

NOBODY'S DECISION BUT YOURS

Feeling alone beneath I-35 pedestrian bridge

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I'll miss the pedestrian bridge over Interstate 35, but one thing I won't miss is the regular group of anti-abortion activists who gather there to wave signs and solicit honks from highway travelers. I respect their right to be there, and they may be perfectly nice people, but I profoundly disagree with their message. Here's what I wish I could have said to all the pregnant people who may have driven under the bridge through the years while these demonstrations were taking place...

If you are excited to be pregnant, and you decide to have a baby, then good for you. You are making the decision that you believe is best for you. I am excited for you! Best wishes for health and happiness for you and your baby.

If you are not particularly excited to be pregnant, but you decide to have a baby anyway, then good for you. You are making the decision that you believe is best for you. Best wishes for health and happiness for you and your baby, and may you find immeasurable gladness along the way. If you need resources, one good source of information is the Healthy Women and Children Coalition website: healthybabieswaco.org.

If you decide you are not ready or not in a good position

to raise a child, but you would like to continue your pregnancy, have a baby and give it up for adoption, then good for you. You are making the decision that you believe is best for you, and you are almost certainly bringing great joy to the family who adopts the baby. Best wishes on a healthy pregnancy and best wishes for you, your baby and your baby's adoptive parents.

If you are pregnant, and you do not want to be pregnant, and you decide to go to a doctor and end the pregnancy, then good for you. You are making the decision that you believe is best for you. Best wishes for good health and happiness the rest of your life.

I may have my own opinions about which choice I wish you would make, but ultimately your decision is what counts. It is not my right, or frankly my business, to dictate what you will do. I certainly would not want you dictating what I would do if our positions were reversed.

I want you to do what you believe is best for you and your life circumstances. I believe it is your right to decide what to do



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regarding your own body and your own life.

To me, this right does not depend on who you are or how you got pregnant. You may be married or single. You may be in a committed relationship. You may have met someone in a bar. You may have gotten pregnant the summer between eighth grade and

high school, or the night of your senior prom, or in the middle of your freshman year at college, or the morning after your 40th birthday, or any other time. You may have no children or 10 children. You may have been forced or you may have been more than willing. You may be rich or poor. You may be a responsible person or a total flake. You may be happy or sad. Whoever you are and whatever the circumstance, it is *your* body and *your* life. I do not believe it is my right, or frankly my business, to dictate what you will do with your own body. I certainly would not want you doing that to me if our positions were reversed.

To me, this right is not dependent on how far along you are in your pregnancy. Yes, the collection of cells growing in

your womb could become a baby at some point, but that does not mean it is a baby all along the way. It is a baby when the process is complete, not when the process starts or even when the process is halfway finished. Even if you have carried a pregnancy into the third trimester before deciding to end it, I believe that most likely you have a good reason for making that decision, and I believe it is your decision to make. I certainly would not want you dictating what I would do if our positions were reversed.

If you are driving under this bridge and you see a bunch of people waving signs and hear people honking horns and you feel alone and unsupported, for what it's worth, I want you to know that I support you. Make your own decision based on your own best lights. That is your right. I wish you a lifetime of health and happiness whatever you may decide.

Ashley Bean Thornton oversees the weekly online newsletter and opinion forum Act Locally Waco, whose mission is to "build channels of communication that make it easier for the people of Waco to get informed about and involved in building a terrific community." She chaired the Poverty Solutions Steering Committee appointed by the Waco City Council and has served as one of the facilitators for the Leadership Plenty program, part of the Today's Action Tomorrow's Leaders project.