

I didn't have sex on my wedding night. I was thrown against a wall instead. My skull reverberated against the brick and my brain felt bruised. He laughed at the stunned expression on my face. This was the first time he was physically violent towards me. It wasn't to be the last time. My first marriage was a path littered with physical violence, emotional manipulation, financial control and spiritual abuse. Those are pretty strong claims. They are also true and factual claims. Not that the truth or the facts meant anything when I tried to get help, when I tried to get away from him. No one wanted to hear the truth or the facts. No one wanted to believe this nice, if somewhat young and goofy, church going man, musician and youth leader was inflicted unspeakable violence against his wife for over █ years. No one wanted to believe any of it. It was easier for them to look the other way, to ignore the weeks I was absent from church and church related activities, to evade any attempts I made to open a conversation about domestic violence, to pretend it was all my fault because obviously, obviously, I wasn't praying hard enough for God to be first and foremost in my marriage, that I obviously wasn't submitting to my husband and being a godly woman. I found it difficult to be godly when I was having pins stuck into my flesh, when I was having my head held underwater until I turned blue and when he was raping me. At first I prayed to God. I prayed long and hard. Nothing changed. He continued to set booby traps so I was unable to leave the house without him being able to tell. He would remove a vital part from the engine of my car so it couldn't be driven

without his permission. He removed my name from our joint bank account so I had no access to monetary funds. He flushed my contraceptive pill down the toilet and he cut up any clothes I owned that he thought were immodest. Except for the red lace teddy he made me wear when he felt so inclined. And when I say he felt so inclined I don't mean inclined towards a night of passion and romance. I mean inclined towards a night when he would tie me down and rape me for hours on end. A night when he would penetrate me with things like bottles and knives. When he would do unspeakable sexual things to me just to titillate himself. He set out to destroy me on every level possible. Physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. All of it was intentional and planned. He knew no one, NO ONE, would ever believe me if I tried to disclose what was taking place. Sometimes I don't even believe it myself. It took over 20 years for me to get to the point where I could tell someone about some of the worst things he did to me, that THEY did to me. I read the letter I wrote to my friend in [REDACTED] in which I described some of the episodes I had inflicted upon me and I didn't believe it could be true. I didn't want to believe it could be true. It sounds like something out of a movie. A bad movie. An exaggerated movie. A story that you look and disparagingly and think 'well that was all a bit over the top'. But what I went through was over the top. It was exaggerated, vile and soul destroying. And then I got away. In the process of my escape there was a near death experience. But ultimately, I got away. Practically in one piece. To look at me you would never have

known. Fractures don't show up externally. He was very careful not to leave visible scars. But the emotional destruction was deep and ongoing. Even some 20 years later I am still impacted by what he put me through. I am still triggered by certain things, things like small, enclosed spaces. Things like [REDACTED] cologne for me. Things like people quoting certain scripture. Things like not having access to money or food. Things like having something put over my face. Things like nooses. Things that bring back vivid and violent memories of the things he did to me. He always told me I was damaged goods and he made damn sure to do his best to make sure I was damaged in every way imaginable.

I met him when I was [REDACTED] and he was [REDACTED]. He came to my town for his work. After a few months he started pursuing me. I kept telling him I wasn't interested but he didn't give up. He kept at me and at me. He just kept at me and at me. One night when I finally gave in and allowed him to drive me home. I should never have given in. At the end of the year I decided I wanted to attend a youth event in another state. My ex was from that area. He would be there for [REDACTED] and afterwards visiting his family and friends. He told me that I could stay at his parent's house with him after the camp and he would bring me home a week later. An extended holiday. For some unknown reason, I agreed. I wish I knew why I agreed. I wish I hadn't agreed because that was when it all got totally out of control.

When I first met him, I did not like him. He was loud. Crass. Crude. Offensive. Ill-mannered. He dressed oddly. He was not physically attractive to me. He didn't seem particularly intelligent. He didn't read books. He was rough with people. His driving was known to be erratic and dangerous. I didn't like him at all. My friends at school who knew him thought he was weird. He tried hard to be funny. People thought he was an idiot. But people from church seemed to think he was wonderful. Or ok at least. He became involved in everything at church. He was everywhere.

