

Appendix A: SHARING OUR GRIEF - TEN STORIES.

In Abortion Survivors Anonymous we are committed to support, affirm and nurture each other by sharing our experiences, our faith and hope.

Some of us have put our stories in writing, thinking especially of you who feel alone in your grief. We would like to assure you that you are not alone, and we hope our stories will encourage you on your journey in recovery.

Ours is an anonymous fellowship, so we have changed names of people and places and some details in our stories.

As we respect your confidentiality, so we ask you to respect ours.

Yours in recovery, and may God bless you!

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Karen

Before coming to ASA I had never been able to talk about my abortion. Talking about it brought all the emotions back. I felt like I was back in Southern California where I had my abortion fifteen years ago. I had just graduated from college in the Midwest, and had driven across the country all by myself. It was my first time so far away from my family, and I felt really uprooted. I had a job at summer camp in the mountains. I was 23 and on my own. It was harder than I thought it would be. The staff would all get together to drink and party. No real intimacies - I felt homesick and lonely.

Toward the end of summer, a bunch of us were drinking one night. One of the counselors and I went back to the cabin. I just wanted to be held, just have somebody there. I told him that. I didn't have any birth control, and it was a fear of mine to get pregnant. Anyway, we were on the bed and I kept saying no, but he forced himself on me, and I knew I was getting pregnant. I laid there, and it was kind of like when I was molested by my mother, or abused by anybody. I felt so defenseless. I didn't do anything. I know now there were a million and one things I could have done. I see all my mistakes. It was like a social rape, because I knew the guy and I said no and tried to make him understand that I did not want to get pregnant.

Afterwards I freaked out. I was an emotional mess and he quit the job and left. I missed my period. I shared with a friend and just kept freaking out. She said, "Until you have the pregnancy test don't worry about it," but in my gut I already knew.

The summer job ended and I had a job as a physical therapist, working with infants. When I got the pregnancy test back and it was positive, I just couldn't deal with it. A week later I set up for the abortion at a clinic, but I didn't have the money yet. A couple of days later the guy who raped me came to town and looked me up. He had a six pack of beer and wanted to party.

I said, "I need to tell you something; you're a father." I told him what was happening. He sat there, had opened up one bottle of beer. I started crying, and told him that I had a real fear of being alone through all this. I felt I couldn't handle it.

"I'm still here," he said.

"You're still here because you haven't finished your six pack." I told him. I felt he didn't care about me. He just wanted to have sex and I kept saying no.

Then he wanted to get together later to talk about it. "Do you want the abortion, or don't you?" he asked me. "Do you want the child?"

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I said, "No way!" My life was still ahead of me and I couldn't see myself tied down with a kid.

My worst fear when I was growing up was being married, having a kid and my husband leaving, like my Dad did. Now to be in that position and not even be married was like a horror movie.

My mother always told us kids she hated to be tied down. I swore I'd never be tied down with a kid. To me abortion was the only option. That's what I told the guy.

So he found a doctor and paid for it. Because I was real broke. A girlfriend had offered to take me. But I wanted him to do it, and he agreed. So the day of the abortion he called me and said, "Oh, so today is the big day!" I thought he was very insensitive. When he came to pick me up he acted like an abusive jerk. But I wanted him there and I kept with it, instead of saying, "forget it"! I wanted him to experience some of the pain I was going through.

He sat in the waiting room. The whole abortion experience was awful. They never mentioned the word baby, just talked about the procedure. No choice was brought up, nothing about complications. Basically I felt I was just led into it. The doctor kept saying, "As soon as this is over all your problems will be taken care of". They told me it would be easy, just minor discomfort, but that was as far from the truth as you can get.

I have experienced extreme menstrual cramps all my life, sometimes to the point where I've passed out. The abortion was like the worst set of cramps I'd ever been through. The doctor was totally obnoxious. He kept saying, "If you can't stick it out I'm going to have to postpone it and put you in the hospital to have the abortion." Just the thought of having to prepare myself again was enough to keep me there.

I kept saying, "I don't want to go through this," but there was no way back. Afterwards we walked out to the car. I think I started crying. He was annoyed with me, and said there was no reason for me to be upset, I should be happy now that it was over. I said, "Look, I just lost my kid!" I thought this was probably the only kid I'd ever have, and I just killed it.

To me there was never any doubt about it being a baby. I just shut down my feelings and pushed the reality to the back of my mind. The guy drove me home, asked if I wanted to go out and eat, and took me to Denny's. He didn't seem to care what had happened to our kid. Afterwards he dropped me off and said he was going out drinking with his buddies. I felt really mistreated. I was hurting and I went to bed and cried.

The next day my girlfriend came over and took care of me. A few days later I started to get

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really angry with the guy. I had a gun, and when he called and wanted to come over, I said yes. I fully intended to shoot him. I thought no one would find out. He came, and the only way I can explain it is that the peace of God came over me. He came in, and I was actually happy to see him, and pleasant. He was uncomfortable, and soon left. A week later my mother came unexpectedly. By then I was in intense emotional pain. I couldn't talk about it, and stayed loaded on pills my girlfriend got for me.

When my mother left, I almost lost it. I drove to the desert and sat there with my 38 in my hand, and I think the only thing that kept me from pulling the trigger was the thought that my brother would have to deal with the remains. And I love my brother so much, didn't want him to have to find his sister in the desert. So I decided to stick it out and shut down my feelings.

For several years I kept it all locked up inside. My life-style was crazy. I held down a job, but I was drinking and taking drugs. I didn't want anything to do with guys, and got involved with women instead. Then when my menstrual cramps got so bad I couldn't stand it any longer, I went to a doctor who said he would do a surgical procedure. He told me the same procedure was used for abortions, and I just flipped. They had to hold me down on the table. I lost it completely. After that things got worse till finally I cried out for help to God.

I started going to AA and to church, and got involved with Incest Survivors Anonymous, and Homosexuals Anonymous. It was very painful to get to those meetings, but so much healing has come from being able to share.

Then I heard about ASA and realized I needed help to deal with the grief and pain of the abortion. I could see a connection between being molested as a kid and deciding to have an abortion instead of wanting to have a kid of my own. Maybe I was afraid I'd do the same kind of things to my own kid that happened to me. I didn't think about it consciously, I just thought I was single, and it wasn't the time to be pregnant and have a kid.

Coming to ASA I could start to deal with it. It was so neat to be in a place where I could talk about it freely, and let the pain and grief out. Now I've found peace with the memory of my aborted child and I notice a big difference in the way I feel around kids. For a long time I didn't really like them. Now I do, and it's neat to see they like me too.

Cecilie

The abortion happened about five years before I came to ASA. I had just met Bob. I really didn't know him, even though we had lived together for a few months. I had gone through divorce. I was angry with men. They just wanted to use me. I didn't want to get pregnant then. I had a baby. She was almost a year old. I wasn't ready for another kid. But when I found out I was pregnant, I started getting scared. I watched every move Bob made for some sign that he really loved me and wanted to stay with me for the rest of his life. I was thinking, should I tell him or shouldn't I? I finally decided that I should.

When I told him his reaction was very cold. He said if I would have an abortion, we could have a baby later. So I agreed to sacrifice this life for the sake of our relationship. It worked. The abortion took place. He drove me, he paid for it. I was seven or eight weeks along. They didn't give much information about it. I wasn't given a choice. They lead you to it. They mentioned there might be complications, but they didn't specify. There were no pamphlets showing what abortion was about. I want to hold them responsible, but I think I knew it. In my previous marriage I was abused and had a miscarriage. I didn't want to go through that again. You really get depressed. So I am sure if I had seen pamphlets about abortions I would not have done it.

When I think back I can still feel myself in the cold room waiting to be examined - with a TV you can't concentrate on because you want to say forget about this, I'm not going through it. And you hear people who have gone through it before and you think, 'maybe it's not that bad'. But it's not that bad until you go through it. I had to wait so long, take blood-tests. But while I was going through this Bob was cold. Everything was cold.

We came back home and he was cold. No special care. It was painful, I cried, and he said, "Why do you cry now, it's over." He turned away from me and was upset because I was crying. He kept saying, "it's all right now". I knew it wasn't all right. Something was missing. I tried to put it out of my mind. Everything was going to be all right. I trusted him.

Bob was in the military and left on deployment. When he came back he told me he wasn't ready for a baby yet. First he wanted us to be in a better financial situation. We got married, but it wasn't the big wedding I dreamt about. We just ran over to Las Vegas in the morning and by noon

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we were back and were married. I wanted him to show me that he really loved me, and I wanted a kid. Especially after I lost the other baby. But now it came out that he wanted me on the pill. He kept track, and if I forgot he would not let me. That hurt, because I thought he wanted another child.

Then he came with the idea that to be completely safe he would have a vasectomy. That hurt just as much as when he told me to have an abortion. Because I remembered what he promised me, and I trusted him and I did it with that in my mind. I didn't want him to know that it hurt that bad, so I said; "Is that really what you want?" He said, "Yes, but they told me it can be reversed, and whenever we want to we can go back and do it." I figured I could not stop him, so I said, "If that's what you want, go ahead." I wanted to have a child, but I didn't want to do it against his will. But that hurt, just as bad as another abortion.

Now he doesn't want to have it reversed. I guess that is one reason I felt so cheated and angry when I first came to ASA. I told him this once, and he said, "You know I have done worse things in Vietnam, and you can put a block in your mind and block it out just as I do things I did there." I tried to do what he said, put a block in my mind, and now my mind goes blank when I try to remember things, but it didn't help with the abortion. Every time I watched a program on TV that had to do with a baby or a baby being born, I couldn't help crying. And when we watched together, I got very upset and we ended up screaming at each other. I tried not to do that, but to keep it in, walk to another room, come back and try to see the movie he wanted.

I was good at not letting my feelings out, but they were there. I would go to the bathroom and wish he wasn't in the house, because I wanted to cry, but I'd been told, "You don't need to cry for this". Sometimes I could feel it inside me, that it was damaging, but I put it off, I could handle it.

