

## When it comes to abortion, men suffer too

By Vicky Franchino  
For the Catholic Herald

For many years, Will\* never really thought about the abortion his girlfriend had when he was just 17 years old. His life at that time was tumultuous. He routinely used drugs and alcohol and often skipped school. During his junior year in high school, Will was turned over to the state. Just 15 years old, he ran away, accompanied by his older girlfriend.

For the next few years, Will's parents had no idea of where he was — or whether he was even alive.

He and his girlfriend lived on a farm with no running water, doing odd jobs to scrape by. When his girlfriend became pregnant, there was little discussion about what to do next.

"I don't remember much debate about keeping the baby or any discussions about things being good or evil," remembered Will. "Her mom took her to have the abortion."

Will and his girlfriend broke up shortly afterwards and he later met another woman, married her, and eventually had children with her.

"I made poor decisions that I wasn't free to make because I was so addicted," said Will.

But over the years, little by little, Will began to reclaim his life. He entered recovery and his marriage eventually ended in divorce. It was during this period that Will returned to the Church and thoughts of the abortion began to fill his heart.

### Re-examining the impact of abortion

During his early years back in the Church, a man in his parish befriended Will. As that friendship grew, the topic of abortion came up and Will eventually shared his story. Will's new friend told him about a post-abortion retreat his wife helped facilitate, Rachel's Vineyard.

"I had a tremendous amount of regret for my past actions," said Will. "The Lord was inviting me to an opportunity to look more deeply at this abortion and acknowledge this soul. Rachel's Vineyard was a gift from God."

At that point in his life, Will remembers the decision to attend the retreat feeling logical and easy. He felt comfortable with the idea of communal healing after years in therapy and reinvigorated by his return to faith, which he felt encouraged him to walk headlong into this next step.

### A new perspective

Attending the retreat opened Will's heart in a number of ways. He began to see how fear and sin had blocked him from other people, severed his connection to God, and created a huge opening for Satan to enter his life.

Thanks to the retreat, Will began to fully appreciate the sacredness of the human person and the truth that in conception his child had a soul, created by God.

He also began to understand abortion from a woman's perspective. "My girlfriend and I never talked about the abortion," said Will. "I felt such a sense of compassion hearing from the women on my retreat."

### Inviting others to experience healing and hope

Will encourages anyone who's been exposed to the trauma of abortion in any way to consider attending a Rachel's Vineyard retreat.

"The mercy and forgiveness that I saw come over people during the retreat was something I can only imagine coming from God," said Will. "This was an experience of destroying fear and growing in love. There is no limit to the grace and mercy God has to offer you. Don't let your fear block you from one of the most incredible experiences

you've ever known. Please don't miss it."

### Your healing journey

Are you, or someone you love, struggling with the pain of abortion?

Begin your journey to healing with a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat.

Project Rachel in the Diocese of Madison offers Rachel's Vineyard weekend retreats twice a year (the next retreats are November 8 to 10, 2024, and March 28 to 30, 2025).

The retreats are open to anyone whose life has been touched by abortion.

They are designed to give those struggling with the emotional and spiritual pain of abortion a safe place to uncover and address their feelings of guilt, grief, shame, and anger.

Theresa Burke, PhD, and Kevin Burke, LSW — who both have extensive backgrounds in counseling — developed the retreat, which has been shared with thousands of men and women around the world.

Project Rachel is a ministry of compassion and listening.

In addition to retreats, it offers a wide range of help including one-on-one peer support and referrals to priests (for confession and pastoral counseling), therapists, counselors, and spiritual directors.

For guidance and support, contact Mary Mead at [rachel@madisondiocese.org](mailto:rachel@madisondiocese.org) or 608-821-3177.

For more information visit

- [madisondiocese.org/rachel](http://madisondiocese.org/rachel)
- [madisondiocese.org/projectrachel](http://madisondiocese.org/projectrachel)
- [rachelsvineyard.org](http://rachelsvineyard.org)
- [hopeafterabortion.org](http://hopeafterabortion.org)

\*Names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Insights from Kevin Burke, co-founder along with his wife Theresa of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries and author of *Tears of the Fisherman: Recovery for Men Wounded by Abortion*.

### What are the most common misconceptions around men and abortion?

The biggest is that it's not a big deal for men — that they can walk away, and it doesn't impact them in any significant way. When it comes to abortion, men tend to fall into two categories: Those who were at least somewhat in favor of the abortion — perhaps actively pushing for it or at least ambivalent or silent — and those who didn't want the abortion. And it's not uncommon to have paradoxical feelings. You could have an immediate sense of relief that the crisis is resolved but, at the same time, have a sense of shame. For those men powerless to prevent an unwanted abortion, it is truly a traumatic experience of loss. These fathers need support and healing resources asap. From our retreats, we've found that even men who were very detached and might not be consciously aware of any regret, often find a sense of shame and guilt as they begin to share their story and unpack what happened. That awareness helps put together the puzzle pieces of how the abortion impacted their lives.

### Men often feel they're not entitled to grieve the abortion. What happens then?

We describe this as "forbidden grief". Men are often given the message to stuff their grief down, to repress it, to lie about how they're feeling. There are serious repercussions in people's lives, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and physically — we can actually become physically sick when we don't have the chance to grieve and express those painful and deep experiences.

Rachel's Vineyard retreats often include both men and women. Please share your thoughts on that.

A retreat doesn't need to combine men and women to be effective — there are wonderful female-only and male-only groups. But abortion causes relational wounds of anger and mistrust between women and men, and our retreats provide an opportunity to safely process, and resolve those painful feelings. On every retreat I've done as a counselor, I praise God as the walls of anger and mistrust begin to come down, and beautiful opportunities emerge for reconciliation and healing.

### What is the most important thing you'd like people to know about men and Rachel's Vineyard retreats?

When we bring deep, painful, dark things like abortion to God, He uses that as an opportunity to manifest His divinity and His mercy. If a man can humbly address this painful event from his past, and try to look honestly at it, the Lord will bless every aspect of his life.