

# CHOICE /LESS

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Radio

## CANDICE: WHEN IS IT OK?

**Jenn: Welcome to CHOICE/LESS, a new storytelling podcast from Rewire, formerly RH Reality Check, about reproductive injustice and the laws that put people in choiceless situations. I'm Jenn Stanley, senior staff reporter at Rewire and the host of this podcast.**

**Today we hear from Candice Russell, whose story has been shaped by Texas House Bill 2.**

**Candice: Hi, my name is Candice Russell, I am 32. I am an executive administrative assistant at a CPA firm, and I do some freelance writing.**

**Jenn: HB 2 contains multiple restrictions under the same law, including a 20 week abortion ban, admitting privilege requirements, ambulatory surgical center requirements, reporting requirements, and restrictions on medication abortions. If you think that sounds like a lot, it's because it is.**

**And most medical professionals, including those at the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, agree that these regulations are not medically necessary and are based on junk science. This targeted regulation of abortion providers, or TRAP law, could force more than three-quarters of Texas abortion clinics to close, which is why a Texas abortion provider challenged the bill in the Supreme Court case, Whole Woman's Health vs. Hellerstedt.**

**Candice lives in Irving, Texas, a suburb of Dallas and Fort Worth. She's now an activist and has been speaking publicly against the law since it first passed in 2013.**

**Candice: I was never really an activist before HB 2.**

**I've been in Texas since 2009, but actually I was born here in Houston in 1983.**

**Jenn: But our story today begins in Seattle, where Candice grew up. When Candice was 20 years old, she met Dan, to whom she would eventually be married for seven years.**

**Candice: He was the barista at my coffee shop, and I thought he looked just like Edward Norton so I would go there all the time.**

**Jenn: But their relationship was off to a rocky start when two months in she found out she was pregnant.**

Candice: It had been a very tumultuous two months, and um, he was a pastor's son, and from a small town on the other side of the mountain pass, and he was in the big city for school and he was great. I liked him a lot.

I had been sick and tired, and I didn't know what that was. I was also pretty significantly overweight at the time, and so I wasn't, I didn't have a regular menstrual cycle, and I didn't worry about that because my menstrual cycle hadn't been regular for like a year. And so I was at work. I had an admin job at a, like my first big girl job, at a company. And I had like these weird, like, flashes in front of my eyes. And I literally couldn't see in front of my computer, and so I called a friend, and she picked me up, and we went to urgent care because I wanted to figure out what was going on.

And he walked in, and he was like, 'Well you're having a migraine, and also congratulations you're pregnant.'

And I just started sobbing. I didn't really know what to do at that moment. But I definitely knew that I did not want a baby.

I did go through, you know, some intense emotions. I thought a lot about my mom, and I was at a time in my life where I didn't think about her very often. And so it kind of brought back some of that stuff.

I was born to a teenage mother. My mom was one of the most beautiful people. Uh gosh, she was um, very very pale, bright green eyes, dark hair. She, you know, there's a picture that I have, and it's four generations. It's my great grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and me, and I'm a baby. And I look at that picture and my mother looks 25. But I'm like, I'm a baby, she's 15.

My grandparents like to call her the bad seed. I don't see her as the bad seed. I think she was kind of a troubled person. But she very quickly fell in with the wrong crowd when she was younger. She hung out with older people. Got involved in drugs. And when she found she was pregnant with me, she'd actually already had two abortions, and was at the clinic and right before she was supposed to have her procedure she decided that she was going to carry me to term.

Sometimes she would tell me the story of me being born and it was you know, full of love, and it was like a bedtime story, and it was her way of saying, you know, 'I chose to have you because I love you, because you're my child, and I was meant to be your mother.'

A lot of times, when she would tell me this story it would be, 'I was supposed to be famous, I was supposed to be a writer, I was supposed to be an actress, but I chose to have you. You're the reason why I don't have these things.' I felt a lot of guilt when I was a child when I would hear her say those things.

**Jenn: Candice never knew her biological father. Her mother would make up stories about him, saying that he didn't want her, that was a drug lord, when in reality, he never knew that he had a daughter. He died of cancer when Candice was 7 years old.**

Candice: None of the things my mother told me about him were true.

But when she was 18, she met a man and married him. And they had two children together. And he's the only dad I ever knew. But my mom was not meant to parent. Did not want to parent. Had no intentions of ever really parenting. Somehow ended up with three kids.

And so I had a younger sister who's three years younger than me, and a baby brother who's three years younger than her, and I did a lot of kind of, forced care taking. And I always think about the times where I wasn't there and I was at school and you know, I would come home and my brother's diaper hadn't been changed for like, 12 hours.

So there were people in my family who were turning a really, really, really, intentionally blind eye to what was happening in my home. I had upper-middle class people in my family who would see me on Christmas, and see my brother and sister and notice that we smelled. Our clothes weren't clean. My mom was obviously high or coming down off of a high. But we opened our holiday presents and had a turkey, and then they sent us home.

