

# Pregnant Pause

TOLEDO TEEN MOM HOPES HER STORY WILL MAKE OTHER YOUNG GIRLS THINK TWICE

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**R**achel Deskins rarely failed an exam in school.

But during her senior year at Toledo High School, two tests changed her life forever.

The first the then-16-year-old took in the bathroom at the Kelso Target. She aced it — she was pregnant.

The second centered on her religious beliefs and faith in God, with a brief tug-of-war between what she had been taught her entire life by her parents, the Rev. Gary Deskins and his wife, Dreama, and the desperate yearning to be free of the big responsibility she helped create.

"I had always said I was against abortion, and I was really being tested about my beliefs," said Rachel, now 18.

With her 8-month-old son, Aidan, nestled in her lap during a recent interview, Rachel said she knows she passed both of her trials with flying colors.

Her life will never be the same, she said, cuddling the chubby-legged boy whose hair glints with touches of red. The teenage things she so enjoyed are behind her.

"I would stay up all night, hang out with friends, go hot-tubbing, whatever," she said. "Sleep all day, pig out on junk food. Watch movies!"

Instead, morning starts early with a gurgling tot anxious for diaper changes, feedings and his mother's undivided attention.

But bad decisions early on don't have to equal a sad life, Rachel said, and she has career goals that center around providing the best life possible for Aidan.

As she prepares to attend community college in Centralia, Rachel also is readying herself to share her story to people her age and younger during the National Family, Careers and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) conference in Nashville.

The club for high school students was formerly known as Future Homemakers of America (FHA). In order to take her project to the national level, Rachel had to win

at the state convention, which was held recently in Wenatchee.

Her project focuses on her experiences as a teenage mother. There's no glamour in the job, she said, and she when she offered up her project at the state convention, she laid it all out.

"I told them everything," she said. "Everything they probably didn't want to hear, but everything they needed to hear."

High schoolers from all across the nation will listen to Rachel during upcoming Nashville event.

For Rachel, who hopes to study education and one day become a high school counselor, if she can get one young person to listen and not make a foolish choice, then it will all have been worth it.

## Practice what we preach

Gary Deskins said his daughter doesn't fit the stereotype of the "preacher's kid."

"She had never been a rebellious daughter in any sense," he said.

He and his wife tried to teach her to abstain, but "nonetheless, it happened," Gary said.

Rachel discovered her pregnancy at two months along. She and her longtime boyfriend had not used protection at times during intercourse, but the thought of pregnancy didn't pop into Rachel's head.

When her breasts began feeling tender, Rachel told a friend, who joked with her.

"He said, 'You're probably pregnant,' and I said, 'No, I'm not. Whatever,'" Rachel said. "Then I thought about it, and I thought, crap, maybe I am."

She and another friend hurried to Target and bought a test, which she intended to take to ease her mind before heading for the movies.

"I found out in the Target bathroom," she said.

She envisioned her participation in sports — especially her beloved soccer — sliding out of her grasp.

"Then I thought, what am I thinking about that for? What are my parents going to do? What am I going to do?" she said.



A couple of days later, as Rachel was gearing up to tell her parents, her mother asked her point-blank.

Dreama said she didn't have any physical proof that her daughter was pregnant.

"I can't explain it," she said. "I just had this feeling that something wasn't right.

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I don't know if you want to call it a motherly feeling or what."

When Rachel didn't respond in the negative, Dreama knew the truth.

"My mom was a wreck. It broke my heart," Rachel said. "I felt like I had let her down and everything. I felt totally bad, and I still feel bad when I think about it."

Gary comforted his wife through her tears. A funeral director in Vancouver, the pastor's experience with tending to the arrangements for deceased young people helped him to put the situation into perspective for his wife.

"Gary, his first thought was, well, she's not dead, is she? It could be worse," Dreama said. "He said that we would support her and love her and do whatever we could to help her."

Rachel said she eavesdropped on her parents while they talked about the family's new situation.

Having raised their children with the Biblical foundation of forgiveness and love, Rachel said, "My dad said, 'We have to practice what we preach.'"

