

# Mother Nature

Thoughts on nourishing your body, mind,  
And spirit during pregnancy and beyond.



Maríahadessa Ekere Tallie

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This book is dedicated to you.

## Acknowledgements

Creator, ancestors, spirit guides,  
Mother Earth and Father Sky,  
Grandmother Moon, Grandfather Sun  
reminding me that we all are one.  
aho

With massive love and light to Serene and Joy-Shanti. Mommy falters but your love is unconditional. Thank you for blessing me with your presences. You are my teachers.

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Mother Nature  
(For Millie)

She comes to me  
daughter of dandelion  
and redwood tree  
prayer christening her womb with kicks

worry flits across her smile  
she explains the tug of war  
between kale and quarter water  
asphalt and oat straw

women tell her horror stories  
but she hears whispers  
a woman of cotton fields  
and white sage guiding her to red  
raspberry leaf and the power of her own scent

this full moon  
will birth a new moon  
open radiant like night sky  
eclipse boundaries  
speak in her foremother's voice  
this full moon will walk across burning stars  
in a ritual ancient as constellations  
courageous  
knowing her strength pulls  
the Earth closer to herself.

## Introduction

I never expected to be writing this book. Having children is something I was always pretty certain I was going to do, but I had never really given much thought to how I would care for myself during pregnancy, how I would give birth, or the way that I would care for my newborn. I was born and raised in New York City. From everything that I had seen, women gave birth screaming on hospital beds, newborns were taken to a room with other babies where they slept, and babies were fed formula from bottles. Natural childbirth was a concept I'd never heard of until my best friend, Mirlande, became pregnant with her first child and invited me to go to birthing classes with her and her partner at the famed Elizabeth Seton Birthing Center in Manhattan.

“So, you're not going to take any pain killers?” I am sure I asked this at some point because I remember Mirlande explaining that the drugs the mother ingests during pregnancy and labor can affect the newborn and the quality of her/his first hours on the planet. What?! I'd never heard that. It struck a nerve. As I went to my friend's classes, we learned about birthing positions, watched videos, and talked about the stages of labor and the importance of creating a feeling of safety for a laboring woman. I thoroughly enjoyed what I learned at the center.

When Mirlande gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby girl, I was beyond thrilled. I remember the peaceful environment at the birthing center where I sat in a rocking chair holding Sequoia, my goddaughter. An unparalleled feeling of bliss came over me. I watched Mirlande and her beloved fill out papers and sit joyously on the bed where their child had been birthed just hours before. My friend was not hooked up to any machines or confined to a bed. Both her partner and child were with her. She seemed so much like herself that it was hard to believe that such a miracle had just occurred. But the gorgeous seven pound and five ounce miracle was resting in my arms. During my first pregnancy seven years later, I remembered this vividly. While I was not sure that I could deal with the pain of labor, the hospital—armed with technology and pain relief—didn't appeal to me. I wanted a calm, warm, peaceful birth. I wanted a midwife.

In 2005, my husband and I were in the midst of figuring out everything from where we wanted to live to how we wanted to make our livings in life. Everything was in

transition. We left Namibia, where I had been teaching for eight months, and went to Belgium, which was meant to be a stop on the way to a new home in either Amsterdam or New York. During our time in Belgium, we bumped into an herbalist who told us about Connie, a local midwife. I set up an appointment with Connie and after sitting with her at her home office for nearly two hours, I knew I could trust her with this sacred occurrence unfolding in my body. My husband and I ended up living in Belgium for almost a year and a half. I birthed my first child, Serene, in my mother-in-law's home, with the love and support of my husband, midwife, and mother-in-law.

I call myself the incidental earth mamma because the decisions I've made have been about trusting nature and the wisdom of my body above all else. I made these decisions one at a time, step by step. I don't follow any doctrine; I am not governed by a specific style of parenting. I do what resonates. Through my own research, experience, and by following the guidance of incredible midwives, herbalists, homeopaths, osteopaths, medical doctors, natural healers, and other fabulous earth mammas, I have seen the power of mother/nature in pregnancy, birth, and infancy.

Whether you are sure you want to have a natural birth, undecided, wondering about life after birth, or are just curious about another woman's experience of motherhood, there is something here for you. Welcome...to yourself.

One love,  
Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie

As a single, childless woman traveling the world and living in New York City, self-care was second nature. I filled my days with long baths, deep talks, pedicures, dancing, and plenty of quiet time to read and write. My responsibilities were few and life was an incredible adventure that I was the center of. ***Becoming a mother shook me to the center of my being.*** My days were no longer mine. My passions fell to the sidelines. I felt much of my identity evaporate and I saw what I felt was a stranger rise in the absence of the self I had known for so long. Yes, this woman was a good mother. Yes, her baby was the center of her universe. Yes, she was a fine wife. But guess what? She didn't feel like me.

**This is the stuff no one wants to say: motherhood can be confusing, isolating, lonely, and relentless. Motherhood can grind your illusions to dust.**

**Motherhood can grind you to dust. Motherhood has done this.** Motherhood has also been an immense blessing, a joy, a healing, and a sitcom. My children are gifts, arrows that point to truths I sometimes don't want to see.

