

A Powerful Journey

Stories of women leaving violent situations

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Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) was established in July 2000.

Previously known as NEWomen, Women's Health Goulburn North East is the government funded specialist women's health service for the Goulburn Valley and North - East Victoria.



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This book is a compilation of the stories of 14 women in the Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria. Our sincere thanks to them. Edited by Debra Parkinson, Kerry Burns and Claire Zara.

Artwork is by the women, facilitated by Jacquie Coupé during a creative arts session.



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Help lines

Police 000

Cooroonya 03 5722 1100 or 1800 721100

Cooroonya Domestic Violence Service offers a free, confidential service for women and children who are affected by domestic violence. Cooroonya provides a crisis response to women and children as well as ongoing support and referral to a range of services.

Community Legal Service 02 6056 8210

The Albury Wodonga Community Legal Service Provides free information, referrals and legal advice to people living in North East Victoria and especially those who are disadvantaged in their access to justice.

Women recommend ...

- ◇ We believe
- ◇ We listen
- ◇ We're patient
- ◇ We give information
- ◇ We accept her choices

Ask workers to tell women...

- ◇ What Domestic Violence is
- ◇ Of their rights within marriage and partnership
- ◇ What a healthy relationship is
- ◇ There's a better life
- ◇ Stay close to people and things that support and nourish you

Ask workers to teach others ...

- ◇ That Domestic Violence is real, it happens, and is a crime
- ◇ The perpetrator could be their good mate, the school president, their brother
- ◇ That it has a ripple effect through the community and through generations
- ◇ That Domestic Violence has no excuse

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Introduction

These are the stories of 14 women from the Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria. They are the complete stories as told to two researchers from Women's Health Goulburn North East. The only editing was to conceal identities where women requested anonymity, and for clarification.

The stories are real and raw, and disturbing in the descriptions of violence inflicted on women and children.

Women's Health Goulburn North East conducted a qualitative research project in 2003 which involved interviewing 16 women in our region about their experiences of leaving a violent situation. Fourteen of their stories are included here. The sample included three Koori women, and three women with culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. There was a range of socio-economic status represented, and an age spread from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. Women from all parts of the Hume region participated, some from major provincial towns, some from small towns, and some from rural areas. All of the women had children, suggesting that it may be valuable to conduct further research with women who have no children.

We believed that hearing women's stories was a way to honour their knowledge of violence and to be informed by their knowledge. We felt the stories would give women an opportunity to make public what has been confined to the privacy of a relationship, and could play a role in confirming that the personal is, indeed, political. What happens to one woman is not a result of her individual inadequacy, but the effect of the way we construct our society – privileging some and penalising some. Through their stories, women could construct meaning of their experience and use that interpretation to reconstruct personal power.

We wanted to hear from women who have experienced Domestic Violence about what was helpful to them, both from the Service System, and from

family and community support. Through the research, we sought to identify areas of action for improvement in our response to women's experiences of violence, and to engage the service sector and the informal sector in this response.

This research has been conducted from a feminist standpoint position, choosing to privilege the voices of women who have experienced domestic violence and the oppression that is overt in such an experience (Millen 1997: Trinder 2000). It is notable that most of the women had compassion for their abuser, and wished for them a less troubled life.

Researching domestic violence is sensitive work. We were acutely aware that interviews had the potential to raise anxiety and stress levels for participants. Measures were taken to minimise potential risks, and women were asked to complete an evaluation of their participation in the research. The women confirmed in their responses that there was intrinsic value for them in the research itself. Telling their stories in some way freed them.

This research project was approved by an Institutional Ethics Committee registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council. This book of stories is a companion publication to the research report, 'A Powerful Journey: A Research Report – Women Reflect on What Helped Them Leave'.

Kathy

I have seen fear in my children's eyes, a fear that I have felt. A fear that no one should experience. I have felt fear that makes you ache inside, you can't speak, and when you try there is no sound.

Leaving. Which time? I left several times. As the violence became more intense so did my leaving needs. I left many times. We got back together thinking that it would work. Paul could be a load of fun. He would play with the kids and take us places. There were good times as well as bad, but the bad times overtook the good. When things were good they were great. Paul was very entertaining and exciting, the children loved to play with him and everybody would be in high spirits.

The children and I sought refuge close to where we lived. We then were placed in a safe house, also local. This was fine for a while but Paul found us. He had followed me home from the street one afternoon and soon after that he knew our every move and then it all started again.

Paul began coming to the house. He had threatened me on several occasions and assaulted me. One time he got into my roof. He had been looking through the ceiling fan in my bathroom watching me take a bath. When I became aware of this I felt horrible and ashamed to the point where I was nauseated. I felt myself as very unsightly and repulsive.

Paul would help himself into the house on several occasions. One night Paul came down through the manhole and stole my money. I woke up, and he just spun right out. He kicked me several times in the face. After he finally left I called the police (acting on my Intervention Order). When they came they told me I needed proof that it was him, and that it was my word against his.

Paul's visits became more frequent and so did the abuse. There were holes in

the walls and he had smashed the television and other furniture.

The women from the Women's Resource Centre (they owned the safety house) visited weekly. When the house had become damaged, I felt guilty. I thought that they would be upset with me. I felt it was my fault because I could have taken more precautions so as not to be followed home. But, on an ordinary day he would have been at work. This was a safe house, and I was so worried about what they would do or say when they discovered the damage that Paul had done that I hid in the house and didn't answer the door. I feared losing the house and I didn't have any other place I could go.

After about three weeks of me not answering the door, they let themselves in and found me. My eyes were swollen and bruised, and there were cuts to my mouth and my face. My torso was also very bruised and sore. I was an emotional wreck. They were wonderful. They took me to the doctor's and decided that for our safety we had to leave the state.

Within twenty-four hours we were on our way interstate. Our only luggage was one striped bag and one bag of nappies.

I was scared and anxious. We were not to tell anyone, not even my family. I had also felt a real sense of freedom, a start to a new life.

Paul found us about three months later.

We lived up interstate for a few years. Things remained up and down with Paul.

We moved back to Victoria because Paul had got himself into some strife. He was in trouble with the police. Things between Paul and I were bad again after a while, so I left him again.

Our last big move was to the North East, and we still reside here. We started off in the women's refuge. It was a good place and the workers there were

terrific. They were supportive and reassuring to the children and me.

Initially I felt a little apprehensive about coming to this particular refuge because they told me over the phone that my eldest son would not be able to stay with me because of his age. They thought that he may display anger due to living with violence and that he was sure to turn out violent. I eventually convinced them that he was very compassionate and loving. He has a very gentle nature.

Finding refuge. I was grateful to be living in the refuge, my kids had other children to play with and were happy, and I had women to talk to. Life wasn't too bad living in the refuge... It was quite good really. The refuges that we have stayed in have all been very clean, well run and safe. The workers have been wonderful. They had genuine personalities and were totally unselfish.

After settling for a few days they helped me to enroll the children into school, and arranged childcare for my two-year-old. They helped with any legal matters that I was facing. There is a wonderful network of organisations and departments that I - or other woman in dire situations - may need to access, such as counselling and workshops.

Society is still very naive about violence and women's refuges. Refuges offer a necessary safe haven for women and children desperate for safety.

Refuges have been perceived as inadequate, subordinate, and some community members don't wish to acknowledge or accept them as part of their community. I have heard people refer to the people who run them as lesbians, men haters, and extremists.

Some people are very harsh and draw conclusions as to what type of person you must be. Women living in refuges have been stereotyped as being unintelligent, troublesome, poverty-stricken, homeless women. They are also presumed to be the lower class of society. Domestic violence occurs in many households rich or poor, and smart women are also affected and in need of

refuge assistance. Some people, with their obstinate minds, may never change their views.

I met one such person. He is the barman at one of the local hotels. He would have me wait for a long time before serving me. When eventually I did get served he would grunt. He would never place my change in my hand. He'd snarl and throw it on the bar. I had always remained polite and always spoke pleasantly. I was at the hotel one evening with a good friend, (a regular) when Luke, the barman, said to him that he should invest in a dog collar, and asked had he had his shots for rabies.

I was humiliated both for my friend as well as myself. Luke had said this very loudly. Some people laughed, but most were pretty disgusted.

This wasn't so long ago. I thought he would tidy up his attitude and eventually come around. However, it's been five years since I first had the displeasure of meeting Luke and he will never change. Luke will remain a moron and an arrogant pig. He is just a rude old prick. At times he had upset me so much that I would burst into tears. I gave up trying to understand why he disliked me so strongly. I have been told it is because I came from the refuge.

He doesn't get to me any more and when I go to the pub and he is there, automatically he stresses, and I am sure he has a bad day. Bugger him because I will have a good day. His loss!

There are people who are good-hearted and non-judgmental out there.

While attending the hotel on another occasion I was given a message that had been left for me. It was written on a coaster telling me to mention this bloke's name to the real estate, and to say that he would be prepared to give me a character reference. I was having a hard time looking for a property to rent mainly because my only reference was from the refuge.

After this I had houses coming out of my arse! It turned out that the

gentleman concerned was a prominent member of the town. I was thankful and thought how wonderful it was of him. I was approved for government housing, so we took the house that was available for us.

Trouble continues. We have had a lot of support from the police in this town and this has enabled us to live separately from Paul. Paul found us here as well, despite the fact that I had changed my name and all. He said he had changed and yes, I starting seeing him again.

Paul became violent again, but this time he faced punishment for his actions.

We had lost faith, in the system, but now it has been restored.

Prior to moving to this town, I was fighting a losing battle. Paul's father was a former policeman and this was always in Paul's favour. My Intervention Orders were useless and he was never charged for the many breaches. He got off so many times, so he had a free run so to speak, not always but often.

Paul has been charged and punished for all of the offences he has committed here. The police have breached him and have always been prompt when we have had to ring them. It was difficult for Paul to intimidate me. It was also difficult for Paul to misbehave in this town.

Paul moved back to his hometown. The distance was good, but no amount of distance stops these blokes, it is just an inconvenience. Most of the abuse is now verbal over the phone. Paul came to see the children often, a little too often. He became friendly with my friends. I now felt we were heading down a familiar track. Paul was here nearly every weekend, socialising in the same circle as me. So although separated, it wasn't much different than being together.

I started to discourage Paul from going everywhere with me and left him with the children to carry out his access with them, as he should. Paul was now ringing all the time abusing and threatening me. He was pissed off because I

disassociated myself from him. He didn't see the children as much and his access was inconsistent and awkward. He was angry and intimidating toward me again. Paul's threats and outbursts were now at a point of severe harassment.

I changed my phone number. A few days later I received a telephone call from the local police station asking if everything was OK and could I come to the station. A police officer picked me up and drove me to the station. We went into an interview room where they told me that serious threats had been made on my life. Paul had gone on a rampage and had threatened to kill me. Paul's parole officer took this seriously and rang the police.

I was scared because he was currently on a road of destruction and was very irrational. I know very well his capabilities. The children were scared as well. I had told them to come straight home from school and kept them very close to me. They sensed my fear and anxiety and now knew Paul was angry.

The Department of Human Services. The police were trying to locate Paul's whereabouts so they could serve him with an Intervention Order. They couldn't find him....

My second youngest child, Josh, was on a school bus. He saw a Harley Davidson motorcycle. He thought that it was his father and that Paul had killed me. Josh ended up at the hospital suffering an anxiety attack. The school notified Human Services. DHS attended my house that afternoon.

They had contacted the police earlier that day and were aware of the threats. They told me that we had to pack some clothes because we were going to a refuge interstate.

I said, "What about my house and all my stuff?" I was then told there was no time to organise my house and all my stuff and that when it was safe we could come back. I thought, "Fuck that", and told them I wasn't going anywhere.

I was sick of running. And what if he came and burnt my house down? There would be no one here to stop him. They said that they would have to place the kids somewhere safe. I agreed.

So they took my children.

They took my kids. The kids were gone for two weeks and I met them every night at McDonald's. They missed me and wanted to come home.

I had to go to court to get my children back. I was mortified. I thought that they would just be returned to me when Paul wasn't a threat.

They told me that the children couldn't and didn't want to come home.

The Department had been to the school to interview the kids, and they misinterpreted what my son had said. They asked Josh when he wanted to come home, to which he answered "Two weeks", because this is what he'd been told and he meant he didn't want to be any longer than that. Josh was crying to me every night, telling me that he wanted to come home.

I had to fight to get my kids back. I was shocked.

The Department claimed I wasn't able to provide a safe environment for the children. I flipped. I had tried very hard to protect my kids and myself from being hurt. The only way to stop Paul was if he were dead or locked up. I hadn't asked him to my place, he just came.

Human Services had, somewhere along the line, turned things around. I was placed on a Supervision Order. I was unsure as to why. As far as I was concerned the sole reason for their involvement was Paul's actions.

DHS and the police together made it very difficult for Paul to disobey the Intervention Order that had been placed on him and he had no choice but to comply with the fact that his access was now to be supervised. It was a

relief that Paul wasn't to come to our house.

There were times when Josh didn't want to go with his father, but he knew he didn't have a choice.

Paul on one occasion had told Josh to, "Wave to your mother, because you won't see her again".

Josh had looked back at me and I could see him screaming. Paul stopped the car as Josh was getting out. I walked over to grab Josh but Paul pulled him back into the car, then he backhanded him and locked the door. I was crying, and begging Paul not to force him to go and to let him stay home this time. Josh was screaming, "Mummy I don't want to go". This was unbearable. Paul took off and returned the children Sunday evening.

At Court. I attended court to apply for the return of my children. DHS told the magistrate that my kids didn't want to come home. I said that this was bullshit and my children had told me that they wanted to be home. My solicitor asked that the children be collected from school and brought to the courthouse so we could ask the children whether or not they wanted to come home. The children told the magistrate that they wanted to come home. They were home that evening. (I knew my children wanted to come home.)

I was glad that Paul was now to have supervised access. This meant that he couldn't take off with the children.

Josh didn't want to go on the first visit they had organised. DHS had told Josh prior to the visit that from now on it was his decision whether he wanted to see his father or not and that they would protect Josh if Paul got angry.

DHS rang on the morning that the first access was to take place. I told them that Josh didn't want to go. The case worker asked to speak to Josh and she told him it would be best if he went and if at any time Josh wanted to

terminate the visit it would be fine.

Josh wet his pants before going that day.

They promised there would be big people around and the visit was to take place at their offices, so Josh agreed to go. They lied. The visit took place at McDonald's with only one female DHS worker present.

My eldest son Anthony travelled to McDonald's with Paul. He was stressed the whole time. Paul reached under his seat and produced a pistol, and said, "I could pop this slut!"

The Department had lied and put my kids in danger. Firstly, the visit took place at McDonald's, not at their offices as they had promised. Secondly, no big people, just one pathetic female caseworker.

I had told DHS that Paul was not to be underestimated.

Paul was using drugs – amphetamines - heavily and was truly not sane. I had explained that Paul was unpredictable at the best of times and especially when under the influence of drugs. I informed the DHS supervisors of the danger that their department had placed my kids in. They just played it down.

Paul had rung the Department on several occasions threatening that he was going to blow up their offices with them in it. He also said, "They're my fucking kids, you can't tell me what to do! I'm going to knock all you fuckers!"

They told me I couldn't protect my kids. Well, they should take a look at themselves. Hypocrites. The Department put my children in danger, and did not report the threats he had made towards them.

Within the month Paul was arrested and charged. He is currently serving five years for the possession of drugs and a pistol. Access has not occurred since.

DHS still remained on the scene. I was still on a Supervision Order. What a crock of shit! I love my children, and they certainly didn't need protecting from me.

The caseworkers would visit frequently to see how the children were. They were hopeless communicators, and had no idea how to talk to kids, misinterpreting everything the children told them. Our lives were turned upside down, my children and I found ourselves stunned and confused as the people that once seemed to be helping us were now placing extra stress and complications on our everyday life. My children feared DHS taking them away again and felt apprehensive about their visits.

It was humiliating to be involved with the Department. If there was anything I was sure of, it was that I have always been a good mother to my children.

Everyone who knew me couldn't believe that I was in the system.

The school passed judgment on me without even knowing why I was placed on the Order in the first place. The teachers had assumed me to be a bad mother. Emily had eaten her play lunch on the way to school one morning. The school then notified DHS, and then DHS wanted to place someone in my house to help me to feed the children and teach me how to prepare their lunches. No shit Sherlock. I have four healthy children, fifteen years, thirteen years, eight years, and five years.

The children. My son Anthony recently told me that one day when I had called for him, Paul had intercepted him and punched him in the nose saying, "Go to your fucked up mum, mummy's boy".

There was one time when Josh was punched into the wall. Paul was yelling abuse at him calling him a "maggot dog". His reason was because Josh rang the police when Paul was yelling at me. (DHS told Josh to ring the police when he was scared).

For every action there is a reaction. Paul's violent behaviour and my insecurities have left the children timid and of low self-esteem.

I have seen fear in my children's eyes, a fear that I have felt. It is a fear that no one should experience. I have felt fear that makes you ache inside, you can't speak, and when you try there is no sound.

Self-esteem builds confidence, self worth, and a ground for your two feet to stand on. It allows you to be upright instead of falling down.

I stood at the school fence one day as it was lunchtime, and all the children were out playing in the schoolyard. I spotted Josh. He was standing at the basketball court where a group of kids were playing. I heard Josh ask if he could play with them, one kid yelled, "No! You weirdo". Josh turned and walked away and he then went and sat alone and watched the kids play. My eyes filled with tears and my body ached. I felt so sorry for him.

Josh is a very timid and gentle boy who had for so long, through no fault of his own, alienated himself from his peers. Josh has a few friends now, but some kids still think him a bit weird because he was such a loner at one stage. He has since told me that the kids didn't like him because he freaked out a lot when he thought his father was around - his anxiety attacks.

My daughter, Emily, was also alone. She is not as timid as Josh but suffers also, particularly a fear of failure. She won't try anything. If there is doubt in her mind she gets quite discouraged and upset and this causes her to be apprehensive towards even the most meagre tasks. Emily often refers to herself as dumb and stupid when she feels that her efforts may be less than perfect. Her fear of disappointing others and a lack of confidence within herself results in many confrontations with the teacher and other class members.

Troy is somewhat the inverted type, he doesn't show much emotion at all,

whether it be gladness or sadness. This is his way of protecting himself. He has a wall surrounding him that saves him from any pain. He shows nothing. Failure haunts him. He is always trying his hardest to please and impress others only to be humiliated and have his efforts ridiculed.

When you believe that you have done the best you can do and you feel proud of what you have done, to then be told how stupid you are, it can only diminish one's self esteem.

Anthony is very sensitive, and caring. He was showing signs of anger as he was reaching puberty and maturing into a young adult, but as time goes on his anger has lessened. He took on the role of protecting me, however this turned into an anti-male attitude. He thought all men were a threat, demanding males leave my house especially if he thought intimacy was a possibility. Anthony slowly gained trust for a few males and I have since been able to enter into relationships.

Recently he has obtained an apprenticeship. He goes out more and socialises with his fellow workers. Anthony has gained confidence within himself and realises that I am going to be OK and I am not going to come to any harm.

It is great to see Anthony's confidence being restored and I only hope that it keeps building.

More about DHS.

DHS suggested Emily was no longer allowed to hug people, and I had to sit her down and list three people she was allowed to hug. She truly cried and said, "I just like people mummy...."

On Saturday and Sunday mornings, the kids and I would have the music going, the kids would be bopping and dancing around the lounge room in their underwear. This was a no, no. It wasn't appropriate behaviour for children of the age five and eight years.

You've got organisations that are meant to help, but they can be really intimidating. DHS belittled me, making me feel inadequate as a person and a mother. My kids were made vulnerable, they once again felt different and out of place. DHS were very intrusive, and had arrogant, insulting attitudes.

It's as if they scoff at your unfortunate life. As if I chose this life and the shit that comes with it! What an asshole bunch.

Any respect and faith I had in the Department has now gone. I do believe that we need agencies that offer support, protection and security for children facing physical or psychological abuse.

DHS in my eyes are doing more harm than good. An overhaul of the current system is due. The caseworkers need a few extra diplomas, i.e. one on customer relations and perhaps one in general manners, tact and respect.

Scars. There was a time when I stayed inside for a couple of months. I think I probably suffered some sort of nervous breakdown. My son Anthony, aged eight years, did the shopping, and paid the bills. We lived near a shopping centre, and he would push the trolley home full of groceries.

I couldn't bring myself to answer the door, and if someone were to visit I would hide in the bedroom. I couldn't look at myself, as it would make me cry and I just wanted to die, I felt everyone would be happier if I was gone. I believed everything was my fault because I was such a disgusting sight and that's why Paul hated me.

I once caught him masturbating over a "People" magazine. He kicked me and pushed me back to bed and he said, "Look at what I have to do because your body's so fucked."

The physical aspect of abuse is obvious but the emotional aspect is not. Emotions cannot be seen therefore they can remain neglected. Depression

and other emotional frustrations play a part in every day life, and can remain a silent, slow destroyer of who we are or once were.

We remain in these relationships because we have lost faith in ourselves; after all the one person we love and would do anything for makes us believe we are such sorry excuses for life. Our spirit breaks, and subconsciously we believe ourselves to be worthless. We fear failure, and the loneliness we have previously experienced, makes us become dependent upon the one who hurts us. We then become vulnerable and we allow our men to intimidate us.

Through intimidation we accept that this is the way things are and will be and it's the only life you will have.

Self-esteem is the key to our undoing but it is also our key to a better life with confidence and self-respect. We don't take every day criticisms so seriously or to heart, when we like ourselves and are confident in ourselves.

No one had ever hit me, or made me feel so horrible, or unlikable except for Paul. I wasn't aware that my self-esteem was diminishing. I just loved Paul so much.

I still have feelings for Paul and always will, but I have confidence now and I have become independent. I now believe that if it doesn't work then it won't, and that relationships need not ever be an effort.

There was a time in my life where I was overflowing with happiness, high on life. I was a positive, carefree, and contented person. Slowly I am returning back into that person I was, and it is a great feeling.

Yeah, shit happens, but don't waste time dwelling on it. Accept that what has happened has happened and can't be changed, so deal with it. When we wake every day it is our day. We don't have to let anything bring us down. We can say what we feel and why we feel this way. We are entitled to express our opinions. We should also respect others opinions even if we don't

agree.

I don't piss in anybody's pocket and I don't allow anybody to piss in mine. I choose who I want in my life and avoid those I do not want. I do not belittle anyone and I don't like to see anyone put down.

I will never allow myself to be intimidated, hurt physically or emotionally abused again.

I love my children dearly and I now know that I can restore faith in their minds by showing example. I don't allow anyone to have the chance to treat us in any negative way, shape, or form. I have had a couple of short-term relationships, ending without any major dramas and based on mutual agreements. These men and myself hold no malice and we still remain on speaking terms.

