



I Am Pro-Choice Massachusetts

A collection of 35 personal stories
in honor of the 35th anniversary
of *Roe v. Wade*.

Compiled by NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts

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*Edited by the staff of
NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts*

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Introduction – We Are Pro-Choice Massachusetts

January 22, 2008 marks the 35th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark Supreme Court decision which ruled that the Constitutional right to privacy includes access to safe, legal abortion care.

In honor of this anniversary, NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts collected 35 personal stories from our members about why they are pro-choice. These incredible stories from people of different backgrounds show us that there are a variety of reasons that motivate people to be passionate about reproductive freedom.

Some of us have had personal experiences with abortion, limited access to birth control, or dangerously incomplete health education. Some of us have experienced starting a family when the time was right or joining with other pro-choice activists at a rally.

All of us have friends, family members, or acquaintances who have felt the impact of these and many other reproductive health issues. And we are all united by a common need to protect the rights of women, children, and men in our families and the wider community.

With our strong pro-choice leaders here in Massachusetts, we can work together to protect reproductive rights across the state. Through giving voice to our values and working for electoral and legislative change, we have the power to make a difference for women and families throughout the state in 2008 and beyond.

We would like to thank the incredible women and men who were brave enough to so eloquently share their stories.

The stories in this collection were edited for space and formatting. The 35 stories reflect the thoughts of individual pro-choice women and men from around the state and do not necessarily represent the views of NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts.

The Logical Position

I am pro-choice because, for me, it is the logical position. I am pro-choice because, for me, it all comes down to ensuring that all women are free and empowered to make those decisions that will shape the course of their future. Decisions surrounding having a child influence one's education, career, travel, relationships, living situations and locations, finances, and much more. Restricting women's access to reproductive health care and reproductive rights are effectively restricting the ability of women to make all critical decisions.

I am pro-choice because I believe in supporting and increasing ways for women to have the full range of reproductive choices – whether that means having a healthy pregnancy, adoption, or abortion.

I am pro-choice because I believe in fighting all barriers preventing women from receiving the best health care possible – whether those barriers are socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, demographic, based on age, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

I do not take those things for granted and never will.

I am pro-choice because although I have never had to make the difficult decision to have an abortion, or experienced what it is like not to have health insurance, or access to quality reproductive health care – I do not take those things for granted and never will.

A.T., 26, Cambridge

Please Don't Make That Choice For Me

I am pro-choice for so many reasons. As a social worker and health care professional who has worked in a reproductive health center, I have seen many, many women who had very good reasons not to have children. These women and their stories are my reasons. Whether it's the college girl who wants to give everything she has to becoming a lawyer or an artist or a teacher; or the woman whose children are older and in college, who "doesn't want to start all over again;" or the teenager who wasn't taught about birth control and "thought you couldn't get pregnant the first time you had sex" – each

I fear what would happen to women who DON'T have the freedom to choose.

of these women deserve a chance to live the life that THEY choose.

Many women my age (29) and younger do not remember a world where abortion was illegal – and sadly –

some of those same people don't appreciate what others went through to enact and protect this important freedom. Unplanned pregnancies happen all the time to all kinds of people – I fear what would happen to women who DON'T have the freedom to choose [...]. Changes and restrictions like the federal ban are affecting us every day. It is my hope that we will continue to be guaranteed the right to choose our own reproductive destiny. To me, that's what it means to be pro-choice. Whether you would choose it for yourself or not, please don't make that choice for me, my mother, or my daughter.

J.P., 29, Framingham

My Parents

I think I'm pretty typical of the now older generation. My parents were very uncomfortable talking about sex. The best they could do was say that you could get pregnant if you had "Sex!" and give me a ridiculously juvenile book about menstruation, though it made some reference to eggs and sperm. I learned much more from my equally uneducated, but older sisters. College brought the inevitable "Health Education" class, taught by an unmarried [...] older woman. Another credibility gap. Maybe it was the boyfriends that had the best influence – fortunately a good lot.

After college I went to work for an agency working with abusing and neglecting parents. There I quickly observed the toll of unwanted, or unplanned, children on families, especially single-parent families, and thus on the children themselves. Armed with a degree in clinical social work, I spent most of my working life in college mental health, working with young women who were struggling with situational and mental health problems of all sorts. I became strongly feminist and always idealistic; sure the world would finally acknowledge the hypocrisy toward women. I recognized that my easy access to contraception in the 50s and 60s, although illegal, was a social class issue – surely not a medical one – but this was in the days when nobody was watching. Access for those who could pay was not yet an issue.

Then I began to see some students who described themselves as anti-abortion, good Christians or whatever, but pregnant – fearful of telling their parents, fearful they would have to quit school, guilty for committing a sin, lost to their church, etc. Ellen Goodman got it just right: "there are three reasons everyone can agree abortion is

**I will never understand
the morality behind
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unavailable.**

permissible: rape, incest, and 'me.'" I was amazed that college students could still say they believed that you "couldn't get pregnant the first time." What were they learning in high school?

