



Published in "Pro-Life Union, Inc."  
May 11, 2003

A Publication of **Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**  
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## **Interview with Theresa Burke, Ph.D.**

*Founder of Rachel's Vineyard and world expert on  
Post Abortion Syndrome*

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**PLU:** You have been counseling abortive mothers since 1986. In those 14 years, how many abortive mothers have you met?

**Dr. Burke:** I have worked with over 2,000 women who have suffered the devastating loss of a child because of abortion. We estimate that nearly 15,000 women have gone through Rachel's Vineyard, and every week we hear from people all over the world who need help to deal with this trauma. This year, there will be about 200 Rachel's Vineyard retreats from Alaska to Florida, and in nine countries.

**PLU:** Is it true that most mothers who abort believe themselves hopelessly trapped?

**Dr. Burke:** Many women who abort do so under tremendous pressure and act swiftly in a desperate attempt to solve a problem. There are no screening procedures to identify women at risk for psychological trauma when the indicators are well known and documented.

**PLU:** What is the "anniversary reaction"?

**Dr. Burke:** Anniversary dates serve as "connectors" to the painful event. The "anniversary" of an abortion or anticipated birth date can trigger feelings of depression, suicidal ideation, nightmares, abdominal cramping and relationship conflicts because the dates serve as a connector to buried traumatic memories and perceptions.

**PLU:** You have assisted mothers who aborted after being raped. What do they verbalize to you?

**Dr. Burke:** A victim of sexual assault has experienced a profound violation of her most intimate self. For many women, their experiences with abortion recreate that inner violence in a more dramatic way because another life is destroyed. They struggle with ambivalence between being a victim of rape as well as the agony of being a perpetrator of abortion. Grieving can become complicated because there is anger and rage co-existing with the need to grieve

for the child. Because that life was conceived in violence, they have tremendous ambivalence and feeling of abandonment by God.

**PLU:** A major percentage of women who abort then adopt a radically harmful lifestyle. Why?

**Dr. Burke:** repetition is one of the greatest indicators of trauma. That means that there is a need to work through the traumatic event and “master” what has happened. The trauma keeps the person locked into a particular conflict and they continue to engage with the same struggle over and over again. Self-destructive behavior is a way they re-experience traumatic feelings that are locked within.

**PLU:** Your book, “Forbidden Grief”, exposes the denial by “organized medicine” of PAS. Why the denial?

**Dr. Burke:** Because the AMA and many mental health associations, including the APA, have taken political positions in support of abortion rights, they have a deep resistance to exposing that abortion is, in fact, harmful and dangerous to women’s health. Nobody would want to take responsibility for that kind of pain – so the tendency is to blame the victim, and appear superior while not taking any responsibility for the injury.

**PLU:** What advice would you give to young, unmarried women?

**Dr. Burke:** You are women – ***an incredible and mysterious masterpiece of God.*** You deserve dignity and respect. Marvel at what we can do in our ability to collaborate with the Divine to create the precious gift of life. Guard your hearts and do not allow others to use and dispose of you. There are many that will want to steal your dignity, to exploit and twist the miracle that you are. Be proud of yourself and the gifts that God has given you. Support each other in maintaining healthy boundaries, and learn to protect yourself from being manipulated because of your desire to please and be loved. Have faith in yourself and in God who will lead you.

**PLU:** Have you ever offered your research to officials of NARAL and NOW?

**Dr. Burke:** I have sent a copy of my book to Kate Michelman, president of NARAL, along with an invitation to have lunch. The book is open to public viewing and went into a second print last fall. I distributed copies of it at the American Public Health Association Meeting. I recently received a letter from Laura Bush after she received a copy of my book, and we’re currently helping with many efforts to raise governmental awareness of the traumatic and physical impact of abortion.



**Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**  
808 N. Henderson Rd.  
King of Prussia, PA 19406  
610-354-0555—1-877-HOPE-4-ME