

Could Be You

a one-person play in one act

by *Linnea Johnson*



www.LinneaJohnsonauthor.com

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Published March 2014, in pdf format at <http://www.LinneaJohnsonauthor.com>.

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Could Be You is based on the activities of "JANE,"
the Chicago underground abortion group
active between the late 1960s and the mid 1970s.
Linnea Johnson was a JANE.



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Characters

LYDIA JOHANNES	A woman who, in her 20s as the play opens in 1970, becomes a JANE abortionist and, years later, (today), tells us why.
VOICE ONE	The JANE answering machine message (woman's voice; recorded).
VOICE TWO	A N.O.W. woman making a speech (recorded).
MARIAN	An unseen acquaintance of Lydia.
SUSAN	An unseen woman seeking abortion.
BABY	Lydia's daughter; mimed.
CHILD	Lydia's son, offstage, unseen.

Setting

Various interiors, minimally set, in Chicago.

Time

In the 1970s (Scenes 1-6) and today (Scenes 7, 8)

Scenes

Scene 1. 1970 phone message (in dark)	1970
Scene 2. N.O.W. meeting: Lydia meets Marian	Later, 1970
Scene 3. Marian calls Lydia	Later, 1970
Scene 4. Pro & Anti choice panel: “We did it and so can you.”	Later, 1970
Scene 5. Lydia calls Susan	Later, 1970
Scene 6. Lydia's living room	Later, 1970
Scene 7. Lydia today.	Today
Scene 8. Today's sign and new phone message.	Today.

SCENE ONE

(Dark.)

SFX: Beep

VOICE ONE

(Voice One is an obviously 1970s phone machine voice with a Chicago accent, and obviously NOT Lydia's voice. Voice speaks slowly and clearly.)

Hello. This is Jane from Women's Liberation. Please leave your name and telephone number and speak slowly and clearly. Someone will return your call. If you do not hear from us in two days, call us back.

SFX: Beep.

SFX: Clackety message machine clicking off.

SCENE TWO

(Lights up.

On the back wall is a paper wall hanging of a woman's spread legs. Two corners of a sign balance on the paper knees. The sign reads: National Organization for Women. It's Chicago. It's 1970. It's NOW!)

VOICE TWO

(Voice Two is a recorded female voice making a speech, words interspersed with mumbling. The speech begins before Lydia enters and it continues as background while Lydia is on stage.)

cocktail party...convince advertising executives...skirts talking to ties...using female body parts to sell products...we don't like that...not acceptable...time for change...educate...convince boys...women not toys...ask nice...understanding...cocktail party...work within the system...convince boys women are not toys...ask nice cocktail party...women educate men...time for men to listen to women...work within the system...cocktail party...educate...play nice...get what we want...shuffle and fetch...someday.

LYDIA

(Carries a new copy of Robin Morgan's book, *Sisterhood Is Powerful*. Lydia listens to Voice Two, then, dissatisfied, nudges the [unseen] woman next to her.)

Something real! Is anything REAL going on in Chicago for women? What is this cockamamie cocktail party stuff. I don't even own a dress much less a cocktail dress. Educate? That's not the problem. It's not like men don't *know*, that only women *know* what's going on with the T&A that passes for advertising. Men **know**. Cocktail party, please!

What we'll say: "Please, pretty please, boys, don't sell beer using boobs and tires with tits."

What they'll say, "Well, gee, gals, broads, er, women, we didn't KNOW you didn't like being spliced and diced to sell products, make big profits. Gee, now that we KNOW, well, sure we won't do it any more. Thanks for tellin' us.

LYDIA (Continued)

You gals, broads, er, women are so smart. You're great. And, that's a strong and powerful and equalizing cock and tail dress you've got on there. Nice tits, er, argument you make. Nice ass..er, assessment. Thank god you all threw us this nice cocktail party to tell us what we didn't know before! Thanks!"

This N.O.W. approach is ridiculous. I want to do something real. Is there anything REAL going on in Chicago for women?

Well...

(Listening to unseen woman.)

What?

(listens)

Wow.

Really?

Yes. Oh, yes.

My phone number? Sure.

(Mimes fumbling in a purse to retrieve a scrap of paper and a pen to write down her phone number. Writes it down and hands it to "her.")

You'll call me?

In a week or two.

