

Whose Right is it, Anyway?

This play was designed in the style of The Laramie Project. Thus, it does not consist of the normal scenes and dialogue; instead, it is a series of monologues relating to a single issue. Unless otherwise mentioned, each monologue takes place at a different place, and actors play multiple characters. Most of the stories are the testimonies of real women, for which sources are cited. Everything else is based upon research.

I.

(A spotlight goes up on MR JUSTICE BLACKMUN standing dsc. This monologue is taken directly out of the Opinion of the Court for Roe v. Wade. The lights make BLACKMUN appear to be in black-and-white.)

MR JUSTICE BLACKMUN

With respect to the State's important and legitimate interest in the health of the mother, the 'compelling' point, in the light of present medical knowledge, is at approximately the end of the first trimester. This is so because of the now-established medical fact, referred to above, that until the end of the first trimester mortality in abortion may be less than mortality in normal childbirth. It follows that, from and after this point, a State may regulate the abortion procedure to the extent that the regulation reasonably relates to the preservation and protection of maternal health. Examples of permissible state regulation in this area are requirements as to the qualifications of the person who is to perform the abortion; as to the licensure of that person; as to the facility in which the procedure is to be performed, that is, whether it must be a hospital or may be a clinic or some other place of less-than-hospital status; as to the licensing of the facility; and the like.

This means, on the other hand, that, for the period of pregnancy prior to this 'compelling' point, the attending physician, in consultation with his patient, is free to determine, without regulation by the State, that, in his medical judgment, the patient's pregnancy should be terminated. If that decision is reached, the judgment may be effectuated by an abortion free of interference by the State.¹

(BLACKBUN stays where he is, frozen. (Normal) lights come up on the stage as SUSAN enters and crosses dsr.)

SUSAN

I was born in 1961, twelve years before *Roe v. Wade*. I can still picture our apartment, that small, cramped place, nothing more than a couple bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. My grandmother occupied one of them; I shared the other with my mother. The walls were paper-thin; we could always hear everyone else's business. I picked up

¹ *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973)

my first swear words from the couple in the apartment above ours, and I heard the sounds of love for the first time from the man who lived to our right.

The person I remember the most, though, was our neighbor on the left. I called her Miss Rose because she always smelled of roses. (*NANCY enters and begins to cross dsl.*) She was young, beautiful, and I wanted to grow up to be just like her. I used to stay with her when my mother had to go out, since my grandmother was too old to look after me. We would sit at her kitchen table and eat cookies while she told me stories of when she was a little girl. I loved her.

NANCY

I had my first abortion in 1965. I was nineteen, single, and as irresponsible as can be. I was impregnated by a man I met in a bar and never saw again. I was drunk, I was young, I didn't know any better. He seemed nice.

SUSAN

One day, when I was seven, a man moved in with Miss Rose. She sounded happy at first; it was the first time I heard love noises from her side. But then the yelling started, and I was scared. My mother held me when that happened, but the man's voice wouldn't leave my head. *Whore. Lazy bitch.* The sound of a slap. Miss Rose crying. I wanted to run over there and scream at him, *Leave my friend alone!*, but I couldn't. I was only seven, and I was scared of him.

NANCY

I wasn't ready for a child. I couldn't control myself; how could I raise a kid? I didn't even think about adoption. I don't think I could have gone through with it. I'm a softie, an irresponsible softie. If I saw my baby, went through the birthing process and *saw* the little baby I'd produced, I wouldn't be able to give her up. I just wouldn't be able to give her up.

SUSAN

It wasn't long after that when Miss Rose changed. She was getting fat—pregnant, my grandmother told me—and she cried a lot. My mother wouldn't let me see her anymore, because she was afraid of the man, too. But I could tell. She wasn't happy anymore.

NANCY

I needed an abortion. My friend gave me pills that were supposed to do it, but they didn't work. They just made me sick. I tried hurting myself, falling down the stairs, but that just hurt and gave me bruises. The little thing wouldn't abort itself. People were starting to wonder. So I found a man, a doctor, who could perform an abortion on me. I gave him everything I had, and he came out to my house to perform the procedure.

