



We Testify Abortion Stories

Compiled for Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (TX-16)

We Testify is an organization dedicated to the leadership and representation of people who have abortions, increasing the spectrum of abortion storytellers in the public sphere, and shifting the way the media understands the context and complexity of accessing abortion care. We Testify invests in abortion storytellers to elevate their voices and expertise, particularly those of color, those from rural and conservative communities, those who are queer-identified, those with varying abilities and citizenship statuses, and those who needed support when navigating barriers while accessing abortion care.

For more information, visit wetestify.org

Aimee Arrambide

When I learned I was pregnant, my immediate reaction was that I was going to have an abortion. I had been cycling through manic and depressive cycles for several years, but didn't yet realize that what I had was bipolar disorder. Immediately I thought, I can't have a baby— I can't take care of myself. At the time, I was waiting tables, going to college and living with my boyfriend, who is now my husband. We were both waiters and living paycheck to paycheck. Having a child would just not have been possible.

There wasn't a lot of deliberation about it, because we both knew how unhealthy I was, even if we couldn't name exactly why. We both knew that it was the right decision. There was not any regret. We were very certain.

It was 2003 in Austin, before many of the restrictions went into place in Texas, so I was able to get the procedure done easily. I'd been cycling so quickly between mania and depression that I was not suicidal, exactly, but I was so reckless with my life that I didn't care about what happened to me. Having an abortion allowed me to seek the mental health help I needed because I was able to try different medications. I eventually found the medication that I needed, but that was a long, arduous process that was pretty debilitating. If I'd had a child at that time, I don't think I would have made it through that.

After I found a regimen that worked, I was able to finally graduate college after nine years. Then I was finally able to have a healthy relationship with my husband and fulfill my professional goals. And I was finally able to be a mother to two children that I'm able to prioritize and love. I attribute my abortion to saving my life. But I didn't start sharing my



story until recently. For a long time I was really embarrassed about the fact that I had mental health issues. I felt like it would undermine everything I had built post-treatment. I think that the stigmas surrounding both mental health and abortion made me feel uncomfortable sharing my story.

I felt that stigma even though my father was an abortion provider. He traveled every other Friday to Laredo and Corpus Christi to work at a clinic. He took me there when I was about 10 years old, and I saw how the waiting room was filled to the brim with people seeking his help because they only had a provider once every two weeks, and it was such a necessity. At the time I don't even think I actually knew what abortion was, but I knew it was important. And I knew that these people needed it so that they could live their best lives. That stuck with me, and as I got older, I realized I really wanted to do something to make that kind of difference in people's lives.

I was an intern with NARAL Pro-Choice America in 2006 and went back there after law school as a public affairs director. Then, when the opportunity came about to apply for the Texas executive director position, I took it because I felt like this is what I was supposed to do – lead an organization in Texas where I'm from, and where my dad provided abortions. I wanted to help in the community I love, and to make abortion more accessible.

Cazembe Murphy Jackson

I was a junior in college. It was the week before finals, and I was walking home from the library, at probably like one o'clock in the morning. These guys were riding by in a truck and saying that one of their friends had just gotten out of jail and was looking for a good time. I always have been a trans masculine person, so I was dressed in "boy" clothes. The conversation ended up being like, "We need to show you how to be a real woman." I got raped by four men and kind of left there, outside. They call it corrective rape, when they're raping you to make you straight.

I found out I was pregnant. I was on financial aid and basically already hustling trying to graduate, and did not want to be pregnant, did not want to have a kid. I was very suicidal and depressed. I stopped school for a little bit and went home. There was a Planned Parenthood around the corner from where I grew up, and I just went there. When I told them the story of what had happened, they set me up with a rape crisis center. That was my first time ever going to therapy. I don't know what I would do had I not started therapy.

My abortion cost \$300. I was a struggling college student. I ended up having to take out a payday loan, which cost way more than \$300 and took way longer to pay back.



Women are not the only people who get abortions and who need them. There are also trans men and nonbinary or gender-nonconforming folk who don't identify as women who also need access. It's important that our voices are heard around abortion access.

Esmarie

The day I found out I was pregnant, I saw all over Facebook that Texas was going to be shutting down the clinics. I thought 'I'm not going to be able to have this abortion.' I thought that I didn't have a choice—I was going to have to just live with it. It was very scary because I couldn't tell anybody. I was trying to get as many hours of work as I could. It was also scary because of everything going on. Everything was closed. I wasn't making enough money. The restaurants were giving me only 10 hours a week, so I couldn't make enough to support myself. I was scared I would get COVID-19 because I was pregnant. I didn't have a car, so I had to walk in the heat. No transportation, no work—I couldn't meet my basic needs.

