

Professional – SEEDS

Survivor Stories

A WOMAN

I fled from my partner and I spent two nights on the streets. I was hurt, frightened, I just did not know where to go or what to do. After two days I went to see my GP who responded so quickly by phoning Social Services they in turn contacted the Women's Aid. Within two hours I was in the women's refuge (very lucky a room was available).

My time in the refuge was a very difficult one, but at least I had a room I could go to, to get away from all the emotional problems I was having within the refuge. During these times I did a lot of soul searching, reflecting on how my life had been for the past few years, wondering why I had allowed the verbal, physical, sexual abuse to be placed upon me. On these occasions I would talk to a support worker, this helped me remarkably, and over the months that followed, this support helped me to move forward.

Though the support was a great value to me, I found living in the refuge a difficult time, due to being a lot older than the young mothers and thirteen children between them, there was no where to go for quiet time, even to eating your evening meal, or sitting in the lounge for a cuppa and cigarette (the lounge was the only place you could smoke) it was so noisy on occasions you just could not hear yourself think, though grateful for being given a roof over my head and for the support, this did place a big strain upon my health, I often wondered why there was never a place for the more mature women whose children have grown up and flown the nest.

I have now moved forward, I moved to a small bed-sit, it might not be a palace, but I can call it home. This is a big step forward for me, a new beginning, if it wasn't for the support and guidance of Women's Aid Support Workers and Volunteers I do not think this positive move could have been made.

I thank them all for the courage and strength I now have to help me move forward, I could not have done it without their support.

The Survivor

I've been punched, I've been kicked.
I've been slapped, I've been hit.
But I survived
I've had cuts, I've had bruises.
Used all kinds of excuses.

But I survived.
I left home, felt alone.
Had no-one to phone.
But I survived.
I shed weight, I shed fears.
I cried buckets of tears.
But I survived.
I made a new start.
Fixed my poor broken heart.
And I survived.
But now my body's repaired.
And I'm no longer scared.
Because, I am the survivor!

(In memory of Michaela Manvill, a courageous woman)

I met him...

I met him whilst working in a hotel he was a coach driver always laughing and joking, Mr Popularity. He began to get really friendly he would take me out for day trips on his coach with the hotel guests he was a breath of fresh air never a dull moment.

He moved in with me, the first few months were great but then I noticed that what he said did not always ring true he was drinking every day, he always enjoyed a drink and maybe he did drink a lot but I didn't see it. He lied about money all the time telling me he couldn't get money from the cash point because his card had broken he was always asking for money and taking money from my purse. One day I questioned where he had been as he was supposed to be meeting me at 6pm but at 815 he hadn't arrived I phoned his mobile I could hear noise and music in the background, I knew he was in the pub so I asked him, he told me to keep my nose out of his business and that it was nothing to do with him. I was shocked at being spoken to in this way I thought it was a one of. At 10 30 when he still at arrived I went to bed.

The next thing I remember was being dragged out of bed by my hair and being kicked in the stomach. He told me never to question his whereabouts again as it was none of my business. The next morning he was fine I asked him why he did what he did and he blamed me saying if I didn't ask him where he was it wouldn't have happened he said he was sorry and wouldn't do it again. He did do it again and again and every time he blamed me. I became a recluse didn't go out unless I was with him and then he would put me down in front of people all the time, he told me what to wear. Who to speak to, and what time to go to bed, I always had to wait until he was tired until I was allowed to go to sleep and sometimes he would punch me in the back to wake me up. Flicking was his favourite he would flick the back of my neck or my ears and nose and say things like just remember I am in charge and he would

tell me don't think of leaving or I will find you and kill you and get you low so that you really believe he will do exactly that.

I came home from work one night he was drunk I knew what would happen so tried to be nice but he thought that I must be seeing someone else as I was in such a good mood he grabbed me by the shoulders and pushed me so hard I fell backwards onto the floor which was concrete, I bashed my head so hard and was knocked out when I came round he was raping me. It was then I knew I had to get out but this was my home and I didn't want to lose it

I carried on living with him for a further three months. One day he went to work so I changed the locks. I suspected he had been seeing someone else so I packed his clothes and left them in his car that night he moved in with his new girlfriend and apart from threatening phone calls he has left me alone, but I still live everyday wondering if he will be waiting for me when I get home.

I am one of the lucky ones I got out pretty unscathed but a lot of women never get out and live in fear of their lives every day.

I DIDN'T BELIEVE I WAS THE VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. DO YOU?

I hope that my story will be thought provoking.

I hope that it will make you uncomfortable.