You will?

Okay, fine.

You'll call me, Marian.

Marian, you'll call me.

(Freezes, open-mouthed, listening to Voice Two.)

VOICE TWO

cocktail party...convince advertising executives...skirts talking to ties...using female body parts to sell products...we don't like that...not acceptable...time for change...educate...convince boys...women not toys...ask nice...understanding...cocktail party...work within the system...convince boys women are not toys...ask nice cocktail party...women educate men...time for men to listen to women...work within the system...cocktail party...educate...play nice...get what we want...shuffle and fetch...someday.

(Fade to dark.)

SCENE THREE

(Upstage center right, pin spot on a 1970s phone. Down stage center, LYDIA remains "frozen." On the second ring of the phone, LYDIA unfreezes, turns around, and goes to answer the phone.)

LYDIA

(On phone.)

Hello. Yes?

Hello, Marian.

Yes. Yeah, I remember.

Absolutely.

I'm still interested

...unless it's going to be another N.O.W. play-the-game meeting about making cocktails while pretending that men are merely uneducated about women's human rights. Choice and all that.

It won't be like that? You're sure. You promise.

I see. I'm all for it when it's the woman's choice.

Absolutely.

Well, good.

So, the address is?

(Mines writing down information.)

And, when?

No, that's fine. I'll get a sitter.

Two.

Six months, a girl.

And a six-year-old boy.

LYDIA (Continued)

Yeah.

Oh, yeah, you betcha. More than a handful...

Oh, old... Ten. And twelve. And fourteen. You have three!

Ok, then. Good.

I'm glad you called.

So, I'll see you then.

I'll see you then, Marian.

(Excited, hangs up the phone, claps her hands, turns around, and yelps.)

Yes!

(Fade to dark.)

SCENE FOUR

(Lydia is on one of four chairs behind a long table, as if on a panel, her name card in front of her. The other name cards read "Sister John," "Father O'Fluck," "Mrs. Felicity Shaftly." 4 water glasses. Lit like an auditorium, 1970.)

LYDIA

Abortion? Murder? Alive?

And whose heart goes out to the spurted sperm, jettisoned by jerking-off males, cold and dead of wiggle in the squash of Playboy magazines, into their 4-H animals, onto bathroom ceilings, into their gym socks?

And what happens to your frenetic concern for the fetus after it is born?

Your furor turns to jabberwocky when the fetus turns to baby.

You say, in effect, "That's what you get, bitch, for having intercourse.

You're on your own,

bitch," children the visual proof,

you imply,

of the wrath of god.

"Lulla-fuckin'-bye, bitch!"

Daddy, Sis, and Mrs. Shaft-y, this here tug

is about control

and I don't mean birth control,

I mean LIFE control, your version

of Lotus hooks and clitoridectomies, of the suttee and the chador.

A fine American custom, like lynching.

LYDIA (Continued)

(Singsong. Or, Lydia could hold up a picketing placard, which reads what she speaks for the next 3 lines)

Only fetal women amount
to a hill of beings
in a patriarchal body count.

(Table-pounding angry.)

Keep her pregnant, that 35-, 45-, or 25-year-old woman, pregnant
with child number 10. Or number six. Or number one.

You tell that woman relieved of stage 3 cancer to stay pregnant
until the day she dies, cancer revving up cell division,
as you know it does.

We don't disagree. We're not on opposite sides of the same point.

You want control, despot of all uteruses, you think you are.

I want choice.

Women didn't overcome at Suffrage.

Women didn't triumph at Roe v. Wade.

There is no winning in a rigged system. A hundred years of hindsight tell us
this.

Suffragists should have dismantled the system of white, male power,
not signed up to be the Women's Auxiliary,
the goddamn cheerleaders, the enablers,
the blowjobbers under the desks.

We can as easily "reform" Daddy Despots
as we can reform water so that we might be able to breathe it.

LYDIA (Continued)

(Singsong.)

Spermicide and sticky jellies
Work like prayer and cause big bellies.

(Not singsong.)

In your case, father; in your case, sister; and in your case, Mrs. Shaft,

I cold happily support post-natal abortion.

(Stands, singing the following to the tune of "My Country 'Tis Of Thee," addressing the audience. As she sings, the lights contract into a small circle, growing dimmer and dimmer.)

