

Alice #31

These days people are starting to discuss domestic violence. Twenty years ago when I finally plucked up enough courage to leave there was very little said. I hope, by reading my story, that I can help someone make the decision to get up and walk away and start a new life. I am so incredibly happy now and wish with all my heart that I hadn't stayed so long but leaving never seemed like an option. I was afraid if I tried he'd follow and kill me. Simple as that. At the end I decided if that happened I no longer cared.

I was brought up in a very non-violent home. I knew nothing about domestic violence. If my parents argued they usually did so behind closed doors. Looking back I don't think they did me any favours because it would have been far better discussing the bad things in the world so I could look out for them but that's what it was like growing up. I met my husband to be when I was 19. The signs were there before we even got married but I didn't recognize them. He was a violent person with a volatile temper. He and his brother got in a fist fight with some other people; and I, being naïve, tried to stop them fighting. He thought I was sticking up for his brother so he punched me in the face and split my lip in two. My lip is still scarred. I lied to my father and made up some story. That was the beginning: the beginning of the violence and the beginning of hiding the truth from everyone.

Over the next couple of years I found that I was gradually losing touch with the couple of friends I had. He didn't really approve and it was easier giving them up than arguing. I didn't have many friends to start with because I'd had a fairly nomadic upbringing, moving from place to place, and didn't form many friendships. I still don't really have any friends. Those we had during our twenty year relationship were his friends and I just mixed with the wives. When I finally left I was nearly forty.

I've often heard people say that they wouldn't stay in a relationship if they had someone hit them. I have to say that's easier said than done. I'm a relatively intelligent person so why did I stay? Well after that first punch he was so remorseful and explained how my actions had confused him and of course it wouldn't happen again. Stupid me – I believed him. Over the next few years there'd be some happy times – the birth of my two children, but the gradual whittling away at me, at my personality, and at my freedom, continued. I used to speed everywhere because if I was late home I would be accused of having an affair. And if the phone rang with a wrong number (and it did happen sometimes on the old landlines) it would be hell because of course it was a boyfriend calling.

When I gave birth to my children I got haemorrhoids. Until I had an operation they gave me hell and used to often bleed. When that happened I was accused of having anal sex. If we had visitors over (his friends) he'd be looking to see if the male and I spoke too much. When they left I'd still be sitting in my chair and he'd shove his hands down my undies to see if I was aroused in any way. Then he'd spit at me. When my daughter was six months old I had to return to work because we needed the money. How I hated going to work for the next 15 years. He'd turn up unexpectedly to check up on me and if I was talking to a male colleague he'd belittle me in front of them and then give me hell when I got home. At one stage I got a job in a place that was predominately female. That was great, but when one of the women tried to befriend me and asked me to go out during our lunch break, I went and her husband turned up. I didn't know he was going to turn up or I would have declined. Then my husband just happened to be driving by and that was it. I never went to lunch with anyone again. It didn't matter to him that the husband and wife were together – all he cared about was a male being there.

He came from a large family and pretty much all of the men hit their wives. Violence was an accepted part of their daily lives. When we were having dinner one night at our place with his brother and his wife, I said something that triggered him and he lurched at me with his fists. My children yelled out. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law held the children so they couldn't follow me as I ran from the house terrified. They didn't try to stop him. He caught up with me and punched me to the ground then while I lay there covering my head he proceeded to kick me. God knows they would have heard the whole thing. Funny thing is I bumped into my ex

sister-in-law a few years ago and she said I should have a coffee with her next time I'm in their town and no hard feelings. That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I'll never forgive her or her husband for knowingly allowing me to be beaten up and kicked without trying to stop it.

I really truly hate guns. That's because I vividly remember being made to sit in a dining room chair while he had a rifle hard against my skull telling me that it was loaded. I was petrified. Then there was the constant humiliation – the belittling of me in front of other people. There was a time in the main street that I was yanked from the car and he pulled me along into the office of a Solicitor's firm. He said we were going there to sort out a separation. No appointment, just me crying and him demanding to see someone. Again the funny thing is that no-one wants to get involved. We had to leave of course but why didn't someone at that office call the police or at least try to help me.

I actually hear of people saying they stay with their abusive partners because they still love them. That astounds me. I can't see how they can. They must just believe that's what they have to say because I can tell you I had no feelings for this man. Every time he went away I'd wish and pray that he'd meet someone else and leave me. I know this sounds awful, I started hoping he'd crash the car and die. Every time he left that was my wish but he always came back and of course when he did he'd accuse me of having someone over while he was away. It sounds strange wishing him dead when the logical thing would have been to leave. That's so hard to do and was even harder twenty years ago when it wasn't discussed. Leave and go where? Live on fresh air?

What really scared me is that my son would think it's okay to treat women like this or that my daughter thought it was something you had to live with. Yet it still took me twenty years! I never bad mouthed my husband to my children. I thought I'd let them make up their own minds. They still talk to their father. It was only a couple of years ago that I finally came out and said something out loud in front of them about my abusive marriage and even then it was just in general terms. It seems my son tries to block all the memories and my daughter remembers everything but it's not something either of us want to talk about. I still get emotional when I remember the awful times. I'm so lucky though. I refuse to be a "forever victim" and I don't hate men. I met the most wonderful gentle man and we've been married for fifteen years now. While I always regret not walking away sooner I'm forever grateful for what I now have.

This is just a brief summary of twenty horrible years but it serves a dual purpose. After all these years it's actually good to share my story and after meeting a lovely lady at a local charity office I actually feel it can maybe make a difference. I'm no longer embarrassed but I still find it so hard to discuss, so this site is great. Please if you feel trapped find a way to take that one step that will change your life forever. We should all have a chance to be happy and it's definitely not good for our children to witness this violence. These days there is help there and if it means you're going to struggle financially for a while that's still so much better than being scared every day. Every day I'm so glad that I can just be me – that I can talk to anyone I like, go anywhere I want to without looking over my shoulder. I hope I've helped....
