



Of Sacrament and Safety

How Two 1970s Home Birth Services
Magnified the Power and the Limits of
Women's Voices

Imagine



Figure 1. Residents of The Farm admiring a newborn. In Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This Is The Farm Book*, sec. "Spiritual Midwifery." Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 1974.



A Tale of Two Birth Services

The Farm Midwifery Service

- Established in the early 1970s as part of a counterculture commune
- Stephen Gaskin
- Ina May Gaskin
- Middle-Class, white women

The Chicago Maternity Center

- Established in 1932 to battle Chicago's appalling maternal and neonatal maternity rates
- Hospital birth had proven more dangers
- Dr. Joseph DeLee
- Dr. Beatrice Tucker
- Minority and low-income women; College families



The Importance of Legacy

THE MOTHERS' VOICES



What Women Want

SAFETY

Prenatal Care

Prenatal Care was the foundation of safety for both services

Women received comprehensive, personalized prenatal care throughout their pregnancies.

The CMC noted that lack of prenatal care predictably resulted in poorer outcomes.

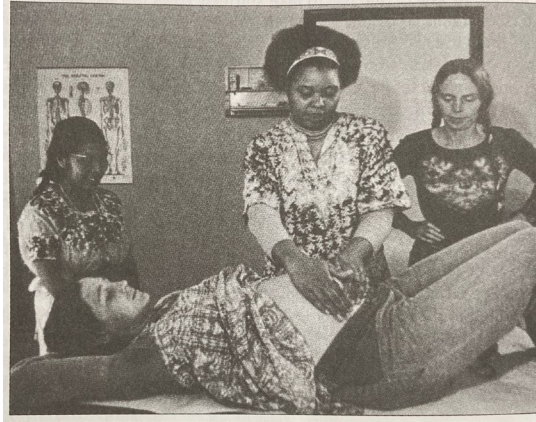


Figure 2. Palpation during prenatal care exam. In Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, 272. Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 2002.

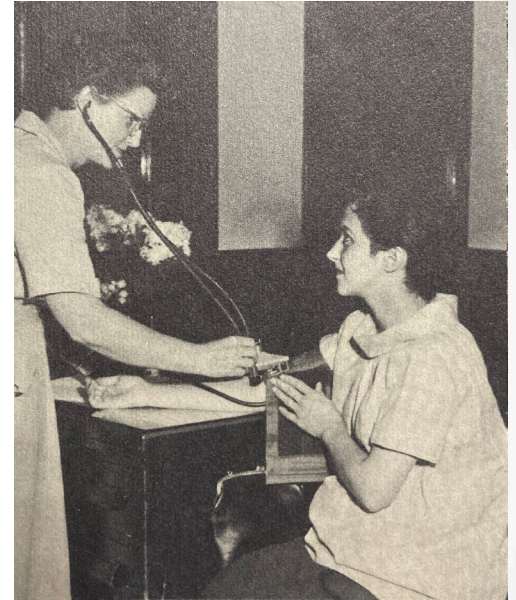


Figure 3. Blood pressure check during a prenatal exam. In Chicago Maternity Center, "The Talk of Chicago: The Chicago Maternity Center Annual Report." Chicago: Rayner Lithographing Company, 1967.

Training

Both Services emphasized training.

The CMC itself was founded not just to meet the objective of delivering a healthy baby to a healthy mother, but to train doctors, residents, and interns.

After the first birth, the FMC realized they needed training and accepted training and textbooks when given. They forged alliances with healthcare providers, such as Dr. Williams, pictured here.



Figure 4. Dr. Williams and Friend. In Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, 111. Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 2002.



Figure 5. Instructing students. In Chicago Maternity Center, "Journey to Another World: The Chicago Maternity Center Annual Report." Chicago: 1964.

Hygiene

Hygienic environments were a primary concern.

This picture is from a CMC training bulletin dating around the 1930s.

This same setup can be seen in photographs and video footage from the early 1970s.

Though the FMC midwives did not place newspaper everywhere, sterile sheets and equipment were part of their standard procedure.

