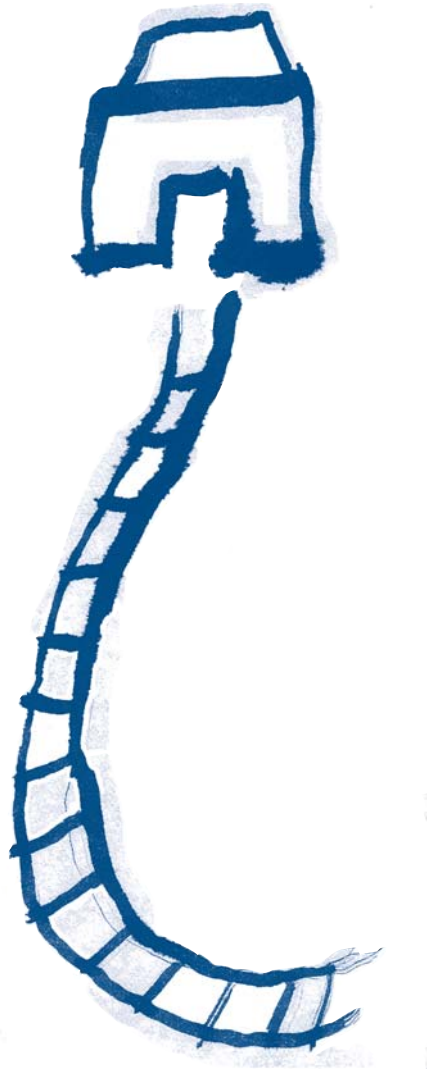


THE IRISH JOURNEY

Women's Stories of Abortion



First published in 2000 by the IFPA

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DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to the women
who so bravely contributed their
stories of abortion and to
all women who experience crisis pregnancy.*

PREFACE BY SHERIE de BURGH

DIRECTOR OF PREGNANCY COUNSELLING, IFPA

The women at the support group were helpless with laughter as Jenny told this story. About ten days after her abortion, she was back in Ireland and feeling isolated and lonely. Only one friend knew about it and it was hard to keep ringing her. Jenny thought that if she could at least read about other Irish women's experiences, it might help her dispel her feeling of 'being the only one'. Jenny went off to Easons to get the book. After wandering around a bit, she thought she had better ask an assistant where to find it. As she looked around for help, three things struck her – that she couldn't ask for a book on abortion because then the assistant would *know*, that even if she found it she couldn't pay for it because the cashier would *know*, (to her own amazement Jenny contemplated stealing the book if she found it – but imagine being caught *stealing* a book on abortion, then everyone would *know*). The third thing that Jenny realised was that there was no book available at all.

Jenny told her story very well, laughing at herself standing in Easons as the pennies dropped, and the group shared the lovely release that is genuine laughter at an aspect of our lives which is painful and present. All the women at the meeting understood Jenny's sense of secrecy and isolation.

Carrying a sense of shame for your country is a terrible burden. Ireland's refusal to accept the reality of abortion, and acknowledge the humanity and rights of the individual woman behind the statistics, bestows a sense of shame on women and creates secrecy and isolation to reinforce that feeling. John Bradshaw talks about the two faces of secrecy. One face, privacy, is the realm of *natural secrecy*; the other face, which he calls *dark secrecy* is the realm necessitated by the breakdown of privacy. The individual decision that a pregnancy which is a crisis will end in abortion is no less painful and sad for an English woman than for her Irish counterpart. But she does not carry the weight of her country's judgement – she is acknowledged by the provision of services which she may decide she needs. Her crisis and decision is private, but not necessarily secret.

Irish women's abortions often become dark secrets because of the fear of judgement, and the journey to England almost always involves cover stories and lies. For many women it is the first major life event that is kept secret from family and friends. The lies are often told to protect those same loved ones from having to cope with this awful crisis.

No woman ever wants to have an abortion. No woman ever wants to be in the position of making that choice. I have never met the woman for whom this was an easy or lightly taken decision. It is my experience that women have abortions because they feel that they cannot give a quality of life to that child, whatever their own personal reasons may be. They are not at war with their embryo. They are distressed and saddened by their knowledge that it is the born child they cannot have. It is the commitment to parenting this child that they cannot make at this time.

It takes courage and strength to make such a major decision, to incorporate it into your life and move on, and live with the sense of secrecy and isolation it brings. Many thousands of Irish women and men are living that isolation today. In *Kate's Story*, her mother asks how she can prevent her 14 year old daughter's abortion becoming "*a dark secret in Kate's past.*"

Not every woman will have an abortion, but any woman could. The women's stories in this book cover a wide range of individual experiences. All walks of life and all parts of the country are represented. The women come from a wide age range, and are married, single, widowed, separated, with and without partners. Some had access to counselling in Ireland, some are clients of the IFPA and others made the journey without professional support or recognition. The experience of their crisis, and its resolution, is uniquely theirs.

The women in this book were approached, and contributed, through a variety of sources. For most of these women, the telling and placing of their story into the public domain was extremely difficult. Names and other identifying details have been changed to protect the women's anonymity.

The stories are laid out chronologically, beginning with Marie's harrowing account of her backstreet abortion over 30 years ago, and ending with Kate's story, just one year ago, thankfully legal and safe.

I am especially pleased that Jacqueline Duignan chose the cycles of moons and trees to illustrate the collection. In the endless debate about abortion, with its emphasis on legal, medical, and political aspects, it is all too easy to forget the personal. Almost every woman I have worked with has said that she never saw herself in this position; never saw herself having to make this choice. Crisis pregnancy, and the possibility of abortion, has become part of her reproductive cycle. In her story, Jean says "*In 25 years, I had had seven children and two miscarriages. I couldn't believe that at 45 I was having an abortion.*"

Fourteen years ago I worked on a Help Line, talking with women who were often standing in phone boxes on cold, windy nights, trying to make contact with someone, anyone, who would listen. We have come a long way from there, and the provision of non-directive government funded counselling services has many positive effects, not least the national recognition that pregnancy may be a crisis. With knowledge of services and information available, many women who do decide to terminate their pregnancies, do so in the first trimester. More women feel safe to give Irish addresses. Most productively, non-directive counselling services can provide the woman in crisis with a safe place where she can focus on herself, her feelings and her issues. No matter who else is involved in her personal life, it is she who will make the final decision and live the consequences.

For the Irish woman who decides on abortion, travelling is inevitable. For many women it is a huge hurdle, involving financial strain, distress and fear, unknown places in an often unknown country. Despite this, I have known women to travel against all odds when they believed the decision to terminate was the best they felt they could make. Several of the stories focus on the negative effect of having to travel. Miriam's story ends with: "*Being the mother of a daughter motivated me to tell my story, should she ever have to make the same choice, I would wish that she could be treated with care and dignity in her own country.*" Miriam is not wishing for convenience for her daughter. She is hoping for the recognition of a reality that *may* become part of her daughter's life, as it did in her own, as it does for thousands of Irish women each and every year.

So a very special thank you to Jenny, for the laughter that broke the sense of isolation and secrecy for the women present that evening and for turning up the flame under a long simmering idea.

That book, *this* book, is now on the shelves in Easons.

Reference: Bradshaw, J. *Family Secrets*. 1995. Bantam Doubleday. ISBN 0 7499 1521 8.

INTRODUCTION BY MEDB RUANE

Saint Brigid met a young woman who had a crisis pregnancy. Brigid was renowned for her work with fertility in all its forms - once, a wooden altar had sprouted blossom under the force of her healing touch. Brigid prayed, then she blessed the woman, laid hands on her womb, and the foetus miraculously disappeared.

Being a force for good in crisis pregnancy can entail such interventions. It always did. For centuries, handywomen, midwives or doctors helped deliver babies, nurse women with spontaneous abortions, or bring on periods for those who could not, or chose not to bear a child. Since the Offences Against the Person Act (1861), however, Irish law has stripped one strand of crisis pregnancy intervention out of ordinary men and women's hands, leaving them vulnerable, alone and for over a century, at the mercy of backstreet abortionists or home-made attempts to terminate unwanted pregnancies.

The introduction of the 1967 Act in Britain released some Irish people from the desperate situation into which they were driven by a combination of dogmatically driven medical ethics and a state dominated by a fundamentalist brand of Roman Catholicism. Yet Britain's proximity and relatively liberal abortion laws now enable Irish civic society to treat abortion as a remote, academic, often unreal debate.

Shame and stigma attach to having an abortion, offering Irish society a crude instrument of social control. Theological and legal arguments supplant the personal testimony of women for whom Britain provides a compassionate response to their crisis pregnancy. Some women are killed by the pregnancy they choose to carry. Meanwhile, urgent debates about the optimum time in which to terminate a pregnancy, other than on life-threatening grounds, are dangerously ignored.

Yet under the white-washed surface, people's sisters, mothers, wives, girlfriends; along with neighbours, teachers, waitresses, poets, students, lawyers, homemakers, doctors, farmers, media workers, factory workers, artists, information technologists, civil servants, bank officials and more, are taking long, sad, journeys to keep official Ireland squeaky clean. A total of 9,531 women travelled to Britain from all over the world for pregnancy terminations in 1998. Less than 25% did not come from Ireland, north or south.

Irish society needs women's silence to keep its good opinion of itself. In all the talk and high rhetoric of the endless abortion debate, the story of Irish women is usually authored by someone else, with few women daring to speak for themselves, to become visible. But just as years of concealment about the abuse of children in state institutions were finally ruptured when its reality became untenable, years of denying the reality of abortion is starting to tell unbearably on other aspects of Irish life.

You don't have to look far for signs of the escalating social and economic crisis unplanned or unwanted pregnancy now represents. Infanticide is rising. Five Irish babies have been found dead on beaches or rubbish tips in various parts of the country this year, 2000. Hospitals report a shocking increase in the number of children admitted

suffering from physical abuse within two-partner families. Single parents remain a severely disadvantaged socio-economic grouping, with single mothers prone to depression at twice the rate of mothers living with their life partner.

The evidence implies widespread desperation. Nonetheless, Ireland continues to pride itself on being a 'pro-life' place. Fear of acknowledging the reality of abortion is taking its toll elsewhere. Resistance to introducing safe, locally available abortion has stalled programmes of sex and relationships education, reproductive health and crisis pregnancy measures. Infertile people find it difficult to access fertility treatments. Such is the level of taboo around issues of sex, pregnancy and birth that even the recommendations for a National Breastfeeding Policy are gathering dust. The Irish Government's own report on crisis pregnancy underlined how negative are the consequences of a limited crisis pregnancy strategy.

Women's fear that some information is biased because of the blanket abortion ban may lead to a number having abortions they might not otherwise have chosen, had they received loving, non-directive counselling.

Blanket anti-abortion rhetoric damns a generation of men and women into netherworlds that need not be. The insistence that abortion is wrong whether your period is six days late, or six months, has created a uniquely Irish culture of late abortions. Rates of late abortion (over 20 weeks' gestation) are now three times higher for Irish women than for their British peers, although rates of life-threatening conditions are identical. Rather than admit a distinction between early and late abortion, blanket anti-abortionists tolerate this trend.

Breaking the silence about abortion means challenging those taboos. Stigmatising abortion stigmatises all crisis pregnancies and paralyzes the community's response. Abortion happens; it is restricted to those who somehow manage to pay for it. All we do by forcing women out of the country to end their pregnancies is to subsidise the airlines and ferries that carry them - sometimes at a stage of pregnancy that brings unnecessary risk.

The Irish exchequer profits by over £60,000 a year, or some £200 a day, in transport taxes paid by people travelling for abortion in Britain. At least twenty women make the journey every day, although this number only includes those brave enough to give an Irish address. Most are accompanied by a friend or relative. The average cost is roughly £750, based on travel, transport, accommodation and hospital charges. Irish airlines and ferries profit by approximately £7,500 a day as a result.

Shame keeps women in their place: out of sight, out of mind, or so it is hoped. Such shame leads directly to negative mental health effects, which can provoke additional physical damage. Alone among behavioural indicators, it stimulates depression and threats of suicide.

Abortion in itself does not lead to depression, unless other life issues remained unresolved before the pregnancy. Women know what they are doing, they take their decision with the utmost seriousness, and they grieve. Every conception evokes our uniquely human qualities of memory and imagination, although some 30% will be lost before we even suspect we have conceived. Women who lose an embryo or foetus through spontaneous or induced abortion will never, ever, forget.

"Only a small minority of women experience any long term psychological sequelae after abortion. Early distress, although common, is usually a continuation of symptoms present before the abortion. Conversely, long lasting, negative effects on both mothers and their children are reported where abortion has been denied." (Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2000)

The culture of shame that stigmatises Irish women having induced abortions puts them at far greater risk of mental and physical ill health than they need be. The apocalyptic warnings of mental breakdown that form part of blanket anti-abortion strategy make it more, not less, likely that women will suffer longer and harder than they should. Blanket anti-abortionists arguably abuse already-vulnerable women's mental health in this way.

Shame is destructive. *"Shame uniquely predicts whether a patient will engage in parasuicidal behaviour (e.g. self-mutilation) in the near future, but not necessarily whether they will attempt suicide."* (Brown et al. 1997)

The risk of suicide in women with crisis pregnancies has been admitted to the Irish abortion debate. Suicide is a more typically male response to life-threatening events, however numbers would probably rise if men had crisis pregnancies. Women are at far greater risk of parasuicide, meaning intentional, acute, self-injurious behaviour ranging from drug and alcohol abuse to self-inflicted wounds and suicide attempts. This may harm women and their foetuses. It may happen months or years after they have given birth against their will, or been otherwise coerced into a decision not of their making.

Parasuicide is what some desperate women do. But for the purposes of the abortion debate, it is ignored. *"Parasuicide occurs more commonly in women and in younger age groups; suicide occurs more commonly in men. The incidence of parasuicide is 10-20 times higher than that of suicide. Less than 10% of individuals committing parasuicide go on to commit suicide."* (Gunnell et al. 1995)

Such women don't die quickly: they bleed over time. A woman with a child she did not want, or cannot care for as she wishes to, is no less loving than any other mother. Many women show exemplary personal courage and altruism. But a minority become mothers-in-crisis, with negative consequences for the child. The crisis mother hates herself for her shortcomings, and may punish herself relentlessly for them.

Crisis motherhood is not a comfortable term. Images of perfect mothers and perfect mothering are so entrenched in our cultural value system we can hardly admit their dark sides. Yet even the most joyful mother falls short of her goals more often than she'd like. For the minority, failure to meet society's expectations can have traumatic consequences.

You die once to get it over with, or you die a thousand little deaths. Whereas four times as many men end their lives as do women, women suffer long-term depression at more than eight times the rate of men. In examining the reality of crisis pregnancy and crisis motherhood, women's more typical tendencies towards self-destructive behaviour need to be brought on board. Suicide is not a high priority for Irish healthcare; parasuicide and life-long depression hardly feature.

The consequences of keeping quiet weigh heavily on Irish women, and on their men. Although the predominantly Roman Catholic ethos in which many were raised

has yielded some of its influence, positive as well as negative, negative attitudes to women within that tradition still undermine the status of women as moral agents capable of making complex ethical decisions. That line of thinking underpins some of the reasons why women contemplating abortion are condemned. Its assumptions lie so deep beneath much legal and ethical thinking in the Irish state they are hardly questioned.

Women make informed moral judgements about abortion, and take the consequences. Not one story in these heart-rending tales tells of a decision made lightly, or without due thought. For those who are Roman Catholic, however, their decision represents a double termination: a spiritual exclusion, too, because they are automatically excommunicated from the Roman Catholic communion.

Devout Catholic women have told me about the hurt this causes. One confided how her sister had eventually found a sympathetic priest who would hear her confession and give her absolution. He broke ranks by doing so.

