

Finally, he asked how I knew her and I told him my mother had lived around there when she was young and had moved away. She wondered whatever happened to Eleanor. So he went into the house and brought out her address and phone number. And when I left, I drove to the town where she had lived all these years, just to drive by, to make sure she was okay. I had always worried that her family had disowned her and she had lived in miserable conditions. Maybe I thought I might catch a glimpse of her.

It occurred to me afterward that she might get suspicious when her brother told her the story of a woman who had been asking about her. Maybe she had not told her children. She might be living in fear that I would show up on her doorstep next. I couldn't decide whether I should contact her right away or wait. I waited fourteen years.

During the years that followed, I created several autobiographical installations about adoption. Whenever possible I offered space in my exhibitions for members of the community to display their stories of adoption along with mine. I was overwhelmed by what I read. The writings left behind by women in New York, California, Texas, and Maryland were the same. What the mothers had been assured when they signed the papers giving up all rights to their children turned out to be a lie: they did not move on and forget. I think my adoptive mother knew this when she lit those candles. I think three years was all that she could bear. *She* needed to move on and forget.

## 2



## Breaking the Silence

You asked me why I agreed to be interviewed and I think it was because you were here, because you came here and it spoke to me—that's all. There's still that voice in me that says, "Who would be interested? No one cared then, why would they care now?" I was abandoned when it was right in everybody's face, so I still believe that nobody cares. My personal struggle is to get beyond thinking I'm not worth caring about. I am here. I do exist. Maybe by adding my two cents I can help other moms who feel the way I do. Maybe they will find someone who cares.

—Suzanne

**I**N JUNE OF 2002, I began tape-recording the oral histories of women who surrendered a newborn for adoption between the end of World War II, in 1945, and the 1973 passage of *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion throughout the nation. These years were a time of enormous change for young women as barriers to equality and independence broke down. For the young men and women growing up in the postwar years, especially those of the baby-boom generation, this liberation from the past also applied to sexual behavior. And though premarital sex was certainly not a new phenomenon, it became increasingly common among those who had no plans to marry. For women born after 1949, the odds were that they would have sex before they reached age twenty.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the increase in the number of young people having sex in the 1950s and 1960s, access to birth control and sex education lagged far behind.

Fearing that sex education would promote or encourage sexual relations, parents and schools thought it best to leave young people uninformed. During this time, effective birth control was difficult to obtain. In fact, in some states it was illegal to sell contraceptives to those who were unmarried. The efforts to restrict information and access to birth control did not prevent teens from having sex, however. The result was an explosion in premarital pregnancy and in the numbers of babies surrendered for adoption.

Though sexual norms were changing among the young, the shame associated with single pregnancy remained. The social stigma of being an “unwed mother” was so great that many families—especially middle-class families—felt it was simply unthinkable to have a daughter keep an “illegitimate” child. These women either married quickly or were sent away before their pregnancy could be detected by others in the community. Between 1945 and 1973, one and a half million babies were relinquished for nonfamily or unrelated adoptions.<sup>2</sup>

I’ve tried to explain to my kids that it wasn’t like it is today. Nobody knew that much about birth control. What used to bother me a lot was I knew lots of girls who were having sex; they just weren’t caught. If you were caught, somehow you were different, and you needed to be horrified and shamed. I was thinking, “But everybody’s doing it. Why am I a bad person now?”

It was just totally, totally different. You didn’t keep your child. You didn’t. I knew one girl who got married and immediately divorced afterward. At least that would keep the people who talk at bay.

—Laurinda

Just about everyone who lived through this era has a memory of a girl from their high school, college, or neighborhood who disappeared. If she returned, she most likely did not come back with her baby but with a story of a sick aunt or an illness that had kept her out of school. If her peers doubted her story, they probably did not challenge her directly. They simply distanced themselves. According to the prevailing double standard, the young

man who was equally responsible for the pregnancy was not condemned for his actions. It was her fault, not their fault, that she got pregnant.

This was in that period of time when there wasn’t much worse that a girl could do. They almost treated you like you had committed murder or something.

—Toni

The girls who went away were told by family members, social-service agencies, and clergy that relinquishing their child for adoption was the only acceptable option. It would preserve their reputation and save both mother and child from a lifetime of shame. Often it was clear to everyone, except the expectant mother, that adoption was the answer. Many of these girls, even those in their twenties, had no other option than to go along with their families or risk being permanently ostracized. For them there was generally little or no discussion before their parents sent them away. Those who went to maternity homes to wait out their pregnancies often received little counseling and were totally unprepared for either childbirth or relinquishment. They were simply told they *must* surrender their child, keep their secret, move on, and forget. Though moving on and forgetting proved impossible, many women were shamed into keeping their secret.

As soon as the time was near and we were going to do this interview, all these physical things started happening. My jaw doesn’t want to open and my lungs are all tight. I thought, “I wonder why I can’t open my mouth.” Then I realized, I’m supposed to be silent. I’m not supposed to tell this story. The secrecy has dominated everything. It’s so powerful and pervasive and the longer you keep a secret, the more power it takes on.

—Diane IV

I’ve never really felt like I could talk to anybody about it. You know, society has this picture—you hear about people giving their babies away. That whole terminology is just so misleading. I didn’t

give him away. I think one of the reasons I don't talk to some people about it is because they are so judgmental. Quite frankly, it's not that society can't understand, it's that they won't understand. People choose to not understand.

—Carole II

Afterward I never told, unless it was somebody I was very, very close to. I never opened up to anyone unless I felt that they would accept me. I felt like I lived a lie because people didn't really know me. I was afraid that people would not accept me if they knew the truth. It was something that I carried with me for thirty-five, thirty-six years.

—Carol I

The secrecy has, in part, allowed some of the old myths about women who surrendered babies to survive. One assumption was that they were women who were having a lot of sex with a lot of different young men. In fact, a majority of the women I interviewed became pregnant with their first sexual partner, some from their first sexual experience.

I'm being very honest with you by saying I was a very late bloomer. When I got pregnant, it was the very first time I had ever had sex. Very first time. I'm sure I probably didn't even like it. I went all through high school and never had sex.

My parents' generation, that greatest generation, thought it didn't happen to nice girls. You just have to know that's what society and parents felt: nice girls didn't get pregnant. But nice girls do get pregnant, and nice girls get pregnant now. People saw us as loose women. Well, I wasn't a loose woman! It wasn't that way for me. I didn't sleep around. But that's the label. That is absolutely the label. Oh, well. I could be called worse things. I could be called a liar. I could be called a cheat.

—Cathy II

Another prevailing myth is that these women were all eager to surrender their child and be free of their problem. The assumption that these babies

were unwanted by their mothers is ubiquitous. The act of relinquishment seemed to confirm this, since it is commonly believed to be a personal decision made by the mother based on her lack of interest or desire to parent—a decision that is independent of social, family, and economic pressures. This misguided and simplistic notion has been hurtful not only to the mothers but also to many adoptees who believe that they were thrown away. Over the years, I have had many conversations with adult adoptees who say, "She didn't want me. Why should I want to know her?" They clearly have no idea how infinitely more complicated their mother's circumstances were and a short conversation could not possibly explain it. This book is partly a response to their comments. It is a story best told by the mothers themselves, and best understood within the context of the time period.

