

A person is seen from behind, holding a large, glowing paper lantern. The lantern is lit from within, casting a warm, golden light. The person's hands are visible at the bottom, gripping the edges of the lantern. The background is a deep purple twilight sky. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the lantern.

FREE *to be* ME

*Stories of strength and
finding peace in God's love*

Loved, valued and at peace...

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. —John 8:32

Both our staff and those we serve come from many different walks of life. No matter what our age or background, we all want to feel loved, valued and at peace.

The following stories, written by some of our GSS co-workers, remind us that many people's lives have been stained and wounded by abuse, bullying and domestic violence. Some who read these stories will empathize because they too have experienced abusive behavior. For everyone, this booklet is a reminder that we all have the responsibility to help create an environment where each of us can feel loved, valued and at peace.

People who are being abused may seem afraid or anxious to please their partner. Maybe they will talk about their partner's temper or jealousy. They might receive frequent, harassing phone calls. They might have frequent injuries, with the excuse of "accidents," or wear clothing that will hide bruises and scars.

How can we help? As we work together to create an environment where people feel loved, valued and at peace, we provide a safe haven for those who are hurting. By raising awareness, providing encouragement and support, and connecting persons to good community resources, we can help those who are being abused make wise decisions. As we live out our mission to share God's love in word and deed, we can make a difference in the well-being of those we serve and those who serve alongside of us.

Nothing can separate us from God's love

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:38-39

Hear these words of a battered wife:

In the beginning, I was young...he was handsome. He said I was beautiful, smart, worthy of love...made me feel that way. And so we were married, walking joyfully together down a church aisle, our union blessed by God.

Then came the angry words...the verbal tearing apart...Now I was made to feel ugly, unintelligent, unworthy of any love, God's or man's.

Next came the beatings...unrelenting violence...unceasing pain. I shouldn't stay, but this is my husband...promised forever. He says I deserve it...maybe I do...if I could just be good. I feel so alone...doesn't God hear me when I cry out silently as I lie in bed each night?

Finally came the release, the realization. It's not me...it's him...I am worthy of love, God's and man's. One spring morning, my heart was filled with hope and with fear now only of starting over on my own. And so again I walked...down the hallway of our apartment building...never again to be silent...never again to live with that kind of violence, to suffer that kind of pain.

We are broken, sinful people living in a broken, sinful world and we all—victims or perpetrators—are in need of healing. It starts with awareness: that we are not alone, that we need help, that no one deserves this and that more people in our community than we think suffer from abuse. Awareness then has to translate into action: seeking help, offering help.

And we need to remember that what enables our awareness and our action is God's grace. Both the source and summit of our inherent "goodness" is God's love and nothing—not any form of abuse or hurt—can separate us from that love! We should pray for the grace to see ourselves as God sees us, not as victim or abuser but as His child.

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We have no greater source of healing in our lives as Christians than prayer, and the scriptures abound with words of hope. Consider these words of the Psalmist:

*But I will call upon God and the Lord will save me. At dusk, dawn,
and noon I will grieve and complain and my prayer will be heard. Amen.*
—Psalm 55: 17-18

Bill Kubat

We Can Be Courageous

*And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it
to one of these My brothers and sisters, you did it to Me.'*
—Matthew 25:40

We were watching swans at a city park in Texas. There were three flawless birds, so beautiful and perfect and white that it was almost hard to believe that they were real. The fourth could have been a young swan or other kind of fowl. Far from being attractive, it was a small, scraggly, muddy looking, multi-colored bird that could have easily earned the title of “ugly duckling.” When it swam over to join the fun with the big birds, the three beautiful swans turned on it, roughly shaking it and holding it completely under the water for extended periods of time, pecking and tearing at it viciously. Too far out in the water to shoo them apart, I couldn’t help but cry as I watched the cruelty of the birds.

Sadly, people can be just as mean. It is often the healthy, strong ones who peck away at those who are vulnerable or have special needs. Co-workers can verbally rip at each other. Sometimes even spouses and family members are viciously cruel.

Jesus tells us that when we mistreat others (or when we treat others well) we are doing it to Him.

How wonderful it is that He promises to walk with us during difficult times. He also calls us to courageously help and defend those who are in difficult situations.

*Dear Courageous Lord,
At great cost, You lovingly saved us from the power of sin
and death. Help us to courageously help those who need us.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Martha Fick

Experiencing the Goodness of God

I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to Him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.
—Psalm 34:4–6 (NRSV)

It's estimated that in the United States, one in three women will be affected by domestic violence. With those kinds of statistics, it's highly likely that domestic violence will impact you or someone you know. I am one of the three. But my story is not about being a statistic—it's about experiencing the goodness of God. Tragedy can either take us further away from a relationship with God, or bring us closer. You may find yourself asking, "Where is God in this? Why me? What do you want me to do, Lord?" I can still hear those questions in my mind as I look back on my relationship of 16 years, and I can now see God's hand in it all. He did not leave me, He did not forsake me, God is good—always.

