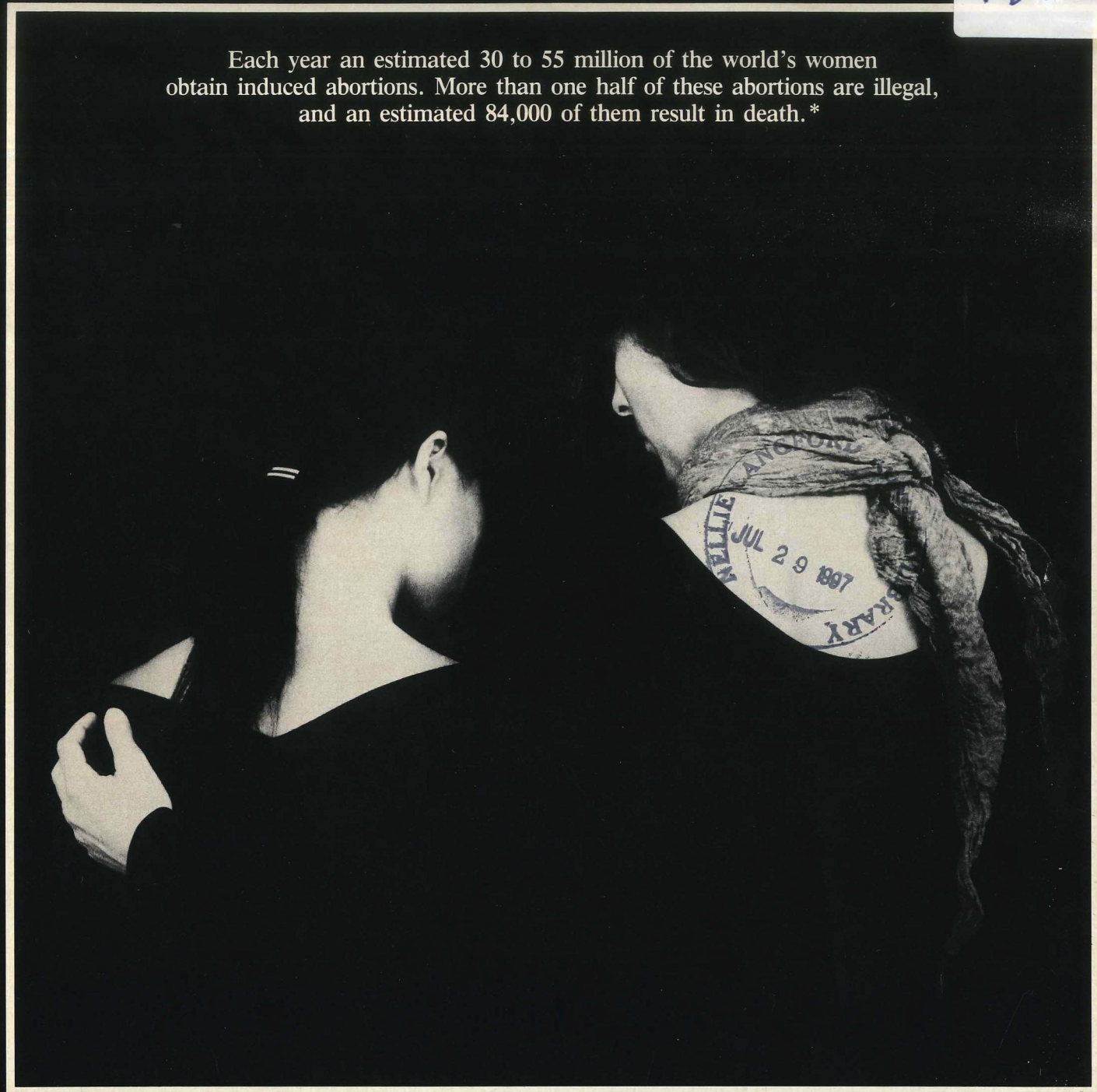


AB 188

Each year an estimated 30 to 55 million of the world's women obtain induced abortions. More than one half of these abortions are illegal, and an estimated 84,000 of them result in death.\*



# Abortion

**STORIES FROM NORTH AND SOUTH**

**WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY GAIL SINGER**



National  
Film Board  
of Canada

Office  
national du film  
du Canada

# Abortion

## STORIES FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### The Film

*Abortion: Stories from North and South* is a cross-cultural survey of the realities of abortion. It shows how abortion transcends race, religion and social class, and how differences in the practice and perception of abortion are mainly in the degree of secrecy and danger accompanying it. It is a film about women's right to safe medical care.

Filmed in Ireland, Japan, Thailand, Peru, Colombia and Canada, *Abortion: Stories from North and South* lends a voice to women around the world. A Japanese woman describes abortion as something women "press down and hide." An Irish woman says that until society is prepared to look after all children, we do not have the right to force a woman to have a child she cannot properly care for. A Thai doctor talks about the conflict she feels, performing a service she knows is needed, despite her spiritual beliefs.

Only a small percentage of the world's women have access to safe, legal abortion. Because of the illegality surrounding it, most women risk their health — and sometimes their lives — in dangerous procedures that are their last resort. Whether abortion is forbidden by law or by social coercion, it is women who must face the physical and emotional consequences of unwanted pregnancies.

