

# *Cesarean Born - writings and art by Jane English and others*

## *Introduction*

### *Cesarean-born*

Part of every human experience has been the journey down the birth canal. Only during the last hundred years have there been many of us who didn't experience that, who were born cesarean. Although the medical procedure of cesarean delivery has become routine, we are just beginning to learn about the psychological and spiritual aspects of this different kind of birth.

There are two kinds of cesarean deliveries: those done before labor starts and those done, often in emergency conditions, after some labor. I call these non-labor cesareans and labor cesareans, respectively. The usual medical terms, elective cesarean and non-elective cesarean, focus on the doctor's and mother's experience rather than on the child's.

Thoughts and images of cesarean birth are for me a conceptual framework, a tool. My interest in using the concept "cesarean born" was not purely academic. It was motivated by great chaos and discomfort in my personal life. The thought of being cesarean seemed to bring some clarity and direction into what otherwise seemed a hopeless morass of emotion and failed relationships in my life. It also connected my body and feeling to the "light" I was pursuing in my photographic work.

I learned that cesarean born people, especially non-labor cesareans, have a somewhat different sense of space and time. Major change can happen very quickly with the help of a group of experts, and personal space can be much larger than the "norm" most people learn during the contractions of vaginal birth.

### *Inner Exploration*

Some of the art in this display is selected from the now-out-of-print book, *Different Doorway*, that Jane made in 1985. The book is a story about explorers and exploration. For me, the unexplored territory was not a new continent or the farther reaches of the solar system. It was within my own being, in consciousness. It was my thoughts, my emotions, my perceptions and images and my physical form.

Many ancient and so-called primitive cultures have detailed and complex technologies of body, mind and spirit. But we in the West, until recently, have been strangely lacking in this area. Several centuries of intensive exploration of the external world have led most people in the Western world away from the vast territory within themselves. Awareness of the inner territory is often suppressed by calling it crazy, unscientific or too subjective.

In the past century, psychiatry has attempted to remedy this lack, but much of the interpretation orthodox psychiatry gives to inner experience is that of pathology. Inner states are recognized only when they are bizarre and cause enough dis-ease to be labeled as diseases. Then the medical model is applied with its symptoms, diagnoses and treatments.

Most of us learned at an early age not to talk about inner experience. To do so was to run the risk of being called crazy or sick. Recently it has become less necessary to carry the negative self-judgments associated with "crazy" in order to experience the territory hidden behind that label. Many individuals and

groups have taken great steps in the past few decades toward legitimizing inner exploration in the context of our western scientific culture, and I am grateful to many of them for making my journey easier.

### *Reality*

It became increasingly apparent to me that a much expanded view of reality is necessary when one is considering the phenomenon of birth. Birth is one of the boundaries of individual physical existence. To consider it only from the perspective of personality, of ego, of being a separate individual who has already been born, creates much distortion. It is as if one were to look at the walls of a house only from the inside and assert that the knowledge gained thereby is complete. We talk about a "person" being born. But when we use the word "person," we bring along with it our own unconscious assumptions of what it is to be a person. Many of these assumptions are based on our own experience of birth, the process in which our person is given a separate physical form. It is important that we be aware of these assumptions when we are with a person born in a way different from our own birth; we may not be seeing them clearly.

Concepts of a transpersonal or spiritual reality served not only as explanations of my experiences, but also as tools for transformation. I came to see that many of my "problems" were the result of the physical and emotional tensions created in trying to stuff my experience, my humanness, into too small a conceptual framework. Concepts of expanded reality were stepping-stones or scaffolding that helped me accept what I was experiencing without judging it wrong or crazy, thus enabling me to release the tension.

My scientific training was both a help and a hindrance. On the negative side was my deeply entrenched belief in a logical, cause/effect, separative, Newtonian physics world. Judgments and denial coming from that part of myself very much slowed down my acceptance of experiences I had in transpersonal, spiritual or higher realms of consciousness.

On the other hand, the spirit of open exploration and inquiry I had cultivated as a physicist was helpful. Perhaps even more important was my experience of the amazing world of sub-atomic particle physics where reality indeed seems strange and paradoxical to anyone whose beliefs are based on the world of Newtonian physics. It prepared me for my adventures in the even stranger and more paradoxical world of consciousness.

### *About Jane English*

Jane was born in 1942 in Boston, Massachusetts in a planned, non-labor cesarean delivery. Her academic training includes a Ph.D. in experimental sub-atomic particle physics. In 1985, her previous ten years of psychological and spiritual explorations led her to write *Different Doorway: Adventures of a Cesarean Born*. She has since given lectures and published articles in the field of pre and peri-natal psychology. She is also widely known for her photographic work that includes illustrations for a best-selling translation of the Chinese classic, *Tao Te Ching*, as well as numerous other books and calendars.

*January 15, 1975* - Awoke with a dream image of Pink Teddy, my childhood teddy bear that has a zipper in it's stomach.

Later in the morning I had some deep tissue massage work. An image arose as work was done deep in my belly: Me, as a child standing in the bathroom upstairs in my childhood home and Mother getting out of the shower. I see the scar down her belly. She tells me that was where she was cut open when I was born, "This is where they took you out of me."

In the afternoon I was in a group that did an exercise on dream images. I chose the one of Pink Teddy. Someone asked me, "Do babies come out of it?" At first I wasn't sure, then I got the connection between the zipper and Mother's scar.



*January 16, 1975* - Awoke with a dream: In a countryside of rolling green hills one area is fenced off. I am given a map that labels this area as "Keystone Park." As I lay there I followed the dream in my half-awake state. I saw a house in the park, went into it, and found myself again in the bathroom scene with my mother.

