

This is an incredibly difficult document to write, and I'm not sure of the structure it should take, but here goes...

My life was marred before I was even born by family violence. My Father was a violent drunk who would beat my Mother frequently. He was from a very poor family and had four brothers- they were all violent, and they have all ended up in prison at least once, some of them to serve long sentences for violent crimes.

I do not remember, but from anecdotal evidence I know my Father continued to physical, mentally and emotionally abuse my Mother. My Mother had to flee my Father, and escaped to the other side of the country with her sister. As far as I know he made some attempts to locate her (and my brother and I), but I doubt her ever put much actual effort into anything other than being a drunk and a criminal. My Mother heard through sources that he had an incredibly violent relationship with his next partner who was also an alcoholic and during an argument once stabbed her. These are the things I know of my Father. I have met him perhaps five or 6 times in my life briefly, but it is always incredibly awkward because I find it difficult to want to know someone who is capable of such things. I think of myself as Fatherless, and always have, even though the painful reality is that I have always carried around an insidious feeling of inferiority and revulsion that I am somehow created through this man, indeed through a family of people like this man. I am very much of the view that violence begets violence, and although I don't remember him, my Mother told me that my Father's Father used to beat all of his children.

Which brings me, unfortunately, to the almost identical story of my stepfather, who was in my life from the age of four. I cannot possibly describe the damage this man brought into the lives of my mother, my brother and myself.

My Mother was very young and extremely poor when she left my Father- she has described when I was too young to remember that we lived in a caravan she shared with her sister and her young son, and that she for a time existed on one pack of two minute noodles a day.

Disturbingly, I believe my Mother chose to be with my stepfather because she needed financial security, and because of her own emotional issues she stayed with this man.

My Mother had/has a very misconstrued understanding of love, closeness and appropriate threat levels (a problem she passed very much onto me)

My Mother was gang raped when she was 13, and has never recovered- she only ever mentioned it to me once when she was hysterically trying to convince me as a teenager why I was not allowed to have boys as friends, and refuses to ever speak about her past. I believe it is this act of absolutely disgusting, abhorrent violence that has devastatingly led her on a whole life wasted, re-traumatizing herself through further abuse via her intimate partners.

My Mother has only had two relationships in her life, with my Father and stepfather, and both of them could readily be described as extremely abusive.

In my terms, family 'violence' is not only physical, and certainly in my case, it has been the emotional and mental torture that has been most damaging, though it all becomes so entwined there is no method of distinction possible.

My step-father verbally abused my Mother, my brother and I incessantly, and would constantly fly into what I consider bordered on psychotic rages. My brother was a daily marijuana smoker, and he either smoked so much to deal with his preceding mental health problems- most likely PTSD- or being on drugs made him so irrationally angry that I often feared that he had very little grip on reality. I have developed HUGE problems with hyper-vigilance because of living with this man for fourteen years. He would regularly smash things around the house in a rage, or flip the dinner table. Once he cut the head off my Mother's pet to 'teach her a lesson.' He regularly beat- and I mean *beat* the shit out of our dogs. Hearing the sounds of this in my memory is still gut wrenchingly sickening. In fact, I hate ever thinking about my childhood, because all I can remember is screaming, crying, horrible insults, and the sounds of people running away from each other.

Oddly, he never hit my Mother- he would intimidate and stand over her- hold his fist in her face or something like this. He went to hit her once, charging towards her booming 'I'll fucking show you...'- I can picture it so vividly- but I screamed so intensely that he stopped himself and went and smashed something else instead of what would presumably have been my Mother's face. She was eight or so months pregnant with his child at the time. Thinking of these scenes makes me sick to my stomach, and forcing myself to write this and trigger the intensely awful feelings it brings up in me is very difficult.

