

THE SILENCE CONTINUES NO MORE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Silence Continues No More: Domestic Violence

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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This creative dissertation is divided into two distinct sections. The first section, or scholarly research piece, begins with a definition of domestic violence and identifies that there are four types of abuse: physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and sexual abuse. Domestic abuse has been around since Adam and Eve, however this paper refers to abuse that has happened within the last century. This paper then takes a historical look at domestic violence. The eleven myths of domestic violence are explored and these myths help to define domestic violence. The myths help diagnose what qualifies as abuse and debunk common misconceptions about intimate partner violence.

The first half also explores the question why tell a short story rather than a novel, film or other literary device. There are a plethora of domestic violence stories to choose from, and it is difficult to pick up the newspaper or turn on a newscast without the

mention of domestic violence. So why tell more stories? It has been suggested that we need to rework old stories or write new stories using the third person, rebirth plot line to illicit political action, raise awareness and elicit empathy.

The second half of this paper focuses on fourteen non-fiction short stories of twelve women and two men who have been the victims of domestic violence. Although all of the stories are based on true stories, names have been changed to protect identities. The majority of the stories are told in third person point of view.

DEDICATION

Thank you to Dr. Betsey Nadle for encouraging, guiding, listening and loving me when I needed it the most.

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Many thanks go to all of my friends for their understanding and love

For my father who loved watching me at the computer

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For Tom, I love you for each mile you drove back and forth for Ms.Daisy.

For Christopher, Eoin, Elizabeth and Linus

For Sean, Kaeleb, Alyssa and Christopher

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Research

Introduction

I am a twenty year survivor of a relationship that was steeped in domestic violence. I knew of no other woman who was in a similar type of relationship. I wasn't aware of any shelters, support groups, or even therapists who specialized in domestic abuse during the early 1980s. I suffered alone and in silence. The abuse was sporadic and never provoked by the same set of circumstances. My spouse was active in the church, sociable and loved to entertain. I began to wonder how one ever becomes the victim of spousal abuse. Is there a cause of domestic violence? What kinds of violence qualify as domestic violence and when did abuse first begin to become prevalent in our society?

Domestic Abuse: A Definition

A widely accepted definition of domestic violence is “the emotional, physical, psychological or sexual abuse perpetrated against a person by that person’s spouse, former spouse, partner, former partner, or by the parent of a minor child,” (Hubbard quoted in McCue (2). The violence can be one act or a “pattern of abuse that occurs over a period of time, anywhere from a few weeks to many years. The intent of this battering is to gain power and control over the victim” (McCue 3).

Margi McCue argues that there is no one specific cause of domestic violence. However, there are a number of opinions that help understand the dynamics of domestic violence when working with victims of abuse. The sociological approach, the systems theory, the psychological perspective, and the social learning theory help consider and interpret the parameters of domestic violence.

The Sociological Perspective

“One sociocultural belief is that cultures that approve of the use of violence have the highest rate of domestic violence. Because we in the United States have accepted spanking as an appropriate method of child discipline and violence is portrayed on television and in our daily lives, our culture is seen as encouraging abuse” (McCue 9). Often when a person is upset or angry outside the home, it is not acceptable to express that anger in the public environment. It has become common to bring these feelings into the home. I agree with McCue. We live in a society where it is common to see parents bring small children into R rated movies, teens buying video games that explicitly state what they are rated due to violence, language and sexuality, and children who sue their parents when they are spanked or grounded.

Systems Theory

The systems theory is “a psychosocial theory that focuses on the process of interactions within the family. Violence, according to the systems theory, is a product of the family system and is based on the premise that in each family there are established rules of behavior for each individual member, that each member’s boundaries are defined, and the patterns of interaction have been dominant over time” (McCue 10).

According to McCue, “if one family member challenges the established goals of that family system, a corrective action by another family member occurs. This corrective action is taken to establish that member’s own power position and is done through an increase in violent behavior” (McCue 10). I am in agreement again, with McCue because

growing up, my father was in control of the dominance of the family. He set the rules, and if they weren't followed, physical consequences occurred. All of my friends feared the paddle, a spanking, the belt or worse. This was the norm during my childhood.

The Psychological Theory

The psychological theory includes two opinions about domestic violence. The psychodynamic theory and the social learning theory are just the two opinions under the umbrella of theories. The psychodynamic theory “suggests that there is a mental illness present in either the abuser or the abused and therapy is geared towards changing the underlying disorder” (McCue 11). Studies of this opinion find that men with this disorder include a low self-esteem and lack of empathy (McCue12). Pathologies of the abuser include asocial/borderline, narcissistic/anti-social, and dependent/compulsive behaviors (McCue12). My psychiatrist has suggested to me that my mother was narcissistic and borderline personality disorder. To look back at childhood memories, her actions seemed no different than what other kids received at the time. However, looking back as an educated adult, I completely agree my mother had some kind of mental disorder.

The Social Learning Theory

As discussed in the book, *Domestic Violence* by Margi McCue, the social learning theory puts an emphasis on behavior rather than pathologies; “Violence is learned aggressive behavior that is perpetuated by the reinforcement in our society, aggressive (macho) behavior in men” (McCue 12). The thought behind the social learning theory is that “those actions that are rewarded are maintained, while those that are not decrease in frequency” (McCue 12). Back in the 1960s it was expected in our society not to “spare

the rod and spoil the child”. Another phrase that was drilled in me was, “Children should be seen and not heard”. The father was expected to rule with an iron fist. Now, it seems that the children rule themselves. Parents are afraid to spank for fear of litigation, and it is not uncommon for teens to report to the Department of Youth and Family Services about abuse, or parents simply want their child to love them, without setting guidelines or rules.

History of Abuse

When discussing the history of abuse, domestic violence crosses the boundaries of centuries of time. Chastisement was the politically correct term used long ago for domestic abuse. Vanessa Garcia and Patrick M. McManimon present an interesting philosophy about abusive men across decades of time (3). (Even though a man or woman can abuse either sex, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on men abusing women.) If you were a man living in America during the 1780s, do you have the right to chastise your wife? The answer is yes. As a woman you cannot sue your husband for the violence he inflicted upon you.

Of note during this time period, “England judge Sir Francis Buller stated that a husband can physically discipline his wife, even with a weapon; however if he uses a stick, it cannot be thicker than his thumb. This became known as the *rule of thumb*” (Garcia and McManimon (3).

One particular case during this time period that was of interest to me was a woman named Abigail Abbott Bailey. Abigail married a man named Asa Bailey in the late eighteenth century. He was extremely cruel and beat Abigail often. However, this

was not enough of a reason for wanting to divorce her husband. There were also complaints that he raped servants and carried on affairs, but the last straw was when he committed incest with their seventeen year old daughter. Abigail confronted him and advised him to turn towards God and move away from their home. She endured more emotional and physical pain upon his returns to their home; however, she was finally able to divorce him in 1793. (Bailey quoted in Lentz, 14). (The original journal with this information is housed in the Princeton Theological Seminary Library.)

Garcia and McManimom examined domestic violence that took place almost forty five years later, in 1824. If a woman wanted to seek legal recourse against her husband for being battered, “the court rules that a husband has the right to physically chastise his wife, in moderation” (Boston Public Health Commission, 2009 as cited in *Bradley vs. State*, 1824). It is impossible to believe that it is legally legitimate to beat ones wife and it is now recorded by the court system.

Over a hundred years later, if one looks for retribution against an act of domestic violence, one won’t be able to find it. It isn’t until the 1970s when women start to make headway in the justice system. Why has our nation taken so long to be proactive when the issue is domestic violence? According to Garcia and McManimon, “the United States has developed a gendered justice in which men have more rights and recognized agency than do women” (4).

“In reality, legal options remained very limited during the colonial period. Besides being very public, they were not always financially accessible” (Lentz 15). Although some changes were evident at times, (some women could now be independent traders or

entrepreneurs) these changes were both good and bad. They gave more rights to women, but at the same time produced a “new source of marital tension” (Lentz 16). It was common to still see men as the head of the household who was to provide funds for the upkeep of all the members of the family. It was shameful to consider having a spouse work outside the home. Regarding domestic violence, the consensus at that stage was that government should not intrude except in extreme cases. It was simply seen best to close the doors, keep family matters private and to forgive and forget.”(Lentz 15).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, women began to fight for their rights as individuals. Lentz stated that without control over his wife’s property, a husband might be more inclined to use force. It was beginning to become clear that the reasons for spousal abuse were usually alcohol abuse and financial disputes. But the biggest reason for wife beating was the ultimately the patriarchal rule of men. Frances Power Cobbe, as quoted in Susan Lentz’s *Women and Domestic Violence* , wrote in 1871 that “the common idea of inferiority of women, and the special notion of the rights of husbands, form the undercurrent of feeling which induces a man, for whatever reason he is infuriated, to wreak his violence on his wife”(16). In 1877 Ezra Heywood chided, “We form societies to prevent cruelty to dumb animals, but horses and dogs are better fed and lodged in our cities, than thousands of working women” (Lentz 8).

Perhaps what is the most shocking point that Clark mentions is “at common law, in the marriage contract a wife (consented) to sexual intercourse” as quoted by Lentz (16).

Lentz also points out that “the legal system refused to acknowledge that the husband could rape his wife without legal ramifications. Control over the size of the family was

also an issue. Women longed to have a voice over how many children should be birthed and longed for birth control. Legally, women had very little control over their bodies and religion was of no help in this regard. The church has always encouraged procreation and no form of birth control except abstinence” (Lentz 18).

By the early twentieth century there still was no state with a law against domestic violence. It was very rare for an arrest to be made and yet common for police and social services to try to gather help from the community (Lentz 22). Being a single mother was even worse. Reforms were slow to come. Even in the civil and religious marriage ceremony, a husband was asked to cherish and love his wife while she promised to obey him (Lentz 13). Most men who abuse their wives are often narcissists who will use every means at his disposal to maintain power and control over the family (McCue 12).

In the 1960s feminism was on the horizon. Small gains were made with some women gaining political, economic and social power, and marriage became more of an equal partnership (Lentz 22). However, women still continued to be raped by their husbands and the battering continued.

In the 1970s, domestic violence shelters began to pop up to try and protect women who were able to escape to safety. For example, “In 1971 an English town with 500 women and children marched to protest a reduction in free milk for school children. This led to the Chiswick Women’s Aid, a community meeting place where women could meet and discuss abuse they were suffering in their homes. This meeting place was under the leadership of Erin Pizzey. (McCue 14). Clearly, this was the voice of the people. They were shouting about the need of shelters and the building had just begun.

Changes did occur, but our society has a long way to go against the fight of domestic violence. Even the inventions of the cell phone and personal computer have been amazing additions to the war against domestic violence. According to the Domestic Violence Encyclopedia 2011, Verizon has donated free cell phones to women who battle abuse so they may dial police if they are in danger. The computer has helped with research to form legislation, and keep track of cases at risk, among dozens of other uses. Verizon offers free internet service as well as technical support in case a woman needs that service (531).

Another service Verizon offers is a database to help shelters track women and keep statistics for surveys to keep track of the numbers of women using domestic violence services. Verizon is also counseling male high school athletes to educate them in the rights for women and how not to become a man who batters. Providing professional business clothing helps women at home as well as in shelters to apply for jobs to create a better future. Finally, Verizon also helps women with finding a lawyer and providing funds for legal assistance. In 2011, Verizon paid over twenty eight million dollars to combat domestic violence. (Domestic Violence Encyclopedia 531).

In the last twenty years, the National Institute of Justice (2003) stated that “The number of non-fatal violent crimes against women by their intimate partners declined from 1.1 million to 588,490 in 2001” (no page). Also, the Violence against Women Act of 1994 has made incredible strides to help women gain the support and services they so desperately need. This act helped put domestic violence on the map and in the foreground of social problems all over the world. This act has also started to raise awareness, and built domestic violence programs all over the nation. Another helpful

tool that was created is called the Duluth Model (Davis and Taylor 71). This model was developed in Duluth, Minnesota and is a program made to recognize that men want to control women. Some men want to use intimidation, isolation, minimizing, denying, blame, male privilege, coercion, threats, emotional abuse, economic abuse, and the use of children to control a woman.

Does batterer treatment work? Until the 1970s most courts were slow to prosecute men who tended to batter their wives due to the fact that domestic abuse was shrouded in silence. Women reporting abuse were often frightened or embarrassed to report wife battering. I know I was. I only called the police once, and it was only to “calm down” my husband. I would have never pressed charges, I was in love with him and had nowhere to go with five children. Women didn’t want to press charges because they just wanted the beatings to stop. The police saw domestic violence and thought that it was something that should be settled by a married couple in the privacy of their own home.

However, with the women’s revolution, reporting has seen an increase due to the fact that states, such as Pennsylvania, have adopted The Pennsylvania Abuse Act. This act enables victims to file pro se protection orders, and many domestic violence programs reported startling increases in request for protection orders between 100 and 700 percent (McCue 131).

We have also discovered what has not worked so far for men is domestic violence interventions. Groups for men who batter their wives have been limited in their impact (National Institute of Justice 5). But, an increase in reporting is better than no reporting at all.

Sexual violence among intimate partners is a heinous felony. How many women are battered? Why is it that domestic violence is rarely charged or often pleaded down and treated as a misdemeanor or breach of peace? Most often this type of criminal activity is ignored. It could be that this type of charge is difficult to prosecute and advocates can focus their attention where it is most likely to have immediate results.

Yet, domestic violence still occurs. Shepard reminds us that it is “deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures” (437). It is difficult to say exactly how many women are abused by their husbands for failure to report to law officials. As Lentz notes, “The fact that husbands are less likely to claim a right to chastise does not mean that they have abandoned the use of physical violence to maintain control (Lentz 25).

Where do we need to go from here? We need to focus on what is working to combat the violence and concentrate on areas that need attention. What has been working is police sensitivity, awareness and response to domestic abuse. This is something that is definitely making a difference in the lives of many people (Elliott 1). A zero-tolerance policy has brought about more criminal charges for men who choose to batter.

We need to focus on more housing and resources for shelters. Many women and their children are often turned away from shelters due to lack of space or facilities. Women with children pose difficult problems when housing for some shelters. Some women sleep in their cars for a week, sometimes with their children, so they can qualify for federal emergency housing vouchers (Hench 5). Also, time for a shelter stay is limited. Some shelters will let people stay from three to six months while trying to pick up the pieces to get their lives back together. This may not be enough time, especially for

women with children. GPS trackers can be put on the offenders so that police can monitor their locations, such as monitoring for sex offenders. It has also been the policy of some law makers that after the abuser is jailed for a time period, the police will call the victim to inform her that the abuser has been released. Another option is a Domestic Violence Emergency Response System. It is a panic button that a victim can wear that can be activated if her attacker is threatening or harming her. It also has GPS capabilities in case the police are having difficulty tracking her location. Court rooms need to be specifically dedicated to domestic violence with specialty law enforcers assigned to cases. This sends a clear message to the victims that personnel with specific expertise is handling their case and that they are dedicated to investigation and prosecution.

Katherine Van Wormer and Albert S. Roberts speak about the eleven myths about of domestic violence which includes the data and frequency (11-17).

1. Women Today are as Violent as Men: Most of the domestic violence cases are female 85% (8). An accurate picture of the death count in one year's time was, 329 males died as opposed to 1, 181 females who died from their male counterparts.
2. There Has Been An Increase In Violent Crime Especially For Women: This statement comes from the fact that police are arresting many more women than they formerly did for a misdemeanor. The changes are in the *law*, not in the rate of violence on women of female-to-male violence.
3. The Domestic Homicide Rate Cuts Evenly across All Social and Racial Grouping. The higher the income, the lower the rates of domestic violence. Domestic homicide does cut across all classes and races. Many of the

abusers are recipients of unemployment and economic problems were prevalent throughout the relationship. So, since economic problems are commonly found in the lower class, we can conclude that social class should be studied.

4. Domestic Homicide Followed by Suicide is Extremely Rare: Unfortunately there is no national tracking information currently. However, Van Wormer and Roberts attempted to track every newspaper article with this type of scenario. The evidence clearly shows that one third of the women were killed by someone close to them, and a suicide took place.
5. Guns in the Home Provide Protection from Violent Crimes: Fifty two percent of domestic violence victims were killed by their perpetrators using a gun. The states with the strictest gun laws had the lowest death rate of women by guns.
6. Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs Is Not a Significant Factor in Domestic Violence: Drinking and Drug use are often just excuses for the violence: A lot of men who are charged with domestic violence claim drugs and alcohol as the culprit. But to get better results, twenty women were interviewed. Here – three fourths of these women describe their attacker as heavy substance users, with huge jealousy issues and poor work records.
7. Female Victims are Slow to Escape Because of an Attraction to Violent Men and Due to Poor Judgement in General: There is a great deal of misunderstanding when it comes to a woman escaping her attacker. First of all, there is always danger and fear present. “If you leave me, I’ll kill you” is

a common threat from attackers. Financial dependency, nowhere to go, and children in the mix are a few problems for women. Also, her support system is weak from isolation by her attacker.

8. **Women Who Kill the Men Who Beat Them Rarely are Punished for their Crimes:** The power differential between men and women is significant. That is why women kill men when men are incapacitated, drunk or asleep. Many women do serve extensive prison sentences for premeditated murder.
9. **Men Who Batter Cannot Change:** Men who batter are split into two groups. One group is known as the Pit bulls, and the other is known as the Cobras. Pit Bulls are the more sensitive types who are dissatisfied with their life and behavior so it goes without saying that these men would be most likely to change. The Cobras are highly sensitive and insecure and very possessive. They are materialistic and will kill for money, careers and are the least likely to change.
10. **Batterer Education Programming Is Based on Empirically Validated Principles:** As one begins to think about domestic violence programs evolved, the programs need some change because it is anything but scientifically based. Some things of the programs work well, and others are not effective and need to be brought up to date.
11. **Very Little Can Be Done to Prevent Battered Women from being Murdered by their Abusers:** There are quite a few things that can and are being done. Harm reduction measures currently enacted upon are arrest and prosecution. The next thing officials can do is guide the victim to fill out an order of

protection and ask the judge to issue a mandatory education class. Teens are now receiving teen dating/violence prevention and there is a male mentoring programming in the schools.

How bad could it possibly be? “The actual physical damage is real” (Jones 87).

“Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women in the United States.”

Countless women who are pregnant miscarry or have babies that are affected by birth defects due to domestic violence, according to the National Center for Disease Control NYT” (15).

If women are lucky enough to escape, battered women may be “saddled for years with a load of complicated problems ranging from anxiety, shame, despair, to flashbacks and suicidal ideation. These aftershocks are the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, a psychological syndrome seen also in survivors of rape and incest” (Jones 87).

Sadly, even when women have taken out restraining orders, gone to shelters and taken advantage of all the resources available to them, sometimes it just isn’t enough. If an abuser wants to kill their victim, some will find a way. According to Howard Elliott for the Hamilton Spectator, Gillian Hadley did all the things she was supposed to do. She pressed charges, she cooperated with the police. She tried to protect herself and her children, but in the end she could not. Two times Ralph Hadley was charged. Twice he was ordered by the courts to stay away from Gillian’s home. He went to jail for violating a peace bond. Against the wishes of the police, a judge released him on bail posted by his mother. It was then that Ralph Hadley took a handgun and violated his restraining

order again, by going to the home of Gillian Hadley and shooting her at gunpoint, just moments before she could hand off her one year old son to the safety of neighbors.

Ralph then turned his own weapon on himself and committed suicide. Clearly, there is still so much that still needs to be done in the fight against domestic violence.

Why Tell A Short Story?

I believe that stories are improvements in our lives. A good short story can educate, ease the mind, erase fears, give a glimmer of hope or create a forever change in our very beings. It can challenge our beliefs and completely change our way of thinking. The short story is essential in shaping our head and our heart. How can something that spans the length of a few pieces of twenty four pound paper pack the power of a perfect punch?

Short stories in our lives are one of those have-to-have items that fit neatly in the bookshelves of our minds. Perhaps one author told the story of an important event, such as a death of a grandparent or the birth of a new baby. Maybe it was one about a romance that was long ago lost, but still can't be put to rest. Could it be about something horrible in life that occurred and the protagonist could not figure out how to solve his predicament?

No one wants to think about horrible things happening to good people (unless you're Stephen King). Fiction or non-fiction, however, human beings are natural storytellers and sometimes, a story needs to be told. Will the story ease those troubled minds, explain the questions we have, or lead someone to take action? Will the story heal the heavy heart full of hurt by providing some sort of comfort?

For every four women in the world, one will suffer from domestic violence. Maybe you're the victim, maybe you're the bystander, maybe you're the activist or advocate. For one reason or another, until battered women (and men) are a thing of the past, perhaps then, we can write the stories as our history.

Telling a New Story

Domestic violence is one of those horrible subjects no one "likes" to read about. There are a plethora of stories written about domestic violence. Some stories, especially the stories written in first person narrative, elicit empathy at best, but are there enough stories ever told? Is there a way that a domestic story can be told that could elicit more than just empathy? Francesca Poletta ponders why even bother writing stories in the first place? Some stories about domestic abuse are considered "just stories." What about film or novels, magazine articles, journals or even a newspaper article? (Poletta, "How to Tell...", 1494).

There are several successful novels or films about domestic violence such as Nancy Price's *Sleeping with the Enemy*, Faith McNulty's *The Burning Bed*, Anna Quindlen's *Black and Blue*, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, a *Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and hundreds of journal articles. It is difficult to open a newspaper, a magazine or see a newscast without the mention of domestic violence. What about the short story? I suggest the length of a short story for the most effective way to communicate the message of domestic violence. In today's world, time is of the essence. Short stories have the power to tell about a lifetime event in a handful of pages.

Even reluctant readers, children as old as middle school have the ability and attention span to hear a short story about domestic violence and react in an appropriate manner. My thirty year career as a teacher affirms that children react to what is familiar to them. Children need the familiar to make them realize they are not the only ones who experience domestic violence in the home and that it is wrong.

It is difficult to recall the last time I sat down with a hundred plus page novel, or even committed time and money to an expensive Hollywood two-hour movie. I understand it is difficult reading a short story about domestic violence. These types of stories are not entertainment that provides laughter, comfort or ease. However, there are still domestic abuse stories to be told. And there are people who are willing and need to listen, especially if the story is told in just the right way. If there are so many stories, why write more? Why aren't the old ones sufficient enough to elicit more than just mere empathy and not action?

Francesca Polletta's 2009 journal article "How to Tell a New Story about Battering" suggests perhaps that we need to rework the old stories, or tell the new stories with a new type of plotline. Traditionally, domestic abuse stories are written using the tragedy plotline. Polletta suggests that domestic violence stories using a rebirth story line rather than a tragic tale would be more effective so that the audience may best identify with the familiar plot line in a new way. The five stages of the rebirth plot line as defined by Christopher Booker (329) are as follows:

1. A young heroine or hero falls under the shadow of the dark power.

2. For a while, all may seem to go reasonably well. The threat may have even seemed to have receded.
3. Eventually the threat returns in full force, until the heroine/hero is seen imprisoned in a state of death.
4. This continues for a long time, when it seems like the dark power has completely triumphed.
5. But finally comes the miraculous redemption either by the hero (if the imprisoned figure is the heroine) or by a young woman or child (if the imprisoned figure is the hero).

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens is probably the best example of the rebirth plot line. Polletta suggests that “*Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* are also good examples of the rebirth narrative. One may think these are unlikely choices due to the fact that they both have passive heroines. However, the genre captures the experience of living death that is similar to coercive control, along with the power of love (which can be self-love) to liberate” (1500).

A first person narrative “makes the protagonist a shrewd observer of her own entrapment” (Polletta, “How to Tell” 1496). Evan Stark claims that conventional approaches to battering are misguided. They fundamentally misrepresent what contemporary abuse looks like. Stark also relents that “for most women violence is only one component of abuse that also includes intimidation, isolation and the regulation of one’s everyday behaviors such as cooking, cleaning and caring for one’s children” (Stark 2007). In Polletta’s 2009 article “How to Tell”, Stark is quoted saying “a study showing

that the men who were most likely to kill their partners were not those that were most violent; it was those who were the most controlling” (1491).

Short stories are important sources of change. Telling stories about domestic abuse is urgent. “Before a problem gains public acceptance,” Stark observes, “it must be fit into a narrative that evokes public interest in intervention” (351). That type of narrative must be an alternative to the victimization story.

Using first person narrative is, according to Polletta, “rhetorically risky” (“How to Tell” 1494). As critics have pointed out, first person stories are vulnerable as being attacked as idiosyncratic, personal and subjective. They may produce in their audiences an emotional catharsis but little in the way of practical action or even lasting opinion change. They may be dismissed as “just” stories (1494).

Recent research suggests that readers process stories whether or not they have a prior investment in the subject; they immerse themselves in it, striving to experience vicariously the events and emotions that the protagonists do. Readers do not want to have the moral of a story shoved down their throats. They want the events of the story to give way to their own meaning. However, this rarely, if ever occurs. We comprehend what we have heard in a story by the schema we have built from what we have heard before (Polletta “How to Tell” 1495). As we read a story, we recognize events of the story from familiar tales, such as *David and Goliath*.

Francesca Polletta notes that author Christopher Booker argues that there are seven basic plots: overcoming the monster, (think *Beowulf* to *Bond*); rags to riches (*Oliver Twist*); quest (*Lord of the Rings*); voyage and return (*The Odyssey* or *The Wizard of Oz*);

comedy, (*Figaro*); tragedy, (*Macbeth*); and rebirth (*Sleeping Beauty*) (“How to tell” 1500).

All stories adhere to one of these plotlines, or a combination of plotlines. Polletta asserts that “a story that strays too far from the familiar risks seeming unbelievable, unintelligible or strange. This poses a real problem for those wanting to use stories to challenge common sense. When activists try to tell a new story, it may be assimilated willy-nilly to the plotlines of the stories their audiences already know. Audiences hear a familiar story, and they produce expectations in line with the familiar story. If the story they do hear defies those expectations, if the protagonist behaves in ways that stray too far from the familiar plotline, if the ending fails to match up with the expected one, audiences will probably find the story unsatisfying, confusing or implausible” (Polletta “How to Tell” 1495).

Remember back to the rebirth plotline and the stories of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*. Polletta asserts both stories involve the sleep-like “death” of a beautiful princess. The world is suspended in time, or frozen as the princesses await their hero to kiss them and break the spell that they had been put under. If the hero was the one under the spell, such as the beast in *Beauty and the Beast* or Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, the heroes then await their heroine to release them from their imprisonment. This illustrates that the gender is inconsequential. What is most important in this storyline is that the protagonist is released from living death. The release is the climax of the story and it is through the power of true love that the release could only occur (Polletta “How to Tell” 1500).

Polletta states that as a model for a story about domestic violence, the rebirth plotline may at first seem to be less than a perfect match. However, even if the protagonist’s liberation does not depend upon a hero/heroine, we can reasonably say that the protagonist spends the majority of the story in a frozen state of death. How can a person who is unconscious awake themselves? Polletta argues, “What makes the rebirth plotline valuable nevertheless is its emphasis on a state of lifeless living, a kind of imprisonment

occurring in a self-enclosed world, from which the protagonist is liberated in the story's climax" (Polletta "How to Tell 1501).

When a victim tells her story of abuse, keep in mind that there are three stages to discuss. First, the early period of intimacy is important to understand. It is important because it established a reason why the couple was together, or what the woman was thinking when the relationship began. The second stage is when the terrible abuse begins. This is where the life-sapping near state of death enters the picture. Finally, during the last stage the victim becomes desperate, and finally awakens out of self-love or preservation. Unless one has been a victim of abuse, it is difficult to understand that the story being told is not to be thought of like a tragic plotline. Using a tragic plotline, a victim's tale becomes just another generic abuse relationship (Polletta "How to Tell" 1502).

How does one make a victim's story personal and memorable? What if the abused seeks self-defense and ends up murdering her attacker? How does one tell the story of murder, into one of insight? Polletta suggests, "by turning a tragic tale narrative into one of rebirth, and by shifting the point of view from 'who I was then' to 'who I am now' in a way that effectively combines victimization and agency into one" (Polletta "How to Tell" 1502). This breaks the story into two halves: one half tells who the woman initially was before the relationship began, and the second half tells us the story about the victim she has now become.

Polletta points out that this is a solid way to produce a domestic abuse story that will focus on credibility, as well as elicit feelings of memory and action rather than just

empathy: “They used irony to highlight the social norms that kept them with a violent man, and they used a story line of rebirth to draw the audience’s attention to a different point in the story than the one they might have expected; not the moment when the woman decided to kill but the moment she decided to live” (Polletta “How to Tell” 1505).

Short stories are a powerful tool for healing and action. We must not give up on the old stories, but to try rewriting those using new plotlines, specifically the rebirth plotline. For the domestic abuse survivor, the last thing that we would want to do is to tell them that their stories are not believable or invalid. We need to provide hope that their story might change someone or save a life in some way. Polletta adds that the rebirth plotline “has made it possible to grasp the condition of living death that is something like coercive control. It has made it possible to understand both why the woman stayed and why she fought back. When told in the first person, the author’s strong narrative voice has conveyed of agency and reasonableness, even as she has described experiences of dependence and dehumanization” (Polletta “How to Tell” 1506).

It is important to be honest and forthright when writing about abuse. I am in agreement with Polletta when she says that speaking “from the heart” tends to work best in most situations. “Speaking from the heart means speaking in a more literary fashion, than challengers have often done when they have concentrated instead on generating a simple, unitary message” (Polletta “How to Tell” 1506).

In Janice Haaken’s research on domestic violence stories, she has researched that there are three other styles of short stories that stray away from the standard plotline that are

usually written about abuse. One type is called the story of bondage. This type of story tends to lean towards the protagonist realizing that her relationship is one of danger and confinement. Haaken states “During periods of feminist mobilization, literary portraits of domestic confinement tend toward the gothic, dramatizing the seductively pernicious trap of marriage and family. Menacing forces surround the female protagonist, as she begins to discern the shadowy figure of her husband in the engulfing darkness” (Haaken 86).

Although this type of story is less common today, it still set the standard for female gothic novels. Perhaps a familiar type of this story is the classic *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Readers associate the two distinct personalities, the good and evil, of the man in their relationship. The thought of reason in this story is that the man is ill, as if he can be cured from the half of a personality illness. Hoevelor points out that “We, like the characters in the female gothic novel...want to find something hidden, mysterious, deep and esoteric behind the black veil” Diane Long Hoevelor (3).

