

July 13, 1997

Thoughts from the mother of a child who was not given the chance to be born.

It's been a long time, but, for some reason I must write this to share some things on my heart. I am eager to see how God uses it for His glory though I don't really understand why I must write this now.

A child was conceived June 27 1976. I remember the night as if it were last night. Gene and I had been married 21 months. My Gynecologist had taken me off the "Pill" in January because I had been on them four years without a break. I truly thought I would not get pregnant. I mean, I had never before!

That night was filled with passion and love. I, with tears, begged Gene not to move away from me. I wanted to feel him close -- to feel his burning passion all around me. Later, as I lay with my head on his shoulder, in the quietness and the dark -- I 'knew' I had conceived.

Around 1 o'clock that same night, we received a call that a dear family friend, Mr. P., had finally lost his battle with cancer. When Gene told me, I thought, "One death -- one new life; one goes out, in comes another!"

By mid July I was beginning to *suspect* that I was 'pregnant' - but still, I would not allow myself to think on it. I 'knew' Gene would not be happy with the news. I was afraid he would leave me, that he would reject me if I remained pregnant. So it was best just to deny and not think about it.

By the end of July my body had begun to change. Sometimes I would think about my baby. I would think about watching my flat belly grow bigger. I had always thought I would like being pregnant; it was the end result that frightened me. "No, don't think of that -- it's too scary. To be pregnant and give birth meant I would lose Gene." I had so many fears, too much uncertainty and too many doubts. No! I told myself -- I simply couldn't be pregnant. Gene does not want children, I said I didn't want children either, but now I am afraid that I will lose something very precious. Yet, also afraid that I No, I simply cannot be pregnant was my denial.

I do not know just when but I began to plan some way for my child to be born. I thought I could go away, give birth and let someone else parent my child. No, I was too afraid to do that! For some reason I did not want your paternal grandparents to know about my being pregnant. I never even thought about telling my mother -- why tell her! What could -- could she do, she had her own problems?

I thought about friends from another state They had adopted one child; maybe they would want my baby. I could go live with them once I started showing and then place my baby into their arms, then go back to Gene. No, how would I explain my husband not wanting our baby?

I had already been divorced once and could not handle the shame of another divorce, especially under the circumstance in which we married. We were married three weeks after we met. We became sexually involved on our second date, two nights after we met. I told him about my previous marriage. His only concern seemed to be if I had children by my first husband. We were married September 6, 1974.

I had no money, no place to go, no one to whom I could turn. Who would understand?
There was no one!

Then, in mid-August, I went to see Dr. Heinley for a problem with my foot. He wanted to x-ray and questioned my chances of being pregnant. I told him there was a good chance I was. He offered a pregnancy test, something my Gynecologist would not do a month before even though he did an internal and I told him I thought I was pregnant -- he said I wasn't. For some reason I was too afraid of him to tell him what I knew to be true or to express my concerns. He did not even take the time to find out -- he did not care about me!

A few hours later, Dr. Heinley telephoned me at home to tell me the pregnancy test was positive. "NOOOO!" I cried. "What can I do, can you take care of it?" I asked him. "No," he calmly said, offering a phone number of someone who would. "They will take good care of you" he assured me.

I telephoned Gene at work. By then I was hysterical, crying, panting, screaming, "I can't be pregnant!" "I'm pregnant!" I said to him when he answered the phone. "What am I going to do?" I asked, but not expecting an answer. I don't remember much else, except I must have told him about the phone number.

Later, when Gene came home from work, I told him I had an appointment at a certain time and day and we needed \$250 cash. It was very important that we bring cash. I still cannot remember the conversation we must have had. Maybe the appointment was on Tuesday; we only had about 4 days between knowing I was pregnant and having that pregnancy 'terminated'. I know it was in the month of August, but I do not remember much else about the weekend or what Gene said. It took me until 1992 to remember the year. Funny thing how our memory works (and does not work).

Many years later, Gene shared with me that he had been concerned about the safety and what 'it' would do to me. He says I assured him 'it' was perfectly safe and not to worry. I remember telling him he had to be with me for the whole thing. He said I told him I did not want him with me at all.

He took the day off to drive me. Somewhere in Cleveland. He waited for most of the morning. I told the 'counselor' to go "get him, I want him with me, he started this, he is going to see it end." I as told he had stepped out. I have had to forgive him for that; forgive him for not being there when I needed him. Forgive him for not protecting me and the baby we had together conceived.

When they told me it was over, I wanted to ask, "What sex?" but I couldn't. I couldn't admit that I had allowed my baby to be killed, I couldn't . . .

After I was released I saw Gene in the hallway, I felt hatred toward him. Oh, how I hated him. Despite my anger and hatred, I kept quiet; I had a marriage and image to protect. Total silence during the elevator ride, the drive in the car, stopping at Sharon's, playing with our 8 month-old nephew Jason. I looked at Sharon and thought "if you only knew what we just did you wouldn't let me play with your baby. I'm a baby killer! Do you know that?"

I put all those memories, sights, sounds, thoughts, smells, out of my mind, sometimes using Vodka or Scotch to wash them away. Regardless of how much I drank, the

memories seemed to always invade my thoughts. Then I just made myself forget. Later I learned that was obliteration denial -- "a conscious attempt to erase all memory of the pregnancy and abortion." For years this way was successful, except, for the fact that 'anything suppressed and not addressed will eventually be expressed.'

This death experience was expressed; in angry outburst, failing health, hatred, distrust, vengefulness, and unforgiveness; mostly directed toward Gene, but also to everyone in general.

