

SHANNON ABBS

Consciously Natural Momma

*Natural Parenting Methods From Conception Through
The Terrific Twos*

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Dedication

*Thank you **Meine Liebling**,
For coming to Earth the exact day I'd hoped.
Changing my perspective on life & love forever.
Allowing me to awaken, heal & create the best life for us here.
I love you forever & even more.*

Momma

Introduction

Heyo, I'm Shannon. I'm so excited to have written this book for you! I'm a Momma who parents consciously, using natural methods and focused on using psychology to better understand children's needs. As well as my own.

I am not a doctor, medical professional, or even an expert. I'm a regular mother who was on a mission to take control of my life and pursue my dreams.

I knew a more natural path was more of my calling anyhow. I had to weed through a lot of regular mainstream information to figure out what worked for me and how to implement that information into practice. All of this searching took a lot of time and wasn't in one place. So, I've put everything from conception, pregnancy, birth, the newborn, all the way to the terrific twos, and more into this one book for you.

Who's This Book For?

This book won't be for everyone but it sure will be if:

- You want to simplify parenting
- You don't mind a little cursing
- You would like to save money overall
- You thrive when you have a strategy that flows
- You'd like to live more naturally and Eco-conscious
- You'd like to parent from a psychological standpoint
- You'd like to be confident in your motherhood journey
- You'd like to rid yourself of power struggles & remain calm

- You'd like to let go of social norms & parent from biological needs
- You need to read something that's **real-life** rather than usual textbook information

If this sounds like you then you'll gain a lot from reading this book. I wouldn't be the best version of myself or mother without this information. Everything I wrote here comes from my personal experience. I share with you the real-life version of my knowledge, lifestyle, and how it flows nicely together. This is not only a guide on these methods but also a memoir. I'm taking this opportunity to explain why I live the way I do.

Everything I've written may not resonate with you fully. That's totally dandy. If something doesn't sit right with you then don't force it. We get to choose our own realities.

If you'd like to skim through chapters you can. However, I found that this lifestyle really has a lot of overlap making it simple to blend each aspect together.

I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart for purchasing this book. I've really enjoyed putting my thoughts to paper. You've allowed me to live the life I've always dreamed of.

Blessed Be.

Chapter One: My Journey To Conception

My journey of conceiving took about 2 years & 4 months. With one miscarriage. W. is a “Rainbow Baby”. It was a wild roller coaster of emotions for me. I was completely obsessed after the first few months.

All our lives we’re told that if we have unprotected sex we’ll get pregnant young, immediately, in High School then our lives will be ruined!

Guess what?

They left out A LOT of information about being human.

Whoever decided to teach kids abstinence, rather than actually teach us how our bodies work and how to be human wasn’t helping anyone in my opinion. I had no idea how my body worked until I started trying to conceive to do what my body is supposed to do. The whole sex education in America needs to be revised. Just sayin’.

Okay, with that rant over let me tell you what happened.

It was the summer of 2016. About a year into J. and my relationship. I was sure he was the one for me. When BAM! I was suddenly struck with “Baby Fever” at the young age of 24. I knew I wanted babies eventually but when people would ask my answer would be,

“Nooo... I have a little sister, so I’m good!”

This “Baby Fever” hit me like a ton of bricks. I was almost ashamed because I still felt like I was too young to have babies.

I was looking at all the cute little baby things, using Pinterest to plan out this fantasy baby life that I didn’t even know I was ready for. A few weeks went by like this. I finally told J. “I wanna have a baby!” except I was nervous. I couldn’t even tell him sober or in the daytime with lights on! I

was embarrassed for some reason. That night I guess was the first time we had ever actively tried. I don't even think he said "Okay". I think we just went for it.

I was surely pregnant! Woohoo here comes my baby! That was easy!

Except, no. I wasn't.

I had no idea how a woman's Moon cycle (a lot of women sync with the moon, fun fact) even worked. If you didn't know, you have to wait until you're ovulating, you have about a 12-hour window and it's not always the same.

I tried really hard to act like that wasn't the case because I didn't want to overthink it all. I wanted this to be fun and a surprise when we finally fell pregnant. So, we kept trying and trying and trying. Still nothing.

Months went by, with me pseudo-obsessing over baby-making. Women seemed to accidentally fall pregnant or they just tried and there you go. I guess that's how it seemed.

I was healthy on paper.

Though... I did a lot of traveling, drank, smoked cigarettes, and ate a lot of bar food. Even though, weirdly, I was kind of a health nut at home. I did, however, work in strip clubs as an entertainer. My home club and other states. (If you know me, don't act surprised.)

I was working about two weeks out of the month partying my ass off, up all night, traveling from town to town, and dancing for almost 6 hours straight, 4 nights a week. That all just came with the job. None of this was helping my chances of becoming pregnant. It was hindering it all.

(If you're thinking of passing judgment on my working in a club. It was a great experience. We're actually business owners. I wouldn't be who I am or have written this book without that part of my life.)

I was determined to not let that deter me from making our baby dreams come true. Eventually, I became obsessed, with the fertility apps, ovulation sticks, timing things out, making sure I was home on ovulation day, and of course drunkenly crying to anyone who would listen.

Cringe.

Over about a year, I was trying too damn hard because I always thought

that if I worked hard enough that something would happen. That's not the case with making a baby though. I think that was the most difficult part for me. Spare yourself the mental turmoil and do what you can to relax. I know, easier said than done! Relaxing really does make a huge difference.

There's so much that goes into trying to conceive and it made sex feel like work. Even so, there was always the goal of a baby for me. I peed on so many sticks!

The Miscarriage:

I really learned a lot once this happened. I know it's pretty triggering to some people. If you'd like to you can skip past it. I just feel it's important to talk about these things. Being that I needed to also know this information and a real story rather than the cut-and-dry textbook style.

So, here goes.

It wasn't until the miscarriage on May 2nd, 2018 that I eventually kinda got my act together. That really woke me up.

I was in Portland Oregon working. Trying to focus on yoga on the porch when I just started balling out of nowhere because I couldn't stop thinking "I'm not pregnant again and it's never going to happen to me!"

About 4 days later I took the usual test expecting to see another disappointing one-liner. This time it was different. This time it was TWO lines! I was shocked and kind of freaking out. I took another test to make sure. Both had TWO lines! Whoooooaaaaa! It was really happening. I then hid the tests in my suitcase.

My friend (& roommate) had been working late so I took the bus to work. I remember walking to the stop and all of a sudden I was STARVING even though I had just eaten. I consulted the anonymous app ladies.

"Welcome to being pregnant! Congrats!"

I was so happy and excited I couldn't believe this was happening to me. Finally, all that obsession wasn't for nothing! That was a Friday night. I made great money because I was so high vibes.

But here's the Fucked up part...

I had a few vodka sodas over that weekend.

MONSTER!

I know... I really do... again, no judging. I'm human too. And I definitely learned my lesson.

I was barely pregnant, not sure if it was for real and I heard many women who didn't know they were pregnant and had drunk a little during the pregnancy. I thought it'd be fine. I was going home Monday anyway and I'd be able to tell J. the wonderful news! Everything was going to be okay!

Again, there are serious repercussions for consuming alcohol while pregnant. Don't be like I was.

Here's something strange though. I was on stage Sunday night and this man who had seen me earlier that week came up to my rack and said, "Wow, you've gotten really skinny this week!".

I asked him to repeat himself because I hadn't noticed & I also didn't remember him. Caught me off guard. He apologized for commenting on my weight. Then we had a few dances and eventually went home. Sundays were always pretty slow.

The next day, I was due for my eight-hour train ride back to Washington. I did notice my arms were a lot smaller than usual but my roommate didn't have a scale.

I was chilling on the couch in my sweatpants wondering how I should tell J. Then suddenly, I felt what feels like the beginning of a moon cycle.

There was blood. On my pants and on the couch. I did what I could to stay calm. I thought maybe it was just spotting. Consulted the app. Waited.

I had cramps pretty intense so I went in the bath. I bled only while peeing so I thought I was fine or maybe it was something else. I cried as I thought,

"This isn't really happening! I get to keep my baby!".

After the bath, I looked at the app on my phone trying not to anticipate the worst. Someone told me to call the doctor immediately. I did.

The doctor was in Washington and told me to call the nearest hospital to me. I needed to go to the E.R. to get my blood taken to make sure it wasn't an RH-factor that could be an issue. This can be an issue if you're RH-negative and the baby is RH-Positive. It can cause severe bleeding because the mother's

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and baby's blood don't mix properly. I did not know this either.

My roommate wasn't home and I couldn't get over to the hospital by myself.

Our other roommate whom I wasn't as close to was upstairs. I had to very shyly ask him to take me to the E.R. I didn't tell them what was happening because I wasn't sure what was even happening. He drove me, told me his kids were born right over in that building, and waited in the waiting room with me.

I told the nurses what was happening and that I had a few drinks. I lay in the hospital bed for a while and got up a few times to pee. Every time there was more blood. There was none while I was just idle. Only when I peed.

They took my blood, guess I have easy veins. Woo...

I lay there trying to convince myself that I was having a miscarriage. Then, that I wasn't because they weren't calling it one. I remember lying there cold, shivering, and just sad hoping I didn't miss my train too. I knew my HCG level was only at a 9 or so but I wanted someone to TELL me I was having a miscarriage. They never did. The woman just stared at me dead in the eyes expressionless.

Eventually, they came back and it was probably two hours since I'd arrived. I guess out of this visit I got to know my blood type. A- so that's cool. I was convinced I wasn't going to make my train on time because I needed to be there in less than an hour. They don't give you your money back if you miss it and I was definitely ready to be home.

I didn't say anything on the way back to the house. My roommate didn't pry just asked if everything was okay. I had obviously been crying you know? My other roommate entered the house not long after I got everything in my suitcase and tried to pull myself together. At this point, I was still going in and out of denial. He also asked but didn't pry. You can read every emotion all over my face. I do not hide them well.

"I just want to go home."

Was obviously not true. I don't think I told him until a month or so later. I think I was really just shocked.

That train ride was the most depressing one I think I have ever had. It's

eight hours long or more and I usually really enjoy the train. I'd watch the scenery, maybe meet someone new, or watch some movies.

I just sat there, staring out the window, hood up, crying silently. Trying to convince myself it wasn't really happening. Everything would be okay. I felt so freaking lonely. I couldn't tell anyone. I couldn't even tell myself. I was so preoccupied with having a baby and then, I was so preoccupied with the loss.

I got home around midnight. I don't remember if I told J. or not what happened then or the next day. I don't even remember his reaction. Anytime I told him things that were important like this or where I needed support was often met with dead silence. I now understand that's just how HE copes with things but that wasn't exactly helpful. Eventually, he did hold me as I cried but just didn't have words. I needed words.

I went to this grocery store that also has a loft where you can sit, eat or have a beer. My friend Slover was there with me. We were sitting and I just burst out crying! I heard a baby cry.

He said,

"I can't believe you're going through this all alone..." and gave me a side hug.

But I wasn't alone, I was with him. And he's been one of my best friends thus far.

There's a lot nobody tells you about miscarriage. Sure, they tell you it may be painful, you'll bleed, and the logistics of it all. 1 in 4 have them after all. There's more to it.

Here's what I learned:

- *I was sad for months*
- *I completely blamed myself*
- *It didn't feel like a moon cycle*
- *Talking about it is still taboo to some*
- *The blood didn't flow like a moon cycle*
- *I went through the entire grieving process, involuntarily.*

- *The pain was so much greater than the usual monthly cramps*
- *I knew what was happening but couldn't control my emotions*
- *Once I got pregnant again my first thoughts were fear of miscarriage*
- *I had crying spells at random times where I couldn't get up off the floor*
- *If I heard a baby cry I'd burst into tears. I never noticed them cry much before*
- *A baby born after a loss is called a "Rainbow Baby" Because they're "The calm after the storm."*
- *1 in 4 women has miscarriages that we know of & 10-15% of known pregnancies end in miscarriage. (That number has risen since COVID days.)*
- *4.2 weeks IS still a miscarriage. I was asked plenty of times if I was sure I was even pregnant and why it even mattered because it wasn't a baby yet*

Lessons learned Universe.

If you or someone you know has had a miscarriage then I want to tell you that I understand the pain. Not just the physical pain. But the emotional pain I can't really explain. I know where I went wrong. I did write a letter to that future baby and even gave it a nickname that early on.

Even though it didn't seem like a baby yet because it wasn't. Everything still felt like someone died. The grieving process was very real. I was not prepared for that. I was confused. If that's happening or happened to you just know you're not alone in having emotions like this. I was there too. Really fucked with me.

Moving Forward:

After all of that, it took me a good month or so to not hurt so badly. I worked as a Housekeeper with a woman for a month or so but I eventually didn't like the schedule and got myself fired. Went back into my old routines, partying with friends, and had some fun outings and traveled with our old pal Dustin (R.I.P) that summer.

Fall came around and I had decided at the beginning of that year that I'd quit smoking. I was down to one smoke with my coffee by then. Dustin would

leave one on the counter for me and I'd clean his house while he was at work. That was cool. I also decided that I'd start a web development course and be much healthier.

The miscarriage really put everything into perspective for me. Maybe I needed to do something else with my life anyway. I was tired of focusing on having a baby. I told J. that I didn't want to try anymore and maybe the Universe wanted me to have a career and whatever first. It wasn't time for us and I was so tired of the mental toll it had on me. We did the deed ONCE at the end of September and I was mad because get this... You're not going to like it...

Astrology is all too real to me. I DID NOT want to have a Gemini Sun sign baby. No, nothing wrong with Gemini themselves. If you're a Gemini person, well, sorry. I know we have all sorts of signs in different placements. Some people say not to get too picky.

However, I could not handle being around most Gemini people. We never clicked. I'm a Capricorn... I'm Earth, they're Air. Dancing all around, can't ever pin them down. Yada Yada. If you know astrology then you get me. Obviously, if I had one I'd love them. Don't hate me.

I literally looked at him and said half-jokingly,

"You just got me pregnant, and it better not be a Gemini!" he never seemed bothered though.

I shrugged it off eventually. We even did a sexy photo shoot together with one of my old photographers. We had some drinks because I wasn't trying to conceive anymore and had some fun.

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First Family Photo!

I eventually decided to do a pregnancy test WAY too early, probably around 2.5 weeks or so. It was obviously negative but you know calms the “DO A

TEST!” jitters.

A week later I was walking to the park laughing at myself and thought, “Wouldn’t it be so funny if I found it in the trash and it was positive!? Ha! Nobody would believe it”.

So, I did. I walked home and went to the trash, pulled it out and it looked like there was a faint second line. I was like...

“Nooooo that’s old. Screw it let’s do another one”.

I did like 5 because they kept coming out positive. I did not believe it at all. There are some conception apps that you can take photos of the results on the stick and it will tell you how fertile you are on ovulation sticks and how high your HCG levels could be. I lined em’ up and snapped a photo. I was definitely pregnant.

I could not believe it. I sent the photos to my friend B. and was all...

“What? I’m only 3 weeks! Is this real life?”

She congratulated me. I was so shocked. There I was, in denial again but for the opposite reason! I didn’t even want to get pregnant this time. You know how much I wanted to prove everyone wrong when they said,

“When you give up trying, the baby will come.”

I guess I’ll believe it now, stop trying and the Universe will come through. And so, we were pregnant.

What Did I Learn About Conception?

First of all, let me run you through how conception really works if you don’t know.

- *Women can sync together.*
- *Everyone’s cycle can be different lengths. Mine is around 32 days. Not 28.*
- *Discharge changes in color and consistency over the cycle*
- *Eggs are released about 2 weeks after Menstruation.*
- *Your basal temperature goes up slightly while ovulating.*
- *Eggs have 12–24 hours to get fertilized before it disintegrates*
- *Some women can feel this happen (it kind of feels like a dull pop)*
- *We ovulate usually on one side and then the other next time.*

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- *Sperm can live up to 5 days but only in perfect conditions.*
- *Having sex too little can make sperm count lower.*
- *Having sex too often can also make sperm count lower.*
- *If an egg is fertilized you may feel it implant.*
- *If fertilized discharge will stay thick.*
- *If an egg isn't fertilized, blood builds up and releases 2 weeks later.*
- *If not fertilized discharge will dry up*
- *We're actually pregnant 10 months because it starts from your last moon day.*
- *The best birth control (or not) is actually the natural cycle-tracking method*
- *Tracking cycles lets you be way more aware of your body, I don't need the tools anymore. I can just feel it all.*
- *There are a lot of old wives' tales out there, I don't see them being entirely untrue. At least for me.*
- *Usually around the Full Moon is the release of blood & The New Moon is the ovulation period. It does change and switch over time though. (Hence: "Moon cycle" or "Moon Time")*
- *If trying to conceive is taking longer than a year you're considered to have infertility issues and can consult a doctor. Under 35. Over 35 you can seek help sooner.*

Whew! That was a lot I was misinformed about!

Tracking your cycles is very easy with the use of apps, ovulation sticks, and tracking your basal body temperature (before you move out of bed take your temperature while laying still. It should go up a few degrees on ovulation day.)

I enjoyed getting a pack of ovulation and pregnancy test strips online because they were the most inexpensive. The tests are all pretty much the same. Even in the doctor's office. The pregnancy tests that say they'll give you results sooner may be a little more sensitive but they all test just for HCG levels. HCG (Human chorionic gonadotropin) levels is a hormone that is produced by cells surrounding the embryo. This goes up quite a bit with each day of pregnancy.

It may work for some women who are out partying and maybe even accidentally get pregnant but it's not like that for everyone. The lifestyle I was living was not helping me conceive. I wasn't healthy being hungover, dehydrated, and putting the stress of traveling and working out constantly on my body.

The stress of trying to conceive is REAL and it even made my menstruation cycle go away entirely for over two months at one point. The stress of constantly thinking about being pregnant or not was such an emotional mess for me. Which helped nothing. Stress releases cortisol which isn't an optimal condition for getting pregnant. My past self was completely obsessed.

The apps were nice and helpful at first, I learned a lot about my body. Eventually, I was obsessing over them and couldn't stop. Oh, and some women are just plain nasty. I left many apps and forums because of the comments.

Eating as healthy as possible (I recommend *mostly* raw fruits and vegetables vegan diet. I'll explain later), prenatal vitamins, drinking water, no alcohol, caffeine, and no sugar are all going to help your eggs be in the best environment for when the sperm comes along. That, and exercising regularly, making sure you're at a healthy weight, and easing stress. There are also fertility teas with rose hips as well that are said to help get women in shape for pregnancy.

Once I let go of control, started taking care of my body more, and focused on other things, I finally fell pregnant. I didn't want to believe letting go would help me. I had all those lessons to go through. Now that I have passed all of that I know why I needed to learn. Next time around I know I'll be a lot less stressed about everything and also just in an overall healthier mindset.

With all that being said, I wish you love and light on your conception journey. Make sure to do what you can to relax and trust that the Universe has your back in all of this.

Chapter Two: Dietary Factors & Veganism

Let me jump into the Dietary Factors & Veganism chapter real quick for you. I didn't know where to place this chapter in the book but it makes sense to put it after the getting healthy conception part!

I'll start by saying no diet is right for every one of us. I have a friend who is legitimately allergic to fresh fruits and vegetables. Yeah, seriously. Everything has to be cooked. It sounds like a joke but there are people out there like her and she showed me how to use her EpiPen just in case she goes into shock and can't breathe. Sometimes she lives life on the edge and eats raw garlic like a badass though.

Consulting a nutritionist and minding your own health needs, allergies or intolerance would be the best route for you.

I'm not going to get huge into the ethical part of veganism here because I don't want to get all preachy or pushy. I could write an entire book on that and this isn't the place. I'll focus more on the health aspects, why it's helpful to especially pregnant women, and maybe throw in a few other facts. We'll see.

The *American Pregnancy Association* recommends pregnant women avoid:

- *Alcohol*
- *Caffeine*
- Raw eggs
- *Smoked seafood*
- Raw animal meat

- *Unpasteurized milk*
- *Soft cheeses (Again, Listeria)*
- *Deli meat (Listeria contamination)*
- *Fish high in mercury (tuna or swordfish)*

Notice how all but alcohol and caffeine are animal products?

BAM!

Instantly just made your life easier! There you go, that's all you need to know.

Just kidding.

The *American Pregnancy Association* encourages pregnant women to eat:

- *Fruits*
- *Bread*
- *Grains*
- *Vegetables*
- *Dairy products*

All but dairy on that list can be made without animal products. I hear you asking me “But isn’t dairy good for you?” No, my friend. It’s not. First of all, we’re not baby cows, we have no business consuming cow milk and it causes inflammation in our bodies. That is why it’s on the top allergens list. Also, they tell nursing women not to consume dairy because it causes the baby to have an upset stomach. That’s because they cannot digest the enzymes. Our bodies can’t either, most of us just think we can because we get used to it.

It’s also recommended to eat if you’re hungry but also:

- *Add no Calories during the 1st. Trimester*
- *Add 200 Calories during the 2nd. Trimester*

- Add 300 Calories during the 3rd. Trimester

Oh! And water. Drink all the water! All the clean glorious pH-balanced tasty water! Water is your best friend! You love water. Water loves you back and will make sure you're not as tired. You need water to move along food, it cleans out impurities, grows your awesome baby, and will help you not be bloated.

If you really want your coffee, then I have you covered. *Chicory coffee* is a great alternative! It's probiotics, supports gut health and you can drink it all day long. You'll get energy from its nutrients, herbs, and no stimulants. It's better than decaf because decaf still contains caffeine and is better than low-acid coffees. They come in many flavors and taste almost like actual coffee. I absolutely love it. The first time I had a cup I was so thrilled I told everyone. Plus, you can drink it all day and keep your spirits up without the side effects of stimulants. Win-win for me

Now, The Vegan Diet:

Definition of Veganism:

“Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans, and the environment. In dietary terms, it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.” – The Vegan Society

I accidentally fell into veganism after being on a vegetarian diet for a while. Veganism seemed extreme to me. Like many of us, I had been told that we needed to eat a Standard American Diet (S.A.D) to be healthy. It's not true. In fact, the S.A.D is known to be incredibly unhealthy. It's weird that we're still taught this despite the fact that I myself had always been told to,

“Eat more vegetables!”.

Yet, when you go to a restaurant it's like one slab of meat and hardly any

greens. Anyway, I digress and I'll leave you with some documentaries later that'll most likely blow your mind.

Let's talk about types of vegans:

1. *Flex-Vegans- Are Easy To Please*
2. *Raw Vegans-Strive to only Eat Raw Food*
3. *Ethical Vegans- Care Strongly About Animal Rights*
4. *Eco-Vegans- Care Deeply About The Environment*
5. *Junk Food Vegans- Enjoy Vegan Versions Of Animal Foods*
6. *Gluten-Free Vegans- Avoid Gluten As Well As Animal Products*
7. *Whole Food Plant-Based Vegans- Health Conscious & Evidence-Based*

I resonate with most of these types, not just one. I think most vegans probably do as well. I deeply care about animal rights now, I eat a lot of raw foods, I'm always working on being more Eco-conscious, I am very health-oriented, I do still eat some junk foods, and sometimes I even eat non-vegan foods if there aren't anything else, and I don't eat a whole lot of gluten anymore.

See, you don't have to be 100% although some vegans would not agree with that statement. I still call myself a vegan because it's pretty difficult to be perfect. I'd like to take the pressure off of myself.

Documentaries to watch:

1. *Dominion – Not for the faint of heart but necessary.*
2. *Food Inc. 2008 – An oldie but a goodie & it changed my life.*
3. *Cowspiracy – After becoming a nursing Momma, I get all of this.*
4. *The Game Changers – Did you know Arnold Schwarzenegger eats mostly plant-based?*

How does a vegan diet make pregnancy easier?!

- You'll feel healthier overall
- Plants remove harmful toxins
- You can eat raw which is healthier
- Lowers risk of food contamination
- Shopping is WAY simpler as well as prepping meals
- Constipation was non-existent for me and many
- Don't have to think about food contaminants as much
- You're more likely to get the vitamins you need by eating healthy vegan meals
- Morning sickness is linked to dairy and meat consumption because the body protects the fetus from unhealthy substances.

You should still avoid some vegan foods. There are plenty of vegan foods out there that are not good for us. Like pre-packaged dinners, potato chips, french fries, etc. That's a given on any diet though. Also, avoiding too many fatty foods like nuts, seeds, and oils will help digestion.

Having good digestion is necessary for any diet. Eating plants will cause you to go more often. Which is how we're supposed to function. Eating animals, processed foods and oils slows down digestion because they take longer to break down. Pregnancy already slows down digestion because organs get moved around to make room. This can be very uncomfortable for women and eating plants makes this process a whole lot easier.

We need a lot of different vitamins and nutrients but the four main ones are protein, folic acid, calcium, and iron. Many people believe we can only get these from eating animals but that is also not the truth.

The only one we can't get from plants naturally is Vitamin B12 which is essential for everyone, not just pregnant women. This has been sourced out of our soils from decades of agriculture. The reason why it's in animal products is that they get it from supplements. Yes, supplements. So, just take a vitamin B12 supplement and you'll be good.

Where do we get the other nutrients on a vegan diet along with taking prenatal vitamins and a B12 Supplement?

Protein:

Protein is essential for energy, but protein deficiency is quite rare.

- *Tofu*
- *Oats*
- *Beans*
- *Potato*
- *Lentils*
- *Quinoa*
- *Spinach*
- *Buckwheat*
- *Whole wheat bread*

Iron:

You need to combine iron-rich food with calcium to absorb it properly

- *Tofu*
- *Beans*
- *Lentils*
- *Spinach*
- *Oatmeal*
- *Brown rice*

Folic Acid:

Folic acid is essential for pregnant women.

- *Beans*
- *Lentils*
- *Cereals*
- *Broccoli*
- *Avocado*

- *Asparagus*
- *Fortified Cereals*
- *Dark leafy greens*

Calcium:

Calcium will help aid a baby's development inside the womb. It will also care for the mother's skin, teeth & bones.

- *Figs*
- *Almonds*
- *Sesame seeds*
- *Collard greens*
- *Brussels sprouts*
- *Fortified orange juice*

Starting a vegan diet is pretty simple really all you have to think about is veggies, fruits, grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, and beans. There are so many products on the market now that are even in conventional stores and food chains. Going vegan is easier than ever!

Giving up meat and dairy is emotionally difficult at first. With any addiction, you get past it. I didn't think I would ever be here and now I can't stand the sight of dead animals in front of me. Weirds me the F out really. I'm no longer desensitized.

I ended up vegan because I was vegetarian at first and had always been curious but it seemed way too out there. I wanted to take control of my health and my skin issues. I had perioral dermatitis since I was around 12 years old. I've had countless people, even doctors tell me my diet had nothing to do with my skin. DEAD wrong. It has everything to do with skin. Our skin is our biggest organ. If something is wrong on the inside, then it will show on the surface of the skin.

By the time I started learning and switching, I was in the middle of my

second trimester. I had done a round of antibiotics for a UTI that I'm still convinced I never had. That was at the beginning of the pregnancy. This is another reason why I left the in-hospital midwives. (More on that in Chapter 6.)

Gut flora was the reason why I started learning more. When I was on those antibiotics my skin cleared up and looked amazing! I was telling J. all about it. But then it all came back and worse. I only realized way later that my skin cleared up because of the antibiotics. Antibiotics kill unhealthy bacteria and yeasts which is where dermatitis stems from.

I later took a home blood test to figure out what intolerance I have to foods. The test came up with yeast, wheat, coffee, cane sugar, and dairy. Which all rips up the gut, feeds candida, and causes skin and other issues.

Gut Flora:

I'm telling you all of this because our gut flora is important to our overall body functioning, immune system, and mental health. It is also crucial for the baby's first line of defense upon entering the world.

We need to have a balanced gut flora all the time but especially while pregnant. Because if birthed vaginally the baby will acquire our flora. They need to have a good balance as well to build on because that makes for a healthy immune system right out of the gate.

Our bodies have good and bad bacteria in them. This makes up the gut flora or microbiome. We need a balance of both good and bad bacteria for overall balance and ease. When the bad is out of balance that's where issues arise. Our body at that point is no longer at ease. It is then in dis-ease. Yes, disease.

The S.A.D attributes to the flora being way outta' wack. For one, animals who are later slaughtered are treated with antibiotics. Later those antibiotics end up on our plates. We aren't supposed to just be consuming antibiotics all the time because it weakens our natural defenses. We eat a lot of sugar, unhealthy fats, salt, and processed items on the S.A.D that grows the bacteria in our guts that we don't want and diminishes the healthy good bacteria to

keep us living.

I want you to understand that a mostly raw vegan diet is ultimately the healthiest. Yes, raw. The raw vegan diet is mostly of fruits, vegetables, fats, and natural sugars. Nothing is cooked over 120 degrees Fahrenheit to not destroy the nutrients in the food. This is why we're told to eat raw fruits and vegetables more often. Smoothies are your BEST friend here. I didn't like them before but now I love them and have a few a day.

Better yet the 80/10/10 Diet (80 % carbs, 10 % protein, 10% fats) is raw vegan but even better for gut health. However, I haven't been able to completely adhere to that and moderation is key here. I used to stress over getting things perfect. Who knows, maybe in time I'll get closer to the 80/10/10 diet. If you'd like to know more about this diet then I did read this book titled "*The 80/10/10 Diet*" By Dr. Douglas N. Graham.

I also say *mostly* with the raw vegan diet because I still consume food that's cooked especially when going out or to social gatherings. This becomes almost impossible sometimes. Preparation is key.

I made the switch to a mostly 80/10/10 Diet because in the book he does explain that humans if we were just out in the wild with no tools, would only be able to eat fruits and vegetables that we can prepare with our hands.

When I have been able to adhere to eating this way I have felt 1000 times more energized, healthy, and less sluggish and my skin cleared up. I am being honest here, I still eat cooked foods, just mostly raw.

I also tried the anti-candida diet. Which was nearly impossible knowing that I shouldn't eat animals either. I later found out that the overabundance of fats in my diet was keeping the foods I'm intolerant to in my body and blood longer causing my body to continue to be in dis-ease.

With that being said, I learned that there's no such thing as the perfect vegan or diet and we all fudge up once in a while and that's okay. I spent a lot of time being stressed and that's not how you wanna feel especially during pregnancy. So, ease into everything and allow yourself to not feel guilty if you go off track and just jump back on.

Maybe you're like "Whooooooooo! But aren't we supposed to be loading up on fats and protein to grow the baby?!" Yes, in moderation. Turns out that

eating a whole bunch of protein is a myth. Our bodies can't process that much protein and it clogs our bodies or goes to waste. However, the more calories you add with each trimester, the more you will add those proteins and fats.

I'm on this topic because throughout my pregnancy I had multiple people comment on my weight. In their eyes I was too skinny and needed to, "fatten up that baby!" .

Or I heard,

"Pregnant Momma gets what baby wants!" .

No, those are not healthy things to do. We need to be nourishing our bodies for the baby. Not lying around eating junk food.

It's partly true I guess. I did only measure out to 36 weeks in the end and I probably only gained around 15-20 pounds. I had one midwife tell me I needed to gain more by eating ice cream because there were more fats in it. No. Another told me that some women are just small and that's just fine. Yes.

For the record, I did feel conflicted on this at times. I did consume the ice cream, fats, and extra proteins. At one point my goal was 120 g. of protein a day. That's a lot when you're vegan. I was eating things like beans, oats, vegan yogurt, nuts, seeds, and these things I made called "fat bombs".

Those fat bombs were comprised of coconut oil, almond butter, agave syrup, and cacao powder all mixed into a little something I called chocolate pucks. These were like 450 calories each. They were the size of Reese's cup.

All these fats and proteins did absolutely nothing but slow down everything in my body, made me feel extremely bloated, gross, sluggish, slimy and I didn't gain a single pound! Gaining weight that way, was not good advice.

W. ended up as healthy as she could be and so did I. So, that's really what matters. I do not believe that we can eat whatever and the baby will get whatever nutrients it needs while in the womb. It'd just be easier to eat healthily and know that we're doing the best we can.

If you're having a hard time making the switch or feel like you can only eat gas station nachos (seriously a friend of mine could only eat this for a while, when pregnant with her son) just know that your taste buds will start

to change. Again, smoothies are the bee's knees!

There were lots of foods I didn't like and lots I didn't know about before going healthy and vegan. Some people see it as restrictive but I learned about so many meals and ways of putting things together. Quinoa?! Nutritional Yeast?! Dates?! I had no idea what those things were before when I ate a S.A.D. You can do this!

On another note, if you're a smoker or drink often then cut down or quit now. These are not helping your chances of getting or staying pregnant. I mean... I'm the prime example here. However, you'd be surprised at how many *women still smoke* or drink during their pregnancies. I did quit and you can as well! I don't even think about cigarettes anymore.

I grew up where the adults smoked in the home. I was sick all the time, had headaches, my brother had ear infections and smoking can cause pregnancy complications. I was also born early at 25 weeks gestation. Yes seriously. I'm not going to say that smoking was the cause of my early arrival, but I'm also not going to rule it out either.

Some people don't drink Kombucha as well. There's a small amount of alcohol in it but not going to affect you. If brewed at home then it's not pasteurized and that's not good for the baby. I ultimately quit drinking it because of the sugar content, and caffeine and it's made from fungi which combined wasn't helping my health.

Let's move on ahead.

Chapter Three: First Trimester: 0-12 Weeks

Symptoms of pregnancy vary from woman to woman. Turns out my first symptom is that I just lose 8-10 lbs. Of muscle. Seriously, weird. I was 112 lbs. Then suddenly 102 lbs. Overnight. For someone trying to lose weight, they'd probably be stoked but I've always wanted to not look like skin and bones. This will forever be my first cue to take a test.

Here are some common symptoms of early pregnancy:

- *Acne*
- *Sleepy*
- *Sore Boobs*
- *Larger Boobs*
- *Darker nipples*
- *Missed Moon Cycle*
- *Thick white discharge in abundance*
- *“Morning” sickness. This can be all-day*
- *You may even lose weight from the sickness*
- *You may even have some bleeding. Sometimes it’s spotting, sometimes it’s in full flow.*
- *Moon cycle-like symptoms like cramps, irritability, hunger for salt + sweets, and bloating.*

Later during the first trimester, I didn't get sick, I felt nauseous a little bit but not much. I did quit smoking and drinking obviously. I just remember being so tired that I had to take multiple naps a day. Seriously, I have no idea how I could have stayed up if I had a job or something important to do. My boobs were huge too. My best friend R. (friendy-wendy) was like,

“Nice, boobs you must be getting your period soon too!”

I choked at the moment to tell her the truth behind those amazing boobs!

First Trimester: 1-12 Weeks

Woo! Pregnancy has been established! Mission completed. Now we wait. Just Kidding.

You have those two little lines on the test strip. What do you do next? Well, go ahead and tell your partner that you're pregnant if you'd like.

I however had a miscarriage so I was freaking out that it was just going to happen again. Except I had some hope because I hadn't been as unhealthy, I was down to one cigarette a day and I had been vegetarian for a few months. I was a lot healthier.

(By now you're probably like “How the hell is this woman going to say she was healthy and natural?!” Bear with me, I'll get there. Just don't do all the self-destructive things I did. Eat a clean vegan diet and try to stay calm. You'll get there. If you're having issues after a year, consult your doctor.)

I called my general practitioner and asked if I could have a blood test because of what happened before. They allowed me to when I was only 4 weeks and a day pregnant. This is not a common occurrence. If you're worried you can always ask.

They usually want you to wait until about 7-13 weeks for that first appointment. This is to check for a heartbeat because the risk of miscarriage is high at 0-6 weeks. At 7 weeks there should be a heartbeat. As the weeks go by the risk of miscarriage falls. By the end of the first trimester which is 13 weeks, the risk goes down to 10%. Around 20 weeks it falls to 5%. Other complications can happen, however.

Here's a timeline of events for the first trimester:

- *1-2 Weeks: You're not pregnant yet*
- *3-4 Weeks: Sperm and egg meet & fertilization happens*
- *4 Weeks: Implantation: You can miss Moon Cycle and get a positive test.*
- *Schedule an appointment with your provider. Get prenatal vitamins.*
- *6-12 Weeks: Heartbeat You can usually do your first ultrasound and appointment during these weeks.*
- *13 Weeks: First Trimester Ends*

Make sure you get a good prenatal at this time. I recommend the Rainbow Light Prenatal Multi Vitamins not the ones from the doctor or the gummies. The reason is that these vitamins are made of actual food-derived vitamins. The ones from the doctor or other over-the-counter brands are made of chemically derived vitamins.

This makes a huge difference in the breakdown, absorption, and gut flora. This is why we hear that pregnant women have constipation or sickness from prenatal vitamins. Trust me, just get these if you didn't already during conception.

You also obviously want to cut out any unhealthy habits, do the same amount of exercise as before if you can, and make sure to be eating clean. A raw vegan diet full of fruits and vegetables is the diet we need as humans.

If you were a runner before you can probably still run. Ask your practitioner though. Just don't do anymore or strenuous exercise at this time. A light walk or yoga are nice options. You just don't want to be sitting around. Your body will thank you later, trust me.

Finding A Care Provider:

This leads me to getting a care provider for your pregnancy. Now, there are many avenues you can choose. You need to find one early on so you can establish care. You can change locations later if you can afford it and insurance allows.

Types Of Care Providers For Pregnant Women

- *Douala*
- *Ob-Gyn*
- *Perinatologist*
- *Family practitioner*
- *Certified Nurse-Midwives.*
- *Unassisted- Not recommended*

Unassisted- Some people can't afford these services and go without care, they don't know about the pregnancy or they'd like to be home alone to give birth. This is not recommended. There are a lot of things that can happen during this time. There are also services for women who cannot afford care on their own. Getting care is very important

A **Certified Nurse Midwife** is a trained licensed professional who provides obstetric and newborn care. The midwife can perform their duties in a hospital or with a private home or birthing center type place. I'll get to my experience later.

An **OB-GYN** is where most women go. This is a medical doctor who is trained to provide medical and surgical care to women.

A **Perinatologist** is specialized in providing care to women who may have complications or may be over 35. The chance of risk during pregnancy goes up over 35 for women who smoke.

A **Family Practitioner** provides health and care to all family members. This can be a more personable experience.

A **Douala** is someone who assists in getting through the year of childbirth. They're not a medical provider, however. They are someone who specializes

in helping during pregnancy, childbirth, and some postpartum care. This is someone you can hire in addition to a practitioner.

I started with my general practitioner, moved to an in-hospital midwife then eventually went to a home birth midwife at around 35 weeks pregnant. Which was a lucky break but boy am I so thankful I did. I received the best care imaginable! I would do this over and over again with them. I'll share why later in this book.

By the way, YES you can switch care providers if you don't feel comfortable. It's incredibly important that you feel 100% comfortable with your provider and environment for all of this and beyond. I'll share more on this later.

Sharing The News:

Telling people right away is your choice, you may not be able to contain the news but a lot of women wait until they're out of the first trimester so they don't have to explain if they lose the baby. Which is still a taboo subject for some.

There are a whole bunch of ways you can tell people about your news! I chose to tell J. early after I had the blood test. By the way, my levels were super high so I was totally pregnant. I wanted to wait until his birthday but I couldn't wait any longer. I gave him an early birthday gift, all pretty with a baby bottle inside that had the test in it. I decorated the bottle with stickers he'd like. Skull and crossbones of course.

The day after I told him, he got fired from his job. Perfect timing.

I had some money saved up from dancing but not nearly enough to hold us over for long. I was also looking for work. I did everything I could to stay calm and drove him around to do applications...This ended up being a blessing in disguise though but wow what a way to kick this off!

At one of the application drop-offs he went inside and they did an immediate double interview! One then another. I was waiting in my car and had to pee so bad I ended up peeing next to the car with the door open. I was by the highway and still hope nobody witnessed me. He got the job! Better pay, vacation time, benefits, and overtime. Definitely better than the

job before.

At around 10 weeks it was Thanksgiving and I figured if I didn't have a drink with Me Father (you read that right) then everyone might suspect that I was pregnant. They'd joke all the time and kept telling J. that they needed more grand-babies. So, get to work!

I decided to give his wife my kinda-step-mom (right again!) Jodie a gift. Man, do I wish I had filmed it but I already thought they were on to me! The gift had a baby bottle in it, wrapped in gift tissue. I also put some onions in there because I was going to give her some anyway and I wanted the bag to weigh more.

Get this, she pulls everything out and she's like,

"Omg I got onions! Thank you so much! Look guys I got onions!".

So much fake happiness haha. While simultaneously holding the baby bottle in the other hand. She didn't notice.

Me father said,

"Uh, what's up with the baby bottle?!"

She finally looked and went,

"Oh My Gosh! She's Pregnant!"

While sobbing tears of joy and still kinda confused. It was SO good! I Shoulda' filmed that!

I told my mom a few weeks later when we met on the bus to go to my sister's school program. She also got a baby bottle but she got the photos of the first ultrasound inside. She was so excited that she (my mom, the shyest person I know) went up to a total stranger on the bus and told him,

"I'm going to be a Grandma!".

He was nice and congratulated us as well. That was awesome.

For other people, we waited until I was out of the first trimester. Yule, Christmas, and my birthday (Dec. 29th) were around the corner. So! Perfect time to send out cards. We sent a few people a card with the ultrasound pictures from earlier.

For the public internet, we waited until my birthday to post the news. That was a fun way to share on my birthday. I made a little framed sign that said "We're Expecting" with a little rainbow on the bottom, got all dolled up, and

took a photo with J. and me holding the sign in the snow. It was cute.

Exams:

I'd like to explain the initial exam to you because I was not prepared for this! When the doctor or midwife is doing the first exam they basically will ask you all the questions about your history while you're up on the table with your legs in stirrups and they press on your belly to feel for the baby and do a pelvic exam.

During the pelvic exam, I was like "Whoa..." I hadn't had many womanly exams before. So, the Midwife felt like she put her whole hand up in me. Ha ha. She was feeling around to measure my pelvis and make sure everything was as it should be. I just didn't expect this.

Keep in mind that if you'd like an even less invasive exam or care you can refuse an exam that you're not comfortable with. I'm not saying you should, just do your research first. This one I believe was necessary and comforting in the end because she explained to me the shape of my pelvis and that it was pretty large for my size which would help during childbirth.

Ultrasounds:

Women with a healthy pregnancy typically have an ultrasound between 8-12 weeks to check on the amniotic sac and see a heartbeat. Then around 20-25 weeks to look at the anatomy. That means the head size, fingers, toes, arms, legs, sex, and more.

Most women these days wouldn't think twice about getting ultrasounds. It's just part of the deal these days. My mom was even like "What? You HAVE to get the ultrasounds!" She couldn't see why I wouldn't want one. I was really on the fence after learning more.

Some women decide to go a less invasive route and have the provider only use a Doppler Radar throughout their pregnancy. This machine is to check on the heartbeat. It's less expensive and doesn't cause as much of a threat

to the tissues.

I didn't know this was an option until later and I felt like I had to do whatever the provider was telling me I had to do. I later found out that there are disadvantages and advantages to ultrasound.

Advantages include

- *Bonding*
- *Sex Of Baby*
- *Due Estimate*
- *Placenta Previa*
- *Confirming Twins*
- *Ectopic Pregnancy*

Bonding:

Some women and men are able to bond with the baby more after seeing the photos of their baby. I know J. and I definitely bonded more after the anatomy scan. That's an actual baby!

Sex Of Baby:

Some women really want to know the sex! And that the baby is safe with all fingers and toes. Some would rather the sex be a surprise. Next time around I'm letting it be a surprise at the birth.

Due Estimate:

I'm going with "Due Estimate" here because this is hardly ever on point. We're not machines and every woman's cycle length is different. For instance, I have a 32-day long cycle on avg. I ovulate around days 15-17 and I gave birth at 40.4 weeks. I wasn't late considering my cycle lengths. Determining due estimate may be necessary when a woman doesn't know her cycle or when she was doin' the deed.

Placenta Previa:

When the placenta attaches in the lower part of the uterus and may entirely or partially cover the cervix. An ultrasound can determine if this is the case.

Confirming Twins:

Using ultrasound is an easy way to confirm twins earlier. There are other ways to confirm twins though.

Ectopic Pregnancy:

An ectopic pregnancy is when the pregnancy starts outside of the uterus and is usually noticeable between 8-12 weeks. This is rare but very serious and needs to be treated. An ultrasound can confirm this. However, it's usually noticeable by abdominal pain and bleeding.

Sometimes ultrasounds can cause unnecessary stress. The heat from the waves heats up tissues and rearranges them. There is speculation that this can cause brain damage to the baby as well as other problems. The baby sure as hell isn't comfortable during any ultrasound process so having more than 2 or any at all isn't going to be healthy for them.

I know a doctor may recommend more ultrasounds or frequent screenings. The thing is, these are very expensive to do so usually offered to wealthier moms who can shell out the cash for them. They aren't very accurate. I don't think any of mine were on point size-wise or anything.

The 3D ones they had in small shops crank the machine up and expose the baby and you to even higher rays that heat up the baby's surrounding tissues. I read in the book "The Business Of Baby" By Jennifer Margulis a story of a woman whose baby wouldn't face the camera and kept putting its hands over its face and ears. This was because the baby was in pain from being exposed for so long. If the baby won't look in the direction you want it to then don't prolong the exposure.

There are at-home fetal Doppler monitors women can purchase these days. A tool that measures the baby's heart rate from inside the womb. The ones on phone apps I never tried because I thought that it wasn't going to actually work.

CHAPTER THREE: FIRST TRIMESTER: 0-12 WEEKS

Some women love them so they can bond with the baby or check on them. I decided it wasn't necessary and it would probably cause me more stress or I'd be doing it all the time. I was already stressed about other things and didn't want to add another to my plate.

Chapter Four: Books To Read During Pregnancy

I started picking up a few books to read. I'd like to share with you the ones I read throughout my pregnancy that I gained knowledge from and gave me peace of mind. I read these in the order below.

- CDC Childhood Vaccine Handbook- CDC
- *What To Expect When Expecting* - Heidi Murkoff
- *The Sh!t No One Tells You About Pregnancy* -Dawn Dais
- *The Business Of Baby* – Jennifer Margulis
- *Ina May's Guide To Childbirth* -Ina May Gaskin
- *Beyond the Sling* - Mayim Bialik

You're probably thinking,

“But Shannon, I bought *your* book to learn how to parent naturally!”.

Yes, you did. And you'll get my take on everything. However, the books listed here are ones that helped me through my journey and they may cover more in-depth than what I can cover in this book. There's nothing wrong with gaining insight from multiple sources!

CDC Childhood Vaccine Handbook:

The first doctor I saw gave me this book in an attempt to educate a new young mom who didn't know anything about vaccinations. I was excited

to learn about vaccines, how they work, why we take them, and what was inside them that made them so effective. This booklet was garbage. It told me nothing but a bunch of fear-mongering. I'll explain more later. It's on the list because I just wanted to let you know it was ridiculous. And I did read it first, after all.

What To Expect When Expecting By Heidi Murkoff

This is one of those books everyone reads, you can always find it in a thrift store. It goes over each week of pregnancy and gives you a general overview of what to expect from a more medical standpoint, there's advice and even portions for dads. J. didn't read them and I wished he would have. I'd recommend this book to gain perspective on the mainstream knowledge around and it's nice to read week by week what's going on with your body and your growing baby.

The Sh!t Nobody Tells You About Pregnancy By Dawn Dais

This one made me laugh. It was light and fun. She explains all the crazy things that may happen while pregnant that people don't really mention. Like having so much saliva you have to spit in a cup or the bodily functions we're not all proud of. I liked it because it was lighthearted but I also felt like it scared me a bit. Not all of those things will happen though, just could.

The Business Of Baby By Abby Epstein

This is the book that gets my heart fluttering with freaking excitement! I wish everyone and their dog would read this! Pregnancy or not, this book is so informative and important to know!

The main objective of this entire book is to explain why in hell we in the United States have the highest mortality rates for pregnant women and infants to five years old. The author lifts the veil on doctor time restraints, money made, products used, baby formula pushed, vaccines, and all the things we've been told to be true that aren't. This book is for truth seekers. Just go read this book.

There's also a *documentary*. This was truly eye-opening and made me

feel so much more secure. I was thinking more naturally and kept asking questions that the doctors and midwives would just blankly stare at me because they couldn't answer. *The Business Of Baby* explained why this was happening.

Ina May's Guide To Childbirth By Ina May Gaskin

Okay, this book was awesome for the woman who's contemplating natural drug-free childbirth. It was loaded with stories from other women's drug-free birth stories. There were even women who achieved orgasm when their baby was born! I waited for this book for a long time at the library.

I thought it was a book to teach me *how* to give birth naturally. I thought it was going to tell me how to keep calm and guide me through the actual birth. That's not what this book did. It was more about how to make decisions and hype you up to feel confident giving birth drug-free and without doctor intervention. I did feel a whole lot more confident that other women have done it for years and years and so could I.

Beyond The Sling By Mayim Bialik

I also waited a long time for this book as well. I watched a few of *Mayim's* YouTube videos and realized she parented just how I wanted to. That was nice and relatable given that she's a funny actress and all. She covers all things natural parenting and packaged it all into a book and some YouTube videos. Awesome read and entertaining.

Again, these books helped in my decision-making. You don't have to read them but why not get more information from multiple sources? I've been scoffed at because people think I got my information from one source or those Facebook moms.

GASP! How dare I reach out to other parents, and doctors and read books to gain information about a life-changing event!?

I guess people discredited the "Parenting Book" when they started becoming popular in the 90s or so. I for one found it's important to read up on subjects we're interested in. I by no means wanted to "Just wing it!"

