

Alice #52

I had always been strong, independent and determined to be different. No, getting married to the same person for 60 years and having kids, for me. I travelled everywhere I could: overseas, Europe and England, and all around Australia. Every job I had was a means to travel – for adventure and fun. Unfortunately a propensity to pick the bad boy was one key to the fun lifestyle.

A B&S (Bachelors and Spinsters) ball was the first disaster – oh, alcohol my friend, your beer goggles got it so wrong. A long period of being alone assisted in the attachment. He knew my interest was flagging and sent flowers, lots of them. He had a good job, liked a drink (a bit too much), flashes of warnings appeared, to be pushed aside when the next gift arrived. Lots of attention, phone calls, letters, presents in the mail, flowers to work.

Then we started working together, and the arguments escalated. While out drinking, the first physical attack happened. I was punched, slapped; nothing was said - just the punches. He was sorry, of course. I said “that’s okay, let’s move on”. After all, “I’m just as much to blame”. Then I was pregnant and he added in sexual abuse too. I didn't want him, but actually it was not my choice.

I decided that it was time to go. I packed up the baby and escaped to a new life.

I start a new life - in a new town, with some new friends. Government Family support is helpful, the baby was now a toddler, I started taking a course, and life was looking good. Then a new guy arrived. He is a tradie (tradesperson), nice looking, quite tall, appears smitten, and starts chasing me. The first thing he did was ask my toddler and me out! Now that was lovely wasn't it?

Very quickly...too quickly, we move in together. Then, we are moving for work. Country town no support, now it changes. No, I can't have made the same mistake again? It has to be me – my fault...I just need to try harder. He has strange moods, and criticizes everything we both do. How can it be my toddler's fault that things aren't right? Then I was pregnant again. How stupid can I be? I was raised right, with strong family values; you make your bed you lie in it. Now I had to deal with this as well. We moved to another town because he had police trouble. Drugs now take up a big part of his time. His personality changes are extreme and we alternate between loving to just frightening.

The abuse escalated. I'm now left with no money, with very little food, and a partner who spends every afternoon and weekend at the pub or club. I had no money for basic items. The loneliness is continuous, but I try to keep making it work. After all, he keeps telling me that if I was a better person, he would do more for me. Then we had a chance to buy a house for only \$60,000.

Awesome price and my grandad lends us the deposit after the loser promises to pay him back. My Dad knows something is wrong, but abused women say nothing. We are great at pretending it is all okay. Then my loser asks me to marry him. Of course, I think, that will fix everything - he will change now. I'm pregnant again, but he is happy at least. “Have another one”, he says, “then I can quit working”. What? He doesn't provide for his family as it is, but now I cannot say anything or I will cop it.

The house is bought – it is a wreck. He half fixes it, while the rest is left in a mess. There are holes in the floors and ceiling, and rats regularly come through walls. He is at the pub or in the shed smoking cones (dope) and the abuse continues. He spits in my face, calls me names, belittles my cooking, parenting, and my ability to sexually please him. We now have a business but the bills aren't paid. The mortgage isn't paid and we owe five years of city rates and taxes.

It is Christmas time. Eldest child has presents from my parents and everyone is happy and laughing. Then my child is crying, because the ‘father of the year’ has taken all the presents and locked them away because someone did not say ‘please’. I call him an asshole and tell him to give them back. He responds by spitting on

me and abuses everyone (but gives the presents back). Thankfully, he leaves the house to go drinking with his friends. The kids and I have a much better time now that he is gone.

Life has become pretty basic: I need tampons, but have no money. This means that I have to ask him, "Please can I have \$10?" As I walk outside, people walking past, he follows me to the door. I am in the front yard, and everyone can hear, "what do you need that money for" (humiliated, I mumble my reply): louder he asks again - people are looking at me. I am dying of embarrassment, "I'll tell you when I'm back" and he replies "no, it is my money - why do you want it...you don't work, you just sit around on your fat arse all day".

I swear to myself, that I will never be in a situation where I have to ask anyone, for anything, ever again.

My kids have no shoes and everything we have is second hand. People are so kind - they drop off clothes. The local fruit shop gives us a box of cherries, they are just older than good, but I am so grateful and I don't care about the mouldy ones. He drinks and continues to abuse all of us, including our kids. He tells me: "everyone hates you, you're worthless, and you will never find anyone else".

My father dies - it feels like the last straw. He comes home from the pub and pushes me into a wall as he spits in my face. It's time. So I change the locks, pack his stuff and put it outside. Thankfully he just goes. He threatens to send us bankrupt, so I wind up the business, get a job, and change the mortgage into my name. The kids still cop the abuse, but now they sit on the club steps while he drinks (it's his weekend). Lucky it is a small town so the kids can safely walk home in the dark.

How did my story get to this? As my step Mum (always the lady) tells me, "You are the author of your own story".

I score a little job, and have happy days. I start another course and then another and learn how to turn on a computer. I give a diploma a try, then another one – it takes longer but I scrape through. Work picks up so we sell the dump, the kids and I buy a house with floors and ceilings...what luxury! "Are we rich?" the middle child asks. Another job comes along, so I give university a stab and manage a Graduate Certificate and then go back for another course. I don't ask anyone for \$10 for tampons anymore. We live without violence. We are valuable. We have many friends. My kids always have shoes..
