

Chapter 8

Personal Experiences

In its work the Committee was aware that the information which it received from several thousand persons—patients, the public, and the health professions—in each instance represented the difficult-to-summarize views and the diverse personal experiences of women and men. This fact was true for the decisions which were made by physicians as they considered the personal and ethical implications of their work with abortion patients. This point was equally true for the women who had had an unexpected and unwanted pregnancy. National surveys are useful to assess broad trends, but they do not easily capture the deeply felt concerns or the personal anguish which women may feel in approaching this decision.

The Committee received a number of written statements from women across the country who had had induced abortions. To ensure that these personal accounts were valid, only those reports which had been written and submitted directly by women themselves and were signed were considered to be valid. Many of these statements were accompanied by sworn affidavits. In presenting excerpts from some of these personal statements, the only alterations which have been made were to ensure the absolute confidentiality of the women who provided details about their personal experiences with abortion. For the same reasons the names of physicians, other individuals, hospitals, addresses, and provincial identification have been deleted.

In their own words the personal accounts of these women “tell it like it is”. These personal experiences illustrate the broader trends which emerged from the findings of the national population survey and the national patient survey. The personal accounts which have been excerpted come from women in all provinces. They are representative of the other reports which were received but which were not included. These statements are divided into five categories: (1) consideration of abortion; (2) illegal abortion before 1969; (3) illegal abortion after 1969 which includes two transcripts from court records; (4) out-of-country abortions; and (5) legal abortions after 1969.

Consideration of abortion

Personal Account 1

At the age of 38 I found myself pregnant. I had been using the diaphragm. I had two previous children, the youngest was fifteen. I was upset at the results of the positive pregnancy test and told my doctor so, vaguely hinting at abortion. He treated the matter very lightly, almost jokingly. My second child had to have a blood transfusion after birth as I am RH negative and this added to my worry about the third pregnancy. By the fifth month the antibodies had reached a high level and I was sent to _____ for pre-natal fetal blood replacement. I made three trips in all and a fourth for the delivery of the baby, which was induced six weeks early. The whole experience of this pregnancy was one of expense, pain, and anger that I had no choice (that I knew of at the time) and of being forced into motherhood. This child, now five is healthy, loved and part of our lives. However, I feel my husband and I should have had a choice of whether we wished to be parents again, and been told of the risks involved. We probably would have chosen not to have this last child.

Personal Account 2

In 1961, I got pregnant for the third time. I did not want to go through with it. I had a boy and a girl and was a career woman. I had taken every precaution for birth control but somehow it failed. I tried the potassium permanganate douche and it didn't work.

I finally had the baby. I still regret it. It may be my attitude toward her, but she was not, nor is, a wanted child. It sounds terrible for a mother, but I so resented the authorities that *forced* me into that birth that I am still bitter. The child is backward in school, whereas the other two are bright and intelligent. I have a guilty feeling because I tried to abort her and failed, and blame myself for her slightly retarded brain.

Personal Account 3

I wanted an abortion because my husband was irresponsible and didn't have any intention of working steady. How I hunted for a doctor to do an abortion! I couldn't find one—I was scared to try too much for fear of killing myself. I ended up with two unwanted children. After my second contraceptive failure, they put an IUD in me, which has worked for me. My "ex" finally got tired and left. Now I sit on welfare, bitter at being trapped and in poverty.

Personal Account 4

My story is nearly 12 years old. It is especially difficult to tell it because the fetus that I wished to abort, wasn't, and today is 11 years old, an intelligent, energetic child who I feel very close to and love very dearly. At a time when there was nowhere to turn but to quacks and charlatans, I was 22 years old, unmarried, in a semi-professional job and a year out of university. By the time I became pregnant it was apparent the relationship could not sustain itself, let alone a child. My first instinct was to terminate the pregnancy.

The sheer terror of the situation is indescribable. The ultimate shame of an illegitimate pregnancy, the loss of face, the disruption of a just-beginning working life, the pain of having to face it all alone, no matter what happened,

led me to seek out someone to abort me. My scanty knowledge of methods told me that a D&C was very dangerous, if improperly done. The child's father had home remedies for me to take—quinine, and castor oil only caused ringing in my ears and diarrhea. The next step was to have a douche—supposedly safe, sure and \$150.00. A woman gave it to me in a friend's house. Then we waited. Nothing happened—not a cramp, not a drop of blood, nothing. I got back half my money with help from my “friend's friend”. Then he washed his hands of me. I was on my own.

It wasn't easy to find an abortionist, but I did. This time it was a man from _____ who agreed to fly to _____ and “help” me for \$200.00. I met him at the airport, drove to my friend's empty house and after a lengthy talk while he “psyched me out” he gave me a douche after giving me my first pelvic examination to determine how “far along” I was. Then he called a cab, took my money, and left me alone. Again, nothing happened.

By this time I was over two months pregnant, absolutely desperate, going through the days like a robot, almost paralyzed with fear. About two weeks later I took a friend into my confidence and told him my situation. He offered to take me to _____ to see this man again if I was determined that there was no other course I could take. I called up _____ and after a lot of difficulty got through to him and convinced him that he had to see me again because what he had done had not worked.

We drove to _____ over night because our work situation didn't allow a lot of time away. We got a room in a motel and slept the rest of the night there. In the morning I called _____ and told him where I was. He picked me up in a dirty car with a lot of paper litter inside it. It was in sharp contrast to his person—he was a very clean well-groomed man.

He took me to a basement apartment that was untidy and dirty. I remember feeling I had really reached the bottom of the barrel. He said he had to give me some pills to make me relax and then he gave me two tiny capsules to take. The feeling I recall having was a kind of giving up—of just having no choice anymore, and a terrible sense of worthlessness. Here I was in a dirty, cluttered basement apartment in a city I'd only visited, on a street I didn't even know the name of, with a sly con man who was telling me that if I wanted to end my pregnancy I must take drugs I had no way of identifying. He then told me that the time during which a woman's cervix opened up the most was during sexual arousal. The best way to succeed with the douche was to “warm up”. He then told me to get on the bed with my pants off, and he proceeded to “arouse me”. He removed his own pants but kept on his shirt and tie, still done up at the neck. Between the drugs and the sense of giving up, I did get a little aroused. I remember feeling I must be some kind of slut.

Suddenly he jumped off the bed, ran and got his “equipment”. He came back all business. He very painfully twisted my breast to extract some colostrum. Then he said almost angrily, “you see, you're at least three months!” He then did something to me—douched or seemed to “pop” something inside me, then showed me the white enamel pan he used—with an inch or more of dark blood in it. I got dressed. He drove me back to the motel with another \$100 in his pocket.

My friend drove me back to where we had come from. The next day I realized that I was still firmly pregnant. The next day I called my family doctor. I told

him why. Then I drove 90 miles alone to his office where he confirmed my pregnancy, told me I had a very mild vaginal infection, and was damn lucky to be alive. The fetus had refused to budge. I had to succumb to the inevitable.

I left my job, hid out at home, and then lived for two months in an unwed mothers' home, giving birth alone and frightened in _____ hospital. I fed and held my beautiful son until that terrible last day when I was to go home and he was to be put into the care of _____ for adoption. I will never forget sitting up in bed on a grey February morning at 6:00 a.m., holding in my arms the most beautiful person I had ever known and telling him that I would always love him and need him but had to give him to someone else to care for because I couldn't.

After seven weeks, during which time I had seen my son twice in his foster home, I drove one day to the _____ where I signed a paper that said my son was no longer mine. I was releasing him for adoption. Then I died inside.

My story takes a sudden happy turn 10 days later. My friend who had driven me to _____ asked me—no, us—to marry him. After more soul-searching I said yes. I called up the social worker and told her I wanted my baby back. She said "you can't do that". I said I could because the three week "escape clause" on the paper I had signed was not up. And I was right. We got him back and brought him home when he was two and a half months old. We married two months later. We had two more sons.

Our oldest son knows that he had a different "man who helped mummy make him". He has only one father. He knows he was loved and very much wanted when he was finally here.

It was eight years before I was able to separate my wish not to have a baby, from the baby that I had. Then I knew forever, that no woman should have to go through what I did, or the far worse experiences of other women.

