

## Alice #23

My experience of domestic violence is less extreme and traumatic than that of many others. As there was no direct physical violence, it took me a long time to realise that the relationship I had been in, was in fact abusive. Although I was never injured or hurt physically, there was the threat of violence, which made me fearful and it took a lot longer to extricate myself from an awful situation.

I was raised to believe I had the world at my feet. Strong and fiercely independent, I never imagined that I could be abused by a partner. In my early 20's and a hippy at heart I held the attitude that the universe takes care of things; everything happens as it is meant to.

So even though he was not my type, an aggressive bad boy who rode a really fast motorbike, a series of strange coincidences, of which I took to be signs, led to my relationship with him. Initially the sex was very good. That was all it was though. He came over to my house drunk late one night when I wasn't there and made my flat mate very uncomfortable. He was a well built guy with a threatening demeanor. A friend laughed when I thought I was pregnant saying "No you don't want him in your life for the rest of your life." The day that I was leaving on a solo journey to Europe, I finally took a test. Unlike many of my friends I had never been pregnant before. I was in shock when I saw the two lines: there was no mistaking it.

I changed my flights so that I stopped in London on the way to meet my high school best friend. I thought I would get an abortion in London and continue on with my trip. But by the time I got there I was having doubts. I was only about 3 weeks pregnant and it was too early anyway. My friend reminded me that I always said I would have a child at this age. I was in a fortunate situation, as I had inherited a house enabling me some financial stability. The rest of the trip was surreal and lonely. I rang the father. Then we started emailing. In my hormonal loneliness I thought I had fallen in love with him. At least if I was having a child to this man, I ought to give the relationship a go. So many of my friends had grown up with single mothers and did not know their fathers, which had caused them all sorts of anguish. I owed it to my child to have the opportunity to know their father. And what's the worst that can happen in a relationship? Two people don't get along and choose to go their separate ways right? Wrong.

When I got back from Europe we were together. It was a bit awkward for both of us, but that was ok, this was an unusual situation. He had a good job. I thought even though he was more conservative than the kind of man I had envisioned being with, at the very least he would see it as an honour to help support his family. I decided to move to my house in the country and be close to my family. I asked him to come too, only if he wanted to. Without hesitation he agreed to quit his job and come with me. I imagined that he would be able to get some work. We didn't need much. I had my house and a modest savings. The trouble started when I moved up ahead of him. He became possessive and jealous of my friends who came to stay. We spoke up to ten times a day on the phone. I thought that when he was there he would be happy, as he did not enjoy his job and seemed to have many enemies within his industry.

Things got bad very quickly when he arrived with all his stuff. He had no money, but a large credit card debt and refused to get a job. He seemed to think that he was entitled to have time off and live off me. It was quickly apparent that we had different ideas about how to live. But he was adamant that his was the only way. I have never watched much television and would never have it on in the background. But at 5 o'clock everyday the TV went on to a commercial station and stayed on until we went to bed.

Initially I tried to offer other alternatives such as quiet or music. This was met with total resistance and he told me I had a problem. This is what normal people do and I was a freak. He yelled at me in the video store when I suggested films I wanted, as he didn't want to watch art crap, he wanted a real movie. As arguments such as these went on he became abusive, calling me a slut, a c\*\*\*, and a heartless bitch. He would stand in the door and yell at me for hours over very trivial things. Arguments would go late into the night and I was frightened as we lived out in the country, in isolation.

He would never let me drive, but he drove my car recklessly when he was angry, which was most of the time. One time when he was so angry I refused to let him drive and he punched my windscreen in on the highway. Another time I went to drive off and he nearly ripped my door off. He isolated me from friends and family, so that nobody came to visit as he was so antagonistic.

When our child was born, he was good for about 5 days. Then the aggression and abuse reignited with more intensity. He punched a hole in the wall next to my head, while I held a screaming baby in my arms. There

was no question of my leaving. It was my house, my car and I supported us financially. He drank a lot of beer, but he was actually much nicer when he was drunk. In his mind he was doing me a favour by being there. But I was not getting anything out of the relationship.

When he finally did get a job, he kept all the money for himself. He came and went as he pleased, catching up with friends, going to the pub in the afternoon. But it was such a relief not to have him there all the time. I wanted him to leave, but he would wear me down so much that I was too exhausted to push the matter. Besides I was terrified of being in the house alone and having him show up in the middle of the night. I thought about all the women and children who had been killed by jilted ex-partners and although he had never actually hit me, he had such potential for violence.

I lost a lot of weight. In the morning I would sleep in whenever he was there, just to make the day go faster. The only thing that made me happy was my beautiful baby. He was so good, he slept through the night and hardly ever cried. He grew into a wonderful toddler. One day he smacked him so hard there was red imprint of a hand on his little bottom for several days. I knew we had to get away from him. I did not want to live a depressing life with him. I wanted fun, adventure and most of all peace for my child and myself. I decided that I had to get him to leave me.

We moved back to the city and I returned to university. I was able to pay rent and daycare through renting out my house. Things were better for me because at least through the week I was free from him, although I dreaded the weekends, where I was stuck in the apartment with him. I pretty much stopped talking to him. I thought, as possessive as he is, even he cannot put up with living in a relationship like this for too long. Finally it worked. I had gone to stay at my dad's place with my child and we had an argument on the phone. I told him for the thousandth time that I really wished he would just leave. To my amazement and utter relief he did. I got back to the apartment and he had taken the fridge, the couch and everything else of his.

I cannot describe the happiness I felt when he was gone. It was like I had been released from jail. Being a single mother, working and studying was so much easier than being with him. My friends came back and I started to have fun again, laugh, smile and enjoy life.

Looking back on it all I feel very lucky that things only got as bad as they did and that it only lasted for three years. But it really taught me how easy it is to get into an abusive relationship and how difficult it is to get out of. Even in a healthy relationship there will be differences and arguments, but feeling physically threatened, degraded and controlled is not healthy. This is abuse.

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