

Florida Gulf Coast University  
Histories of Choice

Interviewee: [REDACTED]

Interviewers: Kaley Dietrich and Talissa Soto

Location: Over the Phone

Date: November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Interviewee: [REDACTED]

KD: Kaley Dietrich

TS: Talissa Soto

KD: Alright, I started the recording and we do have two recorders just so you know to use one as a backup in case one has issues.

Interviewee: Okay.

KD: So, I'm going to get started and we're gonna go around and say our names just for the record. So, my name is Kaley Dietrich.

TS: My name is...oh

Interviewee: Alright.

TS: I'm sorry. My name is Talissa Soto.

Interviewee: Hi.

KD: and can we get your name for the record?

Interviewee: My name is [REDACTED].

KD: Alright, and we just want to have recorded evidence that you did have the um confidentiality notice and we do have permission to use the interview and that you understand everything that is in the notice you were sent.

Interviewee: Yes, you do have permission to use whatever information that you gather and in whatever way you would like and there are no restrictions on the use.

KD. Alright, wonderful. And we do just wanna let you know that if at any time you wanna stop the interview or stop the recording, you have full permission to say so and we will oblige with any requests that you do have.

Interviewee: Okay, great. I don't anticipate any problems but I appreciate the offer.

KD: Alright wonderful, so we would like to get started with getting to know a little bit about your biographical information, just little things about you like where you were born and so forth.

Interviewee: Sure...uhm I was born in [REDACTED] but was raised in the northern part of the state up close to [REDACTED]. Uhm I went all through high school...grade school and high school in [REDACTED]. Uhm when I got out of high school, I joined a group called [REDACTED] which stood for [REDACTED]. It was called the domestic Peace Corps. It started a couple of years after the Peace Corps did and we did pretty much the same things...uhm serving in different communities...uhm teaching English, teaching reading, uhm...working with gangs a while. That was something that was done a lot. I worked with the Boys and Girls Club in the community in [REDACTED]. Uhm, when I was 18...uhm...when I was 18 my friends had gone out to celebrate the Fourth of July and I decided to stay home. Uhm...uh...a stranger robbed our house and raped me.

KD: Oh man...

Interviewee: and as a result of that rape, I became pregnant...at the time in [REDACTED] the law was that to be able to get an abortion, you had to be 21, you had to have a guardian or parent's permission to have the abortion and it could only be in a case of rape or incest. There was no, you know, allowance for the woman's health needs. Uhm, my mother was in California. She was not eligible to give permission for the abortion...So after a few days...at that point I was working on a project with other [REDACTED] with an attorney in [REDACTED] and at that point he managed to get my mother's permission to make him my guardian so that he could give permission for the abortion and that's what happened...uhm

KD: So just for reference, what year was it that you had your abortion?

Interviewee: This was uhm July 4<sup>th</sup>, [REDACTED].

KD: Alright. And why, I'm curious to know, why was your mother not eligible to give you permission? Why did you have to go through a lawyer?

Interviewee: She didn't live in the state.

KD: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, she was in [REDACTED].

KD: So you had...so the parent had to be in the state at the time in order to give permission?

Interviewee: Right.

KD: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. So that...ya know...I had to wait a little longer than normal. Uhm...the abortion was...I have...I pressed charges against this guy.

KD: So you knew who he was?

Interviewee: I didn't know him.

KD: Okay.

Interviewee: But when he left my house, he had to go down the stairs and I got out of bed and turned the lights on and he looked up at me and I could see him really well. I had a good description of him and he didn't come...try to come back at me. He just ran out of the house. So I was able to give the police a really good description. They had found him within the space of three hours.

KD: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: Maybe. And he was from that neighborhood area and had been stalking me.

KD: Oh, do you know for how long?

Interviewee: Uhm probably 3 months.

KD: Okay.

