



FALL 2006

RAISE YOUR VOICE!

Pro-Choice Public Education Project Newsletter

KEEPING THE FAITH IN THE PRO-CHOICE MOVEMENT

By Nicole Clark

"The time has come for the religious people of this country to not only defend the constitutional right of women to choose, but also to defend the religious freedom of all Americans. The time has come to proclaim with all our moral power that women's rights are also civil rights and human rights."

*The Reverend Carlton Veazey
President, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice*



Have you ever felt like a perpetrator, being involved in or doing something and believing that you just don't belong? I would feel this way at times while sitting in the pews in Sunday morning church services. Growing up as a Southern Baptist, I was surrounded by members of the congregation who clapped, danced,

raised their hands and faces to the ceiling in praise and worship, I would often wonder if these people were in sync with the same God as I. I often felt out of place because even though I believed in what most people who consider themselves religious would believe, I didn't however agree with a lot of things.

Many religious individuals believe that homosexuality is wrong and that lesbian women and gay men should not be allowed to marry; I believe that if you happen to find the one that you feel you can spend the next 50 years with, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, why not make it official? Many religious individuals also believe that the man should be the head of the household

and family. Why not make it an equal partnership between both spouses, with each individual having an equal say in what happens inside as well as outside the house? Many religious individuals believe that abortion is wrong. However, I am beginning to see more and more that this is not the case, one notion being that mainstream society assumes that ALL people that are religious are opposed to abortion.

When does life truly begin? For some of us it begins as soon as the sperm meets the egg. For others, it begins when you hear the baby's first cry. I started thinking of this as young as elementary school, where I

continued on p. 3 ▶

Raise Your Voice is a publication of the Pro-Choice Public Education Project (PEP)'s Young Women's Leadership Council, a national advisory board of women from across the country. *Raise Your Voice* is written by young women, for young women with news and views about the reproductive rights movement.

Contributors

Nicole Clark
 Rashi Venkataraman
 Willo Radgens
 Meghan Rapp
 Ebony Barley
 Aimee Thorne-Thomsen

YWLC Members

Lani Blechman
 Nicole Clark
 Alexandra DeValle
 Nondace Garrett
 Leslie Hu
 Tiffany Jules
 Shelby Knox
 Lauren Mitchell
 Jana Priestley
 Willo Radgens
 Lindsay Swisher
 Rashi Venkataraman
 Celica Whitley
 Jess Yousif

PEP Alumnae (PEPA)

Ebony Barley
 Chanel Haliburton
 Jennifer Heitel-Yakush
 Meghan Rapp

**Pro-Choice Public
Education Project Staff**

Meredith Esser
 LEADERSHIP AND
 COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE

Eshanda Fennell
 PROGRAM MANAGER

Mary Mahoney
 DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE

Aimee Thorne-Thomsen
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lisa Schuller
 COMMUNICATIONS INTERN

Raise Your Voice
 is happy to
 accept article
 submissions.

For more information,
 please email:
pep@protectchoice.org

WHERE ARE THE YOUNG WOMEN?

By Aimee Thorne-Thomsen

Since becoming Executive Director of PEP two years ago, no question has irked me more than that one. The first few times I heard colleagues ask the question, I thought it was odd. In my work, I saw young women everywhere – organizing, writing, educating, and leading. When the question made an appearance at almost every meeting, conference, or panel I participated in, I realized something was really wrong with the way we think about young activists. Just this morning, my local National Public Radio station broadcast, “Young people aren’t thinking for themselves. Young people aren’t involved in government!” In all fairness, this was an announcement for a program highlighting youth activism by dispelling the ubiquitous myth that young people are apathetic. Unfortunately, I hear it echoed throughout the movement. Colleagues want to know why young women aren’t mobilizing around the same issues that galvanized them as young activists. They want to know why they don’t see young women leading protests as they did and continue to do. “Where are they?” Unfortunately, I long stopped being surprised by people who ask that question as if it were a reasonable one.

