

# The Conversation

#2 in an  
Ongoing  
Series

JUSTICE  
FOR ALL

*Note: "The Conversation" is a series of articles from Justice For All, an organization that trains thousands to make abortion unthinkable for millions, one person at a time. Each article in the series allows you to learn from a JFA mentor or volunteer the skills of good dialogue on abortion by looking in on one of their conversations. In this article, an anecdote from Laura Beeson (a 2010 JFA Intern) models how to start a conversation in real life and make it productive by finding common ground and giving a tour of the first few pages of the JFA Exhibit Brochure – what JFA calls "Repeat Work." – Stephen Wagner, Director of Training*

## ***Repeat Work in Science Class***

Stephen Wagner & Laura Beeson, JFA Mentors

JFA Mentor Laura Beeson is currently a nursing student in New Mexico. Recently, she relayed a conversation to us that took place in the fall of 2010 in her Anatomy class.

**Laura:** We were talking about abortion in my biomedical ethics class.

**Friend:** Yeah? You know, I'm pro-choice, but only in the very early stages.

**Laura:** I used to be like that, too, actually. I'd stick up for the right to an abortion to my cousin when we'd discuss it. Until I saw a picture. I actually have pictures with me. Do you mind if I share them with you?

**Friend:** Sure.

**Laura:** Well, [the JFA Exhibit Brochure] doesn't start with abortion, it just starts with biology. Like when does life begin? Or is this a human? What do you think?

**Friend:** This is interesting.

**Laura:** Well, the next picture isn't of an abortion. It's a picture of a surgery being performed on a little guy named Sammy. He had spina bifida, so the doctors went in and performed a 35,000 dollar surgery on him while he was 21 weeks old to fuse his spine. Now he's actually a competitive swimmer!

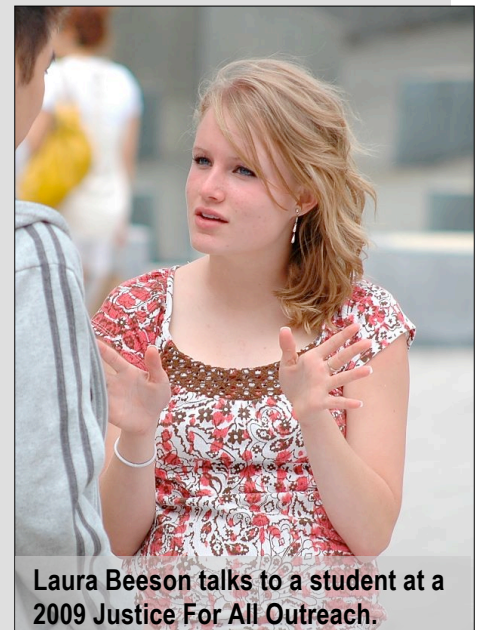
**Friend:** Oh my gosh. That is so cute. But 21 weeks?! What kind of sick person would abort then?

**Laura:** Well, this is how we treat wanted children, right? We give them surgeries to fix and help them, but unwanted children... they get a whole different type of surgery. This is abortion. So I'd like to ask, does our wantedness or unwantedness define our value as human beings?

**Friend:** Oh my gosh, *you can see their intestines!*

**Laura:** I know. I don't think the majority of people know what this looks like.

**Friend:** How could anyone do this!?



Laura Beeson talks to a student at a 2009 Justice For All Outreach.

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She [the young woman from my class] approached me the following Wednesday and said,

**Friend:** Laura, I cannot stop thinking about those pictures. I was *always* pro-choice. But, I never put a face to the word! I even told my mom about it! I just can't believe that happens. I held someone's hand during an abortion when I was young. I had *nooooo* idea what was going on. Why don't more people know!?"

I looked down at my Exhibit Brochure and thought, "This is one powerful tool."

Notice how this conversation seems very natural. Laura didn't have to force the discussion of the difficult topic of abortion. She knew that most people want to think and talk about the issue, that few ever experience good dialogue on abortion, and that she had a recent experience related to abortion. Laura had also been trained over the last three years as both a volunteer and intern with Justice For All. She experienced our seminar ("Seat Work") and outreaches ("Feet Work") multiple times. Because of these things, Laura had the courage to bring up the topic with a friend. We call this "Repeat Work."

Laura was on the lookout for an opportunity to bring up the topic of abortion. ("We were talking about abortion in my biomedical ethics class"). Then she was on the lookout for specific aspects of common ground in what her friend was saying. ("I used to be like that, too, actually.") She also had the JFA Exhibit Brochure in her bag, ready for any opportunity that might arise throughout the day. Finally, she was courteous with the graphic pictures in the exhibit. She asked for her friend's permission even before she opened to the first page of the brochure.

The JFA Exhibit Brochure is a museum-quality, nine-by-four-inch version of the Justice For All Exhibit. It's a simple conversational tool that includes images of the unborn and abortion. She didn't give it to her friend with no explanation, assuming that an impersonal set of words and pictures would be effective on its own. Instead, Laura walked her friend through the first four pages, summarizing the panels in two main questions ("Is this a human?" and "Does our wantedness or unwantedness define our value as human beings?"). Those questions helped Laura and her friend keep focused on the most important aspects of the abortion issue.

This conversation wasn't grueling or nerve-racking. Laura knew how to start the conversation, how to ask the right kinds of questions, and how to show pictures of abortion in a way that was helpful. What strikes me also about the conversation is that it's so "everyday." It's a small moment in which a friend's few words and gracious, no-pressure approach helped a young woman change her mind.

**Next Step:** To receive your own copy of the Justice For All Exhibit Brochure, along with a script of the "Tour" Laura used in this conversation, send an email ("Please send brochure and tour script" in the subject line) to [brochure.request@jfaweb.org](mailto:brochure.request@jfaweb.org).

*For more on Laura's "Repeat Work," see Tammy Cook's June 2011 newsletter.*

*Laura Beeson was an Intern with Justice For All in 2010 and serves as a Volunteer Mentor from time to time. She is currently a nursing student in New Mexico.*

*Stephen Wagner is the Director of Training at Justice For All and blogs at [www.stephenmwagner.com](http://www.stephenmwagner.com)*