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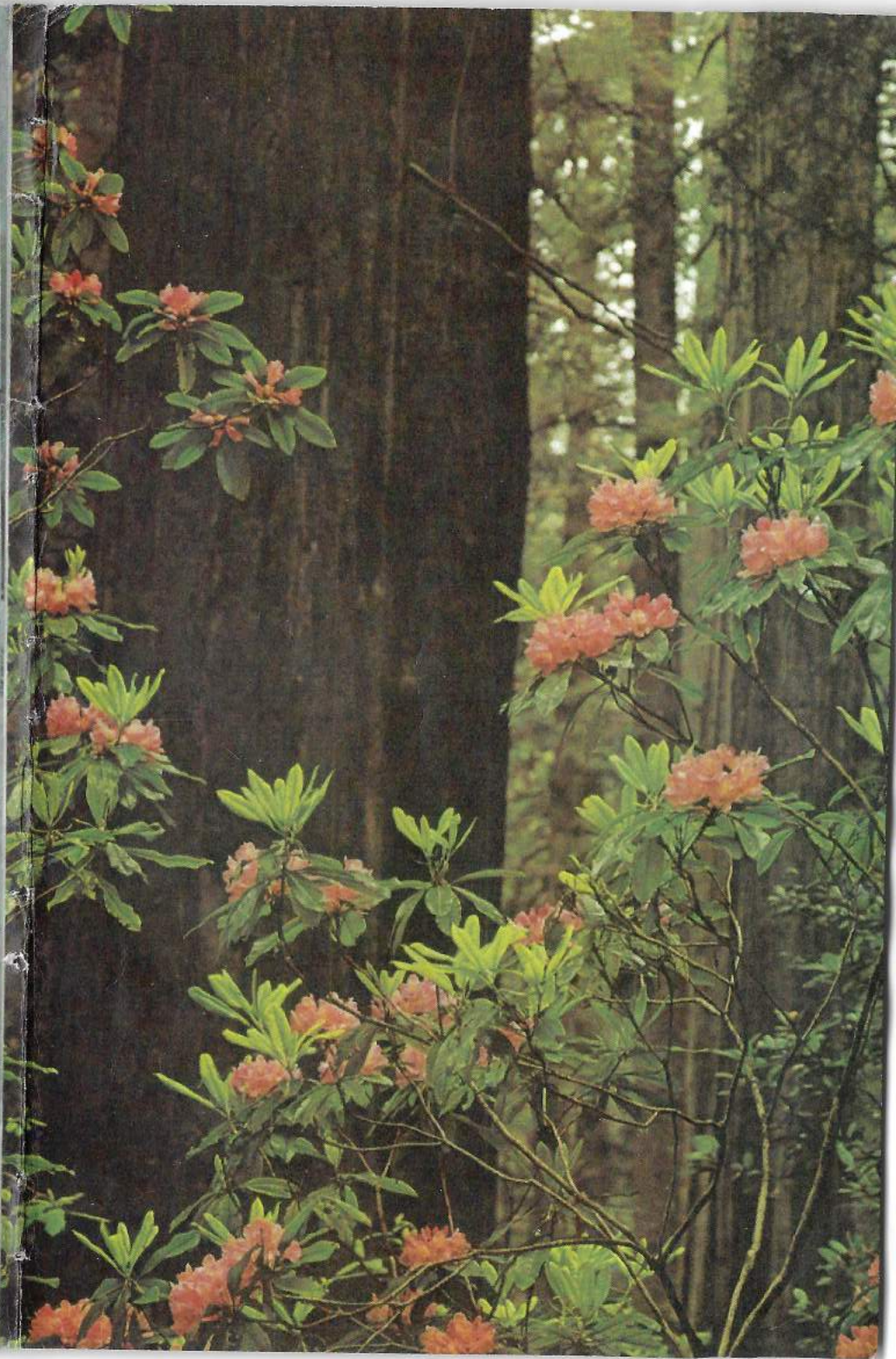
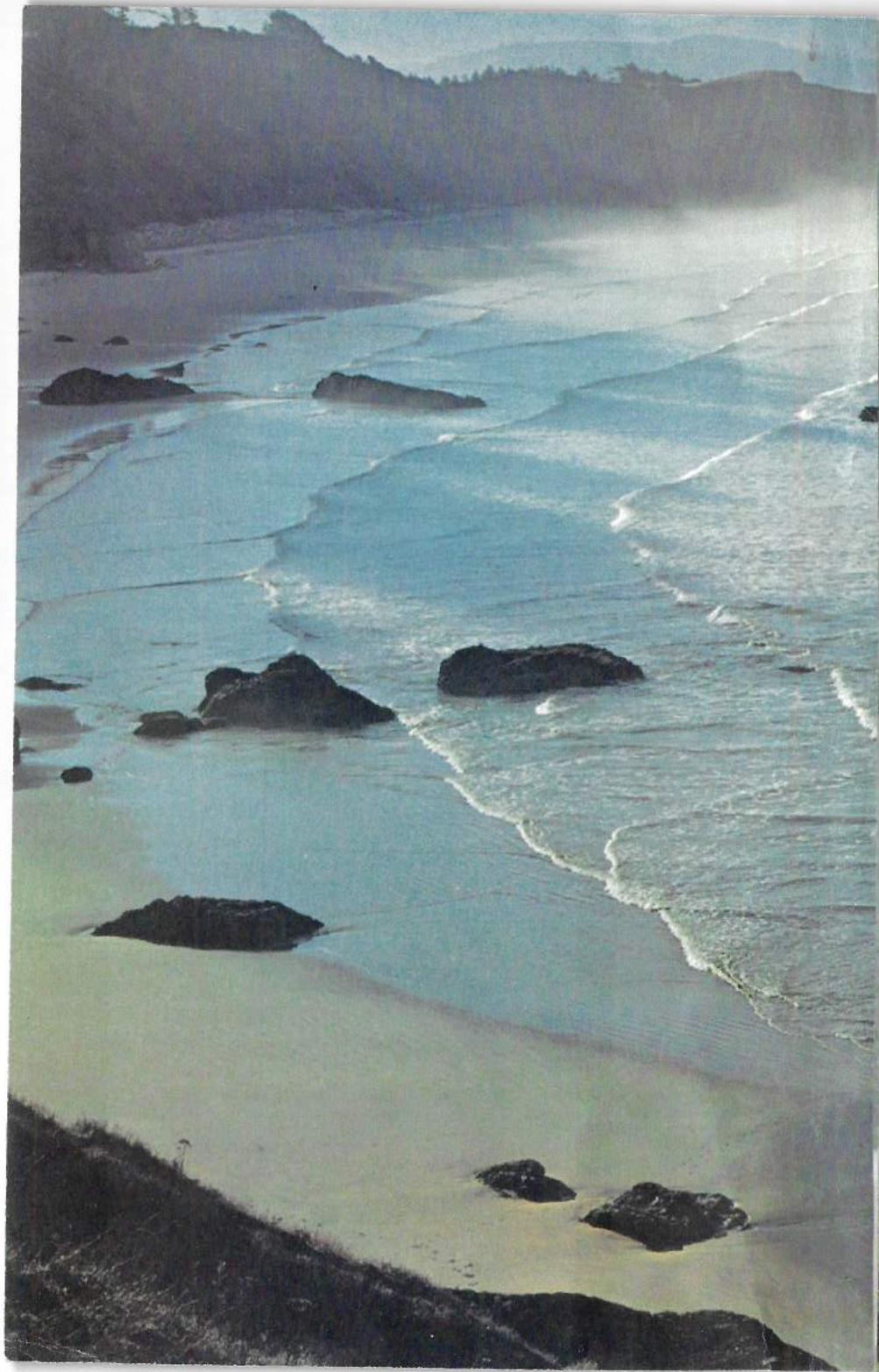
Pregnant

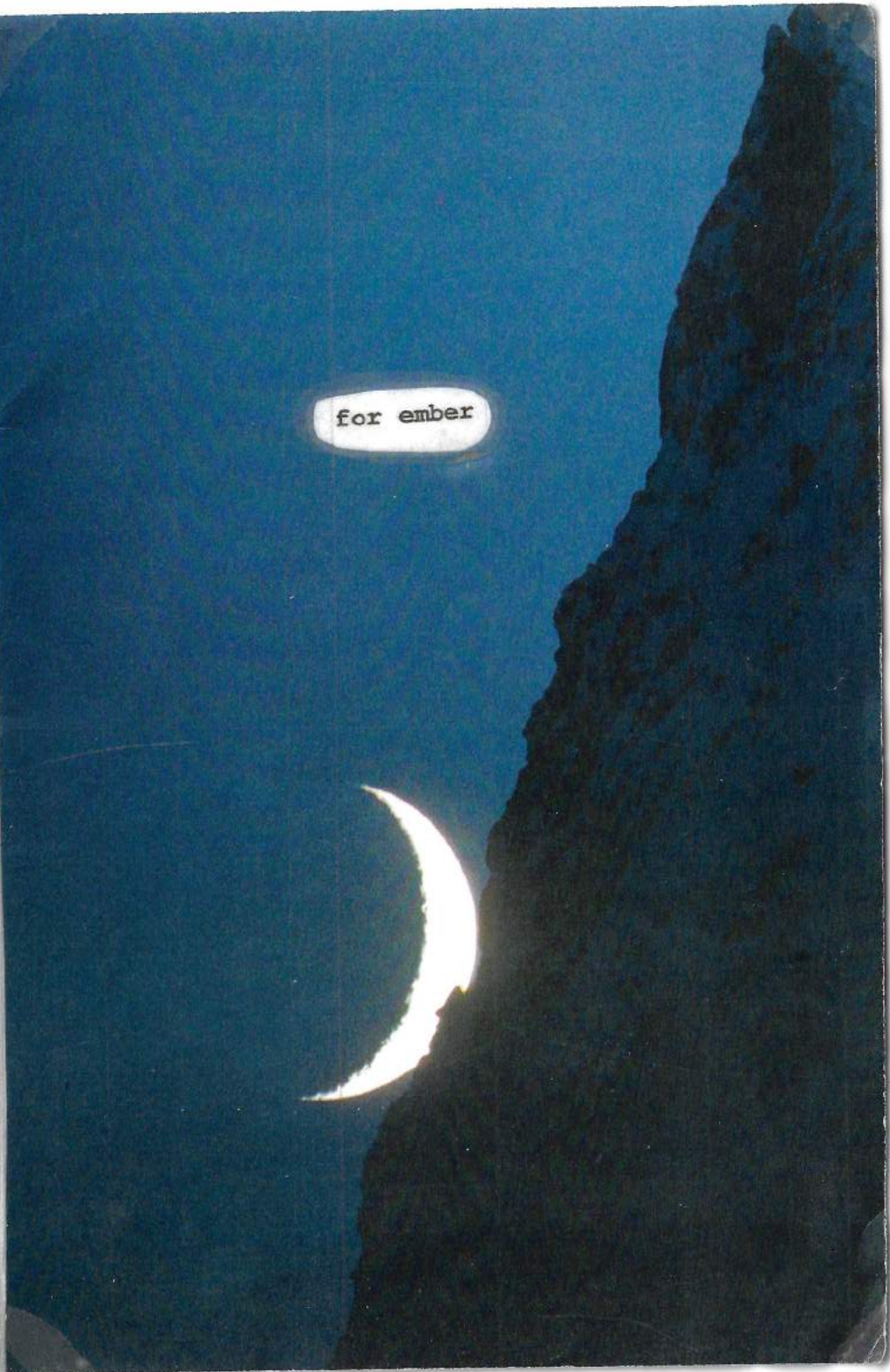
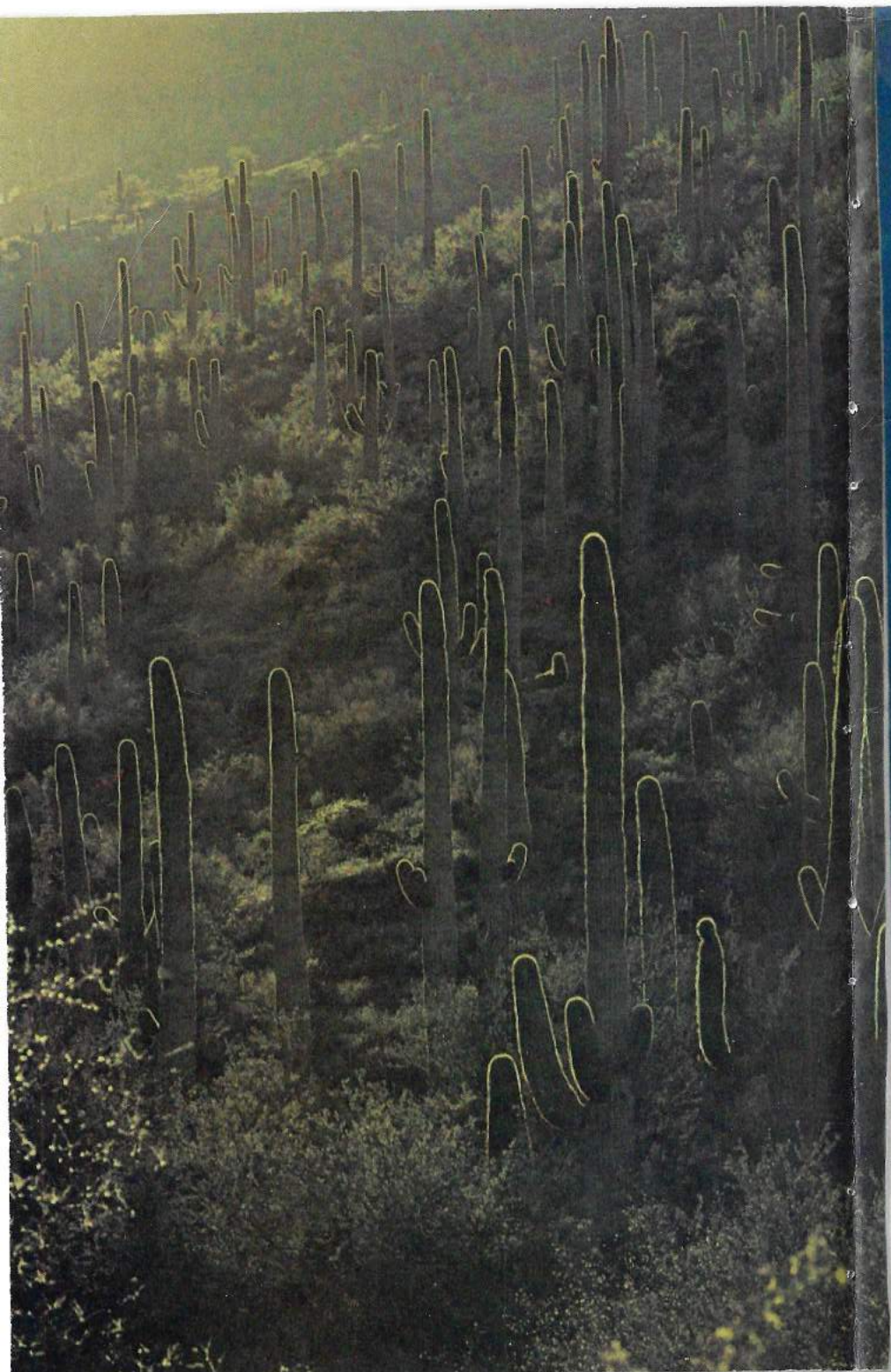
a compilation of information

for expectant new parents

by obsidian zhang

including interviews with
two punk mommas and a midwife
and an herbal guide by Hel Sídhe Wyly





for ember

Intentions

Approaching the research for this was exciting to me. I have been a childcare provider since 2007 in preschools, daycares, libraries, museums, and as a nanny. My focus has been with infants and toddlers. Over the years, I have developed a detailed and thoughtful understanding of early childrearing and how to prepare for new parenthood during pregnancy.

Two weeks ago I moved to Olympia. That same day, I learned that my best friend is pregnant. They decided really early on that they are staying pregnant. They told me about all the books they had begun pouring over and how overwhelming it was to read about these normy situations that had little to do with their personal story. This project began because I wanted to

compile information using language that avoids assumptions about gender, accessibility, and relationships, and focused on empowering ember to self-advocate and trust their body through the birthing process.

Because I wanted this to be finished in time for it to be useful to ember, it is a rushed project- two weeks from start to finish. I do assume intent to carry to full term. I also address this to a pregnant person (ex. 'your uterus') and am mostly speaking to my friend's specific

Please feel free to hit me up with any

questions about pregnancy or parenting, to

talk baby, or if you need support!

I'm super available!

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Thank you.

Mari, a dear +
beloved friend

Molasses, a new friend +
brave new mom
who somehow found
the time to write this!

Rachael, welcome to, our
adventure.

Sighe, who saved me in
the desert once.

Everyone who has
offered their support

All of the parents,
each of your
stories are
important.

Ally + the Olympia
Timberland Library.

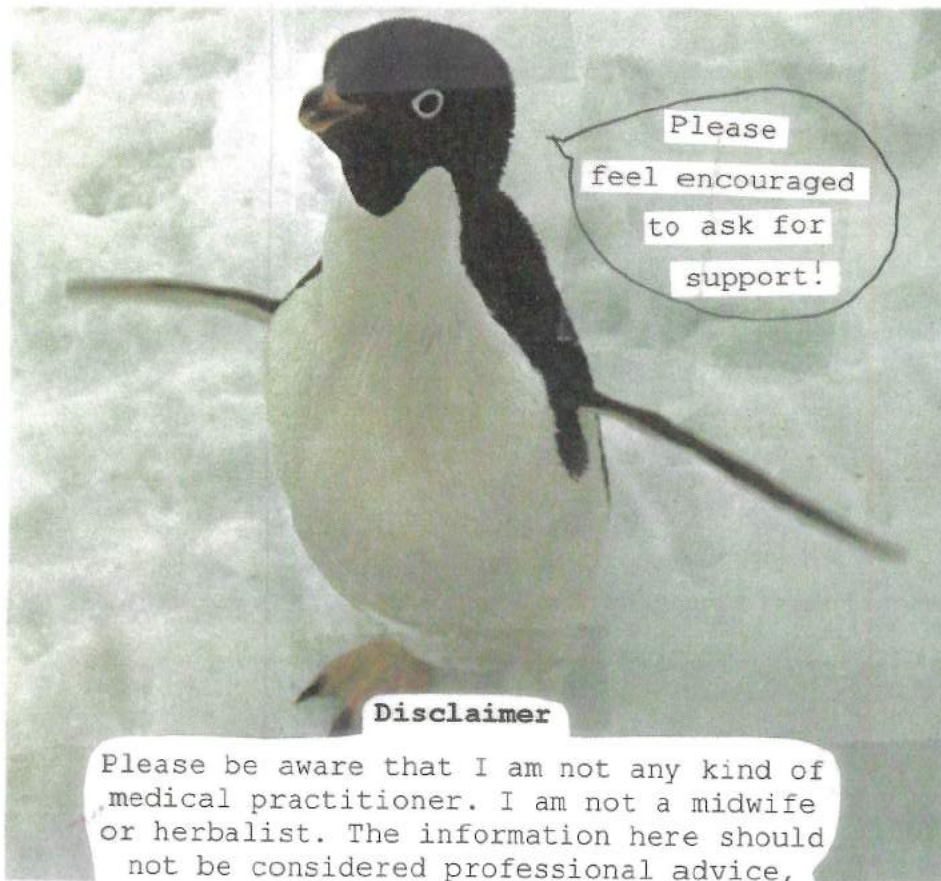
experience. They are a white, sober, very poor, transy queerdo in a brand new relationship, with an unplanned pregnancy, covered by insurance, receiving care from a midwife, with a supportive partner and friends.

