

# Why I Love Siberians

Lessons from a Conversation at Wichita State University

A Letter from Steve Wagner, Executive Director



August 2017

Dear Friend,

Norman and John wandered near our “Should Abortion Remain Legal?” poll table at Wichita State University, so I struck up a conversation with them. Norman did most of the talking. He was a self-proclaimed nihilist who believed no one can know what’s true for someone else about morality. As I explored with Norman his particular views about knowledge, he admitted they also entailed that no one can know what’s true regarding science or the five senses. He even declared that there was *no reality* about truth or morality.

Norman and I discussed how our different views of knowledge also affected our views of how we should treat the unborn. John mostly listened. Finally, Zachary, the JFA volunteer we featured in fall 2016 ([www.jfaweb.org/zachary](http://www.jfaweb.org/zachary)), engaged Norman in conversation. This gave John and me the space to have a conversation for about ten minutes. Those ten minutes with John were worth the sweat I had poured into the previous eighty with Norman.

I briefly described to John a case for the pro-life position, centered on a simple observation about how you and I got to where we are now. From fertilization onward, all that’s been added to us is food. One might note also that time elapsed and that we needed a certain environment to continue living, but there has not been any essential change of our nature. There hasn’t even been any insertion of new DNA. We are actively developing ourselves from within, and we have been doing this since the time of fertilization. Indeed, if we are the sort of being now with fundamental human rights, then we must have been that same sort of being with fundamental human rights from the time we began to exist, at fertilization. It is difficult, in any case, to conceive of how we could have gained something durable like human rights by eating.

John and I looked at the pictures of humans throughout development as we discussed these things. At one point he shared that as an elementary education major he has an immediate appreciation for children. “I’m just not drawn to the embryo, though, in the same way I’m drawn to infants and children.” He meant that he didn’t feel affection for the embryo, that he didn’t connect with the embryo as a *child*. This was especially true for the embryo early in development, a tiny being who doesn’t look much like us at all.

“I understand...I feel the same way,” I said. “I don’t identify with the early embryo. Take the picture of the embryo at implantation. It looks like an orange with fungus on it. I’m not naturally tempted to put this picture on my wall and say, ‘Behold the child!’ That’s the reality of my feelings about the embryo. I don’t naturally have any affection for it. But then I have to look at the facts about the embryo: It is a living human organism, and since it shares my human nature, wouldn’t it have the same human rights I have? It’s a very young human, so wouldn’t I call it a child? Reflecting on these things moves me to work to bring my affections into alignment with the facts.”



Searching for a parallel example to share with John, I said, “I don’t know anyone from Siberia. In fact, it’s worse: I don’t even really know anything at all about Siberia. I just know it’s that really cold place up in the northeast “corner” of what used to be called the USSR. I have never met a Siberian, and I don’t know what Siberians look like. I don’t even know if they would want to be called Siberians or if that term would offend them. Consequently, I don’t have a lot of natural concern for Siberians. As I reflect on Siberians, though, and



as I consider what US policy should be regarding Siberia and its inhabitants, I have to bring my affections (or lack of affections) into closer alignment to the facts. I have to re-train my feelings and affections to “see” the Siberian as an equal to me, *even though I’ve never met one*.

In this discussion of the embryo and the Siberian, I wanted to give voice to John’s (and my) feelings about the embryo, since they are normal and natural, but I also wanted to point out that our lack of sympathetic *feelings* about the embryo doesn’t constitute a good reason to *think* the embryo doesn’t have rights or value. I also wanted to suggest the virtuous way to handle the matter: seek to train our feelings to fit the facts.

John seemed genuinely interested. He said that he appreciated learning about the topic. He had a gentle way about him, a spirit of inquiry that was refreshing. As we closed up our outreach for the day, we watched as Zack accompanied both Norman and John to the student union. Let’s pray for more conversations among the three of them, but let’s especially pray for John, that God will help him think carefully about all of these things.

**I love Siberians not because I have a natural affection or concern for them, but because of the facts. The fact that they are human beings compels me to work to bring my natural affections in line with the facts. It’s the same with the embryo.**

In Christ,



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Wagner".

Steve Wagner  
Executive Director

### **Postscript: Was My Conversation with Norman Worth 80 Minutes?**

“Should I keep talking to Norman?” I asked myself after feeling like I was “beating my head against a wall” for a half hour. No matter how many questions and hard-to-swallow implications I could bring to the table, it seemed like nothing would help Norman see that we *can* know some things about both science and morality.

To make matters worse, since John was contemplative, he could barely get a word in edgewise. Every time he opened his mouth, Norman would cut in and interpret for him. “This is what John means, and that affirms what I just said a minute ago...” and then Norman would continue on. I would stop Norman and say, “No, I really want to hear what John thinks.” Every time I redirected things to John, though, he would say a few words, then pause, thinking things through. This gave Norman an opening to redirect things back to himself.

