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**The Controlled Narrative of “Jane Roe:”
Norma McCorvey’s Life Beyond the 1973 Trial**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
History

By
Eleanor Grace Strickland

Under the mentorship of Dr. Felicity M. Turner

ABSTRACT

Norma McCorvey, Jane Roe of *Roe v. Wade*, 1973, wrote two memoirs twenty years after the Supreme Court trial that surrounded her third pregnancy. These memoirs (*I Am Roe*, 1994, and *Won by Love*, 1997), along with the recent documentary *AKA Jane Roe* (2020), provide an insight into McCorvey’s life and how she was used by politicians and civilians during and after the influential trial. McCorvey lived a complicated life and was constantly being pulled in different directions spiritually, politically, and personally. This thesis shows how McCorvey attempted to re-write the narrative of her life using written memoirs and a documentary. Outside sources will be used alongside the memoirs to explore how McCorvey was used as “Jane Roe” for many years after the trial ended.

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1821

Connecticut General Assembly bans abortion when fetal movement is detected (quickening). Connecticut is the first state to do so.

December 7, 1936

In the *One Package Decision*, physicians regain ability to send contraceptives across state lines.

September 22, 1947

Norma McCorvey, aka Jane Roe, is born in Simmesport, Louisiana.

June 7, 1965

Griswold v. Connecticut protects marital privacy rights, facilitating the use of contraception by married couples.

1970

Alaska, Hawaii, New York, and Washington legalize abortion with minimal restrictions.

February 18, 2017

Norma McCorvey dies in Katy, Texas.

March 3, 1873

The Comstock Act makes it a federal crime to distribute “obscene, lewd or lascivious” material including contraception across state lines through mail.

1942

The American Birth Control League becomes Planned Parenthood.

1960

Abortion is effectively illegal in all states.

April 25, 1967

Colorado begins loosening abortion restrictions in the case of rape, incest, or health risks.

January 22, 1973

In *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court rules that the U.S. Constitution protects abortion rights.

June 24, 2022

In *Dobbs v. Jackson* the Supreme Court rules that the U.S. Constitution does not protect abortion rights.

Introduction

The name “Norma McCorvey” is not a familiar one to many individuals. However, if one were to ask a group of people, “Who is Jane Roe?”, it is likely that most of them would have at least a vague idea of who she is. Norma McCorvey lived a hectic life full of distress and chaos. When she became involved in the Supreme Court trial of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, her life became even more disordered. Lawyers told her half-truths and used her solely for her pregnant belly; her family was virtually non-existent; and countless promises were lost to the abyss.

I examined McCorvey’s memoirs alongside other accounts of her life, and the *Roe v. Wade* trial to understand how she used memoirs to make sense of her complicated life. Both of McCorvey’s books tell many of the same facts, but they have different goals. *I Am Roe*, published in 1994, looks at McCorvey’s life through the lens of the trial. It represents her as a pro-abortion advocate.¹ *Won by Love*, published three years later, looks through the lens of her conversion to Christianity. *Won by Love* tells her story in a touching way; however, it strongly demonizes the abortion industry.² Whether or not all the gory details given about the abortion facilities she worked at are fully accurate is something to consider when analyzing the memoir as a primary source.

McCorvey was regarded as a difficult figure to digest by pro- and anti-abortion advocates. Neither side of the argument fully accepted her into their collection of “inspiring figures.” McCorvey said in *Won by Love* that she “was never very comfortable

¹ Norma McCorvey, and Andy Meisler, *I am Roe: my life, Roe v. Wade, and freedom of choice*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994).

² Norma McCorvey, and Gary Thomas, *Won by Love: Norma McCorvey, Jane Roe of Roe v. Wade, Speaks out for the Unborn as She Shares Her New Conviction for Life*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997).

with the act of abortion itself,” even while she was fighting for the right to have one in the 1970s.³ Her lack of enthusiasm in the pro-abortion movement later in her life made people on that side skeptical of her motives with the original *Roe v. Wade* trial. On the other hand, some anti-abortionists remain unconvinced that she ever had a “change of heart” due to her “deathbed confession.”⁴ Since the initial *Roe v. Wade* trial in 1973, many speculations have been made about Norma McCorvey. Some, such as Rob Schenck, believe that her conversion to Christianity was a planned out, paid for, political move while others, such as Bryan Kemper, outreach director of Priests for Life believe that she had a genuine crisis of faith.⁵

The conversion narrative is tricky to navigate because of McCorvey’s “deathbed confession” interview, released to the public in 2020. It raises the question of how much of either of the two written memoirs are genuine. Did she mean any of the words she wrote with Gary Thomas in *Won by Love*? Did she even write any of them? I am not sure if anyone ever got the full truth of McCorvey’s beliefs about abortion and the trial that bears her pseudonym. This thesis does not attempt to read McCorvey’s mind, but it instead explores her representation in both the pro- and anti-abortion communities and how her life was narrated by outside sources. Why and how she was used by both sides of the abortion argument is the essence of this research.

³ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 15.

⁴ *AKA Jane Roe*, directed by Nick Sweeney (Vice Studios, 2020), <https://www.hulu.com/watch/6800c3bd-ca58-4d8b-a8b7-5884652f2f93>.

⁵ Jonathon Van Maren, “Deathbed Apology: Norma McCorvey’s Pro-Life Friends Tell Another Story,” *Christianity Today* (May 22, 2020), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-web-only/norma-mccorvey-jane-roe-v-wade-friends-tell-story.html>.

Three primary sources have been used to examine Norma McCorvey's life. The documentary, *AKA Jane Roe* (2020) alongside McCorvey's two books, *I Am Roe*, published in 1994, and *Won by Love*, published in 1997 have provided insight into McCorvey's personal, political, and religious lives. *AKA Jane Roe* shows footage of McCorvey's life up until her death and includes interviews with figures associated with the trial. These included Andy Meisler, the co-writer of McCorvey's first book; Gloria Allred, an attorney who represented McCorvey as a pro-choice advocate in the 1980s and 1990s; Flip Benham, leader of Operation Rescue, a radical anti-abortion movement of the 1980s and 1990s; and Rob Schenck, former member of Operation Rescue.

