

As a child and young adult, I never felt a strong desire to become a mother one day. All I thought about was being a career woman, and maybe that was due to my upbringing in an extremely conservative Christian religion that ingrained the idea in me at an early age that my sole purpose on earth was to have children. But I denounced those teachings because the role of parenthood just didn't feel like my calling in life.

And then I had my first abortion. That was an easy decision when I was unexpectedly pregnant in my mid-20s. There was no guilt and no shame. But going through that experience opened me up to the idea of parenthood, and soon after, I chose to have my first child with the partner I was in a relationship with then.

After the birth of my first child, the physical demands on my body were intense. I quickly fell into postpartum depression and anxiety and realized that I did not have a supportive partner in this parenthood journey. I had given up work to be a stay-at-home parent and had trusted my partner with financial support for our new family. I had a long physical recovery ahead of me after a 30-hour labor. It took nearly one year for my body to heal and return to a pre-pregnancy functioning state.

Although I had planned this pregnancy, the experience of having a child for the first time was isolating. What we hope for in choosing to birth is that we will have a village of support, yet so much of what is needed to truly feel supported in this society as a birthing person is unaffordable, inaccessible, and is disregarded without consideration for the well-being of pregnant and birthing people.

Unexpectedly, I found myself living in domestic abuse while I was still in postpartum recovery. My partner continually reminded me then that because I wasn't out in the workforce bringing home money, my labor as a stay-at-home mother had no value. This perspective, usually mostly male, mirrors the societal narrative this country has created and normalized for stay-at-home parents. There are no labor protections for those who choose, or are forced, to stay at home and take on the most physically challenging, emotionally and mentally draining labor of raising children. Because there are no protections, this leaves pregnant and birthing people vulnerable to abuse. It is inhumane to force someone to carry a pregnancy to birth and then be expected to take on such labor and responsibilities.

By the time I was pregnant again and moving forward with having a second child, my toddler and I were living in a very hostile and violent environment. The times I felt safest in my own home were when my partner was not at home. Parenthood was still a struggle. I was still navigating postpartum depression. I was trying to be present, connect with my child, and be a good mother, but it's really overwhelming to focus on anything when you don't feel safe in your own home.

The entirety of the pregnancy of my second child was interconnected with living in domestic violence. I was living with a high state of stress, constantly worried for the safety of my toddler and my pregnant self. I felt extremely vulnerable, and not just in a physical sense but

emotionally and mentally as well. Every day of that pregnancy, my mental state and physical body lived in fight or flight mode with high cortisol levels and chronic stress. Those are not the conditions pregnant people should be in. I could not foresee that as a possible pregnancy experience, yet it was my reality. People who live in domestic violence or are actively experiencing intimate partner violence are often not aware of the subtle build-up of harm until they are deeply entrenched and stuck.

I had a pivotal turning point in that pregnancy. I had been in survival mode for so long, and during an intense conflict with my partner that had me feeling very unsafe, I had scooped up my toddler and locked ourselves in the bathroom to protect us. I crouched down with my big, pregnant belly to hug my child and cover his ears to block out the aggressive, consistent yelling and anger that was on the other side of that door. It felt like we had been locked in that bathroom for so long. It was at that moment that I was able to name what I had been feeling - I did not want to be alive anymore and continue living like this. But I looked at my toddler, and also, knowing I was pregnant and wanting to keep and birth this pregnancy, I knew at the very least I had to stay alive to protect them.

During this pregnancy, I began volunteering with the Abortion Fund of Arizona as an outlet to escape my reality. After learning about their mission to support and advocate for pregnant people seeking abortion care, I threw myself into volunteer work, believing that if I couldn't help myself, I would at least try to help someone else. My first role was returning phone calls from pregnant people who called in requesting financial support to pay for an abortion they could not afford as an out-of-pocket expense. I identified with these callers because of my own abortion experience and needing financial support then.

In my conversations with abortion seekers, I quickly discovered that some of the pregnant people who were calling the helpline were experiencing their own situations of violence and abuse. I knew in those conversations and hearing their stories that having an abortion might be their ticket to freedom. That for them, it might be the opportunity to escape a lifetime connection to violence and trauma through having children with abusive partners. I chose to keep my two pregnancies and chose to have my children while not fully knowing and understanding the circumstances I would be forever attached to and trapped in. And still, no one should be forced to carry their pregnancy to term and stay in situations that they don't want for themselves. And we, as the population of people with the capability of becoming pregnant, should never need to experience violence to validate deciding to have an abortion.

I have now had four abortions, and I am grateful, and honor, and celebrate each one. They have all provided me the freedom to define my future and life path moving forward with the family I have built to pursue my goals and dreams for myself and my existing children. The freedom of not being attached to another person through children. That is the outcome of having children. Whether you recognize it or not, you become attached to the other person who contributed to the pregnancy when you have a child.

In 2019, I finally had the courage to leave my abusive partner and violent circumstances. That was not the experience of life I wanted to continue living and especially have my children witness and grow up in. And I owe this courage to the work of reproductive justice. I often proudly share that volunteering with the Abortion Fund of Arizona and helping others access abortion care is what truly saved my life from my past circumstances. The abortion fund community across the country and in Mexico are some of the most beautifully compassionate human beings I have ever met and have had the great privilege of working alongside.

