

Respect
LIFE

The Fight by Millions

pleted and I awoke, I felt no regret for the child who now lay in lifeless pieces. I had chosen what I thought would bring me the most happiness.

But as the days went by, my sense of emptiness and loneliness grew. I began to turn my heart away from my husband. When he left on a business trip, I found a lover. Soon after we were divorced.

I then began a long line of relationships with men to whom I looked for love and a sense of purpose. A kind of callousness came upon me. Thoughts of suicide became frequent, while my relationships became more and more false. I married again — a truly good man — and yet I still felt incomplete and purposeless. So strong was my habit of seeking solace through a new man that, even though I loved my new husband, I betrayed him with yet another lover.

When I became pregnant again, I knew it was not my husband's child.

The complexities of bearing another man's child frightened me. I deeply feared the repercussions to my marriage and the shame this illicit relationship's exposure would bring to my family. I felt I had to abort this child to save my marriage.

The physical pain of the suctioning process was not so bad, but nothing could kill the pain of my growing sense of loss. One night I wept uncontrollably for hours, and no one could console me. I was self-destructing, and I knew it.

I had been going to Church, and putting on a show of being a good person. Yet I held God at arm's length.

I was so deep in despair that I could not even cry out to God for help. Yet in the midst of that most troubled time, God began to touch the heart of my husband. Through the amazing gentleness I observed in his heart and actions, I could see that God was beginning to call us to healing.

I turned more and more to the Lord, and in time I realized the wrong of my selfish acts, especially the taking of those innocent lives. My husband reached out to me with compassion and understanding, sharing the newfound faith we had both discovered. Yet as I steadily grew in knowledge of God's love and forgiveness for me, I found I did not need to cling to my husband for support and assurance of self-worth. I was finding all of these things in my relationship with God, which never failed me.

Today I am able to give my husband the very love I am receiving so freely from God. It is a true love that frees us both to be the kind of unselfish people we dreamed we could be. Now I know that fear gives death, but love, only love, gives life.

Marcy

I met my boyfriend at the Newman Center in college. We prayed together, we went to Mass together, but for some reason we

couldn't see why we shouldn't sleep together. So, as a junior in college, I became pregnant.

Marriage didn't seem to be an option. I didn't think pregnancy in itself was a good reason to get married. Besides, he wasn't offering to marry me.

Even though I had been active in the pro-life movement, I found myself thinking about an abortion. I wouldn't have to tell my parents I was pregnant and have them feel hurt and upset. It would have been easy.

But I just couldn't do it. I finished the semester at school and then went to a different city for the rest of my pregnancy. I knew early on that I would place my baby for adoption. It was very difficult to prepare for this. But my priest said, "Never think of it as 'giving up your baby.' Think of it as caring for the child in the best way you can, giving the child all the things you want it to have."

I knew that if my child was adopted, he would have a father and a mother; with me, he would have a part-time, uneducated mother who had to work full time to support both of us, and no father. Placing him for adoption was being fair to him. That thought kept me going.

Some of my friends, I found out later, would not have supported this decision to have this child. They couldn't fathom why I'd go through with the pregnancy. It's almost as though the "sin" was not sex outside of marriage — which they were doing, too — the "sin" was being pregnant.

I relinquished my baby for some of the same reasons women have abortions. I didn't want to have a baby; I wanted to finish school, I wanted a career.

