

Petrzalka Woman Escapes Abusive Relationship

At the beginning, Juraj was so wonderful,” Tamara recalls, shaking her head. “He was always bringing me presents—chocolates, flowers, and little things he knew I would enjoy. He was the first man who ever treated me like I was beautiful and special,” the 25-year-old native of Petrzalka, Slovakia, explains. “That’s why I was so confused when he first started to become aggressive after we had been together for about three months.”

It started one night at the apartment Juraj shared with his parents and brother. Tamara had spent the evening and was preparing to leave when, as she opened the door to go, he grabbed her arm and swung her back into the room, refusing to let her go. “First, he only grabbed me, but, over the course of the next three months, he started to slap me,” she says, her jaw stiffening at the memory. “Then the abuse really escalated and he would punch me or drag me around by the hair whenever he flew into a rage. Anything could trigger his anger—if I spoke to another man, if I was running late, even if I left him to go to work.”

The cycle was always the same, Tamara notes. Juraj would become violent, then contrite. “He never gave me any sort of explanation for why he hit me, but he would always meditate afterwards, saying aloud over and over again how much he loved me and that, if his love was not so pure, he would not beat me. That these beatings were the ultimate expression of his love.”

Like so many victims of abuse, Tamara blamed herself. “At first, I felt guilty and ashamed. I thought I had done something wrong to provoke him. Then I began to think that this sort of thing was normal. Juraj’s family knew he hit me,” she states, noting that his mother’s only concern was that others would hear the young couple’s battles. “She told us that we could both beat each other all we wanted as long as we did it someplace else, so she wouldn’t have to be embarrassed when she saw her neighbors. I suspect that her husband treated her the same way, so she thought this kind of behavior was perfectly normal.”

It wasn’t until an exceptionally violent episode that Tamara finally decided to break



PHOTO: KATHRYN UTAN

Thanks to the support and friendship she found at Hope Center, Tamara has put her abusive relationship behind her and started to rebuild her life.

free. “He had beat me badly, scratching me, punching me, even biting my nose, clubbing me in the head with a bat, and stabbing me in the arm with a pair of scissors. That was when I knew I had to get away from him.” She left him the next day, hiding out at her aunt’s apartment for nearly a month. During that time, she filed a police report and had photos taken to document her injuries.

“But, then I went out one day to visit the doctor and I saw Juraj. He came up to me, crying and shaking, telling me how much he loved me and how he wanted to start all over again. He said he forgave me for reporting him to the police and that we should give our relationship a second try. Even after everything he had done, I still loved him, so I took him back,” Tamara says, explaining how she was convinced that things would be different this time, so she decided to withdraw her complaint.

“When I went to the police station, they showed me photos of corpses—all women who had been killed by their husbands or boyfriends. They asked me if I wanted to end up the same way,” Tamara recalls. “I was

Intimate partner violence—the physical, mental, or sexual abuse of women by an intimate partner or ex-partner—is the most pervasive form of violence against women worldwide. This form of abuse transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, educational, and socio-economic boundaries, and involves the systematic use of force, threats, and intimidation intended to subordinate one partner to the other. This is the story of one victim of abuse who turned for help to Hope Center, a facility established through the efforts of AIHA’s Petrzalka/Kansas City partners; the story of the woman who counseled her is on the other side.

so frightened and alone. I told them I had no place to go. That’s when they brought me to Hope Center.”

There, counselor Hanka Konecna helped Tamara find a place to live and worked to rebuild the abused woman’s sense of self-worth. “She asked me if I was really serious about leaving Juraj and told me that I was the only one who could take the first step toward breaking the cycle of violence that I had been caught up in,” Tamara says.

Slowly, through individual counseling and group sessions, Tamara regained some semblance of a normal life. Both staff and clients at Hope Center are a constant support. “I am not as frightened as I was when I first came here. I have a job now and can walk down the street without always looking over my shoulder to see if Juraj is around. Any progress I’ve made over the past few months, I owe to Hope Center. The strength I have now, I would like to share with other women who are in abusive situations. I want them to know that their only option is to break free. It is either that, or to suffer and finally waste away.”

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