

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.

LAINIE

I was the eldest of four children and I grew up with a violent mother and father. Mum was violent. My dad was violent too, but not as violent as my mum. She was very aggressive, and she treated me like I was in competition with her, because I was quite bright, quite good at sports, quite attractive, quite outgoing, and she didn't want me to be any of those things, so she was smashing me down. I always wanted to hide in my room. But then, my dad would come in and start bitching about her to me, so I never had my own space there. He didn't ever sexually assault me physically, but he had an energetic sexuality toward me. I just sense energies. He still patted me on the bum until a few years ago, and I said, "don't do that. I don't like it." And he stopped.

"Don't do that. I don't like it."

When I was 14, I went to a yoga class with my girlfriends from school. There was a hall next to the fast food place we all worked at and we did a class and my friends giggled all through the class but I loved it. The teacher came and said I should be a yoga teacher in that first class. I was only 14. I was too young but I got myself a yoga book, and I studied it. I studied this book, like every little sentence in that book. I'd do the pose and then look where my hands were supposed to be, where my fingers were supposed to be. And then I'd do it.

I've always been spiritual. As a kid I was already meditating. Before I got the yoga book I'd found a way to meditate on my own. I used to go into a space and close my eyes and see like colours and changes inside there. And just sit there with my eyes shut and ignore what was going on around me. So that was a nice coping strategy.

I had this ability to tune in. To scan what the mood was, and even from my room, to know if it's safe to go out now. I have a lot of spiritual energy. I would go to bed and think, "right, you've got to make positive thoughts about the next day." I figured out if I went to bed and started telling myself, "I can do this, it's going to be okay," and feel that energy in my body, not just the thought, then I would wake up feeling better and I'd have a much better day without having to keep thinking about it all day. So, I noticed that. Not that I managed to do it for the rest of my life.

Mum screamed at us a lot. She'd tell me I was stupid and we'd line up for a big whack with the brushes, wooden spoons, and these big, yellow, plastic car tracks. I'd say practically every day we'd get whacked with something. And I'm sensitive. I told someone I couldn't wait to leave home and they said, "you can leave when you're 16. You can get a payment from the dole." So I left home at 16. I provoked them till they got angry, and then I ran away. I just felt like I needed the impetus, so I provoked my father and he went out and got a hose to get ready to start whacking me, and when he did that, I just left. I'd already had it planned, with a bag at my friend's house. So, I went around to her house, got the bag and left.

"You can leave when you're 16. You can get a payment from the dole."

I went up north and got a job, and I ended up meeting this guy there. We were in a relationship together for three years. We got engaged when I was 18. But I decided that I didn't want that. I just knew I wanted more from myself. I wanted to use my intelligence. We went travelling across

Australia. I sold my car and I bought a motorbike and had a learner's permit. And he had a motorbike, and we rode up north with a dog on the tank, all my stuff tied on the back. And that was where I left him. I was very adventurous. I guess I was very brave. I rode on to Darwin on my motorbike by myself and spent some time working there in pubs before travelling on to Broome and working in a pub there.

“I don't like the company you're keeping Lainie.”

That's where I met this guy. He was obviously a bad guy, because he used to hide every time the police would come by. He gave me drugs. I didn't do it all the time, but I did it a couple of times. He did drugs all the time. Guys I was hanging out with at the pub where I was working would say, “I don't like the company you're keeping Lainie.” But I didn't listen to them.

I remember one night at home, he was throwing me around, pushing me. I can't remember what happened to trigger it. I knew I would have to do something. I didn't leave him at that point but what

We were ready. We knew he was coming around.

I decided to do was, I had these friends who were tough and rough and so I took him to them down south. We stayed at their place for a short while then I split up with him. Apparently, he had not treated them right either, and they didn't like him. They had these big watchdogs.

But I think he must have fed them some steak because I was sitting there at their house and I looked at the back door and I saw his white t shirt, and said, “there he is.” We were ready. We knew he was coming around, and there were three of us; me, her, and him. And I saw the t shirt. And they went out and beat the hell out of him. And they were enjoying beating the hell out of him. I was just crying inside. They got him outside the gate to their place and they locked him out. He was staggering up the street and ended up in hospital with whatever smashed bones he had. I remember wondering when he was going to get out of the hospital and if I'd be safe. So, I drove up to the hospital with her, with the woman, and looked up, and there he was in this huge hospital looking out the window. So I'm like, okay, he's still in there. So, I rang the police, I told them everything I knew about him, all the different names, he'd changed his name to. They couldn't find anything on him. If they would have taken him away, that would have been good. But I never saw him again.

We were together less than a year. I must have been about 20 at the time.

The couple who helped me, I think I felt like I owed them something now. So, they were getting married and I offered to cook at their wedding. I cooked everything. I'd worked as a cook through my travels and I grew up cooking with my mum, so I was a little bit confident in my ability to cook.

