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## Laura

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.

## LAURA

I first came to Australia for a friend's wedding 10 years ago. I was living in Dublin and intending to do a six-month trip and spend two months in Australia and then travel to Indonesia and Costa Rica.

I was an entrepreneur in the fetish world back home making very good money doing photoshoots, stripping, videos, parties, burlesque shows. All kinds of different creative stuff. But when I came to Australia it was a holiday thing. So, I walked into the local strip club and made \$2,000 my first night. So, I was like, "this is quite fun." I had to work with a holiday visa and ended up staying for six months instead of two months. And I kept my flat on in Dublin because I was doing really well.

I've travelled a lot. I was brought up in the Middle East; Saudi Arabia, Algeria. I'd lived in Spain for six years. I travelled a bit around Australia and loved it. Really great place. And then I went on to Indonesia, Costa Rica. Because I'd stayed so long in Australia, I thought, "would I live here?" Then, when I got to Costa Rica I was like, "no, Australia is boring!" Costa Rica reminded me how much I loved Spain. Australia was not for me.

A few years later that same friend had a baby, so I came back to visit for a month and went to see friends in Brisbane. That's where I met my ex-partner, Luka. It was a Melbourne Cup Day party. I liked him, but I didn't like his scene; he mixed with some very unsavoury people. But he didn't come across that way at all. To me, he was much more, 'soft'.

I stayed with him a couple of days after I'd met him at that party. We had a really nice time. I was leaving anyway; I was going back to Ireland. And I didn't see it as "this is my future," with him. And I knew that. I was very attracted to him [but] not the scene he was in. He wasn't even working at the time. What he was doing to get money, I don't know - but I had my ideas.

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I would like you to understand that I know my world best; what it has been, what it is now and what it might become. *Follow My Lead*

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I really liked him as a person. He was European, open-minded, well-travelled, very cultured - unlike a lot of Australian men. So, there was some underlying soulful attraction there, which was very deep. I can't really explain it, why you're drawn to someone. But I was quite strong in what I was doing at home, and that person wasn't for me.

He dropped me off after a couple of days and I tried to get out of the car and go. And he said, "I would love your telephone number." And I said, "there's no point. It's an Irish number. It's going to cost me money if you text me." And then, he handed me his spare phone. And he said, "I'll call my own phone."

**"I'll call my own phone."**

I found that very sweet. I found that very romantic. Now he's going to call his own phone. Not really thinking that that was a very controlling thing to do when I think about it. Because he forced his way onto me. But I saw it as an amazing, wonderful, romantic thing. And that's the way it felt. And maybe it was done in that context. He just didn't want me to go. He said, "I'd really love for you to stay". And then he did ring the phone off the hook and he wanted to meet me again, so I did. And then he

said, "I will drive you back to Sydney." And I said "okay, great. I love road trips." So, he drove me from Brisbane to Sydney.

Before we left, Luka introduced me to some friends from his community who were very family orientated and beautiful, and then we did the road trip to Sydney and we got closer.

## She was a bit racist ... so, I didn't listen to what she said.

I introduced him to my friends down there. My friend who'd had the baby was very 'thingy' about his cultural heritage. I didn't really like her views very much in some things; she was a bit racist. And I

guess I wanted to stand up for him then. So, I didn't listen to what she said.

He was supposed to go back, and then we started to talk about me being with him. And I just said, I wouldn't live in Brisbane. And he said, I've got somewhere to show you in the outback, and he named this particular town. And I was like, really? Because I had wanted to go to that town when I was travelling, and I missed it because I stayed longer in Darwin. So, I was like, what a name to say! That was the one place I'd missed, that I really wanted to see. And he didn't know that.

He goes, "I've got connections there." That included the godfather of his children, Mark. He had two daughters from a previous relationship. So, I said yes. I extended the holiday visa. "Let's go and check it out." Why not? We're going to do this road trip there, which was right up my street. And I already trusted him by this point. He was showing me a different side to what I first saw of him. He had much more to him.

On the way we stopped in to meet his daughters and his ex-partner. It was for a passport signing. He was very rude to his ex-partner. I remember feeling very uncomfortable. He was just staring at her across the table. And it took him an hour and a half to sign his paperwork. I thought, "that's a bit rude now. Just get on with it. Just be civil and decent. What's this game you're playing. Why are you trying to do this?" And her husband was there. The kids, they're all a family. And the older daughter was very 'off' with him. I went and sat in the living room with the youngest daughter.

## I just thought, "stop being so silly, just sign the thing."

They were together when they were 18 or 19 or so and I'm not judgemental about how things can go wrong. I come from a divorced family. He was so young when he was in that relationship. So, I didn't blame him for that. I

could never have been with someone and having kids at 19. I could already feel his emotional side. I can understand maybe why he dropped out of their life. And his behaviour when we visited, I didn't think of it as an abuse thing. I just thought, "stop being so silly, just sign the thing."

We continued on our road trip, and we bonded over losing our fathers when we were younger. I lost my father when I was eight years old to suicide, and his father was never around. So, he had a rejection issue, which I understood. Although I was given a lot of love, he had none. I really understood my father loved me and I had many beautiful memories with my father before he died whereas he never even had a barbeque with his father. There was a pain there with that. And I could understand that I guess.

We finally got to our destination early in the morning and we were quite exhausted. So, we went into his friend's place and we just slept and I didn't wake up till early evening. I came out and the sun was starting to set and the sky was just unbelievable. And the wilderness was all in front of us, just the desert and the orange colours. It was amazing. And I woke up, went outside, and it was just, "wow." And he said to me, "could you live here?" And I said, "yes, I could." So, that was it. We started to make plans for me to be with him, and live with him, there.

He said, "I will leave Brisbane now, and we can live here. And I will work in the mine with Mark." Mark had been affiliated with that town for many years and he knew another guy, Mickey, who ran a motel, so Luka said I could get a job there and I could do my fetish work online.

I was very drawn to the desert. There were no blocks when he asked me that. I just said yes. We'd already road tripped now for all this time. We'd been together for a couple of weeks and I just said yes to the whole thing. I said to him, "let me wrap up everything back home, get more savings together, and come back." I extended my visa and stayed there with him through Christmas and New Year and I had to leave Australia by late January.

He was working, getting up at 5:00am going mining, and then doing all different jobs for different people around town. So, I could see he was really pulling his weight. We met a fair few people together. He introduced me to old friends that he knew, like Ivan, but we also met new friends because he was trying to get some work while we were there.

It was all very much like a family and it felt good. We met wonderfully interesting people. I could see a good life there with us. We got a little place. We got pots and pans given to us. Everyone mucked in. I could see this was going to be a good thing. I was in my early 30s and I was ready for that. I'd done the travelling. We talked about all of the things that we would maybe do. I'd fallen in love.

It was three months we were there before I had to leave. I said to him I could be back by probably June or July, realistically. If I really knuckled down. I'd have to get rid of my place in Ireland. I was only renting, but there's still things involved with all of that, contracts I couldn't just get out of it. So he said, cool.