Learn how your bodies work.

specula, dilator, and curette,

buy Betadyne and Chux,

antibiotics for a buck, a buck, a buck, a buck

learn how your bodies work

you can do it, now!

We did it and so can you

We did it and so can you

We did it and so can you

you can do it, too.

Can you sit up? I can and so can you

take blood pressures and read pap smears,

no permissions asked. No docs nowhere, no how,

ev-er-y-body now! YOU CAN DO IT, TOO-O-O!

You can, too!

LYDIA (Continued)

(Still singing.)

Safe and illegal, safe and illegal,
illegal as slaves learning to read

(Not singing. Blare of bright light.)

what would the law say if you wrote it...

(Singing while ligh fades.)

and so can you.

(Dark.)

SCENE FIVE

(Tight bright light on 3/4 profile of Lydia, who holds a 1970s black phone receiver to her ear. She holds a 3x5 card on which is written a name and a phone number, Susan's name, Susan's phone number.)

LYDIA

Hello, this is Jane. Is Susan there?

No?

This is Jane. I'm returning Susan's call.

That's all right. I'll call back. What?

Is this Susan? This is Susan?

This is Jane. I'm Jane. I'm returning your call.

Can you talk freely on your phone right now?

Good.

Ok.

I'm calling to arrange a meeting so that we can discuss what you called about.

Uh huh. Uh huh. Yes.

How about this evening or tomorrow evening?

I'm at 711 Gordon terrace.

(Laughs.)

Really?

Well. we're practically neighbors.

How about 6:30 tonight?

Tonight.

You're welcome to bring a friend, if you like.

LYDIA (Continued)

No.

No.

No.

I'll give you the appointment date, and time, and pla...

No.

I'll give you the appointment date, and time, and place for that tonight.

711 Gordon Terrace.

Right.

And my home number is 798-6529

Seven. Nine. Eight.

Eight. Yes.

Sixty-five. Twenty-nine.

That's it.

So, 6:30? Big green house.

I'll leave the yellow porch light on.

Good. See you soon.

(Fade to dark.)

SCENE SIX

(Lydia's living room. She pours tea for herself and for Susan as she settles in to discuss with unseen Susan the abortion Susan is seeking. Lydia refers to and writes upon a 3x5 card on which is already written Susan's name, phone number, and pertinent medical information Jane elicited from Susan in their phone conversation. This meeting is for Lydia to double check pertinent medical information as well as to describe to Susan the abortion protocols and the procedure itself. A clear plastic speculum, nail polished with eyes to resemble the face of a duck, is evident, as is a newsprint copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a box of Kleenex. The room is strewn with baby things and kid toys. Lydia sips tea, eats a cookie, and rocks a fussy baby in a cradle as she talks with Susan. A 60s poster is on the wall. Incense going. Lydia's discontented elder child is in an offstage bedroom.)

LYDIA

Well, Susan, here we are. How did you find our number?

Clergy consultation. Great.

Well, yeah, they're correct—we are "good."

Yes, illegal. And, yes, good.

Have a cookie?

My name is Lydia Johannes, not "Jane," really. Jane's a name we all use, so you're not calling Lydia, then Margaret, then Carol, you know.

Right, not a doctor among us!

Yes, it is a relief. I think so, too.

Each one, teach one.

Yes, a good idea.

No deaths. 2% infection rate, which is lower than most hospitals.

And we do the abortions in our own homes, on our beds.

LYDIA (Continued)

Yes.

A hundred dollars.

Or what you can afford. Everyone pays something. The average is \$40.

So, here's your card, what you told the first "Jane" you talked with.

Susan Cornell. Your phone number is 796-4682?

Your last menstrual period was when?

Seven weeks ago? You think maybe? Do you remember the exact date?

(Writes.)

Yes.

So, you've missed one period?

Two?

Are you usually regular?

Every 28 days on the dot.

Like clockwork.

Kleenex?

Any other pregnancies?

Three children. Five pregnancies. Two miscarriages.

(Checks and/or writes down info on the 3x5 card.)

Got it.

How far along in the pregnancies

Excuse me.

(Calls to her fussy kid in the offstage bedroom.)

Jordan, hush, puppy. It's time to get ready for bed. No. No. Not tonight. No.