Chances are the baby wasn't unwanted. It was a baby unwanted by society, not by mom. You couldn't be an unwed mother. Motherhood was synonymous with marriage. If you weren't married, your child was a bastard and those terms were used. I think I'm like many other women who thought, "It may kill me to do this, but my baby is going to have what everybody keeps saying is best for him." It's not because the child wasn't wanted. There would have been nothing more wonderful than to come home with my baby.

—Glory

Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to keep the baby, or explained the options. I went to the maternity home, I was going to have the baby, they were going to take it, and I was going to go home. I was not *allowed* to keep the baby. I would have been disowned. I don't even know if they had programs to help women and children back then. I don't know what was available. I was made to feel very ashamed of the situation that "I had created for myself" and for my mother and for my family and friends, so I felt all those avenues were closed. I guess maybe I had to convince myself that I didn't give him *away*; I gave him a way to have two parents, a way

to have a home. Maybe that's a cop-out on my part. I don't know, but that's the only way I can live with it.

—Joyce I

I never felt like I gave my baby away. I always felt like my daughter was taken from me.

—Pollie

Yet another myth in common currency is that these women did move on and forget. In truth, none of the mothers I interviewed was able to forget. Rather, they describe the surrender of their child as the most significant and defining event of their lives. Given the enormous number of women involved and the impact the surrender had on their lives, not to mention the lives of their parents, their subsequent partners and children, the fathers of their babies, and the surrendered children, it is remarkable that so little is known about these mothers' experiences even now, decades later. This silence has also kept many of these women from learning about one another and understanding that their feelings of loss were normal and consistent with thousands of other mothers who had surrendered children.

I am shocked at how much it has impacted my life. I really tried to move on and forget, I tried to do what they said, but it didn't work. I was convinced that there was something wrong with me. There *must* be something wrong with me. It was supposed to work; everybody said so. But it didn't. No matter how many degrees I got, how many credits I had, how many years I worked, I was empty.

—Glory

The surrender was the beginning of a long cycle that colored my entire life. Your identity is formed in your teen years and if you take on this identity of a worthless, horrible, guilty person, then that's going to affect you your whole life. Guilt was always such a pervasive part for me. Not that I was sexual, or not that I was pregnant, but that I let somebody take my child. That's the guilt.

People talk about the worst thing that could happen to you is to lose a child. And no one talks about that in terms of a birth mother. What do they think that is for her? Why would it be any different? It's in your cells, and in your guts, and in your consciousness, and in your heart.

—Diane IV

As I listened to story after story, what impressed me so powerfully was the commonalities in the women's experiences. How the surrender was not only a deeply personal experience that affected the life of each woman but also a profound collective experience. Taken together, these experiences offer evidence of the lack of individual choice and the pervasiveness of surrender as a social phenomenon. For most of the women I interviewed, it was not a question of choice but of doing what society demanded—a demand that society has never fully acknowledged.

You know, it was such a long time ago and I started thinking, "Just let it go. Just let it go and move on," yet I couldn't, and I can't. It's a big issue to those who lived it. There are women out there who lost their firstborn child and never got to grieve. I can't even put it into words. It's a weird thing, this whole adoption thing where people think that someone could just hand their child over and it will be okay. Obviously it's not. We're still alive. We're still here. We haven't died. Our issues are every day. We live this every day. Every day.

—Suzanne

## DOROTHY II

I was fifteen that summer. And I was in love with the Rolling Stones. My girlfriend Patty and I spent a lot of time listening to their music. One day my brother came home with his best friend. He introduced me to this guy and I remember being singularly unimpressed. But I noticed he stared at me in a way that no other guy before had. And it frightened and fascinated me all at once.

Meanwhile, I went on with my life as a Rolling Stones fan. And he started calling the house. He would call and ask for my brother. And we began to play this voice game where I would sound more and more seductive and he would sound more and more interested. And so that's how we began. Then one day when he called, he actually asked me out. It was my first real date. I felt safe because he was my brother's friend. I don't even remember what we did that first time—probably drove around in his car. He had a baby-blue '57 Chevy that was his pride and joy. He spent a lot of time talking about the car and all these little gadgets he had attached. And I kind of liked riding in that car. I felt really important. I'm fifteen years old and I'm thinking, "Wow, this is what dating is like."

Then one night he decided we should go parking. I thought it was just gonna be a make-out session. But the very first time, he was already pushing me back in the seat and I remember thinking, "Boys are a handful," then thinking, "Well, he's nineteen, maybe that has something to do with it." And I think the very first time we went parking I began to be afraid. That this was going in a direction I was either not ready for or in some way I felt threatened by. And yet something else took over—a kind of fatalistic inability to say no. And I am not sure to this day why this happened. I've wrestled a lot with that.

I began to be very secretive with my family, and not tell them I was meeting him. I can't remember the first time we actually went all the way. I don't

remember how many dates, in other words, it took. But I do remember feeling betrayed, because he refused to wear a condom. I remember saying, "I don't wanna do this, because I don't want to get pregnant." And he said, "Well, I promise you, you won't get pregnant." And I said, "How are you gonna manage this?" He said, "Well, I'm going to pull out," and he explained what that meant. So he stopped trying to convince me and just took over and sort of pushed me back, and again I felt unable to act. I was stunned, dazed. I could not say no.

It was very quick. I was not even sure that it had happened. It didn't hurt terribly—it just felt a little uncomfortable. There was this wet feeling between my legs and I said, "Was that it?" He was unable to speak for a few minutes and then he said yes. Then he said, "You're mine now." And I think in my whole life that is one of the moments when I was the most afraid. In my whole life. Even now, to this day. That feeling of being *owned* was horrifying. And that's when I began to think, "I don't want to see this person ever again."

I began to make excuses not to see him. He was very possessive. I thought we carried on for another month or so, and then I skipped a period. I was terrified. And I was just, I remember feeling like I was falling down this hole. I was just falling and falling and everything was spinning. And I thought, "No, not me. Why me?" My first love, and it wasn't even a love. Why me?

I didn't know what to do. I was very ashamed. This was not something that good girls did. Because I came from a very kind of poor family, I was more acutely aware than most people, maybe, about reputations and how easily they are lost. I knew from the experience of living in that small town that girls who got pregnant really lost their ability to have any kind of decent life. It was over for you. Your best hope in those days was to marry the boy and have done with it, and in the years to come hope that people would just forget it. The thing was, I was fifteen. I didn't love this boy. This was 1966. Abortion wasn't an option. I mean, we didn't even think about it.

He said, "I've told my mother" and his mother wanted to talk to me. I answered her "You're gonna get married." She said, "We'll help you get through this, *but* you have to marry him." And I said, "I'm not really ready for marriage." It's one thing to deal with being pregnant, and quite another to cope with being someone's wife. They said I was selfish. They called me some horrible things.

I finally realized I had to tell my own mother because I knew she was my only ally. So he and I took my mother out to Carvel's, which is this little ice-cream place in town. And I remember being really afraid of how she would react. I was the one child of her four who just might make it through school, might make it out of our little town.

