

It all started at age 15, feeling as if I needed to find love to substitute my pain and loneliness. At the same I was dealing with adult decisions and situations. Not being acknowledged and appreciated, from the ones that meant the most to me I walked around with a hole in my heart and always felt empty. I just wanted to build my own foundation, but at the same time knew it was impossible because of my youth. I was a prisoner in my own home, a slave, and the only girl of 5 kids. I couldn't do anything like party and play out late like my brothers. I just stayed in the house cooking and cleaning all the time.

I used to sit at the window and see this one boy pass by on his bike. He was so cute and looked so sweet, very well put and to himself. I found out his name through one of my brothers, that was when I started to write little hearts surrounding his name. That eventually led to a secret crush. Next thing I know, I saw him with a close friend of mine on my way to do laundry and we had our first conversation. He asked me my name, I told him and from then on we began. He was the same age as I was, and I thought it was a match made in heaven.

The arguments started early in the relationship. His jealousy, control, and drug abuse began too, but for once did I think it would get worse. I was satisfied in a way with just having him, knowing I can be held when I needed it and looked passed it when I couldn't receive comfort when I wanted. Two months into the relationship, I found out I was pregnant with my daughter. It was then when I started to see his true colors. My mother had a hard time accepting the fact that her only daughter "messed up her life so early"; and didn't want me near him. It killed me, the fact that I thought I finally found someone for me and only me; the fact that I thought I was finally complete; the fact that I thought I finally found love.

So I decided to run away from home to be with him. My dream had finally come true (or so I thought) A little into the pregnancy, the arguments started getting intense, screams got louder, things started to break, and there were patches of spackle covering holes he punched in the walls every time he wasn't satisfied with something. I used to think to myself, and I remember justifying every word he said and action he made. From the nights he left me while I was sleeping to every time he needed a fix and would have traumatic attacks every time he wanted to get high. I just didn't understand why things went so sour, especially with our baby girl on the way. I thought I had my foundation I longed for.

April 21st came and he wasn't happy and for some reason he wanted to pick a fight with me. By that time I was all cried out. He told me he would leave me and never come back. He would say that I would never find anyone like him to be there when my parents didn't want me, and save me from being a slave in my home. He, knowing I didn't have anywhere to go still left me alone at his mother's house. He didn't come back until the next day and with a smile on his face as if nothing had ever happened. Noticing that I didn't feel the baby moving at all, I got worried and told him I ended up going to the hospital and having an emergency C-section because the stress caused my daughter to lose oxygen and she had almost died. I named her Alani, a beautiful healthy but physically diagnosed with a tumor overgrowth syndrome.

Spent six of the longest months in the hospital with her from birth, she received four surgeries, days filled with stress (I never knew existed), cried tears I didn't know I had, and not to mention prayers I never prayed before. All alone, the father would come in and out as he pleased always altered from drugs, so it was like he wasn't even there. My daughter finally got released out of the hospital. We brought her home thinking it would change how things were; thinking to myself maybe this can make peace. I was wrong, even when we weren't arguing, he was arguing with his parents. If he didn't get his way, he would fist fighting with his father and sister over irrelevancies, and at the same time his mother was dying from brain damage.

I was tired of it and told him I was moving to Florida with my family. He couldn't bare me leaving, because just like he was comfort to me, I was the same to him. We left together. It only lasted six months before we came back to CT. The difference now was if I needed to get away there was no family that I can run to. My only aunt that lived here was tired of seeing me hurt by him, and didn't want any part of it. She cared deeply for me and she didn't want to see me hurt anymore. Once he knew he had an extra advantage of me, that's when the abuse worsened. It went from punching walls and screaming to throwing stuff at my face and throwing furniture almost hitting the baby. It was almost like a demon had possessed him and he hated me.

I found out I was pregnant with my son when I was about six months. Why so late in the pregnancy? Well I will be honest with you, when you're in a relationship of abuse; you tend to serve the abuser whatever he wants. You begin to believe him and not believe in yourself. He used to call me fat and

didn't want me getting dressed up at all. He would even tell my daughter to call me names, because he thought someone else needed to treat me that way. There was a lot of pain. I found comfort in food that I gained so much weight and I didn't even know I was pregnant.

A couple months later I gave birth to my baby boy. I don't even know where the hope came from, but there was hope when I gave birth to my son. In a way believing that he would have a reason to fix himself because he had a little boy looking up to him. He did say lots of things like "I'm going to change I promise just give me some time we are getting married one day", to "oh you know I love you I just get a little controlling because I don't want you to find someone else better than me, I will kill myself". He made me feel so guilty. What else would you expect a victim to feel with constant manipulation?

It was when my son was two months old when he finally hit me in my face because I was breast feeding in his car, and he was driving. Not looking, he thought I was exposing myself. I was already finished feeding the baby and the baby was asleep in my arms. He hit me three different times and when I told him to calm down because our older daughter was watching in the back seat; he hit me the last time, missed me and hit the baby in my arms. That's when I hit him back; there was only so much I could do. It was then that he grabbed me by the back of my neck and pressed me down against his knee blocking my airways and stopping me from breathing. He finally let go, and I cried. This wasn't what I wanted; this wasn't my foundation I longed for.

