

# Great Expectations

## Homeopathy's Role in Childbirth

by Mary Aspinwall

The Salmon proving started in 1994, I was one of 20 provers. A recent tally revealed that 10 of these provers (or their partners) had given birth or become pregnant since then. When one thinks of the life story of the Salmon it should come as no surprise that fertility is so central to the remedy. Seven years ago, just before Christmas, I was in the same expectant condition and since Christmas seems an appropriate time for a birth story, here is one I wrote shortly after our beloved first-born arrived:

### "GREAT EXPECTATIONS"

Our first baby was to be born in London, at home in our bedroom, with a fire roaring in the grate. Lavender oil would burn soothingly in the background. There would be a constant supply of hot water for long luxurious en-suite baths. Homoeopathic remedies with Alice-in-Wonderland labels stood on the shelf, "Mother weepy...Help me." "For second wind." "I hate you." "This is all your fault." "Don't touch me." They said, amongst other things. The bed was thrown out, in case anyone had the temerity to suggest that I lay down on it. This was to be an active birth. My head was full of well-rehearsed yoga positions and breathing, breathing, breathing.

Expecting, they say. She's expecting. I was expecting...but, I wasn't expecting to be ordered to hospital, to be sliding down the icy pathway in my dressing-gown and slippers, in the thickest pea-souper London had seen for decades, at five in the morning. To be sitting in the back of an ambulance, skidding hither and yon at ten miles an hour. To be taking great lung fulls of gas and air and to be, hush my mouth, enjoying it.

The Labour ward was on the thirteenth floor. The gas and air was working so well that I didn't even fret about the tale I'd heard of the woman who got stuck between floors and was delivered by her husband's best friend, whilst the husband ran about like a headless chicken trying to find them. Although I gave it a fleeting thought as the porter wheeled me out. Seeing a mother holding her new-born to her breast, I pointed at her like a football hooligan, shouting, "I want one of them." High spirits. Perhaps because I wasn't expecting that having already been in labour for two days that there were still another six head-banging hours to go.

Coming up for the sixty hour mark, I asked if someone could get the ventouse. I had decided enough already with natural child-birth! There was one, but no-one was quite sure how to use it. **They had forceps. At the sight of them, suddenly my resolve returned and I finally remembered the little bottles. I took one "Mother weepy...Help me" (alias Pulsatilla 200c) and one "For second wind" (Arnica 200c) and to everyone's astonishment a child was born within two minutes.**

Admittedly a blue one with a nasty-looking ridge in its forehead, who was immediately whisked off to be sorted out, but... A GIRL. She came back to me from the ministrations at the stainless steel table to lie on my belly. Pink now, but the photo opportunity passed us by. The camera poised for action, sat at home on the shelf.

She was named Martha after an old Tim Buckley song that I love, about an old flame that rings up his, by now, married ex and tries to entice her out for coffee with him:

"Those were days of roses,  
Of poetry and prose,  
And Martha all I had was you,  
And all you had was me.  
There were no tomorrows,  
We packed away our sorrows,  
And we saved them for a rainy day."

Our days of roses had begun, Martha, although for a while I called you Marmoset, because it suited you better.

The coq au vin, put into the oven, on low, with the first strong contractions, had now been cooking for a record three days and I was ready for it. The whole pot. I had missed lunch and turned my nose up at what passes for dinner in such institutions, because I had been expecting they would let me leave at any moment. Within the hour I would be up to my ears in that delicious gravy, mopping it up with chunks of crusty, old, reheated French stick.

I waited obediently for our permission to be excused. Permission denied. Surprise, surprise, I had a temperature. It might have been an infection or it might have been the fact that the place was heated to

Finnish sauna level and that having run the equivalent of two full marathons, gynaecologically speaking, I hadn't had the strength to open the patient-proof windows. I pointed this out, but being on the verge of tears at the thought of my disintegrating Coq au vin, I sounded as weak as the proverbial kitten and did my case no good at all. I was to stay in, at least over-night.

I begged pathetically for food and they said, "Haven't you just had dinner? ", but grudgingly rustled up two tiny packets of Special K low calorie breakfast cereal. It went against the grain to eat it. I munched glumly. All my life I had sought out maximum calorie content, for all I knew I might expend more calories chewing the stuff than I would actually gain.

