



I Had an Abortion

Real Stories, Real Choices

Volume 1





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Acknowledgments

Our deepest thanks go to all the women who contributed their stories for this book. Their courage in telling their stories is an inspiration for all women. A special thanks to Dana Laurent and Kara Martin who made this book possible.

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This book is dedicated to all women who have made the choice of abortion and whose voices are yet to be heard.



Did you know that one out of every three women in this country will have had an abortion by the time she is 45 years old?

Why, then, is there so much secrecy, shame and self-doubt surrounding women's abortion experiences – an experience that 1/3 of all women will go through and at least 1/3 more will know someone who has? What if women: black, white, Latina, Asian, Native American, young, old, rich, poor, talked about their abortion experiences? What if we weren't afraid of our reactions after our abortions?

What would our reactions sound like? "I'm relieved. I'm depressed. I'm elated. I'm numb. I'm angry. I'm mournful. I miss my baby. I'm glad it's over. I feel nothing. I feel worried. Thank god." For most women who become pregnant and do not want to be, their choice of abortion is all about survival. We know what it means to be pregnant and give birth, to start a family. We know what it means to end the potential life that is growing inside of us; to decide for our current or future families that it is NOT the right time for a child to be born. And when the abortion is over we know clearly what it is we feel, whatever we feel. And yet up until this point in our movement's history we have not had a space for the post-abortion voices – the voices of millions of women who do not regret their decision but who need to be able to SPEAK UP about their decisions.

That is what we have tried to do in this booklet and in our larger Destigmatizing Abortion Campaign – give voice to the women we see at Aradia Women's Health Center every day. Through projects like our *Speak Out: I Had An Abortion* event, this booklet, and our Art Outreach program that brings local art to our clinic walls, we tell women: abortion does not need to be shrouded in shame, isolation and stigma. There is no one way to feel after an abortion, just as there is no one way to feel after a miscarriage, or the birth of a child, or the death of a child. This is what women's reproductive lives look like. If we cannot talk about our lives, our choices and our bodies without fear, then we cannot say that we truly own our lives. It is time to speak out and speak up! The women who have contributed to this book are lighting the way.



Marcy Bloom, Executive Director
Aradia Women's Health Center



Kelly Igoe

So, I had an abortion. Part of me wants to shrug and say, "So, what?" And another part stands sullen and silent, unsure of how to justify the behaviors that led to the predicament in the first place. We all do stupid things, I'm told, though this line of thinking does little to quell the cycles of anger and distress that pummel attempts at rationality into the ground. And yet a third slice of self feels mired in syrupy frustration at Abortion's taboo taint. That frustration inevitably bends back on me.

"...yet a third slice of self feels mired in syrupy frustration at Abortion's taboo taint."

I am the one, after all, who felt too over-whelmed at the time – nearly five years ago now – to explain my emotions and opinions to a handful of friends in anything more than short-lived outbursts, the defensive squawking of one who wishes she did not have to defend herself.

"Abortion is bizarre because it is charged politically, religiously, ethically and, not least, hormonally. You are caught in the cross-hairs ..."

I was never ashamed of my decision, just exhausted by it. Typically, I'm not one to keep secrets, and the timing was terrible. Senior year of college, late May, the final weeks before graduation and mass exodus, everyone working

on the details of their Next Big Step. The atmosphere was euphoric. Everyone seemed bent being either deliriously happy or deliriously sad or both at the same time. My internal state was no match for this carnival.

In the weeks leading up to my abortion, I had the feeling that if I confided in anyone else I would merely invite more judgment. The possibility that I might find support ceased to matter; I resolved to make peace with myself.

Yet having made that peace, I retreated into an even deeper silence about the reality of choosing abortion. The doctors and nurses at the clinic eased my mind with the simple way they treated this common procedure, and when all was said and done, I cried and slept. Days passed, then a year, then two. Still I did nothing to challenge the taboos. I kept my truth to myself rather than standing to defend its merits.

