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## Film reveals experience of 'orgasmic' birth

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Orgasmic birth.

The idea is provocative, sensational, even shocking. But it can happen.

"All of the pathways of sexual pleasure are in fact stimulated by birthing a baby. When you can allow yourself to open in the same way you open yourself to orgasm, the exact same experience is possible," says Christiane Northrup, a renowned author and obstetrician who appears in *Orgasmic Birth*, a documentary film about the little-known phenomenon.

In one scene, a mother named Amber, relaxing in a warm tub, experiences a rolling orgasm during the birth, inviting the audience to witness the normally private pleasure possible on one of the most important days of a woman's life.

Filmmaker Debra Pascali-Bonaro, an internationally known childbirth expert, admits she intended to provoke reaction when she named her film, which intersperses expert commentary from doctors and midwives with footage of 11 women labouring – at home, in birthing centres and in hospitals.

"I'm using the term 'orgasmic birth' broadly," says Pascali-Bonaro, who travelled to New Zealand, Mexico,



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A mother celebrates after childbirth in the film *Orgasmic Birth*, which one observer says "has been warmly received on many levels."

### A WATER BIRTH

Helen Daniels had an orgasmic birth. Sort of.

"When I heard the title of the film, *Orgasmic Birth*, I thought, well I didn't have an orgasmic birth. But then I said to myself, well, what is orgasm? It's a whole body sensational experience, and I certainly had that. I had an incredible

the U.K. and South America to film women in labour. "Some women have orgasmic birth in the strict sense of having an orgasm. Many others describe it as orgasmic in the sense that it's a release. It's like having good dark chocolate."

By presenting the pleasure potential inherent in childbirth, Pascali-Bonaro aims to change the prevailing image of birth as a purely painful ordeal, and a medical emergency that must be controlled.

"A lot of fear exists around childbirth that didn't exist years ago," she says. "People don't know their real range of options to have a safe, satisfying and pleasurable birth," she says. "If you don't know your options you don't have any."

Pascali-Bonaro points out low-tech options women have at home or in hospital.

"Simple things like dim lights, helping her have a greater sense of privacy, with not as many people entering the room randomly, choosing the clothes she wears. It's a special event and a hospital gown has connotations of illness. The availability of water, too. Water eases the sensations of labour and makes it easier and faster for both the mother and baby."

This woman-centric approach is not entirely new, but Pascali-Bonaro says childbirth activists have become more vocal in recent years. It's clear mainstream audiences are interested. The film has earned grassroots support. Pascali-Bonaro released *Orgasmic Birth* for sale on her website, [orgasmicbirth.com](http://orgasmicbirth.com), this fall. From there, it went viral. After learning about the film through the international birthing grapevine, midwives, doulas and birth activists have purchased copies of the film – and a licence to show it in public settings. They've shown it in private screenings in more than 20 countries.

In Toronto, Ryerson midwifery students are excited to share the film at a screening on Nov. 3.

"It's been warmly received on many levels," says Shezeen Suleman, a member of the Association of Ryerson Midwifery Students, which is organizing the event. "People don't balk at the title. They're very interested. They want to learn."

Though they weren't allowed to publish the film's title in the Facebook event listing because the word orgasmic is considered obscene, the students love the

birth. It was great."

An Ottawa-based life coach, Daniels had her daughter, Jaden Paldzyk-Daniels, three years ago. She takes credit for having created the right circumstances for a fully spiritually, emotionally and physically satisfying experience. "I really owned it," she remembers. Here's how it unfolded:

"I deliberately didn't read books that talked about what could go wrong," she says. "I limited myself to things that were positive and uplifting."

"I wanted to get to know my midwife. I asked her about herself."

"I laboured for one hour and then I got in a hot tub. The moment I got in, I thought, okay, I can do this... This is what I was imagining. I spent the rest of the labour in the tub, which was about eight hours, with about 45 minutes of pushing."

When the contractions really started, my job was to get into harmony with them. I was breathing and making noises, like 'ahhhhhhhh.' I focused on keeping

moniker.

"To see a woman who is wholly within herself during birth, when the birth is not being taken away from her, that's sexy," says second-year student Megan Re kai Nutall, who's helping organize the screening. "There is something orgasmic about that, something sexy and cool."

Sexy and cool, yes, but a local midwife who has witnessed hundreds of births over her six years in practice, cautions that orgasmic birth – at least in the strict sense of the word – isn't something an expectant mother should count on.

"A lot of our women report positive experiences," says Lisa Weston, vice-president of the Association of Ontario Midwives. "But as midwives, we want to be careful about setting up expectations. I don't want women to feel that if it's not pleasurable, they've failed somehow. Every woman is different. Every birth is different."

That wasn't Pascali-Bonaro's intention. "It's not about saying everyone should have an orgasmic experience," she explains.

"It's about saying let's look at the range of possibilities. Just like with sexuality, the absolute outcome doesn't have to be orgasm, but yes, that's a possibility."

my jaw very relaxed, because the jaw and the hips are connected. So I was blowing bubbles in the water to keep my jaw relaxed. I did that for about six hours straight."

"I was letting the sound go through my entire body into the soles of my feet. It was just streaming sensations, flowing energy. In the photos I have a Mona Lisa smile on my face."

"When I felt a contraction, I just let go into it, instead of fighting it. It was like eight hours of focused meditation." I was very aware of my body. Very aware of the water. Very aware of life."

"At some point I thought things were slowing down. It felt like the calm before the storm. I'd hit my wall. I hung out there for a while ... Then My partner got into the tub with me. I said I'm ready to commit to having this baby. I committed. Then I dilated fully, and the pushing began."

"I started making more aggressive sounds, with more power behind them. So I'm pushing, I'm making noise. "Her

head was coming out and I was on all fours. I pushed and there was pain when she came out. The midwife scooped her forward and I grabbed her. I still remember seeing her underwater and then pulling her toward me."

"I needed a few stitches so the midwives did that in my bed. I had as much freezing as possible."

"Jaden was born at around midnight and the midwives were gone by 2 a.m. We didn't sleep. We were too excited." One of my friends arrived at the door at about 6 a.m., she was really chomping at the bit. I answered the door and she said, "Oh, you're up?" I said, "Yep, I feel good."

"It was something we did together, first the two of us, and then the three of us when my partner was in the tub. We were in a bubble together. That bubble is still with us. She's a very confident and lovely child. She loves water. It's one of the coolest things I ever did."