

MAI JUIN PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

A FILM BY
GILLES DE MAISTRE

THE FIRST CRY



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PRODUCTION
MAI / JUIN PRODUCTION

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The Eclipse

The destinies of all our characters coincide over a 24 hour period on Earth, the day of the Black Sun, when the shadow of the moon passes over several countries simultaneously. All our protagonists are thus linked by this extremely rare celestial occurrence: the fourth total eclipse of the 21st century.

TANZANIA: The Masai

Northern Tanzania, near the Kenyan border, in the district of N'Gare Sero, at the heart of the Masai lands. The scenery is magnificent. Oldonio Lengai volcano, which is still active, stands 2980 meters tall, overlooking Lake Natron. It is the sacred mountain of the Masai. The edge of the Great Rift Valley, the cradle of humanity, forms the natural border of the Tanzanian lands.

Kokoya is Olesietoi's wife. Their village, a *boma*, consists of ten huts, which stand in a circle around the cattle pen.

Olesietoi is polygamous: he has ten wives and almost a hundred children. Children are considered a symbol of wealth for the Masai, especially daughters, for it is the men who give a dowry to the women upon marriage. Olesietoi is eagerly hoping that Kokoya would have a girl.

Kokoya is pregnant with her sixth child. She already has three boys and two girls. It is her fifth pregnancy because two of her children are twins. She says that she is about forty years old.

The midwife who will assist her is called Nasieku. She is nearly seventy and has been doing this for 40 or 50 years. She has assisted at about 3,000 births.

Nasieku has helped Kokoya during the birth. The daktari is sitting down with her legs outstretched. Kokoya is crouched over her. She is not allowed to show any pain. Everything happens in silence, broken by only one or two discreet moans.

When the little girl is born, Nasieku washes her with warm water, then rubs a buttery cream over her body. A flask filled with cow's blood and milk is given to Kokoya to help her regain her strength. For four months following Nemali's birth, Kokoya will remain confined to her hut with her new-born.

TU DU HOSPITAL, VIETNAM:

The largest maternity hospital in the world

The hospital is a large, modern building. Between ten and twenty women are waiting in the labor room. Some of them are lying on plastic-covered beds, others are sitting in a row of chairs. No-one moans, but when the camera lingers on a face, a spasm of sharp pain often crosses it suddenly. Cleaners mingle with nurses holding babies. A class of 20 students arrives. Outside there is the sound of a pneumatic drill. In spite of all the hustle and bustle, an atmosphere of relative calm reigns, with a surprising feeling of serenity.

The main tower is the nerve center of all the births. Six delivery rooms, each containing two beds, are laid out in a semi-circle around the central office. Dozens of midwives bustle around. One of them is covering herself up a lot more than the others: she wraps herself in a blue overall, puts on long gloves, puts another cap over the one she is wearing and then goes over to a woman who is about to give birth.

Next door, the situation seems complicated: 5 people are staring intently at the cervix of a woman who is twisting in pain on the bed. A nurse strokes her forehead. This is all the hospital provides in the way of pain relief.

In the next room, a baby has just been delivered without problem. He is taken to a table where, under the light of a lamp, he is marked using a cotton bud dipped in India ink. Apparently mistakes are commonplace... In 2005, there were 44,953 births in this department, 17,033 unassisted vaginal births, and 27,920 by forceps, ventouse or cesarean section.

I watch a delivery by cesarean section. The patient is having difficulty and in spite of trying several methods such as swelling the uterus with water to induce the birth, the cervix is not dilating and the baby, which is very large, will not come out. After a few minutes of activity - scalpels and scissors, cutting through tissue - the doctor reaches the sac containing the baby. There is a spray of amniotic fluid. The baby is finally pulled out. The cord is wrapped around his neck, but he is alive ...

USA: Vanessa chooses a natural birth

Greene, in the state of Maine, USA.

Vanessa, 32, and Michael, 36, live in a community made up of 10 other people: a group of friends who are activists, artists, organic farmers, people whose paths crossed while following the anti-globalization movement. Their house is in the middle of woods and fields, near a beautiful lake and surrounded by gardens.

It is Vanessa's first child, yet she has chosen a non-assisted, natural birth. Vanessa is convinced that her body knows what it must do. She is even convinced that if a problem arises during the birth, she will instinctively know how to solve it. She wants no outside help whatsoever.

Her decision to give birth alone worries the members of the community. They wanted a midwife to be present, "just in case". She replied that "it was out of the question to pretend when there's a midwife in the closet".

She does not yet know where she will give birth. She does not think it will be outside as it will probably be too cold. She will have a birthing pool in her bedroom. But she does not want to plan anything, she wants to remain free right up until the last minute to decide where it will happen.

Vanessa has prepared for the birth by herself. She has been doing yoga and learning about massages. She makes homemade herbal tea from raspberry leaves and nettles, which are supposed to be good

for her and her unborn baby...

Vanessa gives birth on the night of the full moon, at the exact date she had foreseen, April 13th. She gives birth in an inflatable pool in her bedroom. All the members of the community are present, they sing to her and the baby, who is a boy, called Fanek.

What is an unassisted birth?

Unassisted, or undisturbed, births are very fashionable in the United States at the moment. The woman may give birth either alone, with her family or with friends, either at home, or wherever she feels most comfortable. Some women give birth outside, others in water, in the living room or in a specially prepared birth room.

This movement came about as a reaction to the excessive medicalization of childbirth, from a desire to return to its physiological roots and to nature. According to this movement, the mother is the person most qualified to bring her child into the world. She is the only one who knows what is best for her and for her child. Nobody should give her any advice. The woman must follow her maternal instincts. She must experience the pleasure of receiving her child directly into her own arms

It is also a question of preserving the mother-child relationship. Nobody, except perhaps the father, should intervene or disturb this bond.

