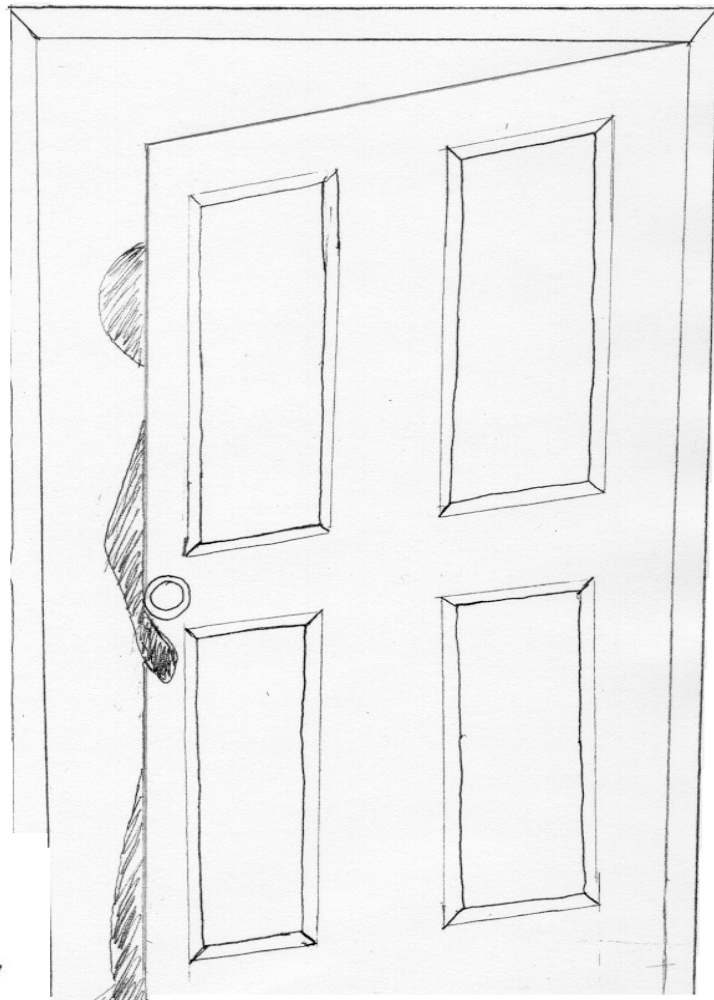


# Behind Closed Doors... Stories of Survival



Read/Write/Now  
765 State Street  
Springfield, MA 01109  
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Read/Write/Now participated in this year's Women, Violence and Adult Education project sponsored by World Education. We were pleased to be involved in this endeavor as it fits with our mission statement to help adult learners meet their own personal, family and community goals. This project was open to all students at Read/Write/Now. Since our program is co-educational, we felt it would be unfair not to include the men. We used a "team approach" with interested learners working in study circles and guiding the large group participation.

This publication is a culmination of many hours of preparation involving discussions, large and small group meetings, writing, research, art, lectures, video presentations, theater performance, group sharing, group building, bonding, raw emotions, nervous laughter, dead silences, tears, and hugs. It was an awesome experience and the stories in this book reflect the learners' thoughts, feelings and deepest emotions. The members of the study circles agreed that all stories would be published anonymously. Our intention was to create an open and honest forum for the writers. We believe you will find this reflected in the pages of this book.

Some of the pieces in this publication are a result of our writers' workshop. The assignment was to choose an object from the table that either triggered a memory of violence or provided a source of comfort during such times. You may be surprised at some of the objects that were chosen and the stories that accompanied them.

As you embark upon the emotional journey before you, may you realize that these writers are no longer behind closed doors.

Michelle Faith Brown  
Susanne D. Campagna

## The Chain is Broken

I think when I was a little girl my sister was abused. I never saw. She was assaulted by her husband. My father and mother went to my sister's house to check on her. She was okay. My sister took the abuse for a short time.

I felt the abuse at home with my mother. I don't remember very much about my childhood. I remember getting stitches in my head. She told my father I slipped in the bathtub. I also remember her burning my hand with an iron. She told my father she was teaching me to iron and it was an accident. I remember a paper bag between my legs and burning. My mother blamed me for wetting the bed. Later, the doctor found I had an infection.

This was not the only thing. I suffered other abuse from other family members, but I always managed to defend myself. I remember my mother mistreating my brother too, but I don't remember about my sisters. However, today when my sister and I talk about my mother, my brother defends her.

When I raised my kids (maybe because I was still so angry inside) the only way I knew was to discipline them the way my mother did to me. My son was so bad. I used to scream at him. I was so angry. I did bruise him one time. I didn't know how to handle my children in a different way. Afterwards, I used to go into my room and cry. I thank God that I have wonderful kids who turned out well and are wonderful parents with their children. They cut the chain.

## *Could This Really Be the Same Man?*

*What's going on here?*

*Who is this man*

*That yells and screams at me?*

*Constantly saying his heart, I could never understand.*

*That makes me cry and hurt.*

*Making me feel unwanted, unloved, lower than dirt.*

*Didn't I try to give him everything?*

*Being there, showing my love, when nobody else cared.*

*Was it all in vein?*

*I gave him my heart to mend.*

*He was more than my lover, but my best friend.*

*So when did his love for me end?*

*I don't know,*

*See that's what I've been trying to understand.*

*And yet I ask myself,*

*Could this really be the same man?*

## God has been with Me All this Time

I tried to kill myself when I was 14 years old. I experienced a lot of violence in my life. I really couldn't read. My father would ask me to tell the time and then yell at me and put me down because I couldn't do it. He would yell at my brothers because I couldn't tell time and he thought that they should be helping me instead of watching TV. But my brothers really didn't know that I couldn't tell time. Although my father didn't ask me to do this a lot, I really dreaded it because I knew that he was going to yell at everyone. Now that I look at it, I know that he really wanted the best for me because he knew my life would be really hard. He knew that I wasn't getting a good education. My brothers would bring homework home and I wouldn't have any.

I really didn't like myself then. I didn't like the way I was living and I was scared to live. There were things going on that I can't even write here and things that I have blocked. One of the things that really made me hate myself was that I was picked up in the mini-bus. My brothers would walk to school or the bus stop, but I would have to wait for the van. The kids in the neighborhood used to call the van, "The wagon," or "The Jerry van," as in Jerry Lewis. When my brothers got mad at me they'd use those terms too.

If this wasn't bad enough, I used to have to wear special shoes that were big and ugly. On top of that, I was going back and forth to the hospital. This was just too much for me. So I stole my grandmother's pills that used to make her calm down. I swallowed 24 of them. I was really scared. I told my father that someone put something in my soda. They believed me and watched over me for a week. They never took me to the doctor's.

Later on, I told my mother that I took my grandmother's pills. My father overheard this. He grabbed a knife and told me to kill myself. He was really upset that I took the pills.

Life got worse. At age 18, I did the same thing but I didn't take as many pills. I didn't try to kill myself anymore after that. I just became an addict. But now, I know that it really was suicidal.

I thank God for being with me and helping me recover. I have learned to read. I have a job. And sometimes I even like myself.

## Dear Diary

4-20-02: Today I found out my boyfriend had another girl. I was so hurt that this happened but he came to my job with her. And I started to hit him.

4-25-02: I want to change my life without my hands because I have two daughters and I don't want it to affect them.

4-29-02: What would I do if I needed to get out? I would call my sister, call the Domestic Violence hotline, and go to a shelter until he could remove all of his stuff. Once he does remove his stuff, I would go back home but I would get a restraining order so he could not come around my home or me.

5-9-02: I want to get help for my problem because I am afraid that maybe one day I will hurt my children. I don't want to lose my children over this stuff I love them too much.

5-12-02: But now we are both getting help so we can make it better for both of us and the girls.

