

Worlds apart

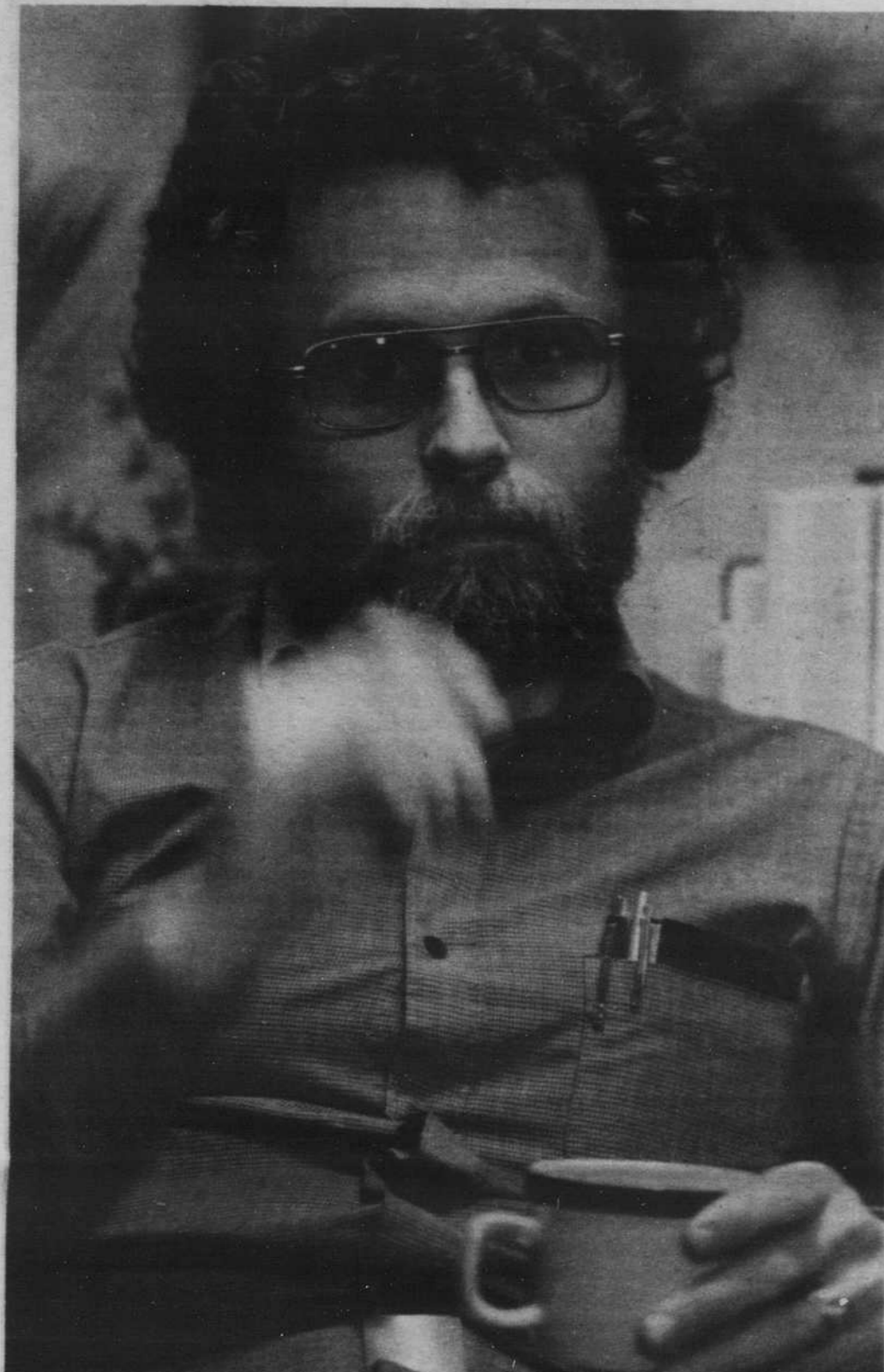


Photo by Mark Pynes

Charles Hoffmeister

"I've never had any patients come back and say, 'Gee, I wish I hadn't had this done.'"

