

Alana Apfel. 2016. *Birth Work as Care Work: Stories from Activist Birth Communities*. Oakland, CA: PM Press. 118 p.

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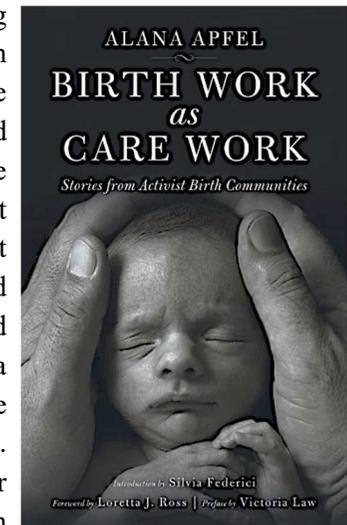
Birth changed from being a natural part of life to a controversial topic dividing medical professionals and lay public into numerous groups. Books are being written and published every day; some explaining what to expect, some warning against what to avoid, while others advise specific techniques or steps to follow. All of them have one thing in common: the driving force behind the research and controversy that is the urge to make the birth as safe and comfortable as possible. The book *Birth work as care work* is different in many aspects. It opens conversation about current practices and realities and allows birth workers from diverse backgrounds to share their ideals and struggles.

Each chapter is a story of its own. We follow women from under-represented communities who advocate for better options in birth and search for ways to preserve dignity of pregnant people in their area. By giving word to a wide array of professionals, the book avoids the usual, almost inevitable division between the medical providers and clients, between hospital protocols and wishes of the pregnant people. The chapters are elegantly arranged into a narrative that introduces the reader into several problematic areas that exist in our society but are rarely talked about. Birth is suddenly brought out into the light and presented in its complexity and beauty. There is no one right way to

birth a baby and Alana Apfel managed to hold space for everyone involved.

The topics addressed in the first half of the book are heavy but open necessary discussions about ethics of care and question many practices and protocols currently in place for management of birth. The book ends with several positive birth stories which bring a sense of peace and hope, after starting with chapters filled with difficult discussions and powerful fights for the rights of the birthing people. We see birth workers inevitably shift into the role of activists. Every person who dives into the deep waters of birth and sees the way birthing is handled in today's society, simply must get angry and fight for change.

Everyone would benefit from reading the book. The text is written in an engaging fresh way which helps the reader take in this usually overlooked topic. Topics surrounding birth are uncomfortable for many because what used to be a natural event that brought families together and strengthened bonds among the pregnant person and their community, has now turned into a taboo; a discussion reserved for the doctor's office or pregnancy class. People need to accept that birth is ever present. It is an event that brought each



of us into the world. It might have been traumatic or enjoyable, we might not know our own birth story or we might have heard it hundreds of times. Regardless of how we entered the world and how we choose to birth it is time to normalize the process and the book *Birth work as care work* is a great way to start the conversation.