

# Billie



*I* grew up in a loving home with two parents who loved and respected each other. There was never any violence. I never knew that any other kind of relationship even existed. At a young age, I learned differently. When I left home to follow my musical dreams, I lived with a man who was physically and emotionally abusive. The physical abuse didn't happen until after the first year. I truly thought, "I must be doing something very, very wrong and NO ONE will understand." I felt there was something wrong with me. I thought I was alone. I TOLD NO ONE. During our relationship, I witnessed my boyfriend's father strike my boyfriend's mother. Even now, writing this, I get chills. It was a dawning moment for me. This is where he learned to hit women.

**I FELT UNLOVABLE. I STARTED TO THINK THAT MY PARTNER WAS A LOSER AND IF THIS LOSER DIDN'T LOVE ME, WHAT NORMAL MAN WOULD? IT IS A WARPED WAY OF THINKING, BUT IT TAKES OVER YOUR SOUL.**

You seem to spend all your time wondering how you can change yourself and change him... so he will not hit you...so he will see who you are and stop hurting you.

**BUT YOU CAN ONLY CHANGE YOURSELF.**

At times he would be loving and regretful, and I would be forgiving and hopeful. I took a job as a guard in a maximum security prison for men. The job offered perspective to see what I was doing to my life. I was NOT alone. The jail was full of men who had abused their loved ones. It happened too many times, to too many people. Knowing this helped me leave my boyfriend. With the help of a good friend I found a new place to live.

**I WAS HAUNTED BY A QUESTION: WHY HAD I STAYED?**

I began working part-time as a counselor at a women's shelter. That was life-changing and helped me focus on making a difference for women like me. Using my connections in the independent music community, I organized a benefit for the YWCA, *Independents for Independence*, where Nashville's independent artists performed to support women who were seeking safety and freedom from violence. Today, I still don't know why I stayed, but I am confident that it will never happen to me again. I am healthy and I want all women to know they can be healthy, too. —Billie

*{today I am healthy}*



\*Excerpt from *Today I Am*. Purchase this book at [ywcannashville.com](http://ywcannashville.com). Proceeds help benefit the YWCA.