

## *Lisa's Story*

This is my story...you may read it and wonder about the woman who wrote it. You may wonder who she is and where she lives. Is she the woman sitting next to you in church? Is she the woman laughing in the car with her children? Is she the woman standing next to the man who torments her life, all with a smile on her face?

When I walked through the door at New Leaf Resources, I did not know how it would change my life. All I knew was that the pain I lived in had become too big for me to bear alone anymore. I reached out so I could live again. I had no idea what that would mean.

I had so many butterflies in my stomach that first day. Would they believe me? Would I be safe here? Could they help me? I told my story...

*"I've been married to my husband for almost 10 years. He drinks a little, actually a lot. He won't admit he has a problem. He can be very mean sometimes. When he comes home drunk he's almost crazy with anger towards me. He'll wake me up at 3 am just to yell at me and throw things at me. He doesn't ever really hit me just scares me. I'm not sure this is abuse because it only happens when he's drinking – he never really hits me. (At least I'm not going to tell you that yet, because I'm not really sure you are safe.) He tells me all the time that he doesn't abuse me. I don't know what to do. It's getting really bad and lately my little boy (I have two children) hits me when he gets mad. My husband yells at him for it, but I want to scream at him, "WHY?" He does exactly what you taught him to do. My little girl is so scared of her dad she won't even go to him. It kills me. I don't know what to do. He thinks I'm here to fix our marriage, I don't even know what I can do to make it better."*

That day my eyes were opened, when after my confession, my therapist handed me a sheet. It said, "What is Abuse?" Then it listed physical, emotional, verbal, spiritual, and sexual signs of abuse. I wept as I read what I could not deny anymore. Although I would try to many times after that, in that moment, it was as plain as black and white. I left empowered. What I knew in my heart of hearts to be true was. So now what? You are probably thinking you leave right? I wish. Like most abused women, I lived the cycle of abuse with him as sick as it may sound it was my normal. I struggled to believe that I was abused yet couldn't deny it. I would go to therapy off and on at times, struggling with the truth. But one day, the truth of my abuse caused my life to change...

Instead of being awakened at 3 am, my husband came home drunk at 7 pm. That night, my children were still awake. We began to fight; while he called me names, he began throwing things at me. I put my 3 and 6-year-olds in bed and pleaded with them to stay there and that I would be right back. He followed me from room to room while I tried to diffuse this anger and rage. As he started throwing things, my 6-year-old yelled, "please mom, don't let him break any of my toys." I yelled back, "OK, baby, just stay in your room." I heard my 3-year-old crying and the terror I felt was encompassing and overwhelming. My 6-year-old begged me to leave but I couldn't. My husband began throwing my

clothes out of the house and telling me to leave. He told me I came with nothing, I'll leave with nothing. When he put his hands around my throat; I thought God don't let this be it – there are two little kids in the next room who can't see this and finally he let go. I ran into the bathroom with the phone and called 911. I told the operator on the other end what had happened, but explained to her that it wasn't really that bad, I was just scared, and he would just pass out and go to bed. (I hear you, crazy right, but remember it's a cycle.) The police came, but no charges were filed.

Something stuck with me that night. This abuse that I had endured for so long wasn't just affecting us; it was being inflicted upon my children. I tried to protect them for so long from his rage, but that night, I couldn't protect them and then I knew I had to leave. I knew my kids deserved better than this. I started my new job two weeks after that fight. I got the job so I could leave with money in my pocket and my children next to me. It took me almost a year from that point to leave my abuser. Standing up to someone, who for so long, has stood on top of you, takes an amazing amount of strength. I went to court, got an order of protection and with the help of family and friends, we left. We could breathe for the first time in years. I will never forget the day that changed our lives.

The battle to leave him was not over. For he would call constantly; manipulating me as well as our children. I was encouraged, nurtured, and strengthened by my therapist at New Leaf. I would recall the nights of abuse, nights of gut wrenching sobs, of a pain that engulfed my soul. I was encouraged to journal through my pain. I found a release there; as if when put down on paper, it would go away. God is ever present in all of my journaling. When no one knew what was going on in my home, when no one could hear my cries or fix my hurts, I felt and called on God's comfort.

Growing up in a Christian home, I was always told that God is here; He is always here and he sees everything. I would rely on that constantly. He was my solace in those nights. I would call on him to strengthen me to fight for my freedom from my marriage. He answered and guided me in so many ways. There are too many to write down. But for those when who read this and are living it, if you believe only one thing, let it be this – that God can hear you, he can see you, he is holding you and you can leave.

I left for my kids not for myself. I left because my husband was changing them. I realized now I gave myself the greatest gift which is self love – for if you love yourself, there is no man or woman who can take that from you. After leaving it took me another year to tell him that I was really not coming back and that I intended to divorce him. During that time, I continued to become stronger and loved myself through all those who abused me before my husband. I've struggled to love myself from the time I was a child. Love to me was pain. It was verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. Love was not unconditional; it was conditioned by what you did or how you acted. I left all that behind and became a woman who could dream out loud and who released those who caused me pain, for they too have their own burdens to bear.

Now, I speak often at domestic violence shelters. God did not, would not have watched me, held me and nurtured me through this pain for me to stand idly by with out making a difference. I tell my story so much, I always think maybe this time, I won't cry. But, I always cry. I stand in the pain for that one minute because the blessings far out weigh the pain. I often use this analogy in my speeches; it came from one of my journal entries...

*"I cry for my children and hurts of today and tomorrow. I cry for relief from pain, from my aching heart, a heart that loved and was tossed aside like an apple. The apple so sweet and beautiful, watched, and enjoyed then painfully bitten apart till nothing is left then tossed away."*

New Leaf took those seeds that were tossed aside; they nurtured them, encouraged them to grow, held them when the strong wind blew and I stand today a strong beautiful woman producing fruit as I help other women stand in their pain.

For those who stand in this same pain, I can tell you that you will for a while ask why am I attracted to a person that is no good, and how can I ache in places that I didn't know existed and that no matter how many new haircuts I get and how many gyms I join, and how many times I go out with my girlfriends, I still go to bed wondering how I could have not seen? And after all that however long that may be you will meet people who make you feel worthwhile again and little pieces of your soul will come back. What you will see is a strong, empowered woman. Someone who suffered struggled overcame and lives.

I will leave you with this...I try to journal daily, but it usually ends up being weekly. After rereading several of my journal entries, I realized I always end up in prayer. I will share with you some of my prayers, pray them for someone you know who suffer. Pray them to give yourself strength. Remember, no matter where you are and what is going on, God is there. He is holding you; he cannot control the bad things that happen in life, but he can hold you in your storm.

*"Thank you Lord for allowing me to use the gifts I have to encourage someone who lives with the consuming pain of abuse, an abuse I will never forget. Allow them to see that there is a way out of a life beyond the pain."*

*"Grant me the courage to face the many challenges ahead of me this week. Grant me the courage to love myself and know that I am the most beautiful of creations. For, I am yours. I am loved, if by no one else, but you. I was created by you, therefore, I am beautiful."*

*"I praise you Lord for the good works you have done in my life. For the blessings you have given me, for my children, my job, and my renewed interest in living life to the fullest. I praise you for sunny, wind, hope-filled days."*

**- Lisa is a 35-year-old mother of two and a domestic abuse survivor.**