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SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT

The **Give Back a Smile Program** Gives New Life to Survivors of Domestic Violence

[WRITTEN BY BRE EDMONDS]

Julie married at the tender age of 16 to a man nearly twice her age. She was young, vulnerable and in love, a blank slate for her groom to mold as he saw fit, and through the years, his methods became progressively more violent. After years of enduring verbal and physical abuse, Julie wanted to escape, but an unsuccessful attempt at leaving brought her husband's rage to its peak. A vicious kick from a steel-toed boot landed her in the hospital with a few broken ribs and a mangled face.

Though her crucial injuries received attention during her hospital stay, the damage to Julie's mouth needed cosmetic work — not a medical necessity — and she was forced to return even more dependent on her abuser than before. Her broken teeth prevented her from finding work and kept her hiding, humiliated, in a treacherous home. Finally, about six months after the accident, Julie filed for divorce. She knew she had to get out of the relationship, primarily for the sake of her then-12-year-old daughter and unborn child. "It was a dangerous situation, not only for me, but also for them," she recalled.

Julie sought safety at Gateway House, an Atlanta-area haven for victims of domestic abuse. Though the house provided Julie refuge from her abuser and the beginnings of recovery, the damage to her mouth kept her from getting back on her feet. Then, a counselor at Gateway House introduced her to Dr. Mark Sayeg, a Sandy Springs cosmetic dentist and chairman of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry Charitable Foundation. The meeting would prove to be vital in Julie's road to revival.

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AD FOUNDATION



PHOTOS COURTESY OF
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
COSMETIC DENTISTRY

Mary, a domestic violence survivor, was near-toothless after enduring years of abuse from a relative. Thanks to GBAS and \$7,000 worth of work by Dr. Brad Beasley of Athens, Ala., **Mary has been given a full set of dentures and a renewed sense of self.**





Julie with Dr. Mark Sayeg at the "Celebration of Smiles" last May.

Restoring a Smile and a Life

In 1999, The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) partnered with The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence to found the Give Back a Smile Program (GBAS). The mission of GBAS is to restore the damaged teeth of survivors of domestic violence free of charge, therefore improving their quality of life. "You change people's lives with their smiles," said Laura Kelly, a California ceramist and the first female president of the AACD.

Once a domestic violence survivor is approved for the program, a GBAS volunteer sets her up with one of the 900 cosmetic dentists across the country that contribute to the program. The extent of damage is not a factor if it is a result of domestic abuse. One survivor may get a few simple fillings, while another receives a full set of dentures to replace

mouthful of lost teeth. Some survivors enter the program with deeper bone damage, warranting \$40,000 to \$50,000 in repairs. In Julie's case, it took \$10,000 worth of dental work, including root canals, reconstruction and veneers on eight of her front teeth over a six-week period to restore her smile.

In the greater Atlanta area, there are 40 dentists participating in GBAS, but the location of the survivor does not dictate whether or not she receives treatment. "If there are no participating dentists in the area, we'll provide transportation," Kelly said. In addition, dental labs do

NOT ALONE

- More than five million people are battered every year in the United States.
- Seventy-five percent of women in an abusive relationship suffer from battering to the face and head area, and are not financially able to correct their injuries.
- Domestic violence affects one out of every three women.
- Thirty percent of Americans say they know a woman who has been physically abused by her husband or boyfriend in the past year.
- Almost 50 percent of female victims of domestic violence report some type of injury.
- About 20 percent of victims seek medical assistance.
- Women of all races are equally vulnerable to violence by someone with whom they are intimate.

the necessary equipment for completing the surgeries and corporate sponsors donate money to make the transportation service possible. "We want the survivors to have the care they deserve at no cost to them," Sayeg said. To date, GBAS has provided more than \$4 million worth of free dentistry.

Before the surgery provided to her through GBAS, Julie was unable to fully express her love for her newborn, Autumn. "She didn't even want to smile at her baby because she was afraid she'd scare her," Sayeg said. After the surgery, he had the privilege of witnessing the first smile to pass from mother to child. Needless to say, it was an emotional event for all present. Today, Julie credits GBAS with the success she has found in life after the abuse. "This has been a healing process," she said. "It's given me back my self-esteem. I can be a mother now. I've got a career."

