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Date:  
Subject: - 1. Pregnancy  
- 2. Labour  
- 3. Delivering while travelling  
- 4. Ailments and shamanism  
- 5. Remedies

M. Would it be the first baby or more than one, what were you told to do when you were pregnant with your first baby?

R. We were never idle in the old days. We were not easy on ourselves. We tried to abide by what our elders told us. We would always be out on trips with our husbands. We would do things in our igloos. But we wouldn't do things that our elders thought would endanger our pregnancies. We wouldn't have complications during our pregnancies. We would feel pains or tire easy. With my first baby, I didn't have complications right up to the day I got into labour. We would never stay in one place. We travelled by dog team and never were at one place for long periods. With my first pregnancy, I was told to take it easy for the first few months, not using my legs to tan skins or use scrapers to scrape skin.

M. Only in your first few months?

R. Yes. What I also was told was not to slip and fall. They said it was not as hard to slip and sit hard on your bum, but it was dangerous to fall and land on your hips or pelvic area. Food with your first pregnancy never seemed a problem. That is how it was.

M. Really?

R. Yes. Later in the pregnancy you could resume with your normal routine. It was during the first few months of pregnancy that the baby's head was fragile that you were told to take it easy. Maybe it rubs against the bones in the pelvic area, I don't really know.

M. Because it is situated inside the pelvis?

R. Yes. That is what I have been told.

M. What if you get into labour, what were you told to do? Were you told what to do when you got into labour?

R. I was told to go out as much as possible. To do things that someone told me to do as soon as possible. To go out for fresh air as soon as I got up in the morning. I was told these things



as I was growing up. This they said would help me to deliver easily and not go through complications. That is how it was with me. With the first few pregnancies, complications never seemed to arise, but as you got into more pregnancies, you couldn't eat properly, because the food was not as tempting, one would become idle, vomiting would start occurring due to lack of eating and so on. That is how it was.

M. You never knew whether or not you were in labour with your first pregnancy, of course?

R. I was told how it would be, I would feel like moving my bowels, and that would be the beginning stages of labour. I would feel contractions, feel pelvic pain and that would indicate labour. I was taught this would happen. I tried recognizing all these signs in my first few pregnancies so I would have an easy labour. I didn't want to go through any complications. What scared me the most was the thought of dying while in labour. I don't mind dying of an illness later in life but to die of labour was scary so I listened to what I was told to do. What I didn't know was what contractions felt like. I was told to move the baby from side to side when a contraction occurred. This one had to do to prevent the placenta from sticking to the wall to the womb. When I thought a contraction was occurring or felt some tightening in my womb, I would move the baby from side to side. I have asked this; "Do I move the baby from side to side when I have a contraction?" Because I have been told to do so. I asked what happens when it gets hard when a contraction occurs. So when I felt a weirdness in my tummy, I would try and see if it was hard or not. It was not until my later pregnancies that I found out exactly what a contraction was.

M. Really?

R. Yes.

M. That time there never seemed to be complications with the placenta being stuck to the wall of the womb, maybe this side to side motion really did prevent the placenta from sticking?

R. Yes. When a contraction occurred it was habit to move it from side to side. We were told to do that.

M. Not hard or roughly?

R. Yes, gently. Complications of that nature never really occurred. So later in my other pregnancies, I knew what to do so I would know what labour felt like. Although I knew I was in labour I would not act it cause I knew when the coming of the baby would be. With my first few babies, I would start feeling the pains and the baby would start coming.

M. With your first babies?



R. Yes. But as time progressed, my labours and the coming of the baby would take longer, so I would do what I had to do so the baby wouldn't take so long in coming.

M. It is also known by elders that you can prolong your labour.  
NUNUJUK<sup>1</sup>

M. Weren't you told to push when the urge came?

R. Yes.

M. So the baby could be delivered faster?

R. Yes. If you were put in a lying position while in labour and the contractions stopped, you would then be put in an upright position. This they did so the baby would come out faster. They didn't place you in the comfortable position.

M. Yes?

R. They would place you in the less comfortable position. As long as you knew the baby would be faster in coming.

M. So the discomfort of labour could go away faster?

R. Yes. When a woman is in labour, being afraid is never really a part, but shivering occurred. Maybe the cold had something to do with it.

M. And being afraid had a part in shivering too?

R. Yes. When a woman got into labour, shivering started.

M. Yes, because a woman in labour was known to be at death's door?

R. Yes. It is known that complications occur with ones doing like; a man in a kayak, spirits are always present. It was also known that if a woman didn't get pregnant anymore or a man didn't go kayaking anymore due to old age, then sickness would be the only way that the person would die. For a man in a kayak, if an accident occurs, he dies. Also for a woman in labour, if complications occur, death is never far behind. That is how it was. If a woman stopped going into labour due to old age or if a man stopped hunting due to old age, then the only way to die was sickness.

M. When a woman goes into labour and delivered a baby, you would then have to attend to their umbilical cord?

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1. NUNUJUK: feel like pushing but not able to due to shyness.