## *An Initiatory Dream*

Except for reading a little about primal therapy, I had, prior to the following dream, little or no sense that one could recall the experience of being born. The dream was an initiation. It gave me an intuitive understanding of the new territory I was entering and sketched the path through it. It was a spark, the element fire, a gift from spirit.

At the time of the dream, I was living with people who shared dreams each morning, and I blithely shared this one. At that point, it was just words and images. I was not at all in touch with the emotions or the physical tensions involved.

The dream was a map. At times when I was deeply immersed in negativity, I would remember the dream and know there was a way out.

*The Dream—sometime in 1973*

*I am lying drugged and unable to move on my back on a high table in the right front room of a big old house. My mother lies on top of me and rapes me. Even in the dream I am aware of the impossibility of being raped by a woman. Lots of sexual feelings and a sense of total defeat, of being overwhelmed physically and psychologically. I withdraw deep into myself and give up.*

*Then I feel resentment. I see her standing by a wall to my right. I go over to her and tear her belly open with my hands. Great rage as I kill her.*

*Then I walk out into the front hall, an empty room with several closed doors. I feel alone.*

*I open the one to the left front room and find it full of strangers. I feel uneasy.*

*I sit by one of the front windows. One by one the people bring me gifts. I realize this is my birthday party. I feel happy.*

The extreme violence in the dream is symbolic of the physical and emotional intensity of birth. It does not reflect my current feelings toward my mother. I was born non-labor cesarean because my older brother was cesarean. My birth was done a week ahead of time because the doctor had scheduled his wedding for my due date. My mother was given ether as a general anesthesia. I was brought to her 24 hours later.

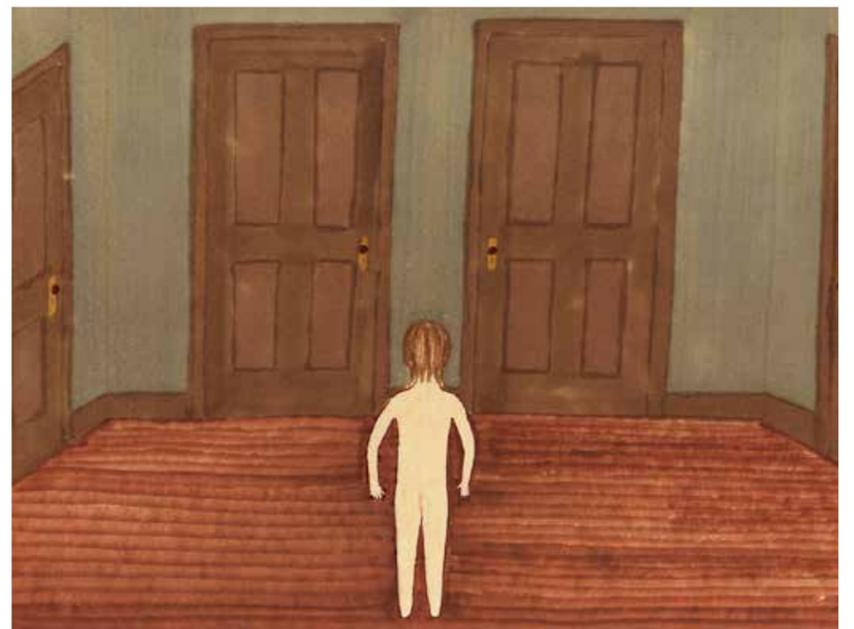
The dream expresses in symbolic language my memory of birth. The drugging is the anesthesia. The rape is the violation and intrusion I felt when the doctor cut my mother open. I was biologically and psychically unified with her, so I also experienced the invasion. This happened in the context of my mother's body, my whole world up to that time, so it seemed that she, not the doctor, was invading me. The murderous rage is related to anger I felt as the doctor and his assistants roughly stimulated me to get breathing started. This happened just outside my bloody cut-open, apparently dead mother, so I seemed to be angry with her, not the doctor. The empty hall is related to being alone in the nursery. The strangers were all the people who handled me that first day. Later I experienced them as nourishers bringing me gifts at my "Birth Day" party.



*Victim*



*Aggressor*



*Alone*



*Strangers*

The pioneering work of Stanislov Grof has showed me the importance and the possibility of transforming the roots of violence that lie subconsciously within all of us. These are often associated with suppressed memories of birth, either vaginal or cesarean. It is my intention to show that a cesarean birth is not less or more intense than vaginal birth. It is simply different.

In Greek mythology, Dionysus (Bacchus) is the god of revelry and also of madness. His challenge to humans is, "If you won't dance the lesser dance of madness (symbolic acting out of intense emotion), I will force you to dance the greater dance of madness (psychosis, violence)."

My dream was an invitation and a warning to dance the lesser dance. I was fortunate that about a year afterward I was in therapeutic situations where I could begin to safely

