

Maia's Story

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If you or someone you know is a victim or survivor and needs help, please reach out to us, we are here 24-hours a day.

As Maia prepares the Thanksgiving meal for her family — brining and chopping, managing the counter space in her apartment kitchen — she focuses on her gratitude. She gives thanks for what and who came before as she makes foods from the country in which she was born. She has memorized her grandmother's recipes from a place and time that shaped parts of her core, but to which she cannot return. These foods will be put in serving dishes and set on the table alongside the turkey, potatoes, and green beans — everything mixed together. She listens to her children's voices from the next room while she cooks. They are familiar noises, comfortable sounds.

Comfort and home felt elusive to Maia as a child. As a pregnant teen she was physically abused by her mother. Put in touch with the Center for Safety & Change, she spent time in the emergency shelter and delivered her first child there at sixteen. It was then that she learned about her citizenship status; Maia's mother never sought legal documentation for her young daughter when she fled to New York to escape an abusive husband. After leaving the shelter, Maia remained connected to the Center, reaching out for advice and support from time to time as she navigated challenges. For many years, she felt trapped in a life that she did not choose. As an adult, when a partner and the father of her youngest child became abusive, threatening to call immigration to manipulate and control her, Maia called the Center for help. With their assistance, she managed to leave the confines of that relationship. The Center arranged for longer-term housing, helped with food and other material needs, and provided therapeutic services to the family. With this support, she could focus on healing, raising her children, and building a business. Center for Safety & Change has helped Maia to understand the choices that she has and to see the power that she holds to shape her own life.

In the quiet of her kitchen on Thanksgiving, Maia gives thanks — over and over — for the shape of her life and for the clear sense of home that she now feels. She describes her gratitude to the Center for their support as overwhelming. She speaks most tenderly about the kindness of staff members. Their kindnesses have been delivered throughout the years, alongside housing and other services, consistent and sustaining.

Maia is grateful, for example, for the way that she can move differently in the world, more assuredly, because there are people who will answer the phone whenever she calls, who will show up again and again if they are needed. She is grateful for the patience and the respect that is shown. She gives thanks for the way that, sometimes, seismic shifts can be initiated by the tiniest movement — like walking a few steps outside your front door to a parked car in the winter cold. In that car, running warm with the heat on, is a staff

person from the Center waiting for you, and — in that car in the middle of the night — something shifts and you make the decision that you can no longer stay.

Maia is grateful for food that has been provided by the



Center at times, particularly during COVID lockdowns when she was unable to operate the successful business that she has been building for years. She is grateful for the sustenance and nourishment of the meals, for the way that she could settle into her chair at the table, her mind and body relaxing, knowing that her children would eat. She

gives thanks also for the peace she felt while watching her kids open donated gifts on Christmas morning. Sitting near them on the couch in her living room, Maia was silently and profoundly relieved that they'd been given another year to believe in Santa. She feels gratitude for the therapy that has allowed her children to begin to process what they saw and heard of the abuse that she endured while they were young. In those years, she locked herself in the bathroom with her abuser to try to hide what was happening. Maia is grateful that her children have an opportunity to learn about — to believe in — respectful loving relationships. She is grateful for open doors.

As Maia sets her table on Thanksgiving, she understands what it feels like to receive beyond what someone is required to give. She models giving beyond what is required of her for her children. She is grateful to be at the center of their lives, reliable and steady as they navigate their own challenges. She is their home, a place for them to rest. She is grateful that she lives a life that makes clear that we have to leave some places and people in order to return to others, to ourselves.

It takes time and work to build a home that is shaped by the beliefs and traditions you want to uphold, by familiar sounds and warmth buzzing, by a table set with what will nourish. For nearly two decades, the Center for Safety & Change has helped Maia to turn and return to build upon the strength of her core, her home. At this core — in her center — she holds all she wants to carry through. Her gratitude exists alongside her grief, the memories of what she has endured, the imprints of what she has let go of and the kindnesses she has experienced and granted, her grandmother's recipes — everything mixed together. ▲