



His money pretty much went to gambling. The majority of the time my pay went to the mortgage and paid all the bills and all the food. There were times where my pay would pay the mortgage, and there'd be \$100 left. He'd go, "there's \$80 for me and \$20 for you." So, me and the kids lived on minced meat and sausages. He would always say "look, I've only hit you a handful of times. It's not abuse. What are you talking about?"

Maya

* THIS NARRATIVE INCLUDES DESCRIPTIONS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE. *

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.

MAYA

Ben was my first partner. Even before I met him, he used to jig school to gamble, so I always knew he had a gambling problem. We met at high school and after we finished high school we embarked on a relationship. Within three months I was pregnant with the twins. So we moved in and lived together straight away. I hadn't had any experiences in relationships and didn't know what a relationship was meant to be like.

The first abusive behaviour was when I was pregnant and he hit me. He was upset about something and he pushed me into a cupboard. At that point I was like, "oh god." I knew I was pregnant but I hadn't told him yet, but I was planning to tell him. And in my head I was like, "you know what, if it doesn't work out we'll just be friends. I'll just walk away."

Ben's Dad recommended an abortion. He was a beautiful, beautiful man. He said, "You guys are really, really young. Have you thought about termination?" And so we booked it in. But I went into the room to do it, and I just couldn't; I walked out. Ben agreed, so, we decided not to. And then we ring his Dad and we're like, "we're having twins." And he was like, "oh my god." Because he knew his son, and he knew Ben's gambling habits, and he knew the relationship Ben had with his Mum. He knew his son.

My parents were very, very upset. They're European and they've got Catholic values and they thought I was always going to be the one who was going to amount to something: I was a smart kid, I was the one that was really studious. So getting pregnant at 18 wasn't the best.

Ben had shown signs of violence - signs of his behaviour - very early. But I didn't really know how to respond. For example, I went and bought him a flower, a sunflower, for Valentine's Day and we had a fight. And he threw the flower in front of my house, in front of my parents, and drove over it. He was very, 'dramatic' is the word. Very dramatic.

When we had the kids we floated from renting, to my parents' house, back to renting, to my parents' house. I guess being so young we hadn't set ourselves up. When we lived with my parents, Ben would say he'll mow the lawn to help my Mum out. And he would have gambled all his money, so he went to my Mum and he said, "can you give me money for mowing your lawn? Can you pay me for mowing your lawn?" So they didn't like him. They were thinking, "you're living in our house, you're not paying rent, you're asking us to pay you because you mowed my lawn?!" They didn't say that, but they thought that. Mum paid him. She just wanted to keep the peace too.

I had a big group of girlfriends that I was super close with, however they turned on me. They saw the way he used to verbally abuse me, and then I confided in them when he hit me. After a while they were like, "we can't support this. You need to get out and if you choose not to then we just don't want to be around you, we can't be around you." So then I was caught in this battle between him and my girlfriends. My answer to them was "I've got a family and I've got twins with him. You're

"You need to get out and if you choose not to then we can't be around you."

making me choose between my friends and my family and I can't make that choice." So, I never saw them again. It was very hard because we were a close group, really close.

When the kids started primary school my parents gave us a block of land down the coast in the same village as their holiday house, the land was right beside theirs, and they said "you can build your house there." We lived in my Mum and Dad's house for quite a while prior to the house being built, and there'd be holes in the walls from him punching the wall close to my head. Not enough to get me, but just close enough to scare me. My Dad would fix it because Ben was never very handy. And I'd always cover up that something happened. It was just brushed off.

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

Finally, we built the house on the coast. We thought it was a good place for the kids to grow up; a nice little country town. So we went and lived there in time for the kids to start primary school. And that's where a bit of consistency came in. I started working full time and he was smoking pot; he wasn't working. He'd worked when we were in Brisbane and when we came down the coast, I applied for a job in a club and I got it. It was full time. So we just went with that. And he said, "you've got the job. You work. I'll look after the kids." And in essence, he didn't. I still got up, did all the housework, did all the cooking.

