Breaking free from abuse: One young woman struggles to regain her independence

By Michelle Sidwell

Guest Writer

Candace Comforted her. Candace was too weak to say anything. She let Jason carry her to the truck and take her back to her apartment. Jason held her in his arms bed. Candace shook from the draft of the broken window and from her jagged emotions.

The cycle was never ending. Candace holds back tears as she recalls the suffering she endured during her year relationship with Jason. "I tried to escape, but he made it easier to stay than to leave. If the nightmare can come alive in my life, then it certainly can happen to anyone."

Cherise Taylor, Candace's best friend through high school, smiles when she is reminded of Candace's dating habits through high school. "Guys? Candace was so independent. She never needed a guy for anything."

Through high school, Candace was an honor student, captain of the dance team, and president of the P.A.S. She was not the manipulated young woman she became during her relationship with Jason.

Very few young women would ever admit that they could become the victim of an abusive relationship, but it could easily happen to anyone. "Between the ages of 19 and 29 have reported more violence by intimates than any other age group. Domestic violence ranging from sexual abuse to economic abuse occurs within 20 percent of all dating relationships, and on average, 28 percent of high school and college students have experienced dating violence at some point in their early adulthood.

When Candace first met Jason, the thought never crossed her mind that he may be a potential abuser. He seemed to be a dream come true. "He was so concerned about me," Candace remembers. "He was extremely interested in me and my family, almost to the point of obsession."

After a couple months, Candace already believed that she would marry Jason. When they began talking about marriage, then the abuse began. "It all started with random outbursts. He would get mad over little things. If was two minutes later to pick him up, he would yell at me and tell me how useless I was," Candace says. The outbursts became more regular, and the mistreatment began to go beyond verbal abuse. When Jason started to hit Candace, she tried to leave, but he would always find a way back into her life. "Often he would call me repeatedly until I would answer the phone. He would show up at my apartment and work. He would send me flowers and gifts," Candace states. "He was my life, and no matter how hard I tried, I could not get away from him. He was there when I woke up in the morning. He followed me to work. He was there when I went to bed. He snatched me up and made me feel disconnected from the rest of the world"

"It has totally isolated our daughter from us," said Candace's father, Bill Alter. "I recall the instant that I knew something was not right with their relationship. I had called Candace one evening, and she answered the phone in a whisper. In the background heard yelling, and my stomach dropped. When I asked her what was going on, she said, 'It's okay. Jason did not know it was you.' At that point, I knew things were wrong.

Her mother cringes at her how much of her mind that she detached herself from her family and friends while she was with Jason. "From my motherly intuition, I knew something was not right," Candace's mother, Beth Alter, says as she remembers the situation. "Our family has always been really close, but Candace became very distant. She drove four hours to our home one day, and my husband and I were heartbroken when we saw how feeble she was. She was a stick. Her eyes were sunken in. She was not the daughter we had sent off to college the past summer."

During that April visit, Candace realized there was no way she could do it on her own. Beth knew she had to confront her daughter, so she sat Candace down and took her daughter's hands in her own. She looked in her eyes and softly said in a quivering voice, "Candace, tell me. I want to help you." Her strong mother, who had never shed a tear in front of her five children, broke down in front of her 19-year-old daughter. Beth had never been so hurt in her life.

Candace recalls the only way she could escape the abusive relationship was from the support of her family and friends. Her mom called her five times a day to make sure she was doing okay and even offered to stay at her apartment with her. Anytime she would even think of calling Jason, she would hurl Tina Turner's song "I Can Live Without You" and call her family. She changed her phone number and made co-workers and neighbors aware of the situation.

She relinked with her the friends she had isolated herself from during her relationship. She even moved back home for four months in order to distance herself from her abuser. Most importantly, she became the individual she once was before meeting Jason.

"It was not easy by any means," Candace relates. "For some strange reason, I still felt like I owed him. He had brainwashed me to believe I did not have a life without him. I struggled with eating and even with falling asleep at night because I had been so used to him being there at all times. Only over time did I become me again."

A year after ending the relationship with Jason, she still occasionally attempts to re-enter Candace's life with a spurious phone call, but Candace knows she can live without him with the help of her family and friends. "They are still my support group," Candace says. "Because of them, I know I will not fall into the same trap again, no matter how hard it may be. They watch out for me."

Being a survivor of an abusive relationship, Candace continues to questions why she spent a year with a boyfriend who controlled her every aspect of her life, from her money to what time she went to bed. Her best reasoning for her suffering is that good things can come out of bad circumstances. "Maybe my story will be an inspiration to young women, and they will realize how carefully they need to be when choosing a boyfriend. Anyone can be a victim, but you can escape abusive relationships." Candace smiles at her mother. "All you need is one good friend."

 Bahamas have been changed.

For help or counseling with handling abusive relationships, contact Dr. Paul Dechones in the office of counseling services by calling 661-3322.