The way many of us find ourselves parenting today is unbalanced and dangerous. Mothering doesn't mean that we have to disappear. A big part of my journey has been learning to honor myself as a mother and an individual.

When my husband and I lived in Namibia for eight months, there was a little boy named Prince who lived nearby. We never could figure out who Prince's mother was because he was always being taken care of by different people who obviously loved him. Children carried him around and kissed him, wiped his tears. Adult arms surrounded him too and women's voices could be heard calling him or admonishing the other children he played with. The entire neighborhood had a hand in raising that boy and he was happy, healthy, and loved. I bet that his mother was happy too. She did not have to have her hands in her son's every activity. She could turn her attention to cooking or cleaning or enjoying a bath or chatting with a friend. She could sit and stare at the ceiling or dance around the living room if she wanted. ***My point?*** We all need community or family support to successfully raise our children. In the West we often pay for the help that traditionally came from community for free. It has taken me having two children under two to admit this. The African proverb about it taking a village to raise a child is so, so wise. Before you give birth, find out who is part of your support system. If you look around and realize that you don't have a support system, **create one.**

Search out groups comprised of women who share your passions or parenting philosophies.

Possible places to start:

<a href="http://www.llli.org">www.llli.org</a>	La Leche League
<a href="http://www.mothering.com">www.mothering.com</a>	Natural parenting resource
<a href="http://www.ymib.com">www.ymib.com</a>	You make it beautiful
<a href="http://www.holisticmoms.org">www.holisticmoms.org</a>	Holistic moms network

## **Yoga Mama**

I am absolutely certain that my yoga practice kept me sane during my second pregnancy. The pregnancy itself was wonderful and I was thrilled about having another person join our family. Our living situation, however, was emotionally taxing and we didn't have the resources to move out. We were living with beloved family whose addictions to television, nicotine, and alcohol I had refused to come to terms with. None of us were giving each other the respect that we each deserved and the home was tense. On top of this, money was ridiculously tight. I had to scramble to get healthcare and find providers in line with my ideas about natural birth and pregnancy care.

I am convinced that the chanting, stretching, and visualization that I did during my weekly Hatha and Kundalini yoga sessions helped keep me together. I felt physically strong during my pregnancy and the yoga sessions gave me much needed time for myself and for connecting with my unborn baby. I also enjoyed meeting and developing friendships with other pregnant women. Kundalini yoga gave me incredible amounts of energy while Hatha yoga helped calm me. Both were indispensable for the sense of emotional, physical, and mental well-being they bestowed. If you can afford to go to yoga class, don't hesitate. If you can't afford to go to yoga class, do what I did: get a good book or a DVD and use it to guide your home practice.

You can also attend community yoga classes that are either dirt cheap or by donation.

My favorite yoga resources:

[Bountiful, Beautiful, Blissful](#)

Gurmukh

St. Martin's Griffin (2003)

[The New method: Baby and Mom Pre Natal Yoga \(DVD\)](#)

Gurmukh

Peter Pan Studio (2002)

Integral Yoga Institute

[www.iyiny.org](http://www.iyiny.org)

## **Pregnancy Altar**

I set up little spaces during my pregnancies where I could write, draw, stretch, meditate, sing, rub my belly with shea butter, and connect with my growing baby. I started with a candle, a crystal, a sonogram picture, and an image of Oshun. I changed the space as I changed. The altar was a place that I could give myself a few much-deserved undisturbed minutes to tune in to myself and honor the sacred time of pregnancy.

## **I'm Hungry...Again**

“If it’s not food, don’t eat it.”-Ina May Gaskin

Midwife, author of *Spiritual Midwifery*

Pregnancy and food. Food and pregnancy. How many conversations have I had with other mothers about what we craved, detested, couldn't keep down, or couldn't resist during our pregnancies? The body is a wise vessel with a definite sense of humor. A pregnant vegetarian longs for steak; a sworn carnivore can't stand the smell of meat. I craved boiled eggs and milk during my first pregnancy, yet I loathe milk and egg yolks. Cravings are messages from our bodies. Try to get to **the message behind your craving**. Desperate to get your hands on dairy? Your body is probably saying you need calcium or protein. Is red meat calling you? That craving might point to a need for iron. When what you crave is a whole food, enjoy.

Confession: I have a sweet tooth.

During the last months of my first pregnancy my husband and I stood on a long line at an ice cream shop practically every night. I never investigated the craving. During my second pregnancy, I craved chocolate often. What I discovered is that women who crave chocolate—during pregnancy or menstruation—are often mineral deficient. Calcium, magnesium, and zinc supplements can be helpful, as can drinking mineral rich herbal infusions. (More about making infusions later.)

Tip: Fabulous herbs for pregnant women: red raspberry leaf, nettles, and oat straw.

When the need for a sweet struck, I drank lots of red raspberry infusion. If that didn't help, I ate almonds with raisins, dates or other dried fruit or had a glass of (sugar free) grape or apple juice. I found that doing this significantly curtailed my craving for chocolate. On the very few occasions when nothing but chocolate would do, I indulged in organic dark chocolate, but honestly by the last months of pregnancy I had worked through my chocolate craving.