Illegal abortion before 1969

Personal Account 5

Many years before 1969 I had two illegal abortions. Three other members of my family, to my knowledge, also had an abortion at various times, only one legal. All of us also had children who were planned and wanted. None of us had any regret over the abortion itself, only over the accidental factor that caused the pregnancy to occur.

At 66, I am long past child-bearing age. I have four children and seven grandchildren. At 18, I "had to get married", left two families in a devastated state, went to _____ to hide the disgrace, and then, when living in a rather ramshackle cottage in rural _____ with an income of \$100 per month and a ten-month baby, found I was pregnant again—the contraceptive didn't work. Another baby meant plain disaster. A good friend had a brother who was a medical student at _____ and he found out the name of a doctor who did abortions in his house. His uncle, a well-known gynaecologist, told him.

I went to see this Dr. _____. He told me to come back a week later and bring \$150 in cash. No cash, no abortion. My young husband and I didn't even know

anyone who could lend us that kind of money. Desperation was relieved by the unexpected over-night visit of my uncle who was a physician. He understood the situation and made no effort to change my decision, merely to help me avoid a nervous breakdown, his chief concern being how competent Dr. _____ was. He gave me \$100.

I was so frightened that I took a friend with me to Dr. _____ 's office. The pleasant man of the week before had become a raging bull. By the time my friend had left and I had persuaded him to go ahead with the operation (the near-hysterical crying and begging having persuaded him that neither my friend nor I was from the police) I was so distraught that I fell on the stairs following a nurse down to his basement set-up. He had my money and all he wanted was to get it over.

I was taken to one of a number of curtained beds around the sides of one big room—there were of course no windows. I undressed and put on a gown. At that time I knew no one who had had an abortion and hadn't the least idea what would happen to me. A nurse led me out and I got on an operating table at the end of the room.

The operation was a dilatation and curettage done with no anaesthetic and as fast as possible, which meant the cervix was stretched as though it were made of elastic. I would not wish such pain on the vilest criminal. I just hung on tight, not daring to make a sound for fear of making the doctor angrier than he already was. When he finished the job, he picked me up, carried me back to my bed and dropped me from shoulder height. He left, and the nurse drew the curtains and left too. All I remember doing was crying. A couple of hours later, the nurse said I was ready to go. I hailed a taxi in the street and went to my friend's apartment. I stayed there two days, my husband dropping in after work and then going home to _____ where another friend was minding the baby.

About a week after I was home I haemorrhaged. Lying in bed with bath towels wasn't enough to stop blood from soaking the bed. I went and sat on the toilet. I thought I might bleed to death. There was no hospital in the area. I knew no doctor. The nearest phone was three blocks away. My young husband was too scared to do more than mind the baby. I had had an "illegal operation" which meant I had committed a criminal offense... the feeling of my insides draining out of me was unforgettable.

The bleeding stopped. I never did find out what caused it. Two years later I had a planned pregnancy. The doctor didn't seem to notice anything abnormal in my condition.

Seven years after the first abortion I had another due again to the failure of birth control. This time one of our top gynaecologists told me to go to Dr. _____, which I did. He looked like a prize-fighter but presented no problems except \$250 cash in advance, which in the depression was an awful lot of money. Instead of using his basement he used his second floor, and I had a small bedroom. I again had a D & C but this time with a general anaesthetic. In a couple of hours after sitting up for some coffee, the nurse said I could leave when I wished but if I wanted a taxi would I please go across to the drugstore and order it from there. Instead, I walked the eight blocks home. The contrast from the sheer terror and brutality of the first abortion combined with a lovely July day made me feel so relieved, it was wonderful.

My husband had not come with me because he was looking after the children. He'd been going through as much strain as I had when he saw me jauntily walking down the street instead of being carried in on a stretcher or crawling out of a taxi, he had a very pleasant shock. But I was taking my kids to my parents and had to pack. So, the second day after the operation I blew a fever. It got worse. Here I was on an isolated island convinced I could be dying of peritonitis. I took one person into my confidence and she backed me up on a story to justify me leaving the children and going back to _____ the following day. I was now running a temperature of 103 degrees. I met my husband in the lobby of the Medical Arts (he looked pale green) and went to see my gynaecologist. Verdict? "If you'd had peritonitis you'd be dead by now." Operation? "Clean as a whistle. You? Sheer devastating strain and exhaustion—go home and let your husband do everything for you for three days." It was a wonderful three days.

Personal Account 6

I, _____ of _____ in the province of _____ do solemnly declare that: "I am 56 years of age. I had an abortion approximately October 1940 at which time I was about three months pregnant. I visited the office of a physician where reams of gauze were packed into my womb. I was awake during this procedure. The next day he visited my home and removed the packing and the foetus was removed. I was supposed to return to his office but did not do so. I went to live with my parents in _____. One morning I awakened and found I was bleeding profusely and called out for my parents as I could not move for fear of drenching the bed. A physician was summoned immediately. I think he removed the afterbirth. The bleeding stopped.

The second abortion occurred during the winter of 1943 to the best of my memory. I was between four and five months pregnant. No other means being available I effected it myself. This was done by inserting a solution of castile soap, cream (dairy) and lysol into my womb with a syringe. I became very weak and took to my bed. I became delirious and a physician was summoned. He pressed on my abdomen and the foetus was expelled. My pulse was very low and I was sent in an ambulance to the _____ Hospital. It was during the war and due to overcrowding I was placed, on a portable bed for moving patients, in the hallway. To the best of my memory I laid there from early afternoon until the next morning when the doctor attended me and I received intravenous and blood transfusions.

My third abortion occurred in _____ about December 1945. Two women met me at a friend's house. They inserted something in my womb twice. The first insertion was very painful and probably would have been sufficient. I don't know what it was but the extreme pain commenced immediately. I think a couple of days later the foetus was expelled. I was about three months pregnant. I was about a week in the _____ Hospital afterwards. I believe damage was done to my bladder and took physiotherapy treatments at the hospital—deep heat applied to my abdomen sometime later. I came to _____ in the winter of 1949 and visited Dr. _____, a gynaecologist. He sent me to _____ Hospital for about a week. I am all right now except that my bladder is a little weak sometimes.

Personal Account 7

I am a woman of 56 years. I am happily married. My husband and I have had two children, a girl and a boy. We have practiced birth control under

supervision of our doctor. I had my pregnancies before oral contraceptives were available. At eleven months of age my second child was diagnosed as a "severe" hemophiliac. Throughout his infancy, youth, adolescence, and manhood, he has been transfused at least twice every month and he has been hospitalized countlessly. At least five times he has been on the critical list.

In spite of my diligent use of the diaphragm (the preferred method of the time) I became pregnant again. It is very difficult to have a healthy family with one hemophiliac. My husband and I knew we could not keep our family in good mental and physical health if we had a third child—hemophiliac or carrier. I knew that we could not manage another child. We also knew that there would be a chance that this foetus could be a hemophiliac son or a carrier daughter.

At that time my daughter was a little over two years of age and my hemophiliac son was a year old. My son was hospitalized repeatedly. My husband had colitis at that time and unable to work, I was forced to get a position to support the family. . . and I was pregnant.

I appealed to my physician, to the physician attending my husband, and to the geneticist at _____ Hospital—all to no avail. No one would give me a therapeutic abortion. I persisted and was interviewed by the chairman of the medical committee set up to review the cases of women who were pregnant with special circumstances. The chairman would not forward my case for consideration because he said that he would not be 100 percent sure that the foetus, if carried to term, would be hemophilic. You see, there was a 50 percent chance that the foetus would be carrying the defective gene.

I had no alternative but to turn to a woman who provided abortions for fifty dollars. She was a distant relative of mine. She did not have any medical training or experience. What could I do? I was desperate. She used a combination of a syringe of warm soapy water and Lysol and of Exlax. After a lot of hard work, scrubbing floors, pushing furniture around and stretching, I induced an abortion. However, I bled excessively and had to go to the _____ Hospital for a D&C.