CHAPTER FOUR: BOOKS TO READ DURING PREGNANCY

Reading these materials also allowed me to feel valid in my decision-making, and learn about alternatives to our mainstream ways. I sincerely feel grateful for the opportunity to read them. Changed my life.

Chapter Five: Second Trimester: 13-28 Weeks

Congrats, you're out of the first trimester jitters, most likely less sick, tired, or feeling weird.

The second trimester is the fun one for most here's why:

- *Acne*
- *Glucose testing*
- *Food cravings may kick in*
- *The morning sickness may subside*
- *You should start showing by the end*
- *You're generally able to be more active*
- *Most get their appetite back for food and sex!*
- *You can even have a gender reveal party if you want!*
- *You aren't as tired hormones are not as much of a shock now*
- *You may start feeling the baby move called "The quickening"*
- *Around 20 weeks you may be able to get another ultrasound & know the baby's sex.*

At this point in my pregnancy, I was able to not be so darn sleepy. I had sugar cravings which I later realized were not pregnancy-related but candida overgrowth-related. (Gut Flora is important my friend.) I also was much

more in the mood to be intimate again. Which is common.

To Show Or Not To Show

Every woman is different and we'll show at different intervals. I honestly thought because I am a small human that I would show faster. That wasn't the case. I think I started really showing around 22 weeks. This was my first (full-term) pregnancy though.

Second pregnancies I understand show a lot faster because the uterus has already expanded once so it's just like,

"Heyooo muscle memory!"

Diet, activity level, and genetics I think play a big role in this too..

Food Cravings

Yes, we've all heard of pickles and ice cream or randomly eating weird things like chalk or something. We're told to listen to our bodies and to give in to the craving while pregnant. Our bodies are trying to tell us something though. When we're craving something like pickles and ice cream we're in need of a nutrient. That one is calcium. So, it's better to consume foods high in calcium like the list I provided in Chapter 2.

If you're having super weird cravings like eating chalk then definitely stop and consult your care provider for advice on what to do. A nutritionist would be a great resource as well because they'll be able to figure out why you're craving something random like that. Don't eat chalk my friend.

I really wanted mayonnaise, sugar and I loved the smell of my cat's skin. I don't know why. I'd hug her like a baby and smell her and **loved** it. That never went away and it is still super weird to me. The mayonnaise I'm attributing to needing fats and the sugar was because of the candida overgrowth.

Acne & Other Skin Issues

A lot of us had grown up with acne and it's considered a normal part of adolescence. I went to a dermatologist when I was around 14. He did tell me that acne is not normal, it's a skin disease and we shouldn't have to live

with it. This stuck with me but it goes so much deeper than that. He gave me prescription meds that cleared some of it up. I eventually just lived with it.

Some people attribute it to hormones, diet, or just bad luck. While I do think hormones are a cause of concern, that's also not the end of the story. Balancing those hormones is where we need to start. Diet is how we start that.

For instance, if I eat cow milk cheese, I have two huge pimples on my chin EVERY TIME. Sometimes it happens, I'm hungry and there's only non-vegan pizza at the person's house I'm at. I try not to beat myself up much because I can get weirdly obsessive about it and that's even more unhealthy.

My point is, that cheese and other animal products are loaded with hormones and other things our bodies don't need. This creates a hormone imbalance. Being mindful of what we consume is the start.

Now, if you have acne like I did while pregnant. All over my back mostly which was new for me. Then don't use acne products. These are not only horrible for our own skin, the environment, and expensive. They also seep into our bloodstream and you don't want these chemicals around your growing fetus.

I know, they dry everything out and it works. But I found better solutions! If you're like me then know that I had no idea that these products are bad for us either. I'd been using 5% benzoyl peroxide wash for years as a teen.

Hormones during pregnancy are most likely the cause. But also eating a clean diet full of fruits and vegetables will help tremendously. You'll feel so much more energized as well. Remember our skin is our biggest organ, what shows up on the surface is also internal.

I've gone back and forth between natural products, the occasional over-the-counter products, and back to more natural products again. One thing that changed my life is *Castle Soaps*. They're vegetable-based soaps that are non-toxic, don't dry out the skin, are good for the Earth, and practically do everything you need soap to do! People use this for dishes, skin, hair, laundry detergent, cleaners, and more! I never could get it to work for my hair though.

I tried a few scents. They also have unscented. I liked the baby scent but

ultimately figured out that the lavender scent was the BEST for my acne and dermatitis. This calms my skin down tremendously. I try not to over-scrub. I've found that this makes everything worse and hurts more. I mean because the skin is all raw. While using this as a hand soap, I put it in a small bottle to-go and water it down halfway. Soaps tend to dry out my hands and it hurts.

Another item I used was a *dry brush*. I purchased one with a long handle to reach my back.

Dry brushing is wonderful for acne but also for the following:

- *Exfoliating*
- Pain Relief
- *Cleans Pores*
- *Reduces Cellulite*
- *Lymphatic System*
- *Natural Energy Boost*

Exfoliating:

My favorite part of dry brushing. The brush removes dead skin cells. Before you get into the shower dry brush your whole body moving towards your heart. When you're done your skin will be super soft with the extra step of dry brushing.

Pain Relief:

Another thing I noticed while dry brushing is that my muscle pain lessened. I think this is because there is more blood flow after activating the lymphatic system. It's not going to numb you out or anything but I do feel like my joints and muscles are not as tight afterward.

Cleans Pores:

An added benefit of dry brushing is that it aids in removing dirt, oils, and

impurities on the skin and the pores when dry brushing regularly. You can get a brush that's softer for the face. Don't use a stiff body brush on delicate skin.

Reduces Cellulite:

We all want this right?! Okay, there isn't much evidence to back this up but some people say that it's helped their cellulite look less in appearance. I think this is probably true because you're basically micro-massaging the skin and that has to count for something right?

Lymphatic System:

The lymphatic system is a major part of the body's immune system. It is made up of organs and lymph nodes, ducts, and vessels that transport lymph throughout the body. Most of these lymph vessels are just below the skin. Brushing the skin regularly helps stimulate the normal lymph flow within the body and helps the body detoxify.

Natural Energy Boost:

Dry brushing activates the senses in the skin and wakes us up by doing so.

Stretch Marks:

Stretch marks are a big concern for pregnant women. So much so that there are thousands of remedies and products out there on the market. A whole-lot-ta home remedies, women who hate them, women who celebrate them with tattoos, and some who don't really notice or care.

Almost everyone has stretch marks somewhere on their body. Men, women, and children. A stretch mark is a type of scar that develops when our skin stretches or shrinks quickly. The abrupt change causes the collagen and elastin, which support our skin, to rupture. As the skin heals, stretch marks may appear.

Stretch marks most commonly occur on women while pregnant but this isn't always the case.

Stretch marks can appear from:

- *Pregnancy*
- *Weight Training*
- *Weight Gain or Loss*
- *Puberty & growth spurts*

Who will get stretch marks is dependent on many factors. People swear by different methods to prevent them but genetics play a big role. If the women in your family had them then you're most likely to get them as well. If you had them during puberty then again you're most likely to get them again in the same areas as before during pregnancy.

I hear you naysayers over there "My mom didn't have them but I DO!" Keep in mind your genetics come from your mother's side and father's side. Some people will get stretch marks no matter how hard they try to prevent them. They may not even show up until way later.

They can show on the stomach, breasts, thighs, booty, legs, and arms. Pretty much anywhere. Our bellies aren't always the only things that grow.

For example, My mom got one on her breast when she was pregnant with my older brother. That's all out of us three kids. ONE. I got them on my inner thighs as a teen and my booty. I never really gained much weight and certainly not rapidly but there they were.

While pregnant I think I may have gotten one small one on my hip and I didn't see any new ones until W. turned two. Turns out I got them on the outsides of my thighs running down, more on my inner thighs, and one or two more on my hip. The ones from puberty also got deeper. Somehow there are some lighter ones around my knees. Knees?! I also burned my stomach with hot tea by mistake and that definitely stuck.

I did a lot to try to prevent them but it's not always possible. There are so

many creams and stuff out there claiming to prevent the marks or get rid of them. For the record, these marks are scars. I don't really think there's a way to get rid of the actual scars. Preventing them you can make an attempt.

There are lots of chemical, laser, and surgical methods out there too. If you're feeling desperate then definitely talk to a dermatologist about your options.

Melasma:

Another skin issue that some women get is dark patches on the face and sometimes other parts of the body where the sun might hit. These dark patches are called Melasma a.k.a. "Pregnancy Mask". I have experienced this and it didn't entirely go away. Mine was on a scarred part of my thigh and my forehead above my eyebrow. I was not aware of this condition before and scrubbed it thinking it was dirt. It is not and you've officially been warned.

You can be prescribed oral treatments or ointments by a doctor to help lessen the appearance. The darkness does fade over time.

Staying out of the sun, wearing sunscreen, no tanning beds, drinking more water, and using products for your specific skin type will reduce the chances of getting Melasma. You can also consume folate and vitamin B9 in your pregnancy supplements or in foods. Foods such as pasta, rice, citrus fruits, spinach and more contain folate.

What I liked:

I used Burt's Bees and their "Momma Bee" line was great. The brand is made of mostly natural and organic ingredients. You still need to read your ingredients because nothing is perfect. They have many options and are also very reasonably priced.

There are a bunch of products for Moms and babies that go together with nourishing oils like almond oil, vitamin E, lemon oil, Shea butter, and cocoa butter. All of which are super nourishing to the skin. These are real ingredients.

A lot of over-the-counter brands that are less expensive may have the chemically made version or be diluted down with fillers like waxes and

whatever else they pack in there. Which are not good for our bodies, environment, or bank accounts.

After I gave birth, I got a whole tote full of post-postpartum care stuff from the midwifery I went to. They had this postpartum care kit with the brand name “Caring Coconut”. They’re local to my home town Spokane Washington. I LOVE all of the products.

The postpartum kit comes with a soothing spray, herbal sitz bath, and healing salve. All of which are made of recyclable containers (I’ve reused mine several times), all organic and natural ingredients and they WORK. The herbal sitz bath I didn’t get to do until a week later since I don’t have a tub but the spray was necessary!

The all-purpose salve lasted me nearly two years! It’s a small glass container. W. loved it for boo-boos. I highly recommend this brand and its products. You can purchase online at <https://caringcoconut.com/>.

Lastly, water and raw foods are going to do wonders for your skin and reduce stretch marks! Water allows the skin to have more elasticity. If you’re like me, pregnancy makes us very thirsty. Your body is doing so much work and needs all the extra water it can get. Fruits are also high in the water as well as some vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers. These will also do wonders for your skin.

I finally found a skin routine that works wonderfully for me. Perioral dermatitis however is still present, just lessened..

Here's what I do/use in order in the shower for skincare:

- Dry brushing for my body, not my face
- Bamboo facial towels ONLY on the face, used once then washed.
- Lavender Scent Dr. Bronner's Castile Soap on Loofah
- Scrub-a-dub-dub in the shower and rinse
- Dry face with a dry bamboo facial towel that's clean
- Tonner, I spray on (ingredients below)
- Aloe Vera gel with healing properties

- Mineral Sunscreen

I decided to make my own toner and this worked as a nice spray for my vagina and stitches after birth. So 2-in-1! I'm all about it!

The toner consists of three main ingredients *Witch Hazel*, Water, and *Apple Cider Vinegar*. Which are all amazing for just about everything. The witch hazel is soothing. Water dilutes everything so it's not too intense and the apple cider vinegar kills unwanted bacteria and helps to treat acne.

You can also use some essential oils like tea tree or lavender to treat the skin and make it smell better but they seem to be too heavy for my skin. Making sure to use carrier oil when using essential oils is important because it can burn your skin.

Using a cotton ball or pad is one way to apply but I like to put it in a nice colored glass spray bottle. That way I can do a quick spritz and also get my back. If you get a burning sensation then I'd suggest adding less vinegar and more water to the mix. Vinegar is an acid so be careful and only use a bit.

Using aloe is super helpful as well. But not just any aloe You want to get some that are pure, uncolored, and have extra healing ailments in it. I use one with chamomile added which reduces redness and calms my skin. Again, make sure all of the products you're purchasing are pure. Organic is best.

You can also get aloe vera juice to consume. It's supposed to be wonderful for the gut microbiome, and coats and soothes the stomach as well. The juice doesn't taste great to most but adding it to green smoothies helps.

On that note, I also use mineral sunscreen with SPF 50. The zinc oxide in it also helps with skin issues. Wear it even in the cold winter months. A lighter-weight sunscreen is great for reducing sun damage and wrinkles.

Shaving the legs and *Ahem*, other body parts at this time becomes kind of a chore. Once our babies and bodies grow enough to affect mobility that is. If you really feel the need to be shaved then be careful. If you can, sit down on the edge of the bathtub with a towel folded under your bum. Or get a chair.

Some women decide to still be waxed at a salon and that's also okay. You

don't want to use wax on areas where you have Melasma. It will make it worse. A mirror in the shower may help you shave better. I pretty much just used memory, trimmed with the full-length mirror in my bathroom, and hoped for the best. Legs? I just sat down.

The Glucose Test:

A.k.a The Gross Drink Test is recommended around 24-28 weeks gestation. You can do this sooner if you usually have high glucose levels though.

What's the test for?

It's to test for gestational diabetes. Regardless of how healthy you are, you can still develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy. The CDC says about 2-10% of pregnancies each year develop this form of diabetes. This is a symptom-less disease and you won't know if you have it unless you're tested.

Gestational diabetes is a disease in which a woman's body won't produce enough insulin, which can result in a blood sugar spike. Testing for this is important so the pregnant woman can then be treated and monitored.

If a woman has gestational diabetes she is then at a higher risk of complications.

These may include:

- *Gestational hypertension (high blood pressure during pregnancy)*
- *Increased risk of C-section (often because babies whose moms' have GD are extremely large, adding to labor complications)*
- *Mom developing low blood sugar later in life*

Your provider will give you instructions on how to prepare for this test in the way they see fit. I'm not sure why they would choose one way over the other. Usually, you need to allow at least 2-3 hours to do this test. There are two ways it can be done. Two steps and One Step.

Two-Step goes like this:

- *Don't change your diet at all*
- *Drink the Glucose drink (Called "Glucola")*
- *Your blood is drawn one hour after you drink the liquid to check glucose levels. If your levels are too high you'll have to come back for another test. That's about 3 hours long this time. It goes like this:*
- *Don't consume anything but water 8-14 hours before the test*
- *Blood is drawn*
- *You drink the liquid again*
- *Blood is drawn every 60 minutes, 3 more times after you drank to test glucose levels.*

One Step goes like this:

- *Don't eat anything 8-14 hours before testing except sips of water*
- *Blood is drawn before drinking*
- *Drink the Glucola*
- *Blood is drawn every 60 minutes, 2 times after you drink to test glucose levels.*
- *This test takes about 2 hours.*

This is the test I swear just about every woman on the apps, forums, and in general, said was the grossest thing they ever had to drink and they were just miserable. Even the hospital midwives I was seeing were saying it was so nasty and they would give me the "less gross" lime-flavored one instead of the orange-flavored one. I psyched myself out so much about this test and was so scared because everyone made it seem horrible.

It's not. It seriously just tasted like flat soda or juice that had a lot of syrup-sugar in it. All that worry for nothing. It didn't bother me. Honestly, It's not bad, don't fret.

There are however several reasons why a woman might want to choose an

alternative to this test. (Fear shouldn't be a reason though).

Dietary reasons usually are the reason. For example, a low-carb diet may give a false positive in glucose levels because the body is not used to eating high amounts of sugar.

I felt a bit uncomfortable because I didn't want to put that much glucose in my body at once. I was on the anti-candida diet at that time which meant NO sugars whatsoever. Which I later learned was not helping my health issues. I'm shocked I didn't have a false positive because of that diet.

Some women don't want to drink the Glucola because it'll make them feel terrible afterward anyway. I do recall not feeling so hot later either. Had I known about alternatives to Glucola I'd have talked to my midwife about them. The important part of this test is consuming 50g of sugar. Of any source.

Common alternatives include:

- *6 oz Orange Juice and 1 Banana*
- *28 Jelly Beans*
- *A Soda with 50g of Sugar*
- *16 oz Orange Juice*

I think I'd have much rather consumed these items than the Glucola. The ingredient list of Glucola was not easy to find but I searched long and far.

Orange, Fruit Punch, and Lemon Lime flavors include:

- *Dextrose from corn*
- *Citric Acid from corn*
- *Natural Flavoring corn*
- *Sodium Benzoate*
- *Yellow #6*
- *Purified Water*

Simply Pure flavor:

- *Dextrose from corn*
- *Potassium Sorbate*
- *Purified Water*

Neither of those ingredients should be consumed except for purified water. Yes, we're told it's safe and whatever else but I encourage you to always look into the effects of ingredients in any product.

Corn for one isn't even digestible by humans. It just goes through us. It needs to be on the list of common allergies. Any food coloring in foods isn't necessary and is also highly toxic. Yellow #6 is directly related to ADHD in children and adults. A lot of what's considered safe in the U.S. is banned in other nations because it's just purely toxic.

Do the test in whichever way is appealing to you and accepted by your provider. This is something you cannot skip.

Chapter Six: Why I switched Care Providers

Thank Goodness I did. Switching care providers allowed me to feel truly comfortable with who I was hiring and who was going to be taking care of me during one of the most intimate moments of my life.

We're paired with providers throughout our lives and we just stick with them because that's who we got. Or "They're the expert." and "Just trust your doctor." No? Just me?

I want to specify that I'm not anti-doctors or medical treatment. It may sound like that throughout this book. I'm always pro-choice. I do feel like sometimes things get over-medicalized though. I believe there's a time and a place for all types of doctors and nurses. W. and I have needed them plenty of times. You'll know why later.

I definitely got pretty fed up with people telling me to trust my doctor blindly. I've been on medications that I never needed, bullied into exams I didn't want, and other traumatizing events that I will not get into here.

That's not to say that doctors and other people who work in the medical field are not important, or necessary and that I haven't needed them or won't go. I just choose wisely and leave if I feel uncomfortable.

Switching:

I felt uncomfortable from the get-go.

When I saw the test saying I was pregnant with W. I ended up calling my doctor's office which I had seen prior but not regularly.

The place was also for maternity care. I called and told them I had a miscarriage previously and wanted to make sure this time with a blood test. They told me to come right in and I was shocked the appointment was so quick. I did the blood test 3 days after the home test. Then a few weeks later went in for another appointment.

At the appointment, they confirmed I was pregnant, and asked me some general questions about my health and everything. I got a goody bag with some information, a "What to Expect When Expecting" book, and a few other things.

I felt weird at first because this was all new and exciting! I said something along the lines of,

"I'm so excited because it took us 2.4 years to get pregnant and it was really hard on me."

She responded with a hand waving downward.

"Oh, yeah it took me 13 years so..."

I don't want to sound insincere here but... I was the patient and she seemed to say it in a way that was dismissive of my concerns.

The real kicker was when she mentioned that I needed to get vaccinated right away and make sure my barely-4-week-pregnant-speck-baby-cell-thing was safe and vaccinated. I explained that I didn't know anything about vaccinations yet.

The "Oh you're such a young naive new mom" voice came next. And a booklet written by the CDC about why we should vaccinate our children. She then wouldn't stop mentioning how I needed to set up the appointment NOW and not wait until the second trimester. This didn't make me feel good. I was already afraid of another miscarriage and didn't want to be taking ANY type of drugs at this point.

I went home, and read that book as I mentioned. It was pure garbage.

I did not want to go back to this woman if she couldn't hand me real information. Instead of fear-mongering me. Maybe that makes me a monster. But damn, I know I was a party animal before. I still looked at the ingredients of everything I ate and sure as hell didn't want someone pressuring me into drugs.

Phew, with that whirlwind of emotions on paper here, let's move on to the next provider I rejected... Early in the second trimester, I decided that a more natural provider would be for me.

I didn't take pharmaceuticals because I tend to get all the horrible side effects. I shopped at the organic natural shops and I even lived off-grid at one point. We lived within walking distance from one of the bigger hospitals as well.

I thought I might as well go to their Midwifery unit and have a chance at a natural birth since this was my first. The kind I saw online of women who were all blissed out and gave birth in tubs with the gas to make them calmer. I'd still be "safe" in a hospital setting and it'd be nice.

The initial appointment still felt very much like a doctor's setting with all the usual doctor's office items. Sterile, cold, impersonal, you meet like 4 people and have no idea who they are or what they do when you leave...

I had the older midwife of the group. She seemed nice at first and even did the pelvic exam where she concluded that my pelvis was the perfect size and shape for giving birth for how small I am. Then she showed me how babies go through the pelvis with a model and a doll. That was informative and relieving.

They tested my urine and told me I needed to be on antibiotics because I had a UTI. I've had several throughout my life and I don't think I had one then. I took them anyway because one woman told me,

"Sometimes we don't even feel them."

I can tell you that I've felt every single one. She was all chipper dismissing my concerns. Man, I feel like these interactions are always so insincere.

Later I was told by the midwife that I was due for the vaccinations. I was still reading "The Business Of Baby" and gathering advice and information on the ingredients and their effects. I told her I wasn't sure about them yet

and that I was leaning more towards no or possibly selective. (I'll let you know why later don't worry.) She got offended, walked out of the room, came back, and had the,

"Sweetie..." voice.

(You know the one. Where they're talking down to you because they assume you're uneducated, dumb, and too young to understand.)

I was again given information from the C.D.C on a sheet of paper this time telling me why I needed the vaccine but again provided no information. I asked if she could tell me what's in the vaccines and their effects and dangers. She couldn't.

I asked the woman who made appointments to please switch providers for me because I didn't feel comfortable with this woman. Things just felt tense.

From then on out I felt whenever I asked a question about anything I was dismissed. Or it was like they weren't allowed to answer my questions because we were in a hospital setting. I can feel people's emotions like that.

When I brought something up that was more naturally minded. I'd get the textbook or hospital protocol kind of response. I remember feeling small like nobody was listening to me, in that super sterile room and it made me anxious. I felt like I had to do whatever they said even if I felt uncomfortable because they wouldn't discuss any other options and even flat out lied to me.

During the anatomy ultrasound scan, I had also been given an extra pelvic exam which I didn't feel comfortable with doing and they don't need to be all up in there all the time. I tried to deny the exam but she talked me back into it after first telling me I had a choice. I felt bullied once again. In the end, these exams ended up being unnecessary anyway!

Eventually, it came time to discuss how I wanted to give birth. I confidently said I'd like to do so in the birthing tub with a side of nitrous oxide (commonly known as laughing gas in the U.S.). Please and Thank you! I wanted to be calm, in warm water moving around as best I could with no dangerous medications. I had a healthy pregnancy, surely I could do this!

They informed me that they couldn't give me the nitrous oxide in the birthing center. Only the labor ward upstairs. Okay, bummer. I was counting on that! They also informed me that I could only be in the tub during the

labor portion of the big day. I had to get out of the tub to push and deliver the baby. On my back... on the bed. Wow, I was disappointed that day.

I tried to say,

“But... What about all those other women I’ve seen?!”

It didn’t come out though.

My mom later even said,

“I don’t think that’s true, Shannon.”

It was true though. I ended up settling on this. Again, I felt like this was just how it had to be.

When I was around 24 weeks J. and I tried to get intimate. We hadn’t in a while but things were cut short because I ended up bleeding. A lot! They say a little spotting is normal but this was so much that it was concerning.

I had an appointment the next morning but he was freaking out. In his calm-ish way. Makes sense. I mean, I was born at 25 weeks and my mom did complain of bleeding the day before I came to Earth.

I called the night nurse and she assured me that a little bit of blood was normal and it would be fine. I kept trying to tell her that this blood was everywhere and more than a few drops. She didn’t seem to get it or care. Sure, she probably gets a lot of calls from concerned women all the time that turns out to be nothing.

The next day at the appointment I mentioned again what had happened. They shrugged it off like it was nothing and didn’t even look or examine me. I’m not a professional but *this* was the one time they weren’t trying to examine me. It did end up being nothing and I didn’t bleed again.

The Camel’s Back:

I kept with this one because we didn’t have a good running car, I could walk and I sincerely thought I’d have needed to walk while in labor.

I ultimately was told by these midwives that I’d need to come in early for antibiotics while in labor before delivering. I guess that means walking would have been an option. They said that I tested positive for Group B Strep (GBS).

This is usually tested for around 36 weeks pregnant with a cotton swab of the vagina and anus. It's to prevent infecting the baby with GBS and there is no treatment if passed. I'm on the CDC website and it's not telling me why this is even important. This is a bacteria that's in some women's bodies naturally and it comes and goes.

Here's the thing though. I wasn't even 36 weeks and they said they weren't going to test me because they already knew I had it. Um, what? They never tested me. They told me I had been tested during our FIRST appointment. That was months prior. They said I had no choice and they were just doing what was best for my unborn child. Again, I was never tested.

I was reluctant to get antibiotics. Our babies need our gut flora remember? If I had to take antibiotics in labor then she wouldn't be able to get what she needs to thrive. I went home and asked the Facebook group. There are also midwives and other health officials along with mothers with experience in this group. Not just "Facebook moms".

One woman told me that GBS can come and go anytime and antibiotics aren't always required. We also have the choice as to whether or not we accept antibiotics.

The CDC states that a woman who doesn't get antibiotics has a 1 in 200 chance of passing it to their newborn. A woman who does get antibiotics has a 1 in 1,400 chance. Okay, fair enough but they didn't even test me! And weren't willing to test me again.

At this point, I felt so bullied. They were forcing me to take these antibiotics, I couldn't have the birth I knew I needed to have, my questions were never answered and I just felt so disconnected.

Screw It!

That's when I finally decided and thought,

"Screw it, I'm having the home-birth and calling the other midwives".

I had been thinking about it the entire experience anyway. I just didn't feel like it was safe because I was being TOLD that home births are not safe.

I found the information for a home-birth midwifery and explained my situation, and how far along I was and we set up an appointment.

Now, I was around 33 weeks pregnant at that time.

Usually, places can't take you on that late and they were booked out. This felt like my last shot to feel safe and comfortable with my provider. So, I put on my cute-as-anything dress with the lemons on it, got all dolled up, and off I went!

We met up in a house that was converted into a school for young children. There was also a room for appointments. They opened the door and I was greeted warmly. This was a different kind of experience from the start. She was so smiley and genuinely listened to me. The room also felt comfortable and cozy.

She explained later that she wasn't supposed to take on any more births for the month W. was due to arrive. However, she told the main midwife that I was in perfect health, a first-time mom, and I arrived in the cutest dress. She couldn't turn me down, I was so upbeat and confident!

Thank goodness they were able to take me. I am so over the moon about the care I received. Every appointment was way more personable. They asked about my life and how I was really feeling because they cared. I received REAL advice and real knowledge from a practice that was much more about health and nature than time restraints and sterility. Everything about their practice was exactly what I needed and wanted. I was heard, and I felt calm. We were safe here.

If you're feeling uncomfortable then trust me, it's okay to fire your provider and find someone new. After gaining this knowledge, I am so much more confident about finding someone that works for me. There is a huge importance in receiving care from someone you fully trust while giving birth. Don't hesitate. Just switch.

Chapter Seven: The Vaccine Debates

Everyone's favorite subject. I've mentioned vaccinations a few times, haven't I? This is *that* subject that really triggers the hell out of people.

Vaccinations are especially triggering beings that at the moment I typed this sentence it was October 6th, 2021. We were still in the Covid-19 pandemic. Talk about vaccines was happening everywhere I went more than ever! People were definitely being divided, fear mongered and everyone was trying to make the right decision. Those debates are not for this book.

In this chapter I'm explaining a bit about how immunity works, the viewpoints people have, where I stand, and why and I'll share some facts with you so you can make your own decisions. I am in no way going to **tell** you what to do or believe. That's not what this book is about.

I'd like to be someone who could perhaps open your mind or expand on what you were already feeling. I told you... touchy subject, I even needed to throw that little disclaimer in. Haha, But with all seriousness, read on.

Immunity:

Immunity from disease is produced by antibodies to the disease in the person's body. Antibodies are proteins produced by the body that serve the purpose of destroying or neutralizing toxins or disease-carrying organisms in the body. Antibodies are disease-specific. They will only destroy that specific disease. For example, the measles antibody destroys the measles but will have no effect on the flu. This is why there are many vaccines on the market.

There are two types of immunity: **Active & Passive**

Active Immunity:

Active immunity is the result of exposure to the disease organism that triggers the immune system to produce antibodies to that disease. This can be achieved through natural exposure or vaccine-induced exposure to the disease. Later if someone comes into contact with the disease organism their body will recognize it and immediately produce antibodies needed to fight it off. This type of immunity is long-lasting and may even be life-long.

- **Natural Exposure:** *When a person is exposed to the disease organism through infection with the actual disease. Usually results in an illness that may last a few days, several weeks, or longer.*
- **Vaccine-Induced Exposure:** *Introduced in a killed or weakened version of the disease organism through a vaccination. Usually results in no or mild symptoms that don't last long. Although, I must note that mild isn't always the case.*

Passive Immunity:

Passive immunity is acquired when a person receives antibodies to a disease rather than producing them through their own immune system.

- *A Newborn baby is provided with passive immunity through the placenta.*
- *People may even receive antibody-containing blood products like immune globulin.*
- *This is given when protection needs to be immediate for a certain disease.*

The advantage of passive immunity is that it works almost immediately. However, it usually only lasts a few weeks or months. Active immunity lasts much longer.

Viewpoints:

There are various viewpoints on vaccinations. We typically hear about the Fully Vaccination and Anti-Vaccination debates. Some people are fully vaccinated, some are on the fence, others delay vaccinations and some don't believe they're necessary. These people come from all walks of life. They're the wealthy, the poor, middle class, doctors, teachers, your cousin, your witchy aunt, and yes...even the "Facebook moms". Like anything, everyone has different reasons for what they believe. Let me give you what I've grasped about each of these beliefs.

Fully Vaccinating:

Let's touch on why people would fully vaccinate. Maybe it's because "It's just what you do". They may believe that herd immunity (immunizing the majority of all beings in a population in order to slow or control an outbreak) is the best option there is and everyone needs this for the greater good.

These people usually vaccinate during pregnancy, babies at birth, and are on schedule for the baby and child's many rounds of vaccinations and booster shots. They probably get their scheduled vaccine booster shots and annual flu shots for themselves and their families as well.

I personally don't know *any* adults who are up to date on booster shots. I mean truly up to date every few years getting boosters for vaccines that require boosters. I'm curious to know how many people actually are. But to each their own.

On The Fence about it:

Some people may be on the fence like I was for a while. We want to know each side of the debate. There are so many opinions and "facts" floating around. I needed real information to make a choice. The good and the bad. Finding information on the adverse effects of vaccinations seems distant. If you're on the fence then definitely don't hesitate to dig deeper. The information is out there to make your decision. I believe more and more people are opening up and being heard in this. The internet is a great place to

talk but make sure you weed through fact, propaganda, opinion, and fiction to make a decision that sits right with you. Weighing the pros and the cons here is definitely important. I'll explain where I put the pieces together for my family later in this chapter. But, You got this!

Delayed:

People may delay vaccinating their children. I read and talked to people mentioning that the baby's immune system can't even process the vaccination until around thirteen months or so. If that's the case then the first rounds of vaccines are thought to be unnecessary because it's not strengthening the baby's immune system. Some may just want to space out the number of doses in a single session or in a year because they may not want to overload the child's body with a lot of foreign substances at once. Sometimes doctors give as many as five doses in one session. That does seem like a lot to me.

Anti-Vaccines:

Oh boy, this really stirred up a lot in the media. These people are often viewed as uneducated and stupid. Let me tell you, they're not uneducated. These are people who may not trust the ingredients, manufacturers, medical industry, or all of the above. They may believe that our immune systems need to remain un-tampered with. Religious or philosophical beliefs may be the reasoning as well. Some may even have allergic reactions.

Honestly, though, most are parents whose children were injured after receiving on-time scheduled vaccines. So, they started educating themselves on the adverse effects of the ingredients and combining drugs at once. While their children never remained the same as before

So, Where Do I Stand?

I'm someone living consciously, vegan and I don't take drugs from doctors unless I really need to. I'm a spiritual, pagan, witch, who reads the food labels, drinks tea for its medicinal properties, and really enjoys living in the 5th Dimension. Did I miss anything? Take a *real* wild guess...

Just kidding, I'll tell you. I lean on the anti-vaccination side of things. Well, I'm actually not anti-anything just pro-choice. Shocking? I wasn't always this way. Somewhere deep down, probably. I believe we need to know all angles of any debate and should be able to make the best choices for ourselves. For anything. No one person's path is right for everyone.

I think the last single vaccine I received was around 13 when I stepped on a nail. My grandpa winced because he thought I'd cry. I didn't. Just seemed like something I had to do. As a kid I always refused medicine and my mom had a hell of a time getting it in my body I'm sure. Yeah, most kids are like that but I think I really see it as poison. Like when my grandma washed my mouth out with soap for back talking. POISON!

Before that, I did receive all three rounds of the HPV vaccine. I fought my mom on that as well, but again as a teen, I didn't have control over my own body. I'm shocked this one hasn't been taken off the market because there are reports of more cervical cancer in women after receiving these doses.

Around 16 or so I was on birth control. The depo-provera shot. Which made me an even *more* psycho and emotional teenager. My poor (then) boyfriend. I eventually got off of the shot after a year or so because I felt like I should be having a menstruation cycle and I was absolutely nuts.

Those were the last I remember. I know I also received the scheduled vaccines for a child in the 90s as well. That number was around 10 vaccines in total. I even got the chickenpox vaccine after my mom attempted to give my brother and me chickenpox twice and we never got it. I think my immune system was doing its job at that point. Here's how many they recommend in 2023:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/child-adolescent.html>

I was pregnant with W., and with the encounters I mentioned earlier, I honestly expected the doctors and CDC to tell me the reasoning behind why we have vaccines. I thought they'd inform me of the good effects and the negative side effects. I mean, with every other drug you see on commercials "DEATH" is probably on the long list of possible side effects they say really fast because they have to.

Nope. Not one doctor told me there were adverse effects. None would

even touch the subject. They just kept telling me that vaccines “work” and are “safe”. I don’t know about you but alarm bells are ringing to me when someone is dodging my questions and keeps trying to convince me that there are no repercussions in using their product.

I’m already skeptical about the ingredients in all of our food so surely I’d like to know what the ingredients in these other products are about. This led me to do my own research of course. When you type into Google or read any mainstream news (or anything) you get bombarded with “Anti-vaxxers” being the stupid uneducated enemy who are being reckless and how dare these idiots spread “misinformation”. Especially after Covid-19.

I’ve often been told,

“Oh but check your news sources, are they credible”?

I feel like my response has always been,

“Who’s at the tippy top owning the major news sources? And what do they want the masses of people to believe is true? Buy the product or think for themselves?”

It’s the truth and I see people waking up to this reality every day.

(Again yes, make sure you’re finding more than one source to make a good judgment. That’s necessary, I’ll just say trusting “news” that’s ultimately owned by the same corporations and backed by the manufacturers themselves isn’t credible to me.)

I was part of a group on Facebook called “Spokane Crunchy Mommas”. I don’t know why they’re called “crunchy” but this was a group for women in my area that were naturally minded. From essential oils and herbs to cloth diapering off-the-grid homesteaders. Yes, these are probably the “Facebook Moms” people like to mock. Where else was I to go but to people with real stories? Women who were most likely thinking and living a way that I strive to live, that’s who!

I posted on the group something along the lines of,

“I’m in early pregnancy and the doctor quickly mentioned vaccines. I don’t know anything about them so can someone tell me which are good and which are not?”

Some women told me they were all good, some told me which they selected

and some said none at all.

A woman DM'd me. She was the wife of a DJ I used to work with. Which was a welcoming surprise. She was awesome. She'd bring in big crock pots of food for us dancers and the staff on Wednesday nights. She'd also stock us up on supplies like hairspray, moon cycle products, glitter, and whatever else we typically used. All because she just cared. She was outspoken and didn't seem to care what anyone thought. The whole family actually lived next to me at one point when I lived in a van off-grid. Except, we didn't know each other yet. I later realized this while talking to the husband one night at work.

She mentioned that she saw my post and wanted to talk to me directly to tell me what they had learned. She told me none of the vaccines were considered safe in her eyes and even sent me the link to a private group that was based in Washington State and aimed to educate people about the effects of vaccines.

They welcomed all people who were either vaccinated, needed more info, wanted to share their stories, selective and anti-vaxxers. The group creator wasn't biased, focused on facts, and really wanted people to be able to talk about these things without judgment. However, the group remains private because of people spamming, trolling, or sharing posts from users which may expose them to more slander.

The woman who DM'd opened up about what had happened to her family. At the time they had 5 boys in total and I think she was pregnant with her first surrogacy of twins. I believe she birthed 10 children in total. But don't quote me.

Up until their third child each had been fully vaccinated on the recommended CDC schedule. Which by the way was around 76 doses by age 6 in 2021. That's much more than I received in the 90s that's for sure!

I don't quite remember how far into the schedule their third boy was before they noticed something was off but he was still a baby or possibly over the age of 1. He had gotten a vaccination earlier in the day and by night he had a fever and was crying and screaming uncontrollably. Which are said to be normal side effects of vaccines.

He also had several seizures and doctors couldn't explain why this was happening to him. After this, he wasn't the same. He was staring off, wouldn't respond to his name, and wasn't the fun lively baby he was before. They now have a handicapped child. With no explanations.

Surely, they connected the dots there and went off on their own journey to figure out the actual adverse effects, injuries, and deaths related to vaccines. She told me the two first boys are fully vaccinated, the third had some rounds, and the other two and then on out are not going to be vaccinated at all. Makes sense. That would have been an immensely traumatizing experience.

Her story isn't uncommon at all. Sadly, there are parents crying out and being hushed on this matter. The group was full of stories every day of babies and children developing rashes, having seizures, getting the illness anyway, and advice on how to detox the harmful metals from their bodies with baths after being forced, bullied, or pressured into injecting a vaccine.

Parents were also saying they were just trying to do what was "right" but had learned what they wished they knew before, discussions about school mandates, and even parents mourning their babies and children who are no longer on Earth. I count my blessings knowing I was able to gain this information before giving birth to W. I truly do.

Surely, these parents who have been through these traumatic experiences are in the right to speak out, right? If a product is on the market and it's a danger we all need to be aware and avoid it at all costs until it's fixed, right?

Not according to the media and vaccine manufacturers, unfortunately.

All of these parents have been silenced and labeled as dangers to society, delusional, reckless, uneducated, and selfish "Anti-Vaxxers." I assure you, these people *are educated* and are really just trying to help and warn others about vaccine dangers so it doesn't continue.

Have you ever noticed how when people talk about vaccines it seems like they're telling you "vaccines work.... vaccines are safe... make sure you get your vaccine... anti-vaxxers aren't credible... this one is free... get a sticker if you do... do your part in saving lives!" Okay, if this is how they're going to market this product to me then I just feel manipulated.

Guess what? We are being manipulated.

Let's remember that every pharmaceutical is a product that earns the manufacturers' money one way or another. Why would they tell us the truth when we're told everyone needs to receive these products?

Matter of fact, the CDC booklet I read on childhood vaccines (the one I mentioned was pure shit before) was almost entirely full of fear-mongering. I drove home, pulled it out, and thought "This is my chance to learn what I hadn't known". But no. Sadly, I was disappointed. I looked at their FAQ page and it was basically the same sentences copied and pasted from the booklet.

Unfortunately, I cannot find another copy of this booklet. I've looked on the CDC's official site but I can't find it either. Covid-19 vaccines seemed to be flooding everything as I typed this. So, I'll be paraphrasing based on memory here.

The point I remember most was one I hear often anyway so here goes...

"Vaccines are like seat belts for your children. You wouldn't put them in the car without buckling up first. Would you!?"

...Really?

Yeah, obviously I'm going to buckle them in as I should. But these are two entirely different things. The news and media do A LOT of fear-mongering to get people to think a certain way. If something were to occur where that seat belt or anything in the car malfunctions, I can hold the manufacturer accountable. They'd investigate, issue a recall if necessary and make it right. The statement above is playing on your emotions, not giving you facts. There's something wrong here.

Get this... you can't sue the vaccine manufacturer, doctor, or anybody if something goes wrong. Nope, they're not going to fix it either. Even if you vaccinate your child and two seconds later they're dead. Seriously. There are laws against investigating the vaccine as probable cause. Sure, there are reports all the time. You can check out <https://vaers.hhs.gov/> to learn more and see all of the reports made. In the days of Covid-19, the numbers absolutely skyrocketed.

Check that out here (2021)

<https://vaersanalysis.info/2021/12/01/vaers-summary-for-covid-19-vaccines-through-11-19-2021/>

Back to that law, I mentioned. This is extremely important. If you're reading this via book then type into your internet search browser this “42 USC 300aa-22: Standards of responsibility”. You'll find this exact law.

Go here to read exactly where I've read:

<https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title42-section300aa-22&num=0&edition=prelim>

If that's not working for you then let me just go ahead and tell you exactly what it says with a little copy and paste. I credited my sources above right? We're good.

—

§300aa22. Standards of responsibility

(a) General rule

Except as provided in subsections (b), (c), and (e) State law shall apply to a civil action brought for damages for a vaccine-related injury or death.

(b) Unavoidable adverse side effects; warnings

(1) No vaccine manufacturer shall be liable in a civil action for damages arising from a vaccine-related injury or death associated with the administration of a vaccine after October 1, 1988, if the injury or death resulted from side effects that were unavoidable even though the vaccine was properly prepared and was accompanied by proper directions and warnings.

(2) For purposes of paragraph (1), a vaccine shall be presumed to be accompanied by proper directions and warnings if the vaccine manufacturer shows that it complied in all material respects with all requirements under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act [21 U.S.C. 301 et seq.] and section 262 of this title (including regulations issued under such provisions) applicable to the vaccine and related to vaccine-related injury or death for which the civil action was brought unless the plaintiff shows-

(A) that the manufacturer engaged in the conduct set forth in subparagraph (A) or (B) of section 300-aa23(d)(2) of this title,

or

(B) by clear and convincing evidence that the manufacturer failed to exercise due care notwithstanding its compliance with such Act and section (and regulations issued under such provisions).

(c) Direct warnings

No vaccine manufacturer shall be liable in a civil action for damages arising from a vaccine-related injury or death associated with the administration of a vaccine after October 1, 1988, solely due to the manufacturer's failure to provide direct warnings to the injured party (or the injured party's legal representative) of the potential dangers resulting from the administration of the vaccine manufactured by the manufacturer.

(d) Construction

The standards of responsibility prescribed by this section are not to be construed as authorizing a person who brought a civil action for damages against a vaccine manufacturer for a vaccine-related injury or death in which damages were denied or which was dismissed with prejudice to bring a new civil action against such manufacturer for such injury or death.

(e) Preemption

No State may establish or enforce a law which prohibits an individual from bringing a civil action against a vaccine manufacturer for damages for a vaccine-related injury or death if such civil action is not barred by this part.

(July 1, 1944, ch. 373, title XXI, §2122, as added Pub. L. -99660, title III, §311(a), Nov. 14, 1986, 100 Stat. 3773 ; amended Pub. L. -100203, title IV, §4302(b)(1), Dec. 22, 1987, 101 Stat. -1330221 .)

References in Text

The Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, referred to in subsec. (b)(2), is act June 25, 1938, ch. 675, 52 Stat. 1040 , as amended, which is classified generally to chapter 9 (§301 et seq.) of Title 21, Food and Drugs. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Tables.

Codification

In subsecs. (b)(1), (c), "October 1, 1988" was substituted for "the effective date of this subpart" on authority of section 323 of Pub. L. -99660, as amended, set out as an Effective Date note under section 300-AA1 of this title.

Amendments

1987-Subsecs. (b)(1), (c). Pub. L. -100-203 substituted "effective date of this subpart" for "effective date of this part".

Whoa!

That's some important! Right? This law means that we can't bring a vaccine manufacturer to court over "unavoidable" side effects. ALL the side effects are deemed unavoidable! Yeah, even death. Because we are supposed to know or be informed of the risks associated with taking a drug.

Have you ever gone into a doctor's office and been told about this? Not me. In fact, I've asked to see the inserts for the vaccines and I've been met with so much disgust and eye-rolls. How dare I even ask?! I've never once been told of any risks. I've been told there are none! Just keep this in mind while making your decisions.

By the way, here's where you can find the inserts for the vaccines licensed in the United States 2021:

<https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/vaccines/vaccines-license-d-use-united-states>

Vaccines For Pregnant Women:

How about I touch on the vaccines deemed crucial during pregnancy. Women who are pregnant are considered to be high-risk people now that they're carrying a baby. This means they're in the category of the elderly and people with compromised immune systems. Basically, they're considered unhealthy because their bodies are doing extra work and can catch illness easier.

(I worked retail through flu season and a supposed measles outbreak here in Washington in 2019. I felt healthier than ever while pregnant. The "outbreak" was conveniently flooding the news right after they put the bill into having the MMR vaccine mandatory in public schools... It was around 60 cases so hardly an outbreak. They ended up passing the bill after it had been voted out many times. Good ol' fear works. Just sayin')

The CDC says to get up to date on any vaccines you may have missed as an adult. They even have a little quiz you can take. That's convenient.

<https://www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched/>

I took the test. Let me share some personal medical information with you. They recommend I get these:

- *MMR*
- *Tdap, Td*
- *Influenza*
- *Pneumococcal*

Nope, Nope, Nope-ity, NOPE!

While pregnant they also recommend you get the *Influenza* and the *Tdap, Td* vaccines. Influenza they recommend everyone gets and pregnant women because they are said to be able to get sick more easily.

The *Tdap, Td* vaccine is a 3-n-1 vaccine that covers Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis. This vaccine is said to be needed only once in a person's life but also a booster every 10 years. And a woman who has multiple pregnancies needs one each time. That's conflicting but okay CDC thanks for the information. They also recommend that family members who will be around the baby or mom get these vaccines.

While reading the book "The Business Of Baby" I remember a section covering the *Tdap, Td* vaccine. They mentioned nobody knows if it crosses the placenta, so does it cover the baby? Not really. It's more to protect the person receiving the vaccine so they won't get sick and potentially get the baby sick. This is because a baby doesn't have an immune system strong enough to fight anything off.

The book also mentioned that when the vaccine was given to a test animal, the animal got pertussis anyway. Also, there was some mention of an outbreak in California where most of the people who got the illness were

vaccinated. So, that raises the question of whether this even works.

However, pertussis (whooping cough) is a very serious illness. Especially if the baby is very young. The CDC states that 7 out of 10 babies younger than 2 months old will die from pertussis if they have it. Whooping cough is very easily transmittable. It's also very hard to figure out if that's what they have at first because it just seems like a common cold in the first week.

We actually got whooping cough at the end of September 2020. Luckily, W. was over a year old at that point but we just thought she had her first cold. She coughed so hard she spit up but had no other symptoms. And it was so much worse at night. J. was worried so we took her to urgent care.

This was Covid-19 days so we had to take her to the basement of the place and they did a Covid-19 test on her and that was it. It was negative. A week or so later I started coughing like crazy too. It dawned on me finally that she had the “whoop” noise while trying to get another breath. I did too. It was whooping cough, we got it from the playground the first day they re-opened after lockdown. Not covid, whooping cough.

Thank goodness we were nursing because that really helps with immune systems but damn I never thought it would end. By that time there was nothing the doctor could really do for us. We coughed and *whooped* for about 9 months. And yes, we are very lucky she didn't get the illness earlier in her lifetime.

It was intense, I guess for adults it's not as bad but I seriously couldn't breathe to do another cough but still had to cough and would get so dizzy I'd have to sit or lay down on the floor. Not being able to take that breath in is where the “whoop” sound comes from. I can only imagine how it affected W. She seemed very lively throughout the day. It's mostly during the night when the body relaxes that the coughing fits get worse.

The cool thing is that after getting natural exposure we are now immune for about 30 years. The vaccine only offers about 5 years if anything. I need to mention that even if you get a vaccine it doesn't always mean it will work. We also have immunity from more than just pertussis after recovering. That's another plus to natural exposure. Our immune systems are now stronger than ever and for longer than a vaccine can offer.

Would I still have been vaccinated knowing what I know now? Nah. There are plenty of ways you can prevent giving whooping cough to a newborn. First of all, we got it from the playground because that's the only place we had been in months. You know, the whole world was locked down for a while and all. So, don't go there if you have a newborn. Obviously, washing hands and maintaining our own health is key. Make sure other children, family, or friends also uphold the same protocol.

Honestly, what I would have done knowing what I do now is just that. I don't think I left the house much anyway. I also had a hard time saying "No." to strangers wanting to touch her. Okay, seriously what is that? Why do so many strangers wanna touch, "coo" at, or hold strange babies? Now, I have more of a backbone but then I was so freaking nervous I didn't know how to react so I'd just be like "Uhh... sure...?" Yeah, nope, don't allow that. Gross.

Vaccine Ingredients:

All right, enough of that. Let's move on to the ingredients in vaccines. Because this one definitely takes the cake for me. Again, if you ask about ingredients in vaccines you'll most likely be told the amounts in them are considered harmless.

Do you know how many toxic chemicals are considered *harmless* that are just casually in our food and whatever else? I don't believe them. (*Fluoride anyone? Yeah, that's literally the active ingredients in rat poison and the popular antidepressant Prozac. Dulls the senses. I literally told that doctor this and she was shocked.*) Makes you think, doesn't it?

I could basically write an entire book on just the ingredients of these products but let me give you a few screenshots of what I have learned and discuss some points that I found important. The first is from the *CDC's website* explaining some of the common ingredients found and where they're found in other products.

What's in Vaccines?

