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THE AMERICAN FEMINISTSM

Feminists for Life of America[®]

rewarding
Motherhood

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PATRICIA HEATON

November 1, 2003

For me there are two words that sum up the job of being a mother: sacrifice and privilege. And in the day-to-day experience of our lives, one doesn't happen without the other.

The sacrifice is easy to see—and feel. From the moment of conception, the changes are immediate. The weight gain, morning sickness, stretch marks, sleeplessness, are all a part of a complete giving of oneself to another person.

But the changes are much more than physical—for the rest of our lives, we will be committed to this new person. We know it from the minute we witness that heart beating in the ultrasound. That first picture of our child inspires a feeling of awe and humility that we, as women, have been granted the great gift of housing such an astounding event—the creation of another human being. To be so intimately involved with this greatest of miracles is undeniably a privilege.

Being a mother is one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Even so, once our children are born, the work and responsibility of raising them, feeding, clothing, educating, loving and nurturing them, can sometimes obscure the joy of watching a child grow, mature and discover the beauty of life. Our limits as human beings can hinder us from appreciating and being thankful for our role in our children's lives.

So imagine the woman who finds herself with an unexpected pregnancy. Not only is she worried about how she might care for her child, she also often faces the loss of support from the father, her family, her employer and her school or university.

*Women who experience an unplanned pregnancy
also deserve unplanned joy.*

As members of Feminists for Life, we have taken up the challenge of sacrificing for this woman, too. We sacrifice our time and money, but there is something even more important that we give—our care, our concern, our love. What distinguishes Feminists for Life, and all of us in the pro-woman, pro-life movement, is our long-term commitment to those brave mothers.

Within these pages are women who have experienced motherhood from many perspectives: birthmothers, adoptive moms, women who experienced loss through abortion or miscarriage before giving birth to a child, and married women with a sense of humor.

This is our family album.



Live well, laugh often, love much!

REWARDING MOTHERHOOD

BIRTHMOTHERS



I only know the birthing part of being a mother: carrying and feeding another person inside you; feeling him kick and stretch and push and thinking maybe he will be an athlete; realizing he is moving with the beat of the music you are listening to and thinking maybe he will be a musician; knowing that he carries a part of you with him throughout his life and that you would give your life to save his no matter how many years later he needs you, even if he never knows who you are. All birthmothers know this part of being a mother.

And then there is another part of being a mother: the round the clock, round the world, constant attention and love part that never ceases no matter how grown up your child is. This part I only know about because I have a mother like that, Lesley, who recently drove from North Carolina to Connecticut (getting there at 3 a.m.) on a Monday to help my sister unpack and set up her new house and then drove back to North Carolina that Friday (another 3 a.m. arrival) to spend the weekend running wedding-planning errands with me. I also know that my birthson has a mother like my mother, and her name is Jenny. I chose Jenny to be Brentan's mother because I knew that at 22 and single, I could not be the kind of mother that Jenny is, and the kind of mother that my mother Lesley is.

I am blessed that I see my birthson and his adoptive family several times a year. Every time I see him he is two inches taller, his legs and arms are leaner. Last time his hair was brushed to the side and he looked suddenly like the 6-year-old that he is. Perhaps every time Jenny has to buy him new clothes or gets some photos developed she feels the same way. Sometimes I see an expression flit across Brentan's face and I know exactly what he is feeling and it strikes me as funny that a 6-year-old boy and a 29-year-old woman can have such similar emotions and temperament. Perhaps Jenny knows how he is feeling before the expression even crosses his face. A few months ago I saw Brentan perform at his kindergarten talent show. Sure enough, he is very musical. But his wonderful performance was also born of practice, and a confidence that comes from being loved unconditionally by parents who obviously were enjoying "Count Dracula's The First Day of Kindergarten" as much as he was.

If I could go back in time to the days before Brentan was even conceived, I wouldn't change a thing. I think motherhood is one of women's greatest privileges and most fulfilling experiences. A birthmother may only know firsthand the birthing part of motherhood, but she can feel a tremendous sense of empowerment and accomplishment for having taken a "crisis pregnancy" and turned it into something beautiful, for seeing an "unwanted child" as someone very much wanted. In knowing that her child is provided for and loved, she has what every mother hopes for.

Jessica O'Connor-Petts
Arlington, Virginia

When I became pregnant at the age of 18, I was more than scared, but knew that my son deserved life. Being Catholic, the idea of abortion never even crossed my mind. However, adoption was an option that I considered from the beginning. Placing my son for adoption was the hardest decision I have ever made and the process has not been easy. I don't regret anything, though, and am thankful for the gift of my son and the perfect adoptive family for him. As a birthmother, I feel that I gave a family the best gift possible.

My son changed my life and made me a better person. He has made me so much stronger and taught me what true love is. True love is putting another's needs before your own. I experienced true love when I put my son's needs before my own. Believe me, I wanted to bring him home from the hospital so badly, but for me—not for him. I know that he deserves a mom and a dad who can provide what he needs and deserves.

I think of my son every day and am grateful for the memories. I saved everything from pregnancy to birth and treasure the pictures that his family sends me. I look forward to the day when we can meet again, but until then he is in my heart forever. He is a part of me and our connection is stronger than distance. Being pregnant my senior year of high school and giving birth the week before moving away to college was extremely difficult, but I am so glad that I had the privilege of bringing my son into this world.