Martha and I spent a fitful night in our own private oven. She in her little see-through plastic box, me precariously perched on my high narrow bed. Occasionally she would wake crying and I would put her tenderly to my breast, where she howled like a banshee. From nowhere, nurses sprang forth offering conflicting advice on how to "latch her on"; proffering bottles of formula; suggesting (horror of horrors) that they take her away to the nursery, so that I could get some well-deserved rest. I explained separation was not an option. We were an item.

At 6 am, just as deep sleep settled upon our weariness, we were woken by the breakfast trolley. Hunger wiped out irritation at the early morning call, but once breakfast had been devoured and temperatures checked, further sleep eluded us. Time crept along. Much later than expected our hero came to rescue us from the fog-bound tower, sheepishly carrying a white plastic laundry basket stuffed with a couple of old blankets. "Sorry I'm late. Couldn't find the Moses basket any where." So pleased was I to see our means of escape that I didn't even snap, but beatifically bestowed my sweetest Madonna (and child) smile. Surely Martha was just as keen as I was to get home. We would both be more relaxed and then the feeding would just...happen.

Cut to the living-room. A fire burns brightly in the grate. A mother rocks determinedly back and forth in her nursing chair, a thoughtful gift from her mother-in-law. As she rocks she weeps. From a far-flung corner of the house her daughter weeps too.

This feeding business. This basic, rudimentary feeding business had not just...happened. Martha had only to smell me and she screamed blue murder. When I put her to my breast she notched the volume up to double blue murder. When her Dad took her on endless circuits of her new home the wailing reduced to an almost tolerable level, at least from where I was sitting it did.

We endured this for three days. I narrowly avoided mastitis with a timely dose of Bryonia and then "the milk came in" and saved our collective sanity. From that day forth Martha became a prodigious guzzler, the star turn of the NCT breast-feeding support group. It was easy ... no muss, no fuss, if she showed the slightest sign of discontent, I stuck her up my jumper.

Some visitors were surprised by the choice of name. "You don't hear that very often these days," they said, then fearing I might take it amiss, added

" Lovely old-fashioned name." One said, "Mary and Martha ... the two sisters who cared for Jesus. How biblical. I didn't think you were particularly religious." It came to me from the mists of time that Mary was Mary Magdalene, ex-prostitute turned Jesus freak, whose poor sister did all the cooking and cleaning only to be told (rather unfairly, I always felt) that she had her priorities askew. Sure enough when I checked it out in that (never once consulted) Book of Names I found to my consternation that Martha was indeed the patron saint of housewives. I comforted myself with the thought if ever a housewife needed divine intervention, 'twas I.

## **HOMOEOPATHY'S ROLE IN CHILDBIRTH.**

The truly divine interventions of my story, of course, were those of the remedies and when Martha was two, I designed a kit called "Specifics for Childbirth" to try to encourage more women to turn to homoeopathy to ease the often challenging passage of new lives into this world. My aim was to squeeze the most vital information on to one double-sided A4 sheet and stick it in a box of the most vital Childbirth remedies.

Constitutional treatment during pregnancy is of enormous benefit to both mother and belly-dweller. It is a great preparation for labour and reduces the likelihood of complications. However, it is also wise for the mother to be prepared and have the main acute remedies to hand at least two or three weeks before the due date and to encourage her birth assistant to read through information about the remedies well before labour starts. Below are some excerpts taken from the leaflet, if you are pregnant as you read this please forgive the necessary focus on the dysfunctional!

### **COMPLAINTS**

#### **Before labour:**

ANXIETY, anticipatory, Aconite 200, Gelsemium 200

FEAR, after previous bad birth experience, Cimicifuga 200

BREECH presentation, Pulsatilla 200 (at 36th week)

