

CATHERINE CLARK PERKINS

My name is Catherine Clark Perkins. I've been in Los Angeles, California for 54 years. Always South Central, Los Angeles in the Crenshaw district. 37th Street, that's where I grew up.

I'm looking for love in all the wrong places.'

I was raised by my teenage mom and my father. My mom was a Christian and my father, the alcoholic. [I'm] the middle child and only girl. I'm very familiar with violence...[my] dad's partying and drinking. We went over to my grandmother's and my dad was laying up in a room with a woman. My mom got upset. It was physical. But it wasn't like a hit punch, he tried to grab the chain off her neck. My mother always believed "never get a divorce, never leave." I think that's why I stayed and put up with so much.

I was sexually assaulted as a little girl. Our adult neighbor, I was sitting on his lap and his penis was out. My mom and dad came, and they grabbed me off his lap. I didn't know. I was a little girl. I was 5 or 6. I remember something happened to our car. My mom believed that [the neighbor] damaged our car after he wasn't able to be satisfied from him getting caught with me sitting on his lap. My mom was hysterical, going off because she tried to protect me the best way that she could. But no child therapy or whatever. I know in her mind, she never thought that in broad daylight, kids playing outside, that would happen. We still lived in that apartment complex after. I was a little girl raised around boys, a little girl wanting her father's love. I'm looking for love in all the wrong places.

'Here comes the abuse.'

My brothers, my uncles – they're bad. You're hanging around with gang members, gangsters. Here I am, a little girl looking for love. So here comes the abuse. Here comes the violence. Back in Highschool, I was sexually assaulted a lot of times by teenagers. I was sexually assaulted by a basketball player. Walking home, I remember he was like, "Come on with me in the house." I'm like, "Okay." Next thing I know, he lifted up my dress and sexually assaulted me. I never told anyone. It was shameful. [I was] embarrassed. *What would they say to me about going into a home with him? I could have stayed outside.* Another time, a football player hit me up against the wall. My grandmother told me that I had low self-esteem.

At that age, in that time, when you were growing up in the 70s, in the 80s, you didn't have counselors. The resources that we have now, you didn't have that back then. My brother was dealing with the same thing because my father was an alcoholic [and] my father smoked weed. What role model does he have in the streets? My brother right now is homeless. He's still an alcoholic and it's sad. He won't even go

into a shelter right now. He will not get help. My dad still drinks. My dad is about to be 75 [years old]. It's sad. He loves drinking. My father never knew who his father was. You would think that he would want to be there with [his] kids. You have three beautiful children and all we wanted was love. That's it. My mother gave us love. She took us to church. But still, there's only so much that she could do.

'He tried to kill me.'

I was sexually assaulted at gunpoint. I was in 12th grade at Crenshaw High School. That was the most fearful, scariest. The guy kissed me and I'm like, "What are you doing? I don't like you." He pulled a gun on me. He kidnapped me and he told me, "You run, I'm going to kill you." I was like, *this dude is serious*. He wanted to do it in my car. I was praying seriously, and some home girls came to the window. That was the worst. I couldn't report [it. He knew] where I lived. When I got home, my Auntie Barbara looked at me and said, "You were raped." I said, "How did you know?" She said, "Because it happened to me." I didn't even tell my momma. My Auntie Barbara, my mom's sister. As a kid, She was my babysitter.

My first husband [T] is a gang member. He was my next-door neighbor. My Auntie Barbara set me up with him. When I first got married, I was 20. I think we started dating when I was 18. I started dating T, not knowing that he was going to be abusive. He cheated and when he cheated, he turned into a monster. I can remember to this day when I told him that I was going to leave him, he tried to kill me. He tried to kill me with a knife [and] he made me sleep with him. The doctor said I conceived. My son only lived four years. That was twenty eight years ago. His death certificate says unspecified neuromuscular disease. My son never had a chance. He was born into trauma. That night when T sexually [assaulted] and even tried to kill me, it was horrible. I even went back. That's the crazy part. I've suffered a lot and have a whole resume of items. When my four-year-old son was dying, I called my supervisor, "Look, I got to go to the hospital. My son is sick." She had an attitude on the phone. She felt so bad when I had to call back to say my son passed away.

'Either you're gonna be dead or I'm going to be dead.'