Some of us in the reproductive health and rights movement have

developed a kind of myopia. We are so familiar with certain forms of activism, maybe because that is what led us to movement work, that we cannot recognize activism taking place in other ways. We then see only what we expect to see and disregard the rest. The problems with that kind of thinking are obvious, but that doesn’t stop us from asking, “Where are the young women?” So in the hopes of being helpful, let me answer that question. **THEY ARE EVERYWHERE.** Just look through the stories in this issue of *Raise Your Voice*, and you will see young women taking charge and engaging on the issues that matter most to them. Whether educating their peers about HIV, lobbying their school boards to pass comprehensive sexuality education curricula, or marching on the nation’s capital to support women’s reproductive rights, young women are doing what they have always done. They are leading the fight for reproductive justice for all of us. Just because they are doing the work differently than we did or would, doesn’t change the fact that they are fighting alongside us. And we would see that if we just looked for it. **RYV**

“We are so familiar with certain forms of activism, maybe because that is what led us to movement work, that we cannot recognize activism taking place in other ways.”

◀ *continued from p. 1*

would ask myself, “Well, if God says that we are alive and human when we are conceived, then why aren’t we considered 9 months old when our moms push us out?” It may sound silly to think about it now, but it does make some sense. Does life begin at conception or after we are born? Do we consider a fetus to be a living breathing person when we want the pregnancy to occur or do we consider it null and void when the pregnancy is unplanned or unwanted? I wanted to know if there were others like myself out there. Others that were grounded in their spiritual beliefs while also believing in equality for all people. I found it hypocritical for many places of worship to tell their followers to love your neighbor as yourself, just as long as you did not extend that love to anyone that was gay/lesbian, an advocate for gay marriage, or for freedom of choice. For years I have struggled with some of the Bible’s teachings. Why would the Bible teach you to love everyone but shun those who were not ‘like you’?

I became involved in sexual and reproductive rights while in college. While it was new and excit-

When does life truly begin? For some of us it begins as soon as the sperm meets the egg. For others, it begins when you hear the baby’s first cry. I started thinking of this as young as elementary school, where I would ask myself, ‘Well, if God says that we are alive and human when we are conceived, then why aren’t we considered 9 months old when our moms push us out?’”

ing to me, I was beginning to have concerns about what my newfound beliefs would have on the religious foundation that I have grown up on. I started to define what about my faith has led me to being pro-choice. Although I continue to find conflicts with many of the Bible’s teachings, I did know that life, or the beginning of it rather, is not fully explained. There is no indication that we are considered human beings at conception or after we leave our mother’s womb. After all, abortion is not even mentioned. This was the defining moment for me when I realized that God has given all of us free will to do what we can with our lives and for us not to be judgmental on what someone

decides to do in their private life.

I feel that it is great that there are people out there like myself that are looking at the complexity of the relationship between faith and the pro-choice movement. I also find it wonderful that there are organizations such as Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice that challenge the notion that one cannot be pro-choice and pro-faith. Although I continue to think about the pro-choice/pro-faith aspect of my life everyday, I do feel better about keeping my faith in the pro-choice movement. 

CONTENTS

- 1 **Keeping the Faith in the Pro-Choice Movement** NICOLE CLARK
- 2 **Where are the Young Women?** AIMEE THORNE-THOMSEN
- 4 **Poonitha** RASHI VENKATARAMAN
- 6 **PEP’s Young Women’s Leadership Council (YWLC)** MEREDITH ESSER
- 8 **My Child Deserves the Right to Choose** WILLO RADGENS
- 10 **Farewell to the YWLC** MEGHAN RAPP
- 11 **“Rights” of Passage** EBONY BARLEY

POONITHA

By Rashi Venkataraman

When I was younger, my vacations were very different from those of my friends at school. While they vacationed at the beach, went camping, or went to Disneyland, I went to India. These visits were often comprised of getting acclimatized to the heat, enduring the discomfort of a million bug bites, and sharing a tiny house with countless relatives. To make matters more difficult, upon my return to the United States, I never had the predictable story of seeing the Taj Mahal or some other iconic Indian tourist attraction, and could only entertain with stories of estranged relatives. But one of those trips was different. In retrospect, it was that trip that defined what I wanted to be when I grew up.

