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Woman at War: How I Won My Battle with Domestic Violence, But Continue to Fight the War

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Woman at War:
How I Won My Battle with Domestic Violence,
But Continue to Fight the War

Thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in English

by

Krista R. Holcomb

Dr. Katharine Rodier, Ph.D., Committee Chairperson
Dr. Sherri Smith, Ph.D.
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Marshall University

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ABSTRACT

WOMAN AT WAR: HOW I WON MY BATTLE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BUT CONTINUE TO FIGHT THE WAR

By Krista R. Holcomb

Woman at War: How I Won My Battle Against Domestic Violence But Continue to Fight the War, is a depiction of my experience in an abusive relationship. The project presents the initial experiences that draw the victim to her future abuser, the forming of a bond between the couple, the feelings of fear and desperation that overwhelm and often paralyze the victim in the midst of abuse, and the final escape and eventual advocacy for other victims. While most of the project is presented as personal narrative, letters, journal entries, and lists appear in order to show the mindset of the victim at the time, and analytical pieces are interwoven which discuss other works and their significance to this project. This project is an attempt to both dispel stereotypes about victims of domestic violence (abused women are weak, poor, uneducated, and always bounce from abuser to abuser), and also to answer questions commonly asked by society: How did you get mixed up with a guy like that? Why did you stay so long? Why did you go back?

Acknowledgements:

I want to thank many people for their contributions to my fight for freedom, both in body and in voice.

I would first like to thank Dr. Katharine Rodier, Dr. Sherri Smith, and Dr. Janet Badia for the time they spent working with me on this project.

Thanks to the wonderful people at Park Junior High School and Dinwiddie Elementary for encouraging me and helping me to believe that I did deserve better and could survive on my own, and that to return home was not a disgrace.

I wish to thank my mother, father, and brother for their help as I struggled to get back on my feet and learn what it was like to be independent. To both of my grandmothers for inspiring me in your various ways to get the most out of my life and refuse to settle for apathy.

A heartfelt thank you to all of my students for showing me youthful excitement, and thus helping to keep my youthful spirit alive.

To Marilyn Smith and the Resolve Family Abuse Program, I thank you for my sanity. Without your counseling and support group, I would not be as healthy and recovered as I am today.

Brandon, if it weren't for your patience, love, and unconditional support, the last two years of studying and writing would have been unbearable. Thank you, Love.

A very special thanks and word of encouragement to all of you who I know are still out there living in your own private hell, for inspiring me to tell my story so that you might have hope. You can do it!

Introduction

Pain Silences Reason, Gives Voice to Insanity

“Listen to your inner voice” (215). This is the simple advice Dianne Schwartz offers the battered woman. Good advice to any common reader, but to the battered woman it may be as abstract as “listen to the pink elephant.” As a victim of torture, the battered woman often has no inner voice. Elaine Scarry argues that “World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture” (35), which would indicate that the “inner voice” is destroyed as well. This representation of intense pain as language-destroying makes the plight of the battered woman that much more difficult, and more hopeless with each blow she endures.

In writing about her first experience with physical abuse, Schwartz writes that “I saw myself lying on the concrete from an outsider’s viewpoint...I tried to think clearly, which was nearly impossible, given what I had just experienced” (9). This seems to support Scarry’s idea that the body and voice become separated, and the prisoner loses power. Scarry also ponders the fact that others cannot experience one’s pain, including the torturer. So, as the torturer experiences no pain, but still has the presence of self and voice that the tortured does not, the power of the torturer is “dramatized” (46). This illusion of power makes it difficult for the battered woman, out of touch with reality, to escape the pain that increases the level of her captivity.

The overwhelming nature and power of pain is evident in Schwartz’s chapter “Misdirected Ego.” Even after she left her torturer, she expresses that “My pain was not finished” (81). She mentions pain again at least three times in the next two pages, emphasizing that even after the physical pain has ceased, it has a power to linger and

remain in one's world. In these pages, she tries to communicate to her torturer the physical pain he has caused, but as Scarry warns us, he is incapable of feeling the pain of the tortured.

Scarry also discusses the "interrogation" that goes along with torture, during which the torturer requires the tortured to make "confessions" of guilt. These confessions appear in the form of "lies" in Schwartz's book, lies that the battered woman is told and forced to confess to so often that she comes to believe them: "I'm nothing without him," "I can't make it on my own," "I deserve to be beaten," "No other man will be attracted to me" (162-4). In her discussion of this ritual, Scarry relates the feelings of the tortured as that of submitting one's entire self to the torturer, and her thoughts as being "all is almost gone now, there is almost nothing left now, even this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another" (35). In depicting the thoughts of one who is tortured, Scarry has beautifully captured those of the battered woman. Is it any wonder that this woman has lost the power to speak out for herself? Is it any wonder that her friends and family have also turned against her, as she sounds so much like her abuser whom they despise? Listen to your inner voice. She does. But the voice says, "I deserve to be beaten..."

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Chapter One: It Is Always Darkest Before the Dawn

Standing on the porch, hands on hips, I scanned the back yard disgustedly, taking in each vehicle stranded in the mud. In November my husband and I had moved into a home that we were planning to buy to use not only as our home, but also as the new site for Jim's business: a wrecker service. I'm sure our neighbors loved us.

Jim decided in January to close his already dying business, but not before it had brought us into the depths of debt and emotional despair. Every day was a struggle for me as I answered the calls of bill collectors, tax agents, unhappy customers, and sundry other distasteful things that go along with closing a business in the red. Jim, of course, didn't want to deal with it and felt it was my duty to answer the phone and free him of the pain of being reminded of his failure.

When he decided to close the business, there was no way we could go through with the purchase of the home. It was just one of those crazy dreams he had that I went along with hoping for the best, for I knew to oppose him was to be accused of bringing him down.

The gentleman who was so happy to have us move in with the bank's word that financing was underway lost his gentlemanly nature when he discovered the current state of affairs. He came to our home one evening demanding to know what was going on.

"You are a coward," he stated simply to Jim. "Why can't you talk to me about this like a man instead of always having your wife answer the phone and do your dirty work?"

I was secretly happy that someone was attempting to put Jim in his place, but still afraid as I knew I was the only one around at whom he could aim his retaliating wrath when the world was against him.

We were to be out of the house by the end of February, along with the twenty or so cars stuck in the mud and snow out back. It was February 11, and we still had no idea where we would go. We had found a home that I could actually afford, but as it was an estate sell, the buying process was delayed.

When I walked through the door around nine that Friday night, Jim was furious. “Where the hell have you been?”

I reminded him that I was taking a class. He claimed that it was a common courtesy for me to leave a note telling him where I was. He was angry, but unusually calm for the anger I knew he felt, and that scared me.

Within minutes I heard a car pull up and Jim walked out the door without so much as a “goodbye.” I ran out after him to see him getting in the Jimmy with our friend Doug.

“Where are you going?” I called.

“Out,” came the terse reply.

I called his cell phone and demanded to know where he was going and what his problem was. He stated that since I didn’t have to let him know where I was, he didn’t need to let me know where he was, and reassured me that he and Doug were just going out to get a drink. The last time he and Doug went out for a drink, I didn’t hear from him again until three in the morning when he called asking me to come get him from Doug’s house because he was too drunk to drive. I had refused to go pick up his drunk ass and

told him to sleep it off on Doug's couch. A month later I had received a bill for \$250 spent that night at Southern Exposure, the local strip club.

Anyway, here I was again, fuming, wondering how much he would charge up this time. I told him that if he could go out then I could too, and I proceeded to drive out to the four-lane, turned around, and came back home to watch TV.

Jim returned home just an hour or two later. I was still mad that he had acted so irrationally about my class and had gone out wasting more money on beer. He was mad that he hadn't known where I was, and he despised me for being mad at him.

I zoned out in front of the TV, too tired to deal with my own anger, too annoyed to deal with his. He wasn't willing to let it go that easily; I came out of my funk as I felt beer streaming down the sides of my face as he emptied a can over my head.

I was infuriated, but said nothing. I simply took a deep breath, stood up, and walked to the bathroom. Bending my head over the sink trying to rinse the sticky, stinky mess from my hair, I heard him saying something to me, but I didn't care. But the intensity of the voice increased. The volume rose. I heard the quick, angry footsteps coming down the hall, and my heart began to pound in the way it always did when I knew the storm was about to hit.

He came around the corner booming "ANSWER ME, BITCH!" as he grabbed the back of my shirt, ripping it, and threw me into the hallway against the wall. His hand quickly found its way to my throat and he lifted me easily to just above eye level so that he could see the panic in my eyes as I watched the hatred grow in his. The veins pulsed in the all-too-familiar red face as his eyes flashed darts at me and spit sprayed from his mouth.

“ANSWER ME, YOU STUPID BITCH!” he continued to scream.

I tried to say something, that I was sorry, anything, but the force of his hand around my throat cut off my air supply and my ability to speak. I could feel the blood pulse in my head and I began to feel light headed. I panicked and wondered if I had taken my last breath--perhaps hoping I had.

Somehow, I managed to finally squeak out “you’re hurting me,” to which he quickly replied, “Damn straight, bitch, that’s the point.” Then he released me and let me drop to the ground.

Chapter Two: Broken Heart vs. Broken Body

When I first met Jim, I was more concerned about having my heart broken than my body. I was driven to him from a loving relationship. I had dated my high school sweetheart for four years and was engaged to him for the last two of those years. We had what I thought was a perfect relationship, as we were always loving and never argued. It suddenly came to an end, however, when he decided that we had grown apart. He had gone away to college while I had stayed safely close to home. He met new people and found exciting things to do.

I was confused. And so this would never happen to me again, I was determined to become more exciting, more rebellious, more risky. I'd had my nose stuck in books all my life and didn't know how to do much else. When I met Jim, the most daring person I'd ever known, I found my source of excitement.

We met as ski school instructors. Jim was always part of that group that was more experienced, more confident, and more rowdy. He seemed to me older, confident, even a little cocky, and didn't really send any attention my way. He was of average height and weight, with slightly wavy brown hair that curled over the collar of his blue ski school jacket. Maybe that's one of the reasons I felt he was "out of my league;" he was already wearing a ski school jacket and was part of the "in" crowd.

Jim began wearing "the jacket" very early. I did not. It took me longer to gain both the knowledge and the skills I needed to pass into the world of the Ski School Instructor.

The day finally arrived, however, when I was told I had completed my training satisfactorily and I could report to "line-up" as soon as I found a jacket to wear. I ran to

where they were kept. The rack was empty. One of the other instructors noticed my dilemma and said, “You can use Compton’s jacket. He’s not here yet, and I don’t know if he’s comin’ in today, but his jacket is here in our locker.”

I wasted no time putting on the jacket and marched myself out to line-up. I didn’t get a lesson that time, but I got to go out on the mountain and ski in the uniform of an instructor. Such prestige, I felt, came with that jacket. Such honor. It gave me confidence. I was still in a dreamy state, wallowing in my good fortune, as I slid up to line-up the next hour. I stood proudly with my rental skis in one hand, and my poles in the other, sporting the coveted blue with the other elite of the mountain.

One of the more experienced, cute, instructors skied purposefully over to me, and, standing directly in front of me asked, “Are you Krista?”

I couldn’t believe the power of the jacket! No one from that crowd had noticed me at all, and now this guy knows my name and wants to talk to me!

“Yes,” I smiled, looking up at him shyly.

He immediately started pulling off the oversized jacket he’d been wearing and said, “You’re wearing my jacket and I want it back. You can have this one.”

I felt like I had been caught doing something I shouldn’t. I slipped hurriedly out of his jacket and put on the huge “Extra Large” he handed over to me. What did it matter if I was floating in the uniform? I was still a ski school instructor. I looked like I should have been all blown up and big in that jacket but I had been deflated, so it hung on me like a kid playing dress up. I had been put in my place.

He was a cocky SOB, intimidating me to give up what I had earned by simply claiming it to be his, even though he was keeping the jacket in his locker against the

rules. If I had acknowledged that and stood up to him everything might have been different. But I didn't. I bowed to his demand, and felt guilty for having taken his property. I was even turned on by his take-charge actions. Determined to prove to him that I was more than just some girl who was easily intimidated, I decided I would find a way to get his attention.

The next time we talked, a few days later, I approached him. I noticed him walking by the lodge.

"Hey, I can't get this thing zipped, could you give me a hand?" I asked with my best helpless-little-girl voice.

"Sure," he flashed that confident smile as he took the two parts in his hands. "First, you gently insert it, then give it a quick thrust," he instructed as he maneuvered the zipper expertly up and over my chest.

He began inviting me to join his group when they went out to ski, and we often rode the lift together.

When the ski season was over, we began training to be white water raft guides. He taught me to rock climb, holding me at the end of a dangling rope as I scaled rock faces. He loved leading me. I loved submitting to his charisma. He was exciting. I had been very conservative all my life, and I was afraid it was that dullness, that desire for safety, that had allowed me to be hurt before.

I was thankful to him for teaching me how to live. I trusted him. As my admiration for him grew, I simultaneously let him take a little part of me, while letting him know that I was easy prey for such theft of the soul.

Chapter Three: The Charmer and the Charmed

Years later, a close friend recommended that I read Anna Quindlen's captivating novel Black and Blue. While Quindlen's book is fictional, it amazes me how she captures the nuances of the abused woman. Her first lines are disturbing in their honesty, and only the woman who has herself been abused can immediately understand them; others must wait until they've gone on Quindlen's journey to grasp the importance of these first sentences and understand that they are indeed the heart of the matter: "The first time my husband hit me I was nineteen years old." That's it. The next sentence carries dual meanings, one for the reader and one for the narrator: "One sentence and I'm lost." As a reader, I thought this meant the narrator was having a difficult time telling such an horrific story, that she was struggling with her next words. But the next sentence fully dispelled that idea and gave way to the awful reality. She wasn't lost in her own sentence, but rather in his: "One sentence and I can hear his voice in my head, that butterscotch-syrup voice that made goose bumps rise on my arms when I was young, that turned all of my skin warm and alive with a sibilant S, the drawling vowels, its shocking fricatives."

The casual reader may wonder at this woman who has in one sentence admitted to being hit by her husband, and in the next begun to reminisce over the beauty of his voice. This apparent contradiction is the crux of the barrier between the abused and the people who could help if they could simply get over the perversity of the reverential way these women often view their attackers.

The outsider's view is understandable, because after all, a man who could do such a thing certainly could have no redeeming qualities, right? Wrong. That's the

whole problem. The woman cannot simply give up on the radiance and beauty of the man she once knew. She knows of the bad he does, but also knows that at any moment that charming young man can peak his head out at any time and make it all seem worthwhile.

Sacrifice. That's it. While some women may have had healthy childhoods, have had positive relationships in the past, and have been viewed as strong women, they can still become entangled with such a man because they have been taught the concept that to sacrifice will bring about great rewards. If I can just survive this one episode everything will be okay and he will be the wonderful man I know and love again. It's all up to me to be strong and know how to make it through. Contrary to the weak creature often conjured up in our minds, the abused utilizes her strength to endure her attacker's tirades.

The protagonist in the novel, Fran, goes on to tell her all-too-common story of how her husband is looked highly upon by all: his friends, colleagues, family, and society in general. And because Fran knew no one would believe her, and if by chance they did life would be over for her as she knew it, she had to lie to those she loved about her bruises and cuts, even to her young son.

Chapter Four: Letting Go of Dreams

Marriage

While my Dream Wedding had been one filled with summer wildflowers and sunny skies, Jim wanted a ski trip for our honeymoon, so we got married in December instead.

On the morning of my wedding, just three hours before I said my vows, I called my lost love from high school. I knew that I shouldn't be going through with this wedding, and I suppose I was looking for a knight in shining armor to save me. Instead, he told me he had just found out he would be a father within the week.

I went to have my nails done and wandered around in a haze in the Mall with my friend Lisa. I didn't return home until close to 1:00, and the wedding was at 2:00. My family wondered if I would show up at all.

I think I was numb through the wedding. I don't really remember a whole lot about it. The pictures we had taken did not come out; they were all dark. The video didn't turn out either.

We honeymooned in Canada, stopping to take in the icy beauty of Niagara Falls on the way. Canada was very different. The snow was so high that we could only see straight ahead of us. As if in a maze, we maneuvered along with no idea what was on the other side of the barriers, just hoping that by following our directions we would make it out. My life had become like a Canadian road in the dead of winter.

Counseling

We started going to counseling shortly after we married, as I learned it was available on campus and one of my privileges as a student. I liked the counselor and she seemed to click with Jim right away, which was important since he wasn't really thrilled about this prospect. He liked that she kept toys out on her table that he could play with while we talked to her.

As we expressed our concerns about our relationship, I admitted that I was very concerned about the amount of alcohol Jim drank and that he often accompanied that with pot, especially when he was with his boating buddies. I also hated the Mountain Dew bottles filled with tobacco spit everywhere.

She mentioned a study that revealed marijuana wasn't as harmful as many people thought. Jim was impressed and wanted to know more.

I next complained about Jim's need to have sex *every* day. I explained that for medical reasons, I had been experiencing a lot of pain during sex, especially when Jim required it so often. Jim felt I was exaggerating, and my reaction made him feel like I didn't love him and didn't want to have sex with him.

She asked me if I knew about gels that could numb the areas of my anatomy where I was experiencing pain. I assured her I hadn't thought of that and would look into it, but it still bothered me that he insisted on sex even though I was in such pain. She again suggested I try the gel, and she recommended John Grey's book *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*.

While I wasn't sure how much this counselor was going to be able to help me, I was encouraged that Jim was comfortable with her, and hoped that he would be able to

work out some of the issues he had with his past relationship with his biological mother. He'd told me that she'd been very abusive to him when he was a child. I felt this was the root of many of our problems, and felt that if he could just work on that, then we would do much better.

Jim continued to demand sex daily, pain or no pain. I often found myself soaking in the bathtub after a particularly painful experience, crying and wishing the pain away. He grew tired of this.

“Stop that damn crying. You're just being dramatic. There's no way it hurt that bad,” he reasoned. He felt this was just a ploy to get out of sex and make him feel bad about himself.

It was not. I loved Jim and I missed being able to make love without the fear of the pain that would follow. I bought a copy of the book on tape that the counselor suggested and hoped it would make me a better wife.

Chapter Five: Making Amends

Jim and I disagreed on many things. We even disagreed on how to disagree. He argued loudly and I clammed up waiting for the storm to pass.

Jim *hated* this. He wanted me to argue with him. It was like he needed me to argue with him to feel like he was loved. I didn't get it, and I wouldn't play along. I offered no arguments because I always knew he would shut me down, but then he got mad that I shut down.

One night we began to argue. I can't remember what it was about, but I remember that I soon clammed up, and he got mad because I didn't want to "talk" about it. I just wanted to get out and go take a walk or something. He wouldn't let me leave the bedroom. He stood in the door blocking my way, asking me if I was ready to talk yet. He wouldn't move and I wouldn't talk. It became a game, and he seemed to think it was funny. I didn't.

I shut the door and stayed in the room. I knew I had problems with communication, so I didn't entirely blame him, but I had to get out of that house. I didn't feel like I was in any danger or anything, I just felt like I couldn't breathe. And I didn't like someone telling me I had to stay in my room until I was ready to talk. He was acting like he was my father rather than my husband.

And I responded by acting like a child. I went to the window and slid it open. Damn, the screen. As I pried at the screen, Jim popped around the corner of the house with a big smile on his face, "Need help with that?"

"No," I replied tersely, and went back to the bed.

Jim's demeanor changed instantly, "You wanna leave? Go then, go!" he yelled. He came back in the house and started packing up clothes and his river gear.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"If you're not going to go, I am." And with that he tossed his things into the truck and peeled out of the driveway.

I didn't know what to do. I panicked. My husband just left me! My heart began to race. *I had just wanted to go for a walk, not leave overnight.*

I called the only person I knew to call. His mom. There was no way I could call my mom. She just wouldn't understand. And I knew Jim's mom knew the worst about him, and she was his son, so she would only advise me to do what was right for him. I was afraid that if I talked to my mom or any of my friends that they would lose respect for him and maybe advise me to leave him. I did not want to hear even a subliminal *I told you so* from my mother. She had never wanted me to marry Jim.

After talking to Linda, I drove the hour and a half to Lebanon. When I got there Linda was waiting up on me.

"Come here, baby," she said as she held her arms out to me, "What is that old turkey doin' now?"

I immediately collapsed sobbing into her arms, recounting the whole scene. She listened intently, rocking me back and forth, and then gave her diagnosis.

"It sounds as though maybe both of you were being a little stubborn. And I know Jim and know he can be really stubborn, especially if his feelings are hurt. Maybe you just need to let him know that you really do love him. He'll come around."

I went to find Jim and apologize. I could fix it. I found him at the campground in Fayetteville. He treated me very coolly at first. But with enough apologizing, begging him to forgive me, and admitting that I needed to work on learning to talk to him about problems more, he eventually warmed up.

We both started listening to John Grey over the next few weeks and talked about his theories on men and women. It was nice. I liked having this common material to discuss. We also decided that we should each attend a counseling session alone to talk about our own problems.

After a few solo sessions, Jim explained to me that he could not go back to our counselor. He had revealed too many things to her and was embarrassed. He just couldn't face her again.

Jim soon decided he needed a change of scenery. He announced that we would be moving out west where he could get a job at a big resort.

Chapter Six: New Beginnings

The first few days in Vail I just tried to get used to the altitude and adjust to my new surroundings. On Christmas day Jim had to work, so I cleaned house and we had Ramen Noodles for Christmas dinner. I thought of my family back home and longed for the Christmas ham, turkey, baked beans, green beans, mashed potatoes, salads galore, and that wonderful array of sweets.

But that was okay, I was here in beautiful Vail, CO, starting my new life with my husband. That night we rode the bus into the resort and rode the Gondola to the top of the mountain to the Eagle's Nest lodge. As I looked out from the Gondola, tiny dots of light shined and flashed against the cold, black sky, with a blanket of white reflecting the bright moon.

At the top was a lodge where you could purchase meals, an outdoor ice-skating rink, a beginner ski area complete with its own two lifts, and snowmobiles awaited to whisk people away to remote restaurants. I was so thankful Jim had brought me here and continued to add wonder to my life. I *never* would have thought of attempting to travel across the country without him. I would have stayed back in the hills of West Virginia forever, with no idea of the opportunities beyond.

I didn't mind that shortly after I started teaching ski school, I also had to take a job working in a restaurant in Avon called *Cassidy's Hole in the Wall Saloon*. It was along the level of a Texas Steakhouse or a Friday's, with an old west theme and entrees like Billy the Kid Burger, John Hitchcock Enchilado, Doc Holiday's Smokin' Ribs. With no restaurant experience, I started out as a hostess.

My day went something like this: Jim and I rode the bus together in the morning to the resort, we taught ski school until about 4:00, then I raced to change in the locker room and catch the bus to get to Avon in time for my 5:00 shift. They wanted me there earlier, but were willing to work with me. Since I got there late, I usually worked until 10:00 or sometimes 11:00, then caught the bus back home.

One night after working a particularly late shift, I just did *not* want to go out and stand in the bitter Colorado cold and wait for the bus, so I started asking around to see if any of the others who were getting off were going my way. The guy who tended the bar upstairs said, “Sure, I’m headed that way, just give me fifteen minutes and I’ll take you home.” I was very happy to wait in the warm restaurant for 15 minutes for a 5-minute drive to my front door, instead of waiting 15 minutes outside for a 20-minute bus ride home, and then still having to traipse across a field piled with 2 feet of snow.

He was a nice guy. We chatted about work, his girlfriend, my husband, and before I knew it we were in front of my house. I thanked him for the ride, hopped out of the car, and headed inside ready to collapse in my warm bed for the night. When I made it upstairs to our bedroom, Jim was already in bed reading a ski instructor’s manual.

“So, who’s your boyfriend?”

“What,” I laughed him off.

“Who just dropped you off?”

“That was a guy from work who was nice enough to give me a ride home. I’d think you’d be happy he kept your wife from standing out in the cold by herself at almost midnight,” I teased him as I nestled down into bed beside him.

“So, did you fuck him?”

“What? You’re crazy. I told you, he is just some guy from work who was getting off at the same time and was going this way. It made perfect sense to catch a ride with him. Why are you so upset?” I reasoned.

“Because I think you’re fucking him. You’re never here. You’d rather be at work all the time. I think you’re fucking him.”

“Jim, don’t be ridiculous. I’m at work all the time because we have to get the bills paid. We have credit card bills and car payments, this rent is outrageous at \$650 a month for a *room*. Do you think I want to work two jobs? I would much rather get off work like you do at 4:00 and have time to sit around laughing with buddies, but I have to work a second job because you *won’t*. And now you accuse me of having an affair? You’re too much.”

There, I’d said it. My real feelings popped out and it felt good.

“Bitch.”

I sat up in bed and started reaching for my clothes. I was not going to lay here and take this. I did not deserve it.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m going downstairs to sleep on the couch. I’m tired, I want to sleep, and I’m not going to sit here and listen to this.”

As I began to rise from the bed he reached up and grabbed my nightshirt, yanking me back down and ripping it in the process. Now I was mad. I tried to get up again, and he grabbed me from behind again. I threw my hands back in attempt to free myself from his grasp and my right hand made contact with his right eye.

His hands released me and went immediately to his eye. “You fucking whore. You hit me.”

“I didn’t mean to, I didn’t mean to, I was just trying to get away. I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” I scrambled for my clothes, grabbed my shoes and ran out the door knocking over a lamp in the process. I was scared to death that he would come after me and really hurt me, or worse, embarrass me in front of our roommate, the kind, gentle older man whose home we lived in.

I heard him calling after me, “Krista, don’t you leave. Where are you going to go, anyway, huh?”

Good question. I didn’t know very many people here, and as for the ones I did know, I didn’t know their phone numbers or where they lived, I just knew their faces at work. Once I made it downstairs I threw on my shoes and coat, trudged over that snowy field I thought I had managed to avoid for the night, and made my way to the nearest convenience store.

I felt confused, ashamed, guilty. I did the only thing I knew to do in times like these. I called his mom. I called her and poured out the story, told her how he had accused me, told her how I had accidentally hit him. She didn’t understand. They had just visited us a few weeks ago and everything seemed fine. We were two kids in love. What happened?

I didn’t know either. But what I did know was that I had been neglecting my husband by working long hours, I had accepted a ride alone in a car with a man I barely knew, then I had vented on my husband because he didn’t bring in enough money, and I

had hit him. I knew it was an accident, but his words rang in my head, “You hit me. You hit me. You hit me.”

I told her I would be okay, that I had calmed down. I took a deep breath and went home. I apologized to Jim. He turned his back to me and we drifted off to sleep.

He wore sunglasses the next few days covering up the black eye. I knew no one would believe my side of the story. How could they when he had proof?

Chapter Seven: Women in Authority

The ski season continued without incident. We started planning for the melting of the snow. I looked into summer camps for kids and Jim checked out the Colorado rafting opportunities. Colorado was like West Virginia, but without the backward stigma. There was skiing in the winter, hiking and biking in the spring, and a summer full of boating and adventure.

Towards the end of the ski season, things at work had started to lift a bit and the 15-day stretches of teaching lessons had dwindled. One day when I was off work taking advantage of the lull, Jim came home early.

