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Local midwives provide alternative to hospital births

By Michael Rivers
Of the Emerald

Editor's note: This is the first part in a two-part series examining the practice of midwifery. Today's article discusses midwifery from the perspective of direct-entry midwives, their former clients and supporters. Thursday's article will explore opposition to direct-entry midwives and will present the perspective of nurse-midwives and the Oregon Medical Association.

Not all infants need be delivered in a sterile hospital setting under blinding white lights, with a tray of gleaming stainless steel instruments next to the bed. A mother-to-be instead may choose to give birth using the services of a trained lay midwife in the comfortable and familiar setting of her own home, surrounded by loving family and friends.

Jan Tritten, a Eugene midwife of 10 years, says the difference between a hospital birth and home birth is "phenomenal." "My home birth was a wonderful experience — I had a lot of control, it was easygoing," she says. "In the hospital, they take a lot of your rights away."

Bobbi Corcoran, a midwife of three years who apprenticed with Tritten, agrees. Hospitals used to give prospective mothers enemas, shave them and not allow them to see their babies until several hours after birth, she says.

"You felt like you were a piece of meat; they could do anything to you — they strapped your arms down," Corcoran says. The

hospital didn't allow Corcoran to see her daughter, Jessica, until four hours after the birth, she says.

But it's not as bad as it used to be, she says. "Sacred Heart is a pretty nice hospital now," Tritten says. "Having to compete with home births made them have to make some changes. Midwifery is better, safer because we don't intervene. We just encourage the natural process."

Tritten and Corcoran recently gave up their midwifery practice to begin work on a new quarterly publication aimed at "childbirth professionals and interested consumers."

The publication is meant to provide a network for sharing knowledge, experience, news and views of birth attendants and educators around the world, Tritten says. The magazine will carry stories on all aspects of childbirth from prenatal to postpartum transition, including nutrition in pregnancy, all stages of labor and delivery, complications, newborn care and breastfeeding, she says.

Karen Schmidt, a 26-year-old Veneta resident and former client of Tritten and Corcoran, gave birth to all three of her children at home. Schmidt decided on home birth because she "never had a real good feel for hospitals," she says.

Friends told her about home birth, and she thought it would be better than the sterile atmosphere of a hospital, Schmidt says. Her first home birth was a

little difficult, and she believes that her midwife's patience and skill probably kept her from "having to have a C-section."

A C-section, or Caesarean section, is an operation where the baby is delivered by cutting through the mother's abdominal and uterine walls.

Schmidt says she prefers home births because of the relaxed atmosphere and familiar surroundings. And at her second and third home births, her children were able to participate, which helped create a bond between the children and the baby, she says.

Midwives definitely have the knowledge and experience to preside at home births, Schmidt says. She wouldn't take chances if she didn't feel they were competent, she says.

"I would say they know more than doctors do because they're so specialized and more in tune with you," Schmidt says.

Mothers also may give birth at a midwifery birth center. Daphne Singingtree, a midwife of 10 years and director of Birth Song Midwifery Services, 1267 W. Seventh Ave., says there is no difference between a birth center and home birth in terms of equipment. The major difference is that at home parents take more responsibility for the birth, while at a birth center they expect someone else to control their experience, she says.

Birth Song provides home birth service only. Singingtree says. "What we try to do more than anything is let the parents choose their birth experience," she says.

"We also try to provide a safe experience."

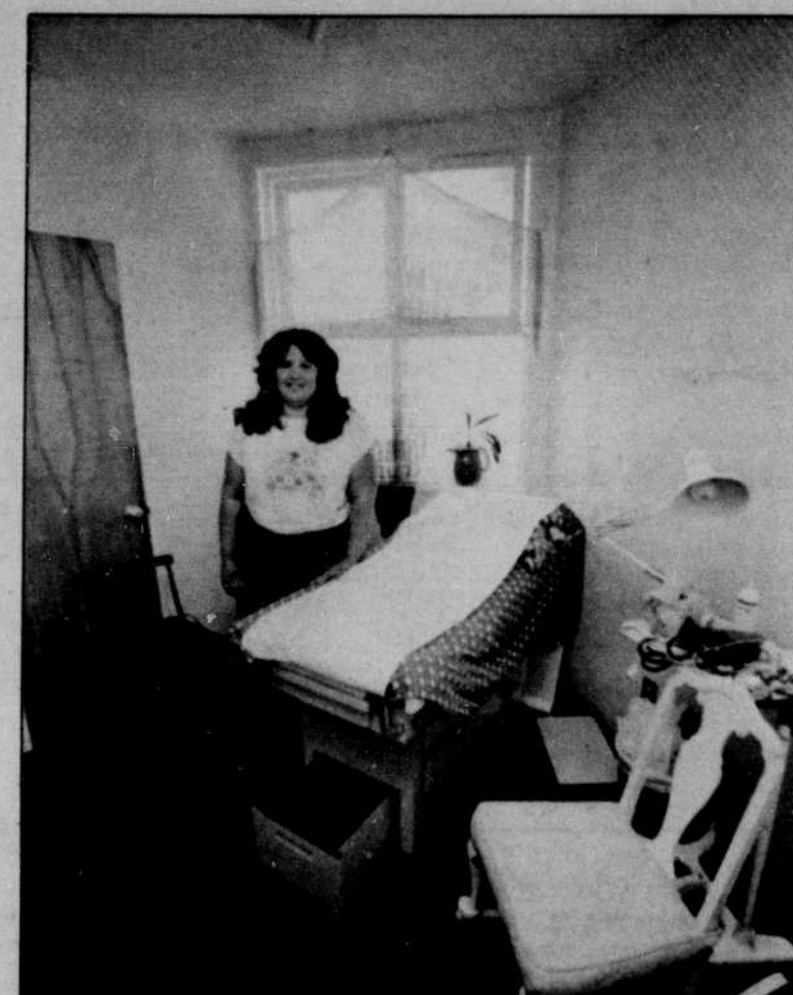
The latest fad among some mothers is underwater births, Singingtree says. Underwater births supposedly are less traumatic for babies because of the transition from floating in the womb to floating in water, she says.

