

# Reflection on the Justice For All Boulder Outreach<sup>1</sup>

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By Melanie Dodd

I remember the bus ride up to Boulder, talking, laughing with my friends. All the while, in some of the deepest parts of me, I felt some very familiar emotions being pulled. *Babies, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, embarrassment*.....I began to remember them all. I know some of the students I was with were a little nervous. They didn't have any experience with this stuff and were afraid they didn't have much wisdom to offer others. In a way it's sort of true. Unless you have been there . . . unless you know what it feels like to be single, pregnant, in an abusive relationship, maybe even disowned by your family . . . it's hard to say what you would do. I wish I had been in the same boat with my friends, but I wasn't. I'd been there; I remember what it felt like.

*No one will know unless I tell them*, I thought. I never considered that God would use me. I was broken, embarrassed, and ashamed. I was surrounded by 87 students who had more character and integrity than I had ever seen and I felt their strong, honorable lives were more valuable than my destructive past. I knew we were all sinners, but my sin was different.....you could see it. Everyone else got to quietly discuss their issues with God, while mine was displayed for the whole world to see for 9 months. There's a stigma that comes with unwed mothers, especially in the Christian community. Sometimes I still wonder if my Christian friends see me as "Mel" or "Mel that had a baby."

I was intrigued standing around the exhibit, listening to debates, arguments, and people just sharing so vulnerably with strangers that you know a lot about a person after only a few minutes. Everyone was being real and a fire was starting inside me. This issue was so close to my heart.

A year and a half earlier I found out I was pregnant with a guy that I should have never dated. Not walking with the Lord, and all options on the table, I seriously considered abortion. I remember when I made the appointment, I wanted it done as soon as possible and the woman on the phone told me that we had to wait 6-8 weeks because the baby was so small right now that they wouldn't be able to tell if they got it all out. It was only a couple of days afterwards that I decided against the abortion. It wasn't a heroic gesture to save my baby's life. It wasn't a good moral decision based on the idea that all life is sacred. It just felt wrong to me. Though I wasn't walking with the Lord, the Holy Spirit was with me and wouldn't let me go through with it. I gave birth to my son on January 13, 2003, and gave him to an amazing adoptive family.

I believe in divine appointments . . . the kind that you know only God could have set up for an exact 15 minutes of your whole life. I was surrounded by a crowd of people, all standing in silence looking up at the giant, horrific pictures. In the background you could hear side conversations and debates, but they are all drowned out by a voice in your head, trying to comprehend these pictures. *Are they real? This is so wrong. These can't be real.* You finally gain your composure after your breath is literally taken away, and you muster up something to say, maybe to yourself, maybe to the person next to you.

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<sup>1</sup> Used by permission.

"I would have another sibling, but my mom had an abortion," said the young man standing next to me. His eyes didn't move from the pictures. I'm not sure who he was talking to, maybe anyone who would listen. As I slowly turned my head to see the tall, thin man, with a baseball cap, and hands in his baggy jean pockets, I hear another person speak out. This time, on my other side. The man, not quite as young as the one on my left, had a beard and glasses. He was holding his girlfriend's hand. "I participated in an abortion once." I nodded my head to acknowledge his words and looked down at the ground as I gently moved the grass under my foot. After what seemed like an eternity, I looked up to make eye contact with him. The girl on his arm had tears streaming down her face. Before I had a chance to speak, she said, "I had an abortion once." I couldn't hold it in a second longer – with no reservation I blurted out, "I had an appointment for an abortion once, but I ended up giving him up for adoption."

The girl let go of her boyfriend's hand, took a few steps, and collapsed in my arms, sobbing. We held each other and cried, holding nothing back. I sensed other bodies around us and then felt the arms of the 2 men who had also just shared their hearts with us. There we were, four strangers in the middle of a college campus, surrounded by hundreds of people, brought together by the Creator of the Universe, to help heal each other's pain. After the heavy sobs stopped and we began to sniff and wipe our noses, I asked these three strangers if they wanted to pray. None of them spoke, but they all nodded in agreement. I took the girls hand, knowing the guys would follow, and led them away from the crowd, under a tree, where we stood in a circle, holding hands, praying to our Lord. I have no idea what I said or prayed as we stood under that tree, because it wasn't me speaking. I spoke truth to them that day, and though I'll never know how it was received or if I made a difference, I know how they impacted me. As I watched them walk away in different directions, I felt a sense of peace and relief for what the Lord has saved me from. I am forgiven and have been washed as white as snow.

This experience wasn't a highlight of my week, or even semester, but something I will treasure and remember for the rest of my life. I realized that day that everyone was broken; I wasn't alone. And despite our brokenness, God still wants to use us for His glory. What an awesome feeling – to be used by our King. He took my shameful past and used it for good.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." - Romans 8:28