

CONQUERED

by

GRACE

*How God Redeemed Me and
Turned My Abortion Business
into a Pregnancy Help Clinic*

Jeanne Pernia

PassionLife

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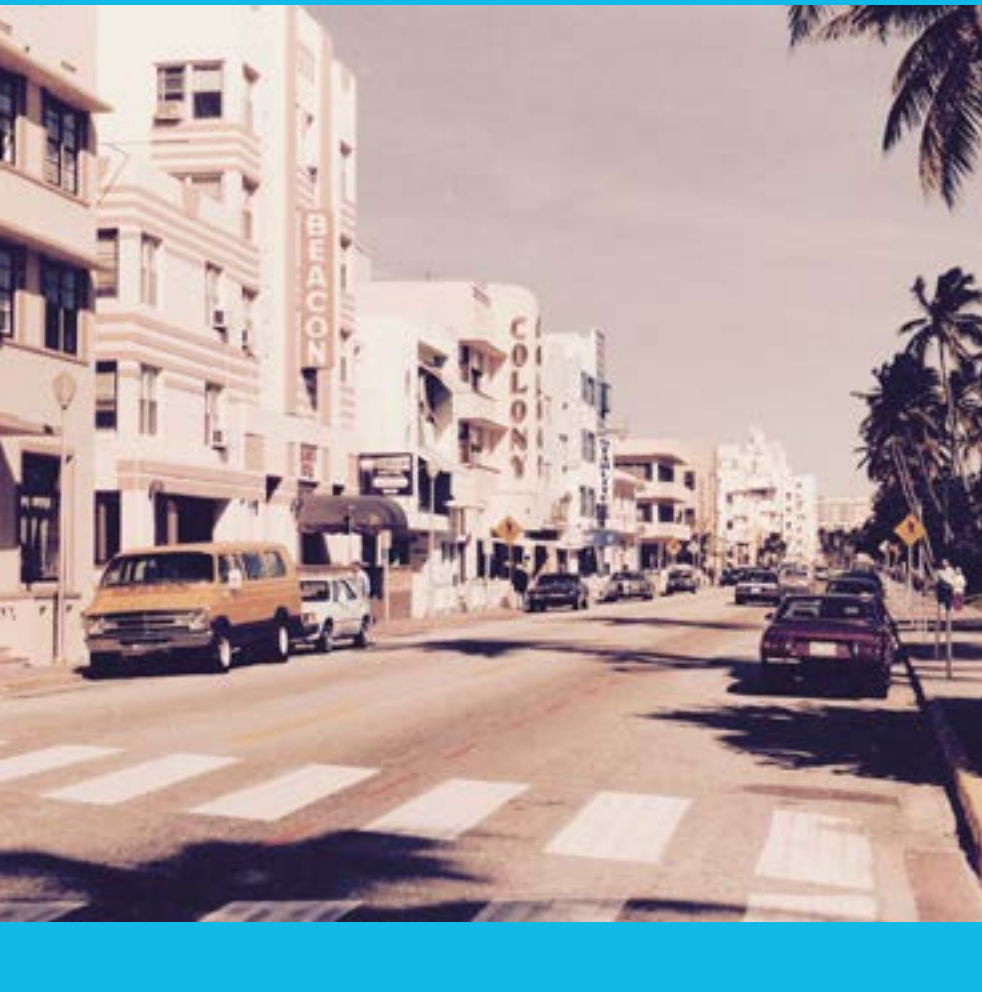
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1978, Miami



PART ONE

Pulled In

"At 19, and needing work, I eagerly responded to a newspaper ad seeking a receptionist at a Women's Clinic..."

THE WOMAN IN OUR ABORTION BUSINESS clung to life only because my mother decided to intervene. She injected an antibiotic into her veins and called for an ambulance. My mother's husband, a doctor working for us, and another doctor, stood there arguing. One screamed, "I'm not going to jail over this!" They openly discussed killing this woman to cover up what had happened.