I was eight years old and I was visiting my grandmother in Madras. The summer loomed long – all the kids were back in school and my lack of language skills rendered the TV useless. Therefore, my dreams of a fun summer in another country vanished.

My grandmother had hired a servant for the house since she was too old to do housework. Her

name was Poonitha. She was in charge of keeping the apartment clean, chopping all of the vegetables for my grandmother, and preparing the dough for the fresh bread my grandmother made. In Poonitha, my grandmother found help in running her household. However, in Poonitha, I found a friend.

I spent my days with Poonitha. I waited for her arrival each morning at dawn. We exchanged few words but our conversation surpassed the barriers of language. She did everything with enthusiasm and I was eager to learn. She showed me how to grate the flesh from a coconut using a blade attached to a board. She taught me how to pick the freshest flowers from the bushes to take to the temple. She taught me to draw beautiful traditional decorations on the floor using just water and a white powder and a scrap of cloth.

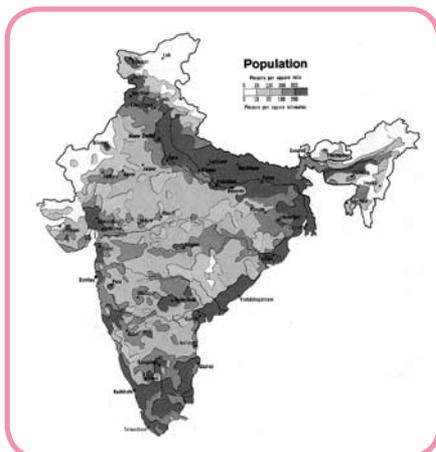
And so my summer continued, day after day. After one day's work, my grandmother wanted Poonitha to go to the bank. Not surprisingly, I went with her. After going to the bank, Poonitha informed me (in very slow Tamil) that she just had



to stop at her own home to drop off lunch for her husband.

In retrospect, Poonitha was probably only 19 or 20 years old. The idea that she may be married or have a family had never really crossed my eight-year-old mind. She led me down an alley that stood next to the main road. This was the poorer part of the neighborhood. The alley was crowded with homes. There were women in tattered saris carrying vessels with water, and small children clung to their mothers and looked around with huge eyes. Men were lounging in doorways or sitting on large upturned pots. The lack of ventilation made the heat unbearable. The

continued on p. 5 ▶



Strong women like Poonitha need education to increase their options. They need access to better healthcare so they can stay healthy and raise families that are healthy. I am truly convinced that the first step to empowering women is to give them economic independence and knowledge about their bodies so they can have a better role in their destiny.

◀ continued from p. 4

humidity in that alley made the heat a thing that enveloped all the space. In a crowded alley like that, the heat that you feel isn't even a part of the surroundings. You feel it seeping through your hair and clothes and into your thoughts, and even feelings.

My hold on the end of Poonitha's sari got even tighter. Soon we were standing outside a small shack. With walls made out of scraps of wood and a low roof that was sheet metal, Poonitha entered her home. Consisting of only one small room with a large vessel filled with water to the side, the house stood in a sea of other similar homes.

She dropped off the small parcel she had brought with her, folded a cotton sheet that had been abandoned in the corner, took my hand in hers and gave me a smile that I will never forget in my life. Over the years, I have tried to explain the expression on her face to my mother or my sister, but have failed. She didn't look embarrassed, apologetic, or even tired. Neither did she seem spiteful, angry, or irritated. Instead, she bore an expression that said, "This is my life. And I accept it."

That vision of Poonitha in the small shack in an abandoned alley in Madras made a tremendous impression in my mind. Years later I am still amazed at her vitality despite living in those deplorable conditions. I had seen her impressive strength and her creative solutions around my home but was appalled at how few options intelligent women like her have in making a better life for themselves.

Reproductive Health and the Millenium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are drawn from the Millennium Declaration, a United Nations document that was signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. The aim of the goals is to urge governments to focus on those issues that are most pressing in the developing world today, and to streamline development efforts worldwide. Reproductive rights and gender equity are major components of these goals, especially those that focus on HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and women's empowerment.

