

# **MORE WORK THAN A PUPPY**

(or what your mother never told you about procreation)

written by  
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Originally produced as a one-woman show in the  
2002 Summerworks Theatre Festival in Toronto, ON

Original production directed and dramaturged by  
Shannon Reynolds

## Author's Note

This show was originally my own birth experience. Rewritten in 2005, it gives a broad multi-generational perspective of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. Times, places and names may be changed to fit your particular production. If say, you have a fabulous local sex shop, use yours instead.

### BIRTHING CHORUS

10 actors enter with vocal scores. One actor is the choral director. The others "sing" along with an edited version of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (2001 - *A Space Odyssey*) using birthing vocalizations to create an orchestra. Grunts, screams and phrases/sentences are used to create a complete birthing experience.

### THE JOY OF UNPROTECTED SEX

This is it! This is the moment. I am having sex and it's going to stick. In mere seconds those sperm will be taking a trip up Vagina Lane, the egg will put on the red-light and if the stars align just right - WHAMMO! - one lucky sperm's gonna meet a very welcoming egg and there will be three, not two of us in bed.

But I can't get my hopes up. It's only the first time, after all. I've been off the pill for three months, to prepare for this, but I can't expect anything. Lots of couples have to wait months, even years to conceive. I can't get my hopes up. Just because I have a plan, does not mean that it will come to fruition.

But the plan is so good! My husband David will be finished Teacher's College next year, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, so that means if I get pregnant, say - tonight - that I'm likely to give birth sometime the beginning of

next June and, if I make up my mind to, I can wait until June 3<sup>rd</sup>. David will be out of school. I'll have the baby before the heat of the summer. We'll have time to get to know the new baby. Everything will be perfect. So if I could get pregnant tonight? That'd be great.

But no pressure. No unrealistic goals. Whatever happens, happens, right? I don't want to set myself up to be disappointed. I won't even think of this as trying to get pregnant. It's just sex. It's REALLY GOOD unprotected sex, which adds this sense of danger to the whole act, because since I was 16 the aim was NOT to get pregnant and now here I am wanting to get pregnant and OH MY GOD - it feels so GREAT not to be using a condom! I forgot how good this could be!

And suddenly: I feel a rushing of warmth from my groin up through my tummy, sliding along my chest, wrapping my skull and blowing my mind. It's Canada Day with those swirly-twirly silver flashes of fireworks making me dizzy. And I'm pretty sure it's not just from the orgasm. Maybe it's the echo of hundreds of thousands of sperm all shouting "Whoo-Hoo!" at the top of their little sperm voices when they realize there isn't a big rubber trampoline holding them back. Can you imagine being an egg at this point? It's the biggest frat party in the world and you're the only girl there.

Wow. So that's a pretty unique sensation. But it doesn't mean anything. All it means is that my body

and his body were very happy to have nothing between our bodies and that it was great sex. There is no guarantee of any sort of procreation happening here. So we'd better keep having sex, just in case.

I wait until my period is two days late before buying the pregnancy test. David awakes to the sound of me tearing open the package with my teeth. It is 6:23 a.m. We creep into the bathroom and I pee on the test strip. We are looking for a blue line. A blue line means that we're pregnant. Looking for a blue line. A red line shows that the test is working and a blue line shows that we're pregnant. There's the red line and ... there's still a red line... C'mon! Mama needs a blue line! and... there's a very faint blue line. "What does it says about very faint blue lines?" "It says that a blue line is a blue line." There's a blue line. WE HAVE A BLUE LINE!! WE HAVE A BLUE LINE!!!!

#### IT'S NOT LIKE THEY SHOW YOU ON TLC

We took hypno-birthing. We saw it on a documentary and it looked like it might be a cool thing to try. We met with a hypnotherapist for 6 sessions leading up to my due date. I never felt like I was actually hypnotized. But I could hold an ice cube in my hand for a long time and apparently that's a good sign. I was going to have that pain free, drug free, stress free childbirth.

I'm not.

When you're reading all about the birthing process, when you listen to your midwife and she's telling you the nitty gritty about giving birth - you really have no clue what's going to happen to you as this kid claws it's way out of your uterus.

I am subjected to the three p's during birth. Puking, Pooping and Passing Out. Where is my glorious hypnotically entranced experience? Do you know how hard it is to concentrate on walking down a flight of imaginary stairs when you are puking your guts out? Forget holding an ice cube in my hand as an example of my stunning concentration and relaxed state of being - all I want are ice chips to suck on between upchucking into the Tupperware. Where is the beautiful Madonna ready to bring forth life? Because here I am drooling and sweating and making noises like something out of *The Exorcist*.

And frankly when it's time to push, all I think I need to do is crap. "I need to poop!" "No you don't," the midwife says. "Your body is telling you that you need to push." "No I don't! I need to poop!" "You need to push - get ready to bear down." It turns out we're both right.

The pain is... like a knife - no a machete - no a chainsaw - travelling along my abdomen. I pass out from the intensity of it. The midwife slaps me in the face to bring me back to reality. My husband says, "You're doing great, you're doing great" and

he has not one clue as to what I'm dealing with. I want to grab him by the scrotum and pull those testicles up to his eyes and say, "Does that give you an inkling of where I am now?"

Crying and begging for drugs when it's already too late. Mucous and blood everywhere. Wanting to give up. "I can't! I can't!" "Yes you can." The midwife holding one leg and my husband holding the other and they're yelling at me to look - LOOK! I'm too afraid to open my eyes. I don't want to see - I just need to focus. "LOOK!" "I WON'T!" "Your son is being born." My eyes barely open to watch as this life slides out from between my bloody legs. Laying him on my chest. He's slick with fluid and yowling like an angry kitten. And I sleep.

And now I don't really remember the pain. It's in that place where you hide all those experiences from life that are too difficult to bear. When I fell out of the tree, when I broke my foot - childbirth too - has become a hazy memory that is replaced by the reality of my son in my arms. And I'm not saying that I'd do it again - but it wasn't that bad.

#### WHERE'S THE MANUAL FOR THIS THING?

The day my son is born is one of the most surreal in my life. Am I in a Fellini film? A parade of colourful, well-meaning freaks enter and leave -

sometimes depositing things... barf bags; and sometimes taking things... my blood. A short, frighteningly-happy hobbit comes in to empty my catheter. She has balloon animals on her scrubs. People speak to me and I don't understand a word they say. What is in my IV?

But it's not the drugs. I'm looking at this sleeping baby at the foot of my bed. My baby. My Mom is sitting beside me. "Mom how is it possible to love someone so completely when you didn't even know him 24 hours ago?" "Because you're a Mom." Proving yet again that my Mother knows everything.

He has a head of dark dark hair. Steely gray eyes. Will they stay gray? I thought baby's eyes were blue when they were born. He squeaks. He sounds so helpless. These sad little cries coming from a rosebud mouth. Crying for food. Crying for me. God he's beautiful.

In the evening we have visitors. Or rather Jack has visitors. I am merely the vehicle through which the baby arrived. I'm sitting in bed, surrounded by rainbow-coloured teddy bears when all of a sudden I have pancake-sized wet spots on my gown. Guess my milk has come in! I have torpedo breasts. They stick straight out almost a half a foot! Poor kid practically drowns trying to nurse.

A word that you learn as a new mother is "latch." "How's the baby's latch? Is he latched? I don't understand what all the "latching" fuss is about un-