

# SPOTLIGHT TITLE FEBRUARY

*the secrets of midwives*  
by Sally Hepworth



SALLY HEPWORTH  
*the secrets*  
*of midwives*

*three generations of women*  
*one captivating tale of life, loss, and love*

'This is women's  
fiction at its finest'  
LIANE MORIARTY  
author of  
Big Little Lies



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## Praise for *the secrets of midwives*

“This is women’s fiction at its finest. Sally Hepworth has written a wonderfully satisfying story... touching, tender, and meticulously researched, giving the reader a fascinating window into the amazing world of midwifery.”

Liane Moriarty, author of *The Husband’s Secret* and *Big Little Lies*

“Compelling... Family secrets test the bonds between three women—Neva, her mother Grace, and her grandmother Floss—as they bring babies into the world and navigate their own complex paths. The story deepens as it moves through their varied perspectives to its powerful conclusion.”

Christina Baker Kline, author of *The Orphan Train*

“From the first page, I could not put this book down. Hepworth delves into family secrets and family love in two different eras, adding mystery and plot twists at a breathless exhilarating pace.

I simply love this book!”

Ann Hood, author of *The Knitting Circle*

“With empathy and keen insight, Hepworth delivers a page-turning novel. This is a rare tale that weaves together the past and the present in a totally absorbing narrative. Hepworth illuminates one of the most important moments in a woman’s life—when she becomes a mother—and spins a story that will hold you captivated until the end.”

Emily Giffin, author of *The One and Only*

“Hepworth’s debut enchants...as three midwives unravel their secrets in the path of a classic New England storm... combines vibrant and nuanced characters with a breathtaking plot.”

Beatriz Williams, author of *A Hundred Summers*

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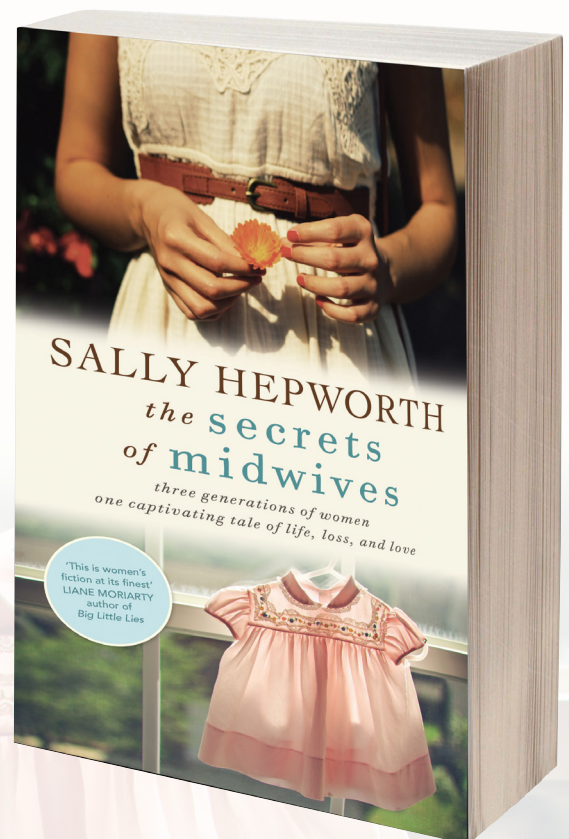
## About *the secrets of midwives*

*In a family of midwives, some secrets are too big to keep hidden.*

Neva Bradley, a third-generation midwife, is determined to keep the details surrounding her own pregnancy - including the identity of the baby's father - hidden from her family and co-workers for as long as possible.

Her mother, Grace, finds it impossible to let this secret rest, even while her own life begins to crumble around her.

For Floss, Neva's grandmother and a retired midwife, Neva's situation thrusts her back 60 years in time to a secret that eerily mirrors her granddaughter's - a secret which, if revealed, will have life-changing consequences for them all.



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## *About Sally Hepworth*

Sally Hepworth is the author of *The Secrets of Midwives*, a novel about three generations of midwives. The novel will be published worldwide in English, as well as in French, Italian, German, the Czech and Slovak.

