

Testimony of Jeanne Ullenberg

My name is Jeanne Ullenberg. I am here today to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 427.

While attending college at UW Oshkosh in February of 1971 I was raped by an acquaintance of my roommates. In March the school clinic doctor confirmed that I was pregnant. I consulted with the school psychologist and he asked if I felt distressed and/or afraid that I might take my life. Of course I did. I was extremely distraught. He told me that I shouldn't have to be punished for something that wasn't my fault and that he thought that terminating the pregnancy would be the best outcome for me. He told me he could arrange for an abortion for me even though it was not legal in Wisconsin unless it was considered a "threat to my life" to continue the pregnancy. It would require two other signatures besides his, one being a physician and the other a pastor. Within one month he had made the arrangements and I was scheduled for an abortion at Milwaukee Lutheran Hospital the 3rd week in May. I never met or consulted with the pastor or the physician. I went to the Hospital and was put to sleep for the procedure. I never met the attending physician or even knew who he was. One week after the abortion I broke down uncontrollably crying. I called the school psychologist and his recommendation was that I go home for the summer and recuperate, and to come back and see him every month. I did, but we never talked about the abortion except to ask "How was I recovering?". The sadness continued but now we talked about my parental relationship instead. Before the beginning of the Fall Session I stopped seeing him. I felt as though no one cared about what I had been through.

I also followed up with the post abortion physical exam at the school clinic. The physician's recommendation was that I take "birth control pills" to protect myself even though I had not been sexually active. I tried taking several brands of "the pill" but was not able to because of physical complications.

I did not date for two years because I felt as though no one would want to date someone like me if they knew what had happened to me, how could *they* understand, no one else did? It was also at this time I started a 2 year long drug and alcohol use to hide the pain of the memories of all of this. I was in such conflict with myself over the values I had been brought up with and this which I had just done. After all "good girls" did not abort babies. I could also hear my mom's voice saying: "If a girl gets raped she probably deserved it." Now I became the girl who deserved to be raped and bad. Somehow, I managed to graduate from college, though not with much joy in my achievement.

In 1973 I began dating and my boyfriend and I decided to live together. I went to Planned Parenthood for birth control advice and again began trying “a new pill”...to no avail; therefore they advised using an IUD – “The Dalcon Shield.” Six months later I went to Planned Parenthood for a pregnancy test ... it was positive. They urged me to have an abortion for my safety sake and “after all I had done everything possible to keep from conceiving therefore I shouldn’t have to be punished by having an unwanted pregnancy”. They explained the procedure to me and told me that what they would remove was only a clump of cells. It wasn’t a formed child yet. I was 12 weeks pregnant. My boyfriend was not supportive and pushed for me to have the abortion or he would end our relationship. I complied, as I did not want our relationship to end, and on my 24th birthday, December 18th, I aborted. This time I was not put to sleep for the procedure and it was very painful and sickening to hear the suction. The collection container was just inches from my side. I was horrified. Within 2 weeks I again became very depressed. When I called the abortion clinic they told me it was just “hormones” and it would pass. Two weeks later I attempted to take my life with an overdose of prescription drugs and alcohol. I hated who I had become. My boyfriend assured me how much he cared for me and that he would try to make it up to me.

At my 6 weeks check up Planned Parenthood informed me that the Dalcon Shield had had a high failure rate and that they had an improved IUD, “The Copper Coil”. It worked well for 2 years, and then in April of 1976 I began to cramp and spot bleed. I could not feel the string that connected to the IUD. I went to the Women’s Clinic and they confirmed that the IUD had been dislodged and was in my uterus. They also told me that I was pregnant. They took an X-Ray to locate the position of the IUD, which I never saw. They told me I needed to have an abortion and a D & C that day and that continuing the pregnancy with an IUD out of place would be risky to my health and that carrying the pregnancy was also a risk to the baby. I was stunned. What else could I do? I could hardly believe what I was hearing. I consented to another abortion. They sent my boyfriend home to get the money for the abortion and a change of clothes. I was put to sleep for this one too. Through all of those tests that day I never met with a physician, although the nurses I had talked to had consulted with me as to the procedure only. When I woke up in the recovery room they told me that I had been 17 weeks pregnant. We did not know the gestational age before surgery. (Post note: I would years later meet 2 women who had had dislodged IUD's and delivered their babies. I felt so duped. Why did they lie to me and tell me to abort that child?)

At my next check-up at the Women's Health Clinic they told me that the Copper Coil had proved to not be very reliable but they had now improved it. New version: "The Copper Coil 7." I had it inserted. What else could I do? In February of 1978 was pregnant again. This time I had wanted to keep the baby and for a little while I did not tell my boyfriend about it. We were now engaged to be married, but I was afraid of what he would say. Two weeks later I did tell him, and he blew up at me. He told me he wasn't ready for a baby and we were not going to have one and if I continued to insist on having this baby he would leave me and move back with his parents, leaving me alone to figure out what I was going to do. We fought for days about this. Finally I gave up and consented to yet another abortion. He brought me to the clinic, I was put to sleep for the procedure. Once again I never met the physician. After this abortion I sunk myself into my new career and went back to school for my 2nd degree in college, and tried not to think about what had happened, hoping all was well with my relationship with my fiancée. Within one month my 5 year relationship had ended. The relationship could no longer endure the hardships.

