

TWO ROADS



Domestic Violence Awareness and Prevention Issue

An honest chronicle of the stories and service of the Incarcerated Women and Men
of the Illinois Department of Corrections

Volume 33

To All Readers

Our monthly e-zine focuses on three phases: *Rehabilitation, Restoration and Re-Entry*. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration and transition back to society.

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

Restoration reflects the refined version of one's self that we've become and our restored self seeks service of self-worth to the world.

Finally, ***Re-Entry*** is the ultimate goal one accomplishes through class study, self-study or modification programs completed during one's incarceration.

We are TWO ROADS, and we want to be a viable resource for our readers. We serve you by sharing the honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated women and men of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Join our movement.

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

****Please Note:** All letters, emails and photos will be reviewed by personnel **PRIOR** to being received by the TWO ROADS editorial staff. All information that is not pertaining to TWO ROADS will be discarded. Thank you for respecting the guidelines.

Our Mission Statement

“We are committed to empowering those most impacted by harmful systems to become dynamic leaders and agents of change. Using the connecting, restorative power of these stories, we hope to do our part in bringing us all together to overcome societal ills, such as violence, poverty and mass incarceration.”

DISCLAIMER

TWO ROADS is built for bringing integrity and honesty about the people who are submitting their stories. There are times where the editors are required to make changes due to spelling errors or grammatical structure. Please know that we will never take away your voice; however, understand that we take pride in our work and strive to be the best in our representation of your voice.

Thank you.

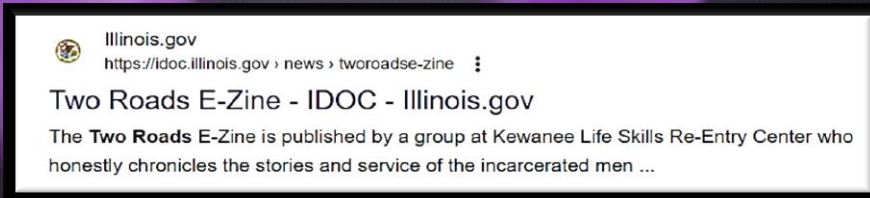
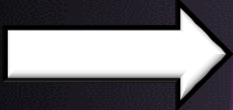
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DON'T
TURN YOUR BACK ON
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

ER



EDITORS TAKE



LaKisha Woodard
Senior Editor – TWO ROADS

A part of Domestic Violence that's not really talked about is the psychological and emotional abuse. This type of abuse is less visible because it is expressed in a less physical way. Psychological and emotional abuse leaves different scars. When you go through psychological and emotional abuse, your partner—he or she—manipulates and controls you; isolating you from those you love (family or friends); don't like (or want) you to work. They love to control your movement and activities. This abuse is devastating

that it could lead to depression, low self-esteem and make you feel worthless. I know many of you may feel afraid to leave your abuser for so many different reasons. You must know that being abused in ANY TYPE of way is NOT OKAY!

I myself watched domestic abuse up close and personal. Watching loved ones of mine being abused played a major part on the person I was—an abuser.

I'm elated to say that I am no longer that person. I sought help by attending groups here at Logan, being honest and real about my behavior. You don't deserve ANY TYPE of abuse. Reach out to someone you feel safe with.

NOTE: TWO ROADS would like to express an apology to Mr. Manuel Enrique Aceituno. His "Making Strides" article in the *Inspiration Issue* was broken into two different pieces when it should have been one. We apologize and thank You for forgiving us!
- TWO ROADS



Domestic Violence

Rebecca Ginsberg

Director, Education Justice Project



Domestic violence isn't just an anger problem. It's about control. Domestic violence is when one person exerts power or control over another person in a dating, family, or household relationship. Domestic violence can take many forms, including:

- Verbal abuse (threats, name-calling, intimidation)
- Physical abuse (pushing, slapping, choking, destroying property)
- Controlling behavior (keeping you from seeing people, going places, or spending money)

- Emotional abuse (making you feel like you are worthless)

- Sexual abuse (unwanted sexual activity, often using force)

In some families or cultures, these behaviors are not seen as wrong. It's hard to break away from domestic violence when the attitudes about relationships around you are not healthy. It may take some time to change your way of thinking. It may take some time to realize that what you are doing or experiencing is wrong. If you are in an abusive relationship, seek help. Making the decision to leave is hard. It can be risky. It takes courage to leave, especially if you fear for your own safety or the safety of your children. It's hard to leave if you depend on the other person for money. Begin by calling the Illinois Domestic Violence hotline: (877) 863-6338 or (877) TO-END-DV. This confidential, free 24-hour hotline provides support, information, and



referrals. It can put you in touch with resources in your area. Even if you are not ready to leave the relationship, the hotline can help you get through hard times. It can help you take the next step.

The Illinois Department of Human Services website has a list of places where you can go for help: <https://thenetwork.org/>. If money is keeping you from leaving a partner who is abusing you, there is an Emergency Crisis Fund for survivors of domestic violence. It is managed by The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence. For more information contact emergency@The-Network.org. We have listed transitional housing and emergency shelter options in our Housing Directory. Many of these shelters serve people who are leaving an abusive relationship. Some provide protection if you fear for your safety. In our Health Directory, we have listed a few counseling resources available to people who are facing domestic violence.

If you have been abusive to a partner or family member, reach out to get help. The first important step is to acknowledge you have a problem. You can change, but it will take work. You

may be required to stay away from your partner until you are in a better place, or you may choose to stay away for a while to keep them safe and give them some space.

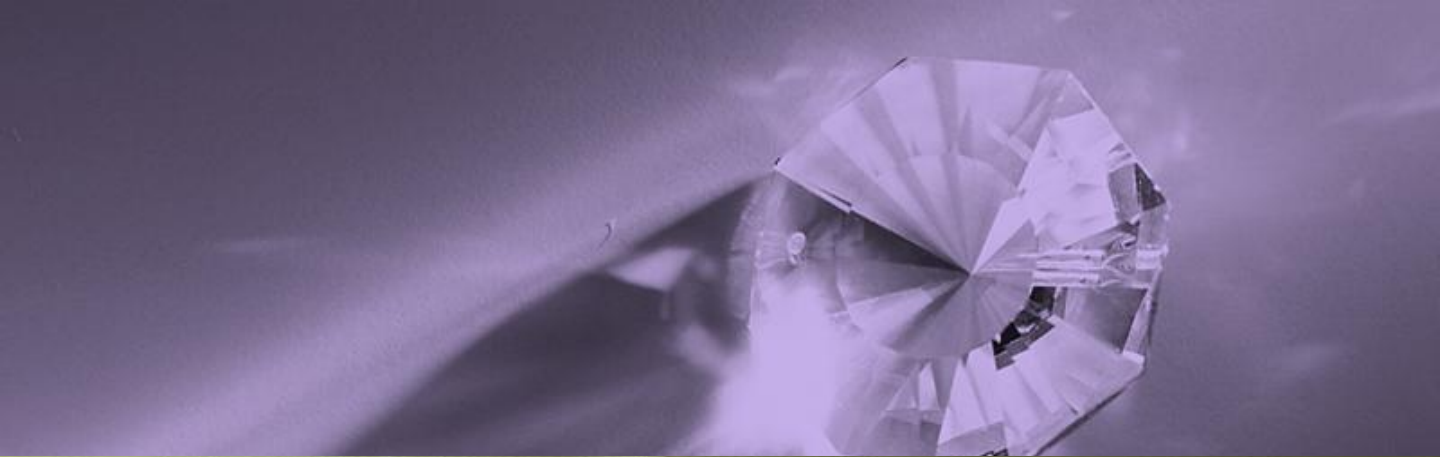
To get help, consider attending a Partner Abuse Intervention Program (PAIP). You may be required to attend a PAIP program by the court. This program is for people who control their partners with physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or economic abuse (withholding money). The program can help you:

- See that it is NOT ok to abuse a partner
- Learn to take blame and credit for actions
- Learn nonviolent and non-controlling ways of communicating and behaving

The program typically lasts 24-26 weeks. You'll get training from certified domestic violence professionals about how to stop abusing your partner. A counselor or therapist can also help you work through these issues. To find a PAIP program, call the State of Illinois Domestic Violence Help Line at 1-877-TO END DV (877-863-6338) or 1-877-863-6339 (TTY).

Brought to you by the Education Justice Project





I Won't Retreat When the Wind Serenades

Every moment spent with you was a game of
"He loves me"
"He loves me not"
I was a wildflower
but you preferred dandelions over daisies
quantity over quality
that's a man's game

In love with the version of you that lived in my head
the one where you were gentle and genuine
I got away from you once
but my memory failed me on how broken we were
Experiences you shared from your past were handcrafted especially to deceive

Like you handed me two baby birds
their broken wings like blinders
their screaming in my ears
left me deaf to your noise
I went from bright and bubbly
to your queen of darkness

Dressed in the finest of sins
deflowered by your storm
innocence torn
saturating my soul with your sickness
intoxicating me with your breath

We made it past nightfall before the script flipped this time
got carried away hoping
we took a bite out of tomorrow
before we were done chewing the many hours of tonight there
was left to swallow



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Domestic Violence

Katie Manning
Decatur

Violence, in any form, is always tragic and when compounded with the reality of coming from someone inside of the home (or relational), it allows the trauma to be even more cancerous. Years upon years, layers upon layers, of generational violence have been imprinted upon so many of us that it seems outside of normalcy to not have experienced it.

Seeing women slapped around was as normal as seeing roaches inside of an apartment. You become numb to these things as the monotony of incidences occur so often that you begin to embrace it as part of the culture.

That is what is amazing about the hypocrisy of it all; we will proudly tout that we are the protectors of our family while simultaneously brutalizing and abusing the ones that we are responsible for.

What are we doing?

