

*When Shari Richard uses  
her ultrasound equipment,  
she knows she's tuning  
pregnant women in to...*

# The Rhythm of Life

**by Felicia Day**

"Do you have a baby-sitter?" Shari Richard asks the pregnant woman sitting in the waiting room, two toddlers in tow. Doing an ultrasound examination with a 3-year-old and his 18-month brother running around will be a challenge.

"No, I'm sorry," the woman replies.

"We'll manage," Shari says. "Bring them in." She helps the woman lie on the couch and gently places gel on the woman's abdomen. "I'm sorry," Shari apologizes, "this is cold." Next, she attaches the simple equipment that will create the ultrasound image of the woman's 14-week-old baby.

To help set the woman at ease, she explains that the high-frequency sound waves she uses are safe for mothers and their babies. As the image on the monitor comes into focus, arms and

legs are clearly discernible and moving.

"Mommy!" the 3-year-old exclaims, pointing to the monitor. "Look at the baby!"

Shari glances at the mother, who is crying, and asks her, "Would you like a picture of your baby?" When she returns with the picture, the woman is sobbing.

"Are you OK?" Shari asks gently.

"I want to thank you," the woman replies. "I was scheduled for an abortion tomorrow, but I had no idea my baby was so much alive. If it wasn't for you, I would have killed him."

Incidents like this make Shari grateful she's an ultrasound technologist. "It's rewarding to introduce babies to their parents this way," she says. "Often, a natural bonding develops im-

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mediately when a mother and a father first see this life within the womb.”

When pregnant women come for sonograms—common procedure for women seeking an abortion—Shari doesn’t turn the monitor away as she was taught. Instead, the mothers see the life they’re carrying.

“Women have a right to be informed about the facts,” she says. “I want to get the word out to mothers and would-be mothers: abortion destroys living babies, not ‘blobs’ or ‘products of conception’”—terms used by pro-abortion groups such as Planned Parenthood.

### **Years of Tears**

But Shari hasn’t always been a pro-life advocate.

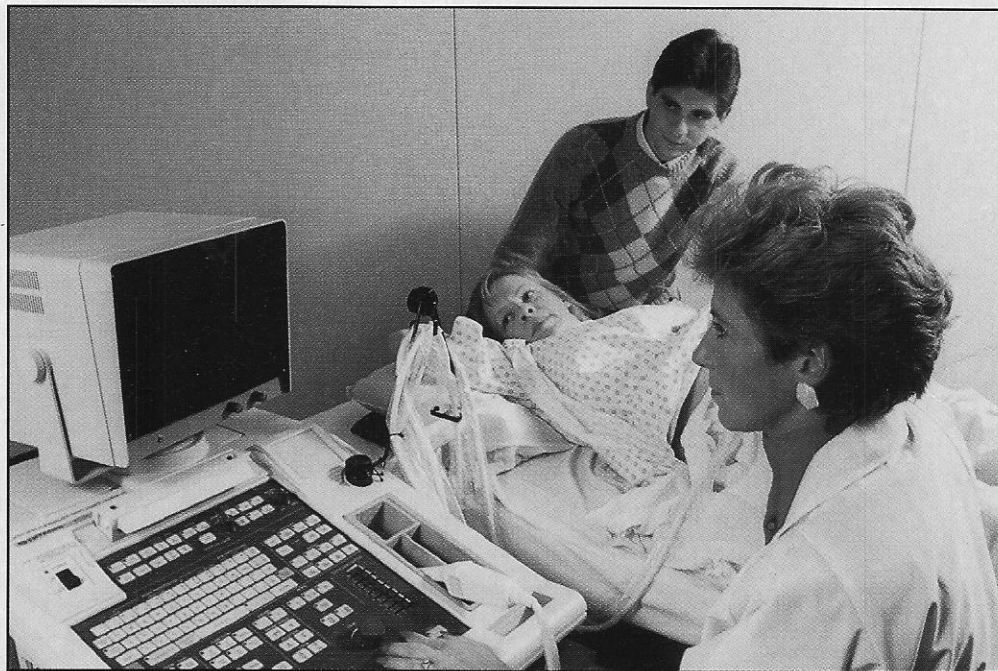
In 1974, at 18, right after *Roe v. Wade* legal-

The ordeal left her with a severe infection, bleeding and vomiting. Finally her roommate called an ambulance, which returned her to the hospital. “The same doctor put me through the same procedure,” Shari says. He’d failed to remove all the body parts the first time.

But the experience didn’t alter her life style, and she found herself pregnant two years later. She went to an abortion clinic and left minus her baby, with reassurances there would be no complications.

There were. Shari developed a growth that suddenly ruptured two years later while she was working part-time at the hospital. She was rushed to surgery in time to save her life.

