

## One Woman's Strength to Break the Cycle of Abuse... and Thrive!

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**L**ISA HERNANDEZ HAD AN IDEAL CHILDHOOD, surrounded and cared for by loving parents. She attended college where she majored in business administration, and soon found herself with a rewarding career. In 2001, Lisa met a man, they fell in love, three years later they were married and Lisa soon became pregnant with her first child. Her life was pleasant, and she was happy.

Shortly after her second child was born, Lisa and her husband were having financial troubles and they found themselves arguing; at first it was once a week, then twice, then daily. The arguments were loud, often waking the children. Then it happened, one of their arguments escalated and he punched her. Lisa stood frozen, shocked by what just happened. Her husband apologized, claiming it would never happen again, but it did.

After that first blow, their arguments always turned physical and Lisa was often left bruised. Everything and anything set him off. She stayed away from friends and family, isolating herself for months, and then a year, to avoid questions or speculation about her husband. One evening Lisa's husband pointed a gun at her and she knew what she had to do. Lisa decided then to make a change. Her children were older now; they had witnessed the violence and she didn't want them to think their life was normal or healthy.

To avoid her husband finding out about her plans, the next morning Lisa went to her local library, where she accessed the internet and found Haven Hills, a domestic violence shelter in the Valley. From the library she called its 24/7 crisis hotline and a counselor assisted her in developing a safety plan, including collecting important documents such as passports, birth certificates, and bank account information, and phone numbers of friends and family. The counselor walked her through steps for she and her children to remain safe.


Haven Hills was able to place her in their emergency shelter after assessing her situation. Knowing her husband

was out of the house, she went home and collected everything she needed and left, never to look back. At Haven Hills, Lisa was provided with support and finally relief. She soon was able to make arrangements to stay with her parents. After a year, which included participation in Haven Hill's weekly group counseling programs, Lisa was in a much better place. She regained her self-confidence, returned to work, rented her own apartment, and continued to provide for her children.

Most importantly, she is safe and has regained control over her life, finances, and health. "I have gained so much in just the short time I was at the shelter," said Lisa. "[Haven Hills] provided me and my children with confidence and a path toward leading a healthy, happy life. I thank the staff and counselors. they are all so kind, courteous, respectful, and supportive; from the bottom of my heart, thank you."

### The VCLF at Work

Haven Hills is supported by the generous contributions of individuals, companies, and organizations. The VCLF is proud to support Haven Hills and amazing people like Lisa Hernandez. Lisa is one of over 3,500 women, men, and children Haven Hills helps every year. For nearly 40 years, Haven Hills has served as a lifeline for thousands of victims of domestic violence, providing safety, shelter, and support. Haven Hills helps them find the strength within themselves to break the cycle of abuse. They save lives, inspire change, and transform victims to empowered survivors.

Shame and fear prevent many victims of domestic violence from making the changes that could save their lives. In fact, victims who are murdered by an intimate partner are often killed soon after they leave their abuser, making that journey to safety that more dangerous. Haven Hills is dedicated to empowering victims to become survivors during those first 30 days and thereafter. 

### About the VCLF of the SFVBA

The Valley Community Legal Foundation is the charitable arm of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association. The Foundation's mission is to support the legal needs of the youth, victims of domestic violence, and veterans of the San Fernando Valley. The Foundation also provides educational grants to qualified students pursuing legal careers. The Foundation relies on donations to fund its work. To donate to the Valley Community Legal Foundation of the SFVBA or to learn more, visit [www.thevclf.org](http://www.thevclf.org) and help us make a difference in our community.