What makes it so difficult perhaps is the sheer number of almost identical versions of the last scenario I could tell you. Except that while my stepfather didn't hit my Mother he took all those liberties in physically abusing my brother and I often and without ever showing remorse. We were often strapped with his belts, pinched, rapped on the knuckles with steel spoons. Very often he would hit us extremely hard with an open hand- he progressed to punching my brother when he was older. He never punched me, but curiously, his raging hatred manifested itself in different ways because of our genders, and rather than punch me he would pick me up and throw me, or push me to the ground and stand over me telling me he would 'kick my fucking face in' or -insert-whatever-horrifying-threat-you-can-think-oh-here. He would trash my room- both him and my Mother, who sadly was extensively abusive herself, could not let me have a sanctuary away from them, and my room was a target for their rage.

I was never allowed privacy- a manifestation of my Mothers intense paranoia- and my door to my room was never allowed to be closed. We lived in a tiny, shitty house, so I never had respite from the toxic environment of my family. Up until I was 12 I had to share a room with my younger brother, which I hated as I never had any time to myself. I was incredibly suicidal from a very young age- its

very painful to think about. I remember being what could only have been about 6 years old and just crying and crying and being so afraid, wondering how I could live if I ran away from home- I was also incredibly afraid of and obsessed by death. I was already starving and hurting myself when I was around 11. As a young teenager I cut and burnt myself constantly, and thought constantly of suicide. The irony is that I was too scared of the retribution of my parents if I failed that it was my fear of them that stopped me from doing it.

My Mother saw that I had cut my arms once and it made her fly into a hysterical rage where her deranged response was to threaten to kill me herself if I did it again. Obviously not a great tactic...

My Mother has always had intense guilt about seeing how fucked up I was, and it has severely damaged my ability to relate to her, and we to this day have an incredibly strained relationship- we talk but very rarely, and I see her maybe two or three times a year. I completely blame the violent environment our stepfather kept us locked in for my Mother's violent and emotionally abusive tendencies- she was under extreme duress constantly. My stepfather also controlled her almost most sickeningly through money- he gave her an 'allowance' and treated her essentially like a housekeeper. She had to feed him, clean the house, do his laundry etc, and as 'payment' he gave her enough for her and us to also live off. My stepfather's revolting patriarchal constructions of women's and men's roles in the home were a massive contributor to his abusiveness. From an extremely young age, I was expected to clean and was often told 'why else would you have kids except to make them do things for you?' Of course, to adults this was a joke, but this is typical of the emotionally crippling attitude my Mother and stepfather had towards me. My stepfather's favourite assertion was 'Fear equals respect.' Sadly, this had been passed to him through his Father- apparently his Father would beat all of his sons with switches before they went anywhere 'just in case' they were bad in advance.

Sadly, this is the attitude he brought into my own family. I absolutely, fucking loathe this man, and I will never, ever be able to describe the depths of that to you. Every day I walked home from school I would be terrified, because I was sure it would be the day he'd snapped and I'd walk in to find that he had murdered my Mother and brother. It was like walking into a warzone- I never knew what might have happened or would be about to happen. I used to pray that he would die so that we could be free of him.

While my Mother was terribly abusive herself- especially verbally- I believe that a lot of her emotional instability was as a result of my stepfather's creation of an incredibly frightening, negative household where everybody was reacting out of sheer terror constantly.

As a result, my brother and I were incredibly violent and verbally abusive towards each other and I have long had incredible difficulty forming healthy, normal relationships with people. In particular with men, I find it very hard to trust their intentions, and despite 8 years of therapy, still have not been able to

shake the feeling that if I make any male partner angry enough he will beat the shit out of me.

Incredibly sadly, the negative impact of my early life on my ability to understand boundaries in relationships came to a head two years ago when I was myself in an incredibly horrible abusive relationship. Luckily I have learnt enough that it did not last for long- only around two to three months- but it was incredibly scarring. After I broke up with this person, who it turned out was unbeknownst to anyone in his life, a Heroin addict, he stalked me for a while, and one morning I awoke to find he had broken in to my room to 'tell me the truth about me,' which ended in him choking me in my bed. Luckily a housemate heard me screaming and came to kick him out. He continued to stalk me online and harass me remotely, despite the restraining order I had against him, which he described as a 'joke.'

