

Alice #33

We were together 34 years.

When I first met my boyfriend, who was to become my husband, I was walking on air. I was so happy and felt I was in love. I soon realised that he was controlling and I needed to conform to keep him happy. My boyfriend was very possessive, accusing and distrustful.

Our life progressed together with him wanting to see me all the time; he didn't want me to go home. It was easier to be with him all the time as when apart he would question what I was doing and accuse me of seeing other people. In the end we moved in together. He would put match sticks into the door at night, and when they were on the floor in the morning, he would say I went out the door. We parted for a short while as he was unfaithful and I went home to my parents. I wasn't happy without him and we went back together, and married.

Being young and silly I thought getting married would change things, of course it doesn't. I then became a possession and things got worse. We used to pay rent and the rent man would come to the door, my husband soon stopped that as he didn't want him talking to me. Over the years my husband gradually changed most things so he could keep track of me. We had many moves while we were together, mostly as my husband became bored with our current address, but he also thought I was seeing someone. Unfortunately my husband took his mind with us and all the problems would come back in our new location.

I was always frightened of my husband and he did hit me, but I was the type of person to avoid any conflict and would run and hide rather than be hit. I do have some marks from his hitting me. One time when I was hanging nappies on the line, I turned about and he punched me in the cheek leaving a hole which as time has passed formed a line. The doctor said his knuckle destroyed the fat cells. I have a cut above my lip from my tooth going through when he punched me, but mostly it was words and thumps that left unseen scars. I grew to know what I could and couldn't do.

There was a time when we were renovating when my husband insisted I help him up in the roof. I wanted him to wait for the boys to come home, but he insisted, and got me to hold something and I didn't hold it quite right and then he pushed me. He tried to push me off the side of the house! I thought of jumping onto the top of the water tank, but then quickly went around and in through another opening and ran across the ceiling. Then my foot went through the pantry ceiling and I ran down the ladder. He chased me and pulled me down and sat on my chest twisting my head from side to side. I think he wanted to break my neck so I kept my head as stiff as I could. In the end I was thinking "what will he do with me...pull me along the floor and hide my body". The children were soon coming home on the school bus. I looked at him and said, "Why are you doing this", "I love you", it was like a switch clicked, and he was all apologetic, said he would see someone, ran me a bath and hid me in the bedroom and told the kids that I had a headache. Of course he never saw anyone. Over the years he did say he would a few times, but never did.

I think my husband might have been bipolar with him thinking someone was about that wasn't. At times he would punch me in the middle of the back when asleep. I could control how I acted when awake but I couldn't when asleep and he didn't take too kindly to being pushed away. He would always ask who I was seeing and my blood would run cold. In the end I learned that it was easier to say nothing than to try to defend myself. In the morning it was all as if nothing had happened...well for him it was.

I did leave once when my husband paired up with a girlfriend of mine and I had his blessing to go; but it didn't last and he was on my doorstep again in four months, he had also wanted to take our second child even though we had agreed he could keep our first one. In the end it was easier to go back with him thinking we could play happy family again.

Unfortunately things didn't work out that way. My husband was much more wary and watchful of me, thinking I might leave again. I stayed with my husband for 34 years, and over those years I had watched television commercials and knew the numbers to ring for help but never did, believing I wouldn't survive if I did. I was

truly frightened. I also had six children and I was told many times that I wouldn't end up with them should I leave. I had a picture of 6 white coffins in my mind and thought it was safer to stay. My husband also had his 'hit list': all my family that he would kill should I leave him.

Over the years I was confined more and more. I didn't have a car key or a house key. My husband ended up on an invalid's pension from the time my youngest child was born and we moved to the country. Life became more frightening then as it was 2 kilometres to our nearest neighbour. My husband surrounded us with an electric fence that was 240 volts and left it on at night. One of our dogs died on that fence attached by her teeth.

