

SUE HERTZ

CAUGHT IN

THE

A YEAR ON
ABORTION'S
FRONT LINE

CROSSFIRE

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Introduction

Ever since the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, hundreds of thousands of newspaper and magazine articles and books have covered the politics of abortion—fetal rights versus mothers' rights, state rights versus federal rights, government versus individual rights. Legal scholars have pondered whether abortion should be decided by legislation or litigation. Moralists, philosophers, and physicians have argued at what point life begins. Yet in the eighteen years since the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which declared that banning abortion violates a woman's constitutional right to privacy, never had the issue incited such passion as it did in 1989.

The reason: *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, a Supreme Court case which challenged a 1986 Missouri law that forbid public hospitals or other tax-supported facilities and public employees (including doctors, nurses, and other health-care providers) to perform abortions not necessary to save the mother's life, and required elaborate and expensive medical viability testing on fetuses thought to be twenty weeks or more. Buoyed by a conservative Supreme Court and newly elected President George Bush, who advocated "adoption, not abortion," those who called themselves prolife hoped that the justices would use the case to dismantle *Roe v. Wade* and send the issue back to the states, a move that could drastically curtail abortion availability. Those who called themselves prochoice went on the defensive, praying that *Roe* would stay intact, fearing any restrictions the justices might inflict.

What followed the high court's announcement in January 1989 to

hear the case three months later was a war of words, demonstrations, and more media coverage than the nation could digest. Throughout that winter and spring and the months that followed the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision in early July, both sides of the battle took their fight to the streets, both wrangling to blast their rhetoric on the evening news.

Ironically, scant attention was paid to those most affected by the Supreme Court's action and the future of abortion access: the people struggling to provide abortions and the people struggling with the decision to have an abortion. This is the story of the people behind the rhetoric, the people caught in the crossfire of the abortion war during one of the most turbulent years in abortion's history.

Many names have been changed to protect individuals' privacy. The abortion clinic on which this story focuses, Preterm Health Services in Brookline, Massachusetts, did not and will not benefit financially from this book. After months of thoughtful debate, Preterm's staff agreed to open its doors to me only in the hope that the public would better understand abortion's complexity and the need to keep the procedure safe and legal.

CHAPTER ONE

The Clinic

THIS is it, Carolyn Wardell told herself as she steered her blue Hyundai through the early morning mist into the back parking lot of Preterm Health Services. This is the day they'll get us. Her stomach fluttered, just a little. It seemed to her that she should feel scared or nervous at the thought of hundreds of abortion foes blocking her doors and bobbing poster-size photographs of dismembered fetuses under her office window. Instead, she felt excited. Facing the invasion couldn't be any worse than waiting for it to happen.

Three times in the past five months, Preterm had prepared for an attack by Operation Rescue, and each time the militant antiabortion group had struck elsewhere. Well, almost each time. On a Saturday in January, the day after Carolyn had taken over as director of her clinic in Brookline, Massachusetts, a woman had secured herself by the neck with a Kryptonite bicycle lock to the clinic's back door. Some of the staff had suggested leaving her there, but Carolyn wanted her gone. As Brookline fire fighters struggled to drill open the sturdy lock without puncturing the woman's neck, a brigade of other antiabortion soldiers drove across the state to Worcester, where they jammed the elevators and blocked the doorways of an office building that housed a Planned Parenthood clinic. More than 100 were arrested. Back at Preterm, the fire fighters resorted to prying off the door handle with the Jaws of Life.

Now, two months later, Carolyn's gut told her that those soldiers, who never revealed what clinic they planned to seize next, would be at Preterm's doorstep in less than two hours. They couldn't ignore the clinic that performed 10,000 abortions a year, the largest provider in

New England, forever. Besides, this rescue had been billed as the big one: a regional rescue that could lure hundreds, perhaps a thousand, antiabortionists from around New England. This could be the first rescue to boast enough people to successfully block Preterm's wide front entrance and back door.

Even the police seemed primed. The sun wouldn't rise for another half hour and already two cruisers sat, engines idling, one in front of Preterm and one in back. As Carolyn slid out of her car into the predawn blackness, another car door slammed, cracking the eerie quiet. She turned to see Lin Sherman, one of Preterm's telephone counselors, walking toward her through the nearly empty parking lot.

"It's nice to have the cops out back," Carolyn said. "It feels like they're protecting us."

"They sure are," Lin replied. "They wanted to know what *I* was doing here."

Carolyn unlocked the back door and stepped into the hallway, one of the few areas that was lit in the five-story medical office building which loomed above the back parking, a giant concrete square. As Lin turned left toward the phone room, Carolyn continued straight down the hallway to the front door to welcome more of her staff and the television crew that hoped to film a rescue from inside an abortion clinic. The media, like the local abortion providers and the police, had learned of the rescue through prochoice women who had infiltrated the antiabortion group. Either at meetings or in a newsletter, Operation Rescue leaders announced the date of the next blockade, and the "moles," as the prochoice spies were called, were quick to forward the message.

Carolyn tried to suppress a smile when she noticed the cameraman filming her from his spot on the front steps. If she'd known, she would have changed from her sneakers into one of the pairs of heels she kept in the bottom drawer of her file cabinet. She hadn't even had a chance to slip out of her coat or comb her hair.

"Good morning," she said to the TV crew as she opened the door with a self-conscious giggle. Media attention was still new to Carolyn. In the two months that she had been Preterm's director, Carolyn had sent most reporters and photographers to the clinic's spokeswoman, Fran Basche. A former journalist, Fran seemed to know instinctively how to answer the questions without stumbling over her thoughts or saying something that she, or the clinic, would later regret. Carolyn was more prone to speak her mind, a trait which some would hail as honest and others, Carolyn herself included, would call blunt.

Carolyn Wardell was a small woman, a few inches over five feet tall,

with soft, curly brown hair and pale, almost translucent skin. Her face was delicate and her voice was so gentle that she often considered using a microphone to be heard at all-staff meetings. But her gaze was direct and her handshake firm. When she walked she marched, always with a sense of purpose, or at least she looked like she had a sense of purpose as she strode through the clinic, arms swinging. Five years before, Carolyn had been Preterm's administrative secretary, regarded as quiet and efficient, a good detail person. Her superiors had quickly recognized her talent for organizing and troubleshooting and the promotions began. A counselor by training, Carolyn leapt from secretary to office manager to director of counseling to director of the abortion clinic to assistant director of all of Preterm's services, which included gynecology, sterilization, and breast cancer screening. When the clinic's director left in January 1989, Carolyn was the likely replacement. Carolyn was a clear thinker with a cool temperament, the previous clinic director told Preterm's board of directors when recommending Carolyn for the job; she wouldn't buckle in a crisis.

Carolyn, too, believed that she wouldn't buckle in a crisis, not even during an Operation Rescue attack. If the troops struck, she would organize her staff into action, something she felt she did well. Carolyn had never bought into the frenzy that in the early days had propelled Preterm's staff to sleep at the clinic the night before a threatened rescue. Fearing that Rescue would strike before dawn the next day, some staffers wanted to make sure that people were inside to answer calls from frantic patients. Although ideally Rescue would have liked to blockade before the clinic opened and staff and patients arrived, in the five months that the antiabortion group had been waging war against abortion providers in the Boston area, never had the troops arrived at a clinic before 7 A.M. Carolyn felt that she had plenty of time to help prepare Preterm for a possible assault if she were inside the building before six o'clock. Besides, sometimes a handful of abortion foes snuck inside the clinics even after the staff had already arrived, chaining themselves to urinals, banisters, examination tables, anything that didn't move. Last month, six of them had locked themselves together by the neck and lay like sardines on the floor of a procedure room at one local clinic. In front of another, they had lain down on Beacon Street, refusing to move as cars piled up for blocks and traffic froze.

Even though Carolyn disagreed down to her marrow with the protesters' belief that abortion is evil, she didn't condemn the protests—only their methods. She wished that they would stay on the sidewalk with their signs and songs, but she understood the need to demonstrate

against something that they felt was wrong. God knows, she had spent much of her twenties shouting about the injustices of the Vietnam War.

Yet her understanding didn't erase her annoyance. The abortion foes had always struck on a Saturday, and it was hard enough being a thirty-nine-year-old single mother working full-time, without spending precious weekend days at Preterm. Her only hesitation in accepting her promotion to director was that she feared her new job would require too many Saturdays at the clinic preparing for demonstrations, too many Saturdays away from her four-year-old daughter.

Last night when she had dropped Lorena off at a friend's, Lorena was sobbing for her mother not to leave. She was still hysterical when Carolyn called a few hours later. "Oh, God," Carolyn had thought, "I'm traumatizing my daughter." Carolyn had gone to sleep sad and frustrated that Lorena was being hurt by a situation her mother couldn't control. Carolyn couldn't stop Operation Rescue from attacking any more than she could stop women from getting pregnant. She couldn't shrug off her responsibility to try to keep Preterm functioning. Her Saturday staff of forty depended on her to protect their right to provide abortions, and their patients' right to receive them.

And on this Saturday, she felt more keenly than ever her responsibility to tell the public what abortion providers had to endure to fulfill their lawful services to women. That's why she had agreed to let the "Chronicle" TV crew in. She wanted the crew to help her show what it was like to gear up for an attack: to rearrange patient schedules, staff schedules, child-care schedules, and then wait, and wait, for the protesters to arrive. If Preterm wasn't hit, perhaps the audience would understand the extraordinary drain of the wasted effort. If it were attacked, well, that was a lesson in itself.

There wasn't much to do now but wait. Sitting at one of the secretaries' desks, Carolyn smiled as Fran Basche flew into the administrative office. Fran always moved quickly, but today she charged into her office as if she were being chased. Reentering the administrative area, she greeted Carolyn and the TV producer, a woman named Maggie. Fran was perfect for TV. Not only did she look good with her wavy, dark hair cropped at her shoulders, her wide smile, and classic features but also she could stun any interviewer into silence with a blizzard of words. Fran could talk faster than most people could think, and what amazed Carolyn was that she made sense.

