

## **HEATHER'S STORY**

Where does one start to tell you their experiences in life? I guess it's best to start at the beginning.

I came from a home where the father dominated the home. Where children feared their parents but did not respect them or feel love from their parents. My home consisted of a total of 7 children and our 2 parents. We came from a home where there was physical abuse just not towards our mom but towards most of the children. There was also incest in our family; my oldest brother had molested not only me but one of my younger sisters and my youngest brother. Our home on the whole was unhappy and most times very stressful.

At the age of 16 I became engaged and was married by the time I was 17 years old. No one I knew attended my wedding as my now husband did not wish anyone that we knew to be around. As you might guess my husband was abusive on all levels. At the time I thought I could change my husband's behavior because he also came from a very abusive family. At 17 my idea was if I love him enough, take care of him enough, listen enough then I can change how he views the world and change all of the hurt that he has so far encountered in his past. I was invincible and strong and I would change him. How very naive I was at that age.

The next four years was unbelievably abusive. I still remember the first time he hit me. We were into our 6 months of marriage and we were just leaving my sisters and brother in laws place. (My sister and I married brothers). Wayne and I were just starting to walk home and I don't even remember what happened but he slapped me across the face. I started to cry and ran back to my sister's place.

From that point on I knew only fear. Every time my husband drank I was extremely afraid of what he might do. I got real good at pretending to be asleep when he came home from the bar. I would lie on the bed, I could hear the key turn in the lock and the door open. My heart was racing so hard I thought that he would hear it pounding and then he would know that I wasn't really sleeping. I had to keep my breathing normal and once in a while make a snoring sound; sometimes he would bend over my face and stare at me while I was asleep. I just kept praying please don't let him find out I am only pretending. In my mind I was thinking oh my god; oh my god please let him fall asleep. The whole time this is racing through my mind I had to keep my breathing normal and regular so he wouldn't find out. Those were the most stressful times of all was the waiting for him to come home drunk, angry and ready for a fight, and then the agonizing wait for him to fall asleep. . Sometimes he would go to sleep right away and other times it seemed like hours even though it was probably just minutes. I would wait and listen for his even breathing. I could take a deep breath and start to relax and get some sleep. I had survived another night.

I don't remember a lot from the four years I was with him. I do remember things that did happen but not on a daily basis.

I don't know if this was a survival mechanism that the body and mind uses for a person to cope and survive, but it did work for me at the time. Now I don't know if it was such a

good thing after all as all that anxiety, stress turned into anxiety attacks much later on in my life. I talk about it when I do Information sessions about Domestic Relationships to agencies, schools and community groups and tell them what happened to me. It has always felt like I was talking about someone else or even to myself it sounded like something from the TV. It never felt real that this did really happen to me and if it didn't feel real to me how could other people believe me. But I know that it did happen and writing this chapter of my life has made it feel real and I needed to see it on paper for myself. This is not a story because most stories are fictional and this was real.

By the time I was nineteen I became pregnant for the second time, the first pregnancy was medically terminated. When I was about seven months pregnant my husband came home from the bar as usual, woke me up this time which was not usual. When I turned on the lights Wayne had blood all over his shirt and pants. My first thought was that he had been fighting in the bar. Wayne stated "I killed a stripper" at first I thought that he was just trying to scare me. He told me that he had shimmied across wires to her window and came in and killed her. Then he took off his clothes and had a shower while I through his clothes down the incinerator as I was told by Wayne to do. Wayne then went to bed and fell immediately to sleep. I didn't really believe he had done it because even though he could be violent he would never go that far.

This happened on a Saturday night and I just had to wait for the paper on Monday to see if there was anything in the paper. It was agonizing, looking back I think I did know that he had done it but with the circumstances me being pregnant I didn't want to believe. On Monday morning we got the paper and on the front page was an article that stated that one of the performers at the hotel had died. It went on to state that they felt it was an accident as the person had a history of having seizures and that she had fallen. When I read the article I knew it was true. How else would he know that she had died? You also have to realize that Wayne was extremely smart and I knew then at that moment it was true.

