

## Alice #36

I am in my early 50's. I am the survivor of emotional, sexual and physical abuse at the hands of my father and then my first husband.

I grew up in a violent home: my father was an alcoholic and regularly abused us kids as well as our mother. We were led to believe we were never wanted and nothing but useless, stupid children. Our mother suffered the most physical violence as she attempted to protect us from our father. The worst experience was when we witnessed our father snap our mother's forearm bones in a physical fight. He said he was sorry and she felt she had nowhere to go back then in the 70's.

Jump forward 15 years to my first marriage. I married at 17 to get away from my father and the abuse. I believed I loved my first husband greatly, but after a short time his true colours came out. He began the abuse by simply being nasty to me around other people: if I spoke to anyone else he would get mad and treat me meanly or belittle me in front of others. He became more controlling by allowing me to wear only certain clothes (that he selected) out in public. If he did not approve of something, he would rip it up and say that only 'sluts' wear such things. I have to say I was a very modest dresser normally.

He was into photography and wanted to take naked pictures of me and develop them in the darkroom he made in the bathroom. I felt I had no choice but to let him take the pictures because he would become aggressive and physically push me around if I said no.

The friends I once had all disappeared over time because of his behaviour and mean spirited attitude towards them. Because of his behaviour and attitude he also had no friends. He controlled all the finances, so I never had any money. This meant that I could never leave if I wanted to, because my family lived in a different city and I had no way of contacting them.

After about four years of his perverse sexual behaviour, physical beatings and being so tightly controlled by him, I felt there was no real chance of life for me. However, due to other circumstances we were able to move to a city closer to my family (it took a lot of convincing and good acting on my part to get him to decide to move). I felt that if we were closer to my family they could help me to change him or at least 'be there' for me when I needed a shoulder to cry on. I never thought I could leave as I felt that I was 'nothing, just stupid and a useless worthless human'.

I had a lot of medical issues due to a car accident a year after we were married, so I had to see many specialists over time. He would always 'have' to be in the room with myself and the doctor, I could never tell anyone how I felt because he was always there. I suffered from depression and the last straw for me was after an appointment I had with a gynaecologist where I insisted I go in alone by saying it loudly in front of a reception room full of people, He began to call me a slut for letting the doctor do a pap smear. He said that I wanted the doctor to have sex with me and all kinds of other disgusting things. We were walking home (because we had no car or licenses) and he had been walking behind me screaming in my ear, all the way home, about how much of a slut I was and that I deserved nothing but a good kick for being such a slut.

I stood on the curb waiting to cross the road when I saw a semi-trailer coming towards us. I had him in my ear still screaming and grabbing and in that moment I thought to myself 'all I have to do is take one step onto the road and all my pain would be over'. I felt a strange calm as I prepared to take that step. But then I thought of my sisters and my mother, how they would react to my death as I knew they loved me and that it would kill them if I did this.

In that very moment I decided that I could not do this anymore, no matter how bad things might get, it could not be worse than this. So, I became an 'oscar winning' actress and pretended that all was fine: I convinced him to allow me to travel to my mother's house for the day while he was busy with a project at home. I allowed him to have sex with me the night before I left so that he would feel that all was well in his world.

I took some of my most precious treasures and snuck them into my handbag. I got on the bus, and waved goodbye. Little did he know that he would not see me for another 25 years. I travelled to the capital city of our state which was only an hour away from where we lived, at first I wandered the streets and had no idea what to do. Then I found a phone box and rang LIFELINE who put me in touch with a women's shelter in the city and

so I began my journey to ME.

I was lonely and sometimes thought I might have been better off with him. because at least someone was there that I knew. But I knew that I was fooling myself. After two weeks in the big city, my mother sent me some money to travel back to her place. I stayed there for the next three years until I moved in with my present husband - who was one of the friends I thought I had lost. I had counselling through LIFELINE and it took me a good 20 years to really trust anyone again (even my poor present husband).

My journey was hard, but I had an encounter at a church when I was 11, and had a spiritual awakening. All through my life I believed in a higher power and that He was not to blame for what has happened to me over the years. During my time away from my abusive husband I re-connected with church and started to read the Bible, which is full of positive stuff about all humans. I came to believe that I deserved to have a good life and I would try to help others have a good life if I could.

My present husband and I are celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary soon. He is a kind and gentle man and has been a great support though my years of depression. I have to say it has not been easy, but it sure has been worth that bold step to leave a violent situation and not come back.

I have wonderful children, something I could never have with the first husband, thank God.