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# Texas made it hard to have my abortion. With Roe at stake, I'm going home to expand access.

Sarah Valliere, Opinion contributor Published 3:15 a.m. ET Jan. 22, 2019

*I owe my freedom and medical career to that abortion. So I'm going home to help give the women of Texas the same shot at their own futures.*

That's the fourth test, my best friend told me in a calm, but stern voice. I was pregnant.

I sat in shock on the toilet seat, staring at all four positive pregnancy tests. How could this be? Taking birth control pills made me feel invincible; there was no way I could be pregnant.

I was 17 years old and in a state of pure instability. With siblings away at college, no longer speaking to my father, and knowing my mother was processing the messy divorce that tore our family apart — I felt alone, lost and with nowhere to turn.

My family physician confirmed what I thought was the impossible. With distinct disappointment in his voice, he handed me pamphlets on prenatal care and adoption at which I stared blankly; neither of these options fits with my life plans.

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I was a proud Texan with dreams that now felt impossible to obtain. I immediately went to my best friend's house who knew of another option — one that my physician withheld from me: abortion. It was freeing to learn that abortion was not only an option, but it was my option. I searched “where to have an abortion in Texas” online and found a Planned Parenthood located 30 miles away in Dallas.

It was 2005, which means abortion had been legal nationally for 32 years, but for me, it seemed nearly impossible to access, regardless of whether it was legal or not.

## One roadblock to access after another

It took weeks to get an appointment; there were so many other people who needed this safe, legal health care. Once my initial appointment was scheduled, because of laws in place, I needed to get [parental consent \(https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2013-06-28/chipping-away-a-texas-abortion-rights-timeline/\)](https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2013-06-28/chipping-away-a-texas-abortion-rights-timeline/). This was a huge roadblock — my mom was against abortion, just like the rest of my family. I dialed my mother's number with shaky hands and fumbled through my confession. Her response left my mouth hanging open: “Sarah, this would never be my choice. But this is your choice. And I'll be right by your side. You're my daughter and I love you, no matter what.”

No matter what.



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Pro-choice supporters outside the Supreme Court in June 2016. (Photo: Michael Reynolds, epa)

This was my mantra as I showed up to my first appointment, alone. Texas law required (<https://apnews.com/80b02d9fa0534b14b91832f6761ebab5>) me to wait 24 hours before undergoing the procedure, so I was forced to wait a couple more days for my next appointment.

Finally, the day of the procedure arrived, and within the waiting room, all of the buildup of the past few weeks hit me. But I found the most beautiful, strange comfort being surrounded by the other women waiting, many of whom were also there alone. None of us spoke, but a sense of calm filled the room. We all knew we were going to be OK. No matter what.

After the five-minute procedure ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-long-five-minutes-abortion-doulas-bring-comfort-during-a-complicated-time/2017/11/27/c63f179c-9f04-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.488adc1f8083](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-long-five-minutes-abortion-doulas-bring-comfort-during-a-complicated-time/2017/11/27/c63f179c-9f04-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e_story.html?utm_term=.488adc1f8083)), all I felt was relief. I was shocked by how much buildup there was for a procedure so safe and quick. I walked to my car through the protesters for the fourth, and last, time that week. Through the chanting, pieces of baby dolls and signs reading “baby killer,” all I could feel was glowing, Texan pride. I was in control of my life and my body again.

Who knew I'd be able to owe that freedom to my abortion for the rest of my life

Because, after that? I went on to medical school and channeled my pride into the thing I was born to do: Provide abortion care as part of my medical practice.

I moved from Texas to Chicago to complete medical training. I recently moved to New York City for a fellowship in reproductive health care and advocacy to be there for my patients in and out of the exam room. My intent has always been to return to the Southwest to provide care to the women of Texas. Because they deserve better.

## Returning home to return the favor

In New York, my patients face none of the barriers I faced. They walk into my office, we perform a pregnancy test, and if it's positive, they're not alone on a toilet seat; they're surrounded by supportive, warm, passionate clinicians and staff members. If they want to call their mom to talk it through, they can — it's their choice. If they want the abortion, I'm able to perform it that day.

Soon, I'll be serving Texan patients who face many of the same barriers in 2019 (<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/state-facts-about-abortion-texas>) that I faced 14 years ago, in addition to now being forced (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-abortion-texas/court-allows-texas-law-on-ultrasound-before-abortion-idUSTRE8091XF20120110>) to undergo an ultrasound and listen to the heartbeat.

I think about the people who delay their abortion to save up for the procedure only to learn that the delay increased the cost, further complicating their situation. And the people who travel not just 30 miles but hundreds (<https://www.texasobserver.org/texas-most-cities-more-than-100-miles-from-abortion-clinic/>) of miles for abortion, increasing the emotional and financial burden they already face. I'm going back to fight for that access so that one day there is no guilt, no shame and no waiting.

Tuesday is the 46th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision that protected the legal right to abortion, Roe v. Wade. For so many women, especially in Texas, Roe alone does not give barrier-free access to a safe abortion that is deserved and needed. And women of color, immigrants and LGBTQ people often are most deeply affected by these barriers.

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**<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/politics/texas/article/Abortion-rights-groups-make-their-case-against-13515595.php>)** — to the 24-hour waiting period for abortion care, requirements for patients to get sonograms before abortions and the ban on abortion after the 20th week of pregnancy — are being heard in federal court.

Legislative and political threats continue, too: A bill has already been filed that would make it illegal for Texas doctors to perform abortions except in cases (<https://www.texasobserver.org/texas-bill-would-revoke-medical-license-of-doctors-who-perform-abortions/>) to save the life of the patient.

In a time when anti-abortion legislators are attempting to criminalize this safe, necessary health care, this is the right time for me to share my story so that the women and families of Texas, which I will always call home, know that there's someone in their corner.

*Sarah Valliere is a family medicine physician and a fellow with [Physicians for Reproductive Health](https://prh.org/) (<https://prh.org/>).*

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