Abortion is bizarre because it is charged politically, religiously, ethically and, not least, hormonally. You are caught in the cross-hairs, and at once realize that there can be no certainty in this debate. There can be no tidy conclusion. I think as we experience something this complicated, our first reaction may be to seek sympathy, and then acceptance. Lately I've begun to wonder if indifference





isn't the true marker of society's tolerance. When I can say to anyone that I've had an abortion, and not get a flabbergasted look, or a compassionate groan, or an enraged tirade, but simply a quick nod of recognition, will we have won or lost?

I have no conclusions to offer, except a conviction that silence serves no one. If I want to live in a society that graciously permits access to abortion, doctors and education, I cannot be cowed by disapproval or contempt. The time has come for me to stop being frustrated by my societal perceptions, and start talking.

Nancy Marcus

At seventeen, I was a typical teenager. I wore black, got depressed and partied too much. But I was also smart, going to college early with a bright future ahead of me. I wasn't in an abusive family situation; Mom and I had a good relationship. But from our abortion debates, I feared that if I got pregnant, Mom would make me have the baby.

"I was trapped. Just like that, a group of strangers had sealed my fate shut, forcing me into motherhood."

The summer before college, I worked as a nanny. It was then, taking care of a beautiful baby girl, that I realized I was pregnant. By the time the test confirmed it, I'd spent weeks comparing the smiling baby in my arms to the empty feeling inside me, questioning everything that life meant to me and whether I could have an abortion and live with myself.

In the end, I knew that not only could I live with myself if I had an abortion, but I could NOT live if I were forced into motherhood before I was ready, or to give birth only to have the baby taken away. Most importantly, I wasn't fit to be a mother, and I knew it.

The problem was, the Tennessee legislature claimed to know better. The same week I confirmed I was pregnant, a parental consent law was due to take effect. There was no way to gather the money I needed in time. I was trapped. Just like that, a group of strangers had sealed my fate shut, forcing me into motherhood. But I was determined to do anything in my power to keep it from happening. I started contemplating self-abortion. Maybe not a coat hanger, but...

God knows what I would have resorted to, but for the lawyers in Nashville. They





weren't representing me, didn't know about my frightened plans, but their lawsuit saved my life. No sooner had I started planning to self-abort than the parental consent law was enjoined. I was safe. A pro-life friend accompanied me to the clinic. That day, she realized the Christian thing was to simply be there for me.

The clinic staff was wonderful, explaining all my options, what to expect, holding my hand. The procedure lasted minutes, the period-like cramps a few hours more. What hit me hard was an overflowing wellspring of positive emotions: immense relief and gratitude to those who enabled me to have a safe and legal abortion in the end.

Years later, the news of Becky Bell's death shook me. I kept thinking, "That was almost me." Today, I am struck by the number of state parental involvement laws, with exceptions only if a judge decides the girl is mature enough or it is in her "best interest," often requiring evidence of extreme circumstances like parental abuse.

"I knew I was NOT mature enough to be a parent... but immaturity was what would have forced me to become a parent under the law."

How do such laws help girls like me, like Becky Bell? We didn't come from abusive families and, in my case, I knew I was NOT mature enough to be a parent... but immaturity was what would have forced me to become a parent under the law.

The laws, as they exist, do not address the reality of what teenage girls go through, and are willing to put themselves through to avoid forced parenthood, dying without a word, to spare their parents. We'll never know how many Becky Bells there are. I just know I was almost one.

Janice Hartford

I was 30 years old, married, with an eight-month-old son when I became pregnant due to birth control failure. We were desperately broke at the time, living in a cramped one-bedroom apartment. My son was a beautiful baby whom I loved with all my heart, but he was frequently sick with ear infections, which severely reduced my husband's and my income due to staying home often with a sick child. He was also a difficult, demanding baby who didn't sleep through the night until he was well over a year old (he was later diagnosed with





Asperger Syndrome). My husband and I were physically, spiritually, emotionally and financially exhausted.

