## Description

## A Tribute to The Love Doula



Maddie McMahon, Photo credit – Justine Fieth

**Maddie McMahon**

**1969 – 2026**

Witnessing one single person giving and receiving so much love is extraordinary – and yet I have. This is a tribute to Maddie McMahon, to her life, our relationship and her contribution to All4Maternity. It's hard to write. Maddie left this troubled world on 31st May, 2026. How can I possibly do justice in one blog post, to someone who positively influenced the lives of so many, and shaped mine? I can only try. It's an honour to try.

Let me begin.

In my mind I met this beautiful woman at a conference, yet in *her* memory it was online, on Twitter (see link later on). I know about this recollection of hers because Maddie did something for me in 2017 when I was in a dark place, suffering from online harassment and bullying. Maddie asked other birth workers who knew me to share short clips of support – she then put them together into a compilation and sent me the link. That video made an enormous difference to me, it gave me the confidence to continue and I felt supported. Because of this, and since that time, Maddie has been my go to person when other conflicts arose – she knew my history and was there beside me. I learned that Maddie had similar challenges. Her stance was always firm, but wise and respectful. Maddie was a peacemaker but willing to confront harmful action or communication. When I read our text messages now I can reflect on how they are seriously ferocious, but compassionate. Maddie would leave me soothing yet firm voice notes – even the sound of her voice helped. Forever the activist, Maddie would be ready when I or others reported the mistreatment and plight of mothers and babies, or midwives. In her usual fashion she would 'rally her troops' and in no time produce a petition or statement – or she would join others to try to influence change. March With Midwives is an example of this – and more recently an open letter. Maddie was intolerant of injustice.

It was an obvious decision when Anna and I bought The Practising Midwife (TPM) journal 10 years ago, to invite Maddie to be a doula representative on our Editorial and Advisory Board. Maddie not only accepted but carried out the role with enormous commitment. Attending most meetings and giving explicit apologies when she couldn't make it. Maddie also wrote articles – usually when the passion inside her to influence change gave her reason to write. A prolific and talented wordsmith, Maddie wrote several articles for TPM, and blogs too, which we have made open access in her memory.

Always a loyal supporter of midwives (but able and willing to have courageous conversation with those who needed it), this article written with midwife Milly Morris on the importance of the midwife-doula relationship has been shared widely. Maddie also created videos for us, like this one on positioning and attachment for breastfeeding mothers as part of a piece for readers to improve their skills.

Maddie's integrity was crystal clear – her social conscience to make the world a better place led her to action THROUGH words – this article on the unethical pressure corporate organisation put on new parents is a must-read, and coercive use of social service referrals against families who decline recommended care or choose care outside clinical guidance.

Co-founder of the renowned Developing Doulas – which is actually a Legacy of Love and Community – Maddie dedicated her life to supporting childbearing, mothering, as a extraordinary doula and breastfeeding counsellor. Breastfeeding support was one of Maddie's super-skills and passions – and this article on the prevention and treatment of sore nipples is a wonderful resource.

As well as publishing a proclaimed book Why Doulas Matter, Maddie wrote about the skilled work of doulas for TPM. Her other book, Why Mothering Matters is an exquisite and tender text, and a testimony to Maddie's core values and her work. It is described as her '*Hymn of Praise'*. Always thinking about the mothers, Maddie compelled us to 'imagine' what it was like to give birth during the Pandemic, in 2020.

Just recently I mentioned to Maddie that a midwife was trying to uplift other midwives during this time where there is much negativity in the press. A Love Letter to Midwives was her project and I asked Maddie if she would be willing to contribute. Not only did she do that – the letter is magnificent – but after another plea she commissioned her wonderful son Danny to record her voice, reciting the poem. Her close friend Becky added images – and here it is for you to enjoy. Another legacy.

If you want to be reminded of Maddie's beautiful mind, take time to check out her musing and prose on Substack, her personal blog and all things birthing.

From Anna and I, and all the team at All4Maternity, we send our thoughts, love and deepest condolences to Maddie's

husband Chris, and children Sean, Danny and Libby. To all Maddie's close friends, her DD sisters, her special buddies.

We hope the outpouring of love for your Maddie gives some comfort as you grieve.

The article below, shared from Substack with permission, sums up Maddie's commitment to love and peace. I will use these words now in my work and in my life, and I think you may find them helpful too.

