



The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir

By Gaby Rodriguez

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When Gaby faked a pregnancy to challenge stereotypes, she also changed her life. A compelling memoir from an inspirational teenage activist.

Growing up, Gaby Rodriguez was often told she would end up a teen mom. After all, her mother and her older sisters had gotten pregnant as teenagers; from an outsider's perspective, it was practically a family tradition. Gaby had ambitions that didn't include teen motherhood. But she wondered: how would she be treated if she "lived down" to others' expectations? Would everyone ignore the years she put into being a good student and see her as just another pregnant teen statistic with no future? These questions sparked Gaby's high school senior project: faking her own pregnancy to see how her family, friends, and community would react. What she learned changed her life forever—and made international headlines in the process.

In *The Pregnancy Project*, Gaby details how she was able to fake her own pregnancy—hiding the truth from even her siblings and boyfriend's parents—and reveals all that she learned from the experience. But more than that, Gaby's story is about fighting stereotypes, and how one girl found the strength to come out from the shadow of low expectations to forge a bright future for herself.

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The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir By Gaby Rodriguez Bibliography

- Rank: #172690 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-01-17
- Released on: 2012-01-17
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

“...Gaby’s story is vividly told with a strong voice and a great story arc that begins with her parents and ends with a call to other teens and adults to stop the cycle of teen pregnancy, motherhood and poverty. THE PREGNANCY PROJECT is not just a good read, but an important one as well.” – BookReporter.com

About the Author

Gaby Rodriguez made national headlines in 2011 when, as a seventeen-year-old high school senior from Toppenish, Washington, she revealed she had faked a pregnancy for a class project. Her experience inspired a Lifetime movie, also titled *The Pregnancy Project*. Her grades were in the top 5 percent of her graduating class, and she was a commencement speaker. She was also in the ASB Leadership group and president of the school’s chapter of M.E.Ch.A (Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlan: Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan). She was raised by her single mom and has seven brothers and sisters. She is currently attending college.

?Jenna Glatzer wrote the text of *Celine Dion*, which is produced by becker&mayer. Jenna is the author of 11 books and countless articles in national, regional, and online publications. The writer recently worked extensively with Jamie Blyth of *The Bachelorette* on Blyth’s autobiography. Jenna operates several writing-related businesses, frequently appears as a guest on radio and television shows, and is a columnist for both MSN.com and Match.com.

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The Pregnancy Project

CHAPTER 1 BEFORE THERE WAS ME

For a moment, I understood just what it must be like to be a celebrity caught in the middle of a scandal. There I was, on a senior class field trip, in disguise, and running away from a reporter and cameraman who had followed me, trying to sneak a quote out of me for their story. That’s because I’m The Girl Who Faked Her Own Pregnancy as a Senior Project. Okay, it’s not an official title, but it might as well be. Overnight I went from being just another unknown seventeen-year-old girl in small-town Washington State to an international media sensation. It was weird.

Weird and scary.

I sure hadn’t planned on any of it. When Good Morning America called my school looking for me while I was in the midst of juggling four other interviews, I ran out the back door crying. Who was I to be on national television? And it wasn’t just Good Morning America—all the major television networks in the United States, plus some international ones, wanted to send film crews out to my little hometown to talk to me. Three of them came to my school to give presentations and try to woo me for my first “exclusive.” And in addition to the news programs, there were also movie producers, talk-show hosts, radio producers, newspaper and magazine editors, book publishers. . . . My principal nearly went out of his mind trying to keep up with the calls that had resulted from my project.

They all wanted to ask the same questions: Why did you do it? You really didn't tell your boyfriend's parents? What do you think of shows like Teen Mom and 16 and Pregnant? What's your message?

I worried about saying the wrong things. I worried I would be misinterpreted or misquoted or just plain misunderstood. I didn't know how to turn my message into a sound bite for the media—how do you explain a lifetime in just a sentence or two?

Because that's what it was, really. This wasn't merely a senior project that I picked out of a hat, hoping for a good grade and the chance to go on The Today Show. It was something that reflected a major issue in my family, which started with my mom decades before I was born. And if you're going to understand my story, I first need to tell you about my family and where I grew up.