LYDIA (Continued)

(To offstage child, Jordan)

Yes. No. No. And...no. I'll come kiss you in a minute. Go potty one more time and tuck your...what?...no...go potty one more time and tuck yourself...no...tuck yourself into bed, Jordy. Jordy, hush.

(To Susan.)

I'm sorry. Where...?

(To offstage Jordan.)

What?

No.

(To Susan.)

So, Susan, so you have three kids!

(Mimes picking up the fussy baby from the cradle, keeping the pencil and 3x5 handy to write upon.)

Where was I?

(To the unseen baby she now has in her arms, jiggling her.)

Oh, honey, honey, honey.

(To Susan.)

And, Susan,

how far along in the pregnancies were you when you miscarried?

One at 19 weeks. About, yes.

One at 24 weeks.

Any other difficulties you've had with your pregnancies...?

(Interrupted by Susan's questions.)

No, I can't do that. I don't do the abortions alone.

There's a group of us.

LYDIA (Continued)

No, I can't.

No, we NEVER do that.

11,000.

Eleven thousand abortions.

We've done about eleven thousand abortions working 3 days a week.

About 80 abortions a week.

(Pauses, sips tea.)

I'd like to finish checking your physical history, Susan. You know, ask you about other health problems you may have experienced, your blood type, and about any meds you take on a regular basis, any negative reactions to meds you've ever had. And, are you RH negative?

What?

I know.

I understand.

It's difficult to wait once you've made the decision.

And then, I'll give you the date and the time and the address of The Front.

You'll be able to bring a friend with you to that address.

From the Front, one of the "Janes" will drive you and 3-4 other women to another apartment, The Place, where we'll do the abortion.

Then, we'll drive you back to the first apartment, The Front, where your friend will be waiting for you.

What? I'm sure you do.

(Hands a Kleenex to Susan.)

We all love our kids, Susan. I'm sure you love yours, too.

I know. Nothing to do with this. Or, maybe a lot.

You want an abortion: it's your decision.

LYDIA (Continued)

You don't have to explain your reasons to me.

(Referring to the baby.)

Baby's six fussy months old.

Sure.

(Mimes handing the baby to Susan.)

Well,

(Picks up the speculum.)

Let me walk you through what happens in a D & C, dilation and curettage, abortion. Have you ever had a D & C?

No.

Ok, and then we'll get back to your physical history.

This...

(Holds up the plastic speculum.)

...is a plastic version of the sterilized metal speculum. This holds back the vaginal walls like in a routine gynecological exam.

Jordan plays with this one, so it's a duck for him, but the ones we use to do abortions are metal. Sterilized. And without duck faces on them.

What?

(Laughs in response to a question from Susan. Thinks for a moment.)

Why do I do abortions?

More tea, Susan?

(Fade to dark.)

SCENE SEVEN

(Today.)

LYDIA

So, when I arrived at the meeting Marian had invited me to, back in the 1970s, it took me awhile to figure out that what the dozen or so women crowded together there in Marian's living room were talking about was doing abortions.

Doing abortions.

Doing abortions themselves.

Not about how they were someday going to do abortions, but about doing them.

This was not a group of women who met to talk about lobbying legislators,

to talk about courting ad execs,

or to talk about organizing marches.

This was a group of women—it dawned on me ever so gradually—who were day in and day out doing abortions.

This group of women, these "Janes" did abortions.

In the early 1970s...

(Film/video/slides of 1970s.)

...there were phone numbers floating around other than that of "Jane,"

of the "Chicago Women's Liberation Abortion Counseling Service."

There were other phone numbers

good for a day or two, a week, maybe a year or two,

phone numbers connecting women to masked quacks in Chicago,

docs on the take in Detroit,

men working themselves through bar tending or medical school,

often working out of the back of a van in California, St. Louis, or Weehawken.

LYDIA (Continued)

Phone numbers connected women to opportunists in Florida

and to fly-by-nighters in Queens,

and, here and there was a phone number of some reliable someone working alone, or in sync with conscience.

With most of the abortionist-profiteers women would find themselves blindfolded, blind sided, picked up on corners, bound to secrecy or to a kitchen table or motel coffee table.

Often, others would do abortions too quickly and without anesthesia, compassion, the exchange of names, or so much as a hello, how are you, women finding themselves dumped back at some train station or onto a remote street corner without follow up, friends, recourse, or information, and out several hundred dollars whether or not the abortion was complete, antiseptic or not, successful or not.

