April 2011

Books & Babies: Having a Child in College

John Lonsdale
Iowa State University

Jacob Gerhardt
Iowa State University

Laurel Scott
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Journalism Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
A Star Is Born

“Twinkow twinkow wittle staw, hah ah wondew wha you ah, up abah da worl so high, like a diamoh in da sky, twinkow twinkow wittle staw, hah ah wondeh what you ah!”

The audience clapped and the two-foot-tall entertainer ran around the small carpeted confines of her stage avoiding her father’s Xbox and television but not her own two feet.

“I stopped myself,” says the little girl, getting back up.

She took off running only to come back to her same spot, her stage, to give an encore performance of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

The two-year-old, Lily, is the daughter of two ISU students, Danielle West and Gilbert Stogdill. She doesn’t know anything different—only that Mommy is home during the week on Tuesdays and Thursdays while Daddy is home the other days. Daddy reads a lot when I go to bed and Mommy told me not to wipe my nose with her sociology homework. It’s normal, right?

As soon as the encore presentation concluded, a tickle fight ensued and laughter boomed from the toothless, smiling face of the little girl.

“Spongebob Pants is on!” she says, as she got lost in the deep, leather couch only until a commercial came on and the tickling attacks continued like ten little knives—ten cute, little knives.

The Six-Month Secret

Danielle, twenty-two, and Gilbert, twenty-one, were high school sweethearts. The relationship ended for a short time the week Gilbert graduated from high school, and Danielle stopped taking her birth control pill for a couple of days.

“[Lily] was conceived the day I stopped
taking the pill,” Danielle says. “And then I started taking it again so we didn’t really think I would be pregnant.” Danielle had been taking the “little blue pill” since she was seventeen.

She had heard that women usually stop menstruating if they are pregnant, but Danielle didn’t. She wanted to keep her pregnancy as private as she could once she found out, though.

“I didn’t tell anybody for six months,” she says. Except for her two younger sisters and Gilbert, no one else knew about the pregnancy. She eventually asked her mom for insurance cards so that she could see the doctor. Her mom, Lerynne, a single parent who had Danielle when she was sixteen years old, had been suspicious of her daughter’s behavior.

Lerynne wasn’t mad at Danielle, but it was understood that she’d be moving out of her mother’s house and supporting herself just as Lerynne had done when she was a teenager.

“It was twenty-two or twenty-three weeks when I finally went to the doctor,” Danielle says.

The clinic she went to scheduled emergency appointments for her to get ultrasounds. The doctor entered the room in the small Waukee clinic and asked Danielle why she was there.

“I think I might maybe be a little bit pregnant,” Danielle told her.

Instead of doing a pregnancy test, the doctor got a heartbeat monitor and told Danielle that she was indeed pregnant. The next day at four in the afternoon, Danielle, her mother, and two sisters went to Danielle’s ultrasound in the tiny room Danielle was in before.

“It was a big family trip,” she says. Up until that point, Danielle had been concealing her secret by wearing loose clothing. The doctor raised her shirt up and started to rub her stomach. There on the screen in white was an image of a full baby. Her mother and sisters began to cry as Danielle looked at her baby’s silhouette for the first time.

“It wasn’t how it normally is when you see this blob and they’re like, that’s your baby,” Danielle says. “I was still kinda in shock because I didn’t realize I was that far along. They did this ultrasound with her foot resting on top of my stomach. [My family said] ‘what should we name it?’ Like it was a family pet.”

**Homework and Having a Baby**

It was Danielle’s first day of school of her second year and Gilbert’s first day of college at Des Moines Area Community College. Danielle had just emailed a professor to let them know she might be gone in the next couple of weeks and then at three that morning, she went into labor.

Instead of packing her schoolbag, she packed her hospital bag and gave birth to Lily two weeks early at eight-thirty. She and Lily had to have special tests done when Lily was finally born because Danielle had not gotten prenatal care. The doctors took blood samples and got test results from Lily’s diaper to make sure everything was normal.

“You and your baby get treated like drug addicts,” Danielle says. Lily has been an easy child to raise for her parents so far. After starting only a week ago, she’s almost potty-trained, is never sick, and hardly cries.

Quitting school was never an option for Danielle and Gilbert. Danielle went back to school two weeks after she gave birth and went back to work at Des Moines Golf and Country Club the third week. Gilbert or Danielle’s mom watched Lily while Danielle went to work.

