

On the Passing of an Icon, Norma McCorvey

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Norma McCorvey died at the age of 69. Saturday, February 25, she was laid to rest in Katy, Texas. (<http://www.tributes.com/obituary/show/Norma-Leah-McCorvey-104498390>)

Norma is truly an icon of our time. If you don't immediately recognize her name, you may know her better as Jane Roe, the plaintiff in the most far-reaching, and well-known court case in America. Roe v. Wade is a shibboleth of our time. For 44 years, it has been the dark star around which our world devolves.

The gravitational pull of Roe vs. Wade exerts its power on almost everything in our culture. The practice of medicine, the polarizing of a people, the definition of human personhood, the exercise of free speech, the concept of human rights, the natural bond between father and child, the legal protections for a child in the womb, and for her pregnant mother, the notion of privacy, tax policy, US foreign aid, and the entire trajectory of party politics... all of these have been stretched and distorted by a force-field centered on Norma McCorvey.

But here's a curious fact found in her obituary: Her funeral was officiated by Father Frank Povone. Yes, the National Director of Priests for Life led the congregation in a funeral for Jane Roe. Hers is a tale that must be told.

As an icon of our times, Norma McCorvey is not a still photograph from 1973. She is a moving picture, the story of a life unfolding. We do a grave disservice to her, or anyone, if we judge their entire story from a momentary photograph.

Norma Nelson's story begins in a troubled home. A violently alcoholic mother and sexual abuse by a relative led to reform school from the time she was 11. Her parents divorced when she was 13. She dropped out of High School at 15, ran away from home, and married Elwood McCorvey when she was 16.

That marriage dissolved while she was still pregnant with their first child, Melissa, who was signed over to her mother. A second child came by another father who raised the child without contact from Norma. Then, in 1969, a third child was conceived by yet another man.

Norma asked her doctor to put her in touch with an attorney to help her give the child up for adoption. Instead, he referred her to Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee, two young lawyers looking for a vulnerable pregnant woman who would help them make history.

Her attorneys met with her three or four times. First, over a pitcher of beer, they convinced her to be the plaintiff in a case they were preparing. The last time, she signed an affidavit without reading it. It claimed that she had been gang raped and that she wanted an abortion. Both were lies.

That was the last time they ever met. They never helped her with an adoption. They didn't offer her help for her drug and alcohol abuse, or help her get housing (she was living in a park). They had what they wanted: her signature on a piece of paper. It was their ticket to fame and the advancement of their cause.

It was March 17, 1970 and she was back on her own. That same year she gave birth to her third child and offered her up for adoption. That's right. Norma McCorvey, the icon of abortion rights, never had an abortion. At the time she signed the affidavit, she didn't even know exactly what it was.

Almost three years later, on January 22, 1973, she read the headlines about how Roe vs. Wade swept away nearly every state law concerning abortion. She had been unaware that her case ever went any farther after signing the affidavit.

Aside from the affidavit, there is no record at all in the case of Roe vs. Wade. There was no written discovery, no interrogatories, no document requests, no depositions, and no expert reports. Norma McCorvey never appeared in court. She was never notified of her case's progress, or consulted for her wishes or strategic input.

Had she ever been asked a single question under oath, her case would have been dismissed before it ever got out of Dallas. But, as incredible as it may seem, her case percolated through the judicial machinery of Texas, District courts, Appeal Courts, and finally the Supreme court of the United States without either her participation or her knowledge.

At first she remained the anonymous Jane Roe. But soon she decided to cash in on her fame. By publicly identifying herself as Jane Roe, she became employable in any abortion clinic she wanted, and was the darling of pro-abortion rallies.

But her work in abortion clinics revealed to her what abortion actually was. After about a decade, she began to tell her story of being a pawn in the abortion-legalizing game. After two decades, she began to regret the legalization of abortion itself.

It was a little girl by the name of Emily who touched her heart with love and hope. Her mother worked next door to Norma's abortion clinic. In 1995 Emily started visiting her regularly. It was her innocence, acceptance and love that broke through years of hurt and self-defense.

One day Norma accepted Emily's invitation to come with her to church. Her experience of forgiveness was so powerful that her life took a 180 degree turn. Baptized by Rev. Flip Benton, the director of Operation Rescue, she left behind decades of abortion advocacy.

By 1997 she was received into the Roman Catholic church and spent the rest of her life trying to reverse the case that bore her name. On March 2, 2000, thirty years after she signed the unread affidavit prepared by Sarah Weddington, Norma filed an affidavit of her own. It can be read at: <http://www.epm.org/resources/2000/Mar/2/truth-about-roe-v-wade-according-jane-roe-norma-mc/>

This affidavit was her opening statement in a legal battle to overturn Roe vs. Wade. After spending her final two decades speaking at pro-life rallies, testifying before the U.S. Senate, and trying unsuccessfully to correct the record, she now rests in peace.

Hers is a story that you should know. It encompasses much that is wrong with our culture. But it also encompasses much that can make it right again. It begins in a childhood that should not be wished upon anyone. It extends into a life out of control and searching for meaning. It ends in the hope of redemption and new meaning and peace.

Rest in peace, Norma. Your moving icon shows us all that redemption is never an empty hope.