



## **May Cause Love: An Unexpected Journey of Enlightenment After Abortion**

*Kassi Underwood*

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**In this powerful memoir, a fiercely honest and surprisingly funny testament to healing after abortion, a young woman travels across the United States to meet a motley crew of spiritual teachers and a caravan of new friends.**

At age nineteen, Kassi Underwood discovered she was pregnant. Broke, unwed, struggling with alcohol, and living a thousand miles away from home, she checked into an abortion clinic.

While her abortion sparked her “feminist awakening,” she also felt lost and lawless, drinking to oblivion and talking about her pregnancy with her parents, her friends, strangers-anyone.

Three years later, just when she had settled into a sober life at her dream job, the ex-boyfriend with whom she had become pregnant had a baby with someone else. She shattered. In the depths of a blinding depression, Kassi refused to believe that she would “never get over” her abortion. Inspired by rebellious women in history who used spiritual practices to attain emotional freedom, Kassi embarked on a journey of recovery after abortion—a road trip with pit stops at a Buddhist “water baby” ritual, where she learns a new way to think about lost pregnancies; a Roman Catholic retreat for abortion that turns out to be staffed with clinic picketers; a crash course in grief from a Planned Parenthood counselor; a night in a motel with a “Midwife for the Soul” who teaches her how to take up space; and a Jewish “wild woman” celebration led by a wise and zany rabbi.

Dazzling with warmth and leavened by humor, *May Cause Love* captures one woman’s journey of self-discovery that enraged her, changed her, and ultimately enlightened her.

## May Cause Love: An Unexpected Journey of Enlightenment After Abortion Details

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# **From Reader Review May Cause Love: An Unexpected Journey of Enlightenment After Abortion for online ebook**

## **Melanie Springer Mock says**

One of the best memoirs I've read in a very long time. I appreciate her very nuanced consideration of abortion and its complexities, and her unwillingness to demonize women who have had abortions. Her story will be comforting to those who are faced with a very difficult choice, and challenging for those whose worldview treats abortion as a black and white issue.

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## **Alexa Weiss says**

Every woman in her 20s and 30s should read this, whether she's had an abortion or not. Full of ego-shattering and life-affirming realizations, it's a real tutorial and exposée on walking through the grief of life not living up to your dreams and expectations.

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## **Lorianne DiSabato says**

I agree with Underwood's basic premise that women should be free to tell their abortion stories without having those stories pigeonholed into the sides of a political debate. But I have the same reservations about Underwood's memoir as I did with Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*. Most women don't have the time, money, or privilege to go on a spiritual road trip in the aftermath of an emotionally traumatic event: divorce in the case of Gilbert, abortion in the case of Underwood. The best chapter in Underwood's memoir is the one where she recounts other women's abortion stories. The rest of the book is breezy and even glib: an "easy read" about a tough topic.

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## **Logan Mitchell says**

This book is one of the best memoirs I've ever read. A must-read for spiritual seekers, dreamers, humans. I saw this book reviewed on *Lion's Roar*, a Buddhist magazine I subscribe to, and I am so happy I saw it. I really feel connected with Kassi, and I cared deeply about her story as it unfolded in front of me. This book made me realize how important it is to listen to people's stories and see behind their political labels, though now more than ever do I passionately believe that abortion is a service that must be provided safely and legally for women in order for our society and culture to thrive. As a gay man, following this journey was the closest thing I have had to a personal experience with abortion, and it may remain that way. I gasped, I laughed, and I cheered as Kassi traversed through her young adulthood and journeyed across the country.

