



Witness statement of Anjali Jana

I, Anjali Jana,¹ of the State of Victoria, say as follows:

1. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

Background

2. I was born in India and lived there for most of my life. Several years ago my parents arranged a marriage for me, to a man who was already living in Australia. We got married and I moved to Australia on a temporary visa.
3. My husband was working here as a civil engineer at the time and supported me for the first month or so that I was in the country, as I learnt about the new culture and the place where I was living. Initially everything was good within my marriage and he treated me really well.
4. I told him that I wanted to pursue my dream of working as a nurse in Australia. However, my qualifications were not recognised here. I found that to become qualified I would have to undertake a training course that would cost several thousand dollars. I asked my husband if I could have the money to pay for it, but he also said that he had no money and soon after that he stopped paying my expenses as well. It was at that point that he told me that I had to work, and he arranged with someone he knew at a major retailer to get me a job there. I thought that this would be OK as it would allow me to save up enough money for the training course. My husband never really gave me an answer but I thought that it would be OK if I gave him some of the money to help with my expenses as well.

My new job at a major retailer

5. I got the job with that major retailer and I have been employed there for over two years now. Initially, my husband was supportive of me working at the major retailer. We opened a joint bank account together and my wages went into that account but his wages went into his personal account, which I didn't have access to. I was able to save a few thousand dollars, half of what I needed for the course. However, he started to work less and less. Then, one day, I realised that he had spent all of the money that I had saved in just one month. I had no idea that he would spend it, he knew that was my savings for my course.
6. I was devastated and when I tried to talk to him about it he just told me that I was only allowed to work with my current employer, whether I liked it or not. He said that I wasn't allowed to become a nurse. I was so upset—that was my dream. I didn't want to argue with him, I was prepared to accept that this would be my life and I would never be able to achieve my dreams.
7. I was doing really well at work and I was given more shifts than I was contracted for, meaning that I was earning quite a bit of money. It was around about this time when I realised that he had stopped working altogether and was completely relying on me for money. There was no reason for this, as he had good qualifications and could

¹ The name and other details of the witness referred to in this statement have been changed to protect her identity.

have worked if he had wanted to. He started to make me put all of my money that I was earning directly into his personal bank account, so that I had nothing. I had to rely on him for access to my money, but he always spent it and said that we had no money for anything.

My husband's change in behaviour

8. When my husband stopped working, this is when his behaviour really started to change. I wasn't allowed to answer my phone after work or to call the other people I was working with to discuss shifts and if I did he would scream and yell at me. He knew what time my shifts at work were and if I was one minute late from work, I would have to call him to tell him, otherwise he would get really angry and yell at me. He didn't let me go out with my friends, I was only allowed to talk to his friends and their wives. When I first moved here, I used to visit my sister a lot, as she lived nearby but now I was hardly allowed to see her either. He wouldn't even let me talk to my parents, who still lived in India. I felt isolated and alone because of this.
9. He refused to do some things for himself, he told me it was my job, as his wife. For example, he needed medicine everyday but unless I stopped preparing dinner or what I was doing at the time and put the tablet in his hand, he would not take it, even if I left it right in front of him, he would just keep sitting there, watching TV. Later, he would blame me in front of the GP when he was told that his results were bad.
10. Even though I was the one working and he did nothing all day, I still had to come home and cook the dinner and clean up afterwards as well as doing all of the other cleaning and other housework. He did absolutely nothing. I also had to do everything when he wanted me to do it, I had to cook as soon as I got home because he was hungry even though I wasn't. He would complain if any little thing was wrong, like if there was too much salt in his dinner, he would scream at me about it. He never picked me up from work even though he had a car and I did not. I always had to catch the train even when I had shifts early in the morning and late at night, even when he was nearby or doing nothing. On top of that, I wasn't allowed to do anything, I wasn't allowed to watch TV unless he was, and it was only what he wanted to watch. There were lots of things like this that he did, small things really but which added up over time and made living intolerable. He was always controlling and I wasn't allowed to do anything but work, though he took all of the money anyway. I didn't know why he was doing this to me, what I had done.
11. All of these things continued to happen over a period of about a year and a half. My husband had isolated me, taken away my dream of being a nurse in Australia, forced me to work and left me with no money. It felt inescapable.
12. Because of all of this, I began to feel sad all of the time, and it was hard to feel motivated, particularly in terms of my work. Previously I had been an excellent employee but now I was having trouble concentrating and I found it hard to do a good job, like I used to. I found that I would make lots of mistakes at work. They started giving me less shifts as a result.

Realisation that my husband's behaviour was wrong

13. People at work had noticed the drop in my performance and I think that they were privately concerned for me but I didn't talk about my life at home with them. I didn't understand at the time that a marriage was supposed to be any different to what I was experiencing. I thought that this is just how marriage is supposed to be. However, when I spoke to the other people that I worked with, I began to see that they were really happy in their marriages and their lives. In contrast, I grew to realise that the

marriage that I was living in was like being in hell. I knew that there was something wrong with my marriage, that the way that my husband was treating me was not right.

