

A new approach to life issues and the media

Andrea Mrozek

Editor's note: This is an edited version of the speech Andrea Mrozek gave to The Interim's 25th anniversary celebration dinner on April 10 in Toronto. Andrea Mrozek is manager of research and communications at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada and founder and editor of ProWomanProLife.org. She is a former associate editor at The Western Standard and her articles have appeared in the *National Post*, *Calgary Herald*, *Montreal Gazette* and the *Ottawa Citizen* and she has appeared on numerous television and radio programs including Canada AM and The Agenda.

It's daunting to address all of you. I am well prepared to debate abortion with a hostile crowd. But I am not sure what I can offer a crowd of stalwart pro-lifers, those of you immersed in the struggle of combating abortion for years.

For this reason, I decided to offer more of a personal introspection into being pro-life in a pro-abortion culture, rather than the sort of academic assessments I might do with my workplace at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. I hope my journey can shed some light on how I see the topic of abortion in the media. I've written articles, many of them touching on abortion for a number of mainstream papers. I hope to continue writing in the mainstream media for some time to come.

A pro-life dream

I do believe we are at the cusp now of a very different era for pro-lifers in the media. I believe that in general, it is a very bad moment to be staunchly pro-abortion. But before I get into the reasons why – let's close our eyes and engage in what my friend Will Johnston of Physicians for Life might call "utopian talk." So here it goes with a minute of Utopian Life and the Media Talk.

Picture it: it is a balmy day, 26 degrees and sunny in Toronto on April 10, 2038. It feels more like San Diego because all the environmentalists were right – global warming finally kicked in and Canadians now complain of a chill when the temperature falls to the low teens. So long as we're being utopian, I should add that David Suzuki has gone into a self-imposed exile with Ted Turner; public funding of the CBC was removed and it subsequently collapsed under the weight of a mega lawsuit. The details are difficult to recall, but it had something to do with too many strenuous calls for depopulation and Suzuki's carbon footprint – it was far greater than Al Gore's many Tennessee mansions combined.

You finish work – no wait, this is our Utopian Minute – you are securely and happily retired and upon returning from a dip in your personal swimming pool – you come inside and turn on the LBC, the Life Broadcasting Corporation. It boasts competitively high ratings and reports on all the normal news. And so you learn about a new fund to support pregnant women; next segment, private researchers are undertaking a new study to understand how adoption affects women and families.

Abortion is not featured in the news, because back in the 2020s, a critical mass of researchers (after years of longitudinal research) confirmed long-held suspicions and began exposing the health risks of abortion and suing doctors who did not warn their patients. Just before that, a massive ultrasound campaign took off and women, who finally – finally – began to receive information on what abortion meant and what it did were, not surprisingly, less keen to pursue it as a vaunted option. In time, no doctors would perform abortions and that was just fine because no women wanted them anyway. It was 2031 when a law was finally put in place – the seal of approval on a culture that thought abortion was terrible, terribly gauche and did not want to talk about it.

Back to reality

Now in that Utopian Minute, I deliberately mixed up the inane with the possible and a couple of things that are already happening for good measure. We'll return

to which is which – inane versus possible – at the end.

Though we are many, many miles away from this Utopian Toronto of 26 degrees and sunny, I still maintain that it is a bad time to be pro-abortion in this country. It is certainly beginning to surface that a woman's health does not fare better with access to abortion – and the healthcare system, in any case, is failing to provide basics, like



Andrea Mrozek addressed 300 people at The Interim's 25th anniversary celebration in Toronto on April 10.

Photo: Tony Gosgnach

doctors, so access to abortion for any reasonable person will not take precedence over access to basic medical care. Female feticide just keeps popping up – I was called to comment on this again just days ago because of my story from 2006 called *Canada's Lost Daughters*, which quantified the extent to which sex selection abortion is happening in Canada.

Abortion has always been talked about in the parlance of choices and freedom – when the outcomes are just so darn depressing, I have to ask myself: how many more studies showing negative outcomes for women? How many more botched abortions (babies born alive and placed in sterile, metal dishes to die)? How many more discussions of missing girls and, most important, how many more broken, sad and lonely women can the so-called abortion rights movement withstand?

It is increasingly difficult for a pro-abortion advocate to stand up and talk about these matters with a smile, all liberty and choice and love.

