

Our Choices, Our Lives

Unapologetic Writings on Abortion

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Writers Advantage

San Jose New York Lincoln Shanghai

OPTING OUT OF THE ABORTION WAR: FROM THE BIRMINGHAM BOMBING TO SEPTEMBER 11TH

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Author's Note: I wrote this piece in January 1998, right after the Birmingham clinic was bombed, killing a security guard and severely wounding a nurse. I was horrified by the assault and angry at the response of the media, anti-abortion activists, and even some of our pro-choice allies. I felt that the providers were taking the hits and yet the whole "war" scenario seemed to be working for everyone but providers. Even though I was trying to become less warlike, the piece still has an angry, confrontational feel to it, even after some edits. I decided to let it stand with only a few updates, and to write a postscript, to reflect what has happened to me "postwar." An additional note on "Lessons Learned from Terrorism" ends this account of my journey as an abortion provider.

1998

The television cameras pan the burned-out clinic, move in for a close-up of the ambulance, the shrouded body, the police looking grim, the clinic people comforting each other. The coverage of the 1998 Birmingham bombing of an abortion clinic is disturbingly familiar. "The latest casualty in the abortion war," intones a commentator, and then a representative of each side gets interviewed, "Grief, outrage, blah, blah, blah," and "We're not responsible, but abortion is violence, blah, blah, blah." We all know the drill.

In the pro-choice movement we have been lulled into accepting the idea that clinics are on the front lines of a war. Certainly it feels that way:

PART III

ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE: RELIGIOUS
AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS SPEAK OUT

seven deaths, seventeen attempted murders, 206 acts of bombing or arson, 82 attempted bombings or arsons, 352 death threats, 682 blockades, 654 anthrax threats, 12,575 other acts of harassment, stalking, vandalism, etc.¹² Danger—from a piece of mail, a suspicious-looking person, and even a flower box as in the Birmingham bombing, is always possible. Vigilance is second nature to us; paranoia, a frequent companion.

But let's take a look at the metaphor and the reality of the Abortion War. There are "holy wars" elsewhere in the modern world. Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. One side bombs a cafe, the other side kills someone in jail. A few mortar rounds destroy a temple, a few women get raped. Seventeen killed, a preemptive strike wipes out a pocket of enemy soldiers. That's war as we know it today.

So, what are the casualties—murders and attempted murders, on the anti-abortion side? *Zero*. How many crisis pregnancy centers have been bombed? *None*. How many blockades, stalkings, incidents of vandalism of right-to-life organizations? *Zip*. Even the number of "pranks" and harassment perpetuated against the anti's is infinitesimal in comparison.

Either the pro-choice side of the war is extraordinarily inept or this isn't a war. The sheer numbers tell a story of real violence and menacing behavior against abortion clinics and the people who work in them. This is clearly one-sided violence, or to name it—terrorism. You would think that there would be an outpouring of compassion and support for such embattled people, but I believe the American people cannot distinguish the victims from the combatants in the Abortion War. It's like the uninformed American perception of the Rwandan conflict: we don't see any difference between the Hutus and the Tutsis. They both seem awful and we don't care all that much if they continue to kill each other. It's a remote conflict between sworn enemies, whose positions we cannot begin to fathom.

If the American people can't get a good grasp of the issue and they want to tune out the Abortion War, they will see both sides as warlike. Hence, the expression, "extremists on both sides," which is nonsensical. This

would explain the massive indifference to the very real casualties of this terrorist campaign: abortion providers. In the case of abortion, it's an unintelligible war for a lot of people, and it plays out along very simplistic notions about "innocent babies" and women having the freedom to have sex.

The polls are telling us that people see the anti-abortion activists as holding a deeply moral position which inspires them to extreme actions. They see pro-choice people as less extreme but also less moral. I would argue that when the pro-choice movement uses belligerent bravado, we weaken our case to an ambivalent American people. Yet, the pro-choice side persists in using war imagery; war rhetoric is rampant on both sides. Our language is completely battle-bound.

So, we must ask, who is perpetuating this war imagery? Who benefits from it?

Anti-Abortion Movement Embraces Violence

Well, first and foremost, the anti-abortion activists perpetuate and benefit from the War. In 1987 Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue wrote, "If you believe abortion is murder, act like it's murder." He, and Joe Scheidler, Keith Tucci, John Burt, and others transformed the meek, passive presence of older, largely Catholic women into a dynamic mobilization of angry men (and some women) eager to put their zeal into action. Their inflammatory and violent rhetoric was a clarion call to every violence-prone fanatic in the country.

