

Pandemic Pregnancy Growth Amidst Crisis

Rhiannon Stratton

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Do you know anyone who has been pregnant during the pandemic? What has it been like for her?
2. What does “growth amidst crisis mean”? In what ways have you grown during the crisis of the pandemic?

Pregnant and Locked Inside

In October 2019, I was happily surprised to find out that I was pregnant. I envisioned a happy pregnancy filled with an ever-growing baby bump and sentimental doctor’s appointments

when my boyfriend and I would listen to our baby’s heartbeat. I daydreamed about an exciting (and nerve-wracking!) gender-reveal party, the maternity photo-

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shoot, our baby shower, and of course the arrival of our baby in June of 2020. Instead, I have spent these months of my pregnancy locked inside and removed from my loved ones, feeling scared.

Can’t Catch a Break

At the beginning of my pregnancy, I was working third shift at a gas station. The hours were not healthy for the baby and me, and it was dangerous. One night during my shift, the gas station was robbed. I decided to make a change and left for another job as a cashier in retail. I was only a month into working there when store hours were cut due to the coronavirus. The company tried to follow strict health restrictions, but soon it closed and I was unemployed. A part of me really regrets leaving my job at the gas station. It wasn’t good for my safety, but at least we’d have another



paycheck. My retail job only compensated its part-time employees with a one-time payment of \$250. The week before I lost my job, my boyfriend and I had put money down on a new apartment and were trying to figure out how to afford the \$1,700 in veterinary work that our cat needed. Now we were even more overwhelmed.

With everyone losing their jobs all at once, the unemployment office had big backlogs. I tried applying for food stamps, so we could at least have food in our house. They claimed we made too much money because my boyfriend has been getting overtime. It seems like we can’t catch a break and it’s the scariest situation. Not only do I have myself to worry about, but now I have a baby on the way and I’m terrified to have him in the middle of this chaos. We’re just two kids trying to set up our lives for success, but it seems that we keep getting dragged down.

If this year had gone as we had hoped, we wouldn’t have had to do our gender-reveal over FaceTime with my mom. We would have enjoyed our baby shower in the spring. And my boyfriend would still be going to all of the doctor’s appointments with me. All I hope for now is that by the time I go into labor, I’ll be able to follow my birth plan to have my boyfriend and parents in the

room with me. The three of them are my support system, and I don't know what I will do without them there.

A Bright Light

A bright light in this whole mess is that it has given me time to focus on who I am and who I want to be. I never realized how much I take for granted. From being able to see my family at any time, to working, to going to the grocery store without stress. Being in the middle of all this has really put things into perspective. It's clear what matters most to me. I'm getting my high school diploma. I was supposed to graduate in 2018, but, unfortunately, I gave up on myself and dropped out close to graduation. The baby has really motivated me to get this done, and next year I'll give college a try. Also I've noticed myself becoming very *frugal*. Now that I'm not making any money, I'm doing everything I can to *stretch our pennies*. I'm proud of myself for handling the stress the best I can. I just keep looking toward a better future.

This challenging time has really humbled me. It's made me more grateful and mature. In the past, I was lucky to be employed by so many good companies, but I never stuck with them. I'd quit with ease. In fact, I never stuck with anything before now. I "tried" to get my diploma three times before, and some excuse always came up. This



Learn some of these synonyms for "change." Which ones apply to your life?

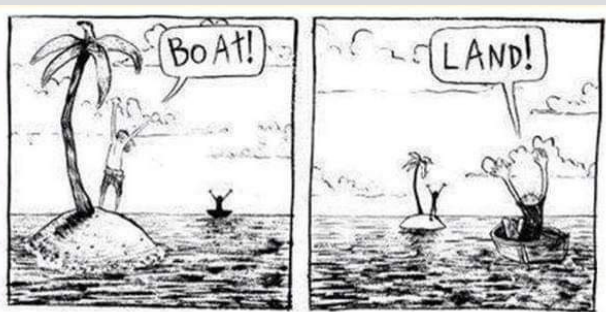
time I'm really going to do it. I'll do it for myself, my parents, and my son.

Although this pandemic is horrible, it has made me open my eyes and appreciate how lucky I am. I will be able to go back to work when this is over, we managed to secure a home for our family, and I'm finally holding myself accountable. Honestly, the pandemic gave me a major wake-up call. It's disappointing that I probably won't have a graduation ceremony or a baby shower, but I've learned some really important lessons. I will no longer be ungrateful, wasteful, anti-social, immature, and selfish. I'm going to be a great mom.

Since writing this essay, Rhiannon Stratton has graduated from the Alternative Diploma Program (ADP) at Second Start in Concord, NH.

Take It Further

1. What does the author mean when she says, "Being in the middle of all this has really put things into perspective"? (Look at the cartoon for more about "perspective.")
2. Look at the word **frugal** and the phrase **stretch our pennies**. Use context clues to say what they mean. Try using them in your own sentences.
3. Explain in detail how the crisis has helped the author grow. Use evidence from the text.



It's all about perspective!