

If only we'd known

A WORLD WIDE PICTURE

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MICHAEL BAKEWELL

PRODUCED BY PETER BRADFORD

IF ONLY WE'D KNOWN

A FILM IN 3 PARTS FOR

THE SPASTICS SOCIETY AND THE HEALTH EDUCATION COUNCIL

PART 1

DEBBIE AND LINDA

Deborah is sixteen and is still at school. She thinks that she is pregnant. She needs someone to turn to for advice. She's on her way to see her friend, Linda, who's also expecting a baby.

“Alright, I expect you're making a lot of fuss about nothing. Are you sure?”

- Of course, I'm sure!
- What makes you so certain?
- I haven't been on for eight weeks now.
- That's no reason to be sure! S'um'em girls go for months and still not be preggers.
- Look, Lind, I'm just positive! Anyway, I was sick this morning. That's enough, isn't it?
- Probably just nerves. Now, I'd leave it for at least another month, if I was you.
- Well, it's no use you telling me that! I'm positive! Anyway, I was sick this morning.
- Terry, was it?
- Yeah, who else? Wouldn't do it with anyone else.
- Does he know?
- No, not yet. He's quite a pleasure to come.
- Well, he'll be off like a shot as soon as he finds out, if he's anything like the fellas that I know!
- Linda, he's different from the rest of the blokes! Honest, he is. Anyway, it's not his problem, is it?
- Your mum know?
- No, not yet. She'll hit the roof! Dad'll probably sling me out anyway. God, Linda, what am I gonna do?
- Well, there's lots of things you can do. I mean, what is it? You have to sit in a hot bath and drink a bottle of gin.
- God, the smell of gin just makes me sick! Anyway, it wouldn't be as easy as all that after two months, would it?
- Hey, listen, Debs. You haven't thought of having an abortion?
- I couldn't do that! That's too official, isn't it? It'd mean telling people about it. And then, *me* mum and dad would know!
- It doesn't have to be official.
- What'd you mean?

- Listen, I reckon I know someone who could sort that one out for *ya*.
- What, you mean a backstreet abortion?
- Yeah.
- My god, you know what they say about those, don't *ya*? Anyway, I might get killed! Where would I get the money from, for a start? God, Linda, I'm just so frightened! I mean, what's Mum and Dad gonna say? And what they gonna say at school when it starts to show?
- Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. Doesn't show for ages! You can keep it hidden for years!
- But, don't you think I should go and see a doctor or something? I mean, I'm only sixteen. I'm still a kid *meself*.
- Exactly, you got nothing to worry about! I mean, okay, if you was forty-five, you'd go and see a doctor!
- Yeah!
- But, there were kids of fourteen having babies in the olden days with no problems at all.
- But if I went to see a doctor, then I'd know for certain, one way or the other, wouldn't I?
- Yeah, right. So would your parents! He'd be straight off to see your mum and dad!
- Yeah, but... I was wondering... If you had a word with your doctor, he'd see me on the side line –
- I don't have a doctor.
- Really? But... I thought since you're pregnant...
- No, I don't on with doctors.
- What do you mean?
- Not after what happen' with *me* old *mam*. You know, she, she, she never saw a doctor in her life. She never needed one. Then she got this swelling, right? And the neighbours persuaded her to go and see the doctor. And he put her into hospital. A week later she died! If it wasn't for doctors, she'd be alive to tell you that story herself!
- Yeah, but Bill, I mean... he must be worried about *ya*!
- No, he don't on with doctors either.
- But if I went to see a doctor, then he'd tell me for certain if I was pregnant, wouldn't he?
- Listen, you don't need doctors to tell you how to have a baby! My old mam had five of us. She never needed a doctor. She didn't go off to a hospital like they all do now! Listen, there's always gonna be somebody around who knows, someone to give you a hand.
- But, you must be frightened!
- Not as frightened as I'd be with all those doctors! All those forms to fill in and all those nurses looking down their nose at *ya*!
- Oh... I didn't fancy the idea of seeing a doctor anyway. I mean, all the examination is enough to put you off, isn't it?
- Right, and then you won't be able to call your body your own again! They lay you out, stark naked and prod you and shove things into you! I bet you Terry would have something to say about that.