Home is thought of as a prison from which there is no release. Women depend on their husband for financial support and women find they must surrender and be miserable in order to survive their ordeal. The husband puts the blame on the wife, making the abuse ‘their fault’ or simply blames a force bigger than both husband and wife.

Conversations with Literature

Bondage

Faith McNulty’s 1980 novel *Burning Bed* is a classic bondage story about a young couple who met in the 1950s and married before the female protagonist finished high school. The husband antagonist loses his job after a whirlwind romance and ends up

having a dual personality, a loving husband and father as well as a physically, financially and emotionally abusive husband. He blames the abuse on stress, alcohol, loss of employment, car accident (among other excuses) and tells the protagonist that despite a divorce, she is basically his prisoner and she will never rid herself of him. She turns to law enforcement, relatives, the judicial system and social services for help and no one is able to make a difference in her miserable life. One night, she snaps and ends up burning and killing him in his bed while he slept. The protagonist goes to jail and eventually is exonerated.

Another story of bondage is Justin Torres' We the Animals (2011). The story begins with the protagonist's life as a young boy growing up with his two older brothers. His father is a sometimes violent and yet sometimes a loving man, and his mother is a loving yet child-like woman, a wisp of a human being. On the day of his seventh birthday, the protagonist and his brothers witness their father carrying their mother in his arms. He has beaten her face to a bloody pulp and tells the boys that the dentist was the one who harmed their mother to loosen up her teeth before he ripped them out of her mouth. When she finally spoke, she asked the child protagonist what the antagonist had done to her, the boy answered, "He punched you in the face to loosen up your teeth" (Torres 15). She begged the boy to remain six so that he wouldn't grow up to become a man like his father, to continue his cycle of violence.

Another example of violence from this novel is when the family goes to a lake to cool off from a heat wave. The mother and their youngest child don't know how to swim. The father believes that if he releases the pair suddenly from his grip that they will know how to instinctually swim. The mother panics and soon begins to claw her way to the

surface of the water, on top of the child, forcing the boy trapped underwater to fight for his own survival. The boy survives the incident but lives on to suffer from post traumatic syndrome from the abuse.

My story “Crushed Cement” is a bondage story. Even when Cherie’s husband moves on to another woman, he still drops in and expects sex and money. He wants two women to himself who are subservient. Even though he has moved away from the marital home, he constantly checks on his possession (Cherie and the baby), to make sure that no other man has taken his claim. On his last visit, Cherie is desperate to escape his abuse to no avail. He is determined to kill her as he chokes her with his belt. She finally snaps and as he is on the hood of the car she has moments to think about how to save her life. She puts the car in drive and moves forward, crushing her husband to death. Now her husband has her in a different kind of bondage. Cherie is in jail on first degree murder charges.

Another story of bondage is my story “Another New Year”. Darren invites Heather to stay with him until she is able to find housing and get settled. From the moment she moves in, Heather does nothing but unsettle life around her. Darren feels like he is a prisoner in his own home. He tries retreating to his den to escape Heather’s daily tantrums. When she finally leaves the home, she continues to haunt him by dating his best friend, spreading rumors about his behavior, and limiting Mark with a physical injury she caused. Emotionally she still holds him in bondage. He is emotionally paralyzed when it comes to relationships. Darren refuses to get close to other women.

Emotional bondage is a similar theme with the story “China Pieces”. A young girl coming of age tries to navigate her way in a world where her mother tries to commit suicide, is hospitalized in a mental hospital and the protagonist is forced to be responsible for a family of five children. In the end the protagonist comes to a realization that the love she so desperately seeks from her mother will never be available. She is held in a state of emotional bondage, with no sign of actual release.

Another emotional bondage story of mine is “Crystal”. The story is about Alex who was trying to remain friends with a mentally ill partner. After reconciling, they try rebuilding their relationship without success. She threatens to kill Alex and fails. She follows all the right procedures to make sure that she is protected from her. Was it a good time to leave? Alex realizes there is never a good time to stay.

“Time Bomb” is Lizzy’s story which is also a story of bondage. Even though she also tries to reconcile with her husband, he attempts to murder her, fails at his attempt and eventually kills himself. Lizzy considers herself fortunate because her ex-husband is dead. She doesn’t have to worry about child visitation issues or stalking or any of the unfortunate business of an ex-spouse who is abusive. However, the emotional damage that she and her children have suffered is very real. She is hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt for medical bills and psychotherapy bills for her and her children.

Deliverance

The second genres of stories are of deliverance. This type of story is a woman’s departure from her husband’s abuse. Nancy Price’s (1987) *Sleeping with the Enemy*

novel is a good example of this genre. In the book, the protagonist Laura is nothing but a material possession to her abusive husband. She fakes her own death to be rid of the antagonist, and ends up meeting another man, who is not physically abusive, but at times emotionally abusive.

This story is similar to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). The story opens with the rape and beating of the protagonist Celie by her own father who tells her she better get used to it. Soon Celie is married and endures a beating on her wedding night by her husband. The violence extends to his children, who also taunt Celie and one throws a stone at her head, causing injury.

When his son Harpo, questions why his father beats Celie, his father replies that it is a husbandly duty for a man to beat his wife. When Harpo seeks marital advice from his father about his strong willed wife, he tells Harpo, "Well how you 'spect to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (42). Harpo admits to his father that he does not beat his wife Sophia. He is upset that he can't bring himself to have Sophia be subservient to him. Even Celie suggests that Harpo give Sophia a good beating to bring her to her senses. This advice only ends up bringing Harpo back with a wounded pride and plenty of bruises from his wife. Soon the violence spreads and they are both fighting each other for control like two animals, rather than husband and wife.

One of my stories of deliverance is "Twelve Hours". The story of Mina is one of deliverance. Mina lives with a man named Shane who physically and mentally abuses

her. She is unable to escape because the more she is abused, the more she craves her abuser. Finally he gouges out both of her eyes in a horrific attack and is put away in prison for life. Mina is finally free, but completely blind. Deliverance comes. but at what price?

“Smitten” is my story of a woman who marries her soul mate. They start their marriage out in Chicago, in utter poverty. She always put herself last and never spoke up or out against someone. Brigid soon finds herself in an abusive relationship and uses her intelligence to claw her way out. In the end, she finally stands on her own two feet and moves forward with her life free from abuse.

My story named “Bayonne” is also one of deliverance. Jayde marries Mike Connelly and they soon live their lives in happiness until Mike loses his job. Mike turns to alcohol and begins to abuse Jayde. She tries everything to work it out, until the abuse reaches a dangerous new level. Jayde moves back with her parents until she realizes that she is pregnant again. She returns back to Mike and tries to work it out one last time. Jayde ends up beaten and in a coma. She realizes that the only safe thing to do is to divorce Mike. The final turning point was that Jayde didn’t want the children witnessing all the violence.

Another story of deliverance is the story I wrote called “Great Adventure”. Lori is a woman married three years right out of high school to Bobby, her high school sweetheart. Bobby had a temper that was evidenced during their five short years of marriage. Even after the divorce, Bobby became violent during an exchange of the children for visitation.

However, it was only five years after the divorce that Bobby eventually drank himself to death. Lori worked hard for deliverance.

My story “Staircase” is a deliverance story that highlights the danger of domestic violence and pregnancy. Nara is an Irish red hair woman married to Liam. She is pregnant and begins to experience domestic violence. The abuse escalates and Liam pushes her down a basement flight of stairs. Liam locks her in the basement and then takes off with the children. The stress of the fall brings on labor and she is finally able to bring a police officer to the house to break down the door as her husband and two children arrive back home. Liam is arrested and Nara presses charges for the first time. She contemplates heading back to Ireland to escape from Liam.

Finally, the deliverance story “Call the Police!” is a story of Emma and one of courage. Emma is married to a police officer who is abusive. To call the police and complain would cause the loss of income or his job that they simply can’t afford, with a new baby. Violence eventually escalates to a murder and a suicide.

Struggle and Reparation

The final genre is stories of struggle and reparation. The overall plotline for this genre is banding together and fighting the fight as a group. There is no doubt that rather than relying on their own personal coping strategies, women should join together and form a “sisterhood of support and advocacy” (Haaken 93). An idiom for this type of book is the *Underground Railroad*. Rather than each slave fight for their own freedom, they collectively put strategies together to fight for what is right. *Incidents in the Life of a*

Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs, originally published in 1861, is another good example of this particular genre.

Another good book that illustrates women joining together to form a sisterhood is the 2007 novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. This story takes place in Afghanistan where two protagonist wives of the antagonist Rasheed band together to escape his abuse. They are caught almost immediately and brought back into the home of Rasheed by a cab driver. Rasheed in turn beats them without mercy and leaves Mariam in a locked tool shed. Laila is locked with her child Aziza in a bedroom with no air, food or water for days on end in the heat. Rasheed tells Laila after her near death ordeal that if she tries to run away again, he would kill Mariam, then Aziza and force her watch their deaths before he kills her. Living with daily abuse, the two women stick together until one night a terrible fight brings Mariam to hit Rasheed over the head with a shovel. Rasheed is finally dead. Mariam turns herself in to the authorities so that Laila and her children can escape their miserable lives.

My story “Why Didn’t You Just Leave?” has Sofia taking us through living a life with a man who suffers from mental illness. She is forced to take Heroin, commit a sex act with an animal while he films it and gets beat up every day that she is forced to spend with her partner. She is too weak to escape the relationship on her own, so she enlists the help of her supervisor to remain at a shelter as long as she can.

All stories of abuse are important, regardless of the style or the way they are told. It was found that “forty two percent of six thousand college students reported some kind of sexual assault; and college men who chose to purposely do so to intimidate, frighten or

force the other person to do something” (Jones 235). What can we do to create change? One must start with educational strategies for youth and key agencies in order to be a catalyst for change.

Educational programs in schools of teens have been documented. As affirmed by Ola Barnett and Alyce LaViolette, “They have helped develop new attitudes, behavior and intention” (Barnett and LaViolette 114). Also, schools need to recognize the signs and behaviors of children coming from violent homes and refer those children accordingly. The church is a prospective area that should be an excellent refuge for victims and their families. Carolyn Thompson “claims that clergy should help victims determine the best theological choices yet realistically offer them a number of possible options”. She goes as far as to advise victims “to shop around and get second or third opinions from religious helpers in the community” (Thompson 38). Helping a woman who is a victim of domestic violence achieve economic independence is crucial when it comes to job skills and self-confidence. “Connections must be made between battering and feminization of poverty as outcomes of domination that extend beyond the personal realm” (Shepard and Pence 60).

Police training is one of the most crucial components in educational training. The first and only time I ever called the police during my abuse, the police responded in a timely manner. I couldn’t even tell the emergency operator what the problem was, so I just rambled on about getting someone to calm my husband down. When they finally took my handcuffed husband away, a female officer handed me a pamphlet about domestic violence. I was confused and couldn’t understand why I needed a pamphlet about violence. Even after all I had been through, I still couldn’t accept that I was a victim. If

the officer would have taken a minute or two with me to affirm that I needed the form more than many other women, she could have spared me a lot of emotional and physical pain.

Also, many police departments have DVRT programs (Domestic Violence Response Teams) that respond as volunteers, to educate victims, assist them with basic needs, to help them get an order of protection against the abuser and show them resources that are available in their county.

The courts have to be aware of gender bias and to dedicate courtrooms to a domestic violence courtroom for family services only. Courts handling domestic violence cases should have more high technological instruments to protect victims. Courts need to improve in cases involved with custody issues. It is difficult to understand how people who batter can gain custody and unsupervised visitation of minor children. Furthermore, we need better legislation, and for protection orders that might expire quickly, and cases that involve children. Helping our children helps break the cycle of domestic violence.

Support from the medical field has been improving but still can reach many victims first after the abuser. I found it interesting that when I went for a recent heel operation I was asked to fill out a survey asking if my injury occurred at the hands of my husband or partner. I was also asked by a nurse if the person I was living with was the abuser of domestic violence at any point in our relationship.

There are so many other areas that need education: Shelters, counselors, Abuser counseling, and researchers all need education to help assist couples who are experiencing the pain and trauma from domestic violence.

There is so much that still needs to be done. First, we need to remember that this is a problem steeped in historical ideologies. We also need to accept that all victims are individuals, each with different problems that need different solutions. Lastly, we must define victim empowerment and work towards education in a multitude of places. Despite all the work that has been discussed, we still continue to see a plethora of intimate partner violence. However, we must continue to work together to put an end to domestic violence.

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The following stories are made up of fictional names to protect the identity of those involved. Any names or events that are the same are purely coincidental.

Chrystal Clear

The November rain cascaded down the living room window ticking like tiny tiles from a mosaic. Alex stretched out on the sofa with a thick mug full of her favorite tasty beverage, Starbucks coffee. She picked up the lap top and decided that she wanted to try her luck with an on-line dating website. She typed her user name and password, and checked the column that she was a girl seeking another girl.

Alex considered herself butch seeking a feminine partner. She remembered when she came out to her parents. Still in high school, Alex had mixed reactions from her parents. They had suspected for a while, but it was still a shock of sorts to hear it, directly from her. They were supportive as they grappled with new territory and tried to embrace her new life style.

Alex was outgoing and flirty. She loved people and socializing was what she enjoyed most. Alex was the type of person who baked goodies for her coworkers and always went out for drinks with her friends on a Friday night. She loved being spontaneous and would jump at the opportunity to try anything new that came along. Alex loved life.

As Alex was browsing through profiles, she saw a girl had messaged her by the name of Denise. Alex was intrigued and they set up a date to meet at the Golden Dawn Diner in Hamilton. Denise was from Pennsylvania and lived about an hour away from the Jersey shore where Alex lived with her parents. Hamilton was half way for both of them.

Three months later, Denise invited Alex to move in with her. Alex knew that things were happening quickly, but there were no warning signs. Denise had her own apartment, her own car, and a job. That spoke volumes about her values. Alex's parents

helped her move into Denise's one bedroom apartment. Denise seemed distant, not at all like Alex's style and her parents hoped she was making the right move.

After the sixth month, the honeymoon stage was drawing to a close. One by one the warning signs started popping up like monsters at a fun house. First, Alex tried to call a friend named Christina. When Denise heard Alex making plans with Christina, Denise went wild.

"Christina is a whore!" said Denise. "Promise me you won't go out with her!"

"How can you say such a thing? You've never even met Christina," said Alex.

"You don't love me," wailed Denise.

"What are you talking about? I'm just going to a ball game!" said Alex.

Reluctantly, Alex ending up cancelling her plans with Christina. She decided it wasn't worth it to cause Denise distress by going out with a friend. She knew that she would reschedule with Christina when Denise felt more secure with their relationship.

It seemed that Denise had a problem letting Alex go anywhere without her. Denise had to go with Alex where ever she went. When Denise went with Alex for a social occasion, Denise never said a word to Alex's friends. Alex's friends thought Denise was anti-social and arrogant.

Finally, Alex had a talk with Denise about her behavior.

"I want to suggest that you seek out a psychiatrist," said Alex.

“You are being ridiculous! I don’t need to see a psychiatrist!” said Denise.

“You have a problem leaving me on my own. It’s really getting bad,” said Alex.

“You go to work every day. You’re alone there! I have no problem with that,” said Denise.

“I’m not talking about work. I’m talking about going out by myself or with friends. You always want to come along and I don’t always want you there,” said Alex.

“Girlfriend’s are supposed to want their significant other’s to go out with them. I guess I’m not good enough for your friends,” said Denise.

“It’s not that. Listen, I’m serious about seeing a psychiatrist. I’m at wits end. If you don’t see someone, then I think I need to move out,” said Alex.

“I can’t go to a psychiatrist alone. I need you there!” said Denise.

To keep the peace, Alex went with Denise to her first psychiatric evaluation. Denise was diagnosed with separation anxiety and anger issues. The doctor gave her anti-anxiety meds and hoped it would address both issues.

Alex kept waiting for the meds to work. They never did. It would take three years for the correct medicine to be prescribed. There was a tremendous amount of tension between the two women and they were fighting constantly. Each fight usually centered on Alex wanting to go somewhere with a friend, and Denise making life miserable for both of them.

In early December, Alex's brother and his wife had a baby boy. Alex was so thrilled that she and Denise rushed to the hospital to see the newborn. They couldn't believe how beautiful he was and they were so proud to be the first visitors. Soon it was time for Denise to leave for work. Alex wanted to stay and continue her visit. Denise wanted Alex to leave the hospital and drive her to work. As they walked towards the parking lot the fighting began.

"You know I want to stay here. I want to visit with my family!" said Alex.

"You know that I'm not a good driver at night. I need you, and I want you to be with me when I go to work," said Denise.

"I am not driving you. I am staying here with my family," said Alex.

"Please, Alex! I am desperate for you to drive me to work," said Denise.

"Drive yourself!" shouted Alex.

It came out of nowhere. Suddenly Denise punched Alex in the face. Alex tasted blood in her mouth and felt the warm liquid dribble out of her nose. Instinctively, Alex put her hand up to her face and touched it gingerly. As she pulled her hand away, it was covered in burgundy blood. What the hell had just happened? Alex couldn't believe that Denise had just punched her in the nose.

"See what you just made me do to you?" said Denise.

"I made you do this?" asked Alex.

“If you had agreed to drive me in the first place, none of this would have happened,” said Denise.

Alex drove Denise to work that night. Alex was shaken to the very core. When she returned to the hospital, everyone could tell that something was wrong. Alex’s stepfather, Tom, confronted Alex about her relationship with Denise. Alex broke down and let the truth be told. She told Tom about the punch to the nose. Her nose looked like it might be broken. Tom insisted on getting x-rays while they were there at the hospital. Alex refused. She could just imagine the repercussions from Denise about going for medical help. At that moment, Tom decided to speak his mind.

“You need to dump this girl. She hit you so hard, that we think your nose might be broken,” said Tom.

“I love her, but..., but...” she left off.

“How can you love someone who hurts you like this?” said Tom.

“She needs me; she is sick and needs to be helped. I can’t just walk out on her,” said Alex.

“It’s not worth it. She’s just not worth it,” said Tom.

Alex decided to continue her relationship with Denise. There were ups and downs in their relationship over the next few months, but Alex kept marching through them. All of Alex’s friends advised her to kick Denise’s ass to the curb as soon as possible. After every altercation between Denise and Alex, there was a honeymoon phase. Most of the

time, things were normal, like most couples. There were dates, social events and day to day tasks that needed to be attended to in order to lead a full life. However, whenever there were bad times, it was unbearable.

Denise decided that they needed a vacation. She knew that her family was vacationing in Wildwood, NJ. Katie and Denise made plans to go to Wildwood for the week. However, it was the week before Alex's spinal fusion operation. Alex's spine was a mess and she had been waiting for a surgery date for months. The doctor recommended surgery as soon as possible. Finally the time was here and Denise wanted to take a trip that would involve tons of walking and no rest and relaxation. She let her mother pay for their reservations with the idea that they would be paying it back. Alex thought it would be better if Denise went by herself to Wildwood. Alex just wasn't up to it.

"I swear to God, Alex. If you don't go on this trip, I'll make sure you never go on another vacation ever again," said Denise.

"I'll go, but we have to rent a wheelchair. I can't do all the walking that's required," said Alex.

After a three hour drive, Alex was writhing in pain. She had difficulty sitting for long periods of time. After the drive, everyone wanted to go to the beach. Alex knew that she couldn't even walk the long distance from the parking lot to the hotel. The only way to rent a wheelchair was to go to a surgical supply store. Denise wanted Alex to try to walk to the hotel and then the beach. Alex agreed to try.

About a quarter of the way to the hotel, Alex was in agony. She stopped and sat down in an outside café serving breakfast. Each step was grinding the vertebrae in her spine together. She simply couldn't walk another step. Alex told Denise to stop walking. Alex began to cry.

"I told you this was a bad idea!" said Alex.

"You need to push yourself more. Besides, as soon as we get done walking to the beach, we'll go and rent a wheelchair. I promise. Now hurry up and walk!" said Denise.

"I can't walk anymore!" screamed Alex.

"You are alienating me from my family," screamed Denise.

Soon Denise's mother came back to see what the matter was with the girls. When she found out, she was incredulous over the fact that Alex needed spinal surgery next week.

"You shouldn't have come on this vacation. It's obvious this is too much for you. What were you thinking?" said Denise's mother.

"You might want to ask your daughter that question. She was the one that insisted I come on this trip," said Alex.

Denise shot Alex a look of pure evil. For the first time, Alex was frightened. When her mother left to catch up with the rest of the family, Denise turned and began to speak through her teeth.

"Don't you ever say anything negative about me in front of my family. Do I make myself clear?" said Denise.

“Crystal,” replied Alex.

The rest of the trip was a nightmare. The two women were barely communicating with one another and each activity they did with the family was another physical obstacle to overcome. By the end of the trip, Alex was in the emergency room getting intravenous painkillers and muscle relaxers. They left Wildwood three days early and Alex spent the remainder of their vacation in bed.

Two months later and it was Alex’s birthday. She decided that she did not want to spend the day with Denise. She chose to get tickets to a Yankees baseball game and invited her best friend Christina to celebrate the day. When Denise found out, she began to rage yet again.

“You know I love baseball! How could you invite Christina to a game, and ignore your own girlfriend?” asked Denise.

“It’s my birthday and I should be able to invite anyone I please,” said Alex.

“I think you’re cheating on me. Are you having an affair with Christina?” asked Denise.

“That’s it. I’m leaving,” said Alex.

Alex began to pack a few things. She couldn’t stand it when Denise began to rage. Her behavior was so erratic and Alex couldn’t stand to be with her for one minute more. Seeing Alex pack a bag only caused Denise to panic. Suddenly, Denise pulled out a butcher knife from the knife block on the counter.

“Now do you understand how serious I am?” asked Denise.

“Put that knife down! What do you think you’re doing?” asked Alex.

“I am going to kill myself,” said Denise.

“Put that knife down,” said Alex.

They argued for what seemed an eternity. They danced around each other in a complicated dance of danger. No matter what Alex said, she couldn’t get the knife from Denise. Finally, exhausted, Denise let go of the knife. She dropped it to the floor as if it were heavier than her heart. Denise cried as Alex held her and assured her all would be okay.

The next day, Alex called Denise’s psychiatrist and told her what had happened the day before. She suggested checking Denise into a psychiatric hospital to be monitored. She also suggested calling for a police car in case violent behavior might come into play as she learned that she was going to be admitted. Unfortunately, Denise overheard their conversation and went wild. Alex tried to calm her down but Denise responded by throwing her fist straight at Alex’s face. Luckily Alex saw it coming and ducked quickly. The punch went through the wall and left a giant gaping hole.

With that, Alex ran for the only safe place within the home. She locked herself in the bathroom. Denise was pounding and pounding on the door, shrieking at the top of lungs for Alex to open the door. Alex was huddled in the shower stall screaming for help.

Thankfully the neighbors heard Alex's pleas for help. Someone called 9-1-1 and the police were dispatched to the scene. Each of the officers that responded spoke to both Alex and Denise separately. When Denise admitted that she threatened Alex with a knife, they put her in handcuffs and took her to the psychiatric hospital for admitting. When the handcuffs were closed around her wrists, Denise was eerily calm. She showed no emotion, no remorse or any sense of where she was going.

At the hospital, Denise let it all out. She cried for over an hour. The psychiatrist finally decided to change her medicines and diagnosed her as bipolar with anxiety/separation disorder. The realization of the hospitalization had finally hit and Denise had to be sedated in order to calm down.

Alex went home exhausted and traumatized. She knew one thing. That tomorrow, she would move out and leave Denise for good. She knew there would be people that would say that Alex left Denise at a terrible time; however there would never be a 'good time' to leave. Now was as good a time as any.

She Put It In Drive

Death began to court her. She clawed her way to breathe precious oxygen after he released the belt from around her neck. He ran after her again and she knew that if he caught her, this time he would never give up. He wouldn't give her another chance. She remembered running for the car and locking the doors. He tried desperately to unlock the driver's side without luck. Cherie put the car in reverse and Jeffrey jumped on the hood of the car. All she remembered after that was thinking how to get him off the hood of the car. Somehow Cherie had to escape. She had to escape death's grip.

*

Cherie and Jeffrey were in love. That -much she knew. She was completely enamored with Jeffrey and could have spent the rest of her life with him. He was strong, strapping and stout with a handsome smile. When he put his muscular arms around her, she felt secure, safe and sound. She never worried about anything when she was with him. He was her protector at twenty years old. She didn't care that he had a criminal record. People make mistakes. Selling guns, robbery and resisting arrest were serious charges, but if he paid the consequences for his crimes, all that was behind him now.

She hadn't felt loved like that in such a long time. Cherie had been in and out of foster care for most of her life. It was heaven to be in a home that belonged to her. She lived in dozens of foster homes since the age of six. She never knew her father, and her mother was an abusive alcoholic. Her mother's routine was binge drinking. Cherie was seen as an inconvenience unless she was fetching the next vodka bottle. Finally, someone

called the Department of Children and Family Services. That was the moment Cherie was placed on the merry-go-round of foster care.

Cherie had seen it all. One particular foster home she was placed in at the age of seven, had a nice woman everyone called Maw Maw. She was a roly-poly kind of woman with big apples for cheeks and a smile that lasted as long as the day was long. At first glance, her husband Joe seemed to be nice too. He was a chain smoker and he was always lighting up the next cigarette with the last one he smoked. He rolled his own cigarettes with a special machine and he would let the kids take turns rolling the crank that turned out the new cigarettes. Upon closer inspection, he drank a lot and usually passed out after drinking. He and Maw Maw would get into terrible fights. Maw Maw would call him a womanizer. Cherie had no idea at the time what that meant, but it made him angry and he would beat Maw Maw when she talked back to him.

One day, Maw Maw went grocery shopping. All of the kids loved it when she shopped because they knew that she would buy them a treat that day. Joe asked Cherie if she would like to take a walk with him down by the woods. She was thrilled to receive special attention and couldn't wait to go exploring. There was an old shed down there, a shack really, covered in twisted vines that seemed to envelope the whole thing. It was rumored to be haunted and Cherie wanted to check it out and report back to the other kids that she had been taken there. .

As soon as they were out of sight from the house and into the shed, he began to pull her pants off. She didn't understand what he was doing, she felt confused and different inside. She began to cry. What Joe didn't expect was that Maw Maw would come home

early. When she called for help to bring the groceries in, she asked the other kids where we were.

When Maw Maw opened the shed door she had a rifle in her hand. She plugged him full of lead. He was bleeding all over the place. She gently picked Cherie up and led them back to the house. As she was washing Cherie up, she remembered the odd frozen look on Joe's face and wondered if he would go to heaven or hell. The next day, the Department of Child and Family Services came in a black car and took all the children away from Maw Maw. That was one of the better foster homes that she was placed in.

The next home she was placed in was no better than the last. It was run by a woman who had six foster kids. Cherie made seven and of course, the extra money from the state. She took the money and used it for drugs. She made Cherie and the others run the drugs throughout the city. They were given strict instructions about how to act invisible when carrying a score. Cherie was always hungry and tired from running drugs all day. When she returned home, there were dozens of household jobs to take care of. She melted into bed and instantly fell asleep. It all came to a halt the day the police busted down the door and arrested the woman and took us to the station downtown. The Department of Children and Family Services were called and it wasn't long before Cherie was riding somewhere else in the black car again.

Thirteen miserable years later, Cherie and Jeffrey lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut. She met him through mutual friends and was instantly attracted to him. It wasn't very long before they moved in together, a couple of blocks away from where he grew up. Bridgeport was a city that had seen its share of poverty. They lived in a dilapidated

apartment, it was all that they could afford. It had a bedroom/living room/kitchen all in one room. The walls seemed to overwhelm her at times. She felt like they were often caving in on her. She wanted space. The city was extremely populated and sometimes Cherie found herself dreaming of a small house in the suburbs, or even an apartment overlooking the Long Island Sound.

She became pregnant. Things gradually changed. There was anger, fighting and even physical violence. He would throw her around like a ragdoll. She'd plead for her life, and then she'd plead for the life of their unborn child. Soon Cherie felt trapped, just like so often when she was placed in another terrible foster home. Jeffrey was also controlling. He controlled her every move, down to the minutest details. She gradually had no life of her own.

On one occasion, Cherie wanted to go back to the neighborhood and visit a friend from her last foster home. Jeffrey would not allow her to visit anyone she wanted to visit. They fought over it constantly.

"Don't you think you're going to visit anyone, go anywhere without my permission? I rule this house and make the rules around here," said Jeffrey as he took another swig from the clear bottle of cheap vodka.

"I have the right to go anywhere I want," said Cherie.

"As my bitch, you have no rights around here, 'ya hear?"

It wasn't long before Jeffrey got tired of Cherie and began to cheat. It was difficult for Cherie at first, but then it became a tiny seed of relief. He wasn't home as much, and

it took some of the pressure off of Cherie. Jeffrey came in and out of their apartment to get his clothes and to check up on his “possessions”. Cherie tried to treat him like an unwanted guest in their home. Despite this, Cherie still felt her situation was hopeless. Soon she sunk into a deep depression. As it was time for their baby to arrive, Jeffrey moved out of their apartment and into the house of another woman. Cherie birthed their son alone, and began the dark life of a single mother. Cherie saw this as a possibility to the end of her suffering. But instead of leaving and focusing on his new relationship, something snapped. Jeffrey began a crusade of terror against Cherie.

His plan was well thought out and calculated to cause the most damage as possible. First, he took her phone and shut off the service that was in his name. Next, he took her credit cards and closed out the accounts so that she couldn't have access to a line of credit. Since he was the only one working, he took all the money in their bank account and closed that out as well. Cherie had no one to watch the baby, no money for childcare and no way out of the mess she was in.

Jeffrey stalked her constantly. She saw him on the street below the second story house she was renting. He'd hang around by her garage, trying to get a look at what was going on inside the house. She saw him in her rear view mirror of her car, tossing his head back, laughing. She saw him everywhere.

One night Jeffrey pounded on the door. She tried to tell him to go away but he said it was important that they speak to one another. When Cherie opened the door slightly, he proceeded to force his way past her and he began to punch her and tried to strangle her. When the tenants below heard her screams, they called the police.

The second time he came to visit, he tried to beat her up but Cherie was able to grab her home phone and call the police. She took Jeffery to court for domestic violence. He was able to plea down to a charge of breach of the peace. Cherie petitioned the court to have Jeffery take mandatory anger management classes. That petition was denied.

