

Bio:

Christine Weirick was born in Charleston, West Virginia, May 23, 1990. She lives just outside of Fayetteville, West Virginia, serving people as they navigate pregnancy, birth and the postpartum time. She has been attending home births as a student midwife under Angy Nixon's guidance. As a birth worker in her community Christine supports families emotionally, physically and educationally.

This work has felt like a calling to Christine. Her interest in birth and babies started very young and the passion for supporting families only grew with time. In 2015, after having her own midwife-led home birth, Christine felt inspired to begin her education as a doula or birth coach. Since then she has attended many more trainings and lectures, building on her knowledge and understanding surrounding birth and reproductive justice. In 2018 Christine began apprenticing under Angy Nixon, a home birth midwife based out of Scott Depot, West Virginia. This apprenticeship allowed Christine to marry the art of supporting birthing people with the science of midwifery.

During 2019 Christine began the Portfolio Evaluation Process (PEP) to become a Certified Professional Midwife through the North American Registry of Midwives. Recently she entered the second of four phases of the PEP, entitled "Assistant Under Supervision." Now Christine is learning how to assess fetal heart tones, sterilize equipment, perform newborn exams and check vital signs for both birther and baby, amongst other skills.

Tradition description:

During this apprenticeship Christine will be learning the art and science of Midwifery. Under the watchful eye of her preceptor, Angy Nixon, she will take the time to increase her skill level, attend births in this region of West Virginia and learn to care for birthing families both prenatally and during the postpartum time. Like many women before her, Christine felt drawn to a more deep understanding of birth after bringing her own children into the world.

Midwifery has a long global history. From the very beginning women have been helping each other give birth. For most of human existence it has been the midwife, not the physician, who has attended births. In modern-day Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and Sweden midwives attend 70% of births. Midwife-led care is still the norm in these six countries which also lead the world with the lowest maternal and infant mother/baby mortality rates. In comparison, in the United States midwives attend only 5-12% of births, mostly due to low numbers of midwives, accompanied by political and regulatory constraints. With such low utilization of midwives, the US ranks alarmingly high in loss of life for both baby (30th internationally) and birther (42nd internationally).

Not so long ago there were midwives in every community through the United States, and hundreds throughout the state of West Virginia. Records indicate that at its peak, there were 558 midwives registered in the state; today there are fewer than 70. Historically, West Virginia midwives primarily learned how to serve families by learning from someone more experienced and giving birth themselves. Today, there are several routes to midwifery education, one of which preserves the mentor/apprentice model of learning; it's called the Portfolio Evaluation Process (PEP) and it is administered by the North American Registry of Midwives. When

Christine completes this process (which usually takes 2-5 years from start to finish) she will become a Certified Professional Midwife.

Artist Statement:

As a young adult I was first introduced to the Midwifery Model of Care when my mother found a midwife to provide me well woman care. She had gone about this by asking her friends and coworkers who they would recommend. Repeatedly a particular midwife in Charleston, West Virginia was suggested and that's who I saw. The care I received was personalized and tender. I am grateful for my mother who turned to her community for guidance.

Before becoming pregnant with my first baby I started absorbing stories from other families in my community. The stories that were filled with respect, attentive care and autonomy came from women who chose to give birth at home, with midwives. When the time came I chose that, too. Both of my birth experiences were deeply transformative and I have the stories I heard from other women to thank for that. This is the power of stories in our community.

With this apprenticeship project I will be exploring the influence that storytelling has on birth in West Virginia through video. I have interviewed families and midwives about As I have sat with this project I have begun to see storytelling in many aspect of Midwifery. From mother to mother, the sharing of birth stories and breastfeeding advice. From midwife to family, the teaching of how to nourish their growing bodies and how to trust their intuition. From midwife to student or midwife to midwife, the passing along of knowledge and wisdom that comes with years of witnessing birth. From student to student, sharing stories and information further solidifying our education as we find words for what we are learning. Storytelling is a vital part of the education I am receiving and with the help of the Folklife Apprenticeship Grant I will be creating short film capturing the power of storytelling in midwifery.