

# Georgia Justice Project

An unlikely mix of lawyers, social workers and a landscape company

**Thursday, July 15, 2010**

## Regina's GJP Story - A clients perspective

Regina Sullivan (N.B. not our client's real name) planned to be the chain-breaker, the one who wasn't afflicted by the generational curse. "I thought, 'there's no way I'd ever let a man get me there,'" she says, still seemingly baffled. She was smart, college-educated, and the mother of a daughter she adored. And she was headed to jail on a domestic violence charge.

As an abused child, and later abused spouse, Regina's life story is in many ways typical. In others, it defies every stereotype of the genre.

The only child of an artist mother and a wealthy, alcoholic, bad-boy father, Regina grew up in an affluent but violent Midwestern household, where her father regularly abused her mother. Her mother, in turn, abused her. "She found me to be cumbersome" says Regina. Her father, though, defended her from her mother's assaults. "He was a terrible husband," explains Regina, "but a great dad."

Unlike her mother, Regina was a tomboy, and at a certain age, her abuse morphed into anger and she began to defend herself. "I've always felt inadequate," she says, yet she was always a high achiever. She moved away from her abusive family and graduated from college in Atlanta. She earned a Master's degree in Education and taught for several years. But she, too, fell for a charming man with his own baggage: unbeknownst to her, he had several domestic violence arrests in another state and an uncanny ability to deflect blame. When he began to abuse her, she fought back. As things became worse, she told him to leave.

In a move calculated to thwart her independence and assert his own control, he picked another fight. The altercation escalated; she fought back; and he called the police. Because her blows had left marks on him, she was arrested as the perpetrator. Two days in lockup gave her time to think clearly. "The hardest thing for me was when I realized, he has never been nice to our daughter," she says. "I was making him more important than her." It was time for a change. She asked for legal assistance and referrals for counseling.

Georgia Justice Project seldom accepts domestic violence cases. "But my case was so crazy," she says, "they called back and said they would." Her counseling started even before her trial. She was

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### Georgia Justice Project

is an unlikely mix of lawyers, social workers and a landscape company. We defend people accused of crimes and, win or lose, we stand with our clients while they rebuild their lives. We believe this is the only way to break the cycle of crime and poverty.

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sentenced to six months probation, and eventually her record was expunged. But with no place to go, she and her daughter had to move back in with her abuser. Still, Regina was motivated to make the break. "When I look at my daughter," she says, "I know I don't want to be my mother."

Regina participates in a domestic violence group but finds Georgia Justice Project social worker Julie Smith's approach to be even more beneficial. "I wanted to learn from the experience, become a better parent and move on," she explains. "And Julie always hits me with the 'and now what?' question. She's totally honest and supportive."

Of her experience with Georgia Justice Project, Regina says, "They saved my life and my children's lives."

It's been six years since her arrest, and Regina and her children are happy and healthy and living on their own. It fills her with pride when Julie tells her, "It's amazing what a centered parent you are," and points out that she's doing a good job. Still, she worries about what effect it will all have on her daughter.

"Being abused affected me in so many ways," she says. "But now we have resources and options. She's more resilient than I'll ever be."

*Posted by Georgia Justice Project at 6:34 PM*

*Labels: donations georgia, georgia criminal records expungement, georgia justice project, georgia non profits, GJP*

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▶ August (2)

▼ July (2)

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▶ May (1)

▶ April (1)

▶ March (2)

▶ February (1)

▶ 2009 (8)

## Labels

[georgia project \(11\)](#) [justice georgia law \(7\)](#) [criminal justice \(6\)](#) [experience with criminal justice \(5\)](#) [GJP \(2\)](#) [donations georgia \(2\)](#) [georgia criminal records expungement \(2\)](#) [georgia justice project internship \(2\)](#) [georgia non profits \(2\)](#) [atlanta law \(1\)](#) [casey foundation \(1\)](#) [collateral consequences \(1\)](#) [georgia lawyers \(1\)](#) [georgia non profits criminal law \(1\)](#) [law school internship \(1\)](#) [law summer job \(1\)](#) [newt gingrich \(1\)](#) [recidivism \(1\)](#) [summer intern experience \(1\)](#) [welcome post \(1\)](#)

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