

My Abusive Marriage ...and what i'm doing in it



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Dedication

This book is for Meme, Nana and Granny, who felt the sting of domestic abuse but did not have the information they needed to end it. They did not realize their husbands abused them; they did not find refuge from it. I dedicate my life to ensuring the habits and behaviors of domestic abuse do not follow our family any further.

Acknowledgements

Erin, my dear little sister, thank you for supporting me through the calm and crazy, never giving up on me and reminding me that being me was more than enough. Thank you, readers of my blog. Without your comments and support, I may never have owned my courage and desire. Without you all in my heart, I may have chosen to return to him that fateful night in January 2010.

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Foreword

Never was a child more loved or more welcomed into the world. Kellie was bliss. It never occurred to me that the person she choose to spend her life would not see that she was smart, had an outrageous sense of humor, was a loyal friend, was beautiful in all ways. I did not like him the first I met him. I did not care for him any time after that. I dismissed it wondering if I was being a stereotypical mother in believing no one would be good enough. After a while, I couldn't dismiss certain signs.

The one most disturbing sign was during vacation. We arrived in the afternoon and were having a wonderful visit – laughing being the main ingredient. He came home from work. It was as if an ominous cloud blanketed the earth. Suddenly, she deferred simple decisions to him. The most chilling indication that things were not right was the physical change in my daughter. She had always had an air of confidence, she smiled, she faced life with open arms – that all vanished in an instant – her shoulders rounded and her face grayed and she appeared old – not older – old. He made snide remarks, but she laughed them off. I wanted to take her and the boys home with me, but she assured me all was okay.

There is an old saying stating, “You are not in your current situation by accident or by mistake or by way of punishment. You are where you are because it is the right place for you to be if only in order for you to realize fully where you want to be instead and how you can get there.” This is bullshit. I do not believe my child and her children needed to live through years of abuse to have the ability to help others.

But; this was her journey and all that she has learned will help you. A misplaced book in the library was the beginning to ending the hurt her family was going through.

If you are considering *this* book, you already know life can be better. Take Kellie by the hand and let her be a guide.

~ Judy L. Christenson, *Kellie's Mother*

“Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.” ~ Christopher Robin

Introduction

In 2008, Kellie Jo Holly began a blog called *My Verbally Abusive Marriage...and what i'm doing in it*. She wanted to keep track of events in her marriage because she and her husband, Will, seemed to remember their relationship experiences completely differently. Will did not remember forcing her to destroy her box of keepsakes. Will did not remember holding her face to the stove. Will did not remember many of the relationship's defining moments, and Kellie could not work out the problems with someone who denied their roots. Kellie decided to keep a blog to create a record of events as she experienced them. She intended to refer to the blog when her husband denied the truth so she would at least know she was not losing her mind. The blog, merely a tool for Kellie, became a point of hope, inspiration and understanding for thousands of readers.

Long before Kellie described her marital problems as abusive, she blamed depression, alcoholism, anger issues, her troubled sexual past, his childhood abuse, military life, stress, and many other causes for "it". When she learned the proper term for "it" was "abuse", a sense of clarity and self-control enveloped her. "It" finally made sense.

Kellie scoured her past journal entries, and finds abuse hidden in them time after time, hidden so deeply from her consciousness that it barely shows itself in her words. This book follows her blog and contains entries exactly as she wrote them; but it also relates the stories of abuse from her marriage's history, pulling past and present together to provide a true image of the Abuse demon's grip on her life.

My Verbally Abusive Marriage reveals the pain, humiliation, and anger Kellie felt during her marriage alongside her desire to work with her husband to create a loving relationship. Although she no longer took responsibility for Will's abusive behaviors, she desperately wanted to straighten herself out and step out of the cycle of abuse.

Kellie did not want to divorce Will. She hoped for a peaceful solution to their problems and the return of the man she thought she married in 1992. This was not to be - Will physically assaulted her for the last time on January 22, 2010 and Kellie left. The recurrence of physical abuse proved to Kellie that her marriage was beyond

repair. The following blog entries give the date of writing followed by the time left until that fateful day in January when Kellie walked away.

I followed Kellie's blog from the beginning, too afraid to comment for fear of my husband finding out. I did reach out to Kellie through email, and our correspondence strengthened and encouraged me. It must have worked both ways, because Kellie gives the credit for her strength the day she left to us, the readers of her blog who walked hand in hand with her through the abuse and now, in her freedom from it. Kellie's courageous story inspired, strengthened and educated me. In June of 2010, I could no longer excuse my husband's abuse, and I left him. I too am free.

I look to Kellie for guidance and support, and she is here for me every step of the way. I believe *My Abusive Marriage...and what i'm doing in it* will have a profound effect on you too. It will open your eyes to the truth of abuse and guide you toward mental and emotional health, understanding that leads to self-awareness and confidence, and the conviction to follow your own path. The choice to stay with your abusive partner or to leave the relationship is yours alone; it is above reproach and not a decision anyone can judge as right or wrong. Nevertheless, to find peace, you must know what you are fighting. Kellie's blog will shine the light bright and full so, if "It" is there, you can identify your enemy as Abuse.

~Anna Lee Tacy, *free from abuse for over two years*

Prologue

I am dying in the shadow of my abusive husband. I write this blog to record my pain and hold onto my memory. My husband says *"I never said that"* and *"You heard me wrong"* so often that I doubt my sanity. I want to prove to myself that what I see and hear happens - that I do not make it up as Will says I do.

Perhaps I will need this blog to show a record of abuse in court, but I hope not. I do not want to leave my husband. I want him to treat me nicely, respectfully ... as a husband should treat his wife. I want to stay married, to enjoy my husband and our children, Marc and Eddie. I want to feel loved, honored, cherished. I want my children to live in a home of peace and love instead of this war zone. I want a normal family.

