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National Right To Life Walk

'Let's Pray That Next Year We Won't Have To'

By Martha Hays

Every one of us had a reason. We would have had to—who would climb on a cramped charter bus and take a 16-hour, uncomfortable, sleepless ride into the night without one?

Each of us had our differences—our ages, where we came from and even some of our doctrinal beliefs. Some of us were Baptists, some were members of the Church of Christ and Assemblies of God and the rest were Catholic.

Yes, we had our differences. However, this weekend it didn't seem to matter. The 56 of us had a reason for being together on that bus, and the reason was as big as life.



We set off last Thursday morning, Jan. 21, as part of Arkansas' first Right to Life delegation to participate in the National March for Life held Friday, Jan. 22 in Washington, DC. It was the 37th anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade decision to legalize abortion.

Initially, my reason for going was to "carry the torch" and write about the event for my good friend Diane Spriggs, editor of this fine newspaper, who recently had surgery and wasn't able to make the trip. Diane has always been a mentor to me and I wanted "do her proud."

However, I didn't want to discount the notion that God might want to use the event to stir my conscience, which had ashamedly become dulled

to the cause of the sanctity of life. And, I admit, a trip to one of the most exciting cities in the country sounded kind of cool! I love Washington, D.C. because you get to see so many historical things up close and personal, things you had perhaps only before seen in books.

The trip didn't start off too well for me because a few miles down the road in downtown Little Rock I discovered I had left my wallet with all my money at home. Our bus driver, Carl, was gracious enough to pull over and wait for my husband, Bob, to bring it to me.

All day and night we traveled through Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville and some breathtaking parts of Virginia that can only be described as "God's country." We arrived in the nation's capital city at 6 a.m. Friday, running on adrenaline and very little sleep.

Later that morning we made our way toward the March to play our parts in a little slice of history at a time when the stakes are perhaps higher than they've ever been. With a nationalized health care proposal that would make abortion on demand a taxpayer-funded Holocaust, the call to march was answered by an estimated record 400,000 pro-life supporters from all over the country. The theme was "Stand Up Now and Unite for the Life Principles."

Pre-Walk Rally

Before the 37th annual March, a rally was held on the Capitol Mall where National March for Life Fund president Nellie J. Gray, 84, reminded pro-life supporters that when they held the first march 37 years ago, "We thought our government would come to its senses and we'd only need to have one march. Our government didn't see it that way."

Other speakers on the rally platform included U.S. Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) and U.S. representatives from all over the country—but none were from Arkansas.

Also speaking was Georgette Forney, the co-founder of Silent No More, a group that ministers to women who have had abortions. Other speakers included Dr. John Bruchalski, chairman of Divine Mercy Care and a former abortion provider, and Bobby Schindler, the brother of 2003 Florida euthanasia victim Terri Schindler Schiavo. Schindler reminded rally participants that the pro-life movement isn't just about saving babies. It's about "preserving life—all life."

Marchers were also treated to music from the Sounds of Liberty chorus from Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA.

The Walk

There are no words to describe the awesome enormity of the crowd. There wasn't a place along the 1.2-mile route where a person wasn't walking. The sidewalks were lined with passionate onlookers chanting expressions like, "What do we want? Life! Who do we want it for? Everyone! When do we want it? Now!"

What was missing from this march was the presence of protesters discouraging the message—we never saw a one.

These champions for life marched through the cold streets of D.C., faces red, toes frozen, with freezing rain and sleet pelting them in the face, all the way to the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court where the 1973 decision was made to legalize abortion. One of my proudest moments up to now is to say that I was one of them.

Local Heroes

While these national "heroes" for the cause of life have set an example for all of us, please allow me to introduce some of Arkansas' "local heroes" I met on this journey.

• **Rose Mimms**—Rose, executive director Arkansas Right to Life, organized the trip to D.C. and has been heralding the pro-life cause since 1988. She began working at Arkansas Right To Life in 1995 and has coordinated the Arkansas March For Life for the past 15 years. This year's march was held Jan. 17 in downtown Little Rock.

Rose said she would love to encourage anyone to participate in the national march one time. She believes experiencing it would encourage people to be "a part of history" and be more active at the local level.

She issued a challenge to all Christians: "If you are a follower of Christ, you cannot sit and be silent while 3,500 babies a day are being aborted." The key to turning the tide is education, she said, and the key to educating people about abortion is access to the people.

Her goal is to get into Arkansas churches and provide information to members about the services Arkansas Right to Life offers so Christians will want to get involved. Services range from free pregnancy tests and ultrasounds to counseling and educating people on the truths about abortion.

