

## **Defiant Birth: Women Who Resist Medical Eugenics**

**By Melinda Tankard Reist**

Reviewed by NRL News Staff

As anyone who reads National Right to Life News knows, we live in a culture that grows ever less welcoming to women who refuse the advice of physicians to abort a child considered to be less than perfect. Melinda Tankard Reist's *Defiant Birth: Women Who Resist Medical Eugenics* is a gripping tale of courageous women who have resisted what Tankard Reist calls "medical eugenics."

As an Australian writer, Tankard Reist is not particularly well known in American circles. She should be. She is a wonderful writer and author of *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories of Grief after Abortion*.

Published by Spinifex Press, *Defiant Birth* surveys our contemporary medical practices in which abortion is frequently recommended when prenatal scans suggest the baby may have some abnormality, no matter how slight. Frequently, in such cases, some health care providers make "recommendations" that often come across as "no other option, but."

In some countries, insurance companies have refused to cover a child who has health problems that the parents knew about before the birth of the child. From the perspective of some insurance companies and doctors, a child with a physical imperfection is a financial liability. In a society where abortion is both perfectly legal and often viewed as a first resort, physicians fear legal liability if they do not forcefully tell a pregnant woman she may deliver a less than perfect child.

But some women of various political, religious, and cultural traditions are fighting the trend. Rather than blindly accepting the counsel of the medical profession, these women are choosing to refuse to abort their children. Tankard Reist relates the stories of 19 women who chose to continue their pregnancies despite intense pressure from the medical community and even their families and friends to abort their unborn children.

Each story, intensely moving and personal, pulls at the heartstrings. But we would be remiss if we did not hear and answer the call to action represented by each of these women. Despite the fact that the women have successfully bucked the trend, they are encouraging us to take steps to ensure that no woman ever feels such pressure again.

*Defiant Birth* also provides an excellent introductory segment that details the questions that have arisen in academic circles which have not been previously hijacked by abortion politics. Both liberal and conservative thinkers point out the dangerous trend in a world in which physical imperfections and disabilities are not tolerated in the least. Such a mindset has its roots in the eugenics movements that go back at least as far as Sparta and more recently in the U.S. and German communities of the early 20th century.

Admittedly, in some cases, this means delivering a baby with whom the parents only spent a few hours or a few short days. Still, it's more time than they would have had if they'd chosen to abort the child.

In other cases, we see predictions contradicted by the birth of a healthy baby. It gives one pause to wonder how many other babies were aborted on the basis of predicted physical "abnormalities" when in fact they were perfectly healthy.

Tankard Reist cites a 2000 study of 300 fetal autopsies in which 39% confirmed the prenatal hypothesis. That means the prenatal diagnoses were wrong in 61% of the cases.

Abortion was supposed to enable women to have more control over life-determining events in their own lives. It was supposed to give them more power. Yet women whose pregnancy doesn't add up to someone else's expectations are finding themselves in a situation where they feel they have no choice. When women don't have the power to make the choice to give life to their unborn child, they are left utterly powerless.

Spinifex Press, a feminist publishing house in Australia, published and promoted Tankard Reist's new book, despite an uproar over her pro-life activities and beliefs. Both the author and the publisher should be commended for their commitment to honest discussion. Had abortion politics determined their actions and views, this book never would have been written.

Defiant Birth is a must-read and an excellent reference tool for anyone who wants to be better informed. With the publication of this book, Tankard Reist and Spinifex Press have not only contributed to the development of a critical discussion in our culture, they have also struck a victory for intellectual honesty. I look forward to their next joint venture.