



Next Month's Letter: *Is Anyone Too Young? (Part II)*
Our family considers elementary school far too late for a young person's first pro-life education. What does that mean? Here's a hint:



Update: In January, [I shared about JFA's recent venture](#) taking pro-life training to the elementary school level. I then shared the teaser on the left for my next month's letter, pairing the idea that *elementary school is too late to start pro-life education* with a picture of Nora Jane (born in December). [Some of you thought I meant that we should teach our children as soon as they're born, but that's not quite it. This newsletter explains.] I fell ill and traveled to Georgia with JFA, so I wasn't able to write that newsletter until now. After a month-long illness, I'm feeling better, but I'm still not back to normal. Please pray for healing and for a thankful heart. In any case, I'm excited to finally share with you Part II of "Is Anyone Too Young?"

Dear Friend,

It was the subject of a number of late-night conversations: What's best for Elsie?

Rebecca and I were making plans for the birth of our second child. We purchased a home here in Wichita last September, so Rebecca wanted to be here at home with our midwife Kathy attending. We were really looking forward to a special day. It seemed odd to send 18-month-old Elsie to someone else's house while we met the baby face-to-face for the first time.

We tried to find resources to help us decide what would be best for Elsie. Had families allowed their very young children to participate in the birth? Was it a good experience for the young child? Was it too scary? I was a part of four home births as a kid in the Wagner home, but I was two-and-a-half when my brother was born and I don't think any of my siblings were much younger than that during the later births. We struggled to find anyone with experience to share.

We turned to "common" sense: Treat birth as a normal (not to mention extraordinary) experience of family life. Elsie would stay with us at home, with Aunt Leonora present to care for her when Mama and Daddy needed to focus on contractions. And, we decided that if Elsie seemed to be doing okay, she would be a part of the birth experience. If she needed to leave (for her or for Mama's sake), we were ready for that, too. So, we didn't want to force her to watch and we didn't want to force her to leave.

Our midwife was happy to hear of our approach. She cautioned that she has seen some women stall in labor because of the distraction of their young children. She suggested we simply place no expectation on Elsie's participation and see what happens. (It's just like a midwife to say, "Wait and see.") Our plan precisely.

So, we began preparing Elsie for the big day. Like many families, we treated our unborn child just like one of our children. Elsie, Rebecca, and I talked to the baby. We looked at pictures of the baby. But perhaps the most exciting thing Elsie got to do during the pregnancy? Listen to the baby with the help of a fetoscope (see right). Since



we don't do ultrasounds or Doppler unless a medical concern necessitates them, we're limited to the fetoscope, a stethoscope with a special cone-shaped horn designed to magnify the sounds of the baby in the womb. Elsie could barely tolerate the fetoscope earbuds, so she couldn't really hear the baby's heartbeat, but going through the motions like Mama and Daddy helped her feel like she was connecting to a real human. (The picture of Elsie with the fetoscope was taken recently, about three months after the birth, and she can now put the earbuds in all by herself!)

Rebecca also taught Elsie some of her relaxation exercises and, encouraged by an idea our doula Janine had, Rebecca prepared Elsie with many repetitions of the "hard-working noises" that would accompany the more difficult contractions in the late-first stage of labor. We would ask Elsie about hard-working noises, and she would moan like a pro! No need for out-of-control screaming in childbirth for this 18-month-old!

So, our pro-life education was under way. It was simply a natural response (you have to give her *some* explanation of what's happening) to a natural family event (conception and pregnancy with Child Number Two).



Finally, the day came. I was planning to help Rebecca with contractions but her labor was so quick, she didn't need much help. I frantically tried to fill the birth tub before the baby came (I failed).

I was planning for Elsie to play with Aunt Leonora for most of the labor. Elsie had other plans. She wanted to be where mom was. She was remarkably sensitive to the needs of her laboring Mama. Elsie stroked her forehead and back and looked into her eyes, watching quietly.

I was planning to catch the baby, but as it turned out, when the really hard-working noises came, Elsie wanted to be in my arms. And when the pushing came, that's where she stayed.

I was very aware of Elsie during these moments. (I almost felt useless because of how little Rebecca needed my help!) I wanted to make sure she was not scared in a way that would be detrimental to developing a healthy concept of labor, birth, and babies. As I talked her through the process, she just listened with wide eyes and pointed from time to time.

Every time we've talked of the birth since, Elsie has one word to describe it. She puts her hand under her chin and signs "dirty." Now she can say it, too. We all chuckle.

Elsie watched the whole thing. She saw her sister come out of Mama. She heard her first cry. She watched Daddy cut the cord. She was one of the first to touch the baby.



