



The following story of HOPE was written and submitted by a *Survivor*.

I grew up in a very abusive home. My dad was physically, mentally and emotionally abusive to my brother and me. My dad was and is an alcoholic. He and my mom divorced when I was little; he would beat my mom on a regular basis. I don't remember everything from my childhood, which is probably a good thing, but I have flashbacks daily. I remember that there was a church just up the road from where I was living with my dad and when it was a good week or my dad was just in a good mood he would allow me to go there on Sundays. It was amazing; I felt so much love there and I really looked forward to that. My mom moved away somewhere when her and my father divorced and left my brother and me with my dad. My dad's side of the family was all very abusive. I remember when we lived with my uncle he used to beat his wife as well. He held her on the stairs with a shotgun to her head because their baby fell; he told her he was going to kill her. This type of behavior was an everyday occurrence in our home. My dad would beat us sometimes for no

good reason. I remember the one time my dad beat me so bad that I was unable to attend school for a while because I was so badly bruised; I had swelling from head to toe and was in so much pain. My dad once put my brother and me into a room and yelled at us for over two hours telling us how useless and no good we were and that we would never amount to anything. My heart broke that day; I honestly believed I was no good anymore and felt broken.

I moved in with my mom and her new husband and as bad as it was with my dad, things got even worse. I was sexually assaulted from age nine until I was 12 or 13-years-old on and off by multiple men (some who were family). My step uncle assaulted me first at age nine. The night that this happened, I was so scared I remember running and hiding in the furnace room and sleeping on the floor in fear that he would find me again. Then friends of my stepdad abused me multiple times after that. The last time that I was abused it, was by my stepdad. He told me not to tell and he would never do it again. I was so scared I just wanted it to stop. I honestly did not know where to go or who to turn to at that point. I confronted my mom about my stepdad and told her what happened. She told me to go to a friend's for the night and she would deal with it. I came home the next day to her telling me that I needed to wear more clothes to cover up and it was basically my fault not his, he could not help himself. I started sleeping with a chair holding my door shut at night because I was terrified that he would try to come in and assault me again. After that he became very mentally and physically abusive towards me and my mom. I always tried to help her, but it always ended up with me getting hurt. I have been thrown through a door and into a TV and so many more incidents, but she

always went back to him and always bailed him out when I would put him in jail for beating her up. I remember coming home at times, and if he was upset about something, everything I owned would be put on the front yard and he would tell me I didn't have a home anymore. I would cry so hard but I had nowhere else to go. As the years went on things just never got better. A Christmas one year, we had no money and my mom went to the food bank for food and presents—but she cared more about getting drunk and high than having a Christmas. I woke up in the morning to nothing under the tree because my mom was so wasted, she was passed out on the floor. There would always be people over and they would party all the time, with lots of drugs and drinking, even on school nights, loud music and yelling; it never stopped I actually hated going home. There came a point in my life I was so lost I honestly felt like no one cared and didn't know why I was born I attempted suicide three times, then started into drugs and drinking very heavily. I ended up in hospital getting my stomach pumped from alcohol poisoning. I struggled with an eating disorder all through high school because that was the one thing I could control and no one could take that from me. Eventually, I ended up in jail for multiple charges and a warrant for my arrest.

I found myself pregnant at 16-years-old. My mom told me to either get rid of the baby or I had no home to live in. I kept the baby and one day came home to no mom. The house we lived in was being taken by the bank, which I had no idea and they took their clothes and left me. They never told me where they were going, and I never heard from my mom again for a while. I ended up living there for a few weeks with no heat or hydro and very little food. I decided to hitchhike toward where my dad lived. I was hoping my dad would let me live there but I was wrong. I ended up living at multiple people's houses couch surfing for a few months. I eventually got in contact with my mom after I tracked her down, and she said I could stay with her and my stepdad. I didn't want to but had nowhere to go and was very pregnant. I stayed with her until my daughter was born. Once my daughter came I was unable to keep living there in fear of what he would do to me or my daughter. My boyfriend at the time—who is now my husband—did not want us there either because I told him what happened to me as a child.

I got in touch with Family Transition Place (FTP) and they took my daughter and me in. Words could never explain how grateful and thankful I was. I actually slept for the first time in years without fear of someone hurting me. Staff was always there to talk to even when I woke up in the middle of the night with my daughter. They helped me with parenting for the first time at a young age, getting my first apartment and getting things for my place. The staff there gave me HOPE that it was going to be okay. They hold a special place in my heart and always will. I've been able to give back to FTP and will continue to do what I can to help. I joined the Dufferin/Caledon Domestic Assault Review Team (DART) this year and look forward to the opportunity to reach out to others.

Although this is just a brief description, I pray and hope to give someone courage and strength through reading my story. To let them know that in a world of darkness and unknown that there is HOPE. I have conquered a lot of obstacles in my way throughout my life, and by the grace of God I am living a happy life filled with joy. I know I still struggle daily with flashbacks and memories and that's okay, I am a better, stronger, braver, more courageous person today than I could ever imagine and I know that I am loved by an amazing God, family and friends.

I can do anything through him who gives me strength - Philippians 4:13