

A letter to Janay Rice from Jane Seskin

Dear Janay,

If you were sitting with me in my office, this is what I'd tell you.

I'm sorry you were beaten. How scary it must have been to see the video. To have this one, incredibly brutal moment in your life on display, over and over again. To relive an experience months old, as if it were yesterday, when you might have been working to put your life back together. To move forward. Please know you did nothing wrong. Ray did. With all this publicity, give yourself some time alone. Find a safe place for yourself. One you can go to when you need some quiet. See supportive women friends. Talk to someone who knows the dynamics of intimate partner violence on a regular basis. You're in this relationship for your own reasons. Try to figure them out. Get a handle on self-care. Treat your body with respect. Discover your passions. Learn what brings you comfort. Surround yourself with people who nourish, not deplete.

Here's what I think. My hunch is the violence didn't come out of the blue. Perhaps Ray has called you names; wanted to know where you were going and with whom. Tracked your time. Made you accountable for every dollar spent. Maybe you've changed aspects of your behavior based on what "he" would like. Little by little his voice has become louder than yours and you may have started to pay more attention to his needs and wants, rather than to your own.

I'm sure he apologized for what happened and told you he'd never do it again. Perhaps he said he was tired or stressed. But ... to be honest, there's no reason or excuse on earth that would justify his use of violence.

He beat you because he could. Because he was teaching you a lesson; he has the power, you do not. He could have stood still. Turned his back. Called a halt. Taken a time-out. He chose not to.

I know Ray is not violent 24/7. I know he may have qualities you adore. He may be a wonderful father to your daughter. And I know you want this relationship. But I also know you don't want more violence. Nor to grow up a daughter who believes violence equals love. Or this is the way Dads treat Moms, men treat women.

Ray will not change by himself. And you can not change him. It doesn't matter how much you love him, talk to him, or beg him. He needs to be in his own individual therapy. Not with you in couples counseling. This is not about a problem with you as a couple. This is about *his* trouble with anger; *his* problem with jealousy, *his* decision to

choose violence over communication. Ray's violence is *his* responsibility. No excuses.

Janay, you are not to blame. Nothing you said or did would make someone raise their hands to you. What I've seen over twenty years of working with survivors of domestic violence is that the acts of abuse escalate in frequency and severity. Now is the time to get help. You can't afford to wait.

What the video does is make private shame public horror. I wonder if you can in the future, use the video to regain your own strength and equilibrium. To stand tall with the evidence of your resilience. To be a survivor. To show it and say: this was then. This was my history. But I am here now speaking out against violence. I know I am not alone. I know I am more than a woman on an elevator floor.

Jane Seskin is a clinical social worker and the author of *Witness To Resilience: Stories Of Intimate Violence*.