

Families return

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figured that if animals could have their babies without the aid of man, why must women be surrounded by doctors in a hospital with all that added commotion?"

So, she decided that when she had her first baby, she would have it at home without the aid of a doctor. But, in 1966 when she was pregnant with the first of her four children, Deborah Ann, she changed her tune just a bit.

"I just wasn't as bold as I thought," she says with a twinkle in her eye and a sheepish, self-teasing grin on her face. "Then, I thought, 'Well, maybe I ought to have a doctor here,' but I still wanted to have natural childbirth." So, she set about finding out how to do it.

This was no easy task for Mrs. Blank because the accepted method of childbirth at that time was to use anesthetics and to be in a hospital. Also, there were almost no books on this method to be found anywhere.

"I searched and searched for books and came up with only one," she says. That book was the Lamaze method of natural childbirth which she teaches today in a modified form.

Her decision was also hard to carry out because she was virtually unsupported by anyone except her husband and by her doctor who agreed to try any method she desired, even though he had never done it before.

So, using her reference book, she practiced all the exercises called for and had her baby at home.

"It was a good delivery," she recalls, "But it wasn't excellent." She says that she was in control the whole time, but at the very last point before the baby was ready to be born (transition) she fought the natural muscular contractions and dilations of her body and made it harder on herself.

"I feel that this was because the book I read wasn't totally complete in its teaching," she points out. This book did not stress the importance of practicing relaxation, the part of natural childbirth which Mrs. Blank now emphasizes the most in her courses. As a result of the incomplete instructions, she was not fully prepared for the effects of labor.

"I did enjoy the birth, though," she says, and she continued in her desire to have her children born at home.

For her second birth, she was armed with books that a friend from Philadelphia had sent her, and she had faithfully practiced her exercises and relaxation. She also found out about a nurse who was trained in natural childbirth and who was going to start teaching at St. Joseph's Hospital in Lancaster. So, Mrs. Blank got in contact with the nurse who then had a private session with the Blanks on the Modified Lamaze method.

As a result of all her preparation, the birth of Marcus, who is now nine years old, was a painless, two-and-a-half hour delivery.

"It was perfect, and so beautiful." Mrs. Blank

beams, remembering her experience. "I recall wishing I could show other people how wonderful it was." She gives a lot of credit to her doctor, who followed her every wish, and her husband, who was an excellent coaching partner. She also points out that she has a good build for bearing children, which was a definite asset in helping her birth be painless.

After the delivery was over, her doctor was so impressed, that he teasingly said, "We'll have to sign you up to give childbirth training courses." And, today, that's exactly what Anna Mary Blank is doing - teaching others the joys and excitement of Conscious Cooperative Childbirth. Her pupils come from all over to her home in Manheim, which she and her husband have willingly converted into a small classroom that can house 20 couples at a time for the training she offers.

"We took the sewing room and the living room and converted them into a classroom," she explains. Her former dining room now serves as both dining room and living room.

Her pupils come from neighboring counties, and she is even known in other states. She also teaches in the community of Intercourse, Pa., where most of her pupils are Amish. Here, she rents meeting space which can seat as many as 60 people. She says her new space in Intercourse is good also, because it has good lighting to show her charts, birth atlas, and other teaching aids she uses to get her subject across to those participating.

Exactly what is her subject - conscious Cooperative Childbirth?

Conscious Cooperative Childbirth as described by Mrs. Blank is a method of childbirth in which the mother is conscious during labor and delivery, and cooperates with her body and with the doctor to give birth. The husband has an active roll as coach and comforter during labor and delivery, and together, as partners, the two parents help to bring the baby into the world. Medication may or may not be used, depending on the need.

Preparing the mother's body is a major part of this method of childbirth.

"I stress over and over again, the importance of practicing breathing and relaxation," says Mrs. Blank. "The important thing is that they must not fight pain, but must teach themselves to relax during it." When the mother fights, and curls up in a ball in reaction to the pain, she works against the muscular contractions and dilations, therefore prolonging labor and increasing the pain for herself. Instead of curling up, she must go limp, and only by training can she learn to do this.

There are approximately 10 different exercises to limber the mother's muscles. "I call them the exercises which prepare the three B's - the belly, the back, and the bottom," says Mrs. Blank. These exercises take out some of the stiffness of disuse from the muscles to make delivery and recovery

after the delivery much easier.