The deepest parts of me fear that I am keeping this blog to chronicle the events leading to my murder. He has physically assaulted me very few times during our marriage, but often enough for me to remember that he is willing to choke the life out of me. He goes for the throat right away; he thinks I am his enemy.

I am writing this blog for me, but I'm making it live on the Internet for you. I lived half my life not knowing the problem in my marriage was abuse. I don't want you to do the same. I do not want anyone else to live my life. Hell, sometimes I don't want to live my life! The idea that I could help you keeps me writing. Perhaps I am crazy and this is the diary of a mad woman, but something inside me says that you will understand.

A voice that is not mine urges me forward. *"Keep writing. Be unafraid of the day he finds this site. Be unafraid of the day he takes his next step. Be unafraid of the day you choose if you are going to live or slip back into the shadow – the day you choose to live or die. Be unafraid."*

Maybe when the day comes to choose, I will read these words and realize that someone courageous and strong wrote these blogs. Someone who has the energy to fight for life decided the fight was worth it. If I am lucky, I will realize that I wrote these pages. I exist. I am here. I matter.

Until that day, you are the reason I write these posts. If I can validate your thoughts and experiences by sharing mine, then I hope you will choose to live...and leave, even if I cannot.

Part I: ... revealing the demon

“Each act of evil creates its own demon. People name the demons they create and believe those entities live for all time, but each demon’s life is short. They are not eternal beings. There is no equal to God’s love; therefore, there can be no anti-God. There are no eternal demons. There is only man’s continual creation of evil.”

~Marguerite, *an Angel*

Loser

September 23, 2008

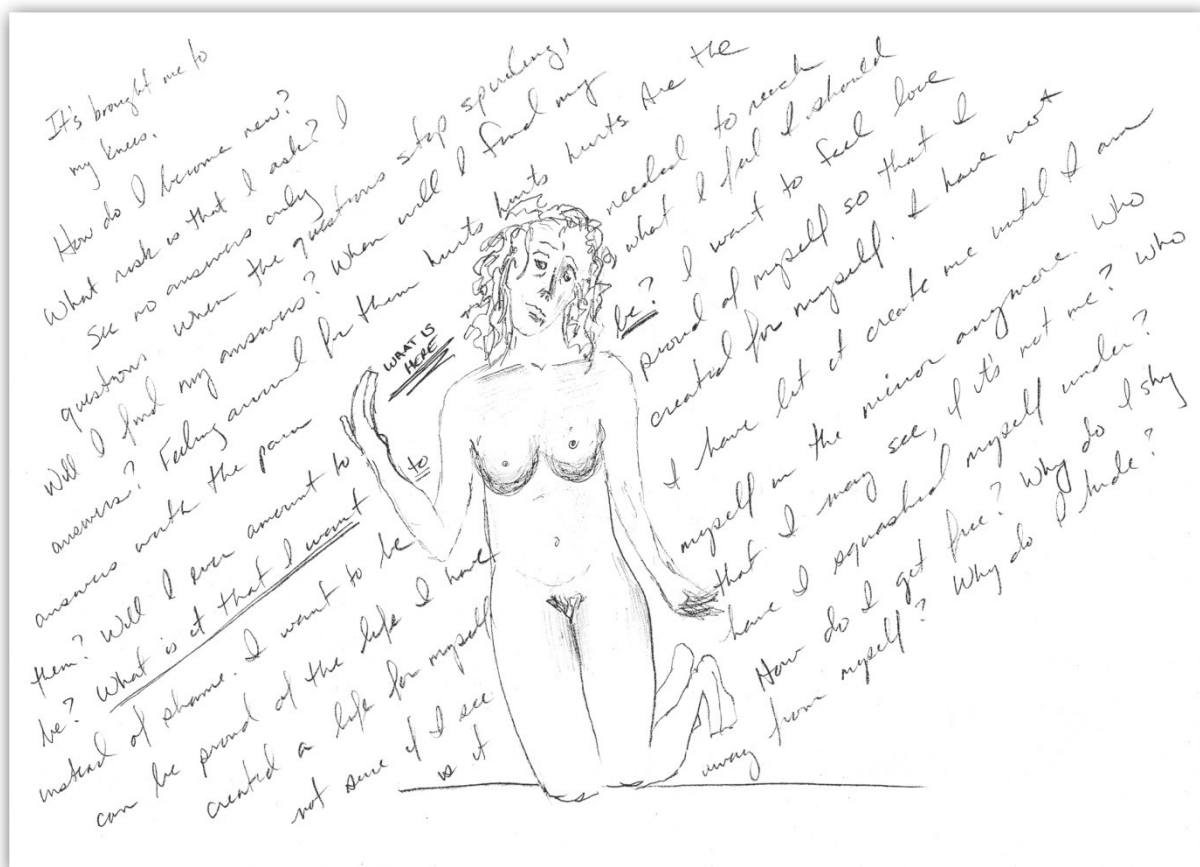
1 year, 4 months until the end

Words that once had meaning make no sense. Love. Compassion. Honesty.

My brain screams "LOSER!" and I believe I am a loser. Another piece of me waits for a better time, a time when the voice goes away. When is that better time? Do I need to *do* something to bring a better time about?

All I want to do now is sleep and keep up an appearance of caring about the house. I do not (or wouldn't) care if we ate off dirty plates. Wore dirty clothes. Neglected all our shit. I just do not care. But I WANT to care. I WANT to be productive and I want what I produce to replenish my and others' needs - not deplete them. Tired. Tired. Tired.

Why am I so tired? WHY?



Words in picture say, in part: It's brought me to my knees,...I want to feel love instead of shame...I have not created a life for myself. I have let it create me until I am not sure if I see myself in the mirror anymore. Who is it that I may see, if it's not me? ... How do I get free? Why do I shy away from myself? Why do I hide?

