

Alice #63

My first encounter with Domestic Violence against women came whilst I was in utero. My 9 month pregnant Mother, was punched in the face and sent flying backwards in her chair at the dinner table by my Father. When I was two weeks old, we left my father and moved interstate to live with my maternal grandparents.

I guess I never really thought there was anything wrong with a man hitting a woman. I can remember from a very early age, my grandmother's boyfriend smacking her around on Sunday afternoon. Both were big drinkers and the boyfriend had had too much whiskey. My father preceded to beat the daylights out of the boyfriend in front of me, my little cousin and her brother. Just another Sunday growing up in an eastern state in the USA.

The first time I was struck by a man was when I was 15. I met him when I was 13 years old. He was 4 years older than me and a red head with a temper and a major flirt with the girls. The first words he ever said to me were "Do you give head?" At 13, I didn't even know what that meant. I laughed and said "sure why not." Two years later I was officially "His Girl." He would drive me to the bus stop in the morning and pick me up from my grandparent's house every afternoon. I was practically living with him full-time when he proposed with a diamond engagement ring. It never occurred to me I was too young. He, his mother and father showered me with lovely gifts and roses. His younger brother had moved in his girlfriend (a 14 year old girl). One big happy family.

I enjoyed feeling like I was part of a real family (one with a mom and dad). That was until Saturday nights. On Saturday nights things changed. I could hear my boyfriend's mother sobbing. She and his dad had gone to the bar and come home drunk. He proceeded to beat on her for speaking out of turn. Before I knew it, my boyfriend was hitting me and his brother did the same to his girlfriend. Sunday morning would come and we all acted like nothing had happened. My first thought was "what did I do wrong?" Why is he so angry? I need to be a better girlfriend. But my boyfriend would continuously put me down and call me FAT, UGLY and STUPID. I would try to lose weight. I can remember thinking: tomorrow I will lose weight.

He was also hypersexual. His obsession with sex went from anything ordinary to very sadistic in nature. It was nothing to be hand cuffed to the bed for hours. Still, I did it to please him. He loved me, so he said over and over and over. On my 16th birthday, my mother bought me a car. I was super excited and drove the car right to my boyfriend's house to show him. He was furious. He proceeded to kick my car door until I drove away. His jealousy was so intense. Thankfully, after two years of dating, he broke up with me. He met someone else. I was devastated. My mother took me to the local bar and bought me a wine cooler to ease the pain. I never thought I would get over him. I never told my mom about the beatings. I never thought it was important enough to mention. Not sure she would have cared either way.

My boyfriends varied over the next few years. I seemed to be attracted to the worst of the worst. I've been told a girl secretly looks for her father in a partner. Well, I was headed on the right track. In the late 80's, I met the father of my children. He was from a large Catholic / Italian family with lots of money. Again, I was wooed with gifts and fancy vacations. Soon we were married and over the years had six children. Our oldest daughter passed away at the age of 9. Our marriage relationship crumbled as he took comfort in illegal drugs. We fought horribly and when I was pregnant with my daughter second daughter, he choked me until I almost passed out. His father frequently hit his wife and daughters so my husband learned firsthand how to keep his woman in line. As the joke goes, "What do you tell a woman with two black eyes? Nothing, you have already told her twice". We divorced after 16 years of marriage. I turned to alcohol to numb the many tears and heartaches. I just decided that I was meant to be alone. I became a "bad mother" and I made very bad choices.

A couple of years later, I met a much younger man. He had the face of angel with the bluest eyes I had ever seen. He had a laugh that warmed your soul and a personality that could charm the birds from the trees. I never intended to date a younger man. Especially a man with no job, no car, no future. I had my hands full working three jobs to support 5 children with no child support from my ex-husband who was in between trips to the rehab and jail. This young guy was a distraction from the real world. He and I spent our days drinking and partying like there was no tomorrow. We didn't worry about bills or money. We had each other and that was all we needed. Meanwhile, my children were raising themselves with an alcoholic mother. After moving in together, his true colours started to show. We would go out together to the local bar and have two drinks and be happy and in love. After three drinks, it was on. He was diagnosed bipolar and turned into a horrible person. It started like it did with my first boyfriend - with a push and a shove. Then he began to twist my arm under the table or squeeze my leg so hard it would bruise. It progressively got worse. So bad, that I called the police; only to bail him out of jail the very next day.

Our relationship was a roller coaster of emotions. I couldn't bear to live with him but I couldn't bear not to. I went to work with fingerprint bruises on my chin and my boss asked me what had happened (he knew). I had bruises on my arms and back of my throat. I had been punched in my face and knocked out cold. The police were always at the house. I made excuse after excuse. He always said he loved me but never said he was sorry.

One day my daughter played the Eminem video of "I love the way you lie". She said this video reminded her of me. It was a profound revelation as to what I was doing to my kids. They didn't deserve it. My boyfriend used me until I was no more. He then left me for another girl his own age. I had absolutely nothing left. I made an appointment to see the doctor because I felt suicidal. I was sent by ambulance from the doctor's office to the hospital mental ward and admitted for a week's stay. I could not stop crying. I wanted to die.

My mother came to visit me. She reeked of alcohol and was asked to leave by the hospital staff. I was heavily medicated, taught coping skills and sent home. Back home, I didn't quite know how to function. Everything was different but the same. I moved out of the house my boyfriend and I shared and into a new space with the kids and got a dog. I had to get myself back on track. I joined a gym and made friends quickly. I went to work, the gym and learned how to be a mother again. The kids and I went to church and life was starting to turn a corner. I prayed. I prayed hard every day. I stayed busy trying to keep the past out of my head. Some days were hard, but it got easier and the day when the angelic ex-boyfriend came back, batting those blue eyes, I was strong and told him "NO!"

Several years later I met another man. He was nothing like I had ever dated before. He was from a good family and is a good man. He has never done an illegal drug or been in trouble. He would never raise a finger or even his voice to me. He is the true definition of a gentleman. He offered me his heart and a chance of a new life with the children in Australia. We came to Australia soon after.

Sure there are many things I wish I could change about my past. I cannot change what has happened. I think of my regrets as lessons learned. I can only promise myself that I deserved better. My daughter deserves a man that won't hurt her. My boys deserve to be gentlemen. By having a positive male role model, this can happen. We can change the pattern. Each day is a new opportunity to do better. I think women are much stronger than we give ourselves credit for.

When life hands you bad, you can be bitter or you can be better. I choose better.