"Abortion is a personal matter between a woman and her physician."
 "Life begins at conception."
 "The most elementary freedom is the right of choice."
 "There's no such thing as a life not worthy to be lived."

Worlds apart. And with abortion legislation pending in the U.S. Congress, the war of words intensifies. Legislators, attorneys, nurses, ethicists, columnists, theologians — and almost everyone who can talk — are joining the fray.

But it is physicians who perform, or refuse to perform, more than one million abortions done each year in the United States.

In Springfield, the offices of Norm Gosch and Charles Hoffmeister are 20 feet apart, separated by blacktop and careful landscaping. But when it comes to abortion, the two family doctors are worlds apart.

Norm Gosch performs between 40 and 50 abortions every month — a needed and worthwhile service, he says.

Of the 30 patients he sees per day, two to four have abortions, he says. Most of his abortion patients are from 18 to 25 years old, he adds.

He performs abortions only during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, he says. Gosch uses the suction technique: the fetus is sucked out of the uterus, through a plastic tube and into a glass container.

In the late 1960s, Gosch worked for six years at the University student health center. "At that time you had to write birth control prescriptions under the authorization of an outside physician because the student health center didn't want to take responsibility for physicians there prescribing pills to women whose parents might be upset about it all.

"Abortions were not available, of course, at that time, and women that became pregnant that didn't wish to be pregnant had to go either to Mexico or to Japan. You never knew when you referred someone out to have an abortion just what the circumstances might be. It was always sort of an uncomfortable feeling not knowing what was going to happen to your patient."

Bev Gosch, the doctor's wife and office manager, says she worked in a Lane County birth control clinic where women often reported they'd been to Mexico for abortions. "Just hearing their stories, of the terror at the frightening conditions and the bad hygiene — just so many things like that kind of changed how I felt about having abortions here."

Gosch charges \$200 for an abortion, in-

cluding three appointments before the abortion and a check-up two weeks after. Prices for abortion range from \$180 to \$220.

"It's a constantly changing profession, and that's what keeps it so exciting. You can do things the way you did them five years ago, but you're not doing them in the best way that you can because things are changing so rapidly. And I feel good just being abreast of what is current, what is new, and what is the best way of doing things."

Do any of his patients feel guilty after they've had an abortion? "I've never had any patients come back to me and say, 'Gee, I wish I'd never had this done,' in my whole eight years of doing it. I've had patients come back for the two-week visit and say, 'Gee, I'm sort of upset about this, yet I'd like some help in resolving these conflicts.'" Norm says his patients are sometimes referred to Planned Parenthood for counseling.

"What's really gratifying is to receive a thank-you note from a patient saying that they really appreciated the kind service, they really appreciated the thoughtfulness and the caring they felt in the office — and that's what I've been working for all this time."

"It makes you feel like you're operating a needed and a worthwhile service, and doing it well."

An unwanted pregnancy can be traumatic, Norm says. "Most of the women I see are not married and not interested in marrying the person who caused the pregnancy." Other patients have career plans that would be disrupted by a child, Norm says. Other patients are teenagers who can't be adequate mothers; others are in their late 30s and early 40s and don't want to have a child who'll be 20 when they're 60.

"I think there's a right time and a wrong time to have children and each person in their life knows when that is," he says. The Goschs have four children. "All children have a right to be parented appropriately and to have loving parents. For the most part, the patients I see are not married, they're not ready to be a mother, have no desire of being a mother, and I can't really see this would be appropriate to require them to remain pregnant under the circumstances."

What about giving the child up for adoption? "Statistically, women are keeping their babies," Bev says. "They don't adopt them out. I've been to the homes where the mother is keeping her baby. I've seen what it's like."

"And it's so very self-serving for those people who are wanting to adopt a baby to jump on the right-to-life or anti-choice bandwagon," she adds. "They're just meeting their own concerns."

