

Judy Price *The Good Enough Mother* (2020)

Transcript

I remember, walking up that corridor with two bin bags they gave me – one was your diary, and the other had papers, the other a quilt and two pillows, I think. You get your greys also – that's grey tracksuit bottoms. They gave me a pair of Kappa's back then, brand new. I thought: "*Bloody hell! Where am I at?*"

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

Felt, it felt warm. It's mad, I didn't feel alone – I just kept rubbing my tummy and that, it felt warm, it felt soft. Yeah in them moments like, I felt like I could have cared for her forever, you know that instinct of a mum just – It's quite sad cos I'll never know now – so she might not have been the answer but whilst being pregnant I felt whole. So, I didn't feel that emptiness that I sometimes feel, that void that somethings missing. Just in them few months I felt whole – that's nice.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

Own room ladies, own rooms.

Just having somebody else there made it a little bit easier like we're not alone. But the other women on the other wings: "oh hello how's your baby?" They wanna rub your belly, "oh have you got a name for her?" You know, "can... can we touch your belly?" I brought a sense of joy to the prison for everybody and it took a bit of the reality away of prison.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

Right, I'd been taking anti-depressants before coming to prison. But since I got here I ain't received any meds. I asked to be padded up because I get stupid thoughts, I get suicide thoughts, but that's what they... that's what they are – thoughts. I mean, I don't act on them, I can't act on them because I'm pregnant. Well I won't act on them.

Can you speak even more into your chest?

Ok – I asked to be padded up cos I... I get stupid thoughts. I get suicide thoughts because that's what they are, thoughts. I mean, I don't act on them, well I can't because I'm pregnant.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

It's the noise of it, the speed, the smell – like a hospital. There can be a bell going off and you're seeing five screws running that way, two coming from A wing, and two coming the other D wing towards two lasses pulling hair and punching each other, shouting up the landing, gates banging. Looking down one wing was a girl pulling her pants down. They were doing the floors, scrubbing it, and she just pulled them down. It's full of mental health.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

I was 30 weeks pregnant... I was locked up for 23 hours. I had sciatica, swollen feet and I couldn't fit my feet into my trainers. I couldn't even go on the exercise yard, so I didn't see outside for about *four weeks!* I begged them for some cold water, you know what it's like... you've got swollen feet, you're out here and you're dying, and you get *nothing!*

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

I was heavily pregnant. And I was already quite a big girl. Didn't stop them from cramming me into the back of a car like a sardine though. Something to do with protocol, not allowed to sit in the front seat or something, so somebody had to sit in the back seat with me and I was handcuffed the whole way – even through the scan. If it was a female officer, then I'd have to stay handcuffed to her the whole time; but if it was a male officer, then I'd have to put the chains on. It was awful. It was just really demeaning.

Ahh god, I hate being locked up, I hate it! Even if I had the door unlocked, and know it was unlocked, I would not come out. I've never had anxiety before I came here. It's horrible – you think if anything were to happen, would they get me out in time? Cos my door's locked, and the night staff don't have keys.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

I had to condition my mind and think: "right, I'm gonna get locked in at 8pm and they'll open again by 8 in the morning, so that's all I got to do, is keep calm hold it down till 8 o'clock in the morning." Ya know? So that's what I did – held it down – till the morning.

I'm really worried just in case they try and make me have a natural birth; I told the doctor: "I'm not having a natural birth." I said: "I'm not going to have it, especially the way that you treat me in here." I'm not going to put myself through that danger, and I'm certainly not going to put my baby through that danger.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

I think it's just the hygiene for me. She's just not clean. It's horrible when you're in such a confined space and you've only got this little room. You need to be clean and sterile,

especially when you're pregnant. I don't have a pregnancy mattress and I just can't get comfortable. So, don't get much sleep you know? It's got a big dip in it, so many people have slept on it, that mattress. I got to tell you man it's killing my back – and my sides – they hurt too.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

Apparently, you get two extra pillows, which I haven't got. You get extra milk, which I don't get. You get extra fruit, which I don't get. You get night snacks, which I don't get and you get the use of a toaster, which I don't get. So, loads of good things that you just don't get!

Cos it was really long and the mattress was thin you used to have to sort of pad it up, and their quilts are kinda rubbish, they're just thin, they're not really even quilts if I'm honest. I used to have the quilt my own dressing gown and err what else... oh and the towel. So where my dressing gown wouldn't reach I used to spread my towels so that my feet or nothing didn't touch the actual bed, and then I used to pull the dressing gown up enough so that it goes under my face and then my face won't touch the pillow – god it's hard work.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

Your panic button is by the door, god it's a silly place to have it, cos if you felt intimidated or under attack, you'd have to get past them. And for a pregnant woman, if I'm in agony on the bed its gonna take me a lot to get to my bell.

I'm pressing it and no-ones coming. I said I'm pressing it and no-ones coming. I'm pressing it and no-ones coming.

Jen what happened with the baby and all that then?

Oh my God, I said to the nurses you know: "I think I'm in labour." And they're all going: "Nah, Mm, I'm not sure. Just lie down and let me check and your stomach to see if you contracting". So, I thought: "alright let me just lie down," and I did and they're all like: "Mmm... nah, your stomach's not contracting, you're not in labour, it's Braxton Hicks, and you're in for a really, really long night".

Right your talking to... Judy, and you're telling her what happened when your waters broke.

Nobody was listening... Oh my days! Within ten minutes I rang the bell again because my waters had broken! The nurses were in absolute flipping panic, "We need to an ambulance, we need to get her to hospital!" But I'm tryna tell them Judy that I don't need a hospital, I'm already in labour!

Ok and now you're telling... a counsellor.

