

# **“Marry Me” Doesn’t Mean “I Love You”**

How I Escaped an Abusive Relationship  
and Found My Rhythm Again

Christy Mayfield

Bright Life Publishing

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Christy Mayfield  
E-mail: [info@dvbleedingheart.com](mailto:info@dvbleedingheart.com)  
Web: [www.dvbleedingheart.com](http://www.dvbleedingheart.com)  
[www.christymayfield.com](http://www.christymayfield.com)

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the women and men who have experienced abuse at the hands of a loved one. May the light you continue to shine, even on your darkest days, guide you toward safety. May the strength you have shown, guide you toward happiness. May the knowledge of your brilliant self- worth guide you toward peace.

May you be safe. May you be happy. May you know peace.

You are loved.



## **NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

Whenever a gender-specific term is used to reference an abuser, such as “he,” it should be understood as a reference to either gender. A gender-specific term may be used solely for the purpose of making the text easier to read, and no offense, prejudice or stereotyping is intended. It is important to acknowledge that abusers who inflict domestic abuse may be male or female.



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# INTRODUCTION

*“How do you give your heart to something that isn’t even real? Loving someone, then finding out none of it was true. None of it, as you knew in your heart, ever existed. Like you were only having a dream.”*

That’s what it was... my dream, obscured by violence and abuse. I didn’t love the way he treated me. In fact, I hated it. I was anxious, lonely and sad, but I learned that my heart could feel love. I learned that I was capable of feeling and giving, and I learned what I didn’t want. I didn’t want his behavior, his angry words, his disrespect, his cheating. I didn’t want his abuse, his manipulation, his criticism.

The hard part is looking back at what I thought were good times and accepting that they weren’t. Those “good times” were surrounded by lies and abuse.

He was supposed to protect me and care for me, keep me safe, and be there for me, always. Instead, he was my biggest betrayer, using me, abusing me, and lying to me over and over again... all the while telling me how much he loved me.

I’m not writing this to sound like a victim... There is no “poor me.”

The first step in regaining your life is openly admitting to yourself what he did to you, and who he really is.

This is important to help you let go. Not of him, because you now know you are better off without him, but to help you let go of the dream you had with him.

Once you let go of your old dream with him, you can move on to find your new reality with someone who really loves you, who can't be anything other than honest; someone who desires your happiness and wants to share that happiness with you, for no other reason than he loves you from the bottom of his heart. No games, no ulterior motives, no manipulation, no power control. Rather, a relationship based on love and mutual respect.

A healthy relationship does not provoke anxiety. And while all relationships take work, a healthy relationship is not a battle.

It's easy because, despite the differences or disagreements, you have the other's best interest in mind. One person does not have their own separate agenda, rather you have the same agenda... together. One person is not left feeling emotionally exhausted, rather, your life is more fully enriched by the other.

The story I share with you is a story of an intimate relationship of abuse that I experienced from my husband, during our marriage. Yet, the cycle, patterns, and dynamics of abuse are the same whether the abuse occurs within intimate relationships, abusive friendships, and work relationships or among family members. Therefore, it is invaluable that you recognize the red flags, understand the abuser's thought process, learn how to keep yourself safe and find your way out of the relationship if you are experiencing on-going abuse from another person, or if you think you are being abused. Abuse is not always physical, but it is progressive and escalates with each episode. It can begin as shouting, belittling, name calling, lying about you, calling you crazy, breaking your things, isolating you, shoving you, spitting on you, hurting your pets or making threats. When it becomes physical, it

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can escalate to sexual violence, rape, hitting, and murder.

While writing this book, others who read it recognized the same patterns within their own relationships which they had previously never considered “abusive.” Because abusers are manipulative and calculating, as well as charming, it can be easy to overlook the early signs. When you begin to add the chaotic cycle of abuse to the pot of manipulation and charm, you often begin to feel very confused about the relationship. The abuser usually doesn’t inflict the cycle of abuse until you are already hooked. If it is an intimate relationship, you may already feel like you have fallen in love with him and this isn’t “really” the person that you fell in love with. If it is a friendship, you may make excuses for the abuse and attribute it to circumstances. After all, you have been friends for such a long time and you can’t really believe that your friend, someone whom you care about, would treat you that way. If it is an employer, you are dependent on them for your income. If it is a family member, it is harder yet. You can’t really believe that your own blood, the people who are supposed to be there when everyone else comes and goes from your life, could really be “abusive.” How can these people want to hurt you? It isn’t about you, it’s about them.

The red flags and characteristics of abusers often overlap among all types of relationships. Learning to recognize the red flags early will help you leave before you feel that the cycle is spinning faster and faster and you can’t get off. The cycle of abuse is dizzying. It is confusing. It is painful, but it is also temporary and even preventable if you know what to look for.

I will share with you what I experienced during my marriage and the domestic violence that ensued and culminated when my (then)

husband loaded a .44 Magnum with the intent of a murder/suicide. I will help you understand the cycle of abuse, the “red flags” to be aware of before considering a deeper relationship, and what is going on in the mind of an abuser as he alternates between violence and abuse, and then apologies, and expressions of love. Abuse affects not only the person being abused, but also the children in the home, as well as family and friends in your life who love and care about you. I understand how difficult it is to talk about abuse. I understand that he has made you feel bad about yourself and you are confused. You may not even understand your own feelings. You may wonder what people will think about you when they learn what he was doing to you. You do not deserve this! It is not a reflection of you or your choices or your worth, but rather a reflection of the abuser and his inability to respect and love you in the way that you deserve. Do not be embarrassed. So many people love you and want to see you smile again. I will help you understand your feelings and take the steps toward getting your life back.