Days after his court appearance, Jeffrey forced his way into Cherie's apartment again and took their nineteen month old baby. She chased him in her car, and then she remembered that the baby was in Jeff's front passenger seat without an infant car seat. She was desperate to get their child to safety. She had no idea what Jeffrey was planning to do. He was blowing stop signs and running through red lights. She prayed for a police officer to appear. After a tense car chase, she was able to get him to stop his car only after she chased him down the wrong side of the road.

The following weekend on a Sunday night, he texted her more than thirty five times. First, there were the emotional apologies for his behavior. Then the threats began. He threatened to take the baby away and to kill Cherie this time. His next demands were for money and sex. He threatened vulgar and horrible acts of deviant sexual behavior that he would perform on her when he got a hold of her. Even though she tried to ignore the texts, she was beyond frightened.

"When I get a hold of you, I'm gonna' kill you bitch. But first, I'm going to fuck you, you whore. You think you are too good for me, well, we will see about that," he sneered. "I got women all over me, and I'm fucking every single one. They lovin' it. You don't know how lucky you are."

At 7:30 a.m. the next morning he was at it again. He threatened her and texted her dozens and dozens of times during the day and well into the evening. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, she left the baby with a sitter and went out for a drive to get away from the situation. She was afraid he'd break into the house and hurt her. At midnight Jeffrey texted her and said, "I'm behind you – lol." She looked in her rear view mirror and discovered that he was right behind her car. Her screams of fear and frustration, in the privacy of her car, were unheard by other drivers on the road.

The following morning he began his routine of texting at 6:36 a.m. Twelve texts later, Cherie snapped. She finally got the courage to stand up for her rights and say, "Leave me alone!" Jeffrey replied, "Now you'll see how crazy shit will get today." He was right. Two hours later their story took a horrific turn of events.

Jeffrey climbed through her window.

"What the hell?" screamed Cherie.

"You fuckin' bitch. You're gonna' get what you deserve," he said.

"It's over, Jeffrey! Just move on!"

"Oh, it ain't over, it's never over," he sneered.

With that, Jeffrey pulled off his leather belt. They danced around the room and he easily caught her and pulled her arm behind her back. She winced in pain. Jeffrey laughed in satisfaction. First, he pulled a knife. He placed it near her throat. His leather belt slid easily around her neck. He pulled it tight as her gargled screams went silently unheard. She pulled at the tightened belt to no avail. She tried to breathe but no air

would enter her silenced mouth. He began to laugh again. As he laughed, he released the belt slightly. It was just enough to allow a desperate break for air. Cherie could finally take a breath. Her lungs sounded like an old car engine as they clawed their way back to towards life. She kicked him to distract him more than anything else. He seemed so amused that he let go of her for a second. She ran towards the car as fast as her feet could take her. She felt the burning in her lungs and continued to pray for the air that so desperately eluded her.

She felt a sense of relief as she slid into the car onto the cool leather seats. Jeffrey was sliding into the passenger door just as she put the key into the ignition. The engine started with a slow grind of pain. Jeffrey had managed to get the ebony colored belt around Cherie's bruised neck and pull it so that she could no longer breathe. She pulled at the door handle and promptly fell out of the car. She swallowed the asphalt of the driveway from her gravely mouth of dirt she had tasted once as a kid on a dare.

As she lay on the ground, she felt a searing stab of pain in her right leg. Jeffrey had slid into the driver's seat and tried to back up over her. She began to scramble on the driveway but her efforts were seconds too late. Jeffrey ran over her right leg, just below the knee cap. She shrieked in pain. He drove the car forward, got out of the vehicle, and checked his handiwork. Jeffrey seemed pleased with himself. Putting the car in park, he got out of the vehicle and came out of the car to continue his mission.

Cherie knew that it was a life or death struggle at this point. She quickly called upon all the strength and adrenaline she could muster and crawled into the driver's seat of the car. Jeffrey realized she was backing the car out of the driveway, so he threw himself on

the hood of the car. Cherie knew she couldn't drive the car with Jeffrey on the hood so she proceeded to pull it forward into the driveway once more.

What really happened that horrible morning? Most accounts claim that Cherie drove forward, Jeffrey slid off the hood and she accidentally crushed him between the car and the cement garage. The force was so great that she moved the stone structure ten inches. The District Attorney claims that she purposely ran the car into the garage crushing Jeffrey Brown to his death. The police claim that her broken leg occurred when she hit the garage full force. There was no evidence that she hit the brakes at all.

When police arrived, Jeffrey's left hand, on his crushed corpse still gripped his two inch leather belt. There were no brake marks. She never tried to stop what she was doing. On the ground below his right hand were Cherie's knock off purse, keys and her phone. Cherie was laying on the ground in a tattered, yellowed nightgown; her leg was badly mangled and broken. She was crying for her baby, who was still inside the house.

Cherie had bruises around her neck as well as lacerations and open wounds on her back from being whipped by the belt. The items found at the scene as well as her injuries corroborate the retelling of her story. There was a history of domestic violence calls to the house by the police which was confirmed. The emergency medical technician brought her to the hospital for her broken leg and other minor injuries that she had sustained.

Three weeks later, she had just turned 21 and had been charged with first degree murder. When her case went through the court systems, the court found her not guilty of the crime, eleven for the defendant, one against. The judge declared a mistrial. Currently

as she awaited the second trial in prison, she wondered about her life. Why all this pain and suffering? Why some people are born into rainbows, while she has had nothing but a mudslide. Would her life ever know happiness? The bigger picture she worried about was her son. If it was too late for Cherie, would he ever know happiness?

China Pieces

No matter what I did, I couldn't escape the shower of dinner plates being thrown me. I was a sitting duck and each time she threw a plate, I was the proud recipient of someone's dinner on top of me. Sometimes the dishes would just hit me in the chest or in my lap, but most of them hit the wall, just above my head to crash and fall on my head and below my face. Even though I covered my face with both hands, they were no protection from her. My mother's rapid fire stunned me. I begged and begged for her to stop but she threw every plate on the table and aimed directly for my face.

Almost all of the plates were broken skeletons, telling tales of their former lives. How many times had we eaten off those dishes, all the cheap meals on cheap plates to feed our hungry bellies? There was hash, Spam, hot dogs, and even sauerkraut sandwiches. We ate crappy foods to match our crappy lives. I tried to guess whose plate would be thrown next. Was it Darren's plate? He ate hardly anything each night and never any vegetables. My father's plate was always empty. He was ravenous after a long day of physical labor. Now that my mother had broken every dish we owned, what would we eat off tomorrow?

After dinner I was asked to clear the table. I didn't do it fast enough. She began to get hysterical that no one ever helped her with the household chores. Thus, how I became target practice. Although we were good kids, we were never good enough. Once she began, she never stopped until she had wreaked havoc on our family. She was always in some sort of frantic frenzy.

We lived in a middle-class home in a nice neighborhood about twenty minutes from the beach. It was the kind of house anyone would have loved. Americana. However, behind our front door it wasn't as simple as that. There were secrets that were not to be discussed with anyone outside our home and we certainly didn't talk about them in our house. We never discussed how we "felt" about anything. I never spoke the words "I love you" to anyone nor was I ever the recipient of that phrase. This was our "normal". I thought others lived the way that we did. Wasn't it the same behind every front door?

I begged for normalcy. My mother was a compulsive liar. Her stories were changing as often as the tides were moving in and out of our beach community. As children, my siblings and I would play games to see which one of mom's stories was the closest thing to the "real story". We tried to survive in an environment where life was either a game or a nightmare. The nightmares were not reserved for our evening hours. Unfortunately the games we played, as confusing as they made it seem, were far from games that children should play.

My mother was once mysteriously hospitalized for a week. She wouldn't discuss why, and we were not allowed to visit. Why she was gone for a week we would never be sure. We spent hours speculating but came up with nothing concrete. Before she left us, she handed me two envelopes. One was addressed to me, the other to a man named Paul. I suspected there was something going on between them. He started coming over the house at the beginning of my senior year. He was constantly dropping by and they always seem to communicate with each other using their eyes. My instructions for handling the envelopes were simple. If she came home from the hospital without incident, I was to tear up the envelopes without reading them. If she died for some

reason, I was to read my letter and deliver Paul's letter to him. A million questions began to swirl inside my brain. Why would she possibly die in the hospital? Why wouldn't she tell me what she was being admitted for in the first place? Why did Paul get an envelope? The envelopes burned my hands. Just as fast as she gave them to me, she took them away. She was experiencing regret and we both knew it. It would be a year before I would be able to view the contents of these elusive letters.

Before she went into the hospital, she decided to paint my bedroom. It was a large space with a cathedral ceiling. Quite an undertaking, even for a professional, but none the less she set her mind to completing the task alone. Before long she tired quickly and began to become overwhelmed with the significant job. She was up on the ladder and my father made the mistake of surveying the work my mother had accomplished. He commented on the spots that had dropped onto the hardwood floor and wanted to know why my mother did not use a drop cloth before she began painting.

My mother's eyes glazed over and I could tell in an instant that a storm was brewing inside her. She took the full gallon of paint on top of the ladder and threw paint everywhere. The walls, the windows, the floor and even my father were quickly covered from top to bottom in "Very Violet". My father was incredulous.

"How could you do this," he cried.

"How dare you criticize me when I'm busting my ass!" she replied. No one dared question her judgment, as crazy as it seemed at the time. My father had committed a mortal sin and would pick paint out of his hair for weeks to come. The room remained

violet for the remainder of my childhood. The hardwood floors were promptly carpeted and the window panes matched the hue of the room.

I began to date in my junior year of high school. I dated a senior with a beautiful sports car. While he was visiting one day, my mother was in one of her moods. She was on the phone and was quite agitated. We retreated to the deck in the back of the house so that we could talk. It wasn't long after when we heard a tremendous boom come from the front yard. We raced through the house as the second boom was heard.

When we reached the front door I saw my mother in our station wagon trying to back our car out of the driveway. The only problem was that my boyfriend's car was behind her car. She was ramming into the sports car trying to get out of the driveway.

"What the hell are you doing?" I screamed into the window of the car. "You're ruining his car!"

My boyfriend began to go wild. He couldn't dig for his keys fast enough. My mother would pull up in the driveway as far as she could go and then ram his sports car behind her. The hood of his car was crunched like an empty can of Coke. She kept ramming him and the second he jumped in the car she backed into his car one final time. I could see his whole body shake with the impact and I pounded on her window, screaming at her, begging her to stop.

"Are you crazy?!" I shouted through the glass. With that, she looked up and I saw a queer look on her face. She put the car in reverse and sped off down the road. My boyfriend got out of his car and surveyed the damage.

“What the hell?!” he screamed. I had no answer. How could I explain my mother in a sentence or two? There were no words.

The night she threw my father out of our house was permanently tattooed in my brain. I could hear them arguing downstairs in the kitchen, which was not unusual by any stretch. I don’t know what made me go downstairs that night, but what greeted me when I turned the corner was like something out of an Alfred Hitchcock thriller. My mother had a knife in her hand. Not just any old knife, but the large, imposing knife that was used to carve the Thanksgiving turkey. It was massive, a knife that had an etched black handle.

My mother threatened to kill my father with the knife. I watched in horror as the scene unfolded. My father kept trying to calm her down and the more he spoke, the more emotional she became. They kept dancing around one another in the kitchen. The only thing that separated them was the knife.

“Give me the knife,” he said.

“Get away from me before I kill you,” she said.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Put the knife down.”

“Get out of this house. Don’t make me do something we’ll both regret.”

“Calm down. There’s no need...”

“Need!? You want to talk about needs! For twenty years I’ve had needs.”

Back and forth they argued, circling round and round until the crucial moment when my father made an almost fatal mistake. He grabbed for the knife to try to pry it from her hands. She instinctively pulled back and the knife slid through his flesh, slicing a gash the entire length of his humongous, calloused hands.

Blood was everywhere. I had never seen so much blood in all my life. My father was screaming and I couldn't imagine the pain he was going through. My mother, knowing full well what she had just done, backed away pretending not to care.

"I told you to leave me alone. You wouldn't listen, would you?" she sneered.

"Get the keys to the car and drive me to the hospital," he said.

"Drive yourself to the hospital. And stop dripping blood all over my clean kitchen floor."

I couldn't believe what I was seeing or hearing. My father was begging my mother to drive him to the hospital and no matter what he said; she insisted that he would have to drive himself to get medical care. Finally, realizing that she was not about to help him, I ran to the bathroom and got the biggest towel I could find. I helped my dad wrap his hand to stop the bleeding. Soon the towel was soaked with blood. My father retreated to the family car, the largest station wagon money could buy. It was a deep forest green and seated nine. It was as ugly as sin, and he slid across the leather seats gingerly and propped his bloody appendage on the steering wheel.

When he returned home several hours later, he had hundreds of stitches in his hand.

"What did you tell them?" she asked.

“I told them it was an accident.”

“It was no accident, and if you know what’s good for you, you’ll get out. Get out of this house this instant.”

“I will not leave my home, don’t be ridiculous.”

“If you won’t leave, then I will!” she said.

Then the moment came that we had all been dreading. My mother called her five children to the kitchen and asked, “Who do you want to live with, Mommy or Daddy?” The three smallest began to cry in utter confusion.

“Dad...” I said.

“Go with your mother.” Those four simple words would alter my life forever in ways I could never have imagined. I knew my mother was crazy. I didn’t want to go with her and she seemed not to care whether I went with her or my father. We paraded out into the night, nestled against one another in the big green station wagon with a bloody steering wheel. She stopped at the Howard Johnson’s hotel, the one in the middle of town with the gigantic orange sign. She casually asked for a cheap room for one adult and five kids. The clerk looked at her up and down suspiciously and I wanted to die of embarrassment. It was then that I knew I wanted no part of the evening’s continuing madness. I used the hotel phone to call a friend. I left the hotel in her car, leaving behind my four siblings sleeping on pull out beds and couches. The last image I had was my mother trying to sleep on the queen sized bed. She was turned on her side with anger written all over her face, her arms across her chest.

The next day we returned to the house and she asked my father if he wanted his children to sleep in a hotel again. With the look of a beaten man, he packed a few of his personal items in a paper bag. Before he left, he turned to look at his family. “Is it another man?”

“No. It is not another man!” Liar, liar I thought. An empty look covered her face as she watched him leave. It would be months before we could see him or his paycheck again. He almost became a recluse, hiding from his family and friends in a boarding home a few towns over.

Was my mother having an affair? The thought had crossed my mind dozens of times, but I knew that was a question I could never ask directly. Soon it was obvious though, with Paul’s daily visits, phone calls and increased involvement in family obligations. Unfortunately, Paul was a mean, ugly little man with a quick temper. He was a chain smoker, drank to excess and was severely cross-eyed.

One day after school, my girlfriend Bonnie and I were taking a dip in the pool. Refreshed by the cool water, we sat on the deck letting the sun dry us and our damp towels. Bonnie left the deck to get a cold drink. When she came back she was suddenly quiet and upset. When I pressed her, she told me that Paul grabbed her breast when no one was looking. Telling a “trusted adult” about the molestation was not an option. She and I thought that no one would believe us, and it would be his word against hers. The incident occurred at a time when children were to be “seen and not heard”. We had been lectured about this golden rule dozens of times. It was a time when no one would take

the word of a teenager over the voice of an adult. This incident disturbed me deeply.

Was I next?

Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, it did. I was walking home from school one day. The afternoon sun was taunting me, telling me the day was wasting away. It was much too hot for October, and I longed for the cool air that fall usually brings. Or coastal town shut down after Labor Day and yet it was a shame that a town with a glorious ocean couldn't be open year-round. I loved the beach and the boardwalk. I used them as an escape from the hell in our house.

I kicked the leaves that had gathered on the ground and I swung my flute in its tiny case from side to side. I heard its squeaky hinges sing against the humid breeze and I looked forward to being in my room, blasting the stereo and singing to the latest John Denver album. When I turned the door knob to my room, I discovered that it was locked. The only way to lock the door was from inside. No one locked a door in our house. I instantly realized something was wrong.

I banged on the door hoping the offender would open up with a good explanation.

"Go away," said my mother.

Her voice sounded nasally, like she had been crying. Why the hell was my mother in my room with the door locked? It was then that I felt that sickening feeling in my stomach when you know your whole life is about to change in an instant.

"Ma, it's me. Let me in!"

"Go away!"

Suddenly I heard a crash of glass and the sounds of my mother screaming. I panicked and unsuccessfully tried to open the door by pushing the door with all of my strength. The door was heavy and there was no chance that a skinny kid could break it down. I did the only thing left for a sixteen year old to do. I got on the phone and called her best friend, Carol. If anyone could get my mother to open the door it was Carol.

It wasn't long before she reached the house. I begged her to help me break down the door. Between the two of us it wouldn't budge an inch.

"Flo, let me in."

"Go away."

"I'm not leaving until you open the door!"

Silence permeated the hot, thick air and my intuition told me that perhaps even Carol couldn't help. I asked Carol if we should call the police. Thankfully, I had never had to call the police before. What would I say? *"Good afternoon. Could you kindly help me get my lunatic mother out of my bedroom? She has locked herself in and won't come out."* Did that qualify for a police emergency? Carol went to the kitchen to make a phone call. It wasn't to the police. It was to Paul. When Carol went back to the bedroom door, I did the unthinkable. I called the police.

The police were the first responders. They had no problem breaking the door down. It was then they found her lying in a heap on my twin-sized bed.

The police asked me to step back. I tried to peer over the adults in the room but I couldn't see anything.

“What happened?” I asked. Then I began to raise my voice over the cacophony in the room. Paul finally arrived.

“Your mom is going to take a little ride,” said Paul.

I was finally able to peer inside my bedroom. The gigantic bay window was shattered in a million pieces. There was a gaping hole in the wall and a huge bottle of Jean Nate cologne broken against the wall. The room smelled like a French whorehouse. Mom’s “little ride” was to the psychiatric ward of Riverview hospital. She had tried to kill herself with the shattered glass from the window, and she’d chosen my bedroom, the only room with a lock on the door for this special occasion. I looked out the broken window and saw some of my possessions amongst the leaves of the iris plants below. Why would she do something like this? Why did she choose my bedroom of all places?

It took a lot of courage, but I decided to try and visit her in the psychiatric hospital that night. There were locked doors and large glass windows everywhere. A series of buzzers and intercoms led me to the patients. When I was finally admitted into the hospital to visit, I walked tentatively to my mother’s room. She was crying hysterically, facing the wall and the nurses were bent over her thin frame. Paul was standing over her trying to get her to turn over to look at him. She turned over and looked right at me with a blank stare. She began to scream.

“Get out! Get the hell out of here. You are the reason I am here in the first place!”

With that, the nurses ushered me into the hallway. I began to sob. Why was she blaming me for her mental breakdown? What could I have done that could have caused her to be hospitalized? The nurses tried to comfort me, telling me that she was not being

hospitalized because of me. Apparently she was disoriented and confused. I was not comforted by this information. At that moment my aunt and uncle arrived. The nurse told us that my mother was not ready to receive visitors. She whisked us out of the glass doors, back up the rabbit hole through the intricate systems of buzzers, locks and intercoms.

Why was Paul allowed to stay when we were asked to leave? This was the cement to my theory that my mother was having an affair with Paul. My uncle was incensed with the idea that my mother was having an affair. He insisted that we wait for Paul to come down from the room and “give him something to think about”. We waited in the car for him to come out of the building.

About a half an hour later, Paul emerged from the hospital. I had no idea what my uncle was going to do. We watched Paul get in his car. It was then my uncle began to follow Paul in a high speed chase.

“Please slow down,” I said.

“Oh no. He’s going to get what’s coming to him,” he said.

My uncle insisted that all he wanted to do was scare the living hell out of him and give him a night that he wouldn’t soon forget. We followed him all the way to his house. My uncle got out of the car and confronted Paul.

“Stay away from Flo, you cheating no good bastard,” he said.

“Mind your own God damned business,” said Paul.

With that exchange, my uncle lunged at Paul. They began to fight, wrapped tightly around each other. My aunt and I screamed from the car as we watched my uncle, who clearly had the advantage over Paul, beat the crap out of him. He left Paul on the sidewalk in front of his home, a bloody mess of misery.

My uncle dropped me off at home. I was a physical and emotional wreck. He soon realized there was no food in the house. Hugging me tightly he slipped a hundred dollar bill in my hand.

“Go grocery shopping tomorrow. Try to make it last. Call me if you need more.”

I realized that this was my introduction being an adult. Thinking I was holding a fortune in my teenage hand, I went to the local A&P the next day. I bought as many practical things that would feed five mouths, but then I also splurged and bought treats that we never were allowed to have. I bought potato chips and crumb cakes as well as popcorn and a bag of candy. It was shocking how quickly the hundred dollars was spent. I had a part-time job that paid fifty dollars a week. I was saving for college, but with no money coming in I had to find a way for us to eat. Who knew how long mom would be gone?

A few weeks later we took a ride in the behemoth station wagon and passed a Burger King. The smell of charbroiled burgers was intoxicating and the kids began to beg for a burger. What the hell? I had twenty dollars in my pocket, but I thought we might as well go to hell and back. We all stepped up to the counter and placed our order. The total came to just under twenty dollars. Just as I was about to pay the bill, the woman mistakenly said, “Thank you and have a nice day!” She thought I had already paid for

our meal. It was as if our guardian angel appeared at the restaurant and granted our wish. We got our entire meal free! Instinctively I walked of Burger King with our big bag of food. The kids in the car were squealing with delight. We sped out of the parking lot quickly before anyone could discover the mistake. We celebrated our glorious meal thinking it was the best gift in the world. Everyone forgot our troubles as we devoured our meal, ketchup dripping from our mouth and hands. We gratefully ate our secret treasure.

A month passed and the homecoming dance was coming up. I went into town to try and purchase a formal gown. I was worried about money, but I had been saving a long time for this special occasion. I bought a gown that was on clearance. When I looked at the price tag, it was only twenty five dollars. It was beautiful. I wished I had someone I could share the moment with, right then and there. A thought permeated my brain. My mother. If she were home, I would just drive there and show her the dress. I made a snap decision to drop in the hospital with my dress. I hadn't seen her since the first night she was admitted. Truth be told, I was frightened to visit her. I didn't want a repeat of that night.

I knew it was a risky choice. I had no idea what kind of reception I would receive, or if she would even want me to visit. It was a choice I had to make. I needed a mother now, not to be a mother to my four siblings. As I entered the hospital I walked tentatively towards my mother's room. To my surprise, she seemed happy to see me. We pretended that nothing had happened. She liked the dress and I expressed sorrow at the fact that she would not get out of the hospital to see me on the night of the dance. It was then that I made my move. I stopped pretending. I needed some answers.

“Mom, what made you decide to kill yourself? Was life so bad that you needed to end your life and then choose my room to complete your plan?”

“Oh, that was a mistake. I didn’t try to kill myself. Everyone is making such a big deal out of things. I cut myself after accidentally breaking your window,” she said.

“So the police, the ambulance, your best friend, and Paul were there because it was just a mistake? Come on Mom. Stop treating me as if I am a two year old who can’t hear the truth. Can’t you finally just tell me truth? Why have you been in a psychiatric hospital for over a month?”

“We’ll the truth is that a friend gave me a Valium and I had a bad reaction to it. I am just in here until they are sure that it gets out of my system,” she said.

Oh. The cycle begins again. Liar, liar. I couldn’t be in the room a minute longer. Our relationship would never change. I could never trust her ever again. I picked up my dress, gathered my coat and purse and said I needed to go home. I would never hear the truth of what I really needed to hear. I stepped behind the wheel of the hideous green station wagon. I came to the realization that I would never have the mother I so desperately wanted. My mother was a stranger.

I cried at the steering wheel of that horrendous car for what seemed like hours. As the sun began to set, I realized I needed to get home and make dinner for the kids. I had no desire to eat, yet I made food anyway for everyone else. It was getting a little easier each day.

After dinner I found myself gravitating towards my mother’s bedroom. As a rule, no one was allowed in there without our parent’s permission. I knew there was no one there

to stop me, so I began to snoop around. Don't ask me why I did it. I didn't find much. I looked in her drawers, her jewelry box and on the high shelf in the back of her closet. I was just about to leave when I noticed something odd in the trash can. It contained a ripped letter with her handwriting on the pieces. My mission became clear. I would piece together the letter, like an intricate puzzle. I took scotch tape and began to put the story together. I would find out what was so important that she had to shred the letter in pieces.

It took over an hour, but I finally put the letter together. It was the letter that she had written to Paul on the eve of her hospitalization that I was supposed to deliver if she were to die. I finally hit pay dirt. For the first time I finally had a nugget of truth. The letter said that she was worried about the abortion, and that she blamed him for getting her pregnant. She was tired of them hiding the affair and wanted him to love her freely, without worrying about their spouses, kids and family. She wanted them to be together forever. She told him she loved him.

I love you. Three words I had never heard in our house. Five children who desperately needed to hear those words, yet she saved those words for him. I was sick as I sunk down to the floor with the letter taped roughly together. I hated her at that moment more than any other moment I could remember.

The truth I was so desperate to have was finally in my hands. Now, I almost didn't want it. But, I think I knew the truth all along. We all knew the truth. No one had the courage to say it, but we all knew the truth.

Just Another New Year

The rain sputtered and splashed as he made his way to the New Year's Eve party. It was cold, wet and dangerous outside. Darren held his breath and white knuckled it until he was at the party. It was raining so hard that many couples were entering the hotel drenched. He hoped it would stop raining long enough for him to get home safely after the ball dropped. Darren wished 2010 proved to be a good year.

At first glance, she was quite the looker. Tall, about 6'2", with highlighted hair, immaculately dressed. Stunning. As Darren was thinking about striking up a conversation, she actually approached him.

"What does a lady have to do to get a drink here?" asked Heather.

"You have to talk to some good looking guy to order one from the bar. Would you like a drink, pretty lady?" asked Darren.

"A Bay Breeze would be fantastic," said Heather.

Darren got up and ordered two Bay Breezes and they proceeded to talk over the din of the crowd. Heather seemed kind and honest. She had a great smile and infectious laughter. Soon the clock hit midnight, the ball dropped from Times Square, and they shared a kiss to welcome the New Year.

As it turned out, she lived a hundred miles away in a very rural area. There wasn't much employment in the area. Darren invited her to live with him until she got on her own two feet with a job and her own apartment.

The first Monday they were roommates, Heather didn't want Darren to go to his job. Darren explained that he was not independently wealthy like Donald Trump and he needed to be at his place of employment every day. This still didn't stop her from asking continuously, and sulking after she didn't get her own way. She also expected him to cancel all plans that he had with any of his friends at any given moment. Darren lived according to her whims.

Heather also accused Darren of cheating on her with other women. She was wildly jealous and hated when he even spoke to another woman. Darren would spend hours trying to assure her that he was being faithful, but there were so many doubts in her mind that she didn't know who to believe. Darren found himself losing his sense of self. He felt as if he was living her life, rather than living his own.

As it turned out, two life events hit Darren that year. First, he lost his beloved family pet. Darren loved his cat that he had since he was a teenager. The cat was ill for a few days and died suddenly in his arms. Darren was emotional after the cat died and began to cry.

"Shut the hell up! I'm trying to get to sleep," she screamed at the top of her lungs.

"Have some compassion, will you? My cat just died!" said Darren.

"I'm going to the spare room to get some sleep while you cry like a girl all night." said Heather.

The other life event that occurred was the death of a close friend. His friend was driving in the rain and the car spun out of control and hit a barrier. He was dead on arrival at the hospital. When Darren told Heather he couldn't believe her response.

"Sucks to be him!" she said with a smirk on her face and a roll of her eyes. Not an ounce of empathy or compassion. Darren tried to focus on Heather's good qualities to keep from wanting to kick her out of his house.

The physical violence started not long after. After complimenting her on her appearance one day, she responded by smacking Darren full force on the cheek. She had four inches of height on him as well as about fifty pounds. The blow caused Darren to lose his balance and fall backward over some furniture. Her hand left welts the full length of his face from ear to chin.

Darren's father was abusive towards his mother. There was never a night that he didn't come home and kick the shit out of her. As the oldest boy, Darren learned a great deal about domestic violence. He vowed never to hit a woman, and he meant to keep this vow. It didn't matter if she started physical violence; Darren knew physical violence was not the way to work out problems. It was just plain wrong.

Heather had a nasty habit of sulking whenever she didn't get her way or get attention exactly when she wanted it. If Darren was busy with something else, work or a video game, she would give him a 'death stare' and find a dark, uncomfortable corner to sulk in. It was disturbing to see how she would cover her head, as if she were crying, and not respond to anyone or anything. Prompting her if she was okay meant that she would get up, shove him and go find another uncomfortable corner by stalking off again.

Once when this was happening, Darren was determined to find out what was wrong. He thought if he gave her a hug, it might open her up to sharing her feelings. He put his hands on her shoulders determined to show he cared and wanted to help. Heather grabbed Darren's shoulders, wound her leg around his and shoved him sideways as hard as she could.

This leg lock caused Darren's left knee to bend at an incorrect angle. A loud crack was heard and then he felt a searing, stabbing pain radiate down his entire leg from the knee down. Darren screamed in agony. He had never known pain as severe as he was feeling in his knee. He was on the floor writhing in agony for over a half hour. Darren dragged his body across the floor to the washing machine to try and stand up. He was unable to stand on his left leg, and Darren was so frustrated, he punched the dryer.

Darren considered calling the police. Heather would probably cry self-defense and the police would end up arresting Darren. The police would never understand that she was the one abusing him and his concern was the ramification of being arrested for domestic violence. He had a great job and enjoyed a good standing with the community. Getting arrested would ruin his life.

His mind started to run wild with all the possibilities of things she might be capable of while he was injured. The next day he was sure she would try something desperate, so he locked up anything that was a potential danger: knives, hunting rifle, hand gun, scissors and his pocket knife. Darren wasn't taking any chances.

One day Darren purchased a new lap top for school. As punishment for buying the computer without permission, she kicked Darren directly in the left knee cap. She was

wearing boots with a large heel that made an imprint in his knee. This injury to his knee brought tears to his eye. He locked himself in a room and didn't come out until the next morning. This was the only safe and logical decision he could make at the time.

Darren decided that this was the beginning of the end. He started ignoring her. He would lock himself in his office for hours on end watching television, playing video games and doing homework. She would bang on the door and scream at him to open the door, but he had decided that he would never give in to her demands again. He also told her that if she was ever violent towards him again, he would kick her out, even if that meant calling the police. He purposely held the threat of evicting her as his safety card.