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*Just as every person is unique, the violence I experience is unique. Follow My Lead*

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To leave town by public transport is a Greyhound bus. It was going to be a gruelling trip. It's an all-night, overnight bus ride, then a two-hour flight to Sydney, then to Singapore, then back to Ireland via the UK

The day before I left, we spent with Ivan, who we had become good friends with, and we drank quite a bit of whisky. A lot. We were dancing and singing and all this great stuff. We came back from Ivan's. It must have been quite early, like sunset time. I was drunk and Luka fell asleep on me, so I was saying, "I'm going tomorrow and you're falling asleep!" And I shook him to wake him up, and he absolutely lost it with me. He grabbed me by the throat, picked me up and threw me into the other room. Literally pushed me up against the wall in the other room and dragged me up. Up high. Holding me by my neck, my feet are off the ground. I can't speak, I can't move. And his eyes, I was so petrified. And he's just hurling all this stuff about my ex-partners in my face.

**He grabbed me by the throat,  
picked me up and threw me  
into the other room.**

On our road trip we'd been getting to know each other and talking about our lives, ex's and he'd introduced me to his ex-partner and his family. So, for him to be spilling and spewing all this at me in disgust was a real shock because he hadn't shown he was upset before, in any of the conversations. He hadn't lost it or told me to be quiet or said it's upsetting at any time. He literally just did it at that moment. It was very, very scary because he looked like he was going to kill me. I don't know why he was doing it.

**I picked [the plank] up to try  
and get him away from me.**

When he finally let me go, I'm then responding physically, trying to fight back. There was this big plank from the bed that had come away underneath. I picked it up

to try and get him away from me and then I swung it through the wall. So, there was literally this huge dent in the wall.

I ran out of the house. I think I was quite aware that he was going to continue, so, I got myself out of the house and removed myself from the whole property. In the few months I'd been there, I'd been going on walks around town, so I knew I could go to this spot up the hill and still look at the house, because it's pitch-black outside. I've got no lights and I don't know if he's going to follow me. I've known him three months. I've never seen this before. I don't know what the hell he is going to do now and I'm here with no phone that had reception.

So, I went to where I knew, where I'd been walking when he was at work in the mornings. I went there straight away and I kept lookout on the property. He started playing really loud music. It was so loud, so I just could feel his tension. I could feel the animosity and everything even from far away.

## I stayed there all night, watching the house.

I stayed there all night, watching the house until I could feel it calm down. I was so overwhelmed with the shock of everything and I'd been up on watch all night. I was starting to get really tired now and I had this long trip ahead of me. So, I really just wanted to

lie down and put my head down. I went back towards the property and I slept in the laundry - it was an outside laundry - and I slept on the floor in there. I felt it was safer to go into the laundry. At least I knew there was no dogs or anything going to come. I lay down for a bit and I think I may have got some sleep. Anyway, he didn't come, and then I finally went back into the house. I think I could feel it was safer, and by late morning it gets very hot out there.

I went back into the property and he was so sorrowful. I didn't say anything. I wouldn't look at him. I was dealing with all the emotions. He was extremely sorry. I think he was shocked, but it was so stressful. I just knew I didn't want to ever see him again. He tried to talk to me all day, he had been sorry, blah, blah, blah, but I was just like "yes, well there we are," whatever.

I didn't speak till literally the last moment of me going. Some other friends came around to say goodbye. That's why I was kind of forced to speak to him in front of them. I wanted to put up a polite front. I wasn't going to let them know. I don't know what I was feeling. I'm leaving. He's going to be left, so it's irrelevant. Why let them know? We said goodbye and then we got in the car and he took me to the bus. I just got on the bus and ignored him.

Then he followed the bus down the highway in his car, in front of the bus. I guess he was trying to show me that he was sorry, that he wanted to be with me, and didn't want to let me go. People on the bus were literally cheering and things and turning around. They were going, "oh wow, he loves you," and all of this stuff. They didn't know what had happened. They're just seeing that I was leaving, and they thought it was very romantic. And it felt that way for a moment. He literally drove in front of the bus and then turned around and waited ahead of the bus.

**"Oh wow, he loves you."**

Although my phone didn't work out there, it worked again once I left the outback. I said to myself, "I'm not turning that phone on. That's it now. I'm disappearing." I had the perfect opportunity.

For some reason, I turned the phone on in Singapore, and I saw his messages. So many messages. Really heartfelt messages of apologising and he didn't want to lose me and all that stuff. Then on the plane, songs came on that we had been listening to, that he had introduced me to. So, there's me then listening to these songs and crying the whole flight, literally. I was exhausted. Extremely tired at this point. So, the strategy that I had for myself not to look at things tired, I didn't follow. I mean all strategy went out of the window I guess because I really didn't want to speak to him again.



When I got back to Ireland, I ended up communicating with him. His excuse was he took two Xanax. I didn't know what Xanax was at the time, and he said, combined with the whiskey, that was why he lost it like that. I said "well, why didn't you tell me you took two Xanax? I don't even know what that is." He explained what it was and he said people can react. And then Ivan confirmed he had seen other friends turn violent on Xanax and alcohol so I did forgive that after all. We got over that incident. But I still needed time which he didn't 'allow' me.

## Ivan confirmed he had seen other friends turn violent on Xanax and alcohol.

Once I was back in Ireland, he was just on my case all the time. He said, "I want to come over. I can't do any more weeks without you." And I said, "I need to get on with things." I was travelling back and forth to Dublin and London. I'm trying to get more work. I was going back into doing more of the strip shows so I was having to do nights again, to bring in the maximum amount of money.

There were a lot of times I couldn't talk. So, he was then saying, "I can't handle this. I want to be there with you." I said, "I know, but I'm back and forth; I'm travelling all over the place. I don't know where I'm going to be tomorrow. We're not really going to be able to be together. I'm not going to be able to focus and knuckle down." I knew, I'd be more productive if I could get on with it. Then we could be together in Australia. But he really didn't want to wait. He was very persistent, very persistent and very loving. And within a few months, he was in Ireland.

**"I can't handle this. I want to be there with you."**

When he first arrived, it was when that soldier got axed in the street in London and there was heaps of press. Historically, his people are very anti-Muslim. He never showed aggression to me about it, but I knew it's a strong subject for him. So, for him to arrive having just come through London when that had just happened, it was horrible.

That first week, he got very drunk while I was at a photoshoot. He was supposed to come and pick me up with my bags and he wasn't there when I came out. So, I had to lug my bags and found him drunk, in the car. And he was just ranting about Muslims. I could see how that was emotional. It was horrific. He was extremely ranting. Even to the point of spitting out the window when I was driving through traffic at anybody he thought was Muslim. And I said, "we can get arrested now!" It wasn't the correct behaviour. But he didn't want to talk about it. He was very drunk. I said, "Come on, I've worked so we could have a lovely, enjoyable time." Then I took him to a beautiful part of Dublin, and he met some expats who spoke his language. That picked his spirits up a bit. Thankfully, that redeemed my faith in him. It was pretty horrible.

He came over for what was meant to be three months, but it went past that. I was showing him Ireland and I was paying for those things with my photoshoots and stuff. I wasn't putting it away, which was what was supposed to be happening. But because of him being with me, I was spending money, so I needed to earn more. I thought, "you need to see a bit of who I am and where I've lived, and my country." That was important. But that's why it took longer.

## I couldn't work constructively because of ... this neediness from him.

He did meet everybody, my friends, in Ireland. They really liked him. He's a very charming person. He's very good at talking to people and things. He's very cultured in that respect. He's able to hold his own. He went to his home country for

a few months and I went over to stay with him a couple of times. He then came back to Ireland in November, and I was ready to go to Australia then. But it was another four months before we finally came back. It was a very frustrating time. He put a spanner in my works. I couldn't work

constructively because of the constant phone calls and all of this neediness from him. But I was still thinking this is him just wanting to be with me and seeing me. And I still thought it was romantic for him to make the trip over to Ireland and want to still be with me.