It was at their wedding where their friends assaulted me. Her brother was in an outlaw biker gang. And after I'd finished the cooking, they gave me a drink and I had it. I should have thought not to. But they drugged me. I had one drink. Someone did come to me and say, I'll take you home now; a woman, I don't know who she was. Her and her husband. They said, “I think you should come with me. We'll take you home.” That was an opportunity missed, because I stayed there and they assaulted me, three of them. I don't remember the details of the act, but when I came to I figured out that it had happened. And then, another guy tried to assault me. I fought him off, and then I told her father, who I liked. He told me to sleep in the married couple's bedroom. They made fun of me for doing that on the wedding night, but for me it made sense. At least there were people around me, and they weren't going to be able to do anything. In the morning I was still there. I guess I just wanted everything to be “normal” again. I was too scared to go to the police about it, because I knew there would be threats from the biker gang.

I left their house eventually, when the husband tried to sleep with me. I was in the car with him. He was drunk and he was driving. And then, he pulled over and I just told him “no.” When we got back to the house, she was angry, not knowing what had happened. So, I told her. She didn’t know who to believe. I was like, “fuck, I’ve got no friends left here,” so I’m out. I was pretty upset at that point. So, at the age of 20/21, I went back to Mum and Dad’s place. I didn’t tell them what happened. I had been sexually abused as a child by someone outside the family and I didn’t tell them that either, because I knew they would just tell me off. I left again not long after that.

I decided to get my truck driver’s license because I thought I could get a job on the mines. That’s how I met my son’s father. Gary was a truck driver and I used to go have lessons with him in a road train. I did that and I got my license for a C class, which meant I could drive anything.

I went off to New Zealand on a holiday and when I came back I met up with Gary up north where he had a mining job. I was already planning another trip overseas in Europe. And that’s when I got pregnant. I had already bought the tickets and he encouraged me to go anyway, so I went. I was in denial about the whole pregnancy. I was scared of the pregnancy. I came back when I was seven months pregnant.

By this time, he was working in another mine and we and we didn’t have a place to live. The town was full up, so we moved even further out. It felt like we moved to the end of the earth. When I went into labour, we had to go with the Flying Doctors to a bigger town. But I got bored quickly living in such a small community and decided I didn’t want to stay. When I went back down to the city I was doing aerobics to get back in shape, and I thought, I’m going to teach this. I need to teach this. So I came down and did some courses and I got a job as an aerobics instructor.

He was away a lot; going up to the mines and down again and then he ended up moving down. We were going to try and work together as parents and be in a relationship. Which we did try, but it didn’t work out. We ended up splitting up before Corbin turned three and Gary went to live with his mother.

I was suffering at the time. My head was telling me I’m not good enough, I’m the bad mother, he’s better off without me. My son seemed unhappy with me, and we didn’t have this connection that I wanted. I think I had created that because of denying the pregnancy and I think that all gets picked up by the baby. To me there was a sense of not connecting with my son how I wanted.

His Dad played on that and convinced me to let Corbin go and live with him. So, then Corbin went to live with his Dad and I’ve always felt really bad about that. I was ringing up twice a day to make sure he was all right. And Gary was going, “He’s fine, he’s fine.” But he wasn’t fine. When I finally went and got him back, his mother came out and told me off for leaving him there. She said he was hiding under the table, he was traumatised. And I’m like, “I didn’t know,” and I was ringing up twice a day to find out.

“He’s fine, he’s fine.”

Later, Gary admitted to me that at that time when Corbin lived there he had grabbed him by the throat and lifted him up. Corbin has no recollection of that now. Neither does he have recollection of the time his dad came around and was really angry, yelling at me. I can’t remember what the argument was about, but obviously I wasn’t caving in. And he grabbed a knife and was stabbing right beside me into the kitchen bench and yelling at me whilst he held me by the throat and was strangling me. I couldn’t move. My body was frozen. It was like when you are in a dream and you can’t move. And then finally I punched into his balls and he let go. And I got Corbin and we ran outside. In the end, Gary drove off. I was all bruised. I had broken blood vessels all around the outside of my neck and bruised all on the inside. I wore a scarf for a few weeks to hide it.

I withdrew from the world completely.

When I got Corbin back, I withdrew from the world completely. I just felt like I was not making good decisions. I didn't trust my decisions, I didn't trust my judgements of people. And I wasn't making good choices with men. I didn't feel safe in the world. I always felt much safer alone.

So that was my thinking when I withdrew.

I also wanted to help Corbin heal. I withdrew to be safe and to take Corbin away from my poor choices. Giving Corbin to his dad to live and then knowing that I've hurt him through that, is one of the biggest hurts in my life because I never wanted to hurt my son. I wanted to parent right and not do what my parents did and make those mistakes. Because I had made that decision when I was 10; that I was going to not parent like my parents.