Today's vaccines use only the ingredients they need to be as safe and effective as possible.

Each ingredient in a vaccine serves a specific purpose:

- provide immunity (protection)
- keep the vaccine safe and long lasting
- for the production of the vaccine

Type of Ingredient	Example(s)	Purpose	Most common source found...
Preservatives	Thimerosal (only in multi-dose vials of flu vaccine)*	To prevent contamination	From eating foods such as certain kinds of fish, mercury (which thimerosal contains) gets into the body
Adjuvants	Aluminum salts	To help boost the body's response to the vaccine	From drinking water, infant formula, or use of health products such as antacids, buffered aspirin, and antiperspirants
Stabilizers	Sugars, gelatin	To keep the vaccine effective after manufactured.	From eating food such as Jell-O® and resides in body naturally
Residual cell culture materials	Egg protein^	To grow enough of the virus or bacteria to make the vaccine	From eating foods containing eggs
Residual inactivating ingredients	Formaldehyde†	To kill viruses or inactivate toxins during the manufacturing process	Resides in body naturally (more in body than vaccines). Also found automobile exhaust, and household furnishing such as carpets and upholstery.
Residual antibiotics	Neomycin	To prevent contamination by bacteria during the vaccine manufacturing process	Antibiotics that people are most likely to be allergic to — like penicillin — aren't used in vaccines

* Thimerosal has a different form of mercury (ethylmercury) than the kind that causes mercury poisoning (methylmercury). It's safe to use ethylmercury in vaccines because it's processed differently in the body and it's less likely to build up in the body — and because it's used in tiny amounts. Even so, most vaccines do not have any thimerosal in them. Learn more about [thimerosal, mercury, and vaccine safety](#).

They also go into a bit more detail here: <https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/safety-availability-biologics/common-ingredients-us-licensed-vaccines-on-why-common-ingredients-are-used-if-you-would-like-to-know-more>.

I deleted my Facebook account because it's weird for one but also totally addictive and invades privacy. I loved the groups I was involved in though so I rejoined. I managed to save one of the most important screenshots from that private group with the vaccines, the ingredients, and everything

highlighted to show you which are harmful to humans and which are not.

Just to clarify, “Human Cell Lines” are derived from aborted fetus cells. These human cell lines are said to be derived from an elected aborted fetus from the 1970s however. I’m pro-choice over here but profiting off of that does not sit well with me.

The screenshots are on the following pages. There’s a link on the first one that’s no longer in service. I, unfortunately, cannot find another one. I tried following the link listed and I was told that they may have updated the information and/or moved it. You can view the package inserts here:

<https://www.fda.gov/vaccines-blood-biologics/vaccines/vaccines-licensed-use-united-states>

(It’s come to my attention after receiving a print copy of my book that these screenshots may be a bit difficult to read. I’ve tried to make the words less fuzzy but to no avail. If you’d like a clearer version then I’ve made a PDF for you to view that you can also download or print if you’d like here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QiUxLjL7O5ZQqo5I1BavhdCwczCfn-3/view?usp=sharing>)

Key:

- *Pink: Human Cell Lines*
- *Orange: Animal Derived*
- *Yellow: Toxic To Humans*
- *Green: Allergy Irritant*
- *Blue: Antibiotics*

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE VACCINE DEBATES

Vaccine Excipient & Media Summary	
Excipients Included in U.S. Vaccines, by Vaccine	
<p>In addition to weakened or killed disease antigens (viruses or bacteria), vaccines contain very small amounts of other ingredients – excipients or media.</p>	
<p>Some excipients are added to a vaccine for a specific purpose. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preservatives, to prevent contamination. For example, thimerosal. Adjuvants, to help stimulate a stronger immune response. For example, aluminum salts. Stabilizers, to keep the vaccine potent during transportation and storage. For example, sugars or gelatin. 	
<p>Others are residual trace amounts of materials that were used during the manufacturing process and removed. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cell culture materials, used to grow the vaccine antigens. For example, egg protein, various culture media. Inactivating ingredients, used to kill viruses or inactivate toxins. For example, formaldehyde. Antibiotics, used to prevent contamination by bacteria. For example, neomycin. 	
<p>The following table lists all components, other than antigens, shown in the manufacturers' package insert (PI) for each vaccine. Each of these PIs, which can be found on the FDA's website (see below) contains a description of that vaccine's manufacturing process, including the amount and purpose of each substance. In most PIs, this information is found in Section 11: "Description."</p>	
<p>All information was extracted from manufacturers' package inserts. If in doubt about whether a PI has been updated since this table was prepared, check the FDA's website at: http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/Vaccines/ApprovedProducts/ucm093383.htm</p>	
Vaccine	Contains
Adenovirus	human-diploid fibroblast cell cultures (strain WI-38), Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium, fetal bovine serum, sodium bicarbonate, monosodium glutamate, sucrose, D-mannose, D-fructose, dextrose, human serum albumin, potassium phosphate, plasdone C, anhydrous lactose, microcrystalline cellulose, polacrilin potassium, magnesium stearate, cellulose acetate phthalate, alcohol, acetone, castor oil, FD&C Yellow #6 aluminum lake dye
Anthrax (Biothrax)	amino acids, vitamins, inorganic salts, sugars, aluminum hydroxide, sodium chloride, benzethonium chloride, formaldehyde
BCG (Tice)	glycerin, asparagine, citric acid, potassium phosphate, magnesium sulfate, iron ammonium citrate, lactose
Cholera (Vaxchora)	casamino acids, yeast extract, mineral salts, anti-foaming agent, ascorbic acid, hydrolyzed casein, sodium chloride, sucrose, dried lactose, sodium bicarbonate, sodium carbonate
DT (Sanofi)	aluminum phosphate, isotonic sodium chloride, formaldehyde, casein, cystine, maltose, uracil, inorganic salts, vitamins, dextrose
DTaP (Daptacel)	aluminum phosphate, formaldehyde, glutaraldehyde, 2-phenoxyethanol, Stainer-Scholte medium, casamino acids, dimethyl-beta-cyclodextrin, Mueller's growth medium, ammonium sulfate, modified Mueller-Miller casamino acid medium without beef heart infusion
DTaP (Infanrix)	Fenton medium containing a bovine extract, modified Latham medium derived from bovine casein, formaldehyde, modified Stainer-Scholte liquid medium, glutaraldehyde, aluminum hydroxide, sodium chloride, polysorbate 80 (Tween 80)
DTaP-IPV (Kinrix)	Fenton medium containing a bovine extract, modified Latham medium derived from bovine casein, formaldehyde, modified Stainer-Scholte liquid medium, glutaraldehyde, aluminum hydroxide, VERO cells, a continuous line of monkey kidney cells, Calf serum, lactalbumin hydrolysate, sodium chloride, polysorbate 80 (Tween 80), neomycin sulfate, polymyxin B
DTaP-IPV (Quadracel)	modified Mueller's growth medium, ammonium sulfate, modified Mueller-Miller casamino acid medium without beef heart infusion, formaldehyde, aluminum phosphate, Stainer-Scholte medium, casamino acids, dimethyl-beta-cyclodextrin, MRC-5 cells, normal human diploid cells, CMRL 1969 medium supplemented with calf serum, Medium 199 without calf serum, 2-phenoxyethanol, polysorbate 80, glutaraldehyde, neomycin, polymyxin B sulfate

CONSCIOUSLY NATURAL MOMMA

Vaccine	Contains
Influenza (Fluzone) High Dose	egg protein , octylphenol ethoxylate (Triton X-100), sodium phosphate-buffered isotonic sodium chloride solution, formaldehyde , sucrose
Influenza (Fluzone) Intradermal	formaldehyde , egg protein , octylphenol ethoxylate (Triton X-100), sodium phosphate-buffered isotonic sodium chloride solution, sucrose
Influenza (FluMist) Quadrivalent	monosodium glutamate, hydrolyzed porcine gelatin , arginine, sucrose, dibasic potassium phosphate , monobasic potassium phosphate, ovalbumin, gentamicin sulfate , ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA)
Japanese Encephalitis (Ixaro)	aluminum hydroxide, protramine sulfate , formaldehyde , bovine serum albumin, host cell DNA , sodium metabisulfite, host cell protein
Meningococcal (MenACWY-Menactra)	Watson Scherp media containing casamino acid , modified culture medium containing hydrolyzed casein , ammonium sulfate, sodium phosphate, formaldehyde, sodium chloride
Meningococcal (MenACWY-Menveo)	formaldehyde , amino acids, yeast extract , Franz complete medium, CY medium
Meningococcal (MenB – Bexsero)	aluminum hydroxide, <i>E. coli</i> , histidine, sucrose, deoxycholate , kanamycin
Meningococcal (MenB – Trumenba)	defined fermentation growth media, polysorbate 80, aluminum phosphate, histidine buffered saline
MMR (MMR-II)	chick embryo cell culture, WI-38 human diploid lung fibroblasts, vitamins, amino acids, fetal bovine serum , sucrose, glutamate, recombinant human albumin, neomycin , sorbitol, hydrolyzed gelatin, sodium phosphate, sodium chloride
MMRV (ProQuad) (Frozen)	chick embryo cell culture, WI-38 human diploid lung fibroblasts, MRC-5 cells, sucrose, hydrolyzed gelatin, sodium chloride, sorbitol, monosodium L-glutamate, sodium phosphate dibasic, human albumin, sodium bicarbonate, potassium phosphate monobasic, potassium chloride; potassium phosphate dibasic, neomycin , bovine calf serum
MMRV (ProQuad) (Refrigerator Stable)	chick embryo cell culture, WI-38 human diploid lung fibroblasts, MRC-5 cells, sucrose, hydrolyzed gelatin, urea, sodium chloride, sorbitol, monosodium L-glutamate, sodium phosphate, recombinant human albumin, sodium bicarbonate, potassium phosphate, potassium chloride, neomycin , bovine serum albumin
Pneumococcal (PCV13 – Prevnar 13)	soy peptone broth, casamino acids and yeast extract-based medium , CRM197 carrier protein, polysorbate 80, succinate buffer, aluminum phosphate
Pneumococcal (PPSV-23 – Pneumovax)	phenol
Polio (IPV – Ipol)	Eagle MEM modified medium, calf bovine serum, M-199 without calf bovine serum, vero cells (a continuous line of monkey kidney cells), phenoxyethanol , formaldehyde , neomycin , streptomycin, polymyxin B
Rabies (Imovax)	human albumin, neomycin sulfate , phenol red indicator, MRC-5 human diploid cells, beta-propiolactone
Rabies (RabAvert)	chicken fibroblasts, β -propiolactone, polygeline (processed bovine gelatin), human serum albumin, bovine serum, potassium glutamate, sodium EDTA, ovalbumin , neomycin , chlortetracycline, amphotericin B
Rotavirus (RotaTeq)	sucrose, sodium citrate, sodium phosphate monobasic monohydrate, sodium hydroxide, polysorbate 80, cell culture media, fetal bovine serum, vero cells [<i>DNA from porcine circoviruses (PCV) 1 and 2 has been detected in RotaTeq. PCV-1 and PCV-2 are not known to cause disease in humans.</i>]
Rotavirus (Rotarix)	Vero cells, dextran, Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium (sodium chloride, potassium chloride, magnesium sulfate, ferric (III) nitrate, sodium phosphate, sodium pyruvate, D-glucose, concentrated vitamin solution, L-cystine, L-tyrosine, amino acids solution, L-glutamine, calcium chloride, sodium hydrogenocarbonate, and phenol red), sorbitol, sucrose, calcium carbonate, sterile water, xanthan [<i>Porcine circovirus type 1 (PCV-1) is present in Rotarix. PCV-1 is not known to cause disease in humans.</i>]
Smallpox (Vaccinia) (ACAM2000)	African Green Monkey kidney (Vero) cells, HEPES, 2% human serum albumin, 0.7% sodium chloride USP, 5% Mammitol USP, neomycin , polymyxin B , 50% Glycerin USP, 0.25% phenol USP

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Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, 13th Edition

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Vaccine	Contains
Td (Tenivac)	aluminum phosphate, formaldehyde, modified Mueller-Miller casamino acid medium without beef heart infusion, ammonium sulfate, sodium chloride, water
Td (Mass Biologics)	aluminum phosphate, formaldehyde, chimeros , modified Mueller's media which contains bovine extracts, ammonium sulfate
Tdap (Adacel)	aluminum phosphate, formaldehyde, 2-phenoxyethanol, Stainer-Scholte medium, casamino acids , dimethyl-beta-cyclodextrin, glutaraldehyde, modified Mueller-Miller casamino acid medium without beef heart infusion, ammonium sulfate, modified Mueller's growth medium
Tdap (Boostrix)	modified Latham medium derived from bovine casein, Fenton medium containing a bovine extract, formaldehyde, modified Stainer-Scholte liquid medium, glutaraldehyde, aluminum hydroxide, sodium chloride, polysorbate 80
Typhoid (Typhim Vi)	hexadecyltrimethylammonium bromide, formaldehyde, phenol, polydimethylsiloxane, disodium phosphate, monosodium phosphate, semi-synthetic medium, sodium chloride
Typhoid (Vivotif Ty21a)	yeast extract, casein, dextrose, galactose , sucrose, ascorbic acid, amino acids, lactose, magnesium stearate, gelatin
Varicella (Varivax) <i>Frozen</i>	MRC-5 human diploid cells, including DNA & protein, sucrose, hydrolyzed gelatin, sodium chloride, monosodium L-glutamate, sodium phosphate dibasic, sodium phosphate monobasic , potassium phosphate monobasic, potassium chloride, EDTA, neomycin, fetal bovine serum
Varicella (Varivax) <i>Refrigerator Stable</i>	MRC-5 human diploid cells, including DNA & protein, sucrose, hydrolyzed gelatin, sodium chloride, monosodium L-glutamate, urea, sodium phosphate dibasic, potassium phosphate monobasic, potassium chloride, neomycin , bovine calf serum
Yellow Fever (YF-Vax)	sorbitol, gelatin, sodium chloride, egg protein
Zoster (Shingles) (Zostavax) <i>Frozen</i>	MRC-5 human diploid cells, including DNA & protein, sucrose, hydrolyzed porcine gelatin, sodium chloride, monosodium L-glutamate, sodium phosphate dibasic, potassium phosphate monobasic, potassium chloride, neomycin , bovine calf serum
Zoster (Shingles) (Zostavax) <i>Refrigerator Stable</i>	MRC-5 human diploid cells, including DNA & protein, sucrose, hydrolyzed porcine gelatin, urea, sodium chloride, monosodium L-glutamate, sodium phosphate dibasic, potassium phosphate monobasic, potassium chloride, neomycin , bovine calf serum
Zoster (Shingles) (Shingrix)	sucrose, sodium chloride, dioleoyl phosphatidylcholine (DOPC), potassium dihydrogen phosphate, cholesterol, sodium dihydrogen phosphate dihydrate, disodium phosphate anhydrous, dipotassium phosphate, polysorbate 80

A table listing vaccine excipients and media by *excipient* can be found in:

Grabenstein JD. *ImmunoFacts: Vaccines and Immunologic Drugs – 2013* (38th revision). St Louis, MO: Wolters Kluwer Health, 2012.

Let me screenshot the covid-19 vaccine 2021. They're not highlighted but I think you get the point.

What Ingredients are in the COVID-19 Vaccines?

Many people are curious to know what the ingredients are for the three currently available COVID-19 vaccines in the US.

Here is a breakdown of the three COVID vaccines and their ingredients:

- **Pfizer Vaccine:** The [full list of ingredients for the Pfizer vaccine](#) is:

mRNA, lipids ((4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate), 2 [(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide, 1,2-Distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine, and cholesterol), potassium chloride, monobasic potassium phosphate, sodium chloride, dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate, and sucrose.

The Pfizer vaccine does not contain eggs, preservatives, or latex.

- **Moderna Vaccine:** The [full list of ingredients for the Moderna vaccine](#) is:

Messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA), lipids (SM-102, polyethylene glycol [PEG] 2000 dimyristoyl glycerol [DMG], cholesterol, and 1,2-distearoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphocholine [DSPC]), tromethamine, tromethamine hydrochloride, acetic acid, sodium acetate trihydrate, and sucrose.

The Moderna vaccine does not contain eggs, preservatives, or latex.

- **Johnson & Johnson Vaccine:** The [full list of ingredients for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine](#) is:

Recombinant, replication-incompetent adenovirus type 26 expressing the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, citric acid monohydrate, trisodium citrate dihydrate, ethanol, 2 hydroxypropyl- β -cyclodextrin (HBCD), polysorbate-80, sodium chloride.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine does not contain eggs, preservatives, or latex.

Awwww, So alarming right?

As you can see there are many vaccines with ingredients that are toxic to humans, animal-derived, Aborted Fetus Cells, Allergy Irritants, and Antibiotics.

We're told that these ingredients are already present in our bodies or "There's more aluminum entering your system from a soda can!" So, that means they're safe and just inject because don't ask questions.

Okay, fair enough there is already formaldehyde in our bodies. But does that mean we need to just be putting MORE into our bodies? My take is if our bodies already produce this then we should be keeping it at the rate our bodies deem necessary. Remember? Gut Flora and our microbiome? There's a balance up in there that we shouldn't be meddling with.

When we drink out of a soda can aluminum enters our bodies (maybe there needs to be an alternative?). It goes through our body's natural filtration system and is filtered out. Remember we have skin, a liver, and kidneys. When we inject anything it bypasses the skin and is injected into the muscle

tissue. There is no filtration at that point. It's just in there. I honestly don't believe we should be adding more of these substances. Remember we have that gut flora to take care of.

Speaking of which, there are also antibiotics in most of these products. Earlier in the book, I mentioned how antibiotics really wreak havoc on our gut flora and microbiome. Again, this is important because having a balanced healthy flora is necessary for optimal health. The flora also IS our immune system so why are we destroying it?

If you're vegan or anti-abortion then the obvious is there too. Vegans don't consume animal proteins or support the exploitation of animals and some people do not agree with abortion. Those two factors are challenged by consuming these products.

Also, why are they telling pregnant women to stay away from foods that may contain contaminants yet they're being injected *with* these contaminants? This doesn't make sense.

Another point they tell us is that these products have been tested vigorously. Now, okay I'm not there doing the testing or making the product. Nor am I a scientist or a doctor but you can read the inserts for yourself. Which mentions the trials done. A lot of people were wary of the Covid-19 vaccine because it's said to have been developed very quickly and with new technology. (*My "conspiracy theorist" alarm bells are going off there.*) But what about the fact that we've only had vaccines for the last 100 years or so? And the oldest is only a few. Before that humans have only evolved for around 6,000 years. And we only industrialized around the 1800s. We were still kickin' without vaccines.

Think about products and medical devices from 100 years ago. We'd say "Oh, yeah people used to think this... How crazy is that!?" Our technology isn't perfect now just because it's new and now. We don't know entirely the adverse effects of these products. They just haven't been around long enough to see what happens.

Sometimes We Have To:

Yeah, it's true sometimes we have to just get the jab and deal with it. I

know, many people can't quit their jobs or they'd like to travel. Who knows maybe one day we won't have a choice here in the United States. I know some schools won't allow children in public schools. Here in Washington State, they did get rid of Philosophical Exemptions for children being enrolled in school. (A lot of children are now home-schooled after that bill was passed in 2019.)

Some schools even give out flu vaccines. I don't think this had ever happened in my schools as a kid but as an adult, I did hear of people's kids being a part of this. There are a few variations of the flu vaccine. However, some vaccines are called "Live Vaccines" because they contain a live version of the disease. An example would be the "Flu Mist" which some schools and people opt to get. It is a mist that's administered through the nostrils instead of injected into the arm. Now, the live version of vaccines means that the disease is "LIVE" in them. That means people are getting these types of vaccines and are technically sick but without any symptoms.

There's a term called "Shedding" that people in the "Anti-Vax" communities like to refer to. Shedding happens when someone gets that vaccine and then unwittingly is spreading the disease to others. Because everything comes out of our pores.

Still, following me?

That's not good, right? We don't want to be spreading the same disease we're trying to protect ourselves and others from!

So what if we have to get these substances injected into us? What do we do? Some people like to do what's known as a "Vaccine Detox Protocol". I remember reading about "Detox Baths" and "Immune Support" when people were talking about their work requiring this or that vaccine while I was pregnant.

I typed "Vaccine Detox Bath" into my search engine and ended up getting smacked in the face with a bunch of news sites that reported some people online doing baths with Borax. Yeah, don't do that! Borax isn't going to help you here. It may even hurt you. I'll get to the vaccine detox protocols in a moment but first, let me tell you what to look out for.

I received a free PDF of a vaccine protocol that you can get as well here

<https://www.Earthley.com/product/vaccine-detox-protocol-packet/> I'll sum up what I see as important for you. No worries!

Vaccine Injury Signs & Symptoms:

Now, many of these symptoms are deemed “Normal” among healthcare professionals but just because it happens to a lot of people doesn’t mean it’s not causing any damage. These can happen at any age but as I told you these symptoms happen a lot to babies. In no particular order:

- Tics
- Eczema
- Seizures
- Headaches
- High Fevers
- Arching Back
- Head Banging
- Food Allergies
- Autoimmunity
- Sensory Issues
- Attention Issues
- Chronic Diarrhea
- Trouble Sleeping
- Loss Of Language
- Facial asymmetry
- Loss of Motor Skills
- Behavioral Changes
- Ongoing Stomach Pain
- High-Pitched Screaming
- Swelling at the injection site

According to many parents who speak out about their babies being hurt

most of these symptoms are on their list. The high-pitched screaming, headbanging, and back arching are the result of swelling in the brain. Their babies are in severe pain.

After the high fevers and seizures, their babies are never the same. Many may have a loss of motor skills, trouble focusing, behavioral changes, headaches, and loss of speech. And antibiotic use could definitely result in food allergies, autoimmunity, stomach pains, and eczema. More and more people are realizing the results of these ingredients every day.

The protocol goes into detail about how you want to support the Lymphatic system and the liver. You can support the lymphatic system by doing dry brushing as I mentioned in earlier chapters, massage, and exercise.

The liver you can support with different teas and foods such as dandelion and ginger, beet juice, grapefruit, and mango smoothies. You can also do what's called a castor oil pack by soaking a towel in castor oil, applying it to the liver or lymph nodes, and covering it with plastic and a heating pad. Then let it rest for 30–60 minutes a day. Peppermint tea is also wonderful at removing toxins.

Now, for the vaccine detox baths, people recommend the following to add to the bathwater:

- 1 ¼ C. Baking Soda add and let sit for 5 mins. This neutralizes hard water.
- 1 C. Bentonite Clay removes toxins from the body
- 1 C. Epsom Salts and add toxin-removing essential oils to the salts such as...
- Frankincense, Lavender, Lemon, Rosemary, Tea Tree

Add the oil to the bath salts in a jar and allow them to soak in. You can do this beforehand so you always have some if you want. Don't add the oils directly to the water because they'll stick to the top and not mix in. Essential oils are highly potent and will cause irritation and burning to the skin if they're not mixed into a "carrier" oil or salt before being applied to the skin.

You want to soak in the bath for at least 20 minutes minimum but 40 minutes maximum to get the best results. And repeat for several weeks.

Some people say this doesn't work at all and most definitely not for the

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE VACCINE DEBATES

COVID-19 vaccines because of the different technology used there. I like to believe in the power of manifestation. And hey, if it doesn't work then at least you get a nice relaxing bath out of it. I always feel much better after doing detox baths and it'll help other bodily systems.

With all that being said, I do understand the use of these products and I know they've saved lives. There is something being swept under the rug though. Who's reporting to the masses the deaths and injuries caused by the same products though? Without safe ingredients and TRUE information being spread among the media, natural immunity will always be the safest and long-term choice for me.

Please be reminded that there is fear on all sides of this debate. Fear isn't a high vibrational state for us to be in. Being in a fear state also lowers our immune response as well making us more susceptible to falling ill. I've found it best to accept what is instead of being stuck in a fearful state in order to live a healthier, more uplifting positive life.

I hope this chapter helped clear some things up for you and thank you for reading.

Chapter Eight: Babies Don't Need A Lot Of Stuff

Go on the internet right now and you're likely to see thousands of "Must-Haves For Baby!" blog posts... Claiming to have the best products and things we *need* to care for an infant, baby, or toddler.

Where do we even start? I got really caught up in all the cute baby things, made a Pinterest board, and kept on scrolling long before I was even pregnant. A girl can dream, right?

Fast forward to the *actual* pregnancy of W. and I quickly realized we had a small space and a pretty low budget. I also was in this mode of wanting to make our apartment look more "grown-up". You know, actual furniture, items that matched, and a color scheme.

I wanted our space to look clean, organized, and basic because I knew I wouldn't have as much time to clean when she arrived, we'd be drowning in toys, and eventually, there would be crayon drawings on the walls. Better off starting with a blank canvas.

The "Minimalist Home" movement was also a pretty big deal on my Pinterest feed at the time. Minimalism everywhere! I loved how neat, clean and spacious everything looked and thought that's definitely a great place to start when making room for a baby!

What's Minimalism?

Type “Minimalism” on the web and you’re sure to be met with a lot of photos of people’s homes that look super bare or too perfect to be lived in! Where’s all their stuff? How do they live? How boring... could be your thoughts.

Minimalist art was where this all stemmed from. Artists focused on art with minimal lines or colors. This later adapted to all areas of life creating an entire lifestyle.

Minimalism is a lifestyle choice that really focuses on identifying what’s used most often, necessary, and courageously eliminating the rest. Doing so frees up a person’s time to enjoy or purchase what really matters to them. Items or experiences that add to their quality of life.

We may not realize in the moment, but we do really live in a consumer-driven society. Before we know it we too are one of those families with a two-car garage that harbors our things instead of our cars. Cringe again...

Minimalism can be attributed to anything really. Cutting down on the unnecessary can most certainly be life-altering when applied to items in the home, finances, electronics usage, social obligations, and totally works for babies!

No, you don’t have to make your home look super boring and stale if that’s not your style. You don’t have to get rid of the things that hold memories unless you really want to. You don’t even have to have homes that look like an internet version of a “Minimalist Home”. To be real, ours doesn’t always look great...

Adopting this mindset allows us to really just get intentional about what we do and don’t really need or desire. We can focus on what’s really important and not be drug down by the “baggage” we’re carrying around.

Now, minimalism means different things to everyone. For me? I do my best to focus on what I need, I get rid of things I no longer use, typically by putting them on the curb for free, I focus on quality and Eco-friendly items, I bundle my Amazon purchases and do plastic-free shipping and I try to stay as vegan and cruelty-free as I can. Which does include clothing, food, beverages, children’s items, toiletries, and everything else in between. If

I were perfect, I'd be doing this perfectly, but I'm not and sometimes I do slip or don't have enough money at the time for the nicer items. Perfection isn't the point. Being intentional is the goal. We're constantly evolving and learning as well, so keep that in mind too.

Babies Can Be Minimalists!

I could write an entire book on minimalism but you're here to figure out how to have a minimalist baby. If you're like me and don't want to be drowning in baby/kid stuff, you like order, have a tight budget, a small place, or all of the above then this is for you!

I cracked the code here.

First! Know that half of those items on those "Must Have..." lists are usually just sponsored or affiliate posts and you really do not need all the things. I was overwhelmed before. I specifically remember reading,

"Tiny humans need a lot of stuff!"

Not true. Don't fall for it. Most of these are convenience items that end up in thrift stores because they're not used. I'm talking about the 10 different models of wipe warmers I saw on an end cap at my local thrift store.

Focus on necessities first. Things that will last and save money in the long run. At least for me, I planned on having multiple children and wanted to get the most bang for my buck. Without the sensory overload.

The Baby Shower:

My Kinda-Step-Mom gets really hyped about these kinds of things.

Did you say,

"BABY?!"

She offered to throw a shower for us the moment we told everyone we were pregnant. She decided to throw it around 28 weeks gestation which seemed a bit early but I think it's the perfect timing.

You see, we didn't want to purchase anything until after the shower so we

could know what we had, and what we still needed. At 28 weeks, we still had the perfect amount of time left to prepare (granted she didn't come early) and my belly was "popped" already.

We hadn't purchased anything other than a \$.50 dress I accidentally had my hand on while talking to a friend at a Goodwill Bulk Bins. I didn't even know the gender yet. We had items saved in mind like the big-ticket items such as a stroller with a car seat.

If nobody wants to throw you a shower then go ahead and throw your own. I'm grateful for the gesture but I'd wished things were different. I asked around and other women said they had felt the same with their own showers. It doesn't have to be anything big but at least you can make it your own and let everyone in on the details.

I had asked for certain details to be included in the invites to friends and family that didn't end up on the invites. So, everyone kept asking me questions about it. I did make a Facebook event page to let everyone know but the people throwing the shower didn't understand why and we ended up getting into an argument because the shower was supposed to be thrown *for* us. I get it but these details were important to me.

For instance, I wanted people to know the color scheme, that we were doing cloth diapering, I wanted gender-neutral clothing in solid colors, we revealed the sex at the party, and focused on minimalism. I also liked calling W. a "rainbow baby" and wanted things to be rainbow-themed, I wasn't able to eat the food served and the details I asked for were just not there. I guess this was taken as "too controlling" or "too picky". So, in the future, if I have another baby, I'd probably just throw a shower myself.

On another note, I was an hour late. Which is typical of younger Shannon. I still feel bad. I scheduled car repairs that morning. It was supposed to take about 2 hours and ended up taking 6. YEAH, SIX!

I didn't have a phone at the time to call for a ride nor did I have any cash for a cab. So, schedule important repairs for another time.

We opened presents, revealed the gender, most left and we played a few games with the kids before packing up. We received so many wonderful gifts. Including a Pack 'N Play we were so excited to get home and put it together.

An hour later after cursing and getting frustrated, we got the Pack ‘N Play together. Aaaaaand it didn’t fit in the space we had set up for her little section of our tiny attic apartment. I didn’t realize how big these things were and didn’t measure the space first.

I’m 5’ 0” so not only could I not get it apart and together by myself, I couldn’t even reach the bottom if I needed to pick up the baby... So, I hurt my Kinda-Step-Mom’s feelings by saying it didn’t fit our needs or in our space and we needed to get something smaller. I hurt her feelings because apparently, she looked long and hard to find this exact Pack N’ Play.

I get it, I really do. It’s a bummer when someone doesn’t care for or enjoy your gift but at the same time, it’s not for the gift giver. You’re allowed to not want or like something gifted to you.

How I Discovered Baby Minimalism?

I washed all the fabric items we received at the shower and realized we had 17 blankets. Yeah, SEVENTEEN! I was overwhelmed thinking there was no way we needed all of these things for her.

There was a huge pile in the middle of the living room. I was sitting there crying because yet again I felt like I wasn’t being listened to. I was supposed to be grateful for these gifts, not upset. I just wanted what I envisioned for my baby. Not chaos.

Of course, I am grateful. Most of the gifts really did work for me. I did get through it eventually. I took this to two Facebook Groups on minimalist lifestyles. The first one people were along the lines of,

“What the hell lady, give it to someone who APPRECIATES people’s gifts then!”.

Another group of minimalists were a lot more caring. Telling me to sort out what I do like and that it’s totally okay to not want a gift. Especially as a minimalist. All this time I’d been holding onto things I never cared for because someone gifted it to me.

You’re not a monster, you’re not ungrateful, and you’re not erasing their thoughtfulness or their memory. You just don’t want these items laying

around because it's not right for you.

I then realized after a woman commented saying she has the same problem. It's a thing to be overwhelmed by too many patterns, colors, textures, clutter, and more. This is called *sensory overload*.

In which someone gets overwhelmed and can't focus or has anxiety because too much is going on around them. We know this typically in people who have Autism and ADHD but this can also happen to people who have anxiety disorders and more. To put it simply.

I cope with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). (Let me just tell you all my secrets.)

The best way for me to describe this in myself is I start to get dizzy, my body is in flight or fight mode, I feel like the room is getting smaller, it's like tunnel vision, I can't breathe, my muscles and chest are tense, my clothes are uncomfortable and there's this weird skin crawly feeling in me.

Oh, and I can't freaking focus on anything else until it's solved while pulling back my hair from my forehead. My mind is spinning. All from the busyness of these patterns, colors, and textures of certain things. I get it auditory as well.

Calm:

After discovering that sensory overload is a thing that I live with. I read around. Minimalism really cuts down the noise. And guess who else gets overstimulated by all of these sensory things? Babies and Children. Especially babies because they're trying to focus on the new and master tasks over and over again. They don't have the emotional coping skills to calm themselves down yet. I'm going to tell you more about this later in Chapter 19 as it really ties into Montessori.

You could say this is also for us parents. Some people thrive in chaos but I sure as hell don't. They don't mind having a mess everywhere and they'd rather not be cleaning and keeping things organized. Fine and dandy for you guys!

I didn't want to be that family drowning in everything from toys, laundry, and multiples of things. Minimalism really simplifies our lives. I can focus

on what's important.

No, you don't have to get rid of absolutely everything and have the bare minimum. Yes, the clutter does creep back into my life. I now have a tool to manage it all effectively.

Please note that my minimalist baby list may not be exactly what you need or resonate with. You may really want an item that I don't deem necessary. I am sharing how I super-simplified this process.

Keep in mind your own budgeting needs. We didn't have a lot of money at the time or space as I've mentioned before. After we got the basics in order we did accumulate other items not on the list. In Chapter 11, I explain my own postpartum necessities so don't worry, I'll let ya know!

Another tip is to come up with a color scheme and stick to it as much as possible with your fabrics. This will help the space look cleaner, items will match together nicely, and help cut down that sensory overload.

My "What You Really Need For Baby!" list:

Start with the basics here. Babies need what?

- *A Place To Sleep*
- *Blankets*
- *Clothing*
- *Travel System*
- *Feeding System*
- *Cleaning System*
- *Elimination System*
- *Loving Caretakers* ❤

No really, that's it. So, if you live with limited room or just want to cut down on expenses then focus on these very basic needs. Let me break it all down for you in the way that we did it.

A Place To Sleep:

As we had a very small space. A “Baby Nook” as I called it. We needed something that would be versatile and transportable.

First, I thought a Mini-Crib would be wonderful. I still sometimes think that maybe we should have gotten one. They are beautiful and would last through multiple babies.

I also thought a co-sleeper or bassinet would have been great. To my knowledge, a baby would only be sleeping there for a few months before outgrowing and I didn’t want multiple items. One item for us, please!

I didn’t measure our space. Measuring would have been helpful in the beginning, so let me break down the standard *interior* sizes of cribs vs. Pack ‘N Play in the USA.

Notice: I’ve specified the interior because this is to ensure the fit of the standard mattress sizes. You’ll want to specify your specific make and model sleeping device and space before purchasing.

Crib Sizes:

- *Standard full-size Crib: 52 3/8 ± 5/8 in by 28 ± 5/8 in*
- *Pack ‘N Play: ~40" by 28"*
- *Mini Crib: ~38" by 24"*

A full-size crib was definitely too large for our space, so that was out immediately. If that’s your style and you have a larger space then go ahead. I didn’t realize the dimensions of a mini crib then and I felt like it was also not versatile enough for our needs. Minimalism is all about having items that do multiple things for me!

I landed on a Pack ‘N Play because there are a lot of styles, they’re lightweight, I could move it from the living room to the bedroom, and if we went somewhere then she could be in her same little cozy spot. I did not plan on co-sleeping at all.

Since the original Pack ‘N Play didn’t fit I was then looking frantically for something that would. I ended up finding the perfect Playard. (A Playard is

the same thing, just a different brand name.) It was a mini play yard called “*Baby Trend Mini Nursery Center Playard*”. I loved this thing!

It didn’t have all the bells and whistles like the other sets but I could put this together by myself. I could move it between rooms without taking it apart, reach the bottom and it had three settings. Newborn stage, Baby, and older baby. Most of these options have a height limit of 32 inches so the baby doesn’t fall out when they stand or start trying to climb. This one was the same.

The only thing that it didn’t have was a comfortable mattress and you can’t buy sheets for it. I ended up getting washable incontinence pads that we used for a long time and have served their purpose. It’s not recommended to put anything in there other than the mattress though.

Blankets:

What’s a place to sleep without blankets, right? This is kinda fun. You can pick out the perfect bedding for your little one’s space. Receiving blankets are wonderful because a newborn cannot keep its own heat yet. They also like being wrapped up as if they were still in the womb.

Even though our little bundle of joy was born in the middle of summer. We used blankets like crazy! People like to make blankets for babies come to find out. However, the receiving blankets got the most use.

Babies really like to be swaddled and we used blankets more than her clothing. We didn’t put her in clothes much when she was a newborn. She was swaddled most of the time.

You’ll want several different sizes and materials. I was going for natural materials like cotton, bamboo, hemp, and linen. We had a few flannel types that were smaller and perfect for the newborn stage. Those really kept the heat in. Getting a pack of 6 or so is very handy.

Another type we received were larger and made of bamboo. I absolutely loved them! They had a nice floral print, were super soft, and very lightweight.

Also, note you’ll want probably 10 altogether. Babies spit up a lot. So lots of laundry to be done. We used the larger blankets in all sorts of ways for

about 2 years. Don't have a burp rag? Go ahead and use that blanket!

Clothing:

Aw, yes all those adorable little clothes. Clothing was the item I really thought ahead about. I worked in a chain thrift store fresh after high school. The number of baby items they had I had to throw in the trash was astonishing.

It feels like everyone has a stash of baby clothes somewhere if they've had a child or seven. I knew there were consignment shops and people would most likely give us clothing. J. and I only purchased one item each.

It's very nice to have a color scheme to aim toward and to tell people about it. This way you can mix and match items so the baby always looks put together. If you care about that type of thing anyway. If you have multiple babies or small children it's easier to see what's what. Their closet will look much neater and you'll get more use out of the clothes.

Sets are cute and all and we did have a few but it was like she needed to be changed so often that it was nice to have just plain pants that went with any other shirt. The few black pairs and leggings went a long way.

Someone you know probably has a bag of clothes somewhere or you can look for full bags on Facebook Marketplace. People are just giving these away or at a low price. So, feel free to not spend a bunch on brand-new items if you're on a budget.

I was gifted three large boxes and a few bags in various sizes from a friend's daughter who had a daughter a few months older than W. Perfect timing!

She said,

"I don't know. People just kept giving them to me!"

A lot still had tags. She also had cloth diapers from when her son was born that she didn't know how to use properly. (Chapter 16 explains) I had plenty to choose from and boy was it overwhelming at first. The large selection was great even though we didn't need all of it.

I started off by sorting out all the new items with tags that I enjoyed. I tend to stay away from characters and large print with "I'm cute" logos. It's just not my style. I also sorted away anything that smelt odd or had stains or

holes. I sorted by size, colors I enjoyed the most, and kept that color scheme going! This seriously took me several days to complete but it was well worth it.

We had a ton of newborn items I thought we would need. She didn't wear anything unless we went out. I sold them to consignment shops for credit so always keep that in mind. Also, they will usually take used baby furniture. This was great, we had credit for larger sizes.

I'm not sure if plastic diapers (yes, they are made of plastic) have to be changed as often as cloth. My guess is no because we changed her each and every time she went. However, I had thought that onesies were going to be all she needed during the warmer months. Who needs pants or shorts anyway? We hardly buttoned the bottom. So, regular shirts and dresses would have been it for us. Just food for thought.

Travel System(s):

Having a travel system is essential whether you have a vehicle or not. You're going to have to go out there at some point. There are so many different styles and items we can get for traveling so you'll have to assess your needs and what you'll be doing with the baby.

If you'll use a stroller often, get the all in one where the bucket baby car seat clicks in to the stroller and has a base to click into the car. The seat doesn't grow with the baby but we really found this to be totally worth it.

I'm 5'0" so I needed a stroller that was short for me but also comfortable for 6' J. We lived in an area with some rough sidewalks and trails. I opted for the jogger stroller. They do take up more room. Everything needed to be lightweight because we had a ton of stairs! We opted for one of the less expensive models and it held up over the years just fine. We used the stroller quite often so it's well worth it.

Let me tell you why the stroller and seat combo was great. Baby isn't supposed to sleep in the seat long. I know this. She fell asleep in it ALL the time when she was tiny. So, instead of wiggling her out of her seat and bringing her up the 3 flights of stairs hoping she'd stay asleep, we just unclicked from the base, and off we went!

You're not supposed to let the baby sleep in the seat because it could restrict air passages because the seats don't lean back. You didn't hear this from me but we put some large pillows under the front of the seat to recline her, un-clicked the buckles, checked on her as often as possible, stayed in the room and she was indeed just fine. But again, you're not supposed to do this.

What it wasn't great for was we often had to put her in the grocery cart basket part and that made grocery shopping a little difficult. All in all, well worth the investment. I also loved how we could click it into place on the stroller because we used the heck out of that thing!

I have seen sleeker minimalist models out there that convert and kind of thought maybe that would have been nice but they weren't usually the jogger type and had plastic wheels. Ours had larger wheels that we air up and that better suited our needs. Plus, I thought I'd be jogging with her one day. Jogging strollers are usually much larger, bulkier, and heavier. I've carried that thing up and down three flights of stairs enough to know.

Babywearing:

Next, if you're into what's known as "attachment parenting" (which is more in-depth than people think, as I explain in Chapter 18.) then you'll probably want a baby carrier. Actually, you're going to want a carrier if you want to do hands-free things. And you will.

This is known as "Babywearing". Some people are really advocates of this for attachment parenting reasons and bonding of course. Some people think it's coddling. I definitely was a fan and absolutely loved it. There's nothing wrong with cuddling a baby in my eyes. They need it. Babywearing is excellent for learning a baby's potty cues. I'll explain later once again!

There are also hundreds of different styles here too. I wanted a wrap. There's a brand name called the *Moby Wrap* that many people rave about. I got a *different brand* made of modal fabric for the very warm weather. They come in many different styles, lengths, and fabric colors. There are tons of ways to wrap these things! People really get into this, come to find out.

I pretty much stuck with the newborn hold and a hip hold. I wish I had gotten one sooner and been holding her more with it as a newborn in the first

few days. This makes the skin-to-skin super nice and easy. Some people even are able to nurse while the baby is in there but I never could figure that out. Wearing her like this really freed up my arms and the weight is distributed evenly if wrapped right. I couldn't get enough of it. J. on the other hand didn't want to figure out how to wrap it so never tried.

Once she was older and heavier she wasn't supposed to be in a front hold because it can cause hip *dysplasia*. Which is where the hips aren't supported properly and the joints and bones aren't lined up correctly. Terrifying I know but with the right technique, you will be able to avoid this. Until the baby is too big to be held in the front hold. Eventually, they don't want to be facing you because Earth really rules, and turning them facing outward won't last long for the hip. This isn't useless though trust me. I loved mine.

There are two types of wraps. Woven and stretchy. Woven is usually thicker, has no stretch, and can be used for various wrapping methods and holds. Which I did not know before purchasing two stretchy wraps. The stretchy wraps have stretch to them so doing a backpack hold (which is basically the front wrap turned on the back) becomes dangerous because the baby will fall backward. Just remember this. There are so many techniques to babywearing but I also could write a whole book there. A search around YouTube will definitely tell you the how-tos.

Once she outgrew the stretchy wrap I ended up thinking a backpack style would be more appropriate. J. was all for this in the beginning. It is easier. We got one from a person on Facebook Marketplace. Nothing fancy but did help a lot. My thing was that I'm petite and I never had the time to find one that fit me correctly. There was a "Sharing Library" but I never ended up going.

Also, they're quite stiff and not as versatile as the wraps. I thought I'd be wrapping forever! Had I known I needed a woven wrap I would have bought two when I was able to. Little babies seem to be more comfortable in the wraps. We occasionally used the backpack-style one until she was around 3 years old. Still think it's super fun.

Whatever your preferences are, I'd say maybe get both. They both served their purpose and I kept them for a second baby when I have one.



The absolute best feeling in the whole damn world!

Feeding:

I'm sure you know babies need to eat and potty a lot. Every two hours that

is! You're going to need some supplies here. I chose to nurse for a ton of reasons and we're still actively doing so. (Chapter 15 explains) I was hell-bent on doing so and didn't see any other way. I know this is not the case for some families due to preferences or not being able to.

I did, however, plan on having her on a bottle by the time she hit 6 months old so I could have some free time, and give her to a caregiver overnight or to work. This didn't end up happening in the end. There are several methods you could choose there though.

If you choose formula and bottles then I would suggest really doing your research and making sure your formula is regulated by someone. While doing my research I was told that these products are basically bulk-up solutions for babies and not regulated by anyone. That was enough for me to nope on out of there. The FDA says it's regulated like all other foods are regulated. In the U.S we all know it's not well. Also, the cost was a huge factor for me and I wanted to do things as naturally as possible. Oh, and nursing is minimalist.

If you choose to bottle feed or nurse and bottle feed you're going to need bottles with good airflow. Keep in mind that you may have to test a few brands because some babies like one or the other more. Again, less is more. If you have a minimalist baby then having fewer bottles lying around is key. I already do this with dishes. We have only two of everything.

While nursing, I needed my boobs, lots of food and water, a nursing pillow, and this milk catcher called a Haakaa. Oh, and ice cube trays. I used the Haakaa to catch what's called the "let down" and was able to store milk from that in the freezer for later use. It was perfect. I'll explain later as well. If you're getting a nursing pillow then go for the name-brand ones that are huge. I had one that was way too tiny and served half a purpose. Don't skimp out on this as I did, you need the big one! You're also going to want reusable breast pads but I will also get into this later.

I didn't need a pump because I could never get them to work for me and I had two nursing consultants. I also didn't put a lot of effort into it because I didn't want to use a machine. It felt weird and just wasn't for me. I think most women can agree. If you plan on pumping then there are many models available.

You may also have to try out different models to find the right one. Going to a lactation consultant or nursing group could really help with discovering the pump for you.

Oh, get some bibs and burp rags for feeding too. They were really helpful and the cute ones were cool for our going out days. Also, it is easier than using a tangled blanket for everything.

Cleaning System:

You're going to have to bathe your little one quite often. Such tiny humans get pretty dirty while lying around all day. A friend of mine who attended the baby shower said,

"Don't worry about getting a baby bath. We just took our daughter in the shower with us. It was much easier."

I'm glad they told me this because I was wondering if we should get her a bath and we only had a shower.

When W. was a tiny newborn I just held her in the shower. I later laid her on the floor and over time she was able to sit up with her shower toys. If I were to do it over again I'd of gotten her a shower chair. You can get ones that resemble one of those bounce seats and the covers are machine washable.

I also bathed her in the sink once she could sit up which was convenient when I also didn't want to shower. She really liked bubble baths so a great option since we didn't have a bathtub.

As for supplies, I tried castile soap for hair and skin and have never had luck with it used in hair. I opted for plant-based shampoo and conditioner that was the tear-free kind. These products are concerning because they do burn the eyes. They just put numbing agents in them so you don't feel it. I use them because shampooing W.'s hair ended up being a struggle each time. We used my regular lotion for massages before bed too. A toothbrush, fluoride-free toothpaste, and a wood hairbrush were purchased as she grew.

Elimination System:

Babies have to potty a lot so you'll obviously need a system for elimination. We went with cloth diapers, cloth wipes, and elimination communication.

(Chapter 16 explains more in depth) They're not entirely minimalist but if done correctly you'll save money in the long run. If you compare how many plastic diapers you need overall to how many cloth diapers and accessories you need it ends up being far less. With cloth you just end up holding on to them.

Loving Caretakers ❤

No baby is complete without loving caretakers who also love and care for each other. I do believe it's crucial to delve into some learning materials. Like this book and make sure you and your partner (or if you're single, people involved) are on the same page on the how's and what's.

Making sure you both get enough sleep and trade-off is very important as well. Moms who nurse often feel as if they're doing all the "work" but there are plenty of tasks Dads can do. As you'll later learn there is a lot that goes into the health and mental health of a baby/ child. Just remember, we're not raising children, we're guiding them into adulthood.

A Few More:

We did get a few extra items for her that weren't necessary but thought they were worth mentioning. I wanted a soft comfortable rocking chair we adults could both fit in comfortably. I thought I'd use it to rock her more often. It did come in very handy through the birthing process and late nights searching around on my computer. Well worth the \$30 I spent on an old swivel rocker. I also got a big exercise ball to do yoga on during pregnancy, labor and eventually used it to bounce up and down to get her to fall asleep. That ball was my best friend until she got too heavy for me.

I really wanted a swing and a bouncy chair to rest her on. I felt like most models of swings were just huge and not my style. Bought one, sent it back, and found the perfect swing that also stopped in place to be a little chair too. I converted it to use a power cord instead of batteries with a little brain power and a few minutes of YouTube. That was well worth my time. It was quite low to the ground so if you're tall or can't bend over get a taller one. They make tons of different models. Like one that acts in motion as a car or

the womb.

What I Don't Think You Need:

A lot of the extras to me are luxury items that I feel would have taken up more space and are just unnecessary. Like a wipe warmer. We used cloth that didn't need to be warmed. Or a diaper pail because you don't really want to trap odors. Just take it out.

She didn't use bottles or want a pacifier. I was against them at first but she ended up not wanting one anyway. I was thinking thumb would be great but she did that for maybe a week. Some people are back and forth on teeth development or weaning being easier or not. I'm not concerned about any of that. A pacifier to me seemed more difficult when seeing other parents have to wean. I get it, the thumb you can't take away but they'll eventually wean. She was a boobie girl all the way through. Teeth look great.

A diaper bag seemed very unnecessary to me. Someone gifted us one. We did use it but mainly when going overnight or on longer trips. People love the pockets but for an everyday deal, we just carried my small backpack with a change of clothes and extra diapers/underwear.

