**Dear Outsiders: Letters**

**from an Abuse Survivor**

<https://www.sheenmagazine.com/an-open-letter-to-domestic-violence-victims/>

Dear Outsiders,

How were you to know? You saw what I wanted you to see. And what I wanted was for you to see that everything was perfect. I was happy. He was wonderful. There was no trouble. I didn’t cry myself to sleep. He didn’t purposely inflict pain. Our children were unaffected. Everything was just fine. Until it wasn’t, but by that time you’d already been convinced so there was no use for me to try and explain that I wasn’t telling you the entire truth before, that I wasn’t happy and he wasn’t wonderful — at least to those of us behind closed doors.

Dear Insiders,

I’m sorry I didn’t leave sooner. I’m sorry that I reinforced the example of how a husband should treat his wife and how a wife should put up with it. I taught you how to respect your father even when he was disrespecting me. I tried to facilitate your relationship with him not understanding that by doing so I was stripping you of your voice when you wanted to speak out and tell me that you were hurting because of him too. I’m sorry that I granted him such power as to alter the road you were on, and now that you’re older you’ve been saddled with the aftereffects of a father who created emotional trauma and a mother who kept up the charade. I’m sorry that I wasn’t a stronger woman and that try as I might I could not make him a better man. My three beautiful boys, you deserved so much more.

Dear Friends,

You knew us as a couple. You knew us back before everything went dark, before the storm ensued. He was someone you trusted, who entertained you, who charmed you. I was someone who was quiet, who smiled and was polite, who was not charming or entertaining and therefore couldn’t hold your attention. But I was a good friend, an honest friend, a loyal friend, and I would have done anything for you. My world then grew even darker when you revealed it was just too much to pick a side, too difficult to get off that fence and offer the unwavering support I so desperately needed from you. My suffering made it impossible for me to share with you the extent of my pain, and I knew you weren’t a mind reader. And yet still, you knew. Still, your gut made you uncomfortable in my presence because you knew how much I needed for you to pick a side. To have my back. To be…a friend.

Dear In-Laws,

We both knew there was nothing left to say. You were skeptical of me from the start, and I accepted that. I understood that your opinion of me was based on the information you received from him, so when he built that narrative, slowly and over many years, that I was depressed, emotionally unstable, jealous, maybe even a bit crazy, you had no other choice but to believe him. That is why when I left him I had to leave you too because I knew the truth wouldn’t have a fighting chance. And that’s okay. Maybe that’s how families should be, standing up for their own even when their own is in the wrong. How could you know the pain my children and I suffered quietly when he was so good at painting an altogether different picture for you to behold? I didn’t have the strength to try and convince you of the truth, so I needed to let you go along with him because all of my energy and love needed to be focused solely on myself and my children as we moved away from it all and tried to start our lives anew.

 Dear Dad,

I wasn’t expecting much from you in my time of need and you offered even less. I knew very well your inability to be loyal to either your children or your wife in all instances, and yet I was still devastated when not only did you refuse to stand up for your only daughter, but went to extra lengths to continue to enable my abuser by showing him more kindness than you showed me. I didn’t need you to knock him out, I didn’t need any violent show of loyalty from you, but I did need you to pick a side, my side, and I needed you to make sure *he knew that* so he couldn’t continue to cause me and my children pain, using you as his tool. I know you were never the kind of dad who wanted to get “in the middle” of things, but that’s what parents are supposed to do, aren’t they? I needed a father who would tell my abusive ex-husband that what he did was not okay, and that you weren’t going to put up with it. Instead, you invited him into your home for Thanksgiving dinner while he was punishing me during our divorce, you welcomed him and his new girlfriend while my children cried themselves to sleep at night, you traveled three states over to visit him, stay with him, in the house where I used to live, enjoying his hospitality and company while keeping it a secret from me, and you became a character witness in court *for him against me*. All I ever wanted was your love, the love of a father for his daughter, and yet the fight for it became too much a burden to bear, which is why I finally had to surrender to the fact that not all fathers are capable of giving love, no matter how I would have moved heaven and earth to receive yours.

Dear Family Court,

When did you become so jaded? If you’re not up to the task anymore of serving those who are going through the most traumatic times of their lives then maybe it’s time to consider a career change. I know you’ve heard it all before: he said she said so let’s just split everything down the middle, throw whatever children are involved to the wolves, and call it a day. But sometimes, many times, there is a bad guy, there is a liar, there is an abuser, there are victims, and for you to not care about the difference shows your apathy and lack of compassion in a system that is in otherwise desperate need of it.

