

Miraculous images found in 'Unplanned'

When moviegoers left theaters after watching the newly released film "Unplanned," they undoubtedly took with them some powerful images. Yet, one of the most stirring details likely escaped their sight.

It is the "story behind the story," a detail Abby Johnson was not about to leave out. In one of the final scenes, the actress who portrays Johnson hastily grabs a few personal items before rushing out the back door of the abortion clinic where she served as director. The large plastic bowl that peculiarly had held a spot on a shelf in her office was coming with her.

"I had worked hard for them, and I wasn't about to leave them there," said Johnson.

Within eight years, as she moved up the ranks from volunteer to the youngest Planned Parenthood director in history, the number of abortions on her watch soared to over 20,000 babies. And the bowl continued to fill. Its contents were the remnants from sidewalk counselors and pro-life visitors who had annoyed her with their continual praying outside the clinic – Miraculous Medals. But what had compelled her to dig these medals out from flower beds and bushes surrounding the clinic?

"I didn't know what they were but I knew where they were, and that is what bugged me," says Johnson. "To this day Planned Parenthood takes trespassing seriously. Now these sidewalk counselors were not technically trespassing but leaving their little medals in my flower beds. It really got on my nerves. I wanted them to just leave us alone and leave the women alone. Placing these medals in the bushes was just the straw that broke the camel's back, and I wanted them to stop."

Each Monday morning would find Johnson digging out the medals but, for some reason, she chose not to discard them. Today she sees this choice as more providential than practical.

About the image on the Miraculous Medal



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The Miraculous Medal took its name from the many miracles that came about to those who wore the blessed medal. The medal shows the Blessed Virgin standing on the globe with rays coming from her hands. The “OSV Encyclopedia of Catholic History” says the rays symbolize the graces that would be bestowed on all who asked for them. The oval frame around the Virgin’s figure has the words, “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.” The reverse side of the oval frame, the encyclopedia says, has “the letter M, surmounted by a cross, with a crossbar beneath it, and under all the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary. The former was surrounded by a crown of thorns, and the latter pierced by a sword.” The first medals were struck in 1832, and the popularity of the medal grew rapidly.

History of the medal

She is now familiar with the history of the Miraculous Medal and its creation, following the apparition of the Blessed Mother to St. Catherine Laboure in 1830.

Originally named the “Medal of the Immaculate Conception” upon Church approval in 1832, the sacramental would soon become

known as the Miraculous Medal due to countless reports of miracles. Johnson counts herself among those reports.

“I now know the significance,” she said. “I am humbled and in awe each time I reflect on how these medals played a part in my conversion. It truly is ‘miraculous.’”

That conversion, which began her journey from the youngest Planned Parenthood director in history to pro-life activist, opened the door to even more surprises.

“After I became pro-life, my Episcopal Church kicked me out and said I was no longer welcome,” she contends. “All of my new friends were Catholic, and they kept inviting us to Mass. Eventually my husband and I caved, and we were like, ‘OK, OK, we will go and we will hate it, and then they will leave us alone.’ We went; we loved it, and the next thing we knew we were in private RCIA classes.”

Led to Catholicism

This past April 6 marks the six-year anniversary of Johnson’s entrance to the Catholic Church. Yet, it seems that seeds of faith were sowed many years ago.

“When I look back, even to my childhood, I see that the Blessed Mother was always there with me,” said Johnson, who grew up in a Southern Baptist home. “My mom told me that she used to come home and find me sitting in front of the TV watching Mother Angelica with a towel over my head like I was a sister.”

“Even when I worked in the clinic my house was decorated in Marian art,” said Johnson. “Then, I was drawn to those medals. Not all were Miraculous Medals; some were Holy Spirit medals and various saints, but the beauty of them just wouldn’t allow for me to throw them away. I seriously had no idea what they were, but I was compelled to keep them in my office. And although the Lord was far from present in my life, he took up

an ever-increasing space in my office through the prayers of the faithful.”

Calling herself a “testament that conversion is real,” Johnson today works to help others leave the abortion industry. Through her ministry, *And Then There Were None*, nearly 500 clinic workers have left – including several abortionists who have “put down their abortion instruments to defend life.”

And what would become of that collection of medals?

“I take them with me when I go to pray outside clinics and leave them in discreet places – whether flower beds or near a fence post,” said Johnson.

Jan Petroni Brown writes from Texas.