

March 5, 1974

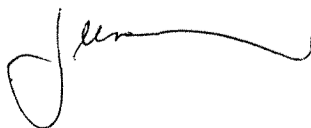
Dear Alan:

I can't find the piece of paper on which I compiled my list of abortion atrocities, if that is not a redundant phrase, so I will try to remember them again.

- 1: A girl of seventeen who had been a speed addict for about two years discovered that she was pregnant after a long series of runs on drugs during which she had not been able to remember when her last period had been. She estimated when she called me that she was more than two months pregnant. I called Women's College Hospital and was told that the waiting list was such that she wouldn't be admitted for about six weeks, which would put her past the three-month period when abortions are easier and safer. I explained this was a bad situation but was told nothing could be done; everything is a bad situation. I was prepared to help finance the girl to go to New York but she didn't want to be indebted. Her baby was born prematurely and is frail in appearance. She is caring for him but is back on drugs.
2. A woman of about 25 separated from her husband and ^{was} broken-hearted about it. She had a brief affair with someone in her office, discovered she was pregnant and was undecided what to do about it when her husband got in touch and proposed a reconciliation. She was also too late for the hospital waiting list, this time TGH, but was able to afford to go to New York.
3. A sixteen-year-old, third generation of her family to be on welfare, became pregnant. The father subsequently was sentenced to eight years in prison for armed robbery. She told me about it when she was four months pregnant. I asked her if she had thought of an abortion. She had wanted one but she didn't know where to go. No one in her crowd has ever had an abortion, except illegal ones. That baby, and one born later when she was eighteen, are being watched by the Children's Aid because both are suffering from malnutrition and unexplained injuries.

Hope we can come up with something acceptable to our members. This is really a difficult one.

Best,



September 1980

ONE WOMAN'S STORY

I was informed of my pregnancy in a doctor's office in the first week of July 1980. It came as a shock as I had been diligently using contraception. It was extremely distressing news! My room mate (boyfriend) and I were totally unprepared for a child at this time in our lives. Financially, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially, we were just not prepared.

After the initial shock wore off and I calmed myself, I asked the doctor if he could begin the procedure to request a therapeutic abortion. He refused. He told me that the law had been 'tightened up', that abortions were now 'almost impossible' to get. He could not or would not refer me to a physician who could help me.

I pleaded with him for a while, then left. Obviously he wasn't sympathetic. He gave me a phone number to take with me which I called from home.

It was horrible! He had given me the number of a hideous, recorded message which insisted that I continue the pregnancy, that the 'baby within' had a 'right to be born'. That was the last thing I needed to hear. More crying!

My next step was to call other doctors and hospitals. I discovered that there were few appointments available in Toronto and none at all in the small community outside Toronto where I live.

The next crisis came when I accepted one of the earliest appointments available and found that the doctor did not accept O.H.I.P. Out of all the doctors I phoned, not one of them accepted O.H.I.P.

I was told that the operation would cost approximately \$200.00 and that I should bring this amount with me. I didn't have the funds and could not easily borrow the money.

I called more doctors, more hospitals. More tears! The next day was the same. Every day was the same. I got the phone book and began to call every doctor. There were two major difficulties:

- (a) Appointments were scheduled for weeks ahead, meaning the procedure would be much more dangerous.
- (b) The doctors didn't belong to O.H.I.P.

I began calling referral centres, women's centres....you name it, I called it! Most tried to book appointments for me, but I discovered only two doctors who accepted O.H.I.P. who performed abortions. I managed to get an appointment with one doctor for the following Saturday. I was grateful but anxious. For another week I would remain pregnant - it was like waiting for a dentist to pull an abscessed tooth - very painful.

I confirmed my appointment and called that Thursday to get directions to the office.

"I'm sorry, I forgot to call. I'm leaving for my vacation. I have to cancel," he said.

He suggested another doctor but the first appointment available was too late. I was getting into my seventh week.

I called more centres and this time got an appointment in Etobicoke. My boyfriend and I were elated. For the first time in weeks I almost relaxed. My headaches subsided, but the thought that I was pregnant never left my mind.

