

Ep. 70: Surviving domestic violence

Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960th Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended.

Good day Gladiators, thank you for joining in for another episode of the Sword and Shield podcast. This is Francis Martinez, Director of psychological health for the 960th Cyberspace Wing. I do have a very special guest joining us over the phone from Fort Bliss. I have Kayla Hodges, thank you Kayla for joining us today. Thank you for having me. Absolutely. And so October is domestic violence awareness month. October actually has quite a few uh awareness months. And so this is one of the ones that we wanted to highlight on our podcast today because it is so prevalent in one of the times we don't really hear um survivor stories as a release to domestic violence because it's a little bit scary right to talk about um situations and things that happened, especially within the military. Absolutely and I thank you for joining us today and wanting to share your survivor's story. Um but I want to give some stats because I don't think people really realize you know how frequent um domestic violence occurs. Um there are about 20,000 calls a day to the domestic violence hotline and for me that's just like overwhelming about one in three women are subjected to some sort of intimate partner, um, or domestic violence. Um, and one in four men. So those are quite high numbers. Um, and a lot of the times when we talk about domestic violence, people automatically assume females are the victims of domestic violence. But about 25% of men in their lifetime have experienced some sort of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. So yeah, the numbers are scary to hear because you don't really talk about it. So when you hear statistics, it's like, it's just alarming to hear and about 500% increased risk of homicide when a gun is present in a domestic violence situation. Um, I'm gonna turn it over to you. I know your story involves some pretty graphic um, and scary situation. So I do want to uh disclaimer out there for our listeners, Kayla story does involve personal story of domestic violence. It can be re traumatizing for those people that have been in the, in these situations. But her goal and her focus is talking about her story and how she overcame, um, and survive. So, um, I just want to give a fair warning for the far listeners out there. So, over to you, Kayla and uh we can start at the beginning, like, you know, uh, where you guys met how the relationship kind of started. Um, and what that looks like for you. Yeah, absolutely. So I met him in 2012, I was 19 and I had a young daughter. My daughter was only five months old and I met him and it was just kind of like the honeymoon phase where you're happy and everything looks like rain bows and sun shines and he, you know, comes in, wants to take care of, my daughter, wants to take care of me like just paint this whole love picture of, it's gonna be so awesome, we're going to be a family. So I'm young and I'm a young mom and I'm thinking like, wow, I can't believe that in this

situation. I never thought that I would meet somebody who wants to raise somebody else's daughter who wants to be with somebody who already has a kid. So I fell and I fell fast and in the span of five months we had met, got married and got pregnant. So I was 19 and I already had a young daughter. Now I'm pregnant with yet another kid and I'm married to this man that I met five months ago and I'm thinking like, Wow, this is actually awesome. My life is panning out. I'm not seeing any red flags, I'm not saying anything that worries me, I'm thinking that this is just it. Um two months later he actually got orders to deploy. So he deployed in February of 2013 and at that time I was pregnant, I wasn't working. Um so he deploys and then he ends up coming back quicker than planned. So he came back in June um and when he came back I could feel and see a difference. He was definitely more angry, um less patient, more distant, but I just kept thinking, okay, well he's deployed, he's coming back to, you have to give him time, he's gotta adjust to life back in the States. I'm sorry, just kind of ignored all the red flags that I saw and I ended up having to go into the hospital two months early to have my daughter um had my youngest daughter and then came home, everything still was okay. He was a little angry, still a little different, but I just kept blaming it on the deployment or you know, we just had another kid, Maybe it's just all the pressure and I'm thinking it's gonna change. He's going to go back to how he was before; it's going to be okay. So I just kind of kept Lying to myself and telling myself that it was gonna be okay. You know, I was still young and scared. I now had two kids, you know, at the age of 20 and I'm thinking like, what am I gonna do? You know, what am I, where am I going to go? I don't work. I am depending on this man, I have two young daughters that need me, I can't just walk away so I just kind of accepted all of the red flags and at that point at that point was there any sort of physical contact or was it just you know the anger or yelling? What did that look like? So it was all just anger at that point. When I had first, when we first came home, it was just more of mental abuse, just the yelling and the screaming, but nothing physical, so then I just kept kind of reassuring myself okay well just mental abuse, like it'll, it'll get better, you know, it's not physical abuse, like it's not that bad, there's people who have it worse, so I'm thinking it's okay and then when our daughter turned five months it turned physical um and he would, you know, just get angry and he would hit me or he would choke me or he would you know , block me from my phone or getting out the door and I just kept feeling like maybe it was something that I was doing , maybe somehow I was triggering it , so I just kept reinforcing to myself like , okay , it's you Kayla you have to maybe do this different or do that different and it's going to change , you know , and I was lying to everybody and I wasn't telling my family or my friends or anybody what was going on , so I was just keeping it inside and taking it , you know , and taking a physical abuse and it just got worse and worse and I like eventually got to a point where I was like , okay , I think I need to reach out and get help and I think I need to talk to my family . And so the cycle of abuse generally, right, uh, something happens, um, like you're physically assaulted or push or you know, um, just out of control yelling type of behaviors and then it's like, oh, I'm sorry, please forgive me. And then it's a honeymoon stage, right? And then it kind of cycles again. Did you see any of that in your relationship? Absolutely. It would get physical and then he would just say, I