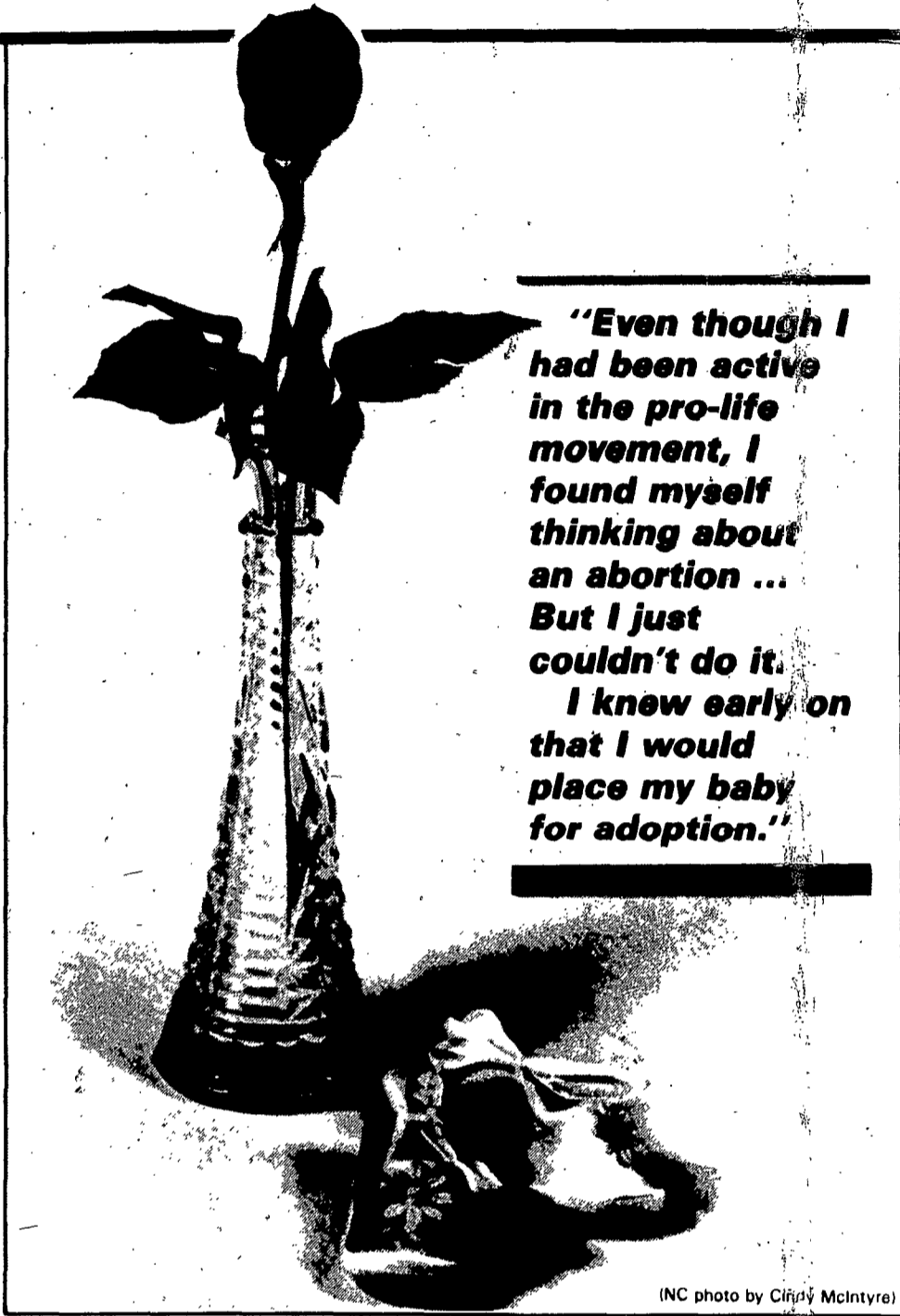
Although I was sure I was doing the right thing for him and for me, I, like most pregnant women, also experienced strong feelings of wanting to keep him.

During my pregnancy, I tried to be conscious of the child growing within me, and aware that our relationship was going to be short. I spent a lot of time praying, talking to the baby, and singing — making our relationship as full as possible, given the circumstances.

But preparing to part with a newborn baby is like preparing for a death. If you know somebody is going to die, you can try to spend time with him; but when he does die, it's still hard. There were a lot of tears. I really felt the power of God's love, though. I felt very much in His hands during that time.

There was a very difficult time immediately following the adoption. I'd be gripped by fears: "What if his new parents are terrible people? Or what if they die in a car accident? Or what if..."

But I had to come back to the fact that even if my son were here, living with me, I wouldn't have control over



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(NC photo by Clippy McIntyre)

his life. I would still have to trust in God.

I am at peace with my decision.

There is no pretending that three women, each telling her own story, can convey the enormous range of situations surrounding unexpected and difficult pregnancies, nor the range of attitudes and actions with which women respond. There are literally millions of "problem pregnancy" stories, and each one carries its own burden of suffering.

Evelyn, Corinne and Marcy (not their real names) remind us that we must listen to the stories of women — and men — whose lives have been changed by conceiving, nurturing or failing to nurture new life.

As Evelyn pointed out in her story of illegal abortion, women are too often trivialized in the area of moral decision-making. Parents and society encourage them from young girlhood to be "nice," to be accommodating, rather than to act with moral maturity, insisting on their own dignity and that of their children.

While the slogan for legal abortion is "pro-choice," the situation of the aborting woman is often experienced

as "no choice." What is often needed is not just physical, tangible support — although this is essential — but also a sense of hope, empowerment and respect.

It takes a community: a community that respects God's plan for sexual love in marriage and encourages women and men to settle for nothing less. A community that makes sure that a woman does not lose out on education or chances for a decent job because of pregnancy. A community that says women do not have to be fearful, that they are strong and can help one another. A community that says children are not just the children of their parents, but that they are children of us all.

The pro-life response to the pregnant woman in need rejects abortion and provides positive support through information and education, through material assistance, through counseling and reconciliation, and through the establishment of a sound public policy. Mother and child are equally in need of our solidarity and support.

Juli Loesch, founder of Pro-Lifers for Survival, is staff assistant in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Pro-Life Activities.

"He saw the child as a hindrance to our life, an unwanted responsibility. He made it clear that if I didn't get a 'safe, legal' abortion, our relationship would be in trouble. I had to choose between him and our child."