

Description

Book Review – Hard Pushed: A Midwife's Story

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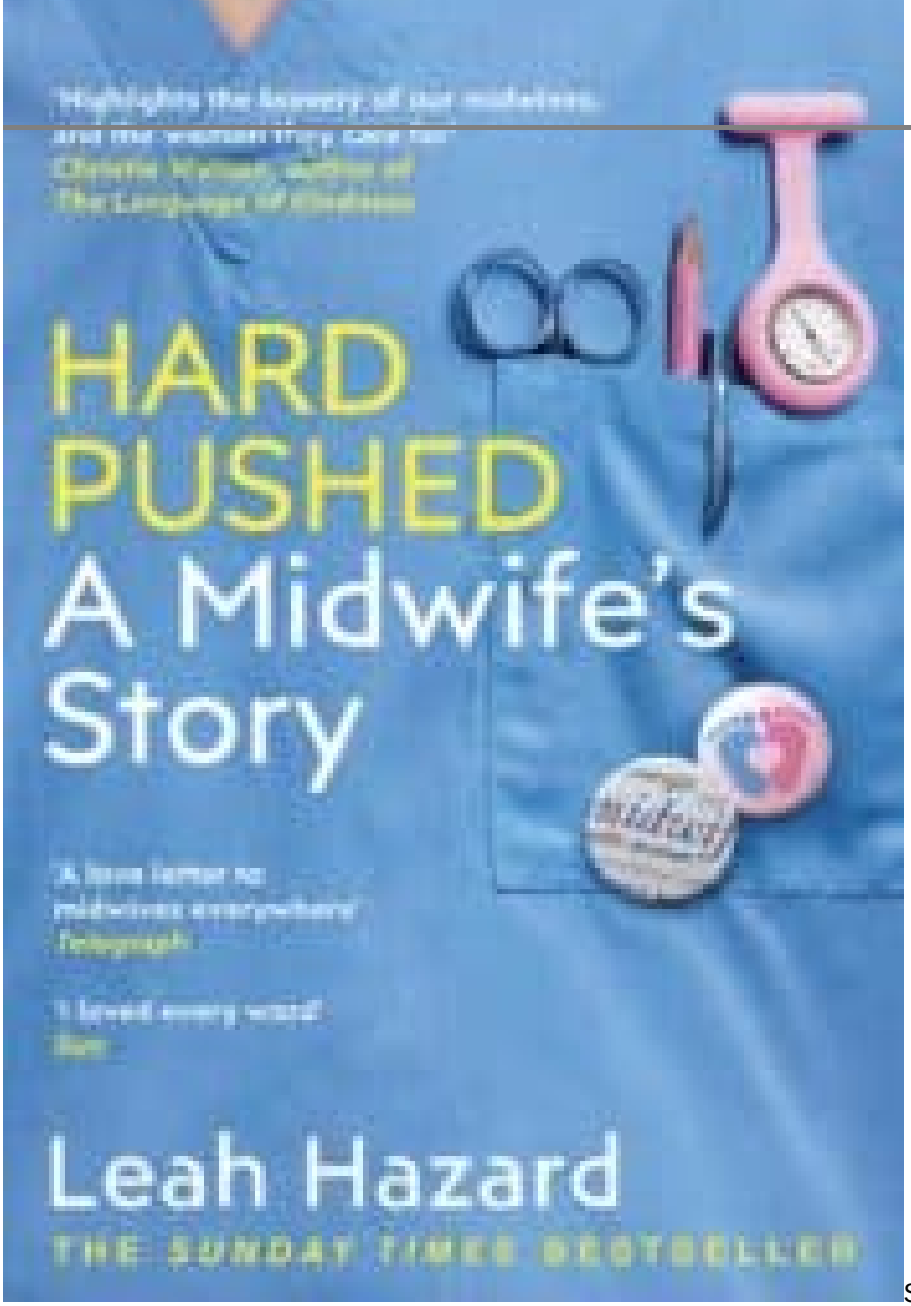
I'll admit it. The VERY first sentence of this book – in fact the very first chapter – annoyed me. *Another night, another vagina.* Here we go, I thought. Another somewhat misogynistic blood fest medical memoir that paints women in disempowered, meek, rescued, precious snowflake terms to illustrate the holiness of the 'caring profession' and the inability of pregnant people to navigate the forest of maternity care and decision making without our help.

And there are parts of this book that DO make me feel that way – although they are few and far between.

Mostly though, when continuing to read, the overwhelming feeling I got from this book was sadness.



Sadness for midwives struggling so much with the bare bones system they work within that they are often ill with stress, in need of antidepressants or medication for anxiety, and fear for their registration during every shift worked.

Sad for the overall sense of disillusionment with physiology, women's autonomy and power.

Sad for the women who read this book, expecting the wholesome, nostalgic realness of *Call the Midwife*, but are instead presented with a terrifying glimpse into an unsafe system they are more than likely going to give birth in.

Sad for midwifery as a profession.

It also reflects back to me why I chose a certain career path within midwifery – a path that makes midwifery as how it appears in the book a very alien, jarring concept to me. I have been an independent midwife for the last 16 years, and before that I worked in a large teaching hospital in the north of England. The dissatisfaction of having only brief care episodes, no continuity, staffing issues and no closure are a very distant memory to me but came across very pointedly

while reading Leah's stories.

Those were the reasons why I removed myself largely from NHS midwifery. I wanted to know what happened to Pei Hsuan, Crystal and co. I wanted to know MORE about those diverse families Leah had met during her work, just like I used to when working in a busy hospital in my early years as a midwife.

It is knowing that implementing ways to provide women with continuity of care can alleviate much of the frustration, stress and fear felt by many midwives in the NHS today, while simultaneously making women's experiences more satisfying and safer, that made reading this book all the more frustrating and upsetting for me.

There are also glimpses into how much Leah really loves the bones of what she does as a midwife. Deep connection with women, facilitation of good care against the odds and of course beautiful moments witnessing what women are capable of. Those were a joy to read.

I hope Leah is well. I hope she has found a niche within the NHS that serves her and the women and pregnant people in her care well.

Is this book a love letter to midwifery? Definitely not. Should it be a rude wake-up call? Absolutely.

But I truly hope that midwifery will somehow manage to recover to a point where midwives feel able to give exceptional care at all times and where women do not have to be worried about their safety during the vulnerable time of becoming a mother. **TPM**

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