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Balancing Act

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On most school days, students wake up to the droning buzz of their alarm clocks after hitting the snooze button just enough times before they absolutely have to get to class. Afterwards they meet up with their friends, they work out at the rec, or they go to different clubs and meetings. Some students, however, wake up to something more than an alarm clock. One wakes up feeling nauseous in the morning before having to vomit in the bathroom. One couple wakes up every morning to the shrill sounds of a baby crying, while another has to wake up early enough to take her toddler to daycare. Another student drives home two hours after class to make sure she’s there to take her son to football practice on time. These students do not get to hit the snooze button on the alarm, even though they share the same stresses the average student has.
"I knew as soon as I found out that I wanted to keep the baby...I guess I just decided that if I was going to do this, I had to do it all the way."

“When I first found out I was pregnant, I was definitely in shock,” says Jamie, sophomore in psychology. “I don’t think that it actually hit me that I was actually pregnant until a week or two after I found out. It was absolutely not planned, so finding out I was pregnant was completely unexpected.”

Before Lee became pregnant, she was practically indistinguishable from any other 19-year-old girl on campus. Like many students, Lee grew up in a small town before attending Iowa State in the fall of 2006. Her boyfriend, Rob, also from her hometown of Truro, Iowa, is a chef at the Hilton Garden Inn in West Des Moines.

The two of them have been dating for almost six months. It was not until August 2006, however, that their lives would become forever intertwined when Lee discovered she was pregnant with their child. Such news could have prompted any number of outcomes, but for Lee, there was only one option.

“I knew as soon as I found out that I wanted to keep the baby. Abortion was absolutely not an option because of my personal beliefs, so that was ruled out immediately,” she says. “The nurse talked to me about adoption, but I just didn’t feel right talking about giving my baby away. I guess just decided that if I was going to do this, I had to do it all the way.”

The couple’s decision to keep their baby, however, only provided more complications. First, Lee had to tell her mother about her pregnancy, something that terrified her.

“I told my mom a few weeks after I’d found out, once it had really sunk in and we’d had some time to digest it all. When I told her, her reaction was ‘I kind of already knew,’ ” Lee says.

I just stood there; I seriously thought she was joking. She took it pretty well the first night, but the next day she wasn’t so kind,” Lee says. “She kept going over things in her head and the anger and disappointment definitely came out that day. Now that she’s had some time to get used to it, she’s actually laughed and joked about it.”

Once she had made the announcement, Lee had to think about what she was going to do about her education. She was just beginning her sophomore year when her life was dramatically altered by the news of her pregnancy. She found herself struggling to stay focused in the classroom, when thoughts of what it would take to be a good mother and how she would juggle it all. Over time, however, she resumed her normal study habits and was able to regain her focus.

“Once I realized that it wasn’t the end of the world, I started to buckle down again. Even now, doctor’s appointments and the lovely side effects of being pregnant have affected my attendance and caused me to have to work harder to keep up in classes,” Lee says. “The most difficult thing so far has been dealing with managing my schedule and taking care of myself. Being busy with class and homework and doctor visits doesn’t leave much time for making sure I get enough sleep and eat the right foods. I’ve had to basically force myself to eat three meals a day and I try to get my eight hours of sleep each night, but it’s still a struggle most days. It’s hard being on the run and then being late doing homework or studying.”

Lee hopes her life will become significantly less stressful when she moves back to Truro after the semester. She also plans on taking online classes during the spring semester in order to keep up with her coursework. “I’ll be honest,” Lee says, “I don’t really know what to expect with everything [once the baby is born]. Moving back to my hometown will help a lot because both of our families are amazing and have promised to help so I can keep up with my studies and Rob can work.”

“I’m looking to transfer to Simpson in the fall because it’s much closer to home. I thought about staying here, but my due date is basically any time in May, and since the doctors keep telling me I probably won’t carry full-term, I don’t want to risk going into labor during class or having something go wrong and not have anyone around to help me,” Lee says.

Since discovering she was soon going to be a mother, Lee has been able to think deeply about the next stage of her life. “Being pregnant hasn’t really been that hard to deal with, but the fact that I’m going to have a baby to take care of has been really hard to digest. I helped a lot with my younger siblings, but that’s nothing compared to the fact that I’m going to be responsible for this baby’s life for at least the next 18 years,” Lee says.

“I guess I’m most nervous that I won’t know what to do. Even though logic tells me that I’ll figure it out and that instincts will help, it’s still pretty scary. I’d say I’m just about as excited about this as I am nervous. The whole idea is exciting, that I’m really pregnant and that in around six months, I’m going to have a baby. For the next 18 years, I get to help raise this kid. I’m hoping that all of the fun parent stuff negates the stuff that I’m nervous about — and I think it will.”
They named him Hezekiah, a Hebrew name meaning "God is my strength."
Although Lee and her boyfriend were not expecting a pregnancy, another couple at Iowa State was. In fact, they were praying for one.

