

First Place Winner
Division II– 10-12th Grades
Pro-Choice is Pro-Life
by Tara A.
Peak to Peak Charter School, Lafayette, CO

Women’s ability to control their reproduction has always been essential to their autonomy and safety. In the United States, the growing movements for suffrage and birth control in the first decades of the 20th century sparked anti-abortion legislation aimed at taking back control from women (“History of Abortion in the United States”). By the 1960s, when abortion rights had become highly stigmatized and restricted by male lawmakers, Heather Booth, a University of Chicago student, founded the Jane Collective, an underground network that worked to make illegal abortions safer and more accessible. In her willingness and strength to fight against the injustice of inadequate access to reproductive healthcare, and despite the risks of incarceration and societal criticism, Heather Booth exemplified moral courage. As a teenage girl in this society, I am inspired by Heather Booth and the women of the Jane Collective who worked tirelessly to ensure women’s safety then and guarantee my reproductive rights now.

Throughout her early life, Heather Booth found a passion in fighting injustices, including women’s rights and civil rights. In 1964, she traveled to Mississippi to become a part of the Freedom Summer, a project that worked to register African Americans to vote (“Heather Booth”). As a college student in the 1960s, she found a deeper personal connection with women’s reproductive rights after she helped a friend who was in need of an abortion. When Booth later recounted this, she explained, “I was told she was nearly suicidal. I viewed it not as breaking the law but as acting on the Golden Rule. Someone was in anguish, and I tried to help her” (Haberman). The circumstances surrounding any woman seeking a medical abortion at this time were extremely dangerous and expensive. Beginning in the early 1900s, women had begun seeking underground methods of controlling pregnancy, including chemical douches and injections, which often proved fatal. According to a study by the Children’s Bureau conducted in the 1920s, 11 percent of maternal deaths were a result of illegal abortion practices, translating to between 8,000 and 10,000 deaths annually by the 1930s (Thompson). Shortly after Heather referred this woman to a doctor who was willing to perform the procedure, she became inundated with requests from other women seeking abortions, and working with like-minded women, she formed the Jane Collective in Chicago. These ordinary women trained themselves to provide much cheaper and safer abortion services to women in need.

The Jane Collective’s operations were something out of a spy novel. Women seeking services called an answering machine, then reported to a primary location, called “the Front,” where they were given counseling services. Next, the women were led to a secondary location, called “the Place,” where they would receive the abortion (Haberman). The Jane Collective helped carry out over 10,000 of these procedures in Chicago from the period between 1969 and 1973 (“Heather Booth”). Throughout their time providing services, Heather Booth and the other members of the Jane Collective faced a constant threat of legal repercussions, with seven women eventually being arrested for multiple counts of abortion (Arcana). Yet despite these threats, they continued their work because they knew that they were saving women’s lives.

In the decade before *Roe v Wade*, when abortions were illegal in all 50 states, Heather Booth found a calling. The work of the Jane Collective made important strides towards giving

women a choice. They knew that it was dangerous work that would likely result in legal punishment, but their need to solve this moral wrongdoing outweighed the potential risks. Joining together to provide this choice gave women the right to control their own bodies. Since the founding of the Jane Collective, Booth has continued to be involved in fighting injustices, including numerous organizing efforts and even directing the national March for Women's Lives in 1989. Heather has observed that in today's society, societal problems are often approached through individual solutions. Instead, Heather argues that "we need to act on the principle of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world). If we organize, we can change the world" ("Heather Booth"). In a time defined by injustices, Heather and other youth banded together in order to promote safety for those who were vulnerable. As a teenage girl in this society 50 years later, I feel the threat of policies that are failing me, including systems designed to address climate change, gun safety, or even access to reproductive rights. In the face of these challenges, I find inspiration through the actions of Heather Booth. I feel the calling to fight for social justice, including organizing a school wide walkout for gun safety in the wake of the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, or in attending the national women's march annually. From as early as I can remember, I have felt compelled to fight for the rights and safety of others around me. The actions of Heather Booth and the Jane Collective remind me that in times of ineffective social systems, youth often have to do it themselves.

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