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

*Follow My Lead*

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By the time we were on the plane together back to Australia, I was looking forward to our future. I did want to make some more money when I arrived back, because I knew I needed to set myself up. He went back to our outback town. He already had a job lined three up. I worked in the city for a few weeks. For me to get my partner visa, was going to be another \$4,500, otherwise, I was going to have to leave again. And I didn't want to be stressed about money when I got back out there, and I was trying to set myself up online with all those expenses. I wanted to be cushioned a lot more than I was. He found a room to live, which was only \$200 a week and he should have been making \$2,000 a week with Mickey. He should have been banking this money, which is what I thought he was doing.

When I arrived, I arrived with cash for the visa proceedings and to open a joint bank account and everything. By the end of the week that I arrived, we got a two-bedroom, big open plan place and we made it a little home, and he's buying me flowers and all these things. But literally the first week I was there, he got very drunk and he stole my money. We'd hidden the money in a place we both knew. And he took \$950 and went out. That is when he ended up grabbing me; this is the time he crushed my ribs. I think back now and I think that was him trying to show me, "this is what it's going to be like. Don't speak." Because I tried to stop him leaving when he took the money.

He'd been drinking after work. So, he was already drunk and then he was wanting to take this money and I tried to stop him. I was like, "what are you doing?" I had a knife in my hand; I think I was cooking. And then he just grabbed me. He's very strong. A big guy. And I was very slim. And he's just put me into a 'bear hug' type thing and squashed me so hard that he broke my ribs. I got a scar on my torso too, from the knife. It wasn't like I went at him with the knife, but I had it in my hand and it ended up cutting me there at the same time. I was trying to reason with him but it was like he was in the car in Dublin that day. He was very hostile. And he squashed me. I didn't realise anything straight away. He immediately dropped me and walked out. But I remember it was such a shock. I was on the floor and I couldn't do anything. I literally stopped. I didn't argue with him. I knew something had happened - something strong. I don't remember thinking, "I've broken my ribs." It just made me outright stop. Because of the adrenaline or whatever, I didn't feel it then. I only knew I was in pain the next day.

**“He took my money ... I don't want you here. I don't want him here.”**

He came back later that night with an Aboriginal fellow. And he said, "this is the leader of the Aboriginals." And I remember feeling very scared for my life at that moment, because this guy was equally the same size as my partner. But, I'm a strong person, so I thought, "I'm not having this." I

think spiritually I already could relate to Aboriginal people; the way they respect people, if it's your home or whatever. And I thought, if you're a leader then, you're going to understand that this idiot needs to be spoken to. So, I spoke to him and I said, "this is my house. And I'm really not happy. He took my money and I don't want you here. I don't want him here. I would not be so unwelcoming normally." And the Aboriginal guy said, "we must leave." And took him away. I didn't want to disrespect anybody. I'd just moved to the town. I'd already spent time there. Three months. Everyone had been so hospitable to me. I would normally sit down in a normal circumstance, but I said this is what's happened earlier. "Take him away. Take him somewhere."

**“We must leave.”**

I knew I was weak after he left. I knew I couldn't do anything, physically, but boy, I was going to stand up for myself. I slept with my metal nail file when I realised that I was vulnerable because of my ribs. I didn't want to sleep with a knife because I knew that could be used against me and had already hurt me. But a nail file maybe was enough. It's small enough for me to hold and hide it. I can hold it without somebody knowing. And I can just put it into his neck if something happens. I was thinking that way that night.

He came back in the morning. And by that time, I couldn't move. I was on my side. Something severe was really wrong. I'd never had broken ribs before, but I couldn't breathe. It was very hard to turn left or right. I think I must have known by the time I'd gone to the toilet that it was hard to get out of the bed. He was extremely apologetic, tail between his legs. Really emotionally upset. He came down and lay next to me in the bed. And he was holding me. And I was like, "you can't hold me because I think you've broken my ribs." And he was just really sorry and holding me. And I said, "you've taken the money. Why did you take the money?" And turns out he still had all the money. He hadn't spent it. It was just bizarre. I still don't know why he did that. But he didn't spend it.

He offered to take me to the hospital. He wanted to do that; he was owning up to it. And I was like, "no, we shouldn't do that." I was scared about the visa. I was scared about what people thought. I think I was afraid for him as well. They're going to ask me what's happened. And I was going to have to tell them. And I didn't want to do it, because that would mean him being arrested. And I guess the bottom line was I didn't want that to happen to him. That wasn't immediate, that was after he showed me he was sorry and all of that. It was a totally different feeling to the night before. From those scared feelings, to the next day, I don't want him to leave. He got me some bandages and I read on Google what you need to do. There's nothing much you can do about broken ribs. You've just got to ride it out while they heal. What's the point in going to the hospital?

## He offered to take me to the hospital.

But in that six weeks that it went on for, I couldn't go to the library, I didn't really want to be around people. We had no internet at the time. The whole plan for me working had been that I'd take my laptop to the library and get on with things. I had my camera equipment and everything, but I couldn't do anything. I was in pain. It was an effort to smile. I couldn't laugh. I had this injury and I'm trying not to show people.

## I didn't want people to get that first impression of me.

Because I'd just moved there, I wanted to be out and about, and talking to people and things. But I couldn't be myself, so I didn't want people to get that first impression of me. "God, who's she? She doesn't even talk."

So, I was just going to the supermarket and back. I couldn't engage in anything strenuous. I became completely submissive. I'm normally quite an outspoken person; quite an upbeat person and very opinionated. But I was quickly a shell of myself.

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

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I got work eventually. A hospitality job on reception at the motel that Mickey ran. But for that whole year, every time Luka would drink there would be some problem.

He was strangling me by this point; just restraining me if I spoke up, if I would ask about his drinking or whatever. There were just so many incidences. He would grab my neck a lot. I wouldn't be able to move my neck from left to right for two weeks after he would. But there's no bruising or anything. There were just so many incidents happening. I would call Ivan when it happened and he'd turn up at 1:30 in the morning, pick Luka up, and take him into his house. Ivan is six foot two and Luka



respected him. Ivan would take him in the car and leave me to rest for the night. I could at least sleep. I knew I could call Ivan. Luka would listen to Ivan.

I remember not being able to concentrate on the work. They put in a new computer system and I was being very incompetent in the job. And it was such a mediocre job. I'd done fine dining in Spain and performed in intense sales jobs, and I couldn't get to grips with it at all. I couldn't concentrate. I was already feeling that I couldn't do my own work with my online business. Why was I doing this reception job that I was doing at 19? I couldn't even do a simple hospitality job. "What is wrong with me? What is going on?" It felt like I was being destroyed.

**"You can't ring me. Talk to the police if this is happening."**

By this time we had the internet on at home, so we had the phone line and I had started to ring my mum from the phone. She was saying, "you can't ring me. Talk to the police if this is happening." She was saying, "Laura, what do you want me to do? I'm in Ireland. Call the police." I just needed some emotional support. I needed her maybe to chat with him.

One time where I guess I comprehended the amount of it happening was when I rang Mum and she told me, "ring the police." Then I rang Ivan. And he just said, "I can't keep doing this."