My mother is a superhero. I know this because I've seen her in action, under the hood of a car that is probably better suited for the junkyard than the highway. She learned how to fix cars by watching mechanic shows on television and by studying what other people did when they worked on their cars. That's how she figured out how to fix washing machines and other appliances around the house, too. Even when she was eight months pregnant with me, she was rolling herself underneath a car to fix something or other, because that's what needed to be done. Give her enough time and she can figure out nearly anything.

She didn't learn these skills in school—she dropped out when she became pregnant in the eighth grade, at age fourteen. I learned that when I was in about the seventh grade, and it seemed unreal to me. I'm just a kid, I thought. How could she have had a baby when she was just one grade above me?

I always knew my mother had been young when she had her first child, but I never did the math, never realized that she was in middle school. And when she first told me she had Nievitas at fifteen, I assumed that meant she got pregnant when she was fifteen. Then she corrected me and said she got pregnant when she was fourteen, and for some reason that pushed it over the edge for me. Fifteen was still a couple of years away, but fourteen was too close for comfort. Some of my friends were fourteen. Picturing them with babies was crazy.

"I made a mistake," my mother said. "But Gaby, this is not a road I want you to go down. This is not an option for you. You have a good life ahead of you, and I want you to wait until you're ready before you have kids. Focus on school and think about relationships later."

I was listening, but also distracted by the implications of what she was telling me about her life. It's hard for me to even think about how she coped. In middle school, I was just starting to figure out who I was; I was thinking about my schoolwork and my friends and sports and what I might like to do with my future. My mother had to think about what time the baby had her last feeding, whether they had enough diapers in the house, and scheduling doctor visits for immunizations and check-ups. She didn't have her own life anymore. Motherhood swallowed her up.

The summer before I took sex ed class in middle school, my mom decided to tell me the whole story. We had looked over my upcoming curriculum together, and my mom had to sign off on a note saying that she acknowledged that I would be taking sex ed as part of my health and fitness class the following year. I wondered aloud what they would teach us. She figured they'd probably talk to us about abstinence and protecting yourself from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and that led into the first of our frank talks about her past. I'm not sure anymore whether she started the conversation or I did; whenever I had questions, she always respected me enough to answer honestly, but she tried to protect my feelings by not sharing some of the more difficult details until she felt I was ready to hear them.

Her father had died of cancer when she was eight years old, and she was the second-oldest in a family of eight kids. There would have been ten, but one of my grandmother's pregnancies ended in miscarriage, and another baby was premature and died in infancy. Three girls and five boys remained. After her father's death, her mother reared all the kids alone, and she was deeply disappointed when my mother got pregnant at such an early age. My mom cared very much what her mother thought, especially because that was the only parent she had left.

Because her mother wouldn't have it any other way, my mother explained, she married the boy who impregnated her. Secretly she hoped he would move back to Mexico so she'd be relieved of her duty to stay with him, but he stuck around and decided he liked the idea of having a wife to do the chores for him and be at his beck and call in the bedroom. Although she wanted to go back to school, he wouldn't let her. Instead, she went to work at a potato plant warehouse. He worked in the fields driving tractors and trucks, a job that usually went to illegal immigrants, though he was a citizen. They had seven children together over the course of their sixteen-year marriage—all my brothers and sisters, but not me. I wasn't born until years later.

Three girls and four boys. In birth order, they are: Nievitas, Genaro, Sonya, Javier, Fabian, Tony, and Jessica.

There were lots of physical fights between my mom and her husband, her husband and the kids, and between the kids themselves. One story my siblings told me that always stands out in my mind is about a fight that started when their dad was at work and my mother decided to run to the grocery store, leaving the older kids in charge of the younger kids. After all, the older ones were teenagers, and all the kids were just sitting in the living room watching television when she left. She figured she would be gone a short time, so what could go wrong?

Jessica, the youngest, was four or five at the time. She was sitting on the windowsill, watching the cars go by and waiting for Mom to come home. When she got up to go to the bathroom, she didn't want to lose her good spot, so she threatened Fabian: "If you're sitting in my spot when I get back, I'm going to get a gun and shoot you."

Guess he didn't take her at face value.

She came back and, sure enough, he was sitting in her spot. So she went off to her oldest brother's room, got his BB gun, pointed it at Fabian's face, and shot him in the eye.