Violence inside of the home is not only restricted to the male ego because many of us have seen women that were equally aggressive. Some believe that trauma can only be caused by physical abuse but ask those who have experienced extreme deprecation how they were affected by this humiliation. For some, this can become completely devastating as their self-confidence and awareness is destroyed, leading into a free-fall of hopelessness and depression. Remember how isolated, alone, and defeated that you felt in 2020, locked in a room for extended periods, now imagine someone feeling like that being hit with an onslaught of malicious verbiage.

We all seek refuge, and humans innately want to survive but when the home is unsafe (or unfriendly), the mind is forced to be on stress alert constantly. We, as civil adults must be intolerant to vagrant abuse or aberrant behavior, especially when it comes to those who are unable



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to defend themselves. I am neither justifying nor encouraging any scope of violence, but we must know that most times, inaction is just as complicit as the act itself. There must be a choice to speak up and out to discourage these situations.

Courage means strength in the face of pain or danger, but for those who study words, the Hebrew word for courage is “AMATZ” which also means to “be alert or aware.” We must be aware of the violence that not only affects us directly but those who suffer in silence that are standing right next to you. Minding your business does not mean ignoring someone else’s safety or

pain. We are an interdependent community, not just in this facility, but globally, and if you think that another’s suffering does not affect you, go ask a statistician why suicide rates, gun violence, and purchases have risen. Or is all of this simply counted as inner city gang violence?

Domestic violence is just as relevant a threat as domestic terrorism; it threatens the lives and freedoms of people, especially, but not exclusive to, people whose inalienable rights include Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

**At any given moment
you have the power to
say this is not how the
story is going to end.**

CHRISTINE MASON MILLER

EVERYDAY POWER



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Somewhere between chopping onions and capsicum,
We talked about the meaning of life
On the edge of death.
From your garden,
you sautéed courgettes and carrots,
Fragrant with garlic, rosemary and thyme.

You spoke about the preciousness of the moment,
like fragile rose petals falling from the stem,
only this moment we shared,
each word a pastel sun,
gifting an open heart.

You said, "There is a deeper reason behind my cancer,
A gift of growth and learning."
As you spoke,
you felt surrendered and strong, so alive...
like you held an immortal secret
in the sinews of your cancer ravaged body.
You talked about the battle scars of the journey,
the lost years, unfinished dreams,
your life force taken too soon,
dying, leaving your beautiful man behind.

We pondered what lies beyond this world,
the beauty of dying,
a sacred passage of all living things.
Lifting our mask,
we held each other,
merged energy,
Our souls bare
basking in the soft tendrils of our hearts,
sharing a magical dinner,
a golden sunset,
a sacred moment.

As the warm orange sunset recedes from the veranda,
a simmering glow lingers
dancing lightly on my skin.
Carving a memory in my heart
long after you are gone.



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Different Day, Same S**** Trigger Warning

Nikki Pruitt
Outside Contributor

My dark auburn hair wads up in your
fingers
you *smash* my face into the center
console as I'm lifted back up
I'm met with *another punch*
straight to the temple
knocking my head into the window

I'm seeing stars
my head is pounding
like my brain is rocking inside my skull
back and forth
back and forth
blood is leaking from my nose

hot
I hate that feeling
it streams into my mouth
I spit it out
wiping my lips with my dirty shirt sleeve
I want to open this car door and break
free

You're outside my door now kicking it
hard, really hard
I really hate this
you scream at me to open my door
I can't
you broke something kicking it
I reach down trying to fix it
when I feel something *sharp*

A knife
it's dull and serrated
I don't care
I slide it under my thigh
this is *fight or flight*
you come back around calling me names
you're blind with rage,

I pick up the knife...

taking it to my forearms
as hard as I can
self harm scarred
I cut quickly carving
away my sins
I look through the
windshield at morning light still dim
tears stream down
my cheeks
my eyes burn
my head hurts

*My little show snaps you out of another
episode*
I cut the story short before it could unfold
with this dollar tee knife as my savior
you tell me to *shut up and drive* before
we alert the neighbors
I'm hyperventilating as I drive down
these windy bends
distracted that **our every single night
has a similar tragic end**

Hear Me...

Anonymous

I screamed out loud, but no one could hear me, hear me.

I was invisible to them they didn't hear me, hear me.

They saw me but didn't act they said they didn't hear me, hear me.

Now I am lost inside because no one heard me

I was invisible to them they didn't hear me, hear me

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

My heart has now closed because no one heard me.

I was invisible to them they didn't hear me, hear me,

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I am trying to find my way because no one heard me,

I was invisible to them they didn't hear me, hear me

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I screamed out loud but no one could hear me, hear me,

I was invisible to them they didn't hear me, hear me

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I wonder if I will ever find my way

because no one heard me,

I am invisible to them because they didn't hear me, hear me.

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I kept screaming out loud but no one could hear me, hear me,

I am invisible to them because they didn't hear me, hear me.

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I am now in another world because no one could hear me, hear me.

I am invisible to them because they didn't hear me, hear me.

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I lost faith in my world that night

I am invisible to them because they didn't hear me, hear me

They say they didn't hear me, hear me.

I have now lost hope because they didn't hear me, hear me.

I am invisible to them because they didn't hear me, hear me

They say they didn't hear me, hear me..



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Broken Pieces

Ramiro Chavez
Illinois River

As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I found out that life is a hard journey to be traveled; we all have come across vices that are unique to each of us. At the same time, they remain the same for generation to generation.

In our culture we refuse to deal with the things that are obvious, they are the things that over time become a part of who we are as people; they become our mindset and a part of the culture – like where woman had to know her place, she also had to know when to speak or not to speak. Out of these vices came the mindset of domestic violence.

Males took it upon themselves to correct what they thought was wrong with a woman. Yet the very same males could not be called out for their wrongs. History shows how males who mistreat a woman take pride in telling others of the same mindset. That is how a house should be run.

Moreover, that people like me are soft because with time we understood what it means to be a real man, realizing the worth of a woman. It has been said for generations that women are Queens, but we as men have not lived up to the words we speak from our mouths. We continue to allow this mindset of domestic violence to stand true today.

Today I am 40 years old, I have come to see and understand so many things that held me back from speaking out about domestic violence. Because of culture, as a child I was told that it was best to remain silent and that was the way a real man became strong. A time arose when my mother faced such violence at the hands of my father and his excuse was, he was drunk when treating her in that way. As a child, I was confused to why it was taking



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place, as we all came to my mother's aid. Two emotions came to me at once; anger took over that emotion of being powerless. I will never forget the sounds of my mother crying as she was fighting for her life, hate and bitterness came with time towards my father.

My mother got a part-time job in order to afford us bus tickets; we left my father and the domestic violence behind. To this day, my mother has not spoken an evil thing about our father and there was never a need to because, as it is said by many, "actions speak louder than words". The real problem I had with my father was, he moved on as if nothing had happened. I forgave him for the things I needed to; I too moved on with my life. As we move forward, I want to talk about some hard realities that come with this mindset, which leads to many questions. In doing so I will tell you about the actions of a person that left me a confused fifteen-year-old. Someone who is dear to me came to me for help in a domestic situation, and I did for her that which I would do for anyone asking for my assistance.

Two weeks after this situation, the person returns to her victimizer. Making me the villain, and we both moved on with our lives. Ten years after this ordeal she was taken to the hospital –



battered by the same person who mistreated her the first time. She told me that as a victim, she did not know her self-worth, and she was made a victim because of it.

As people, we always fail to see the hard realities in life, when we do not take the time to tell family or someone we might not even know what they mean to us and our lives. The reality of the situation is we all fail at times; however, it is never too late to ask for help as a whole.



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Think for a second of a moment in your life, one of the darkest moments that came because someone walked away when assistance was needed. A reality of domestic violence is that the victim often feels judged, and fearful of who will help. Another reality is that domestic violence has no respect for skin color, economics, or gender. There should be no place in our culture that allows a man to view a woman as less than his equal in any relationship.. When a man looks at a woman in any relationship and is unwilling to empower her, there is already a problem.

Trauma is something we also need to address, so often we as a people keep things held within, we

have never been taught to deal with these issues in a positive manner. We also are fearful of other opinions. However, today I want to tell someone, never allow anyone to tell your story. Tell it; write it, because in the end you will always have help; you may never need it, and for those who stayed, it is because you mean the world to them.

In closing for those who like to judge as I once did, take the time to listen to those around you. You will learn as I have. We are all imperfect, misunderstood and misfits trying to fit in. The question will always be: If you saw me in in need, or my spirit broken in any way, would you help?



DV



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Toxic Kinda Love

Mike Rowland
Danville

When I saw October was Domestic Violence Awareness month I wanted to speak up about the other end of the spectrum. I found myself involved with a narcissistic woman. I didn't realize it at first. I was allured by her charm and beauty – like an insect trapped in a spider's web, I was stuck. Looking back, I see the many red flags I ignored. The jealousy and control were brushed off as being her showing she cared.

Eventually this relationship turned toxic. Constant gas lighting, name-calling, shaming, all used to control the narrative. As a man the emotional and mental abuse put out by this woman was torture. I felt so small and helpless. Why didn't I just leave? I tried numerous times, but I always got sucked back in by one of her many manipulations. She faked pregnancy and even had me arrested for domestic battery. She played the victim so well she turned everyone against me.

I was isolated and felt so alone.

I even contemplated suicide. I tried to go to rehab but she guilt tripped me into “being a man” and dealing with it myself. Any addict knows if we could just stop, we wouldn't be addicts. The toxicity of this relationship led me into and even darker spiral of addiction. A pitch-black place of depression.



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My escape was being arrested on this case, but it didn't stop there for me. The emotional and mental abuse continued over the phone. Brothers in prison know, that phone will drive a guy crazy. I went through it when I found out my girl was spending all my money and running around with her ex-boyfriend. After a month and a half my money was gone and so was she. The mental and emotional torture for me continue though.

Finally, I got over the hurt. I had to forgive her and let her go because that wasn't love. Love does not hurt. Hurt people, hurt people, and I realize now she was hurting inside. I wasn't perfect but I didn't deserve that abuse. No one does. So, my word of advice to anyone is don't ignore the red flags, don't settle, and if you find yourself in a relationship this bad, find the strength to walk away.