If you are not involved in an abusive relationship, but concerned for someone who you suspect is being abused, I will help you understand what is going on in the victim’s mind and provide you with suggestions on how to reach out successfully to her so she can begin taking the steps to get out of the abusive relationship. I will help you understand why she has stayed for so long.

The purpose of this book is to empower and inspire men and women through the recognition of the abuse we, or our loved ones, are experiencing and to provide the support and encouragement to believe once again in ourselves and move forward in life in a healthy, fulfilling direction. This book is a resource for victims and survivors of domestic

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violence and abuse, as well as the friends and family who act as support systems for those affected by abuse. While the writing references male abuse against women, this is only because it is my personal experience. It in no way implies that men are the only abusers. The topics addressed in my book apply to both male and female abusers, as well as same-sex relationships. Any and all information given herein is in no way intended to substitute for professional medical or legal advice. Please contact an attorney to provide you with professional legal advice when needed. Always call 911 if you feel your safety is in immediate danger.

Once you have taken the steps and made the choice to be in charge of your own life again, in all its freedom, light, laughter, and beauty... I will help you begin to put one foot in front of the other and keep moving in the direction your life was truly intended to take you... the life where you will feel peace in your heart again and see the world in color once more... the life where you just can't stop smiling.

Before we go deeper into this book, let's do a short, yet powerful exercise to evaluate your relationship for “red flags” and signs of abuse. Remember, abuse can be emotional, financial, sexual or physical.

Go to: [www.ChristyMayfield.com](http://www.ChristyMayfield.com) and download the Relationship Abuse Assessment.

After taking the assessment, you may find that you have a profound realization about your relationship. Any insights you gain from the Relationship Abuse Assessment will allow you to develop more perspective and clarity into those areas as you read through the book.

The simple process of taking the online assessment, before reading through the book, will make this book so much more valuable for you! I encourage you to do so as we begin this journey together...



## CHAPTER 1

# The Definition and Cycle of Abuse, and the Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

*“As I remained locked in the bedroom, three police cars were en route to my house.”*

I literally had a “picture perfect marriage.” If I could show you a real photo of what my life looked like, you would see me and my husband standing in front of our new F-350 truck with our house in the background and my dog sitting proudly in front of us. I was wearing jeans and a pink sweatshirt and my husband was a clean cut body builder who took great pride in his appearance. This is what a great deal of domestic violence really looks like. I was educated, successful, owned my own home, and traveled with friends. I came from a close family with parents who were still married after forty years. While nobody ever saw me with a black eye or bruises, domestic violence is progressive and I ultimately ended up on the end of a .44 Magnum loaded with seven bullets and a husband who had decided he would kill me before ever allowing a divorce.

Abuse can occur within all relationships, not just intimate relationships, as the cycle, pattern, and dynamics of abuse are the same. Many abusers appear very charming to their friends, family, and co-workers. Abuse isn’t about “anger issues.” Abuse is about control. An abuser chooses whom he will direct his violence toward. If you have experienced a violent relationship, then you have seen this. If

you are trying to understand someone you know who is experiencing an abusive relationship, let me explain... if abuse were about “anger issues” the abuser would not be able to control his outbursts and his violence. He can control it. If the abuse takes place within an intimate

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*Abuse isn't about  
“anger issues.” Abuse is  
about control.*

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relationship, he usually has no problems controlling his anger with friends, family and the people he works with. Abusers choose to become abusive and violent and they will choose when. Abuse is very calculated and follows a cycle. I know. I lived it.

It was a particularly warm evening in May as I stopped outside the front door of our home and stared at the tree in the front yard. In my mind, I wished I could lie down under the tree for the night with my dog, rather than walk through the front door and find what might await me. It was always unpredictable. The past nine months of my life were spent walking on eggshells, yet I never knew what would set him off and there was no rhyme or reason for his anger and violence. Therefore, I could never predict his mood and nothing I did or didn't do could prevent his anger or stop his violence once he made the decision to inflict it. It began during my second week of marriage. The third week of my marriage was spent living with a friend as I questioned my safety. All the while he called and begged me to come home, telling me how much he loved me and how sorry he was.



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On this particular night, nine months into our marriage, my husband had become increasingly agitated over a leaking blender, so much so that I thought it best to leave the house and take my dog for a walk. I knew in my gut this night would be different. I just didn’t realize how different. When I returned to the house the sun had already gone down, but the house was still dark inside. I could hear the sound of a heavy metal band playing on the stereo singing about “suicide.” My husband never played that kind of music in the house. He had listened to some heavy metal bands in the past, but mostly in his car when he was driving. As I got to the front door, I glanced over at the tree in the front yard; it looked peaceful to me. The branches looked safe. More than the roof over my head that I shared with my husband. With my dog on his leash, I opened the front door. It was dark inside. I don’t know why I didn’t turn the lights on. I hadn’t even thought about it. Subconsciously I must have known something was going to happen because I didn’t remove my dog’s leash until I was upstairs in the bedroom. I set my cell phone down next to the bed, instinctively closing the bedroom door before I walked back downstairs. If I could just remain “invisible” then maybe I would be safe.

