History in Focus

15. A Sacred Calling

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Daniel Story

I'm Daniel Story, and this is *History in Focus*, a podcast by the *American Historical Review*. This episode is special for a few reasons: It's the final episode of the first full season of History in Focus. We'll take a break for July and August and be back again in September. But more than that, this episode features the inaugural entry in our new podcast collaboration initiative, this one from a podcast called *Sexing History* with a piece titled "A Sacred Calling," which explores the history of abortion services in the state of Texas through the story of early abortion providers Curtis Boyd (who was a former evangelical minister) and Glenna Halvorson Boyd. You'll also find a piece in the History Lab section of the journal where *Sexing History* producers Gillian Frank, Saniya Lee Ghanoui, and Lauren Jae Gutterman outline their work on this episode as well as their perspectives on history podcasting more broadly. You'll find that in the June 2023 issue of the AHR. So, without further ado, we're pleased to present to you episode 15, "A Sacred Calling."

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd

This wouldn't be unique to Texas, because people used to ask me what's it like to work in the Bible Belt, and I say you know Texas is … Texas is part Bible Belt, but it's also part Wild West and there's a strong belief in individual rights and freedoms. That didn't change until the rise of the religious right. That's when that changed.

Curtis Boyd

Women who come into the clinic are the same as the women who are outside the clinic, they have religious beliefs and ethical systems. What they have is a pregnancy that they decided they don't want and it's not in their best interest for them, the children that have or want to have for their family or for their community. They may go through an ethical, moral decision making process. That's what people don't know even the youngest 12, 13 years old, they will do that. When they come in these women that is especially hard on women who have been going to anti-abortion churches. They come in thinking I'm a bad woman about to do the wrong thing, the thing that's prohibited by God is going to punish me and they told me counseling, is God going to punish me am I going to go to hell? What she really wants is affirmation. She wants the need, to feel that she has been reaffirmed that "I am a good person."

Gillian Frank
That was Curtis Boyd and Glenna Halvorson-Boyd, who provided abortions in Texas from the 1970s until this past summer. Too often, when we think about abortion and religion, we picture protesters outside of clinics carrying graphic posters and shouting that abortion is a sin. We might envision white crosses on church lawns, and the blanket condemnation of abortion as murder. But there are other stories about abortion and faith – quieter stories – that involve devout people engaging in the hard work of reproductive healthcare. For nearly half a century, Curtis Boyd and Glenna Halvorson-Boyd have devoted their lives to offering safe and affirming abortion care. Curtis is a former Baptist minister. Glenna is an atheist. They have been married for close to fifty years and share a commitment to providing safe and affirming abortions.

Curtis began providing abortions in East Texas in the late 1960s, when elective abortion was a crime. The genesis of his activism was in interfaith religious efforts to make abortion safe and legal. In 1973, after the US Supreme Court legalized elective abortion, local religious groups helped Curtis open an abortion clinic in Dallas. In the 1970s, Glenna Halvorson-Boyd began working at this clinic as a counselor and soon came to oversee their practice as co-director. Their Dallas practice existed until the summer of 2022.

For Curtis and Glenna, providing abortions has been an act of love and compassion. It offered them a way to help people who are suffering. And across six decades, they have grounded their ongoing service in the fundamental belief that abortion is and ought to be an accessible form of healthcare.

Lauren Gutterman
In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization* overturned *Roe v. Wade*. The *Dobbs* decision took away federal protections for abortion rights and allowed states to ban abortions. It effectively ended the Boyds' abortion services in Texas. Across the country, the *Dobbs* decision has already magnified the obstacles many patients face in securing safe, affordable abortions. It has created horrific healthcare consequences across the United States.

In Louisiana, newly created state policies prevented doctors from performing a dilation and extraction abortion procedure on a woman whose fetus did not have a skull. And in Ohio, a ten-year-old rape victim had to cross state lines to secure a legal abortion. Such stories are not outliers but the predictable consequences of criminalizing abortion.

In tracing Curtis and Glenna's paths, from before *Roe v Wade* when abortion was a crime, through the turbulent decades when abortion was legal, and into the present, when abortion has become a crime once again, we center their commitment to their patients and to each other. Glenna Halverson and Curtis Boyd met and fell in love through their work at Curtis's clinic in the 1970s. Abortion brought them together. Their enduring partnership has enabled them to withstand the violence and hostility of the anti-abortion movement. In the face of tremendous opposition and personal risk, Curtis and Glenna share a belief in the importance of their labor. This episode then is not only a story of faith and abortion, but a story about abortion providers that is underappreciated and seldom told: a love story.

I'm Lauren Gutterman.

Gillian Frank
I'm Gillian Frank. Welcome to *Sexing History*.

When Curtis began his medical career in the mid-1960s, getting an elective abortion in Texas was difficult. The state had prohibited abortion since the 1850s except in cases where pregnancy threatened the life of the mother. Doctors seldom bent these strict rules, even though they knew that some of the women they turned away might end up in emergency rooms or worse after seeking out illegal abortions.

