Ina May Gaskin (1940– )

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Sources

Gaskin was one of four people to co-win the 2011 Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, where she was recognized for her work in teaching and advocating woman-centered care, childbirth, and midwifery issues. She created the Safe Motherhood Quilt Project, a project focused on members making quilts made up of patches with the names of women who died in childbirth or related causes in the US since 1982, highlighting the national statistics of maternal deaths and honoring the women who died. Gaskin states on the project’s website that the Safe Motherhood Quilt Project was created to draw attention to the current maternal death rates in the US as well as, what she calls, the gross underreporting of maternal deaths.

Gaskin has received many awards for her work in midwifery and women’s health advocacy. In 1997, she was awarded the ASPO Lamaze Irwin Chabon Award from Lamaze International, an organization called Midwives Alliance of North America, or MANA, which focuses on furthering the practice of midwifery by increasing survival rates for women and infants. Gaskin served as president of MANA from 1995 to 2002. The formation of MANA led to the creation of the Midwifery Education and Accreditation Council, or MEAC, and North American Registry of Midwives, or NARM, which created a competency-based certification for US midwives. Prior to the formation of those groups, there was not a similar certification available for midwives in the US. Because of that, it was difficult to know and accurately access a midwife’s qualifications.


Gaskin was appointed a Visiting Fellow in 2003. In 2009 she received the title Honorary Doctor by Thames Valley University in London, England. In 2011, Gaskin was one of four people to co-win the 2011 Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, where she was recognized for her work in teaching and advocating woman-centered childbirth methods that promote maternal and child health. In 2013, she received an Honorary Doctor of Science from Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia.

As of 2019, Gaskin lives at the Farm in Summertown, Tennessee, and frequently travels to promote low-intervention methods that made the Farm Midwifery Center successful to midwives and physicians around the world. As of 2019, Gaskin still acts as a midwife to local women, including those who still live at the Farm, as well as women from around the world who come to the Farm Midwifery Center to deliver.

Gaskin states that the group felt they would be unable to afford to give each woman a birth at hospital, and they were looking for a way to give birth the way they wanted, which meant without unnecessary interventions. In the late 1970s, it was becoming more common for women to receive an epidural injection, which reduced her pain during labor. It was also common for women to be separated from their infant after birth due to healthcare providers monitoring the infant’s heartbeat. However, according to Gaskin, some women wanted to be able to give birth inside of a hospital without the intervention. Additionally women wanted to be able to have their husbands present at the birth, which was not common in hospital settings.

When a fetus is wrapped around the infant’s neck. When acesarean section is a surgical procedure that cuts through the wall of a woman’s abdomen to deliver the infant. The use of the surgery is rare and is only performed when other methods have failed. The surgery is performed by a team of doctors and nurses in the operating room.

Sources


14. Up To Date. [Accessed October 6, 2019].
Ina May Gaskin is a certified professional midwife, or CPM, in the US during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. She worked at the Farm Midwifery Center in Summertown, Tennessee, a center well known for its low rates of intervention, which contributed to low rates of maternal and fetal mortality. One technique Gaskin used when assisting women with delivery helped resolve a complication called "shoulder dystocia," which is when a part of the infant’s body is delivered, but the rest of the body is stuck in the birth canal. Her work served as an example for midwives and obstetricians, physicians who specialize in a woman’s reproductive system, childbirth, and pregnancy, to use a low-intervention approach without medication or a cesarean section. Through her work in developing different birthing techniques, Gaskin provided women with alternative ways to deliver infants without the need for hospitals, medication, or surgical intervention, even in the case of complicated births.