



Just a Mom

Amy Polk

amypolk@starpower.net

Session: Women's Agency in Childbirth

9:30am-10:20am

Perinatal Symposium

Fairfax, VA October 7, 2009

Who Am I?



- Not a midwife or other birth professional: “just a mom”
- Extremely squeamish, **hate needles!**
 - Often pass out during minor medical procedures
- No family history of birth or even medicine
 - Family members are all writers and engineers.
- Family history of feminism
 - Mother was “Title IX Lady” for Fairfax County Public Schools 1974-2001
 - Together, we campaigned for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)
- Prior to 2002, only witnessed one birth
 - Carmel the Guinea pig during a math test in 5th grade
- My birth
 - Born in hospital, vaginal birth, delivered by OB, labor induced
 - My mother says the induction was **so convenient**.

How Did I Get Here?



How did I get from here



To here?



Photo: Geneva Woods Birth Center, Anchorage, AK



- September 2001
 - Found out I was pregnant
 - Read the "Pregnancy and Birth" chapter of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*
 - Read about a "cascade of interventions"
 - Wanted nothing to do with any of them

Birth Interventions



- Augmentation of labor with Pictocin
 - Induction of labor not already started, used in 21% of hospital births ⁽¹⁾
 - Speeding up labor already in progress, used in 47% of births ⁽²⁾
- Intravenous (IV) fluids
 - Necessitated by withholding of food and drink during labor
 - Used in 83% of births ⁽²⁾, classified as “unlikely to be beneficial” ⁽³⁾
- Electronic fetal monitoring (EFM)
 - What Monty Python called “the machine that goes ‘Ping!’”
 - Used in 94% of births ⁽²⁾, classified as having “a trade-off between beneficial & adverse effects” ⁽³⁾
- Breaking the waters
 - Used in 47% of births ⁽²⁾, classified as having “a trade-off between beneficial & adverse effects” ⁽³⁾
- Epidural anesthesia
 - Used in 76% of births ⁽²⁾, classified as having “a trade-off between beneficial & adverse effects” ⁽³⁾
- Episiotomy
 - Used in 33% of hospital births ⁽¹⁾, classified as “likely to be ineffective **or harmful**” when used routinely ⁽³⁾
- Caesarian section (C-section)
 - Used in 31% of births ⁽⁴⁾

Sources: ⁽¹⁾ *British Medical Journal* (2005) www.bmj.com/cgi/reprint/330/7505/1416.pdf

⁽²⁾ *Citizens for Midwifery Listening to Mothers Survey* (2006) www.citizensformidwifery.org

⁽³⁾ *A Guide to Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth Second Edition* (1995)

⁽⁴⁾ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center on Health Statistics (NCHS) (2006 data) www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm

Birth Providers & Settings



- Providers:
 - Obstetricians (OBs) (ACOG)
 - American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists www.acog.org
 - Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs)
 - American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM) www.midwife.org
 - Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs)
 - North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) www.narm.org
 - Unassisted birth: Book and website www.unassistedchildbirth.com
- Settings:
 - Hospitals: C-section rate for Maryland hospitals: 34% ⁽¹⁾
 - Birth Centers
 - American Association of Birth Centers (AABC) www.birthcenters.org
 - C-section rate for example birth centers: 8.8% ⁽²⁾
 - Home birth: C-section rate for home births in N. Virginia: 1-5% ⁽³⁾

Sources: ⁽¹⁾ Maryland Hospital Pricing Guide, Maryland Health Services Cost Review Commission (2007-2008 data) mhcc.maryland.gov/consumerinfo/hospitalguide/hospital_guide/docs/pricing_guide.pdf

⁽²⁾ "Maximizing the Benefits of the UDS," Presentation to the AABC 2009 Annual Meeting www.birthcenters.org

⁽³⁾ Northern Virginia Homebirth brochure www.novahomebirth.org

My Birth Choices



- September 2001
 - Chose provider and setting
 - Maternity Center birth center in Bethesda, MD
 - CNMs with backup obstetrician at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital
- Winter 2002
 - Took Bradley childbirth classes
- Common childbirth education curricula
 - Independent classes
 - Birthing from Within ■ BirthWorks
 - Bradley Method of Husband-Coached Childbirth
 - Hypnobabies ■ Hypnobirthing
 - Lamaze
 - Descriptions available at BOA website www.birthoptionsalliance.org
 - Hospital-based classes

