

Handout 6.4: Abused Women to Share in New Therapy Project

by Helen Altonn

NO LONGER “A WORTHLESS PERSON”: CONFRONTING HER ISSUES LEADS DAUGHTER TO SUCCESS

Christie Corpuz says she was molested as a child and had a succession of abusive relationships starting when she was 12 years old.

“There was no one to say or teach me differently,” she said. “Anyone in a different lifestyle, they were not normal to me.”

She was involved with four abusive men, she said, noting she met the first one through her church. “The pastor knew and did nothing. That’s why I’m not worshipping there anymore.”

She didn’t try to get away from any of her partners, who eventually left her. “When you try and run, you get it even worse than before if they catch you, and they do catch you.”

She became pregnant at 17 and didn’t tell her mother. “I didn’t think she could handle it. She couldn’t protect herself. How could she protect me?”

When her parents divorced, her mother was ordered to go to a counseling program with the children, Corpuz said. “Everything started opening up. I was 19 or 20.”

She met Julie Owens, an abuse victim and therapist with the PTSD therapy program, who was working with battered women.

Owens encouraged her to see Dr. Edward S. Kubany in the trauma therapy project.

“She’s a fabulous person, smart and articulate. She’s a great mother. She has everything going for her, but her life was stalled badly,” Owens said.

“I was really scared about addressing any issue,” said Corpuz, who began seeing Kubany in March before the project began officially. “I was able to bottle it up. I thought I was all right with it. Dr. Kubany opened my eyes to a lot of stuff I was doing that I didn’t know I was doing.”

She said she avoided 10 or more things associated with her abusive partners, including four different colognes and the beach. “My first boyfriend had done a lot of violating on the beach because he lived in Waianae.”

She has since gone to the beach several times with a companion.

Her worst fears were related to Old Spice men’s cologne, she said.

“Dr. Kubany told me to just try to sniff it, to buy a bottle and keep it in my room . . . My heart started beating fast. I started sweating, just thinking, ‘Oh my God, he wants me to buy a bottle.’”

Her mother got a bottle for her, she said. With the top still on, she smelled it and started getting dizzy, she said.

“I just had to keep telling myself it’s just cologne; it can’t hurt me. It’s a nasty smell, but it doesn’t affect me like it used to.”

Corpuz said she had major guilt feelings because of her abusive partners. “I felt guilty about loving them and staying with them, making excuses for them . . . I always thought there was something wrong with me because I kept getting involved with these idiots.”

She also had a “horrible traumatic experience” when

she was raped by a neighbor, she said.

She said she's not ready for a relationship anytime soon, but she knows the signs now of a potential abuser: "if he doesn't like it when I try to bring out my opinions, or if he doesn't respect my opinions, if he tries to force intimacy too fast, if he doesn't respect my privacy and personal space."

Corpuz said she's happy just to be with her children, 7 and 3 years old, and work toward becoming a high school counselor. "It was so many years all the things were belted into my head—'I'm worthless; I'm a slut,'" she said. "I have to use the tools (from therapy) the rest of my life. I'm a worthy person. I don't deserve to be hit."

"IT WENT FROM HELL TO HELL TO HELL" FOR MOM

Gloria Riveira said she endured an abusive childhood on the Big Island knowing "once I was 18, I would be out of that house."

One week after high school graduation, she left for Oahu and cut herself off from all of her family except one brother, she said. She has three brothers and two sisters.

"I grew up hating my mom because she was the abuser," Riveira said. "My dad abused the family as a whole and physically abused my mom on a continuous basis. Everybody was abused."

She also was molested by an uncle on Oahu when she was 17, she said.

"I grew up very unloved. I felt so worthless that I don't deserve even to have the breath of life because if my own parents don't love me, who's going to love me?"

After moving to Oahu, she worked at Fort DeRussy, went to an airline school, then got a job as a tour escort and met her ex-husband, a tour driver.

"If I knew the red flags I know now ... Within a week he announced to all the tourists on the bus that we will be married."

They were married for 20 years and had three children. "He was very abusive right away," she said.

"Within the first week he was calling me all kinds of names. He started hitting me within a month with such rage. He choked me until I'd pass out."

She ran away once and stayed all day at Ala Moana Beach Park. When she returned home, "He said all the things I wanted to hear, that he loved me," she said.

"He told me a number of times, 'If you ever leave me, I'll kill you.'

"He clicked a gun in my face one time and said, 'If I don't have you, no one else will.' He pulled a knife on me in front of my children." Riveira said she thought of killing herself or him. "But what was going to happen to my children?"

She called a shelter once but was frightened when a man answered the phone, she said. "I felt I was in *Catch-22*."

She said her husband "fooled around. He cleaned me out. He pretty much abandoned the family."

Still, her pastor told her that "a bad father is better than no father" and that she should try to "win him back," she said. "So it went from hell to hell to hell."

She said they were evicted twice. "I was trying to support three kids. I worked for the state but it was not enough. He wasn't providing anything. I was still hanging onto the marriage, trying to win him back."

She learned he had a mistress, and still she "didn't want to be the bad guy to file divorce and take the kids away from the father."

Then her son told her: "He's not going to change. You've got to do something."

"I had permission from the kids," she said. "I told him to stay the hell away."

She was divorced seven years ago. The court sent her and the children to counseling because of allegations of abuse. But she continued to have PTSD, she said.

Since joining the trauma therapy program, she said, "Dr. Kubany helped me with a lot of my thinking and avoidance issues."

She had a picture of her ex-husband with two grandchildren and had put a sticker over his face. "He told me to take the sticker off... This picture no longer can hurt me."

She said she asked her youngest son to invite his father to his high school graduation. "Before therapy I wouldn't have done it... I had no butterflies whatever. He was no longer a threat to me.

"I have never felt more complete," she said. "I have

God, my health, my children and my life. And I have just finished building my own house with my children."

Riveira said she has asthma, which is aggravated by emotional anxiety, and the therapy "has helped me be more healthy. It has given me a healthier outlook on life.

"It's a piece of gold I'm going to keep in my heart... I'm no longer a worthless person. I'm a person of value."

The above article appeared in the September 6, 1999, issue of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* and is reprinted with the permission of editor Frank Bridgewater.