This is the text which Vanessa wrote after Fanek was born, as a birth announcement:

Fanek is one week old this morning. He shot into the water like a torpedo, then stretched out his arms to mine at 3.58pm on April 13th, full moon, just as he and I had planned.

Have you heard of Jacques Brel's wish that everyone should know how to dream and that some of them come true? This dream, which took the form of the birth and which resulted in Fanek, seems to me my most perfect one. Everything went exactly as

I had wished: I gave birth in the mauve room of the JED, in the small pool which was by the large windows which look out onto the weeping willow. But, better than that, the only experts present were my own intuition and my faith in the birth process, bathed in the love of all the Jeddors who were gathered around me (there were 16 of us waiting for Fanek).

At the end of the morning on April 12th, we went out to eat at Nezinscott Farm, where we toasted the start of the contractions with blueberry wine. In the afternoon, each and every one of us got busy with the final preparations for the room and the event itself: I supervised everything like a film director. At around 4pm, we all went for a walk to the lake, where the contractions got stronger, then faded. A nap (My foot! More like a kiss and a cuddle!) with my love made my mucus plug pop out like a champagne cork. Labor could begin!

First we sang sacred Hawaiian songs, then Brazilian ones with Paulinho, and then Kate and Ethan's guitars and harmonies. With each contraction, a choir of notes rose up to help me through it. Then the labor became more intense and everything became quieter, even my moans. Some people waited in the living room, others fell asleep on my bed, Lauren never let go of my feet, massaging my reflexology points, others monitored the water temperature, others stoked up the fire. I was curled up in Michael's arms, giving myself up to these spectacular pains. I was taken by surprise by the first push: Here we are then! I'm fully dilated! I said to the baby: "It's up to us now, me and you, together!"

So after an hour of pushing, the baby finally lay on my stomach for a little while. But it was time to break the suspense: I lifted him up a little and I announced: "This is Fanek!"

MEXICO: Gaby's preparation with dolphins

Gaby is expecting her second child. She has chosen to follow her antenatal classes in the water with dolphins.

Adriana, her midwife, has been working for several years on the interaction of dolphins and pregnant women, studying the effect of this relationship with the animal on the development of the baby in the uterus and after the birth.

We now know that dolphins communicate with the fetus as their sonar waves can be transmitted through the amniotic liquid. The ultrasound of the dolphin allows the functioning of the two hemispheres of the brain to balance. The dolphins feel the vibrations through their lower jaw. These vibrations create an image in their brain, which plays the role of a monitor comparable to that which a doctor uses for ultrasound scans. The animal sends ultrasounds, picked up by the baby through the amniotic fluid, which stimulate its brain activity, its immunological system, develop its senses and help it to strengthen its abilities.

In complete contrast to a conventional birth, Adriana and the obstetrician, JoseLuis will accompany Gaby so that she can experience a "humanized birth".

Humanization means first of all considering the mother as an individual human being, not as a baby-making machine, where nobody is interested in what she feels, what she thinks, what she wishes, what she senses, and where the impact of her emotions and feelings on the birth are not considered. Respect must be shown towards the mother, her body and the process it engages in order to give life. Humanization also means considering the unborn baby as a human being with feelings and needs.

All living beings go through a process in order to be born, and abbreviating this process by over-medicalization or cesarean deprives it of the strength necessary for it to adapt to its milieu. Depriving the baby of its passage through the uterus prevents its respiratory system from preparing itself and creates the need for first aid. The human body is a perfect machine and the best way to be born is through the vaginal passage.

This respect for nature is to the child's advantage. Adriana and others have noticed a difference between children born conventionally, and those

who have had a “natural” birth. Those who have had a natural birth are much calmer, but very alert, very open, often advanced for their age: they sit up earlier, walk before the others, read and write without difficulty. They also seem to be much more attentive and confident than children born by cesarean who are insecure babies.

Adriana: “We say that welcoming a newborn human being with love and consciousness sows seeds of love and peace for humanity.”

In the pipeline...

The investigation is still going on and continues to explore many different avenues. Here are some of the most successful ones:

BENARES, INDIA: Birth in the street

Benares is a holy town. At the foot of the town, the river Ganges, which symbolizes the hair of the goddess Shiva, has a purifying function. The old town stretches above, with its lively narrow alleys, its shrines, its silk trade, its yoga schools.

SIBERIA: Birth with the Nomadic Dolgan People

The Dolgans live inside the polar circle in the extreme north of Siberia, on the Taimyr peninsula which stretches between the tundra and the Arctic Ocean. They are nomads. They live off fishing, hunting – they hunt arctic fox and wolves – and breeding reindeer.

NIGER: Birth with the Touaregs

The Touaregs can be defined as a cultural community whose identity is centered around a language, with a solid family, social and political organization at its base. The Touareg women have a relatively privileged status for they are autonomous and respected within the society. The tents belong to the women.

AMAZON RAINFOREST, BRAZIL:

Birth with the Kayapo Indians

The Kayapo Indians live in Brazil in the Xingu national park. They belong to one of the largest warrior tribes in the Amazon. Nowadays, they are using political, economic, media and scientific tools in their fight to preserve their cultural identity and lifestyle.

CHINA or JAPAN: Traditional birth

SCANDINAVIA - NORWAY, SWEDEN or ICELAND

PERSIAN GULF - SAUDIE ARABIA or KUWAIT: Birth in a luxury private clinic / women with veil

FRANCE: Extremely medicalized birth (triplets)

CANADA: A child mother giving birth

ISRAEL: Birth in a kibbutz

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