A few months shy of thirty, Fran had joined Preterm a year and a half before, tossing her job of writing press releases about computers to

promote a cause to which she was committed. She liked to say that she simply woke up one morning and it hit her: She spent most of her days talking about computers. "Computers!" she would repeat, aghast.

Since the first threatened rescue last October, whenever a public discussion was arranged Fran had dealt with TV reporters, newspaper reporters, and the antiabortionists. The task had required all of Fran's tact and self-restraint. Just the day before, she had had to clench her teeth as she sat in a television studio with two of Operation Rescue's leaders as all three waited to appear together on a talk show. One of the leaders, Bob Delery, mentioned that a veteran rescuer wouldn't be at Saturday's demonstration because his wife had recently miscarried. The couple had ten daughters; now they were trying for a son. "Sounds to me like that woman should be rescued," Fran had thought. But she had kept quiet. She couldn't, however, contain herself on the air when Delery slammed the clinics for not describing fetal development to patients.

"I think in nine months they know they'll have a baby," Fran shot back. The antiabortionists were forever arguing that women were ignorant of what abortion meant, that patients didn't understand that they were killing a potential child. Why then, Fran thought, was Preterm a vale of tears?

Usually cool in public, Fran was prone to private rages against the antis, as she dubbed them. "I think they're all sexually repressed," she would rant. "And they hate women." To refocus her energy, she prepared for rescues with the aggression of Mike Tyson and the finesse of Martha Stewart. She arranged for the patients to wait out the attack in a safe spot, usually the Episcopal church a block away. She recruited volunteers to help escort patients and answer phones. And she bought food, lots of food, although she'd cut back since the first threatened attacks. Last fall, Fran had fortified the staff with bagels and doughnuts and boxes of cereal, even bananas for the cereal. She was thrilled when a nurse brought in homemade noodle pudding. Somehow the cornucopia made the event seem more festive, less intense. But with each false alarm, the incentive to soften the tension faded. For this rescue, Preterm's table boasted a mere two dozen blueberry muffins, a tray of Danish, a cinnamon coffee cake, and cartons of cream for the good coffee Fran had bought—not the industrial-strength brew the clinic usually served; coffee even the cops on private detail politely declined to drink.

Fran leaned against the doorway which led into Preterm's administrative area and watched the TV people meander up and down the hall,

checking their lights and audio equipment. Soon they would concentrate on her, tagging behind her, monitoring her every move to document the tension level inside the clinic. Before Operation Rescue, Fran's work with the media had been limited to a few interviews with newspaper reporters on special features, such as the one about married women having abortions. While no story on abortion lacked in controversy, her pre-Operation Rescue quotes seemed almost innocuous compared to what she had to say about the injustice of Operation Rescue blockades, about the violation of a woman's legal right to an abortion. These days her words were potent, and she worried that they might be too potent if Operation Rescue actually hit Preterm.

While Fran appeared confident on the outside, inside she was anxious. Last August, when the providers had heard whispers that local abortion foes were creating their own chapter of Operation Rescue, the nation's most radical antiabortion outfit, Fran had worried how this new threat would affect her job, her life. Would she have Saturdays free, ever again, to spend with her boyfriend? Would she stay calm at a rescue? She'd always handled crisis well in the past, but would a siege by antiabortion fanatics push her over the edge? Would the tension reduce her to tears in front of reporters? Now, after five months of false alarms, she was still left to wonder how she'd react to hundreds of protesters outside her clinic's doors.

In her quiet moments, however, Fran, like Carolyn, admitted that a part of her was titillated by the challenge. Preparing for an attack was a lot more invigorating than the duties that had consumed her first year at Preterm: explaining the diaphragm to high-school seniors, or calling doctors' offices suggesting that they refer patients to Preterm for breast screening, tubal ligations, or abortions. When the first Operation Rescue newsletter had landed on her desk, Fran had said a silent prayer, thankful that this hadn't happened the year before when she was just learning the different effects of high- and low-estrogen birth-control pills.

"It's starting to feel a little bit like a war to me," Fran told the "Chronicle" cameraman as he filmed her for the news special that would air the following week. She was controlled, relaxed, unflinching as the camera followed her as she picked up the receiver of a ringing phone. "Hi, this is Fran," she said, looking straight ahead, not at the camera. "Nothing happening yet." It was 6:45 A.M. The camera trailed her outside as she taped a "NO TRESPASSING" sign on the front door. "Assuming, of course," she said, "that they can read." She returned inside, wondering if she should have said that.

As the minutes rolled by, the Saturday staff filtered in, first a couple of nurses, then some counselors and medical assistants. The doctors wouldn't be in for another half hour. Ordinarily, patients began arriving at seven o'clock, but because of the rescue, Carolyn had pushed the first appointment up to nine. She had figured that if Operation Rescue had arrived early as was its practice, the invaders might already be stuffed into police vans by the time patients showed up.

As Fran talked to the TV people, Carolyn patrolled the hallway, peering out the front door, then the back. Nothing greeted her but a raw gray day in early March. It was 6:50 A.M.

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Preterm Health Services operated out of the first and fourth floors of a medical building at 1842 Beacon Street in the Boston suburb of Brookline, which was known to the right-to-life community as "abortion row" for the three abortion clinics it harbored on a two-mile strip. Planned Parenthood was the closest to the Boston border. The first of the three Beacon Street clinics, it was housed in a turn-of-the-century brownstone on the left. A mile up the wide thoroughfare, which was divided by trolley tracks and lined with sycamores and oaks and elegant apartment buildings, was Repro Associates. The only for-profit clinic of the three, Repro functioned behind an unmarked door. Easily overlooked, it was tucked between the post office and a gourmet delicatessen in the middle of Coolidge Corner, Brookline's shopping center. Stores sprawled for blocks up Beacon and down cross streets, offering everything from Oriental rugs to silk pants to cream cheese and lox. When Operation Rescue hit Repro, hundreds watched, from elderly women parading to the post office to computer whizzes heading into Radio Shack to silver-haired CEOs driving by en route to the golf course. No one escaped the scene.

Beyond Coolidge Corner, beyond more apartment buildings, more trees, beyond Washington Square and its cluster of delis and dry cleaners, stood Preterm. The building's modern facade was nondescript; a combination of concrete and windows hulking uncomfortably between brownstones and brick. Nowhere on the outside did it say Preterm. Patients usually knew they had arrived when they saw the raised numbers of the street address, 1842, and the picketers.

From the moment Preterm opened in August 1973, just seven months after the Supreme Court had legalized abortion in *Roe v. Wade*, picketers were as much a part of the clinic's routine as pregnancy tests.

They had figured out the clinic's schedule immediately: Abortion patients were scheduled on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning, and the rest of Preterm's hours were devoted to its other services: gynecology, breast cancer screening, and sterilization. Although many of the picketers didn't believe in contraception, they didn't stand in front of the clinic and pray for the young women heading inside for Pill prescriptions during the hours Preterm provided general gynecological service; they protested only on abortion days. Shuffling in circles, waving signs, silently praying, two, three, sometimes six or seven abortion foes clustered in front of the building during the week, and as many as ten to fifteen on Saturdays, the abortion clinic's busiest day. While some protesters confronted patients entering the building, pressing pamphlets on them and pleading "please don't kill your baby," they were, for the most part, benign, regarded by the staff with more pity than trepidation.

Before Operation Rescue had lured new faces and numbers to the clinics, the staff had known most of the picketers by name, or sometimes by costume. There was the man who dressed as Santa Claus every Christmas and held a sign that said "Please don't kill my kids." There was old Bill Clarke, who warned patients of God's wrath, and Constance Smith, the former nun with the waist-length brown hair. And there was Bill Cotter, the computer programmer who stood stone-faced and rigid, telling patients that they could be hurt inside those doors, that not only would their babies die, but that they could, too.

All the clinics' staffs knew Bill Cotter, for he had haunted clinics from Worcester to Boston for years. But Preterm seemed to be his favorite. He was always in front of Preterm. He began his vigil, or "sidewalk counseling" as he called it, at 6 A.M. When his reinforcements arrived between seven and nine o'clock, he left for his day job of testing computer boards at Honeywell. In December 1988, four months after he celebrated his thirty-seventh birthday, he quit his job to focus all his attention on Operation Rescue and stopping abortion. Since then, he frequently paced the sidewalks until late morning, jogging between the front and back entrance, holding out pamphlets to patients, and telling the women that he had help for them. So low-key was his presentation that few patients or their partners stopped to talk to Bill Cotter, as they sometimes did with other, more aggressive, picketers. Ignored, Cotter would return to his post in front of Preterm's steps, sometimes holding up a poster featuring an illustration of an eleven-week fetus for anyone mounting the steps to see.

Standing over six-feet tall, Bill Cotter was pale, with a square face and deep-set brown eyes. He rarely smiled, but when he did, his mouth lifted, as if in effort, to one side. The Preterm staff snickered about the strong but quiet presence of "Billy," as they referred to him, the man of few words and even fewer changes of clothes. When word leaked out that Cotter was not just a soldier of Boston's Operation Rescue, but its general, some staffers were stunned. While Billy C. had showed some vigor in his crusade—he occasionally invaded clinics, locking himself to utility carts, doors, other people—he hardly seemed to exude the charisma to inspire hundreds of abortion foes to sit on cold sidewalks for hours and risk arrest. "He's such a lump," Fran said. "He has such a blank look, like a robot. It's scary to think of people listening to him."

Whether Bill Cotter was responsible for galvanizing the forces was hard to tell, but there was no disputing that since the fall of 1988, the local abortion foes had become more aggressive, just as abortion foes across the country had become aggressive. The momentum had begun to gather when Vice President George Bush, who advocated "adoption, not abortion," became the undisputed forerunner of the 1988 election. With the hope that Bush and a conservative U.S. Supreme Court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the once muffled voice of the antiabortion troops became louder and louder. Enemies of abortion who had watched on national TV a group called Operation Rescue blockade clinics in Atlanta during the Democratic National Convention saw a new tactic and began to form their own Operation Rescue satellites. Although the satellites shared the same name as the original group, which was based in Binghamton, New York, they didn't share resources. Bill Cotter insisted that Operation Rescue: Boston functioned autonomously, with only spiritual—and tactical—guidance from Binghamton.

