

Dear Sisters . . .

Break Free
from Domestic Violence



Written & Illustrated by
Karen MacKay

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For more information, please visit:
www.YourSelfHelpSite.com

Find domestic violence resources at:
www.DomesticViolenceHelpSite.com

Find more help to take care of yourself at:
www.HotFlashQueen.com

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To All People:

Let's make a better world for our children and our grandchildren. Let's not accept violence any longer.

Not to ourselves.
Not to our neighbors.
Not to anyone.

As long as violence is tolerated in any way, in any place on this earth, it will always reach out and infect those we love the most.

It is time for women to come forth and show themselves, to tell the truth of who they really are. Women's souls have been hidden away for far too long. It is an urgent cry that I hear from our earth and from our children. Unless we put an end to the violence toward ourselves, and to our children and to our earth, we shall lose everything.

It begins . . .

I had to get in the shower to wash away the sickening terror and to soothe my battered body. I wanted to stay in there forever even though I knew it would never be long enough. I was terrified to leave. Yet I was terrified he would break the door down and hurt me again.

When I came out of the shower, he was sitting on the bed, relaxed. He said something to the effect that I had a wonderful, loving place to discuss my problems. I had a loving man who was there for me whenever I needed him. The insanity of his statement terrified me. I had gone into his office when he was angry. I had violated his space. He shoved me into the wall. I was in shock and I sat there. He told me to get up and shoved me again and again. Picking me up off the floor he shoved me again onto the floor and into the table and back onto the floor. It seemed like it would never stop. I knew it was crazy. I had to leave. Yet, I was terrified to leave. He seemed calm and insane. Or was it I who was insane?

The first time we separated was for ten days.

Again . . .

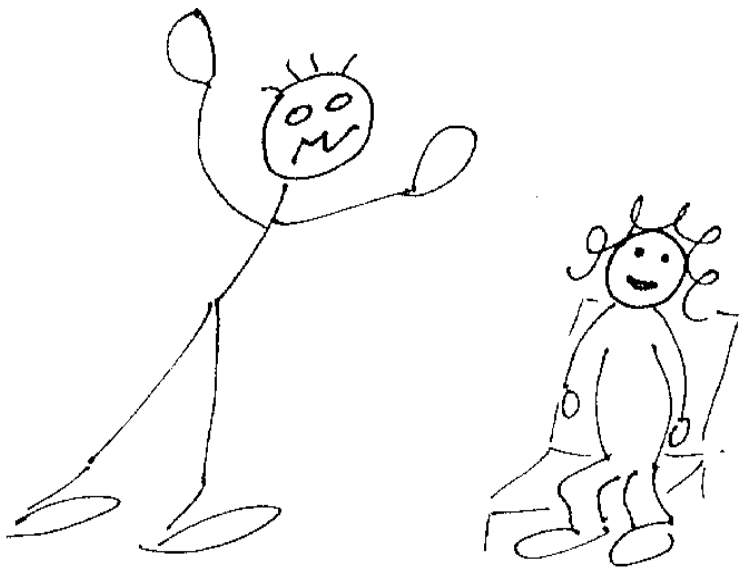
No one would ever hear me. No one would even know where I was. Trembling in fear I only hoped I could get away safely. We were miles from anyone, camping in the mountains of Colorado. One morning, after a ten-day trip of listening to his tyranny, we awoke to a flat tire on his truck. And a rotted spare. Angry that I didn't help him change it, he stormed around and paced back and forth pummeling rocks in my direction, yelling about me and his ex-wife. I didn't really listen to his words anymore but I was shrinking in terror.

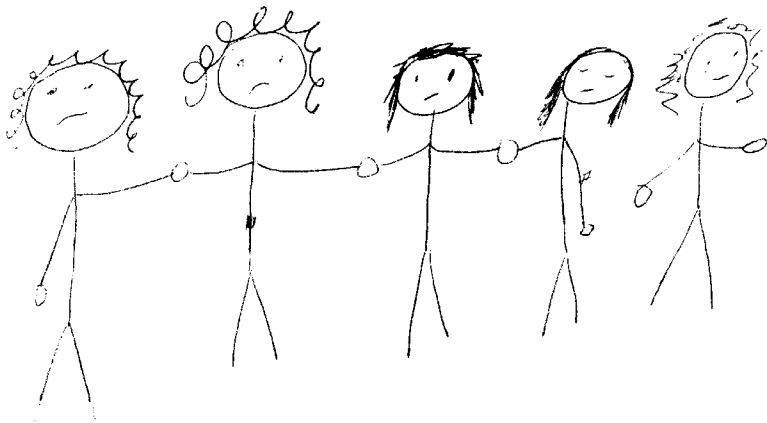
I left for ten days, but I came back and listened to his fury about me leaving him with no money.

And again . . .

The third time I left was after an evening of him yelling and making demands. I left knowing he was selfish and controlling. Everything was him first. I sat by the fire objectively as an adult, not as a horribly frightened kid, but as an adult, detached.

That month alone felt good, until he called . . .





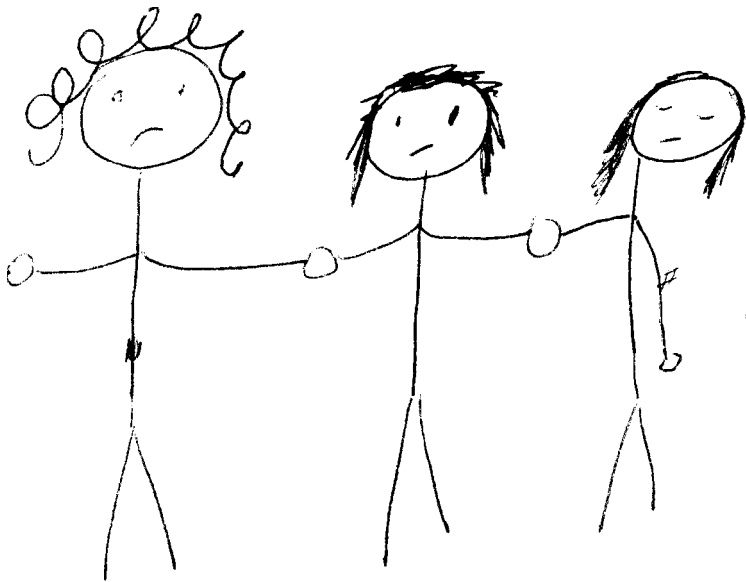
Two to four million women are victims of serious abuse each year. One million seek medical attention for injuries.

Dear One,

I am like you.

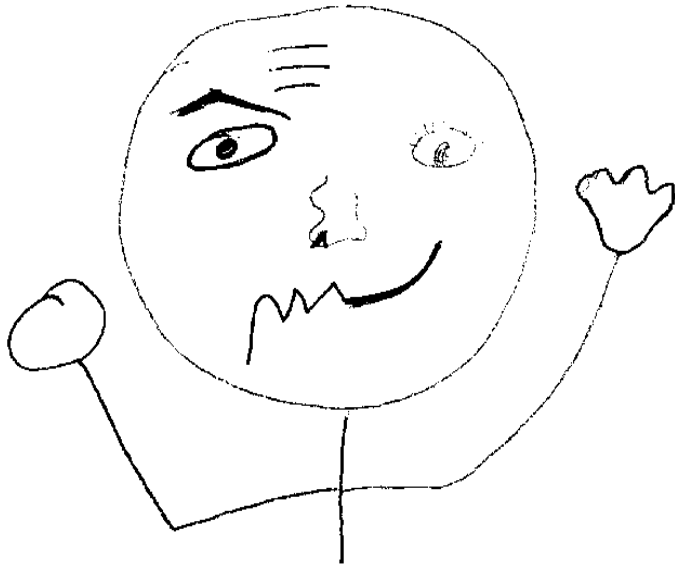
I am one of you,
a friend joined
by violence.

We are together
by being with sick,
manipulative men.



Much of the assaultive behavior in battering relationships involves slapping, shoving, hair-pulling and other acts which are unlikely to prompt serious medical or police concern.

I should've known that one evening. I had met him only a few weeks before and we were out for a walk. I must've said something. I don't even know what. He stopped and stood there with his face constricted and eyes staring off in the distance. I didn't have a clue what the problem was. I only know I apologized profusely. After all, he was the one upset. And I like to keep the peace.



I am alive to tell my story because I am one of the lucky ones. I got out in time. I hope you can also get out in time.

Half of female homicide victims in the United States are killed by an intimate partner.