TRANSVERSE lie (at 36th week), Pulsatilla 200, Arnica 200

INDUCTION alternative to, Caulophyllum 200

PANIC about birth, Aconite 200,

**During labour:**

BLEEDING

bright red, hot, profuse, constant, Ipecac 200

with nausea or gasping for breath, Ipecac 200

alternates with contractions, Pulsatilla 200

dark Gelsemium 200, Ipecac 200, Secale 200

dark and fluid, Secale 20

as a preventative against, in long labours, Arnica 200

CERVIX

fails to dilate, Caulophyllum 200 or Cimicifuga 200

half open or hard, Sepia 200

rigid, Gels 200, Chamomilla 200, Cimi 200, Caul 200

remains tightly closed, Cimicifuga 200

wide open, but contractions stop, Gelsemium 200

CONTRACTIONS

atonic (flabby) weak, Caulophyllum 200 or Gelsemium 200

slow or stop, Caulophyllum 200 or Gelsemium 200

alternate with bleeding, Pulsatilla 200

extend to back, buttocks, Kali Carb 200 or Cimicifuga 200

extend to thighs, Caulophyllum 200 or Cimicifuga 200

move up the back, Gelsemium 200

move from side to side, Cimicifuga 200

finish at the throat with choking sensation, Gelsemium 200

push the baby upwards, Gelsemium 200

prolonged tonic contractions, Secale 200

lack expulsive power (esp. second stage) Pulsatilla 200

fine, needle-like up from cervix, Sepia 200

"hour glass" contractions, Chamomilla 200, Secale 200, Sepia 200

cease and bleeding starts, Cimicifuga 200, Pulsatilla 200, Secale 200

painless, Gelsemium 200

strength weakened by fruitless efforts, Secale 200

#### EXHAUSTION

with no other symptoms, Kali Phos 200

during long or difficult labours, Arnica 200

causes contractions to stop, Caulophyllum 200

with backache labour, Kali Carb 200

with unbearable pains, Chamomilla 200

with weepiness, Pulsatilla 200

with long contractions, Secale 200

better for moving around, Sepia 200

#### LABOUR

slow, Caulophyllum 200, Pulsatilla 200 or Sepia 200

slow, long and painful, Arnica 200

too fast or violent, Aconite 200

OXYGEN STARVATION, mother or baby, Carbo Veg 200

POSITION of baby abnormal, Pulsatilla 200 or Aconite 200

POSTERIOR PRESENTATION Kali Carb 200

VIOLENT (fast) labour, Aconite 200

**After labour:**

AFTER PAINS

after many children, Secale 200

groin area, intense, Cimicifuga 200

long-lasting, Secale 200

extending to hips, buttocks, legs, Kali Carb 200

worse if baby feeds, Arnica 200, Chamomilla 200, Pulsatilla 200,  
Secale 200

with sore, bruised feeling, Arnica 200

with weepiness, Pulsatilla 200

with disappointment/resentment about the birth, Staphisagria 200  
unbearable, Chamomilla 200 or Cimicifuga 200

ANGER (often suppressed) about the birth, Staphisagria 200

BREASTS, painful

radiating pain from nipple, Phytolacca 200

red, hot, throbbing, Belladonna 200/ pale, hot, worse moving Bryonia  
200

BRUISING Arnica 200 or Bellis Perennis 200

CAESAREAN, after effects of

Arnica 200, Bellis Per 200, Calendula 200, Hypericum 200

CATHETER, after effects of, Staphisagria 200

CRACKED NIPPLES, Phytolacca 200

DRUGS, after effects of

Morphine or Pethidine, disturbed sleep, irritable Chamomilla 200

Syntometrine, Secale 200 (give asap afterwards as an antidote)

General anaesthetic, Phosphorus 200 (esp. if vomiting)

detoxification, Nux Vomica 6

EPIDURAL, after effects of, Arnica 200, Hypericum 200,

EPISIOTOMY Calendula 200, Hypericum 200, Staphis 200

FORCEPS delivery, after effects of,

Arnica 200, Bellis Per 200, Calendula 200, Staphisagria 200

MILK, too much, Pulsatilla 200/ too little, Dulcamara 200

PLACENTA, retained

with bearing down sensation, Secale 200, Sepia 200

after long exhausting Labour, Arnica 200

contractions weak or nonexistent, Pulsatilla 200

with bleeding, Ipecac 200/ with shaking, Caulophyllum 200,  
Cimicifuga 200

SYNTOMETRINE antidote Secale 200 (asap)

URINE retention, mother, Arnica 200 / baby, Aconite 200

## **GENERAL ADVICE**

### **Before the birth:**

Practise: breathing (claimed by many to be the most effective method of pain relief) ; relaxation; visualisation; talking to the baby; birth positions; stretching; pelvic floor exercises. Attend a yoga class which puts emphasis on birth or buy The Active Birth Book by Janet Balaskas. Attend ante-natal classes together with your birth assistant. In late pregnancy (but not before the sixth month) try drinking raspberry leaf tea, which reputedly tones up the uterine muscles. Prepare a birth plan and write down any particular wishes you have for the birth, you can discuss this with any one who will be attending the birth, but do so before labour starts if at all possible.