This was originally going to be a sort of scrapbook of information specifically for ember. As I told a few people about what I was working on, it became quickly clear to me that I needed to make this a broader project. Depending on interest, I am considering creating future, more comprehensive editions with even more inclusive, considerate language.



I have a few topics in mind that are important but not included in depth here—abortion, abuse, addiction, adoption, breast feeding, eating disorder, food insecurity, houselessness, miscarriage, race, etc. If you have questions you want answered, topics you'd like to see covered, contributions to offer on these or other topics, or whatever, feel free to email me! Feel free to contact me if you have questions about pregnancy and parenthood too. Let me know if you wanna see that second edition!

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Please
feel encouraged
to ask for
support!

Disclaimer

Please be aware that I am not any kind of medical practitioner. I am not a midwife or herbalist. The information here should not be considered professional advice, especially because each person's health and story are different. Please seek your own information and care wherever possible.

I know that not every suggestion is relevant or even accessible to everyone reading this. I hope that it can be useful to the pregnant weirdos in the world.

Also, please take care of yourself as you approach this information. I encourage you to be aware of your emotional reactions and take breaks if you need to. I know that some topics are intense and that for some folx, talk of pregnancy and parenthood in general can be difficult.

Know your limits and take care!

Recommended Reading

- Ina May Gaskin's Guide to Childbirth
- What to Expect, The First Year by Heidi Murkoff
(I do not recommend the 'When You're Expecting' version.)
- The Birth Partner by Penny Simkin
- Botanical Medicine for Women's Health by Aviva Romm
- The Mama Natural Guide by Genevieve Howland
- Unconditional Parenting by Alfie Kohn
- Caring for Infants with Respect by Magda Gerber

Other Zines

- Phases of the Moon: Resistance is Fertile (traveling while pregnant)
- Pirate Papa (DIY parenting)
- Fireweed (herbalism, wild food, and kiddos)
- Mine (anthology of reproductive rights)
- Placenta (punk rock parenting)

Post-Natal Notes

You and the baby will be checked 24 hours after birth. Babies are born very nearsighted at about 20/400 vision. In a few days, your milk will come in and you may experience engorgement. This will subside soon as your body gets a rhythm for it. Warm showers and compresses can help. Anticipate a long time before your body adjusts to life after delivery. You will have lochia discharge for a few weeks, which is similar to a period, but the post-baby version. You may want pads for this. If you notice anything that makes you feel uneasy (infection, postpartum depression, etc.), call your provider. Reach out for the support you need! Trust your instincts!

I believe in you!

Notes

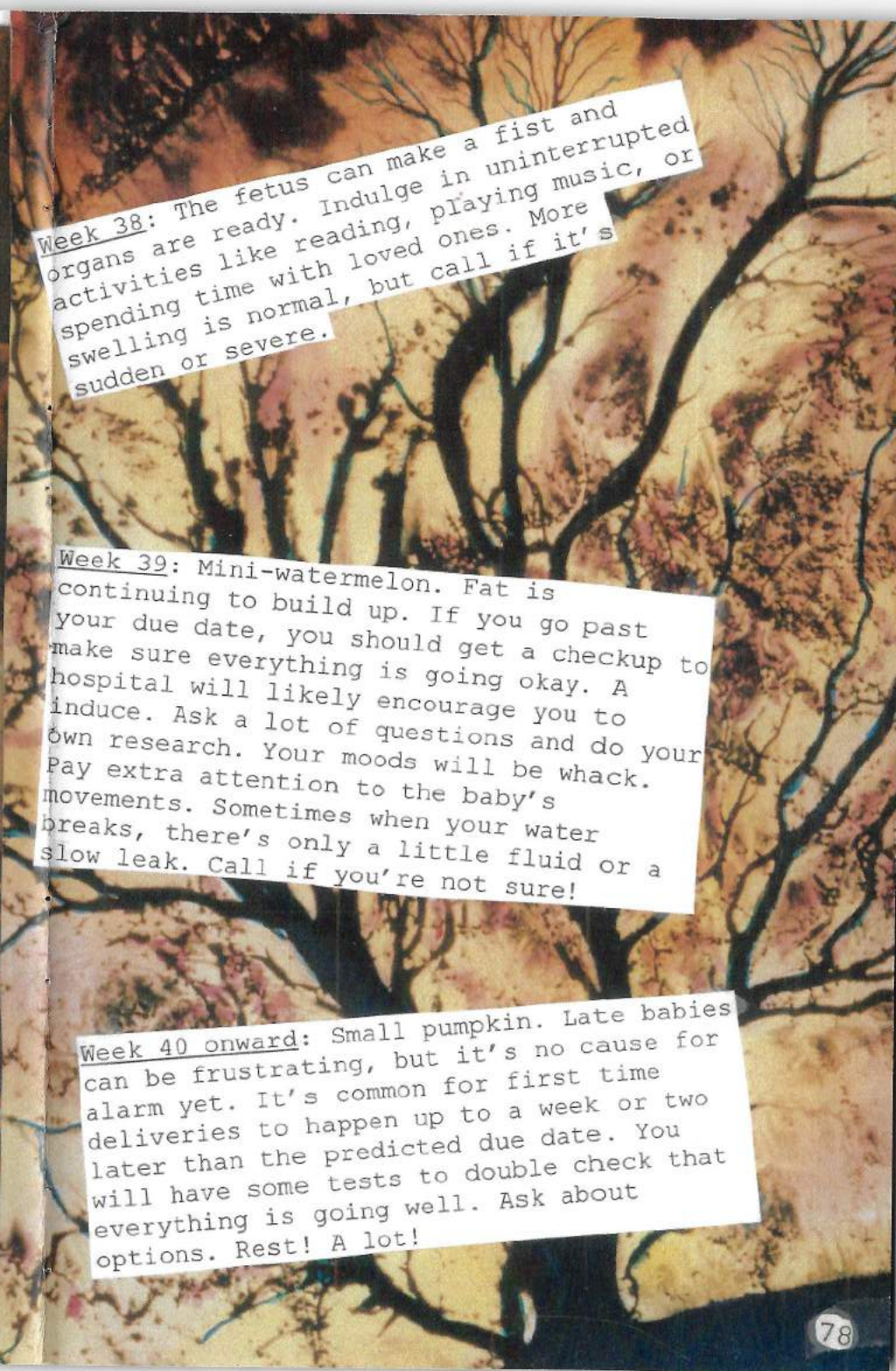
For this zine, I got the weekly information from babycenter.com, which is an amazing resource. Other sections either came from the same site or my personal experience with parents and children or trainings and workshops.

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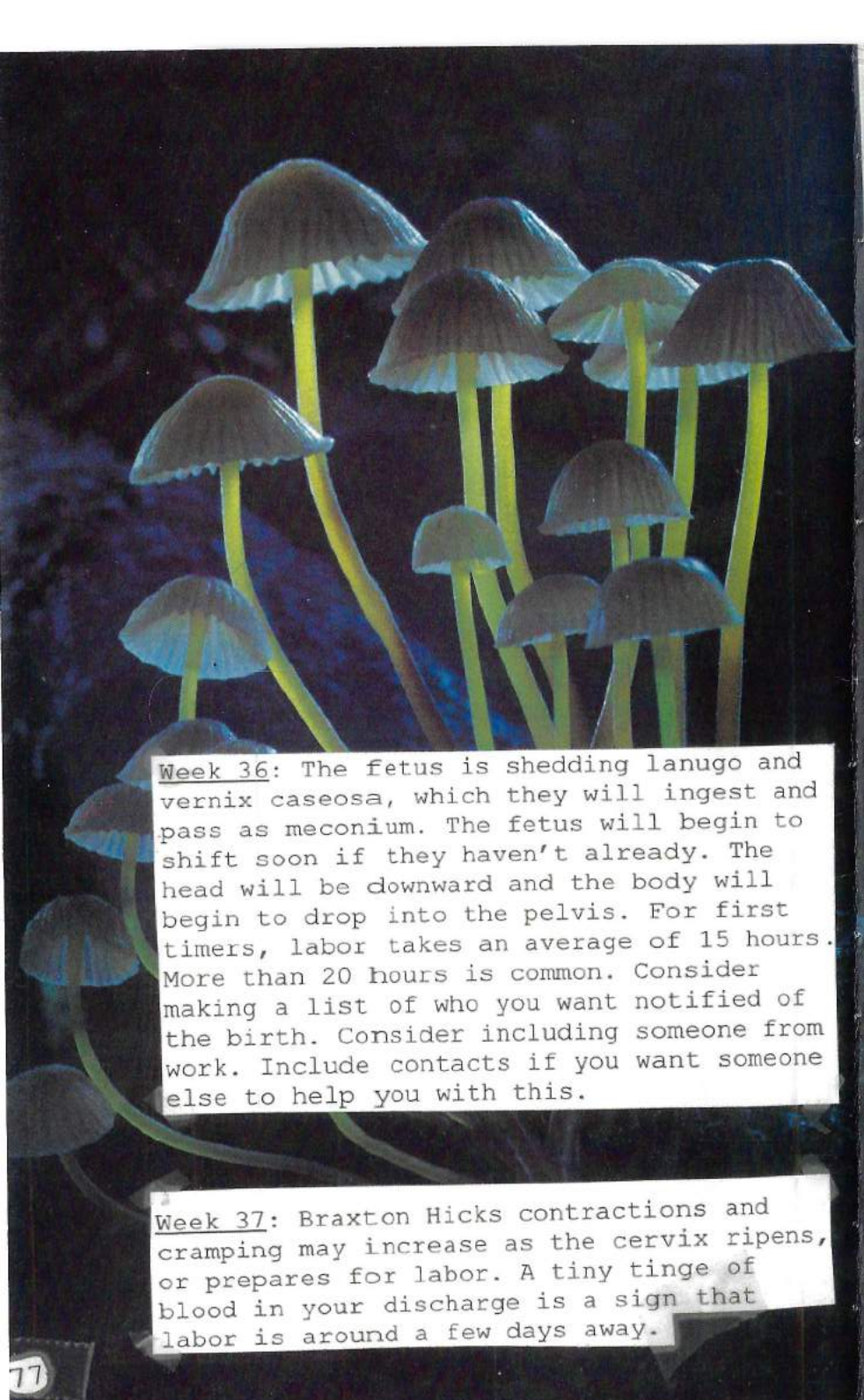
PART I



Week 38: The fetus can make a fist and organs are ready. Indulge in uninterrupted activities like reading, playing music, or spending time with loved ones. More swelling is normal, but call if it's sudden or severe.

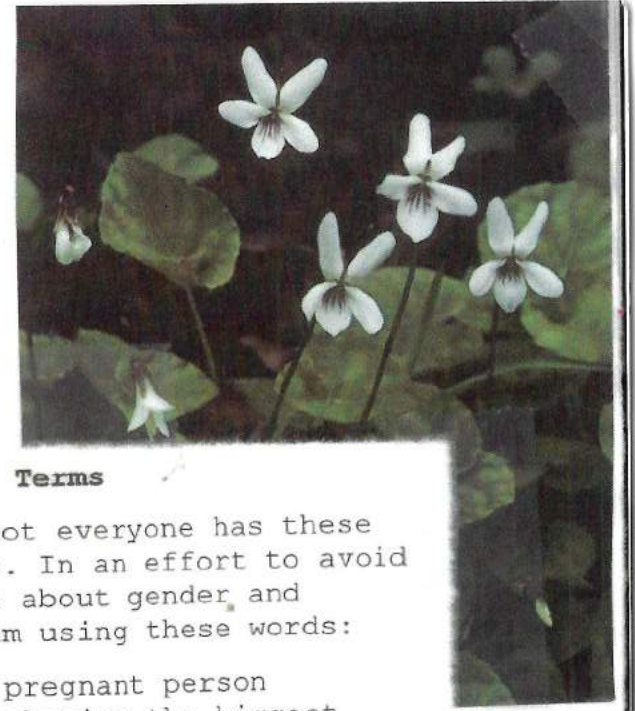
Week 39: Mini-watermelon. Fat is continuing to build up. If you go past your due date, you should get a checkup to make sure everything is going okay. A hospital will likely encourage you to induce. Ask a lot of questions and do your own research. Your moods will be whack. Pay extra attention to the baby's movements. Sometimes when your water breaks, there's only a little fluid or a slow leak. Call if you're not sure!

Week 40 onward: Small pumpkin. Late babies can be frustrating, but it's no cause for alarm yet. It's common for first time deliveries to happen up to a week or two later than the predicted due date. You will have some tests to double check that everything is going well. Ask about options. Rest! A lot!



Week 36: The fetus is shedding lanugo and vernix caseosa, which they will ingest and pass as meconium. The fetus will begin to shift soon if they haven't already. The head will be downward and the body will begin to drop into the pelvis. For first timers, labor takes an average of 15 hours. More than 20 hours is common. Consider making a list of who you want notified of the birth. Consider including someone from work. Include contacts if you want someone else to help you with this.

Week 37: Braxton Hicks contractions and cramping may increase as the cervix ripens, or prepares for labor. A tiny tinge of blood in your discharge is a sign that labor is around a few days away.



Terms

I recognize that not everyone has these supports available. In an effort to avoid making assumptions about gender and relationships, I am using these words:

- Birth parent:** the pregnant person
- Co-parent:** anyone sharing the biggest responsibilities of parenthood with the birth parent, regardless of relationship. Could be multiple people, could include the non-birth parent.
- Healthcare provider:** prenatal doctor, family physician, or midwife
- Labor coach:** anyone supporting the birth parent through the process of labor, regardless of relationship. Could be multiple people, could include the non-birth parent or a doula.
- Non-birth parent:** the non-pregnant parent, regardless of relationship.

I am starting counting where day one is the first day of your last period before conception. Pregnancy starts at week two.

- 1st Trimester:** weeks 1-13
- 2nd Trimester:** weeks 14-26
- 3rd Trimester:** week 27 onward
- Preterm:** 37 weeks or sooner
- Full term:** between 38 and 39 weeks
- Post-term:** 40 weeks or later

Doctor or Midwife?

Briefly put, if you have a choice, it's up to you. Trust your instincts to know what you're comfortable with and what your priorities are. If you choose a midwife, you'll be informed if a complication arises that does require a hospital. Check out *The Business of Being Born*, a documentary about midwives and the history of birthing in the US. Some questions to consider:

Is vaginal birth a priority for you?
It's a priority for midwives, but not all doctors.

Do you want your healthcare provider to stay with you throughout labor?
Midwives stick with you while doctors are in and out as they have other patients.

Do you have preferences for pain management and obstetric interventions?
Both are typical in a hospital setting, but some doctors are accommodating if you'd rather not. Midwives will be advocates for your wishes and will inform you of your options.

sooner than now. Make sure you're getting time to rest and store energy. Itchy bumps are extremely rare and usually harmless, but check with your provider for relief treatment and to make sure it's not something more serious. Intense itchiness may be related to a liver problem. Check in with your helpers! Can someone help coordinate meals? Help with chores and errands? Get your mail and garbage? You deserve support!

Week 35: Honeydew. Kidneys are developed. Your uterus is now sneaking up into your ribcage. Remember when you kept it all in your pelvis? You've done a lot of work since then! Congrats! You're doing it!! Check in with your pain management and relaxation techniques. You could make a list to remind yourself of them when you're in labor. If you are planning a hospital or birthing center delivery, note the fastest routes for getting there, figure out where you can park for at least 24 hours, and ask where to enter if you get there after regular hours. If you are having a midwife attend your birth, go over what to do once you're in labor and the best way to contact them in case it happens in the middle of the night. Start doubling recipes and freezing meals!

Week 32: The fetus is gaining about half a pound a week, which means you're putting on about a full pound a week. The fetus is plumping up and will gain about a full third of the birth weight in the coming weeks. Eating small meals throughout the day can help with symptoms of crowding in your abdomen, which can include shortness of breath and heartburn. Check in with your healthcare provider and labor coach about who you want to be with you when you deliver. If you are planning a hospital birth but want someone to stay with you, consider a labor coach or doula.

Week 33: Moving around is likely becoming more difficult. Numbness in extremities is typical. This is due to that extra fluid pinching nerves. Stretching can help. Note the movements of the fetus. There's no absolute here, but you'll get a sense for what is typical. If you notice a decrease, talk to your healthcare provider.

Week 34: The central nervous system is finishing up and babies born between now and full term, who have no other anticipated complications, are typically born healthy. They may need some extra care at first, but long term effects are far less likely than if they are born

Do you like the idea of constant monitoring or intermittent monitoring and being able to move around?

Many hospitals restrict movement in favor of constant monitoring, though some will allow movement. Midwives absolutely encourage moving through the process and monitor intermittently.

Are you considered to have a typical or high-risk pregnancy?

Midwives are medical professionals and do bring equipment and most can bring all the same medications with them that a doctor would have, but a hospital may be better suited to your specific needs if you're high-risk. A midwife will tell you if you're a good candidate for home birth.

How do you feel about genetic screenings and ultrasounds?

Doctors may require you to get more tests than are absolutely necessary where a midwife will clearly let you know when you have options, allowing you to give informed consent. Consider if you simply like the idea of having all the tests anyway or have a family health history that suggests it's a good idea to go that route. A midwife can do these tests for you too, but will give you options if you'd rather not.

Interview with Rachael Cook, a Midwife

Today I went with ember and their partner ari to a consultation with Rachael Cook of A New Day Midwifery. Afterwards, I contacted her for an interview. Keep in mind that while she is a licensed practicing midwife, her philosophy and services offered may differ from other midwives. Seek your own information as much as possible to find what suits your needs.

How many births have you attended?

I have attended almost 300 births. I have managed just over 100 of them.

What was your first delivery like?

The first birth I ever managed was a sweet second baby to an excited family. I remember the mother had two hounds outside that would howl with her every time she had a contraction. She gave birth on her hands and knees in the water and reached down to help catch her own baby. It was beautiful.

What are the top three reasons for transferring to a hospital?