The gift of my co-workers and the safety I found in my relationships at the Good Samaritan Society made the difference between me leaving and staying in an abusive relationship. Trust did not come quickly for me. I had previously let friends see a sliver of my reality, only to find those people slowly distance themselves from my struggles. I sought outside perspective on the pain and grief I felt trying to fight a healthcare system that didn't seem able to help my spouse with his bipolar disorder.

On Feb. 13, 2011, I survived a violent experience that too many others have also suffered. It was not the first, but I knew it would be the last. I woke up on February 14, Valentine's Day, got ready for work, said goodbye to my husband, and knew I would never return home.

I was blessed that the first face God brought to me that morning at work was my mother, who also works for the Society. I said, "If I need to leave home, will you help me?" She replied, "Of course." The next person I went to was a spiritual ministries consultant at National Campus. In him, I found trust, I knew I would not be judged, I received prayers, and I had an accepting

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and I had an accepting presence to shed tears in front of.*

presence to shed tears in front of. I walked out of his office knowing that I was loved and valued, and that I had the strength to change my life.

I believe God brought me to work for the Good Samaritan Society—professionally, to share my expertise in hospice care, and personally, to have a soft place to fall, where I could build trusting relationships, strengthen my faith in God, have short-term housing on campus in a secure building, and find a vocation to build a new life on.

The Good Samaritan Society has been a key factor in my second life. God has blessed me with this opportunity to share my story and reach out to my extended family—you, my Society co-workers—and encourage you to be accepting, to really listen and hear others' stories and struggles, and to know that you don't need to have the answers. Your presence alone may be the answer to someone's prayer. I recently heard the saying "When God created you, He had someone else in mind." Are you that someone else? Can you be a soft place for them to fall?

Jill Dykstra

*P*EACE I LEAVE WITH YOU; MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU.

NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES DO I GIVE TO YOU. LET NOT YOUR HEARTS
BE TROUBLED, NEITHER LET THEM BE AFRAID.

—JOHN 14:27 ESV

Recognizing Verbal and Emotional Abuse

*A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.
— Proverbs 25:28 ESV*

Abuse? I have a hard time calling it abuse. I suppose I don't want to identify with being a victim, and I still want to believe our relationship is better than many I see around me. When I think of abuse, I think of my friend whose husband drank too much and pushed her down the stairs. I don't think of my own husband who just gets angry so easily. He works hard and has a lot on his mind. But I do know it hurts when so many simple discussions somehow repeatedly come around to my faults, and how they are somehow responsible for so many of the difficulties in his life.

His words cut deeply, and I wonder why he ever married me in the first place. So many of my personality traits seem to drive him crazy and make him miserable. I find that in my dark moments I feel unlovable, as if my attempts to meet his expectations will never be enough. It seems crazy, because I love him and I know he loves me. I will remind myself that this is a cycle—he will come around out of the darkness again. I have learned to trust God in this. We have been here before and God is faithful. We have seen dark days and God has healed our relationship before. So I refrain from trying to defend myself, explain myself, or point out that his words hurt.

My thoughts are filled with prayers that God will show me the good traits of this man, that God will gently point out loving ways for him to communicate with me, and that I will have the courage to stand tall in God's grace, even when I am not feeling grace from my husband. I also have to remind myself to pray for God to show me the ways in which my words seem to trap my husband. I also have to fight off the urge to dwell in my hurt, and this also takes prayer. God is always bigger, and I will trust Him, even in the dark days. I know He has something in mind that goes beyond how I feel.

Susan*

Understanding Displaced Anger

*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.
— 1 John 3:21*

Sometimes it's hard for people to understand how the girl in a relationship can be the abuser. Usually the guy's bigger and stronger. He should be able to hold his own in any situation, right? But it doesn't always work out that way.

She was the partner I dreamed of all my life. Lovely, funny, smart, and adventuresome. I thank God for the wonderful times that we've had together. Early in our relationship, though, I learned the hard way that she is a "high-maintenance gal." I naively assumed that love would be enough to make everything OK, but it wasn't.

Life was great in the beginning, but soon the littlest things would make her angry. One day I thought we had reached a breakthrough when she opened up and confided about her childhood. Along with other things, she felt she could never do anything good enough for her parents.

