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OF AMERICA

THE  
AMERICAN  
FEMINIST<sup>®</sup>

**END  
THE FEMINIZATION  
OF POVERTY**



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# *Honor the legacy of our foremothers*

In the tradition of our feminist foremothers, Feminists for Life continues to work toward justice and equal rights for all people.

We seek to fulfill the unrealized vision of Susan B. Anthony and other first wave feminists who envisioned a better day for women through better circumstances. Help us address a poverty of spirit, reclaim feminism, and raise expectations in schools and in the workplace, along with paternal support.

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# THE AMERICAN FEMINIST®

A publication of Feminists for Life of America

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Established in 1972, Feminists for Life of America is a nonsectarian, nonpartisan, grassroots organization that seeks real solutions to the challenges women face. Our efforts are shaped by the core feminist values of justice, nondiscrimination, and nonviolence. Feminists for Life of America continues the tradition of early American feminists such as Susan B. Anthony, who opposed abortion.

Feminists for Life of America recognizes that abortion is a reflection that our society has failed to meet the needs of women. We are dedicated to systematically eliminating the root causes that drive women to abortion—primarily lack of practical resources and support—through holistic, woman-centered solutions. Women deserve better than abortion.

Feminists for Life of America is a 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

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## CONTENTS

### **5 Introduction**

Serrin M. Foster

### **6 A Rich Life**

Joyce McCauley-Benner

### **10 Educating Mothers for Success**

Madeline Davin

### **14 Workplace Challenges and Solutions**

Cheryl Blake

### **18 Dads Make the Difference of a Lifetime**

Eric Hollenbeck

### **23 Child Care: Essential Support on Campus and at Work**

Sharon Serratore

### **27 Overcoming Poverty of Spirit**

Sarah E. Hinze

### **37 We Remember: Nat Hentoff**

Damian J. Geminder

### **38 In Memoriam: Lisa Toscani**

Serrin M. Foster

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**WHEN A MAN STEALS TO SATISFY HUNGER, WE MAY SAFELY CONCLUDE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG IN SOCIETY—SO WHEN A WOMAN DESTROYS THE LIFE OF HER UNBORN CHILD, IT IS AN EVIDENCE THAT EITHER BY EDUCATION OR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT SHE HAS BEEN GREATLY WRONGED.**

—Mattie Brinkerhoff,

*The Revolution*, 2 September 1869

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FEMINISTS FOR LIFE  
OF AMERICA

# **Women Deserve Better**<sup>®</sup>

BETTER CHOICES > BETTER LIFE

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Women Deserve Better:

For us, that means better information, better support,  
and better choices.

Life brings challenges.

We bring empowerment, because we'll never  
underestimate women.

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# HASTEN THE DAY...



On February 18, 2017, the woman who declared “I am Roe” passed away.

Norma McCorvey never had an abortion. Her daughter was placed for adoption. But McCorvey became the very symbol for abortion—until she became pro-life.

McCorvey’s personal struggles inform us today. Raised by a mother who beat her when learning about her promiscuities, and having a father who was absent, she went no further than the ninth grade.

Her attorney, Sarah Weddington, argued before the U.S. Supreme Court: What if she is poor, abandoned, unwelcome in the workplace, or a student? Feminists for Life answers: **Women deserve better.**

To that end, we joyfully announce our new [www.womenservebetter.com](http://www.womenservebetter.com) website, which goes well beyond replacing our “Raising Kids on a Shoestring” website. While we will continue to connect poor women and low-income families to resources and support, Feminists for Life aims to raise women out of poverty through education, workplace accommodations, and paternal support.

And we also recognize that all poverty isn’t only about money. Since the *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions eliminated the legal protection from abortion for women, the responsibility of children disproportionately shifted to women. A poverty of spirit has contributed to their abortions. But as feminists who believe in the strength and dignity of women, the difference a father can make (for better or for worse), and the potential of every human being, we recognize that together, we are stronger.

Those on both sides of a contentious debate want to help women: red and blue, left, right, and in between; all want to help those in need. But oftentimes, we talk “at” each other, ignoring the regional solutions that might not work if urban solutions are imposed on rural areas, and vice versa. Just like on college campuses where we lead FFL Pregnancy Resource Forums<sup>SM</sup>, one size will not fit all.

So in this issue of *The American Feminist*, we take another next step to systematically look at poverty and model resources, as well as solutions, and come closer to achieving the unrealized vision of our first wave feminists, who sought to address the root causes of abortion.

While we remember Norma McCorvey, we also pay tribute to two great communicators: Nat Hentoff was a pro-life liberal author whose books like *Free Speech for Me—But Not for Thee* painted the clear picture of the irreconcilable arguments for equality and abortion, and who documented the inconsistent treatment toward Feminists for Life and other pro-life groups. We also remember Lisa Toscani, our art director who for two decades made our words come alive through her brilliant design.

And we invite all—including those with whom we disagree on abortion—to increase our efforts to provide support for pregnant women, parents, and birthmothers and their children, no matter where they are: in the home, work, school—or peacefully growing in their mother’s womb.

Because women deserve better,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Serrin".

**SERRIN M. FOSTER**  
PRESIDENT



# A RICH LIFE

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JOYCE MCCAULEY-BENNER

As a single mother of two sons, it is no surprise I have had my share of experiences with poverty.

Sadly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 40 percent of households with children headed by single women are below the poverty line, compared to only 8 percent headed by married couples. Even living just above the poverty line doesn't mean your life is any easier. Most social programs are for those who live up to 200 percent of the poverty guidelines, so that means many more households are barely making it.

When I share my story, I remind students what my life as a single mom was like. Every day was a struggle. Food stamps only get you so much food, and the process to apply and qualify for them is hard work involving a whole lot of invasive paperwork—contrary to what the latest Facebook meme would tell you.

I lived in constant fear of eviction as rent payments piled up and I shuffled around payment of utilities based on which disconnect notice was up first. I cried myself to sleep numerous times out of sheer exhaustion and desperation. My paychecks were simply not enough to meet my family's needs. I would turn to payday loans to make things stretch—which is nothing more than making a deal with a devil who will rob you.

Many people like me turned to payday loans because we didn't have the credit to get traditional loans or credit cards. So when something happened, such as needing an unforeseen car repair, or a high electric bill, we went to a payday loan. Anyone can qualify as long as he or she has some sort of income. It's the interest that becomes unbearable. I would borrow \$300 and owe \$377 by the next payday. However, I already lived paycheck to paycheck, so losing \$377 on the next payday would hurt too much. So instead, I refinanced with the payday loan and paid \$100 toward the principal, but I got charged

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Researchers have found that the socioeconomic status of women tends to deteriorate with each repeat abortion.

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interest again. So now, I am refinancing \$200, and I still owe the \$77, and now I also owe interest again on a new loan of \$277. So the next payday, I still owe the company \$350. Even though I paid \$100 last payday, it feels like bottom line, I paid only \$27. Each company will have rules on how many times you can do this, and once all your chances are up, you have the choice either to surrender your paycheck to them or rollover into an installment loan. There are some states that have rules against these companies and various restrictions, but I lived in a state that does allow them.

The Guttmacher Institute notes that 75 percent of those getting abortions are poor or low income. But those who believe they are helping women in poverty by helping them obtain abortions should consider this: Researchers have found that the socioeconomic status of women tends to **deteriorate** with each repeat abortion. In one study at Yale Medical School, researchers reviewed the records of the abortion clinic at Yale-New Haven Hospital of 886 women having a first or repeat abortion at the clinic during 1974-75. They found that those having repeat abortions were more likely to be welfare recipients (38.2 percent versus 25.8 percent). Among black women, 55.6 percent

of the first-abortion group were on welfare versus 65.6 percent of those having repeat abortions. The respective figures for white women on welfare were 12.3 percent for first-abortion women and 19.3 percent for repeat abortions.

Very often, it's not that these women *wanted* abortions—they wanted out of a desperate situation. Clearly, access to abortion did not change their overall situation. In fact, the greater risk of psychological stress stemming from the abortion can be a contributing factor to poverty. Significant stress can lead to mental health issues, unemployment, addictions, and relationship problems. This may explain why those getting repeat abortions remained in poverty or fell deeper into it.

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Very often, it's not that these women wanted abortions—they wanted out of a desperate situation.

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Since the 1970s women's movement, there have been many arguments that abortion access is the way to alleviate the burden on low-income single mothers. Some argued this was a compassionate response because wouldn't another child just be a burden? But there are also those who think poor mothers (and/or fathers) should not be raising children. “If you can't take care of yourself, how can you take care of a family?” is a common sentiment.

This raises the question: Are poor or low-income parents good parents? Even in all my struggles, YES, my children were well cared for! I was quite capable of being a wonderful mother. **Circumstances do not define our worth or capabilities.** The circumstances of our conception, birth, or childhood do not define us as good or bad. The circumstances of your financial situation are not the defining factor of your parenting. My children knew they were loved, and we learned to express that love in ways that did not involve money.

So those arguments are missing the obvious: Why not seek to eradicate poverty in the first place and empower women along the way?

An empowered woman remembers her inherent dignity and strength, and she can persevere through challenges. Now, let me be the first to tell you it is *very* difficult to feel empowered when you are living in poverty in our culture today. Women face harsh judgment in every aspect of our lives. **Single mothers are swiftly judged for any decision they make. Get welfare? Well, you are lazy and everyone is tired of paying for your laziness. Have multiple jobs? Well, you don't care about your kids and should pay attention to them more. You can't win.**

So the **FIRST** step we must do is ***destigmatize getting help.***

Knowing how to get resources and support is a real strength! Stop, STOP shaming those who receive assistance. Help women and families find resources (most communities

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offer many resources, in addition to the common government programs).

Dutch writer Alexander Den Heijer noted, “When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.” It is not women who need to be “fixed.” It is not our bodies that need to go against nature. It is our environment—and the way we value women—that needs to change.

So, our next step is to ***change our environment***.