The appointment was unsettling. The doctor asked what method of contraception we planned to use in the future, my name, my address and my place of employment. That was all. I asked if I could plead my case since he had no reasons to present to the therapeutic abortion committee. He assured me that he had all the required information.

A week passed and I was now eight weeks pregnant. The doctor's office called - my request had been turned down. Panic! Where to go from here?

I spent two days on the phone. I spoke with more rude nurses and doctors' receptionists than I had known existed. I was scolded, insulted, hung up on, passed from department to department. I felt absolutely drained.

I was growing more moody. It was noticed at work and by my friends. I could not go anywhere - I had to stay on the phone.

I called and called. The earliest appointment I could get would be in the tenth week. What if it was refused again? It looked as if I might go into the twelfth week. I had read about saline abortions and was terrified at the prospect.

The pain and fright I felt enveloped every area of my life. Finally, in desperation, I called a doctor I had visited while attending university in Kingston. It was long distance, but I was now ready to do anything to get money - if that's what it took!

He saved me. He made an appointment that day and assured me that my application would not be turned down. He was correct.

I had the operation when I was ten weeks pregnant. I had to book time off from my part time job, rent a car for the trip to Kingston and pay for meals and accommodation. So did my boyfriend. We borrowed the money without knowing how we would repay it.

You would expect the story to end there, with a happy ending, but it doesn't.

My post-operative check-up was a fiasco! I could not stay in Kingston for the check-up, so I went to another doctor at the medical centre where my pregnancy had first been confirmed. The doctor initially refused to examine me. He told me that I didn't need an examination. He scolded me for getting pregnant. He said that he was angry that I had asked a Catholic doctor for an abortion (although I had no way of knowing the doctor's personal beliefs). He told me 'not to do it again'. He suggested that I abstain from sex as a method of birth control as I was obviously 'stupid' or 'careless'. I told him that I got pregnant while using a doctor-recommended method of contraception - supposedly effective.

I was worried about the possibility of an infection, so I more or less coerced him into examining me. He got angry again. I was still bleeding and he did not like to examine women who were bleeding. He pinched something inside of me which was extremely painful. I asked him if it was an infection. He replied that I should get a skipping rope and skip every morning. If I had an infection the resulting pain would let me know. I could not believe what I was hearing.

We talked briefly - the doctor scolding me and looking very much like he had something else to do. I left with a prescription for a birth control pill which had been taken off the market and a fear that I might have an infection.

Another appointment with another doctor revealed that I did indeed have an infection. I am currently taking oral antibiotics.

I am no longer pregnant, but I am not the same woman I was before this ordeal. I have been regarded as 'sleazy', 'irresponsible', 'cheap', 'unfeeling', and 'selfish'. Through it all I felt very alone and very angry!

My emotional scars will be with me for a long time. They are not the result of the abortion, which left me feeling only relief, but from the degrading and dehumanizing merry-go-round to which I was subjected.

I am a strong person. I certainly will survive. But what about other women and girls? They may not be as fortunate. The process is humiliating. It is a kind of deliberate torture which seems designed only to make women 'pay'.

If I had to I would do it all over again. I would suffer the expense, (long distance calls, car rental, motel, meals, missed work). I would put up with the rude, unfeeling nurses, the doctors who hung up at the mention of the word abortion. I would put up with the ten weeks of fear, nausea, headaches and emotional turmoil. I would go through the daily ritual of phoning doctors. I would even put up with the post-operative examination.

I would go through the whole long, frustrating, insensitive procedure again rather than be forced by strangers to continue a pregnancy that my judgement, my life, my body, my mind, all tell me that I am not ready to handle.

It is finished with now, but I can't help wondering what point there was to this ordeal.

Is justice actually served by ensuring that women who find themselves in similar circumstances are humiliated and degraded? Has some humane purpose been served?

The preceding account was written by a twenty-four year old woman living close to Toronto. She is an unemployed school teacher who is currently supporting herself with a part time job as a waitress.

The Canadian Abortion Rights Action League has her name and address on file.

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