***Angel Aid***

***After suffering abuse in my relationship for over 12 years, I went to the first battered women's shelter that was made available to women and children back in 1989 on Long Island. (Suffolk County)***

***I had been involved with a group for 2 years, (run by state aid), prior to leaving my partner. Their main goal was to keep me alive by giving me strategies to “desensitize” my partner to me so that I could finally leave without getting injured or killed.***

***My first strategy was to be generally horrible and be verbally abusive at all times. When my partner was being nice I was to be even surlier and outright nasty. I was not to have physical relations with him and was to be so nasty and unco-operative that he would decide that I was not someone he wanted to be around after all.***

***I did this for 2 years! I was making the Wicked Witch of the West look like Cinderella!***

***The more he tried to fix things, the nastier I got. Even when threatened, I didn’t back down. I mocked, ridiculed, cursed, and belittled at every opportunity.***

***It was all designed to get me out of the relationship without getting hurt badly, physically. I knew I would get hurt financially. I knew that no matter what, I would end up with nothing to show for over a decade of my youthful life…***

***But I was still willing, since I had suffered so many times of abuse that I had been brought to the emergency room, cops had been called, people I knew witnessed it, and even strangers tried to help me. I went to an Al-Anon meeting a couple of times and years later ran into someone who had been there the nights I had shared. They told me that they stopped coming for a while because my situation was too upsetting for them to deal with and they couldn’t bear to sit and listen to the stories of abuse I told.***

***The sad part is that the stories were all true.***

***So I decided that it was time to leave, one way or another, I was out of there. I solicited the help of the people from the Al-Anon group and 16 people showed up to help me pack up my furniture to get out of that house!***

***My partner owned some carnival rides and games, which he booked into a local carnival, seasonally. He was going to be at a spot that was over an hour traveling time away and I felt that it would give me enough time to get out. My son had gone with his father for the day and even though I wasn’t sure how that would play out emotionally with him, I felt that it would be better for him not to be there the entire time while we all packed and moved everything out.***

***What I didn’t count on was that there would be a problem with one of the rides and the foreman would end up coming to the house to pick up a spare part to remedy the problem.***

***I asked him to not say anything to my partner, but of course he didn’t listen. So my plan was foiled and I ended up not seeing my son for five years…***

***My girls and I had spent over two months in a battered women’s shelter and it was extremely difficult—to say the least. (I could write an entire book on this one subject alone.)***

***But suffice it to say that we made it out of the shelter and into an apartment. I chose an apartment in the heart of town because I didn’t have a car and I would need to walk to grocery shop and do laundry, etc. We found a two-bedroom apartment over a luncheonette on Main Street in the town we needed to be in for the school my daughters attended.***

***Initially I had gotten a job at a nice restaurant on the other side of town but without a car it was too difficult to get to and from work. I ended up getting a job as a short-order cook and waitress for the man who owned the luncheonette. It worked out really well at first. I tried so very hard to learn how to do the job and he gave me the chance to do it.***

***I took the orders, cooked the orders and served the orders. It wasn’t a slamming business, but it was steady and for only one person it sometimes got sticky…***

***My children had been going to the same Catholic School for 5 years and I had been involved in the fund raising activities for the entire time. I was the short-order cook for the Bingo events, ran the craft fair and plant sale for Mother’s Day, and had the food booths for the Bazaar that the Church held each year. I was also Vice President of the Choir and class mother for each of my children at various times.***

***Oh, and by the way, I came up with a great idea to help out the elderly in the Parish. I went to the head Priest and shared it with him. The rectory would notify me if someone had become disabled, due to surgery, an illness, a fall or whatever. I would go and clean, shop, cook, help them bathe or do whatever they needed. I never took any money for any of my work or time. I did it as unto the Lord.***

***So, what do you think happened when I left my partner? One of the first things that he did was to get a meeting with the “Head honcho Priest” and told him that I was a woman of ill repute trying to regain my position in society by trying to work in the church.***

***To my utter amazement, the almost six years of valued service to the church was negated because my ex-partner was such an adept liar.***

***“Friends” that had known me for years suddenly felt that I was a risk to be involved with. It was just so much easier to avoid me than to deal with all my issues. And anyway, if there was any truth to the stories that the father of my children was telling, then I was someone to be avoided anyway.***

***It was about that time that I saw a popular comedienne remark in one of her bits, “Yeah, the blonde pretty girls that everyone hates…”***

***And I thought bitterly, that instead of being the one most likely to succeed, since I was blonde and reasonably pretty, I was the one most likely to be ravaged by wolves…***

***I felt that I was dealing with that situation already!***

***So, I had the chips stacked against me in so many ways, and the worst part was that I was estranged from my precious son through it all...***

***I made an appointment with the head priest and tried to undo what had been done against me but I had a bad feeling that I had failed. He said all the right things but it didn’t sound sincere. He acted so very concerned about the holidays and where the girls were going to have Thanksgiving dinner. He said that I would be getting a turkey and a big bag of groceries for me to make a wonderful dinner so we could celebrate our first Thanksgiving alone.***

***It never arrived and I didn’t know what to do…at the last minute a friend invited us to have dinner with them. Whew!***

***The next holiday to get through was Christmas. I was so nervous about it since I had no money and my children should not have to do without any presents. I was so grateful when my father sent us all tickets to go to Florida to visit them for the holidays! That was the answer!***