That was my life. I'd get up, take the kids to school, get them on the bus, go for a run, get his newspaper and his 'V' energy drink. He would still be asleep. He'd wake up. First things he would do is have three bongs, get up. Then his priority was getting the paper and his 'V', and he'd work out his bets for the day. He'd have his budget and he'd work out his bets for the day and he'd have his marijuana. I would clean the house, cook dinner for the kids that night, do the washing, get dressed, and go to work. I would work night shifts from three in the afternoon till about twelve or one o'clock in the morning. My life was just a treadmill. I wasn't even living, to be honest. I was just in survival mode.

I didn't tell my parents what was going on. I guess they knew a bit. They knew I was trying, but I didn't tell them anything. There was a moment once when the kids were young maybe about four or five, and my Dad tried to hit Ben. They were in their holiday house next door and I think we were having a fight in the house. They must have heard us fighting. So, my Dad came over with a stick. "Don't you hurt my daughter." Ben's very tough in front of me, but in front of other people, he's super weak. He doesn't like confrontation. He turns to jelly, so he's saying. "I didn't do anything mate, don't hurt me. Don't hurt me." So, it looks like my Dad's the aggressor. That's the way it would always turn. The twins were very, very upset about that. They cried and said, "don't hurt my daddy," and that broke my Dad's heart. He was very adamant that he'd scarred the girls. So, he never, ever said or did anything like that again. Ben would always say, "look, I've only hit you a handful of times. It's not abuse. What are you talking about?" But it was more him standing over me; there was a lot of him standing over me, screaming at me.

"Don't hurt my daddy."

He was taking drugs every day and he gambled. And his depression got heavier and the abuse then became more frequent. If he won, he was super happy gambling. And if he lost, he would be really depressed, really sad, angry, and jealous. Because I was going out to work every day and he was just stuck in this place that he didn't like.

Often he'd get to a point where he'd be like "yes, I'm depressed, I need to start working, I've got to get out of this slump." What would happen then, is I would quit my job, so I could look after the kids while he worked. And he would last a week.

That happened multiple times. I got him multiple jobs in the area. I got him a job in my club and they fired him because he got into arguments with colleagues that had been there forever, so he got fired. That didn't work. I got him jobs as a cleaner and as other things and he got anxiety and I'd have to

call in sick for him. He was always very bloody dramatic. Once when he got his old job back at the security facility up in Brisbane where he used to work, he failed a drug test. So he came back and he didn't have a job; I had quit my job, so we were up shit creek. So then I started working at this icecream shop in a nearby town and I worked at the general store in our village, just to cover the mortgage repayments. And I was catching high school buses and I was doing all those sorts of things. It was awful. And eventually from the icecream shop in the mall there was another retail store, they gave me a job to be store manager. And then my old employer from the club, they loved me, so they were like, "come back, come back." So then I ended up getting my job back and then going to a higher position, which was good.

The person committing the abuse ... may steal, control or undermine my finances. *Follow My Lead*

Ben and his Mum were very, very close. She was also a big part of the relationship. She knew everything. He confided in her a lot. Ben borrowed a lot of money from his mother. I'd go to my bank account and there's nothing in there and I'll be like, "there's nothing in the account. We've got no money, how are we going to pay bills?" He'd say, "Don't worry, don't worry, I'll sort it out." And he would always get money from his Mum. Then he'd get to a point where he'd spent a lot of his Mum's money and he'd go, okay, we need to refinance and pay her back. So we'd add another \$50,000 to the home loan and he'd pay his Mum back and there'd be some more money for us and he'd be like, "okay, so we've got savings now, keep that in the savings," but it would never last.

We got the land for free and we built the house for like \$140,000. And then the housing boom happened, and the price of real estate went up, so we just refinanced and refinanced. I paid every single mortgage payment. But eventually got to the point where we probably owed more than the house was worth.

If I'd try to have a conversation about money, it would end up becoming a fight. I'd say, "why did you do that? You can't be spending that much" And he'd always say, "you've done this as well, so you're partly to blame," because I used to smoke a bit of pot too. Sometimes he'd ask me to ask my parents for money. I would hate it. I used to get such anxiety. I would ring my parents and go, "can I borrow \$200 or \$1,000 or \$500 or \$2,000?" And because they love me and I have the kids, they would always say "yes." And he knew that. But it was more me. I hated it. I couldn't do it. But he would be like, "I've asked my Mum for so much money. It's your turn now. We've got so much money off my mother. You'll never be able to pay her back," putting the responsibility on me about the money.