Allison Maguin
Huntington Beach, California

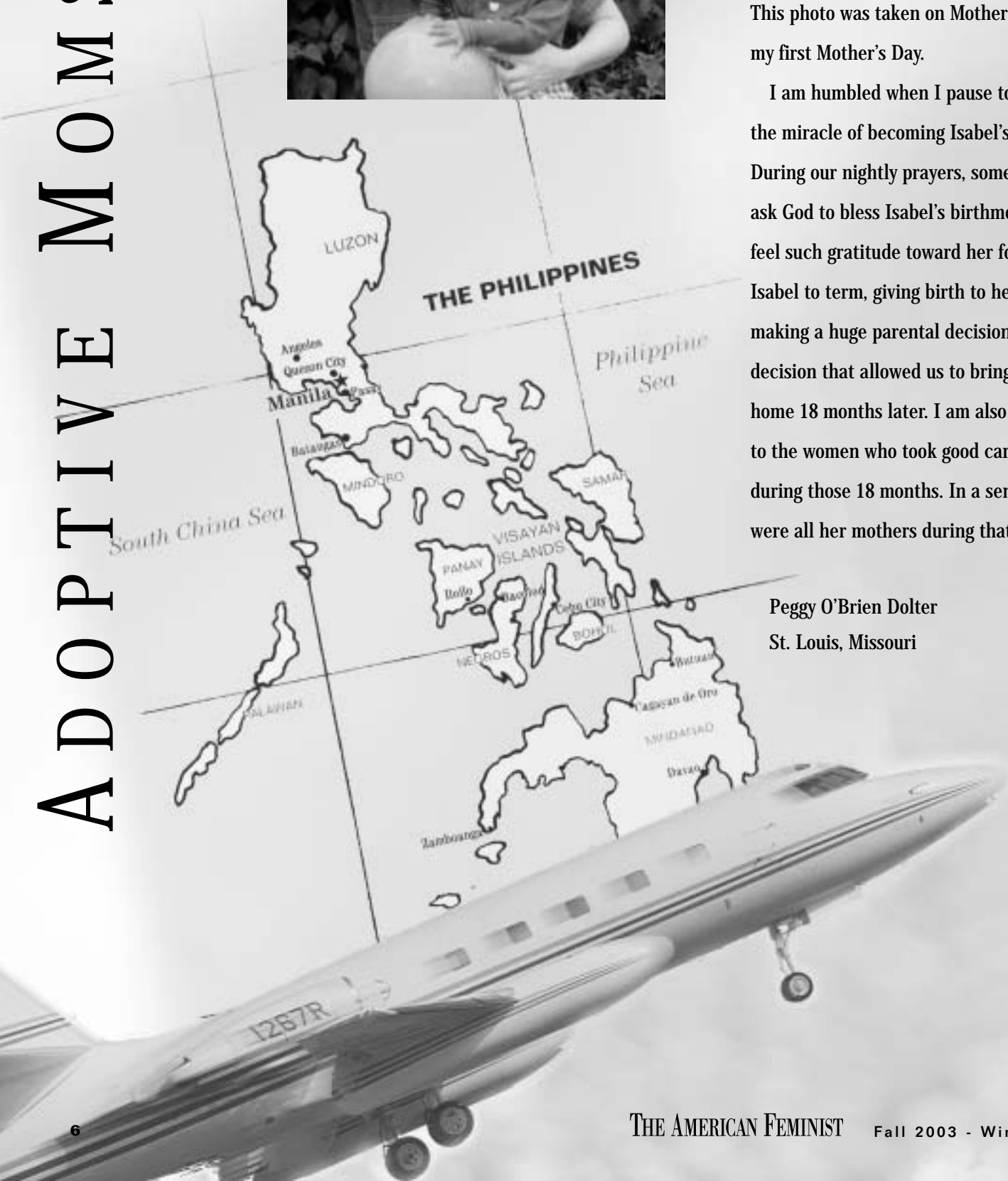




This is my favorite photo; the print is on my desk in my office so I get to see it throughout my work day. My husband and I traveled to the Philippines and brought our daughter Isabel home in March 2001. This photo was taken on Mother's Day—my first Mother's Day.

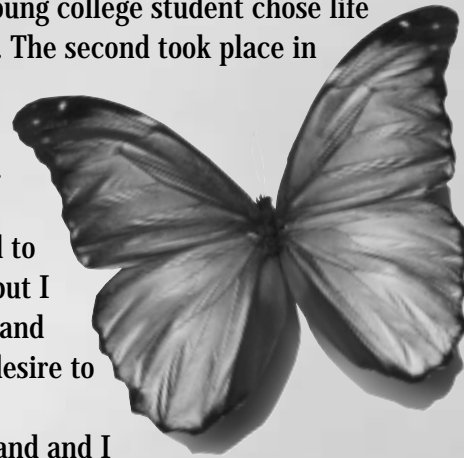
I am humbled when I pause to think of the miracle of becoming Isabel's mommy. During our nightly prayers, sometimes I ask God to bless Isabel's birthmother. I feel such gratitude toward her for carrying Isabel to term, giving birth to her, and making a huge parental decision—the decision that allowed us to bring Isabel home 18 months later. I am also grateful to the women who took good care of Isabel during those 18 months. In a sense, they were all her mothers during that time.

Peggy O'Brien Dolter
St. Louis, Missouri



Motherhood is a miracle, or in my case, two miracles. The first took place in 1974, one year after *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land, when a young college student chose life for her daughter and then placed her for adoption. The second took place in 1997, when that daughter had a baby boy, and chose me to be his mother.

On Mother's Day 1997, I was visiting my parents. After church a pro-life group was selling roses for mothers. My father bought two—one he presented to my mother, and one to me. I wasn't a mother yet, but I was in the midst of a harrowing adoption process, and that rose showed me that in my father's eyes, my desire to be a mother qualified me completely.



After more than five years of marriage, my husband and I realized that to be parents, we'd have to adopt. So in January 1997 we submitted an application. We took educational classes; we had full medical exams; we paid for criminal background checks; and then we started our home study. We had to meet with a social worker and analyze our own personality, our spouse's personality, and our marriage. We asked several friends to fill out a long personal recommendation form. We had to discuss parenting skills and goals. (Our social worker wasn't satisfied with our answers, so we read parenting books to please her.) We had to fill out complete financial forms, and submit to an inspection of our home. I left most sessions close to tears. I just wanted to be a mother. I had so much love to give. Why were they making it so hard?

In June we were finally approved as adoptive parents. We each had to write a "Dear Birthmother" letter, explaining to an unknown person why we would be the best parents for her baby. Then the waiting continued. They warned us it could be a year or more before we'd bring home a child.

Two months later, on a Wednesday, we got a call from the social worker. I listened in a haze as she described a little boy's birth and said that his mother had chosen us to be his parents. She wanted us to meet him Thursday and bring him home Friday. We weren't ready! The nursery wasn't painted or even cleared out; we'd been using it for storage. I had to give notice at work. (My boss says I marched in to the office and said, "My baby's ready!") We didn't have a single diaper or bottle in the house. The day I met my son and held him for the first time he was five weeks old and breathtaking. I now believe in love at first sight.