Gary's pastoral side kicked into gear.

"That was my time to act as a redeeming father to his daughter," he said. "We had a good cry with her, and the level of disappointment kind of evaporated into, what can we do as a family to go forward?"

### **A bright future for the family**

Rachel's parents quickly learned how supportive family can be in times of crisis, from their 16-year-old son who went to Planned Parenthood with his sister for the confirmation urine test, to their parents and siblings.

Rachel's decision to keep the baby rather than place him for adoption made her parents very happy, Dreama said, and she knew they would cope.

"Sometimes families just have to pull together," Dreama said.

Dreama's sister had been through a similar experience at the age of 17, when she became pregnant with her son, now 29.

Rachel sought guidance from her aunt many times, she said.

She also carried forth with playing sports as much as she was able during her senior year at high school.

"I played fastpitch pregnant last year," she said. "At the end, I was showing pretty good."

Despite the sometimes hurtful comments that echoed from the other team's dugout, Rachel said she "didn't want to let my team down, and I didn't want to show that something like a pregnancy could take me down. I was stronger than that."

At eight months pregnant, she helped out her soccer team as much as she was able.

She also remained steadfast in her desire to graduate, taking summer homeschool courses to stay ahead. She graduated in June.

Having loving friends and supportive teachers helped in her quest.

"Toledo is a small school, and I was the first pregnancy there in a long time," she said. "My principal was nothing but supportive. My English

teacher was a dad at 19 in high school and all through my senior year, he gave me advice."

Her fellow members of Bethel Church in Napavine also bolstered her spirits.

"I told my mom that I wasn't going to go to church because they were going to look down on me," Rachel said. "And they did nothing but love me."

Rachel said she knows she is lucky to have so many people cheering her on, and that many other young women aren't in similar situations.

That's when the idea of an FCCLA project on teen pregnancy came to fruition. Rachel's spark also was lit after seeing the faces of the girls in the freshman class at Toledo.

"I saw myself in all of them," she said. "Flirtatious girls who want nothing but to get the boys' attention. I was like, these girls need to know."

She spent hours making poster boards, then talked to classes at the high school.

"I was totally real with them," she said. "I told them I made mistakes really young and all I cared about when I was 14 years old was boys, boys, boys, boys, boys. Just like you guys. I wanted (the boys') attention. I wanted them to think I was cute."

In the end, she said, "I had girls crying. I think maybe I got through to some of them."

In Nashville, she will get to share her story with "tons of people. It's great, I love it."

Even while she cautions kids to think twice about the choices they make, Rachel can't say there are any regrets that her son is now a part of her life.

"There is nothing I can

do about it. What has been done has been done," she said.

She has set her sights on a career that includes years of studying. For the first two, at least, she will live at home with her parents and commute to school.

"College will be hard but I have a lot of support," she said. "I'm kind of going against the statistics. Two-thirds of teen moms pretty much don't even graduate high school."

Every now and then, she wonders what life would have been like if she had given Aidan up for adoption, Rachel said. Aidan's father only is able to see him occasionally because of transportation problems, and Rachel wonders how that will affect her son.

"But then I remember that he has my dad and my brother," Rachel said. "He has good male influences. Even my close guy friends treat him well."

Rachel said she knows that having that high school diploma will be the key to her future success.

Getting that diploma is

the best course for any teen mom, she added.

"You can't have a career, really, without graduating from high school," she said. "No diploma, no college and no career some day. My career will make his life better."



At only 8 months, Aidan's strong legs can sometimes pose a challenge for his mom, who is shown here trying to slide on a pair of jeans. In this battle, baby's flailing legs won out, but mom didn't mind.

"I saw myself in all of them. Flirtatious girls who want nothing but to get the boys' attention. I was like, these girls need to know."

— Rachel Deskins, who shared her story of single motherhood with fellow Toledo girls and is now taking it to the national stage



Photos by **Roger Werth** / The Daily News

Rachel Deskins was only 16 when she became pregnant with her son, Aidan Matthew. She soon will share her story with hundreds of young people during the National **FCCLA** conference held in Nashville.