

Chelsea's Story

I was living with my twin sister prior to meeting my ex-husband. My twin sister was both physically and emotional abusive. She had attacked me with a pair of tongs with hot oil on them which left me bleeding with cuts. She would also kick me in the stomach, pull my hair, bite me, punch me and be verbally abusive. I spent most of my time locked in my room with the door handle taken off and the cupboard pushed against the door so she could not get in. I had an ensuite in my bedroom and a door leading outside so I could still use the bathroom and get outside to go to work etc. I had a tv in my room so I didn't mind having to be locked in there.

I met my ex-husband during this time. After a month of dating he asked me to move in with him and I happily agreed so that I could get away from my sister. We started living with his parents. After four months of dating, he proposed to me. A month later we moved into our first house together and three months later he asked if we could try for a baby. I was not ready but he kept asking and asking so I said we could try, thinking I wouldn't actually get pregnant as I was on the pill. I stopped taking the pill for 3 weeks and sure enough I fell pregnant.

We got married when I was five and a half months pregnant. Our son, Phoenix, was born four months later. My ex-husband's parents bought us a house to live in approximately five minutes from their house six weeks after Phoenix was born. My ex-husband was very verbally abusive. He would constantly say things like "you're not good enough, I'm going to bash you if you don't shut up", "you're so pathetic and stupid, no wonder no one wants you" and "I'm going to kill you and bury your bones out the back". He also threatened to kill himself and would emotionally and physically abuse me, once cornering me and not letting me leave. He was very controlling and did not allow me to contact friends or family. He also behaved inappropriately with our son, watching very scary movies such as *Saw* and *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* whilst he was in the room. Whilst bathing our son he would hold his head under water to 'teach' him to swim which was very upsetting to me and I never allowed him to bath my son again. He would also be violent towards me in front of our son. My ex-husband's mother was also very rude to me, constantly putting me down and trying to control me.

A year after we moved into the house his parents bought, we separated. I found out he had been having an affair with my then best friend for the last eight months that we were together. It was because of the affair as well as the physical and emotional abuse that I was finally able to get the courage to leave him. After leaving I had limited support as my family had cut me off and my ex-husband did not allow me to see my friends. When I had decided to leave, I was able to stay with my parents. I had planned on staying there for two weeks to get away and have some time away from my ex-husband to try and figure out what to do because as I had just found out about the affair and to get away from his abusiveness. During this time, my ex-husband sent me a text message saying we are now officially divorcing and that his parents had taken me off the lease and that I cannot pick up any of my stuff. I was left with just a suitcase for me and a suitcase for my one year old son. I had nothing. No home, no bed for me, no bed for my son, no belongings at all except for a few clothes. The hardest thing about leaving was knowing that this was going to be the end, that I didn't know what was going to happen and how upset I was about having to bring Phoenix into a world that seemed so cruel.

Since I have left I have had support from my friends, family and a number of Micah Projects activities including Young Mothers for Young Women, Participate in Prosperity and Brisbane Domestic Violence Service. I couldn't have done it without this support.

Following our separation, my ex-husband continued to bully me as did his family and friends. He would threaten me and say hurtful things through Facebook and text messages. There was one incident in which my ex-husband locked himself and Phoenix in his house and would not give him back. I had to call the police to help get my son back. After this, I went and stayed with my parents. I was told by my lawyer I had to allow my ex-husband to spend time with our son so we went to court and he was able to see our son again. My ex-husband would use pick-up and drop-offs as a way to harass and bully me. He would even bring his friends to try and intimidate me.

Over the years there were many times when my son would return with lots of bruises, cuts, skin ripped off his ankles, scars and other signs of abuse and neglect. My ex-husband would either provide explanations that did not match up with my son's symptoms or did not provide any explanation at all. There was even a time my son had to be hospitalised. Also, my son would return saying things to me like "I'm going to kill you, you're going to die" which were similar things to what my ex-husband used to say to me. Phoenix also returned saying "you're already dead". My ex-husband continued to threaten me saying things like he would "come back and haunt me" if I did not do what he wanted. He would also say things like "you should go back to the cess pool that you came from", "your mind is too far gone" and "your friends are a figment of your imagination". He said so many hurtful things but luckily

I had them all in text messages so I had proof of his behaviour as well as photos of injuries my son returned with from his father.

