

When I Was Young

by Josh Langworthy

When I was young, I thought that I was the hardest shit ever. Nothing could hurt me. If anyone messed with me or mine, I'd just beat their ass. It didn't matter who they were because I could mess up anyone; anyone except him. I was terrified of him. He was big and strong and always hurt my mom. He didn't care if she begged him to stop; he enjoyed it, hitting a woman. It made him feel strong and powerful. He liked scaring a woman and two young children. We were scared, and he knew it. He could hit her over and over, and after each beating, she would promise me that it would never happen again, that she was done seeing him.

Then a few days later he would pop up with flowers and tears. He would cry, and then they would be back together. Within a few weeks it would be back to hitting.

This cycle would continue for years and years. This so-called man could pull a good sob story; shit, sometimes he would even convince me. Then the hitting would start. He would never hit me, but sometimes I wished he would, just so my mom could get a break; but she never did. He would hit her and hit her; she would beg for him to stop, but he never would. I would beg him to stop, but he just told me to "shut the f___ up." I wanted to stop him; I wanted to make him beg. I wanted to hear his cries for help. I just couldn't do it; he was too big, too strong. But I couldn't do it; I couldn't stop him. If only my body would move, I could end the begging. Why wouldn't it move? I was scared stiff.

Each time I would get closer to moving, but I never could. Then one day I came home from school, and my mom had fresh bruises. He was back. I was furious!

"What's wrong with your eye?" I demanded of my mom, even though I already knew. She didn't answer with words; she just started crying. I was scared, but this time I could move. This was it; it was finally time to be a man. Even though I was only 11, I was ready.

I sprinted up the stairs to my brother's closet. I grabbed his bat and was back downstairs. There he was, standing there like nothing was wrong. "Get the f___ out!" I yelled as I confronted him with the bat. I was ready to swing; I wasn't going to wait for another story. This was it. It was finally his turn to beg. And he was going to beg, beg for his life. I swung the bat with all I had. It soared through the air, but it never reached his face; he had moved. I could tell by the look in his eyes that he was scared. "Stop, please stop!" But it wasn't his voice, it was my mom's. I pushed her voice out of my head. I didn't want her to beg. It was his cries that I wanted to hear.

I swung again, another miss. Why couldn't I hit him? He was just too fast, but he couldn't keep running forever. Sooner or later he'd have to stop and fight, and that's what I wanted: a fight. I went to swing again, but the bat wouldn't move. "Impossible," I thought. "He's in front of me. He can't have it." Then it hit me. It was my mom trying to help him. But why help him, the man who had caused us so much pain? Then her voice came back. "Stop, Josh, stop! You're going to hurt him. F___ing stop!" It was her voice all right, but she didn't sound sad; she was pissed. Pissed at me for trying to protect her, for trying to make the man that had hurt her feel pain. I was confused.

Then all of a sudden the bat was out of my hands. She was yelling something and pointing at the door, but I didn't care. I couldn't hear her anymore. I was off to the kitchen for a knife. The bat hadn't worked, but this time he was going to die. I grabbed a knife and headed back to the living room. But there she was, standing in the doorway yelling at me. Her voice came back into focus. "You want to stab someone? Stab me." I was confused; I was scared. Why did she want me to hurt her? My body was frozen again. "Out!" she yelled, pointing at the back door.

How could she choose him over me? F___ it, I didn't care anymore. It was time for me to leave.