

Alice #32

The Abuse of My Human Rights

Ladies and Gentlemen I am here to share with you ... a story of the abuse of my human rights.

Let me begin briefly with my history.

I was conceived out of wedlock in 1961 and my parents had to get married. I was unwanted by my mother and her family who were devout born again Christians. As far as they were concerned I was a gift from the Devil himself and they treated me accordingly.

My father and his family were kind to me and gave me the best life they could whenever I spent time with them.

My parents had five children and a cold, unhappy marriage. My mother was abusive towards my siblings and I and our father who later killed himself with alcohol as a result of years of guilt and shame about what happened to his children and the verbal abuse heaped on him by my mother and grandmother.

During my life I have suffered child sexual assault and adult rape leaving me with permanent injury. I have been slapped, punched, kicked, spat on and had my hair ripped out by its roots. I have been lied to, lied about, given sexually transmitted diseases due to infidelity, had my money and daily movements controlled, watched my children be terrorized, had my ribs and wrist broken, my jaw dislocated and permanently damaged. I have had a knife at my throat, a gun at my head and had my life threatened numerous times.

Now I suffer depression and post-traumatic stress disorder due to recent severe psychological abuse.

After twelve years of being single and building a great high profile career I met a man and experienced a whirlwind relationship. I happily left the corporate world to work in my partners business. Just four and a half months after being married my husband suddenly turned on me leaving me exhausted, distressed and stunned. The conflict escalated out of control and nine months later I found myself unemployed, homeless and in shock.

I was taken in by a Woman's Refuge. This amazing organisation helped me remain safe, get legal advice and link into services including NSW Police, Centrelink, Housing NSW, Nova who helped me find suitable housing, Lighthouse Mental Health Nursing Services, the Inner Strengths Program where I was educated about domestic and family violence and more.

This was not how I had planned my life would turn out. The abuse of my human rights started from conception and it happened here in Australia. Too often we look overseas to witness Human Rights atrocities. Yet, let me assure human rights abuse is rife here in Australian homes. It is a human right to have a mother and family that loves you. To be denied of a mothers nurturing love is debilitating to say the least. From the time I was conceived and my mother became aware she was expecting me this woman resisted owning me.

I visited her home in my early forties. It was the first time I had been there. A neighbour's response to me when I told her I was my mother's daughter was, 'Daughter? Which daughter? Your mother has never mentioned you!'

This woman's comment cut me to the bone and told me everything I already knew. Decades after being born, I had never held a place in my mother's heart and there was not a photograph of me in her home. When my mother's family found out she was pregnant with me she was placed under enormous emotional stress. One could say that to not be cared for adequately while expecting a child that my mother's own human rights had been abused. However, that conversation is for another time.

When I was born my legs were dislocated from my hips. Today I suffer with Osteoarthritis and hyperflexive joints and have trouble remaining upright on uneven surfaces. I still have my startle reflex which disappears in most babies by three months and the fontanel in the top of my head has never closed. My Chiropractor told me that this is because of the stress I was under as a forming foetus in the womb.

I grew up being told by the women of my family I was ugly, stupid and would grow up to be a slut. I was so young I did not even know what the word meant. As a teenager I was made to wear clothes that were several sizes too big for me. My mother relished in the ridicule of my school friends towards me.

‘How come other girls are pretty, happy and have nice clothes?’ I would think to myself.

Keeping this in mind, please allow me to raise another event with you. This event took place recently in the ACT.

This event is the murder of Tara Costigan by her former partner. As the 15th woman killed on Australian soil in 2015, Tara was murdered with an axe in her own laundry just one week after giving birth to a beautiful, tiny, delicate little girl. Now Baby Sister to two big brothers aged 9 and 11, their mother was hacked to death. Such a shockingly horrendous murder where two other adults were also seriously injured and after court action to protect Tara being taken just the day before.

Like me, Tara was fighting for her life. As an adult woman Tara had many human rights abused as a result of domestic and family violence. Sadly, Tara did not survive.

I would like to concentrate on Tara’s baby whose life is still ahead of her. This little girl has also had her human rights abused. Like me, from very early in life. Like me, this little girl will never know the tender touch of a loving mother. No matter how others will try to love and nurture her, although appreciated, it is never the same. This delicate human being will crave a love she will never know. Others will not understand so she will be alone in this journey.

Like me, this baby will cry herself to sleep for feeling unwanted and unloved by a parent. The very parent meant to protect and nurture her. The primary parent that would teach her to sit, crawl, walk, run, talk, read, spell, clean house, cook, play gently with pets, weave flowers in her hair, raise her own children one day and gently admonish her when needed. Like me this little girl will have the urge to curl up in her mother’s lap and be comforted when she is hurt or taunted at school or misunderstood or fails at something. That urge will never be fulfilled.

What drives a man to commit such a horrendous act? Where in his formative years were his human rights abused? Was it in the example of his father committing violence towards his mother and him? Somewhere in this man’s life something went terribly wrong and not just on the day he murdered Tara. Now he is behind bars.