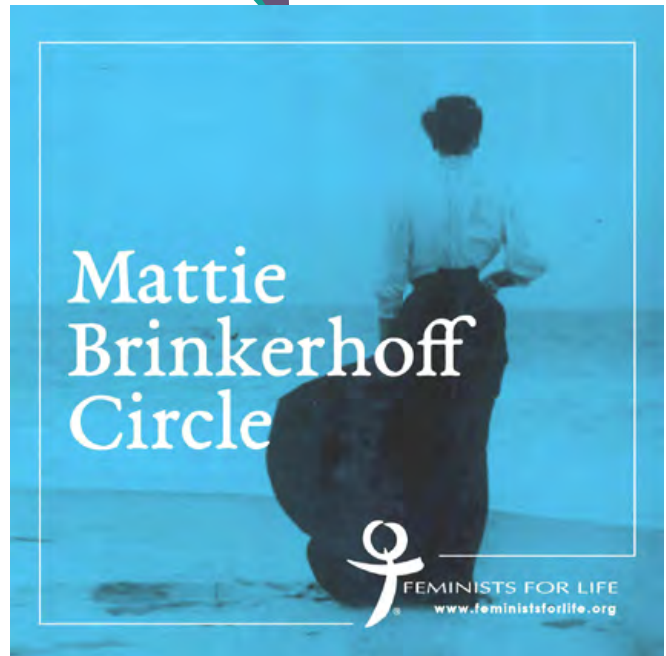
This means helping to create a culture that values women, families, and children. Where women are paid fairly, and jobs offer benefits that value families. Where the education and opportunities for women (including the most disadvantaged women) are equally abundant. A culture where violence against women is nonexistent.

Yes, these are tall tasks. But not impossible ones. It starts with us paying attention. Reading and learning more. Talking to our friends and relatives. Following legislation and advocating for just policies.

While I often remind students how hard my life in poverty as a single mother was, I also say this: IT DID NOT CRUSH ME. I did persevere. I received support and resources, and many people helped encourage me to move up in my career, to continue my education, and most important, reminded me of my own strength and worth. Now, I work to pass it on. □



*FFL speaker **Joyce McCauley-Benner** has worked for over 15 years with low income and vulnerable populations, including sex trafficking and domestic violence victims. Joyce shares her story, “Pregnant by Rape? Victory Over Violence.” She also presents “Slaves Among Us: Sex Trafficking in the U.S.” and speaks about poverty issues internationally.*



**\$100**

When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society—so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that either by education or circumstances she has been greatly wronged.

A high-angle photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a black and white striped long-sleeved shirt, sitting at a wooden desk. She is holding a baby in a white shirt with colorful polka dots. The baby is looking towards the camera. The woman is looking down at the baby. On the desk, there is a silver laptop and a white mug with a red and white striped pattern containing coffee. The background shows a wooden chair and a wooden table with some snacks.

# EDUCATING MOTHERS FOR SUCCESS

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MADLINE DAVIN

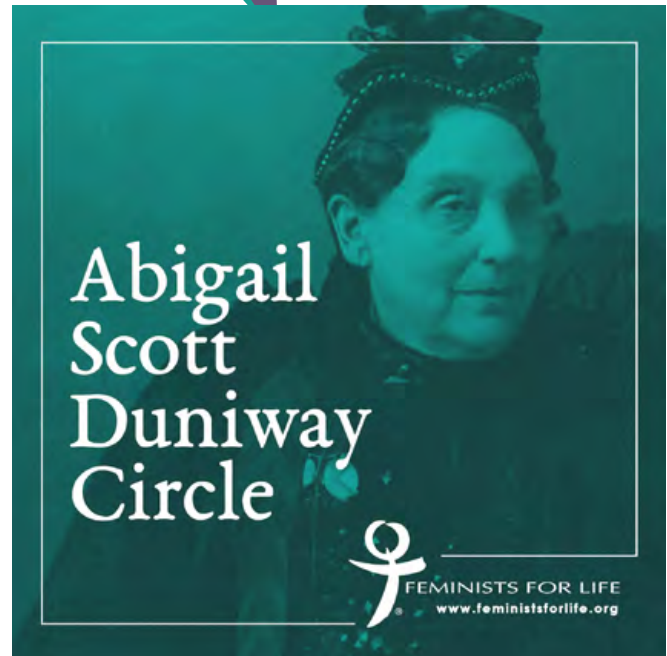
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As Feminists for Life, we know that there are many reasons why women seek abortions. According to the Guttmacher Institute, two of the most common reasons women have abortions are the perceived “inability to afford a child” and the fear that having a child would interfere with their education or career.

The first represents the reality that many single mothers live in poverty, while the latter demonstrates the failure of the education system to accommodate the needs of pregnant and parenting students. These two reasons are linked—if a woman is unable to earn her degree due to a lack of accommodations, she is at a disadvantage entering the workforce and runs a higher risk of both unemployment and falling into poverty. Similarly, women who do choose to carry their pregnancies to term and raise their children have a more difficult time completing their education, which can have impoverishing results.

Some may argue that a college education is not worth the amount of money people put into it. There is no denying that college is an expensive investment and that the job market does not always reward that expense. However, research shows that earning a college degree increases one’s chance of employment and leads to greater earnings. In 2014, the Pew Research Center released a study documenting the benefits of a college education and the detrimental effect the lack of one can have on one’s lifetime earnings and advancement. According to the study, on average, people with college degrees make \$17,500 more annually than those without degrees. This gap in earnings is the largest it has ever been in the country. Similarly, people with only a high school diploma are four times as likely to be unemployed and almost four times as likely to live in poverty as those with college degrees. Though the cost of a college education is increasing, the importance of obtaining one has never been as important as it is today. (For strategies to cut down the cost of your education, visit [www.womendeservebetter.com](http://www.womendeservebetter.com).)



**\$250**

If mothers only knew the natural consequences of abortion... they would stop awe-struck before committing the awful act.

Furthermore, choosing a major that can translate into a future career is increasingly important. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are majors with a bright future. Nursing is always in demand. For those not college-bound, traditionally male roles, such as electricians, plumbers, and computer technicians, are also promising. These professions can offer more flexible hours than traditional office jobs. You can find information about the training required for these professions online, but it is

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**Making campuses family-friendly should be as important to university administrators as complying with Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act. Nothing is as important to raise women out of poverty.**

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important to vet any programs you come across. The Federal Trade Commission website offers helpful steps to take to ensure that your training is worth the money you pay for it ([www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0241-choosing-vocational-school](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0241-choosing-vocational-school)).

In 2015, the United States Census reported that 80 percent of the approximately 12 million single-parent families in the country are led by women. These families are more likely to live in poverty, with over half living in “extreme poverty.” With these statistics, it is no wonder that young women who conceive children unexpectedly are skeptical of their ability to financially support a child. Consider this: On average, women leading single-parent households bring in about the same amount of money (\$26,000) annually as a person with only a high school diploma.

Providing support for pregnant and parenting students as well as birthmothers is missing on most campuses. FFL was an early and vocal advocate to help universities develop and students access family-friendly housing, affordable child care, telecommuting options, and financial aid, in addition to other ways in which universities can help single mothers complete their education. Women who become pregnant in college and know that their university will be accommodating of their situation will hopefully feel that they have better options than abortion.

FFL President Serrin Foster, who has led FFL’s efforts on campus since 1994, says, “Making campuses family-friendly should be as important to university administrators as complying with Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act. Nothing is as important to raise women out of poverty.” Since 1997, FFL’s Pregnancy Resource Forums have helped parents on many campuses, but they are not enough. We need universities to take our Pregnancy Resource Survey (which FFL has shared with Students for Life of America on their Pregnant on Campus website: [pregnantoncampus.studentsforlife.org](http://pregnantoncampus.studentsforlife.org)), host a Forum, and create a task force. “Can you name any other less served group on most campuses?” Foster added. “Each campus should come up with its own solutions. Establishing policies and communicating available resources on and off campus should become the rule, not the exception. That means support for their own employees as well as students. FFL is happy to work with them to develop a tailor-made plan.”

There are several colleges and universities making efforts to accommodate parenting students. These accommodations can include special scholarships, family-friendly housing, affordable child care, and other systems. The Single Mother Guide ([singlemotherguide.com](http://singlemotherguide.com)) has a list of eight universities with the best programs on its website.

Yet receiving institutional help is not the only solution. Help on a personal level is also important. This can come

in the form of family and friends helping baby-sit, getting notes from a classmate, or buying books at a cheap price from a friend. Student groups on campus can be vital resources for pregnant and parenting students. These groups can lead the charge in advocating for better resources on campus, such as family-friendly housing and lactation spaces. Student groups can also help out by fundraising or throwing baby showers for expectant mothers and helping with child care and the cost of diapers. These things are not always available to students who become pregnant in college.

Knowing this, and the incredible importance of earning an undergraduate degree today, I urge my fellow collegians to do three things: First, look into the options your school offers for pregnant and parenting students by taking the Pregnancy Resource Survey—you may be surprised at what you find (and more often *don't* find). Second, if you know someone who becomes pregnant while in college, offer to help out. A few small sacrifices on our part can make a huge difference in the life of a pregnant woman, parent, or birthmother who is trying to finish her education while raising a child. Third, for sustainable change, work with a women's group and/or pro-life group to advocate for established policies, resources and support (on campus and off) and online listings of resources on the school website.

Without accommodating the needs of pregnant and parenting students, universities lead women to think that



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To apply for a telecommuting internship like Maddie and Kara, contact [info@feministsforlife.org](mailto:info@feministsforlife.org) and provide your cover letter explaining why you are a pro-life feminist and your résumé.