I thought this conversation would be a step towards healing, but instead she started turning her anger on me. Maybe now I knew too much about her. Who knows? Since then she criticizes me daily. She also has "tearfully" said many unkind things about me to our family and friends, "confiding" how "verbally judgmental and unkind" I am to her. I'm not sure why some of them believe her. I know they have never seen that kind of behavior on my part because I don't think that way or act that way. But I do know she can be very persuasive.

If I try to calm her down when she is angry, or try to defend myself against her accusations, or if I disagree with her in any way, it makes her very upset. I work hard to treat her with love and respect, even in difficult times. Rather than talking things out calmly, she's more likely to react in a "fight or flight" mode. I find myself tiptoeing around her, not wanting to upset her.

I learned from a counselor that displaced anger is very common. He said the individual directs angry thoughts and feeling towards someone or

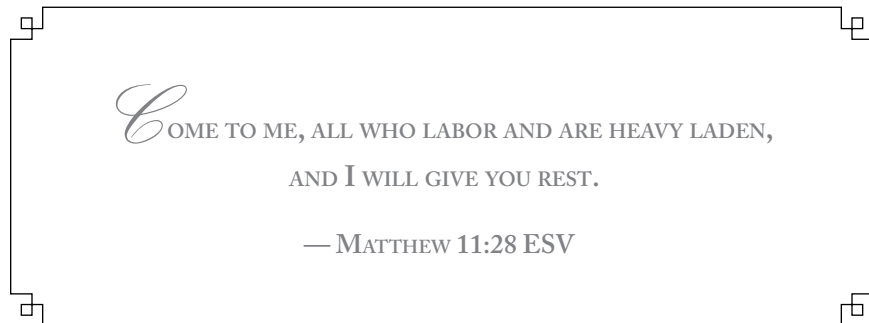
something that is safe or convenient instead of the actual source of their anger. If she directed her anger towards her parents it would destroy their fragile relationship.

I want to help her, and even more than that, I want us to build a life together, but I don't know how long I can live like this. We look like a happy, successful, professional couple to most people, and in many ways we are. She is still the woman of my dreams — except for the anger.

I wish I could say that we are on the road to recovery and healing, but it isn't happening yet. At this point only God has the answers. I'm relying on Him.

I appreciate your prayers.

Jack*



Teaching Accountability and Kindness

*Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.*
— Proverbs 22:6 ESV

I once watched a movie once, called *Enough*. The movie was about a woman who had been beaten and terrorized by her husband, and she not only runs away, but when she realizes her husband is continuing to look for her and her daughter, she decides to fight back, and wins. I found it to be a great anecdotal story for women that have been abused and are in the middle of an abusive relationship; it gives them hope that they can imagine some women get away with their lives. How necessary for these women when there is often no other evidence of a release from the pain and suffering, the fear and degradation. But it doesn't tell the whole story...

My husband was a “bad boy” you could say. He made it obvious that he did not like many women, and yet was drawn to me in a way that I found flattering. I had never been looked at as desirable in my family, just more or less considered naughty, or a failure. My sister was perfect in comparison. I made mistake after mistake. After my first date (which involved nothing more than a goodnight kiss), I remember hearing that my dad had made some comment about me being a “loose woman.” Once this happened, I made it my job as a teenager to show him how right he was. I didn't realize how much I was hurting not only my family but myself, until much later. Eventually I felt terrible regret, and viewed myself under the imperfect exterior I presented to the world, as a tainted, fallen woman.

I met my husband with this mindset, and his approval was like a balm on a battle-scarred soul. While he quickly overwhelmed me with his constant attention, I allowed it. After all, what I mistook as dedication and commitment provided me with evidence that I was desirable and valuable. He was considered a sports hero to his family and his community and thus hopes were high for his future. His fierce, competitive nature caused many an opponent to bow to his aggression. It took a marriage to understand that his perceived competitiveness was an underlying anger waiting to erupt...

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some fruitful, some are weeds.*

By the time I realized he was lying about various subjects including holding a job, I was very pregnant. I remember being terrified, wondering how I would be able to take the time off to have my baby when there was no support coming from my husband. He had been borrowing money for months to cover up the fact that he was not working. I didn't understand the mentality; I came from a family of hard workers who took pride in taking care of themselves and their family.

Life became a constant struggle, and my husband moved from job to job. I never knew when he was working, and I had little time to wonder. I had a baby, and now realized I was married to a big child. He had no accountability; he had never been forced to take care of himself, the house, or do chores, to be dependable at anything, and if he got into trouble his parents bailed him out.

