

I am no victim.

I have been exploited, used, raped, beaten, tortured, shamed, rejected and abandoned, not once or twice, but more times than I can remember, but *still* I am no victim.

Look me in the eye and tell me what you see. Can you see beneath my skin to paint the bruises or trace the scars that riddle my soul... or do you just see a woman? My face does not tell my story. I am simple and vulnerable. I am no different than you. I am not a woman defined by a torrent of events that rendered me helpless and a prisoner in my own body. No, I am not defined by the tyranny of those moments themselves, but rather my response in the face of all that has happened. I am defined by my choices today; not by the impotence that only haunts my memory.

When you call me “victim” you anchor my identity to the past; to an incident in which I was powerless and without choice or escape. You ask me to look for my humanity in a place without hope or possibility of change. The past holds no opportunity for redemption because it is, by definition, already past. It cannot change; it is sealed and what is done is done. Only the present is impregnated with capacity for new life.

A victim is only a victim after the victimization has stopped if the power of the will is not restored. The belief that one is impotent only fuels the cycle of abuse. I have learned to always look for the choice, *because* there is **always** a choice. Even in the midst of ineffable horror, begetting trauma after trauma, there is still hidden within the heart of man a choice. Outside I may have no voice, no control, no impact on the chaos around me. My body may betray me alongside those I love and innocence may take flight leaving me alone in my shame, but the end is not yet.

Inside, buried deep beneath the rubble and wounds inflicted by others and my own lust for vengeance, I find a choice. A choice to forgive. A choice to separate myself from those that seek my harm. A choice to say ‘no’ to that which leads to more darkness and death and ‘yes’ to light and life. A choice to believe that the God Who gave me a choice loves me and has sustained me through the night until the dawn could break again. A choice to believe in hope again. A choice to live again.