



Did this story surprise you? Or was this story about you, or one of your friends, at some point in your life? While the details of the story may be different, the lessons learned may be the same for many of us. There are many powerful points to draw from this experience.

For starters, what I did not realize is that you take yourself with you, wherever you go. Moving to another state or starting a new job, without doing the inner work would not forward me in making healthy choices in my life. I did not think highly of myself then. Do you remember what we said happens when we do not feel good about ourselves? Yes, we operate with gaps! And what did I immediately choose to fill my gaps? A married man. In retrospect, a clear sign that I was not making choices that served my highest good.

I also got swept up in what appeared good rather than what was actually good for me. I took pleasure in the non-stop social scene, the surprises and all of the attention but never experienced joy. I could not achieve joy when it all stemmed from the dishonest relationship I had to be in, in order to have it. I was too ashamed of myself and felt too bad about myself. Those enjoyable things simply served as band-aids for my boo-boos, if you will. The boo-boos being gaps. What I was really in search of was self-love but I could not make that distinction with all the chaos going on in my life.

How about when I chose to let Tom in my house when he was

clearly not being rational? I was willing to put myself in harm's way to avoid having my neighbors, whom I barely knew, think negatively of me. I made up that they would think I was weak, desperate, loose or pathetic. Back then I internalized what people thought of me so much that I found the idea of that more painful than the repercussions of Tom's rage. All the while, my neighbors were simply concerned for my well being. Not only did they call the cops but they even came by the next day to see if I was okay. It never occurred to me that would be their reaction.

Another self-sabotaging move was when I decided to date someone new rather than sorting through the mess I was already in. I did not take the time to learn from the slew of lessons that would only make me stronger. I have learned that we can go on and on avoiding the signs – the signs to look within rather than turn to external people, things or experiences. Think of all the signs I had throughout the relationship with Tom. He was married and I chose to get in the relationship anyway. Rather than have some dignity and integrity, I chose to break up and get back together with him every other day. He pulled a gun on me and I chose not to tell the cops. I chose to let him and his wife stalk me for six months and live in fear. Eventually, some sign large enough to knock me over the head came along and I couldn't run any further. For me, it was the exploration of killing myself that turned me around. I was done with the drama and now I wanted to find out how I got to such a low point.



Now this story has a dramatic ending. I really hit rock bottom before I decided to turn things around for myself but sometimes it is simply a switch that turns on in a woman's head that makes her choose what is best for her. I call it the *light bulb phenomenon* because it is as if a light bulb clicks in a woman's head and says I do not want to live like this anymore! Rather than listening to the million times someone lets us know we are making a mistake or the zillion times we told ourselves, it is an inner awareness that this time I am done.

A woman in an abusive relationship can end up in the hospital on her death bed and with her next breath choose to go back to her abuser. A couple months later when one least expects it, her light-bulb clicks and she opts out of the relationship for good. Once she has gotten to this point she will do whatever it takes to ensure there is no going back. However, this does not guarantee that she will never get into another abusive relationship, it simply means she got out of this one. *Until she does the inner work required to love herself in a way that no one else can, she will remain open and available to making poor choices. And this is okay! You do not have to make yourself feel bad, stupid or incorrigible because you've made the same poor choice over and over again. This is how we grow and come to the healthy awareness that all we have to do is love ourselves in order to break out of such a cycle.* Think of it as learning to ride a bike. If you chose to ditch learning to ride a bike the first time you fell off and scraped your knee, would you know how to ride a bike today? I use this light analogy because it is extremely important for you to lighten up

on yourself. You want to make sure you do not beat yourself up for making poor choices no matter how many times you have a repeat offense. That beating is self-inflicted and turns into guilt, self-loathing and only serves to make you feel worse about yourself.