



Between Friends

The Maitri Quarterly

On March 26th 2003, MAITRI participated at a South Asian cultural event hosted by the DOSTI Club of California State Hayward Students. The programs featured dance, music and various skits. With the proceeds they raised, the DOSTI Club announced its decision to donate \$2000.00 to MAITRI. This is the third such event that a student group has done for our organization. MAITRI extends its heartfelt thanks to all the students of the club in their commitment to making a difference in our community.

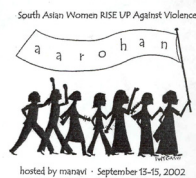
---Priya Sekhar

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Aarohan: South Asian Women Rise Up Against Violence

Manavi hosted a three-day national conference for South Asians working to end violence against women. This was the first conference of its kind. It was held on September 13-15 2002, in East Brunswick, New Jersey. The conference was attended by representatives from many related groups including two dozen



South Asian women's organizations in the United States.

This event allowed the varied people to meet and share perspectives, create channels of communication, promote leadership, and build alliances for the groups to work together towards a common goal which is ending violence against women. The conference included 12 workshops and discussions over the 3 days covering strategies for supporting survivors of domestic violence and sexual assaults and assessment of the legal needs for the South Asian survivors.

This was a long-awaited and much coveted event for us all. We commend Manavi for a very successful presentation and hope they can continue to organize this conference every year.

--Indira Chakravorty



Update from Maitri Transitional Home

The Maitri Transitional Home (TH) has a 100% occupancy rate on an average. Many of our former clients are leading successful, happy, and independent lives, after finding suitable jobs and housing. We continue to help our clients find their way in a new country and new cultural environment by training them in life-skills like English lessons, job hunting, driving lessons, apartment hunting, finding good lawyers, being able to communicate and many other ways.

Thanks to our dedicated and hardworking volunteers; we have formulated and started mentor programs and tutoring classes for our youngsters and adults. Our car donation program has been very successful in meeting the needs of our clients, especially the TH clients.

We have high hopes for our transitional home program, and are planning on implementing many different programs to help our clients and their children in trying to find their ways in leading a happy and violence-free life.

--Indira Chakravorty

LOCAL RESOURCES

- **Support Network for Battered Women: 1-800-572-2782**
- **Next Door: 408-279-7550**
- **SAVE: 510-794-6055**
- **AACI: 408-975-2739**

To Our Readers, we want our newsletter to...

- Provide information on Maitri's activities
- Increase awareness on domestic violence issues
- Be a resource for those seeking accurate information

Triumph: A Personal Story

My story is a story of strength and survival. A story of realizing my inner strength. A story of realizing that there is power in every woman.

I grew up in Mumbai and came to the USA to go to graduate school. As I was finishing up, I met a man, who like myself had grown up in India and had come here to study. He seemed nice enough and when he proposed to me on our third date, I accepted. Of course this begs the question, why did I accept in such a rush? Well, there is a simple answer; my mother had been diagnosed with cancer and was not expected to live for too long. Her only wish left was to see me happily married. As I wrote before, he seemed nice enough, came from a seemingly nice family, was educated, and seemed to share my interests. Besides, who in their wildest dreams assumes the worst to begin with?

Up until we were married and I became his wife, also known as his possession, he was charming and sweet. He treated me with the utmost respect, and I was happy. All of that changed as soon as we got married. The emotional abuse began during our trip to Hawaii (I refuse to call it something as nice as a honeymoon). Suddenly, I was too fat. I needed to lose weight. There was a whole laundry list of things wrong with my body. Emotional abuse is so insidious that you do not realize it is happening. Besides, I knew all about the battered women's syndrome and it could never happen to someone like me. Furthermore, I grew up in a family where my parents adored each other, where they gave my brother and myself the same opportunities, where I was taught that my gender was nothing more than a fact of nature and had nothing to do with what I wanted to achieve in life. In short, I was raised to be a very strong, educated, independent, and proud Indian woman and living alone in the USA further enhanced those qualities of my personality. Therefore, there was no way that someone like me could be abused.