Some pro-life activists are self-serving

when they discover they're pregnant, she says. "Abortion has been here. It's been around since the time of Christ. The bottom line is that it is not unusual for women who have been involved in anti-abortion activity to come in for abortions, or women to bring their own daughters in. And they all say the same thing, 'In my case, or in my daughter's case, it's different.'"

"It boils down to the fact that we're all sort of human, you know," Norm says. "We all have human needs and human desires and human problems — no matter what your beliefs are. They need to be worked out in the best way they can under the circumstances."

Most women having an abortion don't take it lightly, he adds. "For the most part they are there because either their method failed or they just failed to use a method."

"It seems reasonable that if you offer a patient a vasectomy, and you offer to set their leg when it's broken, that you also should — as a regular part of medical care — provide abortions," Bev says.

"Depending," adds Norm, "on how the physician feels about it morally."

When does human life begin? "Oh, that's a question that's bounced around a lot and I think that's a matter of how you feel about it personally," he says. "There's a potential for a viable fetus whenever a sperm and an egg get together, and that occurs from conception on. So, potential life is possible from that point."

Asked about Charles Hoffmeister, Norm says, "As a fellow physician, he's a very competent person and he's most enjoyable to work with. He is articulate, he's up to date and does a good job medically. We just differ on our views regarding abortion."

Charles Hoffmeister refuses to do abortions.

But he speaks highly of his colleague, Norm Gosch. For Hoffmeister, the key issues in the abortion debate are when life begins and when we are willing to take life.

"I was pro-abortion. I felt it was legal and God was just another area of reality. I never did abortions, although had I been in the situation I certainly would have."

"Early in the 1970s and I came to an understanding that there is absolute truth, and that Christianity was that truth. My whole thinking changed."

"Even as a Christian I continued to be pro-abortion, mostly from a sociological standpoint. One, it was legal and, secondly, there were situations that dictated it. I could agree with abortion up to a certain point."

His views on abortion changed when his wife Pam became pregnant.

"What I rationalized, and what I would say about life suddenly didn't apply. When she was six-weeks pregnant, there was absolutely no question in my mind that that was life."

"Most people who are pro-abortion don't want to discuss the question of when life begins. I think that's the real issue. We want to talk around that issue and talk about the social issues. In all biology circles, life really begins when the egg and the sperm come together — at that point all the genetic make-up that's going to be for each individual is there, totally different than any other genetic make-up that's ever come together."

"The evidence is overwhelming as to when life begins. The real question is 'When are you willing to take life?' and 'When do you say it's no longer acceptable to take life?'"

"The surgeon general, C. Everett Koop, asks the question, 'You have a newly-born, full-term child. Is it OK to kill that child?' Currently, most people would say no. 'Then you ask the question, 'Well, would you kill the baby a day before? And if not then, would you have done it the day before, the day before, the day before?' When do you decide that isn't right and when do you decide that life is of no value?'"

"From my position as a Christian — believing life is sacred — I don't think there's any time you can take life."

"If I didn't have that perspective of life being sacred, and — coinciding with that — if there were no such thing as absolute truth, then the relative system we operate in would really come to be acceptable. Norm (Gosch) and I have had discussions about this. His feeling is he's making a decision based with respect to the most social good: Which is better, to have unwanted pregnancies, back-room illegal abortions, women sick and dying, or doing it with the best medical technique? If that's the only question, certainly it's better to do it safely and under the most sterile technique."

"Without an understanding of absolute truth and the sacredness of human life, I could agree with that."

Adoption is better than abortion, Hoffmeister says. "There isn't any easy solution. When a woman of younger age is pregnant and doesn't want to be, she doesn't have any easy option. In a lot of situations you're looking for what's the easiest. Unfortunately, because an abortion is so easy to obtain and widespread, they are presented as the easy answer, or easiest answer."

"But the ultimate question isn't what's easiest, it's a question of what's right."