His money pretty much went to gambling. The majority of the time, my pay went to the mortgage, and paid all the bills, and all the food. There were times when we were living down the coast where my pay would pay the mortgage, and there'd be \$100 left. He'd go, "there's \$80 for me and \$20 for you." So, me and the kids lived on minced meat and sausages. Because minced meat, two kilos, you could have four meals out of that, and with your sausages, you could then do the rest of the meals.

He was always so full of drama; It became so that it wasn't worth fighting him.

And that was because of the gambling. He wasn't earning any money, so he had to win to have money, which he never did.

I ended up just going with it. He was always so full of drama; it became so that it wasn't worth fighting him on it because he always managed to have a way to turn it into being my fault. I don't know how we got there, but then I would be apologising to him. I just don't know how that works. I felt trapped. I felt like I couldn't leave him because I was the one who worked. And if I worked, I worked nights, so who was going to look after the kids? And if I didn't work, I couldn't pay the mortgage, and what the hell was I going to do? There's no way I was going to go home. That would have been like that feeling of failure. That was not even an option.

I felt like I needed to shut up and just get on with the job. I'd already gotten to the point where I've lost friends. And I think I kind of stayed to please my parents, to show them that I could create the family unit and be a success in that form. Because my parents had such big ideals for me as a child. When I didn't go to uni and didn't get the good career, and I'd had the kids, I had to succeed in my marriage. That's what I could do; the family thing.

We got pregnant again when the kids were in primary school, so they would have been about six or seven. I got pregnant again, and I knew I didn't want another child with him. So, I decided to have an abortion. He wasn't happy about it. He said, "I'll look after the child. I'll look after the child." But I knew I couldn't do it. So, he agreed. We got the abortion, and then he became really nasty to me afterwards. "You chose this. How dare you make this choice without me."

I had a six-week-after or a four-week after check at the family planning clinic. I remember she checked me, and she was like, "how are you?" Poor lady. I broke down, verbal diarrhoea about everything that was going on. I didn't tell her about the abuse, just the fact that he didn't contribute, and I was so alone, so alone and no one knew. But I knew that I didn't want a child with him. And she

It was good because she brought the counsellor in, and we got to talk about it.

was like, "oh my god, I'm going to bring a counsellor in right now." She brought the counsellor in, and I started talking to her. And she was like, "honey, you're the full-time worker down there." You've already got twins with him. He doesn't work. He doesn't contribute. There is no way you could have had this child. She's just like, "it's okay." One-hundred per cent, I knew that I was not going to have a child with him. And the only person I could talk

to was some lady doing the cervical check on me. But it was good because she brought the counsellor in, and we got to talk about it. She reassured me that I had made the right decision. She said, "what were you going to do? How were you going to look after the child? You can't do it." That was really helpful because I'd gone through a really traumatic experience, and I had to deal with what I'd done, personally. But it was good. I felt good afterwards. It was good to have that opportunity. I think I always felt like my abuse wasn't that bad. I don't know if that makes sense. It's probably why I never went to any services or anything because I felt like it wasn't bad enough.

Most of the time, when we'd have an argument over money it would start off because of the gambling. There were times when it would get so bad and he was so physically aggressive, I would just lose my shit and start screaming at him, "fuck off; just get away from me." I would scream, and that would snap him out of it. But he'd snap out of it, and he would go, "oh my god. What have I done? What have I done?" And then it would be, "that's it. I'm going to kill myself. That's it. I'm going to kill myself. I'm going to do it." He'd go upstairs. He'd grab his bags. And then he'd pack his bag, and he'd get in the car, and be like, "I'm going to go and kill myself now." And then he'd ring me as he's driving. "I'm on the bridge, and I'm just going to drive off this bridge now." Then it would be all about calming him down, "all right, come back. It's okay."

"That's it. I'm going to kill myself. I'm going to do it."