Both written memoirs share anecdotes from McCorvey's early life, and they recount events that happened in the years leading up to the Supreme Court Trial. *Won by Love* focused on her conversion to Christianity, and the significance of the conversion is hinted at throughout the entirety of the book.⁶ While both books included some of the same facts from McCorvey's life, there are details in each that may have been left out in the other. By studying both of her books instead of just one, a more complete picture of McCorvey's life can be obtained. As with many published works, especially those that utilize ghost-writers, some pieces of these memoirs may not be entirely accurate. Some conversations have certainly been dramatized for ease of reading, and events have been made to seem bigger and more important than they might have been in the moment. *I Am Roe* was co-written with Andy Meisler and *Won by Love* was co-written with Gary Thomas. Andy Meisler wrote several books besides *I Am Roe*, including a few fan guides to the television show *The X-Files*, and a satirical parent's guide titled *What Not to Name*

⁶ McCorvey, and Thomas, *Won by Love*.

Your Baby. Gary Thomas is a pastor from Washington. He has published over twenty self-help, evangelical, and marriage-oriented books. When McCorvey decided to create each memoir, she made a calculated, conscious decision to hire surrogate writers to ensure that the books were engaging and interesting.

As a part of the documentary *AKA Jane Roe*, there were several interview clips of Norma McCorvey. Part of these interviews she referred to as her “deathbed confession.” With tattooed blue-green eyebrows and an oxygen tube in her nose, McCorvey said that her time as an anti-abortion advocate was completely paid for and scripted. She described how she skillfully acted out deep remorse for becoming the Jane Roe that the whole world knew. In the interviews, McCorvey did not seem particularly regretful, but there was a melancholy air about her.

Outside of McCorvey’s memoirs and documentary, articles and books were found to create a more complete image of her life. *A Question of Choice*, written by lawyer Sarah Weddington, is an account of the *Roe v. Wade* trial and the twenty years that had passed at the original time of publishing.⁷ Weddington sought out a mother-to-be in 1973 because she needed a pregnant person to be the face of the trial. Without a pregnant person who wanted an abortion, Weddington had no immediate reason to file a lawsuit. McCorvey filled that role for her.

The title of Weddington’s book suggests that she had her own choices to make regarding the trial and the political journey of abortion. In the tenth chapter of her book, titled “Words of Choice,” Weddington noted how she had numerous women tell her how

⁷ Sarah Weddington, *A Question of Choice*, (New York, NY: Feminist Press, 2013). The edition used in this thesis is the 40th anniversary publication.

much they appreciated the choices that *Roe v. Wade* provided them. Weddington was also adamant that although “Jane Roe’s inconsistencies may hurt the public perception of the case... they cannot hurt the case as a legal document, or the principles it represents.”⁸

Kevin McMunigal’s article in the *Hastings Law Journal*, aptly titled, “Of Causes and Clients: Two Tales of *Roe v. Wade*,” looked at both McCorvey’s (*I am Roe*) and Weddington’s (*A Question of Choice*) accounts of the trial.⁹ McMunigal explained how Weddington needed to find a client—a woman—who wanted to challenge the current abortion laws, but that she would need to be pregnant.¹⁰ That was where McCorvey became important. She became Jane Roe. McMunigal claimed that Sarah Weddington saw Jane Roe not as the singular person of Norma McCorvey, but as every woman in America who wanted legal access to abortions.¹¹ While Weddington’s supposed view certainly was not unwarranted, it did take some autonomy away from McCorvey, which she mentioned in her book, *I am Roe*.

Published in 2021, four years after Norma McCorvey died, journalist Joshua Prager’s *The Family Roe: An American Story*, provides yet another angle from which to view Norma McCorvey’s life. Prager spent ten years researching McCorvey. He went through personal documents and correspondences, spent time with McCorvey, and was even near when she passed in an assisted living home in 2017 at the age of sixty-nine. Because of Prager’s extensive research on and dedication to Norma McCorvey’s life story, *The Family Roe* is indispensable when analyzing McCorvey, her family, and her

⁸ Weddington, *A Question of Choice*, 274.

⁹ Kevin C. McMunigal, “Of Causes and Clients: Two Tales of *Roe v. Wade*,” *Hastings Law Journal* 47, no. 779 (March 1996): 779-819.

¹⁰ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 113.

¹¹ McMunigal, “Of Causes and Clients,” 802, 806, 814.

circumstances. Prager's research extended from unwanted pregnancies in McCorvey's ancestry all the way to her three daughters and where they ended up after being adopted.¹²

"The Evolution of The Right to Privacy After *Roe v. Wade*," found in the *American Journal of Law and Medicine*, detailed the background of abortion in the United States and focused on the legal and political sides of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court case. The article discussed state decisions regarding abortion and debates about the competing and overlapping religious, medical, and legal definitions of a person. Past abortion cases were examined alongside *Roe v. Wade* to compare the terms of cases and the legal and personal issues surrounding them. The article mentioned informed consent and that a woman who is contemplating having an abortion must be informed of alternative options and must give her consent freely and willingly.¹³

A newspaper article from 1974 titled "Abortion Decisions" highlighted problems found in the *Roe v. Wade* trial. Published just one year after the trial, the article gave a political opinion that differed greatly from the pro-abortion supporters. Journalist James K. Kilpatrick said that the ruling caused more problems and confusion than solutions. He discussed the issues of the right to privacy listed in the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. Kilpatrick declared that the ruling was unconstitutional and "the Court went far beyond its judicial duty to decide the cases of Jane Roe and Mary Doe." Kilpatrick

¹² Joshua Prager, *The Family Roe: An American Story*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2021).

