

PERSONHOOD IN ACTION

*Changing hearts
and saving lives*



By Stephen Muff

Pro-life activists have long debated the proper course of political action needed to rid America of abortion. Yet perhaps an even bigger problem is that American culture needs healing—and not merely the overall American culture, but every subculture within it. The subculture most relentlessly targeted by the abortion industry is the Black American community.¹

More and more voices from that community are crying out against this insidious assault. And one of them is delivering a message so powerful that his local government did everything in its power to silence him. But he has refused to be silent, and his message recently touched an abortion-minded woman so deeply that she has joined her voice to his.

Stephanie and Khya's story

Stephanie Spidell, of Sacramento, California, never expected to become an advocate for the pro-life cause. At age 15, she became pregnant with her first baby. Over the following years (which included a marriage), she had 15 more pregnancies. Nine of them ended in abortion and two in miscarriage. Although she's given birth to five beautiful children, Stephanie didn't consider herself pro-life until she experienced a series of remarkable events during her last pregnancy.

Having recently become her niece's guardian after her sister's murder and discouraged by a lack of support from her baby's father, Stephanie had originally intended to obtain an abortion. As she headed into a local abortion business, she met two Sacramento sidewalk counselors. Through their efforts, the encouragement of other advocates for life, and many prayers, Stephanie changed her mind and chose life for her baby. Soon after, she learned her child would be born with a cleft lip.

Medical professionals encouraged her to have an abortion, but she decided against it, as a cleft lip is easily corrected with cosmetic surgery.

But then Stephanie received the devastating news that her baby had the most serious form of holoprosencephaly—a birth defect resulting from a malformation in the brain, which the experts described as “incompatible with life.” They pressured her strongly to abort and warned her that, if born alive, her daughter would live only six months at most. Stephanie then met with the sidewalk counselors to seek their advice. They told her, “Your daughter is a person and therefore she has dignity, no matter what anyone tells you.” Finally seeing her preborn daughter as a *person* changed her outlook and her life forever. And for a third time, Stephanie chose life for her baby girl.

The sidewalk counselors coordinated with the city of Elk Grove's two Catholic parishes (St. Joseph and Good Shepherd), along with the local Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Gabriel Project, and other outreaches.

These groups provided Stephanie with maternity clothes, rent, groceries, Christmas gifts, and the family van—all prior to little Khya's birth—without knowing whether she would even survive delivery. Most of the baby gifts were intended to help “make memories” for the brief time Khya was expected to live.

When Khya was born, Stephanie had nothing prepared for her, because she'd been told her baby would probably be stillborn. But the same groups united to help her and provided everything she needed during the first year—from diapers to a stroller to a car seat.

Khya faces severe health problems, including seizures, and is fed through a tube. Her condition isn't correctable through surgery, except for her cleft lip. Many people ask Stephanie when she's going to take

care of this. But this would just subject Khya to non-essential cosmetic surgery, so Stephanie is hesitant to do it. Despite these challenges, Khya, her family, and their supporters joyfully celebrated her second birthday in April.

Walter's story

One of the counselors also put Stephanie in touch with Rev. Walter B. Hoye II, founder and president of the Issues 4Life Foundation, based in Union City, California. Walter is widely known as one of the boldest pro-life activists in the Black American community. He also serves as a core member of the National Black Pro-Life Coalition (www.BlackProLifeCoalition.org) and on American Life League's Advisory Board.

Walter's life has been an exciting witness to the personhood of the preborn. On May 13, 2008, police in Oakland, California, arrested him for allegedly illegally protesting outside of an abortion business (see *Celebrate Life*, July-August 2009). He was convicted and jailed, but he appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals—and won! In 2011, the court ruled that the City of Oakland's method of enforcing its bubble-zone ordinance was unconstitutional [see “Bringing the law to life: Life Legal Defense Foundation” in our Winter 2013 issue]. Videos show abortion mill “escorts” repeatedly surrounding him and blocking his sign as he peacefully offered sidewalk counseling.

Today, Walter's relationship with the city government is tenuous, since some City Council members who voted for the ordinance remain in



Pro-life activist Rev. Walter Hoye

office, including the current mayor, Jean Quan, who coauthored it. The Oakland police department, however, has been cooperative and helpful when Walter applies for permits to hold rallies and protests. They're assured of his commitment to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence, and his winsome efforts to promote the pro-life message have even earned the private support of many city employees.