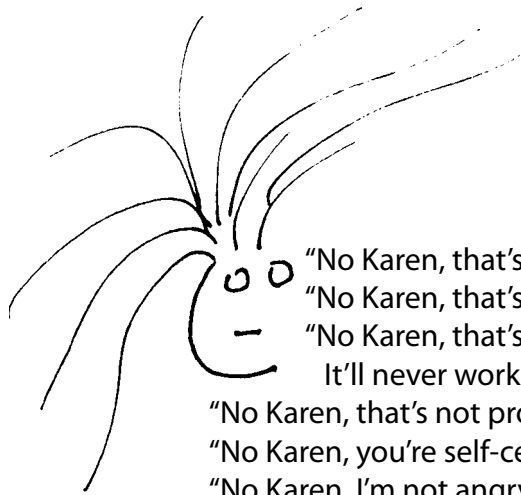
It is painful writing this, it brings back horrible memories when life wasn't mine, a fist in the pit of my stomach. I'd rather pretend it never happened. I guess at the time, I did pretend it never happened.



"The first time you hit me I was shocked. I'm not sure why I should have been because you'd been enraged several times since we'd moved in together only a few weeks before. There was always some truth in what you said to me so I accepted the blame. You were right. I wasn't thinking about 'us.' I was thinking about my friend who was coming to visit. I was concerned she couldn't reach us while we picked up your belongings. I really didn't understand why you were so upset. Why did you have to hit me?"

I feel helpless in writing to you.
I can usually write a letter without failing for words.
This letter I cannot.
I stop.
I start.
I stop again.

In my own home, I cannot even talk. If I say something that is ill-timed or "too cold" for him, he gets his righteous out. Our relationship is falling apart and I am so sad, so in grief. I can't even share it. I can't talk about my needs 'cause then I'd be thinking about myself.

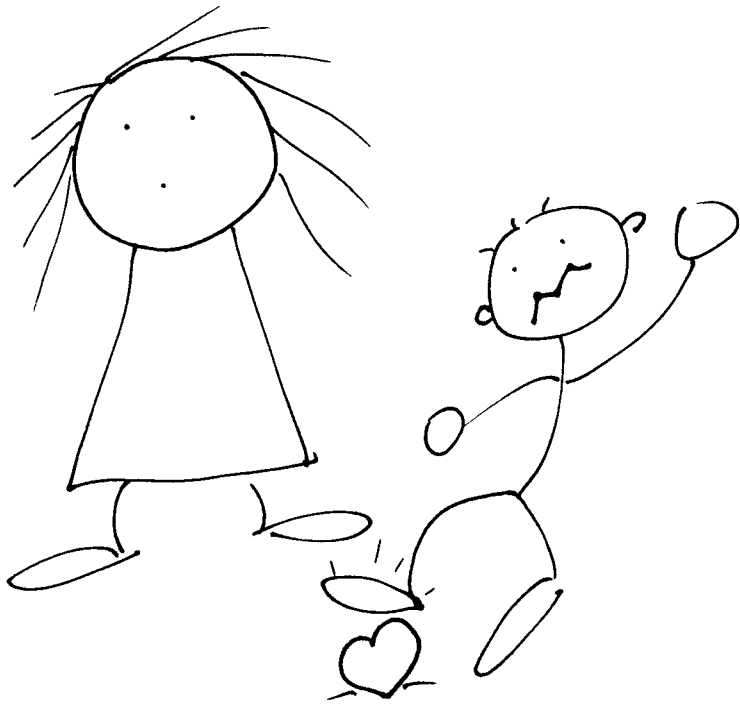


"No Karen, that's not how you do it..."
"No Karen, that's stupid..."
"No Karen, that's a dumb idea...
It'll never work."
"No Karen, that's not proper assertion..."
"No Karen, you're self-centered..."
"No Karen, I'm not angry...
I'll just pin you down and yell in your face."

Sounds like I never do anything right.
Can't I ever do anything right?

He became so angry because I didn't discuss changing my office hours. Yet, he quit working without any other source of income. Why didn't he ever talk to me about that? I supported him for ten months before. Maybe I should support him again?

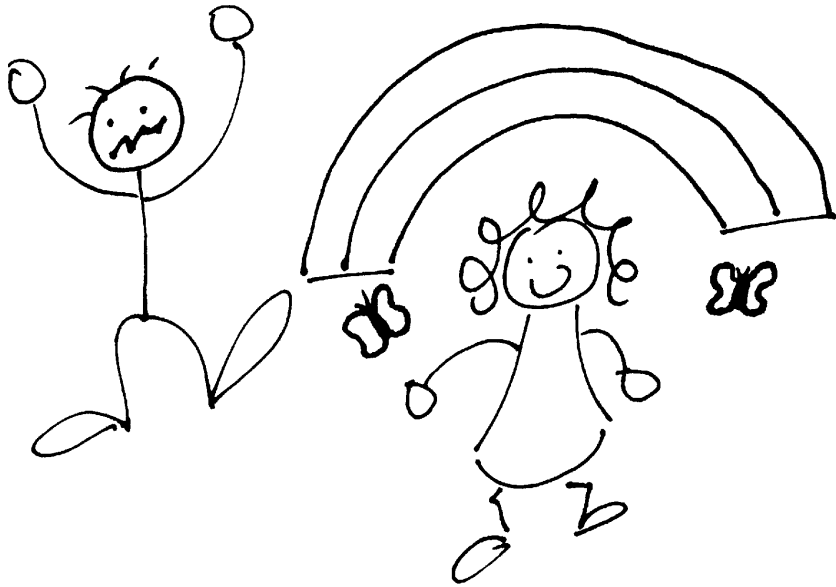
A month later I pick up the pen knowing I must reach you. I must reach into the core of your being and show you the way out.



It is physically threatening for him to be eight inches from my face yelling at me with spit flying and walking toward me where I have to back up to have more space. . . me in my pajamas, outside, and him wearing a down vest, poking me in the chest and no one around for miles. Then he jumps down off the truck in anger right next to me with his teeth bared. That is violent. He is so unbelievably ugly to me. All I can remember about his face is that angry look.

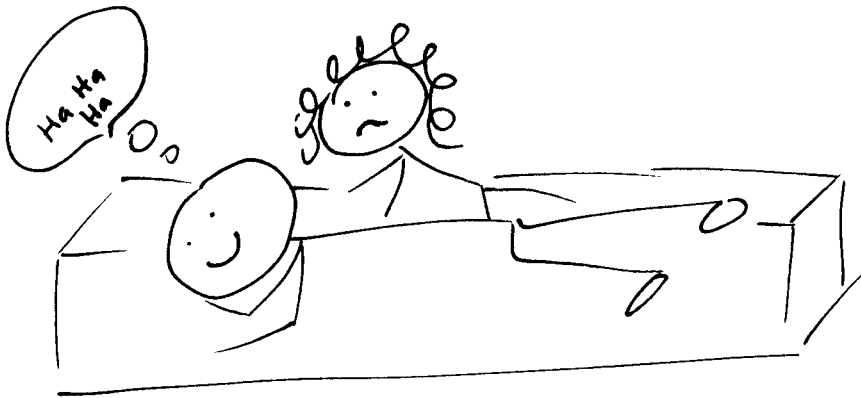
I wish I could come
and hold your hand
while holding your
abuser at bay.
But, I cannot. . .
I am as helpless as I
was with my own
attacker.

It was idyllic with him the first month or so. Who would've ever thought there was a monster lurking beneath the surface. Life was wonderful when he had his own way.

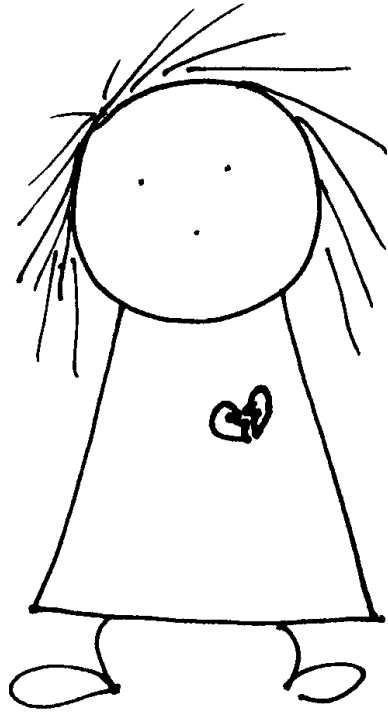


One day I knew I
had to leave or
I would die.
I was sinking deeper.
And, if I hadn't left,
I would've died.
Whether at his hand
or by the death of
my own spirit, I don't
know.

I ought to have told him to go home that first night we spent at my place. He became angry at me when I cried and talked about getting attached to him, being afraid of being abandoned. That was the first time I was told not to express myself. That was when I began prostituting myself. And he laid on his side facing the wall.



It doesn't matter.
I was dying.



