

Alice #37

I was a professional, career woman, with two young kids, married to my school sweetheart, who had become a police officer. We were living in a house with an actual white picket fence. Life was perfect from the outside, it really looked like we had it all.

But inside was a different story.

When we had kids, the man I knew slowly changed. Triggers from his childhood trauma were everywhere and he turned into someone I didn't know. It started with emotional abuse and gaslighting*. Sarcasm and jokes at my expense. Threats to hurt me. Yelling and slamming doors so the hinges would break. Silent treatment that would go on for days, and he wouldn't come home. His mental health was an excuse, shift work, nightwork, all "made him act that way" accompanied with threats "if I were to tell anyone". So, I was slowly isolated from my family.

I gradually lost self-worth. I couldn't fight. I couldn't leave. I was scared for the kids and I - for our safety and financially, "what people would think". I endured it for years, day by day on auto pilot.

We had a big verbal fight one night. He told me I was lucky he didn't hit me. He slammed the door so forcefully the door broke, and the kids had the widest eyes I have ever seen. That was it for me. It was escalating and it was unacceptable.

When he finally moved out, that first year was so hard. Trying to re-establish myself emotionally, financially, single parenting...but also just finding myself; who am I without him, we had been together almost 20 years, I didn't know how to do life without him.

I look back now and I don't regret anything, but I wish I had been braver earlier. I didn't need to be treated that way for so long. There are so many support services out there to help you get back on your feet.

I am now grateful for the experience; I have learned what I will and will not accept, I have strong boundaries around acceptable behaviour, and my kids and I are emotionally and physically safer. He still has the kids a few nights a fortnight, and the kids don't know much of the story.

The kids and I still go to psychology, we still need help dealing with the recovery from the trauma. However, on the whole, we are in a really great place, enjoying every day without walking on eggshells, just living our best life!

**gaslight is a term that means 'manipulate (someone) by psychological means into doubting their own sanity'*
