

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence 25.05.2015

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Professions: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I wish to make my submission on 'Family Violence in Rural Australia' PUBLIC**And I am willing to meet with this Royal Commission on Family Violence should they so desire it.**

- I survived a [REDACTED] yr violent marriage to my ex- husband, [REDACTED], on our rural property at [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Victoria. Throughout that time I was unable to report the assaults to the police because of threats made to me by my ex-husband in regard his gaining custody my [REDACTED] children through the Court System. In addition I feared an escalation of his abuse against my children and myself if I carried through my threats to go the police.
- In order to explain the complexity of the abuse over so many years I have written my story titled, '[REDACTED]' which I have attached for your perusal.
- I wish to publish this book in the hope that my story and experiences can become a part of the collective voice of all abused women be they in the city or the bush.
But my ex-husband has intimidated and threatened to sue me should I put my story to publication.
- Janine Mahoney CEO of Safe Futures Foundation has encouraged me to submit my book and my submission on my abuse to you in the hope that it can help the Commission in its endeavours.

Brief Overview**of****My Ex- Husband's [REDACTED] Family Violence from [REDACTED]**

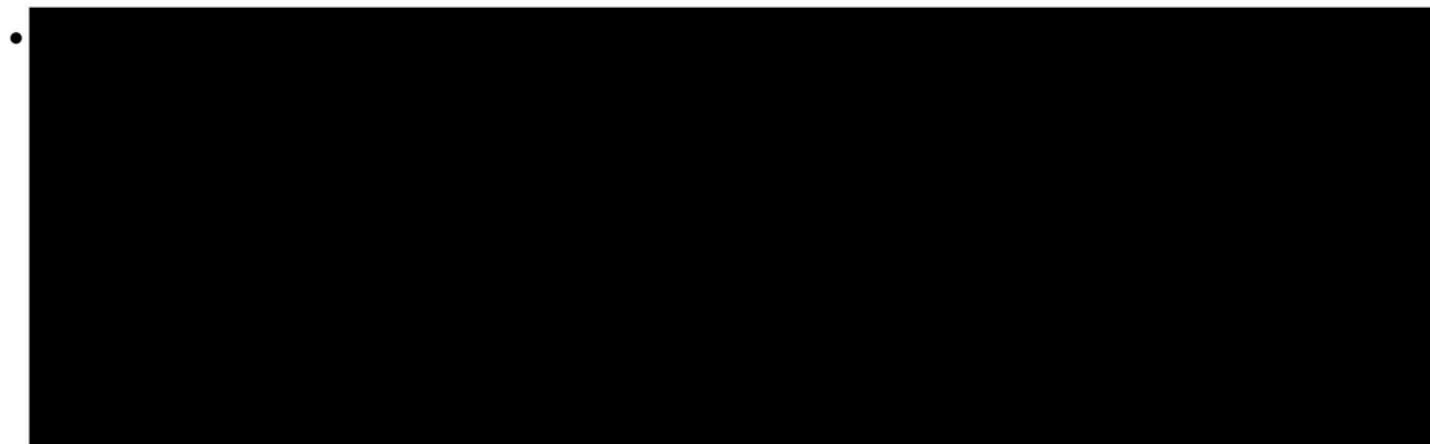
"No one heard my screams. There was no one and nowhere to run to and no one to tend my injuries, physical or emotional. Nobody, not even my own family, wanted to know my shame, my fears, my terror, my utter degradation. No one believed he could abuse his children because to the world he was, 'Such a nice guy who'd help anyone.'"

In retrospect before our marriage, [REDACTED] did exhibit small signs of what his true abusive nature was like. But at the time, I was an extremely innocent [REDACTED] year old fresh out of a Catholic boarding school and, from a family with an abusive father. I didn't think [REDACTED]'s outbursts were anything but normal frustrations, you see I had lived with much worse emotional and verbal abuse all my life.