We continued to scrupulously use birth control. The second and third times I became pregnant, the situation hadn't changed. Again I had to risk the well-being of my family and my life, by self induced abortions. Both times I had to be hospitalized at the _____ Hospital for medical attention. The second time I was admitted due to excessive bleeding (the foetus had not been eliminated) and I developed an infection.

About 1966 I found a gynaecologist, Dr. _____, who was sympathetic to my situation. He did not like to recommend taking the pill because of the possible severe side effects for me. I wanted him to sterilize me but he felt I was too close to the menopause. However, he did promise to sterilize me if I became pregnant. In 1968, I was 48 years old and I became pregnant. Dr. _____ performed an abortion and sterilized me at the _____ Hospital.

Personal Account 8

In the late 1950's I faced a pregnancy which I did not wish to continue. In those days one couldn't, and didn't, talk about it. I'd never come across anyone in the same boat. I lived in _____. I asked our family doctor if he knew where I could obtain an abortion and recall well that he replied he made a

particular point of not having such information. He said though he didn't dare interfere surgically, he'd do what he could medically. He prescribed the necessary doses to induce menstruation. Though he didn't say so, I suspect he'd done the same for other of his patients. It worked.

I've never forgotten the ghastly misery of the whole business of realizing that I was pregnant. When I knew it was all over, my emotions were those of overwhelming relief. I have never had the slightest sense of guilt whatsoever, only thankfulness coupled with a deep anger that the whole thing couldn't have been done quickly, quietly, safely, and legally.

Personal Account 9

I, _____, do solemnly declare that I know the following to be true:

At the age of 24 I became pregnant because I felt that an unmarried woman was promiscuous if she planned to have sexual intercourse. I left my home city to have the child and gave it up for adoption. The doctor who had diagnosed my pregnancy subsequently prescribed birth control pills. He also gave me long, guilt-producing lectures on self-control.

As a result of confused emotions about my sexuality, I stopped taking the pill and again became pregnant in 1968. After trying to get medical help I resorted to an illegal abortionist who used a soapy douche to induce labour. The first attempt was unsuccessful and two weeks later I had to return to the abortionist, who accused me of becoming pregnant again. She then agreed to repeat the abortion attempt for the same \$300 fee. I finally aborted while at work. After several days, when the bleeding had not stopped, I went to a hospital and was given a dilatation and curettage. To this day, I don't know whether I could conceive and bear a child if I chose to.

Personal Account 10

People like me who desperately require termination of a pregnancy will do anything to terminate it. I was aware of the risks involved—unwed and from a respected family. The thought of death occurred to me but I was so upset emotionally that I did not care. As far as I was and still am concerned that "quack" did me a favour. His method was unorthodox—no anaesthetic, no reassurance, an instrument was passed into my vagina, into the cervix. Possibly fluid was introduced. Immediately my bladder filled indicating that the uterus was punctured. What happened after that I don't recall, until I was being slapped on the face to consciousness and told to pay my \$400.00 and "get out". Infection and emotional strain and guilt followed, but I was grateful to be alive.

Personal Account 11

In 1963, as a student I found myself pregnant. I wished to finish my training and was in no way ready for marriage or the responsibility of parenthood. My boyfriend at the time was willing and able to marry me and support the family. He was 21 at the time; I was 20. I became pregnant in the summer (July). Since I did not wish it to be known or to tell my parents, I waited until my Christmas holidays before I had the abortion. During the fall, through a friend, I found the name of a woman in _____ who was a waitress and who would perform the abortion for \$150. I went to her home on December 19 with two friends who waited in the car.

It was a pleasant, clean, expensive home in a new subdivision. I was taken into the bathroom and instructed to lie down on the floor on the bathmat with my pants off and legs apart. She inserted a hard rubber catheter into my vagina and through my cervix. She then injected a solution of lye, soap, quinine, and oil which she had boiled on the stove. There was a fair amount of cramping and a feeling of fullness but no real pain. I was told I would abort in about 24 hours. No other instructions were given. I gave her the money—cash—and was driven to a party where we spent a couple of hours, then went back to a friend's apartment.

Exactly 24 hours later—about 7.00 p.m. the next evening—I started experiencing bad cramps, nausea and backache. I was alone in the apartment and the contractions became more and more severe over the next three hours. By this time I was bleeding and vomiting. I aborted the foetus finally and panicked, pulled on the cord and probably tore the placenta, retaining a piece in the uterus.

Over the next two weeks I bled off and on, finally ending up in hospital. The gynaecologist who examined me was very angry and punitive. When he heard what I had done, he removed the tissue from my uterus in the hospital treatment room with a sponge stick—and no anaesthesia. *That* was the worst part of the whole experience plus the attitude of the hospital staff when it—inevitably—became common knowledge that I had had an illegal abortion. I had two units of blood, was placed on birth control pills and sent home after three days in hospital.

I have—luckily—been well since, suffered no ill effects physically and although I have not had children subsequently, it is only because I have chosen not to until now. I have never regretted the action I took—only that I took a grave risk with my health and fertility. I certainly suffered no great emotional trauma and then, as now, I was only greatly relieved that a pregnancy was not going to force me into a situation I was in no way prepared or ready for. It really only forced me into being more responsible for my sexual behaviour—and admitting to myself that I was sexually active and not relying on “chance” and the occasional condom.

Personal Account 12

I became pregnant in January 1965 when I was 26. I had been brought up with sex being a taboo word; nothing was therefore ever explained to me. I knew nothing about the hazards, ways of protection—the pill was very new—thus I was quite completely at the mercy of my male partner even at that age, and with a B.A. My menstrual periods had always been irregular (sometimes none for months) so that I was three months pregnant when I found out. Being healthy, and a relative newcomer to the country, I knew of no doctor who could help, or who would know me enough to trust me. The doctors I did speak to, refused to do anything. Only one suggested, that if I did get an abortion somewhere I should come right after, to make sure everything was alright.

Through a friend of my friend a nurse tried to abort me three times with soap solution—cost \$100 but no result; I was four months pregnant by then. Through another friend of my friend a man from the U.S. came to that friend's place; he also tried the soap solution method; this time it did work—cost \$500 and another \$100 to that friend for use of his place.

I did not know the implications of an abortion and went to work the next day. Labor started at noon; I barely made it home; 24 agonizing hours followed.

Luckily my mother was on holidays. My younger brother never figured it out. My father had died in 1963. My friend's friend assisted me during the night.

I spent the next morning in bed and the afternoon washing sheets and towels and all other traces of the abortion. Next day (36 hours after the abortion was induced) I went back to work although I almost fainted on the way; the following week the Dr. said I was all right.

Today, I am enjoying the eighth year of a happy partnership with my spouse and the seventh month with a wonderful, healthy, lively and very much wanted and planned son.

Personal Account 13

Because abortions were not legal in Canada, I was taken to Japan where they were. Although I went willingly, I was rather naive. This option had not even occurred to me. I suffered mental and physical pain.

Because of the language problem, I didn't know what was happening or going to happen to me. I believe there was a balloon inserted into the womb and filled with air to simulate a larger fetus. This balloon was tied to a rope and hung out of my body. An iron weight pulled on the rope and balloon, in hopes miscarriage would begin spontaneously. When it didn't injections were given and labor induced.

Although the staff was very kind, my surroundings were unsanitary. There was bleeding, but I didn't get a change of gown. During the three days or so I spent there my sheets weren't changed.

I was going to college. I had to borrow a substantial amount for the trip. Financially, this experience set me back for a year and more.

"Abortion" was not mentioned in those days. I suffered great anxiety for years afterwards that others would find out, although I personally did not feel I had committed a moral crime. One understanding parent took me to Japan, the other threatened to kill me. Before deciding on abortion, I had almost dropped out of college so I could have the baby in another large city and give it up for adoption. I also considered suicide.

Illegal abortion after 1969

Personal Account 14

In the fall of 1974 I had an illegal abortion. Not something that I'm particularly proud of, but nothing that I'm overly ashamed of either.

When I discovered that I was pregnant I didn't delve too seriously into the possibilities of getting a legal abortion. I was mentally and physically healthy, in a fairly good income bracket and living with the father of the child. When I decided that motherhood wasn't for me, I asked my family physician how I could go about solving this problem. The only solution he could offer was for me to go to _____ for \$200.00.

