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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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A stand-out by Ina May Gaskin...elegantly covers the normalcy and power of birth, includes birth stories, and makes sound arguments for more support and less intervention. An essential acquisition."—Library Journal (Starred Review)"Ina May Gaskin is such an important figure in the effort to bring a more kind birthing process back into the mainstream, so check out her book if you'd like to learn more about having a blissful, powerful birthing experience."—Alicia Silverstone, *The Kind Life*

Called "the mother of authentic midwifery," INA MAY GASKIN has practiced for nearly forty years at The Farm Midwifery Center, which is noted for its low rates of intervention, morbidity and mortality. She is the only midwife for whom an obstetric maneuver has been named (the Gaskin maneuver).

She lives in Tennessee.

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? Ina May Gaskin's pioneering efforts show us that it is possible for women to have healthy and empowered births. Her book combines her thoughts on how they were able to achieve these outcomes with inspiring birth stories to provide a hopeful glimpse of what is possible.[...]

I love anything Ina May has touched. I met her back in 1989, just as I was 9 months pregnant and then again just a few years ago. She is the most down to earth person I know and is the most experienced person I've met when it comes to birth education. I've given birth to three beautiful babies at home and she was an inspiration to me when I was pregnant with my second child. I love the personal stories in this book and it stands as another one of the books I'll always cherish (along with the most beloved *Spiritual Midwifery*, which I had autographed :). If you are at all familiar with Ina, or just getting to know her through her books, you'll want to own this one!

Ina May is truly an inspiration, ahead of her time and a wonderful storyteller. In this book, she

explains in detail the history of midwifery and obstetrics and when one understands the history of it, one understands why things are as they are now. I especially love the part where she explained about physicians are trained through the 'illness model' whereas midwives uses the wellness model, which makes so much sense that they have a better understanding and respect for natural physiological birth. And this respect and understanding is why in countries that practices midwife-led maternity care, e.g. the Netherlands, the maternal mortality is extremely low. It's just good sense. It definitely gave me a profound respect for midwifery. As opposed to countries with physician-led maternity care, (and this is not to condemn the physicians, as I understand now it was because of how they were trained), the maternal mortality is much higher, mostly due to unnecessary medical interventions. They would fare much better if they joined forces with midwives. One other key point she addressed was about manipulated studies eg the Pang and Wax study; manipulated to influence the masses and the professional community. In effect, convincing women and physicians alike that birth is inherently dangerous and in need of interventions. It made me realize that the people behind the ethical boards are human after all and can still have evil n greedy intentions. It truly is an appalling study and the same goes to the many routine practices in obstetrics that is not evidence based. In addition, I am also horrified to learn the products aimed at women and the effects which had been detrimental to their health. These products include silicone implants, hormonal contraception amongst many others. Lastly, I am love with the concept of Ina May's The farm. It is an awe-inspiring community and amazed with the birth stories which is so full of oxytocin that is shared by the author. It gives the reader a glimpse of how varied but still natural birth can be. The rate of intervention at the farm is nothing short of remarkable and should be emulated by hospitals everywhere. Personally, it makes me want to be a midwife because of their awesomeness. In conclusion, this book lives up to its title and it empowers women to do their own research and take their birth back; to trust their own bodies and their ability to birth and how much it really matters for the child and to the mother as well, as a good birth experience is invaluable to the mother's wellbeing and affects her journey of motherhood greatly. A good birth equals to happy mom and baby and this equals to a happy family unit and subsequently a happy community. As Ibu Robin Lim says "Peace on earth begins with birth".

Ina May, 2011 recipient of Sweden's Right Livelihood Award, has outdone herself again. As a doula and natural childbirth advocate, I so appreciated this detailed account of the history of childbirth in our country and around the world. I poured through this book in two days. She speaks frankly about her opinions after attending nearly 3,000 births (with less than 2% c-section rate) and clearly sites

various sources supporting her beliefs that women and newborns would be better served by returning to ancient wisdom that is quickly being forgotten by the obstetric community in America. She is brave in her calls to action, asking ACOG to follow the good examples of their peers in the UK by accurately reporting maternal deaths. This book deserves the attention of the entire childbirth community and should be required reading for all students and practitioners, mothers and fathers-to-be, and anyone who cares about the safety of women and their unborn children. By bringing our history of childbirth into the light, this book has the potential to create good and necessary change by reminding readers just how natural and important it is to empower a woman to deliver her baby on her terms.

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