¹³ Deborah Barnard, Susan Clement, Margaret Daley, Lori Goldstein, Lori B. Krauss, Duncan A. Maio, Steven Reske, et al. "The Evolution of The Right to Privacy After *Roe v. Wade*." *American Journal of Law & Medicine* 13, no. 2/3 (June 1987): 368-525.

stayed away from any theological or moral opinions surrounding the question of abortion, and instead claimed that the court case of *Roe v. Wade* as well as the case of *Doe v. Bolton* in GA were simply “plain bad law.”¹⁴

When examining Norma McCorvey’s life, one must take care not to rely on only one category of sources. It would have been temptingly easy to choose sources that are from the same school of thought, either pro- or anti-abortion, and construct a convincing description of how McCorvey lived her life. Since that has already been done on numerous occasions, this project aimed to look holistically at McCorvey’s upbringing, relationships, activities, and interactions to explore how her life’s narrative was controlled by those around her and how she attempted to recover her voice through memoirs and the documentary.

¹⁴ James K. Kilpatrick, “Abortion Decisions,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1974.

Chapter 1

I Am Roe was Norma McCorvey's attempt to reclaim the narrative of her complicated life. She wrote *I Am Roe*, along with Andy Meisler, to give the world a sense of who Jane Roe was outside of the courtroom. Jane Roe was more than a name. She had a story, and McCorvey tried to tell it through this book. Norma McCorvey's life was difficult and complicated. This much can be gathered from the court case *Roe v. Wade*. However, in McCorvey's first written memoir, these difficulties are spelled out in much greater detail than the public ever knew before. Her life followed patterns of abuse, abandonment, and addiction. Journalist Susan Cheever described McCorvey as "an angry shadow from the dark side of the American dream."¹⁵ When she was chosen to represent the case against anti-abortion laws, she was a young, under-educated bartender who cleaned houses for a living.

I Am Roe started off with a declaration from McCorvey where she defined herself as an individual separate from Jane Roe. McCorvey lived most of her life without a consistent home, friends, or family. *I Am Roe* was an instrument of necessity. McCorvey wrote, "I feel that I have to speak out" regardless of how painful and traumatizing her life was.¹⁶ In this book, she did not seem to hold much hatred towards her past and recognized that her pain had a purpose. The women she spoke with, comforted, and encouraged over the years grew and learned right alongside her. McCorvey noted the closeness she felt with these women, and introduced *I Am Roe* as "our story."¹⁷

¹⁵ Cheever, "An Accidental Symbol," 7.

¹⁶ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 1.

¹⁷ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 5.

McCorvey's early life was saturated with sadness, anger, and bitterness. Her mother consistently yelled and hit her, and her father's location was unreliable throughout her childhood. A *New York Times* book review of the memoir from 1994 noted that "Norma McCorvey has been more at the mercy of circumstances than many women."¹⁸ Being relocated every few years of her life created an unstable pattern of inconsistency for McCorvey. Her legal trouble began when she was ten years old. Along with a young female friend, she robbed the convenience store where she had been working, scammed her way into a hotel room, kissed her friend, and was sent to a Catholic boarding school as punishment. Here, McCorvey was introduced to the horrible world of non-consensual sex by a young nun. After yelling at a teacher, McCorvey was sent to the State School for Girls in Gainesville, Texas.¹⁹ This was an institution for so-called "delinquent" adolescent girls.

While in Gainesville, McCorvey continued to break rules on a regular basis. Upon her release from the school, her mother sent her to live with a distant relative. Here, McCorvey again experienced rape, this time accompanied with violence and repeated offenses. Thankfully, her mother got her out of the situation as soon as she found out what that man was doing to her. The brutality McCorvey went through in this time stayed with her throughout her life. She wrote that he appeared in nightmares and that "after a lifetime of being raped by this animal, a lot of me seemed to be gone."²⁰ McCorvey had to yet again figure out who she was regardless of the situation she was in. Her mother was of no more help, and McCorvey was once more on her own.

¹⁸ Cheever, "An Accidental Symbol," 7.

¹⁹ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 29.

²⁰ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 41.

McCorvey began working at a drive-up diner as a roller-skating waitress, where she met her soon-to-be husband and the father of her first daughter. From the moment he gave her his order for a “fur burger,” Woody McCorvey showed immense disrespect towards the then fifteen-year-old McCorvey.²¹ They soon began a sexual relationship, and a few months later were married. After moving around California for a time, McCorvey realized that she had gotten pregnant. Woody responded with violence.

McCorvey wrote that after a frightening encounter with Woody, she moved back to her mother’s house in Dallas, TX. She wrote about the extreme anger she felt towards her ex-husband: “I wanted to kill Woody... I wanted to kill him before he or any other person could hurt me again.”²² Through all this hatred, McCorvey found love for her unborn child, who was her “best friend in [her] fight for self-control.”²³

While McCorvey was in Dallas, she found company in the queer bars around town.²⁴ She connected with the older women and was welcomed by the gay men. They stayed by her side when she had her first daughter, Melissa Renee McCorvey. McCorvey’s ex-husband, Woody, came to the hospital the day after “Missy” was born, but was quickly ushered away, never to be seen or heard from again.²⁵

McCorvey’s mother “took care” of Missy in her own haphazard way. Her controlling behavior quickly got worse, and McCorvey said that she would take “Missy

²¹ “Furburger” is a crude term used to describe unshaven female genitals.

²² McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 59.

²³ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 60.

²⁴ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 64-65. Sue’s, a lesbian bar, was not advertised as such, but was an important place for women who loved women. Other gay bars were White Carriage, Left Bank, Gilded cage, and Numbers.

²⁵ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 67.

outside to hide from her, just like when I was a little girl myself.”²⁶ When McCorvey told her mother about her friends at the lesbian bars, and how she loved women, chaos ensued. Mary, McCorvey’s mother, replaced Missy with a plastic doll in her crib, accused Norma of abandonment, and took Missy to raise as her own child. However, *The Family Roe*, written by Joshua Prager, has a different account of how McCorvey lost Missy. A quote from Velma, McCorvey’s half-sister, gives insight: “Mary adopted her because McCorvey didn’t want her.”²⁷ McCorvey went back to her life as soon as she could after giving birth and was “aloof from Melissa.”²⁸ Norma McCorvey wrote in *I Am Roe*, “leaving Melissa with my mother was the worst thing I have ever done.”²⁹ McCorvey’s mother and her boyfriend, Raymond, became Melissa’s “parents” and moved her around the state frequently.

