

Stories from the home of broken fates



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In Hungary, available statistics show that one woman dies every week from relationship violence and at least three women are murdered every month by their husband, ex-husband, partner or expartner, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend, or casual partner. One in five women are or have been in a relationship where their partner has been physically or sexually abusive on a regular basis. The actual number of crimes is several times higher, and we do not have even that much data on psychological and verbal abuse.

The Salvation Army House of Light is an institution that also provides special care and protection for victims of domestic violence. It aims to provide real help and protection for abused women and their children, as well as for those fleeing from destitution. Its services aim to give mothers who seek help in the home peace of mind and strength to reorganise their lives, and to protect their children from further threats. We spoke to mothers who live here.

The story of Ági

Why are you here?

It started two years ago. I was in a relationship for 8 years. For a long time there was nothing wrong with my partner, but 2 years ago he lost his job. After that he stopped looking for a job, I worked alone, and I went out to sell plasma to support the three of us. Then jealousy set in. First he was abusive mentally, then physically. He humiliated me for a long time, hurt me whenever he felt like it. Once, when my son was at school, he tied me up, raped me and tortured me. He caused injuries that put me in hospital and I had to have plastic surgery. He said he did it so that if I left him I would not want to be with a man again.

How did you get to the House of Light?

When I went home from the hospital, I decided that enough was enough. I hadn't been allowed anywhere for 3 months, only the child was allowed to go to school. Once when he went out, we quickly got on the bike, it was only 5 minutes to the train station. The train came and we took it to Győr and from there to Pest.

Had to escape?

He wouldn't let me go anywhere. We had to run away. We ended up in a crisis hostel in Pest. They recommended the Salvation Army. I had an interview on Friday, and we were allowed to move on Tuesday. It was a great relief and happiness. I have been here for six months now and I really, really

like it here. I actually need psychological help because I was depressed, I even had a suicide attempt. When I came in I was in a terrible state. If people looked at me badly, it made me cry. I got all the help I needed here, I had a mental health professional and I saw a psychologist. I've been better for about a month and a half, and the staff here give me everything I need. They helped my little boy find a new school.

I am going through a very, very big change. There is no fear in me anymore. I've been able to leave behind everything that was wrong.

I can live my normal life, which is what I should be doing anyway. We can wash, cook, have a beautiful room, everything a family needs. Here, we are looked after, the children are looked after, we are given everything we need to forget the circumstances we came from. I have also enrolled in a nanny training course, and I would like to work in a nursery or kindergarten in the area.

What does the Salvation Army mean to you?

Everything. It has given me a home. Attention, love, security. If I could, I would stay here forever.

Erika's story

How did you get here?

When I got into trouble, I tried to find charities, I made a lot of phone calls, wrote emails, the Salvation Army was the first to respond. They were quick to respond, and I was here three days later. I have been alone with the kids for 2 years, we were living in a rented flat, but I had to pay such a high amount that I couldn't manage on my own. Summer came, I sent the children to my brother in the country and I lived in the eight with my aunt. At the end of the summer the children came back. We lived here and there. Later we had a situation where we rented a garage. It had a wood-burning stove, but we got water from outside, from a garden tap, a bunk bed, a table and two chairs. We lived there for three weeks, which was pretty tough. My granddaughter cried quite a lot, "Mummy, when are we going to get out of here". In October, we joined the Salvation Army.

How was your arrival?

After bathing in the plastic tub, cooking on the stove and the cold garage, it was a huge relief. There is no way to describe it. We could shower, it was warm and clean. We were safe. I still remember the first day we came here. After work, I gathered the kids at school and told them we were going home. They love it here.

What can you know about your husband?

I lived with the children's father for 10 years, 5 of them on a working farm. Our relationship deteriorated because of jealousy. He hurt me a lot emotionally, yelling, screaming. Many times we had to go out at night with the girls so they wouldn't hear him shouting. It was too much. I was so afraid of what would happen if I left him, but I did. It was a hard time.

What next?

I have a family carer and a specialist carer, Aunt Judit and Aunt Magdi. They are helping me to apply for a flat with the municipality. Aunt Magdi asked me if I would like to study because I only have 8 primary schools. A shop assistant course has started, they will pay for my schooling so I can have an

OKJ qualification. I would not have had the opportunity to go to school on my own. They are a huge help.

A lot of fun and good things have happened to us here at the Salvation Army. We've had Christmas, carnival, Easter, shows, programmes for the kids and mums. We look forward to all the events that we have in common with the children. We moms sometimes enjoy it more than the kids. We laugh a lot. I will never forget Santa Claus as long as I live. I'm hopeful that we'll be moving from this Salvation Army to an apartment.

Ági and Erika are exceptionally strong women, they made it. With the help of the Salvation Army, they started over.