

MARYANN KACZMARSKI

My name is MaryAnn Kaczmariski. I've lived in LA County, in Mount Washington, since 1994.

'I did not know what to do.'

I was working in healthcare. There was a project that we were trying to work on related to performance appraisals, performance management, that kind of thing. Somebody in a whole different department decided he would do the project. My boss asked me to review it and give them feedback. The gentleman thought [his project] was fabulous, stellar and that this was going to propel him into some big job in the company. Unfortunately, when I looked at what he had produced, I could see the holes. I could see the missteps. I might not have been gentle enough with the feedback. I don't know. But I gave him some feedback. He looked at me straight in the eye, like he was going to say, "Let's go get coffee." He said to me, "I'd like to slit your throat right now."

I didn't even know what to do. I was a full-grown adult, and I did not know what to do. I waited, then I left. I didn't know if he was going to attack me. I didn't know what was going to happen. I gave it a beat and then got out of his office. I told my boss, and nothing happened. He never apologized; he never acknowledged it. That's pretty extreme – "I want to slit your throat." I don't think that kind of attitude, that kind of response is so unusual, especially when it's a guy and it's a woman giving feedback. This was a few years ago, maybe it's better now. But not much is better now. Violence is not better now. The statistics are not better.

'I looked for help in the phone book.'

I grew up in a violent and abusive household. I was beaten on a regular basis by both my father and my mother. My father used to take his belt off – he called it "the strap" – and he would hit us with the strap. I would be screaming because it hurt and he said to me so many times, "If you don't stop crying, I'll give you something to cry about." I'm thinking, *what do you mean? You're beating the s--t out of me.*

When I was 12, I was taller than my mother. [One time], we were in the living room, which we hardly ever used, and I faced her dead on, and I said, "If you ever hit me again, I will hit you back. You are never going to touch me again." Good for me, except that she then would tell my father stories, things I had done, that I talked back to her. He was on the night shift. He would wake me up when he came home and beat me if she told him that I had talked back to her. She got back at me in ways like that.

I remember the first time I went to somebody's house for a long time. I was sitting on the couch and the whole family is there – the father, the mother, the four kids. I kept waiting for the blow up. I kept

waiting for someone to start screaming and nothing ever happened. It was peaceful and quiet. I was blown away. I thought, *how can this be?* I never had that experience before in a family setting.

I never told teachers. School for me was a whole separate planet. I did well in school. I had good teachers. I had good friends. When I came home, I had to put up with that. I just created a life. I lied to my parents; I would tell them I was staying late to help a teacher do something, but I was staying late to hang out with my friends. We didn't do anything. We didn't smoke. We didn't do drugs. We didn't have sex. We just hung around and had cherry Cokes after school. That's the kind of stuff I did. I got into a pattern of lying to them so I could be a little freer.

I knew when I was a kid that I was a survivor. When I was six years old, my sister was five and the little one was one. I knew that it couldn't be anything we'd done because we were too young. It couldn't be us. It had to be them because we were too young to have done something so bad to be treated that way. When I was 10, I looked for help in the phone book. I was searching for Child Protective Services, but I didn't know how to find it. I thought if I call, someone will help us. I found out as an adult that my whole family, everybody, knew. The extended family, neighbors, every single frickin' person knew that we were being beaten. Everybody knew, but they were all afraid, especially of my father. They were afraid of retaliation from him because he could be wicked.

'I never told anybody.'

[While] I was getting my master's in counseling, there were three incidents, all within less than a year. This was the end where you do your on-site practicum 10 or 12 hours a week then you still had classes to talk about that [work] and to be coached. It started with the practicum supervisor, who was a minister. He's supposed to be my supervisor. He was supposed to talk about cases. He's supposed to help me grow my skills. Instead, it got to a point where I would make up any excuse not to have supervision with him because he would hold me close and snuggle up to me. I'm not snuggling back, but I didn't break away because I was afraid. I just took it. He kept doing it and kept doing it. I didn't stand up to him. I didn't know what to do.

At the same time, my advisor at the university decided he was interested in me. I was not interested in him. The guy I was dating even came to class with me one time so I could introduce my boyfriend. At the end of your term, your advisor is supposed to write you a recommendation. Well, mine was horrible. He wrote me a horrible recommendation and I thought, *that's the cost*.

At the same time, I was seeing an attorney for something, and he called me up and wanted to see me on a Saturday, which should have triggered something but it didn't. I go up to the office, nobody's there. He shuts the door, and he starts telling me how beautiful I am. He starts pulling out *Playboy* magazines and telling me that I'm better looking than the women in those *Playboy* magazines. I said, "I have to go." I must

have said that because he helped me put my coat on and touched me and all that. I was afraid he was going to rape me. We were alone; nobody was there. I went downstairs. My boyfriend was waiting, and he looked at me and said, “What happened? You're white as a ghost.” I told him, “Don't do anything. I'll get away from him. I'll never see him again.” And that's what I did.

The three of them freaked me out because I didn't know how to deal with them. I didn't know how to stand up for myself. I didn't know how to make it stop. I wanted it to not happen. I was in my early 20s. This was in the mid to late '70s. All three happened in a very short time. It was so bizarre. The only people that knew were my friend and my boyfriend. I didn't tell anybody else. I didn't even tell them at the practicum. They wanted me to stay on past the end of my practicum and I never told them why I wouldn't stay. Honestly, I didn't learn anything either. That's the other thing that was so painful for me. That was my opportunity to learn and grow and have better skills. I didn't learn a thing from either one of them.

‘That man is going to kill you.’