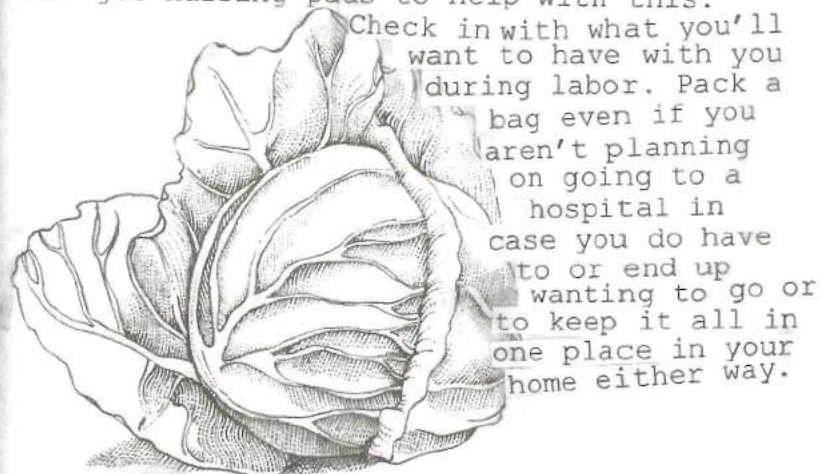
- Prolonged rupture of membranes (water has been broken for a long time) and labor isn't starting.
- A long birth where the person in labor is exhausted and/or the labor is not progressing.
- If there is meconium (baby poop) in the amniotic fluid, it can interfere with baby's ability to breathe on the outside.

Week 30: Cabbage. The volume of amniotic fluid will begin to decrease now as the fetus grows. Your center of gravity is ever-shifting and your ligaments will continue to relax, so don't be alarmed if you're feeling clumsy. Take care when shifting from sitting to standing to lying down. A return or increase of mood swings is typical. Pregnancy is a physical and emotional process- if you're having prolonged symptoms of depression, anxiety, trouble eating, or are experiencing abuse, you can talk to a professional for advice that works for you. Check in with your fears.

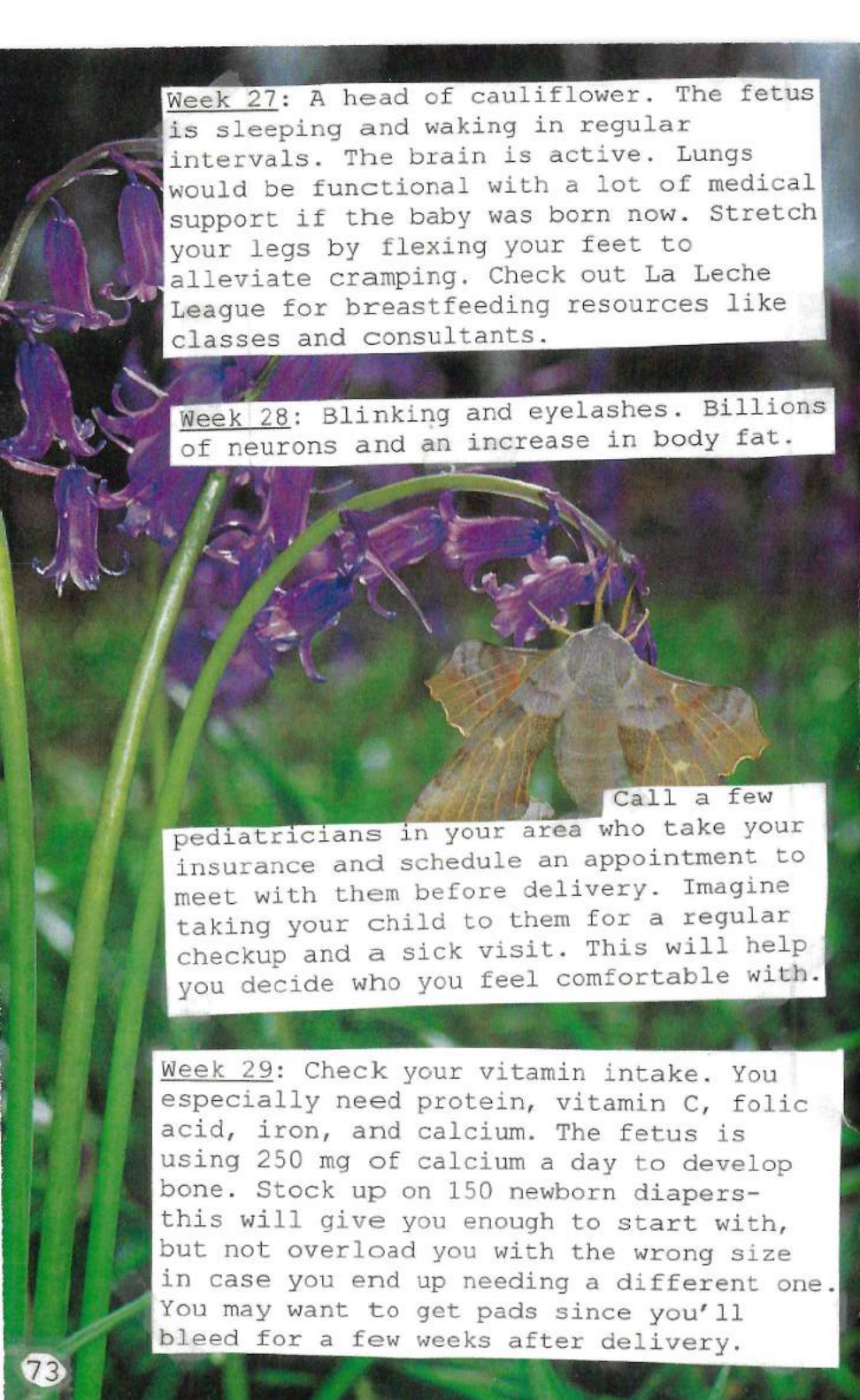
Worries about labor are very common.

Have an honest conversation with your healthcare provider about your questions and expectations to prepare yourself as much as possible. Check in with your baby gear. What do you still need to acquire or assemble? Reach out if you need help tackling this task.

Week 31: The fetus may be extra active. Many people start to feel random contractions known as Braxton Hicks. These are less than four per hour and painless. Keep an eye out for symptoms of preterm labor. Colostrum may start to leak. You can get nursing pads to help with this.



Check in with what you'll want to have with you during labor. Pack a bag even if you aren't planning on going to a hospital in case you do have to or end up wanting to go or to keep it all in one place in your home either way.

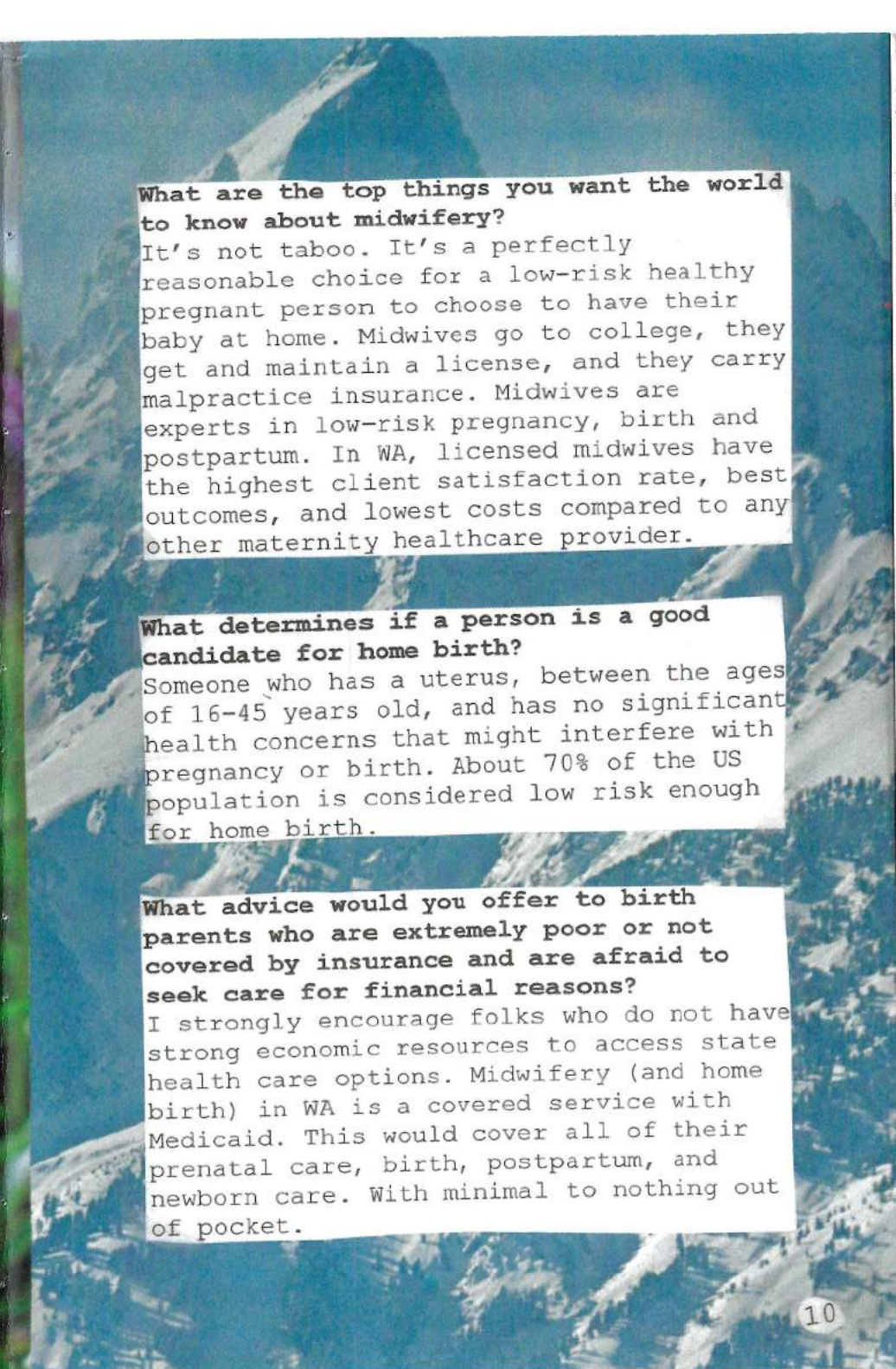


Week 27: A head of cauliflower. The fetus is sleeping and waking in regular intervals. The brain is active. Lungs would be functional with a lot of medical support if the baby was born now. Stretch your legs by flexing your feet to alleviate cramping. Check out La Leche League for breastfeeding resources like classes and consultants.

Week 28: Blinking and eyelashes. Billions of neurons and an increase in body fat.

Call a few pediatricians in your area who take your insurance and schedule an appointment to meet with them before delivery. Imagine taking your child to them for a regular checkup and a sick visit. This will help you decide who you feel comfortable with.

Week 29: Check your vitamin intake. You especially need protein, vitamin C, folic acid, iron, and calcium. The fetus is using 250 mg of calcium a day to develop bone. Stock up on 150 newborn diapers—this will give you enough to start with, but not overload you with the wrong size in case you end up needing a different one. You may want to get pads since you'll bleed for a few weeks after delivery.



What are the top things you want the world to know about midwifery?

It's not taboo. It's a perfectly reasonable choice for a low-risk healthy pregnant person to choose to have their baby at home. Midwives go to college, they get and maintain a license, and they carry malpractice insurance. Midwives are experts in low-risk pregnancy, birth and postpartum. In WA, licensed midwives have the highest client satisfaction rate, best outcomes, and lowest costs compared to any other maternity healthcare provider.

What determines if a person is a good candidate for home birth?

Someone who has a uterus, between the ages of 16-45 years old, and has no significant health concerns that might interfere with pregnancy or birth. About 70% of the US population is considered low risk enough for home birth.

What advice would you offer to birth parents who are extremely poor or not covered by insurance and are afraid to seek care for financial reasons?

I strongly encourage folks who do not have strong economic resources to access state health care options. Midwifery (and home birth) in WA is a covered service with Medicaid. This would cover all of their prenatal care, birth, postpartum, and newborn care. With minimal to nothing out of pocket.

Many folks assume that home birth is something only wealthy people have access to, when the truth is that 60% of my practice fall below the state poverty level. In most cases, if you have a clean place to bring your baby home to, with heat and running water, you have a place to give birth.

What do you tell people who are on the fence about choosing a doctor or midwife?

For people who feel on the fence about which provider they feel comfortable seeing (doctor or midwife), I strongly recommend they do some soul searching to determine what they are hoping to accomplish with their birth.

Do they want a water birth? Do they want to feel empowered? Do they want an epidural? Do they feel safer in a hospital? At home? And then ask LOTS AND LOTS of questions! Know what your provider's cesarean rate is before you sign up with them. Ask them how they handle certain emergencies. What happens if you go beyond 42 weeks? If you have an emergency, how easy are they to contact?

What do you take with you to a home birth?

I take three large bags of supplies with me to a home birth. One carries oxygen and newborn resuscitation equipment. One carries maternal medications and IV supplies. And the third carries essential oils, homeopathics, and herbs.

3rd Trimester

Week 26: The nerves in the ear can now pick up the softer sounds and voices of people around you. Lung development has reached a stage where the fetus is inhaling and exhaling amniotic fluid.

Labor and delivery are unpredictable, but writing out a birth plan can help you realize any lingering questions you have and envision your ideal birthing environment. Discuss this with your healthcare provider to go over your options.

Things to consider: Home or hospital? Epidural and obstetric interventions? Who do you want with you- just your labor coach and healthcare provider, or all your friends and family? Can students attend your delivery? Do you want a mirror to see what's happening? Do you want pictures or video taken? Music? Dimmed lights? Who's cutting the cord? Do you want someone to stay with you for post-delivery procedures? Someone to stay with the baby? Someone to stay over and help out the first few days?

Check in with your self-care rituals and feel empowered to ask for help!



Week 25: Rutabaga. The fetus is starting to retain some fat. Exercising is safe as long as it's gentle and you avoid activities where you could lose balance.



Make a list of any questions that have come up about the labor process. Check in with your plan for finding a pediatrician. Your healthcare provider or local hospital can give you recommendations. Also, start making a plan for maternity leave. Talk to your employers about options and policies. You'll likely use a combination of short-term disability, sick days, vacation days, and unpaid time off. Check your employer's Family Medical Leave Act coverage. If they're not covered, you may be eligible under state provisions. Check with the department of labor.

How quickly are you out the door once you get a call from someone going into labor? When someone tells me they are in labor, we discuss how far apart contractions are, how strong they are, and how long they are lasting. Often times we have several conversations before I head over to their home.

Sometimes I come to their home and it's too early for me to be there. Usually, we make a plan and I come back and check on them in a few hours. Sometimes, particularly with someone who has a history of fast births, I get the call and go rushing out the door in a couple minutes!

I do ask families to give me a "heads up" call. A previous preceptor of mine would always tell people, "I'd rather have a 'heads up' call than a 'head's out' call!"

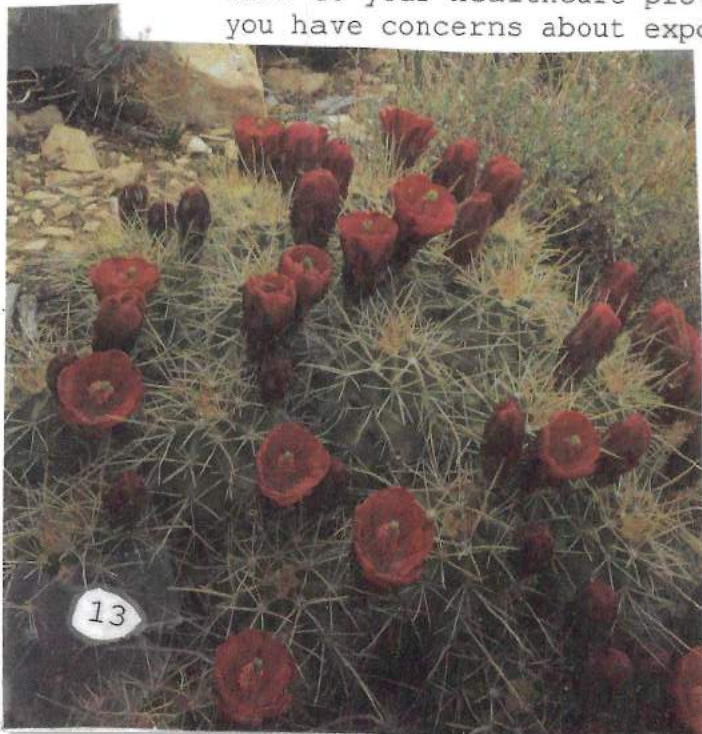
What words of wisdom or reassurance would you offer to the people of the world who are young, very poor, and are carrying an unplanned pregnancy?

I remind them that it's okay. They're not alone. Many folks are in their shoes. Being young and pregnant doesn't mean that you aren't capable, smart, or important. There are many resources that I love to connect my clients up with that offer free services, donated baby goods, and ways to have a positive experience without the judgment of others. My office is a place where folks can come relax, chat, and for me to check in on the pregnant person and the baby. I don't care how much money you have or the year you were born; it's my job to keep you and your baby healthy and help you build relationships in our amazing community!

Pregnancy Tips

Do what you can- know what works for you!

- Seek prenatal care within the first two months, if possible. If you don't visit a healthcare provider this early for whatever reason, keep in mind that seeing one at some point is better than not at all.
- Eat a varied diet high in protein, calcium, iron, and folic acid.
- Develop an exercise routine.
- No drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes, and avoid caffeine. Less than 200 mg (about a cup of coffee, depending on how strong) a day is ok. Remember that caffeine can be in teas, soda, chocolate, and headache, cold, and allergy medicine.
- Avoid routine contact to lead, mercury, chemicals, and radiation. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have concerns about exposure.

