

Interview with Quinn

Aliya: How old were you when you had your first child?

Quinn: Ok so I got pregnant with Ren at 17, had him just after I turned 18 and finished high school.

Aliya: How did you feel when you found out you were pregnant?

Quinn: At first I think I was just in shock, cuz I wasn't terrified like I should have been, ya know what I mean? I hadn't told anyone at that point so I think it just didn't feel real, it was more just a shock than anything. As I got further along then it started to sink in, and I was like "holy shit"

Aliya: What's something that you heard from others when you told people you were pregnant?

Quinn: I got a lot of support, which was awesome, I didn't really expect to get as much support as I did. But I heard all the classics, "oh you're too young, don't you want to ever finish school?", and a lot of it came from my dad. It was people with good intentions, but if I'm at the point where I'm telling you I'm pregnant, I've made a decision. I had a lot of people trying to sway my decision.

Aliya: Who was there for you as support during this time, and was there anyone who wasn't?

Quinn: Adam was my biggest support for sure [Quinn's husband and father of her children]. I always had Adam, we just went through it together which was awesome. I was super lucky in that I had everyone at that time. No one left my life because of it, so that was pretty awesome. I had family, Adam, everyone.

Aliya: Has anyone ever said anything cruel or unfair to you since becoming pregnant or giving birth?

Quinn: Yeah. Obviously I heard the little comments, and I'm not going to cry this time! I think I'm good! But I got all of the little comments, like people on the bus. It doesn't seem mean to tell someone "Oh you're too young to have a baby", but when you hear that a million times, it hurts so deep. The cruelest comments were the ones that people thought were with good intentions. Even just people assuming my kids are my siblings, and stuff like that. My grandmother was a giant support for me the whole time, she's really conservative, I always thought she was going to not be supportive at all, but she was until my son was almost 2 this past Christmas. She had a few too many, and she made some really horrible comments that basically resulted in things being said like "Your son was a mistake", "You could have gone so far, you really made the wrong choice". That was the worst. It's so hard to have someone you think is supporting you, and then you find out that they really think differently. That was the hardest for me.

Aliya: Has your experience with motherhood effected your life in any way that you never expected it to?

Quinn: I never anticipated to be friends with other moms. I thought I was just gonna have a kid, everyone has kids. But I found such a sense of community and understanding and people with good intentions trying to help me be a better mom. I was super surprised by other moms accepting me even as a young mom, even if they themselves were older moms. Giving me advice, and older mom's inviting me to playdates, I almost just felt validated from that. These older moms wanted to hang out with me, and that was really cool for me, I never thought people were going to see me as a mom and relate to me no matter how different we were. You know?

Aliya: That's so important! Do you struggle with mental illness? Did that have an impact on your experience during pregnancy and after giving birth?

Quinn: I have a deep family history of mental illness and suicide and depression. My whole family struggles really deeply with mental illness, and I never felt it personally until I was pregnant with Grey, my second baby. So when I was pregnant with Grey, I found out through terrible experience that there is such thing as pregnancy depression or prenatal depression. I had never heard that term, I had never talked to anyone, I never even knew there was such thing as being depressed just during pregnancy, and so I really struggled alone during it. It just made no sense to myself or even to my own husband, the person who knows me the best, he couldn't understand why I wasn't cleaning up after myself. All of these things that I do normally, but when you're depressed it's just so hard to do.

Aliya: Even the little things.

Quinn: The little things! Exactly! I could take care of my child, but it was taking care of myself that was harder than taking care of my child. I didn't even know it was real until I gave birth and it (the depression) lifted for me, thank god. I don't know, I just got a sense of how people, like my own sisters and grandparents really struggle, because [it was] the first time in my life I felt that, that helplessness. There's nothing you can do when you feel depressed and anxious, you can tell yourself not to be but there is nothing you can do. So for me it really opened my eyes to how real that is, and how much you need to take care of yourself and check on yourself constantly. Even now that I've told my doctor, and I'm keeping an eye on myself for post part depression, because now I know what to look out for. That was my experience.

Aliya: Thank you for sharing that with me. What are the most common pre-conceived ideas and stereotypes that you have heard from others on young parenthood, while you go through it, that you have found to not be true for you?

Quinn: The biggest stereotype that I found was that people think that young parents just pawn their kids off. When I tell people that nobody has babysat my kids up to a certain point, people almost wouldn't believe me, they just think that we want to pawn our kids off to our parents. My own family members assumed I lived with my mom, not with my husband in my own apartment. They would say "You don't live here?", and I'm like, no what do you mean, why would I live with my mom? Not that there's anything wrong if I did live with my mom, that would be totally cool! For me, it's that assumption from people. Also the assumption that young moms, and even first time moms don't know what they're doing, they don't need unsolicited advice from you, a stranger on the bus.

Aliya: Even if they aren't a mom!

Quinn: Exactly! Even if they're not a mom people just think that they can give you all of the advice in the world, and sometimes its the worst advice. They think they have an educated understanding of parenting, and I know it's not good advice, they just think, She's 17, 20, 25, they just assume that you don't know how to parent your kids and that you can't get that information by yourself.