Is this beautiful little child to also live her life without Daddy? How tragic. No mother or father. The most basic fundamental need for a child to thrive and grow into a healthy, responsible, confident and loving adult is to be safe, warm, fed and loved.

As a child I was taught I was worthless, did not have a voice and would never be heard. I learned it was my fault I was abused and was told ‘You made your bed, you lay in it’. I wonder how this little newborn will feel about herself and exactly what impact the violent death of her mother will have. Will she ever know that people like me care, in some ways understand her journey and that we spoke of her with genuine concern here today? How will she respond in twenty years’ time to the public outrage and condemning of the man that killed her mother that is now spread all over the internet? Will she ever be enabled to love her father? Or will that basic human right be denied her now too?

I have been robbed of my human rights in so many ways. Unfortunately, it did not end when I grew up and left home. Although I have always supported myself and my children the men I have had intimate relationships with felt the need to control my life. I was told who to associate with, what to eat, how to spend my money, when I could go out and what time to be home, how to raise my children, what we were to eat for dinner and how to serve them and their sexual needs in bed. If I did not conform to ‘his’ way of doing things I have been punished in one way or another. The beatings were bad and I struggle with my painful jaw every day. Yet, the psychological abuse has done the most damage.

Most recently, after being married I was suddenly prevented from cracking my knuckles. This necessary habit was never discussed previously. Regardless of the pain and discomfort I suffer as a result of lifelong stiff joints I was banned from flexing my fingers in my husband’s presence. I was to go to another room or if travelling wait until we had stopped and I got out of the car. I worked fifteen or more hours a day seven days a week in five

different roles as well as cooked, washed, cleaned and did the shopping. All while my husband had just one role and often sat on the lounge giving me orders.

I was being controlled. Absolute inequality and gender imbalance! One day, I was prevented access to the house to go to the toilet after returning from a long shift. I was followed to the toilet, was unable to bath alone, was locked out of bank accounts, denied access to financial statements and credit cards, was berated for watching television at night, was often forced to go to and get out of bed at a certain time and was not allowed to use a lamp in my dark bedroom at night.

After having major jaw surgery my partner assured all friends and family he was going to look after me. I was left at home alone unable to care for myself day after day. I went a week without being given a meal and when not working my partner got drunk at the pub with workmates and their wives. His excuse for not caring for me was 'I didn't like it when my aunty got sick when I was a little boy. You reminded me of her and I needed to get away'. So much for the vow 'in sickness and in health'. What about the scripture that says 'Husbands treat your wives as you would your own body?'

Fortunately, I have found some decent role models along my journey called life. People who made me question the validity of the lies I had been taught about myself. People who taught me I was a person worthy of being treated in a respectful and dignified way. People who steered me into adult education and helped me learn better ways of raising my children who had also had their human rights abused.

Still too many people standby and do not get involved when they see someone being abused. They do not call for help and do not say, "STOP! Enough!" These dreadful behaviours so rife amongst the Australian community are still being swept under the carpet. 1 in 3 women suffer some form of domestic and family violence. They are unsafe and that is an abuse of a basic human right.

Once I had to go out in public with a black eye and was asked 'what did you do to deserve that?' I was told 'You need to learn to behave'. Women are told things like 'He did not hit you so it's not that bad'. Being psychologically abused and harassed until you give in is worse! My father in law told me 'Oooh you rejected him, he won't like that.' 'No, you shouldn't do that', his mother agreed when I went to them for help. They told me they had heard it all before and did not want to get involved this time. 'Go home and talk things over', my father in law told me. I was the proverbial 'Lamb to the slaughter'.

Fortunately I have a vivid imagination and learned to daydream early in life. Daydream of a better life, a life where my human rights are observed and not just those of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Think about it...

How can you make a difference next time you hear a woman scream? Do you contravene the basic human rights of others by being abusive in your relationships? How much is a little abuse? How much is a lot?

I say Abuse Is Abuse! There is no measurement. Now I am free of abuse and finally understand I have human rights. I live alone and I still do not have the tender loving care of a mother or an intimate relationship with a partner. In fact my entire family ignores me. Given the opportunity they are happy to abuse me, threaten me and tell me to get over it. They simply do not want to know.

Now I see how I suffered silently, just like my father, and until recently it literally nearly killed me too.

I am outraged at how domestic and family violence continues and we now have a statistical average of almost two women per week murdered by their partner. Now I speak out for the silent ones who have been taught they too have no voice and will not be heard outside of the perpetrators circle or the company of those prepared to ignore 'the elephant in the room'.

I take the action of speaking out in the hope they can live in safety. I speak out for them for, like me and Tara's baby, they too have had their human rights abused! Finally, I know one thing ... given my history of life long abuse, low self-esteem, depression, PTSD, fear of public speaking and more. If I can do it, then ladies I know you CAN DO IT TOO!
