AIMS For a better birth...

Birth poetry from the pandemic

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Introduction by Danielle Gilmour

In our last Journal - 'Birth of a pandemic: How we coped'— we heard from mothers, healthcare professionals, birth supporters, volunteers and birth activists about how the pandemic has had profound and lasting effects on the birthing world. From the (ever-changing) rules and regulations, to staff shortages, to changes in our very bodies — the conditions under which people have been giving birth are truly unchartered waters. How are we coping? One of the most powerful ways some women have found of processing their experiences is to express them through poetry. And in so doing, they hold up a mirror to the world in a way that makes us all reflect on how we've fared.

The following three poems are deeply personal and yet they speak to experiences that will surely be shared by thousands of people the world-over. We approached the writers for theMum Poem Press for the voices of women who have given birth during this pandemic. One thing remains true – bringing new life into the world is still beautiful and joyous, if fraught with uncertainties. But that joy has sadly been tempered by isolation from loved-ones, fears around contracting Covid, and the road ahead so unknown.

Road unknown



By Helena Lyon-Shaw

This time
I knew you before I knew about you
I sensed your presence
In the hallway
Under the half moon
My response was a knowing smile
I knew

How different it all would become
When the rest of the world got involved
We were wing clipped and starved
Far removed from our loved ones' gaze
We stood on empty street corners
In the dark
Grieving our loss

Later
You were called a lockdown baby
I was appalled
You were always my spirit baby
I knew you before I knew about you
That knowing smile
Under the moon

The world has now joined in
Joined us in our universe
Time is a healer

But things are not the same
We are forever marked by circumstances
By this road of ours
The road unknown

Author Bio: Helena is a mother of two, a forensic nurse and a dreamer. She lives in Berkshire with her children, her husband and their dog. She enjoys poetry, reading, sewing and drinking tea on woodland walks.

Poem: Giving Birth at the Height of a Pandemic



By Lizzie Wilkins

I watched every episode of one born every minute
But not one episode
showed
what it is like
To give birth at the height
Of a global pandemic: April 2020

Not one episode told
About lockdown and face masks
The fear of each stranger past
In long corridors
Markers signifying 2 metres stuck to the floor

Not one episode explained
What it's like to feel a contraction's pain
But to be too scared to lean on a window's ledge

Because covid was deadly and easily spread

Not one episode suggested
My husband would not be my side
As I attempted to hide
The pain and fear of being alone
Whilst he was sent hesitantly back home

Not one episode predicted
That the sense of being in hospital had shifted
No longer a safe space to rest and recover
Childbirth over and you're now a new mother

Tiny baby in need of protection
Which leads your logic to the rejection
Of time in a hospital to heal and to rest
Desperate to leave after all of their tests

I want to go home
I want to go home
Even though home meant we were alone
So very removed from what we thought we'd known

Everything changed because the fear of this disease
Instilled with me a sense of unease
Which I connected to my tiny baby
And thoughts flashed through my head like... Maybe

Maybe I've made a mistake
Because they say it takes
A village to raise a child
And I have no idea when we will be reconciled

And fear won't be the baseline
Connected to this child of mine

Author Bio: Lizzy became a first time parent during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic (April 2020). After the birth of her son, Lizzy experienced severe postnatal depression and anxiety. As a result, she struggled with bonding and attachment towards her baby. After being admitted onto a Mother and Baby Unit, Lizzy began writing poetry and drawing as a way to process and express the emotions and experiences she was living through. Writing became an outlet and a release; a way for her to articulate her experiences in a way she was unable to in any other form. She now uses her work as a platform to

raise awareness of maternal mental health and wellbeing.

Lockdown Love



By Laura Gooch

The wait before
Was long and arduous.
Every step an uncertain one,
Every decision a tentative one,
With back-ups and plan Bs in place.
When it happened
I was on the ward for 24 hours.
Alone.
Waiting for the time to call my husband and say,
Come up. Come up. It's time.
You can be here with me.
You can hold my hand,
And rub my back
And whisper 'you're doing well' through the veil of your mask.
She came into the world unaware of the social distancing
and lockdowns that awaited her.
She came in fresh and new,
Bold and brave.
He held her in his arms and we had hot toast and warm cuddles.
All was well for a short while.
Then he had to go,
And I held her and wept.

She met her sister on video call -
First embraces had to wait.
Everything had to wait.
Some things are still waiting.
I am full of joy that she came into the world,
And full of sadness for the world she came into.

Author Bio: Laura is a marketing and content officer and mother of two. She loves soul music, strong tea and savage banter, and lives in sunny Eastbourne with her lovely husband and two gorgeous girls.