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AWARDS

- Bynum G. Shaw Prize
- Beulah Lassiter Raynor Scholarship

RELEVANT COURSEWORK

- Editing
- Environmental Reporting
- Community Journalism
- Magazine Writing
- Introduction to Journalism
- Journalism Seminar: Race & the Media
- Writing for PR & Advertising
- Advanced Advertising Campaigns
- Marketing Communication
- Communication & Consumer Behavior
- Digital Storytelling & Public Advocacy

EDUCATION

Wake Forest University
Bachelor of Arts in English
Minors in Journalism & Communication
3.75 GPA
2020-2024

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Editor-in-Chief

Old Gold & Black

December 2022-present

- Directs a newsroom of three managing editors, 17 section editors, and about 75 staff writers
- Edits about 24 articles each week for AP style, grammar, style, and structure across six different sections for print and online publication
- Leads weekly editorial board meetings
- Plans, proofs, and approves biweekly print product
- Oversees the editorial content schedule to strategically plan the development and publication of written and multimedia content

News Editor

Old Gold & Black

January 2022-December 2022

- Leads a team of about 10 staff writers as well as several contributing writers by sending weekly budget lines, guiding them through the reporting and writing process, and leading monthly staff meetings
- Reports breaking local and campus news often within 24 hours to be published to our website and social media platforms to inform an 8900 student population of urgent information
- Edits 4-6 stories a week by correcting stories for grammar, syntax, and structural issues
- Designs pages for our bi-weekly print issue, integrating creative typography, graphics, and photography
- Pitches story concepts at weekly editorial board meetings

Public Relations Intern

North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

May 2021-August 2021

- Wrote feature stories to be posted on N.C. State Fair and NCDA&CS blog sites, mainly featuring North Carolina farmers, small business owners, and other agriculture-related topics
- Crafted press releases to alert local media outlets about news and events related to North Carolina agriculture
- Compiled media clips daily from local news sources to keep staff informed on all news related to the department or North Carolina agriculture

English professor's future unclear after students uncover explicit images of him on social media

Reports of sexual and pornographic content began circulating on an anonymous social media site in early February

Christa Dutton and Maddie Stopyra

In early February, posts began to circulate on the anonymous social media app Fizz about associate English professor Dr. Omaar Hena. The posts referred to photos and videos Hena posted of himself on Instagram and Reddit, which ranged from sexually suggestive to pornographic.

Hena has been posting sexually explicit content of himself on the internet for at least the past seven years, an English professor told the Old Gold & Black on condition of anonymity. The professor also said the content had caused discomfort among some faculty members familiar with them. Hena did not immediately take down the images — a few of which are still viewable on Reddit — in which he is naked and fully identifiable, even as student chatter about the images swept Fizz. He continued to teach his undergraduate and graduate classes.

That changed in mid-February when students received an email that Hena had been put on a leave of absence. The email gave no explanation as to why Hena may have been placed on leave. Hena's 200-level English course and first year seminar were picked up by colleagues. The Old Gold & Black learned from a source who declined to be identified that a Title IX complaint was filed against Hena, though we could not confirm how or if the complaint is connected with Hena's sexually explicit online behavior. Additionally, although Wake Forest's Title IX policy allows the university to put a professor on leave if there is a complaint against them, it is unclear whether the complaint is related to Hena's leave of absence.

Title IX complaints cover a range of allegations. The Old Gold & Black's reporting does not suggest sexual contact between Hena and students. Title IX Director Aishah Casseus told the Old Gold & Black that she could not confirm or deny the existence of a Title IX complaint and therefore declined to comment.

Hena did not respond to the Old Gold & Black's repeated requests for comment. Chair of the Department of English Dr. Jeff Holdridge, Provost Dr. Michele Gillespie, Interim Dean of the College Dr. Tony Marsh all repeatedly declined to comment.



Courtesy of Wake Forest

It is unclear whether English professor Dr. Omaar Hena will be returning to Wake Forest to teach next semester or at any point in the future.

It is unknown if Hena will be returning to teach at Wake Forest. On Feb. 22, Hena's name was included on a list of Fall 2023 English courses in a presentation shown at the Department of English's new major orientation. Currently, Hena is not listed as teaching any Fall 2023 courses on the registration portal, available through the Wake Information Network (WIN).

After Hena became the topic of conversation on Fizz, students began to follow him on Instagram. The same source who told the Old Gold & Black about the Title IX complaint also said that Hena would communicate with current undergraduates, graduate students and former students at night via social media. The Old Gold & Black reviewed conversations over Instagram direct messages between one sophomore, whom the Old Gold & Black will not name for privacy reasons, and Hena. The conversations began on February 10, 2023, at 6:40 p.m. Hena messaged the student first, saying "Thanks so much for following!" with a purple heart emoji. The student replied "of course!" to which Hena responded: "Love your queer energy. And I've been a fan of wake radio people forever" with purple heart, sparkle and rainbow emojis. Hena and the student continued to chat, and Hena told the student he would be willing to "meet up for a drink" with her and "any folks" in Wake Radio.

While the university's faculty handbook makes it clear that sexual relationships between students and faculty are prohibited, the handbook is rather vague when it comes to outlining what faculty can and cannot do online.

If Hena violated university policy, it is likely a violation of this statement: "Faculty are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with generally accepted standards of conduct and behavior for the profession."

