

# I was no longer the same...

Eighteen years after first finding A Window Between Worlds, Silvia Rico shares the critical window of change art opened in her heart and how she is now fulfilling her dream of giving back, using art to transform the lives of other domestic violence survivors.



*"When I left the abusive relationship (with my children) for the last time, I knew it was the art that had allowed me to let go of my past."*

**F**or many years I experienced both physical and verbal abuse by my husband, the father of my children. It was something I always hid. I felt that I was the one who was wrong. My abuse was something that I lived every day and I was completely blind. I took DV classes and only saw it as a problem of others.

In 1994, I entered a domestic violence shelter, Chicana Service Action Center. There I was exposed to the AWBW program. It was the first time I used art to express the feelings I had inside. That night, while meditating and thinking about the class, I felt a great tranquility that was hard to explain. It was then that my dream was born to one day teach this class.

While I continued to live in the same house with my abuser, I found refuge in the art. The AWBW program helped me get my most profound feelings out. I remember when creating art, my pictures were all wet. I cried a lot when I made them. I think my heart moved my hands.

Once, when I was separated from my abuser, he swore to me that he had changed, so I went back to him again. I returned with hope, only to go back to more suffering. But thanks to my art, I was no longer the same. His comments affected me less, and I was sure I didn't trigger or provoke his blows. I knew it was he who could not control himself.

Without the art, I would still be lost. I would be without hope, resigned to continue believing that the situation I was in was normal and what I deserved. When I left the abusive relationship (with my children) for the last time, I knew it was the art that had allowed me to let go of my past. It made me responsible for myself, to decide how I wanted to live my life and create a better future with my children.

Now, my dream to give back has come true. I am very proud to teach what I have personally proven to heal and cure, to help other victims of domestic violence through art to see the world that our abusers would not let us see. As a newly certified Windows Leader at California Mental Health Connection, it is my joy to take away the bandages we have over our eyes and see the light that illuminates our road ahead. Art is my voice; through art I can shout from the depths of my being; it is freedom!



Based on 2,921 participant evaluations submitted in 2016:

95% of adults found the workshops helped them more easily express themselves

94% of adults felt more positively about themselves after participating in a Windows workshop

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