

My mother met my step father when I was about [REDACTED] and my sister was [REDACTED].

I don't remember much about my childhood.

I ran away from home when I was [REDACTED].

When I was [REDACTED], I ran away from home with my sister. After school, we walked from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED], where my grandparents lived. Nobody believed us. They couldn't believe that two young girls could walk that far, know the way and navigate the traffic etc. I vividly remember walking along [REDACTED], scared and my heart racing, thinking any minute now my step dad was going to find us. I vividly remember walking along roads that barely had any footpath, with cars whooshing past my sister and I. I remember vividly reaching [REDACTED] and being confronted with the [REDACTED] that had no footpath and a very sharp bend. I almost cried. To come so close. I found another way. We crossed the rail tracks, threw our schoolbags over the fence and climbed the fence. I hoisted my sister and climbed behind her.

When we did get to my grandparents' house, they contacted the [REDACTED] police station. My aunties and uncles thought that was the best thing to do. They didn't want to get into any legal trouble. When the policemen came, they took my sister and I aside. I don't remember much of what I told them, but I remember vividly saying this: "I certainly don't want to go back home." You see, I had only recently learned the word certainly and learned that the correct pronunciation was SSSSSertainly, not K-K-kertainly. I explained to the policemen that my dad hit my sister and I and that I was very afraid of him.

Meanwhile, my parents had lodged a missing persons report at [REDACTED] police station. The police took me to [REDACTED] police station and it was there that I was reunited with my parents. I couldn't believe it. My mum was so angry with me. She was convinced I was lying. That it was one of my aunties or uncles that drove me from school to my grandparents'. How could I walk that distance and not have any blisters on my feet? She made me take off my shoes and show her my feet. See? No blisters. Lying. How could I make a complaint against my father? He's a good man. Working so that I could eat and get an education. He only hits me, she said, to teach me. If I wasn't such a naughty kid, he wouldn't have to hit me. He doesn't enjoy it. It was all my fault.

The police made me go home with my parents. My heart sank. My sister was upset with me. She had, after all, at one point, asked me to turn back. No way, I told her. We would be in so much trouble. Our dad (we weren't allowed to know he was our stepdad, let alone refer to him as stepdad) would kill us or more than likely, beat us black and blue.

Back home, I copped the brunt of punishment. I was the eldest. The ring leader. How could I do this to our family? I was ungrateful. Unfilial. Shameful.

There were no follow up visits by social workers or the police. No one investigated my allegations. No one cared about our welfare or what happened to these two girls.

The physical abuse continued, in the guise of discipline. There was the time when I was locked in the garage overnight, my hands tied together. It was really cold and dark. I can't remember what I had done to deserve this punishment. Something ghastly, I'm sure.

There was the time I was driven into the grasslands somewhere at night. It was dark and windy. My mother and stepfather threatened to leave me there. "Listen. Can you hear the wolves?" my mother asked me.

There was the time I was hit with the plug end of a power cord. That hurt.

There was the time I was thrown and my head hit the ground. I literally saw stars. It's not just a figure of speech.

Retelling these incidences, I feel like I need to state that I was a good kid. A cheeky kid, but do kids come any other way? It doesn't matter how cheeky or rotten I was. It's irrelevant. No child deserves that sort of treatment, especially by the people they trust.

When I was ■■■, I ran away again. This time by myself. I didn't take my sister. She was so upset with me the last time. Secretly, I resented her. She was the youngest and from where I was standing, was the favoured child. She was still a baby when she met my stepfather. She wasn't the spitting image of our biological father. She was just a kid and didn't know any better.

One day, after school, heart pounding, I sneaked out the school gate and slipped into my friend's mum's car. Her mum had agreed to take me in and I am forever indebted to her for her generosity. My friend and her mum had been in a similar situation with a violent family member. Her mum advised me to take out a restraining order against my stepfather. It seemed like a good idea. I didn't want trouble for my friend and her mum. I didn't want my stepfather finding out where I was and coming to hassle me, as well as my friend and her mum.

On the morning of the hearing, I was scared and nervous. What if the intervention order wasn't granted? Would I have to go back home? What would my stepfather have in store for me then?

We arrived and I found myself in the same waiting area as my mother and stepfather. I was horrified. My mother called me over and I capitulated. My friend's mum said she'd keep an eye on me. My mother hissed the same things at me as she did when I ran away ■■■ years earlier.

Luckily, the intervention order was granted. My stepfather didn't contest the order. I breathed a sigh of relief. The intervention order was only enforceable for a year. I knew then and there I wasn't going to renew the order. I would take my chances. No way was I ever going to be in the same room as my stepfather again. The whole experience was incredibly traumatic.

These anecdotes are a glimpse into the abusive childhood I endured. I still bear the psychological scars over 2 decades on. When I heard about the RCFV, I was compelled to tell my story. Children should be daydreaming about rainbow-filled candied worlds. Not suicide.