I know in some ways our parents both used mistaken judgment; we were each lost children that were thought to be good for nothing, or "the black sheep" of the family. The difference in our experiences and responses were profound; I was the bad daughter, while my sister was the princess. My father gave her whatever she wanted, and yet made me pay at least half of everything I asked for. I look back and wonder if my father's determination to make me something better than who he perceived me to be, was a blessing. I learned to want to be a better person. In my husband's case, his family accepted his lack of ambition, and even the problems he created without attempts to correct or teach him. He was a sports hero, and that absolved him of many faults; not only in the eyes of his family, but also the community, and his school. When he didn't bother with schoolwork, he still passed. When he got into a fight or didn't pay a bill, his mother found fault elsewhere and took care of it. When he beat dents into his parent's refrigerator (and later beat me when I angered him), his family decided the actions must have been justified. After all, aggression in the right circles of society is considered an asset...

I have since come to realize a parent plants many seeds—some fruitful, some are weeds. A seed planted by a careless or contemptuous parent can sprout into a lack of self-worth in a child, and may continue into a lack of self-esteem for a young woman who ends up craving attention. Unfortunately a woman with nothing more in her emotional garden may fall for attention that has nothing to do with love, and everything to do with control. A parent unwilling to work at teaching a child responsibility for feelings and actions may plant a seed of entitlement, or even anger.

I would like to believe that parents, if they were able to look into the future and see their children as adults, struggling to find happiness and failing, would try harder to exhibit the acceptance and love needed to create healthy adults; adults that accept only healthy attention. I would also like to believe that parents, able to realize their children may grow into adults that injure others, would work to teach their children the accountability and kindness necessary to love another the way that God meant for us to.

Rachel*

*S*O NOW FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE ABIDE, THESE THREE;
BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

— 1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 ESV

Recognizing Emotional and Physical Abuse

I married at the age of 18—right out of high school—to a man 5 years older, and we moved from California to Oklahoma. The first year was hard being away from all my family and I felt that our struggles were normal for newlyweds. At first I was flattered and excited to have someone so in love with me that he wanted to spend every waking moment in my presence. I had never had this kind of attention before and thought this was what love was all about.

Soon I began to feel isolated, belittled and controlled. There was, at this time, no physical abuse; however, there was much mental and verbal abuse. He began criticizing me for the way I dressed, my choice in friends and even my alone time spent reading. He constantly told me how stupid and ugly I was and that he was taking care of me because I couldn't take care of myself. The extreme jealousy was evident when I found that several pages had been ripped from the book I was reading.

The physical abuse started one night when alcohol was involved. He apologized crying saying that he never meant to hurt me and that he didn't even remember hitting me and it would never happen again. This happened a few times and I complained to my family back home and my new family (mother and father-in-law) with little to no support.

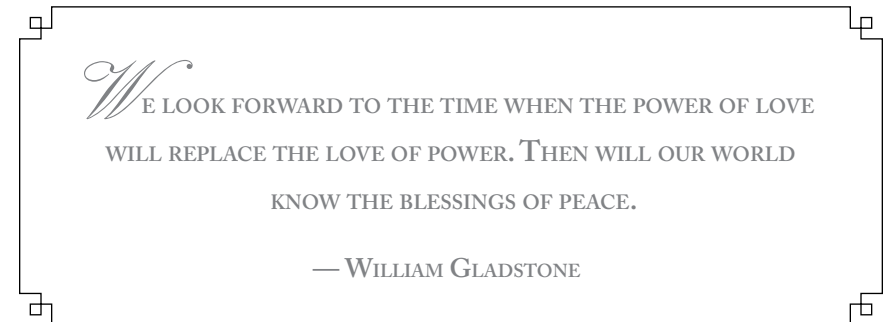
When I became pregnant I called my family and asked if I could come home and went to stay with my in-laws. I told them I was afraid and did not want to raise a child in an abusive environment. My husband came to me and promised no more drinking and that he would not lay a hand on me so I stayed with him. Once the baby arrived we ended up moving back home to California as my father had gotten him a job with Boeing.

From the time I found out I was pregnant he had been a wonderful husband with no fear of him abusing me. This went on for 3 years. We settled in to an apartment and things were going well. My father and brother moved when Boeing lost the contract at the military training base that they all worked at. Once they moved away, the abuse started again. I believe he was afraid of my family and was able to keep himself in check while they were around.

This time it was even worse and once again I was pregnant. I had no formal education or trade, no means of transportation and felt stuck in my own nightmare of a relationship. One day, about 3 months after my son was born, the neighbors heard the commotion and came over after he left. They found me feeding my son with a face they described as unrecognizable. They called my sister and she and some friends helped me move out. I never went back. This was 1988 and the beginning of my life without abuse. I moved to where my father lived in Texas and ended up going to school and raising the children by myself. Going to school was the best self-esteem builder ever. I found out that I was not stupid nor ugly as he had me truly believing and that I could in fact not only take care of myself but my children as well.

