



# Reproductive Freedom: A Series

Hard Crackers  
Chronicles of Everyday Life  
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## **Introduction: For Reproductive Freedom**

A short while ago, Hard Crackers sent an invitation to people who we knew had been active in various reproductive freedom projects over the last fifty years to help us think through the issues and challenges involved in developing an effective radical strategy to secure unrestricted access to abortion for all women. We were very pleased with the responses we received and will be posting them on a regular basis over the next two months. We would like to thank all those who have contributed.

If we receive additional contributions, we will add them. We also welcome comments in response to all the posts. The text below has been slightly modified from the original invitation.

### ***An Invitation***

In light of the threat posed to all aspects of reproductive justice by the reversal of the Supreme Court's Roe decision of 1973, Hard Crackers has invited individuals who have been activists in the abortion rights struggle in different periods over the last five decades to share their stories about their initial involvement in the struggle, the ways in which the legal and political contexts of the times shaped the activities they engaged in and the implications of previous moments of struggle for the battles that lie ahead. We're especially interested in exploring the limits of litigation and lobbying that are focused on reforming, rather than repealing, abortion laws. While the great majority of participants will be from the United States, we hope there will also be several from other countries.

In the late 1960s, in large part because of the profound influence of participation in the Civil Rights and black liberation movements, a modern women's liberation movement emerged. The demand for abortion was a central but not exclusive focus; in many ways, they anticipated the approach of the current Reproductive Justice movement. The early movement was decidedly radical. A short flyer, distributed on the occasion of a Counter-Inaugural March in Washington in 1969, memorably headlined "Women, Let's Give Them Back Their Vote!", suggests an early recognition that the realization of women's liberation would not be found within the routine functioning of political democracy.

In the early period of education, consciousness raising, direct assistance to those seeking abortion (up to and including the training of non-doctors to perform abortions as exemplified by the Janes in Chicago), and numerous personal story-telling by women who had had abortions, the views and

actions of radical women liberationists were dominant. More important, however, they became widely popular. Their position about abortion laws was summarized in the phrase "Repeal not reform!" The proud and brash activism of those days relatively quickly and dramatically changed the national landscape and placed abortion rights in the spotlight.

The upsurge of activism disturbed the powerful and it became evident to them that something needed to be done. In the early 70s, a legal challenge to abortion laws was initiated and eventually arrived at the Supreme Court. Apparently, the jurors knew what decision they wanted and scrambled to find a constitutional basis for it. They found a precedent for their argument in the *Griswold* case which had found that states could not prohibit the distribution of contraceptives to married people. The constitutional reasoning hinged on the invocation of privacy and equal protection from the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The enshrinement of the notion that abortion was a decision to be made between the woman and her physician effectively made doctors (who had preserved and enhanced their professional authority to determine who was fit and not fit for an abortion) into the victors. While the advance for reproductive freedom was real, its legal grounding was modest.

In spite of some warnings to the contrary, *Roe* became the defining limit of abortion defense.

It secured, however tentatively, rights for some at the expense of rights for all. It led to several decades of a preoccupation with lobbying and litigation and the replacement of creative activism by passive voting.

For a few years after 1973, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the basic findings and guidelines of the *Roe* decision. But as early as 1977 and 1980, decisions came that limited real access by approving the denial of governmental funding for some abortions, most notably endorsing the 1976 Hyde Amendment which prohibited the use of federal funding (primarily Medicaid) for abortions. Gradually, more and more decisions approved state restrictions (including additional requirements for abortion clinics, parental consent, warning scripts about the dangers of abortion, and waiting periods).

In the mid-1980s, a militant anti-abortion movement began bombings of clinics and Operation Rescue style confrontations with women trying to enter clinics. Mainstream abortion advocates continued to emphasize litigation and lobbying. In the early 90s, anarchist-feminists initiated radical grass-roots activism. Instead of the slogan "We're pro-choice and we vote," these activists often marched behind a banner reading "We're pro-choice and we

riot!" Once again, those voices echoed the essential convictions of the early calls for reproductive freedom.

Since then, medical innovations have provided women with many more resources to avoid or terminate pregnancy. The "morning after pill", that a woman can take after she thinks there's a chance that she might have become pregnant, is now available over the counter—after a successful fight with the FDA, led by a group that is now called National Women's Liberation.

In addition, 30% of abortions in the US are now performed through non-surgical medications. The FDA continues to refuse full approval for over-the-counter provision of the first of the medications—in spite of quite convincing evidence about its safety. As a result, the treatment remains expensive and often difficult to obtain. At the same time, the opposition to abortion has reached an unprecedented level; judicial, legislative and direct-action victories have emboldened the anti-abortion forces.

Reproductive justice has become an international issue and movement. As a result of the fact that abortion is illegal in many countries, an international movement has emerged to both challenge anti-abortion laws in countries and to provide direct assistance to women needing abortions in countries where they cannot legally and safely obtain them.

We hope that what we publish will aid and abet the development of more powerful movements.

The Hard Crackers Editors  
2022

## What we need now is mass illegality and direct action! Beth Henson



(Image: © HBO The Janes)

If a couple of pills can abort a pregnancy, then it's easier than the old days when we had to learn to do abortions hands-on. Jane, the underground network in Chicago, provided 11,000 safe, cheap, illegal abortions until 1973. It's easier now.

We can find a source for pills and a way to distribute them. And maybe the coming mass civil disobedience of pill-induced clandestine abortions will trigger an uprising.

I had my first abortion in 1970, in New York where it was legal. I don't remember what it cost; my boyfriend paid half and my dad paid half, plus the plane fare from the Midwest. I stayed with my dad and stepmother in Brooklyn.

The clinic was in midtown. I took the bus. My stepmom offered to come but we weren't close, so I faced it alone. The clinic was clean and brisk. They

gave me a general anesthetic. When I woke up, the pregnancy hormones were gone. Outside it was bright and cold, St. Patrick's Day.

My friends had babies and gave them away. They spent all that time being pregnant, with everything paused, and then their lives were severed. Some of them went away and came back and lied about it. My two best friends in high school married at 18 and had babies; both their husbands were crazy but in different ways. Al was bipolar and brilliant and exhausting. Sam was just depressed and addicted to the codeine in cough syrup. His mother was determined to take the baby, so Penelope had to work whatever job she could get, she got no help and barely kept her daughter.

There are two new films about the Janes in Chicago, who started by referring women to a doctor who performed abortions. Then the doctor quit and the women had no choice. They learned to do abortions themselves: safe, sterile, early abortions. Not rocket science.

Birth control used to be lousy, it probably still is. Hormonal methods, such as pills, carry unknown risks. IUDs can fail. I had an early miscarriage and bled for a month with a Dalkon Shield. The device was defective, thousands were hurt and sued and it was pulled from the market. After that I had an experimental IUD that got changed periodically; the pain from its insertion and removal were excruciating. After that I went back to less reliable, single-use methods, spermicides and a diaphragm.

Men ruin women's lives every day, with unwanted pregnancies and abandoned kids. Domesticity is a trap for men and a destiny for women. Modernity has divorced us from our sensuous nature, scattered the family, and sent millions of refugees careening from place to place. But as capitalism expands, it draws women into new forms of participation. And the market, invading every opportunity, came up with the means of preventing pregnancy. We don't have to consent to going backward and we don't have to beg the state. Prohibition didn't work when the target was alcohol and it didn't work against marijuana. Preventing pregnancy has never been easier. Let's do it.

## Clinic Defense in the Era of Operation Rescue Suzy Subways



In the early '90s, anarchists and other feminists defended clinics with our bodies and taught each other how to do abortion techniques such as menstrual extraction safely. As the Christian Right bombed hundreds of clinics, killed health care providers and patients, and mobilized its base to swarm clinics and shut them down, grassroots reproductive freedom activists stood against this terror, building a powerful and exciting movement. But liberal feminist nonprofits rejected this grassroots mass movement, choosing to rely on the police and courts for protection. Since then, the Christian Right has continued to attack and harass people at clinics, mobilizing its own grassroots activists to shame people getting health care and shut down clinics one by one. Their local, bottom-up strategy took the long view and is now winning at the highest levels of government. If today's movement for reproductive freedom is to win, it must return to the grassroots.



The militant anti-abortion group Operation Rescue was founded in 1986 to mobilize thousands of people to physically block and shut down clinics across the country. This well-funded and well-staffed organization presented an image of the Christian Right as peaceful activists guided by a deep moral outrage, although some of its leaders had signed a pledge defending the assassination of abortion providers and were active in the right-wing militia movement. Reproductive freedom activists, led by people with the capacity to get pregnant, mobilized to protect clinics with our bodies. On the ground, Operation Rescue was aggressive, and sometimes the space in front of clinics erupted into hand-to-hand combat as anti-abortion activists shoved people and tried to crawl through their legs.

### **Clinic Defense: Using Our Bodies to Protect Our Lifesaving Spaces**

I did clinic defense a few times, when I was 18 and 19. As a student at Antioch College in 1992, I went to Columbus, Ohio with some friends on a few Saturdays. We'd wake up super early and stand in formation in front of the clinic with dozens of others to protect it. We saw these health centers as precious places. People going through trauma after sexual assault and through abusive relationships, very young people, and married women trying to keep their lives from getting unmanageable were taking control of their health despite their vulnerability in those moments. As protectors we took our role seriously and we bonded with each other as we stood against the enemy. This was the source of the passion that grew a powerful movement from below.

My dear friend Kathy became a legend at Antioch one day for her response to a vile Christian Right protester who harassed her for hours outside the clinic. Kathy was a hot butch lesbian who grew up on a farm and didn't take shit, although she was quiet most of the time. This man kept telling her, "You should be married and having children," until finally, she pulled out her bloody pad, put it in his hand and said, "Put this in your petri dish and grow it!"

This was the vibe at clinic defense. We were taking back our power and control of our bodies, and the energy this ignited in us as a collective body grew exponentially. There's something about being there when your life-giving space is under attack, being able to defend it successfully, and doing it together. Using our bodies to defend our bodily autonomy.

Operation Rescue targeted my hometown of Philadelphia during the summer of 1993. With at least a hundred people on our side—maybe hundreds—we kept the clinic open. Operation Rescue had about half as many people and

stood on the sidewalk across the street. I remember following a crew of badass anarchist lesbians whom I admired around the corner and a few blocks away as they chased a male leader of Operation Rescue, yelling at him and surrounding him. They got in his face, and he cowered. Our power took a visible, audible, unstoppable form: Get out of our town.

Back outside the clinic, I saw a friend on the other side of the street, with the anti-abortion activists. She had been the first to welcome me to my new school when I'd moved to Philly. I felt my face get hot and looked away. I almost felt remorse for the confrontation along with my disappointment. Should I pretend I didn't see her?

I decided to cross the street and say hi. Sheepishly but warmly, she returned my friendly greeting. It looked like she was there with a church group. A woman standing next to her cast me some snide vibes, saying, "Shouldn't you be over there?" My friend and I ran out of things to say and I went back, but I felt better knowing she hadn't rejected me. Decades later, we reconnected on social media, and she is living happily as a lesbian with a wife and kids.

Thinking of that day reminds me of the value of my brilliant, late comrade Joel Olson's favorite saying, "Peace to the villages—war to the palaces." A little kindness goes a long way with people we can win over, but we can't let politeness and decorum get in the way of wielding our power against those who would take our power away.

### **A Betrayal: Liberal Feminist Nonprofits Tell Defenders to Go Home**

In 1995, I moved to New York City and joined Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. In the August/September issue of our national newspaper that year, Laura from Bay Area Coalition for Our Reproductive Rights (BACORR), wrote:

Fight Back Network members from BACORR, Refuse & Resist Minneapolis, and Love and Rage went to LA May 25th-28th to try to keep the clinics open and to blast OR's efforts to define themselves in the media as non-violent-peaceful-baby-lovin'-Christians. BACORR had been in touch with WAC LA (Women's Action Coalition) and a Southern California NOW chapter that welcomed our support and involvement.

Unfortunately, the Fund for the Feminist Majority, a national nonprofit, was in charge at the scene. As reported by Laura, the Fund had put a lot of resources into electing Bill Clinton as president and lobbying for a law that passed in 1994 to make it a federal crime to block clinic doors. The Fund had

decided to let Operation Rescue and a group calling themselves Missionaries for the Pre-Born shut down the clinics in LA that day, in order to bring the FACE law into the courts as a test case. Laura continued:

Saturday, the day of the hit, hundreds of pro-choicers were at the clinics around LA. Many had followed the OR caravan from its church meeting-point earlier in the morning. The Fund's "official leaders" made it clear from the get go that they would offer no resistance to OR if they rushed the door, and were depending on the police to move the anti's away and level federal charges.

In a nutshell, the anti's were permitted to sit down in front of the doors, creating the image of non-violent anti-abortion protest. They kept the clinic shut down for two hours. The Fund's main office lied to BACORR and to Palm Springs NOW, who they knew was working with BACORR, about OR's whereabouts—telling us they had lost the caravan and had no idea where it was. ... A local reporter told us that she had interviewed pro-choice people who were standing at the door when the hit went down who were told not to stop the anti's and to move away from the door.