The abortion clinics were closed at that time, but the CPCs, the crisis pregnancy centers, were open. When I was making phone calls, trying to see which clinics were open for abortion, they were the only ones who answered. They said, "We don't do abortions, but you can get an ultrasound and we can talk to you about your choices." But they really only give you two choices—adoption or parenting. I was definitely not going to do adoption because I was adopted and it just didn't go well. But I knew I couldn't raise my child at this time.

The first time I had an abortion, I was eight weeks along. I had Medicaid and was under 18, so I had to get help from an organization to get a judicial bypass and pay for my abortion. The first time, it was not that bad—I was able to handle the pain, I guess. But the second time, it was so bad. I couldn't move, I had chills, and my stomach was hurting. It was so bad I brought my blanket into the restroom just so I could be next to the toilet. I feel like this wouldn't have happened if I could have just gotten the help earlier.

I had forgotten my mask—that was not on my mind at all. I was nervous. I didn't want to touch anything. I think I was having a panic attack because I couldn't tell them I was having a miscarriage. They were asking me what was wrong and what I needed, but I couldn't breathe because I was in shock. I just remember holding my stomach because it was hurting and I was crying because I was scared. I told them, "I'm bleeding and I was pregnant." I told them I was having a miscarriage because I was scared that I could get arrested for doing my own abortion and because Medicaid insurance pays for miscarriage care.

Then I lost so much iron from bleeding that I passed out on the floor. I'm 4'11" and I weigh about 98 pounds. I later found out that I have an iron deficiency and was able to get



medication for it. I remember a receptionist told me to go put hand sanitizer on. I walked to go get hand sanitizer and I woke up on the floor. They put me in a wheelchair. It was kind of embarrassing—I was bleeding all over the wheelchair, all over the floor and the restroom.

They gave me morphine for pain through an IV. I was on anesthesia because I guess they had to finish taking out whatever was left, so I was asleep. When I woke up, I felt better and everything was fine. The pregnancy was over, and honestly, they did the same procedure, but Medicaid covered it because it was considered a miscarriage and not an abortion. I should have been able to have it covered without going through this.

Jeana Nam

I was on medical leave from Rice University when I had my abortion. I was dealing with some serious mental health issues, and I was seeking treatment so I could hopefully finish my education. Because I had irregular periods, I didn't find out I was pregnant until I was 7 weeks into my pregnancy. Even then, I only took a pregnancy test at my mother's suggestion, who noticed that I was feeling nauseous and suspected morning sickness. I kept the positive result a secret from her and the rest of my family, and my boyfriend and I dipped into our savings to pay for the procedure. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to afford my abortion and to have lived near a clinic, which is unfortunately not true for most people in this country. My abortion allowed me to focus on my treatment, which allowed me to finish college and pursue my goal of becoming a mental health counselor.

Kelsea McLain

In 2010, I discovered I was pregnant. This news came as a bit of a shock to me: I spent several years in college teaching safer sex classes and assumed that my personal knowledge would somehow magically protect me from an unwanted pregnancy. I suffered from the idea that "smart, educated" women don't need abortions and I must admit, was pretty harsh on myself when I realized abortion would be a part of my life experience. Because of this, the first emotion I remember feeling was genuine self-hatred for letting this pregnancy happen. I felt the need to keep it to myself, to suffer in silence, to not burden my boyfriend or my mother with my "mistake." It took several days for me to ease up on myself, show myself a bit of compassion, and really consider why I felt I should be punished and without support. Once I recognized I couldn't afford an abortion on my own, I even went so far as to seek out "home" abortion methods to further keep the burden of my abortion out of the minds of those I loved. I took some risks, tried some herbal methods I found online, and after a few days of zero success and a growing anxiety over a pregnancy that I knew not a single part of me wanted, I decided to involve the folks who loved me. And this is why I want to speak out - abortion stigma isolates us. It limits our options. It leaves us feeling alone in a world where, in reality,



we have lots of support. Despite having support from my mother and boyfriend, I still felt like a terrible person for not “needing” an abortion, despite now understanding I needed an abortion just as much as any person who makes that choice. I felt like I had to have a medical reason, or a tragic story behind how the pregnancy occurred or needed to be facing a bit more poverty or lacking familial support.