In the first [REDACTED] years of marriage to [REDACTED] I was:-

- Roughed up and strangled on our honeymoon leaving me with severe bruising to my neck, arms and body.
- He forced himself on me sexually whilst I was unconscious from prescription drugs for severe depression and [REDACTED], an autoimmune disease diagnosed at [REDACTED], which was exacerbated by severe stress caused by [REDACTED]'s violence.
- Hit in the face with his fist whilst pregnant with my 1st child [REDACTED].
- Hit in the face again when [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] months old.
- Attacked, strangled and dragged me a distance into the bathroom where he held my head under the bath's coldwater tap until I gagged to teach me to do as I was told.
- Man handled and spanked me when I was pregnant with [REDACTED], to teach me a lesson.
- Severely bashed and pushed out of the car, leaving me injured on the side of the [REDACTED] highway [REDACTED]
- After this last bashing I threatened to go the police, and after I exposed his latest abuse to his parent, [REDACTED]'s physical violence of me eased. Around this time he physically abused [REDACTED] and later [REDACTED]. Until the end of the marriage [a period of [REDACTED] yrs] [REDACTED]'s violence towards me and only me changed to relentless emotional, psychological, social, mental and financial abuse with recurrent threats to take my children from me, financially ruin me, and to kill himself. His physical violence to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was intermittently ongoing.
- Had holes punched in wall; pitched a full tin of paint into a fireplace; almost burnt the house down, threatened to shoot out debtors windows.
- I was told frequently that if I cooked, sewed and kept house as good as his mother did then I'd be doing I was supposed to do. That is I was not to concern myself with the running of the farm, the finances, or legal matters.
- I was constantly warned to say nothing to anyone about his abuse or I would suffer the consequences, and instructed to see no evil, hear no evil and to speak no evil.
- Before 1985 reform of the Act, even though I had partly paid for the land we had bought, the car and the house, by law I had no legal right to anything of our joint assets. I was lied to by [REDACTED] and his father to who told me not to worry that they had put everything was in both our names. When I found out their lie, I was threatened that if I left the marriage, one way or the other I would get nothing.
- Isolating me on the farm continually insisting I put too many miles up on the car, wore out tyres and used too much petrol.
- Constantly demeaning me telling me I was useless and knew nothing.
- Regularly discrediting me as a liar who always exaggerated the facts. Throughout this time I wrote poetry, taught myself to play the guitar, taught myself woodwork and numerous crafts and began painting to expunge the deprivation and degradation I felt constantly.
- Making fun of me in front of other people belittling my efforts and lying about what I had said.
- Telling me that I was a trouble maker and stupid and that I knew nothing about farming even though I had spent most of my life to that point on the land
- BUT to anyone OUTSIDE of the home and the children and I, [REDACTED] was Mr Nice Guy, a quiet family man and all round good bloke around the district who would do anything for anyone.
- His parents lived on the property with us and he and they controlled everything that went on. His parents condoned and supported my abuser in everything. I was told by [REDACTED]'s father [REDACTED] after I left the marriage that I was a thief for asking for 50% of our assets in settlement and when I reminded him of all the violence and abuse I had suffer at his son's hands he said "[REDACTED] you got exactly what you disserved.'

- Control and manipulation, of situations, money, social outings, what people said, facts about farm details, legal documentation, lies, abusive outbursts, discrediting and demeaning me and the children in every way possible, abandoning me and [REDACTED] to cope on our own [REDACTED]. Even to, after I had left the marriage, he refused to pay his share for [REDACTED] higher education and keep [I had to have Child Wellfare to automatically take the money out of his bank account], threatening to shoot out people's windows, holding a gun on me, together with other forms of family violence that continued on relentlessly for years and even after I had left the marriage.
- The only reason I stayed in my marriage was to stop [REDACTED] from forcibly, through the court System, taking my children away from me. His threat was that, because I had received psychiatric treatment and suffered depression, he could and would prove I was an unfit mother. I could not and would not allow this to happen and determined to stay in the marriage until my youngster [REDACTED] was 18 and old enough not to be manipulated by him. Unfortunately the situation worsened in [REDACTED] and when I left [REDACTED] was only [REDACTED].
- After the end of the marriage and to the present time [REDACTED] has continued to threaten, control and manipulate myself and the children every which way, especially throughout, before and after the dissolution and sale of the property and the dividing of shared funds.
- He has used sex throughout the marriage as a control mechanism and after I left he had a string of affairs that impacted my children's lives severely and mine to a much less extent.