I was devastated to learn that I was pregnant again. Sobbing uncontrollably, I called a friend whom I considered the ultimate “earth mother” type. She had four children, and during the time I’d known her she seemed to be always pregnant and/or caring for an infant. I’m not sure why I chose to call her—I believe I was looking for someone to convince me that everything would work out. Instead, after listening to me for a while, she confided to me about her own abortion experience and how she had never regretted it. She also added that although she’d had mixed feelings about several of her pregnancies, she had never been as distraught about any of them as I seemed to be.

I immediately understood what I had to do; there truly was no other option. My relief was vast and palpable.

My beliefs about reproductive rights up to that point had always been, “Abortion should be legal and accessible, but I’d never have one myself.” I was judgmental; in my heart I believed that abortion was the selfish option, the easy way out for women who had made bad choices.

However, this pregnancy was not due to any bad choices. In addition, I now see that abortion can be the least selfish option. If I’d had that baby, my marriage would not have survived for much longer—my husband and I were already stretched to our limits. My son (and the baby-to-be) would have suffered most, but my husband and I would also have been damaged.

“I was judgmental; in my heart I believed that abortion was the selfish option, the easy way out for women who had made bad choices.”

I made my decision based on the best interests of my whole family, and I don’t see how that could ever be morally wrong. Today I would never judge anyone harshly who terminated a pregnancy—we never truly know another’s circumstances.

Epilogue, 17 years later: My husband I are still married, happier than ever, after 20 years together. Our finances have steadily improved over the years; we now own our own home and a rental property as well. Our son will be graduating from high school with honors and has applied to top colleges.

And 12 years ago I became pregnant again and we have a beautiful daughter, a precious and very welcome addition to our family.





Zaedryn Meade

Red Twilight- This is not the only way that this story could be, and is, told. The facts, I suppose, are important. My age: 20. His age: 22. Date: January 2000. Periods I'd missed: 2. Weeks I'd been pregnant: 9. Months since we'd broken up: 4. Years we'd been together: 5. Reason I left: I'd loved women longer than I'd loved him.

He went with me, held my hand. There is nothing quite like the click-click-whirr of that machine, on and off, and again, and again—it took three tries to catch the spark deep inside where his fingers couldn't reach but I knew hers could if I let her. I felt it dislodge and fall like a shooting star. A streak of light against a red twilight blood background. It knocked the breath from me, and I came and came until I liquefied and he was squeezing my hand. I was staring at the ceiling, willing it to morph into sky.

I had asked him to lunch to tell him. He expected me to say I never wanted to see him again. Instead, I said, I'm pregnant. Oh, he said. I'll do whatever you need, he said. I said, I need lime sorbet, and for you to hold my hand, then take me home.

“My body was stolen, swollen with a life and proof of a love I was trying desperately to terminate. This was the test of my choice.”

After, they put me in a recovery room and wouldn't let him come with me. I wondered if the women in that room were ever glad to be without the men and boys with whom they came, who felt safer without the ones who were almost fathers. I needed my boy, who would not be a father this time, with me.

In the days between when I knew for certain and when I offered up the pinpoint of a baby, such a weight lay nestled inside my pelvis between my hips. The size of a rubber ball, the weight of solid lead, pressing on my bones, on my purple organs. My body was stolen, swollen with a life and proof of a love I was trying desperately to terminate. This was the test of my choice. This was how certain I had to be in order to become the me I was meeting in dreams.

After it was over there was left a gaping bruise. Something empty where I had pulsed with full. Under a moon I visualized a red wound cauterized, a wash of light replenishing, tiny sparks of night falling from the sky to seal me. I brought my fingers to the place scooped vacant by the click-click-whirr which gave my life back, and I thought of millenniums and choice, of rubber balls and shooting stars, of her fingers I hadn't yet felt, and I was intact. I'd seen the intrinsic qualities of twilight, and I had stories and stories and stories of my own to tell.





