

## Columnists

### **Birth center not everyone's cup of coffee**

By Esther Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. -

Recently there's been quite a lot of attention paid to the North Shore Birth Center at Beverly Hospital. So much so that my friend, a birth center user, remarked, "Esther, you should write your column about saving the center!"

Hmm, interesting.

I mean, I'm totally and completely in favor of saving the birth center — many women think it's a fantastic place. It's just that I'd never set foot in it. Not even, brace yourself, if they put a Starbucks inside.

"Have we met?" I asked my friend. "Remember me? I like hospitals, and all the wonderful potential they hold for modern pain medication."

She nodded. "Right, so you'd offer a fresh perspective to the debate."

You say fresh, I say sane.

Details, details. The point is, even though I might not sign up for a stay at the birth center, I'm glad that Beverly has such a highly renowned and widely recognized option. If my friend wants to make her clothes out of hemp and have a bevy of wood nymphs play pan pipes in the hallway while she delivers her child into a room lit by candles dipped by free-trade monks living in solar powered caves, then so be it. But of course that's just the point: She's not like that at all.

She's a totally normal American mom who is not above feeding her children birthday cake for dinner if that is all that's on hand. She even out-moms me with a minivan *and* a portable DVD player. And yet she's used the birth center twice. Each time she had medical complications that necessitated extra attention and she felt completely supported and well cared for. To me, that says that the birth center is a valid and good choice for some moms.

Obviously I don't include myself — I think she's nuts.

But I respect her desire to express her nuttiness in the form of intense pain, which by the way, she had professionally photographed.

Listen, I'm not totally clueless about the whole natural deal. I've been there. But after 18 hours of active, yet non-progressive labor with daughter number one, I finally demanded pain intervention lest I stab somebody in their jugular with my IV needle. I imagine I looked a bit wild and frothy. But we'll never

really know. My husband is gracious enough to refrain from comment, and there are no photographs to submit as evidence.

Not so with my birth center friend.

“Oh Esther, wait till I show you the pictures!” I assumed we were talking about cute, just-born, baby pictures. Perhaps a glowing mother and child photo. Nope. These pictures showed her looking just short of decapitating somebody with her bare hands while in active labor — back labor to be exact — at the birth center.

“Wow.” I said.

“I know, it was brutal, but I was so glad I was at the birth center. They kept me focused and helped me believe that I could do it naturally.”

I flipped through a few more shots of her looking like she’d stepped out of a Stephen King novel and then dropped the pictures to her table.

“You’re crazy and I’m going to need to look in your basement for wood nymphs.”

But she loves those pictures. I think she was just barely talked out of using the shot of her daughter crowning for the family Christmas card. Of course what she really loves is that the pictures chronicle the long, hard journey that she made — and succeeded so fantastically at. Using the birth center gave her the chance to really go for the birth option that felt right to her. And, to her slightly scary credit, she *can* submit the pictures as evidence.

I get that there are reasons for and against natural birth. I get that there are those who don’t have a say in the matter one way or the other due to medical constraints. I also get that there are many, many of us, who have a choice and choose the happy hospital land where anesthesiologists roam free.

But the birth center is a great resource for our community. It’s a point of pride for Beverly. And it’s critical that moms who want a natural birth have the same support in their choice that I do in mine. All I ask is that they keep their photos and wood nymphs to themselves.

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