

## All death equals termination

The recent shootings at women's health clinics remind me of the plot of the "Terminator" movies. The plots revolve around a hit man from the future traveling back into time to prevent a child from being born. The plan fails and the child is born. It was just a movie, but it made me think about the different opinions on abortion, capital punishment and killing in general.

People don't always agree on death, except that it means a life ends. Unfortunately it isn't that simple. Reality dictates that diverging views, including those which are held by one person or group, help make up the world.

It may seem strange that someone could be against the death penalty and for abortion, for example. But then, being for any kind of death may seem strange to someone else. Pro-life activism has me thinking about the deaths of unborn children and what people do to try to save them. It may be hard to understand people with divergent views who seem to contradict themselves, but everyone contradicts himself at one time or another.

The reality of seemingly divergent views has recently affected me. Last week I read about a local group that hung a noose outside of a new Planned Parenthood location. I've learned that this group protests against abortion while protesting the death penalty at the same time.

Some people think that some killing is OK and some other killing is not OK. To some people, this may be a contradiction. On the other side of things, it may be a contradiction to some people that abortion is legal in a state that has capital punishment.

Someone hanging a noose, which is an unmistakable symbol of death, outside a Planned Parenthood location made me think even



**E. Hughes Shanks**

more about the deaths of unborn children and what people would do to prevent them. The measures people take to save unborn fetuses from being aborted are becoming more and more drastic.

In "Terminator 2," the killer tried to murder the mother before she became pregnant. I wondered what would happen if the abortion clinic killers could somehow avoid killing women who were planning to have children and only kill those who weren't.

Strictly for the sake of argument, let's just say for the moment that abortion is murder. In the same context, killing an abortion clinic employee or volunteer is then, a "good" thing. Since abortion (for the sake of argument) is murder, then killing an abortion clinic worker is saving lives. It is then (for the sake of argument) a justifiable killing.

So (for the sake of argument) killing someone who aids abortions prevents other lives from being ended by abortion. For the sake of argument, this would be the best alternative. But someone still has to die (for the sake of argument). That's one dead.

What if a pregnant clinic employee is killed? Would the killer (for the sake of argument) then be doing a good thing or a bad thing, or both? The question is, would the killer, on one hand, be doing a good thing by killing an

abortion clinic worker and, on the other hand, be committing murder by killing the unborn fetus? That's two dead.

Let's just say (for the sake of argument) that the killer is then given the death penalty and is executed. That's three dead. Does the killing stop there? Not yet, because there are others who would continue to kill abortion clinic workers, and there will always be the risk of some pregnant clinic workers being killed.

What if the clinic worker was pregnant with twins and one of the fetuses survived? What if (for the sake of argument) the surviving fetus grows up wanting to avenge the deaths of the mother and other twin fetus? And what if (for the sake of argument) the surviving fetus thinks that killing only one person isn't good enough? The surviving twin fetus wants instead to kill two members of the killers' family. That's five dead.

What if the clinic worker is pregnant with triplets and two of the fetuses survive. While one of the fetuses is avenging the deaths of its sibling and mother, a second surviving fetus grows up to avenge the deaths in a different way. What if this fetus grows up to become a great prosecuting attorney? What if this fetus becomes good enough to guarantee a death sentence for anyone who kills an abortion clinic worker? That's more dead.

What if the killer gets a life sentence instead of the death penalty, and the triplet fetuses are all saved but grow up disagreeing about whether or not they should avenge their mother's death?

What if one is for the death penalty, one is not and the other is undecided?

That's still one dead.  
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## Auntie's memories fade; humor stays

Our conversation begins as it always does. I come for a visit and find her sitting in her chair, looking out the window. I pick up the small microphone that dangles from the newest of her hearing aids and begin the ritual. "How are you, Auntie?" I ask, as always.

"Oh, I'm a hundred percent," she answers, as always. There is a pause while we share the echo of the ironic humor she has carried with her through life.

She says, as always, "Don't be in a rush to be 97." I say, as always, "Well, all right, Auntie. I was going to rush, but I won't."

I sit down on the edge of the bed and take photographs out of my pocketbook. I show them to her one by one; a rogues' gallery of the nieces and nephews that she calls, happily, her "uglies." She smiles at each picture as if this were the first time she'd seen it; though in fact I have brought this stack to her many times before.

Then she says in her precise diction, "Tell me what is going on in your world?" I lean into the microphone as if it were a radio interview and tell my audience-of-one some stories. Where we've been. Where we're going. What we're doing. Stories that I have told her before.

Sometimes she will tell me, if I ask, tales I have heard before. Tales about a childhood in England, school in America, the longing for college, about her parents, her husband, a whole world that is now in the past.

On a good day she says, again, "I am just waiting to leave this planet. I say that philosophically, not sadly." On a bad day she asks again, "You cannot help me exit, can you?"

We became family, Auntie and I, when she was much younger, which is to say in her 80s. I married the nephew who is more than a nephew to her — her prize, her lifeline — and began learning.