He was probably five going on six at this stage. For a while he went to school in town. His dad was paying the fees. And then I moved way out to the sticks and got a nice, cheap house there to rent. And then I wouldn't let Corbin's dad see his son. So he stopped paying the school fees and stopped paying me any money. He bought Corbin a PlayStation and a dog, and I sold them for the rent. That was probably a bit mean, but that's what I did.

For a time, he went to the public school nearby. One day I went down there to see him, and he was crying. He'd been hit in the face with a ball and I think the teachers were trying to make him 'be a man' or whatever, and I didn't like it. That's when I decided that I was going to home school. So, I brought him home and we home schooled. The education level wasn't difficult for me or for him, he's intelligent. I just bought the books that the teachers used and went from the answers and tried to figure out how they did it.

We did that for the rest of primary school, and he went back to school in grade seven because he wanted to. He went to school, and he won an award for his spelling. They were very nice and welcoming. I remember them saying, "he's never had a swimming lesson?" I was saying, "yes he has, I taught him." But they said, "he's never had a swimming lesson." "Yes, he has. I gave him swimming lessons in the beach." So, yes that was when he went back went to school and we moved back to the city.

In that period of seven years ... I wouldn't let anybody get in touch.

In that period of seven years, we weren't in contact with family or friends. Nothing. I wouldn't let anybody get in touch. My family tried, I'd hang up on them or I just wouldn't answer the phone. I'd take it off the

hook. The friends weren't really an issue. I guess I'd always withdrawn because I travel a lot and I never maintained anything. There were a few people who called me up. My brother asked me to his wedding, I didn't go. They were pretty angry about that.

During that seven-year period, my granny died. And I sensed her coming to see me. I knew. She visited me on the day that she died. And I knew. Still, I didn't make contact with anyone. It was only later that I realised, and I was really sad then that I'd missed out on that part of it. And my son missed out on all that part of it. But I've been in touch with her spirit ever since.

I burned everything. I wanted the past to be gone.

I didn't discuss any of this with my son at the time. The choice to withdraw just felt like the only choice to me. I felt I couldn't handle life at that point. I hadn't really had any

proper therapy. I remember having a burning ceremony where I burned all my photos, all my paperwork, everything. I wanted the past to be gone, I never wanted to see it again. I wanted to

move forward. I thought I could do that. I actually believed I could do that.

We moved back to the city because Corbin wanted to and I guess that's when we came back to the family, made connections again.

After I did the seven-year hiatus, I sat down with mum and dad down to tell them what I'd been through; the trauma they'd caused and how I'd been drugged and raped. But they seemed to be in denial. I think the only reason they listened was so that I wouldn't leave and take my boy away again. So, I didn't actually get any acknowledgement from them. I was hoping for more of a response or an apology, but they just sat there and listened. I've got to accept that's all I'm going to get from them. At least I gave it a go. And I certainly haven't been the best mother in the world.

When I met my husband, I was in my late 30s. This was three years after I came out of that seven-year hibernation period. I came back, my son went to high school, I went to uni, did my undergrad degree. I jumped into the marriage a bit too quickly, probably with the background of stress of wanting to have another baby. I wanted someone who was going to be able to be supportive of that. I didn't want to do it on my own. I wanted to have it in a relationship with support. Which probably isn't a great reason. But as it turned out I didn't even try to get pregnant, because it wasn't settled enough. And I'm glad now that I don't have another one.

I met this guy when my son was about 14. I went out with a bunch of girls that I'd met at work and the party was at his house, and we met. And I just thought he was a nice guy. Initially, he was kind. He was very nice, and generous. I liked that he seemed to be functioning well socially, while I was a bit reserved. My network was pretty much just family I guess, and some old-time friends from before I went travelling. He was charismatic in that he had a whole bunch of friends around him, a whole network. And he used to throw these big parties, and all these young people, beautiful people came, and he put on a musician and food, and stuff he couldn't really afford; which I only found out later on. I didn't really have a social life. My networks, my family, all that, were separate. I just went along for the ride.

I moved into his house in a well-to-do area, the other side of the river from my networks. And he started putting me down and calling me an idiot. Just calling me swear words and nasty names; "bitch, slut."

When I look back, there were signs that he was controlling before I moved in. My body was reacting from quite early. I remember driving to his house and having really bad gut responses and ignoring it. Like, he'd meet me for coffee but rather than just meet me halfway, or meet me at the coffeshop, he had had to come into my work and pick me up. Like he was checking it out; information-gathering. The flowers that he bought me; he'd always make sure the flowers were seen by everybody else - he'd deliver them to my work.

I didn't like to judge people.

The fact that he lived in a rich area without having any money, that was all show as well. At the time I just kind of ignored it. I didn't

like to judge people. Now I see there was something dishonest in that.

