

Heather's T.R.E.E. "Rebekah's Story"

A HeathersTree.org Reader Submission – July 2008

Over the last 9 months since Heather was killed, I have received many emails and stories regarding domestic violence. The majority of them expressing their sadness over her death. They have all been so meaningful to me and I treasure each and every one. Many are from friends and many from people I don't know. This month's newsletter comes from one of those people. It is an extremely powerful and courageous story about domestic violence and how it affects not only the one who is abused, but those who witness it and are forced to live with it, mainly children. Rebekah is one of the lucky ones who escaped it. If nothing else, I hope "Rebekah's Story" will open the eyes of those aware of a domestic violence situation and do nothing about it, to do something. Many times, children's lives depend on it. ~ LHF

Rebekah's Story

Ok... this is very unlike me to write something like this, but all of this with Heather Spencer's death has gotten me really thinking about things. I have always wanted to get involved with an organization for Domestic Abuse victims, but you know how it is- you get busy with...life! And getting involved means talking about my past and all the horrible feelings that I know I would have to share if I ever did get involved with a charity and I just didn't want to do that. You don't want to remember the bad things in your life- you want to put them away or sweep them under the rug like you do with dirt when company comes over. But domestic abuse is out there. It happens everyday. It is happening now, and probably to someone you know. I cannot stress to you how important it is to find help for someone who is going through it. If someone had helped Heather she might still be here.

Let me first start off by saying I did not know Heather Spencer. I have only read about her in the papers and media. I knew George, but not her. It is a humongous tragedy in the way she died. Her family is going to be tormented by this forever and so are her very many friends. It is unfair, unjust, and just extremely sad.

How can someone write something about someone they didn't know, right? Well, I watched my mother get abused every night for years. My mother was lucky enough to get out of it though, even though at times I honestly didn't think she would. Maybe, by me sharing my story, it can help someone from having to go through what my mother went through...or even worse, what Heather went through.

So, here is my story (the edited version)...and it is dedicated to Heather Spencer and every other victim of domestic abuse. My mother met my step father when I was about 6. And even at such an early age, I remember telling her he had "devil eyes". Why didn't she listen to me?? Instead of "children should be seen and not heard", it should be "children should be heard and BELIEVED". But anyway, I digress.

My step "father" wasn't such a monster at first. It came on very slowly....I guess he was waiting until he had reeled her in- hook, line, and sinker. And boy was she reeled in. For whatever reason, she was head over heels in love. The beatings came on at a very leisurely pace at first. They would fight, he would slap her. They would argue, he would push. But it wasn't anything TOO bad right? And, you know, maybe she antagonized him right? Maybe she did something to set him off right? Other than the "small" hits, he was pretty much a "good guy", RIGHT?

My mother stayed with my step "father" until I was in the 7th grade. So, through those years I witnessed a lot--My mother beat repeatedly. I remember times not wanting to go anywhere because I honestly didn't know if my mother was going to be killed or not. There were times I would come home and find her in face bandages. She had "hit her mouth on the cabinet when she was looking for a pot" and broke her jaw. Yeah right... Another time she had "hit her tooth on the steering wheel when she stopped too suddenly at a red light" and had her teeth knocked out. SURE she did. Another time she had "accidentally tripped and fell into a broken glass dining room table". When I asked her how the HUGE table had broken she said "she was changing the light bulb and ladder fell on it". I was young. I was naïve- I didn't know what had really happened. What I did find out later, however, was that she almost bled to death when he pushed her into the broken table he had broken when he threw her into it. The broken piece of the table had jammed into her leg and was about an inch from the main vein. Just one shove harder and she would have died. To this day I still cannot look at a brass and glass table without wanting to vomit.

There were other times my brother and I came home and would find him on top of her beating her with his brand new cowboy boots that he loved. He had her head pinned to the ground and was hitting her with the boot's heel. To this day it makes me sick to see someone in them.