McCorvey turned back to Dallas’s gay bars to replace her non-existent family. This is when she acquired the nickname, “Pixie,” because she was small and moved quickly through the drunken crowd.³⁰ Through various events, including a job in an emergency room, a new girlfriend, and a male lover on the side, “Pixie” became pregnant with her second daughter. She gave this child away without laying eyes on her to give her “the chance in life she deserved.”³¹ Soon after this pregnancy, Norma McCorvey became heavily involved in drugs and her meager income came from selling them out of her apartment window.

²⁶ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 68.

²⁷ Prager, *The Family Roe*, 26.

²⁸ Prager, *The Family Roe*, 24.

²⁹ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 77.

³⁰ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 80.

³¹ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 86.

McCorvey soon met “Carl,”³² who would become the father of her last daughter. They spent their nights together competing in pool tournaments and drinking. After Carl disappeared, McCorvey moved in with her mother and four-year-old daughter, Melissa. Although she had gained a few years, McCorvey still did not get along with her mother: “To tell you how my mother and I got along in that trailer home would be to retell the whole story of our lives together.”³³

Norma McCorvey and Andy Meisler did not spare readers of *I Am Roe* the traumatic experiences that McCorvey went through. Because much of McCorvey's life had been taken over by *Roe v. Wade*, her first book served as a coping mechanism to process the hardships she had encountered in her early life.

In 1969, Norma McCorvey discovered she was pregnant yet again. At that time, McCorvey formally learned what an abortion was through hushed conversations with strangers. The prospect of “getting rid of it” sounded too good to be true.³⁴

Through her former gynecologic doctor, Norma McCorvey got in contact with lawyer Henry McCluskey in the hopes of obtaining an abortion. After assuring McCorvey that he was not able to help her directly get an abortion, McCluskey connected her to lawyers Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee. These women, fresh out of law school, were looking to challenge Texas abortion regulations. McCorvey fit their requirements of being pregnant and wanting an abortion, and the relationship between them seemed to be “solving [their] problem” more so than hers.³⁵ McCorvey wrote about her transition from

³² McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 92. Carl was later revealed to be William Kenneth Wheaton from Columbus, Ohio.

³³ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 96.

³⁴ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 104.

³⁵ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 113.

“pregnant street person” to plaintiff: “I became Jane Roe at a corner table at Columbo’s [restaurant]... in Dallas.”³⁶ She learned about the case that Weddington and Coffee had been building around their pregnant plaintiff and grew to expect an abortion to come out of it. McCorvey noted how these women were her “only chance for an abortion.”³⁷ As McCorvey became involved in the case, she learned that a pregnancy that resulted from non-consensual sex was sometimes easier to abort. In an effort to terminate her pregnancy, she told her first lie to a lawyer in late 1969:

“Were you raped?” [the lawyer] asked me... “Yes,” I lied. He stared at me. “What color was the man who raped you?” What kind of question was that? I thought. “Excuse me?” I said. “What color was the man who raped you?” Things were getting out of control. I felt dirty, ashamed, and angry. I shouldn’t have lied. Now he was punishing me. “I don’t know,” I said quickly. “It was too dark to tell.”³⁸

This encounter started a spiral of haphazard interviews and interrogations throughout McCorvey’s time as Roe.

McCorvey’s struggles with identity persisted through this pregnancy. Pessimistic thoughts of self-doubt chased her out of Dallas and into the “hippie” countryside. When, in her third trimester, she was told that it was too late for her to have an abortion, McCorvey realized that “this lawsuit was not really for [her].”³⁹ Just like her second daughter, McCorvey did not see her third child’s face before releasing her to her adopted family. Soon after, McCorvey drank herself into a suicide attempt with handfuls of pills and a bottle of Wild Turkey whiskey. When she woke up from her attempt, she felt as if

³⁶ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 117.

³⁷ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 122.

³⁸ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 109.

³⁹ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 127.

she had “failed as badly at ending [her] life as [she] had at everything else.”⁴⁰

McCorvey’s effort to end her life started a new era of change for her:

Looking back at my suicide attempt, I realize that this low point was really a turning point. Somewhere, pushed very deep down, the real reasons for continuing to live were already inside me. These reasons were, I think, that in my twisted, self-defeating way, I had a lot of pushed-down feelings of love to express that were struggling to get out. And that no matter how much of a failure I felt, I really did make some sort of difference in the world--with some people, somewhere.⁴¹

McCorvey remained anonymous for the rest of the 1970s. She kept up with the case through newspapers that she and her longtime partner, Connie Gonzalez, could sometimes afford. She began slowly sharing this secret part of her life with those around her and connected with pro-choice women because she “knew what it meant to want an abortion and not be able to have one.”⁴² The dichotomy between “Jane Roe” and Norma McCorvey persisted as her true identity became more widely known. McCorvey “...realized that she (Jane Roe) was a big part of me, and that I would probably never get rid of her.”⁴³

Sure enough, McCorvey received a letter from Sarah Weddington in 1984 asking for help.⁴⁴ Weddington asked McCorvey if she would go on television and share her identity as Jane Roe with the world. Anti-abortion groups were growing stronger and more organized by the minute. They advertised against women’s health clinics and used fear tactics to keep pregnant people away from abortion centers. The goal of publicizing Jane Roe’s “real” identity was to strengthen the pro-choice advocates’ voices. After a

⁴⁰ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 141.

⁴¹ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 142-43.

⁴² McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 150.

⁴³ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 156.

