

# BREAK THE SILENCE: REPRODUCTIVE & SEXUAL HEALTH STORIES

## FULL TRANSCRIPT

### CHAPTER 1: SHELA (1 min 50)



So, the first time I had sex was when I was fifteen. It was March 2nd, 1992, and I lost my virginity, and I wrote a poem about it. I remember that back then like, *fingering* was a big deal. Like, fingering was like sex. And so if somebody could finger you, it was like, WOOH! Homerun.

Right at Memorial Park, up at the top of the ski hut -- was the first time I was fingered. It made me come, and I was like, this is going to be the one for me! I wanna have sex with him. I wanna lose our virginities together. So, we decided to lose our virginities together. We went and got condoms. I remember specifically getting the Trojan blue condom. We went to his parents' house when they weren't home. We went in the back of his room, and I remember -- I lost my virginity, actually, on top. Which is... so I thought it was gangster. [laughs] Because I was like -- and it hurt. And I bled.

And I remember the reason why I wrote a poem about it is because, what I was doing -- I rubbed the skin off of my knee from the bed. And I had this like, just this patch of skin gone from my knee from having sex, because I was on top.

Hands down was one of the absolute best experiences I've had in my life around my sexuality, around my body, around feeling good. We were safe. He was my best friend. We did it together. We were both virgins. And it was -- we loved each other. And... it was the right choice. I really felt it was beautiful.

So even when I talk today about, *oh yes, I ended up getting pregnant* -- all that stuff. I always say that I am so fortunate to have had such a wonderful experience losing my virginity. I honestly wouldn't take it back.

## CHAPTER 2: MAYA (1 min 50)



My wife and I have been together for nine -- eight years, now? And married for six. And we've been trying to have a child for the last four years, now. Prior to this, and sort of in process with this, I've also been transitioning from male to female. Fully out in the world. So sort of hand-in-hand, trying to have a child and transitioning at the same time. My wife, Sara, she's amazing. Through all of this.

Right away, it was pretty clear that my biological material, um, was not good. Even before taking hormones which, uh, really knocks down your -- as a male, knocks down your sperm count and your viability. So, I ended up freezing sperm, as little as it was, prior to taking hormones.

We went through three rounds of IVF that resulted in failure, two miscarriages as a piece of that. Which... were devastating. We talked to a lot of our friends who had similar experiences, and at a certain point we were like, we can't do this anymore. It's just too painful.

But... we tried a fourth time, which has actually worked so far. We're really excited. It's been reaffirming for us. That even as crazy as we are, as a cis woman who's trying to figure out how to fit with a trans woman, and make a relationship and a family, and deal with the medical world -- that it's doable. It may not be easy. It may not always be fun. But it's possible.

## CHAPTER 3: EMILIE (3 minutes)



I thought that, like, I was too much of like an anarchist -- and like, agreeing to monogamy was like giving in to the man. And like, the patriarchy. And like, everything that was keeping all of us down. So I never -- we never actually agreed to be monogamous.

And when I was pregnant, when I was five months pregnant, he um... started dating someone else, who was ten years younger than me. And um, very pretty and young. She was very pretty and young, and not pregnant. And not in debt. And not running a business.

I still, for whatever bizarre, broken reason inside myself, was not angry. I was like, yeah man. I'm free, you're free. Go follow your free spirit to that lovely lady. Please let me know if you have sex with her. Because I need to know that for me. That's something I need. As the person who's been your partner for five years and is now pregnant with your child. I need to know that. And he said sure, yeah. Of course I'll tell you that. That's really important.

So um, I sort of stayed in whatever relationship I was in with him. We were still slightly sexually active together. Um, and then one day I was in our car that we owned together -- like, I just glanced down at the console, and there was this letter from Planned Parenthood. It was like uh, test results. And it said that he was positive for syphilis. And he came out and I was like, *hey, what's this thing here?* And he's like, *oh yeah, um. You know. I'm positive for syphilis, so you probably are, too.*

And I was like... I was finally angry. Like, furious. Furious that he hadn't told me. Furious that I found out on a piece of paper, furious that he hadn't told me he was sexually active with this person. And he didn't apologize. He said it was, um, like no big deal, 'cause like, it's just a social disease.

So, that's bullshit.

Syphilis actually doesn't make people's body parts fall off anymore, which is good to know. Because I thought syphilis was just something in like, Victorian novels that like, really interesting sexy, drunk characters got. But in fact, it's just something that could be cured with antibiotics. Which is great and like, no big deal at all, except um, I was pregnant. Five months pregnant. And um, I'm allergic to antibiotics.

So, um. I took them, but I got like this huge massive fever. And um, I was like, shaking and convulsing and like kind of terrified I was gonna miscarry. And also, syphilis can make babies blind if women get syphilis when they're pregnant. But um, I didn't miscarry, and my lovely son has really very good vision.