So I put it off five years. Till it started coming out as a rash on my hands. The doctor told me something was worrying me, stress. My life was happy, but when I thought about abortion or saw a movie about babies or children, my rash came. It was in my dreams too. It didn't go away. I thought, 'I'm not thinking about it much now, so it's going to go away'. But it haunted me, came back in nightmares. I didn't want others in the family to feel my grief, see my tears. I tried to keep it to myself. Cry in the bathroom.

When I finally called ASA for help, I cried and cried and it felt so good to have someone listen. And I am finding out now that it helps to talk about it. I can get in touch with my feelings and it feels a lot better. I've been able to recognize and express my anger in a healthy way. Especially toward Bob, and now I realize I was even angrier with myself. I did a lot of blaming. Now I feel so much better - even physically. My rash disappeared and only comes back very rarely, under extreme

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stress.

In group I also found out how much I had in common with the others there. I was sexually molested by my father, and I didn't see the connection - I was too ashamed to tell anybody, except my husband. I was afraid that people would take my child from me if they knew I had been molested.

Before we came to ASA I tried to talk to my husband about the abortion at home, but he was having trouble dealing with the same emotions. But when he came to group with me, we could talk there, even about our anger, and gradually our communications improved. I was afraid it would never get better, but now we share an intimacy we never thought was possible. Bob has learned to listen without losing his temper.

When our group held a memorial service, our daughter came too. I felt so good about it. At last we had mourned for our child and put her to rest. As part of my grieving I wrote a letter;

"To the child I will always love very dearly.

I can't seem to come out with the right words to start this letter. Just wanted you to know that wherever you are I love you. Sometimes when I think of you I picture you in my mind, how sweet and pretty you must have been.

I know I'll never have a chance to hold you even, or look into your eyes. But somehow I know you must have been a precious little girl like I always dreamed. I'm so sorry I never gave you a chance to come into this world. Forgive me. I was so selfish. I was only looking to my own interests and what was best for me. I never even thought that you were already a precious human being with the same rights to life as I. I am sorry. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me. And maybe some day when we see each other, we'll be together for all eternity. I'll be always your Mom.

P.S. Daddy and I were thinking of a name for you last night. And we decided that your name will be Joy. I hope you like it. Because that's what you really mean to us."

Bob

When I came to ASA I hadn't dealt with my Vietnam experience. I first went to Vietnam when I was 19 or 20. Later I was with a special forces team, back and forth between Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. I buried all that pretty much, but sometimes it still bothered me. I had nightmares, but didn't talk about it much. I just kept it buried. That may be why going through an abortion was easy for me. It's easy to kill someone when they're not human. In Vietnam we were brainwashed to think that Southeast Asians were not humans. Whether you're on a ship firing rounds into the beach, or you're there doing it with your own hands, it's easy because it's not human. A fetus is not human. So it was easy for me.

I guess I still kind of believed it was not human, until Cecilie showed me some pictures of aborted fetuses, I guess of about eight weeks. I could see the little legs and hips all ripped apart. I said to myself, 'I didn't know it was that well developed', and it bothered me, so I did what I am very good at; I have a little switch in my head. Klick it off, put it away. I know it's wrong, but that's what I did when something bothered me.

I came to ASA because Cecilie wanted to. I felt ambiguous about the abortion myself. Numb inside. Dead. That's how I felt five years earlier when we went through it. For me it was just a matter of fact, "Let's go to the doctor and do this". She didn't want to. I said, "Well, I do." I was taking the full brunt of responsibility. I convinced her. Our finances was a big argument. I had just gone through a bad divorce. My ex took my son. I didn't want another child. What I didn't say was that Cecilie and I weren't getting along well and I didn't want to bring a kid into that. So I talked her into it.

When we got to the clinic I remember a lot of people in the waiting room, reading magazines and stuff. And I kind of felt like when I came back from Vietnam to the United States in seventeen hours. We flew from DaNang to San Francisco. I saw cars jamming the streets, people walking around, stores full of food. Nothing was blowing up, no kids crying. It was weird. I couldn't figure it out. Sitting in the waiting room of the abortion clinic I had the same sensation of 'something's weird here... these people are all just sitting around reading magazines, and what's happening behind that wall'.

I wanted to leave, but then I said to myself, 'Nah, we've already come this far', and then they

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called her in. While I waited something kept coming through my mind, picturing her on the table, picturing the vacuum, and I kept using my switch, and trying to read my magazine, telling myself, 'Everything is cool, I'm fine. There's nothing wrong here. We're all just here, doing a natural thing. This is the nineteen eighties'.

I'm really good at making myself believe myself. Till later when I start having dreams and second thoughts about it. I don't think I've dreamt about babies and abortion. I've only had dreams about Vietnam. But maybe I've been mixing them together and didn't recognize it when I woke up.

When the abortion was over Cecilie was feeling bad physically, having cramps. We went to get a donut and I started feeling real bad for her because I had made her do this, and here she was in pain. I don't remember what we did after that, just trying to go on with our life.

Our relationship was a roller coaster. The first year or two was violent. I was drinking a lot, and she was drinking too. Either we were fighting violently or in love intensely. I was sick of it. I had just bought a new BMW and I would come around a curve at about 115 - 120 miles an hour, and there was a concrete railing. I would think to myself, 'That would be real easy, why don't I just wheel into the rail. Because I'm tired of this shit.' Only thing that kept me was that I knew it said in the Bible that you can't kill yourself. So I didn't. But I kept thinking about it and drinking a lot.

Somehow we survived. Things got a little better when we started going to church. I stopped drinking, but I didn't deal with the emotional garbage I was carrying around. I guess I just turned the switch in my head. I had a lot of stuff to switch off. Starting with my childhood.

There was a lot of abuse in my family. My father abused my younger sister. My youngest brother was abused. Maybe I was and just blocked it out. I've got a lot of blurry memories and blank spots. My mother was emotionally abusive, constantly tearing us down. So I became the overachiever to prove to myself that I'm not dirt. I kept trying to impress my parents till I was past 30. Finally I woke up and said, 'What the hell are you doing? Forget about them, just take care of your wife and kid.'

The divorce and losing my son ripped me up, but I used my little switch again and cut that off. For at least a year I couldn't get over it. Then I met Cecilie and we started the cycle all over. We were self destructive, but we needed each other. Weird. And the abortion didn't help any. I was good at burying the pain and going on, just gritting my teeth, but she didn't do as well. I told her to do as I do, but it didn't work. She tried to talk to me, and I didn't want to. I was a hard, cold, s.o.b. and I guess she couldn't be like that. And so we'd have problems again.

Inside I knew things weren't really working for me either, but I didn't know if I was supposed

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to come to ASA. Cecilie came first, and I was told that a lot of husbands had denial. I said, "I'm not denying I have a problem, I just click it off". But maybe I was in denial. I had a lot of blank spots, and that bothered me.

Coming to group was good. Cecilie and I could talk to each other there. I became more aware of my own feelings of hurt and anger. A big issue between us was over having another child. Even if I had more money I couldn't see bringing another kid into this world. I had seen too much trash. Too much hopelessness and despair. There was too much to be angry at. I'd go crazy if I allowed myself to be angry.

In our meetings we started working on reconciliation with others. I could ask Cecilie to forgive me for my part in killing our child. I did seek forgiveness from God, and felt I received it. Some of the numbness went away. I could cry, and that was a big step for me. The child we had killed became real for me. No longer just cut up pieces of a dead fetus, but a person with an immortal soul. We named her, I named her Joy, it just popped into my brain. We listened to the 'Tilly' tape, and I wrote a letter. The paper was stained with tears when I got through. I wrote;

"Mommy and I were talking about you last night. She asked me, what name did I prefer for you. I replied "Joy". Isn't that a paradox in terms? Joy for a girl who was dismembered by a cold surgeon's scalpel, and vacuumed from your mother's womb like so much dirt from a floor. Joy for a girl who was subjected to such atrocities even before she was able to inhale her first breath. Joy for a girl who never saw the father responsible for giving her life and then taking it away at the cost of merely 200 dollars. Joy for a girl that has been with Jesus for five years and three months. I hope you like your name. Please forgive me as God has, for what I've done. I know you will."

I read the letter aloud for my ASA group and cried some more. Joy probably already knew what I was going to write about. I knew she was happy, and that she had forgiven me. She is a part of our lives now, and I am only sad that she can't be with us here on earth. We miss her. But knowing her has changed things for me. I didn't like small children, one and two year olds'. Now I do. They are neat. Real personalities.

I'm still struggling with forgiving myself for the abortion. But I am willing to forgive myself, and I know forgiveness is both an act of will and a process. I am closer to my Mom, and that too is a process of reconciliation.

Cecilie and I are closer to God, and our communication is much better. We talk about everything now, and I am able to keep my temper. Cecilie wants a child, I still don't. But now I let

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her talk about it, and I can listen. Life is better now, and it keeps getting brighter. We've got a lot to be grateful for.

Laura.

I am an abortion sibling. My mother had two abortions and my grandmother also had one. I was abused as a child by my mother, and had an emotionally abusive relationship with my Dad. As soon as I could I left home. I was nineteen, and when I was twenty five I had a good job as an office manager. I thought I had it all together, knew exactly where I was going. There was a minor physical problem; my menstrual cycle was very irregular, and I went to the doctor. He examined me and said I would always have abnormal menstrual cycles. "In fact you probably can't have children without corrective surgery..."

Now I was sick of being told "You can't". No doctor was going to tell me I 'can't' have a child. I had been sexually active for some time, and now I became what I would call promiscuous, a lot of one night stands. Three months later I was pregnant. At first I thought, 'Great!' But then I became scared. I had read that if you have been abused, there is a high likelihood that you will do that to your child. I could not face the fact that I might turn around and put this child through what I had been through. I went for the pregnancy test and the doctor said, "Yes, you're pregnant, and you're going to deliver just about the time Princess Di delivers." And I said, "There is one difference between Princess Di and I. She is going to have her baby and I'm not." And so I made arrangements to have an abortion. I didn't tell the father of the baby - he wasn't involved in the decision making process at all. I was bound and determined that no one was going to know about this. I had a career and nothing was going to screw up my goal.