⁴⁴ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 165.

nerve-wracking interview with Channel 8 News, “Jane and Norma—but mostly Jane—inched out of the closet and into whatever part of the public imagination that was reserved for people like [her].”⁴⁵

Throughout the 1980s, Norma McCorvey shared bits of her story through interviews and even a movie with the same title as her case. She educated herself on women’s rights and began incorporating Jane Roe into her life, piece by piece. However, McCorvey’s general lack of decorum drove many to disrespect her. A *New York Times* review of *I Am Roe* noted, “there is nothing chic, hip or savvy about Norma McCorvey; she has been attacked by those who think abortion should be banned, and disowned by those who benefit from her courage.”⁴⁶ There were, of course, supporters of abortion rights who backed McCorvey’s involvement, but her adversaries made themselves known through violence. On April 4, 1989, an unknown person/persons drove by McCorvey and Gonzalez’s house in Dallas and fired a shotgun several times. Damage was done to their living room and car.

Just a few days after the shooting, Norma McCorvey attended a monumental pro-choice rally in Washington, D.C. Here, she met Gloria Allred, “a glamorous, smart, and fast-thinking attorney [who] represented all sorts of oppressed and victimized people.”⁴⁷ In the years following the 1989 rally, McCorvey cleaned up her public image and began mending ties with her mother and her first daughter, Melissa. She continued to settle the rift between Jane Roe and Norma McCorvey and used both unique parts of her to advance the pro-choice movement. Whether it was to gain pro-choice awareness or tell a

⁴⁵ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 173.

⁴⁶ Cheever, “An Accidental Symbol,” 7.

⁴⁷ McCorvey and Meisler, *I am Roe*, 196.

poor woman's story, *I Am Roe* certainly gained attention for McCorvey. Through publishing this memoir-style book, she was able to start regaining control of her life's narrative.

Chapter 2

Just three years after *I Am Roe* was published, the newly re-born McCorvey placed a second memoir on the shelves to tell of how she was saved by Jesus and “won by love.” *Won By Love* came into existence to rebrand McCorvey. When she became affiliated with Operation Rescue, she felt obligated to tell the world of her so-called transformation. *Won by Love*, co-authored by Gary Thomas, summarizes McCorvey’s life since *I Am Roe*. This story of redemption ushered attention towards Operation Rescue and the anti-abortion movement.

The book’s narrative begins on March 31, 1995. At this time, McCorvey was working at A Choice for Women, an abortion clinic in Dallas, Texas. A radical anti-abortion group, Operation Rescue, began leasing office space in the same building as the women’s clinic. This caused turmoil for McCorvey as the “O.R. Terrorists” could demolish the clinic’s clientele.⁴⁸ Flip Benham, a prominent leader of Operation Rescue, is portrayed as a bold, yet kind character in *Won by Love*. McCorvey mentions that the first time she saw Benham “was when he crowded into a book signing and shouted at me that I should be ashamed of myself for causing the deaths of thirty-five million children.”⁴⁹ From that very first meeting, Benham approached McCorvey with an attitude of superiority. However, regardless of the previous shouting matches between the two, in 1995, their conversations remained mostly amicable. McCorvey admired the dedication that the anti-abortion groups had to the cause as “these people were willing to *go to jail* to stop [abortion]. I never met a pro-choice group with that kind of commitment.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 3.

⁴⁹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 4.

⁵⁰ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 9.

McCorvey claimed in *Won by Love* that she “was never very comfortable with the act of abortion itself.”⁵¹ Although she desired one during her third pregnancy, McCorvey never had an abortion. Being Jane Roe, the face of abortion, and not being able to fully relate to the women that walked into her clinic wore on McCorvey.

Her struggle with identity continued as she and Connie Gonzalez (her long-term partner) traveled to Washington, D.C. for a pro-choice rally in April of 1989. Among the celebrities and skilled public speakers, McCorvey had a “difficult time fitting in.”⁵² At the rally, she met Gloria Allred, a civil rights attorney from Los Angeles.⁵³ Gloria immediately was kind and helpful towards McCorvey and made sure that people respected her for being Jane Roe. Lawyer Sarah Weddington, who was also at the 1989 rally, ignored McCorvey and brushed her off like she had been doing for the last twenty years since *Roe v. Wade*.

Soon after the rally, McCorvey traveled to California for some “R & R” with Gloria Allred.⁵⁴ During this trip, McCorvey revealed her identity as Jane Roe at a press conference with a speech that was written for her by Allred’s secretary. Although Gloria Allred treated McCorvey well, it is possible that even she was using McCorvey as a “useful figurehead when the camera lights were on.”⁵⁵

McCorvey’s signature was used in the *Roe v. Wade* trial, her name was used in campaigns and clinics, and her reputation was spat on by her nearest neighbors. Her pregnant body was used and then discarded by Sarah Weddington during the trial.

⁵¹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 15.

⁵² McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 18.

⁵³ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 21.

⁵⁴ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 23.

⁵⁵ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 27.

McCorvey recounted how neither side of the abortion argument fully supported her: “though the pro-lifers saw me as their nemesis, the one responsible for killing all the babies, those on “my side” looked at me as nothing but an inconvenient nuisance, a woman who had to be tolerated.”⁵⁶ Through this opposition, Norma McCorvey began trying to understand her trial and the inner workings of abortion more clearly. The actual details of how abortions are performed were off-putting to McCorvey, and word “soon spread around the [pro-]abortion world that Norma McCorvey was nothing but trouble.”⁵⁷ With Gloria Allred’s help, McCorvey combatted the gossip of her weakness and began to “speak out.”⁵⁸

When she returned to Dallas in the early 1990s, her job changed from housekeeper to abortion clinic receptionist. McCorvey wrote that when she started work in her first clinic, “abortion [became] my life.”⁵⁹ Throughout this time, McCorvey claimed that she thought abortion was wrong, and knew that her “identity as Jane Roe was nothing to be proud of.”⁶⁰

Won by Love described McCorvey’s time in abortion clinics as “inherently dehumanizing.”⁶¹ A walkthrough of a “basic” abortion procedure, not sparing many uncomfortable details, was included in the book. McCorvey recounted an abortion where the mother “saw the baby’s hand as the doctor took it out,” and added how she despised handling the “tissue” after procedures.⁶² When the environment became too much to

⁵⁶ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 27.

⁵⁷ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 32.

