

# Domestic Abuse Ends And Healing Begins

## At Women In Distress Of Broward County

'Women suffering this type of abuse need to understand that it **does not define them** as a person, and that it is **NOT OK,**' said Marcia Barry-Smith. 'They need to seek help from organizations like **Women In Distress** who can offer them shelter, counseling and resources to rebuild their self-esteem, empower them to redirect the pain into a positive force and be able to **move on and up!**'

There is a line from a song "... has time rewritten every line?" Survivors of domestic violence know no such relief; to them the nightmare remains as vivid as the day it happened, no matter how long ago.

Marcia remembers only too well the chilling telltale signs — Tony's narrowed eyes, tightened jaw and flared nostrils. These warned her that she would soon suffer yet another brutal beating by the supposed love of her life, her husband, Tony. The blows sometimes rendered her unconscious, only to awaken to Tony standing over her lifeless body screaming, "Look at what you made me do. Why do you make me do these things?"

It was a very dark period many years ago in the life of successful businesswoman Marcia Barry-Smith, executive director and senior vice president of the BankAtlantic Foundation in Fort Lauderdale.

But after many years of dissecting the relationship, learning about domestic violence and, finally, transforming the pain into forgiveness and compassion for others, she is sharing her story in the hope that it will help other women who may find themselves in similar circumstances.

And the facts support that many women do experience such abuse:

- **One in every three women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.**
- **Every nine seconds, a woman is battered in the United States by her husband, boyfriend or live-in partner.**
- **Every day, four women die in this country as a result of domestic violence.**

The statistics become increasingly frightening when one considers that most cases of domestic violence are never reported.

Marcia serves on the board of directors of Women in Distress of Broward County, Inc. and lectures many women's groups about domestic violence, using her own story to show how one can rise up from a life shattered

by domestic abuse to find peace, success and happiness.

A native of Jamaica, Marcia attended the University of Toronto in the late 1960s. In the summer of her sophomore year, this only child suffered the sudden death of her father.

"My world was just turned upside down when he died," Marcia said.

Off campus, she met Tony, also of Jamaican descent, and thought he would be her protector now that her father was gone — he made her feel "safe."

She had no idea of the hell to come.

They married soon after they met. Within months, a now unemployed and cheating Tony began first with verbal abuse, then physical and sexual abuse insisting that she get pregnant.

"People wondered why I didn't simply leave but it's so much more complex ..." Marcia said, her voice breaking. "I even took a trip home to discuss options with my mother. She stated, "there are no divorces" in our family and suggested I return to my husband in Toronto and 'try again,' which I did ... regrettably."

As a victim of mental and physical abuse, you become dependent on the abuser who is very quick to strip you of your own defenses including family, financial aid and even dignity — "he took away all the resources that would've helped to free me from this man.

And this was all so foreign to me ... and so shameful. I felt I was somehow the one to blame," said Marcia.

Baby Scott came along a month after their first anniversary — but life at home just got worse and worse for Marcia. She knew she had to do something. When Scott was 4 months old, she asked a friend going to Jamaica to take her baby there for safekeeping.

After the final beating that left permanent damage which she copes with to this day (she calls this her epiphany moment), Marcia methodically planned her "safe" escape from

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Tony with the help of her aunt, some compassionate coworkers and ultimately, a police escort to the local airport.

"Women suffering this type of abuse need to understand that it does not define them as a person, and that it is NOT OK," Marcia said. "They need to seek help from organizations like Women In Distress who can offer them shelter, counseling and resources to rebuild their self-esteem, empower them to redirect the pain into a positive force and be able to move on and up!"

If you or anyone you know may be enduring abuse of any kind, please call Women in Distress of Broward County, Inc. on its 24-hour crisis line: (954) 761-1133. On the web, visit [www.womenindistress.org](http://www.womenindistress.org)

Its mission is to provide victims of domestic violence with safe shelter, crisis intervention and resources and to educate the community in order to Stop Abuse For Everyone (SAFE) through intervention, education and advocacy. For sponsorship information or to attend the Fourth Annual Starfish Luncheon on May 19, contact Courtney Holshouser at [cholshouser@womenindistress.org](mailto:cholshouser@womenindistress.org).

Honorees at the Starfish Luncheon include: Lifetime Achievement, Lorraine Thomas; Corporate Leadership, Bank of America; and Community Leadership, Bishop Henry and Senior Pastor Carol Fernandez and The Faith Center. A participant of Women in Distress also will receive the first Starfish award. 🐟