He has since passed (8 years ago) and I did forgive him for all he put us through. He was a tortured soul and accepted Jesus into his life at the assistance of his mother right before leaving this world. Thanks be to GOD!

Sarah*



Abusive Behavior Is All About Control

When I was 16 years old, I met my first love. He was amazing. He was a strong, and beautiful man. At 6'2, 225 lbs, he was the man of my dreams. He was 21. After one date, we were in love. He showered me with gifts, money, and always said that "I was his." We got serious very fast. I didn't know much about him except that he had a younger brother and sister that I went to school with. I lost my virginity to him, became pregnant at 16 and lost the baby to a miscarriage at 4 months. I guess people say that's a blessing. But for me it was devastating. After the miscarriage my parents forbade me to see him. But I was in love and continued to see him.

Continually, he would say to me, "you're mine, and always remember that. If I can't have you, no one can!" I chalked it off to love. I thought, "Wow he loves me *that* much! I am so lucky to have that kind of love." My parents eventually caught me seeing him and kicked me out of the house. At 16 years old, I was homeless and had nowhere to go. That's when he said, "You can live with me." I was ecstatic. My young and innocent mind had delusions of grandeur. I can make him lunch, we will be able to sleep together every night, I will have a wonderful time not needing to listen to my parents. He and I jumped on the bus and headed to his sister's apartment, where he was living. As we rode the bus, he looked at me, placed his huge arm around my neck, hugged me like a choke hold, and said, "You have no parents now... I am your parent... so now you listen to me since I am responsible for you." I smiled and said... "OK!"

That's when the physical abuse started. At first it was things like not letting me get out off the couch. "Stay on that couch until I say you can get off!" And then a slap here and there. One day he was looking out the window and calling another woman. When I asked him what he was doing, he turned around and punched me in the chest. I fell back against the wall and blacked out. I couldn't use my right arm as he had broken a few of my ribs. Immediately after that he started to cry. "I'm so sorry baby, I love you so much, why do you make me do those things to you? You know I am responsible for you, I promise never to hit you again." I forgave him.

*Hours later, he broke in, and vowed to kill me.
I grabbed my Bible and started to pray.*

The abuse continued... I would hide my bruises by using long sleeves. I would alienate and confine myself to the apartment when I had lumps and bumps from having my head slammed into a wall. One time he hit me so hard that he broke my nose. I went to the ER and needed stitches. The police came to the hospital and asked how it happened. I had my lies (stories) down. "I fell walking up the stairs." The X-ray tech knew otherwise.

One day he came home with a gun. He held it to my head. He started laughing. "Babe! Guess if there's bullets in here!" as he proceeded to pull the trigger. I cried and begged but he wouldn't stop." I was so scared. And I couldn't leave him because he would say things like, "Tell anyone or ever leave me and I will kill your family! I'll kill your little sister, I'll kill your grandma and grandpa. They would be easy to kill, they are weak! And after that I'll drive myself off of a cliff. I would be dead and so will your family!" I was so afraid to say anything.

Finally, after months and months of abuse, I called my parents and told them everything. They called the police and the police picked me up and took me home. I was home. I was happy, but I was *scared*. I knew he would come for me. I fell asleep that night praying. Praying for protection from this evil man. Early the next morning, there was a knock at my bedroom window. It was him. My father went out to confront him and they got into a physical altercation. He ran off.

I decided that morning to stay home from school so that he couldn't find me. Hours later, he broke in, and vowed to kill me. I grabbed my Bible and started to pray. Right then he stabbed me and then himself. I became the victim of an attempted murder/suicide. I survived, he didn't.

Several years later, I met the most wonderful man. He also was amazing. We were married and had 5 beautiful children. During our marriage he

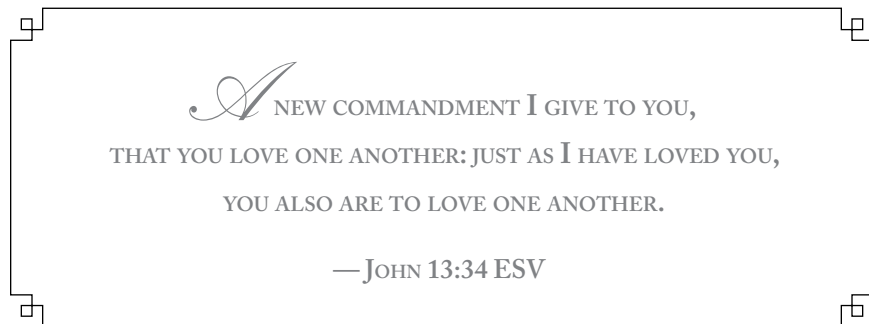
picked up a cocaine and heroin habit, hence losing jobs, disappearing for days on end, and coming home in a fit of rage. When he was coming down off of his high, he would beat the children, beat me, break my things, throw knives at me, and spend all of our money on drugs. Our car was repossessed. We were evicted several times. It was a struggle. All the while I put myself through school, worked two jobs, and took care of the children. I hid the abuse really well. Until one day, twenty years later, after a horrible episode of physical abuse, I came home, packed our bags, and stayed in a shelter for women and children. My children and I were there for weeks. While there I got a restraining order, filed for divorce, and got our life back on track. No more would I be the woman that would take or allow abuse. It was over.