⁵⁸ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 34.

⁵⁹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 42.

⁶⁰ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 21, 47.

⁶¹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 4, 54.

⁶² McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 60, 61.

handle, as was often the case, McCorvey reminded herself who she was: “*You’re hardcore, I told myself. You’re Jane Roe. You can handle a couple of plastic bags full of tissue.*”⁶³

After this emotional exchange between McCorvey and herself, *Won by Love* abruptly changed topics and began explaining how Operation Rescue came to lease the office space next to A Choice for Women and the struggles that accompanied that move. Between Operation Rescue employees approaching clinic patients, and Norma McCorvey screaming at them to leave her patients alone, their business complex in Dallas was never dull. McCorvey noted that “...traveling to A Choice for Women and the new offices of Operation Rescue was more than a daily occurrence for the average police officer.”⁶⁴ McCorvey began learning how to use her explosive anger to her advantage, but to say she had control over it may be an overstatement: “Over the years, I had learned that my temper could be a potent weapon. People melted in the face of it.”⁶⁵

With the members of Operation Rescue, McCorvey encountered a new type of foe. These protestors responded to her insults with smiles of love. McCorvey recounted that she “threw out every expletive [she] could imagine, and the Rescue people threw back affirmations.”⁶⁶ With the long-seated hatred McCorvey held towards the pro-lifers, the attitudes of Operation Rescue members confused her.⁶⁷ She declared that although her new neighbors aggravated her, she knew her life “was not in danger.”⁶⁸

⁶³ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 62.

⁶⁴ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 69.

⁶⁵ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 70.

⁶⁶ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 77.

⁶⁷ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 79.

⁶⁸ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 82.

Outside the abortion clinic, a usually child-less scene, Ronda Mackey's two young daughters (Emily, and Chelsey) made their playground. Mackey was a member of Operation Rescue, and a firm Christian. Her two girls loved "Miss Norma" and quickly became her buddies at the clinic. The girls knew what McCorvey's job consisted of, yet they showed her their eager affection through letters and coloring pages.⁶⁹ Ronda raised her daughters to show kindness and compassion in a traditionally Christian way. The narrative in *Won by Love* portrays McCorvey as being swayed by their caring ways: "it was this child's love and interest that began to melt my heart. Soon this love would constitute an all-out assault."⁷⁰

The daily employees and volunteers at Operation Rescue may have begun to break the ice with Jane Roe, but the anti-abortion protestors that came on the weekends stirred up immense anger inside of her. Signs, bumper stickers, and posters advertised their Biblical beliefs on abortion and life. When McCorvey began arguments with the demonstrators, they responded with "Jesus loves you" and "I forgive you."⁷¹

In April 1995, Operation Rescue's protests caught up with them. Planned Parenthood sued Operation Rescue under the new Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances

⁶⁹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 101-2.

⁷⁰ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 107.

⁷¹ McCorvey, and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 109.

(FACE) Act of 1994 for 1.2 million dollars.⁷² Planned Parenthood took everything from Operation Rescue, but they soon gained donations and new equipment to continue reaching out to pregnant people. At a press conference centered around the lawsuit, a Planned Parenthood employee supposedly told McCorvey that she would become the focus if she did not leave and “we don’t want that.”⁷³ McCorvey grew almost protective of Operation Rescue and its members. She was fine with yelling and cussing at the employees all day long, “but nobody else was going to do it.”⁷⁴

Along with the fighting, McCorvey began talking more frequently with Flip Benham, director of Operation Rescue. News outlets saw them sitting together and began writing narratives about their...friendship. McCorvey’s connection to Benham along with the fact that she had not had an abortion sometimes invalidated her role in the pro-choice community. McCorvey’s response to these remarks was, “I’m Jane Roe, I have every right to work anywhere I want to.”⁷⁵ As McCorvey and Benham grew closer, they began to share more personal details with each other. McCorvey wrote in *Won By Love*, “I didn’t understand why Flip was telling me the stories about his past-especially the ones

⁷² The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994 (FACE) makes it a federal crime to physically obstruct the entrance to a clinic or to use force, the threat of force, or physical obstruction, such as a sit-in, to interfere with, injure, or intimidate clinic workers or women seeking abortions or other reproductive health services. The Act also allows for civil restitution if the defendant is engaging in what is defined under the Act as criminal conduct. For further details, see Susan Gluck Mezey, “Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994 (1994),” Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University (January 15, 2024), <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/freedom-of-access-to-clinic-entrances-act-of-1994/>.

⁷³ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 116.

⁷⁴ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 119.

⁷⁵ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 126.

that made him look less than perfect, like encouraging his wife to get an abortion and staying out all night to drink.”⁷⁶

McCorvey’s supposed conversion was influenced not only by the actions of the members of Operation Rescue, but also by a supposed “spiritual presence.”⁷⁷ McCorvey and Gonzalez both supposedly heard baby-like sounds where baby-like sounds should not be. Late one night, Gonzalez heard “a baby running down the hallway,” and McCorvey heard a child’s laughter echo from flowers outside of the clinic on more than one occasion.⁷⁸ These happenings began to affect McCorvey, and she showed it in her clinic conversations. She crudely told women when the clinic was open for “killing little baby boys and girls,” and began telling them that aborted material was indeed a human child.⁷⁹ The abortion doctor was furious with McCorvey for driving away customers. McCorvey said to him, “Give me a raise, and I’ll bring ‘em all back... I’ll make it right.”⁸⁰ As she observed upon reflection, “[her] conscience was pricked, but [she] could still be bought.”⁸¹ When it was clear that her pay would not be increasing, McCorvey began referring potential clients next door to Operation Rescue.⁸² McCorvey claims that abortion was “personalized” for her when she pictured young Emily Mackey as a small, aborted fetus: “I no longer saw abortion as a convenient way of dealing with “products of conception” or “missed periods” ... it was all my fault.”⁸³

⁷⁶ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 138.

⁷⁷ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 142.

⁷⁸ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 143-44.

⁷⁹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 148.

⁸⁰ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 150.

⁸¹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 150.