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The decisions I make and if/how I take steps is influenced by my context, situation and the coercive control I am experiencing. *Follow My Lead*

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The guy I was working for, Mickey, was quite chauvinistic. A womaniser person. He and Luka worked together for eight hours a day, in the day time, then I would work with Mickey in the evening. And it felt like I was being picked on and then, it felt like they were a team against me. Luka would talk about Mickey's sexual talk; about putting people on a leash and things. There were some mad things he would come out with. He would just say it. Conversations they'd had that day.

**"So what is it you do online?"**

And Mickey would tell me a lot of things that Luka would say when they worked together. And I guess I started to feel a bit targeted there. He would make comments to me like, "so what is it that you do online?" Things like that he would say to me. It wasn't a secret, but I had never spoken to Mickey about it. I guess I started to think, "are they talking about this when they're together?"

I really started to feel like I was on some show or something, not in an empowering way at all. The town itself, the undercurrent of the town, it's a macho town. But I didn't see any of that at first. I saw it as a forward-thinking town of Australia, because there's all these different nationalities living there. But all these different nationalities come from tiny little villages elsewhere in the world. I didn't really get that they haven't travelled anywhere else. I thought they're great - they've come over the other side of the world as well. Brilliant. Then I started to see the violence; an Aboriginal woman being rocked in the head, dragged through the town. So, I started to realise, this is quite a harsh place.

Where I come from, and even in the strip world in Sydney, it's more showgirl, burlesque. You're admired. I know that's a bit of my ego talking, I can hear that. But it was a great, creative, amazing world, to be in. I wasn't used to being looked down on – or treated with less respect because of what I do. Which is what I started to feel like was being said. Luka had made me feel like, 'you can't do it. You're just a stripper'. That was what I started to feel like.

I started to be quite defensive with Mickey. I shut off. I didn't feel like I could express it to him. I didn't feel like he'd get it. And I started to feel a bit demoralised about my own work which I wasn't even focusing on anyway. So, I tried to throw myself into the motel job and just go, "right, this is

what I'll do here and I'll pick up my creative work later." I think I was in that job two months before I was breaking down; turning up to work crying and things.

Once, the police came to speak to me at my work. I can't believe they did that. I was mortified when they turned up. Mickey's Mum was saying, "what's going on? Why did they want to speak to you?" I said, "it's all right." I just brushed it off. As far as I could tell, they didn't have any idea it was because of Luka. The officer said she was coming to check up on me and, "is everything okay now?" And I said, "yes, absolutely fine. Just go away." Luka works there as well. Do they not know that? I know they didn't know that. But why do that? In front of everyone. I was mortified. I was already struggling.

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

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I was starting to get to the point where I was drinking vodka to even get to the job. Drinking at 10:30 in the morning. Or I remember sometimes going to the bottle shop as soon as it opened, at 11:00. And if I had to be at work at midday, I was necking straight vodka, because I would be shaking from the night before. I was feeling I couldn't do it. I couldn't even function in front of people. It was like I needed to be happy; to smile and be the host, and all of that. I guess I was really lost at the time. I just didn't want to fail at the job. I needed to be competent. I already wasn't doing my online work. I already didn't have any money.

I remember speaking to Luka about it. "I need to be great at this if this is what I'm going to do here." I would leave work crying to him and he would be consoling me and all these things. He'd pick me up most nights around 10pm, because I didn't want to walk. I actually feared the town too. I wasn't confident about even walking around in the dark.

One day, Mickey says, "let's all have a drink after work." Anywhere I've been in the world, I've always been part of the team, always had girlfriends. And I had none. And I'm trying to get in with the staff at the motel. I wanted to join the drinks. I'm not going to be the only one that goes, "see you". I was trying to get in with the team, because I wasn't in with the team. And that was not like me. I never didn't make friends.

So, I had a drink and it meant I wouldn't need to be picked up until later. Luka didn't pick me up that day. No, it was Ivan who picked me up. I texted Luka, "are you not here?" He said, "I'll send Ivan to pick you up." So, Ivan came to pick me up in the car because it was later. It was about 10:45pm when I got back. Ivan didn't come in. He dropped me off and I said goodbye and I walked through the door.

We had an open plan place, and Luka was just sitting in the chair across in the kitchen, and I didn't even get through the front door before he's hurling furniture at me, at the door. Bottles, smashing them. Ivan had gone and I just ran out and called the police. I couldn't even get in the house. I just wanted to come home. It wasn't like I wanted to be sitting with Mickey and all of the staff, having a drink. But if your boss is going to get you all a drink, it's important, that bonding. I was quite exhausted. I just wanted to go in, and I was met with that. I can understand now why, but I had no idea why he would be so upset. What is wrong with him? "Why are you attacking me?"

Other times he was violent I could understand. I'd have said "I don't want to drink." Or "Where's the money?" Then he'd put me in a strangulation. But this time, I haven't even had a conversation with him. I'm walking through the door. I'm expecting, "hi". He firstly wasn't there to pick me up. I knew something was wrong from that, but I just thought he must have had a drink with Ivan.

So I run out of the place, into the road and I rang the police. They came and literally said, "we're arresting him because it was

**"We're arresting him because it was only five days ago you called us last."**

only five days ago you called us last.” To me, it was three weeks. That’s what I mean. From that broken rib moment, immediately my world was upside down. So much happened, I couldn’t even follow. So, then the police came in. One was an Irish cop. I don’t know whether that made a difference. Very good response. He just removed him immediately, and I just really did feel protected. He said the timescale was five days, so that’s it, “we’re taking him away, regardless of what you want.” So, they did.

Luka came back from the police station in the morning, because he was put in cells overnight. Again, I’d had that time to calm down but I never really had time to reflect ever, because immediately the next day he would be then loving and giving, and extremely the other way. So intensely the other way, it would remind me of the person I met. So much that I would just want to be with him again; that version of him. And I wanted to get him help for his drinking and stuff. He’d get violent when he was drunk but not when he wasn’t.

In that instance, he got charged to go to court for this assault on me, or attempted assault: he didn’t even get a chance to do anything to me that time, because I’d already ran away. But being violent, smashing up the place, that was enough for the police. They charged him. It was to go to the court.

I dropped the charges because I said, “we can get help together, we can do it together.” We went to the drug and alcohol centre together. And he got all the leaflets. And we met with this guy; the counsellor. I’ve got to say, the guy probably wasn’t great. I think now Luka had no intention to change, but I can understand if you don’t gel with somebody, where he maybe didn’t want to talk to the guy or whatever. But I said, “at least we’ve got the books. We can read these books and things together.” So, that’s what I was saying. But then, after the charges and everything were dropped, he didn’t even pick up the book once. Not even once. I tried to get him to read it with me and said, “let’s go through it together and look up why this is happening to you.” But he didn’t stick to it. He didn’t even read the booklets that we had.

## He would never do anything in front of people.

I know now his violence was deliberate. He would never do anything in front of people. It was only ever when people have left, in the privacy of our house. Nothing ever happened anywhere else. But I didn’t think

that. I wasn’t thinking that way at the time. It didn’t feel like that at the time. It didn’t feel like it was deliberate. And when he was sorry it was really intensely sorry - reminding me of our hopes and dreams, reminding me of the future. And I could understand his pain. Because we had an affiliation with losing our fathers and being brought up by our Mums but Luka never even had any other man at all in his life and no siblings at all.

I had three brothers. Growing up, Mum would cook up a whole day of cooking and leave lasagne or cauliflower cheese, and we would just put it in the microwave, and I would tend to my brothers. But he didn’t have that; So, he would come home from school and money would just be left on the table for food or there would be something in the fridge for him. I thought god, that’s horrendous when I think about it. How he would come home to just a completely empty house and no father figure at all. We had each other at least.