I was just laid there on the bed in my cell, there was a male nurse and a female nurse. None of them had midwifery training, and they were all trying to put a load of gas and air into my mouth, but I'm tryna tell them that I don't want anything! I need to feel awake! I need to concentrate! And then, the baby popped out, twenty past one. Still no filppin ambulance! Still no paramedics – and she came out foot first...

I had nothing for her tea, no nappies, no clothes, because I was still in the main jail! Do you see what I'm saying? I wasn't even allowed to have baby stuff in there. And... and ya hear me? It was September, so you know it was damn well freezing u zimmi. So I had to wrap her up in my own clothes, bearing in mind I was completely naked under my nightie. But my little baby, she had nothing blud, you see what I'm saying? I didn't even *know* whether I was gonna have to hand her out.

You're talking to a child I didn't even know.

I didn't even know whether I could hand you out, or if you were coming back with me? I still didn't even have a place on the baby and mother unit. It's not even nice to sit there, not knowing whether to breastfeed you or not to breastfeed you. Are you coming with me, or are you not?

Jail's just jail, innit? It don't really bother me. I did have enough of just being on the streets, and like, the drugs and the abuse and stuff... And when I first went to prison i had my own bed... I got a routine back and everything. I used to love having my own bed. You know, I was just grateful to have food... I was grateful to have a bed... I was just grateful to have – just a routine.

Roll call.

Ya know, like coming from the streets and stuff it can be really, really hectic. So, even though – you know, my freedom has been taken away but there was so much safety there for me. Having my bed it weren't the street, so, I just kinda got used to prison.

Own room ladies, own rooms. Bang up time.

What about the screws, what were they like with you, when you were in prison?

Erm... It's really hard to say, cos there's some alright ones. Erm... there is, this is hard for me to say but, cos there's even some quite nice ones and some of them it's just a job. So you've, I don't know, I'd like to judge them on their lives – cos the attitude of 'this is self-inflicted, get on with it' – and that's okay, cos I can get on with it. There are some sympathetic ones where

they say: “oh you know, you’re too good to be here, you know you got yourself in a muddle, please don’t come back, when are you gonna sort it out?” So you can feel the sympathy or empathy. Suppose they’re the same as anybody else in life really, I would like to say I hate em though, because I live on a different side, but if I break that wall down, mm, they’re okay.

BOOM BOOM T...BOOM, BOOM T. That’s what I’m talking about, that is what I call a magical connection. You see what I don’t get, she will get, you see it? She don’t get, I will get an Eddy, we’ll put it all together... Fucking hell!

That’s great June

Yes...

You've got all the Mums and the Dads, husbands and wives, and sitting there holding their precious little bump. And there I am walking in and they just look at me like I was filth. And it's like, I've just made a mistake, I was stupid; I haven't hurt anybody, I'm a good Mum.

I feel her moving, I waan tell u seh its lovely, she kicks me and it wakes me up. The midwife, has been really nice. She make the prison dem pull out all of the stops. Out of everybody she seems to be the one that's most upfront and tells me what's going to hap'm.

I’m gonna be a better mum because I don’t wanna repeat the same things that happened to me. Like what my mum used to do, she lock me in the flat all day, she put milk and food on the floor and she’d go to work all day – so, what I know for my child – we’re gonna eat dinner at the table.

I cried when I saw her. I thought, she wouldn't know who I was. But she was really calm on me, she was grabbing my fingers. I didn't sleep and the only time I put her down was when, when I went for a shower – cos I didn’t wanna leave her. Apart from that she was, she was never out of my arms.

I kept having meetings with the social worker and they was umming and arring, and you know, you know I kept saying: “right, you know what, give it a try.” They could of perhaps put me in a mother and baby unit to teach me how to do this thing. But there was a Red dot a black dot or a red dot I think from the beginning. So, I reckon from about – 6 months pregnant that she was definitely gonna be taken from me. But you hold onto 50% that it could change – it’s a fantasy.

Roll call.

I just get really anxious every time it’s the midwife check. And I have to listen to the heartbeat. I’ve done the whole nesting thing. I’ve cleaned my room from top to bottom, but

you think like, what's the point? Got no one to share it with – like the kids. Guess it's my fault really.

It's funny, because I put sweets on my belly and I play games and like move him. I do tell him that I love him and I'm sorry and all that. I wrote two pages for him saying that I'm sorry. But social services have probably put that in the bin.

I've seen it before. Sometimes she'd have a few days with her new born because they needed her milk, what to wean him off the methadone. And then they'd send her back with something to dry up the milk. Empty hands against a still-bloated stomach, as though it never happened. Was it a boy or was it a girl?

A day later an A4 'death in custody' her body, still full of birth hormones.¹

You know perhaps the, the pain was so great that, my whole being just shut down and I carried on doing the same old cycle that I knew. I could be making up excuses by saying: "it could have changed me," it might not have – I wasn't given the chance. I think the thing that I did feel was – me and my baby where both guilty. You know, my baby didn't do nothing wrong, but I felt it was like us – so... Is it a good thing that she was taken away? You know, how would have I coped? Could have been the best mum in the world, on the planet. But there's that little bit of me in the background saying: "but you might not have been." And I might have created the same old cycle/pattern how I was brought up.

Own room ladies, own room.

She went into foster care, and then they wanted to adopt her. And – we have letter box contact – where, I've written one letter, and they've written one letter to me saying: 'she's doing really well' – ahh hmm – that's a hard one because you wanna hear about it but it's so painful – so there's part of me that just wants to say: "just get on with it." That's cos I can't manage the reality – because no matter what – I'm her mum.

¹ [Partially cited from Jailbirds, lessons from a women's prison, Mim Skinner](#)