My mother would not stand for murder—the intentional killing of an innocent human being—in her abortion clinic. If that seems like an oxymoron, given our business was intentionally killing innocent unborn human beings, then we were blind to it at the time.

Just a few years prior to this crisis, I introduced my mother to the booming business of abortion. I helped her open the first abortion businesses (as far as we know) on a busy corner in the

Hialeah neighborhood of Miami. The year was 1978 and on that corner, we did about 3,900 abortions. One of them was my own unborn child. I was only 20.

As a teenager, I worked for a beautiful Indian doctor who loved medicine and the well-being of her patients. She mentored me in the basics and advocated for my becoming a doctor. She told my mother, “Jeanne is born for this. She has a gift for delivering babies.” Perhaps that’s why at 19, and needing work, I eagerly responded to a newspaper ad seeking a receptionist at a Women’s Clinic. By the time I understood that it was an abortion business, I was trained to see it as a way to help women secure their future in the American dream (and make money too). Within months, I got my mother a job there. She quickly saw what a lucrative business it was and determined to open her own. She targeted the predominantly Latino community of Hialeah, and remodeled an office building on the corner facing Hialeah’s busiest commercial street.

Typically, women would enter our clinic just to get a pregnancy test. If the test was positive, the staff was trained to counsel her to “terminate the pregnancy”—a euphemism created to purge away the truth and moral gravity of abortion.

The key to profit was to perform as many “procedures” as possible. This required guiding the ambivalent towards abortion and creating a sense of urgency. The more time that passed after the initial exam, the higher the chance the clinic would lose the revenue gained from abortion.

“The year was 1978 and on that corner, we did about 3,900 abortions. One of them was my own unborn child.”

For similar reasons, the doctors trained us to counsel women to abort even when there was no evidence that she was pregnant. Being young and naïve, I was confused at first. But my doubts were quickly addressed. One doctor assured me, “The patient won’t know the difference. At a minimum, we are helping to regulate her menstrual cycle.” In such ways, we deceived ourselves about the conflict of interest that is at work in every abortion business. (This, by the way, is why it’s illegal for a business to provide eye exams and sell glasses!)

Day after day women in a pregnancy related crisis came to our corner of Hialeah, where I welcomed them and heard them share their reasons or their worries. I witnessed the pain in their sunken eyes. But it didn’t pay to listen or ask questions about their circumstances. We weren’t there to help them find a solution they could live with. So I hardened myself to their plight and cloaked myself in virtue: “we are providing these women with a vital service.” In truth, we were profiting by running a slaughter house, a place of execution for the unborn.

Among them was a woman who came in with her nine-year-old daughter, clinging to her mother with one hand and a teddy bear with the other. We explained that this was not an appropriate place for a little girl. Her presence would create discomfort to the other women in the waiting room. Additionally, due to the sedatives this woman would be under after her abortion, she would not be able to care for the child. The mother sadly whispered that her child was the patient.

“I hardened myself to their plight and cloaked myself in virtue: 'we are providing these women with a vital service.'”

She was four months pregnant—a victim of rape and incest. She trembled throughout the initial examination. Tears slipped down her cheeks as she looked at all of us, confused by what was happen-

“Nor did I realize that by quietly aborting her baby, we were destroying the evidence, protecting the incestuous rapist...”

ing to her. She was now about to endure a grueling two-part procedure known as dilation and evacuation (D&E), requiring an overnight stay and full anesthesia.

Did we call the police? No. Did we demand that this incestuous rapist be exposed and arrested? No. Did we seek out a trauma counselor? No. I remember sitting with her in the evening with a lump in my throat and doubts filling my mind.

The horror of being raped and the trauma of enduring a pregnancy was clear. But I could not help wondering if we were adding more trauma to her life. It did not occur to me to ask about how she might react to the abortion. Nor did I realize that by quietly aborting her baby, we were destroying the evidence, protecting the incestuous rapist, and returning her back to the situation where she could be repeatedly molested and suffer multiple abortions in coming years.