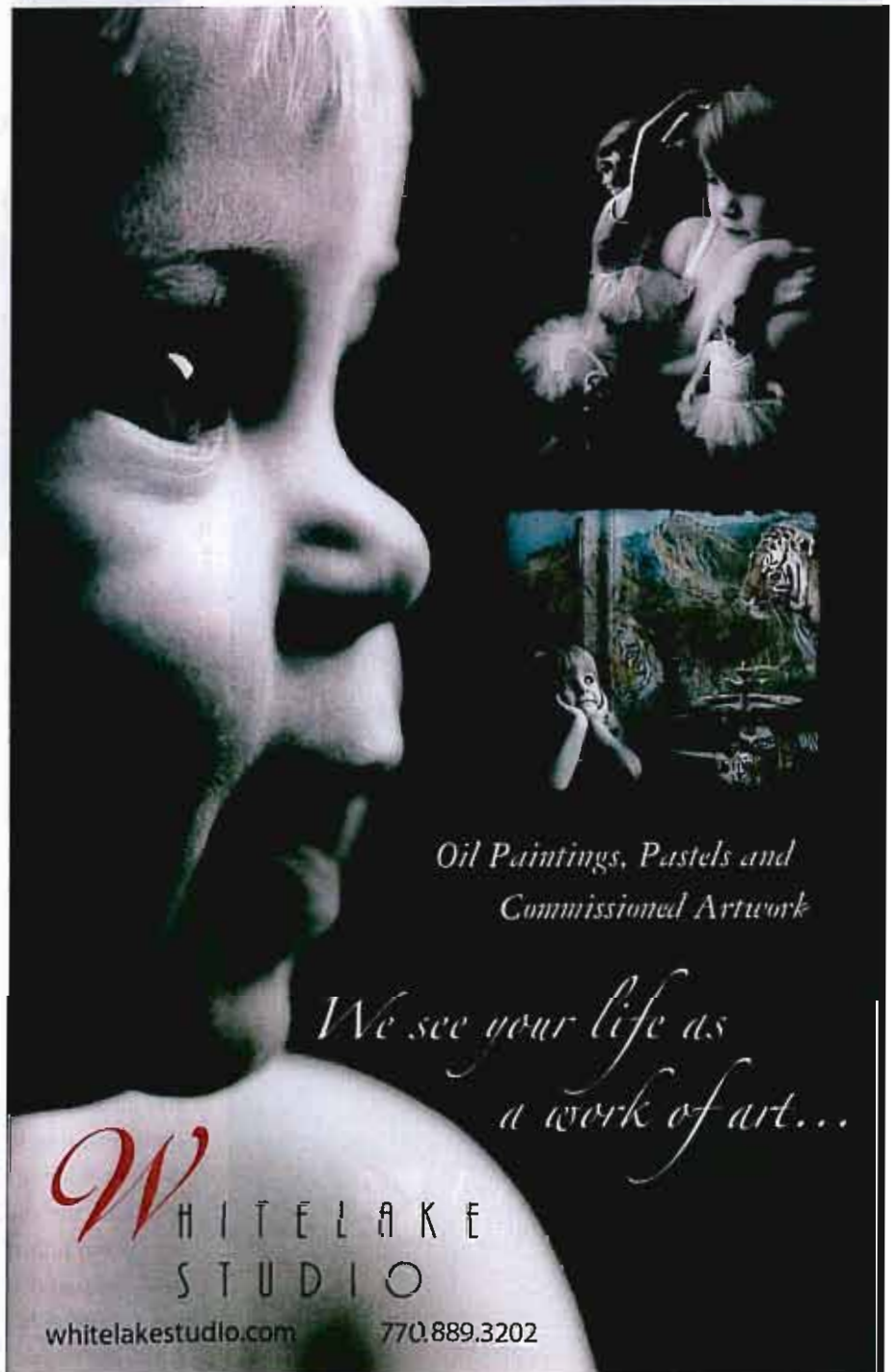
Julie is only one of approximately 500 survivors across the country, and 18 in the state of Georgia in the past year alone, who have benefited from the program, and the success stories never cease to amaze. Kelly will never forget a phone call she received from a mother whose daughter had fallen prey to domestic abuse. The mother had learned of GBAS at a peace rally. "She called me crying because her daughter's jaw had been broken in three places and she didn't want to live anymore," Kelly said. "After her treatment through GBAS, the daughter was better. She no longer wanted to take her life." In this young woman's case, the charity program was a literal lifesaver.

A Smile is Contagious

The numerous passionate advocates of GBAS are proud of the program's success to

CELEBRATE YOUR SMILE!

This October, In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, you can contribute to the AACD smile effort by making your own grin shine! It's a win-win situation: You get your teeth whitened at the discounted price of \$225 (\$100 off the original cost), and you write your check directly to Give Back a Smile. One hundred percent of profits will be used to keep spreading smiles. Contact the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (www.aacd.com) to locate a participating dentist in your area.