I'm a suicide survivor. That's my third marriage. I had two daughters after my son. That marriage was more DV (domestic violence), intimate partner violence, another cheater. He wasn't physical but he was mental. He was dysfunctional. That's more emotionally draining, worse than the physical. I'm so tired. My daughters are messed up from this marriage. My daughter saw me with a knife, wanting to take their daddy out. Talk about trauma. He felt that I was cheating. My grandmother always said a person that's always

accusing you of doing something means they're doing something. I said, "Look, either you're gonna be dead or I'm going to be dead. I'm tired. I had enough."

I wanted to go spend time for Mother's Day with my mom. I'm like, "You watch the kids. I'm getting ready to go." He pushed me on the bed. I push him back. He broke my cell phone. I'm angry. I get up and I go in the kitchen, and I grabbed the knife. He's like, "Oh, you grab a knife. You've better do something with it." My baby— she's in the tub — sees me and she starts crying. Right now, she's 24 years old and she still remembers Mommy walking around with the knife going to stab her daddy. Right there I said, "It's over. I'm tired. I'm tired of this abuse. I'm tired of this violence. I'm just tired. The marriage been over. I'm leaving." But he told my daughters, "Your mama is leaving y'all." He embedded that in their brain. Even to this day, my daughter's like, "Dad said you left us for another man in prison."

I've told my girls' father, "You have issues and the issues that you're having are your issues. I'm not going to take your issues. Deal with your issues and go get you some help because I'm doing the help that I need for myself and taking accountability." I told my daughter, "I'm sorry that I wasn't there for you growing up because I was grieving the loss of my son. I met your father, and he's a con artist. He manipulated me. Then here you come, and after you're born, six months later, I get pregnant with your sister. Then I'm dealing with postpartum, on top of that, dealing with two kids. Then he's cheating." I'm explaining all these things to her, but you know, she's still a kid. They look at it like, "Mama, I want you. I need you." But I'm not in the right frame of mind because I already lost a child.

My last husband in prison right now. I'm a prison wife. He's a lifer without the possibility of parole. This one right here is the best marriage ever. When he came into my life, he helped save me from the girls' father. He helped save me from that marriage.

It's a broken system.'

When my mother was 18 years old; she was baptized with me in her womb. That right there was a calling on my life. I ask the Lord, "Why did all these things happen to me?" All this violence, a whole rap sheet, being married, babies, just all these things. But with all this, He's never left me. [The Lord] always been there. He never left. After time and time, love was right here within myself. I found the validation, which is self-esteem, self-love, self-forgiveness.

I never knew about resources. That's the other crazy part. They don't tell you about no resources. It's a broken system. It all boils down to a faulty broken system. [My first husband and I] were fine before he went to prison. When he got out, he said that he felt he was obligated to marry me. He told me that 20 years later. He used those words, "I felt obligated to marry you because you waited for me. You took care of

me while I was in there.” I was like, “Wow, that was too much pressure for us. I wish you would have told me that.”

Get out of [a domestic violence situation] with the quickness. Don't stay thinking that the person is going to change or that you can fix the person. That's the key. Staying to think you're going to fix the person, that's not going to happen at all. You might not even make it out alive. That's even with my first husband. If I would have stayed, he would have killed me. The women that feel that they don't have any other choice or that they don't deserve better, they have to take a self-help group. They must get in a group. You have to start somewhere. At least hear the stories there, that will empower you. By showing up there, that will make you stronger and give you the courage to be like, “Hey, I can do this. I can leave.”

I thank God that I survived.'

I'm the LA Chapter Coordinator for Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. The CEO of Catron Academy Learning Institute. CALI does healing and rehabilitation, restorative justice. I facilitate healing circles. It brought me peace and harmony. I love forgiveness and helping a lot of others heal through their journey, through their prison experience and heal through love. It brings me balance. It feels good. I even share with my mom because she's so with the church. I told her, “Mom, you've always taught me spiritual first. There's nothing wrong with spiritual first, but also, you have your compartments – physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional. All those have to be balanced within the person.” I had to go through every last thing that I went through to get to where I'm at. I hope that someone by even hearing my story will get the help that they need. Get some healing.

I still get emotional because there was nothing there for me. I had no help at all. Back then we didn't know, we didn't have the information or the money. They're not talking about it as much as they are now. The language has changed, like domestic violence or intimate partner violence. They didn't have that language back then. They didn't have it at all. There were gangs back then and people were getting shot at. We didn't have therapy at all.

I thank God that I survived. I'm able to breathe and share, not be silent about it. I feel wonderful. Right now, I'm living my best life because I'm totally free. Healed people heal people. That's where I'm at. This is the work that I'm called to do. I know who I am and whose I am. I feel good.

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