Using an approach that is more anthropological than moralistic or political, *Abortion: Stories from North to South* is meant to be a positive, serious enlargement of the debate. It encourages us to go beyond our beliefs for or against abortion and start asking new questions. It preaches no solutions, offers no easy answers. It is a thoughtful and moving documentary that will provoke both reflection and discussion.

### The Issue

Abortion has always been with us. It is globally and historically evident that when faced with an unwanted pregnancy, women will resort to abortion despite legal, religious and financial sanctions. They will risk their health and even their lives to accomplish their goal. Yet, in this issue which concerns them so vitally, women have not been consulted. Patriarchal social systems and structures persist. Even in the most advanced democracies, men dominate the top levels of government, church, medical and legal establishments.

There is no entirely safe and effective contraceptive. Information about existing birth-control methods is not available to all women. Some women are still taught to view sex as a duty, and, in many places, contraception is prohibited. Willingly or unwillingly, women conceive. Yet for many of them, hope for the future lies in their ability to limit the size of their families.

It is high time the debate is widened from its narrow moral perspective, one that ignores the endangered health and lives of women around the world. By making abortion illegal, we condemn women to pain, to prison, to guilt, and sometimes to death.

\* L.S. Liskin, "Complications of Abortion in Developing Countries," *Population Reports*, Series F, No. 7, July 1980, p. 107; quoted in *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 1984.

## Quotes from the Film

*"I don't think that we, who are well clothed, well looked after, well educated, who have children that we love, have the right to say to these women 'you must have that child,' when we are not prepared to help them to care for that child."*

*"When we think about abortion, it seems as if there's no existence of men. It's a woman's matter, and... you wonder... how did it come to be that way."*

*"You need to be two to make love and to get pregnant, but an abortion, the pain, the physical and psychological experience, it is only experienced by one person, a woman."*

## Why the Film Was Made

Abortion: Stories from North and South was produced by Studio D of the NFB's English Production branch. Founded in 1974, the Studio provides a forum for women filmmakers and their concerns.

Studio D holds a mandate to make films from the perspective and experience of women.

Like other Canadian women, we hold a variety of personal views about the subject of abortion, but we all agree on two realities: that

the legal, medical and religious strictures on abortion have virtually all been enunciated by men; and that it is only women's bodies in which pregnancy occurs.

We believe it is important that we talk with each other about the issues that affect us, and so we have chosen to make a film about abortion. We chose not to make a film that would advocate a particular belief, but one that would expand the dimensions of our dialogue by looking at the objective historical and cross-cultural facts.

We find that abortions have been, and continue to be, a reality of life in every society. We find that whether or not harsh sanctions are imposed some women, some times, will decide to terminate pregnancies that they do not want. None of us has ever met a woman who made the decision to have an abortion lightly. It is not that women **want** abortions, but that women do **not** want unwanted pregnancies. Outlawing abortion does not eliminate the need some women will have for it, but drives it underground into conditions of increased anguish and danger to the women who, having no other options, will feel driven to risk even their lives.

There are few places on this planet where motherhood is genuinely honored, where the economic and emotional support of society is fully available to all women in each of the pregnancies they may have. There is no contraceptive that is entirely safe and effective, and information about the methods that do exist is not available to all women. There are many places and situations where a woman is not free to decide to abstain from sexual intercourse with men, and fewer where she can be sure of her ability to enforce such a decision.

Besides debating our beliefs for or against abortion, we need to start asking new questions. And perhaps the ultimate question is: how can we create a world where we all can welcome each pregnancy we do have?

Written and Directed by:  
**Gail Singer**

Produced by:  
**Signe Johansson**  
**Gail Singer**

Cinematographer:  
**Susan Trow**

Editor:  
**Toni Trow**

Location Sound:  
**Diane Carrière**

Assistant Camera:  
**Zoe Dirse**

Original Music:  
**Maribeth Solomon**  
**Micky Erbe**

Narrator:  
**Dixie Seattle**

Sound Editor:  
**Jacqueline Newell**

Music Editor:  
**Diane Le Floch**

Re-recording:  
**Jean-Pierre Joutel**

Picture Research:  
**Barbara Sears**

Executive Producer:  
**Kathleen Shannon**

Produced by  
**National Film Board of Canada,**  
**Studio D, in association with**  
**the NFB Ontario Regional**  
**Production Studio**

Distributed by  
**National Film Board of Canada**

**16 mm Color**  
**Screening time:**  
**54 minutes 50 seconds**

**16 mm: 106C 0184 046**  
**Video: 116C 0184 046**

### **Recommended Reading**

**Luker Kristin.**

*Abortion and the Politics of  
Motherhood.* Berkeley; University  
of California Press, 1984.  
(California Series on Social  
Choice and Political Economy).

**Greer, Germaine.**

*Sex and Destiny: The Politics of  
Human Fertility.* Harper, 1984.

**Willis, Ellen.**

*Beginning to See the Light:  
Pieces of a Decade.* Knopf,  
1981.

**Watters, Wendell W.**

*Compulsory Parenthood.*  
Toronto: McClelland and  
Stewart.