

## Stories of Faith.... Journeys to pro-life



Denise Sawyer

I came to the pro-life movement relatively late in life. I did not become Catholic until 2005. It's been a long journey, and today I am 180 degrees away from where I was back in 1973 when abortion became legal.

When Roger and I were married in 1972, taking the "pill" was almost an assumption. It never even crossed my mind not to be on birth control. We knew we wanted children, but not right away. We wanted a few years "on our own." When abortion was legalized in early 1973, we had been married less than three months.

I don't particularly remember the debate about abortion that must have been going in our country at that time. To be honest, I was young and I was oblivious. Neither do I have any real memories of the Roe vs. Wade decision in January of 1973. I'm sure I must have heard about it, but we were living on an Army base in the Canal Zone in Panama, away from most American newspapers and television. However, if someone had asked me what I thought, I probably would have said that the decision to legalize abortion was a good thing so that it would be available for women who needed it – in cases of the life of the mother, rape, etc. However, I couldn't imagine choosing an abortion myself.

In 1975, less than three years after we were married, our first son, David, was born. In 1978, Michael followed. Before we were married, we had decided that we wanted to have two children – only two. This was the time of Zero Population Growth, a very popular movement at the time that emphasized the dangers of an overpopulated world. Although that phrase isn't used so much today, the same fear of overpopulation is still prevalent.

When Michael was two years old, we took steps to ensure "compliance" with our Zero Population Growth beliefs. After all, we had our "heir and a spare." While back in the States for a few months, I made arrangements to be sterilized by having a tubal ligation. Looking back at that time, we now realize that we really didn't discuss the issue, the pros and cons. We didn't question our reasons for wanting to limit the size of our family. It's not as if my two pregnancies had been difficult for me; I loved being pregnant, and I loved being a mother. Still, it never occurred to us that choosing to limit our family size might

not have been God's plan for our lives. It never occurred to us to ask Him.

It wasn't until I became Eastern Orthodox in 1993 that I even became really aware that there was an active pro-life movement in existence. We had been living mostly overseas, and as usual, social issues like abortion just weren't on my radar. I was busy being a wife and mother. Orthodox Christians, like Catholics, are opposed to abortion, although their views on contraception are generally different. Once we moved back to the States in 1996, living outside Washington, D.C., I became more aware of the pro-life movement, especially when the annual March for Life would take place every January. Although the national media gives it little attention, the local stations in D.C. have more extensive coverage.

By 2003, we had moved back to Indiana, and although I wasn't aware of it yet, my conversion to the Catholic Church had begun. Through Mother of the Redeemer and St. John, I gradually became more aware of pro-life issues. but it was a very gradual process. Although I understood and accepted the Church's teaching on abortion, I still didn't fully understand the issue of contraception. However, at some point I think I basically decided that although I did not understand, I would accept the teachings. Perhaps understanding would come later.

In late spring of 2011, I had the strong feeling that I was being called to volunteer to join the Pro-Life group at St. John. When I did so, I was asked to write a short paragraph about pro-life for the weekly church bulletin. I decided to start each article with **Did you know?** This was the beginning of my true conversion to pro-life. Suddenly I was reading everything I could find on-line and in print about all of the pro-life issues. What had always been a somewhat abstract issue to me now became very real.

The more I read, the more I realized how little I had understood about this so-called Culture of Death. Abortions are NOT safe and they are NOT rare; in fact, abortion is a multi-billion dollar industry that not only kills millions of babies in our country every year, it destroys many women's lives in the process.

These past three years have been an education for me, and I am so grateful to God for opening both my mind and my heart to the importance of defending life. I wish that I had learned these things earlier in my life. However, despite my regrets, I can't change the past. I can't go back and have more children; I also can't go back and become a pro-life Catholic earlier in my life. My biggest regret is that when our sons were in their formative teen years, I shared with them my firm belief that abortion is a necessary evil. Today they are solidly pro-choice





**Pat Car**

I remember a speaker for Right to Life saying that it is the post abortive women that will stop abortion. As a team member on Rachel's Vineyard Retreats for the past seven years, I have heard so many stories

of grief, sadness, drug and alcohol abuse, promiscuity, and especially, Post-Abortion Syndrome as a result of their abortion. The retreat begins with the men and women tearful and feeling hopeless, but by the end of the retreat weekend, through the mercy of God, healing begins and all the sadness is replaced with a joy in knowing their children are with Jesus and waiting for them.