Such punishment is not meted out to paedophiles, military dictators, or most other Catholics judged to have committed sin. All sorts of criminals can continue to live within the Church. Yet Roman Catholicism did not always oppose abortion: early termination of pregnancy was tolerated for hundreds of years. Key thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine didn't believe the soul entered the body at the moment of conception. As late as the 16th century, the Council of Trent asserted that the human foetus was informed with a soul only after a certain period of time, reckoned in months, not weeks.

That changed in the 19th century because of the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and a subsequent revised code of canon law. But other old thinking was not replaced. For example, it was believed for years that women were no more than incubators for foetuses inserted into them by men - men alone transmitted the soul. Although genetics proved it wrong, the incubator attitude survives through the teachings of medieval thinkers like Aquinas, with a knock-on effect in other levels of the complex theology now operating.

"God's image is found in man in a way it is not found in women," Aquinas wrote, *"for man is the beginning and end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of all creation."* This line led to the view that women are not moral agents in the same way as men. It is a primary text for arguing why women cannot be ordained as priests, and has spawned a whole theology on related issues.

Men may wage war against thousands of people, with the blessing of theology. Women may not touch the most intimate parts of their own bodies, on fear of exclusion. To change its view of women's secondary status as moral beings, the Church establishment might have to change core aspects of its power structure. Whereas it did in relation to Aquinas's teaching that slaves, meaning members of subject races, were secondary moral agents too and therefore could not be ordained, the official Church has a vested interest in not acknowledging women's full moral competence. Women don't have the right to choose on certain major issues, on this reasoning, because they aren't up to it.

"A woman ought not to speak." (1 Timothy 2:15, New Testament)

Women are speaking: Amy, Áine, Angela, Anna, Carol, Catherine, Deirdre, Ellen, Jean, Kate, Linda, Lorraine, Michele, Miriam, Molly, Rachel, Sinéad and the sixty-something

woman, Marie, who nearly died because of a back street abortion when she was a young girl. They speak because we need them to – as our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our friends.

"I'm not sorry I don't have a child, but I am sorry I had an abortion," Áine writes. She tells it straight. Abortion is about ambivalence. No one wants to have an abortion before they fall pregnant, but not every pregnant woman can bear an unwanted child. Health, money, fear of the future, lack of consent, lack of support, timing, are some of the reasons why women take the painful decision not to continue a pregnancy they have conceived. They think about it carefully; they remember it forever.

"We have survived the greatest loss

Same place, but different time." (Deirdre's Story)

Living in between what Samuel Beckett called the 'unrelieved immaculation' of heavenly ideals and the 'unrelieved viciousness' of base reality defines the challenge of being human. The refusal to acknowledge how hard this in-betweenness is can crush the best of us. Wherever women are, abortion happens. It always has; it always will. Love makes us wonderful and vulnerable at the same time. In love's absence, we may be subject to abuse. Men must take responsibility for their own fertility, but they are human too.

Over 80,000 Irish citizens are known to have had abortions in Britain since 1981; many healthcare workers believe the number is higher still. This is a sizeable constituency in political terms. Irish women also have abortions in other European countries; in the United States, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Those abortions are safe, thankfully, and legal. But they have to happen far from home.

Abortion is an adult decision made with profound concern. Such decisions are officially disowned within this country: ignore them, says the culture of complacency, and the problem seems to go away. But reality can't be battered into a more acceptable shape. The litany of tough cases that began with Miss 'X' and Miss 'C' will continue for so long as we stay comfortable. Ireland's incoherent strategies around sex, relationships, reproduction, adoption and crisis pregnancy can't be resolved until the reality of every experience is acknowledged, and taken to heart.

Irish women's journeys have been part of Irish life for centuries. Mapping their stories engages the present with histories and biographies Ireland used to find it easier to ignore. Women travelled as domestic servants, nuns, farm workers, planters, breeding stock. Women today travel out of Ireland in search of an outcome their society refuses to face.

The experience of abortion represents modern Ireland's hidden Diaspora, as these stories testify. For so long as Ireland forgets the compassion of a Brigid, or an inner-city handywoman helping treat a girl who has been raped, Irish women are condemned to take the longest, most hidden journeys on their own.

These are Irish stories told by Irish people. Remember Brigid's age-old mystery: making barren women fertile, while blessedly disappearing an unwanted foetus from a young girl's womb.

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TIME

MARIE'S STORY

I remember my back-street abortion well. How could I forget? I've told my story many times, and more often than not, the response in Ireland has been silence. I suppose some find it prurient - perhaps a kind of attention-seeking ploy on my part; others may find it unbelievable. But it's all true. Like the woman in the Marks and Spencer ad who rushes to the top of the mountain, all the while ripping the clothes off her ample size 16+, I'm normal. I'm one of the many thousands, perhaps more, of Irish women who have aborted over the generations alive today. If the numbers were what counted, we would surely be viewed as normal as the girl next door.

I remember my abortion because in a funny way, it's been one of those life experiences that has made me what I am. The story is all too familiar. Girl meets boy. Both are lonely in a strange place. They fall in love and she gets pregnant. She panics and quickly falls out of love when he fails to understand her dilemma. The details are a little more unusual. She was an Irish student cum odd-jobber in London in the early 60s having fled an Ireland she rather grandiosely thought was too small for her. He was a Nigerian law student intent on returning home to do lofty things. He didn't see anything unusual in a teenager having a baby. After all, women in his family had several by that age, and he had offered to take her back to Nigeria to join them. She liked the idea of travel, but not to Nigeria to enrol in a very extended family. She wanted a life before babies. And what would her own family say about a black grandchild, whether in Nigeria or London?

The story goes on. I cut myself off from him and began a search lasting months for an abortion in a London not yet swinging or even remotely liberal when it came to things like that. It was all too like Ireland, really. Finally, a friend of a friend of a friend found a nite-club owner who knew about such things. The abortionist was not quite the wise woman of lore. She botched the job several times when the carbolic mix was either not strong enough or the rubber douche she employed failed to find its mark. I dreaded the several returns to a dingy basement flat in sight of Lords Cricket Ground at the Oval in South London. I've never liked cricket since. Finally, the extra bars of sunlight worked their alchemy and I returned to my bedsit alone to wait.

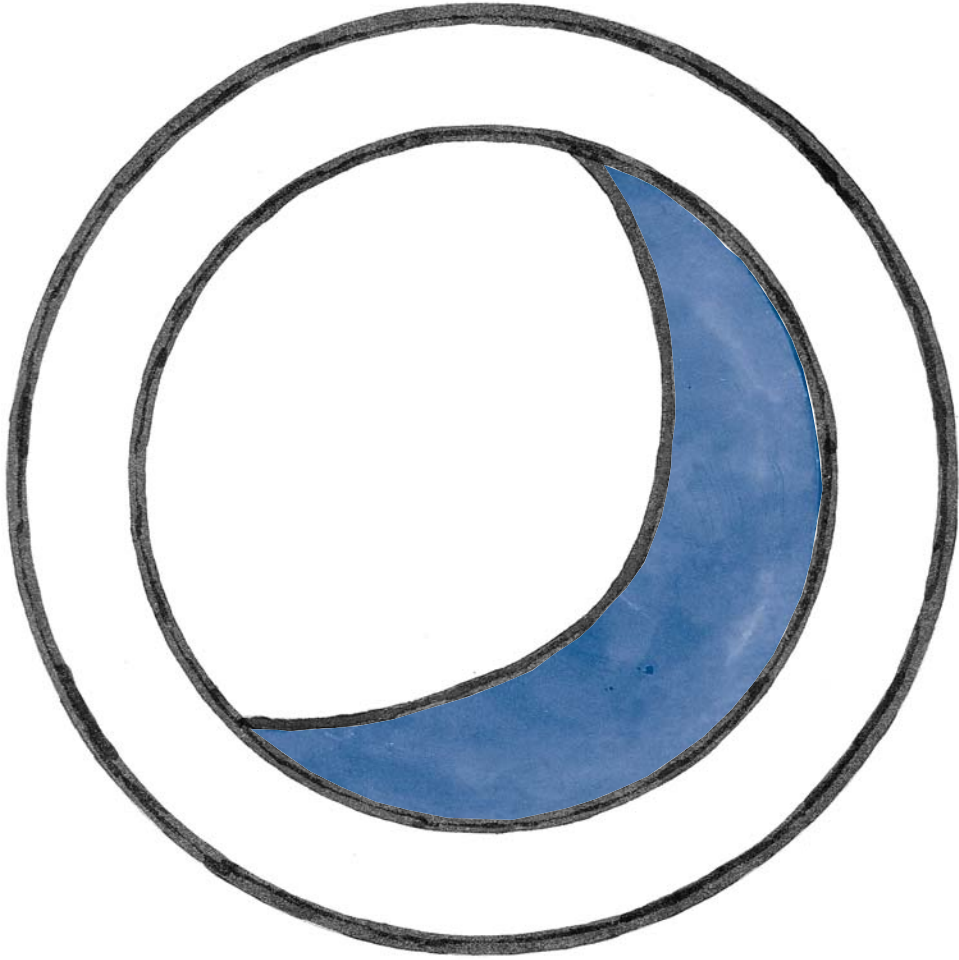
A massive haemorrhage resulted in me being whisked rather dramatically in a blaring ambulance to St Mary's Outpatients in Paddington late that night. The young doctor was polite, just. He seemed keen to establish precise medical details I may or may not have supplied through the fog of pain which he said he could do nothing to alleviate. He did, however, follow medical procedure and had the police question me - unsuccessfully - about the abortionist. Those were the days before the 1967 Abortion Act.

On admission to a large ward full of women who seemed elderly to my youthful eyes, I was cordoned off in a curtained cubicle and handed a bedpan on which I was told to sit. I sat and I laboured throughout an endless night, punctuated by my groans and the tut-tutting commentary of fellow patients whose gynaecological complaints must have seemed to them more acceptable than mine. I suppose I should have been

grateful that I was not put on the maternity ward, as I was later to learn had happened to others like me. Mouthfuls of bitten bed linen did something to muffle my intrusive noises.

My early morning delivery coincided with the changing of a medical and nursing guard which informed me that after showering I was to undergo an internal examination. Somehow I managed both. I was told I was suffering from septicaemia, a damaged uterus, considerable loss of blood, and worse, that I had been a 'very silly girl.' I told them I'd had enough and marched out like a drunken sailor to the strains of 'What can you expect of women like that?'

Looking back on the girl who tottered out of St Mary's onto Praed Street that morning, I know that she was too numbed then to think of anything but immediate survival. In time, all the usual clichés about life never being the same again came true but with something of a twist. She changed. She got angry, not at herself, but with the system. She spoke out, saying 'the unsayable.' The only thing that's not normal about this story is that I should still have to say it forty years on.



DEIRDRE'S STORY – PARALLEL LINES

Waiting anxiously at Camden Lock,
Watching the clock,
It's almost time
To board the Piccadilly line.
Buy flowers for you along the way,
Try to brighten this cold dark day,
The day which every mother fears
For daughters in their teenage years.

The hospital walls loom up in the rain,
Echoing the sadness and the pain
Of those who lie within,
Trying to justify their sin
The choice they've had to make
Solution to a sad mistake.

And yes you have done right to choose,
You're still so young, so much to lose,
I'll help in any way I can,
Because I deeply understand.

I made this same sad journey
Twenty five years ago,
I couldn't tell my mother
Couldn't let my feelings show
My boyfriend journeyed with me
Sold his motorbike to pay the bill,
I don't think he knew how much I hurt
I don't suppose he ever will.
When the operation was over
I awoke in a pool of red
That was all that was left of my unborn child
And a part of me felt dead.
A crowd outside held a banner
"Abortion is Murder" it said
I collapsed in a heap on the road,
And wished it was me instead.

I had a row with my boyfriend
About when I could pay my part of the fee,
I walked away in disgust down the road
Wishing in vain he'd run after me.

I stayed in a squat in Islington
Befriended a motley crew
Ran barefoot in a petticoat from squat to squat
Played guitar, made tea, found things to do.
Stayed all summer,
Tried all sorts of crazy things.
Felt like a wide eyed angel
A social worker on silvery wings.

My mother sent me telegrams,
Begged me to come home,
My Father dead just over a year,
She found it tough to cope alone.
Can't remember how I got back,
With hennaed hair and kohl eyes
To the nuns who told me I'd outgrown school,
The silence I carried telling no lies.

Years of justifying my actions to myself,
The pain, the guilt, remorse,
The what if, the maybes,
The aching watching smiling babies.
So long ago,
So many years have passed,
But every year I know
The age my child would be
If I'd let him grow in me,
And I think it was
The beginnings of a boy child,
Sometimes a mother just knows.

You lie asleep beside me
Curled up like a little child,
My beautiful dark haired daughter,
Headstrong, like me, and just as wild.
I've read your poetry,
I know the pain you feel,
My past relived through you
Feels distant and unreal.
The flickering candlelight
Throws shadows on the wall
Of this cozy flat in Brixton,
And I see you standing tall.
I marvel at your strength
And I marvel too at mine,
We have survived the greatest loss
Same place, but different time.

CAROL'S STORY

My story begins 22 years ago when I was 19 years old. It was springtime and I had missed my period.

I was going out with Ned for two years. We were having sex, but we never thought I would get pregnant. The same old story, it will never happen to me. I was too scared to go to a doctor and ask to be put on the pill.

We were shocked and did not know what to do. Ned wanted us to get married, (he told me later he only asked me to marry him because he thought it would make me feel better). I knew I was too immature to get married. Also I did not want to shock my parents. I felt I had let my mother down, because I knew she had enough on her plate without me coming home and telling her I was pregnant.

We had heard of the clinic in Dublin that could arrange for us to go to England for an abortion, so I phoned and told the receptionist what I was looking for. She gave me an appointment for the next week. As the week went by I felt nothing. I just pretended it was not happening to me, it was easier this way. We arrived at the clinic and I was asked to take a pregnancy test. It was positive.

Then I went to see the doctor. I walked into the room, and he said 'Congratulations, you are pregnant.' He must have seen the look on my face then and realised I did not want this pregnancy. He then talked to me and gave me details of a clinic in London where I could have an abortion. He said the cost would be £80. He could have said £500, I was going no matter how much it cost.

He examined me and told me I was twelve weeks pregnant and he wanted me to go as soon as possible. We decided on the next weekend and it was the June Bank Holiday. I walked out of the clinic and began to tell Ned what the doctor had said. In my hand I had a letter to give to the clinic in London. I was talking and talking but again it was like I was talking about someone else.

Ned and I had a fight, I don't know why, but I remember him going off on his motorbike after he had left me home, and he was in a temper.

I never thought how this might be affecting him at the time, it was only years later he told me he was so upset and worried but felt he had to be strong for me.

So how was I to get away to London for the weekend without my family knowing? I knew there were some members of my family who would gloat if they knew I was pregnant. As Ned was a big motorbike fan, we said we were going to the Isle of Man TT races.

I cannot remember much about the journey over to England, but we were staying with friends of Ned's family.

I remember the clinic, where we met a counsellor named John. He talked us through what would happen. I would check into the clinic in the morning and they would take more details and then they would operate. I would have to stay in the clinic overnight and they advised Ned not to stay. He could drop me off, and then he could visit after 3pm. John also had a talk with us to make sure we knew what we were doing. I still remember John to this day. He was the first person we had talked to who understood us. He did not judge us, he listened to us.

The next day Ned dropped me off at the clinic. He came in with me for a while, but there were no other men there and I asked him to leave. I knew he was glad to get out of that waiting room. It was a big old waiting room, with four other women sitting there. No one looked at each other. I did not want to make eye contact in case I knew someone. There was a deadly silence. I always remember that room as full of sadness.

I checked in. To my surprise, the nurse was Irish. I was so scared, and it was great to hear an Irish voice, maybe she would understand. She was not one bit friendly and that frightened me even more. I wished Ned had stayed. Then she asked me for my money.

O my God, Ned had gone with the money. I told the nurse what had happened and that he would be back at 3pm. She gave out hell to me and made me feel like a two year old. She said they were not running a charity, I could not have the operation unless I paid right now. I began to cry and she told me I would have to leave as they were very busy. I told her I had no money to get a taxi. Even if I did, I didn't know how to get back to where we were staying, or the address. Ned had gone into the centre of London to get a part for his bike, so I could not contact him at the house by phone. All I knew was that the house was in Fulham.