I decided to stay in _____ and pay a bit more if necessary than face the long bus ride before and after the operation. Through one contact and another I

was directed to a respectable doctor who would perform the abortion at the same price (\$200.00), with supervised medical attention should it prove necessary. The operation was performed in his office with a nurse standing by to hold my hand. The whole thing took about 20 minutes, and then I was sent home with instructions to call at any time if there was any undue bleeding, or if an infection occurred. Fortunately only one of these happened, and when I called with a fever of 102, the instructions given were complete and proper; and the infection rapidly abated. The whole recovery period, mentally and physically, was about a month.

Don't ask me for the name of the doctor. I have honestly tried to remember it, but have drawn a complete blank. I simply blotted his name out of my mind. I did a heck of a good job—if I were to find myself in the same position that I was in in 1974, I wouldn't know who or where to turn.

Personal Account 15

I was 20 years old when I became pregnant (because of a faulty condom) in late 1969, about to enter graduate school and still financially dependent on my family. The father and I agreed that in order to continue with our education we had to put off beginning a family. We felt that at our age and with our financial situation as it was, a child would surely suffer. Our only recourse was to find a way to terminate the pregnancy. As I knew of no counselling or referral services in _____, abortion was to be found through the grapevine.

I made numerous phone calls, meeting with both rudeness and fear. Perhaps I was lucky that none of the people I contacted were "in business" any more. Through a medical student, I found a man who had European medical papers but who could not practise medicine in Canada.

This man had a fairly complete medical unit in his basement; he was clean, kind and expensive. \$350 put quite a hole in a student-sized bank account.

The experience was expensive in terms of emotional costs, too. Everything was shrouded in fear and secrecy. But, I was lucky—my doctor was clean and safe.

Personal Account 16

I live at _____ with my husband and my three children. I had my last period of menstruation in January 1971 and in February when I missed my period I knew I was pregnant and became very worried. We already had three children and my husband did not make very much money. I made some enquiries about an abortion and found that we could not make the \$300 to \$400 payment that was required in _____ where abortions are legal.

One Saturday in February 1971 I went to _____ who is my hairdresser and I told her about my problem and she called her aunt _____ who said she could help me. I went back home to my husband. _____ came over to my place and we talked about the abortion. She told my husband that she needed \$50 now to buy the medicine and my husband went over to the drug store to cash his cheque and he came back and paid Mrs. _____ \$50 and she left. She said she would return on Sunday morning.

On Sunday Mrs. _____ returned to my apartment and she told my husband to take the children for a walk for about a half an hour which he did. She then pulled out a bottle of lysol and a bar of soap and asked me to give her a pot. She put soapy water in the pot and poured the lysol into it and then she took a

knife and shaved the soap into the pot. She then gave me two pills to take while she boiled up the solution on my stove. She then told me to lie down on the floor in the bedroom and she took a floor mat and put it under me. She then took a douche and put the nozzle into my vagina and forced the solution from the pot into me. She did this several times then she put all the stuff into a bag and left the rest of the solution in the pot. I put the pot with the remaining solution on the shelf in my bedroom closet. Mrs. _____ wanted another \$125, but I told her we didn't have the money.

Mrs. _____ then left our place and I showed my husband the pot of solution. He took it and poured it into a ginger ale bottle. That night I became very sick and the following day my husband took me to the _____ Hospital where I was admitted and Dr. _____ looked after me. On Wednesday, February 24, they let me go home and on Friday I was still getting pains. On Saturday Mrs. _____ came in. We had an argument about the abortion. I told her that she tried to kill me, and my husband suggested that she tried to poison me. Mrs. _____ said she would do the job again but she wanted her \$125 and she told me not to go to the hospital again and that I would be alright. After some more arguments she left.

My husband then took me back to the hospital and I stayed there until March 2, 1971. I was still pregnant.

Personal Account 17

I was 18 years old and lived at home with my parents. I had left school and had a job. Through this job I met a man whom I dated for about four months. I was intimate with this man starting about three months before July 20, 1970.

My regular menstrual period should have occurred on July 20 and when it did not happen I became worried that I might be pregnant. I went to my doctor just after that. He assured me I was not pregnant but I was doubtful and went to _____ and had a pregnancy test done. This was negative.

On August 4, 1970 I again went to my doctor and this time I was told I was pregnant. I called my boyfriend and he was unsympathetic but through him and others I got the name of _____ and the telephone number.

On August 28, 1970 I called this number in the evening. The woman who answered said she was _____ but seemed reluctant to speak on the phone. I added that I was a friend of _____ and this seemed to reassure her. She asked how advanced my pregnancy was and other information about myself. She said an abortion would cost \$300 and that I should call her back on the Tuesday following to complete arrangements. I did not have the money that day so did not call till the Tuesday after that, which would be September 1, 1970. I said I had the \$300, which I had borrowed and saved.

After some conversation she suggested I should see her on Friday, September 4, 1970. I wanted to go in the evening but she said it would be better at 1.00 p.m. She then told me how to get to her address at _____ and that after entering I should go to the third floor where she would look after me.

I had brought some sanitary pads with me at Mrs. _____ suggestion and when I saw that the door to this apartment was open I put the bag inside the door then went outside again after knocking. I heard a voice call from below saying that the caller would be up right away. A woman came up the stairs still speaking and I recognised her voice as the one I had talked to on the telephone.

I paid her \$300. She went into the kitchen, turned towards the stove, and then called me into the kitchen. She explained she was heating liquid on the stove to put into me; that it always worked; that she was doing about two abortions each day; and that the girls were sent to her by a gynaecologist because she was so good.

She cleared off the kitchen table. From under the kitchen sink she took a white cloth, with a plastic covering on one side and cotton on the other. She also brought out some disposable diapers, some newspapers, and other things. She instructed me to remove my panties and lie down on the table. I did this. The white plastic cloth was under me, next to the table, then on top of that was the newspapers, then directly below me were the disposable diapers.

She then poured some liquid from the pan on the stove into a syringe. She inserted the syringe into my vagina and used about a pint of the fluid. About then I lost track of things and became sick and began to vomit. The woman fetched a pail and started to clean the articles she had used. I sat up then, feeling better.

She took me into the living room where my two friends were seated. She went back into the kitchen. She brought me a small vial of blue and white capsules that were the same as those in a large jar in the kitchen. She said there were twelve pills in the vial; that she used them for migraine; that I should take one every four hours, and to take two pills if the pain got really bad. She said she had got the pills in large quantities from her doctor for her aches after her hysterectomy operation some years before. I then went to the front door and left.

During the night the pains and cramps started. At about 4 a.m. I passed something solid and started to bleed badly. I called a girl friend and asked her to call an ambulance, which arrived shortly afterwards and took me to the _____ Hospital.

Out of country abortion

Personal Account 18

In 1970 I became pregnant. My husband and I decided together, early in my pregnancy that, because this was an unwanted child, an abortion was imperative. At that time we were living in _____. Since we were both in therapy with a psychiatrist at that time, we approached him for assistance as he knew only too well the tenuous situation under which we were functioning.

Dealing with a judgmental physician, we were doomed. We had asked that he take our case to the abortion committee at the _____ Hospital. We were refused. We searched around _____ desperately trying to grasp the loose ends of the elusive "red tape" in order to get our case heard somewhere.

With time running out we were forced to go to _____ for we knew of nowhere closer to go for help. Having made a very personal and private decision, we were put in the position of having to expose ourselves to friends and family in an appeal for a lot of money—very quickly. We travelled to _____ where I found a doctor who would perform my abortion for \$500. I was then placed in a hospital and complications ensued making it necessary for me to be

hospitalized for three days. The latter cost me an additional \$500. Provincial Medicare refused to reimburse me for any of the expenses.

Personal Account 19

I was very much impressed with the kindness and respect with which I was recently treated by a doctor in _____ and his entire staff. Unable to find assistance in _____, and unable to make a quick appointment in my home province of _____, I was fortunate to make a very prompt appointment over the phone and acquire a therapeutic operation within one week, at the doctor's office in _____. I received far more understanding and attention from this office, even over the telephone, than I did in my own country. Without their help, I might still be in trouble today, and I feel deeply indebted to them.