She and Gilbert didn’t get as much financial aid at DMACC and decided to look at other schools. Gilbert wanted to go to UNI, but Iowa State’s family housing, along with Ames being close to family and friends, sealed the deal for them. Pell Grants and

I was still kinda in shock because I didn’t realize I was that far along.
She enrolled herself in summer classes at DMACC and took the fall semester off to have her daughter, Mckenzie. It’s Jenny’s first semester at Iowa State. The twenty-minute car ride from Jenny’s Boone home to Ames is a quick one most days.

“It’s really stressful at times,” Jenny says. “It’s rewarding. I wouldn’t recommend it to anybody, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.” Balancing her daughter, husband, and school is hard for Jenny, like it would be for any twenty-two-year-old.

“I work really hard to be where I’m at and have the things I have so that my daughter can have a better future.” Jenny is fortunate enough that she does not have to work because of her husband’s job and student loans. She has worked part-time jobs in the past two years, but she says it was too emotional to be away from Mckenzie for so long.

Similar to Danielle, her mom watches Mckenzie at Jenny and her husband’s home when Jenny has class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. With twelve-and-a-half credits, Jenny, junior in psychology, has found a perfect rhythm in her schedule. She wakes up between five and six Tuesdays and Thursdays and tries to get home by four to cook for her daughter. Although she doesn’t always cook for herself and her husband, she always makes sure to cook for Mckenzie.

“I just want her to know how much I love her,” Jenny says. “I would do this over a thousand times harder if it meant that it’d be better for her in the long run.”

Danielle and Gilbert spent their twenty-first birthdays together with Lily at home. They were never big partiers, and they don’t go out much now. The couple says they aren’t giving up much, but they never have the freedom of time or space.

“You never have time to yourself,” Gilbert says. Gilbert, a sophomore in English education, and Danielle cram for classes after Lily goes to bed.

Gilbert wants to teach high school English; Danielle hopes to be a social worker and is interested in working with disadvantaged youth.

“A lot of people assume we get a lot of help,” Danielle says. They both set everything up for themselves including their college visits and loans for school.

“What we can’t do ourselves, we expect the other one to do it,” Gilbert says. “Definitely feel more grown up.”

Lily interjects with a long phrase that even her parents can’t decipher. “It’s fun to watch her grow,” Gilbert says. “The words and things she learns [are] interesting. It always amazes me that we taught her. You feel a lot more accomplished. We’re both students. It’s really rough. It’s just normal [now].”

The couple has come from hard childhoods and is thankful that they have the opportunity to make Lily’s life better than what they had.

low-interest loans cover almost everything they have to pay for.

A part-time Wal-Mart employee, Gilbert works Wednesday nights but puts in most of his hours on weekends. Danielle’s mother comes to visit every other weekend to give Danielle and Gilbert a break, and because Danielle doesn’t have class when Gilbert does, Lily doesn’t have to go to day care, which is nice on the family’s budget.

“It’s hard work to make it all work,” Danielle says. “I think just having a plan to graduate…to find an actual career…because our main motivation is Lily. Neither one of us have parents that can really support us. We’re pretty much all we have.”
“We’re trying as hard as we can for her to have a normal kid experience,” Danielle says. Gilbert said their values of education have played a huge role in how they have raised Lily, considering it would have been so easy to quit all of those times but instead took the hard route.

We’re trying as hard as we can for her to have a normal kid experience.

Although education plays such an important role in the couple’s life, they still find time to be typical college students. “I read a lot, and Gilbert plays video games,” Danielle says. “Sometimes it’s just nice to feel like a young adult.”

**THE KID WILL BE ALRIGHT**

The two-foot-tall entertainer approaches the stage for her final performance. She tells everyone to be quiet and listen up. As the crowd intently watches the little one in the teal shirt, she sings her most popular number.

“Twinkow twinkow wittle staw, haw ah wondew wha you ah, up abah da worl so high, like a diamoh in da sky, Twinkow twinkow wittle staw, hah ah wondeh what you ah!”

“Yayyy!” the crowd applauds, and the little girl takes off running but falls flat on her stage. “Okay, good, I was worried,” her father says.

“I’m okay, guys,” the little girl says, getting up. “Okay, good, I was worried,” her father says. 

But time makes you bolder, children get older. I’m getting older too.