"I think it's really absurd," Singingtree says. "Fringe midwives do those — competent ones don't really. These are the kinds of things that, if they go wrong, give midwives a bad name."

Lay, or direct-entry, midwives in Oregon may practice midwifery as long as they don't practice medicine without a license, Tritten says. This includes things like surgery, puncturing the skin, drawing blood and stitching, she says. Direct-entry midwives differ from nurse-midwives, who must attend an accredited midwifery school for four or five years and receive certification from the state Health Division, she says.

In theory, anyone can do a home birth and call him or herself a midwife, whether they are trained or not, Tritten says. But several concerned midwives joined in 1977 to found the Oregon Midwifery Council to promote excellence in the practice, she says.

The OMC grants certificates of midwifery to individuals who have successfully completed specified requirements, Tritten says. An individual must attend 25 home births as an apprentice, then serve as the "primary" at another 25 births, she says.



Daphne Singingtree, a midwife of 10 years, is director of Birth Song Midwifery Services, 1267 W. Seventh Ave.

A primary midwife is responsible for the birth, Tritten says. After fulfilling these requirements, the individual may apply to the OMC, which then

reviews the history of the applicant, his or her philosophy as a midwife and letters of recommendation.

Continued on page 6

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Piecing together family history can be 'endless puzzle'

By Gary Henley
Of the Emerald

Jacquelyn Morgan of Springfield was looking through some of her grandmother's family memorabilia recently when she ran across some pictures and letters dating back to 1892. After discovering the name Hunt, she began searching records to see if her family is related to a man with the last name Hunt, who traveled with Lewis and Clark on the Lewis and Clark trail.

"I'm not very close right now," she said. "I've gone back to about 1790, but I need to go back farther in order to come farther ahead."

It's fun to search for your family's past, said Nancy Falk, president of the Oregon Genealogical Society.

"Once you're bit, it's an incurable disease," she said. "I guess everyone just has a curiosity about where they come from."

But tracing family roots isn't easy. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Genealogical Library, 3550 W. 18th Ave., has files of microfiche and microfilm (from the International Genealogical Index), hun-

'Once you're bit, it's an incurable disease.'

— Nancy Falk

dreds of books and other reference materials — enough for hours of searching for people looking for descendants.

And if someone does stumble on what they think is a relative from their past, there's no guarantee the information is correct, Falk said. For example, conflicting birthdays or places of birth for the same person, and different last-name spellings are common in such records.

"The information that we have is as good as the people that submitted it. You should always be suspicious of it because it's somebody else's work. It doesn't necessarily have to say that 'this is so' or 'that's the way it happened,'" she said.

Once someone gets started, trying to fit the right pieces together, it's like an

"endless puzzle," Falk said.

There are many ways to go about tracing family roots. Professional genealogists will perform research for an average of \$20 per hour. The LDS Genealogical Library distributes pedigree charts and questionnaires that encourage people to start with themselves and fill in as much as they can about their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.

Much of the information can be obtained by simply asking relatives, Falk said. But people should ask "point-blank" questions, she said.

Someone who asks a grandparent about "the family" may not get the answers they need, she said. Instead, they should request specific details such as dates and places, she said.

Going through their family records, or those of their parents or grandparents, is another way of collecting valuable information, she said.

The information a grandparent may have stashed away in an attic can be pleasantly surprising, Falk said. "It's amaz-

ing — they have no idea sometimes."

The LDS Genealogical Library also has a service called The Family Registry, which is offered by the LDS Genealogical Department in Salt Lake City, Utah. It helps people find others doing research on the same family lines so that they can coordinate their research efforts.

Registration forms for The Family Registry are available at the LDS Genealogical Library in Eugene. Microfiche copies of the registration forms and an index of the registry are made available at the Genealogical Library in Salt Lake City and at branch genealogical libraries.

The Oregon Collection in the University Main Library doesn't specialize in genealogy, but it does have telephone directories and census records to assist searches.

The Oregon Genealogical Society Library, 329 W. 13th Ave., Suite D, has meetings for people interested in genealogy from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. the fourth Saturday of every month except December in the Eugene Water & Electric Board cafeteria, 500 E. Fourth Ave.

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