## Junior

*Trylights is a small town on the hill in Jamaica. That is where I first meet Junior and his family. His mother got five boys and two girls. Junior's mother clean and sell cow meat. My grandmother usually send me to their house to buy meat. Me and Junior's brother, Mikey, go to the same school and come home at the same time. I play ball with them.*

*I never remember if Junior be in jail or in trouble. I never remember Junior fighting or arguing with anyone. He was a funny guy. He was a guy that always made you laugh by remembering something from the past. He would make a joke out of people fighting.*

*I leave Jamaica in 1990. I leave Junior back in Jamaica. In 1992 or 1993, Junior came to the U.S. I remember the day like it was yesterday when Junior get out of the cab on 16 Dunmoreland Street. He was living in Springfield for a while and was working with some other guys doing car work. He was never in trouble but he was doing "road work" like hustling people.*

*He moved from Springfield to Seattle and then he moved to Philadelphia. That is where he started to hustle off the streets. One morning my uncle asked me if I heard the news. I said no. He told me that last night they killed Junior in Philly. They shot him in the head and stole his belongings and his money. They killed him in his truck. My uncle told me the police found him in the morning hanging over the steering wheel in his truck. Someone shot him in the head. Junior died a violent death. I don't know if all of that is true but Junior's body is*

*supposed to come to Springfield. He's going to be buried in Oak Grove Cemetery on Saturday.*

## Violence is All a Part of Life

Everyone goes through some things in their lifetime. What is violence? I think it's all a part of life. In some homes there's violence. Dads and Moms discuss it sometimes and sometimes kids go through violence. Sometime, in the home, people do not talk about it.

I have seen violence in my lifetime. I often have been the referee for friends and family members. Sometimes I get in the middle of these people and try to solve the problem. Sometimes my instinct tells me to get involved because I want people to be treated fairly.

But sometimes they misunderstand me or they don't listen. That is life, and life goes on.

## Wouldn't It Be Nice?

When I was a child, I saw my mother and father fight all the time. I used to think that was the way of life in order to be happy. When my mother and father were arguing, they always went into the bedroom and made up. I don't like fighting because when I get started, I don't know when to stop and that just makes it worse.

I have heard some people say if your husband don't get angry with you, then he don't love you. I think that if any man hits you, he does not love you. He just wants someone to be his slave. How do I feel about fighting? I hate it. I did not like it when my father beat on my mother. I did not like it when I was young and I don't like it now.

I have heard some men say some women don't know when to shut up. By that time, I am so angry I can't stop. I just have to keep going until I say what I have to say. I feel if I can't say what I have to say, then I am not a free person. I wish everyone could get along and there was no fighting at all, but I know that that will never happen. But wouldn't it be nice if every man and woman could get along and not fight. Boy! What a wonderful world it would be. No matter what color you are or where you come from, we all could get along.

## Sexual Abuse All Over the World

Sex abuse happens not only in America, it happens all over the world. I know more than two people in Jamaica who were involved. Sex abuse is happening to children in schools, too.

A long time ago, I knew these students, a girl and a boy. They were at the playing field during P.E. class in the afternoon. The teacher left the playground and went home.

A girl friend and a boyfriend were making love on the playground. Another boy came along. He wanted to make love too. She didn't want to. But she was afraid of a scandal so she agreed, but still it got out to the public.

## Violence

Somewhere in America, men and women are affected by violence every day. I can talk about this from my own experience. I have grown up with violence. I have seen my father and brother solve problems with guns and violence. I have thought about doing this myself. When someone messes with me, I don't have to take it. I can hurt this person and solve my problems that way. I think when a person steals another person's boyfriend; somebody is going to get badly hurt, maybe even die.

A lot of women can't take it. When they know their man is cheating, they want to hurt both of them, the man and the woman he is cheating with. These thoughts go through my head. They are very strong thoughts. I know it's not right to think this way. I can't help the way I feel. The only way out is to hurt the person who played with your heart. I know I need some help. But I'm not getting the counseling I need. I'm into some serious stuff. I think my only choice is to move far away. I told him if you play with my heart, you play with my head.

I grew up in a violent home. I was in the house when my father shot at my mother's lover. He just missed killing my mother. My mother almost stabbed my dad with scissors. Violence doesn't bother me. I grew up with it. My mother and father used to fight all the time. I went through so much with my mother's boyfriend. He tried to do things to me when I was 13. I told my mom but she never believed me. He went after my sister too. To this day I can't stand this man.

My brother went through it. He got stabbed by a woman and he went to jail. She tried to kill him but he went to jail. My brother was married and his wife was cheating so he went after her lover and shot at him. Violence has affected my whole life. I can't sleep and can't pay attention in school. Everyday and every night I think about my problems. I think about hurting someone. I think about leaving.

## Life is Hard

I have problems with my back. I'm in pain all the time and in and out of the hospital. My kids have been out of control since I have been in the hospital. Sometimes I feel so lonely. It has been two months and I am still here in the nursing home. I ask myself, "When am I going home?"

I asked my doctor and all he says is, "Not yet."

I was feeling lonely because no one came to see me too much. I was feeling bad and sad and all I did was cry and cry. I missed my kids and my family and I missed school.

I learn a lot at Read/Write/Now. I miss that for real. When I go home in the next few days, I want to go back to school.

## *All about Violence*

*I went through a violent time when I was a teenager. My ex-boyfriend used to use drugs and I didn't know about it. He kept it as a secret, but I found out from a few people. I was with him for almost five years. Just before we had five years together, I decided to leave him. He was a nice guy, but it was the drugs that pushed him away from me. Alcohol made him crazy too. He used to beat me up. I didn't know what was wrong with him. He would take my money from me. He used to act funny when he was high. I didn't know what to do.*

*I'm too nice a person to go through this. I have been through a lot of relationships. Right now, it has been a little better for me. But, if this should happen again, I will go on with my life. And for everybody my advice is to listen to what they say: "Stay away from drugs and alcohol."*

## It Hurts So Much

It hurts so much when you love somebody so much. She helps you every step of the way but she rubs it in your face. That's why fights and different speculations about problems occur between two loved ones.

My baby's mother doesn't tell the truth to people and to herself. She said I hit her. I have been raised by a woman. Why should I hit a woman?

I don't get mad all the time. I am a very humble person. After we argue, I try to work things out because I have a son with this woman. If she don't love me but loves the most beautiful thing in the world, my son, that's important.

But that don't mean I don't need to see my son. If she doesn't let me see him, that is very mean and disrespectful to my son because my son needs a father there.

## My Life in Violence

This is my life story. My childhood was not the best. I saw my parents argue and fight physically. It was crazy. My parents left each other. My father left with another woman and my mom stayed alone. She started to work to support us because every time she asked my father for clothes for us, he would hit her in front of us.

Then I started to grow up. I was ten years old and my brother was 13 years old. He started to be depressed and angry a lot. He started screaming at my mom and punching her and not respecting her. It got worse. He also got violent with me. My mom was sick of my brother. This went on for five years. I told my mom to put him in a program but she thought that he was going to get mad at her. So he left the house.

I was turning 15 years old when I met my boy's father and I lived with him. My mom and his mom forced us to get married because I was pregnant with my son Chris. My son's father was mentally abusive and I left him.

I met another man in my life after I was alone for three years. He looked like a good man and I stayed with him for four months. He treated my boys like they were his and I liked that in him. We started to live together and I didn't know that he had a drinking problem. He started to get mad and argue with me for no reason. Every time it was worse. He was screaming at me and saying bad names to me. I told him to calm himself down. That is when he hit me. But one time he hit me so hard that I called the police. I was pregnant by that time. They took me to the hospital and they couldn't save my baby. The court gave him 10 to 15 years in jail.

I left and moved to Springfield to be with my mom because she was sick and I started to take care of her. She died. I promised my mother at her death that I was not letting no man abuse me no more like my father did to her and my brother did to her and me and that men did to me too. There will be no more violence in my life.