My mother died within six months of my marriage and the last thing she ever said to me was, "Sukhani saunsar kar", which loosely translated means, "Have a happy married life". The loss of my mother was the loss of my best friend and my confidant. My depressed and weakened state of mind was taken advantage of and my abuse escalated. His family abused me as well. I was in a classic abusive Indian marriage, where the new daughter-in-law is abused by every member of the in-law family as though it were an ongoing albeit sick ritual of the wedding ceremony itself.

I kept trying to please him and nothing was ever good enough. My self-esteem and self-confidence were completely shattered. My world revolved around pleasing my abuser and not incurring his wrath and when I did incur his wrath (which was all too frequent) it was completely my fault. When I obeyed him, I received flowers. So I got trained very quickly into the Pavlovian response. My bank accounts were joint while he maintained separate accounts of his own. He had a car; I was forbidden from buying one. Naturally going anywhere other than to work was completely dependent on him – just the way he liked it. I was cut off from my friends and family so that my only world was him, his family, and his circle of friends. However, I was determined to make the marriage work. Why you ask? It is because of my mother's haunting last words to me. It was because seeing me supposedly happily married was giving my grieving father some solace.

Now here is where my story took a turn for the better. This sudden realization literally turned the tide for me. I was focusing on the wrong word in my mother's last words to me. "Have a happy married life". I was focusing on "married" and I know she meant the focus to be on "happy". Once that was in place, I opened up to my father about my life. Of course it turns out he had suspected it all along but did not want to say anything until I did since he was hoping that he was mistaken.

After that, I knew what I had to do. It was a matter of survival. Even at this stage though, I had not fully acknowledged that I was an abused woman. But I knew I wanted to help the real victims. Therefore I went to Narika's website to fill out the volunteer form. Once there, I saw a link, which asked me if I was a victim of domestic abuse. For a reason unknown to me, I clicked that link open and fell apart. My God, that was my life they were talking about! How did they know? I answered a sickening, resounding yes to every question asked on the website, except for the questions about children.

Once the realization that I was an abused woman hit me with full force and I sobbed until I felt as though my heart would literally break into pieces, I wiped my eyes, decided that that was the last time I was going to cry over this, and began planning my escape. Obviously as I began gaining my mental and physical strength back, I was standing up for myself more often, hence equally obviously, my abuse worsened considerably. But by now I was not alone. I had broken my silence and had sought help. What I needed was emotional support and I received generous helpings of it from the wonderful volunteers at Maitri and Narika, from my friends, and most importantly from my family who closed ranks around me and stood by me. Despite everything, I still considered myself to be one of the lucky ones; I had my own visa, I was economically independent, and I had tremendous support from my family.

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The next thing I did was to get an excellent lawyer. I then put all my documents and valuables into a separate safe deposit box in the bank, found myself an apartment, bought myself a car over the internet, and applied to and got into law school, all the while pretending to be trying to make the marriage work. I secretly did what I needed to do and once I had everything set up, I left.

Never straying from the pattern of behavior of a classic abuser, he began pleading and begging for me to come back. He was suddenly ready to do everything, including going into counseling. But I knew that going back was akin to me signing my own death warrant. I filed for divorce, which he fought bitterly for a year. I walked away without taking a penny from him although I was entitled to a big financial settlement. I just wanted to be free of him. I was working full time, going to law school at night, and fighting an extremely messy divorce. Yes, I was stressed to put it mildly. But I could see the light at the end of the tunnel and I just kept moving towards it. The day I signed the final divorce papers and the day I got my maiden name of "Pandharipande" back, were the two happiest days of my life after a very long time.