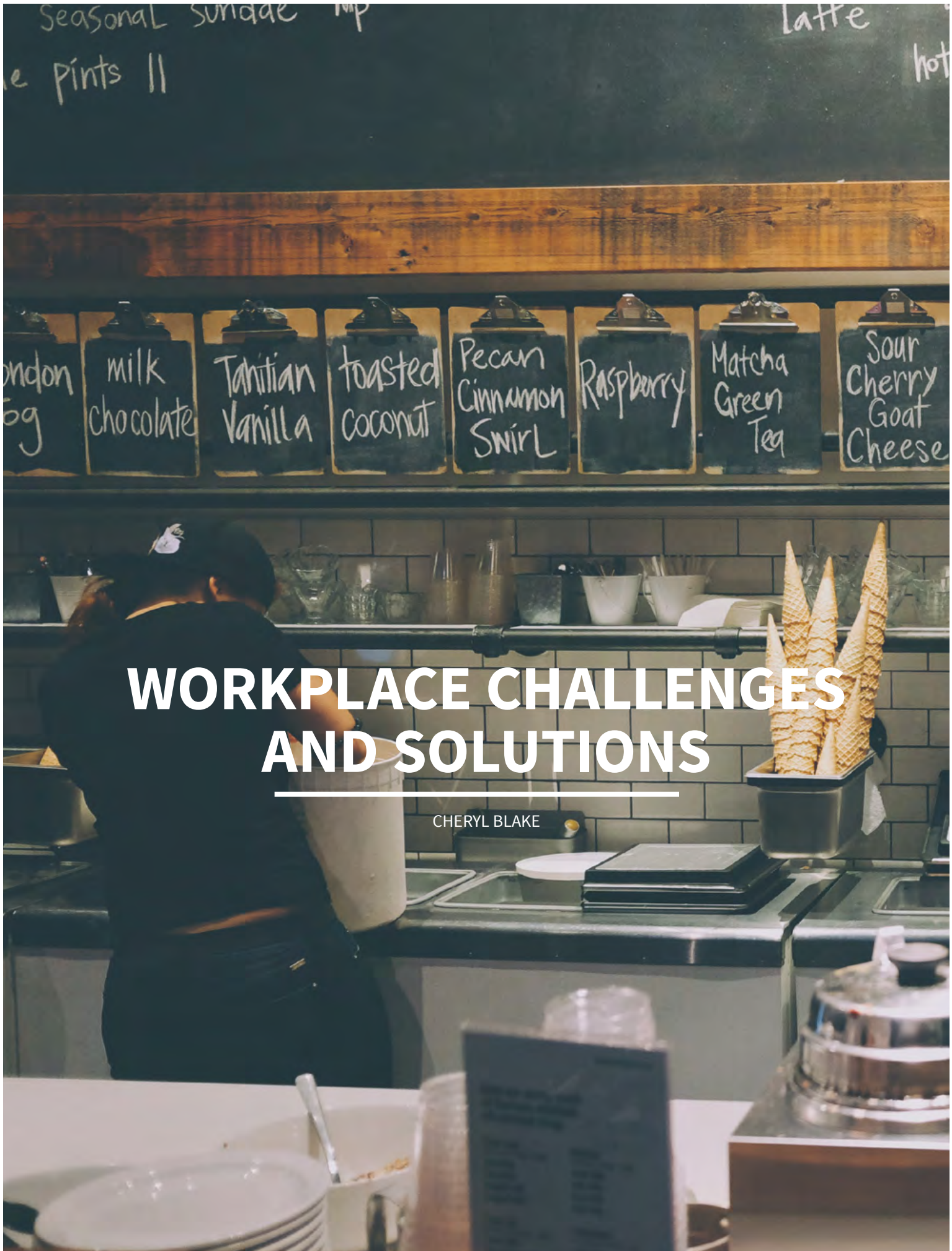
[feministsforlife.org/copinternkara](http://feministsforlife.org/copinternkara)

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they have to drop out of school and face a lifetime of poverty or have an abortion to continue their education. But with the active support of the administration, women can refuse to choose from these limited options and instead face a better future for themselves and their children. □



**Madeline Davin** is a student at Wheeling Jesuit University, where she studies theology and philosophy. She interned with FFL in the summer of 2016, working on FFL's website [womensdeservebetter.com](http://womensdeservebetter.com), writing for *The American Feminist*, organizing FFL's Annual Capitol Hill Intern Briefing, and attending the Pro-Life Women's Conference. She now serves as president of her university's pro-life club and seeks to invite others to become pro-life feminists.



# WORKPLACE CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

CHERYL BLAKE

Taking on the responsibility of a child comes with a myriad of challenges as well as wonderful opportunities. Cindy\* found herself single, in her late 30s, and pregnant. Support from the father of the baby was not going to be forthcoming in any easy or convenient way, and her own parents were in a small town several hundred miles away from the city where she worked for a university. Fortunately, because her older sister's family lived close by, Cindy's circumstances were better than many. Her career in the university's administration had been well established during several years of work. After an uneventful pregnancy, she welcomed a healthy son and they started their life together with a couple of months of leave followed by his attending quality child care at a university facility.

For many parents, the employment situation is not so amenable.

Problems may arise for working parents beginning with the job search. Although discrimination in the workplace is illegal and workers are protected by federal and state laws, biases still exist. Pregnant women, prospective adoptive parents, parents, and birthmothers need to be aware of potential bias and interview questions designed to uncover family information. An interviewer might subtly ask a woman about any occasions or responsibilities she might foresee as causing her to miss work. These may not be the blunt questions of "Do you have children?" or "Are you pregnant?" but they are a back way into that kind of information. As more women file and win against such practices, employers are improving, but prospective employees need to know what is legal so they can protect their rights. Basic legal rights form a foundation to build a workplace where parents need not detach from their family lives at the door. Not only are there clear guidelines concerning pregnancy discrimination, but there are also laws about taking leave for pregnancy or adoption and similar employer accommodations. For more information, go to [womensdeservebetter.com](http://womensdeservebetter.com).

Not only mothers but fathers also face challenges as workers who are parents. Like those of mothers, fathers' experiences vary according to where they are in their careers and what their expectations are. In one Boston College study, many men affirmed that their becoming parents positively affected their lives at work as well as at home. However, attitudes toward family life combined with work life remain skewed toward men as primarily breadwinners while women must maneuver between motherhood and career while protecting both roles.

In spite of some disappointments, positive strides have been made toward family-friendly workplaces. For 30 years, the magazine *Working Mother* has listed the top U.S. companies for their family-friendly policies, and their top 100 list has demonstrated progress. Of the 100 companies on the magazine's most recent list, all now offer an average of six weeks of fully paid leave to new mothers. Nine out of 10 of these top companies offer paternity leave, something not offered at all 30 years ago. Many of the top companies also help financially with adoption and provide assistance with child care and also lactation support, accommodations rarely found in the 1980s.

The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act has also advanced the cause of parents in the workplace. With as much as 12 weeks of unpaid leave available in a year for such situations as the birth or adoption of a child or the illness of the employee or of one of his or her family members, a worker now has more choices when caring for family without fearing loss of a job. Some workers are able to opt for intermittent leave to not only allow for recuperation and bonding after the birth of a child, for instance, but also for major events like training a new nanny or planned surgeries for the child.

Not all employers, however, meet and exceed the FMLA standards. FMLA applies to companies with 50 or more employees, and even workers in larger companies must

## Workplace Challenges and Solutions

have a 12-month tenure with the employer to be eligible for the time off. Smaller companies may comply with FMLA, but they are not obligated to do so. In the *Working Mother* top 100 list, all the companies pay their workers during the leave, but the law does not require that. Many employers provide the leave but do not help with any wages lost by the absence, a major problem for workers who cannot afford to lose their source of income even for a short period of time. In 2014, only about 5 percent of companies nationwide offered that paid benefit to their full-time employees. While over 90 percent of the top 100 offered on-site lactation rooms and back-up child care, U.S. companies in general reached only 35 percent for the lactation rooms and 4 percent for back-up child care in 2015.

A common-sense approach to assessing any work situation and advocating for change is to learn what policies and opportunities are already in place. **FFL's Family-Friendly Workplace Evaluation, ([www.feministsforlife.org/raising-expectations-in-the-workplace](http://www.feministsforlife.org/raising-expectations-in-the-workplace)), is a good place to start.** Based on FFL President Serrin Foster's original moderator outline for FFL's Pregnancy Resource Forum on campus which became the basis of FFL's Pregnancy Resource Survey for higher education, this tool helps to identify what policies, resources, employer and community support, and communication strategies employees and employers can use to work together. Among the issues covered in FFL's Survey are flexibility in work situations, accessibility for parents, health, safety, and family leave. Determining how an employer accommodates families begins the process, but deciding what else might be put into place takes effort. Employees could ask for anything, but employers usually want to know how much a change will cost to implement and maintain. Telecommuting and flex-time are increasingly used solutions when onsite daycare is impossible or cost prohibitive, and have the added benefit for parents who seek more time with their children. Admittedly, help with the children would still be

required, in particular those of preschool age, but commuting times and child care use might at least be reduced.

Among possible flexible scheduling alternatives supported by FFL are the following:

- compressed workweeks in which full time hours are spread over fewer than five full days
- flextime in which the beginning and end of work days do not necessarily correspond to traditional hours as long as important business hours are covered
- job sharing when two people split a full-time position
- telework in which at least some of the tasks are performed off-site, often at home
- part-time alternatives allowing fewer hours and prorated pay and benefits
- and for full-time staff, returning part-time before resuming a full-time schedule.

All of these arrangements are possible solutions to what the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's *Focus on Workplace Flexibility* website terms "negative spillover." **When family life has an adverse impact on work or when employment hinders family life, employers as well as workers suffer.** Ideally, a balance between the segments of an employee's life allows him or her to do better in both realms.

Many private businesses support some working from home to not only keep their employees satisfied but also as a strategy that makes more prospective workers interested in their companies. About two thirds of U.S. state agencies surveyed list improved morale as the big benefit to flexible schedules. There is also the health benefit of decreased stress among employees attempting to find balance in their work and family lives. Both fewer doctor visits and better sleep have been attributed to workers' feelings of increased autonomy.