- He'll have to know. I mean, I'll have to tell him sooner or later, won't I? After all, it's his fault as much as mine, ain't it? I mean, I don't see why I should have all the problems by *meself*! But... I don't think I could bring *meself* to go and see a doctor, Linda!
- Don't go looking for trouble! Probably just a false alarm anyway. Oh, never meet trouble halfway. That's what *me* old mum always used to say."

"So, what do you think about the advice I gave Debbie? Should a girl be worried if she misses two periods?"

- *And what would've happened to me, if I'd done like she said? Drank a bottle of gin, sittin' in a hot bath?*
- *Is Debbie too young at sixteen to have a baby?*
- *And just how dangerous are backstreet abortions anyway?*
- *Are doctors and nurses really as terrifying as all that? And will they tell your parents if you're pregnant?"*

IF ONLY WE'D KNOWN

Doctors are there to help you. Here is a real doctor, talking to a girl who's got the same kind of problem as Debbie.

"You're Fiona Evans. I don't think we've met, have we, Fiona? I know that your mother registered about two or three months ago, wasn't it?"

- Yeah.
- She registered you in the family. I saw her once but I don't think I've ever seen you. What's the trouble, Fiona?
- I don't feel very well. Headache, I'm sick, can't sleep. I just don't feel very well.
- How long has this been going on for?
- About two months.
- Two months, that's quite a long time. You're normally a fairly fit girl. Have you ever been in hospital before for any reason or had any serious illnesses in the past?
- Er...I've had my tonsils out, but that's all.
- Fairly fit girl, are you?
- Mm-hmm.
- Yes. You look a bit worried and you look a bit depressed. Is anything worrying you or upsetting you?
- I've not had a period for eight weeks.
- Mm-hmm. Normally, your periods are quite regular, are they?
- Yeah.
- Any possibility of you being pregnant?
- Yeah.
- There's a definite possibility of this. Have you been feeling sick?
- Yes.
- Mm-hmm. Passing water any more frequently?
- Yeah.

- You haven't discussed this with your mother, I take it? And you haven't discussed this with any other members of the family.
- I can't tell my parents.
- Or your boyfriend?
- No.
- Yes. Hm, I think probably the best thing I can do is to examine you because I should be able to tell at this stage whether in fact you are pregnant. And then we can talk about this afterwards. It's quite a simple examination. It's just examining you internally. It's not going to hurt you. Now, you just slip the bottom part down and just lie on your side on the couch over there and I'll come over when you're ready.
- Okay..."

- "Now, what I want you to do, Fiona, is to just roll over on your left side and draw your knees up toward your chest. Okay? Just on your left side, that's fine. Jolly good. Just bring your bottom over a little bit further towards me, that's fine. And bend both knees up towards the chest. Now, look, I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just going to lay a hand on your tummy and I'm going to examine you inside. It's not going to hurt you at all. And, I just want you to try and relax. I know it's easier said than done but try your best. Okay. Open your mouth really wide and take some deep breaths in and out. Okay? I'm just going to examine you inside. There we are. Okay, just take it easy, that's fine. That's jolly good. All over. Good. Okay. Get yourself dressed up. Get yourself dressed up, now. Come in and see me. And then we'll have a talk about things, okay?"

- "Well, there's no doubt about it, Fiona. You're definitely pregnant, no doubt whatsoever. Er... I suppose you were pretty certain of this anyhow, before you came along to see me. Have you discussed this with anyone? Have you talked it over with your mother?
- I couldn't tell her. She's so proud of me. She, she couldn't, she wouldn't understand. She... What am I gonna do? She'll be so upset. I mean...
- She's going to be upset. Of course she's going to be upset. She wouldn't be very much of a mother if she wasn't! Don't you agree? But because she's upset doesn't mean to say that she won't be caring and won't want to help you. And... Have you got no one you can discuss this with? Look, I'm not going to tell your mother or anyone else without your permission. Whatever we say here is completely confidential. Do you understand?
- You won't tell anybody else?
- I wouldn't even be allowed to tell anyone, even if I wanted to, not that I'd want to anyhow. See, you can understand the problem, but although I won't tell your parents – I've got no intention of doing so – there's not really very much one can do, unless you discuss it with them. Do you understand?
- Yeah...
- Now, look. What I want you to do is this, Fiona. I want you to try and pluck up courage, go back home, and talk it over with your mother. Or if you can't talk it over with your mother, how about your older sister? But it's important to speak to someone

about this. And hopefully, I'd like to see you next week, with your mother or your sister, and we can talk about what we're going to do. Okay?

