



Perspective/Opinion

They believe her when she says, “I know it’s uncomfortable to have swollen ankles”

Transformational Times Copy Editor Karen Herzog (left) and Aurora Health Center OB-GYN Renee Coulter (right) with one of the thousands of babies Dr. Coulter has delivered in her 39-year practice. The baby is Karen’s daughter, Kelsey, born in 1995.

By Karen Herzog

A former journalist who became a mother on Mother’s Day weekend in 1995 reaches out to the OB-GYN who delivered her first baby and later was featured in a newspaper story. They pick up where that story left off with the OB-GYN still loving her job, and now a grandmother of 15...

Mother’s Day weekend at my house is defined by birth days. Both our daughters were born Mother’s Day weekend – exactly two years and two days apart.

One literally backed into the world, unexpectedly breech, in the wee hours of the Friday morning of Mother’s Day weekend, while the other arrived like a tiny freight train two years later -- two weeks before her due date, and the day before Mother’s Day, as we were in the middle of packing to move to a new home.

You never forget the physicians and nurses who skillfully and compassionately guide you or a loved one through a difficult medical journey. The same is true for those who help bring your children into the world. They play central roles in the defining moments of becoming a parent.

An OB-GYN and a mother

My longtime OB-GYN, Dr. Renee Coulter, knew labor intimately before she mastered its textbook physiology.

Her oldest son was born while she was in medical school at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Two more sons came along while she was doing her residency. (Her third son is now a cardiologist.) A fourth son arrived two years after she started her practice, and her fifth child, and only daughter, arrived another five years later.

The first female OB-GYN at the former Milwaukee Medical Clinic on Good Hope Road -- now Aurora Health Center -- Dr. Coulter has always drawn from both medical and personal experience while talking with patients.

“They believe me when I say, ‘I know it’s uncomfortable to have swollen ankles,’” Dr. Coulter said during a 1995 interview for a Labor Day “Labor of Life” article about the medical professionals whose jobs involve labor and delivery. I wrote that story for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel several months after Dr. Coulter delivered my first daughter, Kelsey.

Kelsey, now 28, works in healthcare marketing, and Dr. Coulter is in her 39th year of OB-GYN practice, still with the same medical group.

How many babies has she delivered?

While she is often asked how many babies she has delivered over the years, Dr. Coulter has not kept track. “In my 30s, I delivered 30 a month. Nearly 39 years into my practice, I deliver at least 10 a month,” she said when I caught up with her again last week for an interview with Transformational Times.

While she has not done the math, a back-of-napkin, rough estimate could put the number of babies Dr. Coulter has delivered somewhere in the ballpark of 7,500.

The practice of being an OB-GYN has changed through the years, but babies are still born the same way. Many more women are physicians today than the 20% of Dr. Coulter’s graduating medical school class. (It is now closer to 50-50.) Maternity leaves have also become longer since her own first child was born, Dr. Coulter noted.

When she started her practice in Milwaukee, Dr. Coulter related to her patients as peers of a similar age. As a new mother herself, there were times she got home from the hospital at 2 a.m., after delivering a baby, to find one of her own babies awake and crying. “I was sitting in my rocking chair, thinking I’ll always be doing this while delivering babies... But when you look back, you only remember how wonderful a two-year-old and a newborn are.”

As she, and her children, got older, Dr. Coulter saw patients who were the age of her children. “You become like a mother figure to them,” she said of those patients.

Compassion and empathy come easily. “I really have loved what I do,” she said. “I love my job. I love people. That’s enabled me to find joy in what I’m doing, and I think that comes through. Many people say, ‘You’re easy to talk with,’ and I think they appreciate that.”

Now a grandmother of 15, Dr. Coulter is happy all five of her children and their families live in the Milwaukee area.

She could be retired by now but says she hasn't given much thought to when that may happen. "I hope I'm able to practice as long as I want. I really do enjoy it."

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