

A Lesson Unlearned

results. There were a lot of cars going by, and I thought about how little it would take for me to walk out in front of one of them."

She could not tell her mother — it would hurt her too much. She thought about running away, but she only had \$400 and didn't know where she could go or what she could do to support herself and the baby.

"I knew I had to tell my boyfriend," Carla said. "When I told him, he just started crying. We both cried. He thought abortion was the best option. He kept mentioning it, but he said, 'It's your decision.'"

"Before, I never really thought about what I would do if I were pregnant," she said. "I never thought about how it would affect my life, my boyfriend's life or my family. I had six weeks to make my decision, but it was already made for me."

"If I had this child, I would ruin my boyfriend's life. He was an honor student, but he would have quit school to marry me. What a life we'd have," Carla said. "Having the baby would also emotionally destroy my mother. I could be selfish and keep my baby, or I could consider all of the other people it would affect. I made the only choice I felt I could."

"They give you shots so that it isn't supposed to hurt, but it does. It hurts in your gut and it hurts in your heart. You feel sick. You want to die and you cry."

"The doctor talked me through the whole thing, and the nurse held my hand," she said. "Afterward, they gave me cookies and juice, and I thought, 'They're treating me like I'm such a good little girl and I've just aborted my baby.'"

Although Carla's boyfriend went with her to the clinic and supported her, they are no longer together.

"(He) couldn't take it. I can't say that I blame him," she said. "He carried a lot of guilt, and my state of mind didn't help much. He needed to try to forgive himself and have me forgive him, but I couldn't even forgive myself. All I could do was cry about it."

Three years later, Carla still thinks she made the right choice, but she said she doesn't know if she ever wants to have children.

"I feel like I blew the chance I had and don't deserve another one. I don't know. Maybe someday I'll be able to think about having a baby and be happy."



swimmer at Carnegie Mellon U., Christine had hoped to make NCAA nationals during her senior year, but she was forced to battle with her choices when she discovered she was pregnant.

"Being pregnant was going to make my academic goals very difficult and my athletic goals impossible," said Christine, now a graduate student in physics.

"I was afraid that dropping my lifelong dreams for the sake of the child would make me hate him or her. The father was nervous about the thought of becoming a father, but was not in favor of aborting a pregnancy just because it was unexpected."

Seventeen weeks into the pregnancy, Christine and her partner — they are not married, but are a "strong family unit" — were told that the fetus had a rare but serious stomach defect that could possibly be corrected with surgery, or could result in blindness, severe brain and respiratory damage, and lifelong abdominal pain.

"While I was terrified of bringing an unhappy child into the world and destroying our happiness in the pro-



JOE CEPEDA, THE DAILY FORTY-NINER, CALIFORNIA STATE U., LONG BEACH

cess, my fear of aborting when the child could be happy overpowered all our other doubts."

Christine said the nine months of her pregnancy was the worst time of her life.

"Physically, pregnancy was demoralizing — morning sickness, feeling fat, getting fat, having the fetus move into the space of all my internal organs, indigestion, carrying 30 pounds for three months — my list of complaints goes on and on," Christine said. "I could not be the athlete I wanted to be. I lost control of doing what I wanted to do with my body."

And the emotional strain was just as bad as the physical discomfort.

"Worrying about the health and happiness of someone you brought into the world was all-consuming for me," she said. "It made me hate the world. I only saw the evil, none of the good, and I wondered why anyone wanted to live. I have become more active since I had a child, wondering what his world will be like."

Her son's birth defect was surgically corrected, and although Christine opted to keep her child, she said she is in favor of women having a choice among abortion, adoption or keeping a child.

"Yes, I had a difficult time, and I risked my personal goals, but other women don't have the support that I had," she said. "Though I hated making the decisions and hated being pregnant, I love my family and motherhood. My child, the father and I are only happy now because the choice was mine."



While a woman dealing with an unplanned pregnancy has difficult decisions to make, the man in the relationship is often ignored, his feeling shoved aside as the immediate problem is handled. From being hurt when left

out of the decision-making process to looking for any excuse to escape, the man's thoughts are not usually the focus of any counseling sessions a couple might go through.

"I felt like I was being pulled between Stephanie and my parents," said Carnegie Mellon U. junior Chad, who dated Stephanie for two years in high school when she became pregnant before his freshman year of college.

"I was sort of frightened about what had happened, especially about having sex without contraceptives, but we had rationalized ourselves into thinking it was all right," he said.

They talked with their parents about their situation, and because neither of them were ready to get married, Stephanie decided she would give the baby up for adoption. But four months into the pregnancy, Stephanie decided she wanted to keep the baby.

"I didn't feel the same," Chad said. "I wanted to support the decision she had made, but I let her know I wasn't going to be committed to her decision. I wasn't ready (for marriage and family)."

They both wanted to keep their relationship, but Chad wanted to keep it separate and independent from raising the child.

One month before Chad left for CMU, they had a baby boy. She and the baby lived with her parents.

"(Stephanie) was unhappy in the semester that followed," Chad said. "The relationship started to get tense. I felt that I had caused enough tension with my parents, and I wanted people around me (at CMU) to know what I had experi-

enced, but I didn't quite know how to tell them. I guess I didn't want people to find out by some other way than me telling them."

Four months after the baby was born, Chad and Stephanie broke off their relationship. "I felt like I was being asked to give more than I could give. I couldn't handle it anymore."

Stephanie and the baby, who is now two years old, recently moved about a mile from CMU, where Stephanie attends another college, and she has announced her engagement to another man. Although they live in the same town, Chad and Stephanie rarely see each other because of their busy schedules.

"I enjoy spending time with my son, but I'm not ready to be a father right now."

He said he is more comfortable telling others about what happened, but he knows his experience will affect his future.

Chad's advice for other men in his situation is to "keep a handle on yourself and who you want to be. Look at it from your own perspective."

"You've got to be able to live with yourself, got to be able to look at yourself in the mirror when you wake up in the morning. . . . You have to satisfy what your own set of values asks of you before you can satisfy anything else anyone asks of you."

Names of all sources in this article have been changed.

