

The insight component of [Insight Exchange](#) shares a person's **lived experience** of **violence and abuse**, highlighting a person's responses and resistance to violence and where '**social responses**' were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. This reveals the roles that individuals, organisations and communities play in people's experience of violence.

The Insight Exchange team have inserted content from the Follow My Lead resource as headings to help orientate the reader and to build understanding of the lived experience of violence. The following insights are from a person with lived experience of domestic and family violence.

Ruby

I'm an only child from England. I had a privileged upbringing, went to private school and my parents bought me an apartment when I was 21. I graduated uni and went straight into teaching and I taught in England for three and a half years before I moved here.

I had taught with a girl at a primary school, Jess, and we were really good friends. Her partner worked for an Australian firm in England and got offered the opportunity to transfer to Melbourne. They moved to Melbourne and I missed her. So, the next summer holidays in England, I decided to visit her. I came here on holiday for about three and a half weeks.

I went to Melbourne first and then the plan was to go to Sydney and then the Gold Coast and then I'd go back to Melbourne and see her again. After a few days in Melbourne, I flew to Sydney but I'd actually gone to the wrong airport in Melbourne. I didn't realise there were two! But the airline staff were really sweet, and they just transferred me on to the next flight.

So instead of getting to Sydney in the morning, as planned, I got there in the afternoon. And that changed my fate because when I got to the apartment hotel, the concierge on duty was Derek.

I checked in and spoke to him and said, "I want to do the Bridge Climb and I want to know which bus goes to Palm Beach, because I need to go and see Home and Away. I want to go for dinner at the top of Sydney Tower, can you find out all this stuff for me? I'm going to the aquarium and when I come back, I'll come and speak to you." And he was like, "that's fine". When I got back to the hotel, I got into the lift, and he ran to the lift to hold the door to say, "I have all the stuff you need." I remember thinking, wow, he's eager. We were talking for a while and he said, "who are you here with?" I said, "I'm here by myself." I'm just here for a few weeks and he said, "I'll show you around." I was like, why not? He was attractive. I didn't think we were going to have a relationship, I just thought, well, that's nice of him, and I'd rather a local showed me around. He gave me his number.

Wow, how romantic ... isn't this so sweet?

We went out on our first date and he held my hand walking around Sydney and I thought, wow, how romantic and isn't this so sweet? An English guy would not hold your hand on the first date. We went for drinks, and it was lovely. He came back to my apartment at the hotel and then he realised I wasn't the English backpacking reputation that he thought I would be!

So, while I was in Sydney, we dated. He organised for us to do a day trip, he wanted to take me some vineyards, but I don't drink alcohol. Instead, we went to a wildlife park and the Blue Mountains, which was lovely. And then on the Friday, he took me to the airport, and I flew to the Gold Coast and he said he would fly up to spend the weekend with me there.

I thought his coming was so romantic. I hired a car and went down to Byron. I stayed in Byron for a night. And on the Saturday, he was just going to get a flight up to join me. And I tried to call him several times on the Saturday and I just could not get in touch with him. And I thought that was so weird. Who knows where he was? But I still thought it was romantic. I booked a really nice place for us and I paid for it. I wasn't going to stay in just a 100-buck a night place, and I remember him moaning when he got there because it was on the ground floor and he hated ground floor places.

“No, I can't. I've got my trip planned and I need to stick to what I'm doing.”

I was just thinking, “I've booked somewhere really nice and it's got a spa and it's romantic.” He was moaning, and then he wanted me to go back to Sydney and I just said, “no, I can't. I've got my trip planned and I need to stick to what I'm doing.” The following week we spoke day and night. Then the following weekend, I flew back to Melbourne and he flew to Melbourne to spend the weekend with me and met my friend. And again, I just thought it was so romantic as we had dated in three

different states. How amazing is that?

From when I first arrived in Sydney, I just felt like I belonged. I just had this feeling in my heart that this is where I was meant to be. He said to me, “I want you to move over. You want to live in Australia, you want to live in Sydney, and I want you to live here, so let's do this.”

Back in England the school that I was working at paid for me to do my master's degree and gave me a day off every few weeks to go to uni. I was almost a third of the way through my master's and I had one more assignment to do. Once you're a third of the way through, you can bank the credits. So I said, “well, I'm just doing my master's and I just need a year at home to finish that and then I'll come.” He said “I can't wait that long. I can't put my life on hold for a year. You have to come sooner than that”. So, I said, well, I have to give half a term's notice so the soonest I can move over is around Christmas time.

“I can't wait that long. I can't put my life on hold for a year. You have to come sooner than that.”

So that's what we agreed. I went home and told everybody I was moving to Australia and handed in my notice at school. The next three months were pretty full-on. We spoke on the phone most days. I rented out my apartment in England. I sold my car and shipped over the stuff I wanted. I had just bought a new sofa a couple of months before. I was like, if I come, I have to bring my sofa.

When I was in England, we dated by phone, it was great. There was not the distraction of having the physical stuff. There was this other guy that I had been on a date with before I went to Australia. He was really, really persistent and when I came back to England and was in a relationship with Derek, I just said no to him. There's nothing happening. I'm moving to Australia and that's it. He just would not let it go.

I remember one night telling Derek, “this guy is just still hassling me and I'm trying to be nice about it, but he just doesn't get the message.” Derek's whole tone just changed. Basically, it was my fault that the guy was chasing me. 'I' wasn't making it clear enough. 'I' must be still sending him signals that something could still happen. And he basically said, “you know what? I think we should just leave this. Why don't you give me a call when you get to Australia? And if I'm free, we'll catch up.”

I was beside myself. I'd just shipped all my stuff over and I'd done all of this because I wanted us to be together. Then he hung up and I couldn't get in touch with him. I was terrified because I'd just basically given up my whole life. I hadn't moved yet, but it was not easy to reverse. I didn't want to be in England. I wanted to be in Australia. I had made all these decisions and followed through on those things and then suddenly, this person just withdrew. I was just terrified that I was going to lose this amazing relationship and this amazing guy, that was so romantic, that I was so in love with, because of some other guy who just couldn't get the message.

One of my friends rang him from my phone and he eventually answered, and I remember her speaking to him and saying, “no, that's not the situation, Ruby isn't leading this guy on in any way”. She talked him down. At the time I just thought he's jealous and it's hard to know what's going on from the other side of the world? I'd probably feel the same.

I arrived in Sydney at the end of December. It was a whirlwind. The idea was he would come and pick me up from the airport. All my stuff was already at his house. My boxes had arrived, my teaching stuff and my sofa. When I came through customs, I tried to call him to find out where he was. I thought he'd be waiting, not necessarily with flowers or balloons, but waiting. I couldn't see him anywhere. I rang him and he didn't answer, and I just felt this panic. I thought, why would he not be here? We had this plan that he's going to pick me up at the airport and he knows what flight I'm on. He knows what time I got in. So, where is he? I tried him again and eventually, he answered.

He said, "I'm outside. Just go upstairs to departures, it's too expensive to pay for parking at the airport." I was pretty disgusted, to be honest. I'd just given up my whole life to move halfway across the world for a guy that's too cheap to pay for parking at the airport. We moved in together straight away.