I'm invisible. I am wandering inside my own streets and yet there is no one there, no one around just to listen to me. I feel like a shell of some kind with the inner substance vanished. My soul is elsewhere. . .speaking out has been a traumatic thing. I want to speak out, assert, but no. Speak out and you shall be speaking against the Great Dictator, the one who says his people have freedom to speak, where they can dare to trust and ask for helping hands. Yes, I trust because I want to so bad. He says all the right things, makes all the right promises. Like a sheep led to slaughter, I believed, because deep in my heart I wanted to believe someone was finally with me, in my corner.

I was creating my own way out by shriveling day by day, becoming more dead inside.

I would've died had I stayed.

When battered women present testimony, particularly those who have been victimized over a long time, research indicated that they will tend to underestimate both the frequency and the severity of the violence they experience. Other battered women, out of fear of their batterer's retaliation, will minimize and deny the violence, request that court proceedings be dismissed, or accept the batterer's promises to stop further violence from occurring. All of this will favor the evidence presented at trial. Judges and attorneys who have been schooled in the dynamics of domestic violence will be best able to understand the testimony and judge its credibility. For example, frequently a batterer will testify about "justifications" for the battering that can provide a fact finder important insight into the existence of power and control in the relationship.

The vast majority of batterers are only abusive or violent to their wives and lovers or children. Only twenty-eight percent of men who batter are violent both within and outside the home. Experts working with abusive men agree that batterers greatly underreport their violent actions, minimize or deny assaultive behavior against their wives, and claim more involvement by the victim of their violence than witness or police reports would support. Few men, even the most severe batterers, think of themselves as men who beat their wives. The abuser's tendency to minimize problems is comparable to the denial by alcohol and drug abusers.

YOU CAN LEAVE.

He will not get any better, though I know you'd like to think so. He will only get worse as your life diminishes, dwindles away.

Why do I imprison myself like this? Where I have so little say in what goes on here? Where there is so little easiness, so little joy and laughter? Why do I stay with someone who maintains control over every conversation so that I don't even want to talk anymore? Someone who dominates the physical space so that I don't even care what the place looks like?



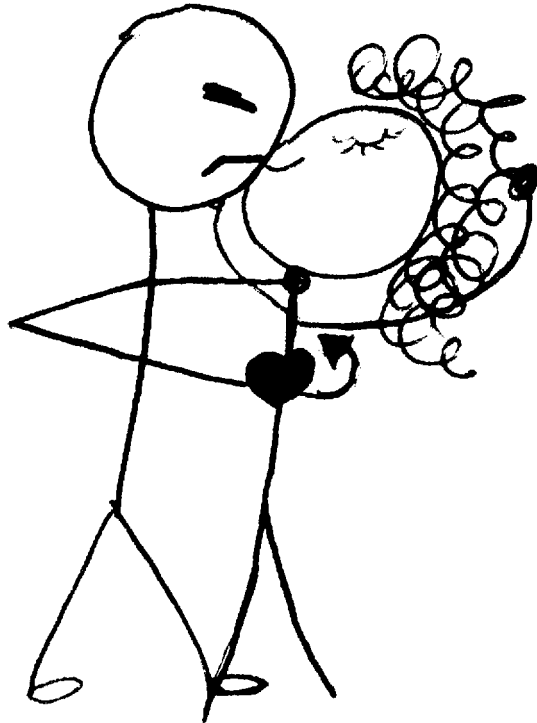
How do you leave someone when they are falling apart? Perhaps they will work through it and come out better or healthier on the other side. Maybe not.

Am I bound to people because of guilt or false nobility?

How precious
your life is.
How sacred.
How much love and
caring you have –
or did have.

It has been lost
on a crazy person
who does not
– cannot –
accept you, love you,
or care about you.

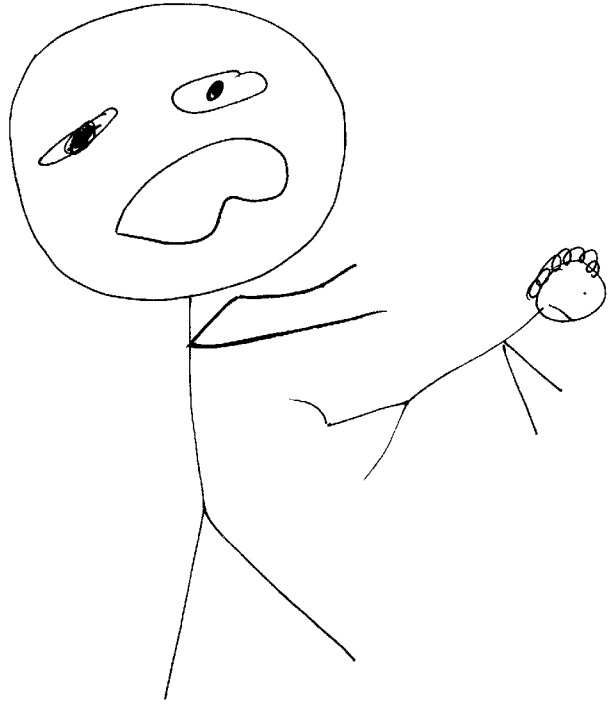
In all probability, the clinical profile revealed by battered women reflects the fact that they have been subjected to an ongoing strategy of intimidation, isolation, and control that extends to all areas of a woman's life, including sexuality, material necessities, relations with family, children, and friends, and work. Sporadic, even severe, violence makes this strategy of control effective. But the unique profile of "the battered woman" arises as much from the deprivation of liberty implied by coercion and control as it does from violence-induced trauma.



Hostage-like coercion

Those tender
moments in the night,
those passionate
minutes are just that,
a brief time that
keeps you hooked.

He manipulates.

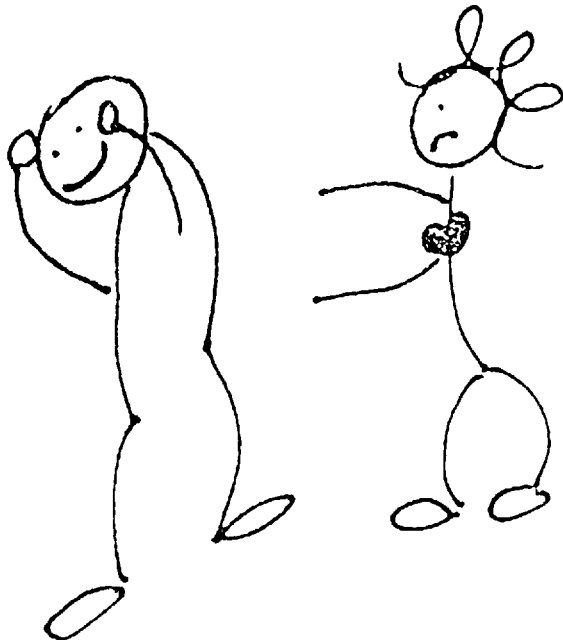


My son and his wife came to visit us when we spent the summer camping in the mountains. We had done a sweat lodge the day before, one of the most beautiful experiences in my life. The next day we went to the hot springs. What a grand time. What a physically exhausting time. I guess the heat took its toll. I was irritable and when we arrived back at camp, my dress for the next day's work was soaking wet from the rain. I did get angry. And he had to pursue it, fix it, and expect thanks for his "help." How much yelling did I listen to that evening? How much the next morning before he shoved me out the trailer door, twisting my ankle? Did I really do anything so awful that I deserved to be treated that way?

Yes, and maybe he has an occasional long moment of what appears to be love, but he will show his other side again. Soon. He will show his other side more and more often as time goes by.

"A woman's bad self-image projects to these guys. The guys pick up on it and they'll use it. They'll con you. They watch you. They know you. When you are put down by the man and don't say anything, he sees this. The longer you are berated by him, the more brainwashed you get. Low self-esteem keeps a woman trapped. The men limit friends and family so all you have is them. The man can't control his own life so he controls others. He chooses not to take responsibility for his own life and says he is the victim, that you are at fault. You blame yourself and the man makes you feel like you are failing. He wants to do the behavior and blames it on others. The biggest con is to make others feel sorry for him."