It turned out that I couldn't tell her. We were sitting in Carvel's in the parking lot, and he had gone in and bought us all banana splits. As soon as I saw mine, a wave of nausea just swept over me. I had to escape from the Chevy. I ran to the back of the parking lot, and I threw up. My mother was sitting in the back of this car watching me getting sick. And I saw the two of them talking from my vantage point and I realized he was telling her.

She got out of the back of the car and walked toward me. I felt so afraid and I started crying. I remember thinking, "Please, Mom, you're all I have. Just stick by me." And I waited, and I watched her walk to me. And she just put her arms around me and said, "It's okay, babe. Because no matter what, we'll get through this together." We cried in each other's arms for about ten minutes, I guess. And finally she waved him away. She waved him away. She said, "Just go."

And she and I walked home from Carvel's. We took this road, this detour that was one of our favorite walking spots. It was along the Housatonic River and it was a road that was lined with these wonderful weeping willow trees. It was the most beautiful place I think in our town at that time, at least for me. We walked with our arms around each other's waist. The willow trees were blowing in the wind and we hardly talked at all. By the time we got home, I knew that she was gonna watch out for me, and that she was gonna make sure that everything was okay.

I had to start school. I was going to school and throwing up in the bathroom. I was absent chronically during that month of September. By then I was about six or eight weeks pregnant, I guess. It became difficult to go to school at all. I decided to go see my priest and tell him about it. He was the only male authority figure that I trusted.

I talked to my priest and he said, "You know, there *is* a way, Dorothy." And I said, "Well, I can't imagine what that is because I don't want to marry him." And he said, "Well, I wouldn't advise you to marry him anyway, because he isn't a Catholic."

I didn't understand a lot of things about the Catholic religion. I convert and had only been officially a Catholic for maybe three years when I got pregnant. I didn't understand a lot of the details—things like you can't marry a non-Catholic. I said, "So you're saying marriage isn't an option for me? Is that what you're saying?" He said, "Unless you can find a good Catholic man who would be willing to adopt the child, no, we don't accept your marriage." On the one hand, I was glad, because this gave me ammunition to tell his mother, "I'm sorry, it's against my religion," of all things.

But the worst part was yet to come. He said, "You know what purgatory is? We've talked about that." And I said, "Yeah, I know what purgatory is." And he said, "We can't baptize your baby if you have her out of wedlock if you don't marry a Catholic man there's only one other option, your baby's going to stay in purgatory when she dies. She can never be baptized into the Church."

I was devastated. Here I am, fifteen years old, having to deal with the metaphysical complications of what happens to a soul when it passes this earth if I don't do the exact right thing at this moment. I said, "Well, what would *you* do?" Like I was six years old. I said, "What would you do?" He said, "I would give the baby to a family who could take care of those things. A Catholic family—a good Catholic family." I said, "You'd do adoption?" And he said, "Yes. I think that's your only out in this situation. You don't want to ruin your reputation. We can find a place for you to live during the last few months of your pregnancy. There's no reason for you to be barrased or go through the pressure that you're currently facing with your boyfriend's mother."

I was sort of enamored of the idea of running away, sure. He said it would sound like this place he was going to send me to was a country club. "There will be other girls like you. You'll be able to talk and have fun during the last few months of your pregnancy, no one will bother you, and you'll be able to make an informed choice." He said, "Nothing is final till I see you, but I think you'll do the right thing." And that was just the first time I had to "do the right thing" in that whole nine-month period.

So I went home after that long meeting and tried to explain to my religious mother what purgatory was, and how my child would end up if I didn't give her away. She finally just gave up on trying to unc-

and said she respected this priest. She said, "If the priest says you should go away to this place, then I think you should go. 'Cause I don't have an answer for you, babe. I'll help you if you want to stay here, but I don't have an answer for you."

So for me the easiest thing to do was to go away. It was a running away; it was a place where I really thought I could go and think. But before I could go there a social worker had to get involved. And it was explained to me that the state of Connecticut would be paying my tuition at this home for unwed mothers called St. Agnes. I was told it was located in West Hartford, and that they would take care of bringing me there. I could stay until my baby was born and then come home. They would take care of the adoption and I wouldn't have to worry about anything. Sounded wonderful, but it was very hard for me to say good-bye to my mother. I had never been away from home except for an overnight visit to a friend's house. I was devastated to be away from her.

She had said, "Write me letters. You won't feel as lonely." So I did. And that started my little pattern. Every night before I went to bed, I would write my mother a love letter. I think she kept them for most of her life. And it kept me in touch with the one person who really loved me.

And I just, to this day, cannot get over that feeling of loneliness and abandonment and being in that place with so many young people. Everybody I saw was just a kid. I noticed one thing very quickly at St. Agnes, and that was that nobody wanted to talk about what was going to happen to them at the end of their pregnancy. They really wanted to live in the moment. They didn't want to talk about "going over"—that became a metaphor for the birth. We would come to breakfast in the morning and we would look around to see who wasn't there. "Oh, she went over last night. She went over." That meant she had gone to St. Francis Hospital and had her baby. We would envy that person because she was out of jail, so to speak. But we were a little afraid, because we didn't know what this was all about.

I remember that one of my best friends at St. Agnes was a girl named Brenda, who was like a movie star. She just was very glamorous and had long blond hair. She was one of those people who didn't really look pregnant. She just had a little belly and she looked *great*. We were all so envious of her. When she went over, we were all very interested to know what she had. Af-

ter Brenda's four days, she came back to say good-bye to all of us. Being popular, she almost had to. She held court in one of the rooms on the second floor, and we were all allowed to go in. We asked her all kinds of questions. "What was it like? What was it like?"

She had changed. In just those four days. She was very mature in a way that frightened me. She was not the same person. She looked fabulous, she looked about four years older. She didn't want to talk about the details and we thought that was kind of curious. If Brenda didn't want to talk about it, it must not be good. She said she had a little boy, and she had said good-bye to him, and she hoped he had a better life. But that's all she would say. She said good-bye to us all, and we were a bit chastened after that. We went upstairs. And that night I remember not many of us had dinner. We were just very, very worried. There were a group of us that were all around the same time, and we kind of bonded. One by one, we went over.

By the time I was in my third false labor, they decided to induce me. I had no one there to hold my hand. I had no one. I didn't even know what was going to deliver me. It was the loneliest thing I've ever gone through in my whole life. The loneliest.

The baby was born at seven o'clock. I had only been in labor maybe seven hours, I guess. And most of it I don't remember. I woke up at about seven-thirty, maybe seven-forty-five, and I was in the recovery room. There was this nurse changing my sanitary napkin. I looked down and my stomach had caved in. I no longer had a child in there. I looked at the nurse and she said, "What happened?" She said, "You've had your baby," in a very kind, businesslike, matter-of-fact way. She wouldn't look at me. And I tried to look up at her to meet my eyes, because I wanted to ask her all these questions. It was a very important moment for me. "I had the baby?" And she was just very busy. She was doing her job, and I said, "Well, what was it?" And she said, flatly, "It was a girl." I said, "Oh, it was a girl."

