

Parksville-Qualicum Haven House: Helping Women through Overwhelming Changes and Decisions

While growing up in the 1940s, June had been taught to be polite, not to talk back, and not to complain. And, you never discussed your private matters with your family or with anyone.

So, when her husband, Harry, started belittling her not long after they were married, she didn't think it was her place to tell him that he shouldn't be saying those things to her. Nothing she did was done well enough. No matter what she wore, he didn't like it. If she forgot to buy his cigarettes, he cursed and called her stupid.

When June and her friend, Martha, were at the park when their children were toddlers, June asked her friend's opinion about Harry's constant disparaging remarks. Martha told her not to worry, that Harry was probably just stressed from his job. June should be grateful that her husband had a good job and that he could offer her and their children a comfortable living. Maybe all Harry needed was more loving care at home.

June tried all kinds of things to make Harry happier, but nothing changed. In fact, as the children grew up, things worsened. When he drank too much after work, he cursed and slapped her when she didn't do something the way he thought it should be done.

Years later, after their children had moved away and had families of their own, Harry slapped June so hard she fell and bruised her hip. She walked with a limp for over a week. When June was talking with her daughter on the phone, she told her daughter she had fallen. But her daughter knew better.

"Mom, we know Dad hits you."

"What do you mean? Your Dad doesn't hit me," June lied.

Her daughter hesitated then said, "Mom, I know you're not going to want to hear this, but you can leave him if you want. The next time he hits you, he could really hurt you." Silence. "I'm sure even thinking about leaving is scary, but there is a place you can go if you decide to leave him. I'll email you some information; I know he doesn't touch the laptop. Read it over then call Haven if you decide you want help." Silence. "I wish I was there to help you, Mom. Call me anytime."



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Her daughter's comments stayed with June. It had never occurred to her that she could leave Harry. Did she want to leave him? Where would she go? How would she live? What would life look like without Harry? June spent days thinking about everything and trying to decide what to do.

Two weeks later, June called her daughter to say that she was staying at Haven's safe house in Parksville. The staff had helped her to create a safety plan and had referred her to someone for assistance with housing. She had an appointment the next day to review her legal options.

The sudden changes and many decisions to be made were overwhelming for June. But, for the first time, she felt like she could breathe. She was looking forward to her daughter coming to town to help her and, in the meantime, she felt supported by Haven and her community.

* For privacy reasons, this story and all names are fictional, but it speaks to the experiences of some of our clients.