He took off his shoes and collapsed on the couch, visibly upset.

“What’s wrong?”

“That dyke bitch sent me home,” he spat out.

“What? Why? What are you talking about?”

“We were at line-up and I was ready to take out a group, when one of the supervisors came over and told me I wasn’t teaching today. She said I needed to go home and shave and come back tomorrow. That stupid bitch!”

I couldn’t believe he got sent home for a little scruff. Jim face is definitely masculine, with his square, set jaw and facial hair that grew very quickly. He’d had to cut off his long hair before we moved out here, which was a big concession for him, and he shaved every night, but this woman demanded he shave in the morning. It seemed silly to me. I felt he was being punished for having active follicles. I tried to assure him that it would be okay, that he could just shave in the mornings from now on, but he wasn’t very appeased.

A few days later he announced, "I think we might have to go home."

"What?" I asked, confused, "Why? What happened?" I'd just started getting used to being away from my family and friends and was adjusting to the area.

"I had my exit evaluation today," he said.

"And?"

"Well, it was going okay. They think I'm a great instructor and all. I should be ready to take my level three exams next season, but my direct supervisor said he was concerned that I had problems with women in authority. Can you believe that? And it's all because of that stupid bitch."

"But that doesn't mean we have to go home," I reasoned, looking for an explanation for his extreme solution to the problem.

"He said I might not be asked back next year."

I was shocked. Jim was a great instructor and an even better skier. I couldn't imagine his not being asked to come back. Me, sure, I was only mediocre, but Jim?

That night he called his dad. Right away his dad tried to find us a house to buy back in West Virginia, faxing us a picture just a few days later of a repossessed home he thought would be perfect for us. It all happened so fast and before I knew it we were packing up our truck and beginning the long trip back to West Virginia.

We were on the road for 38 hours straight, stopping only to run into bathrooms and go through drive-thru's, and once to sit down for breakfast at McDonald's, taking turns sleeping and driving. It was like we were in a Marathon. Jim couldn't wait to get back to a place where he felt accepted, and I looked forward to seeing my family again, even though I had to say goodbye to Colorado dreams.

My parents were happy to have me back on this side of the country, and my mom arranged for me to substitute in the school where she was the secretary. The only problem was that Jim wanted to stay with his parents, three hours away, so we drove back and forth and spent time in separate places, which did not please Jim at all. Once school was out, we stayed with his parents while closing the deal on the house in Shady Spring.

On the weekends, though, we started spending time at the river again. One weekend, I was tired of the whole campground thing and decided to spring for a hotel room on the credit card. After Jim's Saturday on the river, we checked into a room. The next morning Jim got up and reported to the rafting company he worked for, but returned only an hour later.

He stood at the door looking lost.

"What?" I asked.

"I got fired. From a rafting company! Who gets fired from a rafting company?" He uttered in disbelief.

"Why? What happened?" These questions were becoming all too familiar to me.

"Tom met me when I came in this morning and said I went off on Tonya yesterday and that I couldn't work for them anymore. I didn't go off on her. Sure, I was mad, the stupid bitch fucked up the schedule, but I didn't go off on her. They let that bitch run the show up there when she's just the secretary and now she's gotten me fired. From a raft company!"

I couldn't imagine Tonya lying about something like this, but I couldn't believe Jim had behaved in a way that would get him fired. He was always so nice to Tonya, joking around with her all the time. I just didn't get it.

Again, Jim went to his dad. Again, they began to work on something to *solve* the problem. This is when they created the idea for Speedy Beaver. Speedy Beaver would be a towing and delivery service that would run out of our new home in Shady Spring, located near Beaver, WV. But best of all for Jim, he would be his own boss. He and his dad worked up a business plan. Jim called all the towing services in the area, researching their prices and services, found out what he needed to do to get into the business, and found a rollback to buy. His dad co-signed on the truck, they filled out an application to start the business: Speedy Beaver Towing and Delivery Service.

The abuser in Black and Blue is depicted as charming, yet hot-tempered. Combine the charisma of this type of man with the status given him by the society outlined in Andrea Dworkin's "Landscape of the Ordinary: Violence Against Women," and you have an unstoppable monster. Dworkin speaks of the "implicit rights" given the husband over the wife, and of the husband's expectations of absolute adherence to his laws. As Dworkin points out, the husband's violence does not usually begin towards the woman, but rather towards other people or even objects. The wife in consoling the enraged man, unknowingly encourages his behavior. She has given him positive reinforcement, and with her apparent approval of this behavior has also opened up the door for him to turn the violence toward her. Dworkin says of the fearful wife "She must be his valiant companion no matter what the cost," which is echoed in Quindlen's Black and Blue, "no one had ever gotten to me the way he did.... He made me his accomplice in what he did."

Chapter Eight: Accumulating Property

The House of Hope

“How am I ever going to live in this place?” I thought as I made my way through the clothing and junk scattered about on the floor of the house.

We’d come through the back door above the garage because it was unlocked, and the bank hadn’t been able to approve entry for us yet even though no one had lived there for a while.

My eyes watered as the pungent odor of cat urine stings my nostrils, and I continued with my shirt pulled up over my nose to filter out the stench. Litter boxes were prevalent, appearing around every corner.

I was amazed at the size of the place. From the front it appeared but a tiny starter home, but I began to see the potential for much more as I peeked in at the huge master bedroom and bath, envisioning a whirlpool garden tub and double vanity.

Sure, the place would have to be gutted, what with the piss-soaked carpet and the dark, foreboding paneling with its fake wood knots making faces that leered at me and urged me to leave. I would ignore their warning and remove them from my life.

Making my way to the kitchen, I discovered the culprits of the smell. A black cat perched on the table, eating from a 20lb. bag of dry food that had simply been placed there and opened, while two of her friends scattered and ran.

But the view beyond held my attention. Past the hungry cat, through the sliding glass doors, lay a back yard that promised many a tranquil summer’s day. Though the grass was waist high, I could visualize lilies, daisies, sunflowers, all strewn across the

acre expanse, which was already fenced so my Dalmatians would have plenty of room to run and play.

Once I stepped out onto the porch, when I closed my eyes and breathed in deeply, I could even smell the sweet fragrance of a freshly mown lawn. The back porch ran the length of the house and a porch swing would be perfect for enjoying rainy afternoons. And just to the right, a huge apple tree boasted a fruit that would keep me busy. In the far back corner of the property, a cherry tree announced itself with its own bright red delights.

We closed the deal on the house on July 27, securing both a home and a job for Jim, and I found a teaching job in the area within a month. Things were looking up.

Yes, I could live there, I'd decided. There would be lots of work, but the promise of peace the home offered would be worth it.

Monopoly

Before anything else could be done, we had to strip that house of *everything*. We pulled up layers and layers of carpet. In one area of the house I actually pulled up two layers of carpet, under which was linoleum, under which was that green outdoor carpet people used to put on their porches, under which was hard wood flooring.

The walls were no different. We ripped down white paneling to find beneath it brown paneling, and beneath that the dry wall that was cracked and falling apart, covering a very sketchy wall frame.

After purging the house of the old flooring and cleansing it with industrial strength cleaner, we laid linoleum in the dining room. As that was the only semi-finished room in the house at that point, we put our hand-me-down couch that made a bed into the dining room that would be our bedroom for the next few weeks. Over the months ahead, we would move our bed from room to room until we were finally able to finish the master bedroom, complete with new walls, paint, and carpet.

After we got moved into our bedroom, we felt like we could start having friends over without feeling quite so ashamed about the condition of our home. Jim's business had also grown, so some of our first guests were an employee Jim had hired to drive a truck, his wife, and their two children. We had them over for a simple dinner and drinks. After dinner, we decided a game of Monopoly might be fun. Big mistake.

The game started out amicably enough, but as the evening continued and the drinks kept coming, Ellie and I got a little silly and we didn't take the game very seriously. We noticed that a silent competition was starting to ensue with the guys. For fun, Ellie and I decided we wouldn't keep telling Jim every time someone landed on his

property, and he owned some high priced real estate. As a result, Charlie soon overtook him and Jim felt cheated. But more importantly, *I* had cheated him.

It was just a game and we didn't think anyone really cared. Ellie and I just thought it was kind of funny to see the "boss" lose to his employee. It was all in good fun. Jim didn't think so.

They soon left to get the kids home in bed, and I went to the bedroom where the kids had been playing with paper and crayons I had given them. As I was cleaning up the mess they had made, Jim started in on me about how I had embarrassed him tonight. I couldn't believe he was seriously upset about this and told him he was being silly.

Wrong answer. It was like waving a red flag in front of a bull, telling this man who felt you had just humiliated him that he was silly. And as the bull does the matador, Jim charged me, pushing me into the window, breaking it with my elbow.

As the glass and my marriage shattered around me and my arm began to bleed I cried hysterically, "Oh my god, Oh my god, Oh my god. I'm cut. What did I do? Why did you do that? Oh my god, Oh my god."

I couldn't understand. I stood there in a combination of shock and hysteria.

"Oh, shut up, you're not hurt," he said with a roll of his eyes.

I was scared, and because I was sure someone had to have heard the commotion, I was also embarrassed. I tried to calm down so no one on the street just 20 feet away would hear my cries through the now-open window. I cleaned up the glass, bandaged my arm, and we went to bed.

Jim made a comeback and won his own personal game of Monopoly. I was the property.

Fixing It

After the broken window, I sunk into a depression that I could not understand. I had no desire to do anything. I went to work, taught my classes, came home, lay on the couch and watched TV. I didn't smile. I cried at the drop of a hat. I didn't know what to do, and I didn't want to live my life this way. I feared that there was something really wrong with me and I had to fix it.

I set up an appointment with a psychiatrist and took a day off work to go see him. After waiting about an hour in a packed lobby, I was finally admitted.

“What seems to be the problem, Mrs. Compton?”

“I don't know. I'm depressed. I feel bad. I don't have any energy. I'm not happy with my marriage and I just lay around a lot.”

The doctor wasn't looking at me, but writing on a piece of paper. “I'm going to recommend that you see one of our counselors. There is someone available to talk to you right down the hall. Do you need any medication?”

I was taken aback. “Oh, no, I don't need any medicine, I just need to talk to someone to help me figure out what to do.”

That's it? I waited all that time to speak to him for less than two minutes?

I liked the counselor he referred me to. She didn't make me feel like my marital problems were my fault. She didn't suggest that I be more flexible and understanding. She acknowledged there was a real problem and not just one I'd created in my head.

She also detected that I was uncomfortable coming to a clinic where there were so many people, and that waiting that long to see someone was not practical nor possible if I

was to begin counseling on a regular basis. She recommended a marriage counselor across town who had a private practice. She assured me I'd be more comfortable there.

Jim agreed to the counseling. He missed the first session and was late for the second one, constantly checking his phone during the session. He explained that he just really didn't have much time for this since he was on call 24/7 for his business. Neither of us liked the counselor. She was cold and expressionless, and the bill I had to pay at the end made it impossible for us to continue anyway. We didn't see her again.

Instead, we tried working out things on our own. I felt like Jim was spending too much time with the business, and I was upset that we hadn't gotten to spend any time relaxing since he'd started the business. Jim agreed to go to the movies with me.

We hadn't been to a movie or on anything like a real date for a long time. I was ready to sink down into the seats of the theatre, holding hands and cuddling while we watched the film.

As soon as we got into the theatre and sat down, Jim pulled out a can of Skoal and began to snap it between his fingers packing the tobacco. I winced. This was not the romantic date I had envisioned. Next, he pulled out a Mountain Dew bottle and opened it, the release of the pressure from the drink causing a noise loud hiss. I heaved a disgusted sigh and gave him a look that matched.

"Fuck this," he said, in response to my obvious complaint. He got up and walked out of the theatre. I hoped he'd stepped out to get rid of that nasty stuff he had just put in his mouth.

I sat there as the credits rolled and the movie began. After a while, I started to wonder what had happened to Jim. I walked out into the lobby and looked around. No

Jim. I walked just outside. No Jim. I went out to the parking lot where we were parked. No truck!

He had left me sitting alone at the movie theatre! I panicked. I called my friend Kim, crying, feeling half guilty that I had treated him so harshly, but outraged that he had left me stranded, causing me the humiliation of having to call a friend to come get me.

Kim told me not to worry about a thing, she'd be right there. When she got to the theatre, I was in tears. I couldn't just calmly go home and act as if nothing had happened, and arguing with him about it would do no good. With the broken window hovering in my memory, and knowing that this was much bigger, Kim and I decided that she'd take me to grab some clothes and I'd come to stay with her and her husband for a few days.

Luckily, Jim wasn't home, and Kim and I frantically grabbed the necessary items like two thieves in the night, afraid the occupant of the home would return at any time.

Kim and Everett were so wonderful. Kim had lived next door to me in the dormitory in college, and Everett and I had acted in a few plays together. Everett had actually rescued Kim from an abusive relationship, from a man she had almost married, and they were great about not making me feel uncomfortable about this whole situation. They freely gave up their guest room to me and invited me to stay as long as I needed to. It was so nice to be in their company, having dinner together at night like normal families do, talking freely about the day without the fear of saying the wrong thing and causing an argument that would escalate. But I knew that this was their home, their marriage, their life, and I could not continue to intrude upon it. After about three or four days, I went back to make amends with Jim.

When I walked up onto our front porch, I noticed that Jim was looking through the tiny diamond shaped window at the top of the door.

“What do you want?” he asked through the door.

“I want to talk to you,” I answered.

“So talk.”

I reached for the doorknob and tried to turn it. It was locked. “Jim, let me in so we can talk.”

“You can talk right there.”

“Jim, not like this. Let me in, this is my home.”

“No it’s not. Not anymore. You left. Now go on back to wherever you’ve been.”

“You left me Jim. Remember, at the movie theatre?”

“I came back for you after the movie was over. I just went over to the mall to meet Mom and Dad and then I came back. That whole movie thing was your thing anyway, so I let you stay and watch it while I went to the mall. How was the movie?” He asked sarcastically.

“I didn’t see the movie, Jim. Did you think I could just stay there and watch a movie when I was so upset because my husband left me stranded.”

“You weren’t stranded. I told you I came back for you.”

“How was I supposed to know you were coming back? You didn’t tell me anything, was I supposed to just wait there for two hours hoping you would come back?”

“Yep.”

“Well, I didn’t.”

“I know. And that’s why you’re not coming in the house.”

“I want to go back to counseling, Jim. I want to go back to the lady we saw at Concord. Remember her? You liked her. We were doing really well with her before you went away to Vail. Athens isn’t that far away. If I can get her to talk to us, will you go?”

“Probably not.”

“But maybe? We’ve got to talk to someone.”

He didn’t let me in the house. I found the counselor from Concord, only she wasn’t at Concord anymore. She was working for a local elementary school just minutes from us. Although she was uncomfortable with it, my pleading convinced her to see us. I was desperate. I didn’t know who else to turn to, and I thought she was the only person who had been able to connect with Jim.

After I left and came back later, and he felt I’d repented enough, Jim let me back in the house. I was still unhappy, but I wasn’t willing to move out of a house that I was paying for. My name was on the loan and my paycheck made the payment. Our lives were too firmly meshed, so I *had* to find a way to make this work.

During the few days I spent away from Jim, I started to open up to a few people. One of those people was a counselor at our school who told me she had a friend in town who had a private practice that she ran out of her home. She was also a counselor in the school system, and since she had low overhead and this was a second job, she extended a professional courtesy to county employees and waived the co-pay that our insurance didn’t cover. Since money and privacy were both issues, this was appealing to me. I gave her a call and discovered that she was just down the street from Jim’s new shop in Beckley. Perfect. I set up an appointment, and we began seeing her.

Chapter Nine: Remembering

The House

I have learned now, years later, to go back to the house only when I have no fear of getting depressed. The last time I visited, I did so on a ski trip. I made sure to go in the morning so the day's sport would bring my spirits back up. To go afterward would ruin the fun of the day.

Usually, I just did a drive-by, making sure my tenants hadn't burned down the place, but recalling those days years ago when I performed drive-bys waiting to hear word from the bank about our pending purchase, wishing I could go back to those days and just keep on driving. That house meant nothing but pain for me.

Yet, I still picture the little Volkswagen camper bus in the lower driveway, waiting faithfully for a camping trip or just a joy ride. But then the image of a Wrecker and rollback crammed into the upper drive demand my attention. All red, all bearing the insignia of the business that plagued me for three plus years: Speedy Beaver Towing and Delivery. Perhaps we would have made it if it weren't for that business draining our emotions and our finances.

But then I walk into the house and I'm reminded that that is not so. The first thing I focus on when I walk through the door is the huge, brown, apparent water spot on the ceiling at the other end of the room, and I remember the night the spot was created.

A Cry for Help

Please, God, I hope she didn't hear. Oh, but please, God, I hope she did hear.

If she heard, I will be mortified, so embarrassed; but maybe, just maybe, I'll be saved. That's what I want, isn't it? To finally, finally, be saved from this chaos that I call life.

It was my second year of teaching, and I had just been assigned a teacher mentor. It was she who called me. I can't remember the purpose of her call. I think she was just calling to check in with me; maybe about some paperwork we needed for the beginning teacher mentor/mentee program, maybe to give me some information she thought may be helpful, maybe just for an encouraging chat.

Whatever the reason, she called, I answered, and he immediately started mouthing silently to me "who is it?"

He didn't know Laura, so it wasn't like I could just mouth a quick "Mom" or something like that. I would have to explain it, and as I was trying to concentrate on what Laura was saying to me, I simply held up a finger in reply.

He did not deem this an acceptable response. He continued to ask, and very shortly, to demand who was on the phone. The demands became louder. I blocked the demand out as I simultaneously struggled to hear what she was saying yet strived to keep her from hearing what was going on in front of me.

"Who the fuck is on the phone!" In one motion he ripped the receiver out of my hand and from the phone itself with one hand, and with the other he grabbed the footrest of the recliner where I sat and flipped the entire chair upside down. I covered under that

chair, scared, mortified, embarrassed, hysterical. I felt like a rabbit escaping the mouth of a ravaging wolf, who had found a shelter that would only save it temporarily.

I knew what was to come. I was in trouble. I had embarrassed him. I had humiliated him. I had caused him to have to take control of the situation. But most importantly, I had defied him.

I was not allowed the shelter of the chair for long. “Come out of there you stupid bitch,” he bellowed as he rolled the chair from atop me.

He picked up a bottle of Ranch dressing from the coffee table in front of him and hurled it across the room into the wall. It sprayed all over the ceiling. He tossed the across the room, the remains of our dinner inside. “Clean that up, bitch,” he spewed.

As I hurried toward the kitchen, some feeling, something in my peripheral vision, told me to move. I jumped into the laundry room as quickly as I could and heard a crash at the end of the hall as the glass that had just whizzed past my head exploded on the dining room floor.

I quickly moved out of the laundry room and rushed to the kitchen to grab a wet rag. The rag was hardly sufficient for cleaning up the mess I had caused, but in my confused state I just frantically grabbed the first thing I saw.

By this time he had settled back onto the couch, watching TV, beer in hand; I was sobbing as I scrubbed, my shaking hands moving the quickly soiled cloth about hopelessly, helplessly.

The sobs soon ceased, though, as he demanded I stop crying. Demanded that I had no reason to cry as this was all my fault and I’d better shut up and clean the mess

quietly. Insisted that I had no right to cry; he was the one who had been wronged, and I was just trying to be dramatic and create a scene by crying.

“Why did you make me do that? Why wouldn’t you just tell me who was on the phone?” I never realized it before, but at this point, I don’t think he was even asking who it was anymore. It’s not like he really cared who it was, it was probably just a fleeting curiosity; but the fact that I did not immediately respond with obedience is what set him off.

I don’t remember much about the rest of that night. I remember that I left the glass in the dining room in my rebellion against being the one to clean up the entire mess. A day or two later I gave up and cleaned that, too.

I dreaded going to school the next day and facing Laura. I entered her room timidly to gauge her reaction to my presence. I apologized for the night before and she immediately said she just figured we were disconnected or something happened to my phone. “So you didn’t hear anything?” I asked. Nope. Nothing. Was she telling the truth? Did she hear and just didn’t want me to be embarrassed? Did she hear and just didn’t want to get involved? And even if she didn’t hear, she had to know something was wrong, and she had obviously felt there was some reason she shouldn’t call back.

Could she have had no idea? As she had listened to a dial tone, I cowered under a chair, praying that she was the one who had decided to be my heroine and had the police rushing to my door as that animal raged above me.

She had to have had some idea.

Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil

Maria Roy states that “It may come as a surprise that the wife almost inevitably plays a part in her own assault” (115). While Dianne Schwartz agrees with this statement and uses this attitude in her campaign to get women to take responsibility for their lives in Whose Face is in the Mirror, Elaine Weiss tries to move our way of thinking away from placing blame on the victim. Weiss’s use of the stories of doctors, teachers, business women, and other professionals as survivors of domestic violence seeks to change our view of the stereotype of an uneducated, poor masochist with no self-esteem.

In Battered Women, Roy cites the reasons women give for staying with abusive husbands as having: hope for reform, no place to go, fear of reprisals, difficulty finding a place to stay with children, financial problems, fear of living alone, and the stigma surrounding divorce (43). Weiss acknowledges many of these obstacles, but she argues that while remaining in abusive relationships for what seems to many of us too long, these survivors are building up strength to overcome these obstacles so that they can escape. Weiss also cites societal views, that women who find themselves in abusive situations must be weak and in some way deserving of abuse, also serve as an obstacle to her departure.

Roy explores the idea that governmental/social ideas equate a license for marriage with a license to hit. Of course, one may not believe such a claim and simply dismiss it as an outdated notion that we have come past. But Weiss goes beyond generalities and gives several examples of recent public abuse, the witnesses of which failed to acknowledge anything wrong with the situation. People don’t want to get

involved. How, then, can a woman who is in the midst of such trauma, behave in any way to save herself when those around her act as though there is nothing to save her from?

In Weiss's account, Whitney Benson's behaviors may certainly be seen by the outsider as masochistic and neurotic as she goes back to her extremely abusive boyfriend over and over, but when the boyfriend's father watches him throw her down a flight of stairs, her parents ignore her many injuries, her "friends" snub her when she breaks up with him, and a crowd of people witness her being hit down to the pavement and show no reaction, who has the personality problem here? I fail to see how this young girl played a part in her own assault that was any less appalling than the part played by the onlookers. Whitney's experience is not the exception.

Memory Pain

I snap out of my reverie, but only momentarily, for in the small front bedroom, my elbow winced with memory pain when I looked on the front window, now repaired, once broken by the force of my body. The master bedroom brings about similar feelings. I look on its floor knowing how hard it is, knowing what it's like to be tackled on it and slammed to its surface, hard. Even the water heater in the laundry room is familiar to my body, my head having bounced off it because I continued to fold clothes while he talked.

I work my way back out to the kitchen and look out at the back yard upon that expanse that had promised so much peace and tranquility, and find it ironic that this was the route I often chose for escape. But I had learned that there was no safe haven for me here, recalling the summer day when he ripped my shirt half off and locked me out on the back porch, humiliated, degraded, unable to escape and unable to go back in to hide my shame. I tried to bolt in winter once this way, too, but the rumble of the glass door giving away my location, I soon heard his thunderous footsteps resounding on the wood of the deck behind my own timid tiptoe. I whirled around just in time to feel the blow from his hands on my chest. I learned in a new way that day the distance from the deck to the ground, and also how firm melted and then frozen snow feels to the back of the head when hit with force. A blow of this kind brings about a feeling of being enveloped in water, drowning, finding peace within oneself. I black out and travel to another time, another world.

Chapter Ten: Stockholm Syndrome

Stockholm Syndrome :

The 2002 Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary defines Stockholm Syndrome as “the psychological tendency of a hostage to bond with, identify with, or sympathize with his or her captor.”

405 Tar Landing. My vacation destination. Jim, however, didn't have the same thing in mind. It was the summer of 1998. Jim had finally agreed to take a vacation from the business. Jim's brother and his brother's girlfriend were then living with us and helping out at the shop, so Jim felt okay about leaving it to take a break.

I couldn't wait to go to my favorite vacation spot where I'd gone since I was a girl, and have my husband there with me. I went last year without him because he'd just started the business and couldn't leave, but it just wasn't the same. This time we'd do it right, as a family. Jim's only stipulation was that he be able to work some kayaking into the trip. That was no problem with me. As long as I got to spend time at the beach I would be happy.

We began our trip by traveling due south to a river Jim had heard about and wanted to try. I don't kayak, but that was perfect since I could run shuttle for Jim. I didn't mind it really. I would drop him off at the top of his trip, wander around the area, maybe have lunch, drive to the bottom of the run, and read while I waited for his boat to come down the river.

We arrived at the river just in time for him to make a short run, then found a hotel to spend the night before the next day's longer run. The morning came and I dropped Jim off at the put-in for the day's run.

Driving to pick him up late that afternoon, I remembered the road to this particular take-out was a little sketchy. There was just too much loose gravel on the road,

making it tough to keep control of the big Dodge quad cab as I rolled around the curves. But I made it safe and sound. A little aggravated, but safe and sound. Take-outs were always so uncertain. Who knew when the boaters would actually come in, and all you could do was wait and try not to guess what time they should arrive so you wouldn't go crazy when they didn't get there by the time you thought they should have made it safely down the river. When Jim finally arrived, I discovered he had joined a group of boaters who liked to play and surf in the rapids a lot, thus the late arrival.

I was tired of driving all day, and he was tired from boating, but the plan was to head to the beach, so we did. We really didn't have the money to spare on a room another night. We were operating on credit cards as it was. That's another reason I love this beach trip so much. It's basically free! My uncle has a great condo at the beach that my parents get for merely paying what it costs to operate the place, so we didn't have to worry about money.

We were rolling along the road at about 57 MPH in the 55 MPH zone just a few hours from our destination at about 3 AM, when a glance to the right showed a 40 MPH sign with three police cars beside it. The flashing lights and siren were soon upon us. Great, I thought, what a wonderful way to start my part of this vacation.

Jim pulled over and I just knew that once the officer realized we were just a young married couple on our way to our family vacation, that he would let us go with a warning and best wishes for a good vacation. I was wrong. He was very short, had no interest in hearing an explanation, and simply wrote Jim a ticket for going 17 MPH over the speed limit. Reckless driving. This is not good. Jim owns a wrecker service and a

clean license is essential for his business insurance. Also, there was the little issue of money. This economical vacation was starting to add up before it ever really began.

When we got to the beach we camped out on the living room floor and slept through most of the morning. We made it out on the beach for a little bit, but Jim wanted to get back up to the condo to make calls to try to straighten out his ticket. Or rather, he wanted me to straighten it out.

I called the county in which the ticket was issued, and they informed me that because it was reckless driving Jim would have to appear in court or have an attorney appear for him. Upon further questioning, I discovered that he couldn't have an attorney from back home take care of it for him, he would have to hire someone from that particular county. It was a racket. The three cops parked by the sign, now we could only use their attorneys. Ridiculous.

Jim thought so, too. He ranted and raved in the bedroom my mother and father had graciously given up for us to use. Dad tapped on the door and asked if he could come in to get something they had left. While dad was retrieving the missing item, Jim continued, "This is fucked up!"

Dad interjected, "Yes, you're right, it is messed up, but I'd appreciate it if you watched your language."

"Shut up, old man."

