

Submission for RCFV

Written 21st May 2015

A brief background of my story which is pertinent to how I came to be involved in accessing the various "systems" around Family Violence.

I grew up with Family Violence, however it rarely manifested physically. Instead I witnessed my Mother endure emotional, financial, spiritual, social, verbal and extreme psychological violence from a young age. Coercive, manipulative techniques were used on all of us by my Father but these had the most impact on my Mother. Our household was a very tense, highly toxic place. As a child this was a very oppressive environment to grow up in. My parents, my siblings and I were involved in a Religious cult-like church which also had a very controlled, rigid atmosphere. My Mother was repeatedly advised by "Elders" in that church that she should stay with my Father when she approached them for advice, or when things at home had become intolerable.

I had no plans to repeat this scenario in my own marriage, however at ■■■ Years of age, after being with my former husband for ■■ years, and having two children with him, I finally realised I had repeated exactly the same pattern as the one in my childhood home. My former husband presents as a very charming man to all in the community. Friends and family think of him as a "salt of the earth" sort of person ...however at home I was absolutely walking on eggshells and as events escalated became fearful for my life, and the lives of my children.

A particular point I would like the Royal Commission to really hear and understand is that my husband was only once physically aggressive. (He lunged and held my arm and it bruised deeply in the shape of his fingers). But the violence I endured throughout my relationship was psychological, emotional, verbal, social and spiritual. I was monitored and controlled in increasingly alarming ways.

My children did not usually witness overt events, (my husband would pick his moments and wait until we were alone to verbally and emotionally abuse me) however they were picking up on the "atmosphere" in the home which was becoming increasingly hostile. To give an example, both of them approached me at different times, and totally out of the blue began asking me whether I wanted to be cremated or buried and telling me they didn't want to die (in strange voices I had never heard them use before... I questioned them carefully thinking it may be part of the usual childhood fascination with death... them trying to explore and understand it. But they couldn't account for where their questions had come from. I knew in my heart it was to do with the more sinister atmosphere in our home). I give you an example of this in the following scenario...My husband, enraged one night at something I'd said or not said, done or not done drove me and my sleeping children onto the other side of the road in an effort to intimidate and terrorise me. I ultimately felt as events unravelled even further following this incident, I could not sleep with my back to him and was absolutely fearful for my life and the lives of my children.

So this scenario has nothing to do with physical violence...however once I began to access support services, in particular the Magistrates Court and the Police, the people I encountered had absolutely no understanding of psychological, verbal and emotional abuse and violence. None at all! In every encounter with these systems I felt completely humiliated and dismissed. The only service who truly

understood and helped me actually begin a plan to leave my home safely with my children was a local Women's Service. I first accessed them via phone and was incredibly amazed and relieved to hear a support worker saying "yes we're familiar with that behaviour" once I began to tell them what my children were saying, and about the driving incident. I cannot tell you the relief it was to finally, after [REDACTED] years have my experiences validated by an understanding voice from that service.

Another example I can give you to try and help you understand the impact of verbal and emotional violence, is recently, my ex-husband verbally attacked me over the phone about an incident to do with our son. The impact of his words (over the phone) had such an extreme physical effect on me I began retching and gagging and was totally unable to get off the floor. Unfortunately my daughter witnessed this event as I was totally unable to control my bodily reaction to his abuse. It took me some hours to recover from this episode.

These forms of violence, not just physical violence MUST be understood by services, in particular the Court and Police systems.

The following is an example of how I was completely re-traumatised within the Court System. As a result of this incident and phone calls to my local police station, I have absolutely no faith in our Justice Systems. In fact, they further perpetrated the humiliation and degradation I experienced in my personal relationship with my ex-husband.

In the [REDACTED] Magistrate's Court, I was asked to give evidence at my hearing for an Intervention Order. Once I'd begun trying to fearfully stammer out the terrifying emotional, psychological and controlling incidences that were occurring at home, I was interrupted by the Magistrate and verbally threatened with a refusal to give out an Order if I were to keep talking!!! So the very same behaviours I was seeking protection from were repeated in the Court System by a Magistrate! I subsequently wrote a letter to the Chief Magistrate of Victoria asking for this hearing to be investigated and received a reply telling me there was no such evidence for what was "attributed the his Honour". Hogwash! I am an intelligent, educated woman. I know what I heard and exactly what I was threatened with...(I have since been advised these tapes can be forensically examined. I have been involved in an independent study through the Women's Service and a University and have left that particular incident for them to deal with...however it is worth noting I am one of at least three women who have complained about exactly the same sort of incident by exactly the same Magistrate in the [REDACTED] Court.) I can feel the anger rising in my body as I write this. This is an absolutely outrageous scenario and must be addressed immediately by your Commission. To add to this insult, during that particular time in the [REDACTED] Court ([REDACTED]), the Women's Service Court Support Worker was "removed" from duties (as apparently she carried too much influence on women and how they accessed the Courts). She has since been re-instated, however her removal only confirms to me my experience of the Court. I would describe the [REDACTED] Court as a load of Patriarchal, Misogynistic Bully Boys running the show who cannot tolerate women defending their positions. My experience with the Chief Magistrate's dismissal of my complaint further confirms just how far this level of corruption reaches.

I received similar treatment when accessing my local [REDACTED] Police station. My complaints about breaches of the Intervention Order were usually met with dismissal and complete misunderstanding of the psychological and emotional intimidation I was experiencing. I gave up

phoning the police as they were absolutely no help at all. Each time I accessed them, I felt completely humiliated by their dismissal of my complaints.

The same type of scenario greeted me when I made an attempt at Mediation (which, as I'm sure you are aware should never be mandatory in the case of Family Violence, but the Court system co-erced me into attempting that). During that particular experience I felt extremely co-erced and emotionally and psychologically intimidated by my ex-husband, and the Mediator did not mediate at all, rather colluded with him and tried to get me to agree to him accessing more time with our children (whose lives he'd put at risk in the driving incident). I wrote a letter of complaint to that Family Relationship Organisation I'd accessed, and the manager ultimately apologised and agreed the Mediator had no understanding of the intimidation I was experiencing, and she was asked to seek Supervision around that incident.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. It is wonderful to at last have an opportunity for my voice to be heard, as it has been very silenced through the above experiences.

I look forward to the much needed changes within our Justice Systems that I know will be put in motion following this Royal Commission.

