

“But He Never Hit Me” – A Survivor’s Story

By: Anonymous Survivor

I can remember knowing from a young age that a man should never hit a woman. I knew that if a man ever hit me, people that cared about me would hurt him. It would be intolerable. Unacceptable. But I didn’t know about the rest.

I spent five years with someone that was emotionally, verbally, mentally, financially, and sexually abusive. But he never *hit* me. I stayed with him because at first I was trying to fix him and because eventually I believed that I deserved it somehow. I knew he was mean, but I didn’t know it was abuse. I tried to meet his expectations, but inevitably failed because the rules were always changing. I became a shell of a person, completely dependent on him, my self-worth in his hands.

I can remember wanting to tell my family that I was unhappy. I even had the phone in my hand a few times, but I just couldn’t do it. It felt like it would be admitting failure because I not only believed it was my fault on some level, but I felt like a failure for not being able to fix him. What kind of woman did that make me? I also wasn’t sure if they would believe me because every time my family was around, he was this fake person that I didn’t recognize. Affectionate and kind to me, and an involved, doting dad. He insulted me daily, both on my physical appearance and my parenting, and here he was pretending to be Mr. Perfect with a perfect family.

Whenever I would confront him on his behaviors he would tell me to leave if I didn’t like it. During our relationship, I wasn’t allowed to work, so I had limited options. I feared if I left he would get custody and I would have nowhere to go. I believed his lies. After all, it was easier to believe there was something wrong with me or that it was a misunderstanding, than to believe that someone that said they loved me was hurting me on purpose. I was 23 when I accepted that I was never going to be happy in my life. Looking back that makes me sad, but at the time it was an emotionless, numb acceptance.

When I left, I was fortunate enough to have a supportive family by my side. When he threatened to kill me, I was granted a Personal Protection Order from a judge that saw through his disguise. I felt validated in that moment and began my healing journey. It wasn’t until years later, with the help of counseling, that I realized that I couldn’t fix the relationship because I wasn’t the problem.

So often society thinks of domestic violence as bruises and black eyes, and legally physical violence is the criteria, but domestic violence is also a social issue. It is about power and control and coercion. Other than the sexual assaults, which were his way of ‘showing me he loved me’, nothing he did was illegal. That doesn’t mean I wasn’t victimized and traumatized. It’s not about stress, alcohol, drugs, mental illness, anger, or communication issues. It’s one person wanting to have power over another, and thinking they have a right to it. It’s time we stop accepting the excuses.

I know I am not alone in my story; 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will be victims of domestic violence in their lifetime. Only we can change that, by changing the way we see it. There are many aspects of abuse, even if the abuser never hits.

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