I could not believe my ears. My husband just stood in the master bedroom of the condominium paid for by my parents and told my father, "Shut up old man." No, this could not be happening.

"What did you say?" my father asked, equally incredulous, "What did you say?"

“Oh, just go on and get out of here,” Jim answered, blowing my dad off.

Chests puffed out, fingers pointed, voices raised, but I didn't see or hear any more of it as I started tossing clothes and toiletries back into the suitcase that I had just unpacked. “No, Jim, stop. Dad, please, stop,” I begged of the two. Finally, they did, and we fled down the steps and out of my peaceful vacation home.

My mother was down at the beach, so she didn't witness any of it, and I left without saying goodbye to her. It wasn't right, but I didn't know what to do. I was so embarrassed. So crushed. I didn't want to show my face to anyone. I just wanted to go home.

I sat in the passenger seat of the truck in a trance. Finally, Jim pulled over and put his arms around me. I let it all pour out on his shoulder. Why did all this have to happen? It was all so unfair. Not only was our vacation ruined, but how could I ever face my parents again?

“It's okay, baby, our vacation isn't ruined. We can go to Kitty Hawk,” was his solution.

I looked at him in amazement. “There is no way I want to go anywhere but home right now.”

“Home? No way. This is my vacation and I'm going to enjoy it.”

“But we don't have any money. I didn't plan for a hotel stay. We can't. Jim, please, let's just go home.”

“Krista. I haven't had a vacation since we started this business and I'm not about to go home now. You've got room on the credit card don't you? We'll just use that.”

I was defeated. He was not giving in. We drove the three or so hours to Kitty Hawk and stopped at a Brew Pub and Restaurant for dinner, courtesy of VISA, and on to a drive-thru convenience store for Jim's 12-pack of imported beer. After checking out a bed-and-breakfast and a few hotels, we finally settled on a questionable, cramped little place that had a vacancy.

I was still dealing with what had happened back at Tar Landing, but Jim seemed to have just put it behind him. He was actually happier that we were having our own vacation, and couldn't understand why I didn't share his joy. I still wanted to go home, and I told him so.

"Fine then, go home, you ungrateful bitch. I'm trying to make the best of this and give you a good vacation, but if you're determined to mope around and be a bitch about it, get the hell out of here."

I was relieved to hear what I thought was a dismissal. I just wanted to get away, and I really thought he was giving me an out. I picked up my purse and my suitcase and headed for the door.

I heard him coming from behind me and hurried to open the door. Again, he had seen the red flag and charged me, knocking me into the concrete wall just outside our door, scraping a gash on my knee. He pulled me back into the room, grabbed my purse and slung it around, strewing its contents all over the room and shaking it upside down to make sure every last item fell to the floor. He won again.

I snuck out later that night with the excuse that we needed ice. While out I asked the receptionist if we could be refunded the second night we had already paid for if we

decided to leave in the morning. She asked me if everything was okay. I said it was, but I just wasn't sure if we could stay.

I contemplated escape, but the throbbing in my knee made me think better of it. I decided to tough it out. I don't remember anything about the beach, but I do remember we stayed one more night and went home. Jim couldn't handle my pouting anymore.

He announced on the morning of our departure that I would drive the entire way home, and that we would stop somewhere along the way for him to kayak since I had shortened his vacation. As we left town, he instructed me to pull into a convenience store.

"I'm going to get beer," he announced matter of factly.

"But it's only 10 AM," I said with alarm.

"What?" he said, raising his eyebrows as if to dare me to repeat my protest.

"Nothing," I said, "never mind."

"That's what I thought," he said with satisfaction.

Once on the road, he began to down his Indian Pale Ale with fervor. I became increasingly more nervous with each empty bottle. After he had downed about six, he started lecturing me on the qualities of a good wife and informed me that I was lacking many of those qualities.

He began to emphasize his points with raps on my head with the bottle in his hand. I just listened quietly, wincing at each rap on the head, hoping that he would only vent, and that it would go no further. At one point he hit me in the head with the heel of his hand and I became concerned about my ability to remain in control of the vehicle this way.

I noticed an officer who had another car pulled over on the side of the road, and I began to slow down. The change in speed sparked his attention and he followed my eyes to the officer. “Don’t you even think about it, bitch.”

My shoulders sank and I sped back up, unwilling to upset him anymore while I was trying to drive.

Soon, we had to stop for gas. As we were filling up, I scanned the parking lot for signs of someone who might help me. In the store, I eyed the clerk. Jim saw the desperation in my eyes and spat out disgustedly, “Don’t be stupid.”

Back in the truck, the tank was full and I saw my window for escape closing. I didn’t know how I could keep enduring this until we got home, especially if he planned to stop for another trip down a river and another night in a hotel.

As I drifted the truck past the front door of the convenience store, I seized the moment, opened the truck door, and jumped from it letting it stall to a halt as I slipped from behind the wheel. I ran into the store and headed straight back to the restroom and locked myself in.

Oh, shit. What had I done? I just jumped from a moving vehicle *while* I was driving. Anybody who saw that must think I’m insane and horribly irresponsible. That *was* irresponsible. And stupid. And now what? I’m trapped in a bathroom a good six hours from home, my parents are probably six hours in another direction at the beach, I didn’t really even know where I was, I had no money, and my husband was standing outside waiting for his crazed wife who had just endangered him and his truck by jumping from it while driving.

There was a knock at the door. “Ma’am. Are you okay?”

“Uh, yeah,” I responded timidly.

“Ma’am, are you sure you’re okay?”

“No, but I don’t know what to do,” I began to whine.

“Uh, Ma’am, do you want me to call someone?”

“I don’t know. No. No. I’m okay, I just need time to think. I’m really sorry I’m taking up your bathroom. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay, Ma’am, I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

“Yes, thank you, thank you so much. Wait a minute. Is there a man out there?”

“Um, there appears to be a man looking this way. Are you sure you don’t need me to call someone?”

“No. It’s okay. That’s my husband.”

“Okay.”

With that, whoever was on the outside of the door left.

As I had many times before, after weighing my options and realizing I was stuck too far from anyone I knew, I pulled it together and prepared to face Jim.

He lectured me, but he didn’t hurt me anymore, that day. We went to the James River. After a short run down the river, we headed home.

Back at home, his brother greeted us on the porch asking us how our vacation went. Jim went on about the ticket a little bit, but acted as though everything was great other than that. I was continually amazed at how he just brushed things off.

I looked around as I realized my car wasn’t in the driveway. “My car, where is it?” I asked, frantically, upset that I wouldn’t be able to escape right away, suspicious that perhaps Jim had called home and asked his brother to remove it.

“Oh, Susan took it. She had to go to her sister’s wedding in Hinton,” he remarked casually.

She took my car. To Hinton, an hour away. I couldn’t believe the nerve of these people. First they move into my house and eat my food, now they’re taking my car? I felt very claustrophobic. Very angry.

Susan came back later that night with my car intact.

While I was in the laundry room that evening folding up our clothes, Jim decided to come in and lecture me again, either about my behavior on the trip, or my cold treatment of his brother and his girlfriend. I continued to fold laundry while he reprimanded me.

I felt his hand grasp my hair and my head banged hard against the water heater.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you.”

I let out a little cry, “Jim, please, you’re hurting me.”

“Shut up. Don’t you dare make a scene. If you would just listen to me I wouldn’t have to do this.”

“Jim, please, please stop.”

About that time Jim’s brother appeared in the doorway. “Hey man, come on man, you don’t wanna do this.”

“Joe, stay out of it.”

“Come on man, let’s go outside, have a beer. Come on, really.”

Jim let go and glared at me, but went with his brother.

I collapsed on the floor crying. Why had my life come to this? Susan hurried in and hugged me.

“You don’t deserve this. You’ve got to get away from this. Come on, we’ll get you out of here,” she said.

Susan’s idea of getting me out was helping me gather my things and waving goodbye to me from my own front door. I think she meant well.

I climbed into my Topaz and drove over to the Shady Spring High School parking lot. I didn’t know where else to go. I still didn’t have any really good friends in this area, and as it was summer I wasn’t in contact with the other teachers from school, and I was too drained and tired to go any further. I pulled into a space, reclined my seat, and prepared to have my first peaceful night of sleep in a week, in my car, while my husband and his brother and girlfriend slept in warm beds in the home I was paying for only a block away.

I didn’t get to rest peacefully for long. After I’d slept for about an hour, a light shining in my face and a tap at my window scared me back to consciousness. It was the police. This was the second run-in I’d had with the police this week, and neither of them was at a time when I needed them.

“Ma’am, are you okay?”

“Yes.”

“What are you doing out here, ma’am?”

“Just sleeping. I just needed to get away.”

“Do you live around here?”

“Yes, I live over on First Street, but I just can’t go home right now.”

“Just needed to get away, huh?”

I could tell he wasn't convinced, but I didn't know what else to say. In addition to everything else that had happened this week, now I was embarrassed to be found sleeping in my car in the school parking lot. I was a teacher for god's sake. I didn't know where else I could find peace without people bothering me with questions and telling me what I should do.

I soon satisfied the officer by starting my engine and driving off the parking lot. He had done his job, protected his community, chased off the offending vagabond, and I was headed back home to face my punishment.

I didn't see or talk to my parents for months after that beach trip, other than the time dad came and tried to get me to leave with him. I told him the place on my knee was from falling on a rock in the back yard. I lied to my daddy. I told him to go away, that I was fine and didn't need him to take me away. My knee was red and ugly after being opened many times when Jim pulled me across the carpet by the hair after that night. My mom drove by one time, too, but she didn't come in. She just drove by, slowly. They lived an hour and a half away, so this was very strange to me. They didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. So we just didn't.

Chapter Eleven: Keep Your Mouth Shut

Jim was always very determined that we keep up appearances with our friends, and he curtailed any attempts I might make to reach out to someone. We had an impromptu visit one night from some old friends from Winterplace. They arrived, however, just after a scene over our cable bill.

Jim had come home that evening to snow on the TV. The cable had been turned off. When he asked me about it, I put my hand to my forehead and said, “Oh, no! I’ve been carrying that bill around in my purse and I forgot to pay it.” Frustrating, but fixable.

Jim was not so easily appeased. The eyes of the bull appeared, and he charged, pushing me into and over the weight machine in our bedroom, sending me to the ground as the machine caught the backs of my knees, thumping my head on the concrete underneath, so cleverly disguised by carpet and flooring.

I couldn’t understand why he had such an extreme reaction to my forgetting to pay the cable bill, but it soon became clear as he sat down on the bed and explained that, “This is the same kind of shit that Lisa (his biological mother) used to pull. She wouldn’t pay the bills, and she’d go to the grocery store in her fur coat and pay for her steaks and our Ravioli with food stamps.”

I knew he was frustrated with his mother, but displacing that frustration on me was driving me crazy. I made the second mistake that evening by telling him so. Before I knew it, he was on top of me holding my wrists down and yelling in my face, crushing the cute little watch mom had bought me for Christmas. The watch had one of those round, hard, inflexible bands, and when Jim held my wrists, the hard metal flattened into more of a rectangular shape against my arm.

That's about the time our guests arrived. Jim let them in and everything was suddenly jolly in the house. How did he make these transitions from raging bull to life of the party so quickly? I would never understand that.

After one of our episodes like this, I would sometimes hyperfocus on some minor detail. I suppose it was a coping mechanism to keep from thinking about the shambles my marriage and my life had become. Anyway, this time I couldn't stop thinking about my crushed little watch. In the living room with all the guys sitting or standing around laughing and talking, I tugged and pulled at the watch, unable to bend it to reshape it. Without thinking, or perhaps I was, I innocently asked, "Hey, can somebody help me bend this back? It got flattened and I can't bend it back."

Jim spoke up, smiling outwardly, but sending me that inner glare only I could recognize, "Here, give it to me." He bent it easily back and returned it to me.

Great, he fixed it, I thought naively. A little later I wandered into the bedroom to change clothes because we had decided to go to a basketball game, unaware of the rage that Jim still harbored. Jim entered the bedroom behind me and closed the door.

"Don't you dare try anything like that again!" he hissed quietly so our friends wouldn't hear.

"What?"

"Don't give me that. The watch, you bitch. Give it to me."

"No, Jim, please. Come on. They didn't know what happened to it. I just said I bent it. They don't have any idea how it got bent. I just wanted it fixed."

"Give it to me. I'm going to fix it.

"But you already did, see?"

He snatched the watch from me and I watched as he twisted, and twisted, and twisted the metal that I couldn't even bend, and he continued to twist until it resembled a corkscrew more than a watch.

“There, it's fixed.” He spat out as he threw it on the bed. “And I don't want to hear another word about it. Wipe that damn look off your face, and don't you dare cry any of those crocodile tears for attention.”

We went off to the game and a wonderful evening was had by all.

Chapter Twelve: Lists

I'm a list maker. I'm not sure just when I started doing it, because I can't remember a time when I didn't make lists. Lists help me think. They help me straighten out the confusion in my head. They help me make decisions. Tough decisions.

Positive

- The windows for the house are in
- I think I can come up with the money for the remodeling
- We have a manager at the shop now
- I have a job that pays consistently
- I'll probably feel better tomorrow
- I can paint this weekend
- Jazzy & Abby love me
- Everything will be okay

Negative

- The wrecker deal fell through
- My house is a wreck
- I need more money to finish carpet & furniture
- I haven't paid off the beds
- Jim hasn't been paid in 2 weeks
- Jim gets mad at me really easily
- I'm tired of getting yelled at
- I feel bad today

Options:

- Advertise the wrecker more
- Put the wrecker back to work
- Ask my mommy to help me paint & fix up
- Go home & go to sleep- But Jim would look down on me & get mad & I'd just feel worse.

At the end of my first school year, after informing me that he had worked really hard to keep my position for next year so I could stay, my principal asked me to coach the cheerleading squad. How ironic, I thought. Jim always complains that I won't be his cheerleader, that I don't support him enough. Now I'm going to coach the squad. Maybe I'd learn how to be a better cheerleader, I thought wryly.

I couldn't turn it down. I was a new teacher, and as my job was at risk at the end of every year, I had to keep my boss happy. Plus, it would mean some extra money, and I could definitely use that.

I came home from work one evening, after having stayed late to supervise practice, to find this note angrily scratched on a yellow legal pad.

Krista

Thank you for coming home at 4 o'clock so we could have some time together

Jim

P.S. Thank you for calling and letting me know where, & how you are

P.S.S. Thank you for carrying the cell phone I gave you so I could call you and find out where & how you are.

P.S.S.S. Remember Taco's at the Taylor's at 6 o'clock. That's P.M. not A.M.

Chapter Thirteen: Journaling

I had never been one to journal or to write about things that happened in my life much. When my boyfriend in high school and college wrote me every day, I couldn't even seem to make myself return his letters. So I'm not sure why I turned to writing at this time, but I did. It was the only thing that saved me on some of those dark, lonely mornings in my classroom before my students arrived. After a night of his tyranny, I always felt

Crazed
Unable to control my emotions
Jumpy
Drained
Depressed
Angry
Sad
Overwhelmed
Helpless
Hopeless
Tired

These were not, however, the qualities of a good teacher, and I had to learn how to put them aside. I couldn't just make them go away, but if I could put them on paper I felt like I could let them go, if just for the day. I had physical proof of them and could go back and feel them later as I poured over my writing, trying to make sense of the words of my life.

I always went to work very early, and I spent many mornings in my room writing away the sadness of the night before so I could put a smile on my face for my students. I couldn't transition like he could. I couldn't just put on a party face at will. I had to write.

I didn't know, though, that through writing I would also begin to understand my feelings more, that I would begin to recognize my feelings as real and valid, that through

writing I would begin to have a voice, even if I was the only one who heard it. Writing gave life to my inner voice, and I went to it for help when I didn't know what else to do.

February 5, 1999

I love Jim. But can I best achieve my goals with him? Right now I would love to dedicate more time to my work with my students. I would like to coach cheerleading again next year and do it right. But there is no way I could attempt to do this with Jim. Things seem to be such a chore and he makes it even more difficult. The very things that often frustrate me about difficult students, Jim displays quite often. He is very needy. He wants his way and does whatever it takes to get me to give it to him. I feel like a puppet on a string just trying to keep him from making life miserable.

At times I think I would like to do more with Speedy Beaver and help it succeed, but I'm not so sure anymore. Am I wasting my time on a project destined to fail? And if it does succeed, what does that mean? Money. Can I not achieve this through some other, more enjoyable means? Can I not achieve happiness more effectively if there is some purpose other than just to get more money? More money would make things easier, but cutting back luxurious costs would as well. Why do we need all these new vehicles, cell phones and toys? Does Jim really need to be driving a new truck, a dune buggy, and playing the newest expensive video games?

I have sacrificed to this business in ways that really annoy me. About \$10,000 of my debt is directly owed to the business. I have a perfectly capable spouse that could be contributing to the finances as much as myself, but this business does not allow him to. He hasn't gotten a paycheck the last three pay periods. Also, it drives me crazy that I have a perfectly good computer that I could use so many ways in my classroom, but it is in a greasy garage getting ruined by fumes and paint over-spray because he needs it for Speedy Beaver.

February 10, 1999

He has started again telling me how I don't help out enough at the shop. Fuck him. I am so tired of this. And what is it all for? So he can fall flat on his face and take me with him? No thanks.

I am addicted to helping kids. Am I? I think so. I want to assist in a spring sport. We had a really good practice yesterday and I really enjoyed it. Jim and I had a bad night again last night. He wants me to spend more time at the shop and less with school. I want to spend less time at the shop and more at school. The shop is his; school is mine. I will help him when I can in the summer, but there is so much I want to do at school and at home that I can't do effectively if I keep going to the shop. I really wish he would just get out of the business and get a real job. I wouldn't mind the business at all if he didn't expect me to take responsibility in it. Why should I take responsibility? It's not my dream. It's not my interest. I've supported our family so he could do it, but enough is enough. I will support him emotionally, but his demands are causing me to want to pull away entirely.

My only true escape, my only joy, is school. Home can be an escape, but often it is a trap, too. It is where he punishes me for his failures. Where he punishes me for his mother's wrong-doings. Where he punishes me for the injustices of life.

It's not my fault. I don't deserve the punishment. How do I know when to say when? Sometimes he's so wonderful and I love him more than ever. Sometimes he's so horrible I wish he would disappear. Sometimes I wonder if we would both be happier apart. Sometimes I wonder if we should separate just because I would be happier.

The only problem... Would he make my life miserable in the process? Is that what I'm afraid of? Is there a way to prevent this? How can I safely leave this marriage and cause the least amount of financial, physical, and emotion angst possible for both parties involved? This is so difficult because I usually talk to my partner about making important decisions. I wish I could talk to him about this one.

Who do I talk to? I feel certain most people would direct me to leave him after hearing only part of the story. What I need is someone who can see into the future to tell me if it is all worth it; to tell me if he'll ever change. God? Sure, God knows all, but will he tell me? Will God send me an answer or will I just talk myself into one decision over another? So many questions, so few answers.

I feel like I need some time to really think about my options, make a decision and come up with a plan. But to whom do I go for guidance? Everyone has an ulterior motive, whether it is revenge against men, revenge against women, to save an abused woman, to prevent children in a bad marriage, or to save a daughter from eternal grief. Who can be totally objective? Whom do I respect enough to trust his or her guidance?

February 20, 1999

I'm not sure I like being married. I'm too selfish. I don't like picking up after someone else. I want to be a better wife, but more than that, I want to be a better partner. How can I be a better partner if I feel like I don't have a partner? Jim still expects me to do all the cleaning up or cooking. He will do nothing that resembles housework.

I could almost accept this if I stayed at home and that was my occupation, but it's not! I have a job. I have a couple of jobs actually. Most of the women I know who are employed divide the home chores with their husbands. Some take turns with dinner or laundry, or if one cooks, the other cleans up after dinner. Jim will not do any of these things.

One time when we lived in Colorado I made up a schedule for us to clean the house together in time frames. He got angry and refused to look at it.

He will not cook, clean up, vacuum, do laundry, pick his laundry up out of the floor, or even throw away his own trash. The obvious solution would be for me to refuse to do these things for him. I've tried. The hell I have to live with is not worth it. How do I fix this?

I need to sit him down and tell him I am fed up. How do I do this and actually stick with it?

I am ready to make a move. In addition to these other things, his medicine is now having less effect because it is fight the ever-increasing amount of alcohol entering his body. Jim's addictive personality is at an ultimate high. No pun intended. He is on a

daily basis taking Zoloft, drinking in excess of a 6 pack of beer, dipping snuff, and smoking. I go to my room to get away from this disgusting display. I hate the smell of his three nightly habits.

Are disgusting habits just something we have to learn to deal with? I guess it's up to everyone to decide what they are willing to tolerate, but how do I decide when enough is enough? I am longing for happiness in my home.

Jim accuses me of having affairs. He calls me names and insults me when he's unhappy with me. Last Sunday he yelled and cursed me out in the driveway because on the way to church I changed my mind and went to the doctor instead and was gone three hours. I should have called, but I was so sick it was all I could do to stay awake in the doctor's office and then drive home.

I don't want to end my relationship with Jim. But I don't want to continue like this. I'm afraid if I tolerate this any longer it will never change.

Chapter Fourteen: Getting Stronger

While Jim *had* started counseling with me, he didn't go much anymore. Early on, Polla, our counselor, had asked us to go through a role play where we took the positions we would take when we had an "episode." She asked Jim to stand over me as he might when he was mad at me and ready to hurt me. He refused. It was too much. He tried seeing her alone. But again, he felt like he revealed too much about his past and was ashamed to see her again.

He was content, however, to let me go. He felt like I was the one with the problem, and if it meant I left him alone about going, even better.

My sessions with Polla at some point ceased to be about making my marriage work, and more about making me stronger so I could put it behind me.

I continued with my lists. Sometimes my lists were directed at others. I prepared for my meetings with Polla with lists of questions I wanted to ask her, problems I wanted to address.

Polla,

-How do I sit him down and tell him I've decided I will not live this way any longer?

-How do I actually stick to it? Group help?

-There has been a continuing problem. Family members feel I do more for outsiders and treat outsiders nicer than family. Mom and Jim have both expressed this in the past.

Do I do this, and why?

Plan of Action

- 1) *Tell him calmly when he is sober.*
- 2) *Tell his business partner – discuss treatment*
- 3) *Consult an attorney*
- 4) *Line up a place to go*
- 5) *Attend church – UMT*
- 6) *Immerse myself in Pampered Chef*

Chapter Fifteen: Foolish Games

We argued about money and the business again one morning. I'd taken the day off work to help out with a crisis at the business. The paperwork had to be straightened out for the taxes. I was aggravated because I'd started a corporate credit card to help deal with some of the expenses until the business became more self-sufficient, and I'd had to get a cash advance on the credit card to pay the bank because a few of his trucks' payments were severely late. If I hadn't gotten those advances, the trucks would've been repossessed.

Now it looked as though the only option to pay the taxes this year was going to be to get another cash advance. I'd read articles about entrepreneurs operating their new businesses on business loans or cash advances, and they were successful. This sounded crazy to me, risky, but I didn't know what else to do. Jim was pissed off that I couldn't fix everything with the finances, but there was no money. And I was pissed off that while I was trying to figure all this out, he was laying in bed until 10:00 in the morning with three employees sitting at his shop unsupervised, and wasting a lot of time just waiting around for work to do.

When he started yelling, from the bed, about my incompetence, something inside me just snapped. I flipped through the yellow pages, found the name of a divorce attorney, and dialed.

“Who are you calling?” he yelled.

A woman on the other end answered. I told her that I would like to make an appointment, that I was considering divorce and needed to speak to an attorney.

The phone went dead.

“You stupid bitch! What’s your problem?” he bellowed, standing with the phone cord dangling in his hand. He took one long stride toward me, grabbed the base of my ponytail and pulled me across the floor. My knees dragged against the rough carpet. “This is how you want to fix everything, isn’t it? You always want to just quit! You want me to shut down the business. You want to quit our marriage.” His rage had subsided and the desperation was beginning to come through in his voice. “Well guess what, I’m not going to let you! You can’t quit on me. You’re my cheerleader and I need you to get through this.”

He went back to the bathroom, overcome with emotion, and I saw my opportunity to escape. I grabbed my purse, keys, and cell phone and rushed out the door. I headed straight for the shop, where my old car was sitting for sale. I asked Melissa, Jim’s secretary, to help me get it to a friend’s house. I wasn’t sure what Jim might do to it if I left it at the shop. She followed me to my friend’s house where we dropped off the car, and I took Melissa back to the shop.

I left in a hurry so I wouldn’t be there when Jim got to work, and I began looking for a remote place where I could make some phone calls. I pulled into a parking lot and drove behind a building. I first called my friend to let her know I was leaving the car there for a few days. I’d already talked to her about it before, because I’d felt the tension rising the last few weeks and had known it was only a matter of time before I would have to go into ‘protect’ mode again.

Next, I called the Women’s Resource Center. I asked the woman who answered the phone about finding an attorney.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “we don’t have attorneys here.”

“Well, can you recommend a good one that handles things like this?”

“I’m sorry, we’re not allowed to recommend specific attorneys.”

“Well, you’re the Women’s Resource Center, what *can* you do for me?”

“Do you need a place to stay, ma’am? Or counseling? We have that.”

“No. I have a home.” I couldn’t begin to imagine my mother’s horror if I went to a shelter. “And I have a counselor. What I really need is a lawyer to help me figure out how to get a divorce.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. There’s nothing I can do for you there.”

I dialed the attorney I had called earlier, embarrassed that the secretary might recognize my voice, and I made an appointment. It wouldn’t be for a week, but it was a start.

With my Topaz tucked safely away at my friend’s house and a bag of clothes stuffed in the back of my Trans Am just in case, I headed home that night. It was my house, too, and I’d be damned if I’d let him run me out of it. I’d forego the king-sized bed we shared and move into the room with the twin bed that I had bought for his niece to sleep in when she’d come to visit.

Every night Jim came to my new bedroom, begging me to come back to bed and be his wife. When I refused, he just curled up in the little twin with me, caressing my body and apologizing. I didn’t want to give into him when he began to undress me, but I knew it was easier and safer than to try to fight him. Each night I would submit unwillingly to this charade and hoped that he would return to his own bed and leave me alone.

Why didn't I just stay with someone else? I'd tried that before and didn't want to continue to bother others with my problems. I'd also tried going to a friend's to hang out for an evening, only to return to find some of my clothes scattered in the yard, and my expensive Party Lite three-wick candles and figurines smashed out in the street in front of our house, an announcement to the neighbors that I'd been bad again. It was easier to stay in the house. At least that way I knew what he was up to and didn't have to suffer the embarrassment that always ensued if I didn't do what he wanted.