As I walked downstairs, I heard the sound of my husband’s voice from the couch in the dark. “Why don’t you come sit with me?” I froze on the bottom step. I could now see him patting the cushion next to him. His tone was overly kind and gentle in a way that I had never heard from him before. It didn’t sound or feel sincere to me. Something was wrong. I could see he was drinking tequila out of a milk glass. I told him I wasn’t comfortable talking with him while he was drinking and suggested that we talk in the morning. At that moment he became

instantly enraged! He threw the nearby phone at the wall across the room breaking it into pieces and flew off the couch as though he was on fire, chasing me up the stairs. I got to the bedroom before he did and as I locked the bedroom door behind me, he continued to beat on the bedroom door trying to break it down.

I couldn't comprehend that my husband was really going to kill me. Instead of calling the police, I called his parents. It was my father-in-law who told me to call the police the moment he heard my husband trying to break the door down while screaming on the other side of it. Fortunately, my dog was already safe in the room with me and I had already put the cell phone in the bedroom. This was how I had

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*I lived in a constant  
state of survival mode,  
but it saved my life.*

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instinctively lived for nine months. I tried to stay one step ahead of my husband, always having a response prepared in advance for any actions I thought he might take. I lived in a constant state of survival mode, but it saved my life.

As I remained locked in the bedroom with the police dispatcher on the line, three police cars were en route to my house. I had already locked the house for the night, so when the police arrived they were trying to find a way to get me out of the house. They couldn't, I was upstairs in the corner bedroom. One police officer found his way into the basement from the backyard only to find the door to the main house locked. My husband refused to answer the front door.

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In the meantime, through the bedroom door, he screamed at me that he was, “resolved the marriage isn’t going to work.” “You’re going to see my vengeance,” he yelled. Somewhat numb, I listened to him walk down the two flights of hardwood stairs, hoping with each flight that this didn’t mean what I thought it meant. Then I listened to the sound of the door to the garage open and slam shut, then open and shut again as he came back into the house. My husband had guns... a rifle and a .44 Magnum. I grew up in a house with guns and I am a firm believer in guns when you are properly trained. However, because of his unpredictable behavior, I convinced him early in our marriage to keep the guns unloaded in the house and keep the bullets in the garage. I heard the closet door in the guest room slide open, where he kept his .44 Magnum.

I was afraid to tell the dispatcher that he had a gun. I knew how quickly everything was going to change for everyone involved... me, the police, and my husband. I continued to hope that my deepest fears would be wrong, and for as long as I could in that moment, I held on to the denial that he wasn’t really going to shoot me. How could he shoot me? A few hours earlier he told me he “loved me.” I listened closely. It was very quiet. He was directly on the other side of the bedroom door. I listened with my ear to the door. I heard click... click... click... click... click... as he dropped bullets into the .44 Magnum. I quietly stepped backward and positioned myself behind the bookcase as I told the dispatcher he had a gun.

I hadn’t finished getting the words out of my mouth when the information was relayed to the law enforcement that surrounded my house. All the armed law enforcement on my front porch had their guns drawn and began yelling “Open the door or we’re kicking it in!”

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Within seconds they were in my home and had my husband on the floor in handcuffs.

While I endured the abuse for 9 months, trying to find my way out, the following is only a small excerpt from my hour long 911 call. As I tried to hide, the police tried to save me.

**ME:** Hurry! You have to get here right away! My husband is out of control!

**DISPATCH PERSON #1 TO ME:** Okay. Does he have any weapons in the house?

**Me:** There are guns in the garage. We're in the bedroom upstairs. I've got my dog with me, but I know he won't open the door for the police.

**(My husband screaming at me in the background)**

**Me:** God, take him away!

**Dispatch PERSON 1 to me:** We're coming. Are you locked in that room? Can you lock the door?

**Me:** I am

**Dispatch PERSON 1 to me:** You are?

**Me:** Yes

**Dispatch person 1 to me:** Okay

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**DISPATCH PERSON #2 TO POLICE:** Family disturbance between wife and husband. Husband is screaming. Wife is locked in the room. There will be guns in the garage.

**POLICE #1:** Copy

**Dispatch person #2 to police:** 201 Adam, that was for you as well.

**POLICE #2:** Copy

*Me:* He can’t stay here tonight. You’ve got to take him away.

**Dispatch person #1 to me:** They’re coming, okay? And they’re coming as quick as they can. We’re going to help you out, okay?

**Dispatch person #2 to police:** This is the first time we’ve been out there for disturbance. \*RP states that her husband has been confrontational all night.

**Police #1:** Arrived at scene

**Dispatch person #2 to police:** \*RP can’t see the male party. Doesn’t know where he is in the house.

**Dispatch person #1 to me:** You stay in that room. If they want you to come out they’ll tell me and I’ll tell you, okay?

*Me (whispering):* Okay

**Dispatch person #1 to me:** Do you think he's upstairs outside your door?

**Me:** I don't know where he is. Everything is quiet. I think I hear him by the bathroom door.

**Dispatch person #1 to me:** He's at the bathroom outside your bedroom? Standing right outside your bedroom door? You're doing a good job. You just keep telling me where you think he is.

**MY HUSBAND: (yelling)** You're going to see my vengeance for calling the police!

**Dispatch person #2 to police:** We need to try to get her out.

**Police #1:** Okay. Can you ask her if he has any weapons?

**Police #2:** Door from the backyard into the basement is open.

**Dispatch person #2 to police:** It is unknown if the male party has any weapons. She can't see him.

**Dispatch person #1 to me:** You're on the second floor, is that right? There's no way from where you are that you can get out of the house? They're still there. They're going to try to find a way to get in, okay? I want you to just stay inside your room. You don't think there's any door anywhere that's unlocked, or any window they can get in anywhere? There's no way that you can think of into the main house?