We set a record at the agency. It took us just nine months from the time we filled out the application until we brought our son home, but when people who don't know our story ask my husband how long I was in labor, he tells them, "Five years." What he doesn't tell them, what they need to know, is that my journey to motherhood took 23 years and two miracles—from the day in 1974 when a young woman chose life for her daughter, to the day in 1997 when that adopted daughter chose life and a new mother for her—our—son.

Coleen MacKay
Fairfax, Virginia

Coleen MacKay, FFL's Information Management Specialist, has worked part time for FFL since 1996. She has worked from home since becoming a mother.

KEPT MY BABY

As a freshman in high school, I did very well and was involved in cheerleading and the drama club. Unfortunately, as a sophomore, I fell in with a bad crowd. In spite of warnings from my parents about peer pressure and the seriousness of risky behavior, I found myself regularly smoking, drinking and doing drugs. I was constantly getting into trouble not only at home, but also at school (when I bothered to show up for class).

In June 2001, at the age of 16, I found out I was pregnant. That was a turning point in my life. The day I found out, I gave up my old lifestyle and vowed to be the best mother I could be. When I first told my family, they said they loved me and suggested I place my baby for adoption. I considered it, but I was convinced that I could handle being a mother. My family respected my decision and stood behind me all the way.

My parents found an alternative high school in Alexandria, Virginia, where I was placed in a program specifically designed for pregnant and parenting teens. The staff and counselors were supportive and being around other girls who were also teen moms was very comforting. I participated in a jobs program and was hired as seasonal help at a JC Penney's from December 2001 to January 2002.

On February 26th, 2002, I gave birth to my baby boy, Ian. He is now 17 months old and remains my inspiration. After he was born, my resolve to succeed only got stronger. With the guidance of my high school mentors, I worked hard and became determined to pursue a career that would allow me to financially support my son and myself. On June 17th, 2002, I graduated (a year early) at the age of 17 with a 3.8 grade point average, and was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

I am presently 18 years old and attending Northern Virginia Community College, where I plan to pursue their two-year program to become a registered nurse.

I have to admit that I am very proud of myself for all of my accomplishments. But it wouldn't be fair for me to take all the credit. It was only through the support of my family and school that my dreams became possibilities.

Letting Ian live was the best decision I have ever made. I love you forever and always, Ian!

Andrea Weeks
Alexandria, Virginia





I chose not to abort.

When I was 20, I found myself pregnant and not married. The man “responsible” never saw me again after I told him of the pregnancy. Many around me gave me their unwanted advice that I should “abort the baby. It will change your life forever.” Boy, were they right, and I thank God every day for that life-changing incident.

I have very loving and supportive parents who helped me through the pregnancy; my mother was in the delivery room when Christopher was born. I lived with my parents and brother and sister as I went back to school. I went to school nights so my parents could watch my son in the evenings. I got my degree as a registered nurse in 1982 and six months later I married a wonderful man who adopted Christopher. Christopher later told MTV in an interview that his dad was “the most amazing man he has ever known” and then went on to tell of his birth and circumstances of his adoption.

Now 25 years later, Christopher is at UCLA working concurrently on a Ph.D. in Sociology and an MBA.

About three years ago I saw an ad for a local pregnancy help center that needed R.N.s to do pregnancy testing. I have been volunteering there ever since. It is a great joy when these women bring their babies back and thank us for the support we gave them.

Kim Sheckler

Torrance, California

Nobody told me how warm and soft babies were—but if they had, I wouldn't have listened. Nobody told me how sweet their little heads smelled—and still do well through grade school—but if they had, I wouldn't have listened. Nobody told me that I wouldn't know what unconditional love was until I had children—but if they had I wouldn't have listened.

Fortunately—against my intent—I became pregnant my junior year in college. And fortunately, I made the decision—albeit rather flippantly—to have my children.

Nobody told me how many stretch marks a 10-pound, 23-inch child would inflict upon a 22-year-old body—but if they had, I wouldn't have cared. Nobody told me that looking at floral prints would make me nauseous the first trimester of my pregnancy—but if they had, I wouldn't have cared. Nobody told me about the anxiety attack I would suffer the first time it really dawned on me how the baby was going to come out—but if they had, I wouldn't have cared. Nobody told me how it would feel the first time I held my warm, soft, pink baby girl to my chest—but if they'd tried, they never could have found the words.

My daughters have given me a completed sense of being. Life is richer, more real, and more personal than it ever was before they were here. They have helped me to find nurturing, patience and pure joy within me. The love that I have for them is the kind that inspires artists and poets. It is raw; it is primal; it is the very core of my being.

I know many people who either by design or circumstance aren't mothers, and they are truly wonderful people. However, I know that I would have been less of a person had I not experienced the all-encompassing wonder of motherhood. No love is more deep, no bond more strong, no loyalty so fierce as that of being a mom. My daughters are everything to me.

Sally Winn
Helena, Montana

Sally Winn has served as FFL Vice President since 2001. She currently works from home in Montana.



I always wanted to be a mom as I watched my own mother raise 10 children. I now have been blessed with four wonderful children. I remember the absolute wonder and joy I experienced as I carried each one, as I felt each baby grow and move inside of me. I felt so good about being a woman! So grateful for these "gifts."

My first two children were from a marriage that ended when they were both under 18 months old. I received support from my family, friends, and outside resources. I never knew all of the outside help that was available until I became a single mom. I never thought that we wouldn't make it.

I later remarried and had two more children. My daughter is 13 and my sons are 12, 7, and 6 years old. My second child has a learning disability and my youngest is mildly autistic. It's endless work trying to meet all of my kids' needs, but what I give to them is my way of saying "thanks" for all that they have given me.

I have a sense of peace within myself about my kids' future because I turn everything over to God.

My goal is to raise four caring individuals—that would be my greatest legacy!

Patti McGinley
Malvern, Pennsylvania



MOTHERHOOD

I had no maternal instincts growing up. I hid my dirty secret around girlfriends who cooed over babies and begged to hold them by doing likewise. Then I married, and remained in this “defective” state. But one day, we found out a baby was on the way and everything changed. I changed.

The world changed, as my husband Ron and I began to see every detail of creation through a baby’s eyes. Perfect little brown eyes, to be exact. Never mind that in the hospital maternity ward I was the only mother who couldn’t immediately recognize her baby’s cry. Or her baby, for that matter. (What manner of woman is this? Every mother recognizes her own baby’s cry from the very instant they’re born, all the baby books said so!)