When considering the fear that abused women face every day of oncoming violence, and the lies they tell to protect their husbands and the appearance of their own sanity, one might ask "why?" So what if people don't believe them. If they are in that much danger, they should just leave and forget about what everybody thinks about them. If only it were that easy. The most dangerous time for any woman who has ever been abused is when she tells her husband that she wants to leave, or attempts to do so. In addition to the significant risk taken in flight, there are complexities abounding. Even assuming she could find a way to safely leave the home with her belongings on a day when he is not present, she cannot simply move to an apartment across town and be rid of this man. He did not want her to leave, and will do anything in his power to bring her back or see that she does not live without him. This brings up two arguments Dworkin makes in "Violence Against Women." First, the issue of stalking comes into play. Any time a woman leaves an abusive partner, she can count on him stalking her. As Dworkin says, the Women's Movement has brought about some progress in regards to making stalking illegal, but punishment is too lenient, usually resulting in simple restraining

orders demanding the accused stay more than 500 feet from the accuser. As restraining orders are almost never effective, Dworkin states “The crime needs to be a felony, not a misdemeanor.” A man who has already beaten his wife, is certainly not going to be scared off by a possible misdemeanor charge, especially if his intent is to commit a felony; and this knowledge is what keeps the woman within her captor’s grasp. If the stalking itself were considered a felony and the criminal received just punishment, then the intended violence may be prevented and women would feel more confident in reporting such crimes, allowing women like Fran to maintain her identity and lead a more normal life.

Think back to the onlooker’s statement, “They should just leave.” Why is this our society’s automatic response? Why do we feel a woman who has been made a prisoner in her own home and beaten within an inch of her life should be forced to leave to be homeless or struggle to maintain a new living? I find it interesting that the responsibility for change always seems to be placed on the victim rather than the abuser. More emphasis seems to be placed on setting up shelters for women to escape, rather than setting up detention centers to punish the criminals. This is the problem Fran faced in Black and Blue, causing her to have to enter a protection program and change her entire life, right down to her name and hair color. The burden of righting the situation all too often seems to be placed upon the woman, and the man who is doing the abusing is never focused on unless it becomes a murder trial. Even then, many people tend to think she must have been suicidal.

To Leave or Not to Leave? That is the Question.

May 4, 1999

I am going to see a lawyer today. What do I expect from this consultation? Am I simply getting advice to help me protect myself or am I actually going to file for a divorce? A divorce will cost \$1,000. There are many things I can do for \$1,000. But how much more will staying in this situation cost me? How can I stay in this situation with the circumstances as they are? If I actually decide I want to go along with what he wants, I'll be fine. But if I don't, I have to pay the price, because as soon as I cross him, there is hell to pay.

Would I rather pay \$1,000 now, or pay hell the rest of my life? I think I had better suck it up and pay now.

Every day I stay with him means another day of being afraid. Another day of taking physical and emotional abuse. Another day of having my house purposefully destroyed, being forced to have sex, picking up after him, worrying as I sleep in the other room when he might crack again as the realization of the sad state of our life slowly creeps in.

If he's gone, no more violence. No more beer bottles. No more stinky snuff and spit bottles. No more greasy clothes tossed on every surface of the living room, bathroom, and bedroom. No more name-calling. No more trying to make happy a person who has unreasonable expectations. No more worrying about criminal situations he gets himself involved in, either directly or by knowledge of his friends' actions. No more spending money on frivolous toys: boats, motorcycles, dune-buggies, etc. No more disagreeing about how money should be spent and struggling and giving in to his stronger convictions. No more fear of lawsuits because of a business I hate. No more headache from that business. No more being stuck to the phones for that business.

FREEDOM! I can go wherever I want, whenever! I can actually enjoy my weekends and my vacation. Sure, I'll still work through these times and have commitments; but they are my commitments, not those I am keeping for someone else. Sure, there will still be messes in the house, but they'll be my messes so I can actually handle them without being overwhelmed by my mess plus that of an inconsiderate slob.

I can finally take control of my life again and go back to the time when I saved money and made decisions more wisely. I feel like I have been the victim of a child whose purpose is to get his parents to spend more on his desires than they can afford, without consideration for where the money comes from.

But he is an adult, and I trusted him. Not anymore. He does not make these decisions wisely. Maybe they seem wise to him, but I don't agree with them and I end up feeling swindled, taken advantage of, and basically unsatisfied.

What about the undeniable fact that I will be without a husband? What about all those husbandly chores and things women go to their husbands to for help? This is not the case in my situation. My husband spends all his time with the business, working on a dune buggy, boating and/or drinking, with little or no time left for household chores. I go to my father and to his father for help, or my neighbor, or I have to call someone in. Don't get me wrong. He does do a few things around the house, but it's basically the creative, fun projects that he decides to do that are a luxury. For instance, he called in a favor from a friend once and borrowed a Bobcat to dig a hole for a pond. He spent the entire weekend working on digging this huge pond in our backyard, and we even had to

bring the wrecker out there to save the Bobcat when it starting sinking and almost rolled down into the hole. Our neighbors have done nothing but complain about the big hole in the yard, and it never stays full of water.

I really enjoy and appreciate these things when they are successful, but I really don't get much help with the daily necessities. I am certain there are people out there that recognize the necessity of the foundation before worrying about the frivolities. So my point about missing the husbandly things: "You can't miss what you don't have."

What about the love? I can't deny that I love him and will miss the love he often shows, but I have come to see it as only a charm that keeps me coming back and gets me to do what he wants. It is a charm that lures me to self-destruction. Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly.

Will he ever change? I don't know. I have no way of ever knowing. I have been sitting back and waiting and have seen some improvement in areas, but mainly digressions in our "partnership." If things continue as they are, I see no change.

If I want change in my life, I must make it.

I cannot change him or how he conducts his life. If he is satisfied with his behaviors, then he need not change, but I need not stay and put up with it.

Be Careful What You Wish For

After going to the attorney that day, I stopped by Jim's shop. There were some things on my computer I needed to print, and I wanted to give him an update. I told him that I had been to see an attorney.

"Oh, really?" he smirked, "And what did he say?"

"He said I had two options, I could either leave the house myself, which I don't plan to do since I pay the house payment, or since you refuse to leave I could file for a restraining order and have you removed."

His eyebrows raised, "Really?" he drawled, matter-of-factly.

"Yes, really."

"So, what are you going to do?"

"It all depends on you. If you keep refusing to leave, I'll have to file a restraining order."

"What about the divorce?"

"I don't know yet. What I'd really like is for you to get some help. I have a friend who said she and her husband separated while he worked out his alcohol problem, and when they got back together everything was much better. I'm willing to just go for a separation right now, but I can't live with you this way."

"If I move out, that's it. I'm never coming back to that house."

"It doesn't have to be that way, Jim."

"Yes, Krista, it does. Be careful what you wish for."

That evening Jim came home, and I tried to stay out of his way as I had been doing for the last week. After a week with no violence, though, and plenty of

apologizing and Jim trying to win back my favor, I was beginning to miss the playful interaction we once had, and I was starting to feel like *I* was the grouch who wouldn't just be nice to her husband.

I had gone to the attorney because I had set up the appointment in the heat of a scared moment, but my heart wasn't in it today. From what the attorney had told me, I wasn't even sure if I could get a restraining order. No one had ever seen Jim do anything to me, he had never hurt me badly enough that I needed to see a doctor, and I had never taken a picture of any of the minor injuries I had sustained. But I wanted to send Jim a message that this could not continue.

Jim wanted to send me a different message that night.

He spent an unusual amount of time in the bathroom, and then he left as quietly and quickly as he had come in. I was confused. I went to the bathroom and it reeked of cologne and there was baby powder all over the floor where he had powdered his feet. Something was up. He must be going out with his buddy who has been hanging out at the shop a lot lately.

I went outside, but his truck was already gone. The window of my car was down. I walked over to it and noticed Jazzy was standing in the front passenger seat wagging her tail excitedly. Now I was very confused. I called Jim's cell phone.

"Yello," came his perky greeting.

"Jim, why is Jazzy in my car with the window rolled down?"

"What? I don't know. Maybe she wants to go for a ride," he answered mysteriously.

A smile began to creep up on my face. He was always playing games, and I guess now he was playing one to try to get me to come out and hang out with him and his friend. I had been a big grouch lately, and quite frankly, I was getting tired of just moping around and having no joy in my life.

All right, I'd play along. I deserved some fun.

I brought Jazzy in the house, put on a cute little dress, and headed back out the door. I wasn't sure just where he was headed, but as he obviously wanted me to follow, I was sure they would meet up at the shop.

I drove by the shop, but decided to go down the street a little distance and park in a lot and wait. After sitting in the lot about 10 minutes, I thought, *this is silly*. I pulled out of the lot and headed back toward the shop. As I swung into the shop parking lot, Jim and a striking woman with long, blond hair came out of the shop and jumped into his truck, very quickly.

This was not the surprise I was expecting. I jumped out of the car, but Jim ignored me, squealing his tires as he peeled out of the parking lot. Something clicked in me, I began to feel, think, and react irrationally. I didn't know what was happening to me, but I couldn't seem to stop it. I tried to follow, but lost him very quickly. I called his cell phone, but he would not answer. I called his father and asked if he knew what was going on. He said he didn't. I called his friend. His secretary. No one knew where Jim was, and if they did, they weren't willing to tell me.

That afternoon I'd asked an attorney how to get my husband out of my house. That night, I just wanted him home. I hadn't wanted rid of him for good, I just wanted him to get help so he wouldn't hurt me anymore. Why did I let myself act so crazy? I

didn't want to play his game, but he had a way of drawing me into it that I couldn't predict, couldn't understand, couldn't deny.

Jim stood by his promise. He did not sleep another night in that house, no matter how much I begged.

May 7, 1999

Jim,

I know you don't want to talk to me right now, and that's okay. I understand that. I know you don't want to look at me and risk showing any emotion. I also know you still have emotion. You are much too passionate a man not to.

There are a few things I really want you to know.

First and foremost: I Love You. That's it. That's what it all boils down to. I realized last night when I felt I could lose you just how much keeping you means to me. Through all this, I haven't seen our separating as being an end. I have seen it as a time to grow stronger in ourselves, to get rid of some of the hustle and bustle that we deal with together every day so we could just work on us when are together.

I know there are a lot of things we like to do individually that we don't like together. But there are things we like together, too, like working in our yard, traveling, going to the races, loving, dreaming of what we'll make of our home.

I've been thinking about what you have said about me changing. You're right. I'm not a ski bunny anymore. I am around different people and behave differently, but I'm still me. I was busy when we first met, too, with schoolwork and plays. I am definitely more stressed now, as are you.

But you know what? I would be pretty stressed if you were at my job commenting on things, too. Speedy Beaver is your gig. You are the one who has built the company. I feel I can be a benefit to you in the summer when I don't have school. When I have that stress and start feeling the stress of the business, too, I get overwhelmed and start releasing the stress in little snaps and bites that are not the best way to communicate.

I would love to be there for you to come home and unload on, then tell you that everything will be okay and give you encouragement, but we've got to do it safely away from the business. What I mean is, sometimes I've got to know I'm listening just for the sake of listening and giving encouragement. When I feel I'm asked to "fix it," I immediately go into problem/solution mode and I end up stepping on toes because I knock down your solutions. Then I get frustrated because you don't like my ideas and I eventually just quit offering either solutions or encouragement, only frustrations, which is where I have been lately.

I want to be your cheerleader, but in order to do that I have got to know that I am not going to have to run the ball, too. Make sense? That's not all. I need cheer lessons. I was a majorette. They don't make noise and cheer, they just perform the routine with a smile. It's hard to keep that smile when the team keeps coming on the field to run me over.

Speaking of cheer lessons. I've talked to a friend lately who made some sense. He said that professional counseling often comes from a pro "whatever feels right" standpoint, but that there are counseling organizations that are strictly pro-marriage and keeping the family together at all costs. They're not pro-separation, pro-divorce, or anything except keeping the marriage together.

I thought separation could help, but I got the message last night loud and clear that you are driven totally away by it. I don't want that. I can't handle the idea of you going to someone else. It still confuses and hurts me greatly, but I feel we can talk about what happened and work to make sure it never does again. I can forgive.

First, both you and I make empty threats we don't usually mean. I have discovered that I deal with conflict with you this way a lot. It makes it way too hard for us to know when the other is serious and impossible to know when we've been pushed to the edge. I guess we both came through on some threats this time, and I don't like it. I want to stop. I want to talk. Even if it takes silly little talking exercises where we just listen for 10 minutes and repeat what we heard. If we just use these little strategies, I think we will understand each other a lot more.

It's not easy, though. We've created a lot of hurt and we've got to go back and help each other heal.

There are so many more things I want to say, and I really want the chance to say them to you when you're ready. I'll be waiting. I love you.

Your Wife.

P.S. You would have stayed just one day earlier. Please don't let one day of my stubbornness make the difference in our entire lives. I love you.

Expectations

I called Polla and set up an appointment. She tried to help me straighten out my feelings, because I was very confused. She advised me to list about my relationship what I would not be willing to do or accept, what I expected, and what I would do.

I will not:

- live with an abusive person- emotional/physical/sexual
- live with an active alcoholic/illegal drug user
- spend my evenings in a garage
- be harassed about my absence at a business that is not my responsibility
- continue to take sole responsibility for household duties & bills

I expect:

- help with household duties and bills
- to be respected and loved – and treated that way
- to get in return the time I give

I will:

- share household responsibilities with a willing partner
- contribute equally to household bills
- do my best to be respectful to a partner who in return respects me.
- stay free of the influence of alcohol other than the occasional social drink
- remain free of the influence of drugs entirely

Betrayal

Jim told me that I had betrayed our relationship by turning to other people. Not only the attorney, but my sessions with Polla came under question. I quit going to Polla that summer, and instead turned to writing.

June 14, 1999, 8:00 p.m.

I am trying so hard to give you your space, but I've never wanted anything so badly as I want you. Abigail has been wailing this pitiful cry all day for her last kitten that I gave away this morning, and I can't help but think how this matches the atmosphere in this house.

Jazzy went outside today, and as she made her way to Mrs. Newland's fence I couldn't help but think, "Poor Jazzy, you've been gone too long and there is no cookie for you." Before I had completed this thought, however, Mrs. Newland appeared in a hurry to get to the fence with Jazzy's cookie, just as she had every day for the last couple of years until Jazmyn went away with you. The lady said, "She comes to the fence every morning to get her cookie," as if the past month had never occurred. Oh, if only this were true.

Perhaps I will start writing to you like this often in place of getting to talk to you. I must communicate with you somehow. I pick up the phone to tell you some little something or just because I want to hear your voice, but knowing the cold shield I will encounter causes me to put the phone back in its place. My shield is down. I've been in a struggle for so long over whether to keep that shield up to protect myself or to let it down. I realize that keeping it down is the only way I can be with you.

June 15, 1999, 7:15 p.m.

I miss you again. I never stopped, I just sometimes trick myself into thinking that none of this ever happened and you'll be coming home soon. You'll walk in the door and say, "Hey Sweetie," with that tired look on your face. I smudged the "y" because Jazmyn heard me say softly, "Hey Sweetie," and she rooted her head between my hand and the paper.

June 18, 1999, 4:20 a.m.

I WANT YOU HOME! And I think you want to be home. What is pride if it keeps you from happiness? Pride is honorable and just and admirable. It's time we started taking pride in what we have. All my life I've been taught to watch out for me. I never realized that two words that are so similar (me & we) could live in such conflict. Perhaps I just never saw how truly alike the two are. All my teachings have only shown me the differences. It takes only a different perspective to see that an "m" is merely an upside down "w," thus, "me" is really not that different from "we." You could argue the difference, but proving the similarity seems much more positive and productive to me. I no longer wish to waste my time trying to find differences. I officially proclaim them to be one and the same in my eyes. All that is left is for the other part of we to agree with me/we.

Without “we” there is no “me.” You could preach about the importance of finding yourself and becoming strong on your own. I’ve been doing that for too long. I’m finished. I know who I am. I know what I want out of life. We. I had to come to the realization that your dreams are not just your dreams that you were trying to make me follow. They are my dreams, too. You were just trying to be my motivator and I was refusing to let you do it.

June 22, 1999, 1:55 a.m.

I absolutely cannot wait to get out of this town! You can be such a royal ass to me! “I gotta go, I’m busy.” This is the kind of response I get all the time, yet you act like I’m some kind of an unthoughtful bitch for getting the hell out of this place where I’m obviously not wanted! You were an absolute ass to me all day Saturday when all I did was try to help you. Do you expect me to just hang out and wait for whatever little scraps of attention you wish to give? I’m better than that and deserve better. You need a dog of a woman! It’s not that I mind doing things for you and even being subservient, but I at least expect to be treated like a human and not an object upon which you take out all of life’s frustrations. Share frustrations? Yes. Take out on? No. There’s a difference. And there are plenty of frustrations in life, and it’s about time you grew up and realized you’re not the only one with them. Yeah, you’ve had some rough times and running your business is rough, but get over it already!

I just don’t get you sometimes. You’ll be such a wimp with a 20 year old driver and let him run over you and talk to you like shit, but you don’t like the way your wife handles a phone call when she’s working for you when you have no one else, and you go off like a madman telling her what a stupid bitch she is and how she’s trying to ruin your business. How about being a man and dealing with your real problems rather than just taking them out on someone weaker whom you know won’t fight back. I’ve always thought that was pretty cowardly, thus my loss of respect for you. Every time I start to see you getting things back in perspective, I gain the respect again, then the manliness peaks and the cowardly acts kill the respect yet again. Don’t get me wrong, we all have our weak moments, it’s just that when one tries so desperately to prove power by pushing down the weak, true cowardice is unveiled.

You are a rock climber who can see the handholds and footholds. You don’t need to pile up people to climb on. Besides, they can help you better standing than beaten down.

Jim and I went back and forth *a lot* during the summer of 1999. I was torn. I wanted my husband to work on his alcoholism and issues from the past so we could repair our marriage. But the fear that we would behave in ways that were even more destructive to our marriage if we weren’t together made it difficult for me to stay away from him.

I took a job waiting tables until the wee hours of the morning at a nightclub in town to help ease my loneliness and my financial woes. It helped keep my mind off of Jim and made me so tired that I slept better when I finally got to go home.

Jim found out where I worked and started showing up at my job. My tips went down, as I had to spend more time pacifying Jim, and because he was always watching to make sure I didn't spend too much time at any one table, glaring at customers he felt paid too much attention to me. What little I did make was drained by his beer tab. Not long after Jim started showing up, and after much prodding on his part, I finally decided the job had become useless to me, as it no longer provided an escape from him nor a financial benefit. I quit.

Even though Jim was living in an apartment in Beckley and I still lived in Shady Spring, we started spending lots more time together. This time was usually on Jim's terms. On a rare occasion he would show up at the house, staying only long enough to satisfy a need, and on others he would call me up and ask me to come over. If I showed up at his apartment on my own, there was no guarantee that he would see me. And on one particular weekend, he was in no mood to see me.

I stopped by his shop on a Saturday to hang out. He was tinkering on a car and didn't want to see me. He was very cold to me. I didn't stay very long before I gave up and went home. The next day was of no use either. I came by his apartment and he wasn't there. I called his cell phone and his employee answered, telling me they were at a picnic and that Jim had made a beer run.

This went through me. He only wanted to see me when he wanted something, namely sex, but when he was doing something fun and social I couldn't have any part in

it, and he even went so far as to have an employee answer his cell phone to lie to me. But when I tried to do something to occupy my time, like get an extra job, he stalked me and made it impossible for me to keep my job. I felt so trapped. He literally made it difficult to live *with* him, and to live *without* him.

I gave up and went home.

Later that night, at 1AM, I sat straight up in bed in a cold sweat.

Something was wrong. I didn't know what, but I knew something was wrong. I felt like something had possessed my body and I was being led to action. I threw on some clothes and jumped in my car. While speeding toward Beckley, I noticed flashing blue lights in my rear view mirror. The officer pulled me over and informed me that I was driving 10MPH over the speed limit. I was very apologetic, and after the officer figured out that I wasn't speeding around drunk at 1AM, he let me go with a warning.

I drove to the shop. I wasn't sure exactly what I was going to do there, but I had a feeling I would know when I got there. There was a car there I didn't recognize. It was unlocked. I went through it, frantically looking for something, anything, I was just looking. Finding no satisfaction at the shop, I headed for Jim's apartment. As I eased down the hill by his apartment, I saw a red Sunbird in the driveway behind his truck.

Good. He's home, but it looks like somebody's with him, probably JD, one of his drivers.

I got out of my car and walked up the driveway. A quick glance through the window of the red car found feminine decorations hanging from the rearview mirror. My hands began to tremble and my head spun. I slipped my key for his apartment out of my pocket as I walked quietly up the steps and approached the door. My hand was shaking so uncontrollably that I had trouble getting the key in the hole, making enough noise in

the process to announce my arrival. Finally, I got the key in the door, turned it, and pushed the door open just as Jim caught it.

He stood in front of me in his boxers, sweating, with that cocky smile on his face. I didn't say anything at first, just stared in horror.

“Yes, Krista, this is exactly what you think.”

“Where is she? Where is she?” I began to yell as I forced my way into the apartment and tried to get to the closed bedroom door.

“Come on, Krista, don't make this any worse than it is,” Jim said calmly as he picked me up and tried to carry me through the door, literally kicking and screaming. I spread my arms and legs out fighting to stay in the apartment, tearing off an acrylic fingernail on the door facing in the process. I was crazed. I was possessed. I felt like everything he had ever said about me was true at that moment and I didn't know how to stop it. I didn't know how to control my rage, but he did.

“If you don't stop it and go on, I'm going to throw you off this porch,” he scolded.

I looked down from the second floor garage apartment, thought back to the time when he had thrown me backwards off our porch just a few feet from the ground, and decided to put my rage in check long enough to at least walk down the steps. Once safely on the ground, I did the only thing my unstable brain knew to do at the time. I looked in her car, pulled out her purse, contemplated throwing it in the weeds, thought better of it, and then took it back to my car.

I grabbed a pen and paper from my passenger seat and commenced to take down all the information on her driver's license. Her name, address, birthdate. My god! She was just 19! She could have been one of my students just a few short years ago.

He walked down to my car. I rolled down the window and said, "Here, she might need this," as I handed him the purse with its contents back in place, "and tell her she really shouldn't leave her purse sitting in an unlocked car in Beckley."

"Thanks, I'll mention that," he responded, shaking his head with an embarrassed half smile as he pondered the situation. "Krista, you've really got to go."

"Not a problem, I'll go when she goes."

"She's not going anywhere as long as you're here."

"Then I'm not going anywhere."

"Krista, believe me, she really wants to leave."

"Then why doesn't she?"

"Because she's afraid of my crazed wife sitting down here in the driveway."

"OK then, fine, I'll drive down the road and give her enough time to get out before I come back."

"Great."

He went back up the steps and I made a trip around the block. On my way back down the hill, I passed the little red Sunbird coming up. I put my window down and waved as she sped by me.

I stayed that night with Jim. He cried and apologized. I was so afraid that something like that would happen again, I agreed to move into his apartment and put the house up for sale.

Chapter Sixteen: The Police

The school year started and at least I had a normal working schedule again. I'd grown to hate the summers. The summers left me at his will without the escape provided by work. As long as I had to go to work, I didn't need to justify my whereabouts and I didn't risk putting myself in compromising situations, at least for eight hours of the day. The nights were still sketchy.

One night after I moved into his little apartment, Jim became angry with me over a man I'd gone out with while we were separated, after I'd discovered Jim was dating. After interrogating me for a good hour and receiving no satisfactory answers to his questions, Jim decided I needed to leave. Right then.

I was confused, but happy that he was willing to let me leave rather than subject me to a more unpleasant punishment. "No problem," I said, "just let me grab my lesson plans and I'll be out of your way."

"No."

"What?" I asked, even more confused now.

"Leave, but you cannot take anything with you."

"But Jim, I have to have my lesson plans. And besides, I'm being observed tomorrow. My principal reviews my lesson plans as part of his observation."

"That's not my problem. Get out now and leave everything here."

I pleaded with him until his anger became such that I determined I better just be happy he was letting me leave. I left and began to drive around town, trying to think about a solution to my problem. I *had* to have those lesson plans for tomorrow. The

principal would want to see them, and I certainly couldn't explain to him why I didn't have them. That would be just too humiliating.

As I drove around I noticed two police cars parked at a convenience store. Suddenly I felt bold. I walked up to one of the officers.

"Excuse me," I began, "I was wondering if you could help me. I have some belongings in my husband's apartment that I really need, but he will not let me get them. One of the items is my lesson plan book and I need it for school tomorrow."

"Why won't he let you get your things?"

"He's upset with me and told me to leave, but to leave my things," I admitted.

"If you're married you have every right to enter the home."

"Well, it's his apartment. We've been separated and I've just been staying at the apartment recently. It's not that I want to stay there, I have a home I can go to, I just want to get my things. I was wondering if maybe you guys could just go with me so he'll let me get my things."

"Well, ma'am, we can't really get involved unless some crime has been committed. Has he hurt you?"

"No, he hasn't hurt me. Not tonight I mean. He's done things in the past, but tonight he just told me to leave and to leave my things."

"Are you afraid he'll hurt you?"

"I don't guess so. He just won't let me get my lesson plans, and I really need them."

About that time my cell phone rang. It was Jim.

"What are you doing?" he asked, as if he were just calling me up to chat.

“I’m standing here talking to the police.”

“What? What are you doing that for?” He sounded surprised, and just a little nervous.

“Because Jim, I need my lesson plans and you won’t let me have them.” I announced defiantly. “Why are you doing this?”

“Oh, come on, I was just messin’ with you. Come on back.”

“Are you going to let me have my things?”

“Quit being silly,” he chided, “just come on back over here.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Everything was going to be fine and I wouldn’t have to involve the police. The realization that I was willing to involve them was evidently enough to convince him to cooperate.

I smiled at the officer. “Thanks, but he just called and said I could come get my things.”

“Oh, really? What changed his mind?”

“I guess just knowing that I had talked to you guys. Thanks so much, everything is fine now.”

The officer didn’t look convinced as he dug into his trunk and pulled out a large manila envelope. He handed it over to me. It read: Domestic Violence Packet.

I smiled and shoved it into my own trunk before I drove away.

Back at Jim’s apartment I knocked cautiously. He didn’t answer, but when I pushed the door open I saw that he was sitting in the chair right by the door and was obviously ignoring my knock.

“Sit down,” he said without taking his eyes off the TV.

“I just want to get my things, really, I don’t want to stay.”

“Sit down,” he repeated more forcefully.

I did.

“Why were you talking to the police?” he demanded.

“I didn’t know what else to do, Jim.”

I didn’t see the half-full can of beer flying through the air before it hit the side of my head. And I barely had time to recover from the shock of the blow before Jim pounced on me, taking me over the arm of the couch and to the ground, pinning my shoulders down.

“If you ever talk to the police I again, bitch, I will kill you,” he spat, and poured the rest of the contents of the can over my head. “Do you understand me?”

Shaking and speechless, I somehow managed to nod my head.

“Do you understand me?” he bellowed again.

“Y-yes, I understand. I won’t ever talk to the police again. I’m sorry.”

“Just shut up and clean up this mess you made.”

I vowed never to speak to the police again. The only thing it had gotten me so far was in more trouble.

“Hysteria inevitably sets in after a beating. This hysteria—the shaking and crying and mumbling—is not accepted by anyone, so there has never been anyone to call” (Martin 424), especially not the justice system. Del Martin in “A Letter From a Battered Wife,” expresses the frustration of women in abusive situations who try to seek help but are brushed off as simply “hysterical women” who will come to their senses with

time. Martin gives accounts of at least seven occasions when she sought outside help from clergyman, doctors, a friend, a professional family guidance agency, and the police. Martin writes her account while still in the abusive relationship. She has learned from her experiences with outside “help” that she must depend on herself and has come up with a plan for escape that relies only upon her own self-sufficiency.

