

I witnessed my parents struggle for power, as they argued and fought. My dad put some of the kids in a closet, as he threatened my mother with a knife. I had my hair rollers knocked out of my hair for not drying the dishes well. As a teen, I was not allowed to wear clothes that were red, make up, or talk to boys on the phone. My Dad would rummage through my room reading any note he could find, and I hated that personal invasion. He forced me to eat even if I didn't like it, I'd throw it up, and I would have to eat it again. Eating was not a picnic, and as a result I lost my appetite, couldn't eat, and wore size 1 clothes for more than 10 years of my life.

I left home at age 16, after years of physical and verbal abuse to live with a relative. My role models were my aunt and my Grandmother, a retired elementary teacher. I attended college and worked 2 full time jobs. I married a heavy drinker and physical abuser, and after 2 years left that marriage with my child seeking safety. I became a teacher and I have now been happily married for 31 years; I have a loving husband, two children, and two dogs.

I was married to a man of means for 12 years and 11 of those years were spent being physically and emotionally abused. I had black eyes, bruises and one perfect hand print on my neck. My children witnessed most of the physical abuse. I stayed because I had young children and didn't feel I had any options. The culmination of my abuse came during my divorce, while I still lived with my ex. I refused to tell him what my attorney was telling me because he would just try to use it to undermine my case. He had me pinned down on the couch with his fist in my face and said "I'm going to smash your f...ing face and kill you if you don't talk to me". I was so beaten down I just said, "go ahead". He threw me on the floor and that was the end of it. For the first time, I told my mother and left with my children.

I never shared what was happening to me with anyone, because I was humiliated and ashamed. After my divorce, one of my best friends didn't believe I was abused. My children continue to suffer from the abusive situation they were raised in and their father still tries to control them through threats and anger. One daughter still struggles to accept the father she has, instead of the one she wants.

I am a white, middle class, educated woman. When I first met my husband I thought I had found my Prince Charming. We married and settled into a small town. He became more and more controlling. Finally, I had to ask permission to sit in the backyard with the neighbor woman and watch my children. I felt so isolated because everyone in town thought he was a great guy and would never believe the things that were going on behind our closed door.

One day out of the blue he decided that I was having an affair with my boss. He told me that he was going to take him prisoner and have me watch as he shot one limb after another off. I really didn't believe him until I found the gun. My husband came to my work and confronted my boss about the affair. As you can imagine my boss was totally surprised at this accusation and told my husband that this was not true. I decided to get a divorce but knew I had to plan. I found a safe house for my children and got a lawyer. When I told my husband that I wanted a divorce, it was on the phone when he was in Duluth. I called my mother to come and take the children to the safe house. Before I could get my children out the door with my Mother he was coming into the house. I will never forget the horrified look on my mother's face. My husband got very violent and then finally left. I have been free from domestic violence for the last 20 years and now am a survivor instead of a victim.

A Lost Childhood

As a child growing up in an alcoholic family, I experienced first hand, some of the pain of domestic abuse. Both my parents were alcoholic. My dad was mentally, emotionally, and physically abusive toward my mom. Several times she ended up in the emergency room and had many unexplained bruises on her body. As the oldest child, I kept my younger brother and sister upstairs in our attic bedroom during these rage episodes.

I talked with caring adults around me about the violence around my family. After a year or two, I realized they were powerless to change our situation. Eventually, I made a conscious decision to forget my childhood all together. I was pretty successful at it, but I grew up with a lot of internalized shame. I felt defective inside but projected a carefree outside.

Domestic violence left our family shattered. We felt alone and afraid. It cost us our childhood....a big price to pay.

Though I never saw any physical violence between my college and graduate school educated parents, in our home my dad belittled my mother and emotionally abused her throughout my growing up years. For years I tended to side with my dad because he was obviously the most powerful one in our family - and even sometimes blamed my mom for "making" my dad mad. But I preferred being with my warm, affectionate, and fun mother. Psychological studies have shown that daughters in families where men abuse women (in any manner) lose confidence in themselves. That was certainly true for my sister and myself, though I think we both processed what had happened in our family and later talked to others about it . . . all of which helped us heal.

I left for college at 17, and never went home for any great period of time again. Like my elder sister, I was careful to marry someone who was not like my dad. Today, I have been in a marriage for over 40 years. My marriage is one of power sharing and great friendship. We have two wonderful grown daughters and several grandchildren. I recognize now more clearly than when I was growing up, how terribly hard any sort of abusive conduct is on children. Organizations like Safe Haven Shelter have accomplished so much, but there is still a great deal of work to be done.

