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Will poor lose right to choose?

Suppose your daughter is 14, unwed and pregnant.

She has three options: to give birth and raise the child, to give birth and allow the child to be adopted, and to have an abortion.

The choices are not easy. Raising a child while still a teen-ager is difficult at best. The decision to give up a child for adoption is a decision that can haunt unwed mothers all their lives.

The moral and psychological effects of undergoing an abortion face every woman who makes that choice.

As a parent, you attempt to support your daughter, to help her make the best decision. Some parents even assume the responsibilities of raising their grandchildren.

But whatever decision is reached is the mother's.

SUPPOSE, however, that your daughter is 14, unwed and pregnant, and you are raising her with a monthly check from the Department of Social Services.

Your check allows no room for medical expenses; but Medicaid pays for most of those bills.

Your daughter, perhaps guided by you, decides to have an abortion.

You turn to the Department of Social Services to pay the bill, but a social worker tells you that the state Legislature has banned funding of abortions.

Your daughter no longer has three options; she has two, unless her parent can come up with the money to pay for an abortion.

AN UNWED pregnant teen-ager in the suburbs, as well as most pregnant women living in these suburbs, has the financial means to pay for an abortion if she decides to make that choice.

But this week, the state Legislature will vote on whether or not to take away that right from a specific group of pregnant women.

Abortion foes argue that the pregnant woman still has that option; that she can determine her priorities and come up with the money to pay for an abortion if she so desires.

Abortion foes argue, and the majority of state Legislators agreed last month, that it is immoral for the state to pay for abortions, despite the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling that legalized abortions.

Governor Milliken vetoed the legislation once again. Legislators need a two-thirds majority to override his veto this week before the session ends.

The bill would prohibit state funding of abortions except when the mother's life is in danger.

In other words, abortion will become legal only for those who can pay for one.

IT'S EASY to cite the arguments against this kind of thinking: It's discriminatory; it's the imposition of moral views on others; it's even fiscally unsound. The cost to the state of raising a child is hundreds of times that of an abortion.

Abortion foes have their own arguments. Basically, they believe that abortion is immoral, that the right to life is sacred, that they do not want the state paying for what they consider is an immoral act.

You might say they're trying to legislate morality, but abortion foes do not believe that the decision to give birth is the mother's alone. They're concerned about the unborn child.

It's a valid concern, but one that doesn't hold up when you consider just some of the children who will be born to mothers who wanted an abortion but couldn't afford to get one:

A heroin-addicted child born to an addict.

A child born to a mentally retarded 12-year-old without the means to have pre- or post-natal care.

A child born to a 45-year-old woman, with four or five children in her teens, all supported by state welfare.

Abortion foes argue that woman who want abortions should have thought about the consequences before they had intercourse.

That's the same kind of thing suburban fathers and mothers tell their unwed, pregnant daughter. But then, if they choose, they can write out a check to rectify her error.

IF THE right-to-lifers succeed in imposing their views on the poor, they will be the only ones who will lose the right to control their bodies.

When asked about whether it was discriminatory to deny legal abortion to the poor, State Sen. Robert Geake said: "Just because it's legal doesn't make it right."

Perhaps he, as well as other legislators who intend to override Milliken's veto, should remember that just because abortions were illegal didn't prevent them from happening.

Those who can afford it have rarely been denied an abortion. They simply found a doctor who was willing to do it for a price.

If the state Legislators succeed in overriding Milliken's veto, things will be pretty much where they were when I was a teen-ager — except that at that time, before abortions were legalized, even the daughter of wealthy parents could die from a self-induced abortion, or a botched job.

If abortion foes win this round, they can be comforted with the thought that we will have to hear and read only about the poor dying in emergency rooms because they didn't have the money to pay for the abortion they were determined to have.

And only the destitute victims of rapists will be forced to bring another unwanted child into the world.

Silent night: *Choppers murmur 'round yon battle zone*

The gaunt soldier sat alone looking into the silent night.

In front of him was a small artificial Christmas tree, unlit and decorated with a solitary elf-like figure.

Darkness, deep and rich, permeated the area. Only the distant stars and scattered candles around the encampment helped outline the silhouettes of bunkers and machine guns.

Lighted candles in combat zones usually were forbidden. But tonight was different. It was Christmas 1968. Cease fire had been declared in Vietnam.

