Most of us spend our lives trying to avoid the cross. We know that with the cross comes suffering, and there are very few of us who willingly embrace suffering.

There is a great little book by St. Louis Marie de Montefort entitled, “Friends of the Cross.” It can be a tough read as we come face to face with how little, in our human weakness, we want to die to self and suffer with Christ. “A Friend of the Cross,” de Montfort says, “is one chosen by God, from among thousands who live only according to their reason and senses, to be wholly divine, raised above mere reason and completely opposed to material things, living in the light of pure faith, and inspired by a deep love of the Cross. For sure we cannot do it on our own; we are incapable without His grace.”

In this “Year of Mercy,” as we meditate on the beautiful image of Divine Mercy with its rays of blood and water pouring out on us, let us not forget the cross where we truly see the manifestation of God’s Mercy in action. It is the place where we find the love deep enough to heal our wounds. Once we have experienced this profound mercy we are changed, and the cross, although still difficult to embrace, draws us closer because we know personally the love that exists there beyond our fears.

“In short,” de Monfort says, “a perfect Friend of the Cross is a true Christ-bearer, or rather another Christ, so that he can truly say, ‘I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me’.”

May we each, this Lent, strive to be perfect friends of the cross of Christ, manifesting Mercy Himself to all we meet!

– TB

La se ni cora conve, ut audesignoxim inc re et forumus culus labem
Entering Canaan
Weekend for Siblings of Aborted Babies

“\textit{I think that it would be good for people to know that we all suffer from abortion. It is not something that affects just the mother or the father over time. I have not forgotten my siblings and I never will. I miss them although I never knew them. I cannot get it out of my mind and I pray for my mom, my dad, and my siblings every day.}” KT

Are you suffering because your sibling has been aborted?

There are millions of others out there who have also experienced this loss.

You are not alone!

\textit{“Suddenly my whole life made sense!”}

May 20 – 22, 2016
St. Gabriel Retreat House
Catonville, MD

Spiritual director: Rev Fidelis Moscinski, CFR

For further information contact:

Entering Canaan/ROC
www.enteringeanaan.com
enteringeanaan17@gmail.com

Lumina
www.postabortionhelp.org
email: lumina@postabortionhelp.org
877 586 4621
Post Abortive Sibling - I said “yes” and am so glad I did!

It brings me great joy to share this article by Renee (Susie) regarding her healing as the sibling of an aborted baby. I am so proud of her! I remember so well her anxiety and fear as she embarked upon the “Entering Canaan” sibling retreat held by Lumina.

In spite of many struggles she hung in there and shared her heart with all who came. God is so good. Renee has now gone on to help many other siblings through her blog, Surviving Siblings, and her private Facebook page where siblings are able to share with one another. I have no doubt God will continue to use her in many wonderful ways!

I have been very blessed to do sibling retreats for the past six years. Our first weekend for post abortive siblings was held in Catonsville, Maryland last March. Participants came from all over the country. We are very happy to say we will be holding another sibling weekend this year, under the direction of Rev. Fidelis Moscinski, CFR, from May 20-22. The retreat is free and scholarships are available for transportation. Spread the word!

In this wounded world let us reach out with compassion and love to all those impacted by abortion to bring them to the heart of Christ in this Year of Mercy and always!

Significant Date
By susiofanabba

January 22, 1973 had quite an impact on my life, even though I was not yet born. It was the day that abortion was legalized in the United States, which ended up making it easier for mom to abort in '95. But January 22, 2006 had an even bigger impact on my life, for that was the evening that mom bravely shared her testimony with us. There was instant sadness, but no tears. In part because I am really not comfortable with my emotions being visible, but also because I didn’t want to add to mom’s pain, which was so obvious. Despite that, she was open for questioning, letting us know, among other things, that she had named the baby Joseph Michael, as well as the date of the abortion (2/14/95). As hard as it was to hear, these details actually made things easier to handle in some ways, so I deeply admire the strength she showed.

