

# CASA MYRNA

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Community of Conscience Breakfast

Wednesday, June 8, 2011

## **Nadine Walker Mooney's Remarks**

Thank you Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray for your introduction and for your committed work in the campaign against domestic violence. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all for being here. A special welcome to the Mary Foreman family and a thank you to our First Lady of the Commonwealth, Diane Patrick, for asking me to speak in her place about such an important issue. And thank you to Casa Myrna for all their dedicated work in promoting much needed awareness on a social disease known as domestic violence.

Domestic Violence is not an easy subject to digest over breakfast. But, talking about it pales in comparison to those victims who, as I speak, are getting punched in their faces in front of their children at the breakfast, lunch or dinner table by their abusers. Domestic violence does not discriminate against times of the day or against age or between social, economic or cultural boundaries. It is, in my opinion, an equal opportunity destroyer of lives and families and is a social cancer that must be stopped.

At age 15, my grandmother allowed me to travel to Philadelphia to visit relatives. It was my first time on an airplane and I was traveling alone. This journey filled me with excitement especially as the plane lifted off. Although plane hijacking, in the late sixties, was in its infancy, I made sure to bring lots of dimes and nickels so that I could call my family and friends in the event the plane got hijacked to another country. I knew my friends would get a kick out of that. (This brought loud laughter from the audience.)

My plane did not get hijacked. But, within two weeks of my visit, I met a very handsome young man four years my senior. We spent the rest of my visit hanging out every day getting to know each other. He lived with his parents and three younger siblings in a nice home and seemed very happy. His mom, a tall attractive church going woman was always in the kitchen cooking or reading her bible. His father, an ex-marine and retired postal worker, practiced everyday on his saxophone. But, there was a dark side to this family.

The first day I met my new friend, he told me that he hated his father and that they did not get along and that he usually spent his summers at his grandmother's home in south Carolina. Within 10 minutes of meeting his 17 year old brother, his brother told me the same thing. I did not know where all this was coming from until they both said that their father was very mean and very strict.

During the remainder of my vacation, I visited their home everyday and never witnessed any hostility. But, I did notice that both these young men were careful around their father, when he was home, as though they were walking on egg shells. Seeing this made me start paying close attention to their father and while doing this, I noticed that he had a very imposing and threatening presence that would be very scary to these young men growing up. But, neither of the boys seemed to have any issues with their mother, or so I thought.

When I turned 17, he relocated to Boston and we moved in together. It was here that he began hitting me and when he did, I fought him back. I was not use to anyone hitting on me. At age 18, I married this man.

Three babies later, the hitting had already turned into beatings and I no longer fought back.

One summer, when his mother came to visit us, I witnessed an angry outburst from my husband towards his mother that erupted from a conversation they were having about religion. At the risk of him turning his anger against me, I stepped in and told him to stop talking to his mother that way. To my surprise, he did not turn his anger on me.

He waited until the next morning when he beat me up in our bedroom while his mother was in our kitchen cooking breakfast for our three children and my 12 year old sister who was visiting. She never came to my aid. I began thinking that his anger towards her must be because she never came to his aid when his father was hurting him.

Victims who do not know about places like Casa Myrna feel trapped and end up compromising too much and making excuses about their abusers behavior.

After an assault, we walk or limp to the bathroom. Look at our bloodied face, black eyes, busted lips and missing teeth in the mirror and talk to our image by saying things like, it's okay. I'm okay. He won't hit me now for a few days. He got it out of his system.

We also tell ourselves that maybe during this time, we can change some more and he will not beat me ever again. But, as victims we are already so careful about what we say or do or think, that there is nothing left to change about ourselves. So, we walk on eggshells and the abuse continues because it is the abuser who needs to change.