Pam Summa

I didn't love the guy who got me pregnant the first time. I think that shouldn't matter, but it did. I didn't even like him much. I kept thinking if the baby were anything like him, then I wouldn't be able to love the baby, either.

I didn't want to do that to a child. The whole way home from the clinic, crying in the rain, I was speaking to it in my head, saying: go somewhere else, somewhere good.

I didn't want to do it to myself, either. Even before I got pregnant he made me feel trapped, like my life was over before it began. If I married him it would be out of fear and loneliness, out of my worst self, and that's who I would have to be from then on.

In 1969 you could buy a gallon of gas for 21 cents, a pack of cigarettes for a quarter. An illegal abortion was \$1,000.

At the free clinic they gave me a list. One of them was a woman, the first woman minister I'd ever heard of. I thought she would be less likely to see me as a woeful sinner.

I took the train to meet her. She lived in one of the suburbs – I don't remember which one – just the late afternoon December darkness and the woman herself.

She was in her late twenties or early thirties with dark brown hair parted in the middle and pulled back in that Quakerly hairstyle that went with the sixties. She was open and kind and set me at ease, which I badly needed.

We stopped on the way home to buy two chickens for soup, because they were on sale. I remember the bright lights in the supermarket making me feel

“In 1969 you could buy a gallon of gas for 21 cents, a pack of cigarettes for a quarter. An illegal abortion was \$1,000.”

as flayed and naked as the chickens leaking blood in their plastic bags, marveling that the minister could be so ordinary and cheerful. Until then I had felt like someone in one of those novels where the woman comes to a bad end – *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Scarlet Letter*. Living in sin, pregnant and unwed, considering abortion – and this person, a minister no less, was acting like it could have happened to anybody.

In fact, it had happened to her. That helped.





She was married, had a child, preached sermons and was part of a nationwide underground network of ministers and doctors who helped women get abortions. She was amazing. Something new in the world.

We set it up that on Christmas week I'd visit my boyfriend in Chicago. When my parents took me to the train station my mother got nostalgic about taking the train to visit my father when they were "courting." I was in no way tempted to tell her the truth, but I wished I didn't have to pretend that this was about love.

"He leapt up to shut the door, and after that I didn't make a sound."

Then it turned out that the cops were being extra vigilant in Chicago, so we had to go to Detroit. We booked a hotel room and called a phone number. I remember the doctor looking just like the abortionist in *Alfie*. This makes me doubt that I remember the real doctor at all.

I got a local anesthetic and a D & C. It hurt like hell. I remember staring at the ceiling, the light fixture and the swirls of plaster, thinking, if I can stand this, I'll be free. Right after the doctor had inserted whatever it was, and I was saying oh, oh, oh, the doctor realized that my boyfriend had left the door open before he went into the bathroom to wait. People were walking by in the hall. He leapt up to shut the door, and after that I didn't make a sound.

I asked him, was it a boy or a girl? He said there's no way of telling and held up something like chicken guts so I could say goodbye. He looked as distraught, as guilt-ridden, as I was. For some reason, that was a comfort.

Then I wanted to sleep, but my boyfriend was afraid his parents would be angry if he didn't bring the car home before dawn, so we drove back to Chicago. I took my antibiotics in a filling station bathroom that was so dirty it seemed like you'd need antibiotics just for walking inside.

The next day he told me his number had come up, he had been drafted. The following week he would go to Vietnam if he didn't kill himself first over me leaving him. I went home, feeling like the most evil and relieved person in the world. He married an old girlfriend two days later and fled to Canada.

When my daughter was a toddler, I took her with me to a pro-choice demonstration. That was a difficult thing. It felt like I was saying something about my girl, about this child I had chosen to have.

I was.





Brandy S.

