

*edited by* **Stacey May Fowles and Jen Sookfong Lee**

# GOOD MOM ON PAPER

**Writers on  
Creativity and  
Motherhood**

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introduction © 2022 by Stacey May Fowles and Jen Sookfong Lee  
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# Introduction

**STACEY MAY FOWLES AND  
JEN SOOKFONG LEE**

This is a book born of frustration. Through a number of (often angry) conversations, the two of us began to articulate how we felt about our day-to-day struggles with being both mothers and writers.

For us, it felt like to excel in the business of literature you were better off hiding the fact that you had any children at all. Better to conceal the necessity of your school drop-offs and pickups, never inconvenience anyone with the reality of a kid's sick day, never admit the mad scramble for last minute child care, lest you be labelled "difficult." We shared a growing discomfort with the dominant literary culture—how it has a tendency to ignore, misunderstand, make light of, or even mock our very real experiences. In fact, when you become a mother who makes creative work, it becomes clear whom our systems are built for, and whom they are built to exclude.

Through these conversations, we started to feel like it was vital to create a project that highlighted the unique challenges and triumphs that came along with making motherhood and a creative life work. The manuscript written or artist's talk given with a baby sleeping in a carrier. Missing a book launch for a bedtime, crafting a promotional

tour around child care, forgoing a radio spot for daycare drop-off. The exhaustion, the anger, the fear, the sheer impossibility of making it all happen—all while making it look like it was easy.

Yes, there was a great deal of frustration we felt needed to be articulated, but also immense gratitude—gratitude to writerly mothers who made us postpartum casseroles and gave us toddler hand-me-downs, who helped with much-needed publishing and parenting support, who gave us a shoulder to cry on in the hardest moments. *Good Mom on Paper* is grown from the knowledge that mothers are each other's most valuable resource, whether providing a safe, non-judgmental place to complain, or a playbook on how to get things done. We wanted to pull together a collection that could offer creative mothers and mothers-to-be solace through their struggles, comfort through their fears, and a realistic picture of what it means to be passionate about our work, while taking care of the small people in our lives.

We understand that motherhood is not a monolith, and that experiences vary. This is not a book about “having it all” or being a “mom boss.” Instead, it's a thoughtful collection of honest and varied reflections on how challenging, beautiful, confusing, and messy it can be to raise good people while also being good to ourselves. *Good Mom on Paper* showcases the sacrifices (there are many) and the successes (they're both small and large), and gets beyond clichés and acceptable answers to the question of what motherhood means to creators. It examines how children have the potential to both open up a whole new realm of inspiration, and to kill a career in progress. It goes deep into the conflict between fulfilling our dreams and providing support to the people we love the most. Most important, it critiques the very systems, beliefs, and institutions that make all these choices so very hard in the first place.

Every experience of motherhood is different, and we've tried to build a collection that reflects and celebrates that difference. But we



also know that motherhood is a shared project, one better supported by a community of understanding than relegated to the troublesome shadows of our culture. We know that mothers are connected by a struggle to fit into structures that at best fail to nurture us, and at worst keep us out.

*Good Mom on Paper* is also a place to celebrate successes in a world that would often have us minimize them. Jennifer Whiteford writes of completing a novel while mothering and working during a pandemic: “(I)t is a big deal. Just like so many other things that mothers do. There are so many big deals around us that we turn into small deals. Or that the world around us turns into small deals.”

After reading this finished collection, we were struck by how much comfort these stories would have brought us during those terrifying, confusing early days of motherhood; days where everything, including creativity, felt impossible. We are also struck by how much comfort they bring now, even just in knowing we were and are still not alone.

Mothers have long been telling each other these kinds of vital stories in private, and now it's time to make them available to everyone who needs them. The struggles with strollers and adolescence, disabilities and fertility, marriage and loneliness have never fit into the shadows of creative life.

Here they are, in the light.