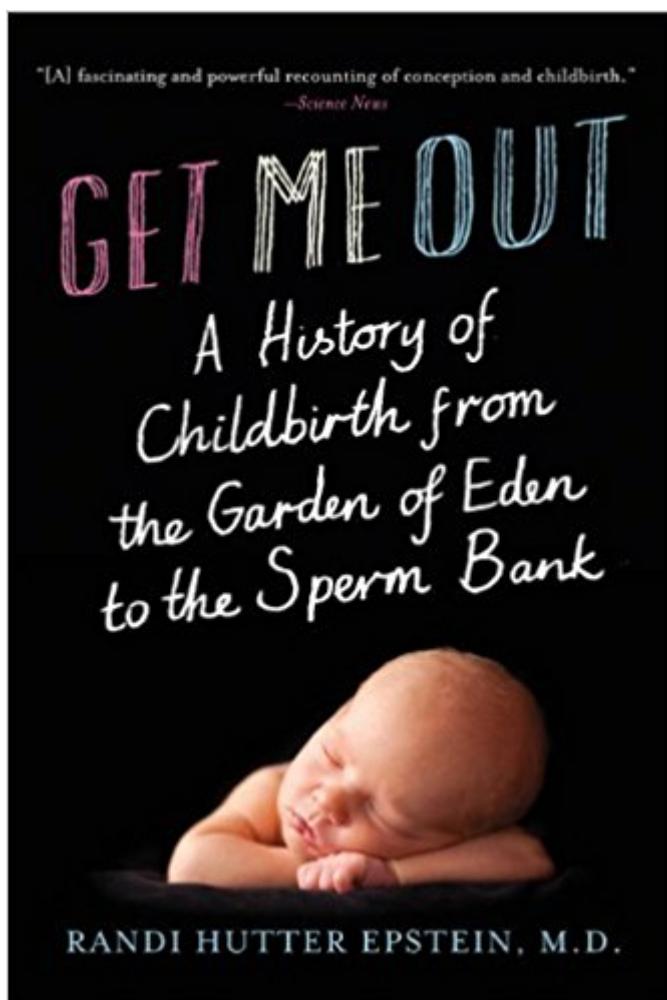


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Get Me Out: A History Of Childbirth From The Garden Of Eden To The Sperm Bank



Synopsis

"[An] engrossing survey of the history of childbirth." —Stephen Lowman, Washington Post
Making and having babies — what it takes to get pregnant, stay pregnant, and deliver — have mystified women and men throughout human history. The insatiably curious Randi Hutter Epstein journeys through history, fads, and fables, and to the fringe of science. Here is an entertaining must-read — an enlightening celebration of human life.

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Customer Reviews

As a 64-year-old mother and grandmother, childbirth is a subject I rarely give any amount of thought to exploring. However, I have a daughter whose education and career includes child development and this book came to her attention. She passed it to me with full assurance that I would enjoy the read. It took me several months to even open it, but I'm glad I did. The author touches on the history of child birthing practices, beliefs, etc from ancient times to the present. She keeps the ancient

history brief and easy to read. I enjoyed reading the history - found it fascinating. I'm so glad I didn't live back then and have to give birth! Even though this book's handling of the history is very brief, she gives enough details and references that it would be easy to delve into any additional areas I might want to explore. She does a good job of setting the stage for what will follow. I found the author to be even handed and she does a good job of refraining from judgment for practices that border on the criminal in my mind. Her perspective was not to be judge and jury, but to inform and give perspective on how our culture has arrived at where we are today in this field. As she approaches modern times, the information is more detailed and consequently more troubling. However, she continues to inform rather than indict. For women who are at this time of life and having to work their way through making decisions for themselves and their unborn babies, I think this is an especially good book. It should help to give some sense of context and perspective to the many decisions that they will need to make. The bulk of the book deals with more modern issues and situations that will be more relevant to today's prospective mothers. For those of us who have already traveled this road, it makes for a quick and interesting journey through womankind's common history.

