

The Day That Changed My Life Forever

By
Mary

Sunday, August 21 is the most important day of my life. What was different about that day? Only the day before I had wanted to end my life to escape my husband's abuse. His response to my attempt to end my life was to take out a gun and say, "I'll put a gun to your head and show you how to be successful committing suicide". To this day, I can still hear the cylinder spinning. Then we went to a movie and 5:30PM mass. Insanity! The next day, he walked out with a suitcase and said, "I'm leaving you and you'll never see me again." I kept hearing his words over and over again in my mind. I was sitting in the sunroom, when suddenly I heard myself say, out loud: "No, Bob, I'm leaving YOU and you'll never see me again". Something came over me at that moment; I was filled with determination and purpose I hadn't felt during the forty-three years of my marriage. I was *done*.

I started for the first time to take action. I went to the calendar and canceled all the immediate commitments. I would leave it to him to explain to friends why we weren't going to Ireland, why I wasn't going to his class reunion and why I wasn't there when his classmate and wife were coming to stay with us for two weeks before the reunion. I packed a carry-on suitcase and walked out the door.

To my surprise nothing happened. The sky didn't fall. I was leaving and had no intention of ever returning. It was my resolve. Was I scared? Yes. Did I know what I would do? No. I only knew I would clean toilets at a motel if that's what it took to leave that bastard. I was sick to my stomach and shaking all over as I backed my car out of the garage and closed the garage door on my life with Bob.

I had made the break and was surrounded by my children who loved and supported my decision. Less than a week later, I left to spend two weeks in California with my son and his family. I was 3,000 miles away from my husband, and for the first time in a long time I felt safe. I was emotionally and physically exhausted. I couldn't sleep, eat or stop crying.

I kept in close contact with my therapist in Maine, who encouraged me to find a counselor in California. In a matter of two weeks, I was given a diagnoses of what was happening to me. I was a victim of Domestic Violence and suffering from PTSD! I was in shock! My journal became an anchor and "my home" for me; a place to write my thoughts and feelings. I had left my husband and my home, but was slowly finding myself.

In Maine, Bob was waiting for me to return home. He told people I had a breakdown and was resting in California or that I was helping my son's family out. In October, My son and his wife asked me to stay for the winter. I finally unpacked my suitcase and put my clothes in drawers and felt at home. My two week visit turned into a stay of one year. They bought me a cobalt blue VW Beetle convertible with beige leather interior. I surprised myself as I cruised on the freeway with the top down at 80mph, blaring my fifty's CDs.

I had a choice at that time in my life: Sit at home, brood and feel sorry for myself and make everyone miserable around me, or get up, go out and live my life to its fullest. I chose the latter. I began volunteering at my grandchildren's elementary school. I read at the library every Tuesday. I was in my glory surrounded by young children; I had taught first grade for thirty years. I was part of the family and enjoyed participating in the daily routines. I found a senior college and took a course at USC Channel Islands on Literary Los Angeles. I attended a Women's Retreat at the Serra Retreat House in Malibu, and there I made the decision to start divorce proceedings.

At church each week, I would listen to Fr. Michael's homilies and felt a connection to his words. I asked if I could meet with him. He told me I had been a slave with no rights or privileges. He said, "Don't let anyone into your heart or home who doesn't love you unconditionally." They are words I live by every day.

A big part of my healing happened because of the opportunity to be 3,000 miles away from Bob. My son and his wife's decision to welcome me into their hearts and home made all the difference in my recovery. Here I was staying with the son who I hadn't protected for so many years. He forgave me, and helped me learn to forgive myself. He told me how important it was for him that I accepted responsibility for my part in our family's dysfunction and didn't make excuses for his father's behavior. I had a safe and beautiful home. I was surrounded by people who loved me, and I trusted and respected them. Once I let my heart open to possibilities away from my hell on earth I began to heal and crawl out of the dark, deep hole I had lived in for so many years.

My children have all suffered in their own ways within the charade of a loving family. My leaving Bob was the beginning of our family's healing and living in the truth. It was finally out in the open. People were shocked. Close friends had no idea of what was happening.

I don't think people truly know the pain and fear of living with Domestic Violence unless you have experienced it. I was a nobody without any self-worth or confidence when I was in that house with Bob. I was on 24/7 call, ready and able to do, say or feel what he wanted me to feel, say or do. It was never enough. I could never get it right. I thought I was alone and helpless without him. I was the frog in the pot and gradually the water got hotter and hotter and hotter and I never noticed.

I have been in therapy but that alone couldn't heal me. I needed to recognize and take responsibility for my actions and begin to make changes in my life. I am still a work in progress. I learn a little more about myself each day.

It wasn't an easy journey to climb out of the hole of Domestic Violence. I was loved and supported by my family and experienced excellent therapy. I had a willingness to work hard. I would go out of my comfort zone and try new things. I spent the first year after my divorce "in the desert" awakening my soul and living in peace. Slowly, I tried new experiences. I took a tour of Sicily on my own and called it My Odyssey to my mother's homeland. I joined groups to meet

people. I reconnected with my dearest and oldest friend Eileen, whom Bob felt threatened by early in our marriage. Some experiences worked others didn't and I moved on.

I am committed to volunteering at a soup kitchen, serve on a state board that focuses on elder abuse and facilitate a divorce program in my church. I am free to spend time with family and friends and am doing what I enjoy.

I live in my 950 square foot condo that is the shelter of my heart and soul. At the front door of my home, there is a plaque that says, ENTER IN PEACE. Each time I come home, I feel safe and secure. The walls are painted Compatible Cream, Fleeting Green and Sand Dollar and the energy inside is positive; each room is a reflection of who I am. My home is a sacred place. I welcome family and friends to share in my metamorphosis and rebirth in my home.

I am proud of my courage to leave an abusive marriage of forty-three years at the age of sixty-five. I unlocked the chains around my soul and found myself again. I love who I am; compassionate, loving, caring, great sense of humor, alive to the moment. I only welcome those who love me unconditionally. I live in a safe and welcoming home. I stand up for what I believe and no long worry about what others may think. I am free of the tyranny of Bob's abuse and I have **a strong desire to share my story to help others.**

Names were changed in this story to protect the survivor and her family.