The Broken Road…breaking the cycle of Domestic Violence

I'm amazed that I am standing here. Despite my upbringing, despite being raised on the East Side around drugs, violence, and gangs, I am still here. I have my BA from a prestigious private college in the Midwest. I am the marketing director for a local successful corporation and I have raised amazing, talented daughters. Sometimes we only see the end result and not the broken road that led us to this moment.

I am truly humbled that this has brought me full circle back to where I started. It's funny how God works like that. God is able to take what the devil meant for harm and turn it around for His good. I have been where these women have been and God has given me the resources to be able to **sow positivity into these women's lives and let them know they are more than a statistic**. *They are not defined by their past.* Let the labels go: victim, addict, broken. These are not who you are. You are loved, you are chosen, ***you are redeemed***.

Although I may not have deserved all the blessings I now have, I believe that God uses my testimony to show how merciful He is. **To show others they are more than the sum of their mistakes.** I have been blessed to be in a position to give back to a program that gave so much to me. I show I am a good steward of what God has given me by sharing with these women, connecting them to resources, and empowering them to end the negative cycle. **To show them it's within our power to change.**

Domestic violence covers all walks of life. I like to say it's an overachiever. *Economics, race, education do not provide any obstacles. It works overtime to decimate families, and ultimately communities. It's like cancer, starting out as a small speck that if left unchecked can ultimately consume its host.*

I grew up so closely to this culprit—that it felt like a fixture. Just like the light or the chair. It was something that just dwelled in the house with us.

I was born and raised in East Salinas in a single-family home. I never knew my father.

Growing up I witnessed so much abuse of the women in my life. The violence and abuse against my aunts became so normal that it is no wonder that these role models set the stage to my own story of abuse. The villains changed but the storyline remained the same.

I received my BA at a Midwest college, and I'd like to say that somehow having that education broke the cycle…but it didn't. **As women we tend to create our own prison, whose door is open and we could just break free…if we only tried the lock.**

The most powerful tool domestic violence has is not the abuse, but the shame that goes with it. I was an educated women, being abused, and said nothing, because I was ashamed. Ashamed that I was educated. Ashamed that I had a child out of wedlock, and ashamed that I knew better, that I said I would never be like my aunts.

And yet despite the education, there I was, a victim of domestic violence.

I met my oldest daughter's dad in college, we were engaged and expecting my daughter.

- Our once loving relationship turned to one of violence, and I had no idea why, until I found out too late that he was addicted to drugs.
- He used to hit me while pregnant, scratching my body, leaving bruises, not caring that I carried life inside me.
- I had nowhere to go, and did not care whether my child or I lived at this point…I welcomed death, because at least the suffering would end.
- I remember praying to God that the next time would be the last time and that I wouldn't wake up.
    - But thank God for unanswered prayers.

This is where I come full circle. Where my cycle begins to end. Where my broken path leads me to the person you see today. **I ended up homeless, fleeing the abuse, with a three-week old infant.** No job, no car, and nowhere to live until a friend connected me to one of the Community Homeless Solution's shelters in Salinas.

I remember going through the intake process. Everything seeming so surreal. That I had lost my path. I remember lying there…thinking…. Lord I can't get any lower than this and the only way is up from here, so I prayed. But thank God for the shelter. **It was at the shelter, that I was able to do what I could never do before. Breathe and exist.**

When you are in a violent relationship you are afraid. Afraid to breathe, afraid to be heard, afraid to be seen, afraid to be anything other than what he wants you to be—all in an effort to avoid their wrath, to avoid their fists. But at the shelter, I learned to focus on me, on the life I wanted for my child. No more looking over my shoulder…my sight was set on the future.

And this is what I want to impart on women in similar situations.

Do not quit before your season is due. I came from a place of violence and abuse, gangs, and drugs. I lost everything. If I had given up that night as I laid in the shelter with my three-week old baby I would never had seen God's plan for me.

- When I didn't have a home, I now own one.
- When I didn't have a job, I'm now a director of a successful company.
- When I didn't love me…God loved me…And He never gave up on me.
- ***Change is hard, but part of changing is discomfort…so it's time that we get comfortable with being uncomfortable.***
- Be that change…end those generational curses with you.
    - That's what I pray everyday, that it ends with me.
    - I speak it to God that my girls be blessed and have a good life…and have faith that it will come to fruition.

In closing, I want to leave all of you with this. I heard Joel Osteen say…"You are either feeding your history or you're feeding your destiny, but you can't feed both. When you hold on to your past, it's at the expense of your future. So, start investing in yourself and most of all, forgive yourself."

- Forgive yourself for what you did when you were lost…regardless of what you may have done.
- God loves you and forgives you.
- Forgive yourself for believing the lies that others told you.
- Make a promise to love yourself the way God loves you.

Hold your head up high…and remember you are God's masterpiece, fearfully and wonderfully made.

Thank you again for this honor. I will continue to spread encouragement to these women, hoping that one day, they too will be up here accepting this award.