So in the course of this next half-hour, I will discuss why I view the situation at least hopefully, if not outright optimistically. I will also discuss why the elite, which includes the media, currently cling to a pro-abortion status quo. And then I'll touch very briefly on how I have chosen to interact with the media.

Becoming publicly pro-life

My own journey into the world of writing and ideas took many years. It also took me many years to be publicly pro-life. ProWomanProLife.org was a major step, but ultimately, I knew something was coming for the past couple of years. ProWomanProLife.org is my website – currently a blog that someday I hope will morph into a charity to give money and support to women facing crisis pregnancies. I have already had the opportunity to offer one woman full financial support instead of getting her second abortion. This was a friend of a friend. Though the woman miscarried in the end, I am told the offer itself was of great comfort. These pro-life ideas come to me, rather strangely, as I jog. I am running and thinking in blog-like snippets. I am designing pro-life T-shirts and websites in my mind as I run – often-times I envision there are "race supporters" on the sidelines cheering me on. But enough – our Utopian Minute is over and I will never win the Boston Marathon even wearing my superbly designed, fashionable, selling like hotcakes, pro-life T-shirt, at an eight-minute mile.

I ultimately decided that if there was one area where I could make an impact, it would be to talk about why abortion is not a woman's right and am now happy to state this unequivocally. But I was not always prepared to be publicly pro-life.

I went through an immature phase in high school of saying that I was personally opposed to abortion, but that if a friend felt they had to have one, I would support "her in that choice." That cliché earned me the nodding affirmation of my teacher. In university, I didn't think very often about abortion or activism or politics at all, sticking to just getting by with my studies. I can honestly say that for Europeanists at the faculty of history, it didn't come up.

By the time I joined the working world, it became clear that the public expression of ideas through writing (read: venting) would have to be a goal. I was becoming progressively more insufferable at cocktail parties, expressing my views vocally to a stunned and awkward silence, or worse, saying nothing at all and feeling my blood pressure rise.

And so the journey continued into journalism itself – where I didn't wait long to pitch my first "life" topic on the then-new Groningen Protocol from the Netherlands, which comments on how to regulate euthanasia for babies. That was one story in, without too much struggle for the simple reason that it was news – if not to all of you, then to my editor. There is, after all, that element of the media that is just looking for news.

Of course, CTV's Bob Fife, with his open disdain for social conservatives and their "knuckle-dragging" ways, is likely not seeking to investigate the stories I'd like him to. But he's not young. And my point is, I believe there is a new generation of non-ideological reporters who are more or less looking to report – and that's it. Everyone has a bias, but when it comes to abortion, I'm not sure that the staunch ideology of 25 years ago is present in newcomers to the media scene. My generation has been taught to be pro-choice, but not to hold pro-lifers in disdain (with the exception of those who run university student unions, who do not, in fact, represent the bulk of students at all). Being pro-choice today is not an all-consuming identity as it may have been when the Morgentaler decision came down, but a side viewpoint that has not been studied or pursued particularly vigorously.

In my previous job as a reporter, I grew more bold, pitching and investigating more life articles – to the point where my editor told me this in a meeting one day: "Listen, Andrea – I know for some reason you have something against killing babies. But this is not a news story." I appreciated that moment of candour and I appreciated this editor – he literally taught me how to write even after years of supposed writing and schooling and university papers. Anyway, he was neither pro-life nor pro-choice and, to this day, I don't know where he stands. But news was news and he conveyed in that sarcastic comment that he understood why this was important to me and always, always gave me the same treatment as every other writer in the office.

Now, I should add at this point that as it turns out, every other writer in that office was also staunchly pro-life, but covert. No one told the other, and but slowly, slowly, it came out. I should have guessed it. The following comparison is very likely exaggerating – I'm given to that at times – but being pro-life in the newsroom felt a bit like being against the communists behind the Iron Curtain. Or perhaps like being a Christian missionary in Taliban territory: you just never know when you might be subject to a figurative stoning, so it's best to leave people guessing what you believe. Needless to say, we just don't know who stands where in the media and reporters, as opposed to editorial writers, are not going to be forthcoming with their views. That's just fine; it's not their job.

Pro-life in the media: changing the climate

There is definitely a renewed interest in life and abortion in the media. It seems that every time I open the paper these days, especially the *National Post*, there is some sort of interesting, if not outright favourable, column printed there.

