

Alice #30

I grew up with a father who was verbally abusive to my mother and also to me. The kind of uncontrollable screaming where his face goes red and his face is so close to yours that you are left with his spit on your face. As a teen it made me feel anxious and guilty that I was causing the trouble between my parents. I felt bad about myself and that drove me to be good at everything else to try and please them.

When my parents broke up and we moved to a rundown rental with not a lot, all I could feel was relief. Relief that I didn't have to see him anymore. I vowed that my life would never be like that. I'd never put up with someone like that.

Flash forward to my late twenties and after the sudden break up of a five year relationship, I guess I wanted to be ok with being single but I was a bit of a mess. Everyone else was buying houses together and getting married and I was living on my own. I was drinking way too much and had little concern for my personal safety. Not even passing out in a club and giving myself concussion was seen as a red flag at that point.

In hindsight I was desperate and wanted someone to save me. Someone to stop me from drowning.

My now ex came along and on the surface, he was that person. He had a good job. Wore a suit. Outgoing. Could hold a conversation with friends and family. Fun to be around.

I wouldn't say that things were always easy but I felt (and have always felt) that I was damaged goods and that I needed to be accepting of other people's faults as they needed to deal with mine. After six months he needed to return home (which was overseas) and I thought that this was the start of an amazing adventure.

And at first it was. I got to travel and see parts of the world I'd never been to. I met new friends and really enjoyed my work. After a year and a half together we were engaged and on our way home to Australia to celebrate with an engagement party.

After what I'd be through in the past, everyone was so excited for me. It all finally started to be happening for me. I had two university degrees, an apartment, awards from work and a great job. All that remained was to get married and start a family. I thought it was finally happening for me.

But it was after we got engaged that he started to unravel. When I asked him what his parents said when he told them he was going to propose he said "they were shocked". I couldn't understand that given he was in his mid thirties and I'd flown half way around the world to be with him.

The arguments then started about the wedding. His mother was catholic and overall his parents couldn't understand why I didn't want a church wedding. I was asked to explain why and they pressured me constantly to have the wedding in their country without any of my family or friends present.

We started to argue about almost everything to do with the wedding including who would be invited, to where it would be and when it would be. Apparently he'd proposed thinking we wouldn't actually get married for another 2-3 years.

He started having uncontrollable outbursts just before our engagement party in Australia and although I had this terrible feeling about it, I just tried to convince myself that he was under a lot of stress and that it would pass when we got home. That was when things went from bad to worse.

In hindsight, he was always very possessive; demanding to know who I was speaking to and what I was saying. When I arrived, I was in a foreign country with no friends so Facebook Messenger was a real life line.

This particular weekend, we had been arguing and he demanded to read my messages on my phone and on my laptop. He was particularly concerned about two of my male friends, one of whom he'd already blocked from all my social media in the past without my knowledge.

I refused, and that when it got physical. He threw me to the ground as I clutched my phone desperately. There wasn't anything that I should have felt guilty about him seeing, but given I had no face to face contact with my family and friends at home, there was some pretty personal stuff in there about what I was thinking and feeling.

He fought with me on the ground to get the phone from me and I was hit by his much larger frame all over my body. He used his arm to place pressure on my throat so I couldn't breathe and that's when I really started to get scared. He stopped briefly only to chase me through the apartment as I tried to escape. I learned that the door was just too far away for me to get out.

He then took my phone and my laptop so that I couldn't contact anyone and slept in front of the door so I couldn't get out.

The next day he was really apologetic and I told him that he had to go to counselling straight away if he wanted any chance of me staying. He agreed.

The next few months were a blur of incidents like the above as I was trying to get him the help I thought he needed. I got him counselling. I got him to see his GP and get medication for his extreme anxiety. He had tests done to ensure there wasn't anything wrong with him physically like an MRI. He had signs of anxiety and OCD such as tapping cupboards and straightening everything in the house from the things in the fridge to the labels on things in the bathroom cupboard. What he really needed to do was see a psychiatrist but he refused, even after the counsellor tried to persuade him.

