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**NOT SILENCED ANYMORE**

***Interview with Deb and Susan***

Susan: The night that I decided to leave, I was sitting on the bedroom floor, and I was gonna commit suicide. Suddenly this thought of my two children, who were teenagers then, and they were out, and my husband was blind drunk on the lounge, and I thought, "I can't do this to my kids."

Celia: I'm Celia Fielke and this is Messages of Hope. Coming up you'll here the stories of Susan and Debra, how they found themselves trapped in domestic violence. You're listening to Messages of Hope. It's easy to think of domestic violence as moments of anger, and physical abuse. But when you look deeper, it's about one person controlling the other. And that can happen in both subtle and extreme ways. Susan and Debra, when you look back at your relationships, was there always that element of control?

Deb: No. No, to start off with he was very caring, attentive, and when you're a young girl you think, "OH this is great. Someone who finally adores me." And he did all the right things, speaking to my parents, getting along well with them. Everything was right. All the boxes were ticked, when in fact, it's one of those things where it's too good to be true.

Susan: Yeah I totally agree with Deb, when we first met he was the be all, and end all. And I would say once our second child was born, was when the behaviour was more noticeable. But because you're in it, you don't see it, you don't notice it.

Celia: So how did his behaviour change or escalate?

Susan: He tried to keep me at home in the four walls. If I went out, I had to say what time I was going to be home. If I was later than that time, he would question me. He would question me if I spoke to people at school, or if I'd been shopping or anything else, and in the end it was easier not to talk to anybody, and just stay in my little cocoon.

Celia: And so you adapted your behaviour?

Susan: Definitely.

Celia: To fit him, yeah. What about you Debra?

Deb: It started off with put downs, name calling, something went wrong it was my fault even though I was nowhere near it. If I was really unlucky, it escalated to physical, which could happen five hours, 10 hours after.

Celia: Many people would be thinking, why didn't you just leave? Is it that physical power over you, or is it about the emotional power that's been taken away from you?

Deb: It's the power. It's both. You don't know really what is out there. You don't know what you're doing, because your mind is in such a state, and you're fearful of moving away from him, what are the consequences going to be? And it's also, you haven't had that opportunity for so long to think for yourself. It's been what you've been told. So to suddenly do something, to think for yourself is so hard.

Susan: When you're in it, you've become so isolated, you actually have no support. You're basically a prisoner, and you're living a life with people around you, but you're alone.

Celia: Coming up, we'll look deeper into what makes it hard to leave. And later in the programme I'll be offering a free resource that offers encouragement, and understanding for dealing with domestic violence. I'm Celia Fielke, and I'm talking with Susan and Deb about the difficulties of getting out of a domestic violence situation.

Celia: So Deb, if you can take us off back to that moment where people say, "Just leave, just go." And what was it that kept you there?

Deb: Hope.

Celia: Can you explain that?

Deb: Hope that things would get better, because he kept on making promises. Sometimes he would say, "I'm sorry." When he finally realised what he'd done, "It's just because you haven't been a good wife" or “you haven't done this", or, "You haven't done that." There was always an excuse. So me being me I thought, "well, I can change that. I'll make myself better." And so you strive to make it better, but then when you make it better and it's all fixed on your side, so you thought, it'll be turned all the way around again to the opposite thing, and it didn't matter what you did. It was wrong.

Celia: How did that make you feel?

Deb: It made me feel like I was losing it. You're going insane, and I was told on many occasions, I had lost my marbles, and I needed psychiatric help. But he was doing absolutely nothing wrong.

Celia: Susan, six years into your marriage you confided in your GP, who just said leave, but gave you no information or support on how to do that. Where did that leave you?

Susan: Two children, no money, and where do I go? What do I do? After I got back from the doctor's and him saying leave, I sat on the bed and thought, "Well the dog's fed, the cat's fed, the birds are fed. The kids have got a roof over their head. I'll wait until he dies, and then I'll start living my life."

Celia: What about you Deb, were children a factor in your situation too?