To emphasize her point, she gives the example of a woman who gave birth in a doctor's office and was on her way home in less than an hour after delivery.

"She told me she felt so perky that she went home and worked in her office for a while," Mrs. Blank remarked in near amazement. This was an unusual case, and one which she feels might have been a bit hurried, but it nevertheless underscores the fact that many times women recover quickly with this method of birth.

Breathing exercises are also part of the program.

"Concentrating on their breathing keeps their minds off the actual physical pain, and helps them to keep things under control," Mrs. Blank explains. Human beings can normally focus on only one thing, so concentrating on breathing helps the mothers psychologically dull the pain.

Besides the various exercises Mrs. Blank teaches in her series, she also includes prenatal education.

"I feel that confidence is gained from childbirth education, which helps to alleviate fear and tension, and this helps to alleviate pain," she explains.

"Depending on the woman, there may be pain - we don't lead parents to expect a painless labor, nor

one necessarily conducted without drugs or medication if necessary," she explains. She does point out, however, that it has been discovered that there is less need, often no need, for drugs when a woman is prepared and supported.

"It's also better for the babies when the mothers don't have to take drugs," she says. Babies born to mothers without anesthetics are so alert and perky," she explains with enthusiasm showing on her face. "Just the other day I assisted a doctor with a birth and when I wrapped the baby in the blanket, he turned his head and just looked all around. He was so cute," she emphasized. In comparison, she says babies born to mothers under anesthesia are more sluggish, and many times blue in color. Usually, babies born with natural childbirth are pink, unless there has been some type of complication.

Another bonus to Conscious Cooperative Childbirth is a special tie which is established between the parents and the child.

"Now, you have to be careful about saying that parents who go through natural childbirth love their children more - that's not really true - but, there is a special bond that they feel for that child because they have worked together, and as a team have shared in the birth of that child." The manifestations of this special tie are many, but

they are often times small which only the mother notices. Yet, they are nevertheless there. For instance, Mrs. Blank says that mothers will write to her saying, "My husband just looks at him more than he did the other children." Or, sometimes the husband will help with diapering when he had never done that with the other babies.

Conscious co-operative Childbirth also takes away any suppressed guilt a husband or child might feel knowing that they caused the mother pain.

"When you've gone through this method, your attitude and expressions with your children make

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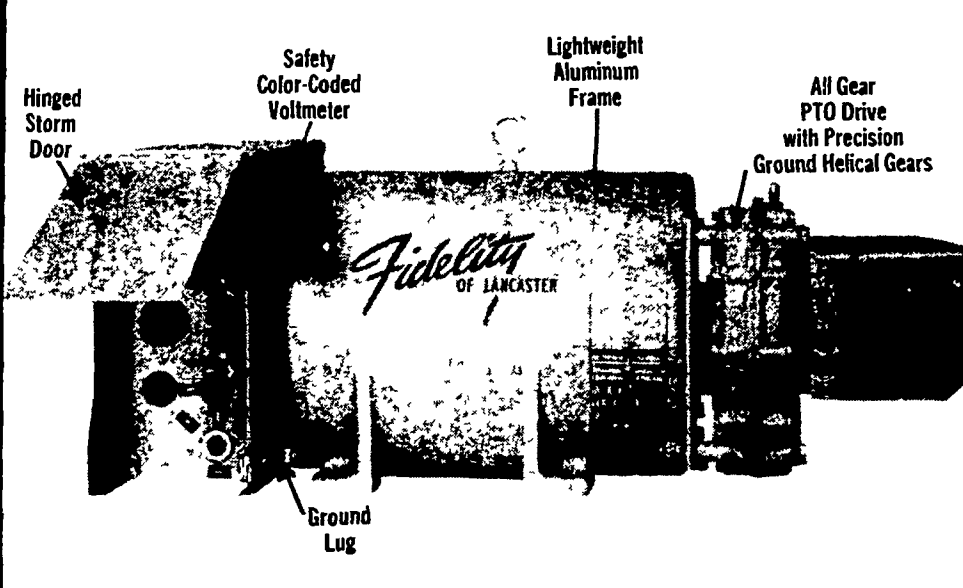
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