The blockade era of the anti-abortion campaign led by Operation Rescue, for all its talk of "passive resistance" and "a peaceful presence" was, in reality, pretty rough. There was a lot of pushing and shoving and demonizing and deliberate risk-taking. Remember this? Clinics blockaded by a dozen or more protesters held "captive" by kryptonite locks and concrete blocks welded to cars—with full gas tanks. In town after town, the "Victim Lambs of Christ," led by Father Norman Weslin, created may-

hem designed to make themselves look like victims, and the clinics, their protectors, and the police, look like the Gestapo.

But this phase of the movement created the righteous martyrdom necessary to escalate the terrorism. After being dragged across the pavement a few times, the activists got over the idea that breaking the law was a bad thing ("Higher Laws" and all that). They began to really see themselves as "victims," like the "innocent babies they were rescuing." (The Army of God manual is filled with such identity confusion: "We are just doing what the babies would do if they could protect themselves.") The anti-choice movement glorifies its martyrs and their sacrifices, and uses every rhetorical trick to justify escalating the risk, danger, and violence.

This new, emerging profile of an anti-abortion activist attracted violent, muddle-headed misfits who wanted to commit an act of "heroism" for a good cause. Michael Griffin, John Salvi, Paul Hill (all murderers of abortion providers) have made the news, but let's not forget Daniel Ware, picked up on his way to a memorial for Dr. David Gunn with a cache of guns. Or Michael Bray, convicted of conspiracy in a series of five or six bombings. Or Shelly Shannon, in jail for arsons and the attempted murder of Dr. George Tiller. Or Marjorie Reed, who was convicted of arson and spent some time behind bars. Or Eric Robert Rudolph, the missing suspect in the Birmingham bombing and the subject of a massive manhunt, now presumed dead.

The anti-abortion movement has done almost nothing to put the brakes on this violence. In fact, some are out-and-out gleeful, and call for more murders and bombings and busily researching good targets. Rev. David Troesch and fellow signers of the "Defensive Action" statement, put forward the "justifiable homicide" thesis on talk shows, and other venues including the Internet. "The Nuremburg Files," as well as other internet sites give names and identifying information for many who work at clinics or who are pro-choice. "Wanted posters" were widely circulated for Dr. David Gunn and Dr. Bayard Britton, both shot down by anti-abortion activists.

The violence has not tarnished the legislative and political successes of anti-abortion people, regardless of their willingness to be personally violent. Why is that? The Catholic Church has notably been silent in any attempt to de-escalate the violence. Anti-abortion Republicans have made no attempt to look into the campaign of terror that taints their cause. In fact, Ronald Reagan tacitly condoned the violence when it first erupted and right wing violence has escalated ever since.

In the absence of convincing denunciations of violence we can only assume that the anti-abortion spokespeople are like the Sinn Fein to the Irish Republican Army—different wings with exactly the same agenda and values. Certainly the rhetoric of the anti-abortion movement, from Senator to assassin, justifies the use of violence against abortion providers.

The Media Sets the Message

Who's next in line of the beneficiaries of war? In dollar sales alone, I think we would have to give this one to the media industry. Violence and sex are the mainstays of commercial journalism and the media is insatiable. A war right under their noses, especially one with undercurrents of sex and secrecy (i.e. abortion) is a boon to journalists. But even a good story is good only once. The anti's quickly grasped the necessity to escalate if they wanted to keep in the public eye. In the Birmingham bombing, the media pounced on this line: "There have been many bombings of abortion clinics, but this is the first fatality in an abortion clinic bombing." This statement normalizes clinic bombings and in a perverse way, encourages the escalation to murder with its attention. When Dr. Barnett Slepian was shot, it was billed as the "first abortion provider to be killed in his home." What will it take next to be the "big story?"

The nature of news today is that it is conflict driven and any other message is simply not heard. Any crossover of message is so confusing to the format that it is not tolerated. Unless, of course, there is a defector like Norma McCorvey, the original plaintiff in *Roe v. Wade*, now in the arms

of the anti's. But then, there's another conflict and the media sells the war one more time.

Is Pro-Choice Pro-Provider?

There's another, on the face of it, unlikely beneficiary of the Abortion War, and that's the national pro-choice organizations. Groups like NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League), Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and the Fund for the Feminist Majority are reliable counterbalances to the anti-abortion side and are professionally always available to comment for the pro-choice side. Within three hours of the bombing in Birmingham, Kate Michelman of NARAL had organized a press conference. Pro-choice organizations recognize all too well that the Abortion War is a great fund-raiser.

