

Chapter Twenty-Two

“If the shoe fits, wear it.”

Nicholas Breton

It doesn't matter what I do or how I do it, things will never be good enough for Todd. Why has it taken me so long to come to this conclusion? Putting two and two together, it's becoming clearer that Todd doesn't like anybody. I can't think of anyone he does NOT complain about. He is the only person that HE trusts. There has to be something wrong with this picture! I should have known it. Red flags everywhere, when people don't like or trust anybody. Why have I not been able to see this before? Is love so blind that I can't see the obvious?

I stand at our large picture window, looking out at the moonlight with the lights in the living room turned off. M.C. jumps up on the piano bench and rubs his face on my hand. He begins to purr loudly, with intense meowing, intermixed with trills.

“Hi, M.C,” I say quietly.

I bend over and kiss him on the head. He stretches out his body to receive my affection. We gaze at each other for a moment. Here is a cat that only one year ago hardly ever came out. Our social times in the evening have become a regular for each of us. I look under the piano and watch Dutch, who is stretched out, lying on his side. He breathes heavily, almost snoring. We have become quite the threesome. I don't know what is happening with me. Today, I felt I was going to lose it. Looking out the window once again, I play back the events of the day.

This morning, I was driving around, running errands. I found myself aimlessly driving around Moscow again, almost to the point of tears, but as usual, they wouldn't come. I had this urge to go see Diana, a woman from church who works at Alternatives to Violence of the Palouse. I hardly know this woman. I see her with her family each week at church and we visit, but other than that, I rarely see her! My hope was she could help me figure out what to do. Todd is not going to beat me up or anything, but I thought she could give me some advice.

Diana works with spouses that have problems. They are abusive situations, but somehow, I hoped she could lead me to some answers. I've never talked with her at church about anything involving Todd, so I'm sure she was surprised to see me. I felt totally stupid walking into the Alternatives to Violence office, almost embarrassed. They help sickos who hit each other and try to hurt their families.

I sit down on the piano bench with M.C., who is still rubbing his head on my hand. His loud purring, along with Dutch's breathing, is almost soothing in the quiet house. Bending down to pick up my car keys, which are on the floor next to my purse, I remember the pamphlet. Yes, the pamphlet. I saw it on the counter when I was waiting to see Diana today. I pick up my purse, open it up, and look at the title in the dim light of the moon as it shines through the window. It Shouldn't Hurt To Go Home ... an interesting title.

Putting my purse back on the floor next to the piano, I get up and walk towards my chair by the wood stove, pamphlet in hand. As I leave M.C. on the piano bench, swipes at me, as if to say, "Mom, Don't leave me! Pet me some more!" I turn on the lamp next to the wood stove and sit down. Todd has been in bed for quite awhile, so I can read uninterrupted. Somehow, I don't believe he would be too happy if he saw me reading this!

I slowly open the pamphlet, wondering what lies in the pages ahead. This is new territory for me. Something tells me to keep going. As I flip through the pages, I begin to see a picture of what is considered domestic violence. I read the usual stuff on the opening page, descriptions about physical violence. I know about that from reading the newspapers and watching excerpts of the O.J. Simpson trial.

I'm tempted to close the pamphlet at this point. Todd isn't like this! Why am I even reading this? But something catches my attention.

"Batterers want to control their domestic partners through fear. They do this by regularly abusing them physically, sexually, psychologically, and economically."

This is familiar territory. I'm intrigued and read on. I am surprised that there are so many forms of domestic violence. I thought domestic violence involved hitting each other.

I look at the category for economic control.

"Not paying bills, refusing to give the victim money, not letting the victim work, interfering with the victims' job and refusing to work and support the family."

This is abusive? I would have never thought that! I think back to the times we had our power, water, and phone turned off because Todd wouldn't pay the bills. Rather than call the companies and make payment arrangements, he just wouldn't pay them. I suppose if you really think about it, this is a form of control.

I continue to read. The verbal abuse category really catches my attention.

"Constant criticism, making humiliating remarks, not responding to what the victim is saying, mocking, name calling, yelling, swearing, interrupting and changing the subject."

Todd exhibits all but one of these behaviors. All I have to do is remember what happened at market on Saturday and realize he did most of what's on this list. Todd never yells at me. Sometimes, I wish he would! It would make me feel better to see that he actually has emotion about something. Why can't we fight like normal couples? I thought because we DIDN'T fight, we were better off. Somehow, I don't believe that is true anymore. At least if we were yelling at each other, there would be some form of communication!

I continue.