I didn't have time to worry about what had just happened to me because now he says he's going to kill himself. And he's been yelling, so all the neighbours have heard, and it's a really small town. So now I'm worried about how he feels because if he goes outside someone might say something to him and I don't want him to feel bad so then I can't worry about what's just happened to me. I console him and I have to be nice to him and I have to make sure he's okay so he doesn't kill himself. So then it just goes in circles.

I am always aware of the actual and possible responses of others, from professionals to my friends and family members. *Follow My Lead*

There were times where people tried to help, but I got angry and defensive because I didn't want them to know and I felt like I had to protect him. It was really strange.

There was a lot of banging, screaming, and the neighbours knew. They all knew and I found out later they were so worried because they would just hear him yelling at me, and then they would hear bangs and then they'd come into the house and they'd see a hole in the wall. Because he used to do that a lot. Rather than beat me up he would get right in my face and then 'bang', but he'd bang the wall. He didn't do it in front of the kids – not when they were older. But I'm sure they heard the fighting.

Yes, so I think there was a lot of talk around the town. One lady said something to him at a party and he was mortified. He came home and he was super upset. And I got very angry at her and I said, "don't you ever say anything to him. How could you do that to him? You know what he's like. He's not comfortable in this town, he's struggling." And she apologised, she ended up apologising.

I got super protective of him and really defensive. I guess it was partly the shame. I didn't want anyone to know. And I guess that stems from probably confiding in certain people and them turning their back on me. I just felt like I couldn't do it. There was nothing positive to be gained from that.

Another occurrence when I was still down the coast and I had a black eye and I had to go to work and I'd use the excuse that the kids had thrown a toy in my face. They knew it wasn't true and one of the security guards was like, "we know what's going on, seriously." And again, I got so angry with him. Told him he didn't know what he was talking about and how dare he make these accusations.

One of my close friends that I grew up with came and knocked on the door and he was like, "you're not okay, what's going on? Come with me." And I told him to fuck off and leave me alone because nothing was wrong and that I never wanted to see him again. I shut the door in his face, and I didn't see him again for maybe 10 years. When I did see him again it was much later, after I'd separated from Ben and I was quite emotional and I apologised to him. I actually thanked him because he was one of the very few who reached out to me, even though I wasn't ready at the time to take that hand. I was really thankful that he had that strength to come to me and try and help me, even though I couldn't. So, yes, we hugged. We cried a little bit. I was grateful to him for trying.

I had my work colleagues, and my work was my escape.

I think being isolated from everybody and living in this small town. My family weren't around. I had no girlfriends, no group of friends. I had my work colleagues, and my work was my escape. But there was no time for me to really engage with anybody. I worked, I came home, I slept, I got up, took the kids to school like everybody does, cleaned the house, got everything ready, then went to work again. So, it was like it was Groundhog Day. There was no time.

Where I am ... changes the risks I face and the responses I can expect to receive. *Follow My Lead*

After 13 years together, Ben and I got married and moved to Brisbane. The kids had finished Year Six, so they're now 12 or 13 and about to start high school. So, we got married after 13 years. We got married the week after he told me that he cheated on me. He said "But it's okay, that was 13 years ago and I've never done anything since. I've spoken to my Mum, she's understanding of that, so you have to be too."

So, we ended up still getting married. We moved back to Brisbane. We rented a place. I got a job at my previous work where I used to work in Brisbane, in another club. He started working again, which was good for him, and the kids started high school. That was the beginning of the end for us.

That was the beginning of the end because I was around my family again. I started to go to the gym. Where we lived on the coast was a three-street town. So, there was nothing. And you come back to Brisbane and there are things to do: I can go to the shops, I can go to the gym. So, he started to lose that grip, the control. Because I would see my family more often, I would be working, and I started to get promoted at work as well. People came into my life again, and I was a little bit more ready to hear them.

I had two older ladies that I worked with at the club and they're still dear friends now. They used to be in the office, and they would hear the phone calls. They would hear him yelling and screaming at me. He would come into work, and people would say, "she's not here. You need to leave her alone." He would start infiltrating my workplace. He would come into my work and gamble. He would tell my work colleagues not to tell me because he didn't want me to know. He'd tip them \$50, \$100. They were scared to tell me, so they wouldn't tell me, or at least, they'd end up telling me after the fact.