I ran out of the clinic crying. I walked for about two miles. All the time I was thinking 'This is not meant to be. I am not meant to have this abortion.' I then decided to get a taxi. I told the driver he would be paid when we reached the house. He was very helpful and friendly and with his help I found my way back to the house. When we arrived there was no one home, so I could not pay my fare. The driver shouted at me, then he drove off. I understood why he was angry, but for me this was the last straw.

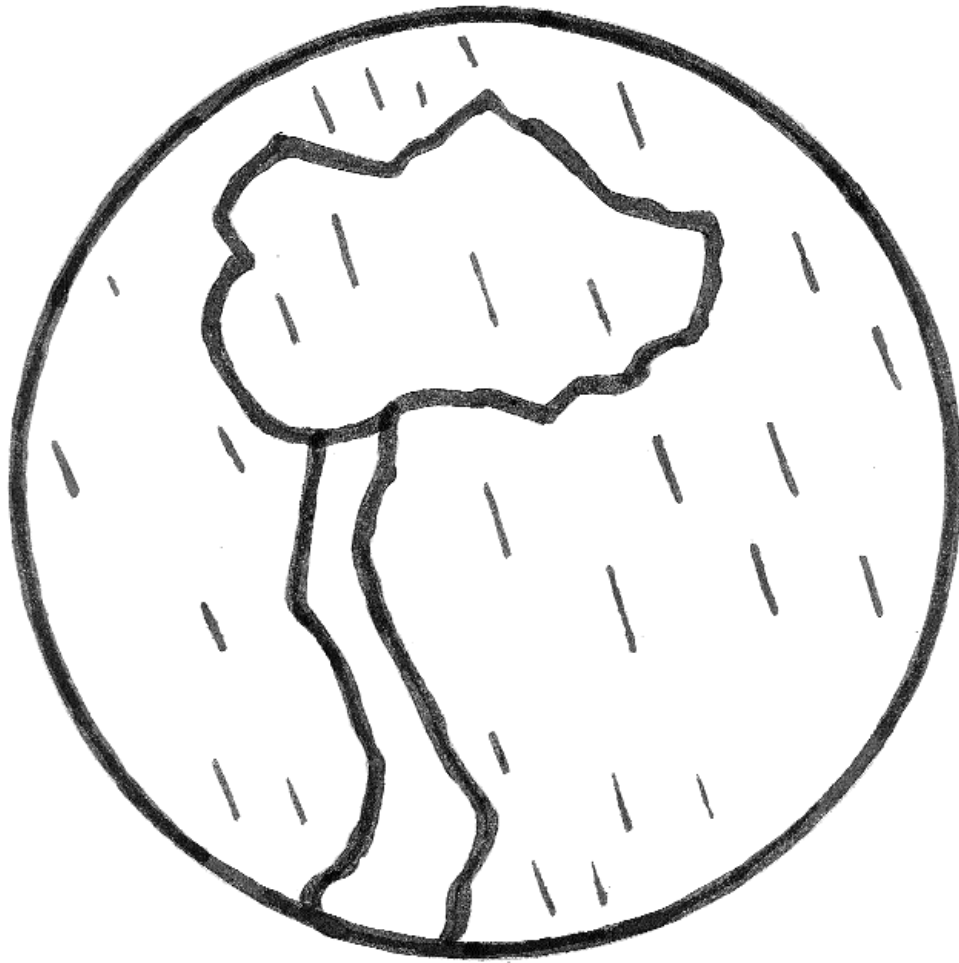
I sat on the footpath and cried. I remember it was a lovely sunny day, and everyone that passed by seemed to be happy. I just wanted to die.

Ned arrived about one hour later. Of course I had a row with him, as I blamed him for not leaving me the money. We rang John. He could not believe what had happened, how I had been treated. With a lot of phone-calling, he managed to get me booked in for the next day. John was very concerned about me and told Ned to take extra care of me.

When we arrived at the clinic the next day, it was the same nurse. She made a point of saying loudly to anyone who would listen, 'This is the girl who forgot her money.' Ned made a point of counting out the money extra slowly, just to annoy her. This time Ned stayed with me until I was taken up to the ward. I was brought to a room with three beds and told to put on a hospital gown. I remember thinking the building looked like a school, it was big and cold.

I was led down the corridor in my hospital gown which did not close at the back and my bum showing. I was very angry because the building was being renovated and there were workmen everywhere. Here I was walking down this corridor with my bum on view to all. The workmen seemed to be looking at me and saying we know what you're up to. I felt two feet tall. I felt dirty and cheap.

When I arrived at the operating theatre, I was put on a bed. I was so scared. What if I die? *O God*, what am I doing? Then the doctor came over to me. He had a



lovely face and he talked to me. He seemed truly interested in me. Up until then, I was feeling crap, because the staff had treated me as if that was what I was. I felt they were saying 'Here comes another Irish Catholic girl who could not wait until she was married.' I felt they disapproved of what I was doing. Now here was this doctor holding my hand and telling me it would be over very soon. And it was.

The next thing I remember was waking up to someone crying. It was a girl in the next bed. She was very distressed and I just wanted her to shut up. I did not want to think about what I had just done, and here was this girl screaming that she had killed her baby. I went out to have a cig. Ned arrived and all I wanted to do was go home. We asked if it was ok to leave as we had a boat to catch. We had to travel to Wales, and I was on the back of his motorbike. Poor Ned tried to avoid bumps and potholes, as the clinic had warned us that if I began to bleed heavily we had to get to hospital.

I had heard so many horror stories about couples who have abortions, that they could never have children, that their lives turn out shit. If anything went wrong in my life, there was this nagging feeling that maybe God was paying me back. When I look back now, I know I did the right thing for me at the time, but back then I had doubts. Now I feel the way I got over the whole experience at the time was to pretend it was not happening to me. But it did. But the way I was brought up was not to dwell on things.

We have now been married for 18 years and have three teenagers. Only two members of my family know what happened and still, to this day, I have not been able to tell my mother.

Many times through the years I have had to listen to people give out about abortion. They say things like 'What sort of woman could kill her own child?' 'They should go to prison, it's murder.' 'Those women are sluts.' I just sit there and say nothing.

I do get angry because I feel you cannot judge until you have been in the same situation. The way I see it, if I had that baby at 19, I would have destroyed its life, my life and Ned's life, as I know I was emotionally immature. I had my first son when I was 24 and married, and that was difficult enough.

I do not have any regrets about my decision and can say I am a happy person. You do come through it and survive. My only advice to others in the same situation is to talk to someone about it, because sooner or later, you will need that non-judgmental ear to listen to you.

ANGELA'S STORY

They say there's no such thing as a typical abortion. That each is different. I know this to be true because I've had two and they were very different.

There were no 'exceptional circumstances' about the first. It was 1982. Like a lot of other people, I was unemployed, penniless, up from the country and living in a bedsit. I had been in a long-term relationship but had ended it when I realised that I didn't really love the guy enough to stay with him. A few months after we split up, however, we went to bed together for old time's sake and I ended up pregnant.

At first, I didn't realise I was pregnant as I had what I thought was a period. When my next period didn't arrive, I didn't worry at first because I hadn't had sex since my last bleed. But I started to have all the other symptoms. I went to a women's health centre, had a pregnancy test and knew before they told me that it was positive. I was already pro-choice and active in the campaign to stop the Eighth (anti-abortion) Amendment being put in the Constitution. So, as far as I was concerned, all the options were legitimate and open to me.

Although there was no way that I could bring up a child, I was excited at the idea that my body worked. I was lucky because I knew that my ex-boyfriend would support me whatever I decided to do. He would have been delighted if I had decided to go ahead with the pregnancy, but knew it would have made no sense in my circumstances. I went back to the health centre, saw a counsellor and booked a bed in a clinic in England. My ex, who has a good job, gave me all the money I needed for a flight and the operation. He was really decent about it and didn't put any pressure on me to go ahead with it.

I didn't tell anyone but my ex where I was going for the weekend. The night before the operation was a bit surreal. I had been in London many times before, had even lived there for a while. But this was like a secret visit. I went to the clinic, had more counselling, and went for a meal in a restaurant which I used to visit with friends. It didn't feel like I was in London. It didn't feel like I was anywhere I knew. I booked into the nearby hostel and went to bed early. Before I went to sleep, I talked to the potential baby that was more in my head than my womb. I said sorry I can't have you just now, but I hope I can sometime in the future, sometime when I can give you a Daddy and Mommy that love each other and a decent home and life. I said, I know you understand and I went to sleep feeling okay about the next day.

My main worry when I got to the clinic the next day was that I would die in the operating theatre and my mother would find out that her daughter was dead *and* that she was having an abortion at the same time. I phoned my ex and warned him to make up a good cover story for my Mum should I die! I need not have worried. It was so straightforward, and over so quick, I could hardly believe it. I came home relieved and in brilliant form.

No one had told me about the 'blues' that hit you five to six days afterwards. At first, I thought the anti-abortionists were right and that this was guilt hitting me. But then I realised it was like a very bad bout of PMT. I asked a friend I knew had had an

abortion and she said, 'oh yeah, it's just like the baby blues that everyone gets a few days after birth.' That made sense and, sure enough, after a few days I was back to normal on the emotional front.

I was, however, scared of having sex: scared it might hurt, scared I might get pregnant again. But, after a few months, I got over that feeling.

Ten years later, my life was very different. I was living with the love of my life, had a decent job, nice house, and a two year old child. When I became pregnant again, it should have been an ideal time - my son was just two years old, the perfect time to conceive a sibling. But Michael has severe brain damage and the prognosis was that he would never walk, talk, see, hear, get out of nappies. I was already traumatised by that knowledge and the idea of having another baby - with the fear that the same thing might happen again - it just terrified me in a way that I can't describe. I can say that I understood for the first time how women can risk their lives using knitting needles or coat hangers to cause an abortion, because I felt desperate enough to do that.

I couldn't stop crying. I felt so stupid, because although I had been using a cap, I hadn't topped up the spermicide. My partner was brilliant; he thought and feared exactly what I thought and feared. I knew I was pregnant as soon as my period was late: I knew all the signs. The clinic said I would have to wait until I was seven to eight weeks, otherwise the embryonic sac would be so small they couldn't be sure it had been removed. Those six weeks were terrifying. Those were the days when anti-abortionists were doing everything to stop women getting to England. I had nightmares that somehow they would stop me before I got to England and force me to continue the pregnancy. I was unable to function properly. I kept imagining myself with two severely disabled children. I tried to be more positive but the thought of trying to give a decent life to *any* other child, while caring for my darling Michael was unrealistic. He is a 60 minute an hour, 24 hour a day, job. Anyway, I had a school-friend whose second child was severely disabled and I saw how, with the best will in the world, she neglected her older child. I needed all my love, all my energy for Michael and I was going to make sure he got it, even if I had to fight the anti-abortionists to get on the plane.

Although I needed him with me and although he wanted to support me, my partner couldn't accompany me because someone had to look after our son. While in 1982, I had been happy enough to go to England, this time I raged about not being able to have the termination in our local hospital. It would have been far easier for the whole family. As it was, Michael couldn't understand why his Mummy was leaving him for a whole weekend and it broke my heart to have to leave him. This time, I felt nothing but desperation to stop this life that was growing inside me. I felt no obligation to it, no soft feelings, nothing but sheer desperation.

Although I'm quite open about having had *an* abortion, I don't often admit to having had two. Intellectually, I know this is silly. But all the anti-abortion talk about careless women having abortions willy-nilly gets to you, even when you *know* it's not true.

MIRIAM'S STORY

About 15 years ago I was working at a job I really enjoyed but I was in a very unstable position financially. I loved it, but I was working week to week, with no job security, and I found that really tough.

I was also in this really poisonous relationship, you know the kind, I think we've all had one, a relationship that could be both dreadful and wonderful at the same time.

I've always been responsible about contraception, although it has been difficult for me. I went on the pill, but had a very bad reaction, and couldn't use it after that. I had an IUD, got really sick, and had to go to a hospital to have it taken out. That left me with the cap and condom, which I was using. I mean I have this horrible history with contraception, but I wasn't in any sense taking risks.

It was at a time when things were very bad in the relationship that I realised I hadn't had a period. I had just moved house, moved in with some friends. I wasn't living with my boyfriend. I remember frantically cleaning the cooker and grill one day, wondering why I was feeling so absolutely wrecked all the time. A little while later I counted my dates. I was still very early, and my cycle a bit irregular, so I just thought I'd check it out, rather than really thinking I was pregnant. But the thought of being pregnant was terrifying, absolutely terrifying.

When I got the positive result I was in complete shock. The nurse was very kind to me. When I realised that there was no doubt at all that I was pregnant I felt awful, dreadful, panic.

The idea of going ahead with the pregnancy, it just wasn't a possibility, it just didn't seem possible. There was no way. It was a gut reaction, a complete gut reaction.

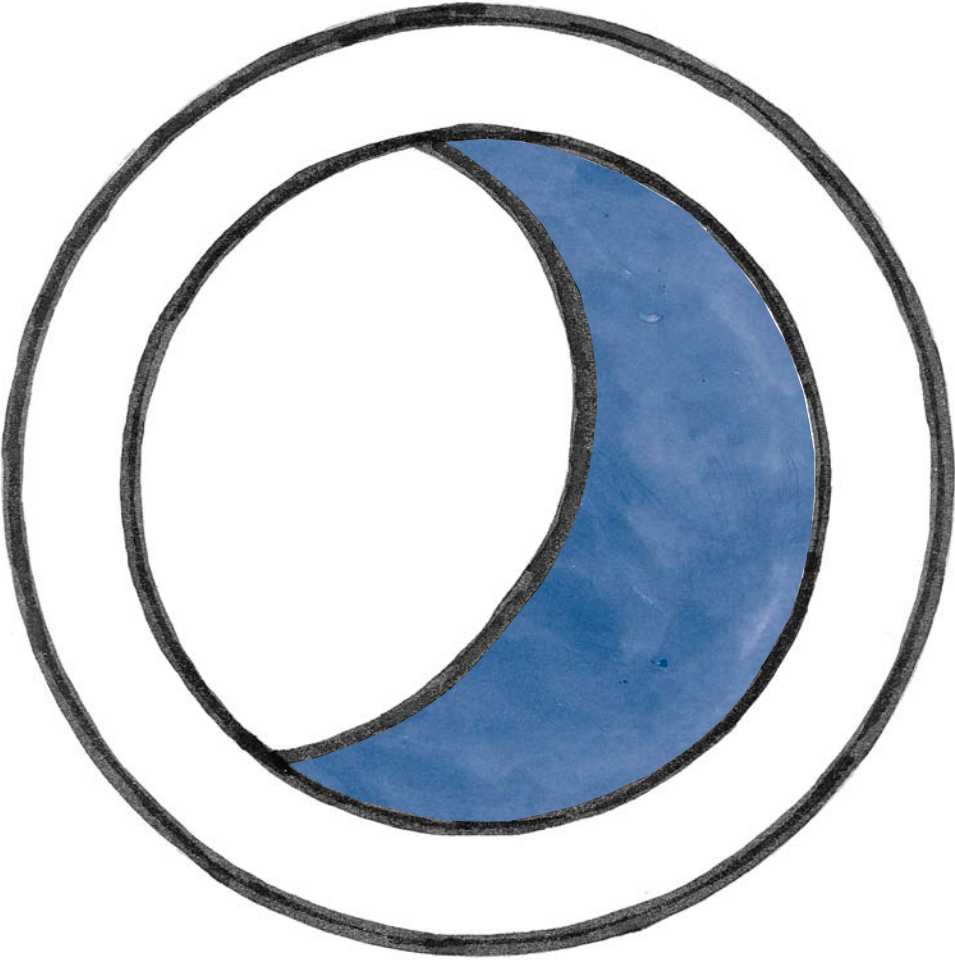
I told my boyfriend immediately. He was very shocked, and completely at sea. It was clear the relationship wasn't going anywhere. He was planning to move away from Ireland.

