



“My Story” by Martha

I was 18 years old, had just graduated high school and started college; very excited about my future. A few weeks into college, I met Mike.

For several weeks he would come by to say hi and hang out; we spent time getting to know each other and he seemed kind, caring and thoughtful. One evening I was at a party, had a few too many drinks and twisted my ankle. Mike helped me back to my dorm, into my bed and locked the door, pushing the key under the door; when I woke in the morning all I could think was that no man had ever been so kind.

A few months later, just after Christmas, he asked me to marry him. I was so excited; I couldn't believe that I was at college studying for a career I was passionate about and found an amazing man who was going to be my husband.

I don't remember how the abuse started; I don't even remember the first time. I remember thinking that this behavior didn't match the person I fell in love with months earlier. It was small things like a raised voice, a negative comment “how could you be so stupid” followed by a laugh. Within two years the physical and verbal abuse occurred weekly.

One Thanksgiving in college, we decided not to go home for break, I invited some of our local friends and made a duck. I had never made duck before, so it didn't turn out that well. Mike was so upset with me that he twisted my arm behind my back and shoved me into the wall, all while our friends were in the living room. A few months later we were laying on the couch in his dorm watching TV, I had no idea then or now what made him mad, but he jumped up, grabbed my shoulders and slammed me onto the cement floor banging my head. That was the first real aggressive behavior. The look on my face must have said it all because he started to cry and tell me how sorry he was, how he just snapped and didn't mean to hurt me. He promised he would never do anything like that again. But he did.

Two years later, 1992, we graduated from college and were married in a big church wedding with over 150 guests. I remember thinking “what am I doing, I can't marry this guy, but how do you stop a snowball that has been growing for two years?” So I went through with the wedding.

Two weeks later we were living in our apartment in Colorado. I had accepted a job as an assistant manager at a resort, my dream job. Mike was not able to find a job for months and that made things so much worse. He was always in a bad mood, blamed me for everything and of course that was followed by abuse. Mike's choice of abuse was very strategic, he slammed my back into the kitchen counter; it hurt horrible and didn't leave any bruises. He

also was very slow and methodical with his verbal abuse and pulling me away from my friends. Little by little the verbal abuse would become worse. Like I said it started with little comments like “how could you be so stupid” and grew to “you are fat and ugly and lucky I decided to marry you, no one would ever want you”. Those words actually were harder to get over than the physical abuse.

Finally we found him a job at a an large retail store but the abuse continued weekly and then I found out he was having an affair with a 16 year old cashier he worked with. I was so shocked and had no idea what to do. Mike had pulled me away from the friends and we had no family in the area. I tried to talk to Mike, not letting him know that I knew about the affair, but nothing worked. So one day I packed up my car and drove back to MN. I had left Mike a letter that I knew about the affair and was leaving him. During the summer of 1993 I lived in MN while my abusive husband continued to date the 16 year old back in Colorado; He never reached out to me once.

In August, I was working at a hotel, looked up and there was Mike, standing in front of me. He had taken a management job at a retail store nearby and wanted to start over, start fresh. I didn't believe any of it, so I didn't move up there with him; not right away anyway. Over the next two months he would drive down to see me, or I would drive up to see him. You may ask why I would even consider giving him a chance, but I stood in front of 150 people and God and said for better or worse. So, I gave my marriage another shot. In October 1993 I moved up and found a job at a hotel. Mike wasn't physically abusive but was very insecure and always asking me who I met at work. His insecurity grew and he started demanding that I go straight to work and straight home.

One evening, in November, a college friend, who worked at a hotel close to the one I worked at asked if we could catch dinner together; after asking Mike for approval I met her for dinner. I had such a nice time catching up with her and how life had been different than when in college. I came home happy. Until I walked in the door. Mike was very upset and crying. He started yelling asking where I had been, who I was with. He told me that my friend had called asking where I was, that I had never showed at the restaurant. I yelled back, that we should call her right now and she will tell him. Of course, he didn't want to do that. Instead, I was thrown from wall to wall, pushed on the floor. He took my shoulders and repeatedly slammed me against the floor. When he was done, I got up, walked to the bedroom and stood there. What the hell was going on, I should have known this would happen, I shouldn't have gone out to dinner, I should have just come home. I started putting on my PJ's but Mike came back grabbed me by my hair and dragged me down the hallway, naked. He had forgotten to slam my back into the kitchen counter. When he was done, he went into the bathroom and turned on the shower. That was my moment; I grabbed my clothes off the bed, my keys and purse and ran for the car. He must have heard me because when I backed up the car, he was banging on the car window. I sped away and didn't look back. For a week I lived in a hotel under a different name. I took a few days off work, saying I was sick. Then I started feeling sick, my boobs were sore, and my urine was bright yellow.