I used base vocabulary in order to shock and keep people at a distance. I didn't trust anyone to come close -- I was afraid they would learn my secret. I am rather ashamed of those years, really. How was I to know my having a part in the death of my unborn would have such a negative impact? Gene did not seem to be bothered. Amazingly, he never left me; why did I ever fear him leaving me? Even when I told him I have been unfaithful to him; something I swore to him I would never do. I thought for sure he would throw me out, as I deserved. He didn't! I hated him and wanted him to hate me. How could he love me after what I did? (I never said what I "did," it hurt too much to say the word 'abortion'. To think about "it."

Three times I told friends, receiving different reactions. I learned it hurt for others to know, so I didn't say anything to anyone again until 1991 --15 years of silence. At church one Sunday night John Fino was bold enough to show a plastic fetal model and explain, "this is what dies in an abortion." I 'knew' that, but I did not want to 'know' I had killed my baby in choosing abortion. I felt guilt, shame, remorse, anger -- something I had tried so long to hide was hitting me in the face making me look and admit and take ownership. It was so painful. My answer: do something to make restitution. So I began the training process to be a Crisis Pregnancy volunteer.

A short time later I met Nancy, she took me through the Victims Of Choice post-abortion Therapy Model program. It hurt to face what I had done to my unborn child, to me, to my husband, but most of all, to come face to face with my sin against God. I cried bitter tears. Thank God, tears have a cleansing and healing affect when cried in repentance. God, in his perfect mercy and grace, bent down and wrapped His loving arms around my cold and bitter heart and began the process of replacing it with a heart of His design. A heart that knows and feels pain and happiness, love and forgiveness. He took what was dead and breathed new life into. . . ME! It wasn't until I read *Tilly* by Frank Piretti that I mourned what I had done to my unborn baby, for losing a child I had identified as being mine while in my womb -- even if for only a short time.

In 1994 I became the director of Victims Of Choice, an abortion recovery ministry. I have spoken to more than 2,000 people face-to-face about my abortion. I've been on radio and TV telling anyone who listened that abortion hurts and leaves two victims. One dead the other wounded! Now I am in the business of healing. God is using this broken, mended vessel for His glory. Praise the Lord for His goodness and grace.

I learned about the National Memorial for the Unborn in Chattanooga, Tennessee through an article about people purchasing the building that once housed the only abortion facility in Chattanooga. I could not wait to complete the order form and get it into the mail. Since I am living near Chicago, I knew I would not be able to see the Memorial any time soon, but wanted my baby to be remembered by having a plaque on the Wall of Names. I wrote

"Baby Verchio, September 1976, If We Had Known-Why Didn't Someone Tell Us!" I did not know I would receive a duplicate plaque, the day it arrived in the mail I was pleased, but, felt emotions I did not expect. Had I not grieved for my baby? Had I not accepted the forgiveness God gives to those who repent? Yes, Yes and million times yes. The plaque in my hand gave a tangible realness to what, or rather, whom I had lost that I had not experienced before. Then, I realized I had the month wrong. The tiny, seven-week old unborn baby, died in August; I know for sure now.

July 1996 I was able to visit the Memorial and touched the plaque that told others of my baby's existence. My emotions were... well I just don't have the words. Linda was so tender and sweet as she told me about the dedication day and all the events.

These last 6 years have brought many blessings. Last fall, when the Memorial of Mourning in SS Peter and Paul Cemetery, Naperville was dedicated I gave my unborn child humanity by giving 'him' a name. Tears came to Gene's eyes and rolled down his face as I spoke that day. 'Brandon Anthony' I told them. I chose Brandon, Gene chose Anthony. Later that day, Gene told me he was beginning to understand, a little bit, the pain I have gone through because of our choosing abortion.

I frequently go the Memorial of Mourning. Sometimes I think about my child that was not, sometimes my attention is drawn to the flowers and small gifts left by mothers and fathers in memory of their children. I started this letter sitting on the bench at the Memorial. It feels good to sit here and write. The morning sun sparkling through the giant maple trees, standing guard. I don't understand why I had to write this, I know my God knows why. I will be content with that.

I ordered a new plaque from the National Memorial for the Unborn today. The new plaque reads: "Brandon Anthony Verchio, August 1976, Changed Forever, Philippians 1:6". Yes, I have been changed forever because of a short 7-week pregnancy. I am changed because of the abortion that ended the new life within me; because of the 15+ years I lived in denial and the last 6 years of healing. Philippians 1:6 is my life verse "He [God] Who has begun a good work in me will be faithful to continue that work until I see Jesus face to face, then there will not be so much left to change to make me as He is," is my paraphrase.

When I turned 40 four years ago, I mourned the fact that I would never have the honor of being the bridegroom's mother because of my "choice" of abortion. I mourned missing out on the honor of being a mother, proud of her son taking his bride. Probably, one day, I will mourn never being a grandmother. You see this one baby was the only one to inhabit my womb. Tears well up in my eyes and my throat is tight as I write this. I think "if only...." but I do not live there. The past is past, today is a new day. There is no value in fantasizing on "what might have been". I live for today and anticipate the future to what God is doing; working His work of completion, redemption, restoration, healing, reconciliation and forgiveness, in me.

My God is good, He is good all the time! I do not know His ways and don't understand a lot of things, but this I know: I have been forgiven and am set free from the guilt and shame of having abortion in my past. I have grieved all the things that I identified as having lost. I am sure there are other things to be grieved, now, I have the tools I need to grieve in a healthy way. My God is faithful and just and merciful and full of grace. He

will do what is right and good! God has blessed me with this wonderful ministry that gives me the opportunity to be part of His miracles as He works His mighty works in the lives of women who, like myself, chose abortion instead of life.

Thank you for reading my ramblings. There seems to be no more words . . .

Looking forward to the soon return of My Lord and Savior,

Elizabeth Verchio