

Welcome BLACK to Sessions With Symba, the melanated podcast where I bring you conversations with Black previously pregnant and Black birthing people, along with Black birthworkers to share our stories and multi-faceted perspectives towards carrying and giving life to the babies that we love.

I am your host, Symba Luna, a Black nonbinary gender nonconforming Licensed Massage Therapist, Reiki Practitioner, Ordained Minister, and student Birth Doula, holding a collective space of peace where Black birthing people can freely tell their birth stories, and share their unique experiences. My pronouns are they/them and g, because I take Chicago with me everywhere I go, and in this space we honor all Black birth stories, all Black pregnancy experiences, all Black birthing people, and all Black family types. It is our intention to share these stories and information that we learn together, as an attempt to cultivate community awareness that seeks to combat the Black Maternal and Infant Mortality rate. We want to honor the ancestral birth workers that have come before us, and the paths that they have laid out for each and everyone of us individually and collectively as we connect and bring forth this healing and liberation work together. Welcome to the show.

Today's guest is an amazing queer and trans birthworker named Nadine Ashby. Pronouns they/them, Nadine is an experienced educator and birthing person that has brought their lived experience into their birthwork all the way from childhood into a passionate career doing phenomenal work in the community of Minneapolis. Follow along with the conversation using #SessionsWithSymba or #SWSPod as we learn how to align ourselves even more toward healing and liberation through birth work. I hope that you're comfortable, take a deep breath, and enjoy the conversation.

SYMBALUNA:

Welcome back to another episode of Sessions With Symba. I am so excited and so grateful to have you here with me today, and I would just love for you to tell the audience your name, how you identify, any pronouns that you may use, where are you from, and where do you live now?

NADINEASHBY:

Yes. I am excited to be here. My name is Nadine. My pronouns are they/them. I am a queer trans birth worker in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and I'm from Minneapolis. So, yeah, in addition to birthwork, I also am a lactation educator, and a Doula educator, and I'm studying to become a body worker as well.

SYMBALUNA:

That's beautiful. That's a beautiful combination. I have it like the opposite way, I was a bodyworker first, and then a birthworker. That's really cool. Definitely excited to get into more of that, but before we do, I would love for you to tell me a little bit about your family structure while

you were growing up? Did you grow up with your parents and or any siblings? Do you live in close proximity with them now?

NADINEASHBY:

OK. So growing up, you know, my mom and dad are both in the cities, and on my mom's side, I have two brothers and a sister. On my dad's side, I have four sisters and a brother. But my siblings on my mom's side are all in Minnesota. My siblings on my dad side's are all in Kentucky cause he's from Louisville. And mom's from Chicago. And yeah. I grew up in two different households. So my parents were separated, but, you know, so I kind of went back-and-forth. and I am the baby out of everybody. So, all my siblings are much, much, much older than me.

SL:

Wow the baby is always a unique experience, like I'm the oldest. So **(chuckles)** my baby sister, I have just watched- I'm like- I'm just amazed at the way **(chuckles)** she navigates the world. But I think that's really cool. I definitely have a family who's also- we're also a lot spread out over different cities so I can definitely relate to that. Families are so interesting. **(chuckles)** So that's cool. So leading into- I like to ask about family because I feel like family is a foundational part of birthwork, and so then I'm curious what capacity do you serve the birthing community? You did talk a little bit about the lactation and- and things like that, so I'm also curious how long have you been a birth worker? And how many births have you witnessed or been a part of?

NA:

Whew. So I've been a birth worker officially for the last 3 years? 3-4 years now. Everybody asks me how many births I've been to, and I have no idea. **(laughs)** I don't really keep count, but I mean for the last year I've been at 3 to 4 births every month? Yeah so I- I don't know. I should really go through, and make a list and figure out how many births I've been to, but I guess it's not really- the numbers aren't as important to me as just like being present with my families and my doula babies. But before I officially started my role as a Birth Doula, I was going to births with my mom, cause she was just somebody who was trusted in our family and in our community. And so since I was elementary aged, I was just kind of tagging along with her, and supporting people mostly in hospital births. So just getting in where I fit in, and holding a leg here and there, and, you know, wiping a- wiping a brow every now and then, so it's been a kind of a lifelong theme in my life. In addition to doing Birth Doula work I do some Postpartum Doula work. Just a little bit here and there, usually for families that I've already done the birth, and they just really want the continuity to happen. And then my role as a Lactation Educator I bring that into my role as a postpartum and birth doula pretty frequently. I'm talking to people about lactation, and nursing, and bottlefeeding, and you know, trying to help people find things that work for them, and work for their lifestyle. Yeah. And then also I'm a Doula educator. Myself and another trans birth worker in Minneapolis started The Birth Revolution which is focused on Queer, Trans, Black, and Indigenous Birth Justice and birthwork. Focused pretty heavily on anti-racism and dismantling the systems that have been put in place around birth, and also

around birthwork and how people become Doulas, and how people engage in doula work. So. That's- that's what I do.