It is also unknown how Hena's online behavior became apparent to students, but it became the dominant subject on Fizz two months ago. Some of the posts made jokes about Hena while others expressed sympathy for him and even outrage that he was no longer teaching at Wake Forest.

One user posted: "F*ck y'all for getting Omaar Hena fired. Even though he posts heinous things, it's his choice, and he was by far the best professor I've had at this school." That post received 164 upvotes.

Another user wrote: "Let's all go on strike to bring Omaar Hena back."

In a February 2023 post on Rate My Professors, a student gave Hena a 5 out of 5 rating and commented: "His online persona is inappropriate, however, he is a great professor with great insight on the topics he teaches."

For other students, Hena's online behavior negatively impacts their perception of him as a person and professor.

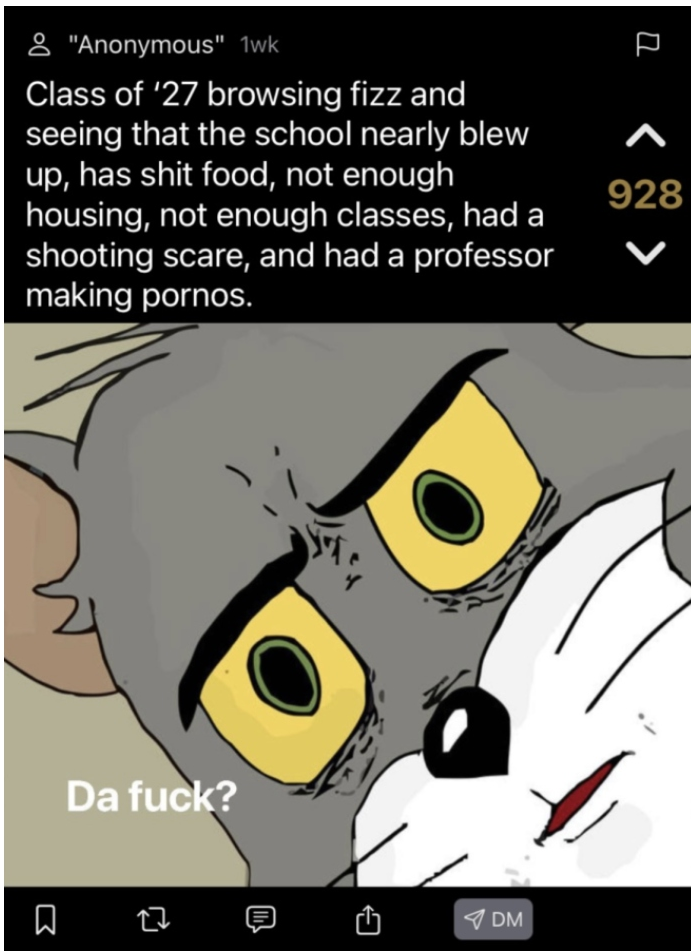
One student on Rate My Professors gave Hena a 1 out of 5, the lowest possible score, and commented "@omaarcomin Very inappropriate Instagram."

Hena's Instagram, now under the handle @oiedevivre (previously @omaarcomin), is now on private. His Instagram content is milder than his Reddit account. The Old Gold & Black reviewed an Instagram post of Hena posing in an Aladdin costume in a Wake Forest classroom — listing "Wake Forest University" as the photo's location. One commenter @janescluesman wrote "Has anyone asked for a magic carpet ride yet?" employing a "grinning face with sweat" emoji to which Hena responded "OMFGG I wish!!!," employing a "woman genie" emoji. (Editor's Note: All emoji characterizations come from unicode.org).

In some videos on Reddit, Hena is seen fondling his genitals while looking into the camera. In many photos, which contain suggestive captions such as "wanna ride?" or "dirty dirty boy," Hena is posed so his body and genitals are visible. In at least one photo that is still viewable on the site, both Hena's face and genitals are visible.

One student in Hena's first year seminar, who spoke to the Old Gold & Black on the condition of anonymity, said that she first heard about Hena's online presence at a fraternity party, when a friend showed her Hena's Instagram.

"When I was in class [afterward], I never really thought about it again," the freshman said. "It never really weirded me out."



Dr. Hena's explicit posts are indirectly referred to in a Fizz post about the Class of 2027. (Screenshot of Fizz)

The Old Gold & Black reached out to other students in Hena's classes and in the English department, who all either declined or did not respond to the Old Gold & Black's requests for comment. At least three female English majors on staff at the Old Gold & Black have said that they would not feel comfortable in a classroom with Hena teaching. Other staffers, both male and female, however, did not share that concern.

Another Fizz post raised concerns about how Hena's actions might affect the university's reputation, especially since prospective and newly admitted students are joining Fizz to observe Wake Forest culture. On Admitted Students Day, a user shared a meme with the caption: "Class of '27 browsing fizz and seeing that the school nearly blew up, has shit food, not enough housing, not enough classes, had a shooting scare, and had a professor making pornos."

The post received more than 900 upvotes.

The question remains whether Hena, a well-liked, tenured professor who is an undergraduate alumnus and has taught for more than 15 years at Wake Forest, will return to the classroom come August or any other time in the future.

Aine Pierre contributed reporting to this article.

