

A MORNING AT THE MILL

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Reprinted from "VOICES FOR THE UNBORN," A MONTHLY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED IN FEASTERVILLE, PA., VOL. 14, #10, OCTOBER, 2001 issue.

The seven-story brick and mortar structure dominates the area at Route 40 and Johnnycake Road in Catonsville, Maryland, a stark monument to the horrors performed inside its walls at the Hillcrest Health Center, under the guise of health care.

My wife and I have been coming here regularly for the past several weeks. Janet can't have children. We'd like to adopt. Janet believes that we might encounter a pregnant woman entering the Center. She hopes that in just a few brief seconds, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we'll be able to convince her not to abort her child and instead, give it to us to raise. Me? I figure the way the Lord works anything's possible.

In the car on the way to Hillcrest that first Saturday three weeks ago, she had been upbeat. "There may be some pro-life regulars there on Saturdays," she had said, "praying for an end to abortion."

We had heard about a small group of pro-lifers that prayed at the Clinic early on Saturdays. But by the time we arrive, if they had been there at all that morning, they had already left the area. In fact, it seems that some members of the pro-life army have been temporarily driven from the field by a line of state and federal court decisions restricting the right of those who hold anti-abortion views to peacefully protest. Two of the latest legal

absurdities? Creation of bubble zones beyond which one cannot pass to make one's protest heard, and fixed buffer zones in which a pro-lifer's freedom of speech and action is restricted. Momentarily stymied, the warriors for Christ have retired to their homes and families, handing a temporary victory of sorts to pro-abortion forces.

So, Janet and I sit in our car, alone, watching young women enter the gaping maw that is the clinic's doorway, focused on their gruesome errand. When the cold winter air penetrates the interior of the car, I turn on the engine and run the heater for a few minutes until the chill is banished.

"What're we waiting for?" I ask.

"I'm not sure," she says, her eyes scanning the nearby sidewalks. "Something. I'll know when it happens."

Frustrated, I shift my weight to a more comfortable position. "Wanna say another Rosary?"

"Yes."

We begin the powerful intercessory prayer to the mother of Jesus, as we have many times before. Just as Mary, at the wedding feast in Cana, asked her Son for help on behalf of the bride and groom, we ask her to petition her Son on our behalf, to lead us to a young woman who will carry her baby to term, deliver it, and let us adopt it.

"We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth...". Actually, good things are happening, I reflect, as we begin the first decade. With a pro-life president now in the White House, we could possibly see eight years with no expansion of abortion rights, and even a whittling away of some pro-abortion gains of the last eight. There was that recent Gallup poll showing that 77% of Americans now understand abortion is the taking of human life. And, there's a lot of opposition in Congress and elsewhere to the partial-birth abortion procedure.

The minutes pass. My wife and I huddle together against the chill watching for something only she will know when she sees it. As we reach the fourth decade she bolts upright. A female, on foot and obviously pregnant, has turned into the alley next to the clinic. *She must have parked her car on the other side*, I muse. Alone, twenty something, dressed in a black navy pea coat and jeans, a blue and white scarf tossed loosely around her neck, she walks quickly toward the door. She carries a small black purse under her arm, pressed tightly against her body. Her head is down; her hands thrust deep into her coat pockets.

"There," Janet cries. Before I can react, she's out of the car, running toward the young woman, who does not see her coming.

"Janet!" In a second I'm out the other side in pursuit of my wife who I think is acting like a crazy person. But I'm a bit behind.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see a clinic "escort" nearby. Obviously concerned, he tosses away a cigarette and heads in our direction. He'll intercept us right in front of the doors.

"You there!" He shouts. "Get the hell away from my client."

But Janet has reached the woman's side. "Don't do it," I hear her say, as I arrive beside them. "You'll regret it the rest of your life." The woman is fingering her purse. She's younger than she had looked from a distance. Her eyes dart from Janet to me and then to the escort, who is approaching quickly, waiving his arms in the air.

"I can't keep this baby," the woman mumbles. She has slowed, but not stopped walking. Her eyes are again cast down. Concerned only for herself, thinking about the inconvenience of raising a child at this stage of her life, she is numbed to the stirrings of her unborn child within her. She has been led to believe that she will breeze through the experience, feeling only relief from the stressful trauma of pending childbirth. She is oblivious to the emotional, moral and

spiritual dimensions of what she is about to do.

"Take this," Janet says, thrusting a white index card at her. "If you change your mind, call us. We'll help. We can adopt the child. We'll pay all the expenses."

The escort is on us. He hasn't shaved yet today. His breath is clearly visible on the chill morning air. I momentarily consider engaging him in conversation, an instant fantasy in which I make point after brilliant point and win him over to the pro-life side. But my hope is quickly dashed.

"Both of you get away from her!" He snarls, as he thrusts himself between Janet and the woman. I press forward. If he touches Janet, I'll do whatever is necessary to protect her, non-violent beliefs notwithstanding. But he doesn't. Instead, he throws an arm around the young woman's shoulders and leads her away. She shoots a furtive glance back at us, but allows herself to be led through the doors toward a doctor she does not know and will not even meet until she is gowned, prepped, and in the stirrups, ready for the grisly ten minute procedure which will then separate her from the baby in her womb, a child she will never hold or be held by in return.

Tears are streaming down my wife's cheeks. She scans the nearby sidewalks for help, finds none and turns accusingly to me. "Why didn't you do something?" She wails.

"What did you want me to do?" I ask. "Toss her in the car and drive off with her?"

Desolate, Janet turns and we walk back to our car. "Please God, don't let her do it," I hear her murmur, as she slides into the passenger seat.

I glance up at the seven-floor stone and brick mountain, wondering what is happening to the young woman we'd met just minutes before, and to the tiny infant in her womb? I knew Janet was having the same thoughts. Was that baby's helpless body even now being scraped or vacuumed from its seemingly secure haven, only to be discarded later in the cold blue steel

dumpster in the alley out back? Would that young woman, little more than a girl really, return home alone and silently weep for her child who will never be?

I recall a Psychology course from college, where I learned of Carl Jung's mother arch type. Jung described this as "the ability of a mother to be destructive and devouring as well as nurturing." *Was Jung right? Are some women able to suppress the nurturing instinct that all females possess, and instead, give themselves permission to embrace abortion as a viable solution to a temporary problem? Is this, I wonder, what leads some woman to present themselves at abortion mills ready to do the unthinkable, while leading others, like Janet, to fight passionately against it?*

I start the engine. "Let's go."

"All right!" She snaps. She slumps back against the seat and then bounces forward, shaking her tiny fist at the huge formless building before us. "But we'll be back!" She threatens. "And next Saturday we'll bring more people with us." Her tears are flowing freely now. "And we won't stop! We won't quit, you hear me? You can take that to the bank."

I stop for the light at Johnnycake and Route 40, reach over and wipe a tear from Janet's cheek. I've never been more proud of her than I am now. " *And I'll be back with her*, I silently vow.