

Small Stone Birth Activism

By Molly Remer, MSW, ICCE, CCCE

As someone who feels deeply, passionately, and intensely about the need to transform the birth culture in the US, I am often struck with an immobilizing feeling of not doing enough. Of not helping enough. Of not being *enough* to affect the kind of social change I want to see happen in the world. As a mother of two small children, I often feel limited with regard to the kind of large scale changes I'd like to make in the birth world. I have been a childbirth educator since 2005 and I'm also trained as a birth doula, a postpartum doula, and a breastfeeding educator. I've accepted that birth doula work doesn't fit into my life right now (and even without young children, I do not know that I actually possess the strength to lend witness to the hospital birth machine). I happily teach independent birth classes, usually privately in homes one-on-one, which feels like smaller scale change than I envision. Rather than relying only on teaching independent classes as my outlet for change, I'm discovering alternate ways of educating others about birth.

While reading the book *The Mother Trip* by Ariel Gore, I came across this quote from civil rights activist Alice Walker: "It has become a common feeling, I believe, as we have watched our heroes failing over the years, that our own small stone of activism, which might not seem to measure up to the rugged boulders of heroism we have so admired, is a paltry offering toward the building of an edifice of hope. Many who believe this choose to withhold their offerings out of shame. This is the tragedy of our world." Ariel adds her own thoughts to this: "Remember: as women, as mothers, we cannot *not* work. Put aside your ideas that your work should be something different or grander than it is. In each area of your life--in work, art, child-rearing, gardening, friendships, politics, love, and spirituality--do what you can do. That's enough. Your small stone is enough."

These quotes caused me to reflect on the myriad methods of "small stone" birth activism that can be engaged in as a passionate birth activist mother embroiled in a season of her life in which the needs of her own young family take precedence over "changing the world." We can offer the small stones of:

- Speaking positively about normal, natural birth, to whomever we are speaking with whenever the topic arises.
- Birth advocacy bumper stickers.
- Sharing our birth stories.
- Creating little informational cards (inspired by Carla Hartley's Trust Birth Initiative cards) to seed around our communities in creative locations. I am fond of using Vistaprint and ordering their horizontal premium cards for just the cost of shipping (\$6.50 for 250 cards).
- Creating bookmarks with inspiring information about birth and leaving them in library books, giving them to pregnant women, handing them out at health fairs, etc.
- Buying subscriptions to "enlightening" magazines for doctors' offices.
- Buying gift subscriptions to enlightening magazines for our public libraries.
- Talking to pregnant women—my most recent approach is simply to say, "I wish you a wonderful birth!"
- Responding to "action alerts" from the organizations in our states promoting healthy, normal birth and midwifery.
- Supporting healthy birth related organizations with your membership. I am a member of 11 birth-related organizations. I also maintain subscriptions to a variety of magazines and journals.
- Volunteering—either for advocacy organizations or directly with pregnant women.

- Showing up at events, fundraisers, and rallies. Maybe we are not able to plan these events by ourselves at this point in our lives (or maybe we can!), but we can certainly show up and be counted!
- Talking to non-pregnant women and girls about birth.
- Giving empowering books to pregnant friends (or to not pregnant friends!).
- Buying memberships to supportive organizations for friends and family members.
- Give back issues of inspiring, positive magazines to people as part of your baby shower gifts.
- Making donations as you are able to local chapters, statewide organizations, or national organizations promoting birth, breastfeeding, doulas, midwives, etc.
- Making your birth stories available online—a good site is www.birthdiaries.com.
- Blogging about birth and about issues in the birth world (in addition to blogging for ICEA and my Talk Birth blog at <http://talkbirth.wordpress.com>, I maintain the CfM blog at <http://cfmidwifery.blogspot.com>).
- Being an online childbirth educator—visit message boards (especially “mainstream” message boards) and give accurate, evidence based information. This has the potential to reach many people, but also can be very time consuming (and addictive in a way) and can replace the face-to-face good you could do, so be careful with this one.
- Participating in online research (such as the Birth Survey transparency in maternity care project, www.thebirthsurvey.org).
- Writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper educating the public about birth options and midwifery care.

Despite my persistent feelings of wishing to do more, when I examine each of my offerings, I begin to acknowledge that maybe my own small stones of effort are enough after all...

What stones can you add to the pile?

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