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WHAT I DO: DOULA TRAINER

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Age: 44

Occupation: Doula trainer; human sexuality instructor; parent-infant interaction instructor

Helping Mothers Experience Childbirth

My sister had a home birth when I was 17 and the idea of it was so novel to me that I really became curious about childbirth issues. That ended up leading into to a career.

What I do now is I lead workshops that train women to be professional doulas: how to emotionally and physically support women and families during childbirth. I've trained about 499 women and one man to be doulas. The workshop is also about what it is inside of you that you need to transform to really be present with someone. Mothers and fathers are going through one of the most vulnerable rights of passage they'll go through in their entire life. While I'm teaching about maternal-fetal positioning and reassurance about what's normal, I'm also connecting with each individual about what it means to work in a path of service for someone else. You give from your heart but at the same time you have to value the job enough to charge people money for it. I am also an active doula, attending births since 1988. I'm also working on a Ph.D dissertation at the UW. I've interviewed doulas and parents who have had a doula from all over North America. I've come up with a theory of doula support and what it is that actually happens at births that makes the mothers in repeated medical studies have shorter, less painful labors. I speak about this at conferences – it's the theory of effective labor support.

In the last hundred years we've unlearned how to talk about birth and we've lost its meaning through medicalization and interventions. It's important to keep that dialogue alive, that knowledge that women can give birth and it doesn't have to be traumatic and you don't have to go through it alone. I don't want to give the idea that doulas are only for a natural birth – that's not true. But we became silent about the meaning of birth to women or families. It's important to be emotionally supportive whether there's a cesarean or not, or an epidural or not...we stopped being able to talk and we stopped being able to listen. So through my work I make that come alive.