I know the answers, but I don't like them. I am tired due to the stress I feel in this marriage, under Will's thumb. I see a shadow of my former self in the mirror because I try to be someone Will can love, someone who isn't me. I could find freedom by breaking my habits and patterns that allow Will to control my thoughts and my life. I hide from myself because I am not proud of myself for loving a man who hates me. I do not like being me because it calls out the demon in him.

You Are the Only Cow

September 29, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 25 days until the end

One night soon after we met, Will took me out to the bar I loved near Ray Barracks. It was small, holding exactly the right number of people. It had a unique charm; not everyone wanted to be there, but I felt very comfortable with those who did. Plus, the bartender gave free drinks to us girls.

In the bathroom, there were two stalls. The first stall did not have a toilet, and graffiti riddled the walls of the second. One night before drinking, I read a scribble that said, "You are the only cow". It offended me for some reason. Later, when Jack and Cokes overran my bladder, I reread, "You are the only cow" and found it incredibly, stupidly funny. Fortunately, I was on the toilet when I read it - I would have peed all over myself otherwise.

Right after my giggles ended, I realized that I was drunk; and then I realized that it was time to stop drinking. I also realized that although I felt trashed, there was a sober little voice in my head that could keep me sane and in control of myself if I listened to it. All of these years later, I still visualize that scribble on the grungy bathroom wall after a drink. If I giggle at the thought of it, I know it is time to switch to straight Coke.

"You are the only cow" woke me up - I no longer believed people who said, "I was drunk! I didn't know what I was doing". That excuse is a crock of bullshit. Alcohol merely weakens a person's inhibitions; therefore, it allows us to be ourselves without restraint and without conscience. Perhaps I remember this lesson so well because it is the first

one I ever taught myself. I believe it with every fiber of my being, but during our first years together, I denied it to safeguard my connection to Will.

I wanted to believe that the beer, or the Jack, or the rum were to blame for Will's angry tantrums. I did not want to believe that he could say hateful things and intimidate me without a reason. I needed to believe that the alcohol turned him into an asshole. Otherwise, I must accept that he was an asshole who willingly drank knowing he would eventually sic his inner demon on me, his conscience free.

I forced myself to accept the opposite of what I knew to be true. Accepting this lie split "me" from my sense of reality. Reality told me that people who drink are accountable for their behavior. The lie told me that drunkenness excuses hurtful behavior. The lie worked in our relationship, and reality did not.

I've drunk a lot of Kool-Aid to force our relationship to make sense - I accepted nonsense as truth until very recently. Will abused alcohol for the first five years of our marriage, and then he quit drinking for many years. By the time he picked up the bottle again in 2003, I didn't blame the booze anymore; Will acted like a jerk sober and drunk.

However, back then, I told myself that when the newness of becoming soldiers wore away, the drinking would taper off. I told myself "everyone in the Army does it". I told myself that in time, he would want to control his drinking as I did. I told myself that he was bold and manly so he lost his temper quickly. I told myself that Will was rightfully angry with me for doing the stupid things I did. I told myself that he knew what was best for me, that he was my protector, that he loved me.

I believed it all. I think he did, too. Nevertheless, the truth is that what I told myself and what actually happened stood in stark opposition. Nothing fit, but I forced it to fit. Reality disappeared and non-reality took over. Will torments me, not protects me. He uses me to project a positive image to the world, but the lie disappears behind our closed doors. Will and I made a horrid match, but we forced ourselves to match. We still force the match, but it is getting harder to accept it.

Uncomfortable

October 4, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 19 days until the end

Will and his friends drank all day in the garage. I avoided them, staying in the house with our boys. Tonight, as Will prepared to go to the drag race, he looked around for a jacket to lend to his friend. He became frustrated and turned nasty. Will insult my organizational skills and insinuated that I lost his blue flannel because it was here when he left for Iraq! He left for Iraq *five years* ago. Everyone seemed uncomfortable except for Will.

Storming into my office, he saw Tilly, my dog, confined to the room. I did it so she wouldn't run through the house. Will hates it when she is in his way. To Tilly, Will said, "It's fuckin' ignorant to keep you stuck in here!"

I yelled out, "No. NO! Don't let her out!" while he kept muttering something about "ignorant". I watched him open the outside door and saw Tilly running toward freedom. I chased after her, but she disappeared into the darkness. When I came inside, I asked, "Why did you let her out after I said not to do that?"

He answered, "'Cause it's ignorant to keep the damn thing closed in the house!"

Before he finally left, Will apologized for letting out Tilly. The dog will come home; I am upset because he blamed me for losing his jacket, disrespected and embarrassed me, said I was ignorant, and ignored me. At least this time I didn't play his game. I didn't engage him in his tirade or join him in a screaming match. I stayed calm because I know arguing with him is pointless. It was so difficult to maintain my composure when he treated me like dog poop.

Is This Right?

Later on October 4, 2008

After Will left for the track, I sat down with our boys and told them I had learned some things that made me unhappy. I said I was sorry for saying mean things to them that made them feel bad in the past. I told them that daddy said the same kinds of things to me. I told them I was going to change it, but I needed them to help me. I showed them a

list of abusive statements I found in a book and asked them if they heard mom or dad say anything like what was on the list.

They said yes, they heard some of it and didn't like it. Marc, our oldest, said he heard it mostly from dad when he was mad at me. I did not respond to that.

Instead, I told them I was sorry for hurting them. I told them I wanted to fix the problem by pointing out to one another when our feelings were hurt. I promised I would stop whatever I was saying and listen to them if they told me it hurt. I let our boys know that my prayer is for all four of us to come out of this better people and a happier family, but a piece of me has my doubts that can happen. I kept the negativity to myself. Will has said plenty of times, "I won't change". I believe him.

Isolated

October 9, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 14 days until the end

Will stole my freedom, bit by bit. It started out small when Will accused me of "playing grab-ass" with my coworkers. I immediately turned my attention to my behavior. As a woman in the military, I couldn't have males thinking I flirted (or slept!) my way through the ranks; if my boyfriend thought I did it, then God only knows who else did. I stopped laughing and joking at work; I separated myself from my coworkers during breaks.

