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## It's Our Choice

*"No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body."* Margaret Sanger

Imagine having a child that is going to die the second it enters this world. Would you rather endure and let it die immediately after birth or end its suffering before it comes into this world? It's a matter of opinion. For me, though, it's more personal than just being a vague hypothetical. My Auntie had to go through the trauma of pregnancy, knowing that my cousin would not survive. She was not given an option. Her choice was removed.

When I was a young, naive child, my world was filled with daffodils and daisies, I was impulsive like a jellyfish, acting on instinct. When my Auntie used to describe the life she missed out on with her unborn child, I would ignorantly say "You don't have a child!". As horrific as this might sound, I can't be blamed. I was a child who didn't yet understand the cruelties of the world; a child that said whatever they saw, without filter and thought. No one explained that my cousin was in heaven, that he merely survived for seconds on this earth. As is typical of taboo conversations, I was shushed and brushed aside. I wasn't told that, as a woman, I have no say over what happens to my body. Instead, ignorance was forced upon me while those around me hid the unjust reality. And so I believed that the world was still full of daffodils and daisies. I was ignorant of the fact that the government and our restrictive laws determine what can happen to my body. Ignorant of the fact that I still have limited autonomy over my own body.

In school I learned about the Irish constitution but, again, there was no conversation around the 8th Amendment until 2018 when society was forced to confront an injustice that we have perpetuated. At this point, I was aware of abortion, but it was something that happened in movies; its illegal status in my country was something that I was only learning about. During the referendum, my neighbour was a staunch activist, standing up for what I now believe was right. It was only through her empowered and informed dialogue that I learned about the realities of the society that I live in.

Driving home from school one day, a conversation opened up between my mom and me about the referendum and the idea of abortion. We reached a traffic light that had just turned red when she started to tell me the tragic story about my Auntie. My cousin was unable to breathe without the support of my Auntie and so her life in this world was not viable. My mom detailed the pain and suffering that she endured for nine months, both mentally and physically, and as a result of bringing my cousin to full term, she was not able to have another child after. People offered the solution of going to England during this time, but her pocket was dry. The red light began to burn in me. Imagine not being able to feel the warmth of your child in your arms. Imagine being forced to feel the cold lifeless body of your child in your arms. I felt immobilised, like a lifeless deer caught in the

metaphorical headlights. I fell completely silent, vocally paralysed by the injustice of the situation. My mind kept returning to the memory of me reminding her that she didn't have a child. I was oblivious not just to the situation, but also to my own cruelty.

Our world is filled with injustices, but the greatest and most damaging is removing someone's control over their own body; denying the rights and voice of a woman to have a say in what happens to her simply because of some black ink that has stained the pages of our constitution, history and society.