I was living with my mother on MLK when I met him, I'll call him "D." He was about four years older than me, and now that I think about not all that cute. He lived in my neighborhood and I was introduced to him by my friend Pam. We talked on the phone for a while and finally after about a week we decided to meet. He came to my house and met my mom, step-dad, and brothers and sisters. I guess you could say he fit right in. We went from hooking up to talking to hooking up to... well, you get the picture. This went on for about a month, then my mom started noticing the emotional changes. After much nagging I finally went to the Swedish Hospital WIC clinic to have a pregnancy test. It was positive. After thinking, I decided that I wanted to finish school and go to college and have children when I was financially stable and mentally able to care for a child. I decided to go through with an abortion. One problem: by then I was already thirteen weeks and there weren't many clinics that would do the procedure if you were that far along. After calling most of the places in the yellow pages, I found a place that would do it, but I needed to come in that week.

"I had never felt so empty in my life, literally. I went home and told my mom what had I had done and begged her to forgive me."

I went to the clinic on a Thursday, and even though the sun was out I was not in a good mood. My belly had already started to show and either I had some serious gas or that child was moving inside of me. I went into the cold office and saw many other sad faces that looked just like mine. Many looked as if they had forgotten where they were. A few of us were called into a room where they told us about the procedure and the drugs we would be given for the pain. After seeing a visual, some left the room and did not return. Once my name was called, I went into the room where it would all happen. I heard the machines come on, then I felt something like a vacuum cleaner hose inside of my stomach. Then about ten minutes later it was over. I had never felt so empty in my life, literally. I went home and told my mom what had I had done and begged her to forgive me.

I still think about that child and what he or she could have been. I think about the way my life would be and how different of a person I would be if I had decided to keep the child. I am now at Seattle Central Community College and the mother of a three-year-old little girl, Dezi. I can't imagine my life being any different, and if it weren't for that experience I would never have become the person that I am. Personally I think that because of the abortion I am a better mother because I appreciate what a blessing my daughter is, and I can't say if I would have that same appreciation for the first child since I was a young girl more concerned with clothes and hairstyles than education and healthy diets.





I have learned that my first real pregnancy made me grow up and realize that life isn't to be taken lightly because you never know what's waiting around the corner. I have since learned to forgive myself, and any advice that I would give to anyone is just to keep telling yourself that you did what was best for you and your life. No person has the right to tell you that you are wrong for making a decision that would greatly impact the person you are truly to become. No man has a right to tell a woman what she should and shouldn't do when it comes to her body. Like the Bible says, your body is your temple and no one has any right to tell you what to do with your temple.

Eileen McComb

I first realized I was pregnant while planting seeds at my friend Erika's house. It was March of 2000, and we got together to share a meal and get a head-start on our garden plot. The evening was going fine until Erika hands me a bottle of beer. When I go to take a sip, a quiet but firm voice in my head states, "You can't drink that—you're pregnant." Hearing voices can be an unsettling experience, especially a voice that seems to be connecting your uterus to your brain. I put down the bottle, told Erika I was sick and high-tailed it out of there.

Given that it was a good possibility this inner voice was correct, I began to panic. I could pretty much pinpoint the exact moment of impregnation, and I felt stupid and self-loathing for not using birth control. There was no sense in shame-spiraling, though: I was here, now, and I needed a plan.

"I could pretty much pinpoint the exact moment of impregnation, and I felt stupid and self-loathing for not using birth control."

When things feel out-of-control in my life, I tend to kick into overdrive, but only after I floss my teeth. Teeth-flossing makes me feel like I'm taking care of myself even though I only venture into my mouth with waxy string when I haven't been taking care of myself at all. After flossing, I did an Internet search for "signs of pregnancy." At one site women described changes in their body during the early stages of their pregnancies that I fully recognized in myself: feeling irritable, breast soreness, just "feeling pregnant." However, as a neurotic person who reads descriptions of symptoms for cancer, ulcers, ADHD, meningitis, whatever and thinks, "Dear God—that's what I have," this was not the most reliable way of determining my condition.