I didn't know that Will's complaint was only the first in a set. After accusing me of playing grab-ass (and successfully controlling my behavior), Will escalated to accusing me of wanting to have sex with his friends and then of cheating. By the time *The Shotler Story* etched itself in our marital history book, I had already changed my behavior so much that I didn't want to go to work at all some days, let alone talk to anyone.

Will says the first guy I cheated with was his friend Private Shotler. Will did not feel threatened by Shotler and would often ask Shotler to dance with me because Will didn't like dancing. I placed Shotler into the category of "safe guys" and assumed Will trusted him. However, Will placed Shotler into the category of "annoying guys who buy me drinks so I let them hang out with me" category. I guess you can never have too many people to buy your booze.

The Shotler Story shows how Will's jealousy played into isolating me from those around me. I didn't see what happened as isolation; instead, I thought I was protecting my

relationship. I valued Will's advice despite the insulting ways he gave it. However, Will's jealousy cut me off from asking males for help. Ninety percent of my co-workers were male and not even the "safe guys" were safe, so I became isolated from most people around me. The story also exemplifies Will's ability to create a story about me in his mind that was not based on the evidence. It didn't matter what the clues were; in Will's mind, he had the story, me and my motives all figured out without giving me the benefit of the facts.

Coupled with Will's physical intimidation the morning after Will claimed I cheated on him, *The Shotler Story* shows how fear and love combine to create a slave.

The Shotler Story

Katie was my best friend in Friedberg and we shared a suite in Ray Army Barracks. One night Katie and I went out together. Will didn't like it, but he wanted to go out with his friends, too. As the night wore on, Katie and I got wasted at a club, and then she disappeared with some soldier. I knew I was in bad shape. I knew I had to get back to the barracks, and I knew it was a bad idea to try to walk there alone, especially drunk.

Staggering toward the exit, I saw Shotler and immediately felt a little better. I walked up to him and told him that I was too drunk. I needed his help. He jumped up immediately, offered his arm, and said, "Let's go".

I vomited after we got close to the barracks, and I remember walking into them and seeing the staircase in front of me knowing there were three full flights to my room.

"Do you want to go to Will's room?" he asked. Will lived on the first floor.

"Oh God no!" I said. "He's mad that I went out!" Then I passed out, I know I did. I remember Shotler saying, "Oh shit ..."

I woke up to find Will staring at me. Weird. He was pissed, I could tell. He stared at me. I panicked until I realized I still wore my shoes and pantyhose; I still wore all my clothes, but I was not in my room. I wasn't in Will's room either. Focusing in Will's general direction, I saw Shotler sleeping on the sofa and Will sitting at his feet. Shotler had covered himself with a blanket, but I could see his jeans and socks poking out from beneath the blanket and I heard him snoring.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Will asked.

"I got drunk...asked Shotler to walk me home. I guess I passed out on the stairs..."

"Bullshit," he said. "You asked Shotler to bring you home, to bring you here."

"Yes, but not exactly", I muttered. My head was pounding and I thought I would blow chunks again any second.

I sat up as Will said, "I've been sitting here staring at you, checking out your story". He was drunk without having the benefit of throwing up or passing out, although he probably should have hours ago. I wondered what story he was checking out. I hadn't told him one.

I found out later that after Shotler had plopped me on his bed, he went to Will's room and told his suite-mate where I ended up. Shotler was trying to do the right thing, or maybe he was trying to cover his own ass. I wouldn't blame Shotler either way. After all, no one knew the whole story on Will. No one but maybe Will's two best friends and I knew, and they would not talk to me about it. Will was their friend; they did not dare get too close to me in any way, did not dare say something that would insult their buddy, their brother.

Will and I left Shotler's room and walked to mine together. Will stayed quiet in the hallway. I wondered, after the yelling began, what the difference was between the hallway and my room. Anyone behind their doors could have (and did) hear him yelling at me. Someone called Staff Duty, and a soldier on duty knocked on my door soon after we disappeared behind it. The soldier was one of Will's friends; he did not talk to me. The interruption took some of the wind out of Will's sails; he quieted, and then passed out sitting at the foot of my bed. I curled myself into a tight ball, forced the vomit down and fell asleep trembling.

In the morning, I woke up before Will. Still woozy, I stumbled into the shower and put on some comfortable clothes. Walking back into my room, I found Will awake, not looking too good either. He did not say anything at all. It was strange, almost as if he'd forgotten the night before.

I made some coffee and searched for something to read, to do - anything to maintain the icy silence he seemed intent on continuing. He seemed to want the

silence, and somehow I knew it was my job to give it to him if I did not want to go back to last night's tirade.

Just as I settled into my book and began losing myself in the pages, Will said, "You embarrassed me last night and you have nothing to say for yourself?"

"What?" I said. "How did I embarrass you?"

"You fuckin' cheated on me, Kellie. You cheated, and now you're pretending nothing happened."

"I did not cheat on you! I am not pretending nothing happened! I didn't know you were ready to talk, Will," I explained to no avail. He did not hear me. He stood up and came over to me, kneeled down and put his face in my face. He turned red, as if on cue.

"Listen whore, I don't have time for your shit," he snarled between clenched teeth. Fear came over me. I jumped up over the side of the chair and opened the window. I stood there in front of the window, thinking he would control himself if he thought someone would hear. No one was outside. Soldiers reserve Sunday mornings for sleeping off hangovers. Suddenly I was afraid to stand by the window for fear of Will pushing me through it and moved toward the door instead.

He steadily followed me around the room, staring, glaring and threatening to blow at any second. Cornered by the wardrobe, I had nowhere to go. I listened to a series of questions, none to which he wanted my answer. He wanted to ask the question and answer it himself. Why bother asking me at all?