Aliya: That's ridiculous oh my god! So you are a mother, but you are also so much more than just a mother, how else would you describe yourself? How do you wish people would see you?

Quinn: I'm just starting to live for myself more, be my own person now, not just a mom, or just this or just that. I'm trying to expand my life in all sorts of ways. I think I'm smart, I know I'm beautiful, I know all women are beautiful. I know those things about myself. I'm trying to figure more out about myself now, just my adult life, what I like, what I want to do. I'm starting to try and take some courses, and do more things for myself because I want to know who I am more, other than being a mom. All of the things I've done in the past, I want to be my own woman now. I'm still figuring that out.

Aliya: Of course, I feel like it's a life long journey.

Quinn: Yeah, and it's hard to go from high school to being a mom. You miss that whole single adult learning experience gap, you know? It's just like "Boom! Responsibility!" You're an adult now. Maybe if I didn't have kids, what would I have done with my life? So now, I'm just trying to do that *with* kids.

Aliya: And you're showing other moms by doing that, that it is totally possible which is amazing. How can people support their friends and family and help to challenge stereotypes and judgements on the experience of young parenthood?

Quinn: The best way first and foremost, is just to support the decision. A woman's decision about a pregnancy. Before they're even a mother you have to support whether they want to be a mother, whether they don't want to be a mother, and then I think you just have to change the way you speak to people. Like what I was saying before, the little things matter. You might think your comment is harmless that you're saying to your daughter, but then like for me, that's my dad saying something. Words have more impact that people think they do. I would say that the best way to support people is to stand up for the mother in your life. Back her parenting decisions, and just try to judge less. I don't think there's any big grand gesture that people could do for you, it's all of the little things.

Aliya: Absolutely. Did you use any resources from organizations and groups to help you during your pregnancy and beginning of motherhood? If so did you find them helpful and accessible?

Quinn: I'm actually going there today! The Jessie's Centre, the June Callwood Centre. It's just an amazing resource for young mothers and parents in Toronto. It's a super safe space, they deal with a lot of really young moms who receive even more judgement than an 18 year old mom would. A 15 year old mom is going to get everything I get, but even more. It's a super safe place for LGBTQ+ people. They've just got amazing resources. They have physical and financial resources as well as emotional support. Any type of help or counselling you need you could get at this place. I can't recommend it enough, it's just an amazing place. Honestly the city of Toronto, and even the province of Ontario, they have a lot of support systems in place for young moms. If you lived in America, you wouldn't get child tax benefits the way you do here. There are so many counselling services, financial support set up for moms here in the GTA, I feel really blessed to live here.

Aliya: In terms of Jessie's Centre, what are some of the things you got from them? What did they do to help you?

Quinn: Jessie's really helped me in so many ways. When I couldn't even afford my first car seat, they literally gave me a car seat, it's just an amazing place. They will not let any baby go without. Clothes, car seats, all of that kind of stuff. They have parenting classes there, prenatal and nutrition classes. They have counsellors, trained counsellors who can help you through so much. They helped me through a miscarriage, through the birth of two babies. They care about you so deeply. My counsellor there is one of the most important people in my life. She's the best. They have ages and stages resources, they helped me figure out my son had a speech delay and I was able to get him into early intervention. They've got a school so moms can finish high school pregnant, or they can finish with their kids upstairs in the daycare, you can go up and breastfeed your baby if you want to, it's just a beautiful and amazing place. They've got every resource I've said and more. Such a great place.

Aliya: What advice do you have for young moms who are expecting?

Quinn: The most important advice is that you just have to trust your gut as a mom, as a woman. We know our kids better than anyone. It's ok to not know little things, but you know your child better than anyone. Don't be intimidated just because you're young, by your parents, grandparents, anyone. You can do it. I also think that as moms, we need to just reach out more. If you need help, you need to ask for help right away. If you need mom friends, find a play group! There are so many things out there. It really takes a village to raise kids, there's a reason they have that expression. If you try to do it by yourself it's going to be detrimental to your own mental health, to your kids, everything. We really need each other, so I would say reach out to every resource you have, every person you can. Do you know how many questions I would message my sister? I'd be like "Hey! You have kids! My boobs hurt, I think I have a breast infection!". It sounds crazy and gross but how else would I know what to do in that situation if I didn't ask someone? Ask questions, reach out to people. You're a mom, you know what to do, so just rock it.

Aliya: Amazing! Are there any other things you would like to add?

Quinn: This is where I really started crying last time [last time we hung out and went over the interview questions]. Being a young mom is so hard. Financially, emotionally, physically, it's so so so hard, and just so rewarding oh my god. Look at my kids right now! They're literally the best. The best thing in the world. There is nothing like being a mom, and just having an impact on the way these little people grow up. It's so beautiful, so rewarding, there is so much love. You can get through anything if you have your kids. That's it, I just love them so much.

Aliya: That's so beautiful, I just want to say thank you so much for being an amazing mom. Mom's don't get thanked enough at all.

Quinn: Aww thank you! That's another thing for your family. Tell the mom in your life what a good job they're doing. It never gets old to hear that you're such a great mom. Just positively reaffirm the moms in your life, it's so nice to hear.

Aliya: Thank you so much for doing this, you are a rockstar.

Quinn: I was so excited to do it!