We had been invited to a party in this penthouse to watch the New Year's Eve fireworks. Because I don't drink alcohol, he had said to me, "you take me to work and then you've got the car and you can come back later and then we can drive home." He didn't have a car, I hired the car. I was like, that's great. He gave me directions to drive back to his place. And of course, I had no idea what he was saying because I didn't know Sydney at all. I left and then the next thing I knew, I was going over the bridge. I thought it was wonderful. I had just moved here from England. I was like, "I'm on the Harbour Bridge. I'm driving over the bridge. This is amazing." It was just an adventure.

I remember him calling me and saying, did you get home all right? And I was like, "yes, I did eventually, but I went over the bridge." I remember him being quite unhappy that I had not followed his

He was quite pissed off that I hadn't listened to him and followed what he'd told me to do.

instructions. I was like, well, "don't worry about it. It's not your car. It doesn't make any difference to you. It's my time and it's me that's paying the petrol. So, what difference does it make?" But he was quite pissed off that I hadn't listened to him and followed what he'd told me to do.

from then until February, everything was pretty good.

We had New Year's Eve and it was great. And I think

I started to realise that he wasn't great with money. I had never met anyone that gambled before and most Saturdays, Derek would get paid and would go straight to the TAB and spend the day betting on horses. I'd never seen anything like it. At first, it was fun and then I started to realise, hang on a second, he just gambles all of his money away and then expects me to pay for stuff all week because he doesn't have any money left. At the time we lived together in a house that his father owned. There was no rent to pay. It was just a case of paying for dinners and stuff and I was funding those household expenses. I realised that financially, I was going to have to get some work. So, I decided to be a nanny. On the Lower North Shore of Sydney, there's lots of people that like to have a nanny. If you are English, that's a bonus. And if you're an English person who's a teacher, you can earn as much money as you can teaching.

Domestic and family violence is an injustice and is an offence to my dignity.

Follow My Lead

For my birthday he had sent me flowers with some Tim Tams and tickets for the theatre. I was working in Mosman the day of the show and was going to meet him at the theatre. I got the bus from Mosman to the city. But with the traffic, it would probably have been quicker to get the ferry. The bus just did not move. It was so slow and by the time I got there, the show was literally one minute from start. I'd spoken to him on the phone a few times on the bus and he was ringing and ringing and ringing.

The more calls he made, the more agitated he became. Until he was screaming at me down the phone saying, "it's so stupid of you. Why would you take the bus? You're sitting in traffic. The show is about to start. I paid all this money for these tickets and how dare you not be here on time?" I was trying to explain that I had just moved here. I don't know about the traffic, I didn't know that the ferry is quicker than the bus.

He was like, well, "why the fuck?" The family I worked for had told me to get the bus. He was like, "why would you fucking listen to them instead of getting the ferry like I told you to?" I'm like, "I don't know, I asked them and that's what they told me to do." He was furious.

"Why would you fucking listen to them instead of getting the ferry like I told you to?"

I had never, ever been spoken to like that before. When I finally got there, we managed to get in before they locked the doors. And basically, I didn't speak to him. During the interval, I just thought, "fuck you, you will not speak to me like that. I'm not going to be spoken to like that. It's so disrespectful. And I'm fine if I did something wrong, but I didn't." So, I just went off and got a drink and something to eat and he did the same. At the end of the show, he just got up and walked out. I got up and followed him out, but he walks very quickly, and I just couldn't keep up with him.

I was in Sydney on my own at night, I had no idea which bus to get home, where to get it from and I just felt this total panic. I'd gone from being pissed off to being scared. I was really scared. Eventually, I found a bus and got home before he did. When he came in, he basically said, "We're done. You can pack your stuff tomorrow and find somewhere else to live. You can sleep on the sofa tonight."

I was heartbroken. How did this go from going to this show that he romantically bought me tickets for, to 'we're totally done?' I'd been here for less than two months. I slept on the sofa that night. I don't think I slept very much. The next morning, he had calmed down and we talked it through. I was in fear then; "if he's going to kick me out, what am I going to do? Where am I going to go? I don't know anyone here." The only other person I knew in the whole of Australia was my friend Jess in Melbourne. I can't just go to Melbourne. And I didn't like Melbourne. I didn't want to live there. I wanted to be in Sydney.

I was quite reliant on him. I needed this relationship to work because there was no plan B. I'd invested my time, I'd changed my uni, I'd invested money. I'd moved. I'd left my parents. I'd done all these things.

Where I am changes the risks I face and the responses I can expect to receive.

Follow My Lead

For his birthday I'd bought him a few presents, but I'd also bought him a birthday cake. The day before his birthday, he decided that he was going to start a diet because he'd been eating all this bad food and he was putting on weight. I'd already ordered the cake, so I was like, it's fine. I was excited by it. And he decided to go berserk. "I can't believe you would order a cake. I told you I'm starting to eat well today. What the fuck are we going to do with this cake?" He ranted for a while and ended up throwing the cake across the kitchen. It was like an out-of-body-experience and I thought, "what the fuck just happened here?" I had made this really caring, romantic gesture and I wanted to celebrate the first birthday that we could share together. And here's this cake that I can't even try now and it's all over the floor. I don't know how we got from wanting to celebrate his birthday together, to that.

"I don't want to see him. He's not a good person. I don't want anything to do with someone like that."

Derek and I decided to go to Melbourne to have a weekend together. I was in regular contact with Jess, and I told her all of those things that had happened. She said, "actually, I don't want to see him. He's not a good person. I don't want anything to do with someone like that." I remember thinking that

will be fine, and me and her could just hang out. I told Derek that we would go, but I'd just go for lunch with her by myself. He wouldn't accept that, saying, "why would you tell her any of that stuff?" It seems weird because at that stage, I still felt safe enough to be able to say those things.

So, when we got there, he said I could go and see her. He said, "you go for lunch with her and I'll just hang out in the hotel." So, I did, but it actually wasn't as okay as he'd said it was. When I got back, I paid the price and he was horrendous. We ended up having a huge fight. I packed my suitcase and called Jess to come and pick me up. I didn't feel safe being there at that time which is why I'd walked out. Jess came straight away, and I went back to their house. I'd probably been at Jess's for about an hour and I just said, "I need to go back to him." I knew that if I stayed at her house that night, there'd be a lot more of an issue for me than if I just went back to him. What was I going to do? I had one suitcase of clothes in Melbourne, the rest of my life was now in Sydney. It wasn't rational to think I could just leave. In that context it felt safer to go back than not to go back. It also felt more rational to go back and sort it out like an adult rather than just walk out. So, I went back.

The next day, we were going to visit his uncle in Melbourne. He had borrowed money from his uncle in the past and he'd asked me if he could borrow money from me to pay him back. But because of the behaviour the night before, I didn't think it was a good idea to lend him money. I remember saying to him on the way to the train station, "I don't think I will lend you the money because you're not behaving like a respectful partner. Why would I do that for you?" He grabbed my wrist so hard and nearly snapped my wrist. "you will fucking pay this. You will not embarrass me in front of my family".

