



GERMANY

## MIDWIFE

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ANN LOOS MEASURING THE TUMMY OF ELISABETH WITTWER. SHE IS PREGNANT FOR THE SECOND TIME AND WILL GIVE BIRTH TO HER BABY ALICE AT HOME. THEIR FIRST DAUGHTER LILITH WAS BORN IN HOSPITAL. THE BIRTH WAS INDUCED, AND ELISABETH FELT UNCOMFORTABLE IN STRANGE SURROUNDINGS IN THE COMPANY OF STRANGERS. FOR HER HOSPITAL BIRTH WAS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE. HER SECOND DAUGHTER IS 21 DAYS OVERDUE, BUT SHE PREFER TO GIVE BIRTH AT HOME. ELISABETH WITTWER SAYS: "MY FIRST DAUGHTER LILITH WAS BROUGHT INTO THIS WORLD, WHILE I FEEL THAT I MYSELF HAVE GIVEN BIRTH TO ALICE."



ANN LOOS, 37, IS A MIDWIFE WHO IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HER WORK. SHE IS ALSO ONE OF THE LAST MIDWIVES IN GERMANY WHO IS STILL HELPING WOMEN WHO WANT TO GIVE BIRTH AT HOME.

THE COUNTRY HAS ABOUT 20,000 MIDWIVES, AND ABOUT 3,000 OF THEM WORK FREELANCE.

OF THE APPROXIMATELY 750,000 BIRTHS THIS YEAR, ABOUT 4,000 WILL TAKE PLACE AT HOME.

RISING COSTS, INCREASING UNCERTAINTY ON THE PART OF THE INSURERS AND SOCIAL PRESSURE MEAN THAT MORE AND MORE MIDWIVES ARE GIVING UP THEIR JOBS.

OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS THE INSURANCE PREMIUM HAS INCREASED MORE THAN FIVEFOLD. IN JUNE 2015 NEW EXCLUSION CRITERIA WERE ESTABLISHED FOR HOME BIRTHS. NOW, IF A BABY IS MORE THAN THREE DAYS OVERDUE, THE MOTHER MUST BE ADMITTED TO A CLINIC. THIS IS UNUSUAL FROM A SCIENTIFIC POINT OF VIEW AS BABIES ARE RARELY BORN ON THE EXPECTED DATE. IN ORDER TO QUALIFY FOR THE BACKUP SURCHARGE, A MIDWIFE MUST HELP DELIVER AT LEAST ONE BABY EVERY THREE MONTHS. THIS, TOGETHER WITH THE EXCLUSION CRITERIA THAT HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED, COULD SEE THE END OF HOME BIRTHS.

LEGISLATORS HAVE ALSO INTRODUCED A "GUARANTEE SURCHARGE" TO HELP MIDWIVES COVER THEIR EXPENSES. BUT THE COMPENSATION HAS A LIMIT OF €4,340. THE MIDWIVES THEMSELVES HAVE TO PAY ADDITIONAL COSTS. FOR THE MIDWIVES WORKING IN OBSTETRICS, THE NEW COMPENSATION SYSTEM HAS LED TO A DETERIORATION IN THE QUALITY OF SERVICE. BECAUSE OF THIS, MANY MIDWIVES CAN ONLY PROVIDE CARE IMMEDIATELY BEFORE AND AFTER BIRTH.

ANN LOOS IS OFTEN BOOKED UP FOR MONTHS ON END. IN ORDER TO FIND A FREE MIDWIFE, WOMEN HAVE TO BOOK DURING THEIR FIRST WEEK OF PREGNANCY. MIDWIVES CAN NO LONGER GUARANTEE COVERAGE. OVER LAST 10 YEARS THE INSURANCE PREMIUM HAS INCREASED MORE THAN FIVEFOLD TO €7,639. THIS DRAMATIC RISE IS BEING JUSTIFIED BY THE INCREASING COSTS FOR BIRTH DAMAGES. THIS IS IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT CASES OF BIRTH DAMAGES HAVE ACTUALLY DECREASED. FOR INDIVIDUAL CASES, NO PARTICULAR BRANCH OF THE PROFESSION MAY BE HELD RESPONSIBLE.