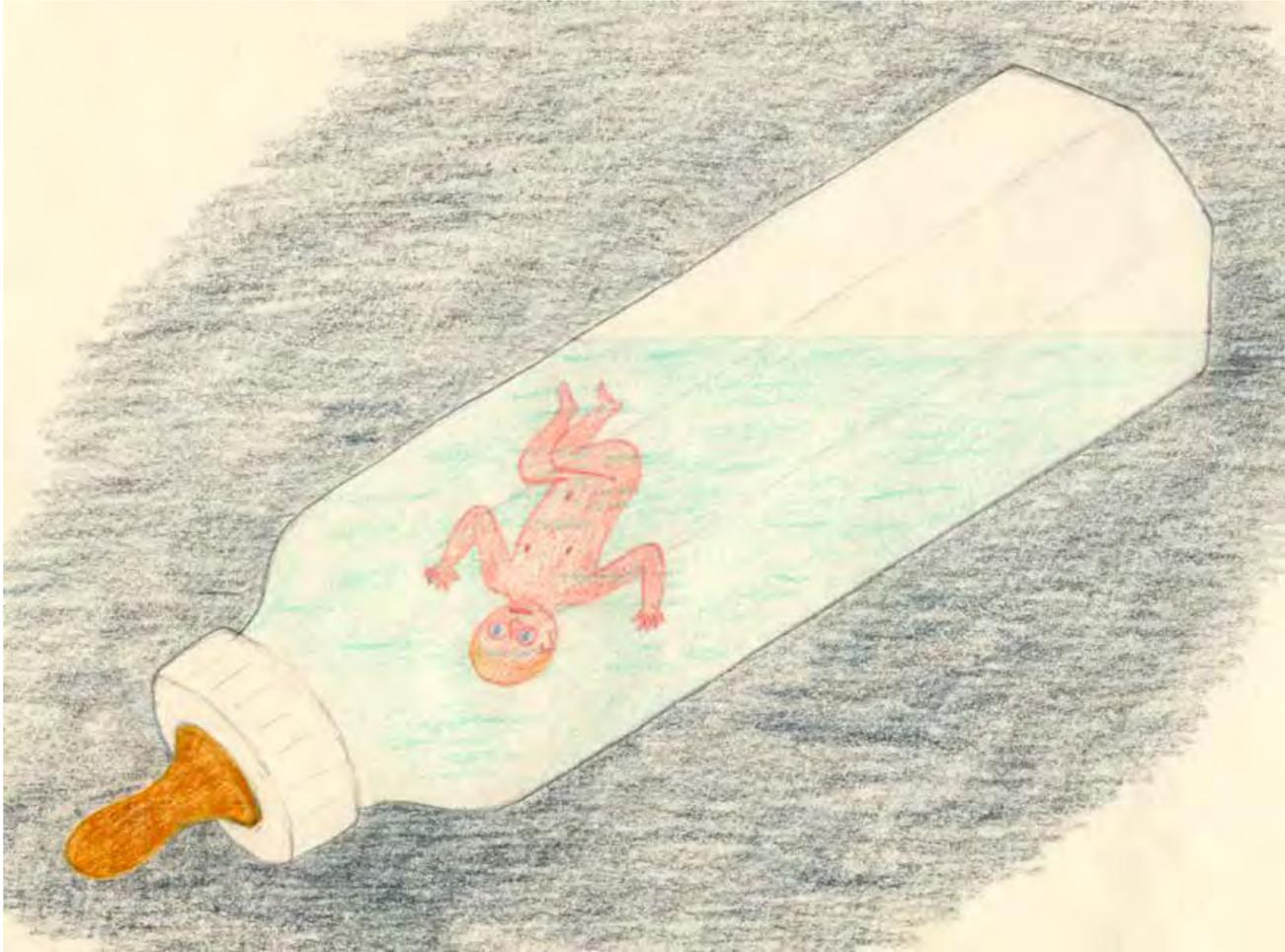
release the emotions, images and physical tensions the dream symbolizes. It is likely that if I had tried to suppress the dream, my life would not have moved in the positive direction it has over the past few years.

It took eight years of living with the dream to become objective enough to draw it. Even so, creating a visible image was very difficult. The dream still evoked many strong emotions and judgments. Drawing was part of my self-healing process. I share them here in the hope that they will facilitate the self-healing journeys of other people.

