

Escaping from Abuse to Save her Life

Testimony from Marieta, a Catholic woman, sharing her experience of domestic abuse.

When I was young, I worked with an elderly couple, helping them in their grocery store and home. They were not able to have children and loved me like a daughter. I met their nephew, a very kind, respectful young man. We became friends, dated and got married. The first year of being together was filled with joy and happiness and I became pregnant.

When my son was born, my husband's parents and siblings started visiting us often. My brothers also came to visit me and I felt happy. My husband became upset after my brothers' visits, angry and insulting. I told my brothers that it would be better if they didn't come. My husband's family was always at home with us and I began to feel unimportant. When I complained and asked for more attention my husband hit me for the first time. After that I cried a lot. He apologized to me and said that it would not happen again. He told me it was my fault. He said he loved me but I should try not to make him angry. I thought he was right and that I was to blame.

I tried not to make him angry, but the blows came anyway. His family knew that he hit me but they did not help me. There were days when he was very affectionate and said that he loved me. Those times I was happy, but it didn't last long. He seemed to look for a reason to treat me badly, insulting me and saying that I was good for nothing. I wanted to work but he didn't allow it. I never had any money because he didn't share with me what he earned from his job. He bought what was necessary and sometimes gave me a small amount just to buy food to cook.

Two years passed and I resigned myself to living like this. I didn't tell my family anything. I blamed myself for everything. I became pregnant again. I hoped that with another baby he would change. But it was not like that. My husband told me when he came back from work, I should have his hot food ready to serve him. I tried to do everything perfectly but he would look for a reason to beat me anyway.

My husband didn't allow me to talk to the neighbors or to anyone. He was very courteous and kind to everyone else, yet he was practically my executioner. Despite that, I loved him. Then another child arrived. On good days when he was happy, I asked him to please stop hitting me. He promised that he wouldn't do it anymore. Yet the blows continued.

I became completely submissive depending only on him, my self-esteem broken. I realized I was living in darkness and fear. I wanted to get out. One day I decided to ask my neighbor for help, but she didn't believe me. The beatings and verbal abuse became even more terrible. I had a chance for the first time and I escaped with my children. An elderly lady helped us, but she could not even provide food for us.

My husband started looking for me and found me. He was crying and said he loved me and my children very much, he also told me that he would change. We went back home with him, but those promises

lasted only a few months. He felt an intense anger that I had escaped. The abuse became more cruel, both sexual abuse and death threats with a weapon. I realized he might end my life.

I was born Catholic and in all the time of my darkness I asked the Virgin Mary to help me. I prayed to the Lord Jesus that he would not abandon me, that he would give me the strength to do something to escape from the hell that I was living. I managed to escape and went to my friend again. She took me to another friend so my husband couldn't find me. He looked for me, but I knew if I returned he might kill me. With the help of my Lord Jesus, the Virgin Mary and God the Father I came out of darkness and became strong.

Today, after 25 years of living in the light with Jesus always in my heart, I want to tell people who are experiencing abuse of any kind to speak up, don't be silent. Please seek help in the church and agencies helping families. Like me you can come out of darkness. Let there be light in your lives. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1 (800) 799-7233.

- *By Catholic Charities-DC Domestic Violence Team, www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/familypeace. Shared with permission.*