

# *un*PLANNED

Abby Johnson

WITH CINDY LAMBERT

*The dramatic true story  
of a former Planned  
Parenthood leader's  
eye-opening journey  
across the life line*

**INCLUDES  
NEW  
CHAPTER!**

“A compellingly candid story! Not argument or ideology but data—first-person facts and utterly honest feelings.” **PETER KREEFT**—Author, *Three Approaches to Abortion*

“As a founder of the National Coalition for Life and Choice, I have always encouraged people on both sides of the ‘life line’ to listen to and understand each other, though they may never agree. Abby Johnson’s sincere and thoughtful story has much to teach both sides.”

**FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN**—Author, *Real Choices: Listening to Women, Looking for Alternatives to Abortion*, [www.frederica.com](http://www.frederica.com)

“I’m grateful to Abby Johnson for having the courage to tell her story as a former director of a Planned Parenthood clinic in *Unplanned*. Though Planned Parenthood provides other services for women, it is the largest abortion provider in America. In this unique and compelling book, Abby shows the compassionate hearts of some of her coworkers, takes responsibility for her own participation in abortions, and shares the journey of how God in his grace and mercy delivered her from blindness. I hope that by reading this story you will be moved to do what you can to offer help and resources to women in need of them, and lovingly tell them the truth about their unborn child.”

**RANDY ALCORN**—Author, *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments* and *Why Pro-Life?*

“Abby’s story is one of great moral courage in an age that groans for lack of it. Hers is a modern parable of hope for us all, witnessing to the truth that sets the human heart free. A riveting story.” **MARJORIE DANNENFELSER**—President, Susan B. Anthony List

“Abby’s gripping story gives a rare glimpse into the heart that motivates both pro-abortion and pro-life activities. Her book is a refreshing affirmation of the power of truth, which overcomes even the thickest deceptions. Abby’s compelling experience gives invaluable insight both to those involved in providing abortion and those who struggle to see life triumph.”

**DONNA J. HARRISON, M.D.**—President, American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists

“*Unplanned* is a powerful and compelling testimony of the power of prayer and love. A story of courage, conviction, and conversion, the book will draw you into Abby’s life and her journey as her eyes are opened to the truth.”

**DR. ALVEDA C. KING**—Pastoral Associate, Priests for Life; Founder, King for America; Niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Think love and kindness can’t make a difference in the abortion debate? Read Abby Johnson’s story and find out how a pro-life ministry’s peaceful and respectful witness forever changed the heart of this former Planned Parenthood clinic director.”

**JIM DALY**—President, Focus on the Family

“Abby understands how good people can be misled, as she was, to support abortion under the guise of helping women. This is the remarkable story of how one director of a Planned Parenthood clinic came to realize the truth about abortion—and what she did about it.” **EDUARDO VERÁSTEGUI**—Actor, star of *Bella*

“Abby walked out of the abortion industry and into my office just next door. After seeing her transformation from running a Planned Parenthood clinic to joining our efforts to help women and save lives, I believe that *anyone* can change their mind on abortion.” **SHAWN CARNEY**—Campaign Director, 40 Days for Life

“Bold, decisive, and a real trailblazer at Planned Parenthood . . . Abby Johnson, when confronted with reality, was courageous enough to admit her compassion for others was misdirected. Her journey of finding a new way to help women in crisis is truly inspiring.” **BOBBY REYNOSO**—Executive Director, Coalition for Life

“Once I began reading this compelling chronicle of compassion, I could not put it down! Abby’s narrative points to Christ’s story of redemption and will inspire readers for generations to come. *Unplanned* shows that God has a plan and purpose not only for Abby Johnson, but also for you and me, because every life matters.”

**BRIAN BOONE**—President/CEO, Life Centers

“In *Unplanned*, Abby shares intimate details of the happenings that ultimately led her to leave her career as a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic director for ‘the other side of the fence,’ where she now ardently advocates for the rights of the unborn. If you have ever peacefully protested and prayed for an end to abortion, Abby’s story will provide tremendous insights—and encourage you never to give up.”

**TONY PERKINS**—President, Family Research Council

“Abby’s story will unsettle your pro-life/pro-choice ‘apprecar’ in a refreshing way. As an abortion-rights advocate, Abby didn’t expect to encounter the prayerful, loving, and nonjudgmental outreach to her by pro-lifers. Likewise, pro-lifers who read this book may not expect to meet a Planned Parenthood director who really wanted to reduce abortion. *Unplanned* is a must-read, especially for those of us in the pregnancy center movement—it’s reignited our hearts to continue our ministry of compassion to those considering abortion and to always trust in the power of prayer.”