Of course there are other newspapers that have columnists and editors who are pro-life: Nigel Hannaford and Licia Corbella at the *Calgary Herald* and David Warren and John Robson at the *Ottawa Citizen*. Leonard Stern of the *Ottawa Citizen* appears to be open to pro-life arguments. Lorna Dueck at the *Globe and Mail*, Susan Martinuk out in B.C., Michael Coren at Sun Media are all very openly pro-life. But I'd argue a pro-life journalist, whether he writes about abortion or not, whether he is open about it or not, simply by doing a good job of reporting in any area, is doing us all a favour. Some day, that individual might feel comfortable to be open about life issues and, at that point, they've amassed a list of credentials – and will be taken seriously.

I look to the great Mark Steyn as the ultimate pro-life writer; indeed, he is one of the finest writers on any subject. I look back to reading those columns as I made my way to my then-dreary office job. Those pages and pages of fine sarcastic wit flowing and I've never read those dreadful cliché words: "I am pro-life" from him. And who

would dare tar him with that terrible so-con brush? He's the best we have. He's pro-life, but rarely writes explicitly about abortion.

There are, of course, other reasons to be upbeat. Other movements, unrelated to abortion but friendly, are rising up. Wendy Shalit is author of a book called *Girls Gone Mild*. Writing that, "It's not bad to be good," in her book, she cites numerous examples of girls

who reject the hyper-sexualized culture around them, girls who are empowered to do radical things like pursue their education and meaningful work and who are willing to do their own thing.

In Ottawa, there are a number of groups – mine, the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, which is the research arm of Focus on the Family Canada, the Centre for Cultural Renewal, Joseph Ben-Ami's Canadian Centre for Policy Studies, the Canadian Coalition for Democracy – and this creates the climate and the climate will form the news. And it won't matter whether the media agree or not; always remember, they are looking for news to fill their paper, to fill the nightly broadcast. And those news stories need different voices.

Blasé journalists

Perhaps I have also adopted the blasé attitude of many reporters. Too many hours in any media environment and I began to notice that very little gets some members of the media animated. It appeared, at times, to be a crowd that universally knew everything already – no need to even research a story. In some offices, there is no need to say "good morning" like my mama taught me. That's the spirit they conveyed to me. Stay cool. Over some time, I learned not to be outraged by, well, just about anything. And in a sense this is partly why I left the media, but in another sense, this is just a good skill to acquire.

Because outrageous things, if they are truly outrageous, make good stories without too much description or effort.

Learning what constitutes a story is something of an art – I'm not going to say I have a sweet clue. But certainly, what makes a story to me as a pro-life person, does not always make a story to a pro-

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'There are trickles' of light already in the pro-life struggle

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choice world. Sometimes, stories do the rounds in the pro-life blogosphere and I know I'm supposed to be shocked, but I'm not. I cite the recent example of the abortionist in Kansas, George Tiller, who said on tape that a baby born alive after an abortion is a mistake and shouldn't happen. Sure, that highlights the presence of evil in this world. But is the presence of evil really a hot ticket news item? Or something present since the dawn of time? I'd have to say that for an abortionist, a doctor who deals expressly in death, a baby born alive is indeed a mistake.

Now, I hasten to add, lest you become concerned that I am a robot: that all abortions, late-term, early-term, chemical, morning-after pill, disturb me deeply. And as such, Tiller's remarks don't concern me any more than your average "successful abortion." The question is: how can I personally convince this culture to change their views? To stop viewing offering this macabre business in all its various forms as compassionate? To know within an inch of their lives that abortion detracts from serving goals of justice and compassion and love?

The good news is it probably doesn't take that much — no crying bloody murder is necessary, if you'll pardon the pun. I believe if I keep kicking at the darkness, it will bleed daylight: that's a line from a Bruce Cockburn and later a Barenaked Ladies song. "Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight — got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight."

There's another trend in media which could serve pro-lifers well — it's a certain style of reporting that fits into the lifestyle section of any paper, which is slightly more emotional, more of an entertaining read. What experience will inform those pages as it comes to life issues in the future? Not likely the "lack of access" angle that the pro-abortion side is pushing today. If I heard the word access once, I heard it 1,000 times at that Morgentaler conference back in January.