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**Police #2:** Door from the basement into the house is locked.

**Dispatch person #2 to police:** We just got the information they also have a gun in one of the bedrooms. The male party does have access to it. Unknown if it is loaded.

**Me:** He’s standing outside my bedroom door.

**Dispatch person #1 to me:** He’s at the door? I want you to just stay right there.

Try not to talk so he can’t hear you. Is he still outside your door? Christy, are you there?

Christy? Stay on the phone with me, okay? Are you there?

**Me: (*whispering*)** I hear small clicking noises outside the door. It’s a gun! He’s loading a gun!

**Dispatch person #2 to police:**           \* RP states husband has a gun

**Police:** Copy. We’re going to force the front door.

**Police:** Drop the gun! Drop the gun! Drop the gun!

**Police:** We have one in custody

**\*RP is police abbreviation for “reporting party”**

I never saw my husband again. Ever. This was my choice. It wasn't easy. I had many mixed emotions. I married him nine months earlier because I loved him. I saw very few warning signs while we were dating, although looking back, they were there, however subtle. My life was turned upside down overnight. I was heartbroken. There were many good times as well that I was choosing to walk away from. My husband desperately wanted to come home. A restraining order was placed and I chose to uphold the restraining order as my heart broke.

I had to figure out if I was in love with him or if I was in love with the dream of who I thought he could be and what we could have. What I wanted I could never have with him.

In reality, I spent the past nine months of my life adding handwritten documentation to a safe deposit box that held detailed descriptions of incidents that occurred by my husband toward me with dates and times included. I added to this daily so, should anything ever happen to me, someone would find this. My safe deposit box also had copies of my Will and Durable Power of Attorney in case I was injured and couldn't make my own medical decisions, pictures of all the valuables in my home should he destroy them, and emergency cash in case I had to leave quickly. I had given a key for my safe deposit box to my parents. They knew that if anything ever happened to me, they needed to get into it. I never told them what was in the safe deposit box. They did have my original, notarized Will and Durable Power of Attorney at their house, not knowing that my life was truly in danger. As with most cases of domestic violence, my family and friends knew we were having problems, however, they didn't know how bad it actually was.



## **Domestic Violence Statistics**

- ❖ At least one in three women and one in four men in the US will be a victim of intimate partner violence at some point in their life.
  - ❖ Approximately 1/3 of all women murdered each year were killed by their partners or ex-partners. That’s three women in the US every day.
  - ❖ 85% of domestic violence occurs against women by their male partners.
  - ❖ 15% of domestic violence occurs against men by their female partners.
  - ❖ Attacks by male partners are the number one cause of injury for women age 15-44.
  - ❖ 37% of all emergency room injuries to women are a result of domestic violence.
  - ❖ 25% of pregnant women seeking prenatal care have been physically abused during their pregnancy.
  - ❖ About 1 in 3 high school students have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship.
  - ❖ 40% of teenage girls say they know someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
- (Statistics on this page have been compiled from various resources)

The US Department of Justice defines abuse as “... a pattern of abusive behavior used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of

violence. It happens when one person believes they are entitled to control another.” This can include physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The abuser and the victim are currently or previously dating, living together, married or divorced, however the majority of domestic violence occurs within dating relationships.

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## **The Cycle of Abuse**

The reason it takes so long to figure out an abuser is because he knows how to keep himself hidden. If abusers were easy to figure out, there would be no abused women. My husband's abuse didn't begin until the night before our marriage. We had finished the rehearsal dinner and he had gone back to his apartment with his two best friends. My home was filled with my family, my friends, and his parents. Everybody was happy. I received a phone call from him and the only words that I continue to replay through my mind are “The last place on earth I want to be is marrying you tomorrow.” I sat on the floor upstairs in my bedroom listening to his words. I was devastated, however, the wedding was in the morning and I tried to convince myself that his behavior was because he had been drinking with his friends and he was nervous. I hung up the phone and walked downstairs into the kitchen, passing everybody in the living room and hoping nobody could tell I had been crying. I stood in front of the microwave heating tea; because

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it was the only place I could turn my face away from everybody. As I looked at my reflection in the door of the microwave, I saw his mother’s face reflecting back to me in the glass. She knew. She was one of the few who knew his history with women and his previous marriage.

I tried to discreetly walk past my family and friends who were gathered throughout the kitchen and living room. Everybody was laughing and I hoped that if I didn’t make eye contact with anybody I could keep my secret. I went upstairs and sat on my bed with my friends. We talked and I cried. My mom came to the bedroom door and without asking any questions said, “You can call off the wedding if you want to.” I don’t know how she knew, but she did. How was I supposed to call off the wedding when everything had been paid for, my family had flown in from out of town, wedding gifts had already been delivered to our home and all of our friends would be arriving at the church in less than 12 hours? I convinced myself he was just having normal pre-wedding jitters.

