On May 8 Gunn's death will serve as a rallying point and a (welcome?) fundraiser for the NOW if they can convince enough zealots to rise to the occasion. "They're going to be amplifying the death of one man," according to Don Gratton. Shaking his head, he contemplates the merits of a possible counter-demonstration and states that Christians need to be there to "focus the attention back on the true tragedy, the innocent children that are killed every day." His voice wanders off a little as he says, "The American people swallow the death of 4,500 children every day...," but then comes back strong when he says, "I refuse to call Dr. Gunn's death a murder anymore. Dr. Gunn was aborted. He was a 47-year-old fetus who was aborted in Pensacola." A cold-sounding commentary on the death of a man, but clearly expressive of the emotional conflicts felt by thousands of pro-lifers who feel they are being manipulated into a false sense of grief for a man who bought his children's college education at the expense of so many little lives.

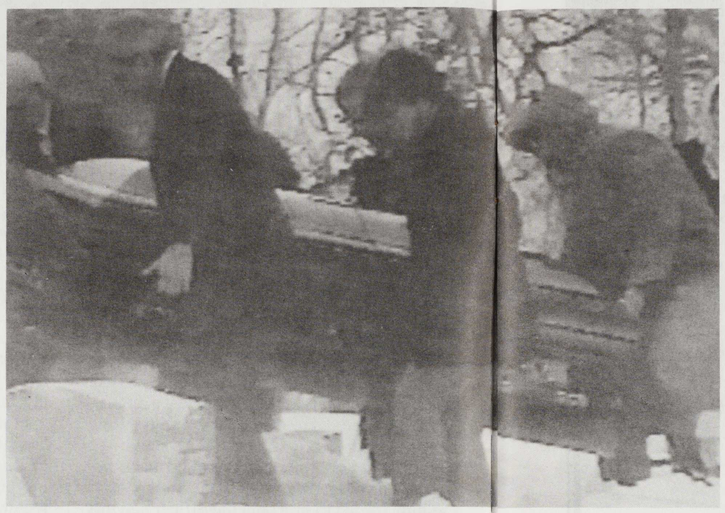
And what of Michael Griffin, the man who would like to put abortion on trial in America? He is locked in his concrete tower — reminiscent of the unholy zeal of Oral Roberts — refusing to talk. In the wake of his action, media representatives who traveled hundreds of miles and spent thousands of dollars to cover the story — like sharks in bloody water — have created a story out of what is only available on the surface.

Much has been made of a smattering of standard, umbrella language from a restraining order obtained by Patricia Griffin during a period of time when their marriage was weathering a smaller crisis than this one. News reports have painted Griffin as an angry and physically abusive husband, but those, like John and Linda Burt, who knew the couple say 'Not so.' "We knew there was some trouble in the marriage," John Burt recalls. "Linda had counseled her and she indicated that Mike was a nice guy, he would do anything for anybody else, but he wouldn't do anything for [his family.]" They talk of a man who was eager to help with projects during the brief time they knew him, but describe him as "shy" or "stand-offish," characterizations not nearly as likely to sell in the media; certainly not anyone's idea of a saint, but not the ghoulish sinner they were hoping to find.

With such slender fragments to piece a story together, and Griffin keeping his vow of silence, the media have also made a full-scale assault on other pro-life ministries. Rescue America and Our Father's House, both run by the Burts, have weathered a constant barrage of interviews and angry phone calls. Reporters like Karen Houppert of the liberal *Village Voice* newspaper have intruded on the lives of those pro-lifers left in Griffin's wake and twisted truths to validate headlines like "Minister of Hate," referring to John Burt, who they say is responsible, at least in part, for Gunn's death. Burt has taken issue with abortion for the past 15 years by picketing, putting up billboards, and holding vigils and memorial services for the victims. The theory is that by exposing Michael Griffin to the truth John Burt might just as well have put the pistol in his hand.

Whether or not Michael Griffin is truly able to put abortion on trial in America, as some have suggested, remains to be seen, but it is obvious that at least for some people his action will have a continuing and profound impact. For David Gunn's family — so torn over his death that they spurned any act of compassion on the part of pro-life Christians and rejected funeral flowers sent by them — Griffin may always be seen as wrong, even if -- like John Brown -- the politics of his action should seem to vindicate him later. Michael Griffin's name will always speak of the death of someone they loved.