“Isolation: making it hard for the victim to see family and friends, controlling where the victim goes, reading mail and taking the victim’s car keys.”

This one is easy. It doesn’t take much thinking to come up with an example. It has been a year since I have been allowed to see my family. Every time I want to go, Todd tells me how much he dislikes them. He hates my mother, my father, all but one of my brothers, and even my grandparents now! I know that my father is worried about me since he has not heard from me in almost a year. I’m shocked that this is considered abuse.

I think back to a conversation Sharon Huggins and I had last Christmas when she came over to the house to have me help her learn her part for the Christmas Cantata. How odd... we used to be best friends and now, we never see each other anymore.

“What do you mean? You aren’t allowed to see your grandparents?” Sharon asks in a whisper, looking directly at me.

“We owe them money from our first house. You know, the one we lost because of financing?”

I look at the music for a minute rather than Sharon. I don’t know why, but I can’t make eye contact with her. She sits quietly in the folding chair I’ve set next to the piano bench. I feel her eyes piercing my soul. Of all people who know me, Sharon will be able to read me.

“So why would Todd not let you see them because of that?”

“He’s embarrassed.”

I sit on the piano bench, eagerly waiting to start the next song, fingers on the appropriate keys. I don’t want to be having this conversation.

“Do you see your father?”

“No, I’m not allowed to see him either.”

“Why?”

“Todd doesn’t like my step-mother. He thinks she’s very negative, and a hypochondriac.” We look at each other for a second. I take my hands off the keys and turn my body toward her.

“Is she the one that’s been sick for so long?”

“Yes. I really miss my father though.”

“I had no idea!”

“I’m sure my dad is worried about me.”

“Why don’t you call him?”

“I don’t know. I think I would have to explain some things, and I don’t feel able to do that right now.”

“He loves you and so do your grandparents.” She touches my arms, which are now in my lap.

We lock gazes for a second. I sense a deep despair in her eyes. I’m amazed that even though we’ve been in the same church for years, lived together, played together, and shared our joys and sorrows together, we’ve not had contact for almost five years. Sharon doesn’t even know me anymore.

I stare blankly. I know what it feels like to be kept away from those who truly love me. I’ve never realized what is really going on. I read on.

“Coercion: the abuser makes the victim feel guilty, pushes the victim into decisions, the abuser sulks, the abuser manipulates family members, always insists on being right and makes impossible rules and punishes the victim for breaking them.”

My mind flashes back to Farmer’s Market again. How true I know these are. I remember Todd forcing me to take the five-hundred pound espresso cart out of the truck with no help. He knew I was tired and could barely move and forced me to help anyway. He was punishing me for wanting to run the espresso business. Can he possibly be doing these horrible things on purpose? It seems impossible that someone could be so cruel. I can’t understand why he would want to make my life miserable on purpose. It seems almost inhuman.

I can’t stop reading.

“Harassment: the abuser follows or stalks the victim, embarrasses the victim in public, constantly checks on the victim and refuses to leave when asked.”

I remember the jokes he makes about me in front of my friends. Todd likes to point out my faults in front of people. By making a joke out of it, he thinks I will get the hint and change whatever it is he’s alluding to, so I won’t be teased in the future. All this time, I thought he was trying to be nicer by putting his requests in a joke. What hurts the most is that he does it in front of our friends. He seems to enjoy embarrassing me in public. This is interesting. He thinks it’s O.K. to embarrass me in public, but when I correct HIM in front of anyone, then it’s not all right.

I think back to the famous quote I used to chant as a child when classmates were mean. “Sticks and stone may break my bones but words will never hurt me!” I have lived by that my whole life. But is it really true?

In our marriage now, there is no hinting about anything. If Todd doesn’t like it, his comments are made in front of as many people as he can get to listen. I wonder if he hopes that they will

take his side and try to talk me out of what I do that displeases him? Sometimes, I think he insults me in front of our friends without anybody realizing it. Somehow, when things are presented in a joking manner, people tend not to take the comments as put-downs.

I shake my head in disgust, then look at the next category.

“The abuser abuses trust: lying, breaking promises, withholding important information, being unfaithful, being overly jealous, and not sharing domestic responsibilities.”

I think of the times he lied about paying the bills or told me he would take care of things and didn't. On every occasion the power, water or phone has been turned off, I had been told he'd taken care of it. Most of the time, Todd rarely remembers he promised things. When I bring it up, he says, “I never said that.” What's the point in arguing?

I sit quietly for another moment. It makes sense now. I fume as I think of an incident just last week.

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“What do you mean? I won't be allowed to open a checking account?” I ask the bank representative.