But, when they found the Jane number, the "Service" number, our number, women found something neither entrepreneurial nor impersonal, neither medicalized nor professionalized. When women found the Jane number, they found other women working together with, for, because of, and among women, however ancient and unique that seemed in 1970. Or today.

Several times a day, whomever was "Janeing" took messages from the tape, writing the information onto 3x5 cards...

(Slide/still of filled in 3x5 card.)

...she'd then bring to our weekly meetings, the business of which, primarily, was to disperse the cards among the dozen or twenty women working any given week.

We chose cards idiosyncratically, noting some similarity or difference in circumstance, neighborhood, religion, ethnicity, or blood factor between ourselves and the name of the women on the 3x5 card.

We'd take our 3x5s, go home, and begin our call backs.

Calling back the phone numbers of the women...

(Slides/stills of 1970s U.S. women, ages 11-60.)

LYDIA (Continued)

...on the cards, we'd find out that some of the women had already gotten an abortion elsewhere, some had gotten their period, some had given birth, kept or given up the baby, and didn't want or need to speak with us.

Some women had died.

Some women were bleeding or had tubes or gauze or rags stuffed into their uterus; they needed advice, referral to a physician who wouldn't injure them further or turn them in, or advice on what they could do for themselves just then.

Some phone numbers had been incorrectly given or received.

Some women couldn't talk then but could they call us back some midnight from untraceable pay phone to untraceable pay phone.

Often a boyfriend or father had called trying to arrange things for or in spite of the woman whose name, along with his number, he'd left on the Jane tape.

However, most often, the woman...

(Hold on photo/still of one woman.)

...whose name I had on the 3x5 card talked to me herself and was eager to meet so that I could describe and we could discuss the abortion she'd called to initiate.

(Fade out photo to Lydia, only, in a circle of calm, warm light.)

I liked to meet with women one to one, though other Service women preferred to meet with women in groups.

I usually invited the woman to my house evenings after I'd put my kids to bed, suggesting that she bring a friend along, if she'd like. Ordinarily, I would have made tea for us and put some cookies out on a plate. We'd sit around my dining room table or in the living room, maybe in front of a fire, and we'd talk. On the 3x5 cards, I'd add to the information she'd already provided over the phone, information about her menstrual history, any pregnancies, children, allergies, or difficulties she'd experienced, any information about medication she took regularly.

(Light 5-6 line diagrams/drawings, preferably derived from the b&w newsprint original *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.)

LYDIA (Continued)

I would illustrate what I was saying by showing the woman diagrams, drawings from the newsprint edition then available of the Boston Women's Health Collective's *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. We had this edition by the cartons full, and we would give them out to interested women.

I'd tell the woman what a dilation and curettage (D&C) abortion was like. The choice to have an abortion was hers, I'd say, until the Os, the opening of the cervix to the uterus, was dilated. After dilation, emptying the uterus became inevitable.

In those days, I saw little mind-changing. Women had their decision firmly made, usually, and were eager to get on with the abortion. Frequently, they hoped I might do it then and there. Women were unaccustomed to being told anything much about what was done to us. Often the woman's attitude was, "don't tell me any (more) thing, just get on with it."

But we insisted that she know, that the abortion was something we were going to be doing together, that this was her decision and that she could, should, and must know all about it.

(Picks up a plastic speculum painted with nail polish so that it resembles a duck beak puppet.)

I would show the woman a plastic version of a metal speculum, and I would talk to her about how it held open the vaginal walls, allowing us, and her with a mirror, if she chose, to see the Os and the cervix.

The speculum I had around the house had eyes painted on it. Jordan loved clacking them about as toy puppet ducks, opening and closing the beak to make it appear to speak.

(Pauses, speculum in her lap as she remembers.)

The first time I saw a cervix was the first day I assisted. The woman on the bed whose cervix it was, could see, too, using a mirror.

I knew the cervix to be the tapered neck of the uterus which extends down in to the upper vagina, the Os at the bottom of it being the opening through which sperm enters the uterus and which then, in full term labor, opens to about ten centimeters. A pregnant uterus is engorged, purpled, as it is just before beginning a period.