⁸² McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 150.

⁸³ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 154.

Soon after this revelation, McCorvey timidly attended a Saturday evening church service with Ronda Mackey and her family. The pages in *Won by Love* say that the congregation had been praying for McCorvey before the service. At the end of that summer night in 1995, Norma McCorvey found herself at the altar, ready to “meet Jesus.”⁸⁴ She recalled an “almost instant peace” with the “release of her sins”: “Now, after I had been forgiven, Jane Roe was irrelevant. The woman [Jesus] loved--the woman He saved--was Norma Leah McCorvey.”⁸⁵

This shifted identity meant that she could no longer work at A Choice for Women. Gonzalez encouraged McCorvey to quit right away and move across the sidewalk to Operation Rescue. Following McCorvey’s move from A Choice for Women to Operation Rescue, six other clinic workers joined her on the anti-abortion side.⁸⁶ McCorvey’s salvation may have occurred in a single night, but her old mindsets and ways were not quick to change: “I had plenty to get used to. My past was inextricably tied up with *Roe v. Wade* and my identity was built largely around my role as the plaintiff.”⁸⁷ The members of Operation Rescue welcomed McCorvey into their group. McCorvey said they did not “expect me to become a different person,” but from reading the narrative that she and Gary Thomas constructed, it is clear that changes were required for her position in this new family to be secure.⁸⁸

Although McCorvey wrote of “absolute honesty” between her and Ronda Mackey, the idea of using McCorvey “to get a big story” floated around in Operation

⁸⁴ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 159.

⁸⁵ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 160-62.

⁸⁶ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 210.

⁸⁷ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 164.

⁸⁸ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 167.

Rescue's possibilities.⁸⁹ They certainly had the opportunity to create an icon out of her, contrasting with *Roe v. Wade*'s creation of an "accidental symbol."⁹⁰ On August 8, 1995, Norma McCorvey was baptized by Flip Benham. This extremely personal decision was made public through news corporations and reporters. McCorvey was upset that her baptism had turned into a public affair. She said, "I still didn't like it, but when I looked at Flip, I knew I was going to do it. 'We've invited an awful lot of people, Miss Norma,' he said gently."⁹¹ McCorvey noted "just how public such decisions become when the former Jane Roe made them."⁹² The general media was not pleased with McCorvey's "publicity stunt." McCorvey denied any claims that her conversion to Christianity was for attention and said, "There will not be any exploitation of my political status. I've already been exploited enough to last a lifetime."⁹³

⁸⁹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 172.

⁹⁰ McMunigal, "An Accidental Symbol," 779.

⁹¹ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 173.

⁹² McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 179.

⁹³ McCorvey and Thomas, *Won by Love*, 184, 193.

Chapter 3

Beginning in 2016, Norma McCorvey began contributing to a feature documentary directed by Nick Sweeney. This documentary, titled *AKA Jane Roe*, showed McCorvey's life from when she signed the *Roe v. Wade* affidavit in 1970 to her deathbed in February of 2017. McCorvey candidly shared stories and details of her time both as a pro-choice advocate and an anti-abortion spokesperson. An article from *The Economist* noted, "Though the director, Nick Sweeney, is occasionally heard asking a question, there is no overarching narration—a fitting treatment of a woman whose story has been commandeered by so many for their own purposes."⁹⁴ The "deathbed confession" of (in her own words) "the most famous cleaning woman in America" shocked the public as well as those who had worked closely with her in the past.⁹⁵

Although certainly a telling of an intense story, *AKA Jane Roe* seemed truly to attempt to figure out Norma McCorvey's genuine opinions on what happened to her. Her "deathbed confession" was shown to each of the individuals interviewed for the documentary.⁹⁶ Rob Schenck, a former member of Operation Rescue, confessed to knowing how the organization used her to further their cause in the years after her advertised conversion to Christianity and televised baptism. While Flip Benham denied ever paying McCorvey or telling her what to say, Schenck expressed remorse over

⁹⁴ "A New Documentary Looks at how Roe v Wade Affected Norma McCorvey: Pro-Choice v Pro-Life," *The Economist (Online)*, May 26, 2020, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/new-documentary-looks-at-how-roe-v-wade-affected/docview/2406671605/se-2>.

⁹⁵ Norma McCorvey, *AKA Jane Roe*.

⁹⁶ *AKA Jane Roe*.

“playing her.”⁹⁷ He also noted that “her whole life was an attempt to tell her real story... That never really happened.”⁹⁸

Norma McCorvey’s identity was influenced by her many jobs and acquaintances, but it was perhaps most influenced by abuse. With her mother being her long-term abuser, McCorvey entered the world in a hostile environment. She encountered violence from family, rudeness from doctors, abandonment from men, and lies from everyone. McCorvey fell into a pattern of victim-ness. Because of the cruelty she suffered, the faults of her life were placed in those around her. By casting blame upon the abusers in her life, McCorvey absolved herself of responsibility for the hardships she endured both in her youth and in her later years.

In the documentary, Andy Meisler, co-author of *I Am Roe*, gave viewers insight into McCorvey’s early relationships, including her first homoerotic encounter before her teenage years.⁹⁹ While remembering her punishment of boarding school after being caught with her female friend, McCorvey said, “I was sentenced at ten years old, and I resented that.” This was the first source of power outside of her family that enforced subjugating principles onto McCorvey.

She would continue to be bound by rules as a pro-abortion advocate and would even be required to erase parts of herself when she joined the anti-abortionists. The pro-abortion groups wanted McCorvey to be professional, educated, and good with the press. The anti-abortion activists wanted McCorvey to be straight, not queer.

⁹⁷ Rob Schenck, *AKA Jane Roe*.

⁹⁸ Rob Schenck, *AKA Jane Roe*.

⁹⁹ Andy Meisler, *AKA Jane Roe*.