CONTROL PAIN ATTACK INTIMIDATE ASSAULT TRAUMA UNSAFE ORDER HATE FEAR DESTROY BEHAVIOR FEAR BATTERY INSULT SECURITY KILL LONELINESS DEPRESSION ABUSE PSYCHOLOGICAL TERROR TACK ANGER TEARS EMOTIONS REGRET VICIOUS MENTAL DENY

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States

34% people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries

20,000 calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide on a typical day

500% increase risk of homicide when a gun is present in a domestic violence situation

72% of all murder-suicides involve an intimate partner

94% of the victims of these murder suicides are female

Women between the ages of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner

CONTROL PAIN ATTACK INTIMIDATE ASSAULT TRAUMA UNSAFE ORDER HATE DESTROY BEHAVIOR FEAR BATTERY INSULT SECURITY KILL LONELINESS DEPRESSION ABUSE PSYCHOLOGICAL TERROR TACK ANGER TEARS EMOTIONS REGRET VICIOUS MENTAL DENY

You Know I Love You...

Kelly 'K.B.' Bennett
Senior Editor, TWO ROADS

Once again, I thank you for your time. Today I would like to tell a story of love, which has become a facade in all our communities. It is the kind of love which leaves scars and trauma enough for a lifetime. You see I was born and raised in a household and community where fights were a common occurrence. Something like a rite of passage, that is until it got out of hand and people were hurt badly.

Today domestic violence is the number one reason offenders in custody are re-arrested and parole is violated. I can personally attest to the fact that domestic violence affects everyone who dwells within the household. I witnessed so much violence as a kid growing up within a household with primarily all strong Black women. Who fought to survive? Many of night, my siblings, and me would awake to a fight because of the lack of control. To this day, that is the reason for many disagreements between the sexes. A power struggle – one that begins and

ends with who will control the relationship. When in reality no one is truly in control or should be in control, a good healthy relationship has a foundation of mutual trust and respect.

The behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another has become an epidemic-affecting people in every community across the country. It does not discriminate regardless of age, economic status, race, religion, nationality, or educational background. Domestic violence results in physical injury, psychological trauma, and sometimes death.

The consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and truly last a lifetime. Below are some facts and statistics on domestic violence and its reach into our communities and its costs. These facts come from *The National Coalition against Domestic Violence*.



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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACTS

- One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
- An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.
- 85% of domestic violence victims are women.
- Historically, someone they knew has most often-victimized females.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND STALKING

- One in six women and 1 in 33 men has experienced an attempted or completed rape.
- An intimate partner at some point in their lives has raped nearly 7.8 million women.
- Sexual assault or forced sex occurs in approximately 40-45% of battering relationships.
- One in 12 women and 1 in 45 men has been stalked in their lifetime.
- That partner also physically assaults 81% of women stalked by a current or former intimate partner; that partner also sexually assaults 31%.

CHILDREN WHO WITNESS

Witnessing violence between one's parents or caretakers is the strongest risk factor of transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next.

Boys who witness domestic violence are *twice as likely* to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults

30% to 60% of perpetrators of intimate partner violence also abuse children in the household and they themselves tend to become abusers..

HOMICIDE AND INJURY

Almost **one-third of female homicide victims** that were reported in police records are killed by an intimate partner.

In 70-80% of intimate partner homicides, no matter which partner was killed, the man physically abused the woman before the murder.

Less than one-fifth of victims reporting an injury from intimate partner violence sought medical treatment following the injury. Intimate partner violence results in more than **18.5 million mental health care visits** each year.



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ECONOMIC IMPACT

The consummate partner violence **exceeds \$5.8 billion each year**, \$4.1 billion of which is for direct medical and mental health services.

Victims of intimate partner violence *lost almost 8 million days of paid work* because of the violence perpetrated against them by current or former husbands, boyfriends, and dates. This loss is the equivalent of more than *32,000 full-time jobs* and almost *5.6 million days of household productivity* because of violence.

There are 16,800 homicides and \$2.2 million (medically treated) injuries due to intimate partner violence annually, which costs \$37 billion.

Reporting Rates

Domestic violence is one of the most chronically underreported crimes.

Only approximately one –quarter of all physical assaults, one-fifth of all rapes, and one-half of all stalkings perpetrated against females by intimate partners are reported to the police.

Protection Orders

Approximately 20% of the 1.5 million people who experience intimate partner's violence annually obtain civil protection orders.

Approximately one–half of the orders obtained by women against intimate partners who physically assaulted them were violated. More than two-thirds of the restraining orders against intimate partners who raped or stalked the victim were violated.

State Domestic Violence Laws

States differ on the type of relationship that qualifies under domestic violence laws.

Most states require the perpetrator and victim to be current or former spouse, living together, or have a child in common.

A significant number of states include current or former dating relationships in domestic violence laws. Delaware, Montana, and South Carolina specially exclude same-sex relationships in their domestic violence laws.



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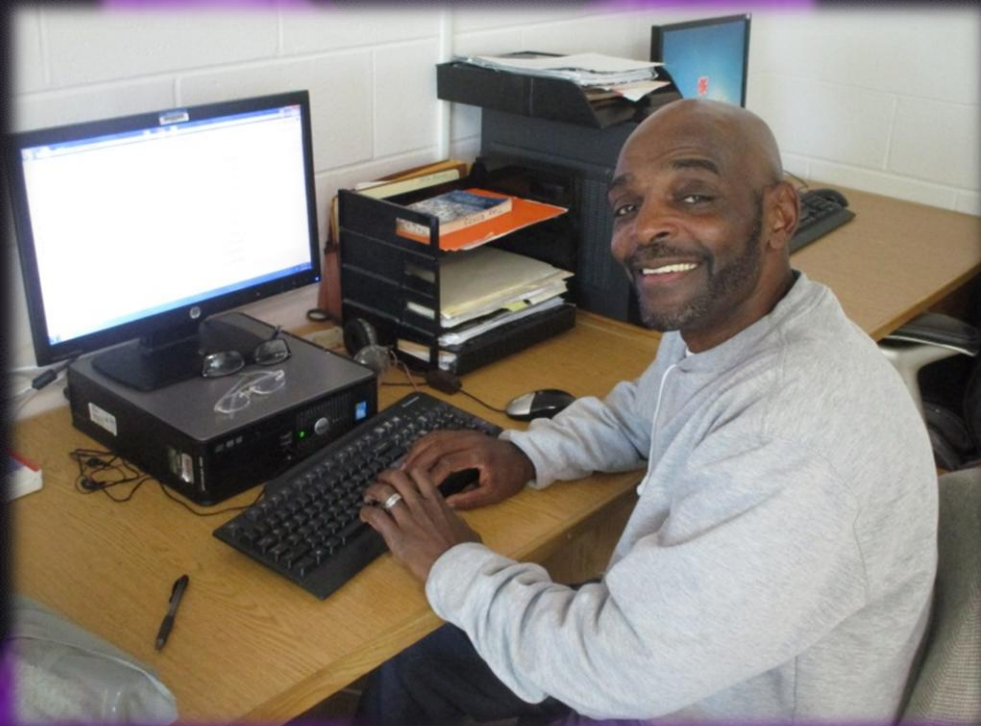
Above is all the information I could gather on the subject of Domestic Violence there is no greater crime than to be unaware. To find more information about Domestic Violence for the state you need please go to www.womenslaw.org

We here at **TWO ROADS** want all our

readers to be aware of the things that affect us all as we prepare to return to our families and society. If by chance you have anything to add to this ongoing issue, please do not hesitate to write to us.

Thank you for your time.

Kelly Bennett



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My Beautiful Black Empress

**Ja'Von Boyd
Logan**

My beautiful black Empress
My beautiful black Empress why do you cry?
She says he hits me and tells me lies,
So I ask her then why do you stay?
She replies *he loves me* and that's why I stay.
He'd says won't no one want you and
No one will ever love you the way I do,
So he says. My beautiful black Empress,
You are a mother, daughter, sister and friend.
You truly are an amazing lover.
Don't believe the lies you're told,
Wear your crest proud.
The love you give will be given back,
Just hold on to the truth that *black don't crack*.
My beautiful black Empress,
Pick up your head and smile
Hold yo head high,
Humble your heart,
For Allah has a plan for you.
My beautiful black Empress, you come first.
You are beautiful inside out,
Not just looks, but with class, dignity,
respect and pride.
Please know that you deserve the best true love

Loyalty, faithfulness, attention and affection
My beautiful black Empress.
Don't doubt that!
Know in your heart that that is a fact!



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Domestic Violence Awareness

Katrina Giles
Logan

Startled from the sound of a loud noise, Anxiety rises as my hands shake from the pitched voice.

Nowhere to hide, nowhere to run I have fallen in love with the damage that has been done.

You hold me tight and kiss me right, then raise your hand and want to fight; abused, accused, and suddenly misused.

But still I bow down and look like the fool, you beat me, mistreat me for all that's beneath me. Then make me lie down your body you feed me.

Brain washed I fall deep in your trap, for no one I know has my back.

You see that I love you and no one cares, just try to leave me I swear I dare.

No one can have you, our death date we will share.

Homicide, suicide by all means

necessary, I told you we play by my rules.

Loud music is playing now it's quiet, until death do us part, turn on the TV and watch the news.



Things Change

Earl Milton, Jr.
Centralia

In time, things do change. The nature of this change largely depends on the thoughts and actions of the one who is changing. Some ways of thinking and acting causes the decline of a mind and body. Some acts and thoughts cause progress and positive changes in the soul and body of the one who is consciously making positive choices. The point here is that we all change in many ways as life proceeds to move forward day by day. The things we do are very important. The goals that we have, take action to fulfill. We can see for ourselves if we are moving towards improvement or decline. It all starts with the thoughts of our minds. Which become the words that we speak? Finally, the deeds that we do. Therefore, things do change but we have a say so in

most cases of the nature of those changes. Where we end up in life is largely the natural outcome of our thoughts, words, and actions. One thoughtful act at a time can build a life that we can be happy about. Change is coming like the wind through the trees. We must learn to set our sails, so that we go in the direction that we desire. Clutch your compass as you navigate the oceans of life. Know where you are headed. Become a better person one second at a time, as you travel on the road to realization. Things are changing every day. The answer to the question of how is largely yours to determine. You have the key. Always remember your tune ups, your checkups, and the overall upkeep of your world and yourself. Because things can change for the better, if you say so and are willing to learn and grow. This is from observation and experience.



