

Protecting the Cave

Written by Patrick M. Houser

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The ancient archetype of a father during birth is that of him standing guard at the opening of the cave, protecting the birthing mother and newborn from danger. As we move through time, he comes closer to the actual location of the birth itself—waiting, protecting. By the late 20th century, he enters the birthing room and becomes more involved.

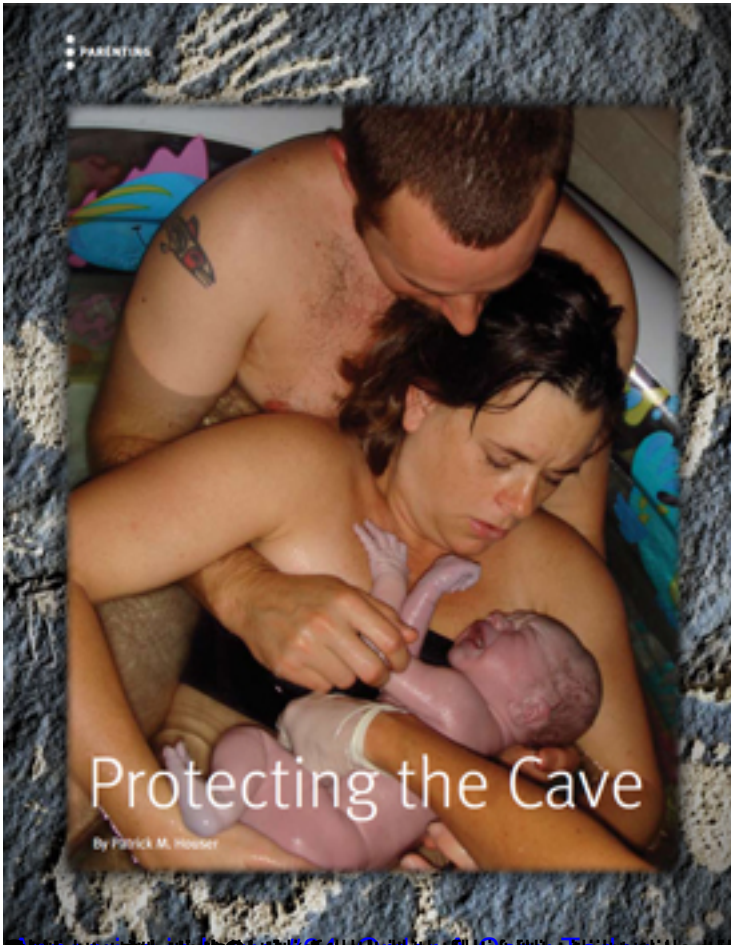
His earliest role in the birth process was to ensure survival—to protect the family from wild animals, or perhaps other tribes. As birth has become more industrialized, his role appears to have altered. But could it be that by entering the birthing room, the father is returning to his initial, primal role of protecting his loved ones?

In our culture today, the threat could be drifting dangerously close to the mother and baby—from inside the birthing room itself. Has our modern approach to birth interfered with the natural physiological process to such a point where fathers are now needed to intercede? To protect in a new way? Interventions of every unimaginable kind are rampant, and much of what is being done to the mother and child is as unnecessary as it is risky.

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Suppose that the modern role of a father is to prohibit the excessive bombardment of people, equipment and drugs from interfering in the very natural and ordinary process of birth. Many interventions at birth are the result of overimaginative professionals, men with good intentions, who have been medically trained to intervene in a nonmedical process. Humanity cannot invent a drug superior to that which the mother's body can manufacture, nor can it produce a doctor whose experience is as vast and wise as a mother's instinct.

If a mother is properly protected in a safe and sacred environment, free from unnecessary interventions, distractions and interruptions, she can get on with the business of birth. She will use her "instinctual brain" to access all of the hormones and inner resources required to birth her baby with ease, safety and empowerment.

When it comes to hospital births, a father's biggest challenge is penetrating the gauntlet of a foreign and unnatural environment. A new father can expect to face emotions and decisions that he cannot rationally anticipate in advance. These pertain not only to himself, but also to those he loves and feels compelled to protect. There are no prepared answers as to how he can do this. He can, however, ask questions, demand reasonable and satisfactory answers, and trust in his ability to protect, just as he trusts in the mother's ability to birth.

Fathers in the Chamber

When my water broke five weeks early and things were not progressing the way everyone else thought they should (they were pushing for interventions), my daughter's father stood up for me when I was getting worn down. I am so grateful to him for staying so strong and supporting me in the birth decisions that were so very important to me. *By Brooke Starr Connor*

We used the Bradley Method for our home births, so I was there to coach her and support her physically and emotionally, and to be there for her every need. *By Matthew McCabe*

My husband spent eight hours rubbing my back, Massaging, I even tried to perform a milk-wax's coming on so he could get a break. He was through that. He also persuaded me to have a home birth—best decision ever! *By Samantha Van Norman*

At the birth of my second son, Max, I lost my cool. Labor was hard and long and I kept saying, "I can't do it, I can't do it, I need drugs!" My husband held my hands and said in the clearest voice, "Then, you are doing it." He was instrumental in helping Max to come into a candle-lit water birth of peace. I couldn't have done it without him, and I have never loved him more. *By Pam Jarboe*

I was there by her side throughout. Nobody's want to start a family any other way! *By Peter Leigh*

He walked with me for the first 24 hours as I tried to walk my little boy into this world. Then, when it was time, he brought my heating pad, massaged my back and so on, and so on. He stayed my love, gave me my water and helped me focus! *By Maggie Hildley*

My husband was the calm at all times of our home births—especially the ones that I was just born, and the cool was around our baby's neck. He supported me emotionally and physically since I stood for a number of them. He even did massage during when necessary. *By Mary J. Houser*

Patrick M. Houser is a grandfather and father of two sons. The birth of his first son revealed to him the need to understand birth more fully. Patrick's second son's arrival, in public, was the first documented water birth in the United States. These experiences have formed his life's work and led him to nearly 25 years of passionate advocacy for birth choices. Patrick has a degree in marketing, has owned a natural health center, and for 10 years owned and ran a construction firm in Austin, Texas. He is the director of The Source Foundation International, a 501(c)(3) registered charity that promotes health and choice from pre-conception through birth and throughout life. Patrick is also a speaker, writer, and is the author of the Fathers-to-Be Handbook, originally published in the UK and now available in a U.S. edition. View article references and author information here: pathwaystofamilywellness.org/references.html.

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