

Birth as a Hero's Journey: Pam England Down on The Farm

*What determines whether a mother experiences her birth as a hero's journey?
Hint: It is neither about achieving a desired outcome in birth, nor surviving a harrowing ordeal in labor.*

Pam England, "Birth as a Hero's Journey"



Reaching new heights. A ladder in a strawbale building at The Farm's Ecovillage. Photo by Jessica Farquhar

This past April at The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee, Birthing from Within author Pam England relayed the life of Harriet Tubman, who, upon her own escape from captivity, led many other slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad.

According to Pam, Tubman's life is a classic example of the hero's journey. Pam's abilities to tell stories, make ancient cultures relevant, and make myths come alive are little-known pieces of what makes her "dream" (how she refers to her version of reality) special.

Indeed, I was excited to visit such a legendary place as The Farm and to experience Pam England's energy and wisdom first-hand. Rather than try to re-create Pam's telling of "Birth as a Hero's Journey," I'll offer my dream

of how a pregnant woman becomes a warrior.

To see birth as a hero's journey is to give a framework to your birth story. When we are first called by love to make a hero's journey, we refuse. But when we finally answer the call and start on our journey, there is no turning back. The starting point is different for every journey. For some women, their journey begins when they find out they're pregnant; for others it could be when labor starts. It could be the moment a woman says yes to a cesarean birth. The next step is preparation—the initiation via childbirth education or from friends or family with experience, then leaving home or the place where we feel safe.

From there we take a leap and descend deep into ourselves. On our journey we

let go of something — an expectation or an idea we had — in order to discover something new. We die, sometimes almost literally, in order to morph into a new version of ourselves. We endure a test, go to a place we've never been, and meet our inner birth warrior to help us rise to the challenge.

Pam writes, "Those of you who know birth have seen or experienced this descent into Laborland. You know very well the struggle a woman experiences, not just with pain or fear, but also within her core, within her raw inner self."

Once we've gone so deep and traveled into such treacherous territory that we've broken into a thousand pieces, our allies bring us the food and water of life. We are re-assembled in order to answer love's call once again. We have something to bring back from the "Underworld," a gift to share with the universe.

Thinking of birth in this way makes us the hero of our story no matter what happens, and it actually allows us to honor the fact that things didn't go as planned, that we have to adjust our expectations in order to cope with the way labor—and life—unfolds. As we continue to make these significant journeys, these rites of passage, we get closer to our divinity. What an empowering way to see birth—that just by making the journey we are heroines! How can we honor women as warriors, acknowledging our harrowing journeys to and from such dark, cavernous places as our own souls?

*Jessica Farquhar
Childbirth Educator
jessica@wonderbirth.com*

*"We have a secret in our culture,
and it's not that birth is painful.
It's that women are strong."*

Laura Stavoe Harm