After struggling with years and years of PTSD, I finally received the therapy needed to make me whole again.

I received my degree in Justice Administration and did an internship with a nonprofit law firm helping women process their Temporary Restraining Orders. I became a peer counselor, I volunteered at different agencies, and I vowed that whenever I can, I would help others in this same situation.

Today I am a successful, strong, independent woman proud of her children. They are all strong independent survivors!

Linda*



Finding strength in the midst of grief

The morning of Nov. 25, 2013, began like any other work day. When I arrived at the center, one of our directors of nursing let me know that Cami Umberger, a nurse, had not shown up to work, and that there may be a problem. I was puzzled—Cami had never missed a shift, and I didn't know what she meant by "a problem." Nothing could have prepared me for what that problem was.

I learned that Cami had gone out with a young man several months earlier, and despite her saying she didn't want a relationship, the man did not leave her alone. She told co-workers that he began stalking her, calling her at work multiple times a day, and texting her cell phone dozens, sometimes hundreds, of times every day. When Cami didn't come to work, several staff members called and texted her to see if she was OK. We called the police and asked for a welfare check-in for Cami's three children, ages 9, 6 and 4. An officer came to the center to document the text message correspondence, and he assured us that Cami and her children were likely together somewhere in the area.

Staff members continued to press on, believing that Cami was in great peril. We gathered in a circle to pray. As the day went on, we learned more from reports about Cami's situation—a secret she had kept from us, and her own family. We learned that the man who had been harassing Cami forced his way into her home two days earlier and raped her. She managed to call a friend to get him out of her house, but she didn't report it to the police. The day before, Cami had told co-workers at the center that the man had called her 167 times that night. Many staff members advised her to call the police, but she never did.

There were reports of sightings of the man in a nearby community, and several staff members went there in hopes of finding Cami and the children there, too. Those hopes were shattered later that night. I saw flashing lights on the street where Cami lived, and crime scene tape was strung all around the area. At the police department, we were told that officers had found Cami and her three beautiful children dead in her home.

*Now, months later, many of us still struggle with the “what ifs.”
... We still openly share our feelings and listen to each other.*

The next morning, social workers and chaplains from each of the hospices we work with came to the center to offer guidance and comfort to residents and staff members. They helped us grieve and face the difficult days ahead. They helped staff members plan a memorial service, which many co-workers say helped bring them peace. The memorial service was the first time Cami's parents had been to our center, where their daughter loved working and caring for residents.

In the months since then, we've raised money to purchase a piece for our prayer garden in memory of Cami and her children. We hosted a candlelight vigil and created memory bracelets and t-shirts in their honor. We've hung a photo of Cami in a special spot at our center, and our chapel has a table with vigil lights for Cami and her children. A hospice chaplain whose wife is a resident here has been at the center every evening. He has been a blessing as he talks with staff members, listens to their feelings and helps them through their grief.

Now, months later, many of us still struggle with the “what ifs.” We still talk about it a lot. We still openly share our feelings and listen to each other. We still worry about the pain we'll face again when the trials begin. But as we've found comfort and solace in each other over the past weeks, with God's grace, we will find strength to continue sharing His love and that of His children. Especially that of His beautiful child and our dear friend, Cami.

Joanna Wilson

Breaking through the silence

The woman made her way from her house down the path out of the city. She carried heavy stone jars past her neighbors' houses. She had learned to ignore the whispers said in her direction. She did not lift her eyes until she nearly ran into Him near the well.

“Will you give me a drink?” He asked.

She silently handed over the water to the man. After He drank deeply, she said, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”

The man answered, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.” He continued, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

In John 4's story of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus, we don't know much about the Samaritan woman's life. We know she had been married five times, and was currently living with a man whom she was not married to.

Jesus' on-the-spot revelation of her marital status may be interpreted as a conviction of her morality. But during those times, there was little freedom for women to choose a partner, initiate a divorce or negotiate a remarriage. It's more likely that she was more of a victim than a vixen.

In Jesus' time, a woman who didn't have a husband often led a desolate, vulnerable life, taken advantage of in precarious situations. She likely found herself passed along as property.