Every day was another day filled with knock down, dragged out fights. The more they fought the more Darren ignored Heather. At this juncture Heather was just a tenant in the house. Darren devoted a lot of thought to how to legally evict her. He was worried about her ruining the house given enough time. Heather started seeing a male friend of Darren's and much to his dismay, Darren began to feel a bit jealous. However, Darren realized that letting her fool around might lead to their eventual break up.

The next day Darren couldn't face the thought of going home after work. He knew that Heather would start a fight, and he would be forced into his office locked away. So he did something different. He went to his parent's house directly after work. He decided to stay and watch a baseball game with them. Heather texted Darren more than thirty times threatening physical violence if he didn't come home. Heather called a few times and Darren ignored the calls. Then she had the idea to call Mark from a restricted

number. Mark was at his parent's home for only four hours. During that span of time Darren received no less than ten phone calls and more texts than he could count.

Then, his parent's phone rang. When his mother answered the phone, it was Heather's mom on the line. She asked where Darren was, and his mother said that he was watching television with them. Darren didn't want to go home after that phone call, but he knew that he couldn't hide out at his parent's house much longer. Before he left, he checked Heather's Facebook page and was stunned to see a picture of Heather cutting herself with a metal nail file. The caption for the photo said that Heather was cutting herself because her boyfriend Darren was driving her to do it.

When Darren arrived home they had a huge blow out of a fight. The next evening she was gone. Most of her clothes and personal belongings, gone! Darren celebrated by doing the one thing she would never let him do; he bought a giant television.

Even though she moved out, the story does not end there. She harassed Darren and his friends after they broke up. Heather told his friends that Darren repeatedly raped her. Darren called Heather to remove the rest of her belongings out of the house or he would remove them himself. She mentioned on the way out of the door that she was in a new relationship, one that involved one of Darren's closest friends. Darren had to threaten her with filing criminal harassment charges if she didn't stop her behavior.

Darren still has problems with his knee. He needs surgery, but he is delaying the surgery; he knows the amount of additional pain and rehabilitation he will have to undergo. He is dealing with almost daily pain and frequent dislocation of his kneecap. Darren had to leave the family job he loved because it involved a great deal of physical

walking and bending of the knee. He found a desk job that allows him to sit down for most of the day. Mark still wears a knee brace and holds hope that he is able to return to his family owned job one day.

The hardest part of the relationship was the emotional recovery. Darren has no tolerance for relationships anymore. It has been almost five years since he had a serious relationship. He has dated a few times and has had several one night stands. He can't bring himself to think about a serious relationship or even holding hands with someone. He is in therapy to try and work out some of the emotional issues from his relationship with Heather.

Time Bomb

Emma was getting ready to do face painting at the San Jose Sharks' baseball arena. It was a glorious day and she felt amazingly alive. Her highlighted blonde hair blew in her face yet she didn't care. Things had been going well for her. Lynn became a certified face painter so that she could make some additional money. She officially opened her business with a beautiful web page that she had designed. The page advertised some of her work and her availability for parties or special events. The website brought in a ton of new business. Things were looking up and she counted her good fortune as a sign of good luck.

Just as she was finishing up a customer, a police officer approached her. Good looking, tall and bald. She liked when men owned being bald. They might as well go all the way by taking all the remaining hair off. Some men clung to their hair in a desperate Donald Trump comb-over attempt.

"Can I help you officer?"

"Is that your car?" he said pointing to her brand new '95 Ford Mustang. She loved her car. Emma had been saving and saving and finally had enough for a down payment. It was candy apple red and had black interior. She loved its classic look and the car itself made her feel fun and flirty.

"It is technically parked in a no parking zone. The sign is right up the street," he said with a polite smile.

“Oh, I didn’t really notice. The parking was almost nonexistent and when I saw this space, I just zoomed in. I was so happy to have it, I didn’t notice the sign down the street,” she said.

“I need to write you a ticket,” he said with a smirk.

Emma was so upset. She was barely in the parking zone. The sign for no parking zone was so far up the street. Now the fine she’d have to pay would take all of her day’s wages. She was devastated. To say that money was tight as a single parent was an understatement.

“Please officer! If you give me a ticket, it will take a whole day’s wages from me. How about I move the car immediately?”

“Off the record, let’s make a deal. How about after you move the car, and when you’re done painting faces here, we’ll stop around the corner for a cup of coffee?”

“Oh,” she sighed with a smile on her lips. It had been a little ploy all along just to get a date. She felt nothing but relief, and yet she was a little cautious. Should she have dinner with him? He was, after all, a police officer and probably safer than most men. But, what if he wasn’t? She was extremely cautious about dating after going through a rough divorce. Suddenly she found herself being extremely impulsive. .

“Sure! Dinner sounds better than just a coffee!”

She handed him her business card and he read her name.

“Emma Easton,” he read aloud. “Face painting one little smile at a time.” He smiled and offered his name.

“Christopher. Officer Chris. Serving San Jose for five years now.”

They decided to meet for dinner at a lovely, well known restaurant in the middle of town. The restaurant was an Italian place named Buona Sera. It smelled like her grandmother’s house on a Sunday, when grandma made the weekly spaghetti sauce. During their dinner, Chris told Emma when he first saw her, he was enchanted. He was delighted that she had agreed to go out to dinner. They laughed together and a violinist came to their table to play. Chris suggested seeing a new movie playing in town for their next date. It was called “Sleepless in Seattle” with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.

Emma was also nervous telling Chris about the fact that she had a four year old son from a previous relationship. As it turned out, Chris was amazingly supportive and just loved kids. The first time Chris met her son, it was as if he had known him since birth. They got along right away and Chris loved playing with him. Emma couldn’t have been happier about the relationship that was beginning to form.

A year passed by and by then they’d realized it was becoming more than just a few dates and Chris decided that he would pop the question and ask her to marry him. He bought a significant ring from Tiffanys. It cost him almost all of his savings but he wanted the best for her. He prepared to ask her in a corny way, but he knew that she would love it. He asked her to fly with him to New York for a romantic weekend.

Emma was like a kid in New York. They went to museums, shopping, site seeing and ate at famous restaurants. There was so much to see but not enough time. She had wanted to see the Empire State Building. Chris assured her they would see it, but only at night on their last night of their weekend getaway.

Sunday after dinner they caught a cab. Chris promised her she would see the Empire State Building and yet, it was late. The building was only open to the public until 9 p.m. and it looked like they were a few minutes too late. When they arrived Chris used his police badge, and as a professional courtesy they were admitted without any problem. As the elevator ascended, Emma was so excited and Chris was getting nervous.

Finally they reached the top. They saw all of Manhattan lit up. Emma was breathless. She turned around and noticed there was a photographer a few feet away. Suddenly, Chris was on his knee, smiling right at her. Just then she put two and two together and out popped the most gorgeous diamond she had ever seen. Emma gasped and began to cry.

“Marry me, Emma. Make me the happiest man in the world.”

“Oh Chris! Of course I will. Yes, Yes, Yes!”

“You’re beautiful.” He said.

The photographer was there to capture the entire proposal. The photo of their engagement on top of the Empire State Building was put in a prominent place in the living room of their new house. Their wedding was quick and simple and they settled into their new roles as husband, wife, and son.

Two years later Emma and Chris welcomed another son into their family, and they knew their family was complete. Chris was promoted to Sergeant within the force and Emma became a stay at home mom who sold scrapbooking supplies and did face painting for money on the side. Money was an issue, as with many other young couples, but Chris

put in for overtime as much as he could. Emma was lonely and resented having to be with the kids all week long without a break. Even when Chris was home he was exhausted from working long hours and all he wanted to do was lounge around the house. Thankfully they lived in a neighborhood where there was plenty of stay at home moms and Emma had a great support system.

She also joined a women's roller derby group. She had a blast roller skating with other women for charity causes. It was at the roller derby practice that Emma met her best friend, Tammy Drews. Tammy became Emma's confidante and they talked to each other about all their problems.

Their money problems seemed to be insurmountable. They were now living above their means, but they loved their home and their neighborhood and refused to give it up. The couple kept looking for ways to cut back on expenses and ways to make more money. It seemed a hopeless battle. Emma turned to friends and family for money, but that was a dicey situation at best. Thanks to a poor economy everyone had financial problems too, and no one had money to lend.

The next day Emma turned down an invitation to go out to her friend Dawn's house for a round of beer. She knew that Chris was becoming angry at the least opportunity Emma had to socialize with friends. He had changed so much lately. Possessive and jealous most of the time. She felt isolated and lonely. If there was another man involved at a social occasion, Emma could count on Chris accompanying her or not allowing her to attend the function what so ever.

One day she decided to deep clean Chris' office after the kids were dropped off at school. She began to throw away old papers when she came across a list of phone numbers. As it turned out, the phone numbers were a log of every call she received or made within the last three months. Chris had been monitoring her phone calls. She was infuriated at his disregard to her right for privacy.

One day Emma went shopping at the grocery store and by chance met a girlfriend in the parking lot. As Emma began packing her groceries in the back of the Mustang, her girlfriend noticed a small, rather odd looking device under the bumper of her car.

"What is that thing under your bumper?" asked Dawn.

"I have no idea," said Emma. "I've never noticed it before and it certainly shouldn't be on there. I'll take it to my father and let him see it. I have to stop at my parent's house and drop off a few things. He might know what it is." Emma popped the magnetic device off easily and looked at it quizzically. What the heck could this possibly be she thought.

Her father knew what it was the minute he saw it. "This is a GPS tracking device. I only know one person who would want to track you. You'd better have a talk with your husband. Is he the one tracking you?"

"I...ummm...don't know. I'll have a talk with Chris tonight."

Later that evening, Emma approached Chris about the tracking device. It was difficult to wait until the boys were in bed and sleeping soundly. Before Chris crawled under the covers of their bed, Lynn didn't hold back at all.

“Did you install a GPS tracking device on my car?”

“Yes, I did.”

“What were you doing with my phone records?”

“Just checking who you are calling,” he said casually.

“What the hell? Why would you do that?”

“I installed the tracker because I wanted to know exactly where you were going.”

“If you wanted to know where I was going, or who I was calling couldn’t you just have just asked me?”

“It’s a matter of trust.”

“You don’t trust me? Why don’t you trust me?”

“How do I know you’ll tell the truth? How do I know what you’re doing all day long when I’m out there working? I have the right to find out exactly what you do and where you go all day.”

“How dare you track me as if I were some kind of criminal? Well you’ve lost your precious tracker. My father has it. Go see if he’ll give it to you!”

With that he smacked her. He took her by the shoulders and shook her while she cried out in pain.

“So you had to go to your father! Is that right? Well, we’ll see who needs their parents now!”

He was so enraged he punched her in the face. Emma screamed out in horrific pain. He had hit her, one single, solitary punch to the right eye. She touched it gingerly and tried to protect it from further damage. She knew it would be black and blue. She ran to the bathroom and locked herself in to keep herself safe.

The kids woke up. They had heard their mother scream and knew something terrible was going on. Chris had to assure them that nothing was wrong and that mom and dad were having a small argument that had gotten out of control. The kids heard Emma crying from the bathroom and wanted to see if she was alright. He herded them upstairs and made sure they were back in their beds. Then Chris came down to unsuccessfully try to talk Emma out of the bathroom.

“Get out of the bathroom. I’ve come to say how sorry I am. Things got out of control, and I didn’t mean to hit you. I love you and would never intentionally hurt you.”

“Go away Chris. Just go away.”

“You can’t stay in there all night long on the floor!”

As things would have it, she slept on the floor using towels as a blanket. The first thing Lynn wanted to do was to call the police. She knew that was not an option. Any call to the police would result in disciplinary procedures against Chris and a possible loss of pay. He might even lose his job. They had so many financial troubles, that wasn’t even an option. She knew she would suffer in silence.

The next day she put it right on the table. She wanted out of the marriage. He refused. She began to cry.

“Chris, what will it take to convince you that I am not in love with you anymore?”

“You are just reacting to the events from last night. You got me angry and I hate it when you turn to your parents with our business.”

“I have thought long and hard about this. We’ll put the house up for sale and I’ll get a modest condo or a townhouse. The kids and I will be just fine.”

“The kids? Who said anything about you taking the kids? I will fight to keep them to the bitter end. There is nothing that will stop me from taking the kids.”

“The courts will never give you custody!”

They began to sleep in separate bedrooms. They couldn’t afford a lawyer. Things were frozen between them. They barely talked and if they did it was to spit out functional phrases to one another about the necessary daily events.

“Pick up the kids at three from school,” said Emma

“Can’t do it. Working overtime,” said Chris.

“Oh. I’ll get Tammy to do it,” said Emma.

Emma turned to her friends for support. She sought comfort from her roller derby group that played for charity events. The latest charity was for domestic violence. How ironic, Lynn thought. She was in the midst of domestic violence; unable to get help, yet she was fundraising for others who were victims of domestic violence as well.

Unable to stand the isolation and loneliness of her situation, she began a conversation with her best friend Tammy.

“I know we don’t have money, but I need to get out of this marriage. I’m going to begin to save money, and ask my parents if they can help financially with a divorce. I feel as if I am being watched around the clock. I just can’t take it any longer,” said Emma.

“Why do you feel you’re being watched?” asked Tammy.

“I found out that Chris has been monitoring my phone calls, my Face book account, my car and Lord knows what else!”

“Oh, Emma,” said Tammy. The two women held each other as both cried over what seemed to be a hopeless situation.

The next evening Chris came into the family room and suggested that the boys go downtown to grab a couple of burgers for dinner. He told them that he needed some time to talk to Emma alone. The two teenagers were glad to help out because they knew things had been rough for a while between their parents. It was unavoidable to listen to the fights and not know what to do or how to help. They left in the family car bound for In and Out Burgers, hopeful that their parents could work things out peacefully.

As soon as the boys were gone, Chris confronted Emma. He wanted to settle things once and for all. He approached her just as she came home from her girlfriend Tammy’s house.

“What took you so long to get home?” he asked.

She set about ignoring him by looking straight through him and walking past as if he didn’t exist. This only resulted in aggravating him into a fit of frenzy. As she reached

the middle of the staircase, Chris pulled her back down by her long, thick blonde hair. She fell backwards and hit her head on the bottom of the staircase. She instinctively felt the back of her head, and realized she was bleeding. Their eyes locked and there was a deep understanding between them. Now it was survival of the fittest.

“I love you and I always will, Emma. If I can’t have your love, no one will,” Chris screamed.

“Get away from me! You’ve done too much damage as it is,” said Emma.

Emma scrambled to her feet and tried running for the front door. Chris toppled her and in the process broke an end table in the living room. Glass shattered from the Tiffany lamp that sat prettily poised on top of it. Emma grabbed at Chris aimlessly, but she was simply no match for a trained police officer who was fit and ready for any move she might make. He pulled her up to her feet and made her go upstairs to the bedroom.

Once they were upstairs, Emma was afraid Chris would rape her. She began to scream. Chris put his hand over her mouth but she continued to scream hoping someone would hear.

“Shut up,” he hissed through clenched teeth.

“Don’t think you’re going to get away with this,” she threatened.

It was then that he snapped. He began to choke her. He listened intently to the sounds coming from her throat but nothing registered. She was turning her head to try and gasp for air but no matter what she did, she was simply fighting a futile battle. Emma kicked her legs hoping for a miracle, hoping by some chance that this was not the way things

would end between them. But by then, it was already too late. Chris was sitting on top of her dead corpse.

He sat back and began to cry. He had just lost the love of his life and he was the one responsible for her death. He could not fathom the thought that she was dead and that he had just killed her. He knew there was only one thing to do at this point.

He dressed up in his crisp dress uniform. Chris positioned himself next to Emma, held her hand with his left hand, and shot himself in the head with the gun in his right hand.

Down the street Tammy looked down at her phone as it was ringing. Another text message from Emma she thought. But it wasn't. It was a text from Chris. It read, "I'm sorry. I went too far. Don't let the kids in." Tammy bolted up the street. She banged on the door screaming Emma's name. She tried opening the door but the chain was on preventing access to the house. Tammy called the police and told them about the text message. She asked if they could just come and try to check to make sure everything was okay.

A squad car responded within minutes. The two family dogs were at the partially opened door as the police cut the door chain. It was apparent that there was a struggle as evidenced by the broken furniture and the blood splattered on the lowest stair. When police entered the bedroom they could not believe that one of their own had apparently taken the life of someone he loved so deeply and then taken his own life.

As the men observed the couple at the crime scene they could not help but remark that Lynn and Chris were holding hands with one another.

Bayonne

Is there one particular moment that changes the direction of your entire life? When something occurs and your life is hanging in the balance, do you recognize the moment as a turning point?

In Bayonne, everyone was some part of an extended family. She felt safe, loved and always protected. Her parents had an old dry goods shop, right in the center of town. Her grandparents owned the store before them, and it had been in the family for over fifty years. The store provided a place for people to meet, to get a cup of coffee and share the local news. There were always people bustling in and out and her family earned an honest living. They sold what families needed, nothing more and nothing less.

It was in the store that Jayde met him. He was handsome and well-mannered. She looked at him and thought to herself that he looked familiar. Had he been in the store before? She would have remembered those eyes. He smiled. She smiled back and then suddenly felt shy. She pretended to be preoccupied with some paperwork near the register. She snuck another look at him when his back was turned. He was nicely dressed, with Dockers and a Polo shirt. He was tall and sported a great tan.

When he approached the register, Jayde felt the heat rise to her face. Suddenly she was embarrassed and silly, like a teenager again. What was wrong with her? She totaled his purchases and found him touching her hand a moment too long as he paid. She laughed and let his fingers linger just a second before pulling away. She found it difficult to concentrate and knew her face was red. She tried to seem business-like as she called out, "Thanks for stopping in!" He looked back over his shoulder and smiled again and

said, “Thank *you*.” Then he did an about face and walked right back to the counter. She was astonished.

“Can I help you with something else?” she asked.

“How about a date?” he asked.

Mike Connelly came in and out of the store on many occasions and each time he asked for a date. He wouldn’t take no for an answer. On several occasions she turned him down. She played coy for awhile, just long enough to get a feel for his personality. Eventually, she gave into his requests and before long found herself enjoying his company on an intimate level.

That first winter together was a difficult one. The weather was brutal and there was a considerable amount of snow. One day, after a significant blizzard, the streets were impossible to navigate and Jayde’s family found it necessary to close the store for the day. The town was completely snowed-in. Mike trudged all the way to Jayde’s house just to make sure she and her family was safe. She was touched by his concern and kindness.

The next day was still difficult to maneuver the streets, but Jayde and her family opened the store for their customers. They knew people needed milk and bread and it was important to open the store for the community. Mike was outside the store with a snow shovel for what seemed like hours. He showed up on his own, without being asked. Jayde and her family were grateful for his presence.

After hours, Mike showed up to walk Jayde home. They began a playful snowball fight with each other. Soon, they were covered in snow. They laughed like children and enjoyed the moment. Suddenly, Jayde felt him shove her from behind. She fell face forward into the snow. Mike stood over her laughing as she tried to catch her breath. He shoved her so hard; she had the wind knocked out of her. She looked up at him in complete disbelief. Why? Why had he been so forceful and hurtful?

He dismissed her feelings and continued to laugh even harder. “It was just a joke,” he insisted. Jayde found that she had conflicting feelings. Sure, they were playing in the snow. Anyone could “overdo” it a bit. But no matter what he said, or how much he apologized, there was still a nagging doubt in the back of her mind.

Their relationship continued on until the following summer. One morning Jayde found it difficult to drag herself out of bed. She and Mike had been out late the night before, dancing, holding each other close. She didn’t want to leave, and she knew he made her feel like no one had ever done before.

She tried to open the old door and jiggled the key. The store’s lock sometimes stuck and she had to try to open it several times before she was successful. When the door to the store finally opened, the smell hit her in the face, and provided that comforting reassurance that came with familiarity. It was a combination of cigarettes, newspapers and deli meats. The aged wood of the floor and trim was worn and dark, and cast a bronze glow about the place. It spoke volumes of the people who had trod there over the years while their silent conversations still buzzed about in the air.

Jayde went about the morning opening routine. First thing she did was open the safe and get the bag that held twenty dollars in change to stock the register. When she approached the cash register, her thoughts went to the evening before. Mike had acted funny, almost nervous and somewhat desperate. He held her tight and told her how he felt. She played the scene in her head one more time.

“I love you, Jayde.” He whispered. “From the first moment I saw you at that worn out old cash register; I loved you more than you’ll ever know.” She smiled as he pulled her closer.

“I love you too,” she said choked with emotion. It was such an important moment between them and she knew that he loved her. She fought to remember every second of that night by replaying it in her head, over and over again. Every word, every gesture, was hers to hold onto and to relive moment by moment.

Absentmindedly, she opened the cash register to stock it with change as she had done so many days before. As she started to put the faded, wrinkled bills into the compartments, she noticed that in the slot where the twenties were supposed to be arranged was a small jewelry box. Perhaps someone lost it in the store the night before, and mom tucked it in the register for safe keeping. Her curiosity took the best of her and she opened it. A diamond ring was tucked inside the tiny velvet box. It was perfect, not too big, and not too small. Just perfect. Stunned, she heard the bell over the door ring, and it was just then that he walked in.

“Hey gorgeous! Have change for a twenty?” She inhaled with surprise and as Mike approached her, he got down on one knee. Her head began to swirl and the moment seemed to whizz by on fast-forward.

“Marry me. I can’t promise you much, but I know I can’t live without you. There isn’t a day that goes by that I’m not thinking about us being together. There isn’t a night that goes by that I’m not dreaming about holding you, protecting you as you sleep. Jayde, marry me and make me the happiest man in the universe.”

“I, um, oh my God I’m speechless!”

“Just say yes!”

“This is so ... well, quick. Don’t you think we’re rushing things?”

“I know I can’t live another minute without you.”

“My parents...they’ll...they think we’re too young!”

“Who cares? Let’s elope.” And secretly, they did.

It took three days to get a marriage license. Jayde borrowed her mother’s wedding dress that was stored away in the attic. Thankfully it was preserved and it fit perfectly. They went to city hall and had a judge marry them. A clerk was their witness and she was giddy to be asked. The whole ceremony took less than ten minutes. Jayde trembled through her vows. She could hardly believe they had done it! They were married.

However, her parents were disappointed when they found out. They felt that Jayde and Mike should have waited, and that they were rushing things. Jayde could see their

point; however she kept her feelings to herself. She couldn't admit that they might have made a mistake. She was young, but her parents married when they were young. Things had turned out well for them. They had been married for the past forty years. It was rare that they ever had a disagreement, and they respected one another. Jayde hoped she and Mike could love each other the same way.

They had been married for just a few weeks when Mike lost his job. His employer said that as soon as things picked up that he would be hired back, but the lay-off situation was completely overwhelming. Mike started drinking. It was just a beer here and there at first, but then he began to hide a flask of vodka in his jacket pocket. He'd take a swig of Smirnoff when he thought no one was looking. Soon, he began to get careless and just got to the point where he just didn't care who saw him drink what.

Jayde became an excuse-maker. He's stressed, he's depressed, and he's upset, he's mad. Every emotion turned into a good reason to drink. The alcohol seemed to permeate from his skin. It wasn't long before the excuses ran out. It was Jayde's parents who tried to intervene first.

"Honey, we're concerned. Mike's drinking is out of control and we need to talk to him."

"Dad, you know how Mike has felt since losing his job? He's just going through a rough place right now. Things have got to turn around soon. Please don't say anything just yet."

"The only way that things are going to turn around is if he makes some dramatic changes in his life. The direction he is headed is not a good one."

Jayde knew that they were right. However, she knew Mike wouldn't listen. The truth was that they only knew half the picture. Mike spent his days and nights in the local bar until they threw him out because he was too drunk to serve anymore. His friends walked away when his drinking became severe. Soon he became a recluse, staying home where he could drink until he passed out. Jayde would come home from the store and find him in a drunken mess, sprawled out on the sofa. She would cry, plead, scream and yell and yet nothing seemed to sink in.

Mike continued to drink with a vengeance. There were nights that he never came home. Jayde would worry herself into panic attacks, so severe that even medication wouldn't help. Mike had heard that his employer called other workers back to the job, and yet there was no phone call for him to return to work. Rumor had it that Mike was a drunk, and Jayde didn't blame his boss for not hiring him back. However, Mike was devastated and this gave him all the more reason to drink.

Just when Jayde thought things couldn't get worse, she found out that she was pregnant. She sat perched on top of the toilet with the pregnancy test kit hovering on the edge of the sink. It was definitely positive. She read the directions over and over. The little blue cross on the stick meant that she was positively pregnant. She laughed at the irony. That test was the only thing in her life that was positive.

A million thoughts raced through her head. What could she do? This was the absolute worse time to get pregnant! She wanted a baby, just not right now. Things were so unstable in their relationship and their finances. She told him that night when he reached for another Coors Light beer. He seemed incredulous.

“I said I’m pregnant. Two months pregnant.”

“I don’t believe it,” he said with a blank stare on his face.

“It’s true,” she said wiping the sweat from her brow.

“It’s just that I never thought...I mean, a doctor once told me that I...well, that it might be hard for me to start a family.”

“Mike, you never shared that with me! Look, things have to change around here, because I can’t live like this anymore. You can’t drink and get drunk if we’re going to be parents. It’s different now.”

“I won’t drink anymore. I promise. Just wait and see.” He wrapped her up in his arms.

Jayde kept waiting. Sobriety never came for him. He was a functioning alcoholic at best. Family get-togethers were a nightmare. Thanksgiving came that year and Mike began drinking as soon as he was awake. It was useless for Jayde to nag him, so she spent her morning cooking for the afternoon meal away from Mike. Jayde had planned to tell her family about their pregnancy that day. It was getting difficult to hide, and she knew that she would need all the help and support that they could give her. She was just about to put her second pumpkin pie in the oven when she noticed Mike standing in the doorway.

“What do you want?” she said with trepidation.

“I want you,” he said with lust in his throat.

“I want you to stop drinking,” she said stifling her emotions.

“Why do you constantly nag me?” he demanded.

It happened suddenly and she wasn't expecting it. He walked up behind her and pushed her up against a door. He began to rub her breasts and she began to cry. He seemed infuriated that she was spawning his advances and then he did the unthinkable. He put his hands around her neck and began to choke her.

She tried to scream but nothing would come out of her mouth. It was impossible to call for help. She began to desperately try to breathe, but no matter what way she turned and twisted, she couldn't escape the grip he had on her throat. She tried kicking him, but he laughed at her futile attempts at control. It was his cold laugh that shocked her. Just as she was about to lose consciousness, she noticed the phone on the wall. She picked it up and hit him over the head as hard as she could. It stunned him just enough for him to let go of her throat for the seconds that she needed to make it to the door. She ran as fast as she could and managed to escape to the car.

She instantly locked the car doors and called the police on her cell phone. They arrived in minutes, and their goal was to try and have Jayde and Mike “talk it out”. She cried and cried, unable to convince them that he had tried to choke her. Mike told the police that she was exaggerating and that her hormones were out of control. The police commiserated with Mike and tried to seem sympathetic with Jayde. They reminded both of them that it was, in fact, Thanksgiving. With a new baby on the way, they should focus on their unborn child. Rather than fighting with one another, they needed to work

together to be good parents. Although she knew this was true, Jayde was now frightened out of her mind. What other horrible things was Mike capable of doing?

Jayde knew that her family would be expecting them soon, and if they didn't show up it would be a concern for her parents. How could she possibly begin to explain what had just taken place? They drove to the family house in a stifled silence, neither one of them talking about the obvious. Jayde tried to put on make up to hide the fact that she had been crying.

Mike was sullen and anti-social at Thanksgiving dinner. Jayde was embarrassed and disgusted by his behavior, his remarks at the table and his total disregard for her family's holiday. While doing dishes, she opened up to her mother and sister in the privacy of the kitchen. She told them how miserable she was. They encouraged her to leave Mike and to move back home. It was then that Jayde told them that she was pregnant.

"You should leave him now more than ever," said her mother. "Leave before it gets any worse."

"It couldn't get worse than this, Mom," she sobbed. Jayde nestled in the safety of her mother's arms. She wished that her life were only this simple again. However, nothing they said was enough to convince her that she should leave Mike. She thought that once the baby came, things would be better. He would get sober. Mike would make an amazing father, of that she was convinced. She had seen him with his nieces and nephews on the floor playing one game after another. He loved kids and he always dreamed of having one of their own.

Money was tight. With Mike on unemployment, all they had to survive on were his meager monthly checks and the money Jayde made working at the family store. Her parents were generous and she felt uncomfortable knowing that they were sacrificing their expenses by paying her a higher salary. However, during this difficult time period, it was a blessing. She couldn't wait for Mike to start working again to bring in a solid paycheck. They lived modestly and tried to save their money, but their income was so low during this period that saving anything was impossible.

Their apartment was humble, with a few hand-me-downs for furniture. They had a few nice things which were wedding gifts from their families. One day Jayde came home to find the apartment a disaster. "What have you done?" she said. Mike had destroyed so many things that were in the house. Presents from her family, wedding keepsakes and cherished heirlooms that were passed down to her from her Grandparents. Words could not express how devastated she felt seeing the rubble of precious things that could never be replaced. Was there anything that Mike touched that he did not destroy?

It wasn't long before their daughter was born. She was a beautiful baby, with lots of light blonde hair. The nurse pulled a tendril of her hair to the middle of her forehead and tied a ribbon to it. She looked simply perfect. Mike was thrilled beyond belief at this little life he had helped bring into the world. He cut back on his alcohol consumption and seemed as if he was making an effort to be a good parent. He loved holding her and rocking her to sleep. He sang old songs to the baby and she was soothed by his deep, melodious voice. They decided to name her Doreen, after Mike's grandmother.

Mike found a job in construction. It was a physically demanding job and he came home most nights exhausted. Jayde stayed home with baby Dori for the first few months, and then brought the baby to the store. She set up a small area in the back office for a portable crib and she did all the paperwork for the business as well as all the ordering. She could care for the baby and take breaks to feed her as often as she needed. It was an ideal situation and a great way for Jayde to go back to work.