It was a very distressing time for me and it was difficult for me to separate out the issues. Being pregnant; the breakdown of the relationship; considering abortion - all were distressing for me. The traumatic part for me, if you like, was that I felt really betrayed by the relationship.

I also told two friends, both very supportive. But one was also pregnant, and happy to be. That was really big for me. It was a kind of marker, and has always remained a marker. I think we were about a week apart, so her child is about 14 now. We're still friends.

I waited a couple of weeks, and then went to see a counsellor, which was great. Myself and the guy had these endless conversations, that really went nowhere. With the counsellor I could talk about what was worrying me, like how I might feel afterwards. I was worried about that and it really helped to talk it through with someone who was compassionate.

We flew to Manchester. I was terrified of flying and had visions of the plane crashing and people at home wondering what we were doing.



My memory of it is a bit hazy. We stayed in a B & B. I remember finding it very hard not to smoke, and having to fast. I hardly knew how I felt. I just wanted it over, finished.

I remember them being very nice, very helpful, at the clinic. I remember going into theatre, and then waking up afterwards. When I woke up I burst into tears, which I actually think was the anaesthetic. I had pains in my legs and felt pretty awful.

I still felt really low when I came home. I had planned to go to work on Monday as if nothing had happened, but when it came I just didn't feel up to it and stayed in bed all day. I felt really drained, both physically and emotionally, I felt run down. I had really good support but the whole thing of having to be normal was really hard.

Another issue for me was not telling my mother. My automatic reaction at the start was to tell her, but friends didn't think it was a good idea, and I wanted to spare her. I did tell her subsequently. It was too huge a thing in my life to keep from her and I regret not telling her at the time. But I was very fortunate in the support I had. I had good friends. I had friends who had had abortions themselves so I knew I wasn't the only one. I didn't have quite that sense of isolation. I'd been through a really hard experience, one I wouldn't choose for anyone, but I didn't feel marked forever.

I had a very bad patch when I got my first period. Also my work situation had changed, and I was even more out on a limb. My relationship had gone completely down the tubes and I felt awful about that. I wasn't sleeping either, which was dreadful. I felt everything was happening all at once.

I had been to this really nice doctor for my post-op check up and I went back to him. He told me I needed to go and talk to someone, so I did go and have some counselling. I went for quite some time, because the abortion was only a part of what came up for me. The biggest part was probably around the relationship, and the betrayal I felt.

The abortion came up again when my friend, who became pregnant at the same time, gave birth. I was really worried about how I would feel. She knew about my abortion, and I know she was also worried. I was afraid I'd have such strong feelings that I wouldn't be able to see my friend anymore. But the reality of it was this beautiful little person, and they are both part of my life.

Years later, when I got pregnant again, it was completely different. Some of the elements were the same - I had no idea I was at risk, and I was deeply shocked. I have no recollection of getting home from the family planning centre that carried out the test, but it was very different in the sense I absolutely knew I was going to go ahead with the pregnancy. It was going to be a big issue for my partner and I, we hadn't planned this, but I was absolutely positive I wanted to go ahead with the pregnancy.

It wasn't about having the support of a man or not having the support of a man. It was about me feeling right about having a child.

Something else came up for me about the abortion. When I went for ante-natal visits I didn't know whether to tell them I'd had an abortion or not. I had a friend, and she had told the hospital, and they had written TOP [termination of pregnancy]

in large letters on her chart. She warned me to be careful and think about what I said. I went back to my GP and he advised me just to look at the doctor and say I'd had a miscarriage and she might know, or cop on. I had no health worries so it wasn't vital information.

The abortion isn't a burning issue for me. It's something big and important, which the people close to me know about. I just tell them along with all the other bits.

I think that afterwards I was certainly very sad and I had a sense of loss, but loss of potential. I never had regret. I have never regretted what was for me the right decision. It felt quite ok that I could feel sadness and loss, natural feelings, and still not regret the decision.

Being the mother of a daughter motivated me to tell my story. Should she ever have to make the same choice, I would wish that she could be treated with care and dignity in her own country.

MICHELE'S STORY

My husband and I were in the fashion business. We had worked together in the same company, and lived together for four years before we married, and I believed it was forever.

We had a pretty hectic social life, and we both drank a fair bit socially. Sometimes Ben would get very verbally aggressive if we were arguing and drinking, but he was always so apologetic the next day, and I did some pretty outrageous things myself in those days, so although he could really upset me, it wasn't a huge issue either.

We had been married just over two years when I discovered I was pregnant. The timing was a bit disastrous as we had just set up our own business, and I felt very confused at my mixed feelings, but Ben was wildly enthusiastic and the business seemed to be finding its feet.

When our beautiful daughter was born I took standard maternity leave, and then extended it a bit. I couldn't bear to leave her. Ben seemed to be managing the business well and I went back full time when I found someone local to look after the baby. We still did a lot of socialising, and it was all very hectic, work and family, and socialising was part of the job, too. But it was all made easier by a good child minder and a good available sitter.

Our second child was born two and a half years later. We only planned to have two, and it seemed such a nice thing to do, have them close together. We were thrilled when our son was born. We both love our children dearly.

With hindsight I know this is when our life started to slip. I had had a difficult delivery, and two children were not twice as much work, they were ten times more. Ben was running the business alone, and doing more and more of the socialising alone. My cosy little child-minding network fell apart and I didn't want a creche - the only way I felt ok about leaving them, that young, was being minded at home.

By the time I sorted it out and went back to work there were cracks in the business. I'd always been the practical one, Ben good with the clients, and he'd let the finances get in a mess. And he seemed to expect me to do all the work at home as well as full-time in the office. He didn't seem to realise we had a full time family now, not just a cute little baby on the side. I suppose I'm still angry.

Anyway. Things went from bad to worse in the business. We were arguing all the time and Ben was drinking heavily. Several times during the rows we would have when he came in late and drunk, he would hit me. Mostly just one or two hard smacks. I never thought of myself as being beaten, but of course it eventually came to that, a good beating one night when somehow everything went out of control. It shocked us both so much that we were almost right again for a few days afterwards, full of promises to change everything.

I wish we had gone for help then, at that point. He beat me three more times in the next couple of months, and by the third beating, I'd discovered I was pregnant again. I didn't tell my husband.

I knew by then I was going to leave him. I say a simple three words 'He beat me' but it goes nowhere to describe the mayhem, pain and tension we were all living in - even the baby was distressed.

I told my brother and his wife the whole story. Of course everyone knew things were bad, but somehow you automatically try and keep up a front, and they were shocked by the true state of my marriage. They were fantastic, offering the children and I a home and support. I left a few days later, leaving Ben a note. He smashed up the living room when he read it.

The next months were a nightmare. Ben kept going on benders. The business was slipping down the tubes. Money was a problem, and I felt we were swamping my brother's family with our chaotic life. But I knew I was doing the right thing. I saw change in the children; saw the haunted look start to fade from their eyes. I knew Ben and I could not repair the damage done to our marriage, and I'd never put the children through that again.

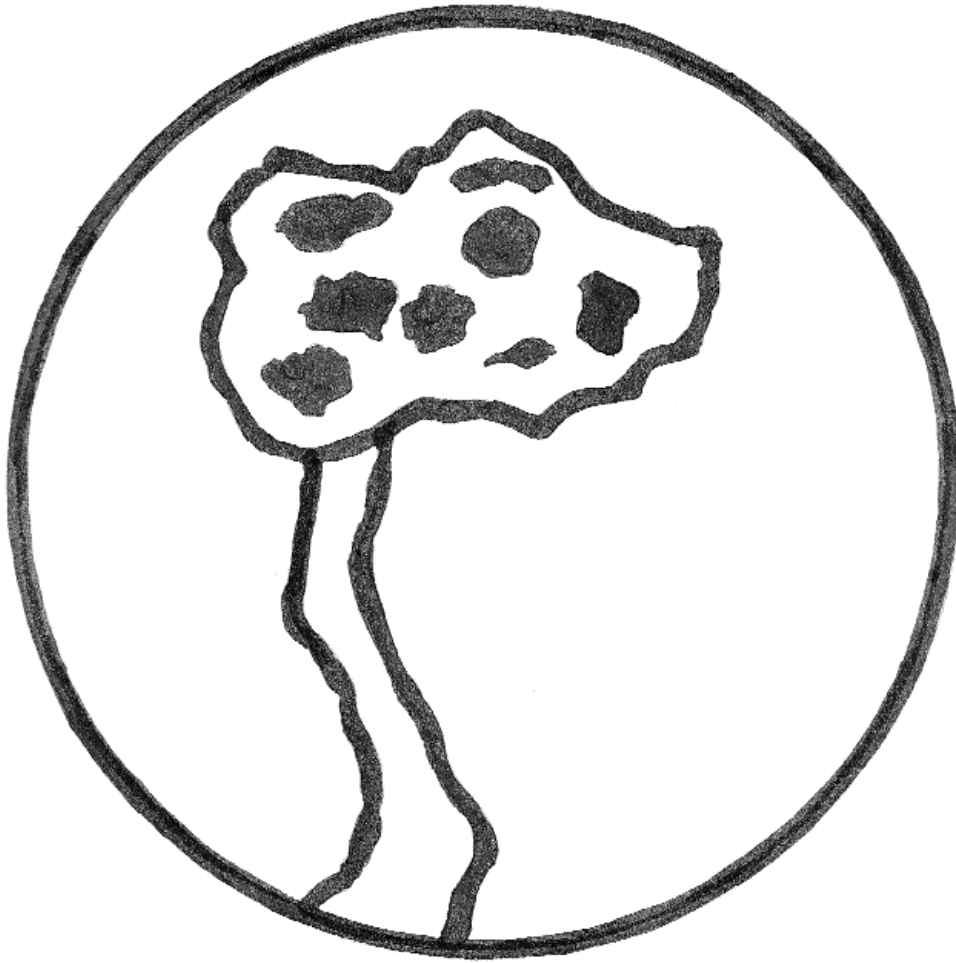
I didn't tell anyone here about the pregnancy, or the abortion I arranged. I didn't even want to. A close friend in London arranged everything for me and then phoned and invited me for a weekend break. Everyone insisted I go; that the break would be good for me.

And, you know what will sound strange, it was. My friend had also had an abortion, in very different circumstances, and she knew how important it was to acknowledge the pregnancy. She talked with me for hours, and the night before the clinic appointment I lay in bed and talked to the baby. I cried and cried, for the baby, for all of us I think. I couldn't go ahead with this pregnancy. I didn't even want to. It was going to be a huge struggle to get back on our feet, myself and the children, as it was.

In the morning I felt light and relieved. The day at the clinic seems slightly surreal now. I mostly remember a very kind black nurse.

I stayed two days with my friend and came back to Ireland full of plans for a new start. To value the abortion I had to make it a turning point for us. I've talked to a few people about it in the years since, mostly women facing or talking about their own crisis pregnancy.

I wish I had never been in that situation, but my abortion is not a burden to me. It's part of my experience of life, part of who I am. And it was a turning point. I took responsibility for the abortion, and after it, I took responsibility for myself and the children. I never realised I had the strength to do that.



MOLLY'S STORY

After having unplanned twins at the age of nineteen, I had no plans to increase the population ever again. But as they say, 'the best laid plans of mice and men...' and even with all the precautions I took, I managed to get pregnant again eight years later.

During my first pregnancy, my family were very supportive and against abortion, my father in particular. It was put to me that I might want to have my *child* adopted, (I didn't find out I was having twins until I was seven months pregnant, major shock). But this option was never on my list as I could only imagine the torture of living with that decision for the rest of my life. Never knowing what might have been and powerless to change it. No, that I couldn't do.

It's always amazed me that women, generally on their own, have to make such monstrous decisions. Choices that will change their entire lives, indeed other people's lives as well, when it's a huge effort to decide whether to do the washing up or not! All your hormones crashing around, bursting into fits of weeping, being totally irrational about small things and generally slightly unbalanced for the first couple of months. Then, 'hey do you want to have another small person to look after or do you want to kill it?' Now that's an easy choice ain't it? How about telling me which peanut butter to buy or will I sweep the floor now or later?

And so it was for me when I found out I was pregnant after ringing the hospital from work one day and nearly getting sick when they said 'positive'. I actually thought I was going to faint. My main problem, and it was a problem, was that I was madly in love. Madly, truly, deeply with a complete... I don't know what you'd call him but he was *not* going to change and was allergic to commitment. At first I thought I wouldn't tell him, then I thought to hell with him, he's partly responsible and he can tell me what to do! Was I thinking clearly? I think not.

Of course, he was hopeless and I could see him visibly shrinking away with the thought of anything to do with it. However, he did tell me he would help me out with 'whatever decision I came to', and ran away. What a giant comfort!

My parents had had enough of me by this time and I couldn't tell them, they also had their problems. My mother was halfway through a nervous breakdown; I was looking after my teenage brother and sister who were going through healthy and violent adolescence, I was ill equipped to cope with this as I was only just getting used to my own children! So all in all the timing could not have been worse. I was also afraid they would *influence* me to go through another pregnancy with thinly veiled disapproval of my failure in the marriage department. After coming to terms with the fact that I wasn't going to be an academic success or a dynamic career woman, my father asked me when I was going to get married? At the time I was not even in a relationship and wondered if I should just run out onto the street and arrest the first man I saw for the job.

When I got home from telling my on and off boyfriend, I was in such a state. I was bitterly sad that he had behaved the way I thought he would and decided that I would give myself a week more to come to a rational decision. There was no one else

around at the time that I could confide in, I felt very lonely and full of grief. At first I thought I was going to keep the baby and I'd manage somehow, after having the twins I realised that if I'd had an abortion they would never have existed. The thought of never having had them in my life was unbearable. What would I be missing if I chose an abortion this time? What sort of life would I be bringing this child into if I didn't?

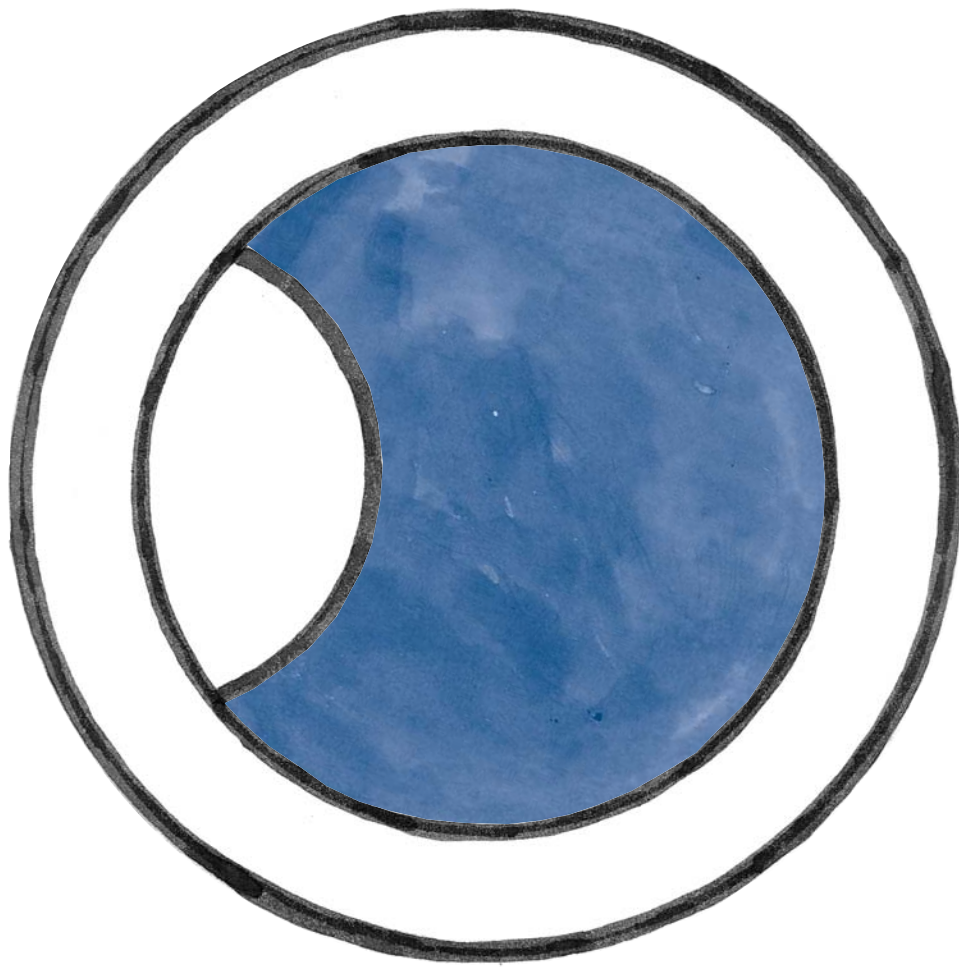
I then remembered a friend of mine in England who had had an abortion a couple of years earlier. I decided to ring her and get my options sorted out. She was wonderfully practical and sent me all sorts of information. So now I had that choice. Just what to do?