R. Yes.

M. When one is in labour there's always water involved, isn't there?

R. Yes. I've heard that the water is a prolonger in labour. We were told when in labour to see if you could touch the water with your fingers.

M. And You personally tested to see if the water was reachable?

R. Yes. When you could touch your water, you had to sharpen a finger nail and try bursting the water by scratching it. What a woman did was see if the water could be reached with the fingers and if she could, she would reach in, scratch it and let it burst.

M. Were there times when difficulty occurred in puncturing the water sac?

R. Yes.

M. And the baby came out only when the water broke.

R. Yes. Water sacs in women were different. Some were easy to puncture, others weren't. As soon as the water broke, the baby came out. We were told to urinate whenever possible. We were also told to wear comfortable pants so our bums could be warm. When your bums were cold all the time, the passage was not as flexible. If a woman kept her bums warm the passage complications didn't occur. The is what I heard happened. Pee whenever possible and wear comfortable warm pants.

M. Also you had to sleep well, or you got sleepy when you get into labour?

R. Yes. That's how it is. With my first born that happened. Whenever the contractions eased, I'd fall asleep. I would start feeling the contractions in my sleep, I'd be awakened by it but as soon as it started easing, I'd fall right back to sleep. Women are told to sleep good so sleeping won't be a problem during labour. We were told these things. The time of the day didn't matter if you were sleepy. You had to sleep, so sleeping won't be a problem when you get into labour. I should have been afraid with my first labour but I slept that one off. I was never like that with my labours after that one though.

M. If you don't pee as often or when you feel like it, does that in anyway cause complications?

R. Yes. Because when you get into labour, it is very hard to urinate.



M. Yes?

R. Yes. That is why you would be told to pee as often as possible, because it gets difficult to pee during labour. I use to deliver lying down, side ways. For those who deliver like that, there had to be someone to support the legs and the back.

M. Really?

R. Yes. This was done so as to keep the legs leveled or something could go wrong. When the baby, in some cases starts coming, the legs start to straighten so someone had to attend the knees and the feet. When the baby is coming out, one would place a hand turned into a fist between the knees.

M. When the baby was coming out?

R. Yes. That is how some babies were delivered.

M. That time when a woman was in labour, was she exposed? A blanket was used?

R. Yes. A blanket was always used. We used caribou blankets. We never had our babies lying completely flat on our backs either.

M. You actually didn't watch the whole procedure of labour.

R. No. Nobody watched the baby coming out, not like today. Everything is exposed today.

M. It was only when the baby came out that you could peek inside the blanket?

R. Yes. And then there would have to be the tying of the umbilical cord. After the cord was cut, you were told to take the cord leading to the placenta and wait for the placenta to come out. If it didn't come out you were placed in an upright position with your other leg extended out and when the pushing urge came, you'd push and the placenta would come out.

M. Yes?

R. It was when the placenta had difficulty coming out that this position was used.

M. You were on your knees for the position or what?

R. Like this.

M. To let the placenta out?

R. Yes. Some had to be assisted by somebody using the umbilical

cord as a guide and go inside a woman and pulling the placenta out.

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M. Really.

R. It is not a game, this labour thing. That time it wasn't. When someone got into labour it was a time to be attentive.

M. Yes. You did most of the work yourselves?

R. Yes. I used to have to deliver my babies at times cause there was no one around to attend to me. I would do the procedures on my own. But I was used to labours then so it didn't really matter. I delivered my last baby on my own.

M. Wow! Really?

R. It is with first ones that you can't be alone. You are told what to do and some have to do with the length of the labour. Some didn't want people around.

M. Really.

R. Yes. Me, I didn't mind people and noises, that is how I was. Some were sensitive.

M. Really?

R. Yes. Maybe those who were not talkative or not as active.

M. But people had to be sensitive to your needs while you were in labour?

R. Yes, they had to be. I've had more than one baby on my own alone. What I would do when the baby's head was coming out was pull on my hair and place my fist between my knees and push..

M. You managed to keep your spine straight on your own?

R. Yes. I managed to. There was a time when we were travelling by dog team and I went into labour. My husband made an igloo. My older daughters attended to the beds. As soon as I got in, I started pushing the baby out, but it was so painful and uncomfortable like my insides were being ripped apart. I stopped pushing, but I thought afterwards that was the only way the baby was going to come out. It was different with my daughter, different from my other labours. She was most painful to deliver. There was no heat or anything in the igloo at that time.

M. You couldn't even attend to the qulliq? (seal oil lamp)

R. The qulliq wasn't even inside the igloo. My daughters were little girls then. They were on their side of the igloo setting



their qulliq. They were too scared to look my way.

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M. You were in labour in front of the two little girls?

R. Yes. They must have been scared, that's how it was. You... remember the lady you visited earlier. She had her baby while they were travelling by dog team.

M. Did she deliver inside an igloo or on the sled?

R. I don't really know how it happened.

M. She didn't mention that in her stories.

R. She didn't. Maybe she doesn't remember it.

M. Was that the only time you had a baby while travelling?

R. Yes. Just that once while travelling. The other one was in early spring. We were travelling alone. Coleman stoves were being used then. Our Coleman didn't have fuel, I needed a drink badly. The snow was melting then, I knew that I was in labour. I looked around to see if there was any water cause I was very thirsty. I'd rest when the contractions would come.