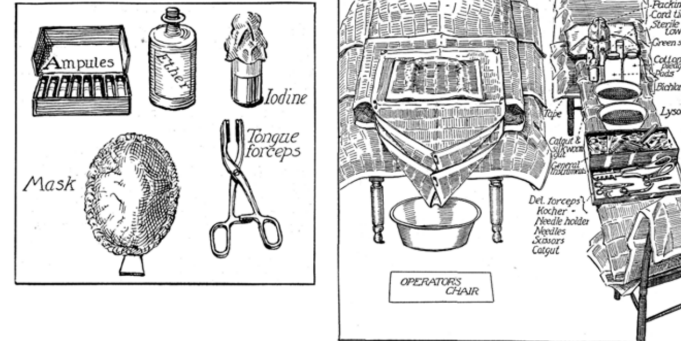
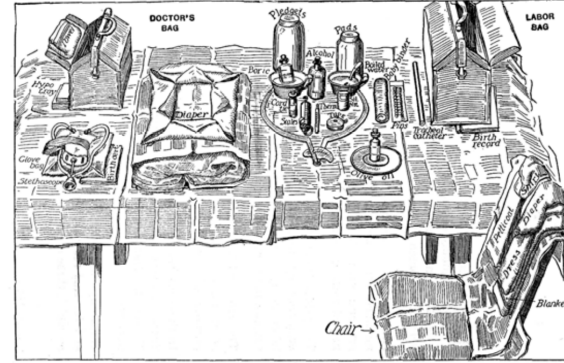


Figure 6. Illustration for customary setup for home births attended by doctors from the Chicago Lying-in Dispensary. In Jacqueline H. Wolf *Deliver Me From Pain: Anesthesia and Birth in America*, 101. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

Technology

"I feel like a princess up here" Dr. Tucker

Both services emphasized technology for a safe birth, starting with 4x4 vehicles

They also used equipment and medications that could be lifesaving to mothers and babies.

A significant difference is in the use of forceps, which



Figure 7. Midwife in Jeep with with citizen's band radio. In Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, 31. Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 2002.



More Than Safety

FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Daddy in the Delivery Room

Mothers from both services repeatedly stated they wanted their husbands with them during labor and delivery.



Figure 8. Epifanio Receives Rafeal. In LIFE Magazine, August 18, 1972, 54-58.



Figure 9. David and Carolyn's Birthing. In Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, 196. Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 2002.

And Children, Too!

Mothers from both services wanted children there.

These children are watching a FMC in the early 1980's; the midwives are careful to reassure them as the mother gets increasingly vocal.

"They saw the baby being born, the stork didn't bring the baby... they saw it, they enjoyed it, and they can tell you every word." a CMC mother



Figure 10. Children Watching Pamela's Birth. In *Birth Story: Ina May Gaskin and the Farm Midwives* (Ghost Robot/Reckon So Productions, 2012), 0:27:43.

Community and Sacrament

Childbirth was considered a sacrament on The Farm, part of its religious rites. Home birth was essential to upholding the sacrament.

Home birth was important to some women using the CMC services, too. For example, Latin American women viewed birth as an important community event.

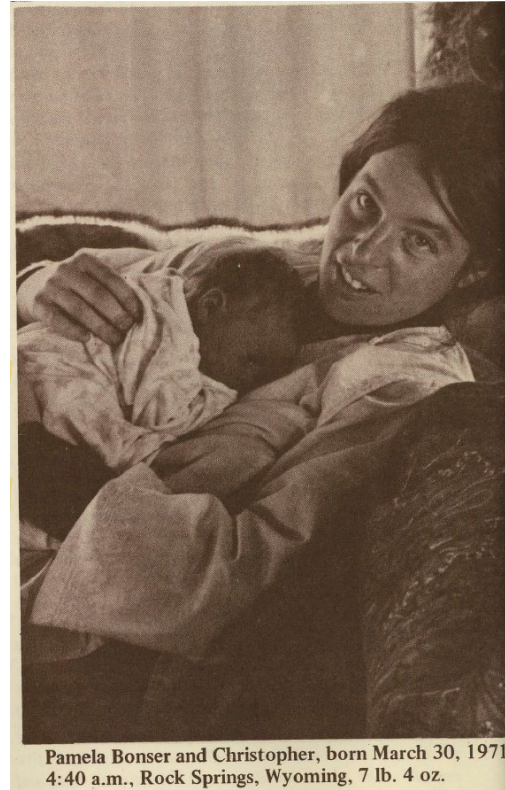


Figure 11. Pamela Bonser and Christopher. In Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This Is The Farm Book*, sec. "Spiritual Midwifery." Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 1974.



