

It is also recognized that midwives require knowledge related to the social, cultural, psychological, and emotional experiences of childbearing women and their families, in addition to knowledge of the physical sciences and midwifery practice.

It is refreshing to see the physical aspects of childbearing presented at the end rather than the beginning of the book. The book commences with an emphasis on the woman-midwife relationship and midwifery practice. The contribution of political and organizational factors in affecting or mitigating against changes in maternity services is also discussed.

All chapters are written concisely and present up-to-date knowledge, usually accompanied by an historical overview and suggestions for practice. The chapters written by midwives often include anecdotes from practice, which validate both midwifery practice and childbearing women's experiences, reinforce the usefulness of combining anecdotal evidence with scientifically validated research, and make for delightful reading.

This book would make a worthwhile contribution to the library of any midwife or midwifery student.

***Baby Catcher:
Chronicles of a Modern Midwife.***

Vincent, Peggy.
New York: Scribner, 2002.

Reviewed by Michelle Moravec

With her background in obstetrical nursing, natural childbirth education, and birth centre administration, Peggy Vincent's decision to become a licensed midwife with a specialization in home births seems almost expected; however, as *Baby Catcher: Chronicles of a Modern Midwife* aptly illustrates, Vincent's experiences as a midwife were anything but the expected.

As a young nursing student at Duke University, Vincent became disillusioned with traditional obstetric practices that gave labouring women no control over their experience of childbirth. The occasional pregnant women who "thrived on the challenge and the passion" of birth and refused to submit to the drugs and procedures considered necessary by the medical establishment showed Vincent that women could make their own decisions about what was best for their delivery.

Inspired by the sweeping changes wrought by the various social movements of the 1960s, Vincent set out to transform women's experiences of childbirth. In Berkeley, California in the early 1970s, Vincent began working as a labour and delivery nurse just as the Lamaze movement gained popularity. However, her own labour and delivery convinced her that a formulaic approach to natural childbirth did not empower women anymore than the stuffy practices

of traditional medicine. Over the years, she developed a childbirth education course centred on the notion that “every birth is different” (52).

As the women’s health movement rapidly transformed the field of women’s health during this period, more women began seeking out alternative methods of childbirth and, in 1974, Vincent had the opportunity to witness firsthand the work of a “lay” midwife. She found the woman’s skill so impressive that she began contemplating a career in midwifery. In her work as a nursing coordinator at a local birthing centre, Vincent enjoyed a degree of autonomy unheard of in conventional medical settings, but she still faced “physicians who believe that normal childbirth is a retrospective diagnosis” (58). After fifteen years as a nurse, Vincent retrained as a midwife and spent the next fifteen years attending home births. Although most of Vincent’s narrative is inspirational, she sounds some cautionary notes. The number of home births, for example, has been severely curtailed by the ongoing difficulties faced by American lay midwives in acquiring malpractice insurance and medical back up from physicians and hospitals.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of *Baby Catcher* is Vincent’s style. Although she has delivered over more than 2,500 babies, each case she recounts reflects the joy and awe she feels at the moment of birth. Deftly, she interweaves memoir and case studies with an overview of the transformations over the past forty years in childbirth practices in the United States. *Baby Catcher* is a valuable work for health care professionals, scholars of pregnancy and birth, and the general reader interested in issues of women’s health and pregnancy.

Families As We Are: Conversations From Around The World

Huston, Perdita.
New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2001.

Kerima Kostka

Perdita Huston, who has worked for several international organizations as well as specialized agencies of the United Nations, spent more than four years interviewing several generations of families of all socioeconomic backgrounds in eleven countries throughout the world (Japan, China, Bangladesh, Thailand, Mali, Uganda, Egypt, Jordan, El Salvador, Brazil, USA). Her approach is one of “empowerment”: to let those who have little voice speak about themselves.

Her book is a testament to these voices and illustrates—as only personal interviews are able to do—family life in its richness and complexity, as well as its changes and challenges, throughout the twentieth century. While listening to these individuals, one begins to see striking parallels between all countries.