



"We fight. We all talk at the same time. We scream and yell. But we really, really love each other. Deep down, we love each other."

CARLA BUCHAN
Kim's aunt

A delivery of 'Saving Grace'

GRACE from page 1

every weekend when she came home to see them and Clete in Omaha. The family was so close, she said, the two couples used to "double date."

She told her mother everything, Kim said, but she couldn't tell her this.

Kim and Clete told no one. Kim did not see a doctor because the visit would show up after the insurance claim went through. And Kim still lived the life of a college freshman, not an expectant mother.

"No research. No reading. No doctor," she said. "I was still in denial. I tried to go about my regular business as if I were not pregnant thinking, 'Oh, yeah, somehow it's all just going to go away.'"

She was rarely ill, she said, but felt the baby kicking by October. Kim ate right, didn't drink or smoke, took vitamins, calcium pills and drank a lot of milk — and that was it.

"I thought I could handle it on my own ... I thought, I'm my own person, I'm 18 now."

Alone but attached

At night, when Kim's roommate was not there, Kim said she sat in her room and cried.

"I would talk to my boyfriend every night, and I would just cry about it," she said. "We talked about calling someone who would keep it confidential, but we just kept putting it off."

When she was with Clete, she could accept the life inside her, she said. For Christmas, he even bought her a pendent necklace with a garnet — the January birthstone — guessing the baby would be born early in the year.

Over Christmas break, she managed to hide her bulging stomach and an extra 40 pounds by making her parents, and everyone else, believe she was just gaining the usual "freshman 15."

But on Jan. 23, the freshman 15 was starting to become the first-born 9-pounds, 4-ounces.

Thursday morning, Kim went to her Spanish class but skipped her afternoon classes because she was sick. Her roommate dropped out after the first semester, so Kim was alone.

The cramps began. She started to bleed. She told herself she was not going into labor. She sat on her coach, watched television, drank hot tea and took some Advil.

At 7 p.m., she went to her friend's room and told her she was having bad

cramps from her period. They watched "Friends." At 8:30, she called her parents with assurance she would still be home the next day, but told her mom she was hemorrhaging and "in a little pain tonight." At 9, she went to the bathroom where it "felt good to push a little bit."

At 10:30, and in pain, she called Clete. Both did not conceive of labor, and thought she just needed rest. At 11:15, she went to her health aide, took some belongings and stayed in her health aide's room. At 12:05 a.m. she went back to the bathroom.

She said she was in and out of the bathroom pushing almost every hour until 3:15 a.m., when she went back to her health aide's room and, lying in the spare bed, kept silently pushing. At 5 a.m., she couldn't stand it anymore.

At 5:15, in the bathroom, she started losing blood and tissue. At about 6:30, she felt the baby's head.

"It's time to go into labor, Kim," she told herself. "I proceeded to get up and walk to Ruth's (her health aide) room, grab my keys and glasses, tell Ruth, 'I'm 10 times better, gotta go, bye,' and went back to my room."

Back in her dorm room, Kim lay on her fold-out couch and pushed in 20-second intervals — a method she said she learned on "ER."

"In one of my hands I held a mirror. In the other I held the head."

Then — staying as silent as the secret she had been keeping — she pushed until her secret was out.

A little after 7 a.m., she cut the umbilical cord with a scissors, washed her baby girl's mouth and nose out, wrapped her in a clean, red T-shirt and held her next to her chest. She wanted to spend time with Katherine before giving her up, she said.

The baby was crying, so Kim turned the television volume up loud. For four hours, from watching "Good Morning America" to the "Young and the Restless," the young mother was forced to accept her newborn. She even named her: Katherine Grace, after her deceased grandmother Grace Katherine.

Sign for delivery

In those four hours, Kim took a 180-degree turn to face the life.

"I couldn't let her go," she said.

"She was mine ... Whoa, I was a mom."

But it was 11:30 a.m. The blood staining the room was Kim's, and she was getting weak. She put Katherine

down to grab a glass of orange juice and granola bars.

Initially, Kim planned to wrap the baby up, drive it to an adoption center, drop it off and still be in Omaha that afternoon and back in class on Monday.

But Kim was too weak to even stand up. Though she was bonding with Katherine, she still felt pressured to give her up. She checked in the phone book under adoption and called the Nebraska Children's Home to pick up a baby — not from a hospital, but from a dorm room.

For Bobbi Richard, the caseworker from Nebraska Children's Home, the call from Kim's dorm room came as a shock. The sight of the blood-soaked room was worse, as Richard said it looked like "a bad car accident."

"And Kim was as white as a ghost," Richard said. Kim had not yet delivered the placenta — she didn't even know she had to. Richard said Kim still refused to go to the hospital because that would mean telling her parents and everyone else. Eventually, Kim's worsening condition won over her confidentiality, and she was on the way to Bryan Memorial Hospital with Katherine in her arms.

Calling the shots

Inside, Kim knew she wanted to keep Katherine, and she was seriously starting to question the outside pressures to give up the baby.

"I wasn't thinking what I wanted," she said. "I was thinking how to please everybody else."

She was thinking of her parents, who, at the time, were making a desperate attempt to find her.

Kim's mother said she had a suspicion Kim was pregnant after purposely brushing up against her slightly protruding stomach the week before while Kim was at home. She said she thought Kim might be five months pregnant — not full term.

At 2:30 p.m., Kim called her mother from the hospital.

"You're not going to believe me," she told her mother.

"Did you have a miscarriage?"

"No, I hid the baby."

"Where? Where's the baby?"

"No. I hid the pregnancy for nine months."

When Marcia Coffeen hung up the phone, she told her husband Bob Coffeen they needed to go to Lincoln because Kim had a baby.

"Whose Kim? Not our Kim.



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

TOP: KATHERINE GRACE Coffeen-Spencer at about two weeks old. ABOVE: KIM HOLDS a gift at a baby shower where dozens of relatives showered Kim with presents ranging from dolls to diapers.

They've got the wrong Kim."

Marcia told him she talked with their daughter. They had the right Kim.

Marcia, Bob and Kim's aunt Carla Buchan, who is very close to her niece, drove down to Lincoln together. Shock was an understatement as they tried to figure out how they had missed Kim's pregnancy altogether.

Bob said it was Kim's nature, though, to try to get away with something until she was absolutely caught. Like hiding "downslips" from high school, Kim was always trying to commit "the perfect crime," he said. But this time, the evidence was crying for attention.

Kim confessed most of her "crimes" and other personal thoughts

to Carla. The two even shared a room during Christmas, when Kim changed clothes in front of her aunt, but Carla said she never suspected.

An earlier conversation between Carla and Kim weighed heavily on her niece's mind. They were talking about birth control, Carla said, and Kim asked what her parents' reaction would be if she were pregnant.

Carla's comment: "They'd probably go ballistic," and it would be the worst thing that could happen.

"That was just an off-the-cuff comment," Carla said, and never realized Kim would take it to heart.

In reality, Carla said, the family would have sat down and worked out

Please see GRACE on 8