

Shelton, Lovie: God Dealt Well with the Midwives ^[1]

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Lovie Shelton: God dealt well with the midwives

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 10/8/2016. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

During a half-century of midwifery, Lovie Beard Shelton brought thousands of babies into this world. She grew up on a farm in Nash County. Her mother paid her tuition at Atlantic Christian College (now Barton College) by carrying sides of pork and beef to the college's dining room. Lovie studied nursing at Norfolk General Hospital and at the UNC School of Public Health, including a stint with the Frontier Nursing Corps serving the wives of Appalachian miners. To reach the mountain women, she often had to travel on horseback.

She later accepted a scholarship to study midwifery in Edinburgh, Scotland, and came home to Eastern North Carolina as the state's first registered nurse midwife. She is now 82. We talked at her home in little Washington, 100 miles east of Raleigh.



Lovie Shelton. Photo by Chris Seward, 2006. To request permission to ~~for the photo to be used~~ purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

I was born in Nash County, Bailey Township. We come up on that land and on that farm. Mom was in the house cooking and looking after children, and because there wasn't a boy there to do the things with the right kind of heart, I fell to the I

We had nine mules, and I just loved them. We had hogs, and they had to have clean straw in the winter so they could save their little piglets. We had cows, and I pushed their babies out, and I put the calves to their mothers to nurse.

I loved the guineas and the turkeys, because they wouldn't nest up close to the house. They were in the woods, so I was always roaming the woods and the fields looking for their nests and eggs. I saw the Lord's hands in the animals, and ho

I graduated in 1942 from Bailey High School. I didn't particularly like school. I was the tallest one in the class and probably the biggest one. I always had the biggest feet and biggest bones and biggest everything, but not the biggest brain. I g

Now the other girls, they could fix the beds, they could clean the floors, they could cook. I wasn't nothing at none of that stuff hardly. I really wasn't. But I could relate to the patient, and I did it with my whole heart. This was my talent: making t

When I was a midwife, a call would be any hour of the day or night, rainstorm, snow, sleet. But when the call came in, I would get up. I would pick up my bags, and I was out the door.

The women whose babies I delivered didn't have money, and the doctors didn't want them. But oh Lord no, I didn't always get paid. I've been paid in peace of mind. You know, you can't turn somebody down or you're not a Christian. You kno

They would have some money. Forty dollars wasn't a whole lot. But you see, I didn't press for it when the circumstances were such that I couldn't.

There were lots of hard circumstances. Some cases, things were so bad that I brought the women home with me. I had babies in that room, babies in here, babies in there on the floor.

I brought them home if there wasn't enough heat or the men were drunk or abusive. Or if they were taking too long and I didn't feel like I could stay away from home.

I was a single woman with four children then! You know, I was only married 9 1/2 years before my husband died. I had two women in the neighborhood that would come over here. I had an understanding with them. I would give them \$5 if I w

At most deliveries, there was an excitement, a happiness. Of course, sometimes there was a sadness too. I did deliver still-born babies. And I knew some babies were coming into bad situations where they weren't wanted or loved.

I did the best I could with them and referred them to social services and talked to them, but there is just so much you can do, you know. You pray. You know that the Lord wanted them to be treated decently and given their chance.

I tried to do my part. I could convey to the women that I cared about them, that I cared about the babies. Every time I had a delivery, that baby would cry and I'd think about Mary in that stable. I thought about her a lot.

The Bible says, "God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied ... and because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses." (Exodus 1:20-21) I take that for a promise. I didn't do miracles, but I was his handmaiden, his

Over the years I did get frightened sometimes. One occasion I did get frightened, it was sort of cold and it was just pouring down rain. I got a call to go to Pamlico County at one o'clock at night. I got to Edwards and there's a bridge and a low

I saw a patrolman and I stopped him. I asked him, could he take me to Pamlico County? He said, no, I can't do that. But you go around to Bridgeton and go around that way. So I did that. When I got to Bridgeton, I turned and I ran into water t

I had the feeling that I had driven the car off into the Atlantic Ocean. That car was floating. To this day, I remember the terror I felt. I thought, how crazy can a woman be?

That was a frightening experience. I remember that night saying, Lord, where am I? Water, water everywhere, no lights, no cars coming or going, no nothing. But it floated me out of there, and I did the delivery.

I tell you, I always prayed and talked to the Lord: to take care of me and the baby, to get me safely there, and to keep my car going. I really believed it calmed me. Sometime I'd just go down the road talking to the Lord about it, right there in t

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina: :

Lovie Shelton lived from June 20, 1925-March 29, 2013.

Additional Resources:

Yarger, Lisa. 2016. *Lovie: the story of a Southern midwife and an unlikely friendship*.Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Obituary: Lovie Shelton. Paul Funeral Home and Crematory of Washington. http://www.paulfuneralhome.com/memsol.cgi?user_id=1666131 ^[3] (Accessed 3/2/2016)

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