

Report on Postpartum Doula Class with Debra Pascali-Bonaro, Switzerland, October 2012, by Awital Zingg-Bollag

In October of this year 16 Doulas from all over Switzerland had the honor to meet the well known DONA International birth and postpartum doula trainer Debra Pascali-Bonaro, who has been working as a doula and training doulas since 1987 in varied communities and settings around the world. Debra's diversity has brought her from training doulas in the South Bronx, NY to speaking at the White House, to developing doula programs for Brazil and presenting doula workshops in 24 countries. Debra's years of experience in the design and development of doula programs provide the basis for her motivational speeches, educational in-service and inspiring doula workshops. Debra is dedicated to returning community based caring, with a doula for every woman who would like one, as part of reimbursed health care system.

It was a great experience especially from a doula exchange prospective. We had representatives from all parts of Switzerland and including a Swiss Expatriate who resides in Finland, therefore even more interesting from an exchange point of view. Not only do the different cantons handling health care, doula support respectively any mother-baby support differently, but adding the Finnish and American system to the talk made the doula gathering even more exceptional. Everybody contributed through their own experiences which left us richer and more knowledgeable by the end of the workshop.

Many skills were taught in this 2 day class with Debra with the main themes being; The role and organisation of the postpartum doula, communication and listening, integration of the birth experience, dealing with the newborn, support of mother and father, rituals and body work for postpartum, and physical and psychological changes after birth.

Despite all the new acquired skills it was amazing to see that at the end of the day the most meaningful part was still our heart and what we carry within us. The stories we shared, the visions we have and just to listen and open our hearts for each other. The acceptance of one and another and willingness to listen and just be together even though we all have our own stories, very different backgrounds, different ages, life situations and life

experiences. Yet we all felt the connection, especially on the second morning when we all greeted each other with no words only body language, which ended up in meaningful hugging. The energy that was flowing during those 2 days was beyond words. Like Debra says in one of her recent Newsletters:“ It might be hard to understand if one hasn’t attended such a workshop the magic that happens when women gather and share their stories and vision for childbirth. Within hours I can see women’s bodies relax, the emotions flow and soon hugs and gentle touch brings our circle closer. We leave as sisters on this journey, if only everyone in the world could open their hearts and minds to others for 2 days and leave as friends and colleagues. This is the magic of women gathering.”

We were all grateful for this opportunity and hope to have many more workshops like this in the future, so that one day we will be able to provide a doula for every woman who would like one!

Awital Zingg-Bollag, doula in Finland