Personal Account 20

In the summer of 1972 I went to my obstetrician (of six and a half years) to seek sterilization advice. I was 32 and a half years old and had two children. Although when I went to my physician about sterilization, I was mainly interested in my husband's obtaining a vasectomy, the doctor proceeded to recommend instead his own technique of vaginal tubal ligation. I had this operation in July 1972.

On October 29, 1974, a G.P. after a lab test confirmed that I was pregnant. A phone call to my obstetrician informed me that he was not so surprised, as he'd been having poorer luck with his technique than he'd expected, and had since improved it.

I was a very stunned, trapped, human being. I felt betrayed by my physician, but worse still, I felt myself in an absolutely impossible situation, that I had done my best to avoid. Previous methods of birth control I had always treated with care and what I felt was intelligence; and they had been effective. The decision for sterilization had been one that had been made with a great deal of thought, discussion and baring of souls—but we had made a decision “for life”. I had not thought that I was being careless to let my obstetrician be the judge of the most effective method of sterilization.

Although I went through the motions (in the next couple of days) of preparing myself and my family for the inevitable, it wasn't long before I realized that there wasn't one part of me that wanted another baby. In fact I was very afraid, for my own physical and psychological health, and the effects on my sons and my husband.

My neighbour sent me to _____ where my husband and I received an interview. They agreed to help me. About three days later we met again with the counsellor, who informed us that the _____ doctors working with them were willing to take on my case, but because of the great number of applications going before the Committee at the _____ Hospital, relative to the few abortions that were actually done (the committee meets only once a week), that it would be three or four weeks before I could expect an abortion in _____. At this point I was now about eight weeks pregnant.

I realized that I would have to take the only alternate route—to _____. I was lucky in that we could afford it. The bus fare for my husband and I (round trip) was \$100; the operation was \$150. A phone call from our counsellor to _____, let the clinic know they could expect us the next morning. We left the children with neighbours and took a 9 p.m. bus to _____, and at midnight boarded a bus to _____.

At around 7 or 8 a.m. we arrived in the city and made our way by cab to the clinic. The clinic was clean, efficient, but busy. My husband estimated that at least 30 women were treated during the time we were there. I was asked for a brief medical history, given a tranquilizer (which in my case had little effect), and given pills for afterwards and instructions for taking them. I was also given a blood test. We waited—a not very cheerful group. Finally, around 11 a.m. I was called. My husband could not come. I went into a room with an examining table, a piece of equipment (the vacuum aspirator) and a large empty bottle which had not been rinsed clean. I was told to remove my slacks and underpants and put them on a chair. I climbed onto the examining table and put my feet in the stirrups. I do not recall a gown but rather a sheet over me. A nurse and a doctor were present—both pleasant but rushed. I assume I was given a local anaesthetic.

What I do recall is the shame, the sorrow and the bitterness that I felt. I felt like a second class citizen. In spite of the obvious cleanliness and good medical care, the personal dignity that one expects with any operation, especially one so emotional, was just not there. Because of people like myself coming from out of town and crowding clinics such as these, everything was run like an assembly line. It was sad that I should feel so degraded, simply because I wanted desperately to remain reasonably sane myself, and to be able to raise well-adjusted children. But that is what I felt—degraded, ashamed, and bitter.

I will never forget the feeling of the vacuum machine on my uterus. I was scared. I begged for a few more moments to lie there. I was given a pad and led to an adjoining room. My clothes were laid at the foot of my cot, and I was left along with about 5 other patients. For the most part we were quiet, except to reassure each other about the feelings we were experiencing physically and emotionally. We were given 10-20 minutes to rest, then we got dressed and went through the waiting room. My husband joined us at this point and we went into a sitting room where coffee, tea and a few cookies had been left.

My husband went with four of us to a neighbouring restaurant where we ate lunch and tried desperately to bolster each other's feelings. Two of the girls went to the airport but the other had been in a state of shock since the operation, so we decided to stay with her and take our time and catch the night bus back.

This was in November, 1974. I cried most of the way home. I wanted to die—not for what I had done, but for what I had had to do.

Two weeks later my husband had a vasectomy by a surgeon who has done thousands of such operations with no failures.

Legal abortion after 1969

Personal Account 21

I had an abortion in December 1975. I was pregnant as a result of pill failure; I had been on the "mini-pill". I am married. Both my husband and I feel very strongly about the responsibility involved in having a child, as we are both products of very unhappy families. We periodically discuss whether or not to have children, now or ever. We were very lucky in having done this, as we did

not then have to make a decision under emotional strain and the pressure of time when I became pregnant, we had only to re-examine our criteria. We both feel that no one has the right to have a child unless they are prepared to accept full responsibility for that child's happiness and to do the very best they can for it. Our decision not to have children at this time was based on financial, emotional and career factors.

We were lucky. I have a very good physician who realized that it would be wrong for me to have a child at this time. We were also lucky in living in a large urban centre, where an abortion is more readily available. The whole process took less than a month. All three doctors I was in contact with, the psychiatrist, the physician and the gynaecologist were very competent, and once they were sure that I was sure, very helpful. The hospital staff was very considerate. At no time was I subjected to any disapproval or criticism. My only criticism, in turn, is that I was not informed of the procedure I would be going through. Physically, I had no idea of what to expect.

Personal Account 22

On my first visit to Dr. _____ I was very concerned to have a doctor with whom I could talk. I was pregnant and in an uncertain position. On my return from a one year trip I was three months pregnant with a child not my husband's. I was vaguely contemplating an abortion, but mostly I wanted to carry the baby to term and in that time decide if I would keep the baby or give it up for adoption depending on my situation with or without my husband. I went into the doctor's office wanting to be quite honest about my circumstances. From the first he made me uncomfortable asking questions but not even listening to my answers, sometimes repeating questions twice. He seemed extremely interested in my sexual life implying that since the child was not my husband's, I must have spent my life sleeping around. He asked questions like how many men and how often after I had already told him what had happened.

During the pelvic exam I asked questions about the position of my uterus because I had had previous problems earlier on in pregnancy with my cervix putting pressure on the urethra making it impossible for me to urinate. He gave me little satisfaction never answering a question directly. He told me to come back in two weeks and I left feeling uneasy.

I returned in two weeks hoping things would go better though I was already asking around about different doctors. The experience was even worse. It was as if I hadn't been in to see him just two weeks before. He asked all the same questions over again—even questions such as when I had conceived. Somewhere along the line he asked if I did much drinking. I said no but I occasionally smoked marijuana. This opened another topic of conversation. He started asking questions. I became very nervous as he asked if when I smoked with my friends we had orgies and seemed surprised when I said no. I am not normally upset about questions about my sexual life, or the smoking of marijuana, especially with a doctor. But this man gave me the impression that he was a voyeur looking in on my life and considering me as scum, an "easy lay". My feeling of unease and nervousness was absolutely confirmed with the humiliation of that doctor rubbing my clitoris with his thumb as he was doing the pelvic exam. I've had many pelvic exams and no doctor has come close to touching my clitoris. The doctor I went to see after this doctor told me a second pelvic exam, 2 weeks after the first was not necessary, if not detrimental.

Personal Account 23

I found it expedient through undergoing mental anguish and great physical discomfort to decide against carrying my fourth pregnancy to term. This decision had been a difficult one, arrived at eventually by a consensus of opinion, in that my husband and I talked exhaustively about our decision, then took the matter to our three children for their views. Because we lived at that time in _____, we were able, with little difficulty, to obtain an abortion and we have none of us regretted that decision since.

Ours is a warm happy and loving family environment. My pregnancy was the result of an IUD failure. We could have stretched our finances to absorb yet another family member, but we felt we were unable to stretch our emotional and physical resources, enough to welcome another child.

I come from a background where my mother found herself pregnant with her first child (me) at a most inconvenient time. My mother was an immigrant as was my father and both struggled to make ends meet in an often hostile environment. The home I was raised in was never a happy one. It was an emotionally deprived situation. I am of the firm opinion that some women are not meant to be mothers. They do actual harm to society in raising children. My mother may well have been one of those women for all her children are alienated individuals in one way or another. While I give thanks to my parents for bringing me into the world, for I hold it most dear, I do believe my mother should have been given the choice to have, or not to have children.

