

From My Heart
July & August 2022

I write this musing for two audiences, those who rage against the June 24 Supreme Court reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, and those who rejoice. For two days, I have been one to rage. For nearly my entire adult life, I have lived under the banner of zero restrictions to my reproductive rights. I grew complacent, for myself and for the women of this country. I began, though, to grow uneasy when Planned Parenthood and comparable services for women were diminished. I worried that abortion would someday be diminished as a choice for many women, especially those in poverty. I never thought that we would lose *Roe v. Wade* altogether. We did, and I have exhausted myself these past days in grief, anger, fear, hopelessness, and, I admit, hatred. These emotions were heightened when Clarence Thomas placed contraceptives in the crosshairs.

I am a middle-class, white, educated woman, beyond child-bearing years. This ruling doesn't directly affect me. However, I embraced the doctrines of credible feminists through study and scholarship, peacefully protested for women's rights, and was a card-carrying member of the National Organization of Women, which pressed for true equality for our sisters and equal partnership for the sexes, until I could no longer find a local chapter.

I share all this so that I do not remain angry and hateful. That will do no good. I share all this not to separate myself from those who rejoiced in the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, but to actually attempt to reach across the divide and ask for all of us to seek a path to common ground, to practice compassion, understanding, and, eventually, love toward all. I plead with rejoicers and ragers that out of respect to all, we do the right thing for all. What a difficult task, a task that will make us step out of our selves and into genuine empathy. No one should fear the loss of the traditional family, as they are used to it, and equally, no one should lose their private right to their bodies, themselves, as a result of outdated viewpoints.

I believe that most who rejoice do so from some basis of family values. Two people, a man and a woman, marry, and they choose to have children. That's a nice picture, a traditional family picture. My husband and I did that. We are comfortable with that. We wish that for many. It is, however, not the only scenario to be valued. A significant number of women, married or single, choose to have intimacy with a partner and choose not to have children. A significant number of women have had "intimacy" cruelly forced on them. If any one of these women suddenly finds herself in an unwanted pregnancy, she should not be forced into an unwanted situation. Her sense of self, her independence, her self-sufficiency, her wise desire not to be further plunged into poverty or medical woes should not be ripped from her. She should not be labeled "sinful" or worse, "criminal" for choosing to abort the pregnancy. She should not be punished for making the choice not to bring an unwanted being into the world. To the contrary. From my own experiences, I can assure anyone who asks that I was unwanted, and thus unloved, and it is an awful existence. I was an object, nothing more. How awful it must be for a woman to carry to term a child she didn't want in the first place.

Now, both single and married women, depending on where they live, may have no choice now, and may have even less choice, if contraceptives are ruled illegal. The law will be that pregnancies, regardless of circumstance, must be carried to term. If it is pro-life that the

rejoicers support, wouldn't it make sense that they would want only the birth of lives that are wanted, loved, and cared for? Surely, they don't support a rising number of children who will feel unloved, like ciphers, or even hated. Considering the mental health issues on the rise among our young people as well as the hatred and violence that has insinuated itself in our country, why would anyone want more unloved, unwanted children to be born? Simply but emphatically put, unwanted children are a result of the denial of contraceptives and the services that can provide instruction in the safe and effective use of these devices.

We have lost so many reproductive services for women, and we have now lost *Roe v. Wade*. Must contraceptives as well be taken from us? Must women who choose, if they can, abortion be significantly penalized? Dare we seriously consider adoption as the only solution, when it is unrealistic to think that there are an adequate number of financially stable and willing families in this nation to provide for all the unwanted children? Worst case scenarios, as Margaret Atwell would indeed attest, can become the norm. All this is so either/or, so insensitive, so void of caring for others. Such a barbaric injustice. I have, though, enough faith in others that I believe, in spite of the ruling of a mere 6 citizens of our country, that we can salvage our compassion and reset our values so that we move beyond the damage wrought by the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, rather than add to it.

Here is what we can work toward. In the spirit of empathy for, and generosity and love toward others, I plead for a sincere and strong commitment to the following. And I implore those who firmly believe the ruin of *Roe v. Wade* a good thing, to dedicate their work and time to the following. It's not too much to ask, considering what many women have been asked to give up.

First and foremost, I ask that both sides of this issue join together and fight like they've never before fought for affordable and accessible contraceptives and the literacy and education that must accompany the sale or implementation of these products. I ask that they pour money into Planned Parenthood, Public Health, and other medical facilities and make these facilities easily available and affordable to women. That they lobby for all pregnant women's financial access to quality prenatal care. That they pour money into Head Start programs and Early Childhood, to lessen competition for funds and to assure that these educational programs are available to all children, regardless of color, gender, or economic status. That they assure affordable and substantial school meals for children who need them. That they provide, realistically, for impartial adoption counseling and assure the birth mother that placement will be excellent. That they support and demand funding to strengthen the public school system. That they erase, within their preferred social media, the stigma attached to the terms "single mother" and "the mother who gave up her baby for adoption" and show understanding, support, and kindness. The bottom line is that care must be lavished while control has been diminished.

Earlier, I alluded to family values. Many who believe wholeheartedly in family values have also expressed adherence to the practice of Christianity, which finds substance in the teachings of Jesus, who directed his unconditional love toward all people, Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans. He was asked in his ministry—and this Bible story can be found in the book of Matthew, Chapter 22—for the greatest commandment. His reply was, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." He added a second law, however: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Wow. These women who have been considered sinners, who have been stigmatized, who now more

than ever need strong, affordable, and accessible Federal, State and local assistance programs are, in fact, the ones who also need compassion, care, and—the greatest of these—love.