Because that would indicate, you recognise these events were wrong to have happened.

It may make you uncomfortable because it will touch on things that are relevant in your own life, pornography, dressing up, bondage, threesomes, things that I am sure you will have thought about talked about and joked about. For some of you it will be things you have tried for yourselves, but ask yourself this; were the other people involved truly happy and giving consent or could there have been bullying, coercion and even black mail behind it all.

And how can you be sure.

I spent 12 years of my life with an abuser. I told no one.

To the outside world I was a strong, intelligent and very capable woman. I was a licensee for a famous brewery, I did all of the hiring and firing, and I ran the business. I dealt with drunks, drug takers and dealers and often violence within the pub. I didn't take any nonsense from anyone. Well, that's not entirely true. For this was my public face.

What people thought of me had always been important, so I learnt from quite a young age to role-play in order to project what I thought people wanted to see.

The good daughter

The doting mother

The loyal employee
The dutiful wife

I believed that if I could project these images of myself I would be liked, and perhaps to a degree I was. But unfortunately it also provided my husband with everything that he needed in order to manipulate and to control me. He used this knowledge of me to devastating effect.

I was desperate to be a good wife, I had one failed marriage and a daughter behind me and I was determined not to fail again, I felt like damaged goods, second hand, cheap, and he made me believe that I was lucky to have him, after all, I was fat, ugly, stupid, and a failure at so many things, and of course bit-by-bit over many years you come to believe all of this.

My story begins with a chat we had, much like many of you I am sure, a chat about fantasies, he told me he wanted me to sleep with other men, it came as quite a shock to me, I had only slept with two men in my life and I had married both of them. I was and still am a one-man kind of woman. Unfortunately it didn't stop there he became obsessive about it; he would buy pornographic magazines and movies especially ones which promoted and normalized group sex, bondage etc. He was relentless in his pursuit. And of course slowly I began to think that I was being unreasonable, perhaps this was quite normal in many marriages, after all I hadn't had a lot of experience, he would say things like "***if you really loved me you would do anything for me***", Oh and one of his favourites, "***I'm giving you this chance because I want you to know what you were missing out on by marrying so young***".

Was I being prudish, frigid, would he get bored of me. Then began the threats, "***well if you won't I'll find someone who will***" and "***I'll leave you***", he used this one a lot, and he knew it was my greatest fear. This stage was followed by the insults, "***your so fucking fat and ugly I'd never find any one who'd want you anyway***", and so on...

It began to completely dominate my life, he would talk about it in bed at night, he would point out strangers in the street and ask, "what about him", and "he is a good looking bloke, do you like him"?

At one point he got me very drunk and introduced his friend into our bed, thankfully this didn't work, his friend back out, this caused a great deal of frustration for him and life was difficult for some time after that. But the craving never went away.

Then came the day it all changed. **I was raped.**

I was bitten, scratched, bruised and the whole experience left me devastated. For obvious reasons this is a part of my story, which I do not want to dwell on, what I will say is that during the attack it became apparent that this had been pre arranged by my very own husband. I felt that I had been violated in every way possible, my body, my mind, and my very heart and soul. Every thread

of dignity taken from me, I cannot begin to try and get over to you the effect this single incident had on my life.

I now know I should have gone straight to the police. But I didn't.

I returned home, He had arranged it all, But I felt that once he saw the injuries, saw the emotional trauma the extent of the damage he had caused me, he would be sorry, he would stop all of this nonsense and we would be able to get on with our marriage normally. One look into his face was enough, those cold blue eyes and that childish grin immediately told me I was wrong. He had taken a huge risk that I wouldn't go to the police, but it paid off. The games had only just begun. As I relayed the events of the evening to him, I realised it was turning him on, any glimmer of hope that I'd had for some comfort was quickly quashed. I was subjected to further pain and torture. A full action replay was what he wanted, a blow by blow, bite by bite, scratch by scratch account. A complete re-enactment, "**did he touch you here**", "**did he bite you like this**", I drifted off into another place, only to return the next morning to the aches and pains and realisation that it had not all been a terrible dream.

My whole world fell apart and the new world, which began for me that day, was a living hell on earth, which continued for the next ten years. I became a puppet, I wore what I was told to wear, I said what I was expected to say, I went where I was directed to go and sexually I was at his disposal or the disposal of whom ever he chose.

I was degraded and humiliated, sometimes I was injured but after the event I would be cared for, given flowers taken out for meals and treated very well. Especially when in full view of family and friends.