can't do, I did that, I'm so sorry, I love you so much. I'm never going to do it again. I don't know what got into me, I can't believe I did that. So that I was thinking, okay, he feels remorse for what he is doing. So he didn't mean to, he just got angry, you know, he's sorry about it. And I kept believing that over and over and over again that it was, you know, going to change because he was feeling sorry and it didn't change, you know, and I took about six months of it and then I got to a point where I was like, I just can't because I have daughters and I've got to do better for them. I start started speaking to my family I started, you know, telling them what was going on. And I think that's kind of where it gets hard because sometimes when you tell people they don't know how to react, you know, because it's not something that we talk about is not something that I ever talked about with my family. Like domestic violence. I know we never spoke about it. So now that I'm going through, I'm just thinking like, what did I do wrong? Like how did I put myself in the situation? And sometimes we accept behaviors because we were brought up in those types of situations, right? Like if we're in a domestic violence, childhood upbringing, a lot of the times, that's what our normal is, right? And so we accept that later in life and this is how I grew up. This is how things just are. Um, and so it doesn't sound like that was your case. Well, my mom, my mom was definitely in a toxic relationship, a toxic marriage and we saw that growing up, but like you said, it felt normal. I never knew anything else. I never knew healthy relationships. I just thought that this is maybe how it starts off, you know, and then you just think that that's how it's supposed to be and so reaching out to family to get help, what did that look like for you? So I just looked like being honest, you know, and telling my mom, I think I'm in a really dangerous situation. I think that I am somewhere that I can't get out of, I don't know what to do or how to do it because you know he would say if you ever leave me, I'm going to kill you or I'm gonna come find you, you know? So then you feel like you can't leave. Yeah. You just feel so trapped. Yeah. Yeah. And there is a turning point for you and do you want to talk a little bit about you know the escalation, the actual turning point event and what that happens. I know it's a pretty scary situation that you went through and then you know kind of how you overcame that. Yeah. Yeah. So like I said I got to a point where I knew enough was enough and I decided that I wanted to leave so I got a job and I got my own apartment and I moved my girls out and we were living and we were doing fine. We were doing good. I had cut him off, I didn't answer text messages, I didn't answer calls and we were still in the same city but we didn't see each other or speak. Um So I felt like okay, maybe I'm out of this, maybe this is it. Um and then one day I was at my apartment and I was getting ready for work in the morning and I hear of being at my door and I'm like okay that's weird, I go to my door and my door is actually being kicked in um So he was kicking my door in and he had found me because he had stopped me from when I came home from work, he had followed me, I knew where I lived, so he stalked me, he actually stayed there was like an abandoned house kind of catty corner to where I lived and he stayed in that house at night and then in the morning he came and he was kicking down my door and I froze , I just froze , I didn't know , I just froze and so I'm standing there and I'm thinking okay what am I gonna do ? You know he's gonna come in here like what am I gonna do? I have my two girls sleep in the bed. Um So he comes in and he tells me to get in the car so I grabbed my