So, hence why I wanted to keep trying with him. I saw a little boy there somewhere that was very lost. And I knew that feeling, so I really wanted to give him a chance. And why I said, “you need to get some help.” But I can understand that guy [the counsellor] wasn’t compatible with him. He was better off looking for father figures or people to talk to like Ivan. Ivan was a very strong, stable influence for him. Although Ivan is a drinker. It didn’t work for me so much when we left Ivan’s, but when we were with Ivan, it’s a very lovely, happy time.

That’s why I rung Ivan a lot at first, because I understood, Luka did listen to these stable male characters. And I was quite happy to mix with them as well. But I was getting very lost in all of this

trying to aid him. So, the charges got dropped and I think that was my turning point, that I really could see he's not trying at all. He doesn't want to try.

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

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I lost the job at the motel, because I just couldn't do it. Narelle had to let me go. Narelle is Mickey's wife and I felt I could trust her. She's a mother. A confident person. She's a manager within the company and much more competent than Mickey and she'd come into that town as a woman herself. I thought, she's with a chauvinistic partner. She must know.

Once she came and spoke to Mickey in the café and, in front of people, he had thrown something or gone to throw something at her. And she said, I'm not dealing with this, and walked off. And I thought, "God, is that how you do it? Is that how you deal with these A holes?" So, I felt I could trust her, so I opened up to her. And she goes, "is he hitting you?" Because I was trying to talk to her and she said, "what are you trying to say to me?" I said, "Yes." I said, "I'm going through this with him." And she had me in the side office to the reception, and I'm crying. She said, "you obviously can't do it. I can't have you working. You're dealing with all of these things. Maybe you just need to take a break and reflect."

I told her about the violence because I wanted to explain my performance. I couldn't believe I was losing the job over it. I said, "I need some more time. Can you just give me a chance?" And that's when she offered me housekeeping. "Look, I still want you to work with us, but I just can't have you on the front of house. I can offer you housekeeping." And I just looked at her. I was mortified. I love cleaning now, housekeeping, but to offer me that. To me, I was being told, "you're not competent. And it doesn't matter that you went through this, or you're going through this. You can't do it." I didn't leave my country to become a housekeeper. I'm a smart person who's got stuff going on, or did have. I thought, "is that what you think of me? To be a housekeeper?" I just knew I'd lost everything. I was like, "no, it's okay. It's fine. I will walk away."

That was it. And I said to myself, I'm going to go to Sydney. And I literally made the decision to leave him at that point. I said that's it. I've lost that job. I've lost that. I'm losing my mind. You're not supporting me anyway. You're being violent. You're not doing your side of the bargain. I'm not going to work in that town doing nothing, being a housekeeper.

I'd been there about six months. Six months of hell.

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It is my choice whether I am in a relationship and whether I choose to leave it. *Follow My Lead*

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I left him and went to Sydney. I got a new phone, so I turned off the phone that he had the number for. I literally tried to disconnect from him. I had loads of photoshoots lined up. I started picking that work back up. I was making really good connections with photographers. I was really starting to feel good again.

I think I was trying to process all of the things he had done and why. I don't think I wanted to chat with anyone about it. It would have been about being embarrassed about it. And I couldn't really talk about it when I didn't know what's going on. I

remember at that time going online and reading more of people's online stories and trying to work out what he was going through, and whether it was something I should work at or get out of? I remember doing that. I was doing a lot of that.

**"It's been five or six years. He did change."**

One of the most powerful stories I read was a woman who had been in this kind of relationship. Twenty-five years with her very abusive partner and then all of a sudden they were fine. She said "it's

been five or six years. He did change.” I just went, “25 years? I don’t know if I could do it.” But she said he changed. I was still very much in love with Luka at that time. So, I thought, “people can change. I can help him get through this.”

So yes, I turned the phone on. I think it was getting close to Christmas then. He had left four messages saying he was really sorry, and he really wanted to have Christmas together with me and his family and the kids in Brisbane. So, I agreed to do that. Then we had a lovely, wonderful

## I’m not going to just come back and it’s all going to be rosy.

Christmas. And we continued to have a really great time and that wonderful time lasted until Easter. I did have my birthday in that time without him, in Sydney. I excluded him from my

birthday, I guess, trying to prove to him I’m not going to just come back and it’s all going to be rosy. Because he was really, “I want to spend your birthday with you.” He had to prove himself. I remember him being very disheartened about it and I said, “no, I’m going to Sydney.” And my friend and I went to a spa retreat.

So, that break away from him I regained my strength, my power I guess. It felt good. He obviously hadn’t taken me to the point yet, where I couldn’t even stand in the house without shaking before he came home from work.

I turned the phone on because there was part of me that would forgive him because of that ‘lost boy’ pain. His pain inside.

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The abuse I have experienced in the past might be similar or different to the current or future threats I face. *Follow My Lead*

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When I came back, he came to Sydney with Mickey and we had a couple of days there before we were to do the drive back. Long drive. I’m still not over what’s happened I guess, but you know I trusted him in a way. But I’m in the car now with Mickey and him, and halfway back, it was probably about midnight or something, Mickey wants to then chat to me about my stripping. I remember thinking, “are you really going to do this now? When I’m stuck in the car, going down a motorway at 12 o’clock in the morning.” He was asking me, “have you ever stripped when you’ve been with somebody?” I remember having to hold my own with all the replies. Now I would just say, “none of your business is it?” But I just didn’t. It was midnight, in the middle of nowhere and I didn’t feel that safe when he started talking like that.

## “Have you ever stripped when you’ve been with somebody?”

It threw me back to the year before when I worked for him and I got the feeling that they were talking about sexual things, and then all of a sudden now I’m in the car with them and there is nowhere to go. I would have liked Luka’s help. He really should have said, “there’s no need to talk about this Mickey.” But he was, I got the feeling he was, pretending to be asleep. I was trying to be pleasant. I always knew I couldn’t talk to him about the creativity and things of stripping. He always had that way of thinking, “it’s prostitution,” and all of this. It was uncomfortable. I didn’t want to start expressing myself about it and I never was able to. But it just reminded me of them two together again and probably I was holding all of those thoughts of, “this isn’t right.”

Within a month of going back, I was trying to get Luka out of the house. We’d moved. We were in a new flat and I became scared of him. He hadn’t been physical again but it was very hostile in the house. I’d be cooking all day and doing all different recipes and things because now I’m literally just doing my online work in the house. I didn’t really go out. He would come home. He would just eat the food and go and sit down. There would be no conversation at all. He wouldn’t even say thank you for the food. He knew that I was experimenting with dishes and things. He would just eat like that



and then go and sit down. If we went to somebody else's house for dinner he would be all over them saying how wonderful their food is, how lovely it is and things like that. I would just be nearly choking thinking, "what's wrong with mine," and all of this kind of stuff.

It was getting very psychological because he was just not talking, I would go back and get on with my online work and then he would distract me from anything I was doing as soon as I tried to get on with it. Like coming up to me and trying to kiss me and then wanting to engage with me, but then he would see what I'm doing. I was doing webcam stuff at the time. I think I remember feeling like, "should I involve him?" So, I did. I tried to involve him in that and said that we can go on webcam together, which we did start to do and then he was very happy.

