Epilogue

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In 2003 the Cleveland Maternal Health Association, or rather its direct descendant, Planned Parenthood of Greater Cleveland (PPGC), celebrated seventy-five years of continuous service. Over time PPGC expanded its range of health services, added and relocated clinics, and moved and improved its administrative offices. The organization embraced new technology in the areas of information retrieval, communication, and record keeping as well as contraception, and lobbied aggressively rather than quietly for women’s reproductive rights. Yet the social and political climate of 2003 resembled the association’s early years: a negative, almost punitive attitude towards family planning prevailed among government policy makers in the United States and abroad. PPGC employed a large paid staff but continued to rely on its staunch supporters—board members, donors, volunteers, and grateful clients—in marketing, fund-raising, and service. Below are a few highlights of the years between 1940 and 2003.

The MHA joined the reorganized national birth control organization Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942, but maintained its own identity in many ways, for example, keeping the Maternal Health Association name until 1966. The agency employed a couple of male directors, but women continued to comprise the majority of staff members and directors over the years. The association diversified its leadership, however, hiring its first staff person of color, Alice Malone, a registered nurse, in the 1950s and continuing to increase the representation of people of color as officers, staff, and board members through the century.

For nearly forty years PPGC provided contraception and related services in Cleveland as the sole public organization to do so, yet it experienced few significant challenges and stayed out of the city’s courtrooms. In 1953 Margaret Sanger returned to Cleveland to speak at the MHA’s
twenty-fifth anniversary celebration; she was introduced by her friend and associate, MHA founder Dorothy Brush (see figure 27). The organization constructed a new building on Cornell Road in the University Circle area of Cleveland in 1957, a building that was among the first American structures to be built solely to provide family planning. PPGC began a mobile clinic in 1965. Hospitals in Cleveland did not officially offer family planning until the 1960s; the city health department provided family planning advice in its health centers only beginning in the 1970s. In the same decade PPGC relaxed its age and marital restrictions and addressed the city’s high rate of teenage pregnancy and single mothers by educating and serving young people. Cleveland’s needs in the area of reproductive health continued to increase. While 5 percent was a standard growth rate for other Planned Parenthood groups of the era, PPGC experienced a 14 percent growth in demand for services, reaching 10,800 clients in 1987 as compared to 5,000 in 1982. During its sixtieth anniversary in 1988, Planned Parenthood undertook a $2.3 million campaign to increase the
number of clinics, endow future work, and make services more accessible for low-income people.

Planned Parenthood of Greater Cleveland assumed an advocacy role in the face of an often hostile political and legislative environment beginning in the 1980s. The Cleveland Planned Parenthood Action Fund organized in the 1990s to manage political lobbying and issue advocacy on behalf of PPGC. In 1993 the American Jewish Committee honored PPGC with its Isaiah Award for Human Relations. Planned Parenthood of Greater Cleveland participated in national Planned Parenthood projects such as Global Partners and collaborated with city schools and community groups in training, programming, and advocacy.

After careful in-house planning, negotiation, lawsuits, and countersuits, in January of 1997 Planned Parenthood of Greater Cleveland began to offer abortion services for the first time in its history, joining two other Planned Parenthood locations in Ohio in providing these services. Women responded gratefully and positively; donations actually increased.

The physical location of the organization changed a few times between its sixtieth and seventy-fifth anniversary years. PPGC closed the deteriorating Cornell Road building in 1982 and moved its headquarters to the Bulkley building in downtown Cleveland, while opening clinics in Bedford, East Cleveland, and Lakewood. Seven years later PPGC moved its administrative offices farther east on Euclid Avenue to a building in the Midtown Corridor, where it opened a large resource center for interested professionals and the public. In 2003 PPGC again relocated its administration, to the Adam Joseph Lewis Cleveland Environmental Center on Lorain Road, only a few miles west of the organization’s first home.

In 2003 the agency served more than sixteen thousand clients at five clinics as the largest single provider of reproductive health care in Cuyahoga County, maintaining a consistently high rate of patient retention. In the twenty-first century, PPGC championed the reproductive health and rights of women, provided health services and educational programs for all ages, and offered all approved options for child spacing. As in its early years, however, PPGC reached only a tiny portion of the women and men who needed and wanted low-cost family planning in the Cleveland area. Still, as other agencies cut back reproductive health care, PPGC asserted upon its seventy-fifth anniversary, “No other organization exists primarily to serve—and to fight to serve—Cleveland-area women, and to preserve their right to make and carry out decisions about their fertility.” That long and affirming history inspired one client to state, “I’ve been going to Planned Parenthood for years. Why would I go anywhere else?”