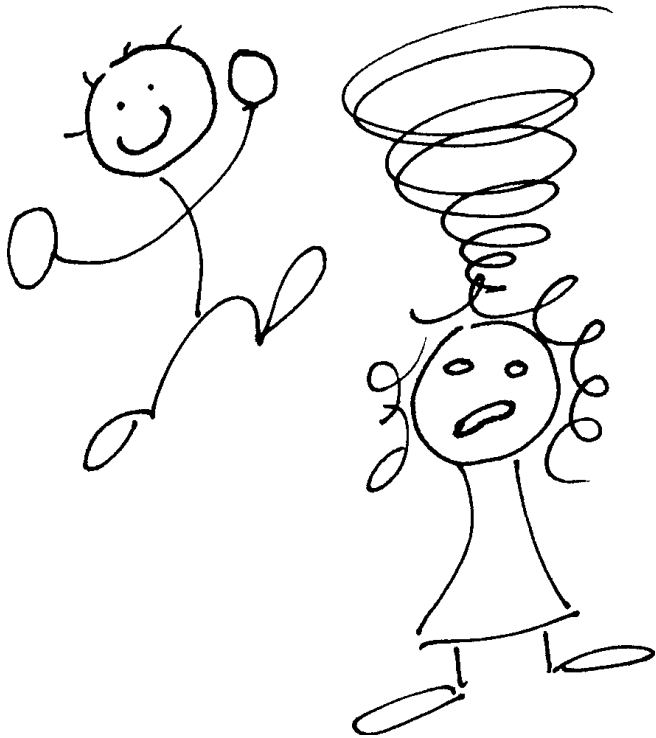
Thomas Fernstrom, Correctional Officer Sergeant



That loving was merely
the ploy to secure the
victim.

You.

My expectation was of kindness and love, not bullying. I did try. I tried a lot. Always I backed down to him. Always I acquiesced. Then I began losing myself... his browbeating lectures, hours long. There was never compassion on his part, only selfishness and egocentrism. Doesn't have time for a hug. What is that? He wants unconditional love. It makes me crazy just thinking about being with him. It makes me absolutely nuts. I was ALWAYS made wrong.



This man does not know how to love, doesn't even know what love is.

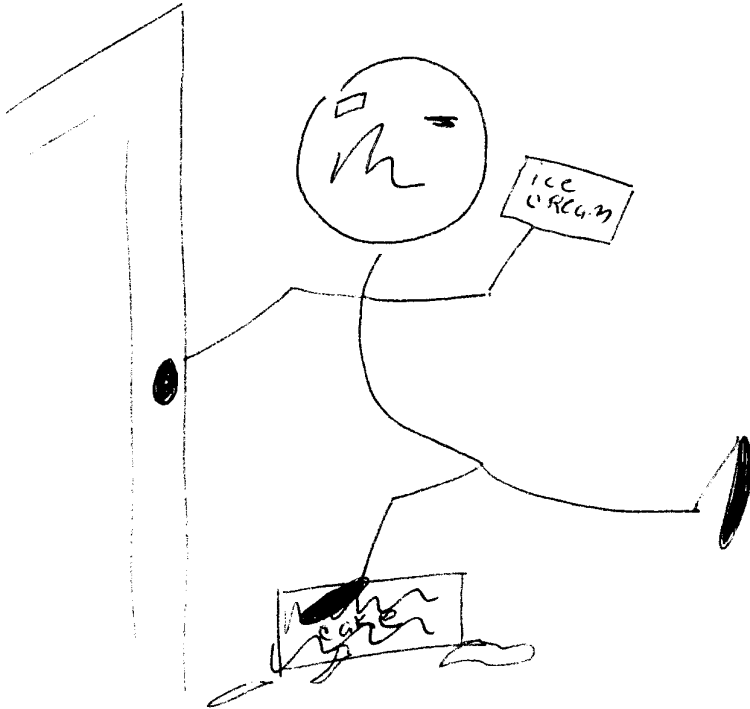
He will never love you – or any other for that matter. He will never love another.

He can't.
He is unable.

Yah, I was trying to smooth things over
when I brought you the ice cream and cake.

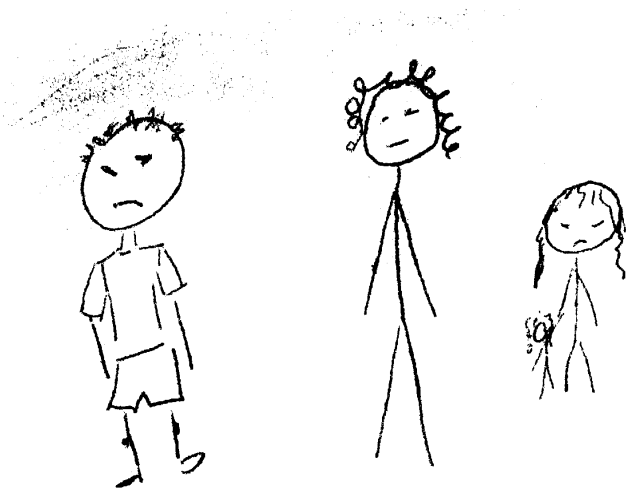
You saw through me though
threw the ice cream out the front door
And stomped up and down on the cake in the kitchen.

Yah, you're right again, I was kissin' up
trying to smooth things over.



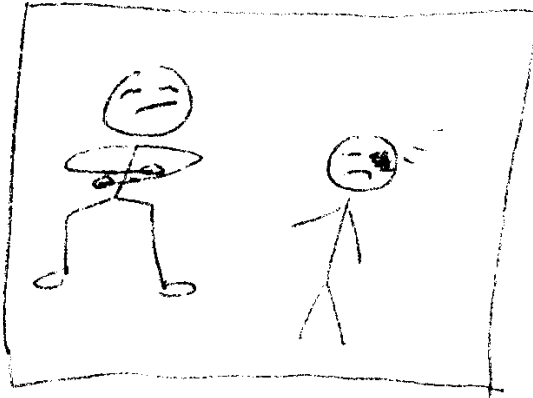
It's impossible for him.
And, whether you
believe it or not, he
is a very angry man
with a sickness that
runs deep and is so
ingrained that he will
lash out again and
again.

You have children you say? Every day, every minute that your children are feeling, are watching, are hearing you, they are learning! They are learning to abuse. They are learning to be abused. They are learning to cringe from life and they are learning to be violent. Every minute they live with fear. Every minute they learn to be like you, to be like him. It is your responsibility to care for them as you would wish to be cared for.



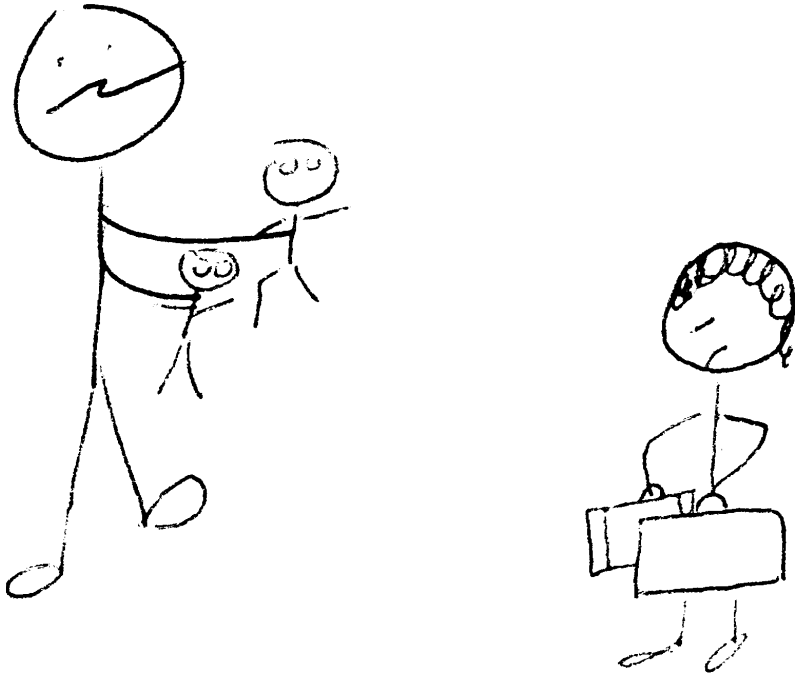
“What about the kids?” you ask. What about them? They are learning it is okay to hit, be mean, to be a bully. Or they are learning to hide, pretend and lie to themselves that bad behavior is okay.

Batterers, in addition to being more likely to purposefully injure their children, also frequently, inadvertently injure their children while throwing furniture or other household objects at the battered spouse. Children of abused women are often injured accidentally when they intervene to try to protect their mothers.



No, he's really changed a lot
He's much calmer,
And he's gotten some insight to his anger.
Yah, he's really different now.
He didn't realize he had that still
It was a surprise to him.
I knew he used to knock his wife around
when he was drinking,
even when she was pregnant.
But this was kind of a surprise
He's figured it out
He's much more gentle now
Won't be doing that again. Yah. Yah. Yah!

They are learning
to abuse
or be abused.