In the end my reasons for choosing an abortion came to a head after a meeting with the now ex-boyfriend. We met for coffee and I told him I was going ahead with the pregnancy, he said 'fine' but although he would give me some money to help out, he didn't want to know or see either of us when it was born. He said he couldn't cope, too young to be a father etc etc. I said, 'fine' and went home. That night I changed my mind realising that if I had this baby I would be forever connected to this man who caused me nothing but heartbreak and grief. He didn't mean to, he couldn't help it and we both knew it.

A week later I asked a man friend of mine to mind the twins for me for three days and I went to London, it was the year the hurricane hit and I was in the clinic that night. I have to admit my ingrained Catholicism told me that the heavens were in a furious rage with me and were sending lamp posts crashing to the ground outside the window, trees falling over, thunder and lightening to beat the band. It was like being in the womb of hell.

After making one of the hardest and most painful decisions of my life and being surrounded by Spanish and Irish girls exclusively, all going through the same nightmare, I noticed that even though we were all in the same boat, there was no feeling of sisterhood between us. It was very strange and made me realise that no matter how much or how little support there is, you are on your own and no one can lift the burden at the end of the day. A lonely and barren feeling it is.

I think almost the worst part for me, if there can be a worst part, was that I changed my mind as they were taking me into the operating theatre and I tried to tell the doctor and nurses that I wanted to leave and not go through with it. They probably thought I was hysterical as I tried to fend off the effects of the anaesthetic, then I woke up and it was a done thing. I never felt so empty and flat before or after. It took me a long time to get over it but I know I did the right thing for me at the time and in a strange way I'm relieved.



ELLEN'S STORY

It all seems like so long ago now. I haven't even thought about it for ages – it rarely comes into my head. I don't remember dates or the year, but it all happened about nine or ten years ago. I was 21 I think.

I was in college. My life was grand but I had very little confidence in myself. I felt I was defined by those around me, and really wanted to learn who I really was. I really wanted to get away from Ireland. In hindsight I think that I felt I could never learn who I was surrounded by family and friends, my role in life was already decided. I took the decision to take a year out of college and move to another European country. As it turned out, this year out turned into several, but I did eventually return and finish my degree. I went to Germany where I built a life for myself which made me happy. I wouldn't want that life now, but it was right for me at the time. I met many interesting, different people and made some wonderful friends – all on my own. These people liked me for me, and not for who my other friends were – a problem I'd always had (or so I thought).

I met Peter who, like me, had moved to Germany from another European country. We began a relationship. I wasn't looking for anything serious, being very happy being single. Boyfriends didn't feature prominently in my life at the time, I was more into making friends and the thought of a boyfriend seemed really boring, settled and quite unappealing to me. It was a casual relationship but intense at the same time. There was no commitment, we were just having fun together, but we developed quite strong feelings for each other, and I eventually believed myself to be in love, as did he.

We used protection sometimes and sometimes we didn't. It didn't really seem like that big a deal. It seems so ridiculous to me now, but even though I was well aware of the mechanics of getting pregnant, I didn't really relate it to me and my sex life. I think I may have believed that getting pregnant was something that happened to grown ups, something I didn't consider myself to be. Also, he didn't like using condoms, so I guess I may not have wanted to cause a fuss, not having much confidence in myself or my sexuality. I also thought that getting all serious about protection would change the nature of our relationship and my sexuality – that it would make it serious, something planned – and I didn't consider it any of those things at the time. None of these thoughts were articulated expressions, but I reckon a mixture of them influenced my behaviour.

I became pregnant. I didn't realise straight away. Around the time my period was due, I got the familiar pains and discomfort, but nothing else. I was worried, waiting, but sure there was a reasonable explanation. I did a pregnancy test about a week after my period was due. I can't remember exactly how I felt, but in hindsight I know I was in shock, and that I felt it must all be a mistake. I didn't cry or anything, in fact, I don't think I cried at all during the whole process. I went into automatic pilot – I dealt with it by being practical. Some women I have known are paralysed by shock and fear, but I became completely focussed on solving the problem. I knew immediately that I would not continue with the pregnancy. I didn't really see it as a choice that I made, as far as I was concerned I had no choice.

My life was all over the place – it was fine for me, but certainly no life for mother and child. I had no plans to return to Ireland, to stay in Germany, or to move to anywhere

else, in fact I had no plans, I was living from day to day. What I did know was that I wouldn't want to stay in the life I had forever; I also knew that I wouldn't want to stay with Peter long-term (even though I was happy at the time). I had no idea what way my life would pan out, I had no direction, but I knew that a child was certainly not in the picture at all. There was no way the pregnancy could go ahead.

I didn't know how long myself and Peter would stay together we were both so all over the place, but I knew for sure that when it was over and me and my life had moved on, I wouldn't want a bond like a child forcing us together for the rest of our lives.

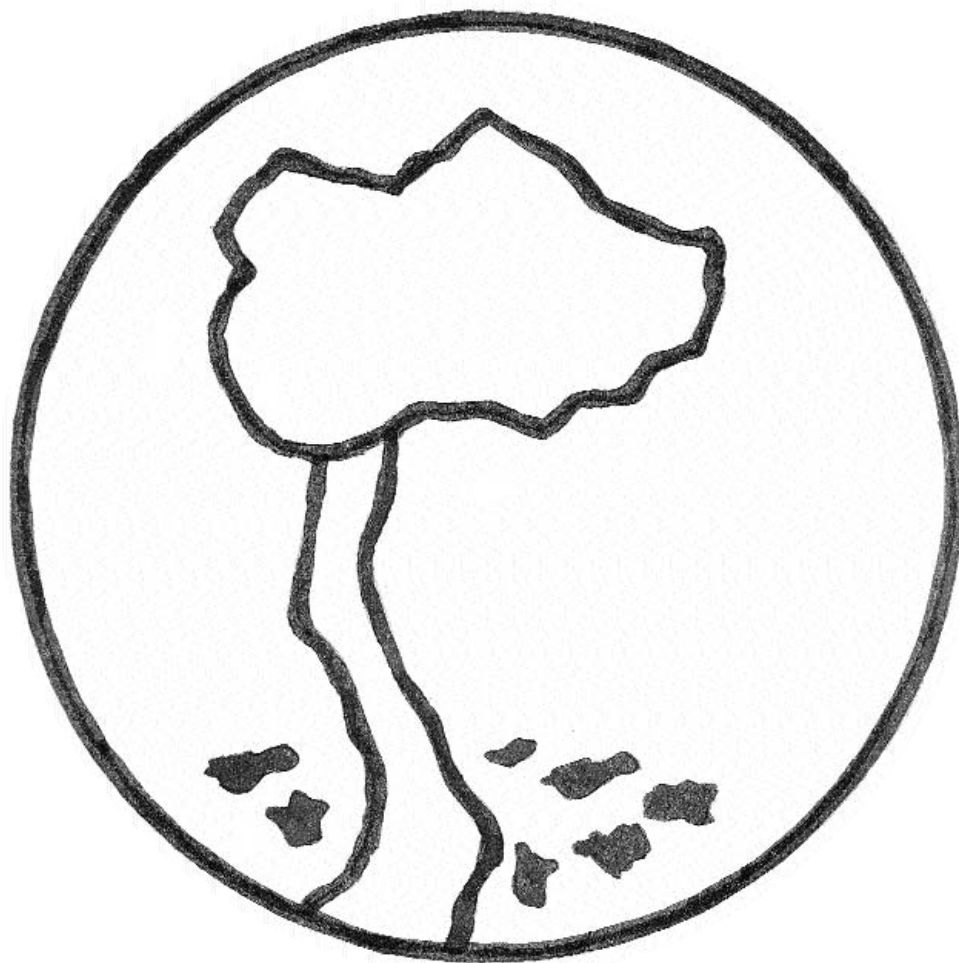
I had not completed my degree and while I had no intention of returning to college at the time, I knew that I would need more in my life than social welfare and the odd jobs of the time. It wasn't a thought, but deep down I knew that continuing the pregnancy would stop me fulfilling the dreams which I still hadn't even discovered for myself yet. I perceived it as having the potential to stamp my life in only a negative way.

I set about organising my abortion – not a difficult process in Germany where it is legal. It was still horrible, I was very low, it was always on my mind, I just felt crap. The fact of my pregnancy was always there, shocking me, scaring me. I was constantly trying to cope with the fact of it, as well as trying to work out how I felt about it, and how I felt about what I was going to do about it. I was quite sick which was strange for me as I have a strong stomach and rarely vomit. I remember one day as I was on my way to the doctor; I was overcome by nausea and had to go down a lane to vomit. That was a very low point – I felt I had lost control of my body, that I was being taken over. The sickness also felt like an omen, that my body was rejecting the pregnancy (although I knew sickness to be very common in the early days of pregnancy).

Dealing with the doctor and the whole process was very simple, but I found the very simplicity emotionally difficult. I can only imagine the horror of facing the same prospects in Ireland, where you not only have to care for yourself, but you need money, have to travel and very often have to tell many lies. In Germany it was all very clinical – go to the doctor, confirm you're pregnant, tell them what you want to do, they give you dates, times, etc, you keep your appointments and then it's all over. In all, I'd say it involved three or four trips to the doctor. The easiness of it all was quite confusing. It was such a big deal for me and this was exacerbated by coming from Ireland where it is all made so torturously hard by the endless discussions and rhetoric. It seemed incongruous to me that it could be so easily achieved.

I was pretty sick afterwards with a lot of bleeding, which meant a few more trips to the doctor than would be ordinarily required and that was it. I was relieved but probably still in shock at all that had occurred in the space of a few short weeks (my pregnancy was terminated at six or seven weeks, I can't remember exactly). Peter was trying to be supportive, but I didn't want to be supported, I wanted to forget all about it and get on with my life, which I managed to do quite easily. I still had hardly cried at this stage, and it wasn't until I returned to Ireland about a year and a half later that it began to become difficult for me.

I was proud of how I'd dealt with what I perceived to be a life-changing problem but coming back to Ireland I was faced with the fact that I had done something which divided the country. It wasn't about me and my life in Ireland, rather it was about my



morals, about politics, about shame, about guilt, about hurt and most of all about silence and secrecy. There were so many people I wanted to tell and couldn't. It was a part of me, of my life experience, and I couldn't share it. It was a secret I had to keep, but I didn't want to and didn't see why I should be forced into this silence. In Ireland I became one of those questionable women who'd had an abortion, in Germany I had been a responsible young woman who had dealt with a difficult situation. In Ireland it was something which could hurt others, make others ashamed of me, it was something upon which I would be judged and found wanting. It felt strange to have done something which was so condemned and considered so wrong but which was so right for me.

The whole thing brought me down. I grieved a bit and cried. I had a lot of support from friends, and spoke about it a lot. I really wanted to tell my family, but judged it better to keep my mouth shut. I didn't want it to be a secret, and I knew they loved me but I knew it would hurt them, maybe even more. The other half of me felt that their understanding of abortion might become more empathetic and human if a young woman they loved and knew to be thoughtful, considerate and responsible had done it.

I also wanted to tell my little sister about my experience. She was only thirteen at the time, but I knew that as she grew into adolescence she would be subjected to the same moralistic propaganda about abortion in school as I had been. I wanted to give her the tools to develop an understanding of the complexity of the situation. I became quite preoccupied with my having to keep this secret, wanting to break out of it, but not knowing how.

I felt angry that it should be like this, that my experience should be shunted underground. I was not ashamed of myself, yet I couldn't talk about it safely. I began to tell people, not just women friends in long deep conversations, but others that I met. It was almost a way of getting it out there, throw it into a related conversation, almost blasé-style, as if I was just stating a fact. But of course it was never really blasé, it was always a risk, and still is.

I think if everyone refused to be silenced, the taboo would disappear, and people would begin to realise how many women's lives have been touched by the experience of abortion. But I know why women don't speak out, they are too afraid and have too much to lose.

I eventually told my mother, over a few drinks, and it was fine. She wasn't pleased but then it's not an experience you would wish for anyone, but she certainly wasn't angry or hurt. I'm lucky that the people who love me, love me more than any principles they hold/held. Not everyone is so lucky.

I also told my little sister after speaking to my mother about it. She asked me to wait 'til my sister was sixteen, which I did. In true teenager-style, it didn't phase her in the least. She was interested, yes, but she would have been just as interested if I'd told her that I'd gone hang-gliding. It was really nice!

It's a long time ago now, but I have no regrets. I never did. And never will have. I did what I had to do, and I respect myself for that. I didn't find it terribly difficult, but it certainly wasn't easy. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy, but hard times come to everyone - it's how you deal with them that's important. The problem with abortion in a country like Ireland is that you also have to worry about how everyone else deals with it.

RACHEL'S STORY

About ten years ago I got together with a man I'd liked for ages. I was twenty and he was seven years older. He'd been married, had children, and was now separated. Along the way we took a risk one night, and I had this sense of dread, but went away as planned to visit a friend in England. While I was there I missed my period, I dreaded finding out but decided it was best to know sooner rather than later, and went for a free pregnancy test at a local healthcare centre. In a blur I heard the words 'Your test is positive. You are Pregnant.' I was so shocked I only remember vaguely making an appointment there and then to see a doctor about a termination.

The appointment was for a couple of weeks later and I decided I would go home in the meantime and talk to someone about it. I told my sister, who was very upset. Then I told my friend, who suggested I talk to her dad. He was very understanding, and advised me to tell my parents. He said he would want to know if one of his kids was in the same situation.

I was so nervous at the idea of telling mum and dad. I couldn't bring myself to say it in the end, and wrote it all in a letter. I told them I was going back over to England. Dad was very upset, and I felt he was disappointed in me. That was a horrible feeling. Mum was more animated in her upset.

I think from the time I found out, even in shock, I knew what I wanted to do. I realised, even though I knew I had to go through all my options first, that I couldn't go through with the pregnancy. It felt, it was, totally the wrong time for me. I had just finished my first year at college. I was twenty and had no financial stability. My boyfriend had married his wife when she became pregnant because his family had told him to, and it had only lasted a few years. When I told him I was pregnant, he was shocked, and said he would be supportive of whatever I decided to do.

I felt a growing sense of physical disgust towards him. I didn't even want him to hold my hand. I couldn't help this change in my feelings, but I felt very confused by it. I'd been mad about Andrew. How could it change so completely? This aspect has continued to affect me, especially when starting a relationship. Sometimes I find it hard to believe that someone could want to be with me, and I also worry about whether my feelings could change like that again. As if my feelings weren't genuine. I haven't had a boyfriend for more than a few months since then. I think it was blame that made me feel like that.

