

# Family, friends support new mother

*"There's nothing you can't tell your parents. Sure, they're going to get frustrated and angry, but at the same time, they're always going to love you no matter what."*

**KIM COFFEEN**



ABOVE: Katherine Grace, now only two weeks old, was kept a secret during Kim's pregnancy. Below: Bob Coffeen, Kim's father, and Cleteus Spencer, Katherine's father, proposed to Kim on Valentine's Day. The two plan to marry next June.



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what was best for Kim.

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

## Driving it home

That love was about to be tested. "I knew the one person she did not want to hurt in the whole world was her dad," Marcia said. "When we got down to the hospital, I didn't know what his reaction was going to be."

On the way down, the family discussed plans for the baby. Marcia initially sided with adoption. Carla even offered to quit her job and raise the baby for Kim. And both said Bob would not let go of his own flesh and blood, saying, "She's a Coffeen. And we don't give Coffeens away."

They brought their inhibitions, anxiety and shock into the hospital room to greet a very pale, and very scared, Kim.

Then Katherine Grace was brought in.

"Kim and I just started bawling," Marcia said. "My only child, my baby, just had a baby."

Marcia, though moved by the sight of her granddaughter, made it very clear to her daughter that if she wanted to keep the baby, her mother would help, but Kim had to raise her.

Kim's decision wasn't cemented, however, until she brought her father down from the pedestal on which she kept him and freed the bounds of unconditional love.

Marcia and her sister left the room.

## Pride without prejudice

Bob Coffeen's father grew up during the Depression. Bob said his father taught him early what it meant to make the best of a situation. As a young man with a pregnant wife, Bob was laid off from his job at Union Pacific. He turned to his and his wife's family for help and also learned early the value of family.

"Kim and Marcia have been my whole life," he said. "Everything I've done has been for them."

Bob had high goals for his daughter. He said he always trusted her to do the right thing. His pride in Kim's going to college in Lincoln was visible by the walls of Husker paraphernalia in the basement of the family's home. His pride in his daughter also was evident in the way she held him in such high regard.

And his pride did not waver in that hospital room.

He reassured his daughter he would support her in whatever decisions she made, and that her health and well-being

were his primary concerns.

But he was still disappointed.

"I think I've failed as a father if I put that much pressure on my daughter if she couldn't have come to us," he said. "That's my disappointment. That I've been that kind of father, for whatever reason, my child felt she couldn't come to me."

Knowing his daughter held him high on a pedestal, Bob brought Kim up from her well of fear and taught her how a family can build.

"I can't put two boards together. I have no talent with my hands," he said, "but I fix things."

"This is just another opportunity for me to fix a situation."

Bob admits getting a phone call that his daughter just had a baby forced him to take a softer approach to the situation than if Kim would have told him in September that she was pregnant.

"The conversation would have started with, 'What the hell are you doing? You can't raise this baby,' but the shock would have worn off."

"... We wouldn't have thrown her off each wall of this house ... no way in the world would we say, 'You're out of the will. Get out of here. We'll never see you again.'"

The news of a baby should be treated with joy, and, as such, Bob said he enjoys being a grandparent. He calls himself "grandpa" and jokingly banters with his wife, whom he now calls "granny."

Bob came from a small family. His parents are deceased, and his immediate family is now small, he said, so he was excited for a grandchild so soon. An extra stocking on the mantle or an extra plate at Thanksgiving fulfilled his desire for a larger family, he said.

"Just think how fun the holidays are going to be," he said.

## Two for one

Bob's family may have to buy two Christmas stockings instead of one, though. In addition to a granddaughter, he may soon have a son-in-law.

On Valentine's Day, Clete slipped an engagement ring on Kim's finger. The ring had belonged to Kim's grandmother.

Clete just turned 24, and Kim will be 19 in June. They plan on marrying in June of next year. But with family support, they're trying to build their own family.

Without Clete, Kim and her secret were alone. Their telephone conversations calmed her, she said.

But one phone call wasn't as calming.

