

PROTECT OUR FREEDOM

BY MARGARET SHINDLER

The issue of abortion rights has become muddled in recent years, and not by accident. Back in 1973, when *Roe vs. Wade* won at the Supreme Court level, women began to believe, after centuries of patriarchal dominance, that their reproductive selves belonged to them. A young woman, such as myself, just working her way into the world, could go to a clinic nearby and kind health workers would teach her about her body and give her information about birth-control options. In the event of an unplanned pregnancy they were able to refer her to an abortion clinic, if that were her choice. *Choice*. There is the key word.

Today the same health workers are severely constrained by law as to what they say to a woman and how they say it. Their budgets have been cut, drastically limiting the number of women to whom they can offer basic health and reproductive care. They have to charge more, even to the poor. There are far fewer abortion clinics (78% of Oregon counties have no abortion provider; 87% of counties nationwide in the same boat), which means rural women must travel expensive and time-consuming distances.

Birth control options have not improved since I was in my 20s, trying to manage my very fertile self. I was able to use an IUD, not the type that became the source of a big lawsuit, but a Copper-7, which actually worked and was cheap. (This doesn't exist anymore.) Birth control pills are problematic for some women. I felt horrible when I took them. Today's pill has a lower dosage of hormone and this seems to have fewer side-effects, from what friends tell me. Injection of Depo-Provera are given now; I understand this is painful and has unpleasant side-effects. My sister-in-law had to stop injections for health reasons. There still remains the old diaphragm-and-jelly that has an uncomfortably high margin of error. I know from experience. And there is the condom, so much fun to use.

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration, perhaps under pressure from fringe groups, has not approved RU486 for public use. Also known as the "abortion pill," it is taken to terminate pregnancy in the first 7 to 9 weeks. The legal morning-after option, known as "emergency contraception," can be taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy in three ways: temporarily stopping an egg from being released, stopping fertilization of the egg, or stopping the fertilized egg from attaching. These options, however, do not address a woman's need for reliable long-term birth control.

Thirty years after *Roe vs. Wade* birth control is still problematic and abortion is becoming more limited. The very word "abortion" can spark furious emotions and angry words. As I write, the anti-choice movement is working to give constitutional protection to the unborn, while the President works to cut Head Start funding. A young woman today has to pay close attention to the strange politics which are poised to change a status quo she may have taken for granted; her rights over her own body.

Powerful and well-funded political organizations, such as the Christian Coalition and the National Right to Life Committee, are working to change public opinion on the issue of abortion rights. I found an example of their tactics while doing research for this article. I went to my favorite Internet search machine, 'Google', and typed in *Roe vs. Wade*. Imagine my surprise when the site that came up, called "roevwade.org," was made up entirely of anti-abortion links and articles. They did start off with the text of the Supreme Court ruling, but at this point I did not trust anything I read there. The use of that website moniker was under-handed and impudent. They do not play fair, and they do not represent young, poor women of the hapless men who will get slapped with 18 years of child support.

Is it my imagination, or have many formerly neutral folks (past their fertile years) begun to parrot the buzz words of the anti-choice movement, that abortion is a terrible crime? "Those women should have those babies, give them up for adoption if they can't raise them!" I find this response to unwanted pregnancy draconian. What about a 'Right to Quality of Life' movement?

I personally know four women who have had abortions in the past six months. None had the financial means to take on pregnancy, childbirth, and the huge ongoing responsibility of raising a child. None had a willing father in the wings, happy to support them. They are all educated, some still students. For each of the four, the discovery of pregnancy was not a joyous event, it was a moment of sheer desperation and panic, but they all knew they had an option out. They still have the right to choose.

