

Naturally Speaking

Janesville native espouses HypnoBirthing

By Shelly Birkelo
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Imagine childbirth with little or no pain.

A Madison practitioner says it's possible through HypnoBirthing, a natural method that eliminates fear and tension through self-hypnosis.

Marie Mongan of Concord, N.H., developed the method. She is a hypnotherapist, hypnoanesthesiologist and a hypnotherapy instructor with more than 30 years experience in education and counseling at the collegiate level and in the private sector.

"It's a whole approach that stresses the basic ways the body works and how fear and tension interfere with the actual process," said Janesville native Melissa Barnes, a certified hypnotist and HypnoBirthing practitioner in Madison. "So we work a lot with releasing fear and teaching hypnosis for deep relaxation"

Barnes had only trained five couples before a "Dateline" special about HypnoBirthing aired in October. Since then, Barnes has trained 20 couples, attended one birth and was invited to five more births from February through May.

"I can't wait. I got a beeper and check it every day," said Barnes, who teaches two HypnoBirthing classes a week in her home.

The four 2 1/2-hour classes, spread out over a month, cost \$250. This pays for instruction and materials: a textbook, two audio cassettes and scripts.

Barnes is one of only two certified HypnoBirthing practitioners in Wisconsin and the Midwest. She has found clients through advertisements, talks at women's centers and to midwives groups, and by driving to smaller communities to give classes.

"Initially, I had to get the word out and try to get people interested," Barnes said.

But "people have become more aware, and interest peaked after the 'Dateline' special," Barnes said. "Everyone who calls said they saw it."

Barnes, 25, graduated from Craig High School and has taken classes in psychology and zoology and UW-Madison. Barnes became fascinated with hypnosis as a teen-ager, so she began reading everything she could get her hands on. By the time she was 18, Barnes was certified through the National Guild of Hypnotists (NGH).

Originally, she wanted to be an obstetrician and use hypnosis in her practice. But when

she got to college and talked to other medical students, she realized the doctor part was not where her passion was. Hypnosis with women was.

So when Barnes learned that a course on HypnoBirthing would be offered during the NGH's annual convention in New Hampshire two years ago, she enrolled in the 32-hour, four-day childbirth education program.

It was hard getting the word out and making people understand HypnoBirthing, Barnes said, because some think the method is hokey or mystical and that she is a crystal ball gazer wearing a flowing gown.

She's not. And once she gets the opportunity to explain how the method works, "It makes sense to people," she said.

Another myth Barnes has had to dispel is that hypnotized people are asleep or unaware.

"That's not true," she said. "They are aware of their whole birth and do remember it."

What happens during HypnoBirthing "is the woman is in tune to stuff that matters but might not be aware or remember nurses coming in and out or the doctor unless it becomes important."

Barnes compared the hypnotic state to daydreaming or focusing that occurs when you are engrossed in a book or staring at a fire.

"You will be conversant and in good spirits but totally relaxed and fully in control."

Brenda Valek of Spring Green, who has completed Barnes' HypnoBirthing classes and is due to have her first baby in May, has been practicing the deep relaxation techniques.

"When I stubbed my toe and had my eyebrows waxed, the relaxation techniques worked," Valek said. "I felt virtually no pain."

Valek also has found Barnes' classes to be relaxing and informative.

At the end of each, she always gave us examples of relaxation techniques in our book," said Valek, who has invited Barnes to her childbirth. "It was wonderfully relaxing. She is the most soothing person to be around."

HypnoBirthing classes can be taken at anytime throughout the pregnancy, but Barnes recommends sometime after the first trimester.

"Then the companion can practice hypnotizing the spouse so she becomes comfortable in responding," Barnes said. "By the end of the classes, the pregnant woman can put herself in a state hypnosis instantly. It's from all the practice she's been getting with the

tapes and her partner."

Believing in the method also is important, Barnes said.

"If you don't believe it's going to work, you're still holding onto fears," she said.

After the first class, most couples overcome their skepticism because they've obtained a lot of information, including what the body is doing during labor and showing how fear and tension create pain, Barnes said.

"It becomes real and not just something people are talking about in a book," Barnes said after couples see videos of five HypnoBirths. "So that's the big convincer that this will work."

And in a later class, Barnes does glove anesthesia, numbing the hand by suggestion and using the imagination.

"I give them a pretty good pinch with my nails," she said. "The reason I do that is so when they come out of their hypnotic state I can show them their hand, and they can see the mark of my fingernails on the back of their hand. They're always amazed they didn't feel it. So that's another good convincer, especially for their partner who watches."

Barnes outlined several advantages of HypnoBirthing:

- * It eliminates or reduces the need for chemical painkillers.
- * Shortens first-stage labor.
- * Eliminates fatigue during labor and hyperventilation from shallow breathing methods.
- * Causes more rapid postnatal recovery.

Barnes, who has only worked with midwives, said they tend to be more open about natural methods of childbirth. However, she knows doctors have referred clients to her after seeing her ad in the newspaper.

"They kept it and gave my number to patients who asked for it," Barnes said.

She said the premise behind HypnoBirthing is that it provides another means of preparing for and having an easier birth. But the classes don't just emphasize what will make a birth more comfortable.

"We actually teach a person how to relax and give them the tools to do it." Barnes said.

For Your Information

Class 1: "Discovering HypnoBirthing for Easier, More Comfortable Birthing."

- * The HypnoBirthing philosophy.
- * Testimonials from parents and medical staff.
- * Introduction to principles of hypnosis for birthing.
- * How the mind determines the body's response.
- * What's wrong with labor. Why it hurts and why it doesn't have to.
- * The origin of pain concept that is no longer valid. A look at other cultures.
- * HypnoBirthing films of labor and birth.

Class 2: "Prenatal Bonding: Preparing Your Mind and Body for Birthing."

- * A mother's conversation with her unborn child.
- * Rainbow relaxation tape and script.
- * Breathing for labor: Sleep breathing, slow breathing, breathing your baby down.
- * A father's script.
- * Rapid progressive relaxation/deepening techniques for transition
- * Learning to maintain comfort and eliminate pain.
- * Stretching inner thigh muscles.
- * Avoiding episiotomy- perineal massage- favorable labor positions.

Class 3: "Getting Ready to Welcome Your Baby."

- * Making hospital, home or birthing center plans.
- * Looking at your estimated due date- early signals of labor.
- * How your body works with you and for you.
- * Achieving a natural onset of labor, free of drugs or intervention.
- * Releasing limiting emotions and fear.

Class 4: "Birthing: Breathing Love; Bringing Life."

- * The birthing companion's integral role in labor.
- * Settling in at the hospital.
- * How labor proceeds.
- * Comfort measures through labor.
- * Meeting a slowed or stalled labor.
- * Breathing your baby down through transition to birthing.
- * Second-stage breathing and pushing techniques for smooth birthing.
- * Stage 3 labor- Postnatal bonding of parents with baby- birthing of the placenta.