- My successful self resurrection after [REDACTED] yrs of this toxic marriage to become a strong, independent, determined, bright and happy woman once again is still a work in progress but I thank God every day for having the courage to leave and start a new life intent on rebuilding myself who I am very proud of today [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] however, I survived a ruptured aneurysm which almost cost me my life. Throughout the last [REDACTED] months of recovery I have become determined to publish my story so that the violence I suffered at the hands of my ex-husband was not in vain. My resolve is to inspire abused

rural and city women who read my book that they can take heart from my struggle and turn their lives into their dreams.

- For or me I found love again. [REDACTED] years ago I married my present husband [REDACTED] who is my greatest supporter and friend. In that time I gained [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] gorgeous grandchildren for which I am eternally grateful. Life is good.
- But even now all these [REDACTED] years later, a legacy of Post Traumatic Stress episodes and torrid graphic dreams still leave me upset and traumatised from time to time.

My Recommendations to the Royal Commission on Family Violence

My Recommendations to the Royal Commission on Family Violence are for all abused women but are specifically aimed at the plight of abused **Rural Women** which is in my opinion far harder to legislate for and far harder to control and monitor because of the following seemingly insurmountable issues of,

- Distance – nowhere for the victim to run to and no one hears the screams or see the bruises
- Social isolation
- Exacerbation of violence due to problems with huge debt, drought, fire floods economy etc
- Financial deprivation of the victim who cannot easily access assets
- Complicated financial arrangements that sometime incorporate two or three generations
- No/ little/ infrequent public transport to get victim to crisis accommodation/ legal assistance/ medical help /social services programs sometimes hundreds of kilometres away.
- Uselessness of a FVIO on so many levels for rural victim and perpetrator
- The prevalence of guns and ammunition
- Emotional and psychological abuse many be known by the community that fails to assist victim
- If there are local police and doctors they are known and often friends of the family socially
- Patriarchal attitudes still prevalent in most rural communities/ Women don't count
- Extraordinary conventional mind sets in the community
- Visibility and condemnation in the community should the victim seek

My Suggestions for the Royal Commission's Goals

1. **Fostering a violence free society:** The only way to achieve this, either in the bush or city, is to continue to educate the community about family violence and its unacceptability. This education program via TV, Press, Internet, and all Social Media should be an ongoing Australia wide media campaign of teaching gender respect, responsibility, anger management and accountability of one's actions for each other regardless of gender, race, religion, wealth, or ideologies [not unlike the 'Slip, Slop, Slap' campaign]. Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) has been going since 1994 which is fantastic but it is an iceberg in a lonely sea of our education system. RRE and anger management has to also be literally taught in our homes, kindergarten, primary schools, high schools and higher education as well as the workplace.
Then and only then can we begin to create a violence free society for our children, grandchildren and beyond.
2. **Reduce and Aim to Eliminate Family Violence:** Organizations like White Ribbon, Safe Futures Foundation, WIRE, Lighthouse, Our Watch National Hotlines, Safe Steps, Men's Referral Service, Sexual Assault Crisis Line and CASA, LVA Victorian Legal Aid, No To Violence, SRV Seniors Rights Victoria and In Touch and for rural Victorians the Rural Outreach Services are all extraordinary organizations all doing good work and heading in the right direction BUT more still

needs to be done especially in the bush where attitudes and outcomes still have a million light years to go. Networking between the above organizations and fund raising for extensive media exposes has to happen for all ‘Say No to Family Violence’ campaigns to move forward. But for Rural Women however many of the above organisations are either in Melbourne or large rural centres like Bendigo, Ballarat, Swan Hill or Mildura, or Warrnambool, Wangaratta or Traralgon which in some cases can be 1 or 2 or more hours away from victims who have little or no public transport.

Rural Australia will only be freed from Family Violence by rural men and women.

We need a squad of rural women, and men who don’t abuse, who are brave enough to go out in the rural areas of Victoria to Rotary, Apex and Lions Clubs and footy club dinners, to field days, CWA afternoons etc, not only for the women to tell their stories in an endeavour to change the attitudes of rural men and the patriarchal dominant male ethos of the bush but also for country men who don’t abuse women, to become advocates for saying ‘No to Family Violence’ by publically telling how they felt when their sisters, daughters, and mothers have been victims of family violence. Perhaps they are the ones who can make violent countrymen understand that family violence defecits all men and all communities financially, socially emotionally and morally.

How about we have ‘Family Violence Free Towns’ throughout country areas like we have the “Tidy Towns, Clean Up Australia, Bin It, and Keep Australia Beautiful” campaigns? Is it possible? Why not?