SUSAN

A month later, I woke up to hear Miss Rose scream. A strange voice pleaded with her to be quiet, but she wouldn't. She just screamed and screamed, loud, painful, agonizing screams. The man called an ambulance and then left, leaving her alone to wait.

I never saw Miss Rose again.

NANCY

When he left, the baby was gone and there was blood everywhere. I'm surprised I didn't die.

(Lights dim on the women, and they exit.)

MR JUSTICE BLACKBUN

We forthwith acknowledge our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy, of the vigorous opposing views, even among physicians, and of the deep and seemingly absolute convictions that the subject inspires. One's philosophy, one's experiences, one's exposure to the raw edges of human existence, one's religious training, one's attitudes toward life and family and their values, and the moral standards one establishes and seeks to observe, are all likely to influence and to color one's thinking and conclusions about abortion.

The Constitution is made for people of fundamentally differing views, and the accident of our finding certain opinions natural and familiar, or novel, and even shocking, ought not to conclude our judgment upon the question whether statutes embodying them conflict with the Constitution of the United States.²

(Blackout)

II.

(Lights come up on NORMA MCCORVEY, standing dsc)

NORMA MCCORVEY

I am Jane Roe. There. I said it. I am Norma McCorvey, otherwise known as Jane Roe, plaintiff. I wasn't looking to make history. I'm not that kind of woman. What am I?

A reform school dropout, sex-abuse victim, lesbian; a carnival barker, bartender, alcoholic, drug dealer, cleaning woman living on the edge of poverty.³

It's simple. I was twenty-two, pregnant for the third time, and I didn't want to have the baby. *(LISA enters and begins to cross dsl)* I found a couple of lawyers and they said they wanted to use me to make a case. I thought they would get me an abortion. They didn't.

LISA

Abortion is not a method of birth control. More teenagers are sexually active today than ever before, and they refuse to be responsible for their actions. They don't use condoms; they forget to take their birth control pills, if they even have them. Get pregnant? Head down to Planned Parenthood and get it taken care of! Simple as that.

I'm not against abortion, per say. I'm pro-education. Teenagers today need to learn to take responsibility for their actions. They need to think before they have sex, use protection if they must engage in it, and take their pregnancies to term if they end up

² Ibid.

³ Sam Howe Verhovek, "New Twist for a Landmark Case," *The New York Times*, 12 August 1995.

pregnant. There are plenty of couples who are unable to become pregnant. If the teens don't want their babies, other families will be glad to give them loving homes.

NORMA MCCORVEY

I had the baby while the courts were still debating. It was a girl. (*LISA exits slowly*) When she was born, a nurse placed my daughter in my arms. My daughter, who I had wanted to abort. It made me wonder. Is it true what people are saying that abortion is killing babies?

My mother asked me over and over again how I could sleep at night (*JOANNA enters and crosses dscr*) after murdering little babies. The truth is, I couldn't. Every night I dreamt of abortion. (*KIMBERLY enters and crosses dsr*) Little babies, still crying, laid on a cutting board, carved by a doctor like a turkey on Thanksgiving.

JOANNA

(*sings*) Be kind to your fine-feathered friends, for a duck may be somebody's mother...

KIMBERLY

Abortion *is* murder. Every successful pregnancy leads, in the end, to a child. Only G-d knows the end result of a pregnancy. Will the mother have a miscarriage? Will the child be a still-born? Will he be born premature? Will he be healthy? There are no guarantees. (*SOPHIA enters and crosses dsl*)

Once sperm and egg meet, a spark of life is created. Who are we to decide who lives and who dies? Everyone deserves to live a full and happy life. Abortion centers don't even give people the chance.

JOANNA

(*sings*) For a duck may be somebody's mother...

SOPHIA

41 bombings. 173 arsons. 619 bomb threats. 1630 incidents of trespassing. 1264 incidents of vandalism. 100 attacks with butyric acid. These are the crimes committed against abortion clinics since 1977.⁴ These people say they are pro-life. They work to save the innocent. What about the innocent people who are killed or maimed from *their* violence?

