

Dorothy's story as told to Joy Butler

My life was suddenly turned around when I was hurriedly married to a young man who swept me off my feet. I was completing my training as a nurse at the Sydney Adventist Hospital and his parents were coming for another family wedding. He said it was convenient for us to have ours close in succession. My father had been a gentle, caring man and so I thought all men were the same.

Three months after my marriage, Graham and I were having fun together and I playfully pulled at my wedding ring. Instantly he beat me up and I was totally shocked. I thought "Goodness me, what have I married?"

After this, it was constant beatings with me never fighting back. I didn't know how. He would tell me "You're a gutless wonder."

He and I both had grown up as good Adventists in Australia and I couldn't comprehend what was happening. I had no knowledge of such behaviour and I remembered my wedding vows where I had said before God that I would commit myself to this man "for better or for worse." This was certainly "worse" and I had no idea what to do.

Two and a half years later my first child was born and when she was only 6 months old I received a terrible beating. This time it was with the buckle end of his belt. This man, who was a respected Conference Office accountant, was the man I was attached to. That day a conference worker/pastor called at my house and when he arrived I begged for help. I said "Please help me – my husband has beaten me and I am hurt." The visitor replied "We all have our problems" and went off to play tennis with my husband.

I couldn't believe his uncaring attitude and packed my bags and with baby we went off to my parent's home at Gosford. It was then that I told my family what had been happening. Graham rang and apologized, crying and begging for forgiveness. Eventually I believed him, gave in and went back.

The minute I walked through the door, he stood on my feet and called me a "slut" and told me I was never to go away again or terrible consequences would ensue. I was monitored closely and it was hard to make a get-away. I was now too terrified to murmur or object.

This man would now wake me at all hours of the night to have sex. He was determined to make me pregnant again. I was often not allowed to sleep and was nudged awake if he could not sleep – "why should you sleep if I can't?" He would kick me out of bed and then pull me back and tell me I should submit as the Bible says and that I belonged in his bed because I was his wife. My second daughter was born 23 months later.

We built a new house and he advised the builders to have no internal locks. I had locked myself in the bathroom many times to escape his tantrums but in a new house there was no opportunity for that. We attended church together

and often he would demand that I put on make up to cover my bruised face and he would proceed to pray a prayer like a “number one minister”.

For 10 years I suffered this abuse, often being covered with bruises, cuts and eventually my hair began to fall out. One day, after a severe beating, I was crying in the doctor’s office where I worked and he asked me what was wrong. I showed him my bruises and he advised me to go immediately to the Chamber of Magistrates, which I did.

That day I took a text from the promise box and it read “We do not have to live with wrath.” I read in a book by Ellen White where she told an abused woman “I would not advise you to return.” I knew this was God speaking to me and I knew then that He had heard my cries. I also realized that I could not rely on people or a church or an institution but on God alone. I told my parents I was leaving and I did.

Court cases proceeded and “I got precious little.” Constant haggling and arguing over custody and visitation rights for the children ensued. The harassment did not end – he would ring, knock on the door, follow me and the children would come home crying after their visits with him.

During this time, Graham told people that I was lying. Because he was a church worker, most people believed him and I seriously considered giving up on church. My family and I were not supported. Graham sent many pastors to visit me during this time who advised “there are exceptions to rules” implying that this could be fixed and he might change but fortunately few advised me to return to him. One prominent minister did encourage me to return and said “Men have needs you know.” I was so angry and asked him to leave. He did not come back. Others asked why I had stayed so long and one suggested “you must have liked it.” Few church members believed my story except for one couple. They listened and believed. I decided that I would keep going to church – I went to worship God, not this man.

I am now happily married to a gentle and caring man. We understand and care for each other and we are content. My children are grown and married. Some kind people in church-employ have apologised to me for not hearing my hurt when I needed their support, others have remained silent. The story hurts to tell but the issues of abuse by “righteous men” have gone on too long. I believe that Pastors and the church must address the issue. I suffered physical, mental and spiritual abuse and I want to share this story to tell the world that this must stop. The damage has been enormous for myself, my children and the family. Praise God He has brought me up out of a miserable pit and put my feet firmly on the rock.