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The author's mother, Dolores, and the author are pictured the fall of 1957. (Courtesy of Valerie Schultz)



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My mother, God rest her soul, would be mortified by the title of this essay. But this bit of history is not what you're thinking.

I am prompted to write by a story recently told by the journalist Lawrence O'Donnell on his show "[The Last Word](#)" about his mother. His mother miscarried a pregnancy and needed what was called a "D&C" to complete the job of nature's miscarriage.

I suddenly remembered my own mother, also a good Irish Catholic woman, undergoing the same procedure. Our mothers had the same lifesaving operation that is now [being obstructed](#) by abortion bans [in a growing number of U.S. states](#), due to the Supreme Court's overturning of its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

In the mid-1960s, I was the middle child of an older brother and a younger sister. My parents, who were prospering as typical white middle-class folks in upstate New York at the time, wanted to have more children. My Catholic parents sent us to Catholic school, and every Sunday after Mass, we were each given a quarter to light a candle and say a prayer for a new baby. I didn't even know back then how babies were made; I just knew that God apparently needed some prodding to send us one.

Eight years of praying brought no joy. And then, nearing 40, my mom had three babies in four years, making me the second of six kids. "Stop lighting candles!" my dad said. God has a sense of humor.

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What I didn't know until I was older was that my mother had a miscarriage during those eight baby-less years. I did remember coming home from school one day and a neighbor collecting me to stay with her until my dad got home, but hadn't connected it to my mother's hospitalization for a miscarriage.

My mother had to have the standard — at the time — D&C, or dilation and curettage, the procedure that scours the uterus and prevents the calamities of infection or infertility or sepsis or death, which can occur if all the fetal tissue is not removed. The female reproductive system puts in a lot of work to develop and sustain a pregnancy, and when the fetus is nonviable, all that biological scaffolding

has to go. Nature doesn't always do a thorough cleaning job.

My mother later told me that, feeling guilty, she'd asked the doctor if she'd caused the baby's death by going bowling.

"Oh my dear," the doctor told her. "If that were the case, the bowling alleys would be full."

Abortion was [largely illegal in the 1960s](#), but nobody spared a thought to [equate a routine procedure](#) that saved lives with having an abortion. Catholic women did as their doctors, Catholic or otherwise, advised them, and no one was accused of sinning or breaking the law.

Now, however, women are [suffering](#), becoming [infertile](#), or [dying](#) in states that have allowed ignorance and ideology to trump reproductive health care. When states restrict or essentially prohibit a necessary procedure and threaten doctors with fines, jail, and/or loss of their medical license, women may have to travel to other states to save their future fertility or their very lives, or die trying.



The author's younger siblings walk the aisle in the author's wedding on Sept. 13, 1980, in Malibu, California. (Courtesy of Valerie Schultz)

I think of my devout stay-at-home mother just wanting another baby, of our three devout faces bowed in prayer before the stand of flickering votive candles, and I suddenly imagine life without my mother or without those three late-in-life babies, my younger brother and sisters whom I love like crazy. And I am angry on behalf of the women who are being denied the lifesaving procedure my mother was given

with no questions asked. Her doctor's medical expertise allowed my mother to continue living a healthy life, and no one in the government, no undereducated lawmaker or self-important Supreme Court justice, had any input into it.

I realize I am skirting the issue of elective abortion. I sit in the "none-of-my-damn-business" camp — I was fortunate never to have wanted or needed an abortion during my pregnancies — but I also believe that if you are moved to legislate to end abortion, you first have to work for a society in which families are better supported, in which women are trusted to plan their families, in which all children are cherished. Simply outlawing a procedure that has medical uses beyond elective abortion is arbitrary and foolish and unsafe. It is also not pro-life.

My mother didn't have an abortion. Her body aborted a fetus that was, for whatever reason, not going to make it to term. But her well-being was ensured by a procedure that is deemed an abortion. She had three more pregnancies that did make it, and the world is blessed by my funny, kind, generous, loving siblings. As are their spouses and their children. My mother loved being a grandmother.

How sobering, how cruel, how wrong, that our current laws may deny other women that chance.