

My Abortion Story

Haley

The story of my abortion is the story of any 16 year old who finds themselves pregnant, and the end of it allows me to stand on a platform against the shame that can accompany choosing abortion at a young age.

I'm hanging out with my best friends, Mary and Lauren, after school. I am a sophomore, and I'll have my license soon! Mary is my only friend with a car right now, and the three of us go to Baskin Robbins after school for ice cream. I am heartbroken, tender. Babe, my boyfriend of several years, to whom I "lost my virginity" and I broke up recently, and I am having a hard time picking up the pieces.

After Baskin Robbins, my friends and I go to Walgreens - it's normal! We look at fingernail polish and makeup, someone needs tampons (maybe?), and we end up in the "Family Planning" aisle. My friends turn to me, "Hailey, we think you need to take a pregnancy test." My periods were irregular often. *Did I tell my friends about this? Is that why they urged me to take a pregnancy test? Had I gained weight? Was I beginning to become visibly pregnant?* "Oookay," I said, shaking. I knew they weren't being silly or dramatic. We browse the pregnancy tests. Did I have enough money? Did I have to borrow some from my friends? *Wow, pregnancy tests are expensive!*

We have to ask permission to use the bathroom in Walgreens. The bathroom is behind a locked door. *At least we will have privacy... I hope.* We go into the bathroom, all three of us. There are two stalls, one narrow, one larger, accessible. I go into the small stall, alone. My two friends are near the bathroom door, standing guard. I pee on the stick, shaking. *Am I doing it right? Do I have enough pee?* I come out of the stall, I'm sobbing now. The truth is near and it is unavoidable. I hand the test to one of my friends. I spin in small circles, shaking my hands at my sides, singing *Jesus Loves Me*, quietly. The room is suddenly silent. The test is positive. Pregnant. The Error Proof Test actually says PREGNANT!!!

We go to Babe's house. It's not far from Walgreens. I throw the test at him, sobbing. He holds me. "We'll take care of it," he whispers in my ear. I shudder, sobbing.

How can I do this? It is my only choice. I love my baby, but I can't be its Momma right now. I'm too young. My baby won't have the life I want to give it. Abortion is our only option. I love my baby and I love myself. That is why I have to have an abortion.

We call Planned Parenthood, or Knoxville Center for Reproductive Health. I tell them I'm pregnant, that I want to have an abortion.

"How old are you?"

"16. I can't tell my parents."

“You’ll have to get a judicial bypass.”

“What is a judicial bypass?”

They are helpful, they’ve worked with young, terrified people before. They know a judge who can help. We don’t have much time, my pregnancy is several weeks along already, and the cutoff for legal abortions in Tennessee approaches quickly. I get an appointment with the judge, I have to coordinate my appointments with Mary’s schedule since she’s my only friend who can drive. Babe borrows money from our friend’s older brother to pay for the judicial bypass and the procedure. I have to skip school for both, the appointments are on separate days. I’ve never been to the courthouse before. We go together, Mary and me. She waits outside as I go into the judge’s office.

“Why do you seek to have an abortion?”

“For my baby’s future, for my future.”

“Why do you need a judicial bypass?”

“I can’t tell my parents.”

“Do you fear for your life if you tell your parents you are seeking an abortion?”

Do I actually fear for my life? The thought of telling them I seek an abortion, I would die.

“Yes.”

The judicial bypass is granted. I go in for the procedure; Mary, Lauren, and Babe wait in the waiting area. I go into the operating room, alone. The procedure has begun. The vacuum is a scary sound. I know what’s happening. *I love you, I tell my baby.* Her name is Ema Grace. Ema from Emanon, “No name” spelled backwards, a secret word from a sorority that my Mom was in in high school. Grace because by the Grace of God I am able to continue my direction in life, not a paria. Not forever branded with the scarlet letter A, for Abortion this time, not Adultery. We go back to Mary’s house after school, “I’m sick,” I tell my parents, and I stay home from school the next day.

A week or two after my abortion, I was in a serious car accident that resulted in retrograde amnesia - lack of the ability to retrieve memories of that which happened in the past. I know the details around my abortion story due to years of reflection, processing, and sharing my story with loved ones. Years later mom told me that she had had an abortion, too. I have heard “me too” from so many people when I share my abortion story.

It has become clear to me how many of us are isolated and alone as we go through our experience because we’re scared of judgment and shame, and then, more often than not, our stories are met with love and compassion. Because of the support I have received, because of my clean slate, my forgiveness from the Lord, the Grace of God, I persist to this day sharing that same message of love and shamelessness with all around me. I am complete.