

CRYSTAL CLEAR

by Betsey Kidwell

It was a cold December night in Chicago, I ran. It was dark and silent, but the full moon's light made my pathway crystal clear. I ran down the street, barefoot, in my pajamas, I didn't hear any sound - not one of cars or dogs barking.

My mom and I were downstairs making handmade gifts for Christmas. This year we were making ponchos. I was taught to crochet at the age of 4 by my mother and as I grew, my stitches were very much like hers, so as she went to do household chores, I would pick up where she left off and crochet away until it was done. I was very proud that my crocheting was like my mother's.

I was content sitting there crocheting, I didn't have a care in the world, and then, I heard the sound. It was a slam of a car door, followed by the uneven gait of footsteps crunching on the gravel. Instantly alert, I looked in the kitchen and I saw my mother freeze. Usually, I would run and hide but this time, I sat frozen unable to move. Usually, my mother would have told me to leave, but this time she didn't, we had not paid attention to the time and now time had run out.

My dad arrived home and the sound of his footsteps, caused panic. He came in the door and instantly grabbed my mother, I

could not move, I could not run. I just sat there with my eyes wide open. The yelling, shaking and hitting started instantly. I watched him push and hit my mother, As he was hitting her, it was as they were on top of a cursed music box, where the ballerina was forced to whirl with a violent partner. As they were whirling around, he spotted me. He dropped my mother, came rushing to me. I still just sat there. He reached for me and I ducked. Suddenly I was full of energy. He tried to hit me, I again ducked, and this time, I was a ballerina only liberated, I whirled and grabbed him and I shook him. As I was shaking him, my mother got off the floor and rushed to us. I continued to shake him, amazed at the strength that I had, amazed that he had not and could not hurt me. This tall, strong, man, was just tossed around like a feather floating in the air. I felt like I was standing back watching a movie. And then I heard the screams. I threw him to the ground, I realized it was my mother shouting run, get away, run, don't come back. Run? Get-Away? I didn't know what to do, where would I run? My mother was telling me not to come back - I was a young, just 15 years old, it was late at night, it was below freezing, I was confused but I ran.

I ran down the street, in complete silence, not even the usual sounds. It seems like there was no one else in the world. I finally reached a friend's house. The door opened, I stood

there alone, no questions were asked except I needed to use their phone. I called Arthur, a family friend, a father of 13, who said if I ever needed anything, I was to call him. He came right away and in that moment became my step-father. He had only one question - do you want to live with Mama and me? All I had was my pjs, no shoes, no purse, no school books, nothing but I nodded yes. My step-father and I turned to leave my friend's house, he didn't even know the people who lived there, my girlfriend was watching with tears running down her face, her parents, speechless. No one, no one talked about domestic violence back then.

The police me again and again they didn't want to arrest my father and tried to convince me to be a "good little girl" and go back home. I couldn't find my voice, so I just shook my head, stepped to my step-father. As I walked out the door with him to get in his car, the only sound I could hear was the police officer saying "I can't believe you are going with him, you don't want to live with Black people, you won't ever be anything". You need to go back home and live with "your people". You'll be successful back home, if you go with him, you'll be nothing, no one will ever speak with you. I grabbed my step-father's hand. As I walked through the door, I looked directly into the face of the policeman, **I finally found my voice - I said I may not become anything but I will be alive.**

As I got into the car, I again noticed the beauty of the night, the crystal clear sky, the frozen ice on the ground and the trees but the silence of the evening was broken by the hum of a car that was taking me a new beginning.

After that evening, my definition of family changed forever. I was raised to believe that your family is your kin, those you were tied to by blood.

That night I learned that family means more than biological kinship, more than blood, something that crosses race and all understanding. Mama and Daddy and my 13 brothers and sisters are everything to me. They provided me with a home filled with love, safety, and security.

Now on the moon lite nights when it comes through the window, it makes it crystal clear that home is truly where the heart is.