Interviewee: But I wasn't aware of it at all. I was just sailing through the world saving people. [slight laughter] So uhm it didn't occur to me to look for someone who was looking for me. So in the meantime...the pressure of...becoming pregnant, knowing that I had...had to have an abortion while I was dealing with the prosecution of this guy was uhm extremely intense.

KD: So the trial was going on during the investigation...or during the process of you getting the abortion?

Interviewee: Yes, I had the abortion...they were in the pre-trial phases of whatever was going on with him. We hadn't gone...when we went to trial I had had the abortion already.

KD: So it was a legal procedure that you had despite it being before Roe v Wade?

Interviewee: Yeah, uhm some states, like I said, they made the age 21 where...you know, that was...I mean you couldn't be 18, 19, or 20, ya know, to allow yourself to have an abortion. Ya know, they made the age 21 and, ya know, it...and only made it for...in the case of rape or incest but that was as restrictive as [REDACTED] was. For the day they were very open.

KD: So could you tell me a bit about your support system because you have not only one awful awful tragedy but now you have to have this pregnancy that has happened. So, how was your family, your friends, those around you? What kind of support system did you have through this event?

Interviewee: uhm I'm afraid that I didn't have a whole lot...the people that I worked with were really good people. They were used to working with situations that were pretty traumatic but none of them have had, as far as I knew, anyone in their lives that have ever been raped. They didn't know...and to be pregnant...they didn't know how to deal with me and so they kind of withdrew and I know after I found out I was pregnant and was going to have to have an abortion, I cried a lot and one of the guys that works with us, I remember him saying to his girlfriend, "my

god is she ever going to stop crying?” and...my mother was of no help. I did not hear from her until the abortion was over and I actually called her, told her it had been done and I had an uncle, her brother, who lived in [REDACTED] and I thought well I'll call him but I haven't seen him since I was a kid but I'll call him and see if I can go to his place. He and his partner had a place out in the country in [REDACTED]. They worked in [REDACTED]. I thought maybe I could go stay there for a few days and just get physically away from everything. I called him and he laughed at me and he said you know, basically you got what you deserved for living where you were living and doing the kind of work you were doing and no you can't come here. Uhm, and...the...as far as the actual abortion went...I was...There was no counseling, no one talked to me about what was going to be done, what to expect afterwards, and I had no...I was like off the farm kind of as far as sexually knowledgeable and I had no idea what was going to happen...uhm. The day of the abortion I was...in bed at a hospital and this enormous...and I'm sure he really was enormous...I don't think he didn't just seem enormous uhm...This enormous guy who was the nurse came in and pulled back the sheets on the bed and started shaving me and I was hysterical. I mean, this is the only contact after the rape that I'd had with a man and I had no idea that this was part of the process. Uhm, ya know, thank god they don't do that anymore at least from what I've heard. But it was so frightening and...and this idea of having a male involved in that procedure after a rape uhm...that's...I was just so frightened and nobody stepped forward \*cough\* excuse me...ya know, to tell me what was happening or why or just to say, ya know, hey you're gonna get through this...uhm this isn't the end of the world, ya know, or anything would have been better than nothing. Then I remember after the abortion while I was still in the hospital, I was in an enormous amount of pain and I wasn't one to complain then, not now, but I told the nurse that I was in a lot of pain and she said, “Well what do you expect? We just vacuumed out a baby out of you.” And it was just like someone had just punched me in the gut. Ya know, it...no sympathy there and then when I called my mother to tell her everything had been done, ya know, I told her, even though she and I were not really close, I told her the anxiety I had over the shaving issue with a male nurse and the nurse not being...the other's not being particularly sympathetic and she the same thing, almost the same words, ya know. She kind of laughed and said “well they just took a baby out of you” and I remember saying, “it wasn't a baby, mom.” But my family treated it like...they didn't look at it like a fetus. They looked at it like I had a baby taken.

KD: So, I'm curious. When you were growing up with your family and while in school, was abortion, reproductive rights, anything on your mind before hand? Did you have any views on the procedure before going through this?