The next logical step was to purchase an at-home pregnancy test. This filled





me with dread, and I felt like I was emotionally crumbling like so much feta cheese— so much bloated, frustrated and hormonally-charged feta cheese. The store I chose had the pregnancy tests locked up tight with the cartons of cigarettes, and I had to ask a gangly, pimply sixteen-year-old boy clerk in a light-blue smock to unlock the cabinet. I mumbled that I needed the EPT, and he asked in what sounded like a booming voice, “What kind of cigarettes?” “No, the pregnancy test,” I responded, more deflated than irritated. I memorized the directions on the back of the box, took the test early the next morning, reread the directions after the test came back positive and immediately called my sister to explain what was happening. When she answered the phone I blurted out, “I’m pre-egg-egg-nant!” and began to cry. She cooed, “Oh, jeez, Eileen. Are you okay? Have you been flossing your teeth?” She sent me a check to cover half the cost of an abortion.

This is where things get blurry. Getting an abortion was not a hard decision: I’ve always been pro-choice and even participated in clinic defenses in the 80s and 90s. But I was new to Washington state and hadn’t a clue about available resources. Somehow I found out that I should get a free pregnancy test done at a women’s clinic and take the results of the test to my local DSHS Community Service Office and get medical coupons because the state would pay for the cost of a D & C and cover my birth control pills after the procedure. The problem was that it was too early in my pregnancy, and I would have to wait a considerable length of time before I could get a D & C.

I learned about a clinical trial for RU486, and I certainly knew that I would prefer performing my abortion at home. What I didn’t know when I signed up for the clinical trial was that med coupons don’t cover “experimental procedures.” Oops. I went from zero to \$440 in three seconds. Luckily I was dating a man that had the financial means to pay for the abortion, and luckily we were on the same page regarding this decision. I was swimming through a sea of privilege and luck.

The most remarkable aspect of the actual abortion was how unremarkable it was. It went as expected: a little cramping, some heavy bleeding, no sex for a while. Afterward, I got on the pill and kept that as my main form of birth control until I met my girlfriend and didn’t need it anymore.

Although I’m not “proud” of my abortion, per se, I am proud that I made a solid, life-changing decision and followed through with the support of my family and friends. I am also forever grateful to the women before me and with me who made and kept abortion safe and legal.





Lynn

Twenty years ago I had an abortion. I was twenty-six years old and married for two years. Doctors had told me I couldn't get pregnant, and I wasn't sure I ever wanted to have children.

When I realized I was pregnant, I told my husband and, at the same moment, told him I wanted an abortion. Every morning I cried. I didn't know why I was crying. I didn't think I ever wanted a baby and certainly not at such a young age. We could not afford a child. We rented and barely made ends meet. My husband told me we could keep the baby if I wanted. I told him I didn't want to and asked him how we could possibly afford to raise a child. He knew this, but it helped that he wasn't pressuring me to have an abortion. It was my choice.

I didn't tell friends or family about my pregnancy. When I went in for my abortion, my husband was right there with me, holding my hand. The doctor said it would hurt a little. He must have meant the physical pain. The emotional pain I can't describe. I felt a part of my heart ripped out of me that day. I remember lying on the table with tears running down my face and puddling behind my ears. I decided to put that episode of my life behind me.

"I didn't tell friends or family about my pregnancy. When I went in for my abortion, my husband was right there with me, holding my hand."

Four years later, I turned thirty and my biological clock started ticking. Suddenly, I wanted to have a baby! Still, I wasn't sure I was ready, but after talking to my husband, we decided we were.

My pregnancy went smoothly, and nine months later I had a healthy baby boy. My son is the best thing that ever happened to me. When he was a year old, I was pushing him around the house in a little wooden wagon. Out of the blue, something that I had managed to not think about for years came to mind: I thought of the little baby that would never get to be pushed around in a wagon by his adoring mother.