You May Not Believe It Hurts...BUT IT DOES

Anthony Bell
Pinckneyville

Before I get into the topic domestic violence, I would like to define a couple of terms to facilitate understanding: violence is an abusive exercise of power; abusive is to misuse or hurt or injure with use of maltreatment.

For the longest time like many, I viewed domestic violence as a physical act: it took a lot of education and self-reflection to understand that there are many forms of violence beyond the means of leaving a physical mark. Once I learned this lesson, I began to realize the abundance of mental, emotional, and spiritual scars I left behind. Then I understood the work I had to do to repair the destruction left in my wake.

Growing up, I was involved with various forms of criminal thinking, some were overt, others covert, and from my upbringing I had developed a severe distrust of women. Although I loved the women in my life, I observed I

also became a victim of their use, abuse, and manipulation, a juxtaposition that came to define many of my relationships. I was taught by my mother to never hit a woman and to treat them with respect.

However, I was unable to reconcile the lessons with the behavior I was seeing from them and being filled with that ambiguity wreaked havoc in my life. We as human beings have an innate need to protect ourselves from all perceived threat, and our trauma can present itself as a constant threat, making us do what is necessary to protect ourselves from it.

As I got older and started having romantic relationships, the ambiguity I felt weighed heavily, and I did not know what to do with the distrust of women that kept presenting itself as a threat.



Being manipulative, distant, verbally and emotionally malicious and even using the threat of physical violence were my responses to protect myself. I often assumed the abuse and manipulation were the weapons going to be used against me because that is what my experiences had taught me.

I watched many men around me go to jail for domestic violence –physical violence against women; society was teaching me that domestic violence was a physical act, so I believed that as long as I was not putting my hands on a woman, I was a decent man.

It was not until many years later, and many victims, that I realized I was a sorely mistaken man. While in prison taking and teaching classes on trauma, abuse, and learning about having healthy relationships, I began to understand how very dysfunctional and abusive all my relationships were. My mother had not dealt with her trauma, passing it on to us kids. I did not know how to handle my trauma, or even have a clue I needed to seek help, so I inflicted it upon others.

Whenever I entered into a new relationship, like everyone else I brought all my baggage with me and had no idea how to handle it in a

healthy way. Therefore, I assumed my partner was just like every other woman in my life – lying, cheating, and using me. I often ended up treating them terribly out of anger, acting toward them in the way I had seen in all the dysfunctional relationships conducted before me. For example, I once told a woman I was dating she could not hang out with her friends any longer. In addition, she lived 20 minutes away and I told her if she did not make it to my friend's place in 15 minutes, I was going to leave. When she failed to make it, I left; she arrived in tears because she believed the relationship was over. The next morning, she came over to my house and I made her apologize for her misdeed.

It was years before I understood something like that was mentally and emotionally coercive. I have lied, cheated gas lighted, manipulated, and verbally abused, all in an attempt to control my partner's behavior. The craziest thing about the way I have treated them was, I actually believed because I was not physically harming them, I was a good person.



The reason I chose the definitions of an abusive exercise of power for the word violence, and to misuse, or hurt or injure with use of maltreatment for abusive is to contextualize emotional and mental abuse. The person(s) we choose to be in relationships with offers us a trust; they trust us to treat them with love, respect, and mercy, and to cherish them in ways they would not receive from the average person. This trust has a certain power, privilege, and right given to us, and to mistreat, manipulate, and withhold things from them is a violation of this trust – it is a blatant abuse of power.

When we talk about domestic violence, it conjures images of a man

knocking his wife unconscious, a woman with a black eye or bruises around her throat, or a person getting gunned down in a jealous rage. We all need to understand that there are many forms of domestic violence, we need to seek help for our trauma, learn how to love ourselves, develop healthy relationships, and know what it means to treat people with value and respect. There are many kinds of violence, and just because you are not physically harming someone does not mean you are not hurting them.



My Voice

For so long I never had a voice,
I kept quiet Just to keep the peace
I lived hiding by your side
Kept all my thoughts to myself
They were stuffed down inside
Until one day I found my Voice

I felt safe enough to even have a voice
I felt safe enough to have a voice
I felt safe enough to have a voice
a voice, my voice.

At school I didn't fit at all
So you had to do it all for me
I would fall down by your side
you picked me up so I could breathe again
Tightly hold my hand, wipe my tears
You will be okay
I survived with you, always by my side.

I felt safe enough to have a voice
I felt safe enough to have a voice
a voice, my voice.

At sport we would win every race
we made such a great team.
Swimming with dolphins and sailing on
our boat
At home we protected our mother
let her hide in our cupboard
and lied to our father to keep her alive.
We fell down the stairs with her

when she was thrown.

I felt safe enough to have a voice
I felt safe enough to have a voice
a voice, my voice.

From Harm we tried to keep her safe
We tried to stop the abuse in our home
We didn't know how to stop the abuse
When we were so young
I was told I was the bad twin,
You were the good one
that nothing I would do would be okay
I was always wrong.
I felt safe enough to have a voice
I felt safe enough to have a voice
a Voice, my voice.

You see, I was damaged, right from the
start
I could never do well at anything I tried
When I told you, you burst into tears and
sent a card
It said when one falls down her twin can
pick her up
I kept the words of that card safe in my
heart
I wasn't such a burden to you, I was
special.

I felt safe enough to have a voice
I felt safe enough to have a voice
a voice, my voice.



Building Healthy Relationships

Rebecca Ginsberg
Director, Education Justice Project

Prison makes it hard to stay connected with family, friends, and loved ones.

Reentry removes some of these barriers, but it can be a hard time for both you and your loved ones.

Rebuilding healthy, positive relationships will require time, patience, and openness. You've changed while in prison, and so have your loved ones. It's going to take time

to get to know each other again. Since you've been gone a long time, you may struggle to feel like you belong. You and your loved ones may feel uncertain about each other. You may wonder if you can trust each other. Your relationship with loved ones may go through different stages when you return home. Things might start out great (the "honeymoon" stage) but get harder as you spend more time together. This is a common experience and you're not alone!

Four Common Relationship Stages During Reentry

Stage 1: Honeymoon. You and your loved ones are excited to be back together. Everyone's at their best, but anxiety is under the surface.	Stage 2: Uncertainty and suspicion. You and your loved ones might feel uncertain about your relationship and question motives. Are you going to stick around? Do you still want to be close?	Stage 3: Testing and learning to share. You and your loved ones may test each other to see if it's OK to share feelings and be yourself. Can you trust each other?	Stage 4: Belonging. You may struggle with how to get involved in family routines. What roles will you play? How can you be part of family life again?
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You don't have to face relationship challenges alone! Here are a few places you can go for help:

- Look for a family-oriented reentry program. Phalanx Family Services, for instance, offers programs to help people and their families reunite after prison. Learn more at <https://www.phalanxgrpservices.org/> or call (773) 291-1086.
- Take a class. Anger management, parenting, communication, or marriage and family classes can help you develop skills that will make your relationships stronger.
- Get counseling or therapy, either alone or with your partner or family. See the Trauma and Mental Health chapter.
- Join a returning resident support group. Organizations like Precious Blood Ministries and First Followers offer supportive circles where you can

share your struggles with others who share a similar background. They can provide advice and support.

- If you are in an abusive relationship, call the domestic violence hotline: (877) 863-6338.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to the challenges people face when reuniting with loved ones.

Below, we share advice about common challenges that people face when reuniting with loved ones. We cover the following topics:

- Sharing (Self-Disclosure)
- Parenting after Release
- Dealing with Difficult Emotions
- Anger Management
- Institutionalization
- Domestic Violence



Brought to you by the Education Justice Project



A Rose Grows in Manhattan

Kevin Simmons
Outside Contributor

This poem is dedicated to domestic violence so that all men will have the ability to speak up and stop the silent suffering of our own troubled past.

If I may, I would like to say that writing to you gives me great joy, and a peace of mind. Knowing that I am able to share a positive message, that comes from a place in my heart and soul that was once dark, due to the many horrors I have experienced early on in this life. If I may, I would like to dedicate this post in acknowledging all the hurt that so many of us have lived and also are living in broken homes. So please let us stand together ending the perpetuating cycle of lies, violence, and dysfunctions.

“A Rose Grows in Manhattan “

They say a rose grows in Manhattan, but what about the rose growing in Chicago, Los Angeles also in all parts in between. “Rose”, you are a beautiful sight to behold, prized by

the vainest of men who have plucked all your petals as a kid pulls the wings off flies. Walked all over and discarded by every element of man. “Rose”, You are a victim of domestic violence and self-inflicted wounds. Nevertheless, despite all that you have been through you persevered, overcoming insurmountable odds.

Standing firm and rooted, your strength holds no boundaries, I admire your willingness to speak and not be silenced, in a world where equality is still an uphill battle.

Never giving up, never give up. Truly, you are the mother to the world around you. This is for all the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, nieces, and daughters. I humbly bow to you for the strength and endurance, your beautifulness and poise. But most importantly I would like to apologize for any wrong that I may have caused in creating the scars that marred your mind, body or your soul.



Through His Eyes

Timothy Youngblood
Editor At-Large
Lawrence

Life with an abuser can be a dizzying wave of exciting good times and painful periods of verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. The longer the relationship lasts, the shorter and farther apart the positive periods tend to become.