- Yeah. Thank you.
- Alright. Come along and see me next week. I'm sure things are not nearly as black as you think they are."

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PART 2

CLINIC TALK

"You're queuing up for a second go, are you? Most of us can't get back home quick enough.

- No, I'm just waiting for someone.
- I've got ages to wait yet. I told *me* boss I was picking *me* granny up from the hospital. It's so difficult to get time off work. I daren't tell him I'm pregnant again.
- Oh? Not your first, then?
- No, I can see it's yours though. You're a bit young to be havin' a baby, aren't you?
- Yeah... That's what everyone keeps telling me. Mind you, I feel, you know, better now that I'm in safe hands with the clinic, kind of thing.
- They'll look after you alright.
- Oh, I'm certain. It was Terry, that's *me* boyfriend. He persuaded me to come along. I'd never come otherwise, I was much too frightened.
- How'd your parents feel about it?
- God, they hit the roof. I mean, I don't know which is worse. Dad, I mean, he just ignores me, pretends I'm not there. And as for *me* mum, well, she just keeps going on and on about it the whole time. It just drives me up the wall.
- Yeah, well, they'll come around when you've had the baby. No one can resist a baby, you'll see.
- Oh, I hope so.

- See, I wish I'd resisted this one.
- Oh? Didn't you want it then?
- Well, we hadn't planned it properly. I mean, we didn't want another one so soon after the first. Girl at work told me I couldn't get pregnant while I was breastfeeding. Well, she was wrong. Still, wouldn't have mattered if I hadn't had to go back to work, but Eric, he's my husband, well, he's been off work for weeks. They have this unofficial strike at the factory! Well, somebody's got to earn the money.
- Oh?
- That's why I daren't tell *me* boss I'm pregnant again. Well, what with one baby home and having to work, and another one on the way, it just gets too much sometimes. It's alright for you.
- You must be joking. You should've seen the embarrassment in the school. It's absolutely awful. Mind you, it's such a relief all that's over now.
- It's always like that after the first one.
- They ask such funny questions, don't they? They want to know all about *me* family's medical history, whether anybody's ever had a deformed child and what diseases they'd had. Then they start goin' on about Terry's family. You know, I never knew, I never had the foggiest, did I? They kept on going on about vaccinations, you know? If I'd ever been vaccinated against German measles... You know, I couldn't remember. Gotta ask *me* mum, I suppose, and that'll start her all up again... Anyway, why do you have to be vaccinated?
- I don't know. But they made sure I was after *me* last pregnancy.
- Mm... Then they start asking personal questions. I got really embarrassed! You know, whether I'd ever had a vaginal discharge or VD. Certainly not, I told them! And then they had the cheek to ask me if I was ever on the pill! I mean, I wouldn't be in this condition if I'd been, would I? And they start going on about drugs and tranquilizers and all that. Oh, I'm dying for a cigarette.
- Hey, you mustn't smoke in here. They'll have a fit! Anyway, it's supposed to be bad for your baby.
- I said I'd give it up. But it's so hard, isn't it?
- Yeah.
- I don't know what's keeping Terry? He said he'd be here.
- How does he feel about it?
- Er... I think he could've died at first. But you know, he's getting really good now. Like he's facing up to facts. Mind you, it's his big step, picking me up from this place.
- Yeah, well, he's probably outside, pacing up and down, trying to get up the courage to come in.
- I hope he hurries up, 'cause I'm starving! Mind you, I've got to watch *me* food from now on. You know, no fatty foods and sweets and all that, isn't it?
- Yeah, I found that the hardest part. So rotten all those lovely things are so bad for you!
- Hello.
- What kept you 'til now?
- I got here, didn't I?
- Anyway, I'd better go. Nice talking to *ya*. I hope you don't have to wait too long anymore. Bye.
- Cheerio."