If elective legal abortions in Texas were difficult to come by, illegal abortions were a different and well-known story. Illegal abortionists operated in motels, in private homes, in gas stations, or neighborhood bars. Some Texas women traveled to border towns in Mexico in search of providers. Luckier abortion seekers found skilled medical practitioners. Others fell into the hands of unskilled predators who were all too willing to take their money and mutilate their bodies.

By the mid-1960s, Texas newspapers drew from public health research and ongoing legislative hearings across the country to report how hundreds of thousands of criminal abortions were being performed each year across the United States. They shared alarming statistics about botched illegal procedures leading to hundreds of deaths a year. Many more women, anonymous and uncounted, suffered bodily harm and psychological trauma from these criminalized operations.

Lauren Gutterman
Mainstream journalism, public health research, and legislative hearings made the dangers of incompetent and criminal abortion apparent to the general public in the 1960s. They also underlined that a skilled physician could quickly, easily and safely perform abortions. A growing chorus of professional and lay health advocates called for the reform of abortion laws. Others, impatient with the pace of change, decided to break the law. It was in this

spirit that Curtis Boyd began offering safe and affordable illegal abortions. His action, five years before *Roe v Wade*, transformed a small town in southwestern Texas into a hub for abortion seekers from across the region.

In the late 1960s, thousands of unwillingly pregnant women found their way to Curtis's office in the small town of Athens, Texas, 75 miles southeast of Dallas. Many of these women were destitute. All were desperate for competent medical care. And Curtis, driven by his religious convictions, broke a law he viewed as immoral.

Gillian Frank
Athens seems like an unlikely destination for illegal abortions. In the 1960s, it was a rural community with a population of fewer than 10,000 people. Like many small towns in Texas, Athens had churches, farms, football, and a small downtown. It was known for "black eyed peas, peaches, pigs and pottery." A highlight of the community's social calendar was the annual "fiddlers' reunion," where western string bands from across the region performed.

Curtis grew up on a small farm outside of Athens and was raised as a Southern Baptist. As a child he learned that the Bible was the literal word of God, that he could achieve salvation by surrendering his life to Jesus, and that it was his duty to share his faith with others. Curtis's ability to memorize and recite Bible passages as a child led him to become a preacher at the age of 16. Yet steeped as he was in the religious life of his Evangelical community, Curtis began questioning the rigid religious teaching of his elders.

Curtis Boyd
I was interested in, really philosophy, but I didn't, I don't think I even knew the word philosophy when I was young, when I was a boy. But I was very inquisitive, intelligent boy and I had a lot of questions. I was interested in how things work, how's this world put together. How do we know what is, that we're behaving and conducting ourselves in the way that pleases God? I wasn't always sure about that. Although the other brothers and sisters in the church were very sure that God knew what he was doing in all things.

Lauren Gutterman
After he entered college, Curtis became increasingly disturbed by racial segregation, which he considered contrary to his Christian values. The Bible, Curtis said, "called out to everyone's salvation, everyone can come unto Jesus and was welcome." Curtis wondered, if that's the case, why did his fellow Evangelicals tolerate segregated restrooms, water fountains and restaurants. These, and other revelations, caused Curtis to move away from fundamentalism.

While attending medical school in Dallas, Curtis discovered Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalists were a progressive bunch. And they were positively wild by Southern Baptist standards. At the time, Evangelicals usually shied away from politics. They emphasized salvation in the next life and individual transformation. Unitarians expressed their faith through social service and political action. They saw it as their duty to challenge unjust social structures. As one Unitarian Universalist explained about the denomination in the mid-1960s, "Instead of a creed, it sets its people free to seek a living truth; instead of ritual it asks devotion to the deeds that make the world more righteous and its people more just." Curtis felt at home in the experimental worship services, vibrant discussion groups, and community programs for education, civil rights, and civil liberties.

Curtis returned to Athens and started a private practice in 1964. He threw himself into local politics. It was also around this time that he performed his first illegal abortion. He told us about the circumstances that led him to break the law:

Curtis Boyd
So when I first went into medical practice, in the primary care, on one occasion a nurse knocked on my door—I was in the office at the time doing some chart work—and she said there is a young woman here insisting on talking to me and that she had to talk to me privately. So I told her to show her in. Coming in was this late teens, she was probably in her late teens, typical East Texas farm girl. She had on a feed sack dress. So I asked her to sit down and I said, "so what can I do for you Sally?" which was her name, the name the nurse gave me. And she said, "I need you to do me an abortion" and she used the word. I said, "well you know now Sally I can't do that, that's illegal." And she said, "don't matter you got to do me one." And there she sat. What am I going to do? I already knew I was going to do an abortion, and I thought, I'm going to do it.

