

Transcript of dialogue
IT HAPPENS TO US
by Amalie R. Rothschild

Bambi: Well about eight years ago I got pregnant for the first time. I didn't have contraception available to me because at that point in Knoxville Tennessee where I'm from, I was born and raised there, they weren't dispensing any birth control methods or information to single people particularly women. The doctors were giving the pills to married women and would turn away the single women. I got pregnant and I had the child and gave it up for adoption I spent seven months in a Florence Crittenden home, which was very much like a prison. There were bars on the windows and a fence all the way around the entire yard. We couldn't go out except two at a time, they wouldn't let us go shopping except a car load of people with one of the women from the home who were on the staff with us.

I was 20 when I went into the home. It was in June of I think '62 and I had the child in 63. I didn't get an abortion because I have a sister that I'm very close to who didn't want me to die from an abortion and we both knew that most of the people available in our town were butchers, that was the reason I choose to have the child and give it up for adoption.

I had told my parents, they knew about it and they were upset but they did not turn me away from my home, they didn't throw me out, in fact they backed me with moral support. Most of the girls that did tell their parents got pushed aside by their parents, some of them got kicked out and they were told not to come back, a couple of their parents felt that no matter what they ought to have the child to be punished for what they had done because they had sinned.

Interviewer: If abortion had been legal or if you would have known there were safe illegal abortions would you had an abortion and taken that risk?

Bambi: Yes I would because I got pregnant a second time and I had an abortion during my 22nd Christmas a year later, it was an illegal abortion, I chose to have it because I would have killed myself rather than give up another child.

Fade out

Opening title: IT HAPPENS TO US

Fade in

Interviewer: How did your boyfriend feel when he found out that you were pregnant?

Bambi: He wouldn't even talk about the pregnancy; to this day I think he thinks I had said I was pregnant to get him to try to marry me which I didn't want. He didn't even know for sure if I had the abortion. He probably thinks I was trying to force him into marriage. He would not talk to me when I told him I was pregnant.

I checked with friends and got the name of an abortionist. I went to see him he charged \$500 and was very moralistic, so I wouldn't go to him, so I checked around again and got the name of another doctor, or I think he was a doctor.

He came to my apartment. It was very clandestine, I had to check and see that nobody saw him. He boiled the instruments on the stove and on a newspaper on the bed with a couple of pills that made me woozy but very aware of what was going on, with my legs hanging over the edge of the bed, he scraped out the uterus after dilating me and I have a very sensitive uterus and it was agonizing. I couldn't scream or let out any sounds because then someone would come to find out what had happened, and I could hear the tissue falling from the uterus to the floor on the newspaper.

I didn't get any antibiotics and later on I started having problems, then I called him, he came back a second time and scraped me out again and I spent Christmas night on the couch at my sisters house in such pain that I had to bite my lip until I drew blood to keep from screaming. I passed a blood clot that big, it looked like a piece of liver. I had an infection— I didn't know at the time I did, I know now knowing the symptoms. I had chills and fever and cramps and I was in such agony for 24 hours that I could hardly stand or even lay still. He scraped out a third time and when he scraped out then he told me that I was even further along than I had said I was or that I was supposed to have twins and I wasn't any further along than I said I was, so I knew I was supposed to have twins.

I had tried to abort myself, through naiveté through such things as bouncing down two flights of steps. There were some pills on the market that were supposed to be slightly toxic. I took them and they didn't do anything and then I got the name of this guy. I found out later that he got out of the country before he got caught and that he was going to be charged with having gone through the uterus wall of another woman and scraped her intestinal lining and she was fortunate to be alive. I feel lucky to be alive because I didn't have antibiotics and I did get the infection. It didn't make me sterile but it was very painful.

Outdoor scene at women's rally, Albany, NY.

Lisa Camett: I think it would be fair to state that the women who most often have suffered because of the unfair and inhumane legislation, are first, our poor

sisters and next, our young sisters. We would like to listen to their reasoning, those in power that deny young women the safety of contraception and the right to abortion, for we are in awe of their ability to make way for so much unhappiness and chaos in our lives. It can never be argued now by the ones whose ethical beliefs have made them deeply upset or angered by the sexual revolution, that to withhold birth control information and perpetuate the fear of birth out of wedlock will discourage human beings from submitting to their natural desires.