Finally, one thing I said caught his attention. I asked, "If you're so certain I cheated on you, why are you still here?" to which he replied, "So you admit it! You cheated on me!" I started to cry.

"Godammit, I can't stand it when you fuckin' cry!" and he pounded the wardrobe sending reverberations bouncing through my head and down my spine. I couldn't press myself any flatter to the wardrobe without becoming wood myself. Suddenly, Katie knocked on our adjoining door.

"Kellie, are you all right?" she said. Will backed away from me, and opened my door. "We're not done here", he said, and walked out.

I decided to go see Will later in the afternoon. When I got to his room, he wasn't there. I went to his best friend's room to find him drunk and happy. He acted like nothing had happened, welcomed me inside, asked if I wanted a beer. A beer was the last thing I wanted, being rumbly from the night before and the added anxiety of wanting to make things right with Will.

Will's happy-go-lucky disposition threw me into confusion. I never stopped to think that it wasn't my job to make things right. I felt guilty for nothing. Will professed that I embarrassed him, cheated on him and threatened "We're not done here", and yet, it seemed as if we were done. He didn't want to talk about it, and I was too afraid to press the issue.

The Shotler Story reappears randomly in our marriage, usually during hard times but sometimes as a joke about my "boyfriends" during the good times. I hear of Shotler when Will wants to distract me, shift my mood to sour, or to put me in my place. Will says that he believes I cheated on him; he pulls the story out of his hat whenever he feels like it, tossing it out there as if his version is fact.

I wonder why Will stayed with me, that early in our relationship, being convinced I cheated. This is convoluted, but what if he knew I didn't cheat on him? What if he convinced me that he thought I cheated so I would be more likely to forgive him for a transgression too? If that is true, then it worked. I did forgive him more than once. Or maybe we're both gluttons for punishment. Perhaps I am the yin to his yang. Maybe this love is the best I can hope for.

Half Dead Mouse

October 11, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 12 days until the end

Our conversation went on and on. For over an hour. It ended with me saying that I was done, and leaving the room. He followed me, harping on something. I said, "Leave me the fuck alone!" and he said, "That's real adult – you're so childish!" He complained that he had only wanted one night of relaxation this weekend, "but NO, I can't even do that!"

I said, "Yes, it's all my fault."

He said, "Well if it isn't your fault, whose is it?"

I didn't say anything else. It's been quiet since.

I have a feeling the peace won't last. Does he expect me to let him insult me without saying anything about it? Does he expect me to swallow it like I have in the past? Should I excuse him because he "doesn't do it on purpose" and "didn't mean to hurt me?"

I am sick of all that. If he doesn't do it on purpose and he doesn't mean to hurt me, then why not look at what he says and change it? Why does he keep doing the thing that hurts the ones he professes to love when the solution is within HIS grasp?

I am as at fault as he is for the length of this stupid "talk". Right when I would think I MIGHT be getting through, I was proven wrong by being caught off guard by a smart-ass comment, change of topic, or confabulation about something I had said either recently or months ago.

I feel like a half-dead mouse batted about by a bored cat.

Wedding Day

October 15, 2008

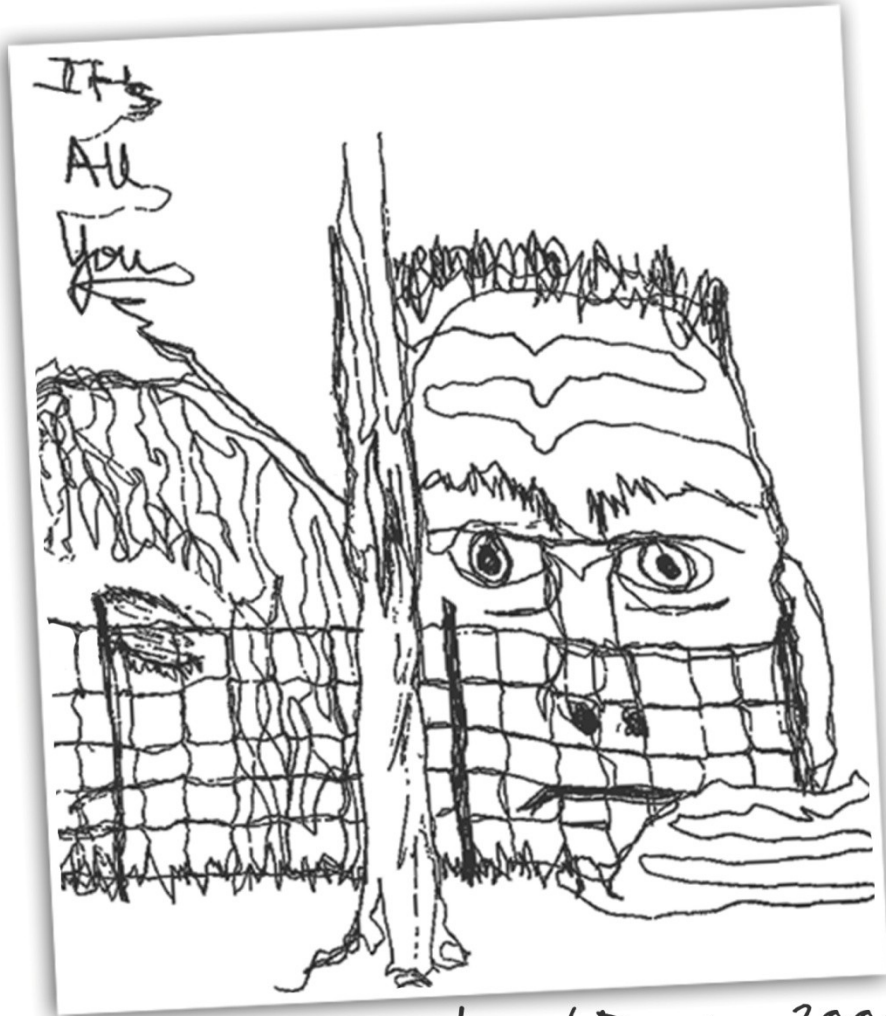
1 year, 3 months, 8 days until the end

Seven and a half months after meeting, we got married in Horsens, Denmark on a four-day pass. We purchased one of the three Army wedding packages and eloped. I told my sister because I told her everything. Erin mailed to me the dress our mother wore during her elopement only months before, but she was not happy about it. She did not like what she'd heard about Will; she asked me to wait to marry him.