Operation Rescue got their dream media opportunity, and police beat and injured Laura and a friend after Fund staff told police they had nothing to do with the official pro-choice response. The Fund didn't alert legal support that Laura and her friend had been arrested, and they implied to the media that the two had deserved it. Operation Rescue and Missionaries for the Pre-Born were arrested gently at their sit-in, creating a widely broadcast spectacle of peacefully praying dissent, but they were never even charged under the FACE law.

## **How the Christian Right Won**

While the Fund and other liberal feminist nonprofits ordered clinic defenders to stop protecting clinics and simply hold a "Keep Abortion Legal" sign on the sidelines, the Christian Right supported and honored its grassroots movement. They energized large numbers of people, and they inspired many, many more who followed their actions. While the pro-choice establishment dismantled our movement, grassroots activists of the Christian Right have never stopped protesting outside clinics. Even in major liberal cities, they harass and shame people who are just trying to get health care. This grassroots, on-site shaming campaign has made abortion something people feel like they need to be ashamed of, feel guilty about, and not talk about—in contrast to the first decade after legalization in the U.S., when people interviewed about their abortions mostly talked about how relieved they felt. This grassroots movement in local areas across the

country has grown stronger over the past three decades, getting clinics closed one by one, winning at the state level and now at the national level, proving to us on the Left what we already knew: Power comes from below.

Since the 1990s, any time there's an upsurge in support of abortion access, it's been brief and felt kind of abstract. Young people need an inspiring, direct-action movement to jump into with all their heart and their bodies—they won't be inspired by getting told to carry a sign through the biggest street in their town. Maybe once or twice, but then it dies down. It's hard to build a base when you're not at the place where harm is being done and able to stop it, or at the place where lives are being saved and able to protect it.

There's an honest argument to be made that health clinics should never have to be battlegrounds, that patients in moments of vulnerability shouldn't have to walk through such a war. But they've been walking through a gauntlet of shame all these years anyway, because clinic defenders haven't been there to shield them from the hate. And in the '90s, clinic defenders used our creativity and joy as a buffer between patients and attackers. The Church Ladies for Choice brought their drag queen brilliance, and our queer kiss-ins outside right-wing churches freaked out the Christian Right activists to the point they would avoid getting near us.

As a strategy, anarchists and other revolutionaries in the reproductive freedom movement have consistently—as in for more than 50 years—demanded the repeal of all abortion laws. Not more state involvement from the police and courts, but a removal of all state power in our reproductive lives. We call it “reproductive freedom” because it's about more than abortion. It's about the history of forced and coerced sterilizations of Black, Latinx, and Native American women and other people with the capacity to bear children. It's about the population control tactics used against poor people and those who use drugs.

People don't have the ability to “choose” whether to have a kid or not when wages are too low, childcare is not accessible, and the rent is too damn high. Medicaid hasn't paid for abortions since the Hyde Amendment in 1977. Giving a baby up for adoption—or being adopted—can be deeply traumatizing, especially under our current, unsupportive system. And it's worse for children of color adopted by white parents. But “choice” has been our battle cry since the 1980s. Why? This “choice” versus “life” debate has allowed the Christian Right to control the narrative and make it about their idea of morality. It's been a successful wedge strategy from the Right, dividing people who could be united in coalitions.

## **Can We Still Win Now?**

If the Christian Right won by building their grassroots movement and letting its power grow across the decades, so must we. If our power is strongest at the location of our bodily autonomy—in the places where we are able to exercise our reproductive freedom—then we must build our movement there.

Abortion pills and menstrual extraction (which can be done in our homes by trained people who don't have to be medical professionals) allow us to take care of ourselves on our own territory. This is our strongest position strategically and what the Right fears most. They are using surveillance by state power and vigilantes to track, hunt down, and punish whoever provides and receives these medications and treatments, because they can't just rely on hospital and doctors' records. Every home could be an abortion clinic. It's a scary situation, but it also makes clear our advantage.

So it seems clear that the reproductive freedom movement's strategy now is to protect these sites of health care and resistance by building powerful, anti-racist and queer-positive coalitions involving hundreds of thousands of people. We need as many people involved as possible in order to keep the most vulnerable safe and also to make this health care accessible. If it's limited to those in the know—people who are already activists and people who are able to find out about the support networks they need—that will exclude the people who need it most.

Some of these coalitions and support networks need to be underground, and some need to be above ground. Some need to be sharing information with people who need abortions about how to get abortion pills and what to say if they need to go to the emergency room ("I think I'm having a miscarriage"—don't mention abortion). Some need to be driving people to appointments, providing emotional support, following up and making sure people are OK. Some need to be talking to the media and educating, agitating, and organizing in our communities and workplaces. Some will need to fundraise for legal support and organize demonstrations in solidarity with reproductive freedom's new political prisoners. This work is direct action, because you're meeting a basic human need in defiance of those who'd prefer that we die.

## Who Are the Experts? An archival glimpse at 1969 abortion rights actions



*The post is an edited transcript of remarks made by women who spoke at the first Abortion Speak Out on March 21, 1969 in New York City. A full recording is available at the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archive (<https://archive.org/details/RedstockingsAbortionSpeakoutNewYork1969March21>). A full transcript was completed later. We are grateful to the Archive for permission to edit the transcript and publish it. We're especially grateful to Jenny Brown for her assistance in providing access to the recording and transcript.*

*We believe that the speakers are representative of radical abortion rights activists at the time. We don't necessarily agree with all the views of those who spoke, but we think the record of what was said is an important reminder of the power of individuals telling their stories in the context of challenging the existing state of affairs.*

**First Speaker:** All of us are members of the Women's Liberation Group in New York City. We discovered that by just talking about our own experiences, about our own lives, things that happened to us, things that generally people call personal or subjective, but things that we really knew most about because they were us, that by talking about this, all together in our group, that we were able to find out a lot more about reality than by talking about all those "objective" things.

It was a technique that I think a lot of people who are involved in trying to struggle for their liberation, a lot of oppressed people, have found that the first thing to talk about is their oppression. The first thing was to talk about themselves, and we thought that we would use that same technique tonight. Instead of talking about things that were really removed from us, we would talk about our own abortions, what happened, what it felt like, what went on, and then, from talking about this, we would learn much more, really, about abortion. And that was our plan for this evening.

It's very hard for us to start. I know for me it's very hard to start talking about it because I never really discussed the fact that I had had an abortion with too many people. When I first discovered that I was pregnant, there was one person, a friend, that I turned to who wasn't even that close a friend. Even my close friends, I felt that I didn't want to tell anybody, because it was all right to be sleeping with somebody. That's fine but when you get pregnant, then there's something wrong with you, and all the sudden, you're some kind of creature and everybody's gonna look at you and then say, "Pregnant!" So, I didn't really want to discuss it or talk about it and, in fact, I have very rarely ever talked about it, and I think that most women don't really talk about what happened. They block it. They get pregnant and they don't want to think about it because if you have to think about it, it's a little horrifying. So, you wake up in the morning and you're scared.

When I got pregnant, I didn't know what to do, where to go, anything. I was in college at the time. It was Christmas vacation and I returned home, and I wanted to go to a clinic to find out if I really was pregnant. I went into a clinic, and they said to me, "We can't give you a test. You have to have a doctor. We can't give you a pregnancy test. Go and get the doctor." I didn't know of any. I was scared to go to the doctor, a private doctor. I didn't know what he was gonna say to me. He's gonna think all kinds of thoughts. So, I waited until I got back up to school and then I could go to the clinic there. But, for years, I couldn't talk about it. Something which affected my life for weeks, it felt like a year until it was finally over. I had to block and never think about and never talk about, and not discuss it with the guy that I was going with at the time. It's just one of the things that happened in

your life, and you just blocked.

This is the first time that I can sit and talk about all this and one reason why I think it's important for us to do it is that I'm sure that there are many, many women in this audience that have had the same experience. I'm no freak and it didn't just happen to me. It's happened to everybody. So, If I get up and I say it, maybe everybody can get up and say it, and if we all get up and say it, maybe they'll do something about changing the situation.

One of the reasons that we have to have our own panel tonight is, that I know from my experience in testifying with the Legislative Committee and with another organization when anybody, except the women set it up themselves, what happens is a woman sits down. I sit down. I say, "Well, it's a very sad story (sigh). I couldn't get an abortion, I had to have the child." And everyone says, "Oh, yes, that's a sad story." And they neglect to see that it is they who are making this sad story. They're putting the women who have to say, "Yes, this happened to me," in a position of being a freak. And the fact is that the only reason that people get into that position is because the laws are not made in terms of a woman.

A woman who, for whatever reason—either she was too naïve to get an abortion, nobody would help her, she didn't have enough money—decides she's going to have the child and not keep it goes through a sea in this society, which is unnecessary. The people who make the laws make them so that only a woman who becomes the property of a man when she marries can gain respect with a child. A woman who's not married and has a child is not part of the system and is a tremendous threat. The laws are made to keep that woman in her place. She can only have an abortion if these men's laws say, "I give you permission to have an abortion. I give you permission only if you're crazy."

A normal woman, and I assume that most women who become pregnant I are normal, who wants to have an abortion can't have an abortion. If I had wanted to have an abortion, which I did, but because it was a criminal act and I was too young to know how to go about finding an abortionist, I would not have been able to get one because I was sane. So, you have to be a freak, you have to get insane, and there are women in this room who have had experiences with this kind of insanity, which are just horrifying.

I had enough sense to see that a seventeen-year-old girl who gets herself pregnant by mistake because she had not been availed of birth control information is not in a responsible position to take care of a child.



**Next Speaker:** Barbara and I were two out of three people who testified at this so-called open hearing [held in February of 1969]. The legislators could not understand that we did not want them to hand us our abortion laws on a silver platter. They kept telling us that they were with us, that they were sympathetic, and that they're doing everything they could to help us. They could not understand that we wanted to legislate our own selves. We wanted to make laws by ourselves for our own bodies.

And we heard in the course of this hearing about some of the reforms, the changes that were to go into this new bill, if it ever comes about. It was as discriminatory as the laws were ten years ago when I had an abortion. The laws did not cover me then and they don't cover me now. If I were to get pregnant tomorrow, I would not be able to get an abortion. I would have to have the money to get two psychiatrists to say that I was a little "sick". As far as I'm concerned, I'm physically and mentally very healthy. It's society that's sick when they tell me that I cannot do with my own womb what I want to, and I think that it would be important for us to talk about why. What are some of the reasons that men make these laws for us to follow?

Speaking about abortion and how it feels, and the ways that laws are occasionally written up, when I went home for my Christmas vacation this year, my parents were listening to me rapping about the need for changing abortion laws and they said, "Well, Mississippi just changed their abortion law. And, you know, it's really a step towards real liberal legislation because now they have a board and if you've been proven mentally ill or you've been raped, you can get an abortion." And I thought about it for a minute, and it occurred to me that no upstanding white southern gentleman would think that his Southern belle should have to go through that.

And it's really interesting to go into what this liberal legislation really has behind it. It's not really in the interest of women in general or women at all. It's still within the man's concept of the woman.

**Next Speaker:** Gail asked a question before, "Why do men make these laws?" Why are there abortion laws. And before, someone had said something about, "Well, a woman can sleep with as many men as she wishes as long as she doesn't get pregnant, cause once you get pregnant everyone knows you've screwed around." You can't hide it. You can't tell your mother that you stayed over your girlfriend's house when .... (audience laughter). You know, there it is. "Look, Mom. I'm not that little nice virgin anymore." There's the proof.

But I want to go further than that. You know, there were these hearings a few weeks ago [the ones mentioned above] and some of the women went

down there. And something was said that completely shocked me. Some judge in the age range of late sixties to seventy was one of the experts on abortion.

He got up and talked about his 'great reform'. This was his reform. After a woman has paid her debt to society and has had four children, if you have had four children and you were pregnant with the fifth, guess what? You can have an abortion. That is after you've paid your debt to society. And this is the way women are thought of, that we have a debt. We have no debt, and I just want to say that. The only people who can know what I'm talking about are the people in this audience and more than likely, if you look at your neighbor, she had an abortion. She doesn't want to say anything (applause) but I would like to have fifty cents for everyone here that's had an abortion (audience laughter).

What I want to talk about is something that we call a therapeutic abortion. Therapeutic? Hmm! I don't know. I've been trying to think for many years what that meant, but all I know is that when I went to get this therapeutic abortion, I knew what was happening, that I was going in and telling this psychiatrist that I was insane because that's what you have to do. You have to tell them that you're going to commit suicide, but you can't just say, "I'm gonna commit suicide." You have to bring a razor or whatever, you know (audience laughter). "If you don't give me, If you don't tell me I'm gonna have an abortion right now, I'm gonna go out and jump off the Verrazano Bridge," or whatever. I knew what I was doing then. When I had that therapeutic abortion, it cost me more for the therapy after the therapeutic abortion (audience laughter) than before. This is the truth.