He was clever. There was never an endless string of men. He would choose carefully, (**usually married men, they would keep things quiet.**) The same man would be used several times over a period of months and then, (*thank god*) I would have a break. This way if things were discovered it would look like I had had an affair and he would be the victim. Just one more way of silencing and shaming me. I became more and more withdrawn; I became numb and functioned automatically.

My husband chose and bought all of my clothes. (*Now wouldn't you think that was a wonderful thing for a husband to do for his wife? Now look beyond it*) He was particularly fond of things that buttoned through, zipped up and his personal favourite was Velcro, he liked to have easy access to me where ever and when ever it suited him. Trousers were never an option.

His justification for this was that he loved me, he liked me to look nice and to have nice things and that I had a wonderful figure and I should be proud to show it off. All I could think was "**Well make your mind up; just now I was fat and ugly!**"

I had the finest lingerie, silk, lace and always complete matching sets. No tights allowed of course. Justification for this was, because I deserved it. (I'd have given anything to wear pants that came up to my armpits)

There are many contradictions in my story;

Were back to me being fat and ugly again...

If that were true then why would anyone want to sleep with me? Was it because I wasn't fat and ugly or would men just have sex with any woman and not really care?

This confused me.

In a strange way being wanted by a third party made me feel attractive for a little while. At the same time I didn't want to be or feel attractive. My body and mind were saying no, this is not what you want, but you quickly learn that the more erotic you can be the quicker it will be all over. These mixed signals just add to the complicated and tangled thought process. And anyone being recruited into this nightmare may well have been unaware of my feelings, remember, after all I was good at role-play. Too good as it happens.

The good daughter

The doting mother

The loyal employee

The dutiful wife

They were all still there, but the real me, she was a long long way from the public eye. Even if I had found the courage to brake my silence who was going to believe me? I was a strong, intelligent, capable woman.

How could I have found myself in this position?.....

Well, I hope I have gone some way to answering that.

Why did I stay?.....

Well where could I go? What could I do? Who could I tell? I was very ashamed, and my will was completely broken. By now he also possessed photos and blackmail is a powerful weapon especially in a small community.

So before we close and go on to the Q and A session I have a couple of questions for you to take away.

My husband never hit me he didn't come home after a night in the pub and beat me. I didn't believe I was the victim of domestic violence, **DO YOU?**

If you had been called to my home and I disclosed this information to you, **WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE TO HELP ME?**

A Survivors Story

We met at work. I was a directors PA and he was a manager. I knew him as a friend first and then we just got together. He was lovely kind, thoughtful, considerate. We were blissfully happy. I thought all my dreams had come

true. I moved in with him and gave up my house. We got on so well together. Our wedding was lovely.

And then it all started to go wrong. It was the day after our wedding. We were due to go on honeymoon abroad. I woke up in the middle of the night and he had his hands around my throat.

It was terrifying. He didn't say anything, just let me go. The next day I actually wondered if I had dreamt it. It seemed so unreal. This is someone I had known for seven years. He was full of apologies, I was still in shock. He promised it would never happen again and I believed him.

Almost instantly I began to see another side of him. We went on honeymoon and he was really aggressive. I was wearing a bikini on the beach and he accused me of flaunting myself in front of other men.

No matter what I said he wouldn't listen. The beatings began and I learnt very quickly how to hide the bruises. I kept thinking that this was going to be the shortest marriage on record.

I couldn't understand why he changed so quickly. It was as if he owned me now we were married. I was his property, nothing more than that. I made up my mind to finish when we returned from honeymoon but fate changed that.

I discovered I was pregnant. There was no way out, I felt I had to stick with it for the sake of the baby. Things then went downhill rapidly. He was beating me two or three times a week kicking, punching and slapping. Strangulation was a real favourite.

He wouldn't let me go back to work. He lost his job. He wanted us both home together. I was totally isolated. He wouldn't let me answer the telephone or the door.

One night he gave me a black eye because we had been to my mum's house and she had joked that he looked like Phil Mitchell from Eastenders.

The worst pretence of all was keeping it from my family. I am close to my Mum but I couldn't tell her. We were supposed to be happy newlyweds expecting our first baby. I kept thinking that when the pregnancy began to show, he would stop all this. Everything would go back to how it was, but he didn't stop, it just got worse.

He only stopped beating me a week before the baby was born.

He never let me see a doctor or nurse on my own. When I was in hospital with the baby he ordered that the curtains be drawn around my bed. He didn't want me to have any contact with the outside world.

Quite a lot of people think that domestic violence only happens if attackers drink a lot or they are on drugs. Not in his case, it was cold calculated obsessive jealousy.