I was pregnant. What in God's name am I supposed to do with a baby? I was 23 years old, in a hotel under a different name, having just been beaten by my husband. I went into work the next day and spoke to my boss. He agreed to allow me to live at the hotel I worked at so that they could keep me safe and I could fill in when others couldn't make it to work. (In Minneapolis during winter, its normal for the roads to get so bad that people can't make it to work). I agreed. When I wasn't working, I tried to figure out what I was going to do. Mike would call, text, and even come by the hotel; Begging me to forgive him, bringing me gifts and asking for forgiveness. Until now we had kept all the abuse from our parents, but now they were aware of the abuse; his parents tried to get me to give him another chance and that they would make sure he went to counseling. My parents told me they would support whatever I chose to do.

One day I received a letter from my grandparents; my mom had told them what was going on and they were worried. They wrote that marriage is very hard, life isn't always easy and that no matter what I decided to do they would support me. They sent me a check for \$500 and told me to use it for whatever I needed. I cried. I cried and cried and cried. The next day I called Mike and told him that I would meet him for lunch at a restaurant close to his job. I told him I was pregnant and that if he wanted to be part of his child's life, he would get counseling and NEVER abuse me again. He agreed and a few days later I moved back to our apartment. The physical abuse had stopped but the verbal abuse did not. He made many comments that I was getting fat, eating too much, and looking horrible; I gained about 15 pounds with my pregnancy. 15 pounds! He also gave me "crabs". Yep, he was having another affair. I don't even know with who, I didn't care, he was leaving me alone.

On June 26, 1994 my beautiful daughter was born. She was perfect.

During the next year we moved twice as Mike moved up the management ladder of the retail chain; our last move was from Ohio to Illinois. He was promoted to a store manager at the store in Illinois. His father had passed away, but his family lived nearby and owned several farms in the area so we could live in one of the houses free, save money and pay off the credit card debt that Mike had put us in over the year. The physical abuse had not returned, but the verbal abuse, manipulation and control had continued. I was not allowed friends as my purpose in life was to work and take care of our child and the house. During that year, he also started throwing things and breaking things that were important to me. He also started "gaslighting" me. Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse where a person makes you question your sanity, perception, or memory. It makes a person feel confused, anxious and unable to trust themselves.

One evening in March of 1996, I was sitting at home, my daughter in bed sleeping, and I knew something was off. I had that feeling in my gut that something was going on with Mike and someone else. I had caught him many times in the backyard talking on the phone, but he told me he was looking for the cat. I noticed he had left his briefcase home, so I opened it. There were letters from a girl (who I had met) from work. The letters talked about their love for each other, how much she loves that he compliments her, how special he makes her feel and how

she couldn't wait for them to get rid of me and raise my daughter. I was numb, absolutely numb.

I called the store and she answered the phone. I started to yell and scream at her, but she put Mike on the phone right away. He told me to calm down and that he could explain everything. I told him I didn't care and that he shouldn't come home. But he did. I was asleep but he grabbed me out of bed, yelled at me about how I embarrassed him, how I had misunderstood all of it, how it was a joke that he and the other managers were playing on her because she was very overweight and ugly. The physical abuse started again that night.