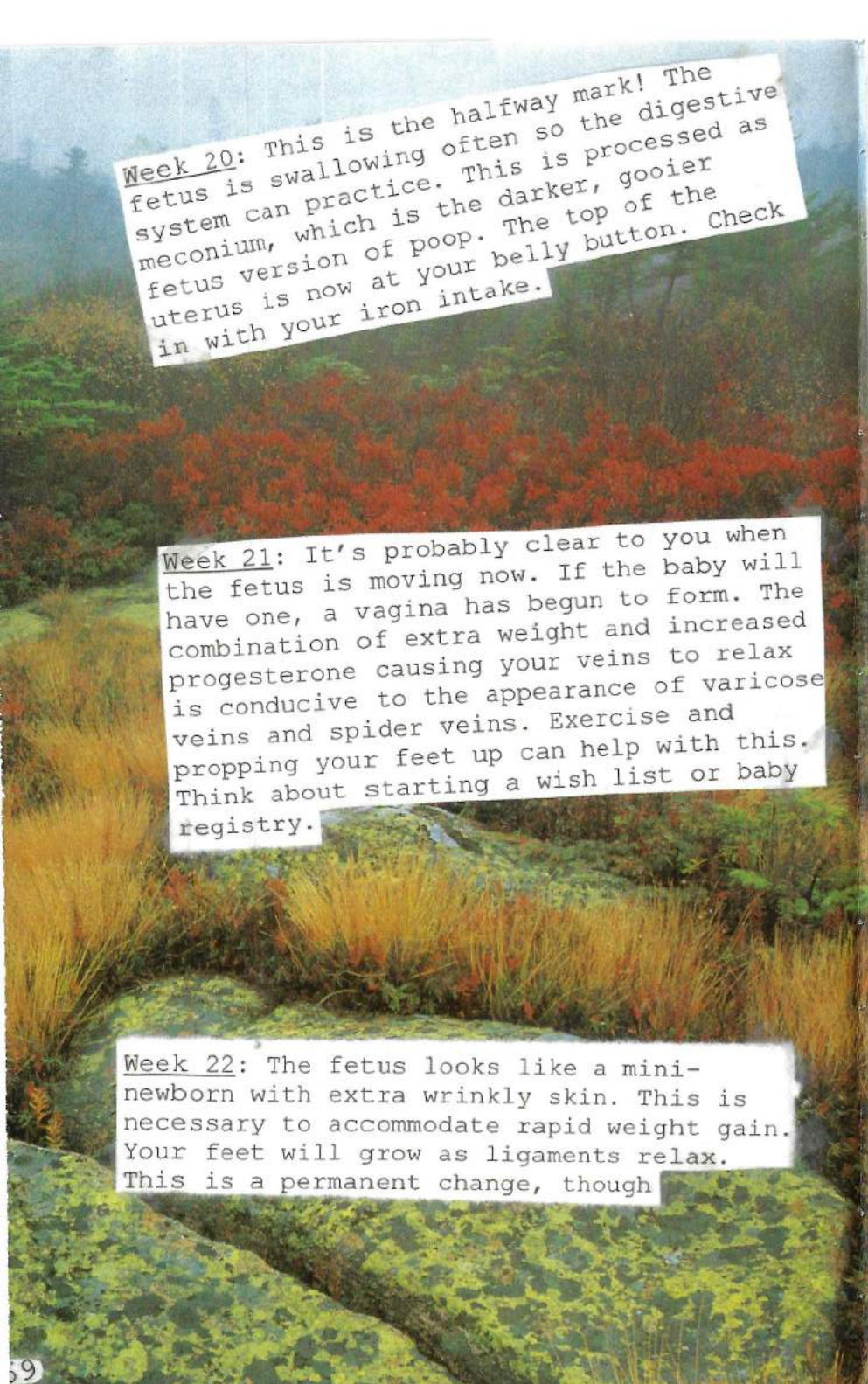


swelling will go down after delivery. Your skin, hair, and nails will be thicker during pregnancy. You'll have increased water retention, known as edema. You'll pee and sweat a lot after delivery as you get rid of all the excess fluid.

Week 23: Large mango. Lungs are preparing for breathing and certain sounds and movements like dogs barking or dancing are becoming familiar. Severe or sudden swelling could be a sign of preeclampsia, which involves increased blood pressure and kidney damage. This condition affects only 5% of pregnant people in the US.

Week 24: Taste buds are developing and lungs are branching out. The lungs are also producing surfactant, which will help the air sacs inflate upon delivery. The uterus is about the size of a soccer ball.

Check in with any home maintenance projects you'd like to complete before delivery. This could include checking smoke detectors and getting a fire extinguisher, finishing repair projects, or assembling furniture.



Week 20: This is the halfway mark! The fetus is swallowing often so the digestive system can practice. This is processed as meconium, which is the darker, gooier fetus version of poop. The top of the uterus is now at your belly button. Check in with your iron intake.

Week 21: It's probably clear to you when the fetus is moving now. If the baby will have one, a vagina has begun to form. The combination of extra weight and increased progesterone causing your veins to relax is conducive to the appearance of varicose veins and spider veins. Exercise and propping your feet up can help with this. Think about starting a wish list or baby registry.

Week 22: The fetus looks like a mini-newborn with extra wrinkly skin. This is necessary to accommodate rapid weight gain. Your feet will grow as ligaments relax. This is a permanent change, though

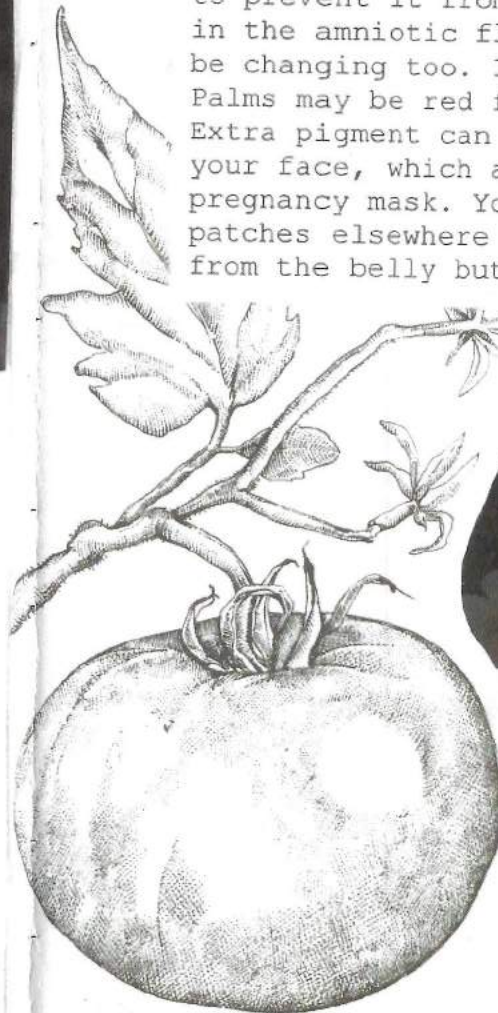
- Visit a dentist at least once if you can. Hormonal shifts can affect your gums' reaction to bacteria. Plus, the fetus uses a lot of calcium in the third trimester, which can affect your teeth.
- Check in with your mental health and reach out for support if you need it, especially if you are having trouble eating, are feeling depressed or anxious, or are experiencing abuse.
- Seek support around cravings and addiction if you need it.
- Do your best to stay well and talk to your provider if you get seriously ill, are exposed to contagious illnesses, or if you have a cold that just won't quit.
- At 25 weeks, review the signs of premature labor.
- Take a labor class if you can. They'll go over these basics and more with you. Some last a few hours and some happen over a few sessions. They can fill up fast. Look around to find one that suits your needs.





Tips for Labor Coaches

- Do some research well before the due date so you'll know what to expect. Join the birth parent in a labor class if you can.
- Talk to the birth parent about their birth plan.
- Pack some essentials for yourself.
- Be ready to engage the person going into labor if they choose to be distracted. Music, movies, reading, chatting, a short walk, and massage are common during early labor.
- Don't take anything personally! Moods can get wild during labor.
- During labor, ask a lot of questions to understand what is happening, especially in a hospital setting.
- Be flexible as plans change and keep in mind the birth parent's wishes.
- Advocate for the birthing parent and any co-parents. Help them focus and relax.
- Know your own limits and show up best you can! Don't expect to be able to do everything alone. You can ask for support too!



A pillow behind you, under your hip, between your legs, or beneath your belly can help make this more comfortable. An ultrasound around this time would check the growth and position of the fetus, umbilical cord, and placenta. It could also help to more accurately predict the due date.

Week 19: Heirloom tomato. Sensory development is kicking in to high gear. The body of the fetus is mostly at its final proportions. The waxy covering known as vernix caseosa is forming on the skin to prevent it from turning into a pickle in the amniotic fluid. Your own skin may be changing too. It may become oilier. Palms may be red from the extra estrogen. Extra pigment can cause darker patches on your face, which are called chloasma or pregnancy mask. You may have darker patches elsewhere too. The darkened line from the belly button to the pubic bone is called the linea negra. Check in with your childcare plans.



Week 16: Avocado. The top of the uterus is between the pubic bone and belly button. The ligaments in your abdomen are stretching and strengthening. With this, pain is normal, but make a call if it's severe or prolonged. This is a good time to plan one on one trips and dates in acknowledgement of the reality that a baby means less quality alone time with your loved ones.

Week 17: Turnip. More cartilage is hardening to bone and the umbilical cord is thickening. As you gain weight and the fetus grows, your center of gravity shifts and you may lose your balance more often.

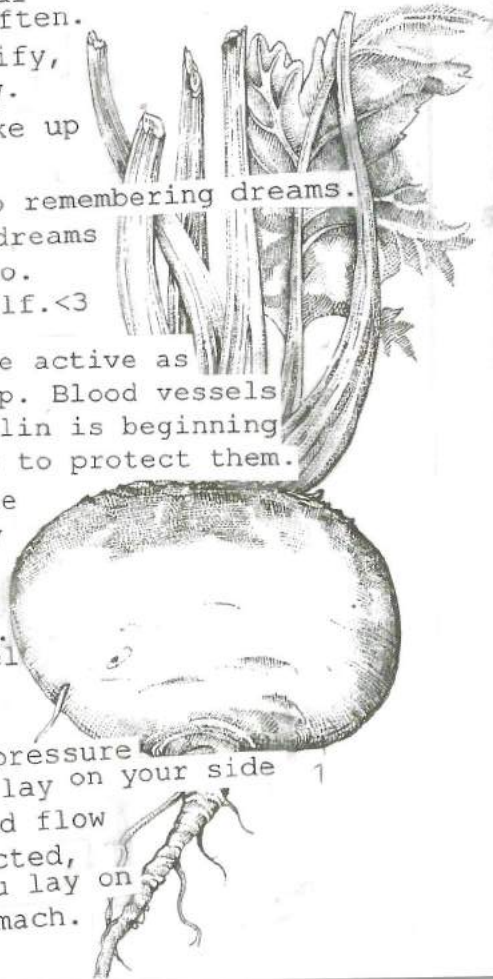
Your dreams may intensify, if they haven't already.

You are more likely to wake up throughout the night,

which is conducive to remembering dreams.

Be aware that stress dreams are normal too.

Take care of yourself.<3



Week 18: The fetus is more active as joints and muscles develop. Blood vessels are more established. Myelin is beginning to form around the nerves to protect them.

This layer will continue to develop until the baby is about 1 year old.

Check in with your meal and snacking routines. It's likely you'll feel

lightheaded as your cardiovascular system changes and your blood pressure

decreases. It's best to lay on your side to make sure that blood flow

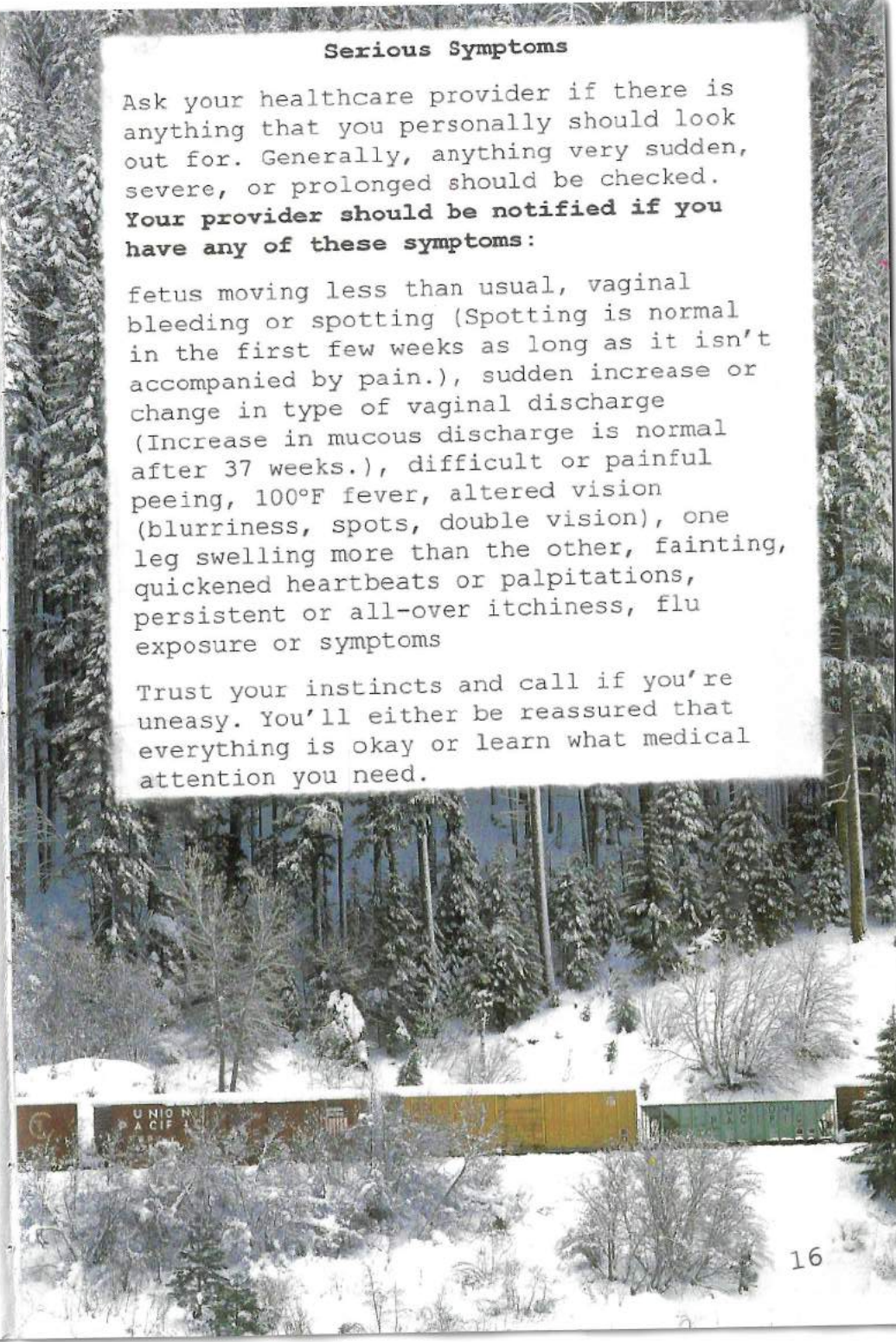
is not being restricted, which can happen if you lay on your back or stomach.

Serious Symptoms

Ask your healthcare provider if there is anything that you personally should look out for. Generally, anything very sudden, severe, or prolonged should be checked. **Your provider should be notified if you have any of these symptoms:**

fetus moving less than usual, vaginal bleeding or spotting (Spotting is normal in the first few weeks as long as it isn't accompanied by pain.), sudden increase or change in type of vaginal discharge (Increase in mucous discharge is normal after 37 weeks.), difficult or painful peeing, 100°F fever, altered vision (blurriness, spots, double vision), one leg swelling more than the other, fainting, quickened heartbeats or palpitations, persistent or all-over itchiness, flu exposure or symptoms

Trust your instincts and call if you're uneasy. You'll either be reassured that everything is okay or learn what medical attention you need.



Interview: Mars Zaineb Goetia, Momma

Can you share about the privileges and challenges you face?

To be honest, identity words, while totally useful, often fail to let people

in on some of my experiences because I exist on the cusp of lots of identities. I'll give it a shot and you can see what I mean.

I have access to white privilege. I grew up Muslim in Muslim communities in New York.

I identify as bisexual which for me means I have both straight and gay/queer sexuality, as opposed to bisexual meaning I am attracted to only two genders.

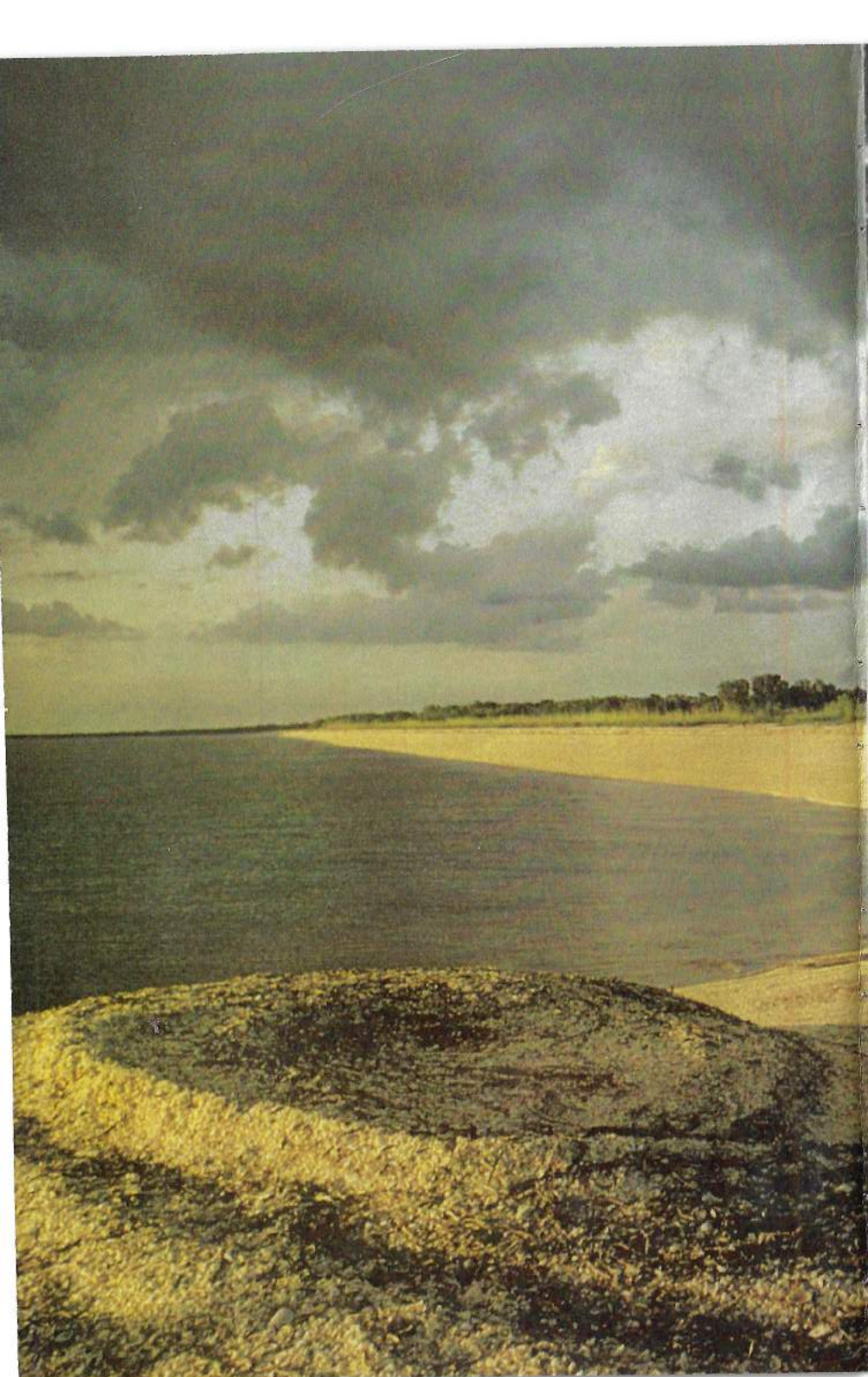
I currently identify as a cis-woman, but went through a long period of struggle around my gender identity, where I leaned more towards the trans-masculine end of things.