## CHAPTER 4: OPEYEMI (2 min 20)



I was just asked when I first had an orgasm. Well, there's two stories. One is that I first consciously had an orgasm when I was about eleven years old and I was playing with the great La-Z-Boy chair that my dad had that had this little vibrator attachment that you could use for the shoulder or for the arm, and I used it on my leg, and I just went a little higher and I went a little higher and the next thing this *amazing* thing was happening to me that I hadn't had happen before! And I used that vibrator a lot over the next couple of years.

Sadly, I believe that I had my first orgasm at somebody else's hand when I was seven years old, when I was sexually abused. And a lot of that story was, I didn't know what was happening. I didn't know what that feeling was. And I felt out of control and I thought I was dying, as this little girl that this pedophile is, uh... you know. Turning on.

Oh, goodness. The more I think -- my first sexual experience was... ugh! So complicated! It was my high school boyfriend, but in college. It was my high school boyfriend that, we couldn't really talk about being girlfriend and boyfriend because he was a white guy, and I was a black girl. This was an integrated school, and it was very messy.

It was my high school boyfriend who had tried to, um, have sex with me while we were in high school and had what I call "performance anxiety" because he was not that much more experienced. I don't think he was a virgin, but he was not super experienced. And then wanted to say that the reason that all happened was because he, a white guy, was intimidated that I, a black woman, would not be satisfied with him as a white lover. He was objectifying me and projecting all of these stereotypes onto me, and all I knew was, *But I'm a virgin! How can I have any expectations at all of you?* And uh, therefore it was confusing in high school, and by the time we actually did the penetration piece in college, it was almost anticlimactic for me, actually.

## CHAPTER 5: LESLIE (4 min 10)



The biggest issue, really, wasn't whether I would have an abortion or not. This was 1974. Um but it's like, where could I get one, and how much would it cost? It cost \$350, which in 1974 was -- I mean like, today it's a lot of money. And we had *no* money. We were students. And we couldn't tell our Catholic parents.

Then I called my best friend from high school, and she um -- just talking about it all, and it came out about the money and she said, well ask my brother. He has a lot of money. And he said yes, he would loan us \$350.

We went to Boston and uh, it was on some kind of maternity ward because there were women who were in labor. That was really my overwhelming memory of the actual event of the abortion itself was *shame*. And like, how could they do this to us? How could they have us being, you know, consciously taking life away while other women are giving birth? It just seemed... unnecessarily cruel.

And I had no regrets over having that first abortion. I knew I was in no place to be raising a child. None whatsoever. If I had had that child-- and I did go through, over the next few years like, seeing little children and thinking, *oh, my child would have been that age now, and would have been* -- you know, that kind of thing. But it was all done with a knowledge that, Oh my God. It would have just been like, I don't know...

And then we went back home, and then he immediately took off and went to his parents'. And, uh, I got a fever. Um. And I just really wanted, like, to kind of "be with him," so I went to his dorm room where I had slept most nights for the last couple months. Um. He had a roommate, Paul, who you know, we were friends. But anyways, I just wanted to sleep in that bed. So then at the end of the weekend, my boyfriend came back and he saw that Paul was in the room, and I was in the room, and he gut-punched Paul. Um. And that was like the beginning of him like, punching any-- basically any man who spoke to me.

Then that summer, we went back home and my best friend's big brother who was like, I don't know, eight or nine years older than me, um, came home to visit his parents and

we talked about the money. I'm like, *I don't have the money*. He said *okay well, if you have sex with me, I'll forgive you the money*. So he took me in a car, we went out into a meadow, and we had sex. And uh, it was kinda like the beginning of a downhill slide.

Two years later, I thought that I was pregnant again. And I was, just -- by the same guy, who was very controlling of me. So I thought I was pregnant again, and he was very verbally abusive, and I ended up taking a bottle of sleeping pills and going into the local hospital, and then I had my period, so. It might have been stress. I don't know. Whatever. But, it was... it was not a happy chapter in my life.

I had another abortion when I was 41 or something? Um. When I had three children, and I was separated from my husband. And uh, I was madly, crazily, lustfully in love with the man who's now my husband. And I just knew that there was just no way I was gonna have a child at that age. I don't remember it costing anything. I think it was covered by my health insurance. My local Planned Parenthood was a half-hour away. It was a very -- it was more like a gynecological exam with like, a day of rest afterwards.

#### **CHAPTER 6: SHARON (2 min 30)**



Even after having been pregnant twice, even after having given birth twice -- you know, even after the experience of recovering from birth... and like, even to this day, I still don't feel like I'm, you know, back to myself -- I'm still expected, in many ways, to... really make shit happen. You know? And in terms of, um, protection.