SL:

I love all that. I think one it's just really cool how you had that exposure as a child, as well like, it's interesting about what you said about how people are being trained as doulas because, you know, you were already doing something like that with your mother growing up. It was probably a lot different at that time, in terms of how people are licensed or certified or like, you know, what you have to go through, versus like how you described your mom being a trusted member of the community, like someone that people probably just felt safe with, and so they asked her to attend their birth. And so I think that's really interesting cause it kind of shows how things have definitely changed since we were young, and so, it's like this work that we do and in all the ways that we do it, is very necessary cause it still- but leads back to the anti-racism that's you even have to teach especially in Minneapolis. So *(sighs)* yeah I think that's really- that's- especially with like- with everything that happened with Minneapolis over the last few years, and things. Like I think- the fact that you are also having a birth cert- well I would say transformative or revolutionary birth conversations around or I would say in a fresh scene where death was just here, you know? And an injustice death- multiple of course, but then definitely the one that was- enhanced (um) and all eyes were on Minneapolis for. So hm. I'ma gonna get into that just a little bit later. I wanna put a pin into Minneapolis, cause I definitely wanna talk a little bit more about that. Before we do, I would like to ask how did you train in terms of the changes like you know- the changes now in terms of like that we have to do a certain level of Doula education. What was that like for you in terms of coming from- it's- being something you were exposed to as a child to now it's a career for you, and I'm curious like if you had any specific schooling background? How did you come to be an educator as well?

NA:

Yeah. So you're asking like what was my kind of Doula education route right? OK. So, I feel like doula work historically at least among Black people and among Indigenous people as well, was a thing that- like being a birth worker was a thing that you sit at people's feet and you watch, and you listen, and you just have an affinity for it. You're kind of born having certain, you know, certain gifts, you drift towards certain things. And the people around you foster those things as you grow up. And so with that kind of in the back of my mind, taking a Doula class, which my first Doula course was through DONA. And it was a weekend long, and it was predominantly white, predominantly straight, completely cis- if I remember correctly. And I remember just being at the end of it like, "What was- what was this?" You know, and no shade to the instructor or anything like that, because this is kind of how a lot of Doula education is right now. It's like, here you take a weekend long class about how to do a hip squeeze, and the stages of labor, and you watch a few birth videos, you know, and you just kind of move on from there. Now you're a doula. Now you're a birth worker. And I just don't- it didn't seem like enough, you know? Just in my cultural belief. It just didn't seem like enough. Because this is something that you foster throughout your whole life, you know? Like there needs to be more to it. About how to hold

space really, and how to even be present, and how to really, truly listen, and advocate, and teach people how to advocate. And how to do those things for people who are not white, cis, straight, wealthy. People who have never dealt with addiction or any kind of STI or you know what I mean? Have never- like- can you work with the people who do not fit into this system? And I didn't really get that, you know? When I was in my first Doula class, I asked about- cause we briefly talked about advocacy, and I had asked a question- I asked about. "OK so what do you do if the nurse is racist? And how do you navigate that, and not impact your client's care in a negative way, but still address it?" And everybody in the room was like. "Oh! Wow! I hadn't even considered! I hadn't even thought of that. My goodness! Maybe we should get somebody Black in here to- so you can ask that question?" You know? **(laughs)** You know and again no shade to that teacher or anybody in that class, you know, everybody starts where they start. And everybody's on their own journey, but I just felt like I needed more. And so from there I took a class- oof- it is slipping my mind. you know what, let me look it up real quick. Yes, OK. My goodness. From there after I took that DONA course, I took a class through Common Sense Childbirth Institute to become a Certified Doula Perinatal Educator and Lactation Educator, and that class was taught by Black people, and everybody in the class was Black. And so it was very focused on Black birth, and how we do this work as Black people, and kind of our legacy. And that was great. It was really- a really good doula course. Again it was still a weekend- a weekend or two. It might've been two weekends. You know I'm not sure what year that was. I'm not good with time. **(laughs)** Time is not my friend. But I took that. It was before the pandemic. So I think it might've been 2019? So I took that course, and we had a lactation component to it, and there was some- a little bit of fatphobia and a little- a sprinkling of you know anti-trans kind of sentiments, and I was just like, "Noooo!" **(chuckles)** you know it always hurts a little bit more when it comes from Black people. But yeah so I mean we had- we had little discussions about language with lactation and being inclusive, and there was conversation about what kinds of foods people need to be eating, and people's kind of exercise patterns, which like you can talk about those things without being anti-fat, you know, fatphobic. But there was definitely a sprinkling, but besides all of that, it was a great course, and I think that I learned quite a bit. So after that, I did Postpartum Healing Lodge with Raeanne, I forget her last name, but a fantastic Indigenous Birthworker, and you know we talked a lot about tradition and foods, and you know postpartum support and things like that. And then after that, after that I was a part of a Sumi's Touch Training, that was all Black, but I couldn't finish it because George Floyd was murdered, right as it was starting up, and I was like, "Look. I can't go through the modules. I can't join your Zoom calls and stuff, and like talk about birthwork, because this city is in flames. And there are birthing people who need diapers and formula, and wipes, and food, and the grocery store is burnt down, the Target is burnt down in this neighborhood. And I have to help my clients and my peoples figure out what we gon do to fill in the gaps." So I did- I took the Sumi's Touch Training, I did bits and pieces of it, but didn't get to finish it completely. Yeah. And then I've taken like Grandma's Hands and learned about herbs and things, and I'm still continuing my education learning about herbs, especially Black traditional herbs and remedies that we have used to get us to where we are because good- goodness gracious. We've been through some things. And so that kind of healing power to get us to where we at, I need to learn that. So, that's where I'm at in this journey, and so bringing all of- all of those stories in, brings me to the birth of The Birth Revolution. After the murder of George Floyd, I was sitting with a fellow birthworker of mine on