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

For more information about the Millennium Development Goals, please visit www.undp.org/mdg.

Trapped by circumstances these strong women end up as the backbone of their families and communities but still lead lives of hardship because of lack of education.

Strong women like Poonitha need education to increase their options. They need access to better healthcare so they can stay healthy and raise families that are healthy. I am truly convinced that the first step to empowering women is to give them economic independence and knowledge about their bodies so they can have a better role in their destiny.

Twelve years later, I am studying Biology and Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University with hopes of going to medical school to study Women's Health and Pediatrics. I found out about the Young Women's Leadership Council through a summer internship with the National Women's Health Network. When I read about their goals of giving all women a voice

and educating them about their reproductive and health rights, I knew I had to get involved.

Sadly, I don't know where Poonitha is. When I was ten, my grandmother moved in with my aunt and uncle in a rural area of Southern India. As it is with any servant in India, after the move, my grandmother lost touch with Poonitha. I always wonder about Poonitha. Did she have children? Does she still live in that same house? Did her indomitable spirit survive her harsh living conditions? I have accepted the fact that I will probably never see Poonitha again. I will never get a chance to thank her for being my inspiration. Because of her, I am pursuing a career in women's health. However, more importantly, because of her, my view of women's health issues was forever changed. 

PEP'S YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP COUNCIL (YWLC)

PEP's Young Women's Leadership Council is made up fourteen exceptional young women from across the country who are in some way involved in the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement. PEP is welcoming ten new members to our council this year. **Lani Blechman** is a junior at Hampshire College in Massachusetts who grew up in Florida and is still adjusting to northeast weather. This fall, Lani will be studying in Chiapas, Mexico and is eager to learn more about the international feminist scene. **Nicole Clark**, already a seasoned reproductive rights activist, recently graduated from Spelman College and is aspiring to continue her work with HIV/STI education for young, disadvantaged black women in the South. **Nondace Garrett** is a junior at Florida Atlantic

University in Boca Raton. An avid athlete and skilled synchronized swimmer, Nondace now helps coach younger girls in her area, and is excited about becoming involved in the reproductive justice movement. **Tiffany Jules** is currently a health educator and HIV Pre/Post Test Counselor at Brooklyn AIDS Task Force in the Youth and Young Adult Unit. This fall, she will be studying at Columbia University toward a dual degree in public health and social work, which she



YWLC Members (L to R): Tiffany Jules, Leslie Hu, Willo Radgens, Lani Blechman, Celica Whitley, Lauren Mitchell, Nondace Garrett, Rashi Venkataraman, Jana Priestley, Nicole Clark, Meghan Rapp. Absent: Shelby Knox, Lindsay Swisher, Jessica Yousif, Alexandra DelValle

hopes will help her to become a more skilled advocate for adolescent sexual health.

Shelby Knox will be a senior at the University of Texas at Austin this year. Shelby's reproductive rights activism was highlighted in the film "The Education



of Shelby Knox" which documents Shelby's experiences with the Lubbock, Texas school board and her attempts to get comprehensive sexuality education passed in her school district. *Lauren Mitchell* is currently in her senior year at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, where her studies will culminate in a thesis concerning midwifery and reproductivity in literature. When she isn't spending all of her time reading, writing and generally being a budding academic, she is a Gynecological Teaching Associate at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. *Willo Radgens* discovered her life's passion in working with teens and reproductive health issues. After obtaining her master's, Willo began working for Planned Parenthood of South Central Michigan as the Youth Program Coordinator. Willo's life has now taken another big turn to that of a stay-at-home mother. She now enjoys the challenge of raising her son and continuing her activism through volunteer opportunities such as the Young Women's Leadership Council. *Lindsay Swisher* is a student at Indiana University currently studying French and Marketing through the Kelley School of Business. Through her involvement with Advocates for Youth, and the cutting edge peer education program Project T.R.U.S.T., Lindsay makes a valuable addition to the YWLC team. *Rashi Venkataraman* is currently a junior at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. She is studying Biological Science with an additional major in Ethics, History, & Public Policy. After graduating she hopes to have a career in public health, especially pertaining to maternal and children's health for underprivileged communities. *Jessie Yousif* is a Freshman at Oakton Community College in Illinois and is studying to become a Veterinarian. In high-school, she was an active member of her local Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) chapter, and hopes to continue her activism with the LGBTQ and reproductive rights communities through the YWLC. They will join our veteran members, *Alexandra DelValle*, *Leslie Hu*, *Jana Priestley* and *Celica Whitley* in advising PEP's programs and developing their skills as young leaders in the pro-choice movement. We must also say goodbye to four women who have given their time and passion so generously to PEP over the past few years: *Ebony Barley*, *Chanel Haliburton*, *Jennifer Heitel-Yakush*, and *Meghan Rapp*. We will miss them terribly. You will find two of their farewell reflections toward the end of this issue. 