The familiar combat sounds were absent — cacophonies of artillery thundering through the palms; bursting flares eerily lighting the sky; automatic weapons clattering in the distance; and helicopters purring through the tropical night.

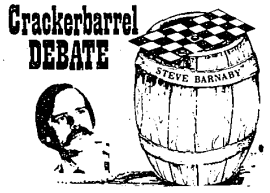
All that could be heard were the hushed tones of soldiers gathered in a small group.

The lone soldier, the one in front of the Christmas tree, found the silence disconcerting. For many months he had listened, day after endless day, to the unceasing rumble of combat.

It had become the ordinary. The near-silence was deafening.

After a time, he stood up and walked over to the group, deserting his lonesome vigil.

"Gotta cigarette?" he asked routinely.



THE ACNE-SCARRED kid from Chicago reached into his fatigue shirt pocket and pulled out a wrinkled pack of Ruby Queens, a French brand of cigarettes which combat soldiers smoked as a matter of status.

"Didn't think I'd see a Christmas tree this year," he said, in a vain attempt at humor.

"Ya, I know. I've been carrying that damn thing around on my back for two weeks. What the hell, anything after 40 pounds doesn't matter, anyhow."

Smiles creased the weary soldiers' faces, then the silence returned. They gazed into the night, alone in their thoughts — about home and what the future held for them.

For some of them there wouldn't be any future. But all of them, on this night of cease fire, believed differently.

"Say, this is sort of stupid, just standing here. Let's celebrate," said the Wisconsin soldier.

They walked over to the boxes stacked up next to one of the bunkers and grabbed cans of warm beer.

"Let's get some food together and have a Christmas feast," said one.

"Sure, why not?" said another. "Might as well."

C-ration cans of ham and lima beans, white bread and jelly, were thrown into a pile next to the Christmas tree.

"Well, it ain't turkey and ham. But it beats starving."

A THREAD OF joviality bound together the diverse group as they heated up their holiday repast over wads of C4, a plastic explosive. Regulations prohibited wasting the valuable explosive for such use. But on this night sergeants and officers would turn their backs.

For a while the soldiers laughed and told stories as they stuffed their bellies and became drunk on the warm beer. But soon they fell quiet again, each staring into the small Christmas tree decorated with the solitary elf-like figure.

The next morning, as the sun crept over the horizon, the soldiers were awakened. In the distance could be heard the helicopters, engines purring, coming to cart them away to another day of battle.

the stroller

W.W. Edgar

Harbor fight slips 'neath sea of time

It doesn't seem possible that 39 years have slipped by since that Sunday afternoon when The Stroller was rudely interrupted by his neighbors while giving the utility-room floor a coat of red rubber paint.

They came to the door and yelled, " Have you got your radio turned on?"

This seemed a rather peculiar question to ask early on an otherwise quiet Sunday. And when The Stroller confessed that the radio was in another room and turned off, the neighbors, Jim and Martha Ryder, shouted:

"The Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor. They already have sunk several of our best battleships and it looks as though they'll ruin most of the our Navy over there."

For a moment or two The Stroller and the lady who runs our house just listened in dismay. Then the thought came that maybe it was some bit of trickery on a radio show.

But the neighbors would have none of it and the paint job was set aside while we went into the living room and turned on the radio (there was no television in those days) and we just couldn't believe what we were hearing.

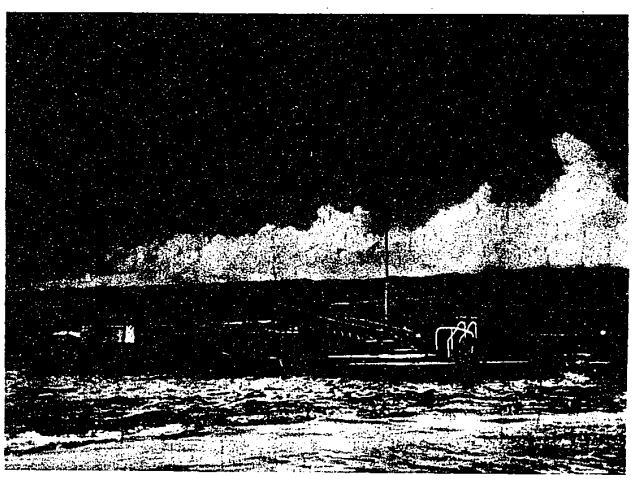
It seemed as though the world was coming to an end as one commentator after another told the tale of the worst destruction of warships in our history.

