

December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. The night I had a phone thrown at my face because I texted a guy friend that he didn't like. He threw it once, not affective enough, then he threw it a second time. The second time ripped through my lip and knocked my bottom front tooth right out of my mouth. As I'm holding my tooth in my hand sitting in a puddle of my own blood, I feared him for the first and last time. Shortly after mopping up my blood, I put my tooth back in the hole by biting down on a towel to secure it back into my gums. I can't describe the pain. I felt so small, and so defeated. While I'm icing my lip, I'm getting yelled at by his mother and manipulated into not calling the cops and was repeatedly told it was my fault and I was "unfaithful" to her son.

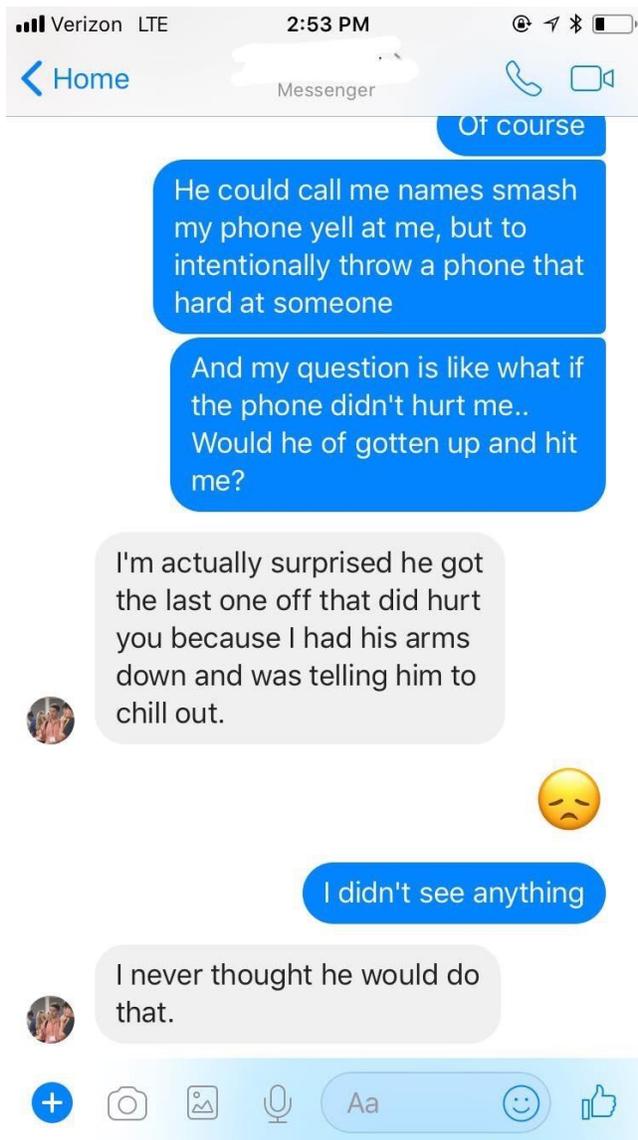
This type of mental and physical pain sent me into months of depression and anxiety, not to mention crippling PTSD where if something moved fast near me I would burst into tears. This is the ugly truth, this is the reality. This is something I must live with for the rest of my life, but I'll wear my scars proud knowing how strong I am. I never went to speak to a professional, as I was too scared and embarrassed, and my support system was so strong. Break the negative stigma on seeking help, I fell into a lot of unhealthy coping mechanisms because I was too afraid to get the professional help that I so desperately needed. To this day, three years later, I still struggle. There is no set amount of time to get through something, as everyone's brain processes trauma differently. I beat the odds and I got out before it was too late. Nearly 1,000 women are killed each year by the hand of a man they know, 85% of these men being first offenders. Sometimes the signs are there, and sometimes they aren't but talking about it spreads awareness, and healing through sharing your stories gives the experience less power to control you. I am where I am today because I pushed through, confided in loved ones, and was patient with myself during all the stages of healing.

As a soon to be graduate at USM, it's hard to reflect on this and think about how I could have so easily left college at the time. My recovery has been long and is far from over. As I stated before I fell into a lot of unhealthy coping mechanisms and found myself calling out of work numerous times a

month, drinking till I fell asleep, and sleeping days away. I saw the patterns and slowly started to make better choices, I wanted to take my strength back, I didn't want him to win, and I didn't want to allow him to take anything more away from me. I went to the gym and walked my dog instead of drinking, I would find something each day that made me excited to get out of bed (even if it was just to try a new coffee or converse with my parents before we all left for work). Those small things each day got me to start thinking about how grateful I truly am for the people who were there to support me and continue to support me, I wanted to make them proud. If I were asked to define what recovery means to me, I would say it's about being gentle and honest with yourself, it's about being open and really learning who you are aside from your experiences. Recovery is not about completely forgetting your past, it's about making peace with it and loving yourself through all the stages of healing. Recovery is not easy, I face challenges everyday and I will not forget what had happened but instead will use it as a testimony to my strength and will wear my scars proudly knowing I am here, alive, happy and on my way to accomplishing all the goals I have set for myself.

-Emilee Orsi

\*\*\*Trigger Warning\*\*



(Also, in the photo of the text message exchanges between myself and my ex-boyfriends' best friend that was there that night, I realize I in some ways, condoned other behavior that is completely unacceptable. I thought that what I mentioned would be okay when compared to what happened to me, but it isn't okay. Violence is never okay, and it can be shown in so many different forms, none of which is acceptable behavior).