Prior to finding out about Joey, I had dealt with numerous losses as a nursing home volunteer, and while they definitely hurt, I was able to move on fairly quickly. I assumed it would be like that with him, especially because I hadn’t even known about him and the death was so many years earlier. Plus, some of it was wishful thinking, so I wouldn’t have to feel such strong and painful emotions.

A decade later, I see how wrong I was. But you know, as rough as it’s been, and still is at times, I don’t regret going through that pain. It has opened my eyes in multiple ways for which I am so grateful and there have been some amazing blessings!

I will not get into all of them in this post, but one of the ones I am most excited about is that I am now an advocate! Through this blog, my Facebook pages and group, etc I get to be a voice for siblings. The kind that I very much longed to find when I was first ready to find help. I was shocked by how little was available for and about us at that time, even among those who offered post abortive counseling. Silent No More, Rhode Island and Lumina were the only ones I could find, speaking up for and reaching out to others like me, but both were across the country, unfortunately. With mom’s permission, a pen name of sorts (Susie O Fanabba, short for ‘surviving sibling of an aborted baby’), and the encouragement of those at Silent No More, I wrote my first testimony. That in and of itself was healing, as a lot that I had been repressing came out. I sent it to SNM and to Theresa Bonopartis at Lumina, who was coordinating a retreat day for siblings, a few weeks from that time. I knew I was not going to be able to make it, but hoped that it could be read to the other siblings at least. To my shock, she wrote back with an invite to attend, and offered to help me figure out a way to get there. WOW! I was instantly nervous! Not just about traveling, but about the day itself. Could I handle being in such an emotionally charged environment? Would I be able to keep my own emotions in check or would I have a public breakdown, etc?

Despite these worries, I said yes and am so glad I did. While it was very physically and emotionally draining (no tears though), it brought amazing healing! To start with, Theresa kept it small, only 7 of us total. 5 siblings, a chaplain and her. We all had a very generous amount of time to share our stories, in a comfortable, home-like setting, with hardly any interruption or fear of judgement, mockery, hurting our parents, etc. When my turn came I imagined I would give just a brief account, especially because I was shy and worried about a breakdown, but nope!! Even more came out than what was in the testimony!! For the first time, I was with others who could relate to my loss and found it so freeing ::D 5 people, from different backgrounds, finding common ground and healing together!

That day was over too quickly! But the healing and joy that came have not left! Nor have the friendships. We are all very busy with our own lives but still find time to reconnect with each other, for which I am grateful. What’s rather sad to me though, is that so few post abortive sibs can relate to the healing I’ve experienced and I want to do my part to help them. The main ways I have done this are through sharing my own story, in the hopes that it brings awareness to our pain and issues and inspires those who can to start programs and such for us. Also, by starting and maintaining this blog, which has a growing number of testimonies, most of them anonymous, and through my private group on Facebook, just for siblings. It’s been such an honor to hear from some, post abortive and non, that my efforts are helping bring healing and awareness!

There have been some awesome changes in the last 10 years, that I am looking forward to seeing what the next 10 bring.
I remember sitting in an abortionist’s office the day my son died. No one spoke to me. No one told me anything. No one asked my opinion whether my son should live or die. They just ignored me, as though I wasn’t really there. The facility staff and all the other people in that waiting room seemed embarrassed that I was there. I was embarrassed too.

Embarrassed by my absolute helplessness to save him.

You see, in America no one cares what fathers think about aborting their children. We have no right under the law to protect our unborn children in the face of the mother’s wish to dispose of them.

No one bothered to warn me that many post abortive marriages fail. No one bothered to tell me that post abortive fathers have high rates of depression, substance abuse, and divorce (even in later marriages). No one bothered to tell me that this single event would haunt my decisions for years to come. They just let me walk into it blindly.

No one bothered to tell me that I would grieve the death of my son just like any other father- only I would have to hide that mourning because killing your child by abortion is one of those secrets we want to keep “in the closet.” No one wants to hear about your aborted son.