I don't feel like I should have to do anything. I shouldn't have to, you know, sort of have any hormones. Like, I shouldn't have to have an IUD. Like, I've done it. In some ways, I would just love my husband just to get a vasectomy. Like, just, you know. Just do it. Um. And it, you know, sort of dealing with the fact that that's not something he's just uh, jumping into.

I would respect if my husband doesn't want, ultimately, to have a vasectomy, but we're kind of in this place of like -- but yes, if he doesn't, then, then what? It's like, is it a diaphragm? I don't want to use condoms. Like, I just don't. You know, I'm -- I'm 39. They suck! They suck. They just suck. And it's like -- and already you know like, sex after like,

being married for a while, and sex after having a couple kids. It's like, I mean it's great in the way that it's great. But it's changed in so many ways. And um yeah, so to add condoms or to add like, kind of another layer of *prepping* for sex to that. It's just like, it really just kind of just feels so tired. And I don't want that, so.

Yeah, right? Um. You know, as best as I can be respectful, when internally there's that voice that's just like, you are a fucking baby. Like, that is bullshit. You know, plenty of men have had vasectomies. And, whatever. But you know, out of respect, it's like -- I can understand there's so much tied up in it in terms of you know, a sense of feeling, you know, verile. And, you know. I don't know. Also, life now. And parenting now. Where, like, we know it's important. But it's like, among the many, many, many things that are on the daily list of stuff.

### **CHAPTER 7: HOLLIS (2 min)**



When I was in high school there was this friend of mine, Madelyn McClintock, and she had been with a medical student at Syracuse. And he had given her an abortion with a coat hanger, and she died. And I can remember sitting at this table in my house with my friends and we were all talking about it and it was like, horrible. Like, because, she was our... our age, and she was dead.

So like, the night -- I knew I could die, so. But it was like, I didn't care. I mean, I just did not want to have a child. And I was willing to die not to have a child. Like, I never felt guilt. I never felt shame. I just felt this defiance. Like, you know -- I'm like, no one's gonna do this to me. And it's like, if it's illegal, you're gonna find a way. If you want to do something, you're gonna find a way.

It still wasn't legal. He paid for me to go down to Puerto Rico, so I flew down to Puerto Rico, and I went to a clinic there and had a D&C.

And the night before I went down there, I was with this friend of mine, and like, we were painting. And like, I painted this seahorse and she said to me, you know, the male seahorse carries the young. I was like, *wow*. Because I felt like, you know. [laughs] I'm pregnant, why can't--? You know, why don't -- why is it on the woman?

And then, when I was -- so when I was in San Juan in the airport waiting to come back, I was just, you know, looking around the airport, and I got this little cube. It was a little plastic cube with a seahorse in it. And it always reminded me of that time, and... and I don't know why it's so important to me. The male seahorse carries the eggs.

### **CHAPTER 8: LANA (3 min 30)**



But navigating being a black woman with a black woman's sexuality around my father in predominantly black areas was very hard. And one of the hardest things for me was, if someone would hit on me on the street and my dad's there, well, I know how my friends' black fathers would respond. They would -- that would not happen. It would be cut down right away. But my father in his like, need to be sort of like, really great to all these guys, you know, be a friend and a buddy, would take it. And that always hurt. I hated that. I always wished that, um -- and my mother wouldn't either, you know. She wouldn't take that. I never felt like I had a protector in that way because of my father.

And I also never had anyone to discuss sexuality with. I mean, I learned about sexuality by being molested and raped. And then I learned what was happening with my body by reading "Our Bodies, Ourselves" and uh, a book of Boy George's makeup tips that I had. I know. I actually went to the store and got it for myself.

My grandmother had 17 children. She died in a mental institution giving birth to her 17th child. My mother has um, six children. So I'm one of six with my mom. And my father always told me these stories about, you know -- and my mother has six different kids by I think it's three different fathers. And I -- there was a sense of shame. And so, when I became pregnant myself as a teenager, that sense of shame and that sense of, you know, this isn't what you're supposed to be doing really, you know, stuck with me.

A lot of my friends had had kids and were on welfare. I decided to have an abortion. My father was right there with me. Um, my boyfriend at the time was not on board. Um. He supported me sort of from afar, and definitely begrudgingly. We broke up shortly after.

I went to Planned Parenthood, and they were phenomenal. Absolutely phenomenal. They had someone just to hold my hand through the experience. And it was during a time when there were lots of protests in DC at Planned Parenthoods. My father, actually, had rebuilt one of the uh, Planned Parenthoods that had been bombed. And

um, yeah. I didn't have to go through any of those things. I was ready for them, but... Sadly, they left me alone that day, so. [Laughs] I was ready for a good fight.