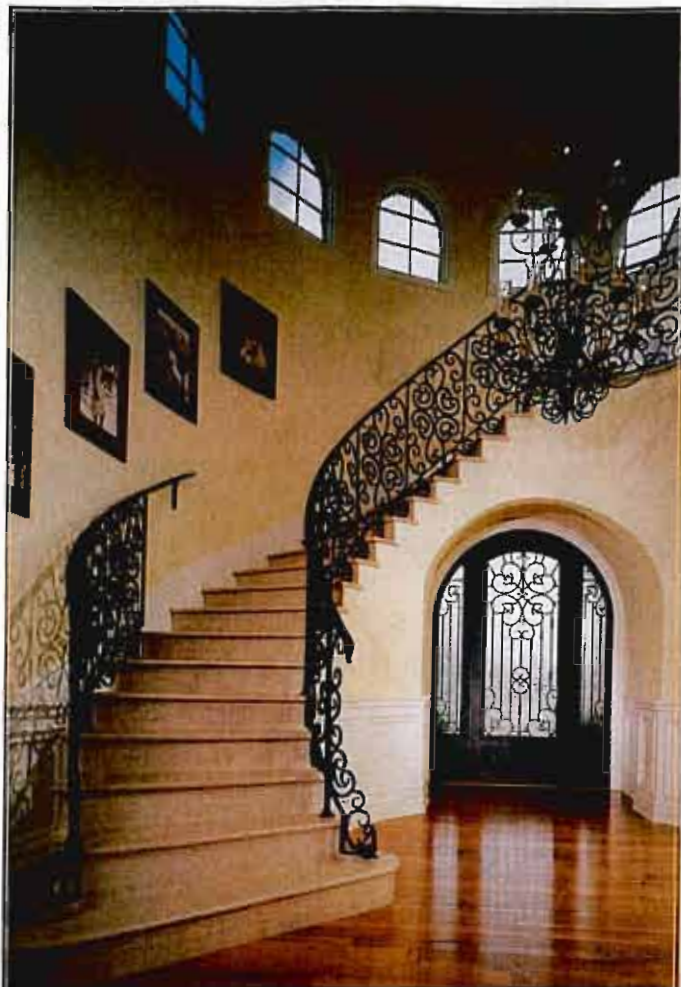


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Give Back a Smile



Julie is smiling as she walks the runway.

date, but are also aware of the need for more widespread support. With more than 2.5 million victims of domestic abuse each year, and some type of injury, there are all too many potentially broken smiles in need of repair. Members of the AACD are working to get the word out to dentists who might donate their services, sponsors who might donate their money and, of course, survivors themselves. “It’s not just one person making this happen,” Kelly said. “It’s about connections.”

Last May, the AACD hosted a “Celebration of Survival” in Atlanta to raise funds for the program and encourage more people to participate. Approximately 700 AACD members from all over the country and their families mingled with survivors at the Georgia World Congress Center for a dinner, live auction and performance by Atlanta’s own Kenny Rogers, whose signature guitar was auctioned off for a whopping \$5,500. But it was a fashion show featuring several of the survivors as models that flew under the evening. Each time one of the brave women entered the runway spotlight, the audience erupted in cheers and whistles.

When Julie began her gait down the runway, my throat tightened. I had (barely) held back the tears when she related her story to me, but in the darkness of my seat, they threatened to slide down my face. It was not pity that had me brimming with emotion — it was

How amazing, I thought, for a woman so suppressed and ashamed, to have the opportunity to regain her confidence, take this stage and get on with her life. At the end of the catwalk, Julie struck a pose and she smiled, shyly yet surely displaying her pearly whites. **PN**

THE FIRST STEP TO RECOVERY

If you or someone you know has suffered dental injuries due to domestic abuse, please visit www.givebackasmile.com for program information and applications. In order to be eligible for treatment through Give Back a Smile, the domestic violence survivor must be out of the abusive relationship for more than one year. Potential applicants may also call 800-543-9220 to request an application. Financial contributions to the charitable foundation are also accepted online.

These recovery houses in the Atlanta area will provide the support a victim needs to take that first step. For a complete list of shelters, call the Georgia Domestic Violence 24-hour crisis line at 800-33-HAVEN.

Gateway House
 Gainesville
 770-536-5860
www.gatewayhousega.com

Family Haven
 Cumming
 770-887-1121
www.family-haven.org

Project Safe
 Athens
 706-543-3331
www.project-safe.org

Circle of Hope
 Cornella
 706-776-4673
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