

## Canticle Talks...

... with **Carole Adlard**

Carole Adlard of Cincinnati, Ohio is a wife and mother of four; she is also founder and executive director of Healthy Visions (formerly called Adoption Option, Inc.), which was originally established to educate people about adoption and to counter its negative misunderstandings. She



Carole and her husband Ed celebrate their jubilee birthdays.

is now currently spearheading a national movement of abstinence-based education. With her Catholic faith leading the way, she is teaching so much more than just how to say "no."



**How has being a Catholic woman affected your life?**

I graduated from high school from the all girls' school, Saint Ursula Academy in Cincinnati. After that I was among the first group of women to be admitted to Notre Dame. Out of 1,500 in my graduating class, there were only 82 females. I think being a Catholic woman in the minority at that time molded me to know that I could make a difference on behalf of Catholic women everywhere – even back in the early 1970s. It motivated me to do something, to try to make a difference.



**How did you first come to realize you could make a difference?**

During my college years, I spent a semester at the University of Vienna. This and some more travel to East Berlin, Czechoslovakia, and Prague opened my eyes to the needs of others. I remember being on a train once, holding an orange. A woman came up to me and said, "Oh, you must be very wealthy." It seems that where she was from, they could only afford oranges at Christmas and even then, they were usually old and brown. As I gave her my orange, and saw her delight in it, I knew that I was learning something – I just didn't know what it all meant at that time.



**Encounters like that can be life-changing. What did you do after that time?**

After college, I married Ed Adlard. We were told from the beginning that we could not have

children. I was not drawn to the idea of adoption. I realize now that I had many misconceived notions about it. I had heard too many bad stories that only focused on the problems – birth mothers changing their minds and so on. But I was led to read more about it and pray about it. We finally adopted our daughter, Tara, now 17. Then, nine months later, the doctor told me I was pregnant. I told him that I knew I wasn't. I just couldn't believe it. It took me three tests to finally be convinced. I had my son, Chase, now 15. The doctor said it was most likely a one-time miracle. But soon after that I was pregnant with Brett, now 14 and then, Eric, now 12.

By acknowledging that God is with them at all times, it becomes like having a parent along on a date. And He is the ultimate chaperone!

adoption, but the truth remains that all of us wish we had made better choices before we became pregnant. We wish we had not engaged in premarital sex. We wish someone had talked to us about ab-

stinence.' With this I came to realize that teaching the students about adoption was wonderful, but teaching them about abstinence would be even better. This was the beginning of our abstinence-based education program.

**What exactly is "abstinence-based" education?**

There are two levels to this. One, is that we want our young people to have a disease-free and pregnancy-free childhood. We give the young teens information to keep them from getting sexually transmitted diseases and getting pregnant. We empower them by giving them boundaries. We teach them how to say "no" and how to back up that "no" with facts.

And the second level of our program is aimed at older women who are on welfare. This goal is what we call "secondary abstinence" – or "born again virgins," if you will. We impress upon these women that until you curb and redirect your sexual energies, you cannot build your life and get off welfare. I am amazed at how well received the talks are for this group. These women feel like they have recaptured their souls by setting up some boundaries in their life – by embracing abstinence.

**Those are incredible goals. How do you go about accomplishing them?**

We do this the same way we do the Adoption Option talks. We have real people talk to the young students and to the women. We have guest speakers who had babies very young. They talk about what it is like to have the responsibility of a baby – how it radically changed their life forever. We also have people with sexually transmitted diseases who talk frankly with the audience about how their decisions altered their lives completely. It is a form of peer counseling.

**The audience pays more attention because the speakers are "one of them" and speaking their language?**

So true. The talks get so emotional. We have students write to us after these presentations and thank us for giving them reasons to say no. One group of women came up to us after a talk and said that there was a big dance scheduled for that night and many of the girls had all talked about giving their boyfriends that special 'intimate gift,' but now they were going to keep that gift for themselves, for their future spouses. They wanted to stay abstinent. One young lady said that she always wanted to say 'no' to her boyfriend, but she couldn't come up with a good excuse – until now. Many say they had been sexually active, but were now planning to stop. Even boys have

**Everything is always on God's time, isn't it? How did you fill your days with your growing family?**

I stayed busy doing all the "mom things" among a few other jobs. Then one day in 1986, I read a letter in the paper from a man whose name is Kip Backscheider. He had just adopted a son and felt compelled to write about how wonderful adoption was in spite of all the bad stories you hear of it. I immediately called him to talk about our shared views, and together, we decided there needed to be more awareness of the good that adoption can do. At this point we formed Adoption Option, Inc., whose initial purpose was to deal with all the negative aspects of adoption. It became apparent to us that there was a great need for education about this. We soon formed a connection to the schools where we arranged for many birth parents to come in and talk to the students about their experiences.

**So you weren't just hitting students with facts and figures, you were introducing them to real people.**

Exactly. By having a real person come in and tell his or her story, the students were really listening. We were hitting a prime target here; many of the girls in the schools where we spoke might have gone the abortion route. Others would have made different decisions. But through Adoption Option, we could tell them the success stories of how adopting can really be an answer to many prayers. It truly can be a gift from God. There's even adoption in the Bible – just look at Moses!

**That alone, sounds like enough to keep you busy, but you didn't stop there. How did this lead to your latest cause?**

One day, five years ago, we were having one of our monthly Adoption Option meetings when one of our birth parents – one of the women who would talk to the students about adoption – brought up a vital point. She said, 'You know, all of us birth moms love talking to the kids about the positive side of

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Carole and her three sons. At left is Brett (15) middle is Chase (16) right is Eric (13).



acknowledged afterwards, 'I realize now that having sex is giving a part of myself away. I am going to stop.'

