

The Wall: Freedom in Three Parts

by Anonymous survivor

Part I

It took six months to build the wall.

The first brick was laid when I decided that instead of being “again” in a never ending hell, this time would mark the beginning of a change.

The second brick was laid the very next day when I broke through the silence of shame and told a friend what had happened.

More bricks were added later that week when I raised the courage to call the Family Violence Project.

The next week I began a new weekly routine. Tuesday morning I walked to work, went in the back door, out the front door, got on the bus and ducked when it passed our street and rode for an hour to group. It was worth it. Every Tuesday I returned with an armload of bricks.

In the evenings I began to take my daughter out of the house and back to my office, our hideout, where she could play in peace and I could hear the clink, clink, clink of bricks sliding into place.

When the yelling started at home and my body ached from the blows, I would leave. I would pull inside of myself and retreat to the wall. Just feeling its coolness, its roughness, its solidness gave me hope.

One night, when the pain was too much to bear, I wrenched my heart out of my chest and buried it in the path of the wall, laying bricks over it and marking it with a pebble. The pain had been holding me back. Without it I could focus on building the wall.

As the wall grew I found I could push some of the chaos behind it. When the chaos could not touch me, I grew stronger.

It took an attorney, a restraining order, four cops and more support than I ever thought possible to push the last few bricks into place. When the wall was complete, the chaos was gone. The silence was deafening, the peacefulness overwhelming.

I could finally rest. I had escaped. I was free.

Part II

The wall in my soul is four feet thick. It contains thousands of bricks. It has stood for a year.

Behind the wall is chaos. Behind the wall is the screaming voice, the raised hand, the cold gray eyes. Behind the wall is every assault, every insult, every coercion, every degradation. Behind the wall is the power that controlled me.

The wall protects me. It is stronger than the power on the other side. The wall is stronger than any one person because it is held together with the experiences and understanding of many women. I add my experiences to the mix and make it stronger. By making bricks and passing them on to other women, I strengthen myself.

The wall is cool. It contains the heat. The wall is strong. It has withstood the violence of hurricanes raging on the other side. The wall is high. It shelters me as I grow stronger. The wall is solid. It protects me. The wall has saved my life.

The safety of the wall is my freedom now. With it, I am able to live each day. For now, that is enough.

Part III

The wall will not stand forever. The wall that keeps me safe also restricts me. It gives me room to breathe but not to move. Sometimes I wish that the wall were gone, that I could stretch my arms all the way out. Sometimes I wish I could hear music. Sometimes I wish I could dance. The wall separates me from the person I was "before." I don't know her anymore. In pictures, she looks like a stranger. I can't get close to her because the wall is in the way.

But the wall is only temporary.

It will not stand forever. It cannot stand forever, because my heart is buried beneath it, healing in the cool dampness of the earth.

When I am stronger than the power on the other side of the wall, the wall will no longer be necessary. I don't know when or how, all at once or piece by piece, but the wall will come down. And when it comes down, I will see the power on the other side of the wall reduced to ashes blowing in the wind, no more significant than crumpled bits of leaves I can kick out of my way.

When the wall comes down, I will stretch. I will dance.

I will reach out and embrace the person I used to be. When the wall comes down, I will find the place where my heart is buried and dig it up. I know it will still hold pain, but I will be stronger than the pain.

When I reclaim my heart, I will be whole again. I will be able to trust, to feel, to love. When the wall comes down, I will finally be free.