Gillian Frank
Curtis's Unitarian congregation in Athens fostered his growing commitment to reproductive rights. In the mid-1960s, his church was actively studying what they called "women's issues," meaning the laws and cultural practices that subordinated women. Of particular concern to Unitarians was the fact that restrictive abortion law drove, in their words, "many women in the United States and Canada to seek illegal abortions with increased risk of death, while others must travel to distant lands for lawful relief." The Unitarian Universalists issued a pathbreaking statement in 1963 describing abortion restrictions as "an affront to human life and dignity." Unitarians' deep concern "for dignity and rights" led them to fight to make abortion legal and accessible, though not necessarily in that order.

The minister at Curtis's Unitarian Church in Athens shared his denomination's sense of urgency about the dangers facing thousands of abortion seekers. He enlisted Curtis to advance a mission that was being undertaken by Unitarian leaders across the United States: identifying affordable and medically competent abortion providers. The goal was to allow

Unitarian clergy to refer women to trusted doctors. What Curtis found was that such providers were few and far between. Competent abortion providers regularly charged upwards of $500, which would be approximately $4,500 today. Poor people, Curtis remembered, couldn't get abortions.

Lauren Gutterman
Curtis and his fellow Unitarians were not alone in the search for abortion providers. Seventy miles away in Dallas, two Methodist ministers were spearheading a fight to making abortion accessible and legal. They were among hundreds of ministers and rabbis across the United States participating in a clandestine abortion referral and support network in the 1960s. These two Methodist ministers founded the Dallas branch of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, an ecumenical group of religious leaders who helped abortion seekers find safe and affordable providers in the United States and Mexico. Here's one of the group's founders, Reverend Claude Evans:

Claude Evans
Part of my work at Southern Methodist University is counseling. Occasionally there comes to me girls, teenagers, pregnant, when marriage does not seem to be indicated. When romance does not seem to be involved. When this is a sin of youth and passion and not a decision made calmly. And one day with a counselee sitting in front of me with this problem, I began to see my daughter through her eyes. I wondered what would I do if my daughter had become pregnant and marriage was not indicated, when there seemed to be no good solution. And gradually my mind changed, so now I do believe that in some situations, in some cases, abortion should be a matter between the mother, her doctor, and her spiritual counselor.

Lauren Gutterman
The Dallas clergy were desperate to find local doctors who could provide abortions. They, too, asked Curtis to help. Curtis knew the task was dangerous. He remembers his fateful decision in this way:

Curtis Boyd
I mean it would be devastating for my immediate family and my extended family would be shamed by it. I would end up without a medical license and in prison. That's a big ask. What he said, the ministers, if you're charged we will testify on your behalf, on your good character, we will protect you. I didn't say anything but I knew, "No you're not going to protect me. I'm still going to be guilty of a felony. Your testimony is not going to stop that."

Lauren Gutterman
Despite the legal risks, Curtis's faith compelled him to say yes to the ministers. He explained,

"You should be humble before your God. You should serve. I acted on those impulses of service and compassion."

Curtis Boyd
Jesus died on the cross, he died for others. So, maybe there's some of that there, I don't know. It was almost like a calling to me. This is the work that I've been called to do. This is the calling I wanted and that I can make a difference. I am making a difference.

Gillian Frank
After Curtis opened his office doors to abortion seekers, they arrived in droves from across the United States. Clergy referred most of them. But a number heard about him through word of mouth. Curtis recalls they came by "bus, by train, by hitchhiking, by car, however they could." He worked long hours, sometimes not turning out the clinic's lights until late at night. He did not want to turn away women who had no other options.

Curtis wanted to make his services affordable. He set his price at $150 at a time when many providers charged as much as $1000. He waived his fee entirely for poorer women:

Curtis Boyd
I charged the minimum rate. I mean, I could have done all the abortions I wanted for $1000 and I charged, initially, only $100. I mean it was nothing. Let me tell you about this woman. This woman saw a minister who was in Austin, Texas. One of the clergy who was a member of the Clergy Consultation referred her. She was a Mexican-American woman, immigrant, she had several children, she's poor. But I didn't know any of this until I saw her when she showed up at the office that morning. This story, she had ridden there on a bus from there she walked to the hospital, which was a mile and a half away. She spent the night in the restroom of the hospital because she knew that it was one that had a toilet, had a basin so she could wash, and she slept on the floor. She knew it would be safe, so this is a woman who's had a hard life and knows how to survive. I mean she knows, she comes in, she speaks Spanish only, very little English. She comes in and at that time there were no Spanish-speaking people in this part of Texas, central-east Texas. The next morning she gets up and washes her face, combs her hair, and she comes over to see me. When she goes to pay me, she opens her purse and what does she have in her bag? It's one of these Mexican spreading bag. She's got tortillas, I see these tortillas in this, probably all she had to eat. She brought these tortillas to eat with her on the way. She pulls out, she knew what the fee was, so she was going to pay me. She pulls out a crumpled up bill, just wadded up, sturdy, turns out it's a $5 bill when I looked. And I'm thinking, well am I going to take the $5—the question was not am I going to do her abortion for her or not cause she knew what the fee was doing—and she's come all this way with no money. I mean, talk about living just on faith. I mean, and desperation, I mean she takes, she had to have money for the bus ticket and