I married someone who held it together and could be charming. I didn't know the red flags. I didn't know anything. The first time we had lunch, he only talked about himself. There was a red flag. It was the last 15 minutes of the time we had, he said, “And what do you do?” When I told him what I did, he was stunned because I don't think he expected that kind of background. If he's just into himself and talking about himself, it's not a good sign. Now, that doesn't mean he's going to be violent, but it means he is a little self-centered. He did end up being very violent and abusive. There was physical abuse, sexual abuse, huge financial abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological abuse.

I was the one that worked, and he would spend the money. He never had credit cards, so I put him on my credit cards. He was happy to spend all my money, my savings, everything. I thought for seven years, eight months and 12 days, I had to stay married because I took those vows in church. I kept thinking, *it'll get better. It could get better.* But it never got better. It got worse and worse and worse.

I didn't realize that there was a different way. I was working in healthcare. I went to see one of our psychologists because I was gaining weight. He asked me some questions and he said, “Do you realize you're a battered spouse?” I was like, “What?” He said, “That's what's going on.” I went home and told my [husband] and he said, “Well, did you tell him I'm a battered spouse too?” I said, “No, because you're not.” Then I took a women's studies class. The woman that taught it was fabulous, so I started to see her. She was a psychologist. I told her what was going on, she said, “I want to see him. I want to see the two of you together.” We did that. She interviewed him and then she interviewed both of us. Then she said to me, “I never tell people what to do, but I'm going to tell you what to do. If you do not get out of this relationship, that man is going to kill you.” I burst into tears, and I said, “What do I do? Do I just abandon him?” She said, “Yes, that's exactly what you do.”

'I was trying to do everything I could to be safe.'

After she told me that, I started to pay closer attention to him. I started all the planning to get out. I didn't know about the resources or services. I did call the police for advice, but I never called to report him. This one time, I don't know what he said but I could see in his eyes, that if I said something back, I was going to be in big trouble. I thought, "Oh my God, she might be right." The look was not normal.

I kept my purse with me always. One time, I left it in the living room, and he went through it. I had opened a bank account in my name only. I was in bed asleep; he shoves the door open. He used to kick the doors. We had holes in our doors and our walls because he punched the walls. He shoves the door open, put the light on and said, "What is this? What are you up to? What's going on here?" I was getting my doctorate at the time, so I said to him, "I did that to keep my educational expenses separate from everything else. It's to pay for school." For some reason, he believed me. Then for his birthday –this was about a month before I was getting out – I decorated, and he got mad. He woke up and said, "What's going on here? What's all this noise for?" When he saw it was for his birthday, he was like, "Oh." I had to play the game and I did it. All the while getting him off my credit cards, working with the attorney and working with the psychologist. I did call the police and alarm company. I was trying to do everything I could to be safe.

I contacted the president of our church and told her what I was going to do; I told her what was happening. I told her what the psychologist said. Because I believe in reincarnation I said, "If he's going to kill me, I'd rather stay and let him do it now rather than have to come back and be with him." They got back to me immediately and said, "Get out. This is not a marriage when there's violence. It isn't a marriage and you're not breaking any vows. You need your health." They said, "Get out and don't look back. Your karma is completely paid on this one." That helped me a lot to keep going. It took 3-5 months to finally get rid of him through the courts. He took everything of value out of the house before he left, but he did go. It was the best thing that ever happened to me.

'There's so many of us.'

I didn't even know about shelters. I didn't learn that there were resources out there until I came to LA. They're not coordinated, but there are resources. There are ways to get help. As a volunteer, I'm on two boards. One for Alexandria House here in LA. It's for women and children who are basically homeless because of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. I also volunteer at Hope Gardens, which is out in the Valley. It's a Union Rescue Mission domestic violence shelter program, a three-year program. The women who are in these programs are so inspiring because it's very difficult. They just keep putting one foot in front of the other, day after day.

I started to write a book about my experience to try to help somebody else. I thought, *if I got out, you can get out. Please get out. There's no reason to live like this.* I started doing research. That's how I found out that the World Health Organization says one in three women globally will suffer physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. That doesn't count financial, emotional, psychological, spiritual, digital [abuse]. There's so many of us that have been through it. I joined a writing program and every single time we had our breakout groups and I talked about my book, at least one woman there said that was her experience too.

We need to be able to do something fast. It needs to be responsive. The County could do so much good work. The opportunities are endless. They could sponsor classes at the neighborhood recreation center and educate people and get people out of these situations when they're ready. Really help them to see what's going on. The YWCA in Glendale goes into schools and talks to young girls. They're doing it in elementary school, junior high school, and in high school. They also said they were starting to meet with boys, which they absolutely need to do too. They need to educate them to know that this is not okay. The other thing is to put up posters that say, "If this is happening to you, call now." I want [the County] to educate. I want them to advertise, and I want them to have a number people can call that's responsive, kind and where the people are trained.

'No one else should have to suffer.'

I want women [in an abusive situation] to know that there's hope. I want them to know that it has nothing to do with education; it has nothing to do with social status or economics. It doesn't have anything to do with race, gender, religion – it is an equal opportunity disaster. I call it a pandemic. Intimate partner violence is a pandemic, a global pandemic.

I really want someone who is stuck to know, you are worth so much more than this. You deserve so much better. You do not have to be treated this way. If you want to be with someone in the future, [look for] someone who will treat you with respect, dignity, will honor you, and will treasure you. In the meantime, you don't need to put up with this. You can get out. There are resources to get out. You can create the life that you want.

I was told that I was very unusual because I broke the pattern the first time. I broke the pattern of my parents and then my ex. Now I'm in a really good marriage. That is very unusual; there's usually a pattern of more bad exes. We've got to break that generational pattern. We've got to break the cycle. No one else should have to suffer like this ever.

Recorded at:
Glassell Park,
Los Angeles County, CA
06/28/24
9:00 am