When the baby lost all the hair on top of his head and looked like a miniature monk, I hid his baldness under a hat, even when he napped. I loved this little person. And I discovered that I had no real comprehension of my capacity for love until I had him. The revelation began anew when his brother came into the world. He was so plump the doctor called him “Pork Chop”. No mere hat could hide this dilemma so I compassionately dressed him in vertical stripes and dark colors.

But the treasure isn’t simply how motherhood has taught me to mother. Motherhood taught me to meet people where they are, appreciate them for who they are, and love and respect them for all that they are and all that they are not. You can’t meet another 6-year-old and ask, “So what do you do for a living?” Learning to understand and appreciate other human beings for their interests, talents, likes and dislikes transcends from my babies to other babies to other adults and finally to me. I had no idea.

Now my babies are teenagers. I cover for them less and pray for them more. And fortunately, I never believed the lie that “the older they get the less they need you” because the opposite is true. And I still like to “accentuate the positive” in people.

Donna Lou Shickel
Dayton, Virginia



BABY AFTER ABORTION

When I am pregnant I suffer from severe hyperemesis gravidarum, the disease that killed Charlotte Brontë in her fourth month of pregnancy. In my fourth month of pregnancy I aborted my first child, because my medical care was terrible, my condition was worsening and I was in “unbearable” physical pain and feared for my life. The abortion was horrible. I had complications and thought I might die. I sustained permanent damage to my cervix and lots of emotional damage. I regret it terribly.

After suffering from this disease again, my second child miscarried on Christmas the following year.

In my third pregnancy I was flat on my back for eight of 38 weeks. A specialist found a 99 percent chance of a Down syndrome child on the sonogram and suggested amniocentesis so we could abort that day. I told him he could have my arms and legs before he could have my child and that I didn't care if my kid had three heads as



long as all of them came out alive. I refused the amnio because it can cause a miscarriage. I went back home to bed, stared at the ceiling, and thought about it for the last 18 weeks of pregnancy.

My son was born, and he does not have Down syndrome.

He is his own unique person, and he adds an amazing

dimension of joy to my life. His life does not erase the trauma and tragedy of losing our first child in an abortion. It is not his job to heal us. We are here for his emotional health, not the other way around. Although the terrible pain of losing our first child in an abortion is still there, it is not ALL that is there. Now we have the joy of our little boy.

Being a mother to my child is the best thing I've ever done. I've never gotten as much out of career or money or anything else. I look in his eyes and I know God exists. He looks in mine and feels the same.

Ashli E. McCall
Quincy, Florida





Mother

Archetype of Goodness and Protection

As the engines of industry began churning in the late 18th century, the notion that women were the natural arbiters of the private realm and best suited for domestic work has been a source of both joy and consternation for every generation of women to follow.

The unquestionable significance of Mother-Love has been a consistent theme of modern Western culture, and it's not surprising that some of the most highly valued European masterpieces are paintings of the Madonna and Child. The purity, innocence, and self-sacrificing themes of motherhood can be seen in art throughout the centuries, from Mary Cassatt's paintings of mothers tenderly caring for children, to the 20th century drawings of Norman Rockwell where an apron-clad mother graciously serves Thanksgiving turkey to her wide-eyed loved ones.

For as long as writers have put pen to paper, mothers have been held in the highest regard, and interestingly, not always shown by their presence as characters in stories but by their absence. A common theme in many of the greatest novels written in English is the impact a mother's death has on a young woman's growth into maturity. The most recognizable heroines of English literature were motherless: Jane in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Mary in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, and Catherine in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, just to name a few.

This plot device allows the heroine, without the loving guidance of a mother, to enter into problematic relationships and dangerous situations. In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the death of Anne Elliot's mother allows Anne's negligent father to squander all the family's money and for Anne to seek advice from a not-so-well-meaning surrogate, with painful consequences. Molly Gibson, the heroine of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, struggles alone to make good choices and longs for the wisdom of her departed mother, while Mary Barton, the motherless heroine of another Gaskell work, makes a disastrous mistake in the absence of her mother's loving gaze, leading to the death of one young man and the false imprisonment of another.

Motherhood is also held in high regard in contemporary works. In the award-winning film "Saving Private Ryan", the brave acts of the Allied soldiers dominating the film are tempered by scenes where dying men cry out for their mothers. Another young soldier berates himself for ignoring his mother's constant efforts to connect to him, and puzzles over the strange force inside compelling him to turn away from her unconditional love.



REWARDING

ction in History and Literature



“Of all the
rights of women,
the greatest is to
be a mother.”

LIN YUTANG

What these and many other images of Mother throughout the ages prove is that the definition of Motherhood is something akin to absolute love, and that Mother is the source of moral guidance and an ineffable presence we don't often understand, sadly, until she's no longer there.

Yet, for all the pomp and circumstance, mothers often feel the burden of loving without reservation and the fear that even the smallest mistake they make might cause pain to another human soul. Sometimes women feel less like the heroine of a novel or the porcelain-skinned beauty of a Raphael painting and more like the selfless spider in E.B. White's children's classic *Charlotte's Web*, who spins endlessly, lays her eggs, and dies.

While no one challenges the slogan on the bumper sticker, “Every Mother is a Working Mother,” our actions as a nation often show we are just paying lip service to the theme. Mothers who work outside the home have for years been desperately seeking quality day care and have won few concessions from their employers or state agencies. Women who work inside the home are not paid Social Security credits and still bear the stigma given by cultural critic Thorstein Veblen in the early 20th century, categorizing stay-at-home moms as “idle. . . conspicuous consumers,” whose only purpose was to raise the status of their husbands. For all the art, literature and film devoted to the image of Mother, the disrespect for Motherhood inherent in legalized abortion, where a child is regarded as a woman's personal enemy, asks us to question the sincerity of the axioms that roll off our tongues easily but bear little fruit beyond the cliché.

In *Tapestries of Life*, feminist critic Bettina Aptheker writes that “women carry the threads of many tasks in their hands at the same time” and “have a consciousness of social reality distinct from that put forth by men.” Women have always been divided over the issue of whether this difference is socially constructed or inherent in one's nature, but most would agree that as the primary caretakers of children for all of written history, women have had to develop skills that are often missing from the world of commerce, politics and industry that men still dominate. As psychoanalyst Carol Gilligan points out in her germinal book about women's ways of knowing, *In a Different Voice*, women act from the “ethic of care,” while men exercise the “ethic of rights.”

