

The following insights are from a person with lived experience of domestic and family violence focused on the financial abuse they experienced.

The narrative highlights the **lived experience** of **violence and abuse** including their responses and resistance to violence, and where **social responses** were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. It has been assembled from an interview conducted by [Rosie's Place](#).

## BRONWYN

Before I met Tom, I was in my twenties and I was a single mum of two, Tegan was seven and Katie was three years old. I wasn't working although I had odd jobs here and there. I also had a single parent pension. So, I was fairly independent. I managed the bills, still had some money left over at the end of the week. I could socialise and I could buy myself clothes.

I met Tom through a friend in the mid 1990's. Tom was very much a charmer; he was a traveller and seemed adventurous. That's how I got completely sucked in. Men like Tom portray themselves in such a way without any sort of shakiness. They are just so comfortable in that role. If he hadn't been so completely narcissistic, I probably would have stayed. Looking back, I know what he was, but I couldn't see it at the time. By the time I could see it, it was too late. The door was shut and I couldn't see any way out. I didn't know what resources or services there were at that point. I was too bloody scared to do anything. We were together for two years and I ended up having my son, Andrew, to him.

The relationship with Tom degenerated very quickly into domestic violence. He was very controlling, very domineering. His intention was to crush me. The control was on every aspect and I think the financial aspect of it was one of the hardest because it stopped any

**“The control was on every aspect and I think the financial aspect of it was one of the hardest because it stopped any kind of escape.”**

kind of escape. Within the first few months we were together, Tom started clamping down on my money. If I wanted to buy clothes, he would usually give me a black eye for that. He would come home drunk every night so the money usually spent on alcohol and gambling and drugs. Tom took all of my child benefits. He would come with me to the Post Office when I used to draw it out. I would have to hand it all over. He wouldn't ask me to hand it over in the Post Office. He never

showed his true colours in public. He was “Mr Wonderful” on the outside. Tom would try and make me get money from my mother she was on income support as well. I knew that even if I managed to get away from him, I would have still had to have gone back to that Post Office to draw my money out and he would find me there and that would have been it.

Although he was working, he would use my money to drink and gamble before he got paid. He would never put the money back. The money was his and that was it. He would give me an allowance to do shopping. I was scraping by at some points. I was also responsible for the bills and everything was in my name. I did have a bank card, but that went missing the account ended up being closed somehow. I had no money that he didn't know about. He controlled it all. Every penny of mine was accounted for. There were quite a few occasions where we would go shopping and he would come with me and actually veto what was in the trolley. He would say "we don't need that; you don't need that; the kids don't need that... I'll have this". So, that was horrible.

**"we don't need that;  
you don't need that;  
the kids don't need  
that... I'll have this."**

When I was pregnant with Andrew every day was a struggle. Just to get up, to do things, to get the kids off to school, to be normal, it was just, overwhelming. Then to cope with the violence, because throughout the pregnancy he was violent. He pulled a knife on me several times when I was pregnant, he threatened to cut the baby out. Also, because I was pregnant, obviously, I wanted to eat more. But that was hard on a very fixed budget. Sometimes he would go to the shops on his way home depending on how pissed he was and buy good food. But that was very occasionally. I was more worried about the kids being fed. Then he would try to portray to them that everything was normal, which of course it absolutely wasn't. I had some good friends who knew the situation, even though I didn't necessarily tell them what was going on. They would give me care packages and stuff, so they were very good when I look back on it.

It's only when you get out of the situation, that you look back and realise that it just was not normal. But you just get sucked into the fear and feeling horrible all the time. You just don't question. You don't argue. You just don't. Because you don't know what's going to happen next. You are walking on egg shells constantly. I was in survival mode all the time because his behaviour was quite unpredictable. He could blow up and quite often he did. But when he had been drinking, he would be just so completely irrational, unpredictable and anything would set him off. I remember cooking a meal one night and I think it was steak and it wasn't cooked to his liking. It was perfect for me. I literally put it down in front of him and the next thing I knew I was wearing it. Totally out of the blue.