I lived in a small Midwestern town, so I drove 185 miles to another town by myself, went through the whole thing alone. It seemed I waited for hours and hours in the clinic. They gave me sodium Pentothal, so I don't remember anything, except at the actual moment of the abortion. They had said it was only going to be like a menstrual pain, but they lied. It hurt. I remember coming off the table with the pain. After the abortion all I could think of was that I needed to get out of there. So I drove myself 45 miles to a motel. I didn't want to stay in that town. I called the father of the

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baby, and he was totally shocked. He hadn't even known I was pregnant, let alone that I would consider an abortion. I rested till I was sure I wasn't hemorrhaging. Then I drove myself back home. I must have been crazy, but I came through it.

For about a week afterwards I felt only relief, but then it became hard for me to be around children. I couldn't bear to hold a baby. I turned really promiscuous and was depressed a lot. Finally, around the five year anniversary of my abortion, I became suicidal. I just did not want to go on. I sat on the edge of my bed with a loaded gun ready to end it. At that point I called the father of the baby again. I hadn't talked to him for years. I told him I was real depressed and that the abortion had a lot to do with it, and I asked him how he felt about it. He said, "I really wish you'd called me and told me how you were feeling, because I don't want you to hurt this way. I never wanted you to hurt, and I'm sorry." His words were so loving and he was so concerned for me. I think that is the point where my healing began. With him being able to forgive me. I kept saying, 'If Michael can forgive me for what I have done, then surely, at some point along the line I should be able to start doing that for myself and to find God's forgiveness.'

I guess something in me cried out for help at that point, because I felt a small voice insisting that I should move to California where I had relatives. So I left the good job I had held for nearly ten years and moved. Not long after that I met Elizabeth who was also grieving after abortion, and we became involved with the group that evolved into Abortion Survivors Anonymous.

It has been almost four years since we began meeting together, and group has been a safe place for me to talk and cry and realize I'm not alone. I now have some wonderful friends I didn't have before, and in time I discovered buried memories of two more pregnancy losses during the five years between my abortion and near suicide. I had one spontaneous miscarriage, and another was induced by taking pills - in other words, an abortion. So now I know I have three children who are with God, and I look forward to seeing them. I have grieved, and there is still sadness when I think of my loss. But I am comfortable with other children around me, and my own children are real to me. Not just 'a little blob of tissue', but real people. My childhood wounds are healing too. I have a healthier relationship with my mother, and I reconciled with my father before he died.

Elizabeth

My mother had an abortion when I was three years old. She also had a miscarriage before I was conceived, and one when I was 13 years old. None of these losses were talked about in our family in terms of deaths to be grieved. When Mother had the abortion she was very sick for a long time, first in the hospital, then convalescing for months to regain her strength. I have only vague memories of crying in the dark and someone telling me to be quiet because Mom was sick.

I remember pretending to be hurt, crying and hoping grown-ups would comfort me, but they just got angry and told me to be quiet. I've been told I had terrible temper tantrums, and that I pushed away anyone who tried to hold me and hug me.

My father was gone a great deal. When he was home I was always trying to get his attention. I remember when I learned to bounce a ball on the sidewalk I thought Dad would praise me, instead he was angry because I played in the street. Grandmother told me Dad had wanted a son, so I tried to be tough like a boy to impress him. It didn't work.

When I was six Dad was taken prisoner of war. Mom was sad and distant. She took my younger adopted brother along on long trips. I was left with grandmother or a nanny. I made up stories to impress people, or to keep them from getting mad at me. I did well in school, because I was always able to guess what the teacher wanted me to say. I loved to read and impressed people with lots of information from books, but inside I was scared and insecure. I felt 'different', as if I never quite belonged. I knew I wasn't like other people. When something sad happened and other people cried, I giggled instead. I tried to hide it, and was really ashamed, but I couldn't help it. I wondered what was wrong with me. Why didn't I feel what the others felt?

My father returned from prison when I was 12, but he still treated me as if I was 6. We had a horrible tug-of-war relationship till I was about 19. Then we started talking without fighting and discovered we had a lot of interests in common. We became like good friends, and I loved it, but by then I had a 'deep dark secret.' I knew I could never tell Dad what I had done. It would have killed him.

I had always been a tomboy and 'buddy' with boys. At fourteen I discovered my 'power' as a girl, and loved to flirt and tease. Dad accused me of being 'loose' with men but I was still a virgin

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at eighteen. I was working in another state, and on my birthday a friend of Dad's called with greetings from my parents. I was flattered when he invited me for a ride. He drove to a secluded spot and started to rape me. He had planned it, and brought a condom to keep me 'safe'. I was horrified and fought with all my might, scratched and kicked, and he was unable to complete his intentions. He got angry and took me back to my room.

The next morning I woke up paralyzed from the waist down. The doctor said it was nerves, and after a few days I could walk again. I never told anyone what happened. Dad thought I was just an hysterical female with no stamina for working and being on my own. He was terribly disappointed when I quit my job and came home. I thought if he knew the truth he would blame me anyway.

A few months later I met a sailor and we became lovers. He drank a lot and then he could be violent, but I thought he was wonderful. We got engaged and talked about marriage. We both wanted children, but my father didn't approve of our relationship. My friend was from 'the wrong side of the tracks', and I thought my father was a snob. When I was nineteen I missed two menstrual periods. At first I was excited, but my fiancée said we weren't ready for marriage yet. He wanted to finish school, pay off debts, have a home. I felt panic, I was trapped in a pregnant body. The shame of a baby out of wedlock would destroy my family. So I went to a doctor and asked if he could 'do something to start my period'. He gave me a shot and said I would start bleeding within twenty four hours. I remember feeling bad about it and asking him if it would work if I were pregnant? He just smiled and said, "If you start bleeding, you are not pregnant." I didn't want to ask him if I could have been pregnant before the bleeding started. The next day I started bleeding and it lasted for a full month. I remember the relief at first - and a strange disappointment. At one point a big blob of blood and tissue came out and I held it in my hand and looked at it closely. Inside I felt grey and sad and I remember thinking, 'If I had done nothing, this would have grown into a baby.'

That day was as gloomy as my thoughts. I looked out over the lake below our house. A mist was closing in, hiding the other shore. I felt as if the sunlight had gone out of my life.

Afterwards I wanted desperately to have a baby, and again my period was late. But nothing had changed. My fiancée was angry. He brought me a box of pills and told me to take them. I did and bled again, for weeks. I think maybe my mother suspected something. She looked at me with those sad eyes of hers, but never said a word. I never thought the word 'abortion', just that my periods had been late, and I had 'helped' them come.

When I was twenty my fiancée left town. Our relationship was over - but somehow I couldn't let go of him in my mind. It was as if something bound us together. I was depressed and restless and

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moved to another state to get a new start. I had a good job and threw myself into my work. In the evenings I was out 'on the town'. I couldn't stand quiet or being alone, and there were plenty of guys who were happy to keep me company. Since I had never admitted to myself what really happened when my 'periods were late', it was easy to push the memory away. Soon it was buried deep.

My father died suddenly of a heart attack when I was 21. When our pastor told me I put my hand over my mouth to hide the involuntary giggle. Inside I felt numb. I didn't cry at Dad's funeral and when mother died two years later, I giggled again. It felt like I had a stone in my chest, and my eyes were dry and burning.

My career was doing fine, but my private life was a dark, shameful secret. I was restless, promiscuous and didn't know I was unhappy. A year after my mother's death I became pregnant again. I wasn't sure who the father was, and tried to rid myself of the pregnancy by vigorous exercise. I thought of inserting a knitting needle into my vagina, but didn't have the courage to go through with it. Instead I drove to the beach and swam straight out into the ocean. I thought I would keep swimming and we would both drown, my baby and I. But again my courage failed and I made it back to shore, collapsing on the sand.

Again I was trapped in a pregnant body. A friend gave me the name of her doctor, and when he confirmed the pregnancy, I asked him to give me a shot or some pills to start my menstrual period. He shook his head disapprovingly. "Abortion is illegal. I won't do it."

I didn't pursue it further. Deep inside a small part of me felt good about having the baby, even if I knew I wasn't fit to be a mother. So I went to a maternity home and made arrangements for a private adoption. When my daughter was born she ran a fever at birth, and the prospective adoptive parents were advised that something might possibly be seriously wrong with the baby. They decided not to take her. That was a shock. As a single mother I didn't have much to offer, but at least I knew I was responsible for my daughter. I did not want her to be placed in foster care under observation - to see if she was fit to be adopted. I was her mother and she needed me. I held the little bundle close and I guess for the first time in my life I felt good about what I was doing. "We're going to make it, baby. You and I together." I whispered. I was scared, but happy too.

A few months later I met a man who seemed reliable and caring. After a whirlwind courtship we were married. Too late I realized that he was an alcoholic, and our marriage was rocky from the start. After two more children, our relationship finally broke down. I suffered from anxiety attacks and was afraid of slipping over the brink into insanity. In despair I turned to God and church.

With faith things began to improve. I dared believe that God loved me, accepted me and

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forgave me, although I had a hard time loving, accepting and forgiving myself. A couple of years after my conversion I cried over the death of my parents, and a burden began to lift. Still, I was compulsive, with self-defeating behavior and my relationships were lacking in intimacy. Honest friends and my almost grown children dared tell me I was controlling and manipulating. I recognized the truth of it and finally acknowledged that my life was unmanageable and that I was powerless to change it.

I turned to Al-Anon, and later learned about post-abortion grieving and reconciliation. I had completely blocked the memory of my own abortions, but I wondered if, as an abortion sibling, I had repressed grief and survivor guilt. I felt nothing, but in a private session with a therapist, I was able to tap into the grief I had buried since my early childhood. I cried uncontrollably for over an hour and felt such emotional pain as I had never known before. I knew in my heart that I had two sisters and a brother in heaven. A few nights later I saw my mother in a dream. She held three bundles in her arms and smiled radiantly as she hugged them. I woke up feeling happy.

In a post abortion group my buried anger towards my parents started to surface, and I could begin to forgive them. I also discovered my own deep survivor guilt and feelings of responsibility for the death of my siblings. In group we talked about it, wrote letters, role played, and allowed ourselves to go through the stages of grief we had repressed. One of the most healing experiences for me was attending a memorial service for my siblings. I called them by name and put a flower for each on the altar. Afterwards our group had a party, and it was truly joyous. As the normal grieving progressed, the walls of resentment, fear, anger, isolation and guilt came down, and I experienced a greater inner freedom and joy. Some of my self defeating behaviors stopped, and I was more relaxed, less compulsive, more creative.

