

classroom, hiking in the giant cedars of Opal Creek, to identifying invertebrates in our majestic tidal pools, I've seen children connect to their natural world. To make America safe for childhood again, is a battle worth fighting. **Z**

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Choices?

## Abortion—On Occasion, With Apologies

By Jennifer Baumgardner

During the spring of 1985, I received my driver's license and more than a few lectures. My parents told me that driving their car was a privilege, not a right, which meant it was subject to their rules, their assessment of how responsible I was, and the privilege could be taken away as a punishment. I had a new financial responsibility with the car, too—I paid for my own gas.

In addition to their threats, I went through Drivers Education, a tiresome, moralizing course that consisted of endless films. One reel that I remember particularly consisted of a dour officer telling about a girl whose prom night was ruined when she refused to wear her seat-belt and then sat on the center seat in order to be closer to her date, who in turn drove drunk into a semi. She "didn't want to

get her dress wrinkled," the cop concluded, "but her nose ended up being cut off on impact with the rearview mirror." The dominant theme of the films was that girls' vanity and recklessness led to appropriate penalties.

That same learning-to-drive year, my sister got pregnant. She was 16 and had no reason to believe that she should have a child. She was an honor student, on the varsity basketball team, getting ready for her senior year and a sure-fire scholarship to an elite school. She also didn't want to tell my parents. My folks are pro-choice but like the vast majority of women, my sister preferred to keep her unwanted pregnancy to herself. But since we lived in a state that had parental consent laws, she had to convince a judge that she deserved an abortion. Besides the court appearance, she had to raise a lot of money to purchase the procedure. My sister's experience was only the first time I realized that the 1973 Supreme Court decision known as *Roe v. Wade* didn't make abortion a "right," as is commonly believed. That law was like driving my parents car: privilege.

The requisites for this privilege: Be over 18 in all but 9 states or your parents are told. Have between \$400 and \$3,000 handy to pay for the privilege. In 14 states, make two visits, one to go through state directed counseling and then a mandatory 24 hours for you to ponder your decision in order to get the brief operation. (The thought that you have already pondered this decision previously isn't good enough—sort of the "go to your room and think about what you've done!" approach to reproductive freedom.)

At the clinics, the sense that someone's doing you a favor (and you should be happy with whatever you get) continues. A number of my friends in New York, one

of the few states with no restrictions, have gone to the same well-respected clinic and they always report the same dreary tale. Women waiting in a holding area with 100 people or so, shuffling through exam and counseling, then shuffling to a waiting room with a dozen or so other nervous girls talking about whether they are going to get knocked out (general anesthesia) or stay awake (local). (The fact that most women choose general anesthesia, a choice that is utterly unnecessary for an early abortion but that increases the chance for complications and makes recovery more arduous, is another example of the requisite punishing atmosphere.) Patients are called one by one for their five minute procedure and then are wheeled into the recovery room on a gurney where they wake up with a dozen or so other women who are throwing up and groggy and lying in the fetal position. The fact that women don't often get to use their "real" doctors, no matter how great the doctor who performs abortions is, makes the experience more frightening and suspect. But never mind: some juice, crackers, and a birth control lecture later, and you're free to go.

According to my friends, the staff's vibe is polite but brisk and impersonal. The doctors are doing one abortion after another and the factory setting is not appealing to them either. Shunned by colleagues, they dress for work in bulletproof vests, some are shot at, their kids are taunted, and their practice completely overshadowed by this safe, legal, and necessary operation. The doctors who perform abortions don't even receive a call from the referring physician—it's the only procedure where professional courtesy isn't part of the package. In these circumstances, it's not a stretch to believe that the doctors and nurses

at clinics really are doing women a favor.