Preterm's staff wasn't concerned with what had ignited the local antis, only with how to deal with the invigorated picketers. Never had they been so feisty. Instead of returning to prayer after patients disregarded their spiel, the demonstrators shadowed the women and their escorts, shouting that their babies had brain waves and feelings and thumbs that they sucked. The protesters' literature became more graphic, replacing illustrations of rosy-cheeked infants with photos of bloodied fetal parts and decapitated fetal heads. One woman protester trailed Preterm staffers as they walked to one of the local lunch spots, yelling, "How did you get into this death business anyway?"

Usually, the staff disregarded the taunts, sailing by the picketers, noses pointed toward the clinic. Pretending that two or three protesters were invisible was easy; ignoring 500 protesters blocking the door to your office building was impossible.

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Preterm's telephone lines weren't supposed to open for another forty-five minutes, but Lin was already at her desk in the phone room. If the antiabortion warriors surrounded Preterm, the lines would open early and patients would call, anxious and scared. Lin hadn't thought twice about hopping into her Ford Escort at 4:30 that morning to drive the fifty-five miles from her home in Worcester to Brookline. After two years as a Preterm phone counselor, she knew that her voice could soothe the most desperate patient.

Lin was a large woman—"obese" was how she described herself—who was most comfortable in slacks and T-shirts and sneakers. The phone-room counselors, most of whom were either in college or fresh out of college, were "her kids." No matter how frantically busy she was, she would stop whatever she was doing to answer their questions. For the moment, though, she didn't have to worry about their questions since the other phone counselors wouldn't arrive for at least another half hour. The phone room was empty, save for herself and Ralph.

Ralph was the teddy bear Lin's twenty-four-year-old son had given her for protection. Last October, when Operation Rescue had threatened its first Massachusetts attack, her son had spent the night at Preterm with Lin and four other staffers who feared the rescuers would beat them to the clinic that Saturday morning. "You be there for your patients," he had told Lin. "And I'll be there for you." After all the false alarms, though, no one slept on the waiting-room couches anymore, and Lin's son no longer accompanied his mother. He had offered Ralph as his substitute.

Even without waking up on a clinic sofa to a battalion of men in blue standing guard outside in the dark, Lin was jumpy this morning. It was the lack of control that disturbed her, the lack of predictability. She'd feel better once Operation Rescue struck somewhere, preferably not Preterm. "I worry about my patients out there," she said. If only she knew what to expect, or at least how many protesters there'd be.

Outside on the front steps, Carolyn and a handful of staffers searched the passing traffic for Operation Rescue scouts—people as-

signed to scope out the preparedness of the clinics. Every time a car slowed down, Carolyn held her breath. A maroon sedan crept by, pulled a U-turn, parked briefly across the street, then sped away. "We're gonna be hit," mumbled a staffer. Carolyn returned inside to the phones, which rang with calls from the other clinics. It was 7:10 A.M. Nothing had happened anywhere.

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The sky was still dark and the mist still heavy as Sergeant Bill McDermott and his partner, George Driscoll, struggled to follow the caravan of cars that had just left Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Newton. The two Brookline detectives had arrived at the church in their unmarked cruiser at 5 A.M., early enough to count the cars streaming into the parking lot and watch the antiabortionists file into the church. Catholics were directed upstairs for mass. Protestants were led downstairs for a prayer service. Sipping coffee, the two cops had tried to estimate how many people would sit in front of an abortion clinic entrance later in the morning. Four hundred, McDermott thought, maybe more.

When Bill Cotter had created Operation Rescue: Boston, McDermott and Driscoll were assigned to gather intelligence on the local group and its affiliates around the country. At first glance, they seemed an unlikely team. A Vietnam vet with a penchant for stogies and horse racing, McDermott was a dark Irishman with the height and thick build of the football lineman he was in college. Driscoll, who at thirty-three was nearly ten years McDermott's junior, was slight and fair, a recent law school graduate who favored khakis and polo shirts. McDermott mumbled. Driscoll articulated. Their superiors thought that combining McDermott's experience as a detective and his solid rapport with the Boston Police Department (with which Brookline would have to work), and Driscoll's legal background might squelch the recent outbreak of civil disobedience. McDermott had the contacts and savvy to gather the necessary intelligence on the antiabortionists, while Driscoll would make sure that the Brookline police were handling the arrests properly in case Cotter and company filed claims of police brutality, as members of Operation Rescue were doing across the country.

It didn't take Driscoll and McDermott long to become familiar with Operation Rescue's shroud of secrecy, its policy that no one but the top two or three leaders knew the details on how and where the group

would attack. The detectives talked to police across the country who had dragged protesters from abortion clinic doors, shattered Kryptonite locks that held five, six, seven people together, and smashed 200-pound concrete slabs to which demonstrators were chained. They talked to Ann Baker, a former nun who had made a career out of tracing and analyzing antiabortion activity, and they talked to local clinic staffs, hoping to plot strategies to keep the clinics open and accessible for patients.

At first, Operation Rescue was a challenge, like any new case would be a challenge. It was fun trying to figure out where the group would hit, how the police should gear up. The detectives weren't afraid for their safety; Bill Cotter and friends were hardly the Black Panthers. It was more a matter of trying to think like the abortion foes, which required insight into their characters. In his nineteen years with the Brookline Police Department, McDermott had made a career out of studying his subjects, learning if they favored *lo mein* or *lasagna*, video games or pool. If he understood minor motivations, often it was easier to understand major motivations. But Cotter was an enigma. "Hi, Bill," McDermott would open. "Hi, Bill," Cotter would reply. Despite McDermott's questions, the conversation rarely went further, not even when the sergeant asked Cotter if he had a girlfriend. McDermott couldn't even get a permanent address out of Cotter. Sometimes he lived in Arlington, sometimes Boston, sometimes with his parents in western Massachusetts.

This morning, as the rescuers piled into their vans and station wagons to head to their destination, McDermott couldn't find Cotter in the church parking lot. He and Driscoll had hoped to follow Cotter's car. That way, they wouldn't be taken in by any decoy vehicles headed to nowhere—Rescue's tactic to confuse police. Instead, McDermott had spotted Darroline Firlit, Cotter's executive assistant. A plump woman with a broad, flat face framed by a fringe of bangs and long brown hair, Darroline was known to the cops as a trench fighter. She would do anything to save babies, including snatching fetal tissue from an abortion clinic. She had told reporters that she planned to keep it in her home until she could make proper funeral arrangements. With nearly twenty arrests for blockading clinics around the country on her record, Darroline would be headed to the heart of the action.

McDermott's gut told him that Brookline was the heart of the action for this rescue. Cotter and company read the papers. They knew that many Brookline residents were livid about the \$17,000 the town paid in police overtime every Saturday that Operation Rescue threatened a

blockade. If Rescue actually hit, which it had done once in November at Planned Parenthood and once in December at Repro, the price tag was even higher. Brookline was forced to shoulder the bill for the food the arrested protesters ate and the hours police devoted to fingerprinting, booking, and guarding the prisoners. If Rescue attacked Brookline this morning, the total cost to the town since last October could reach \$100,000. In Rescue logic, McDermott surmised, that meant victory. Even though the chairman of Brookline's Board of Selectmen had vowed that the town would pay whatever it cost to keep the clinics open, Rescue probably figured it could eventually push the town over the brink.

Now, as McDermott and Driscoll followed the caravan south onto the Massachusetts Turnpike, McDermott wondered if he'd been wrong. This was the route to Providence, Rhode Island. Then again, the rescuers could curl back toward Boston and Brookline. Cotter had amassed enough people to hit more than one clinic. Perhaps there was another group of rescuers that the two detectives had missed.

The river of cars veered off at the Allston-Brighton exit, then turned left onto Harvard Street, which led straight into Coolidge Corner.

"Brookline," McDermott said.

Driscoll radioed ahead to the police station, where seventy cops waited to know which clinic they would defend. None were happy to be there. Working a rescue meant either not going to sleep after the midnight shift, or rising before dawn to spend the morning standing around in the cold and lugging limp prisoners, as heavy and inert as bags of wet sand.

For some officers, rescues were more than physically torturous; they presented a conflict of the heart or the spirit. Antiabortion sympathizers on the police force were excused from the private details at the clinics during the week, but on Rescue Saturdays, every cop was expected to work. If some cops' sympathies rested with the rescuers, their professional obligation lay with protecting public safety. Their job was to keep the sidewalks clear and enforce the law, which meant helping women enter the clinic safely and keeping protesters at bay.

Both Driscoll and McDermott were raised Catholic. During their years as patrolmen, neither had refused a private detail at a clinic; abortion wasn't a major issue to either of them. If pressed, they would say that women had the right to decide whether or not to bear a child. When abortion returned to the public limelight, McDermott began listening carefully to discussions on the issue's complexities, but only when women spoke. At forty-one, he clearly remembered watching

the birth of his four children, and what having a baby meant to his wife. "When men start having babies, I'll listen to men," he said.

The rescuers parked in the Centre Street lot, which offered twice as many spaces as the entourage needed and was less than a football field away from *Repro Associates*. The troops could make a direct hit on *Repro*, or hop on the trolley and head anywhere. McDermott and Driscoll parked across the street and waved to Darroline, who waved back. She wore her battle clothes, McDermott noted—faded blue jeans, a tattered wool coat, heavy boots, nothing that would suffer when police dragged her across frozen pavement from the clinic entrance to the prisoners' bus. Bustling from rescuer to rescuer, Darroline directed her flock. "You go here," she barked. "You go here." McDermott thought she sounded more like a platoon leader than his platoon leaders in Vietnam.

Darroline took her place at the front of the train of people she had assembled, her lips drawn in a tight line. There were at least 100 people behind her, McDermott estimated, each one looking more ragged than the next. The crusaders for the unborn had taken their fashion cue from Darroline, outfitting themselves in worn ski parkas and patched pants, wool hats and thick mittens. Although the sky had brightened, the sun had yet to poke through the heavy cloud cover and the temperature hovered at freezing. Some of the rescuers shivered. It was only 7:30 A.M.; they would be a lot colder by the time their day was over, McDermott knew.

