

ANONYMOUS

I have been living in the Boyle Heights area for over 40 years. Before leaving for the U.S. Army as an active-duty soldier, I called this home. I left here in early spring 1993 and I didn't return permanently until September 2011.

I was married already when I first joined [the Army] and I had my oldest of all my children, my daughter, and the second one, my son, was on the way. I had to wait a period of time for my family to move over there with me. Overseas, my son got sick with the flu, and he ended up in the hospital and almost died. After he came out of the hospital, he continued to be looked after as much as possible and that's when [the Army] decided they had no way to care for him in Germany. They had to send me back to the States. I got injured when I was stationed in Washington State. My service-connected injuries got the best of me, and I couldn't keep working anymore by the Army standards. I had my other three children with my ex-wife after being discharged from the Army.

'I was injured, a single parent and homeless.'

[When my two oldest children were teenagers], my ex-wife met a new friend. And we all established a friendship for a good period of time. We were getting along really good. But then [my ex-wife and I] had rough times. We ended up having to leave the place we were living because of financial issues, and we ended up staying at this friend's home. After a while living with our friend, things started to unravel.

My ex-wife left out of the blue. She left by herself, and she left our children with me, so I became a single father. I was homeless with five children. This apparent friend was nothing but trouble. We really didn't get to know her until my ex left and that's when the whole domestic violence situation for me and my children started. I did not have the means to move out, so what was I supposed to do? I was injured, a single parent and homeless.

'It was a nightmare.'

It started with words, followed with sporadic physical abuse, and then escalated to where I almost lost my legs. I still have leg injuries that have not healed, and I don't know if they will ever heal. It was rare, the day I would not get physically attacked. I have scars from head to toe. The scars on my lower extremities are about a footlong on one. They're about five to six inches in width. I'm having blood circulation issues

there. The other day I was walking and suddenly I did not feel my left leg at all. I felt as if I was walking with only one leg.

As a disabled veteran, I was getting financial support, but it was all taken by this friend. Because my credit was terrible, I did not have the means to apply for any bank account or for any place of my own even if it was rented. [The abuse was happening] in front of my kids. But the brunt of it, I took so [my kids] would not get it. I don't want anybody, especially men, to go through what I went through. As men, we are taught to be strong and protect our families and be the support of the whole society structure. But who's protecting us? Nobody's protecting us.

My oldest daughter, she had to escape from that environment. She was almost 18. We were so relieved, but inside I was crying. For a long time, I didn't know her whereabouts, how she was doing, where she was, if she was okay. I was just hoping and praying that she would be okay and in a better place than this environment.

[The abuse continued] for about three years, approximately. It got to a point where the schools my children were attending got to see not only my children's injuries, but mine too. To say that it was a nightmare is a huge, huge, huge understatement. I tried to [leave] and find a shelter for our family, and every single one of the ones I called said, "We don't have anything available for a male adult with children. We're full right now." I would tell them, "Look, I have no means of getting my own place. I'm a veteran, a disabled veteran with children and one of them has special needs." And all I would get is, "Sorry, we can't help you."

I did the best I could.'

The day I had to go to the hospital again, after multitude times when I could not stand the injuries in my legs anymore, they had to perform emergency surgeries on both my lower extremities. They told me, "If you had come in an hour or even a day later, we would have had to cut off your lower extremities." None of this was known to my family. I did not want my mother and my siblings to know anything about this because my mother was already in fragile health, and I did not have the support of my siblings at all. I did the best I could. I was in the hospital from these injuries about 90 days.

A couple of months later, [my abuser] in one of her fury fits grabbed a bottle of cough syrup and she hit me with part of the bottle right into my eye socket. That's when I lost my vision in my left eye. I opened the refrigerator looking for something, and as I was bent over to grab something, she hit me. I thought at first, it was tears, but then I [touched my eye]. When I saw the blood, I said, "Holy S—t."

The same day, I still had to go with her and drop her two daughters at school. When I returned, I was trying to eat something, that's when I went into shock and the ambulance had to be called. I started

shaking. I wasn't able to eat, and I collapsed on the table. That's when she realized it was more serious than she had expected. They had to do emergency surgery. I had my retina completely shattered and there was no way they could do anything to save the sight in my eye.

