



## The Midwife of Hope River

By Patricia Harman  
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### Introduction

Midwife Patience Murphy has a gift: a talent for escorting mothers through the challenges of bringing children into the world. Working in the hardscrabble conditions of Appalachia during the Depression, Patience takes the jobs that no one else wants, helping those most in need and least likely to pay. She knows a successful midwifery practice must be built on a foundation of openness and trust, but the secrets Patience is keeping are far too intimate and fragile for her to ever let anyone in.

Honest, moving, and beautifully detailed, Patricia Harman's *The Midwife of Hope River* rings with authenticity as Patience faces nearly insurmountable difficulties. From the dangerous mines of West Virginia to the terrifying attentions of the Ku Klux Klan, Patience must strive to bring new light and life into an otherwise hard world.

### Questions for Discussion

1. The opening scene in *The Midwife of Hope River* presents a dark and scary view of birth. Do you think most women (and men) see birth that way, or do they look forward to childbirth as a peak experience? How do you feel about childbirth?
2. Have you ever lost a baby or known anyone who has?
3. Living without electricity was an ordinary part of rural life in the 1930s. We are so used to all our conveniences now. How would you feel about living without them?
4. Unions played a big part in Patience's life and an important part in U.S. history. What is your experience with unions? Have you ever been a union member, or has anyone in your family? What place do unions have in modern times?
5. Most people think of inhabitants of Appalachia as Caucasian. Did it surprise you to read about African-American miners?
6. What did you think about the developing friendship between Bitsy and Patience? Realistic? A stretch of the imagination?
7. Have you ever had a servant in your home? What was your relationship to them?
8. The author writes of Patience's loneliness, living out on the farm without Mrs. Kelly or her Pittsburgh community of radical friends. Do you think you could make it alone like that?
9. What do you think the book says about the human capacity to endure hardship, loneliness, and fear?
10. Patience tells us of her grief and guilt over having killed her husband accidentally while trying to get the goon off him at the Battle of Blair Mountain. The experience defined her life for many years, yet she couldn't talk about it. How can a person let go of something like that? How important is it for a person to find someone to talk to?

### About the Author

Patricia Harman, CNM, got her start as a lay midwife on rural communes and went on to become a nurse-midwife on the faculty of Ohio State University, Case Western Reserve University, and West Virginia University. She lives near Morgantown, West Virginia; has three sons; and is the author of two acclaimed memoirs. This is her first novel.