NORMA MCCORVEY

I am Jane Roe. My case won the right for women to receive safe and legal abortion and goddamn it, I'm not going to sit quietly while people attack that right!

(*Lights fade to blackout. Cries of picketers outside an abortion clinic are heard. NORMA's voice, prerecorded, rings out above others: "Yes, would you like to come over here and watch us kill some? I'll tell you what, bring yours over here and we'll do them in, too."*⁵ *Voices fade.*)

⁴ "Abortion-Related Violence," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_related_violence, accessed 30 November 2008.

⁵ Sam Howe Verhovek, "New Twist for a Landmark Case," *The New York Times*, 12 August 1995.

III.

(Lights up on CARRIE, dscr, and NATASHA, dscl. They are not right next to each other, but they are pretty close to it.)

CARRIE:

I am 26 years old, and I work at a hospital. One of my many jobs is to clean up after the doctor has performed an abortion on a girl, or woman. You need to know that it is the most horrifying sight you could ever imagine. I have to empty a bottle full of baby, blood and tissue. Almost daily, I hold in my hand limbs, or what was the fragile little spine with ribs growing off it. When I have to clean it up, the baby is already in pieces, and let me tell you that child is perfectly developed at only a few inches long!

NATASHA:

I'm expecting. As in "with child." I always planned to have kids someday, but "someday" was never qualified. I always expected to become a mother, but only after I first became a wife. Yet here I sit, unmarried and pregnant. Every time I think I've forgotten about it for a few minutes, I feel another cramp that seems more like a wave of reality crashing over me than a muscle spasm. The lady at the clinic said that the cramps are due to my uterus stretching. Duh.

CARRIE:

When I found out that I was pregnant, I was only 5 weeks along. Because this was an unplanned pregnancy, I had to have an ultrasound. Believe me, I was not happy about being pregnant, it was a real surprise and I was on the birth control pill. For a short time, I almost understood why women have abortions - it seems like such a way out.

NATASHA:

I still can't believe it's true. I found out five days ago, and in five more days it won't be true anymore. A-B-O-R-T-I-O-N. Now there's a scary word for you. What kind of woman kills a baby - her OWN baby? Is it really a baby? What if my parents find out? What if there are protesters there who know me from church? What if something goes wrong and I get really sick? What if I can no longer have kids afterwards? What if I can't live with the guilt? What if I feel no guilt?

CARRIE:

When I had that first ultrasound at only 5 weeks, even then I could see my child's heart beating strong on the screen. Throughout these months of pregnancy, I have felt this child grow within me, and I can feel almost every move they make. This baby can react to my feelings, my voice, when I am in the shower, what I eat! I feel when my baby has the hiccups, and I know when they are sleeping or awake. I feel them stretch, and know exactly how they are sitting. I can see the leg, heel, arm or elbow along my skin, and I love to stroke their head. According to science, my child is just a "fetus"; doesn't it sound like a baby to you? ⁶

⁶ "True Stories from Abortionists," *Abortion TV*, <http://www.abortiontv.com/words/truestoriesfrom-abortionists.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

NATASHA:

My boyfriend has been great about it, and I feel closer than ever to him, but at the same time I feel worlds away. He has no clue what I'm going through - physically, mentally, or emotionally. When it's all said and done, he gets to walk away with no scars. I wish I could say the same. I have no doubt that abortion is the right choice for me right now, for so many different reasons. But it's hard as hell.⁷

(Blackout.)

IV.

(KRISTIN, dsr, MARTINA, dsc, and RACHEL, dsl, are already on stage when the scene starts. Each one is lit with a spotlight when she speaks. There are no general lights.)

KRISTIN:

This is what the abortion issue is like: You're standing on a bridge over the train tracks. There's only one direction the train can go, and at the end there are 5 people that will be killed. You know that the only way to stop the train is by throwing some sort of heavy object in its path. The only heavy object at your disposal at the moment happens to be the very fat man standing next to you. What do you do?