Mike continued his promise about cutting back on the alcohol. His hands shook all the time and Jayde was convinced that he was going through some kind of withdrawal. He seemed sick all the time and highly agitated. She knew it must be hard for him to cut back so much and to want to try to be the best father he could for Dori. No matter how tired he was at the end of his day, he headed straight for her crib as soon as he came home. He loved making her laugh and coo and instantly fell in love when he saw her first smile. He could make her laugh just by the sound of his voice and they developed a strong bond between them during the first couple of months.

One night Mike came home and was clearly irritated. He had a rough day at work and was miserable. Rather than reach for his usual beer, he stopped on the way home with a bottle of Jamieson's. Jayde was furious.

"What happened to your promise about not drinking?"

"For crying out loud! Can't a man have a drink after a tough day?"

"That's just it Mike. With you it's never just one drink!"

"Shut up and stop complaining all the time," he said.

He drank the bottle down and passed out, still dressed in his construction clothes, on the living room floor. Jayde cried herself to sleep that night.

The next day Mike refused to go to work. Again, Jayde was furious. She was afraid the construction firm would fire him if he missed too many days. They began to fight and argue over money. Things escalated and then Mike turned on a dime. He pushed Jayde up against a door and pinned her down.

“Get off me you bastard,” she said. With that he twisted her arm and began to dig his hands into her flesh. She could feel the heat of this burning sensation and she screamed for him to stop. His eyes glazed over like he was in another world. He transformed into a complete stranger and her pleas for help went unheeded. At one point when she thought she could take no more, he finally let go and she bounced up and grabbed for her phone. She dialed 911.

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“Help me, just help me. My husband is after me!”

With that said, the phone went dead. Mike had cut off the phone call by pulling the plug out of the wall. Jayde screamed and screamed and prayed to God that someone would hear the commotion and call the police. A lot of residents of the building knew Jayde and Mike and were familiar with the fights they would have on a fairly regular basis. Most did not want to get involved.

Except one. There was one man, Mr. Everett in 3-F, who became involved when he heard her screams. He called the police, gave them the address of their apartment. The

police arrived minutes after Jayde's attempted 911 call. They were able to break the door down in time to see Mike punching Jayde in the face. They arrested him and asked her if she wanted to press charges. She was too traumatized to make a decision, and eventually ended up not pressing charges. She couldn't bear to know Mike would be imprisoned.

Jayde knew it was time to get serious about not getting hurt again. She couldn't trust Mike's erratic behavior when he drank. She went downtown and filed a restraining order against him. She thought that it would protect her, and scare Mike enough to think twice before putting his hands on her ever again. Her face was a mess, swollen and full of bruises. One eye was completely shut from the swelling. When her parents saw what had happened, they demanded that Jayde leave Mike immediately and move back home. She knew they were right.

Jayde packed a bag of clothes. She moved back home with her parents in her old bedroom. Dori would have to sleep in a Pack and Play until they could secure a crib. It would be a tight fit, but they would have to make it work. Jayde's safety was paramount. Mike was repentant immediately after the incident, but it was too late. He couldn't convince Jayde that he could be trusted and that he loved her. All she had to do was look in the mirror to be reminded. And then, she found out she was pregnant again.

The baby was born eighteen months after Dori's delivery. It was a boy and Jayde named him Michael Jr. They lived apart for awhile, but Jayde found that time away from Mike was lonely and difficult. Friends and family were stunned that she wanted to move back to their apartment with him. Her parents could barely speak to her after her

decision to move out of their house. They warned her that she would be sorry, and that Jayde was putting herself in danger just to live a life of misery with Mike.

However, with an infant and a toddler, life was hard living in a small bedroom as a single parent. Jayde also felt that the kids deserved to know their father. Seeing them on the weekends seemed harsh for both Mike and the kids. He was a great father in the sense that he never hit the kids. He loved them and never laid a hand on them. But for Jayde, it was a different story.

Jayde became a functioning battered wife. As much as they wanted to make their family work for the kids, Mike continued to drink and take things out on his wife. She began to choose clothing and accessories that hid her bruises and scars. She made excuses about how clumsy and awkward she was when people caught a glimpse of her latest battle wounds. She was great at making excuses, acting as if everything was perfectly normal and convincing everyone that she was okay.

Their arguments were usually about money and the kids. One of the worst fights was oddly enough about pizza. She wanted it, and he didn't. They began to argue. Mike snapped and began to punch Jayde. She backed away to avoid contact and suddenly Mike charged forward. Jayde found herself falling backwards over the child safety gate. She lost consciousness yet Mike dragged her upright and slammed her up against a wall. On the wall was a light switch that found its way embedded in her skull.

The room was gray and funny sounding. There were people there that she didn't recognize and voices seemed to fade in and out. They were talking about her, but she couldn't speak. She tried to move yet her body seemed to deny her every request. She

didn't understand what was happening but she couldn't talk to ask questions. All she could do was taste blood in her mouth.

Jaydel had very limited memories of their last night together as a family. The hospital recognized the signs of abuse when she was brought to the hospital with Mr. Everett. He told them that he had heard her screams and called the police. He was so tired of hearing her being abused that he went to their apartment himself and took the risk to intervene. Mike was so out of control that he began to attack Mr. Everett. He pulled his hair, slapped him and then began to pummel him with punches. The police arrived to find Mr. Everett trying to fend off Mike, Dori, on top of Mike's back beating on her father, and Jayde on the floor in a pool of her own blood.

Mr. Everett rode with Jayde to the hospital because he had no idea how to get in touch with her family. He knew they owned the store in town, and yet didn't know their last name. He gave all the information to the police so they could get Jayde the help she so desperately needed. The children were taken into protective custody until family could be located. With the information taken from Mr. Everett, the police located Jayde's parents. They took Dori and Michael Jr. to Jayde's sister so that she could watch the kids while they cared for Jayde. It was going to be a difficult road to recovery.

Jayde was in a coma. It would take weeks for her to gradually emerge from the darkness that enveloped her. When she was strong enough, her parents were able to tell her what they knew about the attack, and she was able to fill in some of the missing pieces. Jayde learned that when the police arrived, Mike jumped out of the window and

onto the fire escape. He threatened to commit suicide unless the police left the building. There was a stand-off, and it ended with Mike being taken into custody.

In the five years they were married, Jayde called 911 over fifty times for police intervention due to domestic abuse. Restraining orders were put into place, but never accomplished protecting her from her abuser. She suffered broken bones, numerous black eyes, lost her two front teeth, experienced several concussions, damage to several internal organs and almost died at the hands of her abuser. The mental abuse she suffered was incalculable.

It took Jayde months to recover from her last attack. She had to learn how to speak, walk and even eat all over again. She spent weeks at a rehabilitation facility working towards regaining her everyday functions back. She missed the children, and worked harder than was expected so she could return home as quickly as possible.

Knowing the children were seeing her abuse was the turning point for Jayde. It changed the direction of her life in a positive way. Mike spent two years in prison and was released earlier than his original sentence required, which was ironically due to good behavior. When he was released, he broke the condition of his probation and headed straight for Jayde's house. What he didn't know was the Jayde knew he'd be coming and was ready for his appearance. It was Thanksgiving weekend and thoughts and memories returned to the first Thanksgiving she had ever spent with Mike.

Mike arrived at her house in the middle of the night, inebriated and out of control. He screamed through the window that he wanted to see the kids. Jayde refused to open the door, and sat in the dark listening to the door bell ringing incessantly. She called the

police and told them she had a restraining order against Mike. The person who answered her call said, "Why are you calling?" Jayde tried to impress upon the operator that Mike was a dangerous ex-con on probation.

The operator said she would send a squad car out, but Jayde felt uneasy. It sounded as if the operator thought Jayde was exaggerating and wasn't taking her seriously. Just then Jayde heard glass break. When she looked out the dining room window, the front door was being breeched by Mike. He threw an object through the glass window and saw an opportunity to unlock the door. Jayde panicked and ran to the kitchen. She grabbed the first thing she could find, which was a large butcher knife. She held the knife in her shaking fist and headed towards the door.

When her eyes met Mike's for the first time in two years, there was nothing but hatred between them.

"Get the hell out of my house," she said.

"You should have never left me," he said.

"Get out Michael, the police are on their way," she said.

"I'm not going back Jayde," he said with a determination she hadn't heard in quite a while.

They began a circular dance around the room. Where were the police? She tried to determine how long ago she had called 911 to estimate when they would respond. She thought it had been at least five minutes since her phone call to the police.

“Mommy,” said Dori. She stood in the hallway in confusion. “Mommy, who is that man?”

“Dori! It’s Daddy! Come to Daddy!”

“Dori! Get out of here! Hurry!”

Jayde took the knife and moved forward, only to find that Mike was able to wrestle it away from her with one swift jerk of his hand. Just then, the police came from behind and wrestled Mike to the ground. The last vision that Jayde saw was the look on her child’s face as she and Mike fought over the butcher knife. Jayde would spend the rest of her lifetime trying to erase that vision from both of their minds.

Play It By The Rules

He tied her arms and legs to the bed with her ripped panty hose. He raped her. He gagged her with a rubber dog ball in her mouth and then tied her scarf over it. She couldn't scream for help. A lot of people consider that there is no possibility of rape inside of a marriage. What do you call it when a wife doesn't want sex, yet is held against her will and her husband performs sexual intercourse?

This was the question in the mind of Katherine. She had known Ferdinand since high school. Her father was the coach of the college football team and he played ball. They grew up in Daingerfield, a small East Texas town. She would come to all the football practices so she could watch him play. She saw him watching her, and her eyes would go down to the ground because she was so shy. She dreamed that he liked her.

Soon, they became an item. They were inseparable and were constantly on the phone with each other. Katherine or Kat, as he liked to call her, wore his college school ring on a chain around her neck. She wore the ring proudly and rubbed it for good luck. He gave it to her on the condition that she was his one and only. He hated it when she even talked to another guy. The ring also meant that she couldn't have any friendships with any other guys. She protested at first, but there was a special love between them. She was touched that he was jealous of other guys. She was touched that he wanted her all to himself.

The blue stick read positive. She was pregnant. Kat tried to abstain from sex when she knew she was ovulating. That didn't work out. She didn't get her period and then she began to have that sick, sinking feeling inside of her. She became terribly nauseous and threw up anything that she nibbled on. She knew she'd have to tell Ferdinand that she

was pregnant, but she had no idea when to tell him. All she could think about was dropping out of school, raising a child and all the money it would take for them to raise that child.

She blurted it out one night after a big football game. He was elated that the team won. When he saw Kat after the game, he picked her up and twirled her around. He was thrilled that she was there to see his accomplishments and thankful that she was always supporting him. She was the only one in the stadium for him that night. His parents were oblivious to him and left him on his own. They knew he played football but never cared enough to talk about it with him or come to any of his games. They were never involved in his education either. Report cards were never scrutinized, parent teacher conferences were never attended, and all they cared about was that he graduated, anticipating the day he would move out of their house.

Kat waited for the right moment, but there never seemed to be a right moment. Finally, she blurted it out. "I'm pregnant."

"Whoa...what?"

"I said, I'm pregnant. About two and a half months now, almost three."

"How...Idon't understand. We used condoms most of the time and we tried to be careful. This is from the one night I didn't want to use a condom? You're kidding me, right?"

"No, I'm not kidding. Ferdinand, I have to go to a doctor or someone, because I need pre-natal care. We also need to tell our parents."

Still stunned he said, "Wait, I need some time to think about what to do. I still can't believe this is happening. Oh my God, I'm going to be a father."

He said it with a strange, ethereal voice. The word father was more like a heartfelt whisper. He kept saying the word 'father' over and over again, playing around with the word in his mouth. Part of him was in denial, yet the other part was in a new uncharted territory. For the first time in his life, Ferdinand was scared. He wanted to do what was right for them, but he just didn't know what that was at the moment.

After getting his thoughts together, he proposed to her on a quiet night. He took her out to the middle of the football field. He bent down on one knee and said, "I know I am not all that you want or need. However, I will spend every moment of our life together loving you and giving you everything that I have. Will you marry me?" he said.

"You know, you don't have to do this. Just because I'm pregnant, this doesn't mean that you have to marry me," she said.

"I know that, but I want us to make us a family, do it right," he said.

"Okay.... I mean...well yes!" she said.

Telling her parents was a different story. They had been against her dating Ferdinand from the very beginning. They had seen his temper and thought he was nothing but trouble. At first, they forbid the two to see each other, but that only made them sneak around and want to see each other more than ever before. Finally, her parents relented and allowed them to date.

Now, they regretted their decision. They never trusted him from the start. Their daughter was now a pregnant, unwed mother. Kat's parents were deeply religious, southern Baptist and very much against sex before marriage. This was a great embarrassment for them within the church community. There was something about Ferdinand that they just couldn't put their finger on. They knew about his temper, but

there was something deeper, something bigger that concerned them. They knew that this was something to pray about and they would speak to their pastor. Perhaps, he would be able to provide guidance and advice on such a difficult subject.

After they got married, Ferdinand wanted to move to the Dallas area for a security guard position at Oak Cliff Charter School. Kat was able to secure a job as an executive vice president of health system affairs for the University of Texas South Western. Kat's job gave them a nice income and they were able to rent a house in the Dallas suburbs. Ferdinand's income was used to pay bills and Kat's was used to pay for rent. They even had a little extra each month to put into a savings account.

However, the newlywed phase passed quickly. Spousal abuse started right after they were married for a few months. Ferdinand seemed angry all the time. He would yell at her and call her names if the house wasn't cleaned. Kat did not understand why it was her responsibility to cook and clean the house when she was the one who worked the longer hours in the family. She tried to calm him down and compensate for his anger. Nothing seemed to work and she grew frustrated.

After five years of enduring all of his anger every day, Kat's situation went from bad to worse. Ferdinand began to use physical violence as a way of life. It was small incidents at first. A teasing slap on the butt, a pinch now and then, but it escalated after a short period of time. Once they had an argument at the dinner table over what to have for dessert. Out of nowhere, he slapped her. He slapped her full force on the right cheek. The blow was so forceful, it knocked her right off her chair. She was completely and utterly stunned. He apologized shortly after, but it left that uneasy, nagging feeling with her.

After six years of marriage they had three healthy children. They were witnesses to the daily violence that Kat experienced. Some days it was verbal abuse, other days it was a combination of physical and sexual abuse. She walked around on egg shells because she could never understand what set him off. Each night when he came home from his job, she rushed to make sure his hot dinner was on the table. She would make sure that the kids were clean and well dressed, that the house was immaculate and that she appeared relaxed and eager to please him. No matter what she did, she could never predict what would bring about his violent behavior.

One particular night she came home from work to find a shocking surprise. When she walked in with the kids he was brandishing a gun at the kitchen table. He claimed it was for his job. She began to protest the fact that he had a gun in the house where they were raising small children.

"I don't like guns. I especially don't like guns around small children. Do you have a case you can lock that up in?" asked Kat.

"I need this for my job, the job that pays the bills around here."

"Why do you need a gun when you work at a school?"

That was all it took. One simple question and she was being held hostage with the gun.

"Who are *you* to question why I need a gun? I need it for my own personal protection and to protect our family, besides it's none of your God damn business why I need a gun!" he said. "You're going to be sorry you question me about things."

With that he took the gun and forced it in her mouth. He said he'd blow the kids away if she didn't comply with his demands. Then he raped her at gunpoint. He held her at

the house for three hours threatening to kill her if she escaped. Kat was physically ill and just wanted out, no matter where she ended up. When he did let her go, she immediately took a hot shower. She felt dirty, used and unwanted like a car mechanic's rag. An hour later she hiked downtown to file for an order of protection against Ferdinand. That was the final straw in their marriage of violence. She promptly moved out of the house.

The order of protection was granted. However, the abuse did not stop even though Kat had moved out of their home and began a life aside from Ferdinand. He told her he loved her and that they should try to stay together as a family. He showed remorse for what he had done. One minute he was dreaming and making plans for them and then beating her next.

The case went to court but Kat refused to testify. She was clearly afraid. She refused to speak at all. The case was not as strong as it could have been, and Ferdinand was able to plea bargain after pleading guilty. He was given ten years probation.

Strangely enough, the couple reconciled after this terrible incident. They relocated to Desoto, Texas and began attending church together. They were faithful members of Inspiring Body of Christ, a large nondenominational church. Ferdinand sang in the church choir and even acted as an usher in the church. Kat felt as if he was trying to become a changed man. .

At this point her family was still frightened. They pleaded with Kat to leave Ferdinand. Kat turned to their pastor, Jill Jones, for marital advice and she suggested that Kat stay in the marriage and try to work things out. She saw the good in Ferdinand and his willingness to serve the church. She suggested marital counseling and offered her services to the couple.

The change didn't happen and Kat left the church and began to live on her own, away from Ferdinand once again. She never really cut off relations with Ferdinand because he supported their three children. She felt if they remained friends, Ferdinand would continue to be a father to the children, utilizing his right to visitation. At this point, the children were all teenagers and the oldest was graduating high school. To celebrate her daughter's educational accomplishment, she booked a cruise in December.

During the cruise it was amazingly relaxing to not have to answer phone calls or obey the demands of Ferdinand. Kat found freedom aboard the ship and relished in it. She knew deep down that she would have to cut off all ties with her husband to finally enjoy life and find peace of mind. She made the huge decision to divorce him and forget about the child support. She wasn't willing to fight for the money, and her freedom was far more important than money. She told the kids about her decision, thinking they would be upset. Their opinion was that Kat should divorce their father. They were so tired of the fighting, the violence. They just wanted a stable environment.

When she arrived home, Ferdinand was there to greet her. She decided it was finally time to cut the ties.

"I want a divorce," she said.

"Never. Not on your life," he said.

"We've been through this so many times. I need to be on my own, to start over again."

"You will always be mine, no matter what a piece of paper says. I've been thinking about this all night long. You are going to die today."

That was the moment he decided to kill her. He reached out and took her in his arms like he had done so easily hundreds of times before. She hadn't a moment to scream

when he reached for her neck with gigantic hands as big as hunks of meat and he began to choke the life from her. She gasped and wheezed for a breath of air. She took her free hand and began to beat at him desperate for a breath. Her eyes began to bulge and her skin took on a funny looking color of grey. Karen knew that she was about to die. She wondered about the children and how they would grow up without a mother. She made a funny gurgling noise and with all her strength she smacked him in the testicles allowing him to release his grip on her neck. She took a huge breath of air down her burning throat. She was able to run to her neighbors for help, but by the time the police arrived, Ferdinand was long gone. Kat was taken to a hospital for her injuries.

At the hospital a domestic violence response therapist named Robin was called in to counsel Kat. Robin was young and beautiful. A perfect blonde, blue-eyed, all American woman, she was meticulously dressed in a turquoise Calvin Klein shift and had manicured nails to match her outfit. Her high heel shoes made tiny clicking noises as she walked back and forth to the nurse's station.

She told Kat that she was a domestic violence survivor. Kat wondered how she could possibly be a victim of domestic violence. As she began to counsel her, Kat noticed a faint scar that ran across her neckline.

"Kat, you are lucky you were able to escape tonight, however, you are in grave danger. With your history of being threatened with a weapon, you are twenty times more likely to suffer a fatal injury at the hands of your abuser."

"I just can't believe this. Ferdinand is violent, but I don't think he would ever commit murder."

That's exactly what I thought about my ex," said Robin. She pointed to her scar.

“I almost died the night that he did this. He slit my throat and left me to die. It was sheer luck that a friend thought to check on me that night. She saved my life. However, a lot of women aren’t that fortunate. One hundred and fifty women have died from domestic violence at the hands of an intimate partner this year in Texas.”

Kat was stunned. She did not want to end up being another statistic. She had the kids, and so much more to live for. Robin counseled her and told her about a domestic violence shelter, but she didn’t want to put the kids in a shelter and put them through all that. They had witnessed so much over the years and she did not want to subject them to anymore hardship.

Robin said she would help Kat get an order of protection first thing in the morning. Kat also spoke to the police in the emergency room. She decided to press charges this time. In the past she had been pressured to call the police to press charges, but she never followed through. Sometimes it was out of fear, and other times she was not in the financial position to have him out of her life. Most of the time, she simply loved him too much to ever have him arrested. Even though he abused her, there was a part of her that still loved him. She wished she could just flip a switch and turn off her emotions, but it was never that easy. They had been together so long and had gone through so much. Kat thought that she could talk to him and make him understand that it was over, and then perhaps they could remain friends for the sake of the children.

The next morning, Robin and Kat stood before a judge to get an order of protection. Karen cited numerous incidents of violence and showed the judge the police report from the previous night. The order of protection was granted for ninety days. A warrant was put out for his arrest. Although the police were having difficulty locating him, Kat

had faith that he would be arrested soon. Kat began to email the Dallas police to thank them for their help and to inquire about the status of Ferdinand's arrest.

When Kat resent the email a second time, the officers responded with words of encouragement. The officers were hopeful of an arrest, but had no progress to report. Kat felt uneasy knowing that Ferdinand was still out there, perhaps stalking her. She began to limit her activities to work and back. That was her only travel or activity outside of the home. She began a support group for domestic violence in her home. It made her feel better knowing that she wasn't alone in her situation.

Soon she began to get extremely worried. Kat had contacted the officers who responded to her case more than eleven times. She hadn't received any notice as to the whereabouts of Ferdinand. He had not tried to contact her at all, which was very unlike him,

Two weeks had passed since the warrant had been issued for his arrest. Still, Kat remained hopeful. She wrote several letters to the Dallas police. She said, "I'm very grateful he will be picked up soon, and I can begin working on a new life." Another email said, "Even though he has not been arrested yet, I am confident it will be soon, and my children and I can relocate and no longer live in fear."

On January 8th, the Dallas police called Kat to tell her that her husband would be arrested that day. Kat sat down and emailed the police with a note thanks. Karen and the girls got ready for their day with a light heart knowing that Ferdinand would be arrested and they could breathe easier for awhile. As they left the house, Kat left the keys in the lock, and had to go back to get them in order to start the car. Her daughter ran up to fetch the keys, and then they proceeded to the car which was parked in a parking garage.

Kat owned a silver mustang convertible. It was a gem of an automobile. It had leather interior, heated seats, a Bose stereo system and a sun roof. As Kat walked into the garage, she saw her car immediately and a small smile came to her face. She loved her car, but her kids were always teasing her about how she loved the car more than she loved them. She and daughters continued to laugh and joke around in the parking garage. She hit the button on the remote to unlock the car. Two chirps rang out.

Suddenly, a gunshot rang out. Kat turned and a bullet hit her in the neck. At first it seemed like a thousand needles piercing her skin. She wasn't sure what had happened. Her daughter's faces were frozen with horrified looks. Instinctively, she put her hand up to her neck and felt something wet. It was her own blood dripping down her skin. Just then she saw him. It was Ferdinand and he was holding a gun. It was the same gun from his security job. He had a crazed look on his face and on his forehead were tiny beads of perspiration.

"Ferdinand! What the hell are you doing?" she asked.

"I told you awhile back that today you were going to die. You managed to escape me that time, however, not this time."

She took her key ring and fumbled to find the tiny can of mace hoping to blind him until she could get inside the car. She pushed the button on the tiny can and aimed for his eyes. The spray can was no match for the gun he was shooting. Three additional shots rang out in the garage. Ferdinand shot her again, three times in the face for a total of four bullets. As he walked away back to his car he saw his daughters crouched over the body of their mother, wearing a black and white polka dot jacket and a black skirt, bleeding onto the concrete garage floor. He paused a moment to think how beautiful she looked

before he shot her. That was the last time he would ever see her again.

The police were called and it wasn't difficult to find the family violence warrant against Ferdinand. Police were able to arrest him that night where he lived in Duncanville, just outside of Dallas. The children were so traumatized that they had to see a social worker at the hospital, and she tried to help them sort out the fact that their father had just murdered their mother and they witnessed the grizzly scene. The horrifying image of their mother bleeding in the parking garage would be forever ingrained in their minds

The morgue picked up her body and brought it to the funeral home. Kat's body was placed on a table in a back room. A tan blanket was placed over the body. The only visible part was her arm and hand. Kat's mother, Mrs. Horton, was called in make arrangements for the funeral. When she saw her only child on the table, she placed her arm under the quilt and then hugged her on top of the blanket. She wanted to see her sweet face one last time; however, she knew that her face would bear the bullet wounds from the gun. She longed to touch her hair, the curly hair that she had brushed and styled for years, but she realized it would be unrecognizable, matted with blood and dirt. She longed to hold her daughter one last time; however she did not want her last memory of her daughter to be one of her bullet-ridden body.

A memorial service was planned a few weeks after Kat's death. It was held at White Rock Lake, one of her favorite places to visit. Her children held three white doves and at the end of the services, they released them as they took flight over the lake.

Faith

Lizzy considered begging for her life. Would he really kill her? They had been married for over twenty one years. How could he possibly take another person's life, let alone the woman he said he loved? His hand was perched on the barrel of the gun, cocked and ready to spring into action at a moment's notice.

Richmond, Virginia was the city that was voted one of the most dangerous cities in America according to media reports. The city had a rich history not only of our founding fathers of this country, but a background steeped heavily in crime. The other statistic of this area was that it was the fourth most populated city in Virginia. Lizzy lived a conservative life despite the times in Richmond.

The seventies were a tough time to raise a child. Her parents had raised their only daughter a traditionalist and tried to instill the Ten Commandments into her education. She went to Catholic schools all her life and grew up hoping to become a wife and a mother. Her parents had been married for forty seven years this summer and whomever Lizzy married; they hoped that she would be as successful and happy as they were.

Just as high school was ending, Lizzy met a young man named Ron who worked for her father. He was new to the company and her father thought he'd offer the man a good, home cooked meal. He invited Ron for Sunday dinner.

Instantly, Ron was smitten with Lizzy. When Ron and Liz's dad were smoking good cigars on the porch, Ron took the chance to make a good impression.

“Sir, I would be most honored to date your daughter. Would you be amenable to that?” asked Ron.

“Well, let’s see. I think it’s a great thing that you’re asking, and not just assuming I approve, which by the way, I do approve. You’re a good Christian man and we would be proud to have you date Lizzy!”

They dated all summer long and in September, Ron proposed. Ron’s parents were thrilled and they were ecstatic that Lizzy would marry someone with the same values. Ron and Lizzy set a date to marry in December and before Christmas, they were husband and wife. His parents gave them a down payment on a house. The newlyweds couldn’t have been happier. Lizzy set about being a dutiful wife, and they had planned to get pregnant as soon as possible.

Months passed and with each cycle, Lizzy feared the worst. She thought she couldn’t get pregnant. After a few years they were just about to give up trying when Lizzy missed her period. She was in complete shock and didn’t want to jump to conclusions, but she made a doctor’s appointment immediately. Once the pregnancy was confirmed, Ron and Lizzy prepared themselves for the arrival of their first born, a daughter. Three years later, they welcomed a son. Their family was now complete.

During the first pregnancy, Ron subtly asked Lizzy one night, “Are you going out dressed like that?”

“What’s wrong with the maternity dress that I’m wearing?” asked Lizzy.

“It looks terrible and I want you to change,” said Ron. Reluctantly, Lizzy changed her clothes. Soon, Ron was going through her closet telling her what was acceptable to wear. She was hurt and disappointed that Ron found so many of her dresses too revealing and risqué. Her parents never complained, and she couldn’t understand why Ron chose to complain.

His chastising was innocent for starters. He gradually progressed to, “You are unattractive” or “You’re a bad mother.” Each altercation was like a knife, cutting deeper and deeper into her wounds. His comments were never consistent, nor were they constant. In between there were moments of normalcy and she was lulled into complacency. She wanted him to rise to the occasion and be like her father, as well as have their relationship mirror her parent’s relationship. He seemed to be shrinking further and further away from the person she’d wish he’d become.

He never laid a hand on her, with the exception of poking. Ron would yell at her for any one of a thousand reasons, but lately he had begun the practice of poking her as hard as he could with his hand. Ron would back Lizzy up against a wall as he was poking her and lecturing.

“You’re a bad mother. You’re a fat bitch. You’re ugly.” The taunts went on and on and Lizzy was not allowed to answer him back. So there she remained, slouched, silent, and up against the wall listening to all her perceived faults. She didn’t feel that the poking was domestic violence. The terrible things he said to her on a daily basis were domestic violence. It was the emotional part of his abuse that hurt tremendously.

In twenty years of marriage, Ron's negative comments increased and grew more and more hurtful as each day passed. Lizzy wanted out of their marriage and pondered her options. Her first instinct was to run away with the children. However, she knew that if she was caught, there would be consequences for her actions. Her next thought was that she could run away without the kids, but she would worry what it would be like for them, living with him all alone. Neither of these two options was acceptable and would likely be looked upon negatively for custody of the children.

The third option was the safest. Just stay calm and remain silent. It was scary to think Lizzy would stay for as long as she could, however at least she could monitor what was happening in their life. At least she could stay and protect the kids. After the children grew up and left their home, Lisette would reconsider moving out. If her parents could last forty seven years of the good and bad, she could stick it out through the rough times too.

Lizzy lived on hope. The hope that Ron matures enough to love her like an equal. She hoped his feelings would change for the better. To respect her like her father respected her mother. She was always conflicted with her feelings. Lizzy felt a huge connection with Ron, yet he continued to be emotionally abusive. He berated her day and night to the point where she couldn't take it anymore.

By their twentieth anniversary, Lizzy was extremely depressed. She started having panic attacks when she heard Ron's car pull up the driveway. Her depression was so bad that she decided to seek help from a professional. During her forty five minute session each week, Lizzy discovered that she was in a dysfunctional relationship at best and her

therapist informed her that she was at a high risk for physical domestic violence. The therapist told her that the mental abuse is a lot harder to recover from than the physical violence.

Lizzy was concerned that the children were affected in this relationship. Her son was already repeating the phrases that Ron would say on a daily basis. One night he called Lizzy a “fat bitch” and told her “it’s your job to serve me”. The child was only nine years old and would hear these things constantly. It’s no wonder he repeated them back to Lizzy without a thought behind their meaning. Lizzy also worried about her daughter internalizing how she should be treated as a woman in a relationship.

Lizzy tried keeping the children out of the house as much as possible. She had them involved in as many extracurricular activities as their school work would permit. When the children were home with their father, his moods were unpredictable. They would walk around on eggshells just to ensure that he wouldn’t get angry. They constantly dreaded being near him because his moods were so easily triggered.

Finally, the time came when Lizzy couldn’t stand it any longer. She wanted out.

“That’s it. I’m done. I have taken all I can for twenty one years and now I am telling you that I want a separation,” she said.