I have had times where I have wanted Paul to feel extreme pain and to be knocked off his pedestal. I have felt jealous when Paul found a girlfriend. I wished he could have loved me; but then Paul abused her as well. Now I hope he does have a good life. I hope he can have a good relationship with the children and overcome his problems, so he too can lead a normal life.

I will care about and love Paul forever. He is the children's father. However I have not forgiven him for our suffering. I have moved on and my memories are still there but have little effect on me emotionally and I find my experiences a lot easier to talk about. I can be honest and am no longer ashamed because it wasn't my fault. I was a victim.

I don't think I will ever truly forgive him. I will always have (very quietly,) the "I wish" syndrome. I will never go back. I have respect for myself. I believe I am a good person and should be treated as such...

It takes time to feel good about yourself. I still have inhibitions, and on occasions I look at myself and see an ugly, disgusting person, and other times

I don't. Some times I can't walk out my front door, but sometimes I CAN.

Postscript. I have been hospitalised eleven times. I have sustained many injuries such as a broken jaw, ribs thumb, nose, cheekbone, and toe. My teeth were smashed out and my head has been stitched up twice. Paul has hung me out the car door, my head only centimetres from the ground, whilst he was driving. He has assaulted me with a steering lock and hung me over a cliff.

Many times my children and I have been dumped in the middle of nowhere at all hours. A hair dryer was lowered into my bath. Paul was lifting it in and out of the water whilst I was in the bath. I have been spat on and ridiculed. Paul has head butted Anthony, knocking him clean out. He has also punched and emotionally abused him. Troy was dragged around the house by his hair, hit and emotionally abused. Josh has been thrown into the wall, hit, and also emotionally abused. Emily has witnessed the abuse. Paul has never hurt her physically, ever. Emily adores Paul and in her eyes he can do no wrong.

Some of these assaults I have no memory of but the blood up the walls and the pools of blood on the floor tell me where it had occurred. The bruises on my face and body tell me that it's my blood. There were times when I thought it wasn't going to end and I just wished that he would hurry up and kill me. I just wanted it to be over. The outbursts, at times would go on for hours. Paul says he has no idea what sets him off. Eventually he would have killed me. I wet my pants one time through fear.

Paul was unfaithful on several occasions, and lied a lot. One time he took me over to meet friends of his and I had a good time. It was when I was just starting to go out in the public. I got along well with them and they asked us back for a barbecue the following weekend. I was up early. Paul hadn't been home all night, but just in case we were still going out I got the children and myself dressed ready for the barbecue. When Paul got home he asked why we were dressed up. I told him that the barbeque was that day. Paul replied,

"Oh, I forgot to tell you but you aren't their cup of tea, so you're not welcome."

Paul took Josh, who was one at the time, and left Anthony and Troy at home. I cried and cried. I had gone to a big effort that day and had the children looking beautiful. I wondered what I had done for them to dislike me.

A few months later I ran into them down the town and they spoke to me. At first I thought it a bit rude to speak to me especially when they didn't like me. I said hello and they asked why I didn't go to the barbecue and continued to say that it would have been OK and there was no need for me to be embarrassed about my schizophrenia and that they would have paid for a new script. Paul had lied and told them I had run out of medication!

I like my new life without dramatic scenes, no fear, very few inhibitions, and the freedom to be whoever we want to be.

Chrissie

Towards the end when I became stronger, that was when he became violent - physically attacking me. It was so scary I can't describe it. It scatters the whole inside of me. Basically I feel people are good, this destroyed my sense of what should be and takes a while to get over.

I hadn't seen Luke for nine years, although he was always there on the periphery for me and then I saw him in town just the other day and I couldn't believe it. It was quite strange - just like going back to a time I've moved away from. It didn't bother me though, I was just surprised.

I am not sure of dates at the moment, I have lost a sense of time this year. We have lost a child in our extended family and time is not important in our grief.

I remember multiple things about leaving. It wasn't that I didn't love Luke anymore. It was that it was no longer a positive relationship for my children and me. I didn't see him as a good role model for my children. I also had this sense of death within me. I knew there was no hope, and he would change, but not fast enough for me. It was a big shift for me, very conflicting because I still loved him.

No one helped me to move. I had made my own inner decision even though I was encouraged by others to look at ways of trying to make it work. I had fundamentally changed the way I looked at things. I saw no way of resolving things. No one encouraged me to go. I had nowhere to go. We lived in the car, moving from friends' homes for two weeks. I literally pulled the plug.

I spoke with some services, but decided not to go to a refuge. I wanted to protect myself and my children from all negativity. Even at the ashram, I was not encouraged to come. I think they wanted me to be very sure of my decision. I stayed with people Luke didn't know so he couldn't find where I

was, especially to begin with.

Then I moved in with two very assertive and strong women, which kept him away. He was always there on the periphery, I would drive places and he would be there. We had chance meetings all the time.

I really felt there was nowhere to go. I had had a really strong connection with him, even though he was verbally abusive for such a long time. The longer I was away from him the more I realised how repressed I had been. We had always lived in very isolated areas, 30 to 40 kilometres out of town, isolated from everything and from family and friends.

I had a sense of fear. He was extremely explosive. Even if it was only a couple of times a year, it was like a tantrum, throwing things through windows, a real anger within him. I never knew when this would happen. I also had low self-esteem. I now have a much greater understanding of the triggers. He was a junkie, having a separate life from me. I was never sure what he was doing. He was supposed to be on methadone. He was always making an excuse for himself, with me never knowing.

In the early years he was never violent. It was him undermining me, through mental torture, verbal abuse and mind games - twisting things around, he was so clever. Towards the end when I became stronger, that was when he became violent - physically attacking me. It was so scary I can't describe it. It scatters the whole inside of me. Basically I feel people are good. This destroyed my sense of what should be and takes a while to get over.

The new home situation was challenging. Safety was an issue. It was a little while, a few months, before I settled in the country. I like being in the country and I chose to rent near some friends who agreed to be supportive; they were just down the road. Other people in this environment were also supportive. However, in the end you are still on your own when he comes. I'm not hiding from him. I had to do that - I knew he would think I was hiding. It was important to me to stand up for myself.

To begin with I had few friends, I cut all ties with his friends, I had nothing to do with them, which meant I was on my own totally. I didn't really have anyone. I remember thinking I haven't seen anyone for days, as opposed to a household where people were always coming and going. It was hard setting up a house. I was pregnant and had two other children. It was an extremely difficult time.

I had made a fundamental decision about not going back, or going into a relationship until I had sorted out why I had done this to myself. I needed to be on my own, establishing a nest, also because I was pregnant. I stuck with this for years. It was seven years before I went into a relationship with a man.

I didn't want to let people get too close. I didn't want any negative vibes. I had to be brutal about this. I wanted to be around uplifting, positive people. I went to the ashram to be around positive people who were self reliant and independent, however they were not nearby for me.

I had resolved to understand the meaning of all of this and stuck to it. Gradually new bonds were formed. This was subtle. I needed at least one hour per week for myself. Another friend became a very strong support. I had people who would take the children for an hour to allow me some time. People encouraged me to be more independent, like getting wood for myself. In this hour or so a week I would stay at home or go for a walk, do nothing, just be quiet. This really worked for me.

Another two friends were supportive, too. We had a reciprocal arrangement in swapping children, gathering wood, food shopping – practical, positive, community things. Neighbours would do small jobs for me. Living in a rural community was good, not imposing.

However, this house, both before and after the birth, was one of extreme and dramatic violence. It was good when I moved away two or three years later.

The next stage for me was living in a 1950's house on the river, and then I moved here. A new life was slowly starting to take place.

My yogic stuff has been my strength. I wanted tools to help me to resolve my situation and in the end it was up to me. I always think back to my own practices, to breathe deeper. I was hardly breathing at all before. All my strengths came from being disciplined. I was very disciplined - even neurotic, for example, with my diet. Not so anymore. I was very controlled and I developed a lot of willpower. It is important to have a good awareness of yourself - even when you blurt things out. Self-acceptance is important. I had a strong desire to improve, not just for me but so I can be a better person and parent and member of the community.

I feel it was an intelligent decision not to use services. I felt totally supported by a worker, a man, who described a women's refuge as a last resort. He said to find somewhere else if you can. The school principal and his wife put me up for a couple of days. I rang my mother who told me I had to find the strength as Australia was my home, and it would be running away to go back to where my mother lives.

I also had support from my naturopath and his wife. They were supportive. When I was assaulted they gave me practical things to do via phone conversations. This was during a time when I had lost direction for a moment.

The police came out - an older sergeant and a policewoman. They were caring, gentle, non-invasive, wonderful people really, and even now they ask after me. They ask, "Has he stopped harassing you?" In the end it is always up to you, you have to find the strength. I feel for women who can't tap into that.

I know that in terms of supporting a friend going through a similar situation, having been through it myself, I would have a great understanding. However, we are all individuals. Yoga is good, although not for everyone. I always speak well of the women's health service - they're good women. I would say,

"Find somebody or something you relate to. You need something there that takes you away. You don't have to live like that".

I am happy to help other people, however, I will not let it come into my home - any violence or negativity. I refer on to different therapists, and suggest to try different things, do some body work. I am supportive yogically.

Women have to find something in amongst the chaos that will give them strength to see things more clearly. They must search for what they desire to change in their situation. They must learn to know and trust that strength is there within them. I know of some women who never leave. I know one woman who waited until her husband died. In a way that too is OK.

I speak English but want to learn Sanskrit and yogic philosophy. My long-term goal is to go to India, after the children have left home. This interview has been just like going back. I can still see it all, I can't get rid of events. I would like to be able to eradicate all those memories, although the pain isn't there as it was at the time.

Leanne

It was in the shed. He had me up against the pole holding me with his hand on my throat and had the hammer in his other hand. He was banging it and just missing my head. I knew that if I screamed or did the wrong thing he would kill me. All I could think of doing was to look him straight in the eyes, and if he loved me, he wouldn't kill me.

I've been abused first by my partner and then by the legal system.

I've got Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I feel traumatised all the time. I lose my memory.

The first time I was told about counselling was in January this year – three years after I'd first contacted the police. Prior to that I'd never been told. No one ever tells you you're going to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. When you get it, you think you're going crazy. At first I was calm - for about a month. The doctor put in my medical report that I was calm, and that went against me in court. I'd wake in the night and have bad dreams, and sweats then start shaking, and feeling startled. Then I'd have this adrenaline thing.

People who have never experienced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder don't understand. It's so scary. People don't think it's related to what's happened. That's one of the things I found out.

You should be debriefed straight away. I got told off by one of the police sergeants. He told me off.

Here, I've been captured for five hours, driven around and around. Rod's been trying to hit trees and oncoming cars, suffocate me, hit me with a hammer.

He tried to suffocate me on Christmas Day. He was going around with really bad people. If they'd been nice, they'd tell him not to hurt me. But they didn't. I told him to make a choice, his friends or me. Prominent people in the town told me I should leave town because of the people Rod was involved with. They believed my life was in danger.

I said to Rod, "Take your things, I want you out now".

It was in the shed. He had me up against the pole holding me with his hand on my throat and had the hammer in his other hand. He was banging it and just missing my head. I knew that if I screamed or did the wrong thing he would kill me. All I could think of doing was to look him straight in the eyes, and if he loved me, he wouldn't kill me.

The thing was that his mobile phone rang, and he'd answer it. He was really nice as pie on the phone taking business calls. He was holding the door so I couldn't get out, nice as

pie on the phone, and then trying to suffocate me. He was taping the whole thing on a micro cassette recorder like he'd done with his previous partner.

Then he said I had to go with him in the car while he did his work. We would have been driving around for four hours. Just before the turnoff, he was screaming and yelling out goodbye to his son, and driving towards a tree as if he was going to smash into it. He was crying and had the look of a mad person, of someone who had totally lost it. I distracted him by trying to ring 000 on his mobile phone.

At the turnoff, he slowed down, and I jumped out. He came back and tried to run over me. I had to get back into the car because there was no one around. Then, he stopped the car, and he said to me, "What are you going to do when you get back? I'll track you down at any domestic violence place, so I may as well kill you now".

He's a locksmith, and he was saying to me, "Any place you go, any refuge, I'll find you".

Then he hit me ... He kept locking the door, and I kept trying to unlock it.

Finally, I managed to get out of the car. There were cars on the road, and for some reason he gave me back my mobile phone.

I took off and rang the refuge. I didn't ring the police because they had treated me really badly. I thought, "What's the use?" Twice before the police have let him out. I rang the refuge and said, "Can I stay the night?"

They asked why, and I said, "Because my boyfriend's been trying to kill me for five hours". The worker was calling the police on the other phone, when I saw that he was coming back towards me. I said, "He's behind me".

They said, "Shit".

He saw me on the mobile, and he just took off.

That night the police were looking for him, and he was changing the locks on a couple of local police stations! I stayed at a motel. He gave the keys to lots of places to his mate

who is a robber. I told the police and they got the keys back from him, but he can still run a locksmith business!

We were together for four years. I didn't know that leaving him was going to be the way it happened.

Sixteen years ago, my first husband was abusive. When I was asleep, he used to bash my five-year-old daughter. When I left him he was mean but not obsessive. Whereas Rod was going to kill himself and me. I thought I could leave him– I didn't know he would behave the way he did.

He used to threaten to get people to kill my kids and me. It was only in the last six months of our relationship that he turned bad. I found out why later, when he was in jail. The girl he's with now, he'd started an affair with her and after that he started treating me like I was the one having an affair. If I went shopping he'd follow me, ring me six times on the mobile. I wasn't doing anything wrong, but he was.

I didn't know when the court case was on, but people were staying at his house, and so I thought it must have been happening. I was scared to ring the court. The Registrar at the court was really mean. He said revolting things to me when I went there.

I got the worker from VAP [Victim's Assistance Program] to find out [about the court case], but she never phoned me back to tell me. I had to go to the office of [the local Member of Parliament] and get him to speak to the Registrar for me. I know the Registrar said stuff about me to him. Anyway, I found out the case was the next day. The DPP [State Prosecutor] said he'd asked the police seven times to tell me, and they wouldn't come out to tell me. Rod is friends with one of the policemen.

I didn't make any of it up. At the court case, Rod pleaded guilty, so I wasn't allowed to say anything. The police and the DPP didn't tell me that would be the case.

The DPP said, "You haven't been hurt that bad, we'll drop some of the charges".

Halfway through the second day of the trial, the barrister was going through the list of my injuries and how he'd hurt my kids. The barrister goes, "What! He's a monster!" I couldn't believe all the evidence I had that they didn't use.

In the county court it would be good to be able to give evidence on a video. I felt intimidated by his friends at the court. They were swearing at me in the hall. I told my barrister.

Rod and his friends waited out the front. We were let out the back. It was me and the worker from the refuge, and we were scared. Then the second day, another worker came with me. We were scared too.

He was sitting out the front just out of jail with his friends. There were 15 of them. There should be more protection. This time, I'll ask for protection or I'm not going. He'll probably get out anyway, so it's a waste of time.

I came out of court saying there is no justice in the world. One really good thing was the article in the local newspaper about the court case. They wrote the words, "Domestic Violence Vile" as a headline and named Rod and his business. So I wrote a letter to the newspaper saying I was the victim in this case and I wanted to thank them because the article was the only justice I've had.

It was hard to leave because we had the business. That made it hard. People know me as being from the business; it was the responsibility that goes with that. Even now, people come up to me and ask about that. For about twelve months I didn't shop in my hometown because I felt ashamed and judged.

We'd had a shop in the plaza. I'd work there five and a half days a week for \$80. That was the first kind of abuse – financial. I had renovated the houses he bought, and I didn't get anything out of it, and I was kicked out when he went to jail.

It's hard now because I live with my parents and he lives over the road from us. That's really hard. He's got a jukebox, and plays really loud music. Just to annoy me, he used to drive up on his Harley round and round the block and check on what I was doing. I told

someone I've got surveillance cameras. I thought it would stop him. And it did, for a while.

At first it's funny because you miss them. It's like grieving. It's bad enough when your relationship splits, but then for them to want to kill you... It's hard to work out.

In a way, Rod still has control of my life. At first, when I tried to go out with other men, he would try to run them over, or let my tyres down. So now I keep to myself.

Three years after leaving him, in January this year, I was talking to a bloke, and Rod said, "Don't talk to her, she's horrible, she's this and that". Three hours later, he came back with his girlfriend, who's an alcoholic, and he got her to bash me up. The publican hid me in the kitchen and they were trying to get through to the kitchen to kill me. He was going off his head, and saying to let his girlfriend through to finish me off. There were four blokes trying to hold him back, but every time he saw me, he'd just go off his head.

I went into shock. After three years he is still angry and wants to kill me. He hasn't moved on.

He would handcuff his previous wife to the bed, and then come home after work and uncuff her. He shoves pillows over your face to make you really scared. It's a thing to scare you. He knows how far he's going to go, but you don't know. Like the incident with the hammer. The look on his face was tormented and terrifying. He looks like someone who's insane. He grew up with it – his father raped his mother in front of the kids. Rod's older brother at the age of twenty went out in the bush and blew his head off. That's how traumatised he was with living with this family.

There are no boundaries for him. He's got some kind of brain damage from the alcohol, I think. Lately, he's always got a really angry look on his face, he walks really angry. His whole attitude has changed. He used to be fun, but he's changed now.

I've found most counsellors to be good. VAP is not good. I was in a group for DV people run by VAP and the outreach worker. That was when the court case was going on.

After my trial, the policeman who is friends with Rod came out to see me. Rod's family were trying to charge me with stealing a painting. He asked me "How did you get it?" I said, "It's been here for two years".

After Rod's dad died, Rod's friend put the painting in the boot of my car and it was there for six weeks. I told them how I did up his houses and worked for him all that time. They said to the solicitors that it was a property matter and I could probably get a house out of it. I said to the police they could take the painting. They said, "No, it's yours". But this policeman kept coming out to my house, three or four times, and asking for the painting back – as a favour to Rod. But I said, "You said it's a property settlement so I'm not giving it to you".

When it was a year after the kids' Restraining Order, and I wanted it renewed, I applied. I got this stupid magistrate. I took him a drawing my daughter did at counselling – it showed how she was scared. He didn't even look at it, he didn't care. The magistrate thought he'd get a Restraining Order on me! I said, "No, I'm not getting one on me because I haven't done anything wrong".

He was an absolute pig to me. When I couldn't get legal representation, the case was adjourned until the following Thursday.

He said to me, "I should make you pay for this man's time because you've wasted it".

But the next magistrate was really good. I had every bit of paper Rod had sent me from jail. There were two or three every day. He hung himself on these.

He'd asked me in a letter to drop the charges and to write to his barrister saying that I wanted to drop the charges. But the solicitor was really the one behind this letter. The letter used words Rod would never use. This was perverting the course of justice – asking me to drop the charges and the Restraining Order.

Rod admitted to the judge he wrote the letter. It was during this court case that Rod cross-examined me. He was allowed to because he represented himself. He didn't know what he was doing and the judge found him to be lying. So at least I got some justice.

But he couldn't extend my kids' Restraining Order because I couldn't prove that Rod had done anything in the last 12 months.

I wouldn't go to the police. If I had to do it again, I wouldn't go to the police. They treat you in a horrible way. The legal system is an abusive thing. The court and the police is the worst thing. You have to prove that it happened and it's like you're doubted and you're a liar and you're against men, and you just want them to go to jail, and you're a troublemaker. And the police have that point of view.

One of the female police was all right, but she's not there anymore. There's no one there now that I'd go to. In January this year they were really nasty to me.

They said first, "You've got a Restraining Order, why didn't you do the right thing?" I told them that we had. The publican and I phoned them three times. The incident happened on the Friday but the police didn't check if I had injuries, they didn't let me make my statement until the Sunday, and they didn't interview Rod until the Sunday, either.

They said they were not happy and said why hadn't I phoned as soon as Rod got on the premises? About a year earlier, I told a community-policing officer that Rod used to stand right behind me at the pub. She said there's nothing you can do because it's a public place, so I thought that I didn't have any rights. Another one said that's not true. There are different interpretations of the Restraining Order. Police up here just let you down. They don't want to know.

I had the opinion the police thought I was like the alcoholic people Rod hangs around with now. They think I'm one of them. They asked me my occupation.

I said, "Do I have to tell you? I don't want Rod to give me trouble at work".

When I told them everything - that I didn't fight back, that they swore at me for 30 minutes, that I ignored them, then went into the hotel with an old farmer, that they followed me and bashed me up, that it was totally unprovoked – then they changed their mind.

At that police station and the court they have this attitude towards me. Rod has told them that I'm mental and suffer mood swings. I even went to places for counselling and they could prove I wasn't mental, but they can still use it against me. It's like you had to prove yourself but the criminal doesn't. It's just canning and canning and it's just horrible.

My dad's view is that he [Rod] should live somewhere else. I'm settled in my hometown. If he had gone to jail and learned, it would be different, but he's gone to jail and got worse. He should be put somewhere else.

I don't think the policeman who sticks up for Rod should be in that position. He got sucked in by a psychopath. He was behind Rod arranging for me to visit him in the cells. Rod was cunning and was telling him that I was suicidal. It was like he believed Rod. They went to gym together. He always says it's the woman's fault. He says his first wife was mad. He's done it with three different partners and he's still the one who's believed.

If Rod decides to do something to me, at least Mum and Dad can hear – I live on the same property. He revs his bike and beeps the horn for an hour or so just to scare me. He has tried to run us off the road with his four-wheel drive. He was circling the block where the bloke I was seeing lives, waving his arms. The kids were scared. They hid in the toilets. I rang 000.

You don't know if he's going to shoot you. We went to another place, and hid the car because we were sitting ducks there. They let him out, and didn't even charge him.

My daughter, who is thirteen, used to be happy and with what happened with Rod she became really hard and tough. Only this year, she's started high school, and she's happy again. She's popular and strong. She wants to be a lawyer and only defend the good people. People say she's like me but she's stronger than me.

I have a 16-year-old son. He used to be really angry and rebelled when stuff first happened with Rod. But now he's a good, responsible kid. He works part time and goes to school and doesn't mix with losers, as he calls them. My son still has nightmares sometimes.

I have gone to TAFE and retrained myself in the Community Services field.

I have found that this has helped me deal with what has happened to me and also it is rewarding helping people. As I have always been a caring person only now I get paid for it.

My children and I are a lot closer than when I was with Rod as I can now give them a lot more attention, where as when I was with Rod he demanded a lot of my time.

Everything is a lot more peaceful now. I still live in fear (I had an alarm installed in January, so at least I feel a bit safer in my home) but at least he isn't in our home and running our lives. We don't have to watch what we say or worry about what sort of mood Rod's going to be in.

There is no more, 'one rule for my children and another for Rod's son'. We have choices now.