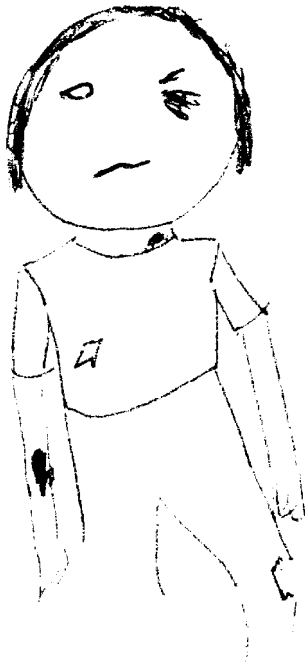


Many batterers use abuse of children as a weapon to control battered women. Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are physically abused or seriously neglected at a rate of 1500% higher than the national average in the general population.

What they are learning will stay with them for life. Your abuser has learned his behavior for life. No matter what he says. No matter how sorry he is. And YOU cannot change that!

The devastating effect of family abuse on young persons' lives is clearly revealed in a study which found that sixty-three percent of young men between the ages of eleven and twenty serving time in prison for homicide in this country are doing so for killing their mother's batterer.

The Senate Judiciary Committee found that the most serious child abuse cases which result in emergency room treatment are merely extensions of assaults directed against the child's mother.



...telling a ten year old boy that you'll throw him out the door because he's whining about the awful dinner you didn't even want to eat. How dare you talk to a child that way. Maybe that's what did it for me. I realized it wasn't me anymore. It was your own sickness.

You can only
help yourself.
And it's not too late
for your children.

We end up with no money
Isolated and Scared
Scared of them, Scared of us
Scared of the world
Thank God, I had no children with him
Thank God, I had some semblance of worth
Thank God, I'd been adventurous before him
I don't know how I'd have done it otherwise
I really don't.

Dear Betty,
I am so sorry about lying to you. The day I was to come over to your house, I was trapped in his office. He wouldn't let me out to even call you. Every time I stood up, he shoved me back into the chair and told me to sit down.



I have no money.
My business doesn't even cover home expenses.
I feel lethargic, yesterday was despair.
Everyone else has this, this, this, and this.
Well, me and my kitty have our camping gear
and a few sticks of furniture.
Oh, woe is me!

What about money?
There are shelters
and programs
willing to help.
Friends and family
might help you.

Please be proud
enough to ask.

Watched *Sleeping With the Enemy*. The beginning of that movie ought to be part of battered women's groups because you can see, visually, how sick it is. You can see the control and the "it's for your own good" type of scenario.



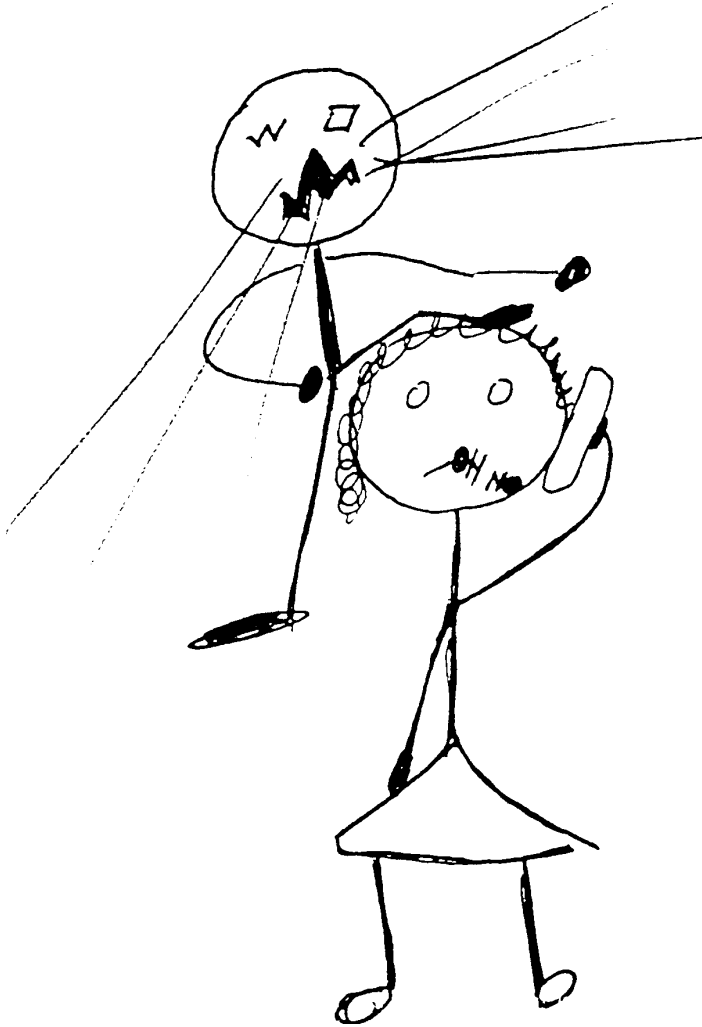
Maybe I'm in the state of numb again. I feel like we go round and round and round 'til he gets his point across. I feel depressed. Why is there nothing inside me? It's like there really isn't. Nothing. I let him push me around, get his way.

I know...

Most friends have disappeared – or will if you don't leave.

They can't bear the pain you are suffering any longer.

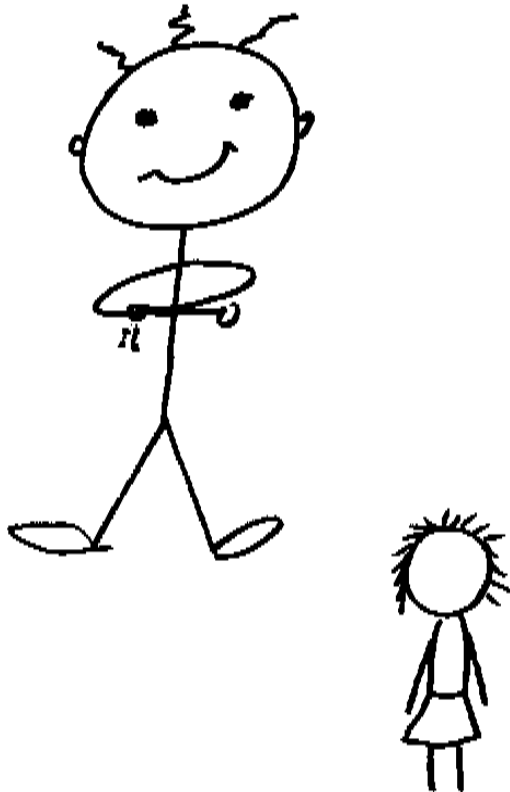
I'll keep maneuvering as long and as hard as I can to avoid pain from you. Inflicted from you. I feel like I'm crazy. This is crazy. I'm spending most of my time here in turmoil. Why, why, why, why, why do I do this? What is so fearful about being alone again?



I know...

Making phone calls and visiting friends and family eventually becomes impossible. He throws a fit and blames you.

If those who "love" us are unsafe, where is our haven?
Where is our place?
Where is our safety?

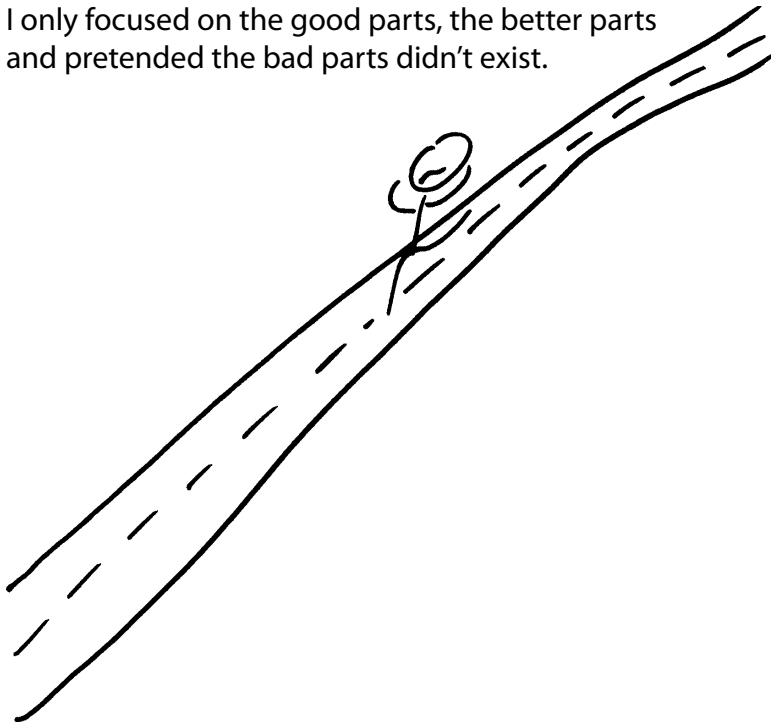


I know...

Keeping you
isolated keeps you
manipulated – keeps
you from reaching
out – keeps you from
telling the truth, the
secrets.

He's afraid you may
wake up.

I only focused on the good parts, the better parts and pretended the bad parts didn't exist.

