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Oct. 21, 2004

FORMER MISS OKLAHOMA CONTESTANT SHARES HER STORY AS A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR

Tascha Bond remembers the night of Nov. 10, 2001, vividly. She and her ex-husband had just celebrated his 25th birthday by having dinner and attending a concert with another couple. Later that evening, after becoming jealous over his friend, he slammed his wife's face into the floor. He hit her at least 50 times in the head, and raped and sodomized her repeatedly over a period of three-and-a-half hours. He told her he was going to kill her, going into great detail about how she would die and what he would do with her body, and said women were lined up to take her place as mother to their infant daughter.

They had been married less than a year.

Bond, now director of community relations and marketing at Valley View Regional Hospital in Ada, said her experience with domestic violence isn't unique, but it defies many of the myths people believe about domestic violence.

A woman who ran for Miss Oklahoma three times – as Miss Sayre, Miss Southwestern and Miss Western Plains – Bond, now 27, grew up in the small town of Rattan in southeastern Oklahoma. Very active in high school, Bond was a cheerleader,

basketball player, district 4-H leader, and all-around high school girl. She grew up in a close-knit family, with a younger brother. Her parents divorced when she was 3, but “other than that, my childhood was great,” she said.

Her first encounter with the man who would beat her until she was

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unrecognizable began as a “storybook romance,” she said.

“He was very athletic – star football player, star basketball player – very handsome, beautiful smile, great personality,” Bond said. “He was very charming, very ‘Casanova,’ my ‘knight in shining armor.’ He knew exactly what women wanted to hear. I just ate up what he told me.”

They were married after a two-year dating relationship.

“During the beginning of our relationship, everything was just perfect,” Bond said. “I fell in love with him and thought he was wonderful. Then, it was a slow process – the alienation from my friends and family. He didn’t like me to go see my family, he didn’t like me to ever spend a night away from him. He made it sound as if he would miss me so much, he couldn’t do without me, etc. At the time, I thought, ‘Oh, he loves me so much.’”

“That’s how it started. He wasn’t physically abusive, but he became emotionally and verbally abusive. He became very jealous, very controlling. He started with putdowns and constantly accused me of having affairs.

“Some nights, he would go out with friends and not come home at all. If I asked or said anything, there would be a big blowup.”

Over a period of months, his outbursts increased. He began throwing things – pictures, bowls, chairs, basically anything he could get his hands on – across the room, demanding that Bond clean up his mess.

“Then, there would be a ‘honeymoon’ phase. With domestic violence, there

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definitely is a ‘cycle’ of violence. In our relationship, there would be a lot of tension, then an explosion and then a honeymoon phase of, ‘I’m so sorry. I’m going to stop doing this. I love you.’ He’d buy me flowers, things like that. I have to admit that when times were good, they were very good. I loved this man and would’ve done anything for him. But looking back on it now, I can see things were *not* good. A lot of times, it’s hard to see the dysfunction when you’re right in the middle of it.”

Before the two were married, Bond’s ex-husband had never hit her. But the evening of his 25th birthday, he more than made up for it.

A Bryan County jury sentenced him to 52 years in the state penitentiary; a judge reduced that to 22 years. But, because of the severity of the violence and the sexual nature of his acts, he must serve 80 percent of the sentence and won’t be eligible for parole until 2019.

Bond immediately filed for divorce and pressed charges against her husband. She and her infant daughter moved in with her mother for a period of time. From November to January, she couldn’t work – beaten so badly that her jaw was dislocated, she couldn’t see out of her left eye or hear out of her left ear.

Since that turning point, Bond has remarried, this time to a “wonderful” man; gone on to pursue a master’s degree in organizational communication from OU, which she will receive in the fall; and become an outspoken advocate against domestic violence, assisting the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in their efforts.

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In the spring, she will compete in the Mrs. Oklahoma Pageant, with a platform of increasing awareness and education of domestic violence issues.

“People perceive domestic violence as physical only – that you’re being hit and that’s all it involves,” she said. “It does involve that, but it’s also emotional and verbal abuse, which can be so much worse. It’s a power and control issue, dehumanizing and humiliating. It never lets up. The younger generation especially needs to understand that when their boyfriends use derogatory terms to describe them, it’s abuse. It’s verbal abuse and it’s degrading. Those things should not be accepted.

“Parents need to teach their children respect,” she added. “Research tells us that 70 percent of the children who grow up in abusive homes will become abusers or victims themselves. We need more male role models to stand up and say, ‘This isn’t right. This isn’t how you treat a woman and hitting a woman will not be accepted.

“It could be that your mother, your sister or your best friend is being beaten or abused. A lot of times, it’s right under your nose and you don’t even know,” she said. “On average, a woman leaves eight times before she leaves for good or is murdered. If a family cares about this woman, they get impatient and upset with the victim because she keeps

going back into that situation. Instead, they need to be understanding, letting her know that whatever the reasons are for not leaving the relationship, there is help. Finances, children, pets, job, transportation, shelter – all of these things must be considered before a woman finally leaves. It isn't as simple as, 'Well, why don't you just leave?'"

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If Bond could give specific advice to women in a similar situation, it would be this: If you are preparing to leave, have a safety plan. Know the plan backward and forward, but do not write it down on paper.

"Know when is the best time to leave, where to go, and who can help you," she said. "Put some money back if you can and hide it somewhere. Do small, little things. Pack a bag and put it somewhere you know he won't find it. There are a lot of things you can do to prepare for when you're ready to go.

"People in these situations must realize there is life after this, that you can pick up and move on."

Truly, Bond's life is a testament to that.

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