Like the clinicians, women don't really like having to go to a marginalized, easily targeted clinic on the edge of town where they will get screamed at as they go in for their appointment. Personal safety and privacy are two of the central reasons why RU-486, re-named Mifeprex, should be approved. Given the fact that French women have used it for decades (and American women for a couple of years in six test clinics across the country), FDA approval appeared to be imminent in January. But by July, seven months after Planned Parenthood was sure it would be available, Mifeprex is still champing at the bit at the FDA. At the same time as early abortion is being stalled, the Supreme Court heard the appeal of *Carhart v. Stenberg*, a case regarding the Nebraska law banning abortion procedures such as the

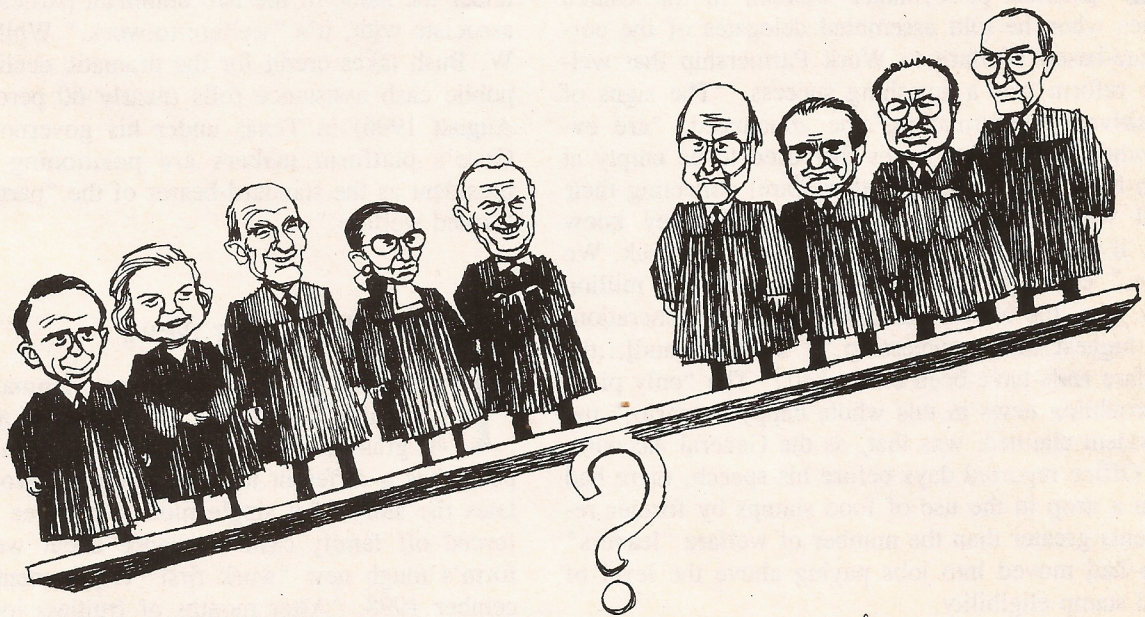
D&E. The entire justification for this ban is that it's too late in the game of pregnancy to be asking for an abortion. (The Court decided that the 30 states in which there were laws banning D&E were in violation of *Roe*, especially since these laws didn't have an exception for the woman's health or life.)

So what do women have with our right to choose? Over 400 restrictions on abortion brought before state legislators in 1999, no end of rules to make sure women are paying for their sexual freedom with their own money, a Supreme Court case that presumed women are getting abortions "too late" juxtaposed with needless stalling on the way to get one early, and punishing laws so that poor and young women spend so much time chasing down money for their procedure that by the time they raise it, it's too late to

have a first trimester, relatively cheap, abortion.

I was three years old when *Roe* passed. I have lived nearly my entire life with legal abortion, and yet every one of those restrictions has directly affected someone in my immediate circle. I know a woman who has had a "late-term abortion" and another young activist who fundraises non-stop to help women pay for their procedures. The truth about the latest battleground on choice is this: Women are being asked to live with having rights over our own bodies only if we're good and follow the rules and are willing to pay for our sexual choices. If we accept these conditions, it means we accept living the life of a teenager. And worse, our two dads are Henry Hyde and Ralph Reed. Z

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*Standmill*

Abortion Rights