

The Survivor

By: Elizabeth Brown, Legal Advocate

So often I hear from my clients that they do not identify themselves as a survivor. After all, many of them are in the earliest stages of escaping the violence they have endured for decades. They are without a home, they have lost all their belongings and they are often living with deeply engrained fears they have digested from their abusers throughout their relationship.

A question many advocates ask is, “how can we help a survivor see themselves as a survivor?” How can we construct a working definition for this powerful word in which these warriors of faith and hope so desperately need in order to properly heal and break the cycle violence in their lives?

At the same time these deep questions come to me I see the face of my mother-in-law in my mind’s eye and I am better able to answer them.

The image I have in my mind is of a woman who loved a man with all her heart even though he hurt her in so many ways. He balanced his hurt with an all-consuming love which had no boundaries and filled her with hope that things really could change; that he really would stop hurting her. In these hopeful moments between the hurt and love, two beautiful children were made. The hope and faith that things would change became even more important for her to hold onto with the love she had for her children.

Sadly, a time came when the physical and emotional hurts became too great a cost to pay and the hope things would change began to run out. She made a plan to leave. She swallowed her pride and reached out to her family. Her family threw her a lifeline free from judgment and reinforced by love and genuine support. She boarded a Greyhound bus, battered, bruised, and heartbroken with a small amount of cash and two boxes of cereal to sustain her children as they fled.

She got off the bus and began the process of healing. She was no longer isolated from her family. Free from fear of physical and verbal abuse she was now able to find her strength. This journey toward healing was not without pain, difficulty, or challenge. There was doubt and fear and shame, but she persevered. She worked hard every day and built a life for herself and her kids free from violence.

Many years later I met her son. I met a person who was taught how to be a good man with the love and guidance of his mother. This woman became my hero, my mother in law, and Gramma Kay to four beautiful grandkids who also see her as a hero. She is now and always will be the bravest woman I know. She is a survivor.

By knowing her and her journey as I do, while also serving as a domestic violence advocate, I am able to recognize the common thread that makes a survivor. That common thread is support. It is a thread we create. Supportive, judgment free lifelines are one of the most critical elements in the life and success of a survivor.

You and me and the guys and gals to your left and right; *we* help by recognizing victims become survivors when we see their domestic violence for what it is and truly listen. When we respect and accept victims where they are, we provide them a space to process and heal from their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wounds. When a victim is given patience and freedom from judgment and blame the process of metamorphosis from victim to survivor begins.

SafeCenter understands that not everyone is born into supportive spaces. SafeCenter seeks to be that presence in the lives of those in need. We are here to offer support, counseling, advocacy, education, and so much more. Please contact SafeCenter if you or someone you know is struggling to find healing from domestic or sexual violence. You are not alone!

SafeCenter is a non-profit agency whose vision is for all individuals to experience the right to be free from violence. Their mission is to build comprehensive and sustainable community strategies to eliminate domestic and sexual violence in Clinton and Shiawassee Counties. For more information regarding services, contact SafeCenter at 1-877-952-7283 or via email at safecenter@thesafecenter.org