Another case stands out. A beautiful Cuban woman came in for an abortion. She wanted to talk. She told me the circumstances of her pregnancy. I listened, but did not (dared not!) engage her. We sold her an abortion and she left. Soon after, she returned for a second abortion, then a third, and then a fourth.

The woman who left after four abortions was not the same woman I met at first. She wasn't talkative anymore. She was sullen and angry. She couldn't look me in the eye. She was an empty shell. We had evacuated her womb again and again and her very

1978, Jeanne's mother, Irene (L.), and visiting family inside the abortion business in Hialeah



soul and spirit went with it. So much for promoting the health and well-being of women.

The typical woman who came in was frightened, under a great deal of pressure from others to abort, and of two minds—meaning she herself understood that this was not the best time to have a baby, but at the same time, unsure about abortion.

For example, I remember one woman arriving with her boyfriend. She repeatedly took deep breaths. She stared at the various corners in the room as if visibly willing herself to another place. She didn't say more than a word or two. The boyfriend was adamant, in control, coercive. He was there to see to it that she had an abortion.

The anesthesia had little effect on her as she fought the procedure. She writhed back and forth in resistance. We had to hold her

“We had evacuated her womb again and again and her very soul and spirit went with it. So much for promoting the health and well-being of women.

down to complete the abortion and then gave her an extra sedative to calm her down. As soon as she awoke from the procedure, she cried out for her lost child. She was angry and in anguish.

We led her out of the recovery room to the waiting vehicle where her “boyfriend” appeared relaxed and relieved. (Studies show that men favor legal abortion more than women. Of course, they do. It fuels the sexual exploitation of women.) As far as he was concerned, his problems were over.

For her, another kind of trauma was beginning—the deep grief and vexation of doing what you know is wrong and the shame of yielding weakly to others. So much for choice and empowerment of women.

I not only observed this after-abortion trauma, I came to experience it myself, and for the same reasons, yielding to the pressure of others.

I never expected to become a patient at my own abortion business there on the corner, but I did. I loved my unborn child from the moment I learned I was pregnant. The father was a wealthy, Cuban-born entrepreneur that had invested into my mother's clinic to make money. I was thrilled by his attentions and surely naïve. I expected this news to be a binding moment between us and a spur toward marriage and family. He had no such ideas. He insisted that I immediately abort.

I was devastated by his rejection. Now I was like most of the women who came daily to our corner business. I needed time to think and talk. But who in this business would listen? Abortion is always the quick solution to ending a pregnancy-related crisis. So, like most women in this situation (of which I was an expert) I began to rationalize rather than think. “If I don't do what he wants, I'll lose him. If he leaves me, I'd be alone to raise the child. I can't do it.” In my anguish, I was neither eating nor sleeping, and I rationalized that that would have damaged my unborn child.

Thus, I became another one of the countless number of broken hearts that entered our corner business. Afterwards, I cried endlessly and mourned the loss of my baby. I experienced something that I have now come to learn is common among women grieving their abortion—a driving need to replace the child I'd lost (killed). I got

“Now I was like most of the women who came daily to our corner business. I needed time to think and talk. But who in this business would listen?”

1985, Albert and Jeanne



pregnant again after just a few weeks. I kept it a secret. When the baby's father, my mother's business partner, learned of it, he left me.

Our abortion business came to an end shortly after my daughter was born. The sirens grew louder as the ambulance pulled up. The doctors had started an abortion procedure only to discover the woman had either lied or miscalculated her pregnancy. They were now faced with killing a very viable fetus at 28 weeks' gestation. The woman was in a life-threatening situation. They thought of killing her. Thankfully, my mother stepped in and the woman survived.

The investigation that followed resulted in the closure of our abortion business. My mother and her partner were sentenced to a year in prison.

My life was upended too. I was angry, grieving, and as a single mom, financially strapped. I battled deep depression and consulted Santeria spiritualists (a Cuban form of voodoo). In the midst of this anguish, I met and married my husband Albert. Albert was Cuban and soon after we married, Albert met a Cuban drug lord in Miami. Soon after that, he went to work for him. We were so very lost. But we were ready to be found.

