

WELCOME EMMA MAY!

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

Sunday night and I was winding down, watching a little of the Golden Globe awards. For me they are more interesting than the Oscars because they move right along and I can visually eavesdrop on all my favorite movie stars who are just sitting around together. The fact is that I never make it to the end of either ceremony, so somewhere around 9:30 PM I found my way upstairs and crawled into bed. Margaret, who is always more game than I am, stuck it out to the end.

She had joined me by 11:30 PM and was on her way to sleep when the cell phone went off. I am glad Margaret was wise enough to bring it with her. Somewhere through my sleepiness I could hear the words, "We are leaving right now." I knew what this call meant, that my daughter Michael Anne's water had broken and she was going to have a baby. Before Margaret put the phone down I was on my feet and already packing a suitcase.

I just grabbed some clothes, my camera, and was out the door. We were taking two cars, so Margaret would follow. She was planning to stay with Anne and help out after the birth, so she had her bags packed for weeks ahead, but I am always speedy. I was just gone. There was no time to lose because it is about a three-hour drive to Ann Arbor where Anne was and it was to be a home birth.

Two of my own kids were home-birthed, including Michael Anne so I knew the drill. She wanted her mom and dad with her for such a life-changing experience, so I was on the road, and on the way there before I even knew it. And with virtually no sleep, you know I was tired, yet held awake by the excitement of the moment. I also knew I had to painstakingly travel that highway, one mile at a time, in order to get there, but in my mind I was already there. And the trip was one of those that was over before I knew it. Time just evaporated.

As I pulled up to their house, it was completely dark. I could not see a single light. Margaret was maybe a half hour behind me and my daughter May, who had played a gig that night (and had no sleep) was also coming, but from a still greater distance. It was all happening. I couldn't imagine what the night would be like or who was coming into this world to see us. I knocked gently on the door, but no answer.

Did I have the wrong house? Of course not. I peered through the window but saw not a single light. I gently pushed on the door and it swung open. I went in. Still no light, but way at the back of the house where the bedroom is, I could see very dim light streaming from under the door. I knocked very lightly and they said come in.

There was only my daughter Anne and her partner Michael Lee. I could see them in the soft light of the candles. Her contractions were already getting close and the midwife had not arrived yet. It was very warm in there so the baby would not be cold. But no baby yet. There were just the three of us. Expectation was electric and the room glowed with the energy of it all. Something important was happening.

Margaret soon arrived and she knew just what to do. Not only had Margaret had home birth our kids, but she loves babies more than anything. And it was all happening right then. The midwife

had still not arrived and I called my daughter May to see where she was at. May was still at some distance, but she got the message that this was not about to be a long labor.

I sat myself out in the living room and allowed my mind to quiet, to calm down, and a little vision or experience came to mind, a vision of many different faces all crowding around a portal or window in time. They were excited and happy faces, all crowded next to one another peering into our dimension as if to see us. I didn't give it any particular meaning, but just relate it because it happened. It could have just been my tiredness talking.

The contractions were now very strong and very close together. Another call to the midwife and she finally arrived. Without a word she went straight about her business. My daughter Anne had also wanted her sister May to be with her and the time for the birth was close now. As it was, May arrived just at the last moment, as the birth was taking place. Everyone had arrived.

The labor was short, shorter than with any of my kids and Michael Anne was a trooper. As a two-time cross-country champion of the state of Michigan, Anne was no stranger to pain and she took the whole thing in stride, almost as if it was easy, which it was not, of course. I was so proud of her. What strength!

And then Anne's voice "It's a girl," and so it was. She is six pounds, 14 ounces, and twenty inches in length. This tiny perfect being among us, already so at home, and just looking up at us like she had always been a part of the family. So perfect! When they call it the "miracle of birth," even that is an understatement. The experience is humbling beyond words, that we, who are so sophisticated with our iPhones and all are, at root, grounded in birth. I was reminded of the image of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Buddha of our age, with his right hand reaching down to touch the earth. Grounded. This was for me a deeply grounding experience.