my front porch. And I live a block away from George Floyd Square. So I'm right there in the midst of everything. And we're sitting there- the air was really like smoky and there was, you know, people with signs all over the place and stuff. And we were just sitting and talking, and talking about how this relates to birthwork. And how we have seen over and over again how, non-black people don't do much of anything until some huge explosion happens, and then instead of coming into community with Black people and being like, "Look. Let's get in where we can fit in. What's your plan, so we can support and fill in the gaps and you know like work together to actually make sustainable forward motion?" They just jump in and start doing stuff. And that's all we saw that whole summer was just white people and non-black people jumping in and doing things, you know, with no rhyme or reason, with no regard for whether they were actually helping or hurting. And I saw the same arc happen when people were becoming more aware of disparities in Black birth. And how people just start doing stuff, you know, and it's like have you- do you even know a Black person? Have you talked to a Black person? Do you have Black people who are actually your real friends? Outside of work. And so that made me reflect on my Doula education journey, and how at every turn almost, it was like if it's not anti-blackness, it's queerphobia. If it's not queerphobia, it's transphobia. If it's not transphobia, it's fatphobia. If it's not fatphobia, you know, it's people saying weird things about HIV and AIDS, you know what I'm saying? It was just like one thing after another, and I was like, "Look, clearly the- the birth work thing that I am looking for, is not here yet, and if I don't do it, who's gonna do it?" So we sat on that porch, and we just started typing away about this dream of a training that would put food on everybody's table, and would encompass how interconnected and layered all of this. So from there we just- we started reaching out to other birthworkers in our city, and so we got a lot of amazing Black and Indigenous birthworkers who are collaborating with us with this. I wanted to create something that we could compile all of our knowledge that we currently have, all of our ancestral knowledge, and put it all together, and also make it anti-racist, and do it in a way that allows for people of color, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color to have their space, and for white people to have some space to do the unpacking that they very, very severely need to do. And also talk about all of the other layers and privileges that are on top of race. So. Yeah, and now here I am. (*chuckles*)

SL:

That's incredible. What's incredible to me is the fact that you talked about like your younger days being, you know, your birth experiences, the cultural exposure you had to birth, and it sounds to me like in the midst of your city being on fire, you had to do the same thing you've kind of always done, when it comes to I would say like your position, in terms of like, the fact that you've had this- the experiences of holding a leg up or you know helping out in that way like- it definitely sounds like that was right on path- right on destiny for you to be there at that time, you know, to really be able to assess what Minneapolis needed, what the Black birthing community needed, and based on what you said about like at every turn experiencing all these different- maybe like microaggressions or- or discriminations, like you have had all the knowledge you needed, you know, to lead up to that- I mean just a crazy time. Like I can't even imagine what it was like living there, you know. So for you to describe like the- the smoky air, like the Target's burned down, you know, it's- that's- from over here that's just really incredible, and so I'm- all

power to you, all power to the Birth Revolution. Because I do believe it's so connected. Like Black people die, and Black people birth in a very similar energy, you know? And that's I think the root of what we're getting to when we're trying to combat the maternal and infant mortality rate, in the way that we are, you know? That's just my perspective you know newly entering this industry, so I really appreciate that you spoke to a lot of that, especially even the traditional tools, you know, and banding with other Black birthworkers and Indigenous birthworkers to really be able to get back to what we were always doing you know before we were interrupted, you know? And I really, really appreciate having that message here on this podcast for sure. So I'll- because we did- you did mention just how a lot of these trainings are weekends and things like that. I have kind of a two part question. I was wondering if you could talk to us a little bit about what a postpartum doula is? At least in terms of the difference versus a Birth Doula. I do believe postpartum is part of pregnancy, and that's also part of the entire journey, and so that's important to speak on even in a birth aspect. But then also like, how is The Birth Revolution different in terms of weekend doula trainings, that may not really be giving enough?

NA:

So the difference- so a postpartum Doula is someone who comes in after the birth time, and helps with some you know light housekeeping things, helps with some laundry, and helps with a newborn care. So giving some education around how to take care of a newborn, give some education about how to take care of yourself, and how to heal the body. There are lots of postpartum Doulas who have a lot of different kind of specialties. There's some postpartum doulas who really put a big emphasis on cooking meals for families. So they come into the house, they check in, you know, "How are you feeling, physically, emotionally, sometimes spiritually? How are you doing?" and check in, "How's the baby doing? How are the other people in the household doing?" And maybe do some light housework, cook a meal that's, you know, big enough to sustain the family for a little while. There are some doulas who work with herbs and so create, you know, herbal baths, and herbal peri wash, and give some teas as well. Culturally, you know, doing some pelvic steams after birth to help the body heal up and get out what needs to come out. And yeah so a postpartum Doula is there after that birth time and comes couple times a week, and checks in with people, make sure that people are doing OK. I think postpartum Doulas are so important because in this country, people kind of dote on pregnant folks, and then they have the baby, and then everybody's like, "Bye, OK, well. See you later." And you just had this huge transformational experience, and now you have this infant, and it's- it can be scary. Because we don't do things the way that we used to do things where your mother or your grandmother or you know another birthing person in your family comes into your house, and stays with you for a while, and teaches you those things, and takes care of you, and make sure that you're laying down somewhere and not up out walking around the Mall of America. You know what I'm saying? With that brand new baby (**chuckles**) Making sure that you putting on socks when you walking on cold floors and things, protecting your joints, protecting the areas of your body where cold can get in and wreak havoc. So postpartum Doulas are so important, and I just- I love them. I think everybody should have one, and that's my little soapbox. I love a postpartum Doula. And so the difference between a postpartum Doula and a birth Doula is that a birth Doula is someone who is there through your pregnancy, helping

people find information, giving people support. Even helping people create the birth team that they want in order to have the joy that they wanna have in their birth time. And then that person is there, right? Throughout the pregnancy, and throughout your birth time, helping you cope, and even if you were someone who wants to get an epidural, having a birth doula there to help you advocate for yourself, help you find information, and also help you with positioning. Because even if you got an epidural, you still have to move around so that your baby can be in an optimal position to come out. And so, birth doulas, they have a special place in my heart. Postpartum doulas have a special place in my heart too. Yeah. And then there was a second part to your question, and I forgot what it was.

