

Covid.

We did everything right; a courthouse wedding surrounded by love, a crisp, sunny day. 9 months later we received news we had waited for: A July baby. Each month, another trip to the doctor to check the progress, the vitals. We never knew what to expect.

It wasn't long it seemed we couldn't escape the chaotic magnetism of social media, the television or radio. 2020 would be an election year, and there was talk of a rapidly spreading virus overseas. "What do you think of that virus spreading in China?" I asked you one night. You shrugged, unaffected. I was nervous. I was pregnant. But I shrugged, too, wishing to convey your same calm.

A few weeks later we were told to wear masks and to limit public exposure. We bought matching tie-dye handkerchiefs to anxiously wear at the gas station or while buying groceries. Our eyes would dart at unmasked shoppers, wondering, should we do the same? But faces became covered and our once frequent visits with our immune compromised mothers halted. I preferred to stay at home, tucked away on the farm, safe, muttering a silent word of thanks at night that I didn't have a job.

But you did have a job, an essential one, and I thank you for that.

At the doctor's they told us, "Just one support person."

Of course it would be you. We couldn't afford a doula anyway, but my mom- well, at least we don't have to have that conversation.

The appointments became bi-weekly, then weekly. The physical signs of carrying life were becoming more significant and harder to ignore. We went for walks at the park and watched the masked children on the playground, and my thoughts percolated speculation of my child's future, and whether I was being paranoid about this whole thing. I'd feel a kick and wonder what would happen if I got this deadly virus. What would happen if I spread it?

2020's social media was saturated with family on family drama. Political opinions instead of facts drove rifts between realities, and so I retreated into isolation. The pregnancy gave me a reason to not have to explain myself to others. But as the months gave way and mere days lasted of my pregnancy, I couldn't help but fear the "After"; the point in which my child would be exposed to life outside.

I got used to the masks and the uncertainty, and at some point the paranoia of being a new parent melded with the fear of Covid. That fear and need to protect will never go away, but maybe going through it together has made us stronger.

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