Sharona

I remember after that, driving down the highway crying, feeling happy and sad, and thinking, 'I'm free'. I had the kids in the car and a few bags, nowhere to go, and no family with me.

I see a counsellor once a week so I stir it up every week. My ex is a bit extreme so I have a new identity. All my Social Security files have been locked - since about a month after I left.

Doing this interview is really good for me. Realistically, you're one of tens of thousands of women and even if you can be counted in a small way it's a good thing. Domestic violence is the worst silent issue that's out there. They put people with half their heads hanging off on TV to stop speeding but this issue is ignored.

There are posters and information in the health centres, but women in violent situations often don't get to go there. It's not out there in the supermarkets or where they can see it. It's a silent issue and people turn a blind eye. It's as if it's not going on out there.

The first time I left, I went to a refuge. It was before I had kids. I was pregnant. The workers thought they were doing the right thing when they advised to me to have an abortion. They said I had no other children so I had no ties to this man. I booked in twice for the abortion and cancelled, but they still pushed me to this option. When I woke up after the operation, I had such a need to recreate that it pushed me back to him.

I left my ex lots of times and went back. I went interstate. I've done all sorts of things. I used to feel I couldn't breathe without him.

The biggest problem in our relationship was he had always been a drug addict and would steal. With his ex-Mrs., he would bring a TV home, and \$3000 to go shopping. She loved that. I'm not like that, and told him I didn't need it. So it was like he lost his job. He just stole then for money for drugs. And he stole from me.

People wonder why I was always scrubbing the bathroom. I was trying to make sure it was clean for the kids. He'd turned into a real junkie - he used to be just a drug addict. In the end, I thought if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Every three months, I'd have to have hepatitis and AIDS tests, and that's just a nightmare. I really believed I could help him, make him stop. I really, really loved him and he really, really loved me. I know he was very tormented at times. I know people say they cry and beg, and he said all that, but he said other things. He said when he was in jail, he

prayed to God that if he got a good woman he'd be good. But because he was doing speed for too long, I couldn't help him stop. He said to me, "I'm never gonna stop sticking the needle in my arm till the day I die".

The worst thing that happened was when I was seven and a half months pregnant with my first baby. We'd been to the pub, and I wanted to watch a baby video, which was due back the next day. It caused a fight, and he ended up throwing fish all over Mum's house. Mum slapped him gently and said, "Behave yourself".

I didn't want to get Mum involved so I said we should go home. Mum didn't want me to go. On the way home, he said, "I'm not going to bash you but you're going to pay". He started to be intimate when we were home, and then just got violent and wanted anal sex. I said no, and he punched and punched and punched me. And he raped me anally. He did it for 15 minutes and then he said, "Get up dog, and go have a shower". I was in the shower and just kept thinking, "Thank God it's over", and he came in and told me to touch my toes. He started again and said, "Take this you dog".

You think you're lucky if you get a backhander.

Apart from breaking my nose for not ringing him when I went shopping (I had to ring him every hour), there were other things he did. He threw knives at me. He did horrible, horrible stuff. But the psychological side is worse than anything else. Punch me, but don't hurt me emotionally.

When I left for good, it was pretty freaky. I'd never rung the police on my ex but I did that time. With his last girlfriend, he'd put half a shotgun down her throat, so they were freaked. The day before, he was really sick, and was half out of it, so I asked him if he would let me move out. I didn't want to be where people were hitting up all the time, and drawing all over the walls in texta. He started laughing and said, "You're not fucking getting your own place, cunt, the only way you're getting out of here is in a body bag".

The next day he started on me, and if I went to go out, he'd scream at me and he'd drag me in by the hair. I was breastfeeding my baby and he punched me really badly in front of the kids and was going to stab me with the screwdriver. I sort of snapped.

There were a couple of other ladies that lived near us who I was allowed to see anytime. One of them said if I ever needed help she'd call the police for me. A lot of people who know him wouldn't open their door to me. I never ran from a beating.

So, the kids are sitting on the couch. It's a house you can run around the hall. He was chasing me, and threw a glass vase. I saw the kids on the couch, and saw the front door open. I ran to the woman down the road and rang the police.

So, some of his family were in the house with me and he's at the window screaming at me. I picked up a cup of coffee, and said, "I'm just having a cup of coffee to calm down". He'd thrown my pusher over the road and smashed it. The one thing that saved me to this day is that at the time he didn't know I'd called the police. He would have smashed the windows and got into that house if he'd known. Then the police rang at the house and I said, "He's running around the house." They asked if he had firearms. I said, "I don't know, you know what he's like". It took them just five minutes to get there, but it doesn't take that long to kill someone.

When he knew what was happening, he rang me and said, "Sharona, all these police are on the corner. I'm sorry. Don't let it come to this".

I said, "It's too late", and hung up. The police went through the house with me. He hates cops and here he is with nine of them in his house. He said he'd kill me. I had hung all the old clothes up, and put my good clothes in bags and said they were for the op shop. I had all the important papers together in these bags too, ready to go. I left a lot of stuff behind. I always could not leave because I couldn't stand the thought of leaving stuff behind.

He used to keep me up all night, and get me to do jobs, and then he started to keep my son with him all the time, so I couldn't leave.

I feel sorry for the girl on the corner. I knew her and occasionally would visit her. All the police cars pulled up there and rang me from the corner. He thought she had called the police and he gave her a really hard time for a while afterwards. The old lady who let me phone the police was not exactly a relative but was close to all his family. She had been in the same situation. After I left, she had a lot of trouble. I was in her house and she wouldn't let him in. My brother had trouble with him, too. He smashed all his car windows in. He said he'd run over him.

You have to think about help for people who cop the abuse after the woman has gone. Anyone who has helped could be in danger.

It affected my mum and my siblings who couldn't protect me. It's far reaching. It's like a disease. He told me I'd never set foot in my hometown again (where my family is). That was July last year. For two months I had peace at night because he was in jail.

Then my mum phoned to say my nan was in hospital sick. He'd got out of jail the day before.

It's wrong that you're not told when they get out. The police can tell you after they're out, but it could be too late then. Everybody said to me, "Don't go down the street, keep a low profile".

Why should I hide, and not go and see my family? While I'm hiding, he's still powerful. I took that fear away because I've been back lots of times. He is someone who has had such power over me. So what's he going to think? All his family saw me when I went to town.

I find the police overworked and underpaid. They didn't have the manpower to send an escort with me to Centrelink or to the bank, the day I left. You've got someone like him who was going to shoot his ex, and who had been threatening to kill me, and I still have to walk around on my own. And then they told me at Centrelink that the social worker wasn't going to be in till after lunch. By then, I was frantic, thinking he was going to walk around the corner any second. I had the three kids with me, and the baby was only 3 months old.

I had to get money from the ATM, which is in the middle of town - the most public place. After getting the money, I went back to the car to find the parking lady had fined me. She wouldn't retract the fine even though I told her what was happening. So I felt the police had just put me back in the same situation I was in, in the house. If the police can't help, then someone should.

I remember after that, driving down the highway crying, feeling happy and sad and thinking I'm free. I had the kids in the car and a few bags, nowhere to go, and no family with me. When you do have an extreme case like that, you shouldn't be left out on your own, with no petrol, no money, nowhere to go. If I went to Mum's that's the first place he'd look.

I had a motel for that night. At that point there was a social worker who I was still friends with - from when I was in a refuge, and she helped me organise that. I've lived in a few places so I'd put some furniture in storage. I wanted to get my photos from the storage sheds. It didn't matter to me if he got the rest - and he didn't know it was there anyway. I went to the DV outreach centre. SAAP accommodated me for two days in motels because there were no beds in Victoria at that stage! There was a big shortage. I remember I couldn't get through on the domestic violence line when I was there.

Because I had so many danger areas, it was hard to place me. My son had his birthday in the motel. I had a candle and a doughnut for his birthday cake. Then September 11 happened and it

was just a horrible, horrible time. After this, I was in actual refuge accommodation for three months. You have social workers out the back, and 10 to 15 different groups of women over that three month period. You have to share everything and there's only this one room that's your private space.

Then it was Christmas. I said I was going to lose it if I didn't get somewhere for me and the kids soon. There was a bungalow available, and I had to convince them to let me have it, because I had the three kids and it was only one bedroom. Despite it not being easy, it was better than nothing when you didn't have somewhere to go. A lot of people don't even know what a women's refuge is. They just don't. It's not advertised on TV and a lot don't even know it exists.

All of it is hard, especially for the family, you can't have visitors at the refuge. Even in transitional housing you can't, because that's part of refuge accommodation. I couldn't have a male visit me. I had a lot of old male friends, so it was hard. A lot of women are rough and have boyfriends that rip it off, so I can understand. The hardest thing is living with the kids, in shared accommodation. "This shelf's yours in the fridge and this shelf in the cupboard". It's not a nice way to live but at least you're safe and secure and you don't have to worry.

A lot of women can't handle the refuges. The hobnobs are out the back watching your every move. You adapt to living like that and it becomes normal. A lot of women went back because it's easier than leaving.

For the first nine to twelve months after you leave it's never easy. A lot of women go to a refuge for a holiday, for a break, and then they go back. I used to go, determined never to go back. I was interstate, living with an old lady who'd given me cheap rent and taken me in, and I rang him one night because Mum had said he'd been begging me to ring, and they'd felt sorry for him. By the next day I was on a plane back to Melbourne.

The sad part is that he couldn't handle the love of my family, and having a nice environment and unconditional love. It was not normal for him. Mum understood this too.

Every refuge is different. I've found some more helpful than others. They were great people last time. They would do anything for you. I've been back to see them and they love to see me because I didn't go back, I've got a car and a new life, and they feel inspired.

One time, we had someone outside the refuge and had to call the police – the phone was near the window and there was no curtain. They didn't get there for 45 minutes. They said there was a

robbery and this took precedence. But another woman and I both had violent partners, and we knew if it was our partner out there, it could have been much worse than a robbery.

The police don't treat it seriously for anyone leaving and especially for someone in my situation where you've gone back and forwards. My partner was a drug addict and a criminal. In my case if you call the police you are just a dog and a rat.

I'm 18 months out and I'm still doing community work on weekends because I was charged with driving an unregistered car. He'd forced me to drive it. I remember the police officer saying, "How can anyone make you do it?" He'd punched me – that's how someone can make you do it. I have to pay to put my kids in care when I do the community work.

It's so hard to leave, and so easy to stay. About 500 people apply for each house that's available for transitional housing. If I was to apply for a house in Dandenong, I'd get one, but in the Housing Commission you're just filth. You have to wait two to three years till you're on the top of the priority list in a decent place. Even then, you can have someone waiting ten years and someone like me will go to the top of the list. This house came up, and Mum drove here to look at it for me. She said it was beautiful, so I put my name down and I prayed I would get it. (I've become a Christian.) I've prayed that I wouldn't be in a Housing Commission area.

So I got this house in the country in two months instead of two years. I'd do anything for my kids. I drove a truck for six hours, loaded all the furniture, and unloaded it myself. I did get some assistance to pay the \$600 to hire the truck.

I thought it was a big mistake at first. I had to leave all my friends and support in the city. It was depressing that I had no one and nothing when I got here. I didn't have a bed. The children had beds. I had only \$50 that I needed for nappies and formula for the week. But people helped me out. In the city you have more options, in the country, there's no bulk billing.

There are so many people who need help. It was disappointing that the Salvos and St. Vincent's, when they helped me, gave me the oldest, junkiest pieces of furniture. When you're in my situation it would be nice to have stuff that worked. It took them three weeks to get me a kitchen table. They had one they could have given me, but they thought it was too good for the likes of me. They sell the good stuff.

When I got here, there were no fences around the house. Maybe the Commission thought I wouldn't care but I've got kids and an eight-month-old baby. A lot of people who live in the

commission are rough, but I wouldn't put up with it. The back yard was disgusting. I had to fight to get them to move the rubbish. I took half a car out of there! Without fences I couldn't let my kids go outside to play. Imagine six months without being able to let your kids out!

I said to the woman at the Housing Office, "If my kids get killed or taken by someone, I won't sue, I'm coming after you". It's my responsibility to see I've got adequate fencing so my kids are safe. I don't like being like that, but there are parts of it you're going to take with you. You try and take the good out of things, so I'm strong enough now but I got frazzled to the end of my tether. I needed fences up. I couldn't let my kids out – the drain fills up with water in the winter. It was a nightmare. I am determined to start a new life for my kids.

I know the services here are on a minor scale to what you've got in the city. You get food vouchers here but in the city they give you food. They gave me \$140 to get my wisdom tooth out in the city. One of the conditions of this Housing Commission house was for me to see a financial counsellor but there's none here. It's two hours in the car to see one.

It's the same with the counsellor for the kids. My four-year-old daughter needed counselling even back then, and my daughter, who is only two, remembers "daddy hurt your nose". I saw a lady from VOCAL, and there has to be a police report to even claim for money to pay for counselling. He cracked my nose and broke my jaw eight times but none of that counted. The maximum compensation is \$7,500.

I was determined and stubborn, and they were my strengths.

I'm good hearted. I don't have money but I spent two hours doing her hair for my girlfriend. But I learned that if I helped everyone else, when I get back to my own problems there's nothing left.

I can express myself totally freely. Expression is one of my best things, and being able to listen to people.

I had a bad experience with a counsellor once, because I told my counsellor that I still love my ex, and she told me I couldn't feel like this. My last counsellor was really different. I was finally able to tell my counsellor the truth - not saying everything's fine when really you're dying. I've still had habits I've had to break and things I've had to do, but out of everything, I'm very aware. I am privileged and blessed. Don't pity me; pity the ones who are still there, and not strong enough to get out.

Friends say, “Can’t you just shut up about it, forget about it?” When you’ve been through something like this, you can’t ever forget. In the first year, I told my counsellor everything over the twelve months. Then I got a new counsellor, which was a big hurdle for me. And he’s a man. He has a problem with me because I’m engaged. He says I have the potential to drive any man nuts.

Sometimes I get repulsed by men. I was washing my new partner’s work shorts here once and when I was hanging them on the line, I noticed they had a hanky in the pocket. I was disgusted that he couldn’t even take it out before putting it in the washing. A lot of people would say “what a bitch”, but I’ve taken my power back. I will stand up for myself and won’t back down to people now.

What people don’t realise is that when you confront overpowering people, they respect you for it. The guy next door has helped me a lot. He’s a bad alcoholic. A big blonde man was having a go at him one night, and I stood up to him and said, “You don’t hit a little alco!” He apologised!

I never really stood up to my ex. But now, I won’t let anyone speak to me like shit. I expect to be treated nicely. I expect to be treated like a queen. What I’ve been through makes you a stronger person. I was no angel, I used to smoke drugs, and people would say I was no better than him. I’d say, “Tell me if you’re being beaten up what makes you feel better?” It still hurts the next day.

The most important thing people can do to help a woman in a violent relationship is to listen and not to try and tell them what to do. It’s important to not attack the abuser because automatically the woman will defend him. They will defend and make excuses because of the fear that he’ll find out. Be supportive no matter what happens. If you ring someone at 3am because that’s the only chance you have, and if they say, “Ring me back in the morning”, it’s devastating.

My mum is always supportive. A lot of parents will wipe their hands. It’s not helpful if you’ve got someone saying you’re sick, because you’re standing there with a broken nose and a black eye, and blood pouring out and you’re saying that you still love him. Don’t be judgmental. Don’t be forceful. There’s an important difference between saying who’s available to help, and being overbearing and saying you *have* to see these people.

It’s important to listen, inform, and support.

People need to understand it’s such a hidden issue and when people get to the point to speak out, when they leave and get in to a refuge, they feel oppressed. I’ve had workers I’ve loved and

workers I couldn't stand. With so many different personalities it's hard to get it right.

People need to make their own choices. The information needs to be more public. If people think it's crazy to put information in the supermarket, well I think it's offensive to have lollies there!

The partner will often be with the woman. Even at Centrelink, often the partner will be there. But how many men who are abusive will want to go shopping with the kids? The supermarket is an ideal place to have information about domestic violence. Women in this situation will look at it, but they won't take it home.

I'd like to see people speaking out about their experiences in the media and on TV. I'd love to write my story to help others – to tell people what I've been through. But it's as if society can't cope with that, and we have to consider elderly people - but they are not gonna help women. Perpetrators are always watching TV. When they are confronted with images of what they are, they cower, they don't like it. So it might stop a woman being belted for one night. And it would make people more aware.

People need to see that this happens. How many guys want people to see what they are? These big strong guys that belt women up are really weak inside and dependent on women. They don't want people to see them as they are.

Cinema advertising is another way. And the radio. No-one wants to confront it. People want to pretend it doesn't exist. Until one of their family experiences it. All you need is a little card. Listen, support, inform, don't be judgmental. Big brochures are not good for people who aren't educated.

The information about where to go for help is sitting in all these health centres, but what perpetrator is going to let women go there? The information should be not only where women are but where perpetrators can see it too. In bottle shops. Make it more public. I never went near one of these centres when I had my babies. In the hospital, people would see him, and say would I want to see the Social Worker. Sure, but what if he came? If my ex came to the hospital and I wasn't there, he would go off his head and want to find me. It's not a good time when you've just had a baby.

I didn't have an antenatal appointment until four months before I had my last baby. Before this I couldn't go to the doctor because he would want me to do something else, or it just wouldn't

happen.

The domestic violence information needs to be in places where women can see it. There won't be change unless there's drastic change. I think about weaker women - I'm very strong, and I can't imagine what its like for women without that inner strength. I've still got lots to deal with myself. I bought some oil pastels and now I'm doing something for me. I plan to do the best I can for my kids. If I can go through all of this and be moving on with my life, other women can do it too.

I still missed him after I left. Crazy isn't it? You just leave everything behind. You have a guilt trip with the kids. I do believe violent partners can love their children. Not everyone is violent to kids. But they're sick people. There's no help for drug addicts. It's just not public enough. The information is not there for them either. It's not in places where drug addicts are. If you've got people on drugs belting their women up, you need to help them. They're sick. Some of them really want to get off it.

When my daughter was six months old, he rang a place for help. They make you ring same time every night for thirty minutes. They need to know you're serious before they'll put anyone in. He was straight for seven days and after getting nowhere, [with the service] he hit up again. People who want to be helped should get that help.

He's been a druggie since he was 13, so that's for 18 or so years. A lot of people don't have serious problems, but I carry a burden thinking about the women who are still out there being punched, kicked, raped, spat at, and the kids are watching that. Until you go through this personally, you don't know.

I get angry at people who pay out on drug addicts because a lot have stories ... they have history behind it. Growing up they may not see their father at all. It goes in families, and now what happened to him is affecting my life and my kids.

I have a new partner now. I was engaged at Christmas. I'm such an extreme person. I said to him if I don't feel like sex, I don't want it. If I don't want it for two months, that's the way it is. When you're walking down the street and you get raped by a stranger and you can't cope, your marriage breaks down, you lose your job. What about when you have been beaten and have a broken nose, and he wants to have sex when you're still bleeding?

It's affecting my current relationship. I want to do what I want to do now. It's hard for me to be

considerate of his needs even though he's adorable, and there's nothing he wouldn't do for me and the kids. It's hard for me - it feels like I'm betraying my ex even now. You forgive, but you don't forget. A lot of women end up bitter and twisted but I've forgiven my ex. I can see he was a victim of his childhood. Although everyone has choices, we don't all have the same choices.

Not every woman has experienced what I have, but whether it's a slap or a hit, it can feel just as bad as the broken nose or jaw that I've had.

He said to me, "If you leave me and don't come back, I'll get you. But it won't be when you are down. When you're happy, that's when I'll come and get you".

Barb

You're mad going back when all you are is a punching bag. If you don't stand up for your rights you don't get anywhere. You lose confidence and self esteem, and it takes so long to get it back.

I ended up going to Sydney, to [the] far west, then to the women's refuge. Then I went to visit the welfare down there because he still had three of the children.

Then I went to welfare to arrange for him to come up. He took to me with a knife when I was in the welfare office. I laid him out. I had black eyes. I was black and blue when I was pregnant. You can see where my cheeks have been broken.

You have to search in country areas to know how to get out. The coppers all knew me and knew what a temper I had. If someone hit me I'd wait till he was asleep then bash him with a brick. Two of my kids have disabilities because I was bashed when I was pregnant. My first husband and his girlfriend tried to get my eldest daughter and son to live with them. Then she came back to me and told me she was leaving him. Because of my two kids being there I had to go with her.

He chased us with a truck and I flogged the shit out of him with a jack handle. He was in hospital for two days. He's never come near me since. It's very hard to get a place to go to. A lot of women go back, but I won't be a punching bag for anyone. If someone starts bashing me, I won't take it.

My ex had a bad accident and he grabbed me by the throat and I knocked him off his crutches. He's never touched me since. Now I make sure no one's going to touch me. If they punch me I say, "Get out".

I won't let my kids take violence because I've been teaching my kids to stand

up for their rights. I don't care who it is. My daughter has been in a violent relationship and the coppers were going to lock her up because she flogged the bloke when he'd hit her. I said, "He's just as bad".

We're not here on this earth to be a punching bag for anyone.

If I see abuse down the street I will stand up for the women if kids are there. In country areas there are not many places to get help. You've got to really look to get out. The refuges in Sydney are mostly pretty good. You've got to double track to check that no one's following you back. Here, they all seem to know where the refuge is. It makes it hard when they know where it is. Some of the women tell everyone where it is.

It's very hard when you have so many kids and you're trying to get out to a refuge and you have to lug them around. I found a way. For anyone else now there are not many places to go. A lot go back to the same violence. Italian women will come into the refuge and be black and blue and go back the next day.

You're mad going back when all you are is a punching bag. If you don't stand up for your rights you don't get anywhere. You lose confidence and self esteem, and it takes so long to get it back.

I coped with it all my life. The welfare says they're going to take my kids. I say, "Try it". They don't come near me now. I put the kids into foster care once when things were tough and they were beating my kids! I took the Department of Community Services to court. We were in the Magistrate's Court and I was telling the judge what was going on. They appealed for me and I got the kids back.

My kids were flogged with razor straps, etc. The Department of Human Services tried to blame me. I said, "No way". They wanted to send me to a psychiatrist. I said I'd tell them the same thing. I don't give them the satisfaction anymore. I teach my daughter to stand up for her rights.

I was in a bad situation in NSW where I was being abused. I came here and went on the housing list for six years and finally got my new home in 2001. I got a nice four-bedroom house. I'm still getting it up to standard.

I've been getting involved in the women's refuge and try to do a lot for different ones. I get my daughter involved. Plus she's involved in a hobby; she loves her art. She's been abused and I am trying to teach her right from wrong.

She's had the welfare and the police onto me.

The police said, "Sorry, you deserve a hiding. If your mother tells you to do something you do it".

