

NTL Celebrates 20th Anniversary

By Joleigh Little

What do chickens with large talons, guys with pies in their faces, and Dr. Seuss have in common?

Well ... unless you were at the 20th annual National Teens for Life (NTL) convention in Bloomington, Minnesota, June 16–18, your answer is probably “not much.” However, if you were among the approximately 100 teens and college students in attendance, you know that the three are inextricably linked. Okay, sort of.

The voice of pro-life teenage America, NTL this June celebrated its 20th birthday. Having lost nearly one-third of its members to this holocaust, the “abortion generation” is fighting back against the abortion apologists. NTLers are energetic, active, and passionate about the cause of life.

But until this year, abortion was their primary focus. After all, it was affecting them most directly. Euthanasia seemed like an issue that mostly impacted the elderly—not their friends in the prime of their lives.

That all changed this spring as the terrible saga of Terri Schindler-Schiavo culminated in Florida. Suddenly they were discussing euthanasia in classrooms and with friends. When the abortion generation arrived at the Sheraton Hotel, it was primed to learn more about end-of-life issues.

Enter guys with pies in their faces. During the session entitled “You Survived Abortion ... Will You Survive This Holocaust?” attendees learned about different types of euthanasia. “Voluntary, nonvoluntary, and involuntary” made a lot more sense when they were demonstrated with pies in the faces of volunteers. There is a big difference between someone who wants a pie in their face (voluntary), someone who doesn’t say whether they want a pie in the face (nonvoluntary), and someone who emphatically states that they can’t think of anything they would like less than a pie in the face, but gets a pie in the face anyway (involuntary).

In clear, concise language, NTLers were taken through a history of euthanasia in the U.S. It began with a discussion of Karen Ann Quinlan, whose respirator was removed, and ended with Terri, whose feeding tube was taken away from her.

This set the stage for what everyone in attendance agreed was the most significant portion of this year’s NTL convention.

On Friday, Bobby Schindler and Suzanne Vitadamo, along with Brother Paul O’Donnell, shared their story “For the Life of Our Sister.” Over the course of an hour, the spellbound teenagers got to know Terri through the eyes of those who loved her most.

There was not a dry eye in the packed room as Bobby showed a DVD he had put together of Terri’s life. Suddenly, the woman at the center of the media storm became more than a symbol. Terri became a beloved sister who danced in recitals and played with her siblings in the sand of the Jersey shore. The Schindler family’s pain became real to everyone in the room, and emotions ran high.

Enter the chickens with large talons—funny and relevant only to those (including Bobby Schindler) who have seen and appreciated the teen hit *Napoleon Dynamite*. In an attempt to lighten the mood, Terri’s brother took the podium and asked the critical question, “Do the chickens have large talons?”

Chuckles erupted and his connection to the audience was immediate. It is understood among teenagers that any adult who can quote *Napoleon Dynamite* is obviously worth listening to!

Terri’s sister, Suzanne, commended the teens for their involvement in the fight for life. “I wish that I had been more educated and involved in the pro-life movement years ago when I was a teen,” Vitadamo said.

“I didn’t realize or take notice of the need and the importance of supporting this cause until I was

thrown into the situation with Terri,” she explained. “I can only now do what I can to make up for lost time and to try to help others with what I have learned from the awful experience that my family has been through.”

In the space of only an hour, euthanasia had gone from a “head” issue—one that makes logical sense but doesn’t always ignite the same passion as abortion—to a “heart” issue. In the words of Tatiana Elowson, a 17-year-old from Wisconsin, “They changed my life. I get it now. I’m ready to fight euthanasia as hard as I’ve been fighting abortion.”

But, of course, the abortion generation didn’t forget about

abortion. Throughout the rest of the convention the entire pro-life message was continuously reinforced. Teens heard from women who had been victimized by abortion, learned how to frame their arguments against abortion and euthanasia, and were even brought up to speed on the complicated issues of embryonic stem cell research and human cloning.

Minnesota state senator and perennial teen favorite Michelle Fischbach taught the teens how to lobby their legislators and answer the hard questions on abortion. NRLC Media Relations Director Megan Dillon and Advertising Coordinator

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