

# BOOK REVIEW

## Reflections on Motherhood: volume I: The Birth Process by Barbara Morgan

Alemka Dauskardt

What a big little book Barbara Morgan presents us with! Little refers to size, which could almost be called 'pocket sized', but only if you have some big ones. I imagine, you could slip it into the pocket of your winter coat as you travel, for example. Being the same format as her first book, this now becomes a recognisable feature of Barbara's published writing. It certainly feels very good to hold; it's manageable, almost soft to touch. In a pinkish magenta coloured cover, it immediately feels feminine and warm. Barbara's long-term collaboration with Lubosh Cech, graphic designer for *The Knowing Field* journal has come to fruition beautifully in this project as well. The design of the book supports the flow of the story, which unfolds in a harmonious way.

It is a big book because it is a story about bringing life forth, so a story as ancient as womankind and as common as life. It is the story, which sometimes flows gently, with delight, like mothers' milk, and sometimes it ruptures in pain, like our dreams of motherhood, or like our most intimate parts during the process of giving birth.

It is not just one story either, but a collection of stories on giving birth by a number of women. The stories, which have obviously been lovingly and laboriously collected by the author, are very intimate, revealing some very 'private parts' of these particular women and of women in general. The stories are told in the first voice, so it feels as if we are talking with these women sitting around a kitchen table, where some of these stories, I imagine, might have been told.

But what surprised me upon reading was the realisation of how seldom we tell these stories and how we have lost the ability to really listen and to pass these stories on, not only from one woman to another, from one generation to the next, but in society as a whole. Giving birth is something hidden from public view, locked behind hospital walls, where this natural process of birthing is treated like a medical condition, requiring ever more technology and professional expertise, and in the process, creating an ever bigger distance from our bodies and the natural wisdom they hold. So, this book is also a story about this alienation.

On one level, it is a very intimate story of the author and her family, including the testimonies of her daughter and her daughter-in-law. I loved how there is an account of the author's daughter being born and also an account of that 'baby' giving birth as an adult woman, so we really get the transgenerational impression of this unbroken chain of life being passed on. This I imagine, required some courage, and some personal processing along the way, but adds enormously to an intimate, family feel, so appropriate for the subject.

On another level, this is a story of something much more. These personal stories collected, standing side by side, make us aware of the bigger issue of how we, in our societies, have lost touch with our bodies, and our souls, also with nature which we are part of. The implicit (and

at times quite explicit!) message of the book can't be more clear: something is wrong in how we treat women, the process of giving birth and motherhood. It is as if women, with or without support of their men, give birth in spite of the system, in general, not because they are supported by it! The plight of many against the professionalisation of this process, at times in their lives when they are most vulnerable, seems very unjust and unnecessary.

It is not only our bodies that we have lost control over, but somewhere along the line, we have lost the sense of sacredness for life, for women and men who bear it forth, for the soul of the family and the priority of the most important task on Earth: birthing and raising children. Not only women, but all of us are poorly supported in this by our societal structures. This is what becomes palpable upon reading this book. And this is the reason it had to be written!

This main message of the book is reflected through stories of women who gave birth, but also, it is brought forth through the interview with Jurga Švediene, a courageous midwife from Lithuania, supporting countless women in the process of giving birth naturally, having to fight the system in order to be able to do it.

Even though the author gives us plenty of relevant references to Constellation Work in her deliberations on the subject, this might not be a 'systemic constellations book', in a sense that it doesn't have constellations in focus. And yet, it is a very important systemic book. It all begins with mothers: with our mothers, with our mothers' mothers, with the divine feminine, with our mother planet. We all know how important it is systemically, to find a good place in our heart for our mother, and all mothers, and for ourselves as mothers. Barbara's effort highlights how we are not aided in this within the general climate of disregard for motherhood and mothering in contemporary Western societies. Like so many other facets of our life, we have lost touch with the sacred aspect of life itself, and have little regard for the spiritual forces that drive it. With our focus on the material, we tend to the physical only, treating women's bodies and the process of birth in a more or less mechanical fashion.

This book invites us to open our hearts, to have a better look, to listen more deeply and employ more natural, more sacred, holistic technologies in one of the most important processes of living: passing life on. It is, therefore, a book I would wholeheartedly recommend for everyone to read, constellators in particular. I see it also, as a great resource to recommend to people we work with, those who turn to us for help and assistance with issues of every day living.

The phenomenological experience of reconnecting with the wisdom lost, is provided in the form of meditations, both written within the book and as audio tracks with guided visualisations, to be downloaded. These are accompanied by music played by Paul Stoney, a fellow constellator who certainly is completely in tune with the sensibilities with which these are offered. All in all, a great step towards acknowledging the magnitude of motherhood, and towards including all mothers in our hearts with loving awareness. Increased appreciation for all mothers was my immediate response to reading this book and to listening to visualisations.

I am grateful to Barbara for writing this book. I appreciate her bringing this subject to our attention and her thoughtful reflections on it. In equal measure, I appreciate the opportunity

this book provides for us as reader to get in touch with the personal experience of our own story of becoming a mother/a parent, often a mix of delight and trauma. Therefore, this is also an opportunity for some important deep processing on the subject, touching most of us. Reading will invariably remind every mother of her story.

In our work, as constellators, we mostly look at our mothers from the position of a child, and often focus on what was lacking, so I appreciate the opportunity this book offers to look at motherhood from the perspective of a mother, with the focus on the enormity of that which was given. It makes this whole 'mother story' even more awesome! And not only for mothers, but for all of us who came to this world from the womb of a Mother.

I am very much looking forward to the next one in this series of reflections on motherhood.

**Alemka Dauskardt**, *holding a Masters Degree in Psychology, with specialist training in Gestalt therapy, relationship counselling, cross-cultural therapy and trauma work, is a full-time Constellation Practitioner in her own practice.*

*Since she was first introduced to Constellation Work in 1995, all areas of her personal and professional life have been inspired by it (also in-Spirited by it!). She has been using this approach in individual settings; she facilitates workshops and offers training in Systemic Constellations in Croatia and elsewhere.*

*Within systemic work, her focus lately has been on reconciliation constellations and on learning how large system events shape the sphere of intimate relationships. Alemka is interested in exploring current challenges the work and constellating community are faced with. She also translates constellation literature and writes. More broadly, she is excited about the paradigm shift, which is occurring in so many related fields and opening up new horizons.*

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