The brigade started marching, with McDermott and Driscoll pursuing by foot in the rear. Dressed in their own heavy outerwear—McDermott in a sweatshirt and nylon shell and Driscoll in a leather jacket—the two detectives almost blended in with the crowd. The giveaway was the walkie-talkie each detective carried. At the first rescue last October, they had tried to hide the radios underneath their coats as they followed the troops into a Boston subway station, but talking into their lapels muffled their message and was about as subtle as waving the device under Bill Cotter's nose. It didn't matter anyway. Police presence at rescues wasn't a secret; it was expected.

Out of the parking lot the army headed, across Beacon Street, and over the trolley tracks. McDermott looked around for more protesters. If all of those who met at the church earlier this morning intended to blockade a clinic, several hundred were missing. Were they on a trolley? In a second wave of cars? Would they hit *Repro* or another clinic? Most important, McDermott wondered, where the hell was Cotter?

He didn't have time to ponder Billy C.'s absence. The rescuers turned left, and one by one, knelt down before *Repro Associates*.

. . .

Sonia Lewis wondered what would await her at *Preterm* as she and her husband Edgar drove down Beacon Street. Would the steps be strewn with bodies and the sidewalk clogged with singing protesters? It was a raw day, even for March, a day made for lolling in bed, or reading spy novels. Who in their right mind would voluntarily stand outside for hours with the goal of spending the rest of the day in the Brookline police station?

Obviously quite a few, she noticed as they drove past *Repro*. Bobbing signs, singing antichoicers, chanting prochoicers, barricades, police—*Repro* had it all. *Preterm* had been saved again, she thought.

A little disappointed, a little relieved, she said good-bye to Edgar and slipped out of the car and into *Preterm*, unobstructed by the usual picketers begging her to quit her job. The only sidewalk activity was a young woman jogging by, her ponytail swinging. Sonia headed straight to her desk, the reception desk, the first stop for any *Preterm* patient.

Sonia couldn't work up much of a sweat about a Saturday rescue. In sixteen years at *Preterm*, she had seen and handled just about everything the antis could muster. Once, raising herself to her full five feet two inches, she had confronted a group of eight protesters who had snuck in *Preterm's* downstairs waiting room, the family room as Sonia called it, and passed out pamphlets explaining the dangers of abortion. "If you believe in Jesus Christ, this is murder," they had shouted.

"You're trespassing," Sonia told them, her head barely reaching one man's chest. "You'll have to leave."

They didn't, until the police arrived twenty minutes later.

When abortion foes had threatened to picket Sonia's home, she had stood on *Preterm's* front steps, dangling a piece of paper bearing the picketers' names and addresses, which she had found through tracing their license plates. "We all know where each other lives," Sonia had told them, smiling. Later, when one picketer had suggested that she remember the Holocaust, she threw a balled-up napkin at his nose. "You're nothing more than a bigot with a crew cut," she had said, and walked inside. "Isn't she beautiful," he muttered after her.

Sonia hadn't been flattered, even though she took great pride in her

appearance, rising at 4:45 A.M. to begin the makeup and hair routine so that she would be at work before seven o'clock. At fifty-seven, she wore her hair high and black and her nails long and sculpted. "She must have seven closets," Carolyn said frequently. "She never wears the same outfit twice." She did, but they always looked different, depending on her accessories, which were as abundant as her outfits. If she wore a gray dress, she wore gray earrings and gray shoes. If she wore a canary-and-black jumpsuit, she wore canary-and-black shoes and bracelets. Her ability to handle heels, two inches high on average, but often as tall as four inches, was a source of pride. "We used to jitterbug in these," she said pointing to her stilettos.

When the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, Sonia was forty years old and had spent the previous nineteen years driving her three children to Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts, to hockey practice and Hebrew School. She was the mother who brought orange slices to her kids' track meets and chaperoned the postprom parties. She had toyed with the idea of getting a job outside the home, but hadn't taken any firm steps until she heard on TV that Preterm needed older, experienced counselors. That was it. She knew what she wanted to do. She had heard too many stories of botched abortions, of teenagers traveling to New York to wait in grimy waiting rooms for doctors with dirty hands. She had to be a part of helping women exercise their new reproductive rights.

Her qualifications? It may sound corny, she had told her interviewer, but all of her kids' friends talked to her, sought her advice when they were in trouble. And although her last professional job had been screening movies with priests to determine if the films were too racy for Catholic Boston, she was hired. Jane Levin, Preterm's founder, saw in Sonia a wisdom, a natural ability to home in on the key issue. Sonia began as a counselor in the medical area upstairs, then later moved to the reception room downstairs, to be, as Carolyn called her, "the patient advocate." No one calmed frantic patients, or the frantic parents of patients, like Sonia could.

Sonia sipped her coffee and admitted some nine o'clock patients. "Good morning," Sonia said, flashing a bright grin to a young woman who clung to the hand of her boyfriend. "Why don't you sit here." Sonia patted the chair beside her desk. "And you can sit here," she told the boyfriend, pointing to another chair. Her face partially covered by a cloud of dark hair, the patient, whose name was Greta, nodded stiffly. This was her first abortion, she told Sonia, and she was nervous. Donald, her boyfriend, a beefy fellow in a dungaree jacket, sat stoically

across from Greta, his legs spread apart, his hands on his knees. Sonia passed Greta a medical chart, explaining the section that patients had to fill out. She didn't mention the possibility of a rescue disrupting the clinic's service; her instincts told her that the day would be quiet. If Rescue was going to hit Preterm, it would have arrived by now.

Down the hall, in the administrative waiting room, Carolyn and Fran sat at the two secretaries' desks. "We gear up and we're let down," Carolyn said, nibbling a piece of coffee cake. "In two weeks, they'll announce another rescue and we'll go through this all again." For the past forty-five minutes the phones had rung with Operation Rescue updates from staffers at the other clinics. The clinic staffs had always been friendly toward each other, but since the advent of Operation Rescue, the women (only a handful of men worked at the clinics, most of whom were either doctors, business managers, or handymen) at Gynecare and the Crittendon Hastings House in Boston and the three Brookline clinics had bonded into a united force. If one had information, the others soon knew it. On Saturdays of threatened rescues, the phone lines between the providers buzzed.

Shortly before eight o'clock, Preterm learned that Repro had been hit. Within half an hour, Leslie from Planned Parenthood called to say that the abortion foes had descended on her clinic in a second sweep. Bill Cotter, who was among the protesters littering Planned Parenthood's front stoop, had been arrested immediately. Most of the clinic's patients were in, she said, but could those who weren't come to Preterm? Planned Parenthood's entrance was still blockaded.

Greta had been scheduled for an abortion this morning at Repro, but when she and Donald spotted the mob in front of the Coolidge Corner clinic, they drove to the nearest phone booth to find another clinic in the telephone directory. On most days, Preterm's schedule was full and walk-ins were asked to return later in the week. Because of the threatened rescue, however, the phone counselors had booked fewer appointments for this Saturday, leaving some openings. Carolyn OK'd Greta, for she didn't envision that her staff would face any hurdles, or bodies, upon entering the building this morning. If the other two clinics have been blockaded, it was unlikely that Operation Rescue had the staff to hit Preterm, too.

"We are never," Carolyn said, "changing our bookings again."

Carolyn returned to her office to change from her high heels back into her sneakers. Since the "Chronicle" crew had left to film the rescue at Repro, she'd choose comfort over fashion. Another wasted morning.

"I'm really disappointed," Fran told Susan Newsom of Planned

Parenthood as they chatted on the phone, adding with a chuckle, "I wore makeup and everything today." She paused. "I . . ." another pause. "Omigod." She dropped the receiver.

"Lock the doors!" the policeman guarding the back door bellowed. "They're coming!"

From every direction, Operation Rescue soldiers raced toward Preterm's entrances. Women with babies. Teenagers in army jackets. Men in workboots. Fran sprinted to the back door, forgetting that Repro's secretary had been injured in December when the demonstrators pushed her behind the door she had tried to block. "Help me," she screamed. Preterm's bookkeeper, Sarah, ran to her aid as Carolyn tried to find the lock button on the fuse box.

"Why isn't that door locked?" the policeman barked.

"It's automatic," Carolyn yelled back. "It opens at eight o'clock." She found the switch and the door lock clicked shut.

Linking arms, the demonstrators jammed the doorways, the steps, and the sidewalks, shoulder to shoulder, five, six, seven deep. Their backs to the clinic, their faces to the street, those at the front entrance sang "Jesus Loves the Little Children," substituting "babies" for "children." At the back door, a leader shouted, "Fifty percent of women having abortions already have children. Isn't that sad?"

"Amen," a priest replied.

"Amen," the protesters echoed.

Sonia would remember for a long time the thud of bodies hitting the glass of the front doors. Swaying and singing, fifty or sixty protesters dammed the outside foyer, blocking out daylight. Sonia could see only the backs of their heads and coats, sometimes a profile when a protester turned slightly. All that separated her from them was a pane of glass, and although Sonia knew that the door was locked, it felt as if they would turn around at any minute and fling themselves into the clinic.

But she couldn't share her fears with the patients. She had to remain composed. Calm. Only three couples had arrived before the protesters had descended, a Hispanic couple, neither of whom spoke much English, a couple in their thirties, and Greta and Donald. In the family room, Sonia found Greta huddled close to her boyfriend, her hand clutching his knee. Both stared blankly at the television set, which blared Saturday morning cartoons.

"Can they get in?" Greta asked Sonia.

"No, you're safe," Sonia said gently, adding that this day, meaning the day of an abortion, was never easy, and she understood that a blockade intensified the trauma. Greta smiled weakly. The youngest

child of a close Italian family, Greta worried that the demonstration would lure television cameras, which might photograph her. Her Catholic parents would be appalled if they knew that their twenty-one-year-old daughter had an abortion. They hadn't yet recovered from learning that she lived with her boyfriend, a lobsterman. Greta placed her head on Donald's shoulder.