After reconciliation with my siblings and parents, I heard another abortion survivor tell how she had been given a shot to induce her abortion. As she described the flow of blood and tissue that came a day or so later, icy tingles went up and down my spine. I felt nauseated and my stomach was in knots. In a memory flashback I 'heard' myself responding to the doctor who refused to induce my menstrual period when I was pregnant with my daughter; "But my doctor did it back home." The physician had looked at me with thinly veiled disgust and repeated; "It is illegal!" The memory made me suddenly faint and I told the group. They prayed with me, that if what I feared was true, I would remember more.

Gradually the dark veil of denial lifted and the memories of when I was nineteen began to emerge. Looking back I realized that my chronic depression and restlessness had begun that fall.

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When our group held the next memorial service and requiem, I put two roses, one for each of my children, on the altar. And as I mourned their deaths, the grey shadow that fell over my life when I flushed them from my womb more than thirty years ago, shifted. The sun shone brightly again.

In ASA we know that there is no quick fix for post abortion grief and reconciliation. The longer it has been repressed and denied, the deeper the wound and the more ingrained are the self destructive, self defeating attitudes and behavior.

I have been active in ASA since its beginning in 1988. Working through the steps as participant in groups, then as co-leader and leader, I experienced peace and a sense of wholeness little by little overcoming confusion, loneliness, brokenness and despair. Increasingly I feel complete, knowing that my family in heaven includes three siblings and two of my own children. Something - someone - was missing before, and I never knew why.

In Abortion Survivors Anonymous the fog of denial continues to lift. Life and relationships are coming into brighter focus. I cry and laugh when it is appropriate now. I feel my feelings, and I am grateful.

Larry

The abortion was ten years ago. I and my girlfriend Cathy were just under eighteen. We were in love and much of our relationship was physical. It was a bond between us. We had made love for over two years and nothing had happened. Then we decided to use contraceptives and it turned out she was already pregnant. I thought, 'why now?'

I remember waking up one night and crying and praying because I loved this woman so much and I thought she was going to be taken away from me. I really didn't mind her being pregnant, because I wanted to be the father of her baby, but I was afraid to tell my parents.

Cathy told her parents, who called my parents. They didn't tell me they knew, but I finally went to them and said, "Cathy is pregnant and I want to marry her." They thought we were too young, and so did Cathy's parents. I was having dinner at their house and Cathy's Mom told me she was willing to raise the child. I was excited about that. But later Cathy and her parents decided she didn't want to keep the baby and would have an abortion.

At that time I accepted it. I remember thinking, 'This will really be something off my shoulders. This baby is in the way'. Cathy was eleven weeks along, and the pregnancy already showed quite a bit.

Her parents took her to the abortion clinic. I came over to her house later that night. She was on the couch. I had bought candy, to show her I loved her. I didn't know how to love except sexually, and when I put my arms around her, I was aroused, and tried to make love to her. She was hurting, and I got mad at her for not responding to me. So I went to a rock concert instead. I got some acid, and took five hits. I was so tripped out, I was thinking of the devil. I remember going into the bathroom, looking in the mirror and believing I was Jesus, and that I was going to die.

Our relationship broke up after the abortion. We couldn't talk about it, but it was always there, like a shadow between us. She started going out on me. I went out on her. I was drinking and taking drugs. I moved to another state and we lost touch.

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One night I was lonely and drunk. Another fellow and I were waiting for two girls and they didn't show up. It had been so long since I had any sex or touching. I feared women, even though I loved women, I hated them too. That guy and I ended up in a homosexual happening. I hated him and myself for it, but after the abortion I had a fascination with sex, both hetero- and homosexual.

I was so miserable and confused. My life was a mess. But six years after the abortion I turned to God and started going to church. My life-style changed. No more drinking or drugs or sex.

I had stuffed my memories and feelings about the abortion, but gradually it began to surface. I didn't realize how badly it affected me and how I had held it against Cathy and her family and myself, and also God. I called someone in ASA, and talking to another person who had gone through an abortion was a real breakthrough to healing my anger and bitterness.

I really hated Cathy, because I felt I had been robbed of my manhood when she and her parents decided to abort my child. Now I could speak out my hatred and say "Cathy, I forgive you!" We haven't had any contact for years, but in time I hope to find her and tell her I forgive her and still love her.

I was angry with society too, and it's still tough for me to realize that abortion is legal. To me it says that life, in our society, has no meaning.

I really hated God and blamed Him for allowing it to happen. But as I voiced my anger and struggled to forgive God, I began to see that a lot of my anger and pain was fueled by guilt. Much of the responsibility for what had happened was really mine. The abortion was a consequence of choices and decisions Cathy and I made. I had initiated a physical relationship without recognizing the responsibility that came with that. I wasn't robbed of my manhood, I abdicated. If we had waited with sex till we were married, the child would have been alive today.

Even if we had used birth-control from the start, it wouldn't have happened. And when Cathy did get pregnant, if I had not accepted the abortion decision so readily, even agreeing with it and thinking that the baby really was in the way... That was wrong and that is where I really felt guilt. I should have stood up and been a man.

If I had trusted in God back then, I could have given it to Him. But I didn't, I just accepted it, and in so doing I decided to end the life of our child. I didn't fight for this child. I didn't understand and accept the responsibilities of a husband and father, so I did not protect Cathy and our child. That was my guilt. I wish I could go back and change it, but I can't, so I had to ask God's forgiveness for it. I know I have received it, and my guilt is gone, but our child is dead.

These ten years I reaped the bitter harvest of my wrong doing, but so did my child. That was

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the hardest part for me, once I realized that God had forgiven me, and I had been able to forgive the others who were involved in the abortion.

My guilt was gone, I thought, but the grieving part remained. I was grateful there were others who understood and could cry with me. In ASA we work through our guilt and grief to reconciliation with our child as well as with others, with God and ourselves. I came to believe that my child was in God's hand in heaven. I think I had always known he was a boy, and I named him. I had sacrificed him for my own selfish reasons, but now God has given him back to me.

I knew God had already formed him in Cathy's womb, and that his color of hair, eyes, smile, all had been determined then. I cried when I realized that, and felt the grief as physical pain. But then I 'saw' an image of Jesus holding my little boy, and I called out to him, "I love you, I love you, please forgive me." And the little boy smiled at me and said "Daddy, I love you. I forgive you. Keep going."

I hadn't looked at my child as a living reality before. Only as someone who 'might have been'. And myself as someone who 'might have been' a father. I thought I was robbed of my fatherhood. Now I know I relinquished the responsibilities of fatherhood, but I am a father! Cathy and I are the parents of a child who is dead as far as this life on earth goes, but alive in God's heaven.

My life, and the way I see myself has changed radically now that I know I am a parent. There was an emptiness I didn't understand, and it is filled now that I know my child. I hope some day I can share this with Cathy - and with my parents. They thought the abortion was for the best - but they lost a grandchild, and I want to tell them about him.

I pray I may some day become a responsible husband and father of living children, but they will know they have an older brother in heaven. And as I think now of my own death, it is different. I know who is waiting for me, and that there is nothing unsettled between us.

Forgiving myself is the hardest, but I know it is both an act and a process. And so is grieving. I'm not through it yet, and I don't think I'll ever get over missing my son here on earth.

I pray for the mothers and fathers of aborted babies - that they may find peace with their children, with God, with themselves and others, and be able to work through their grief in groups like ASA. I am so grateful I can.

Pat

My first abortion was in 1972 when I was about 20 years old. I had a couple of boyfriends and was very confused about the relationships. I knew exactly when I got pregnant because I wasn't using any birth control. I had tests done at a clinic and verified that I was pregnant. I was really upset because I wished I had a relationship where I could get married and have this baby, but I decided to have an abortion.

Being pregnant at the time just didn't fit in with my plans. I didn't have financial security or a job I could support myself with, or a stable relationship. I was just very self-centered and felt I couldn't do this. And I remember going to my Mom, telling her and finding out that I was the sibling of an aborted baby. Mom had an abortion also, and so had my grandmother when she was in college. I didn't have any reaction to the news then, I guess it just made it easier to go ahead with my own abortion.

Telling my Dad that I was going to have an abortion was really hard for me. I just wish so much that I could have said, "Yes, I'm going to get married and have the baby and..." I knew he and Mom both loved kids so much. But my Dad believes in abortion because he can't stand child abuse, and so he told me that whatever I did was the right decision.

I went to a counselor at Planned Parenthood and they asked me if I was able to handle an abortion. They never explained to me that this might be a child or anything of the sort, they just wanted to make sure that I would be able to keep my head straight and I assured them that I would. So they referred me to a doctor's office for the abortion.

I must have been two months along. I was awake during the procedure. It was done very fast, I believe suction. I remember some pain and the doctor saying it was all done as he tossed the pan and the instruments into the sink on his way out. And I got up off the table and looked into the sink, trying to see a baby, but all I saw was blood and tissue. I think at that point I rationalized in my mind that it probably wasn't a big deal. I put my clothes on and walked out into the waiting room where my boyfriend was sitting. He asked me if I was in any pain, and I answered lightly, "No. not at all".

After the abortion I don't remember going into any kind of depression, but I felt dirty and that

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I had done the wrong thing. I knew I would recover and show the world that I was strong. I think some of my fears about being pregnant was that I would have ugly stretch marks, become fat, and if I had a child, who would want me after that? I was afraid of being abandoned and alone.

So I rationalized that now I looked better than ever, and I was very promiscuous sexually. I didn't find anybody I really liked, I just didn't have any direction. For several years I floated through life that way, and then in 1978 I became pregnant again. My IUD had apparently slipped out of place. Again I was living with a boyfriend - but whenever I got upset with him, I felt free to see someone else. I actually wanted a stable relationship and marriage, but living together meant nothing to me. So when I became pregnant, I didn't know whose baby it was.