When we got to his house he had to go make a sale and I had told myself if he had left, I was leaving for good. I remember telling myself, "this is the last time he will put his hands on me!" He left and I called my aunt. I ended up at her house and we called for help. I ended up staying in a battered women shelter for three months hoping he would get help. I met a lot of women in worse situations than I was in. That for some reason made me think once again what he did was justifiable.

Victims weren't supposed to contact their abusers because it would pose risk not only to themselves but also to other victims who resided there. It didn't stop me from contacting him, with hope that he would get help. I didn't witness a change and wasn't very convinced. So I went back to Florida with my mom and family. I felt as if I can breathe for once in my life. I finished school, received my G.E.D.

enrolled in college, and had my first apartment. Things were moving along quickly. I met someone and believed he was the medicine to my pain. He was very respectable, mature, and made me feel hope again. A couple months later, I was pregnant with my third child.

Meanwhile, my abuser would contact me to ask for the kids. We built a type of friendship that I felt no one can break. It was then that I realized I was still in love with him and even though I was pregnant with someone else's child, I still felt as if I suffered enough and deserved happiness from him. The feeling really set in when I found out he had found someone else. Here I was, pregnant and in love with my abuser. I eventually ended things with my boyfriend I was with at the time, he understood I didn't want to live a lie, and so did he. My abuser was arrested for assault with an unlicensed pistol. My instinct was to just go back and be there for him. I missed him and felt as if we can find a way to work through anything.

So I went back and our relationship flourished. We were so good with each other while he was in jail, but by the time he was released in March of 2010, it was a different story. We didn't argue much, it was kind of played out. We would walk away if we had intense disagreements. I was led to believe he wasn't into drugs anymore and he had changed, I believed in him once again. I noticed he didn't really pay attention to my youngest child, never picked her up never really talked about her, nothing, but I felt as if it was understandable. Although I grew a tremendous amount of unconditional love and extreme bonding with my children, I still loved him.

It was June of 2010 when he had come home drunk. I locked my doors that night, not expecting him to come home. First, I remembered being hit multiple times in my face, all I saw was flashes before my eyes. It was dark and I had fallen asleep with my daughters in bed with me. My first thought was to get out the room and get away from the kids. When I realized it was him chasing me, I asked him why he just woke me up like that. He was screaming and shouting, calling me names, and I realized he was intoxicated in the worse way and had to be on drugs because the same demon I used to see, was in him that night. I tried to calm him down, but he was punching me and the walls. He began to smoke in the house, something that I don't allow because of the kids, I knew he had reached his limit.

I walked to my room, closing the door behind me, and I quickly called the cops. My phone charger was in the living room right next to him, and he noticed the "in use" light was on. He then marched to the room punching my door in, screaming "who the f!@# are you on the phone with!?" I told him "no one." He then somehow got into the room, by then I was sitting on the edge of my bed. My kids were up by this time, and he went on trying to look for the phone so he can break it. I was sitting on it with 9-1-1 already dialed. My oldest daughter was crying, saying "daddy you're scaring me!" he replied saying "go to f!@# bed." I was just crying telling him to leave. He then grabbed me by my ankles and pulled me aggressively off the bed hitting my head on the railing causing me to lose consciousness. After that things were blurry, I just remembered hearing my daughters voice "daddy you're going to kill my mommy please stop!" That was when I opened my eyes, and he had his hands around my neck. There was loud banging on my front door; police screamed "IT'S THE POLICE OPEN UP!" The father to my children started to cry asking me why I did this to him, and saying he didn't do anything. The cops broke in and slammed him on the floor, took him, and that was the last time I saw him. My daughter exclaimed to the police that her daddy was trying to kill her mommy, and he needed to go to jail, she then got into details explaining how he was choking her mommy and just didn't want to stop even after her mommy was sleeping. It broke my heart to hear those words come out of my daughter's mouth. I could've been dead right now and I look at it as if my daughter saved my life.

I just turned 23 and two days before my birthday on September 30th he was acquitted on the attempted murder, risk of injury to minors on the 3rd degree, breaking and entering, breach of peace, and interfering with a police call charges and plead guilty to risk of injury to minors on the 3rd degree and got away with a misdemeanor not a felony for attempted murder (strangulation). I feel like a victim all over again. I am now faced to leave the state, because of the injustice! Justice has not been served at all. I cry every night because of the judge's decision. I wonder if that judge spent a day in my shoes maybe she would have understood and realized how mental abuse is so much more scarring than physical abuse. I don't think that she understood how my bruises have gone away and cured, but if she saw my swollen jaw, or my bruised collar bone along with the marks he left on my neck from the strangulation she might have considered giving him what he deserved! She didn't see the deep scar he left in my soul, she didn't see the fear in my eyes, nor did she see the pain in my children's eyes. The pain and fear he has caused on my

children for seeing their daddy put their mommy through that. My children could've been left without a mother, but now that I am alive, people look at it as if it's nothing. As if my life wasn't hard enough. But throughout it all I remain with faith, and believe things will get better for me no matter what. I walked out of a situation so traumatizing not only for me but my children, and chose not to go down that same path ever, pay attention to red flags, and know my worth. I am a survivor, and I am very fortunate to say that today. My daughters will hopefully grow up and see what I walked away from, with respect and dignity. As for my son, I will try my best to make him the man, I didn't find in his father. This is what I call, the beginning of my life.