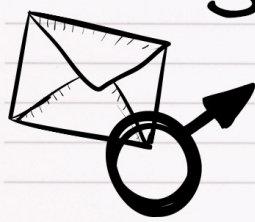


THE
SOURCE
fall 2017



LETTER
TO MY
teenage
self



Dear
Friends,



Over a century of massive social change, ongoing political struggles and tremendous improvements in women's health care, Planned Parenthood has learned a thing or two about what it takes to sustain ourselves through uncertainty. Thanks to your steadfast financial and personal commitment to our mission, you've made it possible for us to learn, grow, and continue our mission in the Heartland.

As Planned Parenthood evolved, we gained knowledge and grew into our role as a powerful leader in reproductive and sexual health. That evolution is the theme of this issue of *The Source* – but with a focus on some particularly resilient people who personally evolved in powerful ways that led them to become leaders in this movement.

We asked people who are connected to Planned Parenthood to tell us about their journeys. Specifically we asked, "If you wrote a letter to your teenage self, what would you say?" The answers were incredibly moving, each in their own way, and I am honored to share letters from five remarkable individuals:

- Alisa, a self-described "helping type" who accessed high-quality care as a young person and has since dedicated her life to helping others receive the same level of care
- Chelsy, whose choice to become a mother at 17 never deterred her from her dream of becoming a designer – and also led her to put her talents to work at PPHeartland


- Eris, who over time found the space and support to explore her gender identity away from her stifling, rural hometown
- Stephen, who blossomed from a quiet, self-contained young man to an outspoken leader in the faith community and champion for reproductive rights
- Paul, whose early experiences set him down a path to inspire other men to take charge of their sexual health and learn the skills to have healthy, more equitable relationships

While each of their journeys was very different, the common theme is how each of them gained knowledge and confidence in their own sexuality – and how they evolved into empowered, compassionate leaders in their own right. Their stories inspire me with confidence that Planned Parenthood – and the young people of today – will also continue to evolve, no matter what.

With sincere gratitude,

Suzanna M. de Baca

Suzanna de Baca
President/CEO



Alisa Buchanan has worked in the Planned Parenthood of the Heartland call center in Des Moines for two years.

Dear Alisa,

You think you know all about Planned Parenthood. You already trust them – they cared when you were 14, doubled over in pain, thinking you’d never stop bleeding. They put you on birth control pills, and things got much better. Back then you thought birth control was all they did.

Even though you are so proud of your dad, a Planned Parenthood security guard who protects patients and staff – he’ll do that for a lot of years – you won’t understand why that’s so important for a long time.

Now that you’re 16 and ready for your – oh my gosh – *pelvic exam*, you’re going to spend time in the waiting room. You’ll see staff respond to the wide range of patient emotions with nonjudgmental compassion. Your mom and dad have always been the “helping people type,” and your heart is going to connect with others around you, especially staff.

Someday you’ll become one of them, and provide for people the same way.

You’ll learn that care goes above and beyond the walls of Planned Parenthood – they’re going to provide information that saves your life. They’re going to find some pre-cancerous cells on your cervix, and they’re going to refer you to the specialist they know will help you best. You’re going to come out of that healthy, and with a healthy sense of what might have happened if you didn’t go to Planned Parenthood.

On your road toward becoming a trusted Planned Parenthood staff member, you’re going to learn compassion for people who are usually shunned and who lack compassion for themselves. The addicts you’ll work with at Prelude Behavioral Services will teach you that some people get so sick, their thinking is altered and they lose judgment. Once again you’ll learn Planned Parenthood’s value as you join with them to educate, test and provide services for people who have forgotten how to care for themselves – or maybe never knew. You’re going to support people who have to make tough decisions to end a pregnancy during addiction, and you’re going to see others move toward healing, one day at a time.

You’ll grow up to be exactly the kind of “helping people type” your parents are. You’ll be proud of the roads you choose. Maybe the roads actually choose you.

Love always,
Alisa

Dear
Chelsy,



Chelsy Aquila, of Omaha, is Planned Parenthood's graphic designer and proud mom to Candace.

You, Chelsy Lyn Aquila, in your current situation – 16 and pregnant – are going to be okay.

This decision you're wrestling with right now is hard. But you will realize that you have more fight than you ever thought possible.

Things are going to suck for a while. You're going to grow up really fast for someone else; balancing school, two jobs and a baby is not easy. You thought you were invincible, that you knew all you needed to protect yourself, and now you're learning the hard way ... but it will make you stronger, and you really will be okay.

Mom has given you some really good advice: "Figure out what you love to do, and get paid for it." Take that advice! Being a teen mom doesn't have to get in the way of chasing your dream. You have what it takes to turn your talent into a successful career if you really work at it, and you will.