The life of those being abused is isolating. Silence is the glue that keeps a dangerous life together. But for this Samaritan woman, Jesus broke through that silence in order to bring her life.

Jesus made an intentional trip to be available to this woman in the midst of her isolating pain. Our call as people in the ministry is to be available to listen. Listening allows the walls of silence to come down. Listening may

feel like we aren't "doing anything," but giving room for those experiencing abuse to speak is a critical step in empowering them to live a different life.

By listening, you hold your hands and heart open, allowing their words to pass through you as prayer. Praying is one of the most important things we can do for someone who is being abused — hold them, their family, even their abuser up to God, so that He may satisfy them with the water of life.

Pray for strength. Pray for resolve. Pray for restoration. Pray for patience. Pray for forgiveness.

There are tangible things that you may be called upon to do, like moving someone out of an abusive home, finding shelter, sitting in court hearings, helping them re-establish a new life. Make yourself familiar with agencies and organizations like the ones listed on the back page that offer resources and counseling to those being abused, as well as to those who minister to families being abused.

In the end, Jesus' offer of living water was not just for the Samaritan woman, it was for the whole community. Just as the woman's acceptance of Jesus' life-giving water helped her share that hope with others, you, too, can be the first drop of hope to someone in a desolate place. When you make yourself available to listen, pray and act, you can let God's living water flow through you and into others in need.

Hannah Price

*N*OW THIS, MY BELOVED BROTHERS: LET EVERY PERSON BE
QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO ANGER; FOR THE ANGER
OF MAN DOES NOT PRODUCE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.
— JAMES 1:19-20 ESV

Who loves me? I'm different and feel all alone.

It was a good life...I was surrounded with family, lived in a small rural community where everyone knew your name—and knew all about you. Love abounded and yet I felt different and often pouted because I didn't think my cousins and friends were paying enough attention to me. I had the feeling I was different and felt insecure and inadequate from the beginning of my memory.

Then all my negative thoughts about myself were confirmed. I started school and a group of boys started chasing me home after school chanting "white eye, white eye—you're so ugly."

I was born with one working optic nerve. That means I can see out of one eye and the other eye is small and has a thick cataract on the pupil so it appears white—thus the "white eye" chant. My parents never treated me as if I was disabled or different and yet those feelings were there.

I learned how to run...for three years those boys chased me and chanted. And I endured...yes, looking back I endured. When I was in 3rd grade one evening my dad and I were sitting on our patchwork loveseat in the living room. He said to me, "You look so sad". That's all it took and the story of the past three years slipped out to him. I had never said anything to anyone about what was going on.

In today's world, the parent would be at school the next day and those boys would have been called in the office and their parents would be called. But this was in 1963.

My dad put his arm around me and he said, "Patricia, you are the most beautiful little girl...you are *my* little girl and always will be and it doesn't matter what others say to you." Looking back, I'm not sure that was the best response to a child being bullied or harassed, but it worked for me. I trusted my dad, and I believed him that it didn't matter what they thought—but what mattered was that I was my dad's little girl and he thought I was beautiful. It was my dad's touch. He was my rock and I took refuge in him.

I don't know that anything changed the next day but I had a new outlook because of my dad. I continue to struggle with those feelings of being unworthy, not being as attractive as others and I still often feel excluded and have feelings that others don't like me.

Here is what I have come to realize through my young childhood experience:

1. **I find comfort in knowing that Jesus Christ is truly my rock/refuge and my salvation.** “My soul finds rest in God alone, my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.” (Psalms 62:1-2)
2. **I find strength and focus through two hymns. These are two of my “go to” hymns when the feelings and insecurities try to take over:** “He Leadeth Me” and “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.”
3. **God knows me and has a plan for me. These are a few Bible verses I keep close to my heart.** “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jeremiah 1:5)
“In his heart a man plans his course but the Lord determines his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9)
4. **Actions can be hurtful or healing and are not easily or ever forgotten. What my Dad did for me that night affected my entire life. I am hopeful that each of us can see those that are hurting or have been hurt and be willing to reach out to others trusting that God will lead us and give us the words and touch that is needed for the situation.** Be a witness/be available—one interaction with someone—your daughter, son grandchild, stranger, *can* make a difference.
5. **We are humans with feelings, insecurities and yes we are weak. I want to be strong but I acknowledge it is only through Christ that I am strong.** “My grace is sufficient for you—for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Then Paul says, “Therefore I will boast and be glad about being weak so that God’s power will rest on me. For Christ’s sake I delight in my weakness—for when I am weak then I am *strong*.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-11)
“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13)

Dear Father thank You for loving me. Help me to love others and make me Your instrument to help others who are sad, lonely, hurting, left out, bullied or harassed by others. Amen.