“You’ll never get the kids,” he said. “I’ll tell the courts about your mental instability, or your weekly therapist appointments, and no judge in the world will give you custody.”

“Fine. I’ll leave without the kids if I have to,” she said. “I’ll wait for my settlement after we’re divorced.”

“If you leave this house you will be forfeiting all rights to any property, so there will be no settlement,” he said. “I will take everything and anything from you that I can. You’ll be lucky to have the clothes on your back to cover your fat ass.”

Ron approached Lizzy about going out of town one weekend a month to renew their marriage, to give it a fighting chance. He told her that he had made reservations at a nice hotel and that she owed him an opportunity to try and salvage their relationship. Lizzy got a foreboding feeling about the getaway weekend and she was so upset at the thought of it that she called her sister as well as her therapist.

“You are in the midst of the honeymoon phase of domestic violence, Liz. This is the calm before the storm when the abused becomes complacent with their abusers because all is seemingly well at the time. I beg you. Don’t go!”

Her therapist said, “Liz, it is clear that you are still undecided whether or not you want to remain married to Ron. Do some soul searching to investigate how you feel at this juncture.”

At this point in their relationship, Lizzy knew it was his word against her word. The one regret she had at that moment was that she never called the police, not even once in their relationship. She never considered his treatment of her abusive, but now after undergoing therapy she knew that his emotional abuse was twice as damaging as physical abuse. It was going to take a lot of hard work and patience to heal from emotional wounds.

One night, Ron acquiesced and agreed he should be the one to move out of the house. Lizzy wanted to rejoice, but weeks passed and he was always delaying and stalling for

extra time. He always came up with some excuse that no one could argue, until finally Lizzy took matters into her own hands. She decided to live at a girlfriend's house until he could evacuate their house. She did not want to spend another minute under the same roof with Ron.

The following day was their son's birthday and they had about ten kids over for a small celebration. Ron and Lizzy did not talk to one another, and Ron was unusually quiet. He had changed somehow. He displayed a sense of calm that Lizzy had never seen before. By the time both children were sound asleep, Lizzy tried to think about how different Ron was behaving. She tossed and turned all night trying to sort things out. The last words spoken that Saturday night will be forever etched in her memory.

"How will you live when you leave me?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I have faith," she answered.

The next morning was the start to a glorious day. It was Sunday, so Lizzy got the children ready and they went to church. Ron stayed home watching television. When they got home, Lizzy went to call her friend to see what time they should get together to take a walk. Before making the phone call, Lizzy went into the bedroom to get changed.

Ron entered the bedroom just as Lizzy was tying her shoes. He asked Lizzy to lay down in bed with him. She refused. He left the room and returned with a gun that was fetched from his travel shaving kit.

"I love you too much to live without you," he said. With that being said, he aimed the gun to her head. Instantly Lizzy stood up and took a bullet to the chest. Ron kept firing

at her and his last bullet entered through her back and just missed her heart. She heard him stop to reload the gun.

With the first gunshot, the kids knew that something awful had just happened. When they saw their mother race down the stairs screaming, and bleeding profusely, they jumped to action. At Lisette's request her son stopped an oncoming motorist to have them dial 911.

When the police arrived they tried to communicate with Ron via the house phone. Ron still had a loaded gun and the protocol was to secure the scene with caution. Ron had used his last bullet to end his life, but no one had any idea that he had committed suicide. While Lizzy was collapsed in the living room, the police had to make sure the scene was secure. The last sounds she remembered were the ambulances that were not allowed to enter the house for what seemed an eternity.

Lizzy was rushed to the hospital. The doctors were able to remove all of the bullets with the exception of the one in her liver. She keeps the thought of it as a reminder of how close she came to dying on that day. She counts the staples that hold her abdomen together, thirty nine in all. Then there's the twenty five staples that helped reattach her right breast over her chest cavity. Sixty four staples are holding her body together until it is ready to heal.

When her visitors leave, she cries. Just as the staples hold her body together, her tears help keep her mind together to try and grasp what has just happened to her and the children. When her sister brings her son to visit, she asks him if he is sad that his father

committed suicide. He responds that he is the man about the house now, and that he doesn't care what happened. He never wants to talk about it ever again.

Her daughter and son are incredibly angry and depressed. Her son has reoccurring nightmares about monsters and he goes from house to house seeking help with no luck. Her daughter is suicidal. She talks about missing her dad as if he did nothing but take his own life. She has blocked out the fact that he was verbally abusive and tried to murder her mother.

The credit card statement for Ron arrived in the mail when Lizzy returned home from the hospital. On the statement was a charge for a hotel room that was never used. Was it somewhere romantic or charming? It was a \$69.00 Motel Six room just outside of Richmond. This was where Ron was planning to take Lizzy to reconnect and rekindle their marriage? Lizzy now understood that the hotel was where Ron planned to murder her. The fact that his gun was in his travel shaving kit confirmed her theory. She immediately felt fortunate that her sister talked her out of going away for the weekend.

Lizzy began the arduous process of rebuilding a broken family, one with a gravely injured mother and two emotionally devastated children. She hired five therapists to interact with the family to get them through this crisis. Extra counselors were brought into the children's schools to help all of the students' process what happened. The financial devastation of trying to run the family after a crisis of this magnitude was staggering. Lisette estimated that just therapy and doctor's bills have hit over \$200K.

When will she stop paying for choosing a bad husband? The costs extended way beyond the financial burden that has been placed upon the survivors. Lizzy's wounds

will heal somewhat. The bullet in her liver can't be removed safely. She still has no feeling in her right breast. It is difficult to concentrate and to focus on the task at hand. She always thought she would be able to heal and go back to work trying to support her family. She was unprepared for how debilitating her injuries would be for her even after a normal recovery time. Now, she sits back and counts her blessings. She is more fortunate than most domestic violence victims. She has her life, her children and no ex-husband to might stalk her, fight for material possessions or even custody of minor children.

For now, her goal is simple. She has no idea what is in store for her family. How will she live? Lizzy has no idea, but she has faith.

Ferris Wheel

When does the violence begin to affect a child? If they are young and don't remember the abuse, does it still hold its grip on them as they grow up and form relationships as adults?

Lori was a Jersey Girl. She was beer, beaches and boys. People used to call her a tall drink of water. Her life was all about fabulous summers at Great Adventure, Point Pleasant beach, walking the boardwalk playing carnival games or just hanging out with friends in Woodridge where she grew up. Lori had a great group of friends, but never dated in high school. She was shy, awkward and had no self-esteem. That was until she met Bobby.

Bobby was good-looking and he knew it. He was a popular football player and had a hell of a temper. Of course, Lori didn't know that at first. They met as seniors in the high school, and he was sweet, almost tender at times. He asked her to prom and that's where it all started. They were inseparable after that. Bobby was her first, one and only boyfriend. Lori always felt, well, loyal to him.

When they were twenty one, Bobby took her to Great Adventure. They were at the top of the Ferris wheel, and the ride suddenly jerked to a stop. All day long Bobby seemed nervous but he turned to Lori and shouted, "I love you. Marry me."

Lori knew they were young and that her parents would object. Her brain was trying to come up with an argument for wanting to get married at their age. She could always point out that her parents married young, or that she was legally old enough to do

anything that she wanted. She loved Bobby and it seemed like the right thing to do at the time. She hesitated a few seconds before she replied.

“Yes! Yes! Let’s do it!” she screamed. They both felt invincible.

Of course her parents felt differently. Her father was overly concerned and completely over whelmed.

“You are barely old enough to vote, never mind getting married to someone who can’t even afford to support you,” said her father.

“I know that you were exactly my age when you got married to mom, who, by the way was even younger than I was!” said Lori. “Mom had graduated high school two weeks before she married you.”

They knew she had it all figured out and there seemed to be no way to make her understand that she was too young and naïve to make such a monumental marital decision. Lori began to furtively plan colors for bridesmaid’s dresses and find a wedding dress. There was so much to do that it was dizzying.

Months and weeks flew by fast. There was a rehearsal at the church the day before the ceremony and the next day Lori found herself shaking in the vestibule of the church. Her father was more than a bit concerned.

“Lori, sweetheart, what’s going on?” asked her dad.

“I want to marry Bobby. I’m just a little nervous,” said Lori. “I’ve thought about this a lot and I am sure this is the right thing to do.”

“Sometimes we all make mistakes or poor choices. I don’t want you feeling trapped in a bad mistake,” said her father. “I like Bobby, he’s alright. I just don’t know if he’s right for you.”

“Daddy, you know how much I love you. You are the best man on the face of the earth, No one can even come close or compare to you. Anyone I marry won’t be a good choice in your book.”

With those words, she began her journey down a long aisle. Lori began to cry as she took step after step on the plastic aisle runner. The heel of her shoes broke through, and tore up the plastic with tiny bullet-like holes. The truth was, Lori had been thinking a lot about the wedding, and as she walked down the aisle she realized that she might be making a mistake. However, as she continued towards the altar, she knew she couldn’t back out. With every guest she met eyes with in the pews; she flashed a shy smile and knew that she could never face the embarrassment of backing out now.

Lori couldn’t stop crying. She was shaking and sniffing and everyone thought she was just emotional, everyone except her father. He knew that she was having doubts. The prayers and vows were said, and before a half hour was up, they were married with a license to prove it. They were off to the reception at the VFW hall.

The VFW hall was a smoky little place. It was a one room venue with a large mahogany bar that people scratched their names and sayings into the deep wood. Sayings such as “Dan was here” or “Call Janet for a good time” were written in the wood after one too many drinks. The walls were decorated with Pepto-Bismol pink streamers and accordion folded wedding bells to match the pink color of the bridesmaid’s dresses.

Kisses were exchanged with parents and friends, and soon they were off to Florida for a week of their honeymoon. The plan was to spend time in Florida on the beach, tanning their golden bronze skin an even deeper shade than the tan they had already achieved. Lori had baby oil and iodine to slather on her skin so that she could soak up the best of the sun, and she sat on the beach with a tin foil pan to help attract the rays to her face. Lori and Bobby wore their jean shorts and walked down the beach liked they owned it. The sand crunched between their toes and they took pictures of their feet in the sand.

After a few days Bobby turned cold and distant. She found he was angry over the most insignificant things. He would yell and scream over nothing in particular. He seemed angry over his family in particular. One minute he was talking to them, and they next week he wasn't speaking to someone in the family. Lori thought there were bi-polar issues that went undiagnosed. One night after drinking he let it all loose.

"What the hell have I gotten myself into? I'm young and good-looking and I can have any girl I want anytime. Why did I marry so young? I really made a mistake this time!" Lori kept her feelings to herself; however, she knew she had made a huge mistake as well. Bobby's temper raged when he drank and he drank often.

When they arrived back home, they moved into Bobby's bedroom with his parents. Lori spent her free time fixing it up and putting a woman's touch on the place. There wasn't much she could do with the little money they had, because they were saving for an apartment of their own to afford them the privacy they needed. She organized the room, organizing was her forte, and she made space for her things while improving the flow and storage space of the room.

Bobby, on the other hand, was not saving their money. He blew it on booze, and charged anything he wanted. He felt he deserved nice things and would justify his purchases declaring that he worked hard and knew he ought to have the finest things money could buy. Their money was dwindling and their debt was mounting. Lori felt trapped without money and worried that their debt was on the rise.

However, Lori developed a coping mechanism that she would use frequently in their marriage. She kept all her feelings to herself. If Bobby didn't have to listen to her unhappiness, it would save them both the grief that could come from it. If he screamed at her, she would simply stand there and take it without saying a word. Inwardly, she knew this might be problematic in the future, but she had too much to process at this point in her marriage.

Soon a baby girl was on the way. Lori thought that the baby would bring about some change in Bobby. Perhaps stir up a paternal feeling, one where he would want to protect both of them. Unfortunately, it was twice as bad as it was before. One evening when Lori was nursing the baby, Bobby was miserable. Things were stagnant at the car shop and everything pointed to a lay off. They began to argue, with the baby at her breast.

"Why did you spend so much money at the grocery store?" said Bobby. "You know we don't have much money in the bank account!"

"I just bought a few things, everything I bought I used a coupon! I bought mostly baby food and diapers for the baby," she said.

"There has got to be a better way," he said. "Spending a hundred dollars every week will zero out our account."

“I can’t cut down anymore. We are down to the bare minimum,” she said.

“Look at this! He screamed as he unloaded one of the plastic bags. “Nuts! Do we need nuts? A bottle of nuts!”

Suddenly the nuts went flying at Lori. They caught her on the leg after hitting the wall. She screamed out in pain, but she was more concerned with the baby.

“Bobby! What the hell did you do? You could have hit the baby!”

“I would never hit the baby,” he shouted.

No, but...you can and do hit me, she thought to herself. As it turned out, she needed several stitches in her leg.

She lied about how it happened and drove herself to and from the emergency room. She was so used to the arguments, they were becoming second nature. The other thing that was becoming second nature was the arguments with his extended family members. He had a terrible relationship with them. One minute they were talking and all was good between them. The next moment they were fighting and the daily phone conversations ended. All of the inconsistency took a toll on Bobby. One minute he was happy as happy as can be. The next day he was depressed and angry. Keeping up with his mood swings was exhausting.

No matter what happened, Lori continued to block it out and go along as if everything was fine. They struggled together to purchase their first home. Their first night in the house, Bobby was in rare form. She went inside the bedroom to get away from him, and he kicked down the door. Lori was furious because they had just bought this home, and

the new door in the bedroom was splintered into hundreds of pieces. She spent the better part of an hour sweeping up the door pieces and taking the splintered frame off the hinges.

Bobby's drinking progressively went from bad to worse. On a day to day basis he was a functioning alcoholic. He drank from the moment he woke up to the moment he went to sleep. Lori tried pleading, nagging and begging him to stop and evaluate his drinking problem. Nothing worked. She appealed to his family to help but they were dysfunctional at best and couldn't care less about Bobby's problems. "They all had problems," Bobby's mother said.

Soon another baby entered the picture. They had two girls under the age of three and Lori was still working full-time. This was about the time that Lori began to shake. Her shaking was uncontrollable and she was embarrassed in public. She was nervous all the time and the abuse had increased. She had no idea when he was about to hit her and he could switch from zero to a hundred on the violent side in just seconds. She put up with daily violence and just prayed that it would be minimal each day. She hid the scars and bruises with various forms of clothing to avoid the stares and the constant pressuring questions. She became an expert at avoidance and lies.

Bobby's drinking became so bad that even he realized, it was no longer safe to drive. One day when Lori was driving him to work, she made a wrong turn and ended up in a confusing neighborhood. She began to drive around in circles, trying to figure a way out of the development. Bobby became so incensed that she was lost; he hit her as hard as he

could from the passenger seat. Lori's head hit the driver's side window with so much force that it almost cracked the window. He knocked an earring right out of her ear lobe.

This incident was witnessed by their two children who were buckled into the back seat of the car. They had already seen so much violence that Lori began to wonder what was "normal" for them now. Were they thinking that it was acceptable for men to hit women? Above all else, Lori thought about the welfare of her children and wanted them to grow up in a non-violent household. This violent marriage was not where her children needed to be. Already, Lori was looking for a way out of the marriage.

When the kids were five and three an incident occurred that was the turning point for the family. Bobby punched Lori right in front of the kids. Lori fell to the floor and the five year old tried to jump on her father's back to force him to stop beating her. It startled Bobby enough for him to realize the tragedy of what was happening, and he stepped back. Disgusted, Bobby left the house. For the first time in her life, Lori called the police.

The police arrested Bobby on multiple counts. He couldn't make bail and stayed in the county jail until his court appearance. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to six months of prison. Lori was awarded an order of protection against Bobby and in 1995, after five long and difficult years of marriage; a judge granted Lori a divorce.

Life continued to be difficult even after their divorce. Bobby hit Lori during an exchange of the children for his sporadic visitation. The court ordered the children exchanged at the police department to prevent further domestic violence. Lori had to move into her old bedroom at her parent's house with bunk beds for the girls in the same

room. Living conditions were rough and overcrowded in her parent's house and yet she was so appreciative that she had a roof over their heads.

Bobby continued on a path of destruction. He tipped a motorcycle on top of himself and became totally disabled. At that point in his life he had to move into his mother's house. He drank himself to death by 2001, just five and a half years after the divorce. Lori's life went the complete opposite direction. Her father continued to be her closest parent until he died four years ago. He was her biggest supporter when she left Bobby and moved into her parent's home. He encouraged her to go to college, so she took his advice and went to Middlesex County College. After two years of studying, she received her associates degree and transferred to Rutgers University where she was awarded a masters degree in labor/employee relations in 2011.

As a single parent, Lori raised two girls, and became successful in a field she loved. Today, she still remains single and works out to remain healthy and fit each day.

Twelve Hours

As Mina sipped her cosmopolitan, she felt the burn of the vodka slide down the back of her throat. It felt good as she was mingling with friends in Carrigans, a musty pub on the lower east side of town. It was the kind of place that was classy and popular with the twenty something crowd. They had to get there early in order to get good seats before the band began to play. Carrigans was an old familiar joint with good music, great food and a crowd unparalleled to any other pub in the city.

While the Friday night crowd was hopping, Mina and her sister Lorraine cashed their paychecks. They changed at work into something dressier for dancing. As soon as they finished touching up their makeup, they dashed over to the pub. It was the coldest winter Mina had recalled in a long time. Perhaps 1999 would bring a ton of snow as well. It was only December and they had experienced three bad storms, dropping over six feet of snow in Denver. Her thoughts wandered to her three year old son named Ben, born when she was just sixteen, while she was still in school. She hoped things were okay with the babysitter.

Mina was a tiny 5'2" bottle-blond who weighed a hundred pounds. She was tough for such a small girl, used to handling large show horses when she was a few years younger. She had an alcoholic mother, who was always in and out of abusive relationships. She and her sister Lorraine grew to depend upon one another. At one point Leanne found out that she and her sister would be placed in separate foster homes. Mina panicked because she was close to Lorraine. It would be years before the sisters were

reunited with one another and they vowed never again to be separated from one another again.

As Mina's drink was watering down, she looked across the dance floor and that was when she first saw him. She gave Lorraine a nudge.

"Cute guy alert," she murmured. "In fact, gorgeous guy alert. Dark shaved hair, a tiny bit of a five o'clock shadow, and those muscles. They're practically popping out of his shirt."

"Cute maybe, but stay away from that one," said Lorraine.

"Why? He seems harmless enough." Mina laughed. She continued to admire the view from afar. He was posing against the bar with one arm as if to say, "I'm gorgeous and I know it".

"He's far from harmless," said Lorraine. "His name is Shane Peters. A few years ago, he was in prison for stomping on some guy's head and leaving him brain damaged. I think he served four years or so. He's a freakin' psycho. The Outlaw tattoo on his arm tells the whole story. I wouldn't touch him with a ten foot pole."

"There was also an incident in '95 where he forced a man to the ground and kicked him in the head and his body, causing a fracture of his skull, facial injuries and broken ribs. He was sent to that young offender prison for that offense. Lorraine's right. Better not get involved with that one," said her friend Heather.

"Still looks incredible to me," Mina said and then deliberately walked right in front of him, flirting by catching his eye and flashing a smile. She stood at the bar, ready to order

a drink. It wasn't but a minute when he sidled right up to her and touched her hand on the bar. Then, for a few seconds, their eyes locked. What mysterious eyes he had!

"Can I buy a pretty lady a drink?" Shane asked.

"Sure," she said with a shy smile.

Lorraine was back at the table fuming. She had just told Mina about Shane and yet Mina chose to ignore her warning. What the hell was she thinking?! Lorraine ran up to the bar and made up an excuse so that they could leave the bar. Mina smiled apologetically and took her purse and coat that Lorraine was holding.

"Sorry, looks like we're leaving," said Mina to Shane. "Next time?"

He smiled. "How do you know there will be a next time?"

When the sisters were outside, Mina exploded.

"Why did you just make up some pathetic excuse to make me leave so early?"

"I just told you that Shane was an ex-con and a psycho and I cannot bear to see you to get involved with that kind of guy. Be smart and stay away from him."

The two women rode home together in tense silence. Mina couldn't stop thinking about Shane and how gorgeous he was. She closed her eyes and thought about how attracted she was to him, and wondered what he was thinking.

Many seasons came and went but the next ten years brought Mina another relationship and another son named Liam. Mina had her first son Ben when she was sixteen, and she plunged into that relationship hoping for romance, but all she got was being a teenage,

single mother. She wanted that fairy tale marriage that never came true. Of course, now being thirty two and a single mother was enough to keep her busy. It was difficult to find time to fold the laundry let alone fantasize about men. However, she was lonely and still searching for something, someone perhaps.

On the night of the playoffs for the Denver Broncos, the girls from the office were going out to Carrigans to watch the game in the bar. Lorraine wanted Mina to go, but she was simply not interested.

“Come with us to Carrigans, you’ll have a great time,” said Lorraine.

“Nope, I’m not interested,” she called from the living room,

“Come on,” said Lorraine. “It will be like old times. I heard there’s going to be quite the crowd there with the playoffs.”

“I’m not interested in crowds!” said Mina. “I’m a boring, thirty three year old single mother of two children.”

Eventually Lorraine talked her into going to Carrigans just for one drink. The band was fantastic that night. It seemed as if everyone was up dancing and there was hardly an open spot on the floor. After a while, Mina needed a break. When she got to her table, the waitress had put down a Cosmopolitan. Leanne hadn’t asked for a drink, so it was odd that it appeared out of nowhere, especially when she was thinking of ordering one. She stopped the waitress.

“I didn’t order this, but its perfect timing. How much do I owe you?” asked Mina.

“Nothing. It’s compliments from the man across the way.” She pointed to a table diagonal to theirs.

At first, she didn’t recognize him, he was gorgeous; there was no doubt about that. He was six foot something, 240-250 pounds, very muscular. She knew she knew him but couldn’t place the connection. Finally, it hit her. She recognized him after more than ten years. It was the same guy she met in Carrigans that night so long ago. She made her way across the room.

“Thank you for the drink..um..Mr?” she said.

“Peters. Shane Peters. You’re welcome,” he said while pointing to the empty seat next to him.

After talking for over an hour, Lorraine showed up and shot her a “What the hell are you doing with that guy” look. Mina took that as a cue to call it a night. She exchanged phone numbers with Shane and he promised her to call the following week. They set a date to go out to dinner at a nice restaurant and she found herself looking forward to talking to him again. She found him sweet and gentle, unlike anyone she had ever known.

When they finally went out the following week, Shane told Mina things that he had never told anyone before. He was abandoned as a child and that he once robbed someone at knifepoint to get food. His childhood seemed beyond belief. He even told Leanne a story about how he used to dig up graves to look for antique jewelry to resell. All throughout the night, Shane seemed so honest and alluring that Mina looked at his

mistakes as a part of his difficult past and felt like he was trying to make a better life for himself.

It was quick when Shane and Mina made the decision to move in together. She was in need of a steady relationship. The last man Mina had been with was with the father of her youngest son, Liam. He never let her know where she stood in their four year relationship. One moment she felt as if he loved her and the very next moment she felt as if he was taking off on her. Her self confidence was the lowest it had ever been. She finally had enough.

He seemed indifferent concerning their split. Leanne wasn't expecting a dramatic response; however she wanted some kind of emotion when their relationship was over. Didn't he care about her at all? Breaking it off with him only convinced her that she was looking for someone who would let her know she was loved, someone stable and strong. When Shane described Leanne as his best friend, she was convinced this was the relationship that she had been searching for. It was at that moment that Leanne knew she loved him more than anyone she had ever loved before.

Leanne noticed their first sign of trouble eight months after Shane moved in. First, he began damaging the possessions she loved when they argued. He broke a china doll given to her by her best friend when she was six. Next he broke a family heirloom vase given to her by her grandmother. Then there was the night he grabbed for her neck and caught her gold chain. He snapped it off her neck and it plummeted to the ground. He began to spit at her during arguments.

Then, Mina was sleeping one night and she was woken up by a sound downstairs. When she investigated, she found her friend Heather in just her underwear with Shane.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Leanne demanded.

“It’s nothing. It’s not what it seems,” said Heather.

“If it’s not what it seems, what the hell is it?” asked Leanne. “What is it exactly? Heather, I thought you were my friend?”

Heather looked at the ground and pushed her way past both Leanne and Shane. She grabbed her pants from the couch and exited the scene without a final look at either one of them.

When Mina pressed Shane for an explanation, things got out of control. He punched her in the face three times. She ran upstairs to try and get away from him, but he threw her right back down the full flight of stairs. The police arrived and took Shane to jail. It was to be the first of many hospitalizations Mina would have to endure after an encounter with Shane.

However, it wasn’t long before he had convinced Mina to and make up a story so he wouldn’t face domestic violence charges within the court system. She blamed it all on alcohol; he was drunk and was not making the best decisions. She continued her relationship with Shane. She loved him. She couldn’t turn her feelings on and off. Whenever they fought, afterwards there was always great make up sex. The more they fought, the more she craved Shane. He must really love me to want to come back, she

thought after each attack. He told her that she drove him to attack her, making her feel it was all her fault. Her self confidence was so low that she began to believe him.

Each time they fought, the more violent it had become. Shane backhanded Mina on each cheek. It was a miracle that she was still standing upright afterwards. Then he gave her blows to the back of her head. Mina's ears began ringing and wouldn't stop for hours. Mina went to the emergency room and Shane had broken her cheekbone.

There was a time when Mina was sleeping and she woke up to find Shane was moving the large wardrobe in front of the door so that exiting was impossible. Then she saw a massive carving knife on the floor. She didn't say anything. She was paralyzed with fear. Shane came over and sat on her chest straddling her torso. He grabbed her right arm and slashed it three times. It was bizarre and unexplainable. The kids heard her screaming and came running down the hallway. When they tried opening the door, the heavy wardrobe was no match for a child's body. The kids continued to pound on the door until Shane opened it for them. By that time, the damage was done.

One night Mina was sleeping and woke up to find Shane on top of her choking her. She was stunned at first. What the hell was he doing? Within seconds her survival instinct took over and then she began to kick him off of her. When she was a kid she had worked to control show horses, and she called on her skill set to kick him off of her so that she could try to escape. When she reached the upstairs, she hid under the duvet cover like a little kid. Shane ripped off the duvet and knocked her unconscious, breaking her arm. Her oldest son Ben had run across the street to a neighbor for help.

After that incident of violence, the police fitted Mina's apartment with a panic button. They also gave Shane with an electronic monitoring system that would track him if he went near her residence. At first, Mina went through with an order of protection. It wasn't long before the couple managed to side-step their way around all obstacles. Mina would sneak over Shane's apartment and meet him there for make-up sex. Shane had Mina convinced that because she was with him, she was suspect as well about her questionable behavior. He had her brainwashed to not trust the police, family services or domestic violence counselors. He told her that she would lose the children if she spoke with the police or any other authorities.

On their second anniversary, Shane and Mina went out to celebrate with friends. Shane was drinking and smoking pot. Before they left, Shane tried to slip their friends some prescription pain pills. Mina knew it was illegal to give them to friends, so she became very upset with Shane. The ride home was tense and difficult. When they arrived home together, Shane fumbled for the keys in his pocket. When he turned the lock, he lunged on Mina, and she crashed to the tile floor. Her back hit the floor first and then her head bounced off of it like a child's toy.

Mina reached up and cradled her head while trying to stop the pounding in her ears. Shane sat on top of Mina delicate frame and began to punch her until she was unconscious. Then he choked her so hard that her toes curled and spasmed. Mina came to, and heard a gurgling sound. She fell unconscious again and when she woke up, something horrible had already happened. There was nothing but blackness. The room was thick with an ebony sheen. Mina reached out to touch her cheek. She felt something slimy and small; she knew something was terribly wrong. It didn't take long for her to

realize that she was touching her eyeball. Shane had actually gouged out both of her eyes while she was unconscious.

She began to scream hysterically. It was then that Shane had a glimmer of an idea that he did something wrong.

“Shut up, bitch. This is entirely your fault,” Shane screamed.

“Shane, how could you do something like this?” asked Mina.

“I’m going to get twenty years for this!” He shouted.

“Get the kids, they can get help,” implored Mina.

“You’ll never see your kids ever again. You’ll never see them grow up!” he said.

Mina was immobile. Shane was holding her prisoner, unable to figure out how to proceed. He knew if he let her go, he would get arrested and charged with attempted murder. He also knew that if he kept her, it could be worse. Who knows what could happen...could she die?

So he kept her. She was wrapped up in a duvet cover, a whisper away from death. She was screaming for her life, begging Shane to get her medical help. She was bleeding so much and Shane panicked. He decided to take her upstairs and put her in the bath full of water. Maybe the water would stop the bleeding and clean up some of the mess. He pushed her face under the water and while she was submerged, she wondered if he would let her up. Would this be the way she would die? The pain was indescribable. She tried to shriek as her eyes felt they were on fire under the water. Over and over again he kept

dunking her. She couldn't take a breath yet he shoved her again and again. Her lungs felt as if they would explode.

As she was coming up for what seemed like the hundredth time, she took the biggest breath and started to scream agony. "I love you Shane. Let me go, you know it's for the best," she pleaded.

"You made me do this. And now I'm going to prison just because of you!" He screamed. "I don't want to go back! You have no idea....all for a stupid bitch."

It had been eleven hours since Shane had her wrapped up and held as a prisoner in the duvet cover. All she kept doing was chanting, moaning that she loved him, and she was hoping he would let her get some help.

Finally, after an exhausting twelve hours, he ran to the house down the street to fetch her older son Ben. He let Ben call 911 and it was just minutes before the police arrived. No one was prepared for what they saw. She had bruising all over her throat. Her nose and cheekbone were broken again and she had so many bruises the EMT squad couldn't fathom the extent of her injuries. They transported her immediately to the local hospital.

When Mina entered the emergency room she was put in surgery immediately. Her left eye was a complete loss and couldn't be saved. Saving her right eye was initially the surgeon's hope, but the doctors were unable to save her sight. Friends and family who came to visit after the attack had to leave the hospital room because her injuries were extreme and difficult to look at for extended periods of time.

When police inquired as to the whereabouts of Shane, Ben stated that he ran off after he told him his mom needed help. Police went to local establishments and began to inquire as to his whereabouts.

When a few of his friends were identified, it was clear that he didn't have many loyal friends. Most of the men were willing to tell the police where to look right away.

"Try Carrigan's Pub. It's about the only place that allows him in at the bar nowadays," said most of the men who were interviewed.

