



## **Pain, Suffering, and Cruelty From Before *Roe v. Wade* Is Making a Comeback**

You can't see her full face, the dead woman who bled out, alone, in the anonymous hotel room. It's hidden from us. She's hunched over on her knees, her face smushed into the dirty carpet, her nudity colored by the blood that soaked the towels and smeared her lifeless body. Her name was Gerri Santoro, but in that image, she was every woman victimized by the deadly cruelty of illegal abortion.

Gerri Santoro died trying to terminate an unwanted and dangerous pregnancy, in the dark days before *Roe v. Wade*. The dark days that opponents of legal abortion in Illinois and across the nation are trying to bring back.

Gerri Santoro and her lonesome, terrible, death became a symbol for the nascent pro-choice movement in America, but she was more than a symbol. She was a woman, a person in full, with life and love, and fear and hope. She was forced into that hotel room by policies aimed at stripping her right to exercise control over her own body.

Those policies are making a comeback. In every state, and at the federal level, the right to choose is teetering on the brink. We have to protect it. Women's reproductive rights are being threatened, and we know where that leads. The story of Gerri, and of women across the decade, provide a clear reminder of what happens when women are the victims of deliberate state misogyny.

## **Gerri Santoro and the Erasure of Women**

In a terrible way, it made sense that Gerri's face was hidden from us. Like so many women of her time, and of ours, Gerri was rendered virtually faceless, voiceless, and choiceless by the violence and indifference of misogynists.

Her difficulties began early. The youngest of 15 children born on a farm in Connecticut, Gerri was from the beginning a product of her times, when men were allowed to do whatever they wanted with women. She met her husband at a bus stop at only 18, and married him just a few weeks later.

Her husband was abusive, and regularly hit her. She would appear at work with bruises, but nothing was done about the domestic violence. Finally, she fled, returning to her parents' farm. She met another man, named Dixon, but kept their life hidden, fearful of her husband's vengeful temper. Given the laws in the country at the time, she wasn't able to divorce him.

A pregnancy ensued. There were no good options. Gerri and Dixon attempted to self-induce at the hotel room, using second-hand surgical instruments and instructions from a text-book. Gerri started hemorrhaging and he fled the motel. She died alone on the floor of that room, a victim of the lack of choices available to her.

This is what happens when men are allowed to erase women from making choices in their lives. It happened in Gerri's time...and it is happening now.

From;

<https://www.personalpac.org/the-tragedy-of-illegal-abortion-gerri-santoros-lonesome-death/>