MY CHILD DESERVES THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

By Willa Radgens

I have recently taken on an unexpected role. As a teenager, it was something I vowed I would never do. As I attended college and began to develop a new sense of identity, it was something I thought I would wait for. Never did I believe it to be a role I would embrace as much as I have. Nine months ago, I became a mother.

I am so grateful for my right to choose to become a mother when I did. I know that without those rights and the knowledge I possessed about gaining access to and using the correct contraceptive methods, my life would not be what it is today - a life I am proud to be living. I also know that every day thousands of women have to make choices about when they are ready to become mothers. I hope and wish for them to have the knowledge and access I did.

However, hoping and wishing are not always enough, especially not lately. There is a growing movement in this country to limit reproductive rights and health care and, unfortunately, it has been far too successful. Now more than ever, it is essential for people who feel strongly about this issue to make their voices heard and protect those rights for themselves and others.

"The generations of tomorrow deserve the same or more rights than we have now. They are too young to fight for it, so we need to fight for them."

One of the most frustrating things to experience as an activist is what I think of as the "somebody else syndrome." This is something I hear from so many people I talk to. Many people feel that reproductive choice and freedom are important, but don't take action to ensure they remain ours. What they tell me is that "somebody else will take care of that...because I am too busy."

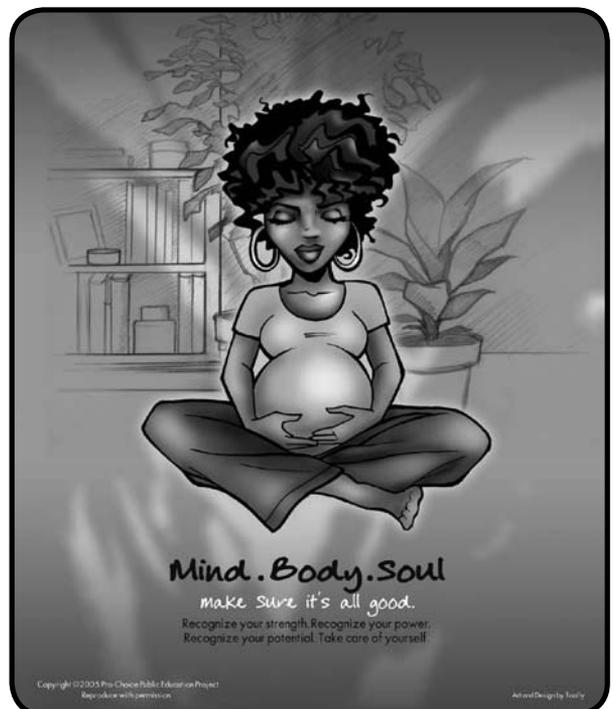
It seems everyone is too busy until those rights, freedoms, and choices they once took for granted are gone. When they or someone they love cannot get their birth control prescription filled or can no longer have a safe and legal abortion should they need it, that is when they want to speak up, when they want to make a difference. Often when it is too late.

