

I had been renting a new place in [REDACTED] when I met [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. I had been separated from my second husband for [REDACTED] and was out with a friend, attempting to lift my spirits. I have struggled with depression and anxiety for as long as I can remember. I used alcohol to help with severe social anxiety on a regular basis. [REDACTED]

I met [REDACTED] in the local pub on this night. I enjoyed talking to him. He seemed different to other men. He seemed quiet and sensitive. I could relate to that. We continued to talk and drink together that night. It felt good. I was [REDACTED] then. He was only [REDACTED]. I felt privileged that a young man would be interested in me. I found him physically very attractive. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I loved that! [REDACTED] I found him alluring and was in a state of optimistic excitement whilst chatting to him. I took him home with me that night. [REDACTED] were at their dads so I thought I would take advantage of some me time. I have always taken men home when I've been out drinking. I have had countless one night stands over the years and many without protection. I have been diagnosed with all sorts of disorders ranging including borderline personality disorder and bi-polar. Labels generally don't 'sit well' with me. But I am well aware that I have always had very low self esteem and that this is the root cause of my consistently reckless behavior. I think my depression has been so severe in the past that I have basically (sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously) walked a path of self destruction. I had been on antidepressants since the age of [REDACTED] and at first I abstained from alcohol but eventually decided that since everyone else on them drinks with no apparent harmful effect then I may as well too. I also think that with every one night stand I partook in I was essentially seeking love, or at least validation that I was okay, that I was attractive, worthy, that someone wanted me. These feelings of 'not being enough' have been with me since childhood. I could go into what I believe led to these feelings but as that is such a complex area I will instead, stay on the issue at hand.

So after the night I spent with [REDACTED] I was surprised that he made contact with me. Men never call me back after I have spent the night with them. I understand that and had come to expect it early on. This didn't stop me trying time and again to fill that ever present void in me, the yearning to feel wanted if only for a night. So basically [REDACTED] and I started to hang out on a regular basis. He lived only about [REDACTED] away from me but didn't drive so he would get buses to my place, or I would drive to his. At this time I felt my self esteem improving. A man was interested in me, and a handsome young man at that. I felt a very lucky girl. Our time together was centered around drinking. I would bring over a couple bottles of wine or he would bring a six pack of beer, and then, needing more, we went off to pick up more from the local bottle shop, or drive through. This was a regular occurrence. I kept my life as a mother separate from my life with [REDACTED]. I ensured that our 'get togethers' coincided with the times [REDACTED] were staying at friends or their dads'.

My first impression of [REDACTED]'s home was that there wasn't much in it. There wasn't much furniture (not too long after this I discovered why. He had recently served a prison sentence – I will get to that later). The kitchen was always littered though, with beer cans and piled up dishes. He had a dog, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] Now I am an animal lover but this dog had no

discipline and would constantly jump up on me as I entered the gate of his house. He was aggressive and I sustained scratches and a bite quite early on. I learned that the best way to avoid his attacks was to ignore him. So I would enter the front gate, turn my body and not even look at him. This allowed me to reach the front porch unscathed – most of the time.

██████████ and I would sit inside his house, listen to music and drink, going out on to the front porch for a cigarette. It was a time of total freedom for me. This temporary state of carefree abandonment was bliss to me. Then I would return home, or he would come with me and then leave in the morning before ██████████ were due back. ██████████ did meet him quite early on. Their impression was obvious. They thought he looked unkempt, too young for me, and as he was so quiet I guess he didn't make an effort to be overly friendly. So I continued to keep the two aspects of my life separate.

Fairly early on there were signs that ██████████ had a temper and an aggressive nature. I also got the feeling that he lacked respect for women in general. I soon learned of his previous relationship with a woman whom he met. ██████████

██████████ and early on he moved in with her. The fragmented details of the story indicated that she had kicked him out after about a month. He told me of how she would flirt and he would end up in violent altercations because of that.

