

REVISED
UPDATED EDITION

No 'One Right Way'



***A Handbook for Parents
nurturing your new baby
Rhodanthe Lipsett***

DEDICATION:

Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Madge Claxton, 1889 - 1987.

A wise woman, greatly loved.

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Published in 2004 by Sea Change Publishing

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Second Edition 2007

Cover Design: Karen Curran, Unicorn Graphics www.unicorngraphics.com.au

Cover Photo: Natasha Stewart

Typesetting: Toni Esser, design and typesetting

Editing: Eileen Woods

Printed in Australia by Ligare Book Printer - www.ligare.com.au

Rhodanthe Lipsett

No 'One Right Way' nurturing your new baby.

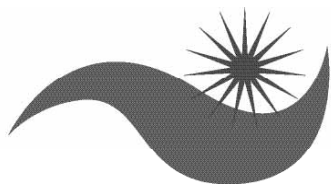
Includes index

ISBN 978-0-9803548-2-9

1. Infants - Care
2. Infants (Newborn) - Health and Hygiene
3. Infants - Nutrition

NOTE TO READERS

All care has been taken to provide accurate, safe information but it is impossible to cover every situation so please consult a competent health professional whenever you are in doubt about your baby's health or behaviour. A book can never be a substitute for an individual professional consultation. The author and the publishers cannot accept legal responsibility for any problems arising out of the contents of this book.



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FOREWORD

by Professor Lesley Barclay,

Director, Centre for Family Health and Midwifery, University of Technology, Sydney

This book is written to support new parents. I imagine it is first time mothers and fathers who will rely on it most; women (and men) who because of today's small families and often heavy work and study commitments have little previous experience on which to rely. Families are looking for information and reassurance as they move from often fearful 'coping' to the confidence that only time and experience can build. Rhodanthe Lipsett has accompanied many of us on that often lonely and challenging journey towards the ultimate fulfilment of motherhood and fatherhood and the confidence we eventually develop when we realise that there is no 'one right way'.

Our work and that of colleagues show many contemporary families, used to ready access to information and often pressed by time, are seeking a resource like this book. The book meets the particular needs of those early weeks and months when motherhood and fatherhood are most difficult because we lack experience in this new role. At the same time we are also getting to know and understand our new and uniquely different babies. This is the time when we are trying so hard to do the best for our babies and at the same time feel most vulnerable.

This book sets out to inform and explain without taking from parents (mostly mothers given the way most families organise these first few months) their own inherent capacity to know and best manage this experience themselves. Its title correctly captures the dilemma of parents who are often offered unsolicited and confusing advice. Parents, and those planning parenthood, have to sift the useful and correct information from all the advice given. Determining what is best for their baby can only happen after the baby is born. It is then, as we try to respond to cues and build a comfortable and nurturing relationship with this small but definite person, we discover that they themselves influence and shape this relationship astoundingly effectively. This process of negotiation is well described in this book. Rhodanthe allows us to explore, test out and learn about parenting and this baby at the same time. She provides immensely practical information and 'tips' that inspire confidence and that help us become effective, comfortable and enjoy the role of parent of a small infant as quickly as possible.

I am delighted to commend this book to women and men contemplating or experiencing new parenting and to their mothers and all those 'others' who are trying to help.

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PREFACE

The seeds for this book were planted more than half a century ago when I was a pupil midwife in a large outback Australian hospital.

On one particular morning an aboriginal grandmother and her 16 year old grand-daughter, Mary, arrived at the hospital. Mary was in advanced labour. The grandmother was taken to the office to provide the admission information and I was left to take care of Mary. I was about to suggest to Mary that she come with me from the foyer of the maternity unit where we were standing to the admitting room. Before we could move, she was gripped by a very strong contraction. Her grandmother had vanished, her pain was severe and the strange environment frightening. She was distressed. Against the wall was a polished timber table complete with a fine maidenhair fern in a large ceramic pot. Mary dived beneath the table. I dropped to all fours and was trying to persuade her to come out, when in through the door swept the delivery suite supervisor—a dignified midwife of ample proportion—one who was held in awe by all the pupil midwives. Her standards were exacting and she demanded a high performance from each of her pupils.

'Nurse! What on earth are you doing?' I explained the situation, and the next moment she too was down on the floor. Her stern expression softened and her voice became warm and encouraging. In response to Sister's coaxing Mary timidly crept out, but as she was helped to her feet, she was caught again by another strong contraction. She made no sound but flung her arms round Sister's neck, where she was comfortingly held. Sister's beautifully starched white veil slid down over one ear, but was totally ignored as she continued to reassure Mary.

I gathered my scattered wits. 'Sister, shall I collect the "prep" tray and take it to the anteroom?' Sister looked down at the frightened girl.

'No, nurse. I do not believe that Mary could handle a "prep".'