REFLECTING THE TIMES

CHRISTA DUTTON

Editor-in-Chief

As soon as I entered J.D. Wilson's home, I could tell he is a man who loves art. Small sculptures sat on shelves, and large paintings hung on the walls. He proudly displays his grandchildren's crafts around the dining room. A cardboard cutout of a woman sat on one of the chairs at the table. Yes, a cardboard woman.

I found it odd when I first entered the dining room, then I learned the story. It was a cutout of his wife's best friend, Frances. Wilson gave it to his wife as a gift before her college reunion so that Frances, who couldn't travel to the reunion, could be in the photographs. I didn't know you could show love through a cardboard cutout, but now I do.

I spoke with Wilson over lunch in his Winston-Salem home a couple of months ago. When I told people I was working on a story about Wake Forest art, they said, "talk to J.D. Wilson." A 1969 graduate of Wake Forest, he is a stalwart supporter of the Wake Forest art collection and a big name in the Winston-Salem creative economy, serving on the Board of Trustees for the Creative Center of North Carolina.

For Wilson, art can be beauty, gift, keepsake and utility. Even the plates for our lunch were painted in bright primary colors.

In the middle of our meal, Wilson sprang up from his seat to retrieve something. I waited for him, staring at the art around his home and making awkward eye contact with cardboard Frances.

When he returned, he placed an event program on the table.

"I found this while going through some stuff we had at storage," he said. "This is the program, the physical program, from that collection that I saw that first opened my eyes to the world of art and the importance of art."

Wilson was referring to an exhibit of the art bought on the first Wake Forest University student art buying trip in 1963. Four years later, Wilson went on a buying trip himself.

"My father taught me that, anything that's important, write the date on it," Wilson told me.

Sure enough, he flipped to the back of the program where "September 15, 1964," was written in pencil. It was a day Wilson will never forget — one that turned him into a lifelong lover and supporter of the arts.

Art Among Us

The student art-buying trip is one of the most unique experiences Wake Forest has to offer. It all started in 1963 when Wake Forest's Dean of Men and College Union Adviser Mark Reece and faculty members Ed Wilson and Allen Easley drove to New York with two students who they tasked with purchasing pieces of contemporary art. Wake Forest did not even have an art department at that time.

Since then, a small group of students has continued the tradition and traveled to New York City every three years during spring break to purchase contemporary art for the university's collection with

university funds. There is no other program like this at a university in the country, according to University Art Collections.

Wake Forest gives the students \$100,000 with only one instruction: buy art that "reflects the times." Students spend their days in the city visiting galleries and spend their nights deliberating their findings. They debate which works to buy, evaluating their artistic value as well as how the work will fit into the collection. They consider factors like which artists they want to be featured. The last buying trip cohort only purchased work from female artists or artists of color to add more diversity to the collection. Before that trip, less than five percent of the collection was from artists of color.

Students also have to talk money. If they buy one piece, that may mean they have to cut another to stay within their budget. They also have to consider shipping costs; it's easier to ship a painting than it is a sculpture.

Formerly known as the Student Union Collection of Contemporary Art, the works purchased on the buying trip are now in a collection called the Mark H. Reece Collection of Student-Acquired Contemporary Art. It is Wake Forest's premier art collection and will celebrate its 60th year in 2023. The collection now has more than 200 pieces by more than 100 artists, ranging in media from paintings to print to photography to sculptures. The collection is a time capsule — documenting the art that Wake Forest students thought reflected their time.

Most of the collection is now displayed in either Reynolda Hall or Benson University Center. These pieces are fine art and would typically live in a gallery or museum, but at Wake Forest, the art lives among the students.

The art's location poses an interesting question. What is a piece of art's relationship to the space it occupies? How do you balance the accessibility of art with the preservation and sacredness of art?

Wake Forest also asked those questions and sought answers. In 2016, former Vice Provost Lynn Sutton initiated a report of the Hanes Gallery, stArt Gallery and the University Art Collections. Dan Mills, an art museum director at Bates College, visited Wake Forest to conduct the review, and he discovered that one of the biggest challenges for Wake Forest would be the care of the Reece Collection (then called the Student Union Collection). His report said the works were of "high scholarly, aesthetic, historic and monetary value," being worth well over \$4 million but were displayed in "insecure, unstaffed and high light level spaces."

He noted that the university would have to grapple with the school's long tradition of public art with the need to provide proper stewardship. Resolving this tension doesn't come without its challenges — challenges that are both practical and philosophical.

A Daily Intervention

Kayla Amador ('19) was one of those kids who

scribbled on the walls. She remembers that, instead of yelling at her, her mother would say "We should take her to art school!"

So when Amador arrived at Wake Forest, she immersed herself in the arts, taking as many courses as she could and working at the Hanes Gallery in Scales Fine Art Center. Amador went on a buying trip in 2017 as a sophomore, and she continues to work in the arts today as a freelance designer and visual artist. Having been one of the students who purchased art that went to live in buildings like Reynolda and Benson, Amador has thought deeply about the virtue of a work's home.

The accessibility of Wake Forest's art collection certainly has its benefits. It's like living in a gallery. Students don't have to drive off campus to experience incredible art. They don't even have to enter a museum, a space that can be off-putting to those who wouldn't call themselves art lovers. The art is where students study, work, eat and hang out. As Amador puts it, "It becomes part of your space, part of your home."

