

BEFORE THE LEGISLATURE OF OHIO
HB228
CHAIRMAN WHITE AND MEMBERS OF THE HEALTH COMMITTEE

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF BETH ANN VALANTINE

JUNE 13, 2006

My name is Beth Ann Valantine and I am the Development Director for a non-profit organization here in Ohio.

On December 19, 1983 I had an abortion. I was 21 years old and working as a waitress. I had ended a relationship that was very negative and a month later discovered I was pregnant. I had met someone new and we were just beginning to get to know each other and I had to tell him I was pregnant and the baby wasn't his. I couldn't lie to him.

He chose to stay with me, but I knew if I kept the baby I would probably lose him. He offered to pay for my abortion, but the future he talked about didn't include someone else's child.

I was very young and confused. I didn't know how I would afford taking care of a baby. My emotional state was terrible. I was raised in a family where abortion was never talked about, but I always believed it was wrong. There was absolutely no one telling me the risks or consequences of abortion. There was no one encouraging me to explore other options. No one told me that at 21 days my baby's heart was already beating, or at 40 days brainwaves could be detected.

My decision took three days -- my choice changed my life forever. My life at that moment was divided into two segments: before my abortion -- and after my abortion.

Some people can remember a turning point in their life where everything changed. For some it's a positive experience. For me it was extremely negative. I defined myself as the woman who took the life of her own child. I chose a relationship with a man over my own child.

The day of my abortion my boyfriend, my mother and I drove to the abortionist's office. We waited in the waiting room with women who were noticeably pregnant and there for a OB appointment. Women who were very happy to be pregnant. I couldn't look at them. I was just trying not to fall apart.

When it was my turn I went back by myself. I cried silent tears as they prepared to do the procedure. No one asked me if I was sure that this was what I wanted to do. Once they began I cried even harder. No one told me it would hurt that much. I remember the sound of the suction machine. It was very loud and I felt like it was inside my head. I began to yell in pain and the nurse told me I could squeeze her hand, but I needed to be quiet. The

pain was so great I began to vomit. I was 7 weeks pregnant. When it was over I felt very cold and couldn't stop shivering.

After that day I tried to push down all the pain and guilt and shame, but you can only repress something so long before it manifests in other areas of your life. For me it started with depression, anxiety and panic attacks. I began to have nightmares and developed a sleep disorder, which I still suffer with today. It almost ruined my marriage. My husband couldn't understand why I couldn't just put it all behind me. When my son was about 7 months old, thoughts of suicide were an everyday occurrence. I began to believe my daughter and son would be better off without me for a mother.

In closing, I would like to tell the representatives that I believe abortion hurts women physically, emotionally and spiritually. I know I am forgiven so I no longer live with overwhelming guilt and shame like I did for almost 20 years, but I will always live with the regret of what I did. That day, 23 years ago, a part of my heart died. I refused to allow myself to grieve because I felt I had no right. Everyone has lost someone close to him or her. Imagine if you pushed down all that grief and kept it buried for 20 or more years...How would that impact the life of your family and even your work? I always wanted to be a mother. That was my greatest desire. I went against everything I believed in and acted in a way that was totally opposite from who I am. I can never take back that decision. I will live the rest of my life talking to women faced with the same choice so they never have to suffer what I did. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you.