

# She Didn't Need an Ultrasound...

*Editor's note. This column, written by Brenda Fastabend, president of Virginia Society for Human Life (VSHL), first appeared in the August 2004 edition of Life Saver, VSHL's newsletter.*

A tiny baby weighing a little more than three pounds was born on August 31. The year was 1937, before even incubators were part of standard hospital equipment. Placed in a shoe box with a hot water bottle, the premature infant's survival looked bleak. The doctors gave no hope, the parents prayed and, against all odds, the baby boy continued to live and to grow.

Although small for his age, he did well in school, graduating from college by age 20. He married in 1959, a week after his 22nd birthday, and by early 1969 was the happy father of four sons and two daughters. Two years later, in May 1971, he would become the co-chairman of the first

chapter of Virginia Society for Human Life, and a few years later, the state VSHL treasurer.

You may have guessed by now, baby Billy grew up to be my husband and partner for life ... in more ways than one.

Following the infamous January 22, 1973, *Roe v. Wade* ruling of the Supreme Court, VSHL was inundated with invitations to present programs to churches, schools, and groups of many descriptions in cities and counties around the state. The subject of legalized abortion was a hot new topic. Our Lynchburg VSHL chapter invited a nationally recognized doctor to town to speak. The physician's sobering slide program was presented to a packed hospital auditorium. Bill's mother, who happened to be visiting from Petersburg, attended the program with us.

The following morning as I drove my mother-in-law to catch her train home, she spilled out the story she had

kept to herself for 36 years. While pregnant with Bill, she had been strongly advised by her doctor to have an abortion.

So horrified with the doctor's recommendation, she chose not to ever tell her husband or anyone else ... until me that morning. After giving birth to two children, there had been three more pregnancies which ended in late miscarriages.

The same would happen again, the doctor advised, and her health was already seriously compromised by her other losses. While Virginia then prohibited abortions except to save the life of the mother, the doctor appeared willing to stretch the law for the sake of her patient's well being.

The recommended "therapeutic" abortion was probably well intended, but Louise Fastabend instinctively understood it would mean certain death to her child. She didn't need today's ultrasound to know there was a baby on the way.

So instead, she chose to stay in bed for the long hot summer months in a desperate effort to prevent another miscarriage. Daughter Catherine and son Patrick, by then ages 12 and 13, helped with household chores and cooking while their dad was at work. But when the baby arrived all too early, his father told the children at home that their baby brother was not expected to live. How grateful we are that this sad prediction proved to be wrong.

Louise Fastabend and all the other mothers and fathers who witness to the gift of life by going through difficult pregnancies have our enormous admiration and gratitude. Because of their convictions, others live. There are some other parents whose difficult pregnancies end in sorrow instead of joy. Those brave life-affirming people also have our heartfelt sympathy as well.