Living room scene

Carol Munter:

It is very important to stress that those people who want abortions now, find ways to get them, often in ways that are very harmful to themselves and that abortion is very closely linked to the whole notion of sexuality in this culture and it's my feeling that one of the reasons that there is such widespread need for abortion and there are so many unwanted pregnancies is that it is very hard for young women to grow into a sense of their own sexuality where they can make a determination about what they want.

Ellyn Frankfort:

I mean if you go out and get a contraceptive device if you are lucky enough to be in a state where it's legal, that's kind of openly admitting to yourself something that you know most women are trying not to admit, which is that they going to have a sexual life, But the irony is that most women have this sexual life and the result is because of this ambivalence that they have unwanted pregnancies.

Judy Bourne: I think the thing is that it's true that the fear of pregnancy has been a big deterrent to having sex I really... I certainly do, but that we have then called it moral, that it's moral not to have sex and the... if the reason... even though the reason you didn't have sex was because you were afraid of a punishment. And I think if parents think that young children shouldn't have sex then teach them something about sex and why it would be good to have it in good circumstances instead of in bad circumstances.

Interviews with women who have had abortions.

Selena: I find myself lots of times fighting the old way of...the way I was brought up. I find myself very open with my daughter, I tell her exactly what her body is like, what her body is going to go through, why certain things are going to happen to her and I hear myself and I say God my mother would have never said anything like this to me.

Judy: And when people who may have philosophical positions one way when the reality of that situation hits them or their wife or their girlfriend or

their child, that people have to survive and they do what they have to do to survive.

Interviewer: How did you get pregnant?

Julia: I didn't really give any thought to birth control I mean there was no way for me to get any. I didn't know anything about when it would be that I could get pregnant.

Selena: There was no one to tell me about contraception or what to do and what not to do. I was on my own and you know [wasn't using any] kind of contraception at all.

Joan: At the time I got pregnant I was using birth control. I was using a diaphragm.

Liz Weiss: We had prided ourselves in, through eight years of marriage the two children we had were both timed perfectly to coincide with the end of the school semester and Christmas vacation. I was extremely proud that I had worked everything absolutely when I wanted to and I found myself pregnant a third time after the second baby was just a few months old, I had been nursing him, stopped nursing I had an IUD in place and the IUD stayed in proper place but didn't do what it was supposed to do.

Trudy: I was using a diaphragm at the time and I just happened to leave it at home and like...

Amalie: It doesn't do any good when you don't use it.

Trudy: Yeah especially when you leave it under your bed, it's... it couldn't help you much and that's where I left it. I left it right underneath the bed that night.

Nancy: One of the biggest problems is taking for granted that oh I'm very regular therefore the rhythm method will work for me except at these times of the month. And it was just a mistake both times; you can't help getting pregnant considering the kind of birth control that is available. I can't take the pill, and so I know that I am constantly in jeopardy of getting pregnant.

Mrs. xx: This was not a planned child by the way, I was certainly no slouch having had my three children already and I wanted to limit my family to three. My parenthood was planned with my husband's consent of course. This just happened.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you discovered you were pregnant?

Trudy: It was really quite a shock.

Nancy: Frightened mostly.

Mrs. xx: I was really very upset about it.

Mary: I was afraid to go to anyone, to say anything.

Liz Weiss: It sort of exploded my ego, in addition to find that unwanted pregnancy cropping up.

Joan: But I was really scared and I was really alone.

Selena: I just refused to believe that I was pregnant.

Interviewer: What kind of abortion procedure did you have?

Betsy: Well, I got the saline.

Wendy: I used the D&Cs and they weren't suction.

Mrs. xx: Well, I think now I'm not sure that it's considered a curettage.

Dr. Felicia Hance:

It's the D&C method, the dilation and curettage is the most common in the United States, not because it's the easiest or best but because that's one most physicians are familiar with. D&Cs really have a different use, they are used as a way of basically diagnosing many conditions in women so many women will have D&C s almost every woman will have a D&C at some point in their life for some reason up and the reason for that is because it's an opportunity to scrap a tiny bit of the tissue lining of the uterus and then give it to somebody to look at under a microscope.

