

Why I stayed

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The author's name is withheld at her request. —Ed.

Every neighborhood has domestic violence. Every church. Every school. We all encounter kids who wake up weary, scared, suicidal, or homicidal due to domestic violence. Each woman's story is different, and each woman's story is differently shattered. These are my splintered reflections.

#WhyIStayed A frog boiled slowly alive doesn't know the pot is boiling until she looks back at the pot.

#WhyIStayed Youth pastors had us dramatize *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. A girl always played the tree. The tree was Jesus. We were like Jesus.

#WhyIStayed Documentaries about "domestic violence" had a woman with a black eye and missing teeth. I didn't have a black eye or missing teeth.

#WhyIStayed Every marriage therapist said we needed to have more sex.

#WhyIStayed My daughter's therapist told me I was lucky to have a husband who supported my career. And that he was "hot." That's a quote.

#WhyIStayed If I came close to telling our therapist the truth: that my husband was systematically dismembering my soul . . . if I even came close to saying that, the next week I'd pay a heavy price.

#WhyIStayed He hit me on the head, hard, the first year we were married. We went to therapy. I didn't tell her he'd hit me. I didn't want to remember. And he'd told me I was delusional.

#WhyIStayed If I was the problem, I could fix the problem. Christians fix problems.

#WhyIStayed I didn't want everyone at the wedding to know I had made a mistake. People were still talking about that "crazy" girl from my hometown who had broken her engagement.

#WhyIStayed Even after I had two children, a PhD, and a job, I did not want to embarrass my parents.

#WhyIStayed He would walk around whistling a happy tune after a fight, while I cried alone in the bedroom. I thought the world was random.

#WhyIStayed I thought I was lucky to be married. I am bullheaded, even if I'm pretty.

#WhyIStayed I thought if I had sex in certain positions he would be happy.

#WhyIStayed Alcohol can help numb a person so she is willing to put up with anything. And if that doesn't work, try Xanax. Friends and therapists recommended marijuana to "loosen" me up to have sex, but that is against the law.

#WhyIStayed I thought if I shaved my private parts the right way, he would like me as much as he seemed to like the images on the screen.

#WhyIStayed I thought he needed me to keep him from committing suicide, which he threatened to do, often.

#WhyIStayed A pastor told me that children are better off living with both parents, unless there is actual bloodshed. No blood, no foul.

#WhyIStayed He is charming. I thought most of my friends would not believe me. I was right.

#WhyIStayed Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer. I was terrified of what he would do if I made him my enemy by declaring the war of divorce after I had submitted to him for 20 years. I was right. I am in serious debt after years of legal wrangling.

#WhyIStayed I knew God was my friend, and that Jesus loves me. Shouldn't that be enough?

#WhyIStayed In the back of my mind, I thought that crying on the kitchen floor, with the dog licking my wounds, made me the righteous, poor man at the gate, and closer to God.

#WhyIStayed My family was far, far away, and my "kin" close by were work related. I was afraid my boss would not believe me. I was right.

#WhyIStayed Even now “friends” ask me how often he hit me, and where. They also ask me, shaking their heads if I tell them details, “Why did you stay!?” My lawyer said, “You do realize, if you testify to all you went through, everyone will think you are batshit crazy to have stayed?”

#WhyILeft I am mad at God, but I grudgingly think it was a miracle I braved divorce. I couldn’t stand watching my own child defend me, yelling at her dad to stop. She had more courage than I did. Now my children and I have to find a way to forgive one another for surviving. I have to find a way to forgive myself as the ostensible woman in charge. It is good that God and I are still on speaking terms. Barely.