I grew up mostly working class. I am a high school drop-out, and have no college education. I often tell people the two best decisions I ever made were to drop out of high school and to become a parent at 19.

2nd Trimester

Week 14: Lemon. Facial expressions, peeing, and possible thumb sucking. The ultrafine hair growing all over the fetus is called lanugo. The liver is making bile and the spleen is helping with red blood cell production. Arms and legs are active. You may be starting to show as the top of the uterus is just above the pubic bone. If you're into it and able to, you could join a prenatal exercise class. There's prenatal yoga and dance. It could be as simple as finding a walking partner. Expect to gain anywhere between 25-35 pounds this trimester.

Week 15: Apple. The amniotic fluid is moving through the nose and upper respiratory tract of the fetus, which supports the development of air sacs. The eyes are still fused shut, but they can sense light. Taste buds are forming. A stuffy nose is common during pregnancy, called rhinitis of pregnancy, due to hormonal shifts and increased blood flow to mucous membranes. Nosebleeds can happen for the same reason. If you're interested, a test called amniocentesis usually happens between now and 18 weeks, which can identify hundreds of chromosomal disorders. You may start to feel the fetus moving in the next couple of weeks. It may feel like gas or being hungry and can be hard to detect at first.



Can you describe finding out you were pregnant?

I was homeless and traveling, sleeping behind the public library in Encinitas, CA when I found out I was pregnant. I took a

test in the bathroom at a pizza place, and the first person I told besides my kiddo's dad was a guy who worked at a taqueria called Raul's where all the punks and street kids hung out. I was still with my partner and baby daddy at the time who I had only just started dating maybe 6 months earlier.

I had been pregnant once before and had an abortion, at 17. I consider myself very pro-choice, but I think classist liberal narrative around abortion, is that you are expected to have an abortion unless you have a planned pregnancy, are "old enough", have enough money, have a partner, etc. It isn't actually a pro-choice narrative at all, it's a pro-planned pregnancy narrative.

Anyway, I felt really pressured by my white middle class friends to have an abortion. I probably would have made that choice anyway, if I had been given the space to feel into it. But to do it without my own incentive was traumatic and shitty. My friends meant well, they just believed the dominant culture- classist, liberal narrative.

What was your pregnancy like?

My pregnancy was fine physiologically. I had morning sickness the first couple months, and didn't want to eat much. Few things appealed to me, I had no job, and almost no money.

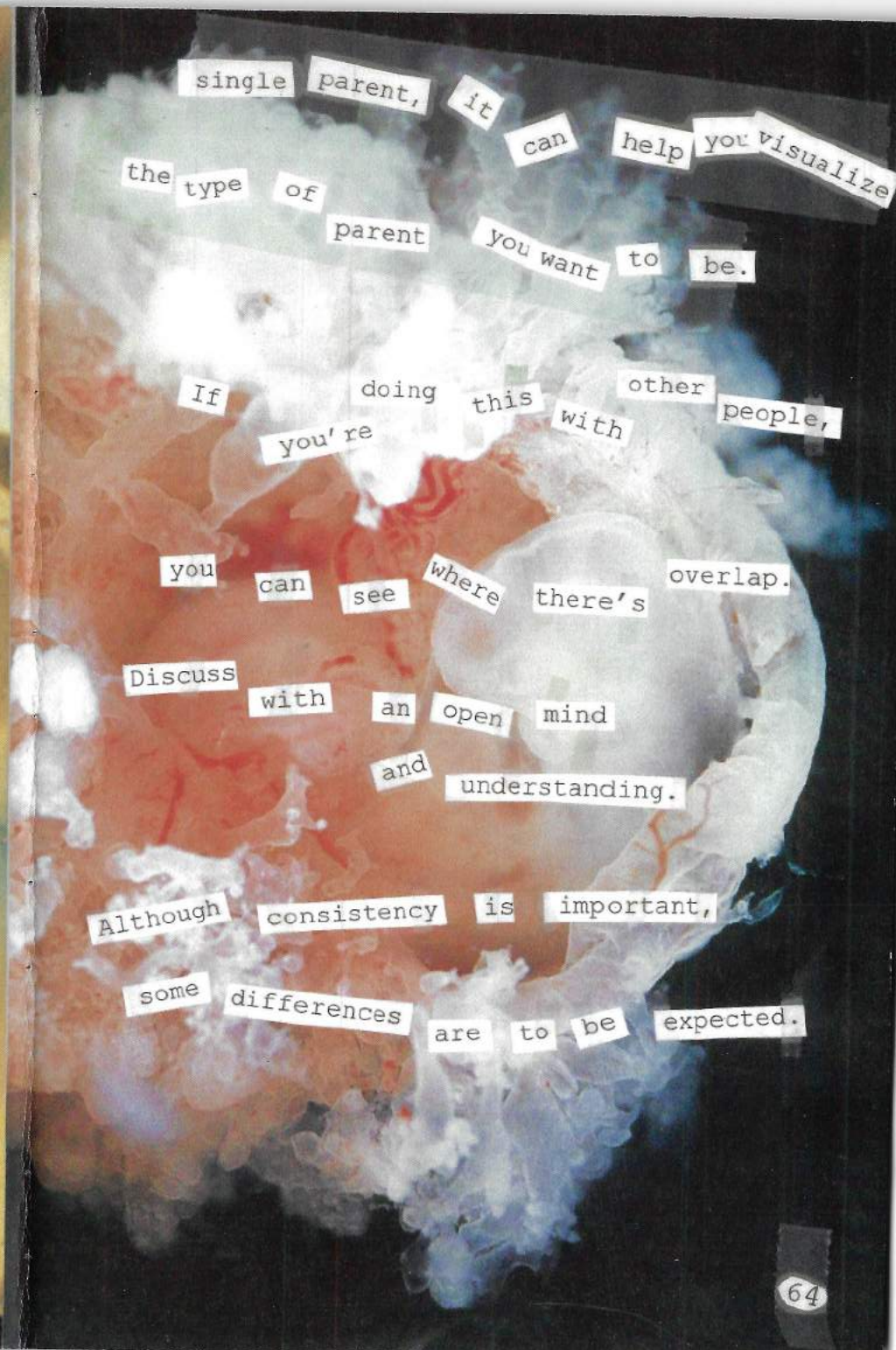
I had started working at the homeless resource center in exchange for food stamps, because at the time the county I was in required homeless people to do community service if they wanted to apply for benefits. Sometimes I would take food that was donated that we couldn't serve for some reason, and that was helpful.

When I was 5 months pregnant I went back to New York from California, to live in an apartment upstairs in my Grandpa's house. Because it was my Grandpa's address and I was under 24, the state wouldn't give me food stamps.

My partner at the time had a job at certain points but money was tight. There were points where he would steal food for us and we would dumpster at Trader Joe's. I really remember being pretty hungry and taking food from my Grandpa's pantry. I think I could have asked for more support from my family, but at that point my relationship with baby daddy was so shitty, it was hard to reach out.

At one point, I think I was about 23 weeks, he cheated on me while he was back in California, and lied about it. I was devastated. I only found out because I

19 dreamt about it and confronted him.



Week 12: Lime. The fetus has reflexes. Fingers, toes, and eyes clench. The mouth can make sucking movements. The intestines have grown so quickly that they are protruding into the umbilical cord. Soon, they will migrate to the abdominal cavity of the fetus and their kidneys will begin excreting urine into the bladder. Nerves and synapses are forming. The face looks like it belongs to a mini-human rather than a mini-alienfish. Discharge is normal, due to increased estrogen and blood flow.

If you notice a sudden increase of or change in the type of discharge, call your healthcare provider. It may simply be a yeast infection or bacterial vaginosis, but it could be a sign of a complication. All three of these things need attention. Check in with your savings and budget plan.

Week 13: Fingerprints are forming and the body is beginning to match the proportion of the head. If the fetus has ovaries, it already has over 2 million eggs. The risk of miscarriage has dramatically decreased to only 3% chance. You may start to make colostrum, the initial extra rich

breastmilk that is released before the milk comes in. Check in with your hydration. You should be getting 80 fl oz of water daily. A writing exercise you can try by yourself or with any co-parents is to note the parenting methods and ideas that you value. If you're doing this as a

I could hardly eat after that. I lost so much weight. My midwife freaked out. At that point I was supposed to be gaining weight, like 4 pounds a week. I lost 4 one month, which my midwife said was basically the same as losing 8. I think she thought

I was anorexic because one time I told her I needed to pee before I got weighed, but I actually just really had to pee, I wasn't worried about the pee making me seem heavier.

I tried telling her that things were hard, and she told me I would be high risk if I didn't eat more. I swear, I was trying to eat, I would force myself to eat half a bowl of cereal and shit. I was in so much pain emotionally, it made me feel sick.

I tried to pick up the pieces of that relationship for the sake of my body and my baby. Toward the end I got healthier and gained more weight.

Did you get any type of prenatal care?

I saw a midwife when I got to New York. I had insurance through my Dad's post office job, because I was 19. She had an

application with my insurance that was pending, so she assumed it would get approved by the time I gave birth, and she would get back pay from them. But when I was maybe 8 months pregnant her application got denied, and she told me she wouldn't see me unless I paid.

I could hardly afford food and maternity clothes, I was wearing sweat pants with skirts and big t-shirts and shit. Pay for a midwife? I was devastated. I wanted a homebirth.

I switched to some hospital midwives an hour away at the only hospital anywhere near me that had policies that might allow you to keep your baby in the room with you, IF they had enough nurses on staff. Such bullshit. But it was the best I had.

I read about unassisted birth and was like, fuck it, I will just do it myself. So when I went into labor I just didn't tell anyone but my partner for the first 13 hours. Peter Young had just gone to prison, and I dreamt all night that he was jumping on my belly.

Eventually I told my mom, because I figured someone should be around. She stayed home from work and went out and got gloves and stuff. She called my old

feels more comfortable. Most people say they had a positive experience telling their bosses. Be aware of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, which prevents covered employers from treating pregnant people differently. State laws may be in place for you too.

Week 10: Kumquat. This is officially the fetal period, when tissues and organs will mature. The fetus is able to swallow fluids. The kidneys, intestines, brain, and liver are beginning to function, though they still have some fine tuning to do. Nails and hair are beginning to form.

Limbs can bend. Spinal nerves are spreading from the spinal cord. The head makes up about half of the body. Your uterus is the size of a grapefruit compared to a small pear before pregnancy. Your clothes might start feeling tight. Check in with your exercise routine.

Week 11: Fig. It's common for the fetus to hiccup as their diaphragm develops, though you probably won't feel any movements for another month or two. Heartburn and constipation are common- progesterone relaxes muscle tissue making this more likely. It may still be hard to eat due to nausea, but only gaining 1-5 pounds in the first trimester is totally normal.

Week 8: Kidney bean. Webbed fingers and toes, beginnings of breathing tubes, nerve cells connecting in the brain and forming primitive neural pathways. You may want to consider wearing a bra for comfort and support. You may go up a full cup size or two. A dramatic rise in progesterone can leave you feeling extra sluggish.

Week 9: Grape. The first stages of all the essential body parts are there. The heart is finishing up its four chambers and the valves are starting to form. Little teeth are forming too. Eyes are formed, but fused shut. Now that most of the physiology is present, expect rapid weight gain. By now, morning sickness and extreme moodiness are very common. Meditation and journaling are great ways to center and connect with your intentions around being a parent. Keep your support network strong and check in with a friend about sharing the nitty gritty of your experience if that feels important to you. Talking to your employers is something to consider now too. By the second trimester, most pregnancies are well established enough to feel confident about carrying to full term. Telling your employer could allow you some slack as far as sick days and time off for appointments. You could ask a coworker who has been pregnant at work about how they were treated. Of course, this is up to you, and you can wait until you show if that

midwife in a panic begging her to come, saying she could pay her over time.

I didn't even want that midwife there, I was so angry and felt so abandoned by her. My mom handed me the phone and the midwife basically told me I was being stupid for trying to do it myself. So I decided to go to the hospital.

My birth was painful as fuck, I had a rad midwife at the hospital, and my birth was easy and drugless besides being exhausted and in pain. Afterward I really think I could have done it myself, but hey, it was relatively smooth.

Did you develop any sort of coping mechanisms for navigating people's judgment, praise, and general sudden influx of opinions on your life and body?

I would go on the website girlmom.com, which was a pro-choice website for teen moms. They were activists like me, and young like me. I mostly just was a self-righteous teenager who gave no fucks about what people thought, and was kinda proud of being willing to be myself.

I would go to punk shows and hardcore shows while pregnant, often tabling anarchist zines. I would also go to conferences and prisoner letter writing

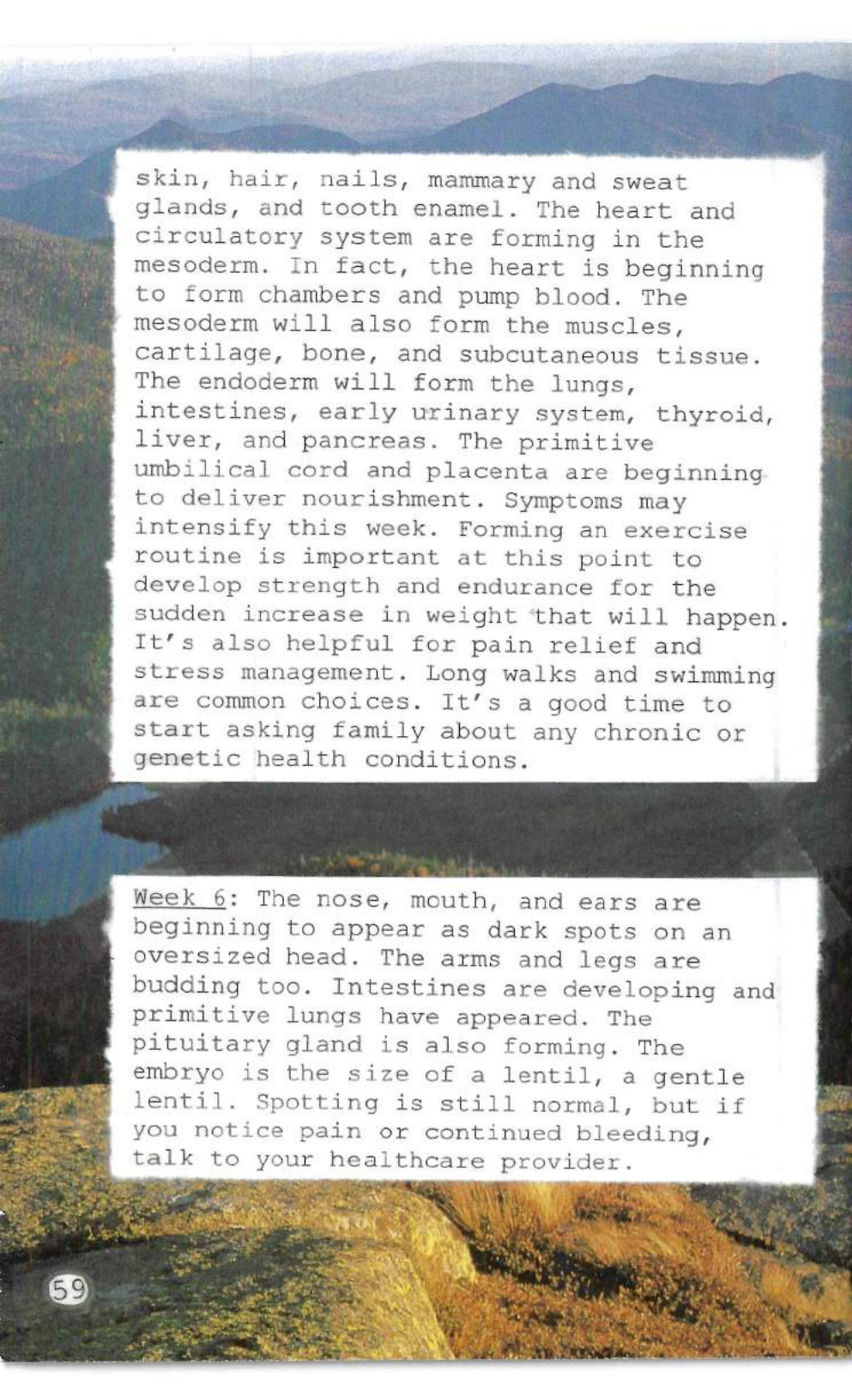
events, while pregnant and with my teeny ass baby. I took her to her first show when she was 11 days old.

I remember someone on girlmom once saying, people will treat you weird and be ageist, but then when your kid is 4-10 it will let up for a while, and then it will start again when your kid is older. That's exactly been my experience.

People constantly ask me how old I am when I say I have a 12 year old. They say all sorts of invasive things. "How old were you when you had her?" "You look too young!" Things like that.

If they ask questions, I sometimes say "What are you hoping to understand by knowing the answer to that?" or if I'm in a fuck-the-world mood, I'll say "Tell me the last time you had diarrhea and I'll tell you how old I am." I know that talking like that doesn't actually help people understand they are being invasive, but sometimes I'm at my wits end.

Week 7: Tiny paddle versions of hands and feet have emerged. The embryo has doubled in size since last week- the size of TWO LENTILS. Or a blueberry. Eyelid folds are forming over the peepers alongside the nose and veins beneath the skin. Both hemispheres of the brain are growing and the liver is making the red blood cells until the bone marrow takes over. The appendix and pancreas are done now too. The pancreas will eventually produce insulin to aid in digestion. The umbilical cord now has blood vessels fully ready for nutrients and oxygen transport. Eating and exercise may be difficult as nausea could increase. Do your best! Your own body has 10% more blood than before pregnancy. You can prepare for a prenatal checkup by writing down any general questions or concerns as well as ones specific to you and any relevant medical history. Bring a list of any medications, supplements, and herbs you take. Note the first day of your last period and the date of conception, if you know it. Be ready to describe your eating habits and daily routine. Consider genetic carrier and chromosomal screenings and ask about them if you're interested. Most tests measure risk rather than actually diagnosing. Prenatal visits to a healthcare provider can help you understand what to expect for your body and developing baby specifically.



skin, hair, nails, mammary and sweat glands, and tooth enamel. The heart and circulatory system are forming in the mesoderm. In fact, the heart is beginning to form chambers and pump blood. The mesoderm will also form the muscles, cartilage, bone, and subcutaneous tissue. The endoderm will form the lungs, intestines, early urinary system, thyroid, liver, and pancreas. The primitive umbilical cord and placenta are beginning to deliver nourishment. Symptoms may intensify this week. Forming an exercise routine is important at this point to develop strength and endurance for the sudden increase in weight that will happen. It's also helpful for pain relief and stress management. Long walks and swimming are common choices. It's a good time to start asking family about any chronic or genetic health conditions.

Week 6: The nose, mouth, and ears are beginning to appear as dark spots on an oversized head. The arms and legs are budding too. Intestines are developing and primitive lungs have appeared. The pituitary gland is also forming. The embryo is the size of a lentil, a gentle lentil. Spotting is still normal, but if you notice pain or continued bleeding, talk to your healthcare provider.