SL:

No worries. I was wondering how you're- If you could just talk to us a little bit about how the Birth Revolution, the training that you're doing is different from like the weekend trainings that maybe leave people with feeling like they haven't had enough?

NA:

Yeah so Birth Revolution, the training is looking like- just from- we're still in the writing phase of getting all of our curriculum together and all of our collaborators, but it's looking like it's gonna be about three months of training. And so it's a long training. It's a long training, and I also wanted to create space for people who are neurodivergent. Because both me and the person who started this are both neurodivergent people, so it's important to us to have accessibility things in there. It's important for us to have, you know, ASL interpreters available. It's important for us to- all of the written texts that's on the modules, that there's an audio version of it. And it's important to us that we meet people where they're at, and create a safe space where people feel comfortable coming forward with the accommodations that they might need and knowing that we're gonna take it seriously and make it happen. Yeah so you know in a weekend long training it's really hard to talk about- it's hard to talk about, you know, the anatomy and physiology, along with culture, and creating ritual, and tradition, and also talk about anti-blackness, and moving past statistics. Not just spouting these dismal statistics, but moving beyond that, and talking about how do we create space for joy, and what does joy look like for Black people and Indigenous people? Because we not- we not all dying out here. Some people have cracked the code, and we just need to create more space for people to have access to that kind of care. In a weekend long training, it's hard to talk about history, you know? Like I think in order to do this work, you need a hefty history lesson. I mean getting to folks who are having babies and are HIV positive and how to support folks through that, and having time to actually process your own feelings about it, and step out of your ego. How to work with people who have a history of substance use disorders, you know? Like these are things that just won't fit into a weekend. Talking about fatphobia in birthwork, my goodness. Every single doula needs to know about fatphobia, where it comes from, and how to support people through dealing with fatphobic providers. Because there's a whole lot of them out there. So like these things are important, and they won't fit into a weekend. Especially for people who are neurodivergent and need time to process things, and maybe need a little more time to read through things. I know, myself

included, when I'm trying to read, I be reading the same sentence (**chuckles**) you know? Like it's important. So, that's what makes Birth Revolution different.

SL:

That's really amazing, I- I love that, you know it's- it's about what's accessible for the clients as well as for the learners, you know. As well as for folks who want to be a part of this work, and three months sounds amazing. Like I'ma be definitely be on the lookout because I've been wanting to do more trainings anyway, and that sounds like a training I need to be in. So I'm excited for you. I'm excited for your team to be able to- to get that work out here because we need that, you know? And it's amazing how this is what you're giving birth to in terms of from the ashes of- all of the things that happened in Minneapolis. Like that's- I think that's really amazing, really amazing work. So thank you for what you're doing for the community because even in it being in Minneapolis, I definitely believe it's going to spread, and it's going to reach where it needs to reach, which is really everywhere, you know, we need that everywhere honestly. I mean it's similar to what we talked about a little bit earlier, just, you know, sometimes even the things, and the discriminations that we see, are often even in our own communities, so we have a lot of work to do outside of just antiracism, you know? So I think that's- that's incredible, incredible stuff. So, whew. I love it. I'm loving all of this. This has been golden. Golden nuggets everywhere. So before we get into our break, talk to me a little bit about, you as a birthing person? Did you have children before you became a birth worker? And how did having your own children inform or even change your work patterns?

NA:

Yes, good question. I have two children. They are five and seven. And my oldest child is adopted. He is my cousin, but, you know, that's my baby. And I was- when we took him on, you know, brought him into- into the family, which I mean he was already in the family, but when he came and started living with us, he was 5 days old. And I was just starting my senior year of college, and he lived on campus with us. Which he wasn't supposed to be. (**chuckles**) We were just hiding a baby on the campus. (**chuckles**) But he was going to all my classes. Wasn't no- Who was gon check me? Ain't nobody gon check me. Not me and my baby. So yeah I was in college, and I was on the track to go medical school and become an OBGYN. And then after my senior year of college, I decided to have another child. So I became pregnant with my youngest. And I realized that I actually don't know as much as I thought I knew about being pregnant and about these doctors, and the hospitals, and the birth centers, and like any- any of those things. You know, like I thought I knew, but I- I didn't really know. And so, I started off getting care from a Black woman at a hospital, and I just- I was not satisfied with it. It felt very cold, very sterile, and you know I was like, "Where is the culture at? There's none? No? No culture? No culture here?" Got it. So then I switched to a birth center, and I ended up having my baby at a birth center with a midwife. And I- I did not prepare myself, not nearly as much as I needed to, and- so I mean my midwife was a lifesaver. She was like, "Okay. You gotta actually breathe though. If you wanna have this baby, you actually need to take breaths." And I was like, "Okay." (**chuckles**) Didn't realize it. Didn't- didn't realize it. That- that part slipped my mind. But you

know, I- I did the thing. I had- I had my baby in- in the tub, and they were born “en caul”. So they were born in their bag of water. Which was cool. Yeah the water just like broke at the very last minute, and yeah it was a really beautiful experience, but my postpartum time was not. It was not a beautiful experience. What I- if I could do it all over, I would've had a postpartum Doula and a birth Doula. And things probably would've went a lot different, but it was kind of from- from that point that I realized the importance and like the gravity of birth work and of birth work in a non-medical sense. And how important that role is because I didn't have it. And looking back I'm like, “That would have been- that would have completely decreased the stress that I was experiencing, especially as a Black birthing person giving birth to you know a Black child.” I just was like, it was very overwhelming, and it would've been nice to have some support through that, and postpartum support as well. And so my whole idea about what I thought about birth shifted after that. I learned a lot more about midwives, and in learning more about midwives, I learned a lot more about Doulas and other kinds of birth support. And that was really what sparked me changing my path from wanting to become an OB to wanting to do midwifery and doula work. Yeah because the more that I get deeper in this birth work journey, the more clear it becomes to me that no matter how many Black people you toss into the system, it doesn't dismantle it. You know, no matter how many Black OB's and Black surgeons, and Black doctors, and Black nurses and stuff you- you toss into this machine, they are just going to get ground up. And either they get ground up, or they get indoctrinated and like tricked into believing some of the nonsense that is given to them via white supremacy culture, through nursing school, and medical school, that you know it's just steeped- steeped in it. Yeah so. That's- that's my journey as a birthing person and how that has shifted my ideas about the medical system.

