
Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

January 2007

Shiprah Birthing Home and Little Children's Home: Caring, Loving and Empowering By Natasha Davis



Jeri Gunderson (left) and her daughter Deborah Gustafson (right)

Manila Women's Forum was fortunate to have Jeri Gunderson and Deborah Gustafson from Help International Ministries, Inc. speak during the last meeting of 2006 about the Little Children's Home and Shiprah Birthing Home. They shared heartfelt stories of empowering poor women to be in control of their birthing experience and the Little Children's Home orphanage where they care for and love many children before sending them off to new families in the Philippines and overseas.

Jeri arrived in the Philippines 18 years ago with her husband and six children, and has been teaching women in the Rizal Province area about pre-natal care, childbirth and nutrition. Jeri has wonderful experiences with her own pregnancies and child birth, but most impoverished women in the Philippines do not feel the same way. Pregnancy and child birth brings fear and concern due to continued high mortality rates, being unwelcome at hospitals and difficulties caused by poor nutrition. Deborah, Jeri's daughter, started working with her mother in midwifery as her understudy when she was only eleven years old, and has since formally studied midwifery. Deborah is now the resource person for the pregnancy and new birth support group for Mothers and Darlings Support Group. When they started, the births took place in their home so that every room and every corner of their home has witnessed a birth.

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Next MWF Meeting

When: 6:30 p.m. Monday 2007 January 22

What: Lisa Lumbao, team leader of the Local Initiatives for Affordable Wastewater Treatment (LINAW) project, will speak about her work to raise awareness about the need to reduce pollution from untreated household sewage throughout the Philippines. **Where:** Cathy Hartigan-Go's home, 27 Woodpecker Street, Greenmeadows, Quezon City. **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **January meeting:** Monday, 2007 February 19.



Women and Babies, on page 2 and 3

The Young Mother (Mother Berthe Holding Her Baby), by Mary Cassatt (1845-1926). The two-dimensional work of art depicted in this image is in the public domain.

Talk about birthing, and the phrase that comes to mind is “women and babies.”

Here then are images of women and babies that captured our hearts, and items that we found intriguing.



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Selected and edited by
Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

Women and Babies

Lithotomy

The Lithotomy position is the position most of us are probably familiar with - lying on the back, with knees bent and elevated above the hips with the thighs apart. The position is often used for women to give birth in, also for

anal and vaginal examinations, as well as anal, rectal, and vaginal surgery.

As a birth position, it has been popular in the past with obstetricians as it allows a good view of the birth process. However, the position is not conducive to a smooth labor as it constricts the birth canal, puts pressure on the coccyx, prevents the fetal ejection reflex from occurring, and does not allow the mother to move during the process, therefore increasing pain in labor.

Today, few birth centres or labour wards in Western countries use the lithotomy position for active labour. One notable exception, however, is the United States, where the lithotomy position remains common for active labor.

The origin of the position, and hence the name, was in the earliest



method of lithotomy, the surgical removal of a bladder stone, in which an incision was made in the perineum. The patient was placed in this posture to afford the surgeon access.

Birthing positions

Other birthing positions include standing, walking, sitting, semi-sitting, lying on



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your side, leaning, leaning forward with support, kneeling, squatting, and being on your hands and knees.

Water birth

Water birth is a method of giving birth in a bathtub or pool full of warm water. Proponents believe it has many benefits for both mother and infant, and is a safe alternative to standard types of delivery.

Water birth is accepted and practiced in many parts of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as many European countries including the United Kingdom and Germany where many maternity clinics have birthing tubs. Some offer water birth, others offer only water labor. Many independent birthing centers and home birth midwives also offer water birth services. Because many hospitals have not yet installed proper birth pools in their maternity wards, water birth is practiced mostly by those who choose to have a home birth.

Women, babies, and FGM

Women and babies suffer even worse consequences from female genital mutilation (FGM) when the delivery is done at home without the help of experienced staff. (WHO study, June 2006)



Picture Acknowledgements for this page, clockwise from top right : [4] Cold Shower, by Georgios Iakovidis (1853-1932). The two-dimensional work of art depicted in this image is in the public domain worldwide due to the date of death of its author (if it was published outside of the U.S. and the author has been dead for over 70 years), or due to its date of publication (if it was first made public in the U.S. before 1923). Therefore this photographical reproduction is also in the public domain, at least in the United States (see Bridgeman Art Library v. Corel Corp.), in Germany, and in many other countries. [5] Maternité, by Mary Cassatt (1845-1926). The two-dimensional work of art depicted in this image is in the public domain worldwide due to the date of death of its author (if it was published outside of the U.S. and the author has been dead for over 70 years), or due to its date of publication (if it was first made public in the U.S. before 1923). Therefore this photographical reproduction is also in the public domain, at least in the United States (see Bridgeman Art Library v. Corel Corp.), in Germany, and in many other countries.