Our church was reasonably strict with things. But the youth pastor was even more strict about things. The youth pastor and a core group of young people, most who had been raised as fundamentalist Christians, ran the youth group and told us how things were to be. One of the big things we were taught was that sex before marriage was totally out of the question. We had this drilled into us. If we indulged in premarital sex, we were used goods. They taught us that if you had sex with someone, you were then married to that person in the eyes of God. So if you then had sex with another person (even if it was someone you became legally married to) you were committing adultery because you were married in the eyes of God to the first person you had sex with. Regardless if the sex was consensual or not. So because I had been raped, I was used goods. The pastor didn't know I had been raped. But he had my ex to do his work for him. The ex was very close friends with the

pastor and he slowly convinced me that no godly man would want me because I was no longer a virgin. And stupid me, I believed him. So when he made moves on me sexually, I didn't fight him. I let him do it. I figured there was no point trying to stop him. I was used goods. Not to mention I was also thousands of kilometres from home and relying on my ex for my transport home.

DV was never, ever spoken of in my church. All that was spoken of was that a wife should submit to her husband. That women should submit to men. That women were not to speak in church. Not to lead prayer or deliver Scripture. We were not to wear immodest clothing which included jeans, tank tops, any clothing that revealed our bra or bra strap. No makeup. No short hair. And that was just the beginning. Divorce was considered unacceptable. Abuse was never spoken of so I have no idea if it would have been an acceptable reason for someone to leave a marriage. I doubt that it would have been. Marriage vows were taken for better or worse. No matter what. You should just pray harder if things were difficult.

The physical abuse didn't start until our wedding night. However the sexual abuse and emotional manipulation started a long time before that. As I said earlier, he pursued me and pressured me until I relented and entered into a relationship with him. He groomed me until he had me thousands of kilometres from home and reliant on him for transport and accommodation. I had never been so far away from home before without my

parents. I had limited funds. He knew this. He pressured me sexually when he had me in this situation. He knew he had me where he wanted me. The sexual coercion went on until we were married. He forced me to perform sex acts while brainwashing me that because I had been raped, that he was the only Christian man who would ever want me and that because of what I had done with him (sexually) that definitely no other Christian man would want me. It was him or be alone for the rest of my life. He knew I had a low sense of self worth even before he came along. I might as well have had it tattooed on my forehead. He knew and he targeted me. I was the perfect victim.

During the [REDACTED] years we were together he subjected me to all manner of abuse. He would throw me against the wall. He would kick me when I was curled on the floor. He would shove my hand in boiling water. He would make me sit in a cold shower for hours on end. He would refuse to allow me to use the toilet and make me stand in a corner until I urinated on myself and on the floor. Then he would make me lick it up. He would not allow me to eat but he would eat in front of me. He would lock me in the boot of his car, sometimes for over 24 hours. In the darkness with no light and no water. He would make me stand on a chair and he would stick sewing pins in my flesh. He wouldn't pull them out, he would just leave them there. He would make me stand on a stool with a noose around my neck. A real noose hanging from a beam in the kitchen ceiling. He would kick at the stool and laugh as I tried to regain

my footing so I didn't hang myself. He would put a plastic bag over my head and close it tight until I passed out. He made me sleep on the floor in the winter with no blankets. He made me sleep in the outdoor toilet with no blankets. He would rape me. He would rape me with bottles and other household items. He told me my nipples and genitals were ugly and deformed. He broke my nose three times. He broke my jaw once. He broke several of my fingers on each hand. He broke my collarbone twice. He ripped tendons and soft tissue. He pulled my hair out of my head. He punched me in the face. He kicked me in the stomach and kidneys. He tied me up for hours on end. Sometimes for days. He wouldn't allow me out of the house. I had no access to money. I was not permitted to work. I was not permitted to see people without him being with me. He had the doors and windows booby trapped so he would know if I had tried to leave. He had a lock on the phone so I couldn't use it without his permission. He took parts out of the engine in my car so I could not drive it. He told me I was ugly, fat, stupid, worthless, ungodly, a slut, shameful, that the devil was in me, that I deserved what I got, that no one liked me or loved me, that my family were ungodly people and I wasn't permitted to associate with them (my mother died during this time). If I dared to defy him, he would punish me one way or another. Several times when I was defiant, he made me eat his faeces. He made me eat his shit. He smashed things that were precious to me. He destroyed photos of my mother who had just died. He had complete and utter control over me.