Tom was constantly being arrested for getting involved in drunken brawls. I also found out from a policewoman that he was also done for kerb crawling, soliciting street sex workers and that was the last straw for me.

One day, Tom he must have twigged onto the fact that I was planning on leaving. He held us hostage inside that house and wouldn't let us out. I had no bags packed. I wasn't stupid enough to do anything like that. But even so, he wouldn't let us out of the house at all. When we went to the bathroom, he would stand outside the bathroom door. I'm lucky, I could have been one of those statistics. The kids could have been without a mother and the

kids could have been killed as well. Tom certainly threatened more than once. It was pretty terrible when my children's lives were threatened and I still didn't have the strength to walk out, because I didn't know that there were any services that could help me.

I honestly didn't know what services to contact. So, I called the Police and the Police would come take him away, he would be charged, he would be released and then would come straight back home to do it all again. There's only so many times that the police will come out. They would just say to me "oh, you have to leave", but how do you just leave? They don't tell you that part. So, in the end they start blaming you, "it's all your fault...oh, what did you do this time?" I said, "I just asked for something. But I didn't ask for a broken rib". I know that much.

**"Oh, you have to leave... it's all your fault... Oh, what did you do this time?"**

Thank God for social media. It was only because someone shared a post about a domestic violence service that I finally found out who to contact to get help. So, this domestic violence service put me and my kids into an emergency housing refuge and at the same time Tom left me. I don't know where he went. When I came back to the house, Tom came around that same day. I think that he must have been watching the house or had somebody watching the house so he knew exactly when to show up. Because that was when Tom abducted Andrew. So, I had just returned home and then Tom was at the front door holding a knife to up to my face and he said to me "if you don't give Andrew to me, I'm going to cut your throat and then I'm going to come back and set fire to the house when the kids are here". Which he was perfectly capable of doing. So, it was a case of "there you go". Andrew was only 6months old. I thought "damn it, I thought I was safe and that I could just go back to the house and pick things up!" Obviously not. Tom took Andrew over to Wales and didn't bring him back.

Andrew just turned nineteen last week. He is still in Wales and because I am stuck on the other side of the planet, I've only seen him four times during that period of time. My other kids have all grown up too and they are good kids. But they haven't seen their brother since he was abducted. I know they are in contact with Andrew on Social Media and all that. Obviously, the distance makes it very difficult. But they point blank refuse to go over to Wales, while Tom is still alive. Marie, my eldest daughter has memories of that period of time with Tom. My youngest daughter Katie has some very dark memories, but she can't really remember everything.

After Tom left, he didn't stop, the financial abuse was just continuous. In the first few months after abducting Andrew, Tom actually put in a claim with Social Security in Wales for me and the two kids. When I went to cash my Australian payment, I was told it had been cancelled. I went down to the Department of Social Services office and was told "oh well, you're not here, you're in Wales with him, what's going on?". I said "I haven't left the country. I have been here". I had to prove that I hadn't left the country and that my other

kids hadn't left the country either. All of that that took two weeks and during that time, I had absolutely no money. I had to go to the Social Services Department every day to get an emergency payment to feed my kids and I. So, I had to borrow money off friends to make ends meet.

Tom had racked up quite a few things in my name. There was a credit card which I could prove that I hadn't had access to because it wasn't my signature on the back of the card. But he had various pub tabs that he had run up in my name. All in all, it was about five thousand pounds. Which is what I would've gotten on the dole. He was very secretive with his paperwork. I also found out that he had also taken out a life insurance policy on me. I was absolutely horrified. I was told by one of his friends afterwards that he'd taken that out quite early on. So, I was his plan all along. Luckily the life insurance policy had lapsed because obviously he hadn't paid anything.