My mother and their father came home at the same time and saw this horrible scene. My mother ran to Fabian to look at the damage, and their father took the BB gun and cracked it over Genaro's head.

He didn't want to blame Jessica—she was the baby of the family, after all—so he blamed Genaro for having the gun in the house to begin with. Beating on Genaro came before taking Fabian to the hospital. He's still partially blind in that eye to this day.

My mother is a gentle woman who was raised by a gentle woman, but the abuse didn't cause her to leave. Her husband was the only real boyfriend she'd ever had, considering she got pregnant at fourteen. She had such little life experience and relationship experience; she didn't know what was normal and acceptable, and she didn't feel like she had a choice. Her mother made her feel like she had to stick it out no matter what because she got pregnant. So for many years, she just accepted that this mistake was going to cost her the rest of her life.

I think that if she had waited until she was older to get married and have kids, she would have had a very different perspective. She would have been able to stand up for herself, and she would have had the confidence to know she could make it on her own if she needed to.

After sixteen years, the rumors started getting to her—word around the neighborhood was that her husband was being unfaithful to her. At first she brushed the gossip aside. What did these busybodies know, anyway?

But then there were little signs . . . his clothes in the laundry would smell of perfume that wasn't hers, or he'd come home later at night. When she saw him driving his work van past the house at a time when he was supposed to be elsewhere, she decided to follow him in the family station wagon . . . a bold move for a woman who had been taught to obey her man without question.

The car parked in an unfamiliar place: a local bar. My mother had never been in a bar in her life, and had no idea that her husband ever frequented them, either. He drank plenty, openly and in front of the kids, but she didn't know he went out to places like this. She walked into the dimly lit room, and there he was—with his arm around a woman, sharing a beer with her.

My mother approached him, her body stiff with shock.

“What are you doing here?” she asked him.

He looked up, dropped his hold on the other woman, and yelled, “You’re following me now? What do you think you’re doing? You go home right now, and don’t you ever come following me again!”

All the bad names she could call him raced through her mind. Part of her wanted to scream at him, humiliate him, but she held back. She just stared at him, nodded, and left him there with that woman, whoever she was.

He’s worth nothing, she thought.

But a short time later, he came home acting repentant, got on his knees, and begged her forgiveness. He had just been shocked to see her there, he said, and he was sorry, and it wouldn’t happen again. With seven kids to care for, she agreed to give him another chance.

Weeks later, he tried to commit suicide. He blamed it on her, saying that he had cheated because he thought she was cheating. They got into fights that involved the police. Then she contracted a sexually transmitted disease from him, and she decided she’d had enough. She’d put up with the drinking and the abuse and the way he treated her like his personal servant, but she drew the line at cheating. She told him she wanted a divorce.

They raced each other to the courthouse, with him speeding about a hundred miles per hour down the freeway while she tried to catch up. But he got there first and filled out the paperwork. He wanted to be sure that he was divorcing her and not the other way around. He also filed a petition for full custody of the kids and got a court order forcing her to leave the house—a trailer home they owned. He wouldn’t let her take the kids with her, which she thought was just his way of punishing her.

She had no idea what he said or did to get the order that kept her out of the house. She moved back in with her mother and waited for the court date so a judge could straighten this out. It worried her to leave her kids with him alone, but every time she tried to see them, he’d call the police to have her thrown off the property.

What happened next is hard for her to talk about, and I don't press the issue much. You could certainly say she'd made her share of mistakes before, but this mistake would haunt her the rest of her life.

She couldn't afford an attorney, but she didn't think she'd need one anyway. There wasn't much to split or to talk about, as far as she figured it—but he figured differently. He hired a ruthless attorney and had his brother come talk to the judge about what an unfit mother she was. It stunned her that this brother would say such things about her when she had devoted her life to her family, but he twisted tales to make her sound neglectful. And her ex spun the story about how he kicked her out of the house and made her leave the kids behind into "She abandoned them."

Not only did the judge buy it, but he ordered my mother out of the house permanently, with nothing whatsoever except the clothes on her back. She was to leave immediately, with no money, no car, no possessions—and she would have to pay him child support because he would have custody of the kids.

From the courthouse, she had to drive the kids back to their father's home, and she cried most of the way. She didn't know how to explain to them what had gone wrong and why she had to leave them. Her visitation time was limited to three hours a week, on Mondays from six to nine p.m. Every time she tried to visit more than that, he said he would call the police.