small, dried tortillas and she comes up there and sleeps on the floor of the restroom. And she has no money expect her bus ticket back and that's all she has. She drops that in my hand so my thought was, okay she has made her contribution do I as a matter of pride and respect do I take the money and say thank you or do I give it back to her. I decided to give it back to her. I said I would like to return this to you in gratitude as … the courage and fortitude you had in getting here and she doesn't understand anything I'm saying, probably (laughs), but I … she gives me this toothless smile, takes the money quickly and puts in back in her purse. So I thought, okay, she was glad to get the money back. Um, well, you see this is, for me, I was, for cause this was not about money. The clergy group, we were doing this to change society, to meet needs, there was clearly an obligation to be compassionate, and to serve, and to never could to be greedy.

Gillian Frank
At first, neighbors and local authorities ignored Curtis's illegal activities. But as young women dressed in counter-cultural clothing, often driving in Volkswagens, and smelling of marijuana flooded Athens, Curtis's practice began to raise suspicions.

Curtis Boyd
Police started following these cars to my office. I thought, well so they just sat there and then they would leave. But then they started stopping some of these cars, and lo and behold they found some drugs on some of them, marijuana, they put a couple of men in jail so then I get the message from the girl comes back and my boyfriend says you gotta come get him out of jail if you don't he's going to tell the police that you're doing abortions cause it's your fault he's in jail. He wouldn't be in jail if he weren't bringing me here and he wouldn't be bringing me here if you weren't doing abortions. That's the kind of logic I had to deal with. So one of my nurses came to me and said, Dr. Boyd I believe in what you're doing, but you need to go to the city to do it. You can't stay here. So I went to Dallas.

Gillian Frank
Curtis moved to Dallas in late 1969. There, he continued to offer illegal abortions without any issues. But his practice became more precarious after a group of feminists, seeking to overturn the state's abortion laws, provoked a District Attorney who promised to crack down on Dallas County's illegal abortion providers.

Lauren Gutterman
As Curtis quietly provided thousands of illegal abortions to women across the southwest, feminist activists, many of them students at the University of Texas at Austin, started a birth control information center near campus. At that time, unmarried women had no legal right to access birth control. The Birth Control Information Center began as an effort to help unmarried women get birth control pills. Although the center's original mission was to

improve access to contraception, the center began receiving calls from women asking for help getting abortions. These requests expanded the group's mission. Volunteers at the center referred women to safe abortion providers in San Antonio, Dallas, and Peidras Negras in Mexico. Here's one of the group's members, Alicia Jarry:

Alicia Jarry
Those of us that drove women to San Antonio, often they were very sick with morning sickness and so we had driving down, they'd be in the back seat with a bucket in their lap (laughs), they'd have the abortion and afterwards the hormones of pregnancy, you know the pregnancies like that will drop very fast and they were completely back to feeling normal and would get back in the car and I'd say is there anything I can get you before we go and they'd say, oh yeah, a hamburger, French fries, and a milkshake (laughs). Oh well I know part of this is you're just relieved, so so grateful that you feel so good after feeling so horrible. You know, and then the cycle of relief. And of course as you know, many, many of those women already had many children already, and this was not only a physical thing but a financial thing for them to be freed up for continuing and of course they were al give birth control if they wanted it and whatever worked the best, we'd put in IUDs, we had, you know, oral contraception, whatever was needed so, um, so we had carpools that we did that with which was really, uh, really great. You know, it was like sisterhood and when I'm talking in the past you just seem to know a lot of these things are still going on because that's the beginning of us being very active about that part of women's health.

Lauren Gutterman
Alicia Jarry and her fellow activists believed women shouldn't have to break the law to get the healthcare they needed. They asked one of the only women lawyers they knew for help in challenging the state's abortion law. That lawyer, Sarah Weddington, was the daughter of a Methodist minister, and had only recently graduated from University of Texas law school. She agreed to take on the case and began looking for a plaintiff who had been denied an abortion in Texas. Weddington and her team found Norma McCorvey, known in legal records as Jane Roe. They filed suit on her behalf in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

Gillian Frank
The lawsuit pitted the feminist activists against Henry Wade, district attorney of Dallas county, who defended the abortion statute on behalf of the State of Texas. Wade was known for his moral conservatism: he staunchly opposed abortion and obscenity, and he even used his office to enforce the state's Sunday laws, which prevented shops from freely doing business on the Christian sabbath. A 1972 song, "The Ballad of Henry Wade," even catalogued his track record of being a moral crusader.

Audio clip of "The Ballad of Henry Wade"

The U.S. district court ruled in favor of Weddington and declared Texas's abortion regulations to be unconstitutional. Even so, the legal outcome still worried Curtis. The court had refused to grant an injunction. This lack of injunction meant that Henry Wade and other Texas officials could still prosecute abortion providers. And Wade told reporters that he planned to continue doing just that because the state of Texas, in his words, had "a compelling interest in protecting the life of the unborn child." In his public defense of the unborn, Wade reproduced the viewpoint of Catholic theologians who argued that life began at conception and that abortion is murder. Fearful that Wade's commitment to enforcing the abortion law put him in greater legal risk, Curtis moved his practice to New Mexico, where the state's newly liberalized abortion laws enabled him to reproductive healthcare without facing the same legal risks.