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stories. If you or anyone you know is a Black or Black queer birthing person that has a birth story that you or they want to share, we can be reached by email at journeyspa12@gmail.com. The only two requirements are that they are a Black person and that the birth story they share is at least 1.5 to 2 years old. We understand that sharing your birth story can hold many things, trauma included, and we honor the postpartum period and would prefer that Black folks who have freshly given birth take their healing time in peace. We are also very interested in hearing birth stories that are as old as we are. We can all benefit from hearing these stories and shared experiences from across time and generations, and if you know anyone looking for resources towards starting their family or educating themselves for future healthy pregnancies and births, share this episode with them. We believe in the power of word of mouth, and we appreciate your help in getting the word out so that we can be of service to pregnant and birthing families everywhere.

BACK TO SHOW:

SL:

That's definitely interesting that you were on the path to becoming an OB and heading right into the system, and you did- like your birth was like, "hard left. nope! actually." Isn't it crazy how your children can save you? Like I don't have children, but I've- I feel like I've heard stories like this enough to understand that that's a thing. Like that's really beautiful honestly too. And I definitely- I relate to the adoption as well. Like my sisters are my cousins, but I don't have to say that cause they my sisters, those are my people like I love them. I love them. That doesn't matter. You know that doesn't matter with how much I love them, you know? And how much they will always be my sisters. That's community. That's the culture. That's how our families have always been, and how we- we've been through many generations, and I love that- you know it just goes right back to how you just talked about your experience before, and this particular birth experience you know lead you into really looking at the more cultural and Indigenous practices of birth like I really- I admire that a lot. Like thank you for sharing all that with us, because that's also very personal. That is not everyone's experience, but that's a glimpse into what I've- I feel like I've seen where I'm like, "that's what we need." And when we think about going back, and what we're going back to, you know. So for birthworkers who have that background like it's really beautiful to see how your childhood and your adulthood just all connect together with that same theme that just runs along, and then even through to your own journey as a birthing person. Like that's really beautiful and then it still informing the work you do

where now you're gonna educate other people who are- who want to be birthworkers in a revolutionary way that's not really being done, like I think that's- ooooo! I'm so excited for you! Like that's so awesome, I'm just **(sighs)**. Thank you for sharing all of that with us because it's- I feel like when you hear about things like this or when I do, I feel like that's because we- this is what we're needing, and this is- needing to hear more about this, and wanting to be- this is what I wanted to be exposed to. So thank you. This is why I made this podcast. I'm like I love it so much like **(sighs)** I just love the confirmations. My ancestors be with me, so it's just like- we here. Like we here. We cool. We got it. We thank you. Thank you for bringing me to where I needed to be at, who's feet I needed to sit at today. So I'm grateful, super. Honestly. All right. All right. All right. OOO I'm so- just- just so excited. I guess I love the- being able to cultivate this energy. So, so this is the part of our show where you get a chance to ask me a question. And so feel free to take your time, you know, take some deep breaths if you need to, and then ask away.

NA:

Yeah, I'd love to hear about how you came into your birthwork journey, and what your values are around- or values or philosophy is around birthwork?

SL:

Great question. I love it. I love it. OK so I feel like sometimes I feel like I'm learning bits and pieces. I feel like I've been asked this question before, and then I feel like each time I answer it, I- I know a little bit more than maybe I did the last time I answered. So I believe that this work is ancestral for me. It wasn't always in my immediate growing up life. It's definitely something I found into adulthood. That I believe also started when I think about my healing and spiritual journey. I feel like healing a lot of my adult traumas, healing a lot of anxiety, and depression, and I think ultimately asking the question of what my purpose was, is what kind of led me to this. So it first started out with you know being a type of person where I always knew I was going to college. So that was a- that was ingrained in me, but I don't think I ever- I never questioned why, and I never really questioned what for, and I kind of just followed those motions. And I did that for about 3 years, and then I ended up not graduating. And so that really- I think it- it took a toll on me a lot more than I sometimes understood. I would say like I feel like I understand it more today than I did at the time, and so I had to- it was the first time I ever had to switch paths, and then choose something for myself. And so I ended up- still thinking- Like I chose massage therapy thinking I was gonna go back to school, like that was initially why I did it, and then like my first day of massage school, I was like "Nah I need to be here like for something else." Like it's- it ended up- the next couple years. I really came to terms with that not being why I found massage therapy, and actually being able to kind of let that go, like let that be what it is. Like I had a great college experience, and I think it taught me a lot about myself, but it was just the beginning. And so- and I had to accept that college wasn't really for me. Like it was- I think I was trying to force something or- I was trying to force fitting into the certain boxes that I had known about growing up. So being able to go away from that into Massage Therapy also helped me in terms of like healing my own body. I feel like most of my childhood was spent kind of