Ann Jones hears her frustration and asks, “How can we help women get free of this violence?” (430) Her claim is that we will not get anywhere with the fight against domestic violence until the men are held accountable for their violence. She recounts horror stories of men such as Burnadette Barnes’s husband who “shot her in the head [and] served three months in prison.” The court system would not protect her, and when she took her protection into her own hands and hired a man to kill her husband she was sentenced to prison for life (430). Not only does the court refuse to protect women from abuse, but it also punishes them when they seek to protect themselves.

But maybe this punishment is a concept that sacrificial women will have to endure to prove to the men of the justice system that women will stand up for themselves if men continue to abuse them and refuse to protect them. While upset by the consequences to be endured, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz would probably support this idea that women must be willing to set an example if we are ever going to emerge as a group that will no longer accept physical submission to men (476-7). In “Women, Violence, and Resistance,” her call to women to “consider violence” as an option when encountered with violence is a concept that women such as Del Martin have probably not considered effective, or if they have, have quickly pushed it aside as a masculine response.

Chapter Seventeen: Doors Close, Doors Open

The next few months were a blur of trying to save both a dying marriage and business. I found a couple who wanted to buy our house. They didn't have the money yet, so we agreed to let them move in and rent-to-buy until they could get a down payment. We also found a house closer to the Beckley area for us to buy. The house was way out of our budget, but it was meant to also serve as a place from which Jim could operate his business. This would allow him to move out of the expensive garage he was renting and he could apply that money to the mortgage payment. The bank said we could do it as long as everything checked out, so we got the owner of the home to let us move in and rent it until the loan went through.

There were a lot of mixed feelings that fall and winter as the home should have been a symbol of new beginnings for us. At least that was the plan. But it became increasingly clear to me that the business was not going to survive and that our ability to pay for the house was going to be significantly hindered.

Just when I didn't think things could get any worse, Jim came to me with a timid look on his face one day.

"Come here, baby, I have to talk to you about something."

Oh, no, I thought, *what has he done now?* He had that guilty little-kid look on his face like that time he told me he'd made a prank call to list a bogus car in *The Trader* with a "friend's" phone number, and was being pursued by the victim who was threatening to press charges. Or the time when he told me he'd helped another friend conceal stolen property.

Good grief, what could he possibly be bracing me for now?

“Your mom called, baby,” he said gently. “Your grandpa died...” and his voice trailed away as he searched my face for a reaction. I wish he were admitting guilt to one of his silly pranks, or even a crime.

Why was I surprised? How dare I tear up and display such grief. I had no right, no right whatsoever to show such emotion for a man I hadn't even bothered to visit in months, even though he was just an hour's drive away.

My grandfather had been sick for a while. Back in the early fall, he'd had some sort of episode and a stranger found him lying on the sidewalk in the streets of Montgomery. He was taken to the hospital and it was determined that he had pneumonia. Once admitted to the hospital, my grandfather deteriorated rapidly. Everyone said he just wasn't in his right mind anymore.

My grandfather was admitted into Beverly Health Care Center in September of 1999. I heard stories of the great-grandchildren, the grandchildren, and the children visiting him. Everyone, it seemed, except me. He seemed to remember the little ones the best. It was the adults he got confused, calling his wife his mother and his daughter his wife. He talked of his boyhood home as if it were still his own.

After Jim broke the news to me, we decided to take a walk in the woods and find a Christmas tree for our home. I needed to get away from the house and get out in the wilderness. I needed to perform this ritual with my husband. I needed to create my own family rituals and traditions, as the reality of death, mortality, and moving on crept into my being.

How I wished I had gone to see Grandpa. At least I thought I did. Or is that just what I feel I'm supposed to say? Maybe I'm lucky that I didn't see him, his deteriorating frame and mind. Either way, I couldn't change it. I could only reminisce over the comic memories and push aside the less pleasant ones.

Standing beside the coffin in the unfamiliar funeral home, with the sickeningly sweet smell of flowers filling still air, I looked at the body. I looked on the gray, pasty, odd sight of the skin in death. Images flashed through my head of a lively grandpa, knees bent bouncing up and down to a country tune on his old radio, singing in his cute little chanting way. Grandpa admiring the ladybug I held out to him in my hand, smiling just before he smashed it, sending me off in tears. Grandpa telling stories of when he was a little Indian girl, or claiming that he had a bone in his leg when he didn't want to play whatever game I had cooked up for us. Grandpa, the last time I saw him alive, angry at me, lecturing me because he thought I wasn't talking to my mother as much as he thought I should.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I realized a man had eased up to the coffin, looking on in a sad, somewhat calm, but almost scared way. The man was about 50, overweight, salt and pepper hair, heavy on the salt. The man was my father. Suddenly, my mind raced forward and I saw my father in my grandfather's place.

I broke down. It scared me. I didn't want to lose another man in my life. Both of my grandfathers were gone. My father was now the oldest living man in my family. And he was not even a grandfather. Here I was, married four years, working full time for as many, and I had been depriving my parents the privilege of being grandparents because of my own selfishness. Standing there by that coffin, looking upon my deceased

grandfather and my aging father, I decided to give my father a grandchild. It would make him happy to have a new life to enjoy, to play with, to entertain, to love. Where the door of life closed on my grandfather, I felt I must open another.

The next day, Jim and I talked about my experience the night before and decided that I would stop taking my birth control. We were going to give our parents grandchildren.

Chapter Eighteen: Always Have a Safe Plan of Escape

My dream of providing my parents with grandchildren went on for a couple of months, but thank God to no avail, for the dream was soon interrupted by the repeating nightmare in my life.

I came out of my funk as I felt beer streaming down the sides of my face as he emptied a can over my head.

I was infuriated, but said nothing. I simply took a deep breath, stood up, and walked to the bathroom. Bending my head over the sink trying to rinse the sticky, stinky, mess from my hair, I heard him saying something to me, but I didn't care.

The intensity of the voice increased. The volume rose. I heard the quick, angry footsteps coming down the hall, and my heart began to pound in the way it always did when I knew the storm was about to hit.

He came around the corner booming "ANSWER ME, BITCH!" as he grabbed the back of my shirt, ripping it, and threw me into the hallway against the wall. His hand quickly found its way to my throat and he lifted me easily to just above eye level so that he could see the panic in my eyes as I watched the hatred grow in his. The veins pulsed in the all-too-familiar red face as his eyes flashed darts at me and spit sprayed from his mouth.

"ANSWER ME, YOU STUPID BITCH!" he continued to scream.

I tried to say something, that I was sorry, anything, but the force of his hand around my throat cut off my air supply and thus my ability to speak. I could feel the blood pulse in my head and I began to feel light headed. I panicked and wondered if I had taken my last breath--perhaps hoping I had.

Somehow, I managed to finally squeak out “you’re hurting me,” to which he quickly replied, “Damn straight, bitch, that’s the point.” Then he released me and let me drop to the ground.

There would remain on that wall sticky beer trails running down from where my head had been driven into the wall, and perhaps where I had slid down as he released me. I would not remove them. They would remain for someone else to clean up. Not me. Not this time.

The next day, I would begin planning my escape from that prison. But I must do it ever so carefully, and be such a good little prisoner so as not to raise the suspicion of the iron fisted warden. I had learned from my years with him how to be sneaky and conniving. I would cover each detail and do whatever I had to do to come out of this alive. I meant business. And that was exactly how I treated this plan, as a business deal that must be handled seriously and precisely. I would draw from my acting skills and patience. Whatever it took, I would be his prisoner no longer.

I ditched family planning to plan my escape. On Saturday morning, I had to be up early to get to my graduate class by 8 a.m., which would meet on Friday evenings and Saturdays for the next several weeks. It was to be a saving grace as it kept me away from him for a few more hours, but I also knew that it meant that the hours I did spend with him would be that much more unbearable. I paid for any time I spent away from him. I was his possession, and he made sure I was always aware of that.

The class also gave me a safe place where I could begin planning my getaway. There would be no more listing the pros and cons of leaving him. The decision had been

made. The lists I began that day were of each item in the house that I would take when I left, categorized by room. The listing was a simple task that occupied my brain and calmed my nerves. It was also necessary that I take anything that might ever mean anything to me so as not to leave him any ammunition with which to hurt me or try to pull me back in.

Abigail, our sweet kitty, had to be taken to a safe place. He'd threatened her before to control me, and I couldn't leave that vulnerability uncovered. Every detail had to be considered. He had a knack for finding weaknesses, and he would use them. He had always seemed all knowing, all-powerful, but not this time. I was going to outwit him and thus out-power him. Buck, the five-month-old Weimaraner I had so wanted, must be placed carefully, too. That task would not prove to be so easy, and Jim knew it and would use it as a reason to bring me back.

Jazzy, dear sweet Jazzy: she'd have to stay. There was just no way around it. I loved her more than any pet I had ever had, but I couldn't risk taking her. You see, he also loved her more than anything, and his love was very much like that of the woman in the Bible who would rather see the child split in two than give it up. I couldn't do that to Jazzy. Plus, I knew it was a battle that was too big for me to tackle. A good tactician must choose her battles and know when to decline sending in her forces.

I made a list of all the people I would need to contact. I needed to call Penny to check about bringing Abby to her; Kim to feel out the possibility of having Buck stay with her and her husband for a few weeks; Ryder and U-Haul to determine who had the better price and get a truck reserved; and the people who were selling the little house to get an update. I told the estate people to only contact me at school or on my cell phone

now, and I would continue to tell Jim that it was still tied up in estate no matter what I discovered. I still hoped to move into that little home, but on my own, and I couldn't let him know if it became available. Most importantly, I must call my dear friend Jennie. Yes, Jennie. Talking to Jennie couldn't wait. I called her at about 10 a.m. that morning on the first break I had. It was the first time that morning that I had allowed myself to feel. I briefly relived the previous night's events as I stood in the little teacher's lounge telling her of my plan. She quickly reassured me that moving in with her would be no problem. Jennie was recently separated and waiting for her divorce to be final and lived by herself in a four-bedroom, two-bath home. She was happy to have someone with whom to share the mortgage and utilities, and I was happy to finally have someone who would actually share it and not expect me to just take on the full load.

I planned as much as I could that day, frantically writing all of my thoughts on paper. I wonder now if the instructors thought I was the most diligent note-taker, or suspected the distractions in my head and in my life. Sometime that afternoon, I called my mother. I didn't tell her about the plan right away, but what I did tell my mother and brother that afternoon was that if the snow melted off enough the next day for me to get my Trans Am out on the road, I wanted to bring it to them and borrow my brother's truck for a couple of weeks until we were out of the brutal February weather. My young brother had no problem sporting the little car, and I certainly didn't want a rear-wheel-drive sports car in this weather to ruin my escape plans; plus, I knew a truck would come in handy.

My family had to remain in the dark for now. I wouldn't reveal my plan to them until I had a date for leaving, and even then, only when that date was near. My family is a

family of worriers. To be quite honest, I had enough on my mind without worrying about them worrying about me.

That night, Jim tried to move some of the cars in the very back of the lot through the snow and mud, in the dark, up to the front so that they could be removed from the property. He required my help and needed someone to blame when things went awry. I was to serve as his verbal punching bag that night. I boiled, but never talked back and just took it as gracefully as I could, counting the days until my escape.

We'd talked about going to visit his parents that evening, but it was getting late and he didn't want to make the two-hour trip. I was hoping we'd go. I always wanted to be in the presence of other people. He was nicer then. I was safe then, at least for the time being. But that was not his plan. He no longer liked to stay with family members overnight. That meant he couldn't have his beer and take out his frustrations on me. Beer had become his best friend, and he didn't like to go where it wasn't welcome. We couldn't even eat in restaurants that didn't serve beer.

His mother called after we came back in to ask if we were coming to their house. Jim covered the receiver, told me to tell her I didn't want to go, then he handed me the phone. I disobeyed. I told her that Jim was tired and didn't feel like the drive. He wanted her to think it was me who wanted to stay home, but I wanted anything but that. We stayed home. He was angry, but didn't act on his anger much that night. He nursed his friend instead.

On Sunday, I made the trip back home to my parents', swapped out cars, and left my brother wondering why I was entrusting him with my super-fast, pretty little car.

Monday was Valentine's Day. The acting began in full force. I got home from work to find a few roses in a vase and a gushy sweet card on the table. This was going to be tougher than I thought. I hadn't gotten him anything and was determined that I wouldn't. Act, yes. Grovel, no. I did, however, treat him to a nice prime rib dinner at a restaurant at the Holiday Inn. It would be our last dinner out together before I would leave, and I enjoyed it as best I could.

Everything started taking on different meanings for me. Everything became something that would be our last, and while I continually had these thoughts, I had to keep them tucked away to mourn on my own. Mourn? Yes, mourn. Why would I mourn being away from this crazy, psychotic monster? It wasn't the loss of the crazy, psychotic monster that I mourned. Not at all. It was the loving individual caged deep inside that I mourned. I'd met him years ago, and I still caught a glimpse of him every now and then between the prison cell bars, but the glimpses were less frequent lately, as we were both imprisoned by this madman. I mourned that we could no longer be together and experience the love we once had. It was the hope that my lost love would one day return that kept me holding on for so long, trying my best to reach him and free him of his own cell, so that he would free me from mine. But the madman was taking over. He was more guarded and more careful, and it was more difficult to gain his trust. He knew my plan was to free the caring man within; to him, the sensitivity in that man made him vulnerable to the world, and more apt to fail. He was fighting for his life. I had finally come to the point where I had to give up on saving the man I loved to save myself.

He noticed that I hadn't gotten him a gift, but I played it off and claimed the dinner was my gift to him. He allowed it, but his guard was up and he watched me carefully for signs of disobedience. He saw it as my duty to provide him dinner regardless of the occasion. I was going to have to be more careful. I couldn't let my pride stand in the way this week. Whatever he wanted, whatever pleased him, I must do.

As the week progressed, I became more and more anxious and excited. It was difficult to contain my excitement when I was in his presence, but I did. Penny had agreed to take Abby for as long as I needed her to. Kim was more than willing to keep Buck, as she and her husband were considering getting a big dog, anyway, and this would be good practice. I had a 24-foot Ryder truck reserved with my credit card, but in Jennie's name. I covered every possible leak.

I resigned myself to staying with Jennie for a while and gave up on the house we'd been looking at, but I kept telling Jim there was no word on it yet. There really wasn't. I opened the new post office box and changed the address on the checking account I rarely used at the Educator's Credit Union, but I couldn't change anything on my account with the bank yet, because he might discover it.

Since Jim and I planned on moving at the end of the month anyway, I used this excuse for having Jennie over to help me pack up things that were in the basement. I hauled all of my books and anything else school-related to my classroom for short-term storage, under the guise that we would be moving soon. Jennie and I rounded up people from school who were willing to help with the move so it could be as quick and efficient as possible.

All of the details were coming together, but the one big detail was yet to be worked out. When. I knew why and how and where, but not when. That was the one big detail that kept hanging me up. Then it happened.

For a while, Jim had known he needed to take a driver safety class in order to remove points from his license. His license had already been suspended for a short time back in December for not paying a fine, and he was scared that he was about to have it suspended again for having too many points. As his new job involved driving a company vehicle, he couldn't afford a suspension. It was, of course, my responsibility to check on the class for him and make all of the arrangements. I sucked up my pride and made the call.

This time, my obedience worked to my advantage. The lady told me there were two courses being offered. A class would be offered right there in Beckley on Saturday of the following week, but then she mentioned one in Charleston the Saturday coming up.

I stared at the notepad on the desk as the one missing piece of my plan came together. I had a date. I told the lady to sign him up for the Charleston one. I asked her the hours: nine to four. Then I asked her for the unofficial hours: was there any possibility he may get out early? She said there was a possibility, but the class would definitely run into the afternoon.

I hadn't hoped for anything so expedient. This was perfect. And I was in control.

The excitement radiated through the big silly grin on my face as I told Jennie and my other friends about my scheduling finesse. They all knew the whole sordid story, or at least what I was willing to tell anyone at that point. As Jim would certainly be gone during my weekend escape, many of them now said they could definitely help me move.

Why all this hassle? Why didn't I just tell him I was leaving? It wasn't that simple. I couldn't just tell Jim that I was going to do something he didn't want me to do and get away with it without someone getting hurt. I would've had to involve the police. The one time I went to the police for help, they told me that they couldn't help me out in any way until I was hurt, and even then, they had to be able to prove that he did it. All it got me was beaten up and my life threatened when Jim discovered that I had spoken with them.

I fought to contain my nervous energy until Saturday morning. At some point late in the week, I let my mother know I was leaving Jim so that she wouldn't panic if Jim called looking for me. I didn't tell her any of the details about why I was leaving, I just gave her vague generalities. She was a bit upset that she, my brother, and my dad, would all be in Indianapolis at the time, but I was happy that they wouldn't be around. I wasn't sure what Jim would do when he found out I was gone.

Friday night, just one week after he nearly strangled me to death, Jim made love to me. The monster wasn't around, and so the sensitive man I loved lay in bed beside me. I wept, knowing that it was the last time we would be together in that way. He didn't understand why I was crying, since I showed no resistance. He had grown used to my crying during sex, though, because he had forced it on me so many times before. I suppose he was just happy that I was only crying and not making the task difficult for him. Even though I wept, I never wavered in my decision to leave. I took deep breaths to calm my nerves and bring on sleep, hurrying me to morning.

February 19, 2000

I got up that morning alive with energy. I waited anxiously for him to get ready and head out for the day. He was due to leave at about eight o'clock. I was to call Jennie on her cell phone after he had been gone about thirty minutes to ensure that he didn't come back to get anything that he may have forgotten. I had to wait until then to pack as well.

Everyone was meeting Jennie at the school about two miles away. I called Jennie shortly after 8:30 to let her know the coast was clear. I immediately began packing clothes into trash bags, as they would hold the most and take up the least room. I wanted to try to have the clothes handled before everyone got there. Everything else, other than the stored things in the basement, had to wait until Jim had left this morning, so there was a ton of packing to do in addition to moving. I put Abby in the pet carrier before everyone got there so she wouldn't disappear with all the commotion.

A caravan of people poured into my place at about 8:50. Shortly thereafter, Randy, a friend and colleague from school, showed up with the Ryder truck. I was inside working frantically when Randy started backing the truck down the driveway, so I didn't see him run over the bush on the other side of the gravel drive and get stuck in the mud. When I went outside, my shoulders dropped. For the first time all week, I wondered if this would work out. I tried not to panic as I told him to just keep running over the bush until he got past the muddy part where he could get traction and get back on the drive.

It worked. We were back in business. Whew! I had this horrible image of one of the other wrecker services coming to bail out Jim's crazy wife, and someone leaking it to

him in Charleston somehow, or simply not getting the job done until after he came home, but we made it.

Everyone was carrying things, packing dishes, loading vehicles. The riding mower wouldn't start, so Matt and Chad had to push it up from the shed out back and get it loaded into Jennie's truck. That was one of those items Jim just had to buy, and he had to have it brand new. It went on a credit card and was supposed to be paid off with a tax return, but he had long ago forged my signature on that return and spent the money elsewhere. If I was still paying for it on my credit card, I was determined to have the mower.

All was loaded and ready to go. The truck had lots of stuff, but it still wasn't full. Abby went with Nancy to travel to Jennie's, and Buck went with me so I could take him to a kennel temporarily. Jazzy sat looking confused in the half-empty house. The hardest thing I had to do that day was say goodbye to Jazzy.

When I'd first met Jazzy, I just wasn't a dog person. I liked my pets to be calm, dainty, clean, soothing. I'd had nowhere to keep a dog, as I'd lived in a small apartment; and as a college student living away from home at the time, it just wasn't practical. I did not want a dog. But that wasn't my decision to make. I didn't pick Jazmyn. She picked me.

When we went to "just look" at the Dalmatians advertised in the paper, the owner was releasing the pups from the barn for feeding time, and all the other puppies rushed past me on their way to the food bowl. All but one. That one small spotted pup ran straight to me and began licking the toes sticking out of my brown leather sandals. She

was the most adorable puppy I'd ever seen. I knew in an instant I was hers and she was mine.

Jazzy and I took potty walks every two hours around the clock and bonded closely in that tiny apartment, but I had no way of knowing just how important she would become in my life.

When I needed to, Jazzy would let me cry into her soft, comforting fur. She would lay in bed or on the couch with me when I was sick. She stayed up late into the night, keeping me company while I finished homework, and later, after I became a teacher, lesson plans.

When Jazzy was huge with pups, she and I cuddled in the recliner. She lay stretched out on her back, spanning the length of my body, her head resting on my cheek and her feet hanging over the edge of the chair. Breathing laboriously, she grunted and groaned with the little comfort she received as I rubbed her swollen, jerking belly. I tried to soothe her, as she had so often done for me.

How was I to know, even then, that Jazzy would not once, not twice, but countless times save me from the man who claimed to love us both?

I never would have dreamed that she could comfort me with her terror, but she did. That terror is what saved me. The sound of our loving, sweet dog's tail as it beat nervously against the bathtub while she hid there in terror was the only thing that would stop Jim's fits of rage.

His love for her could stop him. His love for me could not.

We were out of there shortly after 11AM. Nobody wanted to be caught standing around when Jim got home.

Jennie and I had decided to keep my car inside her garage for a while so he wouldn't know I was there. All my things had been moved in quickly, and I was settled in by early afternoon. I made several calls confirming plans for the animals and enjoyed knowing that I would spend the evening in my bed without the fear of having someone hurt me.

I suddenly felt very free.

He called my cell phone that evening, frantic, in tears, begging me to come home. Begging to know where I was. I told him I was fine but that I would not tell him where I was or come home, that I was gone for good. He was so distraught that I was worried about him.

Jennie and I took a ride late that night and I asked her to drive by so I could see if he was okay. I don't know what I expected to find out. I had no intentions of going anywhere near the house or letting him know I was around. I just wanted to see. When we discovered he wasn't there, I was both relieved and worried for his safety. I suspected that he'd driven the two hours to his parents', and a quick phone call confirmed that. Now, I could finally relax and know that he was being cared for.

Like the roots of an old oak tree, the behaviors and compulsions of an abused woman are deeply embedded; they are not easily altered or removed. It takes time, patience, and many, many mistakes along the way.

Chapter Nineteen: How Could I Have Gone Back After All of That?

Who Am I?

I've forgotten how to be me and I don't really even know what I want to do in life. What things would I like to try in life if I could?

- Go to and play in the theatre*
- Horseback riding*
- Skiing (Take trips to Vail)*
- Eat at 5 star restaurants*
- Lounge on the beach (take my dog)*
- Go on a cruise*
- Read*
- Go to educational & motivational lectures to hear authors and other successful people*
- Join organizations where I can meet people who also enjoy and can afford to do these things*
- Take Ballroom Dancing lesson*

2-25-00

My Dearest Krista,

What do we do? I know you have plenty of reason for what you have done. No one could blame you for not looking back or giving me another thought. The past five years hasn't been all great time, but they were our five years. I thank you for spending them with me. I wish I could talk to you, the you that's been my best friend. Talk to you just as my friend so you could tell me I'm a good person and that she's nuts for leaving you. I started this letter to try and work my feelings out and maybe you could see inside of me and realize I'm a good person. Truth of the matter is the more I think the more I think I'm not a good person. I have a lot of bad habits and bad ways. I'm sorry you had to put up with me. I use to not be like this. You told me people don't change. What happened to me? Ever since you've known me I've had bad habits, but how did they consume me? I use to be consumed with all this energy to do things. It left. I want to find it again. I know you tell me I have issues that I have to work out (I have to work on me). I just wish I had my best friend to talk things over with. Oh shit I just wish I had you with me again. Unashamed of me and wanting to be with me. I don't want to do a nose dive, but I don't know if I'm strong enough to pull out of this without you. I know none of this is wooing you back in my arms, but I feel I need to say it. I am making changes in my life. I have to. I want you to be with me and see the changes. Last summer when we split up, when we got back together we both had a lot of resentment toward each other, blaming the other for the breakup. If you would come back now I wouldn't blame you. I understand why you did it. I don't like the way you did it but may to you it seemed the only way. I know you'll read this letter and shake your head then say, "I can't right now, you have things you have to work out. O.K. I got it I know I do I just want my little rock that's always been there for me. I have been in the dumps for a while and I know I've depended on you too much. I'm sorry. Like I said the more I try to

convince you to come back I'm just supplying you with the same reasons you don't want to. I will get the old Jim back he's still in there dying to get out. I just don't want to lose you finding him. You know the mistakes that can happen when people split up. I don't want to replace you and I know I damn sure don't want to be replaced not even for a second. I want to be the only man to ever kiss your lips. Krissy you're everything to me you're my wife, my partner, my best friend, my favorite toy, my rock and so much more. Please don't take all these things away from me. Give me a chance I'll show you that people don't change I've just been in a slump. I know I won't be able to jump right out of this slump and start hitting home runs every time at bat but I'll give it a hell of a try. I'll have to. I want to be your rock Even if you don't need me. I know the amount of support I've been giving lately is next to non-existent. I don't know why. All the things I want you to do for me I want to do for you, and I don't know why I haven't been making you dinner. I know right now it would give me more pleasure to cook you dinner than for you to do the same for me. I get great pleasure out of doing things for you I don't know why I stopped. I didn't stop caring for you maybe I stopped caring for me. You know what I think it would be a good idea for us to work it out. It's funny how when people find out we split up they say things like hope you work it out or your better off or whatever thing is you can about get 'em to say whatever you want them to. But the only two people whose opinion matters in this situation is mine and yours. I know the last thing you want to hear is me sounding like a weak little man begging you to come back but that little man wants you back and so does that clever fun and smart strong man. And I promise you we'll get rid of that depressed drunk guy. Please give me a hand and grace me with the pleasure of being around you and I'll take care of me. I promise.

I love you

Jim

I really tried hard to put Jim behind me this time. The day after I left on February 19, I went to my favorite local Italian restaurant, Pasquale Mira's. I loved eating there, but it was a little expensive for me so I could only do so sparingly. On this day I had lunch, but I did so with the intent to do a little job research. I took a book with me, as I always do when I'm dining alone, and I talked to my waitress about how she liked her job and if they were hiring. She informed me that they were always hiring, and she brought me an application. I brought it back a few days later, spoke with Mr. Mira, and was soon waiting tables and getting a discount at my favorite restaurant. The discount was a wonderful bonus, since now that I lived with Jennie I didn't have my own kitchen. Not that I couldn't use Jennie's kitchen, but it just wasn't the same not being in my own

house. Plus, I didn't have much time to cook anyway after teaching all day and waiting tables until late at night.

Pasquale's was my only social outlet during this time. There was the stress of the dinner rush, but there was also the music and the camaraderie of my colleagues. I can remember more than a few nights when the music vibrating from the kitchen served as a sad reminder to me that I just could not seem to escape entirely. Macy Gray's *I Try* was like an omen, teasing my weakness, my inability to put Jim behind me, and I sang her words with great energy and feeling.

Sobriety: A Mixed Blessing

Jim didn't give up so easily. He showed up at school on Monday, leaving on my car flowers and a picture of him and Jazmyn with a note: "We miss you." I journaled a lot during this time to try to keep my sanity and to have an outlet for all the things I wanted to say to him and just couldn't.