two girls and my girls are in pajamas like I have no shoes on, I'm still getting ready for work, like I'm not fully you know ready, we get in a car and he drives me to work and I was working at a hospital at the time and we pull up to the front door um and he tells me to get out and go to work, I have no shoes on, My girls have no clothes on, they have an eight um and I look at him and I just say I can't get out and he's like you have to get out the car and go to work ? And I'm like I can't get out because I just kind of knew that it was different, he looked different, he was talking different, I knew it was different. Um so I couldn't get out the car and so we drove away and we were driving down the highway back towards my apartment and I just said you know when I get home I'm gonna call the police and I'm gonna tell them that you kidnapped us and you're gonna go to jail and I'm gonna move away And that triggered him. So he took my cell phone and he threw it out the window on the highway and just started driving and we started driving out towards kind of like a wooded area about 20 minutes from the base that we lived by and we get out there in the middle of nowhere and he parked the car on the side of the road and he tells me to get out and my girls are crying and you know, they're scared and I'm scared and I just kind of blank in the face and I get out the car and he gets out the car and he's you know yelling at me screaming at me , how could I do this ? How could I leave him? How could I cut off all communication, you know? And so I'm just saying that I'm just crying and he pulled a gun out of his pocket and he held it towards me and told me that he was gonna kill me and leave me in the woods and he was going to tell my family that I just ran that I got it was too much for me with the girls, it was too much by myself. So he was going to say that he came over one day and I was gone um and I just, I just broke down, like I was terrified, I was scared, I was crying, I was screaming, I was begging for my life, there was nobody around, there's no houses out there, it's literally the middle of nowhere um and I'm screaming and I'm crying and I'm just begging him, you know, just please take me home, I'm so sorry, like I'll take you back, I'll you know, I'll change, I'm just saying whatever, I feel like I can say to snap him out of it . So eventually he snapped out and he let me get back in the car and we were driving back towards my apartment and I don't know if it was just like word vomit, but I just said like I'm gonna call the cops when I get home and he turned around and he was like did you not learn your lesson? And I was just crying and begging him to let us out the car. I mean like you could have my car, I'll just walk with the girls. Um anything I could say that I thought would make him pull over, but there was nothing, he was just in a rage and there was nothing I could do or say to change it. So he stopped the car at the red light and told me that he was going to turn around and he was gonna gonna gonna go kill me and he was gonna leave me. So he turned the car around and started driving back down the street and I'm screaming and I'm crying and at this point I think I kind of knew like this is it, like I'm not gonna, if I go back out there, I'm not going to survive, I'm not gonna live in my girls, I have no idea what's gonna happen. Um so we were driving and I look in the rearview mirror and I see a fire truck behind us. So I'm thinking in my head, what can I do? How can I how can I save myself right now? So I'm in the back seat at this point and my girls around outside in their car seats and I reach over my daughter's car seat and open the door while we're driving down the street and I just start waving my hand out the door, like I just was waving like, like I couldn't, I just