Diaper rash creams were unnecessary for us as well because we used cloth diapers and changed her each time she went. Plastic diaper babies tend to have more issues because of the chemicals used. (Chapter 16 tells ya more)

Baby bouncers or saucers are not great for their legs or stomach muscles because parents are basically forcing them to use their muscles before they're ready. The ones with trays or a bunch of toys around them don't allow them to make the connection of feet touching the ground + bending legs + pushing = FUN! This is necessary for development. They also tend to get used as "babysitters" and the colors and gadgets all over them are overstimulating for the baby and they get fussy and frustrated.

She had a *Bumbo* seat someone gifted us and I was hesitant and sat her in one anyway thinking maybe she'd like to be able to see more. I got rid of it immediately after reading why people are against them. They also put babies in unfamiliar positions and force them to sit up when they're not ready.

She did have one of those jumper Swings that hook on a door jamb. She

used it a few times but she was able to see her feet. She got bored of it fast though and we only put her in there when she was already standing up and bouncing her legs.

Toys, I don't think we purchased any as a baby. Friends and family did gift her some. She had a teething ring set that had those little rings and a rattle or two. I also focused on Montessori toys which are learning materials AND toys.

I'm sure there's so much more I could include, I think you get the gist. Luxury items are not "Must Haves!" and usually just take up room. Make sure you're doing plenty of planning and research on development with baby items that are supposed to "help" with babies' development. Usually, this is just marketing and holding them back, sadly.

Every home is different and even as a minimalist family our little one did have quite a few things. Being a minimalist Momma will cut down so much stress and overload for you. Less, cleaning, less worry, and everything will have a place. I also hope this chapter helps sum up the "Must Haves!" for you.

CHAPTER EIGHT: BABIES DON'T NEED A LOT OF STUFF



W's Baby-Nook

Chapter Nine: Hypnobirthing – Start Now

Aw, yes another one of my favorite things. The act of Hypnobirthing! Have you heard of it? I discovered Hypnobirthing after learning the different ways women have managed pain while birthing. Let me tell you, this was key. Whatever type of birth you plan or end up experiencing, Hypnobirthing changes everything.

We've all heard horror stories from women before us who've given birth. The media really likes to play this up in movies and television. I for one was terrified of giving birth most of my life. My mom didn't have the best birthing experiences. And I don't think I'd ever heard a great story.

What if I told you, that we can all lessen these fears and that birth didn't have to be scary or painful? You can, I did it.

What Is Hypnobirthing?

Hypnosis + Birthing! Hypnobirthing is a method used by many women in labor. It is type of pain management that involves using a mixture of visual, relaxation, and breathing techniques. You can do this on your own or with guidance. Guided is a great place to start until you feel comfortable by yourself if you'd like.

Many women use this technique for home births, hospital births without pain meds, hospital births with pain meds, or cesareans. This is for all types of births. Hypnobirthing empowers the woman to know and understand her body, to trust the process, and can even experience a pain-free birth.

I scoured the web for as many free resources as I could. I did find a few free

Hypnobirthing meditations downloads that I listened to every night from about 20 weeks on. These helped me stay calm and I'd even fall asleep in minutes. I felt so much more connected to my then-growing baby.

There are classes in my area and maybe even yours that you could join. I didn't join for cost reasons. I did find a class online that did wonders and was inexpensive. They have in-person classes for local folks. This class was great in teaching me and J. about how to stay calm and enjoy the process. Their site is <https://thepositivebirthcompany.co.uk/>

They have a range of digital courses to choose from that you can do online from your computer! Totally worth it. At the time I don't know if they had the larger digital pack classes. It looks like their site has been new and improved since. I purchased the smallest pack.

The woman went into detail about the fear tension pain cycle, and how a "contraction" (we call them waves) really happens. She explained differences between pain management techniques, her personal experiences with birth and trauma, and how to handle staying calm if birth plans change. There were audio tracks to listen to during pregnancy. And more.

If you can afford them, totally get the tracks to listen to while in labor. You do have to be careful with these because they're said to make you go into labor if you listen to them early. That's how powerful hypnosis and Hypnobirthing can be.

Now, you do have to be a willing participant in these types of medicine. You cannot be hypnotized or meditate if you're resistant or don't believe it will work. Trust me, it did take me a while to not think it was silly and give in to the tracks I was listening to. Once I did, I was so much more calm and confident in my abilities.

Starting Hypnobirthing early in the pregnancy will aid in being more prepared, confident, more easily relaxed, and into a hypnosis state.

If you don't want to go all in with this then here's one piece of advice, un-clench your hands, jaw, and your face right now. Feel more relaxed overall? The face is actually connected to the entire body, but more specifically, the vagina.

Trauma:

Most of us women have been told stories of birth, how scary it is, and how much it hurts! I remember my mother's birth stories being pretty intense. My brother was breech and had to be turned, which was very painful for her. I was incredibly early and she had to be airlifted in a blizzard. My sister was delivered by emergency cesarean to which the doctor later apologized saying nothing had been wrong anyway. Yeah, traumatic.

I think our Western society views birth as this dramatic, life or death, and very scary situation. I mean, have you ever seen any movie or television show about a pregnant woman or woman giving birth, ever? It's so dramatic. She's typically scared and screaming. This really paints a picture in our heads over the years.

Yes, there are real stories of course, and people have great trauma from birthing their babies. This is again due to a very over-medicalized view of birthing humans. Yes, many women have died in childbirth and still do. I'm not saying that doesn't happen and discounting the use of hospitals in situations where emergencies happen.

Spoiler Alert I myself had to go to the hospital after giving birth.

In the book *The Business Of Baby*, Jennifer Margulis goes into detail about how medical practices are making things worse and women are having more and more traumatic situations at these times. It's so normal now that we just think birthing a baby is just supposed to be traumatic.

I say this because I honestly don't know anyone who's had a completely positive birth experience. I think I did for the most part but there was still some pain I needed to heal. The woman speaking in my Hypnobirthing class said similar statements. She had an "emergency" cesarean and afterward, a woman came in to talk to her. About her traumatic birth. She had no idea it was even traumatic. It was just what she expected.

I just want to tell you. With more informed women explaining how positive birthing could be. We would have less trauma and more women who've experienced trauma getting the help that they need. I for one am grateful for this knowledge because I was able to seek help when I was feeling low after birthing W.

Fear + Tension + Pain Cycle:

Trauma leads me to the Fear + Tension + Pain Cycle. When something is painful we tend to wince and tighten our muscles. This is normal. When we experience pain we obviously don't want to experience pain again. Our brains will tell us to avoid situations where we may experience more pain. Also, totally normal.

When we fear pain we tense up and the pain feels more intense than it could have been. There are experiences where people may welcome pain too. Because this pain has a purpose. Such as getting a tattoo or breaking up with someone even though you don't want to. Taking the fear out of those situations lets us be okay with the pain and just let it happen.

You can do this in pregnancy and childbirth. You see, contractions (we call them waves instead) have a wonderful and powerful purpose! To birth that baby. Understanding this changes everything. Taking the fear out of waves or giving birth, in general, will allow you to experience less pain. You disrupt the cycle once you take the fear out of the equation, you won't be tense and therefore the pain will not be there.

Yes, seriously. All that is needed is to accept the fact that it's there, notice the patterns, and do everything you can to just go with the wave. My midwife reminded me during active labor,

“Remember there is no fear here, this is pain with a purpose. The only way out is through. Your baby is coming.”

If I had tensed my muscles and let fear take over me that pain would have been much more than tension and I'd have one of those “horror stories” too. Hearing her say that did bring me back to my breath again.

Waves vs Contractions:

The word “contraction” sounds scary and painful. It's the act of squeezing something tightly, pulling, forcing, and creating pain. The reason we call these waves instead is during labor nothing is contracting. It's more like the uterine muscles are moving up and down. The pressure experienced by this comes and goes. It starts lightly, gets more intense, peaks, and then calms

back down. Like a wave.

Knowing this allows us to take the fear out of the experience. The feeling of these waves is not forever, they're temporary. The next one is also going to be temporary. The next as well.

Breathing Down the Baby:

Another aspect of Hypnobirthing and having a much more positive experience is not focusing on pushing. We want to go with the flow, remember? The term “breathing down the baby” sums it up. Instead of pushing and tensing the face. (which causes more pain specifically in the vaginal region). We are as calm as we can be and when a big wave comes, it peaks as we take a deep breath and we can release the huge breath out as the wave comes down.

This again allows us to stay calm and breathe with the “pain” to release it. Similar to yoga practices when in a pose that feels tense. You breathe into that tension and allow it to be there. In no time, you’re more flexible than before.

Each time you breathe your baby will be closer to arriving on Earth. Being confident that our bodies are meant to do this, breathing, allowing the experience to happen instead of resisting, and practicing self-hypnosis is what Hypnobirthing is all about.

Some women get so good at Hypnobirthing that they have to tell the provider,

“Yes, I’m really in labor!” because they’re just so calm.

Seriously, you can view videos of women using this technique on YouTube. To me, they were very inspirational! This does not have to be traumatic or scary. Hypnobirthing will allow this experience to be a positive one for you.

You can do this.

Chapter Ten: Third Trimester

Here's when everything starts really getting real. No turning back now! You've made it.

The third trimester means you're really freaking pregnant and likely really feeling that extra weight. It's time to make sure you have your plans in order and tie up any loose ends.

But first! Some common third-trimester symptoms are:

Fatigue: Yeah carrying that extra weight around is going to make you tired.

Back Pain: Again, extra weight. Do what you can to stand up straight and try not to lean back sticking your belly out in front of you. Cat-cow yoga pose, wide-legged child's pose, and other pregnancy-safe yoga moves are your friends! You'll thank me. I didn't do it enough and have paid for it.

Increased Thirst: You should be drinking a ton of water, but you'll also be really freaking thirsty so drink up!

Frequent Urination: "I have to pee-peee!" was my catchphrase. I even asked the doctor if my bladder is abnormally small. It's not. All that water is going somewhere.

Heartburn: While the uterus and other organs get pushed around, digestion

slows and heartburn can happen.

Swelling: Circulation is key throughout pregnancy and even more so during the third trimester. If you sit or stand for too long without moving water may accumulate in the legs, feet, or hands. Putting your feet up will help after a long day.

Braxton Hicks Contractions (waves for us): During the 8th and 9th months of pregnancy you may experience “false labor” pains. They’re not the same as labor and really just gearing you up for the real deal.

Vivid Dreams: Your dreams will be brighter and more realistic. Sometimes even too realistic. Or you may experience premonitions more often.

Frequent Waking: Your body will actually wake you up every few hours. This is your body’s way of preparing you for how often the baby will wake up at night. I actually thought this was pretty cool.

Relaxin: A hormone released during pregnancy that helps loosen your muscles, joints, ligaments, and pelvis to prepare your body for birth. In my experience, not working out as much during pregnancy made my muscles stay relaxed after the birth. I had to re-tone later. But I could suddenly do the splits and touch my toes more easily during pregnancy.

Constipation: Yeah all of your organs being moved will slow down digestion. Water is your friend. Don’t use any type of over-the-counter laxative aids. They’re usually stimulants that are not good for us in general but basically force the muscles to contract. Regular, sugar free apple sauce with the skins is also your friend here. It’s a natural diuretic.

Itching Around The Abdominal Area: Your skin has been stretched a whole lot but even more so in the third trimester. Try not to scratch and pat instead. Use plenty of moisturizers. Scratching may cause scarring.

Nesting: You're going to get this crazy need to prepare your home. I seriously cleaned absolutely everything and still didn't feel finished.

Birth Plans:

At this point, you'll need to know which method of labor you desire. There are several different methods and preferences to be considered. This is the best way to inform your provider and team what you desire for the birth you have planned in your head. There may even be things you didn't think of at first included on the list below. I know for me, I actually learned what may happen and was able to feel more prepared.

Things don't always go according to plan but it is nice to have something written down for them so you're both on the same page and if they need to inform you of something that won't work for your situation they can. My birth plan was another reason why I switched providers. Had I not mentioned, I wouldn't have known they weren't able to provide what I wanted.

It needs to be known to remain flexible with your plan because life doesn't always go according to plan and resistance isn't going to serve you well.

If you haven't taken a birthing class, it's now or never. We couldn't drive to the location so the Lamaze teacher actually came to our apartment! That's how important the midwives said this class was. They actually told me it was more for J. because as women, we're already looking things up and reading from the start usually. This class was very valuable to J. and to me.

Here's what needs to be included:

Where would you like to give birth?

Based on the provider you've chosen you will have birthing options. If you choose an OB-GYN approach you'll most likely be in a hospital. With an in-hospital midwife, you have some other options and a home birth midwife may have a birthing center or you can labor at home. All of this is also on the condition of your pregnancy and if it's safe for you and your baby of course.

In Hospital: The majority of women give birth in a hospital in the United States. You will have emergency care if necessary, you'll have access to pain medication if available in your condition. If anything is wrong with the baby they will be responded to immediately. The maternity ward as they call it usually is a nicer private room with a few amenities like a fridge and a couch where husbands usually end up sleeping.

Birthing Center: Some midwives have a designated place where you can labor and deliver your baby. There are some hospital midwives as well who have different areas they call birthing centers. These places are usually a lot cozier and almost more like home. Some have large tubs you can labor in as well. The hospital one for me though wouldn't allow any pain management drugs including nitrous and would not let me deliver the baby in the tub. I'd have had to get out. Keep that in mind.

At Home: If you are healthy enough to have a home birth with a home birth midwife (or unassisted which is not recommended) you can labor and deliver in your own home. This is a great option if you don't want anything to get in the way of your natural decisions.

You'll feel much more comfortable at home with all of your things and be able to have a lot more control over the environment. You also won't have to do the same invasive practices hospitals have to do. Like being hooked up to monitors.

Your midwife will be trained to recognize an emergency and you or your baby will receive care in a timely manner. You may need to go to a birthing center if your home is too far from the midwife's origin.

Who would you like/dislike to be present at the birth?

This is important to note because your provider may have specific guidelines or preferences on which or how many people can be present at the birth. There's a lot going on so having a ton of people in the room is probably going to be more stressful for you and your provider. Also, keep in mind family feuds.

In my experience, I didn't really want anyone in the room with me other than J. and the midwives. My mother and Kinda-Step Mom took offense to this. They just kind of assumed they'd be included because they're women. I felt like this was a very intimate moment and I'm not particularly that close to either of them. And there's no way I'd of had them both in the same room together.

Later, Me Father and Kinda-Step Mom expressed that they wished they were included and I did mention that maybe they could have stayed in the hallway or another room. I just didn't want extra energy around, they get rather excited and I think I would have felt like I needed to be a host. Just the way I am.

I actually had to convince J. to be present because he was afraid. He didn't admit to this but to me, it was obvious. He said,

"I just don't want to be around all the fucking screaming!"

Rather insensitive, yeah.

I did explain to him the importance and that the method I'm using wasn't going to be horrible like the movies. I was rather upset by him but in the end, he did show up. He's glad he was there and loved telling the funny parts of the birth story.

Traditionally, when women labored there were a lot of females present because having feminine energy was said to help and other women may have had experience. Men used to stand guard to make sure nobody who wasn't supposed to come in didn't. This is sweet but J. was one hell of a birthing partner. I truly needed him that day.

Some women include children to witness the miracle of birth as well. I'd say that's totally awesome too. If you include children then you may want to have another person present to entertain them for all the boring long parts of labor. Children usually can't sit still and quiet long and may not quite understand. I know the next baby I have W. will most definitely be present.

Include Provider Information:

Which doctor or midwife do you prefer the most? Have you hired a Doula or birthing partner? Will children be present? Do you have a photographer?

Who's who here?

Having this information written down and maybe a small description will let your team know who is doing what when they all end up in the same room together. That way nobody is stepping on anyone's toes. Your provider needs to be able to do their job without anyone in the way.

Pain Management Preferences:

Do you want the strongest meds possible? Do you want them to not ask if you'd like any? Do you want an absolutely med-free birth? What about if you change your mind? Do you want an epidural at a certain point? What if you have to be induced? Would you like them to tell you when your last call is on meds? Have you practiced Hypnobirthing and you don't even wince so they might not know you're in labor based on that? What type of childbirth classes have you taken? This is all very important to include in this plan.

Episiotomy or Natural Tear?

Women tear more often than is talked about. I did and I didn't really prepare for it because I just didn't think it'd happen I guess. Sometimes a doctor will create a cut in the perineum to let the baby's head through easier. This is called an Episiotomy. Yeah, sounds freaky I know but it's very common.

The other option is to just risk a natural tear. You may or may not tear so keep that in mind. A Natural tear can either be just as large as an episiotomy or smaller.

I personally chose to say I didn't want an episiotomy under any circumstances. A clean cut is much more difficult to heal because a natural tear isn't a perfect line. The skin can heal better. I also wanted everything to be as natural as possible.

There are plenty of ways you can prepare the perineum and prevent tearing. Just know, it's common and I didn't even feel it. I had no idea I tore until they told me.

How Do You Want To Deliver Your Baby?

This is obviously important, right? It's a good idea to cover the bases here. You may want a "free-birth" where you want to be able to move as you please. If you're in a hospital and want a natural birth you need to know what you're allowed to do there.

Some places won't allow you to move around specifically if you have pain meds. Do you want to use a pool? A birthing tub? A Ball? Do you want a med-free birth? Do you want to labor on your back? Do you want them to take the reins and you'll trust them? Would you like music? Lights? Or quiet? Communicate all of this in your plan.

What Do You Want To Happen After You Give Birth?

Would you like to have immediate skin-to-skin contact? Would you like them to take the baby so you can rest? If the baby and you need to be separated do you want someone (like the father) to stay with the baby? Do you want vaccinations for the baby immediately? Would you like the baby circumcised if they're male? Do you want to exclusively nurse? Pacifier? Delayed cord cutting? Would you like anything done to the baby in front of you?

Finally, add any additional comments you deem necessary in your birth plan. Get as specific as you need to here. It's okay to over-communicate your needs. Having a birth plan written out and copied for your provider is the best way to communicate your needs when you may not be able to speak up in the moment or have forgotten. Also, letting your partner know what you desire is equally important.

You can find hundreds of birth plan templates online to print off and hand in. There are different needs for birthing places so make sure to specify in your search whether it's in a hospital or out of the hospital. Some care providers will have specific birth plan sheets for you to fill out ahead of time. Make sure you are very specific as I said before. Be sure to include what you'd like to happen if plans change as well. Happy Planning!

Circumcision:

If you have a boy then you'll have to specify on the birth plan whether or not you'd like him circumcised. Circumcision is the act of cutting off the baby boy's foreskin. This is not something medical professionals in the United States or anywhere else in the world deem medically necessary. It is the only preference that people may have.

I think and hope this is a practice that is phasing out because honestly it's absolutely horrific and many men and parents have spoken up about this. A lot of people say it has to do with cleanliness or looks. Both of which are again, not medically necessary.

I wasn't having a boy but I did watch an awesome documentary on circumcision in the United States with J. The documentary is called "*American Circumcision*". You can view it on many streaming services but they also have a website:

<https://circumcisionmovie.com/>.

As someone who had no idea about this practice, this documentary really opened my eyes. They went into detail on how circumcision was started, what people think now, how the practice is actually done, men who feel disheartened by this practice being done to them, people who were injured, and a whole lot more! Definitely worth viewing.

Many men find it to be normal and want their sons to have the same practice done. Many men in this documentary also said otherwise. I don't see any reason why people still do this other than looks and the supposed cleanliness. Also, people say women supposedly prefer this to be done. I can say I've been with both types of men and I don't think I've even noticed a difference.

Let me enlighten you on 12 reasons not to get this practice done. And also, totally watch that documentary.

12 Reasons Not To Circumcise Your Baby Boy:

- 1. There is no medical reason for "routine" circumcision:** No professional med-

ical association in the United States or the world recommends circumcision.

2. Foreskin is not a birth defect: The foreskin is a normal, sensitive, functional part of the body. Infant boys' foreskin is connected to the head of the penis (glans). It protects from urine, and feces and protects the urinary opening by keeping contaminants from entering the exposed urinary tract. Throughout life, the foreskin keeps the glans moist and protects it from injury. It also serves an important role in sexual pleasure, due to its erogenous nerve endings and natural lubricating and gliding functions.

3. You wouldn't remove girls' genitals: In the United States girls of all ages are protected by federal and state laws from genital surgery. Whether this is in medical, non-medical settings, or regardless of religious or cultural preferences. There's no ethical rationale for a difference between male or female genital alterations. If it's wrong to remove female genitals then it's wrong to remove males. If you didn't know, there are places where female genitals are altered and this does cause extenuate lifelong harm.

4. Your baby doesn't want to be circumcised: Circumcision painfully and permanently alters the baby boy's genitals, removing healthy, functional, protective tissue from the penis. Which exposes the baby/child to unnecessary pain and medical risks. All for no medical reason. Of course, your baby can't consent to this procedure. What do you think he'd say if he could tell you? No parent can ethically consent to a baby/child's surgery unless their health or life is at risk.

5. Removing part of a Baby's penis is painful, risky, and harmful: Babies are sensitive to pain just like children and adults are. Many circumcisions in the United States are done without any pain management at all. Even when pain management is implemented, the analgesics used only reduce pain, they do not eliminate it. Imagine that for one moment. The documentary "American Circumcision" goes into detail on the most horrific screams heard from baby boys going through this.

As with any surgery, complications (including death) can and do occur with circumcision. Infection and abnormal bleeding are the most common. Other complications such as removal of too much skin, loss of all or part of the penis (Yes, all), life-threatening infections, and urinary problems. All circumcisions result in the loss of the foreskin and its functions. Also leaving a penile scar.

6. Attitudes have really changed: Every country has different rates of circumcision. As a whole circumcision went from 81% in 1980 to under 40% in 2022. In some states, much lower. *Rates vary from state to state.* Washington State where I am from has a 15% circumcision rate in 2022.

7. Most medically advanced nations don't: People in Europe, Asia, and Latin America are appalled to hear that American doctors and hospitals routinely remove part of the penis shortly after birth. Approximately 75% of the world's male population are not circumcised and remain intact throughout their lives.

8. Caring for and cleaning the foreskin is easy: A naturally intact penis needs no special care. Gently wash the genital area with soap and water while bathing. That's it. Later, when the foreskin can be retracted (which usually doesn't happen until after adolescence), a boy can be taught how to pull the foreskin back to clean his penis. The boy should be the only one to do this when his body is ready. Doing so forcibly by anyone else can result in pain and injury.

9. Circumcision doesn't prevent HIV or other diseases: Studies show no conclusive link between circumcision and sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention. Despite common misinformation that is. Over the years claims of circumcision preventing various diseases have been exaggerated or fabricated. Most men in the United States are circumcised. Our STD rates are as higher or as high in countries where circumcision is rare. It's obvious that circumcision doesn't protect against STDs.

10. Children should be protected from permanent medical alterations inflicted on them without their consent in the name of religion, culture, parental preference, or profit: Accepted bioethical principles allow parents to consent to allow surgery on their child only if it is medically necessary to protect the child's health or life. Routine Circumcision fails this simple ethics test. It painfully removes a normal and healthy part of the boy's penis. It does not protect his health or life. Circumcision in fact poses more of a risk to his health and life. Medically unnecessary surgery to alter a baby's perfectly normal and healthy penis is no different than removing a finger or any other healthy body part.

11. It's weird to say it needs to look like dad's penis: Okay seriously, let's just stop comparing boys' penises to their fathers. Why does this seem so important anyway? By the way, his penis isn't going to look exactly like his dad's and why does it need to? This just poses another reason why appearance and preference are a driving force here. As I said before, I've been with both types of penises and I can assure you I wasn't staring right at it, caring, and felt no differences. Also, for fathers in the room, circumcision takes away very sensitive nerve endings. Which takes away even more sexual pleasure. If that's what we're really getting at here.

12. Cost: While in high school a then friend of mine was pregnant with twin boys. I remember her having a lot of issues during the pregnancy. One of those complaints was that hospitals, doctors, and some insurers don't deem circumcision medically necessary. So, she had to pay out of pocket for both boys' surgeries. I'm unsure if she ever did because she was on state aid. However, the cost of circumcision in the United States varies depending on insurance, doctors' time costs, the age of the boy, and the procedure preferred. In general, the cost is anywhere between \$100-\$3100 (2022).

If that's not enough to convince you then again, watch that documentary. I wasn't having a boy but I'm glad I was informed of the effects of this procedure. Honestly, circumcision doesn't make any sense to me. Baby boys

are born this way and our bodies aren't born broken. They're supposed to be this way. Other complications in adult males may occur and circumcision is actually recommended. But those cases are totally different from the routine surgeries of baby boys.

All in all, it's your decision. Now that you know the risks among the common reasoning for doing so you can make a clear choice that is right for you, your family, and your baby boy (if you're having one that is). Thanks for reading yet another controversial subject in this book. And be sure to include circumcision details in your birth plan.

Baby Moon:

A Babymoon is a moment in time you take out to kind of go on vacation to really pause and take a moment to appreciate these moments. Some people do this before or after the baby is born. Something I really wish we would have done!

Before the baby is born is an excellent time to spend some alone time with yourself, or with your partner. You're not going to be alone as a couple or by yourself for a while. Some couples go on a vacation together whether that be far away or just taking a weekend to close off the world and just spend one on one time. If you're by yourself, then turn off that cellphone, get a prenatal massage (I got one and it was so great! It was part of my Midwives care package!), get your nails done, read the rest of this book, or hang out with friends and family. Whatever lets you relax is in order!

You can also have a Baby Moon after the baby. In which you spend time, just you, the baby, and your partner (if you have one). Some parents take time away from electronics, visitors, and all other stressors. This allows you to really focus on your own needs and figure out your baby without the added stimuli. Something that can really give you some time to rest and recuperate without added distractions. And trust me, this time may go by very quickly, but well worth it.

Nesting:

Oh, boy did I nest! I thought I was nesting long before the third trimester but no, that was more like spring cleaning or an average cleaning day for me now haha. I did focus on minimalism throughout the pregnancy which made the process simpler and more spaced out.

But nesting? Whole different ball game! I was a housekeeper there for a little bit before I was pregnant. I learned a lot of tricks and there are a lot of things we overlook when thinking we cleaned our homes. So, I used those skills and that newfound minimalism to really fuel my nesting extravaganza!

First of all, let me inform you that cleaning cupboards, baseboards, doors, door jambs, window jambs, and vacuuming is almost like renovating your home. Okay, kidding, but it makes a tremendous difference.

Now, I took this a step further and cleaned out all the closets, cupboards, ceilings (well, okay I did half the kitchen ceiling and gave up because I was really dizzy so that was gross.), walls, and made sure everything was cleaned, washed and put where it needed to go.

I even cleaned the hallways in our apartment building which took me 2 days and my neighbor was all...

“You’re nesting! I like nesting Shannon!”

To which I replied...

“No, this place is gross. I’m just spring cleaning, but the baby needs clean!”

I also made sure her little baby nook was absolutely perfect. I showed everyone and was so proud of how my vision came together. I organized all her clothes by size in a tote with newborn-sized on top.

I also got the supplies I needed for a home water birth, which included a bunch of towels, a fishnet, and some incontinence pads. I made a cute little basket of my own postpartum items. The basket was key. I’ll have a list in the next chapter. Lucky you.

What I didn’t do was make a hospital bag of any kind. I didn’t think I needed one so I just never made one. Hey, go ahead and make one full of a few things like a phone charger, baby supplies, a comfortable-as-anything

outfit, water, lip balm, your own postpartum supplies, toiletries, and snacks. Make sure your partner knows where it is and have them make one too.

People make these huge lists of hospital bag must-haves. I get it, cool to be prepared but I literally didn't make one and ended up having J. and my father go to the house for a few things. We lived extremely close though. So, make that hospital bag even if you're not planning an away from home birth. Things happen.

Chapter Eleven: Postpartum Care & Maternity Leave

My postpartum care supply was also minimalist. I didn't want too much everywhere. There's quite a bit that people say you need and if you get reusable items, you'll spend less and have less to have around. I'll get to my "Postpartum Must-Haves!" in a bit don't worry.

Meal Prep:

But first, let me start by telling you that during my third trimester, I went a step further in my nesting routine! This is not necessary but totally super helpful especially since I was down and out for a while.

I decided to make double batches of meals to freeze. We had a small freezer but a deep freeze, if you have one, is totally your friend as well. Who am I kidding, if you have a deep freeze you already know that.

Anyway, I got some foil containers that you can prepare food in, freeze, and then cook in the oven. Depending on the size of your family or if you want single-serve meals, get whatever size you deem necessary. You can totally use regular casserole dishes with lids but I didn't have a ton of those at the time and knew I wouldn't be able to deal with hand washing. You want to use a piece of foil to cover it when you freeze and cook.

Now, I don't always time out how long it takes to cook these meals, sorry, I really just check and if it looks done, it's done right? I also mention freezing some things on a cookie sheet because that way when you put it in a freezer

bag it doesn't all just stick together. Great trick. If you need to vacuum seal a freezer bag, fill your sink with ice water, place the bag in the water with food in it up to the zip-lock line, and seal it. That'll get the air out easily. Yeah, you're totally welcome!

It's super simple to prepare meals and takes a lot of time off when you don't have the time or energy to make a meal. Think frozen dinners but healthier and not as expensive. Since I'm vegan it's less work to prep than using animals. For the sake of simplicity, I'll tell you my vegan ways.

List of Meals I Made:

- **Waffles:** These are versatile as f and you can make a whole bunch one day and freeze them for a long time. Just heat them up. I use them like you would bread if they're plain. Almond Butter + Jelly is great.
- **Casseroles:** Cook/prep your protein or use chickpea noodles, put noodles on the bottom of the foil pan, veggies, vegan cheese if you're feeling it, and loads of sauce. Cover with foil. Freeze. When you're ready to bake, the moisture from the sauce will cook the noodles. You can pre-cook the noodles if you'd like or you can layer a lot of sauce. These were great comfort foods and filled me up! I bake for about 50 minutes. You can do other casseroles too but this was the simplest for me to throw together a lot.
- **Oats mix:** Another meal I need to get back into. Mommas need a lot of nutrients and I pretty much made three bowls of oats on top of my regular meals. Plus, it's too easy to make oats when you're in a rush. You need a big container, oats, chia seeds, hemp seeds, dried fruit, and whatever else you think is going to be good in there. I also put a scoop or two of protein, cacao, or peanut butter powder in there. I put a bunch of different super-foods in as well. Versatile too. When you need a quick meal or breakfast, make overnight oats but put a cup in a container and milk on top, then put it in the fridge. Or just use hot water and wait as

usual.

- **Smoothie Packs:** Favorite smoothie? You can pre-pack the ingredients for when you're ready to make a quick smoothie. Just toss it in the blender with your liquid and there you go! You can make a big batch of frozen veggies too, stir fry anyone? Oh, and buying frozen is great too because fruits and veggies that are frozen are picked, cut, and packaged at peak ripeness. This makes them more nutritious and tastes better. It's not cheating, it's nutrition and less work for you!
- **French Fries:** Cut up a ton of potatoes, blanch them in cold water, drain, season, spread them on a cookie sheet, freeze, and put them all in a big bag. When you're ready, throw them in the air fryer or oven. I think they taste great, and everyone likes french fries.
- **Veggie Pucks:** I used to make my own veggie patties out of various beans, seasonings, and veggies to make a sort of burger. I called 'em veggie pucks because that sounds appetizing haha. I don't entirely have a recipe for this one but I just made a burger that stuck together after blending, mostly beans, put them on the cookie sheet, froze, and into a bag. They're great for adding extra something to salads or just on their own.
- **Burritos/Tacos:** Make your filling, wrap in burrito wraps, freeze on a cookie sheet, and put in a freezer bag, Bake when ready. You can also make the filling, put it in tortillas or taco shells, lay them sideways in a foil casserole pan, and bake them all at once for a larger meal.
- **Labor-aide:** Now, I didn't make a ton of this but it was great for laboring and part of my food budget. Labor-aide is a drink full of electrolytes and tastes great. Women drink it during labor. As you can imagine, giving birth is basically like a marathon and you're going to be depleted of energy. You need something. A lot of people recommend Pedialyte or

Gatorade and freezing into ice cubes. These sports drinks generally have a ton of sugar and lots of other ingredients I wasn't up to ingesting. So, Labor-aide was for me. You can flavor how you'd like but I stuck with a recipe I found. You need a big jar, coconut water, pineapple juice, cut lemons, cut limes, sea salt, source mineral drops, a sweetener like raw honey or agave nectar, and rescue remedy. Put that all in the jar with some ice maybe and a big ol' straw. Now you're ready!

Coconut water is natural and full of electrolytes, pineapple juice tastes great, lemons and limes also have electrolytes, sea salt helps you absorb the minerals, the sweetener tastes great and regulates the stress hormone cortisol, the source mineral drops are for minerals we may not have been consuming and the rescue remedy helps women stay calm. I didn't add the source minerals or the rescue remedy because I was low on cash but I sure wish I did.

Lastly, you're going to want to organize this real neatly in your cupboards, freezer, and fridge. This way you can find everything easily, and label your items with preparation instructions. Oh, and expiration date if you're keeping it around long. This way you can find things easily or your partner can navigate your madness...

I mean kitchen.

J. didn't go in my section of the kitchen much, doesn't enjoy cooking, and certainly didn't know how to make my oats, but now he does thanks to my genius meal prepping and instruction!

Postpartum "Must Haves!" Supplies:

All right, enough food talk, let's get to the other stuff. You're also going to need some lovely care items, Momma! I suggest getting a basket or a box of some sort to put your items in. One for the bathroom and one for the area you'll most likely spend your time in. Hell, maybe you can put one in each room if you want. You can do this with diaper-changing supplies too.

For me, this was the coffee table, we had a small apartment and I wasn't

able to get up much so this was very helpful since everything was right there. Now, people told me all about what to get, someone even made me a package evidently (we aren't now and weren't friends then, long story but I didn't want any "gifts" from her in my home). I knew that I wanted to stay natural, and minimal, and use cloth. I do not regret any of these decisions.

The List:

- **Cloth Pads:** Yes, cloth. They're reusable, so much more comfortable than the alternative, you can get a pack in different sizes, and patterns. They're not made of chemicals like the "disposable" type. You also will not smell as bad. Did I mention comfort? You'll want some heavy flow ones for sure, but I also used my daughter's bamboo diaper inserts for the first few days. They're made of the same materials and were brand new. They do send you home from the hospital with an ice-cold diaper after all. No shame. I cannot tell you enough how much more comfortable the cloth pads are, they don't stick to you, when you move they don't make noise, not as bulky and you get the gist.
- **Cloth Nursing Breast Pads:** Yup, cloth again. These are also made out of the same materials as pads and diapers. You'll need them because nursing gets leaky. There are also tons of sizes, shapes, patterns, and materials you can choose from. I chose to stick with bamboo and organic cotton for most of our supplies. These were also much more comfortable than the disposable type and again, you'll be using them a lot so I don't see a point in buying disposable anything. Oh, and I also purchased these inserts that are circular gel packs that can be frozen or heated up later on. Still have them, W. uses them as a boo-boo fixer and they are wonderful for soothing achy boobies!
- **Frozen Pads with Witch Hazel:** Okay, this sounds super weird but hear

me out. Your vagina and surrounding areas are going to feel pretty sore. What I did was soaked W's cloth baby wipes in witch hazel + aloe mixed in a bowl, folded them longways, stack about 20 of them, and put them all in a freezer bag for the freezer. The witch hazel and aloe along with coldness will heal the area and soothe way quicker. You can use cloth pads too but the wipes are way less bulky. Put one on top of a pad before you put your underwear back on and you'll be so relieved. Spread the word!

- **Caring Coconut Postpartum Kit:** This is local to my town Spokane Washington. My midwives included this kit in a care package they delivered to me with lots of goodies. Oh MY goodness, I absolutely love them. There's a healing salve, the best for nipples, and safe for babies to ingest. You can use the salve on anything including diaper rash, cradle cap, and more. The herbal sitz bath is a blend of herbs to help you relax and heal after delivery. I wish I had a bathtub so I could have done it sooner but I did it at Me Father's house a week or two later. And the Soothing Spray was great for healing my lady bits! 10 out of 10 recommend it to everyone. It's all-natural, and they know what they're doing with the herbs! They make so many wonderful products. You can find it here: <https://caringcoconut.com/collections/skin-care/products/mommy-and-me-birth-kit>
- **Incontinence Pads:** So, this isn't necessary but I found them helpful to sleep on. Because there's breast leakage, I also used them during delivery, as a changing pad on the couch and we used them in case W. wet the bed. I find them super useful. And yes, they're cloth and come in tons of different sizes and fabrics.
- **Another Human:** This one also isn't necessary but I really needed someone there since I wasn't allowed to get up. J. was able to take 2 weeks off which was awesome! If you don't have a partner, ask a friend or family member to help out. And if you're having company to see

the baby, put 'em to work. They can cook a meal, grab your supplies or watch the baby while you take a shower. If you don't live close to friends or family, then perhaps ask your care provider if there are any resources to hire adult care or even just someone to help make meals.

In the basket, I mentioned before, go ahead and put snacks, water, any medications you need, and whatever postpartum care items you need on hand in there. Breast pads are one of them!

I added a notebook so I could do a week or so worth of tracking sleeping and eating habits. This helped so I could tell the midwives and lactation consultant how W. was doing. I could also track my medication intake and I also could figure out a pattern in which W. needed to eat and potty. That way I was super on it!

A few burp rags too will help. I'd also suggest making one full of diapering supplies for easy changes. If you're allowed to take Ibuprofen then add that too, you'll need it.

Maternity/ Paternity Leave:

This leads me to maternity or paternity leave! Depending on your employer, in the United States, you aren't always guaranteed maternity or paternity leave (2022). The retail place I worked at added maternity leave in 2018 for full-time 40 hours or more workers and you had to have worked there at least a year and been planning on coming back. In the United States, leave is usually only 12 weeks, Which is just enough for you to heal physically, maybe. If you have a cesarean or other medical necessity you may need more time to heal.

At 12 weeks a little bundle of joy is out of the newborn phase as. In my opinion and many others, even around the world, 12 weeks is not nearly enough time. Many women experience birth trauma or need longer times to heal. This also doesn't cover the mental stress mothers may be under.

Paternity leave is a different story. There are some employers who include this but few and far between in the United States. W. was born a whole 6 months earlier than they added paternity leave at J.'s work. He would have been paid for those two weeks off instead of having to use all of his vacation time.

Some countries really value parenting and have maternity and paternity leave for up to two+ years a couple can choose how they'd like to split that up. I would have absolutely loved that! J. Could have been more confident, and hands-on and we could have split our time to get some breaks and actually enjoy our W. more.

Figuring all of this out months in advance with your employer will be the safest thing for you to do here. You're allowed and I believe required to have time off to heal and be with your newborn. Some women do in fact, go back to work even the very next day. I do not condone doing so because giving birth is a major stressor on women's bodies. Our newborns need loving caretakers, especially their mothers to be with them to nurture them. Don't forget, the baby has to go through a lot as well to arrive on Earth safe and sound.

Making sure you have extra money saved up as well to cover bills is also a great idea. You may not even want to go back to work if you'd rather be home with your baby. I didn't feel ready to start working again until W. was around 6 months old. I didn't feel like I wanted to leave her side or that it was acceptable. Which is a **biological** maternal response and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. She still needed so much care from me.

It does get lonely at times being a stay-at-home mom, but it is nice to see other adults, sometimes you don't have a choice, and making your own money feels good as well. I get all of that, so make your choice momma! Just make sure you give yourself some time to rest, enjoy your baby, and bond as much as possible before going back to work. It's a very important time.

Chapter Twelve: Water Birth

I bet you have some idea on why I chose a water birth but let me tell you, it wasn't actually my first choice. At first, I just thought I'd have a regular hospital birth with an epidural and just go with what the doctor told me to do. Later, after reading and viewing alternatives, I knew in my heart that I craved and desired something natural to our Earth and less invasive, more private.

As I mentioned earlier when explaining why I switched care providers, my views on this whole thing really shifted. I no longer wanted a medical version of pregnancy or birthing my baby. Often, when I would ask questions the staff would just look at me and I could just feel the "What are you talking about?" or the "I can't answer this question for you." vibes. I also don't know if maybe they just saw me as a new mom who didn't know any better. I'm not sure but I was very uncomfortable.

So, around the world, medical births are not the norm in developed nations. Midwives are the norm. Having a hospital and doctor birth is for special situations like if a woman is at risk of complications. Midwifery has been around much, much longer than our standard hospital births. A midwife specializes in pregnancy, birth, and postpartum care. This is immensely comforting to me.

Now, my frequent Pinterest and YouTube searches of women giving birth in tubs definitely piqued my interest and I thought,

"It's just so amazing how calm and beautiful these births are. They aren't even using medications...".

I wanted to be just like them.

I also read plenty of books and articles early on. Pain management options were discussed most of the time and the side effects and alternatives. I wanted no side effects. I'm very sensitive to drugs so my luck, I'd get all the side effects. I wanted to be present and those women could do it so why couldn't I? Plus I mean, my cat did it pretty often (Sorry KeKe) but she seems fine. (I know... cats are different.)

The cost of a home birth tends to be much less than an in-hospital birth. It depends on insurance, provider, and anything extra you include of course. Without insurance, I believe my provider charged around \$4,000 USD but with my insurance, we only paid \$600 out of pocket for some things insurance didn't entirely cover (2019). We may have had to pay more if I had gotten care earlier in the pregnancy. With each birth afterward care is less expensive with them too.

Induction & Pain Medications:

Let me start with induction. Now, if I was to be induced I most certainly would take an epidural. I am not entirely against anything here. This is because being induced is done by a drug called Pitocin.

Pitocin forces the uterus to contract. Which is said to be much more painful than naturally going into labor. The baby is also confused because when a baby is ready to come out on their own, they secrete a drug that tells our bodies that it's time to start the show.

When induced the waves are very strong and come about quickly, which is scary as shit to me. Just saying. When the baby naturally decides to be born the waves gradually increase in intensity and you get a break in between. They don't just happen super intensely from the start. You get some time to feel the early ones.

So, if I absolutely had to be induced, I'd be taking the epidural because at that point I'd be in the hands of the doctor or midwife and most likely be accepting another drug to help. Fear would probably be set in by then for me.

Induction in the United States is often administered based on doctor time constraints. You have to remember doctors have other patients to get in. So,

“failure to progress” you hear often in the birthing community. Failure to progress isn’t a real thing. Okay, it’s not as common as people are told.

The reason why I say this is an animal in the wild who is a mammal and about to give birth will usually give birth in the evening in a cozy little spot away from all the commotion. They need to feel and be safe and comfortable. Their labor will stall if danger is around. Yup, their labor will stop, until they find safety. Because they can’t fight off a predator while also giving birth. Once they find safety, they’ll continue with their labor.

Guess what? Humans too. We are mammals and animals believe it or not. Which means we’re alike other mammals when giving birth. So, when a human mother is scared, uncomfortable, and generally her brain and body are feeling threatened and that good ol’ fight or flight system kicks in... her labor will stall. How many of you feel comfortable in a hospital? I don’t. So, a doctor says she’s taking too long and will induce her.

There are also situations where they may even schedule an induction earlier than the due date and give the mom some reason why. But maybe he has a lot of births to do that week. Or maybe he’s also scheduled to take a vacation and needs to get you in and out in a hurry. Either way, induction is not for me. It may be for some women who want to know exactly their due date or they are having real health problems like their water breaking days before but “failure to progress” is bull shit. If I heard that, I’d be searching for any other option that could be done. Babies don’t come on a perfect schedule on their own.

Pain Management:

There are many risks associated with getting pain medications or being induced during labor. There are also many alternatives to these options that many women use and are effective. Remember Hypnobirthing? That’s one of them. Remember the fear + tension + pain cycle? Yeah, you can use that too. Trust me, I did.

Types of Pain Medications:

- **Epidural:** A regional pain-blocking procedure that can be used during labor
- **Spinal Block:** A pain blocking procedure that's typically used shortly before delivery
- **Pudendal Block:** A local anesthetic used shortly before delivery to block pain between the vagina and anus
- **Nitrous Oxide:** An inhalation analgesia that can be used during labor
- **Opioids**

I think most women go with an epidural because the risks are said to be low and you're not supposedly high or anything when you get one. I had a friend tell me when she was 18 she gave birth but the epidural didn't work and only numbed part of half of her body. So on the other side, she could feel everything and nothing at the same time.

Now that scared the hell out of me. These drugs don't always work. And after that, she would sometimes get muscle spasms where she would just get stuck in an unnatural position and in pain and wouldn't be able to move. This happened at work no less.

So, I was wary of that for a while but thought, maybe it was just administered incorrectly. You also have to stay very still from what I hear and I certainly did not do so during my labor at home. I don't know, maybe in the future I'll get one and it won't be so bad.

I also didn't like the idea of having to be in a hospital to do this, I wanted to be able to move freely, which you cannot do with an epidural you have to stay in the bed. The baby and mom are not completely safe with this either. Sometimes the baby's heartbeat will drop and that is one cause of an emergency cesarean. Which I definitely was avoiding as much as possible.

You have to get an epidural within a certain amount of time as well, it might be too late by the time you get in. The doctor who administers the epidural may be busy and you miss your chance. There are loads of things that could happen there. Plus, the thought of that huge needle going into my back and needing to sit still for it wasn't for me.

I also want to note that an epidural when it works correctly, doesn't allow the woman to feel below the hips. I think that would just freak me the hell out. Some women can't feel enough to push either which means the doctor delivering the baby may need to use a suction cup to pull the baby out.

All of that just isn't for me. The rest of the medications, with the exception of nitrous oxide, are said to make a woman feel high. Even epidural and nitrous oxide have side effects such as slowing of the heart, nausea, vomiting, headache, and more. I just didn't want to risk any of this.

Nitrous oxide on the other hand is supposed to be very calming and self-administered. In my city, or perhaps the whole United States (I'm unsure), wouldn't allow me to have this unless I was in the regular maternity ward. Not with the hospital midwives who had the birthing tubs. In almost every video I watched, women were using nitrous oxide. I was pretty set on that helping me. Guess not where I live. So, I couldn't have that either.

Natural Pain Management:

- Breathing techniques such as Hypnobirthing
- Massage and counter-pressure
- *Warm shower or birthing tub*
- *Finding the most comfortable position for you*
- *Distraction techniques, such as music or games*
- *A heating pad or ice pack*
- *Birthing ball*
- *Acupressure*
- *Emotional support such as a doula*

A lot of these options are not acceptable if epidural or other pain drugs are used and I never got that far in discussion with the hospital midwives. I did, however, know that when I had menstrual cramps and the miscarriage, my first instinct was to get in the tub and move if I needed to. I also would dim the lights and try to stay calm and just release everything.

Now, that's not as intense as an actual birth no. Our bodies are gearing us up for birth all of our lives. I think experiencing the miscarriage gave me a nice light/medium point on the pain threshold between menstruation cramps and birthing a baby. So thanks to the universe and my awesome body!

Being able to move is a huge reason why I wanted a natural birth as well. Women in hospital settings are told to be on their backs. This is the most unnatural, most painful, and difficult position to give birth in. The baby needs gravity for one. They also have to get around the pubic bone which is definitely in the way when women labor on their backs.

The reason for this position is for the doctor's convenience. They can see everything they need to see and access everything they need to access from here. If the mom is on pain medications as well, it's harmful or impossible for her to be in another position so as to not hurt herself or the baby. If you can't feel your legs then you're probably going to be on your back. But yeah, there's another doctor convenience thing.

What position are women supposed to give birth in, you ask? Well, I certainly was upright and on all fours for a while. It was nice to be able to move my hips. I also wanted to be in a squat position. You see ancient statues of women giving birth in a position similar to this. A birthing stool pretty much puts a woman in this position just elevated with some assistance. I certainly was never on my back probably a week leading up to the actual birth.

It's natural to be in an all-fours position, to use gravity to breathe down the baby and the baby will have a much easier time because they don't have a difficult time getting around the pubic bone. So, gravity is your friend here. This feels obvious.

Water Birth:

I chose a water birth honestly because I thought it looked so peaceful and relaxing. Also, how cool is that?! I'm never one to want to be one of the normal mainstream birthing women! With all I read about why birth is

medicalized the way it is, I didn't want that. I then figured I could use the warm water as help with pain or at least a distraction and I was convinced at the time that I'd be able to have nitrous so everything seemed fine.

There are many more reasons as to why I wanted a water birth in the end though. For one, it's calmer for birthing women. I often would get in the tub or shower in those womanly moments as I said before. This always helps.

The water is calming and floating helps the body go with the flow of the movements. All the women I saw on video doing water births seemed so blissful and calm and every story I read was so inspirational.

The risk of tearing lessons when using a birthing pool to give birth. The water allows elasticity and the skin to be moist and softened before the baby moves through the opening.

The baby also has a better transition from the birthing canal to dry land. Because there's warm water surrounding the mother, the baby goes from the warm cozy liquid-filled uterus to pushing and pushing its way through, to warm water then into mom's arms. This just seemed so right to me!

I chose to do it at home because I kept settling on my desires when I was at the hospital midwives and I just felt misunderstood and not valued. I also felt like I'd stall my labor because I'm already a pretty anxious person and being in a doctor's office or hospital just makes it that much worse. My home is my own, it's calm, and I can control the environment. There weren't 20 different people to "meet" and so many things going on. I wanted to be calm. I needed calm.

Thank goodness I made the switch to homebirth midwives. They are so much more personable and actually seemed to care and tell me real information. They also were able to keep me confident and tell me that I can totally do this! I loved them.

