

LOVE YOURSELF FIRST

By A Sister Friend Who's Been There

People say love comes softly. Abuse, my friends, often comes softer still.

When I reflect honestly, I can say that the first whisper happened very early in our relationship. A relationship that started when I was a teenager. I had many friends. He didn't like any of them. So, bit by bit, I separated myself from all of them. We got married. I liked dinner parties. He didn't like company. So, we didn't have company over. And so on and so on.

Not to say we didn't have good times. We had some great times, fun times, beautiful times.

But, something happened, I'm not sure what ... was it job pressures, or financial pressures, pressure of raising three kids.... Whether something outside of our marriage caught his eye and his attention and he wanted out. I'm not sure.

All I know is things started getting out of control.

Ladies: Here is a little known truth. Abuse doesn't always come with a fist.

Sometimes it comes with Words and Accusations... like you are the cause of financial hardship, You aren't good enough. Not humble enough. Don't show him enough respect as "The Man of the House".

It comes Financially....With instructions not to use the credit cards, meanwhile, he calls you out of the blue and demands you come to the car dealership to co-sign for a new truck that he is in the middle of purchasing....a truck that you had no idea that he was planning to purchase.

It comes Emotionally.... with you rushing home from work to take over "parent duty" so he can go to work and when you get there he is not there and neither are your kids. So you call him on the phone and ask him where he is with your children. And he tells you, "On the Moon". And you ask him again and he tells you, "On the way to Florida." and he laughs at you and hangs up on you.

It comes with Control..... forbidding you to eat certain things or wear certain items of clothing, Forbidding you to wear your hair in certain styles. Calling you and screaming at you on the

phone because he thinks you have taken too long at the hairdresser, longer than a respectable wife should take.

It comes Sexually.....like waking up in the middle of the night when he comes home, drunk, from a Christmas party 3 hours later than he was supposed to, and wants to have sex with you. And you tell him no, because you are angry and he is drunk. But he is bigger and stronger, and rapes you while you cry and beg him to stop. And now you have to drink in order to sleep at night.

It comes in Terror . . . Like waking up in the middle of the night and hearing him climbing the stairs, home 2 hours late, from his high profile job ensuring law and order. You pretend to be asleep as he comes in the room and unloads his gun. He leaves the room. You breathe a sigh of relief. And then he comes back in the room and you hear him reload his gun and cock the gun. And you think, Oh Jesus, this is it. And you are silently, simultaneously screaming and calling on The Lord and frantically trying to search for your cell phone. You are thinking about your three children asleep in their rooms and what will they do without a mommy? And pray that he will spare their lives at least. And hope that your co-workers will put into works the plan for, "The Time When She Doesn't Show Up for Work." And as your heart stops and he is pointing the gun at your head, God tells you clearly what to do. So you say "Honey, did you fix the battery on my car?" And you have startled him because he thought you were asleep and it wakes him up from whatever fog he was in and he goes outside to fix your car.

And in your heart you know you should leave. He has refused counseling. Things are getting worse. But you stay because you don't want your kids to grow up in a house without their father. Then, you realize that instead of giving your kids the gift of a two parent household, you are giving them the nightmare of abuse. And you are teaching them that this is what love is supposed to be. And that by not loving yourself enough to leave, you are teaching them that they are not worthy of love. And, even worse, you may be subjecting them to the horror of watching their father kill their mother or be subjected to being murdered with their mother. So, I took my children and whatever I could fit in my car and I ran, into the night I ran and I never looked back.

And if you are being abused, I want to encourage you to do the same thing. Yes, it will be so hard to raise your kids on your own, but you can do it. Believe in God - I promise He will sustain you. Run, like your life depends on it, because it does. Love yourself more than the false pretense of the relationship. Love yourself enough to be brave. Love yourself enough to swallow your pride and ask for help.

Abuse doesn't always swing a fist. But it hurts just as badly. Love yourself enough to live.

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