Funding abortion care and serving pregnant people in Arizona is what helped me build community with others. I found the village of support I had been longing for.

I am now in my sixth year of serving as the executive director of the Abortion Fund of Arizona and Pro-Choice Arizona, and I'm proud to say that our organization has supported nearly 3,000 abortion seekers since 2017. We are a grassroots, community-based organization powered by our own community, volunteers, and four staff members. We are grateful that community members and foundations continue to invest in our work, recognizing the critical need to keep our fund sustainable.

We have witnessed amazing creativity from folks who organize fundraisers on our behalf, including local bands donating their concert proceeds, small businesses donating a portion of their sale profits, artists creating artwork to elevate reproductive justice and abortion access, and nationally recognized musicians coming through our state and donating to our fund. Amidst all the anti-abortion attacks, we are thriving because of our communities, who deeply support, invest, and believe in our work. In 2023, our fund pledged nearly \$300,000 to support 861 abortion patients with their abortion care and logistical arrangements.

For more than 30 years, abortion funds have provided direct assistance like financial support, transportation, child care, translation services, doula support, and a place to sleep for people who can't afford the cost of their abortion or the expenses that they're forced to take on when traveling. We have built a robust infrastructure of support for our communities as racist, oppressive systems seek to control our bodies, lives, and futures.

Now, after the 2022 Dobbs decision, the availability and accessibility of abortion care and maternal health services vary from state to state, creating a disproportionate healthcare system serving pregnant people across the country. Reproductive healthcare and abortion access in the South have essentially been demolished. And we know that is fueled by white supremacy and racism. Communities of color, low-income people, non-binary and trans people, and those living in rural parts of our state and across the country face the most barriers to accessing abortion care.

In Arizona, after Dobbs, we immediately experienced the revival of an 1864 abortion ban that originally criminalized the pregnant person, the provider, and anyone else who supported or aided the pregnant person with procuring a miscarriage. Not only was the language so vague, state advocates could only assume the use of miscarriage implied abortion. The efforts to revive

this antiquated abortion ban confirmed to us all that the anti-abortion opposition will stop at nothing in their attempts to strip us of our freedoms and control our bodies, our gender identities, and our reproductive outcomes.

Our fund was prepared to handle the influx of callers we anticipated receiving due to the legal confusion and uncertainty of abortion laws in our state. From June 2022 to May 2024, our fund has pledged over \$569,000 to help people access abortion care wherever they needed to go, whether it was in-state while Arizona had legal access or out-of-state when the state ban was in effect.

I had my fourth abortion this past April, right before the Arizona Supreme Court had announced they would uphold the 1864 ban—no shame about my decision, no guilt. But what I did feel was fear for all pregnant people who live under oppressive abortion bans and restrictions. I felt saddened at knowing so many people are criminalized for their pregnancy outcomes, that so many people have to travel hundreds of miles to access medication abortion, which I can pick up at the clinic in my city and take in the privacy and comfort of my own home. Reinstating the 1864 abortion ban and then hearing our courts uphold such an appalling law surfaced immense concern and fear that one day I might have to risk criminalization in exchange for the autonomy of my body. I am committed to doing everything in my power not to be forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy and give birth.

What the current legal landscape of abortion and reproductive healthcare tells us is that we must do more. We need lasting solutions to the growing abortion access crisis to ensure all people have the autonomy and resources to care for and affirm their bodies, identities, and health for themselves and their families. We need to accept and understand that every pregnancy experience is unique; therefore, we need access to unrestricted abortion care. We need to support later abortion patients further along in pregnancy who are also facing immense circumstances. They deserve abortion access, too. Gestational restrictions harm our communities, and limiting abortion care or creating exceptions for anyone, especially those who are navigating overlapping systems of oppression, fuels abortion stigma and shame.

Abortion funds know firsthand that the legal right to abortion established in *Roe v. Wade* was never enough. This moment demands that elected officials listen to the decades of experience that abortion funds have and dream bigger with us so that we can ultimately build and achieve a future where all of us, whoever we are, wherever we live, and however much money we have can not only survive but thrive.

Knowing that every day, there are so many pregnant people across this country who need to access abortion care is what keeps me rooted in advocacy for reproductive justice, and that includes pregnancy, birth, and family justice and abortion access. It's all maternal healthcare.

In Arizona, we have inadequate maternal healthcare infrastructure, and our rural communities and Indigenous and Native people living on the reservation lands are suffering from a lack of access to hospitals with maternity services. We have two counties with no maternal health

infrastructure and then four other counties with very limited maternal health infrastructure. I have the privilege of serving on the Arizona Department of Health's Maternal Mortality Review Committee in both a patient advisory role on domestic violence and as a representative of an abortion access organization, and one of the top data markers we find in cases we review is the lack of access to maternal healthcare resources and support. The top two leading factors of maternal death are mental health and substance use. We need to invest in all areas of maternal and reproductive healthcare to support pregnant people in this country truly. Policies and laws cannot continue to be viewed as one-size-fits-all standards. These are unacceptable standards for our country's maternal healthcare system, which, historically, has already been failing pregnant people.

Sharing my story with others has been part of my own healing journey. I want to shed light on the experiences that are too subtle to notice. I want to normalize the nuances of pregnancy experiences and that every person deserves access to pregnancy support and abortion care.

Thank you,  
Eloisa Lopez