The Big Event 1



- Friday, May 24, 2002
 - 1½ weeks past due date
 - Go to Maternity Center for “non-stress test”
 - Baby isn’t moving around much.
 - Midwife is concerned, calls backup obstetrician.
 - Midwife and OB agree:
 - If I haven’t had the baby by Tuesday following Memorial Day holiday, labor will be induced at Shady Grove Adventist hospital.
 - OB to midwife: “Try all your little tricks.”
 - Am sent home with bottle of castor oil
 - **Saved by the holiday weekend!**
- Saturday, May 25, 2002
 - Go into labor during the night, not very painful
 - Arrive at Maternity Center around noon
 - Labor for 8 hours
 - Midwife makes me eat a high-protein snack.
 - Water breaks around 8:00pm.
 - **Extremely painful** Transition phase begins.
 - Midwife suggests several different positions.
 - Start to doubt natural childbirth
 - “Maybe all these women who get epidurals are onto something!”
 - Ask for, and receive, Nubain narcotic painkiller
 - Same midwife and assistant are with me throughout.

Babies are 50% more likely to be born on a weekday (2004 data). CDC calls this phenomenon the “weekend birth deficit”. *Pushed*, p. 3

The Big Event 1



- Saturday, May 25, 2002
 - At 10:30pm, **Adam Paul** is born!
 - 8 lbs., 12.5 oz.
 - Midwife sews up small vaginal tear.
 - Take a shower
 - Midwife and assistant clean up room.
 - Mom, dad and baby spend night together in birthing bed.
 - Go home around noon the next day



Photo: John Robinette Photography

Between Babies



- Spring 2003
 - Karen Brody starts the Takoma Park Birthing Circle (TPBC).
- Summer 2003
 - TPBC invites **Ina May Gaskin** to speak in Takoma Park.
 - *Spiritual Midwifery* (1975)
 - *Ina May's Guide to Childbirth* (2003)
 - I join TPBC, but never attend meetings.
- Summer 2004
 - Karen Brody moves out of state.
 - Larissa Guran takes over TPBC.

The Big Event 2



- June 3, 3005
 - Go into labor around 5:00pm
 - Labor progresses much more quickly.
 - Arrive at the Maternity Center around 10:30pm
 - Ask for, but do not, receive Nubain narcotic painkiller
 - Midwife says that the labor is happening too quickly for the painkiller to do any good.
 - Birth assistant hasn't arrived yet, so husband is "deputized" as midwife's assistant.
 - At 11:15pm, **Bryan Joseph** is born: 9lbs, 1.5 oz.
 - Midwife sews up small vaginal tear.
 - Take a shower
 - Midwife cleans up room.
 - Mom, dad and baby spend night together in birthing bed.
 - Go home around noon the next day



Photo: John Robinette Photography

My Experience Is **Not** the Norm



- Adam's and Bryan's Births
 - Labor allowed to unfold at its own pace.
 - No epidural
 - Midwife made me eat.

 - Free to move around

 - Continuous support of same people during 10-hour labor
 - Midwife "catches" baby.
 - Small vaginal tear
 - Mom, dad and baby spend night together in birthing bed.
 - Family went home the next day.
- Typical Hospital Birth
 - Speeding up labor is common (47%).
 - Epidural is standard (76%).
 - Denial of food and water, necessitating IV, is standard (86%).
 - Mom hooked up to many different tubes.
 - IV, EFM, urinary catheter, etc.
 - Mom must stay put.
 - Ever-changing parade of labor & delivery (L&D) nurses.
 - Doctor comes in at the end to "catch" baby.
 - Episiotomy is common (33%).
 - Babies often separated from mom; but trend is for "rooming in".
 - Mom spends 1 or 2 nights in hospital.
 - Even for vaginal births