When the anti-abortion "troops" were at their most active in the late eighties, clinics suffered mightily. Patients chose clinics based on the picketer quotient. Leases were lost, vendors refused to come to clinics, and vandalism was at an all time high. Clinics under siege for long periods of time in Atlanta, Buffalo, and Wichita, for instance, took big economic hits. Pro-choice supporters opened their pocketbooks to all those who sent out an appeal about clinic violence. However, until fairly recently, when the Fund for the Feminist Majority made clinic assistance a priority, very few pro-choice resources translated into help for the clinics.

This is not merely sour grapes about money. While the anti-abortion activists targeted what they saw as the "weakest link"—the doctors—the pro-choice movement was still doing a rear guard action on restrictive legislation. But without providers, the possibility of choice for many American women was shrinking. From a strategy point of view, the pro-choice movement was locked into a rights-based strategy, ignoring the emotional appeal of the anti-abortion rhetoric. The bridge to a more effective message is real women's stories, a fact that providers have known all along. But many providers have been alienated from the pro-choice strat-

egy, getting neither help with increased danger, nor interest in a different message.

With such high stakes it also becomes important to try to control the pro-choice response. During the blockade phase of the anti-abortion war, clinics were told to tell the media, "All scheduled patients were seen; no one was turned away" when that was clearly not the case. Clinics suffered terribly, many of them losing leases, patients, and going out of business. For clinics where the anti-abortion effort was prolonged, like Atlanta or Buffalo, the economic fallout was severe. But, the fund-raising biz was booming, and if the clinics suffered, no one knew it.

The pro-choice movement has made an investment in the Abortion War. This is not just a fund-raising tactic. Keeping up with the rhetoric of war affects legislative strategy, public policy debates, and most importantly, the public perception of how it is possible to think about abortion. The action/reaction stance of abortion rights activists narrowly defines acceptable cultural messages about abortion. Consequently, a rich contextual picture of the abortion experience is not available to us, or to women seeking abortion services. Women, and their partners and families, are still struggling with ill-fitting images of abortion as illegal, dangerous, and shameful. They have no cultural expression for feeling sad, disappointed, or for trying to do the right thing, much less for feeling empowered.

Abortion providers have taken the brunt of terrorism and have also been locked into keeping up with the war rhetoric. To change this is nearly impossible, even if you feel, as I do, that the strategy dooms us to more and more violence. In retrospect, providers have to acknowledge that we were willing participants in this collective bullet-biting. As providers under siege we hid our pain, like the child beaten up by the class bully. We didn't want "to give them anything," afraid that if we blinked in the stand-off we would lose our grip on legal abortion. But, more than a decade later, we still have a stiff upper lip and there are fewer of us. Legal abortion is no more or less secure, but we are definitely less secure. It's time to look at this turn-the-other-cheek strategy.

Abortion Providers: Are We Participating in Our Own Victimization?

My own group (providers) naturally concerns me the most. What do abortion providers have to gain by participating in a war where we are sitting ducks? As a group, our folks probably have more than our share of compulsive "helpers," risk-takers, and political warriors. You could also say that the mantel of martyrdom might fit some of us. This protracted struggle, peppered with danger and violence, certainly is satisfying to those personality types.

But more than anything, our rhetorical resistance to the terrorism directed against us protects us from feeling like victims. Angry words, militant posturing, and *de rigueur* battlefield bravery obscure the fact that we are powerless and largely defenseless against unseen terrorists. And let's face it: no one wants to be a victim. But if you are one, the next best thing is to put a brave face on it. So when the clinic in Birmingham displays signs that defiantly proclaim "this clinic stays open" and the owner reports that all staff came back to work, we have to consciously remember the cost of this courage.

When providers and clinic workers are viewed as superheroes we are not seen as human, and the public is once again encouraged to distance themselves from us. Our courage, however noble, does not speak to our good work, to *our* moral belief in what is at stake. Our brave but belligerent words do not articulate our dedication to giving women control of the choices in their lives. Our willingness to risk being targets shields the essential fact that women are the moral agents, making choices to better their lives. Besides, is it logical to have such an important right rest on someone's bravery?

Most providers feel that they do good, honorable, and valuable work. Years of vilification and silencing by the pro-choice movement, and living in fear of violence has left providers on the defensive. But, there are signs of change.

