

Excerpt from The Skin I'm In

by Jewel Tyler

One of my very first serious intimate relationships had been with my eldest son's father Jerome we met during a rehearsal for a talent show in 1974. I used to sing and so did he; we ended up performing together while I was in high school and started dating. He was much older than I was and had graduated from high school several years prior. He attended church and sang in a quartet and his mother was extremely adamant about church and him being with a "good girl" or a "decent girl". She was a part of my life during the years I had no interest in God. She was the most rude, mean, and unloving woman I had ever met in my life, but every Sunday she was in church, there was no reflection of God in her life. She was another reason prior to my experience and becoming saved at Constitution Hall why I was just really was not interested in being a part of a church. The actions she displayed of her version of God's love, I wanted no parts. It was all show and tell for her, the big fancy hats on Sunday her weekly meetings with all of the other hypocritical women from her church. The reason I say this is that there were times I would stop by to see her son and the women from the Women's group at her church would meet in her home. We would sit in the kitchen listening to them gossiping horribly about the other women not in attendance and especially those that were less fortunate who came to church, as they would say "only on Easter Sunday". She never let me forget I was from the "hood" and not worth her son's time whenever he was not around. There were times he would invite me over and then go out with his dad and leave me with his mother, I guess it was his idea of me bonding with her.

Jerome finally left home and rented an apartment not far from where I was living. That really angered his mother because she felt he should not be living in the "hood".

I was visiting with him one evening, we were working on some paper work, a knock came at the door and when he opened it, it was his mother. We were both surprised. She entered, asked me what I was doing there, he said to her "Mom this is my place, I can have whoever I want here." Then, she started yelling and cursing at me, calling me trash, slut and all sorts of derogatory names. I knew it was time to leave, I wasn't going to disrespect her, but I really was not going to sit there and continue to listen to her verbal abuse either. I was attempting to get up and gather my belongings; she pushed past her son and hit me across my breast, with her bag, it was not a purse, but a huge bag, it felt like she had a brick in the bag. Jerome jumped between us and grabbed his mother; they struggled and he told her she had to leave. Seconds later her husband was at the door, he apologized for her behavior, and they left. I went home. My breasts were so badly bruised; to this day, I still have a dark mark from that day. This woman was supposed to be a

representative of God, a well-known Gospel Singer, and a prominent figure in her church. As I said if she was an example of God's Love at that time, I did not want any parts of it.

Our relationship lasted for approximately five years total. We just ignored his mother because we were supposedly in love. The reason I say supposedly is; there is a difference between lust and love; a physical and a more spiritual intimate relationship. We never prayed together, we never went to church together. I stopped singing and he was still in a band and with the band came the groupies. If I ever confronted him about them, he would respond verbally abusively and disrespectfully; there were times he was physically abusive. I was so young and immature during those times, I did not have enough sense to walk away, nor did I tell anyone what I had been experiencing with him.

He left my neighborhood and moved to N.E. D.C., mainly to please his mother, he was not living far from her home. I recall a time he picked me up from school and had to make a stop by his apartment, once there another young woman showed up and they had an argument because I was there. We argued later about her being there, but when I tried to leave, he attacked me. He was like a mad man; he started hitting me with whatever was around him that he could get his hands on. First, it was the iron, then he threw a wine bottle at me as I was trying to exit the front door, but he had dead bolt locked it. When I hit the floor from the bottle hitting me in the back of the head he picked up one of his three-foot solid wood speakers and threw it down on my back, then he proceeded kicking me while I was on the floor. I tried to pull my knees to my chest to try to protect myself; he grabbed my feet and snatched me across the room, which made the speaker flip onto my head. I was dazed, and then I blacked out. When I finally came too, he had put me in the bed and was lying next to me kissing me on my face telling me how sorry he was and how much he loved me. I was petrified; my only thoughts were concerning how I was going to get out of there. I really feared for my life, I thought if I said or did anything wrong, as weak as I felt and the excruciating pain searing through my body, if he would start beating me again; he would kill me! I only weighed approximately 100 pounds and I was wearing between a size one and a three.

