

The Resource Center Newsletter

Navigating the Dark Until You Can See the Light

Where do I even begin? I was a single mother, living what I thought at the time was my best life. It was the best life I had known up until that point. I was in my late twenties, and I had relocated from southern Illinois to northern California with my toddler. It was the bravest thing I had ever done! I was working and had my own apartment. I was doing okay.

A friend invited me out to a club for dancing. There she introduced me to her cousin. He was quite a bit older than I was – 25 years to be exact. However, he seemed charming and caring.

It began with dinner dates, splurges, and gifts, things a single mother could not afford. Jewelry, trips to Disneyland, etc. I looked beyond the age difference. Then I began to ignore other things. I began to make excuses to my family, friends, and co-workers about why I was with someone so much older than I was. I am not knocking May-December romances. I am just sharing my experience.

We were together for five years. In those five years, we had settled into a thing. I am not sure I can describe what the thing was. I knew there were other women and an ex-wife with whom he still lived (for his young daughter's sake, he said). I do not know why I did not think I deserved better. But at that point in my life, he was better. He was better than never having any spare cash because he gave me money. He was better than my daughter not having a father figure in her life because he spent time with her. He was better than trying to figure everything out by myself because he often solved all my problems for me. He was better than having to make decisions because he often made them for me.

Until he wasn't better.

He tried cutting me off from friends and family. He would complain that I spent too much time with them. That I spent too much time at church. Then came the accusations, that I was seeing other men, that I loved others more than I loved him. I was constantly trying to balance my needs and his demands.

I decided that I was not happy and that I did deserve better. So, we broke up. Well, I broke up, because he would not take no for an answer. After the breakup, he began stalking me. He would call my job at least 20 times a day. He would drive by my apartment at all hours of the night. He would suddenly appear at places I was. He would call my home number at least 50 times. He would show up at the mall where I was shopping. It was almost as if he was following me, you think? But I had never heard the word stalker. I didn't know what it meant.

After call number "who knows", I unplugged the phone. I don't remember how I slept that night, but I guess I slept. I got up and got my daughter ready for school and myself ready for work. We came down to get in the car and from behind, I heard footfalls. I turned and there he stood

with a gun. Big and black. My daughter, when she saw the gun, asked, "Is that a play gun?" For a split second, he shifted his focus from me to her. At that moment, I prayed that he would not harm my daughter who stood not two feet away. Thank God, he turned back to me. He placed it at chest level. I begged for my life. I lied and I told him that I would love him again. I promised we would be together if he let me live. I grabbed his hand, and he shot. Luckily, when I grabbed his hand, the gun moved from my chest to my neck. He shot me in my neck. I remember things in slow motion: I remember falling to my knees (those would have scars later), then to the ground, face first. Then he shot me in the back. When I realized that he had shot me twice, I decided that if I didn't play dead, he would empty his gun in me. So there I laid for what seems like an eternity.

As I lay there, wondering what was going on above that I could not see, my daughter ran to me and cried asking me to wake up. I guess it's true what they say about adrenaline, because I got up and directed my daughter to go to the neighbor's door and ask to use the phone to call the police. I told her to get my purse and lock the car doors. When the emergency vehicles arrived, I told the police to call my sister so she could come and get my daughter and to call my job and tell them I would not be in today (always responsible). I begged EMT to not cut my clothes (I was thinking about my spending even then!). They cut them off anyway. I told the police everything, because I wanted them to know who did this to me if I died. They did investigate it as a murder because they didn't think I would pull through. But I never lost consciousness, and I only stayed overnight in the hospital. The bullets went through my body, past some pretty important parts, and out the other side. The only residual of the shooting were a few scars, back and neck pain that would remind me every day of what happened (until a recent surgery), and an aversion to red nail polish because I was wearing red nail polish when I was shot.

Long story short, he was arrested, stood trial and served time. I share my story to let others know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Victim services were made available to me. The local district attorney had an excellent victim assistance program. The advocate I was assigned helped me at a time when I was most vulnerable both physically and emotionally. They provided referrals, helped me navigate the justice system, helped me apply for victim's compensation, and helped me apply for and obtain a restraining order. My advocate through the district attorney's office introduced me to the power and control wheel, thereby providing me an education on domestic violence. She taught me that you do not have to be married or cohabitating to suffer domestic violence. It was the beginning of an education that would continue to this day. An education that allows me to teach other women who may be in a similar situation as mine. She made sure I knew my rights and prepared me as I sat in a courtroom across from the man who once claimed to love me and then tried to kill me. They helped me protect my daughter's heart and mind after witnessing such a violent act by offering counseling right away. Even when it seems darkest, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Victim services helps you navigate the dark until you can see the light.

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