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Jenny Didn't Want Pill's Error

(Editor's Note: This is the first of six stories on pregnant women in conflict. The series includes the true stories of two Lafayette women: "Jenny" who gets a New York abortion, and "Alice" who decides to keep her child. To maintain confidentiality, several names and dates have been changed. Everything else is factual. Today's story is about Jenny.)

By JOHN NORBERG

Staff Writer

On Jan. 22, the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a Texas law prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother.

Whether that ruling affects Indiana remains in question. Some say it eliminates the state's 1905 law which prohibits

Pregnant Women In Conflict

abortion under the same circumstances as the Texas statute. Others say the law still stands. If so, this series giving women abortion information could be considered illegal — barring other constitutional rights.

While legalized abortion is fairly new to the United States,

the procedure is nothing new to mankind. Abortion has been with us so long that no one knows when and where it first began. It may date back as far as sex itself.

Neither is the current debate over the morality of abortion a phenomenon of the 20th century. Both Aristotle and Plato had kind words for the procedure, much to the chagrin of many of their contemporaries. The Hippocratic Oath which physicians have sworn to for centuries condemns abortion, but down through history law on the procedure has gone on-again-off-again like a bathroom light.

What is really new today is the method of pregnancy termination.

Some ancient abortion techniques were: Having a woman dive into the sea off a high cliff; blood loss through multiple

incision and leeching; placing a plank on a woman's stomach and having several friends jump up and down on top.

A few more refined methods women have tried in modern times are: Forcing soap and lye into the uterus; injections of sodium pentothal; connecting a vacuum cleaner to the uterus and turning on the suction.

These are all fine forms of suicide, but they are not suggested for pregnancy termination.

Jenny, an unmarried Lafayette woman in her 20s, didn't take the do-it-yourself route. But the thought entered her mind when she awoke vomiting one Friday.

She'd been sick every morning that week, and didn't need

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Jenny Picks Abortion

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her Purdue diploma to guess what was wrong.

Alone in her apartment, she sat on the couch and thought about the ways she wasn't feeling right — cramps, nausea, dizziness.

"When I thought I was pregnant," Jenny said, "I was mad, I was surprised, I was sick . . . I mean I was really sick. And then when I realized why I was sick, that's when I got mad."

Mike, her boyfriend, was pretty surprised too. They had been sleeping together regularly, but thought they were protected.

Jenny was on the pill.

"I never thought this would happen," she said. "I didn't forget to take one or anything . . ."

At first, Jenny didn't know what she would do. But she did know three things: She was pregnant, she didn't want to be, and, most important, she didn't have to be.

There are ways to eliminate the problem.

Over 500,000 American women eliminated their pregnancy in 1972 with a legal abortion. Over 2,000 Lafayette area women are known to have done likewise since the spring of 1970 — more than two a day.

In addition, some estimate 600,000 illegal abortions were performed in the U.S. during 1971.

But Jenny didn't jump right into abortion. For eight weeks she wondered what to do.

She considered marriage. "But a woman shouldn't get married just because people think she should," Jenny said.

She considered keeping the child. "I don't know if I could ever want this baby," she said, "because I was taking the pill to prevent it. It was a mistake. How I'd hate to think that I was a mistake . . . that I was unwanted . . ."

If only fleetingly, she considered suicide. Not all women pass over this one lightly.

In the end, Jenny expressed misgivings about herself, and didn't want to reproduce her likeness. She considered doing her own abortion, and finding a layman abortionist to end her problem.

"I just never wanted it," Jenny said. "You don't understand. I've never been pregnant before, and it's terrible . . . it's terrible to be and not want to be . . . because every little inconvenience is so outsize . . ."

When the doctor confirmed her pregnancy, Jenny told him she didn't want the baby. He was against abortion, but he couldn't refuse to help . . . because he could.

Jenny's doctor gave her the phone number of Planned Parenthood. She went right home and called.

The woman who answered gave her the number of Midwest Alliance (743-4245), a West Lafayette free pregnancy counseling service. Jenny made an appointment with MA counselor Patty for the next day — Friday.

Midwest Alliance has counseled all types of women, married and unmarried. The youngest was 10 years old, counseled with permission of her parents. The oldest was 51. About 50 per cent of the women helped were affiliated with Purdue.

"The first thing we do in counseling," said Patty, "is deal with the woman's feelings about her pregnancy. Then we discuss the facts — about abortion and about carrying the child — because a woman cannot make a decision on what to do without being fully aware of her own feelings and the facts."

But in the end it's up to the woman, and after two lengthy counseling sessions, Jenny was able to make the decision which she felt was best for her.

Patty made plane reservations aboard TWA Flight 420 out of Weir Cook, Indianapolis. She made Jenny an appointment at the Dade Abortion Clinic near New York City for the following Tuesday.

The decision to get an abortion was not easy for Jenny. It came only after much soul-searching. But not all women stop long enough to think. Some run out to the first person they can find to end their problem — and often end their lives.

While not as easy to find as a train on Fifth Street, illegal abortions have been done in this area.

"The first death certificate I signed in Lafayette resulted from a criminal abortion," said obstetrician-gynecologist Dr. "A."

An Indianapolis physician has been doing the operation for years — at a high cost.

Some girls have gone to Chicago. Frequently they are picked up downtown in the Windy City and are blindfolded until they're dropped off.

A Purdue student used to do abortions up to the day the woman would have delivered the child. He injected women with a 20 per cent salt solution that killed the fetus. It could also easily kill the mother. He had no medical training.

And a Lafayette businessman was in the abortion referral game for awhile, sending girls to a physician in Danville, Ill.

"The last girl I sent," he said "went with her mother. Afterward, the girl didn't do what the doctor said . . . and the mother lost her daughter . . ."

And the doctor lost his license, and his freedom.

Jenny's abortion would cost \$269, including \$119 in round trip transportation. If she had called a phone number advertised in newspapers and magazines, she might have paid twice that much.

"The only thing I'm ashamed of," Jenny said, "is being so dumb as to let this happen."

NEXT: Jenny goes to New York, in the clouds over her abortion.

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