I went back to England for the appointment with the doctor. I thought I'd have the operation at the same time but the doctor wanted me to have the opportunity to consider my decision. She was helpful and understanding. When she realised that my decision was made, and I had told her I was a student, she suggested a way I could get help with finance for the operation. I made an appointment for two weeks on to have the termination at a local hospital.

I made three more lonely journeys to and from England. The day of the operation my friend in England said she couldn't come with me, but would meet me afterwards, I wish she could have stayed with me. I don't have a clear memory of the procedure

or afterwards. But I do remember lying in the ward feeling very sad and lonely. And having to leave after a set time and wait in the hospital café for my friend to come after work. It was awful. I phoned home a few days after my operation and heard our family dog of years had died the night I was in hospital.

Andrew and myself broke up afterwards. I went to counselling for about eight months, starting shortly after the termination. I found this helpful to work through the whole ordeal, as well as other issues in my life. I found it hard for a few years, especially at the time I would have been due.

I didn't see Andrew for years, but then I looked him up and arranged to meet. I needed to get him out of my system and let the past go.

I've never regretted my decision - I knew and know I did what was right for me at the time. Six years later I became pregnant again with someone I was in love with. There were some tears and adjustments but there was no hesitation in my choice to go ahead with the pregnancy. Although her dad and I are no longer together I've never regretted this decision either. I know the time was right for me. Parenthood is a huge commitment and responsibility, full of joys and tears. I needed to grow up a bit, myself, first.

ANNA'S STORY

Despite my better judgement, and tired, lonely, and frightened of being on my own with two children, I had a powerful, lustful relationship with a married man. For four years it was mostly great and gave me a sense of being a sensual, attractive, loveable being. I don't particularly want to remind myself of those days, as they seem unreal now and the cause of a lot of pain.

At the time I had a coil for contraception, but I was bleeding heavily and went back to the doctor who had fitted it. He said there was nothing wrong with it. But the problem continued so I went to another centre. They removed the coil and said there was a bend in it. And so I was pregnant.

I do remember in the throws of passion saying 'I want to have your baby.' It seemed like the ultimate union. As life would have it, and it was said with such passion, life gave me what I'd asked for. Pregnant. Any joy was short-lived as reality loomed.

He informed me he could be of no help financially, or, it transpired, emotionally. He made a joke that he would maybe help with getting nappies. Very shortly I decided I could not have this baby. I did not want to continue my family pattern of many children with different fathers. I had always said I did not believe in abortion and it was a dreadful thing to do. Faced with the prospects, the realities of my situation, I felt I had no other option. I made an appointment for information.

I had no money. He had no money. What to do. I rang a person I vaguely knew, and knowing that they had paid someone handsomely for sex, I approached them with the first choice being a loan, and if not, I would do 'the other'. I was so desperate. And felt so bad that I had sunk so low as to even contemplate this.

Thank God he gave me some money, and I didn't have to. However he gave me cheques that had to be banked at intervals for a reason of his own.

So I borrowed the rest from the Credit Union.

It's all a blur in my mind now.

The flight and getting the train and finding the place. I was engulfed in a very lonely space and felt very frightened.

The place was like some hectic station with a waiting room with queues of people. We stood and sat for hours before being seen. If my memory serves me right I was there for about six hours. Nobody said what was going on or what the procedure was. Eventually I saw a doctor who asked me many questions about being sure, and I informed him that, as I never wanted to be in this position again, I wanted to be sterilised. I asked would it change me, like when you do it to a dog or cat and they can get fat and lazy etc. He assured me no. It was all to be done the following day and I had to fast from midnight. I went off on my own. It was about 9pm, and I sat in an Indian restaurant and wished I could just change everything. I kept saying to myself 'I could just walk out now and just leave.' But what then? I hardly ate.

Then I went back to a room, where for the first time I actually spoke to some other women who were due to have the same thing in the morning.

At 6am we had tea and biscuits and then walked to the building across the road. More queues.

I can remember waking feeling woozy and wondering had it all been done. I was convinced that at some stage I heard a baby crying and it stayed with me because it was a noise you should not hear there. I know that this isn't possible. But it stayed in my mind and it bothered me.

I was given some tea by a nurse and promptly threw up, and was given out to profusely by the nurse for not fasting. She would not listen to me saying I had not eaten. We were told to get up by lunchtime to make way for the next lot who were waiting outside in the corridors. I refused and said I was not able to stand and that I could not get up. She was very annoyed but I was allowed to stay until I felt I could get up. Actually there was no choice because I just could not have got out of bed.

I had nowhere to go. I did not think I would feel this weak.

I had rung a sister and asked if I could stay. Didn't tell her why I was there. She had said it didn't suit. I had kept this whole event totally private and not told anyone. As I tend to do when in trouble. In the end I rang an old boyfriend of one of my sisters and explained the situation to him and he said I could stay with him and his wife. He came to collect me as I could not walk properly. I stayed in bed until almost time to get the flight back, getting up a couple of hours beforehand to see if I could manage it.

I arrived back in Dublin where I had to prepare for my daughter's birthday. I felt rotten.

I felt guilty for a long time because I had invited a being into the world and killed it. I went to see Paddy, a psychic, because I was in distress about this and he said that sometimes souls enter into the world when the time is just not right. I apologised to the soul for what I did.

The relationship was never the same after that. He never called to see if I was alright. In desperation I sent a friend to his house on some pretence to get him to ring me.

Something definitely changed.

I think the fact that I could no longer conceive insulted his manhood. I believe he has since gone on to have some more children outside his marriage.

More increasingly he just wasn't around.

I found that, which I had not been told, being sterilised can bring on premature menopause. Which happened to me and I started bleeding profusely, within the next two years. Finally I was told I could have a hysterectomy, which I refused, as there was no one to look after the children. I went on HRT and have been on it ever since.

I was told not to tell the doctor in the hospital here about my abortion, as he was very against it. It was all at the time when someone could inform about you - there had been a case in the papers.

The relationship dragged on for four years after the abortion. We finished when I realised he was in several other relationships.

I haven't really had a sexual relationship since. Any I have had have been very disappointing.

AMY'S STORY

A few years ago I became pregnant. It was unplanned and I wasn't very happy about it. Luckily, at the time I was living in a country where abortion was legal. The process and procedure were both smooth and safe.

My decision was made responsibly and with careful consideration and I was completely satisfied I had made the right decision. To this day I contend that the choice was undoubtedly the right one for me.

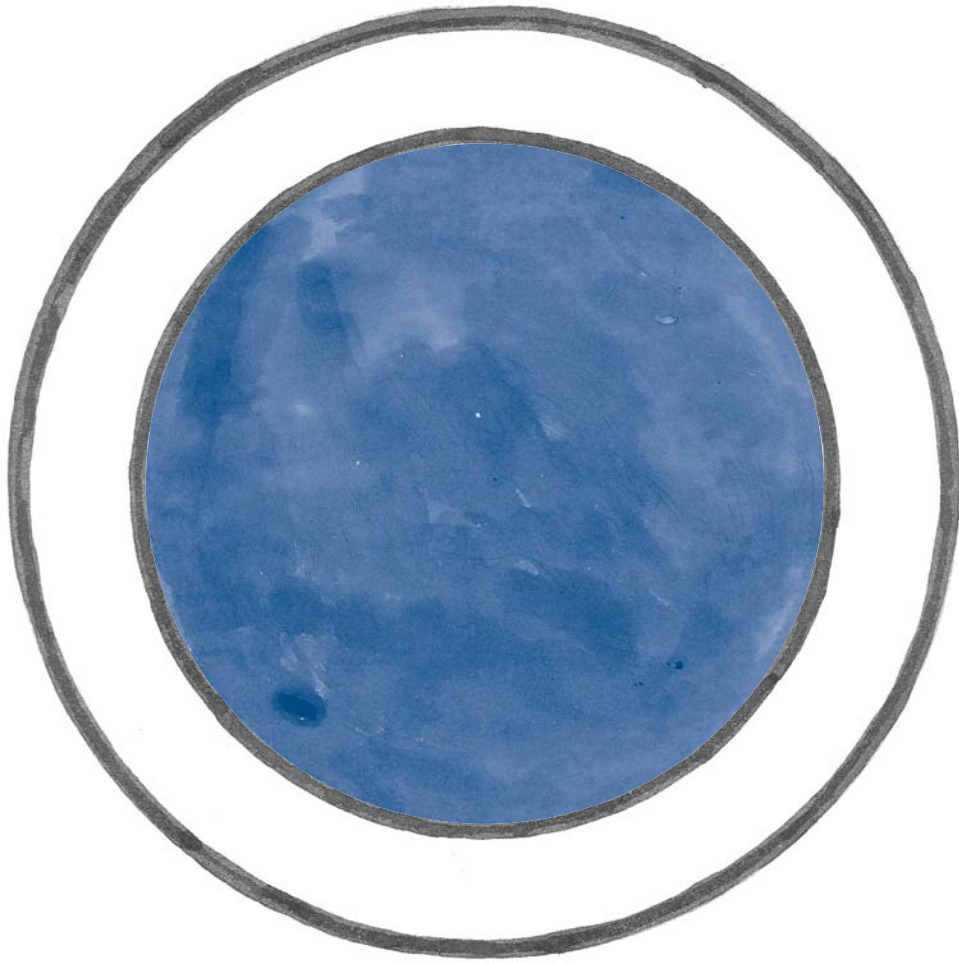
I acknowledged immediately the gravity of the decision. It was a major life event. I was very glad and grateful to have the opportunity to determine the course of my life, it was a tremendous decision. A crossroads where I happily chose one route but at the same time felt sad and grieved for the suspension of the other choice.

It was an important point in my life and under the circumstances I wanted to come home. To be around my family and friends to glean comfort and solace. Also, in some way, to make the experience real by coming back and dealing with it in the familiarity of my own culture. Big mistake.

Almost from the minute I got off the plane newspaper headlines screamed about the abortion debate. TV and radio programmes blasted, street placards roared abortion this, abortion that. Ireland was a cesspool of angry public debate. I felt my personal and private experience had no place.

I was horrified and hid my experience in order to protect myself. I had to be very careful. My abortion became this terrible secret spoken about only in safe places in hushed tones. I had visions of mentioning it to a friend whose politics lay on the other side of the fence and finding myself tied to a pole on O'Connell Street, head shaved with the placard 'Murderer' pinned to my chest. I felt hunted for making a decision that I considered right. It was very confusing and extremely destructive.

When people talk about the psychological damage abortion can have on women it just makes my blood boil. I made an informed, considered, responsible and right decision. I have never regretted it. Trying to negotiate my way through the hysteria in Ireland was destructive, my abortion becoming a secret was damaging, not the act itself.



JEAN'S STORY

Shock and fear - disbelief. I had six children, the youngest eight years old. The family was complete. I couldn't believe I'd been caught. And I felt embarrassed - I was 42. But the biggest worry was handicap. My sister had a handicapped child in her late thirties, and I'd seen the strain of it on them all. They love her dearly, but I couldn't imagine how I could cope. My husband had had major surgery three years beforehand, and although he has recovered very well, it shook us all. Our sense of security. For all the desperateness of the situation we didn't consider an abortion. I prayed for a miscarriage. Hoped for it every day at first, but abortion seemed too big a step to take.

The pregnancy was, frankly, a nightmare. I was sick, tired, and had dangerously high blood pressure. When the baby was born, thank God healthy, instead of relief, I was depressed for weeks. I just couldn't cope, and I didn't know why, which made it worse. I felt washed out and washed up, and the household was falling apart around me. It was a dreadful time, family and friends were wonderful, but everyone has their own lives too, and there is only so much they can do.

It was six months almost before I started to feel normal again. It was a such a relief to wake up able to face the day. I had never known real depression before - day after day until your biggest fear becomes never coming out of it; never feeling good again. The whole episode had shaken me to the core.

Slowly life returned to normal. The children settled down and I came off the anti-depressants. My husband started to relax. Our daughter is a lovely, healthy girl. The older children are great with her, and help out a lot. The benefit of numbers!

When she was three, I found I was pregnant again. This time it felt like the end of the world. I just could *not* go through, or even *risk* going through any of that again. This time I did think of abortion, and with relief, which both shocked and upset me. I was furious too, to be in this position - we were always so careful *and* protected.

I knew I could not continue this pregnancy, physically or emotionally, just as I'd known on the last one that I could. My husband knew it too. He said straight out that none of us could handle another pregnancy like the last. I think that if we had not agreed on that it would have finished us, but we faced it together. We decided to tell no one because that was the best way to make sure no one knew. I couldn't face having to deal with anyone else's reaction. In 25 years I had had seven children and two miscarriages. I couldn't believe that at 45 I was having an abortion.

We had no idea how to organise anything. I knew the information was out there, but it all felt so different now it was me in the situation. I knew about the numbers of women who travel, but I also felt like the only one in the world.

The practical arrangements seemed enormous. I would have to travel alone or we would have to invent a weekend away. That would involve endless lies to the children, family and friends. Going alone was by far the better option in one way, but it felt lonely and frightening to travel alone for an operation.

For all the hurdles, we never doubted our decision. I didn't worry about how I would feel afterwards; I was already sick and knew I could not face this pregnancy. I could not put the family through it and was glad I did not have to, either them or me. But I'll never forget the stress of those weeks. How could everything go so wrong? And why? It didn't feel like a choice. It felt like the lesser of two awfuls. At times I wondered what I had done to deserve this and that's dangerous territory.

The turning point came having coffee with a friend. She asked me if I was alright these days and I started to cry. I couldn't stop and the whole lot came pouring out. It was such a relief. She was so supportive, and I realised how much I had expected to be judged. She knew of someone I could talk to, and she offered to travel with me.

She did travel with me, and we went over and back in one day. My husband was with the children, who just thought I was off somewhere for the day.

I didn't know what to expect at the clinic in England - I know I felt a bit like the poor relation, creeping in the back door. I can see where the sense of shame comes from. But it wasn't like that. The staff were so kind, explaining everything, asking what they could do. The other women there were mostly Irish, as it was a weekend, with four English women. No one talked much until afterwards. But then we told each other bits about ourselves. The youngest was 17. I was the oldest. Everyone with her own crisis. Faced now, for better or worse. Because not everyone felt the relief I did.

The counsellor I talked to said an unwanted pregnancy is every woman's nightmare. It's because of all the women I met I'm telling my story. Because they are not faceless any more, or numbers. They are people like me, who never thought this would ever happen to them. And when it did, faced it as best they could, and all too often, alone.

LORRAINE'S STORY

I was 34 when I was widowed. My husband died in an accident. I had four children, from fourteen to four years of age. It was a terrible time and I never thought I'd get through it - the older kids took it very hard. My family were a great support, taking it in turns to stay over for the first few months, endlessly helping with the kids.

The following year was a big wedding anniversary for my parents and we all got together to plan a celebration. I had hardly been out socially since David's death, but I was looking forward to the party - it was at a hotel, with everything laid on.

By the end of the night I'd had a few drinks alright, but I wasn't drunk, just a bit fuzzy, merry. I took a lift home with a family friend, someone I'd known since I was 19 or 20 years old. There is no easy way to put this - he dropped the others in the car off first, insisted on seeing me to the door, and then pushed his way in behind me. He knew the kids weren't there - I'd told him they were at their cousins.

The horror of that night, I can't tell you. The feelings after he'd gone - shame, disgust, rage, and worst of all - total helplessness. God forgive me, it was worse than David's death - it didn't *happen* to me, it was *done* to me. I knew immediately I couldn't do anything about it - I couldn't put the kids or the family through a public court case; everyone always knows who you are by the end. I couldn't do it.

When I realised I was pregnant I felt total despair. I wondered what I had done to deserve it all. My whole sense of who I was seemed to fall apart.

I finally told a friend the whole story, and it was her support, and organising the abortion, that kept me together over the next few weeks. I can't tell you how awful the pregnancy felt for me - to be pregnant from that night. I wanted an abortion as soon as possible. But it took huge organisation with family and kids, and endless lies because no one knew. I hated that. I couldn't have got through it without my friend. She also booked me in with a support agency here before we travelled, and that was very helpful. I realised there that I was going to need help with the rape, and that there was help available.

