

## **Crime Victims Report**

### **Victims' Voices**

#### **Bridge to a Better Life Found After Years of Abuse**

For Criminal Justice Professionals and Providers of Support Services

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I was raised for the most part in a home with no men. My father died when I was five and my mother never remarried; she never even dated after the death of my father. I have a brother who is 20 years older than I, but he married and left the house when I was one, so he was more like an uncle. I hit those teenage rebellious years and wanted out of the house very much. I was not popular and was overweight, so when this really cute guy took an interest that was all it took. He came from a family in the nice part of town in a nearby city. We started seeing each other and, even though I was only 15, I was sure I had found the love of my life.

#### ***First Marriage Marred by Husband's Abuse and Drug Use***

I was raised in a Christian home and was in church every time the doors opened. My mother knew this was going too fast but I thought I knew it all. So, at 17, we married against the advise of almost all those who knew me and loved me. He used drugs and so I experimented, although I never really enjoyed it. So I know what it is to live with drugs.

The abuse began early on, really before the marriage, but I did not know anything about domestic violence and my pride would not let me admit I had made a mistake. I was so in love with him, I believed anything he told me and when he said he was sorry and would never do it again, I of course believed him, every time.

Husband maintained physical and emotional control. After we were married about six months, I became pregnant with my first son and, 13 months after his birth, gave birth to our second. My husband did not want me working so I was a stay-at-home mom and this was the life I said I had wanted--on the surface anyway. Keeping my home, having a husband, two wonderful sons--from the outside looking in, it was just what I had asked for. On the inside, it was very different.

Threats made with a gun. The drugs got worse and worse and I almost never saw my husband when he was not high. The violence got worse as the drug use increased. I know what it is like to have a .12 gauge shotgun to your nose and told you are going to have your face blown off. He pulled the gun away and laughed, saying it did not have a shell in it. When he broke the gun apart to prove it to me, a shell popped out. He looked just as surprised as I was. I believe he thought it was unloaded but that is how people die everyday.

On another day, we had an argument and I tried to drive away to let the situation cool down. He came around the corner of the house with a rifle and fired off several rounds. I just sat still to see if I was bleeding anywhere. Then he walked up to the car and told me I was not going anywhere because he had just shot out the tires.

Divorce followed discovery of husband's involvement with relative. One of the most terrible things I faced was the emotional abuse. He told me everyday that I was fat and ugly and no one would ever want me except him--and I believed him. The thing that finally got me to leave was discovering that he was sleeping with my 15-year old niece. I had to decide in my own mind that it was all right to live out the rest of my life alone and unloved because I just knew he was right and no one would ever love me again.

### ***Second Marriage Brought Physical Beatings***

Within 30 days, I met my next abuser. His drug of choice was alcohol. He treated my boys like they were his own and me like I was a queen-- until we were married and I had his daughter. This man wanted me to work--but he got the check. The first one kept me at home without a car. This one kept me working but broke just the same. it was pretty much the same story. I had married abuse again, but this time, he was abusing me in front of my sons and baby girl.

I turned back to God and was trying to follow Him and the more I tried the worse my husband hated me. So finally, he left. Thanks to him, I know what broken noses feel like and other fist-type injuries. he liked his fists. My sons got to know very early in their lives what it looked like for mom to be battered and hear her called every bad name in the book. They suffer to this day for that.

### ***Gambling and Battery in the Third Marriage***

So now I knew not to marry drugs or alcohol. This time I went to church to look for a husband. Found one!! Little did I know that abuse lurked in church too. Little did I know that gambling was an addiction just like drugs and alcohol. Sounds funny to say that now, but at the time I did not know it. So I married this "Christian" man who gambled and battered too. The last time he battered me I was seven months pregnant with his child and his mother showed up and I thought I was saved; some one else was there to help me. All she did was gather the kids, mind and his daughter who lived with us. She said she would take them down for ice cream because "they should not have to watch what was going on". Does that tell you what went on in their home?

### ***After Therapy, a Loving Marriage***

I found some therapy after that. We eventually divorced, I never prosecuted any of my domestic violence cases. I did not know how and did not know I could. I was totally uninformed. I did finally marry a wonderful Christian man and we were very happy. We only had one very small nonviolent disagreement the whole time we were married. He passed away from liver cancer in 1997.

## ***Volunteer Work and Therapy Help to Shape Happier Life***

After his death, I started volunteering in the victim assistance center in my area and learned what help was available for domestic violence victims. I learned about the cycle of violence and the emotional abuse. As I said, I went through therapy and worked very hard on changing what was dysfunctional in myself and seeing why I was drawn to the wrong kind of men.

I believe very strongly in leaving domestic violence situations and getting help. The getting help part is so important. It is not easy to tell my story and tell people how many times I married into domestic violence but the point is that until I went to therapy and learned why I was drawn to those types of men I just kept going back. If I had not gotten help I would have finally been killed. So many women die in domestic violence every year. It is senseless and preventable. There is help out there.

Working to help other abuse victims. I am now a part of a wonderful organization called the Texas Council on Family Violence and they operate the National Domestic Violence Hotline. You can pick up a phone anywhere in the country and call an 800 number and they will put you in touch with help in your area. The number is 1-800-799-SAFE.

I never got help back then for my children or myself because I was ignorant about what help was available. Help is here. Please do not stay in a domestic violence situation. But please remember to get help before you leave and make a plan because leaving is the most dangerous time.

Thinking about the environment in which you are raising your children. Statistically, growing up in domestic violence has its consequences. The boys from these homes grow up to batter and the girls grow up to marry batterers. This is a legacy no body wants to pass on to his or her children.

Bridges To Life program helps victims and offenders. I currently work for a program called Bridges To Life. It is a faith-based project that arranges for crime victim volunteers to visit a prison in an effort to show inmates how crime affects victims. It is a truly fantastic program. I could not be more pleased to be a part of the work we are doing with victims of crime. I knew all my life that the things I was going through were for a reason. I can now share my story with other victims while changing the lives of inmates. I hope that the pain and trials I have suffered in my life can help other. I pray that others can learn from my suffering so they never have to experience it themselves. If they do fall victim to domestic violence, maybe my story can help them seek assistance and shed their life of victimization. Bridges To Life embraces victims of all types of crime and, as of this writing, is in seven prisons in Texas.