Cesarean Rate:

In the United States (2022), most births are done in hospitals. Approximately 98% are in hospital births. About .09% occur in the home. As for the other percentages, I'm assuming (because I cannot find any information on

this) are done in birthing centers. Evidently, 1/4 of these home births were unplanned or unattended by midwives or doctors. Again, not recommended.

Now, the cesarean rate for perfectly healthy pregnancies of first-time mothers under the care of midwives in the United States is around 2% of home or birthing center births. A perfectly healthy pregnancy of a first-time mother walking into a hospital to give birth is 33.1%(2022). Just by walking in. That scared the shit out of me too.

This again is either due to medications lowering baby or mom's heart rates, "failure to progress", induction, or just doctor time constraints. According to my Lamaze teacher, while playing a game with a pie chart of reasons cesareans happen, I was correct, 33.1% of new mother cesareans are performed by doctor's time constraints.

No. Thanks. I'm good.

This is why we hear of so many women having "emergency" cesareans. This is also major stomach surgery and just seems so normal these days as just something we women go through. After my mom's experience (she was told it was a false alarm) she couldn't feel part of her hip from permanent nerve damage. And these women get the same amount of maternity leave after major stomach surgery. It takes a lot to heal from this and not to mention, the mental toll.

Remember how I mentioned gut flora in earlier chapters? The mother gives their baby gut flora when they pass through the birthing canal. This doesn't happen through a cesarean. And if the baby is then given vaccines or antibiotics, anything they had is just wiped out and they must rebuild the flora to be healthy. Problem is, not a lot of people are focusing on doing so because of a lack of knowledge or other priorities. I worked so hard on getting my flora to a healthy state while pregnant for myself and my baby. Didn't want to change it.

I didn't want a hospital birth for so many reasons but an "emergency" cesarean was definitely one of them. Sure, there are actual emergencies and even women who elect to have cesareans and that's what they need. But I was terrified.

I also really wanted to take the fear and stigma out of birth so I could go

on to tell the generations of women after me that it's not like the movies. I also felt like if I'd gone to a hospital I may never have the chance to have a home water birth again. Some places will not allow you to have one if there were complications in previous births. I may not get to do this again. This was my chance.

A lot of hospitals and birthing centers also will not allow a mother to eat or drink during labor. This is absolutely crazy because this event in a woman's life can last hours. Some women are in labor for days! Some are only in labor for a few and first-time moms usually labor longer. We need nutrients in order to have energy to birth the baby. I certainly wanted to be able to eat. At home, this is a possibility and even encouraged.

Chapter Thirteen: W's Birth Story

Here it is, the moment we were all waiting for and the most awesome day of my whole life thus far! W's birth was fantastic. Yeah, I had an unmedicated home birth and I said FANTASTIC! I absolutely would do it again. Well, with the next baby, you know? I plan on having more.

List Of Home Birthing Supplies:

- Birth Plan
- 5-8 towels
- 4 washcloths
- Aromatherapy
- Isopropyl Alcohol
- 8 receiving blankets
- Large bowl for placenta
- Plastic sheet for the carpet
- Birthing pool w/ plastic liner
- Incontinence Pads - disposable
- Food and beverages for mom or guests
- Clothing for before and after birth, mom and baby
- Fish Net for catching eliminations in the pool water
- Bed made with a sheet, plastic liner, and another sheet that can be old or stained

Let's back up a bit to about a week before or so. I was still working retail and still getting things ready for her arrival. And if you know me, you know I put things off till the last minute. I was having prodromal pains or some people call them "Braxton Hicks Contractions", which kind of feel like labor pains and can happen any time starting in the third trimester. They're very irregular.

As a first-time mom, I had no idea if I was going into labor or not and totally obsessing over it. Plus, you never really know when you'll go into labor. A healthy delivery can happen anywhere between 36- 41 weeks. That's just the norm.

The midwives delivered a birthing pool a few days before her due estimate. I got all excited, set it up, and realized. I couldn't use the air pump that I could connect to the car because our hallways leading up to my apartment were way too narrow. I wouldn't be able to get it up there. I had to go to the store to get one with batteries. I was low on funds and taking the bus. I had one shot. Walmart would surely have 'em. It was summer and all!

I got to Walmart and about lost my shit because I couldn't find any that were battery-powered. Then, there it was. One left. \$12. Twelve dollars at the time I was stressing about. Seriously. But it had to be done. Took that long bus ride home.

Oh, guess what? I had no batteries! I frantically texted the neighbor and luckily he had some that worked. Thank goodness. I blew the whole thing up, all excited! It was skinnier than I thought but fit so nicely in our tiny attic apartment. I didn't realize how tall the sides would be, it felt like being in a fishbowl.

On her due estimate day June 21st, 2019 I was scheduled to work, any moment she was to arrive. But momma had to go make some money! And remember, I didn't want any Gemini sun sign baby. I kept telling her,

"Please don't come until the 24th or after, then I'll have everything ready and you'll have the most awesome birth chart. We'll get along more. I'm not ready yet."

A few people came through my line at the store and said,
"Oh, you look like you're about due!"

I'd Respond,

"Yeah today's my due date... but we're not ready yet, I'm so excited though!"

That was fun, seeing the absolute horror on their faces knowing at any moment I could just, I dunno, water break on something on the floor?

Saturday rolls around and Me Father told me...

"She's not coming till Monday, I just know it!"

This one specific tarot reader said,

"There's something you've been really wishing for, and you're getting your wish!"

June 22nd. 2019 was a Saturday, my last shift at the shop and I was very relieved that I didn't have to go back for a while. They terminated my contract because I wasn't getting maternity leave as I didn't work full time and had only been there for around 8 months. They told me I could come back any time because they enjoyed having me as an employee. That was comforting. I didn't know when or if I'd be back, however.

Sunday, I decided since J. was away at work, I'd uh... try to induce labor naturally. Many women swear by sex/masturbation, relaxing, spicy foods like curry or castor oil. Now, don't freakin' do castor oil because it forces your muscles to contract which results in diarrhea and dehydration. Everyone says it works but you want none of that during labor.

I decided upon masturbation and curry. That was one hell of a weird sentence to read, huh? I wanted her to be born the next day and all so here was the perfect moment!

(My car, well, it had been stolen when I was 36 weeks pregnant, by a family member no less. The police found the car but the suspect was gone, there was no key, the doors were locked and the e-brake pulled. I had to hunt them down and succeeded. I acquired the key and walked back to the car. The clutch went out in the car theft process and needed a new transmission as well. I freaking walked over 10 miles that day according to my step counter. The tow truck driver was so kind and told us not to worry about the charges,

"Consider it a gift for the baby.")

My car was just sitting in the apartment parking lot all sad, again. So, I had

been taking the bus everywhere, again. At this time I think I only had about \$45 and I needed to get a few groceries, and a heating pad. The heating pad was very important. I figured I could find one in a thrift shop easily.

If you've ever taken the bus as your main transportation you know it takes a while if you need to go to multiple locations. I went by the thrift store and to my surprise, there were no heating pads. I feel like there are ALWAYS heating pads in those places.

I went by McDonald's, not to eat but to pee. I always know where restrooms are and where they won't bother me if I go in. I have gotta pee all the time! I go in there, do my business and guess what? Bloody show!

I feel like this is too much information but the bloody show is a glob of blood and mucus that is about the size of a small bouncy ball that shows up on some women's underwear close to labor. This is a sign that the baby is going to come soon! I was over the moon excited and texted J. all about it. Guess that masturbation really does work ladies!

Went on over to my favorite Target hoping they had a heating pad under \$45 I could purchase. I found a few. One was smaller for about \$18 and one that was larger that would have wrapped around for about \$28. I also needed to get a few other things and groceries though so I had to settle on the smaller one.

I remember my reusable grocery bag being quite heavy so I probably bought coconut milk or something. I had to wait for the bus for quite a while and those pains were getting stronger and more intense. I feel like all of us strangers stood and waited for at least 30 minutes. It was Sunday after all. Probably was around 6:30 p.m. The sun was going down.

On the bus ride home, I did have to transfer at least once. I couldn't wait to get home and eat. I hadn't eaten much that day, too much to do. Curry was on my mind. This baby needed to come! The pains were getting stronger and I wasn't sure if I should just tell the bus driver. Wouldn't that be crazy though? I tried to keep my mind off of it but that's just not how my anxious mind worked.

Looking back on this time I sometimes wonder why the hell I didn't milk this pregnancy more. I think I was just trying to keep moving so the baby

would come and I had to get things done or they never would.

Eventually, I got home at about 7:45 pm. I tried to make curry or something that resembled curry but I had no idea what I was doing and made weird, mushy, gross food. I didn't even eat it and just put it in the fridge. We hardly had any food at this time except for what I pre-made in the freezer. I think I was in too much pain to cook more and was just tired and defeated. It had been a long day.

I decided to take a shower and go to bed. Stood in there for a while like I would with menstrual cramps. Water on my back in a squatting position. If you haven't tried that, try it. It's just what my body wants to do.

I remember it being around 9 pm when I was doing circles on my exercise ball trying to ease the pains and stretch my back and hips. I had the lights down low. I texted J. about 10 pm telling him I had no idea if this was real labor or not and to just work the rest of the night. He worked around 4 pm to early morning, most nights. We still had time. I went to sleep.

I woke up a few times. I think he had gotten home around 1 am or maybe later. At this point, I was hunched over a bunch of pillows on the couch. I kept saying I was fine... I think. I had no idea if this was real labor but he needed sleep too and I just wanted to sleep! I distinctly remember me moaning and him popping one eye open to tell me something along the lines of,

“You’re totally in labor babe.”

I had no idea and honestly, I was getting cold feet a week or two prior. The midwife and I had one of our final pre-labor appointments. I tried to tell her that I was scared. What if I wasn't a good mom? What if the pain was too much and I couldn't do it? I was chickening out but you know, I couldn't. I think she may have misread me and reassured me that I wasn't going to end up in a cesarean. That hadn't even crossed my mind. I was just nervous. Typical me.

I was using my computer to time the waves, texted the midwife at the same time to tell them the progress. I was totally in denial and kept texting,

“I don't know if I'm just being a wimp or if this is labor?”

I didn't want to be a bother or false alarm you know? I'm kind of one of those people who could be on fire and I'm insisting I'm totally fine and don't

need help.

Around 7 am she responded saying I was definitely in labor. To try to stay relaxed and they would be at our apartment around 9 am. That was definitely reassuring. I didn't have everything put together in the big basket for the midwives yet. I thought I'd have more time and less pain, I guess.

I even planned on doing my hair in braids, eating, and taking the final pregnancy progress photo. Didn't happen. I ended up grabbing all the items for the basket and had J. make the bed as it was supposed to be done.

I looked out the window and heard sirens from a few emergency responders. In my head, I heard,

"You're going to the hospital today."

I shook it off and sat in my rocking swivel chair.

The midwives arrived around 8 am. I asked her to check my dilation. She asked me if I was sure because it was not necessary. Some midwives aren't huge on numbers and calculations like doctors because everyone is different. Nothing is set in stone and what's "normal" or "average" isn't for every labor. Now, in a hospital setting, they do this several times. I agreed but wanted to know so she checked. Holy cow it was this intense. I was about 4.5 cm dilated. This was the first and only time I used the bed the entire labor.

Also, keep in mind they do this by measuring with their fingers inside the vagina. A wave hit, right when she measured. Full dilation is said to be 10 cm to allow the baby's head through. Not every woman gets to 10 cm or could even be more. This is just the standard. If you're uncomfortable having this done, it isn't necessary to some midwives. I can't say the same for a hospital setting because I didn't experience this. Nonetheless, I didn't ask her to do it again because it was very painful for me.

I went out to sit on my swivel rocking chair. I also put a chair cover on it that had heat and vibration for massage. This was gold! I wore a sleep mask as well and dimmed the windows. Black-out curtains are also your friend.

The Hypnobirthing mp3s were playing on my computer as I rocked and rocked for what felt like hours. I did not want to be touched at all. J. tried to hold my hand I was all,

"Nope, please do not touch me!"

I was definitely in the zone. I had 3 different pairs of headphones. I didn't plug in or Bluetooth any of them. Big mistake. I didn't have the energy to tell J. where they were or teach him how to hook up the Bluetooth. He's not a real tech-savvy type of guy. I definitely should have done this, first.

Surprisingly, I was afraid that it would be too hot in the attic apartment we lived in during June. We had the A.C and the big fan running later on so, it got too loud to hear my tracks. I needed the headphones. It didn't end up getting too hot either.

Eventually, we set up the birthing pool and they put water in it. Also surprisingly, the water wasn't allowed to be hot. It was only allowed to be the same temperature as our bodies. Except, we didn't have a thermometer so I have no idea how warm or cold it was. It was way too hot at first and I might have been extra sensitive so I waited a bit.

I handed J. a vial of lavender essential oil in a roll-on type bottle. He set it aside not knowing I wanted to inhale it periodically for relaxation and grounding myself. I pinned my hair up and got in. Once I got in the water I felt relaxed for a moment. I couldn't really get comfortable though because I felt like the sides were too high. I couldn't really lean back against the edge. Things were on once I got in the pool though. My moans got louder and more intense.

Hypnobirthing honestly felt like I was just dreaming. Even though I didn't have the headphones, I still was able to just close my eyes and go with the waves. Yeah, dream-state. It was wonderful, really.

I told J. throughout the pregnancy that I didn't want photos taken. I felt like being a lot more private those days. I felt like I'd be embarrassed. I certainly didn't want the same holding the baby — looking up at the camera from a hospital bed photo that I feel like every other mom has on their Facebook.

J. took a photo of me in the pool — the case + flash made it come out weird. I cursed him out for it. I like it now & did apologize. I don't know why I was so weird about this but I just felt embarrassed. If I could go back, I'd have hired a photographer or had him take more photos. I cursed him out for being on his phone too. He's a real glued-to-his-games or scrolling type of guy. I mean, uh hello...? Over here birthing a baby. Evidently, he was texting

Me Father. But I needed a present birthing partner.



Dream-State

One of my biggest fears of giving birth was being too loud and the neighbors hearing me. We lived in a paper-thin place. I felt like I'd be embarrassed and didn't want to be weird. I know, it's freaking labor. I'm allowed to be awkward, right?

The women in the videos the Lamaze teacher showed us freaked me out. I mentioned to her I was afraid of that and I don't think she understood me. It's normal to moan. I think the YouTube videos of those perfect births really got my expectations up. To my surprise, it really just sounded like — sex. I moaned with the waves.

“uh...Uh.Uhh...UH UHH!...uhhhh...okay.” with a sigh of relief and went

back to calm for a moment.

These waves got more and more intense. I think the only position I felt like I could sit up in was up on my knees leaning over the pool at that point. I wished someone would have checked the water and heated it up for me, or put more in so it was higher. I couldn't think through or get the words out to tell someone.

Some men get in the tub with the woman, I mentioned this to J. but he was not about to do that. I think it's a very intimate moment and would have really calmed me down. Oxytocin is what fuels the labor and oxytocin during the labor process will help the waves not feel so intense. Some people even have sex or focus on actual orgasms during labor. Next time!

He was leaning over the other side of the pool, doing counter pressure on my back. Counter pressure really worked for me and he has very strong hands so that helped. During labor the pelvis and hips move a bit and putting pressure back on those areas to pull them back in somehow makes it less painful. I thought the opposite would be true but nope, totally works.

I kept saying, "I can't do this anymore, I just want to be done."

Probably about 100 times. You see, people kept telling me right when you want to give up and call it quits, the baby comes. I was trying to *will* the process along.

My legs hurt so bad from kneeling for so long but I just didn't know how to move. I have no idea how long I was in this kneeling position because time just flew by and I wasn't looking at a clock.

I took some sips of water and the midwives advised me to use the restroom. I think that was to make sure I relieved myself but a lot of women find this comforting and some say giving birth feels like going poop. I didn't have the feeling at all.

I stood up totally normal, they offered me a hand and I just hopped on over the edge like I wasn't even in labor. Impressive? I'd say, Yes.

I walked to the toilet, sat. Hated it. They told me I could turn around but nope, didn't want to move at all again. Any time I got into a new position I was there for a long time.

They called me back into the living room after some time and had set up

a birthing stool. It's basically a chair, with no back and half a seat for your butt. If that makes any sense?

Basically, you just wrap your legs around the sides and straddle the thing. I didn't plan on this. This was **not** in my birth plan. The birth plan — that I didn't write out or show anyone officially because I thought I'd have more time.

I sat up there anyway. I'm 5 feet tall, exactly. I could hardly touch the floor with my toes. J. sat behind me and continued to push on my back. I did frantically several times exclaim,

"Ah! J.!!"

There did come a point where fear was setting in and I did experience a lot more pain. The main midwife was confused when I kept telling J. to press up higher on my back than most people need. I needed my hips and my kidney area counter-pressure. Good thing he has large hands because he was able to do both. He basically had his hands around my hips, thumbs on my kidneys and would push hips together and then up rubbing my kidneys when the wave hit. It was sweet, sweet relief.

I was leaning forward for most of the time. I had my ball and a big pillow on top. There was a large mirror next to us that was leaning against the wall. I always told J. not to look. Just don't ruin the sexiness. He totally looked. At least it was more of a profile. Mid labor I caught him!

I'd been on this stool for a long time and my thighs were killing me. I wasn't getting much of a break between waves. The midwife advised me to start grunting instead. Which again, wasn't in my birth plan. But I never freaking showed anyone the damn birth plan. I wanted more of a calm quiet birth where I would breathe down the baby. Grunting was much louder.

This whole time I couldn't really think. I just did what she said to do. Grunting changed the feeling of everything though. It was like something shifted. She's obviously good at what she does because she knew exactly when I needed to do this. My back no longer hurt and it was more like pressure down below instead. Once I started grunting I couldn't stop if I wanted to. I wasn't even doing it on purpose at this point.

She asked me,

“Do you want to get back in your pool?”

My Response?

A whiny cry of...

“Nooo.”

“Are you sure?” She asked.

“Yeah...” I foolishly responded.

I just didn’t know how to move, or want to move. I didn’t know how to tell them to put more water in or heat it up. I needed someone to **TELL ME** to get back in that fucking pool.

At some point, W. was crowning and they asked me to touch her head. Oh my goodness, I did not want to do this! I was so freaked out by it. She told me I totally had to. So, I did. And I wish I had a video of that. Imagine a grossed-out face being all “eeeehhh” while reaching down with one hand. Hilarious.

Totally worth it though! I still remember the feeling.

I also don’t really feel like I got what’s called “The ring of fire” women talk about. This is where when the baby is crowning it feels like fire down there from all the stretching. I may have but I think everything else hurt enough that I was just numb to it.

At this point, I had been sitting there for so long. She was still trying to move around the pelvis and get on out of there. The baby will crown but they’re still going back and forth or up and down is a better way to put it. I thought I was done and totally wasn’t. In my brain, I thought,

“Fuck this. I’m over this, I’m done!!”

I pushed as hard as I could. I didn’t think ahead at that moment. I wasn’t able to think much during the process. Giving birth really is a very vulnerable moment for women. You really need to be around people you trust with no distractions that are not relaxing to you.

Here’s the hilarious part J. likes to tell everyone. Nobody knew what I was thinking or that I pushed really hard on purpose. He said he was looking down and the midwives had their hands out ready to catch and kept going back and forth between hands out and waiting.

Then, I pushed and out she came! The midwife literally caught her in the

air.

But hold up a second,

J.: "You DID IT, BABE!"

Me: "What? I did??!!"

J.: "WELL YEAH!"

Me... *opens one eye and looks down*

"OH HI! Welcome to Earth!!!"

Dude, I had no idea. I didn't know that was going to work!!! All three of us females looked at her, then straight at J. then back at her and exclaimed, "WHOA, she looks JUST like you!"

And thus,

W. Lucille Gray was finally here.

- **Perfect & healthy.**
- **Born: Monday, June 24th. 2019**
- **4:23 p.m**
- **5.8 lbs.**
- **18.5 inches tall**
- **Cancer Sun, Pisces Moon, Scorpio Rising on a Moonday.**



Fresh out of the womb

The midwife handed W. to me. Most women say when they're handed their babies for the first time it's like an instant oxytocin rush of happiness and love. I don't think I got that, I was more in shock and scared than anything. I've cried about this many times. I wanted her for so long to join us on Earth but I was just scared.

T. delivered the placenta and left the cord intact. This is a typical thing done in midwifery especially when requested. The cord is still pulsing to the placenta for up to an hour after the baby is born and there are vital nutrients

in the cord blood the newborn needs to receive.

Once it is done pulsing is an okay time to cut the cord. This is called “delayed cord clamping”. However, some families decide to keep the baby attached to the umbilical cord until it naturally dries and falls off. This can take a few hours to several days.

I was okay with leaving it until our midwife deemed it okay to cut. J. was hesitant but he did cut it. I'm glad he got to.

A different midwife who took the placenta to the place to be dried said it was the tiniest placenta she'd ever seen. I'm a smaller-sized human so I can imagine. I wish I was able to take a photo. I didn't get to see it. Next time!

I wanted to preserve the placenta to consume myself. Preserving the placenta to be dried and put into capsules is a great way to put nutrients back into our bodies. It's said that doing so can cut down on the “baby blues” and give us a boost of vital nutrients back. I honestly think that doing this helped me with the baby blues and I was sad when they ran out because I thought they were really helping me.

Next, they got me up on the couch with W. in my arms. I was so freaking exhausted at this point. I don't even remember the last time I had drank water. They gave me one of these little sugary granola bars I had made. I had W. on my chest and she was wiggling a bit to my boob. Newborns naturally will find the boob! Cool, huh?

This is a good idea to let them build up some strength and naturally establish nursing. We're all about babies and child-led over here. Back in the cave days women may have passed out or died in childbirth. A newborn's natural instinct is to wiggle their way up to the breast and feed as much as they can. Totally cool survival instinct if you ask me.

The second midwife was someone who was training and was also an assistant. She went to the car to grab something. When she came back she told me that there were two female neighbors on the porch asking who she was. She told them.

The two neighbors joked about how I wouldn't make it past 5 centimeters and would be begging for an epidural. She informed them that I had just delivered the baby and that I handled everything like the badass I am. So,

cool for sticking up for me.

The Dramatic Part:

After I was set up on the couch T. called the hospital to inform them that I had a significant tear and lost about 800 c.c of blood. And we would be driving to the hospital to get stitches.

To put that into perspective, I was about 128 lbs. (pregnant full term), 5 feet tall, female, and should have about 1600 c.c of blood in my body. This varies a bit because I was also pregnant.

I lost approximately 50% of my blood. T., while walking into the kitchen, informed me to let her know if I was dizzy or if I had ringing in my ears. The other midwife was going to help me get dressed because we were going to walk down the three flights of stairs to their car.

(We were supposed to have our own car, with gas by the way. They weren't upset by this because they knew my car had been stolen. Just keep that in mind if you have a home birth.)

Immediately my ears started ringing pretty loudly, I was able to say,
“My ears are riii....”.

I went completely white and I blacked out!

Next, I just remember the woman shouting frantically,

“Shannon!? Shannon! Come back! Stay with us! SHANNON!?”

Felt like a savior moment. I was so confused. J. was holding W. looking as scared as ever.

I was going in and out of shock, had a seizure, stopped, then another. I'd never had a seizure in my life! She was propping me up with pillows and I had another seizure. My body was completely limp afterward. I was pale white and so weak.

They had to call an ambulance.

So much for giving my baby that “golden hour” she always deserved.

The first hour or longer after birth is extremely important. The baby also goes through a pretty big fight to get out and they have to leave the home

they have always known for a new strange one and need to have skin-to-skin contact. It's very important for their nervous system to ensure a secure attachment to the mother. This is why it's not advised to take the baby away shortly after birth. They really do need us.

Once the paramedics got there, I was feeling a bit better — at least awake and not having seizures anymore. They concluded that our hallway was too narrow to get the stretcher up. They had to put me on a tarp and lift me to get me down the stairs and onto the stretcher.

On the top stairway going down, they needed to get a better grip and dropped me by mistake. I blacked out a bit on the way down all three flights. I believe that was another seizure.

The stretcher was on the walkway in front of the house. It was an absolutely beautiful day. I had put on a note card what my perfect delivery day would look like. At home, calm, sunshine, happy, pretty hair. Well, I didn't specify the pool did I? Guess I got that sunshine.

J. asked if he wanted W. with me or with him. I told him he needed to stay with her. Also in that birth plan, I never showed anyone but totally had printed on the shelf. I also didn't pack a hospital bag as I said before. And all of W.'s clothes were in a tote in the closet. J. hadn't helped me with any of this so he hardly had a clue.

We were also going to use cloth diapers from the start but T. told us not to bring them to the hospital because they might launder them and lose them.

I Messed Up:

I get in the ambulance and the guy is trying to make small talk,
“So... why'd you want a home birth?”

That felt like a personal attack honestly. I just said I didn't know at the moment. I felt defeated. I instantly regretted not getting in that pool. I made such a fuss telling my family why I wanted a home birth and the pool was going to be great. My mom was so excited because she had always wanted to do a water birth as well but couldn't. She was the only one actually rooting for me. (R.i.p Mommy)

I'm in the hospital, on the bed thing, they're doing IVs and whatever else they had to do. J., T., and W. show up. The main nurse was Scottish and she was so cool and funny cracking jokes. We were all laughing and having a great time.

No, seriously this was actually a fun experience.

They asked me why I was lying so weirdly and I responded by saying,
“It's how they put me...”

Nurse,

“You look uncomfortable.”

Me,

“I am.”

She moved me a bit, and that was better. I was so weak I couldn't move my own arm. I was so just, out of it. J. wasn't holding W. and they did put her on my chest a bit while they were getting the operating room ready.

But I wasn't excited about my new baby. I just wanted to cry.

They were inspecting the tear saying,

“Oh ouch, that looks painful”.

I couldn't really feel it. So if you're terrified of tearing, I had no idea really and it was a second-degree tear. My body was just kind of a dull numb kind of pain. The only way I can describe it.

I remember saying,

“I messed up because I didn't get back in the pool and I pushed her out too soon”.

Pretty much the whole room told me not to blame myself for this. I knew though. I still know. I blamed myself. I cried a lot over the years and I can't-not blame myself for this. I didn't get in the damn pool.

The water was supposed to keep me calm, it was supposed to prevent tearing. Holy crap, even if I tore and ended up in the same hospital, at least I'd have been able to say, I had a water birth and I also tried everything I could.

Honestly, I couldn't forgive myself, I beat myself up for years. I didn't give my daughter the best she could have had. J. wasn't holding her because his phone was more important. I can't take it back. I can't fix it. I immediately

regretted my decision and wanted a redo.

On top of that everyone was telling me,
“it was not your fault, everyone wants that picture of a perfect birth, things
happen, blah blah blah”.

I achieved a home birth, cool. But I fucked up my own birth plan. I'd have been less pissed at myself if it was medically necessary to not go in the pool. I mean hell, guess I could have had water labor and gotten out to birth my baby at the hospital midwives. I made a stupid decision and I feel like I ruined my daughter's first moments. I've done my best to forgive myself and now I have a list of things I'll do better next time.

T. and the medical staff discussed putting me under anesthesia. She didn't want to let them but they said they needed to. Something about me eating a whole bite of a granola bar was the reasoning. You have a chance of not coming out of anesthesia once put under and I had been under a lot of stress. I am super glad they did put me under though. The whole minute of what I remember of the operating room was so bright and freaky.

They sewed me up and inserted a catheter.

When I was being wheeled back and taken out of anesthesia I was talking. Now a lot of people say some embarrassing shit. I said this though,

“I forgot to tell them I'm allergic to nickel!!! I forgot, oh noooo...I'm shiver-r-ring. I'm so c-c-cold-dd.”

I couldn't ever shake the cuteness.

Next:

I got to the room I stayed in and they brought me some non-vegan food. Nobody informed them but I was so hungry I did not care. Tons of sugar and whatever else.

My tiny little baby was sleeping soundly in the little bassinet they provided. I was still just too scared to hold her. Really, I am a grown woman who waited so long for this. I just didn't know how. A lot had happened. I was trying to process everything.

J. texted Me Father, telling him vaguely what happened. They had no idea

I lost blood or anything. He told them I had to get stitches, not surgery, or that I had seizures.

I talked to them on the phone a bit and I was wondering if I was high. I felt so weird and my kidney freaking HURT. I've had kidney problems in the past from a car accident when I was a kid. So, it's honestly no surprise to me that they hurt. Me Father said I sounded high. The anesthesia I guess made me feel weird and probably the blood loss.

Well, Me Father and Kinda-Step Mom came by to see W. and me. I informed them of what had happened. Me Father of course was freakin',

"Oh my GOD! You almost died!!!? Why didn't you tell us, J.?"

There it was.

I went from wanting to prove that home birth wasn't scary, it wasn't dangerous, I could do this, everything would be fine, a total advocate. To seriously dying or almost.

That gutted me.

I just kept trying to laugh it off and act like nothing was wrong. I was so upset, I didn't even want to hold my baby. Kinda-Step Mom asked me if it was the most loving feeling ever. Nope. Not for me. I was confused and scared. I wanted to go home to cry by myself.

J. and Me Father went by the house to grab some clothes and a few other things. Kinda-Step Mom and I stayed and chatted. She held W. cooing and awing at her. I didn't even want to look at her. I was trying to process everything that had happened.

I just wanted to redo it all. I tried to focus on the positive here and the funny birth story. Nah, everyone wanted to talk about how I almost died and bet I won't ever do that again, huh? Hospital births are safer.

Nope, still don't believe so. I also believe that if I had given birth in the hospital, the same thing would have happened or worse. The fact that I gave birth at home had nothing to do with it.

Everyone, I've tried to tell this birth story to instantly goes from thinking how cool it was that I did give birth at home to,

"Oh my god! That's so scary, you really put yourself and your baby in danger."

And that hurts. I know it's not true but I can't even prove it. I instantly knew I fucked up. I instantly just hated myself even before I had the seizures.

Even the therapist I'd been seeing for years didn't get why I believed this was my fault. I know, I shouldn't blame myself, these things happen, I didn't know it would happen, blah, blah blah.

It bothers me so much because of how much people judged me for even considering a midwife at all. I wanted to prove everyone wrong. I wanted to prove to myself that I could and have that wonderful memory.

Next time, even though I'm a little nervous now, maybe I'll do it right and won't have to regret my decision. I later just decided that maybe the Universe was trying to teach me to be more patient. Maybe I needed to communicate better.

I don't want this story to scare anyone. What happened to me only happens to about 1% of birthing women. It's very rare. But completely possible. I honestly tell people because I try to let them know that I feel I am at fault. No, Not because I had a home birth but because I got impatient. I didn't know any better.

Home Births are safe, thousands of women per year in the United States have completely successful beautiful home births.

I also had absolutely no idea this was even possible before. People tend to glamorize pregnancy and birth but there are a lot of risks involved. Researching these risks would have helped me and can help you as well.

Moving Forward:

Since I went to the hospital, I was the patient, not W. They didn't do anything with her other than give her a bassinet, some diapers, wipes, and a blanket. J. finally got to sleep after almost 2 days of being awake. At around 5 am a woman came in to remove the catheter. By the way, I didn't even feel it.

She, with judgment, informed me that I needed to be feeding my baby. I was asleep most of the night. This was yet another reason why I didn't want anything to do with a hospital. Most people are kind but a lot of women claim nurses are rude to them and that doesn't help anything.

I did get to have a lactation consultant come in to help me try to establish feeding. W. was upset but she wasn't latching yet. The women expressed some milk into a little cup and used a syringe.

Using a pump didn't work either. She kind of drank it and seemed pretty hungry. It does sometimes take a few days for milk to come in and the baby will be fine. But that's not how these nurses were treating me. This felt defeating too.

They did all sorts of tests on me when I was at the hospital. My blood cells were off. I want to say my white ones but I'm not entirely sure. I met so many humans and hadn't a clue who they even wore. My kidney hurt so I kept thinking I had a kidney infection. They said they didn't know what was wrong. T. decided against a blood transfusion as well and I was able to build my own.

T. had gotten us some donor milk from a woman she knew close to us. It was in the fridge. I kept trying to ask the staff after she left about that milk and how to heat it so W. could have it.

Evidently, donor milk is not allowed in that hospital. I'm assuming they deem it unsanitary but they told me not to mention it again. So, she just didn't eat much for the first 24 hours.

Another woman told us about the care I needed at home, medications and to make sure someone was around for at least a week.

We didn't have a car to get home but T. loaned us an old car her kids were no longer using. She convinced us that we would need a car with a new baby and that it was no problem. That was so freaking nice and I'm so happy she lent us the car.

To leave the hospital, we needed to have a car seat safety check. Good thing we did because we hadn't even looked at most of it before. W. was so itty-bitty in that thing! She barely fit, everything was as tight as it could go!

Being in the car was so weird. It was sunny out, and before we left I realized I could open the shade on the hospital room window and actually see! I felt so weird because it was like everything was louder, faster, and brighter. I just wanted to get home as fast as we could. Good thing we lived about 10 minutes from the hospital.

Welcome Baby:

We got home and the first thing was one of the women who were talking about me was out there wanting to look and wanting to know what happened. I told her. Whatever. I had a diaper in my pants and needed to lie down. I gave zero fucks.

The stairs were rough because I wasn't able to walk much without losing my breath. And I mean REALLY losing my breath. I was anemic from the blood loss. My blood wasn't getting to my heart or lungs so it hurt badly when I tried to move around. I kept trying to act like I was fine. I don't need blood right? Which I now know was not very wise.

Later, T. stopped by to help us as much as she could. She tried to help me with nursing but I was so awkward and didn't know how to do my arms. You kinda need the baby for this.

She went over my meds list and I asked her if I could take supplements instead for the iron. You can by the way. The reason for this is the iron pills they give people are chemically derived which makes the person constipated.

They give you laxatives on top of this. I didn't want to take these. She informed me of products I could buy at the health food store down the street. They worked great if not better. The cost was under \$100. I had this juice called "*Floradix*" which was to up my iron intake, a supplement called "*Blood Builder*" to increase my iron intake and rebuild blood cells, and a bottle of *chlorophyll drops* to put into water. No constipation pills are necessary and all of this is made out of plants, minerals, more vitamins, vegan, and gluten-free.

I mention the constipation pills so much because a friend of mine said after her birth she was prescribed these and she was extremely embarrassed because when she had to go, there was no warning.

Having a provider who knew these things was the best. She didn't even hesitate and knew off the top of her head what I needed. They also sent me home with a few other medications, including ibuprofen. Ibuprofen is indeed necessary. I didn't take it one time and regretted it.

T. had asked me if they figured out whether or not I had a kidney infection.

I told her the doctor said she didn't know what was wrong. T. wondered why my blood cell count was off then. I know I had a kidney infection.

That's why I was telling J. to press on my kidney the whole time I was in labor. All I remember about any pain in labor was my kidney hurting like hell. I don't think anything else really hurt.

Me Father and Kinda-Step Mom came by with some spiffy new sweatpants I wore the hell out of. I was so excited to finally use all the new baby items we had been stockpiling. We visited for a while and took some photos.

Once they left I finally took a shower. J. put W. in her car seat as I showered with the door open and kinda held on to his arm and the wall. It was quick and not very hot. I had never been down and out like that before. So, it was hard at first. I wasn't able to stand for long because my chest hurt and I couldn't breathe and would feel faint.

The next two weeks were full of me sitting on the couch. I am so used to being able to take care of myself. Having someone else do things was pretty nice for a moment. He did a swell job as well.

And then we were home, our baby had finally arrived.

Chapter Fourteen: Sharing The News & A Little Drama

There are many ways you could share the birth of your baby. You can opt to have people in the waiting room of the hospital or in your home. Or you could phone or text your loved ones. You could post on social media or even do a video blog of the whole thing! There are endless ways you could share.

The rest of this chapter will be my experience with a little bit of drama. So, if you'd rather get back to the how-twos then skip to the next chapter.

My Experience:

This is a chapter I've rewritten a few times. Sharing the news of a pregnancy or the new birth of a baby can be absolutely wonderful and full of joy. But to every light side, the dark could also come in the form of nay-sayers or people who might want to steal the spotlight.

Yeah, At first, I trauma-dumped this chapter because I felt the need to get everything off of my chest. I felt the need to expose how hurt I felt and I even sold a few copies of this book like that.

It felt good for a bit but every time I came back to edit I felt like this chapter was nagging at me and I needed to change it. I since learned coping skills, I've changed my perspective on what happened to me and I now see it as something a lot more positive. I've done a lot of work to forgive myself and others over the years.

I couldn't let my sob story and my past hold me back.

If you were hoping for a little drama, then I'll still give you a little tea. Only because it did affect me postpartum. What I write will always be the true version of any event in my life. I just do not want to carry it around with me anymore.

So, here it is:

Dramatic, I know

I had hoped for a BabyMoon. I told J. all about it. I thought it would just happen considering he was more private than I am. Sure, he was on social media a lot but he didn't post as much as I did then.

You see that photo on the front cover of this book? I wanted THAT to be our announcement photo to the world. I had seen a woman with a similar photo online right before we fell pregnant with W. I showed J. saying that was what I wanted to do.

It felt powerful, it was feminine and kick-ass. I also wanted to take a photo of my new baby's beautiful face in good light and share a nice little birth story.

I guess I also assumed that since I went to the hospital and some real shit was happening J. would have been more present and worried about me more than typing away to his family and friends.

I thought wrong.

He was immensely excited. How could he not be?

In reality, I knew why he was on his phone. I just couldn't muster the strength to tell him to wait or "start an argument" when I was lying on that emergency hospital room bed. So, I watched him typing.

I didn't have a phone to look online or text once we got home. I used my laptop for those things. The day after we arrived home I asked J. to hand me the computer. I was SO, excited to plan something together. And to my half surprise half suspicion, I already had about 50 notifications congratulating me on the new baby.

J. had taken photos seconds before I had the seizures I didn't know about. They displayed W. on my chest looking up at me. We were covered in blood,

they were dark and grainy. I'm grateful for the photos but I wanted them to be private.

That photo was all over everyone's feed. And her FULL NAME IN ALL CAPS and other (hopefully) private details were plastered all over everyone's Facebook feeds.

I get it, they were excited but nobody had informed me or discussed it with me and they all have over 500+ "friends" on their pages. I was in freaking surgery when they were posted. I don't mean to make this about me but damn, we could have waited a second? Also, I was in bad shape and we hadn't even signed anything for her yet. I was literally just surviving.

These posts, to me, may as well read "FREE BABY! PICK UP AT THIS LOCATION!".

I received a message from J's mom congratulating me as well. He also sent her photos. Of my boobs. MY freaking boobs!? Okay, we're females and a million people have probably seen my boobs but his mom!?

I did not know his mom and I wouldn't have even sent that photo to my own mother. Plus, this was literal seconds before I had the first seizure. I didn't even know it was taken. And I was covered in blood.

Kinda-Step Mom also posted dimly lit photos of her and W. on her feed too.

Everything was everywhere.

I didn't sleep much for three days after her birth and I was crying pretty hard around 5 am one morning. J. had come into my bedroom and asked me what was wrong.

I told him I was upset about the birth and that I didn't get to share it with him. I tried to get him to understand that I wanted this to be a joint decision and I felt like it had been taken away from me.

He didn't understand and ended up being defensive and yelling at me.

So, I had to just freaking suck it up. I asked his mom to tell everyone to at least take her FULL NAME and other details off the web. They reluctantly did.

For one, who the fuck even does that? And two, I wanted to keep her name and these photos a lot more private. Or just show our closest family and

friends. The whole world didn't need to see my bloody chest. I'd of liked to show my baby girl in good light.

But, of course, I just looked like a deranged controlling hormonal bitch of a girlfriend. Who was throwing a fit instead of just merely wanting to have a chance to be included considering I just birthed her.

I'm actually trying not to trauma dump here.

Okay, so I decided to take the freaking photo anyway. I wanted the damn photo. I did what I could to stand up in front of the mirror, put on a bit of makeup, combed my hair, and put the blanket my grandmother had given me onto the bed. Grandma was my favorite.

I asked J. to take the photo. I tried to smile but I was crying before and after this photo was taken. Surprise.

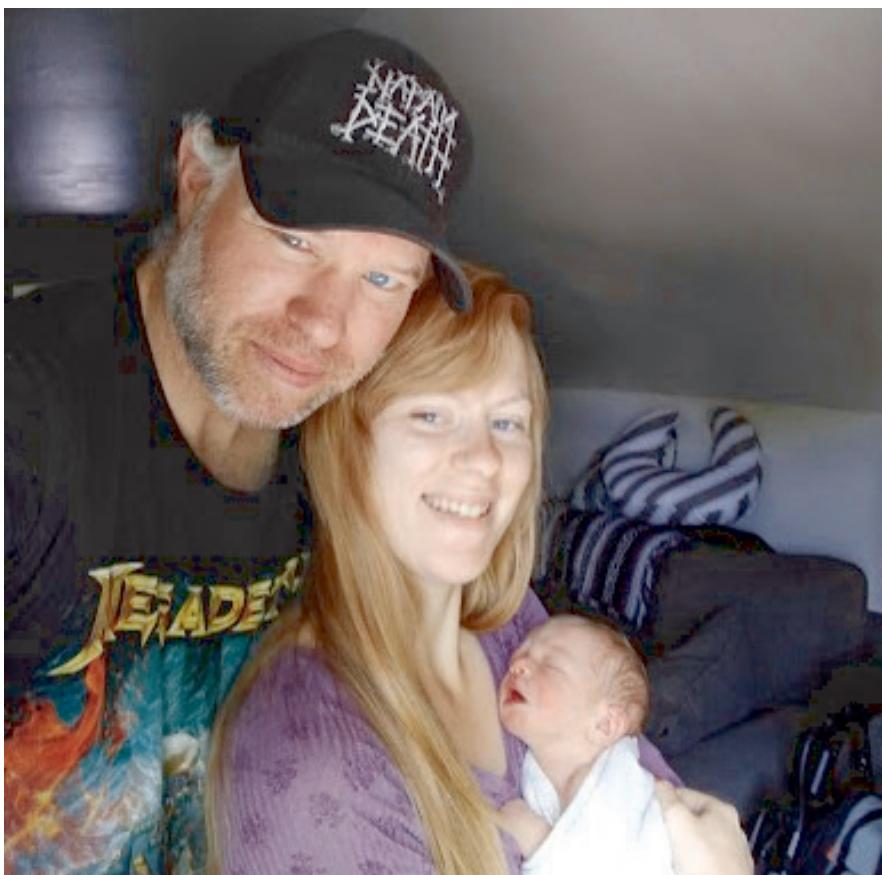
I posted the photos I wanted to be posted anyway. I wrote out my beautiful story, and I got a few likes after everything blew over. It may seem silly but I cried a lot. Because I wanted things to be joint decisions and I could sense that they were never going to be. I felt like the posts lost their meaning and I had a lot to unpack about the birth.

Later, I realized everything had so much more meaning than before. I did give birth at home. It was easier than I thought it'd be. W. was in perfect health. I am a feminine, powerful woman! I officially figured out how to nurse her that day! I almost freaking died! I survived!

And I got to use the photo for this book I wrote for you.

That's more badass than I could have imagined.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: SHARING THE NEWS & A LITTLE DRAMA



Happy Little Family - W. 2 Days Old



Derpy Baby face <3

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: SHARING THE NEWS & A LITTLE DRAMA



Perfect <3

Chapter Fifteen: The Fourth Trimester & Postpartum Depression Symptoms

Dr. Harvey Karp, renowned pediatrician and author of “The Happiest Baby on the Block”, popularized calling the period after birth the fourth trimester. This is a very important time for mothers, babies, and their families.

Not only does the home dynamic change with the birth of a baby but the mom’s body physically and mentally is still vulnerable. Human babies are also born “immature”. Their nervous systems and brains are underdeveloped at birth. The first 12 weeks are crucial for babies’ development.

You should have a checkup 6-12 weeks after the baby is born to make sure everything is going well, if you or the baby need any extra care, medications may need changing or anything else that needs to be addressed.

Physical Things:

Don’t freak out, you’re going to still look kinda pregnant after the birth. Your stomach will just be squishy instead of a harder baby bump. I remember getting home wearing a cropped tank top and looking in the large mirror.

“Whoa, I look so much smaller and super weird!”

For mothers, physical changes are very real. We do need to heal for at **least** 6 weeks before having sex again. The organs during pregnancy moved to accommodate the growing baby so they’ll need time to heal and go back in place. As well as other ailments the mother may have experienced. Definitely time to take it easy.

I experienced quite a lot of hair loss during this time. I reluctantly ended

up cutting my locks off because of it. I've since found caffeine oil shampoo and rosemary oil do wonders for hair regrowth and length. I was pale white and couldn't breathe or would feel faint from being so anemic. My organs felt out of place and I had a gap between my abs called Diastasis recti.

Diastasis Recti is common ab separation during and after pregnancy. Our abs are what protect our internal organs and you can accidentally make it worse. So, this is important to know what to do if you have it.

Symptoms:

- Poor posture.
- Constipation.
- Low back pain.
- Pain during sex.
- Pelvic or hip pain.
- Feeling weak in your abdomen.
- Urine leaks when you sneeze or cough.
- Softness or jelly-like feeling around your belly button.
- Coning or doming when you contract your ab muscles.
- Difficulty lifting objects, walking, or performing everyday tasks.
- A visible bulge or “pooch” that protrudes just above or below the belly button.

At the 6-12 weeks checkup, your care provider should check for diastasis for you with their hands on your stomach. But if they don't, you can check yourself. You'll want to monitor while healing as well.

To check yourself:

- Lay with your back on the floor, knees bent, and feet flat on the floor
- Lift your shoulders up off the floor, almost like a crunch, and look at your belly
- Use your fingers to feel between your abs and feel if there is a gap

- See how many you can fit between the gap

This is measured by how many fingers can fit in between the gap. Some women have no space or only one finger between them. Some can have four or more. Don't freak out if you feel a space. It's very common among postpartum women.

You can and should heal your abs when you're able to exercise again. Closing the gap will help with posture, future babies, and protecting your organs. However, some exercises or movements can actually make it worse. Depending on the width of the space and your exercise ability will determine how long it will take to heal.

At first, make sure to only lift things that are no heavier than your baby. Roll yourself to one side to get up and avoid sit-ups or crunches. You'll notice your stomach doesn't feel or look right if you sit up or lift the wrong way. It will look like a cone outward and will feel like you're not supported. You do want to put some focus on healing your muscles because they may not go back on their own.

The Baby Blues & Postpartum Depression:

Yet another reason why I went to home birth midwifery. They put a huge emphasis on educating about prenatal and postpartum depression. They cared to ask me how I was *really* doing and feeling. This is **gold**.

Mental health is talked about more these days and becoming a normalized subject. There are people who still reject the idea of depression even being real or reject psychology and mental health as a whole. I for one am very fascinated by psychology.

When I arrived home I received a care package from the midwives that had information about postpartum depression in it. Postpartum depression is no less a very real thing that affects 1 in 7 women in the year following birth. And it does not have to be immediate.

If a woman has depression or anxiety issues already, doesn't have a support

system, has financial hardships, or is not in a healthy relationship these factors can influence postpartum depression and make it more prominent.

Something I specifically remember from the readings in the care package is when a woman is pregnant she'll have a huge rise in hormone levels. Which is about the equivalent of taking 100 birth control pills a day. When she gives birth to the baby, these levels just plummet completely down to zero.

During birth as well there's a huge surge of hormone levels doing their job to birth the baby. Once the baby is born there's a surge of Oxycontin, we're filled with all sorts of happiness, typically. When everything is set and done, hormones have plummeted. That's where the "baby blues" can come in.

Symptoms of the baby blues:

- *Crying*
- *Anxiety*
- *Sadness*
- *Irritability*
- *Mood swings*
- *Trouble sleeping*
- *Appetite problems*
- *Feeling overwhelmed*
- *Reduced concentration*

Baby blues is more of a temporary feeling. Postpartum depression can happen shortly after birth, or in the year following at any time. This is not to be taken lightly. Many women don't get the help that they need.

They may feel isolated like they're not good mothers. May not have wanted the baby, or they don't have a good support system. The midwifery I went through aimed to educate and create a support system to help mothers who just needed help in some areas, other mothers to talk to, or were dealing with postpartum depression.

There are tons of reasons why this could happen, each person is unique. And there are a lot of ways a woman can display her depression.

Postpartum depression symptoms:

- *Restlessness*
- *Hopelessness*
- *Excessive crying*
- *Intense irritability or anger*
- *Severe anxiety or panic attacks*
- *Difficulty bonding with your baby*
- *Fear that you're not a good mother*
- *Withdrawing from family and friends*
- *Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide*
- *Overwhelming fatigue or loss of energy*
- *Depressed mood or severe mood swings*
- *Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby*
- *Loss of appetite or eating much more than usual*
- *Inability to sleep (insomnia) or sleeping too much*
- *Feelings of worthlessness, shame, guilt, or inadequacy*
- *Reduced interest and pleasure in activities you used to enjoy*
- *Diminished ability to think clearly, concentrate, or make decisions*

You can see the differences here and the possible severity of these symptoms. Asking for help or admitting you need help can be difficult. But trust me when I tell you, you need all the help you can get. You may be able to ask others for help on simple tasks like helping around the house, watching the baby for an hour, or taking them out so you can relax even for just a shower. Ordering delivery is always a huge help. Perhaps talking to someone about how you're feeling and maybe seeking counseling may help.

Having a support system and not isolating yourself is key. Make sure you're getting time for yourself and interacting with other adults. Motherhood can be immensely lonely and we are social creatures.

I share my own experience with postpartum depression and how I got through it in the final chapter.

Chapter Fifteen: All About Nursing

This cannot be a natural parenting book without a chapter on nursing. Nursing your baby is the most wonderful gift you can ever give them. Sure, it is taxing, let me tell you. Some days, I wanted to just stop. It's hard work and occasionally a woman would see me in public and congratulate me on a job well done. That's wonderful. Women supporting other women.