— Jane English, *Different Doorway*, pp 17, 18 and 65



*Birth Day Party*

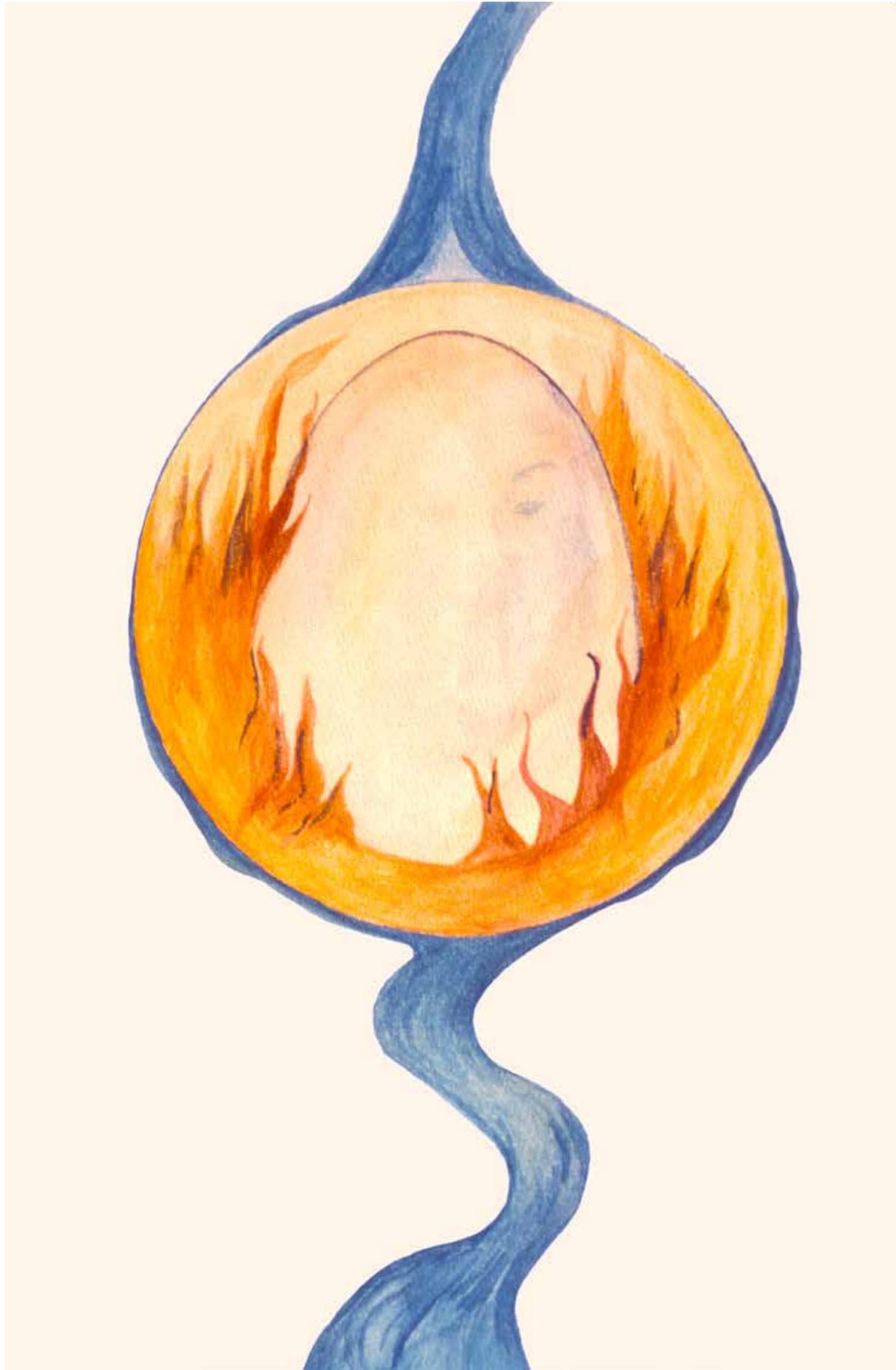


*March 12, 1979* - I awoke with an intense dream image: A baby bottle tilted, nipple down, filled with water or a pale juice. In it a baby is drowning.

*This dream seems to be about the anaesthesia (ether) that was used during my birth. I may have experienced a lack of oxygen that felt like drowning. The baby bottle is perhaps the uterus, and the juice the amniotic fluid.*



*September 14, 1977* - A half-waking dream of being clutched by a huge black female insane demon who is lying on top of me. Feeling drugged and unable to move. A membrane is stretched over me, trapping me. Intense pain in my right knee. The demon is also panicked. I want the demon to go away. Not sure where I am. Someone on the other side of the membrane pokes a hole in it, and I stick my tongue through the hole. I awoke with my mouth open and nose and sinuses blocked, shaken and amazed. It was clearly a perinatal dream. The membrane might be the amniotic sac.



This painting was made by Rosemary Jellison about 1980. She is a non-labor cesarean born psychotherapist who is now retired. She relates the veil to the amniotic sac. Many non-labor cesarean born people may have their first experience of the world seen through an intact amniotic sac as the belly and uterus of the mother are cut open. The blue wavy tube is very similar to the blue and green tubes encircling the baby in Jane's painting below, and may be the umbilical cord.



These two castle paintings are from a series of 24 paintings that emerged from a spontaneous shamanic journey in 1977. The left one is like a pregnant castle. The right one is the castle cracking open and shows the upward movement of a cesarean birth.





*August 11, 1977 - A dream*

I am near second base on a baseball field, talking with some friends. I take a step and my right foot goes through a hole in the ground. It leads to a small tunnel. I see a wooden trap door leading to a side tunnel. I'm wary of the trap door, but a young man with curly hair goes in. I'm afraid for him. It is a tight squeeze. After a while he emerges looking like he's been through hell. He says there wasn't any air in there, just a sticky sweet gas. He almost passed out, but he managed with great effort to crawl back out. I seem to be part way down the hole as I talk to him. I can see a room under the baseball field, maybe a locker room. It is a functional place with bluish white lights. I ask if he will return to the surface with me, and he says he won't yet. He needs to digest what happened. He seems dazed.

*About three years later I wondered if this dream is about birth, about the time when in a cesarean delivery the head has been delivered and the body is still in the womb. Halfway through the process, at second base. Body is full of anaesthesia and not ready to be born. Maybe the locker room is the operating room.*



*August 3, 1978 - a dream*

I am driving south on US1 toward Boston. The air is bad, polluted or poisoned. A low plane flies over. I see a fire in a large office building that is unoccupied. Some workers are breaking through the gates in the fence around it. I crawl over, under, and through a tangle of hoses, then help spray water on the building. I go into the building and find that it is a dormitory. I meet a professor friend there.

*I was born in Boston. The bad air might be the anaesthesia, the tangle of hoses the umbilical cord. The dormitory is a place to sleep -- maybe a mix of the uterus and the newborn nursery in the hospital.*



July 27, 1979 - a dream

I am at a seminar. A male leader tells a small group an account of a process. Mostly he speaks of what the person involved would experience. I felt the process was scary. Some details I saw happen to a small naked person; others I experienced as happening to me. Being grabbed by the head. Hearing the man say, "And we do it like this." Pulled by the head backward. Being arched forcefully back. Pain and resistance in my chest. The group is horrified. Then the leader says, "And this is cesarean birth." I experience a great flood of all kinds of emotions. He has been using me as an example.

