Letter from the Editor

Leaving a Lamaze Legacy

Abstract

The author reaches out across the years to establish a new link with Madame Blanche Cohen and acknowledge her legacy in ongoing efforts to promote natural childbirth.

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Seasons greetings, Madame Blanche Cohen! For all of us who became part of the natural childbirth movement in the United States several decades ago, your name is well known. We will enjoy reading Elaine Zwelling's interview with you, featured on pages 1–8 in this issue of the journal. In Marjorie Karmel's book, *Thank you, Dr. Lamaze* (1959), we learned how Dr. Lamaze sent her to work with you. You are credited with teaching Marjorie how to give birth and being her monitrice. I even have to wonder what percent of the Lamaze Method of Childbirth Preparation (as psychoprophylaxis came to be known in the United States) was actually developed by you.

Those of us who spend a significant part of our lives furthering the development and use of psychoprophylaxis in childbirth are astounded to learn that, until recently, you have been unaware that the method is still being practiced. We are so pleased to be able to tell you of the importance your work has played in many of our lives. Merci! We also thank your husband, Henry, who found us on the Web and helped us establish a new link with you. We hope you enjoy the article by Michele Ondeck (1996) that we sent to you, describing Michele's efforts to take the method back to Russia where it had previously died out, as you say it has in France.

Down deep, we all have the desire to know that the life we live and the work we do will help establish a legacy for future generations. We can now assure you of the legacy to which you have contributed. But we remain mindful of all the years when you did not know about the lasting aspect of this important contribution. There seems to be a lesson for us in that gap of time.

In an era when most young women and most obstetric care providers do not comprehend the long-lasting, life-altering gift of a well-supported natural childbirth, it is easy for childbirth educators to become discouraged about their work. Childbirth educators know, and the research supports, that childbirth is one of the rare opportunities in life for women to discover and get in touch with their inner strength. They can emerge with life-long, increased internal integration. This, in turn, has potential to influence their mothering and the course of their lives. However, it is difficult to send out this message, and we do not see rapid changes in public awareness like the changes that followed Marjorie Karmel's book

However, your example serves to help us "keep the faith." When we do

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the good work that fits with our perception of our life mission, we cannot expect immediate feedback on the contribution we are making. If we are fortunate, we may find out years later about the lives we have touched and the legacy we will leave behind. Or we may be like Dr. Lamaze and never be in an earthly position to know about the legacy left, which in no way diminishes its importance. So keeping your example in mind, we will enter the next millennium acknowledging once again the importance of our work.

—Sharron S. Humenick, RN, PhD, LCCE, FACCE,
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References

- Karmel, M. (1959). *Thank you, Dr. Lamaze*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Co.
- Ondeck, M. (1996). Rebirth of childbirth education in Russia: a case study. *Journal of Perinatal Education* 5(1), 25-29.