

I am a proud survivor.

In the twenty years I spent in an abusive relationship, every single day became a battle to survive.

I am a fighter, I am a survivor

I fight the battles that I choose to
And I fight those that are imposed on me
Each struggle leaves its trace on me
Each struggle strengthens me
From one struggle to another, I am ready
Whatever life brings on, I am ready
To win or not to win is not the question
It is never about what I did but how I did it
To fail is common to humans
But some fail and stay on the ground,
Some fail and go above the ground to never live again
Some fail and refuse to stay down,
They scramble, they stand up and they fight back
I am one of them...
Never give up is my motto
In God I put my faith
He is the source of my strength
Struggles are made to find improved ways through
It is never about what I did but how I did it
It is never about just getting through; it is about how I came out
It is about choices made and means used
I know I will always come out of all my battles with my head held high
Like the phoenix we rise from our ashes, father told me
From years of home confinement and silencing
Isolation and false accusations
My dreams taken away from me
 Beatings and hair pulling
A shattered eardrum and a dislocated jaw
My cracked skull and my nose bleeding nonstop for sixteen hours
Six weeks in a neck brace
A crushed elbow and my right hand in a cast for three months
Public humiliations and mockery
Insults and infidelity
I became homeless, penniless and foodless for day
Walking relentlessly thousands of miles under the sun
Walking relentlessly thousands of miles in the cold
A victim of public services' corruption
Separated from my children
I was discounted as a human being
I survived and I am still standing

I have a history behind me
I hope to leave a legacy
I give the best I can, I fight a good fight, I know it is about survival
In surviving I still have my pride, my dignity
On the battlefield of life I beat the mastermind at his own game
I am a fighter, I am a survivor
I am a victor.

From "I Can Testify, A Few Words From a Survivor"

By Annie Kashamura Zawadi ©2007

Available by mail or at the Toronto Women's Book Store

Red flags

He wants you with him all the time
He wants to know where you are each second,
He decides who you see, why, how, when and where,
He decides the why, how, when, where of everything you do
Girl beware, he is an abuser, he is abusing you
He isolates you
He wants to be your only friend, your only family
Girl beware, he is an abuser, he is abusing you
He decides your every need
But makes you responsible for everything that goes wrong
He makes you responsible of his past, present and future mistakes
Girl, he is a weak man incapable of facing his own responsibilities,
Girl beware, he is an abuser, he is abusing you,
He controls your bills, yours finances unilaterally
He controls your phone
He doesn't show trust
He controls or dictates where and if you can work
He dictates whether you can attend school
Girl beware, he is an abuser, he is abusing you
He belittles you
He insults you
He calls you names
He makes you feel smaller so he can feel bigger,
Girl beware, he is an abuser, he is abusing you
He disrespects you, other women and your family
He suspects you while he is unfaithful
He treats you like a sexual object and needs no consent from you
Girl beware, he is an abuser, and he is abusing you
He is needy, addicted to you and addicted to others and other things
Girl beware, he is an abuser, he is abusing you
He pushes, punches, bangs, beats you

Girl beware, girl run, go, he is an abuser, he is abusing you
He locks you in sometimes or all the time
Girl run, he is an abuser, break the window if you can, he is abusing you
You always feel this je ne sais quoi of uneasiness,
You always have to walk on eggshells around him
You feel scared, oppressed and suppressed
You no longer express your opinions freely
Girl this is an abusive man... get out ASAP
You feel trapped; remember there is a way out...
You are not alone
Reach out, make calls, knock on doors, one will open, somehow, one day
Leave him, he is an abuser, you deserve better
If these lines are familiar to you, that's OK, keep them in mind
If this all the above do not apply to you, that's OK keep them in mind and share them with others
Violence happens even to those who do not fit the victim profile.

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*Violence against women and girls is alive, normalized, tolerated and silenced...
Get involved. If you don't condemn it, you condone it.
If you don't denounce it, you reinforce it.*

We are here; we are alive and still standing

I am so tired of doing so much work and your unfair pay
I am so shocked by your un-deterrent laws and sentences
I am so disgusted by your blind eyes
Looking the other way when you see them pushing us
We are beaten, we are burned, stabbed, raped, and killed
We are powerless.
They have it all and they have us
We are the impoverished
We are the racially profiled
We are the stigmatized
We are the so-called mental health patients
I am in such disbelief that you don't care
I speechless when you don't show up
Where are you when you hear us screaming?
Where are you when you see us beaten?
Where are you when we speak about harassment at work?
Where are you when our daughters are abused on dates?
Where are you when they call us names?
Where are you when they take our children away?
Where are you when they leave the courts free and inflict further harm upon us?
Where are you when the court orders are unobserved?
Where are you when one of us ends up in a wheelchair?
Where are you when one of us is killed?
You even don't bring a flower or a card
As if our lives didn't matter at all
Shame on you!
You even don't write about us sometimes,
Yes we don't make it on the front pages most of the time
Especially when we are darker
And we certainly don't make it on your political agendas
My question is, where do we go from here?
Are we going to let you kill more and more of us?
Are we going to accept your failure to protect us?
Are we going to keep the accomplice's silence?
Are we going to be bound by this shame forever?
I don't think so, don't count on it!

No, I don't think so!
Get involved!
If you don't condemn it, you condone it.
If you don't denounce it, you reinforce it.
From now on,
We are coming out of the closet
Here we are: the survivors and current victims of violence against women
From now on we will fight back
With no bullets or bulletproof vests, without weapons or muscles like yours
We will fight back with our words, our songs, our lines, our peaceful demands
We will march on the streets and to the hills of power
Reclaiming our rights, fighting to change the laws
We will take back the homes, the streets, and the ministries
We were the invisible but from now on you will notice us
When one of us is hurt
We will walk the streets worldwide in Million Woman Marches
We will be in the courts when one of us is judged or misjudged
Worldwide, we will share the power with you
The power in homes, in schools and academia, in factories, in corporations, in parliaments, in courthouses, in ministries,
As the heads of states, in churches, in clubs, everywhere,
We want that power
We were the silenced, the unheard, but from now on we will come to the table of negotiations
We will scream louder if needed
We will knock on doors
We will bang on walls till you call 911
Have a good look at us; we are no longer your easy prey
We are visible, out of the closet
We are here, we survived, and we are alive
We are here, we are humans, and we deserve respect, justice and equal treatment
We are here, we are alive, we are strong, and we are still standing.

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