One time my husband gave me his Valium pills and watched me swallow them, he thought he could get better night's sleep without having to worry about me. He did this for a week or so and I felt my mind going, I couldn't even add-up numbers. In the end I almost wet myself while sleeping and I was so upset that he stopped giving them to me. Then he started putting a 6 inch shot bolt with padlock on the bedroom door at night. He did this in three different homes that we had. His reason: it was my punishment for supposedly seeing someone else, but in reality he slept better knowing I would be there when he woke. In the morning I would look at the lock and not feel like being nice, but I had to ask nicely to be let out. I even had young children on the other side of that door that could have needed me in the night.

My husband continued to get worse the longer we were together and he eventually nailed the front door shut with 6 inch nails; it was easier to keep track of me with only one door in use in the house. He also put silicone around all the window screens. I took a knife with me and kept it in the drawer next to my bed in case there was a fire and I needed to get out.

Towards the end of our relationship my husband increased his drinking and he wasn't someone who should have drunk. He had a violent temper when drunk. One morning I woke to find him drunk and he continued to push me about all that day. I had a gun aimed at me and lots of filthy things said to me. I was told to go to bed and left in the bedroom for the day. I was terrified of him that day and at one time my heart was beating so loud that I could hear it. He had stood looking at me after throwing the bedroom door open so hard it cracked the wood on the side table next to the bed.

The day after that, when my husband had gone back to normal, I wanted to know what had caused all that. When I asked he stated, "don't upset me, I am having a good day", everything was supposed to be forgotten after he had one of his episodes. I knew I would go one day and we even laughed about splitting up but I guess my husband didn't really want me to leave.

Over the years I became a possession that did as she was told. All my mail was opened and everything I wrote was read before it was permitted to be posted, some were even ripped up. I still kept contact with my family but mostly by mail or phone and each call was listened to. My husband would sit in a chair and watch me and listen to everything I said. Eventually after my daughter left home we had code words for when things weren't good. I didn't own a mobile or a computer in those days.

Some people think staying is right for the children but I know that it affected all my children, my girls probably the most as they were the last to leave. My eldest daughter said at the age of 17 she knew she had to leave after going to bed holding a meat cleaver thinking she could protect me.

I didn't know I would go the day I did. I awoke to find my husband already drunk and abusive; he was pushing me about and saying terrible things. We had a phone in the house and another in the shed and to stop me using the house phone he would leave the shed phone off the hook. I waited for him to stop drinking but he then went onto the 3rd bottle of wine and I became more frightened. While my husband slept in the living room, I went to the shed and rang my son. My heart was thumping for fear he would catch me. My son came to get me, and while he did I went about gathering some things. At first my husband said I could go and then he changed his mind and put his fist through the CD radio I was going to take, he then punched me under my eye and put his knee into my stomach at the same time. In the end my son and his father had a fight over the car keys, and eventually my son won and we quickly drove away.

After going to my son's house I spoke to my husband on the phone and I asked if I could have some more

things, he said that might be a problem as he had burned them. He wasn't so drunk that he couldn't divide the bedroom in half and burn all my things. He had emptied out all my drawers and swept off the bed-head bookcase and my dressing table and took everything up the paddock and burned them on a log.

I stayed with my son and his family for a month and then another of my boys said we could move away and live together which is what happened.

I had never been permitted to have friends or do anything away from the home, so it took me a long while to find myself. I did a few TAFE courses after being on my own but never got paid work being an older person by then. I remarried a few years after being on my own and now do some volunteering which I enjoy.

I think people have to realise there is a life out there but also to stay safe. I stayed with my husband up until all the children had left home and it was then just me to worry about. I believed that he could have carried out his threats so I never pressured him, actually he got off 'scot free'. I was told not to get a solicitor (which I didn't) and not to ever call the police because if he got his guns taken off him he would kill me. The day I left with a black eye I could have gone to the police but didn't.

My ex-husband has now passed away and it was on 'white ribbon' day so I find that a bit ironic.