Walter now travels almost constantly, because he's busy raising awareness of the urgent need to legally recognize the personhood of all human beings, from the beginning of their biological development and at all stages of life.² The promotion of human personhood is the only pro-life strategy that doesn't embrace abortion exceptions, and it has a particularly powerful effect on the Black community, because many of its members know what it's like to be told they're not persons.

This message is resonating particularly well in Black churches. Walter has sometimes been told he couldn't mention “the A word” while speaking in a church, but he could talk about personhood. When he spoke at the largest Black church in Los Angeles, he walked away with 3,000 signatures on a petition for the California Human Rights Amendment (a state personhood initiative;



Walter, Stephanie, Khya, and Elaine Riddick at the Walk for Life West Coast rally



Khya at her second birthday party, with Stephanie and sidewalk counselors who aided them

see www.iamaperson.us). For the past few years, he has spearheaded a grassroots effort to put this proposed constitutional amendment on the California ballot.

Walter's Issues4Life Foundation recently sponsored its sixth annual Standing Up 4Life Rally/Walk, Conversations4Life Benefit Luncheon, and Prayer4Life Memorial Service, held in Oakland on the Friday immediately preceding San Francisco's annual Walk for Life in late January.

A partnership for personhood

After reading the information Walter sent her, and doing her own research on him and his work, Stephanie was shocked to learn how deeply abortion has scarred the Black American community. And she was inspired to do whatever she could to help spread Walter's pro-life message. Walter also impressed Stephanie in another way: She'd never heard a man speak so beautifully about children, the sanc-

tity of life, marriage, and love for his wife. Being Khya's mother has also played a huge role in opening her eyes to the value of each person's life.

Late last year, Stephanie created a video (see sidebar) that tells Khya's story, and reveals how Walter's personhood message transformed her own beliefs and her life. *LifeSite News* reported on it,³ and Stephanie has received many encouraging responses from viewers, including staffers she met at the Sacramento Life Center (www.saclife.org), a pregnancy center offering parents the support they need to choose life for their preborn children.

In January, Stephanie was a guest speaker at Issues4Life's annual luncheon (see sidebar) and memorial service. She recounted the story of her pregnancy with Khya, and Khya's powerful impact on her siblings and Stephanie. She received Khya's adverse diagnosis just before Christmas, and the doctor gave her two choices: get a late-term abortion, or see him on Christmas Day. His solution? Stop Khya's heart with an injection and then use her body for research. But Stephanie came to realize she and Khya had been chosen to serve as messengers of personhood in the Black community.

Stephanie and Khya also appeared, alongside Walter, on the stage at this year's Walk for Life West Coast rally in San Francisco while Elaine Riddick and Rev. Clenard H. Childress Jr. each addressed the large crowd. (Both had also spoken at the Issues4Life events.) Elaine was sterilized at age 14—without her knowledge—by a state eugenics board, and Rev. Childress is president of the northeast region of the Life Education and Resource Network (see www.BlackGenocide.org).

Stephanie's experiences at these large pro-life events left her speech-

Unconditional love is a family affair

In her video (see "Stephanie interview first 6 minutes" at www.YouTube.com) and her talk at Issues4Life's annual benefit luncheon (see "Conversation 4 Life with Stephanie Spidell" at www.YouTube.com), Stephanie Spidell spoke eloquently about her other living children and their role in Khya's life. Raising six kids as a single mom on her own "is hard, but nevertheless, I'm very thankful that I have them, and I've been so blessed," Stephanie said. They have provided priceless love and support for Khya: "On this journey, . . . I've always had the support of my other five kids, who have really stepped up and made Khya a real priority." Stephanie and her children handle Khya's routine health care themselves.

Stephanie hopes to set a positive example for her children: "I'm so glad I chose life for Khya, because it was a form of redemption and helping me to understand how wrong abortion is, and I think it actually sends a really big message to my kids. . . . I never want them to face abortion." And Khya has left her own mark on her family and many others: "She has inspired us in so

many ways. We love her unconditionally. . . . My hope for Khya, as well as my whole family, is to get her story out there and . . . remind people of what unconditional love truly is. . . . Through the grace of God, He's given me this time . . . to teach me and others how to be better."