**MELINDA DELAHOYDE**—President, Care Net

“I could not put this book down. Abby’s honest and riveting account sheds light on the fact that some Christians are conflicted but satisfied with the goal of ‘making abortion safe and rare.’ Abby finally had the courage to face the truth about abortion because of the way Christ’s love was reflected through the prayer, courage, and support of individual Christians.” **MARGARET H. HARTSHORN, PH.D.**—President, Heartbeat International

“‘Unplanned’ perfectly describes Abby’s book from the very first word to the last. Once I started reading, I couldn’t put the book down. Abby’s story is a must-read for everyone.”

**BRADLEY MATTES**—Executive Director, Life Issues Institute; Host, *Facing Life Head-On* (TV) and *Life Issues* (radio)

“Abby Johnson’s powerful story of conversion and repentance reveals how urgently a prayerful, compassionate pro-life presence is needed outside America’s abortion clinics. When Abby finally realized the horror of abortion, she knew she could turn for help to the pro-lifers praying outside Planned Parenthood and witnessing to the dignity of every human life. Abby’s story should inspire us all to redouble our efforts to bring Christ’s love to every abortion clinic in the country.”

**ANN SCHEIDLER**—Vice President, Pro-Life Action League

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# Preface to the Expanded Edition

by *Cindy Lambert*

THE TRUE STORY of God at work is never over.

As a collaborative writer privileged to chronicle God's astonishing handiwork in the lives of others, I always feel a curious thrill when sending off the final version of a manuscript to the publisher. While celebrating the deep satisfaction of the book's completion, I am acutely aware that the story God is writing in this person's life isn't over at all. Though the book must end, God's work continues. What additional wonders does God have in store?

Never has that been truer than in the life of Abby Johnson.

Abby and I completed the first edition of *Unplanned* in the spring of 2010, just five months after Abby's dramatic experience and subsequent leap from Planned Parenthood clinic director to advocate for the unborn. Since then, news of Abby's story has spread across the globe and catapulted her into new adventures on the front lines of the life movement. This expanded edition of *Unplanned* could not begin to cover all those new adventures and



makes no attempt to do so. Perhaps someday she'll be ready to write a new book detailing her ongoing journey.

However, on July 18, 2013, Abby e-mailed me with news of a particularly remarkable event, which is inextricably linked to the story you are about to read. I was still contemplating the wonder of how God had written a new chapter of historic importance to the global movement of protecting the lives of the unborn, when an hour later, I received an e-mail from Shawn Carney.

You will meet Shawn, a dynamic pro-life advocate, in the pages of this book. The story of his relationship with Abby began with the two of them standing nose to nose at the black iron fence that surrounded the abortion center where Abby served as director. As you'll soon discover, their unlikely friendship profoundly affected them both in ways only God could have orchestrated.

Shawn's e-mail read, "Cindy, God's timing is a mystery, but how I wish we could have had this closing chapter for Abby's book."

The writer in me couldn't resist a new surprise ending! Abby and I, along with Tyndale and Focus on the Family, agreed that we had to amend *Unplanned* to include it. And so you have this newly expanded edition.

In the pages that follow, I invite you to a front-row seat to watch God's drama unfolding. In 1998, when Planned Parenthood first announced its intentions to open an abortion center in Bryan, Texas, no one would have guessed that God would use that facility as a canvas upon which to paint a story of redemption, forgiveness, and the power of prayer. As I researched the history surrounding 4112 East 29th Street, I met many of the faithful people who prayed at the fence day in, day out, year in, year out, and I experienced firsthand the intensity of standing vigil alongside Abby to offer hope to women in crisis. Had I known then the

surprise God had in store for 2013, I would have burst with the wonder of it all.

Enjoy the story God is writing in Abby's life: her heartrending turning point, the evidence of His transforming work, and the picture of courage and new beginnings He continues to write into her life and into our world.

I pray that you will never be the same after reading this new edition of *Unplanned* and that your understanding of who God is—His heart, His nature, His work in our midst—will grow immeasurably greater.

And may Abby's story invite you to see your own life for what it is—the true story of God at work.



## A Note from Abby Johnson

My story is not a comfortable one to read. I think it's only fair to warn you of that up front. Not comfortable, but honest and true. As you are about to discover, I've spent years on the front lines of the face-off between pro-choice and pro-life advocates. Which side? Both sides. You are about to enter my journey from naive college girl to director of a Planned Parenthood clinic to advocate for families in crisis, including the unborn members of those families.