Yes I stayed. What made me stay was the terror, the overwhelming terror that if I crossed him maybe he would kill me too. If I stayed and became non threatening to him maybe he would leave me alone. Later I had my first child; Glen was a very unhappy baby and sick for most of his first year of his life. Looking back I can imagine what the stress and what I was going through had on him not only once he was born but while I carried him.

When Glen was a few months old my parents and my sister came to visit us. My dad and Wayne went out drinking and later on Dad came home by himself. I knew this was not a good sign. I made up the beds for my family and went to bed. Later on that night Wayne came home. Extremely angry, wanting my family to leave, I pleaded with him to let my parents stay the night and they could go home in the morning as it was a six or so hour drive. Wayne became angrier. He grabbed a butcher knife and held it to my throat and told my parents to leave "Now" in the middle of the night. They left in a hurry and I just kept telling them to leave, hurry up and leave. I had my son Glen in my arms with him over my right shoulder; Wayne had his arm with the knife in it around me and my son. I truly believed that he would have killed me if my family did not leave.

After they left Wayne went to bed. I kept praying that they had called the police but they never did.

Another incident was on a weekend me and my baby were at home. Wayne came home in a rage and wanted money. I told him I didn't have any. He stormed out of the house and I assumed he went back to the bar. I grabbed my son and went to the police station. I waited for hours. The police knew Wayne very well and they were keeping an eye out for him. I was listening to the police monitor as they kept me in an office. Wayne had been seen going through the mall with something under his coat. I told the officer it is probably a knife that he would be very angry that I was not at home. They were finally able to arrest him and put him in jail.

When I had a chance I left and stayed with some people for a while. Wayne found me and convinced me to come back. I was still so scared. I cannot describe the feeling as words such as fear, afraid or scared are to mild. What I was living was truly a nightmare. During the whole time after the baby was born, Wayne would always steal any money I had. I remember having to go to my neighbors and beg for food not for my self but my child. How degrading that was. I felt so ashamed that I could not get out but there was absolutely nowhere for me and my baby to go that would be absolutely safe.

While writing my history about that night, my stomach started churning and the old feelings come back. Even after thirty three years and even knowing that he is now dead still does not dull the immediate reactions and feelings, they will always be with me. When my son was about eight months old I voluntarily put him with Children's Aide in Ontario. Because of my situation the only true way of protecting my child was to put him out of harms way. For many people that might seem extreme but I was living in an extreme situation. Glen stayed with the foster parents for 8 months. In that time Wayne had been in and out of mental institutes and all deemed him ready to be released. I can remember one time the psychiatrist asked me what I thought. I told him that Wayne was manipulating, extremely smart and is saying all the things that they want to hear him say and responded.

Throughout the four years I tried a number of times to leave, there were no women shelters then. I had to depend on strangers to provide me shelter, even then I did not feel comfortable because I was not only afraid for myself and child but for their safety as well.

I felt utterly alone. I didn't know what to do. I just kept waiting on a daily basis for him to come home and the whole routine would begin again. I remember waiting in the living room and watching out the window. My whole body at times would shake so badly and my teeth would chatter anticipating what will happen tonight. I can remember praying on a daily basis for him to die. I just wanted him to go away and never come back.

Near the end of our relationship he went to London in Ontario, we lived in Stratford, Ontario for all of the relationship. He was arrested and put in to the mental institute in London. When he was in the institute it was the only time I ever felt safe. I didn't turn to family as he said he would kill them and by now I knew he would. He isolated me with fear from everyone I knew. I had no friends, relatives or any of his family to turn to as they were also very afraid of Wayne. The only help I ever received was from Wayne's probation officer, Mr. Bonsteel.

While Wayne was in London I started working at a Youth Hostel as a cook. One day a detective came to see me. He asked me about the striper. I told him what Wayne had

told me and what had happened that night. He said that Wayne had told them that he had killed her but how he got into her room was impossible. I told him no, if anyone could do it Wayne could. Wayne was never charged for that murder.

I then met some people who were from Red Deer, Alberta. My son and me hopped on a bus and came to Red Deer to start over. It took us five days to get here; we had no money or a place to stay.