daydreaming, mostly in my mind, never really in my body or like I mean I noticed my body, but like that just wasn't essential aspect in terms of like, "how do I feel?" Like that being a central question. Like I just never really- that was not on my mind at all. So massage therapy really brought me into body awareness, like understanding my- even my connection of my mind to my body. And that brought me into healing a lot of different things. I was very malnourished, I was having a lot of - you know I was doing a lot of things that weren't healthy for my body in terms of- along the lines of certain drugs and also bad or unhealthy eating habits, but my eating habits having to do with a lot of like my self-worth and like if I could afford to eat certain things, and all of that was then still part of like my mind- not necessarily having healthy mindsets. So Massage Therapy brought me into "OK, this is how I have to treat my mind and treat my body in order to take care of both things and then feel well. (um) Because Massage Therapy was me really noticing, "I actually don't feel so good. (*chuckles*) Like there's actually a lot of things I probably need to work on." So and that journey brought me- we know falling in love with massage therapy, and then being a licensed massage therapist really helped me with me taking better care of my body, and the more I did that, I feel like that the more I was growing spiritually as well, connecting with my ancestors, the elevations of- the journey of my altar, the journey of the ways my altar has looked. The ways I've communicated with my ancestors and so, and the ways that they communicate with me, and a lot of times there was you know different aspects about healing, and it- it's kind of never really stopped. It's more of just kept going, so I was in massage- been in massage therapy for about five years now, and I did my Doula training at- towards the end of 2020. So through- all throughout quarantine was really like- there was a- one- one thing I need to like uncover, and I had known about- I've known a little bit about doula work from like things I probably seen on Facebook over the years, and things like that, but I had never really been in that space. Massage therapy I was exposed to prenatal massage, and so that was my- I would say my entry into, but I never thought that I was going to be a- a massage therapist with a certain specialty, and so that was a bit of a- it's interesting so then my- my journey with my ancestors really brought me into like us coming to terms where- or really me- me coming to a understanding of our relationship in the dynamic that they wanted me to choose, and that they didn't wanna just tell me everything, and like it be- and that more so be my path. And I didn't really understand that. I think that's just because most of my childhood everything was already decided so it was just not something I was used to doing, and I believe that's a gift that my ancestors have given me to explore and find out what feels good, and figure out where I wanna fit in, and what kind of things I care about. And so that brought me, quarantine and all those different kinds of questionings, brought me into- brought me to looking at how I could help families be more healthy. And so then that led me into like- so then I guess like working on different kinds of branding and things, people kept- keep asking me that question, "What's your target audience?" And I'm like, "okay. I don't really- I don't like that question, but OK. I'm gonna try to answer it, and so then if I was narrowing it down I was like, OK well I noticed that it was usually the birthing person that brought me to the family, like and even in terms of prenatal massages it was Like "oh now you got to get my partner massage, or give my mom a massage, or get my so and so." and then if I think about it that's usually the support team of a birthing person. And so I kind of decided to take a leap and go- I like had heard about the doula stuff more often through the summer, and so I was like "You know what Ima just see, I'ma just try it and see what it's like, go to the- the thing." And it was a weekend

thing, it was with the National Black Doula Association. I had chosen them because their weekend thing was the only one that did include trans and LGBTQ birth, and I was like, "OK cool I can at least get with that. so let's- let's start there." And then so, and then after that- after my training, (*chuckles*) I was reminded my family- my dad's family's from Belize, and my father was born in a house, and I kinda- that was something that they had said like all throughout my life, but I never really knew what that meant. And then doing the doula training I was like, "Oh so he wasn't born in a hospital. Ooooh. OK. That's Oh so that's a homebirth. Ooooooh OK. So they've been giving me little pieces, little- little nuggets and understandings and I just- but I kind of felt like that in terms of the similar- in terms of the training was great, but I did feel like I needed more. Like I felt like there was a lot more for me to uncover. My mentorship was helpful because- after that they required you get a mentor, and that definitely helped me go a little bit deeper. My mentor was very- very much about critical thinking in terms of Doula work, and so I think that was a really big portion, and also- that also pushed me to wanting to do the podcast. And since I knew I was gonna be moving around. Like at the time I- well right before my doula training, I was in Atlanta. And I had been displaced cause this tree fell on my house, and it was just this whole like uprooting, but I was planning to leave Georgia anyway. And so I was like, "All right. So I'm gonna kinda get on my feet a little bit here, maybe you know, start this podcast, try to talk to people." I knew that I wasn't gonna be taking doula clients, so I was like, "Well in the meantime, I can try to keep learning like as much as I can." And you know that- that's what settled into the families- the storytelling, and the- listening to people stories, like listening to certain births over and over again, then you start to like hear certain things, like why- why shit went south or what- what was the moment where- you know, like that thing where it's that meme, "This is the moment where he knew fucked up." Like that was the (*chuckles*) you know. And so I feel like that was gonna help me with understanding where- where I would come in, you know? And so I- I felt like I had a good understanding of how to be supportive to a pregnant person, but I knew that I had much more to learn in general, and with the act being in a birth space. Like I had no idea what that was gonna be like. So (um) my business or my- when I do my relaunch here in my new city. I live in Myrtle Beach now. It'll be- there's a- my whole tagline or my whole focus is healthy bodies, healthy pregnancies, healthy births, and healthy families. And to me that is a very much so that I'm available to you know the partner of the birthing person, if there are other children (um) that are a part of- that are gonna be apart of the space, and really just being open to helping my clients in however they can need me. Right now I think there's are a lot of things that are just still- I'm learning from and learning that I- maybe I need to be focused on, so I don't know- I think that there's just- I'm feel like i'm in a space where this is where I'm- this is like my foundation and hoping to- to grow from there. And then- and find- and- and also continue to find many more things that can help my clients, in addition to what I already know. And so I want to- and I also- I want to be accessible. I want to be inclusive, and I- I think right now, because I'm not in a space where I necessarily know the community where I'm at, it's more so spreading that message, regardless of who my clients are gonna be, you know? I wouldn't say that I'm- you know I- so- cause I wouldn't say that I'm really in touch with the community to know the full pulse yet, but this is also- this place is a bit more of a culture shock for me versus like Atlanta being around a little- a lot more Black people. And so I'm not sure what you know my- that space will look like, when I actually start to take doula clients, but if I'm working on white people, they still gotta know who I actually stand for, and who I do this work

