



The Next Step: A Survivor's Story of Hope for the Future

written by a girl

Ask any survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault, and they'll tell you the importance of the next step. The importance of their hopes and wishes and how they deal with their past on a daily basis. Healing all comes down to being able to answer the simple question, "what next?" My big "next step" moment came in the labor and delivery room; exactly where my story starts.

I was born to a wonderful woman and a man who was too busy having an affair with our neighbor to be bothered by my birth. Some may say this is the worst a man can do: abandon his wife at her hardest, scariest moment and ignore his new daughter. I would agree, but his presence proved to be worse than his absence.

I'm sure my mother didn't appreciate being smothered by pillows in her sleep and waking to find him staring at her, wondering how she never died. I know that I didn't appreciate him vacuuming me into corners and injuring my legs so often that I stayed terrified of vacuum cleaners until I was twelve. What Mom and I both could appreciate was the fact that his "fatherly love" was bought out under the table by a man that adopted me to keep me safe from my drug addicted dad.

What's the value of a daughter? For my father, it was a "get out of child support free" card. For my mother, it was sacrificing herself and being married to a man that promised us safety. It worked for awhile, until I was six.

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...and her mom.

no chains

as I'm wondering
"what next"
I'm walking now
without a net

I am my own
security
I've made the past
set me free

and no illusions hold
me back
I'm breaking from
the little shackles

of the past
I'm standing free
to make the most
of what can be...

what next...
the future's wide open
when I'm walking
without a net.

A note from Pat:

Every year, the WRC trains new volunteers to help us with services we offer to people who have experienced domestic or sexual violence. Volunteers help us with just about everything we do. Recently, I talked to one of our volunteers about helping us write our holiday newsletter. She was excited about the project and we talked about themes and articles. We came around to the question "What happens next in the lives of people after they receive WRC services?" We both thought it was an important and interesting topic.

The volunteer then told me she and her mom had received WRC services when she was a child. She offered to tell her story and also to ask her mother, who is now a poet, to share her work with our supporters. What a gift! Their writings are compelling and inspirational. I know you will join me in appreciating their willingness to share such a personal story. So many of the people with whom we work make those difficult and daunting next steps. They are truly the workers of miracles. They change the course of their lives.

Just as the writer speaks of personal changes and next steps, we hope for changes and next steps toward a peaceful community made up of respectful and healthy relationships. Our wish for you is the same as it is for the people we serve. And I can't think of a better way to put it than the writings of our guest poet today.

*"The choice is mine to make a life
of which I can be proud.
And live each moment to the max
and dare to love out loud."*

Wishing you quiet restfulness in this season of hope,
Pat Brown,
Executive Director

This month in our shelter, the wishes and hopes of residents, staff, and volunteers decorate the halls. Here are some of the wishes we would like to share with you:

Our wishes and hopes:

"That everyone can find someone special to spend the holidays with- no matter who that someone may be."

"Hot food and good friends."

"World peace... and an iPhone."

"A puppy, not a cell phone ringer."

"A promise of forever."

"Having fun and sharing laughs with my children in a safe place."

"That my daughter will always know how much fun this time of year can be."

If you would like to be a part of someone's next step:

- **Make a monetary donation in support of the important on-going work on behalf of the survivors of domestic and sexual violence in the New River Valley. In these days of financial woe the need for your financial support has never been greater. You can send a donation to:**
WRC
P.O. Box 477
Radford, VA 24143
- **Donate items from the Holiday Wish List on page 3 of this newsletter.**
- **Decide to volunteer at the WRC. Call us at 639-9592 for more information.**
 - **Recruit a friend to join you in your support.**

Thank you!

what next...

finally I found the person that I knew "me" to be she helped me come to realize the worth that was in me...

hidden far beneath the hurt beneath the pain and tears the woman that I found in me had strength beyond her years...

I found a courage deep inside to forgive and let go of the past and found a quiet restfulness a beauty within... at last.

the choice is mine to make a life of which I can be proud live each moment to the max and dare to love out loud.

