

## ELENA'S STORY

### Trigger Warning - Domestic Abuse

Elena was born and raised in Tres Arroyos, Argentina and had a difficult childhood. Elena became estranged from her father when she was six years old after he and her mother separated. When she was older, Elena's mother started a relationship with a man who did not treat Elena or her mother well.

In later life Elena married and had two children, a boy and a girl. Though the marriage started well, over time her husband became verbally abusive. He began to become controlling and, having moved the family out to the countryside, he restricted where Elena could go. She was prevented from seeing her friends and family and was often only allowed to travel with him. On one occasion Elena travelled to the city to run some errands and visit her daughter. Elena explained that her daughter had pleaded with her to get away from her father. *'She said to me, "I shouldn't say this, but I want you leave him. I see that dad is not treating you well. Please, don't tell him I said that, but I know you can move forward without him."* Elena found it difficult to recognise the abuse in her own life. She said, *'At first, I didn't realise he was treating me badly. People would notice the yelling and the abuse, but I would not acknowledge it. To me that was normal.'*

Eventually, Elena listened to her daughter and made the decision to leave. Elena's husband had told lies about her family and made her believe they did not love her and would not want to see her. Despite this, she reached out to her mother who welcomed her into her home. Elena had only her clothes with her when she left her husband and was able to stay with her mother until she could afford a place of her own.

Elena worked every day to earn enough money to rent her own place. She said, *'For months I didn't take a day off. I wanted to build my life.'* It was during this time that an acquaintance of Elena's invited her to join the group at The Salvation Army. *'I was feeling bad, alone. So, I decided to go. "Let's try it," I thought to myself.'* As part of the group Elena was able to tell her story and recognised the importance of sharing her experience with others. *'Before the group,'* she said, *'I felt alone, I was crying all the time and I kept wondering if I was the one who did things wrong. I wasn't the kind of person that would go to someone and talk about what was happening. I tried to sort all that on my own, so that made it worse.'*

In the group Elena found friendship and the encouragement to keep moving forward. She now tries to support other women who are in a similar situation to her. *'I tell my story to others and try to help, and I invite others to the group.'*



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