MARTINA

I never thought about what I would do if I got pregnant until I heard my best friend's story. She had gotten pregnant when she was in tenth grade and had an abortion because she knew that was the only logical choice to her and she could never tell her parents. To this day, when she is almost 20, her parents don't even know that she has even had sex.

Some people who know my thoughts think I'm sort of wrong in my way of thinking since if my mother had had an abortion I wouldn't be here. You see, I was adopted at birth. My parents are great and very supportive of me, but I know that if I ever got pregnant it would greatly disappoint them. I know also, that the only choice to me would be abortion. I am only 17 and still a senior in high school and looking forward to my future, but I can't even fathom a future with a baby in it.

This may seem callous or greedy, but I know that it is the only choice I could make. I have had a scare before and that is what prompted me to come to this conclusion. I just wish that no one would have to make these choices at any age, let alone being a teenager, and that they think before they act.⁸

RACHEL

This is what the abortion issue is like: You're standing next to a fork in the train tracks, with access to the lever that changes the direction the train will take. The train can not be stopped, and if left as it is, it will run over and kill 5 people standing at the end of the

⁷ "Natasha's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/natasha.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

⁸ "Martina's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/martina.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

tracks. If, however, you pull the lever the train will change directions, killing the 1 person standing at the end of that fork. What do you do? (*Beat.*) There is no solution.⁹

V.

(*Lights up on SERENA, dscl, and TABATHA, dscr. There is as much space between them as possible.*)

SERENA

I am crying tonight even as I am writing this. Today I went to the clinic for a pregnancy test...even though I already knew I was... [my boyfriend] was wishing on a star I guess, wouldn't believe the home test, wanted what he called a "legitimate" one.

TABATHA

I was 22 years old, ready to be let loose on the world after graduating from college. It was March and I was anticipating my period because I was *very* regular. It never came. I was devastated. A friend of mine became pregnant that same evening and she was handling it much better than I. I just knew that if I told my parents they would kill me. Besides, this wasn't supposed to happen to a girl like me. I asked God the "why me?" question but the biggest one was, "What now?" I was away from home, no support except my friend.

SERENA

So the test was positive... he said last week when I told him, that he'd be there for me, whatever I decided... today as we walked the promenade back to the car he told me that he wanted me to have an abortion. Not in those words, of course... and it was what I was expecting, I guess, but it's never easy to hear. I wonder why? He says we are both struggling, we don't need to bring someone else into that struggle. I wonder if he just doesn't love me, doesn't want to be bound to me that way.

TABATHA

The first thing that I wanted to do was call the father of the baby. Everyone talked me out of that, telling me that I would ruin his life, like mine wasn't going to be.

SERENA

I'm so caught up in being hurt by this I haven't even thought about what I *really* want... I know I can't have a baby but at the same time I feel so sad... and scared. I was frozen toward him the whole ride back to his apartment, then he told me to come sit with him and tell him what was wrong. And [he] wanted to know what choice I was going to make.

TABATHA

I thought of adoption, but I knew mentally I couldn't handle carrying the child for 9 months only to hand it over to someone else to take care of. If I couldn't do it myself, and I couldn't -- I didn't even have a job, then there was only one answer. I went through

⁹ "Mortality/Moral action," *AllPhilosophy*, <http://allphilosophy.com/topic/3073>, accessed 11 December 2008.

graduation and [was] pushing the envelope on time. I had my abortion the Monday after graduation.

SERENA

Choice? That's such bullshit... he has already made it. And in my mind I know it's the right choice... my heart just doesn't agree yet.

He says he will pay, he says he will be there... it isn't anything I care about. I am supposed to appreciate it. He pushes me for a date... I am five weeks now. I choose December 18. And he takes me home later with no plans to see [me] again until December 18, two weeks from today.

TABATHA

Looking back on things, I still know in my heart that I did the right thing, but it is still really hard to forgive myself for it! Now, after being sober and clean for 5+ years and married and carrying a child that I never will have to give up for any reason, I feel that God has forgiven me, otherwise my prayers for a child would never have been answered. This child is already spoiled and it is not even here yet.