As soon as they police entered, Shane knew it was over. "She made do it," he exclaimed. It was clear to the police that they were dealing with a mentally unstable adult. Who gouges someone's eyes out and then goes to a bar for a drink? Shane was put in hand cuffs and escorted to the local police station. Shane never told the police that he was responsible for the physical attack. When he was up in front of a judge in court almost a full year later, he finally admitted to the charge of grievous bodily harm. He has never expressed remorse for his crimes. He also never inquired about Mina and her condition. Shane was sentenced to life in a psychiatric hospital. After an initial examination, Shane was diagnosed with delusional disorder.

It is ironic that from the moment of the attack, Shane was able to receive counseling and psychiatric care. Minz, however, was advised not to get counseling until after the trial due to the fact that it might influence her testimony, should she have to testify against Shane. It is difficult to imagine a young, single mother of two, having had her eyes gouged out, becoming blind, and not being able to receive psychiatric counseling for

grief, depression and post traumatic stress syndrome. Mina had to rely on her own personal strength, wisdom and strength of friends and family during that entire period.

Shane was no stranger to violence. Had Mina had access to his records involving violence, she would have discovered that in 1994, when he was just fourteen, he also committed grievous bodily harm to a fellow student. He left the child with a broken cheekbone and a scratched eye. When he was fifteen he admitted to robbery with an accomplice where they held the victim for three hours subjecting him to kicking, punching and cutting with a knife. That victim suffered a broken leg and facial injuries. When Shane was eighteen, he assaulted three people by punching them in the face. When he was nineteen he head-butted a police officer called to an incident involving Shane.

In 1999, at twenty, he and another man forced their victim to the ground and kicked him to the head and body, causing a fracture of his skull, facial injuries and broken ribs. For that offence he was sent to a young offender institution for four years. In 2006 and again in 2010 he punched a doorman who refused him entry into a nightclub. He was on a “pub watch” because of his severe behavior and violence.

Shane Peters continues to serve his sentence in prison. Mina had to deal with depression after her last attack. She felt like she wanted to die. She even asked her sister to kill her because she felt so worthless. However, she continues to fight depression and has found the tremendous love and support from her friends and family has really helped with her medical condition. The fact that she has two young boys has helped her overcome this tragedy.

“I’m doing it for them, because I want them to be proud of me.”

Mina has also received countless letters which her family reads to her. One person wrote to her and asked how she felt at that moment about Shane. She replied he was like someone she simply deleted.

“To be honest, I feel nothing toward him. I don’t feel anger because that’s a feeling and I don’t want to have feelings towards him. I’m not going to waste my time.”

Smitten

The train sputtered and spat sparks as it sped towards its rush hour destination. They lived in northwest Chicago next to the elevated train tracks, and on a good day, life seemed like a personal earthquake. When someone was next to a window on the west wall, one could literally reach a hand out and touch the tracks of the train. Life stopped until the speeding trains passed by. The apartment shook and the noise was deafening. They were pathetically poor and penniless, along with the two hundred other poverty-stricken occupants of the building.

Furniture was sparse. Most of it was hand-me-downs and the only thing Mike and Brigid owned that was new was a modest brown and tan sofa they bought using their new Montgomery Ward credit card. The diminutive kitchen looked over the back alley. Brigid made some blue and white gingham curtains to hide the view of dumpsters, dirt and metal bars on each and every window. The living room had one trendy, exposed brick wall. The whole apartment was tiny, but they had grand hopes of moving into a two bedroom apartment in the same building.

Their romance was quick and intense. They met while still in college and were instantly smitten. Soul mates. That's what they called each other. As soon as she could, Brigid left Princeton for Chicago and they were married in a civil ceremony that was almost as quick as their whirlwind romance. The whole ceremony lasted less than five minutes and it took Brigid longer to wait in line for the bathroom than it took to be married by the State of Illinois.

They drove to a small family-only reception at a Polish place called Old Warsaw. No one in the family was Polish or even liked Polish food. Mike's parents had plenty in the bank, yet they felt it was a real treat to eat at the cheapest buffet in town. She could still picture the pierogies, or Polish dumplings, swimming in a vegetable-buttery liquid. They were floating on their backs in that oily pool, as people stood in line to fish for them using a stainless steel slotted spoon. All that was left behind when the line went down was that buttery goo in a chafing dish until the waiters came to refill the dishes with more slime and more pierogies.

The first weeks of their marriage were romantic. Brigid would look forward to the end of Mike's shift when they could be home together each night. Although she missed New Jersey, Brigid was busy adjusting to life in a new city. Soon they would deliver their first daughter and life was seemingly wonderful.

The joy was to be short-lived. The following week Mike lost his job. They were officially without savings, income or health benefits. Instantly, Mike fell apart. He was sobbing uncontrollably and had no idea what direction to turn. After making some phone calls, Brigid went into survival mode and within a matter of days she procured health care to birth the baby. For three hundred dollars (which could be made in three easy installment payments) they could birth their daughter at St. Elizabeth's Hospital right next to the lakeshore. They would receive services like any other couple on the maternity floor. The crowning touch was a gift from the hospital to congratulate them on their new baby. They dined on surf and turf complete with crème brulee and the hospital gave Brigid a long stemmed red rose.

Mike and Brigid also qualified for emergency food stamps. Social Services were able to procure an extra \$500.00 to stock up their pantry, plus a generous monthly allotment for food. Like two kids in a candy store, they realized they could shop at a grocery store and not worry where their next meal was coming from. Brigid would throw cans and cans of food into the grocery cart, laughing at how relieved she was to have food. The last step was for Mike to file for unemployment and then things would begin to look up.

Or so they thought. One day Brigid was having a slight argument with Mike, over something petty, really. The next thing she knew he was pushing her through a third story window. Completely blind-sighted, Brigid began to fight back but was utterly overpowered. Her mind raced out of control and she wondered why Mike would do such a thing. Screaming and yelling, she fought for her life. Finally, he stopped as soon as he began. A funny film covered his eyes. And then, he seemed mad at himself for his actions. He was so angry that he picked up their telephone, smashed it to the ground pulverizing it into nothing but wires and broken plastic.

“What...I mean...why...you just tried...” Brigid whispered through choked up tears. She held her hand up to her mouth, utterly convinced at any minute the scene would repeat itself all over again. Mike could offer no explanation. In fact, he made her feel as if it was entirely her fault for arguing with him when he was tired.

After it was all over, and the mess was cleaned up, she chalked it up to stress. But the incident left her with an eerie feeling and a bad taste in her mouth. The man Brigid loved was kind and funny and would never hurt someone. Why did this horrible exchange just happen between them?

Things went back to normal. Brigid took two part-time jobs and one actually turned into a lucrative full-time position. Mike still searched for a permanent position but nothing positive had come his way. Brigid knew it was a matter of time. However, it was tough being a new mother and working all day. Brigid was still expected to do all the housework, and yet sometimes she was too tired to move off the couch.

Brigid thought they could enjoy and welcome their new baby daughter together in their home. She never expected Mike to become moody, unpredictable and irritable. All he could focus on was the fact that he was not the one who was supporting the family. He was incensed that she was making more money than he was, and he wanted a “real” job that would pay a good salary so that she didn’t have to work.

One day they had their friend, Alan, come over to the apartment. There were a few dishes in the sink. Mike argued that Brigid should wash them right away. She was exhausted caring for the baby and working all day. All she wanted to do was rest. Mike asked her if she wanted to eat a salad with dinner, and not being one for lettuce, she politely declined. Standing in front of the sink, Brigid was about to start the dishes when she felt it come at her from the left side of her face.

He punched her. She had never been hit before, but all she knew was that she would remember that fall for the rest of her life. Brigid found herself in a slow motion movie, the kind where someone continuously keeps falling, in second to second increments. It seemed as if she was Alice and she would never reach the bottom of the rabbit hole. Brigid groped to find the metal cabinet in front of the sink. She wondered why she couldn’t see anything. She tried to stand up but was shaking uncontrollably. Suddenly, she felt the cold metal sink cabinet. Now she was able to maneuver herself to her knees.

Brigid put her hand up to the sink and tried to stand on her own two feet. She couldn't. She had to stop the room from spinning. Brigid struggled and struggled and then fell to the floor again. Then after what seemed like an eternity, she could finally stand up. Touching her face she began to piece together what had just happened. Her husband, the man she loved, had punched her full force in the eye. Brigid would find out much later that she had suffered an orbital fracture of the left eye. At that point, all she could do was to think of getting the baby and leaving him. She had to get out of that apartment.

Mike must have been afraid, because he refused to give Brigid the keys to her car. She had trouble following him because of her decreased vision. She could hardly move about the apartment. Alan knew what had happened and felt disoriented and horrified. He asked what he could do to help her.

"Just get the keys," said Brigid.

Within a few minutes she had the baby bundled in her car seat and they were ready to leave. There were no good-byes, no apologies, and Brigid left without anything except the clothes on her back. She sat in the driver's seat of her Mazda 626 and got a good look at her face for the first time in the rearview mirror. Brigid's left eye was completely swollen shut and turning black and blue. It hurt to touch and she had a nasty knot the size of a ping pong ball on the side of her eye. She was definitely in shock. All Brigid could remember doing was shaking and crying. There was just so much pain, physically and emotionally.

A million questions raced across her mind. Where would she go? Who could she call? What would she do? How could she get help? How could she get her hands on

some money? It was then that Brigid considered calling her family back in New Jersey. She dismissed the thought right away because she knew no one had the capability to help her. The cost of airfare and shipping to get her belongings back to Jersey was staggering. She didn't have a good relationship with her mother. They hardly talked unless it was absolutely necessary. Brigid couldn't call her, because her mother would never understand the situation. Brigid needed help immediately, and she knew only one couple in Chicago who could help. If anyone could help, they had the resources. Brigid knew they would be shocked to hear what a heinous act Mike had just committed.

Brigid went and found a pay phone and called Mike's parents collect. When his mother answered the phone, she initially refused to accept the charges from the operator because it was "too expensive". When Mike's mom heard her crying in the background, Brigid guessed that's what made her change her mind. Brigid couldn't believe her husband had caused all this damage. What happened to her soul mate, the man who said he would love her forever? Brigid broke the news to her just blurting it all out at once.

"He hit me. He punched my face. I can't see out of one eye!" she wailed.

"Well, you don't think you can come here, do you?" she asked.

It was at that point that Brigid knew her fate had been sealed. It was a pointless phone call, a waste of a couple of quarters.

"No, I just... thought...I hoped you could help. I thought you could do something," Brigid said flatly.

Mike's mother began to back pedal when she heard the death begin in Brigid's voice. It was then that Brigid knew she had no idea what to do in this situation and she was

fighting to find the words. Quietly, she hung up, as she heard Mike's mother distantly calling her name through the receiver. She hung up and walked back to the car. It was at that moment in time that Brigid knew what she had to do. She had to return to the apartment, at least temporarily.

When Brigid had first heard of domestic violence, she never thought it would ever happen to her. She would read about incidents in the Tribune and think about "those poor, pitiful women" who must have brought it on themselves. Tsk, tsk...what a shame she thought, shaking her head in disgust. Brigid remembered saying rather smugly that she would never put up with a man hitting her. If she ever had an abusive man in her life, she would leave in a heartbeat. Well, here she was. There were a few things Brigid hadn't counted on. First, she never imagined actually loving someone capable of this kind of abuse. Second, there was a tiny heartbeat, a baby that needed a mother and a father. Finally, she also never imagined being this poor. Without money, food and a place to live, she knew it was over. She had to stay, at least until she could save up money, and get a plan.

It was at this point that she began to live a life full of misery. When she returned to the apartment, a different woman walked through the front door. She was no longer that happy, successful, full of hope woman that she imagined she would become one day. It was as if her finger had been pricked on the spinning wheel and she had been imprisoned in a state of eternal sleep. It took all her energy and bravery to take her coat off and get the baby out of the car seat. She hung her coat up in the hallway closet. Brigid heard crying from the bedroom. She stuck her head in the door to find him saying his mantra, "They're not coming back, they're not coming back..."

Suddenly, he sensed that she was standing there. He popped off the bed and began to ask quietly, “Now what?”

“I don’t know,” she cried.

“Please don’t leave me. Dear God, please don’t leave. I am so very sorry. It won’t ever happen again.”

Brigid was embarrassed to admit that domestic violence had happened to her in the first place. She couldn’t imagine telling her family and friends that her husband, her gorgeous, loving husband was a wife beater. If she had admitted this to her family, they would tell her to return to Jersey and she would have to live with the “I told you so” routine. They didn’t like him from the beginning and they liked it even less that Brigid moved half way across the country to be with him. She began to see through the haze and realized how much they didn’t know about one another. They were too young and too naïve.

Utterly conflicted, she had spent the last few years of her life loving a total stranger. She just couldn’t fathom the fact that she was now a woman, a battered woman, very much alone with a child. There was nowhere to go, nowhere to turn. She knew nothing about domestic violence shelters and she was so blind about the situation, she didn’t think her experience was “that bad”. Brigid was literally trapped at so many angles. She wanted to believe in him, that he could change, but in her heart, she realized that would never happen.

Yet, she went back to him. Brigid continued to try and make their marriage work. There was no on/off switch to turn off emotions. She continued to live each day at a

time, frozen with fear. When would the abuse happen again? What would trigger it? Maybe if she lost weight, maybe if she wore prettier clothes, maybe if she was a better wife, he'd stop the abuse and they could be happy again.

Brigid smiled, she pretended for the camera poised and coiffed, prouder than any wife would be on his arm. At home, it was a different story. She pretended as much as she could at home, but the abuse would come without provocation and always for different reasons. The more Brigid thought she was close to getting away, the deeper in she became cemented. Brigid found herself pregnant again; they acquired additional debt, the car needed to be fixed. There was never the right time. So she continued marching on to the beat of a funeral march, hoping for someone to help.

And then a window opened when she least expected. At an office party she began talking to her husband's friend David who casually said, "You know, you should get your master's degree. Make yourself more marketable!"

Brigid thought she was not competent enough to try for a master's degree. Yet David was a simple nudge, as if he had known she had been living a life of death, as if he had known there were bigger things out there for her just waiting for the taking. So with the help of David, the two approached her husband to ask for "permission" for her to go back to school. Of course, his immediate response was no. He was worried that with working full-time and going to school part-time, Brigid wouldn't be able to juggle her responsibilities of the children, the cooking and cleaning. Honestly she thought he didn't want her to better herself. After much discussion, and a lot of coaxing from his friend David, Mike decided they would give it a try for one semester to see how it would work. If Brigid could keep up with all her responsibilities, she could attend a local university.

School was an intense struggle. Brigid hadn't been to school for awhile, and she had no idea how difficult it would be. Mike expected her to do everything she had always done, without interruption. Dinner couldn't be late, the house had to be immaculate and all the bills had to be paid on time. The children's homework came first and she had to make sure that their school needs were met. Then only time Brigid had to study was on her way home from work. She loved traffic and stop lights. These premature pauses in life provided her brief moments of study in the car. She did her homework while cooking dinner, or even long after everyone was asleep in bed. Many times she simply had no idea how she managed.

Graduation was one of her proudest moments. She had completed her master's degree and had managed to maintain a 4.0 average. If she could accomplish a degree while working and mothering to four children, she could do anything she set her mind to do. There was nothing in her way and she was finally ready to let go, to open her heart again and live. Finally, live.

She was also formulating a plan to leave. She planned to save enough money for tickets to Jersey to be with her family out on the east coast. The next step was a job. A good job on the east coast, where the pay was better and she had the support of her family and old friends. Her younger brother stepped in and was the most influential person in her life. He set up job interviews across the country, went to look at houses and even had her dogs shipped out to his condo so that she didn't have to worry about them. They talked a lot by phone and he really saved her in so many ways.

Time ticked by slowly. It would take a two years to procure a job, find a house, and get a solid plan. But then one night, it finally happened. The chance that she had been

planning had arrived. As they pulled up in front of the house one night, he turned off the car. Silently in the dark, he said, "I am tired. I am tired of all of the responsibilities of this family.

I can't take it anymore. I think we should divorce."

"Do you realize what you are doing?" She breathed deeply. Inside, Brigid was so relieved! He was finally releasing her from the prison she lived in. Brigid couldn't believe it was all coming to an end. She had suffered almost twenty years of abuse at the hands of a man, whom she thought was her soul mate. But something seemed wrong. He initially said he would never leave and now out of the blue he was asking for a divorce. Brigid was sure that there had to be someone else.

Brigid searched the house when he wasn't home, looking for clues, anything that might point her to what he was doing. It was then that she remembered seeing an ad for computer software spyware. It was the best fifty dollars she had ever spent. Brigid installed it on the computer and she could see everything that he ever looked at, his emails, and every key stroke he ever entered. The best part was that it was a stealth program and he never knew it was installed or that he was being monitored.

He always spent long hours on the computer. Every time she entered the office, he turned the computer screen dark so that she couldn't see what he was doing. The more time he spent on the computer, the more information she had. In a few days she was able to generate a report that printed up all of his activity. Physically sick, she fell to her knees. It was worse than she ever imagined. He was having an affair with a student from Northwestern, who was a few years older than their eldest son. That student was a man.

Her husband was having sex with this man. They exchanged erotic pictures of each other, and in emails spoke of their intimate relationship. Mike offered him trips, money and even a home stereo system her brother had given them for Christmas! God only knew how many other men he slept with.

Again she fell to her knees. Brigid was shaking uncontrollably. Her husband had exposed her to possible STD's or even AIDS. The nightmare wasn't over, it was just beginning.

It was funny that next night when he came home from work. He wanted to go out to dinner at their favorite restaurant. He said that he wanted to discuss moving forward. At that point she was as frozen as a margarita, and was trying to think of a way to share her "discovery" with him. Brigid dressed up with her little black dress, the sexy black shoes that matched, and her hair and make- up were perfect. She knew this would be their last dinner together.

Their favorite restaurant was a Mexican place called Lalos, complete with piñatas hanging from the ceiling and a roving mariachi band. They took a table for two and ordered their famous "fish bowl" sized Margaritas. The drink was the perfect tonic, and Brigid began to loosen up and feel a reserve of courage bubble to the surface.

"I have a proposal," he said in an authoritative voice.

"Really?" she said trying to hold back sarcasm.

"I think we should still remain married, for appearance sake. We will remain a couple in public and remain a family. I will go out, and you are not to question where I am going or what I am doing. And, don't forget we'll continue our traditions of entertaining

and you will still cook Sunday dinner. My lawyer said that this isn't a good time to divorce," he said with a proud smile, as if he were handing her the world.

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. He wanted a marriage for appearances and she was supposed to be his servant, cooking and cleaning for him. Was he insane? All this and he obviously wanted to keep up his extracurricular sexual activities and she was not to question his actions. He really thought she would appreciate this offer and do anything to keep him by her side. She started to laugh out loud. It was all so ridiculous! This was the perfect time to drop the bomb.

"Wow, I'm so overwhelmed with your offer. However, I hired a lawyer and she seems to think that now is a perfect time to divorce, especially when I showed her all of your emails and photos you've been sharing on the computer,"

Brigid dumped all the evidence on the table and his face nearly hit the floor. She took another gulp of her margarita.

"You little bitch! How dare you hack into my private emails. I don't know how the hell you got these but you will pay for this, trust me," he hissed. She just continued to smile her sarcastic little smile. He grabbed her arm and began to threaten her. Not once did she ever stand up to him when he was beating her, but tonight was somehow different. She did the only thing she could think of at the moment. Brigid took her margarita and threw it in his face.

He was soaked with frozen strawberry margarita. It was everywhere, dripping off of his hair, his eye lids and even his mouth that had kissed her every day for the last twenty

years. His shirt was soaked and there was a slice of lime on his shoulder. With that, she took her purse and left.

He followed her into the parking lot. For some reason, she wasn't afraid any longer. He grabbed her by the arm again and swung her around. Brigid started beating the shit out of him with her little black Coach purse. People in the parking lot began to stare.

"You bastard! How could you do this to me, your family?!!!" she shouted.

With that comment, he raised his hand to her.

"What are you going to do? Hit me? Go ahead and hit me. I'm not afraid any longer."

He held his hand so close to her face that she could smell the soap on his hand. He suddenly realized he had an audience in the parking lot and it was truly over. He lowered his hand and walked away. Brigid stood in the parking lot. Her legs were still shaky, but at least this time, she was standing on her own two feet.

Why Didn't You Just Leave?

Falmouth, Massachusetts. The heat was brutal that summer, and the roses were wilting as the days wore on. Sofia worked in the hotel industry. She had schooled to be a manager in the business and was hoping to advance within the company. She was Hispanic, with beautiful eyes and long flowing brunette hair. Her family lived in Chili; however Sofia immigrated to America to fulfill her dreams. She was determined to make her family proud.

She first saw him on Facebook. He was incredibly handsome with blue eyes, a dimple on chin and an infectious smile. Sofia decided to send him a friend request. She was single, twenty two and ready for a relationship. Miguel was the same age and after a few emails back and forth, they decided to date one another.

At first, things seemed to go well. However, Sofia was soon to learn that Miguel was sentenced to a year in prison for a crime he committed involving an ex-girlfriend. He was very vague with details, however she viewed his incarceration as a mistake that was in his past. As far as she was concerned, the past was over and behind them, and according to Miguel, he was wrongly accused. She believed in him and was falling desperately in love.

Miguel and Sofia were on and off during his incarceration. He liked to dream of the day when he would be free and spoke of how wonderful their life would be when he was released. His incarceration was also difficult on their relationship, and there were many fights that occurred during that first year. Miguel was sure that Sofia was cheating on him and he started many fights based on the issue of infidelity.

“I know you’re cheating on me, you two bit whore!” said Miguel

“I’m not cheating. I would never cheat on you, don’t you understand?”

“If that’s the case, then you won’t mind taking a lie detector test to prove me wrong and set my mind at ease,” said Miguel.

“Miguel, I love you and I would do anything for you,” said Sofia.

“If you love me, you’d prove it. Take the test,” coaxed Miguel.

“I’ll do it. It is humiliating, but if it means that we’re together, I’m in,” said Sofia.

Their fighting usually began with name calling and would progress to belittling and manipulation. Miguel was so preoccupied with the issue of infidelity. Sofia was deeply in love with Miguel and wanted to stay with him now more than ever. Sofia just wanted to make him happy more than anything else. And, she had passed the lie detector with flying colors.

Sofia thrived working at the Hyatt in downtown Falmouth. One night, in a fit of extreme jealousy, Miguel accused Sofia of cheating again and kept calling her while she was working. Miguel threatened to throw rocks at the hotel windows. Sofia thought that it was so serious that she decided to tell her boss about it. Her manager was an incredible support person to turn to and she in turn called the police. Unfortunately her boss gave her an ultimatum.

“Get a restraining order, or quit.”

After Sofia got the restraining order from the court, she didn’t speak to Miguel for three weeks. But her friend saw Sofia coming out of the courthouse and he told her that

Miguel was incredibly sorry about what happened between them. The truth was that both missed each other and wanted to be back together again. Against the restraining order, Miguel moved in with Sofia. She loved him and thought she was pregnant.

“Miguel, my period is late and I think I’m pregnant.”

“How do I know that baby is mine?” he asked.

“Of course it is yours. I am afraid to have to raise the child as a single parent. Stay with me Miguel, I can’t do this alone, I have no money and I need you. This baby needs you.”

When her period finally came, they stopped fighting and were thankful that her pregnancy scare was just a false alarm.

Miguel suffered from an addiction to heroin. He managed to stay sober when he and Sofia were together that first month. Things were looking up for a change and Sofia loved this time in their lives. They acted like a normal couple dating, no problems and lots of fun. It was June of 2013 when their lives would suddenly come crashing down around them.

One summer night he picked her up from work. An old familiar argument of infidelity occurred again. Sofia began to text a friend in the car and Miguel flipped out. He took her phone and tossed it out the window of the car. Furious, Sofia tried to get out of the car to retrieve her phone. Just then, Miguel grabbed Sofia by the hair and yanked her head into his lap.

“Never get out of this car unless I tell you to, is that clear?”

Sofia was crying and she spoke through choked tears. “Yes, I understand,” she said.

As things calmed down, Miguel wanted Sofia to take another lie detector test.

“You’re the reason why I am so angry all the time. You are the problem here, not me. You are also to blame for all our problems,” said Miguel.

Sofia thought Miguel was being absurd, but she agreed to the lie detector test again, because she wanted him. That night, everything she ever knew to be good in this world went bad. They had sex when they got home and began to shower together. Miguel hit her face while they were in the shower and she fell, knocking over all their toiletries to the floor. Instinctively she ran for cover, out of the shower. He pulled her hair again, stating that she was not given permission to leave.

Sofia was in total confusion. She sat on the edge of the bed, wrapped in a towel trying to process why Miguel was acting violent. Perhaps she was the problem. Was she doing something wrong to make him so upset? Even so, why would he do such terrible things if he really loved her?

Just as she was trying to decipher his behavior, Miguel looked at her sitting on the bed and then shoved her back. He began to choke her. He was relentless and just how many times she lost and regained consciousness that night was unknown. Just when she thought she would surely die, it was over and she stayed awake that night just in case Miguel had any other heinous acts in mind.

The next day under the pretense of a picnic lunch, Miguel and Sofia were out nearby a heavily wooded area when he pulled the car into a deep grove of trees. Sofia had never

taken heroin before and Miguel got the idea that if he injected her with heroin, she would feel what he felt when he was using. Sofia begged Miguel not to inject her, but before she knew it, she had heroin injected through a vein in her right arm. It affected her so deeply that she collapsed in the car seat moments after the injection.

That day was the beginning of the worst week of her life. Each and every day Miguel injected her with heroin. The drug made her sick to her stomach so Miguel let her go in the woods and throw up. After two days he began to have trust issues and made her vomit into an old Tee shirt used as a rag on his car. It smelled like oil, which only made her gag even more. The car was her prison.

The second night Miguel beat her so brutally that she could hardly walk. Her body was covered with bruises. Some of the markings were from his belt and others were from his fists. She looked at herself without her clothes on and she could scarcely believe what she was looking at. She had the look of an old punching bag from Gold's Gym. That's exactly what she felt like. Miguel's personal punching bag. He told her that he loved the way she looked, covered in bruises. She knew she was doomed.

On the third night he brought out a video camera. Miguel forced Sofia to commit oral sex on his Pit Bull, stating that if she ever thought of leaving or telling anyone about the abuse, he would show the video and then they would know what a cheating whore she really was to deal with. She could only imagine what hurt this would bring to her family. It was his way of shaming her, trapping her in his life forever. She was only a sex slave for him to use at his whim.

The beatings and the injections continued each night. Each time she was injected with heroin, she thought that she might overdose and die. Miguel would make it look like she injected herself, and her friends and family would have no idea what really happened. They would be devastated that she had turned to drugs.

On the final day of the week, Sofia was a former shell of her past self. She felt hopeless and trapped and wished that she could die. While Sofia was at work, Miguel called and told her to quit her job because they would be going out of town for awhile. Sofia knew that this was the end and that he was planning on killing her somehow. As she hung up the phone, she began to cry.

Her boss, Nora, had suspected that Miguel was abusing her.

“What’s wrong?” asked Nora.

“Nothing, nothing,” Sofia answered while covering up her tears.

“If you are being abused, I can assist you in getting help.”

“It’s no use. He is blackmailing me. He will find me and kill me if I tell anyone about the abuse,” said Sofia.

“The police will provide protection, and will give you a shelter to stay at while you are getting your feet back on the ground during the court proceedings,” said Nora.

“Domestic violence shelters are secured as well as a blessing for those in need,” said Nora. “You will be safe.”

Sofia went to the police that night and filed charges. She told the detective that she was raped, beaten and injected with heroin. The police documented her bruises and scars

as evidence and picked up Miguel at their apartment. He denied knowing Sofia as anything but a roommate. Sofia was incredulous. A “roommate” does not equate with the relationship Sofia had been living with Miguel. She was his personal slave and was on call twenty four hours a day. Even when she was at work for the Hyatt, he would show up and demand she ask for breaks or she’d just spend her entire lunch doting on him and his needs.

Knowing Miguel was behind bars was a huge relief. Sofia got in touch with a woman’s shelter and was accepted as a resident. “Providence House” was full of counseling, with many women whose domestic violence was worse than her own. She learned that there were six ways a man could abuse a woman; Isolation, money, fear, family, love and shame. Miguel was shaming Sofia into a relationship where he had complete control over her every move.

On the day of the trial, Sofia was a nervous wreck. She had not seen Miguel in months and she was afraid to have to face him again. Sofia was stronger now than she had ever been before but she still loved Miguel. Love was something she just couldn’t turn on and off. Their relationship lasted over a year and things didn’t go bad right away. Sofia’s self-esteem was so low that she didn’t realize how badly she had been treated. She blamed herself for everything that went wrong and didn’t understand that real love is so much more than what she came to expect from Miguel.

As the trial progressed, Sofia was getting sick to her stomach listening to testimony from Miguel’s family and friends’ informing the jury that Miguel was an upstanding individual. The defense made her out to be an angry prostitute who was spurned by

Miguel and was now seeking revenge. Several times Sofia wanted to jump up and tell the jury that she was not some whore and that the truth was that he was evil towards her at times.

When Sofia was put on the stand and was cross-examined by Miguel's lawyer, he asked her about all the abuse she suffered at the hands of Miguel. She told him that Miguel raped her, beat her, and forced her to inject heroin.

"That sounds awful," said the lawyer.

"Yes, it was," said Sofia.

"If it was so awful, why didn't you ever leave him?"

"I said, if it was so awful, why didn't you leave?"

"I...I..um, I..." said Sofia.

With that, Sofia began to cry. The judge reminded her that she had to answer the question, but Sofia was too upset and ended up breaking down in the courtroom. She was too emotionally distraught to continue answering the questions. The court took a brief recess and after that the jury went into deliberations. In less than twenty minutes they had a verdict.

The jury found Miguel guilty on all counts. The judge sentenced him to six years, without the possibility of receiving parole. Sofia was satisfied when she watched Miguel being led out of the courtroom in handcuffs by a police officer. The jury had listened and they clearly knew the truth.

Her lawyer congratulated Sofia, but there was still something that bothered her.

“I wanted to answer Miguel’s lawyer on the stand, but I was too upset,” she said.

