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Book Reviews

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The Father's Home Birth Handbook

by Leah Hazard
Victoria Park Press
ISBN-10: 0956071104
ISBN-13: 978-0956071101
£9.99

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Reviewed by Michelle Barnes

Available from AIMS

I was so excited when I first heard about this book, as I run a home birth support group and I have come into contact with quite a few fathers who seem somewhat uneasy about home birth. I always thought how good it would be if I could refer them to a book that would give them the confidence to home birth and now I can. The Father's Home birth Handbook is a fantastic source of evidence-based information which I believe every fatherto- be or birth partner should read.

The book starts off by looking at risk and responsibility because usually the first question on everyone's lips when they first think of home birth is, 'Is it safe?' Leah writes a very well-balanced view on the safety of home birth and hospital birth with lots of references to the available research. The book makes suggestions for establishing and maintaining a positive outlook and the many benefits that this mind set can have on the outcome of pregnancy, labour and birth.

A whole chapter of the book looks at the pros and cons of who to invite to the birth including midwives, doulas, children, friends and family. A section of this chapter is also dedicated to freebirth and includes a positive story from a couple who chose to go it alone.

Leah covers pleasure and pain including how to understand that the pain of labour is not like an illness - it is natural and in a normal undisturbed physiological birth the pain will be eased by a woman's own flow of oxytocin. This flow is best aided where a woman feels safe and comfortable. This chapter suggests how the father can create and enhance this birth space and help to ease discomfort with massage and other suggestions for pain relief including water, homeopathy and TENS Machine.

It talks about birth as a normal process, what fathers can expect the birth to be like and the different stages of labour and birth including the options available for birthing the placenta. There are quite a few birth stories told by other fathers which are very inspiring.

The book also looks at challenges and complications and how to deal with anything that might arise including premature labour, what if baby is overdue, a long labour, accidental unassisted birth, fetal distress, baby born with cord around neck, tears during birth and blood loss with lots of reassuring stories from other fathers who have successfully dealt with these kind of challenges. The book is concluded with a chapter about what can happen after the birth and some of the ways that you might feel after the birth, for example if the birth doesn't go to plan the father might be left with feelings of guilt. Leah encourages fathers to talk about their feelings so that they are able to move on.

A book that I would definitely recommend.

The Doula Book - How a trained labour companion can help you have a shorter, easier and healthier birth

by Marshall H Klaus, John H Kennell, Phyllis H Klaus
Perseus Books: 2nd Edition 2002
ISBN-10: 0738206091
ISBN-13: 978-0738206097
£11.99



Reviewed by Tina Coley

Find this book on Amazon

I loved this book! I've read many books dedicated to the subject of birth, breastfeeding, VBAC etc. but this was the first one written solely about doulas. It was incredibly useful to me when compiling my website as much of it looks at how a doula is of use to birthing parents. It compounded my ideas of exactly what a doula can do during labour - whilst I accept that simply by sitting quietly in the corner of the labour room the labouring woman can gain comfort from one's presence, I have always felt that many women would benefit from a more actively involved doula. Whilst reading the book, I was struck by how important it was felt by all for the doula to remain constantly by the mother's side, and how important it is to maintain physical contact, even if it's just to keep a hand on the mother's arm. I came away from my

doula training course thinking that this view was wrong, and that it was more important to stay in the background so I'm very glad to find that this isn't necessarily the case. I think that if I hadn't read this book, I would have been less of a doula than my future clients deserve.

As someone who finds statistics comforting, it was great to read the studies done on the effects that doulas have on a multitude of levels, not only on the reduction in caesareans, which has always been my main interest, but on things like length of labour, longevity of breastfeeding, the reduction in the rates of postnatal depression and interestingly, the satisfaction with their partners after the birth. As so many men are not keen on the idea of their partners hiring a doula, I think that this information is hugely important and it's good to have something to refer back to if I'm asked for evidence to back up these statements.

I was very interested in the practical applications of doula skills too, especially those that actively involved the father - the Dangle and the Double Hip Squeeze spring to mind! It hadn't really occurred to me quite how physically demanding being a doula might be. There is a very good section on breastfeeding, and how by following a few simple instructions, the baby learns to latch itself on rather than the mother (or doula) 'getting' the baby latched on. As someone who has breastfed successfully for a long time herself, and as someone who was pretty much self-taught, it was eye-opening to read such a simple description of latching that would be so simple to put into practice with a new mum. I feel that I could explain myself very clearly now whereas before I could only have physically demonstrated how I would do it myself.

My favourite section of the book was the one outlining the doula's role during different stages of labour. There is a lot of specific advice and reminders of how you can best let the mother help herself by focusing on hers and her partner's needs, and I can see that this book will be a valuable part of my doula tool kit. I'm sure I will refer back to it time and time again as an aide memoire before a birth until such time that I feel confident enough in my abilities to do it instinctively.

I think that every doula should have this book on her bookshelf, no matter how many births she's attended. It's very comprehensive and answers all the questions that I never thought to ask on my training course.

The Crucible

by Arthur Miller

Reviewed by Vicki Williams

Find this book on Amazon

Having studied this play at school, both as a work of literature and as a piece of American History, and having seen it performed a few times, I was quite unprepared for the shock of seeing it through fresh eyes.

What suddenly struck me whilst watching it this time, having spent a considerable part of the autumn working with investigations into Independent Midwives and the closure of the Albany Midwifery practice, was how close we really are to repeating the very same prejudicial and ignorant court system which operated in Salem in the late 1600s, described as 'one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history'.

In Miller's account, recorded events are fleshed out to tell a story of mass hysteria and mistrust. In 1692 the town of Salem, in puritanical New England, was gripped by the fear that the authority of the church was losing control. People started to stray from the church, and some say that this is what fuelled the witch trials. Miller tells us how the small community of Salem is stirred into madness by superstition, paranoia and malice, culminating in the deaths of nineteen men and women and two dogs. In this portrayal of the terrifying power of fear, mindless persecution and false accusations, Miller draws a chilling parallel between the Salem witch-hunt and Senator McCarthy's crusade against communism which caused widespread paranoia in 1950s America.

The parallel with the 'trial' of independent midwives at NMC fitness to practice hearings, and their treatment in the press is equally chilling. Midwives are being called to task for actions which are done in the best interests of the women in their care, rather than in the best interests of the system and the accepted 'normality' of birth. Of course, with the physiologically normal (by the WHO definition) birth rate in the UK being somewhere round 10%, if even recorded, the popular acceptance of birth practice against which they are being judged may be what is seriously flawed.

When we judge our midwives supporting a woman in a home birth by the obstetric standards of a hospital with a caesarean section rate of 25%, whilst inaccurately telling women via the press and public perception that hospitals are the safest place to give birth, we are allowing those people who support health and normality to be judged in a climate of fear and mistrust. This is inevitably leading to them one by painful one leaving the profession or being driven out of practice.

Miller urged us to be careful about how we react. We cannot avoid involvement, we have personal responsibility. I think that the time has come for those of us who care about the future of midwifery, about birth for our daughters and granddaughters, to look at the lessons of history, and this play is a very good start. Witch hunting in Salem, chilling, true and not far enough removed from today!