Abused women, I know what you are thinking: “what is going on inside his mind?” Why can’t he just stay in the good mood, what can I do to keep him happy? Well, in the words of William Shatner “that is what we are about to find out.” Ladies, I hate to be the one to tell you this but during the tension – building periods, your man is collecting negative points about you and like a squirrel storing them away for safekeeping. Every little thing that you have done wrong, each disappointment he has experienced. Any way in which you have failed to live up to his image of the perfect selfless woman –all goes down as a

black mark against your name.

Eventually he falls into a routine of walking around the house dwelling on your purported faults. In addition, since he considers you responsible for fixing everything for him, including his dinner; he logically chooses you as his dumping ground for all of life’s normal frustrations and disappointments.

Now during the eruption period, your man tends to mentally collect resentments towards you until he feels that you deserve a punishment. Once he ready to blow the tiniest spark will ignite him. Through his eyes you occasionally decide to set him off at this point, as scary as that is, the fear of waiting to see what he will do and when he will do, it is worse. The explosion of verbal or physical assault that results is horrible, but at least in your mind it is over.



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After he blows, your man absolves himself of guilt by thinking of himself as having lost control, the victim of your provocations or of his own intolerable pain. Whereas at other times he may say that men are stronger and less emotional than women, he now switches saying “there is only so much a man can take” or “she really hurt my feelings, and I could not help going off.” He may consider your emotional reactions—such as breaking into tears—contemptible, even when they hurt no one. However, when he has powerful emotions, even violence may be excusable.

After the apologies are over, your man may enter the flower period- a period of relative calm. He appears to have achieved a catharsis from opening up the bomb bays and raining abuse down on you. He feels rejuvenated and may speak the language of a fresh start, of steering the relationship in a new direction. Of course, there is nothing cathartic for you about being the target of his abuse (you feel worse with each bombshell that hits you unexpectedly) but through his self-centered eyes, he thinks you should feel better now because he feels better. During this period, your man works to rebuild the bridge that his abusiveness just burned

down. He wants to be back in your good graces: he wants sex; and he seeks reassurance that you are not going to leave him or expose him. Cards, gifts, shopping sprees, vacations, and flowers are common during this period-hence the name “flowers period”.

Your man does not, however, want to look seriously at himself; he is merely looking to paste up some wallpaper to cover the holes he has made—figuratively or literally—and return to business as usual. The good period cannot last, and you cannot keep him there because nothing has changed. His coercive habits, his double standards, his contempt, are still there. The pattern of abuse is repeated because there is no reason why it would not be.

Nevertheless, through his eyes he has changed, but to truly understand him is to understand your choices. Better choices produce better life.



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Yearning To Be Free

Carnell Tyler

This house of detention got me stressing, at night to God I am confessing, my background consists of scars and memories. I feel as though I have been incarcerated for centuries, my name on a correction list.

In the dark, I am banging my fist; I am pissed tripping on the lessons of wisdom I missed, my souls in agony it pains to reminisce Lord grant my soul some bliss I know I am damned if I cut my wrist.

As I reflect on my case, I clearly remember the States Attorney in my face, screaming in my ears, I just sat there drowning in my tears. Poverty stricken is a bastard child's reality, see I come from a dysfunctional family, that doesn't mean my crimes are justified, Lord let me ride, alcohol and narcotics Have torn my family apart, I am mentally scarred.

Am I dead, is this reformatory a living grave, at times I feel like I am an ancient slave. When I look into my fellow

comrade's eyes, I sometimes envision remorseful criminals crying. I see doves flying, but the reality is we are constantly dying.

Yearning to be free, I never thought this would happen to me. Thirsting to be free, I truly miss my family. Yearning to be free, I never thought this would happen to me, this penitentiary is a reality.

Mom stop stressing; you did your job, you will forever be in my heart, to my little sister stop smoking that mess, and the devil's drugs only increase stress. I want to be free; prison life is not at all funny, I am holding on to my sanity as if it were money. Oh, help me Lord, my life how could this be? This concrete cell is a heart-breaking reality. Hear my plea, understand my creed, have you ever seen a remorseful spirit bleed.



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Prison is not all that nice, as a delinquent, I should have thought twice. I am yearning, praying; to the Lord I am constantly calling. I have been doing time all my adolescence years, God give me the strength to tame my tears. James Brown was right, it cost to be the boss, and there are a lot of us mentally,

morally, spiritually lost, who are to blame; can we admit our wrongs without shame? Here I go letting my remorse flow; many were scared by the wickedness and in my life. Will I ever again see happiness? I am trying to love and live, praying to god my adversaries forgive. Lord Let me live.

Domestic Violence Awareness

Marvin Alexis
Peoria ATC

When you get the opportunity, do this experiment: look at the names of the people on your visiting list and phone list. Next, look at the gender of each of them. I guarantee that the majority of the names on 99% of your lists are women.

It is an indisputable fact that, for men and woman incarcerated in prison, women are our dominant support system. They are the ones who travel ridiculous distances on the highway, putting miles and wear (and tear) on their cars, and spend hundreds of dollars on high gas prices, tolls, and expensive vending machine food all to come visit

us for a couple of hours. Add that to the \$50/\$100 Western Union they consistently put on our books, so we can purchase low quality, but high-priced products from commissary. Then compound that with the money they put on the phones so that we can have an open line of communication with them and our family. These are only three examples of the vital roles these women play in our lives.



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However, it amazes me how these are the same individuals who we seem to exact the most abuse on. Look, I am not attempting to act like I know what is going on in your day-to-day relationship, but my eyes and ears work, witnessing what goes on back on the deck, so it gives me perspective and credibility to make these statements. We see brothers who get down on his lady, embarrassing her and making her cry over a table full of food in the visiting room. We hear brothers on the phone calling his girl (even his Mother) every foul name in the book, loud enough for the entire dayroom to hear. In addition, we have been on the receiving end of brothers' conversations, who will say the most degrading and debasing things about their women that you have ever heard. Part of the reason for that is the fact that we live in a subculture where disrespect impresses, and the more "Savage" you are the more you are respected and accepted.

Not for one second, will I sit here and act as if I am without blemish when it comes to the mistreatment of women. It is because of what I have done in the past that I feel the obligation and importance of penning these words. Come on; let us keep it thorough, at

some point in time we are going to have cease with "Hurting the people who love us, and loving the people who hurt us," in the words of rapper Kendrick Lamar.

These women sacrifice so much, because of their love for us. They have to endure the emotional turmoil of our absence first and primarily; they have to bear the responsibility of raising our children and maintaining the home front most of the time for a lot of us, while being financially, deprived (poor and on government assistance).

Meanwhile, most of us contribute no financial or physical assistance to them; we deprive them of that consoling embrace at night, and that strong presence which gives them that added sense of security and support. Then to add to their torment, we heap a level of stress, and mental and emotional abuse upon them that is paramount (and worst, to be honest) than the damage a fist could ever inflict. cool factor, we always show love and loyalty to our "day's ones". Let us keep that energy – Naw, scratch that!



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Domestic Violence

Aryules Bivens

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

Husbands, Love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church. . . For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Nevertheless, let everyone of you in particular so love his wife even as himself. (Eph. 5:25-33, KJV)

When I think about domestic violence, my thoughts goes to what we are supposed to be like in any intimate relationship. My understanding comes from my belief in God and lived experience. Some people may reject this but when we treat each other with the same love and respect we give to god, violence is less likely to happen

between spouses.

Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Ephesians because they were living sinful lives. The cultures in Ephesus permitted men to abuse and be disrespectful to their wives. However, as new believers in Jesus Christ, Paul instructed the men to Love their wives, as Christ loved the church (the people Christ gave his life for to reconcile them with God). In this way, Men must have the desire to give his all for or to their wives. Men are to make women health (mentally, emotionally and physically) of essential importance. Men should treat women with the same respect, honor and love as he does God and himself.

Thus, that old saying, “Happy wife, Happy life!” becomes truth. By doing these things, the wife in turn would also give of herself, fully committed and loyal, willingly.

Yes, wives would even reverence their husbands, as they do God.



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She is not submitting herself, as if she is being a servant or dominated.

However, in our society, some men and some women have gotten this twisted.

Domestic violence has been rising, and women are receiving the majority of the violent abuse. These abuses are not all physical. According to a CDC Study 80% of individuals in Domestic violence, relationships have perpetrated emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is categorized as either expressive (in response to a provocation) or coercive (intended to monitor, control and/or threaten). Across studies, 40% of women and 32% of men reported expressive abuse; 41% of women and 43% of men reported Coercive abuse. These studies reflect that abuse is not solely one-sided.

How should love operated in any intimate relationship? Plainly, when it comes to the woman's health, make her a priority, tending to all her needs. Eliminate verbal and physical abuse. Yes, even the control or reciprocal reactions taken to try to control women.

If men love their wives, it will eliminate the wife from having a desire to be reciprocal in vengefulness. No wife or no woman needs to fear giving her all to her significant other in any relationship that encompasses honor, respect, loyalty and love.

When we care for, provide for, honor and respect our significant other, and show these through our actions, we walk in the spirit of love for each other. Surely, if we love ourselves, then we must love our partners the same.

I do not condone any abusive relationships. I also think that people have gotten away from trusting believing and understanding God. Perhaps I am just a romantic, but I still love the idea of "love is what we need".



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It is time we change this. Let us elevate that energy, when it comes to that woman who is the crutch who holds us up when this tricky world trips us up; The mother who is responsible for our presence, or the mother who is the

cultivator of our future (our children). And the woman who has been by our side, like ribs (who they truly are), through our entire journey, as we navigate through these dismal crypts. We must do better!

SUBMIT NOW



Reimagining Corrections Abstract

It's time to reimagine corrections. Punishment, in the form of prison, has proven to be ineffective correcting undesirable behaviors in the long-term. Imagine a justice system that truly rehabilitates, restores, and facilitates a successful re-entry for justice-impacted citizens instead of punishment & revenge. What do rehabilitation, restoration, and re-entry look like to you? What will you reimagine corrections to look like? Please submit.

Is It Love?