I eventually took my husband to court twice only to see the judge release him in spite of my stories of abuse and the fresh bruises that were on my face and body. Apparently, these judges did not think that his abuse was enough for them to lock him up. Both times, I left the court feeling hopeless and believed these judges did not care about me or my children because they had stereotyped people of color and probably thought we deserved to live this way. Either that or these judges were also abusers who could not punish another abuser because then, they would have to admit to their own guilt.

During this time in the seventies, Casa Myrna and places like it were well kept secrets. The consequence of not knowing resulted in many Massachusetts woman being slain at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends.

During the early eighties, thanks to places like Casa Myrna, more victims were speaking out and the public was putting pressure on the courts to toughen restraining orders and jail time for abusers.

By this time, my 30 year old husband was dead, shot to death by the hands of one of his former friends, who allegedly killed him in self-defense during an argument.

Four months after his death, at age 27, I moved my three children into a new home, got my driver's license and enrolled in a degree program at the University of Massachusetts where I later graduated with a Bachelors Degree in English. Two years later, I enrolled in a graduate program at Emerson College.

Fast forward 25 years later. I am happy and my children are happy, educated, grown and doing very well and raising families of their own. I had a successful career and a nice apartment in Boston's South End. I had a very active social life. The only thing that was missing was a committed relationship. So, after many years of being single and enjoying it, in 2004, I told my girlfriends that by 2005, I was going to find my soul mate and get out of the dating game.

On April 18, 2005, he came into my life, or so I thought. Our relationship was only eleven months long. The first seven months were full of fun, laughter and good times. We became inseparable and began talking about getting engaged. By the eighth month, the darker sides of his character began to surface and the red flags started going off. He became possessive, obsessive, controlling and very jealous.

Never forgetting the years of abuse that I had suffered through as a young mother, I began my escape. But, I made an almost fatal mistake. I tried to handle the situation by myself. I had no faith that the courts would keep me safe and I never went to an agency, like Casa Myrna during my marriage. So, I really did not know of one to go to. By now, I knew that shelters existed. But, I was afraid to hide out in one for fear that he might go after my daughter and granddaughter, who lived only a few short blocks away, and hurt them to get back at me. He was dangerous and suicidal and had no regard for his life or anyone else's. This fact was later confirmed.

On the morning of March 20, 2006, the day before my birthday, instead of celebrating my life, I was in the intensive care unit fighting for it. On that morning, he gunned me down and shot me in my face as I left my home for work. Thinking I was dead, he sat on the steps of my South End residence and killed himself. I survived this tragic event

because the bullet entered the bottom left side of my face and exited out my right eye, taking my eye but not my life.

I awoke 2 ½ months later from a medically induced coma, at the Boston Medical Center, only to discover, amongst other things, that I had undergone numerous facial surgeries and that I was now blind. Worse than this was the knowledge that I would never again see the faces of my children or grandchildren or those I love, or the rise and setting of the sun, or the colors that make up life, or my own image in a mirror.

After three months at Boston Medical Center, I was discharged to a rehab hospital where I spent another three months recuperating. From there, I spent another three months at the Carroll Center for the Blind where I was retrained in how to care for myself and adjust to a life of blindness.

Today, I have turned my tragedy into triumph by working hard raising awareness and money for issues related to vision loss and domestic violence.

Please join me in the Community of Conscience campaign against domestic violence by increasing our numbers, voices and outrage, and by supporting Casa Myrna's pioneering MBTA Boston to the Berkshires advertising campaign to spread awareness and create a lot of noise around this insidious social disease.

We must also unite to bring reform by letting our politicians and judges know that the public has zero tolerance for domestic violence in all its forms.

If, for any reason, any of you need more convincing that your help is needed, go to Casa Myrna's website and read the testimonials of some of their clients. You can also log on to my website: [nadinemooney.com](http://nadinemooney.com) and read my essay about what I went through after being shot.

My essay is called...Love Story.

Thank you for your time and for the help you will give in this campaign.  
(While I was saying this, loud clapping began and turned into a standing ovation).