Pittsburgh Nightmare:

"I Wish They'd Broken My Arms"

by James C. Kopp

Snapshot: "I wish they'd broken my arms rather than what they did," sobbed one of the young female victims of sexual assault at Allegheny County Prison as the story began to unfold of the horrors that took place inside the jail on the night of March 10 and 11, 1989.

Snapshot: A dozen Christian college women arrested at a rescue in Pittsburgh, lying helpless on the ground in front of towering cell blocks filled with 700 hooting, threatening male prisoners. Their clothes are pulled over their heads or down around their ankles, exposing them. Guards without nametags openly fondle, beat and kick them, threatening to turn them over to the male inmates.

Snapshot: One girl isolated in a shower with five nametag-less female guards is pinned down and beaten, her head slammed into a steel coathook, her casted arm rebroken. She begins to have an asthma attack.

Snapshot: "Don't give that woman oxygen until she cooperates," ordered the deputy warden the night of the assaults. He knows she can't cooperate: she's gasping for air. Guards blow smoke in her face, worsening the attack. The deputy leaves the room. He wants to be somewhere else if she dies, which appears to be moments away.

Snapshot: "Oh, these complaints?" The Assistant District Attorney holds up a stack of sworn complaints, filed 47 days earlier by the sex assault victims. "My boss told me to stick them in this drawer and not process them." Fifteen minutes earlier, this same ADA had testified in court that the filed complaints didn't even exist.

Snapshot: "If evidence of wrong is provided, rest assured action will be taken." So writes a Deputy U.S. Attorney General. Mountains of carefully collected, sworn statements are provided. Nothing happens.

"The problem with Pittsburgh Nightmare is that no one believes this is happening in America," states Dr. Walter Bechtell, one of the handful of Pittsburgh Nightmare workers. "Then they can't believe that no prosecutor, up to the White House, has done a single thing about it. And yet, these are the facts."

Doris Grady, another helper, has a handle on the lawyer situation. "No lawyer wants to risk their career by going up against the Western Pennsylvania machine," she stated recently. "That is why we're so grateful Free Speech Advocates has stepped forward with their offer to raise their own support for a lengthy Federal case, if we can send them the seed money. It's hard to believe we're on the verge of losing any chance of prosecution, after having come this far."

Police arrests at the March 1989 rescue that preceded the abuses.

The Pittsburgh machine must be strong.

The warden of the Allegheny County Jail, present at all phases of the assaults the night of the Pittsburgh nightmare, is a federally convicted sex offender. He was also tried for the bizarre and gruesome murder of two escaping prisoners, but was acquitted under mysterious circumstances.

Snapshot: A 55-year-old grandmother of three has her arm bent to the point of breaking in Howell, N.J., February 1990.

Snapshot: July 1990, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. "Stand up to be photographed," is the order given to female rescuers, totally disrobed in the course of a strip search.

Snapshot: August 1990, Houston. "Joan was unconscious for 10 minutes, then passed in and out of consciousness for the next 30 minutes," reports Mrs. Elizabeth Andrews, mother of Joan Andrews. Houston Police had used an illegal carotid occlusion hold on Joan after a rescue.

"I am convinced these anti-female attacks would not have happened if we had filed by now." this assessment is from Nick Broughj, soft-spoken California rescuer now living in Pittsburgh, another worker on the project. "As far as the future is concerned, bureaucrats listen to things like insurance companies who have to pay these guards' fines. You can bet that a solid conviction in Pittsburgh, easy to get if we can just get to court, would stop future sexual assaults."

"It's simple," summed up Dr. Bechtell. "Most rescuers are women. If they fear rescue, and rightly so, more babies will die. We've worked hard since February, exhausted all local resources to raise $10,000 of the $60,000 necessary to pursue this case. At this rate, we won't make the deadline. We need help now. It is sad that women exercising their constitutional rights to protest against a law that violates the civil rights of unborn children would be subjected to this kind of terrorism. The hopeful part of this is that if we can bring this case to court, it could prevent future Pittsburgh nightmares." ■

Interested readers can write for further information and send donations to:

Pittsburgh Nightmare
Legal Defense Fund
Box 399
Canonsburg, PA 15317

Judge Rules Louisville Abortion Clinic Needs a License, Closing It Indefinitely

Reprint from The Courier-Journal, 9-20-90

Louisville, KY—Women's Health Services, a Louisville abortion clinic, will remain closed indefinitely because a judge ruled yesterday that it needs a license to continue operating.

