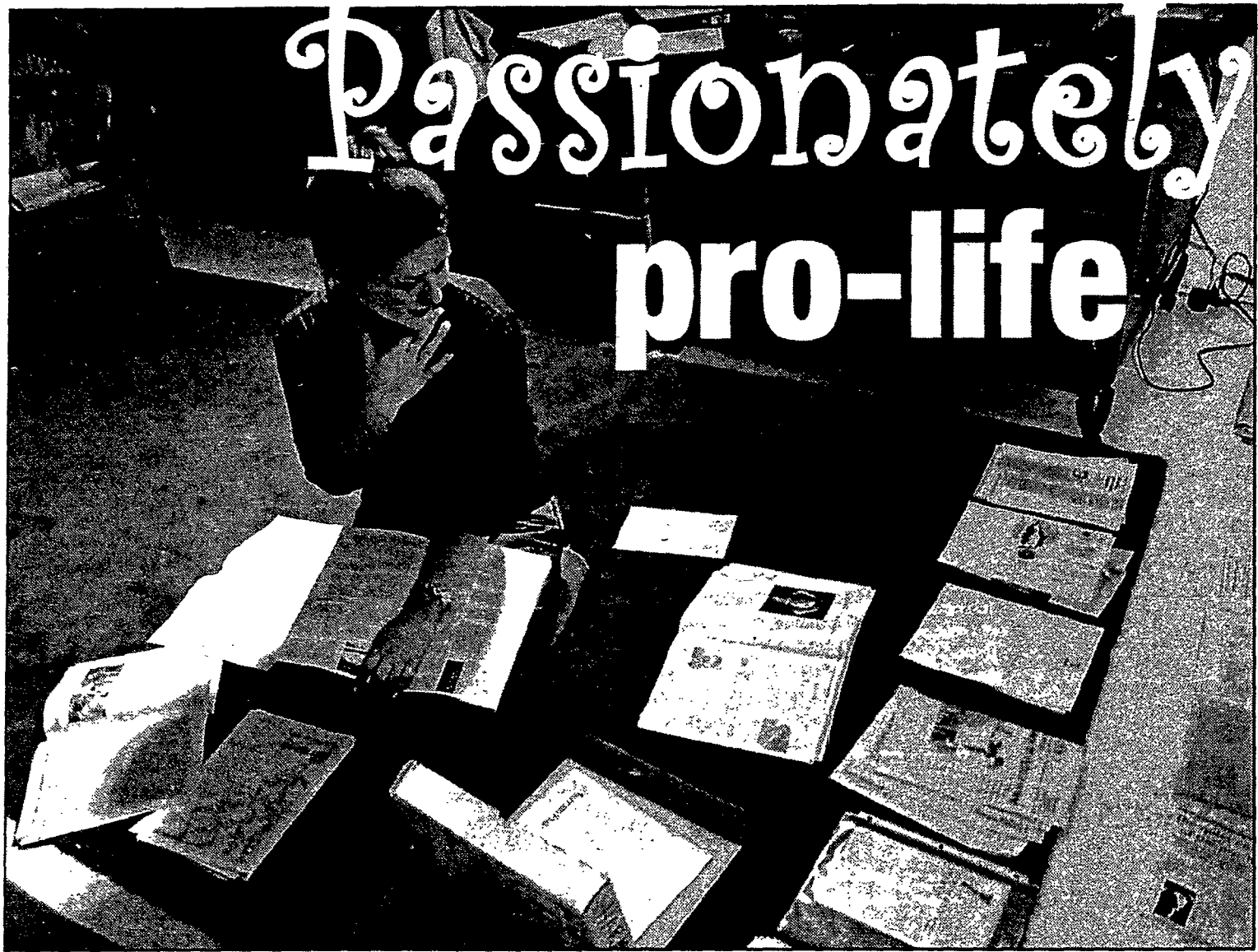


ME MOM on the

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Passionately pro-life

Hannah Maher sorts through articles and papers in the basement office of Carol Crossed, a Rochester-area pro-life activist. Hannah, 16, has taken up the pro-life cause through interning with Feminists for Life, debating with classmates about abortion, and traveling to the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.

In Hannah Maher's opinion, being pro-life isn't something you do halfway — or even 90 percent of the way, for that matter.

