

DONNA JOY WATTS: POSTER CHILD FOR OPPONENTS OF PARTIAL BIRTH ABORTION

Anthony J. Sacco, Sr. © Copyright May 2005

Reprinted from the *Wyoming Catholic Register*, May 2, 2005;
Mr. Sacco's column, Pro-Life Watch: Political Commentary.

PINE BLUFFS --- When Lori Lynne Watts, seven months pregnant, slipped and fell on the steps at her church, she didn't know how much life was about to change for her and her husband. Nor did she realize that those opposed to partial birth abortion would, a few years down the road, gain a lovely poster child.

Although her pregnancy had been unremarkable and her fall not serious, Lori's obstetrician ordered a precautionary ultrasound. What it revealed was devastating; the baby had severe hydrocephalus — an accumulation of fluid within the cranium which causes enlargement of the head. He suggested that Lori and husband, Donald, an officer at Maryland's Correctional Training Center in Hagerstown, contact a genetics counselor in Silver Spring, Maryland. By telephone, they were apprised of a procedure called intact dilation and evacuation, later known as Partial Birth Abortion. In this horrendous process, a doctor delivers the legs, arms and torso of the baby, but when it's within inches of emerging, pierces its skull with a scissors while its head is still in the birth canal, sucks out the brain, and then completes the delivery. The baby, alive moments before, is now dead.

The proud parents of two other daughters, Chrissy, four and Tabytha, two, Lori and Donnie were appalled at the thought of ending their unborn baby's life this way. Believing that God wanted this child here for a reason, they hung up on the counselor. But things were about to get worse.

Shortly, a more complete diagnosis was made; holoprosencephaly, a condition which

causes part of the baby's brain to grow outside the skull, an incomplete cleavage of the brain's hemispheres, and brain centers to be missing.

When notified, officials at Washington County General, which didn't have high risk OB care, refused Lori as a patient, claiming that delivery would be "too complicated."

With a projected birth date only two months away, the couple frantically searched for a hospital to deliver their child. Greater Baltimore Medical Center, Johns Hopkins and Union Memorial Hospitals, three of Baltimore's best, refused, telling Lori and Donnie that their child "was incompatible with life; if she lived she'd likely be deaf, blind, unable to think, suck, swallow, or move." They even suggested she might have cyclopsia --- no face, and one eye in the middle of her head.

"It was very scary," Lori recalls, "but we held onto our faith that she was meant to be, and no matter what the package, we loved her." Finally, Maryland's University Hospital accepted Lori. On November 26, 1991, Donna Joy Watts was born.

Donna Joy is now thirteen. Several surgeries have corrected many of her medical problems. What's she like today? "Although developmentally delayed, Donna Joy enjoyed Karate at one time," her mother says. "She loves to sing and she has a beautiful voice. She likes to model for the camera when photographers come. And she is good at it! She enjoys cooking things she sees on the food channel. She likes to run and to use the computer."

In short, spotlighting the moral horror of partial birth abortion, she's a reasonably normal child. "Like most kids her age," Lori says, "she wants to be an actress, a model, a pilot and a U.S. Senator some day."

Thrilled when told about this article, Donna Joy asked to be quoted. "I really love my life! I'm real happy! And when I'm a TV star, I want to drive to New York and eat a pizza with Elliot." This last is a reference to Chris Meloni, a star on the TV series, *Law and Order, SVC*.

In the political world, things move slowly. It took a long time — seven years — to outlaw partial birth abortion. The issue first came before Congress in 1996. President Clinton, ignoring polls that 65 % of Americans thought this measure should be illegal, vetoed a Congressional ban. Parroting disinformation from pro-abortion quarters, he claimed the procedure was rare and used only in emergencies.

In May 1997, the issue was again before Congress. Ron Fitzismmons, executive director, National Coalition of Abortion Providers, admitted that this excuse was a lie and thousands of these procedures are performed annually, on *healthy* mothers five months or more pregnant with *healthy* babies. Again, Congress enacted a ban. Again, Mr. Clinton vetoed it.

Watching from their Washington County home, Lori and Donnie decided to do something. Their pro-life Congressman, Roscoe Bartlett, introduced them to Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA). Santorum asked them to “come to Washington and share their story with the American people.” They agreed.

Lori Watts, daughter of a Bethlehem Steel worker from Sparrows Point, Maryland, had little public speaking experience before her first speaking engagement in the fall of '97. Lori again: “Pregnancy Ministries International invited Ambassador Alan Keyes to speak on the topic of ‘preserving life however life is expressed.’ I was asked to open for him and tell our story to an audience of five hundred. I was very nervous.”

Bolstered by this experience, “I did pressers with Rick (Santorum) at my side,” Lori went on. “We did talk shows and gave private interviews to people like Tony Snow, Good Morning America and NBC Nightly News.” She’s been traveling the country ever since, telling Donna Joy’s story to anyone who’ll listen.

How did Donna Joy become a poster child for opponents of partial birth abortion? “The press put their collective heads together and came up with that,” Lori said. “We lobbied the

House and Senate with Donna Joy in tow. All she had to do was be her adorable self. She loves men, so she really charmed them with those big blue eyes and big hugs. It made for many long days for her, but she held up like a little trooper.”

On November 5, 2003, President Bush, in a ceremony before hundreds in the Reagan Amphitheater, signed a bill banning partial birth abortion. Senator Santorum, who'd sponsored it and pushed for passage, conveyed the President's personal invitation to the Watts family. That day they arose at four a.m. and made the long drive to Washington, where they sat with Attorney General John Ashcroft, former Congressman Bob Dornan, Congressman Henry Hyde (R-IL), Senator Mike De Wine (R-OH) and Jerry Falwell, all people with whom they'd worked.

Finished his remarks Mr. Bush rose to leave the stage. Half-turning toward Donna Joy, he gave her a wave of his hand and that quirky Texas grin. Embarrassed, she responded by pulling her jacket over her face.

The battle's not over. Immediately after Mr. Bush signed the ban, abortion advocates sued in San Francisco, New York and Nebraska to block it. At this writing three federal Courts have ruled the Act unconstitutional because it doesn't contain an exception to protect the health of the mother. This despite voluminous medical evidence that there's no health reason requiring the procedure.

This is a disturbing setback for the pro-life movement. These cases will be appealed to the Supreme Court. It'll take them some time to get there. Perhaps when they do, a re-aligned Court will rule against this barbaric practice, and the huge numbers of Americans who oppose it will have cause to rejoice.