My Experience Is **Not** the Norm



- Typical Birth Center Birth



Photo: Geneva Woods Birth Center, Anchorage, AK

- Typical Hospital Birth

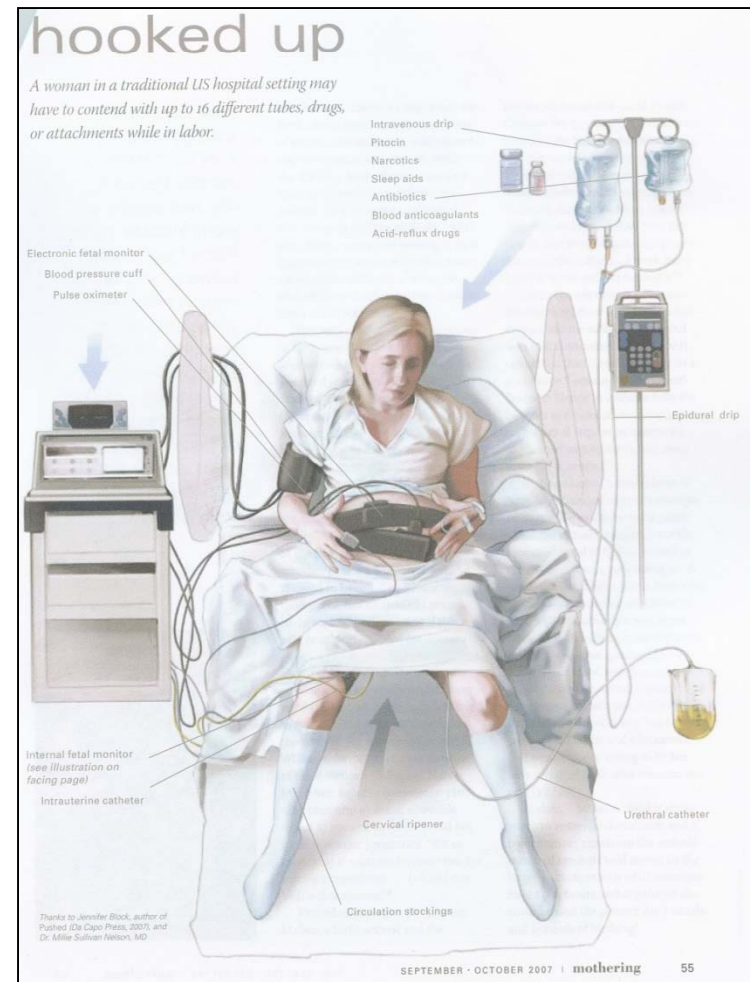


Illustration: *Mothering* magazine

Birth Activism: Two Observations



- Many women are driven to activism by a traumatic birth, particularly a c-section they feel was unnecessary.
 - International Cesarean Awareness Network (ICAN) has many of these stories. www.ican-online.org
 - Traumatic birth can lead to **post-traumatic stress disorder** (PTSD). ⁽¹⁾
 - Some women refer to this trauma as “**birth rape**”. ⁽¹⁾
- Many women are most driven to activism immediately after birth, which is the time they are least able to act.
 - Newborn infant needs constant care.
 - Physical recovery can take time, especially after c-sections.

Birth Options: Threats & Opportunities



- June 2005
 - *British Medical Journal* publishes U.S.-Canadian study of planned home birth.
www.bmj.com/cgi/reprint/330/7505/1416.pdf
 - Conclusion: Planned home birth with CPMs is as safe as hospital birth for low-risk women.
 - ACOG calls this study “not scientifically rigorous”.
- September 2006
 - TPBC hosts production of “Birth–The Play” by Karen Brody as part of Birth on Labor Day (BOLD). www.boldaction.org
- Spring 2007
 - **Takoma Midwives, Takoma Park, MD, closes.**
 - **Maternity Center, Bethesda, MD, closes.**
 - Takoma Park Birthing Circle becomes **Birth Options Alliance (BOA)**.
 - Membership skyrockets.
 - Media attention on narrowing of birth choices
 - BOA President Larissa Guran appears on WAMU’s Kojo Namdi Show.
- May 2007
 - Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park, MD announces its relocation in 2013.
 - What to do with the Takoma Park campus?
- Summer 2007
 - BOA President Larissa Guran moves out of state, current BOA board takes shape.