One day coming back from a family gathering, displaying my careful new in-law manners, I said how pleasant lunch had been. She looked up and said — not unkindly, not sharply, but directly — "I thought it was boring." Laughing, I said to myself, "No shucking, Auntie. We will be friends."

Now we're losing her. Or rather, she is disappearing.

What she calls in her own erudite language "the diminution of my faculties" has continued in countless increments. Ears, eyes, legs. Hearing, sight, mobility. The fierce



**Ellen Goodman**

independence that characterized her life, the long walks, the daily bus trip to Burger King until she was 94. Gone, one by one, like chits she must turn in before being allowed through the door.

Her daily newspaper has given way to a large-type weekly. The names of relatives have dropped off her screen, like atrophied limbs. And then there is the rest of her memory. She lives in a narrowing time frame, a day that is repeated over again without a sense of yesterday or maybe this morning.

My husband, who shares her honesty and her humor, calls her life "Groundhog Day," after the movie about a man destined to endlessly repeat one day. Yet we are still her students. In her presence, we learn about time, about age, about letting things be what they are.

I bring the photographs this Sunday, though she won't remember them the next. I am no longer afraid that this ritual mocks her memory loss. I judge my act by her smile.

I know now that the only way to be with Auntie is on her terms, in her time zone, in what the Zen philosophers call the now. So, for a while, at her side, I am keenly aware that life is always lived in the moments. Moment by moment.

In The New Yorker magazine, biographer Edmund Morris wrote recently about visiting Ronald Reagan, about trying to make small talk with a man hollowed out by the crude, cruel tool of Alzheimer's. "About six months ago, he stopped recognizing me," notes Morris. "Now I no longer recognize him."

I hope this won't happen with or to Auntie, but it may. The long ending, with its certain destination and its uncertain timetable, is a melancholy affair. We begin to miss the people they once were while they still are, not wholly, here.

But sitting beside Auntie today, a companion to her leave-taking, I no longer see it as tragic or unfair. It simply is.

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## Abortion is woman's decision

I can't stand it any longer. You Right to Life people are so hypocritical, you make me want to puke.

How dare you sit in your comfort and pass judgment on a woman who is facing very possibly the most difficult decision of her life?

The most irritating thing about pro-lifers is their opinion that even though they have no knowledge of a woman's personal situation, they feel that they can simply step in and declare themselves as defenders of all that is right and good.

Get off it. What you people preach is your personal set of beliefs. Nothing more.

It is not your responsibility to impose your religious standards upon those who don't share the same view. And who are you to say that what you preach is the truth or the correct way to live?

I don't wish to digress here, but let me point out that religion, in and of itself, is a questionable thing. I grew up in a Southern Baptist church, so don't fool yourself into thinking that my judgment is uneducated. Quite the contrary. I know all about God.

I also think that many religions were formed with shaky foundations. The Anglican church was invented so the king of England could divorce his childless wife. The Roman Catholic Church was organized in order to control the increasing number of Christ followers in the Roman Empire.

The Babylonians invented gods in order to explain what they couldn't understand. So did the Greeks, the most culturally advanced civilization ever to walk this planet. What happened to the mighty Zeus? Was he defeated by our Christian God, or our Christian



**Michael Justice**

ancestors?

Even the most sacred Christian figures are expanded in our minds through traditions and instruction to the point of absurdity.

Did you know that the Virgin Mary was not a virgin? According to the Jesus Conference — a group of clergy and religious scholars — there was a mistake in the translation from Hebrew to Latin (the word for virgin has a similar meaning, young girl) and that created a most celebrated myth. Did you know that Jesus had six brothers and sisters, and that he was a fisherman for many years? Those were the conclusions of the Jesus Conference.

Trust me when I say that I truly hope there is a God watching over me, because I don't want to spend eternity as worm food. However, it is hard to swallow all that is asked of us simply on faith. Our religious icons are really just people and, through the course of time, they have been elevated to omnipotent status due to a human need for ultimate guidance.

Women should be allowed to decide, with the aid of their families, what is best for them. They are the ones who must spend the rest of their lives caring for this child, not the Right to Life people.

I will admit that there is irresponsibility in conceiving a child that is not desired. However, there

is also an irresponsibility in bringing an unwanted child into the world.

Crime is an epidemic in this country. Kids killing each other, random violence and lack of discipline. Most of these kids have a common denominator. They were not cared for or about. They were not loved, and they were not wanted.

About three years ago a very close friend of mine was faced with the decision of abortion. It took her a month to decide what was best for her and the child in the long run. Her friends said they would support her down either road and offered any advice she needed.

My sister was faced with the challenge of becoming a single parent last summer, and she also needed time to decide what was best. I told her that it would be hard work and that there are other options, but whatever she wanted, we, her family, would support her.

These two women chose different paths, and neither was the wrong choice. My sister is working hard to support a little girl she gave birth to in October. My friend was able to finish school and move on to a better relationship than the one she had with the man who got her pregnant.

For her it was the best choice, albeit a tough one, and I know that a day doesn't go by without her thinking about that unborn child. But what was done was for the greater good, in her opinion and by her standards.

She had a choice, and that choice should remain available to every woman.

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**Mike Luckovich**