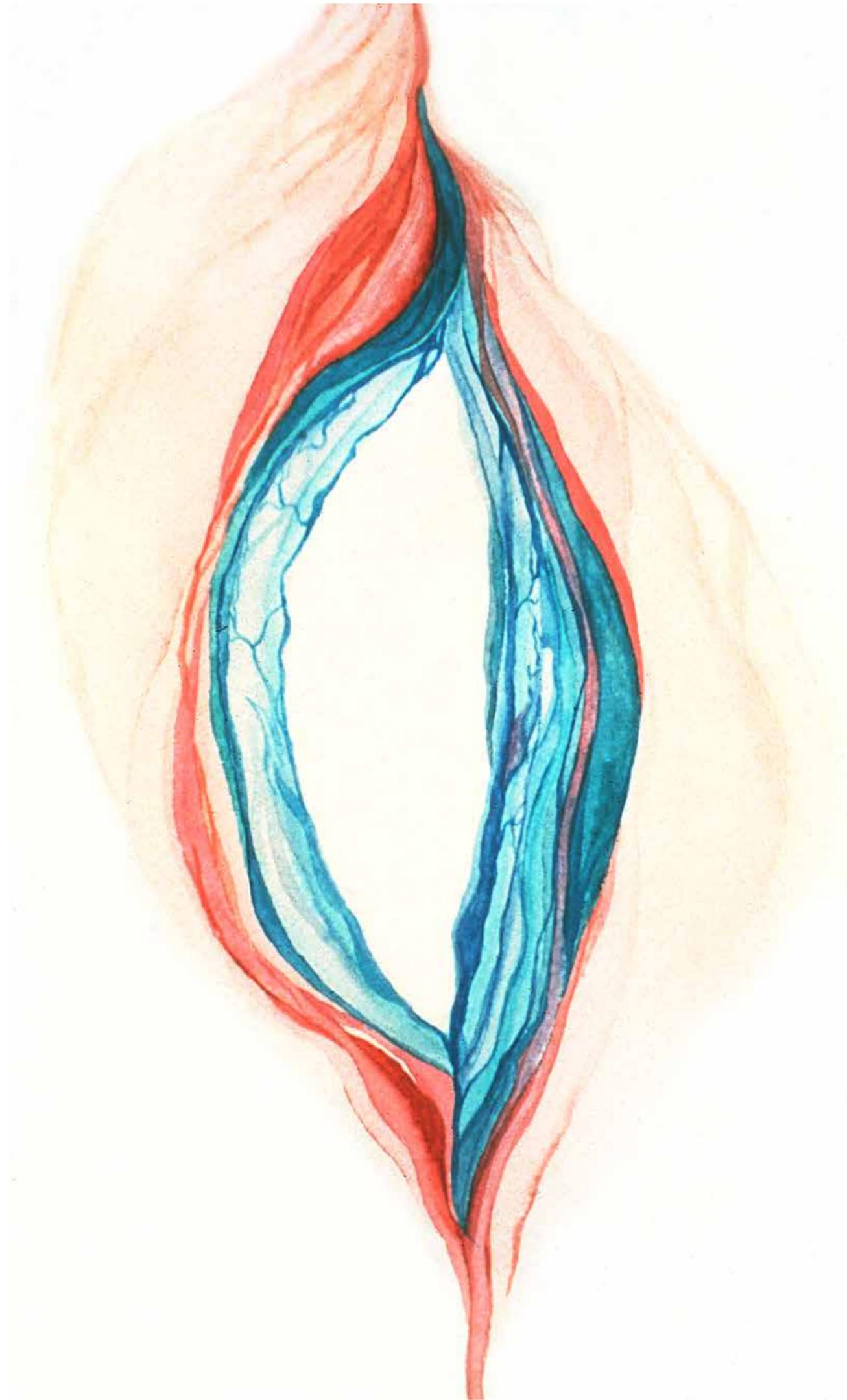
Then we are in a plowed field. I am lying on the ground on my right side. The group leader is now a large man with golden hair. We are both naked. He lies on top of my left side, pressing me into the earth. I experience and release all the hurt, fear, and anger I'd felt in the birth. It is a healing. I feel awe and gratitude. Later I am in the same field re-planting some uprooted beets.

Then someone asks what group I had been in. I describe what I had experienced. I feel I am not communicating well. Then I am riding in a car with someone who is a friend, but she belittles my experience. I feel hurt.

*The beets are like hearts. I had stuffed them back into the ground. At that time I was not able to bring to the end of the dream the earlier experience of awe and gratitude, to say nothing of bringing it into the waking state. But now, over 30 years later, I have come to terms with my birth and no longer hide my heart.*



This painting by Rosemary Jellison has some parallels to the second part of Jane's dream. A golden figure and a rock contain the tree of life - between heaven and earth. Rosemary once commented that this is the first of her paintings that contained earth - the rock.

