

Maria and Bobo

Her name was Maria.

His name was Bobo---short for Boris.

Maria was an emotionally challenged young girl, 16 years old, a victim of extreme abuse whose parents were now in jail. She and her little brother lived with her grandparents.

Bobo was from a supportive family who wanted him to succeed in life. However, Bobo really didn't have much of a work ethic, nor could he get into the school scene. He loved to party and play and party and play. Everyone liked him. He was always up for a good time, crazy-funny and just a super friendly guy. Bobo saw school as simply a great place where he could catch up with some of his friends.

Teachers couldn't help but like Bobo, even though he wasn't passing a single class. He was always respectful, did enough work to get by, and never seemed to cause any harm. No one would ever imagine that he was about to be the one person who would save Maria's life.

Maria, on the other hand, had no friends or sense of joy. She neither smiled nor laughed. Maria was always intense and remained as isolated as possible from any of her peers or teachers. Her face was always lined with worry, apprehension, fearful, emotionally drained. She was clearly a troubled teen due to her abusive past.

Maria was also a victim of post-traumatic stress. And, although she did well in many of her classes, she invariably had at least one emotional breakdown each day. Some unpredictable action or comment would trigger her to panic and then rage. Despite all the professional staff that supported her, no program, no therapist, no mentor could break into her cycle of pain.

One of her teachers had recommended her to an *MPOWRD* meeting and, of course, she was welcome. Once she attended her first group, she never missed a weekly session and eventually would share some of her everyday experiences with the group.

The meetings that she attended had more guys than girls. Most of the group knew Maria from class and had seen her breakdowns. They sensed that she had a lot of problems but weren't sure what they were about. The teens were guarded, careful not to make her feel uncomfortable but also unsure of what to expect.

Bobo showed up for *MPOWRD* meetings now and then, depending on if he attended school that day. He originally admitted that he came to *MPOWRD* because there was (quote) "a hot girl in the group". Later, he decided that he liked *MPOWRD* meetings when he discovered that everyone took them seriously. Bobo didn't have too many serious moments. It was definitely a new experience for him. He continued to come to *MPOWRD* even when "the hot girl in the group" moved.

Several weeks had passed when Maria decided to finally trust the group. She shyly looked up at their faces. Her hands were tightly locked together. Apparently, this was a big moment for her. She cleared her throat and then quietly shared that her father had abused her since she was a little girl. "He's gone now. I'm always afraid that somehow he will come back. I have nightmares every night. I'm even afraid of the dark."

One of the boys, Noah, went ballistic. "We don't talk about abuse," he said angrily. "That's something you should talk to some professional about."

Maria slowly sunk into her chair. She looked completely embarrassed. The group was dead silent. But Bobo didn't waste a minute. There was no way he was going to let anyone put Maria down. "Are you kidding?" he asked. "She can say whatever she wants."

Noah looked disgusted and shook his head.

"That is really cold, man," Bobo continued. "Maria has a right to tell her story and we need to listen. That's what we're about... listening and support, right? And if you don't like it, you should leave. We all want to hear what Maria has to say, right guys?"

A few people nodded. "And then when it's your turn, we'll listen to you but for now it's hers." You have no right to tell her what she should or shouldn't say."

Noah looked around the group. It was clear that they agreed. "Yeah, you're right. I'm sorry, Maria. Go 'head. Sorry."

There was a definite sense of relief from everyone in the room. However, none of us knew the impact that moment had on Maria. Her life would be changed forever.

Less than a week later, I heard some girls laughing in the office. I looked up and was surprised to see that one of them was Maria. She asked if I could see her. She sat down and with a smile I had never seen before, asked me how I was doing. What was this change all about, I thought. This was a completely new person before me.

"I've been wanting to talk to you for a while," she said. "Remember that day when Bobo defended me in the meeting? I can't even put into words what it meant to me. It was like a cloud lifted and I could finally see the sun. Someone believed in me. I didn't have to be afraid anymore. Then the rest of the group did the same. Some of the guys even stopped me after the meeting, thanking me for sharing my story. I finally knew that I wasn't alone."

Months later, Maria shared in an *MPOWRD* meeting that her life had continued to get better and it was because of the group. She said that she couldn't explain it, but she felt that her past abuse was finally behind her. She looked directly at Bobo. "You helped me to believe in myself. No one has been able to do that before. I finally feel ok about me," she said, "and ok feels pretty good."

Your thoughts: (no names or places)

Why was the MPOWRD group a good place for Maria even before the confrontation?

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Do you feel that teens in general care much about other teens on a high school campus? Explain.

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If you could pick one quality that would help teens survive some of the emotional pressure during this time, what would you choose? (examples: self-confidence, compassion, honesty)

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Maria suffered from physical and emotional abuse. How would you begin to help someone like Maria in an *MPOWRD* meeting?

Do you really think that support from a teen could possibly change a life? Why?

Is it your responsibility to defend someone or to find support for someone who is being bullied, harassed or “put down”?

***MPOWRD* groups are set up to find support for self and/or others. What do you think that means?**