

I am a person that was brought up in middle class America with two loving parents. I never experienced yelling or violence while growing up. I was college educated and a professional and started my own business. I was well known in my community and was on the local Hospital Board of Trustees and Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. I married and had a little girl and everything appeared to be perfect.

Then..... something went terribly wrong.

I couldn't do anything right to please my husband. If I left a dish in the sink or clothes on the bed, I was yelled at. If I was late getting home or forgot to pick up the dry cleaning I was yelled at. I couldn't please him. A friend told me that when the yelling didn't work anymore than the hitting would start. I didn't believe her. One night I was late getting home and I walked in the door and the yelling started and I had had enough and I said, "why don't you give me a script so I don't screw up any more" and he came out of the chair and starting coming after me and I ran to the bedroom. I realized that my friend was right and I was scared to death. I told him I was going to call the police and he started coming at me again. As I grabbed the phone off the wall in the bathroom my 4 year old daughter came running into the room crying. As my daughter clung to me, I started to dial 9-1-1. My husband yanked the phone out of my hand and out of the wall and then tried to hit me over the head. I ducked and he hit my leg and foot and all I could think about was protecting my daughter. I collapsed on the floor over the tub with my daughter underneath me and prayed that he would stop hitting me. He finally stopped. I realized that I couldn't walk. I tried to calm my daughter and then he took my daughter from me and told me that if I ever told anyone I would never see my daughter again.

As he took my daughter back to bed, I crawled to my bed and climbed in trying to figure out what to do. How could I go to the emergency room and explain my bruises, they knew me there. Would he kill me next time? How could I have screwed up and married the wrong person? She didn't want anyone to know that my marriage was not perfect. My perception was that it was my fault, after all... that is what he always told me. If I didn't do "this" ...he wouldn't have to yell at me; and now if I didn't do "that" ...he wouldn't have to hurt me.

I lay there thinking about what a mess my life was in. What was I going to do? How was I going to get away from him and protect my daughter? Who could I tell, who could I go to? I didn't want anyone to know, I was so ashamed.

A few months later, after repeated abuse by my husband, I found out that I was pregnant. And when I told him, he hit me in the stomach to try and make me lose the baby. That was when I realized that I had to do something or else he might kill us all. The need to protect my unborn child and my daughter finally gave me the strength to leave my husband and call my parents. That was one of the hardest calls I have ever had to make. I had made a mess of her whole life, how was I going to fix it?

If I had known about a place like the YWCA Domestic Violence Shelter that I could have gone to, I may have left him sooner. What I didn't realize was the "secret" that I thought I was keeping was not a secret. Everyone knew something was wrong. They saw me withdraw emotionally and become more of a robot to survive. Yet no one except my friend said anything. If someone could have helped realize things sooner maybe I could have gotten out sooner. Well what happened to me?

I didn't listen to his stories of "I wouldn't hurt you anymore, please lets get back together" and fought for my divorce, full custody, and a restraining order. I delivered my son knowing that I would have to raise him as a single Mom. Then I worked to rebuild my life through counseling and education programs.

The main reason that I agreed to share my story with you was to break the stereotype that many people think of, when they think of a battered woman. It can happen to anyone, at any education level, any race, any socio-economic level, the person sitting next to you and yes even you. Anyone can marry the wrong person or even the date the wrong person.

What did I learn from that experience? I learned that being battered is NOT your fault. I learned that it can happen to anyone, even if they were brought up right and educated and have 2.2 children and 2 cars in the garage. I learned that I don't have to put up with being abused. I learned that you have to recognize the problem for others and help as they don't realize the situation that they are in. You see the batterer doesn't take away the person all at one time, but a bit every day and before you know it, you are not the same person. You are convinced that it is your fault and that you can't survive without them.

The great thing is that with the right support and counseling, even if it happens to you, you can rebuild your life and you and your children can lead productive lives and not repeat the cycle.