



ARTICLES OF FAITH: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars

Cynthia Gorney

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In *Articles of Faith*, veteran journalist Cynthia Gorney presents the first balanced political and social narrative of the most significant years in the abortion conflict, told from the perspective of the people who fought the battles on both sides.

Focusing on the battle in Missouri, which mirrors the deepening abortion conflicts around the country as American states first begin changing their century-old criminal abortion laws, Gorney draws from more than five hundred interviews and previously unseen archival material to create the first narrative history of the modern American abortion conflict ever written.

The central characters, whose evolving personal stories and eventual confrontation in the U.S. Supreme Court form the narrative drive of *Articles of Faith*, are two passionate, strong-willed leaders from opposing camps in the city of St. Louis: Judith Widdicombe and Samuel Lee. Judith Widdicombe is a registered nurse who runs the abortion underground in Missouri during the illegal-abortion days of the 1960s, and who then goes on after *Roe v. Wade* to set up almost singlehandedly the first legal abortion clinic in Missouri. Samuel Lee is a young pacifist and would-be seminarian who arrives in St. Louis to begin his formal religious studies and finds himself instead drawn to the more compelling and immediate work of the right-to-life movement.

The state of Missouri is an ideal setting for a history of the American abortion wars. Both before and after 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* forces every state to legalize abortion, the real dramas of the abortion conflict unfold not in Washington, D.C., but in communities across the United States, communities like St. Louis, where Judy Widdicombe and Sam Lee are at the forefront of nearly every episode -- Judy directing her clinic, bankrolling federal lawsuits, co-founding the National Abortion Federation, covering her clinic bulletin boards with political updates, stepping through the smoldering aftermath of a clinic firebombing, and confronting head-on the moral ambiguity of late-trimester abortions; Sam studying intently the philosophical background and moral logic of the right-to-life movement and then joining sit-ins, volunteering for arrest, arguing pacifism versus confrontation with fellow civil disobedients, and eventually serving a long jail sentence for defying a court order barring him from the premises of certain St. Louis abortion clinics. When Sam completes his jail time, he makes what for him is the emotionally difficult transition away from protest and toward legislative lobbying in the Missouri state capital.

Their battle culminates in 1989, when the provocative abortion bill Sam eventually lobbies through the Missouri legislature becomes the centerpiece of *William L Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* -- the most intently watched Supreme Court case of the late 1980s, because it is the very first case to challenge *Roe v. Wade* directly before what is generally assumed to be an anti-Roe court. The Reproductive Health Services of the *Webster* case, the lead plaintiff in this nationally anticipated litigation, is Judy Widdicombe's St. Louis abortion clinic.

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