

Alice #15

I met him just after I finished school when in my late teens. We got on well and started dating. Within a month he was putting me down in front of family and friends. He did this and broke up with me a few times only to come back a few days later with flowers or gifts and apologizing for his behaviour. Each time I took him back.

Verbal abuse and put downs became regular occurrences. I did not have confidence in myself and thought I was lucky that someone found me attractive. He took me to meet his parents and the put downs on how terrible I was, how nothing I did was right, carried on. His mum would ask him why he would always put me down in front of them when he came home and he answered "I don't". He could not see what he was like. Time went on with him regularly treating me well, and just as regularly being emotionally abusive. He picked which of my friends that I could associate with and stopped me seeing others. He begrudgingly let me occasionally see my family - who he hated.

Early in the relationship he asked me to marry him. For two years I said no. I said that our relationship was not strong enough and we were too young. Now, why did I stay at this point? The reasons were: 1. Low self-esteem had a big part as did a controlling mother. Mum loved us, but ruled our life. She would not let me move out of home saying "I would bring disgrace to the family and it would reflect on her as a mother if I wanted to leave". She said that once I got married I could leave. Good European mama. 2. So even though I knew my relationship wasn't right, I thought it was better than being stuck at home. I wanted my 'independence'. Ha! That didn't work out as he was more controlling than my mum! 3. He was in the armed forces, so went away a bit. I think I lived a fairy tale when he was away thinking our relationship was good and once when he was stationed away for a few months, we were chatting; I'd had enough of living at home and said, "if you still want to marry me, I'm ready now". So the deed was done. One month after my 21st birthday we walked down the aisle.

The verbal abuse was regular but he would apologize afterwards, treat me well and spoil me and promise never to do it again. I kept believing him. We went on to have three children, again I was hopeful he would change but that wasn't the case.

He then took the abuse a step further - which now can only be described as rape. He would hold me down by my wrists and rape me. I wanted to get away but was frightened for my children and me, as he was very threatening. He used my eldest as a pawn to do terrible things to me. If I refused my child was punished. This child no longer talks to his dad. He doesn't know the full story, only that he was abusive to us and as the oldest, was singled out.

After 10 years my now ex decided I was boring in bed as he was my "first". I was boring as I lived in fear and sex with him was furthest from my mind, but as a good wife I usually obliged (but wasn't interested his bizarre requests). One night he organised for his brother to come over, with his wife, for a foursome. He had told them I was ok with that and wanted to experiment. My ex held me down, as usual by my now badly damaged wrists, so his brother could have sex with me. I started by kicking him in the face but was held down tighter, he continued. This was another turning point. I feared for my life if I left him, but my hatred towards him grew.

I lived my own life and played 'pretend to be the good wife' to get less abuse. I got a job with travel to get away from him when I could. When he was angry he would hit me or throw me across the table. I believe he had mental health issues and he was always worse when there was a full moon. The kids, as they grew, would note the full moon and point it out to the other three of us saying "we better behave tonight, it's a full moon" as they knew any of us were in for a hard time should we mutter anything that could upset him...not that we knew what would trigger him off.

I stayed for more than 20 years. I was able to get free when I took an overseas work contract and long story short, the kids had grown and moved out. I was safe in another country and I finally got the courage to leave. I am happy now and in a great relationship. My only regret is staying for as long as I did. I was catholic at the

time and thought till death do us part was my lot. Also, I thought the kids were better with both parents together, which in retrospect did not teach them about how to treat others or what a happy household is.

I wish I had had someone who could have helped me get away, take me and the kids and let us know we would be safe. One of my childhood friends recently said that she never liked him as she knew what he was like but didn't know how to help. Hopefully there is more visibility, knowledge and support nowadays so women can get out of this sort of horror situation.
