

Don't Suffer in Silence

I grew up in a home with domestic violence. I think it's hypocritical how we pretend to be against this issue because a "famous" person is involved, but the reality is that it's happening around us and in our neighborhoods every day. Don't get me wrong. I know most mean well, and we need to shine light on this issue, however, what are you going to do about it? I know firsthand how domestic violence shapes your life and sets you on a path

My siblings' lives and mine were affected because of the abuse we saw growing up. We witnessed an alcoholic stepfather hit my mother because he thought it made him a man. As a grade-school child, I remember being awakened at 2 or 3:00 in the morning because of the chaos. I felt helpless.

My siblings and I tried to help our mom by pulling on dad's leg, we kicked him, called my uncles for help, and when all else failed we called 911. Sometimes they took him to jail, and other times my mom wouldn't press charges. The abuse continued until my stepdad killed a man while driving drunk, and he was incarcerated for it. The good thing is that once he was out, he never hit another woman and has been sober for over 30 years. Tragically, we grew up fatherless, and he left my mom in a depressed, psychotic state.

I asked my stepfather once about why he hit my mom; the response I heard was, "She hit me first." I witnessed him knock my mom down steps and bruise her from head to toe. My stepdad in his alcoholic stupor brought violence into our home and didn't think of how this affected my mother, his biological kids as well as his stepchildren.

What kind of impact did it have on us? My mother raised seven kids alone, and I believe because of the abuse, she physically abused us because she didn't know another way to control her

children. She beat us with switches, broom handles, extension cords, and sometimes slapped our faces because she was reacting to the pain she had endured.

With that being said, this happens a lot more than we can imagine. Many times the person being abused doesn't have the strength or courage to reach out for help. I can't help but wonder what would have happened if *her community* had reached out to her?

My brothers also verbally and physically abused women. One of my brothers is serving a five-year sentence for hitting a woman with a baseball bat. Then there's me, kicked out of school often, I became an abuser to all the boys who would mess with me in school, did drugs, then lived a life of homosexuality for 14 years.

My motto was "what happened to my mother would not happen to me." Domestic violence can become a generational curse. I've seen how this sickness has warped our own lives. What happens behind closed doors is normally seen in public through our children, and the cycle continues.

If you're being abused, or you're witnessing it in your home, get help. Not only can it save your life but the lives of the generations to come. There's never an excuse for violence. Hurt people tend to hurt other people. They need help and so do you if you have been abused. There's no shame in asking for help; I certainly did.

Far too many individuals are broken and hopeless because of the abuse they've experienced. Don't let domestic violence define you. I wasn't abused by my stepdad but my abused mom in turn abused me. I don't blame my mom for all I have been through; in the end I'm responsible for my own actions. What could she do when she wasn't given the tools or the help to get back on her own feet? "When you know better you do better." I'm hoping that my story, and others like it, will

not only raise awareness but do more to help those who find themselves trapped in this nightmare.

Part of the answer would be if *all* of us would reach out and offer help to those who are experiencing domestic violence and not turn a blind eye.

"There are far too many silent sufferers. Not because they don't yearn to reach out but because they've tried and found no one who cares." –Richelle E. Goodrich

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