But these two ladies had both come out of some hard relationships, and they were like, "Maya, you're still so young. Get out now while you can. Don't leave it too late. We were in our fifties and sixties when we left." These ladies saw the same behaviours, the controlling behaviours, and they were like, "You've still got time." I was like, "yes, yes, but I can't do it, I can't do it." And they were like, "yes you can, yes you can."

"Get out now while you can. Don't leave it too late. We were in our fifties and sixties when we left."

He didn't like me going to the gym. He would call me a man; saying I'd start to look like a man by working out. He'd tell me I was ugly. Then I met this lovely guy at the gym; Ed. He was a beautiful man, and he was so nice to me. Ben thought there was something happening, and he would be waiting at the gym for me when I got out. And Ed was like, "this is not normal behaviour, Maya. That's kind of weird." Other times, Ed would take me to the café for a coffee, and this was behaviour I'd never, ever experienced before. I was like, "wow, oh my god." And he was like, "this is what people do. You go to cafés, and you have coffees, and you have lunches. Don't you do that?" I was like, "no." He said, "this is normal behaviour, and the behaviour from your partner is really weird." I confided in him. And he didn't turn his back on me. He would text me to make sure I'm okay. We would secretly meet at the gym and he was like, "are you okay? What's happening?"

At the same time, I had another friend who was not happy in a relationship, and he left his wife, and he ended up finding the love of his life. I remember he rang me from London. He was living in England with this new person and he was so happy. I remember getting off the phone, and I was like, "fuck, you did it! Now you're happy." And I was like, "I'm still here. I haven't changed. I haven't left. I haven't done it." So, it was all starting to build up.

The gambling was still happening; there were those two women who really opened my eyes to the fact that, yes, maybe I could leave; and then there were two actions, I think the last two, that probably tipped the balance.

Ben had started to get more aggressive and nastier. It was mean. It was hurtful. He would break things of mine. Anything that was important to me, he would break. If we'd have a fight, he would throw all my clothes out the front. I used to love Bob Marley. And because we were so poor, I didn't have much. So, those little things, like a Bob Marley CD or something, were really, really important to me. He would say, "you like this?" And break it in front of me. And he'd say, "I want you to hurt as much as I'm hurting right now. You need to hurt like I'm hurting."

"I want you to hurt as much as I'm hurting."

He was starting to take cocaine, and he would want me to. We'd have nights of cocaine together. He was starting to get addicted to that as well, and I didn't want to do that anymore. We re-financed again. I think we were at \$190k, and we had to re-finance to \$240k. He gave his Mum \$40,000 or something to pay her back and then he gave me \$5,000 and he had \$5,000. And he was like, "that's it. There's no more. That's it. I'm not going to gamble anymore. I'm going to be really good."

I may be threatened, intimidated or coerced into doing things against my will.

Follow My Lead

At this stage, I was training heaps. I had lost a lot of weight. I was feeling confident. I was really happy with myself. And then he spent that \$5,000 in about a day. And then he came home, and he goes, "I need you to give me your key card." And I was like, "no." And then he goes, "I need you to give me your key card." I was like, "I'm not giving you my key card." And he goes, "give me the fucking key card," pushing me around.

He pushed me down and tried to choke me, and it was the first time I thought, "wow, he could kill me, oh my god." And then I ran, and then he pushed me into the bathroom. I'm in the foetal position in the bathroom, and he spits on me. He just spits on me and goes, "you're a fucking piece of trash. You're nothing. This is what you are." I remember just sitting there crouched behind the toilet, I've got spit on my face, and I'm just thinking "wow, people don't do that." I couldn't fathom it. But I gave him the card, and he spent it all, and then there was his remorse. "Oh my god, I've spent it all. What have I done? I've got to try and make it back."

The other thing that happened was on my birthday. We had an argument because I didn't want to have coke with him, and it was my birthday. He got some coke, and he was like, "yes, we're going to get on it. I've got the kids minded." I had work the next morning though and I'm in my work uniform, and I'm like, "no, I am not getting on it. I have work tomorrow morning at six am. No." And he goes,

The foetal position was my little safety mechanism, my spiritual protection to put a shield over myself.

