

Abortion: a nightmare, a relief

Two interviews

Fifth Estate Collective

1971

These are two interviews with women who experienced abortions. One was illegal, the other was a legal.

A nightmare

I didn't know where to go when I found out I was pregnant. My boyfriend didn't have enough bread to support a kid, and I work as a waitress in a bar. I was going through changes trying to decide what to do. I was in a desperate position.

Dave, the bartender at work, hung out with a lot of cops. Once in a while he would try to get me to be a hooker for him at the bar. He always knew about under-the-table stuff, so I told him about me being pregnant and wanting an abortion. He said he had a friend named 'doc' who had a clinic where he did abortions. Dave said 'Doc' wanted \$150 in advance and \$300 cash when I came for the abortion.

"But I don't have the \$150 now," I said. Dave said he'd take it out of my pay. Later, I figured that Dave kept that \$150 and the abortion only cost \$300.

The first time I talked to Doc, I said that maybe I was more than three months pregnant and I was scared it might be dangerous to get the abortion. He asked me when I had my last period and figured out for himself how far along I was. He said I was just under the line. I'm sure now that he was wrong (because of the later complications). But Doc didn't want me to panic and back out because he'd lose that \$300 he saw coming. "Don't worry," he said. "Anyway, if you are, take care of it with a D&C at the clinic." I never saw the clinic and I don't think he had one at all.

Dave picked me up to go get the abortion. I first started knowing something was funny when I ended up at the Tuller Hotel downtown instead of a clinic. While Dave signed us in as a married couple, I was noticing the prostitutes and gamblers around there. But I had made up my mind to go through with it and I didn't back down.

I think Doc works out of the Tuller a lot because he had things arranged to come and leave by himself so he isn't seen with the women he butchers. I was a little scared of him. He looked like a regular mafia guy, with jeweled cufflinks, a silk suit, and a white shirt.

He didn't even pull down the bedspread. I mean—sheets are cleaner than bedspreads. I took off the bottom half of my clothes and he propped me on a pillow and said it wouldn't take long. It didn't hurt. With some kind of instrument he pulled the fluids out and told me that I would abort myself in two days.

He never gave me a phone number or anything for infection or pain, but his last words were, "I'll call you every hour on the hour."

The first night I had cramps and Doc called me until 12 or 1. I didn't get any sleep that night and the second day when Doc called at noon, I said the pains were like labor pains and that I just passed a real big clot of blood. Doc said not to worry and promised to call back at 6 or 7.

Infection had already set in and my muscles were trying to discard the baby but they couldn't because there were no fluids. My boyfriend came over when it started getting rough. He wanted me to go to the hospital, but I didn't want to get nobody in trouble. I said to wait for Doc to call. My breathing got heavy, my eyes were rolling around, I had hot flashes. One minute I would want to hold my boyfriend's hand, the next minute I would be pushing him away and screaming. I had eight hours of dry labor—it was much worse than a real delivery. Doc never called.

I had passed out when my boyfriend called my parents to find out what to do. They said, "Is it yours?" and he said "Yes." "You handle it then," they said. My boyfriend called my doctor and said I was miscarrying and he told him to bring me to Saint Johns.

I was thinking a lot about death then and tried to keep myself calm. I remembered that I had made up my mind to go through with this, and with abortions sometimes you die and sometimes you don't.

I got to the hospital, but before they gave me any treatment the pigs came in, saying "Who did this to you?" and trying to make me feel guilty about other girls dying.

"As far as you're concerned, it's a miscarriage," I said. They sent the nurse in next and as she was preparing the anesthetic she was trying to get information out of me too. "In another hour, you would have been dead," said the nurse. I had to cover up for my boyfriend too.

They took out the fetus, which was larger than three months, and put it in a jar next to me so I could understand what a dreadful person I was. The vibes were like I was horrible, and that nasty abortions never enter their quiet little hospital.

When the doctor came in, he said, "What the hell have you done? You've destroyed a life." He was the same doctor who had refused to give me birth control pills. After this lecture, he yelled at me for taking him away from home on a Saturday night and charged me \$150. The hospital bill was for \$300 and all together it came to \$900 and there was no way I could pay for it all. After I left the hospital I was weak for a long time.

It's easier to get abortions now than it was then. But it costs a lot, even in New York. Besides, the doctors still have the same fucked up attitude and even take the liberty to sterilize ADC mothers, if they feel like it. I don't want other women to have to go through the shit I did. But Doc's still out there ripping them off.

A relief

On January 19th, I went to my doctor for a pregnancy test. It was positive and I was about eight weeks pregnant. Before this, I thought that if I ever got pregnant that I would keep the baby and support it by myself. But now that I was, I realized that I wouldn't dig depending on ADC checks even for a little while and it would be very hard to support a child and myself. I decided to have an abortion because it would be less emotionally and financially straining than raising a child.

I called ARS (a referral service in Philadelphia) for an appointment in New York. They said it would cost \$225. and to wire them a \$25 deposit, which was really their fee. My appointment was made for the following Wednesday at 12:00 with the East Side Medical Group in New York City.

I left my house at 8:00 Wednesday morning. The first flight was at 10:20. I was worried about being student standby, but I couldn't afford a reserved seat. At about 12:00, the plane landed at LaGuardia airport. It took two busses and a lot of waiting around to get to the place at about 1:00.

They started counseling our group of four women at about 1:45. We had to fill out some forms and were told how the abortion would be performed and about birth control. We were given four pills which were pain killers and downers. After waiting about 15 minutes we were given blood and urine tests. After another short wait, I went into an operating room. They only perform vacuumette curettage abortions because they are quicker, safer and less painful than D. and C's.

I was given a shot in the cervix to numb it. The cervix was dilated and after the fetal tissues were removed, the uterine wall was scraped to help prevent infection. The whole operation took only about ten or fifteen minutes. I experienced relatively little pain.

After resting a few minutes, the nurse helped me walk to a recovery room with four other women in it. I lied down for ten minutes, then sat up on the bed. Our blood pressures and temperatures were taken. We ate cookies

and drank coke to build up our sugar loss. Antibiotics, pills to shrink the uterus and a month's supply of birth control pills were given to us.

I left with two other women who were going to the airport. I was having mild cramps for about an hour afterwards. We took a taxi to LaGuardia and I caught a plane at 6:30. I was back in the Motor City by 8:00 that night.

I was very relieved to have gone through with the abortion.



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