AIMS For a better birth...

My Instagram Birth Art

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By Hannah Wood

This is a picture of a pregnant me walking up a hill in the Gower a few weeks before my daughter was born. Drawing and painting aren't really my skills, so I used digital art techniques instead. It was fine to size it to an Instagram (IG) template as I've just started using IG myself as part of my creative life.

It's a picture of me doing outdoors stuff – I had a really easy pregnancy and kept active right up until the end, although it helped having my daughter arrive early. I'd never considered that as a possibility as they

always tell you that first babies are likely to be later than expected.

So while I definitely enjoyed being pregnant and I felt bonded to my child, I also felt that I had a science experiment going on in my tummy which made me use the diagram for my unborn child, remembering school biology. And I was aware that the science felt interesting to me – that feeling of excitement and wonder and not knowing how it's going to turn out. But it did also feel like a lot of people wanted to make observations, take readings, and have opinions about something that was very personal and part of me.

The other strong and 'real' element of this picture is the photo of me cradling B, and I'm walking towards this. For me, pregnant and looking ahead, it would be science that would turn the nebulous concept of a child inside me into something more concrete, but something that I also knew very little about.

Again and again when I was making this piece of art, I tried to balance the two contrasts of knowing and not knowing, strong and soft, and both of them playing out together as I gave birth.

I think that not knowing was a lot less comfortable when I translated it into thinking about the birth. There seemed to be so many variables in it, and so much conflicting information. I felt that it could be a very rational experience with medical methods and statistics and a birth plan, and that was how I was leaning in my head. I wanted it to be my way, but my way by all the scientific guidance. This is the route that comes from my head, with thought clouds and a clipboard and how I thought it would be before I gave birth.

The second route comes from my heart, as I look back on giving birth now and a lot of the time the process was being managed by my instincts, from somewhere inside me that just felt its way through. I think if I'd known this when I was pregnant, I'd have taken much more care of that part of me. Trusted it more, and advocated for it more assertively.

And I think now I've come back to working for AIMS, that this is what I want championed in maternity services – the balance between evidence-based processes around physiology with the support and cherishing of the parts of birth that can't easily be put into words and numbers. This picture tries to encompass that, and it's made me think of the times since that I've slowly learned to take notice of my instincts and ask for those things too.

Author Bio: Hannah is a mum to a teenage daughter and a rescue tabby all living in a muddly house in the West Country. She loves gardening and making things and is always working to make more time for both.