"but it's for your birthday. I've organised it, and I want to do it." And I was like, "I don't want to do it." And he says, "I've got the kids minded. Everything's done." And I was like, "I don't care." So, as I was going up the stairs, he tried to drag me down. He dragged me down the stairs. He ripped my work shirt and dragged me down the stairs. So I get up and

run, trying to get away from him. I run behind the lounge, and I'm getting in the foetal position again - my little safety mechanism, my spiritual protection to put a shield over myself, where all the words that he would say to me didn't infiltrate me. Stupid thing to do, but it worked for me. I'd put this little shield over myself, and the stuff that he did and the stuff that he said couldn't hurt me.

So, I was in my foetal position, and he started smoking, and he ashed on me. He said, "look at you. You're a piece of shit. You're worth nothing." And he ashed on me again.

Those two were the two points in my life where I was like, "I am not putting up with this shit anymore or I'm going to get killed."

Around this time, Ben decided he could make money on the mine sites where he could stay a few months and make a shitload of money. So, he'd go off and make some money and then he'd come back. I used to wish that when he was flying to the mines, I would pray that the plane he was on would crash, so he would die. I wouldn't have to leave him.

He used to ring me from where he was at strip clubs and tell me, "I'm at a strip club and I'm getting a lap dance from this chick, and she's so hot. Oh my god, she's amazing." And I wouldn't care. And he'd be like, "she's so fucking hot. She's this. She's that." And I'd be like, "alright," and then I'd hang up. This is what I would tell my friend Ed, and he'd be like, "what?" And I'd be like, "the thing is that I don't care. So, that's saying something to me."

I also went to South America with my Mum and her sister and it was the first time I'd been alone without Ben and without the kids. We did this big trek and I felt this whole connection with earth again. I've always felt it, but it was like I'd come home to the motherland. It was really strange. My aunt was there, and she had a boyfriend. I was still with Ben, and he would ring me all the time while I was overseas. I remember people going, "god, he's annoying." I had to go down to the shop and email him every day just to tell him what was happening and what I was doing. And then he would ring all the time. My family were like, "does he not know that you're on holidays?"

When I was home and he was away at the mine, me and the kids were really happy. It was nice. It all just worked really well. He was still harassing me. An example was, he'd say, "I'm coming back in two weeks. I need you to get this medication today." I was like, "okay." And he'd ring me back an hour later, and he's like, "did you get the medication?" I was like, "no, I haven't. I'm at work." "You fucking bitch," he'd say. "You need to get it." I remember one of the old ladies at work, was like, "he's not coming back for another two weeks. What's his problem?"

I remember talking to Ed, and I said to him, "this is my make or break. If I don't do it now, I'm never going to do it. I love it when he's gone. Me and the kids have such a good time. I don't want him to come back." For a long time, my mantra had been, this is your bed, you've got to lie in it. There's no option. There's no other life you've got but this. I started to realise that there actually was another option. I was like, "I don't want this life anymore."

This time, when Ben came back, I picked him up from the airport. I was anxious because I knew, "this is it." This is when I'm going to tell him I'm going to leave him. It was petrifying. I was so bloody

I was anxious because I knew I'm going to tell him I'm going to leave him. It was petrifying.

scared. I got there, and even before we got into the car, he goes, "I've organised Mum to take the kids. I've got some coke lined up. We're going to have a night together."

And I was like, "no." Because I'd been off it. I hadn't smoked pot in several years. Since we got back to Brisbane. And I was like, "no, I don't want it." And he goes, "we're doing it." And I was like, "I'm not doing it but if you want to do it, that's fine. I'm not doing it anymore. I haven't been on anything. I've been feeling really good, and I just don't want to do it." And he goes, "I've got the kids minded. We're doing it." And he goes, "fuck you." He started yelling in the car, and he's screaming, and carrying on. I was thinking, "I've had three months of no drama. Well, except for all the phone calls at work from him."

So, we got in the car, and he was yelling and screaming. And I thought, "this is it." I said, "I'm done." He's like, "what do you mean? Fuck you. What do you mean 'you're done?'" And I was like, "I'm done. I'm over it. I'm done. We're over." And he was like, "what?" It was a complete shock to him. He was like, "what?" And then he was like, "we don't have to do it anymore. That's fine. It's fine. We don't have to do it anymore."

