

January 18, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman  
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the U.S. Senate HELP Committee:

Much has been written and said about the allegations I made and then withdrew against my former husband, Andy Puzder, more than 30 years ago. What we should have handled in a mature and private way became a contentious and ugly public divorce. This letter is my sincere attempt to explain my actions at that time by providing to you, the members of the Committee, what I remember to be my motivations, which subsequently set off a chain of events at that time which are now being used to tarnish Andy, and have hurt beyond description me and our children.

First, let me be clear. Andy is not and was not abusive or violent. He is a good, loving, kind man and a deeply committed and loving father. He is, as my own father noted years ago, the "salt of the earth."

Today, we are close friends and love and respect one another as human beings. Our families have blended in a loving and beautiful way. That is because we made a conscious decision to set aside our differences and anger towards one another, and to take responsibility for our flaws. As anyone who has experienced the pain and contentiousness of a divorce can appreciate, I believe it is a testament to his character (and mine) that we were able to put it all behind us and now share a mutual respect.

When Andy and I were married in 1973, he was an undergraduate student in Cleveland. We struggled under financial strain, particularly after we had children. These pressures only grew as Andy continued on to law school, and particularly when I was diagnosed with acute rheumatoid arthritis during my last pregnancy. Like many families, we struggled with bills and children and school. As you can imagine, our marriage also suffered.

Andy and I began to argue. I was frustrated, in pain, and Andy was a struggling young attorney. His job now took him on frequent trips and I felt abandoned. One evening we had a huge argument during which I said things that I cannot even today repeat. We both said deeply hurtful things. The argument was loud and ugly.

The following day I spoke with our parish priest. He told me to "go home and make peace", advice I sorely wish I had followed. I was young, I was hurting, I was angry and that wasn't what I wanted to hear. I left the church, literally.

I contacted an attorney who encouraged me to file abuse charges against Andy. My attorney appeared to genuinely care about my situation. I have come to realize he was more interested in hurting Andy because of a political vendetta, than in representing my best interests. Upon reflection, I believe I became a pawn in the debate and believe strongly that my attorney's advice was tainted as a result of his own personal agenda and was not in my best interests.

After our divorce had been made public in the press, sometime in the mid to late 1980s, I was contacted by producers from the Oprah Winfrey show. They asked me to appear as a panel member to discuss the issue of adult abuse. I was hesitant but encouraged by friends and became caught up in the notion of a free trip to Chicago and being a champion of women and women's issues.

I regret my decision to appear on that show. I never told Andy about it, and in fact, I insisted that I wear a disguise. I did not mention his name. Nor mine. It felt more generic to me, and safe from public judgment. As it turned out I was wrong and for that I sincerely apologize.

I wish with all of my heart that I could take back those moments of anger and rage. I deeply regret many of the decisions I made while young and hurt and misled by faulty advice of someone I trusted. I wish instead that I could tell you about Andy and his compassion, kindness and generosity.

The fact that my attorney used "adult abuse" as a vehicle to gain leverage in our divorce proceedings has haunted me as well as our children to this day. Speculation about the issues surrounding our divorce thirty years ago – from which both of us have moved on – should not be a concern to anyone today regarding Andy's character and fitness. If anything, what should be noted is that two people who loved one another and then caused each other emotional pain, ultimately came back together in friendship, and repaired and forgave the hurt they caused one another.

I am saddened and hurt beyond belief that what should have been a private matter that was put to rest so many years ago has become so publicized and exploited by groups of people who wish to attack and denigrate Andy and tarnish his reputation for political gain. I hope with all of my heart that this letter puts to an end any doubts, questions, and accusations about his fitness and character.

I also hope that it will repair the damage done to our children.

Sincerely,

  
Lisa Fierstein