I remember thinking I wished it was a boy, because boys can't have children. I thought, "I gave birth to a little girl who's going to have to go through this, that poor little thing." I had always thought boys had it better than women. All my life, you know? And that whole experience made me feel even more so—that it's the girls who get punished, the girls who suffer through all of this stuff, and the girls who can't talk about it.



was just being kind. Then I remembered she wanted me to sign that piece of paper. And, sure enough, halfway home, she pulls over by this little lake. She had taken the scenic route. I guess she thought that would make it easier. She pulls over and brings out her little briefcase. My mother was in the backseat. I think she had picked up my mother before she had come to get me. And again I thought this was so kind of her, but it turns out she needed my mother's signature. That's why. It wasn't anything altruistic at all.

So I'm in the front seat with the social worker. My mother's in the backseat. And out come the papers. She said, "We need you to sign these so we can place your baby." I said, "You know, I really don't think that I can sign these papers. I really don't think I can do this. I really don't want to do it now—I'm just coming out of this surgery." And she said, "Well, look. The baby's been in foster care this whole time. You haven't bonded with her at all." She said, "As far as we're concerned, she's only known the foster mother at this point. The adoptive family is waiting for her. And why would you want to just do this to *them*? They've been waiting all this time while you were sick to get this done." On the one hand, I was outraged that I should care that they were waiting, and on the other hand, that was the deal I had made. As young as I was, I understood what making a deal with the devil means: you just can't win.

So my mind is racing, trying to think up ways to get out of this. And I said, "Well, I really need to see her one last time because then I'll know for sure." And, of course, I was planning on making a break for it. She refused to tell me where the baby was. She said, "I'm not at liberty to disclose that." And I said, "Well, have you seen her? How do you even know she's all right?" She said, "Oh, she giggles and coos and she's happy as heck." She didn't say "heck." She said, "She's very happy. She's a happy baby, and she's ready to go with her new family."

I said to myself, "Well, she's got it all sewn up good and proper, doesn't she?" Everything I could think of, she had an answer for. And as things got a little tense, and I was about to say, "No. I'm not gonna sign these," she said, "You know, the state paid for you to go to St. Agnes. That's quite a bit of money that we put out in good faith. Do you have the money to pay for that?" I said, "No." I looked at my mother, and I said, "Mommy, what am I going to do?" And she said, "Babe, I don't know. We don't have any

money." I wanted to know from an attorney—I wanted to know from somebody what my rights were. But for every question I asked this woman I got the answer that I didn't want to hear: that I had no rights. That I had already given her away. That it was the best thing. And that it was all my fault. Somehow, it was all my fault that things weren't going well. And that I needed to just go home and I would forget about it and I would be fine.

We sat there for a long time, wrangling back and forth, and she wore me down. I was still sick, I still had not recovered. I was very weak and needed to lie down. She wasn't moving that car until I signed those papers. I remember almost grabbing them from her at one point and saying, "All right, I'll sign them." I remember just scrawling my name and handing them back to my mother and my mother signed. The social worker took the papers, put them in her briefcase and we drove to my house without saying one more word. And life for me was never the same.

That fall I went back to school. I was a junior in high school but all I cared about was escaping. I couldn't concentrate—it was very difficult. I realized that I could find escape in drugs and, later, in alcohol. And that began a lifelong problem, with trying to realize you can't bury your emotions. You just have to talk about them. So for about fifteen years, I smoked pot really heavily. I drank. I couldn't hold a job. I didn't know what I wanted. I remember just being really wild and not caring about anything. I was courting death, certainly. This went on for years.

I never had another relationship with a boy. I would never let anyone close enough to me. I no longer associated pleasure with sex. I associated death and pain and loss with sex. At some point I cleaned up enough to get a job, and I met my ex-husband in the late eighties. By then I was, like thirty-six or something. And he taught me to enjoy sex, which I'm really grateful for. Before the age of thirty-six, I did not know how to enjoy sex.

I also noticed another phenomenon: I couldn't talk about what had happened to me, about my daughter and giving her up, because every single person I told the story to judged me. Not one single person said, "I know how you feel. If I were in your spot I would have had a hard time." Every single person judged me.

## ANNIE

I was a junior in high school and an above-average student. I finished in the top 10 percent of my class, but I had no aspirations for continuing my education. I simply wanted to work for a year as a secretary and then get married and have babies. I had my husband picked out. He and I had been going steady since I was fourteen and he was fifteen. I was madly in love with him and he with me. That was the thing then. Around age fourteen and a half, we started having sex. Unfortunately, that was not that unusual for young people at that age, though no one admitted it then. When I returned to school in September of my junior year, that would have been 1957, there were about a half dozen girls who didn't come back because they had gotten married over the summer. So in this area of Milwaukee, and our socioeconomic class, it wasn't all that unusual.

We were so serious at fifteen and sixteen. We talked about getting married. We talked about the children we would have. We never thought about any birth control. Neither one of us really knew much about it. It just was not talked about then. Young men certainly couldn't get condoms, and there was no such thing as the birth-control pill. I doubt if I'd ever heard of a diaphragm. Maybe they didn't even exist. We just didn't really face the issue. The feelings that we had for each other were so strong, it never occurred to either one of us that we wouldn't be allowed to get married, because that's what happened if you got pregnant. I didn't know anything about girls being sent away. I never knew anyone who was sent away.

I missed a period and I worried and I worried. I missed another one and we decided that we had to tell our parents because we would both require their written permission to get married since we were underage. We dreamed up some excuse to take my mother somewhere in the car. We got a few blocks from home and he parked the car around the corner. She said, "Why are we stopping here?" I said, "Mother, we didn't go to the circus last night.

We went to a doctor." And she said, "Oh my God, don't tell me you're pregnant. Let me out of this car. Let me out of here right now." She was just crying and angry and we kept saying that we wanted to get married and she said something like "We'll see about that." She wanted to know if his parents knew and he said, yes, he had told them and they were willing to sign for us to get married and that his boss had offered us a room in their home rent free until we could be more established. She said, "I don't know those people."

Within a few days, she took me to her doctor, who was not very nice. He said, "Well, you know, there's a place where they send girls like her down in Kansas City," and he handed her a brochure. He said, "It's pretty expensive. If you have any money put aside for her, use it for this. She doesn't deserve to have it anyway." That was when the shame began. Before that, I had never really felt ashamed.

My mother and aunt went to his family's home and did not like what they saw. She said, "They have linoleum on the living-room floor. They're not good enough for you. Do you want your life to be like that twenty years from now?" When it became obvious that we were not going to be allowed to be married, he decided to enlist in the Marine Corps.

Then one day my mother said, "We are leaving for the Willows Friday night." That was the maternity home in Kansas City that her doctor had told her about. She said, "You're going there and you're going to stay there until you have the baby. Then you're going to give your baby up for adoption and you're going to come home and forget that this ever happened. Someday you'll thank me." I was very compliant. I respected authority and I did what I was told. At sixteen, back then, you couldn't get a job other than working at the local custard stand or as a car hop and earning two dollars in tips. I don't even know if welfare existed. I had no exposure to anything like that. I just had to do everything that my mother said. That was it. There were no options. The only option was to get married and she wouldn't allow it. So that was it. It was all decided for me.

We left for the Willows after dark so that nobody would see us. We rode the train all night long, in coach. I still remember those horrible seats. They were like the old streetcar seats. We took a taxicab to the maternity home and the owner came to greet us. My first thought was, "She seems prett

nice. This might not be so bad." My mother waited in Mrs. H's office while she took me on a tour. There were two vacancies, and they were both semi-private rooms. One of them had a washbasin and the other didn't. As soon as I found out that the room with the washbasin cost five dollars more a week, that was the one I wanted. It was one of the few things I could do to get back at my mother.