If the conversation with Norman hadn’t led to my conversation with John (described in this month’s letter), would it have been worth it? Listening to someone like Norman is worthwhile on its face, since he is a human being with intrinsic value, but this principle doesn’t tell me *how much time* I should spend with him. I have to consider what time I have available to spend and who else may need my time. Norman seemed completely close-minded, so perhaps I should have ended the conversation sooner. I realized, though, that the conversation *was* worth having – for *John’s* sake. Because Norman’s confidence might have misled John after our conversation, abandoning the conversation and leaving arguments unanswered might have harmed John.

In contrast to Norman, John seemed to have his common sense still intact. He thought some things were actually, in reality, *wrong*. He thought some things could be known to be true. He was open-minded, but he didn’t seem easily persuaded by either Norman or me. *So my goal was simple*: I sought to put Norman’s views and my views side by side so that John could see them clearly. For example, I pointed out that my view of knowledge took rape seriously as a real moral evil and took kindness seriously as a real moral good. Norman’s view of knowledge, on the other hand, could not take these things in any serious way to be real evils or goods. Making opposing views clear is a modest goal you can aim for in conversations you have this month as well.





# Making Abortion Unthinkable with JFA

## August 2017



**PRAY FOR  
CONVERSATIONS**

*Partial List of Recent and Upcoming Events:* Please pray with us that God will cause hearts and minds to change as a result of conversations created by our staff, volunteers, and audience members:

- TX – 8/20,23 – Austin – Interactive Workshops – Hyde Park Baptist
- KS – 8/23,24 – Wichita – Poll Table Outreach – Wichita State University
- IN – 9/4 – West Lafayette – Interactive Workshop – St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church
- IN – 9/5,6 – West Lafayette – “Stop and Think” Exhibit Outreach Event – Purdue University
- KS – 9/24 – Lawrence – Interactive Seminar – St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center
- MN – 9/30 – Chanhassen – Interactive Workshop – St. Hubert Catholic Church
- MN – 10/2,3 – Minneapolis – Kiosk Outreach Event – University of Minnesota
- TX – 10/14 – Austin – Interactive Seminar – For the City Center
- TX – 10/16,17 – Austin – “Art of Life” Exhibit Outreach Event – University of Texas at Austin
- OK – 11/13,14 – Norman – “Stop and Think” Exhibit Outreach Event – University of Oklahoma

See All Events and Register to Attend: [www.jfaweb.org/calendar](http://www.jfaweb.org/calendar)

**PREPARE FOR  
CONVERSATIONS**

*Featured Resource for Equipping Yourself:* In his letter this month entitled, “Why I Love Siberians” (find it enclosed, or find it at [www.jfaweb.org/aug-2017](http://www.jfaweb.org/aug-2017)), JFA’s Director, Steve Wagner, shares three things that you can use to prepare for conversations: (1) In the third paragraph, he summarizes the case for the pro-life position in a memorable way. (2) He then shares an analogy that builds common ground about the difficulty of seeing early embryos as valuable, but also challenges listeners to let facts determine how they act towards the embryo. (3) Finally, he gives some perspective on how to judge whether or not a conversation is worthwhile.

Read Steve’s Letter or Download a Printable Version: [www.jfaweb.org/aug-2017](http://www.jfaweb.org/aug-2017)  
See More Dialogue Examples: [www.jfaweb.org/dialogue-examples](http://www.jfaweb.org/dialogue-examples)

**START  
CONVERSATIONS**

*Featured Conversation Starter:* Share Joanna Bai’s recent post, “Not alive. Not human. Not biology?” to start a conversation about abortion in a natural way with a friend. In the post Joanna isolates a short clip from Stephanie Gray’s recent talk at Google headquarters (the talk has more than 106,000 views on YouTube) and then asks three questions to encourage discussion about whether or not the unborn is alive and human...and whether or not these questions matter.

Share the Post: [www.twitter.com/7conversations](https://www.twitter.com/7conversations) ; [www.jfaweb.org/start-the-conversation](http://www.jfaweb.org/start-the-conversation)

### About the *Making Abortion Unthinkable with JFA* Resource Bulletin

For friends of JFA who ask, “What can I do to make abortion unthinkable?” this resource bulletin offers some answers. Beyond supporting JFA financially, which enables JFA’s trainers and volunteers to create conversations that make abortion unthinkable at JFA’s events, you can **PRAY** for the conversations the JFA community is creating (including your own), **PREPARE** for conversations, and **START** conversations.

*What can I do to make abortion unthinkable?*

*Pray for conversations.  
Prepare for conversations.  
Start conversations.*