In an age of limitless opportunities, what will motherhood look like in a decade? Or one hundred years? There is much good news to report: more women today are empowered by education, the Internet, and the abundance of support groups forming in libraries, bookstores, and workplaces around the country. Organizations like Feminists for Life and Rachel's Vineyard, and other academic and medical publications, such as *Studies in Pro-Life Feminism* and the ground-breaking research on the abortion-breast cancer link, are challenging readers to invent realistic solutions to advance the mental, physical and spiritual needs of mothers across the globe.

Artists and writers may continue to honor motherhood in their work in the years to come, but practical solutions to underlying social issues that make the practice of motherhood difficult need to become a national priority, making the matrix of images of Mother more than disingenuous rhetoric. ○

Ellen Kennedy Johnson is a professor of English at Arizona State University.

Once I was introduced to a woman at our church. She said, "Oh, Dorothy Walsh, you're the one with 10 kids, aren't you?" "Nine actually," I replied. "I heard it was 10," she insisted. No, just nine... Here is a slice of my life: January 31, 1990.

I am finishing paperwork in the office, rushing out the door to bring Vincent, 6, to the learning specialist, but first need to trade cars with Vince, my husband. Drop off Vinny, then give Brendan, 21, a ride to class at the college campus. Forgot to bring Vincent's lunch. McDonald's to go: he's delighted. Now drop him off at his school and rush back to office.

No, I was not reading the paper over my coffee.

Vince is all upset, seems the bank called. We are overdrawn. He can't understand this since I told him we had enough money to meet the first of the month's payments. I will certainly check with the bank, surely they made a mistake. But I know, I must have entered the last deposit twice. Better move some money over.

I have to leave early to run to the grocery store as we are totally out of food. See Mary Calica having her coffee. No time to sit with her but I do anyway. As co-chairs of the food booth for the church festival we need to make some very important decisions: the price of French fries, hot dogs, etc., and who will call the volunteers. We again agree that this is the last year we will take on this job.

Dorothea, 10, comes in and asks for 75 cents to go for a treat with her friends. Then Brendan comes in looking for Patrick, 19, to get his pants that Patrick borrowed because he desperately needs them for the winter ball tonight. Then Patrick comes in looking for money and I try to get Patrick to remember where Brendan's pants are.

How do they know where I am?

I buy a few groceries, including several boxes of Hamburger Helper. Tonight I am going out to dinner with some lady friends. I love to fix Hamburger Helper when I don't have to eat it.

Vince comes home and decides he needs a hot bath before I leave and he has to deal with things. He goes upstairs and starts the tub running but gets distracted. Fiona, 8, and Vincent start screaming that it is raining in the dining room.

It sure is. It's nice warm bath water running down the china cabinets and all over the ceiling. What fun. We use all available pots and towels but run out. Fiona borrows our next door neighbor's big pots and little Vincent borrows her umbrella. The plaster starts to peel and then fall off the ceiling.

Kathleen, 15, and Dorothea, totally oblivious, continue to set the table, make salad and pour milk. The phone is ringing but no one answers it between 6 and 7 p.m. because they know they will have to do the dishes if it's for them.

I hear a car horn outside. Thank you, God. Enjoy the Hamburger Helper, kids, and help your Daddy clean up this mess.

Dorothy Walsh
San Francisco, California





Someone once said that “the best things in life happen to you by accident.” Although I can say none of my children were “accidents,” they weren’t full “on purposes” either. Cathy and I were young by San Francisco standards, 23, when we married. And she got pregnant three months after we said “I do.” (I know some from the wedding

party counted backward when our beautiful daughter Sacha was born.) Soon after there was Darcy and then Jacob.

People ask me what it’s like to be a father. To be straight, I never really looked at it from that perspective. I never peered through the prism that way. I was always shocked that I was given the charge of this incredible little (and now much bigger) life. Sure, I guess if I am raising children and I am male that makes me the father, but the idea of the identity of a father has grown on me like a slow-growth redwood. At first when Sacha called me “dad” it sounded almost foreign. Now, after 18 years, when one of my three children says “dad” it can still catch me off guard.

I remember vividly, on the movie screen of my mind, moments I’ve shared with each one of them, and all of us as a family. Do I miss them being little? Sure. But each age has its ups and downs. I remember once when I was driving our station wagon with all three of my paratroopers strapped into their trusty car seats. It began to rain, and from the back seat, from the mouth of a 2-year-old, I heard, “Daddy, if I were a rain drop would you wipe me off the window or let me slowly melt into the glass?”

That was 14 years ago. I was driving up through the underpass at Geary and Webster in San Francisco. I don’t remember where I was when Kennedy was shot (probably taking a nap) but I DO remember when Darcy asked me that question.

I remember being brought up before the board of our co-op because “suspicious” people were coming by our apartment building. Drug running for fun and profit? No, Sacha giving our food to the poor.

I remember my son’s kindergarten teacher telling me a story of my son who was already getting into trouble at school: standing up in class and shouting down a group of kids who were making fun of his friend who had Down syndrome.

Sometimes I look at my life and the struggles I’ve been through. Sometimes I look at the evil that has come out of my heart that has hurt others. Sometimes I wonder if my children are turning out pretty well because of me or in spite of me. And to be frank—I’m not always sure. I do know this—if a father does not fill the space in his children’s lives, something or someone else will.

Howard Meehan
Petaluma, California

I am a stay-at-home mother of three little girls. Although all my children have their own set of challenges and unique personalities, the struggles of my middle child, Sarah, have profoundly impacted me as a mother. Sarah is developmentally delayed. Finding out that your child has a disability can come all at once; however, for us, it has been a slow process of wondering, fearing, testing, waiting, consulting, and wondering some more. Through it all I have learned much about myself as I struggle both to advocate for her needs and to grieve the loss of the "perfect" child I dreamed I would have. To share some of this learning process, I have included a letter that I wrote to Sarah on her third birthday:

March 3, 2001

Today is your birthday, little Funny Bunny, and I thank God for all the blessings He gave us when He made you!

