

Midwife overcomes

Continued from 12A

1993, had worked in construction and later drove a school bus.

She also had studied to become a registered nurse but was too shaken to return for her final year after the deaths of two children, Kent and Eleanor, in a 1972 car crash caused by a drunken motorist.

Both had been students at Florida A&M University. Eleanor, whose twin sister is named Elinor, had been interested in midwifery and often helped her mother.

The Miltons used \$5,000 in insurance benefits remaining after funeral and hospital expenses and a \$3,000 inheritance from one of Huey Milton's brothers to build a midwifery clinic in Eleanor's memory.

It opened in April 1976, but four months later lightning caused a fire that destroyed the clinic and house. Both were rebuilt. A second fire, which may have been caused by an electrical short, closed the clinic again in 1979.

It was rebuilt a second time with help from friends and neighbors and reopened in 1980. Hospitals donated a surplus incubator and two beds.

Five years later, the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services shut down the clinic for violating ventilation and paperwork requirements. The community again pitched in and the clinic reopened 20 months later, renamed as a birthing center.

HRS, however, was not fin-

ished. In 1988, the agency suspended Milton's license. Officials blamed her for a still birth and accused her of violating regulations by taking patients with high-risk pregnancies.

It took more than two years, but Milton got her license back after an administrative hearing and court appeal.

"I didn't know people would stand right to your face and look in your eyes and tell you you did something that you didn't do," she said. "I was unprepared for that."

Midwifery itself was under attack as being unsafe.

The Florida Legislature passed a law in 1984 to limit midwifery to registered nurses, known as nurse midwives. Milton and others without nursing degrees are licensed midwives. Those already licensed could continue but no others, except those already in school, would be licensed.

Milton believes that doctors, afraid of losing patients, were behind the law and the effort to revoke her license. After years of debate, the Legislature reversed itself in 1992 and again permitted licensing new non-nurse midwives. But there are still only 41 in the state.

Milton recalled her struggles in "Why Not Me?" published in 1993 and her second book is awaiting publication.

She believes God made it her destiny to be a midwife.

"I was born to be one," she said. "Nothing I tried to do succeeded when I wanted to waiver away from midwifery. Everything went to pot."

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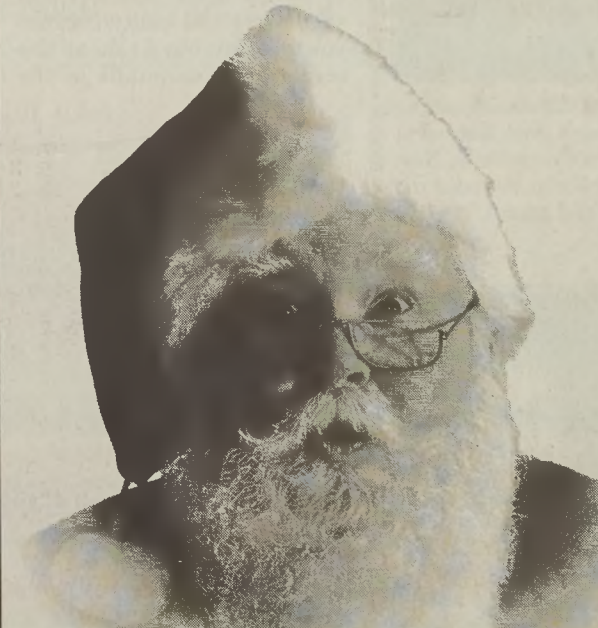
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