Early the week of September 15, the state filed suit against the clinic and obtained a temporary restraining order shutting it down. September 19, Jefferson Circuit Judge Richard Revell replaced that order with a temporary injunction, which will keep Women's Health Services closed until it either obtains a license as an ambulatory surgical center or until the issue comes to trial.

The physician who operates the clinic, Dr. Ronachai Banchongmanie, may continue practicing as a private medical doctor, specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, Revell ruled. But the state Cabinet for Human Resources' lawyer, Rick James, specifically worded the temporary injunction to prohibit Banchongmanie from performing "any surgical procedure," such as abortions and tubal ligations.

September 19, representatives from several groups predicted that the closing of Women's Health Services will force some Kentucky women to travel to out of state facilities for abortions. Only one other clinic—EMW Women's Surgical Center, which is licensed—performs abortions in Louisville. And EMW's executive director, Dona Wells, said that her clinic cannot absorb the entire patient load from Women's Health Services.

"It's certainly going to make it difficult for women here to obtain abortions," said Doris Schneider, executive director of Planned Parenthood of Louisville.

Anti-abortion groups praised Revell's decision, saying they hoped the clinic's closing will encourage more women to forgo abortions.

"At least some of these babies will not be aborted at that facility, and perhaps some of these women will reconsider their decision to abort," said Margie Montgomery, executive director of Kentucky Right to Life Inc.

The Cabinet for Human Resources seeks to close the clinic permanently because it lacks a license. And the Commission for Health Economics Control in Kentucky is taking steps to revoke the clinic's certificate of need because of concerns about quality of care, cabinet spokesman Brad Hughes said.

Two inspections of the clinic, made in June and April in response to complaints, found the place dirty and inadequately staffed, Hughes said. Two of the inspectors testified yesterday that the conditions they observed could threaten patients' health and safety.

One inspection report stated, for example, that "in both operating rooms, suction containers were dirty, table parts were lying on the operating room floor, a dusty television set and an empty cardboard box were on the floor in the corner. The anesthesia cart was dirty and dusty. Medication...were opened and not dated. In the instrument room, the sink, the hopper and counters were extremely dirty and dusty. Stacks of 4 by 4 gauze pads were lying open on the dirty stainless steel counter."

Banchongmanie defended his medical practices, saying he has cleaned up his offices since the inspections and "I hardly ever heard of any infection resulting from my operations."

In response to other deficiencies cited by the inspectors, he acknowledged that sometimes medications have been administered intravenously without a doctor's being present, and that "once in a while" he has left before all surgical patients had been discharged in order to make hospital rounds. But "if I'm out," he said, "I'm just a beeper away."

In making his ruling, Revell chastised Banchongmanie for not moving quickly enough to obtain a license, saying "he has had more than ample opportunity." Revell likened Banchongmanie's operating the clinic without a license to a third-year law student's practicing law before passing the bar exam.

"Dr. Banchongmanie has put the cart before the horse, and he has been doing this since at least 1987 if not before," Revell said. "I think it's time to shut down the operation." ■

Deborah McClelland Update:

Rescuer gets maximum—then released

Dallas, TX—A pro-life mother and former victim of abortion who was given six months in jail plus a $1,000 fine said, "The judge said he was sending a message by my conviction and sentence to others protesting as a group against the act of abortion."

Deborah McClelland, a 38-year-old homemaker, was given the harshest sentence possible by any court for participating in a rescue. She has filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Judicial Conduct in Austin, Robert Flowers.(See *The Advocate*, October 1990, page 22.)

Pro-life leaders from all over the metroplex met with Judge Marshall Gandy following McClelland's resentencing July 11. The meeting, lasting 50 minutes, was permitted by the judge to calm troubled waters and to help him explain his views.

Deborah McClelland

Perhaps the most revealing exchange of the meeting was when Pastor Flip Benham stood at the front of Judge Gandy's desk and said, "Judge, Deborah has done everything she possibly can do to protect these children. Now the blood of these children rests squarely on your shoulders. Now what will you do?" Benham motioned with his hands as if he were passing this burden of guilt directly on the judge's desk. Without another word, Gandy, who had been leaning back in his chair, sat upright, leaned forward with both hands as to receive this. Then he brought his burdened hands back to his person and said, "I will personally struggle with this in my private time. With this decision, I will answer to God now and upon my death."

Gandy later declared McClelland's $1,000 fine to be "uncollectable" and ordered her released on August 30 after two months in jail. ■