

one another comfort and support: "Too caught up in their own pain" (98), they survive individually rather than together.

Davidman explains that individuals' experiences of motherloss are "shaped by our social conceptions of women's roles in the family and society" (inside cover). Her sociological approach (she pays special attention to gender, social class, ethnic and cultural backgrounds) attends to the historical and social contexts that influence the experience of loss. The ideal of the "always there," irreplaceable mother is shared by Davidman's respondents. If the classic nuclear family is disrupted by the premature death of the mother, it must also be held accountable for much of the pain experienced by bereft children.

A strength of Davidman's book, however, is its foregrounding of the silences—and silencing—that surround motherloss: the traumatized silence of denial; the silence that is supposed in many cases to protect children from their mother's illness and death but which, in the long run, adds to their pain; the silence that results from the pathologizing of grief as a period of mourning that includes first "letting go" and later "moving on"; the silence that comes from the lack of a "readily available script" (212), indeed any vocabulary, with which to articulate the experience of motherloss; and, more generally, the silence that today makes the subject of death taboo. Davidman's book helps break through that taboo, not only through its testimonies of motherloss but through its challenging of such silences.

A Good Birth, A Safe Birth: Choosing and Having the Childbirth Experience You Want

Diane Korte and Roberta M. Scaer
Boston: Harvard Common Press, 1992

Reviewed by Deborah Davidson

In this age of highly medicalized and technologized pregnancy and birth, the authors of *A Good Birth, A Safe Birth* start with the premise that pregnant and birthing women, given sufficient information, will make their own good, safe choices. In fact, Korte and Scaer acknowledge what women have been doing since time immemorial and they offer readers an abundance of information necessary to make informed choices, to advocate for themselves within the complex and biomedical amphitheater of contemporary obstetrics.

The authors describe two opposing trends in contemporary childbirth: an increase in out-of-hospital birthing centres and hospitals that provide home-like settings for birthing, coupled with a focus on high-technology, and a trend

toward medical tests and procedures throughout pregnancy and birth. It is the latter high-tech model that continues to dominate obstetrical care in North America. The authors also report a substantial increase in the use of the doula, a woman who offers support and comfort during labour. This increase could be understood as the need for the “human touch” in response to the machines and gadgetry that dominate most women’s birthing experiences.

Korte and Scaer demystify obstetrical terms and procedures and they debunk some popular and medical myths about how to achieve a safe birth. As well, they show that little medical evidence exists for even the most common obstetrical practices. Do note, however, that the text is not a mere disparaging of technologized births, designed to instill guilt in mothers who have availed themselves of technology during birth. Rather, as its title so aptly states, the book focuses on the information necessary to make choices for a “good birth, a safe birth.”

The work is accessible and well-organized. It includes appendices with contact and reference information, some of it, however, more relevant to the American reader. Moreover, as a mother myself, who soon will be leaving behind her reproductive years, the book provided answers to many of my own questions.

Pregnancy the Natural Way

Zita West
New York: DK Publishing, 2001

Reviewed by Maria Mikolchak

Pregnancy the Natural Way is a program for pregnant women. It starts as early as planning for conception and ends with the postpartum period. In many ways this is a traditional guide: the author divides pregnancy into three trimesters and provides information on mother’s and baby’s development, accompanied by advice on nutrition, exercise, common ailments, and specific pregnancy-related problems. What makes this book different from numerous other guides on pregnancy, however, is its focus on natural treatment options. The author, herself a midwife and acupuncturist, strongly advocates natural products, non-invasive treatments, and drug-free methods of pain relief that are harmless to mother and baby.

Each of the first six chapters of the book (“Planning for Conception,” “The First Trimester,” “The Second Trimester,” “The Third Trimester,” “Preparation for Labor and Delivery,” and “Postpartum Period”) starts with conventional information on pregnancy and ends with complementary treatments.