All afternoon long and late into the evening, the almost unbelievable news came over the air waves.

Early the next morning we sat at the breakfast table to get the latest news.

Then came that long-to-be-remembered moment when President Roosevelt appeared before Congress and said:

" This day will live in infamy."



A flagpole rises to mark the Arizona's underwater grave in Pearl Harbor, seen here in a photo taken by The Stroller in 1956.

A lot of water has gone under the bridge since that never-to-be-forgotten morning. Our country has engaged in two wars, we have had several recessions and even the importance of Pearl Harbor Day has dimmed.

If, however, you ever have had the opportunity to visit Pearl Harbor the sights of that devastation will always live with you.

Some years ago The Stroller and his wife were part of a group that was invited to tour the scene of that wanton destruction.

Before our government boat left the dock, one of the old-time admirals told us the story of that awful day and the events that led up to it. Then we were taken around the harbor with the warning that we were to take pictures only at designated places. If this were disobeyed, the old admiral said, both camera and film would be taken.

The first sight to cause a lump in our throats was the bow of the battleship Utah sticking up out of the water. The Utah had been trying to make a getaway — but was hit just at the mouth of the harbor.

The biggest scene was near the spot where the battleship Arizona was sunk. Only the smokestack was sticking out of the water. (This was before the monument was constructed over the hull).

With a choked voice, the old admiral who was our guide said that several hundred members of the crew went down with the ship. He explained that the Japanese bomb had gone down the smokestack and the crew down below never had a chance.

Through a smile from Lady Luck, The Stroller obtained a fine picture of the smokestack sticking out of the water — and it is a picture he cherishes among his souvenirs.

Yet, as he looks at it today, The Stroller just can't make himself believe that 39 years have passed since that Sunday afternoon — December 7, 1941 — when he was rudely interrupted while painting the utility-room floor and told that " the Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor,"

It sure was a day that has lived in infamy.

A growing salute to Emily Dickinson

By JOANNE STEIN

Dec. 10 will mark Emily Dickinson's 150th birthday. "How can anyone live that long?" asked the man on one end of the telephone.

"By writing poetry," came the reply — "especially her kind of poetry."

Although Emily Dickinson lived only 56 years, her poetry lives after her and grows steadily in importance year by year. Even her small circle of admirers in 19th century Amherst, Mass., would be amazed that she has come to be known as one of America's greatest poets.

In fact, many scholars now consider Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman the most important poets establishing the American tradition.

ALL THIS would have been heady news to the quiet woman who published anonymously only seven poems in her lifetime.

And yet she had a strong confidence in herself as poet, even a sense of vocation. After her death, more than 1,000 poems were discovered on scraps of paper in her bedroom. Today we have 1,750 of them in print. And even more may turn up in old letters in somebody's attic.

Unfortunately, absurd myths obscured the reputation of Emily Dickinson for years after her death. The worst, perhaps, assigned her a "little girl" image, the Emily of "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" fame.

That some persons grow up remembering only this poem of the 1,750 is a pity, because this is a poet who wrote with incredible strength about love, joy, pain, loss, eternity and deep religious conflict. This is the poet who can speak to us in ways and at times that few others can:

After great pain, a formal feeling comes
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought
A Wooden way
Regardless grown.
A Quartz contentment, like a stone

This is the Hour of Lead
Remembered, if outlived,
As freezing persons, recollect the Snow
First — Chill — then Stupor — then the letting go

An early biographer, not satisfied with the stark beauty of Emily Dickinson, retouched her photograph with curls for hair and frills for collar. But we are now returning to the real Emily Dickinson. And we are certainly richer for that.

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LOCALLY, Plymouth Book World Vol. II, on Penniman Avenue, will celebrate Emily Dickinson's birthday with poetry, music, sherry and biscuits from 7-9 p.m. Wednesday.

The Bottom of the Hill, Plymouth, will serve copies of Emily Dickinson poems with meals all day Wednesday.

Livonia residents may recall they have been honoring Emily for several years by having named Dickinson Junior High for her.

Joanne Stein has taught in the English department at Schoolcraft College since 1967. She currently teaches a three-credit hour course called "Breakfast and Poetry."