The morning of our wedding he called to apologize and told me how much he loved me and couldn’t wait to marry me. I was still deeply hurt by the words he inflicted on me the night before and I was looking for any opportunity to turn my wedding day into a joyous occasion again. Because it was the day of my wedding, I grabbed on to his apology and hoped our day could still be perfect and happy. I realize now that I used his apology as a way to dismiss the abuse from him the night before, almost as though it had never happened. I felt as though I had no choice, but I did have a choice, regardless of the fact it was the day of the wedding. Had his verbal abuse occurred earlier in the relationship I may not have accepted his apology so quickly, but recognized it as a red flag.

The wedding was beautiful and he cried when he saw me walk down the aisle. I wasn't nervous. I was happy, but I wasn't brimming with excitement. I realize in hindsight that my wedding day was the first time I disconnected emotionally in order to protect myself from his abuse. It was my wedding day, and it was a foreshadowing of what was to come during our marriage. This was the beginning of the cycle of abuse that would continue for the next nine months.

I remember how lonely and empty I felt on our wedding night as my new husband rolled over and turned his back to me, what would be the first of many times. As I lay in the dark, I could see the moonlight on my wedding dress as it hung on the closet door. I looked at my husband's back and strangely I couldn't see my future or our future together. It felt like I had just fallen into a black hole, disconnected and far away from the life I had been living.

When we woke up the next morning, the sun was shining through the windows. We had stayed at an old historic castle on our wedding night and the sunlight through the antique glass sparkled. I had hoped that with a good night's sleep, things would be different and we would begin our new life together blissfully happy and in love. Instead, he was angry that he slept so late and wanted me to get out of bed immediately so we could go have breakfast. He told me I couldn't take a shower because he wanted to have the free breakfast before it ended in fifteen minutes. I complied because I saw that had I not, his anger would have escalated.

My first few hours as someone's wife were spent sitting in the garden outside at a breakfast table with a husband who wouldn't speak to me, other than to criticize me when he thought the opportunity presented itself. I didn't understand why, but even my breakfast choice

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was called into question as he expressed his belief that I should have ordered something else.

As his control continued, the isolation began during our first week of marriage. All of my family who had flown in from three different states were going to the mountains for the day. My husband didn’t want to go and told me he didn’t want me to go because he wanted to spend that time with me as his wife. I was a little saddened that we wouldn’t be spending the day with my family since they all lived out of state and would be leaving soon. However, I thought it was a romantic gesture that my husband wanted to spend our first day of marriage alone, so I agreed. I sat home with him, however, the only thing he had planned was to spend the day in the garage and tinker on his prized custom built off- road vehicle.

It was during my second week of marriage that it got really bad. A few months prior to the wedding date, he convinced me to trade my car in for a truck that cost \$45,000. He said we would both make the payments and I could drive it. I made it clear from the beginning that I would not be paying more than I was already paying on my car. The truck was in my name, but he immediately decided he would drive the truck, leaving me without a vehicle for the first time in my adult life. He had to drive me to and from work every day.

His behavior became unpredictable and he began throwing things and breaking things. He became emotionally and verbally abusive. It was after one particularly explosive verbal attack on me while he was driving me to work that my co-workers began to fear for my safety. They took me home right then while he was at work, helped me get my stuff, get my dog and leave my house... the house that I owned. If others are

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*If others are more  
fearful for your safety  
than you are, be sure to  
take that into account.*

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more fearful for your safety than you are, be sure to take that into account. You may not be ready to acknowledge the true risk that this person possesses.

My third week of marriage was spent at a friend's house with my dog. My husband didn't know where I was and he called my cell phone every day apologizing and begging me to come home. I never answered his phone calls, but I listened to his voice messages as I contemplated what to do. On one hand,

I felt fearful of his outbursts, but on the other hand, I had only been married a few weeks and wanted to be home with my husband enjoying my life as a new wife. I had a close relationship with his parents and spoke with them during my time away from the house. They convinced me that he was remorseful and broken hearted and that while "he had a temper, he would never hurt" me. They told me that he said this was his "wake-up call" and he was going to make a change.

Soon after I came home, he bought a used car as our second vehicle so I would have transportation again. His "wake up call" while I was away was short lived once I returned. The process of going to used car lots with him was unpleasant, to say the least, and he was resentful and angry. He became confrontational toward me in a corner of the car lot, acting like a bully, yelling and cussing at me when I told him that I didn't like the old car he wanted to buy. I stood my ground as I had already traded in a fairly new car for a beautiful V8 Diesel truck for him. We finally agreed on a used convertible Mustang. When he

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drove the Mustang home, he decided he liked it better since it was a convertible. So, after all of his yelling, belittling and bull-doing me to get his way, he told me the truck was my source of transportation again instead of the Mustang I picked out. The truck was no longer most appealing to him.

As an abuser, he was a user and a con man. He used power and control to get what he wanted at the moment, and that could always be different from what he wanted the next moment. Once he got whatever it was he wanted, he would become apologetic, saying his bad behavior would “never happen again.” But it did happen again, and each time it would escalate. This was part of his manipulation.

The verbal and emotional abuse almost always precede the violence. He may begin calling you names, yelling, ridiculing you, ignoring your needs or desires, withholding affection as a form of punishment, blaming you for his problems and the problems in the relationship. He may begin expressing a continued dissatisfaction with you in general by repeatedly shaking his head in response to your words and actions. He tries to make you feel like the abuse is your fault through something you did or something you didn’t do right. It doesn’t matter what you do to try to make him happy, the abuse continues.