I felt enormous relief after the abortion, and even felt positive enough to think about how I could pick up the pieces and move on. But the next few weeks were hell - all that pretending - that we'd had a lovely shopping weekend away or the reason why I couldn't go to the function I knew he would be at - it all left me feeling I'd made some awful mess that I was piling lie on lie to cover. All somehow my fault.

It's taken me a long time, and professional help, to accept it wasn't my fault and to realise I'd lose, and the kids would lose, if I didn't find a way to move on from this.

For me, the abortion will always be a positive factor during a nightmare time. At least I could make that choice. Any other outcome, for me, was so unbearable it was unthinkable.

LINDA'S STORY

As soon as I realised I was pregnant I knew I would have an abortion. I was 45 with a fourteen year old daughter, happily married to a man some years older. I did not want to begin again at this stage in my life. I would not have considered it fair to anyone.

I am not Irish although I have lived here for over twenty years. To the amazement of the friends I told, the first person I told was my mother. To my amazement several of my friends had had abortions but I had never known. I had not realised just how few people my friends felt they could trust with such a secret in Ireland. They were only telling me now because I had told them, but for some reason I was only the second or third person to know. I found the level of fear behind this silence shocking.

Abortion is legal where I come from but that does not make it easy. I knew what I did *not* want to happen; that did not make it easy to have an abortion. But I had always seen it as something for myself and my partner to decide and essentially our business.

I had never realised the emotional isolation imposed on women, on people, when something private becomes, out of fear and necessity, something secret. It seems to me that the difference between the two is vital to the structure of a healthy society.

SINÉAD'S STORY

I got pregnant when I was 16. My parents arranged everything and I was sent to Dublin to a home to have the baby. I wasn't given any say in the adoption and felt I'd done something awful in the first place, so the right thing to do was what my parents wanted. I was lucky Da didn't kill me; as it was desperate at home.

I had the baby for just over a week and then she was taken. She is adopted now. It was the worst thing I ever went through. I don't let myself think about it. What's the point? I get really upset and that's no use, is it?

I got pregnant again at 19. I was doing the right thing but it didn't work. I thought about keeping the baby but how could I? After giving the first away and everything else. I still live at home and I've hardly been out of the town. I couldn't handle it. I told my brother because I needed money and a cover for being away. He helped but made it clear he didn't like it. I had to arrange everything for the abortion - my boyfriend came with me but he was no help doing anything. Useless.

Afterwards, I felt relieved and upset. I can't believe all this has happened to me. I know I did the right thing, having the abortion, but I try not to think about it. I tell myself I've been through worse. I'd crack up if I thought about it all.

Anyone I talk to doesn't know, the ones that know never say a word. It's best to just keep going, otherwise what's the point?

CATHERINE'S STORY

I'd been separated about four years then, with three small children. My relationship with my husband had been emotionally abusive. He has visiting rights with the children but it's still a strain with him. I was just back on my feet, with some stability and routine in our lives. The kids had had a hard time and it still wasn't easy for them.

I was going out with Thomas about a year when I discovered I was pregnant and I was devastated. I'd been using contraception as we'd both agreed we didn't want this to happen. I couldn't believe it was real; it felt so unfair. Every time I thought of continuing the pregnancy I panicked. My precious job/finance/childcare balance, my children's reaction. My husband's reaction. Thomas' reaction – what would he think? That I'd let it happen on purpose? I thought of having a termination and not telling anyone at all. I thought I could cope and it would spare everyone else but I've never felt so lonely in my life.

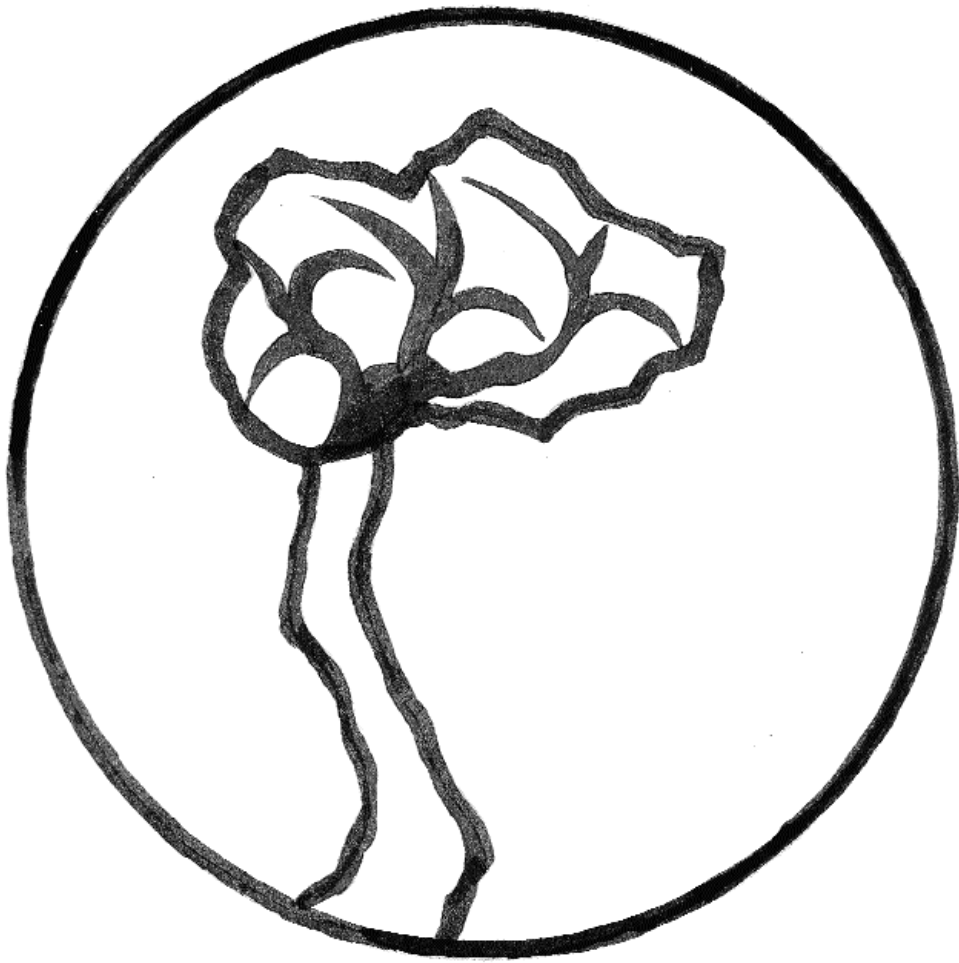
For a week I sat up at nights worrying what to do for the best. I never saw myself having to make this choice. On Sunday night I realised I couldn't go on alone and I decided to tell my sister and Thomas. I was worried about their reaction because I was considering an abortion. I told Thomas first but both of them immediately hugged me, and it made such a difference. Both said they'd support me through whatever I decided. I cried with Thomas because I so wished it had been a happy event for us. I also worried he'd feel differently about my kids if I didn't go ahead with his pregnancy, or maybe he would if I did.

My sister was great, getting in touch every day. She made an appointment with a counsellor. I saw her twice and found it very helpful. It also slowed me down – I had felt driven by this awful sense of panic. I had also found it hard to look at my own feelings, being so worried about everyone else.

Two weeks later I decided to terminate the pregnancy. Thomas and my sister suggested I tell my best friend and she travelled with me. We went over and back in the shortest possible time, for all the practical reasons. But also because I'd feel like a displaced person if I was there a few days waiting to have an abortion.

They were very supportive at the clinic but it all seems slightly unreal now. I've no place in my mind to connect it to – just England. I couldn't pretend it didn't happen but I can see how tempting it would be to try. I just couldn't forget I was one of the statistics.

I've never regretted the abortion. It was the right thing for me to do. About two weeks after I got back I woke up one morning raging. I was so angry at the unfairness of it all; of having to make that choice. I realised I needed to acknowledge the pregnancy as part of my life, not to be ashamed of it because it ended in abortion. I felt I had to deal with this so it didn't stand between me and the people who didn't know. The people who did know were endlessly supportive and caring. I'm so lucky in that. I also went back to the support services. It is almost two years ago now. It will always be one of the hardest times of my life but I've learned a lot too. Thomas and I acknowledge and mark the date. It's not to mourn – it's to acknowledge.



ÁINE'S STORY

I come from a town in the south of Ireland where everyone knows everyone. And knows your business, and has an opinion on your business. Having a child without marriage, you let the family down, even though half the girls in town have babies. When my sister had Jamie two years ago my father wouldn't speak to her for six months. Wouldn't even look at her. Everyone's mad about the baby now but she still lives at home and my parents are still embarrassed by it sometimes. They feel it shows them at fault.

I was going with John about a year when I found out I was pregnant. I nearly died. I'll never forget it. I was living at home and so was John. We spent most of our time at pubs and discos. Weekends I mean. Having a laugh. I mean we weren't planning to get married or even talking about it.

Every time I thought about being pregnant I nearly fainted. I even thought about marrying John then, but everyone would know why when the baby was born. I thought mad things, trying to see how to get out of the situation. I prayed for a miscarriage, but I was scared of that too, in case everyone found out about the pregnancy because of it.

I kept thinking about my cousin. She's older, and married, and has been trying for a baby a long time. I felt really bad about her.

I asked my sister if she had thought of abortion when she was pregnant. She said she thought abortion was the easy way out. She didn't know I was pregnant when I asked.

John was totally shocked when I told him. He kept asking me was I sure. Then he kept asking me what did I want to do. I wanted to be someone else, somewhere else on the planet.

I decided on an abortion, and he said he'd back me. I just couldn't face it all. The same thing my sister had gone through, only now there would be two of us at home. I'd nothing to give a child anyway, not even a home. I couldn't bear how I'd feel if I did that to my parents. Not again. And I didn't want a child, myself. Not then, in that situation.

We got the information from a friend, who told us where to go for help. I do know other girls who have had abortions, but we've never talked about it.

I was relieved when the arrangements were made, but I felt like bursting into tears all the time, too. My mother kept asking what was wrong. I told her I was fighting with John.

We said we were going to a concert in Dublin the weekend we were away, because we had to fly out of Dublin. We left on Friday night for Dublin and I couldn't relax.

I was sure something awful was going to happen - we'd meet someone, or crash, or I'd die over there. When they asked me for next of kin for a form at the clinic I went white.

I never thought along the way of not having the abortion, for all I was terrified. I knew there was no other way for me. I still feel that. But I think as well that it's a

wrong thing to do. I'm not sorry I don't have a child but I am sorry I had an abortion. It will always be both, both feelings together, sometimes more one than the other.

I felt very relieved to be able to be myself again when I got back home. I'd been really worried about being found out, and it seemed like months instead of weeks. Now I'd just deny anything if it ever got out.

I don't know what people will think of my story, but I'd like to be able to tell my sister that it wasn't the easy way out.

KATE'S STORY

I've been married for 21 years and have three children, 19, 17 and 15 years of age.

I'm lucky, I have a good marriage, and although we've had some very difficult times over the years, my husband and I pull together in most things.

Last year we were 20 years married and if you had asked I would have said 'after all that time there isn't much that could shake us up now!' I would most certainly have had to eat those words, as they say. The events early this year affected the entire family, one way or another, and we're still recovering.

My two eldest children are boys, the youngest a girl. Kate has always had a special place in the family, not because the boys were loved any the less, but because everyone in the family fussed over her - the youngest, the only girl - she was 'daddy's girl', the boys' baby sister and my daughter, the only other female in the house.

Last year a lot of the focus was on my eldest boy, who was doing his Leaving Cert. He wanted high points to enable him to do his chosen subject at college, and it was a relatively easy year for the other two - transition year for his brother, and second year for Kate. I only mention this because I keep asking myself if I missed the signs, if we should have seen it coming.

Kate is a lovely girl, with all the beauty of youth, and like all her friends, the meaning of life is boy bands, clothes and the telephone. She has a couple of close girlfriends, in and out of each other's pockets all the time, and a gang of about seven or eight boys and girls who would go to McDonalds on a Saturday afternoon or hang around the local green. Sometimes go to a teenage disco together, that sort of thing. Individual boyfriends didn't seem to feature, although now and then I'd pick up bits about who thought who was gorgeous. I suppose I still thought of her as a child, which, of course, she is. What's so shocking is that, as parents, you think you know your children, and their life. You think you know what's going on. I can so understand the plight of parents who discover their child is on drugs, the distress, the guilt, because you thought you *knew* them and their life.

Kate became moody, irritable, withdrawn. She stayed in her room for hours, and said she wasn't hungry at mealtimes. Growing up is hard, and teenagers, both boys and girls, have difficult patches, private worries and uncertainties. At first we just let her be. Both John and myself tried to talk to her, or give her the opportunity to talk with us, but it was only when it had been going on for weeks that I started to get concerned.

What finally rang the alarm bells was her two best friends - they were waiting for Kate to get out of the bath, and instead of letting them rush upstairs and into Kate's room, as was usual, I kept them in the kitchen. Bit of general chat, and I suddenly said 'Kate's a bit low these days, isn't she.' I hadn't intended to say any such thing, it just came out. Neither said anything, but their eyes slid all over the place - to each other, to me, to the door. I can't explain it, my heart thudded and my stomach turned over. I knew something serious was wrong, it was the look on their faces. I let them all go out and sat down, trying to quell the sense of panic.

Drugs, pregnancy, abuse - my mind ran riot but I couldn't believe it at the same time. When John came home I told him something was up. He tried to reassure me that it mightn't be awful, but agreed I should talk to Kate as soon as possible.

Watching Kate over tea I saw how tired she looked, and thinner. I was fighting waves of panic all evening. I waited until she went to her room for the night and followed her in. I tried to sound calm and said I wasn't going until she told me what was wrong. She just stood there and burst into tears. She said 'Mum, I'm pregnant' and began to sob hysterically.

It was the most emotionally exhausting night of my life. Kate was so distressed I couldn't think of anyone else. My own shock, and relief at knowing, and sheer horror for Kate, all churning. John, sitting white faced downstairs, waiting. Over the hours details came out, who and how. The boy didn't know; Kate had only told her two best friends.

Finally we got Kate to sleep and John and I just sat, shell shocked. I could talk for ever if I tried to tell you all the emotions it brought up for us, as parents and as individuals. If I was shocked Kate had had sex, even just twice, John was devastated.

The next days were a haze - the boys didn't know anything so it was acting normal while feeling insane - *what* would we do? Kate seemed enormously relieved now we knew. She was almost relaxed. I remember coming in one day and she was lying on the floor, watching cartoons on the T.V. I just went up to the bedroom and cried and cried. She was a child herself, my baby. And now she's waiting for us to make it all right. I'd never felt so burdened by parenthood.

Finally John and I were able to sit down and talk about the reality of the situation step by step. Both alternatives felt like a nightmare. Kate to continue the pregnancy, to become a mother at fifteen, what would that do to her life? What would it do to mine - I would have to bring up the baby, there was no other possibility. Kate was too young emotionally to be a mother; I knew that. I also knew I didn't want to bring up another child, even Kate's, and I felt angry at Kate for putting me in this position. Then I thought 'maybe we should go with what's happened, and it will all work out okay.' But I felt a sense of horror at the future I saw. The alternative of Kate having to cope with an abortion at fourteen seemed equally desperate, and although she had said I don't want it several times that first night, I knew she meant she just wanted to wake up and it would all have gone away.

Adoption wasn't an option - I couldn't have coped with that, and would never risk the damage it might do to Kate. We decided not to tell anyone at all, as the best way to safeguard Kate, until we decided. I told Kate's two friends that we knew, and would help Kate, and please not tell anyone just yet. Kate had missed two periods, but I had no idea what that meant in terms of her options. I took Kate to our own GP, who was very kind and supportive with Kate, and confirmed the pregnancy. I spoke to him privately afterwards, and told him I didn't know if Kate would continue the pregnancy. He advised we see someone for counselling before any decision, and gave us an organisation to contact.