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Health care coverage for children can also certainly worry parents. Medicaid and CHIP are two possible alternatives for low income parents who want to insure health care for their children. CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, is specifically for families whose income is above the Medicaid levels which might solve health care coverage for parents who are underemployed or just beginning careers.

First implemented in New York state, Feminists for Life was the first to advocate coverage for pregnant women and their unborn children through CHIP at the federal level. First by regulation and now by law, CHIP now covers insurance for pregnant women who are working but low income and whose company doesn't provide health care. However, if a workplace already extends coverage to dependents, the cost and amount of coverage should make health care reasonable for parents. Prioritizing better insurance when negotiating for family-friendly benefits makes sense. For more information about insurance and health care, see the health care page at [www.womendeservebetter.com](http://www.womendeservebetter.com).

Cindy's circumstances at a major university in the late 1980s were optimal for the time. Today, the FMLA and a desire to recruit and retain the best employees have made what she experienced more the norm, at least for major employers and some discerning smaller ones. Improvement in attitudes and situations comes about with education and demand. Advocating for a family-friendly workplace helps add to the progress already made. □

*\*Name changed to protect identity*



**Cheryl Blake** is a grandmother, a retired high school teacher, an adjunct professor, and a published freelance writer.

## Eleanor Kirk Circle



# \$500

Can you not see that the idea is to educate women that they may be self-reliant, self-sustaining, self-respected?... God speed the time, for the sake of the babies. Little ones will then be welcome...

## HELP US EDUCATE STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS SO THAT LITTLE ONES WILL BE WELCOME

To send a kit to campus in support of a pro-life group, to sponsor a speaker on campus or at the Annual Capitol Hill Intern Briefing, or a moderator for an FFL Pregnancy Resource Forum, please give generously by going right now to [feministsforlife.org/support](http://feministsforlife.org/support)



**DADS MAKE THE  
DIFFERENCE OF A LIFETIME**

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ERIC HOLLENBECK

## **Child Support: Know the Law, Know Your Rights**

The best scenario is when both parents are happily raising their children together. Sadly, this is too often not the case, and women and children are driven into poverty. According to U.S. Census Bureau, approximately \$12 billion is owed to custodial mothers.

The reasons are more complicated than at first glance, says FFL President Serrin Foster, who worked on the coalition which successfully advocated passage of the Enhanced Child Support Act of 1996. “Sometimes it is the mother who holds the child custody and refuses paternal support. Others have court orders but the father is incarcerated or out of work, making it impossible for her to collect. Then there are men who will simply jump state lines to escape their responsibilities.”

“FFL first became involved in this issue when women repeatedly called the office about threats to withhold child support if they didn’t have an abortion,” Foster added. “We joined a coalition to advocate stronger child support and became determined to educate pregnant women—and men—about their rights and responsibilities.” Today that information is in FFL’s brochure, “You Have Better Choices,” which is also online at [www.feministsforlife.org](http://www.feministsforlife.org) and FFL’s website, [www.womendeservebetter.com](http://www.womendeservebetter.com).

Women—including pregnant women—who find themselves concerned about raising children without the support of a father must know the law when it comes to their legal rights to monetary child support from an absent, divorced, or separated father.

Regardless of age, employment, marital status, or financial situation, federal laws exist in the United States to ensure that women have access to financial support from absent or separated fathers. In the U.S., child support laws are in place specifically to ensure that children have the right to financial support from both of their parents, whether the parents are separated, divorced, totally apart, or even when one of them is currently missing or unknown.

Child support payments are not due to children simply to help them survive with the bare necessities of food and clothes. Modern child support laws are in place to assist children in acquiring funds for quality of life needs ranging from medical care to post-secondary education savings. All 50 states are legally obligated to provide child support services for their citizens. Thanks to the Child Support Enforcement Act of 1996 advocated by Feminists for Life, noncustodial parents are now prevented from jumping state lines to escape their responsibilities.

Each state uses a different financial model to configure amounts of payments due to children by non-custodial or absent parents. However, every state has the same goal in determining child support payments: to ensure that money is being substantially provided to a child from a parent who does not have full custody and that both parents are contributing to the welfare of the child. Typically, though certain states can often allow for age extensions up to 21, child support usually lasts at least up to the age of 18.

Certainly it is important that women in need of this resource know the laws of their own state concerning child support; however, there are certain federal pieces of legislation that are effective for the entire nation. State laws exist throughout the country to ensure child support is accessed in various cases, even in cases when an absent father is bankrupt, incarcerated, out-of-state, and out-of-country. Several states have unique laws concerning modifying current child support cases, safeguards for women receiving from abusive fathers, age extensions for the child’s reaching college age, and options for children with disabilities.

It is also important to note that women who place their children for adoption will not owe child support payments unless the adoption takes place after a due payment. In such a case, that payment will be owed and legal obligations will be severed.

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**It is illegal for a man to threaten to withhold current child support for the refusal to have an abortion.**

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**Child Support Application Services Are Numerous, Local, And Readily Accessible**

Obtaining child support is not always easy, and it is important to note that women who wish to secure this service know that there will be obstacles and difficulties along the way. There is often a lot of red tape and follow-up, phone calls, and difficulties in the process. Oftentimes, fathers can skip or miss payments and the steps taken in this process can be timely. It is important to remember that it is illegal for a man to threaten to withhold current child support for the refusal to have an abortion. No threat of refusal for one’s commitment to the life of an unborn child can legally prevent the reception of child support. Remember, children are also not a bargaining chip for child support. Fathers have rights—as well as responsibilities—in this process; preventing a parent from seeing children or attempting to deny parental rights is not a proper form of recourse. Being able to self-advocate and believe in one’s personal abilities and empowerment is vital for the successful and appropriate acquisition of child support.

There can be a number of barriers for the successful acquisition of child support. However, there are a number of options that can be taken to do so to achieve this

resource in a variety of circumstances, including when the father is missing, out of country, incarcerated, or bankrupt. Likewise, there are certain protections that can be put in place for the safety of the woman receiving child support, in terms of address protection, personal barriers, and court safeguards, in cases where violence has occurred. Some tips on the child support process in some of these circumstances will be examined further below.

Ideally, men will voluntarily accept paternity. The American Hospital Association has worked to ensure that all fathers are offered the opportunity to sign a form declaring their paternity at the hospital when the baby is born.

If the father is unwilling, however, the mother must take steps to document his paternity before applying for child support.

It is important to know some basics about the initial process for filing for child support. Local county social services offices offer support for the beginning of this application process. The internet also provides numerous national and state-by-state resources for this process. The U.S. Department of Human Services Office of Child Support Enforcement website alone offers a database for each state and resources available within each state to help begin the child support application process. The U.S. Department of Human Services website also offers information concerning collecting child support from unique cases ranging from out-of-state issues to safety concerns for those applying. ([www.acf.hhs.gov/css](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/css)) Various cellular apps exist, many tailored to a particular state, to assist in the child support payment process. Women who wish to apply for child support may want to have a family lawyer involved in the effort. Women who do not have access to a lawyer may want to consider applying for free legal assistance with social services.

Women should try to have as much evidence of the child’s paternal parent available during the start of this process

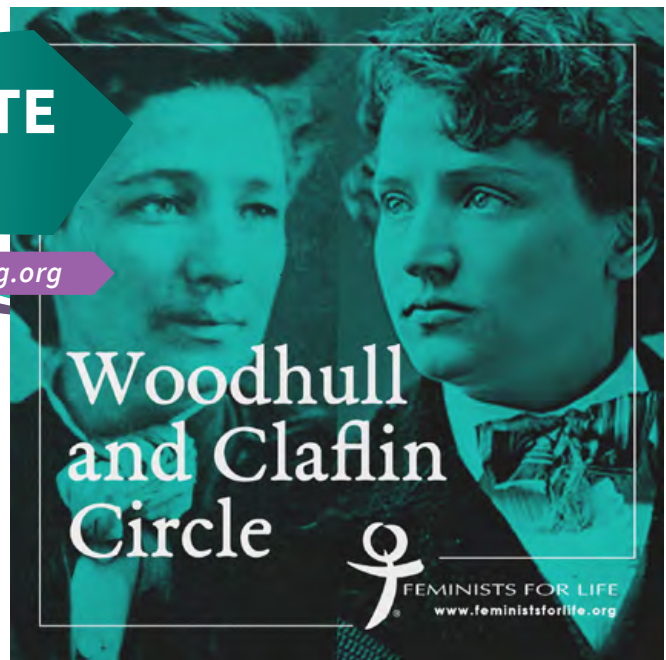
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if the father is missing or unwilling to shoulder his responsibilities. Parent locator services can be implemented in the circumstance of finding a missing father. Likewise, genetic tests can be used to ensure suspected identity of a father in question. In cases where the father's location is unknown, it is important to have as much information on him as possible. Advisable documentation to acquire the successful location of a missing father can be his full name, last address, last employer, birth date, relative names and addresses, military records, and assets. It is important to try to compile as much information as possible for the success of a locator service. Child support cases are ultimately settled in a court. However, it is necessary that women know they have a voice of their own and that they can safely self-advocate in important and challenging matters such as these. If a woman has a language barrier concern, she may want to consider asking for help in this regard during the start of her child support application process. Regardless of whether or not legal counsel is available, women have a right to be their own voice of empowerment for their child and for themselves in this process.

Paternity tests are frequently mandated by a court for the successful confirmation of a suspected father in a child support case. However, paternity tests can be conducted privately, with a hospital or local paternity testing site. It is important to note that these private tests can often involve fees. However, there may be provisions for assistance. For example, according to the child support office of the state

“  
**Fathers have rights—as  
well as responsibilities.**  
”



**\$1,000**

The rights of children as individuals begin while yet they remain the foetus.

