



Review of the new book, 'Born Stroppy' by Ruth Weston

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Born Stroppy

By Ruth Weston

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330 pages

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Available to buy from [AIMS](https://www.aims.org.uk) and from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

Reviewed by Catharine Hart

Ruth's wonderful book, part memoir, part toolkit, is a real page-turner. It was a thrill to have a chance to read a review copy - in fact, after I started dipping into it, I really couldn't put it down. Ruth tells

“herstory” with compelling honesty and humour. The stories are so personal and relatable. Although Ruth is keen this is not seen as a “handbook” for activism, here is a collection of inspiring stories, organised to give useful tips and tools to, as the strap line says “Make Change Happen”. This is a hugely inspiring account of Ruth’s journey, as a mother, businesswoman and activist.

Sharing her expertise from over 30 years of activism, Born Stroppy is for anyone interested in campaigning, or just wanting an understanding of why our maternity services are in crisis and so little seems to have changed on key issues, despite a strong evidence base and years of campaigning. Ruth’s passion to make a difference is clear and reading Born Stroppy really reminded me why we here at AIMS do what we do. Ruth has walked this path beforehand, and gives us newer activists a road map and valuable lessons in pitfalls to look out for. She doesn’t shy away from harder topics - there is grief and rousing tales of deep injustice, but we see how they have shaped her. It is an engaging and energising read - I was laughing one minute, on the verge of tears the next. I LOVED how, forced to make an appointment with a consultant, which she didn’t want or need, she suggests instead that he come “to see me at my home” - which promptly shuts that one down!

The whole book is really valuable, but a few chapters particularly jumped out at me - Ruth talks about the rousing speech she gave at the AIMS and ARM (Association of Radical Midwives) 2003 conference in Birmingham. Shockingly, as Ruth points out, things have not changed much since then. She writes of the birthing pool being kept in the basement of the hospital in Bradford for 13 years, not because women didn’t want it - they weren’t asked - but because of the opinion of a consultant who had decided that “only whales and dolphins have babies under water”¹. We will find out that Ruth herself shortly goes on to prove him wrong. The total lack of kindness, respect or compassion that Ruth describes is heartbreaking and anger-making in equal doses. For us at AIMS, it ties straight to the reasons AIMS was first founded 65 years ago - initially being called the “Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Pregnant Women”¹.

Ruth points out that the current UK maternity service is “structurally misogynistic because it puts the well-being and smooth running of the system over and above the well-being and needs of the women and their families that pass through.” And that “this lack of human kindness is systemic” and services are still not listening to what women are saying. Ruth also points out that “Maternity care in the UK stops far too early; a live mother and baby is not enough; we need to be healthy and happy as well.” - echoing what AIMS has been saying for years about the longer-term effects of pregnancy and birth, on the whole family and even wider community, which are often never acknowledged. Ruth also talks about her experiences with continuity of carer, one of our [key campaigns](#) here at AIMS:

“In my life as in many others, continuity of midwifery carer from a midwife you know and trust made an enormous difference to the health and well-being of me (the mother) AND my family.”

And:

“Having real continuity of carer from a midwife I know and trust made me realise what a massive difference it makes to one’s physical, mental and emotional health. It is a game-changer; it puts the odds in favour of making it through, even when things are bleak. I know that a midwife could

not wave a magic wand and give us the money to fix the car and pay the bills, and they could not give my husband paternity leave or bring him home from working away. But what they did was bridge the gaps of the understanding and skills I needed, gave us information, empowered us, gave us emotional and social support.”

Ruth says,

“To be silent is to be complicit and however uncomfortable it is, we are duty bound as professionals and human beings to act for the well-being of mothers and babies.”

She outlines clearly ways to “change and disrupt the system that heals and hurts us”, reassuring us that we are often not alone in our experiences and adding words of wisdom and encouragement throughout. With her words beside us, we are certainly better and wiser as campaigners.

As Ruth says “together, we will overcome” – please pick up and read this rallying call, you will be glad to have done so. This is an important reminder of why and how we must continue to campaign to improve maternity services for all, and find our voices. Certainly it’s one that should be top of the AIMS reading list for all volunteers - AIMS members might also like to see if their local libraries can purchase a copy so it can be shared more widely.

I would like to end this review with the inspiring words from Ruth:

“Beyond cynicism, there is always hope because as we act and speak out, we make space for others to do the same”. Let us always remember that “TOGETHER WE CAN DO THIS!”

Thank you Ruth, for sharing your wisdom with us all.

Ruth’s book was launched on 10th May and is now available to buy from [the AIMS shop](https://theaimsshop.org), Ruth will also be holding workshops with AIMS later in 2025.

If you'd like to join the AIMS Campaigns team to help us work towards a maternity system that truly meets the needs of all, please contact campaigns@aims.org.uk

[1](https://historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/something-should-be-done-campaigns-for-choice-and-human-rights-in-childbirth/) Davies, A. (2012) ‘Something should be done’: campaigns for choice and human rights in childbirth
<https://historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/something-should-be-done-campaigns-for-choice-and-human-rights-in-childbirth/>