But, answer me this: if you cared not a bit about abortion, would you be more concerned about a lack of access to abortion or the fact that many Canadians have no access to a family doctor? Can't get a knee replacement? Are waiting to have a check up? In complaining about access to abortion, the pro-abortion forces look more than a little out of touch and more than a little callous. And hypocritical, I might add. Where pro-choicers appear to be largely in favour of socialized medicine (this is not very hard to glean from books like *Just Medicare*, edited by pro-abortion law professor Colleen Flood), private abductaries appear to be just fine with them.

How journalists view abortion coverage

In preparation for this talk, I contacted Andre Picard of the *Globe and Mail* for the pro-abortion view. Though he calls himself pragmatic, I believe it is fairly safe to say he is not pro-life. Alongside him was Barbara Kay, a woman with more pro-life proclivities. Not surprisingly, they held different views on the topic.

Picard thought abortion coverage was fair, while admitting the vast majority of the media are likely pro-choice. He thinks it's hard to write about abortion, however, because so few people will be happy with the outcome. "I think it's virtually impossible to write an article about abortion — or even one that touches on abortion in passing — that is not going to displease a lot of people," he wrote me in an e-mail. And there, he is right. He also thought people are bored with the issue: "I just think the public is bored with the repetitiveness of the 'debate' — from both sides." And again, if that weren't true, if the Canadian public were not apathetic on the issue, we would see more abortion reporting, I think, because Canadians would make it an issue. There's not enough people who care.

By way of contrast, Barbara Kay said this: "I don't think the topic is fairly covered and the proof is that what I just wrote today (about abortion as a risk for

subsequent early-term delivery) is coming as fresh news to many people. How come these facts are not known? How is it that nobody has ever taken a clinic to task for not letting their clients know all the risks? Personally, I think any topics that are sacred



to feminists are topics most journalists prefer not to go near. They just don't want the blowback." She agreed with Picard that most in the media are pro-choice: "Also most media people are left-tilting and have absorbed the received wisdom of feminism that it is a 'woman's right to choose' and don't bother going below the surface of that statement."

I foresee a time when cunning reporters who want to get ahead will "unearth" these stories that you and I have known about for years. It most certainly was *not* news when I, along with Sean Ollech in British Columbia, "broke" the story that sex selection abortion was happening in Canada. Every Indo-Canadian knew it. But no one had done the number crunching or the tough homework to get at the story. We can look forward to a time when non-ideological reporters unearth these "new" stories.

Finally, there's the changing media world. Mainstream newspapers are on the decline. The opening up of the blogosphere certainly offers opportunity. Setting up a website is something anyone can do — the only task is then to draw traffic toward that site.

And so onwards to the short section of the talk where I discuss my strategy for doing that.

Reaching out

For one, I am making every attempt to include any and every pro-lifer. I don't care if you are gay or straight, whether you are right- or left-wing (although I'm going to hazard a guess that my readers know where I stand). I am working to welcome even those who are even only nominally pro-life. This will mean, for example, incorporating those who are uncomfortable with abortion on demand in our culture, but not against abortion in cases of rape and incest. Those extreme cases are moot points, anyway — because they don't generally happen. My line on those cases is to say that I'd be happy to discuss abortion in cases of rape and incest when Canada's current abortion rate of about 110,000 annually drops to about 1,000 annually. Of course, by that point, the culture will have changed entirely — and we will no longer look upon abortion as a compassionate option, therefore will not be willing to offer the agony of abortion as a purported salve for the pain of rape.

I am purposefully trying to open the doors to those with a wider package of beliefs that don't match my own. There's a blogger, Rachel Lucas, a social liberal and she makes it abundantly clear she's not Christian. She's "never been pregnant and

never intends to be." She says: "Anyway, when I started thinking lately about why I've avoided pregnancy so vigorously, it didn't take long for me to understand that it's because I'm more opposed to having an abortion than having a baby." And then this: "The second reason I see abortion as anathema to how I want to live my life shouldn't surprise anyone who's read this site for long: *personal responsibility*. To me, the vast majority of abortions (in the U.S., that's all I'm talking about here) are a direct result of an utter failure to behave in a rational, responsible, thoughtful fashion."

This is, of course, true. And though I don't love her tone, which sort of implies that if a woman gets pregnant, it is her fault, she is an ally.