for, and then my hope is that will continue to help me gravitate more and more to those people, and not just here in Myrtle Beach, but also the state, and the surrounding states. And if- and especially if other LGBTQ nonbinary, trans people, you know, are around, I do hope to find them, you know. And it's- it's gonna be- but it's- it's definitely with the message- which- letting cisgender people know who- who it's really- who it's really for, you know, and more so because it's we not- we will never all be free if some of us aren't free, and so it's just- that's really important to me. so that especially in terms of no matter what things look like in the present, people know what I stand for. And so that's- that's where I'm at. That's my lil- my lil foundation. **(chuckles)**

NA:

That's amazing. That's a great story, and supporting the LGBT and nonbinary births is just so fun and uhhh just dreamy, so dreamy. **(laughs)** Wow, but that's- I mean trying to relocate and do this work is hard. I commend you for sticking with it and trusting that it'll work out, you know? If your ancestors brought you to it, they- they gon bring you through it so, you know. It'll all work out. That's beautiful. I'm so happy that you're a part of this doula community.

SL:

Thank you, and Ase. Ase and amen.

NA:

(chuckles)

SL:

Cause absolutely. Aww that's so great. That's so great. Thank you for your question. I think that was a good one. So this is gonna take us into a little bit- the later half, and then wrapping up a little bit. I would love to know, in Minneapolis, what is your relationship like with the hospitals, the home births, the birth centers, and how have those things shifted from the tragedy of George Floyd?

NA:

Whew. Well- **(chuckles)** let's see. Hmm. You know **(exhales)** mm. This is a good question. I had a pretty- I knew a lot of like the midwives in the city, and you know- mm. you know I knew a lot of the midwives in the city. I knew some of the hospitals and a lot of the birth centers, and the homebirth midwives in the cities before the murder of George Floyd, but after the murder of George Floyd, I got to know some birth centers a little better than others. And (uh) it's been weird. Ima be real. It's been- it's been really weird. All of a sudden everybody is like talking about like, "Oh we're like anti-oppression and we're anti-racist, and we're anti-did did it did it da" you know? And in my experience, are they really? Absolutely not. No. No. None- none of them

are. And I might take some heat for saying that, but I'ma say it anyway. A lot of, you know, **(sighs)** I've gotten calls from like hospital systems, and people have been asking me like, "you know well we're losing business, you know, like where- where kind of- where are the Black people at? Like why aren't they coming to birth at our hospital anymore?" And I think, right, with the murder of George Floyd it magnified Black perinatal and infant mortality things, as well which was- I wasn't expecting to see that happen, but it did happen, and so I've- you know, people have asked me to consult with them about like, how can they make the hospitals a better like safer experience? How do we get people to come and birth at their hospitals and stuff? And they don't typically like my answer. That's why they've only called me once. **(laughs)** They don't like my answer. I'm like, "Well, first you start by tearing it down, and then you step far, far, far, far, far away and let Black people and Indigenous people dream up a new thing that has nothing to do with what's currently in place. So are you willing to sacrifice your paycheck for this? And is the person above you, and the person above them, and the person above them, willing to sacrifice their paychecks to make the hospital a safer place for people?" And usually they're like, "Well that's not helpful. Like we need, you know, like what's the- what are the things that we can actually do?" And it's like, "Well you could actually do that. You could. If you wanted to, but you don't want to." And you know then I just never got invited back, which is fine. **(chuckles)** Which is fine, you know, and I, you know, there's been- since George Floyd- I mean there was a birth center that posted some picture of this Black child like laughing, some stock photo of some Black child laughing, and they- it was their Fourth of July post, and I was just like, "You guys, really? Are we really doing that?" Like, don't do that. Like the Fourth of July is not the time for you to be like, "Look! We're gonna- inclusive of Black people!" You know? Like, it's just not it. And so, you know, they got called out, and are saying that they're going to do some work, and stuff, you know, and like there's another birth center in the city that just tried really hard to do the anti-racist, antioppression thing, and you know had predominantly Black staff for a while, and you know after about a year, all of the Black staff left. Everybody quit. Because of the anti-blackness, and the queerphobia, and transphobia, and stuff. And you know, I mean I'll- **(sighs)** I would catch heat for sharing, but it is what it is, and if you don't have the courage to share about your experience, if you don't have the courage to share about when something is wrong, when something ain't right, then you really aren't in the work. You know, your heart is not in it. So yeah it's been a weird time. After the murder of George Floyd has been a very weird time. Everybody's trying to do this performance of anti-racism, and "Oh we're so inclusive of queer and trans people, and we are, you know, like all the Black and Indigenous people, we love them so much and..." And you know, like, no yall don't. **(scoffs)** You don't, but it's OK. We gon move beyond it. Yeah so the conclusion here is that after the murder of George Floyd, my relationship and views about the hospitals and the birth centers in Minnesota has been weird and strange.