—Editor



Stephanie and her children (L to R: Nesha, Tenaya, Anthony, Antone, Khya, and Myesha)

less. And it had all happened so fast—becoming pro-life, working with the pro-life community in Sacramento, creating the YouTube video, and now standing before tens of thousands for a shared cause.

Walter showed Stephanie that a fundamental problem within the Black community is the mindset that “what goes on in the house, stays in the house.” Decisions about abortion aren’t typically discussed, and neither is abortion’s destructive effect on the culture. But, he explained, speaking about personhood resonates for historical reasons, and so it helps to break down such barriers.

The Black American pro-life movement is rapidly expanding, and a seismic shift in the culture war is beginning. Black pastors are speaking up for life. Rev. Walter B. Hoye II is leading by example, with a loving approach and the message of human personhood. He knows who’s at stake: Khya and millions of other vulnerable babies. And thanks to his and Stephanie Spidell’s courageous voices, more people are now hearing this message. May it change many more hearts and save many more lives!

Stephen Muff writes from Sacramento, California. He received his bachelor’s degree in English writing from Biola University and his juris doctor from Ave Maria School of Law. He has authored *The Journals of Josiah Fisk* and various magazine articles published throughout North America. He is currently pursuing a master’s degree in public administration at the University of Southern California.

Visit www.Issues4Life.org to learn more about Rev. Walter Hoye’s pro-life ministry. Donations made through this site can also be designated for Stephanie Spidell and her family, who face major medical expenses as they care for little Khya.

1 The Guttmacher Institute’s August 2011 *Facts on Induced Abortion in the United States* reports that 30 percent of all abortions are committed on the babies of non-Hispanic Black American women. And according to *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 60 No. 7 (2012), p. 4, “About two-thirds of pregnancies among non-Hispanic white (69 percent) and Hispanic (68 percent) women ended in live birth, compared with one-half of pregnancies among non-Hispanic black women (49 percent).”

According to the 2010 census, only about 13 percent of the US population is Black (see Table 1 on p. 4 of *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010*, a Census 2010 Brief issued in March 2011). Moreover, these abortion statistics don’t include the very early abortions hormonal contraceptives can cause. See www.stopp.org, www.Issues4Life.org, www.LearnInc.org, www.BlackGenocide.org, and www.TooManyAborted.com to learn more about abortion’s disastrous impact on the Black American community. —Editor

2 American Life League has proposed the Federal Human Personhood Amendment, whose purpose is “to establish that legal personhood is granted to all human beings in the United States from the beginning of their biological development.” To learn more, see www.all.org/personhood. —Editor

3 Kirsten Andersen, “Video: Faced with ‘terminal’ prenatal diagnosis, single mother of five chooses life,” www.LifeSiteNews.com, December 21, 2012. —Editor

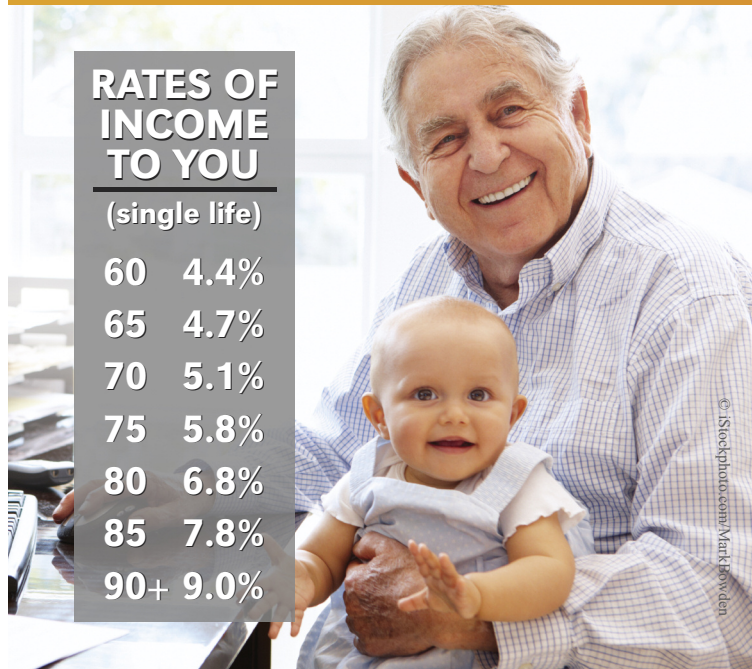
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