“It’s okay, Sofia, it’s okay,”

“No, I want to tell you why I didn’t leave. You see, I thought things couldn’t get worse than what they already were, so I stayed. I was afraid of what would happen if I left. But you know, I used to think I was worthless. Miguel used to make me feel that way. But, not anymore. Not anymore.

The Staircase

Climacophobia, the fear of falling. She had always had a fear of falling. She'd wake up drenched in sweat in the middle of the night, one dream after another about falling. Last night she had dreamt that she was walking over the Sandy Hook Bridge and she could see the rushing waters down below through the steel girders. Suddenly, she fell. Before she hit the water, she woke up and could barely get a grip on the reality that it was all just a dream. Her breathing was labored, fast and hard. She always woke up before the end of the fall.

It was almost time for the alarm clock to perform its morning ritual. Siobhan flipped the switch to the off position and headed straight for the kitchen. She readied herself quickly to savor all the time she could afford. Her hair was a beautiful vivid red and was her pride and joy. This morning it was an Irish tangle of curls. With the baby due next month, she could hardly put her sneakers on, let alone tie them. Waddling down the stairs, she was careful to hold onto the railing. It was early and no one was awake yet. Loving the quiet of the morning she preferred the solitude; her only company was the sound of the coffee maker and the waves breaking on the shore. This was her time before the family would demand what little energy she had left these days. She got up from the kitchen table to ready herself for the day ahead. She was looking forward to the ultrasound appointment she had that day.

This was to be their third child. If it were up to her, she would have stopped at two. They already had the perfect family, one boy and one girl. She had her hands full with two very active toddlers, but he insisted they should get pregnant again. All Liam had to

do was look at her and she became pregnant. He threw her a surprise birthday party when she turned twenty eight. Two weeks later she was looking at that stick with the bright blue plus sign indicating that she was positively pregnant. The problem was that they had two very active toddlers, and baby number three was growing, already on the way. The other problem, as she saw it, was that Liam always got his way with everything.

The doorbell rang and the dog began to bark. It was Diana, their sitter. Diana had been with them since their first child was born. She was devoted and loving, the perfect match for them. Diana was also excited to hear the news of the ultrasound and insisted on knowing the results as soon as possible. Everyone was excited to hear the results. Friends were placing bets and even ran a “baby pool” to guess the sex of the baby. Liam was convinced it was a boy, but somehow Brigid felt it was a girl.

The hospital was about ten minutes away. The ultrasound technician was a perky brunette who seemed extremely busy, racing the clock for extra time. She poured the warmed gel on her abdomen and for a few moments the heat felt good on her belly. Seconds later the image of a tiny baby formed on the screen. The technician pointed out the spine, the heart and even the baby’s tiny fingers. “Can you tell us the sex of the baby?” Liam asked.

The technician announced it was a girl, and her husband was genuinely disappointed and made no attempt to hide his feelings. “Are you sure?” he asked the technician. As Siobhan wiped the goop off of her belly, she was embarrassed and shocked that he expressed his displeasure in public. Whatever happened to the phrase, “As long as the baby is healthy?”

Dejected and depressed, both for different reasons, they headed home to see the kids and relieve the sitter. As they pulled into the driveway, the kids ran outside to greet them. They sprinted to the passenger side to give hugs and kisses to Brigid as if she had been gone a lifetime. Weight gain during the pregnancy made getting out of the car difficult. Feeling trapped inside a body that she didn't belong in made life almost unbearable at times. What made it worse were the constant reminders. "How much weight have you gained?" or "You're going to have to lose all that baby fat when you deliver that baby". He forced her to take walks up and down the beach each night, even though her feet and ankles were swollen. With each bite of food she took, he had an accusatory way of looking at her, judging what she ate. He monitored her weight so closely that you would have thought he was her personal trainer for a wrestling team.

As they settled the kids down for bed, the doorbell rang. It was her brother stopping by for a visit. As she hurried preparing dinner in the kitchen, Liam and her brother soon began to argue. "Not again," she murmured. They were constantly bickering and disagreed about everything. The arguments were always petty. She was always the peacekeeper between them and constantly worried that one day they would resort to physical violence with each other. As she approached the den, their heated voices became louder and louder. She reached the partially open door and gently placed her hand on it to push it open so that she might break up their fight and call them to the dinner table.

It happened in an instant. Just as she pushed the door open with her hand, Liam slammed it closed with his. She knew right away the gravity of the situation. Her pinky

was caught in the door and was amputated at the first knuckle. She began to cry a mantra, “Somebody, help me, somebody, help me.”

She couldn’t be certain when they heard her. It seemed to take forever, in slow motion. Liam was grabbing a towel and wrapping her hand and running with her out the door. The trip to the hospital was one in silence, save for the sound of their breathing. There were no words that could be spoken between them after what had just occurred.

Thankfully they were ushered into a hospital room immediately and an orthopedic surgeon was called in for a consult. He was soothing, reassuring and they liked him, despite the crisis. The doctor said he couldn’t give her anything for pain due to the fact that she was eight months pregnant. She received local anesthesia for the surgery which simply closed the open wound. They wrapped her entire hand in a bandage and put her arm in a sling to minimize further damage while her finger began the healing process. When they were in the car driving home, she let herself cry for the first time that day. He quietly apologized for the accident, but it was no use. She tried not to blame him, but the thoughts in the back of her mind lingered in that direction. Everything was always an accident with him. Why was he always so violent? And of course, he was always sorry – no matter what he had done.

She woke up early the next morning in horrific pain. The kind of pain that she would have never imagined could be possible. All she could do was cry and rock back and forth for some small type of comfort. There had to be some kind of medicine that she could take to decrease the pain without causing harm to the baby. She was convinced that she could not bear this type of pain for another five minutes, yet didn’t know how she would get through the rest of the day.

Thankfully she had her routine obstetrician's appointment scheduled early that morning. Siobhan was worried what her doctor might say about the injury to her hand and how it might impact the birth of the baby. When her name was called by the receptionist, Liam ushered her into the doctor's office. Moments later, Dr. Audrey walked in and stopped right in front of her, shocked to see her hand in a sling. "What happened to you?!" she asked. Siobhan began to cry and shake as she told her doctor everything that had occurred to her over the last twenty-four hours.

"No pain medication was given to you in the emergency room?!!" the doctor asked incredulously.

"The emergency room doctor said that pain medication would damage the baby," she answered.

"Emergency room doctors are idiots! Pain medication is dangerous during the first three months of a pregnancy-not the last three!" Dr. Audrey handed her a prescription for pain killers and patted her on the back affectionately. Siobhan knew she was in good hands. She thanked everything holy for the good care she received as well as for the relief that would come from the medicine she would take when she got home.

As soon as they got in the car to head home, Liam spoke up.

"You heard the doctor at the hospital say that taking painkillers was detrimental to the baby."

"Yes, but you just heard our obstetrician say that taking medicine was safe in the last trimester!"

“Do you really want to take that risk with our unborn child?” said Liam indignantly.

She soon found herself in a conundrum, not certain who or what to believe. In the end, she filled the prescription for the pain medication to get some relief from the epic pain she experienced. Liam was furious that she chose to disobey his wishes and threatened her by saying, “If there is anything wrong with our child, I will never forgive you! You will end up not only destroying our child, you will destroy this family.” She knew they were all talked out about the medicine. Yet, there was something missing. In the end, it always had to be whatever he said. She knew he heard her, but he certainly wasn’t listening.

The next day, they were still at odds with each other. Siobhan hid the painkillers just in case Liam got any ideas about disposing of them. She only took them when she needed them, and yet she felt guilty for needing them. Each time they saw each other around the house, glances were exchanged and occasionally words of an abusive nature. She always gave in to Liam, but this time something was different. Was it the pregnancy, or was she just tired of acquiescing to his constant demands? Didn’t she have a right to make decisions for herself? Did she have to give in all the time?

Finally, that evening she couldn’t take it any longer. She approached Liam and insisted that they talk about the tension between them. He began to scream at the top of his lungs about how she had failed him as a wife. Stunned, Siobhan could only stare at the man she thought she knew was her husband. Liam finally expressed his regret that “she” failed him by conceiving a girl rather than a boy. When she reminded him that the male chromosome determined the sex of the baby, he laughed at her as if she were some

silly little school girl. Nothing she did made Liam happy. He always made her feel stupid.

Suddenly her frustration turned to anger and began to boil over until she couldn't hold back any longer. Siobhan looked directly into Liam's eyes and spoke from her heart.

"Liam, I've held my tongue for as long as I've known you, but tonight all that has now changed. I have one question for you. Are you really capable of loving someone other than yourself?"

With that one question, he went berserk. He reached out and began to strangle her. Within seconds she was unable to breathe. Instinctively she tried to fight for her life. She couldn't believe she was about to die at the hands of her husband. She was beating his chest with her one good hand, trying anything to make him stop. Somehow, at that horrible moment, she knew that her brain could only last a few minutes before brain damage and possible death occurred. In a panic, she kicked him relentlessly and tried anything to catch even a tiny breath of air. And just as suddenly as he began, he stopped. Her lungs fought for one huge gasp of air and she took that first breath like a newborn baby for the first time. She breathed until her lungs ached. But it was hardly over.

Looking at him incredulously, his eyes were glazed, his face unrecognizable. He grabbed for her wild mane of hair and pulled as hard as he could. Having no way to break her fall, he shoved her to the ground and she fell to her knees. Just as she began to fear for the baby's health, he began to punch her without an ounce of mercy. He punched her about her abdomen and she instinctively covered her belly to protect the baby as much as possible.

“Liam, what about the baby? You’re hurting the baby! Please dear God! Think about the baby! For the love of God! What are you trying to do!!!?”

It was at this point that he picked her up and began to shove her from behind. He pushed her to the threshold of the basement stairs. She grasped at the molding and tried to stop what was about to happen. Her hand was out of the sling, and she was holding onto the sides of the doorway, despite the incredible pain. However, she was no match for his strength. Her biggest fear came to life. She began to fall.

Her knees hit the third stair first, and she instinctively put her hands over the baby to try and minimize the damage. She was falling, face down, in slow motion, each concrete stair an assault to a new part of her body. Stair after stair she wondered if she were falling to her death. Would the baby die? Would she wake up from this nightmare, like she had always done in the past, when the fall was just about to end? It seemed an eternity before it was over. She finally reached the floor of the basement in a twisted heap.

It took a few moments for her to assess the damage. It was when she felt the baby move that there was a bit of hope in her heart. She pulled herself up and it was then that she felt a searing pain in her knees. She was bloody, bruised and broken. She had a black eye that was swollen shut and she couldn’t process what had just happened. Her head was throbbing and it ached like nothing she had ever experienced. The door above slammed shut.

She climbed the stairs and tried to open the door. It was locked from the opposite side. As hard as she struggled, there was no way out. The other exit from the basement

was the storm door. This was permanently closed. There was no escape. She was a prisoner.

“Let me out, Liam! Let me out!” There was no response. It was shortly after her cries that she heard the front door shut and the car speed away. She was stunned. How could he lock her in the basement, alone, injured and pregnant? Where were the kids? Did he take them with him or were they in the playroom unaware of what was going on? She continued to scream until her voice was hoarse and her throat hurt. That strategy was definitely not going to work, she thought.

Then her thoughts returned to the children. It had been too quiet for them to be home. Liam must have taken them with him. And what kind of life do they have if they are constantly listening to their parent’s fights, hearing the violence? She had thought a thousand times about leaving Liam. How would she raise these children on her own? She had nowhere to go, no money and no healthcare. She needed a lawyer, but they all wanted a five thousand dollar retainer to begin the divorce process. She was lucky to have five dollars. Liam kept track of every penny she spent. He would never let her go. There would be no divorce.

Suddenly, she felt something dripping. Was it blood? It was clear and constantly trickling down her leg. Her water had broken! This could not be happening she thought. She had to think quickly to get help right away. The contractions would begin soon and she had no intention of delivering a baby in a basement, alone without help.

Her only access to the outside world was a small window at the front end of the house. It was too small to squeeze through, but her plan was to yell out the window and try to

get help. She opened the tiny window and looked out at the street. She began to scream as if her life depended on being heard through that tiny window.

“Can anyone hear me?” she cried.

“Help, I need to get out!”

It was then that she noticed a little girl riding on her bike. Brigid was able to coax her over to the window.

“I need your help,” she said in a tired voice. Go get your mom and tell her to call 911. I’m having a baby right now.”

The little girl looked scared and confused, but she ran inside her house as far as Siobhan could see. A few minutes later the little girl’s mother came tentatively over to the window of the basement.

“Thank God!” said Brigid. “I’m in labor, my water broke. I am locked down in the basement and can’t get out. Can you call 911?”

Within minutes the police arrived. Siobhan could hear them breaking down the front door. It wasn’t long before they were inside the house opening up the basement door. Paramedics were checking out her injuries and preparing her for transport to Mac Neal Medical Center. The maternity unit was notified that she was coming, in active labor. Her contractions were three minutes apart. Siobhan shuttered to think what would have happened if she hadn’t been released from her prison and she had to give birth to the baby, alone in the basement. A female officer rode in the ambulance to get a report. Should she tell the truth and ruin the façade of family they had, or should she cover up

for Liam, like she always had done in the past? The question she had been waiting for was finally asked.

“Why were you locked in the basement? Who did this to you?” asked the officer.

“It was my husband,” Siobhan said with conviction. “He shoved me down the stairs and locked me in the basement. He left with our two children and I have no idea where he might be.”

There. She had finally been brave enough to tell the truth. The actual truth was that she was too damn tired to fight any more. Physical abuse was one thing, but the emotional abuse was the most difficult to endure. The police took the report and gave her a handout about domestic violence. The officer asked her if she wanted to press charges, and at this point she was so confused. Incarcerate her husband? The father of her children? Yes, she thought. It was the only way to send a clear message, one he would have to listen to. If he thinks he was locking me up as his prisoner, wait until he sees who’s going to be locked up now.

It wasn’t long until the police noticed another car pull in the driveway. It was Liam and the children. They were immediately separated and an officer put handcuffs on Liam. He was incredulous and couldn’t grasp the thought of why an ambulance had arrived, or why he had been handcuffed. The police explained that he was being arrested for domestic violence and endangerment to a child, the unborn fetus. He laughed.

Siobhan labored for about five hours. She was in labor alone, yet the nurses knew that she needed tender loving care and more assistance than women who had birthing partners. It was too late to administer anesthesia, so she really suffered through the

whole ordeal. Finally, at 11:30 p.m. Alyssa Kristin was born. The nurses took her away immediately. All Siobhan could ask was, “Is she okay?” What seemed like hours later, a nurse brought her a tiny package to her in a pink blanket. The baby had a mess of fine red hair and the nurse pulled a tuft of it forward and formed a curl in the middle to her forehead. Where did she get that hair? Siobhan was in love from the start, as she had been with all her children. The main thing was that she was healthy especially after the beating about the abdomen and the fall down the stairs. It was a miracle she wasn’t injured.

An officer Rodriguez showed up at the hospital. The older children were playing at the police station in the playroom designed for children of domestic violence situations. Officer Rodriguez said they were having a great time, but wanted to know if there was family that could take them until Siobhan got out of the hospital.

She was the closest with her brother Darren, so after calling him, he ran over to take care of the kids and bring them home. The kids loved their “Uncle D” and were excited to see him. It was a special “vacation” staying there and they were thrilled to be snuggled together in the spare bedroom. He was happy to have them and that made Siobhan feel much better. Officer Rodriguez was like a knight in shining armor.

Officer Rodriguez reminded Siobhan to call the shelter on the pamphlet that was given to her about domestic violence, and she called the number on the back for protective services. An intake worker came to see her and explained that Liam was a first class abuser and her best course of action was to live at the shelter with her children. There they could keep her safe and hidden and she didn’t have to show up to court for Liam. The only hope for the children was to grow up without seeing or hearing all the violence,

the violence that was rapidly progressing. Safety. That's what Siobhan really wanted. She wanted safety for the children, to grow up in a loving home without violence. They'd experience love from her, and she would do her best as a single parent.

Perhaps Ireland, back to where she began her journey. To start all over again would be something of a miracle. It was about time for an adventure.

Table for Two

By Jeannine Connelly Morse

They went to her favorite restaurant, a tiny Italian place called the Capri, a dark little hole in the wall, where empty Chianti bottles full of dust hung from artificial grapes and vine on the ceiling. Music was piped in the room, some tenor serenading in Italian, the song unfamiliar yet soothing. Garlic permeated the air and a heady aroma wafted down the street making people pause and ask, “Where’s that delicious smell coming from?” Barely able to afford this restaurant, Jon planned to charge the bill on his credit card, the very same way he procured her present, to celebrate her birthday.

Jon and Brigid had been married for almost twenty years. His mother never approved of their marriage (She was Irish, he was Italian) and Jon was constantly trying to make her see how perfect their little family had become. They had a beautiful house in the suburbs of Chicago, and four smart, healthy kids, two girls and two boys. He also had a wife who was intelligent and could cook circles around all the other wives in the neighborhood. Yet, it was never enough for his mother. Nothing he ever did was enough for his mother, his friends, and coworkers, never enough for anyone including himself.

Somehow Brigid knew that something had been amiss for a long time. Unforgivable mistakes had been made. His weekend trips with the boys, his lack of participation with the children, his constant flirting with everyone who wore a skirt. Then there were the affairs. Oh, he said they were nothing to him, but she knew deep down that she could never trust him again. She was constantly checking his phone, email, his secretary for any clue as to what he had been doing lately. But, despite all this, he still wanted to work things out. He pleaded for her forgiveness, but she found herself unable to make

decisions. Paralyzed, she drifted from one day to the next. Only the familiar provided comfort.

The birthday dinner was his attempt to ask for forgiveness from his last affair. Brigid wanted no part of it, but Jon insisted they must celebrate her birthday. He hinted that she would simply love her present, but deep down she knew, it was merely a peace offering. She told him she wanted nothing for her birthday and warned him not spend money they didn't have. There was nothing that could take away years of pain and heartache.

The only thing she wanted that night for her birthday was to bolt from their little table for two. Dinner and petty small talk exchanged, their unfinished dinners sat in front of them dressed like tin-foil swans. Trapped inside their intimate table prison, he slipped a small jewelry box across the table. She stared at it for a few moments, not knowing what she should do. Should she graciously accept something she wanted no part of, or send it back across the table? She put her hand on top of the black velvety box, and suddenly his hand was on top of hers.

"Take it," he said gently. He pushed the box towards her side of the table.

She snapped open the tiny box to reveal an emerald and diamond ring. His eyes were full of hope and hers were full of sorrow. His breathing became intense and labored; tears cascaded down her cheeks. The waiter with the well-groomed beard and mustache appeared at their side inquiring if they wanted anything else.

With gritted teeth Jon said, "Check please."

Trembling, she begged him to calm down. She tried to tell him she loved the ring. He snapped the lid of the ring down and threw it at her like it was a dime store trinket. It

landed on the floor next to her feet and she scooped it up and buried it into the safety of her coat pocket. Disgusted, he paid the bill without looking to see if the total was correct. The change came back and he slammed the remainder of the money on the table, and the coins twirled about, some landing on the floor under nearby tables, causing patrons to stare.

They left the restaurant with their uneaten dinners in the tin-foil animals. Furious, he slammed the dinners straight to the sidewalk and pasta splattered everywhere. Sauce splattered on her dress as well as her black silk stockings, making her legs look like two bloody appendages. She stood next to the red and blue mailbox, at the corner of the Oak Park Baptist Church, wondering what the congregation would think the next morning of the remains of her Shrimp Diavolo tossed to the ground.

The car ride home was unbearable.

“You ruined a perfectly good evening, again!” he said.

“What were you thinking, Jon?” She asked. “Just what the hell were you thinking?! Did you think a ring, a piece of jewelry, could possibly erase all the pain and misery you’ve cost this family?”

He gunned the engine with force and determination, and turned a corner making the tires squeal and squawk. She tried to clean some of the spaghetti sauce off of her legs with the napkins they kept in the glove compartment. The speedometer raced and she wished he would just slow down. Just then the gates to the railroad tracks in front of them began to lower. The warning bells began to ring and she begged for him to stop the car. All of her pleading led him to gun the engine and race across the tracks. As she

looked out the back window, she sighed with relief. The roaring sound of the passing train behind them made her shudder with the possibilities of what could have happened and what could possibly happen next. The next corner came quickly and he almost lost control of the car. The car fish-tailed and she grabbed the dashboard lunging vicariously close to the windshield.

“Stop, enough,” she sputtered. “You’re scaring me!”

“You should be scared.”

Racing on, he ignored her as if she wasn’t there. He gripped the steering wheel tighter and tighter as he screamed at the driver in front of them. Brigid kept going over what she could do to make the car stop. There had to be something she could do to get control of the situation. All she could do at the moment was think that she was the cause of all of this rage and it would be her fault if something bad happened.

“Get the hell out of the left lane, you idiot!” He slammed on the horn as the driver in front slowly pulled over to the right lane. She hoped there were no police around. That’s all they needed tonight. He raced down the two-lane street to home. As he spied the driveway, he swung the car too far to the left and hit their mailbox, knocking to to the cold ground. Something else that needs to be fixed she thought. As they sat in the driveway he said, “Why didn’t you just take the ring? But, no! You can’t just take something and be happy! If you just took the ring, this whole mess could have been avoided.”

She touched the ring box in her pocket and said, “What!!! Avoided?” He inhaled but started to cough. She placed her hands over her mouth. Then her next words came

through the space between her fingers. It sounded flat, depressed perhaps. "I'm not...I don't want the ring. There, I said it and I...oh God...."

All she could think about was that if she accepted the ring, it would symbolize an apology for the last twenty years of an unfaithful marriage.

"Did you really think you could buy my forgiveness with a piece of jewelry? All I'll ever do is look at that ring and think about how you cheated on me, on our children, our marriage!

He pounded his fist on the dashboard and screamed, "Damn it to hell!" The noise of his fist made her jump. "The ring isn't an apology! It's your birthday present. An ordinary, everyday kind of present. Why do you always have to ruin everything?!"

"Where did you get that kind of money? What will we do next month? Call the mortgage company and explain that you bought me an ordinary birthday present so we won't be paying them?" She began to weep.

"Where do you care where I got the money?" he asked. At that point he slammed his car door boiling with rage he went over to her side of the car and yanked her door open. "Get out!" He demanded. He began to grab at her arm and she winced in pain.

"Stop! You're hurting me!" She screamed. "I won't go in the house like this. I want to wait until we've both calmed down."

"Oh, I'll calm down," he said with a dry sneer. He had that look in his eyes. The look the scared the life out of her. Slamming her car door as hard as he could, the whole car shook with defiance. Sobbing softly, rocking back and forth for comfort, she stared

straight ahead at the garage door, half out of fear and half out of stubbornness. The last place she wanted to be right now was in the house with him.

It was freezing in the car. A veil of snow fell over the windshield, making the interior of the car dark and she was unable to see past the white flakes that quickly enveloped her inside the car. It began to snow so hard at this point that it looked like another one of those Chicago blizzards.

Her teeth chattered and she shivered in her wet stockings on the cold leather seats. Finally, he came out the side of the house and opened her side of the door again. He had her antique book case in his hand and he held it over his head. She crouched down on the seat thinking he was about to throw it at her, but it landed at her side on the driveway. It splintered into a heap of firewood, making funny imprints in the snow.

“What the hell are you doing?” she screamed.

“Maybe now you’ll come into the house and see what I’m up to,” he said.

Following tentatively, she stepped inside the size ten foot prints he left in the snow in front of her. It was at this point that some of the neighbors began to take notice. A couple walking their dog on the sidewalk, stopped to stare. The neighbors next door were staring out the window again. She was embarrassed, but they all turned away not wanting to get involved. The last time their neighbors had called the police when they got into an argument. Anything but that again she thought.

The time came to stop this mess before it went too far. Grabbing at his arm so she could beg for his forgiveness, he shoved her onto the concrete sidewalk. She

instinctively put out her hands to break her fall and felt something snap in her wrist. The pain shot up her arm all the way to her shoulder. Her fingers began to throb. Still determined, she got up and again, he pushed but this time she fell into her prize rose garden. She was pricked with thorns everywhere and wondered if she had done much damage to the roses that would be so beautiful come spring. She simply wanted all of this to end.

As she entered their bungalow, she could barely walk up the four stairs to the first landing. There were shards of every kind of glass imaginable in every nook and cranny. There was glass piled up everywhere in their beautiful house. Glass crunched beneath every step of her spaghetti stained dressy black pumps. She walked carefully and numbly through the house surveying as much of the damage as possible. It was far worse than anything he had ever done before. Hearing Jon's footsteps upstairs, she saw her father on the landing. He was babysitting the kids and he had the good sense to get them out of the house and to a friend's house before things got any worse. She wondered how much they'd seen and how to answer their questions when they returned.

She heard more glass breaking. She didn't know what to do. Finally, she called 911. The operator answered.

"9-1-1. what's your emergency?"

"My husband...he...uh...oh, I guess he's...I can't make him stop. Is there an officer you can send to just calm him down?"

"Ma'am? Is your husband armed?" said the operator.

“No, he’s just breaking things. O God! He’s still at it!” said Brigid. She just hoped the police could calm him down. Talk to him, scare him a bit. When the police arrived she could hear their sirens before she saw the cars. She answered the door and apologized for all the mess.

When the police tried to ascend the stairs to the third floor, their squeaky, black, dress shoes shone in the reflection of the broken mirror on the staircase. As much as they tried to climb, with each step they took, their shoes crunched a slippery slope down another step. The staircase was a glass tower. Finally, by holding onto the railings they were able to tether up to the third floor. There, they found Jon initially in a fetal position, rocking back and forth on one of the beds. He jumped up as soon as he saw the police, and began to smash another glass object throwing shards of glass everywhere. His hands were full of blood, but he did not seem to notice and not to care. Pictures, vases, crystal, windows, knick-knacks, furniture and mirrors were destroyed. Even as police tried to reason with him, he just continued. He was covered in sweat, his hair slicked back on the sides, wild and curly at the crown. His breathing was staggered and heavy from all his handiwork.

It was at that moment that she heard a window shatter on the third floor. Brigid stood rigid one flight below, the sound was deafening. It sounded as if she were standing right next to the window as it smashed down three flights of stairs. Jon began to smash another window in front of the officers, when one decided to try to put an end to the chaos. He was a large man, handsome and had big, gentle brown eyes. He tried to reason with Jon and then suddenly he charged at the officer with a large shard of glass in his hand. He managed to run as far as the second landing when the police officer tasered

him, stopping him instantly. The two tiny needle-tipped darts delivered a 50,000-volt jolt to his body. The Taser rendered him incapacitated and debilitated. The scene froze in five second increments from the rhythm of the Taser. Each time he was tasered, they all watched his muscles contract as he grew weaker for the takedown.

The police finally slapped him in cuffs. He had never been in cuffs and panic began to ensue. As police took him away, he was crying and howling at the top of his lungs. Now a small crowd gathered on the sidewalk to gawk at what had taken place. Brigid was thankful for the snow for it kept the crowd to a minimum.

“Grow up you pathetic baby,” screamed the old woman across the street. “Lock him up and lose the key!”

The officer put his hand on top of Jon’s head and pushed him into the squad car. As the car took off down the road, a female officer from a second car began to take notes for a report.

“Brigid, are you hurt?”

Suddenly, Brigid snapped out of a dense smog, trying to process what had just taken place.

“Yes,” she said suddenly aware of the throbbing in her right arm. Looking at her arm she guessed it was broken, like so many times before. The officer handed her a sheet about domestic violence. Why this, Brigid thought? Why was she being handed a sheet about domestic violence? They had their fights, he shoved her from time to time. But, he was always genuinely sorry and showed true remorse for what he had done. She never considered herself a victim. She was educated and owned a beautiful home on an

immaculate street. Domestic violence? She never considered what had happened between them domestic violence. She loved him and would never leave him. They had always managed to work things out before. Besides, with four kids and no family support, where could she turn for help? Yet, seeing him in hand cuffs, watching him being tasered, made something gnaw at her insides. She had a feeling she could never shake that image for the rest of her life.

As she waited for the last police car to leave, she began to survey the damage. She embraced herself, looking for some small sense of comfort. There was not an ounce of comfort, no matter what direction she turned in the house. The house was quiet, except for the snapping of the glass under her feet. On every floor, in every room there was shattered glass and broken furniture. They prided themselves on collecting antiques. Nothing could possibly be replaced or repaired; yet she found herself trying to put things back together. She picked up all the pieces and tried to piece the impossible back together again. She just wanted to fix things and make it all right again!

Finally, she gave up piecing together the tattered remains. Times had been terrible before, and yet somehow this time seemed different. Her husband was in jail for attempted assault on a police officer, and would end up spending about sixty to ninety days for that offense. Her chest constricted at the thought of that and she could hardly breathe. Perhaps it was another one of those panic attacks she was having.

A dangerous thought crept up her spine and into her mind. Maybe now was the time to leave. She glanced at the information sheet the officer handed her about domestic violence and as she read each one of the warning signs, a chord resonated within her. The sheet implored the victim not to spend one more night with the offender.

Tired of all the fighting and contemplating the fear of the unknown, she wondered what would happen next time. Would there even be a next time? Brigid could not imagine the sheer strength and determination it would take to leave him, yet she couldn't imagine the strength and determination it would take to stay from this point on.

Outside in the blizzard, the snow began to cascade in tornado-like circles. She began to pick up the pieces of her broken bookcase. There were large shards of glass in the driveway and she knelt down to pick them up so that the tires on the car would be safe. As she knelt down on the driveway, she felt a stabbing pain in her knee. She found herself kneeling on a piece of glass, and it was impossible to clean it all up with the snow falling. Was that blood on her knee, or was that spaghetti sauce?

She thrust her ice cold hands into her coat pockets to warm them up. It was at that moment that she felt the velvety ring box that she had placed there earlier. She took it out of her pocket and opened it up again, looked at the glittering jewels on the tiny ring. Snow began to gather on the small treasure and the bauble began to disappear under a quilt of snow. For the first time, she felt different. As the snow continued to swirl in circles above her flaming red hair, she closed her eyes. She lifted her face upwards and felt the snow upon her tear stained cheeks.

VITA

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<u>School</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date</u>
Middletown North HS	Middletown, NJ	HS Diploma	June 1979
Westminster of Rider U	Princeton, NJ	BM	May 1986
Dominican University	River Forest, IL	MAT	May 2000
Walden University	Minneapolis, MN	MS	May 2005
Drew University	Madison, NJ	D.Litt.	December 2015