ANN LISTENS IN WITH A PINARD HORN.  
SHE USES IT IN ADDITION TO THE CTG (CARDIOTACOGRAPHY),  
TO GET A CLEARER IDEA OF THE BABY'S PROGRESS.



WHILE MIDWIVES IN CLINICS HAVE TO LOOK AFTER SEVERAL WOMEN AT THE SAME TIME, ANN LOOS TRAVELS OVER 50KM TO HELP DELIVER SOME BABIES. HERE SHE VISITS A FAMILY THAT LIVES ON A FARM.



WITH UP TO 30 HOME BIRTHS PER YEAR, THE AVERAGE MIDWIFE IS UNDER A LOT OF STRESS. ANN LOOS SAYS: "NEXT YEAR I WANT A SUMMER WITHOUT BEING ON CALL, AND TO EXPERIENCE NORMAL FAMILY LIFE. THAT WOULD BE EASIER, IF I HAD ENOUGH COLLEAGUES WHO COULD COVER FOR ME. IT IS HARD FOR ME TO TURN DOWN EXPECTANT MOTHERS, BUT THESE BREAKS HELP ME RECHARGE MY BATTERIES, SO THAT I CAN KEEP ON WORKING AS A MIDWIFE."

MIDWIVES IN CLINICS ON THE OTHER HAND, OFTEN HAVE TO DELIVER ONE BABY AFTER ANOTHER. A MIDWIFE MUST OFTEN LOOK AFTER SEVERAL WOMEN AT THE SAME TIME. ANN HAS TO TRAVEL LONG DISTANCES TO SEE THE EXPECTANT MOTHERS. SHE ALSO LOOKS AFTER THE WOMEN OVER THE COURSE OF THE PREGNANCY, SO THAT SHE CAN UNDERSTAND THEIR NEEDS AND FORESEE COMPLICATIONS MORE EFFECTIVELY.

ANN LOOS SPENT THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF HER CAREER AS A MIDWIFE WORKING IN A CLINIC. THAT EXPERIENCE CONVINCED HER THAT THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT WAS MORE CONDUCIVE TO A PEACEFUL BIRTH.

MANY WOMEN WERE UNHAPPY WITH THEIR EXPERIENCES IN CLINICS. THEY FELT THAT THEY WEREN'T LISTENED TO, THAT LABOUR WAS INDUCED WITH MEDICATION. THEIR MEMORIES OF BIRTH WERE OFTEN TRAUMATIC.

FOR THIS REASON MANY WOMEN PREFER TO GIVE BIRTH AT HOME, WHERE IT IS A MORE NATURAL PROCESS. THE WOMEN HAVE FAITH IN THE MIDWIVES AND THEIR ABILITIES.

ANN LOOS IS ONE OF THE LAST MIDWIVES WHO HELPS WITH HOME BIRTHS. WHEN ASKED WHY SHE IS PREPARED TO WORK UNDER INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT CONDITIONS, SHE SAYS: "I AM CONVINCED THAT I AM DOING THE RIGHT THING. AFTER EVERY BIRTH I APPRECIATE HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR THE FAMILIES."

AND THIS IS EVIDENT IN THE NUMBER OF FAMILIES WHO STILL PREFER HOME BIRTH.



SABINE RICHTER IS EXPECTING HER THIRD CHILD. SHE GAVE BIRTH TO HER FIRST TWO CHILDREN AT HOME. ALTHOUGH THE PREGNANCY WAS WITHOUT COMPLICATIONS, THE CHILD TURNED DURING LABOUR AND HAD TO BE BORN IN HOSPITAL.