I can't tell you how many times I've been glared at or discouraged from nursing as well. It's pretty crazy the number of people who have such strong opinions against feeding our babies exactly the way they need. Nursing has simply just gone in and out of fashion. Lucky for us though, it's in fashion again.

A Little History:

What I mean is nursing made a comeback starting around 2010. This used to be looked at as trashy. Women used to hire wet nurses if they could afford to. Wet nurses were looked down upon as trashy women.

Then, baby formula was created. In the beginning, baby formula was basically just flour and water. This obviously wasn't good for the nutrition of babies. Over the years, they added different things to the formula and eventually got it to where it is today.

Overall that time, women were encouraged heavily by formula companies, hospitals, and doctors to use formula instead of nursing. The baby bottle

became a staple in baby symbolism.

Women were also joining the workforce and there weren't laws in place like there are now. Doctors would hand out samples they were given of baby products such as formula, shampoo, soaps, diapers, etc. Some places still do. I believe checking "No" on a birth plan at one point on handing me free samples.

Women were being encouraged to feed their babies from bottles and use formula and rice cereals to fill their bellies. Nursing became less and less common with people again finding it to be trashy, indecent, and even sexualized.

In 2018 a law was passed where I lived and in much of the United States. Nursing in public spaces and parks is no longer an indecent exposure offense. Yeah, 2018! This is crazy to me! W. was born in 2019! I knew people wanted moms to cover up because they were uncomfortable by it but damn they had to *actually change* the laws. This means women used to get ticketed for feeding their babies in public. As in, a park, sitting on a bench.

None of the women in my family had been encouraged to nurse. My mom wanted to but gave up when she didn't know how. My Kinda-Step Mom said she always wanted to as well but nobody was there to help her. My grandma, I'm pretty sure was encouraged to bottle feed and even had to hide her pregnancies in order to still be able to work. A step-sister had tried with her second born and her milk suddenly dried up around when the baby was 6 months old. Which happened to another woman I knew too.

I'm very grateful that nursing has made a comeback and more women are encouraging this to be normal behavior. I'm grateful for the resources and internet where I've been able to witness other women and be encouraged to nurse my baby. It's crazy that nursing our babies is even a controversial topic.

My Experiences:

So, I'd love to tell you a nice little "how-to" on nursing but there are tons of resources out there that will tell you what to do. Oh, but guess what? I found out that you kind of need the baby in order to figure it out. So, reading another "how-to" isn't going to help you. I'll just let you know my experiences and what I've learned about nursing.

Firstly, nursing has so many benefits that bottle-feeding cannot give you or your baby. Yeah, I'm including you as well. Many people overlook this but nursing benefits moms more than is talked about.

How does nursing benefit you?

- **Baby Blues & Postpartum Depression:** nursing helps women bond with their baby, Oxycontin is secreted which helps you stay happier. You're more attuned to the baby's needs, you'll lose weight quickly and hormones don't drop as suddenly as without nursing. The uterus will also come back down to size with nursing hormones. All of which can lessen depression.
- **Your Tits are Going to Look Amazing:** Yeah, I said it. As a small-breasted female, I got to experience what nice round beautiful titties look like on me. Winning!
- **It's Simple:** There's not a lot of preparation needed. You just need your boobs. No bottles, waiting for them to heat up, cleaning and the right amount is in there.
- **Protects You:** From breast cancer, other cancers, illness, and stalls your menstruation. Yes, really. When you're nursing your body will make sure you're in good health to protect the baby and later down the line women who nurse have lowered chances of getting certain cancers.

- **It's Free-ish:** You may still need a few supplies to buy but nursing being free was a deciding factor for me. Formulas cost a lot over time. Hey, and it's minimalist.
- **Peace of Mind:** Your baby is going to get the most optimal nutrients possible, they'll get just enough to eat and you won't have to stress over this.
- **Moon Cycle Stalls:** Hormones will stall your cycle. You can still get pregnant though. How long depends on everyone's own body. Mine stalled until W. was around 22 months old. Which was pretty convenient but I don't think most women experience their cycle being gone that long. I got lucky.

How does nursing benefit a baby?

- **They're fed:** Okay, obvious. But babies will eat exactly how much they need and your breasts will accommodate for any fluctuations over time.
- **It's the best nutrients they can get, catered to them:** Formulas have not ever even come close to a mother's milk. It's impossible to replicate. Seriously.
- **Supports healthy gut flora:** Do I need to say more?
- **Extra Immune support:** If you or your baby happens to get sick, your body will know and add extra nutrients to the milk to protect the baby. It's crazy cool! If one twin baby is sick a mother can pump and she'll be able to see one side of her breast will have darker yellow milk than the other to help that baby. Mind BLOWN!

- **Of course, bonding:** You and your baby will create a secure attachment by nursing. You'll be able to be much more connected and have so many cuddles!

There are probably so many more benefits that I've missed but these are just some I enjoyed. There are some downsides to nursing as well but I feel like they outweigh a baby's optimal health.

I experienced downsides but most of all it's been positive. Let me shed some light on some:

Downsides I Experienced:

- Bleeding gums
- Glares in public
- I had to sit down a lot
- Sleep, Suckling & pinching
- I was very confused at first
- Pumping didn't work for me
- She nursed longer than I expected
- Well, you can't drive and nurse. So, there's that
- I felt like a milk machine with hardly any breaks at first
- J. couldn't take over when I needed sleep or was just tired
- Cracked nipples, mastitis, leaky boobies, and all the not-so-fun things
- I had no relatives to turn to and constantly was told when and why I should stop

Again, many women have other downsides to this experience or may not be able to nurse at all but these were mine. Let me explain some of these and

maybe doing so can help the next woman!

The process was difficult at first:

At first, when trying to nurse she just seemed sleepy and I didn't know how to position my arms right to get her to my breast. It seemed so easy, women would just plop the baby right on there and they'd get their meal.

I had a nursing consultant in the hospital trying to be nice about this but she did get frustrated with me. Again, I read all the books, but you need the baby. T. came by the first day we were home and tried to show me as well.

I ended up watching YouTube videos to get the hang of it. I needed to just manhandle her head a little more. I was being too gentle. I didn't know, I was too scared to even hold her at first. So, yeah you do have to direct the baby to the nipple.

They'll automatically open their mouths when something brushes along their cheeks too. This is another reflex. Brush the nipple against their cheek and make sure to angle their mouth so it's like they're drinking out of a straw, not straight on. Oh, and they can breathe through their nose, don't worry about that.

Once I moved her head correctly, it was on and we got the hang of it. This was probably day two or three. She was hungry but some women's milk does take a few days to fully come in. The baby will be fine for a day or two without feeding. My milk finally fully came in and everything felt different. Heavier, and more of a pressure kind of feeling.

I had a second lactation consultant that was included in my package with the midwives. So, if you're feeling discouraged just know I had two consultants, a midwife, and YouTube to help me. She came to our home a few days after W. was born to check for tongue tie, and birth weight, gave me some much-needed pointers on different holds, and stayed a little over an hour.

I had a log on paper that displayed how many times she had gone pee, poop, and when she was eating. This was helpful to her to know if things looked congruent. I'd recommend doing this because it helped to know what she might have needed next.

If you're unsure if the baby is hungry then the baby will suck on your finger fast if you give them one. They'll also naturally open their mouth trying to find a boobie if you brush along their cheek. I might have depended way too much on this over time.

Also, their cries will be different if you listen. A hungry cry sounds kind of like "Nah, Nah" because their tongue is in a position where it's hitting the top of their mouth. They may even stick out their tongue a whole lot.

Remember, crying is a late cue. Sticking their tongue out or creating a log is much better for them. Babies cry, but we want to be able to help before they get there.

I'm a milk machine!

Feeling like a milk machine was pretty taxing after a while. You're nursing every two hours, then they fall asleep, you may be able to put them down and go pee, they pee and they're hungry again. No, I'm not bitter about this. I wanted to be a mom so badly.

But after everything I had been through I was very stressed and cried because the baby only wanted me for my milk. Oh, and she didn't even look like me. Ha-ha, I'm joking, kind of. I felt like I wasn't getting a break.

This of course isn't their fault and is part of the deal. I feel like it would have been more work if we'd had to use bottles, clean them, and prepare milk. As well as cleaning pumping supplies.

Bleeding Gums:

Pregnancy is a great time to look after your teeth more than usual. Our pregnant bodies will swell which can result in gums swelling, gingivitis, and other ailments that stretch beyond pregnancy. My mom's tooth even broke in half when she was chewing gum while pregnant!

I went to an appointment while pregnant to have some teeth extracted but the numbing medication wouldn't work on me so they didn't want to pull them. I had developed gingivitis and swollen gums throughout pregnancy and it lasted until I ended our nursing journey when W. was 3.3 years old. So, look after your dental health.

J. couldn't feed her:

J. doesn't have boobs. So he couldn't feed her. I think a lot of women feel like the baby-raising duties weigh on them heavily, especially while nursing. Some men would like to be able to share this bonding experience. There are several other things dads can do though. Men do like to help anyway.

Get us water, and then some more water, it'd be cool if they could pee for us too. Making meals helps a ton, getting supplies, vitamins, and medications, grabbing the remote, massages, grabbing the pillow we can't reach, another diaper change and so much more. If you pump as well then you can split the duties a little more.

Since J. worked nights, occasionally when he was off he would stay up with her to bond, change her diapers, bounce her on the ball, get her to sleep, let me get some sleep, and bring her to my room once she needed more milk. That was also very helpful.

Support From Family:

I had no relatives to turn to when I needed advice. I mean they never nursed and they were also advised to give babies rice cereal to get them to sleep. By the way, don't do this. Babies don't need extra rice to bulk them up. It can harm them. This sounds so absurd to me. They need breast milk.

I've also been told countless times that I needed to stop, asked when was I going to stop so she could have an overnight visit, told I was sexualizing my daughter, it's weird, I was coddling, and she's never going to want to stop. All of which is not true.

The CDC in the United States recommends nursing exclusively until 6 months or until the mother and child are comfortable. They'll eventually wean, and the only person weirded out by the "sexualization" is other people. Boobs are for food.

People's Opinions:

The glares in public, now some women are told to or are willing to "cover-up" with a blanket or they go in the bathroom or something. That's their choice. At first, I did for a bit if I was outdoors but that's because I didn't

know how to feed yet without taking my shirt almost all the way off. There's also the fact that some people are not used to people nursing, it's striking at first. Americans think boobs are sexy. They are but don't make it weird.

More women nursing in front of their children of both sexes and making it normal in public will help people be less judgmental. A lot of people are nice about it though. I didn't get too many responses and didn't care in the end. I know my truth.

Also, we all have a natural instinct to jerk our heads if we're eating or drinking and something touches the back of our heads or necks. This is a response to prevent choking and having a blanket over a baby like this will make it that much more difficult to get them to latch.

After a while, they may just get used to it, and maybe a blanket does give them fewer distractions but not at first. As they get older they'll just start playing with the blanket and it becomes the distraction.

After I got used to her latching and more confident I was totally able to walk around with one arm holding her and do dishes or make a meal with the other hand. Me Father commented several times saying he hadn't thought I was nursing.

Oh, nursing attire helps. I made a real janky-looking tank top that I cut and sewed to have some nipple access. Similar to what you might buy, just not as perfect. It was black so not too obvious.

Next time, I'll purchase some shirts because it was worth it. At the time I didn't think I wanted to spend extra money on a wardrobe for pregnancy and nursing. I also didn't need to go up but a size or so in shirts and pants while pregnant. The maternity stuff never fit me right.

People also claim nursed babies are skinnier and it's insinuated that you're not feeding your baby enough. Yeah, they're skinnier because they're getting the *right* nutrients for *their* specific needs and bodies. Not being pumped full of God-only knows what in formula and cereals. If you have to formula feed or choose to, then sorry if I'm being offensive. Fed is best of course. There are also lots of women who donate milk if that's a route you'd like to go.

Also, nursed babies aren't going to match up much on growth charts because those charts take in just numbers, they don't specify whether or not

the baby is bottle-fed or nursed. Doctors may try to tell you the baby isn't growing correctly. Always get a second opinion if you feel the need. None of W.'s doctors had a problem with this. She was on the "smaller" side for a while but grew just fine.

Driving:

Well, you're not allowed to drive and nurse. Take the bus, yeah. Driving a car or riding in one? Nope.

This means you have to time things out and make sure you feed the baby before or after you drive. A long trip is going to take even longer. I'd be lying if I said I never just leaned over her car seat and just gave her boobie like she was a gerbil, but that's extremely dangerous and uncomfortable. I definitely could have been ticketed or worse.

Not having bottles meant I got to carry less stuff in the diaper bag so, cool. It was worth it. Just make sure you plan things out. J. is not a planning & routines type of guy so I had to do a lot of this or he would just do grocery shopping for us to be quicker.

Sitting:

I had to sit down a lot. I'm the type of person who likes to be up and moving, getting so many things done in a day. nursing means you're forced sit and wait. It's literally a 12-hour job around the clock. Bottle-fed babies can hold their bottles eventually. You can't just hand 'em your boobie.

I never did get the hang of baby-wearing while she nursed. YouTube ended up being a pretty big part of my life. I don't like a lot of television and wanted to use my time wisely. So, why not learn something?

I used to read books but that got difficult once she wanted to turn the pages with me. I eventually got a Kindle e-reader and went back to reading books. Also, sitting there definitely is a good chance to meditate.

Not-so-fun things:

Leaking was definitely uncomfortable. You'll likely have too much milk at first and this ends up all over your shirt if you don't have the *nursing pads* in

place. Or you accidentally spill your *Haakaa*. I remember wanting to wear a nice red shirt to a 4th of July BBQ. I wrote on Facebook,

“Nursing means, You’re not wearing that shirt you thought you’d wear today or the other one.”

And that’s just the truth in the beginning.

Cracked or bleeding nipples:

Can happen frequently for some women. There are tons of creams and these things are called “Nipple Shields” you can use to alleviate this. Or just use the other breast if you can for a while. You’ll have one very full breast but you can use the *Haakaa* on the other breast to help even it out. I never had any luck with nipple shields but many women have. If the problem persists then consult a doctor or lactation consultant.

Mastitis:

A huge concern for women who nurse and for good reason. Now, sometimes if the baby falls asleep and doesn’t drain the breast all the way you may get a clogged duct from milk pooling where it ends up getting dried and stuck. It could happen from very tight clothing as well.

Either way, you’ll feel a nice-sized lump that can hurt or sting to the touch. The nipples may even hurt as well. And you’ll get a fever. If you can’t get the clog to move yourself with massage, baby sucking, or pumping it may get infected.

One trick I learned is to lay the baby on the bed and have them feed in more of an upside-down position. Most of the time their chin is facing toward the bottom of the breast while nursing. If you flip them so their chin is on the side or hover over where the clog is, they’ll have more sucking force with their jaw and be able to suck the clog out.

Totally saved me once.

Another time I had a lot of pain and my breast had gotten swollen, red, sensitive, and felt like fire and I had a nice fever within just a few hours. I woke up like that. So, we went to the urgent care. These were covid days so since I had a fever I had to go to the covid testing area in the basement. They did a test, negative and the doctor I kid you not said,

“So, were there any other questions you had?”

I said,

“Yeah, I need antibiotics for the mastitis in my breast.”

Doctor,

“Oh, okay, tell me about it...”

Me,

“You wanna just look?” Lifting my shirt.

Doctor,

“Oh yeah, that’s infected! I’ll get you some antibiotics.”

And that my friend, was covid for us haha. He had no idea why I was even there and I didn’t need a covid test at all. He just had to look.

Anyway, antibiotics cleared it up and I was fine. Letting this go untreated is extremely dangerous. You can die quickly so don’t wait.

Some women experience thrush.

Which is basically a yeast infection on the breast and the baby’s mouth. Again, this feels like gut problems because an overabundance of yeast is the problem. Antibiotics usually wipe it out, but it comes back. I don’t have any experience with this, so consult a doctor.

Falling asleep, suckling & pinching:

Getting a baby to sleep while nursing is probably the easiest method. Some people don’t like using this as a “crutch”. I honestly eventually gave in and it doesn’t bother me. If you don’t want this to happen then pull the nipple out right before they pass out. If you’re lucky it’ll work. W. was too smart for that, so didn’t work long for us.

She did like to suckle a lot for comfort. Nursing is very comforting to little’s and they get used to it. I would give in or not notice a lot so, my bad. Again, you can feel the difference so making a habit of not allowing this is key and eventually, they’ll stop.

Also, knowing how long a baby at each age nurses on average will give you some insight as to whether or not they’re done. Around 2.8, she was able to empty my breasts in a few minutes. Anything more was just comfort for her.

It does get very uncomfortable to have the baby suckling instead of emptying milk.

If you do “extended” nursing (longer than a year) eventually the baby will have pincer grip development where they’ll be gripping and holding onto things with the index finger and thumb. This meant W. was pinching my arm for comfort pretty hard for a good year. All day. This got to be absolutely infuriating to me. Some women have success with giving them a stuffed animal instead but it never worked for me. Later, it was my belly button but I moved her onto her own. It’s a comfort thing.

Anything a baby uses as a “crutch” or a comfort habit usually needs to be replaced with something else. Taking it away abruptly will result in confusion.

Feeling touched out:

Being a baby’s everything is a lot of work. Mentally and physically. Babies also need to nurse a lot and usually end up wanting mom more than anyone else. Because food and comfort.

This means the baby is on the mom’s lap a lot during the day or needs to be held often. Sure, maybe they’ll get down for a nap or play by themselves a bit. But many hours a day a mother is being spit up on, shirt pulled, boobs out, touched on, and generally just not left alone.

Which leads to burnout but also, not wanting to be touched at all. I can say I’ve experienced this feeling of just wanting my body to be my own again. It’s not that we don’t want to nurse and love our babies. And it’s not that we don’t want affection from our partners. We just don’t get a break and our bodies are not our own from conception through the childhood years. It’s overwhelming at times.

Pumping:

Some women choose to exclusively nurse, pump, and nurse, just pump, or bottle feed. I wanted to exclusively nurse and pump so I could get a break once in a while. I didn’t put much prep into both because the books make it seem easy and you do need the hardware and baby to do this.

I quickly, like a lot of women, didn't like the feeling of pumping. In the hospital, it didn't work and I figured it just wasn't for me. Also, being hooked up to this milking machine felt super weird. Other women in my lactation class said they hated it too but had no other choice.

There are a lot of reasons why pumping won't work but I'm pretty sure I just had the wrong size flanges. Flanges come like suction cups that go on your boobs. They have to fit right for proper suction. The lactation consultant I first had, didn't have time or the desire to get a different size.

The Haakaa on the other hand was great. I saved a lot of milk using that thing. But over time the letdown evens out and I couldn't use it anymore. I also tried using a manual hand pump when I had mastitis but it also didn't work.

You can store breast milk in a lot of different ways but most people use plastic bags that are meant for breast milk. They're designed to prevent freezer burn and keep the milk safe. They also have the correct markings, sizes, and everything you need to make the process more convenient.

I didn't want to purchase all these supplies when I couldn't pump a whole lot so I ended up asking around and some women told me I could freeze the milk in ice cube trays, then pop them into a freezer bag and they would last. I am not sure what the difference is here but it worked well and I could pull out a few cubes at a time when we tried to give W. a bottle.

If you plan on or need to pump then a lactation consultant will help you with this. They'll be able to figure out your exact needs and give you advice or maybe products to try to help you along. Also, most insurances will cover renting you a breast pump so make sure to look into that if you need to. There are many devices out there these days, even ones that don't need a whole bunch of tubes and cleaning. Go get that liquid gold!

I've nursed way longer than I thought I would:

I assumed that I'd be able to stop nursing when W. was one and we would be able to use bottles after she was six months old. This never happened. A lot of things I thought would happen or how I'd parent didn't end up being a reality. This is fine though.

Nursed babies aren't just willingly going to take a bottle. Not unless maybe they're given one earlier on. Some women are able to do both. This takes patience.

The baby can smell the mother's milk and will want the boob and refuse the bottle. There are thousands of styles of bottles out there that might help. But I never put too much into this.

Now, since the baby can smell the milk, they won't take a bottle from mom too easily. Another caretaker or the dad will have better luck with the mother out of the house. Seriously. J. and I had a lot of disagreements and this was one of them. He wanted me to suddenly go back to work, family members kept telling me I was using nursing as an excuse and she wasn't able to have any overnight stays anywhere.

Several times, I tried to explain to J. that I needed his help. That it would work better if he tried giving her a bottle. One day, I left for about 3 hours per my therapist's instruction. I came back to him with terror in his eyes because she had been hungry, crying, and wouldn't take the bottle.

I tried to stay supportive, and I tried to calmly explain, but he just rejected my calmness. How dare I leave him with our baby alone? You know, with HIS baby. From that moment on he insisted he wasn't any use to her.

I think he just wasn't confident and I told him the more he does things the more confidence he will have. Men need encouragement as well. Since I had been doing everything so long then maybe he just felt like I was better at it? This ended up being a never-ending argument and we never got her to take a bottle. I couldn't do it on my own.

Since most people in the United States wean their babies onto cow's milk when they're around a year old, I just figured she'd be done nursing by then and that it was my choice and everything.

After not getting her onto a bottle I ended up changing my mind and deciding that she should wean on her own. She very clearly needed milk and was still nursing around the clock.

I just thought this would happen much more quickly. Even though I was giving her regular foods, coconut milk in a glass, and nursing she didn't really seem to be weaning as fast as I thought and this also put a strain on J.

and my relationship. A lot did but this was one of those things.

I had no support, not from J., family members agreed that I was ruining my child, that I was using nursing as an excuse to not let her out of my sight or return to work. I wanted those things but I couldn't just abandon my baby with people who weren't understanding her true needs. Or, who were more than willing to go behind my back because they thought they knew better than me.

I just didn't know what else to do. It seemed unnatural to just force her off. It is. I was the one who had to deal with her upset, crying, and hungry all the time. J. was at work or out with friends for most of this. She was getting the absolute best nutrition possible as well. I've made the right decisions for us. I know so.

Pump N' Dump:

Plenty of people will advise you to pump your milk and then dump it after you've had any alcoholic beverages. You can if you want. Eventually, I got to a point where I wanted to have a drink during the holidays.

I can't turn that down, right? But in all seriousness, I did my research. There are those products where you can test your milk for alcohol content with a little strip, but some of those test positive in orange juice. The amount of alcohol that ends up in breast milk is extremely low. My midwives' group said that it's about equal to a shot of alcohol in 70 gallons of water. Nobody, not even your baby, is going to be affected by that.

Obviously, you don't want to be getting hammered and nursing. This poses a whole lot of other dangers. The rule is if you can't drive then don't nurse. No need to dump your liquid gold. But, you know, you didn't hear it from me. Dump it if you feel the need or don't drink alcohol at all.

Weaning:

Another one of those controversial topics is how, when, why, and at what age a baby or child should stop nursing. There are so many opinions. In the United States, the CDC recommends nursing exclusively for the first 6

months of a baby's life. You can start purees and soft foods slowly after 6 months. Which we did. And by age one most people switch to cow's milk. We're vegan but guess what? The reason why they switch to cow's milk is to try to replicate human breast milk or formula. So...? Why?

Forgive me, but I don't understand why this is a thing. Human breast milk is what human babies need. It's catered to their specific bodies, needs, and immune systems. Seriously, my milk for my baby is different from your milk for your baby.

The baby still needs milk for years. It's recommended to give kids milk often. And we're the only species who drink another species freakin' milk. Not only that, we do so well after the weaning age.

Now, I'm not going to get super vegan on you or anything. If you want to know then watch the documentaries "Cowspiracy" or "Dominion" to know. But this whole practice doesn't make sense. If the formula is supposed to replicate human breast milk, then why do we give babies and children cow's milk?

Cow's milk is supposed to be consumed so the toddler can get enough fats for brain development. So, why isn't formula made with enough fats? There are such products geared toward parents for their toddlers. They call it "Toddler Milk" but they're full of sugars usually.

Again, this is *another* species milk. Made to bulk up baby cows. So the baby cow can gain a whole bunch of weight. Forgive me if I'm mistaken but baby cows are much larger than children. I get it, children don't drink as much maybe but does anyone else think it's weird that we're the only species doing this? On the entire Earth?

Let me get to the actual weaning.

I can't tell you how many times people have told me W. was too old to be nursing. That I need to stop now or it will be harder later. Like this is a choice. Okay, maybe it is a choice because there are other options but I chose to give her the highest and most optimal health she could get.

I also choose not to traumatize her by forcing her to wean before she's not ready. Yes, that took longer than I or anyone in my family thought it would. But guess what? I'm the only one who's nursed in generations of my family.

Now, all the other mammals wean when they're ready. We don't re-home cats or dogs until they're done nursing. We don't force them to quit. So? Why do we do this to babies? Americans live in a very independent frame of mind. We expect our babies and toddlers to be independent of us from the start. My elders think I'm doing everything incorrectly because she seems to be attached to my hip.

Americans are actually weird for weaning our babies so young. Yes, other developed nations use formula as well but American babies are typically weaned by age 1 and are drinking cow's milk or coconut milk for vegans. This is because before age 1 it's considered dangerous for them to consume because their bodies can't digest the enzymes properly and allergies may occur. Hey? Red Flag anyone?

So, what's the natural human weaning age? What's the weaning age globally from a mother's breast? There are many cultural differences but I'm not talking about those. The average weaning age for a human is 2.5–4 years old globally. This can of course be higher or lower. Some children naturally wean earlier and some children will nurse longer.

I expect my daughter to wean when she is ready and when she wants to. This doesn't mean I exclusively nursed her like she's a newborn baby, no. Babies and toddlers will naturally wean over time by dropping feeds when they need to. You'll find all sorts of lists online that will point out an average of feeds throughout the day for any aged baby. Feed them when they're hungry.

There are ways you can persuade the baby or toddler to wean though. If you want to do it now, then just quit and tell them there is no more. You do have to supplement with something else though. Such as formula, cow's milk, or coconut milk.

This is traumatic and may backfire for both you and your child. Imagine just being ripped away from your food supply and changing your main method of survival. Your breasts will also continue producing milk, which can be painful, and lead to infection.

Weaning slowly over time is recommended. You can do this swiftly over about 10 weeks or you can wait until they're ready which may take a year or

more. Setting boundaries and knowing their eating routines is a great way to start. If you don't have a routine then follow their lead for a few days to get the gist.

Then, figure out where they may just be suckling and using nipples for comfort. Kindly tell them (at any young age) why they can't suckle anymore and when an appropriate time is to nurse. Then stick to your guns.

"Extended" nursing:

I've established the natural weaning age for human babies. If you're planning or end up nursing past age one, this is called extended nursing in the United States. Because most people believe one to be the end age. I think it's bogus knowing what I know now.

Most articles and books are telling women how they can "Wear your toddler" or I see questions like, "How do I quit extended nursing?".

To my surprise, there isn't much information out there on how to continue nursing and how to create a good routine. I eventually stumbled, realizing that it's different for everyone. Follow your toddler's cue, don't let them suckle, and cut out night feedings if you wish. Boundaries are key here.

Let me tell you, nursing a cuddly sleepy baby is much different once they hit toddlerhood. They flip, they flop, they flippity flop. Everything is a distraction for a while and the process takes a bit for them to settle in. At 2.7 she nursed a lot more calmly than she did at 1.

Boundaries don't mean you're being forceful. You're just being a parent, little ones are here to learn boundaries, and they're always going to test them. I decided we were done with night feedings. I wanted to sleep again and she was closer to 2 years old. She'd slept through the night before so no big deal right?

Wrong.

She didn't like it at first, I'd rub her back, tell her,
"Boobies went night-night till the sun comes up."

She'd fall back to sleep, wake up a few times, and by the end of the week, she would sleep much better. Both of us did.

Then she just quit sleeping all night.

She would wake up around 4, scream bloody murder while smacking me in the face, and usually pee herself. You don't know motherhood until you're pretending to sleep hoping the baby will drift off again. But they're just staring you down because they **know**.

I was so upset because what did I do wrong? This works for some families but a lot of times it completely backfires. We were the "it backfired" family. So, I just went on and nursed her when she wanted and we got to sleep as we did before. She still needed the night feedings.

At 2.7, she woke up at night but I told her again that they were night-night and she would sleep until the sun came up. I think she was ready for the night weaning at this point. She was not hitting me, she was not peeing and we slept. She still wanted to cuddle but that's okay, one step at a time.

I figured once she hit three, I'd make it a rule that we don't nurse in public or at playdates. At 2.7 she was nursing when she woke up, at nap time, after nap time, and at bedtime. That's pretty typical for that age. I didn't mind the "sleep crutch" either. She was usually done before she fell asleep anyway and I told her it was time to cuddle her stuffed animal. She may have cried for a bit but would fall asleep once she was settled.

This is natural weaning.

Yes, it may seem way hectic for a lot of parents and more "work" than necessary but I'd rather this be a calm process for both of us. Plus, naturally weaning will decrease the supply of milk in breasts slowly on its own too. Abruptly weaning means I'd still have to get that milk out somehow and engorgement is painful. Some days, I wished we were over it, but on others, I enjoyed the process. Neither of us was done. Whatever method you choose is right for your family is up to you.

(Hey, Shannon from the future here. Upon editing this book I'm proud to say she's successfully weaned at 3.3 years old. It was a graceful process, both of us were comfortable, and my milk also dried up gradually. One day I just realized she was only "nursing" to fall asleep and I hardly had any milk left. I told her so and we decided together that she was done.

-Simply, Loving & respectful.)

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: ALL ABOUT NURSING



W. 1 week old



Still nursing at 2 years old - Sometimes I miss this.

Chapter Sixteen: Cloth Diapers & Elimination Communication

Yet another one of my favorite subjects! Cloth everything and elimination communication are two things I never really thought I'd be talking about in my 20's. But here we are! Let me tell you about these two glorious practices and how they might even change your perspective too!

Why did I Choose Cloth?

I mentioned a bit about using cloth earlier. It's minimalist and I like to be able to reuse and repurpose. Cloth is definitely for me.

I'll start with the diapers, honestly, Pinterest got me there. I'd see pins of all these cute little patterns and then started reading a bit about them and how you only need around 25 or so compared to plastic diapers needing 3,800 a year. There's one hell of a difference there.

I say plastic diapers because they're made out of plastic. As are some other feminine or incontinence products. These products are also loaded with chemicals that nobody is disclosing. People say they can only decompose in 500 years or so but do we know that?

They're just filling up landfills sitting there. That's so gross to imagine. The ones that are perfectly clean and can be recycled, are recycled into plastic fencing, which then, never decomposes. There has to be another way.

However, toxic chemicals also affect babies. Diaper rash, I kid you not, is from the chemicals made to make diapers and wipes. The chemicals react

with the child's pee. Diaper rash is a chemical burn! Some babies react differently to certain brands more so than others. This can also cause other problems such as UTIs and doctors are seeing an increase in infertility issues.

Parents also are allowed to sit their babies in these plastic devices for longer periods because they're so absorbent. Great for time's sake but horrible for the babies who have to sit in the pee and poop for this long. I can say I never had one experience with diaper rash on W.'s booty.

Some parents laugh off the horrors of a "diaper blowout" which is where the baby's poop blows out the sides of their diaper. (Wow, I just wrote that...) With cloth diapers, this isn't a problem. Blowouts happen with plastic diapers because of the pressure of the diaper. They're plastic, the only way out is up to their back. With cloth, the diaper is much more forgiving. We never had a problem with this.

I already was using alternative products for my moon cycle. I was a dancer. We used to use a lot of baby wipes. I used to call them "Stripper gold" because someone was always asking someone for one. Toilet paper does not do the job, I'm sorry to break it to you. We liked to be very clean for obvious reasons.

I decided to use cloth then because I didn't want to buy wipes just to throw them away anymore. You could call me cheap or you could call me Eco-friendly. At first, I was using a terry cloth material and it did not clean well. Over time I learned what works and what doesn't.

Regular baby wipes on the other hand are also loaded with toxic chemicals. You'd think it's just water and some soap but no. There was straight-up antifreeze in most of these, tons of different fragrances, and who knows what the cloth material was. I got a chemical burn (diaper rash) from using these every day while dancing, talk about embarrassing.

The cloth diapers were a no-brainer for me, cost, environment, lasted through multiple babies and they are way cuter. Loved it all. I also never ran out of diapers or sizing. No late-night diaper runs. You just need a way to launder them.

We did use a few plastic diapers the hospital gave us the first couple of days. T. and J. didn't know how to put the diaper on W. and I was too ill to show them. Over time I have bought wipes that are supposed to be all-natural

for when we're on the go or vacation. I don't think they work as well as cloth though. I also don't enjoy the production and cost when I had a better alternative.

Another great thing about cloth diapers is that you buy a set and that's it. You can adjust the snaps to fit the baby from newborn to toilet learning age. That way you don't need to figure out which sizes they need or buy too many or too little.

Why Not Use Cloth:

Some people may think it's time-consuming, they don't have a washing system, don't want to put in the extra work, aren't educated about them, or just would rather use diapers they can toss in the trash. They may not care about the environment or their wallets as much as I do either. Luckily there are more brands out there that are aiming to be more environmentally and baby-friendly. I thought that was cool but I wanted to save money as well. The big-name brands didn't seem to be following suit.

Not all cloth diapers are made the same either. Some people choose to use more sustainable materials such as wool or use a prefold. We used the mainstream covers and they're not made of the most sustainable products. Better than "disposable" but not entirely Eco-friendly in the long run.

Types of Cloth Diapers & Wipes:

There are several different options to choose from. We had a few selections to try out because we weren't sure. Eventually, we found our favorites.

All-in-Ones: Just how it sounds. They're diapers that just snap or velcro on, the middle has a built-in absorbance layer. you put them straight into the wash.

All in Twos: These have what's called a "soaker" layer that you can snap onto the cover. You can switch the soakers out and use the same cover until you feel like it needs to be washed.

Pockets: These have a pocket that you can stuff a prefold into, set it on top or add a soaker into the pocket and have a super-absorbent diaper. If you stuff the pocket, you can do this ahead of time and it's basically all in one but if you lay the absorbent layer on top you can reuse the cover.

I had every kind with different types of absorbance and different styles of covers to choose from. My favorites were the pocket diapers with the snaps. Surprisingly we loved the basic ones we got on Amazon a brand called ALVABABY.

We received a brand of cloth diapers at the baby shower with the brand name "Wink". These were great when she was tiny because they were the slimmest. Some diapers are wide, and some are slim. She never outgrew them but they were very helpful when she was tiny.

The friend's daughter who had given us bags and boxes of clothes had also given us a huge set of diapers. Some had snaps and some had velcro. You definitely don't want velcro. It stuck to everything and was loud and would lose its grip. These diapers came with an insert that snapped in and they were very thick. They were made of polyester and worked but I think the cotton ones worked better.

That being said, you may want a variety to choose from, we liked the diapers with the snaps because they grow with the baby, you can make them tiny, and can be worn through toilet learning ages.

As for the inserts we also used a mix but landed on two kinds being the best. First, *black bamboo inserts* were soft and worked great for a while but they were not very absorbent. I did use them for myself after birth. They felt much more comfortable than the plastic diaper the hospital sent me home with.

Second, we used prefolds. These are usually made of cotton, they're quilted and there are several different ways to fold them. We used the butterfly fold which is supposed to be great for girls but I don't see why you couldn't use it for boys too.

The brand we used is called Osocozy. They make diapers, prefolds, and cloth wipes. They're made of cotton and unbleached organic cotton. The unbleached is what we went with. There are also different sizes of these. The

smaller ones had a purple edging that was great for our tiny baby and the larger ones had a gold edging for when she was larger.

Accessories:

There are a few more accessories that will help this process. The diapers that my friend's daughter sent me had some bamboo liners that were supposed to be for putting down on top of everything, setting the baby down and if they went poop it was supposed to catch it for easy cleanup. Some people love these but I just felt like it was an extra step and never used them.

Snappis:

To keep the prefolds wrapped around our little ones' booty, we used these devices called *Snappis*. They came in a pack of five and were super easy to use. They just grab onto the fabric and are quick. Back in the day, people would use pins, *Snappis* replaced the pins. Get yourself a pack of these. I only needed one and don't think we ever lost any. Once she outgrew having the prefold wrapped around her we ditched the *snappis* and just folded along the prefolds lines and laid it flat on the diaper cover. But they were great for when she was tiny and us getting the hang of everything.

Cloth Wipes:

You don't also have to do cloth wipes but it just made sense to me. Let me put them in the accessories for you. These are great, they're thick and reusable, you can add whatever solution you want to them and they have lasted us all this time. I use them for W., myself, traveling, getting messes off our faces, you name it! They work. I think these work better than regular wipes because they're thicker and grab on better.

At first, I went with the *Osocozy* brand wipes. I switched to the *Bumkins* brand wipes because they're a bit larger and thicker. Some women make their own but I never had any luck with that so I decided to just purchase them instead.

To fold the wipes you do an accordion fold. (Lay one down, Lay half of the

next on the first, fold the first over the second, and continue). I also like having a wipe container to hold them. They have holders with seals that will allow the moisture to not dry out. I have a big clear holder for the bathroom and a smaller to-go one by OXO.

Wipes solution:

J. loved these wipe solution cubes that we ordered called *Baby Bits*. You just drop them in a cup of hot water and pour the solution on the folded wipes. After a while, I got tired of buying them and just started making my own. I just got a cup of hot water, a little bit of castile soap, and some tea tree for antibacterial. Mix it all and pour it over the wipes—boom, done. I felt like we went through wipes so fast that I could just as easily make the solution and not wait for the mail or for the bits to dissolve in the glass. You need to use them fast so they don't get mildew. So, don't leave them in the container long. Babies go through them fast so it was never an issue.

Diaper Sprayer:

This isn't necessary but we used it from time to time. If the baby is not nursed or once they're eating more solid foods and having solid poops you have to get the poop in the toilet. Exclusively nursed babies' poop is water-soluble. so, you're allowed to put it in the wash. The latter is not.

Sometimes this is easier said than done. A *diaper sprayer* and a *shield* will make the process a lot easier. Some women just dip the diaper in the toilet but it didn't work the same for me. You just install it on the back of the toilet. It took me 20 minutes and you can use it as a bidet too if you don't have one already. Honestly, game-changing.

Wet Bags:

You'll need some large laundry *wet bags* to contain the soiled diapers. These bags are pretty much made out of the diaper cover outer layer material. You need this to make sure no wetness seeps through. They also make smaller-sized ones for carrying clean and dirty diapers in the diaper bag. They're also great for going to the pool, gym, or beach.

Laundry:

One big misconception about cloth diapering is that it takes extra laundering. I searched and searched, there are tons of blog posts and Facebook groups on how to wash these things and methods and whatever else.

Look, you don't have to do special laundry. We are blessed to have a free washer and dryer in our home. At one point we didn't have hot water and were using cold water. I'm here to tell you that washing cloth diapers and wipes is simple.

As for putting these in the pail? Make sure it's open and not under a cupboard or something. Remember how I said a diaper pail genie thing is silly? You want airflow so they're not stuck in there, just stinky.

I seriously put everything that may have urine on it in the pail. This included her diapers, clothes, burp rags, blankets, wipes, my clothes, and even towels. All of it went in there. Some told me this was gross, but I figured if it had anything to do with the baby on it, it needed to have the superwash. I separated darks, lights, and sometimes my clothes. When I was feeling it.

You're also going to be washing every other day to keep up on your supply but you also don't want diapers sitting long in the pail. Gross.

You **have to** get white distilled vinegar and *Tide Free-and-Gentle*. No, not regular Tide. *Tide Free-and-Gentle*.

Yes, you can get another brand of "Free-and-Gentle" Just make sure the detergent doesn't have any dyes, perfumes, or fragrances. I did find these awesome Eco-friendly detergent sheets and whitening sheets that I've used on W.'s laundry without issues.

Do not use freaking bleach! Don't use soap, fabric softener, or dryer sheets. Especially, not the dryer sheets.

Why?

Because if you get the wrong kind of detergent or detergent with all the smelly chemicals in it, it's going to make a chemical reaction with the urine which makes them REEK and you'll have bigger problems on your hands. Like, leaks, infections, and diaper rash.

If you get dryer sheets, those have an oily waxy coating that will adhere to

the cloth, lock in the urine or feces, and leave a wax layer on the fabric.

The stuff that makes clothes smell like perfume is just oils and wax. When the baby pees or poops, it will react with these chemicals and you have chemical burns. Or, diaper rash. The wax will also not allow the urine to soak into the prefold and the urine will just sit on top of there and leak out. Use reusable dryer balls instead for static. Kids like to play with them too. Winning.

Oh, also the fragrance stuff is straight poisonous for us, our babies, our skin, and the environment.

You've been warned.

Okay, but how do we wash these things?

Again, if the baby is nursed their diaper mess is water-soluble. It can go in the washer. If they're eating formula or are at the age of eating solids, get as much as you can into the toilet before throwing it in the pail.

Then when you're feelin' it, grab the wet bag, go to your washer, turn it on the hottest you can, pour in equal parts vinegar and detergent, and put your diapers in with the wet bag. You'll also want an extra rinse. The vinegar gets rid of the urine.

Then you just dry them on high heat. You can choose to dry the covers too but it does wear out the elastic faster, hanging them dry doesn't take long in my opinion. There was a long while when we didn't have hot water, our dryer didn't work... or both. So, we just used cold water, soaked them a bit longer, and hung everything. We never had any problems with this.

Once every few weeks or so, I like to sprinkle some baking soda in the wash with a couple of cups of vinegar to just wash the washer nicely. We should be doing this anyhow but in a shared facility, it's a kind thing to do.

If you don't have an in-unit washer and dryer and need to use a laundry mat then do the same steps as I said before. Some places may not allow you to wash diapers there but I have never been thrown out and don't see a big deal with it.

That's it for laundry.

If They Get Stains:

Put anything with poop or spit-up stains in direct sun. The sun will bleach the stains out. It's fun. Don't put freaking bleach on them!

If they smell really bad:

You did something wrong. You have to "strip" them. To strip them, get some vinegar, oxyclean, and your detergent. Soak them, then, do all the steps for washing but don't dry them, repeat, then put them in the sun.

If they still reek, do it again if you feel like it. Or soak them in very hot water for a while with the detergents and vinegar. If you keep doing this process and it's not working then they're probably goners. I've only needed to do this once. If you happened to put bleach on them, you're screwed.

If your baby gets diaper rash:

Don't use regular over-the-counter products. They'll create a coating like dryer sheets do on the diaper inserts. I'd gently wash the baby in mild or no soap, dab some witch hazel on the area with a cotton ball, and let them air out as much as possible. There are some *cloth diaper-safe butt creams* available. We did not experience any diaper rash, so I'm not sure how well the creams work. I just know people swear by the cloth diaper-safe brands.

Elimination Communication (E.C):

Hey, what if I told you your baby can go potty in the potty from day one?! You'd call me ca-ray-z! But wait, there's more! They can! W. did!

Elimination communication is a parent who acts on their baby's natural cues that they need to go to pee, poop, or both. Something people either think is super cool or super disgusting and weird.

Babies have needs, they need to eat, sleep, poop, pee, and cuddle. They'll display more subtle cues that they need these needs fulfilled before they start crying. I'll get into all of those later but just like needing to eat, they'll cue they need to go potty too.

Newborns from day one have the necessary sphincter muscles and control

that we have as adults. The problem is, our parenting systems have us believing this isn't the case and they need to be put in diapers asap. Oh, and wait until they're ready to start "potty training".

Have you ever wondered what people did before diapers? Someone told me that cavemen had diapers, okay fine, I wasn't there so I won't argue. However, in some cultures such as parts of Africa and Asia, women don't use diapers at all.

They just rely on their instincts, timing, and the baby's cues, take them to the spot they need to go and let them go. The term "elimination communication" is just a Westerner's term.

Even in the United States and most of Western Europe diaper-free babies and infants in many households were the norm. They were then just taught to use the toilet. Until the 19th century that is.

The invention of cloth and plastic diapers as well as the two-parent working household post-WWII created the trend for using diapers. Then, later potty training. Diaper manufacturers later came up with strategies to keep babies in diapers longer. Telling parents to,

"Wait until he's ready."

The average American baby used to learn the toilet by age 18 months. Now, the average American toddler is out of diapers and maybe still wearing training pants by age 3-4 years old. This is crazy because they're totally capable!

Newborn babies have the muscle control to hold their pee or poo until they just can't anymore, this is why they end up even going in the diaper at all. Plastic diapers, they're absorbent so parents can even just leave them on before noticing they need to be changed. This is great and convenient and all, but it's backward.

The newborn doesn't want to go on themselves, or their caregiver. Humans naturally want to eliminate *away* from their bodies. We are pretty clean creatures. When we put babies in diapers, they don't want to go in them but they have no other choice. So, they do. After a while of doing so, it becomes normal. When it becomes normal, it later becomes comfortable because they're so used to it and may even grow an attachment to the feeling. This is

why potty training can be so difficult for some parents.

Elimination Communication vs Potty Training:

A few people assumed that what I was doing was just “early potty training”. This is also untrue. Potty training or early potty training usually involves parent-led timing, a rewards system, and sometimes very defiant children. Early potty training usually starts before the baby’s first birthday.

E.C on the other hand is the natural order of things. We use the potty or toilet because it’s just normal. Sure, the parent does have to direct the infant or baby to the potty and help them do their business. It doesn’t require a timeline, rewards, expectations, and usually not very defiant children.

E.C also leads to toilet learning. Which is different from potty training. It’s also congruent with gentle parenting, Montessori, and is pretty minimalist.

(Told you this book would tie together flawlessly.)

Benefits:

There are many benefits to implementing E.C in your parenting. For one, you end up catering to yet another one of your baby’s core survival needs. It’s better on the environment, makes cloth diapering simpler, no diapers if you choose, baby doesn’t get used to going on themselves, diaper rash free, you spend less money, you’re more tuned to your baby, your baby ends up being potty independent without the dreaded potty training, and they’re more confident. It’s cool.

Downsides:

You do have to pay attention more. It’s also sometimes messy. I’ve cleaned the carpets plenty of times. Visiting other homes or leaving with caretakers who may not be too thrilled about this. All things to think about and can be time-consuming.

It does feel isolating at times because there are other parents out there but people seem to just assume you are potty training or “early” potty training and may give you advice that doesn’t work.

People may also gawk at the idea. We live in a convenience-driven society. People may sexualize it or be grossed out. I certainly got a lot of side-eye and family members did criticize.

What do you need?

- **Cloth diapers:** are great because they don't wick away the moisture as plastic diapers do. This way the baby will be able to associate the feeling of being wet and they'll want to be changed. It's important because they'll start associating the feeling of needing to go, with the diaper being wet or the parent taking them to the potty. You can skip diapers entirely and just go with it, but I found it easier to clean up when I had missed her cues.
- **Tophat potty:** This is for newborns and small babies, it looks like a *little tophat* that you sit the baby's bum on when they need to go. I didn't have this and used a bowl or the kitchen sink. The potty would have been convenient. If the baby is older, get a seat that they can sit on. I recommend one that is *one solid piece* and doesn't come apart. It's easier to clean.
- **Potty Attire:** I just didn't put pants on her a lot or she wore dresses. There are pants called "split pants" that some people have on their babies. These allow the baby's legs to remain warm while allowing access to pottying.
- **Towels & Patience:** You will experience a lot of misses but please don't get discouraged. It's worth it in the end.

When do you start?

With the right knowledge and drive, you can start from birth. This is the best time to start. Baby will be communicating the very first poop or pee.

When I read about E.C. I thought it sounded so cool and was intrigued. I thought it was also just way out there, a little unbelievable and maybe “good for them, but this isn’t for me” kind of a feeling.

I waited and ended up coming across E.C. again in my YouTube searches or another baby book. I decided I wanted this to be my reality. So, we started when W. was about 6 weeks old and never stopped.

The great news is, you can do everything from the start and dive right into doing E.C full-time, or you can do this part-time when you can. The baby won’t forget! You could do E.C at home and not in public or while visiting others as well. I decided to just go all in with the aid of cloth diapers. Less clean up.

Okay, But How Do you start?

Good news! You just start. There are certain cues the baby will communicate. If you babywear, this will be even easier. The baby doesn’t want to go on themselves or their caretaker. How sweet, right?

Cues & Timing:

- **Squirming:** The baby doesn’t want to go on you, they’re uncomfortable and trying to hold it. If they’re on you and capable of holding their head up they’ll push away from you a lot. Even a newborn will usually squirm a whole bunch with some grunting. They’re making a *great* effort not to soil themselves or you.
- **Pausing Activity:** W. did this even as an older toddler. If they’re playing along and suddenly they stop, they have to go.
- **Waking:** Babies and well, humans can’t wet in their sleep. We have to wake up to go. Babies will wake up squirm, maybe cry a bit, and then go.
- **Let out a loud cry:** May sound like “AaaAaah”. This is a very late cue and means they’ve been holding it and can’t anymore.

- **Sign language:** They may use sign language — You’re about to learn to cue them to potty.
- **Popping On and Off Breast:** They may be upset or trying to cue you, you think they want the boobie but they’ll pull on and off at a rapid pace. They need to pee instead.
- **Sounds:** They may repeat the sound you use to cue them “It’s okay to release”.

What more can you do?

Tracking your baby’s cues, remembering them, and using your intuition is a great start. Eventually, once you’ve got an idea of how your baby cues you can start using intuition to time it out. You don’t want to try to stay on a schedule though. This doesn’t work and may backfire for you.

