



# Ellen's Story

With courage, hearts can be mended.

*Editor's note: While "Ellen" has agreed to sharing her story and photo with readers, the Women's Shelter chose to alter her name and the name of her abuser for security reasons.*

Confronted by the jagged glass edges of the broken quart bottle in her husband's hand, Ellen realized there would be no going back. Frozen with fear, she willed her face to appear calm and her voice not to tremor. She softly apologized for making him angry and slowly backed out the kitchen door.

"I had developed a defense mechanism that was almost like performing," says the 61-year-old real estate agent and paralegal. "But all the time, there was a lot of turmoil inside. I found myself frozen every day."

Ellen could never have imagined she would one day be living in a shelter for abused women. A widow after 22 years of marriage, she knew what it took to make a successful long-term relationship. She thought she found that in Paul when she said "I do" for the second time.

Charming, supportive and hardworking, Paul was able to suppress his control issues for a while and, for the most part, his good days outnumbered the bad ones. Ellen dismissed his angry, obsessive behavior as part of adjusting to a new marriage. But when Paul's abuse turned physical, Ellen started to wonder what she was doing wrong.

"After the first situation, I started to evaluate, was it me?" she says. "His behavior didn't make sense. I couldn't imagine what I was doing wrong to cause such physical and emotional behavior. He would choke me and threaten to kill me."

Three years into the marriage, Ellen's daughters expressed concern for their mother's safety. During a visit, Paul's anger exploded onto Ellen's daughter, and she called 9-1-1. Paul was arrested after one of the deputies spotted a handprint-shaped bruise on Ellen's arm. A restraining order was issued.

Ellen was thrilled to learn the Shelter for Abused Women & Children accepts pets.

"I was offered counseling," Ellen recalls, "but I knew nothing of abuse. Victim Assistance called and I told them, 'I'm okay.'"

When Paul appeared in court, Ellen sent a letter to the judge, stating Paul needed mental counseling, not jail. He was sentenced to attend anger management counseling, and Ellen filed for divorce.



COURTESY OF THE SHELTER FOR ABUSED WOMEN & CHILDREN



### If you go:

*Connect, Collaborate, Support*

**What:** Mending Broken Hearts with Hope Luncheon

**Who:** Featured speaker Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, a foreign policy reporter out of Afghanistan, former ABC journalist and an activist to empower women throughout the world

**Where:** Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples

**When:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mon. Feb. 19

**Why:** Believe that hearts can be mended, support people like Ellen and others through The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

**How:** [NaplesShelter.org/MBH/](http://NaplesShelter.org/MBH/)



You might think that the story ends there, but it does not. Four years later, Ellen received a call from Paul. He stated he realized what he did was wrong and needed her forgiveness. He said he'd turned his life around and would like a second chance. "He seemed so sincere," she says. "I bought it, and we married again in less than six months. I'm a commitment type of person. I wanted it to work. I wanted to try again."

*"I've learned that fear is contagious, but courage is not. Courage has to be embraced."*

She says, at first, Paul tried to control himself to be "normal," but once again, the abuse escalated.

"There was so much control. My every move was watched. It was like being in a prison under a guard," she says. "I was frozen

in my chair daily, unsure how to get myself out of my situation. It was like, wow, I did this to myself."

The day after the broken bottle incident, Ellen went online and found The Shelter for Abused Women & Children's website ([NaplesShelter.org](http://NaplesShelter.org)). She was relieved to see the shelter had a pet kennel for her beloved dogs Cocoa and Maddie.

"I would never have left if the shelter did not have a kennel," she says. "It was truly a lifesaver."

While Paul was out, she called the Shelter's 24-hour Crisis Line, 239-775-1101. As she answered the counselor's questions, she realized the lethality of her situation. She packed a bag for herself and a bag for her dogs and called a friend to take her to Naples. Paul came home just as they were about to leave.

"I pretended like everything was normal," she recalls, "I told him we were going to stay at my friend's house and would be back on Monday."

But, for Ellen, there was no going back.

"I knew when I made that phone call, everything I had was going to be gone," she says. "You're going into the unknown and that's scary, especially if you have a family. It's why some women don't make that call."

After arriving at emergency shelter, Ellen immersed herself in as many of the Shelter's self-help programs as possible. After several weeks, she moved to Georgia to live with her daughter.

"It's scary starting over," she admits. "But I have learned so much about myself, and I now have boundaries in place. I've learned that

fear is contagious, but courage is not. Courage has to be embraced. You can sit back and let someone put chains on you or you can refuse that and take courage. I'm taking courage." ❀

*Kaydee Tuff has more than 30 years' experience in writing, editing and public relations for profit and nonprofit agencies. She currently serves as communications manager for The Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Naples, FL.*

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