• **Marsha Boss** of Little Rock—A representative of Pharmacists for Life, a coalition of pro life pharmacists, Marsha is a catalyst of the 40 Days for Life movement in Arkansas. Marsha has dedicated herself to faithfully supporting the cause of life by praying and fasting for not only the unborn, but also the women who are both past and future victims of abortion, and even the doctors who provide them.

She and other members of her group have steadfastly maintained a vigil in front of a Little Rock abortion clinic, taking turns standing silently in prayer for a continuous 40 days. Their presence near the clinics is non-confrontational. She says they are only there to pray.

• **Susan Tanner**—Marsha is aided in this cause by Susan Tanner, who describes herself as a "co-prayer warrior" with Marsha. Susan, who once volunteered inside the Arkansas Pregnancy Resource Center in Little Rock, has stepped outside the office to pray in the trenches. She said praying near the women who visit the clinics "puts a face" on the work for her and makes her feel the pull to keep going back.

• **Maria Maldonado** of Little Rock—This "sidewalk counselor" volunteers with 40 Days for Life. While she can't stand on clinic property, she does wait near the Little Rock clinic to offer counseling for these young women who find themselves in troubling situations and are desperately looking for a way out.

She hears the cries of the unwed mothers, many of them young and financially strapped. Some of the main reasons these women are seeking an abortion are a lack of money for food and diapers and a lack of support from family and friends. She provides them with information about free medical care, financial aid for needs like housing and utilities, adoption and even offers personal support in telling their parents about their pregnancies.

And Maria goes the extra mile. Along with the help of other volunteers, she has given baby showers for many of the girls she has successfully counseled.

Maria began her pro-life work as the director of the Arkansas Pregnancy Resource Center in Little Rock. She now teaches second grade at a Little Rock school and approaches her pro-life work with the eyes of a teacher.

"I look at the potential (of unborn babies) and just see them gone in one day—our future leaders, presidents, etc."

Her work doesn't go completely unnoticed. This weekend while we were at the March, Maria got a call from one of the girls she counseled near the clinic. The girl called to say thanks and ask for a personal meeting with her and her mother.

• **Judy Wurtz**—One of the most profound statements I heard this weekend from among members of the group came from Judy Wurtz of Pocahontas. When responding to a question from another group member who asked if anyone would be coming back next year, Judy replied: "Let's pray we won't need to."

She added, "I believe if we pray, God could end this holocaust. Jesus said if we have faith the size of a mustard seed we can move mountains and we already know that God is pro-life."

And these women are only a few of the unsung heroes. There were other champions of life with us last weekend—men and women, young and elderly, all regular people like you and me. In their other lives they are mothers, fathers, teachers, office workers, mail carriers, car salesmen, college students—just to name a few. There were even grade school students who took two days off from school to attend the event. The youngest member of our group was 12.

Be humbled because these folks

stand in the gap for those of us who lack the gift or the courage to step out. This week they are my heroes.

Conclusion

Looking back, still groggy from the weekend, one very important thing I learned is that even though we may differ in some of our theological beliefs, we can unite for a common cause. And there's something about reaching across the divide in solidarity and friendship to work together that is good and brings a smile to my face. Somehow I think it brings one to Jesus' face as well. After all, He is the reason for life.

If you would like to help in any of these ministries here are some of their needs and their contact information:

- Rose Mimms, Arkansas Right to Life, P.O. Box 1697, Little Rock, AR 72203; (501) 663-4237; artl@artl.org.

- Marsha Boss, 152 Pebble Beach Dr., Little Rock, AR 72212; (501) 227-0761; marshaboss@aol.com; www.PFL.org. Volunteers are needed to pray near clinics.

- Maria Maldonado (501) 258-2434. Donations of formula, diapers, baby booties and other baby supplies are needed. Volunteers to be trained to counsel near clinics are also needed.

Editor's Note

Another very special person on this trip was one of Martha's and my dearest friends, Debbie Hamilton, who, like Martha, is a dedicated Christian and pro-life advocate.

"I came away realizing how much there is to do, that Planned Parenthood is even worse than I thought... there



**Debbie
Hamilton**

are so many barbaric ways abortion doctors make money," said Debbie. "But I also came away encouraged by the 100's of thousands of people – many of them teenagers and 20-somethings – who took the time to take a stand against abortion and send strong messages."

Martha, Debbie, Kathy Jones (the final member of the four musketeers) and I are already talking about being a part of next year's Right to Life walk. Won't you make plans to join us?

Of course, like Judy Wurtz said, "Let's pray we won't need to."