



# Me

*By Debra Spain*

I come from a family of ten (seven sisters and two brothers). I am number four on the list. When I was about thirteen or fourteen, my mother got sick. She was misdiagnosed for the next fifteen years before it was finally determined she was bipolar. With six younger ones at home, I decided to leave. By then my father had already left as well. I started hanging out with the fun crowd, partying and getting high. Back then the drug of choice was anything you got your hands on which could have been cocaine, pills, pot or a good drink. I thought that I was doing my mom a favor by leaving home. But one day the party was over, and I had to face reality. Things were about to get real ugly. This was in the seventies, and I am here to tell the story.

I started dating a man who would wind up being a big problem for me later. When the relationship first started, everything was wonderful as it always is. After I was with him for maybe a year, he started to beat me. It started out slow, and he would say he was sorry. And, of course, I believed him. I should have known better but I didn't.

I had a girl friend who knew what was about to happen to me, but I had no idea and I never saw it coming. She would say to me, "Once they start to hit you, they never stop." I thought she must be crazy. I told myself, "He is my man and she doesn't know what she is talking about." Boy, was I ever wrong. The beatings continued to the point where I wound up with a broken nose, fractured ribs, black

eyes, and blood in my stomach from him kicking me with steel toe boots. He would beat me because I said hello to someone or because I was watching a TV show he didn't like—anything could set him off. I became very scared and nervous. I never knew what would set him off. I would refer to him as the ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

The time finally came when I knew that I couldn't go on like this. My friend told me to pack a bag of clothes and take it to work with me everyday. That way I was at least getting some of my clothes out of the house without him knowing what was going on. I was trying to get out of the battering situation without his knowledge. I did get out and went into a battered women's shelter, where I got the counseling I needed and moved on with my life.

I have not looked back since then. I went on to have his son as I was pregnant during that last six-hour beating. My son is doing well. He just bought his first house and is moving in this weekend. He has a college degree and a good job, and he makes me very proud. ■