Then almost immediately, he snapped back out of it. And he was like, "I need this to be done. Come on, babe. I love you and I need to do this. You know how Italian families are, it will be so embarrassing for us to go and not be able to pay him back today." I just felt sorry for him and just thought, well, I'll just pay it.

I learnt very quickly that if I tell people about Derek and he finds out, they're not going to be part of my life anymore.

That was the first time he was ever physically aggressive; I went from feeling scared to feeling sorry for him. I made a decision to not have him disrespected or humiliated in front of his family.

Then we just continued. I continued nannying, my contact with Jess dropped off. There was no fall-out, but it wasn't the

same friendship. I learnt very quickly that if I tell people about Derek and he finds out, they're not going to be part of my life anymore.

I might tell you parts of my story to test out how safe I am with you and to explore how you react or retreat. *Follow My Lead*

My relationship with my parents and everyone back in England was fine because I'd just spun this happy life lie to them. My best friend in England knew some of the stuff, not all of it. She was just about to have her first baby and so it was safe to tell her because she wasn't going to come into the house and say, "come on, we're leaving. Pack your stuff. He's an asshole." So, she was the one I could tell.

If I told someone, it made it more real. It was easier to keep it to myself or I could tell you one thing, but I wouldn't tell you everything because it made it too real. But I knew it was a relationship I shouldn't be in and that I couldn't get out of. If I acknowledge that I was in a relationship with an abusive person then as an educated woman, I felt I'd have to do something about it. So, I didn't acknowledge it. Because if you're in a relationship with someone who is abusing you, why would you stay? But I didn't know how to get out because I didn't know anyone. I didn't have any support here. And I didn't have a lot of money. I had no idea where to go. I couldn't go back to my parents and I would not go back to England.

There's no way I could admit failure and go back to England. That was very important to me.

You don't give up on someone that you're so in love with, that you have given up so much for, without one hell of a fight.

There were also my possessions. My sofa and all my teaching stuff, and I couldn't just pick up and move out. I didn't feel like he would have just let me walk away with all my stuff. The reality was that none of my stuff mattered, but at the time, it was very important, because I didn't have anything else. It was about my dignity and I loved him. The person that I fell in love with wasn't this person, and I wanted to get back to the person I fell in love with.

I thought if I just hung around, things would turn around and he would go back to being the person that I fell in love with. You don't give up on someone that you're so in love with, that you have given up so much for, without one hell of a fight. It's all these things intersecting that kept me there. So that question, 'why didn't I just leave?' it is such a stupid question. You can never really answer that question because there's so many factors to why I didn't just leave.

The relationship lasted on and off for seven and a half years.

Within two years of meeting him he had stopped working and was gambling full time. My wage would fund the gambling, the household expenses and the bills. My parents are quite well off and I had a bit of savings in England, I owned my house and I had a wedding fund. So that was about \$120,000 and he gambled that all away.

I bought into it. If he's ever going to make his money back, we've got to put everything into it. I was working 40 hours a week in four days as a nanny, Monday to Thursday, 10 hours a day. And Friday, Saturday and Sunday I worked for him as a professional gambler. I was working for him for free and my money was funding it all.

Every Friday morning, he'd get the papers. He had a set routine, he had to watch a betting show, then he'd work out what his bets were for the weekend. My job was to get all the prices from all the different agencies. While he was betting, I was on the whiteboard and I had to place the bets. My job was to write down what bets he had, what price they're at, what we had in each account and what we'd made that day.

If we ever lost, it was my fault. I was a 'mock' - I was the one who caused bad luck. In tennis, you can bet on who's going to win the next game. You can bet in live time. So, he would bet on Federer to hold his own serve. So, he's got to win that game. He would say "you go out of the room". I couldn't be in there until he'd won his game because I'm the one that makes him lose. Not Federer serving badly, but me. So, I'd go out and I'd pray, please let the bet win. If I went upstairs to the bedroom, I'd quite often watch it on my phone. If he saw that I was watching it, he'd say, "but you're still watching it".

The anxiety that built when my whole life was dependent on someone holding their serve. The gambling caused me more harm than the abuse. It created a level of anxiety that was there all the time, never knowing if you're going to win or lose. That constant stomach turning. The stress of the gambling and the abuse led to me having Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

He would ask for money all the time, but he didn't know exactly what I had and what I didn't. But it got to the point where I barely even tried to hide money anymore. I was buying into his idea of more financial security, but I also wanted to help him do better. I think he felt like a failure. It's not an excuse, but I wanted to help him and I guess I believed in him.

In a previous relationship, he'd gambled with his ex-wife and they'd made a lot of money from it. And he was like, "if we work hard for a month, we can then have a couple of weeks off, but we'll have 20,

30, 40,000. It's unlimited the amount of money you can make." I felt like if he had a purpose and he was successful in something, it might help him to be a better person.

He was winning for a while and we bought an apartment. So, we released equity from my apartment in England and then combined it with my wages and what he'd won. We put a deposit down on an apartment.

My relationship status with the person abusing me creates different levels of risk. *Follow My Lead*

We got engaged after two years, and we sent out 'save the dates' - I can still picture the 'save the date' on our fridge. But after a few months, I decided I just couldn't do it anymore and I was going to leave. I told my dad I was going to leave, and my dad sent me a little bit of extra money to help me get out. I remember having diarrhoea for about two weeks before I left because of the stress of knowing I was leaving. It was my body responding to that level of stress.

At that time, I was nannying full time for another local family. They had seen the bruises on my arms regularly. They knew where they came from. If they asked me, I would deny it, but they weren't stupid. I said I was going to leave him, and they helped me.

I was on a partner visa that was not permanent. They helped me with an immigration lawyer to make my visa permanent. I rented an apartment in Neutral Bay right around the corner from them, and I rented it out about a month before I moved in and gradually moved bits across. I might take a bag with me to work and take it around to my apartment at lunchtime. I bought a TV and a TV unit, I had my own money then, and we didn't have a joint bank account, so he couldn't see what I had.

I was scared of what was going to happen when he found out. How was I going to get out? He had stopped working and he was at home gambling full time. He never went out of the house. How could I get help when he's always there? I had to wait until one day when I knew he was going out.

He was going to get his haircut in the city. I knew he was going to be out all day. So instead of going to work, I went and hired a Ute from the petrol station. I was ready to go whenever the day came. I actually had to call the dad I worked for and say, "I can't carry the sofa by myself. Can you come? You need to come now." He dropped everything and came.

I have my own sense of what is important right now and in the long term.

Follow My Lead

Yes, my sofa. That fucking sofa. Who fucking cares about a sofa? But it was *my* sofa. I'd worked hard back in England to buy it. I was never in debt. I never did anything wrong with money. I had a credit card that I paid off in full at the end of every month. I had no debt. If I bought anything interest-free, it was paid for within the interest-free period. I was very sensible, and I lived a very normal, middle-class life. My sofa was important to me. It was part of my identity, of what I had achieved and what I had worked for.

I left him a note that said I was leaving and that I just couldn't be in this relationship anymore because of how badly he treated me. I had not heard of domestic violence, but I knew I was very unhappy. It was a toxic relationship with an abusive man, and I needed to get out.