Abuse counselor and pro-choice advocate, Charlotte Taft, contributed several interviews to the documentary. Taft said, “being friends with Norma was... complicated.”¹⁰⁰ McCorvey was not a quiet, meek southern lady but was instead a rowdy, spontaneous Texas firecracker. Because she was unwanted from the start of her life, McCorvey craved attention in any way she could get it.¹⁰¹ In *AKA Jane Roe*, McCorvey shares that her priority was always her own “ass.”¹⁰² Monica Hesse from *The Washington Post* writes, “the activists on both sides who knew her found her charming — and found her maddening. [McCorvey] always needed money... At times, she seemed to be exactly what their movements needed. At times, she seemed hellbent on complicating an issue that they found to be absolutely simple and clear.”¹⁰³

Norma McCorvey’s “simple issue” was not the matter of abortion legality, but was that of bills, alcohol, and safety. Evidenced by her extensive job history, McCorvey went where the money was. From fast food joints to bars to drug deals and finally to political activism, she followed the paychecks. As a housekeeper, she was used to dirty, underappreciated jobs. When she started gaining notice in politics and women’s rights, she realized that there were cleaner ways to turn a profit. McCorvey’s relationship with Operation Rescue as well as her publications of her two written memoirs kept her from making beds and scrubbing floors. Contrary to his interview in *AKA Jane Roe*, “Flip

¹⁰⁰ Charlotte Taft, *AKA Jane Roe*.

¹⁰¹ Norma McCorvey, *AKA Jane Roe*.

¹⁰² Norma McCorvey, *AKA Jane Roe*.

¹⁰³ Monica Hesse, “‘Jane Roe,’ from *Roe v. Wade*, made a Stunning Deathbed Confession. Now what?: The Plaintiff, Norma McCorvey, Said She Joined the Pro-Life Movement for the Pay, Not the Principle,” Washington, D.C., United States Washington, D.C.: WP Company LLC d/b/a *The Washington Post* (2020), <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/jane-roe-v-wade-made-stunning-deathbed-confession/docview/2404993792/se-2>.

Benham, once national director of Operation Rescue, [told] Prager he gave money to McCorvey and Gonzalez and helped work out an \$80,000 deal for McCorvey's second book, *Won by Love*.¹⁰⁴ The ties that money created between McCorvey and Benham were not soon severed. He had a fascination with telling his version of her story even after she passed.

AKA Jane Roe was Norma McCorvey's final publicity stunt. The documentary served as a platform for her to represent herself after representing political agencies for so many years. Operation Rescue was more than just a workplace for anti-abortion sympathizers. It was a lifestyle. Flip Benham, Ronda Mackey, and others pulled McCorvey into their herd and locked the gate behind them. She was not only expected to change her political ideologies, but to conform to their radical evangelical Christian beliefs. Even at her funeral, Flip promoted his own view of McCorvey.

Rob Schenck reflected on McCorvey's funeral service, "I was quietly hoping that this would end up a kind of intimate affair where we would really reflect honestly, candidly about the woman we knew as Norma McCorvey... Norma's funeral was the last public event where she was exploited as a trophy for the movement."¹⁰⁵ Her oldest daughter, Melissa mentioned that her mother had taken part in creating the documentary "to show who she was in the end and as a person – just Norma."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ \$80,000 given to McCorvey and Gonzalez. *Vanity Fair*, (January 3, 2013), <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2013/01/commoditization-norma-mccorvey-jane-roe-wade>.

¹⁰⁵ Rob Schenck, *AKA Jane Roe*.

¹⁰⁶ Melissa Mills, *AKA Jane Roe*.

Conclusion

“The most famous cleaning woman in America” gained the attention of the world.¹⁰⁷ She was lied to, coerced, and used by almost everyone in her life, and according to Rob Schenck, McCorvey dabbled in a bit of manipulation herself. In *AKA Jane Roe*, Schenck ponders if McCorvey knew “what we [Operation Rescue] were doing... Is she playing us?... Because I know damn well we’re playing her.”¹⁰⁸

One of the only stable, consistently kind people in McCorvey’s community was her long-term partner, Connie Gonzalez. She gave McCorvey a job and companionship when she had been abandoned by most everyone else in her life. Gonzalez stayed by McCorvey’s side even through her conversion to Christianity and they continued living together for ten years after. Gonzalez reflected on their relationship after Flip Benham got involved: “there’s nothing wrong with either one of us, it’s just that we choose to be that way. Norma chooses to be that way.”¹⁰⁹

Every choice that Norma McCorvey made stayed with her for every year that followed. The rollercoaster of political and emotional unrest began with her involvement with Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee. McCorvey’s “coming out” as Jane Roe started a wave of judgement and confusion from public voices. Her “salvation” with Operation Rescue and Flip Benham started a theatrical transformation of a simple Texas girl. Finally, McCorvey’s decision to contribute to *AKA Jane Roe* began a new era of questions about her life, her actions, and her beliefs.

¹⁰⁷ Norma McCorvey, *AKA Jane Roe*.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Schenck, *AKA Jane Roe*.

¹⁰⁹ Connie Gonzalez, *AKA Jane Roe*.

Thousands of news articles and speculative journals have been written about Norma McCorvey's life, and her pseudonym has been a divisive tool in American politics since it was first introduced in 1973. By publishing *I Am Roe* and *Won by Love*, McCorvey was able to take back some control over how her story was being told. Legal scholar, Kevin McMunigal commented in an article that "participant accounts such as [*I Am Roe*] have their strengths and their limitations. The accuracy of any witness's account of an event depends on the reliability of the witness's perception, memory, and narration of the event."¹¹⁰ Because McCorvey experienced her life firsthand, her accounts of it should be fairly accurate, however her own biases and emotions must be considered when inspecting each anecdote.

By utilizing contrasting sources, a more complete and complex narrative of McCorvey's life can be found. One must be cautious to not impose a political or religious ideal onto McCorvey, but instead remember her as a unique individual with intricate beliefs and opinions. Especially since she has passed on from this world, McCorvey's autonomy should be respected and sustained. Norma McCorvey's story was her own to tell, and she told it in the best ways she knew how to.

¹¹⁰ McMunigal, "Of Causes and Clients," 781.

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