This might be a shocker: A day will come when you'll work for Planned Parenthood, and once you learn all they do, you'll realize they would've been a really great resource for you. You'll realize that your story connects you to countless other women. Your experience will light a fire in you to help others – like your daughter – access better information than you're getting.

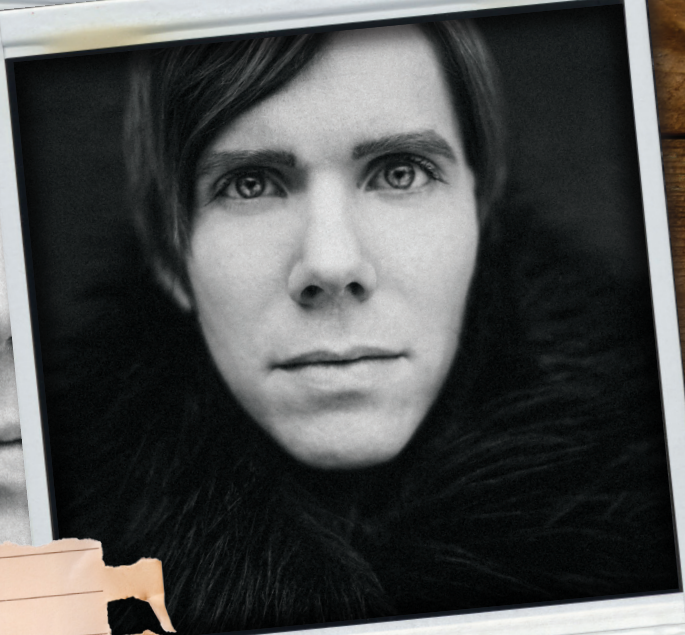
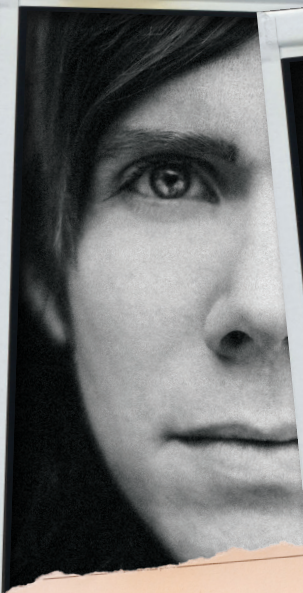
Your story will become the fuel that drives you toward everything you want to accomplish.

I look at our girl, who is 17 now – the same age you'll be when you become her mom – and she has the knowledge, the sexual confidence and wherewithal that, god, I wish you could've had. But you make that possible for her. Millard schools might still be teaching the same crappy sex ed, but she has you, a tough, wise mom who tells her everything she needs to know so that she doesn't have to figure it all out by herself.

So, Chelsy. Even though right now is the hardest moment in your life, it's going to be the best thing that happened to you. You're already such a strong person, and you're going to realize just how capable you are of doing anything you want – for your daughter, and for yourself.

You've got this.

Love,
Chelsy



DEAR ERIS,

*ERIS IS AN OMAHA-AREA
VIDEO GAME DEVELOPER, MUSICIAN, AND
PLANNED PARENTHOOD SUPPORTER.*

I'm writing to you at age 16. I know you're living in a really unsafe place to explore feeling different, and I know you feel so outcast as it is. I know you won't know what I'm talking about right away, but you've been shoving down some ways you feel different from everyone, and one day they are going to have to come up. I'm here to tell you that those feelings are beautiful and good.

Where you are now, it's hard to think about gender or sexuality because people don't talk about things like that. People only use "gay" as an insult; has anyone even said the word "transgender" around you? Soon, though, you'll move away, and for the first time you'll be able to question and explore your own gender, free from judgment.

It may not seem like it at first, but living out the things that you deeply know about yourself will free up a lot of energy in your life. You don't even realize how much it's taking to fight all that.

What you need, and what you will eventually find, is education and a community of people

who acknowledge, support, and celebrate who you really are. Once you have that, so much will change. You'll meet gay people, and transgender people! You'll find a wonderful therapist. Some things will be confusing, and honestly you'll spend years wondering where to go and what's enough, but it is all okay.