LYDIA (Continued)

But knowing is not the same as seeing. Seeing, I remember thinking how beautiful the cervix is and how it looks like a glistening pink doughnut. I felt happy and fascinated.

Seeing her cervix, I knew that this woman was not pregnant: it was instinctual, inherent knowledge, a body reading the semiotics of a body. A pregnancy test had been incorrect, which had caused this woman to find us. For the woman on that bed, her believing our reading her as not pregnant did not have to be an act of faith. It was, instead, a matter of corporeal epiphany.

Towards the close of my one-to-one meetings with the women

(Slides/film/video of women behind Lydia.)

...who wanted abortions, I would write down the date, time, and address of her appointment. I'd write down my personal home phone number, too, in case she had questions or problems before or after her abortion. I said I wouldn't call her unless the Pap test we'd do prior to the abortion was inconclusive or abnormal.

The address I'd write down would get her to The Front, the apartment at which she and a friend would wait before the abortion, at to which she'd return after the abortion.

Another of the Service women, another Jane, would drive her and a couple other women wanting abortions from The Front to the second apartment, The Place, where she would have the abortion. Only Jane women and women having abortions would be at The Place.

(As she speaks, takes out of a brown grocery bag, a linen table cloth, Triscuit boxes, large apricot nectar cans, paper cups and napkins, setting them out as if for a party onto a table.)

Jane women would be at The Front to talk with and to counsel with the women wanting abortions, and to keep the bowls full of Triscuit, the apricot nectar flowing. We always brought food and drink for the women come for abortions, and for their friends, as we brought nourishment and treats for any of the rest of us when we got together any other time. Often, the second group of women waiting for abortions sat quietly until mid-morning when the first car full of women returned. Women returned happy! Things went well. They were emotionally and physically relieved. They were no longer pregnant. Women had put their own decision into effect by finding other competent, caring, and determined women, by finding us, by finding Jane.

LYDIA (Continued)

At The Place we again checked the information on the 3x5 cards with the woman whose information it was. Whenever we were asked if we were doctors, we said, "No, we are not doctors. We are abortionists." None of the women who did those 11,000 abortions had been medically schooled. None of us were doctors.

We women in Jane learned how to do abortions from one another, as peer-apprentices, though no one called it that, thank god.

The first Janes learned to do abortions from a professional abortionist, one who had reputedly learned to do quick, safe abortions for an outfit which allowed for no slip-ups, no mistakes. He liked to spread the notion that he was a doctor, to make women instantly confident in him, he'd said.

The first Janes learned from him, then gradually, one by one, learned that he was not a doctor, and that piece of learning was miraculous. Because, well, if he, Not A Doctor, could do it, then we, Not A Doctor could do it!

(Behind Lydia, a 1970s home interior opens up, either by slide, video, or with props. If it's by props, the table Lydia has just set becomes a part of the interior. Lydia interacts with props, if there's props.)

Both The Front and The Place were someone's apartment or house. We would volunteer our apartments or houses as we could. Our lives were in evidence in the photos and books on our shelves, the Melmac, teddy bears, or the vibrator overlooked in a dining room or bedroom, the glass beads in the doorway, Joplin poster on the wall, the sheets on our beds on which the abortions were done. The Service used some of the money collected from doing abortions to pay for The Place's laundry to be done professionally. I and many of the rest of the Janes used our best sheets on days our homes were being used as The Place.

Our home made abortions had a lower infection rate, about 2%, than most hospital surgeries.

We killed no one, a fact which contrasts with what happened when legislators legalized abortion, allowing physicians who had not necessarily ever been trained to DO abortions, to do abortions. Quite simply, women died from legal abortions because the law granted AUTHORITY to physicians without regard to proficiency, the test for what is "legal" having to do with power and who has granted themselves the right to wield it.

I remain amazed at how relatively simple the physical process of performing abortions is, how readily it is learned.

LYDIA (Continued)

(Lydia is on a stool, center stage, in warm pin spot. Next to her is a surface covered with a clean white cloth on which lie the props (noted in red). Attention should be directed to the props in turn.)

The physical procedure to abort the pregnancy began with giving the pregnant woman an intramuscular injection (in the buttocks) of the antibiotic tetracycline. A week's supply of tetracycline capsules were sent home with each woman after her abortion, with instructions to take the capsules until they were gone. We also suggested she would be wise to eat some cultured milk products, like yogurt or sour cream, while taking that or any antibiotic, to replace the good bacteria in her body which antibiotics kill indiscriminately along with the "bad" bacteria.