I never reported [the abuse] because I thought, *if I file a report what am I going to do if I am homeless?* I already knew there were no shelters of any kind for a father with young children. I even went to churches to see if they had any shelter-type of housing. On top of that, she coerced me. Several times Child Protective Services went to her home, and she intimidated me and my children. She said that if they said anything about what was going on that they would get harmed. What was I supposed to do? I thought, *at least they had a roof over their shoulders.* Do you know how rough winter season is in Washington State? She got her punishment. When she least expected it, she got a knock on the door, and it was the police. She was recuperating from her own surgery so there was no way she was able to try to avoid or to stop being arrested. Now she's serving a lifetime sentence. After she was detained, I was homeless, and my children were taken away from me.

I thought of committing suicide.'

I remember how hard it was. I was again homeless. I did not have my children. I did not wish this on them. I had no money. It was so bad I thought of committing suicide. I [told police], "You know what, before I do something stupid, please take me to the VA Medical Center." I made it to the mental health clinic there for evaluation and observation. I was there until my mother and my oldest sister went to pick me up and I came back to LA. I couldn't have done it on my own. I was so weak, so tired. I was only about 130 pounds. I was skin and bones.

The kids were assigned to foster homes, all separated except for the two youngest. I had to rebuild my own health to ascertain work and get close to a somewhat normal state, but now I had my children all spread in different homes. I had to also deal with my own situation now that I was back home under my mother's roof and having to deal with my siblings.

The kids were in the foster system for about a year or two until my ex-wife got custody of them. She knew exactly what she was doing. She gave a fake address to have me notified of the child custody proceedings and everything that was involved. I checked to see the address of where I supposedly got a notification – that address does not exist. I couldn't even go to the hearings for custody because of my health condition.

I kept thinking [about her], *okay, you supposedly care about your children. You're fighting for them, but you didn't stay to look after them? Or help me get our own place to be a family unit?* Somebody explain to me the congruence of that because I have never been able to find it. I tried to fight to get partial custody of my

children, but the system was rigged in the mother's favor. I started thinking, *okay, their mother wants to have them. Fine. I'm not going to fight anymore.* I did not have the health nor the strength to keep fighting for my children. So, I allowed her to have our children. I did everything the county asked me to do. I was fighting on three fronts: for my children, trying to recoup my health to a decent state, and then my own situation now that I was living with my mother and my siblings not being too fond of the idea of me being back.

'The scars from mental and emotional pain are worse than the physical ones.'

I realize now that I should have said something [about the abuse]. But I was afraid that I would lose my children forever. I had already lost my family once growing up. Growing up my father suffered [from] alcoholism. That's what prompted my mother to pack up our belongings and the three youngest children, and that's how we moved [to LA] from Mexico. I never saw my dad again because he passed away three years after we moved here. Not only did I have to endure [his alcoholism] when we were still living in Mexico, but after we arrived here, my mother became a single parent. I had to become the father figure for the youngest [siblings] because I was the one taking care of them. I was only 13 when I started doing that. I was 26 when I joined the military. That's why I wanted to go, that's one of the reasons that prompted me to join the service, because I didn't have financial stability.

I'll tell you what got me through. Foremost, my faith in God. Second, because I had the white heat of persistence. I don't want to give my children any graver suffering and pain than what they have already endured. Unfortunately, I wish I could say that it was getting better, but they still have issues to deal with, not only from what they went through with the domestic violence, but also from the aftermath. Sometimes the scars from mental and emotional pain are worse than the physical ones.

How do you teach county workers how to deal with men's issues? 'There is zero education for county workers on domestic violence against men. Heck, it's not even thought of. I haven't seen or heard of resources for domestic violence for men experiencing what I went through. We are mocked, laughed at, made fun of. That's why I'm here today.

It's not only about me, but also about you. It's about your children, your family, your uncles, brothers-in-law – it's about everybody. If we don't have the necessary resources for men, what will happen? It's about every single person. No matter the age, no matter the gender, no matter their sexual orientation, social and economic status. We are all connected and if one gets hurt one way or another, we all suffer. And that's what my point has been all the time. In unity, things get better for everybody, not just for a few.

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