

January 15, 2003.

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Orono, Ontario  
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The Right Hon. Jean Chretien,  
Room 309-S, Centre Block  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister:

### **Re: My shocking experience with a women's shelter**

In February 1998, I was assaulted by my husband. Although our five year marriage had been a rocky one, this was the first time I had actually suffered physical harm. After the incident, my husband voluntarily left our apartment and I tried to continue on with my day, but by early afternoon, I felt so overwhelmed by the incident that I called a girlfriend to come over and sit with me. At her suggestion, we called the police.

An officer came to the house and he took my statement. I was told that if I did not want my husband charged that the police would issue a warrant for his arrest and have him charged anyway. There was no choice and no turning back and one way or another my husband was going to end up being arrested and charged. When my husband called the home, the officer spoke to him and shortly after that, my husband voluntarily turned himself into the police.

At that point, I found myself on my own with two young boys. Resources were limited. I went to stay with my sister for a couple of days while I decided my next steps. I received a notice from the Victim Witness Program requesting that I attend a counselling session at one of the local women's shelters. I felt relieved, thinking that I could likely get some good advice and how-to tips on rebuilding my life and getting things back to normal. I needed to find a lawyer, and I needed to help to get my finances in order.

I left my children with my sister, and went to the women's shelter for their "counselling" session for victims of abuse. The ensuing experience was alarming. My requests for support systems to help me get on my feet were ignored. Instead, the interview progressed with the counsellor pressuring me to make sure my husband went to jail for as much time as possible and that he was punished to the maximum extent possible. Without ever being asked what my children's relationship was like with their father, I was told to get a restraining order and also to not let my children have any contact with their father whatsoever. I was also told that I had to get a good lawyer, and fight for sole custody of my children with no access to the father. I could not believe what I was hearing!

This "counselling" session was not about counselling at all – it was about indoctrinating me and destroying my husband and destroying my children's relationship with their father!

Although I admit my husband and I had our problems, he had a very close and loving relationship with our boys. He certainly was not abusive to them. When I began to ask questions to myself as to

how these decisions would affect not only my children, but also any future relationship I had with them, I began to see that the actions that the shelter workers were pressuring me to take would likely do more harm than good for all concerned.

When I attempted to ask the shelter workers the questions that most concerned me, such as finding out about resources in the community that would help me and my children get on with our lives, my requests were ignored. The shelter staff were not interested in what information I needed or wanted but seemed only interested in indoctrinating me and punishing my husband and destroying his relationship with the children.

While I sat and did my interview, I witnessed through a window children sitting in the closed play area. On the TV screen I saw a movie playing which appeared to be a cartoon about domestic violence. Most of the children in the room were not mindful of what they were watching, but there were at least a half dozen young children watching with intense concentration taking in what was being shown to them. It was very clear to me that the TV at the shelter was being used to send subliminal messages to the children and to influence and indoctrinate the children about the shelter workers views of domestic violence. From time to time messages would flash across the bottom of the screen. The lady at the shelter became very annoyed and defensive when she noticed me observing the children and what they were watching on TV. It almost seemed like she was trying to keep me from seeing what was going on in the shelter or from noticing what the children were watching on TV.

At that moment, I thanked God that I had the foresight to leave my children with my sister. When my interview ended, I was urged to bring my children in for counselling as well. I blatantly refused, telling the counsellor that I felt that this was not the right place for my children to learn about domestic violence.

I left the women's shelter with only one helpful piece of information - a list of legal aid lawyers that were supportive of the shelter and would help me gain sole custody of my children and get the father out of the children's lives. I walked away from that building shaking. I was not shaking because of fear, but shaking because of outrage and disgust at what was going on in that facility.

Since that day, I have had several revelations. One is, I was only as abused as I allowed myself to be. Secondly, women's shelters are full of women at their weakest, and counsellors who prey on that weakness. To see a house with battered women and homeless children being brainwashed by a system designed to make them remain victims, is one of the saddest moments of my life.

Women's shelters do not teach women to be stronger and independent, they teach them to remain weak, to convince them that they are victims of men and that their husbands are the only ones to blame. Once they brainwash women into believing they are victims they then teach women how to use their status as a victim to their advantage in the court system. They teach women to hold onto hatred, even teaching them to hate their husbands and men in general even more. They teach women that the values we know are good for our children (love, understanding, forgiveness, respect) are not applicable to themselves, or their ex-partners.

I love my children more than myself. I love them enough to lead them in life by my own example. I love them enough to deny the women's shelter system the opportunity to take control of them or me. I love them enough to show them by example how to be strong and how to forgive. I love them enough to allow them to make their own decisions about their father. I love them enough to

offer them the opportunity to have a meaningful relationship with both of their parents. I love them enough not to deny them their love for their father. All of the things I believe were good for my children were not what the shelter workers believed in.

I am thankful every day that I was strong enough to walk out of that women's shelter. Had I fallen prey to their ill guided advice which seemed borne out of the hatred of men, my life and the lives of my children would be far less than they are today. That day when I left the shelter in disbelief, moulded many of the decisions I have made since.

The outcome, I am happy to say, is that I do not fear my husband. Although we no longer live together as a couple, we are able to communicate and to deal with the issues affecting our children in a very adult and mature way, which is the way it should be. My children view me as a strong, fair-minded mother who does not undermine their feelings for their Dad, but in fact encourages their relationship with him. My children know I love them and respect their rights and freedoms. We know that the system does not.

I know that if I had followed the course of action that shelter workers tried to force upon me and allowed myself to be brainwashed to thinking I was a victim, that my life today would likely still be in turmoil and I would likely still be in conflict with my husband and children. Luckily today, my children enjoy a good relationship with their father, no thanks to those at the women's shelter who claim to be "counsellors" and claim to help women and children.

After my experience with the shelter, I am only left wondering as to how much pain, suffering and family destruction is being done to children and families as a result of these women's shelters. I suspect that many women, weak from circumstances, fall prey to the pressure put on them and I suspect that the lives of many children and their extended families are the worst today because of these shelters. What is also tragic is that while our schools and hospitals are facing shortages in funding, millions of our tax dollars are helping to support the destructive, anti-family and anti-father activities of these women's shelters. These services and programs at these shelters should be opened up to the public to be more accountable. In addition, only those who with a stable family history should be allowed to provide counselling at women's shelters, not women who seem to have a hatred of fathers and who seem to want to spread their personal hatred on to other women and their children. How are children who go to these women's shelters going to learn proper morals and values when they are being taught at these centres that all men are abusive and that society must hate and punish men.

I would very much appreciate hearing from you on this subject of concern to all Canadian families.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristin Titus', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Kristin Titus