When a woman knew that she had (relatively) rare RH Negative blood, she would be given the name of a sympathetic physician who would follow up her abortion with an injection of RHoGam, the gamma globulin used to immunize the woman and to prevent possibly fatal RH Negative incompatibility reactions in future pregnancies.

After the tetracycline injection, the woman would be asked to lie down so that we could position a sterilized metal speculum into her vagina to locate her cervix. We used no draping, no stirrups, no shaving, no masks, and no doctors. We used precise instruments but used neither sort of medical guys/guise

(Pop "guys/guise" onto a screen behind Lydia.)

nor their props.

After locating the cervix, we used long, single-headed cotton swabs to do a Pap test, taking sloughed cells from first inside the Os, then around the face of the cervix.

We placed the cells, in turn, on a glass slide labeled with the particular woman's name and the date, used fixative, and, later, sent that slide along with the others from the day's work out to a lab which read the slides and sent back the results which we later relayed to the woman whose results they were. The lab charged us about a dollar for their reading and their report.

After the Pap test, we would wash the cervix with Betadyne, then inject xylocaine into the cervix at the imaginary marks of 12 o'clock, 6 o'clock, three, and nine o'clock, to create a paracervical block, using a tenaculum to hold the cervix in place, if necessary.

LYDIA (Continued)

Dilation of the Os we accomplished by using either a graduated series of thin to less thin rods, or by using a dilator, coaxing the Os gradually, gradually to open a centimeter or two.

We assumed that women with normal thigh muscles could hold their legs as was necessary and, of course, each woman did just that. We told women: "You're a part of this, not an object of this. This is an ensemble production!" Abortion with Jane was a matter of informed choice. Decision making is a revolutionary act.

The Jane who was holding most of the instruments would tell the woman whose abortion it was what was going on, asking her to relax, to lie as still as possible, and to keep her legs up and apart. We concentrated on what was going on and often we also talked and laughed and told jokes to and amongst one another — not because it was "therapeutic" or because we took abortion, ourselves, or the woman choosing abortion lightly, but because we were doing important things together as the people we were, and we loved doing these things and doing them together.

My favorite instrument was the sound.

(Picks up the sound, holding it as she speaks. It sparkles and appears magical.)

It is beautiful, silver, and pliant, has a rounded tip, and is calibrated.

It is moved around the inside of the uterus to discern the size, shape, and topography of the uterus, the location of the pregnancy.

When the tip touches solidity, the sound bends slightly. The hand holding the sound can feel that. It is a highly responsive, resonant instrument.

One woman who, in confirming the information on the 3x5 card noting her ten pregnancies, her ten living children, said, indeed that she was certain she was pregnant because she hadn't had her period in five months and was usually regular as clockwork. Her cervix was grey, not the fuschia with engorgement of a usual 12-16 week pregnancy, and though starchy diets over a long time often produce such grey tissue, still, pregnant, the uterus should have at least been pink.

Though the sound virtually disappeared into her huge, spongy, and seemingly empty uterus, none of us could find the pregnancy.

It did not, however, occur to us to tell her, as her physician had, that:

LYDIA (Continued)

a) she wasn't pregnant. Her doc could find no pregnancy either.

or

b) an eleventh child would make no difference in her life. The physician had told her to "show him" her pregnancy by having the child, and what would "one more" matter to her anyway.

Finally, one of us, with the sound, found a tiny tunnel on the top and to the back of her uterus, a bubble of the uterus above and behind the tunnel, in which lay the small, underdeveloped pregnancy, a pregnancy which we removed, as we removed other pregnancies, with the help first of the sound, then a curette.

(Puts down the sound.)

Most often, we aborted pregnancies by dilation and curettage (D & C). By about 1972, the technique of manual vacuum aspiration was available, and we used that, too, frequently for women six weeks pregnant, or less, though curettage

always completed those abortions. Manual aspiration was less uncomfortable but then we felt that it was not always entirely reliable when used alone.

For women 6-12 weeks pregnant, we always did the D & C.

For women 12 to 16 weeks pregnant, or beyond, labor was induced, most commonly by simply breaking the amniotic sac with forceps.

