

CHESTNUT

I just couldn't take it anymore. Even though it was 10 p.m., I knew I had to get out of the house. I ran without anything but the clothes on my back to a friend's house, where I knew I would be safe for the night. But I also knew that the next day I wanted to find a safer, more permanent place. My husband had hit me before, but this time it was more violent, and I was afraid for my life.

When I reached out for help the next day, the person who was trying to help me started calling around to shelters. We found out that we had to go through the domestic abuse hotline first, and find a bilingual person who could translate the information. I also informed them that I had to go back home and get my 5-year-old daughter. I knew my husband would not harm her, so even though I was afraid for my life, I didn't worry about her. But I knew my daughter would be better off with me than with her father. I was encouraged to have my husband bring her to me in a public place. Since my husband nor I had proper documentation, if I had asked for a police escort to accompany me to my home, my husband would immediately have been arrested and then deported, and I would follow shortly. I had been told by those who work with domestic violence that my husband would be repentant and assure me that it would never happen again. So contrary to advice I received, I decided to go back home.

I knew my little girl was traumatized by what she had witnessed the night before, so I wanted the school counselor to speak to her. Since my daughter was so young, I knew that a professional would be able to ask the right questions and give her some help. I was told that if my daughter went to a counselor, the incident had to be reported to the Department of Human Services. Again, I knew that my husband would be deported, I would be at risk as well, and my daughter would be handed over to an agency of social services. I cannot tell you that the abuse did not continue, but we all moved to a different city, and my husband found a different job. No one knew of our problem, and I learned it is better to put up with it than to risk being deported.

From *Silent Voices in the Shadows, Stories of Undocumented Imigrants* by Paula Schwendinger, PBVM