Antonio Strong
Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

A beautiful girl lays in the midst of an abusive relationship who lived within a women's temptation to catch her last breath as her thoughts leave her a victim.

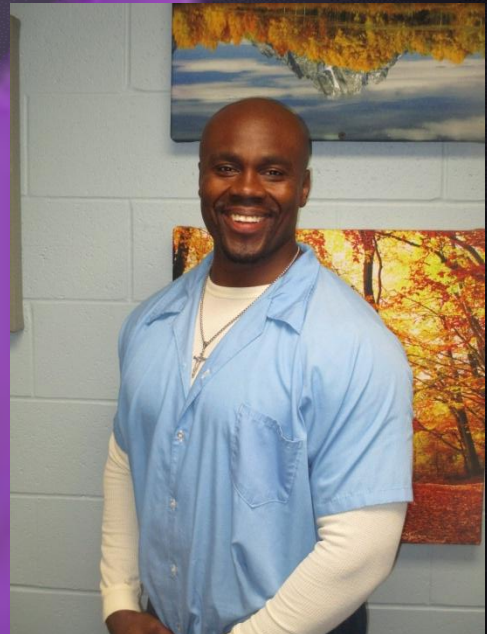
Mentally lost within a teenaged desire of presumptuous rebellion towards her loving parents. She bleeds the hands which cradled her, thinking no one loves nor understands her cause no hands beat her. Such a misunderstanding point of view...

Beautifully crafted, her body lay hidden within a tale of her own making, shrouded within sheets harboring aromas of mankind, an ancient pleasure that stigmatized Mary Magdaline...

The swelling of the eyes is unforeseen to the holder as she loses her virtuousness; weariness overwhelms her soul... Sadly, she wanders in a time torn within blind images of pleasure from a tainted taste of love...

Her faith lies at the bottom of the bottles, drowning an illusion of beauty... if only she knew a woman's

worth...bended knees, her thoughts pulse, someone please save me, but no one hears her pleas nor offers a helping hand of understanding words which not spoken...



Sadly, she's blinded by too many broken promises as years of abusive words and unscrupulous relationships hold her powerless like a lover's warm embrace...

To live and to love was her only religion, her heart spoke forgiveness to the one who's always looking through the mirror... as she lies on the floor, seeing innocence drip in a puddle of blood, she wonders if anything was ever love.

I'm A Survivor You are Too!

**Anthony Wheeler
Menard**

I was once a young man with the world as my oyster and so much potential, but I was lost. In my lost state, I searched for love in all of the wrong places. Sadly, I thought I found love in a man six years older than my 18-year-old self. He gave me attention and made me feel wanted, but it was all a trick. As we got to know each other, he would have moments of extreme anger that resulted in frightening outbursts.

I was exposed to these type of outbursts when I was a child; my mom and ex-stepfather would scream at each other a lot, which made me shrink into myself and use TV and video games as an escape. So, I tolerated the emotional abuse. Then one day, it got worse. He had an outburst during an argument and got so fed up with my frightened silence that he smacked me. That one smack opened the door to further abuse of a violent kind. I thought he loved me, and he told me his “discipline” was for my

good. I didn't know how to talk about it, and he isolated me from my family and friends. The smacks escalated to punches, which escalated to beatings. When he got angry, he turned savage, and I didn't know how to calm him down. I suffered in silence, taking the abuse and losing myself.

Every issue was my fault, and it didn't take much to cause him to fly into a rage. He whipped me with belts, kicked me with boots, beat me with objects, called me every insult one could think of, and made my life miserable. I grew so accustomed to the abuse that I thought it was normal. I believed that his violent tendencies were love. I lived in fear, never knowing when he would spiral into a rampage. He expected me to “take it like a man” so I did. I had no self-worth, no hope, no peace, and no desire to live.



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Have you ever been burned with an iron? I was. Have you been so savagely beaten that your head split open? I was. Have you ever been raped by someone who said they loved you? I have. Have you ever heard of a man being a victim of domestic violence? I didn't before either. Have you ever become so warped by the evil inflicted upon you that you became evil yourself? That was me. I had so much pent-up rage that I internalized and directed at myself. I didn't care if I lived or died, nor did I consider the consequences of my actions. All I cared about was trying to make him happy so he would not hurt me; I was rarely successful.

One day, everything changed for the worst and then for the better. In 2017, we were arrested and detained in the Cook County jail. The incarceration finally separated me from him, allowing me the time and space to reflect on my life. I began to see that what I went through wasn't normal, and I was filled with a multitude of thoughts, feelings, and painful memories. I started reading the bible, finally having time to read. I began reading books again, a happy pastime that I couldn't indulge while in my abusive relationship. God began to reveal Himself to me, little by little and

piece by piece. He never gave up on me and eventually I believed in Him. As I got closer to God, I realized my situation was not just punishment for my sins, but also a rescue from the wicked life I was trapped in.

Now I know that everything I went through was not love, but abuse, control, manipulation, coercion, and evil. God showed me what real unconditional love is, and He continues to lead me out of the shadow of my past and into the bright light of the future. As men, we don't like to talk about abuse, out of fear of being viewed as soft, weak, feminine, or stupid. I didn't talk about what I was going through with anyone; if I had, I would've gotten the help I desperately needed. I know that there are many people out there that are enduring domestic violence and/or have survived domestic violence. It is even more difficult for LGBTQ+ people to talk about it because our lives are stigmatized just for being ourselves. I told my story not to bring any suffering, but to bring hope; there are resources out there, and there are people that can help you.



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There is a better way to live that does not involve violence. More often than not, it's your own family members, individuals that are supposed to love, support, and care for you, who abuse people. If you are a survivor, you are not the only one. If you are in a situation where you are being abused, get help; talk to somebody.

If you are an abuser, I ask that you take a hard look at yourself and see the pain and suffering that you are causing your loved ones, so you can seek forgiveness and get the help you need to change your ways. If you are a survivor, forgive your abuser. It may take time but make the effort. Holding on to bitterness will continue to give them power over you. We are all human beings and deserve to be treated with love and respect as God's image-bearers should receive. You are loved by an amazing Creator who made you for a special purpose that He designed. You are not alone; your experiences may be unique, but there are people that have endured the same type of hardships that can help you overcome domestic violence. Do not give up on life; do not give up on love; do not give up on happiness; do not give up on people.

I have written these words to give

inspiration and awareness to those that are in need. I hope that my words can be used by God to open hearts and open doors to unity and understanding. God builds bridges, and I trust Him to continue leading me forward out of the darkness into the light of His love. I may be locked-up, but thanks to Him I am more free now than I ever was on the outside. You can experience this too; just believe in Him and believe in yourself. Praise God for His love, which endures forever in His creation. God bless all of you and peace be with you. Amen.



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The Men They Deserve

Clarence W. Prather
Galesburg

“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the lord.”

- Proverbs, 18:22

God tells us, but really, we've all experienced that relationship that made everything make sense, every man, incarcerated or not knows that the best medicine for a good or bad day is when we come home or get the chance to talk to our wives or girlfriends about it. For we who are currently away from our families, having that small but big escape from these walls, really makes or breaks our day. So why do so many of us, when we make it out, forget those moments when we so desperately wanted to hear their voices? Why do we forget those nights when we were tossing and turning? Wondering and worrying about what they were doing, because it was a weekend or a birthday. Remember when all we did was think about them, wishing and praying that we could be home with them? Why then do we forget so easily, forget about

those moments, when we make it home? What pushes us or drives us away from all those promises we made to our ladies and ourselves that cause us to mentally and physically abuse women? How could we forget the sacrifices they made for us such as visits, letters, pictures, and money?

Now imagine if the roles were reversed? What if she was booked and we were free? Could we honestly live up to what they did for us? How would we feel if we put our entire lives on hold, and the second they got out, or an issue arose, they left? We would feel hurt, mad, upset, etc... That's the way our women feel about us. We treat our women, when we are supposed to be building them up. We allow temptation to turn men into boys.



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Hold on to those memories when our ladies hold us down, when we know if we're being real, we barely deserved it.

What more do they have to prove to finally have us see that they not only love us but are here for us. Don't go home and forget about them, when they didn't forget about us when we were at our weakest moments.

It is time to keep our promises, stand on our words, and gain our woman's respect. Lastly, let's bring back the old days when women were respected, loved and cherished. And more importantly to my beautiful ladies, start holding your men accountable to what they deserve. A happy wife, leads to a happy life.

TWO ROADS

Presents

PROGRESS

A LOST TIME ABSTRACT

Armed with the knowledge that time is one of life's most valuable commodities, TWO ROADS is asking for submissions on how you are progressing or how you have been using your time productively during your incarceration. As we enter into the New Year, we understand the lack of opportunities because power's out of our control; however, what are you doing for yourself and how? What are you currently doing now that your weren't in the past? What changes have you made to progress? We would like to hear your stories.

Outsiders, Staff and Individuals-In-Custody
(WITH Staff Support)

Please send your submission and scanned photo
(if you choose) to doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"PROGRESS"

SUBMIT NOW

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

Defuse The Fuse

Terrance J. Williamson
Centralia

Anger is a fuse,
ready, set to explode!
It can only be extinguished
if you seek help to defuse it
and let it go.

Anger is a fuse,
ready, set to explode!
You have seen
the catastrophe that it brings;
sadness, defeat, and broken souls.
Hearts that physically complete,
but emotionally have suffered scars
and the bombardment of many holes.

Anger is a fuse,
ready, set to explode!
Hurt and pain, behold the earth
covered in soot, ash, and blood stains.
Indwelled with so much hatred:
Do you know you mean to write
A Declaration of Separation,
a loss of Love?
And to be cast to the relentless
bounds of total isolation?

Unable to control the eruption,
you'll find within the rubble and

desolation,
although your explosion hurt many
people,
The person you hurt the most, is
yourself.

Why, anger is a fuse
ready, set to explode!
It can only be extinguished
If you seek help to defuse it
and let it go.