## I can remember feeling I needed to please him ... just to keep the peace.

But I can remember feeling I needed to please him all the time at this point. A lot of the time just to keep the peace. I can remember feeling it was very hostile a lot of the time, to the point that he was coming back a bit later from work and I'd then say, "where have you been?" or "what are you doing?"

This is where I started to notice I think he was on drugs because he was really changing. His behaviour was changing. He was starting to spend money and he kept interrupting my work.

He would just turn up halfway through work with a mate of his and say, "Mickey's given us the afternoon off." And they'd be off to the nearest town which was three hours away. "Are you coming?" So, I can remember not really wanting to go but I thought well that's nice. I haven't been there before, let's go.

There was a lot of times then where we would not talk for a couple of days. There would be no arguments. I just wasn't liking his behaviour and I knew I couldn't talk anymore to him, because every time in the past I tried to communicate with him, that's when he'd put his hands around my neck. He would pin me down on the bed. He would choke me. I couldn't move my head sometimes from left to right for two weeks. It was enough for me to not want to go there even. So, I just got to the point where I wasn't talking to him.

Previously, he'd come home and give me all his money and I'd put it into the account and we'd pay off people that he owed. He always owed somebody. I would do all the accounts. But now he'd blow the money that he's just earned, \$600 in the pub, those kinds of extreme things and this is money that we're supposed to be saving. So, I started to really see there is no saving with this guy. We're not going anywhere. I knew I had to work out how to leave; financially and with the visa. We hadn't received the final visa. Also, I didn't want him having marks against his name. I was very loyal. Misplaced loyalty, but at the time I still had that affiliation with him at the end of the day, and his family, and I didn't want any problems on that side of the coin I guess.

But I definitely knew I needed to get out of this now. It was at the stage where for an hour before he would come home from work, I'd be literally physically shaking. I was just drinking a lot of herbal tea at the time which was very calming. I just remember religiously thinking, "oh my god I need my herbal tea, I need the tea," and I would be pacing up and down an hour before he's coming home.

And then it escalated, considerably. He started to get extremely abusive. I think he just knew I was done, that I was leaving. He tried to smash up my laptop in this time, and I did attack him over that because that's all my work; my lifeline, my only source of income and my identity. Everything is on that laptop, and he literally had it in the air and I just threw myself at him. I ripped his shirt and everything. I said "no," and I saved him from destroying my laptop; I just remember thinking, "no, you're not doing that. No way!" I ripped it, ripped his whole top.

The next five days were so tense.

I had begun to make friends with some of the women in the library at this time. I'd gone to the library a lot of times to do my visa applications and to work. One of the women there, Ally, would also go to the swimming pool, so we saw each other a bit and we bonded.

We were getting this table from her, a wooden table. And Luka was going to pick it up with one of his friends, so I gave him Ally's number and he basically went to pick up a table. Next thing I know, she doesn't come around. I thought, oh, this is my friend, she's going to start calling in more. Then she was suddenly dispersed away. Didn't even see her at the library and things. I would say to him, "where's Ally? I wonder why Ally's not calling round?" He was just very indifferent when I asked about that.

At the time of the laptop incident, Luka and I weren't sleeping in the same room at this point, so I was making him sleep in the living room. I didn't want to be in bed with him because he wasn't sleeping. He was definitely on drugs at this point and he was going to work still in the morning, but he was staying up all night and he was keeping me up all night.

So, I would start to sleep and then he would blare the TV up really loud. We only had partition walls in the flat so everything was very, very noisy. So, I would come out. "Please can you turn it down," and it would be this whole look he had. He wasn't grabbing me or anything, but I could feel the threat. So, two days of that, me asking. The third day I remember I just knew not to even ask anymore. So, I was trying to just lie there without saying anything, and I would finally drop off to sleep and then he would turn up the volume again. All night he was doing this volume thing. To the point that when he would go to work, that was when I was able to sleep. So, I would sleep most of the day over this three-day period.

I was really getting very stressed and starting to feel very nervous about what's coming next. I finally somehow saw Ally, and I said to her, "I need to leave him." This has been happening over this last couple of days, I don't know what's going to happen next. I'm very fearful about it. I can't sleep even.

Then she showed me this text message from him, that he had basically put himself on her when he'd gone to collect the table. I said why didn't you tell me? She said "well, I didn't know what to do". But anyway, she said, "thank God you've come forward. I'm going to help you." She arranged with this local guy that I could stay at his place, because I was starting to make the steps. She actually dropped me off at the house, this was the fourth day. She said, "I don't think it's safe for you to go back in there." I said no, "I think it's okay." I'm still saying, it's okay. It wasn't. She obviously could hear it wasn't going to be okay. So, she wanted me to have somewhere to go. She told me that two doors down from where I lived were her friends; I could go into that yard and call the police.

**"I don't think it's safe for you to go back in there."**

The police had been called twice since we had been in this new house. I wasn't going into any centres or anything for help. I knew there was a refuge, but there's just one in the whole town. It's mainly Aboriginal people in it and considering Luka was very affiliated with Aboriginal members of the community, and me being from overseas with no one else, it didn't feel like it would be safe or helpful. I was definitely speaking to 1800RESPECT at this time from that house.

So, I had this guy's house that Ally found for me. I had never spoken to this guy in my life before, but he seemed extremely safe, and we told him the situation. He said, "there is absolutely no way I will say anything." I could feel I could trust him and Laura assured me, "Jack is absolutely solid."

So, we had that setup, and she dropped me back home that day and because it was escalating considerably, I packed a bag and left it where I could easily grab it, knowing that I could go to Jacks. I didn't intend to do it in the night, that night. I mean it was definitely a get-out bag but I really didn't think it was going to escalate like it did.

That night, he burst into the bedroom and started laying out these cut pieces of the top which I'd ripped earlier when he tried to smash my laptop, but now they were in little pieces. He had cut them up and put them on the bed in front of me. Then he said, "you could use this outfit online. How about this for an outfit?" I was just thinking, "oh my god, he's going to bash me over my work now." It was the fact that he'd cut them up into little pieces.

I could tell for sure he was on ice and I knew he hadn't slept for now, five or six days solid. I know already what that meant, that sleep deprivation, and I could just feel it in my body, feeling really, really scared. But he left. He left and he went out that door, and I lay down on the bed. And as I was lying on the bed he came back in through the other door, with now strips around his face like a jihadi, and he's ranting about Muslims. That's when I knew: I just grabbed the bag and I ran. It was one o'clock in the morning. I ran down to the neighbour's house like Ally said. I called the police from there, and the police picked me up. They asked me what had happened. I expressed to them what happened. They said they could take me to a safe house and I said, "I've already got one and can you drop me there?"

I stayed away for two weeks in this apartment of Jacks that was being renovated. It was very dusty. Luka wouldn't leave the house, he wasn't leaving. I was paying for the house still. I was paying the bills, even though I'm not there.

I had arranged a photoshoot with a woman from Sydney that was scheduled two weeks later. Her husband and her were travelling the desert and this shoot had been arranged for three months so I really wanted to do this photoshoot with her. But obviously, now I'm not in the house so I hadn't even been able to get in and get my makeup and all those things. I knew Luka goes to work at 8:30 and they were due to pick me up at half-past eight. So I said, "change the time, can you come a quarter to nine?" I still hadn't told them that I'm not actually in the house, but I obviously knew after half eight I could get into the house, get the stuff. They're going to have to wait a bit. I'll explain to them when I arrive.