I don't want it to be too late when it comes to my kids. The generations of tomorrow deserve the same or more rights than we have now. They are too young to fight for it, so we need to fight for them. They may never need or choose to use it,



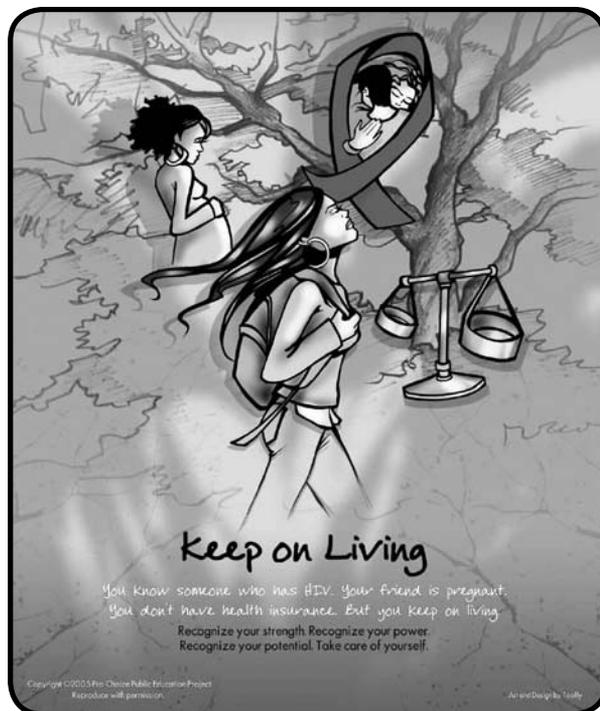
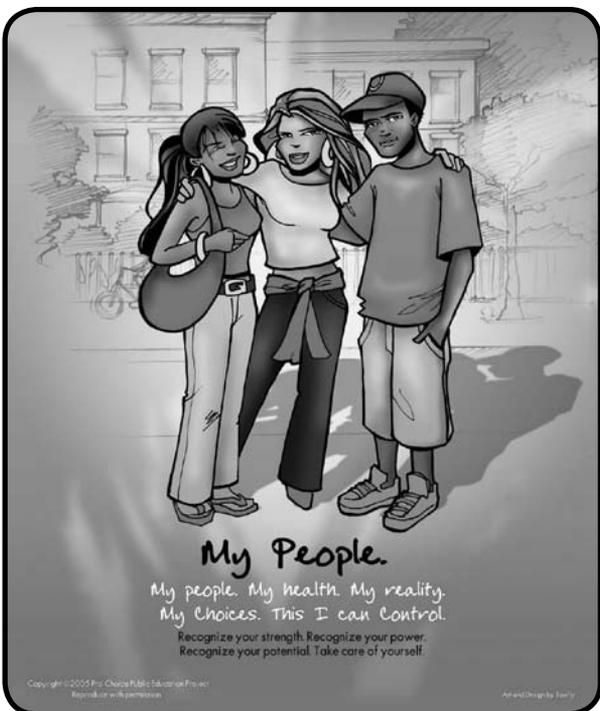
but shouldn't that be their choice to make?

I may be a mother, but I know I will spend many more years of my life preventing pregnancy than being pregnant. I may have chosen to give birth, but there are many women for whom that choice is not the right one. There may be the right to choose in this country now, but I want to ensure that I raise my children in a world where they too will have that choice. **TV**



In January of 2006, PEP launched its **"Recognize!" Campaign**, created to highlight the concerns of young women of color in their sexual and reproductive lives. The tagline "Recognize your strength. Recognize your power. Recognize your potential. Take care of yourself." embraces issues that are important to young women of color and speaks directly to the complex realities that many young women face. Young people worry about HIV/AIDS and their lack of health insurance; they think about their mental, physical and spiritual health and their desire to start families someday. Young women also express a fierce self-determination to take control of their lives. The campaign reflects a more holistic approach to reproductive rights and an emphasis on the importance of family and community than the more individualistic messages that have come out of the movement previously. We hope these messages and accompanying images encourage activism on these issues and broaden the movement to include the perspectives of young women of color.

For more information about the "Recognize!" Campaign, or to request a sample of PEP's ads, please email pep@protectchoice.org, or go to our website at www.protectchoice.org.



