

Setting Starfish Free

BECAUSE ONE PERSON CAN...

Classic Reprint

JUSTICE FOR ALL

June 2024

Catherine Wurts served as a JFA Trainer from 2009 until 2017. In this Classic Reprint of her June 2014 letter, "Setting Starfish Free," Catherine tells one of my favorite JFA stories. In the story of "Anthony," Catherine both makes a persuasive case for the value of unborn children and seeks to help a young man realize his own worth as "one loved by God." She also illustrates the heartbeat of the JFA community, seeking whenever possible to open a door to deeper reflection on spiritual things, in hopes that starfish will by the Holy Spirit allow our conversations to nudge them to "dive in." When you support JFA, you support this heartbeat on the campuses and in the churches where we train and conduct outreach across the country. Thank you for considering a special gift to JFA this month to help us train more Christians to "make a difference for even one."

Smw - Steve Wagner, Executive Director

...CHANGE THE WORLD

My colleague, John Michener (bottom photo, center), often illustrates JFA's mission by referencing the story of *The Star Thrower*, by Loren Eiseley:

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?" The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."

"Son," the man said, "don't you realize there are miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!" At this, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, "I made a difference for that one."

Who are our "starfish"? They're the thousands of students streaming by our university Exhibit outreaches on their way to class. Many of them have had or are going to have abortions. Many others are pro-life Christians who are either silent or unloving when the topic of abortion comes up. Many, many of them are blind to the inherent dignity of the unborn – and of born people – because they have no idea how valued and loved they, themselves, are by their Creator. One significant difference between us and the boy on the beach, however, is that our "starfish" have free



Catherine (right) interacts with a student at the University of Georgia (UGA) in March 2014.



John Michener (blue tie-dye) engages Arizona State University (ASU) students in dialogue in Feb. 2014. John served as a JFA trainer from 2010 until 2014 and now directs Oklahomans United for Life: www.oklahomansunitedforlife.org.

will. We can take them to the ocean, but they have to choose whether or not to dive in. [Editor's note: We are not intending here to weigh in on the precise nature and interrelation of human choices and divine providence.]

Meet Anthony (name changed), a “starfish” at the University of Georgia, Athens (UGA). I met Anthony on a very rainy day in front of our Draw the Line kiosk on his campus last fall. He is a pre-med student from Egypt and has only been in the U.S. for a short time. We spoke for a while about abortion – he considered himself generally pro-life but thought abortion should be allowed in cases of rape and other difficult circumstances. We established a lot of common ground about needing to be compassionate to women and to provide resources for them. Also, he said he thought the logical argument I laid out for why abortion is not justified, even in these tough cases, was consistent and probably true.

Then he asked me, “Are you religious?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

He smiled as though he'd “got” me. “It seems like everyone I've met who's pro-life is religious.”

“Well, I know of atheists who are pro-life,” I said, “which makes a lot of sense, doesn't it, if the unborn is a human being? If we think about it, does a person have to be religious to recognize that murder, rape, and child abuse are wrong? The question is, ‘Is abortion a similar injustice against a human being?’ There are atheists who would say that it is.” *

Anthony agreed this made logical sense. He went on to explain that he'd been raised in an Orthodox Christian home in Egypt, but when he came to the States he put all of that behind him. He had started to think that morals are relative and that perhaps God doesn't exist.

We talked for a while, him sharing some of his disillusionment with Christians, and me sharing that I'd had similar doubts and concerns when I was in college. I told him I admired him for asking the tough questions he was asking. Then I challenged him to look more deeply into the claims that Christianity makes before rejecting it – and before rejecting Christ. I suggested he begin by reading C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. He said he would, but I thought, “How many times have I intended to read something and never gotten to it?” Then Anthony left for class. I guessed he wouldn't read the book, and felt sure I wouldn't see him again.

Come March of this year, I found myself in the same quad by the student center at UGA standing in front of the JFA Exhibit. I was talking with another student who was sharing very similar things with me to what Anthony had shared, but this student was decidedly more antagonistic, sarcastic, and unwilling to dialogue. All of a sudden, I noticed Anthony standing next to us, listening in! He smiled and when the other student left, Anthony said he'd come to tell me that he'd read *Mere Christianity* and talked a lot with his uncle. As a result, he had decided to come back to his Christian faith.

He's started attending an Orthodox church in town and doing some service projects with them. He told me, with a huge smile on his face, “When I met you, I was obsessing about these questions about life and about God. When I would eat my food, I would be thinking, ‘Is there a God?’ Everywhere I went I was worrying over it. But I'm not obsessing anymore! I am happy!” St. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, wrote, “For freedom Christ set us free, so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” Anthony, like the little starfish, had been set free. Praise God. Please pray for him as he continues on his journey with the Lord.

- Catherine Wurts, June 2014

* For example, Secular Pro-Life (SPL) is both strongly pro-life and explicitly atheistic. See JFA's blog post featuring a list of links to SPL posts every pro-life advocate should read: www.jfaweb.org/secular-pro-life.

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www.jfaweb.org/donate