I have grown to feel the self-righteousness of the "right to lifers" is essentially anti-women. But it is not that easy. If you buy the idea that abortion is murder, you can make a moral case for making it illegal. I will never understand the morality behind making contraception unavailable. Nor the concept that the less you know, the less you're likely to get into difficulty. That takes me back to my parents.

70+, Boston

I Trust Women To Make Difficult Decisions

I am pro-choice because women are people who deserve equal standing and equal rights. While this statement may strike some as obvious, the recent Supreme Court decision on the Federal Abortion Ban proves otherwise. In the majority opinion, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy made the argument that banning a procedure without an exception for a woman's health was actually *good* for women, in that it would protect them from a procedure they might not fully understand and would eventually come to regret. This, to me, is the most terrifying thing about the opposition – they seem to believe that women are incapable of making these decisions for themselves. I was furious when I read that one of our Supreme Court Justices actually believes that as a woman, I need him to protect me from myself. Unlike our current Supreme Court, I trust women to make difficult decisions.

Recently, a close friend who is a devout Catholic shocked me when she told me that she was going to have an abortion. She and I had pushed through some difficult conversations in the past about abortion, and she had always clearly identified with the anti-choice movement. Once she was faced with her own unintended pregnancy, she knew, without hesitation, that she was going to exercise her right to choose. She cried and cried, not because she was conflicted about her decision, but because she was so terrified of the support she had given to anti-choice organizations in the past. She had financially supported a movement trying to take away the right she now needed.

Not everyone will make the choice to have an abortion. But it is incredibly important to protect it for those who will.

K.O., 27, Cambridge

Difficult Decision

28 years ago, I was faced with the difficult decision to end an unexpected pregnancy. I got pregnant while taking the pill and had also had a Mumps, Measles, and Rubella booster. No one could tell me what the possible defects to my baby could be and to wait until a more sensitive ultrasound could be done was unbearable! It was the most difficult decision I have ever made but I would make it again. I work in health care and see lots of difficult situations. I will always feel that I made the right decision and will always support a woman's choice to do what she feels is right for her body and her situation!!

C.M., 54, North Dighton

I Am Thankful

I strongly believe that no girl or young woman should have to go through a pregnancy that was forced upon them by a man who lied about his ability to get her pregnant or bullied her into having sex without protection because he “knew” nothing would happen. I've been there [...] it was a humiliating, confusing experience, and I was young and alone and needed love. What I absolutely did not need was another child from a man who lied and then disappeared. No matter what anti-choice activists may say, it is never an easy or impartial decision. I agonized about it [...] but I am thankful that I could make that choice – one that would have had a detrimental effect on me and my other child for the rest of our lives.

D.D., 52, Malden

No Greater Purpose

I'm pro-choice because I was pregnant at age fifteen. I made a decision that I was not going to make what I saw as a mistake ruin the path I had chosen for my life. I walked through picket lines and endured the name calling from the car to the front door of the clinic. Eleven years later when my daughter was born I vowed that she too would have the choice to make should she have to make it [...]. I promised her (in my heart and head) that I would do everything I could to make sure that she too would have the right to choose. I cannot imagine what my life would have been like had I decided to have that child, but I now have two wonderful children. It was a tough decision to make [...] but at least it was mine to make.

As I meet and talk to more and more teens and tell them my story, I tell them that there are two very important lessons to be learned: the first is to be smarter than I was and to use condoms, and the second is that our right to choose when to have a child needs to remain intact. There is no greater purpose than having others learn from my mistakes and I hope to reach as many teens as I can. I am a successful, healthy woman of 42 now and so I think my story has credit when adolescents hear it from me. My desire to reach them has become so strong that I completely changed my career to become a middle school math teacher. I so want to be there for any of them who need it.

C.S., 42, Arlington

A Woman Should Be Trusted

I believe that a woman should be trusted to decide when, if ever, is the right time for her to have a child. Starting a family should be a choice – not an obligation – and planning options should be available to all women, regardless of economic or social condition. And to me, it is more important to protect a living child than an unborn fetus.

I first identified as pro-choice when I was a freshman in high school. We had just begun a sex-ed class, and I remember telling my mother

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that I felt it should be a woman's right to choose. She glared at me in shock and asked how I could be pro-choice, considering I had been adopted.

“Your birth mother chose to give you up to another loving family instead of getting rid of you – would you rather have been aborted??” she yelled. I responded “I don't know, but listen to what you said – my birth mother CHOSE”. We never talked about abortion again after that.

N.P., 27, Cambridge

An Incredible Relief

I was married for the second time in 1979 and was quite happy to find out I was pregnant in 1981. I had a nine-year-old from my first marriage, and he was thrilled about the baby as well. We decided to have amniocentesis, and went for a preliminary ultrasound at around my fifteenth week. No one suggested that anything was wrong, but we were told that we should come back in two weeks – something was said about the baby being too small for accurate placement of the amnio needle.

At the second visit the reason for the delay was revealed: the radiologist and our doctor had suspected that the fetus was anencephalic – that it had a neural tube defect that results in incomplete formation of the brain – and they wanted to do a high-resolution ultrasound to confirm the diagnosis. Anencephaly is incompatible with survival.