Tears streamed down my face. I collected myself and held it together. When my husband came home, I told him I never should have had the abortion. That I at least should have put the baby up for adoption. (In reality, I knew that for me, this really wasn't an option.) He comforted me and assured me that I had done the right thing. Reminded me of some of the details of our past. I calmed down and realized the important thing now was taking good care of our baby.

One thing I know for sure is that my son has a guardian angel who always looks





after him. I talk to this angel sometimes. And sometimes I beg his forgiveness.

After all of these years I've come around to thinking that I did the right thing. I made the right choice. For some reason it was meant to be this way. It is very important for women to have a choice because even if it's the most difficult thing you ever have to go through, in the long run, it's still for the best.

Yulya Deych

Conversation With- What's Done is Done "If I could drink up the sea in which I discarded you—if I forced it down like bad medicine—it'd be good." I put the kettle on to boil. Wince; the quiet broken by metal clanging.

"That drip-drip incessant dripping I can't escape. I've tried with the bucket beneath but that makes it 'ping' till it's full enough to 'glup.' In the end only silence left running, overflows anyhow."

Chad comes in, looks past me, opens the fridge. "Are you talking to me? Lucy... hello."

"Huh."

"It's getting dark why don't you turn on a light."

"I like the light—"

"Is there enough water for me?"

"—how perfectly blue it is."

He grabs the kettle, loads it full with water and slams it down.

I flinch. Several glops of water splat onto the stovetop.

"You alright?" He smirks at his rhetoric, rolls his eyes and skips every other step up till he's stomping across worn wood over my head.

The kitchen continues to fill with sun's leaving. Golden-blue-amber-pink. My hands cling to each other in my lap.

"I didn't mean to but you couldn't stay. You came too quick, too soon—too many bad endings I'd heard. I wanted to choose my own ending—but I couldn't turn to your page cuz I'd torn it out."

***"You came too quick, too soon—
too many bad endings I'd heard.
I wanted to choose my own
ending..."***





Hands aglow in sunset cover my zit-speckled face.

"I spilled you into tide's ebbing pull, your barely formed flesh swallowed. And I didn't even reach for...but somehow another sort of seal formed, sort of. Chad and...you aren't."

"Lucy did the water boil yet?"

Pull hair behind ears. Pull hair back. Pull hair.

"Why didn't I dive in after you? I dream it this way and I reinsert you into my folds reconnect our tissues and filter all of myself through your umbilical until every last bit of me slips into and down through that cord leading into you."

"What the f—," he slams the pot down, pours himself out and takes this tea of his upstairs with him, above where I'm sitting—still—at the table, my empty tea cup waiting.

"This is easier—you in the nether and my transplantable roots perennially uprooted as if I', chasing a ghost; I believe in ghosts, or you. I could recognize if things weren't such a blur. This undecipherable representation of start and stop—you started I stopped you, you stop everything I start."

My hands in fists pressed against thighs formed into the chair.

"Why didn't I bury you? I could visit and wouldn't have to ebb and flood. And the slack, I wouldn't even notice."

He took the kettle off the burner but left the stove on. My body stiff as I go set the water to boil again. My left leg tingles with every step, fingers to lips, eyes squeezed shut.

"If I could give a kiss and take your forgiveness. The hole carved through my chest into lung and muscle—might seal." My hand reaches; fingers push at my hollow belly's button. "Dissection is no pretty thing."

The water bubbles in its kettle and I hear you splash into water I'll never know again. Wipe sleeve across eyes.

"I'll write you a eulogy—chuck it in a bottle with a cap that'll read 'If found please return to sea.' And you'll chuckle once you've read what I've said. You would've been that way."





Hannah Levin

In the fall of 1996, I had an abortion. It changed my life forever in ways that can only be described as positive.

I was 26 years old, a couple years out of college and busy putting my Women's Studies degree to work as an active member of the riot girl arts community and working as the clinical research coordinator for Planned Parenthood. Fittingly, my position at the clinic was conducive to actually determining that I was pregnant. My period was one day late and my boyfriend had expressed anxiety about it on the phone that day. This struck me as rather silly—one day isn't much—but since I had an entire box of new pregnancy test supplies right there in my office, I decided to go take a test and put his mind at ease. After all, it was his birthday and I wanted us to enjoy our evening unencumbered by such worries.