**What a difference this must make to each of them! Why do you think that this issue is so big right now?**

There is such an explosion of sexually transmitted diseases right now. In the teenage population, sexually transmitted diseases run very high. For example, teens have higher rates of gonorrhea than do sexually active men and women ages 20 to 44. Ten percent of all U.S. teens ages 15 to 19 become pregnant each year – twice as high as the teen pregnancy rates in England, Wales, and Canada, and nine times as high as the rates in the Netherlands or Japan. However, it is interesting to note that the actual numbers of teens having sex has gone down – it is now under fifty percent. But there has been a dramatic increase in sexual activity in teens. Multitudes of teens are being infected orally – and many blame ex-president Clinton's affair and all its media coverage for that changed statistic.

**It would have to get depressing at times to deal with those facts and figures. How do you keep on doing what you do?**

It does get hard sometimes. There are times when we don't get the grant we need, when things look like they are stacked against us, but then we get a letter or hear from someone in another way how we have helped. It also helps to hold on to your faith. Faith gets us through every day. We pray before we do anything. We pray for grants, we pray for speakers, we pray that we will get through to our audience. I really feel that the focus of my Catholic upbringing was to help other people.

**That must be what you were sensing all those years ago on that train when you gave that woman the orange and knew it meant something deeper.**

I think so. I feel our Catholic faith tells us, yes, we are saved because Jesus died, but we owe it to Him to do good work and help others. Often when I am around someone who is dying from AIDS, I will be inspired by remembering that Jesus didn't seek out the healthy people. He came for the sick. He saw the lepers and He healed them. He didn't run away. And that is something I hope I am passing on to my children as well.

**One of your children has worked with you on this abstinence project, hasn't she? How did Tara get involved with all of this?**

The more we worked with teenagers, the more I looked for appropriate materials to help aid our presentation as well as offer something for schools everywhere to show. Everything I found was so boring for teens to listen to. Videos and such were usually done by adults who were talking at the students – not with them. They mostly rattled off some statistics about sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy. When we couldn't find the video we wanted to use to teach this message in a better way to the teens, we decided we needed to make one instead. So with the cooperation of Adoption Option, Inc., AIDS Volunteers of Cincinnati (AVOC) and Social Health Education (SHE) we set out to make a video for teens. But first we wanted their input on it. I went to one of the local Catholic schools and asked some volunteers for this project. No one took me up on my idea, so I asked my daughter, Tara, who happened to be a sophomore at Saint Ursula, to help me.

**She was somewhat recruited to this project?**

That's right. But she was more than willing to put her whole self into it. She spent all of the summer of 2000 researching and interviewing people. She helped with the workbook, writing the questions for it as well as the video. I really think that her input on it has made it so well received by teens in the many schools where the video is now shown.

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**Not all mothers and daughters can work well together. Did working together change your relationship at all?**

Yes. Dramatically! So many times through the years I would find that I would get so involved with projects, and the other kids. You see, I also had one son who was deathly ill for two years, which consumed so much of my time. In doing this, I wouldn't make as much time for the people in my life who were not needing me as much as some of the others. And this was Tara. She was going about her life, doing well, but not demanding a lot from me. I felt we lost touch in a way. By working together, Tara and I were able to reconnect and do something that was ours. It definitely strengthened our relationship to work together on this video which, by the way, is called *Why Abstinence? The Price Tag of Casual Sex*.

**How did you decide what to put in the video?**

From our adoption and abstinence talks with the students, we had a pretty good idea about what got through to them and what did not. We worked extra hard to make it understandable, and fast paced, but at the same time, hitting deeply with the points we hope to get across. In the video, we concentrate on three specific parts. In the first segment, teenage parents share how unplanned pregnancies have changed their lives forever. They all acknowledge that abstinence would have been the better choice for them. In the second segment, there is a lot of factual information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including the symptoms and how they are transmitted. Again, the main message here is that abstinence is the only thing that protects you completely from these. And the last part of the video features a mother who, from a one-time affair, contracted AIDS which she then unknowingly passed on to her newborn daughter who later died of the disease.



Carole and her daughter Tara who helped produce the video and wrote the curriculum at age 16. It is featured in the April 25th issue of Rolling Stone Magazine, attesting to its accessibility.

**Was it hard to get people to tell such personal and sometimes painful stories?**

Actually, I am always amazed at how giving of themselves people are. All of the people who participated in the video and in the classroom visits, do so in the hopes that their stories will keep others from repeating their mistakes. I think it becomes a type of healing for them as well. It gives everyone a new way of looking at things. This is one of the reasons we have recently changed our name from Adoption Option to Healthy Visions. We feel that better explains the difference we hope to make.

**You have definitely made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many. As our conversation comes to an end, what one thing would you say we all need to teach our children in order for them to have their own Healthy Vision about all of this?**

That would probably be the number one I try to send all the kids away with and it is also straight from my Catholic upbringing. It is plain and simple. It is the fact that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. And our job as parents, teachers, and friends is to connect our young people to that Holy Spirit within. Once they get in touch with that amazing fact, they will have the necessary respect for themselves that will make them much less likely to short-change themselves in any way. By acknowledging that God is with them at all times, it becomes like having a parent along on a date. And He is the ultimate chaperone!

*Tammy Bundy conducted this interview on behalf of Canticle.*



The video and printed materials can be ordered by calling Human Relations Media at 800.431.2050. For further information on sexually transmitted diseases, please go to our website, [www.canticlemagazine.com](http://www.canticlemagazine.com)