Clete was working at Sutherlands in Omaha — where the couple met two years ago — on the Saturday morning after the birth. Kim called him at about 7:30. She had a baby. She was keeping it. He had to come down and sign paternity papers.

"I was in a world of shock," Clete said. "I was paranoid, and I didn't want to tell anybody."

On the phone, Clete told Kim, "Well, that's your problem Kim. I want nothing to do with this baby," and said he wasn't coming.

Clete's driver's license is suspended. To get down to Lincoln, he would have to tell his mother. Instead, he went to a basketball game with his nephew.

"I did not accept being a father at that point, because I felt like I was losing my life," he said. "I saw my entire life flash in front of my eyes, thinking all the things I've never done I'll never do."

After Marcia threatened to call Clete's mother, Darlene Spencer, Clete went to face her himself.

Clete's father passed away last October, and he said he wasn't looking forward to throwing any more turmoil into his mother's life.

Darlene said she was obviously shocked, and scolded her son for not being responsible, but they wasted no time in getting on the road to Lincoln. She said she did not know why her son or Kim — who she said she treats as her own daughter — did not tell her earlier.

"I would have been there for them,"

she said. "Both families have so much to give."

Bob said Clete "initially didn't come to bat."

"Kim thought he wasn't going to claim paternity," he said. "That was hard for Kim."

"His mom didn't say, 'We'll get a lawyer and fight this thing,' or kick him out. She was cordial to him," and Clete agreed his mother's support was crucial.

Now Bob, Kim and Marcia say Clete's denial was only a lapse.

Clete said his lapse ended when he walked into the hospital room and saw Katherine.

"I looked at her and I thought, 'I can't give her up.' I just decided it was time to stop being stubborn."

Sitting next to his fiancée on the couch more than two weeks later, Clete said he hoped, "someday, maybe Kim will forgive me."

"I've already forgiven you," Kim said. "I was mad and wondering why you weren't there, but you're there for me now."

The couple now says they've been drawn closer together after sharing — and owning up to — the one secret they thought would force them apart.

They're excited to get married, but willing to wait. And that issue brings some tension between the two families: Darlene wants the couple married sooner than the Coffeens do. As both sides work with schedules, conflicts and tensions, they're working together.

"Our families are very close," Clete said. "It makes me happy to see all this happening in front of my eyes."

## Baby steps

Children. Marriage. Graduation. It was supposed to be the other way around, Kim said, but she was ready to take steps backward.

With a laundry list of friends and relatives to watch Katherine, Kim said she will enroll at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the fall and continue on her career in journalism. After setting the date for next year's wedding, the couple said they will plan on moving into a place of their own.

Kim also said it was possible they will have another child five years from now, after she graduates.

"When I'm alone, I kind of feel down because it's like this is not the way I wanted everything to go," Kim said. "... Now it seems like it's totally reversed."

"It's kind of a lot to swallow." Going from one week a college student, to the next week a mother, took a toll on Kim, but she said fraternity parties are now second place to watching her daughter grow up.

"... My roots are here. When I was in Lincoln, I missed Clete and my family," she said. "Right now, I'm so happy I wouldn't trade anything I have right now for the world."

## The bough holds

On a Saturday afternoon, Bob and Kim are trying to stuff Katherine into a red, fuzzy Husker jumper, which matches her grandfather's Nebraska sweatshirt.

Katherine swims in the bulky fabric as Kim puts a matching Husker cap — much too big — on the baby's head.

Maybe she'll have grown into it before Bob takes Katherine to her first game at Memorial Stadium and baptizes her as a true Husker.

The Husker outfit was one of her first. After Katherine's birth, the family went on a necessity shopping spree and Kim took a crash course in parenting.

Since then, gifts and advice have been flowing in. At a baby shower in February, Kim sorted through boxes and bags full of baby necessities and Looney Tunes-themed gifts (a favorite of both Kim and Clete) from friends and family members on both sides. And Katherine made the rounds of cradling arms.

"This isn't the way it's supposed to happen," Kim said. "They're supposed to be mad at me or kick me out of the house."

"They're very supportive."