***I was attending the Charismatic Prayer Meeting at the Catholic Church and they were all very supportive, but ultimately it was the Bridge of Harmony Choir that really pulled through for me. They passed the Hat and collected over $800.00 for the girls and me!***

***I knew that it might be the only time I had that kind of money all at once in my hand so I wanted to look for a car.***

***The vacation was wonderful and we were sorry to leave my family in Florida. I had to get back to work and the girls had school. Our return flight was at night and we were to get into Newark Airport at 8pm or so, take a bus to Port Authority and then a train to Smithtown, then walk four blocks.***

***But something happened to the bus and it was late getting us to the Port Authority. I was supposed to have a full half-hour before the train departure but when we arrived I heard the announcement that the train was leaving in one minute! (The next one going to our town wouldn’t be for another hour.) We were all the way downstairs, needing to go up two flights and then down a long platform!***

***We each had suitcases, which were heavy even when they were empty, and my girls were young then. Melina was 12 and Lisa only 7 so I was carrying two of the suitcases and Melina was taking care of the small one.***

***I looked around Port Authority and saw so many derelicts that it was unnerving. I had heard how bad it had gotten there since President Reagan made all those cutbacks and so many people were released from the mental institutions. The City was having a terrible time with them practically taking over terminals like the Port Authority.***

***I looked up to heaven and said, “Help me Father. Please. I cannot miss this train and have to stay here with my two beautiful daughters for an entire hour.”***

***Suddenly, there was this very tall, handsome man standing in front of me at the foot of the stairs. He was dressed like a cowboy, boots and hat and all! He tipped his hat and said, “Ma’am, it looks like you need a hand.”***

***I said, “Oh yes! I need to get us on the train they just announced and there is no time! I think it is impossible!”***

***He replied, “Here, let me have those bags, you take the small one and hold onto the girls. We’ll make it. Follow me.”***

***We raced up the stairs. Then we raced up the next flight of stairs. We reached the platform and there were very few people on it since they had all boarded the train.***

***The conductor was just shouting all aboard and the cowboy gave an earsplitting whistle and announced, “There’s a few more here!”***

***The conductor said, “I see you Miss. We’ll wait. And he went to put his head inside the train for a moment, probably to notify them that we needed to board.***

***We were breathless and exhausted as we made it to the door of the train. The cowboy set my luggage down inside the door and tipped his hat again. I said, “Oh thank you so very much! I can’t ever tell you how much you helped us! Thank you!”***

***He only smiled.***

***The conductor asked, “Who are you talking to?”***

***“That cowboy! We wouldn’t have made it if it weren’t for him helping us carry those suitcases!”***

***We all looked for him, it was only seconds later, and yet he was gone.***

***The conductor said, “I don’t know anything about any cowboy but Ms. I have never seen such a small lady take on such a heavy load as you had on you! I can’t believe you carried these suitcases and had these girls hanging on your arms too! I never would have believed it if I didn’t see it for myself.”***

***“Where is he? He’s gone! I don’t understand!”***

***My daughters were looking at one another and Melina said, “Mom, you’re acting crazy. You’re embarrassing us.”***

***Are you telling me that you two didn’t see any cowboy? And do you think I carried all this stuff myself?”***

***“Ma! Stop it. There wasn’t anyone with us. We were scared and then you said let’s run for it, so we did.”***

***Lisa was trying not to cry as she said, “Mom please don’t go crazy, we need you.”***

***I asked the conductor again, “Are you telling me you really didn’t see him either?”***

***No Ms. I really am sorry but I haven’t seen anyone with you.”***

***“But did you hear the whistle?”***

***“Sure did! That’s what made me look and when I saw you running with that huge load I almost couldn’t believe it.”***

***“I can’t whistle like that! Never could. It must have been my angel! That is the only explanation! I spoke to him and he spoke to me! I not only saw him! We had a conversation! And nobody else ever even saw him? Oh my God! Thank you God!”***

***Lisa now was outright crying. The poor kid was so traumatized by all that had gone on with the breakup that now she thought I was losing my mind.***

***I comforted her. The conductor was curious though. He said, “You really think this guy you say helped you was an angel?”***

***“Yes! It is the only feasible explanation.”***

***We were making a very big scene. Everyone was looking out the window for this angel cowboy.***

***I was crying with joy, the tears were streaming down my face. I knew.***

***I yelled out to the car full of people, “Did anyone see a cowboy walking ahead of me carrying the luggage?"***

***A couple of people said they saw me running up with all the stuff and my daughters and they thought they would be running to make a train too if they had beautiful daughters like mine. The one man added that sitting in Port Authority would not be very wise at this hour.***

***Melina was so angry at this point that she said, “Mom, enough already! Let it go.”***

***But the conductor and I continued to talk. He said that after he collected his fares he would be back. And he did come back. We talked about the Lord being with each of us and setting angels about us (the heirs of salvation) to assist us in our troubles. I hoped I had sown many seeds in this man’s heart and I prayed for him…maybe it was really because of him that any of it happened—who knows!***

***One thing I would like to add here. I was so very hateful towards my children’s father that they still feel inner turmoil concerning it. And yet it was the answer I had for survival at the time. They were not privy to that information at the time and they were all so young and and and—well hopefully the Lord will completely heal the wounds.***