



Rebecca's Reflections



113 N. Martinson—Wichita, KS 67203—316.683.6426—rebecca@jfw.org

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A Lesson in Love — Part 1

A short distance away from me, three students stood, laughing loudly and verbally mocking our display. They had just walked past our large *Stop and Think* Exhibit, which we had put up to create dialogue at Colorado State University in April. Curious, they had approached our Free Speech Board (see example pictured below) and, after reading a few comments, began to vocally agree with others who had written in opposition to JFA.

Even after years of experience engaging students about abortion, I didn't even have an ounce of desire to strike up a conversation with this group. Before the students walked away, though, from somewhere deep inside I was prompted to take courage and walk over to them. So, I went (albeit begrudgingly) and inquired:

Becca: Hey guys, do you mind if I ask, "What are your thoughts?"

Two of the students walked away as if I didn't exist. The third student, "Sam," quickly turned toward me, laughed again, and sarcastically questioned me:

Sam: You want to know what I think? Yea-a-a-h, I'll share my thoughts.

At that moment thoughts started floating through my mind. *"I really don't want to be in this conversation. I wish I hadn't engaged him. Why am I doing this?"* I attempted to learn more about his view by asking him questions, but I was battling those negative thoughts the whole time. As I tried to find common ground with him (even in the smallest of ways), he shared his belief that abortion should be legal for all nine months and for any

reason. When I asked whether or not he agreed with sex-selection abortion, his response indicated that, yes, indeed he did.

After all my attempts to find common ground, I ended up empty-handed. His mocking demeanor continued and eventually a more complete picture of his view emerged. It was something like this:

Sam (paraphrased): Even if a woman wants to kill a child after it is born it really doesn't matter. Although US law doesn't currently reflect this, in reality nothing has value. Even born humans don't matter. The only value that exists is the value that we as individuals assign to a particular object or being. So if a woman doesn't think a two-year-old is valuable, for her it doesn't really matter if she kills her child.

Because of Sam's demeanor, I felt that attempting to challenge his beliefs would have been done in vain. I mentally prepared to exit the conversation when



Pictured above are comments written this past April on one of the Free Speech Boards at Colorado State University.

another thought overwhelmed my mind: “Love him, Rebecca. Love the person he is. Find a way to love **him**.” I’ll “blame” those thoughts on the Holy Spirit.

Once again from somewhere deep inside I found the courage to try to do what I felt I had no capacity to do – love him. At this point I didn’t know where to take the conversation about abortion, so I just asked him about him. I remember asking,

Becca: Have you always felt this way?

Sam: No. And I probably won’t always hold these views. I grew up Catholic. Things in life happen, and these events help form our views. We are all searching, and our views change as we journey through life.

Becca: So, when did this change take place for you?

As he told his story he shared about the intellectual encounters he had had with others who are atheists, how much those encounters had influenced him, and how old he was when he started questioning God’s existence. My next response may have been the most crucial part of the conversation. Sam’s experience wasn’t so foreign to me, and I told him so.

Becca: Sam, you know what? I can relate to that. Of course, every person’s story is different, but sometimes they have similar elements to them. When I was 21, I studied in Mexico and met a guy from Germany named Marc. We had many discussions about religion and the existence of God. Marc was a very intelligent young man, and he had better answers to why he believed God *didn’t* exist than I had for why I believed God *did* exist. When I returned home from Mexico, I had many doubts in my mind about God’s existence and what I believed. At that point, I started a journey of searching for answers to some of those questions, too. I can understand at some level why you have doubts.

As Sam discovered that we had genuine common ground, his demeanor changed. He seemed to be less defensive, mocking, and condescending. He also seemed to be appreciating the conversation as we each shared more about our personal experiences. Little did I know that Sam was about to share something that would remind me why choosing to love him was so important in the first place. **(To be continued in Part 2...)**

Rebecca J. Haschke