Tip: Buy food without ingredients

If you've never thought much about your food choices, I urge you to start. You will be responsible for nourishing yourself and your child for years (and I mean years) to come. Fast "food", candy, chips, and soda are not foods. They take more from your body than they give and they lack the nutrients that you and your growing baby need to be healthy and strong.

Tough love tip: If you are buying a food and the label has so many words on it that it looks like the back of a novel, or if you don't know what the words on the label are, or if you see red #, blue#, yellow# on it, please put that back on the shelf. It's not food.

Eat as much fresh food as you can. Go organic if you can afford it (some farmers' markets and food coops take food stamps as do Trader Joe's, Fairway, and Whole Foods) and if you are a meat eater, try to get your hands on organic meat.

Recipe: “I betcha I won’t wake up hungry at 4:30 am this time” smoothie

1 ripe banana  
organic milk/almond milk/rice milk  
yoghurt

\*Optional stuff: strawberries/blueberries/mango or other fruit of your choice,  
hemp seed or whey protein powder, molasses

Throw it all in the blender and enjoy  
(if any of the fruit is frozen, the smoothie has a thicker consistency)

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## Thinking about Birth

You’re pregnant. Congratulations!!!!!! What your body is doing is incredible. Our bodies are infinitely wise, how else would all of us be here if not for the deep intelligence of women’s bodies? Pregnancy and birth are natural processes and women have treated them as such for thousands of years. Only in the last 60 years have we started to look at childbirth as a medical crisis. ***Honey, pregnancy is not an illness.***

Our bodies know how to build healthy babies and how to bring them forth. Once I understood that I could trust my body, I let go of a lot of the fear I was carrying. I understood that labor is an intricately designed process and that each sensation I felt was signaling my hormones, my uterus, and my entire being to help me birth my baby and to be able to take care of her after birth.

I decided I wanted to give birth out of the hospital and under the care of a midwife. I knew that midwives believed that birth is a sacred event and not a medical emergency. By keeping my births away from hospital settings I was allowing myself the chance to labor without machines, and chemicals that might hinder—or stop—my birthing process. A clock, strangers, or restrictions would not govern me. I also could create a welcoming environment for my babies.

Tip: Pamela England has a wonderful section on welcoming our newborns in her book “Birthing From Within.”

Two daughters later, I am amazed at the entire laboring process. I can also say that being aware and making choices about my births empowered me to make other important decisions as a mother. I didn’t hand myself over to a so-called authority when I gave birth, I instead allowed my body and spirit to blossom into their own power and I continue to mother from that place of power. I care for my children based on my visions and dreams for them and for our planet. I gather knowledge from sources I trust and call on wise assistance whenever it is needed.

Choose a birth that honors your wisdom and strength as a woman and remember to be compassionate with yourself.

Publications on pregnancy and birth:

[Birthing From Within](#)

Pamela England  
Partera press (1998)

[Spiritual Midwifery](#)

Ina May Gaskin  
The Book Publishing Company Summetown, TN (1977)

[Ina May’s Guide to Childbirth](#)

Ina May Gaskin  
Bantam, New York (2003)

[Bountiful, Beautiful, Blissful](#)

Gurmukh  
St. Martin’s Griffin (2003)

Mothering Magazine

PO Box 1690

Santa Fe, NM 87504-1690

[www.mothering.com](http://www.mothering.com)

1.505.984.8116

(The ultimate guide to everything about natural family living)

### [Herbal for the Childbearing Year](#)

Susun Weed

Ash Tree Publishing (1986)

### Film on birth:

The Business of Being Born

Abby Epstein, Ricki Lake (2008)

[www.thebusinessofbeingborn.com](http://www.thebusinessofbeingborn.com)

### **Recovery**

“I expected pain during labor but I didn’t expect to be in pain after I had the baby.”  
Robyn, artist, educator and new mother.

This is the stuff we don’t talk about. Maybe we don’t want to scare each other. Maybe some of us forget. While it’s true that the discomfort that a woman might feel after giving birth pales in comparison to the joy she feels at having a pure new being in her life, I think it is still worth discussing.

I could have sworn I was in labor again when the after pains hit. I’ve read them described as “cramp like.” Can anybody say “understatement?” After steering clear of chemicals and going through two long labors without epidurals, I found myself demanding painkillers to deal with after pains. I got them when Serene cried and when Joy-Shanti latched on to breastfeed. Now these uterine contractions do serve a really important purpose: they are helping the uterus go back to its pre-birth size. But damn, after all those hours of labor I just could not take another contraction. Renowned herbalist Susun Weed has a recipe for an after-pain brew in her book *Herbal For The Childbearing Year*. I would definitely recommend getting the book and having the ingredients on hand before birth. Had I done this, I would not have grabbed Ibuprofen.

I tore slightly during both of my births and stitches were required. I have read that massaging the perenium with olive oil during pregnancy can help make the skin

more pliable and reduce the risk of tearing during birth. Try it. Better yet, get your partner to do the massage for you. (Weleda makes a nice perenium massage oil.)