Some providers feel that acknowledging fear and vulnerability allows them to be open enough to continue to do their work. Some providers have found that the same strategies used in facing down screaming protesters have not served patients very well and they have switched gears. Personally, I have made a decision to disengage with the protesters as much as possible so that I can engage with my patients. Deborah Walsh (Charlotte, NC), who once carried patients on her back over a human barricade of anti's, reports that the Birmingham bombing tempted her "warrior side." "But I keep telling myself," she says, "my love is greater than their hate."¹³

"I'm tired of being on the defensive," says Renee Chelian, a Detroit provider. "We fought our battles, yet through it all we have been able to create an environment that allows women to see the changes they go through as normal and positive."¹⁴

Normalizing abortion is the anti's worst nightmare, and according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, it is already happening. Forty-three percent of North American women will have an abortion by age 45.¹⁵ Given that the Abortion War is not succeeding in real terms of stopping abortion, the strategy has become one of terrorizing providers and shaming women about their choice. While standing up for "unborn life," the anti's have condoned all kinds of violence, destruction, and murder. Their movement has never been on shakier moral ground.

It is time for providers, and pro-choice allies, to stand firmly on the high moral ground where millions of women make good choices for their lives. As providers, we know how our patients struggle to come to their decisions. As pro-choice people, we must not turn our backs on women's wisdom. The reality of our caring service must not be obscured by war whoops and undifferentiated antagonists in the Abortion War. We must resign our commissions as combatants and focus on our work. Listening to our patients, serving their needs, and providing good, sensitive medical care will, ultimately, be our best shield against violence.

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We must shun the stigma of illegal abortion, speak out on our own behalf, and step off the battleground of the Abortion War. Let the public see us accurately—as victims of terrorism, but also as moral people dedicated to their work. Let us show the full picture of what we feel, not just the bravery, but the fear and grief. Let us allow ourselves to be human in the midst of a guerrilla campaign against us.

When we step off the battleground, the real combatants will be left: extremists and terrorists filled with hate and violence. They will not be seen as holy warriors defending the unborn if we do not respond with a rhetoric of belligerence, hate, and ridicule for those who are uncomfortable with abortion.

Where Are the Women?

When the smoke has cleared from the battlefield everyone can see what has been hidden: the women. The anti-abortion camp will have to face the fact that women, even their own women, have the power and the responsibility to say “yes” or “no” to life. And, no matter what the anti’s do, women have continued to make those decisions in great numbers. The pro-choice side will have to admit their ambivalence about the reality of abortion. They will have to forego clean sound bites for the sometimes messy reality of women’s sadness, repeat abortions, late abortions, the fallibility of birth control, and the “irresponsibility” of women as contraceptive users. Perhaps in looking at the diversity of women’s choices, there can be the kind of peace that truth often brings. Might it be too much to imagine that the acceptance of many versions of morality will undermine the support that the radical Right fringe enjoys?

Regardless, I don’t want to be part of this war any longer. I want to connect with the women that I see in full empathy for the complexity of their choices. And if some nut wants to take me out, I can’t stop that. But no longer will I encourage the war by pretending I am “fighting” for “my side.” My side is by the women who are making choices for their lives. The

anti-abortion terrorists, and their more respectable supporters, will not be able to use me to justify their existence.

I don't fully know what the "battleground" will look like if we step off it. I don't pretend to be a pacifist who turns the other cheek, or who invites violence in civil disobedience. I have had my share of showdowns with Randy Terry and Joe Scheidler. I know I am an unlikely messenger of peace.

Yet, I am frustrated with the media that speaks of "extremists on both sides," with the anti's whose escalating violence goes on unrepentant, and with those "friends" who are invested in this war. And ultimately, also with the American public, fully half of whom have been touched by an experience of abortion, and who seem not to care.

I know, in my heart, that we are helping women who have made their own decisions. I trust them with their lives. My work is honorable and I want that truth to be seen. And, I am finding that I cannot speak this truth with warlike words and actions. But I am hopeful that our truths *will* reveal the reality obscured by the "War." And when it does, I want to be the one with an open heart, not the one with a gun.

1999-2000

PostScript: "It Isn't About Abortion!"

In the year and a half since writing this, I have taken some personal steps off the Abortion Battleground and have encouraged some of my colleagues to do the same. It hasn't been easy deconstructing a cultural phenomenon while still in it. Reporters investigating the War do not want to hear about a paradigm shift. Pro-choice activists, tired themselves, resent an "opting out" strategy and see their efforts as more likely to fail without a show of unity. Clinic workers, some of whom are beleaguered by violence, feel unsupported.

