

ym (what you can do)

a matter of life and death

Emily doesn't want any more babies to die. That's why she works to protect unwanted newborns. BY KAREN J. BANNAN

Three years ago, Emily McIlwaine of Farmingdale, NY, heard a story that shocked her. A 6-pound, 4-ounce girl (later named Angelica by paramedics) had been discovered floating lifeless in a local courthouse's public toilet. "I couldn't believe there are people who kill their babies or just leave them where they're born," says Emily, now a 16-year-old high school junior.

She learned about Angelica from Tim Jaccard, a paramedic called in after the tiny girl was found. As the guest speaker at a child development class Emily was taking, he was there to talk about infant abandonment and Children of Hope. COH is an organization in New York that he started to help women legally, and anonymously, give up their newborns if they're unable to care for them. There are similar programs nationwide, such as Project Cuddle in California and A Secret Safe Place for Newborns in Alabama.

COH comes to the rescue of women like Vanessa, 21, who already had one child and was seven months pregnant with another. "I was living at my sister's house, and my family didn't know I was pregnant," says Vanessa. "I knew I couldn't have two kids. I have no idea what I would have done with the baby if it weren't for Children of Hope. Now I know my child will be in a better [place]."

The group pays the mother's medical bills and works with adoption agencies to place the infant in a loving home. In some cases it arranges funerals for children like Angelica who are found too late.

Sadly, COH is necessary because babies are abandoned way too often. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 108 babies were abandoned in 1998. That's why Tim speaks at schools across Long Island—to let girls know they have options if they become pregnant and aren't able to raise the child.

Emily couldn't stop thinking about Tim's speech. It had depressed her, and she knew she had to do something. Her solution was to start a COH fund-raising group at her high school. Twenty students wrote



Emily (top) says that helping COH runs in her family. "My mom and sister are really involved." The grave site (above) and funeral procession (below) for an abandoned baby. The burial was arranged by COH, which also provided a full honor guard and motorcycle escort for the sad event.



down their names on the sign-up sheet she posted in the hallway—many of them had also been motivated by what Tim had to say.

Their first event was held on Valentine's Day. Members hung signs at school letting people know that they'd be selling heart-shaped pins to raise money for COH. At \$10 each, the buttons weren't cheap, but the sale was a success. It even became an annual event—the fourth one will be held next February. So far the students have raised \$5,000.

Emily's dedication goes beyond fund-raising. "Last year, one girl, who I didn't know that well, came and asked me about abandoning a baby legally," she says. "I have no idea if she was pregnant or if a friend of hers was, but talking about it can help a lot." (That same girl later got in touch with Tim.)

Volunteering with COH has made Emily realize how much she can make a difference. "When you look at what other people have to deal with, it makes us know that what we go through isn't really that bad."

For more info, visit www.amtchildrenofhope.com or call 877-796-HOPE.