This time I had a lot of morning sickness. The smell of coffee would make me throw up. The clinic called me back at my Mom's house with the result of my test. I remember crying and my Mom trying to comfort me, telling me, "It's O.K. just go ahead and have the baby, it will all work out." And Robert, who I was living with at the time, also said, "It's up to you, if you want to have the baby, go ahead, if you don't it's all right." But I just couldn't see having a relationship with a man I wasn't committed to and bringing a baby into the world. To me everything had to be in perfect order - just the way I wanted - before I would have a baby.

So I decided to have the abortion, and it was at the hospital and very different from the clinic. I was put to sleep, and it was a five bed ward. I felt like it was an assembly line and the doctors and nurses were very cold, almost mean. I remember waking up with terrible cramps and pain, throwing up because of the anesthetic. My Mom was there asking me if I was O.K. and I really didn't want to stay there. I told her I was fine just so I could go home.

This abortion was a lot harder on me because I really believe I was searching for God. I was still determined not to be weak, but I was a little depressed after the abortion. Three months later I made a commitment to the Lord. I was still living with Robert, and I thought, "Well I don't want to get pregnant again, that's for sure", so I went back for another IUD.

Driving home from the clinic I was crying and thinking, "Here I am just having an abortion, and now I have another IUD." The whole thing felt wrong. But I was so confused. I think that was the first time I felt God speak to me. He seemed to say, "My child, I love you, and I'll see you through this." I remember just weeping in the car. He wasn't condemning me because I had another IUD. Or because I was still living with somebody. I felt instantly guilt free. I knew God had forgiven me of the abortions. It was wonderful.

Four months later Robert accepted the Lord and we decided it wasn't a good idea to live

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together or make love. I moved in with a girlfriend till we got married - and then I didn't have any kind of birth control.

I got pregnant right away, and it seemed as though my life was so happy. I really didn't think about the abortions. I just felt so blest to have a baby and be married and things were going the way I wanted them to go and the way I knew God wanted them.

I had Kevin and I still really didn't think about my abortions. Then, the next year I had a miscarriage. That was a shocker. I was in the shower and it seemed like everything came out. I remember looking at the blood and tissue and suddenly I realized that this was a baby I was holding in my hands. And then I remembered my abortions. That was very hard. I think I began grieving a little bit during that miscarriage. I had to go to the hospital for a D and C. and I remember being in the recovery room with all the other women who had babies and I didn't. And that was very sad.

I had Diana the following year, and in 1987 I heard about a weekend group for women who had experienced abortions. I had shared my abortion experience with others to some extent, but I was always afraid, thinking, "Oh, what are they going to think and what are they going to say?" It was always in the back of my mind. I thought this was an area I should get more involved in to help other women. I went to the group not knowing what to expect. And it was a real healing time for me. Especially being able to deal with my mother's abortion. I grieved more for Elizabeth, the sister I didn't have, than for my own abortions.

I realized my self-esteem had been very low all my life, and even as a Christian I had felt isolated from God and from the love of Christ. That weekend I learned something about how precious I was to God. I felt very loved. I think that's what helped me most of all that session. After grieving for my sibling, I can honestly say that it felt like getting out of jail. I don't know how else to put it. It was just a real freedom.

Then I started looking at my own abortions and writing letters to the children, getting answers back from God and it was a real eye-opener. It hurt, but that was the beginning of a real healing process that is still going on. I now know that I have two little boys in heaven and I'll see them some day. I know their names, and I've been able to tell Kevin and Diana that they have two older brothers in heaven and that is very important to me.

The more I find out, the more I can talk about it, the easier it is to express my feelings. And that has always been hard for me. I've been numb for so long. I've been able to know more what my emotions are, though I still think I have a lot of numbness and a certain amount of denial. It takes a while to work these things out and I've been through a seven week group where we did grief work,

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then weekly ASA meetings and still another seven week group.

For me these groups are a tremendous time of healing in a lot of different areas. It has helped me to see and understand myself and other people so much better. Especially in my family relationships - like with Mom and my Dad. They have lost six grandchildren in abortions - my brother is the father of four. Now I can tell them about ASA and what the twelve step program has done to help me. My Mom now wants to come to ASA. I just can't say enough about it and the wonderful people who have been there to support in prayer and friendship. And still, to me it's just a beginning.

Kelly

My husband and I were planning our 2nd pregnancy. We decided on having our children 2 ½ to 3 years apart. Our first child was a boy and we were absolutely in love with him. I have a genetic risk of having a child with Down's syndrome and there was a 15% chance with each baby. We did not consider this a great risk, but had an amniocentesis with each pregnancy. On the way to the amniocentesis we were giddy, wondering if we should find out the sex of the baby. On the way home we were somber and devastated. It was a boy, and there was a problem with his brain. We decided then that if there was something severely wrong with the baby we would not have it.

A week later, Friday the 13th, we found out it was Down's syndrome. It was a death sentence. Another week later, at 18 weeks, we had a genetic termination. The term abortion was never used, and it was something I did not want to hear.

My husband and I were both upset and grieving in our own way. It really wasn't discussed much by anyone and there was no memorial service. My husband moved on, but I was tearful and very depressed. My depression lasted about four months. I sought help from a counselor for just one visit and she referred me to a psychiatrist. I had never had any kind of psychotherapy before and I was nervous and ashamed. I canceled the appointment and somehow just 'felt better'.

Two months later I was pregnant. I was scared to death. This time it was unplanned and I knew I could not face going through the same ordeal again. I had a chorionic villi sample, a test that is riskier than the amniocentesis, but could be done much earlier in the pregnancy. It turned out to be a healthy baby girl. I cried, this time with joy.

After the baby was born my husband and I started to have marital problems and saw a counselor. Six months into the counseling the abortion came up when we were discussing intimacy problems. My counselor found the group called Abortion Survivors Anonymous (ASA) in her resource book. I went to ASA 2 ½ years after my abortion.

The ASA meetings were very difficult for me, but I knew I needed to go through it. I had chills and sweats during the meetings and cried easily, once through the entire meeting. All of my emotions re-surfaced. I had to live through it again and this time allow myself to feel. I had suppressed it for too long and it was hurting my relationships with others.

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This was my first experience with a 12-step program. I had my reservations about the program because I am not a spiritual person. But the support I received from the group, and the acceptance, gave me the strength to go through with it. It helped to know that I was not the only one struggling with the guilt and pain of abortion.

Writing the letters and making amends to those I hurt helped me tremendously because I was able to feel and express the emotions that I already should have worked through.

I named our son and this is what I wrote to him:

“Dear Michael. Not a day goes by when I do not wonder what it would be like to have you with me. I feel so much pain in my heart that I had to choose whether or not you should have life. I hope that some day this pain will only be an ache, and that I may think of you again without shedding tears. I do know that I will never forget you. I will always wonder what you would have been like, whether you would have suffered, or whether it was just me who would have suffered watching you struggle through life. I often wonder if it was just my own selfishness that drove my decision, because I did not feel I had enough energy or patience to raise a child who would be so dependent on me for so long. I tell myself that the decision was the best thing for my family, but now I’m not so sure. I can’t let go of my bad feelings, and this I know is not good for us. The worst thought is that you suffered in your death. I feel so guilty for not keeping you, a child of my body. I do not feel you earned it and my hopes and dreams for you were real. I saw your image on the ultra sound, my beautiful baby, but I never got to say good bye. I just hope that you can forgive me, I hope that someday I can forgive myself. I love you so. Mommy.”

In the group we were encouraged to write an ‘answer letter’, from our child. I was a little apprehensive about it, but as soon as I wrote the words, ‘Dear Mommy’, it seemed both natural and right to continue:

“ Dear Mommy. I know this decision was hard for you. I want you to know that I forgive you. I am glad because now you are trying to remember me, and no longer try to push me out of your life. I wish I knew my brother. I am happy that you were able to have my sister. I do not feel replaced but part of the family..... part of your memory. I love you, Michael.”

The response felt very real, and now I had more I wanted to say to my son:

“Dear Michael; I am so sorry for what I had done to you. I really didn’t consider that I had

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a choice at that time. My mind was made up and I closed down all my emotions. I loved you so much and I was afraid that it was painful for you. I robbed you of your life and it was too much for me to bear. I made so many excuses and tried so hard to convince myself that I did the right thing. I wish you were here with me. I know you are sweet and so loving, I wish I could have helped you and at least said goodbye. I love you forever. Love, Mommy”.

I was weeping as I wrote. It again seemed natural and right to pen a second letter from Michael:

“Dear Mommy, where I am there is no pain. I do not want this to destroy you. Show your love for me to my brother and sister. I love you, Michael.”

As I read the last lines aloud in the group, I was sobbing with grief but also with something akin to joy. Ever since the abortion I had been having difficulties relating to Michael’s older brother, my first born. I was impatient and short tempered with him, and he was so needing my love and trying so hard to please me. It was almost as if I had not allowed myself to love him. After all, I had denied life to his brother. Now that I had acknowledged my love for Michael, he was telling me to show that love by loving his brother and sister. In loving them I would also be loving him. Now at last I was free to love all three of my children.

After reconciling with Michael, I felt closer to his older brother. I could begin to reach out in love to the son I had pushed away in my attempt to avoid facing the truth about my abortion loss.

Now, nearly three years after working through my post abortion grief and pain in ASA, everything is so much better in our family. I never thought I would feel this happy again. My husband and I and our children are all doing very well.

I no longer cry when I speak of my abortion. I still detest the word, but I am able to accept it as a part of my past. My children are both carriers of the gene for Down’s syndrome. I plan to tell them when they are older, that they had a brother named Michael.

Abortion brings with it the social stigma that everything must be kept a secret. I know that many others must still be suffering the same pain I did, and I am so sorry for them. .

Life is sometimes filled with difficult and overwhelming decisions. I am thankful for ASA and the members of my group who helped me through such a difficult period of my life.

Ken

The abortion happened just six months ago, in June. I was 22 and had just finished college. Elisha was 18 and graduating from High School. She had been accepted at an exclusive private college on the East Coast. We were very much in love and talked a lot about marriage, but she planned to get her degree first - as a therapist working with abused children.

We had been going out for a year when we found out she was pregnant and we just assumed abortion was our only choice. I think she was two months along. We didn't discuss it with anybody else. Elisha didn't want her parents to know. They were paying for her college, and I think she was afraid they would kick her out of the family if they knew she was pregnant. She didn't get along with them all that well, especially with her mother, who had also had an abortion.