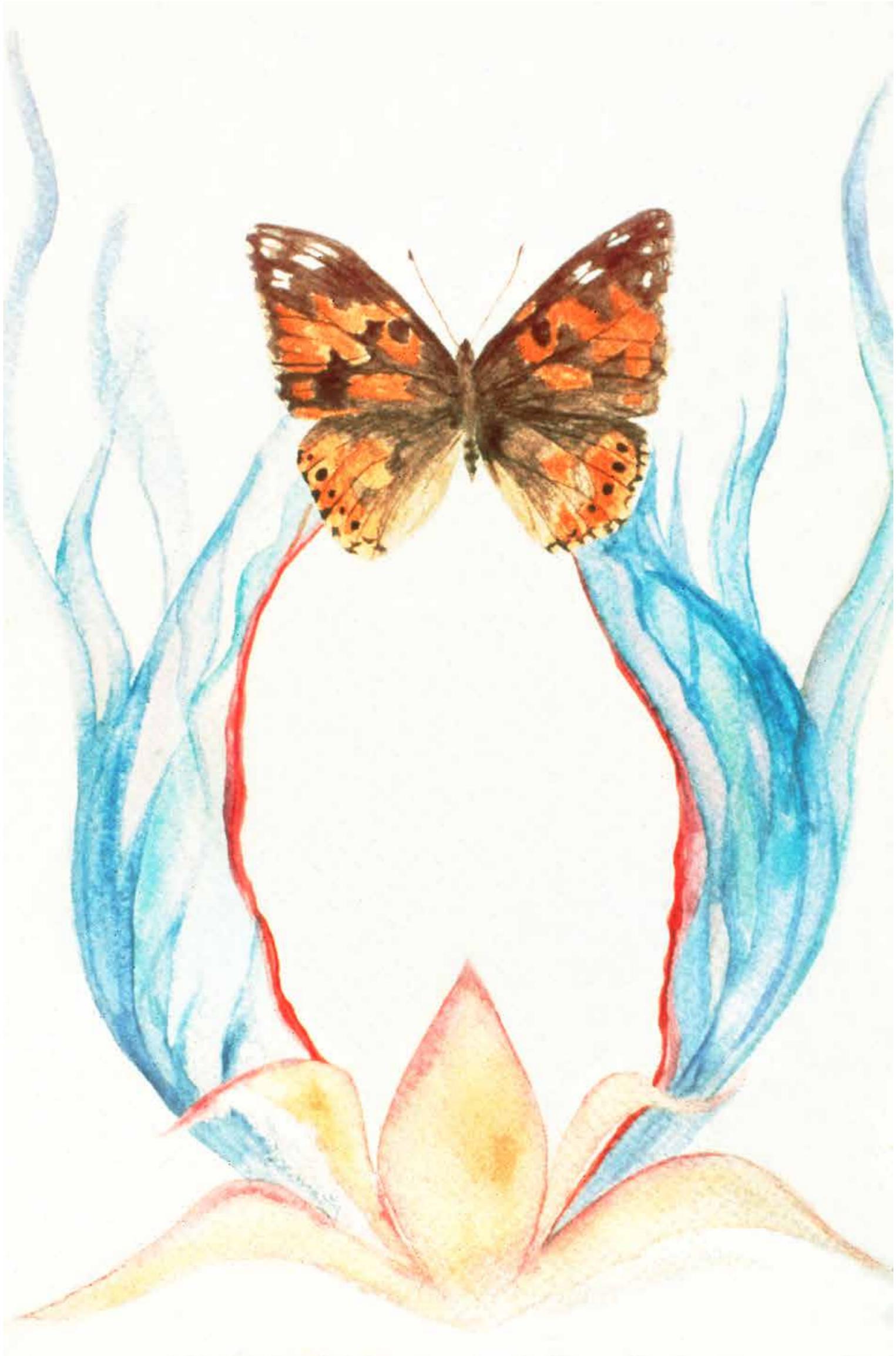


*Wound* - 1981 - Rosemary Jellison - approx 18"x24" - watercolor

These two paintings are powerful images of transformation. While painting *Wound*, the cesarean born artist was aware of its connection to inner work she was doing on anger and on her cesarean birth. The second painting, *Lotus*, she did intuitively and was not aware of it as a transformation of the first until that was pointed out by a friend. In *Lotus* the wound is transformed into a gate-

way for rebirth into a new life of psychological and spiritual freedom, symbolized by the butterfly and the lotus flower.

*A conversation between Jane English and Rosemary Jellison, illustrated with black and white pictures of more of her artwork are in the book Different Doorway, pp. 105-111.*



*Lotus* - 1985 - Rosemary Jellison - approx 18"x24" - watercolor



## *Transcendence*

**Words separate**, divide and categorize but there is a reality beyond words. This is an experience of underlying unity, even beyond the idea of connection, which requires there to be separate things to be connected!

**Images are still apparently separate objects**, but they can point to the unity. The left painting is of falling into physical form; the right one is of rising out of physical form, rejoining the light.

**Birth, both cesarean and vaginal**, is spirit coming into form, taking on limitation. Limits are good, boundaries are good. They make the dance that we enjoy as life. Death is the releasing, going back. The art is to learn how to journey back and forth through this tunnel, which is not necessarily the birth canal. I haven't been through the birth canal, yet these tunnel images come to me. I think of birth trauma memories as demons that guard this opening between the mundane and spirit.

— Jane English, *Fingers Pointing to the Moon*, page 73



— *Watercolor paintings by Jane English, 1977*



*A side view of the tunnel on the previous panel*

TRANSPERSONAL

BIRTH

forming limits,  
boundaries, "I",  
identity, ego,  
distinctions,  
separations,  
sense of "other"

CONTRACTING



dissolving limits,  
boundaries, "I",  
identity, ego,  
distinctions,  
separations,  
sense of other

EXPANDING

DEATH



PERSONAL

# The First Cesarean Birth

based on a shamanic journey experience in 1984

**I**n a cave part way up the side of a valley a small group of people sit around an open fire. It is early spring at the end of a long hard winter. Several members of this small band of people have died during the winter. The others are weak but glad to see the beginnings of spring.

**Until this night** they had also been happy about the imminent birth of a child to one of the women. But the mood is somber as they sit around the fire, for the woman lying on some furs is near death after a long hard labor. The child has not been born. It seems that not only is there not to be a birth but there will be one more death. The band is getting so small it may not survive.

**Across the fire** from where the young woman lies is an older woman whose hair is beginning to grey. She is the keeper of the knowledge of herbs for this band and is consulted in all health matters. She suddenly sits up straighter and peers intently at the younger woman lying there. She can see no movement of breathing; perhaps death has already come. Reaching into her leather pouch for an obsidian stone she uses for cutting leather, she stands and silently walks toward the young woman.

**Telepathically she communicates** to the young woman not to be afraid. She sees that the woman's soul has indeed left the body and is hovering there above the fire. Gently the older woman pulls aside the furs and leather dress covering the young woman's belly. Carefully she cuts open the belly a layer at a time, finds the head of the child, and lifts it out. By now other women have come to assist her as she delivers the child. All are awed, some are afraid, but they trust the older woman. The child cries and breathes jerkily as the women clean him off and wrap him in soft furs. The older woman motions another young woman who is the mother of a one-year-old to take the newborn and nurse him.

**The older woman puts herbs**, maybe sage, into the wound and thanks the great earth-mother-goddess for this new life and for the vision of how to safely deliver the baby from its dead mother's body. Perhaps the older woman remembered seeing living baby rabbits come from the cut open belly of a pregnant rabbit whom the woman had killed with a rock from her sling.

