

Mercy Richard is dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence heal and live a positive life

# *New Beginnings*

*After Fleeing an Abusive Relationship, Mercy Richard Reaches out to Cy-Fair Women & Families in Need with MercyHouse*

Written by Mercy Richard  
Select Photography by Suzi Issa



DeVry University's Houston campus president, Claude Toland and professor, Linda Schauer with Richard

I have always been comfortable with myself. I love my personality type, never had any self-esteem issues, was never shy, and never isolated myself from people. I was very social, generous, and outgoing and had lots of fun with family and friends. I am open-minded, and I mingle easily and get along well with people.

When I met my abuser, he was nothing like me. He was narrow-minded and very distant from his family. He never had a social lifestyle or friends, but I thought it was okay – until he started verbally abusing me. Every year, his attitude towards me got more aggressive and bitter. I tried to be the good wife and mother and overlooked what he was doing to me, but that never got his attention. Instead, he became too cold for comfort by trying to use everything I believed in to abuse me and neglect our child.

### A Dangerous Web of Violence

He actually woke up one morning and decided he was not the father to our son. From there on, he would falsely accuse me of having had an affair, claiming that I was pregnant with our son two years ago before we even got married.

My abuser became racist and very hostile towards me and our son. If something didn't go right, he would say it was my fault. It was my fault that he couldn't donate blood. It was my fault that he maltreated me and our son. It was my fault that his life was not the way he wanted it to be. He started using derogatory language towards me. He secretly took a life insurance policy out on the baby and me, and he starved and molested our son. He then tried to kill the baby by deliberately making him inhale the exhaust fumes. His reason for doing it was to prove to me that I was a bad mother and that I was not perfect. I could not believe that he would use and harm our child just to hurt me.

A few days later, he slammed my head on the sofa and choked me, but miraculously, I survived. Before I finally decided that it was time to leave, he attacked and nearly killed me by trying to split open my head.

### Seeking out Safety

The same day my husband tried to kill me, I sought help after the police left and he left. I went to the nearest Workforce Solutions center, where I was immediately introduced to a social worker who called the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) crisis hotline. I was then taken to HAWC. Without family in the state, HAWC became my family. The staff made me comfortable, and they listened to me and understood my needs and my child's need. They assisted me with going through the legal system for my restraining order, child support, and divorce. They had daycare on site for the safety of my son.



While attending DeVry University, Richard received support and encouragement from the staff to start MercyHouse Organization



DeVry admissions advisor, Ruth Culverson helped build back up Richard's self-confidence and made many donations to MercyHouse



MercyHouse provides a safe and caring environment for women and families to recover from domestic violence



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I was safe, my son was safe, and for the first time in a long time, I could close my eyes and sleep peacefully. I could wake up in the morning without the fear of looking over my shoulder to see what was behind me. I was able to completely transform my life.

### Bringing Women Together

While I was at HAWC, I met many other women who had been through the same things as me. To my surprise, many of them were from Cypress. I met a doctor with a 5-year-old daughter and a pastor's wife with three children. They approached me one night at dinner, and we discussed how to be safe and protected outside the shelter. At the end of the conversation, I asked where they were from. We were all comforted to discover we came from the same part of town.

The next day, I met with another group of women and when I asked them what part of town they had lived in and was told Spring Cypress, I thought, "Oh wow, I cannot believe this!" As we got to know each other, I learned most of the women were abused by their spouse after they had gotten laid off. The husbands could not stand their wife's success in her career and as a result, abused their wife. I began connecting women together who came from the same area.

*“There is a huge need for a community shelter in the Cypress area, and MercyHouse can provide that help.”*

- Mercy Richard

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### Encouraging Healing with MercyHouse

I enrolled in school at DeVry University to study business administration. It was there that I met with Professor Linda Schauer during a psychology class. She was inspired by my story and encouraged me to create Project Mercy, a networking program to help other students in need step up and ask for help. Staff members, professors, deans, students, and even the president of the school participated.

The idea transformed into MercyHouse Organization, a shelter for women and children going through domestic violence and abuse in northwest Houston. I decided to create this organization based on my time at HWAC and the women I met while I was there. I created MercyHouse Organization to empower women and inspire them with courage to break free from the chains of domestic violence and abuse and find some peace and strength to begin a new life toward wholeness. There is a huge need for a community shelter in the Cypress area, and MercyHouse can provide that help. CFM

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Cy-Fair Magazine would like to thank Mercy Richard for sharing her inspirational story of hope and strength. For more information on MercyHouse, visit mercyhousesite.org.*

# Common Myths About Domestic Violence

One of the largest barriers communities face in an effort to eliminate domestic violence is overcoming myths society holds about victims of domestic violence, their life circumstances, and their level of responsibility for the abuse.

## MYTH: Domestic violence only affects certain people.

**FACT:** According to the FBI, every nine seconds a domestic violence incident occurs. Domestic violence is an equal opportunity crime. Both perpetrators and victims come from all walks of life. It occurs across all socioeconomic classes, races, ethnicities, educational levels, ages, religions, genders, sexual preferences, and abilities. The violence does not just harm the victim, but impacts everyone in the community. Domestic violence takes an economic toll on health care services, school programs, and civil and criminal justice expenditures, illustrating that everyone is affected.

## MYTH: Victims in abusive relationships must like to be hit.

**FACT:** Victims do not want nor ask to be beaten. Victims have asked their abuser to stop. They have asked police officers, doctors, ministers, friends, and family members for help. They have tried to leave. Placing the blame on the victim discounts the physical, emotional, and psychological trauma they have experienced. Such accusations exhibit a lack of awareness of the numerous attempts made to stop the violence. The victim has been led to believe by the perpetrator that they deserve the abuse and are to blame when it occurs.

## MYTH: Victims who are abused can always leave.

**FACT:** The most dangerous time for a victim is when he or she tries to leave the abuser. This myth is based on the belief that leaving the relationship will stop the violence. Perpetrators, feeling that they have lost control of the situation, are likely to stalk their victim and follow through with their threats of, "If I can't have you, then no one will." The moment of separation is the most likely time for the perpetrator to kill the victim or the victim's family members, including children and pets, and then commit suicide. Despite the fear for their own life and the lives of their loved ones, many victims do attempt to leave the relationship, only to run into various barriers, such as a lack of police protection and disbelief by the judicial system. Oftentimes, victims find themselves without the financial means to make it on their own.

## MYTH: Once an abused victim, always an abused victim.

**FACT:** Survivors who receive positive intervention are able to move past the victim stage, rebuild their sense of self, and rarely choose another abusive relationship. Victims do not choose abusers. Just as all others, victims begin their relationship with someone who presents themselves to be a loving, kind, caring, and thoughtful person. Once the relationship appears to be stable, the abuser's facade crumbles to expose the abusive and violent behavior. The abuse usually begins in more subtle ways and the severity and frequency escalate over time.

## MYTH: Once an abuser, always an abuser.

**FACT:** Although statistics are low, some abusers do stop their violent behavior. Perpetrators have shown more success at stopping physical violence than they have at stopping verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse.

Source: [hawc.org](http://hawc.org)



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