Audio of Walter Cronkite announcing the Roe v. Wade *decision*

Gillian Frank
On January 23, 1973, when the Supreme Court's decision came down in *Roe v Wade*, Curtis had been a full time abortion provider for five years, first in Texas and then in New Mexico.

Curtis Boyd
It's been legalized, thank god it's over! That was my first thought, I had made it. I had survived. I was going to do something else.

Lauren Gutterman
Curtis planned to devote himself to other social justice issues. The same group of ministers who had first enlisted Curtis to provide abortions had other ideas. They rightly worried that local hospitals would continue to exclude women, especially poor women, who might need abortions. Private clinics might charge exorbitant prices. And so, this group of Texas clergy asked Curtis to open an abortion clinic in Dallas that would be accessible to women from all economic backgrounds. The clergy provided the funds to cover startup costs. Within thirty days of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe,* Curtis opened The Fairmount Center in Dallas.

Everything about the Fairmount Center—from the office to the employees—reflected Curtis's compassionate approach to abortion care:

Curtis Boyd
It was an old, large old house that had been there with an upstairs, and I liked the feel of it. It was homey, very comfortable, and right then I knew I didn't want the more structured professional office building. And so we built it out, started employing and training staff, and the staff we got were incredible. I mean, this was the height of the women's movement and we had, we had receptionists who were PhDs in Women's Studies. I mean, some of them were graduates of seminaries, they were just incredible people. They just the same reason I was there, they wanted to do this.

Lauren Gutterman
Curtis remembers the years immediately after *Roe* as the calm before the storm: they had no security at the clinic. Few if any protesters picketed outside. Staff members and patients went in and out of the clinic un-harassed and un-harried. But abortion remained a fraught issue. Many women who came to the clinic were reckoning with their reproductive choices and their religious beliefs. Curtis's staff included abortion counselors who offered patients emotional support. Among these counselors was a 29-year-old woman from California named Glenna Halvorson:

Gillian Frank
Like Curtis, Glenna had not planned on a career in abortion care. She grew up in Modesto, California. While Curtis grew up in a religious family, Glenna's father was an atheist and her mother agnostic. She first learned about feminism within her own home:

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
I've typically thought of my background and particularly in contrast to Curtis' as so middle-America, average, normal. Um, however as I've looked back on it I think, mmm, that's how it appeared on the outside but that was certainly more complicated than that and hopefully more interesting. I grew up in Modesto, California. My father was a Norwegian immigrant, my mother was an escapee from Philadelphia proper. They were both avid feminists so I was raised by feminists. Given that my father was a Norwegian immigrant, that my mother had a career, we weren't your normal suburban California family of the 50s.

Gillian Frank
After graduating from Occidental College in California with a degree in English Literature, Glenna followed her first-husband to Texas. While he pursued a PhD, she found employment at the Urban league working to desegregate schools. Later she work as a counselor at a

halfway house for people diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia. In 1969, when one of her clients needed in an abortion, Glenna helped her get medical care.

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
I was told to contact the Chaplain at SMU—Southern Methodist University—which I did. And he referred me to a local doctor, a Curtis Boyd, whose office was 5 blocks from the halfway house, and being the arrogant and feminist that I was I thought, a local MD doing abortions must be not very good despite the reassurance from the Chaplain. So I raised money from Board Members and sent that woman to the feminist clinic in Los Angeles. I took her to the airport, got her on the plane, this was obviously when you could still do things like that, went back to pick her up at the end of the day. She got off of the plane, crying, confused, totally disoriented. Umm, she'd gotten very good care at the clinic. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that this was a very, very troubled, um, woman who'd had to make a long journey by herself to another world, go through an experience that all of which was strange and frightening to her, back to an airport, get on a plane. It was a long, hard day and she was—she'd come apart by the time she got back.

Gillian Frank
One of Glenna's friend told her about a job opportunity working as an abortion counselor in Dallas. Glenna remembered what her job entailed:

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
This is private time, our counseling is all one-on-one that we set aside to answer any and all of your questions, to discuss your concerns, there's obviously a lot of paperwork and importantly the consent forms and the information contained therein. But it's truly the patient's time and it's an opportunity to talk to somebody who's not part of your daily life about how you're feeling with this pregnancy and with being here today to have the abortion or begin the abortion process so we can start with whatever is most on your mind. I'll tell you the quick and easy question they ask which is, how long is this going to take, how much will it hurt, when can I get back to my normal life. The more interesting thing is that with that kind of an introduction, then the counselor's task is to sit still, to be present, and to allow the silence that it takes for the patient to go wherever she needs to go, and patients—my experience and that of most of our counselors is—that once the patient believes that she is actually being listened to and that you are interested in her situation, any parts of her story that she chooses to tell, patients will talk about surprising aspects of their life. They will reveal far more than I ever imagined that they would. I was accustomed at the halfway house and even with the school desegregation project, in having repeated contact with the same patients or people, clients. And I wondered how much a patient would share with a stranger. And to this day, I am stunned by the emotional range and depth at which patients will talk to us once they believe that we're listening.