I am trying to keep my sanity. I take on a lot but I won't see my grandkids taken by the Department of Human Services. My twelve-year-old daughter has a disability. When I found out I was pregnant they told me to have an abortion. I told them to fuck off. She has cerebral palsy, and has plaster on her legs.

I left because of my daughter. She didn't need to grow up in all this violence.

Sometimes the police try and help but I found out about services when I went to Sydney through the welfare there. I knew the welfare officer pretty well. They told me where to go and about the refuge. But there were none in the country area where I was living. Sometimes I was able to camp with relations. We had to travel all the way to Sydney to get that help.

I stayed for a while. Then the ex found me and I had to leave again. Then he bought his trog with him. I flogged her on the ferry and held her over the side.

He kept bringing his girlfriends back to my house and trying to get me kicked out. This time instead of me getting carted away in the ambulance, it was her – pregnant or not.

There were coppers on the ferry. The copper was saying, "Can you put her down?" I said, "It's a domestic argument", and he went down the other end of the ferry! I laugh about it now.

If you don't laugh, you feel sorry for yourself. You'd cry all day.

If you're going to a women's refuge you need females to take you there, not males. Women do get frightened to go. No males should be allowed near the women's refuge. Only one has to slip up where it's at and it's no good having a refuge at all. It makes it very hard. The one here needs to expand. All the truckies and taxis know where it is.

Michelle

John would work out exactly how long it took me to get home from church and expect me home within that time. The Christian school asked me to go on their Board. Half way through a meeting my son phoned saying, "Dad has taken heaps of tablets". I couldn't have a life of my own, because of this control John had over me.

I didn't consider myself abused until I left my husband. My husband was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and was attempting suicide numerous times.

On the night I left my husband he tried to force me to stab him and I was terrified. I left after managing to escape from him I fled and have not been back to stay since. I left because I thought my life was in danger. The next day when I went back to get some of my clothes he would not let me in.

The pastor's wife helped me. She spoke to the police on my behalf as well. A

report was made but I did not sign it. The next morning I spoke to a psychiatric nurse to get help for John but I don't think the nurse believed me. I think he thought I was making it all up.

That first night of leaving I stayed at Mum's. I took my nephew with me the next day to get some clothes, as I was scared I would find John dead. My eldest son was at home with John when we got there and they would not let either of us in.

My son kicked up such a stink about not letting us in that we left because the police told me that they would have to arrest my son if I wanted to go in, and he continued to not let us. My son agreed to bring some clothes around to my mum's place later. He dumped a single bed doona cover filled with clothes in Mum's driveway and then drove off. When I went back later I made sure that my son was always there. I didn't want to go into the house by myself.

I was prepared to go back with my husband after awhile if he agreed to some basic conditions; that he would get some help, that he would stay out of bed during the day, and that he would do something during the day, even if it was just to go out into the shed. John said these conditions were too harsh.

After I hadn't seen him for three weeks he initially agreed to these conditions, however he changed his mind again by the following morning. He said he couldn't commit to what I had asked of him. It snapped and I haven't looked back since.

I went to court yesterday for the property settlement. It will go before a judge on the 9th May.

I stayed with Mum for five months. I felt my life was in danger; I couldn't come to terms with my life. I had help from my pastor's wife, and my church friends. I had a lot of support. Even with support I have certainly had my good and my bad days.

It was hard to leave really as I still thought I was in love with my husband. We had been together since I was 13 ½ and he was 17 ½. I went straight from family life to John. I grew up taking on his way of life. I always thought it was me. It wasn't until I left that I realised he had such control over me. I probably still do love him, although not to the same extent.

It was hard breaking from that day-to-day routine of normal living. It was hard not having John there, although he wasn't really there even when he was. We rarely spoke. It was hard to change after 33 years of being relied on by others. It was difficult doing something different. For the first two or three weeks I went to see him almost daily. I would come back in tears. It was hard to break such a habit, something I had been doing for so long. It was hard to change my way of life.

I have a friend who was abused by her boyfriend physically. I saw what he did to her, it was a cycle, and she always went back. I knew that if I went back I would also become an abused wife. I thought that if I went back, John who is very controlling, would control me in every way.

In 1992 we had a car accident and we were both injured. By 1994 John was trying to commit suicide. I was scared to go out, that was his control over me. We didn't have many friends, other than at church. John would work out exactly how long it took me to get home from church and expect me home within that time. The Christian school asked me to go on their board. Half way through a meeting my son phoned saying, "Dad has taken heaps of tablets".

I couldn't have a life of my own, because of this control John had over me.

My sons also tried to control both of us. By March 2002 I started seeing things I hadn't seen before in our marriage, the fact that the children (two sons) were trying to control us. They would threaten that I couldn't see the grandchildren if I didn't do this and that. I had to put a stop to this control they had over me.

In August/September 2001 John left me, stupid me went and begged him to come back. I did say though that he had to shower (his depression would sometimes mean he didn't shower for a week). He also wouldn't do anything around the house, although I wouldn't let him either (take on responsibilities around the house) and he certainly took advantage of this. This problem was both our faults. Eventually I started to say no and made him start to do things for himself, like make a cup of coffee.

In October 2001 it was the first time I actually ever slept away from him (apart from when I was in hospital or in the beginning when he was in the army). I went to some leadership training through a church retreat. John agreed to my going at first, though leading up to me going he had extra pain and headaches, but I still went.

The second time I went to a women's church conference. While I was away I'd ring to see if he was OK. When I got home he abused me so much I slept in my granddaughter's bedroom for a week. The following week (we hadn't talked very much) while I went to a prayer meeting he slashed his wrists.

I took him to the hospital and as there was no psychiatric help available there I had to drive him 50 kilometres to another hospital. They were more concerned about his injuries than his mental health.

Five and a half hours after arriving we finally saw a psychiatric nurse. I had to leave while John spoke to the nurse. When I came back in it was as though it was my entire fault. I was told to take him home as he didn't need an assessment. He had promised that he wouldn't hurt me or harm himself.

Before this I had warned him if he did this again I would have to leave. It was all coming to a head. At a counselling session with the pastor's wife she told me they would support me no matter what I decided to do (stay or go), she assured me they were there for me.

At home on the Tuesday 12th March he asked me to go down and get him

some dinner. He had put a number of locks on the side door and closed all the curtains. He locked the front door and bedroom (which he usually did at night). I was watching TV, lying on the couch. Then he was standing right in front of me with a fishing knife. He forced my hand on to the knife. I was trying to push him away. He wanted me to stab him. He was that close to me, I only just had enough power to push him aside. I grabbed my stuff, which for some reason I had nearby, and raced out the door. That was the last time that I stayed the night in the house.

We own two homes. My husband lives in one and my son and his family live in the other one. I stayed with Mum for five months and then I saw this house advertised. Mum and I painted this one before I shifted in. It was hard setting up a new life. I wanted Mum to come and live with me. She said yes at first but then said no, I had to learn who I was. I went to counselling at least once a week. I now enjoy being by myself, although I do get lonely, so I go out a lot.

I don't really see my children and grandchildren. I just recently started seeing my youngest son. My sons seem to get jealous of one another. If I am talking to one son the other one cuts me off. I have had my grandchildren stay twice in the twelve months, once at Mum's and once here. I have seen one son recently because he wanted to borrow some money; at least then I get to see my granddaughter. It is worthwhile loaning him the money for this reason.

The hardest part is not seeing my grandchildren all the time. They were always living in and out of our pockets. They were there all the time. We usually saw them nearly every day (At least six out of seven days, I think). I have always been very close to my oldest granddaughter. She was a bit standoffish until I told her I still love her.

What has worked for me has been my mum and friends supporting me. Also I went back to school (TAFE). I am doing accounting. Manual at the moment though I am hoping to do computerised accounting soon.

I had a 16-week position at the Shire through the Community Jobs Program. I finished at the end of February. I have kept myself busy, so I don't have lots of time. The hardest time is at night, when I go to bed. I try to study or read.

The mainstays for me have been Mum and the pastor's wife. Two friends have also been fantastic. A mutual friend started to tell one of them that I had done this and that and he told them they needed to be careful what they say. He was very supportive.

The strength I drew on in myself was the fact that I did not want to become involved in the abusive wife syndrome, go back then leave etc. I also thought that if I didn't deal with this now the next relationship I had would be the same, though I haven't had a new relationship yet. My determination has helped and so has the fact that I am protective of myself. It would have been unbearable to go back and I am very strong in my own way. It would break me to go back and see him trying to commit suicide again.

When I left I got support from a counsellor and community services. I saw this counsellor for a couple of months then I stopped when I thought I had had enough. The counselling helped me to understand that I had been abused (I found it hard to understand when it was not physical abuse). This helped me to see that John always had to be in control and this controlling was mental abuse of me.

The police were also notified through Leanne. She told them everything. They didn't ask me if I wanted him charged. She explained the whole story to them. I wouldn't have done anything. My next-door neighbour (an ambulance driver) helped write down a report and it took over two hours. We did it at the pastor's house. He [the neighbour] has the report, not the police. They were not really very supportive.

I think the mental health service didn't really believe me. They wouldn't do anything until they saw him in this state for themselves. How could they? They were never there. Another time John tried to commit suicide with a shotgun,

but I still didn't really feel threatened until the knife incident, when I left. I had real fear that night. I can tell the difference. I felt fear for my life.

If I had a friend in the same situation I would support them as my friends have for me. I would listen and encourage them to get professional help. I would not like to see them go back into that situation. In fact I do have a friend who went back to her husband after he had abused her. He broke her wrist, her shoulder and injured her knee (she has to have an operation). After all this she married him last September!

He went to jail. She always came up with explanations about bruising. I was asked to go to court as a witness. He had locked her in the house and I wouldn't go away. He wouldn't get help and she went back to him. I find this unbelievable, each injury gets worse, and she even asked me to lie in court to protect him. I said I wouldn't.

I think I am as much to blame as John except for that last night. We grew up together, John didn't know any differently. He didn't have a good family life, he had learnt from his father, who was also a control freak. I think it is meant to be that I am out.

John always said, 'my sons' when they were good and, 'your sons' when things were bad.

John used to do housework and get the tea. After the accident he couldn't do these things anymore. When he did try, I would take over. I feel I took away his manhood.

We are getting divorced on 1st May. He signed the papers yesterday. Our final settlement is on 9th May. I just want to be free of him now. I love the man but not the behaviour.

I believe that if you don't deal with this it only gets worse, more damaging as time goes by. If I knew what was involved with the property settlement I would

have waited. I am looking forward to going out with someone else. My mother has been on her own for 34 years and I don't want to be alone like that.

I would like to help distribute resources and help with this work in my town through the church. I would love to help in any way I can.

Samantha

When he beat me I didn't turn to my mother or sister. I didn't want them to see me the way I was all black and blue from being pounded into the floor. I was embarrassed that it could get to this stage.

I was born in Yugoslavia. I speak Hungarian. Apart from with my nanna who's actually adopted, I don't really get to speak it much. I came here in 1965 when I was two. When I was in kinder and prep and bringing home the reader, my mum sat next me and learned English, too. I understand Hungarian but it's hard to get your tongue around many words. I speak English with my mum unless it's Christmas or birthdays when we speak Hungarian so the kids can't understand! I was twenty-five when I married Gordon.

A year before I left he pushed me and I fell over. I'd had a couple of drinks. He was slamming my head into the wall. I had blood everywhere. When I was covering my face to protect it from being pushed into the carpet and the wall, I felt it was wet. I spoke and said, 'Gordon I'm bleeding', and he stopped. I didn't want him to touch me. I grabbed a towel. I didn't want anything to do with him. He called my best friend. I've known her for 20 years. She's the godmother of my daughter. He called her and told her he'd hit me. The children were at their grandmother's. So she came within an hour and a half.

When she came, he hid in the shed, and we started packing. I didn't want my girls to see me. The swelling had started, and the bruising was coming out. Rachael said, "Don't worry about the girls".

That was 3a.m. By 7 or 8a.m. I was out of the house. I hid in Melbourne for a week. I didn't face my family or my mother. Instead I got support with more anonymous friends. I had been using the Internet to get support; also one of my cousin's friends. I was staying two days here and there. I always phoned my girls everyday. I made excuses to them, saying, "I'm down in Melbourne

and have to do a few things."

A week later I came back. I said I'd go back as long as we go to counselling. We went once and that was it. When I went back, I didn't want him to touch me. I was a bit standoffish. He was angry because we didn't talk about anything he wanted to talk about in the counselling session. But we just had one, and then we didn't go back.

We didn't talk. That was the problem. He was working seven days a week. We didn't have holidays, or time together. He'd come home exhausted and wouldn't talk to me at all. We had an electricity failure one night. I lit candles and suggested we talk. He said, "There's nothing to talk about". He's got his own demons to battle, his own issues. A priest molested him, him and his brother. He's told two siblings but he hasn't talked to counsellors.

When he beat me I didn't turn to my mother or sister. I didn't want them to see me the way I was all black and blue from being pounded into the floor. I was embarrassed that it could get to this stage. And I did feel comfortable with these people [Internet friends] although I hadn't met them. I just phoned them up, and said, "Can I stay at your place?" My cousin is gay and I went to his partner's house and they put me up. I didn't want to talk about it. At times like this I hide. I know I do. I go into myself and work myself out.

These people didn't ask questions, they just helped me. They gave me a bed and I had showers at their place. I wore sunglasses 24 hours a day. I didn't go out. It was a crazy time.

We didn't separate at this time though.

By this stage he was starting to check my handbag, my Internet. I had a lot of friends on the Internet. I used a microphone to talk. He wouldn't talk to me, so I used the Internet to talk to people.

One instance is, he was part of school council and president. He had the keys

to the school and would go off to do stuff at the school. One time when he went out, I checked the computer through 'history'. I was shocked because he had gay websites.

At one stage I thought he was gay. I thought he had issues there. But he used it to get pictures of youngish boys, made up an identity, and then he looked me up and started making contact with me, saying he was a young uni student. I brushed him off, and then confronted him when I found out. I just go into chat rooms to talk to people I know. He didn't deny it, but didn't explain why either. He was checking on me all the time. We had an argument over it.

He was a part time DJ. It was a hobby of his for fun. In the beginning he was working in the pub behind the bar, and I was on the other side. I did have a drinking problem. I'd drink a bottle of bourbon every two days. Drink it one day and recover the next. This went on for months. So when he was working in the bar, I'd go out and dance and talk to people because there was just a deadly silence with him. He wouldn't talk.

A few months before I left, I begged him to leave the farm. It was killing us. He came back with, "Dad's letting us have two acres of land and we can build our house on it".

That house was talked about for thirteen years and never happened. We had the argument and I said, "What do you want me to say? That I don't love you?" We were fighting and this time the girls were in the house and heard.

So that was it. I was sleeping on the couch until I got a house. We broke up that night. After the decision to split up, I stayed for a month and was packing some things to take with me.

I'd had enough. It was a friend's house that I rented. We broke up on the Friday night. The next day I was a wreck. It was a celebration of 120 years of the primary school. I was in the mother's club and he was president. I didn't do anything that morning, I couldn't cope. Eventually I made an appearance

after lunch. I was trying to hold it together. People knew something was wrong. I stayed a little while, and then had to go.

I do that. I withdraw. So I went back home. All his family were up visiting. I got my sister in law to get me a bottle of bourbon. I couldn't go into town. It was just a horrible time. I didn't want to see any of the family. He was carrying on like nothing was going on. He was a wonderful community person. He did everything for everyone else but didn't face up to anything at home.

So my friend had a house he rented, and the tenants were moving out. I asked him about it, and he offered the house to me. It fell into place. By the following week, I had a house only ten kilometres down the road. I have a lot of friends that support me and I'm grateful for that.

It was hard because of the children. By that stage, from the time he hit me and I ran away, it was almost one year to the day when we separated. In that year, emotionally, physically, health wise, it wasn't a good year. I'd had enough. Everything built and built and built. I had to say, "Sorry I don't love you anymore. It's over."

I'd vowed to myself never to live like this. My mum was a victim of violence but when it happened to me ... we got the phone call that she was in the hospital. My stepfather beat her with wire cabling when she was asleep. She woke to being beaten.

I phoned my friend Rachael and she said, "Pick me up and I'll come to Melbourne with you". We went down to Melbourne and saw my mum. We saw her in the hospital and packed up my stepfather. I told him to go. I took charge for twenty-four hours and then we were back again.

With me it's been the same too. I got the job here, got the house. Everything just falls into place. I got to a stage where everything's crumbling, and then it falls into place. Everything's in the diary - what I have to do, to deal with. I write it down and I do it.

In the first year the neighbour who was in the house behind mine was a girlfriend of twenty years as well. She was going through a hard time because her mother had died. We took a panel out of our fence so we could easily see each other. She was a huge emotional support. I'd always go and have a coffee.

The hardest thing was he wouldn't let the girls go. The youngest one, said, "I'm living with Mum". So, I collected her furniture and we put them in the house with me. The oldest one wanted to be with him. We came to an agreement of 50/50 share in seven-day blocks, but I didn't want to isolate my oldest girl. There was a bedroom for her too, when she came to stay with me.

I went on the pension immediately. He cut me off everything financially. I worked part time picking chestnuts then doing other work for friends as well. The one with the chestnuts asked if I wanted to do the wood selling and delivering with her, too. So I did that.

They've always been there to help me. My friends. I don't know what I'd do without them.

Then I went through a time of wanting to do it on my own. I didn't want to keep asking people for help. I have asked my mother for help, but reluctantly. I wouldn't ask my sister. I go to my friends. I love my sister, but we're not close. I'm closer to my friends. They know everything about me and everything about what happens to me. I still love my sister and my nieces. My mum knows everything about me. I don't know – it's only just my sister.

I'm always there to listen to my friends and vice versa. Even when I've had a couple of drinks too many, they accept me for who I am.

After I moved, when I was just sitting in the house by myself, the nights the girls were with their dad, I thought, "I'm not a full time mum anymore". And that was the hardest thing. I had a lot of self-pity.

For a while they were two days with me, and for the next two days they weren't with me. I'd just stay inside, I didn't shower, didn't do anything. I didn't let anyone see that either. I just closed the blinds and sat in the house. Then I thought, "This isn't working".

Previously we'd go to the confest. I wanted to go and take the girls. Gordon said, "'The girls aren't going". So I went and told him he'd have to look after the girls that weekend because I wanted to go.

I went and set up my campsite with incense and candles, and I was off a bit from my friends. I sat in the tent and looked at myself, and thought, "What's going to happen to me? I'm a mum, with no qualifications". I had done a home-based care course, but didn't want to do that.

At the confest I started getting more positive and stopped taking the anti-depressants the doctor had prescribed. I'd only taken them for six weeks. The doctor said to me, "It sounds like you've been depressed for years now. You haven't been sleeping".

My friend is a nurse and said, "Samantha, you'd be fantastic at disability work".

I thought, "Yeah, I've never done that before".

So I started phoning TAFE, and, at the last minute I got into the course and did it for a year. I'd leave at 7a.m., drive here, and go to TAFE from 9- 8.30pm. A couple of times a week, I'd stay overnight. I did a work placement later in the year. I organised for the girls to be in after school care. I'd be there between 5 and 5.30 to pick them up and take them back home.

I graduated in February. That's when things started to go crazy.

One time he came to the house and was yelling. The girls were locked in the bathroom. I don't have to put up with that. The girls don't want to go back to

their father.

I was sort of in breach of the Family Law Court Order. I got legal advice from the community legal service. I did what they said. He's now washed his hands of us; we do not exist for him. He doesn't want to see the girls anymore. He told them that too.

I have two jobs now, and have bills for moving here. I have to pay back friends for petrol used when I was shifting. I owe the schools, electricity, etc. But I'll pay off the school, and deal with the bills one by one. I love this house. I said to the real estate agent, "I've just had a job interview and I got the job. If I don't get this house I will need another one". He rang me that afternoon and said I've got the house. I had two weeks to move.

I'd rather help other women who need it. My mum's my hero. She went through an abusive marriage as well. She brought my sister and me up. If I could be half the woman she is, I'd be happy. It's hard but I'll get there and I'll have money behind me. I need a new car. I know one day it will happen.

When I left I went to see my doctor. I think I focussed on the community health nurse in terms of getting help. She was warm and easy to speak to, supporting me, offering me services, getting me food parcels, and vouchers. I always have food in the house for the children and then the bills get paid one way or the other. If I desperately needed her, I knew I could ask her for help.

My doctor - not so much. He put me on anti-depressants and I thought, "I don't need this". I have to get my life in order. I need to do this, and do that, and work out what I need to do.

I have some time out. I got to the stage I enjoyed my own company. The first six months when we broke up and I was only a part time mum was really hard, but then I got to enjoy that time as well with TAFE. The time I wasn't mum, I had to myself, and occasionally I'd go with my friends to Melbourne to nightclubs. The first time was October, then a couple of months later and then

for my birthday. Later on, I was working so it was easier to afford petrol.

Everything just seems to fall into place. I have work, and a house. And it just happens for me. It takes time but I get there.

If I had a friend in my situation I'd drop everything, organise my kids to go somewhere else. I have friends just opposite the school. Within twenty minutes I'd be there for her.

I'd be someone to listen – even if it's just to sit with her and say nothing. It depends on the situation. If she wants to be verbally abusive about someone else, I'll take it. If she wants to be angry and swear about it that's OK with me.

One of my friends would come in the door, saying, “that fucking bastard” and I'd listen, make a cup of tea. Then I'd say what was happening to me, and we'd get really loud and let it all out, then we'd calm down. You just listen to what they've got to say. You support each other no matter what.

My two friends have got issues. One is going blind through diabetes, and he's only 26.

We've had tears. I've been there for them. We're open with each other about everything. We have good times too. I call them the men in my life. They give me emotional support. They helped me move. They're there without the complications of sex.

I've made that decision. I will not have a man full time in my life. I get the support from my friends, and I won't have a man in this house while my girls are growing up. I'm happily single. I'm too busy. When I'm working I'm supporting people with disabilities, and when I'm here with my girls, I do things for them. We walk around naked, and we don't want to lose that just because there's another man in the house. Maybe later when they're off at uni, and not living here...

For the moment I'm happy. I don't need someone saying what to do, where to go, how much money have you spent, where have you been?

The other night we did our groceries at 9p.m., got pizza, just hung out. It was really good. We couldn't do that when I was with my husband.

He blamed me. He was always blaming me, saying, 'You've got the problem'. Yes, I did have a drinking problem. I couldn't talk to him. My father molested me when I was a child from when I was seven until I was fourteen years old.

When I was twenty-three I told my father that no one would want him, and he'd be alone. I haven't heard or spoken to him since then. He's in a mental institution now - not to be released. I don't need to be angry any more. No one wants him. He's not all there.

