

O, Brothers, Where Art Thou?

by Bob Brown

From two observations arises one question.

First of all, during my stint at the HCRTL booth at the Farm Fair, there were relatively few middle-school and high-school-aged boys who stopped by to ask questions or to view the displays. (Their female counterparts, to my happy surprise, came in droves.)

Secondly, at the HCRTL business meetings and speaker events that I have attended, and I have been to most of them, I can recall seeing only two or three men besides myself among a much larger turnout of women.

So, the question that I would like to ask is: "What's the deal, guys?"

Statisticians would chide me if I were to make a generalization about male participation within the entire pro-life movement based on a sample drawn from a couple of hours at a county fair and a few meetings at libraries in the same county. Well, they would have a point if I was generalizing, but I am not. I am merely asking: "O, brothers, where art thou?"

When I was in college in the late 80's, it seemed to me that I heard more men's voices opposing abortion than women's. Undoubtedly, there were women leaders taking important stands against abortion, but even now, I clearly remember thinking that,

unless millions of Average Joannas would stand up against abortion, no progress would ever be made. Men could argue and fight and do whatever we do best, but until the child bearers themselves cried out, "Enough!," the slaughter of unborn children would continue unabated.

That female voice was not very strong fifteen years ago; however, in spite of the continuing saga of a stifling cultural and media suppression of the pro-life message, that voice is significantly stronger now. But I am not so impressed with us men.

Have men's voice opposing abortion grown weaker? Has our righteous anger gone flat from complacency or from decades of seeming defeat? Maybe the few notorious cases of men (Paul Hill, Eric Rudolph) killing people in the name of the pro-life movement have discouraged some Christian men from obeying their call to "rescue the weak and needy [and] deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82:4), and "greedy," I would point out.

Men need to get back in the battle: On our knees, from the pulpit, in the public eye, and among friends and neighbors.

And the pro-life movement needs to make sure that it forms educational strategies and programs which specifically target boys.



We must make sure that we are not raising a generation of children who do not care about the lives of the most innocent children of all. ■

The Legend of the 400,000 Embryos

That there are 400,000 frozen human embryos that could provide a potentially unlimited supply of stem cells has become a truism of the stem cell debate. Indeed, in recent letters to President Bush, members of both the House and Senate explicitly refer to these 400,000 frozen embryos in urging the administration to change its current policy on embryonic stem cell research (ESCR).

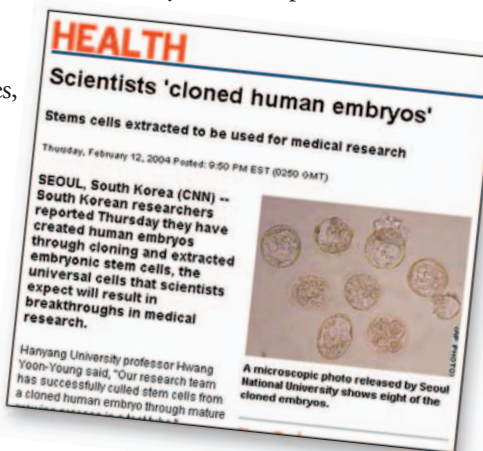
A further truism is that the stem cell lines that could be derived from these frozen embryos have the potential to cure numerous diseases, but that such cures remain just around the corner and just out of reach because the Administration refuses to fund research in which these embryos would be destroyed. After all, yet another truism goes, the vast majority of these embryos will likely be destroyed anyway. Because the number of frozen embryos is so large there is an underlying assumption, accepted almost without question, that an equally large number of therapeutic stem cells can be derived from them.

But like all such truisms, there is little truth behind these assumptions:

- According to a 2002 survey by the RAND Corporation of IVF clinics in the United States, the vast majority of the 400,000 currently frozen embryos are NOT slated for destruction. The vast majority – 88.2% – are being held for family building.
- Only a small fraction – 2.2% – are slated to be discarded.