We spent the day in downtown Kansas City. We went out for supper and it was quite a treat because we didn't normally dine in restaurants. We stayed at a hotel and on Sunday morning my mother took me back to the Willows in a taxicab. They had a front entrance with thirty, forty, fifty steps, but nobody used it except the adoptive parents when they came to get the babies. Everyone else used the rear entrance. The taxi driver knew exactly where to go. I imagine he had delivered quite a few young women. My mother briefly got out of the cab and hugged and kissed me, and I remember that she was sobbing when she left. I remember that her shoulders were shaking and I think now of how difficult, how heartbreaking, that must have been for her. I was so nasty to her—oh, I was nasty to her. I made her pay five dollars a week more. She had on a red-and-white sleeveless blouse and a rust-colored skirt. Horrible color combination but, you know, this was 1958. But I'll always carry that picture in my mind of her with her shoulders shaking as she got into the taxicab.

I NEVER TOLD my husband about my first child. People used to say, "Never tell a man, because he'll think that you're used merchandise." They thought men should have all this experience and women should be virgins. You were supposed to fake it. Well, that's what I did. My obstetrician knew, and he said I made a very good decision. I believed what I was told, and I went along with it. The person that I am today looks back on that young girl and thinks, "Didn't she have her own mind?" But it was a totally different time. There's just no way that it can be compared to today.

When our second child was about seven, things started to fall apart between my husband and me. It seemed like we disagreed for the sake of disagreeing on just about everything. At that time in Wisconsin, the grounds for divorce were horrible things: physical abuse, mental cruelty, abandonment *or* voluntary separation of one year or more. So we separated. I had

quit a really good job about two and a half years before because I was doing better at work than my husband and, you know, in 1972 that was an issue. I had been earning more money, and I hadn't told him about the last couple of raises I had gotten, and when he found out it was a big problem. So I quit the job because I thought the job was not as important as the marriage. A man was supposed to be the provider. It was getting to the point where it was okay for the woman to work, but only to supplement the family income. This was in our circle, anyway.

Everybody was very surprised to see that we were separating; we had been on a really good show. When I went around and told my family members, the first thing my mother said was "I hope you never told him about the baby you had in Kansas City, because if you did he can have you declared an unfit mother and take the girls away from you."

So my husband and I had separated and I don't remember why, but on Saturday when he came over I told him about the daughter I placed for adoption. And I saw something in him that, after living with him for fifty years, I'd never seen before. I saw a caring, a depth, a compassion, and it was really . . . that was big. He had always been kind of surface and casual about everything, and I was the one who spoke about feelings. That was a big, big issue between us. I told him very matter-of-factly. I didn't elaborate a great deal. I did not cry. I just said that I'd never told him because I had been advised not to, but I did not like having this between us. I'd never been honest about it and I just felt that I wanted him to know. He was so careful. He said, "It must have been so horrible for you to carry that all those years." This was one of the finer moments of our marriage, it really, truly was. By then it was just too late. There was so much else that had happened that was just too late.

## DOROTHY II

I was fifteen that summer. And I was in love with the Rolling Stones. My girlfriend Patty and I spent a lot of time listening to their music. One day my brother came home with his best friend. He introduced me to this guy and I remember being singularly unimpressed. But I noticed he stared at me in a way that no other guy before had. And it frightened and fascinated me all at once.

Meanwhile, I went on with my life as a Rolling Stones fan. And he started calling the house. He would call and ask for my brother. And we began to play this voice game where I would sound more and more seductive and he would sound more and more interested. And so that's how we began. Then one day when he called, he actually asked me out. It was my first real date. I felt safe because he was my brother's friend. I don't even remember what we did that first time—probably drove around in his car. He had a baby-blue '57 Chevy that was his pride and joy. He spent a lot of time talking about the car and all these little gadgets he had attached. And I kind of liked riding in that car. I felt really important. I'm fifteen years old and I'm thinking, "Wow, this is what dating is like."

Then one night he decided we should go parking. I thought it was just gonna be a make-out session. But the very first time, he was already pushing me back in the seat and I remember thinking, "Boys are a handful," then thinking, "Well, he's nineteen, maybe that has something to do with it." And I think the very first time we went parking I began to be afraid. That this was going in a direction I was either not ready for or in some way I felt threatened by. And yet something else took over—a kind of fatalistic inability to say no. And I am not sure to this day why this happened. I've wrestled a lot with that.

I began to be very secretive with my family, and not tell them I was meeting him. I can't remember the first time we actually went all the way. I don't

remember how many dates, in other words, it took. But I do remember feeling betrayed, because he refused to wear a condom. I remember saying, "I don't wanna do this, because I don't want to get pregnant." And he said, "Well, I promise you, you won't get pregnant." And I said, "How are you gonna manage this?" He said, "Well, I'm going to pull out," and he explained what that meant. So he stopped trying to convince me and just took over and sort of pushed me back, and again I felt unable to act. I was stunned, dazed. I could not say no.

It was very quick. I was not even sure that it had happened. It didn't hurt terribly—it just felt a little uncomfortable. There was this wet feeling between my legs and I said, "Was that it?" He was unable to speak for a few minutes and then he said yes. Then he said, "You're mine now." And I think in my whole life that is one of the moments when I was the most afraid. In my whole life. Even now, to this day. That feeling of being *owned* was horrifying. And that's when I began to think, "I don't want to see this person ever again."

I began to make excuses not to see him. He was very possessive. I think we carried on for another month or so, and then I skipped a period. I was terrified. And I was just, I remember feeling like I was falling down this hole. I was just falling and falling and everything was spinning. And I thought, "No, not me. Why me?" My first love, and it wasn't even a love. Why me?

I didn't know what to do. I was very ashamed. This was not something that good girls did. Because I came from a very kind of poor family, I was more acutely aware than most people, maybe, about reputations and how easily they are lost. I knew from the experience of living in that small town that girls who got pregnant really lost their ability to have any kind of decent life. It was over for you. Your best hope in those days was to marry the boy and have done with it, and in the years to come hope that people would just forget it. The thing was, I was fifteen. I didn't love this boy. This was 1966—abortion wasn't an option. I mean, we didn't even think about it.

He said, "I've told my mother" and his mother wanted to talk to me. Her answer was "You're gonna get married." She said, "We'll help you get through this, *but* you have to marry him." And I said, "I'm not really ready for marriage." It's one thing to deal with being pregnant, and quite another to deal with being someone's wife. They said I was selfish. They called me some terrible things.

I finally realized I had to tell my own mother because I knew she was my only ally. So he and I took my mother out to Carvel's, which is this little ice-cream place in town. And I remember being really afraid of how she would react. I was the one child of her four who just might make it through school, might make it out of our little town.

It turned out that I couldn't tell her. We were sitting in Carvel's in the parking lot, and he had gone in and bought us all banana splits. As soon as I saw mine, a wave of nausea just swept over me. I had to escape from the Chevy. I ran to the back of the parking lot, and I threw up. My mother was sitting in the back of this car watching me getting sick. And I saw the two of them talking from my vantage point and I realized he was telling her.