I think of it this way: say you go to church and a person shows up on a Sunday morning saying that they had heard of Jesus and thought He sounded like a good thing, but this person was ultimately not 100 per cent convinced that he was the Son of God. Would we say: please come back when you are really sure? Or would we open those church doors wide? The latter, I hope.

Needless to say, sometimes I click on to my own website and there's a viewpoint there I disagree with. And then I remember that's how I planned it: that there would be maximum freedom of expression for my team to blog what they want.

Debating in post-Christian Canada

Then there's the point that Canada is a post-Christian country. So abortion really is not (just) a religious issue, or ought never to be a religious issue. I think that is a tactic of the pro-choice media from time to time — to say one can only be pro-life if one is a church-going Christian or in a faith movement of some sort. Not only is that not true, but it better not be true. Faithful Christians constitute a minority in this country and I am a single white female desperately seeking a pro-life majority to make this country the kind of place I want to live in.

Now, you may debate with me that Canada is post-Christian. But it is a fact that the media are. In 2003, a book called *Hidden Agendas: How the Media Influence the News*, the authors, who quantified the

political and religious leanings of the media, wrote, "Journalists are less likely to belong to a religious denomination than the general public."

In this sense, the pro-life struggle in the media is a communications struggle. If facts, numbers and winning debates could make pro-life activists, we'd have a pro-life culture by now.

I have personally found I have more success in the struggle when I also adopt a somewhat "cooler" attitude. The nightmares of babies being dismembered, the lives lost, the host of unique creations abandoned by their own mothers, fathers and this culture, very

often for no good reason, or no reason at all — these may not be good starting points for a piece in a paper or a discussion on the street. I have and will always struggle

with this.

I believe I should fight with the courage and the internal fortitude of William Wilberforce, but using the non-chalant chic of the main character in the 2005 movie, *Thank You for Smoking*. He's a lobbyist for

Big Tobacco and is responsible for selling tobacco to the public and for damage control after kids get cancer. In one scene, he has to go buy off the Marlborough Man with a suitcase of cash, who is now at home dying of cancer. He tells his son things like this: "If you argue correctly, you never lose" and describes how his job requires a certain "moral flexibility."

To be clear, I'm not learning from this moral

flexibility; I adhere staunchly to my beliefs no matter whether talking to *100 Huntley Street* or Canada AM or CFRB's John Moore. But if I argue correctly, I am never wrong — and this much I have learned. And if I'm the wittiest person in the room, or the nicest, or the most compassionate, that never hurts either.

It's not my job to be as bitter as some pro-choicers are, and neither is it my job to be as hysterical as some pro-lifers can get. It is also not my job to convince the media, to make them believe what I believe; rather, it is my job to present them with an interesting story. In that sense, we need not share the same beliefs to share a page in their paper or magazine or a stage for debate.

Most of all, I believe in using my freedom to fight these issues, the freedom to raise up points, the freedom of speech for every woman. That freedom — in particular for women who are now castigated as being against themselves if they are pro-life — has been curtailed. Information is concealed, and even the very best of reporters ignores abortion-related information, the result of his or her own bias. It is my desire to make being pro-life desirable, even fashionable. To help rejuvenate pro-life. To introduce new faces. To show the faces of women I know, and I know plenty, who are young and working hard and pro-life.

Baby steps as signs of hope

Back in the Utopian Media Minute, I mentioned some aspects that were inane, some that were possible and some already happening. Under "already happening" is the attention being paid to abortion as a negative factor for women's health: largely in the United Kingdom, and in the United States where the American Psychological Association is reconsidering its old statement that abortion has no negative mental health affects for women. Under "completely possible" is the influx of ultrasounds to provide women with information about what abortion is.

I understand the battle can be frustrating and *The Interim* was created of a desire to get some news into the mainstream media that they would not themselves report. I am a woman of baby steps (some say low standards), but that just means I always achieve them.

If we can empower more people to step up to the pro-life plate, in more and different ways, if we can encourage each other mutually to be more active and more clever in pro-life activism, we will create a culture the media has to report on.

I'm not here to say the media currently espouses principles of light and life. But I'm saying there's hope that I can kick at it (figuratively, of course) until such time as it bleeds some light and there are trickles already.

Thank you for your time and I thank you for listening.

If there was one area where I could make an impact, it would be to talk about why abortion is not a woman's right and (I) am now happy to state this unequivocally. But I was not always prepared to be publicly pro-life

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