Maryam Janani-Flores

I was fortunate to attend Harvard for college where I majored in neurobiology, but my passion lay in ensuring that others had the same opportunities as me. So after college, I left for rural Kenya where I worked on health and education programs for a couple years. I was dating a guy who had also come to Kenya to do the same, and my birth control failed. Multiple forms of birth control failed -- the condom broke, the morning after pill did not work.

I never thought I would ever experience an unplanned pregnancy - most of us never do - and, despite being supportive of abortion access, I never imagined I would get an abortion if I did get pregnant. I was wrong.

I searched online the symptoms I was having, assuming I was ill with something. The internet was the first one to tell me I was pregnant. Then I saw the first pregnancy test turn positive. I was not ready to have a child, and I knew immediately what I was going to do. I was going to have an abortion. Out of shock, I took two more pregnancy tests and then traveled three hours to the nearby town to get an ultrasound because I could not believe this was happening to me.

I called Planned Parenthood back in the U.S. when I could, late at night in Kenya in my bedroom, hoping that others would not hear me. I tried to get as much information as possible, tried to understand my options, and scheduled an appointment.

I flew back to the U.S. on my pre-scheduled departure day from Kenya. It was a long, crushing flight. But I was able to take a flight and get away from a place that restricted my rights, leave Kenya where abortion was illegal. I’m one of the lucky ones.

I chose to have a medication abortion, but I could only get it up to nine weeks in Texas and was arriving just under that deadline. So during my layover in London, I fulfilled Texas’s ridiculous requirement for a 24-hour waiting period with mandated counseling including information designed to discourage abortion. Fortunately, the provider could chat with me on the phone. (I missed the even more restrictive regulations which have come after my



abortion). So I sat in the London airport in a corner and listened to the doctor read me her state-mandated script -- hearing her tell me my likelihood of breast cancer if I went ahead with the abortion (even though those studies have their clear methodological fault) and hearing about the risks from having an abortion (even though it's an incredibly safe procedure). I was afraid the travelers around me would hear my conversation, but I should never have had to go through that. I knew my decision and didn't need to listen to lies or undergo a waiting period that did not respect my dignity as a person.

As someone who has had an abortion, I am frightened by these onslaught of attacks on abortion access. Unintended pregnancies will continue to happen - it happened to me - and abortion access will still be needed. I am scared for all of us and the people we love if our rights continue to erode.

Nick Thixton-Scott

Seeking an abortion in Texas as a trans person was a terrifying and alienating experience. I knew all of the talking points about how trans people get pregnant and have abortions, but I still found it so hard to advocate for myself to medical providers. I felt vulnerable on multiple levels: I had to walk past screaming protestors trying to intimidate me, and I was afraid of facing judgment and stigma from the clinic employees as well. The clinic employees were very respectful of my name and pronouns, and they did their best to make the process as comfortable as possible. I was fortunate to have my abortion in a supportive and gender-affirming environment, and I am sharing my story in the hopes that I can help create more spaces like that.

When I got my abortion, I felt like I was the only trans person to ever get an abortion, but several other trans people told me about their abortions when I started talking about mine. I'm sharing my experience publicly because I don't want any trans people seeking abortions to feel alone like I felt. I also want to challenge the belief that pregnancy and abortion only happen to women. My experience with abortion doesn't invalidate my gender. My body is still mine, and I get to choose how to define it.

Sharon Lagos

One college summer while back in my home country of Honduras, I worried I could become pregnant, so I bought what I thought was Plan B illegally on the black market. But it didn't work. I was pregnant, so I called an illegal abortion doctor in Honduras to try to get pills to do my own abortion. But I didn't know how far along I was, so he couldn't give them to me.



When I went back to the US, I had to transfer schools from Florida to Texas, all while pregnant. I moved to Texas right after the now unconstitutional House Bill 2 became law. Many of the abortion clinics were forced to close. I ended up at a fake clinic where they told me abortion was dangerous and that it was too late for me to have an abortion because I was at 27 weeks. But I ignored them. I found an abortion provider in New Mexico but it cost \$12,000. I cried because I did not even have \$1.

I emailed over 50 abortion funds and some were able to help me. In 4 days they helped me raise \$9,000 for my abortion, plus a flight, and a hotel for the four day procedure. I am thankful for my abortion. Now I share my story so hopefully no one else has to take the same journey I did.