Dr. Jennifer Finkel, the university's art curator, believes that art can be a "daily intervention in your life."

"Whether we're going to Benson to study or pick up our mail, or to the copy center, or to get food, or [to] the Women's Center or the Intercultural Center there could be this moment where you don't have to walk into a museum or a gallery to have an art experience."

As curator, one aspect of Finkel's job is to decide where the art goes. She gives this great thought, considering who visits spaces the most and thinking about what art they want to see.

"I think about who's in those spaces," Finkel said. "Who's going to the Intercultural Center? I wanted that to be more like a global representation of international artists, versus the Women's Center or the LGBTQ+ Center focusing on female-identifying artists and other artists. I really tried to think about who's in different spaces and how the art can have an impact."

Everywhere & Nowhere

With public art, one of the first challenges to think about is contextualization. In a museum, works can tell a story, but in hallways, Finkel says there's no way for the works to be in dialogue with one another. That's not without trying, though. Reece Collection works have labels next to them, and some even have QR codes that can take viewers to more information. That is, of course, if viewers take the time to read them.

Another challenge with hanging the works in Benson or Reynolda is that it is difficult to teach there. Finkel says that the Reece Collection is academic and should serve as a resource, but those buildings don't work as teaching spaces.

"It is near impossible to really teach from the art," she said.

While the collection is certainly accessible to students, few know about it. Or if they do, they don't know that it is fine art. Finkel often leads tours of the collection for students, and usually, only half the group knows that Wake Forest has an extensive art collection.

"There are students who will actually go to Benson to have an art experience," Finkel told me. "Then there are a lot of students who are studying in Benson who probably don't even notice it. I mean, it could be poster art. Yeah, it could be posters. It's everywhere and nowhere."

In 2017, Dr. Kevin Murphy from Williams College conducted a review of Wake Forest's art collection, much like Mills. In his report, he wrote: "...works in Benson are so visible as to have become invisible." Everywhere, and nowhere.

Murphy's report also raised alarm about damage to the art. He wrote: "WFU has a choice — it can continue to let its collection deteriorate or not. The display conditions I witnessed are, frankly, appalling."

Murphy only confirmed what art faculty like Finkel have known for years — that the collection is in danger.

"As soon as you have artwork in any public space, it's subject to any kind of UV light, natural light. The degradation starts almost immediately," Finkel said. "Artworks are getting damaged by light. Artwork is getting damaged from accidental impacts. Artwork is getting damaged from vandalism."

Treasures Stored Away

Just under three miles away from campus, pieces from some of the university's nine art collections sit in storage. Some are there to rest in a climate-controlled space and take a break from light exposure and other harms presented by the outside world. Others are there because they are too valuable to be in public.

One such piece is Alex Katz's "Vincent with Open Mouth" — an eight-foot-tall oil painting on canvas purchased on the 1973 buying trip. Finkel said it has been in storage for 10 or 12 years.

While it was displayed on campus, it received dents from chairs bumping into it, and then in the '80s, someone drew a penis on the canvas. It was restored, and it eventually became too valuable to be vulnerable to either accidental or intentional damage.

Another piece that was vandalized was



Alex Katz, "Vincent with Open Mouth", 1970
American (b. 1927, oil on canvas, 96"x72", 1973 acquisition
© 2023 Alex Katz / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Robert Colescott's "Famous Last Words: The Death of a Poet" — one of the Reece Collection's most valuable works, bought on the 1989 buying trip. The painting was vandalized in April 1992 when it hung in Benson. The painting is a montage of a poet's life, depicting his vices like gambling and alcoholism but also his romances: the Black poet is shown in bed with a white woman. Someone took a black marker to the woman's body, making her skin darker to match the poet's. Fortunately, the painting was restored and hung back up, this time in Reynolda.

Then, in the spring of 2020, another one of Colescott's paintings sold at Sotheby's for \$15 million. The very next day, Wake Forest's Colescott was taken down.

"One of the most important contemporary artist's works is in storage," Finkel said. No art museums in North Carolina have a Colescott painting.

Both the Katz and the Colescott have an insurance value of \$1 million. If it was safe, Finkel says the two paintings would "1000%" be on display.

Cūrātor



Robert Colescott, "Famous Last Words: The Death of a Poet"
American (1925-2009), acrylic on cotton duck, 84"x72", 1989 acquisition,
© 2023 The Robert H. Colescott Separate Property Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In Latin, the word "curator" means "one who has care of a thing." A manager. A guardian. A trustee. Finkel sees herself as all of these things — a steward of objects. So it's a challenge to her that she can't hang two of the collection's most impressive pieces — pieces that students acquired — because she doesn't have the proper space to care for them.

"Philosophically, I feel like we, as an institution, are not valuing this collection," Finkel said. "We value the buying trip. We value the \$100,000 that we give to students every four years, now every three years. We are not valuing the art when it comes here. Hence, we are not valuing the artists."

When I asked Finkel what the solution would be, I could tell she'd dreamed of it before. She imagines a safe, dedicated, temperature-controlled, humidity-controlled environment. Where there is open storage, so the Colescott and Katz are safe and able to be viewed. Open racks. Flat files. A huge conference table where students can view art and discuss it. Students could curate shows. There could be performances. Other disciplines could share the space, as well. Chemistry students could learn the science of conservation.