I remember one jolly Christmas he decided to splurge on her and he bought her a bunch of Georgio perfume (do you remember that perfume??) He spent a ton on her that year. What a swell guy right? Since he spent so much money on her he must REALLY love her RIGHT? Well, they started arguing (she probably did something tragic like not having dinner ready on time) and he threw EVERYTHING into the fire. The jewelry, the grandfather clock...the perfume...He started beating her and I ran outside (we were living in an apartment....probably the 10th one at this time since we got evicted from everywhere we lived due to the fighting) and I ran upstairs to the neighbors that lived above us. They called the police- of course- and I remember the cops banging on the door. I also remember them asking me if he had any guns and of course he did. He wouldn't answer the door so the police were calling in the swat team (due to the fact he was armed and had my mother has a hostage)..and all of a sudden we heard the loudest pops from inside my apartment....and then another....and another....and my mother screaming. And at that moment I don't think I have ever screamed as loud as I did then...no New Years Ever party or even at a pep rally have I ever screamed louder. He had shot my mother and was continuing to do

so while she screamed in agonizing pain???? No. Not that at all. The bottles of perfume had burst in the fireplace. To this day I cannot smell Giorgio perfume without wanting to vomit. The apartment reeked of Giorgio perfume and smoke for months. He still went to jail, but Santa skipped our house that year. All the noise scared the reindeer. Merry Christmas.

Are you paying attention yet?

There was another time that sticks out in my head...my brother, mother, and I had come back from shopping to find my room and my brother's room in shambles. He had gone on a manic tirade and had destroyed our rooms. Our shelves were broken...all my books were ripped apart, along with photographs and stuffed animals. My bedspread was shattered, along with my curtains. My brother's room was the same way...and his hamster had been squeezed to death.

Do I have your attention? Are you starting to realize that it isn't just drugs or steroids that make people do these things? Now, my step "father" did smoke pot here and there but for the most part he just drank. He was also a manic depressant though and never took his lithium so there were times his evilness was just him! There were times he was so cool, but most of the time he was a monster. And my mother loved him...and loved him so much that he convinced her to get rid of us. And she obliged. We went to live with my grandparents...a man is SO much more important than children...right???

I could sit here and tell you many more stories and all the times he threw her out of the car on the highway or threw her down the stairs. There were the times he pushed her down on the concrete or the time he threw her outside, NAKED, on the patio (in probably apartment number 15) in the middle of the winter. There were times he blackened eyes, OH! and all the bite marks. Punching and hitting wasn't enough- he would take chunks out of her and leave perfect teeth marks in her skin. Pretty swell guy huh? Oh, and the time I wanted to watch the Karate Kid movie (the 1st one!) but he wanted me to eat my mother's famous black olive and grilled ham/cheese sandwich first. I told him I hated olives. Hated the smell of them. But he insisted and made me consume the sandwich or no movie. I had to do it! Come on! Ralph Macchio!! So I ate it...and gagged and he laughed. My mother just sat there....finally I got the sandwich down until it decided to come up. At the table. All over everything. No dinner for me for two days. No movie either. He did the same to me with shrimp. I don't like seafood. He forced me to eat it. And it always came up. It was a sick, SICK game he insisted on playing. I can't stand to look at an olive or a shrimp to this day without gagging.

Another time sticks out in my mind. My mother had to have foot surgery due to a broken foot (still don't know the truth on that one) and her foot was so bad that she had to have pins in it and was off her feet for weeks. He got angry one night because he was hungry and HOW DARE SHE not get up and cook him dinner and squeezed her foot til she was screaming out in agonizing pain and the neighbors called the police (off to apartment number 17 now) but I think you get the idea. Domestic abuse happens. It is happening now.

Heather Spencer did not deserve what happened to her- no one does. I remember seeing the first news clip of the story and some stupid woman being interviewed as a "nearby neighbor" and her STUPID reply of "Oh my gosh. I can't believe something like this went on in THIS

neighborhood! It is usually so SAFE!" I haven't wanted to yell at someone for being so ignorant in a long time like I did when I heard her open her mouth. Domestic abuse does not automatically happen in poor neighborhoods. It doesn't just happen to "poor, trashy" people. It happens in EVERY neighborhood. It happens to ALL types of people. It doesn't happen to a certain race. It doesn't happen to a certain type of person. And NO neighborhood is "safe" from domestic abuse. It is a secretive crime that no one speaks about. No one wants to come outside to collect the paper saying "Hey there! Guess what? My husband beat the ___ out of me last night! How's your job going? Oh great here! Well I better get inside because my husband is going to come home and beat me again so bad that I am going to have to have stitches in my face and miss work for ten weeks. Talk to you later!"

My mother EVENTUALLY got away from the step monster. But, in order to do so, we had to move to Mississippi from Houston. THAT is why we moved here- to save my mother's life. And I know, without a doubt, he would have eventually killed her. He was a sick, inhumane person with pure merciless evil inside him. My mother EVENTUALLY woke up and got him out of her life. Heather Spencer did not. She never got the chance to wake up and rid herself of her own terror.