(Shiprah... from page 1)

Jeri explained that the Millennium Development Goals are all directly related to the concerns of impoverished women and families. There are three goals that concern health, in particular reducing the mortality of children under five years old. Women's concern for their families means they will forgo food to make sure that their children and husbands get to eat, but this is only a short-term measure that brings about other problems for the families such as poor maternal health. In the Philippines, one mother dies during child birth every 102 minutes and the root cause of this is poor nutrition. Anemia and lack of protein is the biggest problem and results in a poor quality placenta, premature births and the birth of underweight babies.

The philosophy of the Little Children's Home is that there should not be any orphans, that children should have homes and families. The Little Children's Home is licensed by the Department of Welfare and generally has children for one year before they are adopted by families in the USA, Norway, and other countries. The home usually has about 15 babies. Jeri and Deborah shared some special success stories, which also brought home the sadness involved with unwanted pregnancies.

The SM chain of department stores generally finds two babies a month in mall trash cans, in almost all of these cases the babies are found dead. But Jonathan (not his real name) was found, barely alive, in a restroom trash can in the SM mall in Cavite. His mouth stuffed with toilet tissue, his face covered with tissue as well, a table napkin wrapped tightly around his neck, this child had not only been left to die, attempted murder was clearly in view.

Rushed to the hospital by no less than the mall owner himself, Jonathan's life hung in the balance for several weeks. Estimated to be at least two months premature and weighing in at 2.4 pounds, he spent the next three weeks of his young life in an incubator. After some time in incubation he was placed in the Little Children's Home. He is doing very well now except for some delayed eye sight. Louis, another of the Little Children's Home's abandoned babies, was born in prison. After eight months his mother was released but left little Louis in prison under the care of another woman. After some time the wardens realized what had happened

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(Shiphrah... from page 3)

and Louis was released to the Little Children's Home. Louis has just been placed with a family in the USA.

There are many families in the USA who have adopted children from the Little Children's Home and stay connected through a Yahoo group. Louis' adoptive parents found his best friend Oliver at the home and now regularly communicate and get together. This sense of extended family is important for these adopted Filipino children.

Jeri and Deborah also work on systemic problems related to adoptions. They are actively working with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to place their children with new families as soon as possible. The adoption of abandoned children is particularly problematic and generally takes three years because the paperwork has to pass through the criminal court system. These cases are generally the last priority in the long list of cases needed to heard by the judges. For this reason the Home makes it a policy to restrict the taking in of abandoned children.

The goal of the Shiphrah Birthing Home is to create a community and empower both mother and father during the birth experience. The home is one of the few places in the Philippines that doesn't advocate stirrup-supported birthing. They leave it up to the mother to decide on her birthing position, but suggest the use of a birthing stool which increases the pelvic opening by up to 25%. The stool makes it easy for the father or family support person to

participate in the birth by supporting the mother by holding her from the back, which also allows him/her to view the birth as it is taking place. The home serves about 1500 women a year for prenatal care and empowering education and in 2006 more than 450 babies were born there.

Eric is a student at the Alliance seminary where Jeri teaches and recently got the opportunity to experience the Birthing Home's approach. Eric and his wife Jodee planned to give birth at the local military hospital and made the necessary arrangements. But on the night of delivery the resident doctor, not aware of their arrangements, turned Eric and wife away. Now in the process of labor and without a place to give birth, Eric brought his wife to the Birthing Home to ask for Jeri's assistance in the middle of the night.

Later Eric wrote a letter of appreciation to Jeri, explaining what a wonderful experience it was: "My wife took a seat and I hold and hug her while I was right at her back. It was a totally different and wonderful experience, we feel like we are one, every time she pushes, I push, every time she takes a deep breath, I take breath. All the things she does I do also. We felt in control of the whole process together, Dina and Melinda (two midwives) did not get in the way, they just coached us, instructed us and catch the baby right when he came out. A sense of self-fulfillment filled our hearts together. As a husband I felt so significant and important being involved in the process of giving birth to my son, unlike in other

hospitals where a father only gets to see his son after being washed and clothed by the nurses and doctors."

When asked how she chose to work in the Philippines, Jeri said they had friends here who asked them to come, and then one thing led to another. Their mission in coming here was to share God's love, which they have done with great success and joy. The MWF meeting came to an end with donations collected for both the Little Children's Home and the Shiphrah Birthing Home.

Jeri and Deborah can be reached at the Little Children's Home at Tel. 658-4503. ■

The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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