Before we got married there was one incident where he hit me. The first time where he hit me was in the kitchen and he was drunk. There was a lot of alcohol in that place; he drank a lot of alcohol and he smoked a lot of marijuana and cigarettes. I didn't smoke cigarettes or marijuana, but I did drink. I don't even remember why he hit me. I was probably just sticking up for myself or something, and he punched me in the chest. And then he went off and he broke down and started crying. I remember he was in the shower just crying his eyes out, and I was feeling sorry for him. I tried to

pacify him. I'd try to show him that I was considering him as well, because he was always, "poor me, poor me." And I believed what I was saying when I said, "I'm trying to do what you want me to do, I'm trying to do it right, I'm trying to please you."

He used to get angry a lot. I hate anger. I hate being around angry people. His whole body would tense up; he'd move fast. I'm very sensitive. Once we were married, I took him to these dance classes and he couldn't make his legs move the way he wanted. So, he started kicking himself in the leg. And the teacher was looking, and I was thinking, "ooh, it's a bit embarrassing." But that was the kind of aggression, and irritation, and short temperedness he had.

"You're locked in the bathroom, it's the typical sign that's something's really wrong."

I remember one night, he was yelling, and I locked myself in the room. And then, he threatened to smash the door down, so, I let him in and then I went and locked myself in the bathroom. I rang a friend from the bathroom – she was my mum's best friend's daughter and I didn't know that she had been through a relationship with a violent partner – and she goes, "you're locked in the bathroom, it's the typical sign that's something's really wrong." She said, "I don't like him. I never liked him." So, she knew straightaway. I wasn't ready to leave then but I understood that it was not good, and she just made that real for me.

Mostly, I would try and calm things down by not going up against him, because when I did go up against him, that's when he would hit me. So, mostly I would say nothing and try to talk him down, calm him down.

He was sexually assaulting me when I was drunk, a lot. Pretty much, every night. I didn't fight it. He's aggressive in his manner. He got really hard sometimes and he'd just do it. I'd be so drunk anyway. I knew that was going to happen. I just knew from his mannerisms, the way he'd be when I was not wanting to do what he wanted me to do. I just went along with it. I never said, "no," until that last night when he went off.

"No." That night, I had gone out with my friend. We went dancing. And then when I came home, he tried to have sex with me, and I said "no," and I went and slept in the other room. And in the morning, he came in and was really angry, and started abusing me for saying no to him. That was the first time that I'd ever said no to him. So, he got angry. He grabbed me, he held me down. He grabbed my breast and squeezed it, pushed it, and then he ripped the ring off my finger, which tore my skin. I got away and rang the police. I'd just had enough. I'd realised that this was violent. And then I just left that day. I just grabbed a car full of stuff and left. And never went back.

The police came and they got me the ring back off him, they gave it to me and said, "that's yours." I went to the police station, and he got taken to the police station for interviews. He admitted it, pretty much. He was saying, "I didn't hit her. I just grabbed the ring off of her." And they got evidence, and they pressed charges. I didn't, I was a witness. I agreed but I only agreed, because I was working in social services at the time, and I really encouraged people to go through with charges, and I thought I should. I'm not sure I would encourage people to do it anymore, because it just drags things on for so long. It was a whole year, and I guess for some that's a short time, but it felt long.

In that time, he was ringing my friends, ringing my family, trying to turn people against me. I don't know what he was telling them. But he was turning them against me. I could tell from their responses to me. His mates treated me like I was a manipulator, trying to manipulate him. He was

playing the victim and using them to verify his stories about me. I don't know what they said about me in court but I didn't stay around to find out. I'd had enough of all that. He contacted my mum's friends, my mum, and sent big long-winded emails about what a great bloke he was. My mum's best friend's daughter, who I'd spoken to on the phone from the bathroom, she explained to them what was going on. She told them how manipulative perpetrators can be, so my mum could recognise what was going on. Otherwise, my mum probably wouldn't have believed me if my friend hadn't told her how it works. My mum took it really seriously and she invited me to go back to stay at her house, which I did. I went back to mum and dad's place and stayed for a little while. I was a mess thinking I'd done this to myself again, I'd made these choices again.

She told them how manipulative perpetrators can be.

I had cancer in that year. I had breast cancer. So that wasn't pleasant. I look at the stress levels I'd experienced in the years leading up to that and the sense I had of wanting to give up on life and I think that affects your health. I've left my hometown since then and that's been good. I work as a yoga teacher now which is a healing profession and I feel like I'm coming to a place where I'm actually healing properly.

Yoga has been a big part of that. I thought I didn't have the discipline to make myself practice yoga properly, so I decided to do teacher training as kind of a way to enforce my practice. And then I decided to teach yoga too. I'm good at helping people. I'm good at seeing people, I'm good at giving. So, I guess this really helps me as well. It's always helped me.

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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