Todd has asked me to open another joint account at the bank in the Rosauer's grocery store. We had a joint checking account at First Bank for years, and then he closed it about a year ago. Now, he wants to open another account.

“When we ran the credit check, we found that there is a charge-off with First Security. As long as that is on the credit report, you won't be allowed to open another account at any bank,” the woman responds, surprised I'm not aware of the problem.

She looks at me with the same eyes I used with customers when I sold cars. These people knew their credit was bad and when the finance manager told them about the “dings” on their credit records, they acted surprised, as if to be thinking, “There must be a mistake!” This woman probably thinks I'm a goober.

“How long will that stay on my record?”

“For a minimum of seven years.”

“When does it say the account was charged off?”

“Let me see. It shows here.” She flips through the paperwork on her desk. “Um, account closed for lack of paying over-draft charges in 1996.”

“Well, I guess I finally know what happened with that account.”

“You should call First Security. They can give you more details.”

“I’m not sure I really want to know more but I will do that. Thank you.”

“I’m sorry we can’t help you.” She stands up

“Thank you anyway.” I stand and we shake hands.

I’m livid but don’t show anyone, as I walk out of Rosauer’s toward the parking lot. The Clarinet Festival account. I had added Todd as a signer once we married, which meant it was under MY social security number only. This will never appear on Todd’s record. Oooohhh! This burns me! This charge-off will be on my record until 2003 or 2004. He lied to me about why the account was no longer active. What next?! I’m sure there will be excuses for this one, too.

I think of the many times Todd told me he did things, and I later find out he lied. I force myself to continue reading.

“Emotional withholding: not expressing feelings, not giving compliments, not paying attention, not respecting the victim’s rights or opinions and not taking the victim’s concerns seriously.”

I pause for a moment, thinking of all the times Todd has blatantly ignored me. In fact, I can’t even think of a time in the last... four years. I think that would be about right, that he has even called me by my name! I’ve even joked with him about this, and he laughs it off. I’ve never done anything to deserve being ignored and treated worse than a dog. At least Todd calls Dutch him by his name!

I never know how Todd is feeling. He never says anything. I think he is always mad because he acts mad. He doesn’t respect my rights because he always tells me I’m wrong. He doesn’t think I’m smart enough to make my own decisions, so he makes them for me. I think he uses this kind of behavior as a form of controlling me. Is this even possible? It makes me sick to think this, but what other reason is there?

Is it possible that Todd is abusive? We’ve been taught to treat each other with respect. If his behavior is considered abusive, it sheds new light on our situation. If abuse is one partner ultimately wanting control over the other, then my definition of abuse has been wrong all this time. Todd acts like he wants to control the situation, but sometimes, so do I. Or, do I?

I look back down at the pamphlet. I find it hard to believe but it appears that Todd is doing some of these things on purpose! Is it even remotely possible? Could he really know that what he is doing is wrong or does he think it is his right as a man? There is NO WAY he could NOT understand that his behavior is rude. Is he a bad person because of this? I don’t want to even imagine this. I love this man, funny, but true. I can still love someone who is rude but I made a vow “For better or worse.” I don’t take the vows lightly.

Why am I making excuses for him? This doesn't make sense. I have done nothing to Todd to "ask" for the kind of treatment he dishes out. Maybe I'm clueless and don't understand or maybe Todd has me completely convinced I'm the problem. I don't know which it is. How will I ever know?

I read the remaining categories, "threats and intimidation, destruction of property, self-destructive behavior, and physical abuse." They don't appear to fit Todd. I can't think of any examples right off the top of my head. For this, I'm grateful. I'm relieved there are some he doesn't fit into. The other categories overwhelm me and jump out at me. These just seem to sit on the page and do nothing. I reason that he must be none of them.

I'm flabbergasted as I continue to look at the categories. I get out my journal and write them down. How can it be that our marriage could be abusive? If this is really the case, I'm in big trouble! In a way, I'm slightly relieved. If there really is a problem, we can fix it. It is nice to know that at least there's an explanation for what is happening. I may not like the definition, but knowing what the problem is and DOING something about it, are two different things.

Putting the journal down, I curl up with a blanket wrapped around my feet. I have to make a decision about how to handle this. If we ARE dealing with an abusive situation, we must get counseling. A good counselor will know what to do. There's only one problem; we can't do this living in the same house.

I get up and walk back over to the piano where my purse is. I open it and pull out a piece of paper with some names, names of local lawyers. Diana told me I could get a legal separation. This might be our only hope. Nothing we've done so far has helped. It will shock Todd into realizing that there is a problem, and that it will be *public*!