

## HA HA HOO

Some of you may have seen, "Call the Midwife."

Grantly Dick-Read was a GP in the East End of London in the 1930s. In his book, "Childbirth Without Fear, he recalled seeing a woman giving birth without seeming to suffer from any pain.

"Didn't it hurt?" He asked her afterwards to which she replied, "It wasn't meant to, was it doctor?" This led him to believe that the pain of childbirth is intensified by fear and ignorance and to suggest that women would have better experiences of labour if they were educated about birth.

From this beginning came the birth of The National Childbirth Trust whose antenatal classes I attended when pregnant with our firstborn. We were taught relaxation, how to breathe through the contractions (eg ha ha hoo) and informed about every aspect of labour.

Mine was a breech birth. I was left to labour for a very long time knowing that the outcome would be a forceps delivery. I used the techniques I had been taught and these helped me to such an extent that I was inspired to train as an NCT teacher.

Together with a fellow trainee, who is still a good friend, we started the NCT Watford and Bushey branch, offering classes, postnatal and breastfeeding support. There were babysitting circles, coffee mornings and fundraising sales of baby clothes.

I taught classes in my own home for 14 years. At the beginning I taught only women as was the custom then. However, after a trip to the States where I witnessed Lamaze classes, I was inspired to start teaching couples. I continued teaching throughout my own pregnancies, even when I was 8 months pregnant with our third child.

The classes began at 8pm. Before everyone arrived I needed to settle our three children. After giving them dinner, bathing them, reading stories and putting them to bed, I would race around the house picking up toys, cleaning the loo, rearranging the furniture, putting out books and other teaching materials. Then exhausted and collapsing from my efforts I would teach the class relaxation! Sometimes my youngest would awaken and I'd have the opportunity to demonstrate nappy changing on a real live baby rather than on a doll!

At the end of each course I would hold class reunions when everyone brought their babies. Photos would be taken of them lined up along the sofa. They've all now grown up now and many are parents themselves. Many of my NCT couples have remained friends and still see one another after all these years. It was a very special time in their lives – and in my mine.

The skills I learned as an NCT teacher were of real benefit when I began my next career as a lecturer at West Herts College.

This week, our daughter in law, who is expecting her first baby in May, will be attending her first NCT class which will be taking place on Zoom! Lucky teacher – no clearing up for her!

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**Author's note – *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens.**

**See photo on next page.**

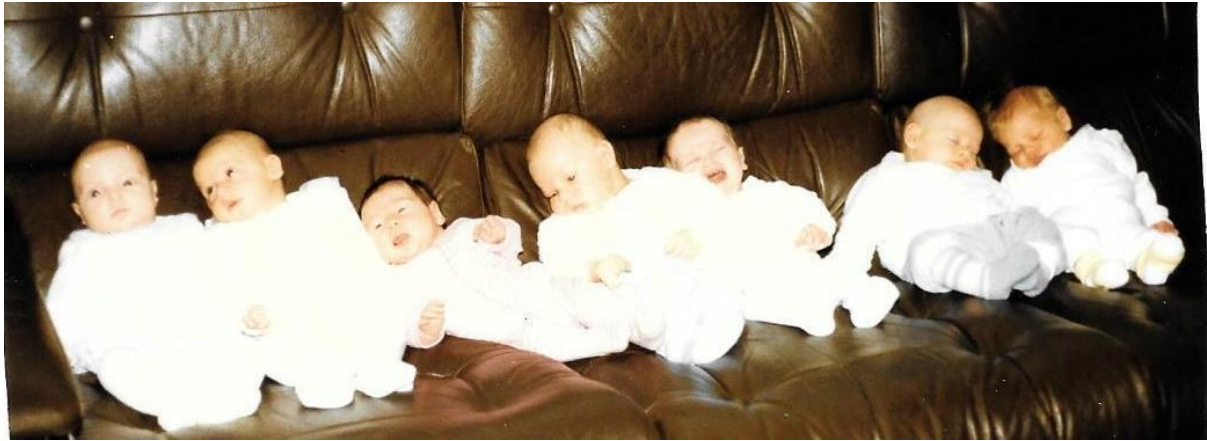


Photo shows the parents' babies lined up at a class reunion in the 1980s including identical twins on the left hand side.