With as much of a reassuring smile as she could muster, Sonia left the couple and returned to the hallway where she took turns standing on a chair with other staffers. Teetering on her tiptoes, hoping that the chair beneath her was stable, Sonia peered over the heads of the protesters clogging the outside foyer. On the sidewalk below were lots of people, she noted, a good crowd, 100 or more. From her perch, it looked as if every other person in the crowd held a sign. Signs bearing photos of cherubic babies. Signs bearing photos of fetal remains. Signs saying "KEEP YOUR LAWS OFF MY UTERUS." The prochoice contingent must have arrived.

When Operation Rescue had first threatened to blockade Boston area clinics last fall, the local prochoice groups, such as Mass Choice and the Boston chapter of the National Organization for Women, had created an extensive phone tree. On the Saturdays of possible rescues, representatives of these groups monitored the antiabortionists' activities, and when Operation Rescue struck, the prochoicers ran to the phones. Each person they dialed called several other people on the phone tree, and those people called other people. Within an hour, the prochoicers were chanting en masse in front of the targeted clinic. On October 29, 1988—less than six months ago—more than two thousand abortion rights advocates had lined Beacon Street to intimidate Operation Rescue, which had promised a blockade that day. The prochoicers cried victory when they learned that the abortion foes had driven to a clinic in Providence, Rhode Island.

Now, as the chanting outside grew louder, Sonia knew that the prochoice forces were swelling. "Not the church, not the state, women must decide their fate," they yelled. "One, two, three, four, open up the clinic door." At times, it sounded more like a high-school pep rally than a war over crisis pregnancy.

Outside, the noise was deafening—not as bad as at rescues in New York City where the prochoicers blew whistles to drown out the abortion foes' hymn singing—but still annoying to the police. Lugging bodies from the steps to the awaiting police bus was almost easier than standing around; at least when they were busy, the cops could concentrate on something other than the competing chants.

Bill McDermott had stayed at Repro to oversee the final cleanup of the protesters there, sending his partner, who had helped direct the arrests at Planned Parenthood, to Preterm. The detectives' job was to determine who the leaders were of each of the attacks. From what McDermott and George Driscoll could figure, Darroline had been in charge of the Repro siege, and Bill Cotter had led his band of fifty or so to Planned Parenthood in a second wave. Probably 100 or more rescuers had bounced back and forth between the two clinics on the trolley before finally heading to Preterm for the third and final blockade. Constance Smith, the former nun, the third member of what George Driscoll called the "Holy Trinity" of Operation Rescue leadership, seemed to have organized the Preterm blitz. Before being arrested, Constance told a television reporter that she thought Rescue had saved some babies.

"This was their Super Bowl," Jeffrey Allen, the chairman of Brookline's Board of Selectmen, told reporters in front of Preterm, grinning smugly as he watched three policemen lift the dead weight of a limp protester. Repro and Planned Parenthood were open for business and the police were quickly sweeping away the protesters from Preterm's front foyer. By 10 A.M., less than an hour after Operation Rescue had arrived, prochoicers outnumbered the abortion foes two to one, and more women and men carrying the blue-and-white "STAND UP FOR CHOICE" signs continued to jump off the trolley. Bodies still clogged the entryway, preventing any patient or staffer from entering, but Allen said he was confident that Preterm soon would be open.

No one locked inside, though, felt confident that the clinic would ever open on this Saturday, and neither were the patients who called, confused and frantic. "How could you let them do this to you?" one patient cried.

"Where are you?" Lin said calmly, her voice almost a singsong. "Don't panic. Wait at the corner of Dean and Beacon and someone will escort you to the church. No, this doesn't mean that your appointment is canceled."

Telephone counselors had warned each patient who had scheduled for this Saturday that there might be a blockade, and that if the women saw a large group of people in front of Preterm, they should drive to the nearest phone booth and call the clinic for instructions on where they should go to wait out the siege. On this Saturday, Lin was the phone room's anchor, assisted by any of the other staffers, such as Fran, who had arrived early enough to be held captive. The patients who called were told to wait at the corner of Dean and Beacon streets, a few blocks

away from the clinic, and a clinic staffer would pick them up and drive them to the designated safe place: All Saints Episcopal Church.

Carolyn paced the hallway, the administrative offices, then the hallway again, furious that she was held hostage inside. It was like being in a submarine: No one could get in, and no one could get out. The poor man who had had an appointment with the dentist on the second floor earlier this morning couldn't leave the building. He just stood by the front door, staring at the backs of the protesters plastered against the glass.

In her most vivid dream of what a rescue would be, Carolyn had never imagined that she would lose control. Most of her staff was outside, arriving at their workplace after the abortion foes had descended. Her only means of communicating with her counselors, medical assistants, nurses, and doctors was by telephoning the church, where one of the nurses, Deb Andrews, and several counselors were stationed with the patients. When Carolyn looked out of her office window on the side of the building, she could see medical assistants clutching each other and crying, looking cold and befuddled. All she could do was hold a sign in the window that said "GO TO CHURCH."

The patients were scared, Deb told Carolyn. Deb, who had been a nurse at Preterm for nearly seven-and-a-half years, had volunteered to be in charge of the church because she wanted to be busy, and she was calm in a crisis. Patients couldn't tell who was prochoice and who was antichoice, she said. By the time they were escorted to the church, some were in tears, most were angry, all wondered if they would get their abortions. Counselors were calming those most upset, and someone was getting coffee.

To hold back the protesters at abortion demonstrations, the Brookline police had recently invested thousands of dollars in barricades. These looked like thick, metal bicycle racks. As Repro and Planned Parenthood were evacuated of protesters, the police loaded up the barricades that had surrounded those clinics and drove them to Preterm. But as the crowd ballooned with the arrival of abortion rights advocates, settling the barricades into two straight lines to create a pathway into the clinic was a struggle. In past demonstrations, the prochoice contingent had stood separate from their opposition, either off to the side or across the street on the median strip. Today, however, the prochoicers and antichoiceers blended into one mob, the prochoicers inching toward the clinic entrance as the abortion protesters, most of whom were either kneeling or lying on the ground, were hauled to the prisoner bus. At Planned Parenthood, two prochoicers had been

arrested for not cooperating with police orders to move away from the heart of the demonstration. If the two sides of the abortion war weren't separated, a riot would erupt, George Driscoll worried.

At Preterm, the possibility loomed dangerously near. Prolifers shoved prochoicers and prochoicers shoved proliferers as the police lowered the barricades into place. Once the barricades formed a long tunnel from the bottom of Preterm's steps out into Beacon Street, the protesters, prochoice and antichoice alike, began pushing to get to the edge of the metal dividers, as if their presence at the front would determine the demonstration's victor.

"Not a pretty crowd," Driscoll thought as he watched some prochoicers taunt the antichoiceers. On the whole, the prochoice contingent had cooperated willingly with the police, but as in any political or social movement, the abortion rights crusade harbored a few extremists. They didn't see the need for boundaries, George thought. The only rules were their rules. "They are no friends of the police," he thought. It was hard enough dealing with Operation Rescue without having to deal with the other side now, too.

George's attention veered to a two-year-old child strapped into a stroller parked in the middle of the demonstration. Weaving through people, he told the woman, who had come to pray in support of Operation Rescue, that if she didn't get the child away from the crowd, he would call the Department of Social Services. She moved the child. Another mother told a reporter for *The Boston Globe* that her three children were safe at this demonstration, that "God would protect them." George Driscoll wasn't so sure, and put in a call to the police station to have someone drive Cotter, who was being fingerprinted and booked, to Preterm to order his people to remove their children from the fracas. By the time Cotter arrived, most of the blockaders had been arrested, and the parents who had brought their children accepted their leader's order without question.

By 10:40 A.M., less than two hours after they had arrived, more than 100 rescuers had been dragged from Preterm's front foyer and steps into two police buses and carted to the station, where they would be fingerprinted, booked, and imprisoned if they refused to pay the fifteen-dollar bail, which they were encouraged by their leadership to do. On Monday, they would be arraigned in Brookline Municipal Court and released. Their trials would be later in the spring.

Once the police bus rolled out, calls and orders flew between the police, Carolyn, and Deb at the church. The police would soon open Preterm's front door, which meant that the patients and staff could

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finally enter. Inside the clinic, behind the front door, stood Sonia, Carolyn, Fran, and the handful of other staffers who had been held hostage, waiting for the police to open the door so they could get a clear view of the demonstration, or what was left of it.

Shortly before eleven o'clock, two policemen swung open the front doors. Three hundred abortion rights activists erupted in cheers and clapping. They were everywhere—congregated on either side of the barricades, spilling out onto Beacon Street, streaming down the sidewalk. Only a few Operation Rescue supporters remained near the building, most of whom were elderly women leaning against the barricades, praying fervently, rosary beads dangling from their clasped hands. Forty or fifty other abortion foes stood in clusters away from the prochoice demonstrators, pointedly avoiding contact with their opposition.

Across Beacon Street, a train of patients and staff, their arms linked in solidarity, wound its way toward the clinic. "Murderers!" someone from the antichoice crowd shouted. "You're killing your own children!"

"They're swimming in blood up there," wailed a woman in a red cape and waist-length gray hair, as she touched a huge crucifix that hung from her chin to her abdomen. Her face had been powdered deathly white.

Cheering on the train of patients and staff, a prochoice supporter pushed away a "PRO-CHOICE EQUALS PRO-DEATH" sign. The man holding the sign punched her in the face. The women en route to Preterm clung together, arm in arm, looking straight ahead. Some cried.

As the train neared the clinic, the crowd parted, tossing scarves and hats to shield the women's faces from newspaper photographers and television cameras. Once inside, the first patient in line slugged her boyfriend in the arm. "You would have to look straight at the camera," she snapped.

Their faces uncovered, many of the women burst into tears. "I am absolutely furious with those people," said one patient. "They were being threatening. They were trying to psychologically abuse us. They don't know what we're going through. They don't understand it's my choice, it's my body, it's my life."

