

Women's Issues Committee Essay Contest



“You Might Say I Was Born into Domestic Abuse”



Family Issues: Prevention of Domestic Abuse

**Kimberly Patrick
Olathe Chapter
Olathe, KS
National Number: 771918
1796 Words**

You might say I was born into domestic abuse. One week after I was born, my father hit my mother so hard he knocked her unconscious, then left to go bowling leaving a two-year-old and newborn alone. Mom had just gotten home from the hospital the night before after having serious complications from her labor. Unfortunately, she was late getting dinner on the table which enraged my father. The next day he blamed her for getting hit, that she should know better than to make him late.

I would like to say that it stopped there but abuse is never just a one-time thing, usually it escalates, and the entire family is drawn into the drama. It never took much for my father to go into a rage. If something prevented him from expressing his anger until later, it just built into a dangerous vortex. I remember many nights cowering under my bed as my father hit, kicked and sexually assaulted my mother for upsetting him. If my brother or I did something that angered him, he would attack her then take his belt to us. Or a stick. Or a skillet. Or a whiffle ball bat.

He very rarely left bruises where others could see them. All my parents' friends knew my father as the life of the party. He was an expert at keeping his dark side hidden from everyone outside of our family. When I was six and my brother was eight, we were playing whiffle ball with all the neighborhood kids in our yard. As my father pulled into the driveway, he saw my brother smack me with the plastic bat. He waited until we were called in for the night and he took the bat and beat my brother on his back till there were huge welts and bruises – the bat ended up bending from the force of the blows. I can still hear my brother screaming in agony. My mother had run to the grocery store, so she was spared the beating, but she had to deal with taking care of my brother without getting caught after she returned.

The dynamics of domestic abuse are different for every situation, and the long-term effects are insidious. From the constant abuse, my mother became stronger and began to stand up more to my father. She would try to shield us, so we knew if the front door was locked, we were to go around back and slip quietly into the house and hide. No child should ever have to listen to the sound of their mother being used as a punching bag. When I was 10, my father flew into a rage after I accidentally knocked over a glass of milk. While he was stripping his belt, my mother grabbed our hands and we ran to the car and went across town to my grandparents' house. I was still crying in fear, and she sat down and came clean with her parents about the abuse – detailing the worse and showing both her bruises as well as ours.

My grandparents were from deep in Appalachia, and my grandfather still clung to a lot of the “mountain folks” beliefs. My mother was looking for support and understanding when she shared our pain, and her desire to leave my father... she didn't receive it. My mother was informed that no one in the family had ever gotten divorced, and she was not going to either. That she needed to learn to not anger my father, and that my brother and I needed to learn that there were consequences. Shortly after, my father showed up and left my brother and me at our grandparents' house and took mom home with him.

The next time I saw my mother, she was in the hospital with six broken ribs, two broken teeth, a broken collar bone and a fractured pelvis. My father had told the doctors that she was carrying laundry up from the basement and at the top lost her balance and fell all the way down the stairs. Whether the medical staff believed it or not, no one said a word.

Not only was I having to try to placate my father so that I wasn't the focus of his anger, I also had to try to avoid situations where my brother could and did assault me. After being a victim and a witness to how my father punished us for supposed transgressions, my brother began his own use of abuse in order to get his way. There was always the threat that if I told, my parents would not believe me and

that I would be punished by my father. Having grown up watching my father mete out his discipline with his fists and household objects, my brother quickly learned that he too could use physical violence and psychological torment to ensure he had the upper hand.

When I was 11, my mother filed for divorce from my father. Knowing he would become dangerously enraged, she and her attorney planned everything to get us out of the line of fire. My father left for work at 6am and my mother woke us at 6:30am and gave us 30 minutes to pack a suitcase. We loaded the dog and cats up and went to the store for supplies then dropped the animals at the veterinarians office. She then drove to the oil refinery where my dad worked and picked up his paycheck, went to the bank and cashed it and we left town. My mom told no one where we were going, and we headed to North Carolina. As my father was leaving the oil refinery where he worked, he was served with divorce papers and was told he had 24 hours to vacate the premises. We were able to forget the drama and enjoy the ocean for a week, then it was time to head home and face my father. The fear of what we would face made me physically ill.

When we returned home it was empty and his clothes were gone. However, we all knew that the peace would not last for long. My father would break into the house at odd times and constantly threatened us all. The court ordered visitation for every other Saturday which was excruciating as he would take us to his apartment and grill us about our mother and threaten to beat us if we didn't answer. Soon we discovered that he had hired a private detective to follow us. It was a very ominous cloud that hung over us for a year. Finally, my parents went to court where it was a very public, ugly fight. By this time mom just wanted out. She gave my dad the house, and we packed up, put our furniture on a moving truck, and again, without telling anyone where we were going, took off. Mom had secured a job teaching music in Kansas, so we headed west. My father threatened to come after her and kill her, but by the end of that week, he had met another woman and gotten married, so we were finally able to relax for the first time. Years later I learned he was abusing his second wife much like he did my mom.

After escaping the physical and mental abuse, we each reacted differently. My mom had always been a very intelligent woman, but she became so much stronger through the abuse. She found her voice, she found her fight, and decided to make a better, safer life for all of us. She showed me that it was all right to take a stand, to protect myself and to not let anyone ever have control over me. She was a survivor and passed that strength on to me.

As an adult, I now understand that my brother was demonstrating learned behavior and that I was the only one he could take his anger out on from his abuse, which included being his punching bag, his breaking my toys, locking me out of the house when no one else was home, or locking me in a small closet when we were alone. To this day our relationship continues to be strained at best as he finds the abuse he meted out when we were younger to be funny, sibling horseplay. When as an adult I shared with my mother what my brother had done, she confronted him, and as expected he just laughed.

My brother's first marriage ended in divorce and his wife accused him of spousal abuse and he and his current wife have some serious fights. My nephew is now 28 and I have witnessed him struggling to contain his anger and his fists, though he relishes utilizing psychological torment as his favorite method of abuse. It is very much a learned behavior and infects entire family units for generations.

The effect of the abuse has been different for me. I have worked to not show any signs of anger, though those that are close to me know that I tend to walk away when a situation becomes heated as I don't

want anyone to be able to push my buttons. I have an extreme dislike for disagreements and arguments and tend to make quick peace and avoid conflict. When I must face stressful situations that could erupt into a disagreement, I become physically ill over the stress, much like I did as a child. My father called me "the puker", because he could make me sick just by threatening me with punishment, and he found it funny, though he would yell and kick me while forcing me to clean up the mess.

As an adult, this history has led me to be extremely cautious in my dating relationships, most of which have imploded before they could get too serious as I overly dissect them and compare even the smallest transgressions to my father or brother. I have consigned myself to being single as I have deep seeded fear of placing myself in a relationship that could become abusive. I have worked with local women's shelters in order to help other women find their voices just as my mother did. I am mostly drawn to the children. No child should be afraid and grow up witnessing abuse. If in some small way I could make the night and day terrors permanently go away, and show a child love and peace, then everything that I endured would be worth it. I am a strong woman, I have found my voice, and know that I will never allow another human to physically or psychologically abuse me ever again. I will continue to lend my strength to those that are fighting to break free of abuse.