SL:

I mean it needs to be said honestly. It's important to call a spade a spade, and especially after the world saw that, the last thing the world needs to think is that Minneapolis is just fine, and everything is peaches and cream, when it's not. And so we appreciate the truth over here, so thank you. But that's also what The Birth Revolution is for, which is, saying what needs to be

said so, Oooh! All power to you. I'm sorry- I just- I got really excited there. But (**chuckles**) oh my gosh. Wow. OK so almost wrapping up, what advice would you give to families and parents that may not have access to a doula, and they fear a hospital birth?

NA:

My advice is even if you don't have the budget to have a Doula, reach out to a Doula. If there's a Doula that you see out there that you think you would have a good connection with, reach out to them regardless. Especially, you know, Black and Indigenous doulas and doulas of color, we are very resourceful and understand the importance of mutual aid and community care. And so we can work something out. Also I would ask those families to be creative. If you have skills or talents, and you want to barter, still reach out to that Doula, and say, "Look, maybe we can fund raise for money to pay you, and you know maybe my partner or somebody in my family has carpentry skills. Do you need, you know, like a table built or like a, you know, a raised bed something like that? You know like get creative. Maybe you're somebody who sells clothes or makes jewelry or you know what I mean? Get creative. I ask people to get creative. Also people be having baby showers, and ask for everything but the support. So like maybe instead of getting that expensive crib that that baby ain't never gonna sleep in, mmkay, until they get to like six months. (**chuckles**) you know what I mean? They're going to be wanting to be in the bed with you, but maybe instead of getting that crib, you ask your family to put money into your Doula fund. And as soon as you find out that you're pregnant, you start- put you know "if you want to give me a gift for this baby, put that- put my gift into my doula fund or my midwife fund, or my- you know postpartum Doula fund." so that you can have that support. Yeah so I- I tell people, still reach out. Still reach out. Most of us, will not turn somebody away for lack of payment, you know. I will go above and beyond to fundraise and do what I gotta do to support somebody, if they really want it.

SL:

I love that, and that's- that's the true nature of the work. That's what it's for, you know, because a lot of times it's the- it's those who are most marginalized, and those who may not be financially capable of, that really need this, and really need the- the revolutionary change that's gonna come, when we're educating people and really showing people how to create space for all different kinds of intersections, not even our- and including our own, you know? So I really love that. I- I think that is amazing. I think that's great advice, and so yall heard it here first. Thank you so much Nadine for coming on with us, like this has been really incredible. You've been dropping gold nuggets since you first started talking, and we so appreciate it. We appreciate your time, and if you could just share with the audience, how they can find you, how they can get in contact with you, and how they can learn more about you?

NA:

Of course. It has been a real pleasure being here and learning about you and your journey with your ancestors and everything. That is just beautiful, and hopefully we can stay in contact, but if

anybody wants to reach me or is curious about Birth Revolution, you can find us on instagram at birth revolution. You can also find me on Instagram at Doula the number four all. That's Doula 4 all. Or if you want more concrete information about Birth Revolution, and what kind of things we're going to include in our training, the website is, let's see, thebirthrevolution.org so feel free to reach out there. My doula website is doula4all.com. Doula, the number four all .com, and there's a (um) lil contact form on there if you wanna get in contact with me, but yeah that is- that's all the places that you can reach me.

SL:

Thank you so much for that, and all of Nadine's information will be in show notes for everyone. We are so excited to have had you on Sessions With Symba today, and I definitely look forward to connecting more with you in the future, taking your training, and we'll definitely- we were definitely gonna connect, and I'm a definitely posted on how things go with me too so. Thank you so much for being in the community with us, and talking to us, and I hope you have a great rest of your day.

NA:

Thank you

ACCESSIBILITY MESSAGE:

Thank you for being on this journey with us. In our effort to build a community that is inclusive and accessible, we pride ourselves on transcribing all of our conversations and captioning every video in order to be able to share what we learn with everyone. As we grow our network, we welcome and ask for feedback to best serve the uniqueness of the differently abled communities. We are also interested in connecting with Black and Indigenous individuals who provide ASL and Black ASL for future live events and productions. If you or anyone you know has any resources, we would love to be in community with you. Please reach out to us at journeyspa12@gmail.com, and we look forward to getting better every day.

QUEER DOULA NETWORK:

The Queer Doula Network believes that every person capable of gestational experiences should feel respected and heard. Finding LGBTQ+ affirming care can often be a struggle, and we seek

to make it less cumbersome. The mission of this network is to provide a directory of queer full spectrum providers for queer individuals seeking support during reproductive journeys.

Queerdoulanetwork.com is a website to be used as an informational source, not as a guide for recommendations. The Queer Doula Network does not vet listed service providers. Clients using this website should independently examine and vet any qualification and use their own best judgement before, during, and after the hiring process. The Queer Doula Network is not liable for any services rendered; the quality of said services; and/or the results of interactions between a service provider and a client.

If you are a Black queer birthworker, you can sign up for a birthworker listing at queerdoulanetwork.com. If you are Black queer individual looking for LGBTQ+ affirming care, queerdoulanetwork.com can be a great place to start and look for individuals.

OUTRO:

Thank you for tuning in to this episode! Before we leave this space, we here at Journey Spa, Sessions With Symba, and I, Symba Luna, want to uplift, honor, and stand in solidarity with Black Trans Women. We pray for the spirits of the lives lost due to senseless violence, and we intend to continue to uplift the lives and activist work that Black Trans Women have done and continue to do for the freedom of all of us. As we hope to contribute to liberation work through healing and birth work, we believe in Protecting Black Trans Youth and Black Trans Women always. We are so excited to have you on this journey with us, and we look forward to being on this journey with you toward having healthy bodies, healthy pregnancies, healthy births, and healthy families. Stay tuned for a new episode coming soon!