When I got pregnant, I had a sister who was a nurse, and I was fortunate because unless you know how to go about doing things, it's very hard. My sister said, "Well, look, go see this obstetrician and talk to him." And I saw him and he said, "Well, you're pregnant. What do you want me to do?" And I said, "Well, I don't want to have the baby." And he said, "Do you have some money?" And this is the truth, I'm not making this I said, "Well, I don't have much." I didn't have any, but I was figuring out what the friends I had could give me. This one could give me fifty dollars, twenty-five and I could sell my body for the rest. That's what happens. I couldn't get pregnant again. So I told him that I had some money and he gave me the address and said, "Go see these two psychiatrists." I won't mention their names, but if you want to ask me that, I'll tell you. I went to see them. The first one I saw for approximately eight to twelve minutes. There wasn't too much to it. And he said to me, "Yeah, you're pregnant and you want an abortion. Do you have any history of mental illness? Were you ever in a hospital for the insane?" And I said, "Well, I ...". He said, "Why don't you want this baby?" and I told

him why: that I just didn't feel at that time that I could be a mother and I couldn't see carrying the pregnancy and then have to give the child away because there was no need for them. He came out and said, "Well, what are you going to do if you don't get an abortion?" And I knew what he wanted me to say, and that was, "Well, I'm gonna kill myself." And I said, "I'm gonna kill myself" (audience laughter).

And he wrote it down that I was gonna kill myself, and he said to me, "Sixty dollars." And I said to him, "I don't have sixty dollars." And he told me. This is the truth. He said that if I didn't give him the sixty dollars, then to come back and give it to him. He would not write the report that had to be given to the obstetrician, then presented before the board. That was only one that I did. Then I saw the other one and it was pretty much the same thing. And he said, "Well how much did the other doctor charge?" (audience laughter). This is all the truth. I said, "Sixty dollars." And he said, "Well, I usually charge more for this kind of consultation." He said, "It's very hard for me to write the report." I said: "Can I write the report?" (audience applause).

And I feel like I'm telling a joke, but let me tell you something. It's no joke ... that two psychiatrists wrote that they agreed I should have an abortion. This was weird for me. I called up the obstetrician and I said to him, "What's happening?" I was in school, I was going to college and working, supporting myself, not living at home. Meanwhile, I kept getting bigger and bigger. And he said to me, "It has to be brought before the abortion board at the hospital, and we'll let you know."

Well, one day I was at school. At that time my school was on strike. I was standing outside and my sister came, and just saw me there, and she said, "Come on." And I said, "Really? Don't!" She's like, "You have to go to the hospital right now." Just like that. I had my books. I went to the hospital and was brought up to the labor room. Meanwhile I hear these women screaming and yelling. They were going to have their babies. I just didn't know what was happening. The nurse comes and she shaves me, and she sticks a needle in your arm and the bottle is hanging there. And I said, "Maybe they're gonna kill me" (audience laughter). It's not funny. I honestly thought that maybe this was real. They were really gonna kill me. I didn't know what was gonna happen when I got in there.

Then the doctor came and I was really crying and he said, "What are you crying about?" I said, "I'm scared." And he said, "You're scared. You're fine. My job is to bring life into this world, not to destroy it." And this was a sympathetic obstetrician who was giving me a therapeutic abortion because I was insane. But he "handled it very well."

Then you have the abortion, which is a very simple procedure. This is something that should be understood. It's a very simple procedure. Takes the doctor twelve minutes, if it's done in a hospital. If it's done in the back room of some hotel, it's not such a simple procedure.

And then you're put up on the maternity ward. It isn't at all therapeutic. This is all torture. This is planned torture. You just had an abortion; you're put on the maternity ward; they happened to find me a room right next to the nursery—a private room right next to the nursery and all the little babies crying. They bring out the little babies to their mothers and you have to see all this.

The nurses come in and say, "Oh my goodness!" And when you go into the operating room, there's a bulletin board, a blackboard, and it's written, 'Therapeutic A-B-O-R'. And this is the procedure for a "therapeutic" abortion.

The reason we have the laws that we have now is because men want to make women suffer for their sins, because it's a sin to get pregnant. And women are forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy. If you do not want the pregnancy, you are faced with a very clear reality, and that is you are sacrificing your life when you go to a hotel or when you get into a car on 54<sup>th</sup> St. and Lexington Avenue and you're blindfolded and taken someplace, you don't know where. You're not given an anesthetic. The instruments are not even sterilized. You wind up with an infection. You can wind up never being able to have children. And this is what women have to go through. This is our debt to society.

As I said before, we owe society nothing. Society owes us something, and that is to give us the right to decide what we want to do with our own bodies. The man is the one that screws you, and then when you turn to him and say, "Hey, look sweetheart, I'm pregnant," he responds, "How do you know it was me? You never slept with anyone else?" (audience applause). He holds his head and he says, "What am I gonna do?" "What is he going to do? What am I going to do?" The man's not the one that has to have the abortion or have the kid, yet we have a panel of ten expert—one man and a woman—a nun! Is she an expert? (audience laughter).

These are the experts: the people that are sitting here, the people that are in the audience who have had the abortions. But no one wants to listen to us (audience applause).

This is why we're here tonight: to make things come home, not to discuss the philosophical aspects of it, not to talk about the religious aspects of it.

These things do not exist. We exist. Each one of us exists. We are the ones that have had the abortions. We are the only experts. A priest, a rabbi, a minister, a nun- No one is the expert unless they have had the abortion in life or let's say, might have to have it. These are the people that become the experts.

**Next Speaker:** This is all women! (audience applause).

**Next Speaker:** I just want to say one more thing. I'm just washed out. Many people, and I've heard this said, feel that abortion is an easy way out. If we legalize abortion, then everyone's going to have an abortion. You will not want to accept responsibility for your actions. This is a misconception that people have about motherhood and the way women feel. At the time when I had an abortion, I did not feel that I could handle having a child. I wasn't ready for it. I had things that were so much more important to me, to my own development. I was working out a lot of things for myself and I couldn't in any way manage to bring up a healthy child, which is hard enough to do if you are married and don't have additional problems.

Well, that was at that time. Then I became pregnant a second time and circumstances were different. I felt that I had worked out a lot of my own feelings, conflicts, whatever, the whole thing, the whole traumatic experience of having an abortion and what not. But I was working these things out. Then I got pregnant the second time and I felt that I could, at that, time, handle having a child.

And I did and I have a daughter. She's thirteen months old. This is the greatest thing. And I am a mother, I have all the feelings of being a mother, but that doesn't mean that when I had that abortion that I was negating my responsibility. I had no responsibility to that thing that was inside of me. The only responsibility I had is when I made that decision to keep the pregnancy. Then that was my responsibility, and I made that decision without anyone forcing that on me. And this is the way every child should be born into this world: as a wanted child. And if people are so concerned about the life or the religious aspects of this thing that's inside of a woman, then certainly we should recognize if the pregnancy is not wanted, the child becomes an unwanted child. I think every human being has the right to be wanted, and every woman has that right and should make that decision, and no one else (audience applause).

**Next Speaker:** I always thought I knew a lot about birth control, and I used birth control, and yet I became pregnant two times and needed two abortions. And I think, the first time I became pregnant, I slept with a guy during my period and no one ever told me that you could become pregnant

when you had your period. The second time, the guy said, "When I come the second time, the sperm is [inaudible] (audience laughter) and you won't become pregnant. And here I was, very hip, very informed, and I didn't know.

**Next Speaker:** And pregnant!

**Previous Speaker:** No one ever told me those things. The thing about the second abortion that I remember most was this "marvelous" doctor who I walked in and there was Muzak of Maurice Chevalier going on, and he counted the money about five times. He was looking at it. Seven hundred dollars. And then when I got on the table, I went. And he said, "You're no nigger, there's no reason to scream," which [sarcastically] put me at ease with the nice type of man that was giving me the abortion. And then he didn't give me any anesthetic and I didn't want to get up from the table, and he said, "Look, I have five patients waiting out there." And I got up from the table and all I felt like doing was being by myself. I locked myself in the bathroom and he sent the nurse in and kept saying, "Look at all these people waiting outside. You must get out of my building." I mean, he was just so concerned with all the other women and all the money he had to make. Finally, he got the guy who'd gone with me to convince me to come out of the bathroom.

About my first abortion: I thought that my parents were very liberal. My mother had told me that she had had an abortion, so I told them when I became pregnant and they sort of tried to act cool. Only my father got so upset he wouldn't come with me to the abortion because he was just so frightened (audience laughter).

**Next Speaker:** Mention that he's a doctor.

**Previous Speaker:** Yeah. He's a doctor (audience laughter). The other thing was my mother kept saying, "I don't understand you, Ross. You must go to a psychiatrist. I mean, you're not taking this seriously enough. You're denying the whole experience." They made an appointment for me to see a psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist was only interested, I remember, in how many people I had slept with. Then, when I started counting on my fingers, he said, "Please!" (audience laughter).

And then my second abortion, I was back at class an hour and a half later, but my parents were so afraid that I had to stay home for a week, Notes were written to the school about how I was some feeble person and I couldn't take gym, and I couldn't make my bed and ... (audience laughter). It's really a simple procedure except for the way you feel about it. The other

thing was I kept thinking about motherhood and I was so afraid that there wouldn't be anything else besides motherhood that I could do. That's what made me so upset.

**Next Speaker:** I was also seventeen when I got pregnant the first time. And, like Ros, I was pretty sophisticated. I knew about contraception and the atmosphere that I was raised in was sort of permeated with this new sexual permissiveness, the so-called sexual revolution—except that it's a male sexual revolution and not a female sexual revolution (audience applause).

I was sophisticated and I knew about contraceptives too and I went right out and got pregnant. Now, nowhere, I've never heard anyone accounting for those subtle things that go on inside a young woman or even a young man, when their minds just go blank and they forget everything they've known before, and create a child. When I got pregnant, fortunately I had wonderful parents. They helped me, and we found a wonderful doctor who helped me, who did not want me to go through a compulsory pregnancy, which is actually what it was—a compulsory pregnancy. He realized that for me there could be another kind of life, and he wanted to help me fulfill that life before I had to take on the responsibility of a child.

**Next Speaker:** I just remembered something about the guy's reaction. It was really funny. My first reaction was, "Get this child out of me," and his reaction was, "Isn't it romantic?" Like playing house. His mother wanted to buy me a maternity dress and I mean ... it was six weeks. And he thought the whole thing was just so beautiful and romantic.

**Next Speaker:** Can I just say one thing? I don't know the name of the woman who spoke. What is your name? "Elaine." I responded a lot to what Elaine said, not so much about the feeling on the tables or in the operating room, but on some of the feelings that you have during this experience, which is like she said, it's not funny at all. To a lot of people here, I guess, men and I guess women who never had abortions, that there's something a little bit like another world. This stuff about being blindfolded and paying all this money--the whole thing seems sort of weird and in another world. It just doesn't come into your own experience in any way. It's the sort of thing that happens to other people.

But the funny thing is that I, and I guess everybody here, was really the same way. I mean, I'm a regular middle-class girl. I never did anything illegal like that. But what happens is that, and I guess it's the way this abortion law is so crazy, you're just going along (laughs) being like a regular college student and was middle class and did everything regular.

And then you find out that you're pregnant--but you didn't do anything strange or unusual. You didn't make any decision. You didn't change in any way; you were just going along and then you find out that that you're pregnant. I was living with a guy and my life is really the same as his life. He was a middle-class guy going along, and it seemed like we had all the same experiences. I didn't understand exactly why this was so much a thing for me. And then it's very, very frightening and you're really, extremely alone. The biggest feeling is of that aloneness. You talked about that a little bit, Helen. I don't know why friends don't help that much. I guess it's just something that you have to- to go through and you don't really share it very much with anybody. It's you alone. It really, really is.

People might say, "Oh, how awful," but saying, "Oh, how awful" really doesn't help in any way. It doesn't help with a single thing. There's really not much anybody can do. You really feel extremely alone, and you drop out of life. You can't continue doing schoolwork; you can't really do very much at all. You stop thinking about anything. Your life exactly stops at that moment that you discover that you're pregnant and you know that you're not gonna have a baby. I remember I just stopped and I would just think about it all the time. I was working part-time. I remember I couldn't talk about it to anybody but I was shaking. The thing about suicide is very interesting because I'm not suicidal, but I told them that. But the thing is that when you're so frightened and so alone, and you're having a very, very hard time just making it in life as it is, just managing is so hard and really an enormous struggle just to manage with life. And then all the sudden this thing comes. It really does seem like it's a little bit too much.

It took all you had just to keep going along, and now there's this other thing, which is a little devastating. And you find that when you cross the street, you stop looking at the cars. You start having fantasies about suicide. You never think, "I'm suicidal." That's something with other people, but you start thinking, "Oh I can't handle it. I talk too much. I, you know, I was so unhappy before. What must I be now?" I think you become very, very careless about your own life at that time.

**Next Speaker:** I also had two abortions and the first one made me scared about the second one. The abortionist gave me pills to take. And I didn't know what they were. All I knew was that they were some sort of abortion. I don't know what it's called. They put something inside you and then it dilates the uterus and then they scrape it.

