

Review of *Living with the Dominator* by Patricia Craven

Review by Rebecca USA

Blogger of <http://survivorheals.blogspot.com/>

I found the Freedom Programme through a Facebook friend in the UK who attended the programme while she lived in a domestic violence shelter. We are both members of the UK-based secret group for domestic abuse survivors on Face Book called *Surviving Beautifully*. I cannot attend the Freedom Programme in person since I live in the United States, and so I purchased the e-book *Living with the Dominator*. I recently fled my emotionally abusive parents and grandmother and am now residing in a transition house in an undisclosed location in the United States.

I read it and responded to this book *Living with the Dominator* during two sessions lasting several hours each. I highly recommend this well-written, entertaining book for all women who have recently escaped from abusive male partners or parents. In this book Ms. Craven breaks down the personality types of seven male abusers: the Bully, the Headworker, the BadFather, the King of the Castle, the Sexual Controller, the Jailer, and the Liar. For each personality type she first explains what behaviors the abuser exhibits. Then she examines what beliefs motivate the abuser, how women internalize the abuser's beliefs, and how the broader society and the media help to strengthen the abuser's harmful world view. Finally she offers a brief contrast to each of these abusive personalities in order to show abused women that not all men act like their abusive partner (or father in my case). The book was so well done that oftentimes I wondered if Ms. Craven hadn't already met my father and my mother. She described them both so perfectly in their roles.

She also includes a chapter explaining how domestic violence affects the child at every stage of life – from pregnancy and childbirth, age 6 and then the teenager. I only wish my mother had read and internalized this chapter a long time ago. I could only remember with horror my childhood at age 6 and as a teenager with my abusive father. Ms. Craven pointed out how abuse often happens at the dinner table – and it was a revelation for me to learn that meal times are often the site of abuse in many other homes as well.

She concludes with a very powerful section where she breaks down the process whereby incidents of verbal abuse and physical violence happen. She explains how abusive men are motivated to attack their partners whenever they feel threatened by their partners' challenging their sexist core beliefs and their control over the relationship. The abusive man believes he has the right to control his partner because he is a man, and she is a woman. He believes all men have the right to terrorize and control all women. This chapter was extremely helpful to me to understand just how calculated, organized, and premeditated my dad's abuse of me and my mother is.

I recognized critical aspects of my father's personality in nearly all the different forms of the abusive man. I had identified my father's two primary abusive personalities as the Bully and the Headworker before reading the book. But Ms. Craven really breaks the elements of the Bully and the Headworker effectively so that I have a deeper insight and understanding into how exactly my dad functions as the

Bully and the Headworker. Her analysis of the Bully was helpful to me because I learned for the first time that the Bully (my father) is not angry. Rather, he is in full control of his emotions when he brutalizes his partner or child. In addition, she said on page 22 that the negative behavior of British politicians who jeer at each other in the British Parliament contribute to the atmosphere which allows for men to emotionally abuse their partners in the home. I always used to like watching Prime Minister's Questions on C-Span and didn't find it problematic. So Ms. Craven's perspective was helpful to me in this regard too.

My father also exhibits aspects of the other abusive personalities as well. He is the Jailer in the sense that he destroyed my mother's relationship with her best friend in order to isolate her and that he refused to allow her to go to work. He is the BadFather in that he treats me, his daughter, with contempt because I am female and favors my brother over me simply because he is a male, and I am a female. My dad acts like King of the Castle in his total refusal to do any housework whatsoever, whether food preparation, laundry, shopping, or cleaning. Ms. Craven's feminist analysis of the Good Wives guide that was used to control British women in the 1950's rings very true.

This book is a very well-written guide for survivors of domestic violence and child abuse. I highly recommend it for women who have left their abusive partners and for adult survivors of child abuse by their fathers like me.