

Write to Heal

Making sense of life and war through personal stories

When Lisa Regina was assaulted by her then-fiancé, actor Vincent Pastore, she stopped going out, afraid of leaving her apartment.

Regina, a Gloucester Township native, was hospitalized following the brutal attack by Pastore, well-known at the time for his role on “The Sopranos” as Big Pussy, a thug-turned-FBI informant. The attack happened on the streets of New York City with passersby watching but not stepping in to help. The incident went viral and pictures of Regina’s black-and-blue face were plastered on TV, newspapers and the internet for months after she filed charges.

Regina found the strength to move on by writing about the experience. She turned her story into a stage production and created “A Write to Heal,” a foundation to help other victims of domestic abuse heal through writing.

She has now broadened her project to expose other hidden traumas, including veterans’ stories of war. Regina is developing 2 TV shows based on those true stories. “Heroic Episodes,” which was filmed in South Jersey, features dramatic retellings of veterans’ accounts of war and their return home. “The Shades” is a made-for-TV crime drama that weaves tales of domestic violence.

Q: What gave you the courage to press charges?

People told me I should have kept my mouth shut because of the stigma. I had no interest in exploiting the situation – I simply wanted justice. I’m a survivor. If my assault would have taken place inside my small apartment, I know I’d be dead.

Q: How did your relationship with Pastore get to this point?

It’s easy to find reasons why someone you care about acts out with anger. Plus, the abuser will blame others and manipulate with excuses like, “I have too much tension with my job,” or “You make me so mad.” There were many enablers and bystanders during my relationship. People who kept their mouth shut about my ex-fiancé’s outbursts, because they had their own agenda or





The Sopranos' Vincent Pastore pled guilty to assaulting Lisa Regina in 2005. He was sentenced to 70 hours of community service and anger management therapy.

were afraid of his power in the industry. People who do nothing are just as guilty. Remember, domestic abuse or sexual abuse is not a shame, it's a crime.

Q: How did writing help you heal?

It took time. I hid inside my apartment for a while and then just started writing everything I was feeling. It was a way to release what were often fragmented thoughts. Eventually, that led me to writing a monologue about my own experience with domestic violence, which I staged for the first time in 2006. I performed, as did other actors, and we told stories that had been shared through A Write To Heal. Some of the victims were in the audience at the premiere, and we had advocates and counselors there for support. It was empowering.

Q: What are some of the stories being told in "Heroic Episodes?"

Over the past five years, I've interviewed hundreds of veterans. It hasn't been an easy task to pick stories for the show.

There's one about an Army veteran who lost his leg in an IED blast. He grew up as an athlete before the war, and when he got home, he had to make the transition to playing wheelchair basketball. Another Army veteran, Capt. Leslie Nicole Smith, lost her eyesight and her leg in Bosnia. Her entire life changed in an instant. There are so many stories.

Q: How did growing up in South Jersey shape you?

It was a simple, blue collar upbringing. I have an image of my dad's muddy work boots sitting outside on the front step of our South Jersey home, and I remember the distinct aroma of my mom's cooking. Although I've had amazing, positive experiences working on film sets alongside A-list actors and directors, my South Jersey upbringing has always been a reminder of who the real celebrities are in my life: my family, my life-long friends and our veterans, who defend our freedom. ■

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