



Connie



*A*s I punched in the code on my home alarm I realized the irony of my life: the one person I feared most was inside my home, sleeping next to me. It just hit me.

HERE I WAS IN A NICE HOUSE WITH AN ALARM SYSTEM FOR PROTECTION AND YET THE PERSON I FEARED MOST IN THE WORLD WAS BEING LOCKED INSIDE WITH ME.

That was in the late summer of 1996. At that moment I began formulating my plan to leave my home and end the six-year bad relationship that was my marriage. Things were bad and I knew they were bad. I had gotten to the place where I wasn't able to help anyone, including myself. I was in survival mode—go to work, come home, keep him happy. A reality, called my life, that I couldn't share with anyone.

MY MARRIAGE WAS ALL WRONG BUT I CHOSE TO STAY, DENYING WHAT I KNEW, TO AVOID THE SHAME OF FAILURE.

As a consultant for an international skin care company, I was working a booth at a convention when a flyer from an adjacent booth caught my attention. It listed the warning signs of potential abusive relationship and I believe that eight out of the 10 signs applied to my situation. I returned to my booth, stunned, but no longer in denial.

Looking at the woman working with me, whom I hadn't known long, I said, 'Eight out of ten, what do you think?' She said, "I'm willing to talk when you are ready." She was an angel in my life and is still an awesome friend today.

SHE AND ANOTHER WOMAN WERE WITH ME ON THE BRISK DECEMBER MORNING IN 1996 WHEN I PACKED MY BELONGINGS TO LEAVE ONCE MY HUSBAND HAD LEFT FOR WORK.

About 45 miles out of town, I called my husband to say I had moved out and filed for divorce. His only comment was "What did you take?" I returned to Nashville to start over.

After spending a few years resurrecting a medical career that I knew could support me, I stepped out in faith to create my own line of women's shapewear and skincare. Today, Connie Elder International's products are a regular favorite on QVC. They have also been featured twice on Oprah—every entrepreneur's dream! All of this from a woman whose husband would say "What are you going to do—sit on the couch all day, eat bonbons and, sell makeup?" Happily re-married and the owner of a successful business, I decided several years ago to pursue my passion to help other victims of domestic violence, using the same tools that woke me up to a better life. Included in every product sold by my company is a bookmark that lists the warning signs of domestic abuse. I also take every opportunity I can to make appearances and speak publicly about domestic violence.

ABUSE KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES.

It exists in our ghettos, trailer parks, retirement centers, country club communities, as well as your neighborhood. It doesn't have anything to do with income, zip code, lifestyle, or the color of your skin. It can happen to anyone. I know this to be true, first-hand.

{today I am helpful to other victims}



*Excerpt from *Today I Am*. Purchase this book at ywcanashville.com.
Proceeds help benefit the YWCA.

