

DEAR CHERI

By Chris Verene



YOUNG COUPLE
 FEARS THEIR
 LOVE WILL SEND
 OTHERS TO JAIL
 CELLPHONE PICS
 PUT MINORS IN
 DANGER

DEAR CHERI, My boyfriend, "Ricky," and I are very much in love, and we have had intimate relations. We are both almost sixteen and under the law in our state, relations between Ricky and me are considered a crime. We just read on Google News that if any adult teacher or nurse or doctor knows about us, that adult becomes guilty of a crime if they don't report us to Child Protective Services. We are serious about our relationship and would be willing to go jail-or any lengths-for our love, but I'm really concerned that the people who know about us will be jailed also. Everybody at school knows we are together, and it's tough to say how many people know that we are intimate, but everyone at prom saw us making out, from the parents to the teachers to the prom photographer. We are so worried that all of these people will be jailed for not reporting us, or that they will turn us in. What should we do?

---WORRIED IN WITCHITA

DEAR WORRIED, You two are right to worry! In Kansas, and eleven other US states, it is a criminal act for any person under the age of sixteen to engage in any sexual act. It's often called "The Kiss and Tell Law." Even "making out" may qualify depending on how the state and local officials define "sexual relations." It is a crime in all twelve states for an adult (who supervises you) to "fail to report" the knowledge of any minor engaging in "any type of sexual activity involving teens even when it's consensual, involves persons of the same age and/or same sex, even when abuse is not suspected." I am sorry to say that anyone who knows about you is already a coconspirator in your crime. Your letter to Dear Cheri even puts my freedom in jeopardy. If you get legally married (unless you and Ricky are not both males), you are no longer in violation, but you any have already broken the law, and many people around you

are already criminals for simply not reporting you. My best advice is to fight this, enlist celebrities to take your side and never give up!

DEAR CHERI, I always hate how I look in pictures and hate it when my friends want to take pictures at parties. I never look anything like the models in magazines and can't imagine I ever will. It's depressing! Senior pictures are coming up and I want to drop out of school so I won't have to be in them. What should I do?

---UGLY GIRL

DEAR GIRL, First of all, you are NOT ugly! No one is ugly who believes in herself and is honest. Cameras DO LIE—they are not a perfect reflection of yourself. Only you and people you care about can truly define who you are and what makes you beautiful. You need to know that the models in magazines are totally fake and created by computers. Spend time with only people who really like you, and who do not tease you about how you look in snapshots. Only let pictures be taken when you are ready, and only with someone who takes great pictures and promises to work at it until you both come up with really great pictures of you! It can be done with patience and searching for the right photographer.

DEAR CHERI, My fiancee and I are afraid we will have to go to jail for something that was sent to our cellphones while at school. This may sound crazy, but you can see our school (Parkland High) was on Fox News. We both got pictures of a topless girl on our phones in November. We didn't think it was bad because people send out random stuff to their entire phone list literally all the time-- Hentai anime, sexy mspace pics, really gross pics, etc. I saw it and deleted it, but don't remember who it came from. The federal government says we all have to turn in our cellphone hard drives to them and have a note from our parents because the person in the picture was seventeen.

The deal is that anyone who is suspected of having received the picture is required to hand over their property for search by the troopers. Our problem is that we do not trust them. The school sent letters to all the suspected kids' parents. My fiancee got a letter but I didn't. But, I did get the pictures in my phone, so am I in trouble for not turning myself in? Some kids at school have said that once you turn in your phone, they have a right to search your whole house. I know that they arrested the girl who took the cellphone pic of herself, and she is supposed to go to jail or a foster home for doing it. They have searched her house and her whole family has been taken in to the police station. We are afraid that if we turn in our phones, we'll be forever in trouble like that girl. Also, my brother says that even if you delete something, the government can still find it again. What should we do?

---AFRAID IN ALLENTOWN



Artist Cheri Nevers counsels young teen models about their rights and self-worth at "The Self-Esteem Salon" at Daniel Reich Gallery in The Hotel Chelsea in late 2005. Since 1998, Cheri has run a national model search in which she finds young teens who want to become models and invites them and their parents to join in her ongoing performance artwork. Recent versions of the work have centered around orphans, refugees, and the immediate need for food and shelter.

DEAR AFRAID. Although it seems like there should be laws in place to protect you young adults, there are none. The issue is that you didn't make or copy the pictures, but you and your phone took legal possession of them when they appeared in your browser. If the state or federal government accuses you of possessing these kinds of pictures, you have no rights as a minor. In this kind of situation, it is helpful to look at what is commonly accepted by society. Recent network news reported that TV star Kim Kardashian (daughter of Olympian Bruce Jenner) was recently accused and later confessed to taking nude pictures of herself and her boyfriend when she was underage. Ms. Kardashian was not arrested in this matter, nor was her property searched to check if she had destroyed the evidence. Also recent events at Farmington Junior High School in Utah, are worth looking up.

As minors yourselves, you cannot be expected to

make decisions about this. Talk it over with your parents or another adult that you really trust. There are several questions to think about: Who decides what is legal about the self-portrait the girl made with her phone? Is it wrong or felonious to click on a weblink or e-mail which might open harmful material? How can anyone be certain of the age of a person in any picture? Who decides how to search and prosecute people who are suspected of possession of the picture? If you are up for it, you could take this to the Supreme Court.

What teens need to know about sex, drugs, AIDS, and getting along with peers and parents is in "What Every Teen Should Know." To order, send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$6 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included.) To reach Cheri Nevers and "The Self-Esteem Salon," please visit selfesteemsalon.com on the Internet. **HB**