

## GUEST COLUMN

BY Joleigh Little

*Author's note. When Dave Andrusko first asked me if I would be willing to write the President's Column for this issue, two thoughts came to mind. First and foremost, "I am so not the President!" and secondly, "Wow, I am not worthy!" However, since this special issue of NRL News is dedicated to youth, and working with pro-life youth is my driving passion, it was my honor this one time to write in the column space of the wise, gracious, and much-loved Dr. Franz.*

As I ponder the importance of young people and their involvement in the cause of life, I can't help but reflect on my own pro-life journey. I like to believe in many ways it is pretty typical. Twenty-two years ago, at the age of 14, I realized that this was the cause of my lifetime. It really was as simple as that. It was obvious to me, even at that tender age, that abortion was no mere "problem" and would never go away if we just ignored it.

After 34 years of legalized abortion and the loss of over 48 million precious unborn lives, it is more crucial than ever that we employ the absolute best strategies at our disposal to bring an end, once and for all, to the killing that has claimed a full third of two American generations. It is also critical that we thwart the growing trend toward euthanasia that is threatening to sweep across our nation.

Neither of these things will happen unless we replenish the troops who daily fight this evil. From the grassroots level to the offices of NRLC, from chapters in Pennsylvania to the halls of Congress, with hospitals, classrooms, media outlets, courthouses, and all points in between, we need reinforcements. We need strong, educated, talented, and passionate advocates for life willing to stand up and speak out in defense of the smallest and most vulnerable among us. It is painfully apparent after all these years that if we don't stand for them, no one will.

It is also obvious that none of us is getting any younger, a fact I realized anew several months ago when I suddenly became closer to 40 than I was to 30. We must train the next generation of pro-lifers to work alongside us and eventually take over for us. Training these young people is not an issue to which we can afford only to pay lip service. It is a vitally important direction the pro-life movement must take if we are to thrive and to ensure the survival of those we seek to protect.

I have been saying this for 22 years. It was true in 1985, but it is truer still in 2007. It is our moral obligation to invest in, actively recruit, and properly train the next generation. One has only to look at the growing trend toward euthanasia that permeates the medical profession and the disposable culture that routinely suggests unborn children are as expendable as soda cans to realize that it is past time to act.

Passionate, talented, and amazingly gifted pro-life young people are out there, and they aren't even difficult to locate! Every church, classroom, basketball team, youth soccer league, and 4-H club has at least one, probably more. But except in extreme cases, they aren't going to come knocking on your door and say, "Hey, let me help your cause and make it my own." You need to find them. And once you've found them (or they've found you), you need to help them grow

in their convictions and learn what they need to know in order to carry this cause forward. We can't win this battle without them, but they can't learn what they need to know without us.

Put in a context we can all understand, pro-life youth are like delicate seedlings. With water and sunlight they will quickly grow into hearty young plants and finally strong mature oak trees able to face the wind solidly without bending. But without the care—the investment of time and resources, the encouragement to keep fighting, and the belief that they can and will make a difference—these promising young people will quickly wither and fade away. I know you agree with me that we can't—and won't—allow that to happen.

In the pages of this issue you will hear from and about some incredible young people, each of whom is a fine example of what can happen when caring pro-life adults invest in the lives of pro-life teens. None of them would be as outspoken as they are today had it not been for parents, grandparents, pro-life friends, teachers, local chapter leaders, and state affiliates who recognized their passion for the cause of life and nurtured it. Each of them is unique, but they are examples of what can happen when pro-life adults take the time to encourage their younger counterparts to shine.

I fully understand that with legislation to pass, candidates to elect, fundraisers to plan, and other immediate and urgent action items demanding our attention, it is easy to keep putting off the long-term training strategy that will provide for the future of the Movement. But from decades of working with young people, training the next generation of pro-life leaders is a vitally important priority. I know that the readers of NRL News are precisely the kind of pro-life champions who will put in the time, resources, and effort required to raise up the Next Generation.