

BAY AREA DOULA PROJECT

Mattress

By Holly Carpenter

I never really fully understood “Put your money where your mouth is” until today. A little background — two months ago, I graduated from a masters program and passed my board exam to become a certified nurse midwife. Soon after, I accepted a full time job at a hospital in Anchorage, Alaska. The job is full time, but doesn’t involve any gynecology – just prenatal, labor and birth care. So I applied to Planned Parenthood as well to work per diem as a gyn provider: birth control, STI treatment, abortion care, etc. All the services that round out a full spectrum midwife.

I had my interview this morning, felt pretty good about it, and set off to buy a celebratory mattress. Understandably, you might be confused by the term “celebratory mattress”. Let me explain. For the past decade or so, I have had series of comically horrible mattresses: one made of cardboard in my college dorm, another that I found while dumpster diving in Colorado, a series of mattresses that were passed down from the former renter of whatever room I happened to be living in, a real winner that I found in the basement of a hipster commune in Haight-Ashbury, and for a while, a sleeping pad while I lived in a tent. I have gotten fleas from a mattress in Ecuador, and bed bugs from the mattress of a former boyfriend. You get the picture.

This montage of truly disgusting sleeping arrangements was not by choice. Between graduating from college at the exact moment the economy went into a deep, dark recession, lots of low wage/volunteer jobs, and graduate school, I haven’t had an extra cent to buy a decent mattress. So this was a celebration of financial solvency, an affirmation that I could finally afford to sleep comfortably.

I set off on my afternoon of mattress hunting. With Milky Chance blasting the base in my car and a hot chai revving up my energy, I went into store after store, trying out all sorts of mattresses, chatting with sales people (usually dudes), and listening with increasing bewilderment as they described “surrounded inner coils” and “memory gel foam contour European splendor sleep”. What? Finally, I found The One. It was reasonably priced, extra firm, did NOT feel like it came from a dumpster, and included free delivery.

The salesman and I worked it out after a wee bit of bargaining back and forth, and a lot of flirting from him. He started with “you couldn’t be 29! You look like you’re 20!” and continued by asking where I went to grad school “San Francisco! All the people there are so... gay!” and gradually devolved to telling me that “women like it when you hit on them at the bar – how else do they feel pretty?” and “you didn’t TURN gay down there, did you?” I tried to keep my cool, explaining that people don’t “turn gay” and that women can feel confidently sexy without affirmation from hicks in bars.

However, the ignorance continued to spew. Desperate to leave, I handed over my credit card and told him I needed to get going. As I did so, I noticed a baby bottle full of coins on the counter. Ever the nosy midwife, I stepped over to read the label on the bottle, expecting a fund for a local kid with cancer, or a store employee announcing a pregnancy. Nope. It was a donation site for Stanton Healthcare, a pregnancy crisis center (PCC) in Boise that rents the building right next to the local Planned Parenthood, and operates in the usual manner of PCCs – providing medically inaccurate, biased, manipulative “services” to folks who have the misfortune to stumble through their doors.

My breath stopped. I couldn’t. His chatter faded into the background as I realized that this was a decisive moment. I had to put my money where my mouth was. I took a deep breath and declared “I can’t buy a mattress from you. Your blatant homophobia is epically offensive and ridiculous in this day and age. Additionally, I believe strongly in everyone’s right to determine their reproductive choices and have unbiased access to continue a pregnancy, put a child up for adoption, or get an abortion. Stanton Healthcare represents everything that is contrary to my convictions, and I can’t support a store that supports them.”

Or, that’s what I wish I’d said. It was more of a blushing bright red and squeakily apologizing several times for having “...wasted his time but I really couldn’t buy a mattress from him because the bottle was against my beliefs and being homophobic was really lame, and, and...” type of situation as I backed out of the store and fled to my car.

I was shaking by the time I put on my seatbelt. I felt so rude, and unsure of whether I had just made a huge deal out of nothing. As I sat there, my phone rang. It was Planned Parenthood. I had gotten the job. I let out a huge sigh of relief and let the irony of the situation sink in. It was slightly ridiculous, but for the first time, I felt a kind of power in everyday decision making. I realize how privileged I am to have that kind of choice and power, and I’m grateful. And I’m going to keep using it.

Later that day, I bought a mattress from a woman named Lena, who told me about her childhood with an abusive father and a mother who moved her children every 3-4 months to escape “every time he found them”. She told me she had found a good guy to marry, and they had had two kids, both pregnancies affected by horrible hyperemesis

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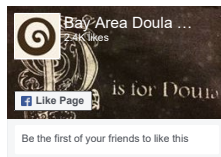
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gravidarum (a condition in which women vomit so frequently that they need tons of medication, IV hydration, and are often hospitalized). She said that she had asked for a hysterectomy after the first pregnancy, but had been told by her doctor that she had to have another baby (and be married) before he would perform one. I signed the credit card receipt, gave her a warm smile and a firm handshake, and said with complete honesty "It was such a pleasure doing business with you".

Holly Carpenter, RN, CNM, is a full-spectrum midwife recently graduated from the University of California, San Francisco. She is a founder and former co-director of the Bay Area Doula Project.

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