And they never will, Carolyn knew. She and Fran stood by the doors, watching the thirty-six patients stream in as the crowd outside shouted "Choice! Choice!" Earlier in the morning, Carolyn had felt invulnerable, believing that Preterm could not be stopped by anything Operation Rescue dreamed up. Eager to experience a rescue, Carolyn

hadn't considered that there would be more attacks after today. Now even though the police had declared the rescue "a bust"—that the demonstrators hadn't prevented one woman from receiving an abortion—Carolyn was worried. Cotter had shut down business for two hours with less than an army of people. This wasn't the end of the war. This was just the beginning.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Opposition

OUTSIDE St. Agatha's Church circled a band of prochoice demonstrators wrapped in wool coats and scarves, their mittened hands holding signs bearing coat hangers slashed with a red line. No moonlight lit their vigil and a bitter wind blew. Bill Baird, one of the nation's most outspoken reproductive rights activists, responsible for bringing to the Supreme Court the case that ultimately made contraceptives available to single as well as married people, was among the chanting men and women. His head bent down against the cold, Baird trudged along, clutching a six-foot wooden cross, his symbol of women's fate if abortion became illegal once again.

The chance that the stream of people pouring into the church would attack Baird's abortion referral service in downtown Boston on Saturday morning for the March 4 regional rescue was unlikely; Operation Rescue was only interested in physically blockading women from having abortions, not in women wondering where to get one. But Baird didn't often miss an opportunity to protest when his opposition attracted press attention, and a pre-rescue rally such as this could lure cameras from every television station in Boston. A dark, stocky man, Baird told a reporter for *The Boston Herald* that this was "the first time people are meeting inside a church to conspire to deny women their constitutional right to abortion."

That wasn't exactly true. Pre-rescue rallies were a critical ingredient in Operation Rescue's strategy and were held before every major blockade. By firing up the assemblage with song, prayer, and preaching, Rescue's leaders hoped to inspire newcomers and veterans alike to

participate in the next rescue. Last October, hundreds of rescuers had met in a Baptist church the nights before they headed to Gynecare in Boston and to Women's Surgical Services in Providence, Rhode Island. "Baby Choice," a twenty-six-week-old fetus which traveled around the country in a casket to various Operation Rescue functions, laid in state at one of the autumn rallies, the subject of much scrutiny and many tears on the part of the hundreds of abortion foes who filed past her. Rescue's leaders insisted that Baby Choice was an aborted fetus that had been found in a dumpster outside of an abortion clinic on the West Coast. Abortion rights advocates claimed that Baby Choice was a stillborn donated to the abortion foes by a doctor sympathetic to their cause.

Wherever she came from, Baby Choice was nowhere in sight at this rally at St. Agatha's in East Milton, a suburb just a few highway exits south of Boston. No one, though, seemed to notice. The mood inside the Catholic church of heavy wood and dramatic stained-glass windows was festive. Individually and in clusters, the women and men, some carrying infants and toddlers squirming in their fuzzy sleepers, sauntered down the church's two aisles, nodding to acquaintances or stopping to quickly hug a friend before settling into a wooden pew. At the altar stood Bill Cotter, rocking back and forth, heel toe, heel toe, his hands clasped in front of him as he watched the pews fill with people. This was the largest turnout yet: between 500 and 600 potential rescuers would soon listen to Cotter's pleas to help stop the slaughter of innocent human lives. A TV camera crew paraded up and down the aisle, filming the faces in the crowd.

"It's good to be around so many people who think like I do, people who want to save the babies," a thin young woman with pale skin and curly brown hair whispered to the man beside her. The man nodded. He, like the woman, was in his late twenties, a small fellow with hands bearing the callouses and redness that come from working outdoors. His wife had been so furious that he had been arrested on October 29 for blockading the clinic in Rhode Island that she had made him promise not to participate in any more rescues. Rallies, she said reluctantly, were OK. "It's a miracle she let me come tonight," he said. "Praise God."

"Praise God," the woman next to him echoed.

It was nearly 7:30 P.M., a half hour past the designated starting time, when the guitar player began strumming the chords of the opening song. On cue, the congregation rose. "I've been redeemed . . ." the abortion foes sang. "I've been redeemed . . ." One person began to clap,

then another, and another. Soon, the clapping thundered over the voices. Those who didn't clap swayed with their arms stretched high toward heaven, eyes closed, mouths open in song. After the final chord, the congregation joined hands and bowed their heads. "Holy Spirit," the priest at the lectern began, "come upon us with power and might that we may hear and see Jesus."

"Yes, God, yes," hollered a voice in the crowd.

"Yes, sweet Jesus," boomed another.

So mesmerized in worship was one woman that she began speaking in tongues, in a language that sprang from her subconscious and erupted out of her mouth in sharp, clacking sounds. "Lord, Father, hear my cry," repeated another woman over and over. The priest asked that the congregation seek spiritual guidance and forgiveness for the years of inactivity, of letting child sacrifice continue unimpeded since 1973.

"Father, forgive us for being chickens, forgive us for being wimps," the priest prayed. "Lord Jesus, give us strength. We ask for power, peace, and love. Thank you, Lord, for not letting us stay home on Saturday or tempting us to go shopping. We must remember that we are killing if we remain silent."

Behind the priest, Bill Cotter waited for his turn to speak. Cotter's face had a white sheen almost the same color as the oxford shirt he wore underneath his gray suit—his only suit, Sergeant Bill McDermott had often joked. To the people before him, owning one suit wasn't an embarrassment but a source of pride, a symbol of sacrifice. Had Bill Cotter chosen to continue working as a software engineer in one of the big computer companies scattered around the Boston area, he would have earned enough money to buy ten suits. Instead, he had traded a healthy income for whatever Operation Rescue, which existed on donations, could afford to give him. To his followers, Bill Cotter had forsaken comfort for a greater cause. Their cause.

The first worship over, Bill Cotter walked briskly to the lectern. It wasn't time to delve into the tactical details of Saturday's blockade, of where to meet and what to do once the troops arrived at the designated clinic. That would come later, near the rally's end. Since much of Rescue's success depended on surprising the clinics and police, Cotter leaked only a little bit of information at a time. In the Operation Rescue: Boston newsletter mailed to more than 1,500 people, he listed the time and place of the pre-rescue rally. At the rally, he mentioned the meeting spot on Saturday morning. At the meeting spot, he would pass out maps to the targeted clinic.

But now his mission was to make each person in the audience feel so

deeply the immorality of killing society's most vulnerable members, the unborn, that all listening would be willing to participate in Saturday's rescue. Recruitment was key. The more people blockading, the longer the arrests would take, the longer the clinic would stay closed. Without numbers, rescues would fizzle.

"We are not doing anything illegal," Cotter told the people, his hands gripping the lectern's sides. "We are saving children and there isn't a Massachusetts law that says saving children is illegal."

Blockading clinics was justified under what Cotter called the "necessity defense." You wouldn't be penalized for trespassing into a burning building to save a child locked inside. Therefore, you shouldn't be punished for saving children whose mothers were walking them toward certain death. To Cotter and the rest of the abortion foes, life began the moment the egg and sperm met. Therefore, that life enjoyed the same right to exist as any living, breathing human. By preventing women from entering the clinic, and perhaps ultimately closing the clinic, the abortion foes were doing what was right. Even if man's law didn't recognize the justness of their action, God would, because under God's law, killing the unborn was a sin. "We are obeying a higher law," Cotter told his audience.

The crowd listened respectfully to his monotone as Cotter quoted the Massachusetts abortion law, reciting that abortion was defined as "the knowing destruction of the life of an unborn child," and that the unborn child was defined as "the individual human life in existence and developing from fertilization until birth." Throughout the pews, people shook their heads while others clucked their tongues in disgust. Cotter talked about the "killing rate," that 10,000 lives alone were lost at Preterm each year. His language was strong. Fetuses were babies or children. Abortion clinics were abortion mills or abortuaries or killing centers. Doctors who performed abortions were murderers.

Cotter applauded Rescue's efforts, claiming that soon the jails and courts would be so full of rescuers and their trials that the only solution would be to "outlaw abortion." The crowd cheered. Cotter accepted his applause with a nod, his expression grim as he retreated from the lectern to make room for another speaker.

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Bill Cotter first discovered his strong feelings about abortion during a debate on abortion's morality in a high-school social studies class. The

teenage Bill Cotter didn't understand why there was a controversy. Abortion was murder. Abortion was wrong. Aside from mailing occasional contributions to various antiabortion groups, however, Cotter was, in his own terms, an "armchair right-to-lifer" for well over a decade. It wasn't until after he walked in the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., in January 1983 to commemorate *Roe v. Wade's* tenth anniversary that he began picketing Boston-area abortion clinics. He would arrive at Preterm or Gynecare or Repro at six o'clock in the morning and leave three hours later for his job as a software programmer. On Saturdays, he often stayed until noon.

Occasionally, he tried a more aggressive approach. In 1985, he and eleven other protesters chained themselves to fixtures and equipment on Preterm's fourth floor. A few months later he and four others did the same at Repro Associates. That same year, he was arrested at Gynecare for trespassing and at a Planned Parenthood clinic in New Haven, Connecticut, for occupying an operating room.

"Abortion," he would say, "was killing babies and it was imperative that I had to do something."

To outsiders, there had to be a deeper reason, something personal that motivated Bill Cotter to invest so much energy in persuading women to continue their pregnancies. One prochoice woman who had infiltrated Operation Rescue said that Bill Cotter had a great need to suffer, to be a martyr. Some of the police wondered if Cotter's activism stemmed from a fear of women, that asking women to become mothers somehow made females less threatening. Yet there was little in Cotter's background—or in what anyone knew of Cotter's background—to draw definite conclusions. The oldest of three boys, Cotter grew up in a religious household, but he hadn't attended parochial schools. He'd lived at home while earning a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a master's degree in math from a technical college in nearby Worcester. Although former computer company colleagues had reported to prochoicers that Cotter had lectured them at work about the evils of abortion, Cotter hadn't seemed much different from any other electronics engineer.

The only event that raised eyebrows was the death of his middle brother over thirty years ago. At age one, the little boy had been run over by a train after he wandered onto some railroad tracks near a summer cottage where the Cotter family was vacationing. Bill Cotter said that his prolife activity had nothing to do with the tragedy, but others wondered if perhaps he felt guilty for living and therefore had to

sacrifice. Or perhaps he felt that all babies—whether zygotes, fetuses, or toddlers—were the same, and could come to no other conclusion: Abortion was murder and consequently must end.

Bill McDermott liked to play psychologist as much as anyone, but he wasn't sure that a sibling's death propelled Billy C. out of bed at 4 A.M. on Saturdays. McDermott believed that Cotter was motivated by one emotion and one emotion only: ego. "Wherever there's a TV camera, there's Bill Cotter," McDermott would say. Cotter had found a crusade that placed his face on the evening news, his name in *The Boston Globe*, and a crowd of followers who did as he bade.

When Cotter first heard about sit-ins being conducted in front of abortion clinics by a group called the Pro-Life Action Network (PLAN) out of Chicago, he wasn't sure that the idea would catch on. Was it possible to gather 100 people to blockade a clinic? It wasn't until 1986 when Cotter had actually witnessed sit-ins in Washington, D.C., St. Louis, and Pensacola, Florida, that he became a believer in what the antiabortion movement called "direct action." The sit-ins created enough confusion to give the sidewalk counselors more time to try to convince patients to find alternatives to abortion.

Direct action began in 1985, when a man named Joe Scheidler published the book *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*. Frustrated with the poor results of political lobbying, Scheidler instructed his followers to stop abortion by physically confronting clinic personnel through whatever means possible: picketing the homes of doctors, tying up telephone lines, or filing legal suits. Scheidler formed the Pro-Life Action Network and led "sit-ins" around the country.

In 1987 at the annual PLAN convention, Randall Terry, a used-car salesman from Binghamton, New York, introduced the idea of blockading multiple clinics in major cities with hundreds, even thousands, of people. Without action, Terry said, the United States was doomed: God would destroy a civilization that killed its children. Borrowing from the Biblical phrase "Rescue those being taken away to death" (Proverbs 24:11), Terry called the blockades "rescues." The way Terry saw it, the "rescues" would not only stop "childkilling" for the day, but also would lead to arrests that would overwhelm the police and the jails, as well as to trials that would overwhelm the courts. The politicians ultimately would cave in to taxpayers' pressure and abolish abortion. Rescues, he said, would produce the social tension necessary for political change. Terry compared his movement to that of civil rights, despite the fact that civil rights leaders, including the Reverend Jesse Jackson, had formally denied any similarity, arguing that Martin Lu-

ther King, Jr.'s goal had been to provide equal rights, not deny women their reproductive rights.

For the next year, Terry plotted. In November 1987 he conducted a dry-run rescue in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, where 211 people were arrested. The following May, he descended on New York City with his flock for a week of clinic blockades that led to more than 1,300 arrests. Rescues in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Jackson, Mississippi, followed, but Operation Rescue didn't hit the big time until the summer of 1988 when Terry led a convoy of three buses and twenty cars to the Atlanta Surgi-Center during the Democratic National Convention. Within ninety minutes the Atlanta police had arrested 134 protesters, using headlocks and vise grips, as television cameras captured the scene and replayed it to the nation. From July 19 through October, Terry and his followers blockaded Atlanta clinics relentlessly, securing themselves with Kryptonite locks to doorways and vehicles—doing anything they thought would delay arrest and, therefore, delay procedures.

Although many in the antiabortion movement, including the National Right to Life Committee, didn't condone the confrontations in front of the clinics, others found Operation Rescue the right movement at the right time. After sixteen years of trying to outlaw abortion through lobbying politicians and submitting bills, the antiabortionists had yet to gain much ground. For many, direct action—physically doing something to end abortion—seemed like a logical move.

Adding to the appeal was a new political tenor. For eight years the abortion foes had listened to President Ronald Reagan's promise to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and for eight years *Roe v. Wade* had stayed intact. When George Bush became President, however, hope surged. Complementing the Bush administration's desire to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was a new Supreme Court. While in office, Ronald Reagan had replaced retiring liberal Supreme Court justices with conservatives—Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, and Anthony Kennedy—creating a divided court on the abortion issue. Justice O'Connor held the pivotal vote. For the first time in sixteen years, the antiabortion forces felt that they could successfully challenge the constitutionality of the right to an abortion. Their first chance would be in April 1989, when the Supreme Court would hear *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, a case that challenged a Missouri law restricting abortion. If the Missouri law were upheld, all states, in effect, would be free to determine their own abortion regulations.

In response, Operation Rescue satellites began sprouting up in major cities across the country. In Boston, Bill Cotter merely blended

Operation Rescue with his existing group, a chapter of Scheidler's Chicago-based PLAN. Cotter took charge. He had the experience. Not only had he invaded clinics in Massachusetts, but he also had accompanied Terry to Cherry Hill and New York. Cotter hoped that Operation Rescue: Boston could be big, really big. He could have the support of very Catholic Boston to invade very liberal Brookline, home of the clinics responsible for nearly one-quarter of all New England abortions and home of other noted liberals, such as the Democratic nominee for President of the United States, Michael Dukakis, and Congressman Barney Frank, known for his quip, "To the right-to-lifers, life begins at conception and ends at birth." What better bait to lure hundreds of abortion foes to Beacon Street?

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Now, at St. Agatha's, a second priest, round and jolly, stood at the altar surveying the rows of faces, saying that the efforts of these soldiers of God to save babies would be rewarded, that "the line for heaven would be 'as long as a line at Bradlee's during a sale.'" When it was time for the offering, the priest asked those soldiers to "dig deep."

"If you dig for ten dollars, go for twenty dollars," he said. "If you grab for twenty dollars, get fifty dollars." Pocketbooks clicked open. Men flipped through wallets. Children plunked dimes into the plastic buckets being passed from hand to hand.

It was a heady time for many in St. Agatha's sanctuary. In Rescue they had found a family of like-minded souls, people who believed as they did. For many, abortion represented not only an insult to their church's teachings on the sanctity of human life but it also posed a challenge to traditional family values, the core of their belief system. Abortion became symbolic of modern society's social evils: premarital sex, promiscuity, divorce. If women could kill their own children, any kind of hell was possible. Although there was no party platform on birth control, Rescue's creator, Randall Terry, believed that contraception interfered with God's plan; that if a couple didn't want to procreate, then they shouldn't recreate in bed.

Antiabortion observers claimed that Operation Rescue was filled with women who had raised a herd of children and felt that women choosing against motherhood made a mockery of their lives. Others argued that Rescue comprised large numbers of men in their twenties and thirties who had not fared well in the past decade. Jobs that would have been theirs twenty years before had gone to women. The affluence

of the 1980s had evaded them, and they found themselves earning significantly less than their fathers. They couldn't afford to buy their own homes, and if they could, their wives often had to work to help pay the mortgage. Preying on others, such as women entering abortion clinics, made them feel masterful, especially since they could claim that they were protecting the ultimate in vulnerability: the innocent unborn child.

Yet those who comprised the bulk of Operation Rescue: Boston could not be so easily stereotyped. Among the crowd in St. Agatha's sat bank auditors and brick masons, professional fund-raisers and waitresses. Their only common denominator was their drive, for whatever reason, to end legalized abortion.

In one pew sat Fred Pulsifer, a retired janitor for the city of Melrose, a Boston suburb. Catholic, he said that a woman in his church had convinced him to help "save the babies" six years ago. Ever since, he had stood in front of Repro and Preterm in rain and sleet and blazing sun, holding plastic fetuses in his palm, slyly hiding the miniature dolls when the police detail watched him. He wore his gray hair in a wiffle cut and smiled only enough to expose his front two teeth. Fred had added to his signature the initials SLE, which stood for "Sanctity of Life Effort." He hoped that whoever saw the initials (a supermarket clerk, for instance) would ask their meaning, giving him the opportunity to regale them with talk about his work to end abortion and to hand out antiabortion literature. Fred didn't have any children of his own and had never married. He participated in Operation Rescue, he said, because he believed that abortion was murder and therefore he should act as if it's murder.

On Friday mornings, Fred usually could be found in front of Preterm accompanied by two women: Jean and her best friend, Alice. Jean was blonde and Alice was brunette and often they wore matching pink Reebok sneakers. Long before they joined Operation Rescue, the two women had picketed abortion clinics, hospitals that performed abortions, and even porn shops. Jean was inspired to become active five years ago after the death of her parish priest, who had been deeply involved in the prolife movement. Although Jean worked as a teacher's aide for disabled children and had a twenty-three-year-old son with Down's syndrome, she didn't credit her experience with the physically challenged for her motivation. Instead, she said that humans were responsible for one another, and that the unborn needed protection.

Alice had started picketing five years ago after she had seen photos of babies dismembered by abortion. Since her three children were grown

and she didn't work outside of the home, she was free in the mornings to try to talk women out of their abortions. She sent away for a lapel button showing a pair of tiny feet, which represented the feet of a ten-week fetus, and wore it everywhere. She believed it was insanity to give a mother the choice of which child to kill. When she discovered that her neighbor's teenage foster child was pregnant, she brought the girl to a prolife doctor and asked the girl to move in with her own family for the duration of her pregnancy. Now, five years later, the "baby" was entering kindergarten. The mother, said Alice, had her "ups and downs" as a single parent.

To Alice and Jean and their prolife peers, there were no good reasons to abort a pregnancy. If the pregnancy resulted from a rape, why should the innocent fetus be a second victim of violence? The same theory held true for incest. If the woman's husband or boyfriend had left her, God would provide and help her through single parenthood. The abortion foes often labeled women who said that they didn't have the money to raise a child as being "selfish." "We are a generation of hedonists," wrote one minister involved in Rescue. "We want comfort. We want more money to buy ourselves more comfort." "Everyone wants the best car, the best boyfriend," Alice would say. And even if the pregnant woman were truly impoverished, giving the child up for adoption was an alternative.

To patients entering the clinics, both Jean and Alice passed brochures listing options to abortion. Most of their resources were referrals to public agencies, such as Medicaid, designed to offer medical or financial assistance. Some of their literature included names of group homes for unwed pregnant women, but beds there were in short supply. The prolife organizations were always on the lookout for people who would take in indigent pregnant women.