Pablo Picasso, "Portrait de Femme a la Fraise et au Chapeau", 1962
Spanish (1881-1973), Linocut, 25"x17", 1963 acquisition
© 2023 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Finkel's dream space doesn't mean that the art in Reynolda or Benson would have to go away. Some of the Reece Collection and other student art could still be there.

"It has been historically in Wake Forest DNA, in our fabric, to have art in the public," Finkel said. "And that's wonderful. There can still be. It's not an either or, it's a both and."

Mills suggested a vision similar to Finkel's. He proposed that the university divide its collections into two categories: a museum collection for works that support the university's academic mission and a campus collection for works that would enhance campus but do not meet museum quality.

Since Murphy's and Mill's report, the university has not announced any plans for a dedicated space for the Reece Collection, although Wake Forest has certainly been thinking about its academic space needs. As a part of the strategic framework, Wake Forest President Susan Wentz created a University Space Planning Group to ensure the management of the university's physical assets. In her February 2023 blog post, Wentz said that academic space renewal was one of her "highest priorities as President."

In Our DNA

The American actress Stella Adler once said: "Life beats down and crushes the soul, and art reminds you that you have one."

As a university in the city with the country's oldest arts council, art is in the DNA of Wake Forest. It's long been a value of our leaders and students, as shown through Reece's revolutionary idea to let students purchase art for the school.

Every few years, students will keep traveling to New York to purchase incredible pieces of contemporary art. They'll be shipped back to campus for all to see. No matter where that is in the future — Reynolda, Benson or an exhibition space — art will fill our Wake Forest home, just like it fills Wilson's. The Reece Collection will continue to be many things to us — a teaching tool, beauty to our spaces, a time capsule of history. People like Wilson, Amador, Finkel and other faculty in the Department of Art will keep stewarding it and showing it off. The Reece Collection will reflect our times, reminding us of the life we've lived and that, through it all, we still have one.

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From the editor: Year 107

The Old Gold & Black continues to grow, but our commitments to Wake Forest remain the same

Christa Dutton, Editor-in-Chief

In its 107-year history, our paper has had the privilege of documenting Wake Forest history and culture. We have covered the most important issues, featured the most interesting people, captured the biggest moments in sports, chronicled opinions and highlighted the cultural phenomena that students loved — or hated — the most. In this year's volume, we will continue to do just that, but as things grow, they change. We are excited to announce some exciting, new additions to the Old Gold & Black.

You'll notice that this print issue is longer than usual. We have expanded our paper from 16 pages to 20 pages, giving our Environment section more space for its brilliant coverage. As issues concerning the environment heighten around the world and environmental advocacy increases on campus, our Environment desk is dedicated to reporting on both challenges and solutions. Since its establishment last semester, the desk has produced fascinating features, strong accountability pieces and helpful, solution-oriented stories. Our hope is that our readership continues to benefit from their diverse coverage and increases their awareness of the environmental work being done at Wake Forest.

This year, we are also expanding our multimedia team by hiring a video editor to oversee our team of talented videographers. Stories come alive through visuals, and the Old Gold & Black is excited to produce compelling video stories.

Lastly, this page will soon be taken over by our new Editorial Committee. The Editorial Committee comprises seven members: the online managing editor, all three editors from the Opinion desk and two staff writers. The group meets weekly to discuss what issues our campus is facing and then decides a stance to argue in the weekly editorial. We are excited to see how the committee influences the editorial direction of the newspaper.

Some things, however, never change. We will continue to produce high-quality journalism online and in print, strengthening the design of both. We will continue to hold ourselves to the highest possible ethical standards and be accountable to our community when we fall short. Our multimedia team will continue to produce podcasts, create videos and provide stunning photography to accompany our work.

Like our motto says, the Old Gold & Black remains committed to “covering the campus like the magnolias.” We are dedicated to providing coverage that is both deep and wide, and we will continue to be a place where students can tell their stories and express their views.



OGB Archives

How a mother's choice saved her child

Wake Forest alumna Lydia Swortzel recounts a *heartbreaking medical decision* she made while pregnant, which resulted in the loss of one son and the life of another.

CHRISTA DUTTON

News Editor

BACKGROUND

Lydia's case and others like it are grounded on the legal debate regarding compelled medical treatment of pregnant patients. Common and constitutional law grants every American — including pregnant ones — the right to refuse medical treatment. However, pregnant patients can be forced by court order to receive medical treatment or be found criminally or civilly liable for any injury or death to a fetus caused by the refusal of medical treatment. Swortzel's doctor was likely referring to exceptions like these that limit a pregnant patient's options.

One such case occurred in New Jersey in 2006, years before Swortzel became pregnant.

A New Jersey woman who is only known by the initials "VM" in legal documents gave birth to a little girl we only know as "JMG". VM's doctors advised her to consent to a cesarean section because her fetus was demonstrating signs of distress, much like Winston. VM refused. JMG was safely born by vaginal delivery and all was well — until the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) learned of VM's refusal to consent to the c-section.

DYFS also discovered that VM had not been forthcoming about her diagnosis or being under psychiatric care for 12 years before giving birth to

JMG. VM's husband, BG, who is also only identified by his initials, refused to cooperate with DYFS when they tried to obtain information.

