

We sat down with **Dr. Carolyn Purcell**, an OB/GYN with years of experience witnessing the medical, spiritual and emotional complications surrounding unplanned pregnancies and the issue of abortion today. Dr. Purcell's novel, *Saving Jane Doe*, reveals the kinds of trauma and isolation women experience in the process of an unplanned pregnancy. Through the story of Jane Doe, whose name is later revealed to be Jessie, she presents many thought-provoking perspectives based on real life events she has witnessed during her career.

Forgiveness

A conversation with
Dr. Carolyn Purcell,
author of
Saving Jane Doe

War Cry: How did you come up with Jessie's character?

CP: I've always loved to read. I graduated medical school the year of *Roe v. Wade* and decided to become an OB/GYN exactly that same year. I've been in the middle of the abortion issue my entire career. I have been very conflicted about it. The woman doctor in me feels very strongly that in the first trimester, it should be legal. Having an abortion up to 14 weeks is physically less risky to a woman's health than carrying a pregnancy. That's a medical fact. It strikes me that when a child is totally dependent on the mother's body and the pregnancy puts her life at risk, somebody else really doesn't have a right to make her decisions about what she does.

At the same time, I feel absolutely certain that abortion is not the right choice. I never say never or always, but I believe that arguments about when life begins and all that are kind of ridiculous. The fact is that abortion is the killing of a human being. I believe that that's true at any point along the way. As far as the legal issue is concerned, the state has a right to intervene when a baby reaches viability. Not only a right but a responsibility to intervene and prevent it at that point. It's interesting, that's exactly what the *Roe v. Wade* decision said. They defined the mother's rights in the first trimester and made it very clear that the intent of the legislation was that abortion would be banned once a baby reached viability.

WC: What made you choose to write a novel about the issue?

CP: The thing that broke my heart was caring for women who made this choice and then suffered the rest of their lives as a result, feeling that it was an unforgivable sin. Even though it may be my opinion that it's sin, sin isn't unforgivable. But a lot of these women feel that it is, and a lot of people who are so vocal in the pro-life camp lead them to believe that it is.

I started writing a novel because I had read that conflict was the basis of any good novel and I've been conflicted about the issue for years. I thought that I would perhaps come to some resolution within myself, what I thought about it. Not a whole lot has changed. I still believe that abortion is the wrong choice, but I believe it's a woman's right to make that choice, at least early on.

That's what came out, but my second goal in writing the book was to show that there is forgiveness, that God does redeem all of our mistakes, no matter how awful. I thought if I could say it through an

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After obtaining an illegal abortion, a young mother of three loses her family and nearly loses her life. *Saving Jane Doe* is the story of her quest to restore her relationship with her children.

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interesting story, people who are closed minded on the issue in both ways would realize that it's complex and difficult and painful and nobody really has all the answers. God Himself recognized the importance of our having choice. He doesn't even demand that we come to Him, that we believe in Him.

WC: That's true.

CP: That's the right thing to do. You can't have love unless you have choice. You can't have good unless there is at least the possibility of evil. That's where it all came from.

The final message in the book is if you don't want to have a baby, use effective birth control. Be responsible about your sexuality. One of the other things that the book shows is that there are very real, life changing consequences to getting pregnant. Whether you have an abortion, whether you have a child or whether you have a child and give it up for adoption—they are all painful options in some ways.

That was part of the reason the pregnancy of Jessie's middle daughter was extremely complicated. She got pregnant as a teenager and decided to keep the child. Her son ended up being the joy of her life and her only child because she had some serious medical consequences from her pregnancy and the treatments that happened with that. Basically it's just to say that if you don't want to have a baby, use birth control or abstain, but that rule isn't always a very effective one for lots of young people. That's it in a nutshell.

WC: Will there be a sequel?

CP: I'd love to write another novel. A lot of people who have read this one in prerelease copies have said that they would like me to. I don't have a definite story. In some ways, I still have the same conflict about the issue. I can't honestly say that I've resolved it in my own mind, but I'm at peace with my position. I've decided that I would rather be compassionate than right. ■