The first five or six years were really rough for me and Glen. I was extremely bitter, angry and unwilling to let any one have control over me. I drank a lot the first couple of years and did some drugs. It took quite a while for me to get settled down again. Years later I received a call from my mom and she said that our neighbor told her that Wayne had been looking for me. My parents weren't home at the time. My parent's were also told by the local police to shoot Wayne on sight if he did not leave the property. Wayne was a murderer with out a conscience.

Three days later Wayne was arrested for the murder of a man in a bar. He had stabbed this man a number of times in front of several witnesses. When my sister called to let me know all I could think of was it could have been me. Oh, my god he was looking for me three days earlier. If I had been in Ontario it could have easily been me. Wayne was sentenced and was deemed criminally insane. He was transferred to the criminally insane institute in Ontario, called Penatanguishene.

He stayed there for a number of years. My sister called me and told me that they were closing the institute and that Wayne would be transferred to a normal jail. I was extremely upset that this was happening. A few months later my sister called again to tell me that Wayne had escaped as they had put him on work duty and he did not return to jail. What he had done was go to his parents place in Smith Falls and beat his mom up severely and he stabbed his dad in the jugular vein. Wayne then proceeded to open a beer and calmly call the police and told them what he had done. Wayne's dad nearly bled to death and both parents did survive this attack. After this incident they decided to reopen Penatanguishene. I was so relieved that they had done this.

Wayne died about 8 years ago of cancer.

I can honestly say when my sister called to let me know of his death, it was the first day I had felt honestly and truly safe. I can say that I was relieved that he was gone, but what surprised me the most was that I cried for him. For all the things that he missed, his son, his life, joy and happiness. I cried for the life that his father gave him which was cruelty beyond belief. All types of abuse that he endured during his young life when children are suppose to have fun and be children. I felt compassion for him. But I could not feel sorry that he had passed away as it truly meant that I was safe, my family and children were safe.

After I came to Red Deer in 1974 and even still today, I have nightmares of Wayne coming after me with a knife. The dreams are different but he has always had a butcher knife. I would wake up absolutely terrified, heart pounding, breathing rapid and sweating. Even after Wayne died I still continue once in a while to have nightmares of him trying to kill me. When I wake up I know logically that it was a nightmare but I cannot stop myself from checking the doors. I then it takes time for me to calm down and return back to sleep. Sometimes it's it will take hours for this to happen.

In July of 1981 I got remarried. My second husband was not physically abusive but he was abusive on other levels. I was with him for 10 years as I did not want to be a single parent again. He tended to do everything for others and neglect his family. I knew that he did pot and some other drugs but did not realize that he was shooting up as well. I did not know this until many years after we were divorced. There were a lot of little things that I did not pick up on or maybe did not want to pick up on so I ignored the warning signs. One incident that I do remember was one winter I went to my works Christmas party. Only people who worked there were allowed to attend. I went down to start my car and it wouldn't start. I was very frustrated I also knew he did not want me to go to the party. So I had enough money to get a cab to work and my husband was suppose to pick me up two hours later as he said he would probably be able to fix it. So I went to the party and I waited. I waited for two hours after the specified time. So I decided I would walk home. It was cold out and I walked from Michener all the way to the apartment which was right across the street from where the Advocate is now. He was not home so I waited in the hall till he got home. I learnt many years later that he had pulled some wires of the distributor so that was why it would not start. My husband liked to play mind games. He also use to think it was funny to touch my breast when we had company even though I would tell him to stop. I left him in 1988 and went to the shelter in Red Deer. I have since had one long term relationship for about 18 months.

When you have chosen to abusive men you start to doubt your ability to choose wisely. I just quit looking. The one thing I do pride myself on was that I never verbally bashed my husband in front of the children. As they grew older the observed their dads behavior and made their own decision about him. They have very little to do with him. My husband is now unemployed and living on the streets. He has a drug and gambling addiction. He also has some mental health issues that he refuses to deal with.

Some people say that abuse does not affect children short term or long term but I totally disagree. In my family 6 out of 7 children were in more than one abusive marriage or long term relationship. My sons have been affected by my second marriage and vow never to be like their dad. I could probably write many pages about my relationships if I could remember the past. I remember very little about my childhood, my first marriage and also my second. I guess the soul, mind and heart can only bear so much at a time. I have nothing profound to say except there is hope and we do endure and we do survive if we are lucky.

Heather