

ACS Speech at PPMHV Art Opening  
August 21, 2016

Many thanks to Nicole Royster and Ruth-Ellen Blodgett of PPNNE for inviting me to do the show and for all their help in making it happen. And to Jim Magner for loaning two Margaret Sanger paintings.

My grandmother lived in Fishkill in the 30s and 40s, moving to Arizona permanently in the 50s. Back then she had more in common with Republicans than Democrats. Barry Goldwater was a good friend—he famously said that abortion is none of the governments damn business. My grandmother would mark her ballot in Arizona as follows: Norman Thomas, Socialist for President, Barry Goldwater, Republican for Senate and Stuart Udall, Democrat for Congress. Can you imagine the consternation of the ballot counters?

This is a daunting tradition that I am following in. Have you read Jill Lepore's new book, *The Secret History of Wonder Women*, where she revealed that my grandmother was the model for Wonder Woman?

I can handle being the grandson of Margaret Sanger, But I'm not so sure I'm up to being the grandson of Wonder Woman!

How did she have time to paint? When she moved to Tucson when in her late 50's in the 1930's, she got inspiration from the desert, took watercolor classes and painted on and off for the rest of her life. She kept up her cause, as she called it, domestically and internationally – at age 72 she started creating the birth control pill and at age 73 she founded the International Planned Parenthood.

The maternal and infant mortality statistics for the United States 100 years ago were the equivalent of the least developed country in the world today. To her, and to us, these deaths were an affront to civilization and decency, and preventable. Her solution, birth control, to enable women to time, space, delay and reduce her births contributed to the massive improvement in the public's health today.

But still: worldwide over 290,000 women die annually from pregnancy-related causes, that is 800 a day, including 43,000 from unsafe abortions, and 5.6 million babies die at birth or are stillborn. 1.5 million men and women die annually from AIDS and 35% of women worldwide have been the victims of intimate partner violence. This is an affront to decency and civilization.

And, no surprise, there are those today as there were 100 years ago who oppose our efforts to save these lives.

So, let's talk about men. Recent news:

The male President of Turkey said that women would never be equal to men, and that they should stay at home and have 3, preferably 5, children. The male Minister of Education in Russia said that sex ed would never be taught in Russia's classrooms. And a Bishop in Poland declared that "The ideology of gender presents a greater threat worse than Nazism and Communism combined." And then there is the Texas Legislature.

The judge who sentenced my grandmother to jail for opening America's first birth control clinic in 1916 said, "A woman has no right to copulate without fear of pregnancy."

100 years ago, Anthony Comstock, the Inspector Javert of his time and the government's enforcer of Puritan morality, proclaimed that sexual pleasure within marriage was "bestial and base".

In 1914, my grandmother took on Anthony Comstock in her newspaper, *The Woman Rebel* – by the way, it was not a birth control newspaper but an anarchist one and Comstock was just one of her many targets. She was indicted and fled to Europe, leaving my father and aunt, ages 4 and 6 with friends. Comstock then entrapped my grandfather, William Sanger, into handing out one of my grandmother's pamphlets, *Family Limitation*, to an undercover officer. He went on trial at the Tombs. It was the trial of the century, or of the decade anyway.

My grandfather, after declaring in open court that Comstock was a "religious and pornographic fanatic" and a "victim of incurable sexaphobia", declared, "I deny the right of the state to exercise dominion over the souls and bodies of our women by compelling them to go into unwilling motherhood. "

He was found guilty. The presiding judge said, "Your crime is not only a violation of the laws of man, it is a violation of the law of God as well. Such persons who circulate such pamphlets are a menace to society. There are too many now who believe it is a crime to have children. If some of the women who are going around advocating equal suffrage would go around and advocate women having children they would do a greater service."

My grandfather was sentenced to 30 days in the Tombs for handing out *Family Limitation*. The first person to go to jail for advocating birth control in my grandmother's crusade was not

my grandmother - it was my grandfather. There are not many painters who have gone to jail for their political beliefs – Salvador Dali was the only other major painter I could find.

He was a man of equal strength, passions and principles as my grandmother. You can see this in my grandfather's Maine coast scenes on exhibit here. My cousin, Nora, describes our grandfather's paintings as, evoking "the menacing waters and skies that are so part of his portentous views of the world. The fury of the coast and the ocean was his own fury." He remained passionate and angry until the end of his days. At his death at age 88 he was preparing an illustrated biography of his hero, Thomas Paine.

While my grandmother in her paintings mainly painted quiet and colorful desert scenes, her past crept into them. The painting with the church in the desert, the church being her number one enemy, a Madonna-type woman walks in the foreground away from the church dragging three children, two boys and a girl. My grandmother had two boys and a girl. The girl is next to her, the youngest. My aunt, Peggy, died of pneumonia at age 5, shortly after my grandmother returned from her Comstock-enforced exile. My grandmother never recovered, and this is the only example we know of her visiting the themes of persecution and loss in this haunting painting.

The organization she founded, IPPF, is extraordinary – now in 172 countries, including the Axis of Evil. She knew the world's women needed an organization dedicated to them. 60 million women a year come to our clinics.

Since our founding, world population growth rate cut in half, from 5.0 to 2.5 and infant mortality by 2/3rds. Planning,

delaying, timing, spacing and limiting children is a huge part of these statistics and the liberation of women.

I travel this Hemisphere a lot, and I take my paints with me. I have yet to take them out of the box – I am busy running from village to village, clinic to clinic. I unwind by painting here in Maine. Last year I was in the slums of the Dominican Republic and high in the Andes, where I witness our extraordinary staff delivering health care under difficult conditions – our mobile health units operate where there are no roads, electricity, or sanitation.

In Peru, I met with women who still use herbal methods of contraception, plants that they grow and make tea. It works better than nothing. As a fallback, the women wash their husband's underwear in another herb to give them a genital rash, which puts a stop to any sexual activity.

Along the way, we fight governments in virtually every country. Latin America is what many of our opponents want this country to be. We have to stop them.

Finally, to our friends and supporters here, we could not do our work without your generous support. Every gift you make is a transformative gift, transforming the lives of the women and children who line up to see us in remote villages or bustling cities all over the world, from Poughkeepsie to Sao Paolo.

I thank you on behalf of the women we serve.