

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF MILLER

MOTHER LOVE

As a doula, Amy Gilliland supports mothers and families when babies are born. As an educator, she teaches what others will not. As a mom, she's found strength from adversity.

I ARRIVED IN MADISON IN 1983 to attend graduate school and never moved back to California. I loved Wisconsin because the government respected the ability of its people to make good choices. My children are Alex, 22, Joseph, 19, and Auriana, 17. I have successfully co-parented with their father, James Lloyd, for more years than we were ever married — it can be done! My days are rarely typical and my activities vary. On this day, I planned to teach, lead a workshop and work on a home project, but spent most of it on the work of my spirit and essence: attending a mother and her family in labor.



baby died. He never inhaled or had his heart beat once he emerged from his mother. Still-birth happens in one out of 115 births. It is one of the harsh realities of the work I do.

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of the noise of teenagers and young adults. In a year, my daughter will be off to college. My middle son is already gone. My oldest son has a form of autism called Asperger's Syndrome and has been living at home while taking a break from college. Slowly, he's entering the adult world and dealing with having a job and buying a car. Raising him has been one of the biggest challenges of my life, but it has made me a better person.

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4:00 A.M.: I'm awake and waiting for a call asking me to come to the hospital. I stare at the ceiling and reflect about my work. Birth doula work is often romanticized as people think of the happiness associated with new babies. But being a birth doula has unexpected challenges. When doulas embrace a family, we offer emotional support that is authentic and caring, which means we open ourselves up to the possibility of great tragedy or joy. A little over two weeks ago, I was at a birth where the

5:00 A.M.: Why haven't they called? Last night, the mom's water had broken. Her due date is four weeks away so I was caught off

guard. My last client was two weeks later than her due date, which just shows the unpredictability of this profession.

8:00 A.M.: The phone rings. Mom is having some contractions. They stayed at the hospital and Mom was started on pitocin (an IV agent to induce contractions) around 4 a.m. They'll call back when they need me. After a shower and a brief breakfast, I head to my home office.

Ten years ago, I became an Approved Trainer for DONA International, a recognized doula association. I lead workshops for women who want to become birth doulas and for nurses who want to expand their skills.

During a birth, a doula is there continuously for the mother's emotional wellbeing, to lessen her discomfort and to help the labor progress by using non-invasive strategies. The doula also helps her to advocate for herself and to take care of her family.

Training women to be doulas means that more women in the world will have support at their births.