

“I Never Thought I Would”

Category: Abortion: Then and Now

written by Deborah McNabb | July 9, 2022

I was a high school sophomore when the *Roe v. Wade* decision was announced. Throughout high school, college and medical school, I was a feminist and supported a woman's right to bodily autonomy, but I only knew one story. That story involved a young woman who knew that she was not mature enough to parent a child or a woman who needed to finish her education in order to have a future livable wage.

My eyes were opened during my OB/Gyn residency where we trained in abortion provision through the entire four years. In my program, beginning in 1984, the intern was paired with a third-year resident to learn, and then later, teach, abortion procedures. At the beginning of each day, we gathered the women who were to have their procedures, in one room. In that room, we discussed the procedure details and risks as a group, we answered questions, and then the women signed consent forms.

However, I never expected what was to come next. My third-year resident, a young man, then asked the women, individually, if they were certain that they wanted an abortion. I would have never asked that question because I assumed that each woman was a capable moral agent who had consulted her own conscience and settled on the best decision that she could make.

But, I learned something that was life-changing for me. As each woman told her story, each story more jaw-dropping than the one before, I was overwhelmed by the challenges that they faced in their lives. My life to that point had not been easy, but I could never have imagined the suffering that these women had endured. Over the years of my career, I never asked for stories, but most women offered them. Almost without exception, every story began with, “I never thought that I would have an abortion, but . . .”

What if everyone heard these stories? What if everyone knew their friend or loved one had had an abortion? Would hearts and minds change?

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