

Alice #2

I choose to call myself Alice not just to protect everyone I love but so I don't allow myself or my family to be victims of my past. My siblings and I grew up in a time when beating your wife, hitting your children and driving drunk were acceptable.

No one thought 'well she's been to Specsavers' when a woman went out with dark sunglasses. They knew she was hiding a black eye or maybe two. It was accepted, not everyone did it, but no one commented if it happened. Living near our house in a small dead end street, it would have been impossible not to know. The doors regularly slammed, there was shouting in the middle of the night, screaming children running from the house as we sought refuge in a neighbour's house or asked her to intervene if we thought it had gone too far.

How do you explain a hole in the wall, a child with a belt or boot mark on the back of their legs or a black eye? I remember the school calling my father to discipline us. What did they think he would do? There was no naughty corner in the 1970's, you didn't sit down and discuss the problem, check if they were being bullied. You didn't look at diet modification, you lined them up and beat them with your doubled over leather belt. We were never quite good enough, we were loud and destructive. We fought each other, we fought our parents and we fought for our mother when needed.

I remember clearly her decision to 'kick Dad out', him coming back and taking back what was his. His decision to 'starve her out' so that she had to sell everything to feed us. There were no emergency hostels for us, no shameful line ups for handouts, we pretended everything was OK. Mum simply got on with her life away from him.

They sold the family home, he took the family business she had helped build. They decided on which children they would take - as you would divide furniture. Thirty plus years on we are successful adults all with families. We don't all talk, there's a certain bitterness to the past but it's similar to a bad toothache. You know you had it, you know it hurt, you don't want it back in your life, you do what you can to prevent it.

I thank my stars every day for my husband and my wonderful children. They are able to accept both my parents and love them and their spouses. They know about domestic violence because we've talked about it. They know about my family's issues with alcoholism and mental health and almost laugh it off because it's so distant for them. And that's just the way I want it.