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Women Exploited by Abortion

Ila C. Ryan, R.N.

Ila C. Ryan, R.N., Maryland state director of WEBA (Women Exploited by Abortion) spoke at the October, 1984 meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds.

It was 1960. I was in my early 20s; I had just graduated from nursing school and had a new career ahead of me. At this time, I found myself pregnant for the first time. I was scared to death. I was single, living away from home and the young man involved gave me only one suggestion. That was abortion; it seemed the easy answer.

I was afraid to tell my mother — I didn't want her to find out about my promiscuous lifestyle and I knew she would kill me if I went home and told her I was pregnant. I did not want anyone or anything to interfere with my lifestyle and that was party, party, party. I did not want to put forth the time and effort needed to raise a child. I did not want to face the embarrassment of having people see me pregnant and not married. I was desperate, and illegal abortion was the only option available to me, as I saw it. All my excuses for abortion were self-centered. Abortion is the most self-centered act I know.

I traveled to Cuba alone and stayed across the street from the gambling casinos of the Havana Hilton. In the morning, I was taken to a clinic where I met an abortionist who spoke no English. Following his sign language, I responded in agreement to general anesthesia. I awakened, rid of my "problem." The price was \$250.

"Relief" would describe my conscious thoughts and feelings more than "regret." I was free of the "problem" and nobody knew what I had done. I returned to the States to try to live my life in the normal way — for myself.

A year later I was in the same condition, with the same problem, but the procedure for solving it was not as simple. This time I made arrangements in Harlem, New York. I climbed up on a kitchen table in a basement apartment and watched as the instruments were taken out

of a dirty linen hamper and boiled on a kitchen stove. Without the benefit of any anesthesia, my cervix was forced open. This caused immediate vomiting. A rubber tube was left in my cervix for a short time and pitocin was administered to stimulate contractions. I was given an antibiotic and sent home. This treatment was supposed to bring about abortion in 24 hours. It failed; I bled for a week and returned to the abortionist to have the procedure repeated. The second time it worked — in less than 24 hours. After about six hours of good labor, I had the baby in the toilet. I had to fish it out in order to be sure everything had been expelled from the uterus. I had been about four to five months pregnant. My dead baby was a boy and cost \$150.

My third abortion was in an abortionist's office in Montreal, Canada. I went in alone. A D and C was performed without anesthesia. I remember being in a great deal of pain which seemed as though it would never end. Again, the "problem" was gone. The father of the "problem" arrived to pick me up, and we returned to the hotel where I found his gift of red roses waiting. The cost of this baby: \$350.

Last Abortion Most Troublesome

My last abortion took place in 1964. It was the most troublesome and difficult to obtain. A friend accompanied me to San Juan, Puerto Rico, with no contact previously arranged. After a two-day search, I found a man who would do the abortion for \$400. I was to receive a spinal anesthetic for this one. The next morning in the abortionist's office I received my spinal, to no avail. I did feel the scraping of the womb and, as with the second abortion, I vomited through the whole thing. I remember that during the entire procedure, I stared at a big gold crucifix hanging from the neck of the butcher. What a hypocrite!

On the flight home, and for the next month, I suffered various complications: bleeding, abdominal pain, severe headaches. Anemia followed. Reluctantly, I went to a real doctor, who pulled out some "tissue" which had not been removed by the abortionist in Puerto Rico.

Each time it seemed abortion was the only answer. After the first one, it's easier to go back the second, third, and fourth times. My heart was hardened. Not once did I think of my baby as a baby. I couldn't allow myself to think that way.

At no time, with any of the abortions was I informed of prenatal development, the procedure to be used, possible risks or complications, or what to do if anything did happen. No operative permit was involved at all. I find this trend to be almost the same today. Women are not counseled on alternatives, risks or complications. They are promised a local anesthetic which does not work most of the time and they feel the entire procedure which is somewhat of a shock when one

expects anesthesia. They sign an operative permit which relieves the abortion clinic of responsibility if there is a complication. I know of no other branch of medicine where this is allowed. They are never informed about prenatal development. The baby is never referred to as a baby, but rather as a product of conception, uterine contents, blob of tissue, mass of cells — never a baby. The woman is coerced into an abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy when she is at her lowest ebb, emotionally and physically. What with nausea and vomiting and the ambiguous feelings about the baby (which is a symptom of pregnancy), abortion seems like a quick end to the early discomforts of pregnancy. I personally feel a woman should not be pressured into making a hasty decision during the early months of pregnancy. I feel she is being manipulated into this decision for the profit of the abortionist. It is a decision which she will regret the rest of her life.

It was almost 20 years before I began to talk about my abortions. The ultimate truth was hard to face. I had not solved four "problems." I had not simply removed four growths of "tissue" from my womb. The truth was, I had murdered four innocent babies who were helplessly dependent upon me for their lives. I had chosen to give them death. I had sought to live my life the normal way — for myself. I had succeeded. The result was death, but not only for four babies. I was dead, too. And I deserved much more punishment than that which I had inflicted upon the babies — I deserved the life apart from God which I had chosen for so many years. Moreover, I deserved to be shut out of His Presence forever.