My baby was thirteen days old and he gave me another black eye. By this time I was totally exhausted, ground down, I couldn't fight. He would even kick me in the legs while I was feeding the baby.

Then one day it was really bad. He attacked me several times. He tried to strangle me eight times, gave me two black eyes. I thought this was it. He was going to kill me.

The final attack was the worst. He put his hands round my throat I couldn't breathe, the room started to spin. I could hear the baby crying upstairs he kept shouting 'I don't care if I do 25 years for you' Then he let go, put on his coat and went out

I knew I had to do something then. It took me half an hour to pick up the telephone. I was so scared, so terrified. I telephoned my Mum and told her to come and get me. I picked up my baby and my cat, packed a small bag.

My Mum was in shock she took me to hospital. They counted a total of thirty bruises on my body the hospital phoned the police. Then he turned up Thankfully the nurses locked him out.

The police were so good they took a statement and arrested him immediately he was kept in over night. I got an injunction and moved in with my Mum. The police gave me a panic alarm.

Six months later he went to court and was found guilty of actual bodily harm. He was given a two year probation order. I also got a no contact order made against him so he could not see me or our daughter.

It was after he left that the Police Domestic violence officer told about South Devon Women's Aid support group they hold weekly meetings and I went along not knowing what to expect. It was brilliant. It was confidential and I got loads of support. I went every week for a year. Now I am a volunteer myself.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE - HOW CHILDREN ARE AFFECTED.

19.11.09

Firstly, there is a very important point to be made. Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) is not just a physical threat. There are many forms e.g. sexual, emotional, verbal, financial, mental, bullying and more. It can happen in any close relationship, regardless of social group, class, age, race, culture, disability, sexuality, gender or lifestyle.

Tragically, no matter how the DVA is manifested within a family, whether the effects are passive, physical, direct or indirect the children receive a huge impact with far reaching consequences. Many parents fall into the trap of thinking that if the children do not see the abuse it has no impact, if they are in bed or in another room they will not be affected. The toddler on the floor engrossed in a toy, or the baby in its cot is "too young" to understand. Not enough credit is given to children being able to hear, if not understand, what is happening in their environment and that whatever affects a parent will have an unavoidable effect on the children. A parent may put themselves in the "firing line" to save the children potential harm, The sad reality is that DVA can have an unavoidable effect on the children because family lives are so interlinked and they are intrinsically dependant on their parents or carers to provide a nurturing environment. This is particularly so if parent/carer develops a substance abuse as a coping mechanism for the misery and anguish of their everyday lives. They can wear the cloak of guilt for the whole family.

The subsequent problems are enormous and together with DVA may lead to a loss of stability, security and the core family framework so vital to a child's wellbeing.

DVA and its' many implications may cause separations within a family. If they have to leave the family home often removal from extended family, grandparents and friends and familiar surroundings. Even siblings may be apart. Children often have no voice, especially the very young. They may become insular and withdrawn or disruptive and difficult in a desperate attempt to regain some sort of power in their lives, resorting to bullying to try and maintain that power. There may be a lack of attachment between children and carers which can cause added behaviour problems in all stages of the child's life. Worryingly, they may become perpetrators of DVA as an extension of that power in family or future relationships.

Families can be inextricably shattered, torn apart and devastated during , and as an aftermath of DVA. The problems do not vanish once a place of safety has been found. Each individual who has been involved directly or indirectly may react in a host of different ways covering the whole spectrum of personal suffering and its' encroachment on their lives and relationships.

When a pebble is thrown in a pond the ripples extend to the edge of that pond and then stop. Imagine, if you can, that pond containing a family and the DVA becoming the pebble. The ripples have no perimeters and would perpetually continue ad infinitum. Such is the impact to each and every member of that family.

Fortunately there is an increasingly wide range of help for those who may feel able to access it. The victims can and do become survivors. However, improvements as always still need to be made to tackle the problems of DVA and the ensuing devastation of all persons involved, particularly children because they are the society of tomorrow. What appears to be an epidemic in today's world cannot surely be allowed to perpetuate? An arguable fact remains that sometimes the damage done is too deep and wounding for some to ever fully recover. Tragically, the legacy lives on in them.

MOIRA MADGE - NOVEMBER 2009. FOR FIRSTLY, MY BELOVED FAMILY, MY DEAR FRIENDS, AND THE MEMBERS OF SEEDS(DEVON) - MY FELLOW SURVIVORS, YOU EACH HAVE MY ADMIRATION AND LOVE