Deb: I remember coming home from school one day, and we'd have little chats in the car, because it was a safe place. And I remember my children saying, "How's Matt?" They used to call him Matt. I think they distanced themselves from him. They never called him dad. That made him really irate. Sometimes I'd say, "Oh he's okay tonight." Or I'd say, "Oh he's just being a bit silly." That was my warning for them, he's being a bit silly tonight. And they knew that they had to keep out of the way, go into my older son's bedroom, shut the door, watch the TV in there, 'cause that could be turned up so they couldn't hear or see.

Celia: I can't even imagine what that would be like, having your children in that situation. What eventually gave you the courage to stand up against that for yourself, and for your kids?

Deb: I kept on being told to leave the house, to go, and something didn't add up in my mind. I was thinking, "Hang on, why is it that we need to go? We have done nothing wrong." So this was when I was in a good mindset, "Why do we need to go? It should be him going. The children don't need to be evicted." And so I fought very hard, even though a lot of agencies back then, were pushing to get me out into hotels, et cetera. Eventually he was evicted.

Celia: If you're experiencing domestic violence, help is available by calling 1-800-RESPECT. That's 1-800-737-732, or go to 1-800-RESPECT.org.au. Coming up we'll hear why support can be so hard to accept when you're in the thick of abuse. And Deb and Susan will share about the support they wished they had, when they were victims of abuse. This is Messages of Hope. We've talked about how domestic violence can make you feel isolated, and powerless to do anything about it. Why do we keep it hidden? And how can people offer support? I've got Susan and Deb with us today, sharing their experiences of survivors of domestic violence.

Celia: Were there any outward signs? Would people have known what you were going through at all?

Susan: No, and I kept it hidden even from my parents. And I only told mum two years before she passed away what actually happened, so.

Celia: Why do you think that was?

Susan: Even when I left, I felt guilty because I'd broken my marriage vows. It just didn't sit right, but I knew I needed to get away. I had to escape.

Deb: How I coped with that, is I was guilty about breaking marriage vows by causing separation. But then I thought back to our marriage vows, he hadn't kept any. So it made me feel a lot better, but then it didn't make me feel 100%.

Celia: Why do you think it is that we feel such guilt?

Deb: Because I had it put on me that it was my fault. I'd caused it. If I hadn't of done this, or haven't of said that, if I had of done that better. So, when you have that psychological sort of thing being done to you-

Susan: And I think it's the brain washing, that you don't realise that it's happening. And it's just there all the time, until you become a person that you don't think for yourself.

Celia: Deb your husband was eventually evicted from that family home. What changed for you then?

Deb: I found that when he was gone, all of a sudden I could feel things. I could think. I wasn't just focused on being safe, 'cause I was constantly ready for anything that would happen. And I didn't cry. I didn't have any feelings during that time, but when he was gone, it was all those years of feelings that just come down on top of you, and it's too much. It is really too much. That's another reason why it's easier to be back in the relationship. Because you don't feel anything, yes.

Celia: If people are maybe listening, and have something, or somebody they suspect or whatever. How can someone help?

Susan: Just have someone consistently there through the whole thing, they didn't need to fix it, they just need to stick by me, be behind me, non-judging.

Deb: When you ask the person how are they, really listen, and I think in society today, it's a pass off phrase. People don't really want to know, "How are you?" Because they're too scared to get involved, and what do they do, and all this type of thing. But it's just listening to what they say is the biggest help, and a hug goes a long way.

Susan: Yes.

Deb: It's just so life giving.

Celia: If you're experiencing domestic violence, or supporting someone who is, help is available by calling 1-800-RESPECT. That's 1-800-732-732. You can also go to our website MessagesOfHope.org.au, for a free booklet about domestic violence, offering understanding encouragement. You're not alone, and God wants you to feel safety and support. That's MessagesOfHope.org.au. I'm Celia Fielke for Message of Hope, a part of the Lutheran church, where love comes to life. I hope you can join us again next week for another message of hope. Real hope, to cope with life's challenges.