Having a child is not convenient, says his wife Pam. "That word comes up a lot, 'con-

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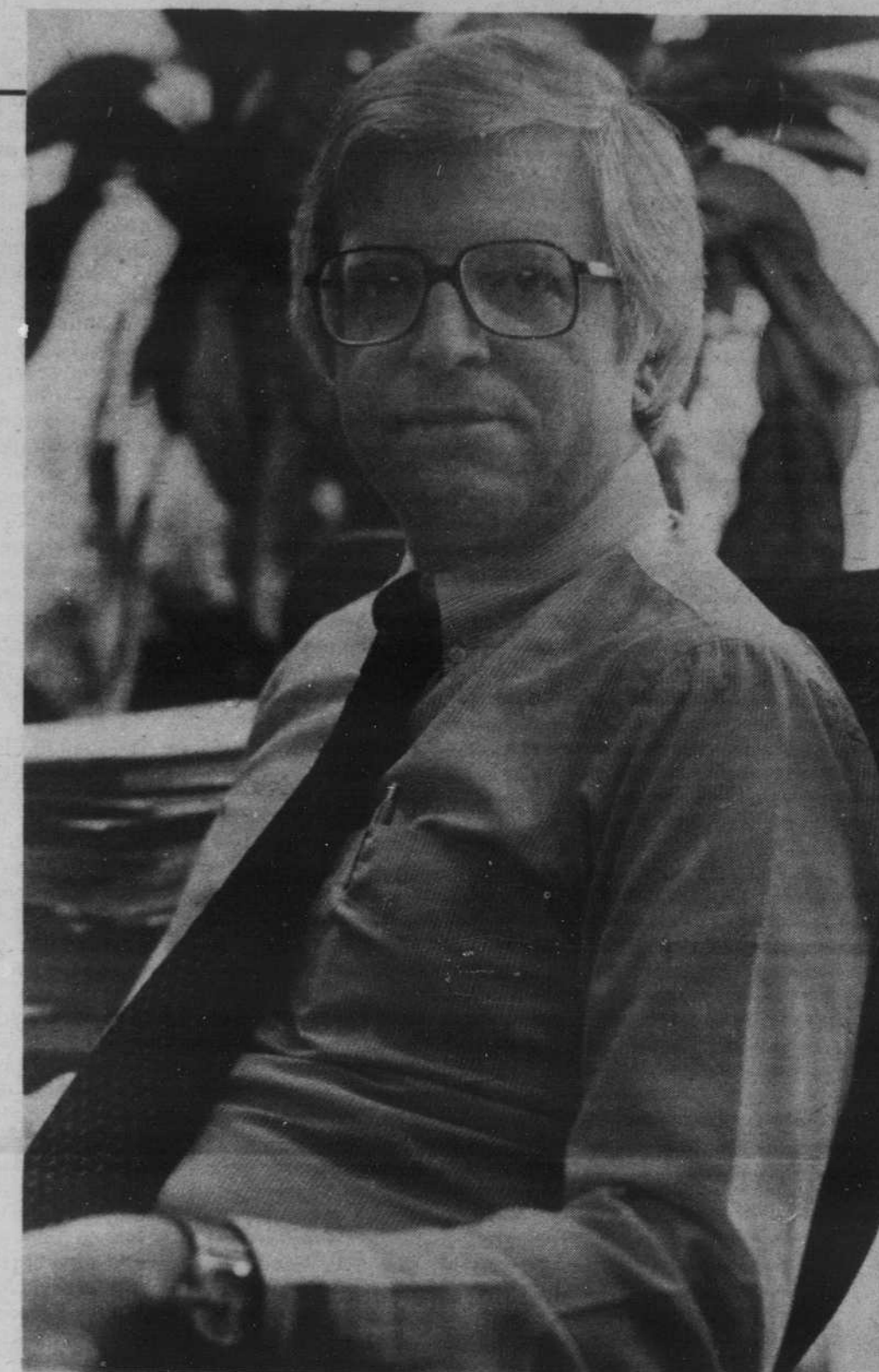


Photo by David Corey

Norm Gosch

From my position as a Christian - I don't think there's any time you can take a life."

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