The internet is a great way for victims of family violence to access advice if they have a computer and know how to use it, but husbands can easily go into the computer’s history and see just what the victim has been reading up about again putting the victim at further risk. Can there be sites victims can access where there is an automatic lock out device that prevents anyone knowing that they have accessed that site?

Another thing we must try and change especially in country Victoria is the patriarchal attitudes of men who think they are supposed to be big, strong and powerful with a role of dominance in their homes, communities and in sport. In fact the attitudes glamourised, trivialized and idealised by media and TV of our sports stars especially football and rugby stars and even that of our cricketers assaults on and off the field contributes significantly to men’s belief of their right to physical assault and aggress. Then take into account the effects of their much published assaults, rapes/ control of women, drugs, booze, seedy night’s out which we seem to be laughed off as ‘boys will be boys’ attitude counteracts much of the good work of all the above organizations. Big money is made out of these types of promotions and how do we stop that? I am not sure, but hey, once, not that long ago, the big tough Marlbro Man Cigarette Ad and the attitudes to smoking changed, so I can’t see why with constant campaigns about Family Violence, attitudes and male superiority can’t be changed too.

3. Ensuring the Safety of People Affected by Family Violence:

Early Intervention: In the bush this is where family, other relatives, doctors, school teachers and community leaders like footy and basket ball coaches can make a huge difference in keeping the communications open with the victims of rural family violence. I am sure that the outcome for my life would have been very different had I had a strong father, or an older brother, who could have warned my ex husband of the consequences of his actions, should he abuse me again.

GPs are usually the first to see signs of abuse on rural women. Somehow we have to make it mandatory law that GPs irrelevant to their personal connection to abusers have to alert the police and

family violence organisations of the need to make contact with the victim and the perpetrator. As well GPs must not automatically resort to prescribing anti depressants and sedatives for the victim whilst turning a blind eye to the real cause of the victim's problems, family violence. In my case the local doctor treated [REDACTED] both from a medical and a psychological point of view after he made himself a victim by [REDACTED] when I, the victim of a vicious bashing by him a short time earlier received was not even examined or treated by our local GP.

Teachers, priests or ministers are some in the community who are approached by the sexual or physically abused and in my opinion it must be made mandatory law that they have to report these assaults which are crimes to the authorities.

4. *Provide Fast Effect Responses to Those who Report being a Victim of Family Violence:*

In rural Australia this is extremely difficult and dangerous because of the geographical isolation of large properties, the prevalence of guns and the ability of the perpetrator to see/hear anyone coming onto the property. By the time a police car drives the length of most rural driveways let alone the 100 kms plus from the nearest police station the victim can already be dead. So in my opinion the first thing that has to happen is the victim and her children have to be safely removed from the property. How, well that's difficult in many cases but at all times the safety of the victims as well as the services trying to help has to be paramount.

FVIO's, as they are now called, I believe are somewhat useless in a rural situation. For me I knew a FVIO would not stop my ex – husband doing anything he wanted to in the freedom and under the cover of distance and isolation of our farm. In fact I believed it was way too dangerous to bait a breathing tiger for it was certain I would wear the brunt of his ire. Therefore in my opinion these days if offenders of rural family violence are issued a FVIO they should be fitted with a GPS device like those for sex offenders attached to their leg so that authorities can see exactly where they are at all times. [Should they remove the GPS device and break their FVIO terms then they receive a mandatory jail term. Better a jailed offender than a dead mother and children.]

Having women's refuge centres only in major country cities is great but in reality they are often 100 or 200kms away from victims and their children [with many refuges full to capacity at any point in time] is still unsatisfactory in 2015. In my opinion there needs to be a local safe house perhaps run by the local Rotary/ Apex/ CWA/ minister/ doctor or police in each town where abused women know they and their children are safe until the police arrive and they can be safely transported to the refuges in the larger country centres.

The Victoria government should be allocating more funds to improve the protection of rural women and their children rather than cutting funding for public housing which is only going to make matters worse for abused rural women.

5. *How do we provide effective protections to women and children who have been affected by family violence in the past and who remain at risk of family violence?*

Oh my God, that in rural Australia is almost like trying to achieve the impossible!