Birth Options: Threats & Opportunities

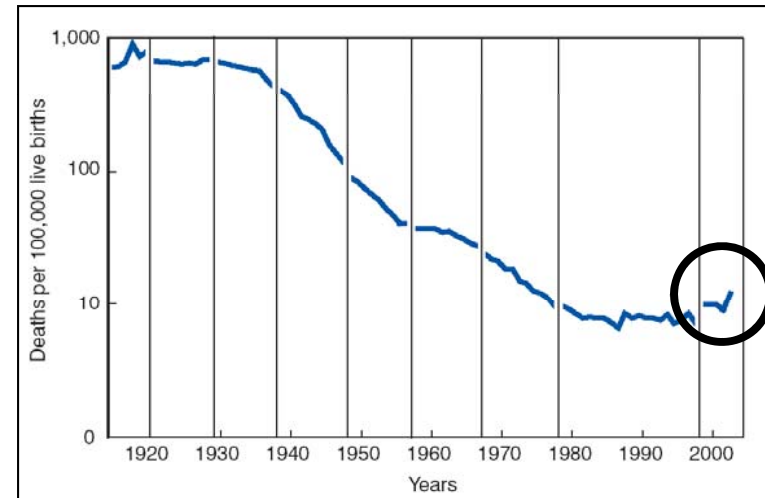


■ February 2007

- CDC publishes analysis of maternal mortality data through 2003, showing 10-year **doubling** of **women dying in childbirth**.

www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_03/sr03_033.pdf

- 1991: MM rate: 7.9 = 325 deaths
- 1993: MM rate: 7.5 = 300 deaths
- 1995: MM rate: 7.1 = 277 deaths
- 1997: MM rate: 8.4 = 326 deaths
- 1999: MM rate: 9.9 = **392 deaths**
- 2001: MM rate: 9.9 = **399 deaths**
- 2003: MM rate: 12.1 = **495 deaths**
- 2005: MM rate: 15.1 = **625 deaths**



■ October 2007

- Ricki Lake's documentary *The Business of Being Born* released.

■ February 2008

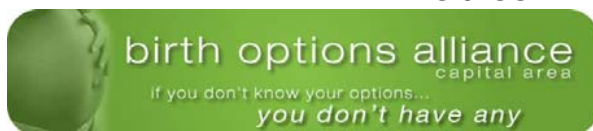
- ACOG reaffirms statement against home birth, calling it "fashionable, trendy... the latest cause célèbre."

www.acog.org/from_home/publications/press_releases/nr02-06-08-2.cfm

Making a Difference: Birth Options Alliance



- Membership
 - Over 600 midwives, doulas, childbirth educators and other birth professionals, plus current and expectant parents
- Mission: Education
 - Lists of DC area midwives, doulas & childbirth educators online
 - Active Yahoo group, people can post questions can get answers
 - Example: “My baby is breach. How can I turn him around?”
 - Exhibits at community events
 - Babies R Us events, BABY! film festival, Takoma Park Folk Festival
- Mission: Support
 - Monthly meetings in Takoma Park, MD
 - Active Yahoo group, people can get moral support
 - Example: “My doctor says that my baby is too big for a vaginal birth. What can I do?”

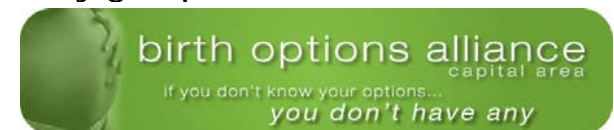


Making a Difference: Birth Options Alliance



■ Mission: Advocacy

- Eliminating requirement for written collaborative agreement for Maryland CNMs
 - Worked to pass the *Birth Options Preservation Act* in 2008
 - BOA Co-President and members testified during hearing.
 - BOA members lobbied to pass it unamended.
 - Sponsored by Del. Heather Mizeur of Takoma Park, MD
 - Amended enacted bill referred the issue to 5-member study group.
 - More lobbying will be needed soon. Stay tuned.
- Starting a birth center in Baltimore, MD
 - BOA provides a mechanism for tax-deductible donations.
- Licensing CPMs in DC and Maryland
 - CPMs are not licensed in DC or Maryland.
 - A home birth with a CPM in Maryland is technically illegal for the CPM, although it is frequently reimbursed by insurance.
 - CPMs became licensed in Virginia in 2005. mana.org/laws/laws_va.htm
 - There is **not** consensus among DC and Maryland CPMs that licensure is desirable.
- Starting a birth center in Takoma Park, MD
 - On Washington Adventist Hospital campus that will be vacated in 2013
 - BOA funded me to attend the American Association of Birth Center (AABC) "How to start a birth center" workshop.
 - I joined AABC as "Developing Birth Center" member.



