

College & Baby & Work —Oh My!

BY LUZ MARTINEZ

I was an above average student my freshman year of high school and participated in drama, choir, and track and field. That was the year I met the boy who would become the father of my child. I thought the world of him, and because he was my cousin's best friend, I thought that he would never hurt me. Sophomore year began and I was still dating the cute and popular senior. I was on top of my game, getting good grades and loading up on extracurricular activities all for the sake of making my transcripts look great for college. My mind was fo-

cused and my goals were clear, until the thing I thought would never happen, did.

I walked to the local

Rite Aid, picked up a pregnancy test and made my way home. My body was incredibly tense, my palms moist. I hoped and prayed to God that I wasn't pregnant,

but the pink plus sign appeared and it was all too clear what would happen to my body for the months to come. I was devastated. How could I have been so stupid? How could I have exercised such poor judgment? I remember lying on my bedroom floor, balling and all my boyfriend could say was that he was sorry for destroying my life.

Weeks went by and I continued to deliberate what I was going to do with this pregnancy. Many options went through my mind, but because I remained physically active, I just hoped for a miscarriage in order to avoid having to make a decision between abortion, adoption, or keeping the baby. The thought of telling my family terrified me. I felt I carried their dreams and aspirations on my shoulders.

In April of 2000, I was five and a half months pregnant and still, no one knew. In the back of my mind I kept thinking this



in order to improve my baby's heart rate. No sooner did I turn, I felt a faint pop, and then it all gushed out. My water broke. I was rushed from the labor room into delivery. On May 29th, 2000, 16 years too young and nine weeks too soon, I became a teenage mom.

No one expected that I would become a mother at such a young age. I was the smart one in the family, the one that would go places in life, the one who wouldn't end up working in a casino for all eternity or taking dead-end jobs just to get by. My parents, both Puerto Rican, were forces to be reckoned with. To them, getting an education was a top priority over friends and of course, boys. I couldn't even think about boys; any mention of them would send my mother into crazy spiels about keeping my nose in those books and not getting pregnant. Looking back, I see the reasoning behind her madness. She didn't want me to end up like her, a young mother with two kids, an eighth grade education and a casino job cleaning toilets.

**"No sea tan cobarde!"
"Shut up!!"
"Nadie te mando!"
"Mom, shut up!!"**

We continued back and forth like this, my mother and I, as she completely disregarded the shockwaves of pain surging through my body. Even the doctor was yelling at me, barking orders for me to turn onto my back

would somehow go away and that I wouldn't have to face my mother and father, the two people who tried so hard to protect me from having a life as a teen mom. My mother found a letter in my backpack that said, "Hey ladybug, how are you and the baby?" When I was asked what it meant, I told my mom that it meant exactly what it said. I kept a straight face the entire time that my mother was yelling at me. My father remained silent, sitting up on his bed, with disappointment smeared all over his face. I knew he felt his little girl had broken his heart.

The very next day, my mother took me to the gynecologist to get checked out. At this point, my parents only knew that I was pregnant, not that I was six months pregnant. Even after being found out, I was still in denial. I was terrified. I was young and foolish and about to become a mother. My parents didn't have very long to get used to the fact that I was going to have a baby because 4 ½ weeks later, at only 31 weeks gestation, my son was born.

Today, at the age of 22, I continue to live with my parents. Even though I messed up and they'll never let me live it down, I am grateful to have par-



ents like mine. For six years they have continued to be supportive, occasionally knocking me down, but supportive nonetheless. Raising my son and living with my parents has not made life any less of a struggle. I still have to work, go to school, pay bills and take care of my household responsibilities. Most people know that no matter how old you are or how many children you have, when you're living under your mom and dad's roof, it's their way or the highway. Though I struggle financially and academically and fight with my parents about these issues, I still keep my head up. I won't allow negative comments to bring me down. Even if it takes me ten years to earn my bachelor's degree, I know that it will be a result of my perseverance and refusal to be shut down by anyone who thinks I will not succeed.

Having children while trying to earn a college degree and work a full-time job does make life more complicated, but for those of you who are in the same situation, hang tight. Keep your head up and don't any take any crap from anyone. There's no doubt that people are going to put you down. They may belittle you because you're a young parent and say or do anything just to see you fail, but keep in

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mind that for every person who wants to put you down, there will be one or more on hand to help. Don't be afraid to use the resources that are available to you. If someone wants to lend a helping hand, then take a hold of that hand. Just because you do doesn't make you any less independent or responsible for you or your child. And remember, children are a blessing, no matter what stage of life you are in. ■

El 29 de Mayo de 2000, 9 semanas muy temprano y a la tierna edad de 16 años, mi pequeño hijo nació a una madre soltera.

Mis padres son Puertorriqueños y muy exigentes, pero toda la persona que tiene padres Latinos ya conocen como son con las reglas, tradiciones y regulaciones. Su sueño era que yo me educara y consiguiera trabajo profesional. Me volvían loca con sus precauciones y advertencias de nos salir embarazada. Ahora ya muy tarde entiendo sus razonamientos.

En escuela superior mi vida social comenzaba a florecer. Yo era muy activa en una multitud de actividades y mis calificaciones eran buenas. También tenía novio pero pensé que mi vida estaba enfocada y mi meta clara hasta el día que descubrí lo

inimaginable. Como pude ser tan descuidada e inconsciente y como pude defraudar a mis padres de esta forma. Pero si estaba embarazada. Cuando mis padres se enteraron 8 meses mas tarde, mi vida se convirtió en una pesadilla vivir con mis padres, pero todo vino a un desenlace increíble para ellos pues 5 semanas mas tarde nació el bebe.

Hoy el niño tiene 6 años y mis padres me han ayudado muchísimo pero yo he tenido que luchar en todo sentido de la palabra para salir adelante. Mi hijo cambio mi vida y mi niñez término repentinamente, es mejor perseguir una profesión sin hijos pero si tienes hijos aunque la lucha sea mas difícil aun se puede llegar a cumplir su meta. ■