The verbal abuse is often intended to intimidate and weaken you, making you feel afraid and powerless. He may control you and keep you in the relationship by telling you, “No one else will have you,” or by criticizing your appearance or comparing you to his exes who he tells you were much more attractive, thinner, or better cooks. The more he weakens you, the more you begin to question yourself. This strengthens his power and control over you. Not only does he withhold affection and sex, he may begin to withhold money.



My husband moved into my house which I owned prior to our marriage, however, once we were married he refused to contribute to the mortgage payments. When I asked him to contribute financially he said, “Why? You would be paying for it anyway if I wasn’t here.” What should be a natural desire in a healthy relationship to love your partner becomes an imposition. In his mind, my purpose in his life was to make him feel good because he didn’t feel good about himself. If I didn’t continuously praise him, he would punish me by expressing his dissatisfaction with me. This is common in abusive relationships.

When we were first married I wanted to be the perfect wife with the perfect marriage. The first time I did his laundry I hung his cotton tee shirt on a coat hanger instead of folding it. He became angry, yelling, “Now it’s ruined! You ruined my shirt!” There was nothing wrong with his shirt, it was just an opportunity to try to weaken me and make me feel I couldn’t even fold laundry correctly. I had previously mentioned that I bought some new shirts that had to air dry otherwise they would shrink. As punishment for hanging his wet shirts on hangers, he washed my new shirts and put them all in the dryer and shrunk them. He claimed he was “trying to help me” and then expressed dissatisfaction and sadness over my upset. Again, this was part of his manipulation as I began to feel guilty for not being good enough as a wife. I felt responsible for his unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Sometimes he would just get up and walk out the room or shake his head and walk away and not speak to me at all. As this continued each day I began to feel lonelier with him than I did when I was alone.

You have to remember that his behavior toward you really isn’t about you. It is about him. He has a low sense of self-worth. The abuser needs constant reassurance and validation. Remember, in his mind,



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your purpose in his life is to make him feel good about himself which is also done by breaking your confidence down. While you may perceive abusers as selfish, it stems from insecurity. He is unable to love himself; therefore he is unable to fully love you as well. His ego is bigger than his heart and he often has a sense of entitlement. In order to build himself up, he usually expresses no interest in what you have to say or how your day was. Your time is usually

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spent talking about him. As easily as they point out your failures, they are quite adept at minimizing your accomplishments and successes. Anything that competes for your attention is a threat to them. If you share exciting news he will ignore you, change the subject to himself or try to break you down telling you what's wrong with the news you were just moments earlier excited to share. He will sabotage your accomplishments and success and suck the joy right out of you. You are left feeling confused.

Life with an abuser is an emotional roller coaster. I once completed an intense training course that taught me the skills to provide Christian caregiving to those suffering grief and loss. At the completion of my training, I and the other people who completed the training with me were honored at a ceremony. My husband didn't want to attend the ceremony honoring my accomplishment. He went with me only because his parents told him he should attend and he wanted to give the impression to his parents that he was a supportive husband. Once

there, however, he wouldn't speak to anybody that I introduced him to.

As I stood in front of the crowd receiving my recognition I looked out at the audience at everybody except my own husband. I couldn't look at him. When I glanced over at him briefly, I saw his slumped down demeanor in his chair and his clear lack of expressed interest. I chose to remain in my joy by watching the rest of the crowd clap for me, even if my husband wouldn't.

After the ceremony, I watched as the others who were honored left with their families to have lunch together. My husband refused to have lunch with me, so I took myself to lunch at a restaurant alone to continue to celebrate myself. It is easy to understand an abuser's lack of support in your life. He can't support something that you did on your own. His intent is to make you feel weak and dependent on him. Acknowledging your accomplishments would build your strength and your self-confidence. Of course, after I arrived back home from lunch by myself he was apologetic. This is part of the cycle.

Anyone who has lived with an abusive partner knows that there are no simple answers. People outside of the relationship who are aware of the abuse often wonder, "Why doesn't she just leave him?" You may have the same question yourself, or you may wonder, "Why doesn't he just stop?" Nobody, not even abusive men and women, are all good or all bad or all violent. There were qualities about this person that made you fall in love. Because abuse occurs gradually, it is difficult to figure out how and when the relationship became abusive. Because it is gradual and one person is not all bad all of the time, your love may continue to grow. Understand that while abuse is gradual it is also progressive! Abusers are often very good at keeping this part of

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themselves hidden from the world. They can be very charming. It was often his charm that drew you to him in the first place.

As time goes on you begin to realize that good qualities and the love that you once felt for this person cannot outweigh the control and abuse. The abuse and violence becomes unpredictable. He often believes that you are the one changing, not him. He may use guilt, telling you how much you are hurting him because you “don’t love” him. You feel responsible and try even harder to please him more. It doesn’t matter how hard you try to please him, you won’t because it isn’t about you. The abuse inflicted on you is about him. You didn’t cause it and no change in your behavior will stop it. It is a result of his sense of entitlement and unexpressed emotions. There are always stages in the cycle of abuse when his behavior is normal. This is part of the cycle, and it is during the “normal” stages of the cycle when your hope is restored and you are reminded why you fell in love with him.

Eventually, tension will begin to build, often during periods of time when he feels he has less control over you. This can be because he feels your attention is not on him. You may be spending time with friends, or busy on a project at work, with the kids, running errands, going to the gym, talking to a family member or friend on the phone. All of these things are completely healthy and acceptable unless you are in a relationship with an abusive partner. If you are in an abusive relationship, all the normal things in everybody else’s relationships become a trigger for abuse and violence in your relationship.