**This small band of people** has lost yet another adult, but it has a new child. And it has new knowledge, a new way of giving birth.

— Jane English, *Fingers Pointing to the Moon*, pp. 62-63



## Birth Poem

Snail squirming grey slime

Tail long in water

Forming

Unforming

Clear starlight silver shimmer

Soft fire above me

Breath exploding in fragments of light

Expanding to the limits of the universe

Disintegrating

Dying

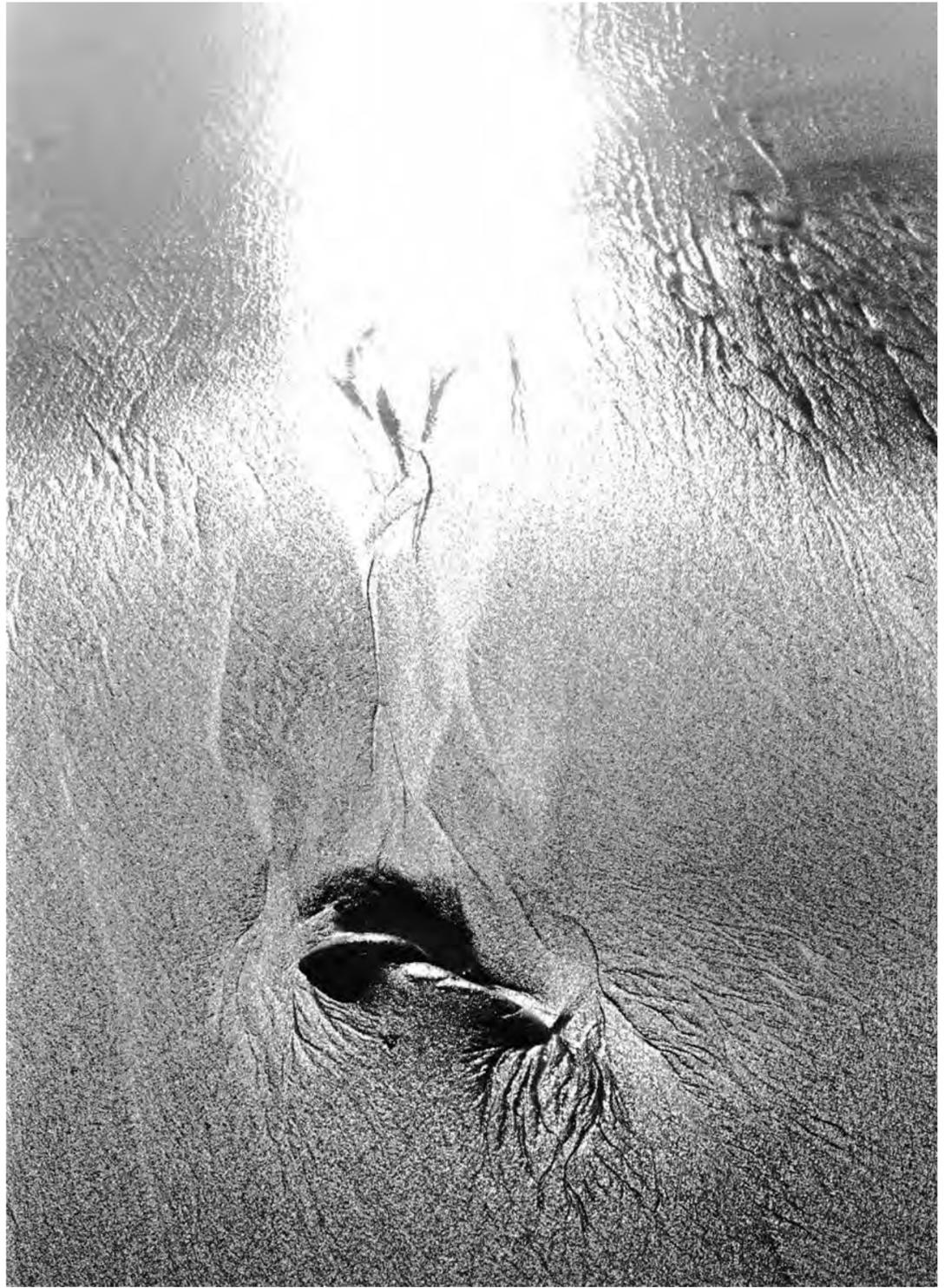
Heavy stone

Holding me against the explosion of

Light & Touch & Sound & Breath

A cool still dark center

I am



## *Apples and Bananas - a metaphor*



The comparison between cesarean birth and vaginal birth can teach us a great deal. Until about 100 years ago the vast majority of people were born vaginally. “Birth” meant “vaginal birth.”

A metaphor that I use for this is: If the only kind of fruit we knew were apples, we probably wouldn’t have two words. We’d have one word that meant “fruit-apple.” Then a banana appears, and our sense of what fruit is expands. It becomes more abstract and is not tied to the particulars of either form of fruit, apple or banana.

During the whole history of the human race part of being human was the journey down the birth canal. Now, an increasingly large percentage of humans are born cesarean; they don’t go down the birth canal. Bananas have joined the apples. We have an opportunity to become aware of a deeper level of humanness that transcends both kinds of birth learning, the patterns learned in cesarean birth and the patterns learned in vaginal birth.

