

## Alice #9

I met my husband (now my ex-husband) when I was 16. For the first few years I think I was happy, I was young and he was the popular local sporting hero in our area, a boxer in fact and I felt good being with him. Our relationship started experiencing volatile episodes a few years later when we moved in together and the mental abuse started very early on in the relationship soon after.

He was a fitness freak who loved his exercise; I wasn't, so the remarks about my body and being told I was fat was just the start of things. I hid a lot from my family for the first few years and to the outside world we had a pretty good life. I moved away from my home town and this was when he was able to start taking control and chipping away at my confidence not only with the slurs against my personal appearance but how I was hopeless, worthless and lazy.

Ironically I cooked, cleaned, held a full time job and earned good money but it was never good enough. He had to stop boxing because of his job and stopped training as much, he replaced this time with drinking alcohol. His consumption was very excessive and he was an angry drunk. The alcohol fuelled rages started and he began smashing up on things in the house and punched holes in the walls and started throwing and breaking furniture. This became the norm and the embarrassing encounters with our neighbours was mortifying trying to make excuses for the noise.

He was always sorry afterwards and promised that it wouldn't happen again. That became the cycle I found myself living in for the years ahead. My parents and friends and work colleagues started noticing my behaviour changing, I was more nervous coming to their homes or to work. I was always upset and did not want to go home, especially on weekends when I dreaded what I was in for. But yes, I stayed with him, he then asked me to marry him. Why I said yes I will never know, maybe I tried convincing myself that marriage would calm things down. Even on the days leading up to my wedding and even on the wedding day itself I asked myself what I was doing with this man. I was physically turned off by him, hated when he tried to be intimate and loved the opportunities and times I was not with him. I much preferred spending time with my friends and family. I fell pregnant with our first child and when he was born I remember him getting drunk and abusive whilst I held my baby in my arms; he did not like that the baby was getting the attention and he wasn't. He hit me and screamed and shouted at me for being fat (I had just given birth) and pathetic because I was crying and begging him to stop. Life just continued to be hell but I was stuck at home with my child and not living close to my parents. Several times I remember driving and willing a car to crash into me to take me away from this life but my son and close family was what stopped me from doing anything stupid.

I became depressed and started taking medication for depression; this gave him more ammunition to call me pathetic and weak. When my child was 3 months old I went back to work full time. I was working in a very pressurised job and if I didn't call him up during the day he would get angry. When he was on one of these episodes which were pretty much

every other day he would call me up to a 100 times a day telling me I was a terrible mother, how he was repulsed by my body and to do him a favour and kill myself. This became our lives, abuse, violence, remorse, calm for a few weeks and then back to abuse. I just accepted that this was a cycle I could not get out of and fell pregnant again with my second child.

For a few weeks things were calm but then the novelty was over for him and the cycle began once more. His trademark was to hold me by my throat with both his hands and press his face against mine telling me I was disgusting. On other occasions he held knives against my throat, this was done in front of the children and he threatened to kill me. Some days I wished that he would, but then I had my children to think of. He also would take a large carving knife and hold it, pointing against his stomach and slap and punch me across the face goading me and telling me to push it in and kill him. I really had to stop myself plunging the knife into him as I knew this is what he wanted me to do. My eldest would beg him to stop and my youngest would just cry with all the shouting. After then drinking heavily for several days he would follow these episodes by sleeping for a couple of days. Eventually he would sober up and tell me how sorry he was and he would get help. He never did.

He had always had a dream of moving to Australia and by chance we had the opportunity of a job offer to give us the chance to live and work in Australia, and much to my parent's horror and mine in hindsight we decided to move. I somehow believed that maybe a new country in the sun would be the thing that might change things and make him happy. How wrong could I have been?

All this did was isolate me and the children even more from my parents and family and gave him control that he so desperately wanted over us. Once we moved to Australia things got much worse: the mental abuse reached even more excessive levels and the physical abuse got more frequent. The irony was I could actually deal with the physical abuse better, as I could see what he had done to me with marks around my neck or bruises on my arms or body where he had punched me. But with the mental abuse you couldn't see it, I couldn't quantify it.

The poor children became used to a world of chaos and violence, they knew no different as this was the environment they had grown up in. The drinking became out of control and on numerous occasions when he was blind drunk he would throw us out and lock the house up so we either had to stay with our wonderful neighbours (who became our lifeline) or we would have to book in a hotel. My youngest daughter thought it was adventure staying in a hotel for the night, if nothing else it was a temporary escape for us all. My parents became increasingly worried about me and the children and begged me to leave him and come back home to our home country, but I felt trapped emotionally and financially. I gave him ultimatums and asked him to leave me several times, but he wouldn't.