The link to the post on Substack is here

*"And in the end the love you take is equal to the love you make"*

Maddie McMahon

I have spent the last two decades learning about the importance of a good birth. And now I am learning why a good death matters too – not just for the person at the centre, but for their family and friends. Life transitions deserve gentle support, fierce boundary setting, ceremony and ritual, laughter, joy and tears.

We are all dying. Some of us will be lucky enough to be able to think about how we would ideally like that to happen. We can write wills, leave instructions, clean up the detritus of our lives so we leave as little mess behind as possible and say all the things that were hitherto unsaid.

We take all this for granted. And yet being born well and dying well are privileges so many don't get. Right now in the Middle East the very basic human rights and rites of passage have been taken away. Babies are being born into famine, people are dying before their time, lives ripped away from them, often alone and lonely in their last moments.

Even in death I will be privileged. I will be lucky enough to be surrounded by love and support, I am sure of that. I cannot give away any of my privilege to those in need. I cannot save them. I no longer have enough energy to physically help or navigate the passionate feelings of others affected directly or indirectly by this tragedy.

But I can say my piece as someone who is facing the grim reaper. Everyone deserves to be born in peace, surrounded by love. Everyone deserves to die in peace, surrounded by love.

As I slowly become a more shadowy figure in this world, I am reflecting on the horrific mess I will be leaving behind and I am ashamed and sorry that my generation of women couldn't turn the tide of the patriarchal greed that has ravished this planet. We have been reduced to helpless consumers, salving our souls with a new mascara.

And for those of us who feel passionate and scared for our children, the ills of the world bite. Some of us bite back, entreating others to join the fight and berating them when they don't. Some feel helpless and hopeless and turn their faces to the sun for fear of losing their minds. The pain is the same. The desire for peace is the same.

Our enemies are the same.

If there is one thing I would like to see before I die is the seeds of change taking root. Right now there is no fertile soil for revolution because those who benefit from slaughter know precisely how to keep peace from sprouting healthy new shoots. Dividing us by inciting culture wars, they sow the toxic seeds of fear and violence. We are told arguments are binary, sides must be taken, shame and blame thrown like rockets and bombs.

For change to take root, we must work together, despite our differences. We cannot change hearts and minds with violent words. Compassion lives in the grey areas of people's messy, lived experience. Division causes lack. It starves us of the energy we need to change the world. At its heart, division is a drought, ensuring that only unkindness can pass our parched lips.

It is only when seeds are watered that their roots can force apart the smallest crack in the stone and, eventually, blossom. It's time to stop and consider who benefits from the culture wars. Who retains power and privilege at the expense of your autonomy and rights? These are the people who must be dethroned, not that woman on instagram who called you an idiot.

Things might make you deliriously angry every time you look at social media but I wonder what that white heat might fuel? I wonder what might happen if, instead of using your words to hurt and win, you channel your feelings into

curiosity. Why does that person feel the way they do? What has life served up for them and taught them? What could you say to find a point of connection and mutual understanding?

If you are White, if you have enough to eat, if your house isn't being bombed, if your children are safe, if you have your health, you are lucky and with that luck comes a duty. Those of us with privilege need to add to the sum total of human happiness. We are bound by bonds of love for humanity to work hard to create community and collaboration. For it will take many of us to sap the power of those who seek to stir up division and profit from violence. Our role is to create allies, not enemies.

Peace isn't achieved merely by rich men in suits signing ceasefire agreements. True peace is the sum total of millions of small acts of kindness and compassion. Words that bridge gaps, gentle smiles of understanding, curious enquiry, wise boundaries maintained without violence, openness to compromise, open hearts and open minds are all small acts of rebellion. We exist in a status quo that thrives on war and maintains control by stoking the fires of fear and discord. Each time someone rises to the bait and slings insults or bullets, we help maintain that status quo.

The way you work toward peace is up to you. You may be bringing up children with a strong sense of service to community. You might be campaigning. You might use your talents to raise awareness of issues close to your heart. Maybe you are just living your life as morally as you can whilst keeping your head above water. Whatever your contribution, let it be a positive one. I find it hard to imagine anyone lying on their deathbed wishing they had caused more discord and disagreement. One day I'll lie on mine safe in the knowledge that I worked hard for harmony. I hope you'll be able to say the same. For at the end of all our short or long lives, all we will be judged on is how much love we gave and received.

**Category**

1. News & Views

**Tags**

1. doulas
2. reflection

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