I reveal my story not because I am proud of it. I am not. But my thinking and choices are not unlike those of so many people I have encountered. And until we each set aside our own preferences for how we *wish* others would think and behave, or how we *assume* others think and behave, we won't be able to understand those with whom we differ in order to engage in real dialogue and discover truth.

I've done my best to be true to my thinking and reasoning *within* each of these stages of my journey—no matter how faulty, how embarrassing, or how politically incorrect—so I suppose that

at times you will ask the same questions I've been asked time and again. *Were you really so gullible? Were you really so inconsistent between your values and your actions? Were you really so ambivalent, so naive, so foolish, so . . .* you get the picture. My answer: Yes. I've also been asked, *Were you and your pro-choice coworkers really driven by compassion and tenderness, by motives of truly helping women and making the world a better place?* Again, yes.

I often find that people don't like my answers.

That is understandable. My story is not neat and tidy, and it doesn't come wrapped in easy answers. Oh, how we love to vilify our opponents—from both sides. How easy to assume that those on “our” side are right and wise and good; how those on “their” side are treacherous and foolish and deceptive. I have found right and good and wisdom on both sides. I have found foolishness and treachery and deception on both sides as well. I have experienced how good intentions can be warped into poor choices no matter what the side.

To this day I have friends on both sides of this polarizing debate. We all long for a story that shows that “our” side is right and good, and “their” side is wrong and bad, don't we? But I testify that there is good and right and wrong on *both* sides of the fence. And even more shocking—we have far more in common with the “other” side than we might imagine.

But don't slam this book shut because of what I've just said. Read it for that very reason. Read it to understand the surprising hopes and motivations on the “other” side. I was loved from one side onto the other. My hope is that many more thousands will be loved into truth as well. Maybe you will be the one loving someone on the other side of the fence.

So what side of the fence are you on? In all likelihood, as you

look through the fence, you see faulty thinking and harmful behavior on the other side. Here's my question for you: are you ready to look through the fence and see goodness, compassion, generosity, and self-sacrifice on the other side?

Did you just feel yourself squirm? If so, welcome to my journey.

### **Special Note**

The names and distinguishing details of some people in this book have been changed, including all Planned Parenthood volunteers and staff. While describing the events in this book, I relied not only on my memory, but on my personal correspondence and interviews with others involved.



## The Ultrasound



CHERYL POKED HER HEAD INTO MY OFFICE. “Abby, they need an extra person back in the exam room. Are you free?”

I looked up from my paperwork, surprised. “Sure.”

Though I’d been with Planned Parenthood for eight years, I had never been called into the exam room to help the medical team during an abortion, and I had no idea why I was needed now. Nurse-practitioners were the ones who assisted in abortions, not the other clinic staff. As director of this clinic in Bryan, Texas, I was able to fill in for any position in a pinch, except, of course, for doctors or nurses performing medical procedures. I had, on a few occasions, agreed at a patient’s request to stay with her and even hold her hand during the procedure, but only when I’d been the counselor who’d worked with her during intake and counseling. That was not the case today. So why did they need me?

Today’s visiting abortionist had been here at the Bryan clinic only two or three times before. He had a private abortion practice



about 100 miles away. When I'd talked with him about the job several weeks before, he had explained that at his own facility he did only ultrasound-guided abortions—the abortion procedure with the least risk of complications for the woman. Because this method allows the doctor to see exactly what is going on inside the uterus, there is less chance of perforating the uterine wall, one of the risks of abortion. I respected that about him. The more that could be done to keep women safe and healthy, the better, as far as I was concerned. However, I'd explained to him that this practice wasn't the protocol at our clinic. He understood and said he'd follow our typical procedures, though we agreed he'd be free to use ultrasound if he felt a particular situation warranted it.

To my knowledge, we'd never done ultrasound-guided abortions at our facility. We did abortions only every other Saturday, and the assigned goal from our Planned Parenthood affiliate was to perform twenty-five to thirty-five procedures on those days. We liked to wrap them up by around 2:00 p.m. Our typical procedure took about ten minutes, but an ultrasound added about five minutes, and when you're trying to schedule up to thirty-five abortions in a day, those extra minutes add up.

I felt a moment's reluctance outside the exam room. I never liked entering this room during an abortion procedure—never welcomed what happened behind this door. But since we all had to be ready at any time to pitch in and get the job done, I pushed the door open and stepped in.