For an undetermined number of others, his name will only speak of life. Wandering around the two Pensacola mills, rattling the locked door handle at suite #46 and surveying the empty parking lot of the other mill, "serviced" by Gunn, one can only guess at the number of children who are still alive because someone took seriously the imminent threat that the abortionist posed to them. According to John Burt, "There haven't been any babies died in, let's see, Montgomery, Mobile...He killed in about four or five cities. No babies have died there, or very few, because they can't replace the doctor." ■



David Gunn gets his last ride as pallbearers carry his casket though the snow.

Common Ground: Both sides blame Clinton

In surprising agreement, both sides of the abortion debate pointed a finger of blame for the David Gunn death at President Bill Clinton.

Clinton angered hundreds of thousands on January 22 by dissolving Reagan-Bush bans on abortion. The move has been hailed by both abortion zealots and pro-life activists as one that "turned up the heat" on the abortion debate. Tensions over the annihilation of fragile political barriers are perceived to have contributed to the explosive scene that resulted in Gunn's having been shot outside of his Pensacola mill.

"The opponents of choice are very frustrated that they have lost the White House," according to Eve Paul, an attorney for the Planned Parenthood Federation. A Grand Rapids, Michigan mill operator stated, "I'm thinking that there may be some backlash," referring to the political gains to the abortion industry since Clinton's administration began paying off campaign debts by eliminating conservative protections against the growing billion dollar business.

Clinton

"I think clearly it is because of the political climate right now. We have a new president with a very different stance on the abortion issue," commented Deborah Sharp of USA Today. "Things are heating up all over."

On the other side of the debate, Rev. Joseph Foreman, an ordained Presbyterian minister, believes the shooting could be the tip of the iceberg. "I've been saying for years that if the government insists on suppressing normal and time-honored dissent through injunctions, it turns the field over to the rock-throwers, the bombers and the assassins."

In Response...

Skolnick

"He killed thousands and thousands of babies, and they didn't even have a chance. I really don't feel sorry for him, but I do feel sorry for his family...They thought he was a doctor, maybe saving lives. Instead he was killing them."

Alicia Skolnick
Sarasota, FL

"He probably arrived at the decision out of despondency and anger. 'This man has been killing all these babies. Look it's been 20 years and nothing's happening'...I wish to God that he would have come to one of us leaders and...if he would have confided in us, this whole thing could have been avoided."

Penny Lea,
Pensacola, FL

Lea

"Personally, I abhor what he [Griffin] did...There's something about seeing the body of a man lying on the ground with blood on his chest — no matter who he was — that when you see these two (the abortionist and the baby), they both were created in the image of God...He [Griffin] is an individual who is not a pro-lifer. He may have had a pro-life philosophy, but to call him a pro-life activist is like saying that someone who comes to Life Chain once a year is a pro-life activist."

Mike Conroy,
Pensacola, FL

Murray

"He could've walked off. Nobody saw him, and he could've just gotten away with it. I think the reason he came around — he not only laid his life down for the babies — there was John and Don and Floyd involved [in a picket], and he laid his life down for them. The cops could have said, pointing to any one of them, 'You did it.' He knew that...God knew that on March 10 David Gunn was going to die...I get very upset when I read in the editorials that David Gunn didn't have enough time to repent. That man, for six years in Pensacola alone, heard the Gospel preached every Thursday out in front of the abortion clinic...He had more chance than most to change his ways."

Cathy Murray,
Milton FL

"I was grieving about Dr. Gunn, but I was real worried about Michael, cause I knew he was in real trouble now, and I wanted to ask him why he did it...Michael did wrong and I know he's gonna pay for it, and I pray he don't get the electric chair. I don't think he deserves it."

Julie Phavemire,
Lakeland, FL

Phavemire

Gratton

"I was very disappointed in Mike. I didn't know him well, but I knew he was pro-life.For a pro-lifer to do what he'd done was beyond my comprehension. If you're for life, you're for life. You don't kill people...I can't explain why he did what he did."

Mary Gratton,
Milton, FL