

Gregg L. Cunningham, Executive Director

February 2012

Dear Pro-Life Friend,

Culture warrior Andrew Breitbart died a few days ago. He was 43 years old. Forty-three was the average life expectancy in 1893, but in 2012, actuarial tables suggest that he might reasonably have expected to live another 35 years. He nonetheless built a remarkable reputation as a conservative polemicist who gleefully skewered the liberal cultural elites at whom he aimed the news aggregation websites he called BreitbartTV, BigHollywood, BigGovernment, BigJournalism, and BigPeace.

He was such a prankster that the announcement of his death was greeted with skepticism by many who assumed it was just another stunt. Breitbart was good at “scattering the mud,” an old Irish expression which refers to “a kind of rough and ungentlemanly travel.” He was also eccentric enough to have helped found both the right-of-center Drudge Report and the left-of-left HuffingtonPost. His political philosophy evolved from left to right and, as is often the case with adoptees, he was outspokenly anti-abortion. His untimely death is a major loss to the pro-life movement.

Breitbart actually was of Irish ethnic extraction (as am I) but he was adopted as a baby by Jewish parents. His formidable intellect may have been the product of this exotic amalgam of Celtic genes and Jewish culture. Throughout much of Europe’s recorded history, Continental monarchs sought Irish and Jewish intellectuals to advise their courts. Breitbart never worked for royalty but he did counsel everyone who would listen and many who wouldn’t, high-born or low, whether they liked it or not.

Byron York, at washingtonexaminer.com, posted a eulogy March 1, 2012, titled “In politics fight, Breitbart knew culture is key.” He said Breitbart understood that if you “Change the culture ... you’ll change politics.” I admired Breitbart for that insight, not least because CBR was founded to change the culture regarding abortion. That is obviously the only way our side can change the law. Breitbart also grasped the importance of focusing on young people. It was in that spirit that CBR radically transformed the way abortion is discussed on America’s college campuses (and on countless campuses abroad).

Wiki cites a *Slate Magazine* article headlined “Big Breitbart: Andrew Breitbart is Messing With You, (Retrieved March 17, 2010)” to reveal that Breitbart “... explained that his birth certificate indicated his biological father was a folk singer.” With that much performance art in his DNA, how could he not end up a showman? York also notes that “Breitbart knew instinctively, as people in Washington and most other places did not, that movies, television programs, and popular music send out deeply political messages every hour of every day. They shape the culture, and then the culture shapes politics. Influence those films and TV shows and songs, and you’ll eventually influence politics.”

CBR doesn’t wait for the culture to come view the pictures we make. We take those pictures to people who would never come to us. We can’t force them to look, but most do. And there is value in forcing the rest to look away. You can’t look away without first looking, and a glance is all we need to imbed a mental image which no viewer will ever forget. The confrontational use of graphic imagery is as effective today as it was during centuries of success reforming child labor abuses and civil rights violations and countless other injustices.

I never met Andrew Breitbart but we did have mutual friends. CBR collaborator Lila Rose was one of them. Mediabistro.com described her as “Breitbart protégé” in an article posted February 2, 2011, and the story criticizes Lila’s exposés of Planned Parenthood corruption -- just the sort of project Breitbart loved. Apparently through one of these shared acquaintances I was invited by Michael Walsh, Breitbart’s cofounder in BigJournalism.com, to become a writer for the site in early 2010. I cautiously accepted this unlikely offer but wasn’t confident that my association with the Breitbart brand would prove durable. I was right.

Walsh wanted me to write something on the media’s criticism of a supposedly (but actually only vaguely) anti-abortion ad featuring Tim Tebow and his mother, which ran during the Super Bowl. I argued that that topic had already consumed more ink than it deserved and I instead proposed a broader essay on the news media’s hypocrisy in publishing and broadcasting all manner of disturbing imagery while censoring even slightly graphic content related to abortion. He bit and I wrote.

