



A Tale Of Two Births

Two Generations Of Filipina Women

WARNING: The information contained on these pages is intended to inform the reader about certain health beliefs in a particular culture. It is NOT intended to be used for diagnostic purposes or self-treatment. We do NOT recommend these practices. The reader is encouraged to seek medical advice for health problems.

I am a 20-year-old Filipina woman living in Hawaii. I have been asked to tell my birth story, and because my mother and her beliefs are such a large part of that story I am also going to tell the story of my birth in the Philippines. My mother was very young when she had me, only 16 and married to my father who was 35. I too was young with my pregnancy, 18, but I was unmarried and to my mother, who is Catholic, I had brought shame on the family. In the Philippines my mother had gone to a *hilot*, we would say midwife in English. The *hilot* came to my mother's house to check on her and make sure she ate a healthy diet, with liver and fish and lots of backyard vegetables. I went early to an OB-GYN doctor for my prenatal care, but my mother was there to make sure that I ate a healthy diet, and I also took my pre-natal vitamins. My mother had many restrictions during her pregnancy, things like no running and jumping, for fear of giving the baby a cleft palate (if baby was sucking thumb), no eating of mangos for fear of having a hairy baby—especially girl babies, and no going out walking after dark for fear of bringing bad luck to the baby. No such restrictions were placed on me. My mother tied a ring on a string and held it over my belly, she told me if the ring went in circles it would be a girl and if the ring went back and forth it would be a boy, it circled and I did in fact have a girl. The *hilot* delivered me at home, with my mother taking no medication for the labor pains except a drink made of burnt

Jackfruit seeds and water. My grandmother and the *hilot* were the only people present during labor and delivery, my father waited in another room, hoping that his first child would be a boy to carry on his name, I disappointed him, but my mother went on to have three boys and one more girl. I gave birth in the hospital, but like my mother my baby's father wasn't with me, either, only my mother and the Doctor and Nurses. Unlike my mother I had an epidural to dull my labor pains. My mother cut the umbilical cord of my daughter with shiny clean scissors; the *hilot* cut my umbilical cord with a sharpened boiled bamboo stick. After I was born the *hilot* threw the placenta in the river with the belief of taking the bad luck away from the baby. I don't know what happened to my baby's placenta.

I was in the hospital for two days, on the second day I showered much to my mothers protest. She was in bed for 12 days after giving birth, the *hilot* would come every day to massage her belly and bind her hips so that the tears in her vagina would heal and the muscles in her stomach would return to normal. At the end of the twelve days The *hilot* came and bathed my mother in water that had been boiled with guava and orange leaves. The only thing my mother was allowed to do during her twelve days of bed rest was nurse the baby, she was given a soup made of chicken and marungai leaves. My mother was worried about me going out with the baby in the first weeks. I also breast fed my daughter but unlike my mother I did not use this as a method of birth control. While our first birth experiences were very different I count myself lucky to have had the support and wisdom of my mother during my pregnancy and birth.

Traditional Health Beliefs

Prenatal Care

- The woman was the first person to know she was pregnant by finding out that she missed her periods and was feeling nauseated followed by vomiting.
- The husband and then the close relatives were the next to know.
- No prenatal care, except by a *hilot*, a medicine man or woman who inherited the skill to deliver babies from special spirits.
- The significant other was not present when she met with the *hilot* at her home.

- The *hilot* gave the pregnant woman a special drink to ease the labor, which was made from mixtures of burned seeds of jackfruit and water. This formula had to be consumed before the delivery.
- There were no nutritional restrictions, except to not eat too much sugar so that the baby would not be too big and make the delivery harder.
- Do not crossover fence, the baby will have the cord go over his/her neck and choke.
- Do not go out at night, this will weaken the baby.
- Do not wear black clothes; this is bad luck for the baby.
- Do not eat mangos; this will cause a baby girl to have hair on her face. The *hilot* would give the mother a big bottle of drink made from wine-marinated roots or herbs. It is called *panigan* and should be taken before eating to make the fetus healthy.

Labor and Delivery

- The baby was delivered at home
- The significant other could be present, but most did not want to see the birthing process. Other family members were expected to wait outside and not distract the mother
- There was no medication used to relieve the pain
- With the thin bamboo that was sharpened and then boiled, the *hilot* would cut the umbilical cord and the placenta. *hilot* would bathe the baby and then she wrapped the umbilical cord, coconut oil and tobacco in a piece of cloth for seven days. After that, the *hilot* told the family to burn the package in a pot filled with charcoal inside the house so the smoke would fill the entire house. This ritual was to make the house a good environment for the baby
- The *hilot* would throw the placenta in the river. They believe this takes the bad luck away from the baby
- It was desired that the first baby be a boy so the child could help take care of the parent's property. Boys are expected to carry family's last name

Post Partum

- The *hilot* would teach the mother to bind her hips tightly to bring all the muscles used in the birthing process back to normal again. The tear on her vagina would also go back together and return to its pre-pregnancy state
- For 12 days, the *hilot* would come everyday to massage the mother's body and hips, and after the 12 days were up, she would shower the mother with warm water that was previously boiled with guava and orange leaves. This recipe was used to make the skin feel good. The *hilot* believed that the skin lost its elasticity during birth.
- After delivery, the mother would be on bed rest for 12 days, with the head of the bed slightly elevated by wood or bricks, so the blood would not go up to her head. After 6 days she might be allowed to shower
- Mother could breastfeed, but other activities were restricted so she would not experience increased bleeding
- She had to eat a special soup made from chicken and leaves called *marungai*, so that she would produce plenty of milk for the baby
- One of the women interviewed thinks having ten (10) kids is ideal. Children were expected to help with the family business or farm at that time
- Questions about health of the mother and children should be addressed to the *hilot*
- Babies usually did not have a special name, except they were usually named after saints since Filipinos are strongly influenced by the Catholic religion

Pregnancy in the Philippines

"I come from a family of seven girls and one boy. My mom had all of us naturally. In the Philippines, we compare with animals. Animals do not have medicine or support when they give birth. I have had three normal deliveries, each delivery I had an episiotomy - without painkillers. When they sewed me I yelled! The doctor scolded me - 'stop giving birth then!' I had to sleep in the hallway! - There was no privacy."

When you breast feed you don't get pregnant for 2-3 years", when I got pregnant again I was so mad at my mom because she told me that - she said " you're the one that got pregnant!"

"The husband is not involved in prenatal care or birth. Sex is not good for pregnancy although the doctor said sex after eight months is good to help the baby get out."

ref.: http://www.hawcc.hawaii.edu/nursing/RNFilipino_04.html

Look more here: www.Childbirth.PhilippineCulture.ph