I can only answer from my experience which is outlined in detail in my book. For me my ex-husband will never stop trying to control my children and consequently my life wherever and whenever he can. I hope his physical violence is a thing of the past but I am sure that if he felt challenged or threatened by me he would revert to type. I coined this phrase after I left my marriage:

“A leopard doesn’t change his spots; he just lies lower in the grass.”

How he will react when he hears that I have put this submission into the Royal Commission on Family Violence frightens the shit out of me.

How he will react to my publishing my book is also equally disturbing and risky seeing that he has already threatened to sue me for defamation. What will he do? I believe he will return to type, and try and control not only what I can do with my book but also try and control and manipulate my children, my [REDACTED] sisters and their husbands, my [REDACTED] nieces and nephews, my husband [REDACTED] and myself. How do we stop it? Now that’s an unknown at this point in time.

Am I scared and afraid of his reactions to the above? Hell yes I’m very scared. But I do believe I have a right and a duty to put in my submission to the Royal Commission and I do believe that I have the right to publish my book. And I will.

The only way to protect other women and children after they have gotten away from the violence is to endeavour to empower those women by knowing their rights, by having them connected to a central Violence centre via a body alarm and by ensuring that the residences they are living in have decent locks, alarms and video surveillance 24/7 as well as having GPS devices fitted to offenders for life. [I am aware that this is not socially acceptable or practical but the victims, unless their abuser is jailed, have a life sentence of living in fear.] Even that is not enough to make victims safe should the abuser be intent on abusing/ killing them.

6. *How can we hold those who have been violent accountable for their actions?*

Placing a fine on a man who had broken a FVIO is ridiculous as it is just a slap on the wrist and into the bargain the money to pay for the fine takes monies away from the family for the needs of women and children. I believe a jail term is appropriate for all offenders who break FVIO’s

For men who physically and sexually abuse women they have committed a crime. From my research I now know they can be, if deemed guilty, jailed for up to 25years

My belief is that all convicted family violence perpetrators should be given the full imprisonment term of 25yrs so that at least the children have time to grow up in safety and the violated woman has time to get on with her life. Perhaps with a 25 yr prison term hanging over their heads abusive men may consider their options before lashing out.

Rehabilitation through counselling and psychiatric therapy is certainly a positive endeavour for some abusive men who can see that they have a problem.

BUT the question I ask is how many of these family abusers have narcissistic personality disorders or even psychopathic/ sociopathic personalities.

These are men who do not believe they are at fault or that they have a problem. I lived with one of these men for [REDACTED] yrs and he never accepted that his abuse was his problem. It was always his excuse that I made him do it or I needed to be taught a lesson or whatever. When I tried to get him to get psychological help he dismissed it saying there was nothing wrong with him. These men cannot be rehabilitated and they will offend again and again.

It is not a matter of IF as I say in my book rather just a matter of WHEN!!

My question is what do you do to hold these types of men accountable?

7. **Community attitudes towards family violence**

Community attitudes towards family violence and victims of family violence in 2015 as outlined statistically in your Issues Paper on page 5 is a sad reflection of how far we as a society have to go in our quest to change community attitudes both in the city and in the bush. Because of the conservative types of people that traditionally live in rural Australia change is slow at the best of times but with something so deep seated as the acceptance of family violence and other types of abusive behaviour the challenge is far greater in the bush.

My conclusion – family violence at that time was still a very taboo subject in Rural Australia. Hopefully today if I was to do the same type of interview the response would be different, but in rural Victoria I have my doubts.

8. **Generational family Violence**

The effects of family violence on children, has been widely documented which this leads me to the subject of the vicious cycle of abuse on a generational level. Is family violence due totally to nurture of children in a toxic environment or is a large proportion due to genetics. Are there any studies being done on this topic because I believe it is basically fundamental to so many issues in the management of abusers and whether or not children should be left in those environs. For me personally I did not understand the huge affect it would have on my children before they were five year old. I didn't have a lot of choices about escaping my abuse and believed as I do today that I made the right choice for my kids when I see how much it has affected them emotionally psychologically, mentally and socially. Back all those years ago my belief was that they were better off with me able to be a full time mother to them than having them raised by my abuser and his parents.

I hope my submission can make a difference and I thank the Royal Commission into Family Violence for allowing me to contribute my experiences and questions to you for your perusal.

It has been an unexpected honour for me and if I can be of help in whatever way please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely