

Voices for Choice

by Canadians for Choice



VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1

SPECIAL EDITION

JANUARY 28, 2008

Why is a pro-choice Canada so important?

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Morgentaler Decision, Canadians for Choice asked the citizens of our country to share their thoughts about why it is important to maintain a pro-choice Canada. While we received many passionate entries, all of which will be included in a Book of Choice, it was the emotion and dedication in Peggy Cooke's submission from Fredericton, New Brunswick that stood out as being a great example of what it really means to be a pro-choice Canadian 20 years after the decriminalization of abortion. To the question "Why is a pro-choice Canada so important?" Ms. Cooke writes:

Every Tuesday morning, I get up early. I walk fifteen minutes to the abortion clinic. I go in, say hello to any of the staff that I see, put on my blue pinney, and go outside to wait for the first patients of the day.

I am a volunteer patient escort at the Fredericton Morgentaler Clinic. My job consists of making sure that women come into the clinic safely and are protected from the harassment and intimidation of the protesters who wait outside each week. The protesters (there are usually between ten and twelve) carry signs and sometimes graphic posters, and they try to lure the women into their "crisis pregnancy centre" next door. Most of the protesters are middle-aged men, and three of them are priests. Sometimes they carry rosaries. Sometimes they call out to the women, in judgment and in plea, and other times they walk silently. Either way, their presence is an act of violence against women and their main goal is to shame women into giving up control of their own bodies.

Everyone knows the ins and outs of the abortion debate. What people do not know is how much is being robbed from us already, outside of the right to choose whether or not to continue a pregnancy. Before someone very close to me started working at the clinic, I did not know that escorts were even necessary. I did not know that every Tuesday (the day that abortions are performed), upwards of ten protesters stand outside the clinic and harass the women on their way in. I did not know that the house next door to the clinic was owned by these protesters and is used as one of the infamous "crisis pregnancy centres" that are springing up across the country. I did not know that New Brunswick is violating the Canada Health Act by forcing women to seek the approval of a doctor and a gynaecologist in order to have a publicly funded abortion. I did not know that the focus on birth control in the province of New Brunswick was declining and that when the Planned Parenthood Fredericton shut its doors last year due to a lack of funding and a lack of doctors, a woman over 21 without a family doctor had nowhere she could go in the city for a pap test. Since I am no longer a student and have no doctor, I have to go to the after hours clinic to get a prescription for birth control. Since I have no insurance, I pay twenty dollars a month for the pill. I was shocked when I discovered all of this. It was as if I had traveled backwards in time. I no longer live in Fredericton. I live in the 1950's. (Continued ...)



Peggy Cooke, 23, Fredericton, NB

Introducing... Peggy Cooke! Peggy was born in Halifax and now resides in Fredericton. She has recently completed her Bachelor of Philosophy in Leadership at the University of New Brunswick. She has been a volunteer escort at the Fredericton Morgentaler Clinic for almost a year and has recently started working there as an office assistant. She is a passionate feminist and a strong advocate for choice. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, amateur photography, and spending time with her friends and cats.

Check out Peggy's personal blog of her experiences as a clinic escort at: <http://antichoiceantiawesome.blogspot.com>



www.canadiansforchoice.ca

"A pro-choice Canada is important because any other Canada is unacceptable."
-P. Cooke

These things disgust me. How can women be so abused by the system when all this time we thought we were living in an enlightened society? No woman, faced with an unplanned pregnancy, should have to go through the ordeal of finding a doctor who will give her a referral (hard enough in this anti-choice province), then a gynaecologist before maybe being put on a waiting list so that she can have what will probably end up being a second-trimester abortion. The other choice for her is to pay out of pocket and run the gamut of protesters at the private clinic. No woman should have her choices about her own body questioned in such a way. As long as there is still one woman facing that kind of patriarchal judgment in order to have an abortion, we do not live in a pro-choice Canada.

There is some irony in the fact that the same people who systematically create hurdles for women seeking abortions also work at the other end of the spectrum to obstruct these women from preventing pregnancy in the first place. I have two close friends whose

doctors will not even give them pap tests because it goes against the doctor's religious beliefs. If your doctor will not give you a pap test, good luck getting a prescription for birth control! And even if you do

manage that, there are plenty of pharmacists (a growing number, it seems) who will not fill that prescription on moral grounds. It seems the only solution is to not have sex. Forget making choices about your own sexuality. But that's just the ladies, of course - men are still free to do what they like with their penises, including committing at least fourteen unreported rapes a year on the University of New Brunswick campus alone. I hope you're not thinking of terminating that rape pregnancy, by the way. That would be immoral.

Because abortion is legal in Canada, we believe we have a pro-choice Canada. But we don't. Because pro-choice means that everyone has access to abortion care. Pro-choice means everyone has access to affordable birth control. Pro-choice means everyone has the information at their fingertips to allow them to make informed, responsible choices about their reproductive health. Pro-choice means that every woman is treated with respect regardless of her colour, size, age, background, sexuality, financial means or relationship status. Pro-choice means every woman has the right to choose; and that does not just mean abortion. It is about giving women the benefit of the doubt and believing that we have the intelligence and the wisdom to make the right choices for ourselves.

This is why I put on my blue pinney every Tuesday morning: because I believe that women deserve to be able to come in and access a legal medical service without being harassed or judged. I believe every woman deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. And I believe that every woman has the right to choose what to do with her own body - to choose to have sex, to choose not to have sex, to choose her preferred method of birth control, and to choose if and when she will reproduce. Her body, her choice; and that doesn't just mean abortion.

A pro-choice Canada is important because any other Canada is unacceptable. A pro-choice Canada is the only Canada I want to live in. And as a valuable, contributing member of society and as a woman, a pro-choice Canada is important to me because that is the Canada that I deserve.



Fredericton Morgentaler Clinic, Fredericton, NB.
Note: the white house next to the clinic is the headquarters for the anti-abortion organisation that leads protests of the clinic.

What is Canadians for Choice?

Canadians for Choice is a national, non-profit pro-choice charitable organisation that, through research and education, is dedicated to ensuring that all Canadians are well-informed about all aspects of their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

To receive editions of *Voices for Choice* electronically, to make a donation to *Canadians for Choice* or to find out more about the organisation, please contact:

**300-260 Dalhousie St.
Ottawa, ON K1N 7E4
Tel: 613-789-9958
Fax: 613-789-9960
Email: info@canadiansforchoice.ca
www.canadiansforchoice.ca**