In the beginning, you could try leaving your baby diaper-free and putting an incontinence pad or cloth diaper prefold under them. As long as they’re not rolling. Doing so may allow you to observe more how your baby is displaying cues and you can see right when they pee or poo.

If you’re nursing or bottle-feeding, put them over the potty before they start eating. Very young babies usually pee while they’re eating. I don’t know why but that’s where I started.

Here’s how you implement E.C. in action. You sense the baby’s cue and you will ask if they need to go potty or tell them you think they do. Next, you’ll remove their undergarments and hold them over the potty.

If they’re little you’ll want to hold their body and head up well. If they’re able to lift their heads then you can put their back against your stomach and hold their thighs in kind of an “M” shape with their butt on the potty. This is a natural poop position. With boys, watch out, and angle right.

Most people say, “Sssss” to signal that it’s okay to pee. Or “Pa pa pa” for poop. The baby will release when they hear that cue. And that’s it, they went,

you clean them up and put their clothes on. It's okay to get excited but later down the line we don't use praise or rewards, this is just a normal bodily function.

You can also use baby sign language as an added step. It's very helpful! The sign for the toilet is your thumb between your index and middle finger and shaken back and forth. While doing this sign you also want to make sure you say the word "toilet" or "potty". W. started signing this back to us by the time she was 5 months old when she needed to go. Truly awesome.

In public, you can't just put the baby on the toilet by themselves or use the sink. So, you'll need to straddle the toilet and hold them in front of you. I purchased a seat reducer that folded nicely into the diaper bag once she was a bit older.

Timing:

There are certain times throughout the day when a baby will need to go. Taking them to the toilet and going through the steps mentioned above during these times will help keep more of a routine and you'll have fewer misses. Baby could even hold it until those times too. These are the times babies may need to go and you should try anyway. These are called "potty-tunities" or giving them the chance to go.

- ***Waking up:*** I feel like we all do this.
- ***During feedings:*** When they're newborns they'll go during feeding times. It helps to have the tophat potty and supplies near you in the rooms you most frequent. Such as next to the couch or bed. A little basket setup helps.
- ***Before and after outings:*** Always a great time to try to go. I would do this in public restrooms too.
- ***Whenever feels right to you:*** If I had taken her each and every time my intuition kicked in, I'd have hardly had as many misses. Mom just knows.

Misses:

Misses are when you don't make it to the potty. Sometimes you're going to have misses. It's okay if this happens. You're still learning so be patient with yourself. The best thing to do is make sure you change the baby immediately after they've gone. Sometimes they won't tell you until they're going or already have as well. Patience my friend. You can do this.

When there's a miss you need not blame the baby. This is your miss not there's. W. always tried to get our attention before going. They're just doing what's natural. Clean up the mess and take them to the potty to see if they need to go more. Sometimes they need to still pee a bit or need to go poo also.

Cleaning:

You'll want to clean up any misses and the potty each time of course. I used those incontinence pads on the bed and under the potty in the living room. This was helpful in the long run. Having the baby or toddler clean their mess from misses is important. Doing so teaches them body cues, the process, natural consequences, and responsibility.

Location:

You can start with the potty in the room you're usually residing in. For quickness. Eventually, as the baby gets older they'll want a little more privacy, so setting up a spot in the bathroom on a nice rug with some supplies in a basket will pique their interest. I remember W. not wanting to go. Once I moved everything into the bathroom she wanted to again.

By the way, this does work at night if you wish to do so. You can just do diapers if you want and the next day they'll remember how to communicate and release on cue. I did E.C at night and was pretty good at waking up when she needed to go.

It helped to have her in those long baby gowns with elastic on the bottom for easier access. In the cold months, I did feel pretty bad undressing her because our room got pretty cold. She slept through the night without wetting herself pretty quickly. That's another plus to E.C and cloth diapers.

Night wetting is way less frequent.

Handling Expectations:

If you read around and watch YouTube videos you're going to be told that E.C works and you'll never need another diaper again. That mom is so freaking perfect and you can be just like her! You just have to watch her videos, buy her books, and probably her courses too!

I know, I've written this book and all but... I'm not here to say your little one will be using the potty in a few weeks all by themselves. There are those awesome stories out there where everything works out perfectly and those babies are potty independent by age one. However, every family is different and every child is different.

I got discouraged because I thought things were going great and that she would be just like all those other babies I heard about. She wasn't but this is normal.

Yes, she used the potty at 6 weeks old. Yeah, that's pretty cool! She was using the bigger potty when she was 6 months and a year old. But we still had misses. She still had some misses at 3.

Those babies *are* using the potty, but I feel like the person writing the stories neglects to include that they still need to be very attentive and help their baby or toddler along. E.C. isn't about being completely potty-independent quickly. That's the next step in this process. E.C. is just the communication habits. As well as, allowing them the opportunity to do what they naturally need to do.

Potty Pauses:

Throughout the baby's first year, they go through miraculous brain development. Sometimes they're trying something new that they don't want to stop to do something else. Pottying included! Sometimes, I got frustrated about this and would blame myself or wonder what the hell was going on.

A Potty pause is what was happening. So, when she was around a year old

she hit a mental leap. She was standing better and exploring way more by crawling. She flat-out refused the potty. She also flat-out refused to be in her sleeping area.

Sometimes it's hard to not get discouraged because we tend to compare our kids with the information we're reading or other families. Try not to do this, everyone is on their timeline. Even as adults.

Later, I realized that these things just happen and to not beat myself up. Around 14 months old she started liking the potty again. She was just busy developing new skills.

She also started walking more around 16 months. At their new mobile moments, they'll not want to stop what they're doing to go. This is definitely normal.

Pauses usually happen when sudden or big changes happen. Such as new siblings, divorce, moving homes, new schools, trauma, or new skills they are mastering. So always keep that in mind. Give yourself and your baby some grace, there's a lot that goes into this job!

Toilet Learning:

E.C is only the beginning. Toilet learning comes later when they seem interested. It's called "toilet learning" because this is just another learned skill. We're not training anything. It's just normal life. Montessori also uses this as part of their classroom teachings as well. Since we did E.C she was already accustomed to her potty. We just made a few changes.

The age on when to start this varies but in Montessori teachings, they recommend 12-18 months being the "sensitive period" for toddlers to start showing an interest in the toilet and dressing and undressing by themselves. About 14 months is when I started with W.

Toilet learning is not the same as potty training. There's no stress Momma. You just go with the flow. If you did E.C then they already know what the toilet is for. Now you're just going to teach them the extra steps. In time, they'll be independently doing it on their own in no time.

You'll need a few things for toilet learning. This is a great time to ditch the diapers at least in the daytime. They'll likely be excited about this. I ditched

the diapers at night too and kept the incontinence pads under our sheet but she hardly went at night anyway. (Which is usually the other way around for parents doing traditional potty training methods).

You'll need a little basket with potty-related things. A few pairs of underwear, some toilet paper, we used cloth wipes too, another pair of pants, and the potty on a rug in the bathroom. This is where it's going to stay from then on. The rug will help it not move around. Some people say to put a book in the basket to keep them occupied for a bit but W. typically threw it aside or put it on the shelf in the living room.

She started pulling her clothes out of the drawers and wanted to dress herself. I also already had her potty in the bathroom and we had implemented an "open door policy".

An open-door policy means, that when I went, she could watch or I would also put her on the toilet. I'd hand her some toilet paper or a wipe, I'd show her how I wiped, she would copy and we would dump her potty in the toilet and toilet paper before flushing together. Then we would put on undies and wash our hands. I'd clean the potty thoroughly. And exit the restroom to get back to whatever we were doing.

No, stress, no defiance, no treats, and no rewards. Just going potty again. She found these new extra bathroom steps to be a lot of fun. Toddlers love to learn new things and copy what we do. Of course, I did have to help her with her underwear but that's expected. You just want to communicate each and everything you're doing. They'll eventually get the hang of it.

There are going to be quite a bit of misses here as well. We don't call these "accidents" because it puts shame on the child and doing so may cause a rebellious streak. Shame isn't a good feeling and we don't want to associate shame or guilt with this process.

Asking them,

"Do you need to go potty?"

This will usually result in the answer being,

"No."

So rewording how you speak will help. Try to say,

"Let's go use the potty!" or "It's time to go use the toilet!" in an exciting

way and they'll likely be all right with this.

You also want to make sure you're not interrupting their train of thought to stop and go. Wait for a second or give them a heads up beforehand.

"When we get into the store, we'll empty our bladders first. Then we'll shop for our items.".

The same timing rules apply. Transition times are best!

When W. woke up, we went potty, before we went to the park, potty time, when we got to the restaurant, and so on. She knew the drill.

Once they get older you can teach them to be more independent with their undressing and redressing too. They'll like to learn the new step but keep in mind that underwear and pants are pretty tricky.

Independence:

Potty independence is the entire goal here. Yes, W. was using the potty and communicating with me frequently since she was 6 weeks old. But that doesn't mean she crawled on over and did it herself. I got very discouraged because this is how women portrayed E.C to be. Well, not 6 weeks but by a year or so.

I later discovered that potty independence takes time. Just like everything else. She knew everything about the potty and we were finally working on undressing her by herself. She usually didn't wear pants at home because it was just easier. I started this process pretty early on and she was in underwear by age one and wore diapers when we went out until about age 1.5.

I even got her a pair of regular fabric undies. Those are much easier to put on but she wasn't ready for them at first. She became more interested in the potty steps and pulled up her underwear around 2.7.

We had a seat that goes on top of the regular toilet seat for about a year before she started liking it. I purchased the step stool as well but she was too short to use it at first. She eventually just got tall enough to get up there by herself. She was over the moon about it. She used the stool to reach all types of new heights around the house.

So, naturally, I decided it was time she learned to pull her underwear up and down. She got the front but was still working on the back. She was also

working on wiping. I still had to do the poo for a long while. I still helped her pull her underwear down sometimes as well. She still had misses.

Only, she'd tell me,

"Oh, I need to go pee."

Or

"Oh, I peed."

Then she'd run to the toilet, I would pull her underwear down or pretend to help when really, she was the one doing it. She'd try to go some more then we would work together to get her cleaned up.

Over this time she also learned to get her underwear and pants out of the drawer and she had decided she wanted to wipe her booty as well. A great way to teach a toddler or young child to wipe their booty is to get a mirror where they can bend over and see if they're clean. It's effective, hilarious, and adorable.

I feel as if when reading or listening to other parents speak about potty training it always seems so rushed and "this is how we did it in three days!" After getting discouraged and down on myself because I thought "Maybe this isn't working, after all, where did I go wrong...?" I realized that maybe potty training just means *using* the toilet. I'm not sure it means they're entirely using it on their own completely. I don't think they'd have the coordination so young.

Potty independence comes in time. If you keep giving your baby or toddler more opportunities to get involved, it'll just be second nature. I'm thankful for this entire pottying journey even though at times it seemed impossible, too messy, or like it wasn't even working. The upside to all of this is that her needs are taken care of, she never got used to the feeling of wetting in her diapers, she doesn't remember diapers and the toilet has always just been a natural part of her life. That was the goal.



W. Lucille, 7 months old.



Underwear can be so tricky! - Almost 2

Chapter Seventeen: How Do We Make This Easier?

Good Question.

Pretty much everything in this book is what I learned to make all of this easier but there's more. I'm not done yet. Now that we got the basics of eating and potty training down, let me tell you some strategies to smooth everything.

Conscious Parenting:

This can mean something different to everyone but in my opinion, it's parenting in a way that doesn't just rely on instincts. We're seeking to understand the way the baby, toddler, child, or teen's physical and psychological development works and how we can better understand them. This way we can make a conscious effort to pause, take a step to seek out explanations for behaviors, and parent in a way that guides them. This way we're helping them through life rather than dictating over them. With firm boundaries, expectations, and love. We're also taking stock of our behaviors, emotions, and impulses and taking accountability.

Baby cues:

There are several different ways babies will cue us of what they need. Being able to pick up on these cues before they start crying will immensely help you meet those needs before they're in distress. For instance, if a baby's hands are in tight balls, they're hungry. When their belly is full, their hands

will release and they can drift off to sleep.

Baby Cries:

Have you ever seen that episode of Oprah where they revealed the different cries of babies? My mom showed me when she was pregnant with my sister in 2010. Priscilla Dunstan had a special gift and could decipher music and decided to use it on babies' cries. They tested her findings on thousands of babies and it worked every time.

The cries went like this:

- **Neh**- "I'm hungry"
- **Owh**- "I'm sleepy"
- **Heh**- "I'm experiencing discomfort"
- **Eair**- "I have lower gas"
- **Eh**- "I need to burp"

Seriously, don't forget this and tell all your friends because this was key and worked perfectly for me.

"The Happiest Baby On The Block" By Harvey Karp, MD:

J. and I watched this one together. There's a book too but the video was worth it. This guy is like a baby wizard. He goes through the reasoning and steps to calm a baby, get them to sleep, and use a baby swing properly. Harvey coined the "5 S's" to getting a baby soothed and sleeping. Which are swaddle, side-stomach position, shush, swing, and suck. This is a must-watch in my opinion. J. ended up picking up some tips as well.

The Wonder Weeks by: Frans X. Plooij:

My midwife told me about this book and there's an app I got. This was an absolute game-changer in learning the psychology of what W. was developing mentally, how she might act, and what was to come. It was all pretty spot on and will help you in handling each "mental leap" your

baby goes through. I got the book pretty late so relied on the app more than anything. This is a 10/10.

A Couple of Little Newborn Tricks:

Let me add that my midwife taught me the “newborn reset”. W. was about 5 weeks old and we were at our final check-up. W. started crying and I just did not know what to do. I felt embarrassed and looked at the midwife with terror in my eyes and a “What the fuck do I do?!” look on my face.

She held out her arms and said,

“Let me show you a little trick.”

She simply held W. upright, rather than cradled and tucked her arms, legs, and feet and put her on my chest. She immediately stopped crying.

She called this,

“The newborn reset”.

Also, when they’re little newborns and spitting up — a lot, I learned another trick. After the feeding, attempt to burp the baby and make sure their needs are taken care of and comfortable. They don’t always need to burp by the way. It’s okay if they don’t burp every time. Don’t force it.

Then, they’re most likely going to want to sleep after feeding. Holding them in an upright position rather than lying down lessens their chance of getting gas bubbles in their tummy and spitting up more. Because gravity. You can hold them on your chest while sitting up or leaning back a bit on pillows. Baby will just close their eyes and sleep more peacefully. You can lie them all the way down afterward.

Baby-led Routines:

When the baby is a newborn it’s generally advised to follow the baby’s lead with sleeping and eating. They call this “on-demand”. This ended up just being how it worked out for us.

I can’t tell you how many times I searched “baby routines” at whatever age W. was starting at 4 months old. I eventually drove myself crazy with this as I’ll mention later as well.

I found it easier to just follow her lead on almost everything. From feeding,

sleeping, potting, and even just everyday life. I did of course get the hang of what times or how many times a day she needed things taken care of. Doing that formed her routine that I could follow.

For example, maybe she'd feed in the morning when we got up, go pee and about 4 hours later she'd be feeding and sleeping again. I wrote down when she would do this for a few days. That way I'd be a little prepared and less surprised.

Trying to follow a routine I found online or having it be on the dot every day didn't work for us. Not every baby is on the same clock. It's nice to have a little insight into what the baby *might* need at each age though. So, they weren't completely useless.

Following her lead early on also allowed me to trust her more and she's gained independence through doing so. If I trust her, she trusts herself more easily.

Baby Sleep:

Newborns need a ton of sleep. The first few weeks I straight up thought this was the easiest thing ever. Until she awoke from her sleepy newborn slumber. She went through her first "mental leap" as the Wonder Weeks app stated she would around 5 weeks old. Everything changed and then I had an actual interpretation of what a newborn baby was like.

They go through a ton of different sleep patterns in the first months because they're rapidly changing. This is normal. People say,

"Once you think you got it, they change".

Boy, is that true! Trying to stay on top of things is great and all, but you're not going to get it right 100% of the time. Take it from me, I drove myself and everyone crazy trying to keep up.

This is kind of the same for feeding too, things change. I did my best to remember that food and sleep go side by side, so trying to get those routines to match up will help immensely. Many mom's like to feed the baby after they wake but mine wanted to feed before and after. She was always a hungry

hippo!

There's a lot of baby sleep advice out there. Some of it's helpful but most of it just stressed me out. A book that had been recommended to me several times was *The Sleep Lady's Good Night Sleep Tight* book. There were others too but this one went into detail on how babies' brains aren't equipped to sleep through the night until they're 40 weeks old and a whole lot of other information.

I resonated with this book because it described exactly what was happening and did not tell me "tips on how to get your baby to sleep through the night!". For me, this book helped.

There's advice out there saying at 4 months old you can start having more of a routine because the baby is out of the newborn stage. Prior they need to sleep whenever they feel like it. A lot of parents are claiming that their baby just follows the routine, sleeps at the same time in the evening, and wakes at the same time in the morning after they follow a bedtime routine.

Hey, this might be true for them. For me, that never freaking happened. Not to a T or anything. As a new mom, I thought there was something wrong with me. I'm not one of those people who just accept that "babies just do that..." Nah, those people did it, and so can I! After months of hating that I didn't know what I was doing, that book put it all into perspective for me.

Too Much Cortisol:

Remember, "sleep begets sleep" which means that the more sleep they get throughout the day and on a "for now" routine they sleep better for the next nap or during the night.

The number of family members who would say,

"Oh she didn't get her nap, guess she'll be sleeping great tonight!"

Absolutely astonished me. Did they really believe that? Is this really how they parented in the past?!

I say this because if the baby doesn't get their nap in they will have an increase of cortisol in their bodies. Remember that's the hormone secreted when we are angry, stressed, worn out, and irritable. Which makes a baby fussy, dig through things if they're mobile, and more difficult to relax later.

W. specifically would need to be put down for her nap within 20 minutes or all hell would break loose and she wouldn't sleep. She'd be overtired and full of cortisol and very upset. Which made me upset because I couldn't put her down.

There was also a time when I couldn't pin this down when she was newly mobile. She would dig through each section of the living room, toys, books, TV stand, etc in a clockwise order. Each and every time. Then she would eventually trip, seek me out for comfort, I'd feed her and she would drift off. I was admittedly happy when she tripped because I knew she'd finally settle.

Bed Time Routine Is a Must:

A bedtime routine, bath, lotion, massage, pajamas, white noise, some type of motion (we used an exercise ball), and no television an hour prior definitely helped us. There's so much distraction and it's great to get the baby's body ready for sleep. They like to know what to expect and having a routine cues their bodies.

I mean, this routine even helps adults. Try turning off your devices an hour or two before bed and removing your phone from your room. See how great you sleep.

The white noise is a great "sleep crutch" because you can just slowly turn it down until it's gone after some time.

Aw, and I learned to touch her feet and then her legs down on the crib mattress before her back. Otherwise, it feels like falling and the impact of their back touching will jolt them awake.

Just please for the love of anything holy, do not let your baby "cry it out". This is a very outdated sleep training method that is detrimental to the baby's nervous system. I'll explain in the next chapter.



I bounced on this ball for months!

Co-Sleeping:

This also wouldn't be a conscious parenting book without co-sleeping. At first, I wasn't planning on co-sleeping at all. A lot of people are afraid it's dangerous and I'll get to that in a bit. I thought I'd be the more "forced independence" type of mom before I delivered W.

I'd say,

"Nope, no baby in our bed, and she'll be in her own room by one!"

I meant that too. I tried to have her in her crib by one but that backfired. She flat-out refused once she turned one.

Let me back up a bit though. I was told how to safely co-sleep with an infant by midwives and the Lamaze teacher. They condoned it. The lactation consultant told me she couldn't say yes to that being safe. I told her to blink twice if she thought it was without her professional hat on. *blink, blink*

First, don't if you are obese, drinking, smoking, medicating, using drugs that may make you sleepy (over-the-counter, prescribed, or illicit), or have other health problems because these ailments may make you sleep too heavily to notice if something is wrong or roll more.

Second, set up the bed correctly, on the floor, with nothing beside it, no pillows, a lightweight blanket for you but not the baby, and sleep in a c-shape around the baby.

Yes, that's the safest way.

When the baby is in the womb, you are their lifeline. They live inside you, they're surrounded by your bodily rhythms, your breath, and your heart rate. You regulate their blood, breathing, heartbeat, etc. with your own.

When they're born that just suddenly stops and they have to do it on their own. They still need you to regulate. This is another reason why skin-to-skin contact is so important within the first hour but also throughout the newborn's first few months and beyond.

The baby's heart rate and breathing are regulated by the mom outside of the womb too. It's also completely natural to co-sleep with our babies. We naturally want to protect them and have them near and we naturally lay in a c-shape around them.

This helps the new baby so much. Co-sleeping reduces infant mortality because they need your energy to survive. It is a survival mechanism to co-sleep. This also ties into attachment parenting which I'll get to.

The reason why I started co-sleeping was all the benefits of course. However before I knew there were benefits, I'd be on the couch or chair nursing and I'd pass out and not realize it. Which is immensely dangerous and I couldn't control it.

Nursing makes you very tired because the hormones Prolactin and Oxycon-tin are released. A few times I woke up with her in my arms thank goodness but the couch and the chair had very large cushions she could have suffocated

in. I slept on the floor for a few days but doing so got very painful.

I decided that co-sleeping was a much better idea because it was more safe than passing out without knowing. I'm very glad I made the switch. Co-sleeping allowed me to attend to W. quickly. I'd roll over, give her boobies and fall back to sleep and she'd just roll over when she was done. Everyone slept, safely.

My midwife also told me I wasn't going to smother my baby. Sure, it does happen but it's a natural instinct for you to jerk awake if your baby is in danger. I mean, I did often even when she wasn't in any danger or when she wasn't even in the room. It's involuntary.

As long as you're sober and don't have other health issues that might impact this, that is. I felt perfectly safe sleeping with her in our bed. You could get a bedside sleeper too which would make sleeping more comfortable but we didn't have the room.

We still co-slept in our bed together for years. I wouldn't have it any other way. There's nothing more exciting than waking up to a smiling baby every morning too. I feel like sleeping side by side has helped us bond immensely as well. She felt safe.

I'm sure you're wondering if I was scared she'd never leave. Yeah, you and everyone else. For the record, she did sleep in the other room at times without me and everything was dandy. She's slept in other homes without me around just fine too. She's not going to be stuck in my bed forever. I'm comfortable, she's comfortable and we all got to sleep around here.

(Future me says: Psst, she decided to make a bed on the floor by my bed at age 4 all by herself. She's slowly moving to her own bed more and more these days. No stress momma.)



Almost a year old.

Baby Sign Language:

Did you know that you can teach your baby sign language so you can communicate before they can speak? An old friend of mine did so with her baby boy and I was so amazed! I had to try this with W..

You can do basic signs like “potty”, “milk”, “drink”, “change”, “bath”, “eat”, and “more” at first and gradually start adding more in. She used to sign “cat” & “dog” were her favorite, and the potty signals “pee” and “poop” were used a lot. In the last year, she doesn’t do them as much as before but we still use the signs when learning new words. Oh, and come to find out, that song “The itsy-bitsy spider” with the hand motions is actually baby sign language.

Doing this is fairly simple, you just learn a few baby signs, (baby signs are sometimes a bit different and easier than regular ASL) do them frequently while also saying the word out loud at the appropriate times and the baby

will pick up on them.

Some people are concerned with using baby sign language because they think it might make the baby take longer to speak. This is said to not be true as long as you're also using the words with the sign.

W. took a while to do a lot of things but speaking, I really think it was because she was focused on other milestones. Remember, we're all on a different path here. She took a while to speak, then a while to say more, and would grunt, or use the signs if we didn't understand. We took her to speech therapy and it seemed like the lady wasn't doing much so I ended the appointments.

We watched "Songs for Littles" with Ms. Rachel on YouTube pretty frequently. Ms. Rachel has baby and toddler speech and learning videos. She uses sign language and speech techniques to show the motions of the mouth. Something the speech therapist we went to didn't demonstrate and also had to wear a mask which to me, defeats the purpose.

Watching and following the videos at home has proven to help her sign language and her speech is always getting better. She got bored with videos for a while so we would read books often instead.

She still did some of the signs at 2 and learned to sign and say "please", and "thank you" at the appropriate times and she liked to exclaim,

"Poop!" While running to me and doing the sign.

She got excited for bath time and would sign and say,

"Clean! Clean! Clean?!"

Eventually, as she got used to saying words instead, the sign language slowly disappeared.

Baby sign language really helps with communication issues because young babies want to communicate but they don't have the words yet, sign language gives them a set of tools to use before they're mentally capable of speaking. You also get to have the satisfaction of knowing they're actually hearing you, listening, and wanting to communicate. All wins!

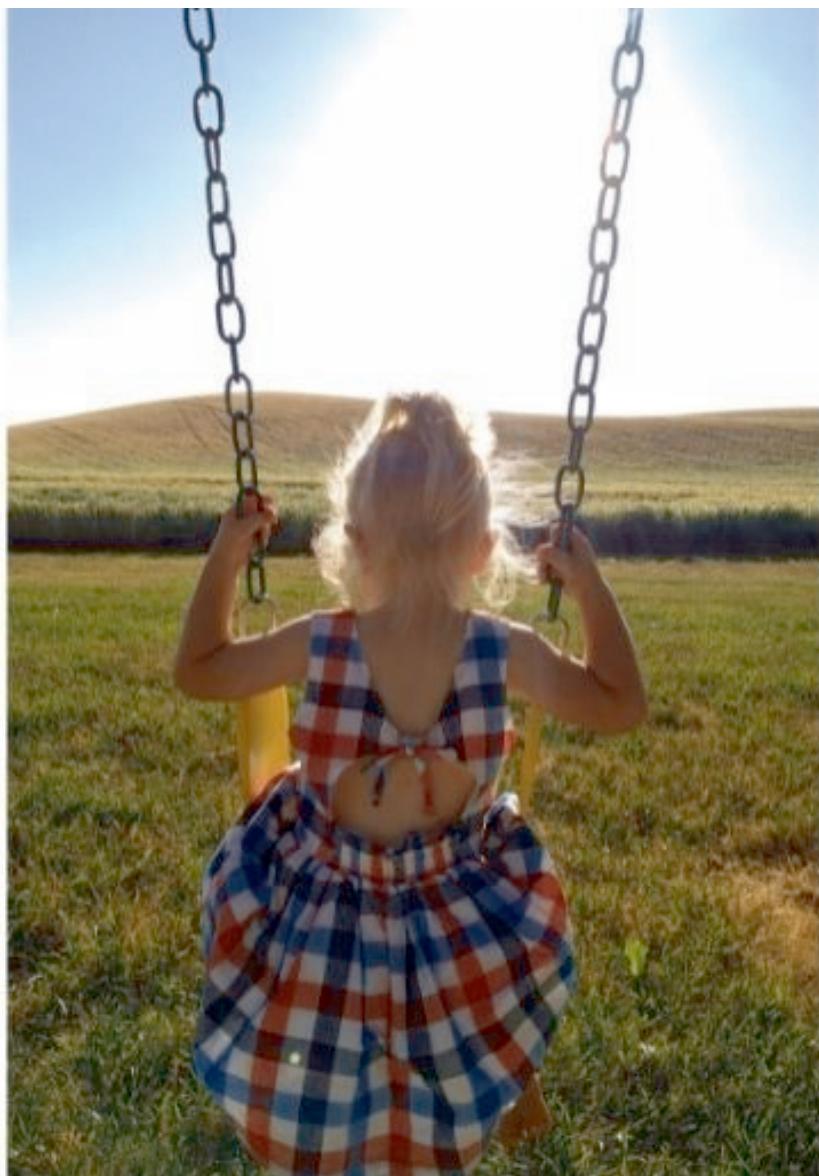
Slow Down Momma:

Motherhood cannot be rushed. I had to learn this one. Before becoming

mothers we may have fast-paced lives. We can go anywhere and do anything on a whim. You can't really do this with a baby so easily.

Taking a slower-paced lifestyle is helpful for bonding, for identifying babies' cues and not having the guilt of "I should be doing more" over your head. Some days, it's really okay to just be at home, doing the basic survival needs and nothing more.

You're keeping a small human and yourself alive and sometimes just surviving is necessary. It's a huge job. And yes, it is a job. We pay other adults to do this same job at times. For the first years, some days it was huge that we got outside for a few minutes or a walk to the park. These were our "big" outings. And huge wins for my mental health.



Summer 2021- Just Turned 2

Chapter Eighteen: Attachment & Conscious Parenting

Let me start this off by saying, I'm not perfect. I don't have all of the answers all of the time. I'm not a mom attacking anyone's parenting. I'm just a mom who vowed to be the healthiest version of myself for my child. That version is also always a work in progress.

So, that I could make sure I raise someone who can show up in the world without fear, knowing she's supported and loved. Who can be kind and compassionate while also confident in herself. I also, in the process had to learn how to form those aspects in myself. I didn't have that before. It's been a wonderful journey and W. truly saved me.

Let's Go:

There are many different ways to parent and people often ask, "Which is the best method?". That's why there are so many parenting books, blogs, articles, videos, and advice out there. I wanted to do a more caring, loving gentle approach. Somewhere along the line, I stumbled upon attachment parenting and a few methods.

I know many people mentioned to me,
"Oh, you just gotta love 'em'."

Or
"There's no **one** way to parent!"

But here's the thing:

I truly believe if we are not guiding our children, allowing them freedom within boundaries, and harboring their emotional and mental well-being then we are not doing our job as parents.

I felt like there had to be a way to not have to demand, yell, and punish to guide W. That all felt forced and I didn't want to have to act like that anyway. It heightens my anxiety, and my nervous system and doesn't make me feel good afterward.

Most advocates will tell you attachment parenting is about being present during birth, co-sleeping, skin-to-skin, nursing, and babywearing as much as possible. Yeah, these things definitely help create a secure bond and I did all of these practices and would do it all over again. This isn't the full story though.

It wasn't until I went to therapy and learned about relationships that I learned the true meaning of attachment parenting and how healthy relationships work. This goes way deeper than babywearing. This goes way deep down into the subconscious.

Where do we start?

Attachment parenting has to do with *attachment theory*. Which is the theory that we form relationships based on how our relationships with our caregivers went when we were 0-7 years old. Boy did this absolutely change the way I view relationships, my upbringing, myself, and parenting.

People who advocate attachment parenting are focusing on creating a secure attachment with the baby or child. They seem to emphasize closeness and that's great and all but like I said, it's much deeper than that. There are also four main types of parenting styles that in my opinion contribute greatly to a child's well-being. Let me explain.

Parenting Styles:

Authoritarian: Focus on enforcing rules that the child must obey. Even when they have questions. These types of parents believe “kids should be seen and not heard” and that it’s their way because they’re the adults in the situation. This creates resistance in the relationship. The child is not allowed to be themselves.

These parents won’t allow the child a chance to problem solve and jump straight to punishments which get confused with discipline. (They’re two different things) The parent may become angry or hostile and not be able to understand his or her own emotions.

Authoritative: These parents have rules and they use consequences. They set firm boundaries but will also seek to understand the child in a situation. They’ll use problem-solving skills with their child and explain to them the consequences of their actions before or after it happens. This parent also allows the child to explore freely. If the child falls, they don’t hover, they gently guide them. The child is free to have their opinions and express how they’re feeling. These parents will guide them through these emotions.

Permissive Parenting: These parents set boundaries but rarely enforce them. They may later not understand why the child didn’t listen. They may lack the ability to structure a child’s needs. Their children may often do as they please because of a “kids will be kids” mindset. These parents usually take on more of a friend role than a parent. These kids may struggle academically.

Uninvolved: Parents who are uninvolved may house the child and give them the physical items they need but won’t seek to create a relationship with their child. The child may seek attention or feel unloved in this situation. As if nobody cares for them. These children end up pretty much raising themselves but still seek a relationship with their parents. They may spend a lot of time away from home. They’ll likely do poorly academically, have low self-esteem, and may cope in unhealthy ways.

What is attachment theory?

This is another subject I'm pretty passionate about, although I'm only able to give you a brief overview today. It may help to dive into your own studies about attachment theory to gain a more in-depth understanding.

Attachment theory began in the 1950s by a group of psychologists. They believed that the primary focus of an infant's psychological development is dependent on their caregivers meeting their core emotional and physical needs. Thus creating a secure attachment and bond with the caregiver.

If a caregiver is capable of meeting these core needs the baby will develop a secure attachment and later in life be able to feel secure in oneself, cope with emotional hardships, and attract partners who are secure for them. They have clear boundaries, know how to stick to them, have emotional intelligence, communicate effectively, and know when to walk away from a situation that doesn't sit right with them.

If a caregiver is unable to meet these needs or is inconsistent in doing so then the baby will develop an insecure attachment to the caregiver, they won't be able to cope with emotional hardships, and often in adulthood, attract partners that trigger these emotional wounds and vice versa. They'll lack a personal understanding of their boundaries, may not stick to their convictions, and allow people to abuse them by not walking away when needed. This also stretches into other areas of their lives such as the workplace, group settings, self-esteem, and managing their emotions.

What are the attachment styles?

There are four main attachment styles but the theory is a four-sided scale, we can lean more one way or the other on the scale. If we're around certain people for instance they may push us in the other direction.

The Four Main Attachment Styles:

Secure:

This person grew up with all or most of their core needs met. They

were capable of feeling safe in dealing with problems with their caregivers. When in new relationships they stay hopeful knowing to take things slow to establish a connection. When there are hardships in the relationship they work to try to work out a solution. They feel safe in the world. They are neither anxious nor avoidant. They're capable of managing their emotions healthily. They will know how to attract secure partners who meet their needs or walk away when necessary.

Anxious Preoccupied:

This person may have had a caregiver who was taking care of their needs one moment but the next would ignore them. Or, one parent was spot on and the other may have been distant or missing altogether. This creates a lot of anxiety because they never know what response they will get. They may learn to judge facial expressions to predict others' emotions. Truly walking on eggshells. Empaths usually stem from this.

This person may over-romanticize relationships because of movies. When something feels as if it's threatening the relationship to them they'll get "needy" and subconsciously push their partner away by doing so. They'll try to "fix" everything and take on more of the relationship than necessary. This person is highly anxious, can't stop until things feel "fixed" and has low avoidance. This person does not feel entirely safe in the world or trying new things. They typically attract partners who may be abusive in one way or many and won't know exactly when to walk away.

Dismissive Avoidant:

This person may have been neglected as a child. They may believe that they don't need anyone because of this but all humans need connection. They may have grown up fending for themselves and often say they don't need emotions or people. This person is actually highly anxious but doesn't show it as the anxious preoccupied does. When issues arise in relationships their instinct is to avoid them and often don't want to work on solutions. This sabotages relationships. They're highly avoidant and not outwardly anxious.

Disorganized:

This person is kind of a mixture of both avoidant and anxious. They could lean more one way or the other. This person may have had one caregiver who was very accommodating to their needs and another who was dismissive of their needs. This person wants relationships but often feels like they're not good enough or becomes bored easily and leaves. Even if they liked them. This person may seem like they don't know what they want when it comes to relationships. They may have a hard time knowing what they want. They often feel conflicted and this confuses them and their partners.

Sleep Training:

A bit about sleep training methods. There are several methods out there for sleep training and we've all heard the "cry it out" method. I need to let you know that this is straight-up where a dismissive-avoidant attachment style can start. This sleep training method was coined by Dr. Ferber in the early 19th century. Many people call it the "Ferber method" after his book was released in 1985. This was a means to "not spoil your baby."

This method infuriates me and many of the attachment parenting community because it quite literally means leaving the baby to cry by themselves and only checking on them over a period of intervals. This is not a good thing and creates sociopaths which is detrimental to society as a whole.

The thing about attachment style parenting is that it's how a baby's nervous system reacts when their survival needs aren't being met. Letting a baby cry is so cruel because that baby isn't crying just because it feels like it. The baby is crying because it *needs* something. Ignoring a crying baby to force it to "cry it out" puts the nervous system into survival mode. So, the "fight, flight or freeze" mode.

Eventually, when the baby stops crying it's because they've given up or simply passed out from exhaustion. If you can have a little empathy right now, imagine doing this. That baby who's been left alone to "cry it out" has been just conditioned to believe nobody is coming for them. So, why even

cry anymore? Why try?

This ends up being carried into adulthood, they think they have to do everything alone and never depend on anyone, not even for love. It's sadly out of fear. They end up doing this to their partners and eventually to their children if they aren't aware. Sociopathy is the symptom. Sure, sociopathy is also formed in other ways but this is one of them.

A better way to care for an infant is to make sure you're caring for their needs of course but sleep training is a big one. Never leave a baby to cry. You cannot and will not "spoil" your baby by cuddling them. They're not intentionally manipulating you into anything. Ever, it's a baby... People have tried to convince me otherwise.

If you're doing sleep training methods then do a more gentle approach where you're there with the baby comforting them as they fall asleep. They aren't going to need you forever and ever, they just need you to be there now so they can grow to be confident later. Remember, they'll eventually leave your bed, slowly gain independence, and leave the home one day.

You can do this by keeping a nightly routine. Babies love routine because they like to know what to expect next. So, dinner happens, bath time, lotion and massage, read a book, and do what you need to do to get them asleep around the same times.

Our Own Attachments:

There's so much more to this but that's the gist. Now, if we have an insecure attachment ourselves, that is how we'll treat the people in our lives. Including our children and that cycle continues.

To check out your attachment style check out this test my therapist sent me: <http://www.web-research-design.net/cgi-bin/crq/crq.pl>

Insecure attachment styles are where emotional abuse stems from as well, we'll attract partners who trigger our attachment wounds and we'll bicker.

People in secure homes who've formed secure attachments will know how to argue towards solutions, state their boundaries and they'll know when to leave a situation.

People who've formed insecure attachments often attract other people

with insecure attachments. These relationships are usually very passionate and that “roller coaster” type of love. These can become very toxic and even abusive.

Raising children in these environments often has them thinking that this is normal in love and relationships. How could they not? They don’t see anything otherwise. Parents with insecure attachment issues often don’t have the skills to create a secure attachment with their children. How could they if they can’t emotionally regulate themselves?

This leads to not being able to identify what their emotions even are, they can’t problem-solve effectively, they’ll have poor relationships, boundaries won’t be established properly, and won’t know when to walk away from toxic situations. This is what people mean by learned “Emotional Intelligence.”

Knowing our attachment styles will help anyone know why and how they interact in relationships. If it’s secure, that’s wonderful, you’re probably doing a fine job meeting your baby’s needs. If it’s insecure there are ways to get to a secure point. You’ll just have to do some self-reflection and work towards a secure attachment with yourself. If left unchecked these attachment issues will come out subconsciously while parenting.

I have personal experience with being anxious-preoccupied myself. I mentioned earlier I dealt with a lot of anxiety. I’ve learned coping strategies and have crossed the line into secure attachment with a lot of work on myself. I actively have to think twice sometimes in my parenting and have messed many times up before. Nobody is perfect. My therapist has told me that W. has developed a secure attachment to me. So, I think I’ve done a great job here as her mom.

Everything can be a work in progress.

Respectful Parenting:

You may have heard the terms “respectful” or “gentle” parenting before. This goes hand in hand with attachment theory. Children are little people who need to be treated with respect just like adults. This is how they learn respect.

Many of us grew up in households that were er-r-r... low-key emotionally abusive.

Or worse, depending. This again stems from the attachment styles people have. Let me explain some more.

We parent from the subconscious. So, how we were parented will come out if we're not paying attention. Have you ever said you wouldn't ever do what your parents did but years later you end up doing the same thing impulsively and somehow trying to justify it?

Well, you just parented from the subconscious and hopefully didn't just screw up your kid like you got screwed up. Congrats.

Okay, just kidding. I hope you get my gist.

Or have you lost your shit and apologized afterward and explained to them that you're human too, you messed up, and hope they can forgive you? But then also gave them time to process? That's the strength we're looking for.

Whoever told people that respectful parenting was "easy" is full of it. Having to re-parent ourselves and emotionally regulate ourselves so we can foster a secure attachment and emotionally intelligent kids is a huge feat. It takes everything I have in me sometimes to take a breath first.

If we aren't actively looking for parenting strategies and healing ourselves we'll end up doing to our kids what was done to us. It's said that (in 2021) 70% of Americans have a secure attachment and only 30% have an insecure attachment. So, that's enlightening to know.

If we had rough childhoods and want to raise emotionally intelligent kids, we're going to have to heal ourselves, to give our kids this gift. Luckily, it just starts with treating them like human beings instead of treating them like they're beneath us.

Respect:

I don't know about you but I was often disrespected. My parents said something and I'd better do it, or else. Even as an adult with my own child in hand. It didn't matter what it was because children were to be seen and not heard.

Have you ever cried and heard,

“I’ll give you something to cry about!”

Or

“You’re okay/fine/all right/faking it/too sensitive/acting like a baby...”

You just had to suck it up and move on even though everything still hurt?

Yeah, that’s not very respectful. And you just got taught that your feelings don’t matter, not to trust your instincts, you’re wrong for having them, and that you couldn’t go to your parents for help when you didn’t feel right or safe.

That’s the exact opposite of what I’d like for W. and I think most people want their kids to come to them when it’s necessary. A lot of kids learn to hide things from their parents, even important things.

In my home I’ve done what I can to remain respectful, I ask her if she’d like this or that. When she’s frustrated I do what I can to remain cool. When I mess up I tell her I’m sorry, what I did was inappropriate and in the future, I’ll do the appropriate response. I’m human too. I’m learning too. Most of all I remind her that when she’s having some big ol’ feelings and talk her through them,

“You are safe, Momma’s here.”

We also pinky-swear a whole lot. I ask for her opinion, we don’t force hugs, she gets to help when she’d like and I don’t scold her for making messes. We’re a team and we clean them up together. Trust me, scolding does not get the right message across. I don’t treat her as if she’s my property and I stick to my word.

All of which to show her what it means to respect someone and how to show up in a respectful relationship. I respect her and the people we come into contact with, I’m polite to strangers and she is learning to be by observing. We say “May I”, “please”, “thank you” and “sorry” when needed. Because children are following our lead, we are their guides and it’s much easier this way.

That’s it.

Allow Them to Fall:

The horror on some people’s faces when I never joined in saying,

“Whoaa...whoa don’t fall, be careful, oh noo...“

When W. looked as if she wanted to climb, would fall on her hands and knees, or just tried out something new I didn’t stand behind her. I allowed her to fall, get up, and if she cried I consoled her. When she’d fall off her scooter and I say,

“Oh you feel down again, are you okay? That must have hurt huh? Would you like to try again?”

Her answer has been,

“Yes!” every time and even tells me to try again when I mess up.

Being right behind your baby or child to catch their falls or scoop in to save the day immediately doesn’t allow them to grow. Within reason obviously. We all have to fail once in a while to learn. She’s naturally cautious and she tries out what she’s comfortable with. I may make suggestions and she gets to choose.

Baby Talk:

For whatever reason adults talk to babies in weird voices where they mispronounce words, get high-pitched, and repeat their sentences about 4 times before moving on to another weird sentence.

I find “baby talk” to be absolutely annoying. Sure, fine babies do respond to higher-pitched voices more often, but our female voices in a caring tone are likely enough.

Especially when a stranger in a grocery store wearing a mask (COVID days) was doing this weird speech to my baby who couldn’t even see their face or make out what this stranger was trying to say to her. I mean, and they just randomly stopped us on our path.

Okay, it’s fun and cute and the baby is cute but just stop. Yes, I’m guilty because it’s how I was spoken to. I also had speech problems for way too long.

Hear me out though.

Babies do like higher-pitched voices, yes. However, they’re also trying to learn the language. Why are adults speaking to them in “baby talk” when we’re supposed to teach them to speak properly?

Maybe I'm biased because I seriously spoke like a toddler until I was 12. Seriously, some people found this to be cute. Some found me very annoying. It sure did make me shy as anything. I had to teach myself to enunciate and push out more air. It still comes out sometimes when I'm relaxed or drink alcohol.

Their speech is important and clearly enunciating words for them in regular speech will help them learn the correct way conversations should be had. Speaking to them in a baby voice also isn't very respectful. If we spoke to an adult this way, or in a way that clearly is speaking down to them, they wouldn't feel very respected. I sure can't stand it when people do this to me. Yes, they still do it. I'm small and female. It's just disrespectful.

Doing our best to speak to babies, toddlers, children, and teens in a way that allows them to feel like equal contributors, speaks miles. They'll also gain the confidence they need to be able to speak in groups, in front of peers, or if they need to speak up about something important.

A Second Language:

I thought it would be pretty cool to learn the German language. My best friend A. has lived there for years now so it's fun to show her my new skills. She gifts us books and different sets of cards printed in German.

Instead of saying,

"No!"

J. and I adapted to saying,

"Nein".

Which is "no" in German.

While W. was a young baby I learned several phrases in German that I often spoke to her. The German phrases are a lot more polite and to the point, because I didn't know a lot of the language yet. This allowed me to pause a second and think about what I was saying. Instead of blurting out,

"Do you need to go to the potty? Gaaaaah I mean, Let's go use the potty!"

I think it also caught her off guard sometimes so she would typically stop what she was doing and respond.

I hope to be really good at speaking the language so she and I can speak

both English and German. It's pretty crazy that she'd say some things in German to her stuffed animals and,

"Nein, Nein, Neiiiin."

to the cats when she wanted them to stop doing something.

And by the way, we probably totally sound like Americans trying to speak Deutsch but A. calls this Deutsch-lish.

I'm learning the language slowly and so is she. We also watch some movies and cartoons in other languages just to change things up.

Consent:

Teaching children consent is a pretty big deal. Of course, we want them to know to keep their hands to themselves and if anyone touches them in a way that's not welcome, it's okay to tell them "No" and to seek help if necessary.

Once I heard a mom talk about how she doesn't allow "secrets" in her home. Because "secrets" could be used to keep a child from telling anyone if they've been harmed. Instead, she uses "surprises" because surprises are fun things we can tell our friends or family members in confidence. Even if they're embarrassing or a gift for someone.

When her daughter told her that her friend told her a secret and swore to never tell, the mom said to not betray her friend's trust, she could write down the secret and her mom could "find" it on her desk.

This "secret" ended up being a way to keep that friend from telling adults something that happened to her. The mom was able to tell the parents to get her help and the daughter didn't feel like she had betrayed her friend.

Let me also add that I ask W. if she would like an item, to play with that kid, to go somewhere, which item she prefers, and more.

I don't force hugs from myself or others either. I ask her,

"May I have a hug?" or "May I have a cracker to share as well?"

Because sometimes she says she doesn't want a hug or she would like all of her snacks to herself. I'd like to respect her space, her body, and her possessions. She's learned to stand up for herself and if she doesn't want to share then that's okay.

Give Them Choices:

Giving them choices even when they don't quite understand at a young age is priceless! You know all those power struggles like accidentally giving them the wrong color cup or something?

I found the solution!

Choices within reason.

Young ones are constantly told what to do, what to wear, and when to do things. They want some freedom and even the little things will go a long way. So, let them choose between the red shirt or the yellow one. As long as they're wearing a shirt right?

"You want the blue cup or the glass?".

(Pro tip, just purchase one set in the same colors if these things become an issue.)

Is it going to take you that long to clean the cup really quickly? Sometimes they get attached to how things go in order as well. It's normal.

This can even be applied when you want them to calm down or need to switch gears. saying something like:

"We have to use the potty right now, but afterward do you want to go to the pond first or the swing set first?"

This allows them to have some say. Of course, you don't do this with huge decisions that are out of their age-appropriate scope. But it gives them the feeling of contributing, freedom and in the long run, they'll be confident decision-makers.

Social Media:

I also would like to touch base on social media. I know I've put photos of W. in this book. However, I find that social media is a whole different area that needs to be addressed.

I'm not saying social media is the enemy but the internet is a very public place with all sorts of strangers. Also, you never know who you're really talking to and there are straight-up kids out there posting.

When we post photos online, those photos can sometimes be traced back to the original owner. And, yes I mean, your phone and the address where

the photo was taken.

This is cause for concern because I doubt people really *know* the 500+ Facebook “friends” they have on their pages. Maybe they’ve met them or an old friend from high school but predators are everywhere — Once a photo is posted, it’s online forever. This is a very easy tool for predators to use.

Not only that, but facial recognition is rampant. It’s used everywhere online and we’re basically creating a profile for our children before they even have a say in doing so. Children deserve their privacy.

Parents think it’s a great way to share and everyone else is doing it. True. But there are more secure ways to share photos of our kids. I find a direct message via text or email to be more personable. Sending to people you actually know rather than hundreds of thousands of strangers online.

We didn’t have our childhoods posted online for the world to view. We don’t know where this technology is headed and so far, it doesn’t look good being that these sites are breaching privacy laws left and right.

We have a responsibility to keep our children safe. It’s okay to share with close family members and friends. But the whole world doesn’t need to see it, and it loses its meaning. All for some likes and some dopamine hits.

I’d also like to add that even today most people’s businesses are online. Which are generally traced back to us and our accounts somehow. Or at least, they can be. Once our children join the workforce and want to start or join businesses of their own, don’t you think it may be a little inappropriate to have their childhoods posted on social media for everyone to see?

I know of someone who posts a lot of their kids and grandkids’ lives on social media. Even a photo of the youngest one on the potty. Posting about how the family was so proud and they’re all standing in the bathroom smiling. Omg, cute and a happy fun moment for them but... the whole world can see that for years to come. That’s just too far in my opinion.

That child has no say in this photo being posted and doesn’t know the consequences of something like that, and damn, kids deserve their privacy too. I mean, maybe it’s just me, but I genuinely would be embarrassed by this post if it were my childhood potty photo.