I told his parents, (who were in their 70s) and they were of no help at all. Actually I think they made things worse. His dad told him to just stop it and that he shouldn't see a counsellor because it was a waste of time and money. He also told him to stop taking the anxiety medication because it would "ruin his life". His mother was probably the worst though. Initially she tried to dismiss the seriousness of it by saying things like "everyone has a bad day". I told her that a bad day for me was being covered in bruises and not being able to make it safely out of the apartment without her son violently dragging me back in. Over time she said things like "I'm not condoning it but it is one of those things that happen" and "perhaps you shouldn't provoke him". She told me that it was a private issue between myself and her son and that no more needed to be said about it.

I told his best friends and they were amazing. They were supportive and tried to help me as much as they could but he was unwilling to talk much to them about it.

There were lots of reasons why I stayed. I did truly believe that he was mentally ill and just needed some help. I felt (and still feel) he has a serious disorder which with the right therapy and medication could have been resolved. He and his parents did not want to address it.

I was in a foreign country, with friends who had only known me a few months. I didn't have any money and didn't know how to set myself in a new apartment with utilities etc. And I didn't want to run home with absolutely nothing. I couldn't imagine anything more depressing. As what some might describe as an overachiever, I couldn't face what was a huge failure. I'd just had to tell all my family and friends that I wasn't getting married and that was bad enough. I couldn't return with no job, no home and no partner. I just couldn't. At least I could be a complete mess in a different country and no one would really know. Like Christmas day where I spent vomiting into a bin next to my bed, by myself, because I'd drunk too much vodka.

I endured a few months of mental, verbal and physical abuse at his hands. He told me that there was something wrong with me and that's why all the men in my life had treated me the way that they did. He told me I would have problems having children (due to a condition I have) and that no man would want me. He told me he knew things about me that he would tell everyone. He told me that it was my fault he was like this.

He threw me to the ground and choked me out as I begged him to stop. He threw me up against the wall. As I ran to the door he put his hand over my mouth so I couldn't scream and dragged me back inside. He held my arms so tightly they went blue. The kind of screaming where his face went red as he sprayed saliva on me and

even spat on me. Once I made it out of the apartment he threw me up against the stairs and kicked my face in. I thought my nose was broken as blood came out.

I realised that this just was not going to change. I called his mother crying and said either you can come and get him or I would be calling the police. She said she couldn't make him do anything but I reminded her that if he were arrested his professional career would be over. He left that evening only to return the next day.

The counsellor managed to convince him that he needed to go and live with his parents for my safety, so he did. I used that time to find an apartment and I moved out one day while he was at work. I left the house impeccably tidy and put some food in the fridge. I left fresh flowers and a note saying that I hoped he got better.

His reaction was not good and he began harassing and stalking me. Sadly, around 15 months on this is still going. He would call and message up to 40 times a day so I had to block him from everything humanly possible. He contacted almost everyone I know on Facebook and begged them to convince me to speak with him. This was humiliating. He looks at my friends pages on LinkedIn. He emails my parents. He's recently obtained my new mobile number. It just never stops.

At the time I guess I thought I was doing the right thing but my one biggest regret is that I didn't have him charged because now I'm powerless and he continues to harass me.

I've now returned home and am with someone new who is very understanding of everything I've been through. I guess the challenging thing about the experience is that some people, even family, don't really understand what I've been through and lack a lot of empathy about it. They think that it's something that happened in the past and they get that it was "a bit rough" but that I should be happy now and forget it all. I don't think people understand how much it affects your self esteem and that I still have flashbacks of the things he did and said. I don't think people understand that you are going to be impacted by this experience for a while and that you need time and space to recover. I've been called selfish by those closest to me and that still stings.

Having said that, my advice is to look after yourself first and foremost and ignore the negativity, even if it comes from friends and family. You are the one who has to get up every day and face the world. You are the one who has thoughts floating around in your mind and you can't be anything to anyone else until you are ok in yourself.