14. My manager had noticed that something wasn't right with me. She spoke to me and asked what was wrong. She was worried that it was something that was wrong in the workplace. I said no it wasn't, but I didn't want to say what the real problem was.

Seeking help in a time of crisis

15. Eventually, my manager spoke to me privately. By then, I knew that something was not right in my marriage so I told her about my home life and what was happening. She told me to see a GP, as I was feeling really down all of the time, and to get a referral to see a family counsellor. This happened around two months before I finally left my husband.
16. When I went to see the family counsellor with my husband, to try and fix our problems, he didn't let me talk at all. He told the counsellor all of these things about me that weren't true, to make me look bad. I cried the whole time. When the counsellor asked me about what was happening, I told her that I didn't feel that I was able to say anything after what my husband had said, that I needed another appointment. We arranged a new appointment and my husband drove us there. I went in alone, and he was supposed to go in after me but he never did. The counsellor gave me advice about how to change his behaviour. However, he refused to change his behaviour or to even try to improve things between us. I began to see that things were never going to change, that our marriage was never going to improve and that this is what my life would always be like.
17. It was around this time when my father had a stroke. I was really worried about him as he was really sick. I spoke to my sister and we decided that we would fly home to India to see him and help to look after him, which was our duty as daughters. I told my husband that I wanted to go and initially he was supportive of the idea. However, he changed his mind and said that I could not go because I would lose my job. I explained that I wouldn't, that I could get leave but he wouldn't listen. He said no. I thought about telling my sister everything then as she knew that something was going on, but I didn't.
18. I decided that if I couldn't go to India, at least I could save up some money and send it to my father for the special medicine he needed, which was very expensive. I saved \$950 and because I didn't know how to get it to India I gave it to my husband to send to him. I thought that he would send it, but I found out later that he didn't.
19. Then, my mother was involved in a car accident. It was a real shock. I told my husband that I definitely had to go back now. My father even phoned my husband and asked if I could go back to see them. He picked me up from work that night after my father had called him. He was so angry that my father had called. He told me that he had booked my flights to go home. He told me that he had used the money that I had saved. That was the money for the medicine for my father. I would never have spent that money on the flights. I was so angry. I couldn't believe that he had done this. He just said that he had not sent it to India as we had no money, that I wasn't allowed to give money to my parents. This was unbelievable to me, that he would act in this way.
20. It was then that I knew that I definitely had to go to see my parents in India. I spoke to my employer about getting leave because my parents were sick and they were completely fine with it—just like my sister said they would be. They said that it was no problem. They just said that I should try to get a medical certificate but if I couldn't

that would be OK too. I told my husband this but he told me I couldn't unless I was taking annual leave, not unpaid leave. I didn't care about the money, I was just so happy to be able to go. In the end I got half of the time as annual leave and the other half as unpaid leave.

21. He then refused to drive me to the airport. He said that since it was my idea to go that I had to figure it all out myself. I had never been before and I had no idea how to get there, I was never allowed to do anything, like catching a taxi. I asked my sister how to get there and she arranged to give me the money, she was very helpful. She couldn't drive me as her and her husband didn't want to get caught up in the problems I was having, as it would affect them too, especially as she was pregnant. He then told me that he had changed his mind, that he would drive me, but only if I transferred all of my money to him that I would receive for my annual leave. He then told me as well that I had to ask my parents for money and bring it back for him, to cover the two weeks that I didn't have paid leave for. He made me give him his pin number so that he could take the money as it came into my account. I did it so that he would let me go.
22. I finally left and saw my parents. I didn't tell them anything about my marriage. While I was there he would call me every day, and yell at me for all of these things that I didn't have control over. Even if I tried to talk to him nicely he would just yell. Eventually I stopped even answering the phone.

Escalating abuse

23. When I got back it was worse than before. We were sleeping in separate rooms, living like two strangers living in one house. It was too much. This is when I gave up on our marriage.
24. It was around this time that I had been feeling sad all of the time, like everything was hopeless, that I couldn't escape. It was like my mind had stopped working properly, I felt like I didn't know what I was doing, and what was happening. Sometimes I thought about committing suicide, there was the train track near where I lived and I thought about just jumping in front of it. I didn't know what to do, I had no one to talk to, both of my parents were sick and overseas, I had no friends and no money. My sister was pregnant and her husband didn't want to get involved. All I had were his friends but they didn't want to get involved either. I had no way to get out, no one to ask for help.
25. I realised eventually that when I was going to the train station to go to work he was following me there and watching. He would know exactly what seat I had been sitting on and what time my train came. When I asked him about it he admitted it and told me he was making sure I was going to work and not somewhere else. This made me really confused and angry because he always went out without telling me where, who with or when he would be back. I thought, why was he doing this to me then?
26. He was also hacking into my Skype, Facebook and email account as well as my phone to see who I had been calling and what I was saying. He would often yell at me and ask me why I was calling my sister or mother when I wasn't allowed to, and providing details that I had never told him, that's how I knew.
27. I asked him why he was following me and listening to all of my calls. I told him that I wanted some privacy in my life and since I couldn't have it, I didn't want the phone anymore. I gave it to him and he threw it at me. I moved and it smashed against the wall. I couldn't afford a new one. I was worried that if I was ever running late to work that I wouldn't be able to let my work know that I would be late. I felt completely alone and scared.

