There he was. After being missing in action for three days, my husband was back. Instead of begging me to forgive him for leaving, he was sitting in the driver’s seat of his car accusing me of being unfaithful.

He had left in my car three days earlier, and left it broken down and undrivable miles away. I didn’t answer his calls the two times he called that day -- I was angry -- and because I didn’t answer his call on the first ring like I normally did, I must have been cheating on him.

I sat in the passenger seat of his car, astonished that he would accuse me of being unfaithful when he was the one who always left. If he was around, I would spend all of my free time with him. I was astonished that he didn’t understand what he had done by taking my only car and destroying it, and why I would be angry about it.

The more I tried explaining myself the more enraged he got until somehow -- it happened so fast I can’t really say exactly what happened -- he had hit me in the nose and then gotten his hands around my throat. As I struggled for air beneath his grip around my throat, it wasn’t air flooding my sinuses, but the coppery tasting blood gushing from my nose.

As I choked and spattered and fought for air I thought, “Is this the day I die?”

I didn’t die.

His grip loosened as he yelled at me that I would get him thrown in jail -- someone would call the police. He assured me that he would never forgive me if I caused him to go to jail.

He left me standing in the rain with blood coating my clothing as he disappeared for another few days.

Family and friends would tell me to leave. They would see the bruises and look at me with such pity. But what they didn’t understand is the scars ran so much deeper than the marks on my skin. The abuse started long before he laid a hand on me.

It started out small. He would throw temper tantrums until he got his way. He would tell me how controlling I was being by not giving in -- he always got his way with that line. He would jokingly accuse me of cheating on him if I was home 10 minutes late from work -- until the joking was no longer a joke and had turned to anger.

It’s like boiling a frog. The frog sits at the bottom of the pot, happy and healthy in lukewarm water. Occasionally a bubble or two float to the surface around the frog -- just like the occasional fit or accusation -- but the frog doesn’t realize the water is slowly getting warmer and warmer around it until it’s boiled alive.

The accusations turned to name calling, and made me question who I was. He would call me a narcissist, and every other name he could think of to diminish my character. I had to prove that I wasn’t what he called me by giving him his way. He would get angry at me when I was optimistic about a situation because I “wasn’t taking it serious” that he was upset.

Before I knew it, I felt worthless, and if I had no worth, then there was really nothing to fight for. This man had become like a drug to me because somehow he gave me worth in those moments of approval I saw in his eyes.

What my family didn’t understand was that this man had done such a good job at reshaping who I was by his words. When he started becoming physically violent I was only a shell of the woman I once was, and no longer had the strength to fight for myself. What they didn’t understand was that the physical abuse would heal, but the emotional abuse would leave deep scars.

The old saying is “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” I once heard it reworded as “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will destroy me.” This rewording rings so true to me.

As time went by he would leave for longer and longer. Fortunately, I’m stubborn, and there was enough of a spark left inside of me to finally walk away. But too many women end up not surviving abusive partners.

Abuse comes in many forms, and often the abuse starts out as emotional abuse.

According to womenshealth.gov/violence-against-women, emotional abuse can come in the form of your partner monitoring what you do, accusing you of being unfaithful, and getting angry in a way that frightens you.

They may discourage you from seeing family or friends, or from going to work or school. They may try to control how you spend your money, or humiliate you in front of people. They may threaten to hurt you, people you care about, or themselves, all to control you, or try to make decisions for your life that you should be deciding yourself.

Both women and men can experience abuse. Abuse is about control, and when they have control, they leave you with none. If you think you may be experiencing any form of abuse, seek help. You’re worth it.