I knew there was more to ██████████'s past than he was letting on, but I didn't push for information. I just enjoyed spending time with someone who appeared to think I was special. After a while his jealousy became apparent. We would be out somewhere and, he would point out his dislike of my talking to other men. At first I took this as reassurance that he really liked me and wanted me all to himself. I found this quite endearing. After a while it resulted in him calling me a slut along with many other choice words, even when I was only talking to someone. He must have been quite insecure. Although I have been promiscuous, I have always been very faithful when in an exclusive relationship. His accusations hurt me and made me wonder if he was the one who couldn't be trusted if he thought that way. His distrust and his temper only made me more determined to gain his affection. Then one night, we were drinking at his house and some argument ensued that resulted in him throwing a chair through his dining room window in anger. I don't remember the details clearly as I was inebriated. I do know that it scared me. I think I managed to calm him down and in the morning everything was back to normal. The glass was cleared up and he was remorseful. The trashing of 'things' continued in a similar pattern. The first time it happened at my place I was angry. ██████████

██████████ were trashed by him on various occasions. One night I called the police and they came out. A female officer asked me if ██████████ was on any drugs. I assured her that no, we had only been drinking. I learned later on of his meth use. She indicated upon scanning her eyes around the room and seeing the destruction that this was textbook drug induced behavior. After these episodes, the pattern would always be the same. I would be angry or upset, he would be sorry and profess his love and remorse, I would forgive and continue to try and 'earn' his respect. ██████████ moved in with me in ██████████. ██████████ were not happy. Although we hadn't discussed the issue, they did not like this man. I'm sure they sensed that something was not right, even though I made sure that every piece of evidence of violence was erased by the time they came home. After a while the verbal assaults evolved into physical assaults. Over the next few years

I sustained many bruises. One I recall being so big and black on my upper arm that it was almost impossible to hide. This is particularly difficult in summer. He also twisted my leg once. I couldn't walk properly for a week. It was severely painful and resulted in my inability to work – [REDACTED]  
There was a twisted arm, a blow to the head as he pushed me and I fell and hit my head on the corner of a desk. An instant huge bump was the result of this. There was pushing and shoving, attempted strangulation, and countless other inflictions. I didn't understand why someone would want to hurt me so badly. You would think this would push me away but it only made me more determined to prove myself worthy of his love and respect. One night a massive argument broke out. The usual, him accusing me of slutting around. I yelled something horrible in return and walked out the back to have a smoke. It was dark and I could see through the kitchen window. He was there, knife in hand and was walking out of the kitchen. I froze in fear. I knew that knife was for me. Think of how I could escape. I was crouched behind a bush and had my mobile. My instant thought was to call the police. I lived on quite a large property at that time and there were plenty of bushes and trees to hide behind. I knew he would be coming outside to find me. I decided against making the call as I wanted to keep quiet. I saw him carrying the knife and walking past the dining room window. He was heading outside. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Once inside I called the police and they came pretty quickly. It turned out that [REDACTED] had cut his own hand. He later insisted that this had been his intention when he grabbed the knife. I don't believe that. If I hadn't acted quickly I am certain I wouldn't be alive today. [REDACTED] was taken away in an ambulance that night and the next day two police women came out to the house. An avo was put in place and one of the officers alerted me to the fact that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I was in shock and utter disbelief and probed for more details. I was now angry. I had no idea. It turned out that this was the cause of his ex girlfriend throwing him out on the street. She had discovered his past and I assume was protecting her children. The officer informed me that she was unable to provide details due to privacy laws, however, not in so many words it was revealed that there had been an incident, in fact an ongoing situation involving a young woman. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
The next day [REDACTED] called and pleaded to talk with me and insisting that the accusation was not what it seemed. He insisted that there was more to it [REDACTED]. I refused to listen. I was thoroughly devastated, upset, angry, resentful and worst of all I felt such a fool. I drank. I caved in and let him explain. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As per previous pattern he convinced me that he had been unfairly treated. I took him back. By now there was no way he was living in my house. [REDACTED] I kept our meetings secret from my children. I saw him on a regular basis despite the avo being in place and despite knowing his past. I think I tried to put it in the back of my mind to avoid the pain it caused thinking about it. I assured him that I understood it was more complex than the police had said. I didn't really believe this. I just wanted to be with him. This went on for the next year and a half. Secret meetings, drinking, talking. In [REDACTED] I moved into another rental property. The same pattern continued. Although he wasn't living with us, I would allow him to stay over when [REDACTED] weren't there. I usually hid the knives when he came over. The cycle of violence continued and one morning [REDACTED] returned to the house. I had escaped his violence that night but the carnage left behind shocked [REDACTED]. They likened it to a scene from Dexter. There was blood spattered all over the walls, floors, even the ceiling. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I had fled to a friends and had planned to return early to clean up the place. It was becoming exhausting, and expensive replacing windows and door locks. [REDACTED] were understandably frantic. Luckily I arrived a few minutes after them. I had not wanted them to see this. The game was over, or so I thought. The worst memory of that episode was walking inside and amongst the shattered window glass on the floor there was a piece of glass and on it was a piece of flesh. His flesh. It looked like part of his hand, complete with hair. It was gruesome. Still, the cycle continued. I was now lying to [REDACTED]. He was gone. It was over. Buut seeing him in secret. one night after drinking we started to argue. He started pushing me in a way that told me he was going to finish the job. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I ran out of the house, called the police from a neighbors. I was shaking and in shock. The police came and an ambulance to treat him. [REDACTED] Even after this, for [REDACTED] I continued to see him. He had moved to a unit of his own by now. I stayed over there but would regularly leave in the middle of the night to escape being hurt. I would go home or to a friends. I once tried talking to my sister about the abuse. She knew I drank a lot and knew that I could be highly sensitive and emotional. All she saw from him (they met once or twice) was that 'he seemed nice'. I basically came away from that conversation feeling that I was the problem. I needed to feel loved. I went back to him seeking it. I may have antagonized him. In fact I'm sure I did on a regular basis. I never once felt the need to inflict physical violence upon him though, apart from that one time with the knife, whilst fearing for my life. I don't even feel that that was me. Something more powerful took over in that moment. I confided in a couple of friends who