Gillian Frank
Glenna came to love her work at the clinic. She found satisfaction in helping other women. In her previous jobs, providing mental healthcare and assisting in the desegregation of schools, she had often felt powerless to effect change. In abortion counseling, Glenna found she could make a tremendous difference in people's lives.

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
With a woman presenting for an abortion, it was so concrete, it was something that we could do. She could walk in pregnant and desperate, and she could walk out in several hours relieved, no longer pregnant, and prepared to go on with her life. It was fabulous.

Lauren Gutterman
It was through their work at the clinic that Glenna and Curtis met, fell in love, and formed a partnership that has lasted nearly fifty years. But their first meeting was hardly auspicious:

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
I threw him out of the surgery area because he wasn't dressed appropriately and I had no idea who he was. He said, perhaps you don't know who I am. And I said, I don't really think that's relevant, you are inappropriately dressed and you need to step out. Um, so that was our very romantic meeting. Curtis was intrigued.

Curtis Boyd
I didn't have on a suit and tie. I was you know I was a bit of a radical. I had long hair at that time, and I had on a shirt, beard, so she had no idea who I was (laughs). I didn't look like a doctor, that's for sure. So soon I went back—I had a ponytail—I cut my hair short, started putting on my surgery scrubs, I had to present a different appearance to the patients coming so that I did not make them uncomfortable.

Lauren Gutterman
Curtis was immediately smitten. It took Glenna longer to come around to him. Glenna, like Curtis, was recently divorced. But, She was soon taken by his humor, idealism, kindness, and deep concern for others. She also adored the three children he shared with his ex-wife.

As Glenna and Curtis fell in love, their practice in Dallas grew in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the most striking things from this period is how much support their clinic had from the community around them. Referrals came from ministers as well as doctors, and by word of mouth. Local religious leaders were often present at the clinic to help counsel patients:

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
We had seminary students who rotated through and were trained to do abortion counseling as part of their religious training.

Lauren Gutterman
This quiet support for the Fairmount Clinic was ongoing. And it sustained Curtis and Glenna in the difficult days ahead. Soon, louder, angrier voices, also often religious, would pierce the walls of this clinic, making the work of abortion providers and clinic staff more precarious.

Newsclip from protest at Curtis's clinic

Gillian Frank
Within half a decade of the Fairmount Clinic's founding, anti-abortion activism had rapidly metastasized. Between 1977 and 1993, abortion providers experienced tremendous violence nation-wide, including at least 28 reported bombings, more than 100 arsons, nearly 200 reports of stalking, and 166 death threats. This violence accompanied ongoing attempts by anti-abortion politicians to erode abortion rights. Violent protest and legal pressure increasingly intruded on Curtis and Glenna's medical practice.

Like many other states, Texas witnessed an upsurge of anti-abortion activism from the mid-1970s onward–activism that grew increasingly militant over time. In 1974, on the first anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, an interdenominational gathering of Catholics, Evangelicals, and mainline Protestants peacefully gathered in Fort Worth to protest the Supreme Court decision. The following year, anti-abortion protesters picketed the National Federation of Republican Women's convention in Dallas where they singled out pro-choice Republicans like Nelson Rockefeller and Betty Ford for criticism. Protestors displayed graphic images that portrayed legalized abortion as an ongoing Holocaust. They marched outside of abortion clinics and hospitals that provided abortions carrying with them crucified baby dolls covered in fake blood and pictures of fetuses in plastic bags.

By the late 1970s, some anti-abortion protesters engaged in what they called "rescue work" to prevent abortions. As historian Karissa Haugenberg has documented, this work involved swarming abortion clinics, blockading doors, destroying medical equipment, and screaming at patients and abortion providers. Sometimes protesters called in bomb threats. All of these actions were meant to disrupt a clinic's daily operations and to terrify clinic staff.

Newsclip about violent abortion tactics

Lauren Gutterman
The anti-abortion movement increasingly drew Evangelicals and Catholics into its ranks and leaders encouraged more drastic actions.

Newsclip of anti-abortion rights activists talking about their work

Lauren Gutterman
During the 1980s, hundreds and sometimes thousands of anti-abortion demonstrators protested at abortion clinics across the country. In El Paso, a reproductive health clinic had to build a wall around its property to keep disruptive protesters from harassing patients.