And that hurt very much, and I had to walk around with this thing in me for twenty-four hours and it had been very painful the first time when he put it



in. I was really scared for the pain again. So I just took the pills again, and I remember thinking to myself. I knew that the doctor was crazy. I mean, he was crazy. There was no doubt. He was crazy because he would talk endlessly, on and on, very weird, strange stories, and he fell asleep in front of me in the room, and I was with a girlfriend who came with me and he thought it was her that was gonna have the abortion.

But I said to myself, "I don't care what these pills are." I thought, "I know I don't know what these pills are, and I know this doctor's crazy, but I don't care because I'm not gonna be pregnant and have a kid." So that suicidal thing was very real because I thought to myself, "I could die from these pills, but I don't care."

**Next Speaker:** The other thing is about the criminal thing that happens. You have all these feelings but you still have to get an abortion. So, you call up your friends, you know? You're in college with a lot of your friends. You call up and they give you names of these doctors who were mostly in West New York, a city in New Jersey.

You call up this doctor in New Jersey and it's like an answering service. It's difficult. They start to make arrangements and you're not allowed to ask about where you're gonna park the car. It has to not be on the same block. All the sudden you're involved in these kind of criminal, illegal things. The main thing is that it doesn't seem like it has anything to do with you. It has nothing to do with your life. I mean, it's not you in any way. You're the kind of person who goes to the hospital. If you got sick, that's what your parents always did with you, when you were little. Now, you are bargaining about money on the telephone.

**Next Speaker:** You must sign a statement saying that you are having a polyp removed (audience laughter).

**Next Speaker:** I had two abortions, like many of the people here, I went through the typical stuff. Blocking the fear that comes forth. One of my fears was, instead of being suicidal, I felt sure I'd be hit in a car accident and I'd be paralyzed and have to have the baby. I was told the wrong price, so I had to go drive and come back the next day with an extra hundred dollars because they wouldn't accept it any other way.

He was a "very lovely" doctor; he had a crucifix in every room. He had a picture of his wife, his family, all the Italian-American societies in West New York, New Jersey and his wife with a Madonna around her neck. They were

very sweet. They were very kind and it only cost nine hundred dollars.

I'm still paying it off. I went to the bank and I got a vacation loan (audience laughter). And I'm still paying off that. I became very involved in women's liberation and I and I really had my heart and soul in it. I also had birth control. Unfortunately, if the device malfunctions, "We can't do anything to help you, dear. It's your problem, dear. We can't help you." And all the sudden, there you are. you're a patient in a clinic and you're a criminal. You're just a criminal because of a malfunctioning device. You're one of the 2% or you are one of the 10%, and that's your problem. You're a statistical error and you're a criminal because you're a statistical error. But luckily, I had been involved in a women's liberation group and I'd been involved in a lot of these demonstrations.

My first thing was I wanted to get that clinic. They've got to be made responsible. The women's lib I was involved with, we went up to the gates and we said, "You're responsible. You've got to be made responsible." They gave the same old rigamarole. They even began asking about other things like, "Why don't you tell women about what the pill can do?" "If we told you about that, you'd never take the pill." "Why don't you give some information? Why don't you tell them?" "Well, you know. Everyone must know." "Where does your money come from?" "Drug companies." All this sort of stuff.

**Next Speaker:** If we lived in a decent society, everyone could have children, they'd be taken care of. The family wouldn't be responsible. There wouldn't be anything like this. Women's liberation is working to liberate women, which would mean the liberation of all society, and people could have children and they- It wouldn't, "Oh, disgusting burden of raising-" I mean, one child wouldn't be put on one poor family. People could do what they wanted. You know, it's not women that are sick or these children that are sick, it's society that isn't taking care of those children. Don't put it on the children.

**Next Speaker:** I had mentioned before that if people are so interested in this thing that's growing inside a woman, then this is the logical conclusion: that a pregnancy is forced if you must carry through this pregnancy, and that is where you have the problem. That is where the unwanted child comes from, because it was an unwanted pregnancy. And if we had abortion, if abortions were legalized, there would be no unwanted children. Every woman would want that child. And this is the reason for unwanted children. It's not the children's fault.

**Next Speaker:** Talking about this unwanted child and what you said before

about the men becoming very romantic, I know that I tried ... every means possible to obtain an abortion when I became pregnant, except that I was totally dependent on the guy who was eighteen, and I was seventeen. And we'd make appointments to go to the abortionist, and I'd wait outside. I'd wait some more. Finally at five o'clock if the appointment was at one, I realized, he's not going to come. And finally, I realized the point was everything was set up to make me get married and have a child and that would end all my adolescent problems.

But the thing about it that I really feel irked about is that I never got any attention for, like good things that I did. Nobody ever said, "Wow, she wants to be a painter. That's nice," or, "She's gonna go to school. That's a good thing." But when I was pregnant, suddenly I got so much attention. Relatives I hadn't seen in ten years said, "I'll take the child." Everyone was taking care of me. You know, suddenly because I was fulfilling my biological function, which seems to be the only one in this society that gives you your validation, you get lots of attention. You're a big celebrity when you fulfill your biological function.

And this is one of the things that makes me most mad, because this is the reason that I had to have a child. Nobody would help me to get out of that thing which was defining me: my biological function. And when I finally did decide that I'm not going to keep this child, what happened was, because I was negating a function on which the society rests, that women are defined in service roles, in nurturing roles, and maintaining roles- When I decided that I'm not going to take that function on now, suddenly nobody was my friend. The family who had been so willing to take care of the child if I would keep it, they weren't my friends anymore. The people, the social workers who were supposed to help me make this decision would sit there and try and convince me that I'm doing something to wrong myself, and they really worked on me to the point where I felt ashamed that I wasn't taking on the role that was expected of me, that I was doing something unnatural, that there was something shameful in giving up the child.

I don't even know if it would have been as shameful if I hadn't had an abortion, which I couldn't have. It's illegal, it was criminal. I didn't know how to go about getting one myself. But the point I'm trying to make is that the only time that I was recognized was when I was in this situation of what, I guess, amounts to being kind of helpless.

**Next Speaker:** At this moment we also have alternate ways, without dealing with the system, because that's going to be obviously very slow to change. If there's a woman in this audience or you know of a woman who

needs an abortion, we can refer her to somebody immediately. I mean, this is part of what we want to do, to disseminate information. I don't believe that they're going to give us our abortions and even if they do change the abortion law, it really isn't gonna change women's status at all. We have a whole lot more to do than just change the abortion law, and I think that even if they did pass a repeal bill, which they're not even talking about.

**Next Speaker:** You're saying why don't women put themselves on the line. When I was asked to speak here, I needed to think about it. I want to teach in the New York City school system. Whether you know it or not, there's a clause there that has to do with, uh, morality, or they call it character. By coming here tonight, by talking about my abortion openly, by talking about the fact that I am a mother and I do not have a husband, that I am jeopardizing my future, that I can be denied a license by New York State because I am an unwed mother with an illegitimate child.

All the women here who are speaking tonight, putting themselves on the line by having relatives find out, by having their parents find out if they don't know about it, by having people that they work with find out about it. There are girls here who were on television and have had all kinds of reprisals. Their co-worker says, "Oh, you had an abortion. Oh well." You know, these are the things. It's not such an easy thing to say, "Well put yourself on the line," because who's going to support me and my child when I can't get a license or when nobody wants to hire me.

There's another point involved here that was brought up, and this is that women are used as a tool in a power structure. People don't want to legalize abortion because then there's a breakdown in the power structure. Women are a tool. Women are possessions. We are owned, and the thing that we carry is also owned. And if abortion is legalized, there's no longer the threat. A man can't threaten you. Excuse me?

**Next Speaker:** I'm not gonna argue that. All we are asking is to be allowed to make a choice. It's up to the women up here to speak and say that they have had children, that they enjoy being mothers, but then at other times in their lives the thought of it was just devastating. Maybe men don't understand that.

**Next Speaker:** If a man is involved in the debate, what do you think the man should be able to say?

**Next Speaker:** Wait a minute. Didn't we decide that we were gonna, for one night, just talk about women and not about men? I think that

communities should control the schools and the police, and I think that women should control their own bodies. And even if the man wants to have the baby, it's ultimately, unfortunately, the woman who's gonna bear the brunt of it. If we didn't have to raise the children and if the state or men did raise the children, or shared it, then it wouldn't be our responsibility. But since not only do we carry the child for nine months, but then usually for at least twelve or fifteen years, we do more than carry the child. We care for the child. The decision about our bodies is ours, and I would say that women have the ultimate control of their own bodies (audience applause).

**Next Speaker:** I would like to just say one thing about this. People have asked me what does abortion have to do with the Women's Liberation Movement? What is the connection? First of all, one thing that you should realize is that the Women's Liberation Movement is very new. In this country, it's only about a year and a half old.

We're women up here who've had an abortion. You have to realize that when each one of us had an abortion, it didn't feel like something that was being done to women. You experienced it as, "Oh, what a horrible misfortune to happen to me! What a terrible thing has befallen me! How will I possibly get out of this horrible situation that has happened to me?" Maybe you've had a friend and it happened to her. You know it doesn't happen to boys. It only happens to you and your friends. But essentially, you feel like it only has to do with you.

Now, what came out tonight, as we were all talking, what became apparent is that being pregnant and having to have an abortion and going through these kinds of experiences isn't just a terrible misfortune that has fallen on one person or two people or three people or four people. This is a situation in this country right now where women are really victims. Men do not have this experience. They do not have to have illegal abortions. It's one experience where women are victims. I think that consciousness among women now is rising. Still, in all, when women find themselves in intolerable situations, women still tend to feel, "Oh, what a horrible situation has befallen me!" It is just another one the ways in which women are victims in this society. And what Women's Liberation's about it is that this is first of all not an accident, that women are victims, but that this is a real oppression of women. But especially that women have got to get together and have got to organize.

It is not a horrible situation that has happened to Ros, and a horrible situation that happened to one person and a horrible situation that happened to Helen, but it's a horrible situation that is happening to many, many women, and horrible situations that are happening to all women in this

country every day. It's one of the ways women are victims, and Women's Liberation is saying that women have got to get together and organize to change it, to overthrow it. And what Cindy was bringing up was very important--women have got to begin to get out on the streets and begin demanding this change. And that, I think, is the best connection that I can make (audience applause).

**Next Speaker:** I'd like to say something to this woman. Whenever I talk to women, girls, or other people who feel bad that abortion's done, the first thing I get from that group is, "But I'm for motherhood." And I'm saying, "Well, I'm for motherhood." Why is it that whenever you're for something, there's always an inference made that you're against something? I'm certainly for motherhood. Of course, I've had a daughter, a lovely person. That's my point of view anyway. But I resent the implication that the moment you are for abortion on the basis of principle, logic, and necessity, people automatically assume you are against motherhood, you are not feminine, that you don't like men, blah, blah, blah!

One of the other things that perturbs me is that our society has so many double standards, and unfortunately the double standards are inflicted on women.

When I was talking to people they said, "Ah, bunch of lezzies. After brunch they make out." (audience laughter). I came out to Women's Liberation and I was very surprised to find that these so-called dykes were the majority married women. You just heard a woman speak now. She is a married woman; she is not a dyke. Her daughter is sitting up here next to her. This is the hostility that exists. When a woman has an abortion, it is because she has had sexual intercourse. Not with another woman (audience laughter). She's had sexual intercourse with a man. After the abortion, she does not run out and buy a suit. She does not turn dyke. After my abortion, I don't hate men. This is the whole thing. I love men. I love having sex. I'm not a dyke, and I don't think any woman up here is expressing this hostility, that they hate men. All we are saying; well, let me personalize. All I am saying is that all people have to be made aware of the fact. The men have to be able to somehow empathize with our feelings. You have to be told the nitty gritty of what it's like to become pregnant, to have the abortion, or to bear the unwanted children. We do not hate men. All we're saying is that you have to understand.

And this is why we're here tonight--not to condemn the men, to make you understand and to make you realize that we need your support because we are not the legislators. And this is the problem that we have.

**Next Speaker:** And no woman can be liberated alone unless every woman is liberated. No one can until all men are liberated. There's no liberation; no one can liberate themselves if there are un-liberated other women. We all have to work for everyone's liberation.

**Next Speaker:** Judith, for me, right now, this whole evening was really summed up. I took a look around the room, I happened to pick out a familiar face, the father of my child. The father who does not recognize his child. He's here tonight. And I wondered how a man can get up and say, "Well, the man has some responsibility!" The point is when a woman confronts a man and says, "I am pregnant it is your child", he does not want the responsibility and it is the woman who bears it. The man that is here tonight and is the father of my child has not had restless nights to think about. Doesn't have to worry about the babysitter. Doesn't have to worry about what's gonna happen when the kid gets bigger. Doesn't have to spend days in clinic with the kid. He's free and out fucking all the women that he wants! But I have the responsibility.

If any man has the nerve to say, "Well, we should have some responsibility", you want the responsibility, then you accept it. And the responsibility that you have is to recognize us as the ones who decide our future. You fuck us up, but we're the ones that raise the kids! That's the only responsibility you have! We have all the rest. And our responsibility is to decide our future and whether or not we are going to carry a child. You have nothing more to say in this!

**Next Speaker:** When I moved to the city and I got pregnant and I wanted to get an abortion, I was really in a bind. My family is working class and couldn't help. I was working then for a civil rights organization so I had contacts. I had a legal abortion but it wasn't very nice.