- An only slightly higher percentage – 2.8% – have been designated for research. That means of the original 400,000 frozen embryos, only 11,000 are actually available to be destroyed for their stem cells.

Only a small number of those 11,000 embryos would actually yield stem cells. Using what it calls “a conservative estimate” the RAND study calculated that only about 275 stem cell lines could actually be developed from the



embryos available for research. And even then, the RAND study concedes that this number “is probably an overestimate.”

Leading fertility experts also agree that frozen embryos would yield a far smaller number of stem cell lines than is often assumed. Dr. William Gibbons, of the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine in Virginia, says the Institute has about 200 frozen embryos available for research, but “there is no guarantee that we would get any stem cells from those 200 frozen embryos. We hear all this stuff about how all these embryos are available, but we just didn’t think there was much there.” And Dr. Barry Behr of Stanford University notes that “By far,

by far, the vast majority of embryos that are frozen are not good. If we thawed 10,000 embryos, we would get 100 or so that are viable blastocysts.”

So behind the seemingly impressive number of “400,000 frozen embryos,” the reality is that the actual number of stem cell lines likely to be produced from them is so small as to be clinically useless. In order to treat diseases (still a very distant prospect using human embryonic stem cells) hundreds of thousands more embryos, beyond those currently frozen and available for research, would be needed. This could only be achieved by a deliberate effort to create new embryos for the sole purpose of destroying them – an outcome that the use of the frozen embryos is supposed to avoid, but would most likely cause.

And if these 275 potential stem cell lines derived from frozen embryos would therefore be used only in basic research, then the number of human embryonic stem cell lines already available for federal funding under current administration policy (a number sure to increase) is already sufficient for this purpose. ■

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Farm Fair Facts

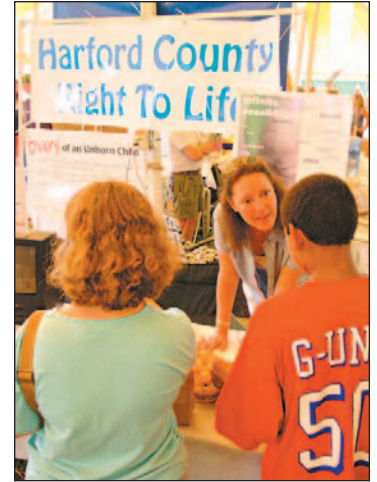
by Leigh Heller and Bob Brown

By all accounts, the HCRTL booth at the Harford County Farm Fair was a success: 275 bumper stickers were given away, more than 500 "Precious Ones" were "adopted," and many people signed up in support of parental notification as well as to receive the HCRTL newsletter.

However, the greatest success could not be calculated by numbers, nor was it represented in the items and materials given away. The most exciting part of the experience came in the reactions that young people had to the displays at the booth. Large numbers of teenagers, young women especially, came to look at and hold the unborn baby models. They came exclaiming, "Here are the babies that So-and-So was talking about," having searched for the HCRTL booth upon the recommendation of their friends.

Volunteering at the booth was easy; the set-up was non-threatening and encouraged people to stop, look, and touch. Visitors could watch the ultrasound video, hold the true-weight unborn baby models, listen to the volunteers' explanations, and read the printed materials. Most visitors had very positive reactions: for every scowl directed at the volunteers and wide berth made around the booth, there were five or six comments like, "Bless you for being here" and "Keep up the good work."

Although Harford County is one of the strongest pro-life counties in Maryland, there is still a lot of ignorance of basic facts and current laws. For example, many people falsely thought that abortion was illegal after three months. Still, the most rewarding part for the volunteers was the opportunity to answer the questions that the young people raised, many of whom then chose to sign up to receive the newsletter. It was amazing to see their reaction when the lies and disinformation of the pro-abortion machine were stripped away by the single, simple event of holding a true-weight, size, and form unborn baby model in their arms.



There is no way to know what the young people will do with the "Precious Ones" or written materials that they took away from the booth, but one has to believe that their exposure to truth and compassion has planted seeds that will save the life of many unborn children. ■

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