



"I finally
feel free."

She smelled the gas before she heard his voice. Her husband of many years stood at the back door screaming, "I want to watch you burn," and threatening to light a match. Panicked, she ran to the other door, but he had locked it. Struggling to breathe, Beatrice* covered her mouth with a wet cloth and hoped she would not pass out before he left.

When he did, she pushed open the back door and turned off the gas tank. She found a hole he drilled in the wall and a propane hose. Terrified that he would try to kill her again, Beatrice fled their home and returned to Los Angeles to live with her daughters.

The terror which marked Beatrice's entire married life did not end that day. Her husband next turned to the courts to try to harm her. But owing to Beatrice's resolve, the support of her family, and the work of the **Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law**, he could not. This time, Beatrice is victorious, and her life ahead is filled with promise.

Domestic Terror

Meeting her husband as a teenager, Beatrice became pregnant and was married at age 17. Beatrice endured daily infliction of physical beatings, verbal abuse, and sexual assault in her marriage. Believing she was supposed to raise their children and stay married, Beatrice never completed school, held a job, nor had the time to study English.

Over 30 years, the long-term trauma took a heavy toll on Beatrice. Her physical health declined, and she faced cancer and diabetes. Although suffering emotionally and facing her husband's
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wrath, Beatrice summoned the courage to fight her husband in court for the due she was owed. She found complete free legal help at the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law.

Overcoming Injustice

The Center matched the seriousness of Beatrice's situation with its own arsenal of legal tools. First, Beatrice asked for a support order, some of which was paid from her husband's Social Security checks. Then, the Center equipped her with two volunteer lawyers to make certain she was not in court negotiating without counsel on her own.

One volunteer lawyer, Denise Nardi, helped Beatrice obtain temporary spousal support. The second pro bono attorney, Sandra Mendell, handled the rest of the case involving her husband's pension and their

property. Sandra was able to uncover the lies and omissions that Beatrice's husband made to his pension plan, when he insisted that Beatrice did not want any pension funds.

Finally Free

Beatrice's support order was made permanent and she is now receiving her rightfully owed pension funds. With the legal force applied by Sandra, Beatrice's husband agreed to transfer ownership of the home she wanted for her retirement.

Beatrice is overwhelmed by the help she received from the Center and looks forward to her safe and stable life ahead. Thanks to the Center and the attention and dedication of its volunteer attorneys, she says she **"finally feels free."**

**Client's name and photo have been changed to protect her privacy.*

Meet the Pro Bono Attorneys



Attorney **Sandra Mendell** is dedicated exclusively to the practice of family law at Jaffe Family Law Group. Prior to JaffeFLG, she worked at Jaffe and Clemens, a long-time Buhai supporter. Sandra says she was "touched by Beatrice's quiet dignity."



Denise Nardi is a solo civil litigator. She is a Center volunteer and has been a supporter since 1988. She received the Center's 2016 Hall of Fame Award and the 2011 Frances Wender Kandel Award.

