



Nourish yourself.

crosswalk.com

Understanding the Post-Abortive Woman

Jane Brennan

“You created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139: 13-14a)

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Luke 19:10

Impending motherhood for most women is a time of excitement, joy, anticipation and hope. Mothers hope that their child will be happy, healthy, and all that they can be. New moms wait in breathless anticipation for this new life, this special gift from God. *Who will she look like? What will he want to be when he grows up? I can’t wait to hold my baby in my arms!*

Yet for some there isn’t any excitement, joy or hope. There is only anger, despair and powerful, persistent fear. *How can I possibly have a baby now? My parents will kill me. My boyfriend will leave me. My boss will fire me.* These are real emotions and thoughts that go through a woman’s mind when faced with an unintended pregnancy.

I know this because it happened to me.

I was a young college student in Boston in the early 80’s when I found out I was pregnant. My first reaction was one of total fear. *My parents will kill me.* I had won an academic scholarship to Boston University. My parents had high hopes for my future, and I did too. A baby would certainly put those plans in jeopardy.

My friends suggested I get an abortion. At the time, abortion was well publicized all over the city and on the campus. There were many ads in the student newspaper, on bus benches and trolley stops. It seemed everywhere you went abortion was talked about, discussed, accepted and publicized. I went to my boyfriend and informed him of my predicament. He wasn’t very interested in “my” problem. When I brought up abortion he told me he would give me half the money for the procedure. So, that day I decided abortion was my only choice.

How could a woman have her own baby killed? Well, you see, at the time, I didn’t even know it *was* a baby. I was 20 years old and didn’t know anything about fetal development. When I went to the abortion clinic the counselor affirmed for me that it wasn’t a baby. She told me I was just carrying a clump of cells. I believed her. In fact, I felt relief, thinking, *Well, if it’s not a baby yet then I’m not doing anything wrong.*

She also told me that the procedure would be simple and quick and that I could get on with my life after it was over. It sounded like the perfect solution to me.

After my abortion, I became very involved in feminism. I believed all the rhetoric; that it was my body and I could do what I wanted with it - even have a second abortion. I believed men were women's enemy and were out to keep us barefoot and pregnant. I believed religion was a tool to oppress women and keep them from fulfilling their desires. I became very militant -- speaking out, going to marches and protests. Any chance I got, I vociferously voiced my beliefs.

It wasn't until many years later that I realized the counselor at the abortion clinic gave me false information. Through the love and compassion of Jesus Christ I realized that "clump of cells" was a baby from the moment of conception. A special child of God, unique, unrepeatable and given to me. I felt consuming anger at this counselor's deception. I felt betrayed, used and manipulated.

With this new information, I began to question. As I investigated the ideologies I had embraced for so long, I began to see things with new eyes. I discovered doctors who believed in the sanctity of life were not "medieval" and the Church, contrary to radical feminist belief, is not out to oppress women.

As I began to write and speak to others on the topic of abortion, I met other post-abortive women; women who had similar stories to mine. We all shared the guilt and shame of aborting our babies. We waged a ferocious interior battle to forgive ourselves. The pain and suffering we went through because of our "choice" was at times unbearable.

The pain of abortion is a pain many women continue to suffer in isolation or silence. I recently compiled a book of women who have chosen abortion, and in their stories I see the same sorrow, pain, agony and guilt I felt that so often gets unreported amid the jumble of political rhetoric focused on rights. In one story, Marie shares: *The despair deepened and turned quickly to depression. I remember sitting in the bathroom during a break at my summer job, seriously considering suicide. I could just take one of these box-cutters from the back room-end it all. Right here. Right now.*

Research shows that among the symptoms a woman may experience following abortion include (but are not limited to):

- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Suicidal Ideation and Suicidal Attempts
- Eating Disorders
- Divorce and Chronic Relationship Problems
- Short and Long-term Risks to Physical and Reproductive Health
(information from www.afterabortion.org)

Yet, as my story and the stories of many others show, healing can take place. Jackie's story demonstrates healing that is nothing short of miraculous. In her own words: *Suddenly, everything stopped. I felt different-light and free. Joy sprung up in my soul. I knew God had delivered me and purged me from all the guilt and shame of my abortion, and He was going to bless me with a baby.*

Today's world is all about comfort, it's all about "me." Our society has convinced us of the "inconveniences" of life and that we need not endure them. Yet, I and so many others have learned that "inconvenience" builds character and makes us stronger. In fact, these "inconveniences" can even be better for us than the alternative.

Unfortunately, many women have already made choices they can't take back. They may be struggling without help and healing. These women may even feel afraid that the Church would reject them or God wants nothing to do with them. This couldn't be further from the truth. Through God's grace, help and

healing is possible. Christ's death on the cross was not for perfect people, but for those like you and me – those who know brokenness and regret.

“I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you.” (Jer 29:11)

Jane Brennan, MS, whose full story is included in the book *Motherhood Interrupted*, has a private counseling practice in Colorado. She is also a state leader for the SilentNoMoreAwareness Campaign. Her book *Motherhood Interrupted: Stories of Healing and Hope after Abortion* can be ordered from her web-site <http://www.motherhoodinterrupted.com/>

Find this article at: <http://www.crosswalk.com/spirituallife/women/11568765/>