To make matters worse, her ex's brother, who had testified against her in court, was married to my mother's sister. Although her sister wanted to be supportive, it wasn't possible for my mother to fully trust her again. She was on "the other team" now. On the other hand, several members of his family would still visit her or talk sweetly to her when they ran into her, telling her that they loved her and would rather have her in their family than him. They knew what his temper was like, and they didn't approve of the way he'd cheated on her.

Seasonally, she worked at Snokist, a fruit production warehouse that canned apples, pears, cherries, and prunes; the rest of the time, she got by on welfare checks. She felt completely lost and had no idea what steps to take.

Please, God, lift me up, she prayed. This can't be my life.

When a friend offered her a chance to tag along with him to Montana, she accepted. She wanted time away to clear her mind and figure out how to get on her feet again and get her kids back. After sixteen years of caring for others—her entire adult life, plus some—she had no idea how to care for herself. Her world had been very small, and she was naïve to the way the legal system worked. All she knew was that a judge had ruled that she couldn't see her kids.

It was around October, and there was black ice all over the mountain roads as she drove the friend's car toward Montana. My mother had never had any kind of experience driving on ice. On a downhill slope, the car accelerated faster and faster, out of control, and slid from side to side. She jerked the wheel to try to regain control, but it had the opposite effect. In a terrifying second, the car hit the median and started rolling over onto the passenger side. Her scared friend tried to jump out of the car, but his head got caught and he slid on his face across the pavement. Most of the skin was ripped off his face, and he moaned in pain.

Don't die. Please, not like this, she thought.

She was trapped in the car, honking the horn and praying that someone would hear. Someone did. It turned out that there had already been five accidents on the road that day. Rescuers in a semitruck broke a window

to reach her, then laid her down in the truck and started driving away.

“No, I can’t leave! You have to get him out first!” she said, but they insisted on getting her to a hospital and promised they would get him help quickly. At the hospital, she found out her friend had died. Maybe the rescuers had realized that at the scene and were trying to spare her from finding out right away.

Now she was terrified to face her family, and the ex-husband who had just taken away their children. How was she going to live with herself? What would they say about her?

More lost than ever, she spoke to another friend, who asked her, “What do you want to do? Do you want to go back home or keep moving?”

“I want to move forward,” she said. He was about to move to Kansas, where he had some family, and he offered to take her. My grandmother had lived in Kansas for a short period of time when she was younger, and had always told my mom that it was really pretty there. So my mom went with him and found work as a waitress in a restaurant. After several months, the friend told her he was in love with her and wanted to be her boyfriend. She was surprised, but accepted. They stayed together, and every couple of months she’d have enough money to go back and visit her kids. Each time, she tried to bring them back with her, but her ex would not allow her to.

Then one day came when she checked the mailbox and found a letter her boyfriend had written, addressed to someone in Mexico. He had forgotten to put a stamp on it, so the mail carrier hadn’t taken it. My mother peeked—and found a letter professing his love to this Mexican woman who was apparently the mother of his children.

“When were you going to tell me about this?” she asked him. But he had no good answer. Realizing that she had nothing to stay for and that her life was in no better shape in Kansas than it had been almost a year earlier when she left Washington, she headed back.

Soon after my mother returned, the kids arrived home from school one day to find their mobile home missing and their belongings packed up and left on the property.

In a hurry, their father had sold the mobile home for \$8,000—far less than it was worth—and decided he was moving to Walla Walla, Washington, with a new girlfriend. Walla Walla is known for its wine, sweet onions, and the largest penitentiary in the state of Washington.

My oldest brother, Genaro, was away in Job Corps, and my oldest sister, Nievitas, had left to live with her boyfriend in their former hometown, Warden, but the rest of them still lived with their dad at the time . . . yet he decided that the only child he wanted to take with him was the youngest, Jessica, who was probably six years old by then. He sent Fabian and Tony to live with their aunt in Oregon, then he handed my second-oldest sister, Sonya, about twenty dollars and told her to take care of her little brother Javier. They had no idea this was going to happen; the first time they realized that they were to be left behind was when they found their bags packed out by the curb that day and their home literally missing.

