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Articles**

Birth

by Jo Bertrand

It is difficult to think about this word without first considering the enormity of its meaning. Without birth we would not exist. It is a fundamental starting point of life which implies creativity and the beginning of something positive.

The birth of a child is without a doubt one of the most inspiring facts of life and one which allows us to continue into the future. Not only is this word extremely meaningful when used alone, it also has several collocations which expand its significance. I have chosen just a few to explore briefly here.

Birth certificate

This is more than just a piece of paper. It is an integral part of our identity. It gives us a sense of belonging and can be a source of pride. Having dual nationality, and so having two birth certificates, can link you emotionally to both countries. Most certificates have the name of both the father and the mother although it is possible that the one or other of the biological parents decides to remain anonymous.

Birth control

In England there is a charity called the fpa (Family Planning Association). Their objective is to advise and provide assistance to people, young and old, who need help with birth control or sexual health. One of their aims is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and trying to limit the number of teenage pregnancies through communication and making guidance available to young people in schools.

Birthday

It depends on what family you come from but many families celebrate birthdays in a big way. In our family when we were younger we always had a homemade cake covered with candles. We don't have saint's days in England like they do in France so our birthday is the one day that is focused on us. It is the day when we are really allowed to self-indulge. Nowadays most people receive cards and presents and organise a party or celebrate their birthday with friends in other ways. Mine is the 29th November if you want to make a note in your diaries!

Birth partner

Nowadays the father-to-be is often in the delivery room assisting his wife while she gives birth. This is not however always the case and sometimes there is a third or even fourth person who accompanies the mother-to-be through labour, both physically and emotionally. Around the world there are mid-wives and other professional birthing assistants who play an important role in the birth process.

Birth Place

Famous birthplaces include the house where Shakespeare was born and lived in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England. In the South of Wales you can find the birth places of many famous singers,

actors and poets such as Tom Jones, Anthony Hopkins (Silence of the Lambs), and Dylan Thomas. In London and other big cities in England you can often see plaques on the outside wall of buildings stating that a famous person was born there.

Birth plan

This is a very Anglo-Saxon concept. When asked what her birth plan was a French friend of mine replied that she planned to travel to her to her parents' village a month before the birth. It wasn't quite the answer that the doctor was expecting. A birth plan is what the expectant parents write and present to the delivery team explaining how they would like the birth of their child to be carried out. This can include details such as having the lights turned down low, music playing in the background to more medical aspects such as refusal of pain relief medication. However, what is written in a birth plan and what happens in reality are often two contrasting stories.

Birth rate

At the moment Japan has the lowest birth rate with the highest life expectancy in the world which could mean that in years to come the ageing population may not have enough people working to pay for their pension funds. China's birth rate is high and remains a potential source of financial problems for the country. This explains the government's efforts, dating from the 1990s, to restrict how many children people have so that they can keep the birth rate down.

Birth rituals

In China the mother and baby stay at home for the first month without washing to preserve the purity of the child and to protect him from the outside world. Elsewhere, Hindu rituals include feeding a newborn baby honey and whispering the name of God into his ear. They also attach a lot of importance to the baby naming ceremony. A strange ritual that apparently takes place in India during a difficult childbirth is to give the woman a glass of water to drink in which her mother-in-law has put her toes! This is supposed to speed up the birth.

Birth stone

The day we are born corresponds to a zodiac sign and supposedly a colour, number and precious stone all of which are meant to reveal something about our personality. With my birthday in November my birth stone is topaz which, according to Polish tradition, signifies fidelity. Our zodiac sign is determined by the rotation of the earth and I am a Sagittarius and am therefore supposed to be frank, honest and am meant to like travelling. Most of this is true!

To give birth

This is for me the most significant word association. Having been through this experience twice I can easily say that it is one of the most amazing moments of my life. The rush of emotion when you are presented with your newborn baby is indescribable. Many years ago giving birth was a perilous event for women. Nowadays the risks are much more limited and it is a wonderful event.

Re-birth

According to some religions such as Buddhism, when we die it is only our physical body that ceases to exist. Many people believe that our soul continues to live on and will be reincarnated in the form of an animal or another human being. This makes life a cyclical process rather than a linear one.