I finished work that day and at five past five he turned up to pick me up. He had gone home, but he hadn't seen the note on the kitchen counter. And the family were like, "Ruby, he is here". I'm like, "fuck, what am I going to do now?" And then I thought - he mustn't know. He wouldn't just wait in the car outside if he knew. So, I went out and told him I was working back late. As soon as he'd gone, I said goodbye and I went back to my new, safe apartment where only they knew where I was. Later that night, he rang me and said, "I just saw your note."

That was the first time I left him, but within a few weeks he was being supportive and loving, and I pitied him. So, I went back, and we ended up getting married.

How you and I view things is personal and unique. *Follow My Lead*

As part of my nannying work I used to go to day-care and one of the teachers at the day-care was Carol and we just clicked.

I needed a matron of honour. My one friend coming from England couldn't afford to come and cover the dress and we weren't able to cover it. I needed someone else. He had his best man and I needed a bridesmaid and so I asked Carol, even though I didn't know her that well. And she said yes and then our friendship developed from there.

She listened to me. She understood the control. She never tried to make me leave. She thought I should, but she never used to give me a hard time and say, well, "why are you putting up with that?" She knew that I wasn't in that space to hear those things. But I could tell her everything that happened, and it was safe. She was everything to me.

The night before I got married, Carol and I were staying at a hotel and before bed I was praying to God, "please, if you don't mean for this to go ahead, please just don't send him to church tomorrow." And she was like, "are you fucking kidding me? You're getting married tomorrow."

I think it gave her some insight into how trapped I felt and how I was getting married, but I didn't want to be. I just didn't know how to get out of it. It had all just gone too far and I felt that guilt, I've got people coming from overseas and people coming from interstate. I can't let everyone down, so I'm just going to have to go through with it. And deep down, I hoped that marriage would change this guy into

this person that I'd always wanted him to be. That he might stop being so aggressive and so abusive and he might actually be a decent husband.

I was getting married, but I didn't want to be. I just didn't know how to get out of it.

On our honeymoon, he was a lot less aggressive. But we didn't have sex after our wedding night. There was no sex on our honeymoon. I remember questioning him about a week into our honeymoon and saying, "what's going on? We're supposed to be having sex." And him saying, "I just

can't. You're just so unattractive. You're so weak and I can't. I don't want to have sex with someone that's so weak and so unattractive. I can maybe think about having sex if we're watching porn because that's the only thing that would get me off when I'm with you, but even then, it's just too much of an effort."

It was undermining. It made me feel I wasn't worthy, not attractive, nothing was ever good enough. I had zero self-esteem. I was in my mid to late 20s. I'm slim, I'm a size eight. Why doesn't he want to have sex with me? What's so wrong with me? What am I doing that's so bad that you don't even find me physically attractive?

When we first met, we had a really good sex life, a very healthy sex life, and then it petered off.

Whenever we had sex at home, he always wanted to watch porn. He would always say, "talk dirty to me. Talk dirty to me." It's one thing to talk dirty to somebody when you're having sex. But when you're being forced to do that, it doesn't come naturally. I didn't want to; he was trying to force me to do something that felt totally unnatural. I was thinking, "if I don't talk dirty to you, you're not able to have sex with me, you're not attracted to me." It made me think, "why do you need me to talk dirty to you? Am I not attractive enough that we can have a loving sexual relationship rather than it needing to be that pornographic type sexual relationship?"

He would be very controlling about when he wanted to have sex, the positions, where it took place. If we had sex, it would be with pornography on or he would wake me up in the middle of the night to have sex. It wasn't that I didn't consent to it. I woke up and I joined in. It wasn't like I was saying no. It was about the lack of loving. He wasn't like, I'm waking you up and I want to make love to you. It was like, he's woken up, he wants to have sex, and this is when we're going to do it. Completely on his terms. When he wants it, how he wants it. I would go into robot mode. I did what I was told, when I was told. It got to the point where I didn't need to be told. I just knew what I was supposed to do, and I did it.

“Does that make you feel like a man now?”

It was easier to become submissive but there was still that fight in me, this resistance. I remember in the early days when he was physically abusive and I would say, “does that make you feel like a man now?” and he'd get more aggressive. It would probably have been better if I had just shut up. But I'd keep going, “you can throw me down on the floor, but I'll get back up and stand up to you because it's not okay that you're doing that. And this is me telling you, “that's not okay. You might be a physically strong guy and you might come back and do it again, but I'm going to keep telling you, emotionally, you still haven't broken me.”

I think it just hit home that nothing would really change. If I'd been kidding myself that because he hadn't been physically aggressive or abusive or hadn't been emotionally abusive in the first few days of our honeymoon, it wasn't because anything had changed. It was because maybe he was happier because he wasn't at home or whatever his reasons were. But the reality was he still had no respect for me, and he still treated me like shit.

He started having an affair with a woman that he'd had an affair with when he was previously married. They had broken up before I met him. And he left me just a few months after our wedding. He came back to the family home a couple of months after that and asked for a second chance. And I was like, I don't really want to do that because I feel normal again now that you're not in my life, but this is your dad's house, so I can't stop you from living here while I'm working out what I'm going to do.

We slept together once when he came back; the first time in my life I'd ever had unprotected sex. I'd stopped taking the pill because I wasn't with my husband anymore and I don't sleep around, and I didn't need the pill anymore. I remember saying to Carol that “I don't remember when I last had my period.” And she said, well, do you think you're pregnant? I was like, “no, I don't. I'm just saying that once you come off the pill when you've been on it for years, you don't think about your periods.” And she said, “let's just do a pregnancy test.”

This is not where I want to be right now, pregnant with this guy's kid.

We're at the shopping centre and we went to the toilets and I was like, what does two lines mean? And she was like, “no, I'm going to go and get you another test” and I did it later in the evening and that was positive too. And I was like, “fuck, this is not where I want to be right now, pregnant with this guy's kid. Yes, he's my husband, but I don't really want to be with him. And I also think he's back with his girlfriend.”

I went to the doctors the next morning. I didn't tell Derek that I thought I was pregnant. We had marriage counselling later that day. It was a joint decision to go to marriage counselling. I was like, if we're going to try and make this work, we need to go to counselling because you can't just have an affair when you get married.

I went to the doctor's in the morning and the test came back negative. But the doctor said, “no, if you've had two positives, you're pregnant. Don't worry about that one, I'm going to do a blood test, I'm going to rush it through.” And so, I told him in marriage counselling. I told the counsellor first. I said, “I need

to speak to the counsellor by myself,” and I said, “I’m pregnant.” And he said, “what does Derek think?” I said, “I haven’t told him, we’re going to tell him together.” He already knew there were issues there because Derek had skipped out of a couple of marriage counselling sessions. So, we told him.

Derek took it much better than I thought. He wasn’t happy, but he wasn’t as cross as I thought he was going to be. The next day, I caught him with his girlfriend. He had gone down to the pub and he asked me to bring something down to him, “but bring it a four o’clock and text me when you’re outside and I’ll come and get it.”

