



Quad-City residents share stories of planned and unplanned pregnancies

Let's talk about... you know

Kay Luna | Posted: Tuesday, October 14, 2008 12:00 am

These women and men didn't know each other when they walked in the room.

But something almost magical happened among them.

One by one, without prompting, this group of Quad-City area residents began sharing intimate stories about issues many people do not discuss in public: sex, pregnancy and relationships.

Conversation flowed naturally in answer to these questions: Did they plan their families carefully? Or did they make tough choices about how to deal with unintended pregnancies?

As former Iowa first lady Christie Vilsack told the small group, which was participating in a panel discussion organized by the Quad-City Times, people routinely plan many facets of their lives.

They figure out what to make for dinner, what to wear when going out Saturday night and how to spend their money. But they don't always plan their families.

And it's not only teenagers facing unintended pregnancies.

The number of adults in their 20s and 30s experiencing unintended pregnancies is high, and the numbers have remained steady across the country for quite some time, according to officials with the Iowa Initiative, a program led by Vilsack to reduce unintended pregnancies among women 18 to 30 years old statewide.

Among women 20 to 25 years old giving birth in Iowa, they say, half of those pregnancies are unintended.

Vilsack and others say people simply do not talk about this subject enough.

So, it's time to start the conversation.

Tesi Klipsch, 26, and Zach Klipsch, 27, of Blue Grass, Iowa

A doctor had just told the young woman she could not have children of her own. She and her boyfriend had talked about adopting someday.

Yet there she sat in a Wal-Mart restroom stall, shaking and staring down at not one, not two, but three positive pregnancy tests.

Tesi Klipsch was a 20-year-old student at the [University of Iowa](#) at the time. She and her boyfriend, Zach Klipsch, were madly in love. So, they got married and took care of the baby while finishing college.

When that baby was 2, the couple decided together to try to have another child. That pregnancy ended in a miscarriage.

Later, Zach gently broached the idea again. That's when they added a daughter to their family. But adoption was still on their minds. The couple brought home their third child, a 3-year-old boy from Ethiopia, in April.

The family lives on the grounds of YMCA Camp Abe Lincoln in Blue Grass, Iowa, where Zach is the director. Tesi is a personal trainer and a stay-at-home mother.

Tesi says the difference between planned and unplanned pregnancies was huge. "With my first pregnancy (a son), I gained like 80 pounds. I was the girl in college then who was huge. I just felt like there were eyes on me all the time," she said. "When I was pregnant with our daughter, I had the job, the ring, money for cute clothes. It was very different."

But their unplanned pregnancy is a happy-ending story, Zach says. "We both had very supportive families. We both came to school, graduated in four years, without big lump sums of loans. We had that option," he said. "I think having that support made a big difference."

Bev Blake, 54, Davenport

Bev Blake was working as a registered nurse at a hospital neonatal intensive-care unit, taking care of other couples' fragile little babies every day.

Privately, though, she and her husband were dealing with their own infertility issues.

After going through painful medical procedures that did not help her get pregnant, the Blakes chose adoption, taking home a son who is now 21 years old.

The biological mother, who was in her 20s, wanted a closed adoption, meaning they had no further contact after signing the papers.

"I've often wondered, 'Did she ever tell her parents? Did she have more kids? What happened to her?' " Blake said. "I wonder how she turned out."

But she never second-guesses the choice to adopt. She gushed about her son, who completed their family, she said.

Now, Blake is a full-time registered nurse who works in prenatal services at the Edgerton Women's Health Center in Davenport, where she sees many clients experiencing unintended pregnancies.

Blake said she asks whether they have considered all their options: parenting the child, giving it up for adoption or terminating the pregnancy.

"I ask, 'Was this planned or unplanned?' " she said. "Many of them haven't thought about any of those things. Sometimes they just live day to day."

Candice Kundert, 56, Erie, Ill.

Candice Kundert did not like school, so she says she took the easy way out.

In 1968, she purposely chose to get pregnant at age 16.

Some girls who got pregnant back then were locked inside bedrooms to wait out their pregnancies or were sent away until they gave birth. Kundert was given another choice.

"I thought it was going to be so much fun to get married," she said.

It wasn't.

The couple had a daughter who is now 39 years old. Kundert also had three miscarriages before having another child, a son who is now 31.

All of the pregnancies were intended, she said.

The youngest child was born without part of his left hand, making those early years even more "difficult times," she said, adding that her son has flourished despite the disability.

She and her husband divorced long ago. She remarried, but her second husband could not have children because of a vasectomy, so she did not have more children — even though she would have liked to. She always wanted six, she said.

Kundert went to college in her 30s and works now as a psychotherapist and licensed social worker, offering child and family counseling at the newly opened Healing Hearts Center in Bettendorf.

In her current practice, Kundert said she sees lots of adults — many of them married — who have chosen to have an abortion when facing an unintended pregnancy and "are in a very difficult grieving process."

"A lot of women don't plan because, if you plan, that means you're going to have sex," she said. "And to some that means you're not a good person if you're going to have sex."

Kundert says we need to do more to teach kids to help prevent unintended pregnancies. "We're not talking about it. We're not talking to kids," she said. "And it's not just girls. Boys can be taught to be responsible for their sexual activity. Teach them your family values." She added that young people need "more education, more support and more tools."

