

At twenty, **Wendy Driver** is a tall, thin, fresh-faced young wife who has an eighteen-month-old daughter and a baby boy on the way. Her husband, Ryan, is in the Navy; he is out on a submarine six months at a time. Wendy had learned in November after her high school graduation that she was pregnant, just prior to Ryan's (already planned) marriage proposal. In Wendy's Catholic family, abortion was out of the question. "I told him I am against abortion. I think abortion is wrong," she said. Her parents were supportive. Wendy had her heart set on a big wedding, but she and Ryan "wanted to get married for the baby." Her parents helped her work out a plan for two weddings: a small wedding took place when Wendy was three months pregnant, and then there was a large, formal, and elaborate wedding when the baby, Clara, was one year old. Wendy now lives about four hours away from her parents, but when Ryan is out at sea, Wendy and Clara come home for long stretches of time. Since Wendy has not learned to drive ("even as a passenger I am just afraid to drive; I tried like three times and it didn't work"), she relies on public transportation. Usually, however, Mr. Driver makes the nine-hour roundtrip to transport Wendy and Clara back home. When her husband is away, she comes home as much as possible.

At the end of eighth grade Wendy was turned down by the magnet high school of her choice. She was redirected to the neighborhood Lower Richmond High School, which was widely characterized by families in the study as a "bad" school. Ms. Driver was extremely concerned. Wendy's "Pop Pop" (her paternal grandfather) paid the \$3,000 annual tuition to send her to the all-girl Catholic high school, St. Mary's, that Wendy's mother and aunts had attended.

At St. Mary's, Wendy thrived socially with a close group of girlfriends. She also worked two jobs (which paid for her cell phone, clothes she bought while out with friends, and part of her mom's cable bill) and was involved in athletics (with a long recuperation after knee surgery). During this recuperation, her mother arranged for home tutors. But academically she struggled. Although she had learned to read, her

academic skills were uneven. Finally, she told her friends, “Look, I am retarded I can’t do this [work].” After she explained the situation to them, her friends pitched in and helped her with her with projects and other school work. The teachers also ultimately accommodated her by giving her tests verbally. With this adjustment, she was able to pass. At times she was even on honor roll. Her high school graduation was seen as a huge accomplishment: “When I graduated all of the teachers were, like, *shocked*. I went up and got my diploma and all of my teachers that I had stood up and started clapping. My principal gave me a hug and started crying.”

Wendy’s mother very much wanted her to go to college, and the high school counselor guided the family through the application process. Wendy was admitted to a small Catholic college about two hours from home that offered a program for students with learning disabilities and included the provision of a note taker, additional time on tests, and other “learning supports.” Her parents were very enthusiastic about this prospect, particularly her mother, and drove her up there for a visit. Though many of the details escaped them, the Driver parents were very clear on the amount that they would have had to pay: \$1,000 per month. Ms. Driver was planning to get a second job.

In the end, however, Wendy did not go to college. She reported being very “stressed” going into the summer following her high school graduation, and in June she simply told her parents that she was “not going.” During the interview, Wendy (tearfully) told me that she had been very anxious that she would not be able to do the work at college. Her mother noted that she had never really been away from home; although the school was only 90 minutes away, it felt “too far” to go. Mr. Driver felt it was because of the boyfriend. Wendy did try to enroll in the local community college, but because that school required her to participate first in a not-for-credit remedial program, she ultimately decided not to attend there either. (See chapter 15 for more details on this experience.)

While Ryan's role in Wendy's ultimate decision is unclear—she does not indicate that this was a major factor—their relationship did strengthen in the months following her high school graduation. Asked to describe Ryan, she speaks of him as a “nice guy” who is “really shy.” In the past he was “troubled” and even got arrested in connection with a pipe bomb. In addition, “he used to drink a lot when I first met him, [but] now he just drinks maybe once every two months.” The Navy guys harass him, but Ryan quit drinking “cold turkey.” They have a traditional marriage: Ryan does not cook dinner or wash dishes. But he is a devoted father, and Wendy says that “he will help me with Clara” and that Ryan “wants to spend family time.” She reports that when he is not away at sea, she tries to “have dinner ready for him when he gets home.” They usually eat at 5 or 6 P.M. “We try to have family night” where they “watch a movie.” They are happy together and are thinking that they would like to have five children. One difficult spot, however, is that Ryan's mother disapproves of Wendy, so much so that she did not attend either wedding. Wendy says, “I have tried everything” but Ryan's mother sees her as a “silly girl.” In the interview, Wendy cries as she says that Clara has never met her paternal grandmother. (Wendy also reports that she also continues to miss her deceased father. November, the month of his death, “is hard for me.”) In fact, Ryan was estranged from both his parents for a time, but now is back in touch. (His parents are divorced; his father, too, is in the service.) Ryan is, however, very close to Ms. Driver; he calls her “Mom.” Although Wendy misses Ryan desperately when he is at sea and it is hard for her to be so far from her family, she is enjoying being a stay-at-home mother. She hopes, at some point, to go back to school, to “take night classes,” and to get a degree in “early childhood education.” Her goal is to have a day care business in her own house.