

## Sandy's Story

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As my father and mother accompanied me up the long church aisle that day, I had mixed emotions. I was nervous about the events of the day, but I was absolutely confident in the future. I knew that 46% of marriages (at that time) failed, but that was not going to happen to me: I was not going to end up as a statistic. I was intelligent, strong and capable.

I knew about his background. He had grown up in fear; watching and listening as his mother was beaten at his father's hands – he told me the whole story one evening complete with candlelight, wine and many shared tears. He was so heart broken about the events of his past, and so vehement that he would never be like his father, I believed him without reservation.

Sun streamed through stained glass windows, as I stood before the altar and pledged my vows before God and a crowd of friends and family. I was happier than I had ever been. I fully believed in “Til death do us part” and this glorious day was the first day of the rest of our life – together.

The first several years of our marriage were happy. We were busy building careers, working long hours yet we still found time to enjoy the company of friends and get away on romantic weekends. As our lives grew busier, he got angry occasionally. I didn't think too much about it at the time, but I still remember the day I ran into the bathroom to escape his anger only to hear the door crumble beneath his fist. I was four months pregnant with our first child.

As the years went by, we had three beautiful daughters. I was able to stay home and be a mom – the joy of my life. The anger gradually got more frequent and he became controlling in subtle ways. If I were on the phone when he walked in the door, he would be furious; so I learned not to talk on the phone. We had moved to be closer to our families, yet he was jealous if I spent any time with my family. So, I began to make excuses rather than attend family functions. Now, in his rage he often broke my favourite possessions.

Once, during a particularly noisy incident, the kitchen table was broken and our neighbours called the police. I was mortified: I had become a statistic. This was not the way I had expected my “happily ever after” to be. Even when the police talked with me alone, I couldn't admit that we had any problems. I was determined to make my marriage work and to honour my wedding vows so I pretended everything was fine. In public, we were perceived as a happy couple and a perfect church-going family. Inside the house, I tried to protect my girls from the truth. I told them, *“When Dad gets mad, go to the furthest room in the house and close the door.”* The funny thing is that I did such a good job of pretending that I believed my own lies for years.

The angry episodes got more violent; I never knew what would set him off. The smallest word might send him into a rage, which would last for days. I walked around on eggshells. Occasionally he pushed me hard enough that I fell backward and was bruised. When I finally tried to talk to him about it, he assured me that he wasn't abusing me because he'd never actually hit me. He was right; he never hit me. Yet the threat of violence was very real: I can still see the image of his rage-red face inches from mine, his spit flying onto my face and his fist raised as a weapon poised to strike. He never did hit me – he didn't need to. The threat was enough to keep me silent.

Even more damaging though were the things he said. He had a way of twisting my words so I was always at fault. Worse, he turned my kids against me and told them I was a bad mother. Sometimes he'd taunt me by suggesting I call the police – but at the same time, he warned me that if I made the call, I would never see my girls again. Little by little, I lost my sense of confidence and my hope for the future.

### **My 1<sup>st</sup> Step – Confiding in Someone**

One day in absolute desperation, I cried aloud to God, "Help!" Within a matter of days, someone came into my life that I was eventually able to confide in. That person opened my eyes to the reality of what I had been dealing with, and partnered with me to find the help I needed.

It wasn't easy to face the ugly truth of what my life had become; my perfect "happily ever after" dream was never going to come true.

### **My Turning Point**

We had been married for over 17 years when I fled from my house for the last time. In his rage, I was thrown ten feet across the garage landing beside a heap of scrap metal. I tried to get into the van, calmly telling him that I needed to go for a drive but I was forcibly pulled out. As I left on foot, he got into the vehicle. I can still hear the sound of screeching tires and smell the stench of burning rubber as he chased me.

It was by far the most violent incident I had dealt with and I knew it was only going to get worse. That night I made the most difficult decision of my life: I called 911 and I finally stopped covering things up.

Later that night, the police removed him from our home.

Those weren't easy times. I was scared and uncertain. I was still determined to go back and make my marriage work – although I had no idea how. I thought I owed it to my girls. I called YWCA Edmonton and asked for help. From there, I made an appointment with Dr. Gregg Janz, an expert in helping women and their families heal from domestic violence. My daughters and I also went to group counselling sessions for families who have lived with domestic violence.

Then one day it hit me: "Til death do us part," did **not** mean *until I died at his hand*. If I were going to be the mom that my girls needed, I would have to teach them that what they had experienced was **not** the way a husband should treat his wife.

It's been almost four years, and the struggle to regain my confidence continues. But, I've come a very long way. My girls are learning that their mom really is intelligent, strong and capable and our future is bright.

### **The Challenge**

You may be wondering why I would share my story publicly; it is because there are too many stories out there that aren't being told. There are too many families suffering with their secret in silence and fear. That has to change.

If you are in the position to make an investment into the future of young families, please consider a generous donation to the YWCA to support their ongoing counselling programs.

If you are in a situation like mine – I beg you, please, find someone to talk to. Seek help. Don't put it off. Stop pretending. Your life and the lives of your children may depend upon your decision.

Blessings,

Sandy

