

In 2020, I began witnessing the abuse and neglect of my niece, my brother's first child. I didn't immediately recognize it as abuse because it was so familiar—normalized since my own childhood. I was living with my abusers and watching them abuse my niece. My mother would beat her, yell at her, and call her "ugly." She allowed my brother to beat my niece whenever he saw fit. My niece was deprived of all emotional and mental support.

I remember one night when she cried herself to sleep at my mother's door. The next morning, my mother posted a picture of her, curled up in a fetal position outside the door, and wrote, "I almost kicked the shit out of her ass. I thought this was a big-ass rat." In 2021, I moved out. When I returned in 2023, the abuse had worsened.

By then, I had finally recognized and processed my own childhood trauma, and with that clarity, I could fully see the extent of my niece's suffering. The separation had given me the perspective I needed to understand both my own past and her present reality. I watched her parents neglect her, denying her food, ignoring her, and shunning her for simply having needs.

Her mother would constantly tell her to "shut the fuck up" when she asked questions or just wanted to talk. When told to parent his children, my brother—the same man who had abused me—coldly responded, "fuck them kids." The family did nothing but gossip about his statement. No one felt the need to intervene. I had many conversations with my family about my niece's treatment. They all agreed she was being mistreated, but instead of taking action, they turned her suffering into family gossip. They talked about it but never stepped in.

Her pain was merely entertainment to them. Sometimes, I would pick my niece up to take her out. When I arrived, I often found her locked in a room with my brother, huddled in the corner looking sad or crying. No one else found this concerning or inappropriate. Years ago, my sister had revealed that my niece once said, "my uncle touched me."

That summer, when I picked her up again, her hair was matted. She was malnourished, dehydrated, and showed signs of depression and suicidal thoughts. Her personality had changed completely. The bright, joyful girl who once laughed, danced, and sang was now silent. Still. Tense. She avoided eye contact. She spoke in barely a whisper. She didn't play with other kids anymore. Instead, she sat alone, staring at the ground.

Her spirit was broken, and she was dying in front of me. It pushed me to the edge. I almost lost my mind. I gave my family an ultimatum: If my niece's physical and mental condition didn't improve in 30 days, I would call CPS. I even offered a solution—I would take her every weekday evening from 5 PM to 10 PM and on weekends.

My mother scoffed, laughed, and defended her parents, saying, "They don't owe you an explanation." The next day, when I came to get my niece, my mother refused to let her outside. So I did what I had to do. I called CPS. I called DCS. I called the police. And when that wasn't enough, I went to social media and exposed my family. I posted photos of my niece's condition, hiding her face. I shared text messages confirming the abuse.

The post went viral across Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, gaining nearly 10 million views. I launched a fundraiser to fight for custody. I raised \$11,000—but it wasn't enough. Legal battles are expensive, and I could barely support myself, let alone my niece. Eventually, I lost the case. I was exhausted, drained, and heartbroken. I felt like I had failed her. My family cut off all contact, so I could no longer see her. I felt like I had taken away the only voice she had left.

On that night, I wrote the first book of my collection: *What Does the Mirror Show Me?: Brown Girl World...* with tears in my eyes. It's a letter to my niece. A love letter to every brown girl in the world. It just hasn't been delivered yet.