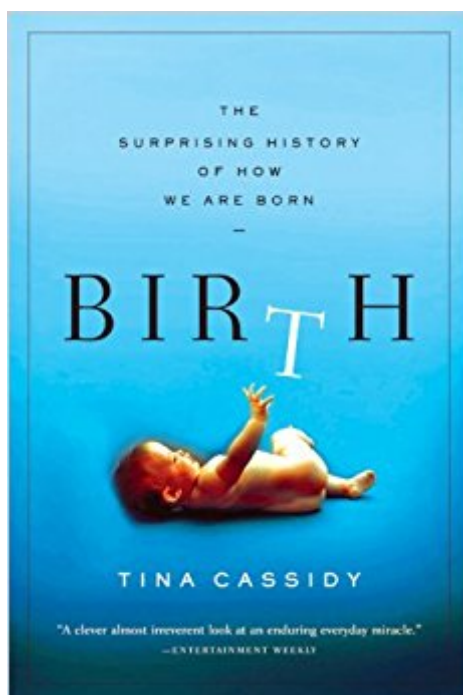


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# Birth: The Surprising History Of How We Are Born



## Synopsis

Well-researched and engaging . . . Birth is a clever, almost irreverent look at an enduring everyday miracle. (A-) [Entertainment Weekly](#); Wonderful. Packed full of information, a brilliant mixture of ancient wisdom and modern science. [Kate Mosse](#), author of the New York Times best seller, *Labyrinth*; Birth is a power-packed book. . . . A lively, engaging, and often witty read, a quirky, eye-opening account of one of life's most elemental experiences. [The Boston Globe](#) Published to widespread acclaim, Tina Cassidy's smart, engaging book is the first world history of childbirth in fifty years. From evolution to the epidural and beyond, Tina Cassidy presents an intelligent, enlightening, and impeccably researched cultural history of how and why we're born the way we are. Women have been giving birth for millennia but that's about the only constant in the final stage of the great process that is human reproduction. Why is it that every culture and generation seems to have its own ideas about the best way to give birth? Cassidy explores the physical, anthropological, political, and religious factors that have and will continue to influence how women bring new life into the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone who has taken a prenatal education class in the last decade can detail much of what Boston Globe reporter Cassidy documents about birthing battles in her enjoyable new book. What she so cogently adds is a history of Western practices and attitudes surrounding birth, from the

"God-sibs" (or "gossips") who sat by a woman's bed in Europe and early America to the scheduled cesarean of today. The book is well written and will be an important eye-opener to many. Cassidy works hard to remain neutral, but a preference for the discourse of "natural" birth creeps in. She looks nostalgically back at times when most women gave birth at home with female midwives in attendance. This leads to some problematic moments, as when she wants to argue that, historically, birth was not the danger to women's lives that many today assume. But then she has to admit that pioneer women wrote their wills before giving birth and that most women who die in childbirth today are in the non-Western world, where they lack access to hospitals. This is, by Cassidy's admission, the work of a woman disappointed by her own birthing experience. But that, too, is a product of our time— the idea that we "deserve" a certain experience as we give birth. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"It's as true of feminism as anything else that if we don't know our history we're condemned to repeat it. A liberating look at how assumptions have changed of what a good childbirth is supposed to be." "It's remarkable how little we know about the one piece of human history we all share: birth. Tina Cassidy has written a lively and informative journey through centuries of what women could really expect when they were expecting." "This smart and fun read is full of 'who knew?' moments that show in fascinating detail how birth has affected our culture in so many ways--even explaining the origins of gossip. Mothers, non-mothers and those who don't want to think about all the messy details of childbirth will find this a gripping read." "The history of birth, as Cassidy deftly tells it, might well be summed up as *What No One Ever Expected When They're Expecting*: Crank-and-pulley birthing systems and fish-bladder vacuum extractors. Man-midwives in drag and obstetricians trained on 'mock mothers.' With wit and aplomb, Cassidy covers the ongoing march of birthing fads, from the surreal horrors of the Twilight Sleep to Lamaze, doulas, and the current craze for elective C-sections." -- MARY ROACH, AUTHOR OF *STIFF: THE CURIOUS LIVES OF HUMAN CADAVERS* AND *SPOOK: SCIENCE TACKLES THE AFTE*

Interesting and informative book, but I found it a little rough reading sometimes. Some chapters were data-rich and well-edited, while others seemed bare bones and under researched. WAY too much explanation and multiple mentions of craniotomy. I'm currently pregnant and had to skip some of them because it was too much for me to digest. I agree with some other reviewers that the author has an obvious agenda and wove some politics into this book, so the reader should keep that in

mind. She is very evidently against traditional medical intervention and very pro-new age approaches to birth. As someone who personally would love to deliver at home, try a waterbirth, or whatever new resource might be available to me, I have complicated pregnancies and have no choice but to deliver in a hospital in the OR. The author leaves very little room for such situations and to some extent, she demonizes doctors and hospitals.

A fascinating book about the history of modern childbirth. I would say it did feel a little biased toward a particularly secularist point of view, which for the subject wasn't a deal breaker. I found many aspects shocking. Some, I knew about, but not in great detail. There are many parts that are extremely disturbing, but history is what it is, and that isn't always pretty. A good look at where we have come and what we could still improve.

The book lived up to my expectations. As a mother who had a phenomenal first birth with a midwife in a hospital, I kept questioning why so many friends had sections and what the hell would have happened to all of them 100, 500, 1000 years ago if they "needed" modern med to survive the birth. The answers were at times horrifying, and while I wouldn't take this source as 100 percent truth and if I wanted to know more I'd dig for some primary sources, it was a good, concise, answer to what birth was like for precious generations!

As a nurse and mother I found the subject interesting and appreciated the historical account and details. I had no idea how awful birth had been for some. I am appalled to think that there are women who are allowed to "choose" c-sections! Major surgery, pain, limited mobility, infection (a friend died from flesh eating bacteria). It was happily Lamaze for me and home packing lunches in two days (OK, Mom came and helped - love that woman!)

I really enjoyed the content - the subject is really important and I appreciate that this book was written. But, the structure was confusing. The final summary chapter should have gone in the beginning - the tone is snarky enough that the whole way through the book you're left wondering about the author's opinion. The final chapter presents a bit of insight into her opinion/purpose for writing the book. I was actually surprised by how her opinion wasn't very strong. The book details some incredibly horrific things that have been done to/tried on women throughout history and the conclusion in the end is that childbirth is a reflection of the culture we live in - which in a way excuses it, or minimize the need to correct the childbirth system in this country.

Interesting view of childbirth through the centuries. I'm not sure where her 1% estimate for death due to birth came from, as the rate is much higher than that even in places with good midwifery and limited access to hospitals. There's good reason why there is so much ambivalence giving birth worldwide through many different cultures. Otherwise a nice, engaging read

Heartbreaking at times and not something I would recommend for expectant mothers, nothing is left out of this history of birth. It is very interesting and written in an easy to read manner. Each story or fact is well documented, and it answers questions you never knew you had about birth.

All-around fascinating. I'm not even a mother, but I still found the book to be totally absorbing. With a history of how (& with whom) women have given birth through the ages, & what was done when things went wrong, you'll learn a lot from this eye-opener.

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