In reviewing our email exchanges I now recall that Breitbart associate Alexander Marlow referred to this article as my “debut piece,” and Walsh characterized my first draft as “a strong, scholarly work ... [which] deserves a longer display to give its moral argument the display it deserves.” He added that “it really will make a great weekend piece.” The deal fell apart, however, when I proposed the inclusion of an abortion photo. Walsh said no (offering to insert a link to the photo but refusing to publish the photo itself). I grudgingly agreed but said I intended to comment in the article on the irony (I was thinking hypocrisy) of a Breitbart essay on big media censorship of abortion photos which essay itself censored abortion photos. Walsh spiked my story and tore up my contract. I had become Breitbart’s Breitbart and Breitbart’s lieutenant didn’t like it.

The aspect of this farcical episode which I found to be somewhat disillusioning, however, was that I had been copying Breitbart on every email message, naively expecting him to intercede and overrule Walsh. Of course, he never did.

The virtue most commonly attributed to Andrew Breitbart in the avalanche of accolades triggered by his death was his “absolute fearlessness.” There is, no doubt, an element of truth to this tribute. But lest his obituary become inflated into the realm of hagiography, the record should also reflect that when it came to publishing abortion photos, Andrew Breitbart apparently lost his vaunted nerve (or, less plausibly, this hyper-wired media maven missed multiple email messages detailing my fight with Walsh). It would seem the man who made his living arguing that “the emperor has no clothes,” on at least this one occasion, got caught with his own pants down.

I nonetheless ended my last message to Walsh by declaring that “I remain a big fan of Andrew Breitbart’s work.” I meant it. If some leaders truly are irreplaceable, Andrew Breitbart must surely be numbered among them. But for all that he was, it is what he perhaps wasn’t that should grieve us most. James Kirchick, a longtime Breitbart media colleague, posted a send-up at TabletMag.com, March 1, 2012, titled “The Audacity of Breitbart,” in which he claims that Breitbart “... was in no sense a religious man, [but] he had a respect for religion and religious people.” Respect for religion may be admirable, but it can never be redemptive. It may seem wishful thinking, but for Andrew Breitbart’s sake, I prayed Matthew 20:1-16 when I learned of his death. Breitbart, however, wasn’t the only prominent pro-lifer who gets cold feet where abortion photos are concerned.

On January 17, 2009, *World Magazine* editor Marvin Olasky wrote an immensely confused and misleading article on the subject of abortion photos, titled “Pro-Life Pivot.” I am a long-time *World* subscriber and I like Olasky personally (and he has written some excellent books) but he is an academic, far removed from the practical realities of activism; and his essay is diminished by his predictable failure to appreciate the utility of graphic imagery in fighting abortion -- or a host of other injustices throughout the centuries.

His opening paragraph asserts in essence that “Twenty years ago the pro-life movement was in bad shape,” because pro-life activists “... thrust bloody photos of dead unborn babies in front of passersby.” That curious contention is wildly inaccurate. Experience teaches that mothers have always been less likely to “choose” abortion if they have seen it, and that voters view anti-abortion candidates as less “extreme” when they have been shown how “extreme” abortion actually is. This is common sense. It doesn't require a Ph.D. to understand.

Yet Olasky says “Guy Condon [the late Care Net crisis pregnancy support leader] typified the shift toward compassion ...” which saved the pro-life movement from the folly of photos. I also liked Condon but he lacked the real-world experience my wife Lois acquired as a public health nurse when she founded and directed the crisis pregnancy medical clinics which she decided to affiliate with Guy Condon's Care Net association. That affiliation and others like it led to constant tension between the cover-up advocates at Care Net headquarters and the local crisis pregnancy counselors who were saving babies with our abortion videos. Care Net's unenlightened policy on pictures unnecessarily compromises effective counseling.

Olasky also cites “A Gallup poll [which] showed that Americans were 45 percent more likely to regard pro-lifers as violent than to see pro-abortion people in that way.” He fails to realize, however, that the reason for these distorted perceptions of reality was that the news media exaggerates anti-abortion violence and the pro-life movement hides the violence of abortion. His solution to this public relations problem is to offer “compassionate” help to pregnant women. Who's against that? But helping Planned Parenthood dupe ill-informed women by concealing the reality of abortion isn't compassion. Abortion is indescribably horrific. Hide the pictures and you are hiding that portion of the truth which no words can express. Showing the pictures offends the public, but so what? Olasky cares too much what others think of us. That is why World won't grant CBR access to its mailing list unless we agree to never mail abortion photos to its subscribers.