This past year has been quite a journey for you, and for me. One year ago, I started pushing for you to be evaluated. I feared that you were delayed in language and motor areas. I wanted to know what we could do to help you. You were evaluated and placed in the Early Intervention program. You have had so much fun in that program—especially riding a little red push car down the long halls of the building. You have made so much progress in all areas; nonetheless, yesterday your father and I found ourselves sitting at a special education EIP meeting for you.

I was very fearful about this meeting. How would I handle people telling me you were delayed? Would people think less of you? Are you destined to struggle with things other kids master easily? Will life be harder for you? How will I be able to help you through the struggles you have ahead?

Your father seems to have none of these fears. He accepts you the way you are and does not worry about the future. At this meeting yesterday, your daddy started to cry. He did not cry because people were telling us you had delays. He cried when your teacher told us you were the most sensitive and loving child she had ever seen. It is true—you give hugs and pats to everyone, and you can hardly bear it when someone is upset. We are so proud of you for your caring and giving heart. We are also thankful that you—and your quirky sense of humor—are in our lives! Who else would think the dog water (and the toilet!!) was your personal indoor swimming pool? Who else would use a glue stick as lipstick, or my make-up as finger-paints?

Oh, to live our lives as happy and joy-filled as you do! One of your favorite things to do right now is to get to the edge of a stair or curb and JUMP! You don't care if it is at the top of a staircase or a tiny curb—you jump with confidence. (You are also holding my hand, and you know that I'll catch you if you need it!) When I look at the years ahead, I don't know what we'll encounter, but I know God won't let us fall.

Kelli Voth
Oxford, Ohio



TRIBUTE TO MOTHER



My dad gave it to her for Christmas, this neon blue and yellow bathrobe with the words 'Wonder Woman' in bold letters on the back. Words that truly describe my mother. They got married when she was 21, and I was born 10 months later. Over the next 14 years, there would be seven more children, three boys and four girls.

My mom, Diane, loves life. She doesn't complain. She just keeps moving. Not only did we learn how to cook, clean, and take care of a home, we learned compassion, sacrifice, and love.

Money was always tight. Sacrifice was not an option for my mom; it was just the way it was. We would get bags of hand-me-downs from friends, relatives, even people we didn't know. She taught us that self-respect came from within, not from how you looked or what you were wearing. My mom not only cared for the eight of us, but ran a home day care, so we always had anywhere from three to six extra children around the house. It wasn't uncommon to come home from school in the afternoon and have up to 14 children all ready for snack. And she still laughed.

Now I am married and have my first son, who is nine months old. I live 400 miles away, and miss my mom tremendously. She is my best friend.

Sarah Wilmowski
Phoenix, Arizona

ADOPTED CHILD

When I was little, my mom always told me that I was very special. Not only did I have a mom and a dad who loved me very much, but I also had a mother who gave birth to me, and then placed me for adoption, knowing that she couldn't raise me.

As I grew older, I began to realize just how lucky I was. Not only was there a woman somewhere who loved me enough to place me for adoption, but she loved me enough to give me life. To her I am eternally grateful, but it is my mom whom I see as a truly amazing woman. She wanted a child, and had the patience to spend years on waiting lists until I came into her life.

My mom has an unbelievable sense of compassion, and used that in her career as a nurse. At the same time, she was always

around when I was growing up, working evening and night shifts at the hospital so that she could be home when I would come home from school. She would even chaperone choir competitions to Florida, though she doesn't like to fly.

But the most amazing thing I ever saw her do was to care so tenderly for her own mother and father when her parents could not care for themselves.

My mom tells me I am special, but I think that lucky is a better word. She is the special one. She is my hero.

Kelly Kroll
Waltham, Massachusetts



By Amy Kuebelbeck

"You have a beautiful baby," the ultrasound technician said quietly. She was studying the flickering images on her screen, staring intently at the shadows of the tiny heart. I think she had already seen that our baby was going to die.

What followed was an extraordinary journey of grief, joy and love as we waited with Gabriel, simultaneously preparing for our son's birth and for his death. Despite some wrenchingly aggressive surgical options, no one could give our son a good heart. So we set out to give him a good life.

As Gabriel grew and settled into position for birth, I could almost always feel one of his little feet just to the right of my navel. No matter where I went, I could take him with me. And when the grief came crashing over me, I could seek solace in curling around him.

Among all the people being affected by Gabriel's expected death, I began to feel like the fortunate one.

The months of waiting culminated in two and a half hours of cradling Gabriel in our arms, in the same bed where he was born, surrounded by family and friends, until his imperfect little heart finally stopped beating altogether.

People sometimes are astonished—and perhaps a little horrified—that I walked around pregnant for three and a half months carrying a baby I knew would die. We were well aware that aborting Gabriel was an option and, in some circles, an expectation.

Now that we've been through it, I believe that aborting my pregnancy would have been disastrous on many levels. Most important, it would have cut Gabriel's natural life short for no good reason.

It would not have been a shortcut through our grief. If anything, our grief would have been magnified. We would have been left with only the raw pain and without the memories of our son and the time-tested rituals of grief to soften it. Perhaps some people thought we were bringing grief upon ourselves by continuing the pregnancy and having a full funeral and burial. Some must have thought that we should just get on with our

lives. But for that brief time, Gabriel was our life. Other than caring for our two daughters, there was nothing more important in our lives than waiting

with Gabriel, giving him the full measure of our time and attention and love.

I also felt that ending the pregnancy early would have contributed to the perception that the loss of an unborn baby is of little consequence. And we would still have been in shock a week or two later, when others would have been expecting us to get over it already. Instead, my

growing belly was a constant reminder to others of what we were going through. Perhaps that meant that everywhere we went, death was an uninvited and unwelcome guest. But it also resulted in our receiving an extraordinary level of support, rare for parents grieving the loss of their "invisible" babies.

Aborting the pregnancy would have meant denying ourselves the life-changing,

bittersweet, exquisite experience of holding our beautiful full-term son and hearing his cries. We didn't realize until later how crucial and sustaining those memories would be. Ending the pregnancy early would have meant rejecting a gift.

I believe that ending our pregnancy early would have caused us real emotional harm, as well as closed us off from the extraordinary gifts that we and our families and close friends were able to experience as we all waited with Gabriel.

Yes, Gabriel was going to die. But first he was going to live.