She got out of the back of the car and walked toward me. I felt so afraid and I started crying. I remember thinking, "Please, Mom, you're all I have. Just stick by me." And I waited, and I watched her walk to me. And she just put her arms around me and said, "It's okay, babe. Because no matter what, we'll get through this together." We cried in each other's arms for about ten minutes, I guess. And finally she waved him away. She waved him away. She said, "Just go."

And she and I walked home from Carvel's. We took this road, this detour that was one of our favorite walking spots. It was along the Housatonic River and it was a road that was lined with these wonderful weeping willow trees. It was the most beautiful place I think in our town at that time, at least for me. We walked with our arms around each other's waist. The willow trees were blowing in the wind and we hardly talked at all. By the time we got home, I knew that she was gonna watch out for me, and that she was gonna make sure that everything was okay.

I had to start school. I was going to school and throwing up in the bathroom. I was absent chronically during that month of September. By then I was about six or eight weeks pregnant, I guess. It became difficult to go to school at all. I decided to go see my priest and tell him about it. He was the only male authority figure that I trusted.

I talked to my priest and he said, "You know, there *is* a way, Dorothy." And I said, "Well, I can't imagine what that is because I don't want to marry him." And he said, "Well, I wouldn't advise you to marry him anyway, because he isn't a Catholic."

I didn't understand a lot of things about the Catholic religion. I was a convert and had only been officially a Catholic for maybe three years by the time I got pregnant. I didn't understand a lot of the details—things like you can't marry a non-Catholic. I said, "So you're saying marriage isn't even an option for me? Is that what you're saying?" He said, "Unless you can find a good Catholic man who would be willing to adopt the child, no, we can't accept your marriage." On the one hand, I was glad, because this gave me ammunition to tell his mother, "I'm sorry, it's against my religion," of all things.

But the worst part was yet to come. He said, "You know what purgatory is? We've talked about that." And I said, "Yeah, I know what purgatory is." And he said, "We can't baptize your baby if you have her out of wedlock. So if you don't marry a Catholic man there's only one other option, or your baby's going to stay in purgatory when she dies. She can never be baptized into the Church."

I was devastated. Here I am, fifteen years old, having to deal with the metaphysical complications of what happens to a soul when it passes from this earth if I don't do the exact right thing at this moment. I said to him, "Well, what would *you* do?" Like I was six years old. I said, "What would you do?" He said, "I would give the baby to a family who could take care of those things. A Catholic family—a good Catholic family." I said, "You mean adoption?" And he said, "Yes. I think that's your only out in this situation. You don't want to ruin your reputation. We can find a place for you to spend the last few months of your pregnancy. There's no reason for you to feel embarrassed or go through the pressure that you're currently facing with your boyfriend's mother."

I was sort of enamored of the idea of running away, sure. He made it sound like this place he was going to send me to was a country club. He said, "There will be other girls like you. You'll be able to talk and have fun for the last few months of your pregnancy, no one will bother you, and you will be able to make an informed choice." He said, "Nothing is final till it's final, but I think you'll do the right thing." And that was just the first time I heard "do the right thing" in that whole nine-month period.

So I went home after that long meeting and tried to explain to my non-religious mother what purgatory was, and how my child would end up there if I didn't give her away. She finally just gave up on trying to understand,

and said she respected this priest. She said, "If the priest says you should go away to this place, then I think you should go. 'Cause I don't have an answer for you, babe. I'll help you if you want to stay here, but I don't have an answer for you."

So for me the easiest thing to do was to go away. It was a running away; it was a place where I really thought I could go and think. But before I could go there a social worker had to get involved. And it was explained to me that the state of Connecticut would be paying my tuition at this home for unwed mothers called St. Agnes. I was told it was located in West Hartford, and that they would take care of bringing me there. I could stay until my baby was born and then come home. They would take care of the adoption and I wouldn't have to worry about anything. Sounded wonderful, but it was very hard for me to say good-bye to my mother. I had never been away from home except for an overnight visit to a friend's house. I was devastated to be away from her.

She had said, "Write me letters. You won't feel as lonely." So I did. And that started my little pattern. Every night before I went to bed, I would write my mother a love letter. I think she kept them for most of her life. And it kept me in touch with the one person who really loved me.

And I just, to this day, cannot get over that feeling of loneliness and abandonment and being in that place with so many young people. Everybody I saw was just a kid. I noticed one thing very quickly at St. Agnes, and that was that nobody wanted to talk about what was going to happen to them at the end of their pregnancy. They really wanted to live in the moment. They didn't want to talk about "going over"—that became a metaphor for the birth. We would come to breakfast in the morning and we would look around to see who wasn't there. "Oh, she went over last night. She went over." That meant she had gone to St. Francis Hospital and had her baby. We would envy that person because she was out of jail, so to speak. But we were a little afraid, because we didn't know what this was all about.

I remember that one of my best friends at St. Agnes was a girl named Brenda, who was like a movie star. She just was very glamorous and had long blond hair. She was one of those people who didn't really look pregnant. She just had a little belly and she looked *great*. We were all so envious of her. When she went over, we were all very interested to know what she had. Af-

ter Brenda's four days, she came back to say good-bye to all of us. Being so popular, she almost had to. She held court in one of the rooms on the second floor, and we were all allowed to go in. We asked her all kinds of questions. "What was it like? What was it like?"

She had changed. In just those four days. She was very mature in a way that frightened me. She was not the same person. She looked fabulous, but she looked about four years older. She didn't want to talk about the details and we thought that was kind of curious. If Brenda didn't want to talk about it, it must not be good. She said she had a little boy, and she had said good-bye to him, and she hoped he had a better life. But that's all she would say. She said good-bye to us all, and we were a bit chastened after that. We all went upstairs. And that night I remember not many of us had dinner. We were just very, very worried. There were a group of us that were all due around the same time, and we kind of bonded. One by one, we went over.

By the time I was in my third false labor, they decided to induce me. I had no one there to hold my hand. I had no one. I didn't even know who was going to deliver me. It was the loneliest thing I've ever gone through in my whole life. The loneliest.

The baby was born at seven o'clock. I had only been in labor maybe seven hours, I guess. And most of it I don't remember. I woke up at about seven-thirty, maybe seven-forty-five, and I was in the recovery room. There was this nurse changing my sanitary napkin. I looked down and my stomach had caved in. I no longer had a child in there. I looked at the nurse and I said, "What happened?" She said, "You've had your baby," in a very kind of businesslike, matter-of-fact way. She wouldn't look at me. And I tried to get her to meet my eyes, because I wanted to ask her all these questions. It was a very important moment for me. "I had the baby?" And she was just very—she was doing her job, and I said, "Well, what was it?" And she said, flatly, "It was a girl." I said, "Oh, it was a girl."

I remember thinking I wished it was a boy, because boys can't have children. I thought, "I gave birth to a little girl who's going to have to go through this, that poor little thing." I had always thought boys had it better than women. All my life, you know? And that whole experience made me feel even more so—that it's the girls who get punished, the girls who suffer through all of this stuff, and the girls who can't talk about it.