Now, for example if a woman has bleeding between periods or some kind of problem like that but the doctor is not sure what's causing it, then that sample of tissue will permit the doctor to decide whether it's an infection, whether it's, some kind of a pile up or something like that that's causing it because he'll be able to see the tissue that you otherwise can't see. So, that's the reason D&Cs are very common and they are done all the time, and make thousands and thousands and thousands of them; probably the most common woman's operation. And because of that doctors feel comfortable in doing an abortion by D&C. They know exactly how to do it. The only difference is that the uterus is larger and softer and therefore he has, to be much more careful when doing a D&C when on a pregnant uterus than you would on an unpregnant uterus but they know exactly how to do it. It's easy and that's why it's so common.

Naomi Fatt: The pain involved in the D&C, there is pain in scrapping, there is pain in dilating, there is pain when the uterus is cramping when the uterus comes back to size. In the aspiration especially with [some of] the local anesthetic or any kind of anesthetic, the actual aspiration does not hurt, that you can feel it, it's sort of like a sucking feeling. They dilate the cervix again, they insert, the tip of the [IB] is two bottles which have a suction machine attached to it and a tube attached to that, insert the tip through the opening of the cervix and that keeps out the, whatever few materials in the uterus.

Dr. Hance: In fact, the statistics on the safety at for the same early early pregnancy, for suction abortion are much better because the suction first of all is quicker, it permits you to remove all the pregnancy tissue in a very short amount of time, suction actually pulls the tissue well just like the vacuum cleaner would whereas the D&C it's a tedious process of having to scrap it bit by bit with this miniscule spoon usually the spoon size is like a half an inch and if it's a fairly advanced pregnancy that's a really tedious process whereas the suction is just a very quick thing.

Naomi Fatt: The third method is saline which is done generally after 16 weeks.

Betsy: The saline abortion involves the injection of saline or salt fluid into the uterus. They remove some of the natural fluid which is the amniotic fluid. Inject the saline solution, this induces labor and brings on the expulsion of the foetus. Suction abortion is no longer feasible because the foetus is too large it cannot be drawn out that way. It's also too large for a D&C it would involve too many risks.

Naomi Fatt: Fourth possible way is a medical operation called the hysterotomy. An incision is made in the woman's belly and they remove the uterine contents and a woman generally has to have any children after that by caesarian because the fear that during the labor the scar might reopen.

Dr. Hance: The question of choosing between all those methods is really a question of safety. What is safest for that woman under her particular circumstances in terms of her own medical situation in the past; in terms of what is available in the community and the experience that the medical people have in her community and what is statistically the safest method.

Now, actually all of those methods with the exception of the hysterotomy are safer than child birth. That the statistics on the kind of risks that you go through in a normal child birth although they are small in this society now are bigger than for any of the different abortion methods. But there is a difference between the safety of a D&C, the safety of a suction abortion, the safety of a saline abortion in and off themselves and relating to have

advanced the pregnancy is at the time. The rule of thumb is that the earlier in pregnancy an abortion is actually performed the safer it is for that woman. That the earlier the pregnancy the smaller is the amount of tissue, the less, the softening of the uterus that occurs later in pregnancy is not so advanced so that all of the risks associated with that are less likely to be a problem. The size of the uterus and the development of the foetal tissue and placenta is less of the danger of hemorrhage is less the earlier in pregnancy and the more quickly basically the woman will rebound back to her normal condition and reestablish a normal menstrual cycles and her, her feel like herself again.

Wendy Megginson, Abortion Counselor:

Every time I go into a procedure although not every time but so many times I'm with the girl and we go through it and afterwards she says I can't believe it's over because it's been so simple. It's a relatively painless and I can't even believe it's over myself being a counselor and knowing from my past experience, my personal experience that it seems to be much worse in the past than it is in the present with legalized abortion.

Robert: If only an illegal abortion had been possible, I have a feeling we would have gone through with the pregnancy and had the child this would have caused trouble with our families as well as with our plans but I wouldn't have risked, I wouldn't have asked Betsy to go through anything like the wild butchery.

Betsy: Butchery

Robert: Which is pretty much what it seems to be.