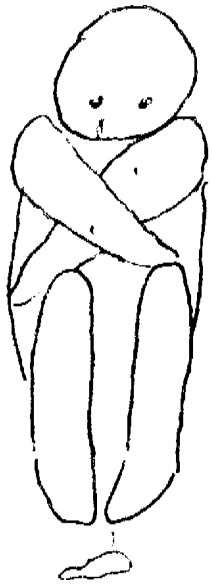


Yes, I know families may perpetuate this nightmare. When I went to court for my permanent restraining order, there was a young woman who had been repeatedly abused. Her family was with her and I thought *how wonderful, what support she has*. When the judge asked her if she wanted a permanent order, she said, "No." The judge practically begged her but she kept saying she'd "Try it again."

Her family was all smiles. And I was crying inside. No wonder it is so difficult to leave.

Who to turn to?

I am wedged next to the toilet in this little bathroom. You are yelling at me to quit feeling sorry for myself. I am crying uncontrollably. We were talking about my feeling insecure and I guess you didn't like what I said. You were towering over me, yelling at me. Your stinking breath and flying spit was sickening me. I was pinned. No way to escape. You wondered why I was turning my head away from your horrible face and when I told you that you were getting spit on me, you horked up a huge amount and spit right in my face.



He still never let's me say what's on my mind.

He still controls everything. He still goes into a rage.

The only sin is dishonoring oneself, allowing someone to dishonor you.

Find someone,
somewhere.
Please.

Search like your life depended on it. It does. Your children's lives also depend on your freedom for they will always be imprisoned unless you leave.

Why do I need to keep making my point with him?

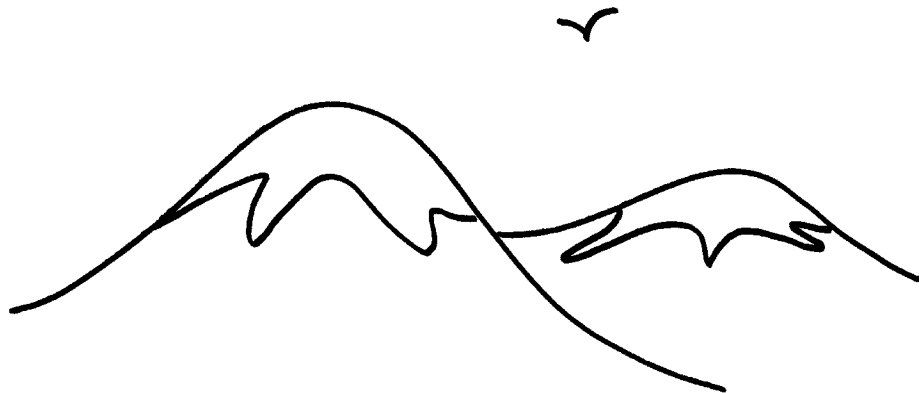
Remember
Who
You
Are!

Remember days of your own choosing even if they were long ago and only in dreams? Remember? Remember that part of yourself that wanted love and to be protected, that part of yourself that wanted a happy life, to give something back to life. Remember that part of yourself. If you don't, pretend for a moment. Sit quietly and intensify your imaginings of a peaceful life. Rekindle the flame of life. That flame cannot be extinguished.

Please hear me. I beg you. I am afraid for you.

Life is meant to be so much more than getting kicked around. Even if you've never known that, recall your dreams, your fantasies. They are still waiting for you.

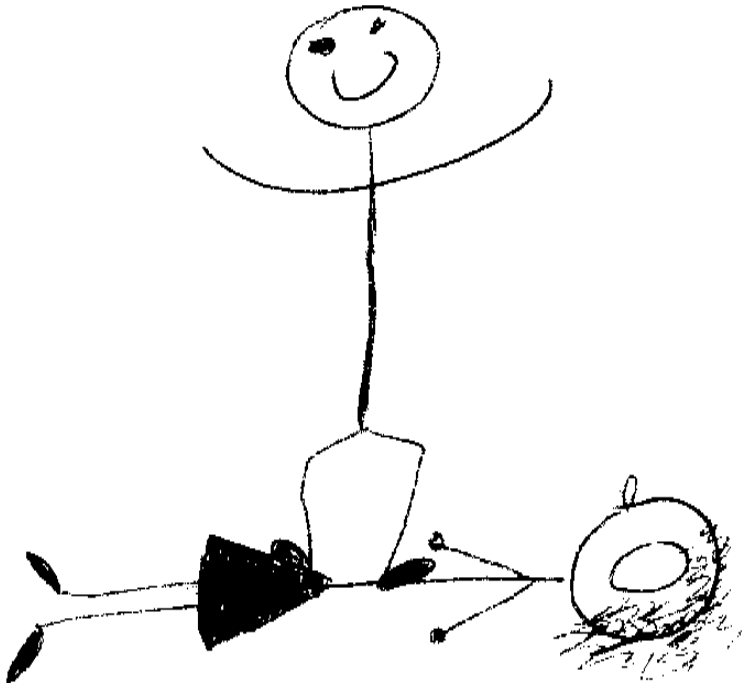
And, you will never
flower into that
beautiful woman you
were meant to be.
You will always stay
hidden inside.
What a gift to the
world and to yourself
and to your children
and to your friends
if you leave.



Dear Sisters,

I pray for you for there is no God, no Bible, nothing in the universe that says you must live as you do. There is nothing that demands you live in the dominion of an angry, manipulating, cruel person. You need not be a slave. We were all given free will and though it may not look like it, we have choices. You have choices. You are the one who chooses to stay and you are the only one who can break free.

Join the land of the living. It's a beautiful place full of opportunity and grace and love.

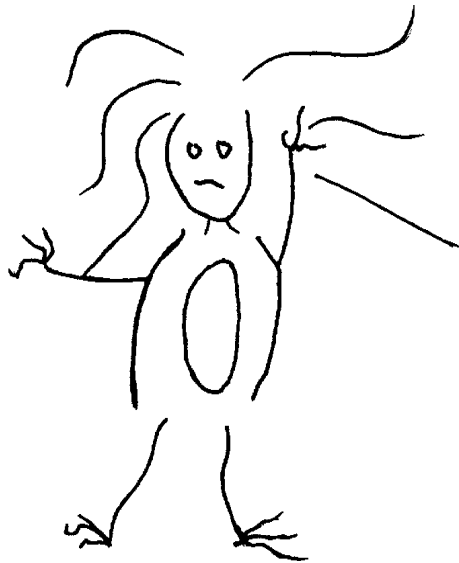


I used to be one of those “why don’t you just leave?” kind of people. I’d been a chiropractor and hypnotherapist for several years before my first experience with a battered woman. I remember wondering why a woman would stay in a hurtful situation.

I’d married at eighteen, had two children immediately and divorced at twenty-four when my husband finished college. I’d lived single while attaining my bachelors and chiropractic degrees and raising my sons. I never thought it would happen to me. I was independent and self-supporting. Why wouldn’t a woman just leave?

It is unbelievable to me how bad things were.
I had no idea.
I thought it was all me, and I kept trying to change me or to do it better.
If I could only do it right, everything would be okay.

Grace. No, there is no grace from this man. He does not let anyone off the hook. That hook is embedded deep. So deep that it cannot be felt. My mind has compensated so well that it does not know it is there. Only my soul knows. There is a deep, abiding sadness I walk with, knowing something is puncturing my soul but hardly knowing what. I've made it so distant. To face it is too grievous for I prefer this illusion of love, of care, of nurture from the Great Dictator. I feel protected from the big bad wolf, but what a price I pay for this protection, a gang mentality protection. The price I pay is my soul. And my safety still eludes me. I am less safe with this man than wandering alone.



My life is peaceful now. I can see friends, talk on the phone, go where I want. When I want. I can think and say what I want without fear of retaliation over something he didn't agree with.



I don't have a clue how I'm going to pay my rent this month but it doesn't matter because I'm free. I'm glad to come home now, no longer afraid of his moodiness. No longer afraid I might say something to invite his rage. I no longer have to listen to him say I provoke him.

