

Foreword

Throughout my adult life, I have been more than a little familiar with the unwed mom phenomenon, usually via a barrage of statistics and government reports. Occasionally, I've had the chance to have a long chat with a woman, now long into her childrearing years, who can reflect back on what it was like to have her first child while single. *Tiny Blue Lines*, on the other hand, places me and you right smack in the middle of the "event" as it is unfolding today, in our own towns, our own colleges, and even in our own churches.

Tiny Blue Lines puts you not only on the scene, but in it. If you're a mother, you can imagine yourself on the telephone taking the call from your daughter. If you're the best friend, or the boyfriend, the college administrator or the health center nurse, the nosy shopper or the well-meaning parishioner, you can better understand why the first thing that flies into your head may not be the thing that should fly out of your mouth.

But more than this, if you are that girl or that woman . . . the scared, pregnant one . . . you need the humor, the stories, the practical advice, the perspective that this graced little book so generously provides. Every woman on earth is overcome in a real way when she first learns that she is no longer alone because she is "with child." The single woman is more so. How do we tell her that her life is not over but in so many, many ways, just begun? We can try, especially we mothers who know that we always get more life than we give. But the bilingual gifts of Chaunie Marie Brusie are better suited to

the task. She speaks “girl” and “woman.” What a gift to every young mother and her child!

Helen M. Alvaré
Author of *Breaking Through*

Introduction

As you may have already figured out, I had an unplanned pregnancy during my senior year of college. I was completely shocked, unprepared, and ill-equipped to bring a baby into this world when the two tiny blue lines appeared on my drugstore pregnancy test. Chances are, if you're holding this book, you're in a similar situation and feeling just as terrified as I did.

I needed help facing my pregnancy, but I didn't know where to turn for that help. After all, I wasn't a helpless teenager; I was a senior in college. I had a long-term boyfriend *and* a full-tuition scholarship to college. I was a motivated, intelligent, and capable woman. And, as many people were quick to tell me, I should have known better.

There seemed to be a lot of help and support for teenage pregnancies, even older pregnancies, but for women like me—the in-between, the not-too-young, and yet not-too-old—everything was a blur.

I sought desperately to find others like me out there. I didn't fit in with the older soccer mom crowd, and I wasn't exactly teenage mom material, either. As an independent young woman in college, my needs and experiences were different. But I couldn't find anything relating to women like me. The unspoken consensus surrounding unplanned pregnancy for college-age women seemed to be that we should just deal with it—or get rid of it.

I needed help navigating my new life. Since the information and support for moms like me were lacking, I decided to create my own support network. Through my story, and the stories of so many other mothers like me, I hope you will learn that you are not alone, that there is no “right” way to get through a planned or unplanned

pregnancy as a young mom. Most of all, I want you to know that you *can* succeed as a mother, as a student, and as a professional. By surrounding myself with strong and amazing moms, I made it, and I know you can, too—hopefully *without* the massive display of stretch marks that I have managed to accumulate.

Through this book, I want to share the advice of all the amazing mothers who have helped and inspired me. By the time you read this book, I will be twenty-seven with three young children, so I've gained a few notches on my young-mom belt. (I'm still working on losing the baby weight, okay?) You'll also find straight talk from women like me who have been there for it all: telling our parents, figuring out final exams, and giving birth. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll probably take a couple of bathroom breaks, but most important, you will discover that you are not alone.

So break out the maternity pants, sister—we have a long nine months ahead of us!

CHAPTER ONE

What If I'm Pregnant?

It's the question that women in every century, in every part of the world have asked.

What if I'm pregnant?

The question lingered in the back of my mind one day on a weekend home from college. Ben, my boyfriend of four years, my siblings, and I had stopped by the grocery store and picked up food for a picnic in the park on a gorgeous fall afternoon. *It's just a normal Sunday*, I tried to convince myself. *Everything will be fine.*

I took a bite of my pumpkin-spice doughnut and tried to nibble on my favorite chips, but I couldn't hide the waves of nausea I was fighting. It wasn't long before I clutched my stomach in agony and curled up in the fetal position on our musty yellow picnic blanket.

"What's wrong with you?" Ben asked me.

I laughed it off, chalking my upset stomach up to the junk food. "I just ate too much. I'm sure that's all it is."

But later that evening, at my parents' house, I spent most of the time lying on the couch, unable to shake my nausea or the desire to sleep for a thousand years.

That night, Ben and I headed back to school. As we drove, I hesitantly turned to Ben and told him that my period was a little late.

"How late?" he asked.

I felt the blood drain from my face. “Um, well, it’s just a little late. . . . Let me think. I had it in August, so it’s only . . . three weeks late.”