Different types of pillows can make sitting after birth easier. Body pillows and doughnut pillows can be helpful during this time, but maybe we just need to recline as much as possible during those first few days. Trust, you will be running later.

After my second birth I used a spritzing bottle every time I went to pee. That bottle and the water in it were lifesavers. The stitches were clean and peeing didn't sting. Alice, Mama of one, shared the following: "My midwife soaked MAMAJAMMA pads (cloth maxi pads) in witch hazel and then put them in the freezer. (I wore them) and they were the bombdiggity!!!! No stinging. I totally felt better."

I've read that taking the homeopathic remedy arnica is great for relieving soreness. I have also been told that comfrey pads can be soothing after birth as well.

Stay hydrated, get plenty of rest, eat nourishing foods and get to know your new family member.

Some new mothers experience post-partum depression. It isn't something that a woman expects to go through after one of the most profound experiences in her life, but the shifting of hormones; the dramatic changes in our lives and learning a new role can come as a sudden shock. Women with little or no support are particularly vulnerable to post-partum depression. Reach out to friends, a good counselor, an herbalist, or a naturopath if you suspect that you are dealing with post-partum depression. It can be treated successfully in a number of ways.

Aromatherapist Valerie Ann Wormwood recommends a number of essential oils that women can use to help keep depression at bay, among them are rose, bergamot, clary-sage, and grapefruit.

[The Fragrant Pharmacy](#)

Valerie Ann Wormwood

Bantam Books (1990)

**40 Days**

In many cultures, a woman and her child are given forty days after birth to cocoon peacefully. They retreat from every day life to honor the intense journey they have taken together. This is done not only for the physical health of the mother but also for the spiritual bonding of mother and baby. A mother is learning who her child is and how to best care for her. The baby is getting accustomed to the light, noises, and smells of her new environment. A child is born. A mother is born. This miracle deserves time to bask in its own glow.

For the births of both of my children, I honored the recommended six- week period for physical healing (complete healing actually takes a year) but with the birth of my second daughter, I embraced the more spiritual aspect of staying home with my baby for forty days. It was summer and some days I wanted to hit the pavement, but most days I was content to nurture myself and my baby within the peaceful, predictable space of home. I had time to reflect on my pregnancy, observe my growing baby, and our family was able to get comfortable in its new incarnation. Post-partum support can make the forty-day period heavenly. If someone wants to throw you a baby shower, let the gifts be soups, stews, and meals that you can freeze to last you for the month after the birth. Never mind the expensive nursery, people can pool money to hire a post-partum doula to come and help with everything from laundry and cooking to baby care. If it is possible, allow yourself 40 days to settle into your new life as a mother. Your baby will never be a newborn again.

## **Breastfeeding**

You probably know this by now, but I'm going to say it anyway:

**There is absolutely nothing in a can that compares to your breast milk.**

Science and corporate titans will try to convince you otherwise. They lie. Formula is no substitute for your milk.

One thing that amazes me about breast milk is that it is tailor made for your baby. Breastfed babies get less ear infections, have less gas, and get all of the antibodies that mommy has. Another wonderful benefit is that the hormones released during breastfeeding promote infant-mother bonding and feelings of well-being. Breastfeeding is a continuation of the perfect dance your body began at conception. Just as you trust your body to carry, nurture, and birth your growing baby, you can trust it to supply all of the nourishment your baby needs. Our milk is a healing, brain-boosting, immune building elixir. I love the peaceful energy my daughters radiated as they settled down to a meal at my breasts. Breast milk is always the right temperature, it's always available and it doesn't cost a penny. Added benefits? Mothers who breastfeed lose their baby weight faster and the baby's sucking helps to get the uterus back into shape.

Can breastfeeding be a challenge? Sometimes. With both of my daughters I had bouts of blocked ducts. With my first daughter I had cracked nipples and I was afraid that I didn't have enough milk. Here's what I have learned: blocked ducts are your body screaming, "You need rest." I found that napping, staying close to home, applying warmth to the painful area, and making sure that the baby nursed on that breast first cleared up my symptoms in three days. As soon as I felt a blocked duct coming on, I also took Echinacea drops to boost my immune system. The truth is that breastfeeding is also work. Our bodies are doing what comes naturally to them, but we need to nourish ourselves by making sure we that we eat well, rest, and drink healthy beverages.

The law of demand and supply governs your milk flow. The more milk your baby drinks the more milk you will make.

If you have any trouble breastfeeding or you have questions, contact your local La Leche League or a lactation consultant. I found the women at La Leche to be knowledgeable, concerned, and helpful when I had a breastfeeding question. Midwives are also an invaluable post partum resource. My first midwife, Connie, visited me daily for the first two weeks after Serene was born. She made sure that our family was getting off to a good start, answered my questions and checked on my health and the baby's.

Oh, and I know I was stressed about not being able to make milk after my first child was born. Connie reassured me that milk takes 24 hours to come in and the baby would be nourished by a rich substance called colostrum for her first day on the planet. So please, relax, the milk will come and the baby will get what she needs.