Anyway, we all met at the house and because I had noted things on the calendar inside the house, Luke could see it was on and didn't go to work that day. And as I'm going into the house, he comes out of the front door. Just glaring. So, I literally stopped. I wasn't going in. There's no back entrance to the apartment. Once you're in the property, you can't get out. There was no way I was going in the property at all. So, I was stopped in my tracks and then they turned up. So, I just had to say, "I'm really sorry but we're going to go to my hairdresser friend." So, they came with me to the hairdressers. They went and got a coffee and I was able to borrow a bit of makeup from my hairdresser.

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I anticipate and respond to threats and risks wherever I go, with whoever I meet and whatever I do. *Follow My Lead*

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Finally, Luka left. He said, "you can have the house, I'm going." I found out later he decided to leave the house on Mark's word. I think Mark had a word with him saying, "she can really do you. You just better leave and just leave her with the place. You need to just abide by things because you're not in a good position."

He left, walking out with the television. I didn't care, I really didn't care. It was great. I just was so happy that he was leaving. I'd spent weeks inside of that apartment full of dust with my asthma.

I was on heightened awareness then. I don't think I was feeling safe because he could come back at any time. At least I could lock doors and things. But there was a window exposed. If the window was smashed, then he could get through that window. But I did understand the response of the police was quick at this point so that did make me feel secure.

After about three or four weeks I think, we closed our joint bank account. I said, "let's meet, let's close our joint account" because I'm definitely not going back with him. So, we did that and we went

to have a drink together. He was quite out of it but very calm with me. It looked like he was on heroin or something. His eyes were very pinned. I asked him if he was on heroin and he said “no, it’s methadone.” Then the whole time we were sitting down chatting he’s literally lying on my shoulder crying and just saying he really needs me and he doesn’t want to live and all of these things.

## “You’re not coming back to the house but I can be there for you from afar.”

and saying it’s emotional blackmail, just break away. So, I could see that he’s probably trying to do this with me because I had a big thing about suicide. So, I remember saying, “you’re not coming back to the house but I can be there for you from afar.”

I do know about that with my father. I do understand the emotional blackmail of that because my brother went through that with a partner and she would go to the top of high-rise buildings and try to throw herself off. I remember mum counselling my brother a lot at the time

He had assaulted a taxi driver at this point. He’d gone to Brisbane with Ivan for a job and down there he had assaulted a taxi driver and he had court for that. I remember wanting him to really have a chance to change. So, I said I will stand there with him for support in the court, not as a character witness, but just stand there in the court; just be present as support. So, we spoke about that.

And we chatted about there being some months left for the visa evaluation. At that point I had said, “I just need six months.” I think six months is a good time for him to turn things around and let’s evaluate it in six months. I said, “I can be there for you but I need six months for you to turn things around.” There was a bit longer than that left on the visa evaluation and he said, “let’s keep going as normal, as if we’re together, so you can at least get your visa.”

I think it was the following week he had to be in court. So, I booked us a hotel in Brisbane because it’s an overnight bus and you arrive at 6:00am in the morning and then it’s the following day his court case, not that day.

He came round for coffee round to the house the day before. This is a week after we closed the account. So, I’ve kept my distance from him considerably. And he came round for coffee and then he tried to stay, he wanted to stay. “We’re going on the bus together so can I stay here the night and

## I got on the bus and I then sat in a separate seat.

counter, so I was like, “right, that’s it.” But I still wanted to stick to my word about being there so I turned up at the bus the next day. He was at the bus. I got on the bus and I then sat in a separate seat. We sat separately the whole journey in the morning.

then we’ll go tomorrow?” I said, “no you’re not.” And he slammed his fist down on the counter. I’m now in the kitchen by the counter. He slammed his fist and just stormed out, thankfully. But I was in the kitchen behind the

I had the hotel booked and he just walked off from the bus terminal dragging his suitcase. So, I got an early check-in and I rang him from the hotel and said, “come to the hotel, I’ve got an early check-in.” We’re passed talking about things now. He just thanked me. He was very grateful and he was being very calm. You know, I’ve left him, so there was no need to talk to me about the slamming on the table, there’s no talking about the relationship. He’s just very calm. He’s very happy to be in the hotel. We then went for dinner that evening, watched a movie in the hotel room. Fell asleep round about ten, and the next morning about half three, four in the morning, I remember I’m sleeping facing the window. All the lights come on in the room and he was up, going to the bathroom. He’s turned all the lights on by mistake. It’s normal to do, but he had gone into the bathroom and left them all on and I just said, “could you please turn the lights off?” I’m fine that he’s turned them on, but can you just turn them off?

With that, he turned them off, but launched on the bed, grabbed me in a headlock, dragged me across the bed from behind, flipped me over and started to strangle me in the dark on the bed in

Brisbane. I didn't think he was going to stop. He did for some reason. He just stopped, And I just leapt up. Screaming. And he also went to the other side of the room. He was by the window now saying, "I'm going to kill you, I'm going to kill you." I said, "I will fucking kill you," and I got myself out of the hotel room. I was just in knickers and I've gone into the corridor and I was screaming and he literally grabbed his case and left the hotel room. He left before anyone arrived, but he was pretty shaken up too.

He said, "I'm going to kill you," not like a threat, more like he realised what he was about to do. I think he was not liking his feelings at all. He seemed quite shaken and just grabbed his bag. He grabbed his things to remove himself from the situation.

## I didn't say who had been with me as he had court that day for assaulting a taxi driver.

The hotel staff came up. They called the police, the police came to the hotel. Yet again I didn't want to talk. I didn't say my name, I didn't say who had been with me as he had court that day for assaulting a taxi driver. And they left.

I couldn't believe he stopped that time. There was no way I could move. I couldn't move and I thought I was going to die. I thought I was gone, but he stopped for whatever reason. He was chatting to my brother a lot. Whether it's my family, whether it was the fact he had court, whether it was the fact we were in a hotel with cameras. I don't know. But he had some word to stop, thank god.

Then that was the last contact I had with him. I didn't go to court. I didn't go with him.

Luckily within a few weeks after that, he met someone else. Somebody who just strolled into town. Vivian. Which was great, he left me alone all of a sudden. My brother contacted me and said they were all over Facebook together. So, I'm like, wow, well that's not helpful for me with the visa. I'm now lying because I haven't notified immigration. But I just needed to stay safe, so I couldn't even deal with that side of things at that time.

The internet was in his name because of driver's licence issues - I didn't have an Australian licence so it needed to be done with an Australian licence. So, the internet was in his name. I was paying for it. The bills were in joint name. The rent was in joint name. So, we kept all that going.

He cancelled my internet when I went away to a festival. I'd put it on Facebook that I was going to this three-day festival. And literally that day he cancelled it. I came back to no internet. It was going to cost me \$600 to start it back up. It took me hours to sort that out. I expressed to them I'm the one who has always paid with my card, so I am the one talking to you. Regardless of what it says on the main account, we only did that because of the driver's licence I didn't have. As you can see, I pay the bill, so can you just reinstate it. All you need to do is get the technician in. I'm not paying all the fees again. It was going to be \$600.

As a result of that I started to fear about social media. So, I got in contact with my brother. Luka wasn't on my Facebook, but he is through my brother. That's how he was able to see I'd left town. That's when I said to my brother, "can you delete him. Just block him." I don't want him having any contact to our lives at all. So, that's when my brother did that immediately.