I had this idea of what it meant to be a teenage mother, and I wasn't gonna do it. There was no way. I was -- I was convinced that I was not gonna be like my mother. And it took me a long time to want to have a child. I didn't, uh, decide I wanted to be pregnant until I was 33 years old. And I think a lot of that has to do with just not wanting to carry that that legacy forward of having all of these children.

I now realize that that is so false, you know. I love my big family. And my grandmother -- I mean, she had a really hard, hard life. And I know that she wouldn't have wanted to have 17 children, but there's no shame attached to it. You know, there's no stigma from my end.

And then one day, I was just at the movie theater and I saw this mother and this little girl sitting on her lap, and I was like, I wanna have a kid. Now. [laughs] I wanna have a kid today. So.

And those of us that have kids, we know that, actually, I envy people that don't have kids sometimes! You know, it's one of those -- those things where you love your child so much, but it's kind of like Stockholm syndrome. It's kind of like, I love you so much, because you're a parasite. [laughs]

### **CHAPTER 9: LACEY (3 min)**



I was not in a great place, being homeless and wondering about where I was gonna sleep. It was really, really, really cold outside and um, I got really sick. And I went to the hospital, and they kept me for like three days. I didn't know I pregnant, um, at the time. I was like, 19 weeks pregnant. They asked me if I wanted to know what it was. I said no. Because I didn't really want to have another baby with that person.

So because I was underage I had to go to the courthouse in Boston, and I had to have a lawyer, and I had to speak with a judge. And he had to determine whether or not I was

capable of making the decision to have an abortion. I went in a room with him with nobody else there in front of me, and he asked me stuff.

This huge desk with all those big law books, and stuff like that. And he's, you know, asking me questions. And I'm like, sweating. Like, I was just hoping and hoping and hoping that he would deem me fit enough to make the decision to have an abortion. Which is weird because, you know, it's some old guy who says like, yeah. She can have an abortion. Or, no. She can't have an abortion.

Just gotta wait on this guy to make this decision for me. Like, no. No.

If I could talk to that guy now I would probably you know, say, *you* got to decide for me. Like, does that not sound fucked up at all?! Based on my saying, you know, I don't have a place to live. I don't have a car. I'm not in school. I don't have a job. I don't have any money. I am not even taking care of my kid right now. Somebody else is. He said, you know -- he said, you know, "You *should* have an abortion, because you can't take care of this kid that's coming."

I didn't think that people actually stood outside of Planned Parenthood and protested, but they do. They, you know, grabbed my arm and it was like, "you-- you messed up. Like, this is for you. I'm here. I'm here to save your soul!" And, just like, fucking ridiculous shit, like...

#### **CHAPTER 10: NADIA (4 min 20)**



You know, I take a testosterone blocker. And I take uh, estrogen. And, uh, sometimes I use a progesterone cream. And it's just a whole other puberty that lasts many years. Five, six, seven. Maybe more years. Um. So, you know. It's been very tough understanding my body.

I was like, slamming my tits -- as small as they are -- into like, everything. Or just like, your pelvic tilt changing. The way you smell is different. The way your skin sticks to like, another girl's skin is different. And um, hair texture.

And some people can maybe just, socially transition. And you know, change their um, outfits. Their attire, *et cetera*. Their mannerisms, maybe, to reflect, you know, how they always wanted to present themselves and act but were suppressing.

It can take a long time even to do that. I'm sure there are some people that are like, I'm ready to go. The next day, Thursday! I transition. Um, but. A lot of times, it takes a lot of steps. And a lot of like, self-reflection. What was I doing that was for others, and what do I want to do for myself? And how do I be that person, without the influence one way from cis people to, um. You know, be one gender or another, like, in a very conventional sense. Or from trans people, um, who are like, you should, you know -- this is what a woman or a man is. Since I've got that sometimes. Like, you use a *carabner* to hook your keys. That's a very manly thing to do.

FILMMAKER: What did you call it?

*A carabner?*

FILMMAKER: Have you ever heard that before?

INTERVIEWER: I've heard carabiner.

Carabiner! Oh my God! [laughter]

FILMMAKER: Wait. Can we take a picture of this?

If it matters, Mandarin is my first language. Um. It's now my *worst* language. But it was my first one that I was speaking...

It sounds like a Southern way of saying somebody who lives in the Caribbean. It's like, *What? The Caribbean? They-- the Caribbean with all them carabiners? I don't know nothin' 'bout none of that.* Anyway, um.

I had a lot of cis people telling me to be a man, and this is how to be a man. My entire life. Um, and then beginning of transition, a lot of cis people *and* trans people both telling me what a woman was. And you know, if I -- I've been told this before, uh, from cis people and trans women: "You act like a lesbian, but you don't act like a woman." Uh. [laughs] Because I don't even know how to explain how... regressive that train of thought is. Separating lesbians from womanhood.