But, of course, once I got used to the idea that it was a girl—which took me all of twenty seconds—I wanted to see her immediately. And they said, “You can’t. We have to take you back to your room, and in the morning when they bring the children around for feeding time, you can see her.” I said, “What’s feeding time?” Because it sounded like the zoo. And she said, “Well, the hospital is on a feeding schedule, and they bring the children at ten and two,” and something else—I forget. I thought, “Oh my gosh, I have to wait until ten in the morning to see my child?” And they said, “Well, that’s the way we do things here.” I said, “Well, where is she now?” “Well, she’s in the nursery. They’re taking good care of her.”

They took me upstairs to this room. It was a room with four beds. Two of the beds were empty and one had one of my friends in it. She had delivered three days earlier. The next day would have been her last day. When I came in, she was awake. By then it was maybe eight-thirty, nine o’clock, ’cause it was dark outside. She said to me, “Dottie, is it you?” I said, “Yeah! How are you?” I was all happy. I was in the euphoria that—right after birth you have this euphoria, “I’m done, I’m done!” She was in the throes of postpartum depression already. I could sense that this was a serious *down* that she was on. She said she had had a boy, and she said, “Tomorrow’s my last day of seeing him, and then I gotta go home.”

I couldn’t even relate to that sadness at that moment. I felt bad, but at the same time I couldn’t relate. I said, “Oh, I can’t wait till the morning, because I’m going to see my daughter. I had a little girl!” We were at opposite ends of this spectrum of grief. I hadn’t seen it yet, she had already and it was very hard. She said to me, “Dottie, I have one bit of advice for you before they bring her: don’t get attached.” I said, “Oh, I won’t. I just wanna see her and count her toes and make sure she’s okay.” I was always a kind of brave kid, and thought, “I can do this.”

Well, when they brought her I wasn’t prepared. All that pain and all those months of waiting were nothing compared to what I felt when they put her in my arms. When I saw her for the first time, I knew what real love really was. And I’ve never been the same since that moment. I remember her cuddling up against my neck, and I held her as close as I could, and the feeling of her little face just nuzzling my neck, and I thought, “Oh my God, it’s a real, live person.” And I loved her so much. I thought I loved my mother,

I thought I loved my friends, I thought I loved Mick Jagger, but this was something else. This was like looking at another version of myself. I never thought you could feel like that in the whole world. And then I wondered, “What am I supposed to do now?”

I held her, and the first thing I did was unwrap her. I wanted to see her entire body. She was very tiny. She had the most beautiful, perfect little toes. I remember counting them, and I thought, “Well, this is what everybody said I would do.” I did exactly what everybody said. I looked at her little fingers, and I remember caressing every single inch of the fingers and toes, and saying, “This is really her. This is really Tracy.” And I started to talk to her, and to say, “I love you. You’re just so beautiful.” I started talking baby talk. And I remember her turning her face into my neck and nuzzling. I just knew it was her way of recognizing me. I thought, “She knows me!” And I called across to my friend, who was seeing her son for the last time—at the same time that I was seeing my daughter for the first. She was in grief and in tears. I said, “She knows me! She knows me!” And she couldn’t speak. She couldn’t even be glad for me. And I just looked back at my child, and I thought, “In three days, I’m gonna be her.”

Finally, on the third day, I had to say good-bye. I remember being very out of it, and not being able to come up with the right words. I felt somehow that whatever I said to her was really significant—that if I didn’t say the exact words that it would somehow curse her. And I have no reason for this except for, possibly, it was the influence of the medication. But I told her to be a good girl. That I would never forget her. And to understand that I just did what I thought was best. And to forgive me.

When it was over, the last thing I remember was that little pink blanket. That little shred of pink blanket that I could see over the nurse’s white shoulder, going out the door. And that’s the last time I saw my daughter.

The next couple of weeks were horrifying. I got sick. They didn’t know what was wrong. They wanted to do an emergency exploratory laparoscopy. I guess at one point I was in critical condition. So during that couple of weeks of recovering from the surgery, that’s when the real loss of my daughter hit me. I was able to think at that point. It was then that I felt seriously depressed.

The person who drove me home from the hospital happened to be the social worker. Again, me trying to think the best of people, I thought she

was just being kind. Then I remembered she wanted me to sign that piece of paper. And, sure enough, halfway home, she pulls over by this little lake. She had taken the scenic route. I guess she thought that would make it easier. She pulls over and brings out her little briefcase. My mother was in the backseat. I think she had picked up my mother before she had come to get me. And again I thought this was so kind of her, but it turns out she needed my mother's signature. That's why. It wasn't anything altruistic at all.

So I'm in the front seat with the social worker. My mother's in the backseat. And out come the papers. She said, "We need you to sign these so we can place your baby." I said, "You know, I really don't think that I can sign these papers. I really don't think I can do this. I really don't want to do it now—I'm just coming out of this surgery." And she said, "Well, look. The baby's been in foster care this whole time. You haven't bonded with her at all." She said, "As far as we're concerned, she's only known the foster mother at this point. The adoptive family is waiting for her. And why would you want to just do this to *them*? They've been waiting all this time while you were sick to get this done." On the one hand, I was outraged that I should care that they were waiting, and on the other hand, that was the deal I had made. As young as I was, I understood what making a deal with the devil means: you just can't win.

So my mind is racing, trying to think up ways to get out of this. And I said, "Well, I really need to see her one last time because then I'll know for sure." And, of course, I was planning on making a break for it. She refused to tell me where the baby was. She said, "I'm not at liberty to disclose that." And I said, "Well, have you seen her? How do you even know she's all right?" She said, "Oh, she giggles and coos and she's happy as heck." She didn't say "heck." She said, "She's very happy. She's a happy baby, and she's ready to go with her new family."

I said to myself, "Well, she's got it all sewn up good and proper, doesn't she?" Everything I could think of, she had an answer for. And as things got a little tense, and I was about to say, "No. I'm not gonna sign these," she said, "You know, the state paid for you to go to St. Agnes. That's quite a bit of money that we put out in good faith. Do you have the money to pay for that?" I said, "No." I looked at my mother, and I said, "Mommy, what am I going to do?" And she said, "Babe, I don't know. We don't have any

money." I wanted to know from an attorney—I wanted to know from somebody what my rights were. But for every question I asked this woman I got the answer that I didn't want to hear: that I had no rights. That I had already given her away. That it was the best thing. And that it was all my fault. Somehow, it was all my fault that things weren't going well. And that I needed to just go home and I would forget about it and I would be fine.

We sat there for a long time, wrangling back and forth, and she wore me down. I was still sick, I still had not recovered. I was very weak and needed to lie down. She wasn't moving that car until I signed those papers. I remember almost grabbing them from her at one point and saying, "All right, I'll sign them." I remember just scrawling my name and handing them back to my mother and my mother signed. The social worker took the papers, put them in her briefcase and we drove to my house without saying one more word. And life for me was never the same.

That fall I went back to school. I was a junior in high school but all I cared about was escaping. I couldn't concentrate—it was very difficult. I realized that I could find escape in drugs and, later, in alcohol. And that began a lifelong problem, with trying to realize you can't bury your emotions. You just have to talk about them. So for about fifteen years, I smoked pot really heavily. I drank. I couldn't hold a job. I didn't know what I wanted. I remember just being really wild and not caring about anything. I was court-igning death, certainly. This went on for years.