I already thought he was back with her. So, I went at 3:30 and walked into the pub and she was sitting at the table. And I said, “what are you doing here with my husband?” And she laughed in my face. And I said, “is it funny?” And she was like, yes, “it’s pretty funny”. So, I said, “did you find it funny when he told you I was pregnant?” And her face dropped. “He hasn’t told you yet? Didn’t you tell her? Didn’t you tell her we’re having a baby?” I just thought, you will not disrespect me because you’re actually not a nice type of girl. You’re sleeping with someone else’s husband and that’s not okay. And so anyway, the next day, he left me and moved back in with her. And I was left pregnant and not really knowing what to do.

I didn’t want to have a baby with him, but I’m Catholic. I’d converted to Catholicism when I moved here for him and his family and for us and our future and our children. Prior to that I was Church of England, and I didn’t have any strong beliefs about abortion, but I was Christian. And I thought, well, his family are all Catholic and my kids are going to go to Catholic school and I’m going to teach in a Catholic school. So, I might as well be Catholic. So now, I’m Catholic. It was part of my commitment to the relationship. And so ‘we’ go to hell if we abort a child. I just didn’t know what to do.

I went to my GP and I said I want to go for a six-week scan. He said, “I don’t think you should do that. I don’t think that’s a good idea.” And I said, well, I need to find out if it’s twins because there’s twins in my family. I need to know because I think I may be able to abort one child, but I will not abort two.

“I think you and I both know you should not be having a child with this man.”

And he said, well, I don’t want you to do that because I want you to make an informed decision. And I don’t think you’ll do that once you’ve heard a heartbeat. And he said, “I think you and I both know, you should not be having a child with this man.”

I could see that he just cared about me, about my safety and my wellbeing and that’s great, but I was going to do it anyway. I had made my decision.

I went for a six week scan with Carol. And the lady who did the ultrasound said, there’s two sacks. And I just broke down in tears because for me, all my choices had just been taken away from me. Because I’d had had this conversation with God in my mind that if you decide this, if there’s two, that’s your decision, and I can’t control that now, then there’s no decision for me to make.

I remember the nurse saying to Carol, “look, she’s so happy. Look how excited she is.” And Carol was like, “they are not tears of joy.”

I’ll be looking to see what you think of what I have shared. Follow My Lead

I remember walking out and being like, “what the fuck am I going to do? I’ve got twins coming.” And having to tell my mum that I’m pregnant with twins to a guy that they know left me three months after we got married. I’m going to get in trouble from my parents. Even though I’m in my 30s, my parents still tell me off. I was so scared of telling my dad that even though my stepmother makes Snow White’s stepmum look kind and loving, I told my stepmum instead of my dad so that she could tell him. I was

scared of the lecture I was going to get from Dad. I had heard it a thousand times in my life about all the things that I've done wrong in my whole life.

I hadn't had his lecture in the context of our relationship. And I felt like he should take some responsibility for that. On my wedding day, I think he probably knew I didn't want to get married. And you know that time when you drive to the church and it's just the two of you? I think he probably had a little speech in his head to say it's not too late to get out of this. But we were running late, and he didn't do it.

But I felt let down by him. He let me get married. And I shouldn't feel like that because I made that decision. But I thought, he was the one person who was supposed to protect me. Surely, he could see what he was like? He could see enough to say I shouldn't have been marrying that person. It was his job to step in and stop what I couldn't. And then calling him and telling him that I'm having twins! Well, he's just going to be so disappointed with me! I just want to say, fuck you. I'm disappointed in you too. You're not the dad I thought you were when I was growing up.

Derek went off with his girlfriend. I couldn't get in touch with him to tell him we were having twins. He wouldn't take the call. So, I told his girlfriend instead. I said, "can you ask Derek to call me?" She said, "he doesn't want to speak to you ever again, sorry." I said, "cool, can you just tell him we're having twins then?" He came around that night and saw the scans of the twins, the little grains of rice. And then he went back to her.

At the time I was still living at the house his father owned. I had a date when I planned to move out. I had to be out by this set date. Derek was not actually allowed to come back sooner unless I agreed he could. But he moved back early because he'd split up with his girlfriend.

The risks I face change over time and can change rapidly. *Follow My Lead*

He left his girlfriend and moved back in when I was about five and a half months pregnant. His controlling started as soon as he got back. We were not living as a married couple; it was an arrangement that was the best of a bad set of options.

I had a good relationship with his dad, and I wanted the children to have a good relationship with his family. I just felt like I couldn't say to his dad, "sorry, I didn't let your son move back into your house." I

They knew about his abuse, but they excused it and enabled it.

couldn't do that, so I let him come back. His dad had been over the moon when he found out I was pregnant. He thought that was the saving grace that was going to bring his son back. They knew about his abuse, but they excused it and enabled it, and they still do.

I told them some things, not from the beginning, but as it got worse, they knew. When I found out Derek was having the affair, he put a photo frame through a TV, and I called the police. The police took out an AVO against him. And the family were very cross at me and said, "why would you call the police? Why would you not call us?"

They can't say that they didn't know. His uncle who lives with his dad had always said to me, "if there's a problem, you call me from now on". And so, before I left him, I'd called him, and he'd come over. But Derek was spouting stuff about me, just fabricating as many lies as he could while his uncle was there. And I was saying, "look at my arm. This is what he's done to me today. And look at this photo of an iPad from last week that's been smashed. This is what he did. This is what I'm living with. You've said to come to you, so what are you going to do about it?"

“Why would you call the police? Why would you not call us?”

And his response was, "What can we do? We all know what he's like."

I had stopped working as a nanny and was waiting to go back into teaching. So, there was no income to pay the mortgage. We had done a full financial separation. I think I got about 75 or 80 per cent because I'd put all my equity into the property. I was the one who came to the relationship with all the money and I was the one who'd worked. So, I got about 120,000 or something like that. And he got about 30, something like that. We decided to sell the property and he put a caveat on it so that I couldn't take my money until the financial settlement was complete.

I bought a brand-new car with my money and I had the rest in the bank. I paid off all my credit cards and everything. But a lot of the companies had said, "don't cancel them." I'd tried to close them, and they were like, "if you keep it open, we won't charge you an annual fee". And I just thought, whatever. That was probably one of my biggest mistakes because that, effectively, gave him those lines of credit.

**"If you keep it open,
we won't charge you
an annual fee."**

When he moved back in, he was gambling again. For a while, he was winning. And it got to the stage where I was working for him. We went on a couple of trips while I was pregnant. We went to South East Asia and then we went to America in the later stages of my pregnancy. And when we were in America, we went to Las Vegas.

He spent the whole time in the sports bars, gambling. He lost all of his money. He lost his 30 grand or whatever it was. When we came back to Australia, I was about seven and a half, eight months pregnant and he started to 'borrow' my money.

I'd seen a place to live before we went to America. And he'd said, "no, don't get it because you're just wasting rent while we're away. Get somewhere when you come back." When I came back, there just was nothing on the market that was suitable. There was just nothing and I was getting more and more pregnant every week. In the end, he said, "just stay here until the babies born and then you can work it out." It was past the date I was supposed to move out, but I stayed.

He knew while I was there that he could keep getting money out of me. It was a means of control and financial abuse.

