

Prisoner of the press

12-year-old Jenny Teague had enough to deal with when she had a baby. Three months later, tabloid journalists made her life even more difficult, when they tagged her 'Britain's youngest mum'.

When a group of under-15s interviewed 12-year-old mother Jenny Teague for a campaign on media representation of children, they learned some hard truths about the press.

Jenny Teague gave birth to Sasha in March last year when she was 12. Three months later, when journalists from The Sun followed her to the local shops, she learnt what it was like to be hounded by the press. Why? As she discovered, she was Britain's youngest known mother.

"My cousin turned round and told the journalists from The Sun to stick their story, so they got back in their car and sat there taking pictures", says Jenny. "They said they would give me 2,000 if I gave them the story and that it was best for me to talk and get it out in the open."

"We had had no idea Jenny was the youngest mum in Britain. She was totally shocked", says Carol, Jenny's mother. "We accepted what had happened and picked up the pieces. We tried to get back to normal as quickly as we could but Jenny didn't know whether she was coming or going."

"It was hard enough looking after a baby, let alone having all the press around", admits Jenny. "They should have had a bit of respect. But as long as they had a story, they didn't care. They were like your worst neighbours. Wherever I went, they were there. They followed me to the shops, to the pictures, even when I was coming out of school. I went to the cinema with my friends. I didn't tell anyone but them, but when we got to the cinema, the papers were there. It was terrible. I got upset when they followed me and my friend into the swimming pool. We were having a really good time until we saw them, but then I had to phone my mum to come and pick us up."

"I told The Sun journalists to go away and leave my family alone", adds Carol. "They didn't. They stayed outside my home and wouldn't take no for an answer. They were very pushy, shouting out, 'Come on Jenny. Talk to us, Jenny'. Wherever you went there was somebody there. They had a car at the top of the road, a car opposite the flat, and cars at both the nearby shops. Every time we went out, a car would follow us. In the end we had to phone our neighbours when we wanted to go out. They'd block their car out to block the journalists in so they couldn't follow us. You shouldn't have to do that, she insists. You should be able to go wherever you please."

The Sun unearthed enough material to print its first article on July 4 1997, leading with the front page headline, Sex at 11, mum at 12.

"I wouldn't go out for a month, wouldn't do anything", Jenny recalls. "Everyone would point and say, there's the girl with the baby, the one who was in the papers. Everyone knew about it. It was splashed all over the papers and on the telly and it's not exactly a good thing to be famous for is it? It was really embarrassing. It drove me mad."

"They printed loads of things we were supposed to have said, but we didn't even speak to them," confirms Jenny. "They didn't interview us. They just got things off other people and made really horrible remarks about us. They printed private photos of the family. There was a picture of my mum and dad kissing and it suggested something like, 'no wonder the girl is like she is - look at the parents'."

Unhappy with the way the article portrayed her, Jenny took media impresario Max Clifford's advice and decided to set the record straight by talking to a different newspaper.

"The people from the News of the World were really good," she says. "They contacted us and talked through what we were going to do. The reporter was really nice. She was only about 20 and was understanding. If I didn't agree with a question I just had to tell her and she would change it."

The floodgates opened, everyone wanted to talk to Jenny about the pregnancy. But her experience with other journalists wasn't so positive. "Some of the papers tried to twist things so I would say what they wanted," Jenny explains. "They asked, how many times did you do it with this boy?. I said, once. And they said, are you sure you didn't do it again?. They were trying to turn it around. Some of them tried to understand but some really didn't care as long as they had the best story for the paper."

"Jenny would get upset by comments in the papers," says Carol. "One newspaper reckoned me and Tom were idiots and Jennifer had more brains than we had put together".

"When you get somebody writing about your mother and father like that you do get upset." Jenny adds, "It was vile. I was really upset. Everything just built up and I was a nervous wreck. It's only recently that I've got my self-confidence back."

"It's been a nightmare", concludes Carol, "But as a family we're closer now. We are more protective of each other. We're very wary when Jenny and Sasha go out. We always make sure somebody is with them in case anybody else decides to pounce on her. Members of the press seem to do what they like, when they like, how they like. I don't think they realise how much damage they do. If the child turns round and says, no, go away, leave me alone, the press should respect their wishes. They shouldn't hound them or go taking photos behind their backs. For children of Jennifer's age, they should always go to the parents and ask permission."

Unless a younger mother comes along, Jenny believes she will never stop being a subject of curiosity for the press. She says, "I know the News of the World want to do a story when Sasha first goes to school and I think this sort of thing will carry on for the rest of her life - when she takes her driving test or when she wants to move out. I've got to explain that to her when she is old enough to understand."

About the team

Interview by Kathleen Dawes, 14, Senab Adekunle, 15, Stuart Fletcher, 16, Kierra Box, 12, and Juanita Rosenior, 13. It was published in [The Independent](#).

7 comments



eww...

This is soo sick...im 18 and have a boyfriend and i haven't even gotten pregnant casue i know im way to young, how can she have sex at 12 or 11 i lost my virginity at 17!

Chloe from 17, 24 August 2010 05:53

To Young

She was way to young to be a mother. Im 20 and 3 months pregnant, and I feel like im to young. I cant understand how children this young are doing this to them selves.

Kristy (age 20) from Gadsden Al, 04 March 2010 20:41

teen pregs

well its her fault for getting pregnant at her age she is a shame to this earth she is making people under 16 have a bad name

abi from cornwall, 25 October 2009 21:03

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