couldn't believe that this was happening. So I'm waving my hand and I'm waving my hand and he finally notices that the fire truck behind us, I think suspected something. They're like, okay, this girl, she needs help. So they turned their lights on and they start following us and we're driving down kind of like a main street, so it's pretty busy, there's, there's cars, but we're speeding and we're kind of like dodging through traffic. I still have the door, but I'm just waving my arm and I just looked at my girls and I'm like, I'm so sorry, I can't believe I get this domestic and business position and eventually the fire truck just keeps their lights on and keeps calling us and I don't know if he got spooked, I don't know what clicked, but he pulled the car over and he jumped out and he ran and then, you know, the police came and the fire truck and you know the girls and I were safe. But it was like; I still was just blank because I couldn't believe that like here I am, you know, like how could this fairytale turned into a nightmare? You know? And so he ran and I went to my mom's house and I decided like, okay, I'm gonna go to my apartment, I'm going to move out and I'm going to move back with my mom just somewhere where I felt safer because I wasn't alone and I went the next day to get my stuff at my apartment and he had actually broken my house, he had threw a rock through my sliding glass door window um and he had took a bat to everything in my house and a knife to all of my stuff, you throw everything we owned. Um and I just was, I think still to this day, I look back and I'm like, I can't believe that like I was living that, you know, because I was just this young girl who fell in love who thought that everything was going to be magical and then now I'm literally living in my nightmare. Yeah, and a lot of the times survivors blame themselves right? Like I shouldn't have done this, but you know, the abusers also, you know, they have to be accountable for, you know what they're doing to people? Absolutely. I think you feel like, oh if I would have, you know, maybe if I would have changed or maybe if I didn't get irritated, maybe if I didn't nag him, maybe if I did this, you wouldn't be like this and you blame yourself, you know, and it's not your fault, but you feel like it's your fault in that moment and so getting out of that situation obviously you and your girls are safe, what does it look like for you now is now is good. You know, I took time I healed, I got counseling, I really focused on myself and my girls um and then I actually met a man about five years later, I am not married, I have a sign and my life is completely different you know, I'm safe, my girls are safe like I feel love, I'm in love and just looking back, I can't believe that I'm where I am now because when you're in that situation you think it's not gonna get any better, it's never gonna change. You're never gonna find somebody who loves you, you know? And now I am living that I've you know I went to court, we got full custody of our girls like I have she has no ties to us at all, have a restraining order against him for me and the girls for life you know we have no contact and it just kind of feels free, it feels free Yeah. You know there is so scary trying to get out of that situation, I'm sure, I mean I can't even imagine when you were talking about it, like I had chills down my whole body just listening to your story and unfortunately some people are so crippled by their fear or what's going to happen that they don't make it out of those situations. Yeah and that's the hard part because it is scary, you know and when I left, I was terrified like I didn't know how I was going to be able to take care of myself, not only myself but now two kids, you know. And I'm still young, like I'm still trying to figure out my life and always scared

every single day, you know? But I just kept telling myself, okay, you make it through today and then you look at tomorrow and then you make it to tomorrow, you look at the next day, you know, and I think probably for like a solid year, that was literally my mentality was just day by day. Okay, you did good today. What about tomorrow and then the next day you know, but it's very scary like you said, a lot of people can't get out because of that fear. Yeah. And so the messaging really today is you know, there is hope outside of outside of domestic violence, right? There is always a way that get out and get help. Um, and so the family advocacy program at most military installations, you know, they have different types of reporting that that can be uh completed, unrestricted or restricted reporting and they have different scenarios or different outcomes. Um, but it's really important for people to know their options right into have those resources available. And so you can contact 24 7 the domestic abuse victim hotline at 2103671213. Also there is the domestic National Domestic Violence hotline. It's 807 99 safe. That is 807 997233. As you know we are recognizing these different awareness months. The 53rd NOS has adopted our domestic violence awareness month and is taking a stand against domestic violence because 20,000 calls a day are recorded or reported to the domestic violence hotline. We're asking that all of our listeners participate in the 20,000 squat challenge in the month of October so 20,000 squats for those 20,000 calls. And we ask that people were purple to show you know domestic violence support and awareness and know that we are all resilient. Kayla. Thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your story. It's very brave to do that because most people you know they live in shame. They don't want to share these types of stories. So we hope that our listeners um if there's anyone out there that needs help that will reach out because of your story, we greatly appreciate you sharing those Gladiators. Please reach out if you're needing assistance we are here to help and Gladiators out.