

7 out of 10

Ten women stand silently side by side with upturned faces devoid of emotion. They seem to demand silence before they will utter a word. Quiet descends upon the gathered throng. The women lower their gaze then begin to chant:

Ten women:

We are the survivors of violence living downtown. We are the women of yesterday, today, and the future. We are your mothers; your daughters; your sisters; your neighbors; your lovers; your dreams and your fears. People have said they loved us and then have hurt us supposedly in the name of love; fathers have beaten us, our siblings, and our mothers; men have raped us; we face intimidation and harassment daily. We are the survivors of violence. We are the faces that you need to see; we are the voices that you need to hear.

The women move forward and form a wedge or triangle at the center of the stage. The first woman at the point of the triangle speaks

1. Veronica

Violence entered my life when I was 54 years old. For seven months I was in Hell. Hell was a program in Northern California that claimed a covenant with the Lord. I was beaten from the first day I arrived. I was locked inside a closet where I knew only hunger and fear. I was but an empty vessel; my spirit having been consumed by the fire. It was like a nightmare without end. Violence became my only companion. I didn't deserve this.

But I hadn't been broken beyond hope. One day I said no, I wouldn't take the abuse anymore. No, I wouldn't suffer at the hands of these evil hypocrites for one more day. They threatened me and beat me and taunted me and tormented me, and I had to get away. I walked for miles. I sought help from those not willing to help. And, finally, I found myself on a bus headed to Los Angeles.

I am one of the seven.

2: Barbara

Each man who beat me, raped me, verbally abused me seemed entirely different on the surface. But their behaviors were all the same.

I have been raped several times. Rape. The loss of power of my body. Pain, humiliation, implied guilt. Then the haunting questions. Why me? Why wasn't I strong enough to prevent this? Will my daughter ever have to endure this?

Rape captured a part of me that I will never get back. Unfortunately the memories can never be erased. I continue my journey of life, survival and recovery. But sometimes, I scream out and no one knows why. Sometimes, my spirit screams and no one can hear it.

I am one of the seven.

3: Thurstina

I was homeless for 7 years. One of my experiences with violence came one night while I was sleeping in a tent. My boyfriend came in the tent when I was asleep and started to beat me in the face. I woke up and fought back instinctively. I completely lost it – I picked up my scissors and lashed out at his face and his eyes. I got away and ran out of the tent.

I was buck naked and had to run down the street just like that. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before. Can you imagine? Running for help completely naked? I found a police officer and he told me to get dressed. He also told my boyfriend not to hit me anymore. That was it. I got dressed, but still was in the same place that I needed help from.

I am one of the seven.

4. Earl

I was 23 years old and I was in a relationship with an ex-marine. He was asleep one night and I rubbed his forehead. He jumped and grabbed my wrist hard, and when he looked at me his eyes were all glossy. He realized what he was doing, and apologized. I accepted his apology, but somehow I viewed it as a warning to watch out for this man.

I was always looking for signs that it would happen again and hoping for signs that it wouldn't. He came home late one night and I followed him into the bedroom to see what was going on. I was completely unprepared for him to grab me and throw me on the bed the minute I stepped in the room. He hit me, held me down, and started to rape me. I used all of my strength throw him off of me. I went running up the stairs to my neighbor's house. It didn't take more than a second for her to see the blood on my face and the look in my eyes, and she just held the door open for me. I barricaded myself in the house for weeks.

I am one of the seven.

5: Maria

As a child, I witnessed my mother getting beat up. My mother has a tumor in her head as a result of all the blows from my father. So I have been around domestic violence for a very long time. I've seen the survivors – and they are truly survivors because there are women being eliminated every day. Killed by their lovers and partners.

I told myself I would never be in that same situation. I carry the attitude that no man will mistreat me, curse me, call me a bitch, hit me, or abuse me in any way. But they have anyway. And that was the end of those relationships – no second chances.

Even though I told myself it wouldn't be me.....

I am one of the seven.

6: Kathy

Being a woman my age downtown has its unique challenges. I've been flattered by men 20 and 30 years younger than me, and I've been more than happy to try and fulfill their needs. I was vulnerable. I thought I needed protection from a man in my own neighborhood.

He used me for everything I had. He took my money, my things, but more importantly, he took my freedom. He convinced me to put up with verbal abuse, stealing, and other manipulation because, without him, I wouldn't be safe living downtown. But I'm safe now, only because he's gone.

I am one of the seven.

7: Debbie

Being a survivor of violence started early for me, with the sexual abuse from my uncles. As a young girl, I didn't understand why this was happening to me and I didn't know how to make it stop.

It took me awhile as an adult to make it stop too. I started going through beatings from people I thought I loved. Right after we said "I do," the beatings started. I left, but he decided he didn't want to let go. I left my son with my mother and hid at a neighbor's house. Over the years, in other relationships, the abuse would surface again. I wanted a relationship based on mutual respect – not pain. Finally, I just gave up on relationships.

I am one of the seven.

8: Pam

What makes me sometimes get overwhelmed by fear and worry, is that I'm going to become #8.

Anger, criticism, physical harm, and other abuses do not empower anyone, on either end of the violence. I continue to see self-serving attitudes of trying to take out anger and aggression against women living in our community. We are not your enemies.

Please, please remember to respect anyone you are in contact with; remember what we have gone through and what we live with every day; and remember that violence against one hurts us all. We must stop the violence.

I don't want to be next.

9: Linda

There are 67 men in the program where I live and 3 women. In this environment, I need to put up a façade of strength to protect myself. All day, every day.

I am already strong, inside and out. But now I need to change how I am and who I am to be sure that everyone I live with knows that they can't mess with me. I'm not going to take any chances. It's tiring, sometimes, having to put on my façade all day, every day. Most of the time, I'd rather just kick back and be me – strong and powerful, but also caring and filled with emotions. But I can't, not here.

I don't want to be next.

10: Peggy

Although I haven't faced personal violence – I've seen it happening on the streets regularly since my move downtown two years ago. Most occurrences I have witnessed have involved very large men aggressively attacking much smaller women. Usually demanding money from those women, and have them in such a cowering position it disgusts me.

One time, I was at the bus stop and I saw someone being trapped up against the wall. Four people were just sitting nearby but completely ignoring what was happening. Not involving themselves in any way, shape or form of stopping the threat to this woman. I did not get involved either, for fear of my own safety. And I have been bothered by that ever since.

I don't want to be next.

Closing Poem - Thurstina

Seven Out Of Ten Heard The Wake-Up Call
I Stand Here Today And Say Let Us Pray Before We Fall
And Don't Hear The Wake-Up Call
Violence Is Every Where So I Say My People Prepare
Because Seven Out Of Ten, That Is Not The End
The End---- When U Win!
So Stop The Violence, Man, Woman, Boy, And Girl
And For Sure We Have Been Heard!