Newsclip of a fire arson of an abortion clinic

Lauren Gutterman
Anti-abortion activists also began targeting clinic workers. On quiet Sunday mornings, they protested outside these caregivers' homes in Dallas, using bullhorns to call them as murderers. Such acts coincided with sustained pressure on hospitals to stop offering abortions. In response to boycott threats from the anti-abortion pastors of 85 different Dallas area churches, Dallas Presbyterian Hospital, located only a mile-and-a-half from Curtis and Glenna's clinic, agreed to suspend its abortion services in 1985. That hospital was not alone. Nationally, the number of abortion clinics and providers began a steady decline in 1982. That year there were nearly 3,000 hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices that provided abortions. By 2017, that number had fallen by nearly half.

Even as the number of abortion providers declined, some anti-abortion protesters viewed this change as too incremental. They wanted an immediate end to abortion and were willing to use radical means to reach their goal. A group called Operation Rescue typified the growing extremism in the movement. During the late 1980s and 1990s, more than 60,000 people were arrested at Operation Rescue actions at abortion clinics across the country. Leaders of this group incited anti-abortion activists to violence, encouraging them to threaten abortion providers and their family members.

Newsclip about abortion protestors trying to get into the Fairmount Center

Gillian Frank
Anti-abortion activists regularly targeted Glenna and Curtis. Curtis received death threats. At least one protestor threatened to harm his son. In 1988, on Christmas Eve, abortion opponents set fire to the Fairmount clinic. It was one of three clinics targeted that night.

Newsclip about the fire at the Fairmount Center

Gillian Frank
There was no question that Curtis and Glenna's lives were at risk.

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
Arson, bomb threats, clinic invasions, death threats, harassment of staff at home or in the grocery store. I remember feeling angry. Feeling shocked and horrified. The arsons were of course very traumatic. My worst fear shifted from probably not having—well, my worst fear was and really still is a serious patient complication. Um, but on a more daily basis, my worst fear became the safety of our staff. I've always thought, you know if they kill me, I'm dead, I'm gone, it's not a problem for me! But, I wondered, worried, how in the world I would live with injury or death of someone who worked for me. And I actually worked closely with the then-Executive Director of Planned Parenthood of Greater Boston when an anti-abortion gunner walked in and killed one of her receptionists. Those are horrifying experiences. It's terrorism.

Curtis Boyd
There's not a lot you can do. If someone wants to kill you, they will. If they're willing to be caught, they can. So I knew that, and I had numerous death threats, innumerable. They came in the mail, I had them dropped in my mailbox at home. And I think that most of those who stayed in the field, they decided this, it's really that service. You have to be, I think, you have to be committed. You believe this is important, it's essential to women's rightful place in society, one of the equality, one of autonomy. You can't deny her personhood that way. You talk about the person, the fetus, but the woman's personhood that's right there, exists, in front of you. So I thought, this work, my feeling was, and I talked to the staff about this, this work is at the bottom line, is this work worth risking dying for. And you think, no one wants to die. We don't want to get shot at work, because this risk exists, are we going to stop

providing the service or are we going to continue to provide it? My decision and Glenna's decision's been made. We're going to continue to provide this service and hope that the worst does not occur.

Things began to change in the early 1990s because federal courts applied the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Operations Act, known as RICO, to anti-abortion groups. If found guilty of violating RICO statutes, anti-abortion activists could now be subject to severe financial penalties and extended prison sentences. RICO prosecutions deterred many, but not all, direct-action anti-abortion groups.

A leaderless, underground network of violent anti-abortion activists continued to terrorize providers. They circulated "wanted" posters of doctors that included their images, physical descriptions, office locations, and license plate numbers.

News clips about the murders of abortion providers
David Gunn, Barnett Slepian, and George Tiller

Lauren Gutterman
These violent outbursts coincided with sustained pressure on abortion clinics through what have come to be known as TRAP laws. In 1992, the US Supreme Court ruling in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* cleared the pathway for regulations that were often thinly veiled attempts to make abortion provision and access more difficult. Nearly half the states instituted procedural roadblocks including mandatory waiting periods, invasive ultrasounds, and mandatory counseling, while providers were burdened with extensive reporting, personnel qualifications, structural requirements, or costly licensing. All of which were meant to make running an abortion clinic prohibitively expensive.

These sustained attacks on abortion access only strengthened the Boyds' resolve. Glenna put it in the following way:

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
Neither Curtis nor I planned to make this our life's work. And if it had gone the way we expected, which was abortion would have become part of mainstream medicine, and specialized clinics weren't necessary, which we expected to happen within three to five years, we'd have moved on. I'd have done something else. There's a stubborn part of me that was just, "damn, they will not win. They will not— I will not be defeated. They will not win."

Gillian Frank
The US Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe* in June of 2022 has shuttered the Boyds' clinic.

Newsclip about the fines abortion providers in Texas face if they provide abortions

Gillian Frank
The state of Texas penalizes abortion from the moment of fertilization, except when pregnancy jeopardizes the patient's life or risks "substantial impairment" of a "major bodily function." There are no exceptions for cases of rape or incest. Doctors who perform abortions in violation of the law can be punished with life in prison and a fine of at least $100,000. In other words, the law is now even more punitive than when Curtis first started offering illegal abortions in the 1960s.