"We don't teach them about parenthood or how to negotiate relationships. We need to give more information. There's porn and sex everywhere, but no one is really talking about it honestly."

Susan Parker, 42, Davenport

Susan Parker knew her father would be furious when she told him she was pregnant at age 19.

But she didn't expect what happened next.

"My dad is 7-foot-tall," she said. "When I told him, he ripped a phone book in half — right in half."

The retired pastor's feelings mellowed over the years as she gave birth five times between the ages of 19 and 27.

Parker said she grew up in the spotlight, always feeling like everyone expected her to be a good girl as "the pastor's daughter." But when she got a taste of freedom at college, the Davenport woman said she "had gone wild, basically."

She experienced a succession of unplanned pregnancies. She lost twins through a miscarriage during that time, she said. She never married.

"So I have to live with that," she added. "I use that as a testimony to others."

Parker said she talks frankly to her children and works with young people through her church, teaching them lessons she has learned.

She is a single parent only in name, Parker added. Her father and brothers have served as important father figures for her children, and her own parents had been married 42 years when her mother died two years ago, she said.

Four of her children now attend college. Her youngest, 15, is a student at Central High School in Davenport. One of her sons, in his 20s, is an unmarried father himself.

But Parker, who works as an administrative assistant at United Neighbors in Davenport, refuses to believe she has begun a cycle that cannot be broken. She said she has taught her children to be responsible for their actions.

"I think not only in the schools but in churches, we need to talk about it," she said. "I have an open line of communication with my kids. It would be very naïve of me to say, 'Don't have sex.' But let's talk about what happens when you do have sex. If you do, who's going to baby-sit?"

Rep. Linda Miller, R-Bettendorf, 60

Linda Miller still remembers the moment she heard the shocking news.

She wasn't having one baby as planned.

She was having three: triplet girls, who are now 25 years old.

"I was mad," she said. "I was 35 years old. That set me back."

Miller, who now serves as a Republican state legislator representing Bettendorf, said she was working as a nurse at the time. It was a second marriage for both Miller and her husband, a family-practice physician.

Between the two of them, they already had three children, 9, 12 and 13 years old. "And my husband said, 'What would one more little baby hurt?' " she said.

So, Miller went through a reversal of her tubal ligation (commonly known as "having your tubes tied" to prevent pregnancy) and fertility treatments, and then ended up with the triplets.

As she talked about her daughters, Miller said one of the triplets was in labor at that very moment in Kansas City, giving birth to a granddaughter.

Despite having "all the sex talk with them," Miller said that particular daughter, who was unmarried at the time, came to her nine months ago and said she was pregnant.

“She said, ‘And guess what? It was planned,’ ” Miller added.

Miller’s next question was: “And you’re getting married, right?”

“So we did do the wedding thing, too,” she said.

Jackie Baumgarten, 52, Bettendorf

Jackie Baumgarten can’t remember ever talking about it before they got married, and they dated for five years.

Yet she and her husband ended up having three children.

Why three? She doesn’t know why they stopped having children.

They never really talked about it, she admitted, sounding almost apologetic.

“I was an only child. I assumed I’d never have children,” she said. “He grew up in a family of three. He assumed he’d have three children.”

“We didn’t plan, we didn’t talk,” she added. “It was opportunity and hormones.”

After they married, her husband began lobbying to have children.

“He was very persuasive,” she said. “I thought, ‘Well, how bad could it be?’ ”

She agreed to have a child and soon gave birth to a son. She immediately fell “so in love with this child,” she said.

Within another year, they had a second child. Again, she figured, “Why not?”

“My friends were having babies,” she said. “My husband said, ‘Let’s have a third.’ I thought, ‘OK, I’m not doing anything else. We’ll have a third.’ ”

She still does not work outside the home, Baumgarten said, although the youngest child recently left for college. Her children are now 24, 22 and 19 years old.

“When my kids were teens, I said this was a real mistake. They were awful. I meant it,” she said. “If I had known how well they were going to turn out, I would have had three more.”

FOR MORE INFO

The Iowa Initiative is a program that aims to reduce the high rate of unintended pregnancy among Iowa women 18-30 years old through networking, research and public outreach.

The goal is to make this topic a “mainstream, Main Street conversation,” according to the program’s Web site at iowainitiative.org.

Program officials, including former Iowa first lady Christie Vilsack, are traveling the state to spark such conversations, with plans to even begin networking via hairstylists as a means of passing on information about family planning services across the state.

The Iowa Initiative’s research work is conducted in conjunction with the University of Northern Iowa, [University of Iowa](http://www.uni.edu) and University of Alabama-Birmingham. It includes five studies designed to increase knowledge, persuade adult women to seek and access contraception if they wish to delay or prevent pregnancy, and to improve contraceptive behaviors.

SHARE YOUR STORIES

Please join the community conversation about family planning by sharing your own stories.

How did you end up with the children you have, or don’t have? Did you carefully plan whether to have children and when, or did you just “end up” with them in your family?

To add your story to our print and online coverage of this continuing periodic series, contact Kay Luna.

Kay Luna can be contacted at (563) 383-2323 or kluna@gctimes.com. Comment on this story at gctimes.com.