Some of the women within Rescue claimed that their motivation stemmed from the horror that had followed their own abortions. Constance Smith, who was Rescue:Boston's executive director, had traveled to New York twenty years earlier at age nineteen to end her pregnancy. Five years of hell had followed, she would say: five years of drinking and smoking pot and feeling as if there were a cavern where her heart had once been. She didn't feel whole again until she moved from Pennsylvania to San Francisco, where she joined a religious order she described as right of Roman Catholicism. Born Catholic and raised Methodist, Constance took vows of purity, poverty, humility, obedience, and service when she became a sister in her new church.

For the next ten years, Constance bounced from city to city, coast to

coast, answering crisis lines for abused women and children and working in soup kitchens. In 1985, she decided to enter the Third Order of her church, which meant she could live on her own, perhaps marry, and not relay her every move to her church superiors. She moved to Boston and instead of opening a shelter for unwed mothers (a dream she said she had harbored ever since realizing that she had “killed her own child”), she joined a group called Sanctity for Life. For income, she became a nanny for a wealthy Boston family. For spiritual fulfillment, she stood in front of Gynecare, asking abortion patients to reconsider their decision; telling them that they didn’t know the desperation they would feel afterward.

Three years later, in 1988, she met Bill Cotter, whose PLAN booth was set up next to Constance’s Sanctity of Life booth at a Christian conference in Boston. Constance thought that her sidewalk counseling would become more effective under Cotter’s tutelage, and she joined PLAN. Tall and slender with waist-length brown hair, Constance soon became as much a presence as Cotter in front of the clinics. When Cotter started Operation Rescue:Boston, Constance was at his side. She didn’t like the physical part of rescues—of being dragged into a police van and sleeping on police-station floors—and she abhorred the feeling of incarceration, but if she could save one baby, one life, by blocking, she said that her sacrifice was worthwhile.

Bill McDermott believed that Constance was genuinely motivated by her religion and feelings of right and wrong. The sergeant’s sources within Rescue adored her. She was gentle and good, a crusader for the underdog. At St. Agatha’s, rescuers and would-be rescuers beamed at Constance as she sailed up and down the aisles, smiling broadly, spending only a few minutes at the microphone to praise those in the sanctuary for their dedication to saving children.

Darroline Firlit was not as visible at St. Agatha’s, or at any rally for that matter, as were Constance and Bill Cotter. Darroline’s strength lay in strategizing the rescues, not socializing with the followers. She would nod to friends in the crowd, maybe even embrace a few, but for the most part, Darroline stood to the side, counting heads and analyzing. Always analyzing. Out of Rescue’s three leaders, Darroline came across as being the toughest and the most determined. “How many people would stand by if the Supreme Court said all teenagers should be killed?” she would say when justifying her more than twenty arrests from Atlanta to Brookline.

Darroline claimed that she first realized that abortion was evil after she had encouraged a friend of hers to end a pregnancy. The year was

1975, her friend had five children and an alcoholic husband, and Darroline thought that a new baby would be too much for her friend to handle. Darroline said that she had escorted the woman to a Planned Parenthood clinic in East Providence, Rhode Island, where her friend aborted a twenty-two-week-old fetus. Two months after the abortion, the friend tried to commit suicide, later telling Darroline that she hated her for talking her into killing her baby. The next time Darroline faced a woman bearing a crisis pregnancy, she steered the woman to a prolife organization. She became an ordained minister through correspondence courses and soon began preaching to prostitutes, taking pregnant hookers home with her to make sure that they didn't abort. At one point, seventeen women lived in Darroline's home with Darroline, her husband, and two daughters. Her work brought her in touch with Massachusetts Citizens for Life, which put her in touch with Bill Cotter. Like Constance, when Cotter began Operation Rescue:Boston, Darroline was ready.

A powerful story, to be sure, except that there had never been a Planned Parenthood in East Providence. Planned Parenthood had a clinic in Providence, a separate city, but abortions there were performed only up to twelve weeks.

Darroline's critics might have been able to shrug off these mistaken details as oversights or as mere exaggerations. But there were so many exaggerations in Darroline's self-described history that it was difficult to discern fact from fiction.

Darroline, now thirty-five, said that her motivation sprang from her belief in doing God's work, that she had seen His power when he rescued her from drug addiction. Cocaine, angel dust, heroin—you name it, she would say, she tried it. Darroline said that she had begun experimenting with drugs at age sixteen, about the time she dropped out of high school. The oldest child of a military family, Darroline had moved constantly throughout her youth, falling so far behind in her studies that instead of repeating a year, she left school to sew shoulder seams at a shirt factory near Fall River, a faded mill town in southern Massachusetts where her mother had grown up and where her grandparents still lived. She met Ernie Firlit, who was three years her senior, at the company Christmas party, and married him the following July. She was seventeen. Thirteen months later their first daughter was born, but since Ernie was in the Army and stationed in Germany, Darroline had to learn motherhood by herself. Despite her heavy drug use, Darroline claimed that her pregnancy was healthy and that she was a good mother. Shortly after Ernie returned home from Germany

later that year, Darroline and Ernie were invited by Darroline's drug dealer, who had been Born Again, to attend a service at a Fundamentalist church. During the service, Darroline felt God talking to her through the minister. Ernie, too, felt the power. Together, the Firlits walked out of the church ready to serve God.

McDermott didn't buy the drug story. A former woman convict he had talked to had known Darroline in her early Fall River days. Darroline had been a heavy drinker, the woman said, and if she had used drugs, they were probably prescription, not heroin or cocaine. Darroline said that her arms were free of track marks because she had shot under her tongue and in her groin, but McDermott knew from his years of work on the streets that addicts chose those spots only after all the other veins had been used up.

Nonetheless, if put through a lie-detector test, Darroline would pass, Bill McDermott claimed. She had told her story so many times that even she believed it. And it was a good story to tell the public, McDermott would say—the woman who crawled from the gutter of heroin addiction, the worst of all evils, to save babies. Darroline had found a cause that gave her a title and an office and reporters calling her for quotes. Without that cause, McDermott wondered, what would Darroline have?

Besides whether or not she were telling the truth didn't really matter. Her people believed her, admired her, were inspired by her dedication. The fact that Darroline had taken fetal remains from an abortion clinic to give "the children" a proper funeral was more important than how she had taken the fetal remains. Darroline claimed she had found "the children" in jars in a clinic dumpster. The clinic staffers, however, had noticed that the remains—or products of conception as they were called—were missing from the vault outside from which the medical laboratory picked up the tissue. Darroline said that she would bury the seven "children" in a cemetery with a gravestone after her husband had built each of them a casket.

Of one fact McDermott was sure: Darroline was a force within Rescue to be reckoned with. McDermott wasn't certain how far Cotter would go for the cause, but the detective believed that Darroline had no limits.

. . .

"We are nonviolent," Bill Cotter told the congregation at St. Agatha's. He was back at the lecturn, this time to explain the details of a rescue.

At a rescue last fall, someone had grabbed the patient list from the hands of a clinic staffer. That behavior, Cotter said, would not be tolerated.

He explained that you could be a prayer supporter and stand to the side and pray without fear of arrest, or you could be a rescuer, laying your body down in front of the clinic. Preferably, all would blockade; what better way to prevent murder than 500 or more bodies crushed together in front of the closed clinic doors? Cotter also encouraged those who were arrested not to give their identity or pay bail: A weekend in jail was a small sacrifice to make for proving their sincerity to the public. On Monday they would be arraigned in court, where they would demand jury trials—another effort to clog the system.

To prepare for the rescue, both rescuers and prayer supporters were advised to drink no liquids to avoid the need for a bathroom during the demonstration. They should dress for extreme cold in durable clothing and they should bring no identification if they planned to risk arrest. Signs would be provided and umbrellas were discouraged; they dripped on your neighbor.

Obedience was the key. Operation Rescue boasted a pyramidal military structure with Cotter at the top, Darroline and Constance beneath him, and a handful of marshals who would orchestrate the actual blockade, telling people where to go. The masses who formed the pyramid's base were expected to obey the marshals, who would obey the leaders. A blockade was no time to question authority.

At the rescue site, Cotter told his audience either to pray and sing or to be quiet. Do not talk with the opposition; ignore their taunts. Do not speak to the women seeking abortions. The sidewalk counselors would talk to them. If struck by a member of the opposition, react passively and wait for a police officer or marshal to intervene. If the police remove you from the blockade, crawl under a barricade or around the police to get back to the entrance. The longer it takes the police to round up the demonstrators, the longer the clinic would be closed, and the more babies would be saved. At the police station, wait for direction from the leaders before you begin the fingerprinting and booking process. Those arrested must work as a group, not as individuals.

The rescuers were to meet at Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Newton at six o'clock Saturday morning. A mass would be held for Catholics upstairs, and a prayer service for Protestants downstairs. From there, maps would be disseminated and the rescue would begin. Cars should boast full gas tanks, although the rescue may be less than five miles from the church.

“How many of you have been arrested?” Cotter asked the audience. Hands shot up throughout the sanctuary. Cotter invited the veterans to stand at the altar. More than 150 men and women slid out of the pews and marched to the altar, as proud as graduates parading to the podium to receive their diplomas. The crowd clapped and cheered.

Heads bowed, the congregation uttered its final prayer. When the abortion foes emerged from the church at 9:45 P.M., the sidewalk was empty, clear of Bill Baird and other prochoice obstacles.

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Forty-eight hours later, 227 people had been arrested for disorderly conduct at demonstrations in front of Brookline's three abortion clinics. One hundred and seventy-two of the arrested refused to give identification and post bail. More than fifty women spent the next two nights on the floor of the Lynch Recreation Center while their male counterparts slept on the cement floor of the Brookline Police Station's garage. To fumigate the stench of the rescuers' two-day-old clothes and unbathed bodies, the police kept the garage door slightly open, letting in the cold March air. When the high-school cafeteria ran out of supplies for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, the police fed the prisoners hamburgers from McDonald's. On Monday morning, looking gray and tired and rumped, the arrested stood before a judge in Brookline Municipal Court to hear their charges and to demand a jury trial for each and every one.

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