I tried leaving him on numerous occasions but I realised I didn't really have anywhere to go and just felt lost. He would call my work and abuse me at work causing disruption, and threatened to continue calling unless I came home and back to him. I really felt hopeless

and helpless with little support. Then one night he suddenly became quite ill, was admitted to hospital and had to have major surgery. I felt nothing for him and there was one point where I actually hoped he wouldn't make it through the surgery...but he did. I had no choice but to help him following his time in hospital and I did my best to support his recovery. Despite this major surgery and advice that he was not to touch alcohol he started drinking several bottles of wine a day in the days following his discharge from hospital.

The abuse got worse in those weeks following his operation, worse than it had ever been in our whole time together. The day arrived for my children's yearly dance concert and they were super excited. We had spent all morning getting the costumes ready. Their father was drunk in the bedroom. They went in to show him how they looked; he swore at them, screamed abuse and told them to get out of his room.

I saw red and screamed at him telling him that he was disgraceful and how could he do this to his child. He started screaming at me and put his hands around my throat trying to strangle me. My eldest was screaming at him to leave me alone, he pushed out of the way and picked up a machine that was aiding his scar on his stomach. It was the size of a small laptop, he raised it above me to bring it down on my head, at the last minute my brave child, with all his strength, pulled him away from me. I believe he was responsible for potentially saving my life or serious injury to me.

That was the last straw. I went straight to my one of my neighbours and asked her if we could stay with her that night. We still had to go to the concert and god knows how we got through the evening, my neck was marked and I had bruises on my arms. My youngest, despite what he had been through and witnessed that night, did me proud and performed his heart out with myself and my eldest child watching him with pride. That night after the concert we called the police and gave a statement to what had happened. The police issued my husband with an interim restraining order preventing him from coming near me or the children for 72 hours.

On the Monday morning I headed to the Magistrates Court and managed to get heard straight away and eventually got issued with restraining orders for myself and the children against my husband, and they removed him from the family home. That was over five years ago. He has breached his restraining order 150 times in that period. In doing so he got arrested on numerous occasions but his punishment was being jailed for 2 days in total and a small fine by the courts! The police felt like their hands were tied by the court system and he became an enemy to the police due to his complete disregard for the law. He continued spiralling out of control and got sacked from his job due to his behaviour and drinking problem. He eventually lost all his money from the house sale and moved back to our home country.

Life has been a real rollercoaster since then. On one hand my life is fantastic without him being directly in it, I divorced him and I have met the most wonderful beautiful man who I am now engaged to. He makes me and the children feel safe and secure and for the first time I have been able to fall deeply in love with an amazing man. Our home is calm (most of

the time) and we are all in a happy place. However my ex-husband continues to haunt me and I realise he will never be gone from my life.

Since moving back to his home country, he continues to send text messages, call me, leave messages on my answerphone and abuse me. I have changed my phone number, and have tried blocking his number etc. However, he contacts me through other forms of social media or through his family who have do not believe he has done anything wrong. The police have no jurisdiction from with another country. He has recently started calling my children and tried to resume relationships with them both. My eldest has become intolerant of him and does not respond to his messages - he responds with abuse, disgusting names and says that he is just like his mother. He has been talking regularly to my youngest over the phone, and he has told me that he wants to have a relationship with him. I really don't know what to do about this as he is 14 years old and very independent (and when I tell him no, he gets angry with me).

I have now heard he is moving back to Australia in 2 weeks' time. I have advised the police but they have said until he does something they cannot do anything to him. I believe the nightmare will start all over again. He told me in his messages that 'if I can't have you no one will and that he will make sure of this'. I really worry what this means. I could write a book about our life and awful experiences and I have tried to block a lot of the memories out. Even writing this brings back so many bad memories, I still have awful dreams about him stalking and abusing me. I'm sure this story is so similar with other women and what is always the hardest question that people ask me is 'why did you stay with him for so long?

I ask myself that every day and feel so guilty that I put myself, but more importantly my beautiful children through the abuse with this narcissistic bully. I am already dreading the future that this man still will inflict on us but then I see hope in my future life with my new husband and his reassurance that your ex cannot hurt you or the children any more, he won't allow this to happen, I truly hope he is right.

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