



A Victim's Voice

It takes a lot of courage to leave....And even more courage to reach out and ask for help.

On June 24, my two children and I were escorted by a Seminole County Sheriff's Deputy from a nearby station to the secluded and secret Safehouse of Seminole. I was scared, alone, away from my family, and exhausted. I had nothing but the clothing in my suitcases. For the past year (at least), I had been emotionally, verbally, mentally and sexually abused by the father of my children.

Driving up to a massive, beautiful building, tucked away within this small Florida town, I began to think I was going to be okay. It looked new to me and was accessed only by an electronic gate. The deputy had to ask permission from the operator to come inside. I could see the camera, but most striking was the barbed wire fence, protecting all inside from anyone outside. As the gate opened, I felt my blood pressure lower. I felt protected.

On June 26, I was informed that an Emergency Order of Pick-Up was issued for my two little ones. I was to immediately surrender them to their father. As I packed my little ones' things and tried to stay strong, the Safehouse arranged the drop-off with law enforcement. As my children were taken from me they screamed and tried to come back to me.

On the Monday after the children were handed over to their father, I was told I would be furnished with an attorney. I think your exact words, Jeanne, were, "She has a little more bite than your former attorney." She was warm and kind to me, but I could tell she had more "bite." She was the best (as far as I was concerned) and she was given to me as part of the services at Safehouse

On August 8, I was given a weekend of overnight visitation with my children. When the children were to be picked up by their father at the end of the weekend, he had taken too many of his prescription medications and he ran his car into a pole and was put in the hospital. I was given custody of my children! I have never been so happy! The Safehouse never heard more cheering!

I would like to thank you for all of the food, the toiletries, the electricity, the shelter, the blankets and beds, the safety, my attorney who kept my children's best interests in mind, but mostly, for the countless other services that cannot be paid for by money. These services are why I am still standing today. The long talks, the times when I just cried and couldn't stop, the times when I laughed until I thought my stomach would burst, the stories from countless advocates and volunteers, the groups that helped me see that I wasn't alone, and the cheerleading.

I learned courage and strength. I learned compassion. The most important thing I learned was that I am a powerful person who can handle anything. My children loved it there. A playground so close, kids to play with, and they got to sleep with their mother! You are all forever family to us.

2008-2009 Success Statistics...

- **190** children and **200** women found a safe home at SafeHouse
- **2,812** callers received crisis counseling on the 24/7 hotline
- **4,652** safety plans developed
- **50,221** hours of counseling provided
- **9,346** nights of shelter supplied
- **10,052** hours of Prevention Education
- **1,915** served in Outreach groups