I've let go. I've tried to forgive. I realised that no matter what I do, he's always going to be abusive. It got to where I was so angry, we had an argument, and I spat in his face. "I don't want to see you anymore". I left then. He abused his (new) wife then, tried to torch her, poured petrol on her. I don't need to have that anger anymore.

I had to take control. No one has the right to be domineering and tell you who to see, who to talk to, what to wear, whether to wear make up. It's different with friends because they take you unconditionally. I've been sick because of too much to drink and my friends have been there holding my hair back! Partners try to control you.

I've been able to sort things out with friends in ways that I couldn't do with my husband. When I was doing assignments I was thinking about my friend. She's got depression; she's got issues, and so on. I was so involved with school and studying self-harm and getting interested in writing about my friend's experiences that I went ahead and did that. When I gave my piece to her to read, it upset her. She sees a psychiatrist.

We sat down, and I apologised to her. I won't do it again. We've learned to forgive. She's been there for me. I met her when I was twenty and I'm thirty-nine now. I have long-term friends. I have another girlfriend here and we go back a long time, our kids went to kinder together.

Mum helped me more financially – she helped out when my car broke down. Also, she supported me by saying she's so proud of me. We talked for half an hour last night. I was telling her about my new job. She says she's so proud of me constantly.

Any friends my husband made were through kinder and school. He wasn't a drinker, wasn't a pub person, and didn't have male contact like going to a mate's place and having a drink. That was because of his work. He didn't want to leave the farm.

Everything he'd always despised about his father, he was starting to turn into. I don't want child support. If at the end of the day if he doesn't want to pay it he doesn't have to. Because of his tax situation, I couldn't make him.

I think to myself, I don't need you. I will support the girls myself.

Nena

The situation was so bad I couldn't stay one day longer. I went [to the Housing Service] crying with three little kids and they gave me an appointment for ten days later.

When I left I felt really hurt and wanted to go somewhere. And I couldn't find a place so in the end I went to a caravan park. The situation was so bad I couldn't stay one day longer. The kids were trapped in this with me. His drinking started earlier and the kids were awake and had to watch how horrible he could be.

It was definitely not safe anymore. I had to ring the police. He was so wild and I was scared. I cried and asked him to stop throwing things around. I was afraid he would accidentally hit the kids. Friends came around before the police arrived and the situation calmed down a bit. The police officer tried to talk sense into John but he didn't hear. That night, I knew I had to leave but I stayed eight weeks longer.

There was nothing to help me leave. Everything was against me when I left – where to go, no money, no Centrelink payment, and three little kids. I just took the car, got some money from the bank and left. I had a couple of friends who helped me to stay strong, but nothing at all helped me to leave.

My friends were talking to me, encouraging me to see the relationship from a different point of view and just talked to me about what's happening to the kids, the relationship, and me. That really helped, having some people to talk to.

When I was deciding I don't want to stay with him anymore I had to think about him going or me going – I could have stayed and told him to leave but I couldn't do that because he would have been able to come around anytime he wanted to.

I tried to find a house to rent at the agent but it was really hard to find rental properties, so the next step was the Rural Housing network. They told me they couldn't do anything without an appointment. I went there crying, with three little kids and they gave me an appointment ten days later!

I went to the Domestic Violence Service (I was referred there) and they said the same thing – that I need an appointment and anyway, the lady was in another town. Then they said she'd ring in the afternoon. I went back home and she phoned and she tried to ring around – she saw the situation was so bad that I had to leave. I had a couple of friends who offered me to stay a couple of days but it was too hard with the kids.

Evening was the hard time – he wasn't drunk in the day. John wouldn't drive out to the caravan park, so it was a good safe place to be for a while.

Money makes it hard to set up again. It's the main thing. I still haven't finalised our financial situation. To involve lawyers, there is not enough money, and to do it without them takes such a long time. I had some advice from a lawyer and financial counsellor. I'm doing what they suggested and today, four months after the separation, I got the first money from him. He doesn't have to pay for the kids. His business is not making enough money.

We have not divided up financially.

The little things you need like sheets and pots and pans. It's pretty hard to get that organised and to find a house. They're the main things. I was in emergency housing. It is especially hard when you have three little kids to find something suitable. It is really, really hard.

My friends helped a lot. I got a lot of stuff given to me. And just from the time I went away (left him), from then, it made me feel a lot freer, and encouraged me a lot more. I never could go back to the same situation.

After I had the Rural Housing appointment, I got a house within two days, so that was really good and really helped. It was the middle of summer and we couldn't even have a little pool for the kids at the caravan park.

Rural Housing just let me do what I wanted to do. Because I didn't know how much money I would get from Centrelink, I had three months to find a new property but if I couldn't find anything else, they would not kick me out. They just wanted me to keep a list of the houses I was looking at. I had a couple of appointments with a lady at Rural Housing just to keep track of where I was at.

At one stage I rang the Domestic Violence Service to see how to handle the situation if he comes up to the house or up to me. I had some advice from the worker. Otherwise I just went to Centrelink to work out the money. All the previous Parenting Payments were in his name. They worked out I wasn't long enough in the country to get Parenting Payment.

The money I took from the bank was used so quickly. They paid me some kind of youth allowance. The social worker made it a bit quicker. All the money I paid for rent in the caravan park is just gone. I can't get it back, and I can't change that.

I can't name my strength. I am definitely a lot more happy now. I am hardworking, creative because I have to be. I'm not pretty relaxed at the moment but I try to be loving to the kids, but sometimes it's just really hard. Caring about the kids of course I do. I am friendly to other people and energetic, definitely.

The leaving thing and caring for three little kids make you such a strong person. You just have to do things. You just have to organise things.

If I knew anyone in a situation like mine I would take her to my house and I would try to encourage her to leave and even if she goes back later it doesn't matter. But just help her to see it from a different view. It is important

to support her to stay somewhere, to see she's got somewhere to go and somewhere for the kids.

It is a really hard situation and if you break up a family a lot of emotions are involved. Just to get the daily things going, the daily work you have to do, and as soon as that is set up and you can live, you're pretty right. But everything that comes before that is so hard. Like Centrelink and waiting in a queue all the time.

To go to a Rural Housing service and get put off for ten days is a bit strange. All the feelings I have. And I'm at the point where I'm really angry with him and every time we see each other we have to fight. It's something I have to work out. Usually he picks up the kids for a couple of hours or for the day. We try to have breakfast or coffee and we always start fighting. I can't handle him, because he hurt me so bad.

We had some family counselling, and I rang the counsellor, but she still hasn't called me back and that was two weeks ago.

Sometimes you don't want to tell your friends what kind of arsehole he really is. I just want to find a way to talk to him, and not tell him everything he's doing wrong, because he does heaps of things wrong. Just for the sake of the kids.

The problem is with that situation. You can't stay at your house, you have to go somewhere. You have to go to a place and of course it's not always possible that straight away someone can see you.

I think it would help to make the offices a bit more kid friendly. There are a couple of chairs and two toys. It's a really small corner where they're not welcome. You have to stay there an hour or so. And in this situation you don't want them staying somewhere else, you want them with you.

I have nightmares of the kids being taken away. You feel like you can't look

after them and that someone will come and take them away. I had a nightmare that someone would come and take my son away. I don't know why I had this dream. You want to be protective and you don't want your kids to be hurt anymore.

Helen

Society could change its ways about women in that respect. Those vibes felt by me that I wasn't telling the truth. You made it up, you stupid, neurotic woman; you're cracking up. You do feel you're going crazy. You find your own situation confusing and find it easy to blame yourself. You wonder if things could have been different if you'd done it this way or that. All these things push around in your head.

I think the hardest thing is that you see it later on after you've left, not when you're in it. You think it's normal. They apologise the next day and each time it happens you wipe it from your memory. They make you believe you can't function without them. You really have trouble being on your own and feelings like you're not able to cope. You think you can't do it without him.

Finally you reach the point where you make the break. It is very emotional because of the mind games they play with you. It takes a while to realise that.

It was June 2000 when I left. It's been three years. Someone said I was back to normal now. I couldn't function without thinking of him all the time. That's what it was like. The step away is the most positive move you can make but when you're in the situation you believe there is nothing wrong. He has you believe that. People say, "Why don't you leave?" You don't. When they say, "Why do you put up with it?" The answer is, you just do.

You love them and you can't see they're doing anything wrong.

The time came when I left. I probably realised my life would be better without him in it. Also there was the fact that he was not only abusive but was fooling around with other women. When I found that out it made it easier. I thought, I don't need to be in this situation.

Lots of people were telling me he was no good and that I shouldn't stay in the

situation. It was no good.

Lots of people thought he'd end up killing me because of my health going downhill. I couldn't handle it any more. It wasn't just the physical. I was close to having a nervous breakdown

I felt strong and independent enough to believe I could go on without him. When it did all happen, it was hard initially but probably the best thing that could happen for me. It was hard coming home and not knowing what was going to happen next. I was on a high all the time, stressed by the uncertainties all the time. I was trying to care for myself by going to have a massage to wind down, and I was going to the naturopath. I always wound up wondering what was going to happen next. I was feeling very frustrated all the time.

You think you've failed – it's a relationship and it hasn't worked. There must be something wrong with you. Am I the one at fault, am I causing this? I initially thought I was the problem and there was something wrong with me. My family and friends said, "You're ok. There's nothing wrong with you". You feel really strongly that you've failed.

It was so hard to leave and set up again and cope with being on your own, by yourself. And having had a lot of counselling, I realised from the psychiatrist that there's nothing wrong with being alone. We think there's something wrong in being on your own. But what I found was that being by yourself, you get back your identity and do things you want to do; you're not just doing what he wanted to do. So I got my life back in my own hands. It's the loneliness, especially at the end of the day, that gets to you. When you're home on your own you do feel it.

It's been three years now and there has been no new relationship. But I enjoy my own company and I'm back into doing things. It's much better. It is a fallacy for women to think there is something wrong with you if you're not in a relationship.

Concentrating on having family and friends around was the most important thing. If I had not had that, I would have been in trouble. To have family and friends, to have counselling, to talk about feelings and also looking at what I enjoyed doing, helped a lot.

I looked at what I didn't do and decided to concentrate on career. My family and my children were happy. And then my home. Creating a nice environment, putting nice things in the garden, getting nice things in the house was good. The house had a nice warm feeling. People say that when they walk in, "This house has a lovely feeling".

You have to do that, create a nice environment for yourself. It takes a while to realise you're the one that is in charge and in control of whatever decision you make. It is your decision.

The worst things people can do are saying, "go and do something". That is the worst thing. If people said to paint the wall red, it's the last thing you want to do. You have to wait till you're ready. The last thing you need is for people to say you should do this you should do that. And don't feel sorry for yourself.

Other people who just talked about the good things and look at you, and not talk about that part of it, were helpful. It was good. I kept away from people who always talked about that situation. They said I suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but I think I'm starting to get through it.

The people that help give you support like, "You know I'm here if you want to talk". And they don't give advice, they don't tell you what to do. They just listen. That does help.

I had a friend who went through a worse situation than me before I met her. Some of the feelings I had, she knew, and that made me feel good. She said it would take me a few years to get through it and then you'll realise it was the best thing [leaving]. You do feel you're going crazy. You find your own

situation confusing and find it easy to blame yourself. You wonder if things could have been different if you'd done it this way or that. All these things you push around in your head. It's nice to have someone who's been there and knows what you're going through.

When I rang Domestic Violence Outreach at 2a.m. in the morning I was going through a very tough time. She answered the phone and she couldn't understand because I was bawling so much.

She said, "I do understand because I've been through it". She said you will feel this and that, and she hit it right on the head because she'd been there. Then I was able to go back to sleep.

I called them a lot. It's anonymous. You just ring up. At night it's the worst. At night if you can't sleep, that's when you think about it. All the time. I had insomnia, but who can you ring at 2a.m?

I'd be thinking, I'm going crazy. I rang and sometimes it's between a life and death situation. I don't think I would've committed suicide, but I said to my doctor, "I don't think my life is worth living". It was important having someone at that time of the night to talk to - you've got someone there and that gave me some security.

It was a support mechanism having that service there 24 hours, and seeing Victims of Crime counsellor. Sitting with her and talking with her about things was a lifeline to me for a couple of years. Then it stopped. It was a really good service. It was the most important thing. I took it for granted and didn't realise we had it. Victims of Crime are a very important service.

At some point in the relationship I realised this is not the life I want. Then I thought maybe things can change; then realised they don't. You say, "I thought I could change them". If someone's like that, you can't change him. Even if you're a good person there is only so much you can take.

It's strange. You wake up one morning and think, "I can't take this". I've tried and tried and tried and I can't take it anymore. You think of having a better life than this – having fun, not just tears. You start to realise in 10 years you'll still be in this situation. When you're in this situation, your identity goes, you're pleasing this person all the time, not doing what you want to do. You start to realise that.

The services I accessed were very efficient and prompt. I went to police and rang them. I had an appointment within a few days. It was very professional, very well done. I have no bad things to say about [the initial contact].

[Later] I put a complaint into the Victorian Police ombudsmen. I don't understand Intervention Orders. Intervention Orders are not worth the papers they're written on. In the newspaper article it said that women are not going through with them and that's a problem but they don't know that the person harasses the woman. He was harassing me just when we were alone, and then I'm left lying flat on my back for two days having anxiety attacks about what might happen.

They (the police) treated me like I was the problem. They were the worst. I think because I lived in a small country town. The red tape is too much effort for them. For three months I chased them to sort it out and I got nowhere. I put in a complaint to the ombudsman and he came round to my house.

There is no way this Intervention Order is worth the paper it's written on. He was trying to get it revoked over 12 months and there were fun and games for a long time after that. I said to the domestic violence worker that I wouldn't have taken out the Intervention Order if I had known the trouble it took. I've got a lifetime order now but spent a lot of money with the solicitor to get it. At the moment he's quiet but he has this attitude of, "How dare you let people know what I've done".

A lot of people in society don't want to know, and people think I'm lying. It's easier to think that a man would not do that. People say, "He wouldn't do

that".

I'd rank the police right down the bottom. I have great respect for them in other areas. But in this situation you tend to be treated like the perpetrator, not the victim. They infer you make things up.

The counselling, the Victims of Crime Service and the Domestic Violence services are very good.

I had a couple of sessions with the private psychiatrist but that was for the court case. I had a GP in town. When he put my arm in plaster he said things were going to be tough. He wanted to put me on anti depressants for two years.

He said the trauma I'd been through meant things were not going to be good for a while. I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He was excellent. I couldn't have got two better people than him and the other doctor. I don't know how they put up with it; with all the tears, and you can't speak. They were excellent, just as good as the counsellors and other services.

The court system was confusing, very confusing. A lot of red tape and the forms all look alike. You read things - they didn't explain things very well.

I went there for an Intervention Order. On the Intervention Order it said if you know the person has firearms to tell the courts. He did, but it was too late. He'd hidden them.

When they issue the Intervention Order, they should ask women, and make it their business to find out. [about the firearms] A week lapsed before they went out and there were none to be found. They didn't explain things in court.

You find it upsetting as well because you're like another number. Its not you, it's just another case. Push 'em out like anything. The thought of going to

court was bad enough. I was shaking and I couldn't handle it.

The counsellor said she'd come with me. There are a lot of people listening to your life. This is about you. It's hard to take. It's hard that he sits there with a big smile on his face. You're sitting there thinking, "I can't wait to get out of this place".

You don't want to look at them, don't want to sit so close – just a few seats away from them. You don't want to be near them at all. Doing the paperwork was OK, but to face him in court was too much. The only reason I went was because she said she'd come with me. I'd go and still feel the same, but with her sitting there next to me saying I could do it, made me think I could do it.

If I had a friend going through what I've gone through I'd probably go straight around to them, sit with them, put my arm around them, cry with them. I wouldn't say you shouldn't have, or any of that. I would just let them say what they want to say.

The one bit of advice I'd give is go and have counselling. That was very good. It really helped me and could do the same for you. If you need to talk, you know where I am. I've been through it, so I do know how you feel. I've been through it and will listen.

It's important for them to know the hardest part is to get out and second is to find a safe environment. That was the biggest step for me, being able to have a safe home to get on with your life, because you do tend not to want to go out in the dark, or in public. You find you want to lock yourself away. You can be safe but you think you're not because you're so jumpy and agitated and it takes a while to settle down and think you are in a safe environment.

You still think they're going to walk through the door and you're on edge all the time. His voice was in my mind. The psychiatrist said she was going to put me into hospital. I'd hear his voice in the night and get scared. You must just

imagine it. You're waiting for something to go wrong next. To venture out in the world, to walk up the street and feel OK, not have people saying, "That's that lady", and it's so hard.

You feel your heart has been pulled out of your chest. You feel so low and so bad, people around you laugh and are having a great time, and my life's shit. When people laugh and joke, I think, I can't do that, I just can't.

Also, maybe it takes a few years to get over it. It's been three years and I'm getting there. Maybe a network of women who have been there could meet regularly and have a mentor or a buddy.

I think the hardest time is at night at home on your own when you start to cry about things that happened in the day, and how you are feeling. Having someone who knows what it's like and has been in that situation is good, because having to explain yourself over and over again, is bad. You don't want to have to rehash it each time. They'd understand because they've been there.

I think also the Intervention Order system needs to be looked at. They need to be strict if that person comes near you. They need to send him to jail. They need to know you're serious about it from the first time they do something. He did it four or five times. Police said to him, "If you come again you'd end up in jail". That's all that stopped his fun and games.

They should act on him the first time he is within 100 metres and not wait 'til someone gets hit. I don't think it is worth the paper it's written on. They can watch you go to the supermarket and wait in the car park. The police laughed at me when I reported this, but they don't understand that he doesn't go to that supermarket, and why would he go up and down the road like that?

They listen to him all the time. They think you're silly and you don't ring the police anymore. Then there was this time they came round. They must have

understood that I really meant it. I went to bed and couldn't get up because of an incident that happened. It took that for them to realise that I was serious.

I said to the ombudsman, "Do you think women want to ring up and complain?" I'd like a stress free life. I don't care about him, but I want him to leave me alone. If he keeps coming up to me and touching me, I don't know what I'm going to do. It is particularly hard for women in small country towns. I'd see him every time and have to stop the car because of an anxiety attack. I got home, and fell on the bed and thought, "My god". I didn't laugh then.

When it does happen in small country towns you have to find ways to get some relief. I got a job in another nearby town and tend not to socialise when I go home.

The psychiatrist told me the only way for me to get over this is for me to move away. I got a job in another town and have worked there for two years. It was like I went into another world. I was able to concentrate on the job and career and forgot about him, but when I drive home to my hometown, the familiar setting, the house, the reminders are all there. If women do move away it can help a lot with recovery. I can understand it.

I guess it depends on what a woman does for an occupation. If people work they can find a job, but if they're in the home looking after children, that would be harder to move to Melbourne or another town, and especially when your family is all here. If I'd just run off to another town to live, I could be six foot under.

You don't have family or friends and to be in a strange place trying to set up a new life with no one to support you. You could be seriously ill. For me, I had to live with the hard parts of staying around because of this. But you just want to run as far as you can. When it first happened I applied for every job in Melbourne. Lucky I didn't get the jobs. People said, "You wouldn't survive".

Small town gossip and mentality is very hard. People confront you in the street. You get calls from people when you're trying to get on with life. People ask my family about me, and I'd tell them not to tell me because I'd be all stirred up. It made me feel sick over it. Also people tend to think in small country towns that it doesn't happen. Violence and domestic violence only happen in the city. It happens anywhere. People in the country think you're lying because they'd rather believe he didn't do it. Not here in their town.

People would say and ask me surprising things, not realising it would just about kill you. You just stand and then walk away because you don't want to be confronted again. You want to go out and socialise. You're stir crazy but part is saying no, I don't want to see anybody that knows him or will ask me questions. You keep right away because you don't want to talk about it.

You do that because people ask questions and you don't know how to answer them. Personal things. People have more front than Myers. They just want to know the details so they can talk about it at morning tea. People don't realise they're dealing with my life and the lives of my children. When they talk about things with other adults in front of children it makes it hard. I was surprised how many kids at school would confront my kids. You have to deal with that too!

The youngest one went right through it with me. I haven't been with someone for three years, but even if I mention I'm going out, if there's a man there, she wants to know all the details so she can tell me that man's OK to go out with. They've seen what I've been through, and they don't want me go through it again. My daughter asks them all kinds of questions to check them out. She's moved to Melbourne now. She doesn't want me to be with anyone because she doesn't want me to go through it again.

Having kids around helps you to heal. They make you forget and you enjoy them. She was so worried about me and what happened. That's why she's having a few problems during adolescence trying to understand things. I try

to tell her that's not what a normal relationship is like.

There's shame. You don't want them to think it's normal. The repercussions come from all over the place. My situation affects my parents, and sister and brothers. They are protective of me; don't want you to be with someone else. Friends are the same, so it really does affect lots of people. They want to check out the new person, what's he like, and be sure.

This happened when I was 38 years old. You forget you're a daughter when it happens. You've left home, you're a mother and wife, and don't realise you're still a daughter. Parents come back to you all over again. That's inspiring enough for you to do things.

I stayed with them for three weeks. It was a nice thing that they did that. I felt safe and Mum was cooking meals and looking after me. They come to your rescue in a big way. It's a good part of recovery with family there. You don't know that until a crisis happens. Family, friends and services are so important to get you there.

What we do for our clients where I work makes me realise we're a lucky country to help people in need with services. You take it for granted I suppose, but if you don't need it, you don't know how important services are.

I have no confidence in the legal system and the police. They really are the worst part of it. They need to look at it. Years ago when people talked about rape, the victim was the worst. People struggled to believe the victim. I said to someone, "I'm glad I never got raped, I don't know what I would've done".

Trying to convince a person that's what did happen is so hard. It really tears you up. The biggest downfall for me was people thinking I've made it up. Friends saying, "We know you're telling the truth", that's all that matters.

But I say, "Well those people don't know that. "Why would they think I'd make it up?" People don't believe what you're saying.

As time goes, the wounds heal but I don't think it ever leaves you. It went on for five years and three years I've been out of it, but it's always in the background.

When I come back here at 10p.m. I'm pretty fast to get to the car. I'm aware of things, of danger. More aware of men after what has happened. The character of that person, you watch very carefully the next time. The psychiatrist said, "Next time you will have a gut instinct".

With this person that I was with I'd push those feelings away and think it would be OK. Now that I'm going with [a] new model you look closely and cut that off before it even happens, if you think I don't think this is the right person.

Before you'd be more likely to try the person to see if they're OK. I've had two relationships and both have been violent. I was married for 15 years and then met this person and spent five years with him. They were both violent. You can't pick them. You have to make yourself more aware. Become friends and check them out. When you start to know someone, those things come out.

When they drink alcohol and then change to become aggressive and violent, that's not a good thing.