## Abuse in My Life

I have learned a lot about abuse in America. Some bad stuff is going on, like people mistreating kids. I heard this old man had sex with a twelve-year-old girl and got her pregnant. A lot of men and women are always fighting. I knew this guy and his girlfriend they fussed with each other everyday.

I also experienced abuse from my father. My brother was abused by my father, too. He used to beat me very badly. He also stripped us naked and beat us real bad. A lot of people used to come and help us. They took us away from him and kept us for awhile. When he wanted to come and get us, we never wanted to go back home to him. He always wanted to take us back to punish me and my brother. So, I ran away from home and never got to finish my education.

## My Advice

I think parents should not argue in front of their kids. Because that hurts the kids and then the kids want to take sides with one of the parents. It seems to me that the boy always takes the mother's side and wants to fight his father. The girls always take their father's side and want to fight their mother. I don't know why this is, but it just is the way it is. Kids also get hurt by their parents arguing in front of them because sometimes the kids think it's their fault that the parents are arguing.

My wife and I raised two kids. We never really argued in front of them. We had our arguments, but we made sure they weren't there. We have been married almost 36 years and never had any problems with our boys. They never went to jail; they never gave us any problems. They finished and college. We were a family that always went to church. Even when I didn't go, my wife made sure they would go.

Here is my advice for a long healthy marriage. First of all, don't argue in front of your kids. Next, be aware that a small argument can turn into a big argument. If the argument gets heated, one of you has to be smart enough to walk away since it takes two people to argue. Or, if you don't walk away, just leave it alone, just drop it. I'm not saying that you don't discuss the issue, just wait until things calm down. When you get "all mad," you lose all sense of right or wrong. If you are both all mad you would be arguing like you were crazy. If you don't stop, you know it's going to turn into a physical fight and one of you will go to jail. That will divide the family.

A marriage is something you have to work on. There are going to be good times, like when you've

been on vacation, but also bad times, like when you argue about money. Two people don't always agree on everything. Sometime you need to get in a room by yourself and think through both sides. Consider all of the angles before you make up your mind. This time, maybe she is right, or maybe you're right. A marriage is a thing that you have to work on together. Communication is the most important thing for a healthy successful marriage.

## I Know How it Feels

Since I was nine years old, I grew up in an abusive family. I was the oldest. My mother never sent me to school so I could help her raise my five brothers and my four sisters. After my mother and my father separated, my mother got another husband who was a drug dealer. He used to hit my mother and used drugs in front of my brothers and me and my sisters.

In my young life I saw a lot of drugs and physical abuse and never got support from my mother. Up to this day, I never tried to use drugs or drink. And now I got the opportunity to go to school and be somebody in the future.

## Family Violence

My dad used to come home drunk every night. The only two people up were my brother and me. I was five years old, and my brother was four. He would beat my mother and then he would turn around and beat us.

I grew up feeling sad, scared, and angry. This abuse continued until the day I stood up to him. I was thirteen years old. He just turned around and belted me. I left for school saying I wanted to leave home. When I came home, my things were in the yard. I stayed with family in New York and then in Springfield.

Right now, we are speaking to each other. It started with the death of my younger brother.

The experience is still with me. I hope never to cause harm to anyone. It stinks.

## Family Violence

### A Rose that Bloomed too Late

My sister was in a violent relationship. She got hurt very bad. She got raped and raped over and over again. It cost her her life. She died at 16 years old.

She died on Christmas Eve. But they found her body on Christmas day. The last time I saw my sister was on Christmas Eve. I told her to stay at home but she wanted to go with her boyfriend. He took her to the park and he raped her and killed her, leaving her son behind. His name is Mark. He was a year old at this time.

## The Bible Can Help You Overcome Violence

It is not good when a person decides to get even with someone who has done them wrong. Because when a person walks around with such vengeance in his heart, it boils up and makes him want to hurt that person so much so, that they think of how they would then go about getting even.

They have to go to the lord because the lord knows vengeance starts with the devil. It's all because we refuse to listen to the lord or go to him in prayer that we want revenge. It has to do with what you let your kids watch on TV. Most of the movies on the TV are not good movies. They have so much violence and/or swearing in them. Some people grow up in a violent household where they see their father and mother fighting or arguing with each other. The fighting and arguing then becomes a part of them. When they get married, they bring it into their relationship.

Here are some of the things you can do to over-come violence in your life. You can seek the lord, Jesus, in prayer and he will give you the victory. The Bible can guide you on how to get the violence out of your life. You have to pray constantly and believe that the lord has the power to help you with such violence. Prayer helps a lot.

## Thursday Night Workshop

Today we met and talked about things that happened in our lives. I hope it will help some of us to understand life when there is abuse going on in the family. Sometimes we cannot talk about it. I think the program will be good for some of us.

I think about what happened to me when I came to live with my godmother and godfather. By doing this, it helped me to overcome my fear of life. I am not unhappy anymore. Coming to school has helped me a whole lot.

## *Her Story*

*Let me tell you a story. She was telling me about something that happened when she was a little girl. I sat there and listened to her going on about different things that happened in her life. The things she was telling me were amazing. I can't believe the abuse this person was going through. By this time you must be wondering who I am talking about. She was telling me about her father! You were probably thinking she was the one going through it. Yes, she was, because she would see her father get hit by her mother and that would scare her.*

*To me that is abuse. She's been through a lot. Her mother broke her father's nose so bad that he had to go Boston to get his nose fixed. You hear a lot about women getting abused all the time, but you don't hear too much about men getting abused. Probably you know of someone, or you may think, "A man getting abused by a woman, that is impossible." But you know what? It does happen!*

## Violence

I learned about violence on TV, while watching about the Vietnam War. I saw all the bombing and the people getting shot for no reason or were they? I know about Communism, but why do you think we should care? Why do you think we were in that war?

But violence comes in many forms. You can threaten someone or you can yell at some kid. Some TV shows like westerns and cops shows, they all have violence. Even boxing is ok in the ring with the "ref," but not for kids in the schoolyard or on the street. I love watching the show, "Cops" on TV. It is filled with violence, people beating people, people yelling at their kids, ladies, and old people. There are a lot of people on drugs and there are drunks on the show. They do not walk away from an argument. If kids aged 12, 13, and 14 or so, watch violence on TV, the kids may get ideas to do the same thing they see on TV.

## Reaction to the Scott Girard and Brenda Lopez Presentation on Domestic Violence

\* I agree with the speakers. I've never experienced the battered part, but I have been talked to meanly. I didn't realize it was a form of abuse. I wish the abuse could be stopped.

\* I was not interested in the presentation by Scott and Brenda. I believe that if someone acts out by abusing someone else, it was passed down to them. Maybe a family member abused them in some way, so they grew up thinking that's normal. I was not around any abuse, or ever abused, so I cannot relate. I also believe that if you are in a relationship where that is going on, and you do nothing about it, then you like it. I also don't care for anyone who does it or is abused, because none of it is normal. And if you don't know that maybe you need to get abused.

\* At the talk on domestic violence, I learned a lot of stuff I never knew. What they said made me interested to find out more about the programs. I would like to talk to my wife so we could go together for help.

\* I do not like to see people beat on by their husbands or their parents, like in the situations they were talking about. It is not good to do that. Parents should not beat their children or abuse them. They should get help to stop beating them up. They should get out of the situation because I would not like to see them get hurt. The children do not like to see their mom get beat up either.

Domestic Violence presentation continued...

\* I NEVER EXPERIENCED ANY KIND OF ABUSE, BUT I THINK THE PROGRAMS ARE GOOD. I LEARNED BOTH POINTS OF VIEWS. WE WERE A CLOSE FAMILY GROWING UP AND NEVER HAD THAT. I NEVER GOT BEAT BUT I WAS SENT TO MY ROOM. TODAY, IT'S A REAL PROBLEM.