I couldn't do it the way some of the other women have done. They're really beautiful and I wish I could do that, but I can't. But I had ugly, ugly things said to me and they were not being very cool about it. But I couldn't talk about it because it was really a rough kind of thing. Ugly thing! You don't talk about those kinds of things. 'm sure some of the other women had sadistic things done to them, too.

I applied to 11 different hospitals and it was the 11th that finally accepted me. They all have a board of men. There were no women on the board. Those men have the power. I couldn't have an abortion if I wasn't sterilized.

**Next Speaker:** I didn't feel very good. I could tell you some other things

that don't have to do with abortion that brought me this morning to the speakout. Things that happen to every woman. Maybe it's a change of attitude, but when you begin to look at your life and see who's pushing you around, it's often men. And they're usually in power. And there are a lot of women who are beginning to realize this. I would say that I think that I have hated men. I have really hated men, and that is probably one of the sanest things that has ever happened to me (laughter). Most people who are oppressed, and I'm a woman and I'm oppressed, get to hate their oppressors.

And men who get up here and accept the hostility that they have for women, that's what oppressors do, you know. Oppressors oppress people and then they hurt other people and it comes back on them. You know they accuse people that they oppress of being unreasonable.

**Next Speaker:** Beautiful! Beautiful! Beautiful!

**Next Speaker:** I'm gonna address myself to this young lady here. I'm constantly amazed by my patients who have who have tried to talk to their children about their fathers. "Can I talk about daddy?" And that's the last time they ever saw him. Or mommy went out with him two or three times on a date and nine months later, or eight months later, you arrived. How can I answer them? And this is really horrible and selfish. What is this doing to the mother?

**Next Speaker:** I've never seen anybody on this panel before. I just came because I had an abortion about three years ago and I think I've suffered since. Financially and every way possible. And when you have an abortion you have to pay \$700, go through this cloak and dagger business and the guy finds you some guy willing to stick a hangar up you. How can you not be hostile towards a male? My god, this guy is saying, "I don't care about your life!" And then you're supposed to say, "Well, that's okay!" For two years after the abortion, I remained friendly with the person but finally I just said, "Get the hell outta my life" and "You don't exist!" And then I began to recover. And I stand here tonight, heart pounding, my hands sweating because it wasn't until after my abortion, I found out that it happened to other people. When I had it, I thought I was the lowest of the low. That I couldn't get any lower and that I was the worst human being in the world. To find out that my mother, that my cousins, that people I was close to, had had abortions, helped me more than most of the therapy that I had to go through. And I'm sure there're women sitting out here right now who are feeling the same thing that I'm feeling. So stand up, do something! Just rid yourself of this horrible stigma!



**Next Speaker:** I'd like to also answer your question. You asked, "What is the responsibility of the man?" None! None! In my case, which is the only one I can speak personally of. First of all, when I mentioned birth control, he said, "Oh don't be ridiculous, everybody knows it's the woman's responsibility." Second of all, when he found out that I was pregnant he said, "Oh God, you know, I'm gonna have to sell some of my stock!"

When I finally found out where to go to get one, I was given two alternatives--Puerto Rico or England. Fabulous! I only had two days to do it in. After I found out where I had to go, and how much it was gonna cost and all that, I said, "Will you go with me?" Because I didn't really picture going to Puerto Rico on a weekend alone for an abortion. I'd never been through it, and I happen to be a little bit afraid of operations. He said, "No, I don't think so, that's silly. All kinds of women do it every day. No. I don't have time. I have to go to class" (laughter). So, that's part of his right, right? He has a right to keep going to school because that was his important function in life, but ... When I got through and I got back in one piece, he called and said, "Listen. Did you get the birth control pills yet?" (laughter). I must also add that I said, "I don't want to see you again."

**Next Speaker:** May I just mention that the reason why we're getting together and talking about this issue in the first place? I want to make it clear to everybody that the whole time women had thought that there's something wrong with them, that they had to have an abortion, that here they're odd-balls, they're freaks, they're psychiatric cases because they don't want to have a child. The reason for bringing that up, and talking about it, is to recognize that it's a social problem and it's not a personal problem. I think that's very important. And anyone against that particular kind of exposing of the truth, I question, very much.

**Next Speaker:** I feel that one of the reasons that, the abortionists who are indirect victims, whereas women are the direct victims, become these crusaders is that people still don't listen to women. They're not important enough. You need a man to get up there and end your whole night of talking before it becomes a real problem. When you walk out with a satisfied grin and say, "Yeah, I'm one of those liberals, like those people are. I'm really progressive; the whole world depends on me". Men and women are both great, we're all great, we're lovely, we're wonderful, we're doing good all the time every day, all the time. We're gonna go to the next meeting for abortion repeal and we're gonna be just great.

I think it's about time we end this shit. Like men are suffering, we're all suffering and you know maybe men should start analyzing it from that angle

for a change. You might come up with a lot of answers to things that were very hard to understand before. This is not an accident this abortion thing, this is one of many, this is a whole pattern here. This is one aspect of it. Women are controlled, women are owned by men. That's the only way they have a victim's society. Anything else they do is incidental. We want to change that; we want to change it from a radical perspective. This will go hand in hand with a lot of changes. One of the things that has been brought up I think is that motherhood is something that women don't owe anybody. If they do it, they do it, I think they ought to be paid for it personally. I think that society should recognize that women are doing something for this society. It takes a lot of labor. If you want us to do that for you, well by god, you can pay us for it, or some other way make sure there's child pay. I mean that's just another angle on it, and you may not agree. I think that women should debate about this.

Any women who are interested, the group that put this on is Red Stockings. It's a new, militant feminist, radical feminist group. An orientation meeting was announced but I don't know the exact date.

**Next Speaker:** March 30th. If you want to come and talk about it and see where you fit into it, come to that orientation. All new people will form new groups and see there's many different shades of opinion within this movement. It's a large movement. We'd like to thank you for coming. And I hope that some of these are things that people start to think about, seriously from a new angle!

## **We Were Keeping the Clinic Doors Open With Our Bodies An Interview with Sunny Chapman**



*Sunny Chapman is a longtime activist and artist. In the 1980s and 1990s she participated in abortion clinic defense struggles by escorting women to clinics and videotaping the activities of anti-abortion activists. In this interview, she discusses how her own abortion experience with Jane politicized her to become an activist and she shares some of her encounters with militant anti-abortion activists.*

**Hard Crackers:** *Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what led you to get involved in abortion activism?*

**Sunny Chapman:** I grew up in a very working- class family in the Midwest. My mother was a waitress and my father worked in factories. When I was a

teenager, I was chosen for Project Upward Bound, which was a Great Society program for smart poor kids. They sent us to college for a summer and everything was paid for. So, I was sent to Northern Illinois University and the first day I got there, I was one of three white kids. The second day, I was the only white kid and the rest of the kids there were Blackstone Rangers<sup>1</sup> from Chicago. I had a lot of amazing experiences with them, and they taught me a lot. For one of our field trips in 1966, we went to Soldier Field stadium in Chicago for an open housing rally in 1966 and we heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak, and that was a transformative moment that just changed everything for me. So, I ended up going to Chicago when I was 17 and I got a job at the Chicago Seed,<sup>2</sup> the alternative newspaper. I was a ward of the state. I had myself declared an emancipated juvenile and I began my so-called adult life. I worked at the Seed for about a year. I quit after the '68 Democratic Convention because I was very unhappy with certain decisions the organizers had made. I felt that they led people to get slaughtered by the cops. I wasn't really involved in activism after that. I was kind of taking a little break from it because my time at the Seed had been intense and the '68 Convention was just traumatic.

At 19, I found myself pregnant and I did not want to have a baby at all. There was no question that I absolutely didn't want to have a baby. I was not having a good pregnancy. The doctor told me later I probably had a detached placenta. I was bleeding all the time. And sometimes it became hemorrhaging. I was in the emergency room a couple of times. I spent the night in an abortion ward because they thought I had tried to self-abort. Meanwhile, I was becoming really ill from this pregnancy. I was already a skinny girl, and I started losing more weight and I was having fainting spells. I just felt like I was dying and none of these doctors would help me. Every time I went to the ER, they would just pack my vagina with lambswool and tell me, "There you go, be a good girl."

So, I called the number that a friend gave me. It was some gangster sounding guy who picked up. He kept asking me questions about how I looked. He wanted to know if I was blonde, which I was, because he really liked blonde girls. I was so creeped out by him. I wasn't quite desperate enough to go but almost. So, I told him I would call him back. And then I remembered Jane. I don't know why I forgot because I knew about them.

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<sup>1</sup> The Blackstone Rangers or the Almighty Black P. Stone Nation (BPSN) were a street organization formed in the late 1950s in Woodlawn, a South Side neighborhood in Chicago. They eventually assumed a political outlook and associated themselves with black nationalism movement.

<sup>2</sup> *Seed* was an underground radical newspaper in Chicago that ran from 1967 to 1974 and covered important events like the Chicago Eight Trial and the murder of Fred Hampton.

They had flyers everywhere that said "Pregnant, need help? Call Jane." So, I called Jane.

***HC: Can you tell us about your experiences with Jane?***

**SC:** When you called Jane you got an answering machine, and you leave a message. Someone calls you back, who is the one that "vets" people. She talked to me for a while and asked me a few questions about myself. I guess I passed muster because then she told me that I would get a call from a counselor who would meet with me. The counselor called me, and I met with her at her house. She was super nice. She was really supportive, and she gave me the instructions. She gave me a date for the procedure and told me to wait on a corner near my house wearing a yellow sweater and I would be picked up by a man driving a car.

The idea of getting into a car with a strange man is terrifying. But when the car came to pick me up that day, I just knew it was the right person. There was a vibe. Also, there was another woman or maybe two women in the car already. So, he drove us to the South Side of Chicago, probably Hyde Park and drove into the back of an apartment building and parked. We went in the back way and went into an apartment where there were other women sitting around in the living room. We stayed there for a while, and everyone was very quiet. No one was in the mood to chat plus no one had eaten and we were all hungry. Then someone came and got a small group at a time and took us to a van, a different car. We were blindfolded so we couldn't see where we're going. And that van took us to another building where we parked in the back. They took the blindfolds off, and we walked up the stairs to another apartment where the procedure was done.

The bedroom where the procedure was done was right off the living room. I heard people talking. You heard everything, and you saw people going in and out one by one. They would blindfold us take us into the procedure room. And there was the doctor who we found out later was not in fact a doctor. Two Janes were in the room. The doctor did a shot of lidocaine to the cervix and then started the dilation procedure which I still remember was very painful. He did a D & C.<sup>3</sup> The Jane counselors held my hands. They were super supportive, and they were really good at what they were doing. When it was done, they reversed the whole transportation procedure and dropped me off near my house. They gave me a medication to help my uterus shrink back into its normal size. That was it. I had a couple days of

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<sup>3</sup> A D&C (Dilation and Curettage) is the most common method of early abortion.

light bleeding and then I was absolutely fine. I started gaining back the weight I lost. I got my life back and it was miraculous.

And then I went on make life very difficult for anti-choice activists for many years after that. I escorted women at abortion clinics, I videotaped anti-choice demonstrations, and I testified in court. I basically did everything I could to make sure that women could have safe, legal procedures and get in and out of clinics safely.

***HC: Can you tell us more about your activism?***

**SC:** Roe happened in 1973 which was four years after I had my procedure. There wasn't a big anti-choice movement then. I got involved in the late 1980s because that is when the real harassment at abortion clinics started. I was active for ten years at clinics in Chicago. I moved back to Chicago from New York. I started working as a volunteer safety escort at a clinic that was the focus of Joseph Scheidler's<sup>4</sup> people and they were very aggressive. I was there every week for a couple of years.

I also traveled around the country to weekly summer protests that Operation Rescue<sup>5</sup> and other groups had, and I videotaped their activities. I moved to New York in 1996 but then I came back to Chicago for another Democratic Convention. That year I videotaped all the clinic blockades in Chicago and tried to get something done. However, the Department of Justice in Chicago squashed the whole thing. They didn't want to prosecute anti-choicers who blockaded clinics during the convention.

I went to a lot of other places, and I testified in a couple of federal trials. There was one in Dayton, Ohio where I filmed anti-choicers for a week blockading a clinic, and I testified in the US vs Operation Rescue court case and provided all the visual evidence. A few years later the judge declared a mistrial because the defense claimed they had not been notified as to the breadth of the witnesses' evidence. This is what we are up against; it's not just individual anti-choice activists, it's a system that supports them.

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Scheidler was a former ad executive who became a leading figure in the anti-abortion movement. He reached national prominence for pioneering street-level anti-abortion activism including protests, pickets and sit-ins at abortion clinics which he coopted from civil rights protests led by Martin Luther King. Jr. He founded the anti-abortion organization, *Pro-Life Action League* in Chicago in 1980 which helped to build a grassroots national network of activists. Many of his followers committed themselves to direct action by vandalizing and burning down clinics and even shooting and killing doctors who performed abortions.