My mother left when I was 12, so I didn't really get to see, kind of her, her rapid downfall, which I think was a blessing for me. When I think of her, I always see bright lipstick, and big hair, and but even without the makeup she was always beautiful. That's how I remember her. I try not to think about what she looked like before she died, which was rather recent. She had a really, really long struggle with drug addiction, lived a pretty hard life.

I found out that I was pregnant. I kind of went through the motions in kind of a numb way. I think that for me part of it was this disappointment that I had somehow followed in my mom's footsteps.

I scheduled my abortion, and I went to the clinic.

**Jenn: Candice had just gotten her first office job at \$12 an hour. She didn't have health insurance but she did have a flex spending account, which she was going to use to pay for the abortion.**

**For those of you who don't know, a flex spending account is money you put aside for medical expenses that's not taxed. The funds are available through a flex spending debit card.**

Candice: And I was there, and I came in and they were like, your card was denied. And I was like, you have to run it again. I know how much money I have on that. It's not denied, it'd not denied. And they ran it three times and I remember I had to call my human resources department at the company I was working for and I said, 'I'm at a doctor's appointment. It is denying this card, I don't have any other money. I need you to figure out what's going on.'

And they called me back and my HR representative said, 'Candice,' and she like faux-whispered it, she said, 'are you at an abortion clinic?'

And I said, 'I don't know what you're talking about.'

And she said, 'Well because the card is coded a certain way that it can only be used at a medical facility and abortion clinics are non-profits. So you can't use your card there.'

And I said, 'I am not at an abortion clinic,' and I hung up the phone.

I mean I knew what her office looked like. She didn't have an office she had a cubicle. So I just pictured her in front of everybody I worked with asking me if I was at an abortion clinic.

And it just, I was just a wreck. I like, I didn't just cry, I like, ugly cried, like snot, gnarled face, couldn't, I was hiccuping my words, I didn't know how I was going to pay for it. I had, I didn't know what I would do. I thought that maybe I would, if I couldn't have an abortion that I probably didn't want to be alive.

And then I cried with the most relief I've ever felt in my entire life when they came back in and they were, they were gone for like 20 minutes. And they came back in and told me they had found me funding. All of that made the actual abortion just so like not, like a non-issue. You know what I mean. Like it's so short, it's so painless, um, you know, it was the emotional turmoil of the, you know, getting my insurance denied, having all of my personal information just kind of blurted out in front of people. That was so much more traumatic for me than going through the actual abortion that I think that I was just relieved when it was over.

**Jenn: Her decision to have an abortion came easily. She knew she didn't want children, and she was living in Washington, a state without many restrictions to access. But her choice brought up a lot of her childhood trauma. And it was that trauma that eventually impassioned her to speak out against the anti-choice laws when she moved to Texas.**

Candice: Me going through the process of having my abortion brought up all of this gunk, and since that wasn't stuff that I talked about, it was kind of, not embarrassing, but hard to be honest with my boyfriend who grew up in a white picket fenced home with a pastor for a dad, and a homemaker for a mom, and had this perfect little family, to have a conversation, a candid conversation about how, you know, I didn't want to be a mom because this was what my childhood was like. And our relationship was really young, you know, it's like, it's a really heady thing to have happen when you're in that process where you're just starting to get to know somebody.

**Jenn: Dan and Candice were married for seven years, and during that time they moved from Seattle to Texas.**

Candice: When I was married, Dan and I were pretty sure that we didn't want kids. And so I started looking around trying to find somebody who would talk to me about permanent birth control. I didn't want to be able to get pregnant. And I had an OBGYN I had been seeing pretty regularly and she kind of laughed at me and she was like, 'Oh well, you know, your husband might change his mind and want kids down the line.' And I was like, 'No I don't think so. We've been together a really long time and we don't want children, we're fine.'

'Well why don't we wait. Why don't we wait six months.'

So I waited six months. and then she said, 'Well why don't we give you a Mirena.'

And I was like, 'Oh, ok for now, but I really, Mirena's not permanent and I would like permanent birth control.'

And she wouldn't do it. And then I kind of dropped it because I was married, whatever.

Well later, when I was starting to date again after my separation, I was like, you know, I should start looking into permanent birth control again. I don't want to get pregnant. I'm definitely more sexually active than I was before. And so I went back to my OBGYN and then it was, 'Well what if you meet a man and he wants to have babies?' and I was like, 'Well that's not going to happen because I don't want to have babies, but thank you.'

And so I went to a different doctor. And it was the same. I went to six or seven different doctors and none of them would give me permanent birth control. None of them would. And then, lo and behold, I was pregnant.