### **Care package for the Nursing Mother**

- Raspberry leaf tea is nourishing, tasty, full of minerals, and reputed to help tone the uterus for the work of labor. It's also recommended for alleviating morning sickness. Get it from a good herb store. At least a cup daily is a wonderful thing.
- If your baby is gassy you can prepare a tea of fennel or anise seeds
- I used sweet almond oil and calendula cream to heal sore nipples.

When I was worried about my milk supply, my husband did some research and found that fenugreek has been used for centuries to help increase a woman's milk supply. Believe me, it works. I have had to stop using fenugreek at times because I was making too much milk.

The amazing herbalist, Robin Rose Bennett, tipped me to oat straw. This herbal infusion is in heavy rotation at my house. Our entire family reaps the benefits of this delicious, beautifying, nourishing herb known for its abundant supply of minerals and for building strong bones.

Nettles, nettles and more nettles. This herb is in heavy rotation in my house. I have found that nettle infusions have helped increase my energy level, which is not surprising since herbalists suggest using it when clients have anemia.

And everyone can use some dandelion leaf tea in their lives Packed with iron, calcium, potassium and vitamins A, B, C and D, dandelion invigorates our bodies, enriches our breast milk, and has incredible healing capacities.

### Breastfeeding Resources:

La Leche League

[lli.org](http://lli.org)

1-877-4-LALECHE

### The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding

La Leche League International

Seventh edition Plume (2004)

## **Why My Babies Don't Break The Bank**

In conversation with other parents of infants, I am always thrown off when someone says, “children are so expensive.” I know that once they reach middle school, children are quite capable of putting holes in your pocket book, but while they are still babies there are lots of ways to keep the cost of caring for them down.

Tip: Buy second hand stuff

Babies outgrow their clothes before we can even enjoy seeing them wear them. You can check online for cheap clothes or opportunities to barter, go to second hand stores, check yard sales, and flea markets for deals. Where I live there are stores where you can exchange your child's old clothes for stuff that fits.

My husband and I have bought the following items, second hand, in great condition:

2 Baby Bjorn carriers \$15, 1 Didymos \$50, 1 over the shoulder baby holder \$15,  
1 Maclaren double stroller \$65, 1 crib \$30

Remember, Craigslist.com is a girl's best friend.

Tip: Breastfeed and save hundreds of dollars in formula costs

Tip: Feed your children wholesome foods and save money in medical costs

### **“Some days I feel like I’m going crazy”**

The sleeplessness. The sudden shift in your identity. The constant responsibility. The lack of quiet. The cooking. The laundry. The cleaning. The broken streams of thought. The friendships that are falling to the wayside. Your undone hair. Your ill-fitting wardrobe. The isolation.

How strange is it that the world is made up of mothers—many of whom have felt overwhelmed at some point or another—and yet the relentlessness of motherhood is rarely discussed? It’s as if by saying that we get tired, need space, and have personal needs, we are somehow not good mothers. I remember meeting another mom in the playground whose children are spaced about twenty months apart like mine are. I told her that I was tired and asked her how she did it. All she would say is that “It’s fun.” Some months later I saw the same mom in the playground with a harried look on her face. Normally very friendly, she barely greeted my children and me. Five minutes after we’d arrived, she rushed out with her two howling children. Absolutely nothing in her body language said that she was having fun. We can admit that motherhood is a lot of things and still be good mothers. We are good mothers and as my friend, Ayoluwa, put it “we are human.” Remember to nurture yourself. The time to care for yourself will find you if you dare to admit that you are looking for it. I believe we need to be willing to discuss the complexities of being mothers.

### **Get out of the house...now**

I can’t tell you the number of times other women have told me, “If I stay in all day with him/her/them, I go crazy.” Of course you do. We are social beings by nature. Go to playgrounds, parks, indoor play areas, free outdoor concerts, festivals, museums (many museums have days where they offer free admissions), and libraries. Try mother’s groups, mommy-and-me classes, or post-natal yoga. Go to where the kids are and you’ll find the mamas you need to connect with.

My dream is to create more family friendly everything: poetry readings, parties, concerts, meditation and yoga retreats, art exhibits...

Oh, and listen: Go out without your baby (or babies) sometimes. It is vital to rediscover yourself or get a glimpse into who you are becoming. The first time I went out without my children I felt like I had landed on another planet. No diaper bag, stroller, baby carrier, or cries of “mommy,” it was wonderful and strange simultaneously. I’ve found that I am a better mother and a happier person when I’ve had some time to myself.

### **Carrying after you carry**

Both of my daughters glowed when I wore them. They were quiet, content, safe observers of the goings on wherever we happened to be. Peaceful in their perches wrapped in cloth close to mommy. I can’t extol the virtues of baby wearing enough.

One of the highlights of a trip I took across Southern Africa was a seventeen-hour train ride from Zambia to Zimbabwe. My male traveling companions and I were unable to book a private train cabin, so we were separated when it came time to sleep. (Men and women are not allowed to sleep in the same cabin in certain parts of the train) So off I went to sleep in a small space with five women who I had never met. Conversation started and was in full swing in no time. We talked about work, relationships, and then the talk turned to children. It turned out that I was the only woman in the cabin without a child. My childless status shocked the other women, as did my confession that I didn’t know how to wear a baby. This led to a spirited demonstration

Of the different methods each woman used to carry her baby. Less than a year after that conversation, I gave birth to Serene and I experienced the bliss of baby wearing.