Patricia*

Surrounded by people, but no one helped ...

*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.
—Psalms 34:18 ESV*

Growing up as a child, my mother fighting with her boyfriends was nothing but an ordinary day in our house. I swore to myself that I would never find myself in that situation... *ever*. Age 15 and head over heels in love, I didn't realize it till it was too late.

It was a beautiful sunny Georgia day, we were taking our infant daughter to stroll her around the park, like we did every so often. This day was the last day I would be returning to the state park. I found myself thinking “This is too good to be true. He’s in too good of a mood.” I was waiting for the explosion that was soon to occur. I can’t remember what started the argument. In those days he looked for any excuse to fight. The argument started in the car upon arrival. Taking the stroller out of the car and getting everything set up for our walk, I thought it was best to stay behind. On our previous visits, if he was angry on our walks he would wait until there was no one around to hurt me in one way or another.

He was infuriated by the time he came back, mad that the path he took the stroller down was a nature trail, which the stroller was not made for, and was ready for battle. He told me to get out of the car, that I wasn't going home. When I didn't obey his demands he pulled me out of the car window by my hair and threw me to the ground. To keep from making more of a scene I tried not to draw any more attention to ourselves, so I started to walk. I heard the engine rev and when I turned to look behind me he was coming fast, with pure intentions of running me over. I ran to the sidewalk to get out of the way. He ran the car up on the curb, threw it in park and ran after me. He thought I was trying to run away from him, but I wasn't. That enraged him even more. He grabbed me on the sidewalk and began to punch me, picking me up by my esophagus (using his thumb and pointer finger). I struggled to keep my feet under me. Losing my shoe during the assault I tried to tell him I needed to get my shoe. He thought I was fighting to run away and continued to punch me.

*If I can use what I've been through to help save even one life,
then what I had to go through won't have been for nothing.*

What is *so* memorable about this situation in particular is that I was in a State park, surrounded by hundreds of people, and no one helped me. A man on his bike actually slowed down. I felt a smidgen of relief that someone was going to save me, but he only slowed down to watch.

I gave up on trying to tell him about my shoe, and just tried to aid myself. He saw my shoe, picking it up he got into the car, and threw it at my face causing my nose to bleed. Driving away he continued to hit me. I knew that if I didn't get out of the car it was only going to get worse. We came to a four way stop and I tried to escape. I was half way out of the car when he grabbed me by the hair. With the door open, and me hanging out of the car, he sped off. The door slammed hard with his acceleration through the stop and threw my head into the window. He back handed me one last time, almost completely severing my top lip. Immediately I was covered in blood. He stopped hitting me after that, realizing how bad my face looked, and that this time it couldn't be so easily explained.

Upon arriving home, I put my daughter down for a nap and went to clean myself off and aid my lip and other injuries. He couldn't take his sight of me so he left. In that moment I took a picture of myself that I was going to send to my friend and my mother. I wanted to break my silence. I took the picture and couldn't bear the sight of myself. I couldn't believe that it had gotten *so* bad. I couldn't send the pictures. I couldn't save them either in fear of him discovering them. In that moment I knew that I had to get out, had to get away. I called my mother the day after Christmas of 2009 and told her "Come get me." When I left the first time I feel that was the moment that I *really* broke my silence. There was no more hiding it, the truth was out.

This was a moment of complete hopelessness, and in the end the encouragement to start the planning of my secret getaway. One of the hardest moments of my young life. I was 19 when I finally got the courage to leave.

I went to a couple different safe houses after I left, but he found me. I went back a year and some months later and stayed for an additional 2 years. When they took my daughter after I went back, I tried to get him help but he only got worse. Losing my daughter was my wakeup call, that things would never be safe. The last day that we were together he beat me pretty badly, and then called the police on me so that I couldn't get her back.

I've decided to take the things that I've been through to help better the system and people in need. I share my struggle with others to help raise awareness and help others get out in time and safely. If I can use what I've been through to help save even one life, then what I had to go through won't have been for nothing.

This story for me involves so many different points, but mainly that these things occurred when I was *surrounded* by people and *no one* stopped to help, no one called the police, no one intervened—not for my safety or well-being or for my daughter's safety. I think this is important to share with others because all it takes is one phone call, one honk of a horn, something to distract him for even just a second, bring him back to reality and potentially save a life.

Angela*

*S*O NOW FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE ABIDE, THESE THREE;
BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

— 1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 ESV

If you think someone you know is in danger, or if you want more resources, help is available *24 hours a day*.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

1-800-787-3224 TTY

www.thehotline.org

The Rave (religion and violence e-learning) Project

www.theraveproject.org

Employee Assistance Program

1-800-666-8606



www.good-sam.com



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