

POSITION ON ABORTION

The bitter partisan divide in this country has turned friends and families against each other. It seems there is no middle ground or any room for compromise or even reasoned discussion with the other side's position on anything from wearing masks to bearing children. With no issue is this truer than in the case of abortion.

In this emotionally-charged, politically-driven debate, the public is asked to take one side or the other. If they take the pro-choice side, they are accused of hating children and wanting to kill babies; if they take the pro-life side, they are accused of hating women and wanting them to die from botched abortions. On the surface, the terms of this debate are ridiculous. No interests on this earth are more closely aligned than those of a mother and her child.

So, first, let me make my own position clear: I am opposed to abortion. I come to this opposition, not through public policy or partisan politics, but from my deep and abiding love for my own children. That love started long before they drew their first precious breaths. I believe a gift from God, not a decision made in legislative councils, instilled that love in me. To my way of thinking, a mother's love for her baby is as close as mere mortals can come to Divine Love, God's love for us.

I have borne two children, both unplanned and unwanted pregnancies that turned into much-wanted and much-loved babies. In 1969 when I became pregnant with my first child, I was teaching and my husband was going to graduate school. I was fired for being pregnant (yes, pregnancy was a job-terminating event back then), so we could be left without income.

Fortunately, when my husband tried to drop out of grad school, his major professor offered to help both of us get graduate assistantships. Money was tight for a few years but, with the help of friends and family, we got by. In fact, it turned out to be ideal timing since we could both be at home with the baby most of the time. We just swapped her off when we were teaching, attending class or studying. As a result, we shared parenthood in an intense way that was rare back then, cementing a bond that carried us through more than fifty years together.

In spite of the less than favorable circumstances, I never considered abortion. From the moment I knew I was pregnant, I loved her with a love I would not have believed I was capable of feeling. When her little brother came along two years later, we still did not have real jobs, but my husband's irrational optimism and belief that we could handle anything carried us

through. (It didn't hurt that he also thought pregnancy somehow transformed his rather plain wife into an amazing beauty—a little delusional, but flattering.) Again, my love for that unborn child was unbounded and ending the pregnancy never entered my mind. I didn't have to see or touch him to know how special he was.

However, I also understand that not all pregnant women are as fortunate as I was. My natural love was nurtured, not just by me as a mother, but also because I had a supportive and loving partner, a family I could rely on for help, and friends that would support and encourage me. I know I can't speak for those whose circumstances are different.

What if I had faced my first pregnancy alone and fired from my job? Or even worse what if my partner had been abusive? What if I had had two more children to support at the same time? What if I had been an hourly employee for whom every hour off work meant I might not be able to feed my children or keep a roof over their heads? What if I had no one to turn to? Would I have been desperate enough to seek an abortion?

I can imagine those circumstances, but I can't answer that question. And I honestly don't think anyone who hasn't been there can. If a woman in such circumstance chooses abortion, I can't condemn her. My own grandmother died from the ill effects of drinking turpentine in a vain effort to end a pregnancy she couldn't afford. My dad was only ten years old, and by all accounts she was a loving mother. I can empathize with her pain, but I can't call her a murderer.