SABINE RICHTER IS WAITING FOR HER CONTRACTIONS TO BECOME MORE REGULAR. THE MIDWIFE, ANN LOOS, WAS CALLED SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT AND WAITED IN THE KITCHEN IN ORDER TO GIVE SABINE THE REST SHE NEEDS.

ANN LOOS EXAMINES THE HEART SOUNDS OF THE CHILD WITH THE CTG.  
SABINE IS EXPECTING HER THIRD CHILD. THE FIRST TWO CHILDREN  
WERE BORN AT HOME. FREDERIC HOLDS SABINE'S HAND.



SHORTLY BEFORE SABINE RICHTER MOVES TO THE AREA  
WHERE SHE WILL GIVE BIRTH, ANN LOOS FEELS HER BELLY.



KATRIN WIESE IN THE AFTERMATH OF BIRTH. SHE HAD VERY LITTLE PAIN DURING BIRTH, AND HER BABY WAS BORN AFTER ONLY THREE HOURS OF LABOUR.





PAULA 23, WAS HERSELF BORN AT HOME. FOR HER HOME BIRTH WAS A NO-BRAINER. OTHER WOMEN TOLD HER THAT THEY WOULD NEVER DREAM OF GIVING BIRTH IN A CLINIC.



PAULA MICHAELIS DURING THE BIRTH OF HER FIRST CHILD. SHE HAS STRONG LABOUR PAINS BUT, AFTER ENTERING THE BIRTH POOL, SHE IS ABLE TO HANDLE THESE PAINS BETTER. SHORTLY BEFORE BIRTH, THE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OF THE MIDWIFE IS ESSENTIAL.



THIS IS DANTON, WHO IS 56 CM TALL AND WEIGHS 4.1 KG. HE IS THE BABY OF PAULA AND FRIDTJOF. ANN LOOS IS ONE OF THE LAST MIDWIVES WHO STILL HELPS DELIVER BABIES AT HOME. WHEN ASKED WHY SHE IS PREPARED TO WORK UNDER INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT CONDITIONS, SHE SAYS: "I AM CONVINCED THAT I AM DOING THE RIGHT THING. AFTER EVERY BIRTH APPRECIATE HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR THE FAMILIES."

DANTON IS 56 CM TALL AND WEIGHS 4.1 KG.  
HIS PARENTS ARE PAULA AND FRIDTJOF. THE NEWBORN BABY  
IS WEIGHED AND MEASURED ABOUT HALF AN HOUR AFTER BIRTH.



ANN IS A MIDWIFE, BUT SHE IS ALSO THE MOTHER OF TWO CHILDREN, IN ADDITION TO HAVING A PARTNER. SHE HAS A LOT OF COMMITMENTS IN BOTH HER DOMESTIC AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE.





IN THE FOREGROUND SVEN PLAYS WITH HIS SON HENNO. ANN LOOKS AFTER THE CHILDREN UNTIL SVEN COMES HOME. HERE ANN IS ANSWERING SOME EMAILS ON HER LAPTOP.



ANN LOOS WITH HER SON HENNO IN THE KITCHEN.  
ANN IS A MIDWIFE, BUT SHE IS ALSO THE MOTHER  
OF TWO CHILDREN, IN ADDITION TO HAVING A PARTNER.  
SHE HAS A LOT OF COMMITMENTS IN BOTH HER DOMESTIC  
AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

ANN LOOS WITH HER SONS HENNO AND ENRIK. ANN IS SEPARATED FROM ENRIK'S FATHER. THE WORK OF A MIDWIFE CAN PLACE A LOT OF STRAIN ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.





ANN WORKS PART-TIME AS A MIDWIFE.  
IN THE MORNING SHE VISITS UP TO  
THREE WOMEN, AFTER WHICH SHE PICKS  
UP HER SON HENNO FROM THE KINDERGARDEN.

ANN LOOS FEEDING HER SON HENNO.





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