Elisha wanted to go on with school the way she had planned, and we weren't ready to get married yet, although we wanted to. So before she even told me she was pregnant, she had a date set up for the abortion. I definitely can't say that I made the decision.

When she told me I just figured it was fine, that was what we needed to do. But as the days went on I started thinking, 'God, I wish we didn't have to do it like this.' From the day she found out till we went in, was less than a week. It's such a big decision it shouldn't be made that fast. I tried to talk her out of it, but she didn't really want to hear, she just wanted to get it over with.

I think we both thought that it would be O.K. It wouldn't be a big thing. Just a short procedure and you walk out as if nothing happened. And that's the farthest from the truth. For some people it may be like that, an easy, quick way to get rid of the problem. Unfortunately, that was definitely not the best way to deal with it for me. Who knows what would have happened had we made a different decision. But I do know that having made the decision, it turned out to be the worst thing that's ever happened in my life. I mean, hands down.

I went with her to the clinic and paid for the abortion. When we were going in there were some people protesting on the sidewalk. They said something like, "Don't kill your child", and I wanted to hit them or say, "Shut up, we don't want to hear it". I'll never forget it. Elisha just didn't want to hear that at all, because she was trying to block reality out and get it over with. But now I look back, and I would like to be one of those people out there trying to save the babies.

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There were a lot of couples in the waiting room. Some were laughing, some were quiet, some were crying. Elisha had to go back and forth for all these test and talk to people to make sure she was doing what she wanted to do. So she'd go in to see the doctor for a while and then come back out, and as the time got closer she got more and more upset. The counselors didn't want to look at me or talk to me. I felt like I was the bad guy who had caused the problem. I just felt like, well I guess that's what I deserve. All I could do was just try to be close to Elisha and comfort her.

When she finally went in for the abortion I just sat there on the couch and looked around. Tried to close my eyes. I couldn't even believe that I was there and that it was happening. Sitting across from me was a girl with a little baby. It made me feel terrible. I mean, that little baby was just gorgeous. It was like I was seeing what I could have, but I was denying the choice to have it. And it was really hard to deal with. Even now, every time I see a little baby, it is so hard to look at them and think that I could have had one. I wonder if I will ever get another chance. For me that's one of the biggest things I want in life, to have children. I always felt that. And I really wanted Elisha to be the mother of my child.

She came back out through that door after 45 minutes. I hugged her and we both cried. She could barely move, and I supported her as we walked to my car. We spent the day together in the park. She told me what happened in there. The way she described it was just terrible. I guess it's similar to when girls go in to have a physical. She hated having to take her clothes off in front of a stranger and be up on the table. She described the cold metal table, and the doctor said something about, "Oh you have a nice suntan", and she hated him.

About a week later she was feeling fine again. I think we both thought things would just get better, and everything would be fine. So I left for the summer. And it hit me not long after I was gone. I started realizing what had happened. There was no way I could get it out of my mind. It was always with me. That I blew my chance to have a baby with her. Or that we had that chance and we didn't accept it. I know it would have been a boy. I would have loved to see what he would have looked like. And I knew that I'd never be able to see that baby. It was all I could think about, and it was destroying me.

I know it's real hard on her too. Our relationship is really bad right now. There's nothing there. It's just amazing to me - I still can't believe it, because we were so close, and now, a complete change. I still want to get married, but just the thought of anything serious now really scares her. It's so sad. Elisha doesn't want any commitment. The physical part of our relationship is completely over. And she can't even imagine any of that with anyone. And I really can't either, because it's just

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horrifying to think about. Which is really too bad.

I've been going to church. It's becoming a part of my life. That's where I heard about a post abortion group. I haven't known where else to turn. It's actually destroying me. Because at first I couldn't tell my parents or anybody. I have told them now, but Elisha still hasn't told her parents.

My parents are divorced. Both were supportive. They basically thought that we did what we thought was best at the time, and there was nothing more I could do about it. The thing is, we didn't really know. We didn't even know if we believed in the whole issue. I don't think either of us believed abortion was O.K. Especially now we don't. That's the hardest part. She tells me that a lot, "I can't even believe I did something I don't even believe in." But when you're put in the situation it's different. Your thinking gets twisted.

Now I don't know if we could ever be happy together again. I don't know if we'll ever be happy at all again. It's really tough. We're both so confused. Elisha just moved away from home. Now she has the freedom to stay out late all the time. We never used to drink, she does a lot of that stuff now. And there's a lot of anger. At first both of us said, "Well, neither of us is really to blame and it's not your fault and not my fault". But I know that she blames me now. She's told me that. And I am angry with her.

Before the abortion, when our relationship was good and strong, I was super happy, knew who I was, felt good about myself. Since the abortion, our relationship is gone and I've been really lost.

I know the grief isn't going away by itself. I'm afraid to face the pain, but I don't want to run away from it. I cry a lot. Elisha can't understand when I tell her how much I hurt. I know I wasn't the one who actually had the abortion, but I lost my son too. I know it was a baby, a unique child, and it was alive. And now it is dead. There will never be a replacement for it.

Maybe I can get to the point where the grief will lose its intensity. I am angry and hurt. I am sorry for what happened. Maybe someday I can believe that my son forgives me. And maybe I can forgive Elisha and myself. She went to a therapist at her school. They basically told her that abortion was O.K. and that she shouldn't worry about it. So now she thinks she is really screwed up. She thinks she is crazy, she hates her body. And I can't be with her and help her.

At least I'm able to talk about it, get in touch with my feelings, write it out. I only wish Elisha would join me in grieving for our son. Maybe we could work it through and go on together. Now I'm afraid she's stuffing it, and I fear for her.

Juanita Maria

What started this mess? I always knew abortion was wrong. When I was growing up I knew. So why did I do it? One of my mother's friends had an abortion in Mexico. She was married with two children. I wondered why she did it when she had a husband and two kids. Maybe that is what gave me the idea that in some instances abortion was all right.

Anyway, when I was seventeen I ended up doing it myself. I thought I didn't have anyone to turn to, and I was afraid to have a baby when I was so young. I didn't know then that having an abortion is much scarier and that living with myself after having one would be a living hell. I knew it was wrong, yes I did, but in my mind I forced myself to believe it was my only option, because I didn't want any other option. I just wanted to get rid of the problem and go on with my life. I was dreaming, and the nightmare still goes on.

I met Lorenzo when I was seventeen and he was twenty. I was desperate for someone to love me, and latched onto him and wouldn't let go. There were so many warning signs, but I was in love and blind. He was possessive, abusive and used drugs and alcohol. To me, he had all the right qualifications of an ideal mate. He was handsome, sexy and very charming. So I got on the roller coaster and am still on it, though it is going a little slower now.

It was like Lorenzo loved me and hated me at the same time. No matter how good I was to him, it was never good enough. He began pressuring me for sex about a month after I met him. He used some great lines on me, tried to make me feel guilty for not doing it. He said, if I loved him, I would. He said, 'all the girls are having sex way before seventeen, you must be frigid.'

I finally gave in about three months after meeting him. It was painful and scary and I was sure that my dad could tell as soon as I went home. After that I basically gave my body and soul to Lorenzo. I disobeyed my parents by staying out late with him or not coming home at all. I should have known better, but when Lorenzo told me he was sterile, I believed him. It turned out he was far from sterile.

I became pregnant with my first beautiful child in April 1982. I knew I was pregnant even before I took the test. I felt it inside and my body was changing quickly. I was in turmoil, agonizing over what to do. I decided on abortion because I felt it was my only option. I don't remember if

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Lorenzo ever offered to help me keep the baby. I don't think he did, because he basically avoided me after I told him I was pregnant. He went off with his friends, drinking and going out with other girls.

I decided to go on a diet and stay skinny. I took diet pills and starved myself. I had a little slip of paper on my dresser with the doctor's appointment written on it. I would look at it and say to myself, 'I'll miss this appointment and make another one.' I was avoiding the abortion and at the same time hurting the baby and myself with the pills.

Finally, when my parents went out of town on vacation, I decided to go in for the abortion. I called Lorenzo and he come over to pick me up. I walked out to the car and he told me he only had a hundred dollars. The abortion cost \$150.00. To my shame and sadness I asked my younger sister for the money and she gave it to me. Recently we talked and she told me that she had tried to stop me by showing me pictures of aborted fetuses. I don't remember any of that, and it didn't stop me, did it? I wish it had. So maybe my sister learned from my mistake.

Lorenzo and I drove to the Planned Parenthood 'butchery'. That's how I think of it now. I can still remember what it looked like inside. There was a circular bench around a plant centerpiece. We sat there and waited and I took out my biology book and happened to turn to a page with a picture of a 2 month old fetus. I showed Lorenzo and said, "Look, that's what it looks like right now." He just looked kind of sad and didn't say anything.

The nurse called me into the room. I felt kind of shaky and scared. I changed into a gown and sat on the table. The doctor came in and asked me if I was sure I wanted to do this. I said yes. I put my feet in the stirrups and lay back. He put something cold up inside me and then I felt a pulling pain. I grabbed the nurse's hand and our eyes were locked in pain and sadness. Then it was over, quick as that. A very short life span. I did not feel relieved. I did not feel happy. I did not feel free. I didn't feel at all. I walked out of the room with a thick pad between my legs and left my little baby dead in a dish.

I didn't cry and I didn't say a word till we got back to Lorenzo's house. We walked up the walkway, slowly because I was in pain, and were greeted by angry stares from Lorenzo's brother and sister-in-law. I felt like the ultimate pile of shit. I have never felt such shame in my life. We went up to Lorenzo's room and he offered me some pot to ease my pain and obliterate my mind. I took it gladly.

I don't remember a lot of things that happened after that. I know that I kept making bad decisions and that my life was very sad. I moved out of my parents' house and in with Lorenzo as

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soon as I turned eighteen. I went from the frying pan into the fire. I was not welcome at Lorenzo's and subjected myself to abuse by his entire family, including the children. The adults would egg the kids on to torment me. It was awful, and Lorenzo was my only consolation. He tried to protect me, and for me he was the good guy who helped me put up with his horrible family.