—Jane English, *Different Doorway*, p.136

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### **For more, see these publications:**

*Different Doorway: Adventures of a Cesarean Born* (1985)  
out-of-print -- look online for used copies

“Artwork” on pp. 31-33 of *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*, by Stanislav Grof, 1988

“Being Born Cesarean: Physical, Psychosocial and Metaphysical Aspects,” *Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health (PPPJ)* vol. 7, #37, Spring 1993, p. 215

“Being Born Cesarean: Physical & Psychosocial Aspects,” *The International Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology and Medicine*, vol. 6, #3, September 1994, p. 381

Website, “Cesarean Voices,” [www.cesareanvoices.com](http://www.cesareanvoices.com)

“Four Perspectives on Being Born Cesarean,” *PPPJ*, vol. 14, #3-4, Spring/Summer 2000, p. 299

“Towards Different Native Cultures”, p.55 in *The Cesarean*, by Michel Odent, 2004

*Cesarean and Vaginal Birth as Different “Native” Cultures— comments by Stan Grof, M.D., Ph.D.*

At the Kyoto transpersonal conference a Japanese Jungian analyst talked about the relationship between the Japanese mind and the Western mind, business problems between Japan and the US. He was trained in Switzerland and had quite a lot of insight into the Western psyche. He watched some negotiations and said the negotiators don't realize that they don't communicate at all. They are exchanging words, but each of them means something totally different because of the difference between the Japanese and Western psyches.

The whole western culture has the idea of creation as coming from a powerful center, God, a powerhouse. Whereas the Oriental psyche has the creation out of a void; the center is empty. And this makes a lot of difference.

A Zulu anthropologist and shaman gave a talk on the difference between the African psyche and the Western psyche, and there was a talk on the Arabic mind and the Western mind. Again there were incredible differences.

We can see these differences and start connecting to some underlying basic humanity and see the cultural psyches as

inflections rather than each one saying, “We are right, and those others are distorted world views that we'll study anthropologically.”

When I saw Jane's slides of apples and bananas I got a similar sense of the cesarean and the vaginally born. This whole concept of contraction-and expansion became what we can learn from each other. Somebody who was born vaginally ends up with a lot of unnecessary constriction, limitations and concerns, that then complicate their life. And a cesarean is born with a lack of boundaries (a non-labor cesarean!) The cesarean can teach the vaginally born that much constriction is unnecessary. And the vaginally born can show the cesarean the usefulness of limits.

In my drawing the vaginally born is pushing on the cesarean, showing them limits. And the cesarean is pulling the vaginally born free of the constriction.

— Stan Grof, after Jane English's slide presentation on cesarean birth at a Holotropic Breathwork training seminar.



So far I have not written about what was, for me, the most difficult aspect of being born cesarean, though technically, this happened after the actual birth.

I'll begin this by recounting a story I was told many years ago when I was first exploring the implications of having been born cesarean.

It is said that the ancient Chinese boat dwellers believed that one should not rescue a baby that fell into the water from one of the boats. The reason was that the child would then be emotionally dependent on the rescuer and would not have a good life of its own. In addition, this dependence would be a burden on the rescuer.

This story resonated with me as my birth was indeed such a rescue. In vaginal birth, the child is an active participant, both in emitting the hormones that initiate labor and especially in the later stages of labor as he or she comes out.

In a non-labor cesarean birth the child is the passive "victim" of the violent intrusion into the womb space and of being yanked out and then roughly and impersonally handled in efforts to get breathing to start.

My own sense is that it was not this manipulation that started breathing. Rather it was a moment of merging with the doctor and resonating with his breath that started mine. It was what is called "bonding." In the "this is cesarean birth" dream this bonding is symbolized by the golden man pressing the child into the earth.

But then I was handed away and that deep bond was broken. I realize that I am just another "patient" and will have no ongoing bond with this rescuer. This is the time of burying the beet "hearts" in that same dream.

The outcome of this in my life has been a series of deep attachments to men I felt could help me, a clinging mixed with fear of rejection. The irrational intensity of the clinging actually evoked the rejections.

Often feeling despair about ever being able to go beyond this situation and harshly criticizing myself for being so dependent, I would recall what was said to me by the woman who had a class of so-called learning disabled kids and discovered that 19 out of the 21 of them were cesarean born. She insisted that cesarean birth should never be done. She saw it as permanently damaging these children who had a paradoxical combination of touch hunger and tactile defensiveness, yearning for contact yet pushing it away.

In these moments of despair I'd think that I needed to leave this life and then come back in the "right way," to be born vaginally. I thought I had been arrogant when as a soul I had intended to get the privilege of walking on Earth, without having gone thru the universal initiation of the journey down the birth canal.

So how have I walked beyond this pattern? By re-living it over and over in many relationships, each time becoming a bit more aware of what has happened, each time letting go of some of the unconscious hold it had on me.

The final bit of this happened in my relationship with the traditional shaman I have worked with the past eight years when I finally realized that I am not the special friend of his I had thought I was. I am simply one of the thousands of people he has worked with around the world. Being present with that disappointment, not running away from it, I made the connection to my birth pattern and released it. Now I am simply me. I have come home to myself.



*Images of Transformation* — felt-tip marker drawings by Jane English, 1975 and 1978

## *Appreciation*

*A Dream -- February 4, 1975*

I am in the big garden at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. the sun is shining brightly. Dick Price is there taking time to be with himself. The colors around him are bright, and he seems happy. Then he and I walk on a new path in the woods. The ground is covered with beautiful green moss and plants, none are weeds. Beams of sunlight shine here and there through the trees. The new path is somewhat walked on, but not yet worn down to bare earth.

*A couple of years after this dream I learned that Dick, one of the founders of Esalen and a friend of my late husband Gia-fu Feng, was also born cesarean. We have indeed been walking a new path.*

*Dick's love and support was essential to my having the courage to begin exploring my birth.*

*I send him my gratitude, wherever he may be in the spirit world.*

*Additional appreciation to people who have helped along the way. These include Stanislav Grof, Ludwig Janus, Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq, and many more.*



*A photograph made in 2014 in Vermont -- it reminds me of the dream*