<sup>5</sup> Operation Rescue was a militant anti-abortion organization founded in 1986 by fiery evangelical activist turned politician, Randall Allen Terry. The organization's slogan was "If you believe abortion is murder, act like it's murder."



*Photo from Clinic Defense at the 1996 Democratic Convention. The police stood by as anti-choice activists physically attacked clinic defenders. Sunny Chapman sent the images to the Department of Justice in D.C. but the local office in Chicago requested they not prosecute.*

***HC: What was it like to videotape anti-choice activists?***

**SC:** I was good at it because I seemed like this nice girl from the Midwest. So, I would just go up to them, point my camera and talk to them. I would say "Hey, what's your name? Where are you from? Do you have a gun? Would you ever shoot a doctor?" I would smile and ask these questions. The amount of information was surprising, especially from the men. The anti-choice men flirted with me, which was really creepy, but I did it for the cause. If they liked me, I could find out more.

I would go to all their stuff. They would invite me to their churches or church rallies. I would go eat with them, I would ride their buses with them and

videotape them all the time. One day I was talking to Ken Scott, an activist from Colorado who was a well-known anti-choicer and suspected clinic bomber, but no one could ever pin it on him. I asked him "What is your vision for this country?" And he was so happy to tell me.

"Well," he responded "first, we should have a king and he should be a Christian. And everyone who holds elective office should have to be Christian. And only Christians can own land" And of course, the unsaid thing was that he should be a Christian white man. He didn't come out and say it, but it was obvious to me. So, this is their vision of this country and they are working towards it and we have to fight back. I taped this guy at Dr. Tiller's clinic in Wichita and there were hundreds of anti-choicers there. This was just one of many disturbing conversations I had. When Dr. Tiller came to the clinic, he had to come in by lying down in a metal box in the back of a bullet proof car. That's how dangerous these people are, and they got him eventually. They got him in a place where he never thought they would do it: his church.

I also did a lot of videotaping in New Jersey and there was one particular clinic where some radical anti-choicers were present. I videotaped James Kopp who would later go on to kill Dr. Barnett Slepian through his kitchen window in Buffalo, New York. I turned my footage of Kopp at the clinic over to the FBI while he was on the run so they could figure out who his friend was, and who was supporting and helping him.

This is another aspect of clinic defense because you find yourself in this bizarre position of working with cops who have traditionally been your enemy, especially if you are an activist. But if you do clinic defense there is some level of cooperation with police. It was a strange and bizarre experience to have to talk to them especially after being beaten up by Chicago cops in the '68 Democratic Convention. But I had to suck that up and work with them. There is some horrifying footage I still have of clinic blockades which should be seen by people today.

That was the extent of my involvement and after the Freedom of Access to Clinics Entrance Act<sup>6</sup> was passed, the harassment at clinics died down. The anti-choicers did not want to go to jail for their cause. So, I retired from direct action at clinics, but I continued to support marches and protests

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<sup>6</sup> The Freedom of Access to Clinics Entrance Act was signed into law by then-president Bill Clinton in 1994. It prohibited the intentional damage of a reproductive health care facility and the use of physical force, threat of physical force, or physical obstruction to intentionally injure, intimidate, interfere with, or attempt to injure, intimidate or interfere with any person who is obtaining an abortion.



including the Black Lives Matter movement and the Women's March in D.C. I also donate my artwork to fundraisers for various causes as well.

Then this horrific Supreme Court decision came down recently and I contacted my old activist networks. I said if you need me, I will come back. I will do whatever it takes to help women get procedures--if it means giving money to abortion funds to help women travel to where they can get their procedures or if it means giving people a place to stay or give them rides to clinics. I talked to a pharmacist about buying a large amount of generic plan B and storing it and giving it to women that need it.

My old pro-choice networks are eviscerated because no one thought they would do this. So, people have not organized all that well to respond to it. This is a plan that they have been working on for decades. The next thing overturned will be gay and lesbian rights. This is very bad and it's going to get worse. It's terrifying to me.

***HC: The Supreme Court decision in 1973 in many ways, contributed to a certain kind of deactivation of the abortion rights movement. The emphasis shifted away from the radical activism that was characteristic of the early abortion rights movement to more lobbying and going to court. As you reflect on almost fifty years, what should anything be done differently now?***

**SC:** There was a general distaste in the mainstream feminist movement for direct action. People who were clinic defenders were looked down on as rowdy children by the mainstream feminists who just wanted to keep their jobs and give speeches. I never felt like they were doing enough legislatively. They were not fighting hard enough while we were keeping the clinic doors open with our bodies.

And by the early 1990s, the right had a vision of what they wanted this country to be. We, on the other hand, don't have a real unified vision. We are fractionalized and we are fighting with each other. And this is what we need, we need to have a movement of people unified behind a collective goal.

***HC: Today many of the people who were celebrating the overturning of Roe v Wade are young women. It seems like the anti-choice movement is doing its work with younger people. How do you make sense of that?***

**SC:** This is something we didn't miss back then. There were young anti choicers at the clinics who had tattoos and green hair. It was confusing to us

because aren't we supposed to be friends? But these kids were the children of the anti-abortion leaders who were indoctrinated.

There are also some women who don't care. They say, oh, it's not going to happen to me. But it's all fun and games until you need an abortion. Even the anti-choice women are going to run into a situation where they can't get the reproductive healthcare, they may need which is not going to allow them to get fertility treatments or deal with an ectopic pregnancy. And then they will have to consider what they have become part of.

But there are more of us. Most Americans support abortion access. The other side is winning because the right wingers outvote us. So, they get that monster Trump in office and three horrific Supreme Court justices. And now we are in trouble. This is all going to get worse, and we have to fight back. We can't say oh this is bad, but I am old, and I can't do it anymore. I think people are freaked out and tired, but we must fight back.

**\ ek- 'tä-pik<sup>[1]</sup>**  
**Norah Booth**



It's 1976. I am 26 and have been experiencing light vaginal bleeding off and on for several weeks. I am married, but getting a divorce. I have no children. I am using the low dose of "The Pill." A friend recommends her ob-gyn doctor. I go to this doctor and after his exam he tells me, to my relief, "Well, you are not pregnant." He prescribes antibiotics along with painkillers. He says he will see me in a week as he is going on vacation. I fill the prescriptions, go home, and find the painkillers essential.

The next three days are a blur. Abdominal pain comes and goes, but is manageable—until it isn't. I go to the hospital connected to the vacationing physician. I spend two very drugged nights there, while people in white coats randomly come in and out of the room. I can't recall eating. I am just lying in a hospital bed popping Percocet and antibiotics. A man in a white shirt and black tie floats into view, announces that I have gonorrhea, and leaves. A visitor from hell? He does not appear again. I do not have gonorrhea.

It's a terrible night, except for the Percocet. It lets me lift out of my body so I can float above it. In the morning I am hustled into a wheelchair and pushed out the door. My ride takes me home and I prepare for another night of lying in bed and drifting in and out of consciousness.

But, first, I call a friend. Mary is entertaining guests, but takes my call. I tell her where I have been. She tells me Donna is visiting, would I like to speak with her? Donna has overcome serious bouts with cancer through alternative medicine and is currently cancer free. Yeah, put her on. She tells me about her recent recovery and how all her doctors, including the allopathic medicine ones, confirm that she has beaten back cancer, at least for now.

Donna suggests I seek an alternative opinion. It couldn't hurt, right? She recommends a naturopath in town. I am aware of his clinic, and I call in the morning to ask if I can be seen. I have an immediate appointment.

I drive myself to the office and am quickly taken into a room that looks like an ordinary doctor's office. I just wear the clothes I have on, no fuss. A young man comes in and says he is apprenticing, is that okay with me? I agree. The treatment is very different. He has some small tools and he taps gently around several parts of my body. He carefully puts his hand on my abdomen. His light touch doesn't hurt and is not invasive. He says, "I will be right back."

He returns soon with the head of the enterprise. "We think you are pregnant," the naturopath says. A lightning bolt hits the back of my head and opens my eyes. Of course!

Between the two men they explain to me that I likely am having an ectopic pregnancy. What's that? The egg is outside the womb. What do I do? I am handed a list of herbs and directions on how to use them. I go to the natural foods store and find all the ingredients. The one I remember best is called "squaw vine."

I take the herbs as prescribed and in the middle of the night wake up as my body starts going through contractions. They are mild but definite. Soon I birth a blood clot about the size of a newborn's fist. After, I get the first uninterrupted sleep I have had in weeks.

The following evening—it's after 6 pm—I call the office of the doctor who told me I was not pregnant to leave a message for him that I would not be coming for surgery in the morning. To my shock and surprise, he answers the phone. I take a deep breath and tell him of my good luck in finding out what was wrong and getting the gentle medicine I needed to abort safely.

He goes ballistic.

"I have you scheduled. I have anesthesiologists, nurses, another doctor..." and I forget what else, ready for me.

"I will see you on the operating table in the morning!" he shouts.

That never happened.

About three months later I received a bill for \$300, a lot of money at the time. I wrote the hospital a letter informing them that I did not require the surgery, I did not have the surgery, and I was not going to pay that bill now, or ever. I never heard from the hospital again. I never was pregnant again. I never regretted dodging that doctor's knife.

I am grateful for Planned Parenthood's nurse practitioners who for several years after provided my healthcare. There are many online sites with reliable information about ectopic pregnancy.

Here are two of the best:

The Mayo Clinic (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ectopic-pregnancy/symptoms-causes/syc-20372088>) provides the following information and advice:

- Women should seek emergency medical help if they have any signs or symptoms of an ectopic pregnancy, including:
  - Severe abdominal or pelvic pain accompanied by vaginal bleeding
  - Extreme lightheadedness or fainting
  - Shoulder pain
- It explains that an ectopic pregnancy most often occurs in a fallopian tube, which carries eggs from the ovaries to the uterus. An ectopic pregnancy can't proceed normally. The fertilized egg can't survive, and the growing tissue may cause life-threatening bleeding, if left untreated.
- If you've had an ectopic pregnancy, your risk of having another one is increased. If you wish to try to get pregnant again, it's very important to see your doctor regularly.

- There's no way to prevent an ectopic pregnancy.

Centers for Disease Control

Reproductive Health:

[https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data\\_stats/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data_stats/index.htm)

CDC references Mayo Clinic

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[1] Greek, ektopos = "out of place"

## **Breaking the Law Does Not Always Have to Be Scary**

### *An Interview with Camille Rudney*



*Camille Rudney is an activist and a clinical social worker based in Richmond, Virginia. They became involved in abortion struggles after being arrested in 2012 for protesting Virginia's restrictive abortion bill that required women seeking abortions to undergo a transvaginal ultrasound as well as other stringent regulations that would severely affect abortion providers. Camille's arrest received a lot of media attention which they and others used to mobilize for abortion access for all. They founded the organization Cooch Watch which used popular media to draw in a new generation to organizing for reproductive access. In this interview, Camille reflects on the lessons that organizing in Virginia holds for contemporary and future struggles for reproductive freedom.*

**Hard Crackers:** *Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved in abortion activism?*

**Camille Rudney:** I've lived in Richmond for about twelve years and before that I have lived in a bunch of different places, including Montreal. But I

grew up in northern Virginia outside of DC. I have been involved in political organizing since I was about 17 or 18 years old. I was born in France and my mother is French. So, I think that experience gave me an understanding of different political systems and of difference and a double lens to understand life in America. Also, my dad has a disability, and he has been involved in disability organizing. Since I was a kid, I helped him do mailers, and their Christmas get-togethers were at my house. Political involvement was modeled to me by both my parents but my politics differed in other ways from them. As a freshman at McGill University in Montreal, I joined a political group which gave me an outlet to express the level of agitation and outrage I felt growing up.

I had recently moved to Richmond when I became involved in abortion activism. It was initiation into political action in the Richmond world and being back in the South, after a long period of time. When I was doing that work, I was not at least outwardly identifying as trans or non-binary. At that time, we didn't really talk about trans issues as connected to reproductive rights.

But I didn't get involved in abortion activism until I got arrested.

***HC: Isn't that how it all starts! Can you tell us about that arrest and how it fueled your activism?***

**CR:** In 2011, the General Assembly in Virginia passed a Targeted Regulations of Abortion Providers or TRAP law, which in this case required abortion clinics to be regulated as hospitals and subjected them to follow design and construction requirements like hallway size for instance. This bill passed without much resistance save for the little noise made by large nonprofit organizations. The law targeted abortion clinics especially smaller ones which do not have the funds to ensure that they can meet these new state regulations. Planned Parenthood, on the other hand, has the money to build larger clinics that could follow these new guidelines. Also, there was no grandfather clause that would have exempted already existing abortion clinics from these new regulations. So, the legislation would have effectively regulated most of the last remaining abortion clinics out of existence.

The legislation also had support of Republicans in the General Assembly who pushed to get it passed. In Virginia, we have an off year governor race. And that year, we had a governor, Bob McDonald, who represents the very conservative Catholic Virginia class of politicians. He pushed his luck a little too far, and he and his Republican cronies in the General Assembly got this



bill passed. Besides the TRAP law, the bill also included a mandated waiting period for counseling and a mandatory vaginal ultrasound, which protestors referred to as a forced vaginal ultrasound. It was the forced ultrasound that became the major object of outrage, whereas the hospital regulations and the mandatory waiting period took a backseat. It's hard for people to get excited about TRAP laws which is also unfortunately why they were passed.