SOMETHING PEOPLE SHOULD REALIZE IF THEY ABUSE, IS "YOU ARE NOT A BAD PERSON, BUT YOU ARE MAKING BAD DECISIONS" WHEN YOU DO THIS.

\* I feel that violence is a love-hate situation that needs to be dealt with. The reason those two people were here was to promote non-violence toward human beings. They have grasped the concept of it, but I feel they have not grasped how to instill it in other people yet. I hope that in time they will have a more successful approach.

\* I can relate to this. The people like Brenda are good people and she'll go out of the way to help you.

In my opinion, a man doesn't go for help at all. It's the woman who does. I agree when they say a friendship should be 50-50. When a man takes a hand to a woman, she should walk out of the door. She should walk out even if he says "sorry," because it's a lie. It doesn't mean anything at all.

They control you and hurt you.

## Speakers on Violence

The presentations yesterday were very interesting to me. For I liked the way the lady opened up everything about women and men. She spoke on both sides. She spoke about men and women calling each other names. Some of the things she said yesterday makes me remember what happened to me back in 1977 with my kids and their mother. My kids were left alone when I was working. When I get home, I spoke to her about it. She hit me and I hit her back. I am lucky I did not go to jail. But God take me out of it.

I enjoy what both speakers had said and I see it on the TV and hear it on the radio everyday. Sometimes because of drugs and alcohol I see men beating women. Everyone can see it on TV news. From what I see, they end up in the hospital or in jail. It sends a message that people need to act more like adults and stop acting like children. People need to take responsibility for themselves and not blame other people for their problems.

Violence is not the solution to any problem. The solution is to go to church and ask God for help. God will help them. It may take a long time but he will help. These people also need counseling. They need to talk to someone who can help them change their behavior.

## Family Abuse

I liked what we were talking about today because it is very important. We were listening to the man and the woman talking to us about family abuse and family violence. Sometimes you see so many brothers and sisters fighting together. I wish I could do something about it. I would like to do something to stop them from fighting.

They should sit down and talk about it inside the house. I think when they were growing up they were abused by their parents. Also when the parents were little kids they were abused.

It goes on every day in this world. I ask God why people like to hit kids so much. If they don't want kids, please give them to someone who could take care of them.

Please God, for those people who would like to hit kids, make them stop. I would like to take care of them so much. The solution is in the family. If we communicate, we can solve any problems. It begins with the family.

## Excessive Violence in America

There is an excessive amount of violence in today's society. There are many contributors to this, like rap music, hard rock music, peer pressure, sex, drugs and even entertainment. Children as well as teens are showing up on the news because of their violent behavior. This world has the idea that being tough is the way to be. If you're not tough, you can't survive in this world.

The lyrics of songs today often talk about kill or be killed. They talk about violence in the home and on the streets. They talk openly about sex and sexual acts. They talk about gang warfare, race against race, area against area, even family member against family member. Music is not the only place that violence turns up.

People often use violence for entertainment purposes like boxing or action packed movies. If you think about it, when growing up and being a child, cartoons had a lot of violence in them. Bugs Bunny had Elmer Fudd who chased him with a gun, and Thundercats have characters with swords and guns looking for the "bad guys". Since we were born, we've seen violence. It sticks to you if you see it all the time when you are learning about the world.

If you don't at least have a reputation for violence, you are not accepted by your peers in school. They tease you and put you in with the nerds. You have to make people believe that you will stand up for yourself. You hope you don't have to live up to your reputation, but if you have to, you have to do what you have to do.

Violence is really an emotion that tells your mind to react in a hurtful way. Violence is more than just hitting or shooting someone. You can be violent with words or actions. But, violence is all in the mind because no one can make you get mad, you have to give into what's happening to you to get mad or violent. People let what happened to them in the past, influence their decision making today.

Men and women get mad and violent sometimes. However, if you want to consider gender in violence, there is more male violence than female. In the past, it was the men that went to battle. It was the man that was taught to control and defend. This is true in the animal kingdom as well. You never see a female lion fighting for the male lion. It is always the male lion fighting for the female lion's attention. It is always two males in combat.

Basically, you have to fight to get what you want in this life. And, there lies the problem. What we want is what we have to get, and we will do anything to have what we want including violence.

There is definitely an excessive amount of violence in today's society. It has always been and will always be. We can't stop violence but we can try to curtail it. Parents need to step up to their responsibility and teach their children right from wrong and that will deter some violent acts. Violence is a thing that is going to happen no matter what anyone says or does. We just need to show our children the way they should go and they won't depart from it. With one child at a time we can make a difference.

## Response to Video

I seen a lady who the guy abused very bad. They had kids together but they were not even married. He abused her all the time. She never did anything about it.

I used to try to talk to her when he wasn't around. I told her I'd pray for her. The way he treated her – I told her she should do something about it. She said she had the kids. So, she couldn't do nothing.

A friend of mine talked to her. She told her abuser and they got into a big argument. She called the cops. They went to court. He works at Ludlow and almost lost his job.

## Woman Beat Up By Ex-boyfriend

In the video, I saw men abusing their wives. The wives tried to get away, but the husbands went after them.

It happens because men want to control their women. They want to have their way. They don't want their women to go out with other men or their girlfriends.

It has happened to me. My ex-boyfriend abused me. He pushed me down a lot. I told on him and they made him go for counseling.

However, he wouldn't go and he's still abusive.

I still see him on Sundays. He has a bad temper. I am glad I am not his girlfriend anymore.

## Response to Quote:

*"I've learned that when you plan to get even with someone, you are only letting that person continue to hurt you..."*

*(source unknown)*

I was with someone that hurt me. I stayed with him because, all my life, I had learned that you stay with the guy you love no matter what the cost. You do what you can to get even in the way that he doesn't know. I hurt him more when I left him and got a divorce.

I know it is not good to get even with the person that hurt you, but it is good to go and get help for both persons.

## *Family Abuse*

*Abuse by her husband  
Punching in the eye  
Punching in the head  
They throw things at you  
If you speak to them to stop the fighting,  
They rage more  
If you try to ignore them,  
They pick at you the more  
When you think of them attempting to kill you  
You want to run for your life*

Sometimes I wonder why people have to be in this mood. I watch the news on TV every evening and see how much people have been abused. It makes you think what a world we live in. People ought to have control over their behaviors, and think twice before they do things. I think when they show bad behavior they should be put in a place to teach them the way to good behavior. Then they would think to live good with each other.

Sometimes family abuse comes from “discussing” an argument. When you and someone have a misunderstanding, you should talk it over and over again until you all understand each other. When someone is in a bad mood, don’t let him or her hurt you. You should ignore the matter, talking with them might cause them to hurt you. You should not allow that to happen to you. You should not plan to be even with them either. Because getting even with them only gets matters worse. Sometimes people throw out their feeling at you and you adopt it. Then it sometimes turns out that you are hurting each other.

## Nasty Woman

I was in a relationship with a mean and violent women. She was arrested two times for beating her husband. I didn't know that and I had no experience with this. But, I do remember this...

She was standing over me, while I was in bed, with a big glass candle jar in her hand raised to hit me. I think if she wasn't on probation, I'd be dead or in the hospital for a very long time.

That was two years ago. Last night I was in Friendly's and she walked by me. I said, "Hi."

She said, "FUCK OFF."

"I've learned that when you plan to get even with someone you are only letting that person continue to hurt you."

## If I Stuck a Needle in My Finger...

If I stuck a needle in my finger, outside of the pain, anger, and frustration, I would want to punch someone in the face right at that moment that I stuck myself.

But I love sewing. I love making things. It makes me feel good when I make a skirt or a pair of pants. But that is not always the case, one day I wanted to fix the hem on my skirt and I couldn't find a needle. I looked all over the house. The more I looked, the more angry I got. I got so angry and frustrated that I could not think, so I just stopped looking and sat down. Boy, it is not easy to find a needle in a haystack.

