



## FIRST PERSON

# Creating New Childbirth Traditions

### A husband breaks with tradition to help his wife deliver their first child



Photo: Alexander Golubov

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It wasn't easy getting Nikolai Yarmakov to take part in the birth of his son. Among many Ukrainians there lingers the attitude that men do not do “women's work” like making the bed, cooking or being present for childbirth. Customarily, a husband gathers with his friends to await news of the birth and then toast the newborn.

Nikolai finally agreed to help in the birth of his first child only after much cajoling from his wife, Maria, and doctors at the Sakhi Rayon Maternity Hospital in the Crimea. Supported by USAID since 2003, Sakhi Maternity seeks to improve reproductive and infant health in Ukraine by fostering quality birth services and nurturing family involvement. Improving maternal health is part a larger effort by USAID and the Ukrainian government to improve overall health in the country.

Based on guidance he received from Sakhi's birthing classes, Nikolai held Maria's hand and massaged her back during the labor and delivery, which she said helped her considerably. He also talked to her and, most importantly, helped her choose a comfortable position. “I delivered our son in a chair with my husband holding me from behind. When I turned around to see his face — he was crying....

“For the first time in my life, in 15 years of marriage, I saw my husband with different eyes after he helped me during labor and delivery of our son,” Maria wrote in a letter of thanks. “I realized how tender and reliable he is. Before the delivery we had squabbles all the time, and the reasons was that he maintained that pregnancy and delivery is completely a woman's business.”

Maria's letter, one of many sent by women who have delivered at the Sakhi hospital, was especially moving. Maria wrote that if not for Dr. Ludmila Belobaba, the obstetrician who oversaw the birth, Nikolai might have never come around. “She insisted that Nikolai visit birth-preparation classes. It was not an easy task but when Nikolai saw other men at the classes his resistance vanished,” Maria explained.

She said that Nikolai told her afterwards that it was as if he had felt all the same feelings she had, and had delivered the baby together with her.