Stephanie Gómez

In 2012, I became pregnant after having sex for the first time. I was 18 and a senior in high school. Instead of planning my prom night, I made plans to get an abortion at a Planned Parenthood in Houston. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what the procedure would be like, I didn't know what it would cost and I didn't really care. I just knew that I wasn't going to be pregnant.

I was terrified that my Salvadoran parents would find out and I was also in an abusive relationship with the boy who got me pregnant and was grappling with my Catholic faith. I didn't know whether it was even legal to get an abortion in Texas.

I didn't know that people had abortions. I thought it was illegal. I was five weeks and four days pregnant according to my sonogram. I had to wait 24 hours before I could get an abortion. I didn't have all the money, so the clinic connected me to an abortion fund which helped me with the other \$300. I worked at McDonald's and I just could afford it. I was not in a situation where I could afford even a \$50 increase, much less one of a couple hundred dollars. I needed a ride, so I was at the mercy of the person who impregnated me. He was abusive. I was on his schedule and if it did not line up perfectly, it wasn't going to happen. And I said that I was not going to be pregnant. I didn't want to be pregnant. So I made it work with the help of an abortion fund.

Tohan O.

I am a mom, a daughter, an immigrant, a preacher's kid, and yes, I have had an abortion.

In 2018, I was faced with a life-changing decision. I was in a relationship that threatened my life and my future. My fiancé at the time was abusive and threatening, and I realized that I



could not be married to him. If I didn't get out when I did, I may not ever have been able to. To the chagrin and anger of much of my family and friends, I canceled our wedding three weeks before the date. I felt so alone, but I knew I made the right decision for me, my son, our safety, and our future.

During all of this, I realized that I was pregnant. I felt it in my bones that I could not continue the pregnancy. The support I received from my closest friends was fleeting. Only a few hours after they realized my decision was real, they began to shame me and called me horrible names. I was deemed an embarrassment by my friends. I was humiliated and alienated.

I needed to be able to permanently leave my abuser and I also knew I couldn't do it while pregnant. Having an abortion was the only way to keep my relentless abuser away from me and my son. I felt so scared and alone but took the leap of confiding in my father, a minister, who helped me get resources and call the authorities to protect me from my abuser. He supported my decision and we kept it a secret from the rest of my family.

I was born in Nigeria, a country in the western part of Africa. I come from a very conservative and religious family. I was born baptized and raised in the church. Nigerian culture is generally conservative, and the way women are treated limits our decision-making and futures. Like many parts of our society in the U.S. and globally, women are treated as inferior and second best. My decision to have an abortion was considered an abomination by all Nigerian standards.

When I was 13 years old, my close friend secretly had an abortion. It was an unsafe procedure performed by the pharmaceutical salesman who lived down the street. She almost died. My friend's story was used as a cautionary tale, not that we should make abortion legal, more available, and ensure we have medically accurate information, but that abortion shouldn't be sought at all.

When I needed my abortion, I found myself in my friend's shoes. I empathized with what she must have been going through. I was also in school for an MBA so close to graduation, but my grades slipped and I missed some finals due to the stress of dealing with all of this and my abuser. I was in fear of losing my life and the degree that I'd worked so hard for. I'm thankful that my professors later allowed me to make up some of the work and I received my degree a while later. I knew I needed an abortion, even if a dangerous pharmaceutical salesman was my only option.

This is a difficult situation for me to explain to you. You might never fully understand it unless you were faced with this predicament. But please understand that these are real situations that people like me are faced with, every day.



To find an abortion, I looked to the internet. I searched things like “abortion clinic,” “castor oil,” and “DIY abortions,” and even bought castor oil in case I needed to do it myself. When searching, I came across several Catholic church numbers and then a clinic that I thought provided abortions. When I got there, I realized I was wrong. It was a crisis pregnancy center, an anti-abortion clinic with no medical professionals on staff.

When I called, they wouldn’t tell me if they provided abortions. They asked me to come in for an appointment. As soon as I arrived, they started preaching to me and telling me how God does not agree with my choices. I’m a preacher’s kid and I have my own relationship with God. I don’t need someone else telling me what God thinks of me. They told me that there are options out there, aside from abortion, and I could continue the pregnancy and place the baby for adoption. Like most people having abortions, I already have a child. I know what pregnancy is like and I know what it’s like to make the decision to become a parent. I know what I need for me and my son’s safety.