The patient was already sedated, still conscious but groggy, the doctor's brilliant light beaming down on her. She was in position, the instruments were laid out neatly on the tray next to the doctor, and the nurse-practitioner was positioning the ultrasound machine next to the operating table.

“I’m going to perform an ultrasound-guided abortion on this patient. I need you to hold the ultrasound probe,” the doctor explained.

As I took the ultrasound probe in hand and adjusted the settings on the machine, I argued with myself, *I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to take part in an abortion.* No, wrong attitude—I needed to psych myself up for this task. I took a deep breath and tried to tune in to the music from the radio playing softly in the background. *It’s a good learning experience—I’ve never seen an ultrasound-guided abortion before,* I told myself. *Maybe this will help me when I counsel women. I’ll learn firsthand about this safer procedure. Besides, it will be over in just a few minutes.*

I could not have imagined how the next ten minutes would shake the foundation of my values and change the course of my life.

I had occasionally performed diagnostic ultrasounds for clients before. It was one of the services we offered to confirm pregnancies and estimate how far along they were. The familiarity of preparing for an ultrasound soothed my uneasiness at being in this room. I applied the lubricant to the patient’s belly, then maneuvered the ultrasound probe until her uterus was displayed on the screen and adjusted the probe’s position to capture the image of the fetus.

I was expecting to see what I had seen in past ultrasounds. Usually, depending on how far along the pregnancy was and how the fetus was turned, I’d first see a leg, or the head, or some partial image of the torso, and would need to maneuver a bit to get the best possible image. But this time, the image was complete. I could see the entire, perfect profile of a baby.

*Just like Grace at twelve weeks,* I thought, surprised, remembering my very first peek at my daughter, three years before, snuggled

securely inside my womb. The image now before me looked the same, only clearer, sharper. The detail startled me. I could clearly see the profile of the head, both arms, legs, and even tiny fingers and toes. Perfect.

And just that quickly, the flutter of the warm memory of Grace was replaced with a surge of anxiety. *What am I about to see?* My stomach tightened. *I don't want to watch what is about to happen.*

I suppose that sounds odd coming from a professional who'd been running a Planned Parenthood clinic for two years, counseling women in crisis, scheduling abortions, reviewing the clinic's monthly budget reports, hiring and training staff. But odd or not, the simple fact is, I had never been interested in promoting abortion. I'd come to Planned Parenthood eight years before, believing that its purpose was primarily to prevent unwanted pregnancies, thereby reducing the number of abortions. That had certainly been *my* goal. And I believed that Planned Parenthood saved lives—the lives of women who, without the services provided by this organization, might resort to some back-alley butcher. All of this sped through my mind as I carefully held the probe in place.

"Thirteen weeks," I heard the nurse say after taking measurements to determine the fetus's age.

"Okay," the doctor said, looking at me, "just hold the probe in place during the procedure so I can see what I'm doing."

The cool air of the exam room left me feeling chilled. My eyes still glued to the image of this perfectly formed baby, I watched as a new image entered the video screen. The cannula—a straw-shaped instrument attached to the end of the suction tube—had been inserted into the uterus and was nearing the baby's side. It looked like an invader on the screen, out of place. Wrong. It just looked wrong.

My heart sped up. Time slowed. I didn't want to look, but I didn't want to stop looking either. I couldn't *not* watch. I was horrified, but fascinated at the same time, like a gawker slowing as he drives past some horrific automobile wreck—not wanting to see a mangled body, but looking all the same.

My eyes flew to the patient's face; tears flowed from the corners of her eyes. I could see she was in pain. The nurse dabbed the woman's face with a tissue.

"Just breathe," the nurse gently coached her. "Breathe."

"It's almost over," I whispered. I wanted to stay focused on her, but my eyes shot back to the image on the screen.

At first, the baby didn't seem aware of the cannula. It gently probed the baby's side, and for a quick second I felt relief. *Of course*, I thought. *The fetus doesn't feel pain*. I had reassured countless women of this as I'd been taught by Planned Parenthood. *The fetal tissue feels nothing as it is removed. Get a grip, Abby. This is a simple, quick medical procedure*. My head was working hard to control my responses, but I couldn't shake an inner disquiet that was quickly mounting to horror as I watched the screen.

The next movement was the sudden jerk of a tiny foot as the baby started kicking, as if trying to move away from the probing invader. As the cannula pressed in, the baby began struggling to turn and twist away. It seemed clear to me that the fetus could feel the cannula and did not like the feeling. And then the doctor's voice broke through, startling me.