- “It’s enormous! It’s just like a bus! Did they really let you have it?
- I’m a tried and trusted employee, now.
- But you’ve only been there two months!
- Perhaps they think I’m a credit to the firm.
- Listen anyway, I’ve got loads of questions to ask you.
- About what?
- I don’t know, they want to know all about you at the clinic.
- Me? Why?
- I don’t know, your family’s medical history and all that. I mean, how should I know?
- What’s my family got to do with it?
- It takes two to make a baby, you know?
- Yeah, I know. I ought to know by now. We’d better be going.
- Listen, you think we should tell your mum tonight?
- She’s gotta know sooner or later, hasn’t she?
- Yeah. I suppose so.”

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PART 3
SARAH AND ERIC

- “What kept *ya*? Quick session at the bingo?
- That number 107 bus kept me. Forty-five bloody minutes at that bus stop! And that long walk from the clinic. It’s freezing now.
- Want a fag?
- Oh, yeah.
- First today?
- By the time the bus came, I was so desperate for a smoke, I’d managed to haul *meself* upstairs!

- Where's Mandy? Mum not brought her back yet?
- She phoned about half an hour ago. I said I'd no idea when you'd be in, so she said she'd look after her this evenin' as well.
- Ah
- I thought we could go out for a change! You know, down the cherry tree, see some of the gang.
- Yeah, well, you go if you like. I've got to rest up a bit.
- What'd you mean? What've they been telling you down the clinic then?
- Well, they think I've been overdoing it and they're worried about *me* blood pressure. They said I got to take it easy for a while.
- What do they mean by that? Take time off work?
- It'd probably only be a week.
- Huh! Only a week? So, er, what're you gonna tell them at the factory?
- The truth, I suppose.
- You can't do that! You'd be out in like a shot! I mean, look what they said to Patsy: 'This is a factory, you know, not a nursin' home'. I mean, there are dozens of girls who could do your job, love. Nah, I'm sorry, you can't pack it in just now. We couldn't manage without your wages anyway.
- They said I might be harmin' the baby by overdoin' it so much.
- But we agreed that you'd go on working right up until the last minute. After all, Mum had one of hers practically on the shop floor.
- Well, it's only what they said.
- Ah, they make a lot of fuss about nothing down there. Got naught better to do. They're paid to tell you things like that. I mean, there's not a chance in a million that anything's gonna go wrong. You were alright last time.
- Yeah, well, I did what they said, didn't I?
- You didn't stop smokin'.
- They didn't know.
- Didn't do you any harm.
- No, but what about Jenny's baby? Well, they said that's 'cause she smokes so much.
- Coincidence, pure coincidence. A thousand things could've caused that.
- Oh, I don't know. I know somethin' though. I haven't got the willpower to give it up, no matter what they say.
- You worry too much, you know? You shouldn't let them get you down. After all, kids were being born for thousands of years before the clinics came.
- Yeah, but just think of all the kids that died in the olden days! Or, or were deformed, all that.
- They've got you in a right morbid mood tonight, haven't they? That couldn't happen to us. Come on, let's get down the pub. It'll cheer you up a bit.
- Yeah, that's another thing. They said alcohol is bad for the baby too and I'm supposed to give that a rest.
- Well, we'll only have a few! A little of what you fancy does you good, you know? Hey, another thought. We could go out and have a nice slap-up meal somewhere, hey?
- Yeah, it sounds nice...
- Yeah. And forget all this stuff about resting up and all that. Just for a while. I mean, we do need your wages, and it won't do you any harm.

- Yeah. I suppose you're right.
- Yeah.
- I don't know what I'm gonna tell 'em at the clinic, though...
- Well, why tell 'em anythin'? Hey look, why don't you put off your next appointment for a bit? I mean, that's what wears you out, tramping up and down there all the time. It's a nuisance.
- Yeah. Yeah, I'll think of something.
- Good lass. Come on. Get your skates on and let's get down to the pub."

Now. That looked like a really cosy little family scene, didn't it? But just think about what happened. Was I really trying to look after her? Or was I just getting my own way? The first thing I did was to offer her a cigarette. Is smoking really a risk for a pregnant woman? Should I really have told Sarah to go on working right up to the last moment before the birth of the baby? Do clinics really make a lot of fuss about nothing? Does a woman need advice about having a baby? And which is really more important: the odd evening out at the pub or making sure your baby's born, sound and healthy?

Transcript: Cheyenne Beile & Sherry Stanbury