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I might have no contact with the person abusing me but know I will (or may) be unsafe if found. *Follow My Lead*

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After about 10 months or something I had heard nothing from him which was amazing. So, now I'm just going about my daily life not thinking about him at all. I'm working in a restaurant in one of the



hotels. I would park my little car outside. There's no need to hide anything. I'm up in the restaurant. Depending on whether it's busy or not I can sometimes finish at 10:00 pm.

I think this was a busy night. Came downstairs with the manager and I walked into the bar. We would always clock off at the bar and sometimes have a drink in the bar. Come down into the bar, he's in the bar. I said to her, oh my ex-partner's here. I don't know whether I had said anything to her, but she just looked over and she goes, oh he doesn't scare me.

I hadn't seen him in a long time and I could see he was pretty drunk and I just had this feeling like I don't know. It was just a horrible feeling. Bit of a shocked feeling. The barman told me, "he has been in here since 3:30pm."

I sat with her at the bar. She came and sat next to me and we looked away, just at the bar, the barman. But there's a mirror, so you can see behind. Then he comes up to me and he's putting his arm around me. And he said to me "I've been waiting for you to finish work." So, he'd seen my car and stayed in that bar for the whole time I was on shift. And he's putting his arm around me from behind but then just leaning on my shoulder. It kind of felt good as well.

But the bar was very busy with people and I didn't want to cause any problems and then he started to ask for me to take him home. So, he said, "can I come home with you," and I said "no." I said anyway, "you're with Vivian." He said that doesn't matter. She wasn't anywhere to be seen. I found out later she had left town. I don't know why but I had my suspicions.

I say no and next thing he starts a fight in the bar and it all escalates to go outside. The police were called. They grabbed him to the floor. Pushed him in very, very strong holds, down into the ground. Put his head into the dirt and had him from behind and they were standing on him and he was squealing out. I just ran over and I was like "please don't hurt him," then they threw him in the van.

**"Oh, great taste in men you have."**

One of the group of people he said, "oh great taste in men you have," and they all left. I was not pushing him off me at the bar is because I don't want to be bashed and he knows where I live. Clearly, Vivian is not in town and I need to be safe tonight. So, I was obviously being attentive to him. But that was the response I had from him. I wanted to lash out and say, "whatever" but I was also with the group of younger people that I was working with and that I had kind of got friendly with now and I didn't want to be abusive or anything, so I just let it go.

## I was protecting him to protect myself.

Then I went back and sat in the bar. I needed a drink. The police then came in again and wanted to search my bag. They had lost the keys for the police car, the patrol car. I think they took him in one of the cage cars and they lost the other keys and they thought that I had them in my bag.

They weren't any police that I had dealt with before because the police change every two to four years in that town, so by now these are police I don't know. They just obviously saw me running over to him and then they've lost the keys in this scuffle and now thought that I may have the keys so I straight away, obviously, showed them that I don't. But then after that comment from that other guy, and then feeling like I've taken the keys, I then was totally now feeling completely misunderstood again about why I was protecting him in the first place. I was protecting him to protect myself.

After that I started to hide my car again. And I was trying to find out in town where he was. Is Vivian back? Because I could gauge that he would leave me alone if Vivian's back or whatever. And then people said, "oh he's left to go to Darwin." But I still didn't really trust it. I even asked my brother at this point to check as well. To go online to check; unblock him and check. My brother said, "I've spoken to him and he says he's in Darwin." Other people had also said he'd left town. So, he'd been released from the station and gone immediately.

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

*Follow My Lead*

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When he and Vivian got married, I had that to deal with in the town because then I was the problem. It was always portrayed as, “oh look, he’s amazingly happy with Vivian,” kind of thing. Like the problem was me. Anybody that we did have an affiliation with, like Ivan or the next-door neighbour, it was always also the conversation about Luka and Vivian. So, I couldn’t get away from it.

I stayed there partly because I wanted people to see who I was. I wanted to prove my character in town. And on a spiritual level, the town was very dear to me as well. It still is. I wasn’t going to burn bridges because I wanted to be able to go back. I didn’t want to leave like that - for that to be people’s view of me, I guess. Plus, there was the visa, and I had no money to go. So, there were a lot of things going on.

A couple of different people told me how he does talk about women. One went into graphic detail about what Luka said he did with Vivian when he first met her. I went, “oh lovely, wonderful.” It was a real shock that I’d been with someone that disgusting. Then I wanted to tell her (Vivian), I really did. But I knew there’s no way that she would believe me at that moment, when I thought about his manipulation.

I kept thinking about what he used to say about his ex before me and realised how he was probably now portraying me. I was thinking “how can I prove that to be wrong?” That’s what I was trying to do. I couldn’t outright go up and say “he’s done this, he’s done that.” More to make what he’s saying not make sense, I guess.

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I may experience supportive, unsupportive or oppressive systems or environments. *Follow My Lead*

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I told Immigration that I had left him because of domestic violence and it’s been going on ever since. I am on a bridging visa, working towards a provisional. I asked for legal aid and I couldn’t get legal aid so then I was trying, with healing, trying to do it myself. The immigration caseworker hasn’t helped. She would take weeks to reply to me. But this one time I got her name wrong and she replied immediately and said in future, “I would appreciate it if you would get my name right.”

**“I would appreciate it if you would get my name right.”**

When I started to get this harshness from the immigration, it just said ‘you’re not being believed and supported at all in any way, shape or form.’ I was really quite... I just hit the bottle. That was my general response whenever I got some of these emails from her. I spent a lot of time drinking. I drank a lot. That’s when I was like, “I actually can’t do this, I need professional help.”

By this point because I had left the relationship a considerable amount of time, I went into the domestic violence centre in town and started to speak to them about where I could help and things, and I think that was the start of a turnaround because I was having no counselling or anything from this, and so that was really nice and I finally got put onto a doctor there. I saw him only twice before I left town. But it was a start. I started to get help at least.

So the centre was very supportive. Half of me was regretting not going in there immediately because they were very supportive but I just didn’t feel that it was a trusted place at the time because of how he had made me feel, so I take back about the safehouse thing but at the time I really didn’t feel any of it was going to be safe.

I also went to work with the ambulance service as a volunteer. I put myself on shift from 8:00pm to 6:00am on-call. I was on-call with a pager. That stopped me drinking. It was a great thing that I managed to stop drinking from that because you can’t drive an ambulance drunk. Then I was going

to these places myself. So, I dealt with another of Luka's friends abusing his wife, Deidre. He actually took an axe to her shoulder, dragged her through the streets by her hair. He wouldn't see me respond because he would be gone, but he was abusing Deidre so I was able to chat to her.

I didn't make it common knowledge that I was working for the ambulance. So, I was able to then start to secretly report domestic violence that I was noticing from different people's houses or people I was affiliated to. I made a few different reports, and the police would take my report seriously and ring me back for info and things. Sometimes I would call in to the safehouse.

It has changed me. It's grown me. Even with relationships with females and things. Now, there's zero tolerance. I can pick people now very quickly. I had a lot of abusive female friends too before him. I only have wonderful people in my life now. Male and female so it's good.

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### Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange (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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### Handle with dignity

You have been reading a carefully assembled excerpts of peoples lived experience of domestic and family violence. These are not simply another 'story', 'sample' or 'case study'.

Whilst consent has been obtained to share these accounts we ask that as the custodian of these copies that you uphold the dignity of the people who shared them as you distribute and store them. 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
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Disclaimer: This Voices of Insight is a carefully assembled excerpt of a person's lived experience of domestic and family violence. Details of this person's identity 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, DVSM assumes no responsibility for how the resource is used by other parties.

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