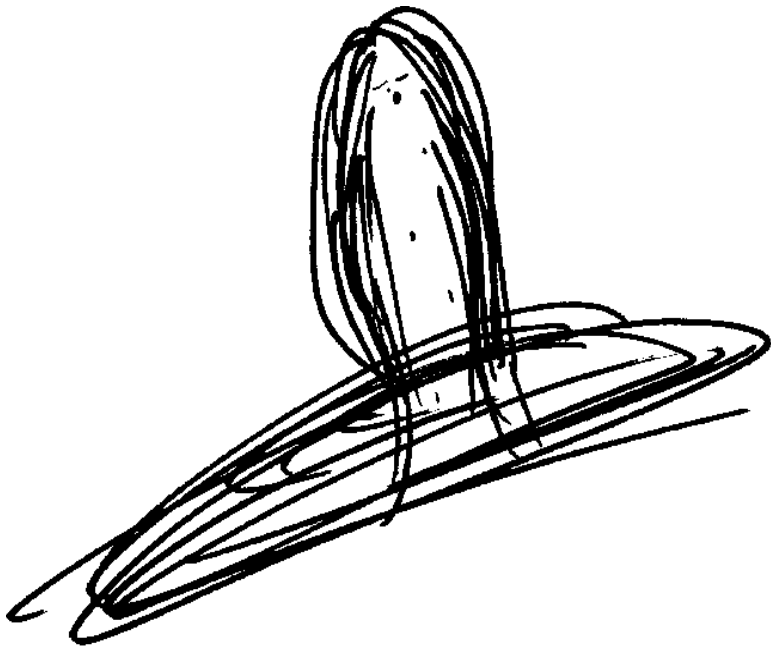
I don't have to wash his socks, fix his food, clean his dirty dishes or look at his junk.

I can have a tidy house or a messy house if I wish.



I have lots of joyful times. I even have a kind and loving man in my life that I would not have met had I stayed. I would not have met him if I hadn't cleaned up my life.

What is happening to me? It seems the end of the line, I am stuck. I can do no more. I don't know what to do. There is no help, no relief. I am in terror. There is no one there for me. I feel like drifting away because there is no earthly anchor. No one to help, no one to help. No one is there. I am scared. I am terrified. Please help, someone. Please hold my hand. I am so cold. I am humiliated. I am cast aside. There is no help. Not even a kind word. There is only despair and no one to hold me, to guide me, to tell me what to do. There is no father, no mother, no lover, no friend to tell me. I am free-falling. I did myself in.



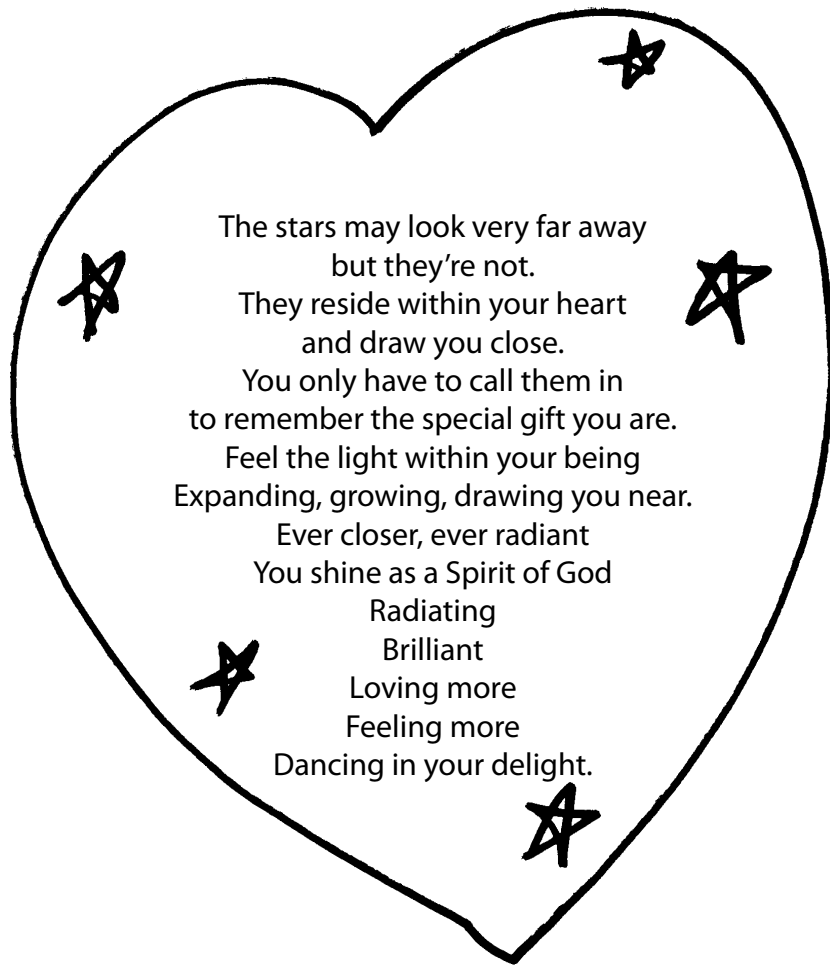
Dear One,
I know it's hard,
probably the most
difficult and scary
thing you've ever
had to do. You must
leave. Please.
If you don't,
you will die...

How much time do you have in this life of yours? How much time do you want to spare, to give up to him? Think seriously about it. If you were to die tomorrow, next week, next year, perhaps at his hand, perhaps not, what would you have wished you had done with your life?



It may not be at his hand. It may be your own will, creating a sick body – an escape route.

Or you may end up with an all-pervading bitterness that you will carry all your days. I care about you too much for that.

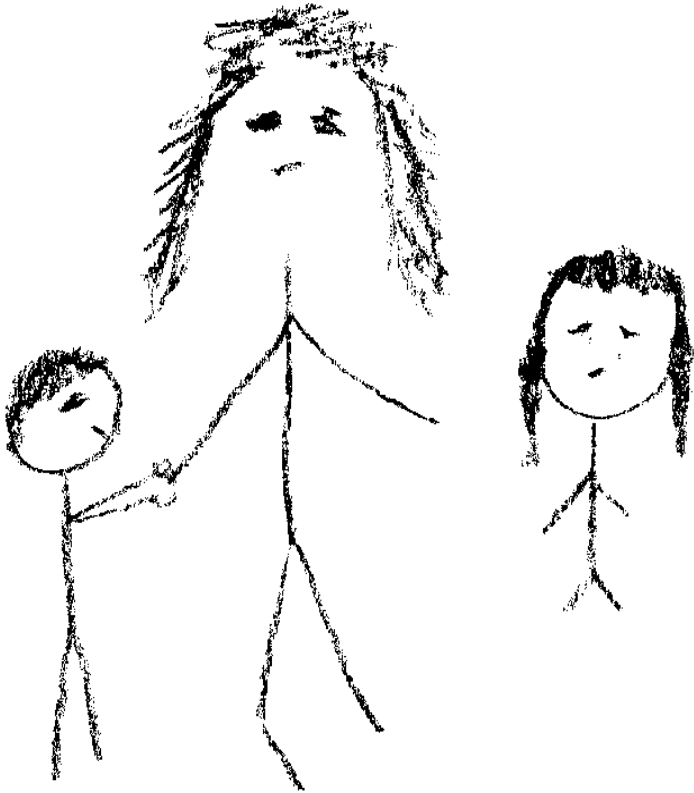


Please leave. . .
Teach others it can be done. Other women think they are the only ones, too, that they are alone. Let them know they are among many and that they can unite in spirit for strength and courage.

PLEASE LEAVE!

Don't let the tyranny perpetuate to our children. Let's join together and tell the world we want a better life.

We demand honor
and
respect!