encouraged me to leave. Why couldn't I? I had absolutely no idea. Was I weak? Was I stupid? I must be. This mindset became ingrained in me. The result was a return to him, to try, again and again to win or earn his love and respect. [REDACTED] ago he moved away. He met someone else. I am now feeling rejected, on top of dealing with all of the other trauma. In my logical mind, I know its my 'out'. Strangely though, I feel like more of a failure than ever. I'm getting by day by day. Did I deserve to live that nightmare? Maybe. I stayed didn't I? What an idiot! I consider myself to be above average intelligence and yet I returned for the abuse. Drawn back like a magnet. Yearning for love and acceptance but receiving the opposite. I have read many books over the past six months on topics ranging from co-dependence to Stockholm syndrome. I can relate to them all. I'm free now, but if he asked for me back tomorrow I am ashamed to admit I may say yes. I would like to see the issue of DV addressed with a focus firstly on education. When a victim opens up to a friend or family member, those people can react in ways that help the victim or in ways don't help the victim and make the situation worse. The general public needs to understand that women who stay are not stupid, foolish or weak, but that they are VICTIMS of a cycle that is very powerful. What victims need is for people to simply listen, offer a hug and acknowledge their strength. The aim is to help the raise the victims self esteem not lower it. Secondly I would like to see a focus on men. Yes some women abuse but we know that it is a predominantly male issue. We as a society need to ask the question why are do so many boys grow into men who are aggressive, disrespectful towards women, self entitled and unaccountable for their actions. Why????? That is perhaps one for the psychologists, and perhaps education could play a major role in nurturing young boys into respectful, responsible men given that we can't always rely on the family or home front. Every grown man needs to be a role model for their younger male counterparts in the interests of their sisters, mothers and daughters.