This was a Friday. After two of the worst days of my life I went for an abortion the next Monday. It was an incredible relief. Note, by the way, that this was well into the second trimester of my pregnancy. I read shortly after about a federal report, which argued that abortion was psychologically traumatic for women. I was astounded – our experience was that abortion averted what would have been a nightmare experience for us.

It is likely that many people would sympathize with my right to have an abortion in the circumstances I just described. But I actually had a second three years later, for reasons that are more typical and perhaps less conducive to sympathy. After having a healthy son in 1983, I became unintentionally pregnant a year later. My husband was just out of law school and starting his career, I was working full time and planning to go back to graduate school, we had a toddler and a rambunctious teenager – it was not a good time for us to have another baby. We thought about it, but it was not a hard decision.

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We aborted again. And we have never regretted it. Our resources, psychological and financial, were stretched to the limits caring for our two kids. We could not have done well by them had we tried to raise another.

D.A., 58, Newton

Thank You, Mom

My mom explained it to me this way: “I have never had an abortion and I’m not sure I could - but I’ve never been in a situation where I felt I needed to. That being said, no gray-haired man in Washington D.C. who is never, ever going to get pregnant is going to tell me what I can and cannot do in that situation. It’s not that I want abortions to happen or even that I think I would have one. It’s that I can imagine a situation where that might be possible and I think only I should have the right to make that decision for myself.” Thank you, Mom. Enough said.

D.F., 37, Arlington

I Was Lucky

I’m pro-choice because when I was fourteen, I was in a relationship with a sexually coercive 17-year-old boy. I was on the lucky end of the statistics and did not become pregnant. If I had become pregnant at that time, and did not have the option of abortion, I do not believe I would have become the educated, informed, and responsible woman I am today. Because I did not become pregnant as a teenager and especially because I did not have a child as a teenager, I was able to exit the dysfunctional relationship, plunge into school, complete college with the help of a merit-based scholarship, and also complete graduate school.

A.P., 30, Cambridge

Those Awful Days

In the 1960s, when abortion was illegal in Massachusetts, as a pastor, I became aware that women were choosing abortions, but were forced to go to underground abortionists who were not doctors, unsanitary, and often exploiters of those who sought services. Women came away from the experience feeling personally terrible, often infected, and sometimes did not survive the procedure. I do not want to see a return to those awful days. It is a difficult decision for any person to choose an abortion, but one in which the woman should be supported.

I became part of a national network of clergy, who identified doctors who would perform abortions within a medical

setting. We then gave counseling and information about where they could safely receive services in another state. As I counseled as many as 50 or 60 women a month, I heard terrible tales of how some became pregnant. Even now, as I remember those stories, I cannot help but fear the return of those days when women could not, with dignity, choose how to manage their own health decisions with a physician of their choice.

E.B.B., 73, West Yarmouth

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A Fundamental Human Right

I believe the decision if and when to become a mother is a fundamental human right. It is wrong to legislate what are incredibly personal, individual decisions made by women depending on their feelings toward a pregnancy, their life circumstances, and their religious beliefs. I waited until my 30s to have a child, because the time and circumstances were not right for myself and my husband until then. I have seen friends relieved to have abortions because they were not ready to have a child. One of my friends who strongly wanted to become a mother had an abortion because the fetus had a significant developmental problem and would not have made it to term. Abortion needs to be accessible and affordable so that women continue to have this option when they want and need it.

E.F., 33, Roslindale

Gender Equality

I'm pro-choice because gender equality isn't possible if women cannot control their own bodies and reproductive lives. And being pro-choice means much more than supporting abortion rights. It's about increasing access to contraception, supporting comprehensive health education, supporting parents and other caretakers, and improving reproductive health care more generally. I first identified as pro-choice when I was growing up (my parents were pro-choice Republicans). I became a pro-choice activist in college when I started to understand the connections and intersections between racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism.

P.B., 24, Cambridge

Her Story

When I was about sixteen, my mother went out one evening every week, and she was secretive about where she was going. When I asked her what she was doing, she told me that she was participating in a women's support group. I could tell that there was something she wasn't comfortable telling me. Eventually I got her to tell me what this group was about and why she was attending. She'd had an abortion. This group was a support group for women who had unresolved feelings about the abortions they had in the past. This is her story. This is my story.

She was about twenty, abortion was still illegal, and she found herself in a situation that almost every woman dreads. Luckily, her father was able to arrange for her to obtain an abortion at a hotel. Her family [...] encouraged her to talk about what she had been through. I think this is why my mother carried with her some unease about this procedure over 30 years later. When I learned her story, I was hurt that she had not been comfortable confiding her membership in this group with me. I don't ever want my mother to hide something from me [...].

In my eyes, I would not have been born if my mother had not had an abortion. She would have become a young mother, likely a single mother. She would likely not have finished college. She likely would have had to move back home. She would not have met my father. For these reasons, my mother's abortion allowed me to have life. It is for these reasons that I must continue this battle. Abortion is not about unborn lives, it is about the lives that are already being lived. Without it women would be forced into situations that would drastically change and possibly end the lives they had been planning. It angers me when I see the bumper-stickers that say "be thankful you're mother was pro-life" – I'm thankful mine was not.