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## **Rachel says**

I loved this book; it was honest, emotional, and timely to our national politics. The abortion discussion is so

polarized in this country to either Pro-Life Bible Thumpers who claim "baby killers" are going to Hell vs. unapologetic, no-regrets Pro-Choice feminism, and the issue is simply far more complicated than that. Kassi tells the story of her termination at 19 years old after becoming pregnant in college by a man who struggled with heroin addiction, and her subsequent questions, guilt, struggles, and successes as she seeks to shed light on and bring humanity to a difficult situation. One of the passages I earmarked that particularly illustrates her message:

"I was sorry about the abortion, not necessarily because I'd made the wrong choice, but because other voices had been so loud that I hadn't been able to hear my own. Sorry that my "choices" seemed so awful: either drop out of college and move back home to hide, or terminate. Sorry I felt so alone. Sorry I didn't know I could keep the baby, my independence, and my education in Vermont all at the same time. Sorry my world wasn't set up for all three. Sorry for thinking I had to become an idealized version of myself, with a swank master's degree and a fancy job title and a standup husband before I'd be good enough for motherhood, for setting myself up to strive to become a perfect future self, but then never feeling I've become her. I'm sorry I wasn't able to make the choice in peace."

Kassi also highlights the harmful way conservative policies have done more to harm to reproductive freedom in the name of religion:

"It wasn't about "killing babies" or moral failings or being sad women...what the story didn't say was, the same conservative system that set up so many of us to get pregnant by accident, was the same creepy system that made bringing a child into the world seem like a brutal thing to do. The same system that taught abstinence-only sex education and told girls that our sexuality was dangerous and dirty and the sole source of our value, and gave boys and men no responsibility for their sexual behavior, and taught everyone to grasp somewhere outside themselves for self-esteem...the same system that paid women significantly less than men and refused to guarantee a livable minimum wage and denied paid parental leave and subsidized daycare, was the same system that shook their heads at the scourge of addiction and waged a "War on Drugs" and locked up would-be fathers and branded them with felony records that followed them making them unemployable, was the same system shaming people for using government assistance to support their families, was the same system that looked down on teen moms and single moms, particularly if they weren't white and wealthy, was the same system that said abortion was murder and shut down abortion clinics, was the same system that said something was wrong with abortion without admitting that there was something wrong with the system."

Kassi did an amazing job of giving a voice to the 1 in 3 American women who will terminate a pregnancy in their lifetime, for all different reasons, in all different circumstances. It's possible to grieve despite making the best choice for yourself; very few things in life don't have mixed emotions involved, and this was an incredible look into the intricacies of one woman's journey to self-enlightenment.

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## **Jordan says**

Full disclosure...I did not actually finish this book. I am marking it as read due to the amount of time I spent trying to struggle through the little bit I did read. I got to page 127 and could not force myself to read any further. The topic was interesting to me but the book itself was a struggle to get through. I would like to read well-written, more engaging books that tackle this same topic.

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## Megan Parrott says

Other than news and personal essays here and there, I've admittedly not read much about abortion. I'd like to thank Kassie for sharing her story—her journey opened my eyes to a lot of nuances. She's warm and funny throughout the book, and she's unafraid to share more intimate details that often go untold. I also came away with a giant list of additional reads, which I appreciate as well.

A couple of quotes stuck with me: "For thousands of years, women had possessed the strength to protect themselves and their children from a world that couldn't hold them both, only to be portrayed as depressive murderers." Second, "If one of us determined that the wrong decision had been made, then we would embrace this admission as an integral personal acknowledgement of wrongdoing, not an indictment of reproductive rights."

I'm struggling to summarize my thoughts but I suppose it's this: This decision is very personal, and in most cases, extremely difficult, not to mention one that stays with women for a lifetime. It's crucial for folks from every walk of life and position to realize that (as simple as it sounds).

P.S. I'd love recommendations for similar reads.

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## Molly says

A surprisingly easy read about a really difficult topic. This is an angle I've never really seen explored, but makes total sense. Those who label themselves "pro-choice" sort of aren't allowed to admit to the fact that abortion is a difficult decision; admitting that gets them shunned by other pro-choicers and shuffled off to the "other camp," because there's no room for doubt in theirs. Yet doubt also stokes the fires of anti-choicers, who embrace those admissions as proof that because it's not an easy decision, it shouldn't be one that women make for themselves. Women who are sad or depressed after the procedure are either labeled as weak-minded and victims of the anti-choice agenda, or used as examples for why it should be illegal- because they have doubts. As the author's mom tells her, she was damned if she did, damned if she didn't. The author found herself having made a decision that scores of people make every day, yet she found that there just isn't a support system in place for "after." So she embarked on a journey that I found both interesting and touching.