"Beam me up, Scotty," he said lightheartedly to the nurse. He was telling her to turn on the suction—in an abortion the suction isn't turned on until the doctor feels he has the cannula in exactly the right place.

I had a sudden urge to yell, "Stop!" To shake the woman and

say, “Look at what is happening to your baby! Wake up! Hurry! Stop them!”

But even as I thought those words, I looked at my own hand holding the probe. I was one of “them” performing this act. My eyes shot back to the screen again. The cannula was already being rotated by the doctor, and now I could see the tiny body violently twisting with it. For the briefest moment it looked as if the baby were being wrung like a dishcloth, twirled and squeezed. And then the little body crumpled and began disappearing into the cannula before my eyes. The last thing I saw was the tiny, perfectly formed backbone sucked into the tube, and then everything was gone. And the uterus was empty. Totally empty.

I was frozen in disbelief. Without realizing it, I let go of the probe. It slipped off the patient’s tummy and slid onto her leg. I could feel my heart pounding—pounding so hard my neck throbbed. I tried to get a deep breath but couldn’t seem to breathe in or out. I still stared at the screen, even though it was black now because I’d lost the image. But nothing was registering to me. I felt too stunned and shaken to move. I was aware of the doctor and nurse casually chatting as they worked, but it sounded distant, like vague background noise, hard to hear over the pounding of my own blood in my ears.

The image of the tiny body, mangled and sucked away, was replaying in my mind, and with it the image of Grace’s first ultrasound—how she’d been about the same size. And I could hear in my memory one of the many arguments I’d had with my husband, Doug, about abortion.

“When you were pregnant with Grace, it wasn’t a fetus; it was a baby,” Doug had said. And now it hit me like a lightning bolt: *He was right! What was in this woman’s womb just a moment ago was alive. It wasn’t just tissue, just cells. That was a human baby—fighting for life!*

*A battle that was lost in the blink of an eye. What I have told people for years, what I've believed and taught and defended, is a lie.*

Suddenly I felt the eyes of the doctor and nurse on me. It shook me out of my thoughts. I noticed the probe lying on the woman's leg and fumbled to get it back into place. But my hands were shaking now.

"Abby, are you okay?" the doctor asked. The nurse's eyes searched my face with concern.

"Yeah, I'm okay." I still didn't have the probe correctly positioned, and now I was worried because the doctor couldn't see inside the uterus. My right hand held the probe, and my left hand rested gingerly on the woman's warm belly. I glanced at her face—more tears and a grimace of pain. I moved the probe until I'd recaptured the image of her now-empty uterus. My eyes traveled back to my hands. I looked at them as if they weren't even my own.

*How much damage have these hands done over the past eight years? How many lives have been taken because of them? Not just because of my hands, but because of my words. What if I'd known the truth, and what if I'd told all those women?*

What if?

I had believed a lie! I had blindly promoted the "company line" for so long. Why? Why hadn't I searched out the truth for myself? Why had I closed my ears to the arguments I'd heard? Oh, dear God, what had I done?

My hand was still on the patient's belly, and I had the sense that I had just taken something away from her with that hand. I'd robbed her. And my hand started to *hurt*—I felt an actual physical pain. And right there, standing beside the table, my hand on the weeping woman's belly, this thought came from deep within me:

*Never again! Never again.*

I went into autopilot. As the nurse cleaned up the woman, I put away the ultrasound machine, then gently roused the patient, who was limp and groggy. I helped her sit up, coaxed her into a wheelchair, and took her to the recovery room. I tucked a light blanket around her. Like so many patients I'd seen before, she continued to cry, in obvious emotional and physical pain. I did my best to make her more comfortable.

Ten minutes, maybe fifteen at most, had passed since Cheryl had asked me to go help in the exam room. And in those few minutes, everything had changed. Drastically. The image of that tiny baby twisting and struggling kept replaying in my mind. And the patient. I felt so guilty. I'd taken something precious from her, and she didn't even know it.

How had it come to this? How had I let this happen? I had invested myself, my heart, my career in Planned Parenthood because I cared about women in crisis. And now I faced a crisis of my own.

Looking back now on that late September day of 2009, I realize how wise God is for not revealing our future to us. Had I known then the firestorm I was about to endure, I might not have had the courage to move forward. As it was, since I didn't know, I wasn't yet looking for courage. I was, however, looking to understand how I found myself in this place—living a lie, spreading a lie, and hurting the very women I so wanted to help.

And I desperately needed to know what to do next.

This is my story.