



Kathy
Collins

**BEATING
ABUSE**

Kathy Collins

BOXING, FOUR-TIME WORLD CHAMPION, FIRST WOMAN TO WIN A PROFESSIONAL BOUT IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

I grew up in a tough neighborhood Down South. As a kid, I got into a lot of fights. It was a way to survive. I was athletic and played lots of sports—basketball, swimming, track—but I was more of a troublemaker at school than anything else. By the time I was 13, I was already smoking and skipping classes. I didn't think that the rules applied to me. I believed I was bad, so I acted that way. And as I grew older, I drank too much, smoked two packs of cigarettes a day and ended up weighing 240 pounds.

One day I decided to start taking care of myself. So I looked for something that could be fun AND help change my life. I turned to boxing. It was a way to feel better, let out frustrations and get into amazing shape. I lost 100 pounds, stopped smoking, stopped drinking and started eating right. What d'ya know? I had the talent to become a great boxer.

The movie "Rocky" was a big reason I got into boxing. He fought and he survived—just like me. But there was something else that led me to boxing. I was beat up a lot as a kid. I was physically, mentally and sexually abused by my parents. I was constantly told that I was no good. I felt powerless and angry for most of my

childhood. I didn't understand that this was not normal. I had never known any other way. After all, these were my parents.

Everything changed one day at school. I had gotten into trouble, again. The school counselor, Mr. Wright, called me in. He told me that he was going to call my parents. I just broke down, right there in his office—out of fear of what my parents would do to me. Mr. Wright had never seen me like that. He kept asking what was wrong. I finally told him.

It was like letting the floodgates open. I had never told anyone about any of this; I didn't think that they would believe me. Once I started talking, I couldn't stop. And the whole time, I was sobbing. Mr. Wright kept assuring me that he would help. I was relieved and scared at the same time. As much as I hated them, I didn't want anything bad to happen—they were still my family. But I had taken that first step, talking to someone; and now things were going to change, to protect me and my sisters.

My stepfather went to prison for a while for the sexual abuse. My sisters and I were in foster care for a time. When we were re-united, we had three years of family counseling. I learned that none of it was my fault. I learned how to ask for help—that it didn't make me weaker, but stronger. I learned that I can survive. All it took was that first difficult step—opening up to someone.

**ONE DAY I DECIDED
TO START TAKING
CARE OF MYSELF.**

BEATING ABUSE

Being young shouldn't hurt. Home should be a place to chill, not a place to dread. Relationships should be about making you feel good, not making you feel bad. Flat out: abuse is always wrong and illegal. Still, it happens to kids of all colors, in all states—kids living in mansions and kids living in shelters.

You've gotta understand abuse before you can do anything about it. So, what exactly is it? Heads up, abuse wears lots of different faces:

- **PHYSICAL ABUSE** is most obvious. That's when someone hits, kicks, slaps, chokes, pushes, shakes or otherwise hurts another person. You don't have to end up in the hospital with a broken leg, either. If a mark is left, it counts.
- Someone doesn't have to beat on you for it to be abuse. Constant screaming, insults, intimidating or just making a person feel bad on purpose—that's **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**. It can hurt just as bad as a slap across the face.
- **SEXUAL ABUSE** is the deep, dark secret. Girls (and boys) are often too embarrassed or ashamed to talk about it. Sexual abuse is any sexual contact between an adult and a kid, including touching private parts, playing sex games, penetration, oral sex, showing porn, or any unwanted sexual activity between two kids.
- Sometimes abuse isn't about what is happening, but what isn't. **NEGLECT** is when a parent or guardian doesn't take care of his or her kid's basic needs—when there is no food in the house, when a kid doesn't get to a doctor when he or she is sick—that kind of stuff.

RED FLAGS

RESULTS OF ABUSE CAN BE...

- Nightmares
- Fear and worry
- Loss of appetite
- Behavior outbursts
- Mood swings
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Urges to hurt yourself
- Physical injuries
- Sadness and depression
- Low self-esteem
- Alcohol and drug use

■ **SEXUAL HARASSMENT** is unwanted sexual comments, gestures, touching, pinching, grabbing and rude names.

One thing that all those kinds of mistreatment have in common is that they are NEVER the kid's fault. People abuse others for so many reasons. Sometimes, a parent was abused, never got help, and ends up doing the same thing to his or her kid. It's a cycle. Other times, people's view of themselves stinks, so they try to stand on a kid's back to feel taller. It's a power thing. Alcohol and drugs have a pretty chummy relationship with abuse, too. It's not uncommon for abuse to surface when a person is drunk or high.

