

"I had in my heart a burning desire to open a home for pregnant teenagers but had absolutely no idea how to get started. I went to several 'self help' courses but found that although I learnt a great deal I was no step closer to 'releasing' my dream.

I met with Nina over coffee and we talked about my plans and dreams and she asked me questions that got me thinking. Words cannot describe the journey that Nina has taken me on, I went to her a confused, unfocused person with a great goal and vision beyond my wildest dream...

My achievements in these last nine months could not be done without her help. I do not hesitate to recommend her and her work to anyone who decides to use her services. She delivers on every promise she sets out." Pru Renders - Sept 2008

The challenges of being a teenage parent – My Story

Shock and disbelief was my initial reaction to the news I heard, pregnant me? Never? Denial, how could that be? When? how? Then fear and terror as I thought about telling my parents. What would I say, what would they do, how would they react. Rejection and humiliation were my constant companions when I told the father of my baby as he refused to have anything to do with me. Being pregnant at 16 is never an easy thing. Not only coping with changes of being a teenager, peer pressure and schoolwork but also having to cope with changes in my body and the prospect that I was bringing a life into this world that would be my responsibility was overwhelming and exciting. The baby would be mine, a little person that would depend on me for its very survival.

Once my parents found out they were very disappointed and let me know what level of shame I had brought upon them. My friends mums stopped them associating with me like I had some sort of plague.

I was forced to go and live with my aunt way out away from everyone in the last trimester of my pregnancy and I was taunted and told I would never amount to anything. People say that sticks and stones break ones bones but words will never harm... How wrong they were... the words spoken over my life were demeaning and demotivating, I lived with a constant feeling of failure, I was looked down upon with scorn and contempt and was not allowed to contribute to any meaningful conversation, everything I said was twisted around and used against me, I constantly felt rejected, belittled and humiliated. I had almost no support from the baby's father and his family accused me of bringing disgrace to their family, saying I should've

known better. Having no emotional support was the worst thing, my family didn't want to have anything to do with me, I was unemployed and had minimal education and did not at that stage qualify to get a job.

My daily survival was at the mercy of my aunt and her household. But I got through it in the end. Just feeling that the baby was growing and that I could talk to it made all the difference in the world.

Being a teenage mum is one thing, but having to go through a caesarean is another, trying to cope with a small baby, having no help, no one to teach or guide you and trying to walk proved very difficult. Once I went back to my aunts house I had to think of looking for a job to support the baby. No one wanted to employ a young mother whose baby was only 10 days old so all the doors I knocked on were firmly shut in my face. So many things to learn and so little time to learn them, everyone had their own ideas of how I should look after the baby and most days I would be confused and in trouble with what I had done. My daily routine went something like this

Get up at 5am, wash by hand and hang up towel napkins (these had to always be sparkling white with no help of bleach)

Prepare baby's bottles for the next two feeds and wash the night bottles

Prepare baby's bath water and clothes and then bath her, feed her and put her back to sleep

By this time everyone would be awake and I would have to clean my room, tidy up and do my share of the chores

When I felt as though I could grab a few minutes shut eye the baby would be up and need changing and feeding and then would take forever to sleep.

By the time she settled down it would be time to iron her clothes from the morning and wash the morning nappies.

By 7pm I would be exhausted and just have time to have a quick bath and the routine would start all over again....

I remember the time I had milk fever, my breasts were swollen and I was running a high temperature. The baby was constantly crying and all I wanted to do was fall into a crumpled heap on the floor and just lay there and not care. I was depressed, had no help and no money. Each time the milk would run out I would have to make a phone call to the baby's father to ask for money, he would bring one tin at a time. I was frustrated and angry at the world...why me...why us.....

Not everyone was bad, there were those good people who brought me clothes for the baby and a food basket and those who never said anything but I could see they wished me strength and that this was not the end of the world.....