FAREWELL TO THE YWLC

By Meghan Rapp

My background lends nothing to this type of activism. I am a Southerner from the former capitol of the Confederacy and am the youngest daughter of Republican parents who worked hard to put me through twelve straight years of Catholic schooling. Sundays I spent as an altar server or Eucharistic minister, and once a year the Church bussed us to the anti-choice “March for Life” in Washington, D.C.

A decade later I find myself marching with the opposition group, having just completed my fourth and final year on PEP’s Young Women’s Leadership Council and embarking on a Master’s degree of Law and Human Rights. I could not say when it was I became a liberal, or a feminist, or even an agitator in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). However, I can say with definitiveness that it all started for me with the email from PEP about the YWLC. An article I wrote in the local newspaper about Bush’s slippery beginnings of restricting reproductive rights had apparently been noticed by some organization based in New York City—and they wanted me to join! Having never been to New York (or been in any organization that supports reproductive rights), I immediately accepted.

My time at PEP has been astounding. I got so much out of a group of people with vast experiences and backgrounds. Working with the PEP staff and other YWLC members also provided a space in which I could breathe

and relax, without judgment, and encouraged me to find my place in the movement. I immediately connected with this amazing group of women.

I also quickly decided that every time I could participate in something, I would. The first event I was involved with was hosting a reading of “That Takes Ovaries!” (TTO). It took place in some eclectic art gallery in NYC, a fabulous setting for my foray into the world of SRHR activism. That evening, I met the editor, Rivka Solomon, and was even the first person to the mike to share my own TTO story. Being a part of PEP on that night, an eighteen-year-old with big huge eyes, I knew I had found my calling.

The rest of my time with PEP was marked by a series of other volunteering opportunities, traveling to new places, and using PEP as a resource to educate myself on reproductive justice issues. Through the Council I networked with other organizations to participate in Choice USA’s Gloria Steinem Leadership Institute; SIECUS’s international Youth Summit; and the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education’s annual conference in Washington, DC.

While doing all this, I continued to organize with PEP during our Recognize! Campaign, and also to use my new skills in coordinating the



Feminist Activist Fair on my campus. This August I met with the YWLC at my last official convening, where I was both very overjoyed and very saddened. I felt overjoyed at the opportunity to meet the new dynamic members of the council but saddened that this chapter in my life has ended. PEP has been the source through which I have learned about and organized on behalf of sexual health and rights issues. If I had not joined the council four years ago, I imagine I would have remained an apathetic woman on the sidelines of a very necessary revolution. Instead, when a line was drawn on the ground at the last convening and Council members were asked to step over it if they were confident in their role in the movement, I crossed. Though I do not know the exact path of my future as an activist, I am fully confident in my past, and I attribute my development to PEP’s Young Women’s Leadership Council. **tyy**

“I am a Southerner from the former capitol of the Confederacy and am the youngest daughter of Republican parents...”

“RIGHTS” OF PASSAGE: REFLECTIONS ON A PRO-CHOICE JOURNEY

By *Ebony Barley*

In 1996, I entered the pro-choice movement as an intern. At 19, I was bright eyed, passionate, and eager to learn. My opinions formed instantly, but I lacked confidence, so I began to retreat from the conversation. Compounded by expert religious thought, issues of ageism and my lack of experience, I spent several years measuring the output of my thoughts as it related to “choice.” I then decided I needed a vastly different experience.

No longer in a sea of religious experts or highly opinionated men who would never give birth to life in this lifetime, I found myself in an organization of good ole girls who were nuanced in their opinions on sexuality, but not in their stance on race, class and gender as it relates to choice. A black woman in the choice movement is a rarity, but her limited presence at “the table,” often signifies a faux diversity—merely satisfying the mainstream outward appearance. It was at this place I claimed my voice in this false sense of reality. Thinking that my opinion held some weight in this heavy matter of choice, I spent several more years working to push forward an agenda that places race, class and gender in a similar scope. But I soon learned that the mask of support only thrust me deeper into a pool of confusion and dispassionate feelings about my own choices.