Caitlin (Clark) Wandling, 22, and her husband, Mike Wandling, 22, were wed December 2005. "We were crazy and in love," Mike says.

Soon thereafter, the couple decided to start a family of their very own. In October, they restlessly awaited the birth of their first son, who was due at any time. "The worst part about the pregnancy has been the waiting," Mike says with an anxious grin only a month before the baby was born. "I feel like we've been waiting for so long now."

The waiting, however, gave the Wandlings plenty of time to think about what to do after their son was born. After weighing their options, they decided that the best way to provide for their son in the future would be to complete their educations.

"I plan on finishing school," Caitlin, a senior in advertising, says. "It's dumb to spend so much money and not take the last five classes that I need to graduate. It may take longer to get it done, but there's no point in dropping now. After I give birth, I'm taking six weeks off, and then I'm starting up with my classes next semester."

Mike is also continuing his education by taking online classes at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh for Web design. They know that raising a child is costly, which is why they're currently doing everything they can to support their family. Eventually, Mike plans to work outside the home, while Caitlin will stay home with their son and any other children they may have.

"God has really provided for us," Mike says. "We couldn't afford anything in the nursery without the support of our family and friends. We got furniture and other things from three different sources, and because of God they all ended up matching perfectly."

Having nine months to think about these kind of events allowed them to anticipate more worries. A couple weeks before she gave birth, Caitlin admitted she was worried about the financial toll the baby would take on their family.

"After our baby is born, I'm most worried about money," Caitlin says. "I'm already up at night a lot, so I'm not worried about those kind of things as much as I am about being able to provide for him."

However, Mike was more worried about the day-to-day duties of being a father. "I'm nervous about the little things, like what to do if he has a rash, what does he want if he starts screaming," Mike says.

Throughout Caitlin's pregnancy, she noticed a difference in the way she was treated by other people. She felt that people became a lot more helpful now that they see her pregnant belly. She also has been offered a lot of life advice and tips on being a good mother.

"Now that I've gotten bigger, people definitely treat me differently, whether they're opening doors, picking stuff up off the floor that I dropped and can't get, etc. A lot of people ask me when I'm due," she says. "Even my mom treats me differently. Now there's a lot more talk about babies, and she offers a lot of helpful advice."

On October 24, 2006 the Wandlings were finally able to use that advice when welcomed their first son into the world. They named him Hezekiah, a Hebrew name meaning, "God is my strength."

"Life's been really tiring since Hezekiah was born," Caitlin says. "He's an awesome baby, but it's really exhausting. I don't think you can really know exactly what to expect when you have a baby, like how tired you can get just from feeding him every few hours."

Caitlin's drug-free labor lasted for an incredible 41.5 hours. Since then, she, Mike and Hezekiah have been sharing tender moments snuggling and smiling, reveling in the miracle of their first child. During this time, friends and family have pitched in to give them some much-appreciated assistance.

"We've had friends bringing us meals and family offering to watch him for a few hours so we can sleep," Caitlin says. "People are being really good about helping us in any way they can."

The Wandlings feel blessed by the whole experience. They credit their faith in God for helping them through the pregnancy and for allowing for a complication-free delivery.

"He's a really easy baby," Caitlin says. "I love his snuggles and his smiles. You can tell he's really happy, and that makes us really happy."
“I'm luckier than a lot of single parents because my parents are involved so I do get to have a social life. I'm dating someone, which can be interesting because there's the awkwardness of trying to figure out how you tell him you have a daughter. But I still get to see my friends, even though it might not be as much as other people.”
While Caitlin Wandling eased up on her coursework during the final stages of her pregnancy, 25-year-old Amanda Eastin, senior in liberal studies, was determined to get through all of her finals almost three years ago.

It was not just because she was tired of studying; she was nine months pregnant and she wanted to finish them before she went into labor with her daughter, Grace.

“I took a human biology final at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday, and I went to the hospital at 8 p.m. that same night,” Eastin says. “My daughter was born the next day.”

Grace is now almost three years old. Eastin lives in Ankeny with her parents, her older brother and his six-year-old daughter.

Eastin’s family is extremely close-knit, which she says has allowed her to have many opportunities that other single mothers do not always have, but life is still a struggle sometimes.

“It’s hard. This semester I didn’t get as much financial aid, so I have to work nights. There are some days that are really hard because I drop Grace off at daycare at 7 a.m. and then I go to class, and then I work until 10 or 10:30 at night. My mom and dad watch her for me, but it’s hard to not spend as much time with her,” Eastin says.

“I don’t want to make it sound like it’s harder to be a single parent compared to being a student with two jobs or anything, but it’s definitely not easy.”

Eastin says that the waiting list for ISU day care programs is incredibly long, which is why she takes her daughter to a daycare in Ankeny.

Iowa State offers three main centers on campus that serve students, faculty and staff members. Children of students take preference over children of faculty members. Because there is such a demand, the Center for Child Care Resources helps place children in other care centers.