S.D., 24, Boston

This Choice

I'm pro-choice because I have always been pro-choice. I just believe that no one can make a decision about a person's body and life except for them. I was glad to have this choice available to me back in 1999.

I was 23-years-old, and I was engaged to a guy that turned out to be a completely abusive jerk. We planned a future together, and in late 1998, we agreed to go off the pill and try to get pregnant. I did get pregnant, and as the weeks went by he didn't stop being a jerk to me; he would walk out on me and disappear for hours or overnight.

Finally I told him, when I was about 8 weeks pregnant, that I did not plan on being a single mother; we planned this baby together, and I did not want to be alone and have this baby if I couldn't count on him being there, since this was a planned pregnancy. He was blasé about it. Then the night before my scheduled abortion, he begged me not to do it and said we'd talk more when he got home from work. Well he never came home that night, so the next morning I called my mother in tears and she went with me.

I had my abortion in a hospital so the experience itself was not that bad. And my fiancé did not take it too hard when I finally tracked him down and told him about it. I just couldn't do it. We eventually broke up because he was cheating, and I am very glad that I am not sitting here by myself with his 8-year-old child.

It was really best for not just me, but the life that this baby would have had [...]. I am so grateful that I had the choice.

H.C., 30, Worcester

It Just Seems Natural

I am pro-choice because it just seems natural. It seems natural to me for women to make their own decisions about their bodies. It's the person, the individual self, that makes and should make decisions regarding birth control, pregnancy, and abortion. Limiting or removing access to honest and proper sex education and access to birth control takes ownership of the woman's body away and gives it to someone else. I am pro-choice because women and their partners should not be limited [in their] options, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, economic standing, and whether or not they approve. I am pro-choice because choice is not about whether abortion is right or wrong; it's about women having ownership of their bodies and having the allowance to make a decision of their own will [...].

When I was young I found out someone close to me had an abortion. It was back when she was in college. I really looked up to her and loved her so much. It was sort of like if she had one maybe it's not so scary, not so bad. It was really the first time I'd heard of anyone having one and the first person I knew. She helped to make it [...] okay? Then in high school a close friend had an abortion and I remember being a little scared for her and a little shocked, but never did I judge her or place blame. I never judged either of them. Both were close to me and both needed the abortion because they were in school and I understood that. I also knew that if anyone challenged their decisions, I would have defended them [...].

A.D., 28, Cambridge

The Right To Choose Should Not Discriminate

After my 16-year-old sister had an abortion during high school, it became clear to me how closely connected reproductive freedom is to women's privacy, safety, and autonomy. My sister became pregnant with her then serious boyfriend during her sophomore year of high school. I was a senior in high school and conservative and anti-choice at the time. Because of that, my sister didn't turn to me for help when she needed it most. She also didn't feel comfortable enough to go to my parents.

Instead, she decided to drive with her boyfriend and his brother one night to New York, where parental consent is not required. The only reason I knew she had scheduled the appointment before she left was by listening in on one of her phone conversations to a friend. When I confronted her and saw how scared she was, I immediately supported her and put her safety and well-being above my own feelings.

My feelings about abortion didn't change immediately, but by college, I realized that if my younger sister hadn't made the choice she did, her life would be completely different. She may not have graduated from high school, and I'm almost certain she wouldn't be preparing to graduate from college. She's also in a healthy relationship and has many future plans, which include having children and a family.

...I feel strongly that the right to choose be one that is extended to *all* women, including minors.

Since that experience and through learning a great deal more about barriers in abortion access, I feel strongly that the right to choose be one that is extended to *all* women, including minors. My sister's experience would have been significantly less dangerous and scary if she'd had the option to seek services near her home.

Our home state's parental consent laws did nothing to protect her safety. Many girls have wonderful and supportive parents to turn to in these situations, but for those who don't, we should put their safety and needs first. The right to choose should not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, income, age, or any other such factor.

H.G., 25, Dorchester

I've Never Regretted It

I took a year off from college to have an adventure living on the West Coast with my boyfriend. We practiced birth control, but had an accident anyway. When I found out I was pregnant, I realized I was not in love with this man, and having the baby would link me, the baby, and this man forever. I didn't think we would parent well together; we were very different people. I realized I would never finish college, and never really figure out who I was. I chose to have an abortion. I've never regretted it. Many years later, I fell in love, got married, and had three wonderful children. My old boyfriend fell in love, married, and had three children himself.

K.M., 49, Sherborn

Forever Changed

My story isn't so much of a story, because I've never had to make this tough decision. I have a beautiful family, and would never change a bit of it. When I was thirteen, I was raped and became pregnant. I miscarried before I had to think about options, but it forever changed the way I saw things. I was so young; what kind of monster should have been able to tell me that I had no choice but to bear a living reminder of that painful incident? My heart breaks for anyone who's had to endure such a thing; I know you're out there and your strength is amazing.