“Those were the years I really wanted to change my life style, and wondered if I could



*Shari conducts a sonogram on a young mother-to-be as the father looks on in anticipation.*

ized abortion, she entered college and left behind her strict Christian upbringing. She sought popularity by imitating some of her peers—going to bars and partying. She got pregnant, and wanted an abortion.

“I was working in a hospital between classes, and went to a doctor’s office on my lunch hour,” she says. “He said I was pregnant, and could take care of it right then. When I asked him if it was a baby, he said it was only a blob of tissue.

“It was the most painful experience in my life,” she says. “It took three nurses to hold me down. I had no painkillers, as the doctor literally sucked out the contents of my uterus.”

have children again,” Shari says. At the same time, she enrolled in an ultrasound program—which proved a turning point. “That’s when I first saw active little babies with fingers and toes, and realized they weren’t just ‘blobs of tissue.’” She was overwhelmed with guilt over her two abortions.

“At work each day I was vividly reminded of how my own babies had looked,” she says. When Shari sought help from her church, she found that it wasn’t equipped to counsel women suffering from post-abortion syndrome.

During this time she met her future husband. They married and moved to Michigan where, for five years, they tried without suc-



cess to have a baby. "I was so overcome with guilt I jumped from church to church, pastor to pastor, trying to seek counseling," she says.

The worst part was thinking she'd aborted the only two babies she would ever conceive. None of the counseling met her needs. Even her friends didn't seem to understand her guilt. But her problem lay deeper.

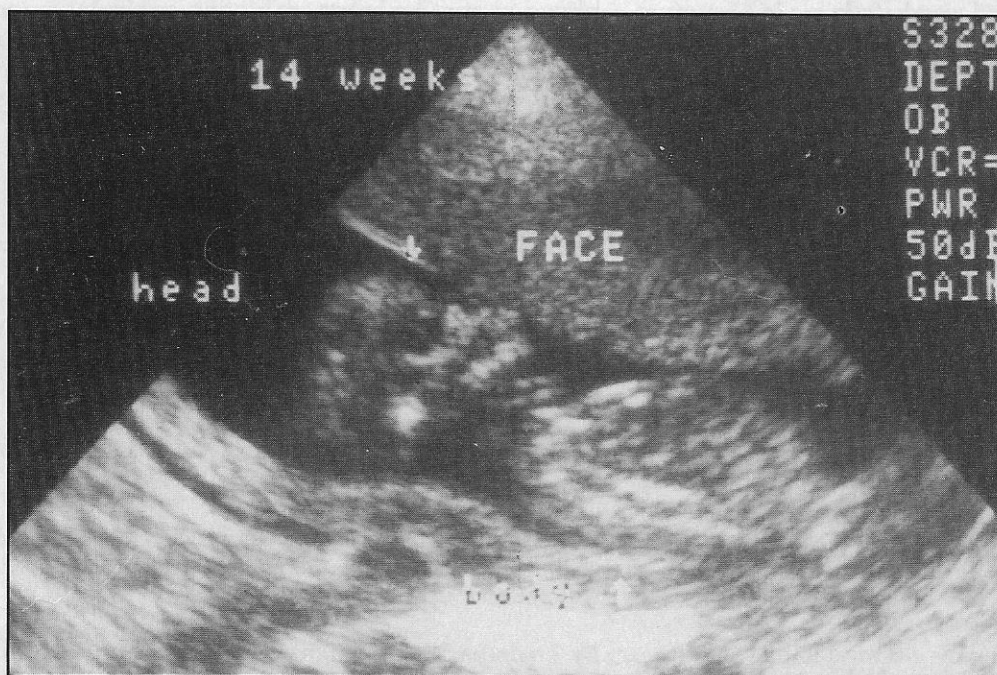
In desperation, Shari unburdened her heart to God. "I cried years of tears that wouldn't stop," she says. "I cried out to God, and asked him to forgive me. I asked Jesus to take over my life. Then I asked him to heal my womb so that I could conceive again. After that, I wanted him to use me to help other women."

That same month, part of Shari's prayer

the unborn baby. "At seven weeks it really did look like a blob, but that's because the technology simply wasn't able to distinguish the individual body parts."

In recent years, better equipment and computers have greatly enhanced the ultrasound images. "We're now able to distinguish body parts three weeks earlier than we were a few years ago," she says. "We can even see the heart beating three weeks after conception. And when you realize the seven-week-old fetus is less than one inch long and we can see tiny fingers, toes and eyes, it's incredible."

But Shari's sense of ministry has gone from a one-on-one in her office to the community and beyond. Using her sophisticated ultrasound equipment and a video camera,



*A window on the womb: In this ultrasound image the baby's face and head are clearly visible.*

was answered when she conceived the first of her three sons.

### Seeing the Truth

Shari determined to put her ultrasound skills to work in a ministry helping pregnant women. "Most women who come to me for a sonogram before an abortion change their minds once they see their fully formed baby," she says.

