



THE SPIRIT of PREGNANCY

*An Interactive Anthology
for Your Journey to Motherhood*

Featuring stories,
poems, and essays
by Louise Erdrich,
Anne Lamott,
Bobbie Ann Mason,
Rita Dove, and others

BONNI GOLDBERG

THE SPIRIT of PREGNANCY

*An Interactive Anthology
for Your Journey to Motherhood*

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*for Isabel May Rose
who made me a mother*

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Acknowledgments

If it takes a village to raise a child, it took a community, like the one I'm privileged to be a part of, to help me create a book during early motherhood.

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Though it goes without saying, I will say it anyway: my greatest thanks goes to my spouse, Geo Kendall, my total partner in creation, be it child, marriage, or dreams come true.

The womb is like an animal within an animal.

—Aretaeus



coil like a serpent

sleep like a lamb

—inscribed on a gold amulet, Kiev, 11th century

prayer to the womb for women's fertility

Introduction

If you are pregnant, you are in the midst of a rich, mysterious, and enlightening period of your life: an odyssey and metamorphosis all in one. Much as there is to learn about your body, your baby, and your hormones, there is also a great deal to glean about the person you are becoming—the new identity you are incorporating into your former self. In contemporary life, many of us live at a pace so divided from the rhythms that create and sustain the natural world that it is possible to lose touch with the importance of this ageless transformation, this time spent in the liminal world.

Pregnancy is an initiation, a rite of passage. When a baby is born, so is a mother. Women experience the nine months of gestation so differently because each of us needs a particular set of circumstances to prepare us to mother. Even if you're already a mother, as Suzy Vitello's "Dancing with the Paper Rose" points out, each pregnancy offers new insights.

I had imagined being pregnant as a means to an end. I thought giving birth was the start of the life-altering journey of motherhood. But that journey had already begun from the moment I suspected I was pregnant. I was told it takes nine months to grow a baby because women need the time to prepare for motherhood. Almost every aspect of my pregnancy, the joys and the trials, also *gave* me something I needed to experience within myself to be a mother.

Into my second trimester, I became frustrated reading pregnancy guides. I couldn't access the wisdom I needed from information about my body or about "the growth of the fetus." I put those manuals aside

awhile and went to the place humanity keeps its most important truths: literature. I searched the library. I knew that if I was in the middle of a timeless, epic journey, and not just preparing for it, the stories, poems, and narratives of those before me would be there like lighthouses to guide me along the way. And they were.

It's surprising how much we can discover when we return to events through literature, and it's never too late to gain insight from a rite of passage. The selected poems, essays, and stories in this collection are the voices of those before you: the tongues of the bells sounding concerns and themes that are a part of the initiation of pregnancy.

When I finished Anne Lamott's "Some Thoughts on Being Pregnant," it confirmed how conflicted I felt about mothering. After putting down Molly Giles's "Baby Pictures," I was able to put into words the shift already taking place in my relationship to my work. Reading Louise Erdrich I felt my own growing sense of strength and vulnerability. Though some of what I read didn't directly relate to my circumstances, each piece brought up something that helped me sort through my thoughts and emotions during this transformative time.

These voices weren't always easy to find. Birth and new motherhood dominated most collections. In the drama of those experiences do we forget all that transpires in the timeless months of gestation? Why isn't there a collection just about pregnancy? I complained to my spouse and then my agent. Make one, they replied. So I created the book I wished had been there for me. I gathered some of the writings I had discovered while pregnant and invited other writers to add their voices. The result is this anthology.

I decided to include another item I wished for as well: a place to record what was happening to my psyche. Even though I'm a writer, I didn't feel like writing much while pregnant. An artist I know admitted she didn't paint a single piece during her pregnancy because she felt so complete. I wanted a no-pressure opportunity to keep track of my impressions and insights—nothing as vast as a whole blank jour-

nal, which I was sure to misplace as I became increasingly absent-minded (a phenomenon one friend calls “pregnant brain”)—just a page or two for between naps or during night wakings. I hope these pages become a resource for you and perhaps someday for your children.

By the time labor began, I was already a mother; as fledgling and newborn as my infant daughter, but still a mother. Not because I was overcome with a wave of maternal instinct, but because during pregnancy I uncovered new aspects of myself, let go of others, and most important, came to accept parts of myself my child and I would have to live with. Three months of 24-hour morning sickness assured me I could put aside my plans and desires without losing my identity. Feeling my little one tumble and kick inside helped me let go of a tired, old image I had of myself as empty. Living through the consequences of a less than perfect sonogram propelled me into acceptance of my propensity toward anxiety and the commitment I made to manage it differently for the sake of my daughter and myself. Despite how utterly pregnancy altered me physically, I changed most inside myself, and those changes were the significant and lasting ones.

Pregnancy changed and challenged me and made me feel twice born. It altered as many beliefs as it confirmed about the core of who I am. This inner renovation created room for the new aspect of my identity—mother of Isabel. It also helped me embrace faith—not the everything-will-be-ok brand, but a trust in the intelligence of change: faith in place of hope.

How to Use This Book

The blank pages that follow each piece of writing are for you to record what resonates for you: how you feel about the subject matter as it relates to your own pregnancy. The prompts included are my suggestions for exploring, examining, and learning from your pregnancy. If different aspects of the piece you’ve read speak to you, put mine aside

and speak to yours. Whether you read the forty pieces in order or skip around, you will be glad if you date each of your entries in the space provided. You might respond to the readings through drawing, collage, or other creative modes. If you use writing, any form is fine: journaling; poetry; lists; a story; notes to yourself, your baby, or someone else; a series of letters. If you have friends who are also pregnant, consider joining together to talk about the readings and your responses. Even friends or relatives who have already had their children can participate with you as a way to touch the richness of their pregnancies in retrospect. To embrace and take full advantage of the incredible experience of pregnancy, you only have to be open, listen, and add *your* voice.

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