John and I sat down with Kate a couple of nights before the appointment, and asked her what she wanted to do. She said she just wanted everything to be normal

again; to be okay again. It broke my heart. I knew it felt as though nothing would ever be okay again. We just wanted to take the burden away from her but I knew we couldn't. It was actually happening to her.

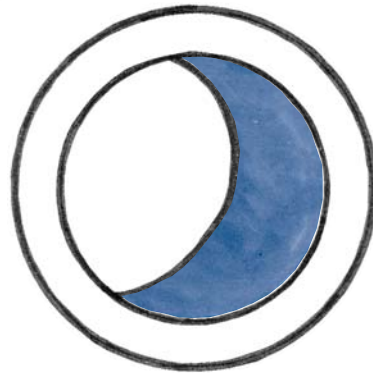
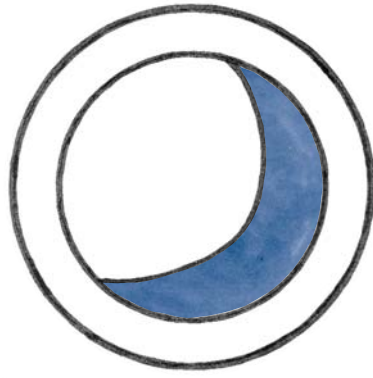
The counselling was a great help, much more than I'd thought it would be. It was such an intense time for us all, everyone felt the relief of talking to an independent person. The counsellor also put Kate first, and included us as the support team, which was very good for Kate. It gave her a sense of control without too much weight of responsibility. Kate also got the chance to talk about her choices in a way she couldn't with us, including adoption.

When Kate told us she wanted an abortion, I tried to talk her out of it, I was so worried she would regret it or blame us afterwards. I also felt guilty, because I felt relieved. In my heart I knew I didn't want Kate to have a baby. But, oh my God, I didn't want her to have an abortion either.

I travelled with Kate. For all the talk of women travelling to England for abortions, I'd never thought of the actual journey. The travelling somehow compounds everything. Before that it was all mostly a private crisis, now it became public with cover stories and lies. It separated John and I at the worst time - I'll never forget the sight of Kate going down for the operation and my sense of loneliness in that waiting room in another country.

A year later and we are 'back to normal' and forever changed at the same time. There is so much left out of this long account - the decision not to tell our sons, the worry it would all get out somehow, the miscarriage story for Kate's two friends, trying to support Kate through this tissue of lies. It was somehow the worst part, if every bit of it wasn't the worst part. And we had to face Kate's sexuality - could it happen again?

Kate has had to grow up a lot, and we have to remember that. She went back to the counsellor four or five times afterwards, and John and I went once, too. We got fantastic help, here and in England, and I'm grateful for that. I believe the abortion was right for Kate, and I believe we are all moving on. But I don't want this to be a dark secret in Kate's past. It has been a desperately hard time but I don't want it to be like that. And I don't quite know how it can be anything else.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the present climate of fear and recrimination, a publication of this kind is the only way for many women to speak of their experiences of abortion. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the women who bravely, and voluntarily contributed to this work. They have spoken for themselves, and in doing so will speak to, and for, many thousands of others.

The staff of the Irish Family Planning Association have approached this project as they do all their work, with a high degree of professionalism, and a deep respect for the rights and needs of the women they work with. Tony O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer of the IFPA has guided the entire project, in the space of five short months, from a challenging concept through to a unique and timely publication. Sherie de Burgh, the IFPA's Director of Counselling, provided women the time and space to share their stories, making the most essential element of this publication possible. Karen Kiernan, IFPA Advocacy and Information Officer, has played a central role throughout the project, co-ordinating production and maintaining the link between the publication, and the launch seminar, *Voices of Reason II*, held on 4th November 2000. Vivienne Cribbs and Patricia Thorpe of our Administration team, undertook the task of transcribing the stories and other content.

Thanks must also be extended to the two artists: Jacqueline Duignan, who contributed nine pieces to this publication, including the cover illustration and Fiona Godfrey who contributed the illustration on page 12. Both have given of their time and talent generously, and their efforts have greatly enhanced this publication.

Finally, many thanks to Medb Ruane for her excellent introduction to this work, which comprehensively examines the abortion debate in Ireland. Ms. Ruane ultimately reminds us that while the word 'debate' suggests a two-sided discussion, the real voices that must be listened to are only beginning to emerge.

Noeleen Hartigan
Chairperson
Irish Family Planning Association
November 2000

A CHRONOLOGY OF ABORTION LAW IN IRELAND:

1861

OFFENCES AGAINST THE PERSON ACT

Abortion was made a criminal offence.

Article 58

"Every woman being with child, who with intent to procure her own miscarriage shall unlawfully administer to herself any poison or other noxious thing.....and whomsoever, with intent to procure the miscarriage of any woman whether she be or be not with child shall unlawfully administer to her or cause to be taken by her any poison or other noxious thing...with the like intent shall be guilty of a felon, and being convicted thereof shall be liable.....to be kept in penal servitude for life."

Article 59

"[W]homsoever shall unlawfully supply or procure any poison or other noxious thing.....knowing that the same is intended to be unlawfully used or employed with intent to procure the miscarriage of any woman whether she be or not be with child, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof shall be liable to be kept in penal servitude for the term of three years."

1983

THE EIGHT AMENDMENT

Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution was amended as follows

"The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

1986-1991

THE INFORMATION CASES

SPUC took a series of cases against the **Dublin Well Woman Centre, Open Door Counselling** and three **students' unions**, to stop them providing women with information on where and how to obtain an abortion. In 1986 Hamilton J. declared that the provision of such information was in breach of Article 40.3.3, as it undermined the right to life of the 'unborn'. In 1988 the Supreme Court confirmed his decision. In 1991 the European Court of Justice ruled that, although abortion is a service under EC law, the students' unions could be prohibited from distributing information on it, because they had no financial link with the clinics providing the service in England. The Irish Government then entered a Protocol to the Maastricht Treaty removing the issue from the jurisdiction of EC law.

1992 (Feb)

THE X CASE

Costello J. granted an injunction in the High Court preventing a pregnant 14-year-old rape victim from leaving Ireland to have an abortion in England. Amid public outcry, the Supreme Court overturned his decision two weeks later to allow her to go, ruling that

"if it is established . . . that there is a real and substantial risk to the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother, which can only be avoided by the termination of her pregnancy, such termination is permissible."

Here, the Court held that there was a real and substantial risk of suicide if the pregnancy continued; thus the termination was permissible, even in Ireland. However, where no such risk existed, both information and possibly travel could be prevented in the interest of safeguarding the right to life of the 'unborn'. The Government then entered a Declaration to the Protocol, saying that they would **not use it to restrict travel or information.**

1992 (Oct)

THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In an appeal taken by **Open Door Counselling** and the **Dublin Well Woman Centre**, the ECHR ruled that the ban on abortion information was in breach of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression. It was *"overbroad and disproportionate"* since it prohibited them from providing information to everyone, including women who came under the **X test**. This decision was not followed by the Supreme Court in 1993, which upheld the injunctions despite a strong dissent by Denham J.

1992 (Nov)

THE TRAVEL AND INFORMATION REFERENDA

Two Referenda were passed, amending Article 40.3.3 to safeguard the **rights to travel and to information**. A third Referendum was defeated. It would have limited the effect of the X case, by restricting the test to cases where the risk to the pregnant woman's life was due to an illness or disorder, and not to a risk of suicide.

Travel

"Subsection 3 of this section [Article 40.3.3] shall not limit freedom to travel between the State and another state."

Information

"Subsection 3 of this section shall not limit freedom to obtain or make available, in the State, subject to conditions as may be laid down by law, information relating to services lawfully available in another state."

Abortion

"It shall be unlawful to terminate the life of an unborn unless such termination is necessary to save the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother where there is an illness or disorder of the mother giving rise to a real and substantial risk to her life, not being a risk of self-destruction."

1995

THE REGULATION OF INFORMATION ACT

Passed to lay down the conditions under which abortion information can be provided. The Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional, as it protected both the rights to life of the 'unborn' and of the 'mother' under Article 40.3.3. The Court held that unspecified rights of the 'unborn' could not be invoked to counter the clearly expressed will of the people in the 1992 Referenda.

The Constitution Review Group issued their *Report on the Constitution*, recommending that legislation should be introduced to implement the X judgement, specifying under what conditions abortion could be carried out lawfully in Ireland. This recommendation was rejected by the anti-abortion campaign.

1997 (March) THE STUDENTS' UNIONS APPEAL

The Supreme Court lifted the injunctions against the students' unions. Two conflicting reasons were given for this decision: (a) Denham and Keane JJ. said that the 1988 Supreme Court decision had been wrong, as it failed to give adequate weight to the right to life of the 'mother'; (b) Hamilton and Blayney JJ. said that the injunctions were originally valid, but due to the change in law in Nov 1992, and the subsequent Regulation of Information Act, they could no longer be upheld. The fifth judge, Barrington J. gave an ambiguous judgement, but also declared that the injunctions should be lifted.

The anti-abortion campaign continued demanding a Referendum to outlaw direct abortion absolutely.

1997(Nov)

THE C CASE

A 13-year-old girl, pregnant as a result of rape, and in the care of the Eastern Health Board was the subject of proceedings in the District Court as she sought permission to leave the state for the purposes of availing of a lawful abortion in England. The original proceedings related not to the abortion itself but to her leaving the jurisdiction while subject to a care order. That matter became more complex when her father, originally supportive of her decision, spoke in the media and came under the influence of extreme anti-abortion groups. Ultimately the matter was settled in the High Court.

Mr Justice Geoghegan ruled that as Miss 'C' was likely to take her own life if forced to continue with the pregnancy, she was entitled to an abortion in Ireland by virtue of the Supreme Court judgement in the 1992 X Case. Since an abortion in this case would not be unconstitutional within this State then she could leave the State in order to have it. The main legal significance of this judgement is that another person, the subject of a care order, who may not be at risk of suicide, could be prevented from leaving the State to avail of an abortion and thus be forced to continue with an unwanted pregnancy.

The main political significance is that it demonstrated that the failure of successive governments to enact legislation, following the *X* case, had led to another similar harrowing court ordeal for a young victim of rape. Opinion polls showed a high level of support for Miss 'C's right to make this choice for herself. More crucially it was now clear that if the government had succeeded in its 1992 attempt to limit the scope of the *X* case judgement so as to exclude the risk of suicide as a ground for abortion within the State, Miss 'C' would have been forced to continue this pregnancy.

1998

ABORTION WORKING GROUP

The government responded to the *C* case by establishing an *Inter-Departmental Working Group on Abortion* supervised by a cabinet sub-committee. Submissions closed on March 28th and a Green Paper was promised for 'late summer 1998.'

1999

GREEN PAPER ON ABORTION

The government's Green Paper on Abortion was published in September 1999. Seven possible options were outlined. These were:

- (i) Absolute Constitutional Ban on Abortion.
- (ii) Amendment of the Constitutional Provisions so as to restrict the Application of the *X* Case.
- (iii) Retention of the *Status quo*.
- (iv) Retention of the Constitutional *Status quo* with Legislative Restatement of the Prohibition on Abortion.
- (v) Legislation to regulate Abortion in circumstances defined in the *X* Case.
- (vi) Reversion to the pre-1983 position.
- (vii) Permitting Abortion on grounds beyond those specified in the *X* Case:
 - (a) Risk to Physical/Mental Health of Mother
 - (b) Abortion for Women Pregnant as a result of Rape or Incest
 - (c) Congenital Malformations
 - (d) Abortion for Economic or Social Reasons
 - (e) Abortion on Request.

The All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution then invited written submissions on the basis of the Green Paper, to be received by 30th November.

2000

ALL PARTY OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE

Organisations and individuals were invited to address the Committee in May, June and July in a series of public oral hearings. Medical practitioners were heard first, followed by special interest groups and then faith groups. This process has resulted in a thorough discussion of the complexities surrounding the abortion issue in Ireland. However, the views of women who have direct experience of Irish abortion were not heard.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Non-Directive Pregnancy Counselling on all options and Post-Abortion Counselling are available from:

- **Irish Family Planning Association.**
Counselling available in Dublin, Cork, Clonmel, Galway and Limerick.
National Pregnancy Help Line Tel: 1850-49-50-51. Email: ifpa@iol.ie
- **Dublin Well Woman Centres.**
Northside Shopping Centre, Dublin 5. Tel: 01-848-4511.
Pembroke Rd., Dublin 4. Tel: 01-660-9860.
Liffey St., Dublin 1. Tel: 01-872-8095.
- **Cherish.** 2 Lower Pembroke St, Dublin 2. Tel: 01-662-9212.

Adoption counselling is also available from:

- **Barnardos** Adoption Advice Services. Tel: 01-454-6388.
- **PACT.** 15 Belgrave Rd, Dublin 6. Tel: 1850-67-33-33.

Support for Single Parents is available from:

- **Cherish.** Information as above.
- **Treoir.** 36 Upper Rathmines Rd, Dublin 6.
National Information Centre Tel: 01-496-4155.

Other useful numbers:

- **ERHA** (Eastern Regional Health Authority) Help Line. Tel: 1800-520-520.
- **Midland Health Board**, Arden Rd, Tullamore, Co Offaly. Tel: 0506-21868.
- **Mid-Western Health Board**, 31/33 Catherine St, Limerick. Tel: 061-316655.
- **North-Eastern Health Board**, Kells, Co Meath. Tel: 046-40341.
- **North-Western Health Board**, Manorhamilton, Co Leitrim. Tel: 072-55123.
- **South-Eastern Health Board**, Lacken, Dublin Rd, Kilkenny. Tel: 056-51702.
- **Southern Health Board**, Cork Farm Centre, Dennehy's Cross, Wilton, Cork.
Tel: 021-545011
- **Western Health Board**, Merlin Pk Regional Hospital, Galway. Tel: 091-751-131.
- **IACT** (Irish Association for Counselling and Therapists). Tel: 01-230-0061.
- **Women's Aid** Freephone Help Line 1800-341-900.

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-77-88-88.
Galway Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-355-355.
Cork Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-496-496.
Dundalk Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-21-21-22.
Limerick Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-311-511.
Mayo Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-234-900.
Sligo Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-750-780.
Tullamore Rape Crisis Centre	Freephone Help Line 1800-323-323.

Further Reading:

These books can be ordered if necessary from any bookstore using the ISBN number.

- *Abortion and Afterwards* by Vanessa Davies. Ashgrove Press.
ISBN 1-853-9801-8
- *Abortion - Between Freedom and Necessity* by Janet Hadley. Virago Press.
ISBN 1-85381-8585
- *Experiences of Abortion* by Denise Winn. Optima Books, Mc Donald & Co.
ISBN 0356141403
- *The Abortion Papers*, edited by Ailbhe Smyth. Attic Press (now Cork University Press). ISBN 0-063-8258-4
- *You are Not Alone: Information for Catholic women about the Abortion Decision.*
A booklet by Catholics for a Free Choice, 1990. Discusses the issue of excommunication.
- *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion* by Daniel Dombrowski and Robert Deltete. University of Illinois, 2000. ISBN 0-252-02550-4

Contact Information:

- "**Anywoman** - not every woman will experience a crisis pregnancy but any woman could."
This site provides accurate, non-directional information on crisis pregnancy and offers a safe and confidential, private place where women can access practical information on abortion, or make contact with other women who have been, or who are going through a crisis pregnancy. Website: www.anywoman.ie
- **Abortion Reform** is a broad based coalition of individuals and organisations which aims to promote an environment in which the issue of abortion can be discussed calmly and responsibly. Abortion Reform, PO Box 6862, Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-473-1606. Website: www.abortionreform.ie. E-mail: info@abortionreform.ie
- **Irish Family Planning Association.** Website: www.ifpa.ie
- **Catholics for a Free Choice**, 1436 U St NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20009, USA. Tel: +1-202-986-6093. Website: www.catholicsforchoice.org