J.B., 29, Centerville

Part Of A Larger Struggle

I am pro-choice because I believe that no one is free until everyone is free and that women are not free unless they are able to control how, when, or if they are to bear children. Therefore, women must be able to exercise this right absolutely without interference. Gender equality is impossible without access to safe, legal, and affordable reproductive health services, including abortion. I also believe that women's full civil rights, social equality, and reproductive freedom are the indicators of a truly civilized, democratic nation. I realized that I was pro-choice in my teens when I recognized that the systemic discrimination and oppression based on gender, sexual orientation, race, and class were interrelated. My struggle was only one part of a larger struggle. Again, none of us can be free when women are denied their reproductive freedom.

J.K., 47, Boston

Women Have The Capability

I'm pro-choice because reproductive rights are fundamental to human rights. I can think of nothing as basic as the ability to have determination over one's body. Women are blessed with the gift to be able to have a pregnancy, but that means that they also should have the ability to decide when it is right for them to conceive.

Pro-choice for me means to support women through all the complex decisions they have about reproduction. Pro-choice means to help women get access to safe, effective and affordable contraception. Pro-choice means helping women maintain healthy pregnancies and supporting them through the pregnancy if they choose. But pro-choice also means that if a woman is not prepared for the pregnancy and the risks that pregnancy entails, she should be supported in her decision to end that pregnancy in a safe and dignified manner.

I am proud to be an obstetrician/gynecologist, and to help take care of women through all stages of their lives, and through their many difficult decisions, not just about abortion. I am proud to be part of the pro-choice community because, pro-choice means pro-woman.

[...] I grew up Mormon and am adopted and had mixed feelings about abortion. However, when I reached the age where my friends were having dilemmas about their pregnancies, I decided that it is inhumane to force women to carry pregnancies that they do not want. [This] was further solidified as I listened to women who I counseled in the Bronx, where I saw babies born with Hepatitis and AIDS who were unwanted. These are very complex decisions and require a great deal of compassion. [...] I believe that women have the capability to make the best decisions for themselves, they do not need to be told, or forced.

R.G., 32, Boston

Pro-Family, Pro-Choice

Why am I pro-choice? I believe in the sacredness of life. It is a miracle from the Divine, and something to be respected. What many forget, is that a life mistreated is as much a sin as a life taken.

Many children were born into families that for one reason or another could not care for them. I was

**I am a pro-family,
pro-choice woman.**

born into an abusive family. Many of my close friends had families that simply could not afford their medical care or basic needs.

Allowing a family, or a mother, to have the choice to have children means that children are not being born into families that cannot support them, financially or emotionally.

I am pro-choice because I believe every child has the right to a home in which they are cared for. I support the right of every woman, and of every family, to make the choice as to whether they can support a child.

I am a pro-family, pro-choice woman.

K.H., 26, Lowell

Because I Am Adopted

I am pro-choice because I am adopted. I believe that every woman who faces an unintended pregnancy should have a full range of reproductive options. For me, being pro-choice isn't just about abortion rights, it's about everything from having the resources to raise your own child, to adoption and foster care, to termination options. I believe that my birth mother and my parents were able to make the right choice for them because they had the resources to pursue a full range of options, and I think every woman and family should have the right to do the same.

**...I realized that the
initiative (a parental
notification law) would
make reproductive care
less accessible...**

I first identified as pro-choice when Proposition 73

was being pushed by Governor Schwarzenegger in California. As a high school senior in Los Angeles, I realized that the initiative (a parental notification law) would make reproductive care less accessible for the next generation of teenagers than it was for me and my friends. We worked with Planned Parenthood to defeat the referendum.

J.B., 20, Wellesley

Every Woman

I'm pro-choice because I treasure my ability to choose when and with whom to start a family. I have been married now for six and a half years, and I love my husband very much. We have always planned to start a family, but since he is working on his PhD at the moment, a baby would put a huge strain on our finances and our lives. I have never had an abortion myself, but I know that reproductive rights don't only include abortion; the anti-choice movement seeks to completely limit my autonomy over my own body. If they succeed in outlawing abortion, their next target will be birth control, an important part of my health care routine.

I am a responsible, caring, married woman who loves children but isn't ready for them. I do, however, think that the sexual relationship between me and my husband is a beautiful and important part of our marriage, and I would never want to give it up.

Reproductive rights impact every woman, not just unwed teenagers. I am pro-choice because I am a responsible adult who is intelligent and able to make important decisions for myself about what is right for my family. I firmly believe that reproductive choice is the foundation upon which other advances for women [stand].

E.J., 29, Brighton

Children Deserve Nothing Less

I am pro-choice because of the extent to which I value the preciousness of life, children, and the experience of motherhood. Every single child should be born to a woman who is ready, willing, and able to be a mother. Having worked in the child welfare arena, I have seen the devastating effects of abuse and neglect on children who were born to parents who were not prepared for that most challenging role. It is my belief that we should encourage women (and men) to only enter into parenthood when they are able to fully commit themselves to a child. Children – our most precious and fragile citizens – deserve absolutely nothing less.

I am also pro-choice because of the value of reproductive rights to women themselves and their ability to realize their full personhood on their own terms and at their own pace. Some close friends of mine have had to undergo abortions. The choice was a difficult one. However, the ability to hold off on motherhood until they are ready has allowed them to continue to pursue their own educational and professional goals, and to not be held back by an unwanted pregnancy. Their choice will allow them to be better mothers to the children they do choose to have later on. I would hope every woman has the personal courage and the political right to make the same choice if put in the same situation.

A.M., 26, Watertown

For These Reasons And Countless More

I'm pro-choice because I understand that this isn't simply an issue of being for or against abortion. This is a matter of recognizing the imbalance of responsibility, control, power, and blame between women and men regarding pregnancy.

I was one of the "lucky" women who always had access to safe and affordable birth control. Despite what many think, birth control isn't foolproof. While applying to graduate school, I became pregnant. I had taken every means available to protect against this but there was that awful pink line. My decision was made: I would join the 42% of American women who [have] had an abortion since *Roe v. Wade*. I discussed the situation with my then ex-boyfriend and we were both in agreement with my decision, but his behavior was far from ideal. He made me feel as if he thought he could throw money at "my" problem and be absolved from all responsibility. He was pro-choice simply out of convenience for himself.

A good friend went with me to Planned Parenthood to pick up the abortion pill. While at the clinic, I was repeatedly instructed that I should have someone with me because some women experienced illness. I lied and said that I wouldn't be alone. I certainly couldn't say that my ex thought so little of me and "my" problem that he wouldn't be present. I put on a tough front and told myself that I could get through this alone. Hours later, in the throes of extreme nausea and cramping, I wished he were with me. Even though I didn't want him back, I would have given anything just to have him get me the glass of water I was too sick to get for myself. I felt utterly alone. In the aftermath, he didn't even so much as call to see how I was.

Roughly a month later, I was at the annual counter protest that NOW sponsors. I thought I was mentally prepared for the onslaught of demeaning and derogatory words that the anti-choice protesters use

about women like myself, but I was not. A sign claiming that abortion was manslaughter brought tears to my eyes. It hurt me deep down to my soul that I, the always caring activist that gives countless hours to help others, was thought to be guilty of manslaughter. Did these people not realize that I was keenly aware that I had the potential for a life growing inside me and that I didn't take having an abortion lightly? Did these people not realize that I took every means necessary to prevent a pregnancy? Did these people not realize that there was a man involved and that responsibility did not solely lie on my shoulders?

At that moment, I became incredibly angry that I was considered a murderer, but that my ex-boyfriend got off scot-free. He didn't have to beg for a day off from work. He didn't walk past the protesters. He didn't sit for hours in the clinic waiting for a pill. He didn't have to go through hours of illness and days of bleeding. He would never be called a murderer, a slut, irresponsible, or the countless other derogatory stereotypes that the anti-choice agenda forces on women. That was the moment that this became more than a political issue that I supported. It was now a personal and painful matter that the public felt entitled to judge only me for.

I refuse to feel shame for the decision I made. While it was difficult and painful, it was the right choice to make. It was, sadly, an experience that left me feeling that even some people, such as my ex, who claim to be pro-choice aren't really concerned with the well-being of women. For these reasons and countless more, I actively support reproductive rights and the pro-choice movement.

J.D., 28, Brighton

I Refuse To Let It Be Compromised

I am pro-choice because I am not going to give up on a battle generations before me lived and died for. I refuse to let my rights be stripped away and my liberty be compromised. I believe in reproductive rights because I believe in healthy and happy families, in education, and in making my own decisions, according to what is best for myself, my well being, and the people I love.

I have been pro-choice and will continue to be pro-choice as long as I am free.

At age seventeen, I was at a bad place in my life – I had no family, I was in a relationship with a drug addict, and I was on my own. When I became pregnant, I knew there was no way I could start a family, and it made me realize I needed to change the direction I was going. When I have children, I want to be able to provide for them, I want them to have everything they could ever need or want, and I especially want them to be loved and happy. I went to the local Planned Parenthood for my pregnancy test, and I learned about my reproductive health. It was the first time in my life I was thinking about it. I made the decision to have an abortion.

Since then, my life is completely different. I went to a community college with a 4.0 GPA. Now, I go to one of the best ranked liberal arts colleges in the country. I have dedicated my life to working in public policy and returning to improve the community I came from. I have come to fully understand the value of the right to choose, and I refuse to let it be compromised.

L.J., 20, Northampton

I Am Old Enough To Remember

I once knew a 13-year-old who not only got pregnant, but was one of those unfortunates who didn't know she was pregnant because she continued to menstruate. By the time her mother realized she was pregnant and scrambled for money to pay for an abortion (they did not have the money for another child in the family, as the 13-year-old was one of ten), they had to go to another state because at the time, abortion was illegal in their state of residence.

[...] Scientifically and medically, an abortion is just a medical procedure. When ethics and belief in a right to life come into play, religion and ethical systems are brought into the picture. There are many who believe that bringing a child not conceived in love into the world is more wrong than abortion. There are many who believe that where the family cannot afford another mouth to feed, the lives of those already existing in the family take precedence. And there are those who believe that life does not begin at conception and that sometimes the soul doesn't enter the body of the child until after birth.

The State has no right to force everyone to live in accordance with a particular belief system [...]. I am old enough to remember the stories about women dying or being rendered sterile from illegal botched abortions. The statistics say that the rate of abortion is unaffected by the legality or illegality of the procedure: women who are desperate enough will seek out illegal practitioners who will make it easy for women to find them. It would be tragic were we to return to that state of affairs.

D.E.H., 60, Lowell

A Personal Reality

I'm pro-choice because it just makes sense. It is appalling that in this day and age, in a "free and democratic" society, our government can even consider intruding on a woman's personal affairs [...]. While clergy, congressmen, and scientists debate fetal development and morality, the circumstances and quality of life of the woman are egregiously ignored.

I had an abortion last year. Overnight, the political debate over choice became a personal reality. While it wasn't a pleasant

**I am proud to
share my story...**

experience, I was so grateful that I had the legal right to terminate an unplanned pregnancy. As part of my healing process, I decided to do my part to ensure that other women will be able to exercise their choice today and [in] the future. Before my abortion, I had no idea how common abortions are [...] nor how precarious the right to choose is in the year 2007. After my abortion, I read the stories of other women and was comforted knowing that I was not alone. I was also awed by their bravery and sacrifice. Yet, at the same time, learning about the legal fight ahead enraged me. I am proud to share my story, even though it is still emotionally difficult, if it will help ensure choice in this country remains legal.

L.K., 32, West Roxbury

Because I Could

When I graduated from college, I moved to Kentucky and taught sexual education classes to middle and high school students. Every child I worked with reminded me why I was pro-choice. The boys who thought it was safer to use two condoms than one; the girls who thought douching with soda was a good contraceptive; Allie and Kiara and Maria, who were pregnant; Cat, who cried and left the room when we talked about touching that is ok and touching that is not ok. I was pro-choice – actively pro-choice – so these children might have fewer opportunities to get pregnant and fully-supported options when they did.

And then, living in Ecuador at 24, I was sexually assaulted. The town had a higher level of cultural acceptance for violence against women than I was used to. In order to prosecute, victims had to make an appointment with the government's doctor and pay for a medical exam. They had to walk across town with medical reports, Xerox themselves, and take copies to police headquarters. Each step in the process required time, money, and courage. As an American living abroad and working in sexual health, I was fortunate to have these things. Most women didn't. I was the third American and at least the seventh woman he attacked. So, because I could, I spent days walking through that process to press charges. I saw doctors, shared my medical record with lawyers and clerks and copy staff, checked in daily with the police, gave testimony in a language other than my own – because I chose to. I had the choice to leave after the assault, and I chose to stay and live out that terrible and awesome journey. Because I could. Before I lived in Ecuador, I was pro-choice for many reasons. Now I have one more.

L.T., 28, Cambridge

I Do Have Control Over Me

I had an abortion when I was eighteen years old. Two weeks into my freshman year of college, I found out I was pregnant. I had only been sexually active with two people at that point in my life [...]. The guy who got me pregnant was an older guy who I had been having sex with for two years with no formal commitment. Of course when I told him I was pregnant he wanted nothing to do with me or the baby [...]. He had basically been using me for sex, and I was too young and naive to want to admit it. He wouldn't even come to the clinic with me.

My friend came instead. I didn't tell my mother, and I skipped class for a few days and stayed with my friend. A few days after I drove home and showed up on my mother's doorstep crying at midnight. I told her what I had done. She hugged me and cried and said she wished I had told her. She said it was okay. She had done the same thing when I was a toddler, and she feared she couldn't take care of me and another baby on her own.

I am pro-choice because I can't control what other people are going to do to me. I can only control what I do for myself. I had no control over that guy not supporting me or falling in love with me. I had control over my decision to have sex with him, but I was seventeen and I made a poor choice [...]. I had sex outside of a committed relationship, but I paid the price. Even if he was my boyfriend he could have broken up with me and wanted nothing to do with the baby, and I would have been on my own. I would have had no control over him not being in the baby's life.

BUT I do have control over me [...]. At eighteen, I knew I was not ready to be a mom. I was the first person on my mother's side to go to college, and college was 3 hours from home. I would have had to drop out of college to have the baby. I chose to stay in school and

graduate so that when I am ready to be a mom, my child will have a parent with a college degree. I don't regret my choice. I know I made the right one because it was my choice. How can someone else choose for me? How can someone else tell me if I am ready to be a mother or ready to give a baby up for adoption? They don't know me; how can they presume they could make that choice for me?

L.P., 26, Boston

Part Of Her Birthright

I'm pro-choice because I am an advocate for women's rights. I firmly believe that a woman's freedom to choose her own destiny is a crucial part of being a human being. It is part of her birthright. To take away a woman's right to make her own choices and dictate her own lifestyle, would be to deny her the right to live, to breathe, to participate freely in this world. As a sexual minority and a woman of color, I am pro-choice because I recognize that reproductive rights affect *all* women. We are all in this together.

