

# An Editor's Invitation: Abortion

Category: Abortion

written by Paul Gross | June 1, 2019

This month's *More Voices* theme is Abortion.

For a long time, we've resisted posting this theme out of concern that it would generate more heat than light—more vitriol than compassion. But recent legislation that would make abortions illegal in Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and now Louisiana has made us think that we need to find a way to broach this subject and talk about it with kindness and respect for one another.

Might we start that conversation by sharing our personal stories about abortion?

I hope so, and I'd like to share two experiences.

A patient of mine, I'll call her Sandra, came to see me, thrilled to be pregnant with her second child. All seemed to be going well, but then an ultrasound at twenty weeks showed something alarming: the fetus was missing vital organs.

While there was a slight chance that Sandra could continue the pregnancy to term, there was no way that an infant born in this condition could survive.

Sandra was devastated. Truly. She wondered whether the ultrasound could be wrong—and wanted it repeated. She wanted to know what could be done to save this pregnancy. Could a brand-new infant receive organ transplants?

The second ultrasound only confirmed the initial findings. And while theoretically, I suppose, a newborn infant could receive an organ transplant, in real life this is not really possible.

And so Sandra had a decision to make, and she had to make it quickly. Should she continue this doomed pregnancy—or should she have it terminated? What should she do?

What would you do?

What would I do?

Sandra decided to terminate the pregnancy—to have an abortion.

I'm guessing that most women—and men, too, if they were placed in that situation—would want to do the same. Can we all feel the pain of this situation, and the complexity that this decision might pose?

Here is my second story, a more personal one:

My wife and I married in our mid-thirties, and not until our late thirties did we start trying to have a family. When you're having children at that age, there's an increased risk of genetic abnormalities, and the woman can opt for fetal testing.

A major reason for such testing is to decide whether one wants to carry the fetus to term. I have patients who've refused such testing, saying, "Whatever comes out, I will love it and care for it."

I have deep respect for such women.

At the same time, I was raised in a practical household by determinedly practical parents—of the type to ask questions like, "Who's going to pay for that?"

If the fetus growing in Diane's uterus had significant genetic issues, my parents would have wondered how we would manage the ensuing challenges—the time, the cost, our two careers, the ache of caring for a child with severe limitations.

I wondered the same thing, and so did Diane.

So we agreed that it made sense for her to have an amniocentesis, which would tell us whether the fetus had genetic defects.

Diane had the test. And it came out negative. There were no genetic issues.

And so we—and by "we," I mean Diane—did not take the next step and seek an abortion.

We were grateful and relieved.

At the same time, I believe that our decision to be tested and our willingness to act on the results was the right decision for us, and I hope that others might understand our thoughts and respect our values, even if they do not share them.

By the same token, I respect and feel compassion for a pregnant woman in my office who arrives at a very different decision. And I admire parents who lovingly raise children with special needs.

Do you have a personal story about having—or not having—an abortion?

Would you share it with us?

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