I don't have much experience, but I think that's the key to pro-life education at a young age like one year old. *Touch. Hear. See.* Before, during, and after birth, let the child be as close to her new sibling as possible. To be sure, there

are times when this simply *isn't* possible. I can think of two families reading this letter right now who have a newborn in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) or just barely out of the NICU. Another family reading this letter had five children, all born by Cesarean section. Are the kids in these families lost because they weren't able to attend the births of their siblings? Are they lost if they have less contact with their newborn siblings due to the practicalities of the NICU? Of course not. These situations just require a different kind of explanation, a different kind of "walking through the experience with them."

I think the point here is that in normal situations, allowing a child to watch the birth of a sibling might just be the best way to help them process what's happening. At least in Elsie's case, it appears this was a positive with no negatives at all. She was able to *touch, hear, and see* firsthand how there is a real continuity between the child in the womb and the child outside.



Sometimes people ask me why I do pro-life work full time. I clarify that I might answer by giving them my *reasons* or my *motivations* for doing pro-life work. My reasons include the scientific evidence and philosophical arguments that the unborn is the same kind of human being you and I are. On the other hand, one of the things that motivates me to do full-time pro-life work is the fact that I watched four births as a kid. Having good experiences being so close to the unborn and the amazing process of birth predisposed me to want to protect both from abortion.

Whether it's the arguments or some experience you've had, many of you have been so motivated to save the unborn that you have decided to support my work with a regular gift to Justice For All. If that's you, please know that your gifts are the encouragement that continues to motivate me to train pro-life advocates.

If you haven't joined my support team, would you consider it today? You can help me give leadership to JFA's first-rate team of trainers who skillfully show others the real continuity between the child in the womb and the child outside. There are two ways you can help: Consider supporting our work and connect us with friends who would be interested in hearing about our work. Using [this form](#), you can both let us know if you can help us and brainstorm ways to connect us with your friends. Thank you for considering this.

In Christ,

Stephen

PS: On the next page, find a summary of JFA's recent activities, including an events calendar.

Help Steve train pro-life advocates to engage those who disagree!
[Click here to give a gift online.](#) Designate your gift for 601 in the "comments" section.



Training Snapshots

AT A GLANCE: MARCH 2010

- 22 JFA Mentors helped teach 226 pro-life advocates during 6 JFA seminars (SEAT WORK)
- 129 of those pro-life advocates continued their training (with the help of their mentor) during one of JFA's 6 days of outreach on 3 campuses (FEET WORK).
- 2 people led group outreaches with JFA materials without JFA staff present (REPEAT WORK).

NEW TOOLS

Please Pray!

- JFA's Training Department is creating a *JFA Trainer's Guide* to help our growing number of trainers learn to teach the training seminar and effectively mentor participants through the seminar and outreach. Target date for first complete draft (staff are already using portions): 5/1/2010
- In Colorado in April, we'll be testing a **new dialogue tool**. It's a simple 6-digit number counter (used to keep score in sports). We'll place it near the exhibit and manually track the number of abortions that have taken place since the JFA Exhibit Outreach began on that campus. The goal? Make students curious to ask, "What is that counting?" and start a conversation.

READ THESE RECENT JFA BLOGS!

- *Don't Give Them Money, They Help Women!* – Trent Horn (www.trentjfa.blogspot.com) argues that the women's charity music festival Lilith Fair should not axe Pregnancy Resource Centers
- *How to Talk about Health Care Reform and Abortion without Being a Jerk* – Steve Wagner (www.stephenmwagner.com) gives a sample dialogue you can use to prepare for conversations.

"REPEAT WORK" SAVES A LIFE

This past February Linda Stewart, Executive Director of Crossroads Clinic, wrote to tell us: "...our Client Services Director, Stephany, took a group of teens to counsel [at the Crossroad's table during JFA's campus outreach at UCO]. [Afterwards] one of these high school girls, a girl named Kyla (a junior), took the JFA Exhibit brochure back to her high school and showed it to fellow students. Several months later Kyla received a note from a Guthrie high school girl that she didn't know. It read, 'Kyla, you don't know me, but those pictures you passed around at school about abortion saved my baby's life.'" (see the March 28, 2010 post at David Lee's blog, www.dleejfa.blogspot.com, for the whole story; also found on JFA's monthly receipts)

UPCOMING EVENTS (APRIL 2010)

All events are part of the Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue Training Program, unless otherwise noted in italics.

- 4/8 Seminar, Dayspring Christian School (Greeley, CO)
- 4/8 Seminar, Faith Christian Academy (Arvada, CO)
- 4/9 Seminar, Focus Leadership Institute (Colorado Springs, CO)
- 4/11 Seminar, UNC Greeley (CO)
- 4/12 Outreach, UNC Greeley (CO)
- 4/13 Outreach, UNC Greeley (CO)
- 4/14 Outreach, UNC Greeley (CO)
- 4/18 Seminar, Right to Life Central California (Fresno, CA)
- 4/19 Seminar, Right to Life Central California (Fresno, CA)
- 4/20 Outreach, Fresno State University (Fresno, CA)
- 4/21 Outreach, Fresno State University (Fresno, CA)

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