

Book Reviews

Brought to Earth by Birth. Hartigan, H. (2008) Eugene, OR: Motherbaby Press. 93 pages. ISBN 978-1-890-44642-0

Harriette Hartigan is a photographer and midwife who has passion for the subject of birth. In *Brought to Earth by Birth*, she depicts birth experiences visually through black and white photography and with words describing the mystery and unique relationships that emerge in the process. Her photo essay is depicted with compassion and graciousness. She captures the beauty, the intensity, and the connections to the birth journey with chapters reflecting on pregnancy, labor, birth, and the newborn. The pregnancy spiral embedded in the pages throughout the book could also double for the opening spiral of birth and lens of the camera. One has the sense that Harriette truly respects, and understands as a mother and midwife the mighty work it takes to birth. She also values the photographic image to record and tell a story triggering memories and emotions of the experience.

The book resonates with APPPAH'S belief about the profound importance of connection and relationship. As Hartigan demonstrates, birth is the experience of a lifetime where we face the wonders of creation. Her images express relationships and honor the birth process within – describing connection to self, to other, and to the world. The effort, the required concentration, and the exploration of inner and outer realms are depicted during the intimate moments of birth. Hartigan shows us how this important journey of connection begins with conception, and how it continues to have impact during the birth process and throughout life. In this sense, her photography is purposeful – a visual journal for all to see, review and remember to appreciate the journey. As an artist, Hartigan truly respects, and understands, the mighty work it takes to birth. Her pictures embrace the beauty of pregnancy, connections to place, experience, and to the power of the feminine. The images bring back memories for both those who have delivered, or those who have not been delivered.

I appreciated Hartigan's emphasis on the importance of connection, however the photos at the beginning and the end of the book surprised me. In her opening image, I would like to have seen the mother welcome her baby open eyed and at the end of the book I would have liked to see, not just the eyes, but also the connection of baby to

other. Hartigan comfortably portrayed male participation in birth and women being supported by their partners. The men seem involved, working, and engaged in honoring the process. Medical imagery is not obtrusive. Vernix covered infants and the alert newborns are shown in their perfection. Artistic, black and white curves of the belly and stylized figures are depicted and perhaps could have been expanded to be included at the beginning of each chapter. The photographs demonstrate that childbirth is empowering. In Hartigan's images, birth is not just an intellectual experience but also a kinesthetic and emotional one. Her images transmit this directly to the viewer – touching emotions, knowledge and memory.

Hartigan's narrative is interspersed with quotes from well-known people, clients, and herself – capturing the essence of thoughts and allowing the reader the space to explore their own experience.

The strength of the book is the empowering depiction of meeting the task of birth positively. Hartigan helps us remember the gift of life by showing confidence in the process and miracle of our bodies from the beauty of pregnancy, to the trance of labor and welcoming the newborn. The images depict not only the pregnant woman's journey but also the roles of friends and supporters to encourage, touch, and love so that birthing women can do their work throughout conception, pregnancy, labor, and birth.

This is not a how to book on labor and birth. It is a book for medical personnel, nursing, sociology psychology and medical students, midwives, and expectant couples. It will mean different things for different people and allow for personal exploration and reflection of the birth journey, whether our own personal birth story or a recent birth experience. It is a book to be read sequentially.

There is space in the pages that could become a photo journal for pregnant women or couples. It is a gift to expectant couples and those wanting to explore the theme of birth through words and images. Whether in anticipation of giving birth or years later, it is a wonderful book to reflect upon, review and relive experiences.

Through photography and words Hartigan describes and reinforces belief in our capacity to deliver babies – to encounter painful places and trust the body to let go and do what is intended.

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