

It's not easy to walk the road of uncertainty. To stand at a crossroads, face your fears, and bravely choose the road to take. And so, I stand at the door of the Denise House, take a deep breath, and step into uncertainty.

"Welcome," a woman says, her voice warm, comforting. "My name is Kathy. We are so glad you're here, Ella." She smiles and extends her hand.

A part of me wants to turn; to run—run back to my home—back to what I know, what I'm familiar with. But, another part, the part that no longer wants to be emotionally, verbally and physically abused, reaches up from deep within my soul and demands I stay.

I attempt a smile. Lower my suitcase onto the floor, then place my hand in hers. Expecting her to shake my hand, I'm surprised. She places her other hand over mine, and holds it gently.

"I imagine you are feeling very nervous," she says. "Please know it's absolutely normal to feel uncertain. After our telephone conversation this morning," she continues, "I am so proud of you for taking this step. Now, let's get you settled in your room, then we'll take a tour of the house and you can meet the others."

Once I'm settled, leaving my suitcase on my bed to unpack later, Kathy places her arm around my shoulder. "Okay, let's go see your new surroundings."

After walking through the house and meeting the others, I feel less anxious but still uncertain. Did I do the right thing? Maybe I didn't try hard enough? Maybe I should go back and try again.

When I married my husband, we were in love, excited about our new life together. He was kind, gentle, so attentive. I truly believed he was the man I had dreamed of since I was a little girl—my *Prince Charming*—and we would live happily ever after.

But, after our first year of marriage, the man I knew (or thought I knew) began to change. Slowly at first, criticizing little things I did or said that he didn't like. When I tried to express my hurt and confusion, he would get angry and refuse to talk to me for hours, sometimes days.

And when I arrived home late (even just a few minutes); received a text or phone call from family and friends; or worked on my laptop at home, he would become furious, shouting and calling me horrible names, accusing me of having an affair. Then he would threaten to hurt me or my family. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't reason with him.

More and more I began to doubt myself. My self-esteem crumbled. I was afraid to speak out, to defend myself against his abuse and threats. I pushed down my feelings; my courage; my ability to reason. I stopped interacting with family and friends. I was afraid to make him angry. I just wanted to maintain peace in our home.

During my first week at Denise House, I learn about the Cycle of Abuse and its three main phases: Tension-Building, Explosion and Honeymoon.

And while I learn, I remember... remember the stress and tension escalating; the break down in communication; the feeling of walking on eggshells. I remember his explosive anger; his verbal, and emotional abuse; his threats of physical harm and blaming me for making him angry.

I remember his denial that the abuse happened and that I was over-reacting. I remember the apologies and promises that he would never hurt me again. Followed by calm and peace for awhile then the cycle repeating over and over again.

That night as I lay in bed, I close my eyes and think about the parts of me that I have suppressed, for too long, deep within my inner core. As I slowly drift off to sleep, I wish I could release those parts, and together we could find self-esteem again.

Suddenly I'm walking along a mist covered road. I don't know where I am, but I'm not afraid. Slowly, the mist begins to rise and as it does, I come to the end of the road. Ahead of me are two paths, each going in separate directions. One with an arrow pointing to *Healing*, the other, *Back Home*.

For a moment, I hesitate. If I choose the path toward healing, my life will change and so will I. If I choose the path back home, I can return to my life as I know it and try to make him happy.

I take a deep breath and choose the path to *Healing*. I'm ready to learn.

As I walk along my chosen path, the first part I meet on my way, is my insecure wisdom, imprisoned by doubt's critical blade.

"If you could," she asks me, "please set me free. I've been locked in here for too long. May I walk this path with you?"

"Yes, please," I answer. "Please walk with me,"

As we walk the road together, the next part we meet on our way, is my buried, forgotten emotion, rusted in silence, afraid to trust again.

"If you could," she asks me, "please set me free. I've been buried here for too long. May I walk this path with you?"

"Yes, please," I answer. "Please walk with me?"

JOURNEY TO SELF-ESTEEM
PAGE 4

As we walk the path together, the next part we meet on our way, is my fearful, nervous courage, pretending to be brave.

“If you could,” she asks me, “please set me free. I’ve been afraid and hiding for too long. May I walk this path with you?”

“Yes, please,” I answer. “Please walk with me.”

With determination and commitment, we walk toward our goal. Suddenly a mighty dragon appears and stands in our way.

“I am self-doubt, guilt and shame,” he says with a roar. “I will stop you on your journey. My power will bring you down.”

We wanted to turn and run away, but stood and faced our fear.

I look him straight in the eye, my heart racing in my chest. “Your negative roar won’t stop us,” I shout. “It is our right to travel here. We know your cycle of abuse and we won’t be fooled again. So be gone with you. You have no power here.”

He looks at us suspiciously, then shakes his head with doubt. “I’ll be back again,” he promised. “Remember I know your weakness, fears, and doubts.” And, as he faded into darkness, he vowed, “My charm will bring you down!”

Shaken but confident in our steps, we continue along the road. The next part we meet is my self-esteem, standing bold and self-assured.

“I am Self-Esteem,” she says. “I’ve been waiting here for too long and hoping you would choose this path on the journey here to me.”

I look at her and smile. “If you could, please set us free. We’ve carried this burden for too long, would you walk this path with us?”

She looks at us, one at a time. “What have you learned on your journey here?” she asks. “For I can not grant your desire, if your learning has not been earned.”

My wisdom steps forward. Shaking but very sure. ‘I’ve learned to trust my knowledge; to reason with insecurity and self doubt. I’ve learned to seek the evidence and challenge negative thoughts. I’ve learned to share my opinions without fear of abuse.’

My emotion steps forward next, shaking but without fear. “I’ve learned that it’s okay to feel my anger... my joy... my pain. I’ve learned that I am ready to trust to feel again.”

My courage steps forward, shaking, but proud. “I’ve learned that I am strong and capable, unafraid to stand up for what is fair and just. I’ve learned I don’t have to hide. I’ve learned to trust myself.”

Self-esteem nods. She looks to me. “What have you learned, my dear?”

With confidence, I step forward and reply. “I’ve learned to face the dragon. To bravely ask for what I need. I’ve learned I do not deserve abuse, guilt and shame. I’ve learned to trust my wisdom, emotion and courage and that I’m worthy of love and life itself.”

She nods with a smile. “You have completed this task,” she says. “I will walk this path with you. Your confidence sets me free. ”

While I walk the path to *Healing*, I hear her voice say, “Ella, you’ve always had this power, now, you’ve learned this for yourself. Therefore, with wisdom, emotion and courage, walk confident in your steps. But, remember the dragon’s promise and the cycle of abuse.”

Today, four weeks later, I leave Denise House with thanks and gratitude. As I continue my path to healing, I will never forget my learning on my journey to self-esteem. And should the dragon return (abuse, guilt and shame), with the power of my inner team, I won’t be fooled again!