I first began to identify as a feminist activist during my sophomore year of high school. Unlike most young women my age, I am not afraid of the word feminist and I do not take for granted the rights I have always known: the right to a legal abortion, the right to contraception, among others. Because I realize that reproductive rights are precious, I am dedicated to securing them for my generation and for the generations yet to come.

M.G.B., 21, Brookline

1967, And Abortions Were Illegal

I had no birth control education as a teenager growing up in a strict Catholic family. There was no sex education. The birth control pill was illegal. Diaphragms were only available to married women or if you could prove that you were engaged to be married. I was totally ignorant about how to protect myself.

It was 1967. The Summer of Love. By first semester sophomore year in university, I'd had sex five or six times with my first "sexual" boyfriend, a senior who was in the military reserve. He never used a condom or discussed birth control with me, except to ask when my last period ended, and then assure me that I'd be okay. I broke up with him that September. I was nineteen.

Then, I didn't get my period. And I didn't get my period. I practically had a nervous breakdown before I finally told my best friend. She took me to the infirmary for a pelvic exam and pregnancy test. The following day, we went back. I learned that, in fact, I was pregnant. My whole world exploded into a million pieces. I was hysterical. The campus priest had a whole plan laid out. I'd tell my mother over Thanksgiving. I'd drop out of school, and go to a home for unwed mothers. I'd have the baby, and put it up for adoption. The campus psychiatrist said, "How could you be so stupid as to get pregnant?"

I was inconsolable. I didn't know how to tell my mother. When I finally did, she was furious. Her first words were, "How could you do this to me!" Her second words were, "Well, you'll just have to have an abortion!" I'd never even heard the word spoken before! This was 1967, and abortions were illegal.

I discovered an underground abortion network on the college campus, which led to an abortion ring in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. area run by an off-duty Baltimore cop. I made the arrangements by phone.

My mother and I took an overnight train to D.C. Four adult women, my mother, and I were picked up by a driver at an arranged time at the Greyhound bus station in D.C.

I underwent the abortion alone, in a doctor's office in a shabby Capitol Hill neighborhood. My mother waited in the car, pretending she wasn't there. I had the \$600 cash concealed in my bra. At the end of a long, echoing corridor, I had to knock in a certain pattern, and give a password before the door would be opened. There was no nurse, just the abortionist. There was no anesthetic, and the pain was excruciating. The doctor kept telling me to shut up. I passed out from the pain. When I came to, it was all over. I lay on a couch in a dark waiting room, clutching my belly, moaning in pain. The next woman leaned over me and asked if I was all right. I shook my head no. When the doctor was done with her, he poured yellow and orange tetracycline pills into a legal sized envelope, and told me to take them for ten days. He warned me not to have sex with my boyfriend for at least six weeks. I limped back to the car, now parked on a dark street, away from police interest. My mother wouldn't even look at me.

[...] The next day I took the bus to university. I was lucky that the abortion didn't kill me. Because of the shame, I kept it a secret for years. I am pro-choice because I never want to see another young woman go through what I went through. I want to ensure that they're given proper sex education so they can make good decisions [...]. However, if any woman becomes pregnant not by choice, she should have the constitutional right to a legal and safe abortion. I believe that a human being begins life at birth, not at conception. It's only a matter of time before the right wing Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*. I do not want to see that happen [...].

M.S., 59, Wakefield

The Opportunity To Live In Dignity

I am pro-choice because of my family and my values. I was brought up in a pro-choice home and I can't imagine a politician having the power to make personal decisions for me or for anyone else.

Growing up, my mother was always open with me about sex and sexuality. She let me know that I could always come to her about anything, no matter what. But I also knew that she hoped I would never have to make that choice. Making a decision about an unintended pregnancy is difficult no matter what you believe. That's why she also made sure I had information about birth control and condoms so that I could protect myself.

Actually, it was my mother who took me to my first gynecology appointment to get contraception in college. I went to a nurse practitioner in the same office as her OB/GYN because I knew I would feel more comfortable with a woman. I remember standing at the desk at the end with my sample of birth control pills, waiting for my mother to pay for the appointment. Of course, her obstetrician had to walk by at that moment, the one who had taken care of my mother when she was pregnant with me. Besides feeling embarrassed, I remember thinking that he must have felt old! Here was a baby that he helped to bring into the world who was now old enough to need contraception herself.

Now that I have some more distance from that moment and can think about it without color rising to my cheeks, I hope that the doctor also felt proud. Here was a mother teaching her daughter how to respect herself and take care of her body. That's the same message that I would like to pass on if I have a daughter in the future.

I want my work in the pro-choice movement...to further the values that I care about deeply.

But to me, being pro-choice isn't just about abortion and contraception. Tied up in these issues are also values about freedom, family, and being a woman. It's connected to other social justice issues like race, class, and access to basic health care. Being pro-choice to me means not only having legal options, but having the social supports necessary to make a real decision about what's best for me and my life. I want my work in the pro-choice movement to not only protect our reproductive rights, but to further the values that I care about deeply. I want to ensure that we all have choices about the most important aspects of our lives and the opportunity to live with dignity.

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