

Patricia Wright

Where are the family programs?

My name is Patricia Wright. I am a resident of South Central, Los Angeles, California. I had to get in touch with something I could cling to in order to tell my story: my truth. Truth links lives. Keeping it real helps us to relate to one another. I am a bilateral breast cancer thriver, of over 30 years. A survivor of domestic violence, a 16-year recovering crack addict. My story isn't "Pretty 'n Pink" because it's filled with a lot of pain, other than what cancer brought into my life.

My mom suffered through domestic violence. I watched her get knocked down and back up time after time, and stay in relationships far longer than she should have. I had no idea it had become her normal state of "love". The violent memories of the physical injuries are vivid in my mind even today. I never knew it was planting seeds of compromise and toxic normality that would impact future relationships in my life.

I never had a relationship with my father. He had other children and I was the eldest. This further injured the little girl that was quickly becoming convinced I needed a man's love in my life. I went into life wanting any kind of male attention. I believed I had to fill that void; I had to have that male figure to be complete.

In my search for love, I married three times, with countless abusive relationships in between. I wanted to run; I didn't know where to run. (To) anyone with open arms. I knew nothing about red flags. I began to use alcohol and drugs casually and that intensified after the (cancer) diagnosis. I was numbed, so any other abuse didn't register. Life was abusing me with cancer; I was abusing drugs...so domestic abuse from then on made no difference. The stress of how I began disregarding myself had a domino effect on everything, physically, mentally and spiritually. That self-made prison for me was a place where it didn't matter if I took care of myself. The total formula was there--the breast cancer, the drugs, the injured fatherless girl—and created a prime candidate to accept domestic abuse.

I married three times with five beautiful children who I've fought to have of more than once in my life. I hear folks all the time say, "I wouldn't change a thing in my story" but well I *would*. I'd change that my children had to endure hurt and pain. I can only pray and share with my daughters (about) the impact of the atmosphere that we allow our children to witness, (to) stop the cycle going forward. Through it all there was a power at work in my life that I knew very little about; that power was God.

'People and their families are set up to fail.'

I have a ringside seat to how people and their families are set up to fail. Slipping through the cracks are newly-released inmates. The returning members have had no therapeutic settings that address the mindset and mentality. While inside the halfway transition housing facilities, how are they being monitored for temperament and mental status? With housing issues and all this other stuff? Where are the family programs? I know they have assessment--mental assessment and all--but how deep do these go? How are these people supported in their relationships especially now with Covid? Domestic abuse is up there. Where are the programs that spend enough time preparing them to return to the people that they previously harmed? How are they getting emotionally and mentally prepared to be accountable for the damage they left behind?

Covid has left so many cracks right now. What can we do? There are churches they can connect with, but do they? How are they followed up with? I'm a little bit scared, not just for my family, but for the mentality of these early-release people, domestic abuse offenders...who are rapists...who are perverts...who've done other things against children.

'Everyone needs a safe place to talk without offending.'

I want to be part of that in some way so that I can share my story to help both sides. There's an African American component talking about domestic violence. The offenders who've been locked up need to understand that they really haven't taken a look at the accountability and impact on the family as a whole that they left behind. They don't heal unless they take a conscious step to understand their accountability.

I'd like to see more of an atmosphere where they get to come together as a families and address what was broken on safe territory *before* they're forced under the same roof and the poor babies are exposed to the same toxic stuff. How can we help create an open place where they can feel safe to talk? It needs to be addressed before they come together, part of the reentry issues everyone is supported with. Everyone needs a safe place they can talk without offending.

What is being put in place to support the families who are receiving these people and that can help the families with the stresses that may arise in the new situation? The offenders may have a probation officer or a medical doctor if they're medicated, but what's set up for the families to express their concerns?

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So that everyone is experiencing a successful reentry. So that it doesn't go right back to the probation officer. Is there a help line that the family can call and say, *we're having some family problems?* Some kind of analyst or therapist that can help. Reentry is a process that's ongoing over time for the family as well as the ex-offender.