It got to the point where every cent we had, I just handed it over. That's how it worked. We got the government money for the baby bonus and because of Derek, that went straight into the gambling fund. And then the paid parental leave - that went straight in too.

I could still remember the day a few years previously when he lost my wedding fund of \$20,000. I was just sobbing in bed. "How are we going to pay for a wedding now?" And it just continued. He gambled away my savings bit by bit by bit.

During the last two months of my pregnancy I was still very physically able until the week before I gave birth. I was even moving furniture upstairs for the nursery. He did not move one item, I did it all.

I didn't want to stay but I couldn't find anywhere to rent. No one wants to rent an apartment to someone who's a single mum who's just about to give birth because they think, well, where are you going to get your money from? I was trapped. I had planned to have moved out, but he had manipulated it so that I was still there, eight months pregnant.

His craziest and most cruel behaviour was in that period. I had a big pregnancy pillow because my tummy was so big and I'm not a big person. He would take it into the bathroom and urinate all over it and say, "how does that fucking work for you now?"

I'm just about to give birth and I can't do anything now. I'm totally trapped. I will endure this.

I was just disgusted. I'd given up all hope of ever getting out at that point in time. I'm resigned to it now, resigned to it because I'm just about to give birth and I can't do anything now. I'm totally trapped. I will endure this. I can't move out now because I'm a month out from giving birth and I'm not going to be able to move when I've got two babies. So, when am I ever going to get away from

this? Once these children are born into this house, I'm effectively fucked. It was disbelief: Who goes and takes a pillow off their wife who's expecting, and urinates all over it as a punishment? What have I done that's so terrible that you feel like I should be punished by you behaving like that?

Being resigned to it was actually the best strategy that I had.

I am constantly inventing and implementing ways to keep myself and the people I care about safe. *Follow My Lead*

I've got a recording of him from my birthday which was three weeks before I gave birth, where he threw me across the room. It's genuinely frightening, but I had the presence of mind to record this just in case something happened and I wasn't able to tell anyone what happened afterwards. I listened to it a couple of months ago. It's not something I go back and revisit, there's no need to, but it was on one of my old phones and it hadn't transferred. When I looked at my voice recording, I was like, I need to get that back because I just need it there.

I had gone to a birthing class to meet other mums. He wanted my help to do something that night and I said, "I can't, I've got the class." He lost it because he wasn't in control of what I was doing. He threw a punnet of blueberries at the wall, so I walked out. I had said to him I can leave early, and we can go and do whatever it is you want us to do and I was texting him and he just didn't respond. So, I didn't leave early. I came home and saw the blueberries on the wall that he still hadn't cleaned up. I was thinking "I'm not picking up those blueberries. I'm eight and a half months pregnant with twins. I'm not cleaning the wall. We've got painters coming in tomorrow. You did it. You fucking clean it up".

I didn't say those things because that would lead to more trouble. So, the way I did say 'fuck you' was to leave. I knew that it was not a safe place for me to be that night. I'm three weeks from giving birth, I need to keep us safe, so I went to stay at Carol's house for the night. But that 'fuck you' is what got me into trouble the next day.

I came back the next morning and when I walked in, the painters were upstairs decorating the nursery. And he was in the lounge eating. We started a conversation and I started recording. Listening to it, you can hear the hatred in his voice. It's so vile to listen to, but it's also a great reminder of what he was capable of. There's just disgust in his voice at his own wife, at the mother that's carrying his unborn children. I knew that he was escalating things.

By the time I started recording you can hear I was in tears, there's terror in my voice, I was starting to break down. I had my phone in my hand and I thought "I need to record this. I need to have evidence." I wasn't planning to use it in court, I just knew I needed the evidence for myself. I didn't think he was going to kill me, but I just didn't know.

I hit record on the voice recorder app, but it had the red 'recording' banner on it, so I put it in my pocket.

His punishment was horrendous. I was the worst person in the world, he made my life hell for daring to walk out, “what's more important? Your husband or your fucking birthing class?” I stopped recording before he got physically abusive. He'd do that, go for a while and then take a break. I'd think, “we're done. At least it's not that physical,” and then he'd start it off again.

While I was in hospital, after giving birth, he was calling me up and abusing me saying, “I need money; put 10,000 in my TAB account right now.” And of course, I've just given birth. I just did what I needed to do to keep safe and keep the peace.

I gave him the money. I'm always clear on that because I think it's important to say he didn't come and take it. It was what I needed to do to survive. It was the way to stay safe. It was really extortion, intimidation and abuse.

**“What's more important?
Your husband or your
fucking birthing class?”**

How you respond to me when I share with you, and in the time that follows, matters significantly to me. *Follow My Lead*

Carol stood by me when he had his affair and when I found out I was pregnant and she was like, “don't worry. We'll raise our kids together. We'll be fine.” She was married and she had three kids of her own. She was like, “we will do it, we'll be fine. I'll come in the mornings and I'll do the morning feed.” She came to all the birthing classes with me. She was my birthing partner; she was there when I gave birth. She came and visited me every day in hospital.

And I said I want you and Simon to be godparents. And she said “we can't do that. We don't want to have anything to do with him and we won't stand by and say it's okay”. Then she walked away. It was probably the hardest time of my life.

**“We don't want to have
anything to do with him
and we won't stand by
and say it's okay.”**

My mum and stepdad came over a week before the girls were born and they stayed for about a month afterwards. That was great, but then they went home, and then Carol walked away. It was just me and him and two new-borns. And I had no one.

Eventually, he said, “you can't be friends with Carol on Facebook. She walked out on you. What kind of person is she?” And so, I stopped being friends with her on Facebook.

When I finally left him, I did contact her, and we met up. And we're friendly, but that relationship was never going to be repaired because she left me when I needed her the most. Some people see it as a choice between Derek or Carol. I could have chosen Carol and I should have chosen Carol. It should have been enough to go, “I'm going to lose her, so I need to leave now because she's the good in all this. She's the thing that keeps me going and he's the thing that drags me down.” But that wasn't enough. I just said to her, “what's done is done.” But that recognition from her for me was the full circle and I'm glad she got it. “You don't need to feel bad about it. I exonerate you of any guilt, but you didn't do the right thing.”

I stayed because that was what I thought was the safest thing to do, and I survived for as long as I possibly could. But you still live with that, especially when it has those ongoing impacts and more so for my children. If it's just on you, you're like, well, I can live with it, but when you've made decisions that have impacted other people, that's when it doesn't sit so well. But it is what it is. That's one of the consequences of a relationship with an abusive person.

The person abusing me may steal, control or undermine my finances, or my ability to work or be financially independent. *Follow My Lead*

When my girls were about five months old, we moved to Queensland for three months. Derek said he just wanted a change. He didn't think we should be here for winter. He told all of his family that we were going to England for three months so we could spend some time with my family. But really, we moved up north.

Just before we went, he said, "We need money to go with, so let's sell your car." So, we sold my car for \$20,000. It was only six months old.

He used that money as a starting fund for his gambling again. When I was up north, I had no savings, no car and I'm now \$40,000 in debt on my credit cards from his gambling when I was in hospital. He didn't have the credit cards. They were my cards that were registered with his betting accounts, they were logged in on their system.