I went to the office bathroom and took a test. It was positive. To be sure, I took another one—and then another one. I fanned all the little strips out in my

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hands, staring at the telling blue lines and wondering if I was experiencing a sudden bout of color blindness. Six tests later, I figured I probably needed to accept the fact that my boyfriend was much more intuitive that I had

previously realized. I cancelled our birthday celebration plans and went home alone. I just sat in my bedroom, listening to *Rid of Me* by PJ Harvey and fighting the urge to drink an entire bottle of red wine by myself, immersing myself in the delusion that this couldn't be happening to me. Avoiding that temptation wasn't easy, so I just kept hitting repeat on my CD player.

It took me 24 hours to make my decision. I was deeply in love with my boyfriend and knew that I wanted children eventually. Unfortunately, he was a very bad candidate for fatherhood, primarily because he was already co-parenting a three year-old with an ex-girlfriend. He was a sexy, smart punk rock boy who relished life and opened my mind to many things, but he was as unreliable as they come.

I went down to Denny-Blaine Park, a beautiful space next to Kurt Cobain's former house and the place I always went to when I needed to reflect. I cried my eyes out and then got in my car, returning to work to discuss my decision with Planned Parenthood's medical director. She was a fiercely funny, intelligent and compassionate woman. I couldn't have been in better hands.





Sadly, despite the fact that I was confident I was making the right choice and that my procedure would be performed by a fearless, feminist woman who I trusted and admired, I was terrified. For years I had viewed abortion as an absolute right—an important choice that must remain available to every woman. But I had also subconsciously absorbed the idea that it was invariably a difficult, painful choice, that the procedure itself might be traumatic and that I might eventually feel wistful about my choice.

During the days that lead up to my appointment, I read everything I could get my hands on at the clinic. I was reading nursing manuals, research papers and generally just trying to find something that would tell me my fears were unfounded. I couldn't find anything to reassure me—a fact that disturbs me to this day. Sure, I found plenty of statistics about the safety of the procedure, but I also found a lot about possible risks and the potential need for counseling afterwards. ***“Where were the stories of women who had positive experiences with abortion?”*** Where were the stories of women who had positive experiences with abortion? Was it inevitable that my head and heart would be heavy with the weight of my choice for months or years afterwards?

My abortion took less than 5 minutes. It was virtually painless and the sense of relief and comfort I felt afterwards was immeasurable. But I was overwhelmed by two distinct feelings: one, that I felt proud that I had made the most responsible choice I could and two, that I was downright angry that I had spent so many hours being anxious, depressed and afraid. If someone like myself—a committed feminist and reproductive health care professional who was raised in a pro-choice family—had to endure that much apprehension and fear at the age of 26, I could only imagine what a younger woman with less knowledge about abortion goes through—and how those fears would be compounded for someone without the support network I was so fortunate to have. Since then, I've combated that reality the only way I know how: by telling my story without apology, without shame and without one ounce of regret.



Aradia Women's Health Center

A nonprofit, feminist women's health center whose mission is to empower women and protect choice through personalized abortion and gynecological health care services, community education, training of health care providers and legislative advocacy.

Aradia advocates for the political, economic and social equality of all women.

Aradia Women's Health Center offers:

- ✓ Supportive Abortion Care
- ✓ Birth Control Including Emergency Contraception ("Morning-After Pill")
- ✓ Annual Exams and Pap Smears
- ✓ STI/STD Testing and Counseling
- ✓ HIV Rapid Results Testing (same-day results)
- ✓ Free Pregnancy Testing
- ✓ Spanish-Speaking Staff and Health Information
- ✓ Saturday Appointments

For more information, resources and links to organizations devoted to telling women's abortion stories, please visit our Web site at www.aradia.org



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