DYFS sought a Title 9 — not to be confused with Title IX of the Civil Rights Act — pursuant to the Abandonment, Abuse, Cruelty and Neglect Act (NJSA 9:6-8.21 to 8.106) and took JMG into their custody. After a hearing, a judge found that JMG was abused and neglected in part because her mother failed to cooperate with her doctor. Other reasons cited for taking custody of the child was VM's psychiatric history and her erratic behavior post-delivery that suggested she and her husband would not be fit parents. At a permanency hearing, a judge approved DYFS's plan for termination

of parental rights and family adoption.

This case serves as evidence that if Swortzel had delivered in another state then she may have been forced to do whatever her physician ordered or face the consequences of not listening. In North Carolina, there is no legal precedent for compelled cesareans. For Swortzel's doctor to have forced her to deliver at 21 weeks, he would have had to appeal to the North Carolina court system to procure a court order demanding that Swortzel deliver.

However, her doctor did not file a court order. Instead, Swortzel had the privilege of making a decision.

TWINS

When Lydia Swortzel and her husband Stevien Reece found out they were having twins, they were shocked.

They were shocked not only because carrying two babies at one time is daunting but shocked all the more because they had only one embryo implanted through in vitro fertilization (IVF).

"Did we transfer two embryos?" the specialist at her local Winston-Salem fertility clinic asked Swortzel as she lay on the examination table.

"Uh, no," Swortzel replied.

"Well, there's two in there. Twins."

The one embryo they had implanted had naturally split into two, resulting in identical twins.

Swortzel said the rest of the visit was a blur. They walked out of the office, got into the car and then started — laughing. It was ironic; from the moment they found out they were pregnant, Swortzel and her husband joked that they would be alright — as long as they didn't have twins.

"Then after [the laughter], we were just terrified," Swortzel said.

As a self-described type-A planner, Swortzel began calculating all the doubled costs of having twins — double the clothes, double the diapers, double the attention. She even thought as far ahead as when they would be paying double the college tuition.

Swortzel was in the middle of Wake Forest University's MBA program at the time. She wouldn't finish her degree until after she delivered the twins.

Despite her apprehension about finances and still being a student, Swortzel was happy about being pregnant. The longer she carried her babies, the more excited she felt. She delayed buying anything baby-related, however, because she knew the chances of miscarriage were

high. Swortzel was 35 at the time and becoming pregnant had not been easy. In fact, Swortzel and her husband had only told their families about their pregnancy just in case something went wrong.

EMERGENCY

One Monday morning, when Swortzel was 21 weeks along, she decided it was time to announce her pregnancy. But before she and Reece had the chance to tell anyone, Swortzel felt some pain she had never felt before, and her husband immediately took her to her doctor.

The doctors did a scan and rushed her to the emergency room. The two babies were trying to come out, but they were only 21 weeks along — way sooner than Swortzel expected.

The doctors couldn't perform a traditional cesarean section because of where Baby A — who Swortzel and Reece had named Winston — was located, so they had to perform another delivery method that posed a much greater risk for both

"Swortzel looked at her husband and told him she didn't want to die."

the babies and Swortzel.

The doctors told her that there was no way to perform this surgery without inducing labor for Baby B, named Oliver. If delivered, both babies would have a zero percent chance of survival. The life-saving equipment like IVs and breathing tubes used on premature babies would not have even fit them since they were so small, each under one pound. Both ba-

bies were likely to die or have a quality of life so poor that Swortzel and Reece would not want that for their children.

The other option was to wait to deliver until she had reached 24 weeks of pregnancy, the most commonly accepted week of viability for newborns. With this option, Winston's survival was unlikely because, where he was located, he was cut off from oxygen and amniotic fluid. Winston would be born only to shortly pass away. His brother, however, would have a fighting chance.

Swortzel and her husband were faced with an incredibly difficult decision — a decision her doctor said she would not have in some states.

"The doctor told me that in some states, the distress and the life of the babies come first — regardless of if I was scared of the surgery because I had a higher mortality rate and regardless of if [the babies] would survive," Swortzel said. "They based it off a hope they can survive."

Swortzel looked at her husband and told him she didn't want to die.



THE CHOICE

After a few sleepless nights, many tears and prayers, the Swortzels decided to go with the latter option — to wait until 24 weeks, knowing that Winston would die shortly after birth, but Oliver would have a much higher chance of surviving.

On a Wednesday, Swortzel hit 24 weeks. Less than 48 hours later, her babies were born.

Oliver was rushed to the NICU, and he was administered the Apgar test, which measures how much life there is in an infant. The exam measures the newborn's skin color, heart rate, reflexes, muscle tone and breathing rate. Overall, the best possible score a newborn could receive is a 10, although few do. Oliver scored a one. Winston, a zero.

“The sun illuminating a world he'd never experience.”

While Oliver was carried away to be treated, Winston remained with his parents. He had a faint heartbeat, but he had been without oxygen for too long.

Swortzel held Winston in her arms as he passed. Before he died, her husband carried him to the window to show him the sunrise — the sun illuminating a world he would

never experience.

They slept that night at the hospital with Winston in a crib beside them. The nurse told them to call when they were ready for the nurses to take him. “Ready?” Swortzel thought. “How can anyone ever be ready for that?” Crying, Swortzel called the nurse and watched her take him away.

The Swortzels describe Winston as “his brother's savior” and “their little hero.” They think about him every day and desperately wish he were with them. Still, they are thankful for the choice they had. Swortzel says her right to choose her medical treatment resulted in Oliver's life.

“We're very lucky,” Swortzel said. “I say that and a lot of people respond, ‘Oh really, are you? Because you lost a baby.’ But we really are because we could have lost two babies. I could have been forced to deliver both of them and never gotten to know either of them.”

Oliver stayed in the NICU for 123 days. He was still very sick, but persevered. Today, he is 18 months old without any health issues and is meeting all the milestones.

PROTEST

Since Swortzel was able to make an autonomous decision regarding her reproductive care, she worried when the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey in June.

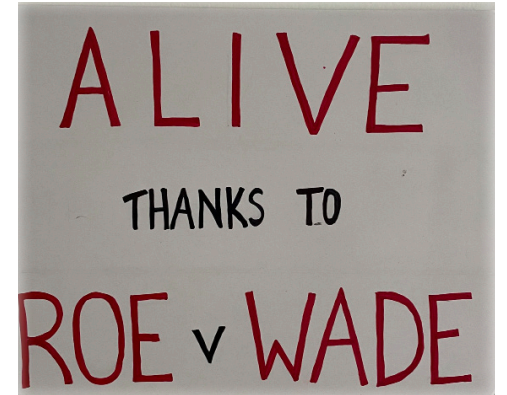
“When Roe v. Wade was overturned, I knew the implications it would have for people who wanted abortion access just to have abortion access, but also [I knew the implications] for people like me who had to make an unthinkable medical decision,” Swortzel said. “Now, that decision may be taken completely out of their hands.”

Associate Professor of Law at Wake Forest University Meghan Boone, whose expertise lies in reproductive rights, explained why Swortzel is justified in being concerned about how the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision impacts medical decision-making while pregnant.

“Roe explicitly protected the right to abortion, but underpinning that right was the idea that pregnant people had the right to make medical decisions about their own bodies, even if those decisions interfered with the health or life of the fetus they carry, at least a s

long as the fetus was not yet viable,” Boone said.

In the case in New Jersey, Roe v. Wade did not protect VM because the fetus was far past the point of viability.



“In a world without Roe, pregnant people like Lydia could be forced into medical treatment or decisions even with pre-viability fetuses, like her twins were when she went into premature labor,” Boone said.

In addition to abortion access, Swortzel wants people to consider how abortion rights affect those who do want children.

“I want people, especially when they're thinking about Roe v. Wade, to think about how it affects more than just people that want to go out and have an abortion because they don't want a child,” Swortzel said. “[Some people] didn't want to have an abortion. They didn't want to have a late term loss. They didn't want to make a decision like this. But they have to — in order to have a life on their own, to be able to give another baby life or in order for a child not to suffer, they have to.”

Swortzel took her concerns and turned them into activism. She was among the 1,000 people that gathered in downtown Winston-Salem to protest the reversal of Roe v. Wade.

The protest was on July 3. The next day, many Americans celebrated Independence Day. That day, however, protesters took to the streets to express that they felt one of their freedoms had been taken away.

Almost every protester brought a sign along with them. Some of the poster slogans included:

“WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS”

“THEOCRACY IS UNAMERICAN”

“KEEP YOUR ROSARIES OFF MY OVARIES”

The Swortzels marched with Oliver in a stroller. They also brought a sign, hanging it on the back of the stroller. It read: “Alive thanks to Roe v. Wade”.

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Photo courtesy of Christa Dutton

Election anxieties drive increase in poll observers

Election integrity, intimidation fears have led to high recruitment rates

Christa Dutton , News Editor

As Election Day nears, Republicans in Forsyth County are heavily recruiting poll observers through social media, reflecting the nationwide movement among Republicans of paying special attention to election integrity. Democrats are also recruiting poll observers with an emphasis on preventing voter intimidation.

Dr. Katy Harriger is a professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University whose expertise lies in American politics and civic engagement.

“I don’t think it’s the case that Republican voters are worried that their voters are going to be intimidated. I think that they are worried that people are going to vote in a corrupt manner,” Harriger said.

In the aftermath of the 2020 election, claims that many people cast illegal ballots were common, spurred on by former president Donald Trump and some of his allies. To date, no evidence has surfaced indicating any widespread election fraud.

Harriger said that Democratic poll workers may also be motivated by fear, albeit of a different sort.

“I think Democratic poll watchers are worried about their voters being intimidated. So they have different motivations, but in either case, their fear is that somehow the vote will be corrupted — either by stopping people from voting or for allowing people to vote when they shouldn’t be voting. It’s kind of two sides of the same coin.”

Poll observers are appointed by political parties and approved by the local board of elections to oversee election processes without interfering with the voting process. On the first day of early voting, Forsyth County Republicans had 10 at-large poll observers — meaning they can attend any polling site — and more than 25 observers assigned to specific sites, according to the Forsyth County Board of Elections. The Democratic Party had 10 poll observers for the first two days of early voting. Michelle Bobadilla, deputy director at the Forsyth County Board of Elections, said these numbers are comparable to other election years.

An average number of poll observers for the Republican Party was not from lack of recruitment. The party heavily recruited election day volunteers, particularly poll observers, through its website and social media posts.

Forsyth County GOP Chairman Ken Raymond has been impressed by the involvement of Republican poll observers this election season.



Courtesy of Heard It Here

Poll observers are appointed by political parties to observe polling places.

“We’re seeing a resurgence of volunteers for poll observers primarily because of concerns about voter integrity, cheating and especially concerns of things that happened in 2020 — concerns that were never addressed,” Raymond said. “They have questions. My people want to be there and watch and insist on transparency.”

In a Facebook post published Oct. 5, the Forsyth County GOP called for its followers to volunteer as polling assistants, addressing them as “patriots.” In an earlier post, the party said they needed more than 100 Republican volunteers to be poll observers. Attached to that post is a promotional image for a statewide volunteer organization that promotes election integrity efforts.

It’s not just Forsyth County Republicans that are rallying around election integrity this midterm season. The statewide GOP organization has an entire page on its website dedicated to “Election Integrity” where you can sign up to be a poll observer.

“Voters across North Carolina report election integrity as a top issue of concern,” the webpage reads.

According to its party leadership, the Democratic Party is most concerned with limiting voter intimidation and confusion rather than spotting irregularities at the polls.

“The big thing is making sure there’s no voter intimidation and making sure people have the patience to cast their ballot, as well as helping avoid any confusion,” Drew Skilton, Third Vice Chair of the Forsyth County Democratic Party, said.

In an email newsletter sent on Oct. 20, the first day of early voting, the county Democratic Party makes no mention of poll observers, yet does urge its members to volunteer as poll greeters to perform duties like “keep[ing] an eye out for Republican voter intimidation tactics outside the polling site.”

Matthew Barr is a professor of film at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is volunteering as a poll observer this election for the local Democratic Party.

“The reason I’m doing it is because it’s incredibly important to protect people’s right to vote,” Barr said. “The whole idea is to ensure people’s right to vote without being intimidated.”

After the May primary, the State Board of Elections sent out a survey about poll observer behavior to local election officials. Forty-three counties participated, and 17 of them reported poll observer misconduct. Tim Tsuji, the Director of the Board of Elections for Forsyth County, reported “no” to experiencing observer misconduct.

“There hasn’t been any reported instances where observers have harassed or intimidated anybody inside the voting enclosure, nor outside the voting enclosure,” Tsuji said.

Other counties in the state, however, reported problems.

According to the survey, election officials in nearby Davidson County reported that several poll observers demanded to stand behind machines to watch people vote and became argumentative after being told they couldn’t. Further west, in Henderson County, poll observers demanded to approach tabulators to verify totals and be in the room where USBs were being uploaded on election night to observe and verify no totals were being altered.

The state-wide election integrity movement

According to reporting in *The Assembly* magazine, representatives from battleground states Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin all attended an election integrity conference hosted by Cleta Mitchell, a conservative lawyer who was a member of Trump’s legal team when he tried to overturn the 2020 election. Now these states have statewide organizations actively fighting for more secure elections.

Jim Womack is the GOP chair in Lee County and leads North Carolina Election Integrity Team (NCEIT), North Carolina’s statewide organization.

One of their goals is to have an active task force in each North Carolina county by January 2024. Right now, Forsyth County has a task force of 56 people.

“Forsyth County is one of our top counties in terms of organization,” Womack said. “I’ve been really impressed by the level of interest and effort there.”

One of the organization’s first meetings was held in Winston-Salem in February and roughly 100 people attended.

“I became a believer that this was not just something that was worthy, but it was also something that we’re gonna see a lot of interest in statewide,” Womack said.

North Carolina does not offer standardized training for poll observers, leaving training to political parties. The election integrity organization conducted some of these training sessions, which Womack said primarily attracts GOP poll observers. The organization hosted a session in Kernersville in April, according to the Forsyth GOP website.

Womack said he begins training sessions by asking the crowd how many believe the last election was stolen or manipulated, and most people raise their hands. He said he tries not to reinforce any myths that have unsubstantiated claims. Womack does not believe the 2020 election was stolen but does believe that absentee ballots were fraught with vulnerabilities. In the meetings he also outlines the rules poll observers must follow and how to report irregularities if they see any.

“I try to present factual information to all and properly frame the election challenges we have,” Womack said. For example, he believes that most improper behavior occurred through absentee ballots.

In 2021, the Associated Press reviewed every potential case of voter fraud in all six battleground states that former President Donald Trump disputed and found fewer than 475 cases — not nearly enough to change the outcome of the election.

Federal government committees released a joint statement in 2020 denouncing false claims about widespread voter fraud, stating that “the November 3rd election was the most secure in American history” and that “there is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised.”

The North Carolina State Board of Elections prepared resources for this upcoming election to ensure that all volunteers follow the rules. State law prohibits poll observers from distributing campaign materials, speaking with voters, disrupting the voting process, taking photos or viewing ballots.

In early October, the state elections board issued Numbered Memo 2022-12 — the most comprehensive guide to date on maintaining order at polling sites. The guide outlines what is prohibited at polling sites as well as outlining proper procedures.

In addition to releasing this memo, the elections board partnered with the North Carolina Sheriffs’ Association and the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police to create the “Elections Reference Guide for North Carolina Law Enforcement,” a guide created to help law enforcement maintain peaceful and orderly elections as well as ensure no voters face intimidation.