I guess what I am trying to say is that yes, we all make mistakes and yes, some of us resort to abortion. We need to forgive ourselves, love ourselves and help others cope with it. It is a decision that we are *allowed* to make and should not feel *guilty* about and no one should be able to make us feel that way!¹⁰

SERENA

And I am sitting here reading these stories and crying tonight. He took me to Toys R Us today to buy a Christmas present for my one year old niece. He played with someone else's baby in the store. We were surrounded by baby stuff.¹¹

(Lights fade out slowly.)

VI.

(Lights up on an empty stage. After a second, PATRICIA enters and speaks as she crosses dscr. Whenever a new character enters, her monologue overlaps with the previous one(s). Her mic is set up so that she overpowers the other characters, but all are still speaking until their speeches are over and snippets from each girl can be heard throughout. Character entrance times are up to the director's digression.)

PATRICIA:

The abortion that I have had has caused me to shut out all emotional contact with both men and women. I am so afraid of opening myself up to a relationship for fear of getting hurt. I feel like I have done the worst kind of evil in this world -- murder -- and to think

¹⁰ "Tabatha's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/tabatha.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

¹¹ "Serena's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/serena.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

that I did not even know then that it was murder. I knew but I didn't feel. How could I have been so unaware, uncaring, insensitive, stupid?¹²

(*dscl*) KATHLEEN:

I was 21 years old and I was in the process of divorcing a terrible man. Now, six years later, I have returned to college, [and] I have a four-year-old daughter (whose father is the same man I dated when I went through my abortion). I don't know how having a baby then would have changed my life, but I can only imagine that I wouldn't be in the position I am in now. I have never once regretted my decision, nor do I regret the entire episode. I have learned compassion and empathy for other people through the event. Nobody is perfect. Sometimes things happen in our lives that we wish we could change and thankfully, women before us have fought hard for us to be able to change an unplanned pregnancy.¹³

(*dsr*) ANNE

The lies have affected me the most: the Big Lie that it all is and all the tangled webs of lies that make it up, compromise it and cover it up. The truth is that I have been affected; one of the lies is that you just move on unaffected. My heart turned cold. I just strived to survive in an empty existence - not a true life. I pretended I wasn't hurt but I was terribly so.¹⁴

(*dsr*) HEATHER:

I am only 6 weeks pregnant. I have not had the abortion yet. I am very scared, and very confused. I am very lucky to have the complete and utter support of my fiancée and family. We all agree that this is the best choice. However, there is that one part of my mind that keeps having doubts. I guess it is the maternal side of me that wonders about my baby. Yet, even with these doubts, I still think that I am making the right choice. Not only for me and my fiancée, but for the child. At the stage we are in our lives now, I wouldn't be able to give my child the kind of life it deserves.¹⁵

(*dsr*) JOSIE

I feel I have no support from my family or my boyfriend. Everyone has been telling me my only choice is abortion – I need someone to talk to, someone to just listen to me and not tell me what to do. I feel so lonely lately, my relationship of 2 years is going down the drain and my family is just as confused as I am.¹⁶

¹² "Abortions Impact," *Rachel's Vinyard*, <http://rachelsvineyard.org/emotions/affects.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

¹³ "Kathleen's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/kathleen.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

¹⁴ "Abortions Impact," *Rachel's Vinyard*, <http://rachelsvineyard.org/emotions/affects.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

¹⁵ "Heather's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/heather.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

¹⁶ "Josie's Story," *Feminist Women's Health Center*, <http://www.fwhc.org/stories/josie.htm>, accessed 11 December 2008.

(Lights down on the girls. MR JUSTICE BLACKBUN enters and crosses dsc with a spotlight.)

MR JUSTICE BLACKBUN

We forthwith acknowledge our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy.... The Constitution is made for people of fundamentally differing views, and the accident of our finding certain opinions natural and familiar, or novel, and even shocking, ought not to conclude our judgment upon the question whether statutes embodying them conflict with the Constitution of the United States.¹⁷

(Blackout.)

¹⁷ *Roe v. Wade* (1973).