A few weeks later I was doing laundry and found condom wrappers in his pocket. The next day I asked him if we could start counseling again, he agreed. Man was he good, he even convinced the therapist that I was the paranoid one, that I planted the condom wrappers that I was stalking the girl at work. My homework was to start trusting and stop making things up or finding issues with our marriage. In May, while doing laundry, I found a receipt for jewelry. Instead of accusing him, I asked him about it when he returned from work. He was very upset and said, "now you have ruined your mother's day gift, because you are always so nosey and causing problems". I felt horrible, he was trying to do something nice for me and I found the receipt and ruined it. On mother's day I received a beautiful ruby ring and necklace. Except that the ruby in the necklace was not the same as the ruby in the ring, completely different clarity, size, and design. He could tell I noticed and said, "and before you ask and cause problems, the ring I bought wasn't the right size but they didn't have one in your size so I bought a different one." Hmm, ok maybe, but doesn't seem right, but I didn't want to cause problems. A few months later I was in the jewelry store to have my wedding ring cleaned and they commented that I had one of their exclusive designer rings. I was very confused, because the receipt was not from there, it was from another jewelry store. Mike had lied, he had not bought that ring and necklace for me but instead had to buy the ring to cover up for what he had bought for the other girl. I confronted him about it in counseling and for the first time the therapist saw what he was like. He admitted that he had bought the ring and necklace for the other girl, that he was having sex with her but that he would break it off. He begged for forgiveness, agreed to weekly one on one therapy with this counselor if I would not leave him. I agreed.

The physical abuse never stopped. One evening, I had not vacuumed (as was required every night before I went to bed) so when he came home, he dragged me out of bed, yelling and screaming that I needed to vacuum, that the house was a mess and that wasn't good for our daughter. I had not been feeling well and when I told him that, he picked me up and threw me across the living room. I hit the wall and fell on to the couch. "Daddy, no, stop. Why are you hurting mommy"? was the next thing I heard. Our yelling had woken our year and a half old daughter.

I don't know if I had a nervous breakdown or not; but if I didn't, I don't want to know what one is like. For over a week, I laid in bed; numb, crying or sleeping, Mike slept on the couch. I didn't go to work, I didn't take care of my daughter, I couldn't even take care of myself. Mike had to help me to the shower, give me a shower and get me back to bed, take care of our

daughter and cook meals. Then, one day, I woke up a whole other person. I had decided there is absolutely no way I was going to raise my daughter thinking this is what a family is like that a woman should put up with being treated and abused like this. I spoke to my minister because I was having a hard time with the “for better or worse”, but the minister assured me that God never meant for this kind of worse. She assured me that Mike broke our vows many times by his mistreatment and multiple affairs and that God understands and doesn't want me to live like this.

I asked Mike to move out, which resulted in a computer chair being thrown at me and him yelling he will never move out. A week later I asked him to move out again, which resulted in many pairs of shoes being thrown at me. Two days later I called his mom, I told her that she has known but ignored that her son has been abusing me for many years and that if she didn't want me to call the police, she needed to convince her son to move out; she agreed. I put his stuff on the front porch and changed the locks. A month later she died of a heart attack and my nightmare began. Mike was now my landlord.

For the next four months, my daughter and I endured nights with Mike banging on the walls or windows of our home, yelling threats and scaring us both. He told me I will never survive without him, that I was too stupid and incompetent to raise our daughter. I lived on pins and needles as I wondered what I would come home to each evening after picking my daughter up at daycare. One day, I received a call on my cell phone from Mike. He had picked our daughter up at daycare and was driving around the area at high speeds and threatening that he was going to kill our daughter and himself in a car accident. For hours I pleaded with him as I drove from work back home to try and find him. Luckily, it ended with Mike returning her to me. The next day I started looking for an apartment closer to work and about 40 miles away from the farmhouse. I also filed a restraining order.

Easter weekend of 1997, with the help of some new friends, I moved my daughter and myself out of that farmhouse to a new life. A life that had hope and happiness. There were still months of stress and anxiety but my daughter and I were safe. My daughter is now 26 years old, married and going to school for nursing. I am 51, living in Florida, happy, healthy and a strong, independent woman. I proved him wrong!



Do you have a story you want to share that would help others understand they are not alone? That there is hope and a place to go to that will offer a safe haven, and help? Please email us at info@sunrisepasco.org.

Do you want to make an impact by offering your help? [Please click here!](https://www.sunrisepasco.org/give-help) (<https://www.sunrisepasco.org/give-help>)

For resources or shelter, please call the hotline at 352-521-3120. Anytime. Day or Night.