Childbearing is not a disease but a beautiful office of nature.

of Louisiana, “If either parent receives help from child support enforcement, the state pays for the test. The court may order the father to repay the cost of the paternity testing if paternity is established.” It is important to ask about and be familiar with what financial assistance is available when conducting paternity testing privately. Many private companies can offer paternity testings for a variety of costs, and it is important to find one that is reputable and affordable. It is important to call, do research, and use the supports available to secure this testing. Fathers who agree to paternity of children can submit a “declaration of paternity” form with the state, which can be found online or through social services, to officially declare themselves voluntarily as fathers to children.

## **Dads Make the Difference of a Lifetime**

Many women may have concerns about the process of receiving child support due to anxiety over contacting the father. Any apprehensions about having to face an abusive father in court should be brought up initially in the child support application. You can also request address security, have your case flagged with a family violence indicator for your privacy, and create legal safeguards for your physical and emotional well-being. While states have different individual laws, knowing that you have a right to safety in the child support application process is of tantamount importance.

Mothers have the right to try to secure financial aid from the fathers of their children even in difficult situations. For example, according to MassLegalHelp, non-custodial parents in the state of Massachusetts who are incarcerated can still be examined for child support payments by investigation of items such as stocks, rental income, real estate, social benefits, and other forms of revenue. In another example, the Office of Child Support Enforcement lists 26 countries and Canadian provinces in which child support cases can be conducted for non-custodial parents outside of the U.S. owing child support. Additionally, it recommends that in cases in which the non-custodial parent resides outside of these specified countries and provinces, that state laws can be inspected to see whether foreign reciprocity can be made with the non-custodial parent through the laws of the individual state. The National Conference of State Legislators ([www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)) lists a number of state-by-state laws concerning age extensions for child support in cases where the child is disabled. Remember, laws are always being updated, and some resources may not be singularly exhaustive in providing details on particular aspects of this process. Young mothers deserve our support, and it is important that they too know that the services of child support do not need to be altogether abandoned due to severity of circumstances.

### **Looking Forward**

It is important to note that both parents, custodial and noncustodial, have rights in the child support payment process. Women and men need to know the laws of their own states concerning the acquisition process of child support. Single mothers are not in this situation alone. The National Child Support hotline has its own website with available toll-free number for advice on questions and concerns about this process ([nationalchildsupport.com](http://nationalchildsupport.com)). Women deserve better than feeling constrained to make drastic choices due to a fear of financial support not being in place for them. This is especially true of poor and low-income women who seek abortions (75 percent) and who already have dependents and become pregnant again and seek abortions (59 percent) largely due to financial issues. Abortion will not bring more money to your home; it will not provide resources. It may seem like a long road ahead, and there may be hang-ups and disappointments, but self-advocacy and the acknowledgment of rights to and resources for child support can pave the way for a happier future for a new mother and that of her unborn child. “Ideally, fathers will increasingly be honored and supported, too, and fewer men will choose to rob themselves of the joy of having their children in their lives,” Foster concluded. □



**Eric Hollenbeck** is a graduate of Stockton College with a bachelor's degree in teacher education. He has worked with Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Trenton and has experience teaching high school students. Eric enjoys acting, the performing arts and classical literature, and volunteering as a writer for *Feminists for Life*. He is proud to be both passionately pro-life and pro-women's rights.



# **CHILD CARE: ESSENTIAL SUPPORT ON CAMPUS AND AT WORK**

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FFL BOARD MEMBER SHARON SERRATORE

## **Child Care: Essential Support on Campus and at Work**

Ask any working mom—single, married, whatever her income—about high-quality child care, and her response will include a comment or two (or 10) about the steep cost. No matter her job, her circumstances, her ZIP code—finding reliable, first-class child care is first-class expensive. Affordable, top-notch care mustn't be a privilege of affluence, nor a workplace benefit exclusive to just a few. Excellent resources are available for parents seeking support and referrals for very good, affordable child care in cities and neighborhoods across the country.

No one option is the solution for all. What works for families in rural Ohio may not be a good fit for beltway families in Washington D.C. or for reservation families in Washington State.

Childcareaware.org is a rich gateway to loads of state and local resources, (including specific links to finding care for special needs children). Within the site, additional tabs lead to recommendations for financial assistance, and for health and social services. The Office of Child Care website of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers much information, including practical parenting resources like budget calculators, a video library, and a live chat button for questions ([www.acf.hhs.gov/occ](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ)).

Child care centers may operate as businesses or as nonprofits; they can be community-run or government-administered, like Head Start. Among the many choices, numerous cultural and faith communities provide affordable, accessible child care options. Pregnancy resource centers often keep comprehensive lists of options and can provide referrals. Though some centers may be church-affiliated, if they are licensed and certified, they must offer enrollment beyond their own communities to the general public (at large). Some may require a volunteer commitment from parents, as a contribution to keep low their cost for the care, yet these



are often flexible. Some child care centers charge fees on an income-based sliding scale.

One such center is the *Marion Forsman-Boushie Early Learning Center*, operated by the Suquamish Tribe in Puget Sound, Washington. The center prioritizes families who are low-income, homeless, below 100 percent Federal Poverty Guidelines, and have children with disabilities. Frequent parental participation in the family services is encouraged to help share duties, reduce costs, and to promote the Suquamish Native American identity.

Facilities that offer intergenerational care can also be a lower cost option because of shared services and maintenance. Tuition may be less at these centers since they deliver both elder care and child care at one location. In Milwaukee, the *St. Ann Center* offers such care, with programs and activities designed to connect the elder and the young populations for socialization, friendships and fun.



The *Hilty Home* of the Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio also provides intergenerational care. Under the tab of “Care Services” offered, their website lists “Child Care Center” along with “Skilled Nursing” and “Memory Care,” plus other levels of care typically associated with senior living facilities. This particular arrangement benefits the entire community: the seniors, the children, and the parents—particularly those who are employed at the facility. These are just a sampling of what may be more widely available in communities across the country.

“After a brief experience with a negligent in-home baby sitter was discovered, my sister turned to family and later to a large Mennonite family in a rural area of Virginia,” FFL President Serrin Foster said. “My mother was delighted when she saw her grandsons being delivered home in a horse drawn buggy. My nephews were able to explore a different kind of community. The old order does not allow electricity, so kids actually

learn to play and help on a farm, not simply engage with electronics. On the other hand, due to my sister’s first bad experience, I am a big proponent of nanny cams for in-home and professional child care as well as surprise visits. If they aren’t welcomed, trust your instincts, and take your children somewhere else.”

Terrific news for parents is the trend that connects foundations with nonprofit child care providers. Grants from partnering foundations are given to early learning centers to help reduce parents’ costs for the care. In a December 2015 article posted at [nonprofitquarterly.org](http://nonprofitquarterly.org), author and education consultant Anne Eigeman reports on this trend. She writes: “As child care has become a growing issue of importance nationally, foundations—particularly women’s foundations and community foundations—have established initiatives to support low-income families to offset high costs.”

For parenting students, onsite campus child care is an emerging benefit that enables them to continue their education. At the University of Michigan, the *Work-Life Resource Center* offers child care for students, faculty, and staff who need it. The school also hosts independent, licensed, home-based care centers as an alternative to the campus care.

And in Orlando, the University of Central Florida is associated with the *Creative School for Children* which serves students, faculty, and staff. According to their website, the center is “an affordable and convenient way of encouraging parents to continue their education...”

“Infant care is the most challenging,” notes FFL President Serrin Foster who moderates FFL Pregnancy Resource Forums<sup>SM</sup> on campuses across the country. “Maternity leave, support from family, and telecommuting options are the most often cited solutions until the child reaches age two. Then some universities with Schools of

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Education provides hands-on experiences for Early Education majors by having onsite preschool. It's a win-win situation."

More high schools are hosting child care centers for students who choose to remain in school while parenting. In a [washingtonexaminer.com](http://washingtonexaminer.com) story from December 2012, Lisa Gartner reports on the growing presence of child care centers on or associated with high schools. According to the report, "(a)t least seven day care centers operate inside Washington-area high schools, serving teen parents who say they might have dropped out of school without the on-site, discounted service." These early learning centers may be subsidized by a combination of county grants, state vouchers, Head Start, or the school districts themselves. In some of these programs, additional assistance is available to the student parents in the form of parenting classes, opportunities for seasonal employment, and transportation.

Parents who work at home or who homeschool may benefit from low-cost au pairs or nanny-sharing. Au pair services can be a bargain since compensation includes room and board. Nanny sharing is an affordable alternative to private care since two or more families share the services and the expense of the nanny. This is a good option for families with similarly aged children or for parents who work unconventional hours. Other in-home solutions are local parenting co-ops and groups, and employing college students.

Meeting child care expenses is an ongoing challenge for all working parents. Perhaps renewed public discourse about offering tax deductions and paid maternity leave will result in concrete solutions to help parents pay for their child care. Incentives for businesses may help, too, like encouraging tax benefits for employer-sponsored child care. Independent of this, many companies are changing workplace culture with



**\$2,500**

...in this world, where cruelty prevails in so many aspects of our life, I would not add the weight of choice to kill rather than to let live.

creative models of child care at the office. Job-hunting parents may wish to target potential employers who offer this as a benefit. Another very essential need is for back-up child care, to supplement when parents' "go-to" options fail. Whatever they choose, parents will want to build a supply of reliable, quality child care options at affordable cost. □



**Sharon Serratore** has been a member of *Feminists for Life* since 1996 and is now a member of its Board of Directors. She holds a master's degree in theology/pastoral ministry from Duquesne University and degrees in communications and economics from the University of Pittsburgh. Her work has appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, *Writer's Digest*, and other online and print publications. She and her husband reside in Pittsburgh.



# OVERCOMING POVERTY OF SPIRIT

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SARAH E. HINZE

## Overcoming Poverty of Spirit

I believe that there is an element of the divine in all of us. That essence of spirit gives us hope when we are discouraged and seeks to comfort us when life gets us down. I believe this element of hope and the divine is especially needed when it comes to being pregnant, whether desired, unplanned, or the result of a crisis.

