

I remember Atzin's birth so clearly...Soon he will be three years old and I am so glad for the vivid memories I have of his coming into the world...of my coming into the world as a mother...

The birth of my son was an empowering and transformative experience. Wanting to enter deeply into the experience of pregnancy and birth, I trusted my instincts and discovered the knowledge that exists within all of us. My deep personal commitment to natural childbirth, along with the strong emotional and practical support of my husband Alejandro and staff at the birth center created a beautiful birth experience for our family.

I had lost my father and two siblings by the age of 24 and so the birth of my first child at 29 was a spiritually healing experience. I tapped into the tremendous energy of new life and found great strength in the image of birth as a shared journey. If one remembers that each contraction is massaging the baby, stimulating the little muscles and preparing the baby for birth then there is a greater sense of purpose to the pain. I wanted to be profoundly present during the birth, for my child and for myself. Why is it that we are told to avoid medication, caffeine and alcohol during pregnancy only to be dosed with drugs to numb our pain, numb our awareness, numb our inner strength?

Alejandro and I lived in Tijuana, Mexico and so several days before the due date, we crossed the border to stay with our friends Tony and Kristine who lived near the Best Start Birth Center in San Diego. Sarah, a close friend of mine had come from Australia to be with us during the birth as neither Alejandro or I had family nearby.

We were having dinner when I felt my first contraction. I had been having Braxton Hick's contractions for a couple of weeks but this one was different. Previously, I had felt a tightening of my belly but this time, I felt some mild pain. I knew that this was probably the beginning... I was feeling relieved and excited. I quietly went within myself but everyone noticed my departure... After a brief interlude of silence, everyone resumed eating, talking and laughing.

It was a full house that night and everyone was excited about the possibility that 'tonight would be the night...' "Wake us up if anything happens," said Tony. Just after midnight, I felt a steady trickle down my inner thigh. I laughed to myself, Alejandro had just gone to fetch a towel in case my

waters broke and sure enough, my waters broke! I was even more intensely relieved and excited as I felt the gush of water. I stood there with my legs wide apart, soaking the towel beneath me. Alejandro went to awaken our sleeping companions to share the news of breaking waters in the spare room! I had never imagined that my waters breaking would be such a comical moment but everyone was so excited and eager to help that I could only laugh and shed a tear!

After the excitement simmered and everyone went back to bed, I took a shower. The hot water felt good on my back. We called the midwife and Gerri, then a doula. I remembered Gerri telling me that it would be a good idea to rest as much as possible in the early stages of labor so with excitement in my heart, I sensibly returned to bed and dozed.

In the morning, I awoke with an intense desire to go the sea. The day before, I had awoken at 5am with the same urge to go the sea but we did not follow through. This day, I was determined to go and so we packed up the car with all that was needed for the birth center and on the way we went to Torrey Pines beach. I wandered about in the shallow water as Alejandro played a drum on the sand...

Alejandro and I had planned to make a welcoming ceremony for our child - a ceremony of three waters to symbolize our coming together. The first water came from my country of birth, Australia. My mother went to the beach and collected the water for us. The water arrived in a little glass bottle. The second water I collected with my husband Alejandro during the early stages of labor at Torrey Pines beach. The third water, we intended to collect from a beach in Mexico, in the company of our newborn child...

After our sojourn on the beach, we went to the birth center to see how I was progressing. The labor was moving rather slowly and I was advised to take cod liver oil. We returned home and crawled into bed. I curled up in Alejandro's arms and slept deeply.

At 4pm I woke up with strong contractions. The castor oil (much more palatable if taken in a fruit smoothie) did its job of clearing my system and stimulating the labor. I ran to the bathroom. We went into the back garden and followed the rhythm of the contractions. I remember looking at the green grass as I got down on my hands and knees. Alejandro was there at my side, my rock. I needed nothing more than to lean on him in those extending

moments of pain. He was such a reassuring presence as was Sarah who quietly stood by.

We walked from the house to the corner of the street, stopping every now and then for a contraction. I remember seeing a woman sweep the verandah. Her children had just gone inside and her reassuring glance told me that she knew what was happening. Alejandro gave me all the support I needed as the wave of each contraction emerged and receded. By 8pm we were on our way to the birth center. The contractions were coming much more frequently and growing in intensity.

We arrived to the welcoming faces of Gerri, our doula and Greta, the midwife. Winnie, the nurse who had also been my birth course instructor, arrived later. I had arranged for a doula to be present at the birth because there had been a possibility that my husband would not be able to attend the birth. I remember thinking that now he was there, I probably wouldn't need a doula so much. I was so wrong! Gerri's constant presence helped me find my way in this new place of being. She was a guiding light who helped me stay deeply connected to my own inner light. An older woman and mother of four, Gerri shared her knowledge and wisdom with me, a younger woman in the process of becoming. She helped me access the source of my own inner strength. Once I felt that deep awakening, I could channel my energy. At one point I began to feel overwhelmed but she helped me engage with that feeling and reconnect with my stronger self. I was acutely aware of the pain but never did I wish for medication, birth was happening and I wanted to be present in all my being.