Personal Account 24

I am writing to you about my experience with having an abortion in _____ in July 1975. I am thirty years old, single, and a university graduate. I have conscientiously practiced birth control and have subjected myself, over the past ten years to such unpleasant and perhaps dangerous methods as the pill, two different IUDs, foam, and finally a diaphragm and jelly (which I was using when I became pregnant). When on the pill I tried several different brands and they all produced in me a bloated uncomfortable body, mood swings, depression, and a general feeling of not being myself. I persevered for several years, going off occasionally.

I realized that it was certainly not conducive to leading a productive, positive life and I refused to subject myself to that again. However, I know that the pill is the safest form of birth control, but for me the price is just too high. I doubt that many men would be prepared to subject their bodies to that kind of abuse.

Next I tried an IUD (the safety coil) which I kept for four months but couldn't tolerate. It was too big, I was told by another gynaecologist, and I have a small uterus. So he removed it and inserted a Dalkon shield. The cramps and bleeding were not much better, but I reasoned that after all some people live with the pain of arthritis and so I could survive with this. I lasted eight months this time. I had the Dalkon removed when the scare of infection and several deaths in the U.S. from women pregnant with the device in place.

At the time I realized that I was pregnant I was working for the summer in a community about 150 miles from _____, and could appreciate how difficult it must be for women who live long distances from big centres and have to come down twice, once for the initial assessment and then again several weeks later. My own gynaecologist was unable to help me because he was on the

Committee at _____ Hospital and apparently that eliminated him as a doctor to administer treatment to his patients in this area. He gave me the name of several other gynaecologists at that hospital whom I called. Two of them were on holiday, one was no longer performing abortions and one had his quota filled for the following week's committee meeting. I was floored!

My faith was shattered, and when it was suggested in my search to find a doctor that I go to _____, I was tempted to pay the \$200 and go. But now it became a matter of principle. I pay my premiums, I rarely use the services I am supposed to be insured for and now I had a real need and I was being advised to go to the States, pay out of my pocket, and act like a criminal, sneaking over the border.

I must have made fifteen phone calls that afternoon to different doctors and none of them would help me. They either didn't do abortions, they were on vacation or I would have to wait two weeks. The staff at _____ Hospital told me that since I was so early (six weeks), it would be about three to four weeks before I could have the abortion because they were bogged down with cases that were 11 and 12 weeks pregnant and they too had a quota. I was shocked and deeply angered. This was forcing me to wait three to four weeks.

I finally found a doctor who practiced at _____ Hospital, who said he would do it, but I would have to wait two weeks because their committee wasn't meeting the next week because again the bloody doctors were on holidays. I decided to take it. He informed me, after an internal examination that confirmed my positive pregnancy test, that I would be required to see a social worker at the hospital, and I would be examined by another gynaecologist on staff at their hospital. As I sat in his office and he spoke to the social worker on the phone, he assured her that I had been using birth control. He repeated this several times, and seemed to be trying to convince her to see me. He said that it was important that I stress to this social worker how depressed I was and to tell her that I had been using the diaphragm when I got pregnant because her report was very important.

I swallowed my anger, saw the social worker, visited the other doctor who stuck his professional fingers inside me and nodded sagely that I was about six weeks along. This whole process wasted the time of all the people I had talked to on the phone trying to find a doctor. It wasted the time and services of a social worker and a doctor who performed an unnecessary examination on me. And it wasted my time and energy, and humiliated me unnecessarily. I had done nothing I was ashamed of and I refused to feel guilty or like a criminal. I was given no supportive counselling and the only person who spoke in an understanding, kind way was the nurse of one of the doctors at _____ Hospital, who gave me some advice and expressed concern with my situation. God bless her.

The final humiliation came two weeks later when I again returned to _____ after a nauseating bus trip and was admitted to the hospital. I was told that I would have to stay for 24 hours after the operation, which I had no intention of doing, and come in the night before. At 10 p.m. a nurse (who was also very kind) came in with a large soapsuds enema and a shave prep tray. I was to have an enema and shave prep for a first trimester abortion! I refused. The woman in the next bed was not so lucky. She was vomiting as a result of hers, and was sharing my fate the following day. But she didn't know that it wasn't necessary, and thought it was part of the procedure. When I awoke in the

recovery room with an intravenous Pitocin drip interstitially infusing into my hand, I removed it. I refused another IV and was given an injection of Pitocin IM and returned to my room which I left four hours later, against the protests of a head nurse.

Personal Account 25

Through an IUD failure, I became pregnant in January 1972. I was a student in _____ at the time, and unmarried. To undertake the role of motherhood was impossible for me at the time and I was most upset and nervous. But I was fortunate. I lived in a large metropolitan area and had relatively easy access to hospitals with therapeutic abortion committees. I had an understanding general physician who knew that I could not carry that pregnancy to term and who referred me to a gynaecologist who in turn submitted a recommendation for a therapeutic abortion to the _____ Hospital. I had a most anxious two-week waiting period before I learned that I had been accepted. I woke up in the recovery room feeling nothing but gratitude that I did not have to be forced into the role of motherhood prematurely. Today, three years later, I have graduated, have a promising career, and have married.

Personal Account 26

In mid-December 1974 I learned on a visit to my doctor that I was one month pregnant. I decided to have an abortion. Irrespective of my age, financial and marital status, I simply and very strongly did not wish to have a child at that time, nor, I quickly realized, by the man with whom I had conceived. Carrying the child for nine months and allowing it to be born seemed much more unnatural than aborting a foetus I hated. I felt that my whole body was in revolt against me; not only was there an unwanted thing in my stomach, but I was constantly nauseous, aching, and extremely tired.

My doctor composed the necessary letter to the gynaecologist who would do the abortion, should permission be granted. Although nothing in the letter was exactly a lie, much of it was slanted. The facts were true; I was 25, single, unemployed, and had split apart from the man by whom I had conceived.

During my initial interview with and examination by the gynaecologist he only once actually looked me in the face. The rest of the time I was treated as an object to be examined or a piece of meat to be prodded and probed. Had I been in a position to change doctors, I certainly would have, for he made me feel like an insignificant piece of dirt.

Dr. _____ and his committee agreed to the abortion. It was performed in mid-January, a month after my pregnancy had been confirmed, and two months after conception. I was placed in the maternity wing of the hospital. I am not so insensitive as to feel no regret, no sense of loss for the child I didn't have. Someday I should like very much to have a child, but not now, and certainly not then. My decision to abort was not made lightly. The one consolation was that the nurses on this ward were extremely kind and friendly, providing the sort of warmth and understanding that neither my own doctor nor the gynaecologist were able to (or cared) to give.

I consider that I got off very easily—I was referred promptly to a specialist; got permission to have the abortion; had my costs covered by _____ ; and suffered no complications at all. What I do object to is having to wait a month; having to agree to a letter that bordered on defamation; having to be the

patient of a doctor who was cold and insensitive in the extreme; having to be granted permission by an unseen committee for an operation I regarded as essential. I felt powerless and abused throughout the whole experience.

Personal Account 27

It was in 1972, and I was 17 years old at the time. My boyfriend and I were using contraceptives, a condom, which broke during intercourse. Perhaps he wasn't wearing it properly, perhaps it was old, I don't know. When it was confirmed I was pregnant, my doctor (a G.P.) was very helpful. She contacted another doctor for me who could perform the abortion. This was the start of the countless excuses I had to make to get time off work. The only people who knew of my pregnancy were my doctor, my boyfriend, and a very close friend. My doctor had written a very good covering letter explaining everything. Of course this doctor didn't believe a word of it and quite frankly told me so. By then I was even more humiliated. He announced that because of my age (not yet 18 he could not do the operation without parental consent. The whole purpose of the covering letter and my seeing him was so that I would not need to get my parents involved.