I am hoping that in sharing my own story as a grandmother of an aborted child that I may help someone else to find some healing and hope. During the 1980's, I was a single, divorced mother with three young daughters. Life was very chaotic, and I had really fallen for the world's message of "be all that you can be." Working full time and going to school for a Bachelor's degree in nursing, besides caring for a family, took its toll. My daughter had gotten angry with me and moved in with her father. I remember the day I received the call from my daughter saying that her father had packed up all her things and I should come and get her. It turned out that at the age 16 and a senior in high school, she was pregnant.

During those years, there was no pro-life group or counseling center to go to. The best recommendation I received was to take her to a clinic, an abortion clinic, and they would talk to her and help her make a decision. So many thoughts went through my mind. I knew this was something she would have to live with for the rest of her life, and I tried my best to help. I did not want her to do this and I told her that I would take care of the baby, but she felt she had no choice. The best way I can describe this whole situation is "like a deer in the headlights." I proceeded with her wishes.

Today the visit to the clinic is as vivid as the day it happened. I still see the men sitting their reading the paper. I can still see my hand writing the check. We went home that day, never to speak of it again until 30 years later.

I went to a pro-life conference at St. Meinrad with Vicki Thorne of Project Rachel. I spoke to her for a few minutes and she said, "You need to go to a retreat for healing." So I went and found mercy and peace. I came back home, and afterwards I went to Sr. Diane at the Pro-Life Office in Indianapolis and asked if we could do the Rachel's

Vineyard Retreats. She agreed to try the retreats; there have been over 100 women and men who have participated.

Only after helping on several retreats was I able to call my daughter and talk to her about the experience. She was in her 40's.

Sharing this story is scary. Some people may find it unforgivable. Many of you may never know that your children had an abortion. So many times, the children of very Catholic families come to the retreats. They were afraid to tell their parents because they are so pro-life or very religious. Many come from dysfunctional homes, poor marriages, and the worst of situations. If God can find it in His mercy to forgive, I hope that we can.



Pat and I are sharing our stories because we know that we are not alone, that there are many women and men out there who have similar stories. There are many people who have been pro-choice most of their lives but have never really seriously thought about the issue. Open your hearts to the pro-life message taught by our Catholic faith. If you have difficulty accepting it, pray for understanding. As the Bible tells us, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."

To read the pro-life faith story from another woman from St. John, be sure to read Monica Seifker's story in the June 1, 2014, St. John the Apostle church bulletin.

## **STORIES OF FAITH WANTED!!**



Whether you are a cradle Catholic or a convert, young or old, everyone has a story to tell about their faith. Sometimes it's a conversion or coming home story; other times it's a special spiritual experience that has enhanced your faith. And perhaps you too have become more pro-life over the years. Please share your faith with us.

[sawyerdenise@yahoo.com](mailto:sawyerdenise@yahoo.com)



# The Roamin' Catholic

By Bryan Wells

Bryan Wells is a parishioner of St. John the Apostle who is a student at Franciscan University of Steubenville. He is presently spending a semester abroad in Gaming, Austria, living and studying in the *Kartause Maria Thronus Iesu*, a fourteenth century Carthusian Monastery. This, and previous articles, though condensed, is taken verbatim from his travel blog.