It’s a woman’s issue they say. My grief doesn’t count. The disruption of my life doesn’t count- not the depression, not the marital troubles, not the disruption of other family relationships, …none of it.

So I did what tens of millions of men have done. I tried to bury my feelings of failure, grief, and anger deep in some dark recess in my soul. I didn’t mention my son. I didn’t think about him. I pretended he didn’t exist. For twenty-seven years I buried it. But, deep down it was always there, lurking just in the shadows of my mind- never in full view and never quite out of the picture.

But, you see it really does matter to me that I couldn’t protect him. It matters to me that my family relationships were ripped asunder in the aftermath of that abortion. It matters to me that my child never had a chance.

I found healing in the same place men have found it for two thousand years, in the gentle compassion of Christ. It’s not a “sissy” thing. Christ comes to us individually and looks us right in the eye. Then He pulls us back to our feet, and sets off with us down the pathways of life. Don’t wait twenty-seven years like I did. My son, Matthew, wouldn’t have wanted me to. Your lost children don’t want that for you either. – Dr. Dave Russell

Where Mercy Meets Faithfulness

It is the point of healing. The joining of ultimate pain with ultimate love. An act of complete trust and surrender, a climbing on to the cross with Christ - there to join mercy with faithfulness.

I can remember the struggles of faithfulness, the searching in the dark to find God, the holding on to His Word because I had tried everything else and I longed to be healed. The movement in spite of the pain, the darkness, the fear, because there was nothing to lose…there could be no greater hell than the one I had made for myself.

I begged and pleaded with God reminding Him of His promises, in spite of me. I worked at chipping my remains away; fighting myself so I could reach a complete surrender.

There were many times when I needed encouragement to continue, to resist the temptation to give up, to deny the pain, and to go on, but God provided the people necessary to give me the push that I needed, the words I had to hear, and the strength to hang on.

I continually pleaded for the saints’ intercession and especially entrusted myself to Mary and Joseph.

And finally, one day alone with Jesus, because He is the only one who can heal, I trusted enough to climb on the cross, to be one with the pain and love that exists there and to allow that love to fill the deep wounds that I had.

There, His mercy met my faithfulness and I finally felt healed of my abortion. I suddenly understood so much of scripture. So much of it was then fulfilled in me, such a gift given. I felt like Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross. Immense love had taken on immense sin and had washed away its stain.

To be sure, the process of healing from abortion is painful and delicate, but with the right help and trust in God even if not “felt,” it is possible. Jesus in His mercy longs to heal us. We in our faithfulness need to persevere.
Heartbeat International Conference:  
March 29–31, 2016  
Theresa Bonopartis will present a workshop on “The Impact of Abortion on Siblings” at this year’s Heartbeat Conference in Atlanta Georgia.  
The 2016 Heartbeat International Annual Conference is offering a rich lineup of workshops, with a total of 75 workshops organized in 15 distinct tracks. For more information, visit their website at www.heartbeatinternational.org/training/conference

Merciful Like the Father Conference:  
April 1-3, 2016  
Come and experience the life-changing effects of God’s Mercy!  
The Office of Evangelization of the Diocese of Metuchen will sponsor “Merciful Like the Father: A 3-Day Encounter with Mercy,” from March 31-April 2 at the St. John Neumann Pastoral Center, Piscataway.  
Visit www.diometuchen.org/offices-and-ministries/formation-and-leadership/evangelization/evangelizationevents for more event details and to register online or by mail.  
Speakers will include: Fr. Mariusz Koch, CFR, Laura Bragg Harris, Theresa Bonopartis, Msgr. Joseph Celano, as well as Vigil Mass Saturday with Bishop Boortkoski.

