**[Holding the Space: A Doula's Best Gift](http://www.birthingfromwithin.com/blogs/birthing-from-within/16783864-holding-the-space-a-doulas-best-gift%22%20%5Co%20%22Holding%20the%20Space%3A%20A%20Doula%27s%20Best%20Gift)**

***by Pam England***

Once, there was a hospital midwife in Albuquerque who earned a favorable reputation among parents for her unusual form of labor support: she sat in the corner of the room and knitted. Initially, I anticipated mothers would feel the knitting-midwife was not really present to them, but, in fact, every mother I spoke with said she was comforted by the midwife knitting. One mother recalled her experience: *"I would finish a contraction, open my eyes and look to see her knitting in the corner. That let me know everything was fine, I was fine, and I could do it. In fact, it was when she got up to do medical checks, I began to wonder a little bit if something could be wrong -- so long as she was knitting, I knew nature and I were still on course."*

This kind of presence in labor non-verbally communicates a felt-message of trust in the mother and the process; knitting is one way of "holding the space." Something stirs in me when I see old, Native American women sit motionless against their adobe dwellings, gazing into the boundless desert out of dark eyes set in faces wrinkled by a million creases. I sometimes feel, in their stillness, they are "holding sacred space" for all of us.

So, when I was pregnant the second time, what I wanted most from my doula was her unhurried presence. I asked Janie, my doula, to do three things: To wear boots to "kick ass" on my behalf, if that was what was needed; To make a chocolate birthday cake from scratch; and t0 “hold the Feminine and trusting space” like the enduring Native women watching patiently. In labor, Janie arrived wearing her cowgirl boots. She made the chocolate cake from scratch. She "held the space" for me to do whatever I needed to do. She didn't do or say that much. I was contained by her calm presence and unconditional love for me. From Janie, I learned the power of a doula's presence. And her gift to me is the gift I try to give other laboring mothers - and the mindset I want to pass on to new doulas.

*As a doula, you are privileged to witness and feel the unspeakable power of birth.*

You are in a position to see the most intimate expressions of the inner-child (the parents', birth attendants' and your own). When adult masks and strategies fall away, giving way to vulnerability in the midst of losing control, not-knowing what to do, and so wanting to get it right, we behold the divine inner-child. To see in this way grows a tender heart.

When a doula is prideful or too busy in labor, she may forfeit being touched by the great Mystery of birth. New doulas, in their insecurity and wanting to please, may compensate for their newness by continuously checking in or touching or talking to the mother. Sometimes less is more, and inaction can be the most powerful gesture of love and service. If the doula isn't in touch with the great Mystery of birth, then who is "holding the space" for the mother who is between two worlds while she births her child? Even though a mother gives birth to the child safely, what is her feeling of being immersed in the work and wildness of labor without truly being seen, held and contained? (Some of us know.)