

# Safe & Legal--In New York

**Author:** James Miller

"SAFE & LEGAL" -- IN NEW YORK

by James A. Miller

Dawn Ravenell was a bright, musically talented child who loved gospel music and sang with her school glee club and her family's gospel singing group, of which she was the, lead singer. Dawn also sang at the Faith Tabernacle Church in Queens Village, New York City, where her father Preston was the pastor, and her mother Ruth a minister.

The Ravenells were a loving, close-knit family of eight, with two adopted children in addition to Dawn and her three biological siblings. Mrs. Ravenell fondly remembers Dawn, her "perfect child," who never gave her parents any grief. Dawn was a great help in keeping the busy home functioning well: caring for the younger children, helping with the housework, often "waxing all the furniture and cleaning out the refrigerator."

As an eighth grade, honor roll student at Junior High School 192 in Hollis, Queens, N.Y, Dawn was truly a delightful and unique child. Indeed, the only problem Mrs. Ravenell could recall was Dawn's pairing off with a steady boyfriend at age 13. Mrs. Ravenell worried about that, and told Dawn that Mother was "kind of old-fashioned and didn't have a boyfriend until she was 16 years old."

Dawn laughed, "Mommy, that was a long time ago! Nobody does that anymore." So the mother left it at that, and Dawn had a steady 15 year-old boyfriend.

## School Counselor Refers for Abortion

Unfortunately, Dawn soon became pregnant. Too embarrassed to tell her parents, Dawn confided in a school guidance counselor, who referred her to a Manhattan abortion clinic. Under New York law, as in most states, minors may not have their ears pierced or a stitch inserted without prior parental consent, but they may obtain abortions without the consent or even notification of the parents. The school "counselor" could not give Dawn an aspirin tablet without first obtaining written parental permission; yet the abortion arrangements were made, quite legally, without parental consent or knowledge .

## New York City's Largest Abortion Mill

And so, on the 23rd of January, 1985, 13 year-old Dawn Ravenell, 21-weeks pregnant and terrified, arrived at 14 East 60th Street, just a few feet off of New York's prestigious 5th Avenue, for her secret abortion. One block diagonally south was the famed Plaza Hotel; straight ahead across 5th Avenue was the entrance to Central Park. Dawn was definitely in the "high rent district," when she entered the office building housing Eastern Women's Center, New York's largest volume abortion mill.

Because of Dawn's advanced pregnancy, lamanaria sticks were inserted into her vagina to dilate the cervix for the abortion which was scheduled for the next day. On January 24th, accompanied by her boyfriend, Dawn again took the subway into Manhattan and came to Eastern Women's Center for her abortion.

## Abortionist Takes Train From Philadelphia

We've updated our privacy policy. You can see the details [here](#).

[Close this notice](#) (we will save a setting in your browser to keep it from showing again).

Eastern charged \$600 for an abortion, and Klein received between \$75 and \$100 of that, depending on the length of the pregnancy. Over the course of a year, Klein earned an estimated \$100,000 from Eastern for his once a week stints. Back in Philadelphia Klein conducted his own lucrative abortion business, which he began in 1971. Klein would later testify that he had "performed more than 5,000 abortions" in his career, an apparent gross undercount considering that at Eastern alone he was doing some one thousand abortions yearly on a part-time basis.

### "Just Another Piece of Meat"

Dawn's abortion started at 1:10 p.m. and was over at 1:25. Soon after, it became obvious that something was horribly wrong: Dawn remained unconscious and unresponsive. She was virtually brain dead and would never awaken.

Dr. Klein was assisted in performing the abortion by nurse anesthetist Robert Augente, who later testified that he received between \$18 and \$25 per abortion. According to court testimony, neither Klein nor Augente had ever met or even spoken to Dawn prior to putting her under general anesthesia. Although Dawn had been "counseled" by a clinic "social worker" the previous day, and had signed a consent form, the abortion mill hadn't bothered to record her weight or age, much less explain the risks and dangers of the abortion procedure. As attorney Thomas Principe, suing for Dawn's estate, told the jurors, "This child was just another piece (of meat) on the assembly line."

Dawn's fate was sealed when Augente began administering the anesthetic Brevitol to her. A highly dangerous drug, Brevitol's known side effects include nausea and vomiting. There is no indication in the skimpy clinic records that Dawn was told not to eat prior to her abortion, a routine precaution.