You know, despite the way that I can act when I start to get more confident, like, I'm actually super socially anxious. And a lot of that has to do with being trans. Men wouldn't be friends with me because I didn't really act like a man, but they couldn't

really put their finger on it. And uh, women wouldn't be friends with me because they thought that, you know -- you know, there's a sort of defensiveness that men are possibly dangerous. Or would actually, you know, cross like sexual boundaries, *et cetera*.

Which nowadays, I'm a little bit like with a lot of like, men. Especially if they are imposing or I don't know them, or you know. Positions of authority. Gets kinda scary.

I've had people compliment me about how much of a, you know, "real woman," as they would put it, I look like, compared to other trans women -- in front of my trans women friends! And the term "real woman" is like, so fucking offensive. [laughs] Because it implies that I'm just an impersonator, that I'm just fake. That I'm not a real woman at all.

I would like there to be the understanding that trans people can be, and *are*, as diverse as cis people.

#### CHAPTER 11: KIERA (1 min 35)



For me, as someone who grew up in a very white area, you know, sometimes I question the way that I'm interacted with. Whether it's actually motivated by race or not. So like, you know, I've been in a relationship it'll be nine years this year. Um, at five years, I had gone in for a check-up at Planned Parenthood. Which is like, amazing because it's so inexpensive. But, you know, the nurse practitioner asked if I needed an AIDS/HIV test.

I was like, oh no. I've been in a relationship for 5 years. And she was like, *well I think you should*. And I was like, hm. That's weird. Why are you telling me to do that? I've been in the same relationship for 5 years. That's a very strange thing to like, kind of demand of somebody, right?

Um and so, for me, my initial response was like -- oh, well maybe that's racially motivated. But like, how am I supposed to know? And it's just because there isn't very much representation. So like if maybe like, a Native American woman had said that, or a Latina woman or a Black woman had said that, my response wouldn't have been like, *what's going on?* Maybe I would have been like, oh, well maybe there's something that I don't know that will show up, and that is important regardless of how long I've been in this relationship.

So it's just important because it takes away kind of like, the misunderstandings that could happen. Um and also like, even having people look at my vagina, like, I'm pretty certain it would look more like a dark-skinned Black woman than like, some white blonde woman who happens to be my gynecologist. And so when she says like, *everything is fine*, I'm kind of like, okay. Like, I hope so. I'm trusting you, because maybe you're not going to recognize something that looks different on me than it does on you.

### CHAPTER 12: MARLENE (4 min 10)



So I mean, I've experienced rape. And um, sexual abuse as a child. And then there's that gray area of um, sex that was... not exactly consensual.

Alright. I would consider sex when I'm passed out is non-consensual. You know, and being woken up by somebody on top of me who I thought was my friend, you know. That was a very bad experience right there. And uh, that took a lot of -- I can think of one time where I really had to process this with him. You know. Because I thought he was my friend. We weren't very close after that. The trust was gone after that. You know, and he did finally realize how screwed up that was.

But you know, he -- here was a case where the guy somehow thought that was okay. You know, that that was okay. And it's not. So. And then it was hard for me to know that that wasn't okay as well. I must say that.

I mean, I had another friend of mine. A man. A young man, back then, who was absolutely irate -- much more so than me. And so with him, the fact that he was so irate about it kinda clued me into, oh wow. This was not okay. I didn't even know.

I got pregnant during that. Okay? I got pregnant. From that. And I then had to have an abortion, and Planned Parenthood was there for me. That took place in New Mexico. The guy was actually my roommate. We were not lovers in any sense of the word. I don't know what he was doing on top of me in bed that night.

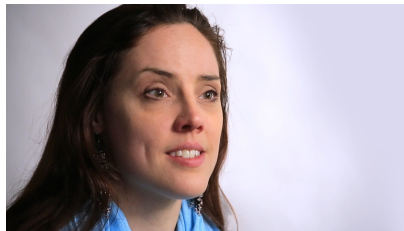
So, my experience at Planned Parenthood during that time was a very positive experience, because I felt like they were very supportive. And nobody shamed me. I already had enough shame around this. I had shame about, you know, I mean -- looking back on it, I don't think I was that conscious of the fact that I was an alcoholic. But I did not have good self-esteem back then, or a sense of confidence. And I had a lot of shame. I had shame left over from my childhood, even, that I wasn't conscious about.

So, it would have been very easy to shame me further, and they did the opposite. They made me feel like I was okay. You know, that this was right. They were supportive. They were kind and gentle. They took a terrible situation, and they made the best of it for me.

I mean, it's not fun to get an abortion. Okay? That in itself feels bad. It does. It's not something I think most women take lightly, and I certainly didn't. And that wasn't my only abortion, either. And every single time, it's a whole mixed bag of awful. You know.