Did you experience depression during or after your pregnancy?

I didn't have post-partum depression. I had the kind of depression you have when you are poor and trying to live a

meaningful life and take care of your family. I could hardly tell I was depressed because it seemed so normal.

I broke up with my partner when my kiddo was 2 months old, and that helped a lot. I coped by building community, moving back to California and being homeless with my baby until we found a house full of anarchists to live with. I read, played music, I did primitive skills. I went to the forest, all the time.

I had to find a way to have purpose in life beyond caring for a child, and my child needed that too. Kids get stressed as fuck if they only see adults doing kid-centered things. Like, what's the point of life? They get their physical needs like food met through us, they also get their needs for purpose and meaning met through us. It's the first step toward learning to meet that stuff on their own.

I also had to examine a lot of my behavior and ancestral trauma and family trauma responses, and practice mindfulness to step fully into my relationships in a mutual way. It was hard. I learned things about myself I'm not proud of. But it was worth it, and I still to this day work on myself all the time to be in right relationship with my community and the earth, with my child, with my sense of purpose.

Do you have any tips for the actual being in labor part?

I had a normal labor, so I can't speak to people who need C-sections or anything like that. Just remind yourself it's temporary if it hurts. That saved my ass.

Some people have slightly painful labors, and some people have very painful labors. Birth comes in many ways, and while there are normal stages of labor, we all experience them differently, so it's okay if it doesn't sound like whatever stories you read or heard.

Whether you choose drugs or no drugs, it's going to be hard in different ways. It was extremely painful for me, but being a self-righteous teenager, I was stubbornly refusing drugs.

I am glad for that, and I think many people can do that if they choose to. But you don't HAVE to. We all have different pain thresholds and inner resources, and different values we bring to the table. There's not a right way.

How did you navigate the logistical side of things?

Well, I was unemployed for most of my pregnancy and my child's first year. I was on welfare from when she was 6 months to about a year old. I went to community college for a semester and got some financial aid, and would play music on the

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progesterone. Before the placenta develops, the blastocyst receives oxygen and nutrients from a system of tunnels that connect it to the uterine wall. It is normal to begin noticing pregnancy symptoms. Some spotting is normal as long as it isn't accompanied by pain. Stock up on vitamins!

Week 4: As soon as the "yolk" which supports early nutrient intake is absorbed, the blastocyst is considered an embryo. It is the size of a poppy seed. It has two layers- epiblast and hypoblast. These will develop into all the organs and body parts. The primitive placenta also has two layers and is beginning to create tunnels for your blood to flow from the uterine lining to the developing fetus. This is a good time to schedule an appointment with a prenatal doctor, family physician, or midwife. You should also look into the terms for insurance coverage for prenatal, maternity, and pediatric care. A healthcare provider can help you understand your coverage options.

Week 5: The sesame seed sized embryo is lookin' like a tadpole. There's three layers now- ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm. These will form all the organs and tissues. Within the ectoderm, the neural tube is forming. This will become the brain, spinal cord, nerves, backbone,

1st Trimester

Week 1: This starts with the first day of your last period before pregnancy. It is followed by ovulation and conception.

Week 2: It takes 10 hours for sperm to reach the egg. Once a sperm successfully joins an egg, they merge nuclei and begin combining genetic material. This winning combo is called a zygote. It takes 3-4 days for the zygote to reach the uterus. During those days, the zygote divides into 16 identical cells. Once in the uterus, it is called a morula. Within a day or two, the morula will burrow into the uterine lining. Now, the ball of cells is officially a blastocyst, because it has an inner and outer cell mass. The inner cell mass will become the embryo as well as the amniotic sac. An outer cell mass will become the placenta. Begin avoiding intense chemicals and heavy metals as much as possible. \m/

Week 3: The blastocyst consists of several hundred rapidly multiplying cells. The outer lining has begun to produce human chorionic gonadotropin or hCG. This is what causes pregnancy tests to give positive results and why a test may not show positive in the first week or two after a missed period. It tells the ovaries to stop releasing eggs and increases levels of estrogen and

street. I never got college credits for that time because I didn't have a GED and owed some money at the end.

I had really amazing friends. I want to stress that I just whole-heartedly believed that anarchists valued community and mutual aid, and I literally just acted like, of course everyone would help me. I had unwavering faith. And I think my community responded to that, and lived up to that because of how my faith spoke to their values.

I didn't expect to be discriminated, I expected to be welcomed. Now, sometimes that actually made me avoid or ignore discrimination. But most of the time, it actually created a situation in which people had a chance to live a different story than the dominant culture. People were hungry for that. We all were smitten with the vision of community based on consent, mutual aid, mutual responsibility, and right relationship with the earth.

My daughter was a chance to actualize that, and she made it necessary and essential to do it. Most anarchists in my community at the time would help watch her, take her to pee and poop (we used Elimination Communication), put her down for naps, make her snacks, watch out for her as she freely crawled and walked around the not-childproof house, etc.

I dealt with logistics the old fashion way- by making a huge investment and leap of faith with people I was around. It was mutual. I paid for bail with my welfare money. I took care of people when they were sick. They took care of me and my daughter. It wasn't all easy, there was classism, gender issues, poly drama, etc. It was not perfect at all. But is anything?

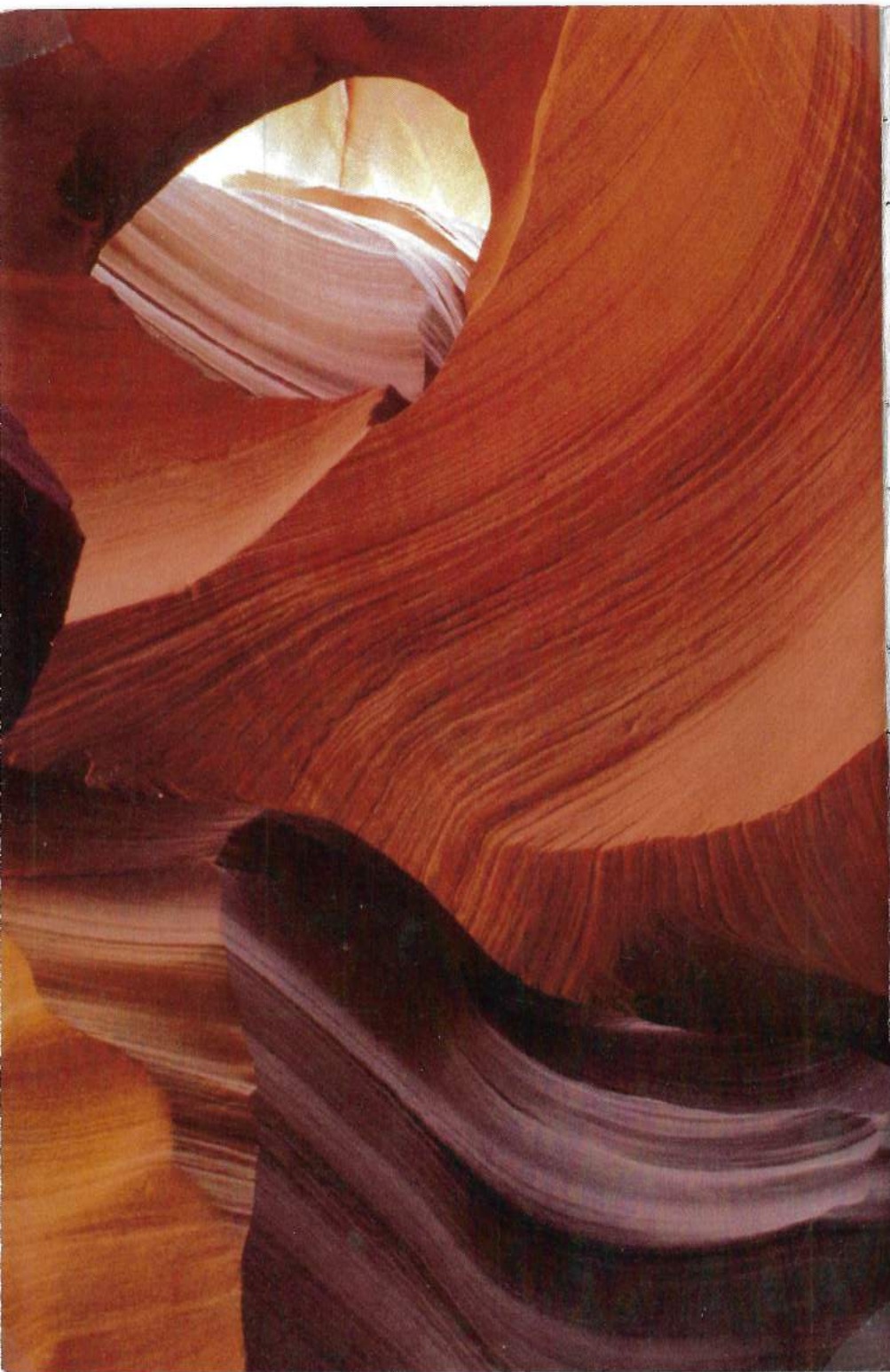
What words might you share with a pregnant person about being a young and poor punk parent?

You can do it, but you don't have to. I'm pro-choice, including being a parent under non-conventionally accepted circumstances, and the choices to have an abortion or seek adoption.

I encourage people to ask for help when they need it, and make time to mourn the unmet needs we have. I also encourage folks to seek out their own passions and desires, and bring your kids with you when you can. Even if they sit on the floor playing during the meeting, I swear they absorb it. It's okay to get time away from your kids too! But they learn most by watching what we do and seeing how our lives are structured, and less by what we say.



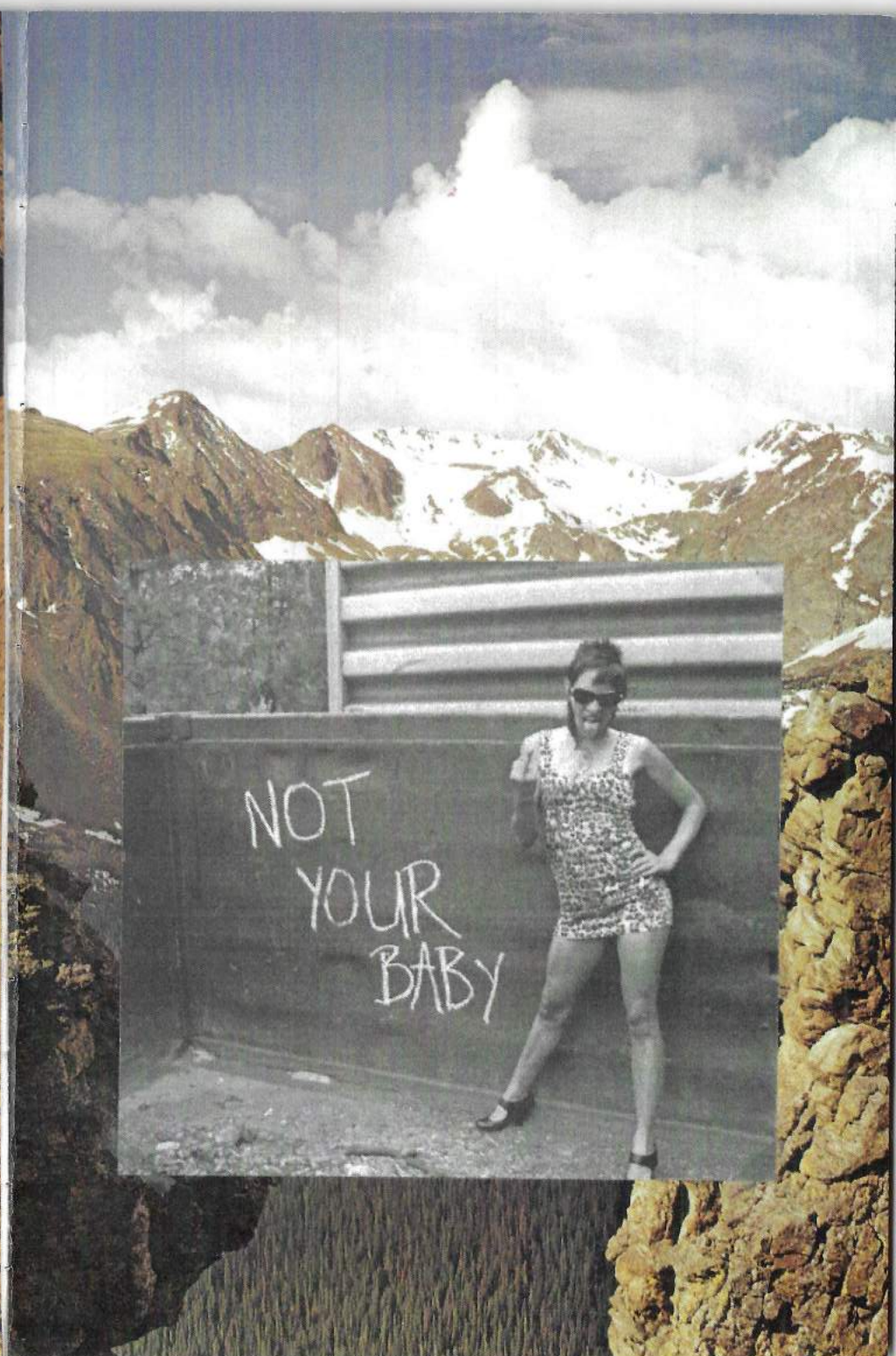
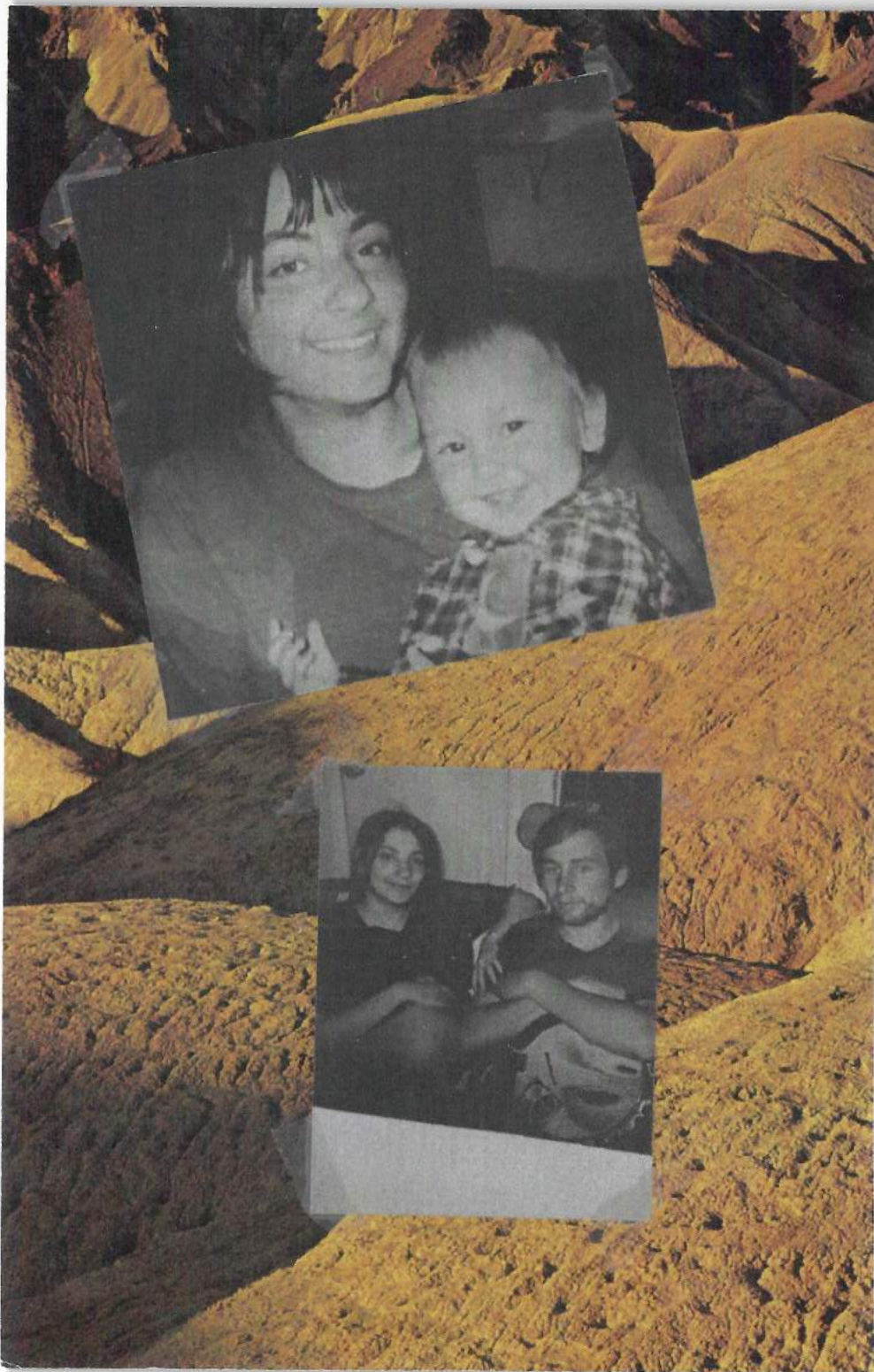
PART II



Poverty is designed to oppress, but I think we can also use it to carve out space to build our dreams. Where there are great needs, people can come together and get creative and innovative. If me and my community had a bunch of money and owned our houses, we would have way fewer chances to live our values of mutual aid and mutual responsibility.

Oh, and read Unconditional Parenting by Alfie Kohn. It doesn't have all the answers, but it's radical as fuck, and gives you a way of thinking that can help you seek your own answers.