I just lay next to him frozen; I did not say anything or move at all. He finally got up and said he was going to the drug store to get some bandages and some medication to work on my face and body. Before departing the bedroom, he stopped at the door and turned around and said, "Don't even think about leaving, ever leaving again, you're going to move in here with me; I will go to your mother's and get your belongings." I knew he had lost his mind at this point, I was still in high school, I was 17 and it was my last year, furthermore, my mother would never give him my belongings and he knew that. Once he left, I got out of bed, I went to see if he had dead bolt locked me in at the front door; he had. I went to the back door and it was not locked, I checked out the front window to see if his car was gone and it was. I gathered my belongings and left. I ran down the back alley all the while checking through the apartment building openings for his car on the street in front of the buildings. The pain was excruciating! I finally made it to a main street

I was trying my best to get to an intersection to flag down a taxi. I was in too much pain to run any further, I had to walk, my back, ribs and head were pounding with pain.

It was the spring of 1976, everyone was outside on their porches in the front of their homes either gardening or playing with their kids; guys were washing their cars and neighbors were socializing with one another. A group of women sitting on their front porch ceased their conversation and stared at me as I passed by. Before leaving Jerome's apartment, there was no time for me to check my face, I imagined it was swollen and bruised. I made it to the main intersection where I knew I could flag a taxi. I saw one approaching, just as I raised my hand to flag the taxi from my peripheral I saw Jerome's car coming around the other corner. I was frozen, I whispered, please light change, change now. However, when he saw me, he sped to the corner, slammed on brakes, jumped out his car, music blaring and yanked me by my hair off the street corner, picked me up and slammed me into the car. He sped off wheels screeching; he was driving with one hand on the steering wheel and his other hand was wrapped around my throat, yelling he was going to kill me when he got me back home. I thought it was do or die, I grabbed the car door while he was speeding up the street, when he turned the next corner, my weight shifted and I pushed the passenger door open and yanked away from him and jumped out of the car. This time I ran with every muscle available, I felt no more pain, as I was running down the street I was also screaming for help; this was on the same street I had just barely made it down minutes ago. Not one person offered to help me; no one, they just looked at me; some stood up on their porches watching me go by; but no one offered any sort of assistance. This time the traffic was moving on the main intersection and when I reached the corner a taxi was coming, I flagged it and jumped in. I never looked back to see if he was following me, if I had I believe fear would have slowed me down.

As we were crossing the Sousa Bridge into Anacostia, I heard a horn constantly blowing; the taxi driver made a comment about us being followed when I turned around it was Jerome. I slumped down in the seat and ignored any further comments from the taxi driver; I just wanted to get home. I knew he would stop following me the closer we neared my home. He didn't want to deal with my family.

When I entered the front door I let out a sigh of relief, my mother was in the kitchen cooking with her back turned to the front door. She didn't notice me entering the house, my siblings were all engrossed watching a TV show, they never even glanced in my direction; I almost entered totally unnoticed, my aunt glanced over her newspaper and I just simply waved and hurried up the stairs to my bedroom; I shut the door, turned out the lights undressed and got into bed. I cried myself to sleep; every part of my body throbbed from the pain. This man and his mother were supposed to be an example of Godly people in church every Sunday, singing in groups performing and touring all over the United States.

I was startled out of my sleep when my auntie sat on my bed. The mere pressure of her body on the mattress in turn shifted the movement of my body causing excruciating pain to ripple from my knees to my head. I gasped for air as the pain hit my now again throbbing head and let out a shriek that jolted my auntie.

She turned on my nightstand light; based on her facial expression of looking at my face I knew it was bad. I had not looked at myself in a mirror. She spoke so softly, honey I knew something was wrong when you didn't even come into the kitchen to say hi to your mother or me. It was my daily routine to greet them both with a hug and a kiss every afternoon.

Tears streamed down my face as I pleaded with her not to tell my mother; she attempted to comfort me by embracing me and I yelled out in pain. The last outcry did two things; 1) my aunt pulled back my comforter exposing my bruised body, 2) my bedroom door opened and my mother entered. When my mother looked at my body from head to toe as I turned to lie on my back tears were streaming down my face onto my pillow because of the pain. She asked me turn over on my stomach so she could see my backside; when I returned to my back, she calmly asked who had done this to me. I forced myself to sit up in bed, I told her everything. My reasoning for not telling her as soon as I arrived at home was not to hide what he had done, but not to upset her. My mother left the room, she said she would be back, she explained she was going to run a bath with witch hazel and Epsom salt to ease the pain and reduce the inflammation and bruising.