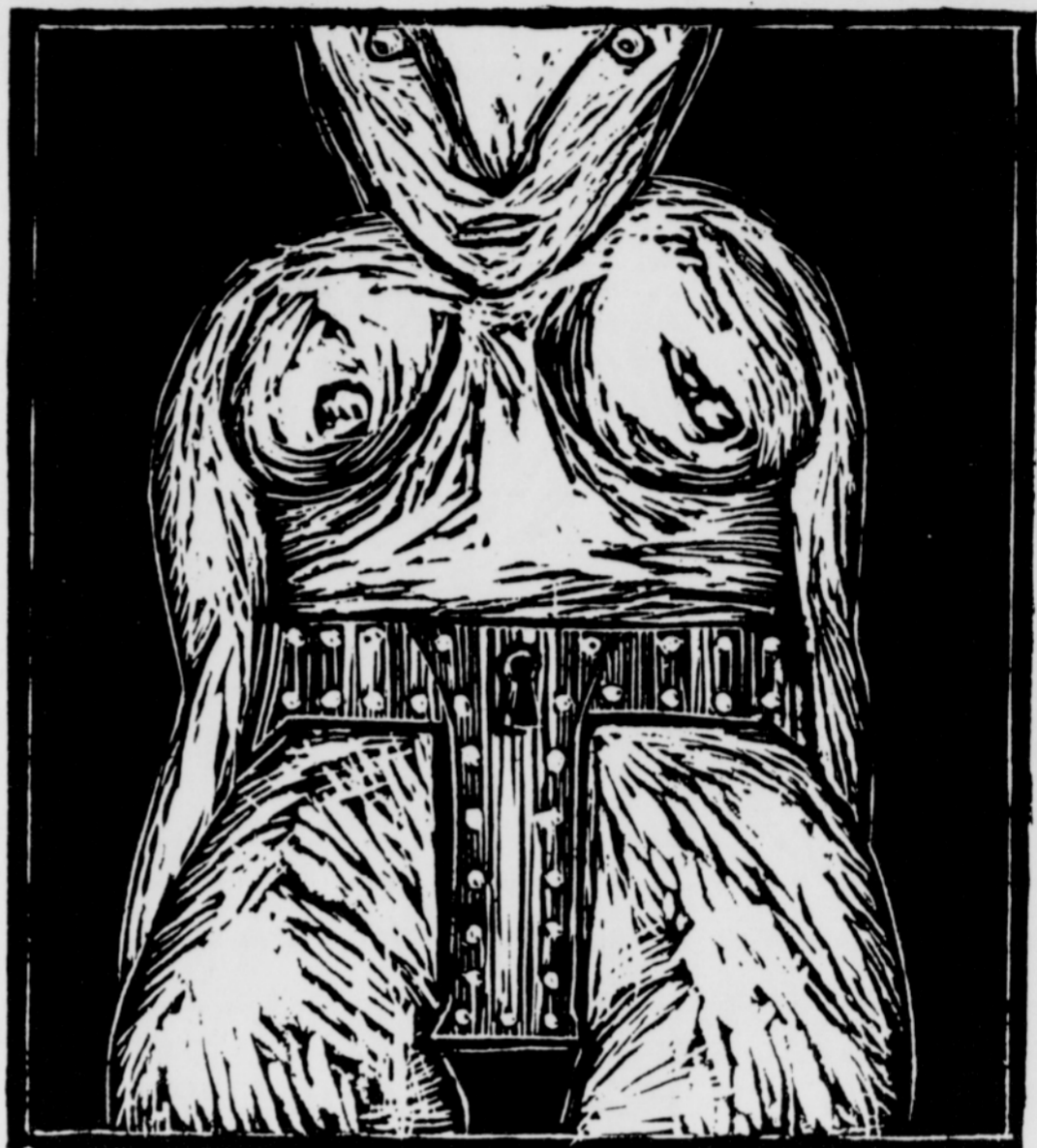
The lives of these four are progressing well. Those who were students are still in school instead of on welfare. Those who are parents can concentrate on earning a living and having time to spend with their kids. For these women the right to choose meant the right to sanity and a better future. It meant waiting until they were ready to become willing parents and have the time to devote to active parenting. If forced to give birth none would have given the child up, but what are the consequences for a child born and raised under duress?