I am extremely bothered by um, certain politicians using this issue as like a weapon. You know, like a means of control. I feel like they raise this moral issue, and I don't hear any sincerity about any morality behind it. It just feels like a weapon. Like a way to wield control over women.

### **CHAPTER 13: BECCA (1 min 50)**



I was working as a wildland firefighter, which is a very male-dominated field, and I started being a supervisor. So I was responsible for up to seven people on a burn, which is a dangerous thing.

And for some reason, every single time we burned, I had my period. For the last six years, I've been getting these terrible migraines during my period, and they last like four days. They're awful. I'm seeking medical care. So it's like -- it's like a big deal. I'm a wicked cryer, and I also happen to have my period and a headache, so. [laughs]

And it was like -- it was just such bad timing! So I felt like garbage, but I had to do like, physically intense work all day long and supervise all these dudes. You know, and it just-- I just wanted to take like, five minutes out of the day to like, go be by myself and

rest. Or like, you know, take care of myself. And I just felt like that was never gonna be okay.

I just feel like I should've been able to say, you know what? I don't feel well today. I need 10 minutes. But I think that if I had, I would have been viewed as weak. In a way that would have *undermined my ability to lead*. So I didn't take breaks.

Like, women can't get through a burn day without a 10-minute break. Except, we're in charge. We got there 3 hours before you, and we're staying 3 hours later. You know what I mean?

I don't think it's okay that women are expected to like, suffer in silence when they have like, menstrual issues or reproductive issues. It bothers me that that's stigmatized, and that women can't just be honest about what they're going through.

#### **CHAPTER 14: DEDE (2 min 40)**



You know, I grew up in a very strict Catholic household in Providence, Rhode Island. Getting pregnant was just, you know, this major -- you spoke about "other girls" from Providence who got pregnant, and it was this like, stigma. And this like, fear that I had.

And this is like, 1976. You know. And *R v. Wade* was only, what, 1972. Or was it 1974? I'm not sure. Blanking on the date. So there I was, needing birth control and support, and that was my first experience With Planned Parenthood.

They inserted an IUD for birth control and um, I was uncomfortable at the beginning. I remember calling. and they said yes, there's sometimes a little discomfort. And then I immediately went off to college and I was busy moving into my dorm room, but I started really running a fever. I started to have some pains in my abdomen. So, um. I wasn't sure what was going on. I really was a little nervous about the whole birth control thing, and telling my mother. I couldn't do that. I was really alone.

I had something called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, and it's a very serious condition. And I let it go. For probably -- the doctor said, "You should have come in sooner." You know, I remember waking up in the college infirmary and um, it was so eerie. There was no one in this big room except for me. And there were all these empty cots, and I was

crying, and I realized, I couldn't tell my mom. I'm getting kind of sad right now just thinking about it. You know, I was just very scared, and frightened. I thought maybe I won't be able to have children. *What am I gonna do?* You know, it seemed like things were -- I was falling behind in my classes.

Then I went back to Planned Parenthood, and they just took care of me. I'm really lucky, because I had great care. They took out the IUD and then I was on, I believe, antibiotics. My situation improved in just a few days, so that was good. There was some risk associated with getting an IUD inserted. And in those days they weren't as, um -- they were relatively new. I believe it was this Copper-7 I think, that I had. My body just rejected it. So now I think there's just a lot more knowledge about birth control methods. But for me, it was a little bit of a rocky start.

### CHAPTER 15: DIANA (4 min 30)



I actually remember crying in the car on the way to the clinic in my boyfriend's Honda Accord, and crying and saying, "This is my first big fuck-up."

And I just kind of knew. Even before the test, I could tell. Uh, we thought we were careful. I had a diaphragm, but I left it in my dorm room over Christmas break, and then he came to visit me, and we didn't go to the drug store to buy condoms. We just kind of thought, oh, what the hell. Or, it's not gonna happen to me.

This was 1992, I think. And I don't think you could necessarily go buy a pregnancy test the way you can now, so we had to go to -- we went to the college health services. We were in New Hampshire, and we got sent to this clinic that seemed lovely, and a little bit upscale, and we went. And we had been sent there by the college.

And they ushered us back to an exam room, and I should've known. I should have been a little suspicious that the whole room was filled with baby pictures. And finally the nurse comes back with a huge smile and she says, "Congratulations! It's positive." And at first I thought that meant positive news, meaning, Oh my God. Thank God, I'm not pregnant. And then she hands us this whole folder with a star on it that says "September 10th." I remember the date. And she says, "Your baby's due September 10th. And here's everything you need to know about first trimester. You're gonna want to start

taking prenatal vitamins, and this is what your baby looks like now,” and on and on and on. And I was just in shock.

