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Only Once Did Parents Reject a Daughter

(Editor's Note: Alice, a Lafayette woman, was ready to get an abortion until she learned of the services available to help her keep the child. Today, the last story in this series looks at what those services are, and how you get them.)

By JOHN NORBERG
Staff Writer

Pregnant Women In Conflict

When Alice told her father she was pregnant, he cried. Later, he said, "Don't worry. You aren't the first girl this has happened to, and you won't be the last."

Like many women, Alice had worried about how her parents would react to her pregnancy. She had wondered how they would feel about her decision not to marry.

It is this fear of confronting parents that drives many women to abortion.

But as many times as not, their fears are unfounded. "My experience with parents has been real good," said Patty, a pregnancy counselor with Midwest Alliance, the West Lafayette group helping Alice continue her pregnancy.

"In all the counseling I've done," she said, "there was only one instance where the parents would not accept their daughter. Many times, something like this draws a family together."

For the woman who decides to carry her child, telling her

parents is the first step on a long road. If she got an abortion, no one would know, but there is no way to hide a pregnancy.

Both Midwest Alliance and Birthright Indiana, a Kokomo-based counseling group specializing in alternatives to abortion, have helped young women tell their parents.

Alice was very afraid to approach her family, but Patty helped her, and in the end she found her parents were ready to offer any help she needed.

But Alice didn't want to live at home. So she was faced with the problems of finding a place to stay and finding a way to cope with the financial burdens ahead of her.

As soon as Alice decided to carry the child, Patty found her a place to live—in a private home with a family. In exchange, Alice does light chores around the house. She plans to stay there until she finishes school.

This is not an unusual situation.

There are many families willing to take unwed mothers into their homes during pregnancy in exchange for light work—sometimes in exchange for nothing. Both Birthright Indiana and Midwest Alliance have the names of these people, and frequently make these arrangements.

Both organizations also refer women to group homes for unwed pregnant women.

These are places where women can stay generally during the last three months of pregnancy, and sometimes longer. Many are modern, bright, and are totally aimed at helping the women. Some offer accredited high school courses, and all are located near a hospital where the baby will be delivered.

Some of the best in this area are: Wincrest Nursing Home, Chicago; Ten-O-Four Group Home, Fort Wayne; St. Joseph Maternity Home, Cincinnati; and St. Elizabeth Home, Indianapolis.

All are non-sectarian. The cost is about \$800 for a three-month period, including medical bills for delivery of the child. If insurance covers medical expenses, the cost is reduced.

Under extreme hardship circumstances, Birthright Indiana and Midwest Alliance can help women with the financial burden.

There is another alternative for living quarters in Lafayette.

Catholic Charities, in conjunction with St. Elizabeth Hospital, operates an apartment for four pregnant women. They are allowed to live there until the child is born and are helped to find work to pay expenses.

Private homes, group homes, and the Lafayette apartment are alternatives—alternatives to living at home with parents, with relatives or with friends. Not all unmarried pregnant women decide to live away from their families.

Birthright Indiana and Midwest Alliance have also assisted in helping pregnant women find part-time work.

Throughout the pregnancy, both groups will help in whatever way they can. This includes counseling on the second biggest decision a woman must make after deciding to carry through the pregnancy—to keep the child, or put it up for adoption.

The conditions of adoption vary according to the agency used. Some want a decision from the woman immediately after birth, and do not allow the mother to see the child. Others allow a period of time before the decision must be made and put the child in a foster home during the interim.

There is no problem finding a good home for healthy, Caucasian babies. With most agencies, the parents must wait

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two years before getting the opportunity to adopt a child. Non-white babies, on the other hand, are difficult to place.

The mother cannot pick the adopted parents. However, she can designate the religious preference of the child.

At the same time that Alice decided to carry through the pregnancy, she decided to keep her baby—and she never swayed from that decision.

Since she has one more year to go for her degree at Purdue, she has filed for Aid to Dependent Children.

Under the ADC welfare program, a woman is eligible for a maximum of \$115 per month for one child, depending on her income, and until the child reaches the age of majority.

Also, when a woman is accepted on the program, which includes Medicaid, it is retroactive to the first day of the month in which the child was born. Therefore, all her medical expenses in the hospital are covered.

Alice has not yet been accepted in the program, but it is almost certain she will be. She plans to stay on it until she finishes school and gets a job. When she does go to work, there are many day-care centers in all price ranges which will take care of the child during the day.

With liberalization of abortion laws today, women have control over what will happen with their pregnancy—whether it will be continued or terminated, and, in the case of carrying through a pregnancy, whether the child will be kept by the mother or put up for adoption.

But changes are being made.

The United States Supreme Court has ruled an unwed father is entitled to a hearing on his fitness as a parent before his child can be placed for adoption.

More court tests are likely to come. There will probably be a case filed to determine if the father—married or unmarried to the mother—can prohibit the woman from getting an abortion on the grounds that he has equal rights to the child.

And if an unmarried father is entitled to first chance at adopting a baby to be put up for adoption, there will also probably be a court test to determine if he is entitled to a fitness test to gain custody of a child the mother wants to keep.

While the father of Alice's baby denied it throughout the pregnancy, he has now tried to see his daughter several times. Alice has not let him.

But Alice is happy with her decision.

"If I could go back to before I was pregnant," she said, "I wouldn't change a thing. This has all been a learning experience for me."

Jenny got an abortion—Alice kept her child. Two different

women, and two different solutions to an unplanned pregnancy.

Today, both women are happy with their decisions.

Many who read these stories will be quick to judge who made the right decision: Alice or Jenny. But Patty, the woman who counseled both, never attempted that judgment. Her only question was whether Alice did the right thing for Alice, and whether Jenny made the right decision for Jenny.

While their predicament was the same, their problems were different. Alice, after all, really wanted to keep her child. Jenny did not.

There are many speculations on the cause of unplanned pregnancies—abortion vs. giving birth. Some say it's lack of education on contraceptives. This was true with Alice, but not with Jenny who was on the pill. But taking into consideration human error and medical imperfection, there will be birth control failures.

There are many who say the real problem is indiscriminate if not immoral behavior and the product of such conduct—a pregnancy—is just dues for wrong doing. Many also think an unplanned pregnancy is the result of a woman's psychological need for love.

Still others say the problem is with society. The pregnancy of Alice and Jenny may not in itself have been a crisis. The crisis may really have been in society's reaction to their unmarried pregnancy. Abortion is an easy, inexpensive, quick way to avoid being called a fallen woman. Maybe society encourages abortion through its reactions and judgments.

Maybe in the final analysis, it will be found the problem is really different for each woman. Many might be the victims of no birth control information, or contraceptive failure. Many might be pressured into abortion by society—running scared. Women who return for a third and fourth abortion may be behaving indiscriminately, or fulfilling a psychological need.

And if each problem is different, maybe each course of action should be different also. Maybe abortion is right in one case, and wrong in the next.

Maybe not.

But the way laws are being rewritten today, it is the choice of the individual woman to take whatever course she wants. And for most, the existence of options makes the decision on an unplanned pregnancy difficult to make.

Whichever way she goes, she is risking her mental and physical health. Whichever way she goes, she is possibly affecting her future life. Whichever way she goes, she alone is morally responsible for what happens to her, and to her child—the child she did not want.

And that's why they call it, pregnant women . . . in conflict.