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remains, my day-to-day worry about it is fading. But the biggest change of all is how I conceive of my work of providing abortions to women. It started with a fundamental shift about how women see abortion—they don't! "I never thought I would be here" is the most frequent refrain from most women considering abortion. It was a shock to me to understand that *it isn't about abortion*. When I was able to refocus, it became clear that the key question is: "Is this the right time for me to bring life into the world, through my body?" In answering this question, the real picture of people's lives emerges in rich detail with recurring themes: the necessary limits of material resources as well as emotional resilience, the uncertainty of relationships in the modern era, the huge responsibility of parenthood (frequently *single* parenthood), the struggle to respond to an unexpected pregnancy ethically, and above all, the nearly complete misunderstanding of the abortion experience and pregnancy decision-making by our culture.

Once in a while a woman seeking abortion reports her hyperawareness of the negative images of abortion on television, in print, and in the small talk of her associates. There are almost no cultural messages that resonate with her reality. Women and men involved in an abortion experience need to feel that the complex issues they work through are seen as important, moral, complex by the larger community.

Providers realize that many women are unsupported not only by loved ones but also by the culture. In this hostile climate filled with misinformation, hateful name-calling, and desperate bids for secrecy, many women have no idea how to go about deciding about a pregnancy. To fill this void, I, with colleagues in many fields, wrote "Pregnant? Need help? Pregnancy Options Workbook," a guide that frames the decision around being responsible for life.¹⁶ It offers information, discussion, exercises on basic decision-making skills, an even-handed look at all three options, and some cross-cultural perspectives on pregnancy loss and abortion, as well as a discussion of fetal development and basic reproductive health. After battling "the anti's" all these years, it came as a revelation to me that abortion politics is only a peripheral annoyance to women who are trying to decide

what's best for their lives. But only after getting "unbound" from the battle could I find a way to write something useful for people facing this decision.

I now believe that the answer lies not in the struggle to protect abortion rights but in the challenge to create an abortion experience that addresses the complexity, diversity, and sometimes difficulty of an abortion decision with love, kindness, and respect. Providers are in a unique position, if they can see it, to respond to women and their families in a new way. They can listen to women and men about what this decision means to them, and reflect back to them the responsibility and the morality of their position. They can acknowledge the harder emotions of loss and shame and guilt while empowering women to embrace the future that abortion gives them. What could be more gratifying?

Changing the conversation about abortion one person at a time is rewarding, but it is also slow work. Capturing this paradigm shift in the *Pregnancy Options Workbook* has extended some of this understanding to women all over the U.S. and Canada. My colleagues and I are also trying to influence the training of abortion counselors and other staff so that more women can find a dreaded abortion experience to be transformational and validating.

As heartening as this is, we have yet to make even a blip on the media consciousness of the nation. We need help. We need the understanding of pro-choice people to create a momentum for a way out of the Abortion War. Here are some random suggestions I can offer:

Acknowledge the ickies. Supporters of full reproductive choice do not have the privilege of sitting down every day with women who are making a decision about pregnancy the way abortion providers and family planning workers do. But they can get in touch with their own experience and their own feelings about it. Acknowledging a full range of feelings, including the hard parts (or the "ickies," as one provider friend calls them). These might include repeat abortions, "late" abortions as defined by each person, or sex selection abortions, among other tricky topics. Exploring,

and ultimately embracing our own ambivalence, will deepen our commitment to choice, not weaken it. Acknowledging differences makes us truly understand what individual choice is all about.

Break through the silence. Another strategy for pro-choice people is to talk about abortion compassionately at home, at work, at school, and with your friends. Identify yourself as someone who understands the complexities of the situation a woman faces and still comes down on the side of the woman who must choose what is right for her life. Break through the denial about this issue (“I thought it would never happen to me.”). Make some room for the people around you to feel better about their decisions and about themselves. Challenge the image of guilt and shame, and affirm the morality of being responsible for life, whether “unborn” or full grown.

