

4th Episode

Pregnancy and childbirth, under lockdown

Welcome to Doorstep Revolution, a project emerging out of the heart of South Riverside in Cardiff and run by gentle/radical, an arts organisation based in the neighbourhood, and interested in connecting up culture, community, politics, spirituality, and healing justice.

Supported by a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, this sound archive was born out of the pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

We spent time knocking on doors, hearing people's stories and finding out how our thinking about the future might have changed under COVID.

From homeschooling to weddings under lockdown, from acute isolation, to finding new forms of togetherness, these conversations with neighbours reveal questions and profound reflections on recent times and how we might wish them to be different.

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During the pandemic life continued, including the welcoming of new life. In this episode, we find out about two very different but overlapping experiences from a new mother and from a grandmother. We hear from Hardev on Wells Street, whose daughter-in-law, Umrah moved to Cardiff from India just before the pandemic, and gave birth to a new baby son. And we also hear from Jess on Rolls Street, who lives just around the corner, and who talks about her experiences of pregnancy, birth and parenting under lockdown.

Hardev

The most wonderful thing in the lockdown was my grandson, that was amazing. Obviously, it was the pandemic, you were still worrying about what's gonna happen, when he's going to nearly arrive, is everything going to be okay? That was the worrying part of the situation we were in. But luckily, everything went well, and that's fine. It took a day for us to see him because we couldn't go to the hospital, and that was frustrating. I've got a beautiful grandchild, I can't even go and see him. And, obviously, that was hard. And also, the hard thing was, you know, keeping yourself safe as well, not going out.

Jess

I was working from home like between March and July, without anyone knowing that I was pregnant. Because, had I been in the workplace people would have known, but because I was working from home, no one needed to know, and so I didn't tell anyone. So my family knew, but that was it. And so it was just a lovely time. We went for loads of walks. My partner had nine weeks worth of furlough. So we walked every day around Bute Park. We'd never had that kind of attachment to the parks in Cardiff before, but we just walked a long way while my bladder would hold. I knew that work would fuss, I didn't want fuss. I told them on the absolute last day I had to, which was right at the end of the academic year. And actually it meant that I wasn't returning for the next academic year at all. So actually, what's particularly strange for me is that when I think back to that time, my last day working was the last day that I knew myself in that way, and that Self was gone. I didn't realise that that was the last time I would be myself in that role, in that way, like, it's gone because now I'm a mother. And it's gone because of the pandemic but it's gone because I'm a mother like, I can't return to that job in that role in the same way ever again. And so it's really strange that whatever that date was that I was last in Worcester, that's like this last known version of myself. And I'm about to return to work, but I don't really know who I am in that role when I return to work now. So, kind of, who knows...

Hardev

She came to Britain in February. In March, it was a lockdown. She said, I only seen a few places - the castle, and then nothing. Nothing I seen ... Yeah. And that's what it was for her. And she did find it very difficult to see what was going on. And she said, is that the way you live? I said, well, no, we actually don't, it is the lockdown, and nobody can go out, until we've been told we can. It was a time where it was hard for her to adapt to all that, coming from India, you know, to a lovely lifestyle. You know, people passing by, people coming in, and all of a sudden, after February, it was a lockdown. She did find it a bit stressful, you know, but what's going to happen, but that's what it was at the time.

Mary-Anne

And then just having a baby and having to deal with health services and so on...

Hardev

Yeah, and it was all these video calls and stuff like that. So she really hasn't had that experience of going and being pregnant, and going to antenatal clinics, meeting other mums. It didn't happen, it didn't happen for her. I think that was a challenging thing as well for her really, you know, and going into hospital, and, you know, no English, nobody can go in with you, they'll have an interpreter for you, and that's all it was. You know, not going to antenatal appointments, and where they go to, you know, for new mums and that. There was nothing there for her to go to. Obviously, she had to be kept safe and everybody else was involved.

Jess

Like, obviously, I had nine months then, in near total lockdown, able to acclimatise on my own. But like women are used to acclimatising to that role alongside other women, and alongside friends and family, and I couldn't have anyone visit. I couldn't see my family. I couldn't really be in my mum's house. Yes, we got to see them over the summer, and like their response back to me was they just couldn't believe that I had this huge belly, because I was so infrequently there, when in other circumstances, I would have been sharing it with a group of people. So yeah, there's definitely a sadness there because something that's about women coming together was taken away from me. So yeah, I was mainly concerned that I'd have Jason there with me, and that we'd be able to be there together. And actually at the time, he kept working after his initial nine weeks of furlough. He's a floor layer and so that's domestic and commercial properties. So he was like the biggest risk to us, and as the news kind of got worse at the end of the summer, in the autumn. It kind of felt like, oh, hang on a minute, in a minute there might be something quite substantial that I have to do on my own. I didn't sign up for that. Fortunately, he was able to be there. And I had no intention to hang around in a hospital environment, so I was in and out in 24 hours. But I guess the most substantial difference is that the two weeks following, no one visited us because Wales was in its circuit breaker lockdown. So he was born just at the beginning of that circuit breaker lockdown, so his grandparents couldn't visit and his aunts and uncles couldn't visit. And for weeks, they saw him across the doorstep, in the cold and the rain and the dark. So we had this, like, a second gift that we got to spend all of this time like just us and him, which was amazing but it's kind of like, we're seven months down the road now and we've missed out so much, like so much of that stuff that's just automatic, whether it's family or like aunts and uncles at the door, sitting on your sofa and just having a cuppa when you've had sleepless nights back to back, that would be nice.

Hardev

I'm diabetic. And well, I was really, really ill, I wasn't in hospital, I didn't go to hospital or anything. But the thought of it, it was awful. It was before Christmas. And we all had it, she had it, my son had it and of course, the baby was only a couple of weeks old. And they said they couldn't do anything for him. He has to stay at home. But you've got to monitor him and see if he's okay. If, God forbid, anything you think is not right, you have to dial 999 and take him to hospital. And that was really, really horrible, you know, I wasn't worried about myself, but the baby, he's just a little baby, what's going to happen to him? Those couple of weeks, you know, I had the COVID for nearly three weeks, because I was quite poorly. But all I was worried about, my grandchild. He was just a newborn baby. Thank goodness, he was fine. His mother could stay with him but the thing was, anything could have happened. And the worry for all of us, it was like, you know, every day passed, we thanked God that day.

Jess

I guess it's like not having the opportunity to grow into parenthood alongside other people. Like in January, that shook us, that made us kind of realise how isolated we'd been. And that's what we've

missed out on, is to grow into parenthood with other people, other babies and friends or strangers that are going through the same things, that just make you realise that you're not going out of your mind.

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We hope you enjoyed hearing from some of the voices in our community. Doorstep Revolution is an ongoing project. So if you're a Riverside resident and want to get involved, do get in touch with us at gentleradical.org. In the coming months and years, we'll be continuing to build a resource of stories, perspectives and dialogues exploring the realities as well as the dreams of people living on our doorstep.