Sally has lived around the world, spending extended periods in Singapore, the U.K. and Canada, where she worked in event management and Human Resources.



Sally lives in Melbourne, Australia with her husband and two children. She is currently working on her next novel.

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The release of *the secrets of midwives* will be supported by

Dumpbin promotion on release  
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And a national media campaign of reviews and feature stories pitched in

*Australian Women's Weekly*  
*New Idea*  
*Woman's Day*  
*YOURS* magazine  
*Who* magazine

With national radio and TV interviews to be pitched.

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## A conversation with *Sally Hepworth*

Q. How did you come to write the book?

A. There is a saying among writers “Write the book you want to read.” That’s what I did. Being the mother of young children (and pregnant while I wrote book), I was finding myself drawn to novels such as *The Birth House* by Ami McKay and *Midwives* by Chris Bohjalian. I have always thought there was a certain magic to midwifery—for a while, after I left high school, I even considered becoming a midwife. So, when it came time to start a novel, there was no choice to make.

I researched for months before I wrote a word. While I knew I was going to write about midwives, I had no idea what the actual story would be. I had a suspicion it would involve a mother and a daughter—particularly when I found out I was carrying a daughter—but it wasn’t until I read some fascinating stories about midwifery in the 1940s and 50s that Floss’s character (a grandmother) was born.

For me, the best plots start with a question, and the question I landed on for this book was: “Why would a woman hide the identity of her baby’s father?” I like books that have a big upheaval really early on—a ‘call to action’ for the readers—so I knew that by the end of the first chapter, the reader would find out that Neva was pregnant, and that she wouldn’t reveal the identity of the father. At first, I didn’t know why she was hiding it, and I didn’t know who the father was, but as I wrote, I started to figure it out.

But when all is said and done, *The Secrets of Midwives* is a book about family. What makes a mother, what binds family together, and the role of biology. In writing this book, I found answers to a whole lot of questions I never knew I had. And I suspect it is no coincidence that this book took me nine months to write. In effect, in 2012, I gave birth to two babies.

Q. In the novel there are many differing opinions about the “right” way to give birth, even among the midwives. Why did you choose to include this in the book?

A. In my experience, there still exists a lot of debate over the “right” way to give birth so I thought it was important for authenticity to include this in the book. Also, the idea of “right” and “wrong” tied in with the novel’s theme: family. Unfortunately, there is still a commonly held belief that there is a “right” and “wrong” kind of family. Or at least a “good” and a “better” type. But these days, there are so many different kinds of families—blended, adoptive, single-parent, same-sex parents, communities of singles. Of course, there are a lot of (strong) opinions on this too! To me, this was all rich fodder for a novel.

As I started researching for this book, I read a lovely line in a book that said childbirth was a woman’s first battle as a mother, and it was this battle that made her a warrior, capable of protecting her child. I found this fascinating, but also troubling. If birth makes a mother a warrior, where did it leave adoptive parents? Step-parents? Fathers?

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It was also troubling on a personal level. My son had been born naturally and my daughter was due to be born by scheduled C-section. I had a sense that it didn't matter how the baby was born, that the birth had no continued bearing on the relationship between mother and child, but the more I read about the transformative quality of natural birth, the more I wondered.

In writing this book, and in giving birth to my daughter by C-section, I was able to find answers to my questions. I have more respect for natural birth and midwifery now than I ever did, and I think a woman's ability to provide everything her child needs through pregnancy and birth (and beyond!) is astonishing—even magical. And the idea of a home birth, I'll admit, holds a certain appeal for me now that it hadn't before. But I finally determined that there is no "right" way to give birth, because there is no "wrong" way. You don't become a warrior because of the way you give birth. You become a warrior because of the depth of the love you feel for your child.

And while labor may be the first battle you'll fight for your child, compared to the battles that still lie ahead? Even the most arduous birth is a walk in the park.

**Q.** What research did you do?

**A.** As I prepared to write this novel, I read everything I could get my hands on about midwifery—novels, memoirs, non-fiction books—and I watched every piece of footage that showed high-risk deliveries that Youtube had available. I subscribed to online communities and forums where I was able to ask questions about midwifery and birth, and I touched base with several home-birth midwives and midwives alliance groups. I also have an aunt who is a midwife who was able to make suggestions and verify things for me.