I never had another relationship with a boy. I would never let anyone close enough to me. I no longer associated pleasure with sex. I associated death and pain and loss with sex. At some point I cleaned up enough to get a job, and I met my ex-husband in the late eighties. By then I was, like, thirty-six or something. And he taught me to enjoy sex, which I'm really grateful for. Before the age of thirty-six, I did not know how to enjoy sex.

I also noticed another phenomenon: I couldn't talk about what had happened to me, about my daughter and giving her up, because every single person I told the story to judged me. Not one single person said, "I know how you feel. If I were in your spot I would have had a hard time." Every single person judged me.

## ANNIE

I was a junior in high school and an above-average student. I finished in the top 10 percent of my class, but I had no aspirations for continuing my education. I simply wanted to work for a year as a secretary and then get married and have babies. I had my husband picked out. He and I had been going steady since I was fourteen and he was fifteen. I was madly in love with him and he with me. That was the thing then. Around age fourteen and a half, we started having sex. Unfortunately, that was not that unusual for young people at that age, though no one admitted it then. When I returned to school in September of my junior year, that would have been 1957, there were about a half dozen girls who didn't come back because they had gotten married over the summer. So in this area of Milwaukee, and our socioeconomic class, it wasn't all that unusual.

We were so serious at fifteen and sixteen. We talked about getting married. We talked about the children we would have. We never thought about any birth control. Neither one of us really knew much about it. It just was not talked about then. Young men certainly couldn't get condoms, and there was no such thing as the birth-control pill. I doubt if I'd ever heard of a diaphragm. Maybe they didn't even exist. We just didn't really face the issue. The feelings that we had for each other were so strong, it never occurred to either one of us that we wouldn't be allowed to get married, because that's what happened if you got pregnant. I didn't know anything about girls being sent away. I never knew anyone who was sent away.

I missed a period and I worried and I worried. I missed another one and we decided that we had to tell our parents because we would both require their written permission to get married since we were underage. We dreamed up some excuse to take my mother somewhere in the car. We got a few blocks from home and he parked the car around the corner. She said, "Why are we stopping here?" I said, "Mother, we didn't go to the circus last night.

We went to a doctor." And she said, "Oh my God, don't tell me you're pregnant. Let me out of this car. Let me out of here right now." She was just crying and angry and we kept saying that we wanted to get married and she said something like "We'll see about that." She wanted to know if his parents knew and he said, yes, he had told them and they were willing to sign for us to get married and that his boss had offered us a room in their home rent free until we could be more established. She said, "I don't know those people."

Within a few days, she took me to her doctor, who was not very nice. He said, "Well, you know, there's a place where they send girls like her down in Kansas City," and he handed her a brochure. He said, "It's pretty expensive. If you have any money put aside for her, use it for this. She doesn't deserve to have it anyway." That was when the shame began. Before that, I had not really felt ashamed.

My mother and aunt went to his family's home and did not like what they saw. She said, "They have linoleum on the living-room floor. They're not good enough for you. Do you want your life to be like that twenty years from now?" When it became obvious that we were not going to be allowed to be married, he decided to enlist in the Marine Corps.

Then one day my mother said, "We are leaving for the Willows Friday night." That was the maternity home in Kansas City that her doctor had told her about. She said, "You're going there and you're going to stay there until you have the baby. Then you're going to give your baby up for adoption and you're going to come home and forget that this ever happened. Someday you'll thank me." I was very compliant. I respected authority and I did what I was told. At sixteen, back then, you couldn't get a job other than working at the local custard stand or as a car hop and earning two dollars in tips. I don't even know if welfare existed. I had no exposure to anything like that. I just had to do everything that my mother said. That was it. There were no options. The only option was to get married and she wouldn't allow it. So that was it. It was all decided for me.

We left for the Willows after dark so that nobody would see us. We rode the train all night long, in coach. I still remember those horrible seats. They were like the old streetcar seats. We took a taxicab to the maternity home and the owner came to greet us. My first thought was, "She seems pretty

nice. This might not be so bad." My mother waited in Mrs. H's office while she took me on a tour. There were two vacancies, and they were both semi-private rooms. One of them had a washbasin and the other didn't. As soon as I found out that the room with the washbasin cost five dollars more a week, that was the one I wanted. It was one of the few things I could do to get back at my mother.

We spent the day in downtown Kansas City. We went out for supper and it was quite a treat because we didn't normally dine in restaurants. We stayed at a hotel and on Sunday morning my mother took me back to the Willows in a taxicab. They had a front entrance with thirty, forty, fifty steps, but nobody used it except the adoptive parents when they came to get the babies. Everyone else used the rear entrance. The taxi driver knew exactly where to go. I imagine he had delivered quite a few young women. My mother briefly got out of the cab and hugged and kissed me, and I remember that she was sobbing when she left. I remember that her shoulders were shaking and I think now of how difficult, how heartbreaking, that must have been for her. I was so nasty to her—oh, I was nasty to her. I made her pay five dollars a week more. She had on a red-and-white sleeveless blouse and a rust-colored skirt. Horrible color combination but, you know, this was 1958. But I'll always carry that picture in my mind of her with her shoulders shaking as she got into the taxicab.

I NEVER TOLD my husband about my first child. People used to say, "Never tell a man, because he'll think that you're used merchandise." They thought men should have all this experience and women should be virgins. You were supposed to fake it. Well, that's what I did. My obstetrician knew, and he said I made a very good decision. I believed what I was told, and I went along with it. The person that I am today looks back on that young girl and thinks, "Didn't she have her own mind?" But it was a totally different time. There's just no way that it can be compared to today.

When our second child was about seven, things started to fall apart between my husband and me. It seemed like we disagreed for the sake of disagreeing on just about everything. At that time in Wisconsin, the grounds for divorce were horrible things: physical abuse, mental cruelty, abandonment *or* voluntary separation of one year or more. So we separated. I had

quit a really good job about two and a half years before because I was doing better at work than my husband and, you know, in 1972 that was an issue. I had been earning more money, and I hadn't told him about the last couple of raises I had gotten, and when he found out it was a big problem. So I quit the job because I thought the job was not as important as the marriage. The man was supposed to be the provider. It was getting to the point where it was okay for the woman to work, but only to supplement the family income. This was in our circle, anyway.

Everybody was very surprised to see that we were separating; we had put on a really good show. When I went around and told my family members, the first thing my mother said was "I hope you never told him about that baby you had in Kansas City, because if you did he can have you declared an unfit mother and take the girls away from you."

So my husband and I had separated and I don't remember why, but one Saturday when he came over I told him about the daughter I placed for adoption. And I saw something in him that, after living with him for fifteen years, I'd never seen before. I saw a caring, a depth, a compassion, and that was really . . . that was big. He had always been kind of surface and cavalier about everything, and I was the one who spoke about feelings. That was a big, big issue between us. I told him very matter-of-factly. I didn't elaborate a great deal. I did not cry. I just said that I'd never told him because I had been advised not to, but I did not like having this between us. I'd never felt honest about it and I just felt that I wanted him to know. He was so caring. He said, "It must have been so horrible for you to carry that all those years." This was one of the finer moments of our marriage, it really, truly was, but by then it was just too late. There was so much else that had happened. It was just too late.