Making a Difference: Seasons of Life Women's Health and Birth Center



■ Mission

- The center will provide care to women in all seasons of life:
 - Onset of menstruation: teen sexuality issues
 - Childbearing years: birth, birth control, fertility
 - Menopause and post-menopausal care
- The center will follow the Midwives Model of Care ⁽¹⁾
 - Monitoring the physical, psychological, and social well-being of the woman throughout the childbearing cycle
 - Providing the woman with individualized education, counseling, and prenatal care, continuous hands-on assistance during labor and delivery, and postpartum support
 - Minimizing technological interventions
 - Identifying and referring women who require obstetrical attention
- Will be a non-profit organization, reinvesting all profits into:
 - Patient care, community education, other public service

■ Current Status & Next Steps

- Hospital administration and head of obstetrics are supportive.
- To be completed by 12/31/09:
 - Incorporate as a non-profit in Maryland and file for 501(c)(3) status
 - Refine business plan
 - Continue discussions with hospital administration and medical staff

Source: ⁽¹⁾ Citizens for Midwifery: cfmidwifery.org/mmoc/define.aspx

Making a Difference: Seasons of Life Women's Health and Birth Center



■ You Can Make a Difference, too.

■ Donate

- We need to raise **\$2,000** over the coming year!



■ Learn more

- Visit our website: www.seasonsoflifebirthcenter.org
- Join our Yahoo group: health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Seasons_of_Life
- Follow our blog: seasonsoflifebirthcenter.blogspot.com
- Join our Facebook group:
www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=138305076970
- Become a fan of our Facebook page: "[Seasons of Life Women's Health and Birth Center](#)"

■ Volunteer

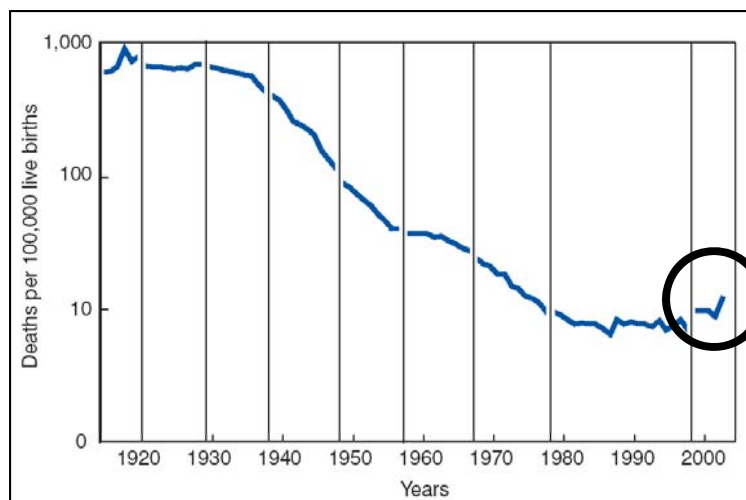
- We need people with **expertise** in:
 - Medicine and midwifery: MDs, RNs, CNMs, CPMs, etc.
 - Law
 - Accounting and finance: MBAs, CPAs, etc.
 - New media: Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.
 - Press relations
 - Grant writing and other fundraising
 - Graphic design
- We need people with a **passion** for expanding options for birth and women's health.
- Contact amypolk@starpower.net to volunteer.

Birth Activism: How Did I Get Here?



- Maternal death is on the rise in the U.S.
There is a story behind every number.

- 1991: MM rate: 7.9 = 325 deaths
- 1993: MM rate: 7.5 = 300 deaths
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- In the birth of my two children at the Maternity Center, I experienced something very precious, something that is no longer available to other women. I am working to bring it back. **Not bad for “just a mom”.**



Photo: John Robinette Photography