

A Summer Night

by Jennifer Overman

"You lost it for us!" He was yelling. My father was. His face flushed with anger. He directed his anger at my mom, throwing things across our homey living room. Sure he was mad, but none of us could have seen what was coming next.

We were at a softball game, my parents' softball game. It was supposed to be fun, a good time, not to be taken seriously. It was supposed to be a time to catch up, relax, enjoy the nice summer evening. What could go wrong?

In the seventh inning, the game was tied. My mom was up to bat. She walked to the plate in her gray and black pin-striped shorts and t-shirt, bat in hand. There was a runner on third, a base hit would win the game, but with two outs, she was under a lot of pressure. And pain. In the fifth inning, she tweaked her ankle.

First pitch. Ball one. Second pitch. Ball two. So far so good.

"Good eye, Cindy," the team chanted. "Good eye."

Third pitch. Strike one. Fourth pitch. Whack! Line drive right over the first baseman. She ran. She was almost there, but she fell. Her ankle gave out. Third out, extra innings. Mom's and Dad's team lost the game in the eighth inning by two runs.

"Pizza at Pietro's," yelled the team captain.

My parents loaded the four kids into the truck and headed out. That's when it started, the verbal abuse. In that five minute drive to Pietro's, I never heard so many cuss words in my life. Dad parked the car and helped my mom out, slamming the door behind her. We all jumped.

When we walked into Pietro's, we all put fake smiles on our faces, pretending to be that "perfect American family" everyone dreams about. My father walked in that pizza bar like he was a god, with his unhappy trophy wife and his four picture-perfect children. What a lucky guy.

After two hours of pizza, soda, video games, and lots of chatter, we headed home. My father helped my mom into the truck, with yet again another slammed door behind her. The abuse started up once more. We should have been receiving Academy Awards for being such fabulous little actors instead of his verbal abuse.

My chubby little brother, only two, was sitting on my mom's lap being rocked to sleep when my father pulled her out of the chair. We were stunned, but what could we do? Little Andrew went flying. My mom flung her arms, saving my baby brother from cracking his head open on the television. She tucked him in close to her stomach just before the first punch. His verbal abuse cooked itself to physical abuse.

"Stop it," my older brother yelled. "Stop it!"

HANDOUT: A Summer Night

He wouldn't. It continued for a couple of minutes, him tossing my poor mom around the room. When the nightmare ended, his handprints were bruised around her biceps.

Thirty seconds hadn't passed before she packed our clothes and we stood by the door. We were going to my grandparents' house. My father urged, begged, and pleaded for us to stay.

"Mom will be fine by herself," he argued.

But how could we trust, let alone stay with a man who not only hurt my mom, but who could have potentially been my brother's murderer? We wouldn't, we couldn't, and we didn't.