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Birth Matters: A Midwife's Manifesta



Synopsis

Renowned for her practice's exemplary results and low intervention rates, Ina May Gaskin has gained international notoriety for promoting natural birth. She is a much-beloved leader of a movement that seeks to stop the hyper-medicalization of birth "which has led to nearly a third of hospital births in America to be cesarean sections" and renew confidence in a woman's natural ability to birth. Upbeat and informative, Gaskin asserts that the way in which women become mothers is a women's rights issue, and it is perhaps the act that most powerfully exhibits what it is to be instinctually human. *Birth Matters* is a spirited manifesto showing us how to trust women, value birth, and reconcile modern life with a process as old as our species.

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Customer Reviews

I had my baby at the Farm Midwifery Center in August 2010 and my story is included in this amazing book. My husband, our daughter and I went to Ina May's book signing in Brooklyn on Sunday. It was wonderful. Since we came home, I have not been able to put the book down and it opened my eyes to the beautiful reality that I was privileged enough to live and conversely to the horror that I managed to escape....When I decided to give birth at The Farm I did not have any knowledge about birth. The pregnancy had not been planned and I always thought that I would have children much later. I knew nothing of the typical birth experience of today's moms in America. What I did know was that I was not very comfortable with my OBGYN nor with the hospital where most of my prenatal care took place. My OBGYN seemed to me at the time like she was bored by "normality"

and was only excited when abnormalities came up. When a blood test came back positive for toxoplasmosis I saw a flash of excitement in her eyes where I would have wanted to see compassion. This did not sit well with me. Topped with a lot of pressure to have sonograms and tests of all sorts (I reluctantly had the nuchal translucency but stubbornly refused the Quad test which infuriated the doctor). At the end of the day I was also confronted with huge medical bills which I was paying out of pocket because no insurance would cover me for cause of "preexisting condition". I was utterly shocked. Was pregnancy an illness? I quit the OBGYN and had the rest of my prenatal care at the hospital for \$15 a visit (this fee was based on my income). I really disliked everything at the hospital but at least I could afford it.

This book is very interesting reading, even if you're not expecting a baby. Gaskin gives a little of her own history as a midwife and goes into some detail about the history of midwifery, especially in the United States. As an RN, mother, and childbirth educator, I thought I knew more about midwifery and obstetrics than I did. Gaskin's book gave me a whole new perspective. Mainly, physicians/obstetricians are trained as surgeons to deal with birth problems. Most of them never have a chance during training to observe a natural, un-medicated childbirth, so they go out into practice expecting the worst, that most deliveries will require medical intervention. Common sense would tell us this couldn't be the case or the human race would have died out long before the development of modern science, but I and many of my peers have bought into the belief that hospital births are the "safest." Gaskin makes a good case that for healthy mothers and babies this may not be true. Although her opinion is admittedly biased, she presents plenty of facts and published evidence to support her position and is pretty convincing. Another reason this book would be of interest to a general adult audience is that Gaskin examines the politics of childbirth. Even though I grew up during the women's movement of the 70s, I was not aware of how negatively pregnancy and birth were viewed by many of the movement's early leaders nor how this negativity may have influenced a generation of young women. As a business person in the 80s and 90s, I did watch childbirth become an important loss-leader and/or profit center for many hospitals and saw the rise and fall of all the birth centers in my community, as well as the opening and closing of the nurse midwife program at the state university.

I was so impressed with the birth statistics from Appendix D for The Farm Midwifery Center from 1970-2010. There were 50 cesareans out of 2,844 births. That's 1.7%. Their practice included women who had breech babies, twins, and VBACs (vaginal birth after cesarean, which incidentally had a

96.8% success rate). In general maternity care in the US, these factors classify many women as high risk and often result in automatic c-sections performed by doctors who are unwilling or unable (due to training issues) to attend a vaginal birth attempt. These and other issues have caused the cesarean rate to climb each of the last 13 years to its current 33%. Many would argue that the numbers from The Farm Midwifery Center cannot be compared to the general U.S. rates. I do understand that the women represented by these numbers opted into this practice. They weren't just 'any women'. They embraced the midwifery model of care and were highly motivated to participate in this preventative, wellness model of care. A random pregnant woman off the street may not be in a place emotionally to have this type of birth experience. She may not even desire it. But does she even realize that she has a choice? Does she even realize how possible and safe and rewarding natural birth could be with a different approach to maternity care? If she is giving birth with a typical Obstetric practice, she certainly would not have the type of education and support offered to the women at the Farm. Of the nearly 3000 women, 98+% gave birth vaginally. Certainly we can't expect every maternity caregiver to start producing these types of results, but doesn't it plant the seed that we could do better?

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