If your understanding of the term 'consent' is seen without looking at it within the context of his abuse, then it's misleading.

He had a 40-grand line of credit in my name. He didn't often put money into the gambling account without telling me. He would say, "I need more money." Technically, he had my consent, I'm very clear about that. I always 'gave' it to him. He never secretly took money from me, but if your understanding of the term 'consent' is seen without looking at it within the context of his abuse then it's misleading.

I still owned my property in England at that time. We had a much bigger mortgage and I'd had soon-to-be-released equity, but I still owned it. It was in my maiden name. Derek had been bankrupt before I met him and so he said to me, "the only way forward now is to declare bankruptcy."

You need to declare that you are bankrupt so we don't have to pay that credit card debt and then at least that will be taken care of. And I was like, well, what about my property in England? He said, well, "they won't know about that because it's in another country and it's in another name." So that's what I did. I did what I was told. I did what I needed to do: I declared that I was bankrupt.

"They won't know about that because it's in another country and it's in another name."

My daughters were probably about eight months old by then. It was just before we came back from Queensland. I declared bankrupt and then we moved back to Sydney.

When they were two and a half, there was a final physical assault. And I left him for the final time in autumn. In the February, there'd been another physical incident and I was almost ready, but I wasn't quite there. I talk about all these things as stepping-stones and how every relationship you lose, every friend that walks away, every friend that stands by you, and all these events and things that happen, they're like stepping-stones. They're like building blocks. And you just have to hope that there's enough of them that build up in time that you can escape before you give up or you get killed.

In February, I was almost ready to leave. I spoke to the police. "I want you to come and talk to me, but I'm not giving you a statement. I want you to know what's going on in this house". And they were great. Then in the April, I left for good.

The person committing the abuse may isolate me from those I love and manipulate others against me. *Follow My Lead*

Once I left, once I made that decision, once I called the police and made a full statement, his parents and family all turned their backs on me. His dad signed an eviction notice. I feel that that was done under pressure from Derek, but he still signed it and put his daughter-in-law and his grandchildren on the street.

I didn't have my car anymore because he'd sold it, so we had borrowed his mum's car for a few months. His mother told me straight away that she wanted the car back. I told her I was trying to find somewhere else to live and that it was hard to look at rental places with two toddlers without a car. "Derek needs it more. You need to give it back to Derek."

His dad had an eviction notice served on me as I was on my way back to the home. Someone just said, "you've been served" and it was an eviction notice. I happened to be moving out that day anyway, which they didn't know about, but the reality was they were willing to see us out on the street. All of his family shut us off. I ran into his uncle outside Coles and I said hello, and he was like, "I don't want anything to do with you."

"I don't want anything to do with you."

Derek had four AVOs taken out against him by other women. None of them had been made final, only mine. But still, four other women taking out AVOs against you says you have got a massive history of abuse. And it's been allowed and enabled by his family instead of someone saying, if you continue to behave like this, you will not live rent-free in our house, you will not have this, we will not support you. But it was always swept under the carpet. Let's just blame the woman, blame the woman, blame the woman.

Derek claimed I was having an affair. He found messages between me and an old boyfriend from when I was 17 who lived in England. He told the family I was having an affair. So, it was "well, he did it because you were having an affair."

When I was living in the shelter, my mum and dad were saying, "Ruby, you don't have to do this." But I did need to do 'this'. It was an independence thing for me. "I didn't ask you for help then and I'm not asking you now." There was always the opportunity for my dad to just do what he could have done, but he didn't. Even now. That's what pisses me off. I need money for winter uniforms, so lend us some freaking money, Dad. But instead he just goes and books another holiday. But I've also learnt to let people be the way they are a bit more. You have to live with your choices. I have to live with mine. I'm living it and I take responsibility for mine.

After I'd left, Derek had called the Department of Housing and said to them that I had money hidden in England so that my housing application for Start Safely got put on hold.

I had to go in and sign paperwork to say, "I don't have any money hidden in England. Here's my English bank accounts, there's no money." He had told Centrelink the same thing.

I don't have proof of who made the complaint, but I didn't need it. He also contacted ASIC and told them that I declared bankrupt while I owned a property in the UK.

My body and mind suffer from the violence and coercion. I can become physically unwell, fearful, desperate, lonely, sad and angry. *Follow My Lead*

By that stage we had moved into our new place and I was quite ill. I'd got a cold, but it had totally wiped me out. The whole crisis had caught up with me and my body just shut down for a week. I was having to hire babysitters to come and look after the children during the day while I was at home. I literally

could not get out of bed. I got an email from ASIC that said, 'please explain', and the penalty for this is jail time. And I was like, shit, I'm in big trouble now. Because ultimately, I did this.

I contacted a lady that I knew from the court advocacy service and I said, I don't know what to do. She said, this is what you need to do. I'm going to call someone at a Legal Centre and try and get them to help you. They made an appointment for me two days later and I dragged myself in there with the kids. I was sick as a dog, and I told him everything and he was like, "well, we'll have to try and fight it."

We tried to get as much evidence together as we could, but the problem was that a lot of the betting accounts were in my name because the credit cards were in my name. We had to prove that between my declaring bankrupt and his reporting me to ASIC, that the property in England had been sold and also that there were no funds left because he had also gambled all those away. It had been sold and he had gambled all the money away, but I had to prove it. "Here's my bank accounts now. Here's the money going from the sale of the property into this bank account. Here's the money going from the bank account into this gambling account. Here's all that money being lost. And yes, all those accounts are in my name, but he is responsible for this."

"We'll have to try and fight it."

My accessing Start Safely support was delayed because my abusive partner called them to say that I had money. The money that I could get because I was being abused was delayed in its approval by the person abusing me. The lady there was quite good, and she said, "your ex-husband rang anonymously, but we know that's who it was." They had to follow their due processes, but they knew what was going on.

The same thing happened to me recently at Legal Aid and I lost my grant because he made an anonymous call. Well, it's anonymous to me. But it's not anonymous to Legal Aid because you have to log your details in online. But he made a complaint to them and said that my new partner was living with me and therefore I shouldn't be receiving Legal Aid. And Legal Aid took my grant away, even though I provided them with all the evidence they had asked for that showed that that wasn't true. I lost my Legal Aid and I had to appeal it. On appeal, I won. But by then, it was too late. We'd been to court and I'd had to have it adjourned. So now, we're not back in court until July when it could have been dealt with in February.

It makes me cross. This is somebody they know is abusive and has a history of systematic abuse. Yes, you need to follow your processes, but you need to speed them up when you can see he's an abusive person. It's not acceptable for you to be losing appeal paperwork or not looking into things properly. His abuse of me through the system has been one of the most damaging things because it stops everything. Derek understands the system and how to play it to perpetrate the abuse.

He just lies to everybody to try and get me into trouble or stop whatever benefit I may be getting. The reality is though, was that by stopping Start Safely, he was stopping his children having a roof over their heads. I was barely in touch with him at the time he reported me to ASIC. We were already in court. That was my punishment for him not seeing our children even though he had caused that situation because he put them on the watchlist. That's what took it to court. That's what stopped him from seeing our daughters because my lawyer went, "he's not seeing them unsupervised."