Why had he taken them away from the mother who wanted them if this was what he would turn around and do less than a year later?

Sonya and Javier had nowhere to go and no phone, so they walked to Nievitas’s house. Luckily they knew the way. My mom found out about all of this when Nievitas called her to say that she was watching over

Sonya and Javier. At that point, the kids didn't really know how to feel about my mother—they'd been told she had left them behind. But Nievitas thought my mother should know what was happening and come get her children.

It had to be done in three stops. My mother first went to Nievitas's house and picked up Sonya and Javier, then headed to her ex-sister-in-law's house to get Fabian and Tony. The ex-sister-in-law readily gave them over to her. She still liked my mother very much and probably didn't want to be involved in this mess to begin with.

The most concerning part, though, was finding Jessica, who she felt would be the most vulnerable, especially because she was separated from her siblings. From the stories they've told me about their father, I can just say that it seems he drank a lot, fought a lot, and had volatile mood swings that worried all of them. The word they've used to describe him is "cruel." But at least until then, they had each other for protection from his anger.

My mother didn't really know where Walla Walla was, much less where Jessica might be in it, but miraculously, as she drove around the first corner in the town, she saw Jessica standing on the street. She was staying at a shelter with her father and his new girlfriend. My mother went to the courthouse and asked for paperwork to modify the custody orders. She didn't want to go back to court, especially since it had gone so wrong for her the first time, but she prepared herself anyway. Thrusting the paperwork at her ex, she said, "I'm going to submit this to the court if you don't give her back to me right now."

Custody was never legally transferred to my mom because she never filed the papers. He gave Jessica up without a fight because he'd been having problems with Jessica's behavior. She was probably the most affected by their divorce. In her mind, then and even now, my mother had abandoned her.

Many of them still feel that way. There's a grudge that's sometimes spoken and sometimes unspoken, but it's always there. She left us. It mostly comes out when they're mad for other reasons. Sometimes that makes her cry. There's nothing she can do to change the past.

It was about a year, all in all, that she was away from them. Following that, except for the two oldest who were off on their own, my mom had her kids back. She tried to figure out a way to support the five of them, plus herself. Since custody wasn't legally hers, she didn't go after child support. They shared a four-bedroom house with her brother, sister-in-law, and their kids in Yakima, Washington. The kids doubled and tripled up in the bedrooms. My mom worked overnight shifts at three factories—and still managed to cook wonderful meals and do the shopping and care for the house and the kids.

Then my oldest sister, Nievitas, announced that she was pregnant.

My mother sank into depression; she didn't want history to repeat itself. At seventeen, Nievitas hadn't graduated from high school yet, and now she probably wouldn't. For a short time, her boyfriend stuck around. Then he was gone, and my mother had to pick up the slack. She thought she was done taking care of babies . . . but she wasn't—not by a long shot.

A year after Nievitas had her daughter, a bigger shock came along.

Me.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Willard Callahan:

Now a day folks who Living in the era just where everything reachable by match the internet and the resources included can be true or not involve people to be aware of each data they get. How people have to be smart in acquiring any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Studying a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information specifically this The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir book because book offers you rich data and knowledge. Of course the knowledge in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you know.

Elida Allman:

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the water world or hanging out with friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, in that case why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. 1 activity that make you not experiencing tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition info. Even you love The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir, it is possible to enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout men. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its called reading friends.

Dolores Mika:

In this era which is the greater individual or who has ability in doing something more are more valuable than other. Do you want to become one among it? It is just simple approach to have that. What you should do is just spending your time little but quite enough to enjoy a look at some books. On the list of books in the top listing in your reading list is actually The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir. This book which is qualified as The Hungry Hillsides can get you closer in growing to be precious person. By looking upward and review this guide you can get many advantages.

Ana May:

As a scholar exactly feel bored for you to reading. If their teacher asked them to go to the library as well as to make summary for some guide, they are complained. Just minor students that has reading's heart and soul or real their hobby. They just do what the instructor want, like asked to the library. They go to at this time there but nothing reading very seriously. Any students feel that reading is not important, boring and also can't see colorful images on there. Yeah, it is for being complicated. Book is very important for you personally. As we know that on this age, many ways to get whatever we want. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore , this The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir can make you sense more interested to read.

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