“Albert was Cuban and soon after we married, Albert met a Cuban drug lord in Miami. We were so very lost. But we were ready to be found.”

1983. Evelyn and Jeanne



PART TWO

Pulled Out

"The seed of redemption was planted in me right there in our Hialeah abortion business office..."

FIRST HEARD OF GOD'S LIFE-CHANGING GRACE a few months before our abortion business closed. A Christian woman by the name of Evelyn came in, but not for the typical reason. She came with a friend who was pregnant. This friend was considering an abortion. Evelyn came along in hopes to encourage her friend, even at this last moment, not to abort her baby. During the visit, Evelyn herself took a pregnancy test and was overjoyed to learn that she was pregnant. I was struck by her joy. In turn, Evelyn saw my inner turmoil. Evelyn shared with me the hope of the gospel. I loved the story, but I was not ready to respond. Nonetheless, the seed of redemption was planted in me right there in our Hialeah abortion business office.

Within a few months of this encounter, my mother was sent to jail. My husband's new work in the drug trade took us to New York City. I was extremely depressed, even suicidal.

At this low moment I met a total stranger while standing in line at the bank. Her name was Carmen, and she noticed my anguish. She boldly offered, “I would be glad to come to your house and pray for you.” Indeed, she came, and came with ten others! The first sign

“That night, the same Spirit that conquered death and raised Christ to life began to show me his conquering grace.

that something mighty was at work was that Albert welcomed these total strangers into our home. Drug dealers don’t do that.

Soon we were meeting regularly, praying and reading the gospel. I was so hungry for God’s peace. I believed the good news wholeheartedly: that Christ on the cross suffered the full punishment for all my sins, from the least ones to the ones I was most ashamed of, and that I might be forgiven and set free. That night, the same Spirit that conquered death and raised Christ to life began to show me his conquering grace.

God also came after Albert, but in his own way and time. Albert went to prison in Texas for three and a half years for his involvement with the drug trade. I waited for him there. Upon his release, we focused on our family and doing honest work. Sixteen years later, we returned to Miami. We began to attend Palm Vista Community Church in Miami Lakes. But God’s conquering grace in me was not completed yet.

During these many years, the truth of abortion was never raised in any church that we attended in the various places we lived. And my past life remained totally hidden.

That all changed one Sunday morning in April 2005. John Ensor, a pastor, author and national speaker, came to preach in our church. But before he began, to my surprise, a friend of mine

walked to the pulpit. Cindy Irrizzary was my close friend. We were close, not only because of our common faith, but because of our similar cultural backgrounds, both being New York City natives of Puerto Rican descent.

Cindy took the microphone with a trembling hand. With a quivering voice, before us all, she shared her story about what led her to abort her unborn child and how she deeply regretted it. Her pain was highlighted by her subsequent inability to carry a baby to term. She miscarried every pregnancy since then and was childless. She wept with regret, even as she stood under the banner of God’s grace.

I thought, how could she possibly stand up there and share something so private and personal? This was a church, for goodness sake, a public forum, not exactly the place to make such a profound revelation. As I listened to Cindy, I realized that there was no better place for her to confess.

As Cindy talked of her abortion experience, so vulnerable and filled with regret, I debated whether or not to excuse myself. But that might expose my own culpability. So I sat very, very still.

Rev. John Ensor walked up and gave Cindy a comforting hug. He thanked her for her courage to speak. He spoke from the Bible about the equal value of all human beings, born and unborn. He used Cindy’s testimony to illustrate how abortion kills the innocent child and devastates women. He pointed out that within just a few miles radius of our church in Hialeah, there were seven abortion businesses. He made the case

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that not all, but most women going in would prefer to have their babies. How well I knew it. I saw it every day. I experienced it myself, right there on the corner in Hialeah.

