

WOMAN WHO WAS ABUSED FOR YEARS BEFORE ESCAPING IS VISITING ACTON ON SEPT. 23

Continued from page 1

feet every morning before you get up to receive his blessings.

"These are things I've never heard before," Kamal said. "I've had sisters-in-law who were newly married and came to our house and they were made to fit into our family and it all went just right over me, nothing really stuck, and the only thing I thought was, 'What would happen in this house? What am I keeping a secret?'"

And that's when she heard him. Her husband was drunk.

He was swearing and being vulgar when speaking with other men from his family.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'This is the man that is supposed to be my god? A drunk?'" she said.

That night, her husband raped her. She was taken to hospital, then released to go back home with her husband. It was the very beginning of the years of abuse

that would follow.

Over the years, she reached out to her family for help, but received none. She was told it was her job as a typical Indian woman to respect her husband.

"You are married to him for life," her father told her.

"And he saw my tears and he said, 'But I'll come get you one day. I'll come for your body,'" she recounted.

Kamal has had 10 jaw surgeries. She has no feeling left in her face. Over the years, her husband repeatedly raped her and tried to murder her, often in front of her children.

She was poisoned, beaten, doused in kerosene and hanged by her sari.

She survived.

Kamal and her children were taken to India where she was further abused by her husband and his family. Her documents were burned and she was kept there for more than two years. One night, with her children nearby in the car, her husband tried to drown

her in the ocean.

"The next morning, with so many injuries — dried blood, open wounds, bruises, swelling — I was scary to look at, I made myself go down to my father-in-law's office. He got scared when he saw me. And the first thing I said was, 'You send me and my children back to Vancouver,'" she said.

Her father-in-law agreed. But when he sent her the envelope with the plane tickets, there was only one.

"I went to him and I said, 'Dad they made a mistake. The travel agent forgot to include the other four tickets.' And he said, 'There was no mistake. These are our kids, not yours.'"

Kamal endured more abuse over the following days and she finally decided that she would have to leave alone, but she made a promise to her children that she would come back for them.

"I said to them, 'I'm go-

ing back home to find a place and I'll be back very soon and the first thing I'll do when I take you is we'll go to McDonald's.' It made them smile," she said.

Do not be silent towards the victim. In their silence they are still speaking to you and hoping that you will look at them.

-Kamal Dhillon, author, survivor of domestic abuse

"And I said, 'Until then, will you take care of one another? Keep packing your bags every day because mommy will come and take you.' And they

said, 'Do you promise?' and I said, 'Pinky swear.' And we did that."

It didn't all go as planned, but Kamal fought. She went to a women's shelter back in B.C., learned her rights and got two of her four children back, as they were Canadian citizens. A couple of years later, she went back to India to take her other two home.

It was a struggle, but she made it.

A few years later, her husband's body was found in India, not too far from the place where he had tried to drown her.

"I went to the funeral for closure. I took my older two kids because it is the East Indian custom for the son to cremate the father and I wanted to see firsthand if he was really dead," she said.

"His death brought me life."

Now Kamal is living a healthy life and continues to have strong relationships with her four children — one of whom she lives with. She is now a grandmother to four grandchildren. Kamal has written two books about her experience: *Black and Blue Sari* and *I am Kamal: Survivor to Thriver*.

Kamal has won several awards and speaks publicly about her experiences. She trains police officers and front-line workers to notice the signs of abuse.

"I continue to speak out and continue to be the voice of those who don't have one — those who are silenced by honour-based violence, by honour-based killings, by shame, by pride," she said.

"I say to people, don't compare your abuse to mine ... Don't compare. Your abuse is abuse and it should not happen."

For the public, she has a powerful message as well.

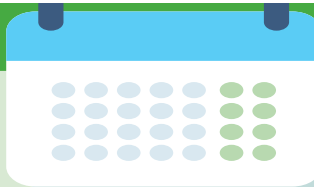
"Do not be silent towards the victim," she said. "In their silence they are still speaking to you and hoping that you will look at them. That you will see the fear in her eyes, the bruises on her face. You may be the last person there that could save her life. Let's be a community that's not ignorant anymore — that's not silent anymore."

Kamal Dhillon will be giving a talk at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Acton on Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. For further information about Kamal and her work, visit <http://kamaldhillon.com/>.

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