He told me that because my family weren't real Christians that I shouldn't be involved with them. He kept me away from them as much as possible. Even when my mother was dying he tried to keep me away from them. He would give me the silent treatment and often not talk to me for days. If I dared to speak to him, he would punch me in the face or the stomach. If I did anything to disobey his usual rules during this silent period, he would punch me in the face or the stomach or do something even worse to me.

I was not permitted to wear jeans. Or anything tight. Or anything that might show my bra strap. Nothing low cut. I wasn't permitted to go swimming as bathing suits were too revealing. I wasn't allowed to watch TV or listen to secular music. I wasn't allowed to read non-Christian books (theme wise) or anything by non-Christian authors. He smashed all my secular music when I moved my things into his house. He also destroyed all my books. I wasn't even allowed to attend the doctor by myself and not once did any doctor I saw in his company EVER ask for him to leave the room. If they had, I would have had a chance to tell them what was happening. As it was, I had no way out. This was before the Internet, I had no way of looking anything up. No way of finding a way out.

He would go out to events to and leave me at the house. This happened when I was visibly bruised or too sore to move without other people realizing there was



something wrong. There were times I would leave the house when he had told me not to. I was always found out because of the booby traps. He would always beat me senseless or do something terrible to me when I came home. It got to the point where I knew I was going to be abused regardless of what I did, so I did things he said I couldn't without caring what he might do to me. He would find an excuse to do those things to me anyway so I figured I might as well do some of the things he told me not to (like wearing makeup or going out with friends).

The type of abuse only worsened the longer we were together. It slowed down a little for a few months at one point. That was when his mother died. We left to go interstate [REDACTED]. We were interstate for [REDACTED] days. He didn't hit me or hurt me physically at all during that time because we were staying with his father and around other people all the time. It was the longest period during our marriage that he didn't physically abuse me.

He wanted me to get pregnant. I didn't want to. Before we married and I was on the Pill, he would flush them all down the toilet. After we were married and he wouldn't let me go to the doctor on my own, my best friend went to two different doctors to get two separate Pill prescriptions. She got them dispensed at two different pharmacies. Then she would give one packet of Pills to me and keep one for herself. I hid my Pills inside a teddy bear I had been given as a child. The teddy was in the

spare room and in a box. There were days I missed taking it because he didn't leave the house long enough for me to access my stash. I was surprised I didn't get pregnant because of the days I missed but I didn't.

In the end, after [REDACTED] years of being with him, I did leave. It was bizarre because he actually helped me move my belongings to the new place. He knew where I was moving to because we lived in a fairly small town. There was no point trying to hide it from him and I had no resources to move far enough away that he wouldn't know where I was. Plus I wasn't brave enough to do that. So he helped me load the car up and take things to the flat. I didn't take much. Just my personal belongings and some things I had owned before we married. I didn't want anything that would remind me of him or that we had shared. When I told him I was leaving (the day before I left), he didn't say much. He was very passive about it. It was almost scarier than when he was abusing me. I didn't really tell anyone from church. I hadn't been to church for a long time because of injuries. When I had approached the pastor much earlier on, he had told me I needed to pray harder if there were issues in my marriage. I found out later that my husband had told a lot of people I was cheating on him and that I was sleeping around and drinking and doing drugs. When I saw people from church out in public, they would look the other way or just blatantly ignore me. My friends from high school (remember I was only [REDACTED] when I left so I still had contact with friends from school, limited contact but it was still there) were very