Finally, he revealed the life-saving and life-changing impact we could have in starting a pregnancy help clinic. Such clinics provide crisis counseling, ultrasound verification of pregnancy, and ongoing support and practical help. Again, I knew all this was true.

As the service ended, I stood with tear-stained cheeks, knowing that this was my moment. This was God at work, still conquering me with his grace. This was his time for me to go public, like Cindy. I approached John Ensor. He says he was stunned by the words that I blurted out; words that I honestly don't remember saying, but that he has never forgotten: "I started it. Now let me help you end it."

Thus began a time of remembering things long suppressed and hidden. Strangely, I felt myself being set free, even as I confessed my past. John Ensor calls this "coming clean" or experiencing a cleansed conscience. I tend to describe it as a healing; a healing of soul and mind. It feels like a healing because the burning shame

and chronic grief finally gives way to peace with God and an open testimony of his grace. Cindy, John Ensor, and my pastor, Al Pino and his wife, all listened, prayed, and probed my story.

In the spring of 2006, as I continued through this healing process of confession and repentance, I felt prompted to return to

the very corner and the very building that was once our abortion business. As I drove there I was plagued with flashbacks of the things we did in that building; painful memories and buried tor-

“He was stunned by the words that I blurted out, 'I started it. Now let me help you end it.'”

ment that I'd spent nearly 27 years running from and had nearly successfully forgotten.

I could almost hear the cries of the babies. I was flooded with dark, even satanic, condemnation, telling me to steer clear of this corner. Gripping the steering wheel, I prayed, "Jesus, reveal your purpose and plan for bringing me back to this corner." I'd been praying for forgiveness repeatedly. Now that my sin was clearer to me, I was unwilling to fully accept that God could totally forgive "even that."

I wasn't sure why I was coming back to this place. But if it meant that I was to get on my knees and repent in the very place where the curse began, I was willing to do so. I was willing to do whatever it would take so that I might freely play a part in starting a pregnancy help clinic, where we could truly help women and save lives.

I was relieved to see that the building no longer served as an abortion business. I walked prayerfully around the building several times. Then the grace of God broke through to me again. In the window of the building next door to my old abortion business was a sign, "For Lease." John Ensor had asked me to search for a location and building for our pregnancy help clinic. Was it possible that God brought me to this corner, the very same corner where it all began, to turn this corner from death to life?

Within a few months, volunteers from area churches completed the renovations, equipped it with an ultrasound machine, secured a Medical Director, hired a sonographer, and trained volunteers in pregnancy crisis intervention. I left my job and became the Clinic

“Gripping the steering wheel, I prayed, 'Jesus, reveal your purpose and plan for bringing me back to this corner.'”

Director of the pregnancy help medical clinic. We called it Heartbeat of Miami.

Every week, and for over ten years now, I've welcomed the same women, struggling with the same difficult circumstances, that I had greeted so many years ago in the building a few feet away. Then, I steered them toward death. Now, I work to help each mother give life.

Each one receives free medical care relative to her pregnancy. Each one is given time to think. As millennialist writer, Wendy Shalit says, "It is always hard to separate what you really want from what you're supposed to want." This is especially true for women in pregnancy distress. Those who resolve to have their babies, despite their difficult circumstances, I help further. I equip them to make their case for life to those pressuring them, and turn those same people into a support system. As long as it takes, no matter the challenges,

I find a way for mothers to make a choice they, and their babies, can live with.

“As long as it takes, no matter the challenges, I find a way for mothers to make a choice they, and their babies, can live with.”

Beside me in the work are dozens of volunteers from Miami churches. They mentor and help mothers find the life-affirming solution that is best for them. Today, Heartbeat of Miami has five locations, supported largely by donations. From 2007 to 2017, our team of medical professionals, staff, and volunteers have helped over 45,000

women in pregnancy crisis find out if they have a viable pregnancy. Of those that did, over 25,000 babies have been born to women who arrived at our clinic—women who were fearful, uncertain, and under pressure to abort. Not one has ever returned expressing their regret for giving life. I and my co-workers are a fountain of stories

2013, at the same corner building where her abortion business operated, today, Jeanne welcomes women to Heartbeat of Miami, the pregnancy help clinic



2016, Jeanne providing pregnancy crisis counseling and intervention services at Heartbeat of Miami



about women overcoming extraordinary difficulties, with courage and faith. I overflow with a sense of God's redemption! It seems to have no end or limits as it moves from forgiveness to healing to restoration and beyond.