Just prior to this bill, there had been the Richmond Occupy protests. I wasn't involved in them because at that time I was relatively new to the city. But as Occupy petered out, abortion rights organizing was heating up. Many of those who had been involved in Occupy started to organize around abortion rights. Occupy activists brought a different style to organizing that sometimes put them in tension with coalitions like the ones headed by more established non-profits like NARAL, Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) who had overseen everything up to that point. And then there were these smaller abortion clinics that were going to be legislated out of existence who were outraged at what was happening and were more willing to go out on a limb than the more established nonprofits. So, an ad-hoc organization came together called Speak Loudly With Silence and the first thing they did was organize a big silent protest that lined the pathways up to the Capitol building. Anyone going to the General Assembly on their way to vote would have to pass this protest. But they still voted yes anyways. There was a follow up protest scheduled for the following couple of weeks. I heard about it from some of my social work school friends who were involved in organizing it. So, I went, and it was a very dramatic moment.

The Capitol Building in Richmond, which was designed by Thomas Jefferson, has these large imposing white columns and big steps. There were about a thousand protesters which was a very big protest at that time. The protest was large but relatively tame. Yet there were helicopters hovering over us and state police in full military and riot gear, which was dramatic back then, but I guess today more normalized. The police were telling us to get off the steps. Ironically these are the same steps that the gun lobbyists are allowed on but we couldn't be on them. The police told us to disperse but 32 people, including myself, decided not to move. That day I had not planned to get arrested. I had not eaten breakfast and I had never previously been involved in abortion organizing. I had never been arrested before, but I had been to lots of direct-action training and civil disobedience trainings. I felt strongly about opposing this law and it just seemed to me that getting arrested wasn't going to cost me as much relative to the potential effect it would have. I was also angry. I had my little sister around and she was angry. This

bill would affect a lot of people I cared about. So, that day I made a pragmatic decision to not move.

***HC: What happened then?***

**CR:** Well, the police dragged us off the steps of the Capitol. I was wearing these bright red pants that day and against the whiteness of the Capitol building they stood out. It was a very dramatic scene. The police were dragging me, and I was yelling to my sister and that was when the media started snapping pictures of me. And that image of my arrest made the frontpage of some newspapers and was on the Rachel Maddow show. It was this very big spectacle in a way we hadn't had much in Richmond before. The cops have gotten more militarized and their level of organized violence against protesters during the Black Lives Matter protests here made what they did to us look tame.



*Rudney's red slacks are now part of the "Speak Loud with Silence" collection at the Virginia Historical Society.*

Then they put us in these buses and held us for a very long time, but they eventually released us. We did the usual thing of going to court but at the end we got the equivalent of a slap on the wrist because we had a lot of support, and we were mostly white. It was a small risk with a big impact.

So, after that, me and some of the people who got arrested plus some others decided to try to build on the momentum from this protest to address the wonkier TRAP regulations. They ended up taking out the vaginal ultrasound part of the bill, but they kept the mandatory waiting period, which was the more repressive part of the bill, especially for lower income people. It has since been repealed. But we tried to use this moment to attack the TRAP regulations. We wanted to get a grandfather clause so that the existing clinics can be grandfathered in and not have to follow all the crazy regulations.

At that time Ken Cuccinelli was Attorney General. People may have heard of him because he was running the immigration department for Trump when all the scary things were happening. Both he and McDonald were easy villains to target, and they were both part of this Catholic establishment class. Cuccinelli was trying to pressure the Board of Health and sending them threatening memos because they were the ones who were going to be voting on whether there would be a grandfather clause or not. So, we organized a massive presence at all the Board of Health meetings and for people to come and speak at all the public comment periods. We would literally wake up at 4 in the morning to race the anti-choice people so we could be first in line. So, it felt very personal and very weird getting to know the anti-choicers. One of the most disturbing things to me as someone who is a child of a disability activist was how anti-choice people would bring their disabled kids along and yell, " My kid would not even be alive if I aborted him." There were so many things about that experience that were disturbing.

***HC: Did the Board of Health end up passing the grandfather clause?***

***CR:*** They initially did pass it, which was great, but then Cuccinelli sent another one of his legal memos basically threatening them. So, they forced another vote and this time they ended up voting against the grandfather clause. This outraged a lot of people, and many were angry at Ken Cuccinelli, who was also running to be the next governor of Virginia.

Simultaneously and after these protests at the Board of Health, we started an organization Cooch Watch, which was a purposeful play on words. One of

our main logos was an eye with eyelashes flipped horizontally. We [harassed Cuccinelli constantly](#) and a lot of it was satirical. We did fake news reports at all his fundraisers and campaign events. We also [did satirical musical videos of popular songs that called attention](#) to what was happening in Virginia at this time.

Honestly, initially none of this was my style at all. But it was responding to a moment, and it was something different from just going to the same protests over and over. The videos captured people's attention and imagination and got people excited. One time we were protesting outside of a Cuccinelli event, and this Capitol police officer pulled up and rolled down his window. I thought he was going to yell at us for being there, but he said that his wife would not stop playing Cooch Watch videos and songs at home. This tells you a lot about how we were effective but it also made me think, who exactly are we reaching?

***HC: Did you run up against any abortion nonprofits in your organizing? Were there any tensions between what your organization was doing and these more established nonprofits?***

**CR:** Several of the people involved in our organizing, which also overlapped with some of the Occupy people, worked in smaller private abortion clinics that the TRAP laws affected. So, they were fighters and were not afraid to get into trouble. They were also impacted by the hand wringing and delaying of this coalition and there was a lot of frustration. So, we decided to not work with the coalition and to do our own thing, get in trouble and maybe this would push them a little bit. So, we never invited them to our meetings or tried to organize with them. But we still got a lot of push back from them. One time we were planning a banner drop that displeased the coalition and we got an onslaught of phone calls to delay the action. There was a lot of trying to persuade us to be more rational, less crazy. This was the time when these groups like Planned Parenthood avoided saying the word abortion. Planned Parenthood was saying that most of the services they provided were not abortions and they did this by dividing up the entire procedure into smaller parts to account for this.

But by the time that Cooch Watch became popular, Planned Parenthood came out with a new website that was sassy and a clear imitation of what we were doing. They clearly came around to seeing that they needed to be more subversive because there was an appetite for a more fighting organization especially among younger people.

Cuccinelli did lose the governor's race and I think our organizing had a part in it. The General Assembly passed the grandfather clause, but the small abortion clinics still had racked up a lot of bills. And, to this day there is only one abortion clinic in the more rural part of the state.

***HC: Having organized locally against these restrictive abortion laws and now seeing the overturning of Roe v Wade, what has been your reaction?***

***CR:*** Honestly, I felt dead inside. Even though it was not a surprise, and we knew it was coming, I feel that this is a different ball game now. Because Virginia borders West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee there are going to be even more people coming to access abortion. There is a lot more mutual aid that is called for and that is where we should put our energy and resources.

There were a few protests in Virginia, and it was nice because there were the usual suspects but also a lot of younger people were present. And they did not care about what the nonprofits were doing.

***HC: What do you think should be done going forward?***

***CR:*** Something that I also took from my involvement in Cooch Watch is that we need more public art, things that are energetic and that match the current zeitgeist. These things help build momentum and we need this because we are all a little bit dead inside. I was glad that I wasn't too snobby to do that work. Honestly, I think the most important thing to me is to not be a perfectionist about it and just go do something and learn from it. Don't be too cool to do something—go out be weird because otherwise you will feel jaded or bored by it and you are not going to convince anyone to get involved.

Virginia is Thomas Jefferson's state, and the ethos of civil liberties is very strong and we were able to push on that to stir more outrage. But I do think in many ways we are also past just making noise. It's important because it helps you build energy, but you must harness that into building a movement with real, practical power to help people access abortions

The threat of the evangelical right is very real and the overturning of Roe v Wade and anti-trans legislation is a rude awakening. They are true believers and they have been doing the long term work to make it possible. When all

the anti-trans legislation started building momentum, that was terrifying to me. This was synonymous with what was happening with abortion. In a way, the laws they are passing now to criminalize healthcare providers who work with trans kids represent a new kind of TRAP law, so it might be useful to reference that, as in "You saw what happened with abortion, so we already know what they say." It's all in the name of our health allegedly but what they want is to legislate and regulate you to death." We need political language to draw these connections, which is what reproductive justice organizers have been doing for decades, but that's not where the big donations are going. We have to persuade people not to put their hopes and their money into single-issue non-profits that have no real political analysis or accountability to those most impacted by these attacks.

There is a benefit into channeling people to get involved in mutual aid and to help people get abortions in states where it is illegal and to get ready to help trans kids get access to healthcare where it becomes illegal. I think it's important to direct people into activities that are illegal and to help them understand that breaking the law does not always have to be scary. The more we get people used to breaking the law the better.



## Demand What You Really Want

### *An Interview with Jenny Brown*



Jenny Brown is an organizer with the feminist group National Women's Liberation. She was a leader in the grassroots campaign to make morning-after pill contraception available over the counter in the U.S. and was a plaintiff in the winning lawsuit. She is author of [\*Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight over Women's Work\*](#) (PM Press) and [\*Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now\*](#) (Verso).

Jenny's writings have been especially helpful as *Hard Crackers* developed the questions that have guided our series on reproductive freedom. She also assisted us in making use of materials collected in the Redstockings Archive. We're grateful to her for all her help.

**Hard Crackers:** Can you tell us a bit about yourself or your organization?

**Jenny Brown:** National Women's Liberation traces its roots to two 1960s women's liberation groups: Gainesville (Florida) Women's Liberation, which

was the first women's liberation group in the South, founded in 1968 by Judith Brown and Carol Giardina, and Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, which is a germinal offshoot of New York Radical Women that emerged in early 1969. Redstockings members were responsible for developing much of the theory and program of the movement. For example, Kathie Sarachild, who now leads the group, coined the term Sisterhood is Powerful, to express the labor union point "in union there is strength." They developed consciousness-raising as their immediate program and from that developed the pro-woman line. They're perhaps most famous for disrupting abortion reform hearings, and they held their own hearing where for the first time in history, women spoke out about their illegal abortions. "The Personal is Political," meaning that what appear to be personal struggles in our lives have political roots, was coined by another two Redstockings, Carol Hanisch and Shulamith Firestone. Redstockings also wrote an excellent history of the first years of the movement, Feminist Revolution, [which is available on their archives website](#).

We founded National Women's Liberation in 2009 during our campaign to get morning after pill (MAP) contraception available over the counter in the U.S. We were mostly based in Gainesville and New York, so we founded NWL so women around the country who were participating in that struggle could join us, and learn the history of radical women's liberation organizing, which has lessons we found so useful. We're dues-funded, and therefore independent of the corporate foundations that determine the priorities and strategies of so much of what passes for "the movement" in the U.S. today. We teach history and theory classes, and conduct campaigns. Right now we're collecting signatures on our pledge to aid and abet abortion ([aidandabetabortion.org](http://aidandabetabortion.org)).

***HC: How did you get involved in the abortion rights struggle?***

**JB:** I was recruited by Gainesville Women's Liberation members in the late 1980s, and through them I was able to attend a New York event Redstockings organized to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their 1969 speak out. I learned about the history of the radical demand for repealing all abortion laws and saw how the movement had become apologetic and defensive by comparison.

That was March 1989, and in April the U.S. Supreme Court decided Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, a mealy-mouthed decision which opened the door to new state restrictions on abortion. In response, Florida's governor called a special legislative session to enact more restrictions. I had just restarted a NOW chapter at the University of Florida. We had an internal fight within the National Organization for Women over calling a rally



at the state Capitol Building during the session (our opposition wanted to have a rally in a stadium in South Florida, far from the action). Knowing the history of how we had made progress on abortion allowed us to make convincing arguments to change the strategy in Florida. I organized students from the University of Florida, the largest in the state, to go to the session in Tallahassee and protest. About 10,000 people showed up from all over the state and we invaded the Capitol Rotunda and, along with feminist legislators working on the inside, we stopped any legislation. The governor, Bob Martinez, was defeated in the next election.

As part of that organizing, we held speak outs on abortion and birth control on campus and continued to do this through the 1990s. As a result, we learned that women students were having trouble getting prescriptions for the morning-after pill because a doctor at our infirmary refused to provide it for ideological reasons. So, we started organizing around that direct need, demanding a work-around from the university. And when that didn't work, we demanded they fire the doctor. It didn't occur to us that the prescription was medically unnecessary until a nurse practitioner at our local abortion clinic pointed this out to us.

This exciting discovery led us to start campaigning for over-the-counter access to the morning after pill. When we started, various nonprofits counseled us not to try for this, but to set our sights lower and try to get the pill available in hospital emergency rooms for rape victims.

We did consciousness raising—another technique we learned from 1960s women's liberation—about when we had needed the pill and discovered that the demand the nonprofits suggested would not help any of us. For most of us who had needed the pill, it hadn't been as a result of rape. And those of us who had been raped had not gone to a hospital ER. We were interested in our own liberation, which distinguished us from the nonprofit charity-like approach of helping some other more oppressed women.