I’ve worn my daughters in a number of different carriers and in a number of different ways. Every time I can take a fussy baby, put her on my body in a piece of fabric and see her transform into a serene baby, I am struck by the genius of my foremothers.

It is natural for babies to want to be close to their caregivers and baby wearing makes it possible for us to carry our children and get things done, as our hands are free. Baby wearing is also more convenient than strollers for us urban mamas who use subways and buses. My daughters also slept much better when they were carried. I think that I am more in tune with my second child because I carried her almost exclusively for the first seven months after she was born.

I've worn my daughters in:

- A sling that my friend Veronika created. She came into my room grabbed, one of my many pieces of fabric, tied it in a magical and safe knot and put Serene in it. In fact my husband used this home made sling just about every night to get our colicky first born to sleep. It was a lifesaver. Thanks, Veronika.
- The Over The Shoulder Baby Holder. An absolutely fabulous carrier. Joy-Shanti lived in this sling and it too worked magic on her and everyone who realized that she was in it.
- A Baby Bjorn. Lovely.
- On my back in pieces of fabric that I also use as skirts, head wraps, dresses, blankets, tablecloths etc.
- A Didymos is a long piece of fabric that proved to be versatile and wonderful for distributing the weight of the baby.

As my needs changed and my daughters got heavier, my carriers changed. I mostly use the stroller now that they are older, but my love of babywearing has me keeping my eyes open for something that will allow me to carry them close, comfortably for a little while longer.

### **Don't be scared**

There are tons of resources out there to help you get comfortable with babywearing. There are even groups centered on learning this ancient art.

## **Baby Wearing Resources:**

[www.thebabywearer.com](http://www.thebabywearer.com)

[www.mamatoto.com](http://www.mamatoto.com)

[www.babywearingconference.com](http://www.babywearingconference.com)

### Babywearing

Maria Blois, MD

Pharmasoft Publishing L.P (2005)

## **Toxicity**

When my husband and I left Belgium for New York, we moved into an apartment building with family. There was a family above us living in crisis. At three in the morning I used to hear a male voice yelling, “Shut the f\$%# up,” and then I’d hear a baby cry. I never found out exactly where the family lived, I only knew that they were in deep pain.

Parenthood can be challenging. I have done things I regret as a mother. I have raised my voice at my child; I popped her on the arm with a comb on two different occasions. I was disappointed with myself afterwards. This was not the way I wanted to relate to my children. This was not the example I wanted to set for them. I had to dig deep. Deeper to find ways to raise them that did not involve any form of violence. Why? Because after almost three years of motherhood, I realize that my daughters learn more from what I do than from what I say. When I had my second child, my oldest daughter mimicked me by wearing her own baby doll in a sling and pretending to breastfeed her. I know that my daughters emulate me and your own child/children will imitate you. Our children are our mirrors.

I had a conversation with a friend of mine when I was a student in undergraduate school and the subject of raising children came up. I’d said that I didn’t see anything wrong with hitting kids to get a point across. He asked, “Do you hit adults to make yourself understood?” “No, of course not.” I answered. “I reason with adults. I talk to them and listen to them and try to reach an understanding.” “Why wouldn’t you do that with children?” He’d asked. I had to think about that. The logic could go that children are not our equals so we have to get our points across

however we need to. Or maybe we think children don't understand certain things. But where does that understanding start if not at home? I turned that conversation around and around in my head until it dawned on me: children too were worthy of respect and if I wanted to help my daughters grow up to be thoughtful people, able to communicate beyond screaming or hitting, I would have to model that behavior. Besides that, yelling at children or hitting them might be a quick fix, but it doesn't seem like a good way to help them understand the deeper lessons we are trying to teach.

When I am impatient or feel myself getting angry with my daughters, I try to check what is going on. Am I tired? Am I frustrated about something that has nothing to do with the children? Am I trying to show someone else that I am in control? Do I actually need to enforce some necessary boundaries? If I need to lay down the law, how do I go about it? I am learning that anger is not good fuel to help me reach my daughters when they are not behaving. I prefer to mother my children from the most centered, loving, healthy position I can muster and this is not always easy. In those moments when I start to feel anger taking me off course, I step back. I take a deep breath (or five) I look deep into my daughter's eyes and try to understand what exactly is going on. I might use humor to switch up the energy, I might talk to her, or if I've had to tell her the same thing twice, I warn her that I will send her to her room. Understand, sometimes I am rocked by my toddler's defiance. I never expected my child to yell at me, boss me around, or tell me what she will or won't do. Sometimes I struggle to live up to my ideal of mothering. I just try to remember that we are imprinting ways of being on our children every moment of every day. I hope to have confident, thoughtful, respectful, healthy, strong and loving children who grow into loving, capable, healthy adults. I believe that most parents, if they think about it, want the same for their own children. My aim is to care for my children in a way that honors their spirits and mine. Sometimes we have to seek help before we become parents to ensure that we don't pass the legacy of our pain down to our children.