As I worked contentedly, day by day, in pregnancy crisis intervention, I also worked discontentedly. Our medical clinic needed twice the space. Occasionally, I would think of the building next door, which had twice the space. The significance of moving into our old abortion building to save mothers and babies was not lost to me. I thought often of the words of Jeremiah, which paraphrased says, "In the days to come," says the Lord, "I will sound the battle cry... and I will take back the land" (49:2). I often prayed, Lord, take back that building!

In the fall of 2012, our landlord, who owns both our building and the one next door, called me. "Would you be interested in moving in next door? It's being vacated and it has twice the space." My hands shook as I set the phone down. Soon after, Martha Avila, who co-founded Heartbeat of Miami with me, and serves as President, held my hand, as we entered the corner building.

Standing in the center of the lobby, I closed my eyes. Tears coursed down my cheeks. I stood on the very same black and white tile that I had stood on 35 years earlier. I recognized the chairs. I could see the sad and sullen faces that had sat there waiting their turn for the slaughter. I walked past the rooms where so much

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blood had been shed. It was very hard to stand in the very room where my very own unborn child died.

Agreements were made and renovations began soon after. How could I not be overwhelmed by the fullness of God's redemption now? He rescued me from the dark forces of death. Now he was

“Now he was redeeming even the brick and mortar of my life, and turning it into a testimony of his power to take back the land.

redeeming even the brick and mortar of my life, and turning it into a testimony of his power to take back the land. The children aborted here are gone. But Martha Avila, who tracks the numbers, reminds me how much God is taking back this place through his conquering grace. Many, many more now have been rescued; and the work continues today.

To my surprise, God's conquering grace continues to expand in visible ways. A few weeks after moving our pregnancy help clinic into the old abortion business space, we started a class designed for women grieving their past abortions. Written by Linda Cochrane, and titled, *Forgiven and Set Free*, I lead this study to bring healing to others suffering vexation and regret.

On our first night, one participant stood at the door trembling. Her hand covered her mouth in shock and she began to cry aloud. I ran to the door. I saw her face and understood what was happening. I wrapped my arms around her and held her shaking body as she affirmed that this was the very building where she aborted her baby so long ago.

She was not the only woman to come seeking relief from abortion guilt and grief, only to discover she had returned to the very place where her baby died. God had now positioned me to serve these

2013, Jeanne, pausing to give thanks for God's conquering grace in the same spot her mother, Irene stood years before



2017, Jeanne at her office in Hialeah



women a second time, in the same place, but in a wholly different way. I greeted them warmly. I was most likely the one who greeted them coldly so many years ago. The God who was redeeming each one of us from our guilt and grief was also reconciling us one to another for the saving of many lives.

As of 2017, I have joined John Ensor and his PassionLife Ministries team. We bring the work of pregnancy help ministry to the neediest places in the world. We target countries where abortion is most concentrated. We teach biblical bioethics to pastors and other leaders and mobilize the local church to provide “life-saving help in a life-changing way.” We work in China, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Columbia, Romania and other places. When I’m not on the road, I’m in my office at Heartbeat of Miami, right here on my corner in Hialeah.

2017, working with PassionLife in Cuba, Jeanne trains Christians in pregnancy crisis intervention



(Top L) Evelyn, who first shared the gospel with Jeanne
(Bottom R) John Ensor, the pastor who helped Jeanne confess her past and start Heartbeat of Miami



2017, Jeanne and her family
(L to R) Albert Jr., Cherisa, Jeanne, Briana, Albert



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*Expanding pro-life ministry into a
global missions movement*



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