There were quite a few lines in the book that really spoke to me- and not all were about abortion, but more about women's agency and choice-making, in general. I found it a comfort that there are others out there who grieve an experience for years, or never learned quite how to process a choice they made. Because clearly, there is hope.

Some favorite bits:

"Regret is a defense *against* grieving... We regret so that we don't have to grieve." p 180

"They used our pain as evidence for an argument that we needed to be protected from our own agency, that we needed to be controlled for our own good and the good of our children." p 207

"Because I believed abortions were a right, I pretended mine was no big deal." p 229

"Maybe my body isn't the most important thing about me." p 240

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### **Kay Kuever says**

Many may see May Cause Love as controversial seeing that the topic of abortion is still considered a taboo subject not meant to be discussed openly. However, Kassie Underwood does an amazing job recounting her own story in a way I've never read before.

Underwood's story is unapologetic and one of conflicting moral background that clearly shows her struggle and relationship to abortion. There is such importance in the fact that Underwood was able to tell this story, let alone put it to pen and paper. This is her story and her story alone. In a world where the public is so unable to discuss abortion unless it's to demonize the procedure and threaten to take over the rights of a woman's uterus, this is a story that needs to be heard, read and told over and over again.

May Cause Love is a great step towards opening up the dialogue for everyone about abortion and creating a safe, understanding emotional space for women to discuss their own stories or apprehensions. It's a fantastic, quick, sometimes funny read that I would recommend to anybody.

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### **Susan Lyon says**

Amazing book - read it cover to cover in one day and wish there were a sequel already! Not only is it a juicy page-turner written to entertain, but it adeptly covers stigmatized topics in America around ungrieved grief and how we do ourselves a disservice by not allowing ourselves to properly feel grief and pain in order to heal and get stronger.

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### **Katie Short says**

When I started this book, I didn't know if I would finish it. However, this opened my eyes to the pain and hopelessness of a woman who made the choice to abort her child and the struggle she found afterward in looking for peace. As a Christian, I believe that abortion is wrong. Reading this helped me understand how a non-Christian processes through loss and the guilt and emptiness in not knowing the truth.

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### **Rebecca McPhedran says**

What an amazing testament to the power of forgiveness, and the ability to grieve a loss, and the overarching need to find your own path in life.

Kassie Underwood had an abortion at the age of 19, as a sophomore in college. The next ten years of her life were a literal rollercoaster of emotions. She started to drink, heavily. She blamed herself for making the

wrong decision. She had many different partners, and a quarter-life crisis of faith.

This is her story of healing. The story of all of the different paths she took to come to terms with her choice, and the outcomes. From a catholic-run retreat, to a Japanese ceremony to honor and grieve loss, to a red tent-esque gathering of women to help her bury her choice and move forward-without regret.

This book is very well written. Underwood does not condemn or shame anyone based on their choices. She focuses on her personal journey, and does so with such grace and strength. I am in awe. Loved it. Would be great for a woman's studies class, or anyone who has had to make a difficult reproductive choice. Great!

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## **Gordon Grose says**

Kassi Underwood, *May Cause Love: An Unexpected Journey of Enlightenment After Abortion*. New York: HarperOne, 2017. Review by Gordon S. Grose

Some years ago, as a pastor needing to firm up my opinion on abortion, I attended a panel at another church in my denomination on the issue. The panel presented positions both pro and con. Although I leaned pro (the unofficial position of my denomination), after hearing both sides, but especially the pro arguments, I left with strong con. I found the pro reasoning weak. I hope it isn't simply because of my preconceived view on abortion, but I came away from reading Kassi Underwood's *May Cause Love* the same way.

Raised in Lexington, KY, Kassi obtained a MFA in literary non-fiction from Columbia University, where she also taught in the Undergraduate Writing Program. She has published in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic* online, and has appeared on HuffPost Live and on MSNBC.