And I was like, "no, I'm done." So, we ended up coming home. As soon as I get in the door, he pulled the bag, which was slung over my shoulder, and he pulled me to the ground. And I was like, "I'm done. I'm going to leave you." He's like, "you can't do that." I said, "look, I will stay for the weekend, and then I'm moving to my Mum's." Because I hadn't told my parents yet either. "I'll move to my parents. You can stay with the kids for the first couple of weeks until you start work because you haven't seen them for three months, and it's important that you spend time with them. But then we'll work something out with what's to happen." Because I didn't want to make the kids' lives difficult.

We both had our parents close by, so I thought we could keep the kids in the house, but each of us have our time in the house. Depending on our work shifts, he'll stay at the house one week, and I'll stay at the house the next week. That was the original plan. So, we have that weekend. My parents have a barbecue. He makes me sit on his lap like everything's all hunky dory. And then I told my parents. It's funny because having been so scared to tell them, they were super supportive. They were like, "yes! Come here. Bring the girls. Let's just work it out." That was really, really good. So, I moved in with them. But they were very, very angry at me for allowing the kids to stay there. "How could you leave your kids there? They need to come and live with us. They need to be with us." And I was like, "what's more important is to not fracture their school year because they're in Year 10, and Year 10's quite important."

"How could you leave your kids there? They need to be with us."

The plan didn't work out though because where the kids were in our mutual house, when he was supposed to have one week, and I was to have the next; he would come in when it was my week and get into bed with me. And I'd be like, "you can't do that. It's not going to work." So the kids ended up being with me full-time.

People say that leaving is the hardest part. I reckon the years after were the worst because he'd lost me, but he's trying to pull me back in. He didn't stop harassing me and watching me and sending texts at all hours of the day and night.

I had a counselling session but after my first appointment, Ben was outside, waiting there. I was just like, "my god." And he's saying, "I need to talk to you. I need to talk to you." And I was like, "no." And he chases me through the city yelling. I had to run into a supermarket and hide in the toilet. I didn't know what to do because he was just there. He was telling everybody that I had cheated on him, that I would regret everything I'd done; that I'd regret things because I hadn't focused on the kids. I remember I got in the car and I just drove away and he's following me in the car beeping his horn.

I went to the police for a Domestic Violence Order (DVO) against him because he was so full-on; hundreds of phone calls a day, text messages. Ed said, "you need to go to the police." So, I did. I went to the police station. I had never called the police in my whole life. I had never gone to the police. So, this was a big moment for me. And I walk into the police station, and I say, "I've got hundreds of calls a day and text messages." And they were like, "unless he physically threatens you, there's nothing we can do." And then I was like, "okay, what can you do?" I was a bit disappointed because there was physical abuse, but unless he physically decided to stab me with a knife or do something of that form, then there was nothing they could do. And the cop said to me, "he's bound to be upset. You were together for 18 years." And so that was the end of the police situation. I was like, "I'm never doing that again."

"He's bound to be upset. You were together for 18 years."

His mother hated me for leaving. She would say to me, "marriage is for life. How can you just give up so easily?" I remember saying to her, "I did not give up easily. You, of all people, know how much I tried and how long I've been in the relationship for, and the stuff that I've put up with."

His brother was really nice when I left. He said, I know what he's like, and I know the financial situation. He said "Our Mum's got nothing left. I know who it is, and I know why." So, he goes, "I understand why you have to go." He actually said, if you need help in the divorce settlement or assistance, I can help you.

When I left him, one of my twins started the same behaviour. She pushed me into a cupboard, and she was like, "I hate you." And something that I loved, a tape recorder, she threw it on the ground, and she broke it. This is where I was like, "oh my god. I've done the wrong thing. She thinks that behaviour's okay now." So, that was a real turning point, to see that.

And that was the child that he stopped talking to because she lived with me. She started smoking pot. She rebelled. That was a hard time. It was really hard. But it was because she was hurting, and I

"See what you've done. We were a family, and you left, and this is what you've created."

knew that. And then he was like, "see, you did all this." So, there's this guilt there because he would put it on to me. Because I was the one that left, he would say, "you've done this. See what you've done. We were a family, and you left, and this is what you've created."