Technological advances have made the difference. She thinks one reason pro-abortionists call the unborn baby a "blob of tissue" is because of old technology. "In the mid-1970's, all the ultrasound showed was the position of the fetus," she says, using the medical term *fetus* for

she produced two video tapes that show prenatal development. One video is for the religious market, the other for the secular.

The secular video is the first she knows of that's geared for public schools. "My goal is to show the video to students before they become pregnant. I want the evidence to speak for itself," she says. Both videos give viewers a window on the womb, and have sent Shari beyond the confines of her examination room to schools, churches and civic groups—even to a U.S. Senate subcommittee meeting where she appeared as a key witness for the pro-life side.

"Society has a way of denying the existence of anything it can't see, hear, or feel,"

**"If the world could see what I see inside the womb, there wouldn't be an abortion issue."**

Shari explains. "If the world could see what I see inside the womb, there wouldn't be an abortion issue."

Shari says she's convinced education will open peoples' minds to the truth and cites Harrison Hitchman, a speaker at the pro-abortion National Abortion Rights League in 1989: "Probably nothing has been as damaging to our cause as technological advances that show pictures of the fetus."

She adds, "When I realized what abortion is and that I had to do something, I prayed for God to use my special gifts and talents. He'll reveal his plan as each of us asks him

to, and are obedient to serve him.

"I have no choice but to use the gift of ultrasonography God has given me," Shari says. "I don't knock anyone over the head with it. I was 'pro-choice' once because I wasn't educated about the issues. If someone had come to me and been judgmental, I would've rebelled."

Wherever her ministry takes her, Shari has faith that once people see God's greatest miracle at work, they'll begin to respect the life of the unborn child. ■

*Felicia Day is a freelance writer living in the New York metropolitan area.*

## God's Incredible Creation

**W**e're "fearfully and wonderfully made," Scripture says, each of us a one-of-a-kind creation. Still, we all share a common glory—the divine pattern of life inside the womb. Technology has now made it possible for us to discover just how amazing that pattern is:

**At conception:** Life begins. All that we are—height, hair and eye color, sex—is included in the single cell called a zygote.

**Day 2:** The zygote splits into two cells, then splits again and again into a bundle of cells called a blastocyst.

**Week 1:** As a bundle of cells, we implant ourselves in our mother's uterine wall.

**By 3 weeks:** The structure of all our basic organs and our fundamental body shape are beginning to be put in place, from brain to simple fingers.

**By 4 weeks:** We have a discernible heartbeat.

**By 6 weeks:** Our brain reveals electrical impulses.

**By 7 weeks:** Our neural cells in the brain begin to connect, and we begin to move spontaneously.

**By 8 weeks:** We're around 1 1/2 inches long, and have all our organs. Our hands, feet and limbs are clearly shaped. Even our brain has convoluted folds, like that of an adult's. Every minute about 100,000 nerve cells begin to sprout until there are around 1 billion at our birth. At this point we are called a fetus.

**By 8 to 9 weeks:** Ultrasound can pick up our fingerprints, footprints, even the creases in our palms.

**By 10 weeks:** We become very active—sucking our thumbs, jumping, scratching our head, and playing with our umbilical cord, our lifeline to our mother.

**By 11 weeks:** We are about three inches long and weigh one ounce. We look and behave like the complete human

beings we are. Our hearts are beating, our brains are active, and all bodily systems are working. We can suck our thumb, make a fist, hiccup, sleep, dream, hear, feel, urinate and have tiny bowel movements. This is the average age of an aborted child.

**By 12 weeks:** We can grasp with our hands.

**By 12-16 weeks:** We'll move back if you touch our feet or body.

**By 4 months:** We can frown, move our lips, turn our head, kick our feet, and grasp with our hands. We even grow a little hair.

**By 4 1/2 months:** We respond to a touch on our lips by sucking—just like a newborn baby.

**By 6 months:** Our nervous system is developed enough so that only the part of our body that's been touched will recoil from touch.

**By 7 months:** We're in high gear. Our eyes can open and we respond to light. We also process and respond to sound—like the rush of blood through Mom's arteries.

In essence, our neural circuits are the way they'll be when we're newly born. We can pay attention to speech directed to us through a loudspeaker, and repetitious sounds will bore us—our heartbeat will speed up, as if to drown out the boredom.

**By 8 months:** Our brains will have the same number of cells as we will have at birth.

**By 9 months:** Our cerebral cortex, the part of our brain associated with thought and consciousness, is well defined. Our brain waves are similar to those we'll have as newborns sleeping, dreaming, and waking.

We're ready to be born. We decide the day of birth by signaling that labor contractions should begin. Watch out, world. Here we come!

—Vicki T. de Vries

(Research based on information from Shari Richard and Do You Hear What I Hear? in Newsweek Special Issue, Summer 1991.)