And eventually, my boyfriend had the presence of mind to stop her and say, “Actually, we're not gonna keep this pregnancy. Diana's 19. I'm 21. We're in college. We can't be parents.” She said, “Oh.” And he said, “Can you offer us information about what options we have now?” And she said, “Well, we don't do anything like that here. You'll have to go somewhere else.” And we were very briskly ushered out and into the car.

We had the support of our parents, because we had some financial resources. We knew what we wanted, and we knew we could go somewhere else.

The physical experience of going through it on a table was a trauma. After it was over, I felt this relief. I felt relief. I didn't feel guilt. I didn't feel like I'd killed a spirit. You know, I just -- I was relieved to have my body and my life back.

I wish I'd never been sent to that clinic. I think about that girl and just, crying in the car and feeling so scared and so guilty, and just, such... sadness. And stupidity that, God, you know, why'd I leave the diaphragm? And like, why did we have to--? You know, all that stuff. I think if I hadn't had that experience of being told about my baby, I don't know. I think would have been kinder to myself.

And I actually recently did have a second abortion. I got unexpectedly pregnant at age 40. We really had to choose not to have another baby, mostly because of my health. Because I had two emergency C-sections with my first daughters.

It was easy. We took the, um -- I took the RU-486 pill. Now, I wish that had been available when I was a college student. I think that would have been very different. And there was not trauma to do with this. Basically, it induced a miscarriage. There wasn't even that much bleeding or cramping.

And so my demands are that every woman and every girl have that choice, and get the whole spectrum of choices presented to her. Here's another demand: let's come up with some better birth control. I mean, the IUD's great, and it's getting better. I wasn't able to take the pill, and basically condoms really suck, and they're also not reliable -- and how about some birth control for men? So those are some demands.

## CHAPTER 16: JESS (1 min 45)



I'm on my third IUD right now.

INTERVIEWER: You like that?

I'm crazy about it. I love it. [laughs] It's just a very nice like, "set it and forget it" sort of a thing, you know? You don't have this nervousness of trying to remember to take a pill every day. And also, you know, when it comes to cost... I mean, birth control pills are ridiculous. I think the cheapest one I was ever on was maybe like, fifty dollars a month.

So it's like, why wouldn't I get something that's free and that's gonna last me five years, and I'm not gonna have to worry about it? It just really seems like the most practical to me. Right now I have the Mirena. I started with Paragard, which is the non-hormonal one. And I used that for about -- and I think that's supposed to last 10 years, and I used that for a little over a year.

Um, and suddenly I was bleeding really heavily. I was in a new relationship with the person I'm still with now, thankfully. And I woke up one morning, and I had just bled through a super tampon, my underwear, my pajama pants, his sheets, and his mattress.

I like got up and turned the lights on and looked over -- there's just like, blood everywhere. So I was, of course, freaking out. And I called my doctor, and I went in there that day. I don't know what I thought. I was like, maybe I'm miscarrying or, I don't know. It was terrifying.

And he examined me and he said, you know, "This can happen. You can get really heavy periods with the Paragard." And I said, "Well, I've had it for over a year. You know like, I feel like I've been adjusted to it, so why would this happen now?" And he was just kind of like, "Oh, that can happen even a year in. So. My suggestion to you would be to get rubber sheets or to change to the hormonal one." [laughs]

## CHAPTER 17: AURELIE (3 min 30)



I actually tried to transition multiple times. Once as an adolescent. My parents... at the time in California -- it's now illegal, but at the time in California it was not illegal to, um, put your child in conversion therapy. Um, and so I had an experience with being in conversion therapy. Um, and... It didn't stop me. [laughs]

It was sort of like, I had my ten sessions that were basically like, supposed to be the program where now you're saved and you've seen the light. And I was like, still queer. Still trans. Fuck you.

And, um. So then I thought for sure, going to New York City, being in an arts program... I went to NYU Tisch School to study dance. I got a BFA. I was classically trained growing up, all throughout my adolescence. And I was boy propping up girl to do these amazing, gorgeous things. And um, when I got to college, I thought I would be able to drop that. I thought I'd be able to queer my experience as an artist.

Having access to a student healthcare center that was trans inclusive, which was actually super unique at the time -- that's 2006-2010. It was actually still pretty unique. Got a social worker and was ready to start my transition in college. And, um. The director of my program basically told me that, um, I was accepted as a male. I had a scholarship. And that if I wasn't able to complete the program as I was accepted into the program, that I could continue dancing at NYU, but I would not be in the BFA program. I could not complete the program. Which would mean losing a \$25,000 scholarship, and not being able to finish school.