I am now very happily married to a wonderful man, who is my best friend. We have a beautiful house and hope to have children together some day. I do not know what love is. All I know is that he is the only person I can completely be myself with. On my career front, I am in the field of my choice. I have added one item to what I would like to do once I get my law degree. I intend to do *pro bono* work for battered and abused women. So yes, there is hope and we need to realize our own inner strength. But it is not easy and hence what a victim needs is a lot of support. I had that and I was lucky. I should not feel lucky though. Victims getting the support they need should not be a matter of luck. It should be their right.

By Sharmila Pandharipande



A Walk to Remember

The yellow tape with the words "Crime scene: do not touch" caught my eye. Eight chairs had been placed in a grim circle on the dais. Each chair represented a victim of domestic violence – men, women and children, there were no exceptions. There was a hushed silence as the case histories of the victims were read out. The ceremony served to remind all present that domestic violence could strike anyone, anywhere, anytime. While the scene seemed like it was lifted straight out of a movie, in reality, I was attending the fifth annual "Walk to end Domestic Violence" held on October 13, 2002 in San Jose.

Each October, elected and public officials join the City Family/Domestic Violence Prevention Task Force and organize a two mile walk to focus public attention on the growing problem of domestic violence. These incidents of family violence involve people of all cultures, races, religions, sexual orientation, age, education, and income levels bringing home the fact that violence in families is not just a private matter; it is a serious community issue.

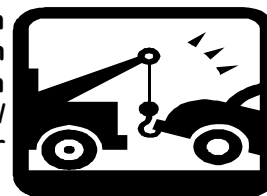
As a new Maitri volunteer, this was a first-time experience for me. As I reached the venue, I noticed that it was teeming with people. Most of them had already donned the t-shirt emblazoned with the "walk the talk" logo designed expressly for the event. It was heartening to see the sheer number of people who turned up, a drastic improvement from the previous years. It was a sunny day

as we all set off on our walk carrying our bright yellow banner. I noticed a few onlookers jotting down the help line numbers. Judging by the number of cars slowing down to see the banners being displayed by various organizations, the walk had succeeded in garnering both attention and visibility.

The two mile walk was over before I realized it and it was time to head back, *taking home with me the stark reality that while the fight against domestic violence had begun, we still had a long way to go.*

By Aditi Jagannath

Maitri is now signed up with America's Car Donation Charity Center. You can check out <http://www.donateacar.com/> for additional information.



We will come and pick up your car within 3 working days and give you your tax deductible receipt.

So if you, your friends or family, are looking to donate your car please call (408) 730 4049.

Remember, your car does not need to be in running condition to help someone. Just call and you can donate your car to help a Maitri client lead an independent life.

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P.O. Box 60111
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Phone: 408-730-4049
Hotline: 1 888-8-MAITRI

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Maitri Hotline: 1-888-8-MAITRI/1-888-862-4874

How to Support Us

There are many ways you can support Maitri's initiatives.

Some of them are as follows:

- Grocery cards to local Safeways or Albertsons.
- Domestic and international Phone cards, where clients can contact their families.
- Shopping cards to local Walmart, Kmart, Target, Office Depot, and such stores.
- Gas Cards which clients can use towards at least one month's car fueling expenses.
- If you are a lawyer and willing to do pro bono work for Maitri, we have an urgent need for your services.
- If you own a second home in the Bay Area and are currently renting it out, you may consider donating a twelve to twenty-four month rent-free space for the Maitri Transitional Home.
- If you are a counselor, a social worker or a psychologist and willing to do pro bono work for Maitri, we have an urgent need for your services.
- If you know of any job openings at your workplace or in your community, we would like to pass the information to our clients.
- If you have a car in good working condition and would like to donate it to Maitri, we always have clients who need cars.
- If you have extra storage space that you could donate for 12 to 24 months, we have a great need. We currently receive several offers for the donation of items that we cannot accept due to lack of storage space.
- If you have other ideas for ways in which you could lend your support, please contact us.

Send correspondences to:

Maitri, P.O. Box 60111, Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Ph: 408-730-4049