

Sharing the miracle of life

By MIKE ARNHOLT

"It's a boy!"
I'm sure my shout was heard all over the third floor of the hospital.
It could have been anything—puppies, kittens—I couldn't hold back the excitement of witnessing birth—the miracle of life.

This was our small contribution to the joy of the human race.
My part in the event was small. I was a labor coach who had been present for both the conception and delivery, and had tried to be an understanding and as helpful as possible during the nine months and three weeks in between.

My wife Rosemary's job was more Herculean—at least in my eyes.
I know that women have babies every day, and I realize in other mothers the task might not seem that much out of the ordinary. But I admire the stamina of any woman who can calmly adjust to an awkwardly changing figure and carry the equivalent weight of a bowling ball for nine months, strapped in her abdomen for several months.

OUR JOINT PROJECT climaxed in the birth of our first son, Graham Michael, at 10:23 p.m. on May 3 at Women's Hospital in Ann Arbor.
We can share a great deal of our joy over a good birth experience with the Lamaze method people of the Livonia Childbirth Education Association.

Armed with two pillows and an eagerness to learn everything I could to help in the impending miracle, I joined my wife in classes at St. Mary's Hospital in Livonia in early February.

The six-week program took us through a crash course which touched on anatomy, physiology, chemistry, psychology, physical education, nutrition, and fun.
Under the artful direction of Marge Solanki, a Lamaze mother of two and a registered nurse, 10 couples were "conditioned" to react to pregnancies and birth as something to be enjoyed and shared.

We were in that frame of mind when we entered the University of Michigan's Women's Hospital at 9 a.m. May 3.
UNLIKE MANY others who come to the hospital already in labor, Rosemary's labor was to be induced because the baby was three weeks late.

Labor was under way by 9:30 a.m. in Labor Room 4. The nurse hooked up the intravenous tubes which pumped dystrene and pitocin into Rosemary's veins.
The dystrene would be the only food she would receive until she nibbled on a candy bar at 11:30 that night. Pitocin was the drug used to contract the uterus—the same hormone which is produced within the mother's body for just such a purpose.

At 11:30 a.m. the snow outside had started and stopped for the third time I had finished reading. All the President's Men and Rosemary had become bored with the science fiction anthology she'd been reading.

Contractions were four or five minutes apart and caused very little discomfort.
Throughout the pregnancy, we had joked about the discomfort of labor. In instructing expectant parents, Mrs. Solanki insisted there were no such things as labor pains, only varying degrees of discomfort.

WITHIN THE NEXT hour I decided it was time for lunch.

I opted for the cafeteria and hurriedly ate a hot meal. I really don't remember what it was, but it was hot. I didn't want to miss anything.
Walking as nonchalantly as possible (but I just knew I looked like an expectant father), I stopped in the book store and bought a science fiction novel for Rosemary.

She'd already read it.
She sent me back to exchange it.
The sign on the cash register said, "No Refunds."
I was crushed.

AT 3:30 P.M. Rosemary's water broke. The amniotic sac which surrounds and protects the baby in the womb was now broken—a good sign.
Birth would be "within 24 hours" according to one of the nurses.

Labor became heavier. For the fifth time, the doctor of the pitor was increased, making the contractions harder, longer and more frequent.

Inconfort became a reality, and Rosemary began to use her breathing exercises learned in Lamaze. For an hour or so, she was able to use a "candle blow," a light exercise used in early labor.
By 5 p.m. she was using the "part" regulated breathing through the mouth which becomes more rapid during the height of the contraction.

At this point, contractions were about 90 seconds apart.

I was able to help her gauge the contractions and their intensity by reading the fetal monitor which was hooked up to both Graham and Rosemary. An electronic pen clicked off the baby's heart rate and the strength of the contractions in continuous moving graph paper.

EACH CONTRACTION brought to mind thoughts of earthquakes and scientists had died around a seismograph.

By 6 p.m. Rosemary had grown very tired.

For the better part of the next three hours all our attention was focused on the contractions. Lasting close to two minutes and with less than a minute in between for rest, I had little time to think of anything except encouraging Rosemary to remain relaxed. It was hard work for her—the term labor is an appropriate and accurate description of the hours preceding birth.

After nine months and three weeks the event we had been planning for was all over. I was all over it. I tried desperately to take in everything that was happening. A feeling that this wasn't happening to Rosemary or me, but just another couple in a dream kept working its way into my mind.

I WANTED to be nervous and fidget and relax and have a cigarette all at the same time, and I really couldn't do anything other than stay on top of the situation.

It was my responsibility to make sure Rosemary knew what was happening, anticipating contractions, relaxing, breathing correctly—knowing I cared.

The doctor came to examine just before 10 p.m. when I was about to give up the idea of a baby before midnight. After all we'd waited this long, and the baby was sure to be as stubborn as before and drag labor into a marathon.

You're dilated to eight, the doctor said. We needed a score of 10 centimeters before the baby would make her entrance.



Mike Arnholt, Observer & Eccentric copy editor, snapped this photo of his wife Rosemary and son Graham Michael just a couple of hours after the birth he describes in this story.

trance. A nurse told me to go "out up" for the upcoming appointment in the delivery room.

I WALKED (probably ran) to the father's changing room, changed into scrub clothes in less than 10 seconds, and rejoined Rosemary in the labor room.

I got to help push her labor bed down the hall to the delivery room. In the meantime, Rosemary had been told not to "push" the baby, even though she wanted to.

By now it was 10:10 p.m. We were joined in the delivery room by Dr. Stephen Cohen, a third-year resident at University Hospital. Dr. Linda Weir, an intern and a medical student and two nurses.

I took my place at the head of the delivery table, urging Rosemary to "breathe" — an other Lamaze technique used to help combat the urge to push.

Much to our disappointment, the mirror we hoped to see all the action through was placed on the opposite end of the room, giving us a great view of the backs of two doctors and a medical student. It seemed like only a few minutes later that Rosemary was told she could push the baby.

While giving a local anesthetic so she could perform the episiotomy, Dr. Cohen suggested she might push hard so he could catch the 11 p.m. news.

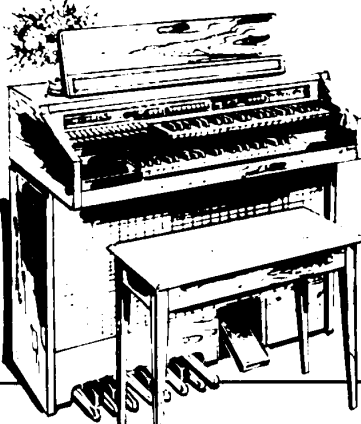
She did—holding her breath and pushing during three contractions.

We then heard the doctor say what we'd wanted to hear for nine months and three weeks.

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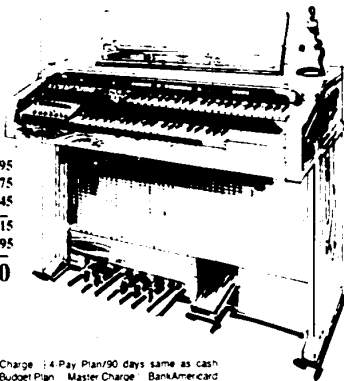
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Pre-registration is possible by calling 581-4440, extension 218. To complete registration, individuals should send a \$10 check payable to the center designated credit card permit. Schoolcraft College, 10800 Haggerty Road, Livonia.

A senior life saving class will be offered for six weeks beginning June 21. Classes will meet Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to noon through July 29.

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