28. It was around this time that I received in the mail a traffic fine. I asked my husband why it had been sent to me as I don't have an Australian drivers licence as he had never helped me to learn or let me have lessons. I tried to learn by paying for my own lessons but he stopped me from going and said we didn't have enough money for that. He told me that he had transferred the fine to me, to say that I had been driving the car so that he would not lose the points. He said that if I didn't pay it I would get a second notice and then the Sheriff would come around.
29. I got the second notice but I decided that I wasn't going to accept this. I went to the police station and I spoke to the police officers there about the situation. They did a search and said that there was indeed no record of a driver's licence existing in my name. To prove then that I could not have been driving the car, I spoke to my work and they provided me with a letter confirming that I was at work at that time. After this, they said that I did not have to pay. This made me angry, it wasn't fair that he did this to me.

Escape

30. Soon after, on a hot day, we were at home and I was getting ready to go to sleep. I had an early shift the next day but it was too hot to sleep. My husband had the cooler in the lounge room and wouldn't let me move it into my bedroom so that I could sleep. I said that I would sleep out there in that room so that we could share it. But when I lay down to go to sleep he turned the TV on and put the volume up really loud so that I could not sleep, even though he was using the computer and not even watching it. I asked him to turn it down but he just yelled and told me to go if I didn't like it. I asked him again and he became furious. We had a huge fight. I have never been involved in such a huge argument before. He said to get out of the room or to get out of the house. I had nowhere else to go so I went into the other room—I was really scared, I didn't sleep at all.
31. The next day, without really knowing why, I took my passport and phone charger with me when I went to work. Maybe I thought that he would burn them. I went into work but I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't talk to anyone, it was all too much. My manager spoke to me and I admitted to her what was going on, that it was really bad. I knew that if I went back I would do something that I would regret, to myself, because this was not the life that I wanted. One of my colleagues was there and she gave me a 1800 number to call, I think it was the Woman's Domestic Violence Hotline. I called them but they said that they couldn't help me because I had a job. They told me to call WAYYS in Dandenong instead, so I did. WAYYS told me to come and see them in person. I asked my manager and she said that was absolutely fine, that I needed to go and sort this out and get my life in order because I couldn't work like this. She said that she would look after my shift and that I should take as long as I needed. My manager spoke to the area manager and he said that this was OK as well. Normally you have to give four days' notice for leave but they were great about letting me go with no notice at all. They were so supportive and lovely throughout the whole process.
32. I stayed at WAYYS for one night but then they refused me after that as I had a job, and they said it was for women that did not. I called my sister and told her the situation that I had left my husband. My husband had been around to her house accusing her of letting me stay there, threatening them. My brother-in-law said that I couldn't stay there more than one night, as he didn't want to get involved.
33. WAYYS gave me another number to call for a woman's refuge service. They said that they couldn't help me because I was working. I stayed at a friend's house from work and then they found me a room in a boarding house as my friend was afraid my

husband would turn up at her house. He showed up at my work one time and created a disturbance but I wasn't there. I wasn't going back.

34. I called InTouch and they were able to help me. I had a social worker that was helping me with everything. She helped me to apply for an intervention order against my husband. This included a condition that he couldn't call me, my friends or my parents, as he had called them and threatened them. He also had to stay 200m away from me. The order lasted a year. She was my guardian angel. He stayed away from me after that and I haven't been in contact with him. They were also very helpful in helping me with my visa.
35. My husband called my parents and told them I had left, and they tried to pressure me to go back, because it is not socially acceptable in India to get divorced. I refused. I said that I would not do it. My parents do not treat me the same anymore, not as a daughter. I hope though over time things will return to how they were.

A fresh start with the help of my employer

36. I am starting to get my life back on track after all of this. It has been about a year since I left. He took everything, every penny in my account, however I have been able to save up by working hard and my manager helped me to find extra shifts. In addition, the people at work have been so amazing in helping me get all of the basics that I needed. They gave me money to help me when I had first left my husband. They were like my family, when I had no one else to turn to. My employer has been so supportive, they did things like making sure that I was never rostered on alone until my intervention order was in place, in case my husband turned up at work, so that I was safe. They have been amazing.
37. I have saved enough money and I have started my training to be a nurse. I am so happy. However, I will still keep working one shift with my employer so I can stay in contact with all of my friends there.

Accepted into evidence at the Royal Commission into Family Violence public hearing on
Thursday, 16 July 2015.