I am the mother of nine children. Yes, nine. My husband and I wanted a big family, yet it was not easy. Now, at this time in our life when they are grown, many of them with families of their own, I marvel at it all. I am so glad that we were able to weather the storms of life and be there for each other. My dear family has been the source of my greatest learning, my greatest struggles, and my greatest happiness.

Many voices in the world marginalize having children. The world reminds women often in one-sided myopia, *“It’s your body! It’s your choice.”*

At times we must smile at the craziness of motherhood... but in more thoughtful moments let us not forget that there is a spiritual essence—a majesty in motherhood as well.

We all know life can be challenging. It can also be beautiful. One way to overcome challenges and find beauty is to share and learn from one another’s experiences. I have specially selected the following stories from my books illustrating how several women overcame obstacles contributing to poverty of spirit. It is my hope that you will find the stories shared herein to be helpful in your life as they have been helpful in mine.

### **The Phone Call**

Returning home from a speaking assignment one evening, Brent and I were tired, yet excited to be reunited with our children. We were just getting readjusted to the hustle and bustle of our busy home when the phone rang. One of the conference directors from the event we had just attended was calling.

# HELP HER FIND “BETTER CHOICES.”

Go to



“Sarah, I’m so glad I caught you. We have a problem on our hands, and you’re the only person I could think to call.” I sat down and listened intently.

“I just found out my daughter has scheduled to have an abortion. She had no intention of telling me, but I saw it written on her calendar. I’ve tried everything to talk her out of it and she won’t listen. Sarah, can you please talk to her?”

I said, outwardly calm, “Yes, please put her on the phone.” Inwardly, I prayed fervently in my heart while I waited for her. What could I possibly say that would make a difference? Could I tell her that her unborn child is eager to come into the world? Would she believe me?

The idea entered my mind to share with her a story I had collected years earlier. After brief introductions, I opened my book, *The Castaways*, and read the following letter received from a social worker who had encouraged her client—an unwed mother—to write a letter to her unborn son to read when he was old enough to understand. You see, she had decided to place him for adoption rather than abort him. She explained her choice in the letter:

*My Precious Son,*

*I do not know how you feel toward me.... At the time I became pregnant with you... I had just turned 17.*

*Eventually, with the... help of a [minister], I told my parents of the pregnancy, and we proceeded with making plans on what to do. After much counsel and prayer... I made the decision to have you and give you up for adoption....*

*My parents felt I should live with a foster family in another state until after the birth of my child and arrangements were made. I now understand the wisdom of their decision, but at the time, I was angry and felt as if I was being "put away" to hide their shame. I did not want to go, and as the time for me to leave drew near, I became desperate to find a way to stay home.*

*I had always been strongly opposed to abortion, but with these difficult pressures I found myself thinking about it occasionally, and even considering it. If I could just remove the presence of the baby, I could move on with my life and everything could go on as it had been. No more problems. No fears. No shame. No facing up to my mistake.*

*The idea of having an abortion actually started to sound like my solution. I really did not want an abortion, but I was feeling desperate. I knew I had to act quickly as my flight was scheduled to leave within a few days. Each clinic I called was unable to fit me into their schedule until well after my flight out of state.*

*I was emotionally exhausted when I finally hung up the phone. I went into my room, turned off the light, and crawled into bed, where I cried myself to sleep.... I can still remember the dream I had as clearly as if it were yesterday.*

*In my dream, it was a few weeks before your scheduled delivery date, and I was lying on a table in the doctor's office having an examination. The doctor wanted to make sure that you were growing properly and wanted to take your weight and measurements. He made an incision in my abdomen and carefully removed you from my womb. I watched as he had you weighed and measured. Everything was just fine, and you were developing normally into a fine, healthy baby. I was enjoying the experience, yet at the same time I was still searching for a way in which I would not have to follow through with the whole ordeal. For a moment, I considered telling the doctor not to put you back into my womb: to stitch me up and just let me walk away.*

*But at that moment, a wonderful thing happened. You suddenly turned your head and reached out for me, your big eyes glistening with tears. I could not resist the urge to pick you up. As I held you close, you wrapped your tiny arms around my neck with the strength of an adult and would not let me put you down. I could feel your desperation to cling to life, and I knew then that it was a small sacrifice for me to provide that life for you. The doctor and his office slowly faded away, and you and I were left alone, still clinging to each other.*

*When I awoke the next morning, I told my mother about the dream... that now I knew without a doubt that my child had a right to live, a right to be born into this world and experience the joys, as well as the sorrows, that this life can bring. My sweet son, please believe me when I say how much I love you!*

*I thought over every possible solution concerning my keeping and raising you.... I prayed to keep you, but never felt [right] about it.... I know I made the right decision in having you adopted, but it is the hardest thing I have ever done. You were such a beautiful baby, and I loved you so much.*

*I felt that another couple that was prepared to start a family but could not have children of their own would be able to provide for you far more adequately than I. With me your life would start in shame, guilt, and sorrow, and without a father to love you as your adoptive father now loves you.*

*I then realized that I was actually carrying a child that really belonged to another couple. I hope you understand. Even though I am the person who carried you and gave you birth, your mom and dad are actually your true parents.*

*Though all my wishes are that I could watch you grow up to be a handsome young man, I know deep in my heart that I have done the right thing. I hope someday in the eternities we may meet and share our feelings face to face. I love you son, and always will.*

*Forever my love,*

*Mom*

When I finished reading, I could hear soft sounds of crying coming through the phone.

Gently I asked, “What are you feeling?”

“So many of my friends have had abortions, but I can’t do it. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

I thanked her for listening, and concluded with words of encouragement, “I feel sure you will do what is best for both you and the baby.” With that, our conversation ended.

A few days later, the mother called again with relief in her voice and reported that her daughter had decided to allow the baby to live and place their grandchild with good parents for adoption.

After the birth some six months later, the mother phoned me with details of how her daughter had picked the adoptive parents and how grateful she was to know the baby is with a good family.

I honor mothers who feel unable to keep the baby they are carrying, yet sacrifice to give their baby life through the gift of adoption. And may God bless those wonderful people who adopt children, giving them the inestimable gifts of love, family, and opportunities for a happy life.

\*\*\*

Our next story\* is alarming, yet inspiring as another example of “overcoming poverty of spirit.”

## I... HAD... AN... ABORTION...

*I choke on those words. They get stuck in my throat like a rock. I have only said those words out loud three times since it happened: to my parents when I went through my divorce, knowing it had the potential to come out in court; to my cleric; and to my current husband, who listened to me tell him, as he loved and comforted me, and played a huge role in my healing.*

*I was 16 years old, and in a terrible abusive relationship. I had no self-esteem. I had established a pattern of making poor choices, and as a result, had no self-esteem or self-worth. I must be clear; I was born into a wonderful family. My childhood was truly ideal. I had the best parents and family anyone could ever hope for! Over the years, they have helped me see forgiveness and heal.*

*I take full responsibility for my actions and decisions and do not want to push blame onto anyone else. I believe my journey to this low point in my life began when I was in second grade. I was molested by my elementary school teacher. I told no one. I was scared. I internalized it. Looking back, I believe this incident was the catalyst that brought me to where I was at 16. After my experience in second grade, and the feelings I hid deep inside of me, my self-worth was tied to how women are viewed and objectified sexually. I felt I was a sexual object.*

*Let me reiterate: This was not what I was taught, nor how I was raised. My father is a perfect gentleman and reveres women. He cherishes my mother, my sister, and me. He devoted his career to taking care of women.*

*I continued down a path of promiscuity, as I felt this is all I was good for. I dated a boy who was older, and he wore on me about having a sexual*

*relationship. He was manipulative and convincing. I had, in the back of my mind, this was all I was good for and all men wanted from me, or from women in general. I felt if I wanted to be loved or have a boyfriend I had to give in to their desires. I felt dirty and used. When this relationship ended, I vowed to do and be better. Then, the voice started again that I wasn't worthy. I wasn't forgiven. Soon, I was back on the path of bad choices. It was a vicious cycle.*

*I found myself in an abusive relationship when I was 16, and soon after, found out I was pregnant. I was terrified. I first turned to my boyfriend. Yes, the same boyfriend who was abusing me. He was controlling and abusive from the beginning of the relationship. He controlled everything I did. He told me not to wear makeup, how to dress, where to go, whom I could be friends with, and even what color I could polish my nails. He told me if I ever broke up with him, he would kill me.*

*My boyfriend said things to me like, "You are dumb, I have to think for you, nobody else will love you." He was not a member of the same faith as me and made it clear I was also no longer to be a part of that faith. He was the oldest in his family. His entire family were controlling bullies—and abusive, too.*

*I should have seen the signs. It was the polar opposite of the loving family I had. He told me we couldn't have the baby. He wanted to graduate from high school. His parents would be disappointed. I felt trapped and cornered. I knew his family would make this a horrible situation for my family. He convinced me that abortion was the answer. I knew it was not, but I felt there was no other choice. How could this be happening? I was drowning in my mind. I wanted to die.*

*My boyfriend had me make the appointment for a Saturday so he could drive me to the appointment.*



# \$5,000

There must be a remedy for such a crying evil as this. But where shall it be found, at least where begin, if not in the complete enfranchisement and elevation of women?

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## **Overcoming Poverty of Spirit**

*I made the appointment from a pay phone in front of a Circle K, using a false name and information. I did not need any parental consent, nor ID to perform a medical surgical procedure to end the life of my baby and that could endanger my own.*

*I met him on Saturday, after telling my parents I was going to hang out with friends at the mall. We drove to the clinic. I prayed the whole way there asking that the Lord would forgive me. We checked in. It was \$285 for this procedure.*

*It smelled awful; I can remember the smell. I wanted to throw up. I wanted to run; looking back, I think I was having an anxiety attack. I was told to take all my clothes off and change into a hospital gown. They had me take a pregnancy test. I prayed it was negative. It was positive. They had me lie on a table.*

*Then I heard the vacuum sound. At that moment, I went numb, and I died inside. The only memory of the ride home was lying down on the back seat crying. I damned myself and my soul to hell. I told myself there was no way I could be forgiven for what I had just done. I just committed the most heinous act that a mother could commit: I killed my baby. Who does that? I felt there was no forgiveness for me at that point, and I deserved any and every horrible thing this life had to offer.*

*I remember going home and going to bed. I told my mom I was sick. I felt so disconnected and awful that there was no one I could talk to about this. I was harboring a dark, disgusting, awful secret. I was the worst mother in the world. How did I get here?*

*I continued to date this boy, continuing to endure his control and abuse. I deserved it. I married him right after high school. I convinced myself that this was my penance for the decisions I made. I was forever to be tied to this horrible person who treated*

*me the way he did because we created a life, and we destroyed it together. We were bound by this awful secret we shared. He told me I needed to “harden my heart” toward my parents, my family, and those I loved the most.*

*I endured his abuse for 10 long years and was completely separated from those I loved. To this day, I wonder to myself how old my baby would be and what would he or she look like.*

*I was trapped in this abusive marriage. His threats and verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse continued throughout our marriage. He threatened to kill me if I ever left him, and after we had our two other children, he told me if I left he would kill all of us, or that if I left him I could never take my children with me. He told me he would tell my parents the truth about me, and all the horrible secrets he knew about me. He told me my parents would never understand and hate me. More threats and lies. I had not one shred, sliver, or ounce of self-esteem left. So I stayed.*

*My life changed after being married for six years. My brother died. He committed suicide. He never left a note but did write my name in a notebook, along with the words, “Come back to what you know is true.” This was a turning point. I started talking to one of my brother’s friends, who happened to be a police officer. He started building me up and repairing my broken soul. He told me my parents would love me and help me. He explained to me I was in an abusive relationship, and it was called domestic violence. My husband told me daily I was stupid or retarded and that he had to think for me. I thought I was trapped, with no way out. I was convinced I was living an eternal sentence as a result of my decisions.*

# NEW FFL WELCOME BACK KIT FOR RETURNING SUPPORTERS

Right now, returning members and supporters will receive “Voices of Women—and Men—Who Mourn,” containing articles about the spectrum of grief and offers healing strategies for many situations. It also includes “MANIPULATION: Shattered Dreams, False Choices, Eternal Hopes,” with in-depth interviews of former abortion providers, analysis of Planned Parenthood’s internal staff training, articles about coerced abortions and legal strategies to protect women and children, and stories of sex trafficking and a wife and children held hostage internationally. It also includes our brochures, “Voices of Our Feminist Foremothers” and “You Have Better Choices,” informational brochures, a bumper sticker, and a sticker which explains what we do and why, and an



[FEMINISTSFORLIFE.ORG/SUPPORT](http://FEMINISTSFORLIFE.ORG/SUPPORT)

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“  
I know that forgiveness  
is real, and that it  
applies even to me.  
”

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*The day finally arrived that I knew I had to get out of this situation. I realized my children were going to grow up and likely be abused or abuse others. I was downstairs in my child’s bedroom and dropped to my knees and prayed for the first time in a LONG time. I asked Heavenly Father if this was the course I should take. I asked him for help and to show me the way. Learning about domestic violence and the resources and options available to me from my brother’s friend gave me knowledge and confidence. Since he knew my family and parents, he gave me courage that I could indeed go to my parents and they would love me, help me, and listen.*

*I got the courage to tell my parents the truth and that I wanted out of my abusive marriage. They did not like him—and really never did—but they loved me and trusted me to make good decisions for myself. They knew he was abusive but had no idea to what degree. My brother who died hated him and knew he was bad news! I know he was helping me out of this situation from the other side.*

*One night, I told my husband I was leaving him, and just as he threatened, he went into the closet and retrieved his gun. He pointed it at me and told me he would kill me before he would ever let me leave him and take his children. I put my hand on the gun to stop him, and we scuffled for a minute. Then, he just stopped, put the gun on the bathroom vanity, walked into our kitchen, took all of the car keys, and left.*

*I went downstairs and started crying. I was terrified he was going to come back and kill me and the children. About an hour went by, and I heard knocking on my door and the doorbell ringing. I was scared to go to the door. I thought it was his parents, who were crazy like he was! Then, I heard my angel mother calling my name. It was my mom*

## Overcoming Poverty of Spirit

*and dad. My husband had gone to their house and told them how horrible I was and how everything was my fault. My parents felt my safety was in jeopardy, and as soon as he left, they raced to be with me and protect me.*

*This started the long, drawn-out process of my divorce. We had been together for 12 long years, 10 of them married. My brother's friend gave me advice on what to do in my dangerous situation, leaving a domestic violence abuser with threats of bodily harm and death. Talking with him had been building me and helped me take back control of my life. Taking control and taking steps to get out of the marriage were helping me regain some self-worth. I talked to my parents and confessed everything. They were heartbroken and so sad I was in that situation, at that age, and that I had*

*not come to them. They were so kind and so full of love for me.*

*My current husband and best friend has been amazing. He is so patient and kind, rebuilding me and my self-worth, loving me and never judging me for what I have done. He tells me I am his hero. I love him so very much for helping restore my life and my faith in mankind.*

*I am still sad and full of regret for what I did. If I could go back in time and change what happened, I would. I think, even with forgiveness, I have bad days, which may be a consequence for my choices. But, I do know that the Lord loves me, and I am forgiven. All this, because someone believed in me, and helped me believe in myself. I know that forgiveness is real, and that it applies even to me.*



# vision

Help us realize by 2020 the Centennial Celebration of the 19th Amendment, the unfulfilled vision of Susan B. Anthony, who urged the movement to address the root causes that drive women to abortion.

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[www.feministsforlife.org/support](http://www.feministsforlife.org/support)

# VALERIE: MY ROSE BEYOND THE THORNS

*I found comfort, encouragement, and wisdom in visits with my grandfatherly friend, George. One day as I was about to leave, he reached out, took my hand in his, and looking deeply into my eyes, offered this counsel, “Valerie, in one year, you will receive a rose beyond the thorns, and it will take away your pain. That rose will love you unconditionally, the same as I do.”*

*I was puzzled. The comment came out of nowhere. Roses? Thorns? What was dear George talking about?*

*Those troubling words turned out to be among the last I heard pass George’s lips. Before our next visit, this kind man died. I was saddened and truly missed him, but in the pain of loss, I temporarily forgot George’s confusing statement about thorns and roses.*

*Within three months of losing George, I was accosted and raped by, of all persons, a security guard! The violation left me terribly vulnerable. I trusted no one and experienced unrelenting post-traumatic stress with panic attacks. I was afraid to leave home, and when I did, I was constantly looking over my shoulder for the next attacker. To complicate matters, it soon became apparent I was pregnant!*

*Family and friends, seeing all I was going through, strongly counseled me to have an abortion. I realized their intent was to help, but I believe two wrongs don’t make a right. It took little deliberation to know in my heart I could not abort an innocent baby, no matter how it was conceived.*

*I assumed my resolve not to abort would be respected. To my surprise, my decision was met with anger and resentment. I was subjected to vicious slander, rumor, and abandonment. There was even speculation that I had made up the rape*

*to hide the real cause of my pregnancy. This was an incredibly difficult time in my life—almost as severe as the rape itself. How I missed George! I knew he would have sustained my decision to save the child.*

*Seeking comfort, I went to the one other person I felt I could count on, my great-grandmother. After pouring out my soul regarding the gossip and rejection to which I had been subjected, Grandma placed her arms around me and reassured, “I know you didn’t cause this, dear.” Gesturing toward heaven, she continued, “He knows your heart and that is all that matters. I believe you, and I believe in you.”*

*With the memory of George’s unconditional love, reinforced by my great-grandmother, I found the strength to continue believing in myself. Nine months after the rape, I gave birth to the most beautiful baby girl I ever laid eyes on. I named her Mary, after my great-grandmother.*

*Not long after little Mary’s birth, I held her, gazing into those innocent, wondering eyes. Suddenly, our souls connected, and a kind of knowing passed between us. In that instant, the thorns and roses puzzle fell together: One year had passed since George’s prediction prior to his death. Somehow, he had known what was coming in the next year of my life. First came the thorns, symbolized by the rape and the barbed comments of those who did not understand a higher purpose was coming out of all this. Second, after I endured, came my beautiful little Mary—my rose beyond the thorns!*

*I was satisfied that I had solved the puzzle of George’s last words to me. However, it turned out there were more pieces. You see, I have never told*



*my daughter the circumstances under which she was conceived. When she was 7 years old, she brought me a crayon drawing that included a self-portrait and a rose, beneath which Mary had written: “Rose Beyond the Thorns.”*

*Astonished, I asked, “Why did you write that?”*

*Her exact response, “George told me. I have always known it!”*

*I was stunned. George?*

*I retrieved an old shoebox full of photos and began shuffling through. Soon, a picture of George surfaced. Before I could say a word, Mary pointed with excitement, “That’s him. That’s my George.”*

*How did she know? Mary had been conceived three months after George died. I had never before shown her pictures of him. But obviously she knew him—and shared my love for him! Had she agreed to come to me in this unusual way because George had promised I would not abort her even after a rape?*

*I could never cast away Mary, “my little rose.” She is God’s greatest gift to me.\*\**

I close with the words of C.S. Lewis, with a few additions:

It is a serious thing to remember that any person (your child) you talk to may one day be a creature, which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. There are no ordinary people (children). You have never talked to a mere mortal. Next to God himself, your neighbor (your child) is the holiest object presented to your senses. □

*\*From the forthcoming book by our daughter, Laura Hinze Lofgreen, Stories of Unplanned Pregnancies.*

*\*\*This story and similar stories can be found in my updated version of The Castaways: New Evidence Supporting the Rights of the Unborn Child, by Sarah E. Hinze, Three Orchard Productions, Mesa, Arizona, available on Amazon.*

**Editor’s Note:** *Feminists for Life is nonsectarian, and we welcome all perspectives and know that each person heals differently, including those from various sectarian and spiritual sources.*



**Sarah E. Hinze** is an author, blogger, life coach, and most important, a wife and mother. Sarah has spoken on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and at the United Nations against abortion. She blogs at [www.sarahhinze.com](http://www.sarahhinze.com).