They could make him accountable where I couldn't.

was responsible, if they would chase him for the funds. I don't think they have because he's never mentioned it. He certainly wouldn't be so civil if they were chasing him for 40,000. It would be awesome if they did follow up on those things. Because if they've made the call that he was responsible, then he

He would never accept responsibility or be accountable. Of course, it's my fault, so I need to be punished. My punishment was being reported to ASIC. I would love to know if, given that ASIC could see that he

should not be off the hook. They would have to make him pay. They could make him accountable where I couldn't. I wanted that protection from the system. I wanted them to say, "while you can't hold him to account, we can." There should be some consequences for making false allegations.

He doesn't pay any child support. I got the domestic violence exemption from Centrelink. A lot of people in my life think that he should be forced to pay child support, even if it's just a small amount. My view is allowing him to pay even \$30 a fortnight allows him to say, "well, I'm trying. I'm giving what I can". I would rather he didn't give anything. But because he doesn't work, he doesn't have to give me any child support, professional gambling is not seen as work.

Financially, I basically started from less than zero because I was 'bankrupt'. I couldn't even get credit, and it has taken me several years to undo. I'm finally out of bankruptcy.

I resist and respond to violence in visible and invisible ways that are important to me and is part of upholding my dignity. *Follow My Lead*

My parents are divorced. They know my ex-husband was abusive, but they don't know the details about the abuse, about what it entailed. I want to protect them, especially my mum. She's quite soft. I had an article published in the newspaper, and I told her. She said, "can I read it?" and I said, "you can, but I don't think you should". "Will I get upset if I read it?" I said, "yes, you will. So just be happy that I had it published. I can't stop you from Googling stuff, but for your own sake, you don't need to go and read that". She can't change what happened and I wasn't willing to tell her when it was going on. But in terms of the financial abuse, they don't know exactly how it happened, but they know what happened, I think.

I just feel this need to protect them from those things. And also, I think it's a need to protect myself. I've disappointed people by allowing myself to be taken advantage of to that extent. I remember my dad and my stepmother came over in 2016 and we were out for lunch and he asked me "but what happened to all the money from your house? What happened to all your money?" And I just broke down saying, "it's all gone." He said, "if you ever need anything, you just have to ask us."

“What happened to all your money?”

But I didn't ask him for anything. I just don't feel that close to him. I think if you see your child struggling to bring up her children financially, you should help. I'm not going to come and ask. My mum's the opposite. She gives us money every month. I just don't think my father gets it. He knows we don't have any money and that he has plenty.

When I first came to Australia, I wanted to make the best of it on my own and to be proud of myself. I didn't want to fall back on my parents for help. It's complicated too because it's around not wanting to upset my mum and not wanting to have to deal with the shit of my Dad being disappointed in me.

But also, when I was about to get married and dad's driving me and I was like, "you could save me. You could fucking help me now. I need you to do the thing that dads are supposed to do here. But I can't ask you because I've got my pride too."

It's hard because I was still protecting my mum all the way through and not wanting her to know. She's proud of me, but she needs that protection whereas he doesn't.

I have rights and responsibilities, I respond to events and exercise choice. But violence and coercive control limit my options. *Follow My Lead*

I am really big on taking responsibility. Even though I know the logic of the decisions that I made, I can understand the deliberate nature of the violence and force that meant they were the only decisions that I could make. Yet it's still important for me to take responsibility. I just don't believe in blaming everyone else. I think blaming everyone else is not good for you as an individual. It doesn't mean that

I'm to blame. I don't believe I am to blame for the relationship or for the perpetrator behaving the way he did. No, I think I say it so deliberately because it's the thing that I still have to deal with every day. I have to deal with the consequences.

We don't have any money. And we don't have any money because Derek gambled it all away. But I also have to take responsibility for the part that I played in my own life. I gave him that money. I know why I did it and I probably wouldn't change that. There is a part of me that behaved in a submissive way. I did what I needed to do to survive. And at the forefront of all that were my twins that I knew I had to be responsible for and keep safe.

I don't know. Maybe if I had my time over again when we got back from Vegas and he'd lost all of my money and I couldn't find anywhere to live; I should have got a serviced apartment. Because the reality is, if it cost me \$10,000, it would have only been \$10,000 as opposed to \$120,000 and bankruptcy and all the other shit. But I didn't see it like that at the time. But I'm the one that has to deal with it. I can't go and buy my daughters new shoes straight away when they need them.

Every fortnight that we get our Centrelink benefit, after one week, there's \$50 left that we've got to live off for the second week. That's his fault, but it's my fault too.

I guess I always have, and I still do, think I'm smarter than him. That was always a big fuck you. Even to the point that he accused me of installing spyware on his phone. I had just used Find My iPhone; it was a safety measure for us, but the fact that I could do it and he had no idea I was doing it for a long, long period of time, was like, "well, fuck you. You might have stormed off and you think I've got no idea where you are, but I know exactly where you are."

I don't need to say anything because saying something is going to cause a physical assault that I don't want. But it kept me hanging in there. It kept me thinking that I hadn't totally given up on this life yet. It's calling him out. It was those little things that kept me sane.

I remember, he smashed up my hair straighteners one day. They're worth about \$300. It was a punishment for something that I had done. At the time he's doing it, I'm just trying to get myself and my daughters out of the house for a while. I went back up to my room, saw they were smashed and was like, "I'm not dealing with this." and I got out of the house for a few hours. When I came back there was no straighteners, he had removed the evidence. So, he knows that I know he's smashed them up. Then I would wait until we were in a situation where he couldn't fully explode.

We're driving in the car and he's going to drop me and the girls somewhere and I'd record him. I'd secretly record him and say, "where are my hair straighteners?" He'd say, "I've put them in the bin." Well, why? "Why have you put them in the bin? Why would you smash them up?"

"You will not break my head to the point where I can't think for myself and don't think you're doing anything wrong."

That evidence can never be used in court because it's not legally obtained. But it's for me to know I'm not going insane. I'm going to make sure I've got the evidence and it's just for me. It's that resistance, "you will not break my head to the point where I can't think for myself and I don't think you're doing anything wrong. I'm going to keep reminding myself and if it means I have to secretly record you, then so be it."

My daughters are still on the watchlist and I am due to go to England shortly, so I am going to travel without them. I'm hoping they'll remove them from the watchlist soon.

They know I'm going to England at some stage. But we're trying to downplay everything and just not talk about anything at home so that it's not in the forefront of their mind. They're spending this

weekend with Derek. I can't have them miss a weekend with him, but I am worried they will tell him I'm going to England and then if he knows he can decide not to bring them back and I've got to spend all next week in court trying to get them back.

I'm still very carefully managing everything. Derek doesn't hurt me as much anymore. He's just annoying.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Domestic Violence Service Management would like to thank the person with lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence who has generously shared their insights for the benefit of others

We acknowledge that despite our best efforts to assemble with a person a more accurate representation of some of their experiences of violence, we can never fully understand all that their experiences mean to them now or through their life. We understand that no one's life experience can ever be fully represented in language or any other form.

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