He begins punishing you for your lack of attention to him. This usually begins with emotional abuse. He may become distant, he won’t look at you, he turns his back to you in bed or sleeps in the other room,

and he walks out of the room when you are speaking to him.

As the tension continues to build, he will eventually explode. He begins to yell. Being yelled at by anybody feels bad, however, an abuser's yell is bone chilling, frightening, and almost paralyzing. You are afraid to move. It is not the kind of yell that gives you the chance to yell back. If you do try to stand up for yourself and become angry, it only fuels his anger more. He doesn't believe that you have the right to challenge him or defy him. The more you put your foot down, the angrier he becomes. He will hurt you with any kind of abuse he can to ensure you won't do it again.

You have probably lived a great deal of this relationship in survival mode. You begin to do whatever you have to do to calm him down to try to keep yourself safe, to protect your children, to protect your pets, to prevent your belongings from being broken. I remember those times I was lying on the floor feeling him standing over me, afraid to move, like a child who is hiding under the sheets from a monster. I held as still as I could hoping I wouldn't feel his hands on me or his feet kicking me and praying that my dog who followed me everywhere would not be harmed as he lay next to me at my side.

After his angry explosions, the abuser will express remorse. He may apologize and cry and say he will "never do it again." He will say he "loves you" and he has never behaved this way with anybody else. This furthers your confusion and leaves you feeling a little more off balance emotionally each time. If he really never behaved like this with anybody else, as he says, you may begin to question what you are doing that triggers such anger in him. It is highly unlikely that he hasn't been this way with anybody else. His expression of remorse is a

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form of manipulation to pull you back in and continue to control your emotions. He is also trying to justify his behavior by blaming you and directing the focus away from himself and his abusive behavior.

The relationship becomes “good” again as long as it is proceeding on his terms. Because he feels good again, he believes you feel good too. He has no regard for the emotional and physical pain you are feeling.

He wants reassurance that you won’t leave him. He becomes warm and loving, drawing you back in, reminding you why you fell in love with him. You may also have a hard time letting go of your dream or accepting that this person really doesn’t love you. This period of time that you feel closer to him will only last a short while because nothing has changed. He will continue to become increasingly agitated and the most trivial issue may trigger the next cycle of abuse, usually worse than the previous outbursts. He can fly into a rage in an instant. Quick and dramatic changes in personality are common with abusers. Nothing you say has an impact except to make him angrier. He is outraged again, and once again you are assaulted with a barrage of insults, ridicule, and name calling, which at some point progresses to physical violence.

My husband always ended his rages by screaming at me, “No man will ever have you!” My heart would sink. Abuse is a repetitive traumatic cycle. His insecurities and resentments toward you continue to build up until he feels you deserve to be punished, at which time the smallest spark will trigger his rage. The trigger is usually out of proportion to the ensuing rage. Anything can set him off. An abuser’s rage is completely unpredictable. I came home from work one evening and smiled and said, “Hi!” His response was a fit of rage screaming,

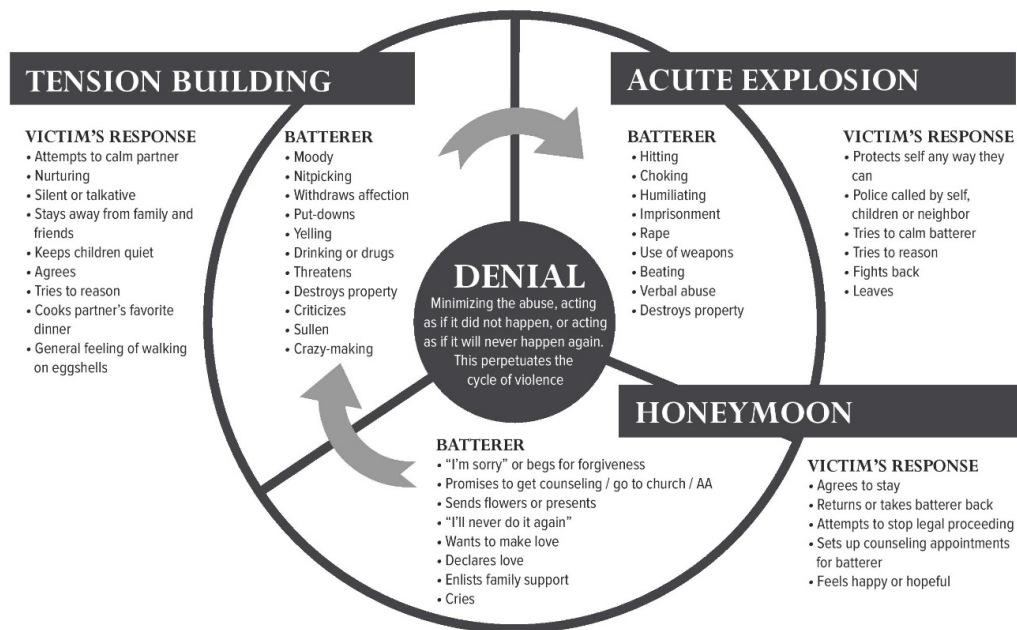
“That’s how you greet me?!”

Because you never know what will set him off you begin to retreat into yourself. His rage is like a freight train. The more he yelled, the angrier he got... the more I retreated, the more he screamed to try to get my response. If I did respond he would scream, “How dare you challenge me?” If I tried to ignore him he would follow me around the house with his mouth practically against the back of my neck screaming in my ear. I once saw him in a full-length mirror and he was walking against my back so closely that he had to widen his stance so he wouldn’t step on my heels as he screamed into my ear.

