



Labor Day: Birth Stories for the Twenty-first Century: Thirty Artful, Unvarnished, Hilarious, Harrowing, Totally True Tales

Eleanor Henderson (Editor), Anna Solomon (Editor)

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Thirty acclaimed writers share their personal birth stories—the extraordinary, the ordinary, the terrifying, the sublime, the profane

It's an elemental, almost animalistic urge—the expectant mother's hunger for birth narratives. Bookstores are filled with month-by-month pregnancy manuals, but the shelves are virtually empty of artful, entertaining, unvarnished accounts of labor and delivery—the stories that new mothers need most.

Here is a book that transcends the limits of how-to guides and honors the act of childbirth in the twenty-first century. Eleanor Henderson and Anna Solomon have gathered true birth stories by women who have made self-expression their business, including Cheryl Strayed, Julia Glass, Lauren Groff, Dani Shapiro, and many other luminaries.

In *Labor Day*, you'll read about women determined to give birth naturally and others begging for epidurals; women who pushed for hours and women whose labors were over practically before they'd started; women giving birth to twins and to ten-pound babies. These women give birth in the hospital, at home, in bathtubs, and, yes, even in the car. Some revel in labor, some fear labor, some feel defeated by labor, some are fulfilled by it—and all are amazed by it. You will laugh, weep, squirm, perhaps groan in recognition, and undoubtedly gasp with surprise. And then you'll call every mother or mother-to-be that you know and say "You MUST read *Labor Day*."

Labor Day: Birth Stories for the Twenty-first Century: Thirty Artful, Unvarnished, Hilarious, Harrowing, Totally True Tales Details

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From Reader Review Labor Day: Birth Stories for the Twenty-first Century: Thirty Artful, Unvarnished, Hilarious, Harrowing, Totally True Tales for online ebook

Edan says

I have an essay in this anthology, but I am rating this based on the work by my fellow contributors, women like Cheryl Strayed, Joanna Smith Rakoff, Dani Shapiro, and many, many, more. This anthology offers so many diverse birth stories, and each took my breath away: they're honest, they're harrowing, they're moving, they're funny, they're true. It's a great, necessary book!

Elyssa says

Interesting, honest, and raw birth stories from a variety of writers.

Emily says

Some were great, some were terrifying (especially while pregnant), most were written really well, and almost all of them made me cry.

2018 Reading Challenge: A book with an ugly cover

Destinee Sutton says

So I'm six months pregnant and getting tired of reading blah prose about pregnancy and birth. I was really excited to find a book of essays about childbirth by great writers. Finally! A pregnancy book the English major in me can sink her teeth into (really the English major in me should say, "into which she can sink her teeth").

Now, I liked this book for the quality of the writing, but I'm going to say that I sort of regret reading it. If you're a pregnant lady trying to prepare for an unmedicated home birth (as I am), this is not the book for you. Many of the stories are horrifying. My last midwife appointment was full of me relating stories from this book and Shari assuring me, "That's very rare." It's almost impossible to shelter yourself from negative birth stories nowadays, but you certainly don't have to read this book and freak yourself out. So many of the stories start with some version of, "I really wanted to have an unmedicated birth," and end with epidurals, c-sections, and various traumas. Even though Ina May Gaskin's books are hardly poetry, they are meant to get you to a place where you believe you can have an awesome birth.

To be fair, I know that these stories are all true and they are not all scary. Still, if you were about to take your

first trip on an airplane, would you want to read a bunch of stories describing traumatic airplane trips that didn't go as planned? Probably not. Better to read it after safely landing at your destination.

I may alter my three-star rating after giving birth. There are some really great essays in here. I particularly liked Cheryl Strayed's, Gina Zucker's and Susan Burton's, but they are all worthwhile.

Sherbert says

Good for pregnant women who are not easily alarmed. Really nice to read birth stories penned by good, thoughtful writers.

