

No Longer A Victim

One Woman's Triumph Over a Lifetime of Abuse and Neglect

Maria* grew up in a family where love and affection were hard to come by. Her first experience with domestic violence occurred in her late teens. Her boyfriend at the time provided the love that she so desperately needed. But the honeymoon phase was short lived, and it wasn't long before Maria's intuitions told her something was wrong with their relationship. The boyfriend's verbal attacks soon turned physical, leaving Maria not only bruised but broken in spirit. She had suffered damage to her self-esteem and self-worth. Abusive men continued to come in and out of her life from that point on.

Maria found she had fallen into a repeating cycle of abusive relationships. She sought refuge at Carpenter House, Family Service of the Piedmont's Domestic Violence Shelter in High Point. Fighting back tears, Maria remembers that at the time, she was in love. "Doing something different was scary to me," she says. But she knew she was being controlled and manipulated, and this time Maria was determined to be a victim no longer. She had found Carpenter House by researching shelters on the internet, to leave everything behind and flee from her abuser. "When you're in a desperate situation, you will take desperate measures," Maria says. "I looked at myself as trying to save my life."

During her stay at Carpenter House, Maria was able to work on issues that she had buried since childhood. With the help of the shelter staff, she addressed the hidden things which had affected her life and caused her to stay in so many abusive relationships. "I felt the staff genuinely cared about me," Maria smiles, "They allowed me to open myself up and gave me the support and encouragement to believe, I can do this. It was like I had a healing which brought me to where I needed to be now."

Since her time at Carpenter House, Maria has seen many positive changes. "The first couple of weeks I had so many doubts," she remembers. "I felt I wasn't ever going to get out of the shelter." Six months later, Maria was back on her feet in a new home of her own. She is now a full-time student studying counseling. "When you really want something you're going to find a way to do what you need to do," she says. "It just depends how much you want it."

"If you make a decision in your life to get to the root cause of a situation, it will always work out for the best." Maria says that is the most important lesson she learned during her stay at Carpenter House. "I felt my experience with domestic violence stemmed from my childhood and something deep within. You have to go through the process of healing. Take the advice of others even if it's scary. Change is scary. Implementing the lessons learned gives you a positive outlook and freshness in your life."

Maria hopes other women who need change will have the courage to make the right decision; those who are really tired, at a crossroad and don't know which way to go. "The ultimate decision to stay in an abusive situation is yours," she states. "If you need help getting out, Carpenter House is the place that can put you on the correct path. They will help you make the right choice without making the choice for you."

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.