And the birth was just the beginning. It was the birthday of this tiny wonderful being looking out at me. And after birth, there was the afterbirth, and the cleaning everything up. All present were transported to some special space that just opened in the everyday time that we all live to receive this special being, to make room for something new.

It brought home to me once again that time is not just linear, one thing after another, but that any activity, like this birth, creates or generates space around itself (like an aura) and both the past and the future are shoved aside and give way to the present. The present burns through the center of time with no thought of past or future, like the Sun shining in the sky. That is the correct image: the Sun shining!

And the present is not to be found somewhere at the end of the current timeline, but any real activity creates space or room all around itself, radiating in all directions. The activity and labor of birth made room for this new being. Time precedes inwardly and not linearly, just as the Sun shining sends off rays in all directions, so any sacred activity like a birth expands time, stretches and makes time, makes room in all directions for whatever the nature of that activity demands.

I know. Words cannot express the reality of the way things are. Only the experience itself can be the expression, an experience we each must have for ourselves. After all, that is the whole point of life: to live it!

And so it went. Everyone there was in a sea of sleepiness but held so awake by the precious birth of this child. The tiniest little feet. The most gentle soft sounds in the world. The beginning of a new life.

She is called "Emma May" and she is indeed something to behold. But she has another name, given to her by the great dharma master Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche just this morning and he gave Emma May the name Karma Chö-Tsol, which means "Dharma Lake." Maybe the swans will go there someday!

P.S. As night became day and as the day went on, Michael Anne's brother and other sister came and there was a dinner and a celebration. For myself, I was already way too full of everything. My cup was overflowing and I had so much to think about that I had taken in. I knew that three hours away a little black dog was probably looking out the window and waiting for me. I had to go.

I was so tired, but I made my goodbyes, got into my car, and drove off into the night and the rain on my way back up north. I made it home and, sure enough, one little dog was thrilled to see me. What an experience.

Emma May, thank you!

INSIDE TIME

January 18, 2012

I am glad I drove back home through the night on the day of the birth because by dawn of the following day the roads up north were icy and a snowstorm was in full sway by mid-morning and it lasted until nightfall. At the same time a cold front moved in, plunging temperatures to the mid-teens. So here I am in Big Rapids, holed up with our dog Molotov, who was very happy to see me return.

Nothing earthshaking to report. I am told that my new granddaughter Emma is doing well in Ann Arbor with her mom and dad, surrounded by other family members who have arrived and are helping out, everyone sleeping wherever that is possible. There were extra futons and sleeping bags all over the living room. Of course my wife Margaret is down there supporting the new mother in every way she can. Margaret loves babies.

As for me, I am fairly useless with newborns. I start to shine when they get old enough for me to talk with them, but until that time I feel a bit like a fifth wheel.

The birth was a moving experience that I am still processing, a vivid reminder of the real, where the rubber actually meets the road. The hum and drum of ordinary life is quick to reassert itself, doing its best to push the extraordinary birth experience into the past, but in my mind that event is still shining.

I am busy working with the Matrix Software team on our new Blue*Star astrology system and that name fits the recent events. Blue stars are the young stars that have just been born and are beginning to shine in the heavens. For sure Emma is one of those.

And since there are (practically speaking) an infinite number of stars in the heavens, our lives are like those stars. We are all born, live, and eventually die. We suddenly appear and light up the heavens just where we are, pushing aside the darkness surrounding us to shine for a brief lifetime.

Through this recent birth experience I am reminded once again that eternity, heaven, or

whatever it is we want to call it is not something found at the livelong end of life when we die. It is something found in the middle of life. Here and now is where we shine.

Eternity is not a reward waiting for us at the end of life, but the result of our own daily activity, that if concentrated and pure enough, pushes beyond our distractions and touches on the real, if only for a day, a part of a day, or even for a moment.

Time is a consensus agreed on by the majority. Time is relative, not absolute. And we are always free to go between the clock-ticking seconds, to expand time with the kind of our activity, with a special experience, and to push aside the darkness of day-to-day distractions and experience the perpetual shining of the Sun of life, to touch on eternity and once again renew and celebrate life.

The Sun is always shining!