New York Life Team –  
Pro Life Day Symposium:  
April 16, 2016

Pregnancy: Tough Situations, Real Answers.  
Pro-life leaders are often asked about the hard situations related to pregnancy.  
What if a woman is raped or becomes the victim of incest?  
What if the pregnancy threatens her life or health?  
What can you say to a woman who already seems set on abortion as a solution to her difficult situation?  
How can we help a woman who suffers from a past abortion?  
Our speakers will provide serious, informed answers to these vital questions.  
Confirmed speakers include: Dr. George Musalli, Associate Professor of Clinical Obstetrics & Gynecology and Women’s Health at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and Director of Maternal-Fetal Medicine, Bronx Lebanon Hospital Center and Theresa Bonopartis of Lumina Ministries.  
Theresa is the co-developer with The Sisters of Life of “Entering Canaan - a Sacramental Journey to an Inheritance of Mercy,” a post abortion ministry published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Upcoming Post Abortion Retreats

Entering Canaan Ministry  
(Entering Canaan Ministry begins with day retreats, which we encourage all who can, to attend preceding our weekends. Please call for our weekend dates)

WOMEN
Days of Prayer & Healing
Sisters of Life Contact:  
866-575-0075  
Theresa Bonopartis: 877-586-4621
March 19, 2016  
April 30, 2016  
May 28, 2016  
June 25, 2016  
June 11, 2016 New Jersey  
Theresa Bonopartis: 877-586-4621  
lumina@postabortionhelp.org

MEN
Day of Prayer & Healing for Men  
Contact: Lumina 877-586-4621  
October 29, 2016

SIBLINGS
Day of Prayer & Healing  
April 6, 2016  
Contact: Lumina 877-586-4621  
Weekend for Siblings  
For siblings of aborted babies  
May 20-22, 2016  
Contact: Reclaiming Our Children  
enteringcanaan17@gmail.com  
Entering Canaan  
Nationwide Days of Prayer & Healing

Bridgeport Diocese  
Maureen Ciardiello 203-416-1445  
Email: mciardiello@diobpt.org  
March 19, 2016  
May 14, 2016  
July 9, 2016

Arlington, Virginia  
Phone: 888-456-HOPE  
projectrachel@arlondiocese.org  
March 12, 2016  
October 1, 2016

Syracuse New York Diocese  
Contact: Lisa Hall 855-364-0076  
hopeandhealing@syrdio.org  
April 9, 2016

Toledo, Ohio  
Contact: 419-260-5811  
projectrachel@toledodiocese.org  
April 6, 2016

Nashville, Tennessee  
April 16, 2016  
Contact: Rena Burns  
enteringcanaan4midtn@gmail.com

St. Louis, Missouri  
Day of Prayer & Healing (ecumenical)  
May 7, 2016  
Weekend Retreat for Women  
August 5-7, 2016  
Contact: Marisol (314) 792-7451  
Email: ihnpfaff@swbell.net

Day Retreat for Men  
September 10, 2016  
projectjoseph@archstl.org  
Phone: 314-792-7565

Washington, D.C.  
Entering Canaan Day of Prayer and Healing  
Project Rachel Ministry  
Phone: 301-853-4565  
projectrachel@adw.org  
English:  
Spanish:
I’m free!

Such was the tried-and-true motto I claimed as my own when I graduated from high school a semester early during my senior year. It was 1987, and I dreamed of nothing more than to kick off the dust of small-town Iowa to start my grown-up life in Iowa City, the artsy hub of the Midwest, where I planned to wait tables and save money for fall semester classes at the University of Iowa. What did I want? Who would I be? How would I live? The choices were exhilarating.

At 17, I was both proud of, and careless with, my newfound independence. My hometown boyfriend drove to Iowa City to spend most weekends with me, and I obtained a fake ID that made it easy to drink in bars with my legal-aged co-workers almost every night of the week. Drinking too much and eating poorly, I did not lead a healthful lifestyle and wasn’t too concerned when I missed a few periods that summer. Not until my 18th birthday had come and gone in a haze of partying and I was an official college freshman did it occur to me that I was gaining weight and might actually be pregnant.