My world rocked. I firmly believed that all mothers should have a perineum - shave and an enema before giving birth. Next I offered to go into the delivery room and put up the stirrups—a routine procedure in preparation for the birth of a baby. Again sister looked at Mary's frightened face. 'No nurse, I do not think that Mary could handle stirrups. At least we have persuaded her to lie on this trolley.' A further blow to another of my assumptions—that stirrups were to be used for all normal births in the labour ward.

Sister continued, 'In fact I think that I will be delivering this baby on the trolley if I can persuade her to stay on it. However, you had better bring in a mattress and put it on the floor just in case we need it'. Another strong contraction. Mary scrambled off the trolley and went down on hands and knees. 'Baby stuck, baby stuck. Gran says rock.' As Mary rocked back and forth I looked helplessly at sister. 'Just rub her back firmly while I grab some gloves', she said. Suddenly Mary climbed back onto the trolley - stretcher. 'Baby come, baby come', she panted. Sister was prepared, gloved hands ready. Another push and the baby boy arrived. As the cord was cut I expected sister to hand the baby to me to take to the nursery to be bathed and weighed.

‘No, nurse. Mary will be very upset if you take the baby. Get a bassinet from the nursery and put it beside bed nine.’ She gently placed the little blood-covered baby into his mother’s arms and told me that we would bath and weigh him beside Mary’s bed. ‘It is likely that he will not go into the bassinet at all but spend his time in the bed with his mother.’ This is just what happened and Mary went home two days later instead of on day seven or eight as was customary then.

This birth occurred in the days when rules were rigid. There were certain ways things were to be done and we were expected to carry out our duties accordingly. The babies were kept in the nursery and could only be viewed through the glass window even by the fathers. They only left the nursery to be fed, and this with stop-watch precision—ten minutes on each breast and then back to their bassinets.

I was still reeling from the morning’s events when sister appeared at my elbow, stiffly starched and immaculate once more. I was writing my report of the birth of Mary’s baby. She fixed me with her firm eye, ‘Well nurse, tell me, what did you learn this morning?’

I thought for a minute and then replied, ‘I guess Sister, what I really learned was that there is “no one right way” of doing things. Sometimes rules need to be changed to fit particular circumstances.’

She smiled, ‘Quite right, see that you remember that’. And she swept off into her office.

I have never forgotten that lesson.

Babies are babies for such a short time that parents need to be able to delight in them and avoid unnecessary worries. Babies are a wonder and miracle of nature. Sadly, many parents find that the care and responsibility of their new baby are overwhelming, they become anxious and then doubt themselves when they need not do so.

They need to know that there are often many options from which to choose. They need to get sound information, and to feel free to question any advice they do not understand or which causes them anxiety. They need to know that care will vary from day to day and must be suited to each individual baby.

I wrote this book because I felt there was a place for one that addressed **in detail** the difficulties faced by parents in the early days and weeks after the birth of their babies. My aim is to inform, assist, inspire and encourage parents, particularly mothers who are most often the principal caregivers, so that they can have more ‘up times’ than ‘down times’. If they can experience less anxiety and greater confidence in these early weeks I believe it can set the pattern for the months and years ahead.

Here I offer much of the knowledge I gained during my career as I shared experiences with colleagues, cared for and worked with mothers, fathers and their babies and reared my own children. I have concentrated on the very young baby referring to older babies when appropriate. The same basic principles of care apply as a baby grows. I have repeated parts of some sections to explain a particular point being discussed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhodanthe Lipsett was born in South Australia and spent her early years on a fruit orchard at Cadell on the Murray River. She received her secondary education at the Presbyterian Girls' College in Adelaide.

Rhodanthe (pron. Row-dan-thee) began her career as a nurse at the Adelaide Children's Hospital, before gaining postgraduate experience at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Her love of caring for and educating mothers and their babies led her to specialise in midwifery at the Broken Hill and District Hospital. She further expanded her qualifications by gaining her Infant Welfare Certificate from Tresillian in Sydney. Rhodanthe then travelled to England where she spent the next two years gaining further experience in maternal and infant health.

On return to Australia Rhodanthe followed her interest in the care of mothers and their babies in the Australian Capital Territory's Baby Health Centres. This experience included the adventures associated with visiting mothers in the rural out-lying areas of Canberra during the 1950s.

Following her marriage to her husband John, there was a break in her career while she cared for their own three children.

Rhodanthe then joined the staff of the Queen Elizabeth II Postnatal Hospital in Canberra where she spent the next 18 years providing professional support and practical information for mothers and teaching parenting skills. By this time Rhodanthe was also teaching health care professionals both in the community and at the QE II.

Rhodanthe is a Fellow and a Life Member of the Australian College of Midwives. In 1992 she received an Order of Australia Medal for services to infant health and the care of mothers and babies.

Since retirement, Rhodanthe has remained an active member of the College, and continues to be enthusiastically involved in furthering the welfare of mothers and their babies. Rhodanthe and John live in Canberra.

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