

Healing Post-Abortion Pain

Sydna Massé wants to make the truth of God's forgiveness known, so that women who have been traumatized by abortion no longer have to suffer in silence.

It took Sydna Massé 19 years to fully grieve the loss of her first child, completing the process by naming him for his grandfather. That emotional step came in 2001 at the National Memorial for the Unborn in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"There were a lot of tears involved," says Sydna, an outgoing mother of three teens. "You can't lose a child and not cry. I think about him every day. You never forget. I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing without that."

What the Florida resident is doing is reaching out to those suffering from post-abortion syndrome (PAS). After nine years, Ramah International (), Sydna's speaking, teaching and writing ministry, has touched thousands worldwide.

The 44-year-old ministry leader is on a mission to provide counseling and other support for both genders, helping them share their grief and find healing. She also steers abortion-minded couples toward pro-life alternatives.

Although post-abortion pain is a reality the world largely ignores, the outspoken, energetic speaker doesn't intend to remain silent. Sydna and other post-abortive mothers believe their voices will eventually bring an end to the practice that has claimed more than 45 million unborn children since the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling eliminated most restrictions on abortion.

Ultimately, she hopes to spare others from the pain that wreaked havoc on her life. "I feel like people are telling me I don't hurt," says Sydna, whose boyfriend pressured her to

have an abortion while both were students at a Christian college. “When you talk person to person, you see the devastation. It’s evident everywhere.”

FINDING HEALING

In 1991, six years after graduating from a secular university—Sydna transferred there to escape recriminations if her secret leaked—she joined the marketing department at Focus on the Family.

Her first day on the job, ministry founder James Dobson discussed abortion on his radio program and promised God could forgive anything. Before that, she had never connected inner turmoil with her 1982 abortion.

“I didn’t want to talk about it,” Sydna recalls. “I never knew the part of my own heart that was so painful was part of the abortion. I worked hard to never admit I had one and to forget it ever happened.”

Soon after, she felt inspired to help others and called a crisis pregnancy center. Before she could volunteer she had to answer a question: “Did you ever have an abortion?”

Answering affirmatively meant she would have to complete a Bible study for post-abortive women. Although resistant, two weeks later Sydna had a chance to assume oversight of Focus’ crisis pregnancy ministry.

Trying to convince her boss she was qualified, she blurted, “If it will make you feel any better, I’ll go through a Bible study at the pregnancy center.”

Sydna is convinced the Holy Spirit prompted that statement because the class started her toward healing. But when her husband, Tom, asked why she wanted to “dig all that up,” she replied, “I’m not digging it up. It’s stuck in my throat and if I don’t get rid of it I’m going to choke.”

“He got it then,” she says. “You don’t know how much your life is impacted by something until you find healing from it.”

Still, Sydna eventually saw how little help was available for post-abortive women. Although God directed her to start a ministry for that purpose, she feared leaving a salaried position.

Sydna finally surrendered, realizing God might give the task to someone else. She incorporated Ramah International in December 1997, securing a start-up grant to fund development of materials.

Her first step was writing her story. Her Choice to Heal (co-authored with Joan Phillips) released in late 1998 and remains in print. In February of 1999, Sydna led her first training event.

Today, she leads six to 10 seminars a year, training 600 to 1,200 people in crisis pregnancy work and post-abortion ministry. That includes helping staffers from pregnancy centers better understand PAS.

Sydna also fields numerous phone calls and e-mails and develops such resources as training booklets and DVDs. Her concern extends to post-abortive men, many who are just now breaking a long-held code of silence.

“We’ve got to stop abortion from devastating people,” Sydna says. “One of my frustrations comes back to abortion providers, and that they’re allowed to do abortions without explaining to women the psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical impact.”

FINDING A LIFESAVER

For those finding healing from PAS, Sydna is a lifesaver. They include a woman from England who was on the verge of suicide a year ago.

Though a mother of five, Catherine Wright (not her real name) started thinking about the two children she aborted in the 1990s as individuals, a realization that exploded like a time bomb. Winding up on Prozac, she regularly awoke in mental agony, wanting to slit her wrists so she could go to heaven and ask her children for forgiveness.