March 8, 2000

What did you expect? Did you think I would simply take this forever?

Every time I ask you this kind of question you seem to act like you pretend not to know what I am talking about, as if you want me to come off with a list of things I will not accept. You know and I know what things have and have not been done. You know and I know that even while you were doing these things to me I was begging you to stop. Good grief Jim, you even gave me a strategy to try to deal with it. I remember you telling me that the next time it happened (you would never promise it would not happen again), I should try balling up in a little ball in the floor and say, "Please stop, you're hurting." You said this is what you used to do as a child. I don't know if it worked for little Jim, but it never worked for me.

As a matter of fact, the last time you hurt me was when you threw an almost full can of beer all over me, and as I tried to wash it out you jerked me out of the bathroom by my shirt, leaving a burn under my left arm from the seam, and proceeded to lift me from the ground by my neck choking me until I couldn't breath. As I felt the pressure of the blood pulsing in my head I desperately pulled at your fingers to try to get a gasp of air. I was finally able to squeak out "you're hurting me." Your response: "Damn straight. That's the point, bitch." That's love.

I know you say that everyone has problems and they need to deal with those problems and go on. I agree. I also agree that some problems are more serious than others. The problems we have are not the kind of problems everyone has. It may seem normal to you, but it is not. It might be different if this were a freak occurrence that just happened once at a bad time. It has happened so many times that I cannot recall them all. You may feel you have a justification for each time, but nothing justifies treating anyone this way. You should know that more than most people. But then again, it is a confusing cycle that is passed from generation to generation that neither the victim nor the abuser seems to understand. It will not appear in the generation of my children.

God grant me the strength to change the things I can,

The serenity to accept that which I cannot,

And the wisdom to know the difference.

I have finally been granted the wisdom to understand that I cannot change you, and I am trying to keep the strength to improve my own life. I have been doing pretty well with this; I just have trouble on days like today when I have been harassed and attempts are made to alter the truth.

You also argue that I have my own issues to deal with. Yes, I do. Everyone has issues. But up to this point, my life has been so overshadowed by your issues that I don't

even know what mine are or what I want out of life. I am, however, starting to discover these things, and I just wish you would work on your problems and leave me to work on mine.

You keep bringing up our vows which say “for better or worse.” They also say to “love, honor and cherish.” These vows were sacred to me, but I will not let them be used to manipulate me to enter again in to a lifestyle of abuse, lying, extravagant spending without the income to back it up, and the overall destruction of life and property. While these vows are from the Bible, if you cared to study it you would discover that in the case of abuse it not only allows for, but actually encourages divorce. I am not saying that this is what I am basing my decision on by any means, but I just wish you would quit throwing it up in my face to try to get me to stay with you. What about the vow as my promise to you? Look back at the response you gave me when I said you were hurting me. I don’t think I am real worried about keeping my promise to that person. Would you?

What else do you want me to say? Yeah, there were other good times; but I don’t wish to pay that high price for those good times. There are good people out there who while they may have problems, deal with those problems and take responsibility for them. You do neither. You say you want to, but you never do. Maybe one day you will actually deal with them and take responsibility, or maybe you will just find someone willing to deal with them for you. Either way, you’ll make it. Either way, you will have to do it without me.

It is amazing how with the weight of your problems lifted from my shoulders I am finding values, energy and ambition I had forgotten I had. I am revisiting dreams that I had put aside because of the constraints of a husband who monopolized my time and my feelings. It is as if my eyes are open again after a long sleep. You keep trying to knock me back into that slumber, and now you have been brought your mother in to help administer the sleeping potion. I will not be fooled. It is not my fault. I do not owe you another chance. I do not owe you my life. I do not even owe you my love. This last I will give you, however, along with my pity, and hope that you will someday discover who you are and what you want. I will not give you my life. Someday there will be someone who will accept my love without asking me to give my life, and I will then wish to give that which has not been requested. Until then, my life is my own. Live your life.

I felt like I was being double-teamed. When Jim got tired while harassing me, his mom stepped in to give him a rest.

March 9, 2000

I am now more certain than ever that I have made the right decision. The phone call I received late last night was the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. However ridiculous, I am almost glad that it happened, as it has made me realize exactly what I have been dealing with all this time.

This idea that one should simply find a way to place the blame on others, even if you have to make up lies, is one that has obviously been instilled in Jim throughout his life. I was under the original impression that it had come from his biological mother in early childhood; now I know it has been reinforced, and still is, even in his adult years. These are definitely not ideas I want to instill in my children someday, nor do I want to

be drawn into this never-ending game myself. I feel sorry for these people, especially because I get the strange feeling that they believe the lies they tell. I didn't understand when all the problems were occurring with Lisa and Joe why Jim felt that Linda was planting ideas that did not exist in Lisa's head; now I see why. I wonder how many false accusations have been planted in Jim's head as a child in an attempt to help him "deal" with his problems by avoiding the reality.

Last night, I had been out driving around trying to get sleepy enough to fall straight to sleep when I went home, because Jim had been calling that evening and I did not want my mind to have the chance to dwell on any loneliness I might be feeling. When I got home at about 11:30, I saw that he had called at 11:08 and 11:16. I listened to the messages to see what he had to say. It was not Jim. It was his mother asking me to call her back. I thought it was late, but she had only called fifteen minutes earlier and I was sure she would only call that late on a school night if it were an emergency, so I called back.

She said she was calling to see how I was doing and if I knew what I was doing. I didn't quite understand the second part of the question, so I just told her I was doing fine. She then wanted to know if I knew how much Jim was hurting, how much I was hurting him, and what I was doing to him?

I tried to stay calm. I responded, "I am sure he is hurting right now, but I have hurt for a long time and had to get away."

She asked, "Get away from what?" I had tried to steer away from details, but her accusatory tone was getting to me so I told her, "well, from being strangled for one thing."

Her immediate response was, "What did you expect him to do when you kicked him and screamed at him?"

I was shocked, but had expected Jim to make up things to excuse himself, so I simply said, "Excuse me?"

"You told me that yourself."

"What?" I asked. "I have never kicked that man."

"Well, kicked at him. You told me yourself that you have kicked at him and that you throw screaming fits on him all the time," she proclaimed self-assuredly.

I tried to explain to her that I have never said anything like this. I finally just gave up and said, "Look, you folks can just keep enabling him and he will never change."

I could hear her ranting as I hung up the phone.

March 9, 2000

Leave me the hell alone!!! Why are you doing this to me? It has been so nice to be able to go to bed and know that I am not going to be rudely awaked in the middle of the night because you have decided that it is time for me to satisfy your needs, or because you are in a rage and want to "have it out" right then. Do not call me in the middle of the night again! And do not call me in the middle of class again! It is difficult enough keeping a room full of Jr. High kids under control without having the phone ringing just because you want to say "Hi." Grow up. Get a job. Get up in the morning and work hard all day so you can go to sleep at night (Unless of course you have a psycho man and his psycho mom calling you late at night with "emergencies" not allowing you to rest). Find some meaning in your life. I don't care what you do, just LEAVE ME ALONE!

If he wasn't harassing me by phone, or in person, he used his favorite strategy.

The bank account.

March 15, 2000

Once again, I thought I was on the verge of getting my debt caught up and, once again, you screwed it up. I had it figured almost to the penny how to get my bills caught up (not including all the utilities I have to go back and pay and your corporate credit card I have to pick up the slack on because I was stupid enough to sign for it), and when I went to the bank to close out my account I discovered that you screwed me again.

Why did you write a check for \$550 of my money? And why didn't you tell me so I could at least go back and cover it, cleaning up your mess as usual? Yeah, you deposited \$200, but I think you missed Math class on the day they taught that there is a big difference between \$550 and \$200, not to mention the \$64 check you also wrote and didn't tell me about. While the account had both our names on it, you know as well as I do that the money in there came from Raleigh County Schools. Wasn't it bad enough that the week before you made me pay Dan his final paycheck, taking money from our house payment? If you're not going to help with the bills, at least don't take the money I have worked hard to make and budget without even letting me know. Find some other sucker to keep your sorry... No, I will not go there. I will not stoop to your level.

I am so glad I got away from you. I just pray I have the courage to stick to my guns. You keep giving me more and more courage in the form of little deceitful stunts like this. Maybe getting alcohol out of your system will help you, but it will take a long time to pull yourself from this lifestyle of deceiving people to get what you want.

It seems as though every day something happens to prove to me that I am making the right decision. I really feel that I need to break communication with you. It is only when I am with you that you start to draw me back in: "Come into my parlor said the spider to the fly." Sure, you can paint a pretty picture and you draw on my weak points, but every salesman knows how to do that. You just don't have the product to stand behind your sales pitch.

I have given up too much already. I had not really realized it until I was able to step back and take a look at what I want out of life versus where I was headed with you. They are two very different pictures.

Over the next couple of months he showed up at the restaurant where I worked, crying in the parking lot until I let him in the car to talk, then refusing to get out until I let him come home with me. The adrenaline I had worked up for my escape was long gone and I was losing the energy to fight him. It was easier to give in than to fight. I felt myself being slowly, deliberately, pulled back into the web Jim had created for me.

I noticed a butterfly in a spider web the other day. It was caught in the web between two bars of the railing at my townhome, and looked for all the world like one of those stained glass butterflies that you put in your window with a suction cup. It was stuck there, flapping its wings rhythmically, the sun shining brilliantly through its delicate wings. For some reason, I was overtaken with sympathy for the plight of the butterfly. I ran over to it and traced a hole in the web with my finger, and gently lowered the silken beauty to the ground. It was now free from the web, but its ability to survive independently in the world had been affected by its brief time of captivity, and it still lay there on the ground flapping about, unable to free itself from the threads that covered its delicate body.

If only a few moments in the web can be so paralyzing to the butterfly, imagine what a few years in the web of domestic violence can do to a woman. She will often be paralyzed for a long time, unable to think straight, act reasonably, stay away from her abuser. It is during this time, when she is the most disoriented, that he can most easily trick her into coming back to the web.

May 5, 2000

I am trying to learn to give. What kind of statement is that? Am I a selfish person? Am I greedy beyond belief? Why is it that I can't seem to make myself give to Jim? Or do I give to him and I just don't realize it because he is constantly trying to drill into me that he is the only one willing to give while I just take. I think both are true, to an extent.

Yes, I am timid about giving. I am burying myself in my work, and thus I don't feel I really have the energy to go see him when I do have time off. I am not always willing to do the things he asks me to do. There are a few reasons for that. One reason is that it annoys me that I feel like I am being tested by someone who "loves" me. Another reason I don't always do what he asks is because I have taken on the same philosophy he told me he has taken on. Prioritize. I feel that the things he asks me to do are not high enough on his priority list for him to exert any energy to complete them, but he wants me to put them top on my priority list just because he asked me to do them. I am overwhelmed, too, and there are things in my life that I need to do but I have not been able to move them up to a high enough priority yet. I am not going to start letting his

priorities butt mine out again. If they are that important to him, he will take care of them. If they are not, then he will not.

What kinds of things am I talking about? One is calling Beckley Loan about his outstanding loan with them. I feel this is an unfair thing to ask me to do. I have already spoken to these people for him several times. They have been rude to me and often refused to talk to me because it is not my account. I have made trips to the office to pay late payments for him and have told them when he could be expected to make more payments. He has not made those payments and any promises I call and make to them are going to be useless and make me appear like a big flake. And besides that, I cannot make any promises for him; he may follow though and he may not. It is his responsibility to talk to them to determine what they can work out together.

Also, the person with whom I would have to speak at Beckley Loan is the father of one of my Advanced English students. This makes this whole situation even more uncomfortable and embarrassing for me. I have already expressed this to Jim, and either he just doesn't care or he doesn't understand the significance of my making empty promises to this man. I cannot simply avoid him when Jim doesn't follow through. I have to communicate with him and his wife concerning their son, and I currently have a good relationship with them. How much respect will he have for me then? How much will he believe what I tell him about his son's progress in my class?

My final problem with this request: what happened to simplify and prioritize? This loan is guaranteed by yet another of his many precious vehicles. If this van is a priority to him, fine; take care of it. If it is not, then do not, but don't expect me to make it my priority when I am struggling to talk to and deal with my own creditors.

Now, let's look at the other side of the give/take question. Am I giving and just can't see it because he tries so hard to convince me that I do not?

He started Alcoholics Anonymous. Maybe I had finally gotten through to him.

He recognized that he had a problem and he was willing to do whatever it took to get me back and his life back on track. He took a steady construction job in Virginia and started taking care of himself. He also started pressuring me to move to Virginia to be with him and put our family back together. I wasn't quite ready for that, but I continued to make my lists to weigh the possibilities.

Why Stay Here

*My family is close
My friends are here
My professional contacts are here
I already have jobs here
I already have my things here
Jim & I can see each other for short periods of time*

Why Go There

To be with Jim

All logic told me that I should stay in Beckley. The only reason I had to go to Virginia was to be with Jim. The mind of an abused woman, even when she has seemingly escaped, does not always follow that of logic and reason. She may think reasonably at times, but the manipulation and the madness often begins to be too much and she finds it easier to give in and hope for a change.

May 31, 2000

Jim,

I feel like you are trying to control me again. I feel like last night was ridiculous. I attended the annual awards banquet, serving as the announcer for the entire evening's departmental awards, and afterwards I went out with several of my colleagues to the Japanese Steakhouse for drinks and conversation.

I called you before and after the banquet to no avail. I did not get angry because I could not reach you, but rather made sure I had my cellular with me in case you tried to return one of my calls. When you did call, I was very happy to hear from you. I had no reservations about telling you what I was doing. I was doing nothing wrong nor out of the ordinary.

I went home pretty soon to call you only to discover that you had left about an hour earlier. Again, I was not angry, but this time I was concerned. I assumed you would call when you got home, but I awoke at 2:00 in the morning to discover that you had not. I immediately called, worried, only to discover that you did not want to talk to me and in response to my asking where you went, you only said "out," and told me it was none of my business where you were.

I don't understand this. I showed no such attitude when you asked where I was and was very open with you. Your actions create suspicion, since I have experience in the past how you "punish" me when you are upset with me. I don't appreciate your attempts to control me with your behavior and I don't feel very much trust for you. I love you, but I won't remain in a relationship with someone who feels his whereabouts are none of my business. I know what that normally means.

I understand that you were concerned because I was drinking. But you need to understand that I do not, by any means, have a drinking problem. I have, on very rare occasions, a drink or two, just as I did last night. I have agreed that when I am with you I will not have anything to drink, for your sake. It is not fair of you to tell me that I am not permitted to have an occasional drink out of your presence. Whether or not I have a drink is not that big a deal to me, but what is a big deal is that you are using this to try to control me. My having a drink a hundred miles away from you should have no affect on your problem, and there is no reason that you should tell me not to. You are trying to shift the focus of your problem from you to me, and I am not buying it.

I am concerned about you. Are you still attending meetings? You are starting to behave in ways that make me think that you are not buying into the program. I have been doing some research and I am finding that it is recommended that your sponsor be someone you are not so emotionally involved with so that you will not use that person as someone to blame if you decide to abandon the program. I understand that I have not been asking you every day as a sponsor is supposed to, but every time I think of asking seems like a bad time. I spent years training myself not to nag you about this, and every time I get ready to ask, I get that worried feeling about what will happen if I nag you. I think we need to put our heads together and think of something to solve this problem. I want to help you, but I won't be blamed or controlled. I would like to attend some meetings to find out first-hand what I can do, but you have to continue to do the same if you are dedicated to this.

We visited each other on the weekends. Jim began to seem less manipulative without the alcohol, and was actually acting like a responsible adult. He paid all his own bills, took care of his own laundry, and seemed to be one of the more dependable men on his construction crew. But the latter was often the case. Jim seemed to like to surround himself with male counterparts who were less mature, less talented, less attractive. Anyone else was a threat.

When school let out, against all previous reasoning, I went to spend the summer with him in Virginia. I felt that since he was putting in a true effort to change, I owed it to him to give him and our marriage one last chance.

Chapter Twenty: Why Did I Finally Leave For Good?

He buckled down and landed a Park Ranger job in a beautiful park and I found a teaching job in the same area. We found a house and were one big happy family again. He hadn't physically hurt me since that February night, but I soon realized that things still weren't right. While he didn't hit me, he was still very controlling and often demeaning.

For the second time, we had moved into a home and rented it with the intent to buy as soon as the financing went through. For the second time, for some reason, the financing of the home was held up for several months. We moved into this house in Virginia in August with the loan due to close in the end of September. By December, we still didn't have a definite closing date. Jim's parents were cosigning on our loan and there were some complications because they were also on his sister's mortgage. If it were not for the delay in financing, I would not have been able to escape the hold he had over me. I was very fortunate that it had happened twice, and it instilled in me the feeling that someone was watching over me, but I couldn't count on it happening a third time. It was in December, with Christmas and our fifth wedding anniversary drawing near that I realized I had to leave him forever.

I'd been coming to work a nervous wreck, sometimes even going into a colleague's classroom to talk and cry it out before students arrived. Jim had started playing mind games with me again. My friends, thank God, were starting to rally around me and encourage me to leave Jim and go back home. They were very supportive. One woman even went so far as to ask her husband, a state trooper, to come in and talk to me about what was going on. This was the first positive experience I'd had with a police officer, and I will never forget him for it.

While I didn't want to press any charges because Jim hadn't really physically hurt me lately, the officer still encouraged me to give him a statement. He wanted to make sure it was on file just in case things changed and Jim became physical again. He gave me his cell phone number and encouraged me to use it if I ever felt frightened. He pointed out that since Jim was a Park Ranger and could be in uniform at a time when I might need help, that sadly, responding officers might not be as helpful to me, so I should keep his number with me at all times.

He asked me to list incidents of violence in the past year. I told him he hadn't been very violent in the past eight months, but I would make an overall list.

Violence

Pushed me through a window (cut my arm)

Pushed me off the porch

Held me off the floor by my throat

Threw me around the room

Pulled and dragged around by my hair

Spitting in my face

Slapping my face

Hitting my head with his hand and objects

Throwing items at me (full beer cans, glass, etc.)

Restraining me

Physical threats

Threats on my life - "if you ever involve the police again I will kill you"

Pushing into a concrete wall (cut my knee open)

*Dragging me by the hair and pushing me down, re-opening the cut on my knee
before it could heal*

Busted my lip open

Choking me

I gave the trooper the list, and he filed it away. He assured me that Jim wouldn't be informed about it, but it would be documented in case it was needed. He gave me more words of encouragement, checked once more to make sure I had his number, and was off on another call.

Knowing that I had such support and people who *believed* me, I gained the courage I needed. Again, I turned to writing to work out how to approach Jim.

How can I talk to Jim?

I want to face him and tell him what I am doing and why I am doing it.

I want him to understand that his behavior and his actions are not acceptable.

Maybe suggest he try for Park housing.

He and I are not compatible.

I have allowed him to treat me poorly for so long that when I now try to stand up for myself it does no good.

He knows he can get me to back down by being loud and intimidating, and if that doesn't work he always lets me know he is willing to get physical.

He knows that isolating me from family and friends further enables him to take advantage of my vulnerable position.

Why?

-Cursing me

-Blowing up for little or no reason

-Throwing things around and making a mess and making me clean it up while calling me names.

-Getting angry with me because he has to pay bills.

-Continuing to spend while we have to borrow.

-Threatening me by telling me he's not gone off on me yet, but if I "keep it up" he will. Reminding me that I know what he is capable of.

-Is determined to buy this house, but refuses to help in any way, and blames me that it is taking so long.

-Refuses to have anything to do with my family.

-Throws away gifts from my mom.

-Wants me to ask my parents for money for a down payment on the house, but does not want them to co-sign, and will not talk to them or face them.

Shortly after my conversation with officer Goodwin, I requested an appointment with my principal. I was under contract with the county school system, and I wasn't sure if leaving was going to be a viable career option. I'd never broken a contract before, and now I was about to break two: one with the school system and the other with Jim. To my great relief, Mrs. Bracey was very understanding and admitted that she was expecting me to come see her. "I've been wondering about you lately," she said, "I saw you the other day and just thought 'My, that's certainly not the lively young lady who came in here in August. Something has changed.'"

I wasn't aware that my problems at home had become so obvious, but it was clear that they had.

Mrs. Bracey told me that under the circumstances, they would certainly release me from my contract. She also told me that she had a new December graduate in mind for the position. This bit of news made me very happy, because I didn't want to leave my students until I knew they were in good hands. I told her I could work with my replacement the first few days so that she could ease into the position.

I called my mom and began making plans for the move. My brother and a friend of his would bring my brother's hauling trailer and they would move me home as soon as possible.

Once I knew my career was safe and I had a means of getting back home, I broke the news to Jim. He didn't hurt me. Always before I feared telling other people because I feared he would hurt me if he knew I told. But I think making so many people aware of the situation, and letting him know so many people were aware, is what kept me safe those last few days I lived with him.

It didn't, however, keep him from playing games. After I made the announcement to him, I quit getting up early before I went to work while he was still in bed to pack his lunch for him. He didn't like this, so he got up the first morning he had to pack his own lunch and slammed cabinets for what seemed like forever. I got ready for work and left. On the way to work, I got one of those feelings I sometimes get when I know something is wrong. I can't explain it. When I get the feeling I am just compelled to go check things out, and I can't shake the feeling until I do.

I turned around and headed back home. Jim's truck was gone, but the door to the house was wide open. Not just unlocked, but open. It was his way of rebelling against me. If I hadn't come back to check on things, the house would have remained open until that evening.

Another morning when he was angry with me he went outside before I left for work. He took all the empty Mountain Dew cans he and his buddies had been tossing in the back of his truck for the last week and piled them up in the driver's side floorboard of my car. When I opened the door to get in my car, I took a deep breathe, tried to remember that it was just a few more days, and emptied the cans from the floorboard. The sight of Mountain Dew still makes me cringe.

The day before I was to leave, I noticed his car keys on the kitchen table and picked them up to remove the key to my car. It was my car and he had no use for it. When Jim saw me holding his keys he yelled at me to put them back down.

"I'm just getting my car key," I told him and continued to pry at the key ring.

"Put down my keys, you crazy bitch!" he boomed.

"Jim, I'm not taking anything of yours," I replied calmly. "I'm standing right in front of you so you can see I'm just taking *my* car key. You don't have a need for it. I need my extra key."

"Fine, you want to mess with my stuff, go ahead," he yelled as he picked up my favorite rattan rocking chair, raised it above his head, and crashed it down onto the floor over and over again.

Yeah, I thought as I calmly watched this spectacle, *I'm the crazy bitch*. I couldn't believe that I had let him convince me for so long that I was the crazy one. But I had.

Thank God I was finally coming to realize that I was not, that rather it was his manipulation and mind games that had driven me to act in ways that seemed crazy. Not anymore.

To this day, when I disco to Anastacia's *I'm Outta Love*, I'm reminded of that crazy time in my life.

December 11, 2000

You tell me that you are angry with me, that I am a mean person, that I have bad timing for choosing right now at the holidays to leave.

Guess what. I'm angry, too. I think you are very mean. And I think you have lousy timing choosing to act this way so close to the holidays. I am tired of being treated like this! You say you wish I would quit leaving. I want to. Just leave me alone. I wanted to be left alone before, but you hunted me down, called me, and showed up at my job.

I don't know why I let you convince me to come back. I guess you just made me believe that the alcohol was the only problem. I wanted to believe it. It wasn't. There are too many things that have occurred to think they will just go away, especially when bad things continue to happen.

I have tried my best to put the bad things in the past, but I am reminded of them every time you call me a bitch, whore, etc. I am reminded of them every time you break something or tear up something as important as my gradebook, and only 3 days before grades are due. I am reminded every time your face shows rage and you push me, pin me on the bed, spit in my face, and yes, slap me. I am reminded every time you do something like leave the door to the house open all day to prove a point (play a game) or hide my wedding ring, denying that you have it while I search for it.

How can you blame me for being afraid to buy this house with you? I can't and don't trust you. You have proven to me in the last few weeks that I never know what you'll do. I am still in awe that you ripped my gradebook apart. I have asked, begged, pleaded with you to go to my parents with me. I tried to give you time and yes, I eventually became demanding about it. I will not continue to drive 5 ½ hours by myself to see my family, and I will see them. They are much more committed to me and supportive than you have ever been or can understand.

What you are doing right now is not commitment; it is desperation, need, convenience. You told me yourself you stay with me to have someone to share expenses with. You have told me that your parents' relationship was one of convenience, someone to raise the kids with. I understand that this is all you have as a model for relationships, but I will not remain in a marriage of convenience just to find myself bitter and hateful with the person I claim to love.

The ways you treat me are not expressions of love. While I understand where they come from a little more after a few scenes at your parents' this summer, it does not mean I accept them. I am not going to try to fix you. I don't know you. You don't want to be fixed, just accepted. While it's a nice feeling to be accepted, there are certain behaviors

that are entirely unacceptable. We have discussed these behaviors for years. They have continued for years. I am tired of feeling like I am wasting my time, my life. Life is too precious to waste; for you or for me.

When will you really hurt me so that I can't work? So that you can't work? When will we have a child that we disagree entirely about how to raise? Where are we going?

You don't like how I treat you.

I don't like how you treat me.

I don't want to buy this house.

I want to live near my family.

You hate my family.

You don't want to go to counseling.

I don't trust you.

You don't trust me.

You scare me.

I can't let go of the past.

You can't let go of the past.

We don't like the same things.

I resent paying all the credit card bills, especially the corporate credit for your business.

You act as though the bills are my problem.

I resent that.

The day after I told Jim that I would be leaving him for the last time, we got a call that the financing problem on the home had been straightened out. I had to face the realtor and the owners to tell them we would not be buying the house after all.

I didn't leave because he forced unwanted sex on me, nor because he threw cold water on me when I didn't perform properly, nor because he pushed me into the wall, nor because he destroyed my grade book, and not even because he threatened me with worse. It was because this time, as he did these things, he was sober.

In the past when he did all those things to me, he was usually under the influence of alcohol, thus allowing me to blame the alcohol. I had blamed many things for Jim's actions throughout our relationship: alcohol, his biological mother's abuse and neglect,

his stepmother's coddling to make up for his past, his father's extreme enabling behaviors, the stress of the business, self-esteem issues because I had to support us financially, money problems, my own actions. Not this time. No, this time it was all Jim. And as long as I knew that, I knew that there was nothing that would change this behavior; it was just him. In a bittersweet moment of clarity, I suddenly realized that this was, truly, a never-ending cycle.

And because I knew this had to be the end, I also knew I needed to do some things very differently this time when I left. Oddly enough, I think the isolation Jim created with our last move actually helped this leave to be the final one. We now lived six hours from my parents and three hours from his. In the past when I left, it was across town or an hour and a half's drive away. This time I would have to go back to my hometown six hours away, making it impossible for Jim to simply drop by, and also much more risky for him since I would be living next door to my parents. Yeah, Jim may have been a lot of things, but he wasn't entirely stupid. While he was pretty cruel to my father on one occasion before, he also knew that my Dad wasn't one to mess with, especially where his little girl was concerned. I had never confided in my parents before because I knew Dad would wind up either in jail or in the hospital if I ever told him the truth. There is no way I would have involved my parents at all if I did not know this was final. I did not want to concern them with the stress of my life if I were going to continue to allow it to yo-yo with this man.

