

Chapter 1

Survival 1975

As the first fist hits my face, one strike after another, the impact is too strong for a cry as my eyes begin to swell. I am unable to cry. Why God? Why God? Why do I deserve this? Why does my flesh and blood hurt so much? Why are my bones aching? Please help me. Somebody help me, rescue me please — but there's no one there. No one to answer my cries. My tears finally start rolling down my cheek bones. My heart is in complete sadness. I'm all alone and desperate to get away from these penetrating, hurting, fast, strong knuckles striking my face. One blow after another, with the pain so strong I feel numb inside. My face feels like that of a boxer's punching bag being hit repeatedly. The blows come fast, strong and furious. My head hits the floor. I hear no sound. This boxer, the man I call my husband, leaves me helpless on the cold floor. I become unconscious and feel left behind. My bruises turn into welts and my cuts bleed slowly from my face. Initially my welts look like bee stings, but within minutes they turn into tiny golf balls. With battle scars embedded on my face from repeated attacks, my face looks like a war zone.

My attacker, my knight in shining armor, the man I married is gone for now. In a fury and rage, he leaves the house, jumps in his car and erratically speeds away. There is now a moment of quiet and

peace in the house. I am asleep, drifting in the heavens in peace where I feel no pain. I have been once again knocked around. This life of marriage is no savior from my past. My husband does not embrace me. He rejects me.

There is no fairy tale in this log building. This wood house is not what I call home. It may be made from strong crafted timbers, but on the inside, it is dark, cold, and damp. It has such an eerie feel, as if Satan is lurking in the shadows. The hairs on my arms stand up straight enhancing the fear generated in the darkness. Our log house is set on a private secluded lot on a mountain with a breathtaking view being framed by a proud oak tree.

We live in a two-story rustic log house with a three-car garage, doors painted brown. Attached is a large covered front porch decorated like a living room. On one end of the porch is a large wooden swing. I spend hours daydreaming in that wooden cradle. Here I can rock away some of my fears and enjoy comfort like a baby wrapped up in a swaddle, tight and secure. At the other end is a chaise lounge and two wooden chairs with green and white plaid cushions.

Inside the house are three upstairs bedrooms—one for each of my children. The oldest is Mary, a teenager who gives me joy especially when she plays the flute in the marching band at school. Isabelle, who will become a teenager next year, is my softball

star. She recently made Captain and inspires me with her skill and determination. And my youngest is Sara who is a robust combination of the two siblings. She performs in the school band and is a competitive athlete following in the footsteps of her two older sisters.

Our first floor has a modest kitchen, white laminate counter tops, and a stainless-steel sink placed in the center island. The walls are decorated with fruit motif vinyl wallpaper with dark wooden oak cabinets. The appliances are green like the color of peas. Our master bedroom is down the hall away from the rest of the house. It looks as pretty as a garden with pink flowered wall paper and rose color carpet. This oversized room is so large it has two entrances, one at each end.

The living room is grand with tall cathedral ceilings. Plenty of windows are placed around the room, bringing in the day's sunlight. At the end of the room there is a small window placed up high near the peak of the roof. The window was installed there for a loft we never built. I decided to place stain glass over the unused window. It filters in the array of pretty colors that cascade down with the waning sun and reminds me of the magnificent church windows that bring in rays of hope during our Sunday morning mass.

At the other end of the living room there is a fieldstone fireplace, with its stoic rocks standing tall from floor to ceiling that are interrupted only by a

beautiful wood mantel and a blue slate hearth for seating. The wall to wall shag carpeting matches the colors in the fieldstone. Directly in the middle of the room is a wagon wheel light fixture, hanging by a black iron chain from one of three large decorative beams that run horizontally and helps to give the room a rustic appearance.

Our yard is covered mostly with sand and green crab grass. Flowerbeds surround the edges of the grass. Orange tiger lilies, bleeding heart, honeysuckle and rose bushes bloom in the summer months to create a harmonious smell. Our wonderful stoic oak tree shades the impatiens with their multiple red and white blossoms flowing like a carpet beneath it. On the side of our garage we hide our large RV. Tall wild grass covers the tires, as it hasn't moved in the last few years.