Her Voice Mattered

AGENCY

Reach and Advocacy

Home birth movements began to grow and spread.

As Kline has traced, doctors trained by the CMC helped expand home birth to the Chicago suburbs and beyond.

Kline has also explored the impact of *Spiritual Midwifery*, the FMC's dual-purpose book. The book, which remains in print today, is part birth stories, part midwifery manual.

Women across the world wanted a home birth. When the CMC's closure was announced, advocates tried to stop it.



Figure 12. Chicago Women's Liberation Union Marching for the Chicago Maternity Center. In Gabriele Kreutzner, "Feminismus, Sozialismus Und Strategien Der Repräsentation: The Chicago Maternity Center Story (1973-1977), Kartemquin Films, Suzanne Davenport, Jennifer Rohrer." *Frauen Und Film*, no. 52 (1992), 31.

Support

Women wanted to choose the support people at their homes.

Mothers utilizing CMC services had a more medicalized birth than women using the FMC. Yet they still had support people of their choosing present.



Figure 13. Chicago Women's Liberation Union Marching for the Chicago Maternity Center. In Gabriele Kreutzner, "Feminismus, Sozialismus Und Strategien Der Repräsentation: The Chicago Maternity Center Story (1973-1977), Kartemquin Films, Suzanne Davenport, Jennifer Rohrer." *Frauen Und Film*, no. 52 (1992), 35.

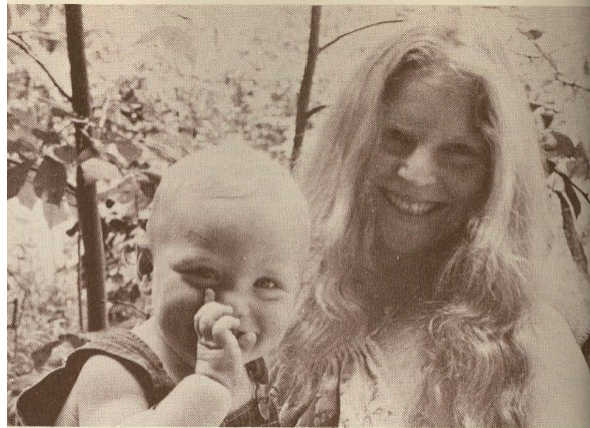
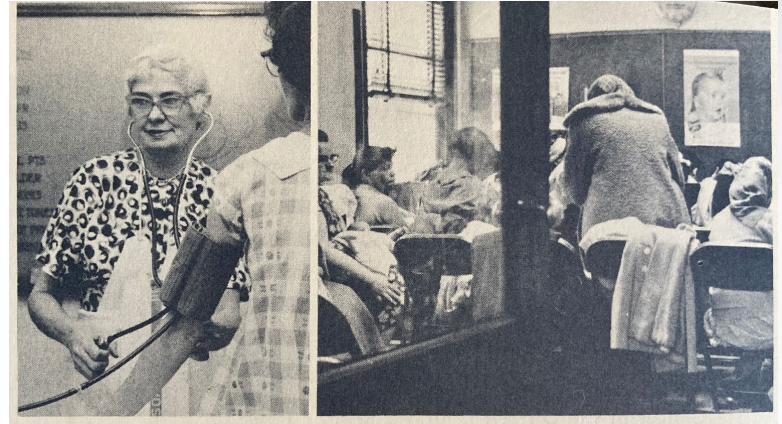
Dignity and Respect

Women wanted to be treated with dignity and respect.

