

Pamela Lowry, who advocated for abortion rights before Roe v. Wade, dies at 77

By [Bryan Marquard](#) Globe Staff, Updated November 23, 2021



Pamela Lowry, abortion rights advocate before Roe v. Wade, in 2007. THE LOWRY FAMILY

A month before turning 21 in 1965, Pamela Lowry began working in Planned Parenthood's Boston offices, helping women at a time when most had to leave the United States for a legal abortion, and many illegal abortions were dangerous or fatal.

Nine years later, [she testified](#) before a US Senate subcommittee and recalled the awful choices women faced before the US Supreme Court's landmark Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 made abortion legal across the country.

In 1967, she said, Planned Parenthood staffers helped arrange trips for women to Japan, where abortions were legal. The following year they set up visits to London when England's abortion laws changed, which cut travel costs in half. But those who couldn't afford a trip to England faced "the hunt for classic illegal abortions," Ms. Lowry said. A Boston surgeon who worked 10 blocks from a major Catholic maternity hospital "charged \$650. If you wanted an anesthetic it was an additional \$100."

Worse still was a Newton physician. "He was an alcoholic and drank during the procedures in order to steady his hand," she said. "And so it went down the rung of the people who weren't physicians and so on. It was a terrible kind of thing to witness."

Ms. Lowry, who later became a valued campaign staffer for Governor Michael S. Dukakis, was 77 when she collapsed and [died Nov. 16](#) while volunteering at the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter.

She and her husband, Allen Rozelle, had moved 13 years ago to Santa Cruz, Calif., where she wrote novels and focused her political talents on the shelter and its foundation.

“Pam was an all-around superstar and cheerleader for the shelter,” Erika Smart, the organization’s program and development manager, wrote in a tribute.

In her years as a Massachusetts political operative and champion of women’s rights, Ms. Lowry “truly was one of the unsung heroes of the Dukakis return to office in 1982,” said John Sasso, a former political consultant and top aide to Dukakis, who was elected governor in 1974, lost a Democratic primary reelection bid in 1978, and was elected governor again in 1982.

“Computers were in their infancy,” Sasso said of that era. “She kept up the lists and names of volunteers and small contributors as if they were gold, which they were. That is in large part what helped Mike build such a robust organization of volunteers in the field and contributors throughout the state — because of what Pam did.”

After joining the Dukakis campaign team in 1979 and serving as part of the senior campaign staff when he ran for president in 1988, Ms. Lowry launched her own political consulting firm, which focused on administration, election-law compliance, and fund-raising.

“Everybody recognized the tremendous value of what she was doing,” Sasso said. “And her deep conviction about women’s health was at the heart of her commitment.”

Ms. Lowry remained politically active in Massachusetts until 2002, when she married Rozelle, whom she had known since she was at Wellesley and he was at Harvard College. She then moved to Switzerland, where he lived.

Six years later, they moved into a home they had bought in Santa Cruz, drawn there for their retirement years by the proximity of close friends.

Since then, under the authorial byline Lee Lowry, she wrote three novels, “If You Needed Me,” “Judge Not,” and “The Lost Horse,” all of which drew on her experience as an expatriate in Switzerland in a later-in-life marriage.

Like her first novel’s protagonist, “I gave up my career and moved to Europe to help an old love after he lost his wife to cancer,” she said in [an interview](#) posted on her website.

“Elements in this story are inspired by my personal experiences as an expatriate, second wife, and step-parent, but I have also drawn heavily on stories from others whom I met in the course of my own adventure,” she said. “As one friend observed, ‘We as humans need to share our journeys.’ ”

By phone, Rozelle described the novels as “fictional accounts of our getting back together in Geneva. The names are all changed, but the events are recognizable, if you know what you’re talking about. And they’re very good.”

The second of five siblings, and the oldest daughter, Pamela Lee Lowry was born in New York City on Sept. 9, 1944.

Her father, Donald Lowry, had graduated from Harvard College and worked for Procter & Gamble, rising to become a vice president. Her mother, Barbara Schueler Lowry, was from Boston and attended the Cambridge School of Weston before marrying Donald.

Pamela grew up mostly in Cincinnati’s suburbs, once her father’s work brought the family to P&G’s Cincinnati headquarters.

At the family’s suburban homes, Ms. Lowry developed her love of gardening.

“She and my mother shared an interest in wildflowers and built a wildflower garden together at the edge of the woods,” said her sister Sarah Lowry Ames of Boston.

Departing from the more conservative politics of her parents, “Pam was the liberal of the family. We all admired her,” said her brother Sam of Huntsville, Ala.

Much like her experience as a field hockey goalie, Ms. Lowry would, in the political arena, “be the person who would defend to the last her team, her side,” Sarah said. “She was completely committed to an ideal or a cause and

there was no arguing about it. She knew what was right and put everything into trying to convince other people as well.”

Ms. Lowry studied at Wellesley for a couple of years before leaving. She worked briefly at the Design Research retail store in Cambridge before moving to the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, where she chaired public affairs by the time she left at the end of the 1970s.

Before Roe v. Wade, she also had been co-director of MORAL, the Massachusetts Organization to Repeal Abortion Laws, and later she was on the executive committee of the National Abortion Rights Action League.

“She was very articulate, she was very beautiful, she was very friendly,” Rozelle said.

In addition to her husband and her siblings Sarah and Samuel, Ms. Lowry leaves another brother and sister, Peter and Amy, both of Camden, Maine.

Plans for a memorial service are incomplete at this time.

In her 1974 testimony before a US Senate subcommittee, Ms. Lowry recalled that on Aug. 1, 1965, her first day as a Planned Parenthood staffer, the Massachusetts Legislature rejected a proposed bill “which for the first time would have legalized contraception.”

She added that “we could count the numbers of senators and representatives who voted against birth control whose wives we knew were on the pill.”

The personal and the political were always woven together, she told the US senators who were hearing testimony about abortion rights.

“I hope we never go back to the way it was 10 years ago when, with \$187 in my pocket, I walked to the lower end of Massachusetts Avenue, the seedy side of town, the seedy side of the tracks,” Ms. Lowry said.

“I won’t go into all of the details, but it ended up in a chiropractor’s office and it is the kind of experience which changes your life. It changed mine.”