A bitter mercy

by Donna Bray

There was no question that I would attend Paul Hill's FACE trial on October 3. We became friends while we were both trying to defend the actions of Michael Griffin who shot an abortionist in early 1993. It was during Griffin's trial that I met Paul Hill, and I found him to be a godly man who cared about people, even his detractors.

During that time, I witnessed local pastors tell Paul, with a superior attitude, that they would pray for him, but at the same time they refused to meet with him to discuss their differences. I watched as Paul viewed a video of a national television show where another pastor called him "an enemy of the cross." When the show was over, Paul turned to me and said he liked that man and thought he was a good speaker, very sincere. I saw Paul Hill as he spoke with the press, played with and had devotions with his children, interacted with his wife, and I saw how he treated me as a new friend and house guest.

I left Pensacola feeling as though I knew Paul Hill, and I was proud to call him my friend. He was then, as he is now, a kind, caring, intelligent, brave man.

Upon hearing the news of July 29, that another abortionist and his bodyguard were dead, I knew there would be work to do to defend and support Paul Hill. I anticipated his trial with some apprehension because I had never really dealt with the press before. I thought only of Paul's defense, and how I would try my best to present it, but there were other things that would prove to be stressful too. Later, at the trial, I realized that I was unprepared for what I would hear from the prosecution. In many ways it caused me to leave Pensacola with a better understanding of my own position.

But let me go back for one minute. My involvement in the pro-life movement has been very diverse. I have lobbied, written letters, directed a crisis pregnancy center, picketed, sidewalk counseled, and taken a woman into my home to wait for the birth of her baby. I have done "rescues" and more recently have been like Martha at my local CPC, cleaning the center and sorting baby clothes.

For those many years while I served in the pro-life movement I personally believed that the use of force, if necessary, was justifiable to defend innocent unborn babies. I imagined many scenarios as I considered the debate in my head, and there were sporadic private debates over the years, mostly as a result of "clinic" burnings or bombings. But it wasn't until Michael Griffin shot David Gunn before he entered a building to kill babies that I was ever involved in any real public debate over the use of force.

Before that time, I realized, I had allowed myself to become "hardened" to the reality of abortion. I was more than an activist. I was a wife and mother. As babies of my own came along, I consoled myself, like so many do, that I was doing as much as I could under the circumstances. With the shooting of David Gunn and the widespread condemnation of Michael Griffin (and now Paul Hill) by the pro-life establishment I realized that I hadn't only become hardened toward the plight of the babies, I had developed a callousness toward the abortionists and their accomplices too. They were, after all, the guilty ones in all of this.

Back when I was involved in sit-ins at abortion clinics the justification for "civil disobedience" to rescue babies came up occasionally. Later, after the advent of Operation Rescue (OR) type "rescues," I proudly showed the OR video to whomever would watch it. There were clearly times when one could break a law or usurp another's rights in order to protect life. Therefore, defending Michael Griffin's action came naturally to me. Babies were not murdered on the day David Gunn was shot and a serial killer would never kill again.

It bothered me that pro-life leaders all over America condemned the killing. In all of the denunciations I wondered what had happened to the humanity of the unborn. Later, when the press called, I responded with what I felt was a more consistent pro-life statement; that if we find it justifiable to use force to defend and save the life of our own child from a would-be killer, we had to agree that it was justifiable to use force to save the life of an unborn child too. They are as fully human as any of us. The controversy over force was an intellectual debate and I couldn't understand why everyone was suddenly sympathetic towards the child killer and his accomplices. That changed during Paul Hill's trial.

Paul Hill, according to the testimony, acted openly on July 29 and provided the government and the state of Florida with all of the evidence they needed to put him at the Ladies Center abortion mill with a shotgun in his hand. There were eyewitnesses to almost every move he made, from the time that he was asked to remove white crosses from the grass just outside the abortion mill's property to him picking up a shotgun out of the bushes, shooting, and walking away with hands raised, palms out. I remember thinking during the trial that this was like a made-for-TV docudrama. No missing pieces.

I sat stoically, taking notes, and observing the reactions of those in the courtroom and jury. I watched Paul Hill as he listened, expressionless, to each witness and politely declined to cross-examine. I considered the outrage others were feeling at what they were hearing, and I admitted to myself that it took a lot of courage and resolve to plan and follow through with such an act. I also admitted, if there was ever any doubt in my mind, that I was not capable of such an act, although I might have considered it many times.