It was hard to leave there. I felt coerced to stay and they put so much pressure on me to say that I wouldn’t have an abortion. They preached about choices, yet I didn’t feel like I had one while I was there.

When I finally left, I started searching again for an abortion clinic, this time being sure to check out the websites to make sure the clinics *actually* provide abortion care. Racing against time, after several more searches, I found a clinic in Houston. I scheduled an appointment. I was still a little scared that I might have come across another fake clinic, but I went anyway.

I spoke with a kind counselor who talked to me about all of my options. I told her that I was sure I wanted an abortion. During the counseling, they went through a list of statements that they had to tell me as mandated by the state of Texas. I had to acknowledge that I was advised about how dangerous abortion can be. I know that research shows that’s not true. They had to read a statement that said abortion can affect my ability to have kids in the future. That is also not true. Because of the state law, I also had to have an ultrasound even though I would have rather not done it. The ultrasound was particularly disturbing for me because I insisted that I didn’t want it. We already confirmed I was pregnant. But their hands were tied. The nurse told me I could look away if I didn’t want to see it, but no matter what they had to do it and describe what they saw because it was required by law.

During the ultrasound, they told me how far along I was. I learned that at 13 weeks the cost of my abortion would go up and the availability of providers would go down. I was angry that I had faced so many delays and trying to do this while attending school and caring for my son, and that visiting the anti-abortion clinic cost me time.



Afterward, they told me that I could not have the procedure done that day even though I was ready. I had to wait another day because of the law. Apparently, the Texas government believed I needed more time to think about my decision, on top of the two weeks I'd already been scrambling to try to get care. I was confused at how the state of Texas could dictate my decision and say that I hadn't thought about it enough. They hadn't met me. The law couldn't protect me from my abuser. The law does not bear the emotional burden that I had to. So how could this possibly be? I had no other choice but to wait.

After waiting the government-mandated 24 hours, my abortion was scheduled. I thought I was out of the woods, but then I ran into another issue: it was not covered under my insurance. The abortion cost \$850. I had no money to pay for it, I had no one to help. I had nothing, only \$120 in my bank account and over \$50,000 of debt from the canceled wedding was looming over me.

Thankfully, a clinic worker saw what I was faced with and she gave me the business card for the Clinic Access Support Network, a non-profit organization that helped me through the process. The volunteers at Clinic Access Support Network arranged a ride to and from the appointment for me and bought me lunch, which was so kind and helpful. For the first time in my life, I put my healthcare into the hands of complete strangers. Clinic Access Support Network got me the help that years of friendships could not get me. The Clinic Access Support Network showed up for me. They even continued to check in on me to make sure I was fine. I can't believe it. They were the best part of the whole experience.

It took me a few days to get the money for my abortion. I took out an online payday loan of \$600 to pay the deposit and then another payday loan from a different company for \$500 to pay off the \$250 balance. I didn't realize how predatory payday loan companies are in this country. The interest rate was 400%. That itself became another nightmare. I kept making payments and the balance seemed to never end. Once I paid one payday loan off, I defaulted on the other because I couldn't pay it. It ruined my credit and has done so much damage. It was a never-ending cycle, all because my insurance wouldn't cover it.

When the procedure was all said and done, it took over two weeks and thousands of dollars to get a basic constitutionally protected 10-minute medical procedure. It was a nightmare.

Zoraima Pelaez

As a child of Mexican and Colombian immigrants who grew up in poverty, I never expected to go to college. After graduating from high school, I, like others in my family, began a career in cosmetology. While cosmetology was never my passion, the opportunity to grow my business



over the years gave me the courage and financial stability to finally prioritize and pursue my education. But not long after enrolling in community college, I learned that I was pregnant. Immediately, I thought of my sisters who had become young mothers and the barriers they faced in parenting their children in safe and sustainable environments. I thought of my future. Would I be able to continue my education and become the first in my family to graduate from college? I considered my options and decided to have an abortion.

In the most fundamental sense, the opportunity to exercise my constitutional right to abortion made me who I am today. Not only was I able to transfer from community college to The University of Texas at Austin, but I also graduated with honors and am now a successful third-year law student at The University of Texas School of Law. As a law student and future attorney, I am dedicated to using my legal education to advocate for everyone's right to access abortion so that people can plan and provide for the families they want—despite age or income—and do so in an environment that centers their aspirations and fosters their personal success.