer 1991, p140), so it is our duty to try and make this transition as easy as possible.

Pregnancy can be a time of great ambivalence. Joan Raphael-Leff puts it quite simply; 'To successfully negotiate the journey between being someone's child to becoming someone's parent, the pregnant woman and her partner, if she has one, will have to come to terms with mixed emotions and great shifts in the structuring of their sexual, couple, and personal identities' (Raphael-Leff 1995, p171). She emphasises the benefits of therapy or personal exploration during this time of great change because pregnancy can reactivate a 'past traumatic legacy' which therapy can help to work through. Prenatal therapy can also help to reduce 'the likelihood of postnatal depression and suicidal attempts, possibly preventing obstetric complications, and pre-empting the long-term effects of pathological parent-baby interactions, child abuse, and emotional neglect' (Raphael-Leff 1995, p171). 'There is evidence of increased incidence of anxiety and depression in pregnancy' (Gelder, N., Mayor, R., Cowen, P. 2001) and not just in the UK. However, the risk does not fall equally on all pregnant women. 'Mental disorders are more common in pregnant women who have a past history of psychiatric illness, family psychiatric history, past obstetric/gynaecological complications and C-section' (Scott, J., Jenkins, R. 1998). With these and many other possible experiences in mind, it seems vital that we treat the time between conception and birth conscientiously for all women in order to lay the foundations on which the future human being can grow, and to ensure a more pleasurable experience for the mother.

I hope you have enjoyed this sneaky preview into my book *The Art of Birth – Empower Yourself for Conception, Pregnancy and Birth*. If you would like to read more, please visit www.theartofirth.co.uk or go to Amazon. Thank you, with love, Alex xx