

In Good Hands: A Doctor's Story of Breaking Barriers for Midwifery and Birth Rights

Darrell Martin

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In Good Hands is a compelling memoir about a political battle fought for birthing rights and midwifery.

Darrell Martin's gutsy memoir *In Good Hands* is a feminist, anticapitalistic historical account of how midwifery was reintroduced into gynecology after the established medical community deemed the practice to be unfit and crude.

Martin's medical career in gynecology and obstetrics began in 1970s Tennessee when the use of midwives was considered taboo by established doctors. Those doctors tended to practice childbirth as a medical procedure for their convenience and at the expense of expectant mothers' comfort and health. Martin was ostracized in Tennessee's medical community because he fought a political battle on behalf of midwives and their patients' birthing rights. The ordeal catapulted him into a lengthy harassment battle that dragged on for more than a decade before Martin and his midwife colleagues finally achieved a ruling in their favor.

Its tone passionate, the book is informative when it comes to explaining these issues in the context of the medical field. However, it doesn't dive into the core subject of midwifery until about halfway through its pages. And its autobiographical portions go far afield of this focus, covering the minutiae of daily life in depth, including Martin's college days and rediscovery of Christianity. There are also notes about Martin's love for pasta and bread and that classmates called him "Darrell the barrel" when he was young. Where it focuses on the various stories of pregnant women and their concerns of being treated as numbers by their doctors, it is more broadly compelling.

Further complicating the book's delivery, its work hits an abrupt terminology brick wall of hospital jargon once Martin's push for midwifery is fully introduced. There's a discombobulating flood of medical talk, and a number of major doctors and institutions are introduced in too-quick succession. Further, some gaps exist: The book asserts that traditional hospitals viewed expecting mothers who use midwives as lower-income patients, for example, but the stories of patients of with various socioeconomic backgrounds are not included as examples.

Additionally, while the book touts a feminist issue with compelling verve, it doesn't heavily feature the perspectives of either of the midwives with whom Martin worked. The absence of their voices is glaring, in particular where the book covers their having been undermined and belittled by male doctors. Further, the resolution of their stories is kept vague: After Martin was ejected from the gynecological scene in Tennessee, he moved to South Carolina and later Atlanta, leaving the midwives back in Tennessee to continue their fight against the local medical community without his presence.

Still, *In Good Hands* is an invigorating memoir by a doctor who combated sexism, classism, and hypercapitalism in his field.

BROOKE LEIGH HOWARD (November 14, 2024)

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