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lence
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PARENTING FROM PRISON

It is that time of the year when we have this discussion. TWO ROADS is now taking submissions for this issue. If you would like to share your thoughts or give opinions on this issue, please send us your work.



TWO ROADS

My Role

Anthony “Wayne” Davis
Western

Scrolling down tablet, I scrolled across the callout and I became intrigued. I’m sure everyone can relate to at one point in life taking action to being “called out.” So yeah, I took the bait. I’m writing to elaborate on my shame in my role in Domestic Abuse.

There was a saying: *sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never hurt.* Somehow, I forgot about that saying and allowed words to become my trigger. Some people call it “the button.” At the time, I was 6’4” allowing a 5’6” Nubian to press my buttons.

Hold on, let’s back this up. The thing that made me take a look in the mirror was being told not so long ago that my son had been physical with his girlfriend. Brokenhearted is an understatement. I closed my eyes and reflected after hearing this news and before I opened my eyes, I saw flashes of my mother being beaten as I was a

child by a man that I’m sure claimed that *he loved her wholeheartedly.* I guess she had pushed his buttons.

Those same buttons I allowed my 5’6” Nubian to press that I claimed to love wholeheartedly. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, he didn’t love my mom, I didn’t love my Nubian, and my son didn’t love his girlfriend. and if anyone ever displayed such behavior, they were not displaying love.

Love is *I Corinthians 13:4-8.* But violence my friends is a combination of pain, despair and hate that can momentarily be spilled upon the world and affect all parties involved. Even the young spectators that view us as their heroes.

So, I call us out to be better, to love better and set BETTER EXAMPLES. Someone is always looking, and we are who we are when we think no one is looking. Thank you TWO ROADS and keep up the good work!



A painting of a woman's face with long, wavy brown hair. A large, semi-transparent purple 'X' is drawn over the face, obscuring the eyes and part of the nose and mouth. The text 'CULTS' is written in a large, black, serif font across the top part of the 'X', and 'ARTURE' is written in the same font across the bottom part. The background is dark and textured. There are faint watermarks: 'instagr' on the left and 'javi-g-art.tumblr.com' at the bottom right.

CULTS ARTURE

instagr

javi-g-art.tumblr.com

The ICEBREAKER

Interview

As told by Lakisha Woodard

Sheila Palma has been incarcerated for 19 ½ years. Her hobbies are coloring, reading and talking with friends. Some of Sheila's passions are teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) as well as Spanish hands-on. She loves to play educational games with her students that makes it more fun.

These aren't the only topics she's really good at. She excels at trivia, and she does research to learn different things. If you would like to know something, believe you me, Sheila might know the answer and if not, she will find it. To Sheila, education has always been important. Her grandmother and great-grandmother were able to obtain a high-school diploma BEFORE they were subjected to their "domestic"

duties happened.

Sheila's mother and aunt were the first females to go to college, to break up the cultural cycle of glass ceilings and stay smart, no matter what. Instead of being allowed to go to parties, Sheila had her nose in a book of some sort. Her mother would "pop quiz" her on anything, so she learned to **stay ready**.



Choices We Make

Sheila Palma

Logan

There are different types of abuse. There's sexual, physical, psychological, emotional and eventually, self-harm. How do we break these ties that bind us so tightly that we cry on the inside?

Education doesn't always help (I found this out the hard way). Calling the authorities makes it worse. They question you—the victim—as though you're the aggressor, let alone if the kids see these occurrences, then sides are chosen. Lines are drawn so deeply in the sand that there's no "takebacks." In the end...you're still with them!

Maybe it's that moment when they tried to bash your brains out because you said you two were done. I took on more. *"They were ill and not on their meds, so it was all my fault"* so says the lie. Maybe, they're just a family member or friend that's "going through it." My name is Sheila, and my ex-husband was my aggressor. My daughter saw him bash my face 47 times into a

brick wall and then raped me and then bit the top of my head, just to prove that I was nothing, a nobody, and nobody wanted me.

Yes, I called the authorities. 48 hours of protection...HA! He called me all night from the county jail and wrote threatening letters, telling me that he would harm me and my child if I didn't take him back. After all, I didn't want my child's father to hurt himself like mine did, so she'd be fatherless too.

Again, there are many types of abuse; they just bind us tighter in some areas more than most. This is my first time ever sharing this. I just hope it helps someone come out alive. God saved me. Yes, I'm here, but I'm alive! I'm not broken as I used to be *Isaiah 42:16 I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight...*

Find comfort in the solace of fellow survivors.



It's Okay, Ask For Help

Abdul Khabir

Senior Editor, TWO ROADS

Many of you have heard my story in the past and can go to past TWO ROADS issues on domestic violence if you would like. I just want to share a few words and try to share some encouragement. My entire life has been riddled with drugs, alcohol, and violence. Sometimes they all come with one another, yet they can come by themselves. For example, one does not have to be on drugs and alcohol to become violent. I never knew any other way to deal with my emotions than to react in a physical way or fill myself with mind altering substances. I was an alcoholic and drug user, but I did not have to be drinking or using to become physical.

Although, for many years I used my drinking and using as a means to justify my behavior. I made excuses because I knew my actions were wrong and shameful. In a cowardly fashion, I would hide behind excuses and play the blame game or just blatantly lie. I refused to ask for help because that would mean that I

was guilty. It did not matter that I would be admitting guilt to myself, this I already knew. I did not want others to know what I had done and what I was capable of doing.

At about year seven I woke up and decided it was time to start taking accountability. This was just the first step on a long journey. Because self-knowledge is not enough. If we want to effect real change in our lives, we must put in some work. Asking for help and joining groups geared towards change and growth was the best choice I had. Joining the groups and gaining the knowledge is not enough though, now I have a long road ahead – one in which I must apply the tools given to me. **One thing I learned is that anger is a natural emotion; it is okay to be angry at something. The key is finding healthy ways of managing the anger. For those of you who are like me, and you do not know what that looks like, ask for help!**

Inside the institutions, there are groups and



mental health staff that can help you find ways to manage. There are some of our peers who have discovered and are applying these tools as well; most of them will freely give what they have discovered. For those that are free there are groups of your peers as well and professionals who can share with you the tools you need.



YOU have to make the move to get the help though. I discovered that in being brave enough to seek guidance my outlook and experience with shame and

guilt has changed. I am still ashamed of my choices and actions that harmed other people, but I do not live in that shame anymore. I do not allow shame and guilt to drive my emotions or my motives. I also no longer react in a physical way to emotions such as anger or jealousy. Mr. Ross taught me that when I try to control what someone else does, I stop being able to control myself. By trying to control outlying circumstances, outcomes, or other people's feelings, emotions, and actions, I relinquish control of self.

My friend Nathan reminded me of Mr. Ross's lesson last night. The only true thing I have control of is self; anything else is just a false sense of control. Lastly, I want to share with victims of domestic violence. I was living in an almost unbreakable cycle. Each time I became violent or made any other poor decision I lost a little bit more sense of control. I would in turn try to regain my false sense of control of the person or situation.

As I pushed the envelope further, I felt myself losing more control. I only became more desperate to somehow take control.



Control I would never actually have.

The only thing I was ever in control of was myself and at some point, I had even relinquished all control of myself. I went to lengths of desperation. On top of it all I made choices that I regretted and would cause me severe shame and guilt...things which I became desperate to keep in the dark. Fear of being exposed as a violent man, a cheat, and a fraud helped to justify my behavior.

I could go on and on with the defects which I have discovered in myself. That is not my goal here though. My point is that if you are living with a person that was as I was, and you think it will just stop, you are most likely wrong. And you are probably risking your life by taking a chance that things will just get better. You probably hear things like; I am so sorry, I will never do that again, I can't believe I did that to you, I am such a horrible person, if you would not have done such and such, I just get so angry, the alcohol made me do it, I only act like this when I drink too much, anger runs in my family, I'll get help. Then that person does it again, and they do not get help, they know that drinking exacerbates anger, yet they drink anyways. They say they love you, but they only show it when they are waiting

for their last episode to blow over. I know this person because I was this person.

The hard truth is that I came close to taking a young woman's life. A woman to whom I professed my love. A woman who entrusted me to her home. She even allowed me to be a part of her son's life. My daughter began to be close with her as well. During the trial she said, "what if my son had been home?". After all she had been through, she was thinking of someone else, while like a coward I was trying to save myself.

As I have shared in the past, this was not my first instance of violence. Had I not come to prison, I, like most people, was very unlikely to get the help I so desperately needed. How far would I have gone the next time, because it was very likely that my behavior would have only gotten worse? The sad truth is that for most people, prison is even unlikely to effect a real change in them. If you are experiencing domestic violence in the form of verbal abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, financial abuse, physical abuse, or any other form of



Abuse, get out while you can!!! If you feel it difficult to get out, then get help!!!

I am sure that there are many who are scared. A brave woman stood up to me, she stepped up and told me who I was. She taught me what I was and showed the harm I had done. And she did it in a courtroom full of her loved ones and strangers. It is very difficult for me to admit these things about myself, but I want people to understand the seriousness of what they are dealing with. She most likely saved herself from

further abuse from me, and possibly saved her life or someone else's.

Hopefully, I can encourage people who have no way of managing their anger and people who are victims of that anger to seek help. Call the domestic violence hotline, call the authorities, seek a mental health professionals help. There are many ways for both sides to get help, you just have to have courage. You might just save someone's life or your own.

What We've Learned

**Christopher Perez
Galesburg**

The moment we awaken to know that we are lost- to realize that the ego is not master in the house – then we have begun the journey. Helen Luke

Most of us know the life we are born into; we only know the essence of ourselves that we believe is us. Most of us grew in an environment of anger, sadness, abuse, hatred, madness; hate shaped the essence of our lives. Like all things in nature, we adapted to survive,

so we grew up looking at life through these veils of emotion. These emotions are like the coal that fuels our engines so we stick to these tracks and at times we cannot distinguish right from wrong. Because right or wrong does not factor in when you believe at the core of yourself that you are what you are born into. That is not me making excuses; it is me trying to make you understand.



