

KATIE'S STORY

"I thought, 'My aborted baby was a real baby.'
And that's when I started feeling the guilt."

by Kathleen Winkler

Reprinted with permission from the January, 1994 issue of The Lutheran Witness

Each woman's reason for choosing an abortion, her particular circumstances and the feeling behind her decision, is as unique as her voice, her eyes, her fingerprints. Yet, there is one thread that runs through many women's stories—the thread of insecurity. And often that thread is tangled with the threads of alcohol or drug abuse.

Katie's story is shot through with all those threads. Growing up in a cool, distant family, she never felt secure. She started drinking and doing drugs early—while in high school. Like so many girls, she had sex for closeness with a man who had no interest in her or her baby. Afraid to turn to anyone for help, she took the "easy" way out.

But it wasn't easy. Even though abortion solves a problem temporarily, it often creates a greater problem than the one it supposedly solved.

That's what happened to Katie. Years later, while pregnant, she had to confront what she had done. It was through a Christian woman friend, ironically one who couldn't have her own children, that Katie finally listened to the message she'd heard so often: that God forgives. "I do know one thing for certain," she says triumphantly. "And that is that I am most definitely forgiven."

This is Katie's story, in her own words:

* * * * *

I grew up in a suburb of Chicago. I guess you would say we were a middle-class family. I had two sisters and three brothers—I'm the middle child—and we all got along pretty well. My parents were very conservative about money; they went to the extreme of not spoiling us. They also were not very affectionate people. They were the type who would say, 'I don't have to tell you that I love you; you should know that.' Looking back now, I was a very insecure person. I grew up wanting to be accepted by my peers. I would always do what they wanted me to do so they would like me.

I didn't grow up in a Christian home, although my parents had us baptized. I'm not sure why—I think to them it was just something you do. We never went to church after that. I don't know if they even had the full knowledge of who God is. I remember once when I was little, saying, "Oh, Jesus," and my father telling me not to say that. I thought "Jesus" was a bad word. I don't remember ever learning the Gospel.

When I was a teenager, I started really getting in trouble. During my freshman year of high school, I was this scared, innocent little person. But at the end of that year, I got

introduced to marijuana, and I think that's where it all started. I started going out drinking, and then I got introduced to boys, and then I became sexually active. But it was just with one boy. He gave me the big, "Now, if you really love me" type of thing. I was so insecure I was afraid to lose any friends or relationships, so I did whatever they wanted me to do—trying to please people.

My parents didn't know how much I was doing. Once I got caught drinking and was suspended. My mother was really mad—she yelled about me being the outcast of the family. They grounded me for two months. But that was the only time I really got caught and in trouble.

I was very distant from my parents. I would come in and just go upstairs. Maybe they thought that was the typical teenager. Anyway, they didn't ask. Today, I listen to my father say, "I'm really proud of my kids; none of them did drugs," and I think, "If you only knew." I smoked pot, I dropped acid, I tried cocaine once, but I didn't like it. I never did anything with a needle, though, because that scared me.

My parents didn't encourage me to go to college. They figured that was for the boys, not the girls. We were going to get married anyway. I was just glad to get through high school—I barely made it. I could have been a good student if I had tried hard, but I really didn't care.

When I graduated from high school, my parents were going to move to a farm in Iowa. I moved with them and got a job as a waitress and an apartment nearby. I was doing OK—I was your basic nice girl—until I got a roommate, although it really wasn't her fault because I made my own choices. She had a boyfriend, and I soon met her other friends, and it started all over—I got into the drinking and the drugs again.

After a while, I wanted to move back to Illinois. With me, if things weren't going just right, if they were stressful or boring, I'd pick up and leave. I'd run away from problems rather than face them. I got back in with the same old crowd in Illinois, with the drinking and the drugs—and the sex. I started dating the man, Jerry, who is now my husband, but it didn't work out at the time. He still wanted to see other women, so I met another guy, and that's when I got pregnant.

When I told him I was pregnant, he basically said, "Well, could you please leave town?" He didn't want anyone to know that I was pregnant with his child. I mentioned the idea of having an abortion, but he said he didn't believe in abortions, adding, however, that he had no plans of supporting me or the baby. "Don't have an abortion," he said. "And don't say it's my kid. Just go away quietly."

I didn't want to tell my parents I was pregnant, because I thought they would just hate me for it. So I decided to go ahead with an abortion.

I planned to hitchhike to the city to get the abortion, but the day before I left, Jerry, my eventual husband, phoned and asked me to move back. I didn't tell him I was getting an abortion, I just told him I had some "woman problems." He drove me to the clinic.

I don't really remember, but I think I was very frightened. They had me watch a video, and then I talked to the counselor. I don't know if it was the lady or the video—but somehow I got the impression that the fetus was just a little blob right now. It wasn't a baby, just a blob. The counselor spoke with me for five minutes at the most. I didn't spill my guts to her—all I wanted to do was to get in, get out and go home.

Then they took me into the room. I remember the nurse. She was very friendly. She kept saying what a good patient I was. When it was over, they gave me some soda and told me not to drink any alcohol that night.

Jerry and I continued dating. A few months later, when I told him exactly why I had gone to the clinic, he said he had guessed as much, but he had thought it best not to say anything.

We got married. I wanted to get pregnant right away. I stopped drinking and using drugs while I was pregnant because I didn't want to hurt the baby. When the baby started moving, I started thinking about the abortion. I thought, "My aborted baby was a *real* baby." And that's when I started feeling the guilt.

At the time, I wasn't a Christian, so I didn't know it was guilt, but I knew I was feeling something. I was so overprotective of my child, a little boy. I wouldn't let him out of my sight.

Shortly after he was born, we moved to a very small town. At first, not knowing anyone, I was very lonely. But every Sunday morning I would see a lot of my neighbors leaving for church. I talked to my neighbor across the street and told her that I needed to find a church to have my son baptized. I don't know why I wanted that—I guess it was just something you do. She told me about the nice little church she went to. I called the pastor and he baptized our son and told us about an instruction class at the church.

At the class, the pastor started in with what he called the Law, which made me focus on my abortion, and went home crying my eyes out because I had killed my baby. But eventually the pastor got around to describing the Gospel, and the more I learned and thought about it, the more I realized that I had been forgiven.

I met another woman who was also joining the church. She had been a missionary and was just returning home. I told her about a sin in my past that I couldn't forget (I didn't want to tell her what it was because she and her husband couldn't have any children).

But finally I couldn't keep it in any longer, and I told her. She told me right away, with no judgmental tone in her voice at all, that I was forgiven. I wondered how this person,

who couldn't have any kids, could take this so well—somebody who had killed a baby. She really got me through it.

That was 11 years ago. Since then, I've had three more children. I don't feel the guilt anymore; rather, I feel relief from the guilt. But the sadness has not completely gone away. I still cry, and I still feel very sad about what happened. I go through periods where I seem to dwell on it—usually in January, when the aborted baby would have been born. I still feel sad because of the loss, and I don't think I'll ever get rid of that. I don't know if you are supposed to get rid of that.

I'll probably have gray hair by the time I'm 40 from worrying about my kids. But they have much more than I did, because they have the Gospel. Unlike me, they are growing up with God's Word. And I know that would have made a difference to me.

I just trust in the promise of my Savior: that He loved me enough to die for me, that my sin is now erased, and that He loves my aborted baby even more than I do. That's my peace.

Kathleen Winkler, is the author of *When the Crying Stops*, from which this story is excerpted. This book, and others by the author, is available from her web site: www.kathleenwinkler.com.