I went on birth control pills and took them inconsistently. Surprisingly I didn't get pregnant, even though in my heart I wanted to replace the baby that I killed. Lorenzo's mom had to move out of the house so I went back to live with my parents. It seemed strange after living with a guy and being somewhat independent. I didn't last long at home because I wanted to be with Lorenzo and I couldn't stand my dad's drinking and drug addiction.

Lorenzo moved to Florida to live with his cousins and attend college. I was heart broken and did the worst thing possible to get him to come back. I told him I had an affair with a friend of his and he got mad enough to take the next flight home. From then on I stuck with him. Our relationship was very bad. I didn't trust him and he didn't trust me. He became increasingly abusive.

In 1984 we moved to Anchorage, Alaska. It was all right for a while, but then it became violent between us. Lorenzo didn't hit me, but he threw things at me, pushed me around, called me a stupid b... and many other mean words. Instead of leaving or defending myself, I abused myself. I punched myself in the face, scratched my arms and face, and beat my head against the wall, trying to get him to feel sorry for me and love me again. One day I started having really bad abdominal pains. I was on the floor in agony and had to call a neighbor for help. She took me to the hospital, but they wouldn't do anything for me because I didn't have insurance. I lay in a bed for hours in pain and they did nothing. Finally the pain went away and we went home. I think I may have had a miscarriage, but I don't remember if I bled.

After that I finally decided to do something to better my life and I joined the Air Force. Before going to boot camp I went home to regain some strength. My face was still bruised and my parents thought Lorenzo had hit me. I told them that he hadn't, I had hit myself, but they didn't believe me. While I was home I kept in touch with Lorenzo, and as usual absence made my heart go pitter-patter for him again. I went to boot-camp and later to school, and when I arrived at my first duty station in Tucson, Arizona, Lorenzo was already there working. We lived together again, partied and got drunk a lot, hanging out with other party people. I was pretty happy until I found out Lorenzo had another girl friend on the side - someone he worked with. I thought I was going to die from heart break. I lost ten pounds in a week and cried all the time. Then I kicked that cheating b..... out and didn't want him back ever. Next came the notes, the calls, the 'I'm sorrys, she's nothing to me,

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you're the only one for me, Juanita'. So, being a sucker, I took him back and we got married.

Well, we actually got along better married. Then I started trying to get pregnant. Guess what? I couldn't. I thought that God was punishing me for the abortion and I would never be allowed to have a baby. I couldn't stand to see baby commercials. Every month when my period started, I was depressed. I'd make charts of my cycle, counting the days, hoping that I would get pregnant.

Finally, after two years it happened. I took the home pregnancy test and it was positive! I was so happy, until the day I sat on the toilet and a large clot plopped out of me. It was a strange looking thing, kind of brown colored and not blood red. I didn't know what it was and flushed it down the toilet. I kind of put it out of my head and didn't acknowledge it as a child. I was very upset that I wasn't pregnant, but it didn't really hit me that I had a miscarriage and lost my second baby or maybe my third.

Two months later I became pregnant again. I was really careful and every day I checked myself for blood. If I spotted, I would panic and think I was going to miscarry. When I passed the third month I felt better, but throughout the pregnancy I expected to lose it.

My first live child was born and I was so happy! Over the next 7 years I had 3 more babies and I smothered them with love and never let them out of my sight. I tried to protect them from any harm. I finally had to protect them from the one who should be their protector - their father. As the years passed he had turned into a black-souled monster, kind one minute and horribly cruel the next. It was very bad and I felt so guilty for subjecting my children to it. I left him and took the children to a woman's shelter, but we came back. Then I left with them again and came back, over and over again. Finally I didn't go back and things are getting better.

In despair I turned to God and the Church and we all have God in our lives now. It is a daily struggle and hard work to be a Christian, but I wouldn't want to be anything else. I thank God for bringing me to where I am now, and for letting me find ASA where I met special people who help women who have had abortions come alive again. It has been three years since I first came to ASA and little by little my emotional numbness has left and the blank spots in my memories are filling in.

I didn't want to feel the pain I had tried to numb with alcohol and drugs and sex. It was hard for me to break through my resistance to tears. I would let myself feel a little and cry a little, then clamp the lid over my pain again. But I am coming more alive. I feel and I cry and I am beginning to trust myself and God more. With Him I can make it, and I will. Sometimes I fall back, but then at other times my guardian angel grabs my hand and pulls me forward. Thank you, guardian angel.

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Writing letters to God, to the people I needed to reconcile with, and to my children, helped a lot to unplug my fountain of tears. This is the my first letter to the baby I aborted. I read it aloud in my group:

“Dear Giovanni. I love you. I have always loved you and I miss you terribly. After what I did to you, I hope it didn’t hurt you too much. It must have hurt. I wish I didn’t do it, honey. I could give you a lot of excuses for what I did, but basically I was scared and selfish. I didn’t know what a big mistake I was making. I hope you can hear me now. I am your Mommy. I feel like such a horrible, cruel, wretched Mommy. Can you ever forgive me? If I could I would hold you, kiss your cheeks, nibble on your toes, smell your soft hair, look into your eyes and pour all my love into your soul. I’m so sorry baby, I wish I could go back. Why did I do it! I want to be with you so bad now that you are real to me. Now that I know you are my baby I just want to reach up into heaven and pull you back. I hope you are happy with God. You must be. Your Daddy is sorry too. I can only say that he loves you. Now that you are in my life I will never forget you again. Now you have a place in my heart. Please pray for me, my baby, and come to me in my dreams. Your Mom.”

After writing my letter to Giovanni, I wrote an answer. Once I had written “Dear Mommy”, the rest came by itself. In my heart I knew it was real - that it was what my son in heaven said to me.

“Dear Mommy, I am here with you, all around you. I am with our God. At first I was mad at you because you forgot me. Now I am happy with you because now I am with you at last. When you are in God’s Kingdom on earth you are with me in God’s Kingdom in Heaven. When you sing in His Kingdom I am with you and with my sisters and my Dad. Tell Daddy to come be with me more. I like him a lot. My sisters are so good. I love to see them. I forgive you. I forgive you, Mama. I forgive you Mama. I forgive you Mama. Love, Giovanni. “

I told my daughters that they have a big brother named Giovanni in Heaven. They know he died in my stomach before he was born, but not that their daddy and I chose that he should die. The girls were sad that he died, but happy to know about him. My youngest daughter proudly told her friends she has a big brother in Heaven who looks after her. Lorenzo came to a memorial service and wept for his son. Our relationship is still broken, but I know that mourning our loss has been good for all of us. The girls have also attended a memorial for their brother and it was good. Giovanni is part of our family now.

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As part of my healing process, I made a quilt to benefit Abortion Survivors Anonymous. I named it for my baby, and sold raffle tickets in my neighborhood and in church. One of my daughters picket the winning ticket out of the basket at a church gathering. The ticket belonged to my grandmother! She was so excited and happy to own the quilt commemorating her great-grandson.

It has been three years now since I first came to ASA. I have continued to work through my grief and numbness in several groups - lately as co-leader. Each time I attend the memorial service at the conclusion of our nine week group, there is more healing, and a reminder that our babies are in Heaven. It is good to acknowledge them and hope to be with them some day.

I pray for all of you who are in pain after abortions. May God help you heal.

Appendix B: ASA TRADITIONS, PRINCIPLES and GROUP STRUCTURE.

The Twelve Traditions of ASA.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on ASA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to recover from the impact of abortion on our lives and relationships.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or Abortion Survivors Anonymous as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose; to help Abortion Survivors in recovery; to accept, comfort and encourage those who suffer; and to carry the message of hope and new life beyond abortion grief and loss.
6. An ASA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the Abortion Survivors Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every ASA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Abortion Survivors Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. ASA as such ought never to be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Abortion Survivors Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues. No ASA group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate Abortion Survivors Anonymous, express any opinion on outside controversial issues - particularly those of politics, abortion reform, or sectarian religion; hence the ASA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films. **We need guard with special care the anonymity of our fellow ASA members.**
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

*The Twelve Traditions reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

The Twelve Traditions of AA.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose; to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A. as such, ought never to be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

ABOUT ABORTION AND CONTROVERSY.

Tradition Ten states that Abortion Survivors Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues, hence the ASA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. ASA as a group has chosen to maintain the tenth tradition as established by AA, recognizing that the abortion issue today is at least as volatile a topic of political, public and private debate as the issue of prohibition and alcohol reform was when AA was founded more than fifty years ago. In those days there was public and private furor over the pros and cons of legislation regulating the use and sale of alcohol. Members of AA surely had their private opinions, but recognized that discussions within the meetings, or outside implicating AA as a group, would destroy the program. Today the world-wide success of AA and the universal respect for the program owes much to the firm adherence to the tenth tradition.

We in ASA recognize our own vulnerability in this area. Our survival and usefulness as a group depends on our guarding the tenth tradition well. We must keep firmly in mind that our purpose as a group is to support one another in our individual growth towards wholeness post abortion, not to promote or oppose abortion reform.

Individually we are likely to have personal opinions on the issues relating to abortion, but we

leave those opinions outside the door when we enter our meeting. **If, outside the meeting, we do engage in discussions or activities of a controversial nature, we do it as private individuals.** Our responsibility to the group, and our commitment to the tenth tradition (as well as the eleventh and twelfth traditions concerning anonymity) compels us not to implicate ASA. We may choose to identify ourselves as an Abortion Survivor, but we do not express our opinion "as an ASA member", or "on behalf of ASA".

ANONYMITY.

Anonymity is fundamental to an ASA fellowship. Our Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions establish our guidelines for anonymity both public and personal. Tradition Eleven states: **"Our public policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and films. We need guard with special care the anonymity of our fellow ASA members"**. This tradition does not restrict us from giving the public information about Abortion Survivors Anonymous, but only from disclosing the identity of other ASA members.

It is each member's choice how anonymous he or she wants to be with family and friends, but we need be particularly careful to guard the anonymity of other ASA members. Before coming to ASA, most of us kept our abortions secret from even family members and close friends. Fear of exposure kept many of us from coming for help until our pain became unbearable. There are those among us who cannot share their abortion loss with anyone outside our group. It is imperative that we guard their identity. Particularly since ours is a society with merciless media exploitation and public hunger for the 'secret lives' of others.