Looking for a job was the worst, I would get up early leave the baby with mum, walk into every shop asking for work, apply at every agency and be told the same thing... I had no experience....I would come home exhausted and have to look after the baby. No time with friends, no me time, no rest. I used to love going to the disco, ice skating, meeting my friends for lunch, going to the mall and cinema... all that was over now. I had to stay at home and take care of the baby. I finally got a job when the baby was 10 months old. It used to take me two hours to walk to work and to walk back home but I knew if I could just learn this job it wouldn't be for long. When I got my first pay cheque, I couldn't go and spend it on myself I had to buy her clothes and food and laundry stuff and pay for my lodgings. I learnt how to budget money early and how to compromise. Somehow in the clouds a silver lining always appeared....

- ❖ Comparing yesteryear with today I see the opportunities that are available for teenage mothers, there are so many network supports, people who run workshops to teach basic things such as how to prepare a bottle, how to change a nappy. That when baby is teething its not the end of the world. The government offers to help by giving advice and free courses. There is a Young Women's Antenatal Clinic available; they deal with everything from after birth contraception to mental illness including baby blues. Information about returning to education, starting training or finding a job is available. After the baby arrives, you will find that household expenses go through the roof with the additional costs of baby food, diapers, clothes, furniture and other necessities, but we are fortunate in this day and age to have the government give some money in terms of benefits for the baby, so Finances, Benefits and Budgeting are given. There is also assistance in Childcare and housing which is made available even though one may have to wait for it. If you need to attend an interview a baby sitter can be arranged for you. The world today has changed so much from the time I had my baby .

As my daughter grew, I grew, I learned patience, I learned unconditional love, I learned that you can't force people to love you or believe in you, you have to do that for yourself, I learned that anything you want you have to work for and get it for

yourself. I learned that people will have their own opinions of you and what you should do. But its what you think of yourself that matters. Going through the experience I thought the world was against me, I felt as though I was alone and that no one cared. But through it all I learned the experience of life.

Looking back now as an adult I can understand why my parents were so upset, I can relate to their disappointment, heartache and concern. Feelings of anger, betrayal and distrust must've been in their hearts and they were pained by the fact that their daughter traded a promising future for a moment of pleasure. I can see the hopes and dreams my parents had for me. I know now that every parent of a teenage daughter dreams of the day when his or her daughter moves from high school, to college, and then graduates from University, they look forward to the day she walks down the aisle on her wedding day and then lovingly cuddles her first child. Parents don't expect to be rudely awakened from their reverie by their teenage daughter uttering the dream-shattering words, "Mom, Dad. I'm pregnant."

I can see now that those who were hardest on me had expected more from me and maybe if I had been an adult in their shoes back then I would've reacted the same way. I see my children as teenagers now and I want the best for them. I want them to grow and develop and become the best they can be and I guess as parents we can be harsh and give tough love only because we want to guide our kids on the right path.

Today I am a qualified PA, I work for a large organisation. I had to work myself up from being a shoe sales assistant in a shoe shop, through being a switchboard operator, receptionist, pool secretary, junior secretary, secretary, senior secretary, Executive secretary, Personal Assistant. I have worked in various industries and organisations, I've had to go back to school, learn some development courses, learn how to deal with my emotions and overcome some hurdles. Its been a long journey getting here and it hasn't been easy but its been worth it. The little girl who was born to a teenage mum is well balanced, educated and has a goal and purpose set out ahead of her. She has a wonderful personality and has great love. All in all I have 3 children who are in various stages of growing up, I always encourage them to be the best in everything they set their heart to do.

I know that there are social service agencies around the country that are willing to give young mothers a helping hand to better themselves and to provide a decent life

for their children. I too want to give back to those who think that they have ruined their lives and find themselves at a loss, disappointed with what has happened and my contribution is to Open a home for pregnant teenagers **because I know that in us and through our experience we are strong, and beautiful and have hopes and dreams and these will be realised when someone shows us love and lends a helping hand. We are not worthless and good for nothing, we are valuable and victorious and the life that we are bringing into this world is precious.**

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