It is possible to educate young women. It's funny you hear women say they're attracted to a larrikin because he is outgoing. Behind closed doors they're not a great bloke. They become manipulative and play mind games. A young girl at puberty may be educated to make her more aware of the opposite sex. They should know what signs and what things to look for. The psychiatrist said "Helen you have gut instincts". I'm 41 and never knew that.

You dismiss what you don't like about a person and say it doesn't matter. All those instincts I pushed away with both partners were right. A woman's intuition is pretty good. The psychiatrist said that and that's right.

I see my daughter being attracted to that type of person. She's young and vulnerable. She says, "Mum, you don't know what you're talking about. You take people for what they are. If they're nice and talk to you, well, you think they're nice".

But I know it takes two years for it to surface. The honeymoon phase is over after two years and you start to know what they're really like. It would be worthwhile to try to tell young girls. It worries me about young girls. When its time to have a relationship, it's hard for them. They have more obstacles to get around then we did; drugs, all sorts of things that affect everything.

Sometimes I think you're better off not to say anything and keep quiet. A myriad of things happen when you say something, and stand up for what you believe. I don't really want to do this but if I can help another woman down the track it will be worth it. If I speak up now and fight for what I think is right, someone else will benefit. It's the hardest thing to stand up and make this public.

My domestic violence worker said, "you're strong and you stand up for what you believe in". I hope I can help someone down the track. We have a long way to go in our society. People don't want to believe, and when a woman says, "I need to tell people this", they don't want to believe her.

My parents have a close relationship and my father is a kind and gentle man. They've always portrayed it [a good relationship], and I've seen it day in day out, and that's what you want in a relationship; that' s what you think it's going to be like and you get a big shock when it isn't. When you have parents like that you stick at it longer than you should because you think you've failed.

I took marriage as a serious thing but you can't stick at it forever. You feel like you've failed. Society could change its ways about women in that respect. Those vibes felt by me that I wasn't telling the truth. "You made it up, you stupid, neurotic woman, you're cracking up". You think we have equal rights

but they still don't believe what you say. They don't listen. I realise how far we are behind.

Police attitude is the same – making it up, neurotic woman. I was in casualty. They go by red tape more than anything and I don't find them to be caring or sympathetic to what's happened.

"Ok, what time?" Write it in your notebook.

You're in casualty vomiting, you've just been attacked and there's no one to put an arm around you or to say, "We're here to help". There's none of that. Nurses and doctors are fine, but male police can't handle the fact that a woman has been assaulted. Female police still don't cross the line. They keep to formalities. A male and a female police person come-the male stands at the door and the female questions you. You don't know whether they're going to talk about it in the car or at work. It's very cold towards you. The "Didn't happen" attitude is one that feeds through the court and the police. The service system is supportive and the other side, the legal side, is exactly the opposite.

Scarlet

I can remember one of his worst episodes was when I was eight months pregnant. He had come home drunk and completely smashed the whole house up. He took the front door off and was chasing me around the house in a rage.... It was so loud, he was smashing windows and pulling doors off, yelling at me and telling me he was going to get me...I didn't really know the neighbours but I expected someone would help.

The final leaving was pretty awful. My daughter was two months old. I'd left and gone back a couple of times after violence. With other violence, he was drunk, but this time he was sober. On that day he'd spent our last ten dollars on beer. I got cross and poured it down the sink. He got quite violent with me.

After that he rang my mother and said, "You'd better come and get her".

At other times when he'd been violent with me, he'd been angry or upset or worried. When I was pregnant, Mum tried to put in place safe strategies. She said to him, "Next time you're angry, call me". She knew I wasn't going to leave.

That last time, he called her after he'd had me by the throat and pulled me down the hall. Ten minutes after he called she came to get me. I'm trying to remember. She came to get me and I went with her and stayed the night with them (my family). I decided after talking with Mum that I wanted to leave. He called me that night and I told him, "I'm not coming back". The next day, I went to get my stuff. He wouldn't let me take my car so I ended up having to walk with all my stuff. The baby was two months old.

I think at that point, he did a bit of talking to try and make me come back but it was not like the previous episode where he rang me all the time. He got funny immediately and wouldn't let me have the car at all. I remember he brought his kids to the house - he has two other girls - to make me feel guilty

and come back. I felt strong about leaving but I still wanted him and wanted to have contact with him, so I was taking the baby to see him. And that carried on till she was one. I was still sleeping with him at times then, but when I decided to go on holidays up north, it showed his possessiveness. Three days before my holiday to see my girlfriend, he decided to move to Queensland. He wanted to see me all the time when I was there, but when I came home he stayed.

I feel more fear from him now than when I had lots of contact. You don't feel as scared as you should be when you see him all the time. The thought of him coming home now terrifies me. We don't have any contact now. We haven't for one and a half years.

I had a phone call from my girlfriend's boyfriend. It was about my girlfriend's birthday and when I picked up the phone, it sounded like George. He'd said something silly like, "Hi, sexy". I thought it was him, and I almost vomited straight away because I knew it was a local call and I thought that it meant he was in town.

At the end, he was actually more physical - in grabbing me by the throat and really pushing me and hitting me across the head - than when he was drunk. Memories are coming up more and more. In the last couple of months I remember two times that he did this, hit me in the head or across the face.

It was just my parents who helped. I can remember one of his worst episodes was when I was eight months pregnant. He had come home drunk and completely smashed the whole house up. He took the front door off, and was chasing me around the house in a rage. He finally passed out in the bedroom and I relaxed and went to bed in the lounge room. But then he woke up half an hour later and went into the bathroom smashing mirrors and windows and finally finding me and trying to kick me. I had to grab the phone and race out the front. I only had his coat on and nothing else.

I had to run away from him. I remember being out the front and there was a

man over the road standing in his garden listening, a neighbour, who watched the whole thing and didn't call anyone or do anything. He didn't even ask if I was OK. It was so loud, he was smashing windows and pulling doors off, yelling at me and telling me he was going to get me. We'd been there at least four months. I didn't really know the neighbours, but I expected someone would help.

I did ask him after that time to see a counsellor. I went back – I can't believe I did - on the condition that he would see Life Works about his violent behaviour. He ended up making me go with him. The counsellor wanted me to go in, too. Me going too was fucked because then it looked just like a normal relationship problem. It looked like I was being brought in to explain what was going on. Then we had that whole cycle of him being sweet to me again. He went once, and then found excuses to not go again. At that time, I was nearly having the baby and he was being OK again.

One of the reasons it was hard to leave was that he smashed the house up, and, stupid as it sounds, I remember thinking, "I have to go back and fix the house".

The real estate agent wouldn't rent to me at first, because he'd had so many bad experiences of George renting. He was completely financially dependent on me, and I'd convinced them to rent to me, so I was thinking, "Oh my God, he's smashed the house". I wanted to make sure he'd fixed all the holes in the bathroom that he had kicked in (he's a plasterer!), and I wanted to get someone to fix the doors and windows. I was worried about how people perceived us. I had this idea we could be a family, and that he would come to that, and it would be ok.

You cover up because when it's good, you want some ease with your family, and that doesn't happen when it's shitful. So you cover up what's going on, so you don't lose your friends and family.

The baby made it hard to leave. Obviously. It's this fantasy of a family. And I

loved his children very much. They were doing the access thing. For the first time in their lives they'd been stable with their father. He wasn't living with friends, he was living with me, and so they could come and do the family thing with us.

Another thing that made it hard to leave was that we'd been drug users together and he had threatened to tell my parents -which I've since done. He'd always threaten me with telling my parents I was a junkie if I didn't do what he wanted.

I'm still with my parents. I have lived with Mum and Dad from when I left. It's two years now. Dad has built a house where I have my own living space with my daughter. They're upstairs. I've always been close with my family. It's nice to have my own space and just pop upstairs when I'm a bit lonely.

When I first left it was probably a good six months when we were all in the one house. But there were four bedrooms and the baby was little – until she was about ten months - and not running around, so it was OK.

I had some help from a friend. He's into yoga. He runs emotional release workshops. I had lots of help dealing with my issues from him.

I've had support from my friends. I've always been honest to people since I've left. I'm a teller. I don't feel private about it, like when we were together, or ashamed to tell. I didn't talk about it when we were together because you always got this question of whether you wanted to leave them or not. You keep hoping they'll get better enough so you never have to tell.

The strength I got from being a mother helped. I stayed on in this violent relationship for a couple of years before I had my baby. I guess even though people see me as being very strong. I wasn't. I was one of the people who should have known. I was the girl who always gave advice to others not to stay in this kind of relationship. Being a mother is what made me leave.

In the last episode, she was sleeping in the bed and I didn't want her to see any of his violence. And I wanted to give her things. He was spending all the money on beer and drugs. And us not having anything left at the end of the day. It was all my money. He would talk me into giving him money and even my credit card. He was consuming all my money. He'd say he had to go and get milk, and I'd find him a couple of hours later in the pub, spending a couple of hundred dollars. He would run a tab or use my credit card.

Even though I was a drug user, I would never let us get to ... I would never have spent the last of my money on drugs. I was working full time and enjoyed living a normal, responsible life even though I was a drug user. But he had the hand of control in everything that happened. A lot of my use was because he would spend all my money on drugs, and he'd have the drugs there, and I'd end up using a lot because I'd think, "Well, I may as well use it". It's not like I could take the drugs back and get my money returned.

I'm competent because I managed to hold a job down through all of this. I think I'm warm, and I'm adaptable. Caring, sensitive. Forgiving – I don't know if that's a strength, it's been a lot of my problem with men. I'm determined.

I had to go to Centrelink. I went on to be single mum and handed over the child support ball to them because I knew I wouldn't get a cent out of him. So I don't get maintenance. At one stage I was to be paid \$7 per month from him! The woman I saw at Centrelink was helpful. But I owe them \$1200 because they overpaid me.

Really, it's only Mum who supported me. She could give me support as a mother and, because of the field she's in, I got all the support I needed through her.

Through my work as well - being in the welfare field was helpful. You might just have a chat over coffee and I guess [the people you work with] do what they do without you even knowing. They encourage you. I had 12 months maternity leave, so I was able to go back to work, and that helped my sanity

and my financial position. By the time my daughter was eight months I knew I wanted to be a working mum, so it was really helpful having the choice of going back to work.

Just after the baby was born, his mother lent us \$1500 to buy a car. We bought it, and I was giving him \$100 a pay to give to his mother to pay it back. I can't believe I trusted him with it. We were seeing a bit of his mother then because of the baby and she was trying to re establish her relationship with him.

Things had been difficult because he'd been wild. She had left her husband because he was violent. She waited until the boys were eighteen and then she lived a completely free life. His mother lives about 50 kilometres away and we see her every couple of months if we're lucky.

When we split, George said that's why he wouldn't give me the car. He said, "My mother says I shouldn't give it to you because what if you don't pay her the money". So I took in a cheque - from my mum - to pay off the rest of the money that we owed. I remember she gave me this look and I knew straight away. I couldn't believe I'd trusted him to give her the money [each pay]. He hadn't given her a cent.

I've always encouraged his mother to come to our house to visit with her granddaughter, but our visits with her are very infrequent. Normally it's us having lunch with her in her lunch hour. We haven't spoken about the car. She knew he was financially unreliable. She probably knew he was like that before I did. All she'd say is, 'I've told George he's better off far away. He's not doing you or the kids any good being here". But there is never any talk of, "Are you OK?"

I thought there might be help from her in that she'd suffered the same stuff from her partner. Maybe it's too hard for her to think her own boy was doing that.

I have a friend in this same situation, and I think I've been honest with her. If she's told me stuff that's gone on, I've just been honest. I've said, "That's not OK". But I never pressured her to leave because I know she won't until she's ready. She asks questions and I give her honest answers, and that's all she needs. I'm very supportive and encouraging. But I never say she should leave. Otherwise, people feel like they're letting one or the other down all the time. I felt that way - especially with my mum.

I knew in my head it was crazy. When I'd go back, I knew I was letting my mother down. You just feel like, "If I stay I can't be their friend. I should leave, they've told me to leave". All it does is break down the opportunity for them to talk about it – and to leave - because they'll just cover up what's happening.

I can always, with my knowledge of services, give helpful advice to my friend about where to go, and tell her that she can always stay with me.

As far as my relationship with George went, he first became violent six months after we moved interstate. Before we moved there, he had been reluctant for me to give him money. He wanted to move there so he could get work with his father. He asked me to go with him and we used my holiday pay to get there. He said, "When we get there I will have work straight away with my father".

The minute my money ran out and I was asking for money, it started. I was dependent on him, knew no one, and he started being emotionally violent. His father would give me money. Then the drinking came to light. He and his father would drink together. It was such a drinking household. I was with him for two years and then had another year after the separation putting up with his bullshit.

Last Christmas he was still behaving violently - he was drunk, feeling sad and sorry because he had nothing. I'd said I would take our daughter over to see him. I had the baby in my arms and he threw the coffee table at us.

I was trying to keep her and her father together, but things just got worse.

Dawn

I want people to believe me and say sorry that it happened to me. Even though they didn't do it. It's not like taking the blame. You want people to say they're sorry, and more important to say they believe you. I don't even mind them asking the hard questions about why I didn't leave sooner.

My story is not private anymore. The more people who know about it the better. I just want to have it acknowledged that what he did was wrong. I took him to court over another matter – my daughter's maintenance – but it's not the money. He was pathetic.

Leaving was funny, tragic and scary at the same time. I'd been having an affair. My husband had been having an affair for five to ten years and many others before that. I didn't know that. The person I'd been having an affair with had been living in my house. He was a victim of violence as well, and we had a lot in common.

My husband trapped me into a confession on the Saturday morning (after a blow up between us overnight). He was going to work and said, "We'll talk when I get home". He usually got home about 6p.m. He came home with six cans of beer, though he was not usually a drinker. He sat with me and with John in the lounge room. We must have had a normal tea. The kids were in bed. He tackled us both about our relationship and became louder and more aggressive over the course of the evening. He drank the beer and threw the cans in the corner. He had a terrible temper and was very violent. He screamed and he swore at the two of us. I find that amusing because he was putting on such an act. He ranted for a couple of hours and we hardly

said anything. It was funny. It was scary at the same time, but it was funny.

Then around midnight he hunted John out of the house and was screaming at him "Come back for your things at 4pm". He went to the bedroom, and I was in the kitchen or laundry and my husband came out stark naked. He grabbed me and dragged me through the kitchen into the lounge room and I was resisting; hanging on to doorjamb the way I used to. John saw me through the window.

My husband tried to push me but I fell down on the floor. John was trying to open a window to get in but they were wind-out windows and he couldn't. John grabbed the window and tried to get in but broke the lock instead. This made a noise and my husband turned away from me and raced to the window in the little office. He ranted, screamed, yelled and carried on. Your mind is like porridge when you've had years of this.

I went into the bedroom. I sat on the side of the bed. Fortunately, he must have changed his mind. I don't know what he was going to do. I don't like to think about it. I sat there a while. Maybe he didn't come in for a while. Eventually I thought, "What am I doing?" and went out the front door. I was wondering what had happened to John. Eventually my husband must have got dressed and we talked a while. We both got in the car and drove around the streets looking for John. I don't get it anymore. I don't get it.

I didn't spend the night at the house that night. He must have gone back home. We didn't find John. I just wandered for the rest of the night. I finally found John and we sat under a tree wondering what to do.

I spent one more night in the house. My husband went to work and the kids went to school. I slept most of the day because I was so tired. John stayed in the caravan park. My husband was pushing me out the door of my home in a very devious way. He had constructed our story in this way. He'd been dominated by this woman (me), for 22 years and he was the victim. I did spend that night in the home and the Monday night and we must have slept in the same bed. But there was an understanding that I was going. He would have been secretly happy because he moved his girlfriend in straight away.

I moved myself out on the Tuesday. My husband was extremely helpful with that. He took me to a place to buy a second hand fridge and car. Every time I went to the house, there was a pile of stuff on the dining table, and he'd say I could take that lot with me. He'd been cleaning out the drawers.

I understood quite clearly that I was making his life miserable and I was the cause of all his problems. I understood clearly that I couldn't do things right. I had to move away. I believed what he was telling me you see. It was quite clear. We had three children. The eldest was fourteen years old. There was absolutely no thought about taking the children because I understood that was not what a good mother would do. I understood the whole household would be much more harmonious without me.

He was a teacher and would get home about 5 p.m. I worked part time. So the understanding was that I would pick up the children, do some washing and cooking, and he would come home about 5 and I'd pick up my clothes and leave. I firmly understood that the kids wouldn't notice any difference. While he worked a weekend job I

spent the whole time doing the washing, cleaning and cooking for the freezer. I totally believed they wouldn't notice. I thought I was being a good mum. Some people don't see that. The kids don't see that either. They don't hold it against me, but they hurt like hell.

I found a little essay one had written; just talking about how much they missed mum and the noises in the kitchen. A photo of me was missing from an album, and I later found it amongst my second son's stuff. Your mind gets so changed by the emotional abuse and blackmail. Its crazy and you are crazy, slightly insane.

In a doctor's surgery a few years after I left, I saw a poster saying that emotional abuse hurts more than physical abuse, the wounds go much deeper. I didn't have that many physical injuries. I don't know if he was clever, but there was nothing I could show a doctor or the police. I didn't mention a word of this to my parents or anyone. I believed it was obviously my fault.

It must have been something to do with John that helped me leave. Leaving had crossed my mind before but I'd dismissed it straight away. I had no idea how I would survive. I knew nothing about women's refuges, health care cards or any other kind of support. We were on a good income, I'd never heard about those things. Where would I live and get money from? It was all too hard and scary. You'd think the situation I was in was even scarier, but it's amazing what you'll put up with.

I believed when I was leaving that it was the right thing to do for his sake and the kids' sake – because he convinced me I was so hopeless. I had no idea what to do, but at least with John beside me there would be two of us. The kids finally, one at a time, came to live with me. Two

years, three years, seven years later. It was hard waiting for them to make up their minds.

John was an excellent support and he would still be here in my life if it weren't for his addictions. He is an alcoholic and a drug addict. He hadn't had a drink for the six and a half months he stayed with our family and he was a brilliant, fantastic, wonderful supportive person. He totally changed his personality when drinking and he's now in a homeless men's support shelter. I would be happy for him to come back, if clean and sober for twelve months – and that's never going to happen. He was just great for the first year or so.

John and I went together to a counsellor in town who was also a friend of mine. It might have been within weeks of leaving and the aim of it was to help with the separation. I had no idea yet that there had been verbal, emotional and physical abuse. We went six or so times.

The year of leaving was around the time of the police phone-in, Operation Pegasus – it used to be an annual thing. After I moved here, around 1994, there were police announcements on the radio, "If you think you've been a victim of abuse you can ring". One day I phoned, and the policewoman asked me to describe an incident. I described one of oral sex that he'd forced on me. She said, "That's rape". I said, "Well, if that is, what about ... a few other things". What's that, ten years ago; the awareness (of an experience of domestic violence) gradually built over a period of years. The awareness, the sadness, frustration, anger, desire for retribution gradually built up. Sometimes it's hard to explain to people, or for them to understand, the realisation and desire for action can take years to build. So trying to convince a policewoman or counsellor or legal person years down the track is well nigh impossible.

When I left I set up in the flat with John and there can't have been much that was hard about it. Money was always tight but you cope. Emotionally it wasn't hard.

I was prepared to accept as little as he [my husband] gave me. I can remember saying once when I was packing things up at the house, (I always regret this) that I would not take anything good. We'd just renovated the kitchen five years before and there was new linen and pots and pans, but I felt I couldn't take any of that. How could I? The sheets I took had holes and I took the old set of pots and pans.

I was in the mindset that I could accept second best. When we were working out the property settlement I said to myself, " that's OK, I can shop at the Op Shop but he can't. I'm prepared to make do with second best but he can't. It doesn't worry me". So setting up the little flat by scouring second hand shops was no drama. I never got all the things that belonged to me.

The hardest thing was the emotional work of dealing with not having the kids around. It didn't work out the way I thought it would with me being around most of the time and the idea that the kids wouldn't notice. As soon as I'd gone, he got custody of the kids within three days. His girlfriend had just left her husband and I remember him telling me we had to work out about the kids. I knew they would stay with their father because I was a decent mother and I couldn't take them away from their beautiful bedrooms and school.

So he said we just have to formalise this. I realised later his girlfriend, who is a real nag, would have been at him to make sure he formalised the custody quickly.

I left on April 9th and the court order, dated April 12th, is when he got the custody.

He gradually tightened the access to the kids. They were not to come to my place. I was to come over to the house on the weekend – maybe because he had his meals cooked this arrangement suited him. All the way through the marriage, he would make insults and innuendoes and under the breath comments and accusations about me to keep me where he wanted me. Afterwards it was more about the kids, and how he'd move away. All these veiled threats so I'd be scared to complain or object to any arrangement and wouldn't get to see my kids at all.

I was really at pains to show that I was OK even if I had had a really hard day.

I'd get all dressed up and be trying to show him I was happy and relaxed. Damned if you do and damned if you don't. He blamed me for running off with someone. He used this against me too, in court cases – and also that, “No she didn't appear to be upset”.

John and I were happy. I didn't mind the hardship of the accommodation or the finances. The hardest thing was that I thought I'd be getting away from the blackmail and the verbal abuse but I didn't. I still had to have contact with him and communicate with him about family court, property etc. and he took every opportunity to abuse, bully, belittle and ridicule me. One technique was to walk outside while talking to me, and I'd have to follow him into the driveway, and he'd make loud disgusting accusations about me so the neighbours could hear.

If I bumped into him today, he would still make accusations and run me down.

He's a talker. People make jokes about it, but when you're lying in bed in the dark, whether he's been physically abusive or not, when he's talking for an hour or more about how pathetic you are and how you don't measure up, and how all the other wives do things for their husbands that you don't, it wears you down. I used to put my fingers in my ears so I couldn't hear him but it didn't matter - he had to justify it for himself. He was brainwashing himself. He had to get his story straight. That didn't stop when I left – well at night it did!

John helped me. I had no network. Our friend, the first counsellor that John and I saw, was helpful. It was good to have her there. I can remember her saying once, months down the track, "Dawn, when are you actually going to leave him? I don't think you have emotionally left him. You're still worried about his welfare and not yours".

I've been to a succession of counsellors since, and didn't discover CASA until 1993 or 1994 after I rang Operation Pegasus. So nobody helped. I'd lost contact with my father. My mother had died. How do you explain to a seventy-year-old who was brought up at a time when divorce is unacceptable that you've left your marriage?

Because my husband was such a talker I knew within days that it was too late to seek support from any of our family and friends. He'd already told everyone else his version of the story. He'd even told my father and my brother. I didn't ring my brother until a year later. I asked him if it was still OK for me to talk to him. Now we're really close. There was no friend or neighbour I could go to. He would have got to them

first. I hated going into town – I believed that everyone would have believed his story. I now know that lots of people think he's a bit wacky.