He is correct, however, in noting that “... 51 percent of Americans now tell pollsters that abortion is morally wrong, with 40 percent saying it's morally OK; that's an improvement from 20 years ago.” But he misses the point that much of the progress reflected in those numbers is a product of CBR and anti-abortion allies spending the last 20 years making visible what the abortion industry works so hard to keep out of sight.

Olasky then quotes the now late Fox News journalist (and former G.W. Bush Press Secretary) Tony Snow, whose remarks added to the confusion by criticizing activists when “... they startle innocent shoppers or passers-by with graphic pictures of dead, red, dripping fetuses. This is no way to win political support.” Snow was a gifted journalist and a great man of God, but he was no student of history. Disturbingly graphic images were exactly how William Wilberforce and his fellow abolitionists were able to “win political support” for ending the British slave trade and eventually slavery itself.

In his Wilberforce biography, *Amazing Grace*, Harper San Francisco, 2006, author Eric Metaxas says that:

Of the many social problems Wilberforce might have thought needed his attention, slavery would have been the least visible of all, and by a wide margin. In fact, the answer to how Britain could have allowed something as brutal as West Indian slavery to exist, and for so long, has much to do with its invisibility. Few British people ever saw the slightest hint of it, for only a tiny handful of the three million Africans who had been pressed into British slavery over the years ever set foot on British shores. They were kidnapped [in Africa] and shipped straight to the West Indian sugar plantations thousands of miles away. The sugar and molasses from these plantations came to England but who could have known of the nightmarish institution of human bondage that attended their making? Who could have known that much of the wealth in their nation's booming economy was created on the other side of the world by the most brutal mistreatment of other human beings, many of them

women and children? Most British citizens had never seen anyone branded or whipped or subjected to thumbscrews. They had no idea that conditions on West Indian sugar plantations were so brutal that most of the slaves were literally worked to death in just a few years and that most of the female slaves were too ill to bear children. Black faces were very rare in Britain in the late eighteenth century, especially before the 1770s, and any blacks one might have seen would probably have seemed to be treated rather well.

The Telegraph.co.uk explains the importance of expressing the inexpressible savagery of slavery in a feature article headlined “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?” on March 11, 2007. It reported that “Slavery was undermined by the very thing that kept it going -- a brutality unendurable by the slaves or by the awakening sensibility of the British public.” It was awful pictures which “undermined” it, shifting public opinion in support of abolition when nothing else had worked.

Anti-slavery imagery was at least as provocative in 18th Century England as anti-abortion imagery is in 21st Century America. But abolitionists used it anyway, because slavery was shocking and voters needed to be shocked. At BBC.co.uk, in the section titled “Religions, William Wilberforce,” May 7, 2011, we read that “... [T]he abolitionists were brilliant at public relations and devised radical new ways of bringing their cause to public attention.” The writer says “They had pamphlets full of eye-witness testimony. They had extraordinary graphics such as the famous image of the slave ship, Brookes, which showed captive Africans packed like sardines in a can.” Most importantly, “The potter Josiah Wedgwood struck a brooch that depicted an enslaved man on bended knee. At the bottom of the brooch was the inscription: ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’”

Metaxas says that this disturbing picture of a tortured slave “... was reproduced on snuffboxes and made into cameos that women wore pinned to their dresses and in their hair. It was also made into a letter sealing fob ... so even the wax seals on letters would draw attention to the cause.”

For his confrontational tactics, Wilberforce was denounced as an extremist. In the book *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*, William Hague, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2008), quotes Wilberforce declaring, “If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large.” At BBC.co.uk, in the section titled “Religions, William Wilberforce,” May 7, 2011, we read that “For Wilberforce personally it meant enduring vitriolic attacks in the newspapers; he was physically assaulted, he faced death threats and he had to travel with an armed bodyguard.”

Abortion today is as invisible as slavery was in antiquity. We must make it visible exactly as abolitionists exposed the unspeakable evil of human bondage. With God’s help and your continued support, we will.

Lord bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregg Cunningham', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Gregg Cunningham
Executive Director