A year and a half later I marry and 3 months later I am pregnant. I do not tell my OB-GYN that I have ever had any abortions. I am too ashamed to tell anyone how many abortions I have experienced. The pregnancy is not going well, there are some complications: I am bleeding and cramping. The doctor recommends I quit my job and prescribes bed rest. I do so until my 17th week. I am doing better. I deliver our first born child one month early, a beautiful daughter, but as I watch her lying on the warming table next to me I am swept with the memory of the children I never delivered. I think "so this is what it would have been like," and I begin to cry. I lie and tell my husband that they are tears of joy. If only he knew. He does not.

Two years later I conceive our second child, another difficult pregnancy with bed rest and I deliver our first born son one month early. Eighteen months later, I am pregnant with our third child, I miscarry this child at 12 weeks on January 10, 1985. I think that this is justified punishment for aborting so many babies.

In 1987 my husband and I separate for six months. He's going his way and me mine. I begin another relationship and use a diaphragm and foam for birth control. On May 10th, I go to Bread and Roses and they confirm my pregnancy. The next morning with little emotion but anger, I abort again. While I am on the table the cramping becomes pretty unbearable and I start to cry and my legs start shaking. The doctor tells me to "Shut up and stop whimpering so he can do his job." I lay there and clench my jaws while the tears are running down my face. It's over. I become nauseous in the recovery area and the nurse tells me "it's normal." I will bleed heavily

for the next two weeks, and when I call the clinic they tell me just to put my feet up, some women just are bleeders.

My husband and I reconcile two months later. He does not know what has happened. I would have another child in August of 1988, this time without many complications. Oddly, I remember upon his delivery the child I aborted the previous year. Why do those memories always cloud the joy of a new child in my life?

In June of 1993 my husband starts to attend some Pro-Life rallies. I am furious but he can't understand why I am so ambivalent. He keeps urging me to attend with him, so to keep peace I attend a rally with him on July 12. That night I watched a movie called "The Hard Truth". What I saw on that screen was too unbelievable for words ... babies at 10 & 12 weeks gestation torn apart ... but they had hands and fingers, and feet and perfect little toes, ears, some wonderfully formed little faces. This was NOT a clump of tissue ... a nothing. My lord what had I done? I didn't know! Why hadn't I been told the truth! I would have never allowed this to happen if I had only known. I couldn't talk, I could only weep and sob. I continued to be in a state of confusion for four days. If I told someone, who would I tell? Who would understand? I couldn't continue to hide but if I exposed myself what would people think of me? I had been silent for 21 years. And my husband, of 13 years, didn't know anything about my past in this regard ... Would he leave me? ... How could he love me if he found out? My two older children ... what would they think of their mother? I felt very, very alone once again. Fortunately, I did talk to a pro-life person at a rally a few days later. He listened, he held my hand and let me pour out my hidden most secret, my grief ... and he didn't ridicule me but hugged me and told me about the help I could get...that I was not alone in this, that there were many other women who felt and hurt the way I did. I wasn't able to tell my husband about my "real" life until two weeks later. We have gone through some hard discussions, but now he too understands.

For the past 13 years I have been a counselor at a Crisis Pregnancy Help Line and work with a support group within our Church. I am awed to see the genuine loving kindness extended toward not only women in a crisis pregnancy, but those who are in need after an abortion.

As you can see upon two occasions I felt I had no choice but to abort because of the pressure by my then boyfriend to end the pregnancy. I had no one to talk to about how I felt. No one ever asked if I was being pressured, not the doctors, not the nurses, and certainly not any of the clinic workers. When I first became aware of the Pro-Life movement in 1993, and that there were people who cared and would have helped, I was angry that no one was there for me at any

time of my life. I often wondered if the secret pain I endured all those years would have been deterred if I had been given the opportunity to speak out about my fear and the pressure I was under.

As elected officials representing womens' rights in Wisconsin, I ask that you consider the rights of women all over this state to be well informed of their "choice" about their reproductive rights. I feel no woman should be pressured by anyone, albeit a boyfriend, a parent, family member or a clinic, to abort her unborn child. This kind of coercion is tantamount to the worse kind of mental abuse a woman in a crisis pregnancy can endure. In many respects, this is not much different than being raped. I also worry that there may be underage girls that are not able to speak because of fear, and are being forced by the perpetrator to abort, thus protecting the perpetrator and not the girls. I wonder about the fathers who bring their daughters, that the girls may be victims of incest. If no one asks her how will they know to help her? You, as the people we entrust to make our laws, need to protect the women of this state to ensure they are not being coerced in any manner and get the help they truly need to make an informed choice. A choice that hopefully will not leave her emotionally and sometimes physically scarred for the rest of her life.

I urge you to vote for Assembly Bill 427. Thank you.