Being pro-life may mean not going along with popular opinion. It may mean alienating your friends. Or becoming upset to the point of tears while defending your position.

"I've definitely cried over it," said Hannah, 16. "I'm very, very sensitive, and people can get to me very easily. Things do get ugly sometimes. People get very angry, including myself."

Yet however challenging the environment, Hannah doesn't hesitate to raise the subject of abortion among her classmates at The Harley School, a private school in the town of Pittsford where Hannah is a junior. Once, she said, she brought in a type of utensil that is used during abortions to scrape out parts of a fetus from a womb. Needless to say, that provoked quite a reaction from her peers.

"They were shocked," she said. "It's not pretty. You've got to be straightforward."

She also recalled an intense classroom debate with a fellow student about abortion. By the time it ended, the whole classroom was buzzing with discussion.

"If you put it in front of their face, they'll listen," she said.

Then there was the time in seventh grade when Hannah wore an anti-abortion shirt to school. And once, there was a guest speaker at The Harley School who had had an abortion, and told the students that someone has to live the experience to understand her decision to abort.

"I said, 'Wait. You don't have to experience it to know it's wrong,'" Hannah said.

With such strong statements, Hannah acknowledged that she has become a target for people who want to push her buttons.

"Oh, they love to do it. They know if they say 'abortion,' I'm right there," she said with a laugh. "They find it kind of crazy that I care so much. I get so worked

up about it; I just can't stop. I've got to learn to keep calm, not raise my voice about it."

She said she tries to talk these situations out even with those who continue to disagree with her.

"You can't just attack a person and say 'I'm pro-life, you're pro-choice and you're wrong' — and then walk away," she remarked.

Through such discussions, Hannah said she hopes to enlighten people who may say they favor abortion but not really know why.

"They hear that it's a woman's body and her choice, and that an unborn baby is just a blob of tissue," she said. "Maybe it's something their parents have said."

These debates are worth the effort, Hannah emphasized. Over the years, she said, "A lot of people I know have changed their views."

But others — even friends — do tune her out, she acknowledged.

"It's hard when people get up and walk away and say 'I'm not going to listen anymore,'" she said.

Asked why she catches so much opposition to her pro-life views, Hannah said, "Because it's the easy way out, that's what people think. They don't know how many women are in depression."

Hannah said that her parents, Ken and Mary, provided her with a very simple understanding about abortion.

"They've always taught me basic morals," she said. "It's not really hard to understand; it's never been confusing to me: 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

"Family has always been important to me. I feel sorry for people who can't experience that because they don't want to," Hannah added. "They choose to abort, they contribute to it, or they stand by and watch (someone go through with an abortion)."

Hannah, a parishioner at St. Bridget's Church in Rochester, said she began to take strong ownership of her views when she was 12 or 13.

"I really got the passion; it really got to

me," she said. "A lot of people say, 'You're just pro-life because your parents are.' Of course your parents influence you, but mine are very good at saying, 'We've raised you this way and now it's your turn to choose.'"

Hannah currently has an internship with Feminists for Life of Western New York, a women's organization that advocates for numerous pro-life causes. As part of the internship she worked last summer in the office of Suzanne Schnitman, the diocesan life issues coordinator who also serves as Feminists for Life treasurer.

Then, in the fall, she began working every weekday at the Pittsford home office of Carol Crossed, a Feminists for Life board member. There, Hannah files articles and documents related to pro-life issues. She also makes phone calls and writes letters, imploring other women to get involved with pro-life causes.

Hannah said she would like to set up a group for teens to discuss such subjects. "A lot of people my age don't say 'I'm pro-life' or 'I'm pro-choice.' We'd just talk about women's issues," she remarked.

Hannah plans to take part in the March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 24. She has attended the two previous marches, held annually to commemorate the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision that legalized abortion in the United States.

Looking ahead, Hannah said she'd like to become a teacher. Even higher on her priority list, she said, is to get married and raise a family.

"I just leave that up to God," she said. "If I get pregnant, I will put everything aside for that."

Not surprisingly, Hannah plans to stay aligned with pro-life activities well into adulthood.

"Yeah, definitely. I don't think I'll ever stop doing this," she said.

**COMING NEXT WEEK:
"Souper Bowl" fundraiser**