Julia Reichert: As it turned my father arranged the abortion. It's very interesting; He went to like the black section of town and asked an on old black woman who he knew if she would do it. I guess this is what happened anyway because she came to the house one night and my parents weren't home and they told me she would be there and she did it you know. Then I didn't... I found out after that how strongly my father hated the thought that I had slept with somebody and that I had gotten pregnant and so forth and it was, of course it was an illegal abortion, the person didn't do it in any kind of, I mean I didn't realize at that time but the person did it in a way that was really bad.

She just took what looked like a coat hanger really and she just unfolded it and this big black piece of metal and just shoved it up. It was not, she didn't sanitize it or anything. It was just in my parents' bedroom. I can remember hearing the TV set downstairs, my brothers were watching TV and they didn't know anything about it. And then it was very complicated because I had started to bleed and a lot. And my father see that's when I

found out, my father would, just said let her lie there you know just let her lie there you know and I was screaming, you know I don't usually scream very much, I don't react that way to pain but I mean it's really bad.

He just got really mad at me and I'd be screaming and he would just say you liked it when it happened you liked it when you got it, why don't you like it now and just, my mother wanted to take me to the hospital because I was bleeding for like two days and he just wouldn't you know and he just wouldn't allow it. He just said it's her fault, you know let her just lie there. He just said that over and over again. Matter of fact my mother when I say why does he treat me like that. She would just, say well, you really hurt your father, you know she'd say you really hurt your father and that's like nobody could see that I had been hurt it's just that I'd hurt my father.

Betsy: And I'd say two or three years ago I thought abortion was just the worst thing that could ever happen to anybody and I read articles in the Readers Digest about these illegal things in the back alleys and I thought Oh! Something going into my uterus and Oh! God and killing a baby and I just thought it was terrible

Robert: But when we found out that this could be easily taken care of with no danger to Betsy, it reassured us just about being alive in a sense, we were very much happy to be somewhere and totally capable of mastering our own lives. We weren't victims of circumstance.

Interviewer: Were you frightened though at first when you know you both found out that she was pregnant?

Robert: I was very frightened simply because throughout my life I've always had the fear of pregnancy instilled in me by my parents so the first time I went out on a date, 14 or 15 years old, the first thing my mother said sort of wondering about the fact that the girl is older than I was and all this sort of thing. Don't get anybody pregnant was like the last thing I heard before I went out and this sort of thing has just led me to have a very strong fear that pregnancy or even sexual relationships are just going to mess up my life , get me into trouble but this is, this is all changed. It has changed very greatly just the fact that you can get legal abortions which are not horrible experiences, which do not endanger the life of the woman involved and because of this my idea of having sex together, my idea of being married, my idea of having children has benefited greatly from the fact that Betsy got pregnant and we had an abortion. It was our abortion in many senses...

Betsy: Yeah, I would say that too.

Ellyn Frankfort:

I've seen women in the clinics in New York that are these free standing clinics that are not typical institutions come in and they can't believe that a woman who's walking out has already had her abortion. They really have this image that there is you know there is going to be a haggard horrible kind of experience and it's hard to believe that it's possible with good personnel and when the moment comes at a safe time to have it a simple safe procedure where the woman is not going to be in some terrible mess afterwards either physically or psychologically.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to have an abortion?

Robert: The child it just doesn't fit in, I'm still in school and a large number of years yet to go and Betsy's teaching and we are not married yet and we don't plan to be married for a number of years.

Mary: First of all, I'm Catholic and I started having second thoughts that maybe I did the wrong thing and I did try... well I'm not sure that I was aware that I was really doing it but I did stand in front of a car and I did want to be killed which was ridiculous but I remember going through this. I had a pretty hard time. For one thing it was hard to accept the fact that my mother rejected me at the time when I needed her most but you have to realize that first of all I was very naïve and I hadn't dated very much and he was the only fellow I dated and this was my first 'affair' and I was 19 and it was just a bit much you know and then there I was alone.

Mrs. xx: But when this fourth pregnancy came, I felt that it was totally out of line for me and with a youngster of 17 months running around the house and two other children to take care of, it just seemed like much too much and I couldn't face the idea of a pregnancy of course I was pregnant, but I... trying to think of what I could to escape from the pregnancy and I did some silly things like exercising too much or one time I even got drunk thinking that perhaps if I threw up the foetus would somehow be diminished in size or lost. It's silly of course but I was quite distraught and I decided after talking it over with my husband that an abortion would be the answer. I wasn't physically prepared to tackle the situation.