Both laminaria and Luenbach paste, which separate the placenta from the uterine wall, were available during some of those years, but their presence is clinically detectable, while a broken amniotic sac, drained fluid, and a dilated Os can all be attributed to natural process. The Os dilated, the sac broken, labor induced, the pregnancy comes out.

With women who chose later-term abortion, whose pregnancies were advanced more than about 16 weeks, we followed their labor as closely as they needed us to, in some cases, by staying in close phone contact; in some cases, by staying with them as they labored; in some cases, by providing them a safe place in which to deliver their fetuses.

After a direct abortion, an abortion in which labor is not induced, but during which both fetus and placenta are removed, the newly not-pregnant woman would be returned to the Front where she would meet up with whatever friend she'd brought along, talk with Jane women, celebrate, recover a bit, eat a Triscuit, drink some apricot nectar, and talk with the other women there for the same reason she was there.

LYDIA (Continued)

If she had come alone, she would call someone to pick her up.

When she left the Front, she'd leave with a packet of tetracycline in hand and a list of phone numbers for her to call in case she had a problem or wanted to talk about the abortion. We told her we would call her in a few days if her Pap test needed to be followed up on.

We told her again what we'd told her the first time we'd met with her, that some bleeding after the abortion is normal, but that if there was more bleeding after the abortion than she experienced during her normal period, she should lie down, put her feet up, and put ice over the area of her ovaries and uterus.

If this didn't slow down the bleeding, we said she should go—or we would take her—to her doctor, to a doctor, or to a non-Catholic emergency room where, invariably, she's be told to lie down, put her feet up, and put ice over her "tummy." If she were filling a Kotex in 15 minutes or less, we told her to consider that flow hemorrhaging and to go directly to a non-Catholic emergency room where we'd meet her (if she wished).

More frequently than we took women to doctors or to emergency rooms, where we took them was into our homes, our confidence, and frequently into the Abortion Service.

Indeed, if a woman expressed interest in joining us, someone would call her up, as someone had called me up,

(Brief video tape of Lydia "meeting" Marian at N.O.W. meeting.)

and invite her to one of our meetings.

(Fade to black.)

SCENE EIGHT

(Paper wall hanging of spread woman's legs reappears behind LYDIA. The bottom two corners of a sign balances on the paper knees. The sign reads: NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN. IT'S CHICAGO. IT'S 1970. IT'S N.O.W.!)

LYDIA

(Gets up, turns around, and takes down the N.O.W. sign, looks at it, becomes irritated, and frustrated. She marks out the date "1970" and writes in the current year. Videotape of SCENE SEVEN plays on the paper wall hanging. LYDIA shows the altered sign to the audience, first holding it straight-arm in front of her, then shows it around to the audience, making certain that EVERYONE sees it. Then she strikes a pose, sign high in her fully extended arms, face pointing up, her body a defiant "X." Video plays, then sound only. Silhouette of LYDIA as "X." LYDIA speaks as if she's a recording on an answering machine)

BEEP.

(Slowly, deliberately.)

This is Jane.

From Women's Liberation.

Take your own name and phone number, get up off your ass, and STOP ASKING PERMISSION.

Return your own call and call on other women.

We did it ourselves and so can you.

We did it ourselves and so can you.

We did it ourselves and so can you.

Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep!

(Curtain.)

by Linnea Johnson

Author's Notes

Could Be You is based on the activities of JANE, the Chicago underground abortion group affiliated with the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU) and active between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s. I am a former JANE.

Could Be You is an eminently portable play that could be produced simply as a reading or more elaborately following, stage directions/suggestions. The play is in the text. It's art! It's politics! It's herstory! It's an organizing tool!

Recommended related references:

Laura Kaplan, *The Story of Jane, The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*

Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, ISBN: 0226424219, LCCN 96039768, 314 pp.; New York, Pantheon Books, 1995. Includes bibliography and index.

Paula Kamen, "Jane: Abortion and the Underground." On the web at <http://www.enteract.com/~bower/paulakamen/jane3.html>

Kate Kirtz and Nell Lundy, *Jane: An Abortion Service*, a documentary. On the web at <http://www.burn.ucsd.edu/archives/ats-1/1995.Dec/0010.html>

Sincerely,

LINNEA JOHNSON



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