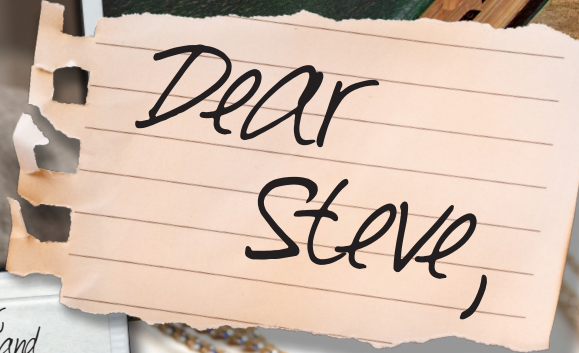
A few years after that, you'll graduate college: You'll get a full-time job, benefits, and health care. After years of doubt and more years of waiting, accessing hormones will be a pivotal moment. In some ways, you'll go through puberty all over again – a puberty you actually want. It won't be about a perfect result on the other side; it will be about accepting who you are. I can't even explain what that will feel like, but you will start to feel at peace with your body.

A lot of this probably sounds even more confusing because gender is complicated, and your journey in understanding your gender won't be a straight line. But it's not for other people to decide. Your body is your own, and you don't have to express it how anyone else wants you to. You are yours and no one else's.

With love,
Eris



Stephen Griffith is a retired minister, PPHeartland operating board member, and social justice advocate.



I know it's tough being you right now. You feel like an outsider trying to fit in, keeping your head down, trying to not make too many waves. But you're good in band, and get top grades in math and English and history, so you do get noticed. It's tough being a teenager, and even tougher when you're "the preacher's kid" and you've been relocated to a whole new community during your sophomore year.

But it's going to be okay. You'll find your voice.

I know you believe in God, but your belief will expand in the years to come, and you'll understand that humanity is filled with divine goodness. It'll be a while yet before you're not embarrassed by sex and sexuality – including your own. But you are already totally okay in God's eyes.

You'll begin to understand the beauty of everything that God has created, and know the essential goodness of the human body. God became human, so nothing about humans is disgusting to God – in fact, human-ness is an immeasurable blessing. And it'll be longer still before you're aware that, because of the goodness of every person, everyone has a right to have access to basic health care, including reproductive health care.

It's going to be okay. You'll find your voice.

Steve, I know you've always been close to your baby brother. Brace yourself: In a few years, you'll learn he's gay. You'll still love him, and be quietly proud of him – and at some point in the future you'll recognize you can't stand by any longer and let him and other people be discriminated against, or let certain religious groups dominate the conversation in ways you find hateful.

Steve, for a kid who's trying so hard to stay under the radar, you'll be shocked to learn that someday you'll not only speak out publicly, you'll be actively involved in organizations that are deliberately making waves, that are contrary to the prevailing doctrine of the day: Planned Parenthood, LGBTQ rights, racial justice, and other social issues. You'll get political. Oh, and brace yourself again, you'll become a minister, despite your intentions not to.

You'll learn to live in the now, and you'll find that life is a wondrous, imperfect, exciting journey. It's going to be okay, Steve – you'll find your voice.

Blessings,
Steve



Paul Wittau recently joined the Planned Parenthood Voters of Iowa PAC Steering Committee.



At 16, it's hard to imagine the man you'll become. You'll be shocked to learn all that you don't know – and other kids know even less. You think you're getting good information at your affluent suburban Chicago school, but trust me: There's way more to learn than condoms and scary diseases.

Your future leadership in sexual health might seem unlikely now. You're pretty reserved. Sensitive. Nervous about sex, because the only information you've received is DON'T.

And there's your mom, who got pregnant with your sister at 16. She will hold on to feelings of shame for a long time, and she is trying to protect you – staying connected, asking you about your relationships, giving unwanted advice.

There will be nothing to tell her ... until there is. In college you'll begin to experience healthy sexual relationships. You're going to expect that your mom will be proud when she opens an insurance statement and asks you about a doctor visit, and you tell her about getting tested for an STI. After all, you were proactive. You're going to be stunned – and a little crushed – when you see her response.

But it's going to help you realize a lot of people don't have the information they need to feel comfortable with sexual health. In fact, later you'll look back on the girls around you, many of them Black, who are stigmatized for their pregnancies – and realize nobody is actually talking about what might be contributing factors to that.

Someday you'll realize there are huge connections between social justice and reproductive justice. You'll even remember racist experiences that right now seem perfectly normal to you because you're so busy trying to fit in. It's going to hurt when you look back.

All of these experiences will inspire you to educate others, especially men, to take charge of their sexual health. You'll become a sex-positive, confident leader. You'll strive to shift the culture away from women bearing the sole burden of sexual health and toward more equitable relationships.

And get this – someday you'll serve on a committee for Planned Parenthood that's crucial to their mission.

You can't imagine what it looks like now, but you're going to become the kind of man you'd aspire to be now, if you only knew what I know. I'm already proud of you; someday you will be too.

Love,
Paul

SHARE YOUR STORY

We hope you are inspired by the stories in this issue – and we hope you will share your story with us, too! Champions like you make an enormous impact in your local communities, and we want to hear from you. Please reach out to the strategic partnership director in your area:

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