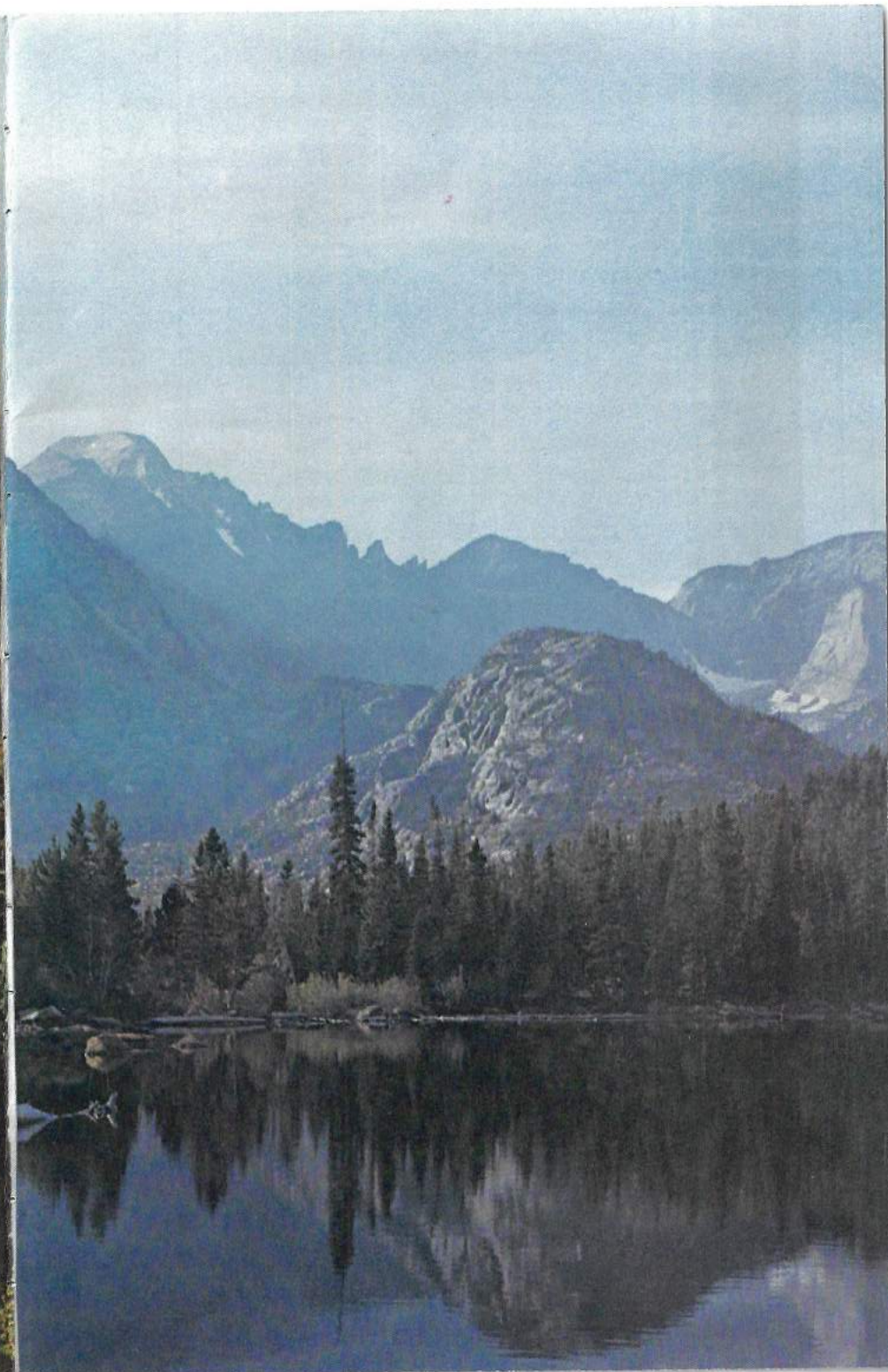




It makes sense to have help from family if it's an option, or to try setting up help within a community of friends if you can. Short of that, it's been important to me to consistently frame my full-time mothering as a choice that I made and a great joy and deep love in my life, rather than as a difficult job. This helps to keep me in a parenting-positive relationship with my baby.

What words of wisdom or reassurance might you share with a young pregnant person about being a poor punk parent?

To all the poor pregnant punks out there on your way to parenthood... If this is what you want, then go for it! Fuck a racist, misogynist, capitalist society that says otherwise. It's your body; it's your choices. It'll likely be difficult at times, and it'll almost certainly be beautiful too. I believe in you.



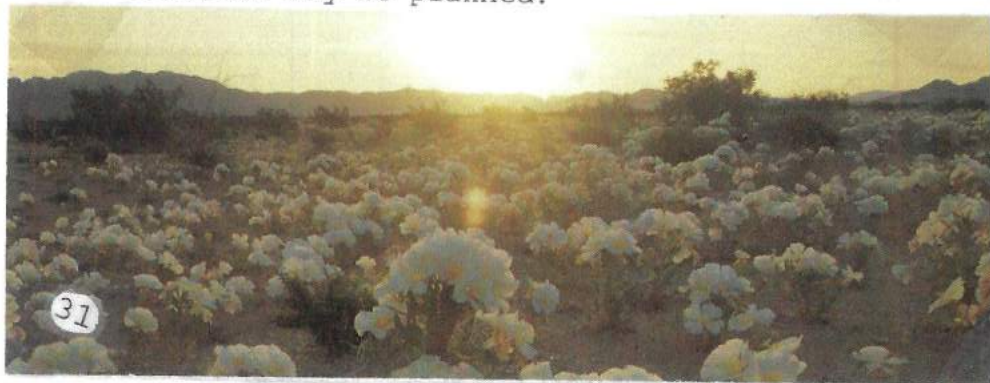
Preterm Labor + Birth

Preterm labor is when regular contractions and cervix dilation happens at 38 weeks or sooner. Signs of labor include an increase or change in type of vaginal discharge, bleeding or spotting, four or more contractions in an hour, increased pressure in the pelvic area, and new or rhythmic back pain.

Spontaneous preterm birth is unlikely. There are usually clear signs if a preterm delivery is anticipated. Preterm labor does not necessarily mean premature delivery- it may be delayed with medication. In this case, the fetus can be given corticosteroids to help speed lung development.

Most babies born between 34 and 37 weeks fare significantly better than those born earlier, but any baby born before 38 weeks has a higher risk for having short or long term health complications. Asthma and other lung disease are common.

Premature labor may be caused by a variety of factors including genetics, infection, physiology of the uterus or cervix, being underweight, iron deficiency, and trauma to the abdomen. If there is a complication with your health or the health of the fetus, a preterm labor induction or cesarean may be planned.



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In my last trimester, the other parent moved to the town I lived in and started helping me out financially, having more access to resources under patriarchal capitalism, as a middleclass masculine-presenting person with a skilled labor trade. The financial help was incredibly supportive and meant I could do full-time baby care and breastfeeding without having to worry about getting back to work too soon, but it also brought its own issues of how to navigate a class/gender system that's inherently fucked.

Helpwise- As a full-time breastfeeding Mama with a full-time working other parent, I often end up with the baby for about 22 hours out of the day, with an hour or two in the evening or a few hours at a time on the weekends for the other parent to hang out with the baby after working.

It's not necessarily easy. I eat, sleep, and breathe baby. I often have my hands too full to find time to make myself food or even go pee, much less get around to doing other things. It's a basic reality that Mamas in our society (and most often in our subcultures too) don't get the help that we need, especially poor Mamas who are already struggling to cover basic needs.

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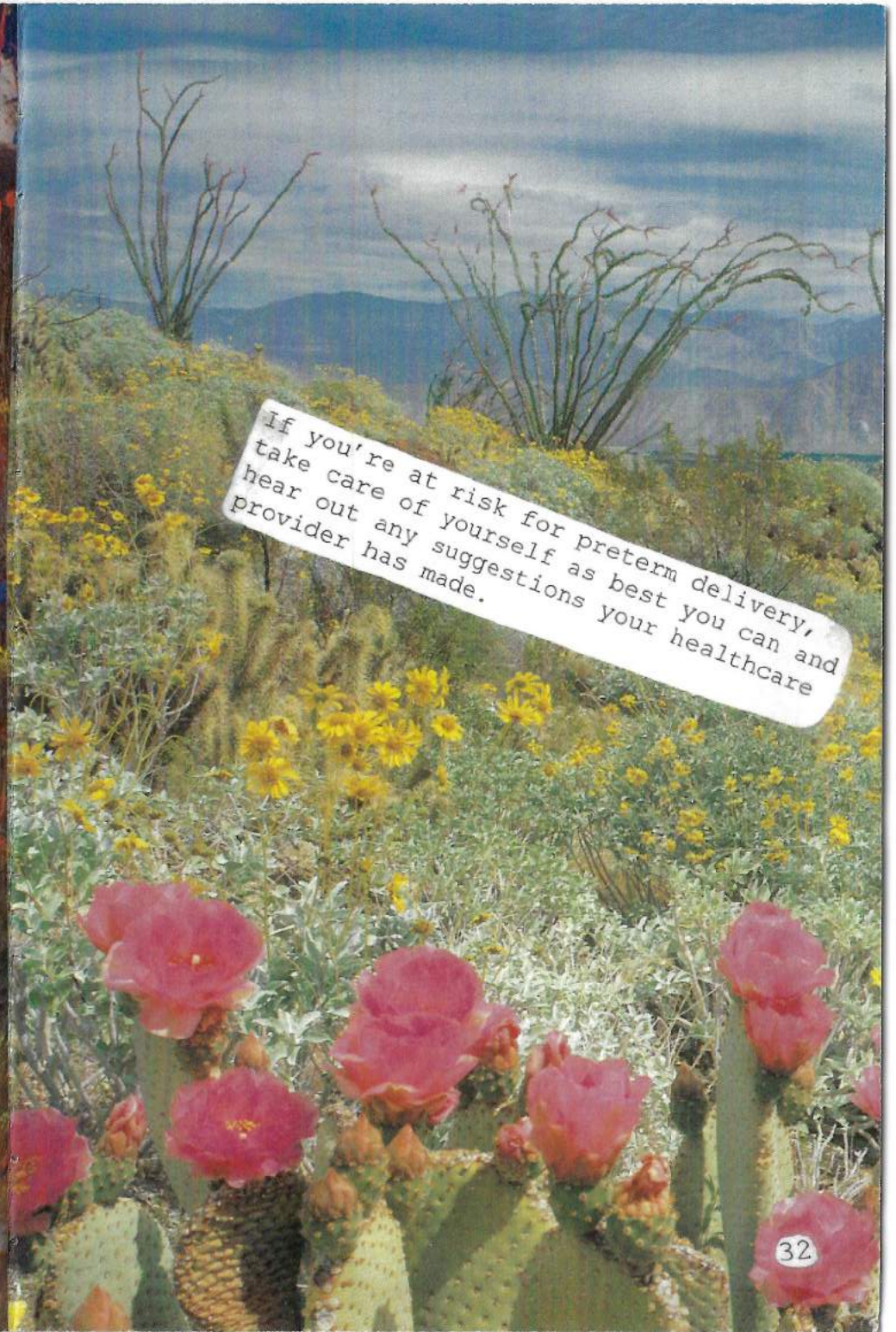
How did you navigate logistical things?

Healthwise- I had state healthcare at the time, which covered hospital visits but not midwives or alternative care. Luckily I also had access to a well of knowledge and information on pregnancy and birthing through my Mama's midwifery experience. And in the end it was her that made it possible for me to birth naturally and uninterrupted at home, without having to worry about how I would afford to pay for a midwife.

Moneywise- As a poor woman with no money to fall back on, higher education, or marketable trade, I seriously wondered how I'd support myself and a baby. I was working two jobs at the time, doing childcare and housekeeping. I had to quit doing childcare because my risk of miscarriage meant I couldn't lift anything, but I worked as a housekeeper through my eighth month of pregnancy. I hid the pregnancy from my employer for fear of losing the job, and trying to maintain some sense of pride in not letting them know that I was a poor pregnant person cleaning their fancy vacation home.

I needed the money, but it felt like shit to have to scrub rich people's toilets when I could barely keep food down and to have to struggle to walk up flights of stairs with a growing belly while carrying armfuls of their dirty laundry. I'd saved some money from working hard a few years earlier, enough to cover about six months' worth of bills, which I was planning to use for a small safety net as a new Mama to help support me and baby.

If you're at risk for preterm delivery, take care of yourself as best you can and hear out any suggestions your healthcare provider has made.



Food

and

Nutrition

You know what is available to you and the struggle is real! Ask for support if you need it.

Avoid fish high in mercury. Make sure all fish, meat, and poultry are thoroughly cooked. Refrigerated, smoked, or pickled fish, meat, and poultry should be heated until at least steaming. Leftovers should also be heated till steaming. Avoid raw or unpasteurized dairy products and juice. Beef, veal, and lamb should be cooked till 145°F, pork and ground meat should be 160°F, and poultry should be 165°F. Be wary of salad or cold bar foods or food sitting out for longer than four hours. Wash or peel raw produce. More than 200mg of caffeine a day can interfere with iron absorption. Grapefruit may prevent vitamin absorption.

My advice would be to find the love! If there's people in your life who can help you celebrate this super special time, then surround yourself with them. You deserve to be celebrated. You deserve to enjoy this. It's your pregnancy! How you feel during pregnancy is how the baby feels too. Your nervous system is the baby's nervous system. You owe it to yourself and to the little one growing inside of you to be treated with extra love, care, support, and excitement. I know it's not easy to try making that happen when you're juggling everything else. But dang, you deserve it.

Do you have any tips for the actual being in labor part?

Trust your instinct. Believe in your body and in your baby. Surround yourself with people who believe in you too, and who can help support your choices and advocate for you if necessary. Remember, the labor is all about you. So do whatever you need to do to get through it. It will be the hardest thing you've ever done, and you can do it. Since labor is such a personal experience, unique to each person and each time they do it, it'd be hard to say I have any tips that apply. So just give yourself the permission to just do you!

Did you experience depression during or after your pregnancy?

I wouldn't say that I experienced depression during or after my pregnancy. Pregnancy and parenting was something that I really, really wanted and had been trying to prepare for over the last six years of my life, so I embraced it fully and ferociously. I will say though that I experienced a deep sadness and at times a devastating loneliness at not being in a position to truly celebrate my pregnancy and birth.

I was living in a house with people I barely knew and couldn't relate to, in a town with no long term friends or family, and the strain of trying to figure out how to relate to the other parent felt hard and heavy, to say the least. This was the single most important decision of my life, and there wasn't really anyone celebrating it with me.

Instead there was the heavy weight of navigating difficult interpersonal relationships at a time when I just needed for things to be easy, and when I just wanted for things to be enjoyable. I found myself sitting alone in my bed grieving over the loss of what should have been a time of receiving extra love, care, support, and excitement. The few times someone did something to recognize or celebrate my pregnancy meant the world to me, and I wish I'd had so much more.

The best foods during pregnancy are:

- Eggs (12 vitamins + minerals, omega-3, protein, choline)
- Less than 12 oz per week of salmon (low mercury, protein, omega-3)
- Beans (protein, nutrient rich fiber, iron, folate, calcium, zinc)
- Sweet potatoes (carotenoids, vitamin C, folate, fiber)
- Whole grains (fiber, vitamin E, selenium, phytonutrients)
- Walnuts (omega-3, protein, fiber)
- Greek yogurt (high protein, probiotics, calcium)
- Dark greens (vitamins A, C, K and folate)
- Lean meat (protein, choline in beef and pork)
- Produce of many colors- keeping a varied diet ensures you're covering your nutritional bases and sets the baby up for healthy eating habits. Their flavor preferences can be affected by what you're eating once taste buds develop at around 24 weeks.



Recommended daily dose for a first time pregnancy being carried to term of someone who is between 19 and 30 years old:

calcium (1,000 mg), choline (450 mg), chromium (30 mcg) copper (1 mg), folic acid (600 mcg), iodine (220 mcg), iron (27 mg), magnesium(350 mg), manganese (2 mg), pantothenic acid (6 mg), phosphorus (700 mg), potassium (4,700 mg), protein (70 g), riboflavin (1.4 mg) thiamin (1.4 mg), vitamin A (770 mcg RAE), vitamin B6 (1.9 mg), vitamin C (85 mg), vitamin D (600 IU), water (80 fl oz), zinc (11 mg)

It's possible you'll need to supplement for calcium, choline, magnesium, zinc, and vitamin D. It is important to supplement for folic acid and iron. There are specific prenatal daily vitamins you could acquire.



just as it is. The perfectly intense act of standing at the gateway of Life.

I write my own birth story with no judgments on how anyone else chooses to birth or ends up birthing. Every birth is the perfectly intense act of standing at the gateway of Life, no matter the situation, the choices or lack of, the complications, or the outcome. I support and believe in birth, all birth.

Did you develop any sort of coping mechanisms for navigating people's judgment, praise, and general sudden influx of opinions on your life and body?

A photograph of a waterfall cascading over rocks in a lush green forest. The water is white and frothy as it falls. The surrounding trees are dense and green.

I think that being thirty-five years old and certain of my desire to become a Mama, I probably escaped the bulk of outside opinion that would've come if I'd been younger, unsure, etc.

I definitely still felt the weight of judgment from society at large for being a poor person with an unplanned pregnancy. But I did my best to avoid unwanted opinions and to settle deeply into focusing on my choice to be pregnant and become a parent.

numerous appointments with doctors and specialists and all their fancy medical equipment.

It was clear to me that my belief lies in birth itself, in the natural process, in the body. I found comfort in knowing that millions of pregnant bodies had given birth before me, with little besides the internal knowing of their body. I was truly excited to give birth!

In the end, I made a last minute decision to birth at home. Fuck the "high risk" label, which felt arbitrary at that point. It wasn't an irrational, philosophical, or fear-based choice; it was a solid, well informed, instinctive decision to do what my body knew how to do, in the familiarity of my own home, with the support of my own Mother.

It was an incredible experience- by far the most difficult and beautiful and intense and powerful and awe inspiring experience of my life. I birthed my baby at home, on the floor of my living room, in the sunlight of a warm winter afternoon, surrounded by a small group of supportive loved ones, sweating and grunting and howling through the pain, shaking and crying and singing as I held my child for the first time. My body and my baby danced the birth journey together. And nothing could have ever prepared me for it. It was

The Herbal Blurble by Hel Sídhe Wylly
bramble.botanicals.birthwork@gmail.com

Avoid herbal medicines in the first trimester. Seek high-quality organic or wildcrafted herbs. Be sure that any preparations you use are made from the unadulterated herb itself. Practice moderation when using herbal medicines! Listen to your body. Ask an herbalist or healthcare provider about dosages.

Prenatal Care

Constipation

Psyllium, flaxseed, dried fruits

Edema and Bladder + Kidney Infections

Cornsilk, dandelion root

Nausea + Morning Sickness

German chamomile, ginger in moderation

Headache + Nerves

Linden

Sleep Problems

German chamomile, linden, lavender

Heartburn

Meadowsweet

Yeast Infection

Infusion of calendula in bath

High Blood Pressure

Beet or pomegranate juice, fresh garlic



Postpartum Care

Galactagogues (increasing milk production)
Fenugreek, fennel, blessed thistle

Afterpains

Cramp bark, catnip, Frankincense oil compress

Hemorrhoids + Varicosities

Topical application of witch hazel, St. John's Wort, yarrow, wild geranium

Tears + Episiotomy

 (perineum incision)

Lavender and tea tree oil diluted in water in a spray bottle. Use after peeing.

Topical application of aloe gel, comfrey, calendula, plantain

Tender Chest

German chamomile or calendula infusion compresses applied topically
(Rinse before feeding baby.)