I wasn't conscious of any strength in myself. I realise now that during the marriage I was the victim and he was the child within the marriage. My counsellor friend pointed that out. Therefore, I mothered him a lot. I had to take charge of finances. He wouldn't assist in any of that. I made all the arrangements with the school and took care of all those practical things because I'm capable of that. All those skills I possessed to survive day to day, to find a flat, to organise finance were there, but I wasn't conscious of that as strength. I couldn't have done it without John there though, emotionally. Obviously I can do it, because now I have this house.

The way I found CASA could have been one of two ways; either through phone calls to Operation Pegasus or the time when a policewoman organised an interview here and she may have referred me to CASA. I am a community development worker, so I get a lot of stuff in the mail. I might have been filing away bits and pieces. I gradually became aware of CASA somehow. If it was through the police, it was the only thing that was helpful. The rest of my contact with the police has been a total disaster.

The recommendation to go to the police came from Operation Pegasus, and it was through them that I took it up.

In 1995 or 1996 during the course of unrelated legal things like property and maintenance, my solicitor wanted to bring to court that during the first property settlement I was under undue pressure from him. There was no evidence of intimidation so he suggested I talk to people I knew to see if they noticed anything during the marriage.

It was really hard to do at first, but a good thing to do. I was amazed at the things they had to say. Their suspicions made me feel better. The other thing I learned from these conversations was that he'd had a string of affairs. After hearing all of this I was so angry. I felt stupid because everyone knew and I didn't. I felt murderous. People said don't lower yourself to his level, but by not accusing him publicly about what he'd done for the past twenty years, by getting on with my life, I was allowing him to continue to do this. He was confident that I would never expose any of this, and that he could continue to abuse me. I became angry and decided I wanted him to pay; I liked the idea of a magistrate shaking his finger at him and telling him he had acted unlawfully.

I went back to CASA and told my worker that I wanted to stop him and wanted to make it public. She said I could use Crimes Compensation to take him to court for criminal action. She arranged for police to come and see me about it. The next appointment was ninety minutes with community police and CASA. I sobbed during the interview and felt very angry and frustrated. The policewoman was very hard. When I was sobbing, she said, "If you behave like that the prosecutor will make mincemeat of you". I thought she was probably right and that she thought I was weak.

I decided to make a statement by the end of the week. I went in to see the policewoman. We were chatting in the staffroom, and she was telling me about her terrible marriage. I arranged to make a statement within a day or so. When I went back she was pretty hard.

I'd been told when making a statement you must have actual facts about incidents. The CASA worker told me that and gave me examples

to think about, for example if incidents happened around particular events like birthdays. So I wrote a timeline, and then I could link in about six incidents.

So I took this with me to make the statement with the policewoman. She started asking me about each incident and I referred to my notes. She sometimes asked me hard questions, like “Why didn’t you run out of the room then?” I didn’t need her to be sympathetic, but she was really hard. She even argued about the spelling of dining chairs! When we finished, she said, “This is like a cloak and now you can take it off and go home and plant a tree”. She was going to pass my statement onto the CIB.

I know he was taken in and interviewed. A solicitor in town was taking care of this. John made a witness statement and then retracted it (because he was back on the drink and didn’t want police involvement).

My [new] solicitor got cold feet and passed me onto another one. Then one day he got a copy of my statement and it had a note attached by the policewoman saying she thought I was lying to get crimes compensation. I was devastated. Hell, it’s taken so much guts to get this far – to try to get him to court. You think about this: how will I cope if the magistrate finds he’s not guilty? I worried then about my reaction to the policewoman’s note and how I would react if a magistrate didn’t believe me.

I went back to CASA and was given a copy of the Police Code of Ethics. I wrote a letter to the policewoman’s supervisor. I think the whole problem was that because I took a list in she thought I’d planned it. I don’t know how I’m supposed to remember dates and details without

being methodical about it. I had no idea I was being watched, and sussed out by her.

The CASA counsellor gave me a copy of the Police Code of Ethics, which made it clear she was absolutely wrong to make any comment or opinion on my statement. My letter to her superior got me nowhere. The supervisor eventually came here after I rang and complained. She sat at the table and said the policewoman was going through a bad time herself, and agreed that she shouldn't have made a comment. I gave her my written complaint and she promised to get back to me but she didn't.

I rang the police again. The supervisor said, "Oh, no, she's been spoken to".

I contacted the police ombudsmen. The senior sergeant talked me into writing a letter with their help saying they had apologised to me and I was satisfied with the action they had taken against the policewoman, and would take no further action.

I'm sorry I did that now. I am still so damn compliant, like I was in my marriage. Basically, they were perpetrators too, and I just went along with it. I don't know what I could have done. I am so angry with that policewoman. She was a trained policewoman in the community policing squad. Isn't she expected to know?

I have no faith in the police at all. Never did really, I suppose. When John was drinking I had to call the police a couple of times and they just sneered at me.

I have had friends in this situation (domestic violence). There is not a lot I can do.

The most important thing is to listen. I occasionally give advice but this is a bit presumptuous. I give advice on practical things; go back and get everything that's important to you even down to CDs. I had a salt pig that my mother gave me and it was important to me and some finger puppets I had made for the kids. They're important things to get.

The reaction from friends is always the same – I say, “Make sure you get it as soon as possible – anything that is precious to you”. They always say, “Oh no, it's OK, were getting on OK”. Then six months later they strike problems when he's become really picky.

Listening and supporting is all you can do. I've offered to go to court with people. I've dealt with my stuff, and think I'm far enough along to cope with it. No matter what solicitor I have I write my own affidavits now because they are more accurate. They don't say things the way I do. I wanted to go through and correct it to make it exactly how I would say things. So I have to be aware of the way court works and I think I could help others by sharing what I've learned about the legal system. Also I think the support in the court is important. It was so difficult to sit in one room and hear the sound of his voice in the next room. I was alone every time. I would go cold at the sound of his voice.

So what I do most for a woman is listen; just let them talk, and validate. The most important thing anyone did for me was validating. I was never able to take him to court over the abuse. My application for Crimes Compensation was rejected because the courts don't want to bother with cases without solid evidence. There are no witnesses to this crime. The solicitor said I could go to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and

try and have that decision changed so it could be heard in court, for Crimes Compensation. The money offered by Crimes Compensation wasn't important to me; I just wanted to get him stood up there and told off.

So I went to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to get Crimes Compensation heard. I had a barrister appointed that day. A friend was going to come with me to court but she forgot, so I was there alone and my barrister started to put my case and the member asked what evidence was going to be put, and specific incidents that post traumatic stress can be tracked back to.

The case was adjourned and my barrister said, "This is not good", and, "This member is not usually this harsh. It looks like if we can't provide specific evidence of post traumatic stress, you will lose and have to pay costs".

Her advice to me was to withdraw and bear my own costs. It was good advice and the only thing I could do. We were in her office, and I was sobbing and getting distressed. I had said I wanted it out in the open, and my husband told off. She looked at me and said, "I believe you". That was so good.

So I went home on the train knowing that a barrister believed me. And she's a little bit more important than a policewoman.

It's a very big story. A few years down the track when I started to acknowledge the real situation I saw a counsellor and she gave me an article called 'Disclosures and Confrontation', and she said, "Think about telling people about it".

That was a revelation to me. I read it, and told people and was amazed at the reaction. I think everyone believed me. I think because they knew the personality. And then I confronted him and that was pretty good too. It was scary as well. He dropped the kids off here one weekend and I read him a statement I'd written saying he was responsible for what had happened. I stood at the door of his car and gave it to him because it was his and not mine. He screwed it up and said, "Thank you for your support", as I walked away from him. That was excellent advice from my counsellor.

No one action is the answer. It's an accumulation of the little things you do that are beneficial. One thing that helped was writing my story. I wrote thirty pages and it was painful, hard, agonising. There were times when I wanted to give up.

I'm really glad I did it. I wrote everything, every little incident from the day I was married. The only things you can't recall are the words. I wrote everything. It was good when it was finished. It got it out of my head, out there, outside of me. It helped me to put things into words that I hadn't thought about properly before then.

I've started thinking about things. It's still having an effect. Why? How? I have a job fifteen hours a week and it's not enough to live on. I'm a trained teacher but this isn't a teaching job. People tell me I have a lot of talent but I really don't see it. When I look for jobs, I can't see anything for me.

Then two weeks ago, I saw a full time job I could do on my ear as a personal assistant to a CEO. It had a lot to do with minutes, meetings, knowing legislation and I didn't apply for it. I got the job description, read through the cooperatives act, relevant information etc. and in the

end I didn't apply. There were lots of reasons I created for not applying. The due date came and went. I only realised yesterday that it's because I didn't have the confidence. I don't know where you get that. It's been thirteen years. I say I'm over it, but there are still bits that I'm not over.

My daughter left her father's house in 1997, and I had been really worried about her because the two boys had left earlier. The boys were fed up with him, and his wife is no better. I was worried because of the mind manipulation he does that her mind would be altered.

I had contacted the Child Protection Unit at the Department of Human Services. The child herself has to say, "I don't like it here any more". She was only seven at the time. When she was fourteen, on a weekend visit, she said she didn't want to go back. She had been in the business of protecting her father. Maybe it's got something to do with being female.

The boys had never really confided in me. She's confided so many things to me about how she felt, like how she hates going into town, and we end up talking about it. She hates the way her father lies and lies and lies. And I can listen and say, "Yes".

He would get people off side through his lies. There were so many times she'd share her feelings with me and I could validate that - we could validate it for each other. She could say anything to me about her father. I won't run him down but I will validate her feelings. Once she moved here, she said she did not want to cut her father off like the boys did (not that they really did this).

Three years later she wrote a letter to him saying she didn't want to have anything to do with him, his games, threats, lies and manipulation. I could totally identify. She said if I'd stayed there, I would have become a sheep. My eldest son is twenty-seven and has very little to do with his father. Just does the obligatory visit. He's stoic and doesn't socialise. My second son is twenty-four and I'm concerned for him because he's taken it on his shoulders to be there for this father because the rest of us are not. He is a kind-hearted person and puts himself last for others, not just his dad.

When my daughter started sharing her feelings I was finally able to say, it wasn't just me after all. She is an intelligent person and she's reacting the same way.

One of the people I disclosed to is in a peak body in Melbourne. The Yorta Yorta people were in the midst of reconciliation and she said something about the Aboriginals wanting us to say sorry. I immediately saw the connection. I want people to believe me and say sorry that it happened to me. Even though they didn't do it. It's not like taking the blame. You want people to say they're sorry, and more important to say they believe you. I don't even mind them asking the hard questions about why I didn't leave sooner.

Tina

For the whole nine months of my pregnancy, my poor little girl, there wasn't one month when I wasn't crying, crying, crying. It was constant mental abuse, yelling all the time and being very manipulative. He got me to a stage where my confidence was so low that when I'd walk down the street or into a shop my head was low.

Being in a relationship for so long made it hard. I felt that what was happening to me was normal. I wasn't able to see anything differently because he would make it, like, that relationship I was comparing us to was wrong, and he would twist it so that what I was in was normal. It was the only way to put it. It seemed normal; a normal way of living.

If I asked Jack to do something, he would turn around and blast me. That was normal for me. Now I realise I can ask anything and it shouldn't have to be a drama. I changed my personality to suit it. I went against people for him. With Jack it was constant mental abuse, yelling all the time and being very manipulative.

He got me to a stage where my confidence was so low that when I'd walk down the street or into a shop my head was low. If a man gave me a compliment, he would say that man must be gay. He said no one would put up with me. That's why I stayed too, because I thought I'd never find someone else. He had me believing that.

My cousin sent out invitations to her wedding. We were so close and she included him in the invitation. But by the look on his face as he read the invitation I knew not to say any more. He thought my family would pressure him into marrying me.

At 9 p.m. in the evening he came over and blasted me, ripped shreds off me about my family and the wedding. He would go on for two or three hours about the same thing and get me so low. He left at one or two in the

morning. I was like, where did this come from? I didn't dare say a word. I thought my cousin had done the decent thing by inviting him to the wedding.

Another occasion, we had gone to get some McDonald's. I didn't feel confident enough to go inside, so I suggested going through the drive-through. The look on Jack's face said it all; I knew I would pay for suggesting that when we got home.

After we had arrived home, he threw his hamburger at my face. For the first time in my life, I got angry with him. I found I couldn't stop. It was like six years of build up just exploded in me; never before had I dared stick up for myself. Jack told me to "Shut up or else". But I couldn't stop.

Out of all the more severe situations, something so simple gave me the strength to finally stick up for myself and not fear him. He then threw me against the fridge, with his hands around my neck, holding me upwards, while the other hand was on my mouth suffocating me. He was screaming at me, telling me to "fucking shut up". I couldn't breathe, let alone say a word. I started crying, then he stopped.

The next day it was as if nothing happened. He smiled, said, "Sorry", and I was never to mention what had happened, ever. I was to carry on as normal.

My mum could see right through Jack; therefore their relationship was not good. There was a mutual dislike between them. I missed my mum terribly. I wanted family around as much as I could, but I couldn't say anything, otherwise it would have made them suspicious.

So this one time, I asked my mum to come over and stay with me for a few days. Upon telling Jack this he proceeded to yell at me, started throwing my furniture around in a fit of rage. He threatened that if my mum came to stay, "Watch out". But I stood my ground. He left absolutely wild.

Mum came and I was so scared. I remained calm, but inside I was dying,

knowing what was to happen. So I suggested to Mum that we go across the road to the park for lunch. The whole time my mind was ticking over, trying to think ahead to prevent a nasty situation, and at the same time trying to have a normal lunch with Mum so she wouldn't suspect a thing. I thought I was good at preventing situations where Jack was concerned, but I was so wrong.

As we were at the park I saw him pull up at my flat, banging on the door. I could see his mind ticking. He couldn't understand why the car was there and we weren't. I could see he was wild. Lucky we were tucked away, so he couldn't see us. So he drove around the park, (with a, "I could kill you", look on his face).

He drove around four times, and then sped off. Scared, I said to Mum, "Let's go back home". No sooner had we gone inside, he pulled up. I could have died on the spot. So I went outside and locked the door behind me.

Jack said, "I want to go inside."

I said "No".

"Let me go inside now."

I asked, "Why? What are you going to do?"

He said, "I just want to go inside and have a drink". I wouldn't let him in, so he started screaming abuse at me, jumped in the car, and said, "Fuck you, you fucking bitch!"

I went inside in shock, then about twenty minutes later I received a call from the police saying Jack was in hospital and he asked to see you. Apparently he was so wild and had such a build up of anger in him [that] he went to his family's business and started abusing his brother. Then proceeded outside and smashed his fist through the rear window of his dad's car. So my poor mum, needless to say, went home in shock and was so sick with worry.

Over the years I became an expert at reading his face and knowing what simple things would set him off. Mind you, once he was in those black, I call

psychotic, moods, nothing would stop him. He was a scary human being that nobody could stop, or would ever suspect he was like that. He was so charming and polite to other people.

It wasn't my actual decision to leave. The reason I left was because we were supposed to be married. Three weeks before the wedding he came to my parents' house to organise the reception. He came up to the house and it ended up being a physical fight with my dad. It was quite severe. There was blood and the police were called. I was pregnant at the time and hadn't told my parents because we were getting married.

The police were involved. Jack finally left the property. The next-door neighbour intervened, and it took him an hour to get Jack off the property. Jack was down on the road and he kept his hand on the horn and yelled abuse at my family so the whole town would hear. He did that so the police would come.

They came to my parents' house, and the police took it that Jack was a bit crazy. They asked my dad if he wanted to press charges. He said no, he didn't want to press charges. Jack ended up having to go to the hospital.

I followed the police back to the hospital. The police advised Jack not to go back on the property. The nurse was there. Jack just stood over me and yelled. He said he wanted me to testify on the stand against my father. He abused me for quite a while. It took the nurses three hours to get Jack to leave without me.

The police thought he was a madman going off. They could have enforced more with Jack. He has gotten away with too much; too many threats were made without follow up. That's why he's gotten so bad. With his family, if he threw hammers through the window, or punched holes in their walls or abused them, his family would say, "He is just going through a bad time", and would shove it under the carpet, hide the way he was, so everyone would think he was an intelligent, warm and friendly young man.

It was the most horrible situation. My parents said they would not go to the wedding. They asked, "What do you want to do? Do you want to go ahead with the wedding?" It took me a couple of hours to decide and it was the hardest decision of my life.

It took another couple of years for me to distance myself from him because I was so far gone in, because he had brainwashed and manipulated me so much over seven years. It had to take something like the beating of my father for me to leave. It was something beyond Jack.

What helped was that my mum and dad weren't going to the wedding. That's what did it. It was stronger than Jack. I never thought anything would be strong enough to make me leave him. He was so shocked because during all the other arguments, I'd always gone against my family. This time he was blown out of the water and couldn't believe I was going against him.

It took one and a half years of more threats and abusive behaviour... and treating me badly ... for me to realise and let go... and to realise it wasn't my fault. Previously I had no idea he was so manipulative and so mentally abusive.

I wasn't going to tell anyone about my situation with him. You don't tell people your problems. They don't want to listen. They're going to think you're this or that. It wasn't until the doctor told me to see the midwife, and she asked, "Where's the father?" I just broke down and I ended up telling her.

That was the start, she put me onto the counsellor, who helped me a great deal and then in turn put me onto a domestic violence counsellor. Otherwise I wouldn't have talked to anyone about it. I didn't want anyone to think badly of him.

Until a year and half ago I was always thinking of him. I felt sorry for him. I saw a vulnerable side to him. He was crying when I cancelled the wedding. His

father had just died, too. Five or six things happened at the same time; it was a terrible time.

I rang his brother who'd helped me out over the past seven years and also through this whole situation. I said I was worried about Jack. I was always worried about him and not me. I was always putting him first and not wanting anyone to think he was a bad person. It is weird, but even though your partner could beat you to a pulp, you still feel sorry for him. After a year and a half I started thinking about me.

A combination of people helped me leave. Sally, a very close friend I have known all my life, even though she has a family and a busy life, she always had time to talk and listen. I owe her a great deal. My family, my counsellor and the domestic violence counsellor helped me recover and survive to become the person I am today.

When I was leaving it was hard not having the security. Jack made the decisions for me, did things for me. "You can't do it", he would say. So then he would take over. He made all my decisions, had a hand in everything I did.

I was building a house for my daughter and I, and at that stage, my brother kept getting annoyed with me because I kept changing my mind all the time. I'd ask him, "Do you think I made the right decision?" With Jack it was always the wrong decision and we always went with what he wanted.

My brother said, "It's your house, you make the decision". So building this house was a learning curve for me. I was learning how to make a decision and stick to it.

It was hard not having him around... we were together 24/7. Most of the time I wasn't working. He never worked as he was on a pension. The situation of having a baby as well, and not having Jack there was hard. It's taken 'til now for me to be my own person. It was hard to get used to not having a

domineering partnership.

My daughter helped. The thought of doing something on my own without Jack's influence and input was huge at first. Parenting her is something I've achieved on my own and I've done it. I can do something and do it well. He was always saying, "You'll never get anywhere", and I realise now he was wrong. I have built a house. I'm paying off my housing loan on my own. I am working. I have fantastic friends and a wonderful family. My family are my rock, and standing back now, I realise that it was their love for me that helped get me through.

I didn't handle this whole situation properly. I felt I was the one who caused all the trouble, and I felt for my family to help me the best thing to do was to get the counsellor to sit down and have a talk with them. By doing that it helped a great deal and it paved the way to get easier. Also having said to me that I am actually a strong person to have gotten through all of this was a turning point for me, because it made me realise that I was a very strong person.

Another strength I have had is that I stayed the same, didn't change my personality. I didn't get bitter or angry or change. If I had got bitter and angry things would have been different, a far worse situation, I wouldn't be here now and in a good situation.

The counsellors listened. I'd never told anyone about my situation. I had kept it bottled up. I said a few times, "I'm not expecting sympathy". They didn't say, "I feel sorry for you". They pointed out things for me. I didn't need anyone to say it's all their fault and not yours. They just listened and weren't on about it being everyone else's fault. They were able to point out a few things. Listening. You really need that. Even if they make no comment for the first couple of times, you need to talk it out, and after that you start asking questions.

If I had a friend going through something similar, I would not tell her what to do. I'd tell her briefly what I went through and how I got out of it. A lot of

people don't have the patience. A few people will listen but only for a short amount of time and then say you should get over it. A close friend of mine was always there to listen, and still is.

She said to me "I will be there for you and listen till the cows come home even if it takes four years". Mental abuse for such a long time is so hard to get out of. You're trained to feel you're nothing. You need to say you are a good person. And you need that for as long as it takes.

I feel what's important for you to know is that the only way I happened to go to anyone is by chance. You don't want to go and see anyone. You need more encouragement from your doctor – it's private and one on one. It would be great if your doctor was able to read the signs of someone in an abusive relationship or ask certain questions to be able to seek out women in domestic violence relationships. Then your doctor would help you to get in touch with the right people.

When I broke up with my fiancé, it took time. It has to be known that it doesn't finish with a month or two of counselling. It's an ongoing thing and takes years. At the eighth month mark, I was happy and confident. The counsellor could tell that I was ready to move on and it was a mutual decision.

You do have lapses. They are when you're feeling low and things trigger off your memory of everything that has happened. Or you enter another violent relationship, which in one week can undo two or more years of getting yourself back on track. These relapses will happen for a while, - I had mental, verbal and physical abuse, but the mental abuse is the worse, it took its toll.

The counsellor was really good. Even if you come back in a year or six months, she would make me feel comfortable to do that, she said to ring her anytime, and that's so important.

She made me feel confident to talk to a friend. But it took her a while to get it through to me that it was OK, and to trust her. You don't trust anyone. It took

me a while to realise that she meant what she said. Trust is totally gone, especially when you have trusted someone with your heart and soul and they betray you in that way.

I know with Sally, my support worker and my family [that] they will always be there for me. And I couldn't have survived without their support!

Stella

There should be changes to the Intervention Order system. When they break the Order, it should be not just a warning and a slap on the wrist but it should be more serious. These men are dangerous. He said he would chop me up with an axe. I don't have anything to do with him, but he's not stable. The police - or anybody - should believe you. You wouldn't be doing it, calling police to make reports, for no reason.

Financially, it was hard when I asked him to leave. He left with the money and we were left with none. But I was relieved and the children were relieved that it wasn't going to happen anymore. And I was afraid he'd kill me.

I spoke to the nun at the school to organise counselling for my children because they've known no other way than to get angry with each other and use violence. She got onto the Domestic Violence Outreach workers because they have a man who counsels children. I didn't know I'd have to see anyone, but one of the female domestic violence workers started talking to me. I hadn't known about it before.

