

On a Tuesday in December 2018 I terminated a much-wanted pregnancy for medical reasons via dilation and extraction. Three days later Governor Kasich signed Senate Bill 145 into law, making dilation and extraction procedures illegal in my home state of Ohio.

My husband and I were thrilled to discover we were pregnant in September of 2018. We had miscarried our first pregnancy earlier that year and were lucky enough to get pregnant again quickly. At eight weeks pregnant we went in for the first time and saw our perfect baby on ultrasound with a strong heart beat. We were elated. We decided against doing any sort of genetic testing as we are young, had no history of genetic diseases in our families, and planned to go forward with the pregnancy even if something was wrong.

Around week 10 I started having some spotting. As a nurse, I knew that I had an equal chance of miscarrying as I did carrying the pregnancy to term. We went in for frequent ultrasounds, which showed a wriggling, punching, kicking baby with a strong heartbeat. As the weeks wore on I continued to bleed, which made me incredibly anxious but I was reassured by the ultrasounds and presence of heart tones on my fetal doppler at home. By week 14 I began to bleed more heavily and decided to do non-invasive genetic testing, just to get more information. I genuinely didn't believe that anything would be wrong. I was just hoping for some reassurance.

On our first nuchal translucency ultrasound the baby would not stretch out enough to get a good measurement of the space at the back of her neck. She remained curled in a ball for the entire hour of the test. I would have to come back again the next week and try to get a better picture. Over the next several days I bled even more heavily, and on Monday I asked to be referred to Maternal Fetal Medicine. Up until this point no one was able to explain the bleeding, and I was becoming increasingly anxious as we were unable to identify the cause of the bleed.

The specialist was able to get me in that day for an ultrasound. The sonographer spent an hour scanning me as she tried to get the baby to stretch out. I paced the room, emptied my bladder, did jumping jacks and the baby wouldn't move. I asked if it was normal for a 14 week baby to be that curled up and the sonographer shook her head. Shortly afterwards she left the room to speak with the doctors. This was the beginning of my nightmare.

The doctor returned with her very quickly. She said that there was likely something wrong with the pregnancy, as the baby's head was so large and the body was comparatively small. The baby was not growing as fast as she should be. The placenta was quite large and there was almost no amniotic fluid. Her fingers were fused together, as the sonographer pointed out on ultrasound. She very likely had a genetic condition called triploidy, but we couldn't know for sure unless we did invasive testing. She broke this news to me gently; she cried with me and was so incredibly kind.

Triploidy is a condition where a baby has three copies of *all* of their chromosomes. It is always lethal. Most babies with triploidy are miscarried early on, and if they are carried to term they are typically stillborn or die within their first minutes of life. I am sure I read the words in anatomy

and physiology, or maybe a high school biology textbook. I never thought that it was something that could happen to me or my baby.

I decided to do chorionic villi sampling that day. The results of the test confirmed the diagnosis. Our sweet baby wouldn't live past her own birthday, if she even got there. The longer I waited, the greater my risk for developing preeclampsia as well as choriocarcinoma, a rare cancer that can occur in abnormal pregnancies.

I was told my options were to terminate the pregnancy or try to carry her to term, knowing that she would suffocate to death in her first minutes of life due to undeveloped lungs. I know this pain all too well. Working the ICU I have held the hands of many patients whose lungs are not strong enough to survive. We are able to give medications to ease the pain, but it is never pretty. I couldn't imagine going through the rest of my pregnancy, having strangers congratulate me and ask when I'm due, knowing that my baby would have to go through that. Knowing that I would never take her home. For me and my family, abortion was the only choice.

For those of you who think you would choose differently, that you would be the "Choose life!-hero" in my story, be grateful that you will likely never be in my shoes. I have always been passively pro choice, but never ever in my wildest dreams did I think that I would get an abortion. I have a good job, am happily married and have a wonderful and supportive extended family.

In the same breath that I was told of my baby's fatal diagnosis I was told that I would not be able to receive a termination in any hospital. No hospital in Ohio would do it, and regardless my insurance wouldn't cover it. We had to get in contact with our local abortion clinic, Planned Parenthood, in order to schedule the termination. I was warned that there would be protestors outside, but this was my only option. My nightmare continued.

We were able to be seen relatively quickly at Planned Parenthood, I was told that there would need to be a consultation 24 hours prior to the actual procedure. I know Planned Parenthood is not the bad guy here - I am so incredibly grateful for them and those who support them. We went to the clinic, accompanied by my parents who drove us swiftly past the protestors and up to the main entrance. Even though I was exercising my constitutional right, I was made to feel like a criminal on the very worst day of my life.

I was given the required informational packet while signing in. The words on the front said I had three options: abortion, adoption or parenting. I thought to myself, well I don't think any adoptive parents are in the market for a dead baby. And parenting. *Wow.* What I wouldn't give to parent this baby. To kiss her, hold her, support her and love her for the rest of my life. That wasn't an option either. And that's why I was there. So, I thought, abortion it is.

I hate the word abortion. I even hate the word fetus. She was my baby, she was real and I loved her with the depth that only a mother can have for her child. I was making this choice out of

*love*. And I am so grateful that I had that choice. I am so grateful to the staff at Planned Parenthood who supported me through the hardest time of my life. I realize that there is no hierarchy of reasons for seeking an abortion. *A crisis pregnancy is a crisis pregnancy*, and no woman, or family, should have that decision made for them by their government. Neither I nor my child would have benefitted from carrying her to term.

That choice has been ripped away from the families of Ohio with the signing of Senate Bill 145. And that is why, even though it will not bring her back, I have to share my story. I am sharing for the other women who desperately want their babies, but cannot, for whatever reason, bring them into this world. I am sharing it for the women who want to be mothers some day, but do not currently have the privilege of a loving, supporting, and financially stable family like me. I am sharing for the victims of sexual assault whose babies were formed under violent circumstances. I am sharing for the sister or cousin whose abortion you don't know about and might not have approved of; for the coworker or friend-of-a-friend who had to drive to another state or borrow money just to get the healthcare they needed. But more than anything, I am sharing for my beloved daughter, so that strangers trying to regulate my body can hear my voice loud and clear, and know without doubt: I was her mother, and it was my choice.