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MAY 8, 2013 4:00 AM

Abortion's Underside

Kermit Gosnell is not the only seedy backroom abortionist operating in the age of *Roe v. Wade*.

By Jillian Kay Melchior

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Sycloria Williams was recovering from a botched abortion at her Pompano, Fla., home on July 21, 2006, when two homicide detectives knocked on her door. They asked if she knew why they were there. "Yes," Williams said immediately. "Because the baby was born alive."¹

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It took investigators one week and three separate searches to find the corpse of Williams's infant, which was hidden away in the abortion clinic in Hialeah, Fla.² It was a tiny black girl, only 25.5 centimeters from head to toe, born prematurely on July 20. Her body was badly decomposed, discolored and infested with maggots, but the autopsy report and an expert physician's review both suggested she had drawn breath on her own before she died.³

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The body had been hidden, according to a tip received by the police, on the

roof⁴ or perhaps in the dropped ceiling of the abortion clinic,⁵ then later in a biohazard bag within a medical-waste box in the malodorous recovery room.⁶ Florida's Department of Health later alleged that Williams's doctor had "falsified [her] medical records in an apparent effort to conceal his errors and the true events of July 20, 2006."⁷

Those "true events" — the alleged murder of an infant who was not supposed to be born alive — turned out to be harder to sort out than anyone expected, and the conclusion also proved hazy. In the end, no one was successfully held responsible for the infant's death in either criminal or civil court, despite efforts at prosecution.

The sensational case of Philadelphia doctor Kermit Gosnell, which finally gained coverage from the reluctant media, has revealed the ugly operations of an abortion clinic where live-born babies were allegedly murdered, their spines snipped with scissors, and where women received abortions in horrifyingly unsanitary conditions. Many sustained internal injuries; one woman even died, drugged up on cheap Demerol.

The Gosnell case prompts the question of how common similar practices are. A NATIONAL REVIEW investigation revealed the troubling history of three Florida abortion clinics, located in Miami, Hialeah, and Miramar, that have had several run-ins with the law. After a 2004 tip proved accurate, two owners and two staff members were successfully prosecuted for unlicensed medical practice; and, although there was no conviction, it appears that Sycloria Williams's baby was born alive and murdered at the Hialeah clinic in 2006. Furthermore, some of the clinics' doctors have records best described as routine medical violence against women. Yet despite their fraught past, the three clinics remain fully operational today. And they are a critical but often-neglected part of the picture of abortion in America.

Dr. Frantz Bazile arrived in Florida with a shady medical record. According to a complaint by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation, in September 1987, Bazile had performed a late-second-trimester abortion on a 17-year-old, which he thoroughly mangled. He lacerated her vagina and cervix, also digging out spongy material from her body that he failed to recognize was mature placental tissue. The girl consequently began bleeding profusely, so Bazile began suturing her vaginal vein. Finally, an ambulance had to be called, and the girl was taken to

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the hospital for an emergency C-section. The baby was born alive, but it died later the same day.⁸The Illinois Department of Professional Regulation accepted a proposed settlement from Bazile, placing him on three years' probation.⁹

It was apparently soon afterward that Bazile moved to Florida, where he immediately ran into more trouble. The *Miami New Times* reported that in 1990, a patient named Gwendolyn Bolton claimed he had misdiagnosed her appendicitis, although no negligence was found, and the case was dismissed. Also in the early '90s, Bazile was taken to court for allegedly performing an abortion on a 17-year-old without parental consent. This case was also dismissed, and it's unclear whether a settlement was paid.¹⁰

Around this time, Bazile came into contact with a woman named Belkis Gonzalez, with whom he eventually shared a residential address.¹¹ How long the two had known each other is unclear — Bazile never responded to my interview request, which was left with a receptionist at his office in Hialeah — but according to a complaint filed in the 11th Judicial Circuit Court in Florida in 2009, Bazile and Gonzalez had had a sexual relationship in addition to a professional one, conceiving one or two children together.¹² Details about Gonzalez are scarce; official records say she has little more than a high-school education and considers Spanish her language of choice. She later told authorities that she had attended university for a mere six months, but she nevertheless began calling herself a medical assistant.¹³ At the time of publication, she has not returned my interview request, left with a receptionist at the clinic in Miramar.

In 1994, Bazile and Gonzalez filed articles of incorporation for a Hialeah abortion clinic, A Gyn Diagnostic Center, listing a woman named Siomara Senises as the vice president. Senises also has not responded to a message requesting an interview, but corporate records show she had served as vice president of A Woman's Care Abortions in Miami, of which she helped found in 1989. A Gyn Diagnostic Center, the original clinic in Hialeah, was dissolved in 1997 for reasons that are unclear, but in 2000, it reopened under the name A Gyn of Hialeah, Inc., located in the same office, with Bazile listed as president, Gonzalez listed as secretary, and Senises listed as vice president and treasurer. In 1999, Gonzalez and Senises began a third clinic, A Gyn of Miramar.¹⁴ The details of Bazile's medical practice at these clinics over the years are unclear, but he does perform abortions at the Hialeah clinic today.

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