It was after speaking with her that I left. He thought I'd take him back because the other three other times I did - one or two weeks later. This time it's four months.

I've had great support from my family and my fourteen year-old daughter, and from the Domestic Violence Outreach workers - and from my mum of course. She'd been wanting me to leave him for a long time.

I also had a worry that nobody else would ever want me. No other man would find me attractive, that I'd be nobody without him. He used to say we were only something because of him. I've always cancelled Intervention Orders and gone back, but not this time. It's been four months and this is it. I won't go back.

I made myself believe I could manage the money. He had the fear in me that

I couldn't drive out of town, couldn't be by myself. I believed him and used to be scared. Now it's wonderful because I'm not scared. This time I believed in myself. He blamed me all the time and said it was my fault he was doing all this stuff. I had to be strong for the children. That's the most important thing.

This was our married home so I didn't have to find somewhere else for us to live. Setting up a new life has been good for me. It was very hard in the beginning. I wanted to take him back earlier on because of financial reasons and loneliness. But it's better now– I can go out and I don't have to be home all the time. He'd yell and scream if I went out with the children. Now I can go to Mum's or drive to town. I can do all that stuff and it's really good.

Mum was a big, strong support because she'd seen me suffer for so long - and the children too. She stood by me the whole time. She came to court with me. I lost all my friends because of my husband. They didn't believe he was doing all that. The Domestic Violence Outreach worker and the solicitor were both good.

Here in town I'm not believed. I feel angry and frustrated because I know what he's like. He comes up here on the weekends and he stays at friends' houses, and he stalks us. I've told the police but because he's two hundred metres away they can't do anything. I've lost friendships, and he's gone to businesses in town and discredited me. He has told untrue things and he's pleading that he's the victim. But he's not. The children have witnessed it and they know it's true. Mum knows. She's seen it many a time. She's seen him push me out of the car when it was moving. I wouldn't go to this extreme if it wasn't true. I just have Mum and my children now because I've lost all my friends here. But they're not true friendships if they don't believe me. I keep battling on, over every hurdle he throws at me.

I had a partial stroke and a clot in the lung and a breakdown. All from the stress and worry of living with him all the time. I figure next time I won't be here to tell the story. I just had had enough. Basically, I didn't deserve to live that way and neither did the children. He had me believing that this is what

goes on in married life. He would force me to have sex. He had me believing that I had to have sex because I was married to him. But I'm fine now. It's the first time I've been able to go to the toilet without having diarrhea. I'm having normal bowel motions now, and putting weight on because I was really skinny over the years of our marriage.

We couldn't eat before. My daughter is chubby, and he'd say she was a pig and he'd make her sit there and eat her food, then he'd put our food there, and make her eat it. He'd say, "I know you're going to eat it". And we couldn't eat. She's not his natural daughter. He was doing to her what he was doing to me – except not the sexual stuff – and to the boys too. We can eat in peace now. The kids used to knock drinks over before because they were so nervous. Now they don't.

The Domestic Violence Outreach workers were fantastic. At one stage we had no hot water when the hot water service blew up. We lived for four weeks with no hot water. The domestic violence worker helped by applying to the Department of Human Services and they put a new service in. Before he moved out we had been renovating and the carpet was lifted. We're on concrete now, and they're going to help me get carpet down.

With the domestic violence worker, I've been able to talk about it. I had never told anyone. People think because I never talked about it it's not true. Because he has such a massive front they all think he's wonderful, but when the doors are closed, he's not.

The domestic violence workers are very caring. They check the police do their job. The Intervention Order has been breached 30 times and they don't do anything about it. I'm pretty frustrated about that. I've made statements but he just gets off. It's awful knowing that when I walk out the front door he's 200 metres away watching us all day.

I'm applying for custody for the children and he's going to court saying I'm unfit and trying to get custody. The kids are having counselling so papers are

being drawn up about what the kids say as evidence for the court.

I didn't go to the doctor this time. In '98 I went to a doctor for injuries which he still says today he never did. The police took me to a doctor's clinic. That time he smashed the house up. There are holes in the wall and he smashed ornaments and the glass in picture frames. The doctor was elderly, and he was looking at me saying, "That's your husband. You've got to do what your husband says". The police just got me whatever doctor was available. I normally go to another doctor. Anyway, what he did to me that time is documented. I have to get a copy for the court.

After he left I was worried about the children. Their behaviour deteriorated. Especially because my discipline is time-out in the corner and his is to hit them with sticks and belts. The children now feel they can do anything and won't be disciplined from him. It's probably why the women don't go - because afterwards, for a while, it's worse. There are so many obstacles - the children's behaviour and that sort of thing. And financial difficulties. I got paid yesterday and now I'm penniless, there is so much to be paid out. It's \$400 for food, so I do that first. Before, he'd say to me, "You can go shopping - here's \$400". I'd ask if he was sure, and he'd say yes, but then, when I'd get home, he'd be angry.

Next fortnight things will be a bit better when I get paid.

Nobody deserves to be belittled and treated in that way. Some people think marriage is meant to be hard and you just have to be strong and there are plenty of people out there to help. Life is not meant to be like that. It's good now because I can sleep at night. I couldn't before because I'd wake up and he'd be having intercourse with me. Now I can sleep and eat like I did before I met him.

We have miniature horses, and he used to punch and kick the horses, and smash things that were important to me, like my paintings. Our little white dog is very affectionate and he'd pick her up and fling her across the room. I clip

that breed of dog. I would be clipping her and he'd get angry because I wasn't paying attention to him. He was jealous. He'd say I may as well be married to the dog, and that I love them more. He was very domineering.

He would do things just to hurt me. I'm slowly replacing the things he's broken. My dad came over and asked where the path to the front door has gone. The kids and I pulled up all the paving stones because he put them there. I've taken away things that remind me of him.

I don't discuss it or belittle him even through everything he's done to us. We do have a laugh though! The kids will say, "I've got the cheese container open and the lid's not done up". It was things like that that would make him very angry. We joke now.

There should be changes to the Intervention Order system. When they break the offence, it should be not just a warning and a slap on the wrist but it should be more serious. These men are dangerous. He said he would chop me up with an axe. I don't have anything to do with him, but he's not stable. The police - or anybody - should believe you. You wouldn't be doing it, calling police to make reports, for no reason. He should not be allowed to see the children or me. He shouldn't be coming to town. He doesn't live or work here.

I've been reading a book about Intervention Orders, and I went back to court to try and stop him coming here. He keeps on annoying, intimidating, and harassing me. My son has just started playing football. And he comes and pushes things to the limit. He comes over within 200 metres then quickly goes back. He drops gifts off to the kids. We don't want them. He never did it before, and he only does it to make himself look good. He only pays \$21 per month maintenance. He's also working and not declaring that money.

He wants us to need him. If I've got to take wood to my dad to get it cut then that's OK. If I run out of money Mum takes me to town and we put it on her credit card. We're not going to let him think we need him because we don't. I have five children and I can look after them. The kids are happier. We're

getting there. They don't want to see him.

Even the little fella has seen what he's done to me and the other kids. And to him. He doesn't want to see him. The kids don't have to go and stay with him anymore because he was badly behaved and abused them. I've got an Intervention Order. He was saying to them to look at what their mother is doing to him. I've done nothing wrong. The kids ran away from him and went to the police. His solicitor is still pushing for overnight contact. He was calling me up telling me I'm a whore and slut and sleeping with other men. I had to get the police. I said to my solicitor, "I'm trying to tell you that this man is dangerous, and is using the kids to get to me". He used to go two weeks in Melbourne without contacting the kids. He'd yell and scream when I bought things for them. He's just using them to get to me.

The baby is a very bad asthmatic. One time we went on holidays, then halfway there he started being abusive. The baby stopped breathing and he wouldn't let me take him to the hospital. I grabbed him, and took him to the nearest hospital, and they transferred him to the Royal Children's Hospital. I don't trust him to look after the baby.

His father was like this, too. I wanted to break the cycle. I don't want my four boys to treat their wives and kids this way. Even for my daughter, being a female, there's nothing to say she won't beat her children.

We could write a book. My dad gets teary and cries when he thinks about it, and about my situation. I say "Don't worry, it's better than going back to him". We can't go back to a life like that. I didn't love him for such a long time and felt no attraction to him. That's made it easier. I loved him but I wasn't in love. I found it repulsive to sleep with him. That was hard. It's good now because I don't have to worry about that.

The boys are violent towards each other because they know no other way. They thought it was right that he smashed all our chairs. Now we have plastic chairs. He'd be smashing things and yelling and the kids would be just sitting

on the couch watching TV and not even noticing. They were so used to it. My youngest will smash things and punch me in the back, because that's all he's ever seen. If he's angry he'll either break or hit something. If I had seen my parents fighting I would have been screaming. They were babies in bed with me when he'd yank me out by the hair. They saw all that.

For women trying to work out if you can pick them, you can, because they're very generous with money and will buy you everything in the beginning. You get married and then the moods start, the different behaviour. The first time was six months after we were married, and he beat me with a coat hanger. I was pregnant with my older son when he dragged me out of the car.

He believes he's a victim, and is saying that the children and I abused him. When friends used to come over he'd buy meat and fruit and vegetables at the market in Melbourne and give it to them. When they'd go home, he'd start on me, "Why can't you be like her?" He'd say how hard he had to work in Melbourne all week and then I'd spend all his money on food. He set me up with money and I'd have to show him the receipts from anything I bought. The other day I burnt them all.

Our friends would see him being nice and very generous. He might be sitting with the kids playing in front of the house. Then he totally changes from so happy to just smashing stuff – as if he had a split personality. I tried telling his family but they don't believe me. He's got them all bluffed. I don't care. I figure soon enough they'll be in danger when they have him in the house on the weekend. He's abused strangers in Melbourne. It was so humiliating to go places – he'd yell and scream in public too. He'd smack the kids. He didn't care who was around. He'd say, "They're laughing at you", but he was the one making a fool of himself. We can take the kids out for the day now and have fun. Last time we all went out together, he let us stay ten minutes and then we had to leave because he wanted to, after a long drive.

I've tried to leave him from six months into the marriage till 12 years later and finally I did it. It takes a long time to leave, but you get there in the end. After

13 years of marriage, I've had the gift of having the children and that's all. He has today what he has because of me, not him. The house loan and everything is because of me.

If I had a friend in this situation, I'd just tell her that if you leave, don't believe that you won't survive. Don't believe that there's not another life out there. He might have told you there isn't, but there's always hope. I say to my mum I'd rather die than go back to him. I just have to be strong and to try for her sake and for the children.

Claudia

Robert had total control of every thing we did. He (the doctor) was trying to speak with me and Robert wouldn't let him.

He said to the doctor, "You ask me, I'm in charge of her. You want to talk to her, talk to me".

It was a whole chain of events that led to me leaving. It felt like someone was telling me I should leave.

When I actually left it was a quick decision for me. My ex husband pretended it wasn't happening. I told him he needed to have counselling for me to stay. It was like I was a nothing anyway, so why would he want me to stay? I'd always been a nothing.

When I made the decision to go, it became scary. Someone put me in contact with the Rural Housing Network. They said it could take a while, but I did qualify. They said it's only if you're threatened physically that you could move to the top of the list.

Once I figured out that I was suffering abuse - because it took me a while to know - I didn't want to stay. Robert kept saying that if I were to ask him for sex it would prove that I loved him and that maybe if we did that a bit more, we'd be happy.

I rang the guy at Rural Housing and said, "I don't want to stay because I'll end up having to have sex". He said he could have me a house by Wednesday. That was a Friday. I thought, "Shit", because I had to decide what to take, find someone to move me, and organise everything.

The Rural Housing Network was amazing. I keep hold of their brochures, here and in the car, and I've made sure the church has them so that if anyone's in need, they're there. They can't do enough. They're the first port of call. Not for counselling, but just talking. They are amazing and relaxed. They make you

feel like it's just so normal for you to come in and need a house. I thought I'd be looked upon as someone unworthy or not able to cope, but they have the attitude that, "Of course you need to come in here".

I sat Robert down and said, "I'm going to be leaving".

And he said, "Ha-ha, silly cow. You can't afford to". I had no material wealth. Just the furniture that I had brought with me into the house and the kids' furniture.

I said, "I don't need money". I've existed without money for a long time. He found out the night before that I was really going and he fell into a heap. That was the worst thing - seeing an angry man fall into a blubbering heap. I didn't like feeling that I'd hurt him.

It was almost a year ago but it feels like forever. The time has gone so quickly but in another way it hasn't.

Robert had total control of every thing we did. My first husband was laid back, very easy going. He ended up living with my ex-best friend, but he and I are still on talking terms. When I met Robert he wanted to care for me, to look after me. It was like living fifty years ago. I wasn't to have, and didn't get, any housekeeping money. I used the maintenance from my first husband to pay bills, buy things for the kids, buy food, and other things. I used the Family Allowance. If I needed any more I had to ask him. I had to ask for \$40 for the hairdresser or for shoes – and then explain why I deserved it!

He had total control of everything and was very hard on the kids. They had to do jobs and couldn't watch TV after school. They'd have to clean the yard, while every other kid was riding a bike around. He was a very hard man. The house was never clean enough. If there was dust on the television, he would say things like, "How can you let people down like that"? He wouldn't yell and scream in front of other people, but would make you feel uncomfortable. And then he'd yell and scream for weeks. He would put me down all the time, saying I'd let my self go after having his child.

The worst part was that he was always saying to the kids, "It's just as well I came along, she wouldn't have been able to look after you, you'd be in the street". I had no self-confidence with these constant put-downs.

The first person who made me aware of the abuse was a doctor. I had suffered an epileptic seizure and was taken by ambulance to hospital. I have a very close family and Robert had always resented that. I'd been unconscious for half an hour and no one knew how to find him. He's a manager and had been in meetings. By the time he got to the hospital my mum and dad, my sister and her husband were all there. My sister is in the Sexual Offence and Child Abuse Unit of the police force.

Robert was angry that my family had 'interfered' and gone to the hospital. The doctor couldn't find anything wrong with me. He was trying to speak with me and Robert wouldn't let him. He said to the doctor, "You ask me, I'm in charge of her. You want to talk to her, talk to me".

The doctor said I'd be all right to go home and told Robert to go and bring the car closer to pick me up. While he was gone, the doctor said to me, "You have a serious problem. The social worker can be here in a minute". She came quickly and said, "I want you to call me". Robert came back and saw her give me her business card. She said to him, "I'd like Claudia to call me". He said, "I'll take that". When we were walking out, she slipped another card into my pocket.

I started to think, "Why are these people interfering?" I rang her and she said, "Don't you see what's happening?" As I talked I realised it wasn't normal. I'd been there six years. It was just so stupid. She really helped me a lot. I saw her four times.

Sometimes I'd think there wasn't really a problem and it was me who was bad, but when I talk to people like my family and friends, they'd say you only had to watch how he stood and how he looked at me. They had suspected something was going on. He was aggressive in nature. He never laid a hand

on us, but I've seen him punch a wall, and you had the feeling, "This could be us". It was always "Don't upset him", because it could have been us.

I have wondered whether everyone could see this and have asked myself was it just me hiding? How long had people been noticing this?

I had to keep going to hospital to have more tests because they didn't know why I'd had a seizure. Different people at the hospital would say they were glad he didn't come and that it was good that I was there on my own. It was an awakening to me that people would say that when they hadn't before.

The first place we went for counselling after I left was the community health centre, but they said they couldn't do anything for us because the only counselling Robert wanted was for me to admit I was wrong and go back to him. I convinced Robert that we needed counselling to work out the separation. The best was through Relationships Australia. Their approach was for us to accept that we were not going to get together and look at how we could stop future problems around my son and his welfare. T

The counsellors were amazing working through separate sessions and then on to joint sessions to set up parenting plans. It was scary in that I didn't know if he was going to cry and I wasn't used to him being like that.

Mostly, I thought I was the problem. I was letting the side down and I was lucky to be there. We had a lovely home and everything I needed. I had my little boy. The only reason we were married was because I was pregnant. He told me that a lot. It was an accident. I was on the pill but became pregnant because of antibiotics. I felt it was me who was the problem. I'd dragged his life down. He'd been a single man and now I'd saddled him. And I already had a sense of failure because I'd had a partner for fifteen years who had left me.

I'd had a total breakdown when my first husband left me, and ran my car under a truck. I felt that everything I'd lived was a lie. I was with him from the

age of 15 until I was 30.

I didn't want to fail again. When I met Robert he said he would take care of me. But as soon as we got together, I knew it was a mistake. How do you get out of that? I knew I'd made a mistake, but it was easier to stay. It wasn't - but then in some way it seemed it was. I'd go to girlfriends' houses and not want to go home. I'd say, "I'd better go home, the beds are not made". I talked about it all the time. They'd say I shouldn't put up with that. But it was the fear of the unknown. I wish I'd got out earlier. Now I'm just waiting for the settlement to buy a house and look after myself. This time I'll get a settlement.

It's hurting him so badly. He wants to have it all. A large house on an acre. I asked him to move out for three months while we sorted things out. But he was selfish and made us move out. He wasn't going to put himself out. It's easier for a man to live in a flat or caravan or with a friend than for a woman with three young children to find somewhere. He was still looking after number one.

I didn't want to take the kids to a Commission area and the transitional housing was only for three months. With my teenage daughter being so impressionable I wanted to keep them in a good spot. I had a nice home like this in transitional housing but I got it for Housing Commission rental because the rent is worked out as a percentage of your wage or income. It was really good.

I had to make sure I had all the essentials - white goods and furniture. When I moved into Robert's home I had everything. My first husband didn't want anything. When I moved in with Robert he sold all my things, yet I wasn't allowed to take anything with me when I left his house. I didn't even have a bed. The Rural Housing Network put me in one of the fully furnished houses. I said to him, "You've got to let me take the things that were mine". I said to him, "You can't have everything". He admitted that.

I had not been allowed to think for so long. When I was with him if I ever

wanted to get anything I had to get his approval. And I had to be sneaky and make him think that he'd thought of it. I still have to do this. I have to turn things around so it looks like he benefits. If we wanted to go anywhere, I'd ring a mate, and ask them to suggest it to Robert. If the mate suggested it, it would happen, but if I did, it was a stupid idea.

Moneywise it's been amazing. He's been condescending to me asking, "Are you going to be able to cope with kinder fees and school fees?" Now I say, "Hey, I've had more money since we split because I'm not paying your bills!" While we were together he still thought of himself as a single man. We were the parasites. He would have got so much more done if we weren't there hanging on, slowing him down.

Aromatherapy has helped me enormously. I use it on the kids – a calming blend. I've had a lot of family support and that has been massively important to me. My mum's just around the corner and every day or second day I see her and talk about it.

I used to be a grief counsellor with the SES, and used to make the guys talk. They'd laugh and then open up. Talking got me through the first break down. You have to open up. People would say, "How are you?" and I'd say, "Do you really want to know?" I'd have no problem saying, "I'm having a really shit day".

I've spoken to a couple of counsellors at the school in regard to my daughter. She's gone through two dads. One of the biggest things was the way Robert would treat her. Because he's a tradesman he got along well with my twelve-year-old son and would do things with him as long as that suited him. But he'd be critical and if he didn't learn quickly or "do it like a man", he would treat him like an idiot.

But my daughter is a teenager, and wouldn't want to do stuff like that. She was at the stage of answering back and slamming doors. That's normal at her age. His view was if she answered back she'd get a slap on the backside and

an hour lecture but not to the point of abuse. I'd say you couldn't slap a teenage girl. My sister, who works in the Sexual Offence and Child Abuse Unit cautioned him and said, "If you leave another mark on her buttock or her leg I'll report you".

Then he was angry. If it were just me - you'd put up with it forever. But this was one of my biggest fears. One of the reasons I stopped working nights was because I'd have to go out at night and that's when he'd have access to her to lecture her. He told her it was her fault we'd split up.

I'd say to him, "If you're going to slap her and lecture her over slamming a door, what are you going to do if she climbs out a window or goes drinking or comes home pregnant?" That was hard for her and made me angry.

Once I got angry, then I started to think, "How dare you?" That was the best part. Before I didn't have that, and I believed, obviously, it was all my fault - I should have made the bed or cooked good dinners all the time. I should not have just said, "Can we have toast and soup?"

I should have been out of it years ago.

I scared the shit out of myself when I left. I had no faith in myself. I had no idea that I was going to be able to make it. I was really scared in myself. I was thinking that if something happened to me, the kids would be able to go to someone good. When I first left I hid a lot. I did jigsaws and read books 'til all hours. I was hiding behind something else and not being myself. I made sure to be there for the kids. Even if I'd been reading till 4a.m. I'd get up at 6a.m. for their breakfast. That way you don't have to think about yourself.

The worst thing was when friends would say, "Let's get you two back together". I just didn't want to talk about it anymore. I don't want to explain to you and you and you. A lot of friends only saw one side of him and didn't understand. Certain friends saw his real nature.

I'm sure if you spoke to Robert there'd be an arm's length of things I did

wrong! You knew whatever you did, it wouldn't be done right. When you know you're going to fail, you just think, "I've failed anyway", even before you've started.

Now, when friends say I'm looking good, I draw on that – the positive comments from people. You're walking different, not being dragged down anymore. Another thing with Robert was that I wasn't allowed to wear the clothes I wanted - like tight clothes or bright pink clothes - because people might look at me. Now, I can buy whatever I want and wear what I want. I wanted people to give me a positive comment and that would cheer me up for ten days at a time! At the work Christmas party, the guys gave me good comments. I feel very safe there because I've known the manager for a long time.

I love being able to buy things for the kids for Christmas. I had an amazing feeling of power the month before Christmas not having to justify myself. I wasn't extravagant but could buy things they didn't need. I wouldn't have to explain, and walk around worrying about what was in my shopping bag. They are silly little pleasures. The taking off of the rings was also really good. I enjoyed that. The day after I left, I put them inside the jewel box and packed the box. It's still packed.

Now I don't feel as naked, having bought two rings at cash converters. I have a boyfriend now, and he asked me why I bought them. I told him I didn't want him to buy me one. I said, "Do not buy me jewellery. I'm in control of my own life and I'll tell you when you can and can't stay over at my house".

I have a friend in a similar situation where she has the put-downs from her husband. She's read all my pamphlets about support and information, if she decides to leave. We'd sit down and say, "Aren't we both so stupid letting these men ruin our lives like this?"

I wish there had been something for me to see somewhere, something even to pick up and read to tell me there are all sorts of abuse. That's what I didn't

know.

I didn't know about all the forms of abuse and that's why it took me so long to realize. If I hadn't recognised the abuse when I did, my daughter would have left home. She wouldn't have put up with it for much longer.

Now we have our future in front of us – a wonderful life full of wonderful experiences.

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