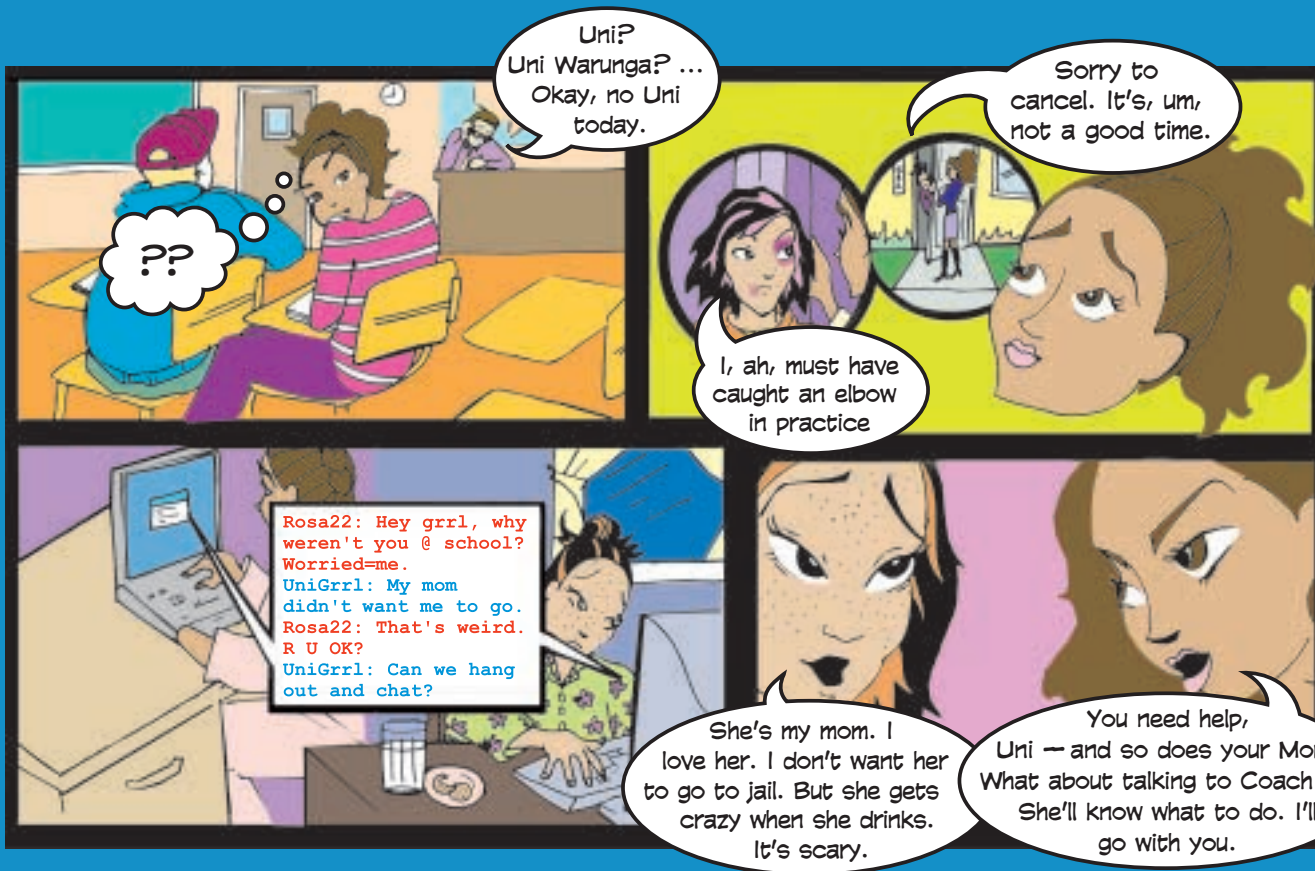
Eighty percent of abusers are people you know. Abusers are not always parents, either. Abusers can be parents' friends, coaches, strangers, girlfriends, boyfriends—just about anyone! Even the people you love can be abusive. Is the person you are dating or the people you hang out with constantly criticizing you? Losing their temper a lot? Trying to control everything you do? Are they threatening to hurt you or actually hurting you? Forcing you to have sex? That's abuse.

Being abused when you are young can leave scars that you'll have for the rest of your life. Girls who've experienced it are more likely to have a hard time in school, use drugs, drink, have sex when they are young, get depressed, consider suicide, run away, develop eating disorders and a whole bunch of other stuff. The longer the abuse lasts and the more intense it is, the deeper the emotional and physical scars are. That's why it's so key to squash it immediately.

The best way to stop abuse is to call it out. If you (or someone you know) are being treated in any of the ways we just described, there is no time to waste. Even if it's hard or embarrassing, you gotta tell an adult you can trust. Talk to an older friend, a neighbor, a rabbi, a coach—someone you feel safe with. Telling doesn't mean that you don't love the person you're telling on. It means you know something is wrong and you want help—for you and for them. You don't need proof, just tell your story. If it's a friend you are worried about, talk to that friend first and try to get him or her to speak up. Know that you're not stuck in a life of pain. You have a choice. **Be brave—choose you.**

Resources

- ❖ www.childhelpusa.org
- ❖ www.connectforkids.org
- ❖ www.jointogether.org
- ❖ www.loveourchildrenusa.org
- ❖ www.nationalsave.org
- ❖ www.preventchildabuse.org
- ❖ www.safetyoptions.com
- ❖ www.safeyouth.org/teens



whaddya think?
 SEE WHAT THE SPORTS DIVA HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT AT WWW.GOGIRLGO.COM

What different emotions do you think Uni is feeling?
 How about her friend Rosa?