

**My name:** Jacinta Barrett

**My town:** Melbourne

Having a baby, caring for a newborn, entertaining a toddler and healing from childbirth are exhausting, stressful and often overwhelming experiences under normal circumstances. But for those who have had a baby amid the coronavirus pandemic it is truly bittersweet.

Sophie Mae, our darling daughter born on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2020 - our sunshine in this storm of isolation and anxiety.

My husband Luke and I arrived at the hospital at 7.30pm and Sophie made her quick entrance into this world only 40 minutes later. She was just perfect. Although it was very scary how quickly it had all happened, not just the birth but everything – COVID numbers were increasing dramatically, suddenly masks were mandatory, hospital restrictions were getting tighter. I remember at one point during the birth looking at Luke for reassurance but could only see his eyes, due to him having to wear a mask.

I'm very close to my family so not having them come and visit Sophie in the hospital was sad, even more heartbreaking was not being allowed to have our older daughter, Isla who was 2.5 years old at the time, come and visit her new baby sister and Mummy in the hospital.

Although the hospital staff were all very supportive, Luke and I felt pressure to leave the hospital after one night stay instead of the usual two "oh you look like you know what you're doing being second time parents, you're welcome to go home..." We had also just heard news that Luke's school, where he teaches was suddenly closed and he would now be teaching from home. Everything was changing so quickly. We just wanted to get our new baby girl home straight away and be safe in our little family bubble.

Little did we know that we would soon be back to hospital only after being home for less than 24 hours. After having a routine midwife home visit, she was concerned Sophie's temperature was very low so sent us straight back to hospital. After spending a night in the special care nursery with tests and monitoring all was completely fine, and Sophie's little body was taking time to adjust but I felt such guilt and wondered if we should have stayed that extra night. I will never forget sitting in the dark hospital at 3am feeding my new baby, and just crying to myself with sheer feelings of being overwhelmed, scared and alone, as Luke was not allowed to be there with Sophie and I.

Sometimes I feel like I've been robbed of the joy that comes with having a baby. I suppose many people feel that COVID has robbed them of special things in 2020. Luke lost three of his grandparents and was unable to attend their funerals due to them being regional and us living in metro Melbourne. It was special to be able to send them photos of their newest great granddaughter before they passed.

It was great having Luke working from home but at the same time it was tricky for me to keep a newborn happy and quiet and a 2.5yr old occupied all day long! With no visitors or pressure to get out of the house, we were forced to just slow down and embrace the little things as a family and watch the special relationship grow between Isla and Sophie. I truly feel so blessed and lucky.

### **An act of intersectional kindness**

We are so grateful for the generosity of our family, friends and neighbours who sent special things to new big sister, Isla. Letters and little items arrived in the mail such as books, craft packs, cookies, stickers, just little things to make her feel special and keep her busy. Isla's world had already been turned upside down by COVID, then adding a new baby in the mix and having to suddenly share her mummy and daddy.

Any time I would receive a text message from someone saying something like 'just checking in, thinking of you' their kindness meant the world to us, even when they were going through their own crazy rollercoaster ride with COVID.

As I reflect and farewell 2020, I take from it resilience, gratitude and hope for 2021.



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