



.....● Maureen Davis

Hope is...

Surviving and thriving – and finding hope. by Maureen Davis

Hope is...the first peaceful night, curled up on the couch with your children, one on either side, knowing you're safe, and that he can't get to you. Hope is...the first Christmas with close friends and my then 11-year-old son telling me it was the best Christmas ever... "and not because of the presents, Mom. Nobody's arguing, angry, or yelling."

Editor's note: some of the content in the following article may be difficult for some readers.

“Tell me that you love me, you bitch... Just say it,” he demanded through clenched teeth. The full weight of his body was pinning me down on the couch, my head jammed in the crevice where the seat cushions meet the back rest, the blade of the knife against my neck. “Just say it, you bitch!”

I can't bring myself to say it. The voice inside my head is screaming, “Say it! Say it to save your life,” but the words won't come out. I remind myself that I don't have to mean it; I just have to utter the words and maybe, just maybe, he'll let me up.

I can feel the blade of the knife against my throat. Is this how it's going to end? Each time it escalates, each time worse than the last, I ask myself if this is how I am going to die. I'm scrambling to find my voice, but it fails me. In this moment, I realize how dead I am inside – I cannot conjure up the words he demands of me, not even to save my life.

“I'm going to kill you,” he announces. “That's how this is going to end; you're going to die tonight.”

This is not the first time he's announced that he's going to be the instrument of my death. I lost count long ago. If it wasn't for two little boys in their bedroom down the hall sleeping through this, I don't think I'd care either way how this turned out any more. I'm tired. I'm shattered. I'm broken.

I feel his rage ebbing a bit, ever so slightly. The crushing weight that is suffocating me eases up. He leans back to survey the results of tonight's tantrum—he's drawn no tears. I'm laying still and quiet, waiting to see how this plays out. It's clearly out of my control; I am merely an unwilling participant. The knife is still at my throat, not pressed quite so hard as it was. He leans over and licks my face, across my left cheek. I don't flinch. Maybe he wants to know what fear tastes like. He's going to be sorely disappointed—I don't fear him. I'm not afraid; I'm dead inside. Fear had long ago surrendered to sheer exhaustion. Unable to find my way out, I had found a numb place within myself where I could retreat and wait out the storm. Whatever was going to happen was going to happen whether it was a verbal tirade, a fist slammed into my face, or the use of a weapon of convenience—a pair of scissors, the fireplace poker, a knife.

That tongue dragged across my face is merely the parting shot. He can't bring himself to finish me off and the fury is subsiding, so he settles for the most degrading thing that comes to mind. He takes the knife from my throat, laughs a sickening, mocking laugh, and sits back. It's over. For now. He can't quite bring himself to cross that line tonight. He's run out of steam, tiring of his own

rage. So, this is not how it ends, at least not yet.

“You're lucky, bitch.”

Yep, that's me... lucky.

I had stayed because he said he would kill me if I left, but there is a growing awareness that it's only a matter of time before he kills me if I stay.

It was shortly after that night that I borrowed my dad's truck, and with the help of a friend I had confided in, threw everything we could into garbage bags and left. It was a leap of faith, fuelled by hope.

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I had a job at which I excelled, eventually resulting in a company-paid transfer halfway across the country, where I bought a house and raised my sons in a home free of violence. Two little boys whose early years were spent in the eye of the storm have grown up to be two amazing young men of whom I am immensely proud.

Hope is... in a letter of reference my son wrote for me as part of an assignment:

“When it became apparent that his physical and emotional abuse had become intolerable, she took us away from our home, packing everything we had in garbage bags while he was at work. From then on, with great determination, she built a life for me and my brother, providing us with everything we needed. When the opportunity arose to move to Toronto, I wasn't scared because I knew that our little family could get through anything with my mother at the helm. Since then, our family has flourished, and I know it's mainly because of my mom's strength and determination.”

I share my story with victims and survivors of domestic violence, front-line crisis responders, and anyone else trying to understand the complicated dynamics of abusive relationships. My goal is to shine a bright light in dark corners—domestic abuse thrives on secrecy—we need to talk about what happens behind closed doors. If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, there are agencies in your community that can assist with confidential counseling, safety planning, and legal advice. Reach out, make a phone call, start the conversation. Hope is... finding your time and place to be happy, and discovering you were worth it all along.