Many states neighboring Texas have completely banned or severely restricted access to abortion. Even as new laws are choking off abortion access across the country, some states are taking measures to protect reproductive healthcare. In New Mexico, where the Boyds still have another clinic, abortion remains accessible. However, *Dobbs* has caused a dramatic increase in the Boyds' total number of patients. While they once had an average of 40 clients per week, they now treat 100. A larger number of patients now arrive from out of state.

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
They feel confused. There's confusion. Some are angry at the situation, but more simply desperate.

Curtis Boyd
They're glad to get there. They go through a great deal more expense and effort to have to get from their home city in Dallas, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, they're coming from all over Texas. It's a big, it's a long way to drive from East Texas to Albuquerque, and there's the problem of getting off work longer, you've got to arrange childcare. It's burden too. Even if women find out where to go— {Glenna interrupts with, "and can get an appointment} and can get an appointment, and even have whatever, they've still got to have these extra expenses: car, gas, childcare, loss of work time, despite that most of them when they get to New Mexico and are seeing us, telling us how grateful they are that we're able to see them and they thank us. I said, that's quite gracious of them, that's it's been a real burden on

them. But most of them, they may be frustrated, but not with us. They appreciate the fact that, “at least I got an appointment and I got here and I’m grateful for that.”

Lauren Gutterman
The anti-abortion movement is not content to rest upon its Supreme Court victory. Instead, leaders want to use the *Dobbs* ruling as a springboard to wall off abortion seekers from those who might help them. At the time of this recording, efforts are underway in Curtis’s hometown to repudiate his life’s work. In Athens Texas, where Curtis first began offering abortions 55 years ago, residents recently passed a symbolic proposition outlawing abortion in Athens, except to save the life of the mother. Speaking from a conservative Evangelical understanding that human life begins at conception, these abortion foes have enshrined legislation making Athens a “sanctuary city for the unborn.” The ordinance describes Curtis as a “notorious illegal abortionist” who engaged in “violent and criminal” actions. Whereas abortion seekers from across the southwest once journeyed to Athens for help; this ordinance criminalizes abortion referral and make it more difficult for Athens residents to travel outside the state to seek an abortion.

Those who support the ordinance in Athens, and similar local measures across the state, frame fighting abortion as a Christian duty. This proposed ordinance is merely one example of how anti-abortion activists are trying to assert that only their religious views on abortion are legitimate. But their understandings of life, of gender, and of healthcare are fundamentally at odds with what many other mainline Protestants, Jews, and others believe. Curtis’s career and his faith-based commitment to affirming his patients’ dignity, autonomy, and choice, stands as evidence of what those opposed to abortion have sought to deny: that faith also animates the struggle for reproductive justice.

Despite the dire status of abortion access today, Curtis and Glenna have not given up their struggle. And they have not given up hope. Abortion, they believe, is a canary in the coalmine for the health of a democracy. And as bad as things are now, they told us, a majority of Americans want to see this freedom enshrined.

Glenna Halvorson-Boyd
Losing the right to abortion is indicative of the danger to our democracy, to individual freedoms.

Curtis Boyd
The work has always been about bigger issues about women’s place in our society. One of equality, respect, that they have full citizenship. We’re going to obtain that because the majority of the people in this country even today, in most of the polls, somewhere in the 60s, 70s percent of women think that *Roe v Wade* was better and hadn’t be overturned. So

eventually we will prevail. I don't think I will live to see that, it's not that fast, so I tell them, people I'm working with, change is slow and difficult. So, keep working on it. Fifty years from now and look back and see what you've accomplished. When I look back on my fifty years, well I'm back where I started (laughs), but not really. There's been changes. Organizations are stronger, half the states are going to have abortion rights. There have been changes. This is an abhorrent period in our history. This Supreme Court decision does not represent the will of the majority of the people in this country.

Gillian Frank
Sexing History is written and produced by Lauren Gutterman and me, Gillian Frank. Our senior producer is Saniya Lee Ghanoui. Rebecca Davis is our story editor and producer. Our assistant producer is Mallory Szymanski.

Lauren Gutterman
To see our liner notes for this episode and all our previous episodes, please visit out website www.sexinghistory.com.

Gillian Frank
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Lauren Gutterman
From all of us at *Sexing History*, thanks for listening.

Daniel Story
Our thanks to *Sexing History* for producing this important and powerful episode and sharing it with us here on *History in Focus*. This is the first of what we hope will be many podcast collaborations over the next few seasons, and it was a great one to get things started. And don't forget to checkout the companion piece in the June issue of the AHR in the History Lab section.

History in Focus is a production of the American Historical Review, in partnership with the American Historical Association and the University Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz. You can find out more about this and other episodes at americanhistoricalreview.org. You can learn more about the *Sexing History* podcast at sexinghistory.com.

And with that, we bring to a close this season of History in Focus. Thanks for sticking with us. We'll be back in September. In the mean time, you can go back over any episodes you missed over the previous year, or maybe go and explore more episodes from Sexing History. Whatever you do, I hope you have a great summer. I'll see you next time.