Don't Forget About Yourself:

People talk about self-care this self-care that because it's really necessary. Self-care doesn't always mean face masks and getting your nails done. Sometimes I really just need a break. I'll ask J. for an hour to read a book or schedule a massage for a time when W. does not require me. Sometimes, I need to cut off a relationship that's not making me feel good. Or an event I agreed to but don't really have time for.

Making sure you get enough sleep, fluids, and food is necessary too. I also need a clean home to be able to function. Having time to do that or getting help is important.

I drove myself to my breaking point by thinking I could balance it all. For the first 6 months to a year of her life, I think I could have used and asked for a lot more help.

Being able to have this time for yourself is important for not losing your shit. Even when I can just get up a bit earlier to get some exercise, shower, or do my hair makes the world of difference. Whatever it is you need, make sure you're putting yourself first sometimes.

Monkey See, Monkey Do:

We're social creatures so taking care of your own mental health, recognizing what triggers you, and taking responsibility for it is essential to raising quality adults. We often blow up on our kids, partners, or whoever and blame them for us being upset, mad, sad, etc.

We also need to be taking responsibility for how we behave and react in any situation. If we freak out at our kids it's entirely our fault. We weren't regulating our emotions appropriately. Taking a moment to stop and breathe, reflect, and truly apologize when it's due will show them exactly how to handle their emotions in difficult situations.

We're constantly modeling behavior whether it's positive or negative. So, making sure to take a look at ourselves is just good parenting! Yes, we're allowed to make mistakes too but owning those mistakes and doing what we need to do to make it right will show our children how to appropriately form and navigate healthy relationships.

We are also showing our children how men and women show up in the world. How relationships look and feel. We're showing them what a good partner is by modeling this behavior.

I show my daughter how to be a kind, loving, strong, capable, feminine woman. I show her what it means to be a mother, wife, sister, and daughter and how to respect myself and others. With confidence.

Little eyes are always watching and their ears are always listening.

Gentle Discipline:

These topics seem to also get a lot of grief from generations before me. I've been told that W. will never respect me if I don't force her to obey me by spanking her or giving her timeouts. Even when she was a baby, seriously.

There has got to be a better way. All of this ties into displaying emotional intelligence and creating a secure attachment to children.

Gentle Parenting often gets confused with permissive or uninvolved parenting, in which a parent doesn't display firm boundaries with the child. This isn't what gentle parenting is. Gentle parenting is more authoritative parenting which includes an equal balance of boundaries and guides the child through their experiences.

“Spanking”:

Children don't need to be beaten into submission in order to obey us. I don't want her to blindly obey me anyway. I don't want her to fear what I might do if I find out about something she messed up on or is embarrassed about.

Especially, if it's something very important for me to know. I don't want my child to feel like she needs to hide anything from me to avoid being hit or punished. Yes, I do mean spanking too.

Spanking is becoming less common for a reason. Logically speaking, the parent is hitting their child on their bum. How is this any different from their face? Their bum is still their person.

When a child is spanked the same pain receptors are fired in the brain as if they were being abused in another manner. The nervous system does not know the difference.

Take it from someone who was both spanked and hit... It's the same. I later ended up in very abusive relationships and did not know the difference. I did not know I needed to leave. I'd make excuses. We wouldn't allow our partners to hit us or scream at us. It's the same abuse, just a different relationship.

These children are experiencing trauma, just the same. Children who are spanked are also less able to concentrate in school, the trauma doesn't process healthily, and they may test lower and have learning problems as well.

They'll replay the abuse in their heads trying to process it. Being hit and loved are not the same things. Which is confusing to the mind. I think there's a need for more laws in seeing "spanking" as hitting and true abuse.

Natural Consequences:

A child will learn long-term responsibility and lessons from natural consequences. They don't need external punishment in order to "learn their lesson".

Oh no, no this is not the quick method. Respectful and gentle parenting takes a lot of time and patience to take effect. I have indeed wanted to do something to immediately alleviate the behavior but I know this won't work long-term. Respectful parenting takes a lot of patience, courage, and faith. It's by no means, the easy passive method.

Hate me all you want but I honestly think hurting kids for immediate obedience says a lot more about the parent losing control and wanting an "easy" method. Rather than taking the emotional patience, it takes to actually discipline.

Remember this, discipline means *to teach*.

Punishment isn't the same as discipline, it's cruel.

Let me give you an example,

A child hit their sibling, that child starts crying and the parent gets involved. They make sure the child who was hurt is okay, and give them cuddles. The

child who hit the other gets told that they hurt their sibling by hitting them. If that child was hit instead it would hurt them just as badly. The child knows this, the parent asks why they hit the other child, and maybe they have an explanation of why they wanted the toy they had.

The parent can now explain that they're feeling envy and tell them a proper way of dealing with envy. That child is offered an explanation for why their sibling no longer wants to play with them. They can apologize or try to make it right. The other sibling can choose to accept or not. There's the natural consequence.

Now, say the child hits the child and the parent immediately goes into a rage at that child yelling at them telling them not to hit their sibling and grabbing them forcefully, spanking them, and forcing them to stay in their room, and leaving them there for some time. Then they attend to the other child's wounds. When the child's time is up in their room they're forced to say they're sorry and they resume playing, just to most likely have it all happen over again. That is external punishment.

In the first scenario, the parent attends to the injured sibling, not giving the other child the attention they were seeking, the child gets to see how hurt the child is feeling from the attack, the parent asks why they hit their sibling, and the child gets to explain, the parent talks them through their emotion and how to properly deal with it. Then explains that the sibling doesn't have to accept their apology until they're ready and may need some time to feel safe playing with them again. This is long-term, they were taught personal responsibility and empathy.

In the second scenario, the parent gives the child the attention he's seeking, responds with low emotional intelligence by yelling, strikes the child which fires the same pain receptors in the brain as any other type of abuse, and forces them into their room to think about what they've done.

Except, while they're in there they're angry thinking, they'll get away with it next time, it's the other sibling's fault for being a "cry-baby". Then they go into shame, thinking they're bad, unlovable, and isolated from the group.

Once they're let out they're forced to apologize. They do it because they want to play again. Which isn't a real apology. All of this was short-term

and the child didn't learn any long-term problem-solving skills or why their having and emotional response in the first place. This creates a manipulative child who will try to get out of getting in trouble next time.

Just remember, everything takes repetition to master. They may not get it the first time or the tenth. Which is incredibly frustrating but eventually, they'll learn right from wrong.

Aw, and children also need us parents to remain calm in times of stress. No matter how silly it may seem to us. They're looking to us for guidance in these times. If we're freaking out and reacting emotionally, then that's what they're learning. If we're calm in times of distress, they feel safe and will be able to regulate their emotions more quickly.

All of this carries into adulthood.

Respect your Elders:

I absolutely cannot stand this. I will not blindly obey anyone and I don't expect my child to. Nope, not even her elders. I'm not saying it's okay to blatantly disregard the generations before us. Sometimes the older generations are demanding respect or obedience while just flat-out wrong and/or being disrespectful to me.

Even at a young age, I give W. the chance to explain herself. Hey, sometimes she makes a valid point as to why she wants something. Sometimes I'm left wondering why I even said "no" in the first place. Maybe I said so on impulse and didn't even hear her.

I don't see her as someone who is beneath me or invalid just because she's younger than me. She's taught me many things I wouldn't have known without her.

I never want her to blindly obey me because she'll be doing so out of fear at that point. I'd rather that we have a mutually respectful relationship where we both feel safe to express how we feel, our needs and desires, hear each other, and truly care. We're both allowed to say "No". Which is a complete sentence.

That's not to say I don't set clear boundaries and limitations. I am the parent and the guide after all. I do have to keep her safe. I explain that.

And the many,
“But why?!”
I get it, I calmly explain and that is it.

Whisper:

I’m not sure if my mom meant to teach me this long term but it stuck. When I was young and would act up in public, my mom would get down on my level and whisper what she wanted me to do. This was also to spare us from making a scene.

Whispering is great because doing so literally changes tone, and calms the environment and nervous system. For you and the child. Whispering also forces the child to use their listening ears. And they’ll naturally whisper back. (Seriously, whisper to anyone and they’ll whisper back.) This lets the message get across more easily.

Pause, take a breath, and reflect.

This is emotional intelligence. Thanks for coming to my TED talk. ;)

How to Not Lose Your Cool Pause & Breathe

1. Children aren't giving you a hard time,
they're having a hard time.
2. Misbehavior is your child's way of telling you
"I need help."
3. This is NOT an emergency. This too shall PASS.
4. Am I being kind & respectful?
5. Is this the parent I want to be?
6. Remember, I am their "inner voice".
7. Seek first to understand. Get down on their
level.
8. Validate their emotions.
9. Take a breath, and apologize if need be.
10. Give them solutions or alternatives & "I love
you."
11. Reset.



Shannon Abbs

For When You Need a Moment to Breathe

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: ATTACHMENT & CONSCIOUS PARENTING

Chapter Nineteen: Montessori & The Terrific Twos!

While searching around for ways to create a minimalist baby-friendly home I was at a loss about all the baby gear, toys, and everything in between. I was frightened that I'd be drowning in toys that would break and never get played with. I hated the idea of buying plastic everything all the time and I wanted something that just looked clean, natural, and elegant.

I went to one of the minimalist groups I was on at the time and asked if anyone knew how to solve this problem.

"Why is baby furniture so freaking ugly...? There are so many colors and patterns. Isn't there some basic wooden toys or something...I want these things to be educational and not overwhelming or mindless play?"

Or...something along those lines.

Seriously though, why is baby stuff so ugly? I couldn't deal with all the crazy patterns and mismatched things. I had a small space and all of that would have just been more cluttered.

I had in my head some toys I played with at preschool that were made of all wood. Someone commented on my post mentioning how Montessori might be right for me. I clicked on the link and absolutely fell in love.

What is Montessori?

Montessori isn't about toys and stuff. Maria Montessori was an Italian physician. She developed a child-led and child-focused education system that's changed how we view the child's ability to learn all over the globe.

She developed this education system after examining children who were in a mental hospital. These children were considered to be a lost cause in terms of education. They were so bored they were playing with crumbs on a table. They didn't have any toys or any other stimulation because they were deemed a lost cause then.

Maria ended up finding ways to stimulate their brains by giving them simple tasks and eventually developed this whole schooling system that focused on connections made in the brain by stimuli that make them want to learn and grow further. She opened her first school in 1906. There's a whole lot more history here, but I can't write you another book within this book. Let me just explain the gist of things.

Maria figured out that by giving children the tools they need, they will learn on their own because children do want to learn. If you try to force a child to learn something, they're going to be resistant and not learn as much as they could if they wanted to on their own.

Think about it, as an adult, when you want to learn something you're interested in you start with the basics and it becomes more of a hobby or fun as you keep going. When you're told to learn something you don't have much of an interest in you have to force yourself to do it.

Learning is much easier when you want to learn, things just flow better. Maria caught on to this. She also caught on to the fact that children are much more capable of doing things than we give them credit for. I can attest to this because I've tried it.

The great thing about Montessori is that a child can go to a school and be a part of a classroom or you can do this in a homeschooling environment. Since it's child-led, the child picks what they'd like to work on. Remember, "Play is the work of a child." - Maria Montessori.

In a school environment, the learning materials are basic, usually made of

wood or other natural materials. These make them durable and last for years. They all serve some type of cognitive purpose. Such as when a young baby has a ball, the ball goes into the hole, where did the ball go? It's behind the door. The baby just learned something called "object permanence". Object permanence is the realization that when the ball goes in the hole, it doesn't disappear, it's just behind the door. This is life-long brain development.

A classroom usually has a mixed-age group with one or several teachers in the class depending on size, there are no desks children sit at for hours a day and they're free to do as they choose.

Some people may think it's absurd to have kids "running wild" but it makes more sense when you realize how much children like to move, we're not supposed to be sitting at desks all day.

Older kids can teach younger kids how things work, and the younger kids can bring new perspectives to the older kids. In our regular world, like in the home, this is how learning works anyway. Each child, however, is shown at least once how each material works.

The day may be structured a bit as well. The children do have circle time in the morning, they sing songs, they have outdoor play and they have meal times. It's just less rigid than, sitting down, learning this, keeping up with the class, and doing as you're told kind of schooling.

Montessori also ties into minimalism even though there can be a lot of materials, but the items are usually plain, made of wood, there are primary colors used, and nothing is too "loud", and this is actually to serve the child's sensory receptors to not be too overwhelming.

The materials focus on brain development but are also fun for the baby or child to play with. They all serve a specific purpose that the teachers are trained to know.

The child is also given real practical life objects and is allowed to take care of their own needs. Such as getting dressed, and brushing their teeth. They'll be invited to learn how to cut foods or prepare meals as a part of the family or group.

Set up:

As I stated before the materials are usually made out of real, natural materials. Children are given real objects instead of pretend ones. They drink out of glasses with no lids, they'll have real fresh cut flowers, they use a lot of wooden objects, and real musical instruments and everything will serve a simple purpose.

There aren't any toys that have a lot of functions all over them, nothing is battery-powered to play random songs and flashing lights. All of these objects are super overstimulating, serve too many purposes, and are distracting to the child. The colors and patterns on baby toys may be a little abstract but this is to help with brain development and eyesight.

Instead, there will be shelves, and in each area of the room will be a different "sensitive area". For simplicity's sake, let me explain how I set up our home and W.'s toy shelf.

A sensitive area is an area of a subject, such as music, science, reading, writing, art, and so on. W. had a shelf with 8 different cubbies. Each cubby has a different sensitive area.

At 2.7 she had cars and a ramp on one, science. She had some books and flashcards, reading. A notebook, writing and art. There's a cubby with musical instruments, music. And a shape sorter, math. She had been really into building and using tools so she had several types of blocks on the shelves and she also loved puzzles.

Once she's mastered an item and learned a new skill, about every two weeks I observe and figure out what she's left on the shelves. Maybe she hadn't been using her musical instruments much so I'd remove those and put something else out.

That way all of her toys weren't out all at once and I could keep things refreshed. This allowed her to learn a different skill with a different object and she didn't get bored of all of her toys at once. There's less clean-up as well.

Each of the materials are undone and on either a basket or a wooden tray. Having the toys undone peaks the child's interest more and they'd like to

solve it. Because who wants to do a project that's already done? The wooden tray or basket allows materials to stay neatly in their place and the child has to pull the tray or basket down to get it off the shelf.

They're also taught to put items back on the tray and back on the shelf before choosing another item. Which is a nice way of teaching personal responsibility.

They're allowed to play with an item as much or as little as they'd like. There are no time limits. Everyone gets to learn at their own pace. Of course, if the child is severely behind cognitively then that's cause for concern.

However, W. still played with some of her baby toys I thought she would have outgrown. No big deal. One of her favorites was an Ikea wooden play gym. I got it from someone on Craigslist. The pieces are removable and she liked to move them around and shake them. It had been in the closet for a year but each time she saw it she asked for it so I let her and it kept her busy. Kind of like a puzzle. She also liked to sit on top of it.

Sensitive Periods:

There are many periods in a baby and child's life in which they'll hit certain milestones. Sensitive periods are alike but more like when their brain is making the connections on let's say, how pants work.

We tend to think this period is around potty training age, so 2-4 years of age. It's around 12-18 months if you're following Montessori. I noticed this when W. would grab her pants and attempt to put them on. I'd try to aid her in doing so.

These sensitive periods are very important because if you notice, and can guide the child through the process, their brain will make the connections and they'll have it for life. You may have to do this several times of course.

If a parent or teacher misses this sensitive period then it's pretty much gone until later in life and needs to be re-taught. I believe I may have not aided her enough in the "how clothing works" sensitive period because we learned it all over again around 4 years old. Which is fine, you're not going to nail absolutely everything.

There are subtle cues as to when the child is in the sensitive period that can

go amiss if we're not paying close attention. A Montessori school teacher is trained to notice these cues and they'll aid the child. There are resources out there to help you know when the periods happen, but with a keen eye, you may be able to pick up on them when they're happening.

Why Montessori Rocks!

All of Montessori rocks, but I'd like to point out what I found specifically really cool about implementing this education into our home and my parenting. With the basics down you can just go with it. It's not a rigid system and is very baby or child-led. This gives you more time on your hands.

Practical Life:

Part of the sensitive areas is practical life tasks. Such as brushing teeth, going potty, brushing hair, getting dressed, preparing food, etc. Parents often just do these tasks for the child to hurry them along or they don't believe they can do them on their own.

Aside from the gorgeous display of toys, the minimalist looks, and aiding her development, I think practical life skills are also up there on the list of my favorites about Montessori.

I love it because you just hand them the materials which are child-sized but real, put everything at their height or get on their level, show them how to do it and they're all about it! Then brushing their teeth just becomes a normal part of life. W. was able to grab her toothbrush and paste and tell me she'd like to brush her teeth. I helped with the water because she couldn't reach it yet. Simple.

Anything to do with practical life skills, you just hand them the materials, show them how it's done, and there you go. Of course, some things are age-appropriate, she mastered how to take her jacket off and hang it up when she was 2.5. We cook meals together, she makes her sandwiches, helps with the gardening and so much more.

In her room, we made a "baby wardrobe" which is an old shelf that we

screwed a wooden rod into, got some wooden hangers, and some baskets on the bottom for pants and socks. This was also a game-changer in helping her get ready. Little ones want to be involved, this wardrobe looks stylish and she can choose her items.

Anything she can reach in our home she is allowed to touch also. She has her own drawer in the kitchen as well.

When she was a baby we created a “yes space”. In which she had her own items, a mirror to view herself in and it was the spot we knew she’d be. This cuts down a lot on having to grab things out of their hands. She never liked being stuck in a playpen either. She’d just scream so, I created a space for her that was all her own and she was able to roam around as she pleased while I got things done. I had doors and gates up where it wouldn’t be safe for her but this was very effective.

Montessori Book:

Any book that was written by Simone Davies. She has a series of Montessori books by different ages you can use to set up the home with great photos and everything is neatly organized. She goes into detail on the how’s, why’s, and age by age. I was reading *“The Montessori Toddler”* by Simone Davies while writing this book.

Home Schooling:

I need to add that homeschooling in general is an extension of attachment parenting, or parenting in general. People homeschool for many reasons. For me, I wanted to take control over what my child was learning, and while she was very young I didn’t feel right leaving her with near strangers all day. Plus, we were nursing and I couldn’t pump.

Homeschooling also has many benefits for the child and the whole family. It’s said that pre-teen girls are usually a lot more confident self-esteem-wise and in their abilities when they’re home-schooled. Kids usually have more of a drive to learn and are excited to try new things and are more confident in social environments when talking with different age groups. Just to name a few.

Families can curate homeschooling to their needs and their preferences. The time it takes to school is usually less. Which gives them more opportunities to explore other avenues in life.

I know it's not for everyone. Some people have other obligations or are fine with the public or private education systems. Which is great. I'm just all for homeschooling when it works for the family!

Unschooling:

Yeah, people hear “unschooling” and they look at me like I’m out of my tree. Unschooling isn’t what it sounds like. Okay, kind of but unschooled kids aren’t just running around without an education.

Unschooling kind of goes along with Montessori in the sense that unschooling is child-led. Some people can’t grasp their heads around letting the child lead but hear me out.

Children and adults are naturally curious. We like to learn new subjects when they interest us as I said before. Unschooling allows the child to explore his or her interests. Learning becomes fun and when we’re having fun with a new endeavor we retain the information easily.

Unschooling doesn’t mean they don’t skip the hard stuff like math or reading and writing just because they don’t want to. We usually have to read something to learn, right? So, parents get creative with this.

W. had been really into dinosaurs. To turn the dinos into a learning experience, J. purchased her some small dinosaur figures in a pack with all of them. She liked to play with them and make them “rawr” of course.

To teach her a bit about dinos, we watched a movie about people who find their bones while holding our favorite figures. We then drew on paper the different dinos and their names so we could learn which is which. Next, I took some photos of the dinos and we played a matching game. I can speak their proper name and she would find the figure that matches the card.

When she gets older in order to teach her to read and write, we could always find books on the dinos. We can go to a museum and make a road trip out of the day. We can write a letter to a friend or family member about what she’s learned. I can teach her how to write a proper letter, make an envelope, and

stuff it, then we can weigh it and decide how many stamps it needs. Then we'll take a walk to the post office, enjoy the outdoors, maybe even run there and see how long it takes vs walking or driving.

By doing all of that, she will have learned about the dinos, taken a field trip, read, written a letter, arts and crafts, folding techniques, how and why to weigh, some math with money and counting stamps, and some physical education including beating our time. We can cover all the subjects in a school day while making it fun and using practical life skills she'll need and never forget. This is what homeschoolers call "Unit studies."

Keep in mind that homeschooling isn't always 8 hours a day. A lot of homeschooling parents only focus part of the day doing school work. For instance, a 5-year-old may only have a lesson or independent study for maybe 25 minutes.

I love unschooling... This also will teach her that I respect who she is as a person, that I respect her ideas, and that we can do what she wants for a change. I'm not forcing her to learn something that isn't in her best interest and she'll develop critical thinking skills.

Let me leave you with a quick book to read on unschooling called:

Unschooling Rules By; Clark Alrdich I loved the way he set each chapter up to flow with the next. It's short and to the point. I originally was attempting to write this book how he did but I just have so much to say.

Baby-led Weaning:

When a baby is around 6 months old you can slowly start introducing foods to their palette. I waited until W. could sit up all the way on her own. Parents usually do this by giving them pureed baby foods. I was all for making my own baby foods and storing them in the fridge. Why buy it when I could make it? I usually made everything from scratch anyway.

I got to blending! This ended up being time-consuming and I felt like I was wasting more than she was eating. There had to be a better way, man. Of course, I started looking into other options or how to do this properly. I stumbled upon baby-led weaning.

Totally hooked.

Basically, you just give the baby soft foods like noodles, different fruits, and maybe some cooked veggies. Typically you do one food at a time or maybe two. Don't do too many, this gets confusing. They pick up what looks appealing and try it out.

This way they get to choose whether or not they want to eat and you're not just shoving food down their throats. I sure as hell don't think that's comfortable. They also get to explore the real textures of the foods as well and this is more fun but also great for brain stimulation!

They're not going to eat a whole bunch of it and may even throw it on the floor but this gives them control and the confidence to explore foods on their own. I found it to be a great time-saver, she had a lot of fun and we didn't have the power struggle.

I also learned that having her up in a highchair resulted in her throwing her food on the floor because the "splat" was fun. Setting her down lower on the floor cured this issue for us. Montessori schools have furniture that's all child-height. A small table and chair would be great even as a baby.

Of course, they need to be sitting up really well. They're allowed to get in and out of the chair by themselves as well. This lets them be more in control. Babies and toddlers don't like being confined against their will. Nobody does. Eventually, we got a little table and chair set for her and it's been well worth the investment. It's a place of her own.

Skip The Sippy Cup:

Another great idea is giving the baby an actual glass cup full of their water. Yes, glass with no lid. You can get some thicker shot glasses for this but we just used a plain shot glass. W. loved this.

Yes, they're going to throw the water on the floor a few times. It's just water, it cleans up easily. And the glass is only for the kitchen.

Show the baby how to use the glass, put it in their hands with a bit of water, help them tip it back a bit then set it back on the table. The glass always goes back on the table. Personal responsibility, remember?

You'll have to do this a few times and if they're frustrated or seem done then don't force it. Honestly, this didn't take long to teach her. By the time

W. was 8 months old, she was using her glass all by herself. We even *cheers* our glasses together and still do often.

I've shockingly gotten a lot of grief for not giving her a sippy cup. I don't know why this is such a big deal to some but I think they're just worried about spills. I chose not to use the sippy cup because it was not necessary.

They were invented in the late 80s so haven't been used forever. (Montessori seems to keep these older habits around because they work). A sippy cup teaches the baby to tip the cup all the way back because it has a lid so no spills. The "sippy" part is bad for their teeth. I also didn't want more dishes.

Using a glass teaches them to use a glass without a lid or straw, the glass stays in the kitchen, and spills hardly happen but she cleaned them herself because she also had her own cleaning supplies and cloth napkins (even at 8 months old), I don't find random sippy cups around the house, fewer dishes to clean and it's freaking cool!

Gentle Discipline:

Montessori schools and homes focus on natural consequences. I gave some examples in the last chapter. Maria knew that children didn't need external punishment to learn from their mistakes. The natural consequences are enough to inflict change.

The children also get taught how to respect each other, how to handle conflict, and that it's okay to make mistakes. Montessori teachers seek to teach emotional intelligence and personal responsibility. This is huge when dealing with meltdowns and it serves long-term mental health the most! Eventually, they're going to grow into adults. So remember, we're parenting (or guiding) adults, not children.

Community:

In classrooms the children are of mixed ages, they help one another and at meal times they often set the table like an actual place setting with plates, glasses, forks, spoons, knives, napkins, and even flowers. Yes, at three years old children are doing this. W. set the table for both of us before dinner.

They also are involved in preparing meals and serving themselves. This

again teaches them valuable skills and gives them a chance to be involved in decision-making, and the power struggles are gone. I just freaking love Montessori.

Toilet Learning:

In most Montessori schools they'll focus on toilet learning at the appropriate sensitive period. By 18 months a toddler will be going on the potty. If they miss this period it becomes much more of a struggle. The parent provides underwear and several pairs of pants. The toddler is shown the steps and just like we've done at home. They'll be going on the toilet.

If they wet themselves, they're instructed on how to get cleaned up and a change of clothes. There are no accidents in this process. The teacher just helps them and shows them how to do this themselves. If you scold a child in this process shame sets in and the process will be much more difficult. There are no time limits just like everything else they're learning. Everyone learns in their own time.

These are just the basics of Montessori. I hope you can take this information with you and maybe use some of these strategies. I fell in love from the start and never looked back. I'd even like to become a teacher one day. For now, we're just doing everything at home. I have found we have way fewer power struggles and more time to learn and be creative together. Everything runs more smoothly.



Drinking water from a shot glass 7 months old

CHAPTER NINETEEN: MONTESSORI & THE TERRIFIC TWOS!



She liked to dig in the garbage at 10 months old. Her very own garbage pile.



Her old “shelves” on her first birthday.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: MONTESSORI & THE TERRIFIC TWOS!



Because Belly Buttons Rule - 1.9 years



She Loved Making Mommy's Coffee 1.7 years old.

The Terrific Twos!

I really would just like to shed some light on the twos! Two-year-olds are awesome and I feel like they get such a bad rap! They get called terrible, and hard to deal with and people post photos of their tantrums.

I have enjoyed every age thus far, from newborn and beyond I don't think there was any particularly difficult age. The two's included. That's why I'm calling them terrific!

I have a confession to make though. I didn't come up with the term "terrific twos" all on my own. I read a wonderful healing book called "Respectful Parenting: From Birth Through the Terrific Twos" By Joanna Baume, Ph.D. Loved it. This book really helped me understand and heal my own childhood trauma. We're allowed to re-parent ourselves, you know.

I also read a book that transformed my life called "Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children

Who Thrive” by Daniel J. Siegel MD Mary Hartzell. This book teaches you how to re-parent yourself and what to do when you mess up.

Two-Year-Olds Are:

Misunderstood, awesome, fun, love-able, happy, impulsive, exciting, adventurous little human creatures!

They don’t have a mean bone in their body. They just act on impulse. If they want something they go after it. Nothing holds them back and I love it! Sure, we have our scream at mom all day, every day, times. Sure, I also tell her that I’m feeling pretty crabby too.

They’re also super forgiving. If we mess up as parents and apologize appropriately, they don’t hold it against us. If our hair is a mess and the home is crazy, they’re cool with it. They just want snacks, love, adventure and give the best hugs and kisses ever. Sometimes they are even so excited for a kiss that you end up with a face full of teeth!

In all seriousness though, I loved the twos. Now that W. is past 3 years old. I wonder where my little baby went. She’s just growing up every second and it’s crazy how fast it all happened.

Time flies by because we’re having fun. Having a two-year-old around rocks! We got to do kid things, I could jump around with her and act like a monkey, and she taught me ways to explore that I never thought of before. She’s so creative!

Two-year-olds rock because they just get right back up and I aspire to be carefree some days too. They pretty much say yes to anything fun and they’re always honest. When I’m feeling like saying “No”, sometimes I just decide, the answer can totally be “Yes!” Let’s do it!

They are jam-packed full of energy and always down for an adventure. I absolutely love the twos! With these parenting practices in mind, I feel like everything has run much more smoothly. We don’t have power struggles, we pinky-swear our promises and always kiss the thumb. We make messes and decide as a team to clean them up. This is honestly just so much fun.



Baby/Toddler Wardrobe! I was so excited about this!

CHAPTER NINETEEN: MONTESSORI & THE TERRIFIC TWOS!



That Time I Found My Keys, Washed. I'm still laughing



On her balance bike Summer 2021 2 years old



Singing “All-Done” on the big chair- almost 3.

Chapter 21: My Experience With Postpartum Depression & How I Moved Forward

This is the chapter I wrote, deleted, and re-wrote several times. I wasn't really sure if I wanted to solidify it in writing as part of me. I also had to re-live the trauma in order to tell you how my life went in those moments. I feel like it's important to share our experiences with each other as women and mothers to possibly help each other.

So, Here Goes:

My postpartum depression was multifaceted. I already dealt with anxiety and mental health issues beforehand so I was already at risk of developing this condition. As are you if you're in the same mental health boat as I was.

I experienced pretty much all the symptoms I listed in Chapter 15. Although, I resisted the fact that I could even go through depression. I felt that it wasn't for me. That was supposed to be for other women with worse symptoms and harder lives.

But sure enough, I was experiencing it.

Below is a list of my symptoms. In my own words.

A List Of My Symptoms:

- Guilt
- Anger
- Felt duped
- Resented J.
- Panic Attacks
- Hopelessness
- Perfectionism
- Loss of interest
- Felt like a failure
- “I’m a bad mom!”
- Excessively crying
- Obsessive thinking
- Out-of-body feeling
- Convinced she hated me
- Lonely yet isolated myself
- I didn’t want to look at her
- Convinced I was being judged
- Fear that I would hurt my baby
- Recurrent thoughts of death and suicide

Timeline of Events:

Pregnancy:

I believe my symptoms started during the pregnancy. Which is a possibility for any pregnant woman. I felt a lot of anger because J. wasn’t as excited about this as I was. Although I felt alone, I shrugged that off as pregnancy hormones.

When I was nearing the due estimate, I started getting cold feet. I told the midwife that I was feeling scared and she assured me that I wasn’t going to end up in a cesarean.

I was more afraid of being a “bad” mom or that I wouldn’t be able to handle the birth. I also started having intrusive thoughts that someone was going

to stab me in public. Specifically, my stomach.

Yeah, intense! But that's where my depression started.

The Birth:

Well, I told you what happened.

I immediately thought I fucked up and could not let myself live it down. I felt incredibly stupid and guilty about not getting back in that pool. I was also convinced it was my fault for pushing too early causing me to tear and lose more blood. I think the hardest part about that is for years, people just kept dismissing me saying,

“Things happen, it’s not that big of a deal.”

It’s true things do happen that are out of our control but I think I’m still convinced it was my fault. I no longer beat myself up about it but I sure did then.

The Baby Blues:

I think I experienced the baby blues because my depression came full force months later. Those first few days I was upset about the birth, how everyone took it upon themselves to share without consulting me, I didn’t sleep much and I just started crying hard a few days after.

The event kept playing in my head over and over.

“I should have done x,y, and z... instead. What if?”

I also felt like all I was good for was milk because I couldn’t even really get up off the couch and this was very different than the life I had lived prior. So many emotions hit me at once.

When I received the placenta capsules I felt a lot better.

I Felt I Looked Terrible:

I didn’t save a lot of photos, unfortunately. I looked in the mirror one day and looked so old that I Google’d it. With each pregnancy, our genes change and actually age us!

That, and I was so anemic and had lost a lot of muscle mass from not working out every day. I was pale, frail, couldn’t smile, tired, my hair was

falling out in full clumps, and just looked and felt like crap. My anxiety was also just through the roof and it showed.

The Newborn Stage:

I knew the newborn stage was supposed to be pretty difficult. There are so many “How to Survive the Newborn Stage!” articles floating around the web. I allowed myself to take it easy and just focused on healing and taking care of her “On Demand” as they call it.

I surprisingly thought this was the easiest part, especially when she was in her sleepy little newborn slumber in the first weeks. I remember thinking how great I had adjusted and how I was being a much better mom than I thought I could ever be!

J. went back to work and his pool leagues on the weekends 2 weeks after the birth. Which left W. and I alone. I felt like it was too soon and I didn’t know if I was capable of being alone with her but had to carry on anyway. We hardly saw him but I did my best to remain grateful that I was able to be a stay-at-home mother.



W. around 8 weeks old

Slowly Losing My Mind:

Around the end of the newborn stage, I started really losing it. J. wasn't home much, and genuinely seemed disinterested in us. I didn't have much adult interaction. I was doing my best to pretend like I was fine.

I felt judged, I felt stupid, and I beat myself up often. I cried while holding

my baby convinced I completely ruined her life. And there are no “re-dos”.

Also, I kept feeling bad because “Wasn’t I supposed to be happier than this?” One moment I was playing with my baby enjoying the little things and the next I was sobbing. I didn’t understand why I was so upset because this was what I had wanted for so long.

Intrusive Thoughts:

The truth is, I was very much not okay. I mentioned thinking someone might stab me during the pregnancy, right? Well, the intrusive thoughts never stopped. The birth events played in my head over and over again.

Later, I would have vivid images, thoughts, and dreams of me hurting my baby on purpose. And I mean it felt real and played in my mind over and over.

I’d run by the staircase quickly out of fear that I might drop her or fall down with her in my arms. My brain would often show me stabbing her so I hid the knives from myself. I kept the windows shut and wouldn’t go near them. I straight up thought I was going to chuck my baby out the window!

Yeah, That’s not good.

So, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:

I was convinced I had OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). This can also happen to postpartum women because OCD can be a heightened anxiety response. So, keep that in mind because what I just described is what it can look like.

Basically, a person will have intrusive thoughts, involuntarily. Most of us would just think “That was weird” and move on. But the O.C.D mind will obsess about it, most likely do a compulsion (like flicking a light switch three times) and then “check” if everything is okay, a lot. That compulsion later becomes their go-to thought-killer because the person feels “safe”. Even though nothing was even wrong. It becomes a disorder when interfering with normal everyday life.

In me that looked like going down the wrong streets to avoid being stabbed... by nobody, hiding the knives, staying clear of staircases, and

keeping the windows shut. I also would check to make sure W. was breathing, alive, or un-stabbed often.

It was weird and I did feel crazy, but those things really did happen.

I was never formally diagnosed with OCD because I wasn't so heavy on the compulsions, mostly intrusive thoughts and obsessions. I was originally diagnosed with GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) which, is true.

Much later I realized I've been living with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) my whole life. This explains the sensory issues and a lot more. There is some overlap between symptoms as people with ADHD can also have symptoms that are alike OCD.

Just food for thought. Many people don't mention these conditions happening or being heightened with postpartum women but they still can occur or manifest into worse symptoms.

My Own Expectations:

I honestly expected myself to do so much more than I was capable of. Again, you need the baby to understand how this is going to go.

Somehow I had it in my head that I was just supposed to know exactly what she needed each and every time. I thought we were "in sync" and if I didn't know my mind would tell me,

"You're such a horrible mother! Your baby is suffering! Do something!
You're terrible at everything!"

Part of this is biological, yes you do have to keep the baby alive, but I held myself to much higher standards than I did other women. They were allowed to "mess up" or "fail" but I wouldn't accept that from myself.

If someone complimented me I'd thank them kindly but I wouldn't believe them. I'd think, "Shouldn't everyone know this?". Because in my mind, there were 100 things I wasn't doing right. Yeah, I couldn't even take a compliment and then judged people when they gave them to me.

I fully expected myself to be the "perfect" mother I pictured in my head. She does all the housework, knows exactly what the baby needs, takes care of it, her baby doesn't cry, cooks, cleans, looks good, and smiles the entire time while making her own income of course. And people notice and appreciate

her!

Although I was doing most of those things, I still didn't think it was enough. That level of achievement was probably impossible. I'm kind of sad looking back on how harsh I was on myself.

Lack Of Support:

Despite being told others wanted to babysit or help out, it never happened. For one, I was nursing and nobody in my circle had done that. They simply didn't understand anything about nursing or care.

In fact, pretty much everything in this book nobody around me understood. I was told that I was wrong and never listened to. Instead, they just saw me as stubborn and difficult and rolled their eyes at me never attempting to ask questions or understand my reasoning behind my methods.

When we would go to family's homes, I expected them to interact with her and test run having her for longer periods. But it just seemed like they weren't interested.

So, I just didn't trust anyone with my baby.

Intimacy Issues:

I don't want this to sound like a complete bitch-fest. But it's going to...

I'd love to say we were blissfully in love and everything worked out. In fact, I tried to hang on to that belief for a delusional long amount of time.

Truth is, J. checked out of the relationship the moment I told him I was pregnant. Complete discard phase. Yeah, he started sleeping on the couch and gave me multiple excuses as to why. This was sudden, unlike us, and devastated me.

In the beginning, I kept trying to tell myself it was the new work hours, his back really did hurt, and that it was my hormones making me sad and "crazy".

Sex was off the table for him after I told him I was pregnant.

I'd try to discuss it with him or make a move and he'd tell me there was nothing wrong. That he wasn't afraid of hurting the baby and to stop making a big deal out of nothing. I did what I could to not take it personally but I

mean, the only thing that changed was that I was home more often, gaining weight and pregnant.

Once she was born nothing changed. I felt unattractive and unwanted. I started thinking it was my fault.

We were intimate 3 times in 2 years because I cried about it. Yeah, pity sex. I was heartbroken and genuinely confused. I thought maybe he'd come around and maybe he was just scared.

Now that you know entirely too much about my sex life, let's move on.

Parenting Differences:

While I was pregnant I attempted to talk about how we would parent. This is incredibly important because parents need to be a team to hold the household together.

J. didn't want to discuss anything with me. He'd tell me he didn't need to learn because he had watched his cousins grow up. Which was at least 25 years prior. So, severely outdated. Or he would just nod in agreement so I thought we were on the same page.

He refused to go to the Lamaze class.

So, she straight up arranged for the teacher to go to our apartment. He got some good pointers that helped during the labor (like counter pressure on my hips) and I was grateful he participated.

Once W. was born he disagreed more than I thought he would. I do have to give him credit as he did help out a lot during the first two weeks.

After J. changed a diaper Me Father even said,
“Man, you really got this guy trained!”.

Oh. My. Goodness. You can roll your eyes double for that if you would for me, please. I didn't train anything, men need to parent too.

The truth came out. He wasn't home much because, well, he didn't want to be. He could have switched his schedule to the day shift but refused to. So, he'd be sleeping all day. And he didn't need to do the pool leagues.

When I would ask for help with W. he'd throw his arms up and yell at me to quit being lazy and do it myself. Because nursing, looks like I'm doing nothing apparently. He also believed that each and every time W. cried, she

needed to be put in her crib, alone to “cry it out”. Without trying to figure out why first.

I could not do that to my baby.

The midwife even had a chat with him about it, he nodded, but when we got home he berated me.

I carried on and ended up just doing most of the baby necessities myself because he'd hand her back and tell me he couldn't do anything with her. I'd just baby-wear and figure it out. He claimed he couldn't do anything for her until she was about 4 years old. I don't know why he believed that, but he did.

As time passed, I grew resentful. I was doing the mental work as well. Timing the day out, researching what needs to be done, appointments, milestones, sleep techniques, etc. I'd try to discuss methods or why we couldn't just get in the car because she needed to eat first. We'd end up in huge arguments. He'd disagree about it and could never back up his statements.

I truly didn't understand why someone would actively try to conceive and then not want to take care of the baby. I chucked it up to fear and did what I could to get him involved.

I felt betrayed, angry, and alone.

So, What Did I do About It:

Enough gripping, I had to do something. I promised myself I'd be the healthiest version of myself for my baby. I meant it.

Reaching Out:

The midwifery had a text line for women postpartum to use if they had questions or urgent needs. They'd check in once a week to ask how I was doing. They meant,

“Okay, but how are you **really** doing?”

One night around 3 a.m. I was nursing W. back to sleep in the living room.

Tears streaming down my face, staring off for the hour she nursed. Thoughts spinning in my mind. I decided to use the text line.

I told the woman that I could not stop crying and that I needed to figure out how to give W. to J. for good. I was absolutely convinced that I was going to hurt my baby and I was such a terrible mother. I needed to keep her safe from me. Even though I love her more than anything.

She asked where W. was and if I was able to care for her at all. I told her I just nursed her and she fell asleep in my arms. She asked if I had anyone to help. I didn't and I couldn't tell J. because he would have just yelled at me. I then told her what was going on in my mind and I needed to give up custody for real.

Alarming? Yes.

She assured me that I was most likely experiencing postpartum anxiety and/or depression. These things do happen and I didn't need to give my baby up. I clearly loved her, was taking care of her, and wasn't a terrible mother. I just needed some sleep and a professional to speak to. She gave me the number for a therapist who specialized in postpartum mental health and reconnecting families.

Therapy:

I had my first therapy appointment when W. was around 3 months old. Therapy changed everything for me.

I know people often say “therapy doesn’t work for me” and maybe it doesn’t but I do believe my willingness and my liking for psychology helped me heal a lot as well. I would go home with what she would tell me during our sessions and further research myself. This gave me a great understanding as to who I even was and how I got there.

Let me give you some key points to what I learned with her.

Attachment Parenting:

This goes much more in-depth than I originally thought and I briefly outlined some key points in Chapter 18. She was able to walk me through my

own attachment issues, and how I got there, and helped me heal. I had been anxious preoccupied and am now secure. This also explains why I attracted abusive relationships. This is sometimes what people refer to as our “inner child” or “shadow work” that may need healing.

She offered to assess my parenting and W’s attachment cues and explained that W. was displaying a secure attachment to me.

Allow Ourselves Some Grace:

My anxiety and attachment issues had me thinking I needed to be 100% perfect all of the time and go above and beyond. She assured me that we aren’t capable of that, and it needs to be more like 70% on it and 30% just okay or even completely not. We’re human and nobody has anything down perfectly. The baby or child will be okay as long as we can acknowledge our mistakes, apologize when needed, move on when necessary, and show personal accountability.

We’re Not Supposed To Do This Alone:

I was under the impression that I was supposed to be able to handle everything and be happy about it. Otherwise, I was complaining.

At 6 months postpartum she told me,

“If you don’t get a break, you’re going to snap.”

I was honestly already there.

She then suggested I take an hour away to focus on therapy. Without the baby at that time J. could take care of her and maybe get her to take a bottle. I left the house for 3 whole hours for the first time in 6 months away from her. It felt great. I even purchased a pair of jeans. When I returned, he reeled into me about how I shouldn’t leave her with him alone.

She later suggested maybe I use a crisis nursery because I really did need the break that badly. I never did but looking back, it may have been a good idea.

Other Mom’s Lie:

Especially on the internet.

I think this is because as women and mothers, if we disclose that we aren't holding everything together so well, we're deemed incompetent. When I started out, I believed I needed to do everything perfectly. I mean, if *that mom* did then why wasn't it working for me too?

Not everyone's son or daughter slept through the night. That mom doesn't always know exactly what her baby needs. Potty training in a few days isn't the reality. And that YouTube Channel probably doesn't disclose the whole truth.

Mom's in-person hold back and lie too. A huge reason why I wrote this book was to not only tell you exactly what we did, and how it flowed together but to also tell you that even though we did it, it wasn't always perfect and everyone's family is different. Nobody has it all together.

Mom Burn Out:

Being someone's everything is too much for one person.

We need to ask for help sometimes. And accept it. A lot of the parental duties especially when they're young fall on mothers in our society. This causes a mental overwhelm because there's more to taking care of littles than financial and physical needs.

Moms who aren't getting a break or time for themselves or other activities will burn out. This usually comes out in other emotional ways such as crying, yelling, depression, and relationship issues.

I straight up thought my baby hated me at one point and would be fuming with anger when I needed to feed her, again... Then I was shamed for it by a peer. I simply needed a break.

Recognizing that the mother is just super overwhelmed instead of "mom rage" is important for ourselves and our partners.

Moving On:

Spirituality:

I am going to add a little spirituality in here as it did help in my healing greatly. I had always been told I was Christian from a young age but I was never taught anything so I just kind of formed my ideas.

Deep into my depression, I needed something to grasp onto. I was in the apartment a lot during the winter and I usually get pretty depressed from the lack of sunlight. Add in having a small baby to take care of 24/7 and I needed to put my mind to something more positive.

I was always curious about spirituality and more Earth-centered pagan ways. I wanted to know more about celebrating the Earth, how it cycles and to be more connected to all of that so this gave me something to put my focus on.

I already knew quite a bit about astrology. I then learned about the Wheel of The Year and how our lives are cyclical. Spirituality also allows us to ask ourselves,

“Well, what do you believe”.

I learned to heal my inner child, about spiral dynamics, frequencies, raising my vibration, the law of attraction, a little witchcraft, and manifestation. We even started celebrating the pagan holidays which I had always wondered about.

This was the light I really needed at that time, alongside my therapy sessions of course. I was able to finally allow myself to relax because I was giving myself more grace and going with the flow. But most of all, I started believing in and being much more kind to myself again. It just felt right for me.



Our First Yule as a Family. W. was 6 months old.

While I was going through this depression I was also going through another

huge spiritual awakening. All of a sudden I'd see 3:33 or 2:22 on the clock all the time. When J. would argue I'd always notice 3:33 or 1:11. This was freaking me out so, I looked into it. As I typically do. I learned they were my spirit guides or my intuition telling me I was on the right path.

That voice I heard in my head when I gave birth? The one that said, "You're going to the hospital."

That gave me the heads-up. I later accepted this. I have now decided that the universe was trying to tell me to slow down and enjoy the moment. That's why I believe I learned the lessons of going to the hospital that day.

I know, this may sound crazy but it's true.

Spirit guides can be another term for intuition.

J. & Me:

I later got a real eye-opening when J. and I just couldn't stop arguing. I don't want to paint him as a horrible monster, he was still a good partner and father sometimes. But at times, I really couldn't bear it anymore.



J. & W. - They looked so alike

I decided that we needed to break up. It took an entire year for us to do so.

I'd try so hard to fix things, but he didn't want to work on us. He'd tell me there is no us. But somehow wanted to still live with me for the rest of our lives.

I was getting healthier and I was outgrowing the relationship.

It was long, painful, and abusive in every way. I lost my shit during that year. I wanted him to grow with me. I thought we had this unshakable bond. I adored him for so long.

He didn't see the importance as he grew up in a divorced home with an unsafe environment. I tried so hard to just love him but I couldn't take the pain anymore. We were living in an anxious-avoidant roller coaster trap of a relationship.

W. deserved way more.

After the neighbors called the police for domestic violence, he went to jail, promised to do therapy, and stopped. The abuse got worse.

I finally ended the relationship in April 2021. While I wanted the break-up, I also didn't. I wanted to fix it but I couldn't alone. I was hanging on to who he portrayed himself to be. The man he wasn't.

I think the hardest thing is knowing I can't be with the father of my child. She has to grow up in two homes, two realities, and be pulled in two directions. We cannot be a family. I cannot give her a two-parent home, show her a healthy marriage, and secure attachments to us both. And nothing was healed, the abuse continued we just live in different homes now.

I do know that W. and I are more safe. Our home is calm. Leaving him was worth it in many ways.

But not without a lot of pain.

I felt deeply betrayed. I did not fall in love, give myself to him, decide to have a baby, work on that for 2.4 years, deliver that baby, almost give up my life, and plan an entire handfasting.

For us to just, not be a family. I was in this wholeheartedly and he told me it was just a game to him.

I embarrassed myself and called off the handfasting I planned after sending invites. He didn't want to get married, it was clear. Everything I thought was reality, wasn't. I was embarrassed at how much I loved someone who

wasn't in love with me back. What a fool I felt like.

I eventually woke up and said,

"Fuck this shit, I'm done".

It was time to quit sulking, pull myself off the floor, and rebuild my empire. I rediscovered hobbies, decided to write this book for you, made new friendships, focused on parenting, built my business, and re-met myself again.



2 years old <3

I'm now a lot more forgiving to myself, I've forgiven J. I'm grateful that we can still kind of be friends.

I learned that love isn't always enough. Communication is key.

I learned that I'm allowed to make mistakes and that forgiving myself and others is essential.

I know that we're spiritual beings living a human experience, each rela-

tionship we have I understand is a mirror. Which includes my relationship with W. I'm here to learn lessons and create. I'm here to share with others as a Lightworker to help them on their journeys.

I used to say to customers,

"Oh, you can have anything you want in life!"

It's true.

Everything leading up until now we manifested. Knowing this has allowed me to have peace of mind, I see the lessons in situations and I move forward.

I understand that I am here to guide W. I know now that anything I desire is mine. I just have to believe it's mine and it will be. We're all one decision away from a completely different life if we desire.

With that, I thank you so much for reading this book, I know there's something in here of value to you. I wish you the very best in your parenting journey. You can do this Momma! I believe in you and I am here for you!

If you'd like, then go ahead and make a commitment to yourself. Let yourself know that you're rooting for yourself and manifest your desires! You can really do anything!

Here's my manifestation:

With my presence, I bring joy, insight, love, and gratitude to people all over the universe. Love surrounds me. I am the perfect mother for my child. My child chose me to be her mother.

I help people. I successfully built a community of like-minded individuals so they feel connected, understood, and always loved. Money, love, and abundance come to me easily and effortlessly. With the natural use of my energy, I am in flow with what's best for me. The Universe is always providing.

So, it is.

Love & Light, Blessed Be, Thank You Kindly,

Shannon & W. ❤



Go with the flow- W. 3 years old.