Hospitals were cold and impersonal. Staff managed or outright controlled labor from start to finish, often interrupting the natural process. Mothers and their wishes were ignored.

Women from both services spoke out against such impersonal and disrespectful treatment. The personal, respectful care they received at the FMC and the CMC were vital to them.

Figure 14. Dr. Tucker and the Chicago Maternity Center Waiting Room, "Journey to Another World: The Chicago Maternity Center Annual Report." Chicago: 1964.



Carolyn Hunt and Jason, born July 25, 1972, 2:11 a.m., at Maury County Hospital, 5 lb. 12 oz.

Figure 15. Carolyn Hunt and Jason. In Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This Is The Farm Book*, sec. "Spiritual Midwifery." Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 1974.

Transcendence

Mothers using the FMC often spoke of the joy and transcendence they experienced during their baby's births.

CMC mothers did not report this as often, though women writing for the Chicago Women's Liberation Union newspaper did note this.

University families began choosing the CMC in the early 1970s because they wanted this natural childbirth experience.



Figure 16. Chicago Women's Liberation Union Marching for the Chicago Maternity Center. In Gabriele Kreutzner, "Feminismus, Sozialismus Und Strategien Der Repräsentation: The Chicago Maternity Center Story (1973-1977), Kartemquin Films, Suzanne Davenport, Jennifer Rohrer." *Frauen Und Film*, no. 52 (1992), 37.

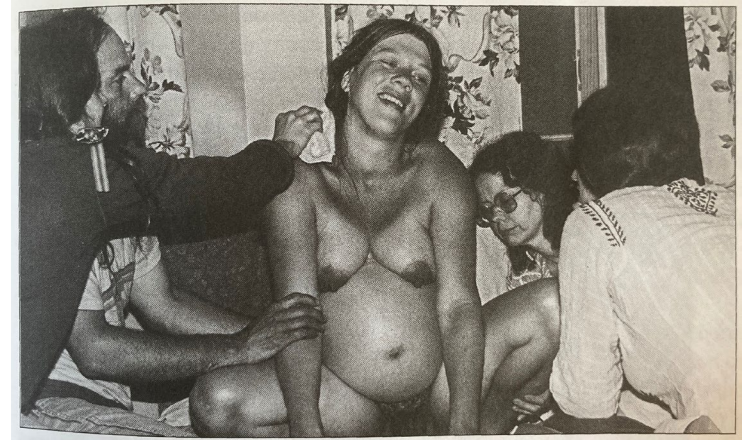


Figure 17. A Birthing. In Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, 231. Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 2002.

A Woman's Domain

As Leavitt argues, birth was traditionally a woman's domain.

This domain was lost when birth was transitioned to the hospital.

Services like the CMC and the FMC demonstrate that women still valued agency and control over this pivotal time in their lives.



Figure 18. Pamela Bonser and Christopher. In Stephen Gaskin, *Hey Beatnik! This Is The Farm Book*, sec. "How to Deliver a Baby." Summertown: Book Publishing Co., 1974.

Parting Thoughts

SONG AND SILENCE

Some Voices Rose, Some Were Silenced

- The Chicago Maternity Center was closed in the mid-1970s due to loss of funding
- Low-income, minority women lost access to home birth options
- Doctors trained by the CMC offered home birth to more affluent women
- The Farm Midwifery Center is still active today
- Midwives inspired by The Farm and the midwifery movement continue to offer home birth to more affluent women

Home versus Hospital?

- As Leavitt argued, the transition from home to hospital removed agency and control women had traditionally held
- Kline argues that the discussion about women's birth choices has been reduced to a home versus hospital debate

Who Controls Birth?

Doctor

Midwife

- Is the question truly home versus hospital? Or is it a question of who has the “right” to manage birth?
- The options:
 - Doctor
 - Midwife

What About the Mothers?

- Today, we still see a sharp divide in who can choose a safe home birth and access respectful maternity care
- The Farm Midwifery Center and the Chicago Maternity Center both modeled programs with excellent outcomes

What About the Mothers?

- Both respected mothers
- Ultimately, as Dr. Tucker said, it should be a woman's choice where she brings new life into the world.