

MEXICO

Video Birth

While in Mexico last winter a birth took place. Our friends, Sandy and Linda were in Progreso, Yucatan, awaiting the delivery of their first child, and we raced to meet the arrival, video gear at hand.

We made it in time (in fact, we had to wait two weeks before the event took place). At 4 PM on the day Linda went into labor, I set up a strong flood light above the hammock (she was to deliver in pure Mayan style, with a hammock, and a local midwife . . . sans drugs, and with all the energy befitting a first delivery), plugged in the Portapak, and checked the scene in the viewfinder.

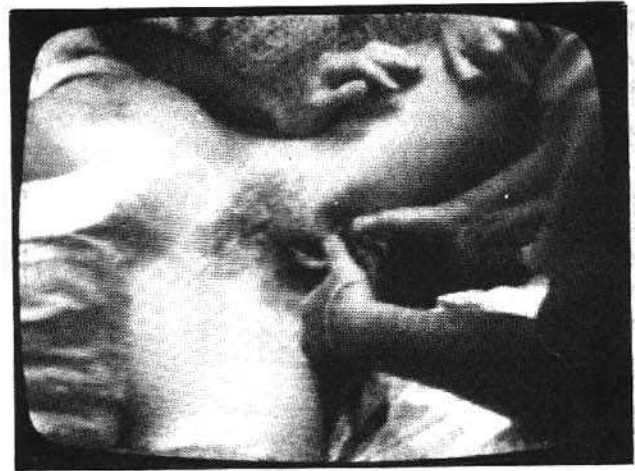
For about two hours things progressed slowly, and smoothly. I raced around, going back to our nearby house to have a bite of supper and to get Colleen to assist in the delivery. By about six o'clock, things looked interesting, and I began taping short bits of the labor. Contractions increased in strength and frequency, and the midwife checked Linda for signs of imminent delivery.

Little by little the event drew closer. Linda was nervous and anxious. The bright light was bothering her, so it was shut off except when the camera was rolling. I was concerned about interfering with the flow, the camera becoming just another item to worry the expectant mother.

By 8:00, the labor was well progressed, and I had shot about 10 minutes of tape, condensing the long hours into a brief sketch of the events. Things then began to pick up rapidly. The water broke, and Linda was well along. As the time came closer, she became more nervous and I became more concerned about the taping being a hindrance in the delivery. The Mayan midwife, however, was cooled out about the whole thing, having delivered some 2000 babies in fifteen years without a major problem.

Both Sandy and Linda kept saying they wanted the tape to be shot, so I stuck with it. It was the chance I had been after for a long time. Two years earlier, I had tried to get hospital permission to film my son Zachary's birth, but had been denied permission. (As it turned out, the delivery had to be by Caesarean section, and a film of surgery was completely verboten.)

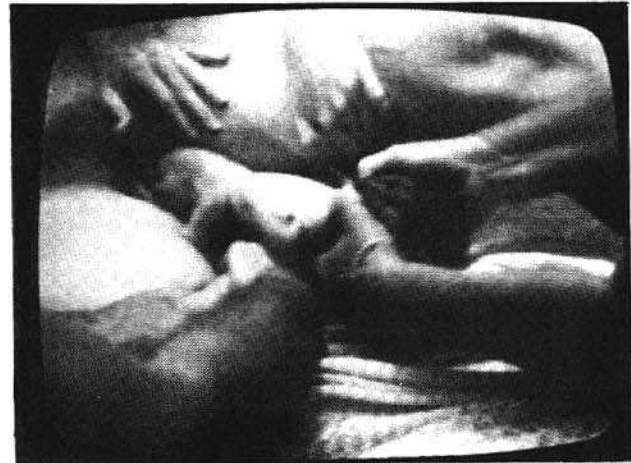
By 10 PM the pace was frantic. I was shooting with each contraction. Linda was working hard at getting the baby out, and her muscles pushed the infant closer and closer to the delivery point. I was poised with camera in hand, pointing at the emerging head. There was no slick hospital procedures or pulled up white sheets to block the important scene from my view. It was happening right out front.



1



2



3

photos: Tobe Carey

Push by push the baby moved out, and the tape got it all . . . the hard work, the stretching agony of the baby's head against Linda's vaginal walls, the excitement of the onlookers and helpers trying to urge the baby out.

Then, all in a rush, the head popped out, and the pressure lessened on Linda. The midwife aided the rest of the way, and a healthy baby girl was born. It was a moment of joy felt around the room. Linda lay back, exhausted and nerve wracked . . . too tired to move. It would be a few hours before she was able to hold her child. Cutting the umbilical cord and