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Pregnant at 40 and other adventures
By Jane Horwitz September 30

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It is impossible not to like writer/performer Ginna Hoben's salty-perky stage persona. From her own fraught experience of being pregnant at age 40, she has written a snappy new solo show, "No Spring Chicken." Hoben's edgy sense of humor weaves the play's contrasting elements — hilarity, raw emotion, graphic detail, darker fears — into a consistent whole.

The word "graphic," by the way, means that parents of kids under 15 should take note. Reproductive processes and body parts get a detailed verbal airing in "No Spring Chicken."

In a polished world premiere at NextStop Theatre Company in Herndon, whose artistic director Evan Hoffmann commissioned the piece, Hoben tracks her pregnancy from infertility treatments through childbirth.

Her fictional stage persona, "Jenn," speaks often of her husband, "Fletch," who must be the most supportive guy on earth. He's by her side while Jenn spends her first trimester vomiting, then worries during her second and third trimesters about her mothering skills and fears about the danger to a fetus during an "advanced maternal age" pregnancy.

The actress bounds onto the stage in crop pants, a sleeveless top, comfy shoes and a backpack that includes its own little collapsible stool. This woman is prepared. Behind her hangs a giant raggedy crescent moon (designed by Jane Hosticka Fink) that nearly fills the back half of NextStop's intimate stage. There's still room, though, for the odd fertility dance or cartwheel.

With candor typical of a late-night college gabfest, Jenn launches into her tale. She always wanted to be a mom but wasn't quite ready. And when she finally was ready, getting pregnant was tough.

Her resentment of the much younger women in the infertility specialist's waiting room, all of them visibly pregnant, is bitter and amusing, as is her description of the endless tests of her personal "pipery."

"All those teenagers that tried not to and *still* got pregnant," gripes Hoben. "Man, those were the days!"

The New York-based Hoben, with the help of director Sullivan Canaday White, adapted "No Spring Chicken" from her pregnancy blog, "bambino & the bean." That makes the play's primary development team, actor/playwright and director, all women for this entry in the Women's Voices Theater Festival. So are three of the show's four designers.

"No Spring Chicken" could've been a teary-eyed ode to motherhood. Instead, Hoben and White have whipped up a funny, surprisingly raw show for grown-ups that, it should be noted, entertained the men in the audience equally well.