Jessica says

WHITE LADY BABY FEELINGS TIME. Still worth reading if you're pregnant or have been pregnant, but don't buy it. I got RULL tired of the incessant "the only good birth is the home/unmedicated/'natural' birth and any other birth is only worthy of lesser assholes who feed their children food with high fructose corn syrup" crap, and thus got to revel in schadenfreude when they had to face the reality that all the holier-than-thou in the world won't solve medical issues during labor and birth.

Amanda says

Since these are all written by authors, they are mostly all about births to women of a very certain demographic, i.e. mine, in Brooklyn. But with that caveat, I found them interesting in a voyeuristic way and slightly terrifying.

Nicolas says

This is the book about how I was born and I love the way I was born

Jill Gooch says

Loved it!

Even though I am way past childbearing age, I still love to read about having babies. Well written, I couldn't turn the pages fast enough. Thank you!

Heather says

I have mixed feelings about this book. On one hand, I really appreciated hearing all the varied perspectives and experiences about birth. As a woman approaching that day soon herself, I was craving some real, honest, and uncensored accounts of what other women have been through. However, it can be very scary to hear what can go wrong, and how many unexpected things can happen no matter how much you prepare! I knew that to be true but also I will admit some of these stories caused me to have nightmares and anxieties about my own impending birth. So I would suggest that people read these stories cautiously and with the knowledge that anything can happen. I was hoping it would help me build my confidence going into birth knowing I wanted a natural, unmedicated one if possible, but this book has actually just taken away some of my previous confidence and made me much more nervous. So while a good read, and obviously well written stories, I'm still not sure how to feel about the book and my reading of it at this particular time in my life.

Margaret says

As a mom, I found this to be a really interesting read. Apparently I had easy birth experiences compared to most people! Yikes!

Erin says

I just gorged on thirty birth stories, and my head is spinning. I remember the first couple of birth stories I ever heard, pregnant with my first baby. Tearing skin, stitches, blood and mess, pooping, all things I had not ever associated with these women I thought I knew. And yet, those stories helped me through the pregnancy and helped me to see both the variety and the sameness of each childbirth. These birth stories included here provide much the same reminder.

Each story is different, although they all blend together. They address first births, miscarriages, c-sections, inductions, lovely medical professionals, horrid medical professionals, dashed expectations, pain, support, struggle, strength, and so much more. You could fill libraries with more stories that would all be as unique, and as much the same as what's here.

Would recommend for people interested in other people or in medical stories. Honestly, I feel like anyone who's ever been at a birth should be at least nominally interested in this... and that would be everyone, right? After all, someone labored to bring you into the world.

Some bits that resonated for me:

7: "I felt awed to be a portal through which another would enter her life." [Yes.]

44: "If I didn't fear the pain, I wouldn't feel it." [Perhaps more accurately, if I didn't fear the pain, I could endure it.]

92: "...for all of our careful planning, no matter how our birth experience turns out, we cannot prepare ourselves for anything or protect ourselves from disappointment and heartache."

117: "I didn't want a reward for pushing out my baby. I wanted the story of pushing him." [The story... you

don't just get a baby, you get a story.]

130: "...real female power is nothing less than the power to risk death to bring forth new life." [Thinking of those two recent Ranger graduates. Females are built, literally, to fight for life in the midst of suffering and sometimes death.]

139: "Every single one of these people had a mother who brought them into the world, just as I am doing now." [One of those facts that boggles my mind.]

145: "...childbirth...had nothing on the vastness of parenthood, just as weddings have nothing on marriage."

151: "I had never felt the urge to push with my [first] birth; the midwife and the nurse had had to instruct me to lie down on my back, pull up my knees, and count as I pushed for as long and hard as I could. It was a tremendous effort of physical and mental concentration, and I was never sure I was pushing at the right moment. This was different. I felt something..." [This could have been excerpted from my own experience: birth one featured no urge to push; birth two featured an intense and surprising urge. The familiarity of some of these stories was comforting, astounding, delightful.]