## Coloring Book

Fun, fun, fun, I like to read books sometimes, but other times, I like to color in books more. I had more fun with coloring books. I was like a pro at coloring books. But my mother did not like the idea of me spending time with coloring books. She did not want me to color no more. I felt small but I was ten years at the time. I am a creative person. I liked creating things.

My mother didn't push me to read books. I came home from school and sometimes she didn't even see me. Many times I did anything I wanted. My mother is a nice person. I love my mother with all my heart. She blamed me for a lot of things. One day, she said to me, "It is because of you that my life is like this." I did not speak for a minute. I walked away and I thought about it.

Sometimes tears come to my eyes. It's hard for me, but my goal is to work hard and hold up my head.

## Spatula

Last year I went skiing with three friends. We stayed at a very, very nice motel. It had three bedrooms, two baths, a big kitchen and a living room. I woke up at 3 a.m. or so, I heard loud noises from the kitchen. I went into the kitchen, to the refrigerator for something to drink. That was when I saw my friend spanking a woman he just met that day. He was hitting her very hard with the spatula. He made her put her hands on the wall and then he hit her and called her names--names that I can't write here. She loved it. The next day she had a hard time sitting. His nickname is "Spatula" now. Is this violence if she enjoyed it?

## Army Toys

When I was a kid, I used to play with army toys with my older brother. It took me away from being outside. My mother always kept us in the house because New York was a bad place to live. There was too much violence, but we still went outside to play with the toys.

Once me and my brother were playing back in the yard and it was getting dark. My brother told me we had to go home. We picked up the toys and we were going upstairs. There we saw a man shot in the head. I told my mother that we saw a man shot in the head. My mother was so scared that she told my father that we had to move from New York. So we ended up in Springfield, MA to get away from the violence. But we moved to Springfield for nothing because my mother and father were fighting. My mother caught my father with a woman. There was broken plate glass all over the house. And there goes the violence again.

Where I was living, there was more violence. Police and the Puerto Ricans were fighting because the police killed a Puerto Rican. When I saw all the violence, I started to do bad things like stealing cars, and breaking into people's houses. I was a gang member. I was shooting at the other gangs and beating up people too. I ended up in jail. When I got out of jail, my life started to change and there was no more violence for me.

## Cologne in the Bottle

This bottle of cologne is really mine. When I was growing up we were very poor and my father and mother had a farm. They could not buy all of us cologne because we were five girls. So, my mother would buy one bottle of cologne. All of us would use that one bottle of cologne. I was just happy to have a bottle of cologne to share with my sisters.

Our first bottle of cologne was Lily of the Valley, but now I buy all kinds of cologne. White Diamonds is my specialty. The first thing I do when I have money is buy a bottle of cologne. I tell my family and my friends to buy me cologne. When I was a little girl, I used to hope that one day I could buy all the cologne I ever wanted. So now I have about fifty bottles.

I love cologne very, very much. If anyone wants to buy me anything, buy me cologne.

## Fry Pan

When I was a baby, my father beat me with a fry pan because I was crying and he told me to stop crying. I was only nine months old when he beat me. My father was a drunk and my mother was a drinker too. So today, I have a speech problem that my mother told me is because of my father beating me. He broke my nose. My mother did nothing about my father beating me. She never called the cops or took me to see a doctor to see how bad I was. I have had to live my life like this.

## Powder in the Streets

When I was growing up in my neighborhood in Springfield, "coke" was in full effect. I seen a man put a bag under some leaves. I seen him for a while and I wondered what was in the bag. The man seen me looking at him and he told me to come to him. He asked me why I was looking at what he was doing. He said, "This side of the world, you will learn as you grow up." Then he told me what it was and he showed me what was in the bag.

I was young at the time, maybe 13. He told me not to tell no one. Next, he showed me how the drug was used. He had a spoon and put some coke into the spoon with some water. Then with the needle, he sucked it up and told me to lift up his shirt. He shot up right in front of me. This put me in a place and I learned to live that life of the streets. For me, it was reality. It was a neighborhood known for this kind of thing. I learned how to live and survive in my neighborhood.

I am not that 13-year-old kid anymore. The life I'm living now is without the negative. It is still in my mind. The drugs were what made me who I am now. Before, I would just take their money. I didn't care, but I would never sell to mothers cause I knew they would do it in front of the kids. All this made me realize a lot of good you can do with your life. I lost a really good woman once because of drugs. But now, my life is going the right way. I'm working and I'm happy and I'm not wondering who's looking at me anymore.

## *Barbie in a Wedding Dress*

*I was eighteen and old enough to go out drinking and dancing on my own. I met a guy one night and had sex. I got pregnant. I didn't know the guy so I never saw him again.*

*I got sick in the morning and I had no idea what was going on. I had no one to talk to because all my life my mother pushed me to the side or beat me. I have an older sister and her friend that I called and talked to. I knew my mother would have beaten me because I was not married. But by talking to my sister and her friend, it helped my mother to understand that it was the 70's and more girls were having babies without being married. It took my mother a little time but everything turned out for the good for a little while.*

*Now I was nineteen and nine months into my pregnancy. I was feeling so good like I was not pregnant. But March 17<sup>th</sup> came and so did the little signs of labor pains. They did not stop me. I drove my mother to the store for shopping and I told her that I was not picking anything up because I was having little pains every ten minutes. I drove back home.*

*At four thirty in the morning, I got my mother up. It was time. On March 18, I had my baby girl. We lived with my mother for eleven months. Then she told me to get out so I packed up my baby and moved to Jackson Parkway. I lived there for 13 years.*

*My mother and I got into a fright over my daughter. After two years of staying home with my baby, I wanted to work. I got a job in a nursing home. My mother worked at the same one but at night so she watched the baby in the day. I had sisters and brothers living with my parents. I did not have to go and pick up the baby everyday. She stayed there until I had a day off. My mother would also have the same day off. She would not let me take my baby home so I quit my job and I stayed home with my baby until she was old enough to go to school. I stayed out of work for eight years.*

*During that time, my mother saw her granddaughter when I was going out at night because I needed a babysitter. I went back to partying all the time because my life was empty without a man in it. It was too quiet. Since I left home there was no one to beat on me or yell at me so it was time to go out and meet guys and get into trouble. My mother loved her granddaughter so I did not have to pay for a sitter.*

*After two years of going out and meeting guys, I met a real nice guy. We went out for ten years. I got pregnant with my second child. I told him I was pregnant and he told me that he was moving to Texas. So after all, he wasn't a nice guy. He was just one of those guys that got women pregnant and didn't take the part of being the father. I had two children and no husband. But my dream was to have two kids and never get married. I came from a big family and some of my siblings are older than me. So I saw what happened to married couples. They got into a lot of verbal and emotional abuse. I didn't want that. I was happy just going out meeting guys and taking them home. Some guys I saw more than one time. I went out with one guy for six months. He started to abuse me verbally and emotionally. There was some physical abuse and sometimes it was in front of my daughter and son.*

*So at the age of thirty-one, I worked three jobs in addition to being a mother. I had to work fifty hours a week at one place and the other two was bartending at night and on weekends so that I could give my kids the things I never had. The one thing I did give them*

*was love. But since I never had love as a child, it was hard being a mom and having to love my kids.*

*Now my daughter was turning out like me. As a teen without her mother around, she was seeing boys behind my back. One of her friend's mothers called and told me. I was hurt but looking at my background, I could see me in her. I had no friends to talk to so I did what my mother did to me. I beat her and then called D.S.S. on her for help. At the young age of 15, she was pregnant. I loved my kids and I would do anything for them. So I decided to stop the bar scene and get married. I would find a man that would take care of me like my father took care of my mother before she died.*

*After my mother died, my father moved to VT where I met a man who lived with him. We went out and after five months, he moved down here with me and my kids. We got married in June 1996. It was okay until one day he got me fired from my job in 1997. I wasn't happy about that. He called my boss and fought with him over the phone. That was none of his business. My husband was a drunk and he verbally and emotionally abused me. So one day I called my daughter to see if my son and I could come and live with her and her kids for a little while. While I was living with my daughter, I got a D.U.I. and lost my license. My husband called and asked me to come back. So I did. It was getting worse. I had no car or job and he lost his job due to his drinking and doing drugs. So no money was coming in but he always was drinking or doing drugs.*

*One Friday night it got bad. He was physically abusing me, and my son called the cops. He heard my husband threaten to kill me. So the cops came and took him to jail. I left and went to a domestic violence shelter and lived there for six months. Now I have my own place and I'm happy with my son. I don't have a man in my life now but there will be time for that later in life.*

## Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence has played a big part in my life. I was born in a low income Housing Authority property in Holyoke. I lived with my four brothers, two sisters, and mother and dad. I cannot remember one good time with my dad. My dad was very hard on me and on my brothers. He hit all of the boys. When my dad and my uncle's wife had a car crash, my dad died hours later in Holyoke Hospital. I was fourteen. I did not go to the funeral. I was angry at my dad. I did not cry. It made me very mad and left me with questions. Did my dad really love us or did he just like making us?

My mother did not graduate from high school. She finished sixth grade. My mother had to work in a box company. We did not have a lot of money. My whole family has had problems. My older brother has been married two times and now lives with a woman. My two sisters married alcoholics. I have been married three times. My first wife walked out on me and left me with my daughter. My second wife sexually abused my daughter. I divorced my second wife. My third wife is very good to me and to my daughter. My wife has two children, one boy and one girl.

I had an argument with my daughter. I was mad at her. She was not home when I came home and there

was no note. I did not know where she was. Then she came home and her boyfriend was there. He is not allowed in my home when I am not at home. I grounded her for two weeks. She got mad at me. I yelled at her, and she yelled at me. I got in her face and she hit me. My glasses went flying. I slapped her, and then she ran out of the house. Minutes later the police were out in front of the house with my daughter. The police did not help. They made things worse. All they wanted to do was arrest me or my daughter. The police often play the game of good cop, bad cop.

I live near a neighbor that calls his girlfriend all kinds of names. The man has a little boy that will grow up the same way if he does not change. I think one day the man will kill his girlfriend. He talks about killing her.

On May 12, 2002, my stepdaughter called me. I have not seen her for three years. I could not believe it. She thought I was mad at her. She told me that her step-dad tried to abuse her sexually. So now, she lives with her dad. Her brother had run away. His mother called the police on him.

God has given me two gifts. One is that I can talk to strangers about my deep personal problems. The second one is that I love people, children and animals. It has taken me forty-six years to see the gifts that God gave me. Read/Write/Now School has

helped me with my anger. I think that school can help children too.

## Bad Medicine

It was a Sunday, and my nephew came over. My brother cooked him a steak. I asked him for a piece of it—it made me very sick. I went to the hospital and they gave me a shot of Compazine in my arm. They said it would stop the nausea and relax me. Well it stopped the nausea but...

It made me anything but sleepy. I was totally hyper. I got into the house and I started slamming the doors. I told my mother to rub my back but I couldn't sit still long enough. I went into the kitchen and looked at the stove. A voice kept telling me to "put it on, put it on." I was also in some kind of trance as I was looking at the stove. My brother went to get my mother. My mother came in and stopped me. She asked me why I wanted to turn it on. I told her a voice kept telling me to put it on.

The doctor called from the hospital to see how I was doing. My mother wanted to bring me back to the hospital. The doctor said it would take 72 hours to get the drug out of my system.

During days #2 and #3, I was shaking my feet and my arms. I tried to lie down for a few seconds but it didn't work. My mother wanted to take me outside to wake me up. She said, "I'm sending you back to the hospital," like I was something that could be returned to a store. She didn't know what to do with me. By this time the voice was gone, and I wasn't slamming the doors anymore. I was just walking back and forth. I was very tired. I looked at myself in the mirror and asked myself, "Is this what medicine can do to you?" My face looked like a zombie, and I was walking like one too. My arms were straight out in front of me. My mother thought I was the "Energizer Bunny" because I kept going, and going, and going.

About 9 a.m. on Wednesday, the whole thing came to an end. I didn't have the funny stare in the mirror and I was finally standing still. I could walk normally and I could put my arms straight down by my side. After three days of walking, standing, and being uncomfortable, I was able to sleep. I slept for 24 hours.

A week later, my psychologist said my reaction was called, “The Ping Pong Effect.” I had never heard of it and she told me that a lot of people go through it. It made me feel better that other people went through what I went through.

## Family Violence

If you try to get even with someone, it just makes the situation worse for you. If those people have power over you, they use it to control you and manipulate your life.

Every time I see a book, it brings back so much memory about my family who was very educated. My family always wanted me to read. They sent me to different schools and they tried their best with me. My mother, especially, used to sit and cry about my learning disability. I used to give her comfort words to make her happy. I created things to make her happy.

I lived in Jamaica until I reached thirty-three. My wife and me migrated here. Two years later, my wife passed away. That was a big shock for me. I had known my wife since I was seventeen. We had six kids. That caused me concern to find someone to marry and to take care of the kids. That was the first time I know the world was cold.

In my second marriage, it was the first time I know about violence. My second wife and her two sons abused me mentally and physically. I finally filed for divorce. I gave up everything. I only kept

my house. She took everything, furniture, furnishings and money. I started my life all over again. It was a new page in my life.

I started a lawn service, and a snowplow company. Then I married again and started a new life with my wife. Then, she became greedy and put me down and called me different names. There was physical and verbal abuse. My plan now is to get rid of her and start my life again.

All this experience has motivated me to write about the missing pieces in people's lives that have caused them to be mean.

## This Story is About Violence

There is a lot of violence and abuse in the world today. We hear about women and children being abused. But what about men? There are a lot of men being abused. When a woman or a child has been abused, we hear about it on TV or in the newspaper. But when a man is abused we don't hear too much about it because he's ashamed or he doesn't want anyone to know he's been abused.

Some men put up with abusive women because they love the woman or they have children and he doesn't want to leave his children. A man's pride keeps him from telling anyone. The woman knows he won't tell anyone so that makes the woman more aggressive. She knows her man or her husband won't report her to the authorities.

I know a woman who used to beat up her husband. She was always hitting on him. He would throw up his hands and walk away. He knew that if he left her, his kids wouldn't be treated right. Here is another story about a man being abused. The man left his wife and moved in with a friend. The man moved out because his wife would throw stuff at him, swear at him and was also cheating on him. So the man was at his friend's house and the wife came by. They wouldn't let her in. She broke the glass in the door, reached in, and unlocked the door! When she got in she was screaming and yelling. The guy was going to call the police on her, but the husband told her to leave. He didn't call the police because he did not want her to go to jail for the kid's sake.

When we hear about abuse, the first thing we think about is someone beating someone. But that is not always true. When

there is abuse, it doesn't always have to be about physical fighting. There are other ways to abuse. I have a friend who worked two jobs. His wife did not work. She would nag him and wouldn't have his food prepared for him to go to his other job. She knew he only had enough time to walk in, and change his clothes before he was off to his second job. He didn't even have time to eat at home. He had to take his food with him and yet she didn't prepare food for him because she wanted to torture him.

They had three children and she knew he loved his children and he wouldn't leave them. So she took advantage of him. She kept nagging him, bossing him around, swearing at him, etc. She knew he loved his children and wouldn't do anything about it. He had too much pride to tell us about it, so he didn't talk about it.

When we hear about domestic violence don't think it is just about women and children. There are a lot of men being abused too. Abuse and violence are a big problem in the world today. We hear about it on TV, in the paper and on the radio. We have to find a way to stop it.

## Melissa's Life

When I saw my husband for the first time, it was inside the school. I looked at him like he was a good boy. When I looked at him again, I talked to him and asked him why he was looking at me. I do not have a monkey in my face. For two weeks after, we talked more with each other, sharing ideas. We started a relationship like he was my boyfriend and I was his girlfriend.

After four weeks, we did not think it was bad to have relations. After one month, I had to go the hospital because I was not feeling good. I was feeling bad. When the nurse saw me she talked to me. I was pregnant. Two months after we had a wedding because I wanted to get married to him. We got married on March 20, 1993. So my baby was born on September 13, 1993.

Sometimes we had arguments and fights. The problems were coming more and more in my life. I tried to protect myself because maybe another baby was coming. I lost that baby. Well, two years passed and I was pregnant again with my second baby. I was happy in one way and in another way not too much because of too many arguments.

When I saw in one moment that I was pregnant, it was too late to try to talk to him about the situation. The same year my daughter was born, I left to Puerto Rico with my two daughters. I stayed in PR for 8 months. My baby's father went to PR to try to pick up my daughters and me. I talked to him and I told him your daughters and I are not going nowhere with you.

So two weeks after, he left to Springfield. At that time I said OK, let me give him another opportunity. I came back to Springfield in 1998 with my two daughters. We tried talking again about trust. I thought we could come to an understanding about how I could trust him and for him to trust me. We talked and I told him not to talk bad words in front of my daughters and no fighting in front my daughters. Things were ok for a little while.

Three years after, we can't understand each other. Sometimes we were screaming too much. I was crying because he tried to make me feel bad about everything. Anyway now the time had come. I had to say stop and I had to be more of a mother than a woman. For now we can't stay together. Sometimes people don't know they have something good until they lose them.

My husband left my house because he did not want to stay with me no more. I want to tell God, "Thanks," because he heard me when I talked with him. God brings me more strength and makes me a stronger woman. Thanks to God for giving me my daughters.

## Family Violence: Breaking the Chain

I saw things I never saw before. How can a woman and man who are in love to a point of deciding to marry and to live together forever start to fight each other? How can they start calling each other bad names? I believe that after they start calling bad names the violence comes up. So the man starts to abuse the family. In the beginning it started with his wife and afterwards reached to the children. After these big problems come around, sometimes they get divorced. Some others go to jail because they abused others so much. They wanted control of everything.

I remember a couple who was always fighting because he fooled around with some other women. One day they started to fight and he grabbed a knife and he tried to kill her. He cut her throat. After, he cut his throat too. The result of this was that both of them went into the hospital. He almost died. After, they were in court and he got punished with two years in jail.

I think that family violence and abuse comes from the parents. Some parents don't respect the children. They say dirty words in front of their children. They talk about everything when their children are around. Sometimes they think kids don't pay attention because they are always playing with some toys, but they hear everything and they learn quickly. And they

grow up with no respect in the family. Some parents don't care with their sons, they don't teach them or give good advice to them.

Some fathers abuse their daughters sexually because they don't have a good sense as to what family means. They don't know much about religion so they don't see the bad things they cause for their daughters in the future. They must live for the rest of their life with that on their minds. I believe that must be hurtful forever. I think nowadays there is a lot of violence in families because of drugs and alcohol.

I want to leave some advice to all parents. Try not to have arguments in front of your children. If they have any problems, talk with them nicely. Try to speak so they trust you. If you get their trust, you can help them resolve their problems. Check out who their friends are, those, that they are used to going anywhere with. If they are good, then it is okay. If they are troublemakers, they make our kids worse than they already are. So we have to show them what could happen in the future if they continue causing trouble. Sooner or later they will get caught by the cops. I don't think any parent would like to see his child in jail.

## What is Abuse?

I got married on June 26, 1971. In my first year of marriage, my husband was a loving husband. The first year of marriage, I lived in Springfield for 11 and a half months then, we moved to Worcester. He worked all the time. I thought he was a good man. The first year we were married, I was pregnant with my first baby. I had my first baby boy. My baby boy was born in 1972. My husband was still working all the time. My second year of married life was good too.

I was pregnant with my second baby the next year. My second baby boy was born in 1973. My third year was ok with two kids running around. My husband was still working very hard. My fourth year with my husband was still ok, but he lost his job. He was out of work for six months. I told him to get a job. I was on welfare. I was getting money and food stamps. I had two little ones to feed and take care of.

He started to yell at me and throw things on the floor. My husband started to hit me and break my things. Then he got a job and was working fifty-nine hours a week. He was working at a place that was called "Mass-ten Truck Stop." He was on drugs. He came home tired and hungry, and he started to hit me. I tried to put my kids to bed before he came home. My older son saw him hit me and he was scared.

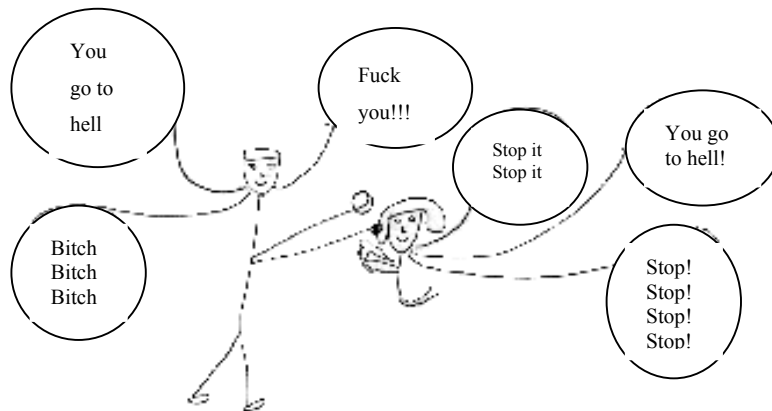
My fifth year of marriage was hell. My husband started to hang with kids that were teenagers. My husband was in his twenties and the kids were sixteen to eighteen years old. My husband was taking off with the teens two or three days a week. I stayed home with my two boys. I had to take care of them, clean my home, feed my two boys and take my boys to the doctor where they got sick.

I was pregnant with my third baby; it was a girl. I was still on welfare. As the year went on, my husband was still hanging with the teens. The next year my husband's friend tried to rape me. That year I moved back to Springfield with my mother and my dad. I got on welfare

again. I was on welfare when my husband moved down here. For six months, he went back and forth to Worcester to go to work. Then he found a job here. We still lived with my mother and dad. In two months we found a place and we moved into it.

For the next four years, things were wonderful. Then in 1984, my oldest son (who was 12) started getting into trouble by smoking weed, stealing cars and running away. My husband started hitting him. I went between them. So, my son turned out just like him. He hit his girlfriend. It was like my son and husband were the same person.

Now that my son is in his 30's and my husband is in his 50's, they get along. My oldest son landed in jail so many times that he finally learned his lesson. He is a changed man and he no longer abuses his girlfriend. And my husband changed because once I called the cops on him, and he didn't want to go to jail. I told him I would drop the charges if he agreed to go and get counseling. He did and now things are back to normal.



## *Why I'm here in this group...*

*I was mentally abused by my grandmother, Tina, my mother's mother. I think Tina was a mentally ill person. She told her youngest daughter and me, at my kitchen table, that her mother mentally abused her. Tina was the darkest of her family. She said she was treated like a slave. So, the old cliché of light skinned blacks being treated better than dark skinned ones was true in her case. She wasn't allowed to eat at the table with the adults and her siblings. She had to eat separately. I think because of the way Tina was treated, she had anger for her children who were light skinned, like my mother and her youngest sister, Mikey. Tina had Mikey, the youngest daughter, declared mentally ill. We believe that Mikey is a hermaphrodite, but the family wasn't allowed to discuss it. To this day, it is still not discussed.*

*The family thought that Mikey was her favorite, but I think she just wanted her under her control so she could collect the social security from her father. If you love someone you teach him or her how to survive in life. If you control someone, you alienate him or her from society. That's not love, that's abuse.*

*Tina had a son, known to me as "Cuz." He was her only boy out of five children. They say that she was crazy about him. He was sent to jail for life. We don't have a clue about what has happened to him. But here is what I remember of what happened that night...*

*I was a little girl and my mother was working nights at a bar around the corner from where we lived. It was in Hartford, CT, on Westminster Street. One night I walked to my mother's job. I think I remember it was a dark, clear night with music playing and bar lights. As a little girl I tried to walk in and ask for my mother. But they wouldn't allow me inside. So Cuz must have seen me because he came outside. I asked Cuz to go get my mom for me. When he did, I don't know what happened, but Cuz and a man were arguing and the man started hitting on Cuz. The man pulled a knife on him and they struggled for the knife. Cuz stabbed and killed the man in self-defense. Someone yelled, "Call the police."*

*I think Cuz was saying, "I stabbed a man." The police came and took him away. I cried. I didn't understand why they took my uncle away. That man had tried to hurt him! I do know that Cuz wasn't trying to kill anyone, he would not even hurt a fly. My mom came out and took me home. I thought I would see my uncle again, but I never did. I do think that the police allowed him to come inside my house to say good-bye to me. (I think they let him do that because I was a little kid and pretty scared.) Then he disappeared forever and I never saw him again.*

*Tina was in contact with him, she said, but until this day, I am not sure if she lied about that as well. Then over the years he stopped calling her or writing her. So once again, we lost Cuz for a lifetime.*

*His son, "DK" had to grow up without a father. The family and his mother helped raise him. Now DK has a child of his own. So that means that Cuz is a grandfather and doesn't know it. DK and the family don't know if Cuz is even alive, or if he's living a wonderful life undercover. Tina said that he was out of jail and living an undercover life. She said he was in a spiritual place. We couldn't find him to let him know that his mother died on June 19, 2001, in Valdosta, GA. "Cuz, if you are in heaven then you are with your mother in peace."*

*I am not sure if that evil woman is in heaven. She lied to and manipulated many people throughout her life. Tina had hurt many people in the family. But she was a churchgoing woman and I believe that an evil heart can be turned into a spiritual heart in the end. Wherever she is, I hope she is in peace. I have come to believe that she was mentally ill and in a lot of pain during her life.*

## Too Many Beers

Today was hell for me, because today was Daddy's check day. Yeah, I know what you're saying to yourself, "Okay today he got his check, what's so bad about that?"

Well, for most daddies, when their payday rolls around, they come in the house with something for their kids. But not my daddy, he comes in the house with a pint of Mr. Boston Vodka for my mother and two cases of Miller Lite for himself. Then he sits in that red rocking chair of his and rocks back and forth, drinking can after can until...CRASH! Someone broke my mother's favorite crystal set. But who? My brother, John, and I were in my room playing with my Playstation when the crystal was broken. So it wasn't us. Now my father doesn't know who to blame, and John and I know what that means. My father comes stumbling into the room, "Which one of you broke your mother's favorite crystal set?" he yelled.

"We didn't," we replied.

"You're lying to me! What did I tell you two about lying to me?"

"Daddy, NO!" we both yelled, because we knew what was next.

My father grabbed my brother first. "No! Daddy No!" I yelled out. "Please don't beat him. It was me. I did it."

My father looked at me instantly. "What!" he yelled, "You were going to have me beat your brother for nothing? Now you're really going to get it."

I was standing there shaking and scared to death. My brother was sitting in the corner next to where I was standing. We both watched our father storm out of the room.

"Tina, what do you think he is going to do to you?" my brother asked cautiously.

"I don't know," I answered, "But if it gets too bad John, call 911."

My brother nodded, "Okay, I will."

"TINA!" my father yelled out.

"Yes, Daddy," I answered.

"Strip. I'll meet you in the bathroom in 5 minutes."

"Yes, Daddy," I answered. I began to cry.

"What is he going to do to you, Tina?" my brother asked again. But this time I didn't answer him. I just took off my clothes and went straight to the bathroom like my father said. When I got there my father had warm water in the tub.

"Get in," he said, "I will be right back to deal with you." I got in the tub, I began to notice that there was salt in the water. Then all of a sudden, WAP! I felt a sharp pain across my back. I instantly looked up to find my father standing over me with an extension cord. He began beating me and beating me like a wild man, until finally I lost consciousness from the pain.

When I woke up, I was in the hospital. My brother was there next to me. "What happened?" I asked.

"You passed out from Daddy beating you. But you don't have to worry about that anymore," my brother answered.

"What are you talking about, John?" I asked.

"Well, Daddy is gone and now Mommy is too," John answered.

"Gone, gone where?" I asked.

"Mommy is in jail and Daddy, well, Daddy's gone forever."

"John, what do you mean 'Daddy is gone forever?' And what is Mommy doing in jail?" I asked.

John looked at me with tears in his eyes and began to explain what happened. "Tina, while Daddy was beating you, Mommy woke up

because of your screaming. So when you stopped, Mommy thought that Daddy had beaten you to death, for sure. The tub was full of your blood. We really thought you were dead. Mommy was so angry that she jumped on daddy screaming 'You killed my baby.' I tried to stop them but, before I knew it, Mommy had a knife and was running toward Daddy. It was too late. Daddy fell to the ground, and he was gone. I ran to call 911 right away, just like you said. And that's how we got here." I sat there in shock..

"Daddy's dead," I said to my brother.

"Yes," he said, "I watched him die."

I began to cry, "Oh no, this can't be happening to me."

My brother hugged me and said, "It's going to be okay. It just a shame that all of this trouble was caused because Mommy broke her favorite crystal set."

## Community Resources

Friends of the Homeless  
Day Center/  
Women's Shelter  
503 Worthington St.  
Springfield, MA  
734-9946

Worthington House  
Friends of the Homeless  
769 Worthington St.  
Springfield, MA  
732-3069

Veterans  
Transitional Home  
52 Maple Court  
Springfield, MA  
746-6539

MASS Housing and  
Shelter Alliance  
East Longmeadow, MA  
525-4710

Brightside Counseling  
2112 Riverdale Street  
West Springfield, MA  
788-7366

Springfield Rescue  
Mission, inc.  
19 Bliss Street  
Springfield, MA  
732-0808

First Call of Springfield  
Springfield, MA  
737-2712

Brenda Lopez  
Police Task Force  
for Victims of  
Domestic Violence  
Springfield, MA  
787-6888

Scott Girard  
MOVE  
Men Resource Center  
Springfield, MA  
734-3438

YWCA OF Western Mass  
Main Office  
120 Maple Street  
Springfield, MA  
732-3121

YWCA/ SafePlan  
50 State Street  
Springfield, MA  
731-9143

Abuse and Rape Crisis  
Hotline/ ARCH  
YWCA of Springfield  
Springfield, MA  
733-7100

YWCA/New Beginnings  
Westfield, MA  
24 hour hotline  
562-1920  
(800) 479-6245

Women's Institute for  
Leadership Development  
Springfield, MA  
747-9300

Family Advocacy Center  
2 Medical Center Dr.  
Suite 201  
Springfield, MA  
794-9816

New England Farm  
Workers Council  
1640 Main Street  
Springfield, MA  
272-2208

Crisis Services of  
Franklin County  
164 High Street  
Greenfield, MA  
1-800-562-0112

The Carson Center for  
Human Services  
24 hour crisis hotline  
568-6386

Griswold Center  
Domestic Violence  
Resource line  
283-7622

Womanshelter/  
Companeras, Inc.  
Holyoke, MA  
536-1628