I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for your hard and dedicated work on the Rachel's Vineyard retreat dealing with abortion over the last weekend. The compassion, commitment, and tireless efforts you put into this ministry, both physically and emotionally, are truly awe-inspiring. It is remarkable to witness how you voluntarily give of yourselves to help others heal from such profound pain and trauma.

My wife and I attended this retreat after 22 years of marriage, during which the two abortions of our babies 24 years ago have haunted us in deeply traumatic ways countless times over the years. I must confess that I was the driving force behind those very painful decisions, and the weight of that responsibility has significantly impacted our marriage. Throughout the years, the impact of those abortions has loomed large, causing untold emotional turmoil for my wife and putting a strain on our relationship.

At 64 years of age, I consider myself a full-blooded man, steadfast in my belief that one deals with emotions by moving on and not dwelling in the past. However, this belief has often left me blindsided when unexpected triggers would push my wife over the edge, making me feel like the number one enemy and plunging us both into a dark hole for days on end. During those days I usually had no idea how we got there or how to find our way back to normality.

When I arrived at the retreat, my expectation was to gain insight into how to deal with my wife's triggers and navigate our way out of these dark holes more effectively. My focus was solely on understanding and dealing with *her* emotions. After the first day, I expressed my doubts about my ability to contribute positively over the weekend and even considered not attending the remaining days, thinking my presence might inhibit my wife's freedom to express her deepest emotions.

On the second morning we were encouraged to “share our story” and my story telling went very different to what I expected. I knew I had some guilt feelings about the abortions but having the opportunity to express this to a group of people in a safe place was clearly just what I needed to lift off the scab and open the flood gates, both in expressing my emotions and gaining the understanding of the cause of these emotions. I cannot remember expressing emotions to that extent, especially not in front of a group of strangers!! I thought that this was going to be embarrassing, but it was not. The “strangers” was right there with me!!

I then had the privilege to listen to, not only my wife’s but also to the other women’s stories. What a blessing!! This opened a world for me which I gallantly confess that I knew nothing about. How ignorant could I be??? It’s true, on the Friday I was blind to the traumatic process a woman must endure during, but even more so after the abortion, even for years and even for her whole lifetime!! The Saturday and the Sunday built further on this understanding and then on a process helping us to deal with this. My learning of the trauma and emotions in a mother that aborts a child grew from 5% to 95% and I will be forever grateful for that.

My wife and I do understand and expect that we will again encounter triggers and become emotional, but at least it will be us and not my wife with me trying to support her. I am convinced that my understanding and empathy will without a doubt help me to support my wife and deal with my own emotions in future. Further to this, and even more important is my newly found understanding of how my emotional reaction, tend to make things much worse!! I expect to be able to manage this much better.

Bottom line is that I will be forever grateful that I could attend this retreat with my wife. I believe that my understanding grew much more than the women in the retreat. They already understood and I still can't believe that I was that ignorant!! I would really suggest that men try really hard to attend this with their partners, even if the abortion was not your child or not on your watch. Just go and trust the process!!

God Bless!