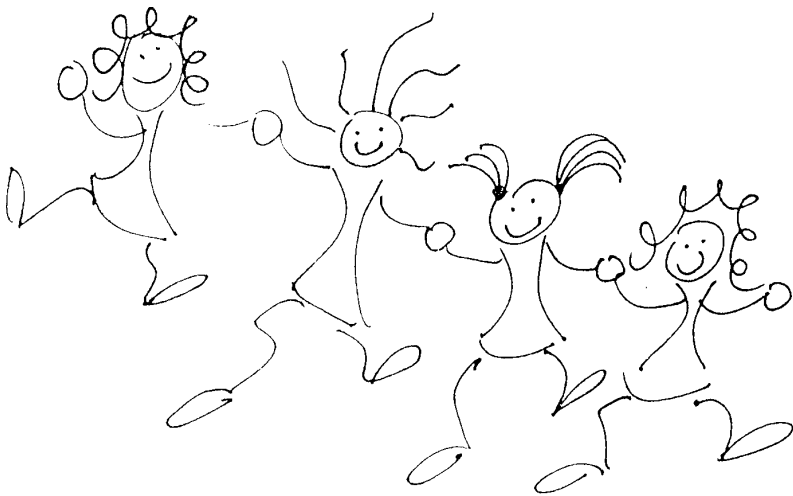


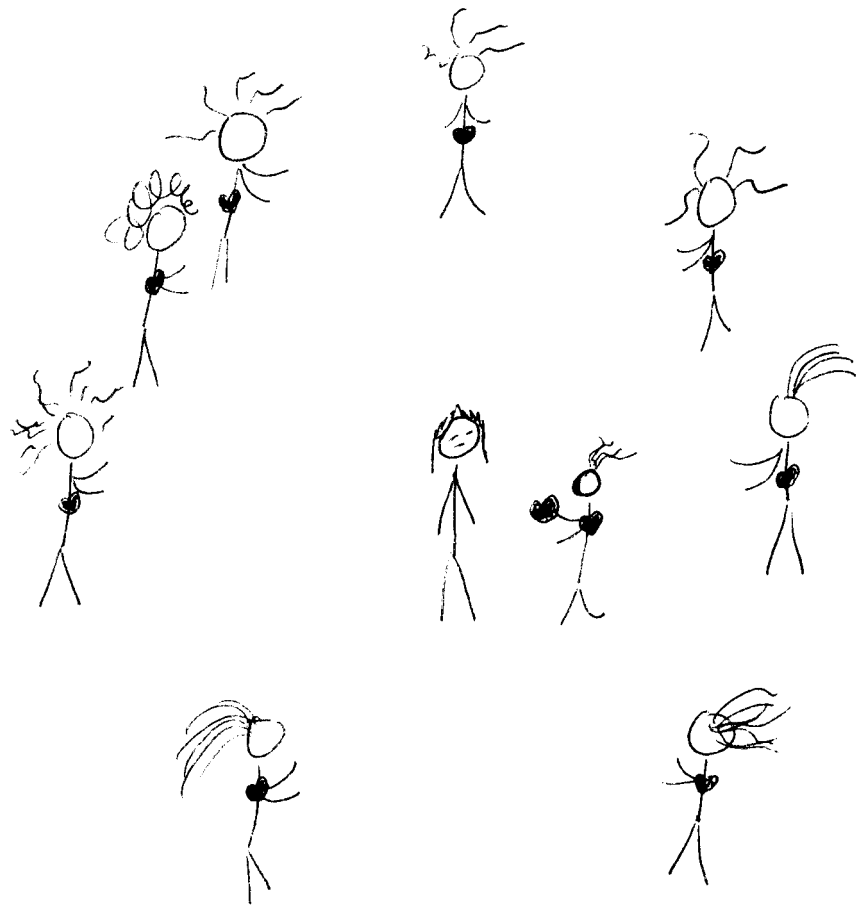
I guess there wasn't that much physical abuse, compared to some. I just was afraid to talk because of the hours of lectures I'd get. Or being pinned to the chair while he was enraged.

Please...

Stand tall and know
that you are not alone.

I am with you.





There are many
thousands with you
who will hear your cry.

They support you.

They love you.

I can talk on the phone for an hour if I want, eat what I want whenever I want. The remote control is mine. And, best of all, I am opening up to the beauty I was made to be. I am creating what comes through my heart. It is a precious gift of life I have been given again. I shall remember who I am and walk the sacred path of beauty. No longer will I be oppressed. No longer will I be possessed till the last breath of life is squeezed out of me like thousands of women of old. No longer will I be contained.

I am with you.

*Love
Karen*

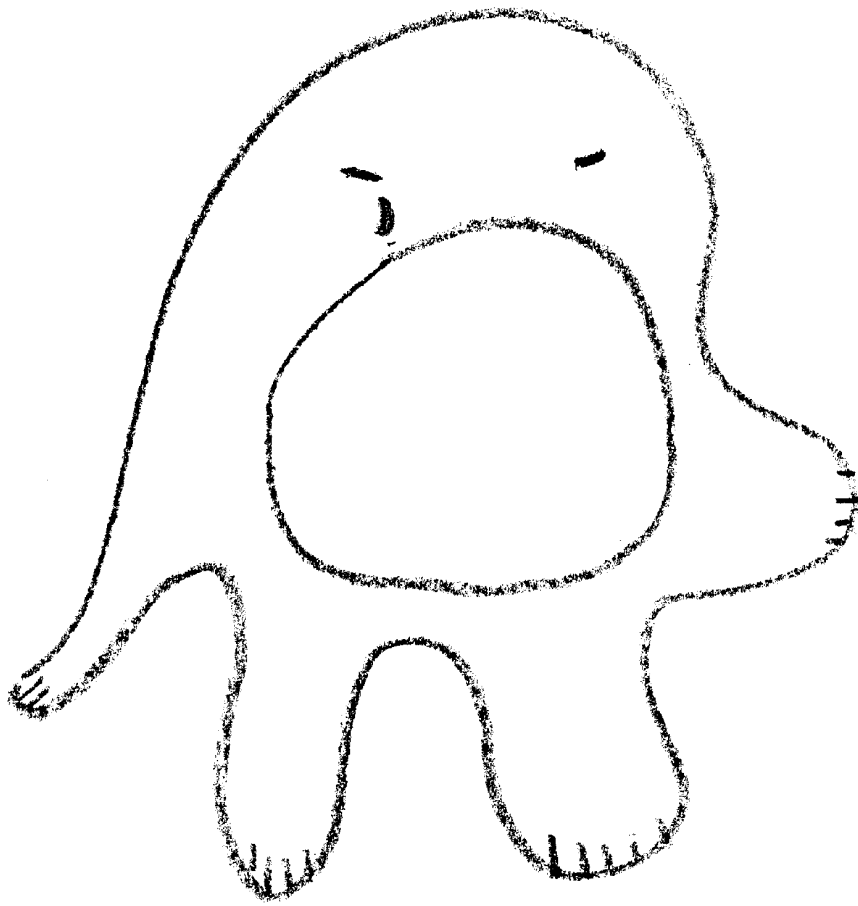


What's inside me? Where am I inside me? I want to know. My joy got put in the closet a long time ago. I'm a closet joyful person. Secretly laughing, playing and dancing about. Ah me, raucous laughter, the impish grin. That becomes me. No useless time for me. I'm a closet joyful person. Where am I now? I'm off on an adventure, seeking the wonder. "Wow," I say. I had no idea how fun!

Yes, I've been hiding in the closet for a long time now. Scared to come out and let my light shine. I catch snatches of myself every now and then. Not nearly enough. Not nearly enough for me.

I've been a closet joyful person. Hiding away in the dark where no one could see. Hiding away in the dark, too dark for me. Oh, I'm coming on out for all to see. I've been hiding away in the dark. Too dark for me.

Written nine days before leaving for good.



You Big Jerk.
All the grief you pile on me.
You want compassion?
I lost that a long time ago
when you shoved me into the wall
onto the floor, into the table
and back into the wall again.

You Big Jerk.
You want loving from me
to listen to you with kindness
after you tell me "get over it"
when I tell you I prefer shoes
on the floor
rather than the kitchen table.

You Big Jerk.
Where is the love in your eyes
when I come through the door
after a hard day's work
or after a walk in the park.

Do you not see me? Really, do you not?
I used to see you and I still usually do.
But it is fading.
Yah, you tell me I'm self-centered.
Because I didn't keep track of the time for you.

You Big Jerk.
I am keeping track of the time for you.
It's only a matter of time for you.

You Big Jerk.

You hit me one last time. I was secretly waiting for something to happen. We had a vacation planned to go to the desert. Where there is nobody around for miles and miles. I was more and more scared as the time approached for us to go. The reality of my life was starting to dawn on me. I knew I might never return. The thought of being alone with you was horrifying. No one would know where I was. I prayed and prayed for help. We had another stupid argument about something ridiculous. I was sitting on my closet floor to get away from you. And you had to come after me and yell in my face. Then you slapped me – awakening me from the nightmare that was my life for two years.

Dear Sisters,
This is my experience of domestic violence.
It is not as bad as many of you. It's worse than
some. Many of you will deny you have a problem.
But you do. You will say yours isn't that bad, so you
won't leave. Many will say yours is much worse, so
you can't leave. But you must. Any violence,
physical, verbal or otherwise, even once, is too much.
Because it only get's worse. **IT WILL ONLY GET WORSE.**
Please leave. Domestic violence will kill you,
eventually.

No one ever
deserves
any kind of abuse,
ever.

When you're ready,
there is a workbook
or sessions available at
www.YourSelfHelpSite.com
to help you find you again.

You do deserve
more.

Please Leave...
it only gets worse.



Dear One,

Please leave.

Domestic violence
destroys lives.



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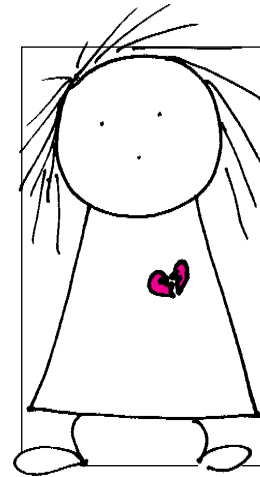
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I was creating my own way
out by shriveling day by day,
becoming more dead inside.

I would've died had I stayed.

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