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# A SURVIVOR'S DEFINITION OF STRENGTH

Tabitha (Smith) Brinkley

Growing up, I was quite the tomboy, much like Ellie Mae Clampett from the Beverly Hillbillies, minus the ravishing beauty. I had no friends that were girls. Girls were "sissies." I had all guy friends. When I was in high school, I was an athlete, eventually becoming the first softball player in my hometown to be named to the All-State team. I could run 3 miles continuously. I could throw a ball from home plate to center field, quite accurately without much effort (even though I played third base and was a pitcher). I could squat 300 pounds and I could even bench press 265 pounds. I could take a line drive in the face, pick up the ball and still get the out at third. I thought I had incredible strength. Strength is an attribute a person possesses, allowing him or her to exert energy or force greater than expected. You see, I thought strength was purely a physical attribute.

I have since learned that strength is not being the girl that can lift more than the boys; it is not being the tomboy that all of the guys were afraid of because she could hit harder than they could; it wasn't being the one in the family that moved the furniture in the house for my mom; it wasn't the ability to do stupid, dangerous things and not get injured. Strength is facing obstacles in life and with every ounce of everything I have, overcoming said obstacles. It is accomplishing things I once thought impossible. It is surviving unthinkable situations. It is losing a loved one and making it through the day without shedding too many tears.

The last five years of my life, I have learned that strength is much more than a physical thing. You see, I was in an abusive relationship. When I was 21, I married a man that I knew when I was a young girl. He was quite the wooer. When he and I were dating, I thought he was a kind, hopeless romantic. He once sent me a dozen roses just to see me smile. Oh, to be young and naive. One afternoon, when I was six months pregnant, my eyes were opened fast to reality. I had just started picking up the house when I started feeling ill. I thought I would hop in the shower to cool off. Out of nowhere, the curtain flew open, and I got punched in the chest, knocking me to the shower floor. I then learned that I was to have the kitchen cleaned before he got home. Sadly, things only got worse from there. Even though the abuse was tough, I never told friends or family. I didn't want to burden them with my problems.

My once husband eventually moved in with his girlfriend. This was a hard thing for me to deal with. I thought I needed this man. I slipped into a terrible depression and quit eating. In the midst of all of this, God blessed me with a good friend that came to my rescue. It was at this point I realized that strength isn't so much physical as it is mental. I realized that, even though I was once able to bench press more than some grown men weigh, I had finally gained strength, strength to face evil and file for divorce, strength to start eating, strength to be okay with being a single mom, strength to start living again, strength to grab an extended hand and pull myself out of the pit. This same strength has allowed me to forgive the things that have happened to me and move on with my life. Strength has given me the ability to still see the good in the world and even trust in marriage again.