I could not do that. Will and I were to be married, and that was that. I got used to the idea of eloping; it seemed romantic and we could tell our children we married in a faraway land of castles and dragons. Their daddy was a knight and mommy was the princess he rescued. It was as simple as that, and we would all live happily ever after.

How was I to know that every day I'd sit on pins and needles wondering if or when he would explode into a rage over the money, the boys, the food, or how unappreciative I am? How was I to know he would dictate the events in my life with no concern for what I wanted or wished? No one gave me a crystal ball to foretell the absolute disappearance of me when I took his name for my own.

I did not know it would turn out like this. I always thought it would get better. I believed that Will was a good man who would change if I loved him. I did not know that the “good man” I saw masked his true face. I didn’t know.



Journal Drawing, 2000

Shock and Awe

October 16, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 7 days until the end

It took almost 5 months of marriage before Will physically assaulted me. When I look back on that day, I realize that I was so close to leaving him! I had my bags packed, but I did not leave. I honor my decision because I did the best I could at the time.

I didn't know anything about abuse and couldn't have known it would only worsen, never get better. In 1992, living in Germany and serving in the military, there were no posters describing domestic violence or meetings for family and soldiers about it (like there are now). I did the best I could. None of this was my fault. Will holds complete responsibility for hurting me. At the time, I didn't see it that way.

...He drove drunk to pick me up at work, and I got into the car out of fear of what he would do if I did not.

I was afraid of him, meaning that I had reason to be afraid before this day. Refusing to ride with a drunk, or taking the keys from them, should hold no fear of repercussion. Will is my husband, but it was less fearful to ride with him drunk than to refuse to get into the car.

...He berated me harshly, and I explained how he was wrong.

I believed I could win him over to see my side, and this shows that I thought he misunderstood me. He did not misunderstand me - he wanted to gain control over me. Explaining myself against nonsense weakened my position.

...He wouldn't let me escape.

First, I was captive in the car. Later, when I tried to get away from him, he prevented it. Restricting movement is physical violence.

...He demonstrated his strength and my powerlessness against him.

Physical violence is about power over another person; its purpose is not necessarily to cause injury. Think about the "shock and awe" movements of the Iraq War...people died, but the idea wasn't necessarily to kill them, but to show "the people" (the least powerful) that the US had more power than their current leaders and to convince the people to abandon their leaders and help the US instead. As a side note, "shock and awe" was followed by "winning the hearts and minds of the people", or in domestic abuse language, "the honeymoon period".

...He took the car so I could not leave the house.

Again, he restricted my movements, but this was also a way to isolate me from other people and keep me from seeking help. We lived in Germany, I didn't speak German, and my only "help" seemed to be on post.

Physical violence is not the first abuse that occurred in my marriage, it was the last part of the first cycle. Mistaking it for the first action of abuse influenced my decision to give Will another chance. The violence was so unlike what he did or said before that it was easy to believe he would not do it again.

Here is the story, if you're interested:

First Violence

One night, my section worked late, so Will went home. I called him as soon as we finished our work, and he showed up drunk to drive me home. In the car, he pummeled me with insults and questions, supplying me with the proper responses when I failed to answer correctly. I tried to calm him, tried to reassure him that I had not slept with anyone, that I had called him as soon as I left work, and defended myself against his other insane accusations. It didn't matter. He thought I was a liar and a whore.

Inside the house, I attempted to quietly retreat to my art room. A few steps up the stairway, Will grabbed my shirt and pulled me down. I hit the floor hard on my butt, surprised. Will grabbed my arm hard and dragged me into the kitchen: "Do you see what I did while you were out fucking my friends?"

I saw the hot stove, dinner cooking, and fearfully said, "You made dinner. That was nice-" Cut off by his grip on the back of my neck, he stood me up and forced me closer to the stove. Removing one of the boiling pots with his free hand, he shoved my face within inches of the burner yelling, "This is what I did for you! And what do you do in return?"

I struggled. Somehow, I got away from the stove, away from him, yelling, "What are you doing?"

"You shut up! It's my time to talk!" he said. He switched his grip from the back of my neck to my throat. He pushed me against a door and repeatedly banged my head against the wall using my neck as a handle. I thought he was going to kill me. Bang, "Bitch!" Bang, "Whore!" I thought I would pass out from fear or the beating, but I didn't know what he'd do if I lost consciousness, so I pretended to pass out. I fell limp against the door, fell further into his grip, let my knees buckle, let myself hit the floor naturally.

He let go of me, stood over me, tapped my head with his foot, tapped harder on my ribs, "Get up. I know you're faking. Get up." I didn't get up. I didn't open my eyes. I heard him filling something with water, and then felt the cold water hit me as he threw it over my body. I didn't get up. I didn't open my eyes.

"Fine. Be that way," he said, picking me up, throwing me over his shoulder. He headed toward the stairs. On the second flight, he started jumping up the stairs, forcing my stomach to bounce hard against his shoulder. It hurt. He said, "How" jump "does" jump "this" jump "feel" jump "bitch" jump "Do" jump "you" jump "like" jump "this" jump "whore?"

Finally, in the master bedroom, he threw me onto the bed. He left. I heard him muttering to himself going down the stairs. I heard the back door open and close. I jumped up and grabbed a backpack from under the bed. I threw in a change of clothes, gingerly opened the door to the bedroom and checked the hall. Checked the stairwell. Silently crept down one flight of stairs and into the bathroom. I packed my make-up. Packed my toothbrush. Then grabbed everything I saw in a panic and stuffed it into the black bag.