It is time to clarify the issue of a woman's rights over her body. "Family Planning" was a positive set of words when I was 20. I want those words and the concept they represent to come back into style. It is time for the majority who want their reproductive rights intact to take a stand and begin talking again. We love our children and care about all children. That is why we believe in a woman's right to choose.

It is time to take action on this issue. The upcoming Presidential election will include Oregon's first anti-choice ballot measure in over 13 years — sponsored by Oregon Right to Life, which already has almost \$400,000 to support it. To get involved with Oregonians for Choice, the pro-choice movement that is getting underway on the coast, contact Rebecca Green, Pro-Choice Coalition organizer. E-mail rgreen@prochoiceoregon.org, or call (503) 223-4510 ext.#16.

Join me in protecting our freedom.

Margaret Shindler lives in Gearhart.



FRANCES JETTER

POLITICS AS USUAL

BY VANIA J. BRIGHTMAN

It was with a curious sadness that I watched President Bush sign the "partial-birth abortion ban" bill into law. Upon completing his signature, he stood smiling with a backdrop of about 10 men in suits applauding. Not one, I'm guessing, was under the age of 50 and not one, I'm willing to bet, has experienced the crushing blow of poverty.

This was politics as usual, right? Yet I felt a wounded anger that disconcerted even me. Why should I care so much, I thought, that these lawmakers who triumphantly applaud (as if they've won) are all older, privileged men? Why should I care? And I tamped down the deflated feeling I get so often these days — the one reminding me that I am not represented adequately and that my liberties are at risk.

I have studied the theoretical components of this American system to the level of a master's degree, and I must admit that I more often focus on its flaws than its positives. However, I have just witnessed a component of the American system that I had only theoretically considered previously. It's the amazing three branches of government! And it's the concept that says that if two lose sight of democracy, the third might protect us from losing our rights. And the third branch (the quieter one, which doesn't rely as heavily on elections) has come to my ailing freedom's aid.

As I write, at least three federal judges have granted requests to block enforcement of the ban, citing that its broad language could halt legal and safe procedures before the viability of a fetus and what's more, that there was no clause for a woman's health. *There was no clause for a woman's health!*

"Partial birth abortion" is not a medical term, it is a political one. And the (mostly) men who created this law knew darn well that there was no clause for a woman's health. These were my leaders telling me that their opinions (based on a religious foundation) mattered more than my health *because there was no clause for a woman's health.*

In my democratic world, in which I have a voice and a vote, this was hard to comprehend. Not only was I not represented in the creation of that law, but it was created in direct, negligent opposition to me *because there was no clause for a woman's health.*

The most powerful narrative that can be used to blatantly override a woman's health and rights is the narrative that surrounds religion. However, part of the glory of our Constitution and the democracy it affords us is freedom of (as well as from) religion. Our framers were very explicit in this desire to keep a concept as powerful as religion from impacting political decisions.

Thus, and I speak directly to the politicians here, *do not*, when you make a law that obviously hinders a person's freedom based on your religious (and by proxy, moral) beliefs, celebrate your victory prematurely, because 1) taking my freedom is serious business; and 2) there is a third branch of government to protect me (unrepresented me!) when the others lose sight of their purpose.

I assume there will always be, in my lifetime, a debate over abortion. I don't plan to convince anyone that abortion is moral, or at times necessary, because I know I am entitled to have my opinion, but I don't get to force it on anyone else. And I would not want it any other way because I am a proud democratic American. Should I get to make the laws one day, abortion opponents will always retain their democratic rights; never would I create a bill that would neglect their health. Now if only my "representation" would stop trying to take this basic right from me.

Vania J. Brightman is a university administrator by day, and a social studies teacher-in-training by night. This article is reprinted from AlterNet.org.

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