

Across the Ocean and into My Living Room

How a Cross-Cultural Friendship Opened Our Eyes

JOANNA WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2014



“I had never seen what it looked like before. I was heartbroken over those pictures ... If people in my country actually saw abortion, I don't think they'd get nearly as many of them.”

Wendy* reflected the above comments to me during a break at a recent *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* seminar in Wichita, Kansas. Wendy is a good friend of mine, and we shared a home until she recently married in December. Wendy grew up in China and plans to return there with her new husband within the next few years.

During the fifteen months that I lived with Wendy, the subject of abortion periodically arose, mainly because of my work. When I first asked Wendy what she knew about abortion in China, she replied that she did not know much about it. She said that she had recently been devastated by hearing about a forced late-term abortion back home, but that she didn't know much about early abortions, only that they were very common in China. She mentioned that cheerful billboards advertising abortion are abundant there, billboards that encourage the belief that abortion can quickly and simply “get rid of your problem.”

My friendship with Wendy has caused me to think beyond the boundaries of the American debate and think about how people of other countries are affected by abortion. What I have discovered is heart-wrenching.

Abortion is the most common surgical procedure performed in China, at an estimated 13 million abortions per year. The strict family planning policies in China have compounded this problem, as childbearing is heavily regulated for the purpose of population control. There are no legal restrictions on abortion in China, and the government is heavily involved in providing and encouraging the procedure.*

Abortion is the most common surgical procedure performed in China.

So, with abortion being such a common procedure in China, how had Wendy never seen what it looked like? How had she never been confronted with an opposing perspective?

While the answers to these questions are multifaceted, it seems clear that a robust dialogue about abortion in China is not prominent. I fear that if we don't continue to actively bring up the topic here, our country will soon be in the same position. Students I talk with often say things like, “You're just wasting your time.

People are not going to change their minds because you're out here talking with them.” From many conversations that have shown otherwise, I know this assertion to be false. However, I also know that even if it were true, my work would still matter.

Justice For All must keep raising the topic of abortion on college campuses (both literally raising the images of abortion as well as creating conversations with college students). If for no other reason, this work keeps the dialogue alive. Without a dialogue about any issue, most people will gravitate toward the opinion of the masses or toward what is legal. Without a dissenting opinion being voiced, there is little hope that following generations will think critically about the humanity of the unborn and the inhumanity of abortion.



Wendy discusses abortion with a Wichita State University student during a JFA outreach in November.



JUSTICE FOR ALL TRAINS THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

WEB: WWW.JFAWEB.ORG

EMAIL: JOANNA.WAGNER@JFAWEB.ORG

OFFICE: 316-683-6426

Martin Luther King Jr. was no stranger to this concept. In his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963) published in the book *Why We Can’t Wait*, he discussed why it is critical that people not remain silent when human dignity is violated:

We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to work to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.

Thanks to her Justice For All training, Wendy is seeking to implement Martin Luther King Jr.’s words in her own life and to think of ways to bring the discussion back to China.

Wendy took the initiative to attend both a JFA seminar as well as a JFA outreach to Wichita State University. Before coming to the outreach, she told me she had been hoping for an occasion to talk to another Chinese student about the issue. I prayed before she arrived at WSU that she would have just such an opportunity.

During the hours she spent on campus, I witnessed Wendy gracefully displaying the Three Essential Skills that mark our JFA community: asking questions with an open heart, listening to understand, and finding common ground when possible in her conversations. After observing other staff members’ conversations, Wendy wasted no time in starting her own conversation. Admiring her boldness, I stepped closer to listen. Wendy was talking to another Chinese student in Chinese! God gave Wendy what she had requested.

After the whole outreach experience ended, Wendy wrote this on her response card:

Comments: *I really enjoyed the seminar and our reach. I think the graphics are really helpful. I got to know a lot of knowledge about abortion. The seminar changed my view of abortion.*

I am very thankful for Wendy. She has opened my eyes to the beauty of another part of the world, while at the same time deepening my concern for the plight of those dehumanized internationally. In China, specifically, this is a major problem. Pray with me that Wendy finds a way to help change the heart of that nation. She is eager to serve, and we can all learn from her example.

Peace and joy, *Joanna*



This Chinese hospital advertisement says: “If you get pregnant by accident during your university year, now there is an installment payment package for abortion... You just need to bring your ID or student card, in person... and then you can enjoy our installment payment facility for abortion... The process is very convenient and we will make sure your privacy is protected. Shenyang Sun Yatsen Hospital provides a special abortion technique that can protect your uterus and at the same time is painless. Seven thousand women in the city of Shenyang who had accidental pregnancy can testify to our safety guarantee.”



Wendy wasn't the only one from my house who came to outreach in November. Erin Sundquist (center) also came to use her past JFA training to create further dialogue at Wichita State University.

* Notes: Wendy’s birth name is Minshen, but she introduced herself to me with her American name, Wendy. / See www.jfaweb.org/Joanna-China for pertinent information and statistics and a related article I wrote in college for MercatorNet.