Before long, I was in hard labor. I remained very focused on breathing and exploring different positions. Metaphorically, we held hands, my baby and I. We were in this together, journeying towards each other.

By midnight, Alejandro and I were sitting in a tub of warm water. It was soothing, the warm water and his embrace. He was completely still, holding me in his arms. I was deep inside myself and yet completely aware of the presence surrounding me - Gerri, Greta, Winnie and our friends Sarah, Tony and Kristine. Seven candles lit the room, a candle for each of the seven chakras. They were tall thick candles that we wanted to carry into the years ahead, to be lit on special days, on ordinary days - a way for our family to reconnect with the transformative energy of birth. As Atzin's head was

beginning to crown, a tall white candle was lit, a candle that my mother had sent to us, a symbol of her presence.

When my husband had come to join us in San Diego (Sarah and I had crossed the border a few days earlier), he had carried one item in his pocket. It was the cassette of music he had composed for the birth. We had brought several of our favorite CD's (and instruments) to the birth center but all I wanted to hear was the mesmerizing sound of Alejandro playing ocarinas, bamboo flute and udu, an African clay drum. At one point, when the music stopped, I asked for someone to rewind the cassette player. At another point, someone was looking for a video camera battery. No one expected to hear the location of the battery mentioned by me! All was quiet and I was deep within myself but I still felt very connected to the world. I remember hearing laughter and surprise in the voices around me as my practical self reached out from the intimacy of my birth space.

During this final stage of labor, deep primal sounds emerged from my being. It was a great release for me. Atzin's head was crowning for 1 1/2 hours. Between contractions I almost drifted off to sleep, conserving my energy for the next pushing phase. Finally, Atzin emerged from my body and was placed on my chest. As he cried with his first breath, I cried with relief and amazement at what we'd been through. It was all over...

It was all beginning...

Atzin Acalli...water...one who floats on water...

Recommended reading:

**Our Babies Ourselves: Biology and Culture Shape the Way we Parent*
Meredith Small

**The Continuum Concept: In Search of Lost Happiness* Jean Liedloff

**Reclaiming the Spirituality of Birth: Healing for Mothers and Babies*
Benig Mauger

Recommended video:

**Birth Day with Naoli Vinaver Lopez and family (2001)*

For Atzin, Singer of the Deep Song

When water decided to become your
soul and join with all of heredom,
we listened with our thirst, that bright early morning,
for your arrival. You arrived in our now where we all flow.

A man who once lived by the sea said that humans are a fancy
way for water to get around. When you passed through the veil,
that unforgettable morning, from your dear mother and father's elements
you were more than fancy. You were all the elements dancing and
singing while San Diego slept. But we, awake to your arriving,
held you in our arms that thirsted for the flowing wonder
that you are and will always be.

When you arrived you did not cry out in pain but
opened your eyes and soul to the vision of all
the seasons of your life before. Even before you
learned the vowels and consonants you knew how to sing
the deep song, you knew how to hold it gently in your arms.

It has been said that the soul is a boat. What a magician you are, then,
to be both the source of the boat's levitation and the boat itself.
Sail on, Atzin, sail on.

Tony Allard,
June 2001

Welcome Song – for Atzin

Where did you come from,
water child? Are you a spring
that slithered through the mouth
of a mountain? A star-filled stream
that threaded silver
through the roots of trees?
Or are you a river that spread
yourself over the big earth
that invented you? We heard
your voice one night, and it was
such a fresh sound,
small stones warbling
on the shore. The pearl bowl
of the moon dipped
into you to fill itself, and
a dragonfly welcomed you
with her colored glass wings. All
the thirsty mosses and wandering seeds
are glad to see you here.
We are all so happy
you have come,
child, wherever
it is that you are from.
Welcome home
to our rooms and our tables.
Welcome
to all our arms.

Lisa Stouder

Biography

Name: Mary-Ann Murnane
Address: 873-4 Paseo Playas Secc. Monumental
Playas de Tijuana, BC 22200
Mexico

Tel/fax: 011 52 664)609-6842
USA Cel: 619)894-0665 (Tuesday and Thursday)
Email: cantoalauna@yahoo.com

Birth Companions

Child: Atzin Acalli Espino-Murnane
Husband: Alejandro Espino Aldana
Friends: Tony Allard, Kristine Diekman, Sarah Tuke
Midwife: Greta
Doula: Gerri Ryan
Nurse: Winnie Sunshine

Alejandro, Atzin and I live in Tijuana, Mexico. We play music professionally as 'Arbol Azul' (Blue Tree), a Latin American folk music trio. In 2002/03 we toured the US presenting our assembly program 'Canto a la Luna: A Musical Journey through Latin America' to 400 schools. We also teach piano and guitar in our home studio. In 2004, I intend to complete my M.A. in Performance Studies. Atzin's recent activities have included: making a stone piano at the beach, talking to his imaginary monkey who lives inside a pan-flute and visiting the bakery to buy sweet bread.