### Cardiac Arrest and Coma

Although a 21-week, second-trimester abortion would normally last for 15 to 20 minutes--the baby must be crushed and pulled out part-by-body-part-- nurse Augente gave Dawn only 80 milligrams of Brevitol, a dose sufficient to keep her unconscious for just 5 to 7 minutes. Dawn awoke during the abortion and began choking and vomiting; medical records indicate that she "aspirated [vomited] gastric juices from her stomach into her lungs." Klein and Augente gave Dawn more anesthesia and inserted "a 75-cent plastic airway into her throat to help her breathe," and rushed through the rest of the abortion. In his haste to complete the job, Klein left some fetal tissue in Dawn's uterus, which was discovered later during the autopsy.

Klein and Augente compounded their blunders by removing Dawn to a recovery room, where she was left unattended with the plastic airway still in her throat! When Dawn started to come out of the anesthesia she was again choking and gagging on the airway in her throat and the vomited material in her lungs. This time there was nobody in attendance, and so she choked on her own vomit, literally drowning in it, and suffered cardiac arrest--a massive heart attack.

When a nurse finally came by and saw what was happening, emergency services were summoned, but it was too late. Dawn was rushed to nearby Roosevelt Hospital, where she was placed on a respirator, and then transferred to St. Luke's, the hospital's uptown division. A call from St. Luke's was the first indication the Ravenells had of their daughter's pregnancy and abortion. At St. Luke's they encountered Dawn's boyfriend, bawling uncontrollably.

On February 11, 1985, after 18 days of being kept alive on a respirator, Dawn, brain dead and totally unresponsive, was disconnected from her life- support systems.

### The Malpractice Trial

We've updated our privacy policy. You can see the details [here](#).

[Close this notice](#) (we will save a setting in your browser to keep it from showing again).

Dawn's age and weight at the time of the procedure. Medical records were also changed regarding the amount of anesthesia given to Dawn.

Eastern Women's Center, which had no medical malpractice insurance, was severed from the case on the grounds that they simply hired the abortionists and thus were not responsible for the malpractices they might commit. Eastern, so the argument went, merely provided facilities for the abortionists and the hired guns then operated entirely on their own. (This writer has seen the same defense prevail in other abortion malpractice suits).

Abortionist Klein and nurse Augente, on the other hand, argued that it was not their responsibility to advise their patients of the risks of an abortion--that was Eastern's job!

One of the more amazing bits of trial testimony occurred when lawyer Principe, cross-examining Klein, asked whether Dawn's age bothered the abortionist. Klein callously replied, "Oh, no. I've done 13-year olds before. When they're 10, maybe I'll notice."

### Record Malpractice Verdict

Although Principe had asked for a verdict in the amount of \$1,000,000 against defendants Klein and Augente, the jury, calling Dawn's death "an abomination," returned a verdict of \$1,225,000! Dr. Klein was held liable for 20% of the award and Augente for 80%. The jury award--greater than what was sought, an almost unprecedented occurrence--was also the highest amount ever won in New York State for a wrongful-death abortion case, eclipsing the previous record by more than a half million dollars.

Unfortunately, the trial judge felt the amount was excessive and reduced the award to just \$400,000, which the bereaved parents accepted rather than go through the agony of another trial. Unlike Eastern, Klein and Augente both carried malpractice insurance and their insurers paid the damages.

### Currently

The Ravenells are going on with their lives despite their tragedy. Though Mrs. Ravenell had said she would never sing again, time and faith have healed some of the wounds; the family has cut some new albums of gospel songs. Two more children have been adopted.

Eastern Women's Center has relocated 30 blocks south of its former premises. It continues to advertise extensively and apparently is still New York's largest volume abortion mill.

Dr. Allen Klein is back at his old stand in Philadelphia. A phone call by a prospective client elicited Klein's abortion price scale: "up to 10 weeks, \$375; 15 weeks, \$500; after that it goes a lot more; it could go into the thousands, depending on the age." The informant, who identified herself as a nurse associated with Klein "for 16 years," lauded Klein's alleged skill.

The whereabouts of nurse-anesthetist Augente are unknown.

### ENDNOTES

This article, and its various quotations, are based on the following sources:

Thomas Principe, the attorney who successfully sued Klein and Augente, personal communication;

Trial transcript, New York Supreme Court #22504/85: Ravenell v. Eastern Women's Center, Dr. Allen Klein, and nurse Robert Augente.

We've updated our privacy policy. You can see the details [here](#).

[Close this notice](#) (we will save a setting in your browser to keep it from showing again).

Brenda Herrmann, "\$1.225 M(illion) awarded in girl's abort death," Daily News (N.Y.), Dec. 11, 1990, p. 13;

Emily Sachar, "Abortion Team Told to Pay \$1.2 M(illion) in Teen's Death, New York Newsday, Dec. 11, 1990, p. 6;

a Sept. 15, 1992 call to Dr. Klein's Philadelphia office, personal communication.

We've updated our privacy policy. You can see the details [here](#).

[Close this notice](#) (we will save a setting in your browser to keep it from showing again).