

does and Mom is having trouble coping again. Dad and I get her on her hands and knees. We fall into a rhythm as grandpa and his granddaughter go find something to do.

9:30 P.M.: Mom feels something different and groans at the peak of each contraction. We know what this might mean! When the doctor does her exam, Mom is almost completely dilated.

10:05 P.M.: Mom says she's not going to listen to anyone telling her not to push. The doctor is close by and rechecks. The baby is very low and the cervix is completely gone. Mom sits and pushes. I hold a towel in front of her so she can pull it with her arms while she pushes with her diaphragm, and I watch her perineum bulge. I suggest Mom kneel for the next contraction and she leans over me and grabs my head and shoulders. As she pushes, the baby's head is almost born. We move her back into a seated position. Grandma has run down the hall, shouting for the doctor. The nurse and I catch the baby and lift the wet, pink, slippery baby girl onto Mom's chest as the doctor leans in to examine the newborn. Everything is fine.

11:30 P.M. I won't leave until everyone is settled. There are photographs to be taken, clothes to be put away, and Mom needs a shower. Babe needs to breastfeed again successfully and there are notes to be taken for the birth story I write later on.

2:00 A.M.: I feel a deep sense of satisfaction as I pull into my garage. I realize that others would never want my life. I deal with birth, death, sex and people's messy relationships, sometimes during a single day. I'm not afraid of life's depths — somewhere along the way I figured out how to traverse them. This work is powerful — it has the power to change who I am. In a way, it's shaped me and allowed me to be present with strong emotion without needing to control it or fix it. But when I doula well, it also has the power to change others. I care for them, with all that I am, in the way that they deeply need during a very vulnerable time. Don't we all wish we had that? ●