

He locked me out of the house multiple times in the middle of winter. Sometimes I wasn't wearing a coat and had no shoes. Other times I didn't have my crutches. As soon as he would hear the neighbor or anyone else, he'd unlock the door. He didn't want anyone to know how cruel he was to me. He was always so nice to everyone else.

He quickly learned how to take advantage of my disability and short stature, which was due to my disability. He'd take my phone, tear it apart, and hide the parts in higher spots that I couldn't reach. He'd laugh as I frantically searched for my own phone. He'd taunt me by saying things like "hot" or "cold" if I was getting closer or farther away to finding them. I would plead with him to give the pieces back. He'd eventually return them, but only when he felt assured that I wasn't going to leave.

Another trick he used to prevent me from leaving was confiscating my crutches, which I rely on for mobility. He would withhold them till, again, I would assure him I wasn't going to leave. There were times when he'd hurl my crutches against a wall, which left ugly indentations that served as constant reminders of his cruelty.

The police were never involved until the very end of our 9-year marriage. I was always too frightened to call for help.

That changed the day my husband pinned me between the door and the wall. I couldn't breathe and yelled for help. I had secretly called my friend while this was going on. She called the cops, and I'm thankful she did.

When they showed up, I was distraught and looked like a mess. My husband sat back calmly like nothing had happened. I looked like the crazy one. He went from 100 to a 0 in an instant and tried to justify his actions. I didn't press charges because I was scared of the outcome.

Many other abusive acts occurred, but my mind has blurred them out. My husband selfishly took

advantage of my disability and undocumented status. I knew this wasn't the life I wanted for me and my children. I finally reached my limit and left. Once again, Safe Journey helped put my life back together. They provided counseling and temporary shelter for me and my kids and helped me obtain a divorce.

Around this time, I fell in love with and married a man who treated me as an equal and respected my need for independence. Rather than use my disability and undocumented status as tools to control me, he willingly helped me obtain my long-awaited U.S. citizenship.

As a mother and wife with disabilities, I am here to say we don't need to be saved from our disabilities. We don't need anyone to set limitations for us. We don't need pity or to be reminded every day that we are different. That doesn't define who we are. But regardless of who you are, if you are a victim of domestic violence, help is available from agencies like Safe Journey that offer comprehensive domestic violence services.

No matter how trapped or helpless you feel, I want you to know there's always a way out. You may not realize it yet, but there's a support system waiting to help you. Let today be the start of your new journey.

***I am not just a survivor.
I am a thriver.***

Contact Safe Journey:

SAFE JOURNEY PROVIDES FREE
AND CONFIDENTIAL SERVICES FOR
ADULTS, TEENS, AND CHILDREN
MySafeJourney.org
814.438.2675



My Story



**I AM A SURVIVOR OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

You are not alone.
Read a survivor's story.

The system would see me as unfit.

I came to the United States from a foreign country on a medical visa when I was 9 1/2. I had a disability, spoke no English, and had no family in the states.

My parents made arrangements that, because I was so young, I never completely understood. I had a medical condition that required surgery, so I did as I was told. I boarded a plane with about a dozen other children who were headed to the U.S. on medical visas and left my family behind.

People in my poor native country viewed the U.S. as a golden land of plenty. It is all that. However, due to the language barrier, my youth, disability, and non-citizenship status, I was a vulnerable, frightened little girl.

Strangers settled me in a small town with a family that fostered other children, many of them with special needs.

I underwent surgery, which was good, but other events added to the trauma I already felt after leaving my home and family. For years, my foster mother abused me and the other children through neglect, manipulation, and control.

Abuse started immediately. Her first action when I arrived was to take away my beloved Raggedy Ann, the treasured doll that comforted me on the journey from my homeland thousands of miles away.

My foster mother failed to regularly update my medical visa and threatened to call immigration officials about my undocumented status. She threatened to make me strip before throwing me out in the street to fend for myself. Mail from home disappeared. She told me she accepted only the kids that no one else wanted — like me.

Because my foster family received financial assistance, I believe she saw a price tag on every child she took in.

As soon as I reached legal adulthood at 18, I made plans to get away. With the help of a friend's family, I secretly packed my belongings. When the time came, I tossed them out my second-story window into their truck that was waiting below and made my escape.

I found shelter and support at Safe Journey, a local domestic violence services agency. I was scared, but counselors listened and believed my story without judging me. That meant so much. I felt like other people thought I was making it all up. It wouldn't be the last time Safe Journey helped me escape domestic violence.

I was now a young adult just coming out of my childhood trauma when I met the abuser who would become my first husband. He was charming. He'd buy me flowers and shower me with gifts. He would tell me and everyone else how special I was. It was as if someone was saving me from the nasty life I had been living. Someone was showing me love, attention.

Early into the relationship, I got pregnant. I was scared, excited! Then he brought up marriage. I wasn't ready. The thought of marriage was overwhelming, but he insisted because he didn't want our child to be a bastard baby. I didn't see the big deal in being unmarried.

We ended up getting married. He convinced me that he loved me and it was the right thing to do. So, why not? At that point of my life, I was vulnerable and a little naive.

Throughout the pregnancy we had good and bad days. Then he slowly eased in with the name calling and making me feel unwanted. He had a hard time keeping jobs, but was against me working. He said he wanted to take care of me and the baby. At the same time, he made me feel bad for not contributing financially. He wanted me to take advantage of the fact that I could get money because of my disability. When I'd refuse, he'd get angry. But me getting a job? Out of the question, he said.

The abuse escalated and became more violent when I got pregnant with my second child. I remember arguing about wanting to end the marriage. I'd had enough. He got so mad he threw a glass jar of spaghetti sauce at me. The jar barely missed my very pregnant belly. Glass shattered all over, sauce everywhere. I was so scared! I left and stayed away for about a month at Safe Journey. I got my own place and eventually moved him in, thinking I was doing the right thing. He promised me things were going to be better.

After the baby was born, we fought constantly. A disturbing pattern developed. I'd leave, and when I came back, he would shower me with gifts. He'd be nice for a week, a month, maybe even a year. Then he'd go right back to the same pattern of abuse.

According to him, I was a whore, a slut. At times he'd tell me what a wonderful mother I was. Other times he'd say I was a horrible mother. He'd tell me red lipstick made me look like a whore.

My lifelong dream was to become a U.S. citizen, but he always found excuses as to why we couldn't make it happen. He'd say, "As soon as you become legal, you'll leave me."

My independence has always been important to me. He didn't want me to get my driver's license, because driving meant I'd need him less.

I found out he had cheated on me a few times. He would tell me to go, but I wasn't allowed to take our kids. I had no money, I was illegal, I had a disability. The system would see me as unfit.