*What is your experience with painful menstruation and how did you learn to treat it? How did you find your path as a menstrual midwife and sexual health educator, and what have been some of the hurdles? What is it like going on the journey of traditional Siamese midwifery with your mother? How did you come to understand the power of your period and leave any cultural shame/stigma behind?*

I was born into the hands of “Moa Tum Yea” or Traditional Midwives, in a little village of Southern Thailand. My mother danced through her labour, whilst some of the village played music and when my cord was wound around my neck, they unwound it without cutting her open and a special piece of bamboo was chosen from the forest to cut my cord a few hours after I was born. Postnatally she drank herbs and bathed in them, stayed close to a fire for almost a month and was massaged almost daily to recuperate. The whole experience was photographed and written about in various Thai magazines as an act of cultural preservation. This kind of wisdom was slowly being drawn into hiding or at the very least being superseded by a western vision of natal healthcare. Just a week before my birth my mother was kidnapped and held at gunpoint for an afternoon because she sought out this kind of birth. At the time it was “unofficially” outlawed. Local hospitals were becoming the officially sanctioned places to give birth. As seen all over the world. In Thailand at this time. The price could be high for practicing or receiving. Later she would take me with her to study Siamese Traditional Midwifery (*STM*) and leave me at home when it wasn’t safe enough. My mother’s teacher, Kru Sawang (Bright Teacher), only agreed to take her as an apprentice, because her own daughter had gone missing in unusual circumstances. This wisdom is not something that is to be taken for granted nor shared without thought, it is usually only handed down through bloodlines and by strict oral tradition. During the 5 years spent at the side of her Kru, and the other midwives in her locality, my mother didn’t write a single thing down but instead expanded and built up the power of her memory. Like most old time people all over the planet, this kind of skill is in decline, under attack or being capitalized on in other ways. It can not survive as the old format alone, there is no consciousness left in the community to hold it all together. This has deeply impacted how I work and think of the menstrual experience. I have so much respect for the people willing to maintain centuries of tradition in the face of bureaucracy and powerful industrial medical complex. Whilst I was taught this Siamese perspective, part of these teachings maintain that the source of their wisdom and the wisdom of others around the globe, are the same and thus many parallels or similarities form across cultures.

I started menstruating at 14 and given my mother’s training one may imagine my menarche (or first period) would be abundant in ritual but it wasn’t. She was kind and alerted me to all the ways in which I needed to keep myself clean, what different colors of blood meant and warmly welcomed me into the “club”. The family was in London and going through a heavy divorce, there was no outside culture that could hold what I now know and without the power in collective thought, lots of the subtleties can go amiss. I don’t blame her for not being able to articulate how I could view my body as powerful. Anyway, to my 14 year old self there was nothing magic, mystical or profound about this blood and with hindsight I see that no one could have convinced me otherwise. Shame, fear and stigma ruled me, like so many of us. I had been living in the U.K since I was 5 and my world view at the time was agnostic and fully science based. It wasn’t until I moved back to Thailand at the age of 16 that I got my first glimpses into the world of spiritual understanding that pervades daily life in my home country. I didn’t ask for these experiences, they just came and that’s what shook me out of a purely scientific slumber to the world beyond. (I want to note that I do still value Science and incorporate it into my world view but not as a dogma.)

Yet, none of this would truly take root until I was 18, and I started getting cramps that gradually escalated into a kind of fast paced flowering of non-stop pain that no painkiller could solve, would leave me vomiting and on the worst occasion passing out from. My cycle was 45 days long, with 7 days of abundant bleeding. This is when I began to look into ways to heal my body.