157: "I was both more and less myself as a pregnant woman." [One of many paradoxes that pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting usher in.]

213: "It's hard not to make comparisons, and I felt these stories as a judgment about my choices, my capabilities." [And it doesn't stop with birth.]

227: "Isn't that why the natural-birth movement has taken hold...? Pregnancy is such a vulnerable and mysterious state that it's comforting to focus on what you can achieve instead of what you can't know. Easier to blame any... disasters on a medical establishment you can sidestep instead of on fate, which is beyond your sway." [I have always thought of the 'natural birth' folk and the 'medical birth' folk as being opposites. This statement shook that perspective and made me think that both 'natural birth' folk and 'medical birth' folk are each trying too hard to control something that is utterly capricious, they just have different ideas of how to exercise that control. What has become increasingly apparent to me, however, is that there is no need to pick a side and narrow your options. Why there is not more collaboration between 'natural' and 'medical' I am unsure.]

Lorelei says

This book is one of those things that reminds you how amazing and miraculous birth is. These women honestly shared their stories of expectations and misconceptions as well as triumphs. It was interesting to read that again and again we are so hard on ourselves about natural birth and the gap in rhetoric between birthing classes and what happens in hospital. I suppose what ultimately matters is getting baby delivered safely.

Lightreads says

For context, I should note that my response to this collection probably has a lot to do with the fact that I read two-thirds of it while repeatedly slamming my head into the emotional brick wall that is a stubborn breech baby. So in one respect, this collection was helpful because pretty much any group of birth stories, in the aggregate, will be all about how this shit doesn't go to plan. It just doesn't. It is peripherally comforting to remember that, as one's plans crumble around one's ears.

On the other hand. This is a collection of stories of singleton births and twin births; births in the hospital, at home, the birth center, the car; births after miscarriage; births after infertility; births of well babies and sick babies and at least one dead baby; complicated births and easy births; medically mismanaged births; traumatic births; beautiful births. That sounds like it covers a lot of ground, and it does. But for all that, there's a . . . sameness here. And I don't mean that this collection has put its finger on the concerns and experiences of America's gestators. More like this collection has put its finger on the concerns and experiences of well-educated, well-informed, married, intentionally pregnant women writers of *New York Times* notable books who seek out midwifery care and who have caesarians at a noticeably lower rate than the norm, which is to be expected as an artifact of economic/access privilege. I mean, some of that describes me, too, and yet this collection didn't truly speak to me, didn't reach me while I'm wrestling with this thing that is happening to me, which it should have.

I don't know. Maybe it's not the fault of this book. Maybe it isn't just that the experiences of women who write *New York Times* notable books (most of which I suspect I would loathe – the books, not the women) are so similar in essence, even while being different in facts. Maybe it's birth stories themselves. Maybe they are like relating a dream: so personal and vital to the teller, but rather strange and impenetrable to the listener, because that's just how it is with an experience so profound.

Or maybe it's me. Maybe this memo from the universe I am taking right now -- *let go, you are not in charge here, there is no amount of smart that will fix this, let go* -- maybe I still need to hear it a few dozen more times before I can hear anything else.

Kim says

This was a lovely read. Just lovely. I can't help it...once I had children, I became addicted to birth stories. There really is something magical about that moment when you move from non-mother to mother.

I loved this collection of stories because the stories were so personal and so full of varied emotions. Each had its own context and aftermath, and reading each was like being invited into someone's personal and sacred space. I laughed, and, yes, I cried at times.

I gave it four stars vs. five (though it was close) just because after a bit, many of the stories seemed to blend a bit, and I started to see a lot of similarities. I think this took away a bit from the uniqueness of each story. However, it was beautiful to have a writer's perspective in each story....the ability to reflect on, at times, just one angle of a birth experience is special.

A good read for anyone who is a parent, anyone hoping to be a parent, or anyone fascinated by childbirth.