### **First stage:**

Characterised by low adrenalin. A time of waiting whilst the body does the work of opening up. Offer minimum resistance. Don't make predictions about how dilated you are or how long it will take. Shut out your rational mind. Breathe in as the contraction comes and out during. Ask your birth assistant to remind you if they notice you are forgetting to breathe or holding your breath because of the pain. It may help if they breathe with you. Use a clock with a second hand to time the average length of particularly painful contractions; just knowing how long they will last helps you to pace yourself and to remember that they won't last forever! Stay upright whenever possible. Keep moving. Minimum distractions and interruptions. Maximum comfort, support, encouragement and reassurance. Sip watered down fruit juice between contractions to keep energy and blood sugar levels up. Remember Rescue Remedy.

### **Transition:**

Point where your cervix is fully dilated and nature of contractions begin to change to those which will push baby out. Potentially the most difficult time because of these conflicting messages. Many feel the need for pain relief at this time. Attendants should reassure; suggest a visit to the toilet (for a change of scene); help with breathing; encourage mother to visualize baby and talk to it. Remember Rescue Remedy.

### **Second stage:**

Characterised by high adrenalin as mother takes a more active role. The pushing will just happen. If for any reason labour seems too fast, get down on all fours with bottom high as possible, head low; panting also helps slow things down. If contractions have many peaks divide your out breath; as if blowing out separate candles.

### **Third stage:**

Particularly in hospital, Syntometrine is routinely injected into the mother to speed up the delivery of the placenta and Vitamin K is given to the baby. If you decide against either or both it is easiest to put it into a written birth plan. It is not unusual for contractions to stop for a while before pushing the placenta out naturally.

### **Medical Interventions:**

Before the birth become as well-informed as possible about the pros and cons. For your own peace of mind, if for any reason intervention is

suggested, rather than requested by you, ask for:

a clear explanation of the problem

information about any possible alternatives

a time limit on your decision that will not endanger either the baby or you.

## **USEFUL REFERENCES**

The kit mentioned above is Specifics for Childbirth (18 Remedies). Available from this site for \$45.

Homoeopaths (and clients who are pregnant or have a child under one) should check out Miranda Castro's excellent "Homoeopathy for Mother and Baby" published by Papermac ISBN no 0-333-55748-4. The layout is similar to "The Complete Homoeopathy Handbook" with separate materia medica and repertory sections. It encourages an authentic approach to remedy selection with blank repertorising sheets and example cases. There are sections on preparing for life after birth; pregnancy; birth and the post-natal period. The latter has particularly helpful common sense advice with "dos and don'ts" for a wide-range of possible complaints.

Homoeopaths and other health practitioners would also find Richard Moscowitz's " Homoeopathic Medicines for Pregnancy and Childbirth" (published by North Atlantic Books ISBN No. 1-55643-137-6) worth looking at. The first two chapters are dedicated to those with little knowledge of Homoeopathy. These are followed by five chapters on Materia Medica in relation to pregnancy and labour and a further four chapters on Therapeutics. The contents pages and index make this an easy to use reference source.

Less accessible, is Yingling's "Accoucheurs Manual". Sadly this is currently out of print, but it is included in Mac Repertory's Reference Works Professional. This is a very comprehensive 109 remedy Materia Medica (including many little-used small remedies) which concentrates only on Generalities; Pregnancy; Parturition and Lactation. There is a wealth of information here, but the absence of an index of complaints makes it quite difficult to use for acute/emergency prescribing. It would be worth working through it (without pressure of time) and making notes on therapeutic hints for later use.

Murphy's Repertory has a special section devoted to pregnancy which draws all the rubrics handily together in one place.

\*\*\*\*\*

So by the time you read this, Christmas will be coming and the goose won't be the only one who's getting fat. I plan to take a break at Christmas for three or four months to snuggle up to some huge log fires with my expanding tummy and, later, my expanded family. Your thoughts and good wishes around the arrival in mid-January would be much appreciated. To anyone else out there who is "expecting" I wish you and your little one a joyous birth.

© Mary Aspinwall.

Post script: Our second child, Gabriel Luke, was born at home on January 30th 1999. He entered the world under-water in a birthing pool after a three hour labour. To read his birth story click on [Birth Revisited](#).