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English 15 Section 009

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Murderer

People very rarely think about the consequences of their actions beforehand. I could have never fathomed that my actions in 1973 would affect one person, let alone millions. Here I was standing before the nation as nothing, as a no one. Now I stand before the nation with bloodied hands, responsible for the deaths of thousands, no millions of innocent babies.

I remained anonymous for many years, ashamed of what I had done. During that time, I was known as Jane Roe, the infamous villain responsible for legalizing abortion in the United States. My real name is Norma Nelson McCorvey. I was born on September 22, 1947 in Lettesworth, Louisiana. I can’t say that I had an easy life or that I wasn’t at times myself a victim. I am not making excuses for myself, but it is important that others understand that I didn’t wake up one day and decide that I was going to make history (Pilkington).

My story begins way before my first pregnancy. My childhood was filled with anything but joy. I suffered many years under the physical and emotional abuse of my mother. At one point, I was sent to a reform school in Texas until I eventually dropped out. Later in my teen years, I was assaulted and raped. It was a never ending cycle of abuse until I married at sixteen, or at least I thought. I married Woody McCorvey, a sheet metal worker. Our marriage did not last long once he found out I was pregnant. He became physically abusive and after a few months I left him. My daughter Melissa was born in 1965. Shortly after, my mother took custody of her against my will. This is where my dramatic downward spiral begins (Wood).

The years following were very painful for me. I still bear the physical scars from attempted suicides and years of drug and alcohol abuse. My life was out of control as I was often between jobs, and at times had no idea where I was going to sleep. I had sexual encounters with both genders and at some point I became pregnant again. The baby was born in 1967 and immediately given up for adoption. As difficult as this was, this would not be my last pregnancy (Pilkington).

Two years after giving my second child up for adoption I became pregnant for a third time (Wood). I was still heavily abusing drugs and was very poor. My family disowned me due to my sexual tendencies, and I had no one to go to for support. I remember I was working for a circus freak show at the time (Pilkington). My life was not fit for a child. I felt I had nowhere to turn so I started looking into abortion. It did not take me long to find that abortion was illegal in Texas.

I knew there had to be a way around Texas state laws, I had heard of women who had received abortions. After a little digging, I found that the laws made an exception if the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest. My only option was to lie, which I did unsuccessfully. I told them I was raped and I wanted to terminate my pregnancy. Unfortunately, I did not have a police report to collaborate my story. I was denied the abortion and had to continue looking for alternatives. At this point, I was desperate and that’s when I learned of the illegal abortion clinics (Pilkington).

As desperate as I was, I was not desperate enough to go through with it. The illegal abortion clinic was a disturbing sight to see. The floor was covered in blood stains and there were dirty utensils all over the place. The room smelled of rotting flesh. The entire sight was nauseating. I didn’t want to imagine what horrors had taken place in this room. At some point the police had shut the clinic down but it still did not solve my problem. I was young, poor, and still very pregnant (Pilkington).

Shortly after, I was directed to contact Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee (Stacey). These women were lawyers who were trying to change the abortion laws in the state of Texas (Stacey). I was told that they were looking to help women in my situation. I never could have imagined that they were really working on their own agenda. I was under the impression that the lawyers would file a case on my behalf, and the judge would grant an abortion for me. This was not the case.

In March 1970 the attorneys filed a lawsuit on my behalf against the District Attorney of Dallas County, Texas, Henry Wade (Lewis). I was assured my identity would remain anonymous, thus the creation of “Jane Roe” (Lewis). It was important that my identity remain anonymous for many reasons. Most importantly, I had made several bad decisions and I wanted to shield my family from the embarrassment. The lawsuit was originally filed on my behalf, but at one point I was proud to include the rights of all other women in making my lawsuit a class action lawsuit.

I was joined in my lawsuit by James Hubert Halford. He was a licensed physician that chose to intervene on my behalf after his own run-ins with the law. Halford was arrested on several occasions for violating the same Texas statues that we were fighting to change. He alleged that

as a consequence, the statutes were vague and uncertain, in violation of the [Fourteenth Amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct-cgi/get-const?amendmentxiv), and that they violated his own and his patients' rights to privacy in the doctor-patient relationship and his own right to practice medicine, rights he claimed were guaranteed by the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and [Fourteenth Amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct-cgi/get-const?amendmentxiv)s (Roe V. Wade No. 70-18).

The third party that joined me in the lawsuit was John and Mary Doe. They were a married couple who felt that the Texas statues violated their rights towards any future abortions. Mary Doe was under a physician’s care for a medical disorder. In her lawsuit, she stated that she discontinued the use of birth control at the request of her doctor. Any pregnancies at that point would have been life threatening to her. The Does filed suit on behalf of themselves and any other couples in a similar situation. Mary Doe did not want to take the chance of being denied what could have been a lifesaving abortion (Roe V. Wade No. 70-18).

The two cases were combined and heard before the District Court. The District Attorney Henry Wade was listed as the defendant for both cases. The hearings were presented in front of a three judge panel. I was not forced to testify at the hearings to maintain my anonymity. The Does case was eventually dismissed. The court had decided they did not have ground to sue. My case was different. My case would change the nation. With the assistance of Halford, the court declared “the Texas criminal abortion statutes were void on their face because they were both unconstitutionally vague and constituted an overbroad infringement of the plaintiffs' Ninth Amendment rights (Roe V. Wade No. 70-18).”

Even though I had won the court case, I had lost. The Supreme Court ruled the laws of individual states violated the constitutional rights of women. The court case took several years to work through the legal system. The Supreme Court’s ruling took place on January 22, 1973 (Wood). Even though the Texas abortion laws were now null and void, it was too late to receive the abortion I fought so hard for. The court system did not seem to care that a pregnancy only lasts for nine months. My third child was born three years prior to the Supreme Court’s ruling. This child was immediately given up for adoption (Pilkington).

This was the heart wrenching pain I was trying to avoid in the first place. I remember lying in my hospital bed after my third child was born. The nurse was not aware the baby was being placed for adoption and brought the baby in for feeding. "There was a flap of cloth over its face. My entire body, my entire soul cried out to me to turn the flap down, to look at my baby's face. But my mind told me that it would be the worst thing I could ever do. I never touched the flap." This would be the last child I ever had (Pilkington).

My memories may be tainted with years of experience but I remember hearing of the court decision. I remember thinking to myself how did all of this happen. This was supposed to be about me, about one abortion. I never wanted to change the laws of the entire country. I was not even concerned with the laws of all of Texas. It was supposed to be about Dallas County and one Norma McCorvey who wanted an abortion. I would be lying if I said that at some point I was never proud of what I had accomplished (“An Interview with Norma McCorvey”).

For many years I felt as if I had served women of this country some justice. I fought to give women their equal rights that were outlined in the constitution. Today it just makes me sick (Pilkington). I look back and see what I have done and it is almost to much to live with at times. I opened a door, a very bloody door that remains one of the most controversial subjects over forty years later. I made history on January 22nd, 1973 and I will spend the rest of my life trying to unmake it.

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