Question: How do you want to raise your children?

Counseling, mentors, spiritual communities, naturopathic doctors, support groups, or 12 step programs can help us to deal with our issues, whatever they may be, before they interfere with the health of our families.

## Mental and Emotional health Resources:

Dr. Joy Degruy-Post Traumatic Slave Disorder

[www.joydegruy.com](http://www.joydegruy.com)

### You Can Heal Your Life

Louise L. Hay

Hay House, Inc (1984)

## **Clean House**

- Dr. Bronner's soap
- Vinegar
- Lemon juice
- Water
- Baking soda
- Tea tree oil

Once you start tuning in to your mother nature, you might find yourself questioning everything. Pregnancy and raising children have a way of making you reconsider your habits, ideas, relationships, and lifestyle. Both of my pregnancies helped me to look deeper within myself and clean up my emotional baggage. During my second pregnancy I realized that I was having a relationship with too many chemicals. One evening as I prepared the tub for my daughter's bath, I became aware that I always aired the bathroom after I cleaned the tub. If the chemicals I was using to clean the bathroom were strong and dangerous, why use them? Commercial cleaners are no more effective than the stuff our grandmothers used to clean their homes. (And you know grandma's home was spotless)

Dr. Bronner's soap is a fabulous all purpose cleaner. I used it as body soap for a long time before I realized I could use it to clean everything from floors to laundry. A little goes a very long way. Baking soda is a wonderful abrasive. Vinegar is great for windows, stainless steel and it works well as a fabric softener.

I use essential oils and fresh herbs in the water that I am using to clean the house. You can put one drop of an essential oil in an open container of water as an air

freshener (keep these out of reach of children), or boil herbs on the stove to circulate the scent in the air. Lavender is a soothing herb that works well on the nervous system. Eucalyptus is fresh and energizing. Cinnamon is warming and makes people feel at home. Tea tree oil is a powerful anti septic. I use a drop of it sometimes in mop water or clean furniture with it during cold season.

Essential oils can serve many purposes, as they are also wonderful for healing illness.

### Health Resource:

#### [Natural Healthcare at Home: Doctor Mum's Quick Reference Guide](#)

Kathy Duerr

Findhorn Press or New Age Books (2000)

### **Babies as healers**

During my first pregnancy I battled fear for the first five months. I was constantly afraid of losing the baby, I worried I wasn't eating right, and if I didn't feel a movement for a few hours I'd start to panic. Sometimes I had nightmares. It wasn't until my best friend, Mirlande, called a doula and the three of us had a conversation that I finally exhaled. "Drink lots of red raspberry leaf tea." The doula told me. "And trust your body." The words "trust your body" completely transformed my experience of that pregnancy. Birth is indeed a natural process, it is the reason we are all here. Natural, yet mysterious. Pregnancy and birth require a level of surrender that many of us are not used to. In a way, conscious pregnancy is an exercise in faith. I started believing that my body might actually have the wisdom to get me through it. I also began to acknowledge that certain birth related things were beyond my control.

Without physical worries to distract me, emotional and spiritual issues began to surface. I found myself reliving traumas—date rape, childhood experiences, and a procedure to remove abnormal cells from my cervix that left me damaged for well over a year. I started to fear for my child's physical safety. If she were a girl how could I protect her from such horrors? If the child were a boy how would I ensure that he didn't inflict pain on women? How could I help him see beyond stereotypes

to the beauty and promised he held within? Then the realities of having a child of color began to dawn on me. Thoughts of racism and police brutality circled in my mind like vultures. Then, as if to justify my fears, Hurricane Katrina happened. I was full of rage and grief and fear. I wrote a lot. I drew. I decided that more than anything else, I would muddle through all of those emotions for my child. I had to be free. I had to be healthy, whole, and present for my baby. I wanted to embody a positive force for him or her. So I wrote more. I cried. I mourned. I vowed to educate my children, to arm them with self-esteem, self-love, and self-respect. I decided that when the time was right I would tell them my stories. I have seen that in my own immediate family generations of women have been through abuse but no one talks about it. I would like to break the silences and give my children the gift of awareness. My first pregnancy was cathartic. I unpacked baggage I didn't even know I still had. When I gave birth, I was much more emotionally and spiritually clear than I had been for some time.

Raising my children has taken me to edges of myself. Jagged places I didn't know existed. Strong places, beautiful places, ugly, insecure, and unhealed places. Our children give us the opportunity to do better, to be better, to dig deeper, to find our most compassionate, loving, and wise selves. Love is not always a soft thing. There are boundaries that need to be set and lessons that need to be learned. I do get angry with my daughters sometimes. Sometimes I wonder if I have got this parenting thing all wrong. I can only say that I am far from a perfect mother...whatever that is. I do the best I can. And if I make a mistake I acknowledge it, I apologize to my child (and myself) and I do better. Sometimes my child apologizes to me and she does better. Our children truly show us who we are.

***“Having a child is like wearing your heart outside your body.”***

You are embarking on a journey that will teach you, change you, challenge you, and deepen your connection with all life. Many blessings to you.