Interviewee: Uhm, we didn't talk a lot about it. In fact, we probably talked next to nothing about it. Uhm...my mother was semi-religious but I never heard her really say anything. I mean she never really discussed basic sex with me much less something as traumatic as an abortion. I didn't have an opinion about it. When I was about 15 I started being really active in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement and I had formed my own opinions about many things...women's rights...and while I didn't dwell on it because I didn't see a time where I might need an abortion, ya know, not in reality...uhm it's like “that wouldn't happen to me” is

how I looked at it but I knew that if the time came that I would have an abortion even if I had to do it myself or find somebody in a back alley. I had formed that opinion.

KD: I'm curious, you said your mother...you said your mother was semi-religious. Were you religious at all? Did you follow any doctrine, or do you now?

Interviewee: Uhm, she...I'm an atheist and have been since I was 15. From the time I was 8 to the time I was 15, I was raised...excuse me \*cough\*...I was raised as a Mormon. My mother, as far as I know is still a Mormon but when I was 15 I left the church and shortly after that I declared that I was an atheist and I still am.

KD: So, after the procedure, did you continue working in the area, continue living in the area, or did you change professions, go to university, or anything of that sort?

Interviewee: I did go away for a while. I went to [REDACTED], of all places, and got a job selling encyclopedias door to door in the middle of winter. But for me that was kind of a break . . . When I look back at it, I think I had a nervous breakdown. And I lived there for maybe three months or four months. And then I went back to [REDACTED] and went through their little questionnaires about how I was doing and could I handle coming back into the system. And I went back and rejoined [REDACTED], not in the same state. I went to [REDACTED].

KD: . . . So after moving and changing your surroundings, after the entire event was over, did you find getting back into having romantic relationships with other individuals?

Interviewee: Yes—I could say *oh yeah it changed my life*. It wasn't that dramatic but it was insidious. And it kind of slowly took over the way I looked at relationships with people. I was hugely disappointed because I had been so active in the women's movement, and even though I was only 18, at the time there were a huge number of young black women from the [REDACTED] who were there just to support the defendant, and not support me as a woman. And that caught up with me later in life, not being able to trust anybody for support. I want to say all these years later it doesn't bother me, but it does occasionally. It's not something I dwell on all the time, I have a life. But 4th of July I remember, and it's always going to be there, in how I look at people.

KD: You said that you were heavily involved with women's groups. So what women's groups were you involved with and was there any support from them at all, before or after the procedure?

Interviewee: No there really wasn't. And I belong to professional groups. We worked—you sign up and you have a membership and like now in the NAACP or SNIC or SDS, Student Democracy Society. You belong to those groups; you might attend conferences or protests, but it wasn't like a woman's support system. And as I had an author tell me famously one time, "It's great being an atheist, but where do you go when you need support?" They're kind of out there alone.

KD: . . . I'm taking it that you experienced a lot of stigma from your family and those around. Do you feel that that stigma has been continuous since [REDACTED]? Is it around today with abortions and events like rape happening?

Interviewee: I don't think it's a constant thing. I would say as I've gotten older some of my relatives have died, so I don't have that. My mother, however, is still alive. I haven't talked to her in 20-something years. And the abortion was part of the reason, not all of the reason by any means, but part of the reason. My brother, whom died when he was 25, was conflicted about it—we were very close. He wasn't sure what to do, whether to support my mother or support me. And that never was resolved before he died.

KD: Did he identify as a Mormon, or had he separated from the church?

Interviewee: I think by that point he was living by himself or with other people in a commune kind of thing.

KD: Okay.

Interviewee: . . . I'm sure he didn't identify himself as a Mormon. He identified himself as some Eastern-influenced group, whose name I can't pronounce.

KD: You had been in your 20s when Roe v. Wade was passed, correct?

Interviewee: Yes.

KD: How did you feel about that? What was your experience in your community when the Supreme Court decided to have abortion be a legal procedure?