I was surprised at myself during June Barrett's testimony. I had seen her on a number of television shows since the shootings and knew she was undaunted. She and her husband "devoted their lives" to protecting and participating in "reproductive health services" and she would continue. I knew that she had the blood of countless innocent unborn babies on her hands, and yet, I felt great sympathy for her as she recalled the morning of July 29.

I understood that she had been through a great ordeal. The trauma she experienced was one I would pray I would never go through. She experienced what most of us only experience vicariously on TV. She had crouched, eyes closed, on the floor of the pick-up after the first shots were fired. She had responded to the abortionist Britton's inquiries about the location of a gun, and then she heard the second round of shotgun fire that killed him too. Finally, she was carried over the bloody body of her own dead husband. She was very upset.

I then thought about all of the dead babies and the brutal ways they died. I thought that Mrs. Barrett, like me, had hardened her heart to what was going on behind the abortion mill doors. It was what made it possible for me to focus my attention on my home and family and ignore in some measure the seriousness of what was happening to unborn babies, and it was what made it possible for her to continue her murderous plan against them.

Every last Friday of the month June Barrett and her husband would pick up an abortionist from the airport, transport him to a local abortion mill, provide protection to him (Mr. Barrett carried a gun), and ensure that women with appointments got into the mill. June Barrett was an accomplice and direct participant in the murder of their unborn children. Even though I felt sympathy for Mrs. Barrett, I had to acknowledge that it was an act of mercy toward the unborn-and-scheduled-to-be-victims of Britton and the Barretts that had caused her to suffer.

I understood that if I had to shoot and kill a man who was trying to rape my daughter it would be very traumatic for me and my little girl, but it would be necessary to prevent a greater harm. Scripture, American case law and common sense tell us that force may be used under certain circumstances to defend and save an innocent victim who is threatened by a guilty aggressor. Unfortunately, as the saying goes, "where sin reigns many suffer," not just the guilty aggressor but those who are their helpers too. Mrs. Barrett has suffered as one who is a participant in the slaughter of unborn children.

I left the courtroom that afternoon and happened to see that federal marshals were preparing to escort Mrs. Barrett to a car which would take her away from the courthouse. I stood and waited, and as she came out of the back door of the building I called out to her pleading with her to repent. I hadn't planned on doing this, it just came out.

Later that evening I realized that I had learned more of the "hard truth" in this debate. It is all very grisly and ugly, the murder of over 4,000 babies every day and the killing of those who are going to kill them. It is not a pretty picture like the sit-ins of old. It is not easy to gaze upon or consider like volunteering to clean the local crisis pregnancy center. It is a bloody battle. It was bloody before Michael Griffin or Paul Hill pulled a trigger.

I often say, I hope this never happens again. I have a hope that abortion will become illegal by nonviolent acts. I have hoped that the citizens of America would rise up and declare that they don't want any more Griffins or Hills or dead babies, and that their united voice would put an end to child slaughter in our land. I have hope that these two acts will cause the truth about what happens inside the death mills to be told, pictures shown, and the bodies of dead babies on every news show. I have hope that by their own free will abortionists will quit their trade, and no woman will ever choose to murder her own flesh and blood again.

I pray this way daily, but I cannot truly say that I hope this (shooting of an abortionist) will never happen again. How can I pray that without saying that it would be better to let babies die than to see another abortionist's dead body or hear another widow's gruesome story?

I don't like that the whole situation exists, but when faced with it (that another abortionist has been stopped by lethal force), a decision about how we are to respond must be made. Do we say, "Save the babies! Save the babies!," or do we say "Save the babies but only through peaceful means; only within the law, maybe by trespassing, *but nothing more*!"? Are unborn babies worthy of the same protection and defense as our own children? If so, how do we plead their case? ■

Donna Bray is founder of Defenders of Defenders of Life

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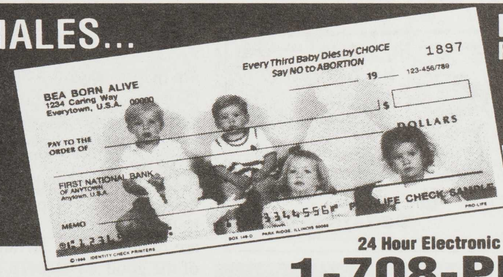

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