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www.RachelsVineyard.org

## In Response to: **Kassi Underwood's *Get your Politics Off My Grief***

By: Theresa Burke, Ph.D., Founder of Rachel's Vineyard

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As a ministry dedicated to enabling women to process feelings of grief following an abortion, we naturally read Kassi Underwood's May 2 column in the New York Daily News, "Get your politics off my grief," with interest. Ms. Underwood's description of her own symptoms following abortion resonated strongly with the stories of thousands of women who have gone through our healing weekends throughout the world. Just as importantly, she described the lack of support and the reactions of suspicion she received when she attempted to share her emotions with others.

We were troubled, however, by Ms. Underwood's claim that the Rachel's Vineyard facilitators use the retreat as a platform to encourage participants to engage in political lobbying. This has never been a component of the retreat program, and for a very good reason: Any focus on politics or any form of activism (pro-choice or pro-life) would sidetrack the arduous work of grieving – in particular confronting the complicated grief associated with the loss of one's irreplaceable child in order to reconcile the experience and find meaning and peace. That is a deeply individual, personal, spiritual and psychological process. Any other focus could easily derail the critical work of grief – which is the singular mission of Rachel's Vineyard. All our retreats are facilitated by professional counselors, psychologists and other licensed specialists in mental health.

Some people who have been through healing programs do feel called to contribute their significant "voice of experience" in the ongoing public debate. This is a personal decision. The empowering sense of grief resolution can be the impetus for political engagement. To claim that their commitments originate with imposed "brainwashing" from therapy is grossly inaccurate, dismissive and disrespectful: It invokes an era when women were not deemed capable of independent judgment, or the freedom of sharing their opinions and voices.

But in Rachel's Vineyard we do empower people with the gift of healing and reconciliation. Once they have discovered a peace which ends the war within, and the symptoms associated with trauma and loss, we celebrate any ways they acquire the freedom to utilize their gifts to make the world a more loving, accepting and nurturing place that protects women and their children.

Rachel's Vineyard is a unique and groundbreaking non-profit service organization and faith-based ministry that helps women, men, and the people they love to experience real

healing from the wounds and trauma suffered in the aftermath of abortion. Those involved in the abortion industry have also sought solace in Rachel's Vineyard. In the last ten years it has spread to 35 countries and is available in 15 languages. It has been spread by women and men who have been helped by the program and want to assist others who are hurting. We agree with Miss Underwood that there is no place for politics during this weekend of healing and we make that clear with the following statement in our retreat manual:

*The focus of this weekend is not the politics or the "issue" of abortion, but the personal experience and the healing journey of each participant here.*

Rachel's Vineyard's mission is to offer safe, non-judgmental, confidential help for those suffering the loss of a child because of abortion. Rachel's Vineyard belongs to those who intuitively sense that life is a gift, a precious seed which has been given to us for cultivation. We acknowledge the loss of that irreplaceable life and the grief that comes from having relinquished one so intimately connected to us. It provides a safe environment to search the fabric of our lives, the inner most depths of the soul, and an opportunity to be supported through bereavement and grief and a path to discover peace.

Afterwards, many women desire to give voice to their own truth -- that during a time of despair, pressure and even coercion, they believed abortion would improve their lives. They felt misled, lied to, deceived, and exploited during a time of crisis. They are the voice of traumatic experience that demands change. They believe women deserve better than abortion.

You can listen to more voices of experience at [www.silentnomoreawareness.org](http://www.silentnomoreawareness.org)

While many studies claim to "discredit" what these women suffer, there is just as much peer reviewed research utilizing numerous controls which demonstrate significant mental health problems after abortion. Please visit [www.standapart.org](http://www.standapart.org) Alliance for Post-Abortion Research and Training.

For those readers who are interested in learning more about abortion as a traumatic experience, I invite you to read *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*.

For those who have suffered the aftermath of abortion, we invite you to visit [www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org) for information on weekends for healing.

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