

Foreword

If I had blinked I would have missed it. There they were on nationwide television – several young married couples working collectively to address some of their serious marital issues with the help of a psychologist on a television talk/reality show. One husband in particular had earned the disapproval of the rest. Neither the men nor the women found him sincere. They saw him as rude and self-centered. Still his wife was hopeful.

During a counseling session, as the group exposed him, he must have felt outnumbered and publicly shamed as they named his offenses and hurtful behaviors toward others, particularly the man's wife. As her tears fell, she looked longingly to him for reassurance. And, then he seemed to soften, shed a few tears, conjured up what warmth he could muster, glanced at his wife and asked her to forgive him. She paused for a moment, quietly accepted his apology and reached over and put her hand on his.

And then I saw it.

It was the slightest, briefest manifestation that could have easily escaped notice – he smirked. I reflexively gasped and pointed at the man on the screen and fairly yelled, "There it is!" His expression had unwittingly betrayed him. I wanted to jump through the screen, take that poor woman and shake her and tell her that it was not likely that all she would ever receive from him would be empty promises and deceptions. She could run after him the rest of her life trying to earn his love and affection and she would be left lonely and longing. What a terrible realization. It was all so wrong. So horrifying to behold – seeing in that split second his cold heart and what could be for his poor wife a lifetime of heartache.

Perhaps my assessment was too hasty. Perhaps. I hope I am wrong, but the man's behaviors and attitudes had obviously played out in other scenarios. The camera caught the moment; the truth was betrayed by his body language. He knew how to play the game; he had her right where he wanted her.

It was not a moment of satisfaction or justification for me – in fact just the opposite. I know that that woman on television is not alone. I am only one survivor of many, and one who has a recollection broad and wide enough to empathize with those who live with the lashings – whether or not they leave visible scars.

I have had conversations with other women who left abusive relationships. I have even made the mistake of asking the question, “Did he ever hit you or was it *just* verbal and emotional abuse?” There is no “just.” Abuse is abuse. Don’t allow an abuser the luxury of *not* laying a hand on you.

You may know in your head that abuse is unacceptable. But your heart has been beaten into submission. You have incrementally embraced the justifications, rationalizations and outright lies that have held you hostage. Still, you have kept on believing that something will somehow, automatically, miraculously change. Of course, change is not only possible, but also essential, although *you* may need to be the one to change – not so that he will, but because it’s right, necessary, and healthy.

Dear friend, if, as you read these pages, you catch glimpses of your own world and realize that your relationship is all wrong and the conditions under which you live must end, know that you are not alone. Others have survived, and many of us have had to get out and go on.

I only want you to know what I wish I had known, what I wish someone had told me. It was a terrible realization to turn an unseen corner and suddenly face the shocking truth head-on – that I was married to an abuser, and, I was his enabler. I’m not sure I have ever known deeper pain. Still, it was the impetus I needed to set a new course and find the determination to put an end to the abuse – whatever that meant.

Life is messy. There is no simple three-steps-back-to-sanity formula. Your situation may be frighteningly similar to what is discussed, yet completely different.

There are many more of us who have also survived and shared their stories. There are countless resources available to help you rediscover joy, freedom and peace.

You deserve to be loved.