M. Were you travelling?

R. No. We had just camped, our tent was just put up. Pools of water were forming at that time, so I was looking around to see if there was any. We camped. The Coleman was out of fuel, there was not even blubber for our qulliq. I was walking around. I returned to the tent, my husband was asleep. Our child was asleep beside him. After returning, I prepared a place on the other side of the tent. I placed the blanket using some of it as a mat and the rest to cover myself.

M. Was that blanket all you had for comfort?

R. No. There was a mat underneath it. I folded the blanket using some of it for mat and half of it for covering. That is how I delivered my baby. It is only when the baby started crying, that my husband woke up. It was girl. I thought I would go through more pain. As you know, girls are less painful.

M. Yes.

R. Boys are stronger, so the pain is stronger. I thought I'd feel more pain, and if that happened, I'd wake my husband. But the baby came with hardly any pain.

M. You didn't make any noise at all during your labour, so your husband didn't wake up?

R. That's right.

M. He only woke up when he heard the baby crying?

R. Yes. Also too, if you are pregnant with your first, if you... feel like crying while in labour, do so, but I had been told that if you make noises on your first labour, it happens with all the rest.

M. Yes, so that's how it is.

R. Yes. I've been told that I didn't want to make any noises so I didn't. Yes, that is how I had my babies. We didn't have any sanitized things for the baby so rabbit skin was used to wrap the baby for warmth. We would make caribou clothing for the baby. Hats of caribou skin. That is how we did it.

M. Wow! Really?

R. Caribou was the available clothing around.

M. Yes. Would you use caribou skin to wipe the baby right after it was born?

R. No. We used rabbit skin. Those were used for wiping. We would use rabbit skins for sanitation as well and for cleaning the baby.

M. You used them as we use towels?

R. Yes. There was nothing else available. All we had was what we were using. Our elders would supply us with what we needed. That is how it was, our elders really helped us.

M. Really. Maybe too because you abided by their words so they were willing to help you.

R. Yes. And too we all lived in the same igloo. Even when we became adults, we lived with our elders. I was only when we had more than one child and our younger-in-laws needed our places. That was when we started living on our own. We were together in the Qangmat (sod houses). In-laws lived together. It was when an igloo or a tent became too crowded that the older knew would start living on their own. That is how it happened.

M. Do you know of anyone at that time who was able to help other people in their ailments like a doctor would do?

R. No. I don't know really. But we tried abiding by what the elders told us, during labour. We never seemed to have help in any other way. The people who helped were our supporters on our knees, feet and back during labour. Word was what helped us. I don't recall of anyone being attended to while he/she was sick



like a doctor would do. All I remember is dislocated joints being mended by placing the bones properly. The person would be supported and held while the leg or whatever was being attended to.

M. Really?

R. That is how it was.

M. Really? This lady seems to want to know how ailments were cured. Maybe the way the shaman did it?

R. All I've heard about that is how the shaman through rituals would try and heal the sick.

M. You mean healing the sick?

R. Yes. In the days when shamanism was practiced, it was through shamanism that a shaman would find out what was wrong. If a person did something that was against the culture, than that caused the sickness, by something that the person was not saying.

M. Really?

R. If some one kept a secret it was liable to kill him, so he'd be forced to say his secret so he could get better. If a loved one got sick, it was known that some member of the immediate family had done something wrong. The shaman would find out.

M. Really?

R. If he was told to say what his secret was and voiced out what he had done, then the sick person would become better.

M. Really?

R. That is what I know.

M. Really.

R. Yes. Since shamanism was banished, prayer has been our main way of helping. That is how it is now, just religion.

M. It was when religion was introduced that praying became a means of help?

R. Yes. Yes, that was how it was with us cause we didn't know any shaman at the time I was growing up. Yes praying was and still is.

M. Cuts could be healed?

R. Yes, and bile, seal bile was used to apply to a cut before bandaging. Square flipper blubber too, were chosen. If there was no square flipper, seal blubber would be used by removing all the fat. If someone got a bad cut and it couldn't stop bleeding, rabbit feces would be used. First you'd grind the feces and sprinkle it on the cut. Herbs were also used too because they were good. The blubber was good for healing wounds. Also if someone got a cut, the wound would be dipped in urine. That way the bleeding and pain stops. The urine stings the wound helps heal it. I've witnessed those. They tried all methods of healing.

M. And bleeding could be stopped too right?

R. Yes. For a bleeding nose, strips of blubber would be used. If you get a nose bleed, and you plug on nostril, blood goes out through the other or if you plug both, blood comes through the mouth. So what they did was use strips of blubber. They would wind the blubber right to the end of the nostrils and that would stop the bleeding. Also suction to the back of neck was a technique used to stop bleeding noses and put cold compression on the forehead.

M. Really.

R. Yes. That's how it was