



NATTY'S POND

Finding hope and forgiveness after a medically advised abortion

A Memoir by
JENNY FOSTER

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“Natty’s Pond: Finding hope and forgiveness after a medically advised abortion

By Jenny Foster

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CHAPTER 14:

WOUNDS

(2008)

It is often said that it's the truth that sets us free, but for many abortion survivors, the truth is impossible to speak. I spent a lot of my life putting lipstick on situations that warranted nothing more than a broom and a dustpan. I excelled at making light of bad situations, but it took a long time to learn that lipstick doesn't fix everything, and I was denying and stuffing complex and life-changing pain. After two decades to think about my abortion decision, the image that often comes to my mind is of the human heart, made up of four chambers and an outer covering called the pericardium. When I analyzed the thought process I went through when faced with a medically advised abortion, I later realized that I made the decision quickly, thinking I had fully engaged my heart, only to find out later that there was delayed processing that caught up to me. I followed the advice of medical providers who would never have to live with the natural consequences of my decision. I made the heartbreaking choice to terminate in shock, disbelief, and anxiety, in the outer anatomy of my heart—the pericardium. I did not filter my decision through the life-giving

chambers of my heart nor through the eyes of my Creator by communing with Him in prayer. I did not come to full faith in Christ until March of 2001, after my son was gone. It took years to fully process the profound regret I felt, wishing I had taken more time to sit with and better understand the long-term consequences of abortion.

Other than online support groups where I searched for other parents who opted for medical termination, no one other than our family knew the circumstances surrounding our pregnancy loss. Comparisons existed inside my head that were quick and piercing. A mom would confide in me, “We had two miscarriages before getting pregnant with our second baby.” Immediately, I would think to myself, *I’m so sad for her*, but my next thought would be, *I wish that was how I lost my baby*. As immature as it felt to think this, it was an automatic and private way of expressing what I felt every day—regret. When a new friend at church told me they were praying for a miracle for a family whose baby was diagnosed with Down Syndrome, I felt compassion, and I earnestly prayed for them, but my heart ached with simultaneous empathy and agony as I thought, *See...they’re waiting it out to see if their baby might be healed. I didn’t wait*.

One afternoon as I rounded the smoothly banked corner of a rural country highway, I received a phone call from a client who had become a close friend. She and her husband had just received the worst news of their lives that their first baby, a girl, had been diagnosed with mosaic trisomy 16, and they’d been advised to terminate the pregnancy. She talked in shallow breaths and gulps as she relayed the story to me. I pulled my car over into the parking lot of a local air conditioning company, took a few deep breaths with her, and we cried together. The next two nights left me feeling anxious and unable to sleep, as I imagined what was playing out over at their house. I knew they were probably not sleeping either and were wrestling with what they should do. She and her husband had the weekend to do research and agonize over their decision, and

Monday when I called to check on her, she updated me that they'd decided to go forward with the pregnancy.

“We want her no matter what,” she said with clear resolution.

I was so relieved for them, and I cried in joy with her on the phone as I let her know that I'd stand by her as a friend to support her no matter what life dealt them. When their daughter was born prematurely, weighing two pounds four ounces, I had the honor of holding her in the NICU. I sat in awe watching their tiny angel fight hard to survive amidst a feeding tube, supplemental oxygen, and IVs, with surgical tape covering more than half of this shockingly small pink doll. She seemed so fragile and yet she was so strong. Diagnostic genetic tests following her birth confirmed that the devastating birth defect was miraculously contained to the placenta. Their powerful testimony is one of pure hope, faith, and love. Watching her grow and thrive, fully overcoming a devastating diagnosis, is inspirational, and it is an honor to know such a miraculous child. To look at pictures of this beautiful young lady, no one could detect that she faced the impossible. When I reflect on the story of this family's victory, my eyes water over, and I wonder...if we had said we wanted Nathaniel “no matter what,” whether he might have had a chance to be a miracle, too. It was the first day I began to process the painful reality of how desperately I still wanted my baby, damaged or not.

Trauma brings out the worst and the best in people, and my friend and her family powerfully illustrated human hearts at their best, carrying on with demonstrable courage. While I've been told I'm a friend who can be counted on, a friend who is truly empathetic, I was not a superhero. The impossible choice we made in 2000 put me in touch with the back-office side of myself, the back side of my ribbon, too unraveled to be double-faced—part of me I didn't know existed until I was broken. My shame and self-loathing caused me to compare myself to our mama

dog rejecting her runt puppy. It was self-condemnation I felt I deserved. The dark side of me secretly wished to go back in time and lose my baby through the involuntary experience of miscarriage, which I imagined would have let me off the hook. After the abortion, there were nights when I heard the cruelest whisper pass over me in the darkest hour of the night, rousing me awake to say, *You are a murderer.*

It was a thought that could only come from an unmistakable enemy who was the prince of accusation. I never thought condemnation over anyone else, especially not a vulnerable and grieving woman. I had compassion for every woman in the world who had an abortion yet had no compassion for myself. I just knew that what we had done, what I had done, was wrong. It was wrong for me. It was wrong for my emerging faith. It was wrong for me to say I was pro-choice, and it was wrong for me to say I was pro-life. Everything about it reeked of regret. It smelled because it was a wound, a wound that was so deep, so infected, in such an awkward place that I couldn't lance it myself. There wasn't an obvious incision that could be cleaned and dressed and monitored for infection. The scalpel of my shame created wounds that cut deep places in my heart and in my soul, leaving an indelible mark. I couldn't see that the wounding had formed scar tissue so deep and so corded that it created a wall obstructing not just my physical and emotional healing but my spiritual growth. I left the hospital that fateful day in 2000 with antibiotics, pain meds, and ice packs, but I also left a part of myself behind forever. I was changed, and it was not for the better. I could rationalize it away, but my body was telling me something vastly different.

When a wound scabs over on the outside, there can still be infection at the core. The initial pain of cleaning and dressing a wound is much easier to endure than the pain of a festering injury. Wounds are to be dealt with expeditiously and not ignored, kept clean and dry, lightly covered and out of extended periods of darkness. Light is healing for wounds—sunshine, heat lamps, lasers,

and so many other healing therapies—but darkness fosters the growth of bacteria and mold and fungus. I had the kind of wound that was to remain unspoken, untended, without light and without air. I couldn't tell anyone the truth of how I'd come by this wound, let alone wear it on the outside where the light of truth might have accelerated the healing. My wound grew in direct correlation to the secret urn of ashes I first hid in a sock drawer, then in a shoe box, and later in a larger wooden box. The wound grew into a stronghold in my life, festering time and again until it outgrew any neat and tidy packaging I could arrange for it. Any nurse can tell you that infection stinks. I kept a polished exterior, clean and tidy, with natural makeup and appropriate clothing, but I was living a lie, hiding my self-loathing just under the surface. I may have been unleashed from the responsibility of a poor fetal prognosis, but on that day, I became shackled to shame.

I kept my feelings of shame outwardly hidden, but they festered on the inside. Life's distractions gave me a tidy excuse to avoid dealing with them. I had a tsunami of an endless divorce to deal with, a child who was often sick, and a job that ran at a furious pace. There was no time to cry or be "inappropriate." There was no time to be weak. There was no time to be anything other than a model employee and a good mother. I was insulated by an overbooked schedule that kept me distracted from night to night. I was delighted to be a mother to a precocious and sensitive little girl who made the hard work of daily life sparkle with joy and promise.

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