Adapted from *Waiting with Gabriel: A Story of Cherishing a Baby's Brief Life* by Amy Kuebelbeck (Loyola Press 2003). Reprinted with permission of Loyola Press.

Kuebelbeck, her husband, Mark Neuzil, and their two daughters live in St. Paul, Minn. Gabriel was born and died Aug. 8, 1999.





If an oracle had come to me 15 years ago predicting that my destiny was to become a suburban housewife with three kids and a minivan, I would have laughed until I cried—and so would everyone who knew me. I was a free-spirited party girl and an adamantly pro-choice feminist. As a college student in the late 80s, I was one of a handful of progressive students responsible for founding the first ever women's studies group on campus.

In January of 1997 my first son was born. Nineteen months later my second son was born, and twenty-two months after that, in June of 2000, our little girl came into the world. Three kids with only three and a half years between them! I spent five straight years either pregnant or nursing.

I am still a feminist, only my ideas about "choice" have radically changed. From the first look at my baby on the ultrasound monitor I

knew that voluntarily destroying an unborn life would never again be an option in my mind. This was no longer cerebral debate in the halls of academia. Here was a real live baby—heart pumping, fingers wiggling. He wasn't a nameless picture with a politically charged caption. He was my child, my Zachary.

Today I am older, wiser and a little wider – having babies will do that. I'm still a party girl, only now it involves Barbie birthday cakes and Bob the Builder piñatas. I still consider myself a free spirit. At least that's what I tell myself to avoid feeling guilty about living in chaos. Kids are chaotic...and unpredictable...and maddening...and enlightening...and amazing...and amusing...and by far the best choice I've ever made.

Elisa Hays

Puyallup, Washington

SLICE OF LIFE



ELIZABETH CADY STANTON: FEMINIST, WIFE AND MOTHER OF SEVEN

Suzanne Schnittman, Ph.D

When her seventh child, Henry, was born in 1859, early feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton raised a flag in front of her home—scandalizing the Seneca Falls, N.Y., community by her public celebration of motherhood.

The mid-19th century was a time when pregnancy and birth were still surrounded with silence and secrecy. It was an era during which women frequently remained out of public view throughout their “confinement” of pregnancy. They emerged after a few months with (surprise!) a new family member who was received with little fanfare. Even in their diaries, women rarely mentioned their pregnancies, only briefly announcing the arrival of children as if they were good harvests. Women like Stanton were the exception. Her public flag-waving aptly symbolized the importance she placed on motherhood and gave her critics reason to distrust her for more than her women’s rights advocacy.

Even in her letters, Stanton celebrated her children’s births. Writing to her cousin Elizabeth Susan Miller at the birth of her fourth child (Feb. 10, 1851): “Laugh in your turn. I have actually got my fourth son. Yes, Theodore Weld Stanton after two long mighty flourishes of his royal crown bounded upon the stage of life, with great ease comparatively! I was sick but a few hours, did not lie down half an hour before he was born, but worked round as hard as I could all night to do up the last things I had to do.”

The letter announcing the birth of her daughter, Harriet (Oct. 22, 1852), to Lucretia Mott, who helped her organize the first Women’s Rights Convention in 1848: “I am at length the happy mother of a daughter. Rejoice with me all Womankind for lo! A champion of thy cause is born.” Later in the same letter, Stanton says: “When the child was 20 hours old I took a sponge bath, a sitz bath, put on a wet bandage, and then walked out on the piazza, and the day being I fine I took a drive on the plank road of three miles.”

Stanton had been raising eyebrows in Seneca Falls since her arrival in 1848, when she moved to the rural upstate village from Boston. Isolated from the social reform activities of the larger city where she spent the first years of her marriage, Stanton adored motherhood

but was frustrated. The move plunged her into domesticity often marked by the difficulties of being a single mother whose minister husband traveled. She found herself left with the sole responsibility for home and three young sons more frequently than she wished, and her family eventually grew to seven children.

Throughout her life Stanton had to make choices between her work on behalf of women and her family obligations. Probably because she passionately endorsed woman's role as mother, she did not compromise her own position as mother. During her children's youth, from about 1843 to 1870, Stanton was dedicated to her children. She rarely left home for public talks on her beloved issues, but helped write speeches with Susan B. Anthony and sent her off to deliver them. Occasionally Stanton called Anthony over from nearby Rochester to care for the children while she formulated new ideas. She enjoyed motherhood and had radical ideas about child-rearing and health, as evidenced by the flag-raising.

Once Stanton bore her children, she insisted that other feminists allow her the space and time to mother them properly. After Susan B. Anthony requested that she attend a convention, Stanton stated reasons for her firm refusal (June 20, 1853): "Say not one word to me about another convention. I forbid you to ask me to send one thought or one line to any convention, any paper, any individual; for I swear by all the saints that whilst I am nursing this baby I will not be tormented with suffering humanity...therefore I say adieu to the public for a time, for I must give all my moments and my thoughts to my children."

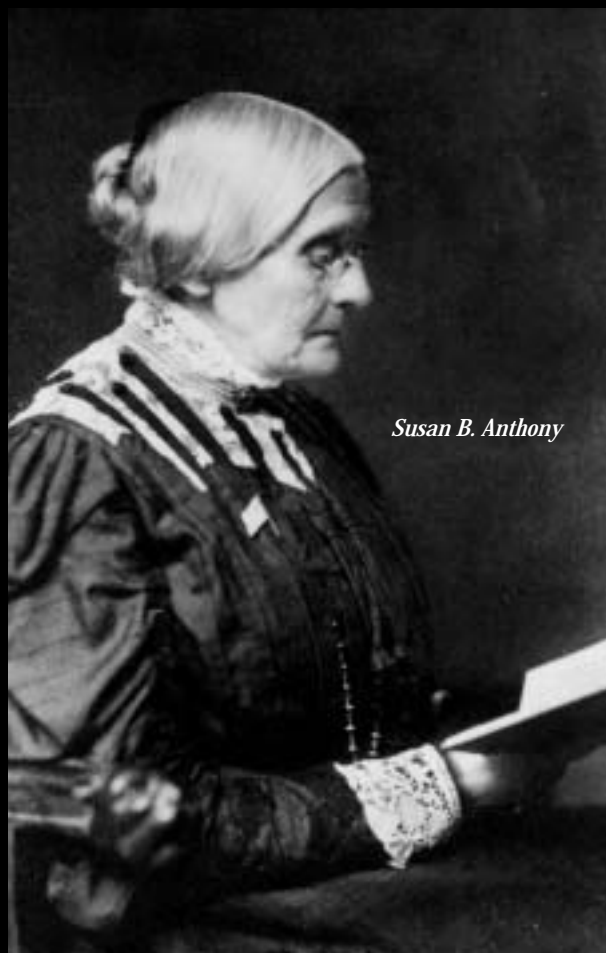
Among her advocacy issues Stanton particularly supported the right of married women to hold property (only single women had this privilege at the time). Because she knew well how difficult it was to depend on her husband and father for support, she understood how important it was for women to have security against

poverty. The role of wife and mother were vital and deserved the same financial and legal advantage as the role of husband and father. She never stopped working for women until her death in 1902.

