

“The Blessing of Being Alive”

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website (churchofgodbig sandy.com). It was posted for the weekend of Oct. 18, 2025—following the death of the author on Oct. 16. (A version of this article was posted in the “Edifying the Body” section on Nov. 24, 2018. At that time, the article was compiled from notes that Mrs. West used for an oral presentation at a community Thanksgiving church service on Nov. 18, 2018. Mrs. West had written a similar article for this website on Jan. 5, 2013.)

By Shirley Dobbs West

BIG SANDY, Texas—I strongly believe in the sanctity of life. Therefore, I am pro-life, and the reason is very personal.

Mother was a young bride

My parents were married in 1932. My mother lacked one month being 15 years old and my daddy was 24.

My grandmother gave permission for the marriage because doctors had told her she had only a few months to live. She knew Daddy would take good care of her young daughter. She made Daddy promise that Mother would not have a child before she was at least 18 years old.

Pregnant mother on the floor

In the spring of 1935, my mother became pregnant. My parents wanted a child, and they were joyful. But one day Daddy came in from work and found Mother on the floor. He thought she was dead. He carefully laid her on the bed and she came to—crying in pain and anguish. Then, she passed out again.

Terrified, Daddy ran two miles to the country store that had a phone to call the doctor.

The doctor came and thought Mother was having a miscarriage. But, as time went on and the pain and anguish continued, he knew something else was wrong. He called an ambulance to take Mother to the hospital, 16 miles away.

Would an abortion save the mother?

At the hospital, he conferred with another doctor, and they decided the only way to save Mother’s life was to abort her child.

Mother refused and begged Daddy, “Please don’t let them take my baby.”

Daddy wouldn’t sign the consent form.

An elderly doctor was in the hospital attending to a patient. The younger doctors consulted him and he examined Mother.

He told them: “This woman will die if you take her baby. With surgery I believe the mother and baby can be saved. But I am too old to do the surgery.”

Mother agreed to the surgery

The younger doctors said they would do the surgery under the supervision of the older doctor. They also promised Mother they would not take the baby unless it was absolutely necessary. She agreed to the surgery.

I don't know what the problem was, but the surgery was successful. Mother had to have care the rest of her pregnancy. My grandmother (who was to live three more years) took care of her.

On Oct. 18, 1935, Mother was 18 years old. She was with child, but she had not given birth. So, technically, Daddy had kept his promise.

Not breathing at birth

On Dec. 30, 1935, I was born.

I wasn't breathing. The doctor put me in a basin of warm water and then in one of cold water. That shocked me into breathing and I let out a good, healthy cry.

The family story is that my grandmother was so happy she slapped the doctor on the back and he almost dropped me.

I wasn't the only miracle that December night. It snowed in western Oklahoma, which was the first moisture in 13 months in that drought-stricken area of the Dust Bowl.

I was 40 years old when Daddy told me the story of my birth. He also said I was 15 years old before he got the hospital bill paid.

I am now almost 83 years old. And—just think—I could have been a statistic in a dusty record book in the Beckham County courthouse that reads,

"Dobbs—girl—aborted at three months—June 1935."

Wonderful opportunities

Because of God's mercy, my mother's courage and my parents love, I have had many wonderful opportunities. I have had the opportunity to be a wife for 60 wonderful years and be a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Each birthday, I remember three tremendous blessings.

- God's mercy
- Mother's courage
- Daddy's love for his wife and unborn child.

And I say a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessing of being alive.

Oh, by the way. My grandmother lived to see my children.

We serve an awesome, awesome God.