So um, I closeted myself again. In retrospect, it was actionable in the state of New York, um, at the time. I probably could have complained. And I didn't. And that's the thing, is like, when you're pre-transition and closeted, and society is telling you that who you are is fundamentally wrong, you internalize that. You buy it.

I didn't even think to challenge her or push back and say, "What you're saying is wrong. And fucked up. You're policing my gender, and threatening to take something away from me if I don't let you police my gender." Um. That's defamation. That's a lawsuit.

And I know that now, because like, I have done the work of like, wresting myself to the center of my own narrative. And like, fuck you for telling me who I am or how I should be. At the time though I was just like, a scared trans girl. Closeted. And like, I didn't know that like, that was something I could push back against.

There's never a good time to, um, step into authenticity. The conditions are never going to be right. And just... live your truth, and there are the resources. So long as you show up for them. You know like, and that's -- there's some privilege to that. Like, not everybody does have the resources that I magically came upon, um.

But for the most part, if we're pretty rigorous in living our truth, the conditions will rise and meet that. And I wish that six-year-old Aurelie, um, knew that there would be a place in this world for her.

### **CHAPTER 18: LISA (8 min 10)**



I remember feeling um, attracted to people, and loving that feeling. Experiencing attraction as a really beautiful thing to go through... you know, on the verge of pain. Sort of self-defining and obsessive and engaged.

After trauma, I lost that feeling for a while. And I knew that. I knew I had lost something beautiful. Something gorgeous.

I was involved in a youth civic organization. We did projects. We built haunted houses and made money for charities. When I was 13 and I had one of these crushes -- I loved this group, and I adored a high school senior named PJ. You know, I'd just look at him, and all I wanted to do was be in the same room with him. Just be there and feel the way I felt, which was amazing.

And clearly, he picked up on it. One day he called me. I was um, at home. The phone rang and I picked it up, and it was PJ. And he was calling me! And he said, "Come down the street. We're having a party." So I went to the party, and I was handed a beer. And I had a beer. And I felt really grown up. After a while I was going down the hallway with PJ, and he pushed me into a room, and I left my body while something happened. And before I knew it, I was just laying there, and he was gone.

It was really hard to move. Like, to get back in my body in a way that -- enough that I could get up and walk out and nobody would look at me at the party. And I walked out the door, and I went home.

So, um. I know I didn't have my period long at that point, because when I didn't get my period for a while, it didn't occur to me that there was a problem. One day I was putting on a bathing suit and feeling pretty heavy and thinking I was getting bigger. And I noticed that I was lactating. Um. My mom had had three kids after me, so I knew what was happening right then, and it was something that had never entered my mind until that moment.

So um, I had my first pelvic exam at thirteen. My mom took me to the doctor immediately. He probed and felt the size of my uterus and said that I was 21.7 weeks pregnant, looked at my mom and said, "You have a few days." Some period of time afterward, I was at the hospital, uh... having an abortion.

I felt punished. By the words of the nurses, and the actions of the nurses. And I sensed their pity for my mother, but there was never a shred of what looked or felt like compassion toward me by anybody in the process. And um, that was... that stands out as the hardest part of the whole thing for me.

So after induced labor for eighteen hours and an abortion, the placenta didn't follow, so they had to take me into an operating room and do a D&C. And uh, that was the point where I passed out for good. 'Til the whole thing was over.

We left the uh, hospital, and I went back to school and had a thirteen-year-old year.

I've thought about, what would my life be like if I had had that baby at thirteen? I can say, with certainty, that I am immensely grateful that the punishment ended there.

About a year later, I saw this young man on the sidewalk. We were passing each other, and he said, "Oh hey. How ya doin'?" And I looked at him and said, "I had an abortion." And he looked stunned. And I -- I just remember the disbelief in my... the disbelief I felt when he started crying and said to me, "Why didn't you tell me?" And really made it out as if I had hurt him somehow -- by not telling him that, by raping me, he'd made me pregnant. And by raping me, he'd traumatized my whole family, really.

And there I was, being this person that did something to *him* somehow. And you tell me how that happens -- that um, at thirteen, you have no idea what's going on. You get pushed in a room, you experience was isn't even called "date rape" yet but is, in the

most classic way, and is illegal. And you find yourself pregnant, and decisions are made for you. And how is it that you're to blame? How does that happen?

There was never a question of what was happening to me, or what my experience of it was. I was just, uh... my existence was creating problems for people.

I didn't rape myself, and I didn't make anybody rape me. And I grew up without permission to know that. You know, and it makes me so furious. It makes me furious for myself, but it makes me furious for every girl and woman on the planet.

Every argument against abortion being legal, against access to abortion, um... is absolutely predicated on the notion that the person who is the woman doesn't matter. Everything *but* the woman matters in the arguments made by people who would say women should not have access to abortion.

I disagree with that.