On the morning I was to leave, Jim left for work with absolutely no drama. I was amazed and appreciative. My brother and his friend Erin called me early to come have breakfast with them before we packed up the truck. I had asked my brother to try to

come without my father, because I was seriously afraid of what would happen if Jim happened to be here with my father here. The scene would not be pretty.

There was, thankfully, no scene. My brother even joked as we loaded up the truck, asking if I had cut holes in the floor where more things were hidden, because he didn't know how I kept coming up with more stuff for him to load.

All loaded, I went out back to say goodbye to Jazzy and Buck for the last time. I had decided to leave them behind entirely, because I knew he was too attached to them and would use them as an excuse to see me.

Eric and Erin hopped in Eric's truck, and I in mine. The drive out of town was surreal, as if it couldn't actually be happening. I couldn't be escaping for good, with the help and support of my family. It all just felt too good. As I contemplated my new lease on life Nelly Furtado's *I'm Like a Bird* came on the radio. I smiled all the way out of town, belting out this tune and singing my bittersweet freedom. There were a lot of unknowns ahead, but I was finally flying away.

I arrived in Cedar Grove that evening and realized it was December 21, my parents' anniversary. I entered our home and found my mom in the kitchen, gave her a big hug and said, "Happy Anniversary Mom."

Every woman who has ever left an abusive relationship can remember that one incident that was the deciding factor, the epiphany. In I Closed My Eyes: Revelations of a Battered Woman, Michele Weldon recalls the one time that she "told," when she screamed out when her husband hit her so that his parents in the same house heard her. They took in the scene, chastised their son, but also felt she was to be held partly

accountable as “it takes two to make an argument” (Weldon 112), and couldn’t understand why she insisted on taking her car and leaving. She writes of her humiliating experience in the courtroom as the judge made note of her injuries, and having to pack her husband’s belongings for him when a protective order was filed. Even then, Weldon tried to protect her husband, asking if the list of attacks could be left out because he would be mad if she had told (maybe it was fear rather than protection). Even at this point she didn’t want a divorce, she only wanted “the violence to stop” (131). What abused women often cannot comprehend is that the violence will not stop without the absence of the abuser. What society cannot understand is that the violence will not stop with the absence of the abuser. In a society where prozac and counselors are thought to solve any problem, and even long before these luxuries came into being, we held the belief that we can change people. This belief is sometimes the problem that gets women into abusive relationships, and is often the one that keeps them in one.

Maybe no one has the power to change someone else. Maybe the power is in leaving. I thought I was strong enough to stay. But after twelve years with a man I loved, I learned that a man who batters cannot be changed. A man who behaves violently has to change himself. I was ashamed that I had been hit. But I was also proud that I had tried everything that I could. All the power in the world could not change this man. I took back my power and used it to get away. (106)

After leaving Jim, I was able to function much better financially than I had in the past. I’d had to become the epitome of the West Virginia stereotype to do it, living in a trailer next door to my mom and dad, and I also had to work night and day teaching both day and night school, but I was really able to make quick progress in paying off the debt Jim and I had accrued throughout the years. Within one year from our divorce, in addition to keeping all my other bills current, I was able to pay off \$13,000 in credit card

debt. That kind of success was more than enough to remind me that I was doing the right thing, and that I was definitely not the one to blame for many of the problems we had. It was proof that I was the diligent, hard-working, responsible individual that I had forgotten I was.

And again, the artists of the times seemed to be singing my life. But these days, the beat emanating from the radio sang of a life I was proud to be living, and my decisions were reinforced every time I tuned in to Destiny's Child's *Survivor*.

Chapter Twenty-One: After the Violence is Over, the Fight Continues

Educated women with healthy family backgrounds aren't usually considered possible victims of abuse, thus implying that women who are abused must not be educated, further adding to the embarrassment and reluctance to come forward. I appreciated that Weldon's account I Closed My Eyes went outside of the stereotype, helping abused women raise their heads and realize that they are not part of a doomed group of women who just have to settle for the lot they have been given.

Weldon's experiences were similar in many ways to my own, but also differed in others. While I understand that the nature of her husband's departure and quick marriage to another woman hurt her in many ways I cannot fathom, I also note that she was very fortunate that extreme arrogance caused him to walk away from her entirely. Many men stalk their wives and fight to get them back. This man did not. But he did, however, have the power to constantly torment her mentally through the children and attorneys.

He married another woman very quickly, and then blew off the children's and her complaints about him, claiming that she was unable to move on and jealous that he had found a "loving relationship." Her husband wasn't her only tormenter; the \$100 bills for nonproductive attorney phone calls continued to haunt her for years. No one understands the expense of a divorce until it is over and you still continue to receive bills. As her husband was an attorney, he also knew that he simply had to cause problems that required her to speak with her attorney to make life much more financially difficult for her.

Chapter Twenty-Two: The System

I've heard people talk about being re-victimized by "the system," but I never stopped to think about what that really meant. I always assumed they were talking about having to stand in line for a long time to get a check, or not being assigned a good lawyer as their public attorney, or having mail lost or a process held up because, after all, it is a system and doesn't have a heart. I didn't understand that they were speaking about cruelty and irresponsibility that actual people in the system often throw at those who are at their mercy to solve their dilemmas. I didn't understand, until I became victim to their cruelty and irresponsibility.

After having left my abusive husband of five years, when I came to my attorney I just wanted a divorce and hoped to have Jim pay for half of the debt he'd helped me acquire. I felt that he was responsible for much more because of the way he bullied me to spend on things we couldn't afford, drained my accounts, and refused to get a job that would help with our expenses; but I am a reasonable person and understood that those are domestic disputes that a court does not have the power to settle. But I soon saw that the court was not even willing to put forth the power that it did have and act upon the mere standards of the law, and some attorneys were not willing to perform the duties for which they were paid, and simply want an easy out.

My first example of this came from the attorney that Jim supposedly retained on his behalf when he received my petition for divorce. I would later discover that the man would not represent him, and I'm assuming it is because I would not agree to allow his attorney the easy money he would have gotten had I gone along with his plan. Jim's attorney wrote to mine:

Dear ----,

It appears that these two cannot avoid a bankruptcy-free future. Most likely, the court will hold both liable for the credit card debt and the truck repossession deficiencies (expect those soon), and the creditors are going after both for payment. She is closer, in West Virginia, and an easier target.

Should the court order him to pay the marital debt, as support to her, even though she earns more money than he does, he would most likely still be eligible for discharge from the marital debt through bankruptcy as the exceptions of 11 U.S.C. 523(a)(15) would apply.

Even if the bankruptcy court decided to not grant him a discharge from spousal support, at best for her, she will spend the next several years having her wages garnisheed and chasing him for a debt that he cannot pay.

This stuff gives me a headache. How about a simple divorce and a simply Chapter 7 for two clients that cannot afford anything else?

With best regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

The banks weren't going to come after me for trucks repossessed in his business. I'd already talked to the banks and verified that, so his implication that they were already after me was fabrication. As for the bankruptcy part, I thought it pretty presumptuous of him to state that a woman who has paid her bills in a timely manner, even through all the financial hell Jim had caused, should choose to file bankruptcy.

I'm also not someone who would require "spousal support." Not that I think spousal support is a bad thing, and I understand that some need and deserve it, but that's not what I was asking for. I was simply asking for Jim to take responsibility for his half, and the idea that I was asking for his support was just insulting. It was very frustrating to see a man twist a woman's request that another man take responsibility for his actions as a plea for support, and so typical of what I thought was an obsolete attitude about the roles of men and women.

And I don't know where having my wages garnished came from. That was the most ridiculous part of all. How does someone who pays all her bills on time have her wages garnished? What he must not have understood is that while I was trying to get Jim to take responsibility and pay for his half, in the meantime, I was taking up the slack and paying for us both, as I always had. I had to move into a little trailer that my parents owned next door so I could have cheap rent, teach day school starting at 7AM and night school ending at 8PM five nights a week, teach summer school, and sell Pampered Chef on the side, but I definitely took care of my responsibilities and would not have my wages garnished, nor file for bankruptcy.

I won't even bother to comment on the lack of professionalism so clearly exhibited in his "This stuff gives me a headache."

The big thing that bothered me about the whole tone of this letter, which was not only meant to scare me and send me running to the safety of this attorney who could supposedly fix all my worries, but it was also written as if he were one attorney speaking to another about the insignificant little lives of two lowly people who were nothing more than "headache[s]" to the superior people of the world. Outright cruelty and irresponsibility.

But that's okay, because I had a tough female attorney who was ready to go in and whip some good country boy ass, and the discovery that my family law master was female made me beam just a little more.

Jim missed the first hearing. My attorney was late. I took the afternoon off work for nothing. Jim claimed he didn't know, or couldn't get off work, or something lame, and he also still claimed he didn't want the divorce.

For the second hearing, I had to make sure I had some witnesses of abuse present in case he still tried to hold up the divorce. Of course, with domestic abuse, there aren't usually any real witnesses, especially when you tried as hard as I did to keep it from everyone. I had my parents and a neighbor be there in case they were needed.

When I came into the tiny, cramped waiting area where there were many long faces, I spotted Jim. He looked different to me. Thinner. Still handsome. I quickly found a seat on the other side of the room from him. Unfortunately, the only empty spot had two seats, and so he was soon in the seat next to me. He gave me one of those sheepish, boyish grins, "Hey, how ya doin'?" I looked for a place to escape to, but I knew moving would only cause a scene as he would likely say something to draw attention to my coldness, or worse, follow me. My attorney arrived shortly, and we were called into the law master's chambers. Thank goodness Jim agreed to the divorce and I didn't have to have anyone testify.

I couldn't wait to see these women get hold of him and chastise him for his treatment of me and neglect of his responsibilities.

But I had forgotten about the charm. There it was, rearing its beautiful head in all its glory, working its magic for him.

"So, Mr. Compton, what do you do?" the family law master asked.

"I play with squirrels," Jim said matter-of-factly.

Oh, yes, he was in for it now, there is no way she was going to put up with his silly business, I thought.

However, not only had I underestimated his charm, I had also overestimated an extremely overweight lonely professional woman's need to have a handsome young man flirt with her.

“Really? I like squirrels. They just kind of skitter about. And you work with them?”

“Yeah, I'm a park ranger. It's a pretty nice, relaxing job. Not a lot of stress.”

“Well, cool.”

Shit. I had had it. He was on top. He rode in here on that damn motorcycle that scarred *my* credit, had no attorney and thus no expenses, and charmed the pants off the family law master right away. The law master never once addressed me, and since I had an attorney, I had no real power to speak for myself when I didn't think she was doing it for me.

And what's more, Jim came in without a piece of paper work or financial documents, and wouldn't agree to my requests that he take on half the debt, so nothing could be settled today. We were sent to mediation, which would cost \$120 an hour, and were to return to court in a couple of months.

Jim didn't want to attend mediation. He wanted to “work it out on our own,” but he wouldn't take any responsibility for any of our debt. Mediation was our only choice. Jim continued to call me and try to “work it out,” which consisted of telling me that he didn't owe me anything. He continued to call me in the wee hours of the morning and harass me. Usually he wasn't mean, unless I started bringing up the truth about what he had done and the money he owed me. He usually just cried and told me how he had messed up, or told me about some crisis that was going on in his life.

July 5, 2001

The conversation we had on the phone the other day was fine, for the most part, but I do not wish to speak with or hear from you on a regular basis. I tried to be nice, I told you I would get back to you on the phone number business and did not intend for you to get my number the way you obviously did. Please lose it, forget it, I don't care what you do with it, but do not call it again. You may call 304-555-1234. That is my attorney and she can give you whatever information you need about the case and can take any information you need to give.

I am sorry that so many things seem to be going wrong in your life, but we live by the choices we make. When you encountered more bills than you could afford with your current income, you tried to escape by doing things that brought you even more problems. When I encountered more bills than I could afford with my current income, I got a second job. Yeah, I had to wait tables at night after teaching school all day. Yeah, it sucked, my feet ached, I was always tired, I would get home after working a 15 hour day to check my caller ID to discover that my lousy ex had nothing better to do that evening than call me multiple times. There was no time for a social life other than my counseling and therapy groups, but I did what needed to be done to get my act together.

What's keeping you from doing the same? Nothing. You simply choose not to. You choose rather to run around with people wasting time (this is self-proclaimed), working on hobbies (VW's), whatever it is you choose to do other than get another job to get back on track. I'm not sure how much you're learning about responsibility from your Dad's telling you to only worry about paying for your bare necessities and he'll handle the rest. Do you know what your bare necessities are? Do you know what your responsibilities are? Your responsibilities include a lot more than your rent, utilities, truck payment, food and daily living expenses. If you think that is the case, you are living in a fairy tale world and I am sorry that you have been so misled and that you have been saved from reality so many times, because it's about to land right in your front yard. These court cases that are coming against you (mine included), these people have valid complaints against you. Do you know what that complaint is? They all have the same one: that you refuse to pay them. And yes, I say refuse, because you could. No, not on what you make right now, but you could if you would quit listening to whomever (and I know who because I made the mistake of listening to them myself) keeps telling you that it will all just pass and nobody will be able to make you pay because you don't make enough.

Hello! Wake up! Look around you! Yeah, it will all just pass, if you want to live like your brother running away from everyone for the rest of your life, ducking warrants, having no pride, and living the life of a vagabond. Why does he live this way? Because he believes that he cannot do any better, and he is so stubborn that he doesn't want to feel like anyone is making him to responsibility, so he chooses not to. He may say that he doesn't want any better, but you and I both know that he doesn't think he can, or that he deserves it. He has listened for too long to those who have told him that he is not good enough, and so he is fulfilling their prophecy.

Is that what you want? To be dragged into court passively? To be sought after for the rest of your life to take responsibility? Good God, be a man and have a plan for yourself. And I don't mean tuck tail and run back to school right now when what you need to do more than anything else is pay your dues and regain some pride. I can't

imagine that you can get much public assistance if you already have a ton of court cases against you, nor that law school will look too highly on that. Contact these people and work out something, anything, that you can pay, even if it's just \$50 a month until you can get back on your feet; then work your butt off to get as far ahead as possible, so you can then go to school and stand a chance for some public assistance.

You say that you're in the red about \$200 every month. That doesn't sound like much of a problem to me. You definitely get off work early enough to go in and work an evening shift at a restaurant. If you do that 4 or 5 days a week you are looking at a bare minimum of \$200 a week; and that is a very low estimate, you could do \$400-500 a week. But sticking with the low estimate, that gives you \$800 a month extra! That's your \$200 in the red, your \$200 for your half of our debt, \$100 on each of your trucks, and an extra \$100 to do with as you please. And that's all based on the low estimate. Imagine what you could do if you really put forth effort, found a high tipping restaurant and made the higher \$500 a week. You could more than double all those payments and get paid ahead so you could have some breathing room for school.

On to the next issues, although it is still related. You keep making statements such as, "I would help you with your bills if I could." I have never, and will never, ask you to help me with my bills. What I am asking, however, is that you pay your half on our bills, those being the credit cards and the house.

Before you start in on this thing, yet again, about how they are my bills, I am going to ask you, yet again, to be honest with yourself. Before you make a fool of yourself by trying to claim to a judge or anyone else that they are my bills, understand that the statements show groceries, gas, veterinary bills, PSIA memberships, and several house payments. You're going to have fun explaining how such household expenses are not equally yours.

Beyond them being equally yours, it is also quite obvious that my little car wouldn't even hold the amount of gas being charged on these cards for your large business trucks. Nor would I have a need to purchase a \$700 kayak and sign your name, nor would I spend \$250 at Southern Exposure, all of which appear on these credit card statements.

Shall I go on? Surely you get the picture by now. But in case you don't, I will go on to state that I also had no need for a \$4000 rollback engine, for which I am now paying since someone placed it on a credit card that was in my name. Now, can you understand why it pisses me off when you refer to these bills as mine? Yes, my name is on that stupid credit card, along with Speedy Beaver, Inc., and I started it and allowed you to use it in good faith that it would be the responsibility of your business or yourself to pay it. While it was my poor judgment to trust you to do so, it will not continue to be my poor judgment to allow you to try to convince me that this is somehow my responsibility. Yes, it is my legal responsibility to see that it gets paid, but in doing so I will see that the proper person pays it. And that, my dear, is you. I pay anything and everything I owe, but I am getting tired of working my butt off to pay your debt only to listen to you whine about how you can't pay any more when you haven't even tried.

Now, to address a few more "reality" issues. I know your parents are probably preaching to you that "there is no such thing as a debtors prison," and I say this only because I have heard them say it to you many times before in trying to soothe your worried feelings. However, when (and I do say when, and not if, because that is the

reality) the court orders you to pay your half of the marital debt, if you do not do so, you will be taken back to court, charged with contempt, and if you still do not pay, there will be a warrant for your arrest.

Now, I know maybe you're thinking, "That's no big deal. It happened to my brother and he never went to jail." But again, I want to remind you that you are not your brother, and I don't think you want to live the way he has to live to avoid that. And I am also not Lisa. Lisa cut him way too much slack, and being that they had a child together I could understand how she would be disillusioned into thinking that she should take it easy on him. We have no child. I feel no obligation to protect you. I simply want you to pay your part and I will take whatever legal action is necessary to see that that happens. This is why I hired an attorney who is also licensed in VA. Anything that needs to be carried into that state can be. This is also why I keep in touch with my friend whose husband is a VA State Trooper in that area, who was very instrumental in getting me to leave you and would do anything he could to help me.

You work in a state position, you are easy to find, and I can't imagine that they would look too highly on this situation. Tucking tail and going to school still makes all of the above applicable, so that's not an escape either. Hanging out with the people you do, you have probably heard a lot about people who have gotten by with similar things and nothing ever came of it.

But understand that the one big difference in their situation and yours is that they didn't have me on the other end seeing that justice was served.

I say none of this to threaten or scare you, just to reveal to you the reality, because I know that you are surrounded by enablers who want to make you believe that it will all be okay if you just sit tight and trust them. Sitting tight is not going to cut it. You have to make some changes in the way you think and act. Now, not later.

It sounds as though you have started to accept a tiny bit of the blame, but much more important than that, you have got to really accept the responsibility. The two are very different. Stop saying I can't and starting saying I can. Then do it! Quit wallowing in your self-pity. Don't call my brother with pity parties about living in the ghetto. Everyone knows you put yourself wherever it is you are, and nobody wants to hear that garbage. Do something about it.

I'm not sure what I expected from mediation, but I sure didn't expect what happened. We arrived in the small parking lot at the same time, which was unnerving enough. Jim immediately approached me and said "Hey, I don't really have the money for this thing, so is there really even any point in going in here?" I couldn't believe him! He had driven here from six hours away, without money to proceed, and expected me to just say, "Sure, that's no problem, let's go have dinner."

“We’re under court order to attend mediation. We have an appointment. I’m going in.” He followed.

There were two women in the room with us, not good luck for me lately. The first thing Jim said to the mediator in charge was, “Look, I was told to come to this thing, but I don’t really have the money to pay you, so what should we do?”

The mediator was a little surprised and said, “Well, sir, there is a court order for you to attend. Mrs. Compton, if he doesn’t go through with the mediation when you are willing to, I can send a notice to the law master that he is in contempt of court. How would you like to proceed?”

“I’m here for mediation, I want to get this over with,” was my reply.

She looked at him and he squirmed, “Well, I’ll have the money next week, if you could hold a check until then.”

The mediator agreed.

Again, Jim had absolutely no paperwork or financial statements, but he claimed that the business debts he was dealing with were equal to if not more than the personal debts and business credit card I was currently taking care of, so he proposed that he continue to take care of the business debt and I take care of the other debt, especially as he claimed they were all debts I ran up anyway. “I don’t have credit cards. I don’t like credit cards. I don’t use credit cards. That’s her game and she goes crazy with them. I don’t know how she racked up all this debt.”

I was furious. “You don’t use them? Would you like me to show you a receipt when you did?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I could show you the receipt for \$250 at Southern Exposure charged to my account, and I’m pretty sure I didn’t make that charge.”

Busted. There came the sheepish grin again. “Oh yeah, I kinda forgot about that. But that was just once.”

“How about the \$700 kayak you charged on one of those accounts that you say must be mine because it has my name on it? Those are just a couple of examples for which I have documentation. And the other charges, even if you didn’t make them, were to support us. I actually had to pay the house payment with a credit card several times because you had no income to help support us.”

“Okay, okay, but I still have all this business debt that’s more than any of the stuff you’re talking about. I’ll take care of it, keep them off your back, and you take care of the other stuff.”

“I don’t owe half the business debt. That business was a corporation started by you and your father. You two can work that out. The personal debt is all that we share.”

“My father? Krista, you know that business was ours. My dad just helped me out, but you know it was ours.”

“Ours? Jim, I hated that business and I just wanted you to have a job so we could pay the bills without using my credit card. Your dad helped you, and he also helped you get into debt.”

“Don’t go dragging my dad into this. He never got anything out of that business. He just helped me.”

“Jim, the fact of the matter is, you two were corporate partners. I was not.”

“No, we weren’t.”

“Okay,” at this point I turned to the mediator, who hadn’t really been doing anything other than sitting there. “These are the corporation papers stating that James M. Compton and Edward J. Compton entered into a 51%/49% partnership. And these are the tax documents for the year 1998 stating that the business took a loss of \$20,431 dollars, which loss both Mr. Compton and his father used on their tax returns as a deduction, as shown here.”

Jim was dumbfounded. He didn’t like the way things were going. I saw him brings his hands up to wipe his face as he did when he was stressed and trying to think his way out of a problem. The downward motion stretched his face out and had a strange effect, making him seem older, wiser. “Look, Krista, can we talk alone for a few minutes?”

“Why?” I asked.

He turned to the mediators and asked them if we could be alone. The woman in charge responded, “Well, we can step out of the room if you need us to. Is that what you want Mrs. Compton?”

I thought about it a minute. I didn’t know what he was up to, but since they were just in the next room I didn’t really see what it could hurt.

“Sure,” I said, “I don’t see why, but I suppose we can talk privately for a minute.”

“Take all the time you need,” she responded, “just come get us when you’re ready.” And with that she and her assistant walked out the door.

As the door closed behind them, I looked across the table at Jim.

He gave me a lopsided grin and commented, as though it had just occurred to him, “Hm, you’re gaining weight.”

This caught me off guard and put me on the defensive. “Yes, I’ve been going to the gym and lifting weights a lot lately so I’m probably putting on some muscle weight.”

“No, I don’t mean like that, I just mean you’re putting on weight.”

I had very carefully picked a black suit and heels to wear that day to look my best. His comment did not amuse me. Weight had always been an issue with him. I was an incredibly unhealthy 105 pounds when we met, but had soon come up to a more comfortable 120 pounds that I maintained throughout our marriage. Lately, as I was more confident about myself and secure with my body, I had come up to the 130 pound range. There was truth in what he said, but it was just the kind of comment that he had always tried to use to make me feel unworthy. It wasn’t working this time.

“Let’s focus on what we came here to talk about,” I said.

“Krista, I can’t pay anything right now and you know it. I would if I could. I want to help you out.”

“I’m not asking you to *help me out*. I’m asking you to take responsibility. This is your debt, too. Can’t you at least start making payments? I only have to make \$100 payments on the corporate credit card, but at that rate it will take forever to pay off the debt. If you could also pay \$100 a month, we could knock it out a lot quicker.”

“I’ve got too many other obligations right now. You know that. The banks are coming after me for the money on those trucks, and even a cheap apartment is expensive in the Richmond area. I don’t have any extra money after my bills are paid. But I’m hoping to get a promotion and a transfer soon and I’ll be in a better position to do something.”

“Okay then, when can you start making payments? In a few months?”

“No, I don’t think so. The transfer is going to take a while.”

“Fine then, surely you’ll be in a more stable position in a year. Can you pay it then, or at least start making payments of \$100 a month then?”

“Sure, yeah, I can do that for sure. And if we can go ahead and just set it up that way, I’ll send you money sooner if I get it. You know how I fix up old cars and sell them. I may have a few opportunities come up with that soon and I can send you a few hundred here, a thousand dollars there.”

“Okay,” I said and went out to find the mediators.

They came back in and I presented what we had worked out. Jim would either pay me one half of the amount owed in exactly one year, which would be \$3,900, or he would pay me \$100 a month for 45 months. I worked in the 45 months to give him an incentive to pay the entire amount up front, especially since I was cutting him a break by continuing to pay and bring down the balance in the meantime.

The mediator recorded our agreement and drew up papers for us to sign. By the time we were ready to leave, we had been there three hours. At a rate of \$120 an hour, that was \$180 a piece. I wrote her my check and Jim wrote his. The mediator asked, “Okay, Mr. Compton, you want this held until what day next week?”

“Ah, don’t worry about it,” he said with a sly grin, “it’s good.”

I couldn’t believe him! He had been bluffing all along, which strengthened my convictions that he was bluffing on the whole thing. I began to reconsider the deal we had struck, and regretted agreeing to talk to him alone.

I walked out to my car with Jim close behind.

“Hey,” he said, “it didn’t have to be this way. Can I have a hug?”

I looked at him in awe, “I know it didn’t have to be this way, but you wouldn’t agree to take responsibility. And no, you may not have a hug.” I couldn’t believe his nerve. He had ruined five years of my life, was continuing to make the next few years more difficult by refusing to pay his half of our debt, was continually dishonest, and he repulsed me. There was no way I would even entertain the idea of shaking his hand, much less giving him a hug.

The rage in his face gave me that momentary rush of adrenaline I had become so used to throughout the years, and as I tried to open the door to my car, he quickly jumped in his and peeled out of the parking lot, throwing gravel in his wake. I went back to school and worked the rest of the night.

When we met back in the family law master’s chambers about a month later, I got tired of waiting for my attorney to talk for me, as she and the law master were just chatting back and forth about the busy schedule and my attorney’s 4:00 hair appointment (my hearing was at 3:00), so I intervened and informed the law master that I wasn’t satisfied with the mediated agreement. I didn’t feel Mr. Compton had been honest about his financial standings, and he still hadn’t provided the financial documentation he’d been ordered to provide, and I still felt like he and I should only be splitting half of the business debt since his father was his partner.

“Well,” she responded, “we don’t have time for your attorney to do her song and dance today. I’m behind schedule and she has a hair appointment. You can go back to mediation and come back here in a couple of months.”

“Fine, then,” I conceded, “forget it, I just want this over with. Let’s go with the mediated agreement.”

Two months later, I got a bill in the mail from my attorney, stating that I owed her \$1,365.06 more, beyond my initial \$1,800 retainer fee. The retainer was supposed to cover the entire amount. I had asked before the final hearing for an update on how much of my retainer I had used to make sure I didn't go over, but was told they didn't have the figures yet. I had also paid for all the extras, like the mediation and deed preparation for the house, along the way so I wouldn't owe a lot at the end.

Looking over the bill I realized that I had been charged an exorbitant amount of money for making phone calls to her office. I thought back and remembered calling her office on three different occasions one week. I had asked my attorney to make a settlement proposal to Jim over the phone. I called her to see what his response was, only to find out from one of her assistants that she hadn't called him yet. I called two other times that week and received the same answer. She charged me \$43.50 for the privilege of making those calls and finding out nothing. Over the course of the proceedings, she charged me a total of \$798.50 for 16 calls made to her office. That's an average of \$50 per phone call, which never lasted more than about 5 to 10 minutes, and often less.