“But I’m sure I’m getting it today,” I rushed on, “I’m sure that’s why I feel so awful.”

Ben continued driving in silence, his face emotionless.

What if. . . ?

That night, I decided to take a pregnancy test.

“There’s no way I’m pregnant,” I said to Ben as we stood in my kitchen, trying and failing to keep my voice from rising in panic. “But I’m sick of worrying about it. I’ll just take the test, and that will be the end of it.”

And so I found myself sitting anxiously in the passenger seat and chugging a water bottle as Ben sped to the store at 2:00 a.m. We left the first store after discovering that they kept their pregnancy tests locked up. There was no way I could actually bring myself to admit *out loud* that I needed a pregnancy test. *Ridiculous!* I thought, *when I’m obviously not even pregnant!*

Finally, we ended up at a Rite Aid. I browsed the selection of pregnancy tests while Ben pretended to examine batteries in the next aisle. The choices were overwhelming. Should I get the e.p.t.[®] or chance the off-brand? Did I want one test, or two?

Finally, after staring at the tests for what felt like hours, I grabbed a box of two tests and headed toward the register. As we checked out, I found myself staring at the young cashier, memorizing a face I knew I would never forget and wondering how he could possibly ring us up so calmly when my life could be changing forever.

When I got home, I attempted to read the instructions and realized I was having trouble deciphering the words because my hands were shaking. That ruled out the whole peeing-on-the-stick thing,

so I did my duty and carried the cup to the kitchen, where Ben sat waiting in the corner. I held the test poised over the edge of the cup for a minute, hoping and praying that I could prevent my life from crashing around me for just a moment longer.

I held my breath and dipped the test.

What if. . . ?

Before the test was even fully submerged, I saw it.

Two tiny blue lines innocently aligned in the form of a presumptuous “plus” sign.

I screamed. I tore open the second pregnancy test and dunked it. Positive again. I stared down at those two tiny blue lines, illuminated by the fluorescent light of my student apartment, with my boyfriend motionless in the corner, and I screamed, a sound that felt like it couldn't possibly be coming from me.

I was twenty-one, unmarried, a student in my senior year of college, and still taking my laundry home to my parents every weekend.

The question of “What if I'm pregnant?” quickly became “What the heck am I going to do now?”

CHAPTER TWO

What Now? Your Future as a Young Mom

Three weeks before I took my pregnancy test, Ben and I sat doing homework at a coffee shop near campus.

“So, what do you think about getting married while we’re in Italy?” I asked Ben casually.

He raised one eyebrow at me over the stack of books that crowded our table.

“Just imagine it—a beautiful white dress, the ancient church, a romantic gondola ride—what do you think?” I continued, growing more excited by my flash of inspiration.

Ben just shook his blond head at me and sipped his double-chocolate-chip Frappuccino®.

Senior year of college was going great. I had just finished an awesome internship in Washington, DC, found my first “real” apartment, and my boyfriend and I were planning to study abroad in Italy for the next semester. I had high hopes for a relaxing senior year filled with good friends, fun times, and a few drinks to celebrate my newly acquired legal drinking status. (Oh, the irony.)

Yes, ma’am. I had a lot of high hopes and dreams—none of which included having a baby during my senior year of college.

When I found out I was pregnant, I’ll be honest with you—my first thoughts weren’t about the baby. They were about *me*. Many

women, myself included, worry about how having a baby at a young age will affect their life plans. Not only do they fear disappointing their parents, being left out by their peers, and being stigmatized as unwed mothers, but they also fear losing the lives they once dreamed of.

“Before I found out I was pregnant, I was a good student,” Jessica Watson, a mother of four, writes. “I had plans to go to college and possibly law school.”

Kayla McAfee was twenty-three years old and living with her sister in Germany, working a “crappy resort job” in order to travel when she began experiencing terrible morning sickness. Kayla writes,

When I finally admitted to myself that something was off, I bought a pregnancy test at a German drugstore. My first attempt at the test was on a train because I was too impatient to wait the hour and a half until we got home. I couldn't read the instructions (they were in German) but I knew the basics of how pregnancy tests work, so I peed on the stick, waited the appropriate amount of time and crossed my fingers for one line. Nothing showed up. I waited a little while longer and then hid the test in my purse and took it to my seat to show my sister. Apparently I'm an idiot, since I peed on the protective covering, not the actual stick.

The second attempt took place in a dorm bathroom. I locked the door, and this time I peed in a cup and then stuck the (unwrapped) test into it. Fully prepared to wait the three minutes, within thirty seconds there were two very distinct lines. My immediate reaction was panic. All my plans, dreams, and goals for the future instantly flashed through my mind, my stomach dropped, my eyes welled with tears, and I cursed, repeatedly, a long string of expletives.