One love,  
Mariahadessa Ekere

## Human Resources:

International Center for Traditional Childbearing  
Network of midwives, doulas, healers, and support for families of color  
[www.Blackmidwives.org](http://www.Blackmidwives.org)

Doula (birthing assistant) organization of North America  
[www.Dona.org](http://www.Dona.org)

Tioma Allison  
Deeply treasured midwife and herbalist  
917-497-3529

Kristen Leonard  
Compassionate, caring homebirth midwife  
[kmleonard@mac.com](mailto:kmleonard@mac.com)  
646-290-8020

Connie Gerrits  
My fabulous midwife, a gifted, and wise soul  
[www.geboortehuis.be/WatDoetWie/ConnieGerrits.html](http://www.geboortehuis.be/WatDoetWie/ConnieGerrits.html)

Patricia Jacquelin Codrington  
Craniosacral, biodynamic and ayurvedic healing  
A fantastic healer, Patricia treats serious conditions in babies and adults  
212-337-3434  
[www.in-resonance.com](http://www.in-resonance.com)

## **Appendix: How To Make An Herbal Infusion**

An infusion is basically a tea that has steeped long in an air- tight container. Herbalists make infusions instead of teas because we get more of the benefits of the herbs this way. I make all of my teas from dried herbs. Big up to Robin Rose Bennett who taught me how to make incredible infusions. This is her method and it really works for me.

- 1) When you are using one herb, take a handful of that herb and put it into a half gallon mason jar.
- 2) Bring a large pot of water to a boil.
- 3) Turn the water off and pour it into your jar. Make sure to fill the jar all the way to the top and then close the jar tightly. (Robin even likes for a little water to spill out when she caps her jar) This ensures that your brew is airtight.
- 4) If you are making an infusion from leaves (red raspberry, nettles, oat straw), you can let your tea sit for between four to eight hours. If you are making an infusion from seeds (anise, fennel, fenugreek), let it sit for a half hour. Flowers (rose, calendula) steep for an hour, two tops. Of course there are exceptions to every rule. Red clover blossoms should steep for at least four hours.

(I make my infusions when everyone is asleep to make sure I can give them my full attention. Notice how some of the herbs in the jar fall to the bottom and others stay on top. When herbs are at the top of your jar, it's a sign to add more water. So open your jar, add more water, close it tightly again and watch. I usually have to do this twice.)

5) Open your tea and strain the herbs from the liquid. Then squeeze the herbs to make sure you get all of the liquid out of them. There are vitamins, minerals, medicines, and nutrients waiting to dance out of those just steeped herbs into your teacup.

6) Give thanks and enjoy. Refrigerate whatever you aren't using.

If you like exact measurements, try one part of the herb to five parts water. (Example: one cup of oat straw and five cups of water.)

Where do you get herbs? There are specialty shops where you can get quality-dried herbs. I live in New York and highly recommend the Integral Yoga Apothecary and Flower Power. A cheaper way to get herbs is by ordering them by phone or online. I have placed large orders with Healing Spirits Farm and been amazed by the quality of their herbs. Some health food stores also carry herbs. I've included a resource list at the end of the book.

Note: If you have no time or inclination to hook up these brews, Traditional Medicines makes a delicious tea for nursing mothers called Mother's Milk.

#### Herbal Resources:

Healing Spirits Farm & Education Center  
Family-run and friendly. Organic, high quality herbs and tinctures  
61247 State Route 415, Avoca, NY  
[www.healingspiritsherbfarm.com](http://www.healingspiritsherbfarm.com)  
[herbs@healingspiritsherbfarm.com](mailto:herbs@healingspiritsherbfarm.com)  
(607)-566-2701

Herb Pharm  
Incredible line of herbal tinctures (widely available in health food stores)  
[www.herb-pharm.com](http://www.herb-pharm.com)

Robin Rose Bennett  
Inspired healer, herbalist, wise woman, and teacher  
[www.robinrosebennett.com](http://www.robinrosebennett.com)  
(973)-728-5878

Yonette Flemming  
Herbalist, green community organizer, raphaologist  
(718) 638-3566

[Flower Power](#)

Quality dried herbs, tinctures, bath goodies and more

406 East 9th Street, NYC

212-982-6664.

[Integral Yoga Apothecary](#)

More yummy herbs, tinctures, supplements and friendly faces

234 West 13th Street, NYC

212-645-3051

## About the author



Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie is author of “Karma’s Footsteps” (Flipped Eye Publishing). She has taught writing and read her poetry in North America, Europe, and Africa. Her work has been published in several anthologies, magazines, and literary journals including “Listen Up” (One World/Ballantine), “Role Call” (Third World Press), “Crab Orchard Review,” and “Beyond The Frontier” (Black Classic Press). Her mother introduced Ekere to natural healing, yoga, and meditation when Ekere was still a child. The births of her daughters, Serene and Joy-Shanti, inspired her to delve more deeply into natural healing and living. Currently, Ekere lives in her native New York where she is mothering, writing, studying herbal medicine making, and learning something new every day.

[For more information visit her websites:](#)

[www.ekeretallie.com](http://www.ekeretallie.com)

[thesagehoney.wordpress.com](http://thesagehoney.wordpress.com)