I had graduated from school at the age of 16 and that same year had found a very reputable job. My parents were, at that time, going through a marriage crisis and were drinking quite heavily. My older sister had moved out some two years before, and my other sister and I were having a hard time at home. We decided to leave and share an apartment together, feeling that my parents' marriage would be saved somewhat, which, incidentally, it has. I had started my job in June, we left home in October. It was December when I found I was pregnant. Our parents still were not speaking to us—it was four months before they realized the reasons for our move. I had a lot on my mind then, and could not bear to have my parents involved.

My doctor searched and finally found another doctor for me to see. He agreed to do the abortion, but his attitude was even worse than the former doctor. He admitted "I have 4 kids. I bring babies into this world, I don't like having to do abortions." I was charged \$150 and had to travel out to a rather dingy hospital. I could not even tell my sister for fear of her upset. So I fabricated some story about the need for a D&C and asked her to tell my coworkers that I had the flu. At this point I was about three months pregnant. I went and returned from the hospital alone. During my stay they found that the father of the child had a positive blood type and I had a negative, resulting in numerous tests, injections and worries. The nurses in the ward knew what we were in the hospital for and treated us accordingly. One woman in my room (there were five of us crammed together) had to come from _____ and another sobbed her heart out the whole time. There was no type of counselling.

I only took three days off work, since I was a bit paranoid and thought any more time off would arouse suspicion. I really didn't think I needed more time. I was only back a week and a half when I started to hemorrhage violently at work and had to be shipped back to the hospital for another D&C to get rid of blood clots. It was at that time that my boyfriend took off, never to be seen again. It's been so long since I've spouted this story. I'd forgotten how alone and empty I'd felt. It's good to talk about it. Too bad I couldn't do this three years ago.

Personal Account 28

When I was seventeen in 1972, I had an abortion at the _____ Hospital. The only way I found out about how to go about getting one was through a

girlfriend of mine. Half a year before she had had one. I was lucky she could help me as I had never read any information about legal abortions in any doctor's office, or for that matter at school.

When she took me down to the clinic she told me I'd better act pretty desperate and young or else they might not let me have the operation. So I told them the truth: I *was* desperate. I did not think of the thing inside me as a child but as a problem I wanted to get rid of. I also told them I wanted the whole thing absolutely confidential. Since I was over 16 years old this was done.

I was given a rough, cold internal examination in a lineup of other girls who had similar problems. During my two night, two day stay at the hospital I was treated fairly. I don't know what kind of operational procedure was practiced on me. The abortion was not discussed with me at all, by nurse or doctor, before or after the abortion. I was however given a birth control prescription afterwards, and was told how to look after myself for the following two months.

Personal Account 29

My medical background as it affects the abortion:

August 1974—gave birth to my second son.

September 1974—coaxed my husband into having a vasectomy.

June 1975—had a "stripping operation" done (varicose veins) to the tune of 37 scars on my legs.

December 1975—I discovered I was pregnant. Hubby had *never* had his sperm count checked. He was fertile!

I told my doctor that I wanted an abortion. No questions were asked as his office made arrangements for me to go to Dr. _____. I had to make three trips to _____—all in the few days before Christmas: (1) Appointment—general examination by Dr. _____ and my only chance to give my "story" (I was told that it had to be a good one or the abortion committee at _____ Hospital would not accept it.) With the story of my husband's vasectomy and my leg operation, I was OK'd. (2) Appointment the day before the abortion (Dec. 22)—to insert an apparatus that causes the cervix to dilate. (3) _____ Hospital: Admitted 8.30 a.m.; out by 4.30 p.m. After I came out of the recovery room, I spent the rest of the day in a large room with about 10 women who had also undergone abortions that day. It was a depressing environment, believe me. I had semi-private hospital coverage but this was not used.

I was told the bleeding after the abortion would stop within five days. Mine stopped three weeks later. I finally began my first menstrual period after the abortion on Feb. 4, 1976. Unfortunately, it never stopped. In fact, it got heavier. Yesterday (Feb. 20), I had to have a D&C performed. Today, I'm recuperating, and hoping that things will start to "get right again" with my body. Was the abortion performed correctly? If so, why so much subsequent bleeding and the D&C?

Personal Account 30

In the summer of 1972 I had a Dalkon Shield inserted by my obstetrician-gynaecologist. I had no problems with it, but in November of that year I

discovered that I could no longer feel the string and went to my doctor to see if it had been expelled unnoticed. A pregnancy test came back positive. At that time I was single and unemployed and financially dependent upon the man I was living with. I asked my doctor to help. He suggested going out of town, but I felt that I should be able to have the abortion locally, and we submitted an application to the _____ Hospital. I wrote a letter outlining the various reasons I desired the abortion and also consulted a psychiatrist upon the recommendation of my doctor. My application was turned down, and my doctor remarked that one committee member had asked whether I was a "test case". A referral was made to Dr. _____ of _____ Hospital in _____. I saw him six days after my refusal in _____ and had the abortion performed under local anesthesia three days later on December 21.

Personal Account 31

Appointment was made with Dr. _____ for one week after the pregnancy had been confirmed in _____. Arrived in _____. First saw the gynaecologist who referred me to a psychiatrist in the same building. Before seeing the psychiatrist I was asked to complete several forms; one was a fill-in-the-blank questionnaire and some of the questions were:

I feel _____ Mothers _____ what annoys me most _____ I wish _____
Sports _____ Most feared thing _____ Dancing _____ I hate _____ I
dislike _____ People _____ I like _____ this place _____ Men _____
Reading _____ .

Then I went into the psychiatrist's office and we talked for about half an hour. He asked me several questions: Have I ever had V.D.? What would my parents think if they knew? How many men have I slept with? Why do I want an abortion? How much money do I have in the bank? How much do I earn monthly? How old is my boyfriend? Will I ever get married? Was I using birth control? Why not? What would I do if I didn't get the abortion? If I had the baby, would I keep it or give it up? Had I ever taken drugs? Did I ever try to commit suicide?

I then saw the gynaecologist. He examined me and I was finished. They said the committee would meet Friday and I'd be called. The operation was scheduled for 11.30 Tuesday. I was given my first needle at 11:00 and got to the operating room at 12:00 or 12:30. Another needle—out stone cold. Back to my room by 1:30. I slept all day. I was given intravenous immediately after my operation which lasted for about six hours. For the next few hours I was extremely tired and wanted to sleep. I was in an overflow ward with other women who were having gynaecological surgery. By Wednesday morning I was restless and more than glad to be discharged. The nurses and doctors were all nice to me. I felt no hostility or coldness from them at all.

Personal Account 32

A couple of years ago I had to give up taking the pill and due to some misinformation I became pregnant. My husband and I were in a position where we would have run into great financial difficulties had I gone through with the pregnancy and I decided to seek an abortion . . . I was put in the care of a very qualified doctor and subsequently had the operation in a _____ hospital under the proper conditions.

Personal Account 33

At 38 years of age, I had an abortion last year. Not having any particular reason for not having another child, such as poor health, financial, emotional,

family insecurity, I was very upset thinking of going through another pregnancy.

My doctor insisted there would be no problem, referred me to a gynaecologist who after a very pleasant examination, told me of my appointment in one week at the _____ Hospital where in a pleasant one night stay (sterilization included) I was relieved of all my anxiety. I have never had *one* twinge of guilt or misgiving since I am a devoted mother of two, very happy with her lot who knows there are enough (too many) children in the world.

Personal Account 34

In the Spring of 1973 I had been fitted with an intra-uterine device, the Dalkon Shield, by Dr. _____. He had recommended the IUD as a method of birth control, following the development of side effects (severe headaches and chest cramps) on the pill, which I had used for approximately five years. I did not regard myself as being in either a financial or an emotional position to adequately maintain a child. The IUD was still implanted in my womb somewhere, and I was concerned about its potential damage to the fetus. Finally, I was pregnant *despite* having followed medical advice.

In the late summer of 1973 I had separated from my husband. During October 1973 I began to think I was pregnant. My regular doctor was away at that time and I was examined by another doctor who was unable to confirm a pregnancy. Following a two or three week delay, such a confirmation was made. Since I have a low income I requested a referral to a doctor with whom I could discuss a therapeutic abortion. An appointment was made with Dr. _____ for the second week in December. I was informed that this was the earliest possible date.

