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OPINION



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Posted on Fri, Jun. 12, 2009

Letters: I knew him as a gentle man

Philadelphia Daily News

MANY PEOPLE in the field of genetics are mourning the murder of Dr. George Tiller as the loss of a personal friend. I'm one of them.

I first met George in 1987 at a conference of the National Society of Genetic Counselors, where I was executive director for 18 years until 2005. He and his incredibly loyal staff - whom he treated with great generosity - had developed a procedure that provided excellent medical care but also respect and emotional support to the women who came to him for help.

When a genetic counselor is called in to meet with a pregnant woman - and, in many cases, her spouse - it's often because an ultrasound or amniocentesis has shown evidence of "fetal anomalies inconsistent with life" or a terminal condition that will cause pain or no quality of life.

Since these diagnoses can't be made until the later stages of pregnancy, women or couples have just a short time to adjust to their failed dream, what their options are and how their lives have been altered by the news.

It's rare that couples have truly considered in advance what they would do. The genetic counselor's role is as an



Associated Press

Closed Tiller clinic in Wichita, Kan.

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educator, to explain the problems and lay out the alternatives available, all of them difficult.

Counselors are professionally and ethically bound to refrain in any way from trying to influence the decision, but if a woman chose to have an abortion, it was technically considered "late-term" and she often was referred to George's clinic.

The procedure George developed ensured that those involved would have a private, respectful experience with counseling and the ability to spend time with the fetus to achieve some sort of closure. His staff were all long-term family to him and were well taught by George how to treat patients with the care and compassion the situation deserved.

George knew his risks - he knew what had happened to other doctors.

He also was forced to spend thousands in legal fees every month to defend himself from people trying to shut down his clinic.

But he believed in what he was doing. At conferences, he gave away mugs and pins that said, "Attitude Is Everything" and "Trust Women." He trusted women to make their own decisions, and not only about abortion.

George was a Christian, but, for me, a Hebrew word describes him best.

He was a tzaddik, a righteous person, and I am honored to have passed by his life in this one.

Bea Leopold, *Wallingford*

I find it sad that so-called civilized American people find that Dr. Tiller is an American hero. How damning can you get? I do detest the person who committed murder by killing him, as I condemn murder, yet I'd put Dr. Tiller in the same class as Hitler and Stalin.

They're all killers of human beings. What's happened to society?

John Stuhr, *Philadelphia*

George Tiller a hero? PLEASE!

Pvt. William Long was a hero. He was earning less than \$20K a year to defend the rights of all Americans, including pro-abortion zealots, to spout their propaganda. And he was killed because of it. Tiller earned more than \$1 million a year. I'm sure he was nothing but altruistic.

There's a reason that there are only two other facilities in the country to provide late-term abortions. Doctors don't want to perform them. First do no harm! Ring any bells?

Maryanne McGovern, *Delran, N.J.*

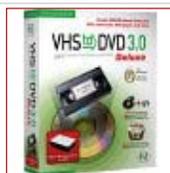


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