Creeping down to the main floor, I grabbed the spare keys and went outside. The car was gone. I never felt so scared or so alone. I went back into the empty house and cried.

Suddenly, I wanted Will to come home. I wanted to see what he would say, what he would do. I went to the kitchen, turned off the stove and put the food away. I took a shower and prepared for work the next day. I knew he would come home eventually. He couldn't go to work in the morning without his wife - people would know something was wrong. I kept my packed bag hidden in the storage room. I went to bed, but didn't sleep.

Finally, I heard the front door open and softly close. I heard him creeping downstairs, up the stairs, opening the bedroom door. I closed my eyes, pretending to be asleep. I guess he wanted to be sure I was still home. Closing the door, he went back downstairs. I felt relieved that he did not come into the room, into the bed.

The next morning, we both got ready for work in silence. I grabbed my bag and went downstairs when it was time to leave. I let him open the door for me as if he

were a civilized person. In the car, he asked me about my bag. I told him I was not coming home. Ever. I was leaving.

He looked at me in shock. "Why? What the hell is going on?" he asked.

"You've got to be kidding me, right?" I said, staring him in the eye. He looked like he had no clue what had happened, why I was upset. I told Will what had happened, blow by blow, as if he didn't know. He seemed like a stranger to me. At times, he would say, "That didn't happen", but his refutations let me know that he did remember what happened. He lied to me. He did not tell me where he had gone when he left. He didn't try to defend himself. I was right, he was wrong; we both knew it.

When we got to post, I grabbed my bag and took it into the barracks. My old room was still empty, so I dropped my stuff in there. Will knocked on the door. I opened it.

He said, "You can't stay here. You belong at home."

"I belong wherever you aren't," I said.

"Please, Kellie. I'll make this right. We'll go talk to the chaplain today, I'll get out of work and we'll tell him most of everything that happened."

"Most?!" I asked.

"We can't tell him about the stuff in the kitchen. I will lose my job! They will demote me and probably put me out. I think we can work through this, but we can't tell about that."

"I'll think about it," I said.

Later, he came and got me at work. He had asked my section leader, and it was okay for me to go with him. The chaplain was waiting. He had gone over my head and spoken for me. I was pissed. I went to the chaplain with him anyway.

We couldn't say too much. The chaplain was able to address the way I dressed. Will thought I should dress like his mother, more modestly. The chaplain pointed out that I was almost 30 years younger than his mother was, that we had not been married long enough for me to change my wardrobe. Will acquiesced to easing up on what I wore. That was about it.

When work ended, I went home with him. It was my home, too. He wasn't going to leave it, and neither was I. I was distracted from the horror of the previous night by a chaplain and a husband who kept saying, "It won't happen again. Whatever it was, it won't happen again," I decided not to talk about it. I didn't want to think about it anymore. I didn't want to deal with it at all.

I thought it was be okay to trust Will, to believe he meant that "it" wouldn't happen again despite saying that he could not remember "it" happening at all. I let it go - somehow thinking it was over. I hold the memory of his brutality in the back of my mind every day of my life, but especially on the days Will acts volatile. He showed me what he would do, and it takes very little to remind me. I am afraid of him. There is no therapist, no chaplain, no one who can remove this fear from my mind; Will is dangerous. I didn't want to accept it, but I must if I am to protect myself and our boys.

I Knew It

October 17, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 6 days until the end

During our first months of marriage, I wrote,

Maybe he does it to hurt me. Maybe he wants me to be scared of him for some reason. Afraid he will leave, afraid he'll hit me again, afraid he'll call me whore again. He wants me totally dependent on him for some reason - so he has control.

I read that now and know that I intuitively understood the game. I knew what he wanted. I knew it was not about love. He wanted control, and he would stop at nothing to get it. He wanted so much control over me that he did not ever need to think about me again. He wanted me on marionette strings, or maybe he wanted to see a perfect reflection of himself when he looked at me. Maybe if I could wear a mirror instead of my face, then he would love me. So I tried to be him.

I tried thinking like him, acting like him. There were a few a few ideas he held that I could not make my own. For instance, he disliked anyone not white or male. I refused to play along with that. He wanted me to be like his mother; I would not. Actually, it's not so much that I would not, as that I could not. He thought his mother could do no wrong, and I knew I could never compete with perfection of the sort he imagined.



"Coming Apart"

He wanted me to want to stay home and raise kids. I did not want that before our boys were born; but after, when I saw their cherubic smiles and chubby legs, you couldn't have ripped me from their sides. Unfortunately, he saw my change of heart as a win for him. It didn't matter that staying at home with our sons was my choice. All that mattered was that I was doing what he told me to do. He felt like he won.

In time, it seemed every conversation we had, and every action I took, turned into a battle. In his mind, one of us had to win and one of us had to lose. There were no gray areas, no compromises. I didn't realize that by giving me an Art Room for my own he thought he gave me a "win". When I won, that meant I owed him. I owed him the right to do as he pleased with no repercussion.

Maybe he makes tick marks on a tablet to tally up how many times he's won, how many times I've won, and probably the formula for discerning at what point he owes me something. Or maybe he never "owes" me anything. Maybe he gives me what he thinks I want, tallies up a win for me, and then figures he's got one coming to him.

The "one coming" is his right to lose his temper, his right to call me names (subtly and not so subtly), his right to be an asshole and my lack of rights to call him on it. Nine times out of ten, when I tell him he's being a jerk, the conversation flips to how I am the jerk. Then I apologize for being a jerk. In the beginning, I knew all of this. I naively hoped it would go away. It has not gone away; it's gotten worse.

Right after getting married, we rushed back to Friedberg to get my name changed officially. A process that took most couples three weeks to complete took three days for us. Will always knows the right people, and they always owe him a favor.

