



January 2014

A Publication of **Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**
www.RachelsVineyard.org

Prison Break from Shame and Guilt: Testimony from a Man Serving a Life Sentence

By: Kevin Burke, LSW

This is David's Story:

I started college at age 17 and found a job at a sporting goods store to pay my tuition. I was a successful high school athlete and knew sports, apparel and their related equipment thoroughly. I also had the arrogant swagger common to popular teenage athletes. I met Jessica when she came into the store, and we fell into a casual sexual relationship.

My mother is a devout Catholic, and my father was a convert to the Catholic faith. Though I knew right from wrong, it was a passing comment, from my not-so-devout father that muddied the moral waters for me. In the context of a basketball game, he told me that it was not a foul unless the referee blows the whistle.

Sadly, I understood this to mean that it is not wrong unless you are caught. So religious faith and spirituality were for Sunday mornings, and from Sunday afternoon through the rest of the week, I lived by the subjective moral standards set by the rest of the secular world.

Though I avoided drug and alcohol abuse I had no trouble developing an addiction to other vices: gossiping, cursing, holding grudges, dwelling on vengeful thoughts...and womanizing. All of this behavior led to me developing a very self-centered system of priorities that eroded my ability to love my neighbor. I passed myself off as a civilized gentleman, until it was opportune for me to behave otherwise. This caused a split in my personality.

I was sitting at home on a weekday afternoon when the phone call came. It was Jessica...she told me she was pregnant.

Instantly the thought that abortion is wrong flashed through my mind. Apparently I had not yet killed my conscience entirely. I told her we could take care of the child. She told me that she did not want to carry the child and that she needed four hundred dollars to have the abortion. I was going to argue further, yet her boyfriend then got on the phone.

It is difficult to put into words the rage I felt flare up when I heard him on the phone. It felt like an ambush. I told them that I did not have the money. As they continued to push, I pushed back and told them that it was not my problem but theirs. Then I attacked her, "You knew what you were getting into. I don't know why he is even sticking around."

Later, as what was left of my conscience chided me for allowing her to go through with the abortion, I justified myself by saying that I had nothing to do with it.

January 2014

After the abortion, anger became my constant companion. I tried to continue with schooling but it did not take long for me to lose track. Violent thoughts lived in my mind day and night. I took unnecessary risks, such as racing, lashing out and fighting others.

Danger and risk became synonymous with a good time. Adrenaline and caffeine became my bread and water. I still attended church on Sunday, because it was expected of me, and in spite of my chaotic interior life and lifestyle, I still thought it important to live a portion of my life by societal norms.

The divide in my life grew wider. Before long, I was one person during the day with certain acquaintances and friends, and a completely different person at night and with different acquaintances.

My academic plans in college — to complete a pre-med program and obtain a degree in psychiatry — finally collapsed under the stress of my double life. Long-term goals became obsolete and I lived my life day-to-day. Relationships began to suffer.

One of the men I spent time with on my ludicrous escapades came to me with another wild idea. The plan was criminal in the extreme.

Finally, the fruit of passive-participation in the killing of my child ripened within me. I participated in the murder and robbery of a man, the wounding of another, and the near death of a young woman at the scene of the crime. It did not take long for the police to arrest me.

When sitting in the county jail a grace filled moment occurred. I realized that I had hit rock bottom. But remorse for my crimes and sins did not flood me, though I did recognize just how insane my behavior was. When sent to prison, I continued to look at the bizarre split in my life and the chasm that existed in my lifestyles.

This, and God's grace, brought me back to His Church, and I began to recognize how my sinful actions created this split personality. In walking with Jesus through my memories and past actions, I began to understand remorse, guilt, and healthy shame. However, no matter how much I prayed, no matter how much I fasted, and no matter how much I sacrificed, I suffered these demons of self-doubt and pride.

Finally, the Holy Spirit brought the phone call from Jessica to mind. I became overwhelmed with the sense that this wound was the source of my suffering and struggle. I prayed for God to forgive me and I went to confession about the sin I committed against God, my child, Jessica, and myself. Still I struggled.

At weekly services the Catholic chaplain polled 100 inmates to see how many men had gone through an abortion experience.

A surprise came when I learned that more than 90% of the men around me were involved in an abortion decision. Later, the chaplain announced that the Rachel's Vineyard program was coming to our institution to help heal the wound of the abortion.

The seminar answered my deepest prayers. It showed me how my self-image and core beliefs were warped by the abortion, my self-justifications, and my denial. I came to recognize that the need to

January 2014

overachieve, my obsession with detail, my propensity for anger and violence, and even my hunger for adrenaline excitement were rooted in my corrupted idea of masculinity.

My consent in the abortion of my daughter was a violation of my natural purpose to protect and provide for my offspring. When this occurred, the split in my personality was a defense mechanism that allowed me to exercise denial, so that I would not have to feel the pain of my decision. This denial was forcing me to overcompensate for the damage I caused to my natural masculine identity. The problem was that this denial also meant that I was denying everything that made me human.

It was a suffering joy when I came to know my heavenly daughter, Angela Grace. I had been unaware of just how callous and unfeeling I was, but through the healing received by God in the Rachel's Vineyard seminar, it allowed me to feel. I came to know myself, my wrongs, and experience a remorse that is difficult to express adequately — painful to feel, yet liberating to know.

Rachel's Vineyard is the grace that God ordained for my healing, and the healing of so many others. Though I justly remain in prison for my crimes, Rachel's Vineyard has been the vessel of grace by which God has made me free. It is in this freedom that I will now be...Silent No More.

[David has been transformed by his ongoing conversion which began with his incarceration and blossomed after his Rachel's Vineyard experience. He is truly growing in holiness, and you can see this clearly as he reflects the love of Christ and shares that love in practical ministry with his fellow prisoners. David and 3 other inmates are being mentored as team members for the next Rachel's Vineyard program in the prison under the leadership of Donna Gardner and Thomas Lawlor of the Palm Beach Diocese Catholic Charities. Over 60 inmates have experienced spiritual and emotional healing through their Rachel's Vineyard groups. However I was honored to stand with the women and men of the Silent No More Awareness Campaign at the steps of the Supreme Court at the close of the March for Life, January 22 2014 and share this testimony. – Kevin Burke, LSW]



Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

808 N. Henderson Rd.

King of Prussia, PA 19406

610-354-0555—1-877-HOPE-4-ME