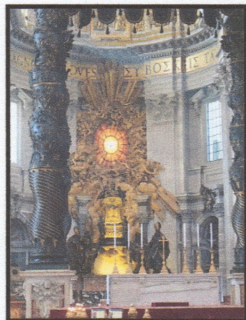
*Bryan continued to write extensively of his weekend trips to Poland, Italy, Hallstatt (where a fall on the mountain resulted in a broken ankle, a helicopter evacuation off the mountain, surgery, and 8 screws and a plate in his leg), and the Holy Land. Time and space do not permit us to publish his entire blog, so we end the series with this report on his first trip to Rome.*

The...week is like a blur and I'll just highlight a few of the main things that happened. Almost every day we had some kind of walking tour, taking us to see saints, relics, and various churches and monuments. We began each day with mass, celebrating at all the main basilicas around Rome, including St. Peter's. It's incredible how many churches were around Rome: nearly every corner had a steeple and inside the churches it was even more incredible. Most had at least one relic of a Saint and many had



tombs of incorruptible saints. Some of the more popular saints we saw included St. Paul, St. Peter, Bl. John Paul II, Bl. John XXIII, St. Monica, St. Thomas, St. Valentine, St. Augustine, etc. What caught me most off guard were seeing the relics of Christ. These

included the Holy Stairs (the stairs walked up by Christ to Pontius Pilate, stained with his blood), the scourging pillar, thorns from the crown of thorns, pieces of the true cross, a nail from the Passion, wood from the crib, wood from the table from the last supper, the sign above Christ which reads "King of the Jews," and more which I'm sure I'm forgetting. On one of our walking tours, Mr. Pipp (our tour guide and head of student life in Austria) stopped us, took us down a back ally to a small church, and inside there was the scourging pillar. All of this completely blew me away and moved me in a way I cannot describe. To see the Catholic faith so present, literally right before my eyes was too much to process. To think that, as I was looking at the nail and the thorns or the blood or the scourging pillar, these were the thorns which pierced Jesus' head, the nail which pinned him on the Cross, literally the blood of Jesus Christ stained on the



marble and the pillar on which he was stripped and scourged. These are no longer just stories I hear about in the Bible; Jesus' life and Passion are lived out right before my eyes. This is something you cannot deny. The same applies to the Saints. No longer are these just people I hear about, but I see them (sometimes actually in the flesh) right in front of me and their lives become real and relevant to me and my faith. These are people I can look to for an example for how to live my life and ask for their prayers in helping me achieve the perfect end.

One of the highlights of my trip was seeing Papa Francesco (Pope Francis). I first saw him at the angelus (prayer at noon) up in a window so far away that if I didn't know it was him I wouldn't be able to distinguish who it was. However, I had another chance to see him during the Wednesday papal audience. Somehow our school had gotten the red tickets instead of the general audience tickets (this meant that we had the chance to be front row in St. Peter's Square as Pope Francis processed around and gave his address. So, the majority of us decide to catch the first metro at 5:30, which meant waking up at 4:30...Waiting in line just outside of St. Peter's, they finally open the gates and it's a mad rush to get through security. I got lucky enough to get the quick line and immediately find myself front and center....At around noon, we heard shouts, saw the televisions light up, and knew the Pope was coming. Before long he was rounding the corner with a huge grin on his face, and came within twenty feet of me and everyone



around me. Not once, or twice, or three times, but four times he passed right in front of us. It was tempting not to run out to him! But, we all exercised our best

self-control. It was incredible to see this man so close. Just like all of the Saints, you hear about the Pope and what he's done but it's hard to actually know he's a real person. Yet, there he was, in the flesh. A great and humble man leading the Church by example. Although I didn't get to meet him personally, there's nothing I can really complain about!

Later during the week, besides taking all of the city tours we went to the Catacombs and the Vatican Museum. I was in the group that went to the Catacombs first. On the way we stopped by a small church which houses (according to tradition) footprints of Jesus. During the persecutions, as St. Peter was fleeing Rome, it was said that he met Jesus along the Appian Way (a main road leading out of Rome). When Peter asked Jesus where he was going, Jesus said that he was going back to be crucified. Peter then took this as a sign to go back and face his persecutors and his death. At the Catacombs we begin the tour and are led deep underground to the thousands upon thousands of graves of the earliest Christians as well as some martyrs. We were told that this one catacomb alone had four layers and around 70 miles of tunnels and that it was one of many around Rome. It was almost like an underground city!

*Bryan's Blog can be read in full at :  
<http://blog.travelpod.com/members/bwells>*