Conveniently for me as a female student at the U of I, the Emma Goldman Clinic was situated just a block off campus, next door to a sorority house, and directly across the street from my apartment. Access to women’s healthcare couldn’t have been easier. At my next-day appointment, I answered a few questions, took a pregnancy test, and was informed that I was approximately three months pregnant. A clinic worker explained the three outcomes of this scenario: plan to keep “it,” give “it” up for adoption after birth, or have an abortion before “it” developed any further. Since I was a legal adult and responsible for my own actions, no parental advice, or consent would be needed if I chose to terminate the pregnancy.

I wish I could say that I agonized over what to do about my unplanned pregnancy. The truth was, I knew right then and there that I would choose abortion and had no intention of sharing the situation with anyone other than my boyfriend. The justifications were numerous. Neither my boyfriend nor I had any interest in getting married or being parents at the time, so having an abortion was the perfect solution. Even had he suggested otherwise, I wanted only to consider my own future. Choosing abortion seemed to me - a late teen of the 1980’ and the daughter of divorced Baby Boomers – like a rite of passage into modern womanhood. Why, having an abortion was my right as a woman; part and parcel of female independence. And how I loved my independence in Iowa City – making good tips at work, partying with friends, being a college student. Wouldn’t having a baby mean living with my mother and stepfather in the sticks, being on welfare, and never finishing college? Furthermore, I couldn’t think of any women, let alone men, in my personal circle that would have offered congratulations and encouraged me to sacrifice my education and future career for the sake of unborn “it.”

Given these notions and presumptions, I returned to the Emma Goldman Clinic in mid-October firmly resolved to terminate my pregnancy. There, as I lay exposed on the exam table and felt the cramping pressure of “it” being extracted into a machine that sounded like a vacuum, I was overcome by a crying fit and a flood of emotions I could not understand. What was there to cry about? Wasn’t I only rejecting the dead-end lifestyle of small-town motherhood? What else was there to consider? After all, weren’t abortions just routine medical procedures scheduled and performed daily by doctors and nurses in tidy clinics like the one in my own neighborhood?

As a pregnant 18-year-old girl, it did not occur to me that some future day, after years of feeling inexplicably broken in so many areas of my life, I would be drawn to Entering Canaan, a ministry that would help me trace the brokenness back to that fateful October day on the table. It did not occur to me that I would eventually have to process the inevitable physical and emotional trauma resulting from abortion, and the intense shame in my heart – at the irresponsibility of getting pregnant in the first place, at the selfishness of choosing abortion so that I could be “free” to live my life as it pleased me on any given day, at the realization that I had rejected not just a lifestyle but an actual life, the life of my first baby.

No, my abortion story cannot appeal to the sympathies of the unfortunate young girl or woman whose unplanned pregnancy was the result of rape or incest. I am deeply saddened by her plight, and I pray that she will be surrounded by the hands-on support and counseling she needs to move forward from the rape and incest itself, let alone the complexity of her “choice.” My abortion story is for all the rest of us who become pregnant at an inconvenient time in our lives. Whether we like it or not, pregnancy is a risk we all take as women when we choose to become sexually active. This means, of course, that if we say no to that lifestyle, we avert the risk entirely and will never have to make the choice to keep, give up, or abort the life we helped create with the man with whom we may or may not share a commitment.

Just say no to sex? In our self-serving, indulgent culture, that’s viewed as a pretty ridiculous and religious extremist notion. I mean, it takes a lot of self-control to say no to our material wants and physical desires, especially when we’re overrun by hormones as teenagers – and yet that is all it takes, some self-control. Self-control…isn’t this what we should be teaching and exemplifying to our children, instead of doubting that they’re intelligent enough to get a grip on their impulses and make responsible choices on a daily basis?

Imagine, for a moment, a world in which people regularly exercised self-control in response to their emotional and physical impulses. It’s my body, my life, and I have the freedom to say no to sex or any other action with pernicious consequences. At least to me, that sounds a whole lot like the peace and freedom – and women’s reproductive “rights” – we all claim to stand for.

Leilani McDonald - January 2016