In ASA our focus is on publicity for the program itself and how it can help those who suffer after an abortion loss. We are not to put ourselves or other members in the public eye. We want to extend a hand of help and friendship as a group, not engage in high pressure promotion to push our program on anyone.

ANONYMITY AND SPIRITUALITY.

Perhaps the most important reason for practicing anonymity is given in Tradition Twelve: **"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities."**

We may begin practicing anonymity to provide a safe place to share confidences, but we will gradually discover a spiritual dimension to anonymity; **The willingness to forego personal recognition for the good of the group is a hallmark of true humility.** In our meetings, we leave our 'public image' outside. In group we can come to know ourselves and be known for who we really are, not for what we do on the outside. We can take off our labels and masks and become human beings -not 'human doings'. Practicing anonymity in our personal affairs also means we become willing to sacrifice our time and efforts in order to help others without expecting personal gain or glory in return.

The practice of anonymity is a fundamental aspect of our program, helping us grow towards humility, wholeness and spiritual maturity. As a reminder of our commitment to these principles, it is a good idea to say the anonymity pledge at the beginning of each meeting.

SPONSORSHIP.

Most of us came to our first ASA meeting because someone already in the program was willing to share the gift of their own experience, hope and recovery with us. **Sponsorship is just another term for the ongoing relationship between a seasoned member and someone with less experience in the program.** The newcomer is often frightened and lonely, even desperate. The personal attention and friendship of an established member can be of invaluable help.

Sponsorship is by mutual agreement, and is recommended not just for newcomers, but for all ASA members. The relationship to a sponsor can be of vital importance in our growth towards wholeness. It helps us develop trust, and to break the pattern of withdrawing and isolating so typical for many abortion survivors. The sponsor is someone who can be a special confidant, a contact between meetings, a prayer partner, someone to discuss problems we are not comfortable in bringing before the group. A sponsor does not advise or direct, but shares his or her own experience, hope and strength.

The benefits of sponsorship is mutual. Sponsor and sponsored are equals, growing through giving and receiving encouragement, nurture and friendship. We learn to be

responsible and accountable. Experience has taught that those who get most from the program, maintain a relationship with a sponsor. By accepting the mutual responsibilities of sponsorship, our personal growth is enhanced. By committing ourselves to another's spiritual growth, our own spirituality is deepened. Our serenity and strength grows as we give to others what we ourselves have received.

GROUP STRUCTURE.

ASA has no organization as such, no leader with authority to govern, no formal membership lists or dues. We are guided by our Twelve Traditions, and **Tradition Nine tells us that "Our groups as such, ought never to be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve."**

Our traditions state that no ASA group is to be organized or run on the basis of personal authority. Individual groups need the least possible organization. Leadership is rotated, some positions from meeting to meeting, or as determined by the group. The smooth functioning of a group requires a leader - facilitator or meeting coordinator responsible for opening and closing the meeting. There may be a secretary/treasurer responsible for taking care of voluntary contributions, paying group obligations (rent and supplies), and maintaining available literature lists and sources. One member is usually responsible for maintaining a supply of coffee, tea, and cups, and plugging in the hot water pot before each meeting.

CLOSED MEETING FORMAT

ASA meetings are generally 'closed', limited to those who identify themselves as abortion survivors and come seeking help for themselves, not for others. Because of sensitive issues surrounding the abortion loss in our own lives, as well as public controversies concerning abortion, **we recommend that prospective members come by invitation after a 'screening' contact with an experienced member.** If meetings are listed, only a telephone number for contact should be given. The address of meeting places should not be made public.

In an established ASA group, the leader and co-leader will have already worked through the Twelve Steps. When all are newcomers, you may want to choose a leader or take turns leading the meetings.

We suggest that the leader begin each meeting with an invitation to a moment of silence,

followed by the **Serenity Prayer** and the **Anonymity Pledge**. (p.9) Take turns reading **The Twelve Steps**.(p.8)

Take turns reading the step being studied, and the reflections. The group may relate to what they heard, and work through the personal application part together. If your group is large, we suggest you divide into smaller family groupings of four or five for sharing.

Try to limit the meeting time to maximum two hours. Pace yourself. This is hard work. You may take as many sessions as you need to go through the steps.

SHARING

Our recovery and serenity depends upon openness and honesty with ourselves, with God and with others. Our discussions and sharing in ASA meetings should help us grow towards these ideals. We help each other by sharing our personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. We avoid topics, issues and attitudes which tend to separate and hinder us, rather than strengthen and encourage us in our growth towards wholeness and peace of mind and heart.

ASA is not a confrontational or problem solving group. We don't tell people who they are or how to solve their problems. Our task is to create a trusting, loving and nurturing atmosphere where we can all discover who we are and what our choices are. By attentively listening and participating in honest sharing of our weaknesses and strengths, our fears and faith, our experience and hope, group members gradually grow in awareness and acceptance of ourselves, of others and of God.

SOME ROADBLOCKS TO RECOVERY IN ASA;

As Abortion Survivors we are likely to share in certain dysfunctional patterns of communication - or lack of it. In the past we may have found that self-revelation resulted in judgment, criticism, rejection, misunderstandings and hurt. To protect ourselves we may have held others at a 'safe' distance by restricting our conversations to opinions, issues, and other people; or we may have adopted other attitudes that blocked real communication.

Our recovery and serenity depends upon openness and honesty with ourselves, God and others. In ASA we help each other by sharing our personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. We have found the following issues to be particularly 'risky' roadblocks to helpful sharing in our meetings:

RELIGION. ASA is a spiritual program not affiliated with any sect or denomination. You are welcome here whether you confess a particular creed or none. We may share our faith, but always respect the beliefs of others. Discussions of specific religious tenets tend to divide us, and are best avoided.

ISSUES. In ASA we learn that we cannot - and ought not try to - change another person's opinions. Our serenity grows as we learn to accept that fundamental fact of constructive relationships. Our tenth tradition teaches that Abortion Survivors Anonymous as a group has no opinion on outside issues. We avoid discussing controversial issues in our groups, particularly issues relating to abortion reform.

GOSSIP. In ASA we are learning to develop trust and sharing of our inner selves with others. This can only happen when we respect and guard each others' privacy. Gossip will destroy us and cause serious setbacks in recovery.

BETRAYAL OF CONFIDENCE. Nothing is as damaging to our group relationship and individual growth as betrayal of confidence. Discussion of anything of a personal nature at our meetings should not be repeated elsewhere - not even to loved ones.

CONTROL. All of us may have tried to avoid emotional and physical pain by attempting to control, manipulate and dominate others. In ASA our function as a group is seriously damaged by any attempt to assume authority, direct others or give advice. In our program we make suggestions, share our strength, hope and experiences, and rotate leadership, thus allowing each of us to grow in our own way and pace.

We are in ASA because we acknowledge our own need for help. We are not here to help or 'fix' others.

CLOSING THE MEETING

Meetings may end with a group member reading the following:

"I would like to remind all of us that we grow and become whole in relationship. We retreat and slip back in isolation. Recovery doesn't happen in a relationship vacuum. Each of us add to the group, and the absence of one is a loss to the others. Growing together means taking risks. But we are here to share each others' pains, joys, disappointments and triumphs, and to help each other develop confidence and a sense of security. That takes time, as our program teaches us. We reach maturity and serenity one step, one day, one moment at the time.

So be patient with yourself and with us. Refrain from judging yourself or others. Don't

compare. Each of us are different, growing in a way and at a pace best for us/ So let us accept and affirm each other as God helps us grow in understanding, love, serenity and joy.

Would you care to join me in the closing prayer? (Usually the Lord's Prayer on p.9)

RE-UNIONS OR CONTINUING MEETINGS

After completing the nine or ten weekly groups working through the steps, we encourage members to get together for follow up and mutual encouragement on a regular basis. Perhaps in monthly meetings of sharing where the group members are in their individual journey's to wholeness. Some groups choose to meet for a picnic, an outing, or a special theme meeting. Some groups may choose to get together for a workshop with clay, paint or other form of creative activity. Some may form a study group using a book of their choice. The purpose is to stay in touch, to encourage each other and provide a safe place to share our struggles and triumphs, our days of grieving and days of joy.

OPEN MEETINGS

We may hold open Speaker's Meetings for the purpose of introducing our program to the public or invited guests who may have a special interest in helping those who suffer post abortion. Speakers should be experienced members of ASA who share their own abortion story - the pain that brought them to ASA, and their recovery in the program.

Guests may be members of the clergy, doctors, counselors or others who encounter abortion survivors in their practice, and who may want to refer them to our group. At such meetings a panel of experienced ASA members could also answer questions from the guests.

APPENDIX C Additional Help:

Abortion Survivors Anonymous recommends material in use by other twelve step programs, such as **Blueprint for Progress**, Al-Anon's Fourth Step Inventory.

The 12 Steps - A Way Out, A Working Guide for Adult Children of Alcoholic & Other Dysfunctional Families

The Twelve Steps - A Spiritual Journey, A Working Guide for Healing Damaged Emotions. Revised Edition Based on Biblical Teachings.

Meditations for The Twelve Steps - a Spiritual Journey.

All three are developed by Friends in Recovery, and available from Recovery Publications, Inc. Tools for Recovery, 1201 Knoxville Street, San Diego, CA 92110. Phone: (619) 275-1350

Women in Ramah: A Post Abortion Bible Study, by Linda Cochrane, R.N. suitable for individual or group study, available from Christian Action Council, 701 W. Broad Street, Suite 405, Falls Church, VA 22046

Love is a Choice, Workbook, Recovery for Co-dependent Relationships. Minirth Meier Clinic Series. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1991.

We also recommend the use of a daily book of meditations, such as **One Day at a Time in Al-Anon**, available from any Al-Anon group in your area.

Letting God, Christian Meditations for recovering persons, by A. Phillip Parham, Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1987.

Day by Day Love is a Choice, Devotions for Co-dependents, Serenity Meditation Series, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville 1991

Tilly, a novel by Frank Peretti, Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois 60153. 1989

Real Choices, Listening to Women: Looking for Alternatives to Abortion, by Frederica Mathewes Green. Conciliar Press, P.O.Box 76, Ben Lomond, California 95005. 1997

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