  Dear Lawyers,

Do you see us as real people anymore? Do you see our suffering? Do you realize that just because a woman or a child doesn’t have a black eye or broken bone that they can still be a victim? And if you’re going to defend a victim of abuse, why not brush up a little on personality disorders, learn what a Sociopath or Narcissist is and how they destroy everything in their wake, especially during a divorce. Otherwise how could you possibly help your client? And if that’s a female client, do you care that in the majority of divorces the woman comes out financially worse off than the man? Maybe you could help change those odds? Or is the burden too great to bear and can I send you a check next month because I have to borrow money since I’ve already maxed out my credit cards in attorney fees.

Dear Judges,

You always seem bored or pissed off when having to hear another divorce case or child custody proceeding: Do you realize your words and orders will change lives, and mostly for the worst for women? Why do you take the job if you seem to hate it so much? And why do the rest of us have to be punished for your lack of caring or concern for our well-being? Maybe during a divorce proceeding there could be a bit more compassion and empathy instead of bitterness and contempt, reminding us who are victims that we’re not the bad seeds and are undeserving of your scorn and judgment while we also have to stand in the presence of our abuser — who when you look away is smiling.

 Dear Facebook Friends,

To my high school peeps: I disappeared there for a while (two decades to be exact). But I’m back and I want to thank you for reminding me of the girl I used to be long before I was swallowed up in the darkness. Thank you for reaching out to me in your posts and private messages and letting me know you’ve still got my back after all these years, and that I still matter and have as much of a right as anyone else to take up space on this planet. By being reminded of the girl I used to be — feisty, kind, fun, with a dash of troublemaker thrown in — you’ve allowed me to recover in a way I never thought possible. CHS Class of 86 still rocks!

To my new fb peeps: I’ve never met you in person and yet that doesn’t lessen how much I value your friendship. Your badass-warrior-goddess selves have helped me rise above and find my place in the light with enough armor to protect myself for the rest of my days. Thank you for your beauty and warmth and continued bravery to share your stories that are so similar to my own. I would not be in the place where I am today if not for you. You threw me a life preserver right when I needed it, and now I finally have the strength to throw one to the next woman still suffering in the darkness. This Sisterhood of Survivors saved my life and I will be forever grateful.

Dear Good Guys,

Every day three women are murdered by a man. Eighty-five percent of domestic violence victims are women. In the U.S. a woman is beaten every nine seconds. So yeah, it’s not exactly a friendly world for women. But it would be that much more unfriendly without you, the men who value women, who cherish and lift up and respect the women in your lives. As an abuse survivor, I am not jaded by your gender. In fact, just the opposite. I am grateful for all the good guys, the nice guys, the guys who are loving husbands and fathers and brothers and sons and who cry along with us at the violence or trauma we suffer. I cannot hate all men simply because of one man. All men are not abusers just as all women are not victims of abuse. So I want to tell you that I see you with your mothers and fathers, wives and husbands and partners, daughters and sons, and how grateful I am for your example and your light and for welcoming me into your world. At the age of 49, I may be late to the party, but goddamn it’s good to finally be here.

 Dear Me,

Well this has been a shitstorm if you’ve ever seen one. Wasn’t exactly what you wrote in your high school yearbook when asked *Where will you be in 25 years*? And yet here you are, strong as ever, still struggling but moving forward, still recovering but kicking ass in a way you never did before. I know you still carry the burden of shame and blame. I know the violence your heart has withstood. I know you have regrets when it comes to your children and how much pain they’ve endured. And I know how deep those scars are that no one else can see. But just look at you now. Look in the mirror and remind yourself how far you’ve come and what you’ve survived: your closest friends abandoning you and enabling him to continue his abuse, your father’s betrayal, the divorce lawyer who took tens of thousands of dollars from you without anything of worth in return, the court’s indifference to the emotional abuse your children suffered, the justice system’s failure to hold him accountable for his crime, the physical trauma on your body (nothing like a good ass-whoopin' from PTSD when you least expect it!), and the rivers of tears you’ve cried into your own hands with no one around to dry them, while also having no one to hold you in your hour of need.

And yet you are not a victim. You are not only a survivor, but a goddamn warrior who continues to hold the world up no matter who may be biting at your heels to surrender. So take a deep breath and look in the mirror at the beauty that exists within you, the strength that your children see and depend on, the courage others who still are suffering in the darkness need to find their own way to the light.

And exhale. Because you’ve got this, sister. And just like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, you’ve had the power through it all, you just needed a reminder of the badass you really are.

Welcome back to the land of the living, Beautiful. The world is a better place to have you in it.