Interviewee: Well I was thrilled. The more choice we have, the better. And I don't believe anyone should make decisions about our bodies except ourselves—I'm not sure about the community as a whole, it was pretty divided. It depended on where you were geographically. And I was doing a lot of traveling, and it really depended on where you were as to what kind of feedback you got. The country wasn't behind it like it is now, despite our newly Republican-based Congress; they're really out of tune about how people in this country feel about Roe v. Wade. But at the time, I think the Supreme Court made a very brave decision. It wasn't necessarily a popular decision, but I think it was the right one.

KD: Did you know anybody else who had an abortion, either before or after Roe v. Wade?

Interviewee: I feel like it, but I don't know where they are now. I know two young women who lived at pretty much the same time in a home for unwed mothers, in the late '60s, like '69, and they lived in [REDACTED]. And I knew them from my work there. They both had abortions. It was a rule supposedly that if you lived there and paid their high price that you had to give the baby up. But for whatever reason they both were allowed to have abortions. They are the only two that I know. Obviously I was . . . the other people I know . . . oh wait a minute, I do know

another woman who was raped and also became pregnant. That was in the early '80s. And I don't know where she is either now.

KD: What about when you were in high school? Did any girls fall pregnant or did they leave under mysterious circumstances or anything like that?

Interviewee: You know I lived in little, tiny towns, little lumber towns or professional fishing ports, you know the coast of [REDACTED]. Just really tiny towns, I mean we had in our high school senior class we might have had 30 kids total. There always was a rumor that there was one girl, [laughter] but I really don't think anybody got pregnant or had an abortion. It was too small a town to do that.

KD: So what do you think about current efforts right now by states and the federal government to restrict access to reproductive health and abortions?

Interviewee: Oh my... I can't believe that men and the few women that we have in Congress still don't get it, that people do not want the government to be involved with their bodies, to tell them what they can and can't do as far as reproductive rights.

KD: Do you think that Roe v. Wade is or will be at risk of being overturned with the tax on reproductive health?

Interviewee: I don't think they will be able to overturn it. It's been oppressive for so many years now; it would be very difficult and surprising to me if they can overturn it. But I think they certainly can chip away at one little part here, one little part there, and make things more restrictive. It would be nice if the federal government would step in and make a law that would allow women freedom, freedom for reproductive rights. But that's not going to happen. I think there are places in the law that can be done away with, and I think that's what the Republicans will aim to do. Not right away, they've got other things they want to waste their time on first, but I think at some point it will come back to Roe v. Wade, and we have a little bit of time.

KD: With views on the procedure and on the Supreme Court case, are you currently involved with any women's groups or political groups that advocate for these kinds of situations?

Interviewee: I belong to [REDACTED]. I belong to [REDACTED]. Those are the only two right now.

KD: . . . It's [REDACTED] and—

Interviewee: And [REDACTED].

KD: [REDACTED], okay thank you. So how did you become aware of the project that we are doing currently?

Interviewee: Well I told [inaudible]. I've been around so long and been active enough that I am a very long-time member now. And I'm also a huge advocate of women in political office. And I think [REDACTED] does the best job at that, at pursuing and successfully getting women into office. So that's where I focus my efforts.

KD: So we're coming to a close for the interview and I was wondering if there were any topics or if there was anything else that you wanted to talk about before we end the interview?

Interviewee: No, I think you've covered everything.

KD: Talissa, did you have any questions?

Interviewee: No, I don't.

TS: I only had one question because it didn't come up during your biographical information, but what was your relationship, if any, with your father? Did you have a relationship with him or was he present during the time that you were dealing with the abortion?

Interviewee: No, by that point he had a number of strokes and was in kind of a [inaudible]. And he never knew anything that had gone on with me.

KD: Well we thank you greatly for sharing your story with us. We really appreciate it.

Interviewee: Oh you are more than welcome.

KD: We currently don't have any more questions right now, but would you be open to doing a follow-up if we have any other information that we needed from you?

Interviewee: Oh sure! No problem.

KD: Okay just so you know we are turning off the recorder.