I would have been much better off without an attorney. The only thing that had gotten worked out I had worked in mediation, with the mediator out of the room, but I had paid all these people all kinds of money. And I still had nothing to show for it because he wasn't even due to pay me until next August.

Women are beginning to realize that we are not supported by the system in place, and must move toward a plan of self-sufficiency. Mary Susan Miller, Ph.D., author of No Visible Wounds, even goes so far as to outline the abuse we encounter with the court system, claiming that “Court abuse parallels the four kinds of nonviolent abuse women suffer in relationships,” which are emotional abuse, psychological abuse, social abuse, and economic abuse (175-83).

It’s becoming increasingly clear to me that there is no one way or one area to focus on to improve the state of affairs concerning domestic violence. Women will have to overcome many demons themselves, but both societal changes regarding expectations for men and women and changes in the court system can help them fight the demons that plague our society. Women shouldn’t have to fight this war on their own.

When the following August came with no payment from Jim, I found out where he worked by looking him up on the Internet as a Virginia State Employee. I sent an email to the address given on the Internet to remind Jim that his payment was due. I received a return email from the Park telling me that Mr. Compton was no longer employed there. When I called and explained my situation to someone in the office and inquired about how long it had been since Mr. Compton’s departure, I was informed that his last day of employment had been August 31, and that his forwarding address was his parents’. August 31 was the exact day he was due to start paying me. What a drama queen. He knew I could find him since he was a state employee, so he quit when his debt became due.

On one of my trips to my attorney's office to drop off a payment, I inquired about what I would need to do to collect on the money Jim owed me. I was informed that I would need to pay another \$1,800 retainer fee to my attorney before she could do anything for me. I thought that my initial retainer retained her services and that anything after that I paid for along the way. I was quickly informed that this was an entirely different case, and would require a different retainer. I felt like it was the same case, which still hadn't been resolved, but she would give me no help.

I wrote the following letter to his parents in hopes of getting some help from them.

Dear Linda and Joe,

I am writing you to get a message to Jim. I have tried every way I can think of to reach him without bothering you, as I know this is not your responsibility; however, everywhere I try to reach him I am given your address and phone number.

Last year it was ordered in the court that Jim pay half of the Speedy Beaver Corporate Credit Card that was in my name, but which was used to buy a \$4,000 rollback engine, the \$1,100 riding mower that was left at your home (which Jim told me was stolen when I inquired about getting it since I have been paying the bill), \$5,000 in back payments on all the business vehicles, and various other business expenses. At the time, I tried to get Jim to agree to begin making payments right away, but he would not, and the courts only wanted to send us to more mediation at \$120 an hour. As a result, I gave in and agreed that he could pay half of what was due on August 30, 2002, continuing to make the payments myself until that time. I even agreed that if at that time he was still not financially stable enough for the entire amount, he could then begin making payments of \$100 a month.

As you know, right around that August 30 deadline, he has picked up and moved again, and I cannot reach him to let him know that I must file a motion and he will be found in contempt of court for ignoring a court order.

I'm not sure what you think about me or what you've been told about what happened in our marriage, but I've tried to stay clear of your family out of respect for your relationship with your son. As you know, we did have a lot of personal debt with the house and personal credit cards, but I took on all of that myself just to get the divorce over as quickly as possible. I am currently trying to sell the house, but I'll probably have to pay off a significant amount of the second mortgage on my own. As far as the credit cards go, I have worked diligently at multiple jobs teaching from 7AM to 8PM every day plus summer school, and continued to live in the little trailer next to my parents so I could bring that \$13,000 credit card debt down to \$1,500 in the last year. You know from Cindy's experience how tough that can be, but I've done it. Sure, I've wanted to

buy a house, run off to try new and exciting jobs in wonderful places, but I knew I had to delay those dreams for a while and work hard until the debts are paid off.

I have made no attempt to contact Jim in the last year since we agreed to the August 30 deadline, which the court order upholds. I'm sure he is not happy that I have refused to talk to him on the numerous occasions he has called me (usually after I AM), but I have been through too much counseling to risk letting a conversation with him cause emotional turmoil in my life again. Besides, as my mailing address has not changed, taking care of this debt does not require our talking to one another.

I didn't intend to go on this long, but I've talked to you both so much about plans and getting debt paid off before, that when I started writing I just felt like I was having a conversation with you again. Maybe I wanted you to be proud that I am finally kicking this debt thing in the butt, because you were like parents to me. I don't know if breaking off all communication was the right thing to do, but it's what I had to do for me so I could stand strong and take care of what I needed to do.

I'm not sure if you care, but I am now happily teaching at the high school level in a wonderful school. I will start working on my master's degree this summer if all goes well financially, and I plan to begin my doctorate work full time as soon as possible after that.

So, what am I asking of you? Only that you relay to Jim that there are consequences to ignoring a court order, give him a reminder that his payment was due to weeks ago, and hopefully, encourage him to do the right thing.

*Thank you for your listening ear, now and in the past.
Respectfully,*

Krista Holcomb

I never sent the letter.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Contempt & Judgment

In April of 2003, eight months after Jim was supposed to start paying me, I filed Contempt of Court Charges against him. I learned that it was a very simple process and that I didn't need an attorney at all, just \$35 and the ability to fill out a simple form. I tracked him down in Vail, Colorado, and had him served by the police, which cost about \$50, but still far from the \$1,800 my attorney wanted to charge me just to talk to me again. It wasn't difficult to find him. He'd been calling pretty regularly, usually at about 2:00 in the morning on a week night, telling me that he was standing at the bus stop in Vail and trying to get me to take part in reminiscing about our times there. I was having none of it, but it let me know where he was. A phone call to the ski school there even let me know what his schedule was so I could make sure the officer didn't make a wasted trip.

Of course, he didn't show up at the hearing, but he sent a letter to the family law master, who was now a judge, telling her that he would pay me when I had his name taken off of the home loan. Since that wasn't part of the agreement, she dismissed his letter and granted me a judgment for the full amount of the debt. At that time, however, the judgment did me little good. The judge told me I could file an Abstract of Judgment with the county, but I soon learned that that would only help me if he ever tried to buy property in Kanawha County. Not likely, since he had never even lived near Kanawha County. And if he did, I would be willing to give up the money to have him leave. I asked around to find out what else I could do to collect this judgment, but everyone just kept telling me that they couldn't help me because they couldn't give me legal advice. They told me to hire an attorney. I laughed.

In the summer of 2004, a little over a year after I was granted a judgment against Jim, I discovered after a routine check of my credit report that the corporate credit card I had been paying on my own for the last four years had been written off. I didn't understand how they could write it off since I had been paying it, but they explained that since it had been handed over to a collection agency that they had the right to do so.

I could understand their writing it off, because I had refused to pay it for a period of time because I didn't feel it was legally my responsibility. I thought that since it was a corporate card that I was protected under the corporation. I thought I was only signing for it as a formality as a secretary of the corporation. I found out otherwise, but they would not provide me with proof of such until after it was turned over to a collection agency. As soon as I was convinced that I was legally responsible, I had begun paying the debt every month. Jim had been ordered by the court to pay half of it, but since he hadn't done that, and since the bill wasn't even showing up as an active account on my credit report, I just continued to pay the \$100 a month I could afford.

But the refusal to pay had been back in the year 2000. Why wasn't it written off then? I had had some financial problems the last few years I was with Jim, *because* I was with Jim, so the write off would have been more easy to explain then, especially since I had been paying the debt ever since. But I had had absolutely no blemishes on my report since I left him, and now this "write off" was showing up in July of 2004, making it look as though I currently did not pay my bills.

I was furious. And after talking to both the credit card agency that submitted the write off and the collection agency I have been paying for four years, I received no

satisfaction, only assurance that a *note* would be made on my credit report only after I had paid the debt in full. Until then, it would show up on my credit report as the full, original amount written off as though I hadn't bothered to pay a dime. And even after I paid it off in full, only a note would accompany the write off, and it would take several *more* years for it to drop off my report. The pristine credit I had been working to rebuild the last four years now had its ugliest blemish yet, at a time when I was the most financially stable and almost ready to buy a home of my own. My fury against Jim was newly fueled. I determined that day to find him and make him pay.

After doing a little research, I discovered he was back in West Virginia. I couldn't believe my luck!

I'd been doing some volunteer work at the Resolve Family Abuse Program through the summer, so one day while I was there working with the kids, and stopped in the office of the lady who was an advocate and the contact person for legal aid. I explained my dilemma to her and asked if she knew what I could do. I can't believe I hadn't done this before. I had been going to group therapy off and on for years and thought it was a wonderful service, but I had never bothered to find out what other services might be available to me through the program. She took down my questions and emailed the legal aid advocate.

While waiting to hear from her, I also called the judge's office. It seemed to me that she had mentioned contacting her to have Jim picked up if he were back in the area because he was in contempt of court. I explained this to the lady who answered the phone, but after looking up my case, she assured me that since the judge had issued me a judgment, it was now out of her hands.

“What?” I exclaimed, “If it is out of her hands, then whose hands is it in? This judgment is basically worthless to me unless I can have it enforced, and nobody seems to be able to or willing to tell me how to enforce it. Are you telling me I would have been better off to deny the judgment and request that the case remain open?”

“No, ma’am. There should be ways that you can enforce it. The Circuit Clerk’s office should be able to help you with that, ma’am.”

“I talked to them the last time and all they told me to do was file an Abstract of Judgment in the County, which is also worthless.”

“Try talking to them again, ma’am, I really think there are some other options they can tell you about.” I could hear in her voice that she knew something that she felt was out of her realm of practice to share with me, so I trusted her suggestion and called the Circuit Clerk’s office. This time I let the person I spoke to know that I had been sent to them by the judge’s office, and was told there that they could share some other options with me.

The woman gave me three options right away. I could either file a document to place a hold on his personal property and have it sold, or I could file a different form to place a lien on his bank account, or I could file a Suggestee Execution to garnish his wages. I felt confident that any personal property he owned was protected under his father’s name or hidden on a farm, and I didn’t know with whom he banked to place a lien on his account. I had, however, recently discovered where he worked. I filed the Suggestee Execution as quickly as possible.

I didn’t hold my breath, though, because I figured that at best I would get money from one of his checks, and that he would quit and move after that. I was especially

skeptical when they told me they had to send him a letter notifying him of the garnishment before they could even send the notification to his employer. At this point, I just wanted to get anything from him to feel like someone had forced him to take even an inkling of responsibility.

One can only imagine my surprise when less than a month after I filed the paperwork, Brandon, my fiancé, brought me the phone one September evening and said, “It’s for you.”

“Hello?” I said into the phone, completely unaware of who might be on the other end of the line.

“Hi, there,” came the distantly familiar voice.

“Oh, hello,” I answered uncertainly when I realized it was Jim.

“I just called to tell you that there is a check in the mail with your name on it for \$4,574.26.”

I was shocked, and a little disbelieving as I said, “Okay.”

He continued, “Well, actually, it’s two checks. One is a cashier’s check made out to me for \$4,500 and the other one is a personal check from me for \$74.26. There’s a problem, though. They’ve already garnished my wages, so I need you to hold onto that check, don’t cash it.”

“That’s not a problem,” I quickly responded, “What do you want me to do with it?”

“Um, just send it back to the company I guess, but don’t cash it.”

“Okay, I won’t cash it. If you’re paying me in full I won’t have any need to.”

“Good. Well, that’s all I wanted.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“Sure. Bye.”

“Bye.”

I clicked off the phone and looked straight ahead in disbelief. I gradually turned my gaze to Brandon.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“That was Jim. And I really mean Jim, and not Psycho, no drama or anything. He said there’s a check in the mail for me for \$4,574.26. I’m not holding my breath, but I don’t know what he would have to gain by telling me it’s in the mail if it weren’t, because he said they already garnished his wages.

“Good,” Brandon replied in his usual calm tone. “Now maybe you can get your house taken care of and be done with all that business.”

“Yes, maybe I can.”

I called mom and let her know to watch out for the check. I don’t want Jim to know where I live, so I always used mom and dad’s address with him. The very next day she called to tell me the check was there.

Mom was pretty skeptical because the cashier’s check was made out to him.

When I took it to the bank the following Monday, I took every piece of paperwork with me that I thought might be helpful in getting the check cashed. I told the woman that I had two checks I needed to deposit into my savings account, but that there might be a problem with one of them. When I told her it was a cashier’s check made out to my ex-husband which he’d signed over to me, she said there would be a problem, and that he would either need to be present or I would need his driver’s license.

I quickly informed her that there was no way either of those things was going to happen, and explained my situation, emphasizing that this was my only chance to get my payment from him. I was sure I'd never get him to write a check for the entire amount again. I also showed her the judgment I'd been awarded over a year ago and the wage garnishment paperwork. I pointed out that the signatures on the back of the cashier's check and on the front of the personal check matched, and that the two checks added up to the exact amount shown on the wage garnishment order.

She took all this information to her supervisor, made copies of everything, and deposited the checks for me. She said that it helped that I was depositing them into my savings and not expecting cash right away, because there would be a five-business-day hold on the money. Not a problem, I told her, because I wouldn't be using the money for a while anyway. I planned to keep it in the savings to help me sell the house when my tenants moved out.

I felt very, very relieved with the checks in the bank, but I determined I would do nothing in the way of informing the circuit clerk of Jim's payment until that five days was up. I wanted to be sure the cashier's check wouldn't be denied.

It went through. The money was mine. I took my sweet time sending a release to the Circuit Clerk, getting it to her some time in October, and I took even more time sending the three checks that were garnished in the interim back to Jim's company. He kept me waiting for four years, I figured he deserved to have to wait at least two months. When he started calling every night in November to remind me to send the checks back, I did. Brandon didn't deserve to be bothered by him every night, and I didn't want to provoke another battle. He's only called me at 4 AM once since then, but it's early yet.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Taking On the Cause

I was driving home from work one day last October when I noticed a large sign at the entrance to town. It read simply, “October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.” I felt very gratified to know that there was actually a month dedicated to domestic violence and that evidently, someone was doing something about it. But I asked myself, *So what if October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, what am I doing to raise awareness?* I had recently made the decision to go back to school to work on my master’s degree in English, but mainly because I wanted to write a book about domestic violence. I knew if I wrote the book as a master’s thesis I would have deadlines and plenty of feedback to motivate me to finish my project.

But that wasn’t enough, I wanted to do something to raise awareness now, but I didn’t know how to get an audience for it. Then it hit me, I have an audience of at least 75 every day. I went home that evening and began scouring my bookcases and scavenging through stacks of paper, pulling out pamphlets and books that related to domestic violence. The next day I arrived at work extra early, probably about 6:15, and began arranging the books on the shelf of my dry-erase board, and taping the pamphlets and posters up on the board. Above this display, I wrote in purple marker (the color for domestic violence awareness) “October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.” The books I had ranged from Anna Quindlain’s *Black and Blue* about relationship violence, to Dave Pelzer’s *A Child Called It* about his life as a survivor of child abuse, and Jodee Blanco’s *Please Stop Laughing at Me*, which chronicles her endurance of school bullying from elementary school through high school.

I didn't say anything to the kids, but an amazing thing started happening after I put together this little display. My students started asking me about domestic violence. Then, an even more remarkable thing started happening: they began asking me if they could borrow the books I had on display to take home to read. I was ecstatic. Reading was my passion. Teaching was my passion. And being an advocate for domestic violence awareness was my newest passion.

I left my display up for the next week, answering students' questions and loaning out books. As the end of October drew near, and I saw my window of opportunity coming to a close, I pulled together my courage and decided to have a heart-to-heart with my students. I explained to them that it was important that people become aware of the complexities of domestic violence, and talked a little about the significance of each of the items I had on display. I then took a deep breath, and told them that the reason this had become so important to me is because I had been in an abusive marriage for five years.

My students were shocked. "But Ms. Holcomb, you're always so happy," I heard more than once, and, "We just can't believe *you* would let someone do that to you."

I explained to them that I hadn't always been so happy and that even when I wasn't, looks can often be deceiving as victims are usually embarrassed about the abuse and try their best to appear as if everything is fine. I also let them know that when I first got away from my abuser, there were people in my profession who told me that I should not make my past public knowledge because it might hurt me professionally. There were those who would lose respect for someone who had lived in an abusive situation. I told my students that while it was a risk, I greatly disagreed, and I felt that more people needed to stand up and admit this publicly so that others could gain hope from their

survival and confidence that it was not something to be ashamed of. We talked about how people often say things that unknowingly place blame on the victim, like, “If she stays with him, then she deserves it” or “She’s stupid for putting up with that.” Many of my students admitted that they had made or heard others make these kinds of comments, but hadn’t really thought of the message it sent.

After our discussion, I asked my students to write about domestic violence for 10 minutes, just getting out their thoughts and feelings about it. My kids opened their hearts to me that day. Some felt the need to write about scenes of domestic violence they had experienced, witnessed, or knew of. Others wrote strongly about their beliefs on the matter. And still others admitted that they hadn’t been very respectful of victims in the past, but that today’s discussion had opened a new door for them.

That’s domestic violence awareness.

In the Spring of 2004, I had a Tuesday evening off, so I made my way back to a Victim’s Support Group meeting. I’d been writing about my experiences a lot lately for an independent study I was doing entitled, “Domestic Violence: Literature and Literacy.” I wasn’t having horrible flashbacks or anything like that anymore, but I was experiencing disturbing feelings every now and then as I had to relive the experiences to write about them. Also, I wanted to continue to participate in group every now and then to continue to offer encouragement to those who were current regulars in the group. Many people in group are still in violent relationships, and many others are fresh out of the relationship and need encouragement to stay out and stay safe. And some just need reassurance that they’re not crazy like their abusers have told them they are for years.

But in addition to these two reasons for attending the meeting, I had an ulterior motive. I wanted to talk to Marilyn, the group leader, about possible speaking engagements. I had been considering public speaking much more seriously, and asked Marilyn if she had any thoughts on this idea. Rather than just mere thoughts, Marilyn had a name and number for me to call with the date of an upcoming conference for which they needed a panel of survivors to discuss their experiences. What luck!

I called the number excitedly and had soon booked my first speaking engagement as an advocate for domestic violence awareness. The event sounded fairly informal, though, as the mailing I received said it was a training for advocates at the Embassy Suites and that there would be representatives from 14 different counties. Fourteen people. No problem. Piece of cake. It will be more like a discussion with only fourteen people. I'm happy I got there early, because the fourteen counties I had somehow translated to mean fourteen people, was actually about 250 people. When I saw the crowd I was at once excited and petrified that I wasn't prepared to speak to such a large crowd. I quickly wrote a four-page speech that was surprisingly coherent.

After the other panel member and myself had spoken about our experiences, we answered several questions. The audience was very receptive and I loved it! It was so empowering. And to beat it all, I actually got paid to do it. I definitely planned to do this again in the future.

Shortly after my speaking experience, I did a survey with my students. I decided that I would really like to teach a specialized literature course, and surveyed the students to see where their interests lie. I placed the following categories of interest to me on the board:

Women's Literature

African American Literature

Appalachian Literature

Domestic Violence in Literature

Autobiography: Literature and Composition

I asked the students to identify classes that they would take if they were offered at our school. I told them if none of areas interested them, they needn't raise their hands at all. Overwhelmingly, my students chose the class about domestic violence in literature. Autobiography came in at a distant second.

Our kids are concerned about domestic violence. They are seeing it, they are experiencing it, they want to know about this mysterious reality that everyone knows exists but no one wants to talk about. It was too late for me to request to teach the course the following year, but my goal is to have the class in place by the fall of 2005.

I became antsy that summer and wanted something to do other than just teach summer school, so I called the Resolve Family Abuse Program to see what I could do. I visited the shelter a couple of times and gave manicures to the women who were staying there. I'd like to tackle a writing class with them, but I thought that would be better to try after I had worked with them a while and gained their trust.

I also served as a mentor for a few of the girls in the kids' program, doing activities with them on Tuesday evenings. I liked the work I did, but I was only one person and just didn't feel like I was doing enough, so when my principal asked me to

advise the school's Key Club I saw an opportunity to raise awareness about domestic violence.

Key Club is a service organization that does basically two things: volunteers in the community and raises money to send to causes. With October so close to the beginning of the school year, I began talking to my students about Domestic Violence Awareness month right away. We planned several activities for October, making purple ribbons to pass out to people, posting signs and fliers all over the building about domestic violence, and informing students where they can find help. We also sold carnations to raise money to buy Halloween costumes and pajamas for the kids at the shelter.

The students were so helpful that two of them even attended the Candlelight Vigil at the capitol building with me and read poems that were written by survivors. I delivered the following speech at the Vigil:

Silent Too Long, Silent No More – A Candlelight Vigil

My name is Krista Holcomb and I'm a high school English teacher.

I was in an abusive marriage for five years. My ex-husband did not become abusive immediately, but rather gradually began exhibiting controlling behaviors. These behaviors increased so gradually that it took me a long time to recognize them. By the time I did recognize them, I was well into my marriage, and as a perfectionist, I was determined to make this marriage work to avoid the failure implied by a divorce.

My husband had also told me that he had been abused by his biological mother, and so I knew he was acting out what he had seen as a child and needed help. I got him to go to counseling with me on several occasions, but each time he began to admit the abuse he had endured as a child, he became ashamed and wouldn't see that particular counselor again. He also backed away from counseling and became defensive when he had to acknowledge what he was doing to me.

His biological mother was diagnosed as being manic depressive. I worried that he suffered from this as well, and encouraged him to see a doctor. He did and was prescribed an anti-depressant, but continued to drink alcohol, thus voiding the medication's effectiveness and giving him an excuse to stop taking it.

I was never on medication for the depression I suffered while in the marriage, but I did read or listen to every self-help book I could. I began with John Grey, who deals with relationships, but then moved on to books that focused on my individual problems: feelings of anxiety and a tendency toward co-dependency.

I also went to counseling, but I tended to go when I felt my worst or when he became explosive, and only went long enough to start feeling better. As I began to feel better, I didn't feel my marriage was so bad, and so suddenly I "didn't have time" for counseling anymore. My counselor once confessed that she was discouraged that she felt like my 'cut man'." And there was probably also a time when I became embarrassed that I was staying with this man, and so I backed away from counseling.

At some point, I started to realize the hopelessness of the situation and gained the courage to begin leaving my husband. Yes, I say begin leaving because I left on several occasions. It is common for abused women to leave as many as 5 to 7 times before making the final break. I tell you this not to discourage you, but to urge you to remain supportive of a woman who is in the process of leaving even though she may return to her abuser, because each time she leaves she gains strength and something she needs, whether it be the knowledge that she can survive emotionally without him, that she can survive financially, that her friends and family will stand beside her, or that people won't look down on her because her marriage failed. She must learn many of these things for herself by leaving multiple times before she can put her abuser behind her for good.

The last time I went back to my abuser, he got me to do so because he started attending AA meetings and quit drinking. (He had been drinking a 12 pack a day.) He also showed up at the restaurant where I waited tables at night after teaching all day. He begged me to come home and give him another chance. He made it very difficult to be away from him, and I thought life would be easier if I'd just go back. And who knew, since he stopped drinking, maybe it would all be better and I would get back that loving, fun guy I met on the ski slopes.

To my knowledge, he did not drink for the last 8 months I was with him, but the controlling behaviors began again, gradually. The final time I left, it was not only because he ripped my gradebook to shreds a few days before my grades were due, and not just because he pushed me into the wall and threatened me, but because he did these things sober. I knew that if he still hurt me when he was sober, he would never stop.

I had to put my pride aside and move back to my hometown, next door to my parents. This was a very difficult concession for a woman determined to be independent. As soon as I got back home, 6 hours away from my abuser, I called the YWCA and asked about help. I was told about the Victims Support Group that Marilyn Smith led there. I attended that group faithfully for the next year and a half, and also saw Marilyn in individual counseling. This network of women who had been through similar degrading experiences and thus would not judge me because of them, did wonders for my self-esteem and my recovery. Without these groups I would have had much more difficulty dealing with the attorneys who simply told me to file bankruptcy because my ex-husband's business and my marriage had brought me into such debt.

The group also gave me the strength to deal with my abuser during the divorce. Although I saved up money for an attorney so I wouldn't have to speak to my abuser, after my attorney spoke to him on the phone only a few times, she too refused to take his calls or speak to him again, so I had to step back in. Then when it came to the hearing, the Family Law Master required us to go to mediation to settle our financial disputes. What a great idea! Put a bully and his victim in a room and tell them to come to an agreement. At the next hearing, when I told the law master I wasn't satisfied with the agreement because my husband revealed that he hadn't been honest in the mediation and

had not provided the documentation necessary to back up his argument, her response was, "Well, we don't have time for your attorney to do her song and dance because I'm behind schedule and she has a hair appointment, so you can go back to mediation and then come back for another hearing." I quickly went along with the "mediated" agreement so I wouldn't have to see him again.

Because of that agreement, I've been paying off all of our personal debt and part of the business debt ever since. I paid off \$13,000 in credit card debt in one year by teaching day school, and night school, and summer school. I had to file contempt of court charges because my abuser refused to follow the court order that required him to pay part of a corporate credit card for his business, which was in my name. I was awarded a judgment, but couldn't find anyone who would tell me how to enforce it. Everyone kept telling me that I would have to hire an attorney because they couldn't give me legal advice. Well, my attorney had already charged me twice the agreed upon amount, and as far as I could tell she had hurt my case more than helped it, so I wasn't going that route. Then, two years after that final hearing, I finally got someone to tell me what paper work I needed to file to have his wages garnished.

After spending years trying to get away from my abuser, I've had to spend the last 2-3 years trying to track him down to get him to pay his debt, as he moved and changed jobs each time I discovered his location and attempted to recover this debt. I was told by friends and colleagues on numerous occasions to just give up and be happy that he was out of my life, but I would not. I was determined that this man who had hurt me and others in so many ways, would not get off without consequences while I worked days and nights for years to pay off a debt that was not entirely mine. This summer, I discovered that he was working back in this state. In August, I filed the paperwork to have his wages garnished. I suppose he decided that this job was too good to simply quit and run, because within a month of filing I received what was for me a symbol of victory in this battle: a check from him for the full amount of the judgment.

Why am I telling you about all of this aftermath? Because it is part of the battle. The battle does not end when a survivor walks out the door. She still has to contend with the abuser and a complex legal system for a long time after leaving. For me, it took four years after leaving to finally have this feeling of triumph.

I'm still teaching days, nights and summers to try to pay down the house we lived in when most of the abuse took place, so I can sell it and bring closure to that part of my life. I went back to school last year to complete the coursework necessary to earn my Master's degree. As my thesis, I'm writing about my experiences with domestic violence to help encourage women to get out of abusive situations, but also to help family and friends of victims understand how they can support them without showing judgment and blame. I hope to one day publish a book on these experiences and speak to groups about Domestic Violence, so I am very pleased to be privileged to speak to you here today.

To those of you in abusive relationships: you are a survivor, and if you have survived what your abuser has put you through, you can survive life without him.

To those of you who know someone being abused (and most of you do whether you realize it or not): please, be kind and supportive, but most of all, be patient, it takes time to truly leave an abuser behind and turn one's life around.

Thank you so much for letting me share my story with you.

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