

“She believed she could. So she did.”

My name is Sandy Thellus, and I am a survivor of domestic violence. After 2 decades of abuse and control it seemed nearly impossible for me to emotionally separate and start life anew. Especially when that life was being dominated by an intimate partner. Today & everyday I choose to allow this pain to give me purpose. I positively process and work to gain perspective as I rebuild my life and the lives of my children and generations to come. I had to learn that the only thing I can control was my mindset. Any other thoughts were self-defeating & unproductive. My abuser was either incapable or unwilling to

provide a safe and nurturing environment for our family. Leaving this situation is the hardest & most fulfilling thing I have done.

As statistics will show, one in every three women and one in four men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Whether it is physical, sexual, financial, mental, or emotional abuse – these are the real numbers. While we would like to think this can occur in just certain areas or neighborhoods, economic backgrounds, educational status, or religious circles, this is a grim fact globally.

Most people are used and manipulated every day for different reasons. This will apply to all toxic relationships and people. This can be familial, co-workers, friends and so on and even if you think this is not an issue that affects you or you don't personally know anyone... well, once again, my name is Sandy Thellus. Now you know someone.

I have been fortunate enough to have supportive friends & family. I am especially thankful to amazing organizations like The Naples Shelter for Abused Women & Children and their staff & volunteers for helping myself and my family to rebuild our lives.

Mr. McKinley Williams & everyone at The SWFL Chronicle who invest in giving our community a voice and a platform.

Today, I am working diligently as a small business owner. I am working to purchase our first family home. I plan to go back to school and earn a degree. My biggest accomplishment happens every single day and that is being the best mother and example I can be to my children. I am more than confident that with time, clarity, and some emotional healing I will continue to gain the necessary tools to allow me to choose peace over chaos while also safeguarding my family's future.

So, if you believe that you are in an abusive intimate partner relationship, you don't have to have it all figured out (I know I didn't). Think about what peace looks like to you. Build on that hope. Find strength because your future self is waiting. Please call your local shelter or The Naples Shelter for Abused Women & Children at 239-775-1101 and speak to an advocate today.

by Sandy Thellus, Naples, FL

