



# *The Spirit of a Fighter*

Nazalena Natasha Houston

“ I will write and share my story with anyone who is willing to listen. Women need to know this abuse thing is not a joke. Seek help and move away from the relationship. Don't let one time turn into death. ”

**S**he witnessed the hacking to death of her children; she herself lost an arm and three fingers all at the hands of a man she once loved. The pain and horror were indescribable: Natasha Houston saw death and lived to tell its tale.

*“I am okay,”* a sigh escaped her lips. *“What else can I be? I am alive for a reason only God knows, but I am thankful.”*

Eight months before this interview Natasha had two main reasons to be happy, her angels, six year old Kimberly and two year old Saheed.

Tragedy would, however, steal Natasha’s angels and attempt to break her spirit. *“I believe they are in a better place. That thought keeps me going.”* Natasha said as she held their pictures close to her heart.

The date was July 31st, 2013. Natasha unwillingly returned to the home of her abuser, Richard, a man she had lived with since the age of 14. Weeks before she and her children sought refuge at a friend’s home after she decided she had had enough of the physical and emotional abuse she suffered for eight years.

*“I thought he was my life. I drop out [of] school and run away from home for this boy. I loved him bad.”* Natasha related.

*“The first time he hit me I kept it silent. He apologised and said he would never do it again... it, however, continued from there.”*

Natasha suffered physical and emotional trauma if he drank too much, if she asked him where he was, if she was out for too long or if any response during a quarrel upset him. Eventually this abuse affected her relationships with family. He did not want her talking to her mother or spending time with any family member or friends, especially male friends. Richard’s behaviour was so erratic that he

built their home facing the fields instead of the road since he claimed Natasha would be able to see men and leave him.

Natasha did think about leaving him, but after witnessing abuse as a child at the hands of her step-father, a permanent fear plagued her. *“I actually thought it was better to stay with Richard [because] I might find another man and he might beat me and my kids, just like my step father did with my mom and siblings.”*

When the abuse got

unbearable Natasha would muster up the strength to leave. With help from family and friends she managed to be away from Richard for a few weeks.

*“There were moments I got away but he always find me, no matter where I go. He would turn up, pack up my clothes and take them back home. Sometime he would come crying and begging me to come home and I would eventually go back with him.”*

The last time she left she made a decision never to return. On the 23rd July, 2013 Richard beat her with the usual weapon of choice, the cutlass. Natasha then fled with her children to a friend’s home where she hid for several days.

A week later Natasha went to meet with a probation officer in Pouderoyen. Though worried that Richard might see her she proceeded, cautiously, with the children. There Richard was, hiding at the corner of the road.

When she was near, he grabbed Natasha and forced her and the children in the back of a taxi that was waiting for him.

Despite her pleads with the taxi driver to take her to the police station, the taxi drove them home.

*“Mi come home back fuh mi dead!”* Natasha screamed as Richard dragged her out the car and into their home. Inside the abuse intensified.

*“He cuff me, kick me, punch me, bang up me head to the wall. He do me that for hours.”* Natasha relayed as her lips trembled. *“He then lock me up in the house, ‘you can’t leave me’, he tell me.”* Natasha became his prisoner.

Later that evening Richard began to sharpen his cutlass. Natasha noted that this was a normal routine for him as a cane cutter, so she was not alarmed.

The events that followed, however, can be described as a real life horror story. *“I was making porridge for my son when*



*I feel a burning in my back, when I turned around Richard was over me with the cutlass. I watch he chop my hand off and I fall to the ground. He then turned on my children.”* Natasha then provided a chilling account of the murder of her children.

*“I tell Kimberly run, but it was too late. He grab her hair and fly a chop straight cross she neck... I see she head roll down... I know she dead. He then turn pun baby who di hollering all di time.”* Natasha clutched her stomach as she recalled the horror, *“I tell he run, and Richard tell he don’t move. The boy was confused.”* Natasha’s countenance suddenly appeared blank, no facial expression. *“All I hear after was a chopping sound as I see baby blood land pun di walls... the place immediately get silent.”*

Natasha’s mother, who had been trying all the while to break the door of the house, eventually succeeded. This forced Richard to end his rampage, scale the fence and escape.

Neighbours and relatives could not assist her or move the bodies of the children until the police arrived so bleeding Natasha was left, surrounded by death, for two and a half hours. Natasha’s life, as she knew it, was over.

*“I wasn’t thinking about living ‘cause I didn’t know what I would be living for,”* Natasha reflected, *“I lost my children, they were everything to me.”*

The weeks that followed were filled with agony. She was unable to pay her last respects at her children’s funeral. Richard was eventually found hanging from a tree at the Zeelugt foreshore. In keeping with her request, the house she once lived in was dismantled. Nightmares tormented her as she relived the murders both in dreams and visions.

There was, however, a fighter that emerged. Natasha was named a “miracle” by the doctors, after a successful surgery. Help and Shelter then placed Natasha in a safe house where she was counselled and provided for. The Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana assisted by sponsoring a live-in nurse for her during her time at the safe house. Natasha eventually started Physiotherapy and was on the road to recovery.

*“If it wasn’t for the women at Help and Shelter I don’t think I would still be here. People like Ms. Greene and Ms. Wilson helped me get back on my feet. If I knew there was a place like that earlier, I would have gone long time.”*

Natasha eventually returned to her mother’s home and has been facing daily realities but is determined to rise above her darkness. With only one arm Natasha has learnt to manage on her own and can be considered semi-independent. She cooks, cleans the home and can put on a shirt by herself (this she demonstrated to us with much pride). Plans have already begun (through an NGO) to secure a prosthetic arm for her which she hopes will make her fully independent.

It has not been an easy journey but with

her strong faith in God and support from her family, counsellor and well-wishers, Natasha continues to hope for better days. During counselling sessions at Help and Shelter Natasha found emotional release through the pen and has written several stories and poems that bear testimony to her unbroken spirit.

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Though she is not sure what the future holds she remains somewhat optimistic about it. She is, however, sure that she will discover and fulfil the plan God has for her life. Therein lies the spirit of the fighter.

