

Testimony by Susan Justice on behalf of HB 228

Dear Legislators,

June 13, 2006

It is with great honor and privilege that I stand to give testimony today in favor of HB 228 - Ohio's ban on abortion. I stand today not to speak from theory and rhetoric, but from the standpoint of one who has experienced abortion firsthand. It is my hope, that by sharing my story, it will become clear that Abortion should be banned, because **ABORTION HURTS WOMEN.**

My own experience of abortion occurred on Dec. 17, 1980. I was 18 years old, a freshman in college, studying to be a nurse, when I chose to end an unplanned pregnancy through abortion. I had not become sexually active until college, and when my worst fears were confirmed through a positive pregnancy test, my mind was filled with anxiety and fear. Though my boyfriend and I had a steady relationship of two years and had talked about marriage, we both had started our college path and did not see at the time, how a pregnancy could fit into the plan at that stage in our lives. I was very scared. I never anticipated that I would be faced with this situation, much less encounter the anguished struggle and wrestling over what we should do.

My boyfriend suggested that abortion was the only foreseeable option, since we had both recently begun colleges. We scheduled the abortion for December 17th -- during our Christmas break. We did not tell our parents of our dilemma. My "counseling" at the women's center where I obtained the abortion, consisted of telling me that abortion was safe, quick and easy, and "would solve the problem." I wasn't told about the possible long-lasting emotional consequences I might experience. Neither was I informed of the option of adoption, or of the varied local support services within the community that would assist me if I chose to carry my child.

I was not given written or verbal information concerning my child's fetal development. You can imagine the devastation I would later experience in my nursing rotations to learn that my child was not a "blob of pregnancy tissue" as I was told, but in fact, my child's **heart began to beat at day 21.** At day 40 (not even 6 weeks into my pregnancy, even before I would miss my second period) my **child's brain waves** would have been able to be **detected and recorded.**

The abortion itself was handled in a sterile and unfeeling manner. Before the doctor began the procedure, I became very tearful and anxious. Neither the Doctor nor nurse, stopped to explore my emotions, but continued on with prepping and then performing the abortion. When I reached out for the nurse's hand, I found no solace in her cold, uncomfoting touch. As I heard the loud hum of the suction machine, I remember the thought crossing my mind, "would I see body parts, if I looked?" Nothing prepared me for the terrible pulling and severe cramping I would feel as I knew the life (literally and figuratively) was being sucked out of me.

After the procedure, the nurse escorted me to a waiting area and casually offered me juice, as if nothing of any real consequence had happened. No matter how much I tried to deny it, instinctively I knew that I had just ended a life that had been growing inside of me.

After the procedure, my first reaction was one of relief. My crisis had past, so I thought. No one would know. I could go on with life as if nothing happened and put this all behind me. Within days, a strange emotional numbness began to envelope me. There was a deep inner emptiness that permeated my being, as well as a generalized sadness that now clouded my outlook on life. Life had lost it's zest and luster.

In subsequent days and weeks, I experienced a deepening depression. I would frequently and unexpectedly become teary-eyed, and find myself crying at the drop of a hat. I also became very "touchy" and irritable. I would fly off the handle at the slightest provocation. These uncharacteristic and chaotic emotional swings were in themselves anxiety producing.

To cope, I essentially tried to push the abortion experience out of my memory and would not allow myself to think about it. This emotional pressure was a lot to handle. Though I had no previous history of drug or alcohol abuse, I found myself becoming more and more involved with drinking - to the point that I would drink most nights of the week, and on the weekends. In retrospect, I see that the alcohol abuse was my attempt to further dull and self-medicate my emotional pain. During the day, I went on "autopilot" in order to function in my College classes, but during the nights I would go to local bars and get loaded.

The abortion put a rift in my boyfriend's and my relationship -- a rift that we were unable to mend. My boyfriend couldn't understand what had "gotten into me" after the abortion. He couldn't understand why I had changed. I was no longer the positive, bubbly, upbeat person that I used to be. I had become sullen and depressed. I was irritable, and my face no longer sported the bright smile he was so used to. He had also become more critical, irritable, and prone to anger. He had lost some of his patient, easy-going spirit that I loved so much.