Postpartum Depression

If this persists or worsens after a month, seek support. <3

Motherwort, passionflower, lemonbalm, St. John's Wort, chamomile

Weaning or Overproduction of Milk

Crushed cold cabbage leaf compress

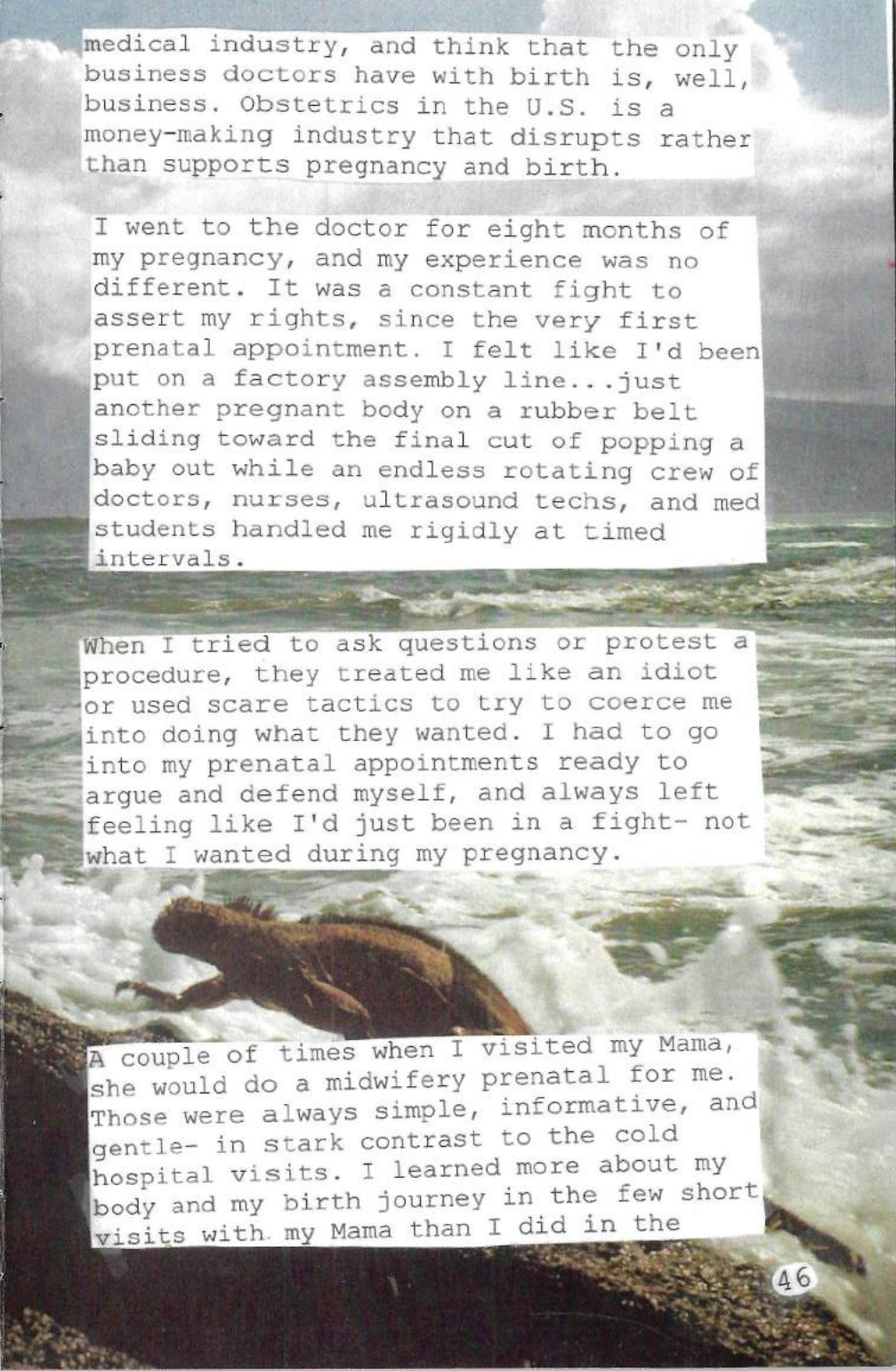
Lemonbalm, mint, sorrel, yarrow, thyme, chickweed, parsley, sage

Postpartum Sitz Bath

Yerba mansa, marshmallow, comfrey, yarrow, potentilla, calendula, lavender infusions in bath

Vitamin + Mineral Replenishment

Nettle, red raspberry leaf, oatstraw, dandelion root, red clover, seaweeds



medical industry, and think that the only business doctors have with birth is, well, business. Obstetrics in the U.S. is a money-making industry that disrupts rather than supports pregnancy and birth.

I went to the doctor for eight months of my pregnancy, and my experience was no different. It was a constant fight to assert my rights, since the very first prenatal appointment. I felt like I'd been put on a factory assembly line...just another pregnant body on a rubber belt sliding toward the final cut of popping a baby out while an endless rotating crew of doctors, nurses, ultrasound techs, and med students handled me rigidly at timed intervals.

When I tried to ask questions or protest a procedure, they treated me like an idiot or used scare tactics to try to coerce me into doing what they wanted. I had to go into my prenatal appointments ready to argue and defend myself, and always left feeling like I'd just been in a fight- not what I wanted during my pregnancy.

A couple of times when I visited my Mama, she would do a midwifery prenatal for me. Those were always simple, informative, and gentle- in stark contrast to the cold hospital visits. I learned more about my body and my birth journey in the few short visits with my Mama than I did in the

as well as deep serenity, expansive love, and an overwhelming sense of trust and mystery. It maxed me out on my ability to extend myself or offer much of anything at all, beyond simply being in the present moment. And I absolutely loved it.

I loved what was happening inside of me. I loved my growing belly. I loved the changes taking place in my body. I loved it most when I was able to settle into it and just feel and exist and be. The hard parts came when the world around me would throw heavy expectations, doubts, and rigid complications on top of something that was already naturally all-consuming. But overall, it was wonderful.

My body was creating life... that incredible dance. I was two beings living as one, for nine months. For nine cycles of the moon I was eating, breathing, loving as two lives. I felt strong and sexy and sure. I felt so incredibly alive. I wanted to dance and to eat and to laugh and to swim and to deeply love. I wanted to wildly celebrate this physiological wonder within me.

Did you get any type of prenatal care?
I've always believed in homebirth and my Mama is a midwife, but because my pregnancy was "high risk" I went with a doctor through public healthcare. I was critical of the misogynist/capitalist

Baby Gear to Acquire Before Delivery

Remember to ask friends or family for help paying for or acquiring items and to check out thrift stores for gear on the cheap and parenting and childcare groups for free extra or outgrown gear. You'll know what your own accessibility to gear and preferences are- trust your instinct for the items that aren't top priority.

Top priority: car seat, clothes, diapers and wipes, crib, bottles and breast pump or formula, stroller or baby carrier

Other items: nursing pillow (any pillow under the baby will help your back), diaper bag (any bag could do), sleep sack (swaddling works too), baby monitor (good idea if you spend any time out of earshot), pacifier (depends on preference)



Stages of Labor

Stage One: This is the longest stage with the hugest range in length, 5-30 hours. It is the regular contractions accompanied by cervix dilation. Your water can break before or after contractions start. It may come out all at once or slowly leak. Get as much rest as possible during this stage.

Stage one is broken into two phases- early labor where the cervix gradually effaces (thins) and dilates (opens) and active labor where the cervix dilates rapidly and contractions are more intense and frequent.

Stage Two: This can last mere minutes to several hours. It starts when the cervix is fully dilated and ends with the birth. If you can, try moving around. Most people instinctually want to as this can help the fetus move towards the birth canal. Very gradual pushing will allow the perineum to stretch and prevent tearing. Your body will tell you when it's time for that last big push.

Stage Three: This usually lasts only 5 to 10 minutes. There will be a few contractions to separate the placenta from the uterine wall and then a few more to deliver the placenta.

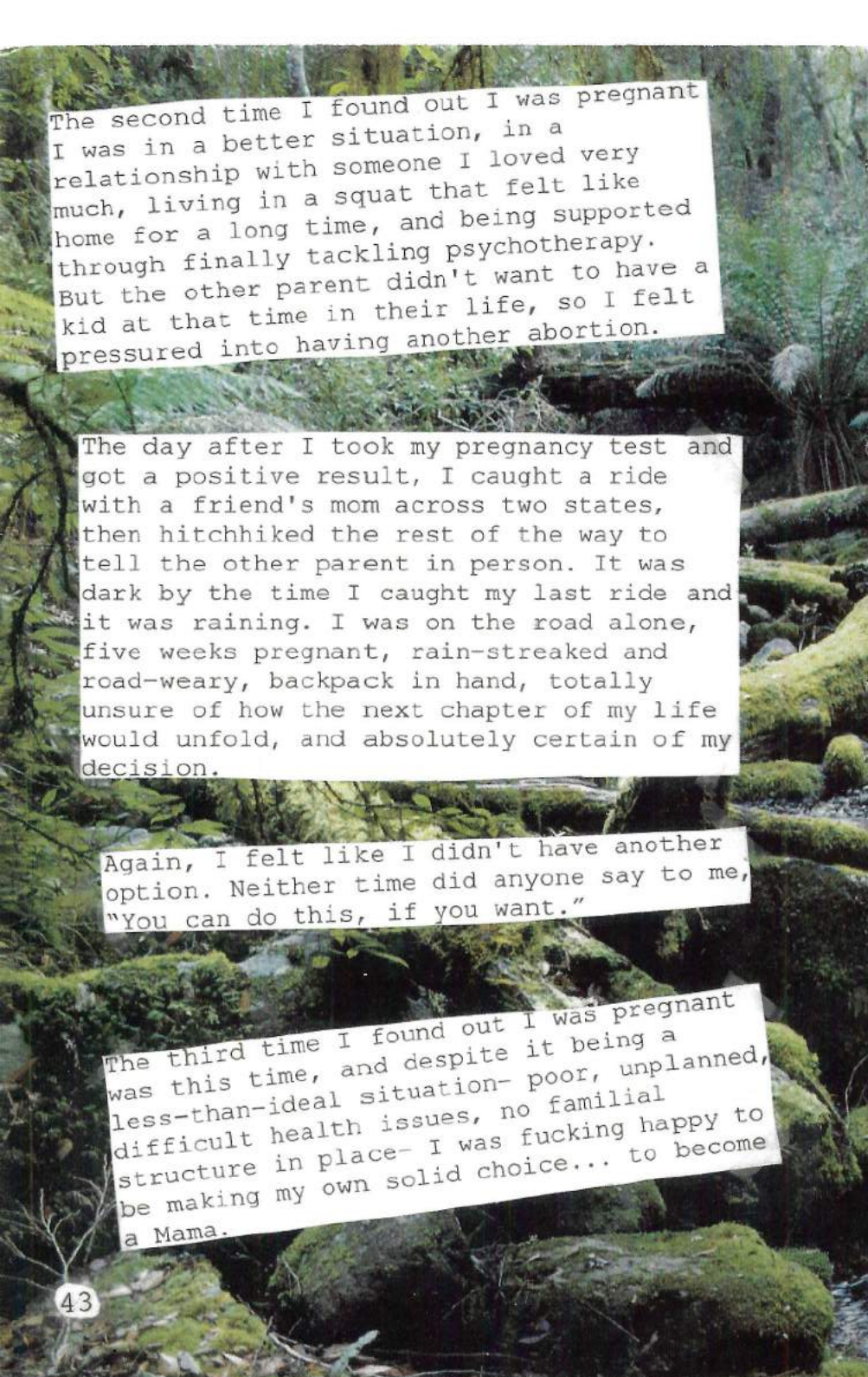
What was your pregnancy like?

My pregnancy was labeled "high-risk" for two reasons. First was the bullshit age thing (If you're thirty five or older, they call it "advanced maternal age" and label it as risky). Secondly, I'd spent the last six years dealing with persistent endocervical carcinoma in situ. I'd had three surgeries and was facing more surgeries and possibly hysterectomy. That put me at a higher risk for miscarriage and the possibility of increased complications.

During my pregnancy I was terrified of losing the baby. I didn't realize until after giving birth just how much the "high-risk" label affected me, how much it made me doubt my body, and how much extra stress it added to the time during my pregnancy.

In spite of the risks, I loved being pregnant! The pregnancy/birth journey was by far the most physically and emotionally demanding thing I'd ever done. It required all of me- body, mind, and spirit. It gobbled up my focus, my capacity, and the very food I ate.

It also filled me with wonder, an inexplicable calm, and an altogether unique sense of joy. It was a roller coaster ride of sometimes extreme lows, intense anxiety, and a host of new worries,

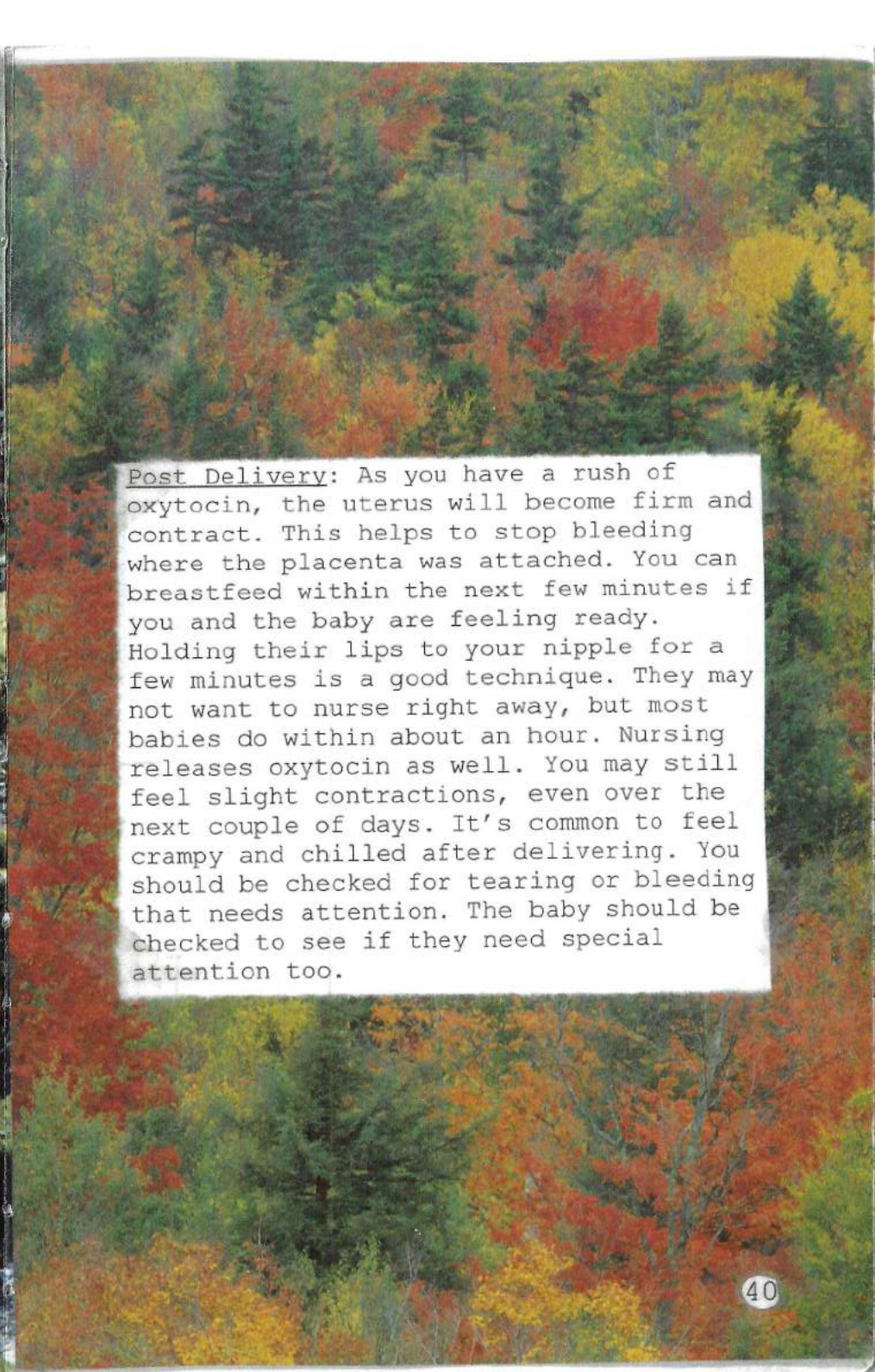


The second time I found out I was pregnant I was in a better situation, in a relationship with someone I loved very much, living in a squat that felt like home for a long time, and being supported through finally tackling psychotherapy. But the other parent didn't want to have a kid at that time in their life, so I felt pressured into having another abortion.

The day after I took my pregnancy test and got a positive result, I caught a ride with a friend's mom across two states, then hitchhiked the rest of the way to tell the other parent in person. It was dark by the time I caught my last ride and it was raining. I was on the road alone, five weeks pregnant, rain-streaked and road-weary, backpack in hand, totally unsure of how the next chapter of my life would unfold, and absolutely certain of my decision.

Again, I felt like I didn't have another option. Neither time did anyone say to me, "You can do this, if you want."

The third time I found out I was pregnant was this time, and despite it being a less-than-ideal situation- poor, unplanned, difficult health issues, no familial structure in place- I was fucking happy to be making my own solid choice... to become a Mama.



Post Delivery: As you have a rush of oxytocin, the uterus will become firm and contract. This helps to stop bleeding where the placenta was attached. You can breastfeed within the next few minutes if you and the baby are feeling ready. Holding their lips to your nipple for a few minutes is a good technique. They may not want to nurse right away, but most babies do within about an hour. Nursing releases oxytocin as well. You may still feel slight contractions, even over the next couple of days. It's common to feel crampy and chilled after delivering. You should be checked for tearing or bleeding that needs attention. The baby should be checked to see if they need special attention too.

Postpartum Depression

This can be caused by a range of things. People who experience mental health challenges or hormonal imbalances before pregnancy may be more likely to have difficulty with this. After delivery, a huge drop in hormones can affect your mood and mental stability. Also, giving birth is a giant emotional deal aside from the hormone wonkiness. Some folx describe it as the most difficult thing they've ever done and experience an intense natural high afterwards. The come down from this is more treacherous for some.

Transitioning into parenthood from pregnancy can be really exhausting too.

Know that things may balance out on their own eventually, but if it's severe or prolonged, feel encouraged to reach out to friends, family, a healthcare provider, or mental healthcare provider if you can. Be gentle with yourself and seek support if you need it.

lotus pod

Interview: Molasses, Momma

Can you share about the privileges and challenges you face?

lemon

atraxa

I'm a poor, punk, light-skin, lady-type, coming from a background of violence and health issues, with all the undue challenges and privileges that come with those realities within a racist, misogynist, consumer-capitalist system. Most of all, I'm a Mama... and so fuckin' proud and happy to say that!

statice

sinuata

starflowers

Can you describe finding out you were pregnant?

This was my third "unplanned" pregnancy. When I found out, I was thirty-five and had just moved to a new town, spent the winter living out of my truck and crashing couches while looking for housing following an eviction, and had no solid job lined up and no long term friends around for support. The other parent lived in another state, and we'd only hung out a handful of times.

The first time I found out I was pregnant I was young and didn't know if I wanted to become a parent then- poor, unstable from years of abuse, and the other parent didn't even live in the same country. So I went with the only option that Planned Parenthood offered me, which was abortion. I did it alone, without telling anyone.

mushroom

salal leaves

sabulosum