I hate what happened to that poor, innocent girl. I hate that her life ended the way it did. I hate it ended at all. I hate that no one did anything to stop George. I hate that she didn't listen to friends and family when they warned her about him. I hate that she didn't see the evil within. I hate that she wanted to only see the good in him. I hate him for what he did to her.....

I cannot stress to you how important it is to get someone help if they are in an abusive relationship. Yes, you might lose their friendship but at LEAST they won't lose their life. My mother threw away her friends, family, and even children for that man. She gave up everything for him. The only thing she didn't give up was her life, but that was ONLY because she picked up everything and moved away. We had to move to a totally different state, and start a totally different life to rid ourselves of the hell we lived in. That is usually the only way. Please please PLEASE do NOT ever think "oh, it isn't my business" because it is. If you know about something wrong going on it automatically becomes your business. You have to get that person help because they aren't going to. They, for whatever sick reason, see only the good in that person. It goes far beyond co-dependency. It is something I have still yet to grasp reasoning for. And usually, the sicker the situation, the harder the victim is sucked in.

I am probably going to regret writing all this. I know it will probably get passed around to people who don't deserve to know a thing about me....but hopefully it will get to at least one person and help them. I didn't even think about doing this- I just sat down and starting typing. I am not the type of person to open up, but all I have thought about is Heather Spencer- a girl I never even knew- and the horrible HORRIBLE way she died. All of this has brought up many painful memories and I have had nightmares all week. But at least I am able to dream.....she is not.

Like I said earlier, I have always wanted to get involved to help others who were victims of domestic abuse. It is something I have always felt extremely strong about, but never really knew what to do except send money to shelters. But, shelters aren't for everyone. And they are usually for people who don't have the money to get away. So, I thought I would share some of my life to let you all know that YOU CAN HELP. If you know of anyone, ANYONE that is going through domestic abuse, please get them help. Tell the authorities. Lend them money to get away.

Convince them to move out of state if need be. Let them stay with you. ANYTHING. DO ANYTHING TO GET THEM OUT!

I know no one wants to get involved- believe me, I know that. I cannot count how many times my mother's friends or our neighbors turned their backs because they didn't want to get involved. But you have to. You have to get involved. I can't count how many times restraining orders were filed and then later dropped- charges filed and dropped, etc. But see, my mother was lucky. She got away! I sometimes think about him and wonder what he is doing and if he is doing the same thing to other women. I really hope he is dead if you want to know the honest truth. But she got away. So many others aren't so lucky.

Domestic abuse is happening right now as I write this. We live in one of the "best neighborhoods" in Jackson and everyone is soooooo "picture-perfect" friendly here. There are "picture perfect" houses on "picture perfect" yards. There are "picture perfect" children with "picture perfect" parents. But at least 1 out of 5 of these "picture perfect" families has domestic abuse in it. Somewhere, right now, someone is getting beat for burning the pot roast or the chicken being too cold. Someone, right now, is being beat for talking to someone else or wearing something that hadn't been "approved" first. Somewhere, right now, someone is begging for their life...somewhere, right now, someone needs your help. Please people, PLEASE, don't look away from this. If you know of anyone...ANYONE who is going through this please get them help. Please let them know they are NOT alone and that it isn't going to stop. It isn't going to go away because someone goes to rehab. It isn't going to go away because someone quit doing steroids or quit drinking. It isn't going to go away because "that isn't like that person- they are usually so nice! They were out of their mind that day". It isn't going to go away because they love that person. It isn't going to go away unless they GET away from the abuse...and the abuser.

My heart...my entire heart...goes out to Heather Spencer and her friends and family. I cannot imagine the pain and grief they are all feeling. I am so sorry that innocent and beautiful girl had to endure so much pain...I only hope now, that wherever she is, she is happy and free. The pain is over. She doesn't have to be frightened anymore. She doesn't have to be scared. She is free from George and the pain he caused her. She never has to worry about him or anyone else ever hurting her again.

Ok...I am done now with story. I hope after you read this that you think long and hard about your life and the goodness in it. Before you gripe about work or the weather, please take the time to appreciate the fact that you can sleep without being afraid to close your eyes. Be grateful that every time you hear a loud noise you are not scared he is coming back into your room (or your mother's) for another beating. Be grateful that you can go to sleep and not be scared that you won't live through the night. Even though I still dream about him, I know when I wake up he can't hurt me or my family anymore- only the memories can.

I know I have never had it better and I am so grateful for everything I have in my life...so be grateful for everything you have and everything around you. Not everyone has it so good.

~ Rebekah Petrowski Hixon

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