Being pregnant, I also had easy access to my obstetrician for questions. It became common for my prenatal check-ups to consist of a quick blood pressure check, followed by twenty minutes of question time about my novel. In the hospital after having my daughter, I had a fantastic midwife who shared many stories with me about unusual or memorable births. I was stunned by the level of skill and expertise that was required, and the host of things to be prepared for during labor. But what I remember most about our conversations is her awe and respect for mothers in labor, and I attempted to weave this awe into all three of my POV characters, particularly Neva.

**Q 4.** What are some of the weird and wonderful facts you've learned about midwifery and birth during your research?

- In the past, midwives were known to secretly harbor unwed mothers, perform abortions, baptize babies, and serve as pediatricians for the first year of the baby's birth.
- May Babies are the Heaviest : Babies born in May are, on average, 200 grams heavier than any other month.
- Centuries ago the midwife would catch the baby in her apron!
- In the US, midwifery is only Licensed or regulated in 21 states. In most states licensed midwives are not required to have any practice agreement with a doctor.

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Q 5. One of your protagonists has issues with her mother. Did you draw on personal experience for this?

A. Actually, my mother and I have a very close—verging on boring—relationship. Though we are quite different (she is private and conservative like Neva, and I am like Grace—pushy and talkative and loud) conflict between us is rare. So I wasn't able to draw on that relationship from a dysfunctional perspective. That said, I was able to identify with loving someone who is very different (not just my mother, but also my husband and my son), and learning how to love them the way they need you to. Above all, the key is respecting the person for who they are, and always looking for the good they can offer.

Q 6. How can readers get in touch with you and support your work?

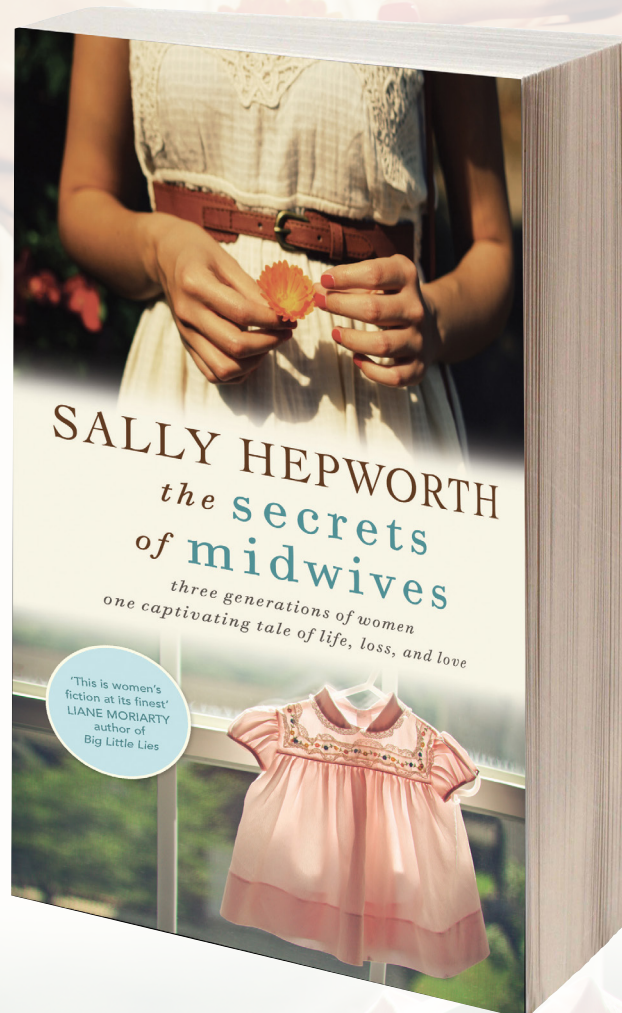
A. I am very active on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. I have also started spending more time on Goodreads. My website [www.sallyhepworthauthor.com](http://www.sallyhepworthauthor.com) is the place to go for book information, upcoming events and my bio.

Thanks for listening (reading)!





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