

et cetera

# Woman's plea

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two so you can't leave your room.

Was it the constant degradation? "You stupid idiot," when I didn't hang the rakes up the proper way in the garage. "You lousy slut," when I asked if I could waitress my junior year in high school. "You filthy jackass," when I wanted to wear bluejeans like everyone else back then.

Did it start with watching in terror as one of my brothers was beaten by my father, then watching my mother running frantically into the room yelling my father's name? But she wasn't coming to her son's defense, as I had hoped for an instant; instead she was horrified about what the neighbors would think.

Did the crack widen when one of my siblings, defeated and angry, forced me to have sex with him on numerous occasions while my mother cooked dinner, oblivious to the pain and revulsion in her house? Did it grow more jagged as one by one the older kids disappeared, leaving the younger ones behind to drown in the misery?

Children need love, no matter how old they are. There was never any affection in our house, no hugs, never kisses. Being perfectly miserable my adolescent years and dreaming of running away my high school years — yet having no idea where to go — I settled on simpler survival tactics of clinging to any substitute form of love.

I was 14 for my first sexual encounter of my choosing. Actually, it wasn't quite choosing so

much as it was that a boy wanted sex and I grabbed on in hopes that maybe he would love me. I wanted someone, anyone to hold me. I remember receiving more solace and security when someone put his arm around me than I could ever remember in my whole life. Sex was how I reacted to the pain for another eight years, always clinging, struggling with the memories, groping, always crying my prayers, hoping God could forgive me someday. In between was the running away, sleeping here and there, the wandering and the pregnancies — a couple of them — and, of course, the secret abortions.

Coming by the money and the confidentiality was they easy part. Planned Parenthood was a household word at my high school, a Catholic high school in Rochester. So off to Planned Parenthood I went to learn my pregnancy test was positive. No one ever asked me if I was interested in learning about alternatives. "Do you want the baby?" I stuttered, "How can I ... my parents would kill me ... What should I do?" Then the hand reaching across the desk. A slip of paper with a name and number. I called and made an appointment using a fake name. I paid cash.

Never did anyone ever ask me if I wanted to talk about it. Never did anyone say, "Are

you sure?" I never heard anyone say that there are other solutions. Sure I was mature enough to understand what adoption meant, but you're dealing with a confused, extremely unhappy, scared teenager. Events happened in a daze.

I remember laying on the bed, while the procedure was taking place, sobbing, scared to open my eyes, knowing God was watching me and knowing He was shuddering as much as I at what I was doing. A nurse came and held my hand. I told her I was Catholic and I knew what I was doing was wrong. Why didn't she sense my desolation and confusion, and offer alternatives? So it went. I walked away feeling like Judas.

So what can be learned here? Where could the changes have taken place?

There's the obvious: a warm and loving environment that at least gives children a chance. Children need to be given self-respect and love. Neighbors, teachers and friends need to step in when they see injustices being done. For years, I prayed that someone would just pick me up and put me down somewhere else, help me, let me begin again. I'll never understand how so many people were aware of so many problems in our family, yet no one ever became involved in trying to help.

My escape was sex. Believe me, teenage girls do not become involved in sexual activity for the pleasure of it. If a boy hugged me, I would have done nearly anything he asked. I had no hope, absolutely no self-respect. I only knew I was hungry for someone to care about me.

I see the pro-life sit-ins. Do any of those people realize they are only intimidating so many of the girls? Do any of these people try to talk with the girls in a non-accusatory manner? Do any offer their homes as sanctuaries? If I had arrived outside an abortion clinic to picketing, I would have run so fast. A teenage girl who

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