When I finally settled back in bed after a long hot soak and taking some aspirin for my pain, I began to doze off to sleep. A knock awakened me again before I could reach a REM state of sleep. It was Albert, my mother's boyfriend along with mom. They came to request I call Jerome and invite him to the house; Albert told me ever so calmly to act as if everything was fine and to ensure it would be late afternoon the next day. Albert said while gritting his teeth, "He is going to pay for what he did to you, and pumpkin I will not touch him unless he touches you okay." He continued, "This is what you're going to do, when he gets here, you take him in the living room and with all of your might you punch him dead in the face." I really wanted it to all be over with and just to go to sleep. I whispered, "What happens if he tries to hit me back, you don't know how crazy he looked and acted when he jumped on me today." A sinister grin came over Albert's face, "Trust me pumpkin, if he even lifts his hand in your direction I am going to be on him like white on rice." "Once he is in the living room, I will be standing at the entrance of the living room." Moreover, my mother chimed in "And I will be standing at the dining room door, so there is going to be no where he can run, he is going to have to take his ass whipping." I sunk back down in the bed and covered my face with my sheet to shade my eyes from the light, "Okay you guys I will call him tonight."

After hanging up the phone and saying "I love you too" at least four times, for some reason I began to feel a bit empowered, my family has my back I thought to myself. I began to visualize every punch I wanted to land on HIS body.

The next day seemed to drag along; every muscle in my body seemed to cause pain with every move that I made. Finally, the afternoon arrived and Jerome called to let me know he was on his way. When I really took a good look at my face as well as the bruises all over my body anxiety began to set in as the time drew nearer for his arrival. My mother had finished cleaning the kitchen after everyone had dinner my siblings were told to stay upstairs. My mother turned on the Parliament Funkadelic; I remember it like it was

yesterday. *My brother yelled downstairs, he is here; I adjusted my sterling silver leaf ring on my right index finger to ensure the point of the leaf extended past my knuckle when I drew my hand in a fist. I was ready, I didn't do anything to deserve what he had done to me yesterday, no girl or woman or even child deserves to be physically abused by anyone. He knocked on the front door just as George Clinton chanted "tear the roof off, were gonna tear the roof off the mother sucker, tear the roof off the sucker."* When he entered, he reached for me to give me a hug and I stepped back into the living room and stood by the fireplace. He came very close to me and whispered in my ear, "See baby you don't look so bad, you know I'm sorry, I just lost my temper" he reached to grab my chin to turn my face toward him. I pulled back and with all of my might, I punched him in his face with my right fist. I felt his blood splatter on my face from the tear in his cheek caused by my sterling silver ring as it opened a gash on his cheek. He stepped back and as he raised his hand to slap me, I truly believe he forgot where he was for a split second. Albert came out of nowhere, came up under his raised arm, and hit him with an upper cut. I don't know anything else that happened, because I left the room. I heard him screaming like a girl and hollering for help as Starchild introduced himself inviting you to come along and party with him on the Mothership Connection blaring over his pleas of help. As I walked down the hallway toward the front door, I could see he was on the floor, he must have somehow broke free and unlocked and opened the front door before Albert could get to him again. He was gone. It was enough, I believed in my heart from that day forward he would never put his hands on me again.

Two years later Jerome and I had a son and were living together in the same apartment complex where his mother had attacked me. As you can see I had not learned my lesson, individuals that are abused I believe have serious issues with low self-esteem and in my case immaturity. Being a recipient of this type of abuse, I look back now and wonder what in the world was wrong with me, why didn't I just walk away after that day in his apartment when he had beaten me so badly? I wasn't afraid of him, the only conclusion I arrived at was I was young, naïve, immature and in so called LOVE.

