



GOOD SHEPHERD SHELTER

Ending violence. Rebuilding lives.

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My name is CM, I am a mother of four and I am a domestic violence survivor. I came to the United States when I was 21.

I was unaware until recently, that domestic violence had been part of my early childhood. I found out that my mother was in an abusive relationship with my father for the first couple of years of my life. Ironically, at the age of 23, I would meet the same kind of person. We were married for 13 years, raised three beautiful children together, and carried a dark secret that burdened me for a long time.

The domestic violence began subtly and slowly sneaked into our marriage. It started with jealousy. It could be about anything or anyone. He started following me to work, checking up on where I was going, and he would not allow me to leave the house unless I took the kids with me. I had no social life and I started to become isolated. Then came the emotional abuse. He turned my kids against me with his lies. He often threatened me and coerced me. He did not treat me like his equal; I was more like an object. He also started handling our finances by himself. The little income that we earned got spent on drugs and alcohol with friends. Major financial decisions like buying a car, tools or electronics were made without my knowledge. Then the physical abuse started when I was six months pregnant with our first son.

My abuser also fought with drug addiction, which got increasingly worse the longer we were together. I learned that he had come from a family with a history of drug abuse and violence. In a span of 13 years, I had to leave four jobs, we moved 10 times and some of these moves were out-of-state. During four of the moves, we were homeless for short periods of time. **There was one time when we lived in our van for a month.** We would go to public parks to freshen-up and lay a blanket on the grass to stretch our aching bodies from having to sleep all together in the car. I had just started working as a shift manager at a restaurant at that time. **Not a single soul at work knew what I was going through.**

From early on in our relationship, I had made attempts to leave him, but every time I would make an attempt, he would threaten to kill himself or he would revert back to his best self and ask for forgiveness or promise to change. He also made me believe that it was my fault. **I always fell for it.** Sometimes I felt compassion for him and sometimes I hated him. I thought if I pleased him more, he would change. I thought if I covered up his anger with love, the abuse would stop. Also, because we both came from broken families, I thought it would be better to stay with him and keep the family together to keep the children happy.

But as the years went by, **I became more and more miserable.** I would go to work after getting pounded on the head with his bare fist. I would just smile and pretend like nothing happened. **Deep within my heart, I was overcome with sadness and hopelessness, my head was filled with rage.** I was angry at myself for not being able to do anything and allowing my kids to witness the brutality of **this monster** they called dad. It

also seemed like every time I was beaten, the harder I cried, the harder the beating would be. **No matter how loud I screamed in the four corners of our tiny apartment with open windows, I felt unheard.** One time I remember, I prayed to God asking him, “why would you allow this to happen to me? **I thought I was your child,”** But the nightmare did not stop!

When I got pregnant with our fourth child, I received another beating with a solid kick in the womb and in that moment it dawned on me, my children were not safe. My children were not safe anymore. In fact, they were never safe to begin with. It was time. The next day, when he went to work, I hurriedly packed a bag of clothes and called my friend to pick us up. She took me to the nearest police station to make a report. A month after living in her living room, I found a emergency shelter. A month after that, Good Shepherd Shelter took us in.

I vividly remember the time we arrived at the shelter. After packing our stuff that morning, we were so hungry. Sr. Regina brought us some quesadillas and water. **Those were the most delicious quesadillas I had ever eaten in my life.** When I was shown our apartment, I was in complete awe. My kids got so excited, their faces lit-up and they ran to the rooms. I looked around, the apartment was clean and well furnished. There were no stains or punch holes in the walls. It was not fogged with smoke. There were no bottles, cigarette butts, drugs or weapons lying around.

Finally, we had found a place we could call **HOME.** The next day, we met the staff and the Good Shepherd Sisters and I tell you, I have never met more kind and gentle human beings.

My children had a lot of trauma and were greatly affected by the domestic violence. My eldest son had a lot of aggression and would resort to hitting his siblings. My eldest daughter had difficulty speaking-up and expressing her feelings. My youngest son was diagnosed with symptoms of PTSD and he had trouble focusing at the Good Shepherd Shelter School, and paying attention at home.

Over the past year, with the love and support from the Good Shepherd staff, teachers, therapists and Good Shepherd Sisters, my family has undergone an incredible transformation. My eldest son learned coping skills to combat his anger and he has become responsible and a caring brother to his siblings. My eldest daughter is no longer shy to speak-up and with the help of art, she is able to communicate her feelings better. My youngest son took a huge leap from being chaotic to calm. **I have become a better parent.** The adult classes and groups helped me heal and I discovered new things about myself. I also have regained my self-confidence and my self-esteem. I am stable now! I am prepared for what’s ahead of me **and I have a clear vision of my future.**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people that I have worked closely with during my healing journey at Good Shepherd Shelter. Throughout these several months, they have stayed by my side as I overcame my internal and external battles. When I went back and forth to court, they were there to support me. When I delivered my baby, they were there to hold my hand and congratulate me. When I got very sick and went to the hospital for a few days, they were there to lift me up. Even when I called them in the middle of the night, they answered the phone and relieved my anxiety. They have helped me and my family tremendously in so many ways. To Sr. Donna, Sr. Regina, Ms. Sally, and all the rest of the teachers, staff and therapists, I just want to say **THANK YOU**.

Looking at it now, the path I have experienced was temporary and it just made me stronger. The strong love for my children gave me the courage to leave. The courage I mustered served as a powerful force to break free from the domestic violence.

I lost some time, but I still have a lifetime;

I lost some friends, but the rest of the world is waiting for me;

I lost my hopes and dreams, but I can dream and hope again;

I lost my voice, but I got it back. I got it back! I got it back!

CM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'CM' with some decorative flourishes.