Moving on, feeling isolated again, age was no longer the central opposition to my mainstream ambitions. Race and class were now the determining issues that propelled

I remember my first convening of these women and how empowered I felt simply sitting next to them—women who held little to no inhibitions regarding their opinions and needs when it came to “choice.”

my distrust of the movement. I felt myself having an out-of-body experience with the choice movement. My soul had departed this body of activists and I no longer felt the connection I thought once connected me to these women and the movement we all fought for.

At age 27, now a fairly seasoned proponent of choice, my passion was gone. I felt betrayed, no longer wanting to be in the forefront of choice issues and now doubting the difference I thought I could make. I asked God for clarity and validation of my activism. I feared the answer, but what I received was PEP. The Pro-Choice Public Education Project’s Young Women’s Leadership Council invited me to join, not as an employee, but as a volunteer who could speak truth to power and express all that I had been holding back for so long. I had prayed for an opportunity to not simply work within the movement, but also to voice my opinions with the freedom the movement spoke so vividly of.

I was thankful for the life lessons learned from working within the pro-choice movement, but I now had a voice parallel to those at the table, a table full of women from all walks of life, educational backgrounds, races, cultures and sexualities. It would be best described as finding a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

I remember my first convening of these women and how empowered I felt simply sitting next to them—women who held little to no inhibitions regarding their opinions and needs when it came to “choice.” PEP gave me back my passion and even strengthened my resolve as the years passed. As I reflect on my experience on the YWLC, I am grateful for the opportunity I had to grow and to learn from the women at this table. I am also thankful to these women for listening and being open to my opinions.

So now, at 29, ten years after my initial entry into the pro-choice movement, I am departing the Young Women’s Leadership Council with the passion that first connected me to this movement at the tender age of 19. Although, I thought my passion was lost, PEP gave me an opportunity that my spirit will never forget. PEP’s YWLC invoked my passion again and validated my needs and desires as a woman, a young woman and a young woman of color in this movement. For me, choice is a way of life. And in this life we make choices every minute of each day. I am so happy and grateful to the women of PEP for choosing me and allowing me to share my energy and regain my passion through the Young Women’s Leadership Council. 

About the Pro-Choice Public Education Project

The Pro-Choice Public Education Project (PEP) is dedicated to engaging young women on their terms around the critical issues of reproductive health and rights. Historically, the reproductive rights movement has marginalized young women, women of color, and low-income women, among other groups. PEP works to bridge the gap between organizations and diverse young women by both listening to young women's stories and by working with organizations to help them meet young women where they are.

About the Young Women's Leadership Council

The mission of the Young Women's Leadership Council (YWLC) is to be the voice and raise the voices of diverse groups of young women in the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement.

Donate to PEP!

Thank you for picking up the first issue of *Raise Your Voice*.

If you like what you have read, we encourage you to become part of the PEP family. Please visit our website at

www.protectchoice.org. You can join our email list, donate online, and learn much more about the work that we do for young women.



You can also send a donation via mail to:

The Pro-Choice Public Education Project

PO Box 3952
New York, NY 10163

or call **1-800-253-CHOICE** for more information.

PEP Steering Committee

Desiree Flores

MS. FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

Emily Goodstein

RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR
REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

Kayley Harrington

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

Margaret Hempel

MS. FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

Lisa Horowitz

NARAL PRO-CHOICE AMERICA

Leslie Hu

PEP'S YOUNG WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Crystal Lander

FEMINIST MAJORITY FOUNDATION

Eleanor Smeal

FEMINIST MAJORITY FOUNDATION

Rev. Carlton Veazey

RELIGIOUS COALITION FOR
REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

James Wagoner

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

Celica Whitley

PEP'S YOUNG WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Jamia A. Wilson

PLANNED PARENTHOOD
FEDERATION OF AMERICA

The Pro-Choice Public Education Project (PEP) would like to extend a special thanks to the Educational Foundation of America, the Compton Foundation, the General Service Foundation, the Irving Harris Foundation, the Moriah Fund, Ms. Foundation for Women, the Overbrook Foundation, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the Scherman Foundation, the Quixote Foundation, our Steering Committee Members and our individual donors for their generous support of PEP and our programs.