

The choice is clear: Leave decisions about abortion to women and their families

Written by By Noreen Kelly Diné Elder with Forward Together Action Superman Canyon, McKinley County
Friday, 05 March 2021 06:04



I have always heard stories about our ancestors and how they controlled their pregnancies. These practices may have been called by different names along with the ancient medicines they used—but now, we refer to all of this as abortion care.

We need to end the shame and stigma around abortion care that has been brought on by the western patriarchal system. I have taught this to my children, and I will teach this to my grandchildren—because change must start somewhere. And for my family here in McKinley County, the change starts with me.

Thirty years ago, I had to make a difficult decision.

My son was around 5-years-old, my daughter around 16, and I was a pregnant for a third time. My husband and I called it our “happy surprise,” and we welcomed the news of this pregnancy with joy. At my second prenatal checkup, however, my doctor told me that something was wrong. The pregnancy had complications. He had grave concerns that my baby would be born with mental and physical challenges and that the pregnancy itself could kill me—leaving my two beautiful children without a mom.

I remember being shocked and just staring at the doctor. My husband was at work; the kids were at school, and I was alone in the doctor’s office hearing the unimaginable. I was being asked to make what felt like an impossible decision. I had to decide whether to have an abortion or to risk this very wanted pregnancy. The doctor told me that the decision was mine to make. Still, I was unable to respond.

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That evening, after dinner, when I was finally able to talk with my husband alone, I broke down. He held me tight as I cried. Neither of us knew what to do. I kept thinking about all of the what-ifs. My husband told me that he couldn't imagine what I was going through and that he wanted me to know that he would love and support me, no matter what.

He said that it was my body and my decision, but that he wanted our children to "be able to enjoy you." We both cried. In the next few days I made my decision: I decided to have the baby.

I'm not going to say it was easy. I was scared, but I made a leap of faith. I put aside my fears and did my best to take care of my health and have a healthy pregnancy. Then, at just seven and a half months, I went into labor and gave birth to a son.

When they brought him to me, I couldn't see anything wrong with him. He had 10 fingers and 10 toes and so much dark hair on his head. To me, he was perfect.

Now that baby, my son, Raynebeaux, is an adult. He graduated from high school, attended college, and is a joy to our family. Yes, he has health problems, but I've never regretted my decision. I had my child on my terms with the love and support of my family.

Every woman deserves to be able to make the decision that is right for her. Politicians certainly should not be trying to interfere.

It's because I had the ability to make my own decision that I have been speaking out in support of House Bill 7 and Senate Bill 10. These important bills would repeal an old abortion ban from 1969 that would put doctors in jail for providing abortion care. Women need to be able to make their own decision about what's best for them and their families, and doctors need to be able to provide safe and legal abortion care.

It is particularly important to me that Native women, like me, can make their own decisions. The future of our communities depends on our ability to determine our own destinies.

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