I began to disconnect from myself during these episodes. By disconnecting from my feelings I could turn off my emotions, go numb and wrap myself inside a protective mental shell trying to keep his rage out of my head and heart. It becomes a coping mechanism for people who are experiencing abuse.

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## UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



Because you never know when the next explosion will happen or what will trigger it you no longer feel safe in your own home or sharing your thoughts with your partner. You retreat and disconnect. This is the point where you begin to lose yourself. He feels more in control when you have less power. He begins to suppress you emotionally by denying you the right to express your thoughts and feelings without paying a price for it. Complying with his desire to suppress you emotionally becomes one of your coping mechanisms to try to ensure your safety. He may begin to criticize everything you like and you begin to give up the things you once enjoyed in order to try to “keep the peace.” You continue to lose yourself more and more each time you give up something that once brought you joy. How much joy do you get out of a relationship with someone who puts you and everything you love down?

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My husband criticized my TV shows so I wouldn't watch them when he was home. If I did watch them he would walk in and change the channel as if I wasn't sitting there and would begin watching what he wanted. He criticized my music and if he was in the car, he would not allow me to listen to it. If I was cooking dinner with music on in the kitchen and he was in the garage he would turn the kitchen radio off as he passed through the kitchen to get something before returning to the garage.



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After we were married he told me I could no longer go to the Catholic Church. This, despite the lengthy discussions we had addressing religion prior to our marriage. I continued to go to my church, but also joined him at his Baptist church every week as well. I wanted to try to please him and share our faith together without giving up who I was. He was so enraged that I wouldn’t give up my faith; Sundays became a point of contention and violence rather than peace and love.

When he saw I was wearing a toe ring on the way to his church he demanded that I remove it. I didn’t see any harm in wearing a toe ring with my sandals. When I refused to remove it, he pulled the car over. As I took my toe ring off and placed it in my wallet I felt confused as to how someone as independent and strong as I, was removing a toe ring at someone’s demand. It was a toe ring for goodness sake, but I had to remove it for fear of what might follow if I didn’t do what he demanded. He was in a rage.

## **The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children**

As the cycle of violence continues between intimate partners, the abuse and violence begins to extend to the children and the pets within the home. Abusive men are 1,500 times more likely than non-abusive men to abuse their children if they are already abusing their partner. 50% of male abusers come from homes of domestic violence. Therefore, as the children become adults, the abuse and violence often continues into the relationships with their own partners, children, and pets. Male children exposed to abuse often become abusive toward their adult partners. Female children exposed to abuse are more likely

to tolerate abuse, emotional neglect, and violence in their own adult relationships. Children living in a home where abuse is occurring are almost always aware of the abuse. The abuse is not hidden from them simply because it may occur when you think the children are asleep or in the other room. If the children have eyes and ears, they are aware of the abuse regardless of whether they are in view when the abuse is occurring.

In the same way, the abuser disrespects you, and exerts power and control over you, he also begins to disrespect the children. He does this verbally through name calling, belittling and humiliating them, and breaking their self-confidence. He may show no interest in the child's activities or accomplishments and fail to show up for events that are important to the child. You may recall, this cycle is the same cycle exerted toward their intimate partners. Abuse is progressive and in time, the abuse usually progresses to physical abuse and in some situations sexual abuse. Each day, three children die from physical abuse.

When sexual abuse is occurring, the abuser controls the children through fear, intimidation, and threats of harm to the child, the child's mother, or pet if the child tells of the sexual abuse. He may try to convince the children that their mother is mean and unfair. An abuser will try to "win" a child's loyalty through manipulation. He will use the children as a way to further control his partner. Children are easily influenced, always wanting to please. Because the biggest influence on children's values is the behavior and statements of their parents, the cycle carries over. Children learn how to blame others and begin to follow the same abusive patterns.

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Children who are exposed to violence within the home have a higher incidence of poor impulse control, loneliness, depression, and aggression. They may become withdrawn and have poor social skills and poor conflict resolution skills. Children exposed to violence learn from the poor example they witness from the abuser, that having power over others is the ultimate goal. They may become disrespectful and physically abusive toward the parent who is being abused. Boys may begin to imitate their father’s abuse by hitting or shoving their mother. These children also have a higher risk of drug and alcohol abuse and running away. On the contrary, the children may try to become a caretaker to the parent who is being abused. They may feel guilt for the violence they and others are subjected to and believe if only they behaved better at home or tried harder in school that they, their siblings, their mother and their pets wouldn’t be beaten. For this reason, children exposed to abuse may also become overachievers in school.

Abuse may not affect everybody the same, however, abuse has long-lasting emotional and psychological effects on all those involved. If you don’t have children with the abuser, get out of the abusive relationship now before you do. It is important you understand that choosing to have children with him will not stop him from abusing you. Pregnancy will not draw an abuser closer to you. In fact, violence often escalates during pregnancy. Choosing to have a child with an abuser will only endanger your child’s physical and emotional well-being. Four thousand women and children are beaten to death every year, and children from domestic violence homes are six times more likely to commit suicide.

The best way to prevent abuse is to recognize the abuse early before the cycle of violence begins. There are many characteristics of abuse that occur in nonviolent forms within the first few months of a relationship.