THE PRACTISING MIDWIFE

Blog

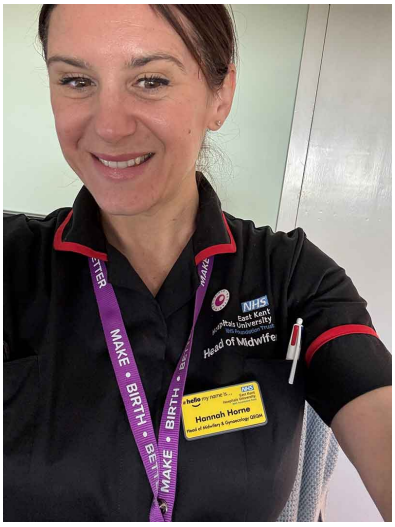
Description

Reflecting on My Career

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Rediscovering My Tribe

20 years…..I can't believe I am writing this……20 years since I became a qualified midwife! In some ways it feels like a lifetime ago and in others it feels like only yesterday! This anniversary feels monumental, and I have spent so much time reflecting on my career. It feels almost poetic that this anniversary falls during a time in which we are highlighting the challenges in midwifery practice. "Addressing the Crisis" is a new and growing movement championed by strong and empowered midwives, who are speaking out and fighting for students, midwives and ultimately women/birthing people. Admittedly, my strength to fight has been intermittent, as I lay here in silence I can hear the sea lapping on the sands – the sound of the tide rising and falling feels like a suitable metaphor. My passion for midwifery and providing holistic person-centred care has always been very present in everything I have done throughout my career – but my

courage to challenge, speak out and stand up for our profession has changed dependent on many factors…..all underscored by fear. Fear of repercussion, fear of punishment, fear of making a mistake and ultimately fear of letting women/people down and being a disappointment.

I have spent many years angry at myself for not speaking out and for losing focus of the reason I became a midwife; to care for, advocate and empower. Midwifery was a calling for me – fuelled by the birth of my brother who is 14 years younger than me. From the moment he was born I knew that I wanted to be a midwife – my parents supported and encouraged me to follow my dreams. One day my dad came home with Ina May Gaskin's "Spiritual Midwifery"[1] – this phenomenal book opened my eyes to the true role of the midwife and how truly amazing women's bodies are. I read this book over and over – I surrounded myself with friends who loved pregnancy and childbirth as much as me. We would spend hours talking about the miracle of birth, these relationships further fuelled my passion and drive – this was my tribe, I felt safe, empowered and strong. Sadly, over the years these friendships changed, and life got in the way. I found myself surrounded by midwives who were battered and bruised by the realities of working within the NHS. We were tired, had lost focus and often found ourselves living shift-to-shift. What caused this change? I suspect the rise in external and internal scrutiny, policies, guidelines and national "guidance". Interestingly, a recent paper by Weeks et al[2] detailed the negative impact of these changes on staff.

> ..I found people who, like me, had been lost at times in modern midwifery practice but were empowered and felt stronger to challenge.

Following a period of absence from work due to planned surgery, I broke. I had jumped off the NHS maternity hamster wheel and crashed. I spent hours crying and questioning my why……why was I continuing to do this? Why was I a midwife? Why did I care? After another sleepless night I decided to refocus – the first thing I did was buy another copy of the book that ignited my passion (I had sadly lost the original version that dad had got me). I joined lots of midwifery groups on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok – behind these little squares on my phone I found people who, like me, had been lost at times in modern midwifery practice but were empowered and felt stronger to challenge. I reached out and followed not just midwives (both NHS and independent) but doulas and birth-keepers – their ethos really resonated with me. I listened to podcasts, read, and engaged with everything midwifery and maternity. I loved listening to like-minded people critique and synthesis research, guidance and policies – I felt empowered and inspired. I made the most amazing friends; I re-discovered my passion and used this re-discovered passion to influence and inspire others.

> Midwifery isn't just about pregnancy and childbirth it's holistic – a golden thread that weaves through every aspect of life for the whole family.