I was incredibly suicidal for about a year after this incident and barely left my house. One day I was so close to crumbling and committing suicide that I called WIRE, and they really helped me. I cannot stress enough how important these services are.

Thinking about all of this has made me feel incredibly exhausted and depressed, and that sums up my entire life. The extent this abuse has had on me in every possible facet of my being is so extensive I couldn't possibly begin to describe it. My health has suffered and now continues to suffer, I have never been able to hold a job for long enough to make money because of the mental health problems I have to deal with because of the recurring PTSD problems, so I am in chronic poverty, which means I can't break the cycle I grew up in, and exacerbates so many of my depression and anxiety problems. I have never, ever had a chance in my entire life to feel like I have security, or a safe place to go home to. I struggle with personal relationships, particularly sexual relationships, and this causes a huge burden on my life generally, but also a massive amount of anxiety around thinking about my future. I will never have children because I don't think I could cope with the stress it would cause me, and I am too terrified that I would pass it negative mental health problems, either through genetic predisposition of how I raise it.

I had a major problem with using drugs and alcohol to escape my reality post-abuse when I was in my early twenties, which put me into a lot of scenarios where I was taken advantage of sexually by men, including two attempted rapes which I managed to escape. However because I am so terrified of male dominance, and have been conditioned by my stepfather to be so afraid of male violence, many friends and strangers have sexually assaulted me and have no repercussions.

What is the most fucked about our society, is that *every single woman I know has had some form of violence perpetrated against her by a man, and most often it has been in her home*. I honestly do not know one single woman who has not been at least sexually assaulted by a stranger at a bar, and I know *many* women who

have been raped, either by strangers, be their friends or by their partners. I know many more who have been beaten by their partners.

Sadly, I think so many women do not recognise the signs of past or current abuse perpetrated against them by their male partners because they have come to expect that this is 'just the way things are.' Male domestic abuse, particularly verbal and emotional abuse- is now so common that this seems normal, and meeting a man who does not abuse you is the anomaly.

I am so ashamed of the culture of violence against women and children that we condone in our society. I am so sick of knowing women whose lives have been destroyed by abuse, but also of knowing that most of the men who abuse them were horrifically abused by their own fathers.

Steps to take in reducing domestic violence:

- When women are pregnant both they and the father should be offered or made to have clinical psychology/counselling- not to assess whether they will be 'good' parents, but to discuss their own childhoods and how they feel going in to parenthood themselves.

- STOP PROMOTING ALCOHOL CULTURE.

- Pay women an equal wage so they aren't trapped into relationships with men because they cannot have the same economic stability

- Work to change the stigmas and overtly sexist workplaces for women in a wider variety of male dominated industries so that women can feel confident to take positions in these fields where they can earn high entry-level wages, ie, construction/mining.

- The mental health subsidy should extend to so much more than 10 sessions with a psychologist- this is one of the greatest travesties in our country. Both for victims and perpetrators, fixing the problems that cause violence to happen or to be accepted takes many years to solve. It is degrading and insulting that this government thinks this is enough- it shows a complete disregard for the actual health of the citizens of Australia, and is indicative of our bizarrely antiquated attitudes to treating mental health as at the epidemic proportions that it is.

- Children should be receiving education around how to recognise sexism and manifestations of sexist attitudes from kindergarten onwards.

On top of this, why the hell aren't we teaching kids how to have self-love and respect, without the religious over-tones? Violence is perpetrated out of a place of fear and self-loathing, and it is accepted from the same place of fear and self-loathing in someone else.

I can't write any more right now, as I am so exhausted by this. I am happy to be contacted for further comment however: I run an Arts Festival that supports women who are marginalised from the mainstream, and I am currently studying

how the affects of early childhood abuse that develops into PTSD manifests in and/or affects the work of artists.