Our routine daily was I would leave for work first, Jerome would dress our son and take him to my mothers and then he would go to work. One morning, not long after arriving at work, I received an emergency call from my mother; she said I needed to come home immediately it was about my son. She did not want to tell me over the phone what was going on, she did explain my son needed to get to a hospital right away. I panicked, the train could not get me home fast enough. Soon after I crossed the Virginia line in to D.C., I exited the train and when I reached the streets, I flagged a taxi. I asked the driver to get me to my destination as fast as he could, I explained to him it was an extreme emergency. My mind was racing I could not figure out for the life of me what could possibly be wrong with my son; I know his father had just recently dropped him off.

When I arrived at my mother's I could not believe my eyes, my son must have been approximately five to six months old. He was dressed very neatly and then my mother began to take off his clothes, he had bruises everywhere, his tongue was split, it looked like it had been split with a knife. I was screaming on the inside and crying on the outside as I held my precious son in my arms. How could he have done this to his own son? My mother, held us both in her arms and off to the hospital we went.

Once at the hospital, and the doctor had finished his assessment, my mother and I realized Social Services did not want to give my son back to me, she called my aunt and other family members to come to the hospital for support and to also explain I was a good mother. I was losing my mind in the hospital crying hysterically, trying to explain to the social workers I loved my son, if I believed for one moment this man would have caused any harm to our son, he would not have been anywhere near him. I called his father's family because I could not reach him by phone at home or at his job; and I informed them of what he had done and I was going to have him arrested. I had to explain repeatedly to the social worker if they would just allow me to have my son back I would guarantee them his father would no longer be living with us. I had assumed after what he had done to our son, he was no longer living at the apartment anyway if he had any kind of good sense left in his brain.

Finally, after meeting with my family members, Social Services allowed me to see my son; they put me in a glassed in room, and a nurse brought my son to me and left us alone. My mother later informed me they were observing me with him. I had no idea, I held him, kissed and kissed him and I wept, I told him over and over I was so sorry this had happened to him, I vowed to him, I would never let anyone hurt him ever again. We stayed in the room for hours; they brought me food so I could feed him and I had my diaper bag to change and clean him. When he fell asleep, I put him in our favorite place, in the middle of my chest, so he could hear my familiar heartbeat he had listened to for nine months while living inside of me. He knew it was momma and he was safe.

That was it for his father and me, I had taken the abuse from him and his mother. But now it involved my son, honestly I wanted him dead, and I have shared some of my past with you, so, I guess you can understand when I say several of my friends from my neighborhood paid a visit and said all I had to do was say the word and they would have ended his life. I knew two wrongs didn't make a right, so I wanted no parts; I told them thanks, but no thanks.

After my son endured this abuse from his dad, it was difficult for him to be in the presence of a man let alone a dark skinned man. Jerome was dark skinned! He would scream at the top of his lungs from fear if a man came near him and especially my brother David (he was dark skinned). It took months before he would even let anyone that even resembled his dad near him; he was only comfortable with women.

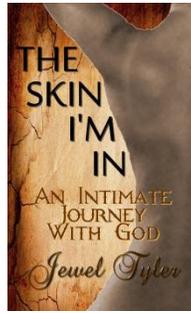
I provided social services with all of the information I had pertaining to his father, but he did not go to jail. The condition mandated by social services, as long as he stayed away from us, there would be no problem with me keeping my son. They did not bring a case up against him strangely enough because during that time child abuse was not taken as seriously as it is today. Praise God it has changed!

I later heard from Jerome's mother, she explained to me he wanted to provide me with financial support for our son. Nevertheless, I explicitly explained to her he would never see him again. I had moved and I didn't want him to know where I lived, so I would meet him at his residence on his paydays to pick up the money he provided for support. It started out good he would be there on time with the money. Once I

obtained the money from him, I would leave immediately. However, later on that year during one of my visits to his home to pick up the child support money, I waited for hours for him to arrive and he was a no show. He had started a trend of maybe paying on one pay period and then he would be a no show on the next. It became very annoying when he did this because I had to catch several buses to get to his home and then to mine after work. Once again, he was a no show, which meant, no money from him to assist me with our son financially. Even though his mother had begged me not to put him on child support. That afternoon as I was walking to the bus stop to head home from his apartment, I started to seriously contemplate going to apply for Child Support through the social services department. I didn't have much faith in them after they had failed me when he had attacked our son, however, that would alleviate me from having contact with him.

For more of the story you can purchase *The Skin I'm In* at Barnes & Noble and Amazon

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