In the front of the house is a natural stone walkway leading to the front door. Off to the side of the walkway is a flowerbed with green spruce bushes. Placed in the middle of the flowerbed is a tall metal white flag pole, that often hosts our American flag. I take full ownership, pride and responsibility for caring for the flag. When the heavy rain storms are in the forecast, I draw down on the ropes, detach the clips and carry the American flag inside. I iron the flag if needed, then fold it perfectly square and place it in a plastic bin until the storm passes.

An abundance of pine trees shades the woods that surround our yard. The large and strong ones capture the sunlight with sap dripping slowly from their core. Pine cones dangle from their extended branches, the wind carries the natural sent of pine needles. Barn owls and snow owls “hoot” in the forest, as they are building their home for the months to come.

The years pass, my children grow taller and the beatings continue. My once proud and vibrant oak tree senses my pain. I am connected to this old majestic tree that recently was struck by lightning. As I am dying inside from the fear of the next beating, the tall oak tree also suffers in fear of the next blow from Mother Nature. Now standing like a solitary soldier with moss growing at the base of the bark, many of its branches are now bare and lifeless. Its broken branches are hanging on trying to survive —dangling and not wanting to break apart like the bones in my body. This old oak tree is trying to stay together all in one piece yet dying from the inside out. It has few green leaves with little oxygen flowing and some branches devoid of any signs of life.

This is the same feeling I get when my husband makes me have relations with him, holding my wrists, laying on top of me, giving me no choice. Like the oak, I feel I am dying from the inside out, wanting to scream and shout.

This once thriving big oak tree was so impressively alive and monumental to me. I would spend hours fantasizing under its strong shaded branches. I could stare into space and feel my soul slipping away. My attachment became saddened as I watched this oak slowly deteriorate just like my marriage. Insects are making their home inside this now traumatized oak tree. They march down its grey, dry, branches in a grand parade. A woodpecker sits on the tree's branch. The bird enjoys his morning breakfast, and feels the warmth of the rising, orange-yellow sun, that crests above the big beautiful pines. The woodpecker fluffs his red fire-engine breast feathers, pecking steady with his long hard beak. He eats the parade of bugs slowly, sucking the life out of these tiny little helpless creatures.

When I awake from my unconsciousness, my children are staring at me with their heads down. They seem amazed, scared and frightened. They wonder what daddy has done again. When will he come back? When will this monster be returning with his evil behavior?

For now, our house is quiet. The children emerge slowly out of their upstairs hiding places, peaking over the railings to see if it is okay. They are scared and shaking from the beatings that occurred just moments ago. They were too afraid to come out when the boxer was striking me. My girls are caring for me once again by placing ice packs on my face. I

feel the coldness of the compress on my bruises. My children are reassuring me; they tell me it's going to be okay. Somehow our roles as parent and child are reversed. It's not I, a mother who takes care of my children, but my children who nurture me back to health. They spoon feed me by filling my mouth with puréed baby food, spoon after spoon. I am too weak to care, and my face is too swollen. For the moment, everyone is scared and frightened of this demon in our house.

The children's father can be loving and caring when he is not drinking his whiskey. The choice is his, and his only. His temper flips like a switch when his bipolar personality emerges. When the switch is turned on he is the meanest. His strength is like an ox and his temper irrational. He is like an unpredictable rumbling bull. This man has a gun collection, stored in our bedroom and is unafraid to use them. These guns hunt and kill the helpless animals who run free in the wild, not knowing if there is a killer stalking them.

In our living room my husband has deer heads mounted and nailed to our log walls. Their preserved heads hanging like a trophy or a first-place blue ribbon. A bear lies on the floor, its eyes and claws glossed over with clear paint, bullet holes hidden in the fur. This proud bear, turned into a rug sprawled out flat on the living room floor, is one more trophy for a man who is proud that he has conquered the

defenseless animals who live peacefully in the darkness of the forest. This is a man who uses his muscles to hurt the weak. He preys on those he can control. He is unhappy with his life and unaware of his own anger disorder. The father of my children directs verbal and physical abuse towards me in order to release the anger and pain that festers within him from his childhood.