During the pre-examination interview, Dr. _____ conducted a very cursory review of my personal situation and my reasons for desiring an abortion. He attempted to discourage me from undertaking that action, arguing that economics were not a barrier to raising a healthy child and that childbearing was a beautiful and most fulfilling experience. He suggested that children could "bring together" a previously unhappy marriage. I could bear the child and put it up for adoption. Dr. _____ went to great length to describe the medical "dangers" of the therapeutic abortion procedure, such as future child-bearing difficulties and possible sterility.

A nurse was not present during the examination. The conversation escalated to a diatribic monologue. Dr. _____ claimed that doctors such as himself were being "forced" to perform therapeutic abortions by the actions of the "damn stupid" government which had relaxed the regulations surrounding this procedure. I suggested that if the procedure bothered him so much he should refer me to another doctor. He stated his opinion was the unanimous position of all doctors, so that a referral was unnecessary. He claimed this was the reason for all the gynaecologists "getting together" and setting a standard fee, which was higher than the government rate for the procedure and was directly charged to the patient. That action was the only option available to doctors to "counter" the government and to control what had become, in his opinion, an "abortion on demand" situation. Dr. _____ became quite emotional and excited, repeating many of his arguments and claims. At one point he accused me of "looking at him as though he were stupid". I assured him that I was not, but that I did not agree with many of his thoughts or opinions. All of this occurred

while I was undressed and on the examining table, and lasted for approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

After the examination, Dr. _____ agreed to perform an abortion. He said I would be required to pay the fee prior to the operation. It was, to the best of my recollection, either \$120 or \$160. At no time did he describe what was actually involved from a medical standpoint.

I had one examination in late January 1974 with Dr. _____ following the abortion. The latter was conducted on either December 22 or 23, 1973, and was completely straightforward, with no complications. At the time of the examination I complained of a discharge. Dr. _____ declared it to be quite normal, and declared me healthy. For approximately a month and a half I ignored the discharge, until it became quite painful. Subsequently, another doctor diagnosed it as symptomatic of extensive cervical infection. He referred me to still another doctor who performed a cervical cauterization later that spring, after a period of drug therapy.

The personal side of care

Regardless of how their pregnancies were terminated, all of the women who gave personal accounts had in common a deeply held concern about the choice which they had to make. Once they had made their decision, they had a sense of urgency to get it over, that they wanted to get the induced abortion done promptly. As the number of illegal abortions has declined and there has been a shift toward more patients obtaining this operation in Canadian hospitals, these personal accounts show that there have been changes in the outlook of women about the type of care which they expected to receive. Unlike the frightened women who got illegal abortions, often under hazardous circumstances and at considerable cost, many of the personal accounts about abortions which had been done since 1970 show that these women expected, but had not always in their judgment received, compassionate treatment from doctors and nurses.

These women felt they were entitled as patients to a degree of respect and a sensitive understanding of their situation, qualities which for a number of women had been missing when they obtained their abortions. While the technical quality of the care which they got may have been excellent, and in terms of what is known about the low rate of short-term complications associated with therapeutic abortions this seems to have been so, these women in some instances felt they had been treated with discourtesy and had been humiliated or degraded as persons.

At its nub the effectiveness of the doctor-patient relationship rests on a sense of mutual trust and respect. For those conditions which require a personal knowledge by a physician of the social circumstances of a patient, particularly when these matters involve social ethics and stigma, the give-and-take in obtaining information under these circumstances requires time, much perception, and a sense of personal tolerance by patients and physicians. Because of the important service provided by the medical profession, patients

often have a feeling of personal gratitude for the treatment and the special concern which they have received from their physicians. Patients may see their physicians as wise and understanding counsellors who are to be trusted as few others are in society with the intimate details of personal experience.

But just as there can be discrepancies between what is ideal and what is actual, there are also two sides to the treatment which is given to induced abortion patients. For many of these patients and their physicians, the customary doctor-patient relationship had broken down. In many instances mistrust had replaced trust. There was much mutual bitterness and a not always shielded antagonism. For some patients and some physicians, these situations led to strained and emotional encounters.

From the perspective of the women who had induced abortions, the personal accounts give some graphic details about how they saw their medical treatment and how they felt about it. Many of these women were angry that despite having previously visited physicians and having taken contraceptive precautions, they were seen to have been sexually irresponsible or promiscuous. They were often angry about the difficulties which had been involved and the complex manoeuvring which was required in the processing of their requests for an abortion through professional and administrative networks. They saw many doctors as roadblocks, rather than as facilitators. In their eyes some of the physicians whom they had consulted had failed the test of personal decency by insulting them, making light of what was being done, providing indifferent and impersonal care, or on occasion, giving rough physical examinations.

In some instances the pelvic examinations of these women by their physicians had not been done in the presence of a nurse or another attendant. A few patients in this situation felt that the professional care which they had received bordered on being impertinent and in one instance, lewd. The extent to which this happens is unknown. Because of the intense personal nature of this aspect of the doctor-patient relationship, which in some cases were already strained, these allegations are difficult to prove. It should be observed, however, that where the widely endorsed but not always adhered to practice was followed of having another attendant such as a nurse or an aide present during a gynaecological examination, no concern was voiced by these patients about professional improprieties. Some of the women who gave their personal accounts were upset because they had been financially gouged for a service to which they felt they were entitled under national health insurance. Constrained by the stigma associated with this operation from making formal complaints about their extra-billings, some of these women felt their physicians had taken an unfair advantage of them.

The views of the physicians who did abortion operations were on occasion in sharp contrast with those of their patients. Half of the obstetrician-gynaecologists in eight provinces did not perform this operation. Among the members of this medical specialty who did, many did so out of a sense of professional obligation. Almost without exception these specialists and many family doctors made the point that they had been primarily trained to provide therapy and to save lives, not to terminate life. With little or no formal training in the social and psychological management of the special circumstances

involving the women who were seeking abortions, these physicians had much ambivalence about their work. Adhering to the ethics of their profession, many of these physicians gave exemplary care. But the personal dislike which some doctors had about induced abortion was not always professionally shielded in their treatment of these patients. Their opinions of induced abortion such as in some of the replies which were given in the national physician survey were readily apparent to their patients.

The women who do not take the trouble to try to prevent pregnancies are the majority of abortion cases.

. . .

I have seen many women who repeatedly come demanding abortions for unwanted pregnancies, but yet despite family planning counselling they "cannot be bothered" to take contraceptive measures.

. . .

...someone who's doing sex liberally, without morals, not bothering (about) contraception. Having no responsibility, not willing to obey parents or school disciplines, alcoholics, school drop-outs, and welfare cheaters.

. . .

An easy solution to an illegitimate affair or a morning after the night before.

. . .

Many of us feel our practices can be ruined by the constant barrage of young irresponsible girls seeking a therapeutic abortion without a whim of regret and like it's our responsibility to perform it. I do it. But I dislike it. Our beds are filled with these patients, while others wait months for elective, needed surgery.

. . .

Love and sexual companionship are rights to be preserved and cherished, not treated as an offhand form of excitement as part of the day's entertainment.

. . .

Too liberal and readily available...the increasing number of repeaters with an increasing decline in morals leading to degradation and degeneracy.

. . .

Abortions are sought by women as a "back-up" to contraception and women have become careless about contraception.

Ridiculous: After 25 years of active practice—this problem did not exist 15 years ago.

What the sharp differences in the perspectives of some patients and some doctors about induced abortion highlight is that personal convictions can be, and on occasion are, intermingled with what patients may expect of physicians, and in turn, be involved in the professional judgment of physicians. Changes in legislation do not immediately alter long-held values, particularly when the medical condition poses difficult choices involving personal morals, professional ethics, and much social stigma. Unlike the practice of some other branches of medicine, there was little that was felt to be satisfying either by patients or physicians about the induced abortion operation. Both wanted to be done with it as quickly as possible. From the personal accounts given by women and the surveys done by the Committee, **an appraisal of how the optimal professional care of women who obtain induced abortions can be provided is indicated, an appraisal which takes into account their views, and the concerns of the doctors and nurses who serve them.**