

Steve Lopez

Columnist Steve Lopez joined the staff of The Times in May 2001, after four years at Time Inc. where he wrote for Time, Sports Illustrated, Life and Entertainment Weekly as editor-at-large.

While at Time, he helped establish the Bonus Section, a series of narrative news features. His first story in the series, about the French capture of Philadelphia hippie guru and suspected murderer Ira Einhorn, won a Society of Professional Journalists Award for national magazines.



He also was the author of Time magazine's "Campaign diary," a road journal filed during the 2000-01 presidential campaign; and of the weekly, "American Scene" column, for which he traveled the United States.

Prior to joining Time Inc., Lopez was a columnist at The Philadelphia Inquirer, where he won the H.L. Mencken Writing Award, the Ernie Pyle Award for human interest writing and a National Headliner Award for column writing. During his 12 years at the Inquirer, he filed dispatches from Iraq, Bosnia, Colombia and the Soviet Union.

His earlier newspaper jobs were at the San Jose Mercury News, the Oakland Tribune and three other daily newspapers in Northern California.

He is the author of three novels, "Third and Indiana," "The Sunday Macaroni Club," and "In the Clear." A collection of his columns is published in the book "Land of Giants: Where No Good Deed Goes Unpunished."

Lopez is married and has two sons.

STEVE LOPEZ POINTS WEST Teen Girls Talking About Prop. 73 Steve Lopez Points West

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I see the whole world differently now that I have a daughter. Before she was born, I wouldn't have given as much consideration to Proposition 73, which would require notification of parents when a minor goes for an abortion.

Based on that thumbnail summary, it sounded good to me. That's because I was thinking only one thing:

If it were my daughter, I'd want to know.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger came down on the same side, albeit clumsily.

"I wouldn't want to have someone take my daughter to a hospital for an abortion or something and not tell me," he said. "I would kill him if they do that."

Given the fact that doctors have been killed over the issue of abortion, Schwarzenegger couldn't have been more irresponsible. But I could understand why he was so worked up.

The subject came up when I visited Arcadia High School recently to hear a debate on Proposition 76, which would limit state spending. It would be nice, by the way, if the average Californian were half as informed as teacher Ashley Novak's debate team. After the students sparred, I asked a few of them what they thought about Proposition 73.

"Coat hangers," said Rita Rozenbaoum.

That's what'll happen if 73 passes, she said. We'll be back to the days when a girl would take a chance on crude methods of abortion to avoid having her parents find out she was pregnant.

Rozenbaoum, born in Russia, is imposingly tall and very persuasive. I'd like to think I'll be the kind of dad whose teenager is willing to tell him anything, but the image laid out by this 16-year-old made me rethink my initial take on 73.

Another student, Priyanka Mantha, 17, arranged for her, Rozenbaoum and three classmates to continue the discussion several days later at Hyper Coffee on 1st Avenue, not far from the high school. None of them can vote in the November election, obviously. But I thought they might help educate those of us who can.

For more than an hour, the girls critiqued Proposition 73 and all the arguments for and against. They were so passionate about parental

notification, their rights as minors, and the complications presented by natural urges, they often spoke simultaneously. One of them finally decided they should pass a soda bottle around to designate a speaker.

"I wouldn't put myself in a position where I would need an abortion," insisted Audrey Simes, 15, who has been in what she calls a serious relationship for eight months.

"It would just ruin all my chances for college," Mantha said, agreeing that pregnancy is a mistake she doesn't intend to make at her age.

"My mother and I firmly believe in abortion," said Ashley Lee, 16. "But I wouldn't tell her if I got one."

And so she is obviously against the idea that someone would call her mother and break the news. Lee also had a problem with the following text from Proposition 73:

"Defines abortion as causing the death of the unborn child, a child conceived but not yet born."

"It's not killing a person, it's like killing a bunch of cells," Lee said. "You kill cells every time you take antibiotics."

Is it really the same? I asked. Are you simply killing cells several weeks into the pregnancy, or several months into it?

"I think a third-term abortion is disgusting," Lee responded, and the others agreed.

Mantha worried, though, that the passage of Proposition 73 would be one more domino falling on the way to a time when the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* decision collapsed.

But Jackie Pinta, 17, broke up her friends' pro-choice rally.

"I can't deal with the guilt of killing a fetus," she admitted.

Abortion, Pinta said, isn't just a physical ordeal, it's an emotional one. Did her friends really think a 14- or 15-year-old is equipped to handle an abortion without letting her family in on it?

"If you're living with your parents and you need permission for a tattoo or a piercing," Pinta argued, "they should be notified if you're getting an abortion."

Think of what you'd be in for, though, some of the others said. It's not just the abortion that would send parents over the edge.

"It's the fact that you had sex," Mantha said.

Simes objected to the invasion of her privacy and the unrealistic, implied message that teens ought not to be having sex at all.

"I'm responsible for what I do," Simes said. And capable, she added, of handling the consequences.

"Abstain, abstain, abstain. From grade school on, that's the only thing you hear," she said, wondering why the safe-sex argument gets so little play. "Your choice is between abstain or abstain.... They're scaring us about sex."

Why, Simes wondered, is the proposition necessary at all?

As its backers would argue, parents simply ought to know their underage daughters' personal and medical histories. And a study of 46,000 pregnant school-age girls found that more than two-thirds were impregnated by adults, meaning that sexual crimes are going unreported.

But the persistent Rozenbaoum argues that parents ought to be more concerned about their daughters' seeking unsafe abortions to avoid being found out. If she got pregnant, she said, she'd tell her mother. But she knows girls who wouldn't tell and would end up risking bootleg abortions.

Where would they go? I asked.

"You go to downtown L.A.," Lee said matter-of-factly, as if the knowledge were universal.

Where in downtown L.A.?

Nobody knew exactly, but they were in agreement. You go downtown. And that's where everyone will be headed if Proposition 73 passes, so it has to be stopped.

Pinta still wouldn't budge.

"So if you're 13 or 14, it's OK to have an abortion by yourself?" she asked.

No one at the table - including me - was entirely comfortable with the idea, although Rozenbaoum insisted it was nobody's business.

"I don't know a single 13-year-old mature enough to have sex," Mantha said.

But coming up with an acceptable age for a girl to do as she pleases was no easy assignment. If she's too immature a day before she turns 18, Lee asked, what makes her so wise a day later?

"There has to be a defining point," Pinta said.

Yeah, said Mantha. As her mom defines that point, it's when she gets married. They were at a social event together when her mother noticed that Mantha's knees were nearly touching a boy's knees.

"Move away from him," Mom whispered, having once told her daughter that if she gets pregnant, "I will not be able to hold my head up in the Indian community."

That's just it, Rozenbaoum said. They all have different cultural histories, different relationships with their parents and different values of their own. So how can an arbitrary proposition, on a complicated personal subject, serve one and all?

Rozenbaoum cast a firm no vote on Proposition 73, and she was joined by Simes and Lee.

Pinta voted yes, and Mantha was on the fence.

"I'm pro-choice, but there are things about this bill that make sense," she said.

If Mantha is leaning, it's against. She thinks a provision allowing minors to get a court waiver of parental notification is too vague. Such waivers would be granted "based on clear, convincing evidence of a minor's maturity or best interests."

Yeah, right, as Mantha likes to say. How can any court make such a finding?

Talking it out with the girls, I came away with as much respect for their parents as for them. If I do as good a job with my daughter, maybe she'll be able to handle herself as responsibly as these girls have. They all seem to have gotten along just fine, so far, without Proposition 73.

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