“There are more than 300 children, so we really can’t take everybody,” child care coordinator Julia Graden says. “That’s why we use a database of child care centers in the community.”

By continuing her education, Eastin has had to balance the time she spends with her daughter, and the time she spends at Iowa State. She finds it difficult to devote a lot of her time to different campus activities and clubs, but she has found alternative ways to stay involved.

“I have purposely taken courses that are just for fun because that’s one way I can be involved in something, like ballroom dance and independent study for dance. I get to work with ballroom students now and a professor doing office work. It’s something that’s just for fun,” Eastin says.

“I do get involved a little bit, but I don’t have the time to devote like other students do. I won’t be in any clubs because I don’t think it’s fair to join if you don’t fully have the time to devote to it. I don’t feel like not being as involved outside of class makes me feel like any less of a student though.”

Eastin says her supportive family makes it possible for her to still feel like she is just as much a student as everyone else is. She credits them for allowing her to still enjoy student activities.

“I’m luckier than a lot of single parents because my parents are involved so I do get to have a social life. I’m dating someone, which can be interesting because there’s the awkwardness of trying to figure out how you tell him you have a daughter. But I still get to see my friends, even though it might not be as much as other people,” Eastin says.

“You just have to be creative about the time you spend with people. I go out to lunch more often than dinner because of day care. That way I get to see my friends and spend time with my daughter.”
"I have tried for the last year or so to prepare my kids for the inevitable move after I’m done with school, and I think it’s something that I’m going to be able to work out."
Seventeen years after she first enrolled at Iowa State, Kara Naig, junior in public journalism and mass communication, is now working toward a career in public relations. Within the first few weeks of her freshman year when she first started at Iowa State, Naig dropped out of college because she didn’t feel it was the right place or the right time for her to be enrolled in school. Aside from that, she was in a serious relationship and missed her boyfriend. She moved back home to Osage, Iowa, and was married the next year. Although she put her education on hold, Naig says she was happy for a long time. In those next seventeen years, she raised three sons, ages 4, 11, and 9. When Naig and her husband divorced two years ago, she made the decision to continue her education.

"In the last two years, prior to getting divorced, I knew I was going to have to do something to raise my family on my own," Naig says.

"I took one class at NIACC each semester and started off slow. About a year ago I needed to make a decision so I checked out some closer colleges and saw that they were farther away. Iowa State had the journalism program I was looking for, so I applied. Now I make a two-hour drive and sacrifice my time on the road so that my kids won’t have to move yet."

Sacrifice is something Naig says she has become accustomed to. She says she constantly feels the pressure to be a good mother and provide for her sons, while at the same time to do well academically. She relies on the help of family and friends from time to time in an effort to create a sense of balance between her roles as a mother and as a student.

"I have a great support system. My mom’s really close to me, my brother lives in the town and I have friends that are always willing to help me out. If I had to be on campus late, I could be," she says. "Not only that, but my kids are getting older and more independent so I can be away a little bit longer."

Naig’s sons acknowledge the hard work that their mother puts in so that they can continue to remain involved in activities and live in the town they grew up.

"It’s important that my mom is in college to finish up school so we can have a better life," Kody, her oldest son, says.

Even with the help of family and friends, Naig’s role as a mother also sometimes limits her campus involvement. Although she would like to become more active on campus, she also knows her limitations. She realizes the importance of getting journalistic experience before she completes her major, but she also realizes the importance of being there for the special moments in her sons’ lives. Even though she sometimes finds it difficult to get as involved as she would like to be, Naig is trying to make it work.

"Right now everything is working out pretty well considering my schedule is just two days a week at Iowa State. The only catch is getting some of the extra activities into my calendar. I’m trying to find a balance," she says.

Finding such balance, however, can often leave her feeling overwhelmed. Working full time, raising three sons with good values and staying on top of her schoolwork requires a great deal of time and effort. Stress is inevitable, but Naig has found that by managing her time things run much smoother.

"There are definitely days where I have my homework, plus three boys’ worth of homework that they need help with, and it can be a lot to handle," she says. "Then they’re in football, soccer, wrestling, basketball and Boy Scouts on top of that. I have a calendar to keep track of it all. It takes a lot of organization."

Still, Naig realizes the importance of being able to provide for her family. She knows that at some point in the future her sons may have to make a few sacrifices of their own, but Naig is working to make the transition as easy as possible for her sons.

"Once I’m done with school I’m willing to move for my career. I have tried for the last year or so to prepare my kids for the inevitable move after I’m done with school, and I think it’s something that I’m going to be able to work out."

Balancing parenting and a college education is an uphill battle that brings many new challenges. "I don’t think you can really know exactly what to expect when you have a baby," Caitlin says. What these parents do know is the importance of finding a balance.

There are definitely days where I have my homework, plus three boys’ worth of homework that they need help with and it can be a lot to handle."