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I remember my mother and I giggling about something funny that happened to me in school. As soon as we got to the front door I knew something was wrong. There was trash as far as I could see from the window and broken glass was everywhere. My new father was stampeding through the house and destroying everything he could get his hands on. All my measly possessions were broken or scattered. The paper chain that Mom and I had worked on for weeks was torn to shreds; millions of confetti-like pieces of construction paper littered the room. I walked around my bedroom trying to figure out what I did wrong. I heard screaming from the kitchen and ran in to find my mother being held on the floor, beaten and bruised. Blood ran on the kitchen floor and down the heating vent. I remember yelling and screaming for him to stop but he wouldn't. I pushed him with all the strength I could find while telling him that he better "leave my mommy alone". My tiny body was shoved quickly and easily across the room and onto the floor. From there I had the best view of my mother's broken body.

That first time is always the worst. After that, you learn to ignore the reality you can't escape. Clean up the messes when you get home. Turn up a stereo when you hear yelling. Stay on the floor when you've been shoved there. The weird thing is, when you're finally ready to leave it can be the smallest thing that pushes you over the edge. For my Mom, it was a sarcastic comment about a church outing and we were gone.

I was in middle school, and quite the holy terror for my teachers, when Mom and I were introduced to the Women's Resource Center. It took one teacher who was completely fed up with me to reach out and suggest I needed help. (That wonderful teacher didn't teach the next year, she went on to bigger and better things because of me- early retirement). That step in her story is what got me and my mom into counseling and learning how to survive in this world on our own, with all that we experienced.

It wasn't an overnight transformation. It took years of healing and taking risks. It even took reconnecting with my father and landing right back into counseling a few years later. The counselors took me in once again and worked with me on setting healthy boundaries. Turns out, my boundaries pushed him out the door and never let him back in.

Six years later, and I've put myself through college. I've used my boundaries to set up a world I'm comfortable in. Even better, I've set up a world I'm comfortable for other people to be in. I met the man of my dreams two years ago and he holds me in his arms when he's angry, not on the floor. When I gave birth to our daughter I knew that my "next step" had been taken. I was over the worst and I was going to provide the best life for that baby that I possibly could. She would never be held down and made to question her worth. That tiny angel smiles at both of her parents with all the trust in the world and that won't ever go away.

I'm back at the Women's Resource Center, but this time I'm not here as a victim but as a survivor. I'm one of the many volunteers that give up their time every day to help abused women take back their lives. It's not as glamorous as it sounds. I've probably scrubbed more toilets than I have saved lives. Some days, I spend hours just waiting for someone to reach out for help. I clean the office and I don't even mind vacuuming (but don't tell my husband). I've learned that it's not what you do that matters. What matters is that you're there when someone is ready to take their next step.

People always wonder what happens next; after all the donations are given, the money offered, the time volunteered. What happens to the survivors that walk the halls of the WRC?

The answer is that we took our next step. We made it.

If you would like to donate to the Women's Resource Center this holiday season, please consider the following:

For Children:

teething rings
infant play-mats
toys
board games
wooden block sets
DVDs
baby dolls or action figures
books
fleece blankets
portable music players
sports equipment
undergarments
socks
pajamas
toiletries

For Adults:

scarf, glove, hat sets
Winter clothing and sweat suits
(sizes small-XXXL)
quilts and blankets
collapsible hampers
small alarm clocks
stationary with stamps
umbrellas
flashlights
gas cards (\$5-\$15)
disposable cameras

For WRC Programs:

journals and diaries
sketch pads
art supplies
trash bags (13 and 30 gallon)
gift cards in small denominations
tissue paper
ribbons
scotch tape
silly putty and stress balls
teddy bears

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women's resource center
of the New River Valley

P.O. Box 477 | Radford, VA 24143

There is no way we can thank everyone who has helped us over the years because, thanks to your generosity, the list is just too long! But please know that we could not have provided the services we have without each and every one of you.

Our thanks go to community members and groups that hold food and supply drives for our shelter residents. • Churches that bring us supplies and gifts. • Our government funders, from local to state and federal. • Donors who freely give any amount of cash. • Everyone who gives to the United Way or the CVC Campaigns. • Churches, schools, and civic organizations that invite us to speak about domestic and sexual violence. • The Police who protect the people we serve and work to keep our community safe. • Attorneys who help us fight injustices. • Our sister organizations. • Everyone who comes to hear us speak out against violence. • Allied professionals who help in so many ways. • Volunteers who provide a listening ear and a comforting voice in a victim's time of need. • Our Board of Directors. • And finally, the WRC staff members who tirelessly give their time to better the lives of others.