Kassi's compelling story of her pregnancy touched my heart. At 19, broke, unwed, struggling with alcohol, living a thousand miles from home with a drug-addicted boyfriend, she checked herself into an abortion clinic. The baby she aborted she had named Jade. Three years later, after achieving her college degree, able to control her drinking, and raise house plants, just at the point she felt able to raise a child, she learned her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend was pregnant. They named their baby Jade. That couple, in the same situation as she had been, "had the baby anyway." That spurred her to ask, What if I didn't have to terminate my pregnancy?

Kassi chronicles her search for support from, among others, Buddhists, Roman Catholics, Planned Parenthood, and a Jewish Rabbi "wild woman." She sought out other women who had also experienced abortion. Amid her seeking for support from writings about abortion, but finding none, she decided to provide support for others through this book. She describes intense conflict between the reasons pro (it's just tissue) and the vivid memories of her experience of unwanted images of the abortion intruding.

After publishing her personal account of her abortion in *The NY Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/fas...>), Kassi heard from many women who had had abortions. She collected their stories and recorded their reasons, what it felt like to be pregnant, and the chain of events set off by the abortion (with good results). She doesn't collect "regrets."

In her Introduction she describes the result of reading personal essays on abortion: "Everyone was either relieved or regretful. These two emotions did not appear together in one account, let alone in one person... 'Pro-life' advocates argued that nobody should have a choice because some people wished they'd continued



their pregnancies. There is no shame in regret. There's no shame in regretting an irreversible decision a person is forced to make during a time crunch imposed by the law and ramped up by one's own biology." Decisions forced on one due to a legal time crunch or to biology beg the question; she only slowly develops a sense of personal responsibility for her choices.

I found the book tedious to finish, as Kassi pursues "enlightenment." She marks time elapsed from her abortion as she begins each chapter. Chapter 20, for example, begins: "NINE YEARS AND EIGHT MONTHS AFTERWARD" in caps. Although the last two chapters reveal Kassi's reflections on her life, on her relationships with men, and on her personal choices, much of the writing seems a way to slip through the knot of personal choice. She spends her time, energy, and ink to answer the question with which she began, What if I didn't terminate my pregnancy?

The *May Cause Love* title derives from Kassi's short paragraph on p. 279: "Enlightened f\*cking may cause orgasm. May cause heartbreak. May cause children. May cause abortion. May cause friendship. May cause love." Whether sex is "enlightened" (i.e., committed to the welfare of the other, not the pleasure of oneself) or not, it can lead to unwanted pregnancy, the direct result of previous personal choices made.

As Kassi Underwood describes suffering caused by our own decisions, in *Tragedy Transformed: How Job's Recovery Can Provide Hope For Yours* (2015)

[[https://www.amazon.com/Tragedy-Transf... s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1504637867&sr=1-](https://www.amazon.com/Tragedy-Transf... s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1504637867&sr=1-2&keywords=tragedy+transformed)

[2&keywords=tragedy+transformed](https://www.amazon.com/Tragedy-Transf... s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1504637867&sr=1-2&keywords=tragedy+transformed)] I describe suffering as the result of events and circumstances not of our making. Although the suffering is very real in the latter, in the former, the likelihood of regret is much stronger.

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## **Devon says**

I read about this one in Publisher's Weekly and, maybe because it's a subject I've never read much about, or because it's a point of view that seemed different than what you typically hear in politically-charged debates, I've been interested in reading it since.

It's well-written, and had me feeling an entire spectrum of things from sad to angry and back again, but in the end it seemed overly-long for the amount of story told, and all of the pieces fit together too neatly in the end. It's a memoir, and maybe this is one of those cases where the truth is stranger than fiction, but I felt a strange sense of dissatisfaction when I finished this book.

All of that aside, I do think it's an important perspective--for feminists, for women, and for people in general.

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## **Nicole Sacca says**

The topic of the book is one that is still taboo for many people so it was interesting to read about different perspectives. I thoroughly enjoyed the first 75 pages of this book. After that, the book seemed to just drag on and I struggled to stay engaged.

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