Interviewer: How old were you then?

Mrs. xx: At that time I was 36.

Liz Weiss: I was 29.

Julia: It was between when I was 18 and when I was 19, I think I had turned 19.

Selena: I was 16.

Joan: I'm 17 now, I was 16 then.

Judy Bourne: One thing I'd like to say for really young girls, I had the experience of many young girls who said I just can't tell my parents. I just would rather die than tell my parents but it turns out they have to tell their parents because they can't get the abortion without it and their parents come through and more often than not they think their parents will disown them, their parents will die, they'll have a heart attack. And the parents once the reality is grasped they realize that it's insanity for their child to have a child while she's still a child and the parents come through and sometimes I think abortion can be a marvelous experience for people because for some girls it may be the first time they've ever really faced reality; an important reality and a stressful situation and coped with it in a constructive way and made a decision and said I am an adult making an adult decision about a stressful situation and it can be a very returning experience.

June: Yeah, in our clinics which I think is one of the better ones we have a questionnaire that the women send back two weeks later and some of the responses are very exciting that you know I found that this was a very educational experience, I felt that I've become much more of a person through this experience and really very very positive comments.

Joan: Getting pregnant is like a reality, you can have sex and kind of put it under the cover but when you get pregnant you know that's an out and out physical statement of the fact that you've been having sex.

Interviewer: How do you feel about it now? How do you feel about having had an abortion?

Joan: I feel like, when I had the abortion it was the first time in my life I admitted to everybody else that I hurt and I hurt a lot and I needed help and I learned an incredible amount in just doing that. I feel like, the abortion was three months ago and what I learned when I had the abortion was nobody else was going to have that abortion for me and it was my body and I was going through it and no one was going to get on the operating table with me and when I realized that and I went through it and I came out of it I was very alive. I just got very much in touch with the fact that I am alone and it hurts to be alone and I'm alive and I can take care of myself. However, there were many things going through me, I was in a lot of torment about it. One of the things I was in torment about was the fact that I wanted to be pregnant, I don't feel like it was a biological error that I became pregnant. I wasn't very aware of myself, when I did, I wasn't very aware that I hurt or that I had very strong needs that I now know about and so it was just kind of like an unconscious thing and I

wanted to take care of someone and I feel like now the someone I wanted to take care of was me

Interviewer: Instead of the child?

Joan: Yes, and I couldn't get to that, I couldn't get to it, it was me and so I kind of projected it outside of me which is a child but a child is also inside of me. It was like not admitting the fact that I really wanted to take care of myself and now I feel, I see a lot of things differently and I want a baby, I want a baby some day and I don't want a baby until I am fully taking care of myself and fully responsible for myself enough that I can be responsible for a whole other person. And to have a baby at 16, I feel would just... before I was even aware of what being responsible for myself meant it would have just been a disaster for me and for any child that I would have had.

Fade out

END CREDITS with women's voices off screen over photo montage of women

Voice: And frankly I was so grateful that I was getting it done and I wasn't about to complain.

Voice: I just kind of expected that was like people were going to treat me like I really deserved it I just felt ashamed.

Voice: I was told, you know don't make a sound, don't peep, don't say anything.

Voice: It was very horrible.

Voice: I was furious that society was putting me through such hell for something so simple.

Voice: But then when the abortion law was passed in New York.

Voice: I got calmer and calmer.

Voice: My main feeling was one of relief.

Voice: I was relieved because I didn't want this baby.

Voice: It was just a great big relief.

Voice: It took about 10 or 15 minutes, the doctor was explaining what he was doing and all of a sudden it was over.

Voice: I can't believe it's over because it's been so simple.

Voice: And I had no complications, no problems of any kind.

Voice: It was so easy.

Voice: It was not a traumatic experience.

Voice: It was again least traumatic part of the experience.

Voice: And I feel now that if some of us who've been through it don't speak out they'll never change to the pattern that we are supposed to feel bad because we decided what to do with ourselves and control our own bodies

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