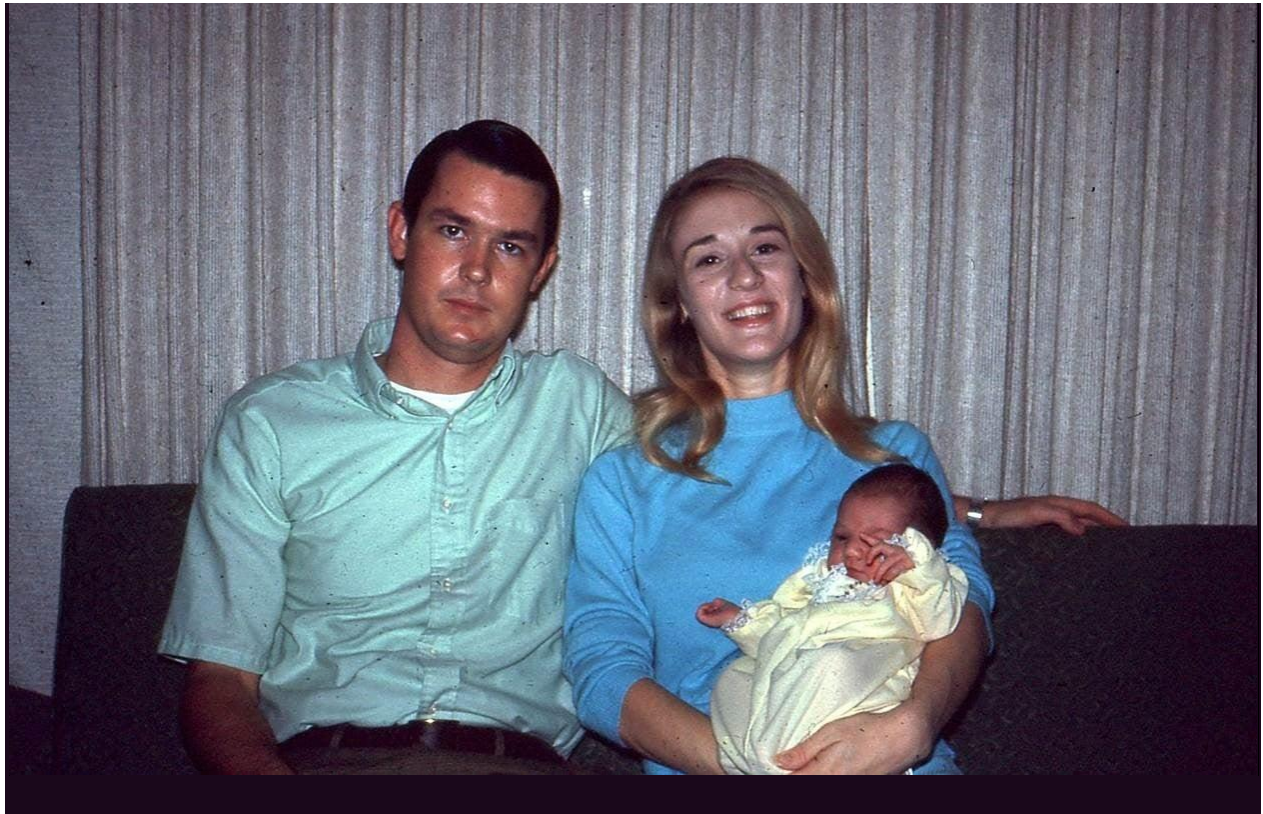
Instead I would like to propose alternative solutions to abortion. Without making abortion illegal (only the Supreme Court can do that now anyway), we can significantly reduce the rate. First, we can make birth control more readily and inexpensively available. Without unwanted pregnancies there will be few abortions. Second, we can create a healthier, more welcoming environment for both mother and child. Although motivations are complicated, most women who have abortions give economic reasons for their decisions.

It stands to reason then if the economic stress were relieved, fewer women would take that option. Just a few examples: we can establish paid maternity leave, we can stop denying a mother medical care when the new baby is just two months old, and we can support funding for child care and early childhood education.

If we put down the partisan weapons for a while and actually reason with each, I think we can find a multitude of ways to help women make the

choice most of us support—to bear their children to term and love them with all their hearts.

Let's stop fighting and work together to create a society that sustains and supports the Divine Love that God instills in our hearts for our children. Let's realign nature's strongest bonds—those between a mother and her child and work together to build a world where women are so valued and children are so loved abortion becomes unthinkable. We shouldn't have to choose between a mother and her child—we can choose both.



Bill and I welcome Shay, our own little unplanned blessing in 1969