Mother, Midwife, Grandmother

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I chuckled when asked to write an article about being a “grandma midwife.” What could the readers of *My Healthy Beginning* gain from reading about a midwife who catches her own adult children’s babies? Promote the cause of midwifery? Highlight the glamour of homebirth? Get more people to watch Ricky Lake’s *Business of Being Born*? Get the folks to order *Orgasmic Birth* from Netflix?

Should I paint a picture of idyllic family harmony? Can’t you see the Hollywood depiction complete with slow motion, roses cascading down from the heavens, while *Canon in D* plays in the background? Truth be told, it’s not all sunshine and roses, but can be more about internal family drama and even getting on each other nerves!

I have been present when my four daughters and even my daughter-in-law gave birth to 12, soon to be 13, of my grandchildren. The words of one daughter give a glimpse into that moment of birth. “Taking her little body and holding her close, I’ll never in my life forget how she stopped crying and looked up at me while I held her and talked to her. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done and totally surpassed all my hopes…to have my mother there, delivering my child…there are no words for how amazing it was.”
Yes, receiving a grandchild into my hands rivals life’s peak experiences. Yet as awe inspiring as this sounds, let’s do a reality check on what being a “grandma midwife” is really about. Fact: Safety is Job 1 – the midwifery care is actually shared. There’s always another midwife (or two!) with an objective eye and detached heart providing thoughtful decision making and practical assessment skills as need arises. Fact: Like most homebirths, dad provides the TLC, with a little help from sisters, friends, older child and mom. Fact: Being a good “grandma midwife” is being a good midwife, practicing within the Midwifery Model of Care.

In truth, the Midwifery Model of Care and good mothering intersect and overlap in a myriad of ways.

Doctors Marshall H. Klaus and John H. Kennell highlight this intersection in their popular book “Mothering the Mother.” They write “for millennia the relationship of mother to daughter, of older experienced woman to younger birthing woman, was respected and understood. Today, although many women may want their own mother’s help during labor, most of today’s grandmothers are not experienced around birth.” p.6.

However, the modern Certified Professional Midwife is such woman…often a mother, and with time – a grandmother, experienced around birth and trained in the art of the Midwifery Model of Care.

The Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. is based on the truth that pregnancy and birth are normal life processes. Mothers themselves are usually masters in caring for their child’s life processes - getting down and dirty with smudgy diapers, slippery little faces, mounds of laundry. Motherhood is a complex mix of deeply held emotions, love and service.

Midwives do much the same…connecting with their clients…getting their hearts involved in the care they provide. A good midwife serves with her “Heart and Hands.” The wet and wild work of childbearing in many ways reflects the wet and wild work of being a mom. Midwives are not just “providers”… midwives exhibit a blend of roles… akin to being a mother, a sister, a best friend, and a normal birth expert all rolled into one.

The midwife monitors the well-being of the mother throughout the childbearing cycle, providing the mother with personalized education, an ear to listen to the problems of life’s ebb and flow. She has the skills and knowledge to watch the growing momma’s pregnancy week in and week out making sure momma and baby are staying within healthy parameters.
As pregnancy draws to a close, the midwife provides continuous hands-on assistance, appropriate monitoring, and a caring presence during the labor, assuring a safe and rewarding delivery for momma and baby. She continues to orchestrate practical, physical, and emotional support during the postpartum recovery time. As a professional trained in normal birth, she has an eye for identifying problems, and refers to an appropriate obstetric provider as needed.

Sounds very much like a mother with her child…watching the years come and go, being present in the teachable moments, giving ear to her child’s chatter, treating the scraped knees, and wisely heeding the occasional advice from the family doc - essentially being a guardian of a normal childhood.

A healthy family is known by the traits of respectful treatment, personal attention, instilling self confidence, building a healthy body image, being emotionally and physically present for each other. A healthy family studies and researches natural ways of living, developing habits of healthy self-care and appropriately accessing allopathic care when needed.

The midwife practicing in the Midwifery Model of Care likewise offers nurturing care that respects the woman, her family, her beliefs, and her birth plan. She offers personalized caring attention and meaningful discussions to help resolve fears; she offers information about pregnancy, birth, the newborn, breastfeeding, and newborn care. She offers regular and thorough checkups and appropriate use of diagnostic technology, and referrals to specialists as needed. She aims to instill confidence in the woman and her body. She empowers the woman to give birth rather than rescuing her from its realities. She offers natural techniques for comfort in labor and stays throughout the labor and “mothers the mother.” She is a guardian of normal birth.

For families interested in healthy beginnings, seeing the philosophical link between the Midwifery Model of Care and good mothering lays a foundation for understanding and ultimately choosing midwifery care for their births.

The heritage I hope I have given my daughters, and inspired in my daughter-in-law, is the knowledge that normal birth is a part of being a healthy woman. This is a heritage that will stand through generations to come. Yes, the role of mother-and-
daughter/midwife-and-client can be a multifaceted one requiring healthy boundaries, confidentiality, honesty, loyalty, respect, and trust. These are the same hallmarks of a healthy family… what readers of My Healthy Beginning are all about.

References:


Elizabeth Davis, Heart and Hands, A Midwives Guide to Pregnancy and Birth, Celestial Arts. 2004