Before facing these hard truths — I lived in a continuous spiritual and mental state of alienation, guilt and self-hate. This sent me on a road of almost total self-destruction. I began to drink heavier than ever before — I tried to lose myself in the bottle — in the arms of many, many men and overwork. I could not stand to be alone with my thoughts. I so desperately wanted to be loved and accepted but I could not allow people to get close to me. I was afraid if they knew what I had done, they wouldn't like me. My personal relationships were stormy and brief. I felt God could not possibly love me for all the terrible things I had done. So because I felt He hated me, I hated Him, I denied Him and was very afraid of Him. During the 60s, a pattern formed — drink, fall into sexual relationships, get pregnant, abort, feel guilty, fearful, *lonely*, self-hateful — then start all over again.

My first marriage did not ease the soul-sickness, and because of my drinking and numerous affairs, it ended in divorce after seven years. There were no children born to this marriage. I did not want children. I couldn't look at a baby without crying.

I eventually became so lonely, so guilt-ridden, and so desperate, I saw suicide as the only way out of my torment. I overdosed on

Valium and Jack Daniels and was admitted to an alcohol rehabilitation program on Oct. 10, 1976. It was while in rehab that I began to be aware of a Power greater than myself. I prayed for the first time in many years and my prayer was answered. I suddenly realized that there was a God out there and He heard me. He must care for me because He answered my prayer. My heart began to be filled with joy and hope and I was no longer alone. He came to me where I was in a nut-house with a bunch of drunks.

Shortly after my new relationship with God was established, Jesus Christ was brought into my life and I accepted Him as my personal Savior and Lord of my life. My life changed rapidly and dramatically. I was able to stop smoking three months later. The compulsion to drink left me. I know it had to be God Who did this; no human had ever been able to make me stop drinking before.

Nurse-Anesthetist by Profession

By profession, I am a nurse anesthetist (a person who puts you to sleep for your operations). I had been giving anesthesia for abortions in the hospital I worked in. I felt I understood the women's dilemma and sympathized with them. I knew how lonely and scared they were, and I wanted them to know I understood. I wanted them to have the best anesthesia I could give. I don't know how many times I did this. The last time I gave anesthesia for an abortion, it was to be a hysterectomy. The woman was about 6½-7 months pregnant. I put her to sleep as usual, the incision was made in the abdomen, then into the uterus, and a baby was pulled out. I mean a fully developed, moving, breathing baby. It hit me like a ton of bricks. The baby was put into a bucket of water and drowned. I was shaken and I knew at that moment I had stood silently by and condoned murder, not only this time but many times before. I told my boss I would no longer give anesthesia for abortions and was removed from those duties.

My life started to improve after this and I really began to improve in my recovery from alcoholism. I began to like people and not be afraid of them. I prayed on a daily basis. I had an overwhelming desire to go to church which I did and still do to this day, not because I feel I should, but because I want to go to thank our marvelous God for my sobriety and all the wonderful blessings which He has bestowed on me. About a year and a half after my suicide attempt, I was married again to a most wonderful man. He was so supportive to me and today gives me all the freedom I need. He can trust me and I trust myself. The compulsion to seek out men has been removed. I am faithful to one man at long last.

Our marriage has been blessed by the birth of a beautiful son on Aug. 23, 1980. To me, he is a direct sign of God's forgiveness. The

pregnancy, labor and delivery were smooth as silk. I didn't even have morning sickness. I was so happy to be pregnant at the age of 41. After four abortions, I was able to carry an absolutely normal pregnancy to full-term and give an easy birth to a normal, healthy child. O, God is so good. Only through His grace and His protection was this possible.

I later became involved in work to open a Crisis Pregnancy Center in my community. With the help of God and many good people in my church, I was able to finally talk about my abortions to large groups of people. My testimony was used to influence our church planning council to support the Center. I began to search out reading materials and learn all I could about abortion. It was while seeing some of the graphic pictures of aborted babies — all cut up in pieces — that I fully realized my sins as murder. I had only been able to talk and think about my sin as abortion. When I confessed before the Lord my sin of "murder," I was completely free. Today I have peace of mind, a beautiful gift from God.

I went on to become involved in WEBA and know I must do all I can to help stop legal abortion in this country. I do this by speaking to groups anytime I'm invited — churches, pro-life groups, schools, etc. I reach out to women who want help and share my testimony with them to help them find the one answer to the emotional hell that follows abortion — that is, forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He waits with arms outstretched just waiting for us to come to Him and ask for and receive His forgiveness.

Only in Him do I have hope for my babies who have died and for my husband, and my four-year-old son who lives.

To God belongs the glory!!!