Support Abortion Funds. Pro-choice activists might also ally themselves with women directly by supporting abortion funds for women who cannot afford abortions or access to them. (Only fifteen states, as of this writing, pay for abortions through Medicaid and many have costly barriers such as parental notice, judicial bypass for minors, and twenty-four-hour waiting periods for women, requiring two visits.) In many places women must travel far to get an abortion incurring transportation costs, childcare expense, and lost work for themselves and the person who came with them. Despite the obvious need, abortion funds are the last to receive pro-choice dollars.¹⁷

De-gender abortion. Let’s de-gender abortion, and parenthood too. Men have typically been shut out of the decision and the experience and the politics. But in real life they are part of the equation and pretending otherwise only reduces the number of people who will stand up for women. And it participates in the myth that men don’t have a role to play in being responsible for life.

Lose the war rhetoric. Finally, are there ways to de-escalate the Abortion War in our own lives? What rhetoric are we using? Are we belittling people who disagree with us? Are we making it harder for well-meaning “pro-life” people when they face a difficult decision about a

pregnancy? Can we afford to be less hateful to the other side? If not, what is the payoff for our own entrenched attitude?

Create a DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). How is change possible? We have yet to make a dent in mainstream culture. But a “sea change” happens when a critical mass of people change how they think and act. Like the bumper sticker says: When the people lead, the leaders will follow. We can have an impact on the culture because we are part of it. A pregnancy decision or an abortion experience could happen to someone close to any one of us, and we can make a difference for that person. Any one of us can carve out a small DMZ from the war, and in so doing change the experience.¹⁸

The Abortion War is perpetuated every day. Women have yet to see their reality reflected in the culture. The American people are still tuning out the abortion issue and turning their backs on what they see as inauthenticity on both sides. I still believe that a change is possible on this issue, but until the *New York Times* notices, I’ll be listening, talking, and loving a change into existence. I hope you’ll be doing the same.

2001-2002

Living With Terrorism, Some Lessons Learned

The terrorism of September 11th, 2001 has shocked the nation deeply. In the months following, as most people were struggling to adjust, most providers I know were saying, “Hey, this feels familiar!” Of course, most Americans thought that this was our first brush with terrorism, forgetting all the Black churches burned, the gay folks beaten, the abortion clinics terrorized. The incredibly diabolical boldness was what got to me; that sociopathic quality is what I associate with terrorists, whether they are home-grown or imported. Their actions are about power, not about cause, or belief, or religion, or even economics.

Sociopaths are attracted to divisive conflicts *because* there is room for terrorist activity; people who are otherwise passionate about something do not usually take the next step to terrorism, even if they support someone

else who embraces violence. Every terrorist draws energy from a conflict and from that side of the conflict that most encourages violence. It is this social context that yields the most promise for action, the most hope for peace.

It's what I call the "ants at the picnic" phenomena. In the abortion context, when our patients are using the same words as our enemies we cannot help but notice that we have left "crumbs" that we need to clean up, so as not to "feed" the conflict. Post-abortion grief, fetal development information, fetal tissue disposal, and the religious/spiritual needs of our patients are some examples of our crumbs that keep the ants fed. Where would the anti-abortion folks be if every woman plumbed the depths of her soul, with the support of partner, family, and community, to arrive at a place of unshakable resolution and peace? What if every woman knew the facts about how far along her pregnancy was and what that meant, had her spiritual and religious needs addressed, and understood how to best care for herself emotionally after a pregnancy decision?

Both "our" terrorists and the Al Qaeda terrorists have the support and tacit (or even explicit) support of ordinary people. Let's look at the context that supports such hideous violence. Osama Bin Laden, or whatever groups are behind the terrorism, obviously enjoy(s) a great deal of support from the people. Why is that? What is feeding this conflict? And why don't Americans know anything about what goes on in the world?

We would be wrong to hear only the war whoops and miss the cries of injustice. While we work every day to amass wealth we cannot forget that the poorest among us in this country are better off than most of the people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and any number of countries rife with terrorism. The wealthiest of Americans are richer than many whole nations. That most Americans are completely unaware of this disparity surely is feeding this conflict.

America's cultural obsession with "becoming a millionaire" does not cause a terrorist to pilot a jetliner into the World Trade Center. But our ignorance of the world's problems does give energy and righteousness to

those who hate us and makes terrorism possible. When we refuse to notice world hunger, when we cavalierly cut off family planning dollars, when we tolerate mass slaughter in various parts of the globe, we leave crumbs for the terrorist ants to feed on and in the process, make ourselves righteous targets.

We are now in the middle of a war to root out terrorism. If we do not also address the context that feeds terrorism we will be at war forever. Just as with the Abortion War, if we truly want peace we must get past the war imagery and pay attention to what is happening to real people. Slim chance that this country will get on board, but it's perhaps the only chance we have.