

Bolinas voice for Pro-choice

By Laura Riley



Piles of mailings and campaign literature are stacked across the living room of Bolinas authors Diana Alstad and Joel Kramer, overflowing their small office. There's an excited buzz in the air even when the phone and fax machine are not ringing, which is rare.

This is the home of a single-handed, grassroots campaign to strengthen the foundations of the Pro-Choice movement by arguing that abortion is not merely a choice but a moral issue. They see their contribution to the debate as a shift in the thinking about morality and human rights. The urgency in their message coincides with the 25th anniversary of the historic *Roe v. Wade* decision.

The 25th anniversary of *Roe* is a happy one, Alstad said, "but there is a shadow on this celebration."

Added Kramer: "Women's rights, both in this country and abroad, are being more and more restricted, and religious fundamentalists are gaining ground in Congress and influencing US foreign policy."

The couple's unexpected campaign began Oct. 7 when Diana was invited to speak at a private fundraising tea for the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) in San Francisco.

Vocally Pro-choice

"Joel and I have always felt strongly about the abortion issue," she said. "But we were busy with our lives and it wasn't obvious how to write an article or speech which would give the Pro-choice position the moral advantage it deserves ... So we jumped at the chance to help the Pro-Choice movement."

The couple defines two camps within the Pro-Choice movement: the first, most prevalent group, has been "stuck" in recent years in an apologetic stance, referring to abortion as a "regrettable, unfortunate act."

By contrast, Kramer, Alstad and others are calling for a less defensive position. In their view abortion is a positive, moral and protective act. They are apparently not alone in this view, judging by the deluge of support they have received by phone, fax and mail since Diana made the speech that has since turned it into a well-circulated essay.

Women's and children's rights

"To force a woman to have a child she doesn't want and cannot care for is the immoral act," they write. "Unwanted children are one of the greatest sources of violence on the planet ... Children have a moral right to responsible and willing parents ... Conscious conception is moral and necessary in a world with so many social problems and personal tragedies."

The speech was expanded into a formal paper called, "Abortion and the Morality Wars: Taking the Moral Offensive," but the authors could not find a magazine to publish it. Discouraged, Diana sent off the faxes and left for New York City, feeling she had finished her work. In New York, she attended the 30th anniversary of Women's Liberation, a celebration put on by Jacqui Ceballos honoring founders of the movement such as Gloria Steinem and Kate Millett. With others, Diana was honored with a Veterans of Feminism medal.

Upon her return, Alstad found many letters in her mailbox, applauding the paper and requesting copies of it. Thrilled and encouraged, she answered each one. And requests kept coming in.

High-profile support

ACLU Director Ira Glasser wrote back, "Your speech fused the particular issue of abortion with the broader moral themes I have been exploring and which I think lie beneath many of the struggles in which we've been immersed for nearly two decades now..."

Faye Wattleton, president of Planned Parenthood for 20 years, was preparing for a press conference for the *Roe v. Wade* anniversary. Her secretary phoned Alstad, "We've lost our copy of your speech and Faye would like you to fax one for her preparation."

"It's snowballing," said Alstad. "We've struck a chord and done more than we ever dreamed. This was never an orchestrated campaign. It's just two people faxing, mailing and phoning. The groundswell of support for our position has kept me going."

You can find a copy of their essay at the website of Resources for Independent Thinking, <http://www.well.com/user/rit>.

"Abortion & the Morality Wars: Taking the Moral Offensive" (10 pages) and "Abortion as a Moral Act" (1 page) by Diana Alstad and Joel Kramer; and "Teen Pregnancy" are posted on web site of Resources for Independent Thinking at: <http://www.rit.org> (in "Editorials")