Stanton also argued that woman's voice in the public arena be equal to man's. The vote best represented this voice and it was something she championed most of her life. Suffrage should be granted because women were equal. It also would be a tool to bring women's superior sense of morality to issues that concerned their families. The vote would give women a way to houseclean a society pervaded by the violence of war, poverty, crime, child labor, corrupt politics, and enormous injustice. As historian Carl Degler argues, opposition by feminists to these problems as well as abortion and infanticide was "in line with a number of movements to reduce cruelty and to expand the concept of sanctity of life...the elimination of the death penalty, the peace movement, the abolition of torture and whipping in connection with crimes."

Like the other women's rights advocates of the 19th century, Stanton opposed abortion and infanticide, opinions she voiced in *The Revolution*, a newspaper she published with Susan B. Anthony. It is not surprising that a woman who was brassy enough to celebrate her motherhood in a scandalous fashion upheld motherhood as the ultimate right of women. In an 1873, often-quoted letter to Julia Ward Howe, the originator of Mother's Day, Stanton wrote these words: "*When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit.*" ○

Honoring the legacy of our foremothers



Susan B. Anthony

In the tradition of our feminist foremothers, Feminists for Life continues to work toward justice and equal rights for all people. We believe that our struggle against abortion, euthanasia and other violent, dehumanizing "answers" to complex human problems is as pivotal as the efforts of the women of the mid-19th century who worked to ensure the women of future generations the right to vote.

Once again, your annual contributions will be recognized in a special way through FFL's Feminist Giving Clubs.

Feminist Leadership Circle

\$100-\$249

Feminists nationwide who support justice and full rights for women and children.

Alice Paul Circle

\$250-\$499

Author of the original Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, Paul told a colleague, "Abortion is the ultimate exploitation of women."

Susan B. Anthony Circle

\$500-\$999

Her publication, *The Revolution*, stated: "I deplore the horrible crime of child murder ... We want prevention, not merely punishment."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton Circle

\$1,000-\$2,499

In a letter to Julia Ward Howe in 1873, she wrote: "When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit."

Women's Suffrage Circle

\$2,500-\$4,999

In a landmark victory for the nascent women's rights movement, nationwide women's suffrage was guaranteed through the 19th constitutional amendment in 1920.

The Revolution Circle

\$5,000-\$9,999

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's and Susan B. Anthony's periodical gave voice to early feminist thought and documented the anti-abortion consensus among feminist leaders.

Seneca Falls Society Circle

\$10,000+

The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention marked the beginning of organized feminism in the United States.

As we approach another New Year, please help FFL honor the memory and legacy of our feminist foremothers by continuing the work they began. Donors who contribute more than \$100 during 2003 through the Combined Federal Campaign or United Way local campaigns and wish to be recognized should contact FFL's national office immediately. Charitable agencies, including FFL, are not informed of individual giving amounts.

Donors who prefer to remain anonymous should notify the national office immediately. *Thank You!*

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THE PERFECT YEAR-END GIFT

Surely you know someone who would relish the unique viewpoint of Feminists for Life. Gift memberships are \$25 (students \$15). Note recipient's name on the enclosed envelope or order form on the center spread. We will notify them of your thoughtfulness. (Sorry, no anonymous gifts.) Gift members receive a full year of *The American Feminist*.

YEAR-END GIFTS DOUBLED

THREE WAYS TO MATCH

CELEBRITY MATCH

PLANNED PARENTHOOD has confirmed what we knew was true—FFL's College Outreach Program is capable of having a "profound impact on college campuses and on Planned Parenthood's public education and advocacy efforts." But being capable and having the capacity to make their prediction a reality are two very different things.

It will take serious funding to bring FFL's College Outreach Program to even more campuses across the nation. **Emmy winner Patricia Heaton, Margaret Colin and other Hollywood celebrities have pledged to match whatever you give—dollar for dollar—toward FFL's 2004 Public Education and Outreach Campaign.**

But we must receive your gift before midnight on December 31, 2003, for it to count toward the challenge grant!



Patricia Heaton



Margaret Colin

MONTHLY DONATIONS MATCH

A former FFL Board member and a member of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Circle has challenged FFL members to begin or increase their electronic donations. **All monthly online donations (NEW) and electronic fund transfer donations received or increased by December 31, 2003, will be doubled by this generous feminist.**

Make a resolution to provide Feminists for Life with year-round support by beginning or increasing a monthly contribution through FFL's Electronic Fund Transfer. Along with your pledge, your first three months of support will mean twice as much because each gift will be doubled!

CORPORATE MATCH

Many employers offer a corporate match program. Ask your company if they participate—and double your gift to FFL!

Electronic Fund Transfer Form

Help FFL Help Women and Children! Your monthly electronic donations provide essential support as FFL works to bring about positive change for women and children. Electronic donors receive quarterly President reports, detailing FFL's progress. To begin your monthly contributions, simply fill out the electronic transfer form and send it (along with a voided check) to FFL. It's that easy! Donations will be debited on the first business day of each month and will be put to work immediately by FFL. Your participation helps FFL continue the tradition of the early feminists—pro-woman and pro-life!

I want my bank to transfer monthly donations to Feminists for Life of America. My authorization to charge my account at my bank shall be the same as if I had personally signed a check to FFLA. This authorization shall remain in effect until I notify FFLA, or notify my bank in writing that I wish to end this agreement, and my bank or FFLA has had a reasonable time to act on it. A record of each charge will be included in my regular bank statements and will serve as my receipt.

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Thank you!

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of the
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