

Women Are Safe, Inc.

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A New Me

I grew up in a home with a mother who had a mental disease. My father could not cope with her illness. He was in the military. Therefore, he would often take assignments away from home. I felt unloved and unwanted. It was a long time before I knew what “being in love” or “being loved” meant. As a result I was involved in several abusive relationships. My self-esteem dissolved away with each broken marriage.

In 1975, I was twenty years old, pregnant and married to a man who would often hit me. It did not matter to him that I was carrying his child. There weren't any shelters or counselors for victims back then. I did leave a few times. One time he found me and threatened to kill my relatives who let me stay with them. I believed his threat. He had a gun and a lot of bullets lying in the front seat of his car. Another time, after a fight, his sister took me to the Sheriff's office. He gave me directions to a lady he knew who would take in battered women. She had several teenage children. I was afraid to stay there. I was afraid he would find me and hurt these innocent people. We divorced after the baby was born. I would eventually remarry two more times to abusive men.

It wasn't until 1998, when I was in my last abusive marriage, that I saw the “Women Are Safe” advertisement in the Dickson Herald. I was so ashamed that I was in this situation again. I knew I needed help. I was comforted to know that there was help for people like me. It was several months later that I called that number. I was tired of being abused and seeing my children mistreated. I was at the sheriff's office when I dialed the number for the first time. I had to leave before my call was returned by “Women Are Safe”. I was told I had to go right then, if I wanted to get any of our clothing.

I called the number again the next day. I talked to a real nice lady, Dovie, who convinced me to come to a support group meeting that week. I was finally ready for help. I went to those meetings faithfully for about a year. All of the counselors, Dovie, Rhoni and W.A.S. volunteer, Jerrill, taught me many valuable lessons. They taught me about the warning signs of abuse, the cycle of abuse, having a safety plan, the mindset of an abuser and victim and what is the signs of a good relationship. They also listened to me. I felt they truly cared about my well-being.

My sons also attended the support group meetings for children. They really liked their counselor, Korie. She is wonderful with children. She taught them about how to protect themselves from abuse and helped them conquer their fears, frustration and anger.

Rhoni and Jerrill stood by my side whenever I went to court. They explained the court proceedings, legal terminology, orders of protection and restraining orders. I do not think I could have gone to court without them. I was so afraid. They were a great blessing to me.

A young lady, in her twenties, started coming to the meetings. Some of the stories she was telling was a lot like my own. I was thinking what a shame. She is so young. Then I realized my

own shame. I was forty-three years old and still living the stories she was telling. What would my life and my children's life be like if there was help in 1975?

When I was purposed to in 2000 I knew I met the right man. I knew it based on everything that I was taught by the counselors at "Women Are Safe" and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. **4** *Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited;* **5** *does not act improperly; is not selfish; is not provoked; does not keep a record of wrongs;* **6** *finds no joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth;* **7** *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* I have finally discovered what "being in love" or "being loved" means. The wonderful part is I am now experiencing the act of being loved and of loving others the way love should be.

One of the most greatest rewards of heeding to lessons well taught was hearing my youngest son say, "I know what having a father is like now" and that my other son was able to experience a peaceful family life before he passed away last year.

I appreciate all of you at "Woman Are Safe" for your help in creating the "new me!"