

EXCERPTS FROM THE STORY OF JANE by LAURA KAPLAN

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Instructions:

1. This is a dramatic reading, please act out the words as if you were one of the Janes who was pioneering abortion access in the 1960s.
2. In the subject line please write “your name - Janes”
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4. At the top of the recording state your full name.
5. Please let us know if you would like to be credited at the end of the episode. If you would not like your name credited in the episode please let us know. If you would like to use an alias please use that name instead of your actual name.
6. Read any and all passages below that you feel you can relate to. You do not have to read all 15.
7. Please read the number that precedes each passage, and read the passage entirely.
8. Please email us only the best takes of each passage, not multiple versions.
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Thank you!

-Team AFP

1 - Abortion was so hidden; the word itself had a seamy, negative connotation that might alienate women from women's liberation.

2 - It was me, my existence as a woman, that left me vulnerable to this terrible oppression.

3 - One incident that summer clarified my thinking about government institutions as a force for social change. Late one night, while I was working at a Freedom Center, someone phoned threatening to bomb the building. The volunteers called the Justice Department for help but were ignored. All night we lay on the rough wood floor, terrified, out of range of any possible gunfire. I learned a valuable lesson: We can't rely on the government; we can only rely on each other. But that summer taught me something else too: ordinary people, acting together, can change history.

4 - Each woman I met with felt isolated and frightened; each one was wrestling with guilt and self-blame. Often women apologized and cried while expressing gratitude for my help. To lessen the heightened emotions of the situation, I tried to be supportive and, at the same time, businesslike: This is a matter of fact. This is what happens; this may hurt a little. I wanted to create an emotional detachment so that, in addition to the social and psychological horrors being inflicted on them, and the medical uncertainty, they wouldn't feel there was an additional moral trip being done on them. Some came nearly suicidal. The key for me was to learn to empathize with their feelings but not become so overwhelmed by the grief and the tragedy that I was immobilized.

5 - To protect the doctor's identity we blindfolded the women, but only during the operation.

6 - I was looking for someplace that was my place. It was like I was waiting for the women's movement to come around so I'd have something to participate in. That was my life.

7 - Women were valued for their ability to attract men, encouraged to be sexy, and then damned for being sexual. They were stuck between two opposites: the Madonna or the whore--neither of them of their own creation.

Women had a right to be sexual beings, to sexual pleasure. They had to free themselves from those oppressive definitions. They had to gain control of their lives and they could not control their lives without having control over their bodies.

If they did not have the right to regulate this basic biological function, their reproductive ability, what chance did women have to control any aspect of their lives?

8 - Abortion was viewed as a medical problem, not as a women's rights problem. In this scenario, women were passive victims of either a drug--thalidomide--or a disease--rubella--rather than active determiners of their lives who had a right to control their bodies.

They called for "therapeutic" abortions if two doctors agreed that continuing the pregnancy would gravely impair the mother's physical or mental health; if the fetus was seriously damaged; or if the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest.

This formula again relegated women to a passive role. Doctors determined whether a woman deserved an abortion.

9 - Population control groups, with an ominous eugenics-slant, joined the ranks of those lobbying for reform. They raised the specter of a dangerous global population explosion among the poor. In that view, women were again, as in the medical model, the objects, not the subjects, of the abortion debate. Since their arguments supported the power of professionals to determine what was best for women, abortion was potentially a weapon used against women, rather than a tool for women's liberation.

10 - The same society that glamorizes women as sex objects, and teaches them from early childhood to please and satisfy men, views pregnancy and childbirth as punishment for her "immoral" or careless sexual activity... especially if the woman is uneducated, poor or black.

Only women can bring about their own liberation. It is time for women to get together... to aid their sisters and make the state provide free abortions as a human right.

We are for every woman having exactly as many children as she wants, when she wants, if she wants.

11 - Once a woman arrived for her counseling session, the first step was to ascertain whether the person was absolutely sure she wanted an abortion. If she was at all conflicted, she was encouraged to go home and think about it.

Once that was established, a description of the abortion followed, not just the technical/medical part, but, based on what they knew of each doctor's method of operating, how the entire day would proceed, the phone calls, the contact with the doctor's people. The intent was to lessen the fear through giving detailed information, to make the unknown known.

12 - The most difficult task was to counteract the guilt and self-blame that women carried. Even if there was no way they could afford or care for a child, they still internalized society's judgments that women who sought abortions were selfish, immoral, denying their female duty, and stupid or careless for getting pregnant.

Black women, as usual, were under a double bind. They were not only burdened with society's attitudes, but also, by the criticism of black nationalists who identified abortion with genocide. Within those circles, any woman seeking an abortion was considered a traitor to her race. It was the counselor's job to try to lift the guilt, validate each woman's decision, and put the entire experience in the context of women's liberation.

13 - You wouldn't be in this situation if you weren't being exploited. Facing this situation is one of the ways you are oppressed and, in this case, oppression is really physical.

14 - Look, we're a powerful organization and we've got a lot of business. If you want a piece of the action you're going to have to do some things our way, rather than your way.

15 - We wanted women to go in there with a feeling of power, knowing they were backed by an organization, knowing they could voice complaints and make demands, knowing they had the right to be treated fairly. It gave women more strength and made them feel like they were part of the organization, too.
