

Giving Birth—Unveiling Birth: The Wisdom, Science and Heart

Reviewed by Deanna Broxton

Giving Birth is a magnificent film that challenges the belief that birth is something to be feared, rather than a natural rite of passage, and a deeply powerful event that shapes and changes a woman forever.

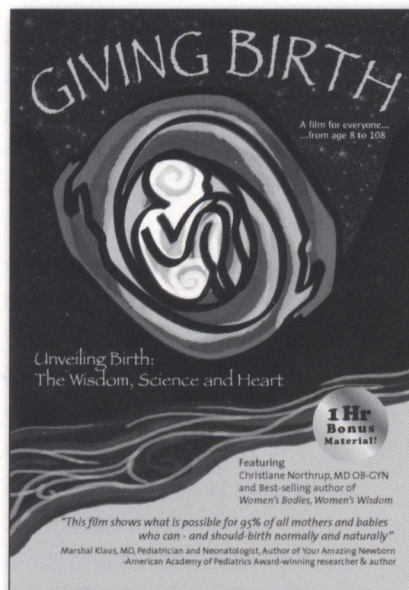
Created by childbirth author Suzanne Arms, and produced by Amy Gilliland, this 36-minute film is an excellent teaching tool packed full of compelling facts and insightful commentaries from a variety of childbirth experts, and age-old wisdom about the transformative power of birth. It is the perfect film to show to expectant parents, many of whom may have deeply ingrained fears, doubts, and shame surrounding childbirth. *Giving Birth* addresses those fears head-on and explores how those deeply held beliefs influence labor and birth.

In this film, viewers will see how a baby experiences birth and bonding; watch a natural, normal pregnancy, labor, and birth; and hear from obstetricians and nurses who believe in the ability of women and babies to birth. We also discover a man's experience of birth, and learn that scientific research has proven that medical interventions are actually more harmful than beneficial, except in rare situations involving complications.

Giving Birth also includes one hour of bonus material that features reflections on birth from Certified Nurse Midwife Roxanne Cummings. It also contains post-birth footage of a mother

named Molly whose family, labor, and delivery are featured in this film.

An accompanying teaching guide entitled *Giving Birth: Challenges and Choices* includes resources and references, bios of the film's professional experts, and provides useful tips on how to use the DVD in class. The guide also explains important birth issues and facts including the history of childbirth, labor, positioning, risks and hazards of interventions, safety of home birth and midwifery care, birth trauma, and the role of women and men in the birthing process.



Arms, who narrates most of the film, shares a profound discovery. Her research revealed two approaches to birth: one is the medical management approach that perceives and treats every birth as a crisis waiting to happen;

Executive Producer: Amy Gilliland
Created By: Suzanne Arms and Suzanne Berthiaume
SuzanneArmsPresents.com
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and the second is the midwifery model, which views birth as a normal, natural process that needs patience, watchful attendants, and support.

Arms effectively uses scrolling text, soothing music, photos, and interviews with childbirth experts to communicate a number of compelling points, one of which is that 95% of healthy women can give birth naturally at home and in birth centers with the help of a supportive partner, doula, or midwife. We also learn that part of being supportive includes speaking encouraging words to the laboring mother and having faith in her ability to give birth.

And so, as the film progresses, we learn that there is a need to redefine what a *normal, natural birth* is. The film's assertion is that seeing what is normal allows women to be really free to make choices that will best serve themselves and their children.

Giving Birth drives home the point that when it comes to birth, there is a wide range of what is considered normal; yet unfortunately, many obstetricians have never seen one. Instead, Arms explains that particularly in North America, much of what we

have come to think of as a normal part of the birthing process, such as artificial induction, vacuum extraction, the use of epidurals and sedation drugs, fetal monitoring, cutting the umbilical cord early, and separating mothers from their babies after birth, is in fact, not normal at all.

With that in mind, *Giving Birth* may help women who have already birthed their babies, make peace with the birth that they had, and for those waiting to give birth, this new knowledge may empower them to know that their birth experience, does not have to follow the medical model to be normal and magnificent.

This film refutes the idea that the way birth is done in the United States of America is based on scientific evidence. It instead reveals that medical management of birth is the result of a series of historical circumstances that moved birth into the hospital. Arms says women are strongly influenced by a legacy of fear, pain, fear of pain, and shame about their bodies. She adds that women operate under the mistaken belief that somehow their bodies don't work well enough in birth, and they therefore need to be rescued by modern technology.

Cummings also explains that it is the job of a midwife to treat that legacy of fear with respect. For couples in your classes who know very little about midwifery, this film will show them that traditional midwives are skilled at helping women feel unafraid of birth.

Throughout the film, we are repeatedly reminded that birth is a family affair, and that supported, natural births are good for parents and babies. *Giving Birth* discusses how various cultures approach childbirth. For many, children grow up around it, and know their own birth stories — a fact that

Arms believes is critical to the physical, spiritual, and emotional wholeness of a child. It is for this reason, and all of the others previously mentioned that Cummings, in her soft-spoken, yet determined way, challenges us to consider *doing birth differently*.

And because Molly chose to *do birth differently*, the birth stories of her two children may very well be known and special to them. We are fortunate to be allowed to witness her labor and the birth of her son, in all its power and beauty.

Couples who have never journeyed through the birth process should find that watching Molly and her partner Jim go through labor together, under the watchful care of Cummings, is awe-inspiring. We see the couple in nearly every stage of Molly's labor. One minute they are dancing together and laughing, then the next minute, Molly is hanging on to Jim tightly, gripping his shoulders, head down, resting on his chest, as she works through a contraction. We see Jim physically and verbally encouraging her when the contractions get difficult. He stands like a strong tree in a fierce storm — pliable, yet unbreakable. Molly is allowed her moments of vulnerability without it leading to intervention, and without her needing to be rescued.

Cummings tells us that the power a woman feels during her labor is one that she can work with and not against. She can merge with it and own it. "The body has its own ability to deal with the pain of labor, and given the right amount of support and privacy, a woman can do it, and it is a major achievement of her own strength and capacity that no one can ever take away from her for the rest of her life. That leads her to be a fiercely protective, strong, and confident mother."

Molly did just that. It was that power that gave her the strength to sit on a birthing stool and push her son out into the world; and into her hands, then into her arms that drew him to her breast in triumph and joy.

Giving Birth will most certainly challenge our most deeply held beliefs about birth. You may even begin to see it as Dr. Christiane Northrup did while attending her first birth as a medical student. In the film, Northrup says she cried and thought, "This is the holiest, most sacred moment I've ever experienced. I was brought to my knees by it."

As the film ended, I wanted to remember the blessing ceremony for Molly and her unborn baby. I listened to the voices of women from many generations past and present... "I am Cory, granddaughter of Eva... daughter of Esther, mother of Erin..." I listened to these voices as I watched ocean waves roll, rise, and fall — much like the contractions of labor. I watched as words of wisdom scrolled down the screen. I believe those words are the essence of *Giving Birth*. They inspired me, and I hope they inspire you and the students you teach:

"Childbirth is an experience in a woman's life, which if entered into fully holds the power to transform her forever. Passing through these powerful gates, in her own way, remembering all of the generations of mothers who walk with her, she is alone, yet not alone..."

Deanna Broxton is Associate Editor for the *IJCE* and the owner of D. Broxton Designs — an editorial services company. She has been a professional writer and editor for 15 years, and her work has appeared in regional and national publications.