Reflections of Observed Births

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When I stepped into the world of birth, I was hesitant and nervous of the unknown experiences to come and if it was appropriate I play a part. Over time I have come to embrace it and all its beautiful moments along with the rigor. The initial births I attended that were guided by the medical model of care were often frustrating to me with so many “rules”. I found it a challenge to feel like a great support person in an environment not only foreign to me but highly regulated. The births I have attended in the recent past have solidified my love for the Midwifery model of care. Not because it is lax compared to its counterpart but because it instills confidence and education in its clients while providing a sacred and safe for babies to be born. Beyond that, relationships have blossomed and profound memories have been retained.

My observed births have been primarily in the role of a birth assistant and have been flooded with learning experiences. I have been under supervision of mostly CNMs versus CPMs and have noticed the differences in practice from the two. Coming in, I think I was looking forward to practicing a hands-off style of midwifery with little to no interventions (with the exceptions of emergencies) and now I see the place where some things may help a laboring person. I see now where interventions such as membrane sweeps, artificial rupture of membranes and directed pushing could benefit someone. For the person who is post-dates and scared to transfer care, or amidst an unusually long labor or having a hard time knowing where and how to push, leading to severe exhaustion, these things could make all the difference.

There have been two significant challenges in this part of my clinical work. The first is my confidence in my Neonatal Resuscitation skills and my ability to properly help in an emergent situation. To combat that, I have prematurely renewed my NRP certification with Karen Strange as I have heard many great things about her class. This helped me so much because it gave a different, out of hospital focus on the practice unlike my initial training. Afterwards I felt confident that in the moment I would be able to assist well. The second challenge I had was remembering that these births come with so much meaning and also trauma to recover from. I had a specific birth that will forever ground me when I think of timeframes of labor. I showed up as a birth assistant for a multiparous person anticipating this, as most, would go pretty swiftly as she had been at about six centimeters for days with no contractions. My household need for this birth and the monetary gain it presented got in the way of my empathy and I found myself after about the tenth hour feeling really anxious and frustrated because other births had been called in to which I missed because of the length of this one. This parent had been offered artificial rupture of membranes for days and even in labor and had declined, stating that her last labor was initiated in such a way. In time I sat back and let go of all my emotions and reminded myself that this was their experience not mine and it was my job to attend despite the time it took and that I had to be ok with that. When she reached ten centimeters, she opted for an artificial rupture, and baby was born within minutes. As we lifted the baby to her chest, she let out all of her fears in a cry that I will never forget and explained that with her last birth it felt so “unnatural” and rushed. She thanked us for not pressuring her and allowing her and her body to labor naturally and for being so patient. She healed from her past trauma in that very minute and it taught me such a grand lesson that birth cannot be controlled nor rushed.

My style of observing whether it be as a doula, or birth assistant has been a calm quiet presence. I often don’t speak very much and just look for subtle opportunities to help make a difference. At first, I thought this may not be the best, that I needed to be more vocal to properly support someone. What I have found is that this has helped people even when it seems to me that I haven’t done anything. Just being there and acknowledging the situation with a gentle facial gesture or quietly whispering into the parents’ ear that they were doing so well, has done more than any “special” technique I could try. It amazes me at how little someone really needs to make them feel secure during birth and many times just a positive, quiet person to remind them to breathe is all it takes. I also have noticed my need for severe organization in a birth setting and have slowly tried to let that go. I usually have a specific setup that would otherwise throw me off my focus and although I understand organization is important, I also understand that in a homebirth setting things will be different every time.