**Jenn: After her separation, Candice had been seeing someone who lived in California. They broke up, but shortly after she found out she was pregnant.**

**Now remember, Candice had an IUD, and she kept the IUD in after all of her doctors refused to sterilize her. The Mirena IUD kept Candice from getting her period, and since IUDs are more than 99 percent effective, she never thought to check if she was pregnant.**

**It was the spring of 2014. HB 2 was already the law of the land. Despite a successful challenge to some of the laws requirements in district court, the fifth circuit had upheld those provisions as constitutional.**

**In April 2014, Whole Women's Health and other providers filed a federal law suit. It challenged the admitting privilege requirement as it applied to two clinics: Whole Woman's Health in McAllen and Reproductive Services in El Paso. It also challenges the ambulatory surgical center requirement.**

**So back to Candice. By the time she realized her Mirena had failed her, she was about 13 weeks along. The clinics that remained after HB 2 were completely over-booked and it would be more than two weeks before Candice could get an appointment.**

**If that's not enough, in 2011, then Texas Gov. Rick Perry signed into law a bill that forced women to wait 24 hours between an initial appointment with a mandatory sonogram and the abortion procedure. She was afraid that if anything happened and she missed the appointment or couldn't make it to both appointments, that she would be getting dangerously close to the 20 week mark. With HB 2, came a 20 week abortion ban, which hasn't been challenged in court yet and is currently in effect.**

**So Candice decided to go to California for her abortion.**

Candice: I have a really good support network out there. I have a lot of friends. You know, I wanted to be able to, if he, you know wanted to be part of it, you know, my ex-partner was going to be there. He was helpful in that. And so we called and had an appointment.

**Jenn: Candice says that she was more fortunate than most that she was able to access abortion care. As an activist, Texan, and Latina, she's seen how the law has had devastating effects on women in the Rio Grande Valley, particularly women of color.**

Candice: I definitely had to scramble. My finances were kind of a wreck. I took out a payday loan to get on a plane. But I was back within five days I think.

**Jenn: Candice was already very familiar with HB 2 before she needed her second abortion. She had been in Austin the previous summer to testify against the TRAP law in front of the Senate.**

Candice: I had never spoken in public before HB 2. When I gave my Senate testimony, I left and vomited immediately afterward. It was really hard for me. It was a rough day. I got there at 7:30 in the morning. I testified somewhere near midnight. It had been raining all day. And so I was soaking wet. I didn't know anybody there. So by the time I got up there, group like, eight, right, and they've all, they've sat through a day of this stuff, I mean I was talking to a glass wall. I started out by saying that I was supposed to have been an abortion, and that that didn't change my opinion on choice. And that, you know, my mother's choice is the same reason that I felt it was important that I was able to make my choice. And at one point, one of the representatives rolled her eyes at me. And I felt, I didn't feel helpless because I knew somebody was hearing what I was saying, but I was kind of disgusted with the process.

**Jenn: Candice said access to reproductive health care goes far beyond abortion rights. Her strongest feeling about her pregnancy in 2014 is anger, that none of the doctors she visited looking for permanent birth control would trust her with that decision.**

Candice: The saddest part for me was the way that they approached it was never, 'YOU might change your mind,' it was always, 'You might meet a man who might make you change your mind.'

Well I don't understand what he has to do with my uterus. Like, I don't, ok, but we're talking about me and my body. You're not going to let me make a decision for my body because you're afraid I'm going to meet a man.

And it wasn't ok when I was married, but it's also not ok now that I'm single? When is it ok for me to make a choice for my body. When are you going to tell me that it's ok?

**Jenn: Though Candice had testified against HB 2, she had never really spoken publicly about her second abortion, which was directly affected by the law, until now.**

**She says she wants to speak out about her experiences to honor her story, her mother's story, and the story of the too many children who go unparented and unsupported.**

Candice: We don't have resources for people. We refuse to create new resources. And yet we're trying to force women to have babies. And I don't understand, and it makes me so sad, it makes me sad for just our nation as a whole. It makes me sad for these people who are being forced to make decisions that they know aren't right for themselves, and then having to live with the consequences of it. And it, I wasn't going to cry, it makes me sad for the children, who are going to end up in situations like mine, where they're not living, they're barely surviving, and it's all because somebody thought that they knew what was best. It just makes me, it makes my heart hurt.

**Jenn: This episode of CHOICE/LESS was produced by me, Jenn Stanley, for Rewire Radio. With editorial oversight by Marc Faletti, our director of multimedia. Jodi Jacobson is our editor-in-chief. Brady Swenson is our director of technology.**

**Special thanks to all of the Rewire staff.**

**Music and sound design for this episode were by Doug Helsel.**

**And for more information on Candice's story and comprehensive news, commentary, and analysis on HB 2 and other reproductive and sexual health and justice issues, visit our website at [Rewire.news](http://Rewire.news).**

**Thanks for listening.**