I ceased custody from my ex-husband last year. My son is now fully toilet trained, has stability and is extremely happy. In January this year, my ex-husband accepted supervised fortnightly weekend visitation in front of the judge. I had finally felt comfortable that my son will be protected and treated properly. I now also have a domestic violence protection order against my ex-husband.

I am now happily engaged with a new partner. I couldn't have done it without him; he is a brilliant father figure for my first born son. We have been together for a year and a half and have a beautiful baby boy together. We also have full care of my first born son and my ex-husband spends time with his son fortnightly weekends under supervised visitation only.

It was very hard to start a new relationship. I was scared to trust another man, scared whether I'd have to go through anymore Domestic Violence if I did get into another relationship, worried as to whether another man will do what my ex-husband did. I was worried about whether I deserved the treatment or not, wondering whether being treated that horribly by my ex-husband was normal, something I will always have to go through and never get away from, would every man abuse me or hurt my son like my ex did?

Was there truly a man out there who would be the man of my dreams who will be my best friend, who won't hurt me or my son, who will give me and my son our happy ending, who will protect us and love us? I needed to know that I needed to trust him, not only for me but for my son too. It was a very hard thing to think about because the only thing I cared about was making sure my son was happy. When I met my now fiancé I was nervous and scared, but I decided to give it a go. Straight away we had a magical connection - he is intelligent, sweet, caring, respectful, old fashioned - romantic, he would open doors for me, when we went to restaurants, he would stand behind my chair and wait for me to sit down and help me into my chair and then he would sit down, he would cook me dinners, take me out on dates, spend time with my son, take me and my son out for a day. He had a lovely family that straight away accepted me and my son and my family really liked him too. He made me so happy, he made my son happy, I have never felt so happy for as long as I can remember.

I had been through so much, and finally I found happiness in a man that I could trust and that would do anything that would make me and my son happy. It took me a while to introduce my son to him though at first because I wanted to make sure that I was making the right decision for my son and for myself. When the time was right, I then introduced my son to him. He and my son are so close, my son sees my fiancé as a very close friend, someone he can talk to, and that he can also play games and toys with. When my fiancé moved in with us it was quite the change for my son

because it had been just me and him for three years. It was very different for my son at first so it did make him crave my attention more and more which is very understandable but we made sure he knew he is our top priority and that we are both here for him and now he gets to have a new person to play games with and to be there for him just like me, mummy. My son and my fiancé developed similar interests in things which gave them things to talk about and play games with.

I have still carried scars from the domestic violence, but my fiancé helps me get through it, we talk about it, and he is a wonderful support with everything I went through. He makes everything so much easier and even though I have scars from the domestic violence from my ex-husband, my fiancé helps me feel so comfortable and loved and my son too. He helps my son feel comfortable, safe and happy. My fiancé and I had a son together too, and now we are a family of 4. We now have a puppy too. We have never been so happy. At first it was hard to open myself up to falling in love again, but I'm so glad I did, because I have never felt this happy. I have found my soul mate.

If you are experiencing domestic violence I know how hard it is to talk to someone, scared in case your partner finds out. Do not be afraid. Make sure you keep your friends close, always have someone you can turn to and talk to. You deserve to be treated better; no one should experience domestic violence. If you have children, remember you need to protect yourself and them. Do not stay with an abusive partner because of your children, get out of there and stay with a friend or family member that you can trust and take your children with you. Talk to people who can help e.g. BDVS. They helped me through so much, I could not have done most of the things I have done without their help. Remember, you are never alone. There will always be someone, somewhere that you can turn to for help.