After finding Ramah's Web site, she e-mailed Sydna. To her amazement, Wright received a reply two hours later and continued to get answers to a series of inquiries.

The Englishwoman says Sydna helped her grasp the fact that God had forgiven her when she accepted Christ in 2005, and that her aborted children were in heaven. The key, though, came from her new friend's encouragement.

"I can truly say that Sydna's support kept me going through that horrific period," Wright says. "I prayed very, very hard that God would give me a friend who'd been through the abortion experience to help me. He answered that prayer rather spectacularly."

Kansas City resident Jean Lewis feels similar admiration. A mother of two who aborted as a teen and later out of fear of losing custody of her child to her ex-husband, she befriended Ramah's founder in 1999 after calling for advice.

Those contacts led to a post-abortion group at the crisis pregnancy center where Lewis volunteered. As the facilitator/teacher, Lewis helped women see they had to explore their past to find answers to perplexing problems.

"She encouraged me that I wasn't abnormal and would give me Scripture," says Lewis of dealing with her grief. "She opened up and was willing to take on my burden. She was someone to look up to. Now she's someone I work with and we have a mutual respect."

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Leslee Unruh, founder of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse, credits Sydna with empowering women to do amazing things. The founder of South Dakota's largest crisis pregnancy center, Unruh turned her attentions to abstinence after seeing that a lack of instruction in purity fueled high abortion rates.

Proud that her state is on the forefront of the battle to outlaw abortion, Unruh says Ramah International is a key component of rolling back unfettered access.

Among recent steps forward are closings of clinics in Omaha, Nebraska; Wichita, Kansas; and Birmingham, Alabama. In Mississippi, which has passed 15 pro-life laws since 1993, Americans United for Life say abortion rates have declined by 60 percent.

"[Sydna] does a great job with training us and encouraging us," Unruh says. "It's so important we work together with one voice, not just for our children we aborted, for the future children...and other women who have had abortions and are suffering in silence."

After her 15-year-old daughter got pregnant in 2001, and she was unable to find any help, Vikki Parker started a crisis pregnancy center. Last year A Woman's Place in Cabot, Arkansas, saw more than 1,000 women.

"When we opened the center I was as green as any tree," says Parker, who received help from an existing center in Little Rock. In the midst of organizing the center, God laid post-abortive women on her heart. After hearing Sydna speak, Parker started a PAS recovery group in the spring of 2002.

However, trouble cropped up early when one participant objected to Parker's presence because she wasn't post-abortive. When she called Sydna for advice, Ramah's founder replied, "You're the executive director; you can go in. As post-abortive women, we need you. You show us the validation

of God's love and His forgiveness."

"That changed everything," says Parker, who helps lead two groups a year and in 2005 completed her first session for post-abortive men.

"Sometimes post-abortive women get so wrapped up in their situation," Parker adds. "Just because you haven't had an abortion doesn't mean God can't use you. That would be like saying a male doctor could never deliver a baby."

A CALL TO EDUCATE

Nancy Meier Brown is the president of a chain of 23 mental health clinics that see thousands of patients suffering from PAS. She considers post-abortive problems close to a universal trauma for women who have had the surgery.

"It's amazing the sadness of it, the regret," says the president of the Chicago-based Meier Clinics, a speaker at Ramah's 2005 national conference. "I would have a hard time believing women don't suffer from it unless they have a callous heart and pretend it doesn't bother them."

Which is where Sydna comes in: "She believes in this ministry with all her heart. There's no question she has a call on her life."

It is a call that extends to educating her children about abortion's long-term consequences. She has seen the impact of her teaching through her college-age oldest son, whose pro-life license plate sparked many a conversation in high school.

"A lot of girls would come over and say, 'What right do you have to say what I can do with my own body?'" Sydna says.

"[Bruce] is extremely vocal and his answer was always what he learned from me: 'What right do you have to say that a woman should make a choice that will hurt her emotionally and psychologically for the rest of her life? That's not choice.

That's pain.'" And it's the kind of pain that Sydna hopes to help millions of women avoid.

Ken Walker is a writer and editor with more than 35 years of experience in newspapers, magazines, books and web sites.