When I met my husband, we seemed to be compatible in every way. He enjoyed spending time with my family, Friday night was our date night, and he didn't believe in controlling women. My money was mine and he treated me like a queen – he was everything I ever wanted – my dream come true – my soul mate. Soon after we were married, his behavior started to change. Arguments started over nothing and he would give me the silent treatment for touching anything that belonged to him. The mind games had entered into our marriage. After a while, it became clear that my husband wanted to control my time, my money and my emotions to a point to where I couldn't function as a normal human being. I became numb. I started to walk around on eggshells and became very anxious. I started to live in fear; after all he had threatened to kill me at one time. He started drinking a lot and the more I pleaded with him to go to counseling, he never would. He stated I was the problem, that I was a product of my upbringing. As the arguments got worse I was controlled, called vulgar names and had items thrown at me. I was told repeatedly of how I deserved everything that was happening to me, that I needed to listen to him, that I couldn't do anything right. After one major blow up, I decided I couldn't live this way anymore and needed help. That's when I contacted the shelter.

Safe Haven Shelter helped to put me on a path to heal and rebuild my life. They have been my rock ever since. I wouldn't be the happy go lucky person I am today if it wasn't for the support that I've received from the shelter – my light at the end of that very dark and ugly tunnel.

When the officer announced that he was arresting me for domestic assault, I couldn't believe my ears. I questioned him several times, I said "You've got to be kidding, I was assaulted, I called 911, why are you arresting me?" When I realized he was serious, he dropped the next surprise; he said he had to cuff me and take me to jail. I begged to be taken behind the garage, out of the line of sight of my eight year old daughter. I promised not to run. He followed be around the corner and cuffed me behind my back. I begged to call a friend to come and get my daughter. That's when the officer hit me with surprise number three; the officers would be taking my daughter to her dad. Again, I begged to tell her so she wouldn't be frightened, so I poked my head out from the garage and told my daughter that Mommy has to go somewhere...the police are going to take you to your dad. I didn't lie and say that everything would be okay, because my world had just turned upside down and I had no idea how things were going to turn out.

While I went through the entire jail experience, there was storm raging outside, but I was oblivious to the weather as my mind ran through the course of events of that night. My inside cheek was cut where one of my husband's punches landed. My pinkie hurt. I didn't even know how that had happened. What had happened? Why did I call 911? Did I think the police had the magic ability to see through my husband's abilities as an actor and storyteller? When the officer asked what happened, I just didn't know what to say. I had not been able to bring myself to say that my husband had punched me. I had never been punched in my life.....until now, that is. I was in shock. I was always taught not to tattle, especially on my husband, who was a minister.

Although I grew up in a close, loving and supportive family, I still found myself in an abusive relationship. The abuse began at the age of 15 and lasted until I was nearly 30 years old. The first time I stood up and told him that I could leave and raise our children alone, he told me that he would kill me first. I stayed, and he blackened my eye. I stayed, and he intimidated me with his guns. He held my life in his hands, and I am very grateful to be alive. I came to work at Safe Haven Shelter in July of 1996 and found the strength to break free of his hold on December 26, 1996. This day was the beginning of a new life for us. Today my sons are healthy, and we are all very happy. Safe Haven Shelter helped me escape the cycle of violence that was destroying my family. I owe my life to this organization and will be forever grateful.

I grew up the oldest child of a very controlling and emotionally abusive father. I went on to marry my first husband, my best friend and father of my two children. After a couple of years of marriage and "issues" he began drinking and soon became an abusive alcoholic. After 14 years of marriage it ended after he ran me over while intoxicated...oh and don't forget the other woman that was riding with him at the time! Safe Haven truly saved my life...our lives. I didn't know where to turn to. I was ashamed and so broken...my whole life had just crumbled. I had already begun attending Al Anon and starting counseling for myself and my children. Again, with the assistance of Safe Haven Shelter, I found ways to begin the healing process. I met the most amazing women I would ever meet.

After a short time (1 1/2 yrs) I became involved with husband #2. I was very vulnerable and weak...still not healed from the death of my marriage, AND still dealing with the aftermath of that death with him. Husband #2...was as if I had married my father...only worse. I saw the signs and ignored them. His manipulative, controlling, obsessive, and narcissistic behavior continued to worsen...finally after raising my two children and his, I found the strength to leave...and never look back. It has been 2+ years of living on my own and living a life of inner strength and peace that at times I can't even articulate. My journey is not one I'm proud of...but the journey I'm now on...I'm elated about, and will shout from the roof tops how proud I am...how lucky I am...and just how blessed I am to be where I am and who I am. I love my life today and am confident this is just the beginning...