



On June 7, 2011, I woke up at five o'clock in the morning and spent two hours analyzing the text of a final restraining order, memorizing every word. The truth is that I did not know what to expect on my first day at Partners for Women and Justice. Somehow, in my third year law student mind, I thought that if I read and re-read the text of the FRO, I would be best prepared for my summer. I had no background in domestic violence law. I knew basic facts on domestic violence ... and had read a few cases and statutes on child custody and divorce proceedings. I was not emotionally prepared, however, for the true, hard facts surrounding domestic violence: the repeated exploitation that breaks down a woman's emotional and physical strength, buried tales of dreadful child abuse, and most of all, the startling cyclical nature of it all which posits that a woman will go back to her batterer an average of seven times before she finally leaves for good. The world of domestic violence is no walk in the park, and I spent the first week feeling a bit defeated and even cynical about my tribe, the female race. This sadness reached an all-time high when I had a client tell me she was grateful that she had given birth to sons, because every woman in her family had fallen victim to an abusive man.

In my second week, however, I found hope in the strangest place: in the domestic violence plaintiff's waiting room... As I sat with our client, who had just been granted a motion to relocate with her children ... I suddenly felt hopeful. ... She told me she finally felt free from her husband, a man who had belittled and oppressed her for years. I realized then that I had made some difference, however small, in helping her obtain the legal means to move forward with her life. And so I began on my journey: conducting domestic violence intakes, preparing victims and witnesses for court appearances, and researching and writing motions and briefs on domestic violence, child custody, and relocation matters. With every task, I felt more hopeful, and I began to feel a sense of sisterhood with these women and with my colleagues, as we aimed towards this greater goal of ending domestic violence one case at a time. ... [My colleagues] made me, an amateur, a true believer in the power of a small non-profit organization and its drive in helping thousands of low income, abused women find their legal voice and advocate for their rights.



One in four women will be the victim of domestic violence in her lifetime. This statistic ... is one that I can't seem to get off my mind. It reminds me of how much of an epidemic domestic violence is and it reminds me that, no matter how much is done for one woman to help her get out of an abusive relationship, there are still many more women who need the legal, emotional, and social support to combat domestic violence. My work at Partners for Women and Justice made me realize that [by]... providing women with the legal representation they need ... and with hope, hard work, and compassion, we can help break the cycle.