

Zoe's Story

I was with my ex-partner for 12 years after initially meeting at work. If I am honest, the relationship was never quite right. He was angry and emotional as he was not allowed to see his children from a previous relationship. I have since found out that was because there was a restraining order in place. About two months into our relationship, he attacked me. He was very apologetic the next day and I fell for it. At the time I was very vulnerable as I had just been through a divorce so it was easy for him to play on this vulnerability and control me. His jealousy was apparent early on which I at first thought was flattering but soon realised what was to come.

My ex-partner used every sort of violence; extreme emotional abuse, extreme verbal abuse and extreme physical violence. He did not allow me to have friends. Within six months of our relationship I had lost contact with all of my friends. He also ensured that I was not able to build any new friendships whilst we were together. We would only have new friends for a very short period of time before we either moved or he made up some issue that stopped us being friends. This behaviour also extended to my family. He would not allow me to speak to my family for long periods of time. He would make me email my mum with some reason as to why I did not want to speak with her. During one of these episodes, my mother became physically ill due to the emotional strain. I have always been very close to my family so he used it against me as he knew it was my weakness. Again, he did this because of his own jealousy.

During the last few years of our relationship not a day would go by without him calling me a slag or a slut or a similar vulgar name. One incident that I will never forget was when we were viewing a house and I held the corner of a map for the estate agent for one minute. When we got home, he went crazy calling me a slut, that every man could tell straight away that I was slut and that no lady would act that way when all I did was hold a map.

I used to work in recruitment so I am very aware of how important it is to make eye contact with people. After a few years, I couldn't/ wouldn't look anyone in the eye, regardless of whether they were male or female. I don't think I will ever be able to do it properly again as I have simply had it beaten out of me.



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The violence escalated from bruising that could be hidden on my legs and arms to broken ribs, black eyes and fat lips. I had my front teeth broken four times. On one occasion, he threw a dinner plate at me like a frisbee and smashed both my top and bottom teeth backwards 5mm which was beyond repair. He did not allow me to go to the dentist for more than 24 hours after the incident. Alcohol did escalate the violence, I knew if he had consumed alcohol he would verbally and physically abuse me as the two went hand in hand. However, during the last six months some of the worst violence was conducted when he was sober.

During the last 6 months of our relationship, the incidents that occurred have been described by my lawyer as attempted murder. He stabbed me, he smashed me over the head with a metal poker and he cut my hair off. He would beat me for hours while listening to music. I tried to escape once but returned. He told me that he was ill and needed me. He told that he was disgusted with himself and if he ever did anything again I was free to walk. He tricked me. The only thing that changed was his anger. He was annoyed that I got away so he had to punish me. Within an hour of being back he was beating me to within an inch of my life. He locked me in the house to avoid me escaping again. I never went anywhere alone in the last few months of our relationship.

I didn't have a mobile phone for the last eight years of the relationship as they would get smashed in a rage. It eventually got to the point where I wasn't allowed one. I didn't have a bank card or any money. I had nothing. I felt so alone and useless. I had no confidence. It was a black hole. I knew I was going to die. My body could not take anymore. I have been told I would go into survival mode during the violence but maybe if I had stayed one more day it would have been the end. I had to find a way out.

I left and went to my parents. They called the police because of the state I was in but I begged the police not to arrest him as I was petrified that he would hunt me down if I caused any trouble. My parents put me on a plane to Australia and I stayed with my brother for 3 months. Luckily there were no children involved, however, I had rescued dogs over the years who helped me a lot during the bad times but I had to leave them behind which still breaks my heart but I knew I had a ten minute period to get out of the house and as far away as I could.

I had no support through the actual experience but once I had left I had wonderful support from my family. They now understand why my behaviour had been so erratic over the years. My mum has done a great deal of research which has helped her understand why I stayed for so long.

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BRISBANE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE

Working with Families, Women & Children

HOME SAFETY ASPIRATIONS

PO Box 3278 South Brisbane BC, Q 4101 | ABN 76 409 721 192

Phone 07 3217 2544 | Fax 07 3217 2679

bdvs@micahprojects.org.au | www.bdvs.org.au

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I also received support from the Brisbane Domestic Violence Service. It was a massive step making that call but my caseworker guided me through the process in such a wonderful way. She arranged for me to see the doctor and have a CT scan done. She made me feel human again and to have her tell me that the emotions I was going through were normal was the most positive thing anyone could have done. I cannot thank BDVS enough.

Currently, I am just getting through each day as it comes. I have decided to study so that I can help others in the future. I think it makes a difference to be able to speak with someone who has been through it before and understands the raw emotion. I have good and bad days but the bad days are getting less and less. Trust is always going to be an issue though.

My message for other women experiencing domestic violence would be to get out! You do not deserve to be treated this way. I know you feel as though it's your fault but that is their way of dealing with their own guilt. They blame us. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, you just have to believe. When you think there is no way out look again, and again, and again. They are human, they will make a mistake. You just have to be ready to act on it. He made the mistake of not locking the door that one day. If I hadn't acted immediately I know I would not be alive today to tell my story.

Be strong!

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