I think there was some hatred for me from the girls for leaving. But I think as they're getting older, they're starting to understand. They know. They don't ask their Dad for money. If anything, the tables started to turn because they're working; they're not in school anymore. And he started to ask them for money. An example is that Taryn saved her money to go to Europe. She finished high school, and she was going to go to London for four months to live. He goes, "give me your money, I'll put it in a term deposit account, and I'll double your money in a month." So, she trusted him. She's about to fly out to London. The night before, we're staying at Nan's, and Tia says, "tell Mum." And I'm like, "what?" And Taryn's like, "Mum, I've got no money." I'm like, "what do you mean?" She goes, I gave Dad all my money, and he says he can't get it to me until next week. So, she's crying because she's got no money. Me and my parents have always provided a lot for them, so I already had money transferred into pounds for her to take. I paid for the room that she was going to be living in for the next three months. My parents had money for her as well. So, we were like, "righteous fucking asshole."

When we got divorced and when we were getting the settlement, I had to explain to the solicitor what had happened to the money; for me, that was a real eye-opener. He was like, "okay, so you build a house for \$140k, but now you're up \$270k on the mortgage; you've refinanced. What work did you do on the house?" And then I was like, "oh, nothing." And he's like, "what?" And that was when I realised, "wow." Ben had a gambling account in my name, so I could get the cheques out for him. That was only in the last five years of our relationship. But that was a good estimate to see how much he'd been gambling. I looked in the account and there was around \$2 million turnover. I remember I calculated the ins and outs. With losses and wins, he had lost about \$150,000 in five years, and we had re-financed the mortgage by close to that amount in the last five years. So, it was a good proxy.

That was one of the things that my solicitor wanted to put into the divorce papers, that Ben had a bad gambling problem, and although I tried to stop it, I was fearful of the repercussions. Ben wanted that taken out. He refused to sign the settlement papers. But I stuck to my guns, and I said, "no, I want that in there." Eventually he signed it, but I had to pay him out. I was like, "but it's shown he's gambled it," but they said, "he was the main carer of the children while you were working full-time. So, he deserves his proportion of the money." And in my head, I was like, "what? Are you kidding me?" But I had to. I bought him out and paid his car off.

It's funny because, upon reflection, I knew it was wrong, but I didn't even know who I was at the time. I was a mother of twins, so I was just in survival mode, trying to keep the kids alive.

I used to have visions that I had a white dress and wreath in my hair and I was chained to a table and then when I left him I was lifted up and walking through fields of flowers. It was like I was free. Once it was over, it was like I was able to feel things. Because most of the time before then, I was just helping everybody else, and making sure he was okay.

I'm in control of my finances again now. I've never asked my parents for money ever again, and I never will. It's good to have control of it. It was really important for me to show the girls the value of

I have control of my money again, which is probably the most important thing.

being financially independent: They could do it themselves. And I think that's why I really wanted to work.

unit, I have control of my money, which is probably the most important thing. And I've got a beautiful relationship, but I still have my independence as well.

I believe in myself now I don't have that person dragging me down. I've got a great career, I'm supporting myself. I own my own

The doors have opened. People are seeing me in a different light and it's like I'm being able to bloom. I've been able to grow. Like I said, walking through fields of flowers.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange 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.

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
- Collect any copies left behind by delegates/participants after workshops

Further resources and support

My Safety Kit is an Insight Exchange resource for any person who at some point may be reflecting on their own relationships and experiences of domestic and family violence. The resource may also have benefits for people who are:

- Supporting friends and family who are (or might be) experiencing domestic and family violence
- Working as a service responder to people experiencing domestic and family violence

[My Safety Kit](http://www.insightexchange.net) includes contact details for services across Australian states and territories that may be able to support a person in their next steps. It is available online at www.insightexchange.net.

Copyright: © 2020 Insight Exchange www.insightexchange.net. Insight Exchange gives permission for this resource to be photocopied or reproduced provided that the source is clearly and properly acknowledged. Insight Exchange does not grant permission for the artwork to be separated from the narrative, nor repurposed, or sold.

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, Insight Exchange assumes no responsibility for how the resource is used by other parties.