supportive. Things got more complicated [REDACTED] weeks after I left though. My husband had been trying to convince me to come back to him. He had been taking me places and I had agreed to go with him because he threatened to do things if I didn't. He didn't physically abuse me during this time. Not long before [REDACTED] I found out I was pregnant. The baby was not my husband's. I knew I didn't want to have a termination. I wanted someone to love and someone to love me. So I decided to continue with the pregnancy. The baby's father didn't want to be involved which was fine by me. Someone told my ex I was pregnant. I have a suspicion it was a nurse from the hospital who went to the same church. I had gone to the ED with bleeding and she was there. She had rung my husband (he was still listed as my next of kin). She didn't ask me if I wanted him to be contacted. She just did it. My husband came around to my new residence practically as soon as he found out. I was in the yard at the time. He came up behind me and told me that he would take me back if I had an abortion. I laughed and said what the hell sort of Christian was he, telling me to kill my baby. He pushed me to the ground and started kicking me in the stomach. He kicked me about 8-10 times. He told me he would kill the baby himself. He told me if I called the police he would come back and kill me as well as the baby. My housemate took me to the hospital. I was kept in for a few days with internal bruising. The baby was fine. That baby is now nearly [REDACTED] years old.

Not long after that incident, I found out that my husband was now in a relationship with the woman I had thought of as my best friend at church (I will call her Jane). She was a sole parent, her husband had left her for another woman. I had often asked my husband to go to Jane's house to do things to help her – mow the lawn, repairs etc. He was always happy to go. Now I knew why, he was involved with her. I was appalled. She had ■■■ small children. I knew I had to try and warn her. I did try to tell her but she didn't believe me. She continued to be involved with him for some months. By the time I was almost due to have my baby, my husband got a new job interstate. Some ■■■ hours drive away. I was elated. I had encountered him several times in public and he had verbally abused me each time. I was so happy that he would be leaving town. He left the week before I had my baby.

The talk around town was that he had thrown me out because I had been sleeping with other men and got myself pregnant. The dates didn't really match up but no one cared about that. I was a slut and that was all they cared about. By this stage I had totally lost any support I had from people at church. No one rang me. No one spoke to me. No one tried to help me. They all believed every word that came out of his mouth.

he didn't see me and my son. I haven't seen him in person or heard from him since then.

I lost contact with any people from church. I got a casual job and then a part-time job. I also started

studying at university. I wasn't making much money but it was enough to get by. Then I filed for divorce.

Today I have been happily married for ■ years and have another child. I am a successful professional with a post-graduate education. I have never gone back to church. It was difficult for me to establish new relationships after leaving my abusive marriage. The first long term relationship I had after my son's birth was emotionally abusive although not physically abusive. That relationship was on-again-off-again for nearly ■ years. I met my now husband not long after that relationship ended for good. It was very difficult for me not to be scared of being subject to physical abuse and to not put up with anything remotely like emotional manipulation etc. It took me a long time to trust my now husband and other men in general.

During the time I was abused people simply turned the other way. They refused to see what was in front of them. I had no smart phone or Internet to help me and the people around me closed their eyes to the obvious. There were times when the medical profession could have helped had they asked to see me alone. There were times my pastor at church could have helped if he had actually believed what I was saying and believe that women were worthy creatures in their own right. There were people who saw my bruises, who knew I would go 'AWOL' for weeks on end and who never asked why. Who never sought me out. No one wanted to know the truth about what was happening. And the nurse in the

ED, I could have been killed because of her. Because she took it upon herself to ring someone and tell them my personal details. She had no right to do that. I think the only reason he let me leave and that he didn't kill me was that he became bored with me. He had spent years abusing me and he got bored. Simple as that. I know he abused the next woman he was involved with as well. I found that out when she sought me out years later and told me that he had done that to her and that she had a feeling he had also done it to me. She was the first person who believed anything I had to say about the abuse. I am sure there will be people who read this who won't believe what I have written here. I don't care about that sort of thing anymore. I know it happened and I know what I have written here is true. And I have no doubt this sort of thing has happened to other women at the hands of their abusive partners. I was just lucky enough not to be killed. Something I am thankful for every day despite the ongoing flashbacks and nightmares that I still have, even now, nearly ■ years later.

Thankyou for your time.