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Although my situation is not ideal, it is an ideal situation to break a person. It has given me the opportunity to see life from a different perspective, one that is more humble. You see, in here it does not matter where you come from, how important you are or think you are, at the end of the day you are powerless.

It is that deprivation of power, which slowly kills the ego; I have learned that every time we suffer, we die a little bit. However, our souls are like that of a Starfish; it has the power to regenerate. It is up to us how that part of us is reborn. We can let it sour, or we can nurture that pain and let that part of us bloom.

Life does not discriminate; it brings pain and suffering to everyone at one time or the other. As crazy, as it may sound, I believe there is beauty in those moments when someone or something hurts you. It can be so easy to hate, resent, or be angry at people or just where you may be in life...whatever evil emotions you may be feeling...but it takes beauty, strength, real courage and soul to forgive that person, to forgive yourself and grow from that experience. You have to have empathy, because even when I was wronged, I realized that I've also done damage to others and myself. Physically and emotionally. I've had to live with that regret, shame and guilt and

those can be a cancer if you allow them in, but I've learned that we don't need another's forgiveness—although we love it, although we may yearn for it.

What we need is to accept what has happened, so we have to get it right the first time. I wasn't allowing myself to open up to the growth that life comes with.



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All that anger and sadness came from a heart that was wounded, hurt and wronged, but my heart is mine and in me, so it can only be wounded, hurt or wronged by ME. God freely forgives, there are no demands, no expecting anything in return. I'm trying to live by those same principles.

We're no longer unwise, unhealthy, or impractical. We face our challenges with open hearts and the desire for misunderstanding. We're learning to disengage from our self-seeking, once we reach whatever we're chasing, we feel empty right after, but the focus on others brings an unexplainable feeling; we no longer question our loneliness, or our purpose of being here. We understand the mystery of life isn't a problem to solve, but a reality to experience. I now question, *what ends with me?*

Perhaps the divine nature of things is revealed to us through our humanity; moment by moment, we could say that experience is the way God helps break our trance, so that we might have another chance to be whole. Our challenge is not to get stuck in between, but to endure the holy process deeply enough that we are rearranged by life itself as we're put back together. All of

which is happening to you and me as I reach for you through these words.

I could've named this *What I've Learned*, but I learned that I'm nothing special; we all go through the same thing, in one way or another, and we all have the blessing to learn from it. So, in the end, I'd like to say that if you can relate to this, I'm sorry for your hurt, for the pain you felt, or are currently feeling and will feel in the future. I hope you find the strength, courage and wisdom to know where to take it further and to have the understanding that all our setbacks are inside of us.

Believe it or not, we are loved and if it's not too much I'd like to thank my backbone, the foundation of every structure in me. My angel, the lady in the picture, my beautiful mother. Without you, I would have given up so many times. Thank you, TWO ROADS, for giving me the chance to voice my soul.



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Domestic Violence

**Thomas J. Gordon
Sheridan**

Not knowing where to really start on a topic such as this, I will begin by saying that I write from the perspective of both a perpetrator and a victim of domestic violence. In sharing what I have to say, I only wish to be able to add to the concerted effects shared by the many that look to make positive changes in their lives and the lives of others. I want this story not to be about me but about the bigger picture, that being the prevention of more victims, or more trauma, of more heartache and of the needless shattering of lives.

I first became familiar with domestic violence around the age of eight years old. My parents were recently separated and looking to be divorced. My mother was a young 26–27-year-old with three young boys of which I am the oldest. She had met this person...I will name him Oscar... who was a real piece of work. Most of my memories of my mother's time

with Oscar were riddled with domestic violence. Fortunately, she was only with him for a period of less than two years. I wish I could say the same of my memories of him.

According to my memories, Oscar would viciously beat my mother, hitting and kicking her, throwing her around the small two-bedroom apartment we lived in. At times, he would lock my brothers and me out of the apartment while he physically abused our mother. One time, while he had my mother on the floor in the bathroom, hitting and kicking her senselessly I had grabbed a baseball bat and came up behind him. While I do not specifically remember what I was thinking, I am sure it had



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something to do with wanting to protect my mother.

My mother told me years later that when she saw me with the bat, she was terrified. Her only thought had been the hope that Oscar did not turn around and see me because she feared he might use the bat on me. She told me that had he attempted to hurt me or my brothers for that matter that she would have fought him, that he would have had to kill her.

While this is only a small window into the span of time, it nonetheless conveys some of the emotions felt by not only my mother, but also myself and my brothers. (I speak on behalf of my two brothers, at least in this situation). Confusion, terror, scared, cowardly, shock, and even the inability to properly feel, to think are but some of the emotions that ran through my body at that moment. Here is why in speaking with my mother, I was able to understand better some of what she, as a victim, may have been dealing with internally.

She told me regardless of how extreme the initial event was, it throws you into a shock. It is in the events that follow where the victim may be thinking, "If I try harder: If I love him

more, they will stop the violence.

This can and generally does grow into a habitual cycle unfortunately that will lead to different outcomes, one of which, according to my mother, was that she stayed because she became terrified of him. "A sad state to be in for anyone." She also shared with me how there were moments where after being beaten senselessly and without cause, she would be huddled like a scared little child, and even felt incapable of processing or feeling anything.

As a young child having to bear witness to these vicious attacks on my mother, I was terrified, seriously terrified. A human being should not have to feel like this. These are not excuses whatsoever, that a person can come up with to justify treating someone in this manner. Yet this is often not the case, I think of the movie *Forrest Gump*, A movie most of us are likely familiar with. Fast forward to when Jenny takes Forrest to the Black Panther Party.

Forrest is caught in a conversation that allows Jenny's



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boyfriend to pull her aside and start a conflict with her. Next thing, Forrest sees Jenny being walloped by her boyfriend, cut to Jenny telling Forrest “He doesn’t mean it when he does things like this.” Cut to the scene in front of the bus when Jenny is getting ready to depart with her boyfriend. The boyfriend says, “I would never hurt you, you know that”.

Here is what I would like to point out in this scenario, you see when he said, “I would never hurt you” he did not actually mean that. The fact of the matter is that he did hurt her! He likely has hurt her before, and the likelihood is he would do it again. That is not the only excuse he attempted to use either.

Moreover, poor Jenny, with the lack of clarity and strength, justified his actions, too. Look at what she said to Forrest. What is he talking about? If he did not mean it, he would have never done it! Period!

Ladies and gentlemen: the point is that this is not how it has to be. Generally, in my personal opinion, all the abused want is to be loved and cherished, like most of humanity likely does. That person has a right to that; stop-making excuses for the victimizer. **THERE ARE NONE.** Moreover, stop

letting them make excuses. Each of you is worth more than that; each of you is capable of much more. You do not have to stay in an unsafe situation. If you have children, you should not stay in that situation. Think about how traumatic experiencing all of that is and can be for each of you; you can make a choice before it goes too far.

To bring the light back to me for a moment, I would like to say that I have had a lot of time to reflect on my actions. and for them. I apologize to those I may have harmed and the things I have said therein have been a reflection of that. While I never understood then what provoked my mother’s boyfriend to such anger and violence, what I can say now is that it was selfish and a lack of empathy for the other person. I know because I am guilty of physically assaulting and abusing another human being with absolutely zero regard for their rights to be free from harm or how my actions may have affected them. I was exactly like Jenny’s boyfriend, I made the same



pathetic excuses. You do not do these things without lacking empathy and being selfish. Once again to my victims, nothing I can do or say will ever erase my past actions, each of those moments are something that in a way we will carry with us forever. For that, I am forever sorry. I am sorry for having not considered the effects of my actions, I am sorry for having physically assaulting and abusing you all.

Moreover, to my mother, I am sorry for having to not learned from your plight. I understand why you took the side of the women I harmed and not mine,

There is one more thing I want you to

know : I do not blame you for any of my actions, nor do I hold it against you in any way. I never have and you do not have to blame yourself either. You found that courage and strength within yourself (that is within all of us) the stuff that was always there and rose up against your circumstances. That makes you blameless!

Finally to all who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence, I leave you with the words of Carrie Underwood, "YOU ARE INVINCIBLE, UNBREAKABLE, UNSTOPPABLE, UNSHAKABLE, YOU ARE A CHAMPION!"

Save Me

Vanessa Wooden

Logan

I was finally coming to terms with it
After wasting a couple years of my life
After trying to find a way
I finally realized it was over
It had been for a long time
I was devastated
Someone saved me
Til one night
I (was) celebrating my sister's retirement
From the United States Air Force
Me and my family

How did he know where she lives?
He told me he drove all the way
I have to leave with him, I owed him that
He saved me, remember?
The next day we fought so hard
My sister was celebrating after 21 years of
service, You shouldn't have come!



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He smashes my hand into the steering wheel
How could he?
My eye is black, and people are asking questions
I left...
The one who saved me.
He found me
He shows up in the middle of the night
He will never do it again, he just lost control
He's crying and crying
On no...
I have to save him
The next day it happened
I tried to leave
But he's faster than me
I'm scared
He wrapped a rope around my neckline
He dragged me home like that
He told me he'd destroy me and then himself
I don't want to hurt him
So I stayed
I saved him!
The last night, we were fighting
The things he did to me were unspeakable
One thing I knew for sure
Tonight I'm going to die
I cried as he poured kerosene all over my clothes

My house,
Me.
Kerosene everywhere
“We will burn in this house together”, he said
Why?
You were supposed to
SAVE ME!
Dear readers,

That night after hours of torture, I got away. You know, I had a gut feeling from day 1 that something was wrong. I was just so hurt over the loss of my soul mate, my one true love that I didn't pay attention to the warning signs. By the time I did, I was in too deep. I was lucky to walk away with my life. In the end, I saved myself.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my advice to you is if you're in trouble, tell a trusted friend, a family member. Don't cover things up for your abuser. Get out. Leave while you can. Share with a trusted person what you're going through. Your life may depend on it.



Domestic
Violence
Awareness
Month