As soon as we got into our own home, his drinking increased along with his sense of entitlement. He expected me to take on the role of both Mom and Wife, and although we didn't have children yet, this made sense to him. Meanwhile, the expectations I had for a husband (few as they were) dissipated as he told me what I could and couldn't expect of him.

He started using sex to control me. He cut me off if he felt displeased with me. The same guy that a week before couldn't get enough of me, cut me off because I didn't know how to cook chicken fried steak. He had to cook it, God forbid. He made a big production of it, inviting his friends over for a "real meal" and telling me to stay in the kitchen with him so he would not need to cook it ever again.

He encouraged his friends to tease me about my lack of cooking ability, my dirty house and the laundry cluttering up the basement. He neglected to mention that we agreed to move into the dirty house for a discount in the first month's rent, that he had promised me he would do the laundry always if I would take care of the rest of the housework, and that he'd had tasty meals of roast beef and hamburgers the two previous nights. He humiliated me in our home, our sanctuary.

Meanwhile, he let his drunken friends run around the house, horse playing on the verge of putting a hole in the wall or knocking out the glass doors. He let them stay the night, drunk, and dismissed that one guy's advances toward me saying that my pajamas, the silky long-sleeve top and long pants, were too sexy to be wearing anyway.

It was horrible. I felt angry, and I told him so. He acted as if he didn't know what I was talking about. "You know how I get when I'm drinking, Kellie. I just don't remember this stuff." That meant it didn't happen. "If it will make you feel better, I won't invite them all over at once anymore."

No, it didn't make me feel better. Instead of bringing them home, he stayed away from home. "You're pissed off when I'm home and you're pissed off when I'm gone! I can't win with you!" he yelled. Win.

Maybe he was fighting the wrong war. I didn't want to win; I wanted him to respect me. I began to think that I must play his game if I were going to earn his respect. It did not dawn on me that I "should" already have his respect; he asked me to marry him, and that was supposed to mean he at least liked me, at least respected me. I guess I thought that when that ring went on my finger, he would stop being the jerk and start being my hero. It was a misplaced assumption, but now, almost 18 years later, I am willing to admit I was wrong.

Cheating

October 20, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 3 days until the end

In 1995 our marriage erupted in a cheating scandal. Will accused me; I accused him. It was very ugly. I assumed that he accused me because he had cheated; I'd heard as much through rumors beginning right after he left on the 6-month deployment. Plus, Will sent me a totally gorgeous picture of himself. Viewing the picture, I thought he'd come in from a run. He was sweaty and glowing, wearing his running shorts and grabbing for a towel. Hubba hubba! But then, combined with the rumors, I started to wonder, "What guy would take a picture like that of another man?"

And then I learned the photographer's name: Sheila.

Soon after he came home, I wrote in my journal:

Today is our third anniversary. Sometimes it seems like a long time we've been together, and other times it seems like we got married yesterday. He's planned a party for "us" but only his friends are invited. He acts as if he didn't just spend six months with them!

He got back from Cuba three weeks ago, and we've been going through a tough readjustment. I'm just not sure what is right. I know one thing in my heart, but he denies it to my face. I know he's lying about cheating on me. I know it.

He accuses me of cheating on him over and over. He yells out random names and tells me I'm a whore and that he can't trust me. Then, five minutes later, I'm still crying and he is whistling and walking around like nothing happened. I know my secrets. I know what I've done. But that doesn't take away from what he did. It doesn't take away from how he acts.

I just have to forgive him. I can't carry this pain around inside any longer. Forgive him, forgive me, and then go on with it. Between his lies and my lies, I feel like I'd rather not go to Texas with him – not now, not ever.

One day I decided that I couldn't go on like that. I had to either leave him or forgive him. I decided to forgive him. Whether he cheated or not, I believed he had, so forgiving was the tact I took. I knew I'd never forget, but I did decide to forgive.

Soon after the party, my sister said that she knew something I didn't about my husband. I told her that I didn't want to know. She kept silent about it until yesterday after reading *The Shotler Story* when she again asked me if I wanted to know what she knew. I said okay, and she summoned her husband.

Reluctantly, my brother-in-law told me that he heard my husband say, "I had that" (or something similar) in reference to a female soldier (Sheila) who came to a party at our house. He took the statement as fact and told my sister about it at that time. Barring some stupid macho bragging to the guys my husband was talking to (which makes no sense to me - he was married and everyone knew it), my belief that he cheated was confirmed.

It doesn't make a difference one way or the other. I already knew in my bones that he was unfaithful. I chose to forgive and put it behind me; evidently, it worked. I forgave him so well that I have successfully ignored my suspicions of his infidelities up until the present day.

Dollhouse

October 21, 2008

1 year, 3 months, 2 days until the end

Will fought with the 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq for 13 months. He was in Kuwait, ready to go, a week before the U.S. announced its attack. When he came home, he told me he started drinking again. He had not drunk a drop of alcohol for almost seven years. You see, right after our second son, Eddie, was born in 1996, I gave Will an ultimatum: "You can be my husband, or you can continue to drink. But you can't do both". To my surprise, he quit drinking. Also to my surprise, the absence of alcohol did not help our relationship. In hindsight, I see that the alcohol was never the real problem. Alcohol may free the demon within him a bit easier, but the demon can come out on its own.

In the years Will abstained, he did not change who he is at the core. I lied to myself, making up excuses for him so I could continue to love him. I felt that I should love him, had to love him because he relinquished Jack Daniels for his family. We play house, but

our house is a plastic dollhouse sheltering plastic people wearing plastic smiles. There is no truth behind the smiles. There is only make-believe. I wanted so badly to believe our love was real that I substituted my lies for truth.

Why did I do it? I wanted our relationship to make sense. I wanted to think I loved him. I wanted to believe he would never hurt me on purpose. I still want all of those things, but there is no evidence for any of it.

-----End of Preview-----

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