Eventually I had to go over to Wales for the custody Court case for Andrew. It took eighteen months to come to court. The Judge decided to have it behind closed doors. So, my Barrister and I were sitting in one of the back areas of the court and Tom walked right by us and my Barrister looks up at him and says to me "geez he's a handsome man, isn't he"? I was sitting there just shuddering and I said to her "that's him". My Barrister replied "oh I'm so sorry...I'm so sorry, but he is very handsome. I can see why you fell for him". I thought, "well that doesn't help". You know, wow, what is wrong with these people! The court case was a joke too. The Judge said "well, we will leave him where he is (Wales), you can have joint custody and you can come and visit every six weeks". Which is of course not feasible at all. It's just impossible. Imagine flying Sydney to Wales every six weeks on my income.

**“Geez he’s a handsome man, isn’t he? I’m so sorry, but he is very handsome. I can see why you fell for him”**

Last year I went to Wales for Andrew's high-school graduation. That's only because Andrew had made contact with me on Social Media. I stayed at Tom's sister's house, because his sister is actually a nice normal person. She was quite happy to have me stay there. She was instrumental in getting Andrew to contact me over Social Media. I was only meant to be there for two weeks, but changed my flights and I came home early because I just couldn't cope with Tom. He was still trying all the same crap on. I felt so bad that I couldn't stick it out for the full two weeks. But Tom kept trying to pressure me to stay at his house. He was making it impossible for me to refuse because he was saying it in front of Andrew. I didn't want to say "No I'm not going to stay in the house with you because you are psychotic". No fucking way. So, I made up a story that I had to come home because Katie, who's my youngest, was sick and I had to go home. He knew that I was lying.

Tom made me tell the entire family why I had to go home and I had to come out with it in front of twenty-five people. It was horrible, I was bawling my eyes out. I just felt like I was

back in that situation. You think that after that length of time, that you would be stronger and that you can cope with it but you can't. Just being around that person is horrible. Thankfully, Andrew has pretty much been brought up by his grandmother and his aunts but he has still had that mad influence of his dad.

The awareness of domestic violence certainly over the last twenty years has improved. I know refuges have been around for a long time, but they don't have a great profile. There was none that I was aware of. Looking back there must have been, but just didn't

**“If I had access to this kind of thing earlier on, I definitely think this would have been a different story with a different ending.”**

know where they were. I suppose refuges can't go “hey look at us. Look at what we are doing”, so women don't hear about them or know that they're there. If I had access to this kind of thing earlier on, I definitely think this would have been a different story with a different ending.

---

#### Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange would like to thank [Rosie's Place](#) for conducting these interviews and providing these transcripts to Insight Exchange to ensure the voices of lived experience are able to help inform and strengthen social, service and systemic responses to domestic and family violence.

The initiative to conduct the interviews was from an informal pro-bono collaboration by Rosie's Place, WASH House, and the Mt Druitt Family Violence Team. The narratives were provided by the individuals for the benefit of others. The narratives were obtained through interviews with Rosie's Place and assembled by the Insight Exchange team.

Insight Exchange would also 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.

---

#### Handle with dignity

You have been reading an excerpt of a person's lived experience of violence and adversity. It is not simply another 'story', 'sample' or 'case study'. Whilst consent has been obtained via Rosie's Place to share this account we ask that as the custodian of this copy that you uphold the dignity of the person who shared this experience as you distribute and/or store it.

Tips for handling with dignity:

---

- 
- Keep the copies in an envelope distinct from paperwork and reports
  - Explain the importance and value of these accounts before distributing them
  - Collect any copies left behind by delegates/participants after workshops
- 

Copyright: © Insight Exchange 2021 [www.insightexchange.net](http://www.insightexchange.net). Insight Exchange gives permission for this resource to be photocopied or reproduced provided that the source is clearly and properly acknowledged.

Disclaimer: This Insight is a carefully assembled excerpt of a person's lived experience of domestic and family violence. Details of this person's identity, and that of others, have been altered to protect their safety. Whilst great care has been taken to do no harm and to contribute to improved understanding of and responses to domestic and family violence, Insight Exchange assumes no responsibility for how the resource is used by other parties.

---