

Alice #3

I would like to use my story to totally reframe the way we think about domestic violence.

I am widowed , almost 7 years now. We had two children, the younger of which was diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome. I met my husband through an introduction agency , and we married soon after. Our children were born in the years that followed. My husband was European born and a qualified professional who migrated to Australia and was naturalised three years later.

As I mentioned, our youngest child, was diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome (a form of autism) - at the beginning of grade 2. It was during this time that my husband self-diagnosed as also being on the autistic spectrum.

However, my husband was totally unable to reconcile the difference between how he saw being male - taking on board that flawed hyper-masculine identity - and the autistic personality he actually was. I also firmly believe he was also asexual in his sexual orientation.

So , over the course of his life span he set out to do all he could to **not** deal with person he was. He dealt with his asexuality by allowing his type 2 diabetes, he was also requiring insulin when we met, to go uncontrolled. His fasting blood sugar was already at 20 (around 3 - 5.5 is considered normal) when we met. Diabetic impotence was easier to live with psychologically for him than was his asexuality.

My observations about his Aspergers Syndrome behaviour:

Step 1- move away from Europe - that person was a product of his life in Europe. Which worked - for a while.

Step 2 - on realising that autistic person was still there within you - try to ignore that person. This can work - while you live on your own, however, getting into our relationship and then having children - that person became harder to ignore, so he decided:

Step 3 - cut off the outside world as much as you can. Try to keep on making your home as much as possible how you want it to be. When your self esteem is low and everyone else's is high (particularly your wife's), pull her back down to your level by:

- looking for the super small jobs she hadn't done;
- blaming her when the kids don't do their chores properly - because they weren't supervised (during their late childhood/early teen years)
- on the one hand compliment me on getting good marks at university, followed in a half hour later with pulling me down again over the state of the house.

Now this all took time to build up - it didn't happen overnight. And here is where I change the narrative and framework surrounding Domestic Violence. The violence was emotional/psychological only - there was never any physical or sexual violence. Yes - he had a strong violent streak in him which he worked hard to control. And sexual violence can't happen when you have difficulty in getting it hard and keeping it that way. But as a society we tend not to acknowledge emotional and psychological violence, and when we do accept their existence - we link them with the presence of physical and sexual violence.

Often we load Domestic Violence with intention - an intent to hurt. But my husband felt real pain at the pain he knew he was inflicting on me. He knew he was inflicting pain on me, however at the end of the day for him, the cognitive dissonance (performing an action that is contradictory to their beliefs, ideas or values) he was living with, combined with the pain he felt because he knew his actions were hurting me, was minor - compared to the emotional pain he would've felt by having to accept and deal with his true self. He went to an

early grave rather than admit his ideas about diet and portion control were wrong - because to admit error meant the possibility of being wrong about who and what he was- that he would not allow.

How did I cope? I was one of those middle-aged women who does Humanities at university as a way of sorting out their emotional crap. Uni allowed me to:

- 1) get out of the house which was a place of violence to me and
- 2) get the book learning that I used to both help myself and my children, as well as
- 3) providing an understanding of *why*.

I lived behind a psychological barrier separating me from my living space.

After his death, I experienced continued Domestic Violence at the hands of both my children - again emotional/psychological violence. My youngest has admitted to me that they had acted out. Three years ago we moved from the north to a larger city - so my youngest could access the supports needed to live independently.

Living alone has provided me with the relief and healing I needed. The fact my youngest has admitted wrongdoing has also helped. A lot. I'm in the best place psychologically I've been for some time.

However all the emotional/psychological violence has had an effect. I do not see myself being in another relationship - maybe more a romantic friendship. I will live alone, with only my cat and birds for company. I am cautious about situations, and will only enter into a situation if I feel I will not be exposed to disrespect. There is so much disrespect out there - like waiting 2.5 hours past my appointment time to see the doctor while someone who came in after me was seeing the doctor before me. Not to mention having to follow up on something to make sure the person has done their job properly, and the big one for me - not being accepted for who I am and having to deal with other's emotional crap.

But - now - finally - I'm in a good place.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.