Nine of us joined a lawsuit initiated by the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR) to get the FDA to put MAP over the counter. When the FDA empaneled experts to consider this, we organized two vanloads of testifiers to attend, though we were told personal testimony instead of expert testimony would be "too subjective." We testified about why we needed the pill—normal, everyday reasons, like we didn't use birth control or a condom failed. This was a deliberate strategy based on our understanding of how abortion had been won—not by emphasizing worst case scenarios, but with expansive demands that encompassed the largest number of people who could benefit. We also unrolled an aisle-long scroll listing the 38 countries that already had

over-the-counter status. The FDA's panel of experts voted 28-0 that the pill was safe and 23-4 that it should be put over the counter.

We also violated the prescription requirement publicly, passing out the pills at demonstrations, and making them door-prizes at benefits. We organized a campaign to violate the prescription requirement we called, "Give a friend the morning-after pill." Women from nearly every state faxed the FDA their signed pledges to violate the law. For several years on February 15, the morning after romance's official day, we held press events and provided the pill to anyone who needed it. And one cold January day in 2005 we sat down to block the FDA's headquarters in Maryland, the way they were blocking our access to the pill. Nine of us were arrested.

As part of the suit, we took depositions of various FDA officials, revealing that there had been improper political pressure on them to deny us the pill. All our activity encouraged those in the agency who were opposed to its policies. Susan Wood, the FDA's assistant commissioner for women's health, resigned a few months later.

Throughout our ten-year campaign (2003-2013) we were told to settle for half-measures. We think the pressure came from nonprofits so oriented to "winnables" to justify their fundraising that they lost the thread. But to us, this was a fight for our own freedom, not a bullet point in a grant. There were a lot of opportunities to capitulate. At one point the FDA agreed to allow those over 17 to get the Morning After Pill over-the-counter. We demanded no age limits and added young women who would be directly affected to the lawsuit.

The strategy was driven by our experience and what we learned from the 1960s abortion struggle. Not only would young people be excluded, everyone would have to prove their age—we would be carded for birth control. What if you had no ID? Or your ID had the wrong gender? What if the pharmacist knew your parents? Or you were a guy and wanted to buy it for a friend? Age limits meant pharmacists would still be in control. Surveys, and our experience, showed that pharmacists misunderstood the regulations and denied pills wrongly, even when they weren't outright hostile. We overruled even some of our CRR lawyers as we pushed on for full over-the-counter status.

When the Obama administration came in, we expected the FDA to be better, but still they fought us. Obama said he didn't want his young daughters to be able to buy the pill. This alerted us that opposition to birth control had become bipartisan, and sent us looking at the reality of opposition to

reproductive control in the needs of capital, but that's another story, detailed in my book [Birth Strike](#).

We won in 2013 when a New York judge ordered the pill to be put over the counter. Anyone can buy it, like aspirin or condoms.



*This and the cover photo were taken by Pete Self at the National Women's Liberation protest in a Gainesville, Florida drug store in 2013 where the protesters physically put the MAP on the shelf. This was just before our victory on the age limits.*

**HC:** *What do you think of the potential of a focus on defending Roe as a strategy for today's circumstances?*

**JB:** I think it's a weak strategy. Working class life has gone all to hell, to the extent that half of us don't have \$500 for an emergency. Well, that happens to be what an abortion costs in the U.S. right now, in states where it's legal (it averages \$530).

We need abortion and contraception through a national health care system that covers everyone for everything—like Bernie Sanders' Medicare for All

bill, which covers abortion and contraception. To win that we are going up against rich insurance companies, big capital, the biggest, because they are also tied in with the banks. It's one fifth of the economy that we're talking about restructuring and that will get rid of a lot of opportunities for private profit-taking.

So we need a large, united movement. Yet without that, we can't truly have reproductive freedom.

***HC: What, for you, are the lessons taught by the last 75 years of reproductive justice struggles in the US and abroad?***

**JB:** Demand what you really want, not narrow exceptions to existing laws in a misguided attempt to woo the middle. Demands should be those that benefit the largest number of people. Repealing abortion laws in the 1960s was such a demand. "Free Safe Legal" was the successful demand in Ireland. Argentina's campaign was the 'Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito'. And in Argentina, the law they won says that the medical system has to give you an abortion within ten days of your request, which shows just how much we never won in the United States.

Without universal health care, birth control and abortion are just another thing we can't afford, along with children. In Argentina the victory was much more substantial— the national health system made it instantly more accessible than it has ever been in the U.S.

The other lesson is that providing abortions secretly didn't change the law. We had a century of underground abortions—millions of them—and it didn't make a difference. What changed the law was public demand for the law to be changed, including publicly breaking the law. We encourage readers to join us by pledging to ["Aid and abet abortion."](#)



## Women's Liberation and Reproductive Freedom

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Instead, [the right to abortion was won through militant mass struggle](#) over the course of only a few years. Beginning in the late 1960s, feminists in the Women's Liberation Movement spoke out publicly about their own abortions and organized consciousness raising groups across the country. They discovered that their personal issues, including reproduction, were deeply political. Instead of relying on politicians and professionals, these feminists built power from below and took control of their lives and bodies. They marched in the streets, disrupted male-dominated medical spaces, and built underground networks to provide abortions—including the Chicago Jane Collective, which performed over 10,000 abortions between 1969-73. Feminists took reproductive care into their own hands and built a mass movement to fight for the repeal of all abortion laws, rather than tinkering around the edges.

These mass movements forced the Supreme Court to act. Faced with militant mobilization and widespread public disobedience, the Court calculated that the easiest way to respond while preserving its legitimacy was to codify limited abortion rights into law. This history of struggle has largely been erased. Instead, we are told a narrative of enlightened liberals pursuing legal strategies that convinced the Supreme Court to protect the constitutional right to privacy.

After Roe, the Right launched a concerted attack on reproductive freedom and on the Women's Liberation Movement more broadly. First came the 1976 [Hyde Amendment](#), which prevented many poor women from receiving care by forbidding the use of federal funds for abortion. In the 1980s, a growing anti-abortion movement pressured the government to impose further state and federal restrictions. As Reagan and the New Right attacked women from the heights of the government, right-wing extremists bombed clinics and assassinated abortion providers. Operation Rescue, founded in 1986 by Randall Terry, advanced the slogan "If you believe abortion is murder, act like it's murder" and tried to physically shut down clinics.

Much of the feminist movement retreated and conceded ground to the right by framing the struggle around "pro-choice" activism rather than fighting openly for abortion rights and women's liberation. The radical conception of reproductive freedom, autonomy, and liberation was subsumed into a liberal framework that regarded abortion as an individual choice and as a right for the state to protect. Liberal legal strategies laid the basis for the Supreme Court's 1992 ruling in [Planned Parenthood v. Casey](#) that substantively upheld Roe v. Wade but opened the door to further restrictions provided there was not an "undue burden." But not all feminists accepted this retreat.

## Clinic Defense, Feminist Infrastructure, and Dual Power

Anarchists (anti-state socialists) within the movement rejected voting and legal reforms in favor of radical grassroots activism. Following the example of second-wave feminists, they framed abortion once again as a question of bodily autonomy and women's liberation. Anarcha-feminists were convinced that *Roe v. Wade* would not last forever and that they could not depend on the state and the legal system to protect reproductive freedom.

The first task was to defend clinics from Operation Rescue, who regularly harassed patients and blockaded clinics. Anarchists introduced militant street tactics—including the use of black bloc and the anti-fascist street fighting practiced by Anti-Racist Action—to the broad feminist and queer coalitions who mobilized to protect clinics. Feminists in Anti-Racist Action argued that anti-abortion militants were a key component of contemporary fascism and they resolved to bring anti-fascist street tactics to bear on Operation Rescue. Activists used these confrontational tactics to successfully protect clinics in NYC, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and across the country.

In 1993, Operation Rescue tried to host a summer training camp in Minneapolis. They wanted to repeat the success of their 1991 "[Summer of Mercy](#)" mobilization in Wichita. Unlike in Kansas, however, anarchists defended clinics from them, blockaded them in their church, vandalized their materials, and ultimately ran them out of town. Reflecting on the experience, [a local anarchist named Liza wrote](#) that "it seems like no matter how hard activists fight, we rarely win. Except this time we were victorious. We fought against these fascists ... We saw the demise of Operation Rescue in the Twin Cities, partly due to our unprecedented aggressiveness and opposition, and partly because their movement is losing, big time."

In addition to defending clinics, anarcha-feminists built reproductive care infrastructure to perform abortions outside the reach of the state. Anarchists believed that the state was inherently patriarchal and was ultimately the enemy of reproductive justice. Thus, the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation (1989-98) argued in its [draft political statement](#) that "our freedom will not come through the passage of yet more laws but through the building of communities strong enough to defend themselves against anti-choice and anti-queer terror, rape, battery, child abuse and police harassment." Instead of the slogan "we're pro-choice and we vote," anarchists often marched behind a banner reading "we're pro-choice and we riot!" Rather than petitioning the state to protect abortion, Love and Rage argued for reviving "women-controlled health care and abortions" along the model of Chicago's Jane Collective (which disbanded after *Roe v. Wade*).

While anarcha-feminists supported abortions provided by accredited doctors, their focus on women's autonomy and critique of the male-dominated US

healthcare system led them to draw on alternative traditions of women-controlled health practices. This includes herbal and holistic methods which women have used “throughout the ages ... to control their fertility and reproduction.” They sought to build autonomy on their own terms by organizing self-help groups in which, [San Francisco activist Sunshine Smith explained](#), “women learn the basics of self-cervical exams, do pelvics on each other, and learn how to do menstrual extraction.” Anarchists thus sought to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to induce abortions on their own terms and provide their own reproductive care.

If women controlled their own bodies and institutions, they would no longer depend on the state to protect their rights. Establishing reproductive healthcare infrastructure is a key component of feminist dual power that challenges the rule of the state and capitalism. Inspired in part by the Zapatistas, anarchists sought to build grassroots infrastructure along with the capacity to defend it from the violence of the state. This kind of infrastructure prefigures—and concretely establishes—a new world defined by mutual aid, solidarity, and autonomy.

Grassroots reproductive infrastructure laid the foundation for further revolutionary action. [As Sunshine Smith remarked in 1990](#), forming self-help medical groups and abortion infrastructure in the Bay Area “has, in very concrete ways, made our struggle against the anti-abortion group Operation ‘Rescue’ and the ‘Supreme’ Court stronger and more effective. We have learned that if the time comes, we can and will do home abortions. We are becoming physically aware of the invasion the government is conducting into our bodies. We are now able to repulse the state from our uteri because we are gaining the knowledge that enables us to control our own bodies.”

With parallel strategies undertaken in the courts and in the streets, feminist activists successfully defended abortion from both the Supreme Court and anti-abortion mobilization during the 1980s-90s. Yet abortion activism has remained on the defensive since reproductive rights were first won nationally in 1973. The framing of “pro-choice” activism—rather than women’s autonomy or the right to abortion—reflects a retreat from the strategy of women’s liberation.

The anarchist and feminist traditions of mass mobilization, autonomous health infrastructure and grassroots struggle offer alternatives—or at least a radical complement—to voting. Reversing *Roe v. Wade* will not stop abortions; it will only make them more dangerous and less accessible. As [anarcha-feminist Liz Highleyman argued in 1992](#), “the day when abortion is again made illegal may come sooner than we like to think. We must be ready to take our bodies and our lives into our own hands.”

That time is now.



## Roe Overturned Miriam Pickens



Roe Overturned  
no mas, no more

babysitting  
in the doctor's house  
waiting  
for infection to clear  
before the d & c,  
the abortion.  
When I woke  
the nurse say, You  
punched him,  
you punched the doctor.

After a week, I flew  
"home" – nyc.  
October, 1967  
I had missed the  
March on the Pentagon  
and used it as my excuse  
for my week away.  
I was 17  
and the whole thing was  
illegal:  
the reference from the University Health Center  
the loan from Carol  
the plane flight to Puerto Rico  
the taxi driver who dropped me  
a block away  
from the Women's Hospital in Santurce  
the procedure  
the everything.  
Breaking this law  
Saved my life.  
Tell it all:  
I had already had Carol  
jump on my stomach  
and I tried to  
roll myself down stairs.  
This didn't work.  
Take care of a baby?!  
I clearly couldn't take care of myself!  
...June, 2022.

## Introduction to Selections from Redstockings Document Collection



Redstockings Archives

*The documents in this selection are drawn from materials related to a February 1969 New York State Joint Legislative Committee Hearing which were disrupted by members of Redstockings and the group's first abortion Speak-Out held the following month.*

*They include a leaflet distributed by Redstockings at the hearing, a list of the scheduled speakers, newspaper reports of what happened published the next day and background quotes from activists and advocates on different occasions between 1968 and 1973. The background quotes had been prepared for a 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Abortion Speak-Out.*

*The full set of materials is available at:*

[https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/main/taking-stock#archives\\_for\\_action](https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/main/taking-stock#archives_for_action).