

It was a hot, dry afternoon, and I was in an artisans' market in Accra, Ghana. I had been in the vibrant West African city for nearly a week, running a workshop on financial management for local NGOs. I walked down a narrow lane with stalls crammed together on either side, admiring fabrics, woodwork and other handicrafts.

One woman's shop caught my attention. She sold wooden sculptures and intricately carved stools. As I walked into her stall, she introduced herself as Grace and invited me to look around. The small space was crowded and at one point, we accidentally bumped into each other. As I stumbled, the tip of my cigarette touched her hand. She said "Ow!" and quickly pulled her hand back. I apologized profusely. "It's okay," she assured me, putting her hand on my arm. "We're women," she said, almost conspiratorially. I paused. I didn't understand what she meant, which must have shown on my face, because she then said, "You know, from cooking. Over the fire."

It suddenly became clear to me how different our lives were. I didn't have that shared experience that she alluded to. And I didn't relate to the strength she implied – we're women, what's a little burn? I felt a world apart.

It wasn't until 10 years later that I felt the type of connection Grace suggested. It was two in the morning and I was in my apartment in New York City, in labor with my first child. The sparkling city skyline, dotted with lights from other people's apartments, surrounded me. I sat on the floor stunned and breathless after a particularly painful contraction. As the next contraction approached, I imagined all the women around the world who were laboring at that same moment. In that instant, we were all connected – rising to meet the contraction, letting it tear through our bodies, and then resting together, softly panting an encouraging "We did it. We did it" until the next one came. They were me and I was them. It was as real as anything I have ever touched.

After I delivered my son, I couldn't shake what I knew – that so many of this cohort of women who labored while I did either died, were seriously injured or lost their babies. While I knew the statistics – that in Chad, for example, 1 in 15 women die a so-called 'maternal' death – it was only by giving birth myself that the meaning of those and so many other numbers became real. It became unbearable to me that hundreds of thousands of women go through what I had just been through, but without access to the safe and clean healthcare services I had received, and were suffering and dying as a result.

And so, Kangu was born. Kangu is a crowdfunding website for safe births that reduces the number of women and children who die or are disabled in pregnancy and childbirth. Hundreds of thousands of women die preventable deaths each year, with 20 times as many being severely injured or disabled. If women had access to basic healthcare services and emergency care, 80% of these needless deaths could be averted. On our website, www.kangu.org, you can search profiles of pregnant women around the world – initially in India, Uganda, Burundi and Nepal – and contribute \$10 or more so that one mother-to-be and her baby receive access to high-quality, respectful healthcare services.

We anticipate that our most engaged users will be women – particularly pregnant moms, new moms, and grandmothers, who are eager to connect with each other and help other mothers have safe births and healthy babies. After months of building the website, vetting healthcare partners, and establishing the non-profit corporation, Kangu is just weeks away from launching.

Within the space of two years, I had two children and founded Kangu. Throughout the process of bringing into being both my kiddos and Kangu, I couldn't help comparing the two. No sleep? Check! Emptied bank accounts? Check! Neglected social life? Check! Fake it till you make it? Check! Fear of failing? Check! Labor of Love? Check!

When I first took my son home from the hospital, I tried to do everything right. I read every book I could get my hands on, I meticulously tracked my son's actions, I took copious notes at doctor's appointments. I was desperately trying to control something that was ultimately uncontrollable. After 2 sleep-deprived weeks, I was so exhausted that I was forced to focus on only the most immediate tasks. My mantra became "Feed baby, heal mama." I let go of anything that detracted from that – be it my own insecurities, the desire to do things perfectly, or even the tendency to think about what I needed to do later in the day. I had no other choice but to release anything non-essential to the moment and to my goal. It was a tremendous relief.

This lesson, that there isn't a right way, that I need only take one moment at a time and act in the way that I think best in that moment, has been extremely useful to me as an entrepreneur. Kangu is many things – a technology company, a non-profit organization, a grant-making institution, and a lifestyle brand that celebrates mothers. I couldn't build Kangu if I expected myself to know all of the answers; I don't even know all of the questions. Like parenthood, or life for that matter, there is no manual. As we close in on the beta launch, my new mantra is "Build and ship." Anything that detracts from that – be it my own insecurities, questions without immediate answers, or less urgent tasks – I gently put aside. This has freed me to work much more calmly and productively.

For parents and entrepreneurs, things change constantly. This is both a huge struggle and a tremendous relief. I have learned that my job is not to do everything right and right now. Instead, my job is to do my best and to constantly push things forward, little by little. I need to be present, try, fail fast, learn. Repeat. There is an amazing relief in building "fail" into your process from the beginning. Some days I feel like we are almost at the finish line. Some days I feel like we are miles away. I am comforted by the fact that it will continue to change and that I will continue to bring my best self to the task at hand.

Over the years, I've thought about Grace from Ghana. If I could talk to her now, I would say: Yes, we are women. Yes, we are strong. Yes, we feed our kids and we run our businesses and we love our friends and we nurture our partners and we care for our parents and we strive for more. It is my deepest desire that Kangu will not only expand life-saving health services to pregnant women and newborns around the world, but will also allow women from very different worlds to connect, to stumble into each other, to become visible to each other and recognizable in each other.