Our relationship quickly disintegrated under the emotional weight of our "choice". Though previous to the abortion, we had a close, loving, relationship, and had spoken often about getting married -- Now, the abortion had become an open wound that brought tremendous alienation, anger, and guilt. Being together brought up the awful reminder of what we had done, so it was easier to just let the relationship die.

After the break up of our relationship, my life continued to spiral downhill. Because of the abortion, I had lost my self-respect. I became involved in an abusive relationship. Looking back, I think that the relationship subconsciously allowed the acting out of the punishment I felt I deserved for what I had done. My self-esteem hit an all time low.

After ending the abusive relationship, I continued to choose unhealthy relationships with men, succumbing to a lifestyle of promiscuity and demeaning relationships that only further served to confirm what I felt about myself.

The abortion experience created the self-perception of being damaged, tarnished, and defiled. The abortion procedure itself felt in many ways to be a "violation" of my body -- causing violent abuse to me and my child.

In a reactive way, whenever the topic of abortion would come up - I would vocally support a woman's right to choose. But no matter how much I tried to buy into the pro-choice philosophy, it never assuaged the deep inner instinct that women know - we are

nurturers, and are designed to protect our offspring, not kill them. All the mental "gymnastics" of calling the baby a "fetus," or a "ball of cells" did not erase this inner instinctive challenge to the pro-choice philosophy. I found no hope for healing in the message of Pro-choice, because they would not even acknowledge that it was a life that I killed.

After 7 long years of denial, and a lot of unhealthy choices, the beginning of my healing came about when a friend told me about a post-abortion support group being held at a local Pro-life agency in my area. Through the support I received from the facilitator and other women in my group, I was able to work through and come to terms with the abortion, and enabled to grieve the loss of my child.

A significant help in my journey of healing came when I acknowledged the truth about the development of my child. Of my own idea and accord, I decided to go to the clinic where I had the abortion, and retrieve my medical records. I found from the records, that my child was estimated at 6 weeks gestation, when its life was ended.

I looked in a pamphlet about fetal development, and found that by 6 weeks - its heart had already begun beating. My child's brain waves would have been able to be recorded. I saw a picture of what my child looked like at 6 weeks (just 2 weeks after I missed my first period). My child wasn't a "blob of pregnancy tissue." NO! It was very discernibly a BABY ...small as it might be, but *clearly* a baby. I had to work through the tremendous amount of rage and anger I had toward the abortion clinic doctors and counselors for not giving me this truth.

It has taken many years, many tears, and much overcoming to arrive at a place of healing in regards to my abortion. I will always carry the scar, where the once opened wound used to be. And yes, I still shed an occasional tear -- especially on Mother's day, or the anniversary of my child's death, or around the time of year when my child would have been born. When I watch my two boys grow up, there are instances where I wonder what my aborted child may have looked like, or accomplished.

Though I have had the privilege of sharing my story today, there are MANY, MANY more like it. With 1.31 million abortions occurring annually in the United States each year, I shudder to think of the sea of silent mourners that is spread out across our nation.

I close with the words of two other post-abortive women:

"No one points out that either way a person goes, it is a decision that stays with them all their life. I think I could live with myself a lot easier having given a child up for adoption. Abortion doesn't make the baby go away, it just makes a dead baby."

"After I had my abortion I felt relief. But after 7 years of denial it finally hit me. I was so scared when I found out what an abortion really is. The abortion is definitely the one thing I regret. There will always be remorse and sadness. The feeling of the loss of a child will always be there. I wish I could have known then what abortion was all about, and its devastating effects on the woman. It is really a shame that lies about abortion are not taken seriously by people like doctors, and politicians. So many women feel that if they had more support and truth during their crisis pregnancy, many lives would have been saved."

Please pass HB 228 -- PROTECT WOMEN -- PROTECT LIVES!

Respectfully,
Mrs. Susan Justice RN