I linked with organisations including Make Birth Better and Birthrights, I undertook the training both online and in person. I became a Make Birth Better (MBB) champion and worked with the MBB team to highlight the significance of birth trauma and moral injury on women, families and staff. These organisations stoked the fire in my belly, linking evidence, birth trauma awareness and human rights law to practice was life transformative and revolutionary. I realised that some of my burn out was linked to fear, I feared making a mistake and ruining a woman's life, scared of litigation or scared to lose my midwifery registration. I attended a Birthrights study day on 'Human Rights in Pregnancy' and it was life changing – I had never been taught anything about human rights. This study day further unlocked my passion and squashed many of my fears – I felt so inspired that, following a successful interview, I joined Birthrights as an associate trainer. I thrive spending my days off teaching human rights to colleagues and peers across the UK. Whilst facilitating these sessions it has been an honour and privilege to spend time with midwives, birth-workers and doctors – I love hearing about their experiences and sharing knowledge and wisdom to help them navigate the legal aspects of pregnancy and birth.

Midwifery isn't just about pregnancy and childbirth it's holistic – a golden thread that weaves through every aspect of life for the whole family. Surrounding myself with people who are passionate about maternity care helps me to stay focussed – re-finding my tribe is key to keeping me balanced and focussed. Midwifery is my vocation – I can't separate my home and work life – I enjoy everything about pregnancy. I was once told that it was toxic to think about work whilst at home and that I needed to improve my work/life balance. I have spent so long ruminating about this comment, it made me feel that I shouldn't do anything midwifery related when not a work – this confused me and added to my downward spiral – I have a great work/life balance, I spend time with my family and love making memories, but I also love surrounding myself with midwifery knowledge, education, stories and inspirations. I felt lost and empty on my off days because I always wanted to reach for something midwifery related to occupy my brain, I didn't know what to do with

myself, so I parked this comment and let my heart lead. What I do find toxic is stressing and worrying about work – I work hard to stop myself doing this. I close off from work drama and politics when I am away. I use my evenings and weekends charging my midwifery battery, using healthy, balanced and inspirational midwifery friends.

> My advice for any student midwives starting their journey or midwifery colleague at any stage of their career……find your tribe!

My advice for any student midwives starting their journey or midwifery colleague at any stage of their career……find your tribe! Surround yourself with like-minded people who holistically champion and understand midwifery and maternity care. Open your heart and mind – and expose yourself to as many inspirational, forward thinking and holistic midwives, obstetricians, doula's, service users and birth-keepers. Each person in your tribe holds a square in the blanket of your career – your passion and drive will stitch these squares together. It is my vision that when I retire, I can sit in my retirement home and use this blanket to keep me warm…memories of a long, passionate and groundbreaking career…..well that's my wish!

Home is where the heart is…….my vocational home is where my tribe are! They're in my ears, the tip of my tongue, my brain and, most importantly, my heart.

Some of 'My Tribe' favourites:

- Dr Sara Wickam
- Make Birth Better is such an amazing organisation (I am a champion)
- Freebirth Folke Podcast
- Juno Midwives – Independent midwives who are just awesome!
- BirthRights
- Through the Pinard Podcast
- Association of Radical Midwives (ARM) – website, IG and Facebook
- All4Maternity – website, Instagram
- All4Maternity podcasts 'Midwifery Love, Life and Learning' and 'In Conversations With'
- All4Maternity Australia podcast
- Dr Claire Feeley – website, podcast and books – I am, Claire's biggest fan!
- Sheena Byrom – the QUEEN – one of my biggest inspirations.
- Louise Thompson – book "Lucky" is a must read for ALL staff who work in maternity
- @the_babys_ok_am_i Jo details the long-lasting impact of birth trauma – I encourage all midwives to follow. I have learnt so much about language, treatment and trauma.

References

1. Gaskin, I., *Spiritual Midwifery,* Book Publishing Company, USA
2. Weeks, A., Espenhahn, S., Crowe, S., 2025, *The UK Maternity Crisis: Analysing the Underlying Causes to Find Solutions,* Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394459891_The_UK_Maternity_Crisis_Analysing_the_Underlying_Causes_to_Find_Solutions [Accessed 25 August 2025]

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