WE REMEMBER

# NAT HENTOFF

JUNE 10, 1925 – JANUARY 7, 2017

By many accounts, Nat Hentoff “should not” have been pro-life. He was, after all, an atheist civil libertarian whose social circle heavily overlapped with the urban crowd who saw his passionate defense of the unborn as quixotic at best and offensive at worst.

Needless to say, we as pro-life feminists had much empathy for his position.

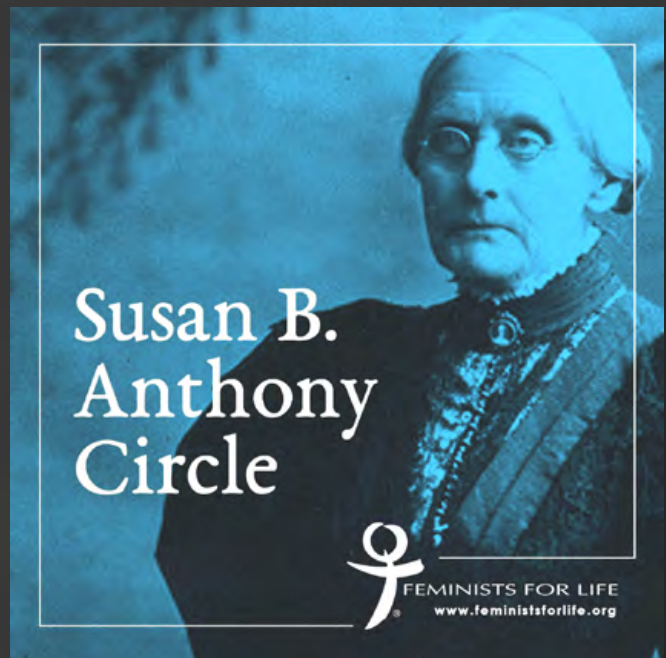
Always eclectic and outspoken, Nat’s original claim to fame was, of all things, jazz criticism. He wrote for *The Village Voice* for more than five decades, departing the publication in 2009 and continuing his music column at *The Wall Street Journal* up until his final days.

In 2004, Nat was the first non-musician to be named a Jazz Master by the National Endowment of the Arts. Nat’s unapologetic advocacy for unborn children earned him the honor of receiving a Great Defender of Life award from the Human Life Foundation in 2005. In 2014, a documentary based on his life was released: *The Pleasures of Being Out of Step: Notes on the Life of Nat Hentoff*.

And being out of step was something Nat absolutely relished.

Nat’s belief that personhood extended to children in the womb was part and parcel of his consistent life ethic philosophy. An ardent opponent of capital punishment, Nat embraced Feminists for Life’s nonsectarian, nonpartisan ethos, repeatedly lavished praise on our work (including you, our “bold, witty, crisply intelligent members”), and noted our willingness to partner with organizations with whom we disagreed on abortion to oppose penalties against women on welfare who had “too many” children. Feminists for Life was proud to feature Nat as a Remarkable Pro-Life Man in the Spring 2001 issue of *The American Feminist*, our “characteristically pungent magazine,” as Nat so aptly put it.

“Nat Hentoff will long be celebrated as a unique voice for the unborn, but he should also be remembered as an advocate of pro-life groups like Feminists for Life when people tried to silence us,” FFL President Serrin Foster said. “We hope that through his writings, he can inform and inspire future generations of journalists who refuse to fit into a ready-made box.”



## \$10,000

Sweeter even than to have had the joy of caring for children of my own has it been for me to help bring about a better state of things for mothers generally, so that their unborn little ones could not be willed away from them.

[Go to FFLgiving.org to donate.](http://FFLgiving.org)

In the wake of so many prominent sudden deaths last year—including the loss of our beloved former Board member and art director Lisa Toscani—it may be tempting to mourn Nat as another wonderful person departed from us far too soon. But this sentiment would undercut the full, rich, long life Nat lived. According to his son, Nick, Nat died surrounded by his family listening to Billie Holiday—the people and passion he held so dear to his heart. Nat’s was truly a life well-lived, in no small part because he dedicated so much of it to the protection of the lives of others.

**Damian J. Geminder**  
Editor

IN MEMORIAM

# LISA TOSCANI

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JULY 10, 1957 – DECEMBER 22, 2016

The woman behind many of the most memorable pro-life images has lost her own life. Former Vice President of Communications for Feminists for Life of America and our art director, Lisa Toscani, succumbed to lung cancer after a years-long struggle.

For two decades, Lisa served as our art director. Her images have converted many to the pro-life side and inspired others to focus on the unmet needs of women. She designed FFL's original College Outreach ads and many iconic covers of *The American Feminist*, even contributing memorable lines about abortion. ("It's our body. It's our choice. Yeah. It's our problem.")

Lisa's art elevated the entire pro-life movement from the mid-1990s. She replaced images of sorrow with the joy of being a Feminist for Life. Her tongue-in-cheek ads about an "Anti-Choice Fanatic" (featuring Susan B. Anthony) and "Just Another Old Biddy for Life" (with Elizabeth Cady Stanton) took people on both sides by surprise and made them think.

Lisa's art gave life to FFL's slogan, "Women Deserve Better than Abortion." The campaign, which began a year in advance of the 30th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, was supported by the USCCB's Pro-Life Secretariat through a grant from the Knights of Columbus and in coalition with dozens of other pro-life groups. "Women Deserve Better than Abortion" soon became a rallying cry that continues to this day.

It was Lisa who first suggested the "Voices of Women Who Mourn" column in FFL's magazine, *The American Feminist*—and another for those women who died from abortion called "We Remember."

Now, we remember Lisa for her numerous efforts to help the most vulnerable.

Her last effort for FFL two years ago was the ad for "Raising Kids on a Shoestring." The project was close to her heart.

Many years earlier, Lisa, who always wanted to be a mother, went to Vietnam and adopted her precious son, Max. Lisa shared a video of him as a little boy running and laughing in the orphanage. Lisa left on the last plane out of Vietnam before adoptions to U.S. citizens were prohibited by the



Lisa Toscani (center) with FFL President Serrin Foster and Rep. Chris Smith, co-chair of the Bi-Partisan Congressional Pro-Life Caucus.

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Vietnamese government. Lisa said, "Max was a miracle on so many levels."

Since Lisa first learned that she had stage 4 lung cancer in June 2014, her determination to beat this daunting diagnosis was unyielding. She had good days and bad days, but her determination was consistent, inspired by her love for her son, Max, who is now 13. Friends and family rallied to fundraise for Max's mom. They also created a huge support group, doing every possible thing for her and Max.

Before Lisa died in her mother and father's home, she told Max that he had a new home and would be raised by his aunt and uncle. As Lisa was leaving this earth, her mother said she raised her arms. One can only imagine what she was seeing.

At Lisa's burial, her son, Max, followed by her parents Nancy and Dom, nine siblings, relatives, and friends laid roses on her coffin. The sun emerged on what had been a gloomy day. We felt a peace beyond understanding. The last to leave her side was Max, who now lives with Lisa's brother and family.

I am heartsick. Since I began at Feminists for Life in 1994, Lisa was there for us every step of the way and for those we serve. One can only imagine how many lives she has touched—and saved. But Lisa will continue to reach people through time immemorial.

At the luncheon that followed her burial, I told her parents that Lisa's work for FFL will be donated as part of our publications and ads to the Schlesinger Library for the Advancement of Women's History at Harvard University. It is the most prestigious archive on women's history in the world, and FFL was the first pro-life group to be invited.

In her memory, let us redouble our efforts for mothers and children so that we all see a day that Lisa envisioned when, "No more children die. No more women cry."

**SERRIN M. FOSTER**  
PRESIDENT

# Estelle Sylvia Pankurst Society

For monthly donors of all giving levels who provide core support to achieve our vision:

“It is grievous indeed that the social collectivity should feel itself obliged to assist in so ugly an expedient as abortion in order to mitigate its crudest evils. The true mission of Society is to provide the conditions, legal, moral, economic, and obstetric, which will assure happy and successful motherhood.”

## Monthly Donors Provide Core Support!

Help FFL help women and children! Your monthly donations provide core support as FFL works to bring about positive, holistic change. To begin your monthly contribution, visit [www.feministsforlife.org/support](http://www.feministsforlife.org/support) or fill out the electronic transfer form below (also downloadable at [www.feministsforlife.org/support](http://www.feministsforlife.org/support)) and send it (along with a voided check) to FFL. 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 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 my bank in writing that I wish to end this agreement and FFLA or my bank has had a reasonable amount of time to act on my request. A record of each charge will be included in my regular bank statements and will serve as my receipt.

AMOUNT OF MONTHLY PLEDGE (\$5 MINIMUM)

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**SEND TO:** Feminists for Life of America  
PO Box 151567, Alexandria, VA 22315

*Electronic fund transfers will begin  
immediately upon receipt.*

**THANK YOU!**

## JOIN FFL NOW!



Like Susan B. Anthony and other early American feminists, today's pro-life feminists envision a better world, where no woman would be driven by desperation to abortion.

If you have been wondering where you fit in, please consider this your invitation to join Feminists for Life. New supporters will receive an FFL Welcome Kit (or Welcome Back!).

Become a member, renew your membership, or give the gift of an FFL membership today! Just \$35 for regular members and \$25 for students.

**[www.FEMINISTSFORLIFE.org/membership](http://www.FEMINISTSFORLIFE.org/membership)**

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FEMINISTS FOR LIFE  
OF AMERICA

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