What if we view history not by the rise and fall of empires, but through the everyday experience of childbirth through time? This is the story told in "Get Me Out: A History of Childbirth from the Garden of Eden to the Sperm Bank," (W.W. Norton, \$15.95 paperback) by Randi Hutter-Epstein, M.D. Witty and entertaining, the book is also encyclopedic in scope. It passes muster as a work of medical history, and at the same time, provides practical information that new mothers will find valuable. "Get Me Out" is full of truth-is-stranger-than-fiction tales. To get pregnant, Catherine de Medici, France's sixteenth-century queen, was advised to drink mare's urine, and to soak her privates in cow manure and ground stag's antlers. In nineteenth century New York, post-partum women aired out their genitals on the hospital rooftop, high above Manhattan. The book abounds with fascinating characters. We meet England's Chamberlen family, who for 200 years beginning in the 1500's, were renowned for their ability to safely deliver babies thanks to a secret family tool--forceps. In pre-Civil War United States, surgeon Marion Sims took ten postpartum slave women into his backyard, and by gruesome experimentation on their genitals, cured one of childbirth's most horrible side effects--vaginal rips that caused women to leak urine and feces, and to thus be outcast for the rest of their lives. This disabling postpartum condition is still common in developing countries, but no longer exists in the west, thanks to the anonymous slave women, and to Dr. Sims. We meet Berkeley mom and activist Pat Cody, who took on the powerful drug companies that manufactured

DES (diethylstilbestrol), a synthetic hormone given to millions of women as a pregnancy enhancer, but which instead caused cancer and birth defects for children exposed in utero. We get a personal glimpse of sperm bank proprietor Dr. Cappy Rothman, who lives in a home decorated with penis sculptures, and whose California Cryobank has a masturbatorium wallpapered with porn. The quest for healthier, pain free childbirth is one of the book's many storylines. In the Garden of Eden, Eve cheated on her diet with an apple, as the author's version of the tale goes. In this manner, the first woman incurred the sentence of painful childbirth for all women. Virtue and painful childbirth were so synonymous that in 1591 Scotland, Eufame Maclayne was burned at the stake for requesting pain relief while birthing twins. Only in the early 1900's did pain relief in childbirth become socially acceptable, reflecting a time when women discarded their corsets and danced without chaperones. Lithuanian immigrant Lane Bryant (nee Lina Himmelstein) started the first line of maternity wear. "Twilight Sleep," became a fad in which upper class American women traveled to Germany to undergo birthing while knocked out by morphine and sedatives. Backlash begat the freebirthers movement, and later, Lamaze. "Get Me Out" also offers cautionary tales about technology and pregnancy. In the 1930's, X-rays were a routine part of prenatal exams. Even after fetal X-ray exposure was linked to leukemia in 1956, prenatal X-rays continued for another 20 years. Dr. Hutter-Epstein uses the example of X-rays to provide a context for the widespread use of prenatal ultrasounds today. "We must not forget that it took nearly half a century for the damaging effects of X-rays upon the fetus in utero to come to light," cautions Ian Donald, the very obstetrician who pioneered fetal ultrasound. "Get Me Out" indeed covers a lot of ground. Several storylines could have been better developed. But altogether, this is a commendable book, readable yet rigorous, written by a woman with the unusual qualifications of medical journalist, an editor of the Yale Journal of Humanities and Medicine, and also, a mother of four.

This book is highly readable. At the same time, it could have done with a good swift edit. I don't need exclamation marks and snarky jokes to keep me interested - I'm reading a book about the topic because I'm already fascinated by it. This book is thoroughly researched but with some puzzling gaps. I can't fathom how she can write about the maternal mortality rate in early and mid-20th Century USA without mentioning the current state of the maternal mortality rate in the US. It is abominable and *rising* (a woman giving birth today is 2x as likely to die from complications thereof than her mother was). Look up the Amnesty International report if you purchase this book. Supplementary reading and all. ;) Epstein is a medical doctor; her understanding of the history of childbirth (which has only recently become the domain of doctors, e.g. over the last 70 years) is

coloured by her training. Her coverage of home birth, doula assistance and new-age post-birth practices (lotus birth, anyone?) is a bit lacking in this regard. BUT I loved her discussion of sperm banks! She got some good interviews.

Very useful overview of childbirth through history. I was researching the probable cause of my great grandmother's death hours following the birth of her daughter, in Conway NH, in 1897. Tough info to read in places, but the writer has balance and a sense of humor that provides perspective.

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