The *STM* system emphasises self-led learning and care, so my mother didn’t tell me anything until I asked her about what I should do. She directed me to look at the foods I was eating, to notice how I felt during, before and after bleeding, what I was doing at those times and to find out what it was that was causing a blockage or what had changed in me that caused so much tension. She highlighted that relaxation was a key to releasing these cramps. That even my thoughts could impact my body. That’s when I began my research with vigor and haven't stopped since. A whole world opened up to me that I could not have known was just behind the veil. The intense politics around the female body, the long and painful history of silencing, violence and unfair treatment around menstruation, the period tax! Some of it was excruciating to learn, like the roots of modern gynecology with experiments on enslaved women, or the derogatory, alienting, shameful and violent way in which hysteria was treated in Victorian England that still lingers today. I learnt a whole new take on my biology. The liver being another organ responsible for healthy menstrual function. That Menstruation comes from the greek word for month and is linked to the moon. And with every lesson my mother sat down with me to share her practice, I understood better that our bodies are built to function in this world of cycles. Our bodies have gone through millennia of evolution to live upon this planet, to be involved with the seasons, the shifts, the celestial bodies. I learnt that the menstrual cycle is an inbuilt framework for acute sensitivity and grounded living. The menstrual cycle can serve as a tether in a world that is so fast paced and designed to not ever stop. To remind ourselves that we run on our own time. It’s something I can’t escape and instead of working against the tides, leaning into them is so much easier and more fruitful.

Within 1 month I saw changes, and within a year and a half, I had no cramps at all. Instead I intensely enjoyed my 35 day cycle, and felt a little sad that I only had 4 days of bleeding to tune into my super-heightened senses but happy that my curse had been transformed into a gift. This came from mandatory quiet time I carved out for myself, tracking my cycle, learning about the sensitivity of my body to harsh sounds, foods, images and situations as an alternative way to look at PMS. No dairy, little well-reared meat, exercise, self massage, good sleep, essential time in various forms of mediation and supplements of Magnesium, Iron, Comfrey, Burdock and Vitex-agnus castus (chasteberry) all contributed to the transformation. I only get cramps during extreme stress, which does happen now and again and calls for a moment by moment adjustment of what is best for me to support my overall health.

After 5 years on an off learning with my mother about how to be sensitive and treat bodies with care, directing self-learning, massage, foods to eat during which parts of the cycles and more she gave me her blessing to begin working with others. I’m Thai, Haitian, Scottish and French so I try to incorporate all parts of me somehow into this work and combine this training with my apprentice herbalist skills and other modalities I’ve been lucky enough to learn. Regardless, the base is *STM* and this is governed by unseen teachers who guide the student along their way. And guide they did (and do). They sent me to people wanting this kind of work and once I saw that simple things such as changing perspective and making sacred space for oneself could impact others and not just myself in truly profound ways, I knew that this was important and the circumstances of my birth were no accident.

I call myself a Menstrual Doula or Midwife because the Siamese Midwifes work encompases sex, birth and death. Their attentive skill and knowledge of the body allowed them to be present for the key aspects of human life cycle. I’m not a full fledged midwife and don’t know if I’ll ever be. I’m choosing the parts I feel comfortable with and for now it’s the sex part. That being said, even the sex part contains elements of the other two working areas. But I’m still growing, learning and listening to what questions to ask next. I’ve created Seed and Bee which is a platform for me to share this information, through social media, workshops and one on one work. The biggest challenge I’m overcoming is figuring out how to put this information into a coherent format within our quickly emerging “menstrual revolution” and how to honor what has been only an oral tradition, through writing. I also call myself a *Community* Sexual Health Educator because I didn’t go to university for this, I’m coming at this angle with a different kind of education. I see myself as your big/little sister who reads a lot and wants to share all the information with you and listen to what you have to say. Having a space where people collect together to talk about all things menstrual and sexual from their own perspectives is an age old tradition that is sorely missed today. “Moon Mouth” is a workshop I have hosted that aims to re-generate that space. It’s one of the ways I can bring alive the old school ways. There is a huge need today for ground level work to dismantle and overcome stigma that pervade our western culture. Some days I am overwhelmed by the need for better healthcare and access, dismayed to my core that so many painful legacies live on in legislation and crude comments people make. Yet this kind of old school medicine *always finds a way*, and if I pay attention, dedicate and quiet myself enough - the unseen teachers that rule this tradition speak and I’m just a humble conduit for the work anyway. This is why I’m building Seed and Bee at a pace that suits this work, to make sure I can honor the tradition properly whilst doing what nature does best, evolve to suit the conditions of our time.