



## MONTANA'S STATE OF ABORTION

PAGE 8

# THE A WORD



## MONTANA'S STATE OF ABORTION

By Tess Haas / [teresa.haas@umontana.edu](mailto:teresa.haas@umontana.edu)  
Photo illustration by Brian Walton @brian.walton

**SARA GOLD SITS** drinking black tea in the University Center. Her cell-phone keeps buzzing. Apparently someone in her group text has sparked a succession of funny replies. She laughs to herself before straightening up and getting serious. "So this is anonymous right?" Sara Gold isn't Sara Gold's real name. The 20-year-old hasn't told her mother, her current boyfriend or many of her friends the story she is about to tell. It's the story of one of the most personal times in her life. She said she isn't ashamed, not at all. She just doesn't want the people she loves who she didn't tell to feel betrayed. She knows to some it's a controversial topic.

"It was my freshman year when I found out I was pregnant and decided to have an abortion."

Gold was 18 in the fall of 2013, and had just started at UM. 2013 also marked a record number of 73 abortion clinic closures in the U.S., according to the Guttmacher Institute and Bloomberg Review.

"I was 18, a freshman, and the guy was an asshole."

Montana kept with the trend. In October of 2013, a Livingston clinic closed when the clinician retired, reducing the number of Montana's clinics offering surgical abortion to three. Surgical, or in-clinic abortions, are performed up to 14 weeks into a pregnancy, depending on the clinic. The other option is a medical abortion. Five Montana clinics offer the latter, where two doses of medication are given to end the pregnancy. Generally, medical abortions are an option only until the ninth week of pregnancy.

In early November, Gold, who moved to Missoula from out of state, was hanging with a group of friends including one guy, Sam. After a holiday weekend, the two drunkenly had sex in her dorm. The next morning was awkward, made worse because she had taken his virgin-

ity. The friendship and the friend group disintegrated. Gold was hanging holiday decorations with her mother over winter break when she realized she'd missed her period. Still, she didn't think she was pregnant. She had missed a weekend's worth of birth control, but she hadn't really been having sex. Maybe she was sick.

Gold came back to Montana, and while visiting a friend in Bozeman, decided to visit a clinic for a free pregnancy test.

Bozeman has no abortion clinic, and Bridgcare, the clinic Gold's friend took her to, is the only publicly-funded health clinic in the city. There are 28 clinics in Montana like Bridgcare that receive money from Title X, a federal grant program dedicated to family planning and preventative care. Title X does not fund abortions.

The Bozeman Daily Chronicle reports that Bridgcare's client base of around 7,000 is, for the most part, like Gold, young people seeking reduced or free medical services and testing. Many of their clients are young women seeking birth control.

It was here that Gold realized for the first time the obstacles facing the clinics she needed so desperately to help her.

"I was scared, not because I thought I was pregnant, I thought something was wrong with me," Gold said. "I went to pee in a cup and put it in a drawer that pulled out of the wall. There was another cup in there and I thought 'This is an overworked clinic.'"

The wait was agonizing. "I didn't sit down once. I paced around the waiting room for 45 minutes. I was angry it was taking so long. I walked up to the receptionist a couple of times and asked 'How much longer?'"

Gold always wanted to be a mother. She wanted four kids, but not now and not with Sam. She was 18, a freshman with no financial stability.

The doctor took Gold into a private room and told her she was pregnant. They'd need to do an ultrasound. She lay back onto the exam table, still in denial. Maybe there had been three false positives, and maybe, just maybe, they were wrong.

"And that's when it hit me," Gold said. She began to cry. "That's inside me."

"I'm sorry," the doctor said.

It was then that Gold, like one in three women of reproductive age in the U.S., decided she needed an abortion. But in Montana, fewer clinics, renewed anti-abortion legislation, demand from out-of-state

## ONE IN THREE

women will get an abortion at some point in their lives.



women and social stigma stood between the scared 18-year-old and her choice.

Bridgcare could only offer Gold a free pregnancy test, she'd have to go back to Missoula for an abortion. By the time she got back and scheduled her appointment, it would be too late for a medical abortion. She would need a surgical abortion.

Bridgcare referred Gold to Blue Mountain Clinic in Missoula, one of four remaining clinics offering surgical abortions in Montana. She made her appointment for 9 weeks into her first trimester when she'd finally be back at school from Christmas break.

If Gold had needed a surgical abortion in Montana just four months later she would have had even fewer options. In March of 2014, All Families Healthcare clinic in Kalispell was broken into and vandalized beyond repair. Zachary Klarit pled guilty to the break in. He is the son of a board member of Hope Pregnancy Ministries, an organization that advocates abortion alternatives. Women in northwest Montana previously served by All Families now have to travel 120 miles to Missoula or 450 miles to Billings for an abortion.

Violence towards abortion clinics isn't new. The same Kalispell clinic was fire-bombed in 1994. Since 1993, eight abortion providers and volunteers have died in the U.S. Last week, a mass shooting at a Planned Parenthood in Colorado Springs left three people dead, including a police officer. Gun violence has been the main focus in media and political talks about the incident, but The New York Times reports that the suspected shooter, Richard L. Dear, said "no more baby parts" in a police interview.

Sabotage and closure leaves only one clinic to serve western Montana. Blue Mountain Clinic was the only place Gold could go. Billings is over 300 miles away, and Gold couldn't miss the three days of school it might require. She also needed a ride if she wanted the optional mild sedation.

Blue Mountain Clinic director Annie Hansen said she has seen abortion care double in the last two years alone. While there are appointments, services like abortion need to be fit in with all the other health services BMC offers, and women from other states need BMC's services too.

Women come from North Dakota where there is only one abortion clinic for the roughly 135,000 women of reproductive age. In the western part of the state, the closest clinic for women needing surgical abortions is Planned Parenthood Billings, an eight-hour drive.

Hansen said she often hears of the Billings clinic being booked for up to six weeks, or being hard to get ahead of. So when women can't go to Billings, they come to Missoula.

"There is really no one providing abortion care on a consistent basis in the entire state, except for Blue Mountain Clinic," Hansen said. "Though there are Planned Parenthood clinics all over the state, either they do not offer the service, or are so booked that people are willing to travel to see us," Hansen said.

Idaho, Wyoming and South Dakota are also lacking in clinics. In North Dakota and Idaho there is a mandatory counseling appointment and 24-hour waiting period before any abortion service is performed, deterring some women from obtaining abortions at all. Forty percent of Idaho's abortion procedures were performed in other states, according to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

While Gold waited for her appointment, she began experiencing morning sickness. She fell into a deep depression. She wore

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE