

## **Abortion's Aftermath and the Journey Towards Healing**

by Lisa Everett

Since *Roe v. Wade*, there have been over 50 million legal abortions in the United States. According to Vicki Thorn, the foundress of Project Rachel and director of the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing, while some women report relatively little trauma following abortion, for many, the experience is devastating, causing serious and persistent emotional, psychological and spiritual difficulties. According to Vicki's website, [www.hopeafterabortion.com](http://www.hopeafterabortion.com), women who have experienced an abortion may exhibit some or several of the following symptoms:

- Low self-esteem
- Grief (mild to profound)
- Depression (sometimes to the point of suicidal thoughts and attempts)
- A sense of alienation from family and friends
- A feeling of being 'numb,' not able to enjoy activities that used to be pleasurable
- Isolating oneself from others to avoid discussing the abortion experience
- Guilt and shame
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anger towards oneself, the baby's father, or others involved in the abortion
- Sleep disorders
- Abortion-related nightmares, flashbacks or even sounds of a baby crying
- Alcohol and drug problems, which develop to dull the pain
- Desire for a 'replacement' baby
- Anniversary reactions of grief on the date of the abortion or the baby's due date
- Problems bonding properly with her other children
- Fear that God will punish her, or is punishing her

Some women, especially teens, experience symptoms soon after the abortion. However, it is more common for symptoms to occur over the course of five to twelve years after the

abortion. Sometimes a woman does not realize that the suffering has been experiencing, perhaps for many years, is associated with her past abortion. This is likely due to the fact that our society has largely accepted abortion as a common surgical procedure that is no big deal and means little more than having one's appendix removed. Those who experience symptoms of grief and mourning afterwards are often dismissed with the advice to "get over it" and left alone to suffer in silence, sometimes for decades, before seeking help and healing. "Many women who have walked a path of grief and hopelessness after abortion, usually alone, eventually begin to understand that they have a deep spiritual wound," Vicki comments. "But sadly, they also are likely to believe that they have committed 'the unforgivable sin' and fear God's anger. Women who have had an abortion often have many questions, the answers to which are indispensable to beginning the healing journey. Can God ever forgive me? Can my child? Can I ever forgive myself? Will the Church let me stay when I confess this sin? Will this horrible pain ever go away? Is healing possible? The answer to all these questions is, of course, YES!"

Pope John Paul II himself, in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, The Gospel of Life, specifically addressed women who have had an abortion with words of tenderness and compassion: "I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life."

### **Resources recommended by the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing**

*Aborted Women: Silent No More*

David C. Reardon

Chicago, Ill.: Loyola University Press, 1987. (800-621-1088)

*Abortion and Healing: A Cry to Be Whole*, (2nd ed.)

Rev Michael T. Mannion

Franklin, Wisc.: Sheed & Ward, 1992. (800-BOOKLOG)

*Catholic Women and Abortion: Stories of Healing*

ed., Pat King

Franklin, Wisc.: Sheed & Ward, 1994. (800-BOOKLOG)

*Do Not Lose Hope: Healing the Wounded Heart of Women Who Have Had Abortions*  
William F. Maestri  
Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 2000. (800-343-2522)

*Experiencing Abortion: A Weaving of Women's Words*  
Eve Kushner  
Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth Press, 1997. (800-HAWORTH)

*The Jericho Plan: Breaking Down the Walls Which Prevent Post-Abortion Healing*  
David C. Reardon  
Springfield, Ill.: Acorn Books, 1996. (888-412-2676)

*Men and Abortion: A Path to Healing*  
Catherine T. Coyle  
Belleville, Ont. (Canada): Essence Publishing, 1999. (800-214-5849)

*Mother of Mercy and of Love*  
Therese Marie Green  
Mukilteo, Wash.: WinePress Publishing, 1998. (800-917-BOOK)

*No One Told Me I Could Cry: A Teens' Guide to Hope and Healing After Abortion*  
Connie Nykiel  
Frankfort, Ill. Young Family Press, 1997. (800-214-5849)

*A Path to Hope*  
Rev. John J. Dillon  
Mineola, N.Y.: Resurrection Press, 1990. (800-892-6657).  
Also available in Spanish edition.

*Post-Abortion Aftermath*  
ed., Rev. Michael Mannion  
Franklin, Wisc.: Sheed & Ward, 1994. (800-BOOKLOG)

*A Rachel Rosary: Intercessory Prayer for Victims of Post-Abortion Syndrome*  
Rev. Larry Kupferman  
Williston Park, N.Y.: Resurrection Press. (800-892-6657)